

My Experiences in the World War

By General John J. Pershing

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W. N. U.
Service

The division of the Fourth corps (Dickman) and those on the left of the First corps (Liggett) overwhelmed the hostile garrisons, and quickly overran their positions, carrying the fighting into the open. The German resistance on this part of the front was disorganized by the rapidity of our advance and was soon overcome. Although the enemy was expecting an attack, he did not think it would take place so soon and it therefore came as a surprise.

When the First division, on the marching flank of the southern attack, had broken through the hostile forward positions, the squadron of cavalry attached to the Fourth corps was passed through the breach. At 1:45 p. m. it pushed forward to reconnoiter the roads toward Vigneulles, but encountering machine guns in position was forced to retire.

Western Attack Slower.

On the western face of the salient progress was not so satisfactory. The Twenty-sixth division, in its attempt to make a deep advance toward Vigneulles, met considerable resistance, and except for a battalion of the division reserve had not reached the day's objective.

The French at the tip of the salient had attempted to follow up the flanks of our successful penetrations, but made only small advances. Upon the request of Gen. E. J. Blondiat, commanding the French Second Colonial corps, a regiment of the Eightieth division (Cronkite), in reserve, was sent to his assistance.

On the afternoon of the Twelfth, learning that the roads leading out of the salient between the two attacks were filled with retreating enemy troops, with their trains and artillery, I gave orders to the commanders of the Fourth and Fifth corps to push forward without delay.

Using the telephone myself, I directed the commander of the Fifth corps to send at least one regiment of the Twenty-sixth division toward Vigneulles with all possible speed.

That evening a strong force from the Fifty-first brigade pushed boldly forward and reached Vigneulles at 2:15 a. m. the 13th. It immediately made dispositions that effectively closed the roads leading out of the salient west of that point. In the Fourth corps the Second brigade of the First division advanced in force about dawn of the 13th, its leading elements reaching Vigneulles by 6 a. m. The salient was closed and our troops were masters of the field.

Could Have Passed Hindenburg Line.

The troops continued to advance on the 13th, when the line was established approximately along the final objectives set for this offensive. In view of the favorable situation created just west of the Moselle river by our successes farther to the left, a limited attack was made on that part of the front by elements of the Eighty-second and Ninetieth divisions, with good results.

During the night our troops all along the line were engaged in organizing their new positions for defense, preparatory to the withdrawal of divisions and corps troops for participation in the Meuse-Argonne battle. September 14, 15 and 16 local operations continued, consisting of strong reconnaissances and occupation of better ground for defensive purposes. Beginning the 13th, several counter attacks were repulsed. The line as finally established was: Haudumont, Fresnes-en-Woevre, Doncourt, Jaulny, Vandieres.

Reports received the 13th and 14th indicated that the enemy was retreating in considerable disorder. Without doubt an immediate continuation of the advance would have carried us well beyond the Hindenburg line and possibly into Metz, and the temptation to press on was very great. But we would probably have become deeply involved and delayed the greater Meuse-Argonne operation, to which we were wholly committed.

During the fighting from September 12 to 16 the German One Hundred and Twenty-fifth, Eighth Landwehr, Eighty-eighth and Twenty-eighth divisions, reinforced the enemy's line and several other divisions arrived in reserve positions. September 16, in front of the First army, there were ten German divisions and two brigades in line and seven divisions in reserve.

French Overjoyed by Release.

Nearly 16,000 prisoners were taken and some 450 enemy guns had fallen into our hands. Our casualties numbered about 7,000. As the enemy retreated he set fire to many large supply dumps and several villages. The few remaining French inhabitants who found themselves within our lines were overjoyed to be released from the domination of the enemy, but many were left destitute by the burning of their homes at the very moment of deliverance.

On the 13th General Petain came by my headquarters and we went together to St. Mihiel, where the people, including children carrying French flags, gave us a welcome which may well be imagined when one realizes

that they had been held as prisoners, entirely out of touch with their own countrymen, for four years, though always within sight of the French lines. On my visit to several corps and division headquarters the following day I found all jubilant over the victory and overflowing with incidents of the fighting, reciting many cases of individual heroism among the troops.

CHAPTER LVII

In accordance with the understanding of September 2 we were now moving rapidly toward our second great offensive. Questions concerning the concentration and supply of the elements of the First army in the battle areas were being worked out by the staff of that army, who were given every possible assistance by the staff at G. H. Q.

The general plan of action of the allied armies, as agreed upon at the conference of commanders in chief July 24, was, to state it simply and briefly, that the offensive should continue, each army driving forward as rapidly as possible. The allied and American operations during the summer had resulted in the reduction of the Chateau Thierry, Amlins and St. Mihiel salients and the great offensive was now under way. Immediately west of the Meuse river the battle line had remained practically unchanged since 1917. It was on this front the American army was to play its great part.

The disposition of the Belgian, British, French and American armies on the wide front between the North sea and Verdun was such that they would naturally converge as they advanced. So long as the enemy could hold his ground on the east of this battle line frontal attacks farther west might drive him back on his successive positions, yet a decision would be long delayed.

Yanks Face Strong Position.

His main line of communication and supply ran through Carignan, Sedan and Mezieres. If that should be interrupted before he could withdraw his armies from France and Belgium the communications in the narrow avenue which lay between the Ardennes forest and the Dutch frontier were so limited that he would be unable adequately to supply his forces, or to evacuate them before his ruin would be accomplished. As our objective was the Sedan-Carignan railroad, it was evident that the sector assigned to the American army was opposite the most sensitive part of the German front then being attacked.

The danger confronting the enemy made it imperative that he should hold on in front of the American army to the limit of his resources.

Germans Strongly Fortified.

The area between the Meuse river and the Argonne forest was ideal for defensive fighting. On the east the heights of the Meuse commanded that river valley and on the west the rugged, high hills of the Argonne forest dominated the valley of the Aire river. In the center the watershed between the Aire and the Meuse rivers commanded both valleys, with the heights of Montfaucou, Cunel, Romange and of the Bois de Barricourt standing out as natural strong points. From these heights observation points completely covered the entire German front.

The terrain over which the attack was to be made formed a defile blocked by three successive barriers, the heights of Montfaucou, then those of Cunel and Romange and farther back the ridges of the Bois de Barricourt and of the Bois de Bourgoyne. The Meuse river was unfordable; the Aire river fordable only in places. In addition to the heavy forest of the Argonne there were numerous woods with heavy undergrowth which were serious obstacles.

These natural defenses were strengthened by every artificial means imaginable.

A dense network of wire entanglements covered every position. It was small wonder the enemy had rested four years on this front without being molested.

Hindenburg Position Is Objective.

In accordance with the principal mission, which remained the same throughout this great offensive, the main attack of the First army was to

be launched west of the Meuse river, its right to be covered by the river and by the operations of the French Seventeenth corps on the east of the river, that corps being a part of our army.

Our left was to be supported by a simultaneous attack by the French Fourth army. Our attack to include the Argonne forest was to be driven with all possible strength in the general direction of Mezieres.

The first operation of our army was to have for its objective the Hindenburg position on the front Briulles-sur-Meuse-Romange-sous-Montfaucou-Grandpre, with a following development in the direction of Buzancy-Mezieres in order to force the enemy beyond the Meuse and outflank his positions on the Vouziers-Rethel line from the east.



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In conjunction with our advance, which would outflank the enemy's position south of the Aisne, the French Fourth army, by attacking successively the positions between the Aisne and the Sulpices rivers, would be able to occupy the line Vouziers-Rethel. After that it would operate in the direction of the plateau east of the Rethel-Signy-Abbaye road.

Aim at Tactical Surprise.

Our purpose was to effect a tactical surprise, if possible, overcome the enemy's first and second positions in the area of Montfaucou and (Cote Dame Marie) of his third position before the enemy could bring up strong reinforcements. It was an ambitious plan and one that would require a rapid advance of ten miles through a densely fortified zone. From an estimate of the enemy's reserves and their location it was realized that we must capture Montfaucou and seize Cote Dame Marie by the end of the second day.

It was thought reasonable to count on the vigor and aggressive spirit of our troops to make up in a measure for their inexperience, but at the same time the fact was not overlooked that lack of technical skill might considerably reduce the chances of complete success against well organized defenders.

General Petain had already given it as his opinion that we should not be able to get farther than Montfaucou before winter.

CHAPTER LVIII

The Meuse-Argonne offensive opened the morning of September 26. To call it a battle may be a misnomer, yet it was a battle, the greatest, most prolonged in American history. Through 47 days we were engaged in a persistent struggle with the enemy to smash through his defenses.

The attack started on a front of 24 miles, which gradually extended until the enemy was being actively assailed from the Argonne forest to the Moselle river, 90 miles.

In all more than 1,200,000 were employed and the attack was driven 32 miles to the north and 14 miles to the northeast before the armistice terminated hostilities.

The outstanding fact that I desire to emphasize is that, once started, the battle was maintained continuously, aggressively and relentlessly to the end.

All difficulties were overridden in one tremendous sustained effort to terminate the war then and there in a victorious manner.

Battle Opens Favorably.

After three hours' violent artillery preparation the attack began at 5:30 a. m. At the same time, to divert the enemy's attention elsewhere, local raids and demonstrations were made on the Meuse-Moselle front. The French Fourth army (Gouraud), to our left on the west of the Argonne forest, began its attack half an hour later.

The battle opened favorably. Our attack at that particular place and at

that time evidently came as a surprise to the enemy, and our troops were enabled quickly to overrun his forward positions.

The vast network of undestroyed barbed wire, the deep ravines, dense woods and heavy fog made it difficult to co-ordinate the movements of the assaulting infantry, especially of some divisions in battle for the first time, yet the advance throughout was extremely vigorous.

Third Corps Reaches Second Line.

The Third corps (Bullard), nearest the Meuse, carried the enemy's second position before dark. The Thirty-third division (Bell), wheeling to the right as it advanced, occupied the west bank of the Meuse to protect the flank of the army. The Bois de Forges, with its difficult terrain and strong machine gun defenses, was carried in splendid fashion.

The right of the Eightieth division (Cronkite) had by noon cleared the Bois Jure in the face of heavy machine gun fire and established its line north of Dannevoux. On its left, after an all-day fight, the division forced its way through the strong positions on hill 282 and reached the northern slopes of that hill.

The Fourth division (Hines), on the left of the Eightieth, took Septarges and firmly established itself in the woods to the north. It was abreast of Nantillois and its left was more than a mile beyond Montfaucou, but through some misinterpretation of the orders by the Third corps the opportunity to capture Montfaucou that day was lost. Three counter-attacks against the division during the afternoon were broken up.

Fifth Corps Falls Short.

In the center the Fifth corps (Cameron), with the exception of the Ninety-first division (Johnston) on its left, fell short of its objectives.

The Seventy-ninth division (Kuhn) on the right of the corps, took Malancourt, but in the open ground beyond

encountered considerable opposition, and the advanced elements were not in position before Montfaucou until late afternoon. The attack of the division launched against this strong point early in the evening was met by the fire of artillery and machine guns from the southern slopes of the hill, which held up further progress.

The Thirty-seventh division (Farnsworth), in the center of the Fifth corps, after overcoming heavy machine-gun fire, pushed through the Bois de Montfaucou, and its attack in the afternoon carried the line up to and west of Montfaucou. The left of its line, facing stiff opposition, cleared the woods in its front and established itself just south of Ivroly.

The Ninety-first division (Johnston) overcame strong initial resistance and advanced rapidly to Epinonville, which it entered but did not hold. Crossing into the sector of the Thirty-fifth division, during the day it occupied Vervy.

First Corps Makes Progress. On the left of the army the First

corps (Liggett) made excellent progress. The Thirty-fifth division (Traub) cleverly captured the strong position of Vauquois and took Cheppy against stubborn opposition. Elements of the division reached the corps objective east of Charpenry, but were soon withdrawn to a line west of Vervy. On the left the division captured that part of Varennes east of the Aire river, but was held up between Varennes and Cheppy. At this time a fresh regiment took the lead, giving a new impetus to the attack, and pushed the line forward to the high ground south of Charpenry.

In the Twenty-eighth division (Muir) the right brigade captured the western half of Varennes and continued about a mile farther. The left brigade, facing the eastern spur of the Argonne, which constituted the enemy's chief defense of that forest, was unable to overcome the intense machine-gun fire from the vicinity of Champ Mahaut. The Seventy-seventh division (Alexander) in the difficult terrain of the Argonne made some progress.

By the evening of September 27 the Fifth corps was abreast of the First and the Third on its flanks. The Seventy-ninth division captured Montfaucou the morning of September 27 and on the next day Nantillois and the Bois de Bengue were passed despite determined resistance.

In the Third corps the Eightieth division had taken the Bois de la Cote Lamont after hard fighting, but at lack after attack made with dogged determination across the open space toward Briulles-sur-Meuse was rolled back by the galling fire of the enemy from the town and its vicinity and by the artillery firing from east of the Meuse.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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BEAUTIFICATION OF ROAD BETWEEN FAYETTEVILLE AND FT. BRAGG PLANNED

The ten-mile stretch of highway between Fayetteville and Fort Bragg will be developed into one of the most attractive drives of the State if plans made by officials of the city and post mature.

Details of the project were discussed at a recent conference in the office of Brig. Gen. Manus McCloskey, which was attended by General McCloskey, Col. J. W. Harrelson, director of the Department of Conservation and Development; Mayor Quince Nimmoock, of Fayetteville; W. C. Ewing, member of the Board of Conservation and Development; Thomas H. Sutton, Fayetteville, and Assistant Forester F. H. Claridge, in charge of reforestation.

The project was reported to have the full sympathy and active cooperation of Chairman E. B. Jeffress of the State Highway Commission, and Director Harrelson proffered the services of the Department through Mr. Claridge in helping to direct the planting.

General McCloskey's interest in conservation is attracting wide attention. He has recently issued orders against the cutting of any trees on the 121,000-acre reservation without the approval of the commanding officer.

The post commander has also manifested deep interest in protecting the forests of the reservation against fires. With these efforts and other attention given by the commander, it may be expected, since this section is in the longleaf pine district, that thrifty forests of this species will be brought back.

Twenty-two thousand acres on the post have been set aside as a game refuge by means of which considerable sport has been furnished and an overflow of game has spread into Cumberland, Hoke, Moore, and Hatter counties.



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