

MacArthur and America's Two-Front War

by Dean Andromidas and Don Phau

Aug. 20—On August 16, 1962, President John F. Kennedy held his second meeting with General of the Armies Douglas MacArthur. In the course of a wide-ranging discussion Kennedy asked MacArthur the following question:

I was wondering, having read that [The Guns of August], whether in reading some other things—whether you thought the leadership by the British and the French was wholly incompetent, and left, particularly in '17 (1917) with Passchendaele and all these tremendous casualties for 8,9,10 miles—from what—June till October, November? Was there any alternative action by the Allies? Do you think they had to continue those assaults on those trenches, or was there anything else they could have done?



White House

President John Kennedy has lunch with General Douglas MacArthur, July 20, 1961.

MacArthur answers:

I would have handled the campaign in a completely different way. With modern weapons, with the machine guns, and even the weapons which we had not talked about since 1917, frontal assaults were nothing but suicide. You must envelop. You must hit the lines of supply. There's no other way to victory. You'll have one of these tremendous assaults that go ahead and gain 3 or 4 kilometers. They'd be so decimated, and so exhausted and everything, that they couldn't be exploited.

And both sides made the same mistake. The Germans made exactly the same mistake. He

[was] down there when he made that great attack through Champagne, we just slaughtered him. My division was right in the middle on the day they fought the French army at that time. I put all ... I put every gun of my artillery brigade on the line of the infantry, all the colonels of the brigade commanding just sweated blood. But we put them in there. And they just mowed those people down. You couldn't get—nothing could penetrate.

Now the firepower is so much greater that a frontal assault is just suicide. I'm sure that the British ... They were under the influence, the old Wellington influence. And those soldiers that Wellington had, they were all volunteers,

you understand. You only had about 60,000, small forces compared to that. And they were always magnificent. They could make a frontal assault that was always exceptional. Always they won on the peninsula. Always they licked the French. Always they licked everybody. And they had an idea that bravery, courage, and to face with your breast and go on with the drums beating and the fifes blowing and everything that they'd roll along. There never was any great leadership on the Western Front by the British during the war. Douglas Haig I knew well. He was a good, cautious, average type of, well, a pragmatic soldier. But the . . . There was nothing . . . There was no spark that was shown anywhere.

Now in the French, they had some leaders who were magnificent. [Marshal Ferdinand] Foch himself I rate as a great captain. [Marshal Philippe Henri] Pétain was timid. He was something like [British Field Marshal Bernard Law] Montgomery. He always could see how he couldn't do it, but never could quite see how he could do it. But they had men like [General Henri] Gouraud, who was magnificent, of the leaders I have known anywhere, anywhere. [General Jean] Degoutte. Oh, they had a number of them. The French leadership was not lacking, but the French leadership in the Second World War was beneath contempt.¹

When the United States entered World War I, it was not as an "ally" of the so-called "Allied" powers, but as an "Associated Power" because, other than defeating Germany, it did not, officially, share in the war aims of those powers. The "Allies" saw the war as a principal means of destroying their main rival Germany, which would enable a redivision of the global assets as outlined in the secret treaties like the 1916 Sykes Picot, which divided up the Middle East between Britain and France. For MacArthur's faction, their forecast was far more foreboding, as they saw the defeat of Germany opening the way to the British Empire to organize a new entente against the United States, which had to

fight the war with this forecast constantly in mind. The war had to be conducted such that the early defeat of Germany would put the United States in a position to dictate a peace that would secure the interests of the United States, whose interests were diametrically opposite to those of the British Empire and their would-be allies. As we shall see, the U.S. military did its part towards this goal, in which MacArthur's role was important, only to see it squandered, undermined and destroyed by Wilson and "colonel" Edward House. This would serve as a bitter lesson to be corrected two decades later by FDR and MacArthur.

America's Principles of War

The principles laid down by the military, which were shared by Secretary of War Newton Baker, were roughly as follows:

First: the war will be won in Europe on the Western Front. The United States will not send its troops for major operations on other fronts, would further press to assure that the "Allied Powers" would not expand any efforts beyond the Western Front.

This became a major point of contention after the Russian Revolution and Russia's leaving the war. Churchill and the British government led a campaign to withdraw troops from the Western Front to establish a new front in the East, which in reality was to crush Soviet Russia. Lloyd George wanted to allow Japan to deploy 2.5 million troops to occupy all of the Russian Empire east of the Ural Mountains. U.S. General Tasker Bliss was to comment that if that were to happen, the Japanese would never leave. This became a major issue for the U.S. military, since such a Japanese move was seen to be laying the ground for a major threat to the United States once Germany was defeated, by consolidating an Anglo-Japanese entente against the United States. The United States therefore prevented this new front from forming. The United States participation in the anti-Soviet so-called "intervention" that did take place, was small and highly restricted, and in reality had as its purpose the prevention of British plans to divide Russia between the British Empire and the Japanese Empire.

Second: the United States would deploy an independent army with its own territorial front and not become auxiliaries of the British and French by sending regiments to be integrated into and serve under Anglo-French command. This was not simply to maintain self-respect: more important, with its own independent army,

1. This interchange is reported in: John F. Kennedy Presidential Recordings, Kennedy Conversation on Aug. 16, 1962 (12); Conversation with General Douglas MacArthur: http://web1.millercenter.org/presidentialrecordings/jfk_1_pub/18_aug16.pdf

the United States could most effectively assure that all effort would be exerted on the Western Front, and allow it to earn the necessary prestige in the eyes of the European population so that it could play a decisive role in organizing the post-war peace. The military's plans foresaw the United States deploying five million men to Europe by the Summer of 1919, a force larger than the combined armies of Britain and France, which would put the United States in the strongest position in negotiating a peace that would protect American interests.

Thirdly, and this is the importance of an independent army—the United States would do everything possible to put an end to the meat grinder of “trench warfare,” and revert once again to an “open warfare” of rapid movements and flanking action.

Fourth was the naming of an Allied Commander, under whom the United States, France, and Great Britain would coordinate a common strategy. It should be noted that this did not exist prior to the U.S. entry into the war, so that both Britain and France were launching independent offensives without even coordinating with one another.

MacArthur was intimately aware of, and supportive of these goals; in fact he had helped to formulate them. It will be seen that the United States was in reality fighting a two-front war. One against Germany, which was the easy one, the second with the Allies who were pursuing a new “Thirty Years War.” The Allies wanted American money and American blood, whereby American soldiers would be directly integrated into allied divisions under British and French command, and thus fall victim to the organized butchery they called warfare.

MacArthur's Role in Preparing for War

Once War was declared in April of 1917, MacArthur had already participated in many of the decisions taken to prepare the army for war, from his position as a junior



Library of Congress

Newton D. Baker, Secretary of War from March 1916 to March 1921.

officer on the General Staff.

In March 1916, Newton D. Baker, a Democrat and former mayor of Cleveland, had become Secretary of War. MacArthur, who was assigned by the General Staff to serve as Baker's military assistant, had this to say about him in his memoirs: “diminutive in size, but large in heart, with a clear, brilliant mind, and a fine ability to make instant and positive decisions, he was to become one of the U.S.'s greatest War Secretaries.”²

On June 30, 1916, MacArthur had become Baker's military assistant and chief of the Bureau of Information of the War Department, in effect, the liaison with the press and press censor. In this period the question of “preparedness”

and preliminary reorganization and expansion of the Army as well as the Navy began. In fact, a major naval construction program was begun. In this context there was a debate on whether to deploy the National Guard if the United States entered the war. While some of the General Staff were opposed, MacArthur and Baker called for its deployment, which was accepted.

Baker was always up against the Anglophiles inside and outside the Wilson Administration. One of these was U.S. Ambassador to London, Walter Hines Page, who many considered represented the British cause in Washington rather than the American cause in London. While Baker disliked “Colonel” Edward House's influence on Wilson, Hines Page was so anglophile that he even upset Wilson. One biographer of Baker said that Baker agreed with U.S. Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels, who said this about Page: Wilson was “so incensed at Page's partisanship with Great Britain that any recommendation of Page's irritated rather than convinced him. This irritation was all the greater because of his long friendship for Page and real affection for him. He felt, and had good grounds for thinking so,

2. MacArthur, Douglas, *Reminiscences* (U.S. Naval Institute Press, January 1, 1964, republished April 15, 2012), page 50.

that Page... did not represent the United States in England but represented the British Government and took his cue from it.”³

Another Anglophile whom Baker learned to dislike was Teddy Roosevelt, who, despite his advanced age and great weight, demanded that he resurrect the “Rough Riders” and be given a commission to fight in the war. TR cited the fact that as President he had been at one time “commander in chief” of the armed forces. Baker, Wilson, and Pershing refused such approaches, not only because of the absurdity of TR as a military commander, but out of fear was that if he had any official standing, TR would deploy to Paris at a time when “Washington was trying to protect purely American interests against enthusiastic concessions... to keep things humming.” In fact, according to one biographer Baker thought TR was “insane enough to die in restraint, possibly a straight jacket.”⁴

Needless to say, both Lloyd George and Clemenceau hated Baker as they did General Pershing and the whole American Expeditionary Force (AEF) he headed.

When the United States declared war on April 6, 1917, the General Staff proposed sending only an army of 500,000 men. MacArthur and Baker opposed this, calling for an unlimited number as well as the deployment of the National Guard. The reasons are obvious. With an army of 500,000 men, the U.S. army would become an auxiliary of the allies and have zero influence on the execution of the war.

Baker opposed a “volunteer” army and supported the draft. He cited the British volunteer system, which whipped the population into a “frenzy” with “orators preaching hate of the Germans, and newspapers exaggerating enemy outrages to make men enlist out of motives of revenge and retaliation.”⁵

Following discussions between Baker and MacArthur, Major General John Pershing, a protégé of Douglas MacArthur’s father, General Arthur MacArthur, and the youngest and most competent of the Major Generals in the army at the time, was chosen to head the AEF. MacArthur had great respect for Pershing from the time he had first met him in his father’s office, when his father was stationed in California. MacArthur wrote

that he consulted with him throughout his career, even when he himself was Chief of Staff. MacArthur mentions that when he was wrestling with the question of transforming the cavalry to armored and mechanized warfare, and came up against resistance within the Army, he consulted with and received the backing of Pershing. In his memoirs, MacArthur has this to say about Pershing:

General Pershing’s fame rests largely on his personal character. He was not a genius at strategy and his tactical experience was limited, but in his indomitable will for victory, in his implacable belief in the American soldier; in his invincible resistance to all attempts to exploit or patronize the American army, he rose to the highest flights of his profession. He inspired self-respect for our national forces and a foreign recognition of our military might which was properly placed as fully equal to the best of the human race. My memories of him sustained and strengthened me during many a lonely and bitter moment of the Pacific and Korean Wars....⁶

It is this fight, led by Pershing, for the recognition of the military might and capabilities of the American Army, which is the context for MacArthur’s heroism as a subordinate officer in his capacity as Chief of Staff of a Division, and later Brigade Commander. In the two-front war Pershing was leading, any victory and demonstration of the competence and superior fighting capacity of American military power was crucial in the fight on the second front, against British and French policy. It is safe to assume that MacArthur fully grasped this most important of all issues in conducting the war.

Conflicts with the British

Baker fully supported his generals, especially Pershing and Chief of Staff General Payton March, both of whom were protégés of Arthur MacArthur and close to the younger MacArthur, in their determination for the United States to have a fully separate Army and territorial front. The arguments between the Americans and the British and French were famous throughout the war. Pershing’s steadfastness at the meetings of the allied military command councils and earned him the hatred of British Prime Minister David Lloyd George and

3. Cramer, C.H., *Newton D. Baker: A Biography* (The World Publishing Company), page 90.

4. Cramer, *ibid.*, 113.

5. *Ibid.*, 96.

6. *Ibid.*, 56.



Major General John Pershing (right), head of the American Expeditionary Force, with French Marshal Ferdinand Foch, Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies in World War I, sometime in 1918.

Marshall Douglas Haig. Baker joined in that fight whenever necessary, and once told Lloyd George, who had “advised” Baker to put U.S. soldiers under British command: “If we want advice about who should command our armies, we would ask for it. But until then we do not want nor need it from anyone, least of all you.”

“Colonel” Edward House, being a British agent, fully supported the British on this question and tried to convince Baker. On July 18, 1917 Baker wrote House to rebuff this suggestion and explain why an American army had to have its own doctrine, secure a place at the front, and operate independently. “This puts us into the war as a great power conducting *pro tanto* a war of our own,” he said. The United States would retain its identity and remain uncommitted to Britain or France after the war. Thus, America could work out its own peace plans. “Complete diplomatic and military individuality, if not independence, will then [after the war] be of great importance to us.”

The determination for the creation of an independent American Army was at the center of the U.S. prepara-

tion for war. The General Staff drafted the “30 Division Plan.” Since American divisions comprised a complement of over 20,000 men, they were twice the strength of French, British, and German divisions. Comprised of two brigades, these divisions were almost the size of a French and British corps. Thus thirty American divisions were the equivalent of 60 European, and would be the size of the British expeditionary force in France.

Furthermore the plan called for the arrival of 1,328,448 men in France by December 31, 1918. Not only had this been surpassed by August, but in July 1918 an “80 Division plan” was approved and began to be implemented. If the war had gone into 1919, the American army would have out-numbered the combined forces of France and Great Britain!

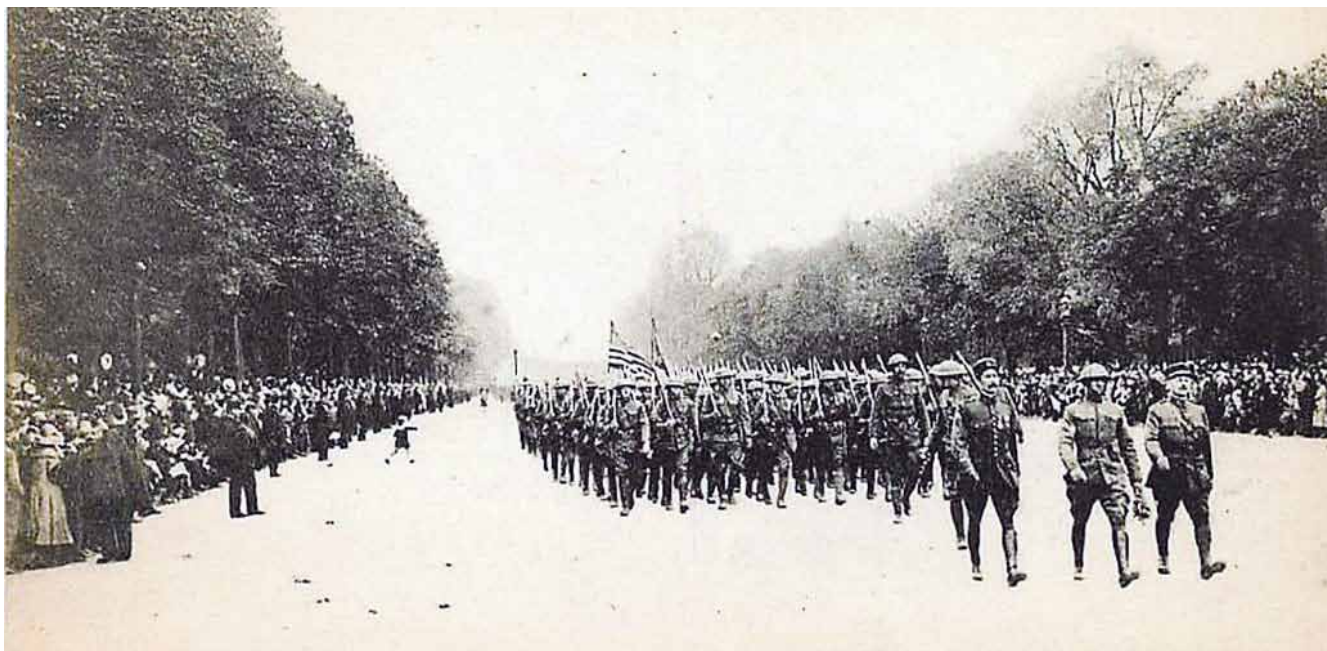
It was suspected that maybe Lloyd George and Clemenceau were getting second thoughts about American involvement in the war. This was reflected in the foot-dragging by the British in supplying shipping for the transportation of the American Army and its equipment. The U.S. Merchant Marine was not sufficient. Although a Liberty Ship-type mass production of cargo and troop-carrying ships was immediately launched when the war broke out, only a few ships were finished prior to the end of the war.

Pershing had this to say about the failure of British and French to supply shipping:

The question, in its finality, was, therefore, one of sea transportation; but so far all efforts to get the allies, especially the British, to consider giving help to bring over men and supplies had been futile. They did not seem to realize that America would be practically negligible from a military standpoint unless the Allies could provide shipping. Nor did they seem to appreciate that time was a vital factor. But the spirit of full cooperation among the Allies did not then exist. They seemed to regard the transportation of an American army overseas as entirely our affair. This apparent indifference also gave further color to the suspicion that perhaps an American army as such was not wanted.⁷

Another thorny issue involved the deployment of the National Guard. It was decided that the third Amer-

7. Pershing, John, *My Experiences in the World War* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co. Vol. I), page 95.



American troops parade through Paris upon their arrival July 4, 1918, to what General Pershing characterized as “joyful acclaim.”

ican division to be deployed would be comprised of National Guard members. But, if such a division was drawn from just one state, it could have negative political consequences. On the one hand, the other states might consider it as a biased move in favor of a single state. On the other hand, if that division suffered huge losses or other catastrophes, this would have a political blowback effect on the war effort. Therefore Baker and MacArthur conceived of the 42 “Rainbow” national guard division as one that would draw units from states throughout the union, stretching, as MacArthur himself said in his discussions with Baker, like a rainbow across the United States. Baker chose MacArthur to become the division’s chief of staff, promoting him two grades, from Major to full Colonel. Brig. General William Mann, the head of the militia department of the War Department, was named commander. But he was one year away from retirement and not physically fit. In fact, he was not really fit to command, so MacArthur basically ran the division until it was deployed to France, soon after which Mann was replaced by Major General Charles T. Menoher. The Rainbow would become one of the four or five really crack divisions of the AEF.

This issue of fitness to command among the senior officers who were a few years away from retirement, as with all wars, was a crucial one, because younger officers possessing both vigor and an aggressive intelli-

gence were required if war was to be carried out successfully.

Pershing himself called for weeding out old and incompetent or physically unfit officers from troop commands in France, because of the harsh and rigorous conditions of modern war. He pointed out that the French and British had very few division commanders over 45 years of age, and very few brigadiers over 40.

MacArthur Arrives in France

The question of the need for the AEF to earn the United States the “prestige” that was necessary to impact the postwar settlement, is reflected in this description by Pershing of the first appearance of American troops in Paris on July 4, 1918, following three years of slaughter because of the incompetence of the British and French leaders.

The first appearance of American combat troops brought forth joyful acclaim from the people. On the march to Lafayette’s tomb at Picpus Cemetery the battalion was jointed by a great crowd.... With wreaths about their necks and bouquets in their hats and rifles, the column looked like a moving flower garden. With only a semblance of military formation, the animated throng pushed through avenues of people to the martial strains of the French band and the still more thrilling

music of cheering voices.... The humbler folk of Paris seemed to look upon these few hundred of our stalwart fighting men as their real deliverance. Many people dropped on their knees in reverence as the column went by. These stirring scenes conveyed vividly the emotions of a people to whom the outcome of the war had seemed all but hopeless.

The 42nd division and its Chief of Staff MacArthur sailed to France on October 18. One of the naval escorts was the *Chat-tanooga*, commanded by his brother, Captain Arthur MacArthur. Fourteen days later they landed at St Nazaire, France. Following a short and incomplete period of further training, four regiments of the division were placed under the command of General Georges de Bazelaire of the French VII Army Corps, to be battle-trained with four French divisions. General Mann was retired and replaced by General Charles T. Menoher, highly respected by MacArthur and a classmate of Pershing. Menoher preferred to supervise the division from headquarters, where he could keep in constant touch with the corps and the army, relying on MacArthur to handle the battle line.

The 42nd carried out this mission under the following orders by General Pershing: "In military operations against the Imperial German Government you are directed to cooperate with the forces of the other countries employed against the enemy; but in so doing the underlying ideas must be kept in view that the forces of the United States are a separate and distinct component of the combined forces, the identity of which must be preserved. This fundamental rule is subject to such minor exceptions in particular circumstances as your judgement may approve. The decision as to when your command or any of its party is ready for action is confided to you, and you will exercise full discretion in determining the manner of cooperation...."

The other crucial issue was the fight against the self-



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The "self-slaughter" of trench warfare during World War I.

slaughter of trench warfare. Up until the time of U.S. entry into the conflict, the war had been nothing less than a series of massive war crimes, not just against respective enemies but against their allies' own men. The use of artillery barrages accounted for 87 percent of the casualties of war, with the average casualty rate reaching 38 percent, one third of which would be deaths. The British at the Battle of the Somme suffered 60,000 casualties on the first day, 20,000 of which were deaths. This is not to mention the gross crimes of the First Sea Lord Winston Churchill and his infamous Dardenelles-Gallipoli campaign (1915-16), which ended in the sinking of six capital ships, the slaughter of tens of thousands of British, French and Allied troops, and an ignoble defeat. These troops could have otherwise been deployed in France if the Allies actually wanted to end the war.

The AEF always had as its major goal a return to the "open warfare" of rapid movements and flanking actions. This was an issue at every echelon of the army, from the level of army group which should seek to out-flank the enemy's entire front, to the twelve-man squad which could use flanking maneuvers to take out a machinegun nest. A conflict arise because the United States had to resort to using British and French instructors in the beginning of the war. But these instructors taught

tactics for “trench warfare,” which were no tactics at all, but in many cases, simply training soldiers to jump out of their trenches and advance forward in some organized formation. Contrast this to what the U.S. army called “minor tactics,” where even the twelve-man squad is trained in skirmishing tactics of rapid motions and mini-flanking operations; who are well-trained in the use of their rifles, and capable of organizing the rapid defense of areas they have conquered.

The Rainbow’s 165th Infantry regiment, also known as the “fighting 69th,” called these minor tactics “Indian style” warfare. George Patton, who was a sort of genius on the battlefield, but who would become more of an opinionated jerk the further he got from a battlefield, nonetheless aptly described these minor tactic when he said, “first, we are going to grab the enemy by the nose and then kick him in the pants.” In other words, aggressively attack the enemy while at the same time looking for the opportunity to outflank him

Commenting on this problem in a communication to the War Department that was using French and British instructors in the training of American officers in the United States, Pershing wrote,

My cable stated that too much tutelage by Allied officers tended to rob our officers of a sense of responsibility and initiative. It was well known that many of these [French and British] officers sent to the States were not professional soldiers, but were men whose knowledge was limited to personal experience in subordinate grades in trench warfare. Moreover, the French doctrine, as well as the British, was based upon the cautious advance of infantry with prescribed objectives, where obstacles had been destroyed and resistance largely broken by artillery. The French infantryman, as has been already stated, did not rely upon his rifle and made little use of its great power. The infantry of both the French and the British were poor skirmishers as a result of extended service in the trenches. Our mission required an aggressive offensive based on self-reliant infantry.

The organization of our army was radically different from that of any of the Allied armies and we could not become imitators of methods which applied especially to armies in which initiative was more or less repressed by infinite attention to detail in directives prepared for their

guidance. It was our belief... that efficiency could be attained only by adherence to our own doctrines based upon thorough appreciation of the American temperament, qualifications and deficiencies. I recommended the withdrawal of all instruction in the United States from the hands of Allied instructors. This recommendation was promptly approved by the Chief of Staff, who entirely agreed with my view.

Needless to say, Pershing conceived what he believed to be a war-winning strategy for an independent U.S. Army on the Western Front. Up until then, the front had stretched from the Swiss border, northward along a line through France, Luxembourg, and Belgium to the channel. Various Allied and German offensives had been launched along this line. But the most strategically vulnerable part of this front for the Germans lay in front of Metz, which was the sector of the front closest to Germany, and was in fact the main avenue of entry into the very heart of Germany. If one passes Metz, one direction leads you directly to the Rhine valley in the region of Frankfurt, and on to Berlin. The other direction, down the Moselle River, leads you to the Ruhrgebiet, Germany’s industrial heartland. Furthermore, Metz and the city of Sedan, further west along the front, served as the crucial railheads for the sophisticated network of railroads and hard surface roads that Germany used to supply their entire front extending to the English Channel. Capture this sector and the entire German line crumbles much like the famous Inchon strategy.

In the opposite direction, is the road directly to Paris. Germany well understood this, and this was the chief reasoning behind its ill-fated Verdun offensive.

In laying out his conception, Pershing wrote:

...Therefore on the active front anywhere west of the Argonne Forest there would have been little space or opportunity for the strategical employment of our arms.

On the battlefield from Argonne Forest to Vosages Mountains a chance for the decisive use of our army was very clearly presented. The enemy’s positions cover not only the coal fields of the Saar but also the important Longwy-Briey iron-ore region. Moreover, behind this front lay the vital portion of his rail communications connecting the garrison at Metz with the Armies in

FIGURE 1



An overview of the battlefield on the Western Front, showing the battlefront between the German and Allied forces.

the west. A deep allied advance on this front and the seizure of the Longwy-Briey section would deprive the enemy an indisputable supply of ore for the manufacture of munitions. It might also lead to the invasion of enemy territory in the Moselle valley and endanger the supply of coal in the Saar basin. Allied success here would also cut his line of communications between the east and the west and compel his withdrawal from northern France or force his surrender.

Under the circumstance, the enemy could but regard the Verdun salient as threatening this sensitive area in the event that the Allies should find themselves capable of taking the offensive on that front. It was his desire to improve his position and also his prestige that prompted his violent and persistent attack in the attempt in 1916 to capture Verdun.⁸

As we will see, these words would almost become prophetic.

For reasons unknown, by 1917 this region, the most vulnerable for both France and Germany, was considered a “quiet zone” where both sides seemed to main-

8. *Ibid.*, 83-84.

tain a tense status quo rather than pursue serious operations. On February 13, 1918, after a period of a few months training, Pershing ordered the 42nd to move to the front at the Luneville sector of Southern Lorraine for a month’s training with the French VII Corps.

Prior to entering the line in a quiet sector, an inspection of the 42nd by the AEF staff revealed some serious deficiencies among its regimental commanders, some of whom had to be replaced for incompetence. Many of these officers were not from the regular army, and had other deficiencies as well. This was the key reason MacArthur felt he had to be in a hands-on position during operations, to provide encouragement, and if

necessary, direction. He was not some bullet-head wanting to be where the action was, and to get loaded up with medals for bravery, but saw it as a necessary part of his mission to overcome the inherent deficiencies in his very young and inexperienced division. Furthermore, success on the German front was crucial for success on the other front: winning the respect of the Allied officers and men as part of the fight for an independent U.S. Army that could act decisively and determine the course of the war.

As divisional Chief of Staff, MacArthur was considered as highly competent, and according to his military aide Captain Wolf, “MacArthur worked very early in the morning on his field plans. Alone, he made notes on a card, and by the time we met for a staff discussion he had the plans all worked out. . . . His plans invariably covered the optimum situation as well as the minimum. He was meticulous in organization and consummate in planning.”⁹ This enabled him to deploy himself on the front.

MacArthur’s first action at the front came quickly when he decided to join a French raid:

9. James, D. Clayton, *The Years of MacArthur, Vol. I 1880-1941* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1970), 156.

On February 26th I had my first contact with German troops. I had long felt it was imperative to know by personal observation what the division had to face. It is all very well to make a perfect plan of attack, to work out in theory foolproof design for victory. But if that plan does not consider the calibre of troops, the terrain to be fought over, the enemy strength opposed, then it may become confused and fail. I went to see General De Bazelaire, but he was reluctant to authorize me to join a French raiding party out to capture Boche prisoners, I told him frankly, "I cannot fight them if I cannot see them." He understood, and told me to go.¹⁰



U.S. Army

Brigadier General Douglas MacArthur receives one of his two Distinguished Service Crosses, won for his valor in World War I.

MacArthur went on that raid with veteran French soldiers, in what became a very savage fight which nonetheless ended in a success. He received the Croix de Guerre from de Bazelaire and a Silver Star from the American commander, which MacArthur himself said was "a bit too much" for him. Nonetheless it was the first, though small, victory in the U.S. Army's two-front war.

The division's first attack took place in March. It was to be a raid on the German trenches by the division's 168th Infantry regiment, and as MacArthur, who accompanied it, wrote, "millions of people, friend and foe, waited breathlessly for the first news of an American attack."

Following the initiating of the attack, a German artillery barrage was laid on them. "Our casualties began to mount. I began to feel uneasy. You never really know about men at such a time. They were not professionals. Few of them had ever been under fire. I decided to walk the line, hoping that my presence might comfort the men."

The men did not fail, and the success won both MacArthur and the regiment's commander, Major Charles J. Casey, the Distinguished Service Cross, the second highest military award below the Medal of Honor.

In his evaluation of MacArthur, Divisional Commander General Menoher wrote, "On this occasion, in the face of the determined and violent resistance of an alert enemy, he lent actual advice on the spot to unit

commanders and by his supervision of the operations not only guaranteed its success, but left with the entire division the knowledge of the constant attention of their leaders to their problems in action, and the sense of security which his wise and courageous leadership there impressed on the engaged companies."¹¹

On March 19, 1918, MacArthur gave Secretary of War Baker a tour of this front. Back in Washington, Baker would tell journalists that MacArthur was the "greatest fighting frontline general" in Pershing's army.¹²

The importance of MacArthur's hands-on approach was underscored by the evaluation of the Division by Lt. Col. Hugh A. Drum, who, while giving MacArthur high praise, pointed out there was "failure on the part of officers to look for and sometimes to correct errors of tactics and discipline. The principle of teaching constant observation for errors and correction of faults has not been developed sufficiently in this division." Nonetheless he noted that the division has "made a very favorable impression on the French and performed its work with excellent spirit and aggressiveness..."¹³

Taking over No-Man's Land

On March 31, 1918, the Germans launched an offensive they hoped would win the war. They targeted

10. MacArthur, *op. cit.*

11. James, *op. cit.*, 159.

12. *Ibid.*, 160.

13. *Ibid.*, 161.

the British 5th Army, 170 miles to the left of the 42nd. Then there was a strike towards the French lines on the Marne and Paris. The four French divisions that had been stationed with the 42nd were withdrawn to be deployed in a counter-attack, leaving the Lorraine front in the hand of the 42nd for the next 82 days.

The 42nd relieved three French divisions who had held the Baccarat sector. The so called “quiet” sector became a lot noisier once the 42nd arrived, because they used the opportunity for live combat training by “taking over” no-man’s land. Over three months the division conducted over 90 raids.

When the division was relieved, French General Pierre Georges Duport, under whose corps command the 42nd served, cited the division for its “offensive ardour, the sense for the utilization and the organization of terrain as for the liaison of the arms, the spirit of method, the discipline shown by all its officers and men, the inspiration animating them, [which] prove that at the first call, they can henceforth take a glorious place in the new line of battle.”¹⁴

Father Duffy, senior Irish Catholic Chaplain of the Division and great friend of the 165th regiment, the so-called fighting Irish, in which the very aggressive and intelligent Major William Donovan commanded a battalion, had this to say about MacArthur at Baccarat:

Our Chief of staff chafes at his own task of directing instead of fighting, and he has pushed himself into raids and forays in which, some older heads think, he had no business to be. His admirers say that his personal boldness has a very valuable result in helping to give confidence to the men. Colonel [Frank R.] McCoy and Major [William J.] Donovan are strong on this point. Donovan says it would be a blamed



French General Henri Gouraud, considered by MacArthur to be “the greatest” of modern French commanders.

good thing for the army if some General got himself shot in the front line. General Menoher and General Lenihan approve in secret of these madresses; but all five of them are wild Celts, whose opinion no sane man like myself would uphold.¹⁵

These four months gave the 42nd the live training that turned it into one of the AEF’s crack divisions. Colonel Henry J. Reilly, commander of the 149 Field Artillery, commented that this period demonstrated the Division’s effectiveness not only to the AEF high command, but to that of the British and French as well: “Of greatest importance, the Rainbow in the

course of its tour of duty in Lorraine demonstrated to the French, the British, and to the American high command that American citizen soldiers could take their place beside the best troops the war produced and equal their best performance.”

Champagne Marne German Offensive

By June 1918 there were 510,000 U.S. combat troops in France, including 18 full divisions, but only the original four were combat-ready. When the Germans struck at the Aisne-Marne region and advanced to and captured Chateau Thierry only 50 miles from Paris, Pershing committed the 2nd, 26th and the 42nd to aid the French in stopping the German offensive. In July, in preparation to counter a German offensive, the 42nd was assigned to the French Fourth Army under the command of General Henri Gouraud. That same month MacArthur was promoted to Brig. General.

For MacArthur, Gouraud “was the greatest” of the modern French commanders. By contrast Pétain “always exaggerated the enemy potential and thereby failed to exploit fully his successes, and Foch was too inflexible once he had outlined a plan, and consequently

14. *Ibid.*, 63.

15. *Ibid.*, 165.

missed opportunities. But Gouraud was without a weakness. I spent much time with him in his headquarters at the Ferme de Suippes and the more I saw him the more I liked him. It became a mutual friendship that lasted until his death many years later.”¹⁶

For his part, Gouraud told Colonel S.L.H. Slocum after the war, “I considered General MacArthur to be one of the finest and bravest officers I have ever served with.”¹⁷

There is a reference in MacArthur’s discussion with Kennedy, to how he lined up his division to wait for the German attack. He was actually referring to the tactic that Gouraud had developed to counter the German tactic for forcing a breakthrough on a limited front, in which the Germans bypassed strong points and attack the weakly held rear:

When I reported, he had already worked out a complete new theory of defense against the German tactic of breaking through and then bypassing strong points to exploit the lightly held rear areas. He would vacate his first line of trenches except for skeleton ‘suicide squads’ who would warn with rocket flares when the enemy’s grey clad infantry began their assault. Gouraud would wait until the attack reached his now evacuated first line, then lay down a withering fire, thus destroying the enemy’s momentum and solidarity. By the time our main line would be reached, the enemy would be spent and ready for destruction. It was an entirely new concept of trench warfare—a defense in depth which became a death trap for the attack.

But when they met the dikes of our real line, they were exhausted, uncoordinated and scattered, incapable of going further without being reorganized and reinforced... “Their legs are broken,” I told our sweating cannoneers.¹⁸

The German offensive was successfully defeated, and in praise of the 42nd Gouraud said: “We have in our midst in the most perfect fraternity of arms, the 42nd American Division. We esteem it an honor to rival them in courage and nerve. Its men went under fire as at a

football game, in shirtsleeves, with the sleeves rolled up over nervous biceps.”¹⁹

The 42nd was then assigned to the French Sixth Army under the command of General Jean Degoutte. On July 23, the 42nd was deployed near Chateau Thierry to relieve the 26th Division. The Germans were already pulling back and they were ordered to pursue. This battle earned MacArthur a fourth silver star, while France made him a member of the Legion of Honor with a second Croix de Guerre.

MacArthur was made commander of the 84th Infantry Brigade of the 42nd Division.

The Fight for the First American Army

Despite his success in stopping the German offensive, General Gouraud’s tactics were still very much within the geometry of “trench warfare.” His plan did not include the immediate launching of a swift counter-attack that could be carried through the German lines. Instead, the lines were again “stabilized” and a separate detailed offensive plan would be drafted again for some limited fixed objective to be implemented at some future point, giving the Germans time to re-establish their lines of defense.

Up until this point American divisions and brigades fought within French and British corps or divisions. Invariably, wherever they fought, they not only gave a good showing for themselves, but had a remoralizing effect on Allied soldiers, especially the French. With over one million men now in France, Pershing made the decision to fight for the formation of an independent American army with an independent territorial front. That front, Pershing reasoned, would have to be in front of Metz at the St. Mihiel salient, precisely the point which Pershing had earlier reasoned could become the decisive sector to break the German front and roll up the entire German line.

Pershing opened this fight for an independent Army at the Allied Conference of Commanders in Chief at Foch’s headquarters on July 24, 1918. On the same day, Pershing issued orders for the formation of the First American Army to take effect Aug. 10, 1918, “Not only was it demanded by the existing situation,” Pershing wrote, “but by all the circumstances of our participation in the war. Not the least important consideration was that until such an army should be actually formed and successfully carried out an operation, our

16. MacArthur, *op. cit.*, 64.

17. James, *op. cit.*, 176.

18. MacArthur, *op. cit.*, 64-65.

19. *Ibid.*, 65.

position before our people at home would not be enviable.”²⁰

At the same time the British kept insisting that the U.S. troops be sent to support the White Russian armies. Despite his opposition, Pershing was forced by the White House to send a token force of one regiment to Murmansk. Nonetheless, Pershing was backed by this statement from the Administration, probably issued under pressure from Baker, entitled “Aims and purposes of the U.S.,” which was sent to the Ambassadors of Great Britain, France, and Italy, reiterating the U.S. commitment to win the war and calling them to “accept its deliberate judgment that it should not dissipate its forces by attempting important operations elsewhere....” As for Russia “it was clear that intervention was out of the question as it would serve no useful purpose nor be of advantage in the prosecution of the War.”

In a letter to Secretary Baker on July 28, 1918, Pershing laid out this new fight:

On July 23rd, when Mr. Clemenceau was at my headquarters for the conference, I had an opportunity to speak about the use of our troops. I told him they were being wasted and that instead of the Allies being always on the defensive, an American Army should be formed at once to strike an offensive blow and turn the tide of the war. He was very much impressed at such boldness, as he had heard only of our men going into French divisions as platoons [an obvious lie] or at most as regiments. Soon after that, Pétain was called to Paris and I have heard he was told my views. Anyway, Pétain soon began to take another view.

Our troops have done well for new troops and the part they have taken has encouraged our allies, especially the French, to go in and help put over a counteroffensive. This offensive, between Soissons and Chateau-Thierry, was planned some time ago, to be undertaken south of the Marne; or to the east between the Marne and Reims. I had conferred with General Pétain and had arranged to put the 1st, 2nd, and 26th Divisions in the attack north of the Marne. As it turned out, all of these troops were engaged with results you already know. The participation by our troops made this offensive possible and in fact the brunt of it

fell to them. Our divisions in this advance outstepped the French and had to slow down their speed occasionally for them to catch up.

Two American corps are now organized and on the active front. There are to be organized into the Field Army, which will take its place in line under my immediate command on August 10th. We shall occupy a sector north of the Marne and probably replace the 6th French Army. So that before long I shall have to relinquish command of the Field Army and command the Group [of Armies].

I have had to insist very strongly, in face of determined opposition, to get our troops out of leading strings. You know the French and British have always advanced the idea that we should not form divisions until our men had three or four months with them. We have found, however that only a short time was necessary to learn all they know, as it is confined to trench warfare almost entirely, and I have insisted on open warfare training. To get this training, it has been necessary to unite our men under our own commanders, which is now being done rapidly.

The additional fact that training with these worn-out French and British troops, if continued, is detrimental, is another reason for haste in forming our own units and conducting our own training. The morale of the Allies is low and association with them has had a bad effect upon our men. To counteract the talk our men have heard, we have had to say to our troops, through their officers, that we come over to brace up the Allies and help them win and that they must pay no attention to loose remarks along that line by our Allied comrades.

The fact is that our officers and men are far and away superior to the tired European. High officers of the Allies have often dropped derogatory remarks about our poorly trained staff and high commanders, which our men have stood as long as they can. Even Mr. Tardieu [Official U.S. French liaison officer] said some of these things to me a few days ago. I replied, in rather forcible language, that we had now been patronized as long as we would stand for it, and I wished to hear no more of that sort of nonsense. Orders have been given by the French that all of our troops in sectors with the French would be

20. Pershing, *op. cit.*, 174.



UK Official War photographs

King George V was “hands-on” during the War, seeking to put American troops under British command. Here he inspects members of the South Africa Native Labour Corps.

placed under our own officers and that American division commanders would be given command of their own sectors. This has come about since my insistence forced the French to agree to the formation of an American Field Army...²¹

The British did not like this at all and began to sabotage it. King George even came and made a personal appeal for more American troops to be assigned to the British command so that the “English-speaking peoples” could fight side by side and become permanent allies after the war.

While saying he agreed “friendly relations ought to be stronger after the war,” Pershing was unmoved, and politely said that now that the United States was forming its own army, it would require all of its troops and that he “could make no promises.”

The British still wanted U.S. troops to serve under British command. Both Marshall Haig and Lloyd George schemed behind Pershing’s back to break the idea of an American Army, even encouraging Italy to make the absurd request for no less than 25 divisions, which of course came to nothing.

Commenting on these schemes, Pershing wrote in his war memoirs, “The impression left on our minds was, first, that the British desired to discourage the con-

centration of our forces into one army, and second, that perhaps there was a desire to check the growth of too-friendly relations between Americans and French.” Besides he also wrote, “Our experience with the British had shown that, due to differences in national characteristics and military systems, the instruction and training of our troops by them retarded our progress.”

The British used other forms of pressure. Knowing the United States was dependent on British shipping, in August 1918 the British began reducing the amount of shipping available to transport U.S. military supplies and men. The United States was still deficient in artillery, tanks, and aircraft, and therefore dependent on France and Britain to fill these gaps.

Unable to stop the formation of an Army, the British moved to prevent Pershing from carrying out his plans for a breakthrough on the St. Mihiel Front at Metz that would bring the war directly onto German territory.

Throughout the second half of August Pershing completed the organization of the First Army and even took command of the St. Mihiel front. Yet on August 30, within hours of taking control of the front, and only a matter of days before the American offensive in the sector was to begin, Marshall Foch came to Pershing’s headquarters with an entirely new plan which was obviously drawn up in cooperation with, if not at the instigation of, the British. The plan called for nothing less than shifting the main area of Allied offensive activity fur-

21. *Ibid.*, 188.

ther to the West in front of Sedan, that would be launched in conjunction with a British offensive even further to the West, which is reality would be hundreds of kilometers from German territory. Foch proposed nothing less than breaking up the First Army and parcelling out its divisions among the French and the British. Pershing saw this as a transparent attempt to force the United States into a totally subordinate role in what was to prove to be the last offensive of the war, where France and Great Britain could be seen as having “won” the war, relegating to US to the role of their “native” auxiliaries. Thus, having only a secondary role in winning the war, the United States could only expect a secondary role in determining the peace.

For the sake of brevity, let it be said this meeting was so tense that it almost became the moral equivalent of a brawl. In the end, following another Allied conference on Sept 2nd, it was decided that the First Army would stay intact. It would carry out an attack on the St. Mihiel salient with the limited objective confined only to its reduction. The First Army would then be assigned to the Meuse-Argonne to the west of St. Mihiel, serving as the right flank of a combined attack in the direction of Sedan.

Except for having won the fight for an independent U.S. Army on its own front, Pershing was by no means pleased with this outcome, but he really had little choice under the circumstances. He managed not only to retain the First Army, but was able to form a Second Army. As we will see, MacArthur would confirm Pershing’s original conception of the potential for a decisive breakthrough at Metz.

St. Mihiel: the Americans Demonstrate What Open Warfare Is

Demonstrating the contrast between the slaughter in the trenches, versus the American system of “open warfare,” Pershing made the following observation when he took command of the St. Mihiel sector from his French counterpart:

When we arrived, the French General who was being relieved and his Chief of Staff, all dressed up in their red trousers and blue coats, came formally to turn over the command. The Chief of Staff carried two large volumes, each consisting of about 150 pages, the first being the Offensive Plan and the second the Defensive Plan for the St. Mihiel salient. These were presented to me

with considerable ceremony. My orders had already been prepared, the one for the attack comprising six pages, and the one for the defense eight pages. This incident is cited merely to show the difference between planning for trench warfare, to which the French were inclined, and open warfare, which we expected to conduct.²²

On September 5 Pershing made the same point when he issued his “Combat Instructions” to the American First Army:

From a tactical point of view, the method of combat in trench warfare presents a marked contrast to that employed in open warfare, and the attempt by assaulting infantry to use trench warfare methods in an open warfare combat will be successful only at great cost. Trench warfare is marked by uniform formations, the regulation of space and time by higher commands down to the smallest details... fixed distances and intervals between units and individuals... little initiative... Open warfare is marked by irregularity of formations, comparatively little regulation of space and time by higher commanders, the greatest possible use of the infantry’s own fire power to enable it to get forward... brief order and the greatest possible use of individual initiative by all troops engaged in the action... The infantry commander must oppose machine guns by fire from his rifles, his automatics and his rifle grenades and must close with the crews under cover of this fire and of ground beyond their flanks... The success of every unit from the platoon to the division must be exploited to the fullest extent. Where strong resistance is encountered, reinforcements must not be thrown in to make a frontal attack at this point, but must be pushed through gaps created by successful units, to attack these strong points in the flank of rear.²³

Commenting on his plan, Pershing wrote:

[In] our original plans it had been my purpose after crushing the salient to continue the offensive through the Hindenburg Line and as much

22. *Ibid.*, 238.

23. *Ibid.*, 358.

farther as possible, depending upon the success attained and the opposition that developed.

As we have seen, however, the agreement reached in conference on Sept. 2nd limited the operations to the reduction of the salient itself. The basic features of the plan were not altered, but its objectives were defined and the number of troops to be employed was reduced.

Tactical surprise was essential to success, as the strength of the position would permit small forces of the enemy to inflict heavy losses on attacking troops. The sector had been quiet for some time and was usually occupied by seven enemy divisions in the front line, with two in reserve. It was estimated that the enemy could reinforce it by two divisions in two days, two more in three days, and as many divisions as were available in four days.

From captured documents and other sources of information, it seemed reasonable to conclude that the enemy had prepared a plan for withdrawal from the salient to the Hindenburg line in case of heavy Allied pressure. There was no doubt he was aware that an American attack was impending. Therefore, it was possible that he might increase his strength on our front. . . .²⁴

He then made this point, which would be key to MacArthur's mission in this two-front battle:

In that case, our task would be more difficult and as anything short of complete success would undoubtedly be seized upon to our disadvantage by those of the Allies who opposed the policy of forming an American army, no chances of a repulse in our first battle could be taken. These considerations prompted the decision to use some of our most experienced divisions along with the others.²⁵

The order of battle for the main attack on the St. Mihiel salient was to be carried out by three American Corps. The I corps on the right with the 82nd Division



creative commons

The result of the trench warfare methods of the British-French command: mass graves throughout France. Here, the Roeselare French Military Cemetery.

astride the Moselle and the 90th, the 5th and the 2nd in order from east to west. Then came the IV Corps with the 89th, the 42nd and the 1st divisions. Here was to be the main attack, with the 42nd making the main effort. Then came the 5th Corps with the 26th, part of the 4th division, assisted by the French 15th Colonial Division, which was to conduct the secondary attack against the western face. The 26th alone was to make a deep advance, directed to the southeast toward Vigneulles.

At the point of the salient was the French II Colonial Corps, composed of three divisions.

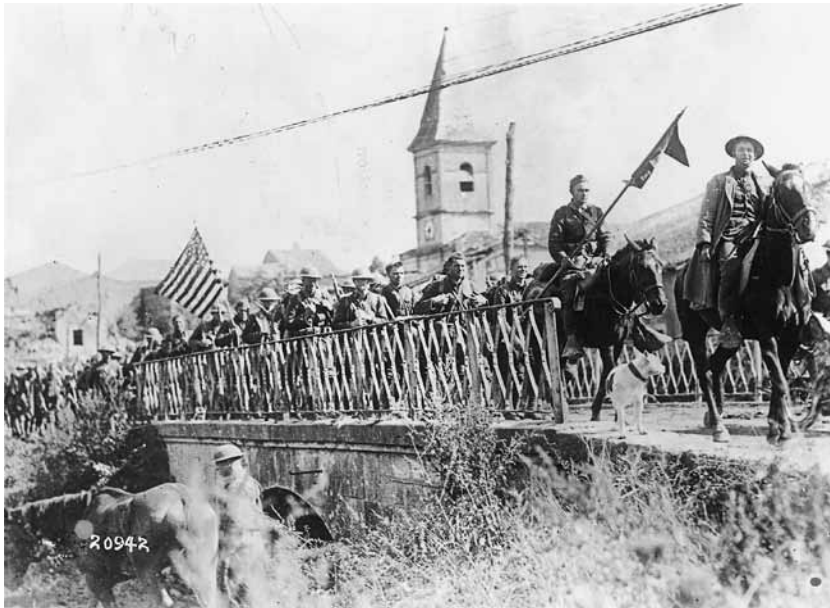
The three American Corps comprised a total of nine divisions in the front line. Recall that American divisions, and therefore their corps, were twice the size in manpower of those of the French.

This was to be a battle of movement, not the typical "trench" warfare offensive that so constantly failed to achieve a breakthrough. In the typical trench warfare tactic an artillery barrage could last up to four days. This was supposedly needed to break up the barbed wire entanglements as well as strong points. In reality, it gave away any element of surprise, allowing the enemy time to bring up reinforcements and adjust his position in preparation for the attack. It also chewed up the no-mans land so much, that it became almost as impassable as the barbed wire.

By contrast, Pershing planned a preliminary barrage of no more than four hours. Left with no heavy tanks, because the British refused to give them for this battle,

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*, 263.



National Archives

American engineers returning from the St. Mihiel front, after MacArthur was ordered not to proceed to the capture of Metz.

the plan was to have the engineers using special equipment move with the troops to cut paths through the barbed wire. They also threw chicken wire over the barbed wire, thereby allowing the men simply to walk over it. This facilitated rapid advance and a battle of maneuver, which totally amazed the French.

The battle started on September 12. The rapid advance of the Americans, who attacked within only a few hours of the artillery preparations, and simply walked over or through paths cut through the barbed wire, overwhelmed the enemy, who were forced into a disorganized retreat over open ground. By the 13th, days ahead of plans, Pershing and Pétain were in St. Mihiel and the salient was no more.

MacArthur Gets His Orders

As commander of the 84th brigade of the 42nd Division, MacArthur received his orders on September 10th. They were to be in their assigned position by September 12. "The 42nd division will attack in the center and deliver the main blow. . . . The division will seize its objective of the first phase, first day, without regard to the progress of neighboring divisions."²⁶

In the early hours of September 12, after artillery preparation, MacArthur led his assault line forward,

which was followed by a squadron of light tanks led by Major George S. Patton, but the tanks soon bogged down in the mud. Commenting on the tactics he deployed, MacArthur wrote:

I have fought the German long enough to know his technique of defense. He concentrated to protect his center, but left his flanks weak. The field of action, the Bois de la Sonnard, lends itself to maneuver and we were able with little loss to pierce both flanks, envelop his center, and send his whole line into hurried retreat. By night fall we had the village of Essey and were out in the open in the broad plain of Woëvre, on the far side of which was the fortress of Metz, a stronghold since the days of Caesar.²⁷

With these tactics, MacArthur's brigade advanced rapidly; in fact, the entire offensive operation made exceedingly rapid progress out of all expectation of the Allies, although not of the Americans, who had in fact expected this rapid advance. MacArthur's brigade advanced the most rapidly and soon found itself in front of Metz. In his *Reminiscences* MacArthur observed:

...As I had suspected Metz was practically defenseless at that moment. Its combat garrison had been temporarily withdrawn to support other sectors of action. Here was an unparalleled opportunity to break the Hindenburg line at its pivotal point. There it lay, our prize wide open for the taking. Take it and we would be in an excellent position to cut off south Germany from the rest of the country; it would lead to the invasion of central Germany by way of the practically undefended Moselle Valley. Victory at Metz would cut the great lines of communication and supply behind the German front, and might bring the war to a quick close.

I recommended as forcefully as I could that my brigade immediately attack the town, promising that I would be in its famous city hall by

26. Amerine, William Henry, *Alabama's Own in France* (New York: Eaton & Gettinger, 1919), 170-171.

27. MacArthur, *op.cit.* 70-71.

nightfall. I emphasized that the tactical success of the last days meant that little in itself unless fully exploited, that to tie us down now would be 'like a cavalry horse on a lariat tied to a picket fence. It can go so far and not farther, no matter how much richer the grass is beyond its reach.' Division, Corps, and Army agreed with me [This included Pershing since he was Army commander], but the high command [the Allied command] disapproved. Other plans had been made—the Meuse-Argonne drive—and while my ideas were deeply appreciated, no change would be made. I have always thought this was one of the great mistakes of the war. Had we seized this unexpected opportunity we would have saved thousands of American lives lost in the dim recesses of the Argonne Forest. It was an example of the inflexibility in pursuit of previously conceived ideas that is, unfortunately, too frequent in modern warfare. Final decisions are made not at the front by those who are there, but many miles away by those who can but guess at the possibilities. The essence of victory lies in the answer to where and when.

The enemy lost no time. He brought up thousands of troops from Strasbourg and other sectors, and within a week the whole Allied army could not have stormed Metz...²⁸

In an indirect reference to MacArthur's own observations, Pershing writes:

Reports received on 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 involved and delayed the greater Meuse-Argonne operation, to which we were wholly committed.²⁹

Describing the rest of his role in this battle MacArthur wrote, "I was directed to organize a line of defense and I established my headquarters in the Chateau at St. Benoit. I was promptly shelled out. In order to

confuse the enemy, I was ordered to stage, on the night of September 25, a powerful double raid against the center of his line to make him think we were about to resume our advance, whereas the real attack was to be in the Argonne.

"The raid was to be made on two German strong points, one a fortified farm—which in France meant a group of buildings with walls connecting them—and the other a village of stone buildings with trenches and strong barbed wire entanglements..." MacArthur ordered an artillery barrage, "The fire from these ninety guns was so accurate and so overwhelming that both Germany garrisons were practically annihilated. I maneuvered the infantry carefully so as to make a lot of noise and much display, but not to bring it into the line of fire. I actually lost fewer than twenty men killed and wounded. Shortly afterward, the division was relieved and went into preparation for what became the final drive of the war. I was cited for the St. Benoit actions—my sixth Silver Star."

MacArthur's 8,000-man brigade captured 10,000 prisoners.

The tremendous success of this operation prompted Marshall Pétain to issue the following order to his own troops after the battle:

It is desirable for a certain number of French officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers to visit the terrain so that they can fully understand the manner in which the American infantry has been able, during the last attacks carried out by the American First Army, to overcome the obstacles encountered during the advance and not destroyed by artillery or by tanks.

The American units have cut themselves a passage with wire-cutters through the thick bands of wire or they have walked over these wire entanglements with much skill, rapidity, and decision. It is interesting that our infantry soldiers should see for themselves the nature of the difficulties thus overcome and that they should persuade themselves that they also are capable of doing as much on occasion.

The Meuse-Argonne Meatgrinder

The new front put the American right flank on the Meuse river and its left flank to the west on the Argonne Forest along an 80-mile front. "A million American soldiers," MacArthur wrote, "were to attempt a break-

28. *Ibid.*

29. Pershing, *op. cit.*, 270.



National Archives and Records Administration

American gunners in Argonne Forest, September 1918.

through in the center of the Western Front to Sedan, a breakthrough which would mean the collapse of the powerful Hindenburg Line and the defeat of Germany.”³⁰

Behind this front on the line Metz-Sedan lay the intersection of the great rail network the Germans had developed that would bring supplies from the direction of Cologne-Liege-Namur, then south to Sedan, and from Koblenz down the Moselle valley to Metz, from which the entire front to the west was supplied. This defined this front as the most decisive of this last offensive of the war.

On the other hand it was the most difficult terrain along the entire front. MacArthur wrote, “In 1914, when the great German armies first marched to conquest, they had come through the Argonne, seized it and had never been dislodged. The terrain was so difficult, so easily defended, that the French had never attempted to attack. It was so powerfully fortified over four years that doubt existed in Allied high circles that any troops in the world could drive out the Germans. The Germans themselves boasted they would drown the American attack in its own blood.”

Pershing’s original plan, and MacArthur’s later observations about making the decisive breakthrough at Metz, had been designed to outflank this front by breaking the Hindenburg line at Metz lying to the East. This would have enveloped Sedan from the east, behind the strong position of the Meuse-Argonne.

Pershing was well aware of this from the beginning.

One senses that the British and the French were aware of this as well, and maneuvered, pressured, and in the end forced the Americans to accept the limited objectives on the St. Mihiel-Metz front, and shift their effort to a front position on the Meuse-Argonne.

The British and the French seemed to have expected the United States to fail from the beginning, thinking that they could not logistically shift an entire army of 500,000 men in time to launch their attack. This feat was in fact carried out in time, to the total surprise of the Allies.

On September 26, on the first day of the offensive, the United

States had advanced to and captured Montfaucon, an accomplishment that Pétain thought could not be finished before winter set in. The Germans nonetheless had carefully prepared a system of defenses through the sector, MacArthur wrote:

Into this red inferno the American had jumped off on September 26, and foot by foot, over scarred and wooded hill and valley, had fought their bloody way from trench to trench to the enemy’s main line of resistance. The German, alive to the threat, had a machine-gun nest behind every rock, a cannon behind every natural embrasure. Here was the key sector of the famous Hindenburg Line, known as the Krunhilde Stal-lung [sic. It was in fact called the Kriemhilde Stellung]. Here was the last line of the mighty German defenses in the Argonne. Breach it and there would be laid bare Sedan and Mezieres, the two huge rail centers, through which all the German armies as far as the North Sea at Ostend were supplied. Take Sedan and every German army to the west would be outflanked. The railroads by which they could withdraw such large masses of troops would be either in American hands or under fire from American guns. It would mean the capture of troops running into the hundreds of thousands. It would mean the end of the war.³¹

30. MacArthur, *op. cit.*, 73.

31. *Ibid.*

The 42nd was not in the first wave of the attack, but was thrown in at the crucial point where the entire offensive was being held up at a point called the Côte de Châtillon, where the American First Division, after driving a deep salient into the German front, was stopped. The Côte de Châtillon was a high point that jutted out forming a natural bastion along the German front. As MacArthur wrote, “This salient was dominated by the Côte de Châtillon stronghold which raked the Allied flank and thus stopped the advancing American attack. Every effort to go forward had been stopped cold by this flanking fire.”

“I carefully reconnoitered the desolate and forbidding terrain that confronted my brigade. There were rolling hills, heavily wooded valleys of death between the endless folds of ridges.... I saw at once that the previous advances had failed because it had not been recognized that the Côte de Châtillon was the keystone of the whole German position; that until it was captured we would be unable to advance. I proposed to capture the Côte de Châtillon by concentrating troops on it, instead of continuing to spread the troops along a demonstratedly unsuccessful line of attack. Both the division and corps commanders approved.”

Then there was the famous demand by the V Corps Commander and former associate of Arthur MacArthur, General Charles P. Summerall, who said, “Give me Châtillon, or give me a list of five thousand casualties.” To which MacArthur said he would take it “or my name will be head of the list.”

The front of MacArthur’s 84th Brigade lay astride the Côte de Châtillon, which protruded into the 84th sector with a broad front which tapered back on the sides. As MacArthur explains, he would deploy his 168th regiment on the right, and the 167th on the left. Knowing that the Germans maintain a strong center while keeping their flanks weak, his purpose was to launch a pincer operation with the 168th attacking up the right flank of the Châtillon and the 167th up the left. MacArthur wrote that during a reconnaissance of the Châtillon, he “discovered that, as usual, while the German center, where the 1st Division had spent its blood, seemed impregnable, the flanks were vulnera-

FIGURE 2



The lay of the land during the battle for the Argonne.

ble. His deep belt of entanglement and trench dribbled out at the ends. There was where I planned to strike with my Alabama cotton growers (the 167th Regiment) on the left, my Iowa farmers (168th Regiment) on the right. I planned to use every machine gun and artillery piece as covering fire.”

This was harder than it may sound, because those flanks were also covered by other hills which had first to be taken before the Châtillon itself could be attacked.

We moved out in the misty dawn, and from then on little units of our men crawled and sneaked and side slipped forward from one bit of cover to another. When the chance came we would close in suddenly to form squads or platoons for a swift envelopment that would gain a toehold on some slope or deadly hillock. Death, cold and remorseless, whistled and sung its way through our ranks, but by nightfall Hill 288 was in Iowa



Australian War Memorial

The signing of the Treaty of Versailles, June 28, 1919, the signal for the beginning of the next war.

hands. That night I readjusted and reorganized, and the following day we fought up hill 282, a frowning height of 900 feet, and fought around and skirted hill 205 to take the Tuileries Ferme. (This was on the left of the Châtillon and its capture exposed its flank which could then be attacked by the 168th Iowa Regiment.)

The last defenses of the Côte de Châtillon were still before us, but as dusk was falling the First Battalion of the 168th under Major Lloyd Ross moved from the right while a battalion of the 167th under Major Ravee Norris stalked stealthily from the left toward the gap in the wire. The two battalions, like the arms of a relentless pincer, closed in from both sides. Officers fell and sergeants leaped to the command. Companies dwindled to platoons and corporals took over. At the end, Major Ross had only 300 men and 6 officers left of 1,450 men and 25 officers. That is the way the Côte de Châtillon fell, and that is the ways those gallant citizen soldiers, so far from home, won the approach to victory.

Both his divisional commander and Summerall recommended MacArthur for the Medal of Honor and a promotion. Both were turned down; nonetheless, to his satisfaction MacArthur was awarded another Distinguished Service Cross.

While this broke the strongest point of the line and broke the back of the Germans, nonetheless the hard fight continued for the next three weeks to the end of the

war on November 11th. In the last days it was said that Pershing wanted the U.S. soldiers to be the first in Sedan, the site of France's ignoble defeat in the Franco-Prussian war in 1871. He ordered his divisions to race to its capture. In the haste of battle divisional boundaries were crossed, which led to MacArthur's capture "by friendly forces" from another division who took him for a German. He was soon released, and the war was soon over.

While the Germans were clearly defeated, that "second front," the British-dominated Entente, was not.

In November 1918, only a few days after the signing of the Armistice, the U.S. Navy's London Planning Section, which was headed by the reputedly anglophile Admiral Sims, nonetheless warned that Britain could target the United States. An estimate written at the time by the Planning Section stated:

Four great Powers have arisen in the world to compete with Great Britain for commercial supremacy on the seas—Spain, Holland, France and Germany. Each of these Powers in succession have been defeated by Great Britain and her fugitive Allies. A fifth commercial Power, the greatest one yet, is now arising to compete for at least commercial equality with Great Britain. Already the signs of jealousy are visible. Historical precedent warns us to watch closely the moves we make or permit to be made.³²

At the end of the war, the prestige of the United States and its army was enormous in the eyes of public opinion in Europe, a fact that enraged the British, who redoubled their efforts to prevent the United States from imposing a settlement in Europe that would assure a peace for the future. Unfortunately they had a willing accomplice in the person of "colonel" Edward House and his dupe President Woodrow Wilson. By the end of 1919, the world was already sliding on a course that would lead to the next war, and the U.S. Navy and Army began work on War Plan Red, a contingency plan if war broke out with Great Britain.

32. Herwig, Holger H., *The United States in German Naval Planning 1889-1941* (Little Brown, 1976), 171.