

PERSHING'S RIGHT HAND:
GENERAL JAMES G. HARBORD AND THE
AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCES IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

A Dissertation

by

BRIAN FISHER NEUMANN

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2006

Major Subject: History

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ABSTRACT

Pershing's Right Hand:

General James G. Harbord and the American Expeditionary Forces
in the First World War. (August 2006)

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This project is both a wartime biography and an examination of the American effort in France during the First World War. At its core, the narrative follows the military career of Major General James G. Harbord. His time in France saw Harbord serve in the three main areas of the American Expeditionary Forces: administration, combat, and logistics. As chief of staff to AEF commander General John J. Pershing, Harbord was at the center of the formation of the AEF and the development of its administrative policies. He organized and managed the AEF General Staff and served as Pershing's most trusted subordinate. In May of 1918, Harbord transferred to the fighting line, taking over command of the 4th "Marine" Brigade. During his time with the 4th Brigade, and later as commander of the 2nd Division, Harbord played a significant part in the battles of Belleau Wood and Soissons. A dedicated supporter of Pershing's tactics of "open" warfare, Harbord's failings as a combat commander showed the limits of American tactical experience. For the final four months of the war, Harbord took over control of the AEF's logistical system, the Services of Supply. Though he proved an able administrator, the American supply system approached total collapse in the fall of 1918, and was prevented

only by the signing of the Armistice. In all three of these roles, Harbord embodied the emergence of the military manager in the American army. The First World War illustrates that war had grown so large and complex that it required officers whose primary talents lay not in leading men in combat, but in the areas of administration and management of large bureaucratic organizations. James Harbord was one of the first, and best, examples of this new type of officer.

To my mother, thank you for always reminding me that if I am not having fun then I am doing something wrong. I'm learning.

To my dad, thank you for giving me the unflinching support that enabled me to do this right. Enjoy the raise.

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The research for this dissertation required several lengthy trips to various archives from Washington, D.C. to upstate New York. I want to thank the staff at the Norwich House in College Park, MD, the Milburn Hotel in New York City, and the Craftsman House B&B in Canton, NY. These locales offered comfort and refuge when I was a long way from home.

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Despite all the amazing assistance I have received during this long project, all factual errors, erroneous interpretations, and misguided conclusions are mine alone. So be it, I'm only human.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Purpose

When asked to name an American officer from the First World War, few respondents will be able to think beyond General John J. “Black Jack” Pershing. As commander of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF), Pershing monopolizes all discussion of the American effort in France. He embodies the image of the glorious general at the head of his army, the Great Chief who commands from the front and is victorious due to his own brilliance, character, and natural ability. History is replete with these paragons of the military arts: Alexander the Great, Caesar, and Napoleon to name a few. This cult of personality dominates American military history as well, stretching from George Washington to Norman Schwarzkopf. As Winfield Scott and Zachary Taylor dominate discussions of the American war with Mexico, so do Douglas MacArthur and Matthew Ridgway hold sway in the Korean War and William Westmoreland in the Vietnam War. The list expands considerably for the American Civil War and the Second World War, where names like Lee, Grant, Sherman, Jackson, McClellan, Eisenhower, Marshall, Patton, and the aforementioned MacArthur have become established figures in the public mind. That these two wars should produce so many commanders of renown is understandable, for they are the pivotal struggles in the development of the United States and its rise to a global super power. Every other war

This dissertation follows the stylistic format of the *Journal of Military History*.

pales in comparison to those titanic struggles, and it is only natural that they receive the lion's share of attention amongst students of American military history.

The First World War is an anomaly in this equation. In terms of size and scope, it is the third largest war in American history. Two million Americans served in France during the United States' eighteen-month involvement, more than the forces of the Spanish-American, Korean, and Vietnam Wars combined. Yet, the American war of 1917-1918 remains a minor occurrence in the public mind. The reasons for this presumed irrelevance are varied and complex. Though the war lasted four years, the United States entered it only at the very end, with combat troops engaging in the fighting in the last six months of the war. The war also suffers in the shadow of the Second World War in the American imagination. There were no great campaigns in France in 1918, nor was there an enemy that embodied evil as Adolf Hitler and the Nazis did. What glories there were in the First World War were confined to the trenches, where death and desolation went hand in hand. It was an impersonal war, fought with artillery and machine-guns, tanks and aeroplanes, with the common soldier reduced to grist for the mill of industrialized warfare. Even the relative importance of the American contribution to the war remains a topic of debate amongst historians, with many arguing that the presence of American soldiers on the battlefields of France relieved the pressure on the European Allies but did not secure the victory against Imperial Germany. Consequently, for many observers there is limited interest in war as a source of national pride, and little need to look beyond Pershing when discussing the AEF and the American military effort.

But understanding the First World War is essential to a larger comprehension of the development of the American military. It was a transitional war for the United States,

completing the transformation from the Napoleonic warfare of the nineteenth century to the era of modern war in the twentieth century. It brought the American Army into the arena of mechanization and saw the United States engage in coalition warfare on a large scale for the first time. More importantly for the present discussion, it was the first war in which the United States benefited from what historian Edward Coffman termed the “Managerial Revolution” in the United States Army.¹ Begun during the reforms of Secretary of War Elihu Root (1899-1904), the transformation of the U.S. Army from a constabulary force to a modern army is one of the major sea changes in the Army’s history. One of the most important reforms with regard to the development of officers with management skills was the creation of an educational system within the army, centered around the Army War College and the Leavenworth schools. This system brought a managerial ethos to the American military, conceptualizing war as not only a contest of arms, but also, given the increasing size and modernization of military forces, as a business enterprise requiring officers to possess skills beyond the direction of troops in combat. Consequently, the army needed a “new breed” of officer: the military manager.²

This study focuses on one such military manager in the First World War: Major General James G. Harbord. During the war, Harbord quickly established himself as General Pershing’s most trusted subordinate, the able lieutenant who the AEF commander called upon to oversee the most difficult operations in the AEF. To illustrate Harbord’s role in the AEF, this work uses a narrative format to examine his wartime career. In addition, it focuses on his contributions to the American war effort in the three primary facets of the AEF: administration, combat operations, and logistics. From May

of 1917 through May of 1918, Harbord served as Pershing's chief of staff, aiding the general in creating the AEF General Staff as well as the development and implementation of policies covering, but not limited to, the organization of American forces, training, coordination, administration, and supply. In May 1918, Harbord transferred to the line, where he remained until the following July. During this period, he commanded the 4th "Marine" Brigade at Belleau Wood and the 2nd Division during the Battle of Soissons. Harbord's tenure in combat illuminates the questionable effectiveness of Pershing's doctrine of "open" warfare, and shows the difficulties weighing on the American combat forces given the pressing need to contribute on the fighting line, the limited time they had to work in, and the resulting inadequacies in the American training programs, all of which impacted American combat effectiveness. Finally, from August 1918 through May 1919, Harbord took command of the AEF's logistical organization, the Services of Supply. As Commanding General, Services of Supply, he worked to correct the problems and delays that plagued the AEF supply system, which was ultimately saved from collapse by the Armistice in November 1918. In these three areas, Harbord represents the managerial officer needed to wage a modern industrialized war. His talents, education, and professional experience prepared him for the responsibility of managing and administering organizations as complex and massive as the AEF General Headquarters and the SOS. Less effective as a combat commander, Harbord is an example of the "new breed" of officer in the U.S. Army: the military manager whose primary responsibility was not the command of soldiers in combat, but the management and administration of a massive military organization in the field. He is the forerunner to the modern officer whose duties reach beyond combat operations into areas such as civil

administration, the creation and maintenance of public works projects, and the direction of forces of occupation. Finally, he represents the professionalization of the American officers corps, and the modern officer whose training and expertise is an amalgam of managerial techniques and military arts.

Historiography and Methodology

In the present scholarship on the American Expeditionary Forces, James Harbord is largely forgotten, overshadowed by the monolithic presence of General Pershing. The only book-length descriptions of Harbord's wartime career are his own works. *Leaves From a War Diary* (1925), is a compilation of Harbord's letters to his wife, written sporadically throughout the war. They offer a unique insight into the daily occurrences Harbord found noteworthy and display his raw feelings on Pershing, the Allies in general, the French people, the relationship between the AEF and the War Department, and the overall role of the military in a democracy. But as with many memoirs and diaries, Harbord's coverage is erratic, skipping over vast stretches of time between entries, and offering more anecdotal observations than any real insight into the war. His later work, *The American Army in France, 1917-1919* (1936), is a much fuller examination of the war and description of Harbord's experiences in Europe. In it he seeks to give a complete history of the American war effort, while also covering his own role in intricate detail. Its general breadth and depth, along with Harbord's natural skill as a writer, make the work one of the best treatments of the war from any of the American generals involved. Even so, it suffers from a sense of self-aggrandizement regarding the

American contribution to the war and is overly forgiving in its treatment of Pershing and the AEF. All successes were due to Pershing's skill and the abilities of the AEF, while any setbacks or difficulties encountered were the fault of the Allies, the War Department, or circumstance.³

Given his prominence in the AEF, Harbord is not a complete unknown to historians of the First World War. Timothy Nenninger provides a brief biography of Harbord's career in *The American National Biography* (1999), as does Reggie Shrader in the *Dictionary of American Military Biography* (1984).⁴ While suitable for their purposes, neither offers more than the most cursory, encyclopedic treatment of Harbord's life. The most detailed discussion of Harbord during the war comes in Donald Smythe's biography, *Pershing* (1986). In it Smythe characterizes Harbord as, "A man of wit, imagination, and independent thought" who proved "enormously competent" during the war.⁵ Yet the focus of the work is on Pershing and it subsequently loses touch with Harbord when he is not connected in some way to the AEF commander. The same can be said of Frank Vandiver's biography *Black Jack* (1977). While it traces the relationship between Harbord and Pershing over a longer timeline, the book fails to discuss Harbord as an individual, instead confining him as a supporting character in the life of John Pershing.⁶ Edward M. Coffman also covers Harbord tangentially in *The War to End All Wars* (1968), which remains the best single volume treatment of the American military contribution in the First World War, but does not examine him in any detail or capture his overall importance to the AEF's development.⁷

Very little has been written on officership in the Great War, or the experiences of the staff officers in the American Expeditionary Forces. Allan R. Millett's, *The General*

(1975), covers the career of Lieutenant General Robert L. Bullard, and analyzes the transformation of the American officer corps into a professional organization in the decades leading up to the First World War. It provides an excellent look at the experiences of those in the line during the war, but is limited in its discussion of the work of the General Staff.⁸ James Cooke's *Pershing and His Generals* (1997) is the best description of the formation and development of the AEF General Staff and the relationship between Pershing and his senior officers in France. It contains detailed information on Harbord as AEF chief of staff, but does not follow him after he leaves AEF General Headquarters. I.B. Holley's *General John M. Palmer, Citizen Soldiers, and the Army of a Democracy* (1982) also provides an insight into the inner-workings of the AEF General Staff. It blends biographical narrative with historical interpretation in its analysis of John McCauley Palmer, who directed the AEF's Operations Section for the first months of American involvement in 1917. The book discusses the challenges in setting up the American organization in France, and provides a good picture of the personal relationships between Pershing's staff officers at AEF General Headquarters.⁹

Regarding Harbord's time as a combat commander, Oliver Spaulding and John Wright's *The Second Division* (1937) is the most complete general history of the entire 2nd Division, in which Harbord served as a brigade commander and then later as the division commander. Allan R. Millett's *Semper Fidelis* (1980) contains excellent information on the Marine Corps in the World War, and specifically covers Harbord's time as the commander of the 4th "Marine" Brigade from May through July of 1918. As to the specific battles Harbord fought in, Robert Asprey's *At Belleau Wood* (1996) is the best treatment of that battle and specifically analyzes, rather critically, Harbord's role as

the brigade commander. The only book on the divisional experience of the Aisne-Marne offensive is Douglas Johnson and Rolfe Hillman's *Soissons 1918* (1999), which is also critical of Harbord's abilities as a combat commander.¹⁰ In addition, several memoirs and historical monographs discuss the combat experiences of the Marines and the 2nd Division during Harbord's tenure in the line.¹¹

The historiography of logistics in the AEF is rather sparse. Coming mostly in general works on the war, such as the aforementioned *The War To End All Wars* by Edward Coffman, the most detailed analysis of the supply system in the AEF remains Johnson Hagood's *The Services of Supply* (1927). Hagood served in the AEF supply system for most of the war, first as chief of staff in the Line of Communications, AEF, and then later in the same capacity in the reorganized Services of Supply. Though a memoir, his work gives a good account of the challenges facing the AEF supply system and its overall development. But like Harbord's own works, Johnson's slides into self-affirmation and treats the supply services as an organization perpetually ignored or disregarded by GHQ AEF. James A. Huston's *The Sinews of War* (1966) provides the most comprehensive look at Army logistics from the Revolutionary War through the Korean War, and its five chapters on the United States in the First World War are the standard for historical analysis of American logistics.¹²

All of the above works touch on Harbord's experiences in the AEF in one manner or another, but none deal with him specifically, save his own books. The goal of this dissertation is to fill this gap in the historiography of the United States in the First World War. In so doing, it details how Harbord used his skills as a manager to help organize and administer the AEF, his effectiveness in implementing Pershing's doctrine of "open"

warfare during his time as a combat commander, and his difficulties in bringing order to the AEF's supply system. The investigation takes the form of a basic narrative, beginning with Harbord's assignment to the AEF as Pershing's chief of staff in May of 1917 and ending with the Armistice of 11 November 1918. Although Harbord was intimately involved in the demobilization of the AEF after the war, first as the Commanding General, Services of Supply from November 1918 to May 1919, then as AEF chief of staff from May 1919 until his detail to American Mission to Armenia the following September, this study is specifically targeted at Harbord's experiences under the pressure of wartime and will not offer a detailed analysis of his post-war career.

Given these parameters, the narrative can be broken down into three main sections. Section I (Chapters II-VII) deals with the organizational development and policy formation in the AEF. As Chief of Staff, Harbord oversaw the AEF General Staff's eventual emergence as an effective administrative organization, whose basic makeup was later reproduced in the War Department General Staff after the war. Section II (Chapters VIII-X) covers Harbord's time in the line, first with the 4th "Marine" Brigade and then as commander of the 2nd Division. While he was only in the line for three months, Harbord took part in two of the AEF's first major combat engagements: the battles of Belleau Wood and Soissons. Harbord's firm belief in Pershing's views on combat doctrine and effort to implement them illustrate their limited effectiveness given the inadequate training provided the AEF combat soldiers and the constraints of time affecting the Americans in the summer of 1918. Section III (Chapter XI & XII) is the culmination of the analysis of the AEF's logistical system. While Section I covers the initial development of the AEF's Line of Communications and its reorganization into the

Services of Supply (SOS) in February of 1918, the supply problems that plagued the AEF over the course of its entire existence came to a head in the later summer and fall of 1918, prompting Pershing to tap Harbord to command the SOS and bring order to the chaotic organization. Harbord's efforts to improve the overall performance of the SOS could not offset the struggles the SOS endured as it tried to supply the AEF as it began conducting independent combat operations against the German Army. Chapter XI will discuss the circumstances surrounding Harbord's taking over the SOS and his initial efforts to improve its efficiency. Chapter XII will analyze the mounting problems that afflicted the American supply system and the factors that contributed to the SOS's anticipated collapse had the war extended into 1919.

Pre-war Biography

Before examining Harbord's wartime career, it is important to possess a general understanding of his life prior to 1917, for it was during this period that he gained the skills that made him an effective officer in the AEF. Harbord's origin is as undistinguished as it is classically American. His family came from Scotch-Irish stock, moving west from Virginia around the time of the American Revolution to settle in the Kentucky territory. In the winter of 1823, Harbord's grandfather, James C. Harbord, and great-grandfather, William Harbord, moved the family again to Twin Grove, Illinois, one of the first white settlements in the area that would become McClean County, IL. Seven years later, James C. Harbord brought his Irish-born bride from Indiana, and the two settled down to build a life as simple farmers. Harbord's father, George Washington

Harbord, was born in 1841, and remained close to home until the Civil War, in which he served in the Union cavalry. During the war, George Harbord married Effie C. Gault, a native of Ohio, and the two had a son in 1864. Although the boy died after only nine months, their second child would grow to the penultimate position in the U.S. Army.

Born on 21 March 1866 in the small farming community of Bloomington, Illinois, James Guthrie Harbord was the first of three children to grow to adulthood. By the time Harbord was born, his father owned several pieces of farmland in the Bloomington area, and had part ownership in a local mill. His mother divided her time between managing the household and teaching at the local school. Despite these apparent signs of success, the family struggled to get by. Seeking better fortunes elsewhere, they eventually moved to Pettis County, Missouri in 1870, and again to Lyon County, Kansas in 1878, traveling by covered wagon to settle on newly opened Indian land. Young James did not accompany the family to Kansas, but returned to Bloomington to finish his schooling. He joined them the next year, and spent the next three years dividing his time between school and working the land, learning the values of physical labor and the need for continuing his education.¹³

By 1882, the now 16-year old Harbord was a tall, lanky, raw-boned young man with a thatch of red hair and a ravenous thirst for knowledge. He walked two-and-a-half miles to the local school, where he devoured any book he could get his hands on. Effie Harbord described her son as “a better student than most, [who] didn’t have to spent a lot of time with his books, but he always mastered everything thoroughly, and he also took an active part in school affairs.”¹⁴ His parents recognized the limited educational opportunities available to Harbord and his two younger sisters in Lyon County, and

decided to move to Manhattan, Kansas, where the children could take advantage of the Kansas State Agricultural College. They rented out their homestead and sold most of their belongings to pay for the trip, which Harbord's mother and sisters took by rail. After working the summer as a hired hand to earn enough for clothes and books, Harbord and his father walked the seventy-six miles to Manhattan, which took a week, conducting the family's remaining cow along the way. Once there, Harbord enrolled in the Agricultural College, where he did well in science and mathematics. He also served as a captain in one of the school's three cadet companies, and spent his summers working in the local telegraph office, where he learned to type. It was at this point that Harbord developed an admiration for military life, and after earning a Bachelor of Science degree in June of 1886, he took the entrance exam for the United States Military Academy at West Point. Though he tied for top score out of twenty-four applicants, Harbord did not gain acceptance to the academy. The other finalist was one year younger than Harbord, and the acceptance committee decided that he was the more preferable choice. It was also rumored that the boy had certain political connection that helped him secure the position. Either way, Harbord learned the value of making oneself the best possible choice in any contest, and the need to develop personal and professional relationships that could help in future situations where qualifications alone could not secure advancement.¹⁵

Disappointed, Harbord spent the next two years as the assistant principal at a school in Lyon County, where he served as librarian and instructor of telegraphy before enlisting in the U.S. Army in 1889 as a private in Company A, 4th U.S. Infantry. His colleagues at the Agricultural College were reluctant to lose the jovial young man, but

believed that his “intellectual attainments and pleasing manner make it reasonably certain that he will not for long remain with the rank and file of the army.”¹⁶ Assigned to Fort Spokane in the Washington Territory, Harbord proved his supporters correct, using his typing skills to rise quickly through the ranks, eventually becoming the post’s Sergeant Major. After a transfer to Fort Sherman in Idaho, Harbord served as Quartermaster Sergeant for the 4th Infantry, where he caught the eye of the regiment’s commanding officer, who recommended him for a regular commission to the grade of 2nd Lieutenant. Harbord went to Fortress Monroe in Virginia to complete the examination process, and eventually received promotion to the officer’s list in August of 1891. Assigned to the 5th U.S. Cavalry, Harbord spent the next two years at Fort Reno, Oklahoma, and Fort McIntosh, Texas, before attending the Army’s Infantry and Cavalry School at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, in 1893. He graduated on the distinguished list in 1895, and his thesis, “Requisites of Rapid Field Sketching,” earned him a Master of Science degree from Kansas State. He returned to service in Texas for the next three years before the outbreak of the Spanish-American War in 1898.¹⁷

Hoping to secure some form of foreign service during the war, Harbord joined the Second U.S. Volunteer Cavalry, the Torrey Rough Riders, early in 1898 with a rank of major. The unit was transferred to Florida in preparation for shipment to Cuba, but the conflict ended before Harbord could depart. Frustrated at missing out on the opportunity to take part in combat operations, Harbord took solace in further career advancement, as he received a promotion to 1st Lieutenant and a transfer to the 10th U.S. Cavalry. The young lieutenant journeyed to Huntsville, Alabama, where the unit was training, and quickly made a name for himself in the eyes of one John J. Pershing, future commander

of the American Expeditionary Forces. Serving in the 10th as a Major of Volunteers, Pershing was having difficulty with an Army auditor over missing supplies. With the bureaucrat threatening to cut off his pay until he found the lost property, Pershing was in a tight spot until informed that a new quartermaster officer had located nearly all of his missing material. That officer was Harbord, and he and Pershing became fast friends during the chance encounter.¹⁸

Eighteen ninety-nine finally brought Harbord the opportunity for service in Cuba and a significant development in his personal life. In January, the thirty-two year old lieutenant married Emma Yeatman Ovenshine, daughter of Brigadier General Samuel Ovenshine, in a small ceremony in the Ovenshine home in Washington, D.C. A small, lovely girl, Emma was a year younger than Harbord, and possessed a delicate constitution that prevented her from having children. She remained the one constant in Harbord's life until her death in 1937. Soon after the wedding, Harbord was transferred to Cuba to aid in the post-war administration of the country. His good-natured personality and determined work ethic brought him to the attention of the Military Governor, General Leonard Wood, who made Harbord the adjutant general of the departments of Santiago, Puerto Principe, and Eastern Cuba. Along the way, Harbord gained a promotion to Captain, 11th Cavalry in February of 1901.¹⁹

After returning to the United States in 1901, Harbord briefly served in Washington as the assistant Chief of Insular Affairs under General Clarence R. Edwards, before shipping out to the Philippines, where he would spend the next twelve years. Initially his Philippine service came in the cavalry, but Harbord's reputation as a man who could get things done administratively brought him to the Insular Government.

Governor William H. Taft appointed Harbord to be one of the assistant Chiefs of the Philippine Constabulary upon the recommendation of General Wood, now the governor of the Moro Province. Promoted to Colonel on the Constabulary list, Harbord spent most of the next ten years in southern and central Luzon, working to improve relations between the Americans and the Moros. Harbord tried to learn the ways of the Filipinos to make him a better administrator, and his ability to deal with frustration effectively and without anger endeared him to subordinates and earmarked him to his commanders. Sympathetic to the Filipinos, Harbord hoped to use his time to help them rise above what he perceived to be their primitive nature so that they could join the ranks of the civilized world. It was a tremendous opportunity for Harbord. Slightly balding and approaching forty, he used his time in the Philippines to learn the skills of management and administration. Exercising what amounted to independent control over an area the size of New England, he was responsible for maintaining law and order and had to solve a myriad number of problems in the field. As one newspaper writer pointed out regarding Harbord's experiences, "Successfully solving problems in one field helps men to solve them in others. It trains them in the exercise of tact, coolness and the habit of prompt decision."²⁰ His service also allowed Harbord to develop associations with the seasoned leaders in the army, who he could watch and learn from. On the whole, the Philippines provided a measure of excitement to an officer used to the dreariness of life on the American frontier. "The romance and adventure of the Constabulary service, particularly in the Moro country," Harbord later wrote, "would furnish the theme for a score of Kiplings, Remingtons, or Wisters."²¹ Up to that point, Harbord's tenure in the

Philippines was the crowning achievement in his life, but more opportunities were soon on the way.²²

By 1913, Harbord had risen to acting chief of the Philippine Constabulary, but politics in Washington and the War Department soon brought his time in the islands to an end. In response to a fight between General Wood, now the Army chief of staff, and Adjutant General Frederic C. Ainsworth, Congress passed the “Manchu Law” in 1912, stipulating that all officers on detached service who had not spent at least two years out of the previous six with their commissioned units must end their details immediately.²³

Harbord had been in the Philippines for twelve years, and was required to return to the United States. It was a bitter pill to swallow. He complained to Pershing that, “After ten years service among these people, the Government throws away that experience and sends me back to do what I was doing well ten years ago, interrupts some officer commanding a [Cavalry] troop, and again breaks it up a few months later to make me a major.”²⁴ He tried to secure an exemption from the new law’s stipulations due to his intricate knowledge of the Philippine Constabulary, but was unsuccessful. It was the first instance where he felt somewhat betrayed and unsupported by the politicians and administrators in Washington and the War Department. Those feelings would grow stronger during his time in France when the War Department became a source of opposition and annoyance to Harbord and Pershing. For now, though, Harbord followed orders and returned to the United States, where he was again assigned to the 5th U.S. Cavalry at the Presidio in San Francisco. The next two years brought brief service along the Mexican border and a promotion to major on the Regular list. In the fall of 1916, he

received an assignment to continue his education at the Army War College, where he remained until America's entry into the World War in April of 1917.²⁵

Harbord's pre-war experiences provided the chance to develop several distinct attributes that prepared him for service in the American Expeditionary Forces. His education and desire for knowledge gave him an inquisitive nature that allowed him to think creatively. It also forced him to organize his time in order to solve problems quickly and decisively, a feature Pershing demanded of his officers. Harbord's long tenure in the Army gave him the opportunity to develop personal relationships with many of the officers he would serve with in France, which proved a necessity in Pershing's staff that was built around those same relationships. Finally, his education at Fort Leavenworth and his time in the Philippines gave Harbord the knowledge and skills needed to serve not only as a staff officer in a combat unit, but to build and manage a complex and multi-faceted organization such as the AEF General Staff and the Services of Supply. He was not intimidated by a challenge, nor was he overwhelmed by the size and scale of the American effort in France. Though he had never commanded a combat unit larger than a cavalry troop, Harbord's pre-war experiences gave him the management skills necessary to serve ably in a war where the need for officers who could administer and manage organizations and men was as great as the need for those who could command in the field.

Notes

¹ Coffman uses the term to describe the evolution of the U.S. Army in the period between the Spanish-American War and the beginning of the First World War. Edward M. Coffman, *The Regulars: The American Army 1898-1941* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 2004), 142-201; Allan Millett does not specifically call this period a “Managerial Revolution,” but he does discuss the era in terms of the rise of professionalism in the U.S. Army in Allan R. Millett, *The General: Robert L. Bullard and Officership in the United States Army 1881-1925* (Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press, 1975), 3-15.

² Frank E. Vandiver, *John J. Pershing and the Anatomy of Leadership* (Harmon Memorial Lectures in Military History No. 5, United States Air Force Academy, CO, 1963), 17-19; Morris H. Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1960), 152-53.

³ James G. Harbord, *Leaves From a War Diary* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1925); James G. Harbord, *The American Army in France 1917-1919* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1936).

⁴ Timothy K. Nenninger, “Harbord, James Guthrie” *American National Biography*, eds. John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 10:42-43; Charles R. Shrader, “Harbord, James Guthrie” *Dictionary of American Military Biography*, ed. Roger J. Spiller 3 vols. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), 2:437-41; See also Trevor N. Dupuy, Curt Johnson, and David L. Bongard, eds., *The Harper Encyclopedia of Military Biography* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992), 314-15; Robert McHenry, ed., *Webster’s American Military Biographies* (Springfield, MA: G&C Merriam Company, 1978), 162-63; [no editor indicated], *Who Was Who in American Military History – The Military* (Chicago: Marquis Who’s Who, Inc., 1975), 235.

⁵ Donald Smythe, *Pershing: General of the Armies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 10.

⁶ Frank E. Vandiver, *Black Jack: The Life and Times of John J. Pershing* 2 vols. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1977).

⁷ Edward M. Coffman, *The War To End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968); Coffman discusses Harbord in relation to the feud between Pershing and Army Chief of Staff Peyton C. March in Edward M. Coffman, *The Hilt of the Sword: The Career of Peyton C. March* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1966); See also, Laurence Stallings, *The Doughboys: The Story of the AEF, 1917-1918* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963) for further information on Harbord’s general contribution to the war. Of more direct interest, Donald Smythe has written three articles dealing with the March-Pershing dispute and the relationship between Pershing and Secretary of War Newton D. Baker, each of which offer good insight into Harbord’s relationship with the AEF commander. Donald Smythe, “The Battle of the Books: Pershing versus March” *Army* 22 (September 1972): 30-32, “Literary Salvos: The Pershing-March Conflict in World War I” *Parameters* 11 (December 1981): 53-62, and “‘Your Authority in France Will Be Supreme’: The Baker-Pershing Relationship in World War I” *Parameters* 9 (September 1979): 39-45.

⁸ Millett, *The General* (see note # 1); A good supplement to Millett’s work is George C. Marshall’s *Memoirs of My Services in the World War 1917-1918* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976); Also see Timmothy K. Nenninger’s “‘Unsystematic as a Mode of Command’: Commanders and the Process of Command in the American Expeditionary Forces, 1917-1918” *The Journal of Military History* 64 (July 2000), 739-68.

⁹ Jams J. Cooke, *Pershing and His Generals: Command and Staff in the AEF* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997); I.B. Holley, Jr., *General John M. Palmer, Citizen Soldiers, and the Army of a Democracy* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982); A brief, but still effective, analysis of officers in the First World War is given in Edward M. Coffman, “American Command and Commanders in World War I” *New Dimensions in Military History*, ed. Russell F. Weigley (San Rafael, CA: Presidio Press, 1975), 177-97. Coffman also

discusses the educational background of the officers in the AEF in his “The AEF Leaders’ Education for War” in *The Great War, 1914-18: Essays on the Military, Political and Social History of the First World War*, ed. R.J.Q. Adams (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1990), 139-59; Elliot L. Johnson’s dissertation on Hugh Drum, who served in the Operations Section of the AEF General Staff before becoming Chief of Staff of the First Army, AEF has information on the early development of the General Staff and Harbord’s direction of it during the first year of the war. Elliot L. Johnson, “The Military Experiences of General Hugh A. Drum From 1898-1918” (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1975).

¹⁰ Oliver L. Spaulding and John W. Wright, *The Second Division American Expeditionary Force in France 1917-1919* (New York: The Hillman Press, 1937); Allan R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps* (New York: Macmillan, 1980); Robert A. Asprey, *At Belleau Wood* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 1997); Douglas V. Johnson, II and Rolfe L. Hillman, Jr., *Soissons 1918* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999); Edwin N. McClellan’s *The United States Marine Corps in the World War* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1920) provides a simple narrative of the Marine units during the war, and reproduces many of the most important official documents. For more detailed analysis of the performance of American units in combat and the effectiveness of Pershing’s doctrine of “open” warfare, see Mark Grotelueschen’s *Doctrine Under Trial: American Artillery Employment in World War I* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), and “The AEF Way of War: The American Army and Combat in the First World War.” (Ph.D. diss., Texas A&M University, 2003); Timothy K. Nenninger’s “Tactical Dysfunction in the AEF, 1917-1918” *Military Affairs* 51 (October 1987): 177-81, and “American Military Effectiveness in the First World War” in *Military Effectiveness Volume I: The First World War*, ed. Allan R. Millett and Williamson Murray (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 116-56; and James R. Rainey’s “Ambivalent Warfare: The Tactical Doctrine of the AEF in World War I” *Parameters* 13 (September 1983): 34-46, and “The Questionable Training of the AEF in World War I” *Parameters* 22 (Winter 1992-93): 89-103.

¹¹ A.W. Catlin, “*With the Help of God and a Few Marines*” (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1919; reprint, Nashville, TN: The Battery Press, 2004); George B. Clark, ed., *His Time in Hell: A Texas Marine in France: The World War I memoir of Warren R. Jackson* (Novato, CA: The Presidio Press, 2001); Elton E. Mackin, *Suddenly We Didn’t Want to Die: Memoirs of a World War I Marine* (Novato, CA: The Presidio Press, 1993); Frederic M. Wise and Meigs O. Frost, *A Marine Tells It to You* (New York: J.H. Sears and Company, 1929; reprint, Quantico, VA: The Marine Corps Association, 1981); George B. Clark, *Devil Dogs: Fighting Marines of World War I* (Novato, CA: The Presidio Press, 1999); John W. Thomason, Jr. has two books that are of particular interest in describing the daily experiences of the Marines during the World War. -and *a Few Marines* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1943) and *Fix Bayonets! and other stories* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1925).

¹² Johnson Hagood, *The Services of Supply: A Memoir of the Great War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1927); James A. Huston, *The Sinews of War: Army Logistics 1775-1953* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1966); Charles R. Schrader’s anthology, *United States Army Logistics 1775-1992* 3 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1997) also contains a good discussion of the AEF’s logistical system. William J. Wilgus’s *Transporting the A.E.F. in Western Europe 1917-1919* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931) contains detailed information on the American transportation system; its facilities, procedures, doctrines, and performance. For information on the War Department supply system, see Phyllis A. Zimmerman, *The Neck of the Bottle: George W. Goethals and the Reorganization of the U.S. Army Supply System, 1917-1918* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1992); James Charles Fischer, *Not Fallen, But Flooded: The War Department Supply Bureaus in 1917* (Ph.D. diss., The Ohio State University, 2003); and Peyton C. March, *The Nation at War* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1932).

¹³ Christian Gauss, “The Education of General Harbord” *The Saturday Evening Post*, 30 July 1932, 28-29; “James Harbord: Pershing’s Right Hand” *Pantagraph*, 4 July 1976, E:7.

¹⁴ *The Kansas Industrialist*, 6 December 1922, James G. Harbord File, Morse Department of Special Collections, Kansas State University (KSU).

¹⁵ Gauss, "The Education of General Harbord," 29, 62; *The Kansas Industrialist* (Manhattan, KS), 2 October 1886, 6 December 1922 and 17 August 1932, in the Harbord File, KSU.

¹⁶ *The Kansas Industrialist*, 12 January 1889, Harbord File, KSU.

¹⁷ I.D. Graham, *Major General James Guthrie Harbord, An Appreciation*, published as a pamphlet in *Reverberations from the Class of 1886* (Chicago: No publisher, 1921), 8 in the Harbord File, KSU; *Faculty Record*, Kansas State Agricultural College (3 April 1895), 312, Harbord File, KSU.

¹⁸ James G. Harbord, *Serving with Pershing: An Address Delivered before the University Club of Port Chester, N.Y., May 26, 1944* (n.p., n.d.), 3-4; Donald Smythe, *Guerilla Warrior: The Early Life of John J. Pershing* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), 60; Gauss, "The Education of General Harbord," 62.

¹⁹ James G. Harbord, *The American Expeditionary Forces: Its Organization and Accomplishments* (Evanston, IL: Evanston Publishing Company, 1929), 5-6.

²⁰ Gauss, "The Education of General Harbord," 63.

²¹ Harbord quoted in Vic Hurley, *Jungle Patrol: The Story of the Philippine Constabulary* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1938), 388.

²² For additional information on Harbord's time in the Philippines, see Vic Hurley's *Jungle Patrol*, W. Cameron Forbes's *The Philippine Islands* 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1928), Stanley Karnow's *In Our Image* (London: Century, 1990), and assorted documents in the James G. Harbord Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

²³ The "Manchu Law," reprinted in *Annual Report of the War Department, 1912*, 229; Mabel E. Deutch, *Struggle for Supremacy: The Career of General Fred C. Ainsworth* (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1962), 127-35; Elting E. Morison, *Turmoil and Tradition: A Study of the Life and Times of Henry L. Stimson* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), 150-67; Otto L. Nelson, *National Security and the General Staff* (Washington, D.C.: Infantry Journal Press, 1946), 138-77.

²⁴ James G. Harbord to John J. Pershing, 21 October 1912, Box 4, Harbord Papers, LC; Other letters in the same location reflect Harbord's attempts to secure support for his exemption from the Manchu Law.

²⁵ Gauss, "The Education of General Harbord," 63; Special Order No. 180, War Department, 3 August 1916, Box 6, Harbord Papers, LC.

CHAPTER II

OFF TO WAR (APRIL – MAY 1917)

On 2 April 1917, President Woodrow Wilson stood before a joint session of Congress to call for war against the German Empire. The Congress responded four days later with a declaration of war. But declaring war and actually fighting are two different things. The United States was in no position to join the struggle that had consumed Europe for the past three years. It had neither the army, shipping, nor administrative institutions to raise, transport, or supply an expeditionary force to Europe, let alone engage in combat operations. Everything would have to be created from scratch, beginning with a basic military organization. For a country protected by its geographic isolation, shifting to a war footing proved incredibly difficult. The War Department suffered through a type of daze as it contemplated its new task, and the entire organization was gripped with the malaise of years of bureaucracy and inactivity. It was into this sea of indecision that the first elements of what would become the American Expeditionary Forces assembled over April and May of 1917. Uncertain of their responsibilities, these men gathered around their new commander, General John J. Pershing, and prepared for what each considered would be the defining moment of their respective military careers. Lacking any specifics, each prepared as best they could for the long days ahead, confident in the surety of their eventual success, but possessing no clear vision of how to attain it.

Call to Washington

While the Wilson Administration, and the nation as a whole, began to contemplate the realities of the decision for war, Major James Guthrie Harbord quietly passed his time as a student at the Army War College. Knowing they would shoulder the burden should the United States go to war, Harbord and his fellow officers followed the debate closely. Like many of his compatriots, Harbord longed for the opportunity to practice his craft in the field. It had been three years since his return to the United States from the Philippines, and domestic service proved incessantly dull for the 51-year-old officer. Though he never held a large combat command while overseas, he was at least close to the action in a land rife with conflict. Since his return to the United States in 1914 with the passage of the “Manchu Law,”¹ Harbord served as a captain and then a major in command of various squadrons of the 5th Cavalry at the Presidio in San Francisco. Despite a short stint along the Arizona-Mexico border during the Punitive Expedition of 1916, his service in the states was a rather dull one. Serving at six different stations within his first year with the 5th Cavalry, Harbord often found his most difficult task being getting the post’s polo outfit into shape. Neither he nor his wife enjoyed the post or the city, and both welcomed his detail to the Army War College in September of 1916.²

A career officer who had never experienced a war, Harbord sensed the opportunities for adventure and advancement that the present crisis offered. Growing up in the shadow of the Civil War and missing out on combat service in Cuba during the Spanish-American War, Harbord ached to see a large-scale military conflict and the

chance to test himself in the face of a determined enemy. When the United States declared war on Imperial Germany on 6 April 1917, Harbord finally had that opportunity. The main question now was what form his service would take.

With no direction coming from the War Department regarding Army mobilization, Harbord looked to alternate avenues for his place in the conflict. The most promising possibility grew out of the preparedness movement and President Theodore Roosevelt's plan to form a volunteer division, much like the famous "Rough Riders" cavalry regiment of the Spanish-American war.³ Harbord knew the former president through his long-time association with Major General Leonard Wood, with whom Harbord had served in the military administrations in Cuba and the Philippines. He had modeled himself as one of Wood's many protégés, and now hoped that his connections with the nation's most renowned general at the time would begin to pay dividends. But associating oneself with Leonard Wood was a double-edged sword in the spring of 1917. As chief of staff of the U.S. Army (1910-1914), Wood battled with then Adjutant General Frederick C. Ainsworth, for supremacy within the War Department. Over the course of their fight, Wood succeeded in permanently establishing the General Staff and the office of the chief of staff, but in the process he generated a considerable amount of animosity from Congress towards the General Staff and himself. Ainsworth possessed many influential friends in Washington who were disinclined to support anything or anyone associated with the former chief of staff.⁴

Though Harbord knew it was potentially dangerous career-wise to attach himself to Wood and Roosevelt's star, the chance to go to France proved too tempting, and Harbord offered his services to the former Rough Rider. Writing to Roosevelt on 6 May,

Harbord plainly stated his interest in any opportunity for service in France should Congress and the President accept Roosevelt's offer. This was no small matter, for it required Harbord to turn down a position he had been offered in the Adjutant General's Department and run the risk of being irrevocably linked with Roosevelt and Wood, whose standing with the current administration was less than stellar. On a personal level, the position within the Adjutant General's Department came with a promotion to colonel, and would secure a transfer back to Washington, which both Harbord and his wife desired. The move would also bring Harbord into the Army's staff system and its opportunities for further career advancement. Yet despite these factors, Harbord's desire to go to France trumped all other concerns and he decided to pursue service with Roosevelt.⁵

The chances of securing a position in Roosevelt's proposed division looked promising. Aiding Harbord's cause was his long-standing friendship with Captain Frank McCoy, whom Harbord served with in the Philippines. Roosevelt had already designated McCoy as his chief of staff should the division be approved.⁶ Though serving in Mexico at the time, McCoy was also close to General Wood, and had his own source on the coming's and going's in the War Department in the form of the current Army chief of staff, Major General Hugh Scott. Like Wood, General Scott supported the idea of Roosevelt's division, considering it the best way to get the military machine rolling. Approaching the end of his career, General Scott now found himself facing the challenge of overseeing the transformation of the American Army from a small peacetime constabulary organization to a massive combat force. With the war in France in its third year, whatever force the United States sent overseas needed to hit the ground running in

order to provide an immediate lift to the wilting Allies. But as Scott knew all too well, the Army with which the United States went to war was not built for major combat operations on a grand scale.

In April of 1917, the United States Army did not possess sufficient manpower levels, equipment, or an organizational structure suitable for service on the European battlefields. Though the Defense Act of 1916 raised the Army's authorized strength to 235,000, poor recruitment efforts resulted in the U.S. Army containing roughly 130,000 officers and men at the time of the war declaration.⁷ Deficiencies in motorized transportation, airplanes, artillery, and tanks placed the United States well behind their European counterparts in development of military technology. Most American soldiers knew nothing of grenades, rifle-grenades, automatic rifles, trench mortars, or light infantry cannon; all standard fare on the Western Front. Most alarmingly, though the war in Europe clearly showed the value and necessity of the machine-gun on the modern battlefield, the American Army called for only four such weapons per infantry regiment (compared to thirty-six in each infantry *battalion* in the German Army) and was still in the process of adopting a standard model.⁸

Organizationally the U.S. Army found itself wanting as well in comparison to the Europeans. With the exception of the 1916 Punitive Expedition against Pancho Villa, the Army had conducted no major field operations since the Spanish-American War. It had no standing armies, corps or brigades, and very few regiments. Structurally, the American army was still designed along the same lines of the late nineteenth century, when it served as a frontier constabulary, coastal defense force, and civil engineering and exploration service. Only one officer, Brigadier General John J. "Black Jack" Pershing,

had experience commanding a force larger than 10,000 men, and roughly one-third of the Army's officers were in their first year of service.⁹

General Scott was well aware of how fearfully unprepared the United States was in 1917. He confided as much to Frank McCoy in late April, admitting, "This is the twenty-fourth day of the war, and nobody knows how to raise a force." He considered Roosevelt's preparedness movement a good place to start, but knew there was little chance that President Woodrow Wilson would authorize the division.¹⁰ Like Scott, Roosevelt hoped Wilson would put aside partisan squabbles and accept his proposal. While he awaited official word from the administration, the former president made what preparations he could, including selecting Harbord to take command of one of the division's brigades.¹¹ Thankful for the opportunity, Harbord could not accept outright until the administration made up its mind regarding the division's status. Like Roosevelt, Harbord would have to wait until Wilson and the War Department settled on a policy for American mobilization.

Unknown to both men, events were proceeding in Washington that promised to change things considerably for both Roosevelt's volunteer division and Harbord's military career. Over a month removed from the declaration of war, the administration finally decided that the United States would send an expeditionary force to France.¹² With the decision made, they now needed to select an officer to command what would become the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF). Taking charge of the process was Secretary of War Newton D. Baker, a small, shy-looking man, who came across as a rather unimpressive specimen to be in control of the nation's military arsenal. A Cleveland lawyer in his mid-forties, Baker had well-established pacifistic leanings,

making him an easy target for critics. One of Harbord's friends thought Baker more suited to be a "first class teacher of rhetoric at a ladies seminary" than to be Secretary of War.¹³ But despite his appearance and lack of experience, Baker emerged as an excellent choice to head up the War Department. Well-read and quick-witted, Baker possessed a quiet determination that allowed him to attack any issue put before him skillfully. A model of competency, Raymond Fosdick referred to Baker's mind as "one of those rare combinations in which swift perception is balanced by judgement, and clarity and sanity run hand in hand."¹⁴

Taking the first step in forming a military force for service in France, Baker appointed now Major General Pershing to command the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) on 10 May. Like all of Baker's decisions, this one was based on careful study and contemplation. The major generals and brigadier generals in the American army in 1917 had had little opportunity to gain experience in combat operations over the previous fifteen years. Moreover, Baker wanted a man not only experienced, but physically able to handle the strain of command in Europe.¹⁵ The Secretary knew that whoever he chose would have to tackle unfathomable challenges in order to put the Americans on the battle line with any speed, and would have to bear an immense burden in the process. In Baker's mind, there were only two realistic choices for command in Europe: Generals Pershing and Wood. From the beginning, General Wood was at a disadvantage in terms of his physical presence. On top of being several pounds overweight, Wood suffered from an old head injury for which he wore a steel guard in his cap. Though the wound did not impair his ability, it did cause the general to walk with an easily discernable limp. Baker noticed Wood's apparent physical ailments on an inspection tour of Plattsburg, and

could not put the memory of the man struggling up a hill out of his mind when the time came to select a commander for the AEF.¹⁶

Pershing, on the other hand, looked every bit the commander that Baker wanted. Tall, robust, with a jaw line chiseled from pure granite, Pershing exuded physical confidence and ability. His command of the Punitive Expedition made him the most senior officer in the Army to hold a large field command, and his lack of stated political aspirations made him all the more acceptable to the Democratic administration. Though Baker had never personally seen Pershing before their meeting on 10 May, he knew of the general's qualifications. During his service in Mexico, Pershing had to deal with serious frustrations regarding supply and restrictions regarding the parameters of his authority. But the general never criticized the administration, showing himself to be "obedient and loyal" in times of struggle.¹⁷ The same could not be said of General Wood, whose open criticism of President Wilson's policies during the preparedness campaign were a matter of public record. Baker took all of these considerations into account and decided that Pershing was the only real choice for command in France.¹⁸

For Harbord, Pershing's selection as AEF commander came as an act of providence. Though he had a close relationship with Wood, Harbord also knew Pershing well. From their brief encounter in 1898, the two men maintained a friendly relationship while both served in the Philippines. Though Harbord criticized Pershing's management of the Moro Province as Military Governor, it did not affect their burgeoning friendship.¹⁹ When Pershing received the command of the AEF and began selecting his staff he specifically thought of that same lieutenant who had saved him a great deal of worry almost twenty years earlier.

Still at the Army War College, neither Harbord nor any of his fellow students knew of the plan to send an expeditionary force to France, or of Pershing's selection to command it. While they knew Pershing had been recalled from Texas, many believed it was for the position of Army chief of staff, which would open soon with the retirement of General Scott and the assistant chief of staff, Major General Tasker Bliss. Harbord had been expecting the move for several months, and supported the idea.²⁰ It therefore came as a great shock when, on 14 May, Harbord was summoned from his classes by telephone to report to Pershing at the War Department that afternoon. Departing at once, Harbord made his way to the State, War and Navy Building, still unclear as to the reason for his visit. He later recalled, "There was no intimation of the purpose for which I was called until I faced General Pershing in the office of the Chief of Staff – a Military Holy of Holies [sic], to which I had not been a frequent visitor up to that time."²¹

Pershing wasted little time at this initial meeting, explaining his assignment to lead an expedition to France. The new AEF commander then dropped a bombshell: he was considering Harbord for his chief of staff. Dumbstruck, Harbord muddled through the rest of their brief conversation. At the end Harbord found himself admitting that he was not fluent in French, which presented a particular challenge considering Pershing's own deficiencies with the language. Pershing said he would hold off on a decision for the time being, but wanted Harbord to accompany him to France in some capacity and needed him to come to the War Department at once to begin preparing for their departure. Excited and bewildered, Harbord immediately set up shop in Room 223 of the War Department and began addressing the numerous tasks required to build an expeditionary force. Several days later, Pershing unexpectedly intimated that he was considering two

other candidates for chief of staff. Spurred on by Pershing's emphasis on frankness, Harbord responded that he was a better choice, even with his problems with French. Pershing eventually agreed and named Harbord chief of staff for the AEF several days later. So began the working relationship of James Harbord and John Pershing.²²

Leadership in the AEF

Of all the partnerships in the history of the American Army, perhaps none were as effective and long lasting as the one between John J. Pershing and James Harbord. The two men proved ideally suited to each other in terms of temperament and administrative style. Pershing, the hard-charger and martinet, provided the drive and sense of purpose for the AEF. Though he possessed a quiet warmth about him, few had the pleasure to experience it. Most saw only his icy demeanor of military discipline and single-mindedness that inspired more respect than affection. While not a brilliant strategist or tactician, Pershing knew how to make decisions, and could not be rattled or intimidated easily. He held himself and his men to the highest of standards, and made the AEF his own through sheer force of will and an unquestioning belief in the American soldier.

Harbord, on the other hand, was a more cajoling spirit. No less driven than Pershing, Harbord was more sensitive to those under him. A true man's man, he garnered genuine affection from his contemporaries through his good-natured humor and receptiveness to the concerns of others. When Pershing ran roughshod over the AEF staff, which happened often during the early months, Harbord would follow close behind soothing egos and rounding off the sharp edges of the commander-in-chief's dictums.²³

As Pershing dealt with the myriad aspects of his command, which included considerable political and diplomatic duties on top of his military responsibilities, it fell to Harbord to manage the day-to-day operations of the AEF General Staff and to make sure that those things that needed to be done got done.

Pershing had a clear idea of what he expected from a chief of staff. “Apart from sheer ability,” he explained, “a chief of staff, to be highly efficient, should have tact, and he must have the confidence of his commander. He would be of small value without the courage to give his own views on any question that might arise, and he must have the loyalty to abide by the decisions of his chief.”²⁴ This is exactly what Pershing got from Harbord. While unquestionably loyal, Harbord never shied away from speaking his mind when he thought it necessary. He was open with his views, and stated it clearly when he disagreed with the AEF commander’s course of action. Once Pershing made a decision, however, Harbord made every effort to see it carried out to the best of his ability. Pershing recognized these features early on and soon came to rely upon them, and showered Harbord with praise after the war:

Throughout the war Harbord never hesitated for a moment to express his opinion with utmost frankness, no matter how radically it might differ from my own, nor did he ever fail to carry out instructions faithfully even when they were not in accord with his views. Entirely unselfish, he labored incessantly for what he believed to be the best interests of our armies. His ability, his resourcefulness, his faculty for organization, and, above all, his loyalty, were outstanding qualities, and

these together with a compelling personality made him invaluable to the nation in this important position [of chief of staff].²⁵

With Harbord established as Pershing's primary subordinate, the two men began working out the details for their imminent departure for Europe. Between his meeting with Pershing on 14 May and their departure on the 28th, Harbord worked diligently to fashion together the beginnings of a General Staff. Adding to his difficulties were swarms of officers and civilians who descended upon the War Department seeking an assignment to Pershing's expedition. The applicants displayed various levels of military experience, age, and physical fitness, forcing Pershing to quickly establish the types of officers he wanted for the AEF.²⁶

From the beginning, Pershing looked to officers he knew either personally or by reputation. His long service gave him a considerable reservoir of knowledge of the Army's officer corps, which served him well in the selection process. His initial criteria when considering officers were efficiency and availability. Neither political connections, seniority, nor personal friendship with the General secured a position (although the latter could certainly help). Nor did Pershing require the officers to have graduated from West Point, though its graduates were certainly well represented on the staff. Harbord himself signified this fact, having been denied entry into the Academy and risen through the ranks as an enlisted man. But there were certain standards that Pershing insisted upon. To serve in France an officer needed to be fairly young and in good physical shape. They needed to show the same commitment to personal and professional discipline that Pershing embodied. Though he did not require attendance, Pershing intended the AEF to

represent the standards of West Point in terms of discipline, drill, and general comportment. But these concerns were secondary to a man's ability. In simplest terms, if the man could do the job, Pershing wanted him.²⁷

The question of officer availability proved more problematic than Pershing and Harbord anticipated. Naturally every officer in the Army wanted to go to France, but Pershing and Harbord immediately ran into difficulties with the War Department over officer selection. The problem boiled down to numbers. When the war began, there were less than 9,000 officers in the Federal service (5,791 Regulars and 3,199 National Guard).²⁸ While plans were already in motion to expand the officer corps through selective service, as of May 1917 both the War Department and the AEF had to work with the resources at hand. This led to a competition between the AEF and the War Department for trained officers. As the commander of military operations in France, Pershing wanted the best and brightest with him. But whatever forces Pershing hoped to command, he needed the War Department to furnish it, and Washington needed capable officers as well. Of particular need were those officers with general staff experience. Whereas England began the war with a General Staff of some 230 officers, the United States had only forty-one, over half of which was prohibited by law from being in Washington at any one time. Consequently, the General Staff in Washington, the heart of the American war effort, numbered only nineteen officers. Though it would number over a thousand by the end of the war, in those early days it needed men just as desperately as Pershing did.²⁹

For the most part, Pershing and the War Department cooperated in the selection of officers for service on the AEF General Staff, but there was some initial difficulty in

securing present General Staff officers for duty in France. With its ranks already understaffed, the War Department allowed Pershing to select only two officers from the General Staff on duty in Washington to accompany him to France, a restriction Harbord found to be particularly irritating. "One might easily have inferred," he noted, "that some of them considered the opportunity for an officer to serve in their Washington offices outweighed the importance of accompanying General Pershing to France. It was a question if some of those asked for were not too busy to be 'spared' for the War."³⁰ While understandable, Harbord's feelings betrayed a lack of sympathy for the War Department's concerns, which only grew stronger as the war continued.³¹ But without any form of recourse, Pershing and Harbord pushed forward in the selection process, all the while grumbling at the War Department's restrictions.

Building a Staff

Despite these irritations, Pershing and Harbord made great strides in putting together an effective staff in the two weeks before departing for Europe. Of critical importance, they needed to fill the main staff positions for the AEF General Staff. For these, Pershing took full advantage of his limited access to the General Staff and selected two men from within its ranks: Majors John McCauley Palmer and Dennis E. Nolan. The AEF commander gave Harbord the task of informing the men, which he did several days after arriving at the War Department. Seeking to keep the decision private, Harbord extended invitations for both men to join him at his home that evening. When the two men arrived, Harbord informed them that Pershing desired their presence in the AEF

General Staff. Both men were equally thunderstruck, especially when Harbord enlightened them as to the scope of their duties. Nolan was to command the Intelligence section and Palmer would head up Operations. Each duty carried with it overwhelming challenges and would require a tremendous effort to be carried off successfully.³²

Given the War Department's restrictions concerning their selections, Pershing and Harbord chose exceptionally well. Though filled with self-doubt, Major Dennis Nolan proved himself particularly well suited for the task ahead. Considered the "father of U.S. Army intelligence" by historian James Cooke, Nolan graduated from West Point in 1896 before serving with both Harbord and Pershing in the Philippines.³³ Twice cited for gallantry in the Spanish-American War, he took up a position as a college professor of history from 1902 to 1903 before being selected to serve in the intelligence section of the first General Staff (a duty he attributed to Harbord's recommendations). While questioning his own knowledge of wartime intelligence matters, Nolan had a patient, studious nature about him and was a rigid adherent to detail. These characteristics served him well in sifting through the mounds of information churned up by his own intelligence apparatus. Not one prone to informality, he remained a valuable but distant member of Pershing's staff throughout the war. While conducting personal meetings daily with the AEF commander, Nolan never became a member of Pershing's inner circle.³⁴

Like Nolan, Major John M. Palmer performed well in his short tenure with the AEF General Staff. Graduating from West Point in 1892, he served in both Cuba and the Philippines before returning to the Academy as an instructor from 1901-06. In addition to details to China, the General Staff College at Leavenworth, Kansas, and with the Maneuver Division of 1911, Palmer served twice with the General Staff. He sat on a

committee charged with ironing out the details for shipping Pershing's initial force abroad and worked with the various foreign missions sent to Washington to help coordinate American activities with their new Allies.³⁵ A good-natured man who made and held friendships easily, Palmer was blessed with a remarkable understanding of military policy and theory, which he put to good use in the initial month's of American operations in France. Though he eventually suffered a breakdown from the strain of building the AEF from scratch, Palmer remained a valuable asset to Pershing and the AEF, and became a leading figure in the post-war fight over Army reorganization.

Palmer clearly expressed his fellow officers' frustrations with the restrictions the War Department put on the AEF General Staff, stating that "The failure of those in authority to appreciate the importance of a fully trained staff to an army in the field was to impede us seriously in the months to come."³⁶ Too many things needed to be done in the short amount of time before the senior AEF officers sailed to France, and any obstacles, no matter how justified, only increased their already considerable workload. Not only did Nolan and Palmer need to put together their own staffs, but they also had to keep Pershing supplied with the information he needed for the overall job of forming the AEF. It soon became apparent that the AEF desperately needed additional staff officers. Palmer went so far as to suggest initiating an apprentice program to train young staff officers as quickly as possible. He wanted all recent graduates of the Staff College to be shipped to France with all due haste, where they could learn on the job and then a sufficient number would be returned to the United States.³⁷

Though understandable given the AEF's enormous need for staff officers, such a plan would have decimated the War Department. The General Staff rightly concluded

that the proposal was not feasible and rejected the plan. It did, however, sympathize with the AEF's needs and authorized Harbord to call upon qualified staff officers on duty with the troops for service with the AEF General Staff. Harbord wasted little time in securing the details of Majors Arthur L. Conger, Hugh A. Drum, and Captain William O. Reed to Pershing's group. When combined with the men attained from the Staff Bureaus, Pershing's party grew to just over fifty officers.³⁸ Harbord later observed, "Neither arm of service nor seniority played much part in [Pershing's] selections. One or more were to give way under the terrific strain of work to which they were subjected after arrival in France – but the record of the group as a whole justified his judgement."³⁹

As personnel decisions were finalized, orders went out with due haste, catching many men unprepared for the rapid progression of events. One such case, that of Major Hugh Drum, illustrates the experience of many officers that May. On 17 May, Drum was stationed at the headquarters of the Army's Southern Department at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, where he was serving as assistant chief of staff.⁴⁰ With no advance warning, Drum received orders to report to the War Department, where he learned of his detail to Pershing's General Staff. Though delighted at the opportunity, he was initially stunned to discover they were scheduled for departure within a week. This left little time to wrap up his affairs, secure his orders, say goodbye to his family, and journey to New York City, from which they were scheduled to depart on 28 May.⁴¹

That the process of putting the AEF General Staff together suffered from difficulties and confusion is not surprising. The same can be said of the entire American war effort in May of 1917. But it was hardly the Americans' fault. As representatives from France and Britain arrived in Washington to begin coordinating with their new ally,

they amplified the pressure bearing down on the United States. The British military attaché in Washington, Major General G. T. M. Bridges told General Scott that the quickest and best way for the Americans to contribute to the war would be by “sending 500,000 untrained men at once to our depots in England to be trained there, and drafted into our armies in France.”⁴² Likewise the head of the French Mission, René Viviani urged that the United States’ vast, untapped, manpower reserves be immediately funneled into the French Army. But the most persuasive argument came from Marshal Joseph Joffre, the hero of the Marne, when he stated that Allies had but one need from the Americans: “We want men, men, men.”⁴³ Though each man recognized the desire for the Americans to fight under their own flag, they also saw the pitiable state of the American military. It would take perhaps months, but probably years before the Americans would be ready to conduct major operations on the Western Front, and none of the Europeans expressed any belief that their nations could hold on that long. If the Americans chose to find under their own flag they needed to do so in a hurry, and that meant making mistakes.

With the pressure already building from the Europeans, the War Department girded for action. Considering the abbreviated time frame, inefficiency became the watchword of the day. This included even the all-important task of writing Pershing’s orders for his command. At this crucial point, President Wilson decided to send Chief of Staff Scott to Russia as a part of a military mission. Though scheduled to retire soon due to age, Scott’s departure left the Army without its nominal head just as it was organizing an expedition overseas. The assistant chief of staff, Major General Tasker H. Bliss, filled in as *acting* chief of staff and Brigadier General Francis Kernan became his acting

assistant. While neither could issue orders except by direction of the secretary of war, Kernan began to draw up a set of orders for the AEF commander.

Despite being in constant contact with Bliss, neither Pershing nor Harbord heard anything pertaining to their orders. Consequently, they decided to prepare a letter of instruction for Pershing in case the War Department neglected to produce one. Each man wrote his own draft and the two were then combined into a final letter for Bliss to sign, which he did. At the same time, Kernan drafted his set of orders for Pershing, which Secretary Baker signed. Whether Bliss knew of Kernan's draft or not, he never spoke of it to either Pershing or Harbord. Either way, when Pershing and Harbord visited the secretary of war on 27 May just before their departure, Baker presented Pershing with the orders prepared by General Kernan. Pershing now had before him two legitimate sets of orders, one signed by the secretary of war and one by the chief of staff. A bit confused and more than a bit irritated, Pershing gave precedence to Kernan's draft, as it had Baker's signature on it.⁴⁴

Luckily for all concerned, the actual provisions put forth in both documents were fairly similar, differing only in the level of detail they conveyed. The Bliss letter, written by Pershing and Harbord, was the simpler of the two. It instructed Pershing to establish his forces, cooperate with allies, and conduct operations against Germany. Given the two officers' ignorance regarding Wilson and Baker's concepts as to the scope of American operation, the letter established conservative geographic limits for Pershing's command authority, stating that Pershing would be the "superior military representative of the United States in France."⁴⁵ It made no mention of any ancillary operations that the AEF could possibly conduct, and gave him no authority over forces beyond the French border.

The Bliss letter, in the end, amounted to basic instructions, and as such comes across as a poor piece of staff work.

The Baker letter, however, was the more useful of the two. It specified Pershing as the commander of the American land forces (including the Marines) operating in continental Europe and the United Kingdom. More importantly, the letter stated clearly that “the underlying idea 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 observed.” Thus the letter ordered Pershing to build his own army and not simply turn over his troops to the Allies. Though the letter did allow “minor exceptions in particular circumstances,” it left the final decision to Pershing. This made Pershing the final arbiter over how American soldiers were to be used; an arrangement that both Secretary Baker and President Wilson supported fully throughout the war. Whenever calls for the amalgamation of American soldiers into Allied armies grew in intensity, as they did in the spring of 1918 during the German Spring Offensive, Pershing held the ultimate trump card in the form of the Baker letter.⁴⁶

With both letters in hand, Pershing and Harbord left Washington for New York on 27 May, beginning one of the more laughable attempts at military secrecy of the entire war. Considering the very real threat German submarines presented for anyone crossing the Atlantic, let alone the command apparatus of the forthcoming American army, every effort was made to keep knowledge of Pershing’s sailing to a minimum. Harbord and the rest of the group spent the two weeks prior to departure trying to keep as low a profile as possible, while at the same time running around Washington making the necessary arrangements for the journey. Harbord noted in his diary that “with War Department

bureau chiefs regaling dinner guests with secrets supposed to be sacred; with the Pershing party hiding its heads around the capitol for two weeks, avoiding its friends and looking mysterious when Europe was mentioned . . . one wonders while we are making the world safe for Democracy, who is going to make Democracy safe for the world.” Each officer was allowed to tell his spouse of their impending departure, but had to refrain from giving further details (i.e. the date of departure or the ship they would travel on).

Harbord himself gained clearance to write Theodore Roosevelt and decline service in his proposed division, but could give no reason save that circumstances made it now impossible.⁴⁷

On the morning of 28 May, Pershing’s entire sailing party gathered at Governors Island in New York City. Grey skies and pouring rain greeted them, prompting ceaseless observations of bad omens at the beginning of their grand undertaking. With an eye towards secrecy, the party had to take a ferry to their vessel, the S.S. *Baltic* of the British White Star Line. When Harbord arrived at Pier 60, he was presented with a scene as comedic as it was disconcerting. The party, numbering some 193 officers, soldiers, field clerks and civilians, were told to travel in plain clothes so as not to arouse suspicion. However, some thirty officers failed to heed these provisions and arrived in uniform, while numerous others wore military shoes or carried their swords. The supply departments, appearing to have been left out of the loop regarding security, had been assembling supplies on the pier for several days, all of which with “S.S. *Baltic*, General Pershing’s Headquarters” stenciled on them in large letters. An assortment of civilians were also milling about, many of whom wanted to accompany General Pershing aboard the ferry. Harbord looked on with pride as the General, jaw clamped in noticeable

irritation, held his temper throughout the entire affair. Major Hugh Drum observed wryly that “the long peace America had enjoyed has kept her in ignorance as to secrecy.”

Finally, in case anyone within earshot was not aware of what was occurring, the signal battery at Governors Island fired the Major General’s salute to mark Pershing’s departure.⁴⁸

If the strain were not enough after the situation on the dock, events continued to conspire against the party once aboard the ferry. The plan called for the group to steam out to Gravesend Bay, a rather inauspicious name, to meet the *Baltic* so as not to make the ship’s name public. Departing Governors Island around noon, the party found no ship waiting for them when they reached the bay. Apparently delayed by the Navy, the *Baltic* did not appear for several hours and the ferryboats, lacking an anchor, were forced to bounce around in the bay while the party waited. One soldier, not knowing that they were waiting to board another ship, lambasted their ragged conveyance, saying, “Hell, we can’t go to France in this damned thing!”⁴⁹ When the *Baltic* finally arrived, the party began transferring over, which ended up being quite a challenge in the rough seas. Harbord had to stop several impatient uniformed officers lest they beat Pershing up the gangplank and present themselves to the ship’s captain as the commanders of the American Expeditionary Forces.

Once aboard, the *Baltic* finally set out for England at around 5:15 p.m. Harbord, gazing at the dark, foggy weather and the aging ship, took the time to mark the moment in his mind. “There was no inspiring view of the New York skyline,” he wrote in his diary, “no Napoleon-on-the-Bellerophon-gazing-at-the-fast-fading-shores-of-France for us, for it was cold and raw, and a fog like pall settled over the green shores of Long

Island.”⁵⁰ Several members of the party, coming face to face with their situation, expressed a slightly fatalistic apprehension as they confronted the black ocean in front of them and the unknown future beyond. The reality finally sank in; they were heading off to war.⁵¹

A Working Voyage Across the Sea

As the *Baltic* steamed out past Halifax, the small contingent that formed the American Expeditionary Forces got down to business. They quickly fell into a routine of life-boat drills, French lessons, briefings from French and British officers aboard, work, and various other entertainment that helped pass the time. The general topic of conversation centered on the submarine threat. Most of the passengers found themselves glancing out over the vast ocean and wondering what dangers lie beneath. News that two torpedoes narrowly missed the *Baltic* on her voyage from Europe added to the tension, and efforts to find distractions often failed as conversations invariably turned back to the lurking predators. Harbord knew that submarines were not equipped to take on passengers, and that should a German sub captain know of Pershing’s crossing he would make every effort to send the ship and all aboard to a watery grave. In an effort to conceal their position, the ship’s captain ordered all windows covered and strictly prohibited smoking on deck after dark. Once away from Halifax, however, the weather cleared and the bright moon over the Atlantic illuminated the ship as well as any spotlight. Several passengers took to sleeping in their life preservers, which one can imagine led to less than restful sleep. Card games, shuffleboard and other such

diversions could ameliorate the fear of attack only so far, leaving many to bear the stress as best they could.⁵²

Harbord, meanwhile, struggled with his own jumbled emotions. Though excited at the opportunity before him, he was more than a little apprehensive regarding his new responsibilities. Added to this was a quiet sadness at leaving his wife, Emma, for an indeterminate amount of time. He could not shake the image of her tearful farewell, and she remained always in the back of his mind. To keep himself busy, Harbord began thinking about the task ahead. The more he thought about circumstances in the War Department the more concerned he became. Harbord knew of the competitive nature of American officers, and feared that the failure to use men like Leonard Wood, J. Franklin Bell and Hunter Liggett threatened to create a situation where “somebody will be starting little backfires behind us.”⁵³

Harbord’s initial fears illustrate a degree of suspicion and paranoia that would become increasingly pointed as the war continued. He knew the poor reputation American officers had in the eyes of Europeans, and believed that Pershing needed immediate promotion to full general lest he meet the various Field Marshals of Europe at a disadvantage. Having recently received a promotion to lieutenant colonel (Cavalry) on the Regular list himself, Harbord knew that this small group was conspicuously short of general officers. He consoled himself with the knowledge that neither French Generals Robert Nivelle, Henri Philippe Pétain, nor British Field Marshall Sir Douglas Haig were first-tier generals when the war began. Only time would tell who in the American contingent would see their star rise in the AEF.

The relative youth aboard the *Baltic* symbolized the need to transform the U.S. Army into a modern military force. For many of these officers, their introduction to the military came on the American frontiers, where boredom was a more common foe than the American Indians. They served in Cuba and the Philippines, and witnessed the organizational upheaval that came with the reforms of Secretary of War Elihu Root in the first years of the century. These men, raised on tales of the American Civil War, educated at West Point and the Leavenworth schools, and seasoned in foreign service, represented a new breed of American officer. As argued by historian Allan Millett, “Between the Civil War and the World War, the army officer corps became an institutionalized profession.”⁵⁴ The new breed of officers, beneficiaries of career-long education in the military arts and sciences, looked to supplant once and for all the past image of the amateur warrior.

Henceforth, the war promised to change the makeup of the American army and officer corps. Over the past thirty years, the army never rose above 200,000 officers and men, even during the Spanish-American War. Consequently, there developed a small, insular officer corps well suited to the Army’s pre-war role of frontier constabulary, coastal defense, and foreign occupation force. This aided Pershing in selecting officers to accompany him to France, but could not last given the numbers the AEF would eventually need. Considering the size of the armies now fighting in Europe, Major Palmer noted that “success in contemporary warfare is less a matter of dash than of mass – millions of men and tons of supplies.”⁵⁵ The fraternal officer corps could not hold up under this weight of numbers. Harbord knew the truth of this fact. He also understood that this war marked an end of an era for the army as he knew it. “Many of that old Army

of ours,” he observed, “of which we have grumbled and complained so much, and with which we have found so much fault, but which we have all the time loved so well, will lay their bones in the soil of France.”⁵⁶

In between the officers’ French classes, Pershing and Harbord put the staff to work on other tasks. Pershing had various officers, especially those British and Canadian officers accompanying them, give a series of lectures ranging from discussions on the British Army to the dangers of social diseases in wartime. The latter became a personal campaign for Pershing, who had a puritanical obsession with combating venereal disease. In addition to these lectures, Pershing created several Boards of Officers to make studies of the various issues before them. One board examined the issue of artillery equipment, making recommendations as to caliber, manufacturer, etc, while another studied the port situation in France. Pershing also worked closely with his staff on the issue of where they would fight. Knowing the political necessities of keeping the French in control of the front guarding Paris, and the British protecting the English Channel, the Americans looked further to the interior, settling on the Lorraine as the most agreeable choice.⁵⁷

As the staff went about recommending solutions for the various challenges before them, Pershing and his immediate subordinates worked on creating the policies and organizational framework under which the AEF would operate. With the exception of the AEF commander, Major Palmer suffered more under his workload than anyone aboard. As head of the Operations sections, Palmer oversaw the creation of the actual staff system for the AEF. At present, Pershing’s staff consisted of Harbord as chief of staff, followed by an amorphous mass of men with no operational structure guiding them. All other sections relied upon Palmer getting the structure up and running, which was a

daunting task given the lack of precedence for building an American General Staff in the field. Palmer recognized this with an ominous feeling. “The more I reflected on the comments of our British friends,” he recalled, “the more I came to appreciate how rudimentary and inadequate our existing staff organizations really was.”⁵⁸

The main problem, as Harbord saw it, was that “certain staff problems appeared to demand almost simultaneous and immediate solution.”⁵⁹ Foremost of these were:

The Organization for the divisions that were about to be formed in the home country; the constitution of our General staff and the allocation of its functions; the order of priority of shipments of troops and supplies including munitions; the organization of what we then styled the Line of Communications; the training of the troops that were to come; the system of supply for the Lines of Communications to the troops; [and lastly] the strategy of our future combat employment.⁶⁰

When combined with the thousand other decisions that needed to be made, the Americans faced a daunting task for even the most skilled and seasoned staff organization, let alone one being created along the way. In an effort to get a head start on the process, Palmer and Harbord drew up a rudimentary outline for Pershing’s staff before leaving Washington. Their initial plan mirrored the Army’s organization in the United States, separating the General Staff from the operational bureaus. At the top was the commander-in-chief, followed by the chief of staff. Next came the Adjutant General and the senior members of the General Staff on an equal footing. They divided the General

Staff into two sections: Intelligence and Operations, while the Adjutant General oversaw the various service bureaus: Supply, Inspector General, Law, Medical, etc. The British officers on board quickly expressed their doubts regarding the staff system's feasibility in regard to the complexities of modern war. They advised a total reorganization, and suggested that the Americans needed to re-envision their conception of a working field staff. The focus on planning and policy-making that earmarked the General Staff in Washington, in lieu of actual operational command authority, could prove fatal to the effectiveness of the AEF General Staff. Pershing saw this too and wanted Harbord and Palmer to "create an executive section in the General Staff 'to give it responsibility.'"⁶¹ Pershing did not want the AEF to see its General Staff and service bureaus engage in the same squabbles over conflicting authority that plagued the War Department.

After making his directions clear, Pershing moved on to work with the heads of the staff departments, leaving Harbord and Palmer to create a workable staff organization. With the outline they prepared prior to leaving the War Department in hand, the two men began a long and exhaustive attempt to flesh out the details of this system. After several long nights in Harbord's office stateroom, however, they concluded that they were fighting a losing battle. They lacked the practical knowledge of how a staff operates in wartime and had no precedents to work from. They decided that their time was better spent addressing other problems until they could observe their Allies in action and gain a better understanding of a functional General Staff.⁶²

On the night of 5 June, the *Baltic* reached the submarine Danger Zone west of Great Britain. The captain required the passengers to sleep fully clothed should a submarine attack, knowing that if he could get them in the lifeboats quickly there was a

good chance of being rescued. Trusting his own ability to dress rapidly, Harbord laid out his clothing for easy access, adding a box of matches to his pocket contents should the lights be knocked out in an attack. The *Baltic* itself took up a zig-zag course designed to throw off any submarine seeking to home in on their position. Two destroyers took up escort positions on 6 July, with a third arriving the next day, providing the passengers a measure of relief from the constant fears of the German U-boats. Several SOS calls from vessels making the crossing along with the Americans dimmed their spirits a bit, as did the news that some fifteen ships were sunk in British waters while the *Baltic* steamed between Halifax and Liverpool.⁶³

Finally, the *Baltic* arrived in Liverpool in the early morning of 8 June after nearly two weeks at sea. Ever the student of history, Harbord observed that they were the first foreign soldiers to step foot on English soil since William the Orange in 1688. Unlike the famed English monarch, the Americans were not at their final destination, still needing to cross the English Channel. For now, however, Harbord and the rest of the group relaxed and enjoyed the revelry that accompanied their arrival, clear in the knowledge that their real work would come soon enough.

Notes

¹ See Note 23, Chapter I.

² James G. Harbord to Leonard Wood, 16 March 1915, Box 4, James G. Harbord Papers, Manuscript Division, LC; Special Orders, No. 180, 3 August 1916, Box 6, Harbord Papers, LC.

³ Roosevelt applied for permission to raise a division of volunteers and lead them to France in February 1917. He went so far as to secure the backing of both the French and British governments, hoping their combined pressure could sway the current Democratic administration into acceptance. Secretary of War Newton Baker, acting on President Wilson's behalf, did his best to politely dissuade and deflect Roosevelt's proposal so as to not come across as openly hostile to the popular ex-President. See Daniel R. Beaver, *Newton D. Baker and the American War Effort 1917-1919* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 27-29.

⁴ Harold Dean Cater, "The War Department General Staff: What It Is and How It Developed", unpublished article in General Staff Interviews, Office of the Chief of Military History Collection, MHI.

⁵ Harbord stated that he had already decided to accept the promotion, not wanting to "fall between two stools" as it were, but would gladly resign it should Roosevelt have a place for him. Harbord to Theodore Roosevelt, 6 May 1917, Box 8, Harbord Papers, LC.

⁶ Roosevelt to Frank R. McCoy: TG: 4 February 1917, Box 14, Frank R. McCoy Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.

⁷ Exact numbers for the U.S. Army at the beginning of the war are difficult to determine. The official statistical history of the American war effort lists the size of the Regular Army at 133,000 officers and men and the National Guard at 67,000. Historian Edward M. Coffman places the numbers at 127,588 officers and men in the Army and 80,446 National Guardsmen. Coffman further states that the nation possessed a "second line" of defense in the form of 101,174 guardsmen under control of the states. Allan Millet and Peter Maslowski list the numbers for the Regular Army and National Guard at 133,111 and 185,000 respectively (but make no distinction in the latter for those guardsmen attached to the states). Leonard P. Ayers, *The War With Germany: A Statistical Summary* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1919), 15-17; Edward M. Coffman, *The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 17-18; Allan R. Millet and Peter Maslowski, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States of America* (New York: The Free Press, 1984), 349. [Revised and Expanded edition published in 1994.]

⁸ Mark Grotelueschen, "The AEF Way of War: The American Army and Combat in the First World War" (Ph.D. diss., Texas A&M University, 2003), 9-11.

⁹ Allan R. Millett, "Cantigny, 28-31 May 1918," in *America's First Battles, 1775-1965*, eds. Charles E. Heller and William A. Stofft (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986), 150-55; Grotelueschen, "The AEF Way of War," 10.

¹⁰ Hugh L. Scott to Frank R. McCoy, 30 April 1917, Box 14, McCoy Papers, LC.

¹¹ Harbord to Frederick Palmer, 13 May 1919, Box 8, Harbord Papers, LC; James G. Harbord, *The American Army in France 1917-1919* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1936), 71.

¹² Millett and Maslowski, *For the Common Defense*, 349.

¹³ J.E. Fassett to Harbord, 26 November 1918, Box 10, Harbord Papers, LC.

¹⁴ Quoted in Donald Smythe, *Pershing: General of the Armies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 6.

¹⁵ Baker was especially loathe to appoint a man like Major General William R. Shafter, who led the American expedition to Cuba in the Spanish-American War. An obese man, Shafter's health did not benefit from service in the Caribbean. Millett and Maslowski, *For the Common Defense*, 294-99;

¹⁶ Frederick Palmer, *Newton D. Baker: America at War* 2 vols. (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1931), 1:165-66.

¹⁷ Smythe, *Pershing*, 3-4.

¹⁸ Coffman, *War to End All Wars*, 42-43.

¹⁹ James G. Harbord, *Serving with Pershing: An Address Delivered before the University Club of Port Chester, N.Y., May 26, 1944* (n.p., n.d.), Box 18, James G. Harbord Papers, NYHS; Harbord, *American Army*, 44; As acting Chief of the Philippine Constabulary, Harbord criticized Pershing's heavy-handed tactics in dealing with dissidents and his financial administration of the province. He went so far as writing to General Wood in 1910 on the matter, saying, "I think the Moro Province has been practically a blank since you left there, and that its future is hazarded more or less as a tail to the Pershing kite." Quoted in Donald Smythe, *Guerilla Warrior: The Early Life of John J. Pershing* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), 59-60, 156-59; Pershing even attended Harbord's wedding in 1899, a fact to which he attested in an affidavit in 1913 when Harbord needed help securing a pension for his wife should he be killed in the line of duty. The completed affidavit is attached to Harbord to Pershing, 4 August 1813, Box 4, Harbord Papers, LC.

²⁰ Harbord to Pershing, 21 January 1917, Box 11, Harbord Papers, LC.

²¹ Harbord, *American Army*, 60; Harbord considered that the meeting may be to chastise him for not call on Pershing and pay his respects when the general arrived in Washington, as was custom. James G. Harbord, *The American Expeditionary Forces: Its Organization and Accomplishments* (Evanston, IL: Evanston Publishing Co., 1929), 13.

²² *Ibid.*, 13-14; Harbord, *American Army*, 60-61; Diary entry, 15 May 1917, John J. Pershing Diary, Box 6-7, John J. Pershing Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.

²³ Though "Commander-in-Chief" is the official military title of the President, the officers in the AEF used it to describe Pershing and so will I.

²⁴ John J. Pershing, *My Experiences in the First World War* 2 vols. (New York: F.A. Stokes, 1931), 1:19.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:19.

²⁶ Harbord, *American Army*, 61.

²⁷ Smythe, *Pershing*, 11; Millett and Maslowski, *For the Common Defense*, 366; James J. Cooke, *Pershing and His Generals: Command and Staff in the AEF*, Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), 5-7.

²⁸ By the end of the war, the U.S. Army would contain roughly 200,000 commissioned officers. Ayers, *The War With Germany*, 21-22.

²⁹ By comparison, Germany started the war with 650 members on its General Staff. Smythe, *Pershing*, 10; Cooke, *Pershing and His Generals*, 9.

³⁰ Harbord, *American Army*, 61

³¹ I. B. Holley, Jr., *General John M. Palmer, Citizen Soldiers, and the Army of a Democracy* (London: Greenwood Press, 1982), 273-75. As explained in the Preface, the book has a convoluted authorship. General Palmer wrote the first ten chapters himself and roughed out the next fourteen. Holley wrote chapters twenty-five through fifty-three himself, and shifts voices from first to third person. Consequently, I will treat the first twenty-four chapters as autobiography, and the remainder as Holley's biography.

³² *Ibid.*, 273-74; For Dennis Nolan's recollections and descriptions of these events there are several drafts of chapters for a book Nolan worked on in the 1930s but never completed. Hereafter cited as "Book Chapters," Box 2, Dennis E. Nolan Papers, MHI.

³³ Cooke, *Pershing and His Generals*, 92.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 91-93; described in Nolan's typescript copy of his lengthy notes on Pershing's memoirs, completed in 1931-32, Box 2, Nolan Papers, MHI; "Book Chapters," Box 2, Nolan Papers, MHI.

³⁵ Initially Pershing was given command of a single division for duty in France before being tapped to lead the entire AEF. The committee Palmer served on, along with Major Briant Wells, and Captain Dan T. Moore, dealt with this early force's shipment to France. Holley, *General John M. Palmer*, 271.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 275.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 275.

³⁸ The complete list included two officers from the General Staff, two from the Adjutant General's Department, sixteen from the Quartermaster's Department, eight from the Signal Corps, three Engineers, four from the Medical Department, two from the Judge Advocate General, three from the Inspector General, two from the Ordnance Department, seven from the line (including Harbord), and two officers from the U.S. Marines Corps. War Department to Pershing, "Subject: Orders" 26 May 1917, Box 11, Harbord Papers, LC.

³⁹ Harbord, *American Army*, 62.

⁴⁰ Pershing had been the Departmental Commander prior to being called to Washington.

⁴¹ Diary Entries, 17-28 May 1917, Hugh A. Drum Diary, Box 9, Hugh A. Drum Papers, MHI.

⁴² G.T.M. Bridges to Hugh Scott, no date, reprinted in Pershing, *My Experiences*, 1:32.

⁴³ Smythe, *Pershing*, 8; Coffman, *The War to End All Wars*, 8.

⁴⁴ Harbord, *The American Expeditionary Forces*, 15; Harbord, *American Army*, 63-64.

⁴⁵ Tasker H. Bliss to Pershing, 26 May 1917, Box 15, Drum Papers, MHI; Harbord, *American Army*, 66.

⁴⁶ Newton D. Baker to Pershing, 26 May 1917, Box 15, Drum Papers, MHI; Harbord, *American Army*, 65-66; Smythe, *Pershing*, 11-12.

⁴⁷ James G. Harbord, *Leaves From a War Diary* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1925), 4.

⁴⁸ Diary entry, 28 May 1917, Drum Diary, MHI; Harbord, *War Diary*, 4-5; Harbord, *American Army*, 71-72; Richard O'Conner, *Black Jack Pershing* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1961), 153-54.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Smythe, *Pershing*, 13.

⁵⁰ Harbord, *War Diary*, 6.

⁵¹ Diary Entry, 28 May 1917, Drum Diary, Box 9, Drum Papers, MHI.

⁵² Diary Entry, 6 June 1917, Drum Diary, *Ibid.*; Harbord, *War Diary*, 7, 18-19; Diary Entries, 28 May – 6 June 1917, John L. Hines Diary, Box 1, John L. Hines Papers, MHI.

⁵³ Harbord, *War Diary*, 8-9. Of the three men mentioned, only Major General Hunter Liggett would see duty with the AEF, rising to command the American First Army in the Meuse-Argonne campaign in September 1918.

⁵⁴ Allan R. Millett, *The General: Robert L. Bullard and Officership in the United States Army 1881-1925* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975), 9.

⁵⁵ Holley, *General John M. Palmer*, 279.

⁵⁶ Harbord, *War Diary*, 13.

⁵⁷ Harbord, *American Army*, 73-75.

⁵⁸ Holley, *General John M. Palmer*, 279.

⁵⁹ Harbord, *The American Expeditionary Forces*, 16.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁶¹ Holley, *General John M. Palmer*, 280.

⁶² Pershing, *My Experiences*, 1:43; Holley, *General John M. Palmer*, 279-81; Harbord, *War Diary*, 18.

⁶³ Harbord, *American Army*, 75-76; Harbord, *War Diary*, 20.

CHAPTER III

“LAFAYETTE, WE ARE HERE” (JUNE – JULY 1917)

After a rapid organization of an initial expeditionary force, General John J. Pershing and two hundred officers, clerks, and enlisted men departed for Europe in late May 1917. During the voyage, the Americans worked to outline a basic organizational framework for the American Expeditionary Forces and to develop its operational policies. When they arrived in France after making a brief stop in England, the group endured an agonizingly long period of jubilation and relief from the British and French citizenry. Suffering through three long years of war, the Europeans were desperate for any sign of hope that could signal the eventual end to the war. To these people the Americans were a godsend, and they poured all of their emotions into the arrival of their friends from across the sea. But unknown to many, the Americans were in no way prepared to make an impact on the Western Front, nor would they be for many months. The failure of the United States to prepare for war had left its military wholly deficient in the techniques of modern warfare now being utilized on the battlefields of Europe. The Americans in the AEF were well aware of their own limitations, and could only hope that the celebratory spirit that accompanied their arrival would not turn to anger and disappointment during the extended period it would take for the United States to train, transport, and supply an army for operations against Imperial Germany.

London

The *Baltic* steamed safely into the Mersey River on the morning of 8 July. Upon disembarking at Liverpool, a grand reception of the local officials, military representatives, and reporters met with the members of the fledgling AEF. The most senior members of the party, who would come to be known as the staff,¹ accompanied Pershing ashore to a serenade of the *Star Spangled Banner* from a local band. While Pershing reviewed a contingent of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, the rest of the party stood back, taking in the significance of the moment. The presence of a young soldier wearing a vertical shoulder stripe, signifying being wounded in combat, brought home that this celebration concerned a darker purpose.²

Freshly promoted Lieutenant Colonel James G. Harbord received his first appreciation for the subtle differences between his own armed services and those of his new allies when a British lieutenant colonel mistook his oak leaf for a star and thought Harbord a brigadier general. Much to his embarrassment, Harbord admitted his own confusion regarding American ranks, let alone those of his British counterparts. None in the party, either American or British, could surmise why the gold leaf of a major was subordinate to the silver of a lieutenant colonel, but all enjoyed the mutual puzzlement.³ After the ceremonies ended, the Americans returned to the *Baltic* to gather their luggage and prepare for the journey to London. Pershing made a short address to a group of reporters, playing up the British public a bit in a show of diplomacy. Harbord humorously observed the ceremony with which the British dock workers unloaded their luggage, taking an hour to do a job the Americans could have performed themselves in

fifteen minutes, and without jumbling up the baggage as the British did. Conceding to ceremony, Harbord boarded the special train provided for their journey to London with a dispatch case under his arm containing the complete records of the American Expeditionary Forces.⁴

The group arrived in London's Euston Station around 3:15 p.m., where they were met by the Secretary of State for War, Lord Derby, Field Marshal Sir John French, the American Ambassador Walter H. Page, Admiral William S. Sims, and various others. While their arrival brought a new feeling of hope to the British, the Americans' appearance did little to inspire confidence. Over the course of the previous three weeks, the entire party were subjected to several rounds of inoculations for typhoid, smallpox and the like, with the last shots being delivered the day before. One of Pershing's officers noted that "every American staff officer I saw looked yellow and old as if they were all suffering from bad livers; everyone looked [at] least ten years older than he actually was."⁵ Thankfully, General Pershing must have declined the last round of shots, for his appearance remained as straight and vigorous as ever, personifying everything the British could hope for in the American commander.

For a nation expecting the vaunted resources of the United States, the size of Pershing's party came as a cold shock to the British. The Americans brought less than two hundred officers and men to a war in which millions were engaged. Only two conclusions came to mind: either the Americans did not understand the situation, or they were not ready for the fight. Both statements had elements of truth to them. While obviously not ready for the war, the Americans were only now coming to realize the size and scope of the conflict. The next few weeks would show entire nations engaged in a

desperate struggle for existence, things that could not be discerned from official reports and newspaper accounts. The AEF faced a steep learning curve if they hoped to help prevent the Allies from crumbling.⁶

The necessary introductions and ceremonies progressed accordingly. Already sensing Pershing's deficiencies regarding public relations, Harbord suggested the AEF commander stand for a photograph with the train's engineer and fireman. Pershing did so, making a point to shake each man's hand, ruining a new pair of gloves in the process as the cameras shuttered away. The party then made its way to the Savoy Hotel, which housed the American officers during their stay in London.⁷ That night, Pershing and the Staff enjoyed a dinner in their honor given by Brigadier General Lord Brooke, who had been assigned as aide-de-camp to Pershing during his visit. The informal affair offered an excellent opportunity for the Americans to become acquainted with their new allies. Over the course of many such dinners and excursions in London, the Americans began to notice the impact and agony of war. Major John M. Palmer noted, "To dine on fish instead of beef is not war, but like the darkened ship our first night at sea, little evidences of austerity like this helped to push one closer toward understanding what it meant."⁸

The next morning, 10 June, Harbord received a great thrill, accompanying General Pershing and the Staff to Buckingham Palace for an audience with His Majesty the King of England. Though he enjoyed the historical significance, Harbord was fast growing weary of ceremonial waiting. He confided in his diary that "a king's anteroom is no better place for me to cool my heels in than that of many a man of less degree for whom I have waited. I am rapidly getting to be a professional waiter since I joined this staff."⁹ Harbord struggled with the fact that he was no longer simply a military officer,

but a representative of the United States, which required a certain level of pomp and circumstance as part of his normal duties.

The meeting with King George V went well, with Pershing finding him a most pleasant conversationalist. Harbord thought the King a rather unimpressive figure, with his small stature and habit of nervously shaking his left knee while speaking, but found his words satisfactory for the occasion. When presented with Pershing's Staff, the King took the opportunity to mark the occasion, saying, "It has always been my dream that the two English-speaking nations should some day be united in a great cause, and to-day my dream is realized. Together we are fighting for the greatest cause for which peoples could fight. The Anglo-Saxon race must save civilization."¹⁰

The rest of their time in London progressed in much the same way. Dinners followed luncheons, which followed various other ceremonies, all marking the American entrance into the war with a dual sense of excitement and relief. After three long years of hardship, the British could look to their American cousins for aid in this struggle that had taken such a toll on the British nation. Ambassador Page, who had long suffered English stares as the United States remained ensconced behind the Atlantic and its rhetorical "Too proud to fight" neutrality, could now hold his head high "and look people squarely in the eyes."¹¹

When not joining Pershing at one ceremony or another, his staff split its time between the War Office and sightseeing. Majors John M. Palmer and Dennis E. Nolan, the newly appointed heads of Operations and Intelligence for the AEF, grew increasingly dismayed the more they learned from the British. They toured the British War Office to see how their respective sections were organized. What they found made clear just how

ill-prepared the United States was for this new war. Palmer observed that where the British Operations Section contained hundreds of officers with thousands of clerks, “the whole Operations office for the AEF, officers, clerks, and all, could ride comfortably in a single one of those funny little London taxis.”¹² Nolan found the same thing at the British Intelligence Section, with one exception: it was even larger. The service heads met similar circumstances as they spent time with their British counterparts, all realizing that they had a long way to go before they could build a comparable organization.¹³

While the staff busied themselves at the British War Office, Harbord stayed close to Pershing. He accompanied the AEF commander to most meetings and engagements. At services at Westminster Abby on Sunday, 10 June, Harbord noted that, “in front, piled high on one of the figure groups, are the banners of regular regiments gone to the war” that provided “a constant reminder” of the struggle taking place just across the Channel.¹⁴ After the services Harbord parted ways with Pershing, who spent the day with Lord and Lady Astor. Though the AEF commander was originally scheduled to join Sir Arthur Paget, commander of the Home Defense Forces, and his wife for lunch, Ambassador Page made the last minute alteration, sending Pershing to the Astors for lunch instead and promising him to the Pagets for tea. Not wanting to alienate any of their influential hosts, Harbord decided to keep the original appointment with the Pagets. It proved a refreshing decision, as Harbord “spent as lovely a day as I ever expect to spend outside my own little house.”¹⁵ Holding a certain affinity for European nobility, Harbord enjoyed himself immensely. He found Lady Paget, an American by birth who had lived in England for the past thirty years, especially pleasing. After lunch, he enjoyed a walk with Lady Paget

and another guest, taking in the grounds and reveling in the brief moment of respite from the business at hand.¹⁶

The peace and calm did not last as tea time came and went without any sign of Pershing. When he finally arrived, some time after eight that evening, Ambassador Page insisted that they could not stay long. Concerned that his commander was being impolite, Harbord pulled Pershing aside and insisted that he stay for dinner. When Pershing agreed, the irritated Ambassador stayed as well intending to whisk the General away as soon as possible. Harbord managed to occupy Page long enough after dinner to allow Pershing a few minutes' talk with Sir Paget. The move bore fruit as Paget promised to call out a full division for a mock attack on Tuesday morning for Pershing to observe. When the General finally departed with Ambassador Page, Harbord made his way back to the hotel, finally getting to bed after midnight, but not before recording his impressions in his diary. "It was rather a trying day as far as the tact required to explain our Ambassador and our General was concerned, but otherwise a very delightful one."¹⁷

The next day Harbord had a chance for a bit of shopping, needing some warm clothing, boots, and the like. The occasion finally brought him face-to-face with the effects of the war. "In all the crowds along the streets there is a fair sprinkling of officers and men in uniform," he recalled, "many people wearing mourning; recruiting signs still abound; here and there you see signs of organized relief of one sort or another; even in Trafalgar Square at the foot of Nelson's monument there was exhibited during our stay a shell-torn ambulance."¹⁸ Everywhere he looked Harbord saw the various uniforms of British colonial soldiers. Anzacs, Canadians and the like mingled with British regulars, presenting a wondrous tableau of military regalia. Only two weeks removed from the

United States, as yet untouched by the war, Harbord marveled at the stoic determination of a nation consumed in a titanic struggle for what many believed was its very existence.

At roughly 5 a.m. Tuesday, Harbord and Pershing made their way to Brentwood in Essex to observe the division maneuver arranged by General Paget. The camp held a quick nine-week course offering basic instruction in trench warfare. The group witnessed “bomb throwing, trench fighting, bayonet fighting, and training of all kind,” which Pershing found “more realistic than anything we had so far seen in our own service.”¹⁹ Harbord was not as impressed, seeing in the men signs that England’s manpower reserves were quickly reaching their limits. He could not help but think the camp was a place “where the physically indifferent, the convalescents and other unfit are made fit.” The small stature of the 17th Yorkshires, who paraded past them, made Harbord conclude that the British were down to the “physically poor, runts, crooked, [and] undeveloped” in their search for fresh bodies to throw into the trenches.²⁰ A better indication of the need for American troops could not be asked for.

Upon their return to London, the party attended a full state dinner at the Lancaster Hotel for Pershing and the remainder of his staff.²¹ The Americans were split amongst six tables, with Pershing sitting at the one headed by British Prime Minister David Lloyd George. When the Prime Minister arrived fifteen minutes late, Harbord surmised that a politician “can do that sort of thing,” but secretly hoped that Pershing would not adopt the practice.²² If the Americans did not feel conspicuous enough, a British officer innocently asked Pershing, “General, is this your personal staff?” Pershing replied gruffly, “No, this is my General Staff.”²³ Seated at a table headed some distance from Pershing’s, Harbord could only watch as the AEF commander struggled through the evening. But despite his

concern for the general, Harbord found the entire evening extremely interesting. It turned out that Lord Curzon, who headed up Harbord's table, had served as Viceroy of India and the two men enjoyed a lively discussion over their common interest in the Far East.²⁴

Several speeches followed, accompanied by toasts to the King and to President Wilson. The entire evening was a gallant affair that one could mistake for a reunion of old friends. Major Palmer could not help but notice the underlying politics of the event. "As I looked about the room," he noted, "it occurred to me that this was no empty ceremonial but a dinner with a purpose. Whoever arranged the seating had carefully contrived to mix us all into congenial groups representing a wide cross-section of interests. Here were the people who would be working to make a success of coalition warfare for months to come; the better we knew one another as individuals, the easier it would be to collaborate harmoniously."²⁵ The Prime Minister made it a point to meet each member of Pershing's group individually, which Harbord found a bit taxing. While he understood the need for diplomacy and tact, his patience for politicians went only so far.

On their last morning in London, 12 June, Harbord arose at 4 a.m. for the journey to France. He felt a touch of regret at leaving General Brooke, whom he had enjoyed immensely, but their time in London could not be stretched any further. The group headed for Folkstone to board a steamer for the channel crossing. It would be nine months before Harbord returned to England, and there was a considerable amount of work to do before then.

The Americans Come to France

The AEF's arrival in Boulogne mirrored that at Liverpool, with crowds cheering and bands playing with near hysterical frenzy. Docking alongside the Americans were steamers carrying Annamite troops from Indochina²⁶ and Senegalese from North Africa, testifying to the strain on French manpower. Harbord could not help noticing the AEF's arrival at the sight where Napoleon had assembled the Grand Army for its planned invasion of England in 1805, but dismissed it as "other days; other alliances."²⁷ Waiting for Pershing amongst the cheering crowds was General Peltier, first Chief of French Mission to AEF General Headquarters (GHQ), who had lost a hand while throwing a grenade away from his wounded troops. Alongside Peltier was Lieutenant Colonel Count Adalbert (Bertie) de Chambrun, a descendant of the famed Marquis de Lafayette, who had aided General Washington during the American Revolution. Born in the United States and married to the sister of congressional representative Nicholas Longworth, Chambrun eventually became a close friend to both Pershing and Harbord, and proved himself a valuable ally in dealing with the French. Harbord liked him immediately, but could not help noting that Chambrun "speaks good English, and a great deal of it."²⁸ After the initial introductions the men stood through several playings of the "Star Spangled Banner" and the "Marseillaise." To Harbord it seemed that the band played nothing but the American anthem, and he could not help but notice that "even the General, who stands like a statue, growled over the number of times they played it."²⁹ After two hours of speechmaking, hand shaking, and band playing the group boarded a train for Paris. Harbord, for one, was glad to have a bit of peace. He feared his hands

were going to break off at the wrists with all the clapping, hand shaking and back-slapping, and could only cringe at what awaited them in Paris.

The party finally left Boulogne around noon in order to arrive in Paris at the end of the work day when the greatest number of people could greet them. Crowds gathered at every rail stop along the way, with their sense of joy and relief at the Americans' coming growing more palatable the closer the party came to Paris. Meeting them at the Gare du Nord was Paul Painlevé, current Minister of War and soon to be Premier; Joffre, General René Viviani, General Ferdinand Foch, the French chief of staff; American Ambassador William G. Sharp; and a throng of others. The greetings were pleasantly informal, with no speechmaking, much to Harbord's relief. There ensued a bit of diplomatic jumbling as assignments were passed out for the automobiles designated to carry them through the streets of Paris. Marshal Joffre, so instrumental in securing Pershing's early dispatch to France, was shifted between several different cars, each one further from the front of the procession. It was a stark reminder that the venerable French commander, though still close to the hearts of the French people, had been firmly shelved by the French government.³⁰

On the ride from the station, roses and Parisians shouting "Vive l'Amérique" swarmed the motorcade. Pershing was a bit taken aback by the overflow of emotion, finding it hard "to imagine that any people could be so wildly demonstrative," to the point of being "most touching and in a sense most pathetic. It brought home to us as nothing else could have done a full appreciation of the war-weary state of the nation and stirred within us a deep sense of the responsibility resting upon America."³¹ Riding through the hordes of enthusiasts Harbord felt a bit overwhelmed himself, having to be

reminded by Chambrun to smile to the shouting crowds. Frenchmen wept openly in the streets as the party passed and women kissed any hand hanging out the windows. Harbord's enjoyment briefly turned to fear when he lost sight of Pershing's carriage, leading him to think they had passed the AEF commander. Harbord envisioned being mistaken for the American commander-in-chief, causing him a moment of panic that only subsided when they reached the Hôtel de Crillon where he saw Pershing fighting his way up the steps through the cheering crowds. Never was Harbord so glad to see the general in a difficult position as at that moment.³²

The rooms at the Crillon offered little peace and quiet to Pershing and his staff as expatriate Americans seemed to materialize out of thin air. They offered endless opinions of the relations between the Allies, most of them less than encouraging, and made requests to join the AEF in various capacities. Added to this were the constant calls from the streets below for a view of the American commander. Pershing had to make repeated appearances on the balcony, each of which was greeted with a thunderous ovation.

When the visitors finally stopped coming, Pershing and Harbord had a chance to sit down and compare their impressions of the day. Both were touched by the outpouring of emotion on the part of the French people, but they could not shake the feeling that the French were making too much of their arrival. Yes the Americans had come, but there were less than two hundred of them. The men who would make up the proposed American Army were still many months away from being ready. Harbord knew that with their arrival, "it would not be many hours before all France would be looking for the troops which we both knew were still undrafted in their homes all over the broad United

States. . . . A rebound of sentiment seemed inevitable and it was almost sure to be accompanied by a certain lowering of Allied morale.” Though a remarkable day, Harbord could not hide the feeling that they were received “under false pretenses.”³³ The Americans needed time to build an organization, transport their men, train their forces, and put them into line. Exactly how much time they needed remained in question, but all evidence pointed to it being considerable. How long the Europeans could wait was another matter entirely.

Of course these were the same questions facing the Americans prior to their journey across the Atlantic. But now that they were in France, Harbord surmised that the short boost their arrival gave to the tenuous French morale would quickly evaporate when American troops did not begin arriving en masse. It made sense given the current state of the French war effort. Recently the French had launched the disastrous Nivelle offensive, which sacrificed some 120,000 men in a futile attempt to break the German line. What broke instead was the French Army, with some sixteen army corps almost simultaneously rising up in mutinies. One division even threatened to march on Paris, and the Minister of War, Paul Painlevé, reported that only two divisions could be counted on fully should the Germans decide to launch an offensive. Though the public remained unaware of this, Pershing was told before leaving Washington. While the main threat of the mutinies had passed by the time the AEF reached France, they continued to cast a pall over the French military. Now that the Americans were face to face with the desperate joy of the French citizenry, Ambassador Sharp’s statement, “I hope you have not arrived too late,” to Pershing rung in everyone’s ears.³⁴ Pershing himself could only wonder if the French morale could be restored.³⁵

The next several days were filled with the much the same type of ceremonies as in London. Though anxious to get to work, Pershing recognized the need for these delays. Harbord, for one, enjoyed the time immensely, having a particular soft spot for the unique extravagances of French hospitality. He was doubly pleased at the skill with which Pershing handled himself. Everywhere they went it seemed Pershing knew exactly what the moment called for, the best example coming on their visit to Napoleon's Tomb at Les Invalides on 14 July. When presented with the Emperor's sword Pershing declined to take it, choosing instead to bow stiffly from the waist, hands at his side, and kiss the blade in a show of respect. Harbord later recounted with pride that "the story was told in every bivouac and barrack in France, and ran through the drawing-rooms of the capital like a bulletin from the Grande Armée."³⁶ For days the politicians continued to fawn over Pershing and his officers. During a visit to the Chamber of Deputies, the "Chamber nearly went amuck over General Pershing, rising to their feet and cheering for ten or fifteen minutes." When a request came in for Pershing to visit the Senate, Harbord mused that the General "could be elected King of France" had he so desired.³⁷

For all the praise, Pershing knew that the time was fast approaching to begin tackling the business at hand. The first step came on 16 June when Pershing and Harbord paid a visit to General Henri Philippe Pétain at his headquarters at Compiègne. The first meeting between the men, it would set the tone for their relationship and needed to go well. Though Joffre remained the hero of the people, Pétain represented the heart of the French Army. After the disastrous Nivelle offensive, it fell upon Pétain to hold the army together, which he did through a combination of tact and understanding. In addition to improving food rations and redressing justifiable grievances, he promised that there

would be no more major attacks for the foreseeable future. For the time being, they would hold the line and wait for the Americans.³⁸

With Pershing now in Paris, both he and Pétain anxiously sought a meeting. Harbord noted that for all the ministers and officials they had met in France, none seemed to show the iron will that had kept the French in the war up to this point. Where were the men who inspired the people to carry on year after year? Up to this point Harbord had only seen smiling diplomats and glad-handing politicians, a fact that made their endless diplomatic visits all the more wearisome. Sensing his concern, Chambrun stated simply, “These are all great men, but they are great men of the past. Wait until you see Pétain.”³⁹

When Pershing and Harbord finally gained their audience with the French general, they found Pétain hard at work with the business of war (something they had not seen much of up to that point). Kindred spirits, the two commanders liked each other immediately and formed a strong friendship that survived the strain of the next eighteen months. As it turned out, the men shared a great deal in common. They were strong, virile, ambitious, and serious minded, yet possessed a good sense of humor that only a close few enjoyed. Roughly the same age, each man focussed on the task at hand, and drove those around them to a degree that bordered on ruthlessness. Historian Donald Smythe summed them up by saying, “Both were men of sound common sense, of great steadiness, of dogged determination, tempered by humanity and a knowledge of human weakness. Both were men of the possible, who knew that the grandest of schemes must be conditioned by finite human and material resources.”⁴⁰

Dutifully impressed with Pétain, Harbord noted with pleasure that “he looks you in the face when he speaks to you.” The French general’s reputation for common sense

preceded him, as did his disdain for politicians (a feeling Harbord found himself quickly developing). Harbord eventually credited Pétain with saving France at its darkest hour, pulling it back from the brink of implosion.⁴¹ Pershing echoed these sentiments, thinking Pétain's appointment to command the French Army matched that of Marshal Ferdinand Foch's eventual rise to generalissimo in importance to the final victory.⁴²

The luncheon went well enough, though the need for an interpreter slightly hindered their ability to communicate. Neither Pershing nor Harbord had yet reached a point of fluency to be able to carry on a real conversation, but the group carried on as best they could. Pétain was pleased that the Americans had come at last, but he shocked his guests when, with solemn seriousness, he said that he hoped they were not too late. It was one thing to hear such sentiments from the American Ambassador, but quite another for them to come from the French commander-in-chief. It drove home the point of just how close the French were to losing the war and had a profound impact on the Americans.⁴³

When the time came for Pershing and Harbord to depart, Pétain suggested that they take a trip up to see the front. The Americans agreed and Major General Franchet d'Espérey, commanding a group of armies under Pétain, secured two motors and took them to a point in the line opposite Saint Quentin. They took up a position in an artillery observation outpost and gained their first view of the front through a high-powered telescope. Though there was some fear of artillery fire, the most dangerous part of the affair was the return trip, as their chauffeur took it upon himself to drive at breakneck speeds so as not to expose them to possible enemy fire for too long a time. After

cautioning the man several times, General d'Espérey's anger grew to the point that he threatened the chauffeur with violence, after which their speed was greatly reduced.⁴⁴

With their journey to the front completed, Pershing and Harbord returned to Paris with the hope of getting to work. What greeted them, instead, was an avalanche of representatives from various American missions seeking to do their part in the war. Though well-meaning, these groups soon developed into a nuisance. Included in their ranks were engineers, railroad men, and scientists of various specialties, all claiming a need to see General Pershing. Harbord confessed his increasing weariness at these do-gooders to his diary, complaining of "Charitable organizations insisting on tending to the wounded, while hundreds of widows and orphans are in need of aid; misguided enthusiasts cabling for motor cars two thousand at a time when the French have not gasoline enough to operate those they have. People bringing things to France that take up shipping room, when the most important thing in the world now, and that on which the victory will turn, is shipping."⁴⁵

Harbord's emphasis on American shipping was no exaggeration. When the war broke out in 1914, ninety percent of American foreign trade was carried in foreign-owned berths. As France and Britain shifted their merchant fleets to wartime needs, the United States scrambled just to meet its own commercial needs. After the war declaration, the government seized a number of German passenger and cargo vessels sitting in American docks since 1914, adding nearly 300,000 tons to the shipping fleet. But to transport the numbers Pershing envisioned, the United States needed several million tons more for troop and supply transport.⁴⁶ To secure these bottoms, the nation embarked upon a massive building program that promised great returns for 1919, should the war last that

long. Until then, however, the United States would have to rely on the tonnage it already had, and whatever additional ships the Allies could supply.⁴⁷

31 rue Constantine

In addition to the charitable missions vying for Pershing's attention and causing Harbord much irritation, there were several missions in Paris focussing on military problems. The most important of these, the Military Mission in France, preceded Pershing to Paris, where it began studying the line and staff organizations of both the French and British and observing the military methods America's new Associates utilized in the field.⁴⁸ Composed of six officers from various branches of the Army, the Mission provided valuable information concerning organizational makeup of the Allied staff systems to the newly arrived members of the AEF.⁴⁹ The Mission also contributed several of its members to the AEF General Staff. The most notable of these were Lieutenant Colonel James A. Logan and Major William "Billy" Mitchell, both of whom transferred to Pershing's command soon after the general's arrival in Paris. Logan had been in France since the war began, having been directed to aid in the evacuation of American tourists during in the fall of 1914. An extremely able staff officer, he eventually became Pershing's assistant chief of staff for Administration. No less efficient, Mitchell became the driving force behind American military aviation, eventually replacing Pershing's original aviation officer. After the war, he continued to advocate the potential for air power, but was forced to resign from the Army for

insubordination that stemmed from his efforts to establish a separate Air Force for the United States.

In addition to providing information on the French and British staff organizations, the Mission aided in securing temporary office spaces for Pershing and the AEF staff. Though Pershing wanted to establish a General Headquarters as soon as possible, several questions needed answering before the process could begin. The first of these was the section of the line the AEF would occupy once it built up its forces. Several factors influenced the decision, the most pressing being operational and logistical practicality. With the British firmly ensconced along the Belgian front protecting the Channel ports, and the French covering the approaches to Paris, the most logical section for the Americans was further east, perhaps in Lorraine or the Vosges. Supply concerns also factored into the discussion. The ports and rail lines surrounding the Channel were already pushed to their limit with the demands of the British Expeditionary Forces. The same could be said of the transportation network surrounding Paris. Neither region could handle the logistical needs of another army, especially not one of the size Pershing envisioned. This left central and southern France as the most practical region for establishing an American supply system. But like any issue of this magnitude, a final decision required further study, and the Americans needed temporary facilities for the time being. The need to coordinate with the French and British made Paris the obvious choice for a temporary headquarters, much to Pershing's chagrin. As any Parisian could attest, the city offered a bevy of potential distractions for officers and enlisted men alike. Pershing needed his men focussed, and wanted to create a controlled environment for

them to work in. But at this early stage of AEF development, the commander-in-chief had to accept Paris as an initial base of operations; there being no workable alternative.⁵⁰

For office space, the Mission secured houses at 27 and 31 rue Constantine on the left bank of the River Seine. While not the worst choice possible, the selection suffered from some serious deficiencies. First and foremost was a desperate lack of space. The entire Operations Section, clerks, officers, and equipment, was confined to a single room. Boxes, maps, and other supplies remained scattered about, making walking a difficult proposition. Nolan also piled the entire Intelligence Section into a single office, making it “such an uncomfortable and crowded place that it kept at least a few of the Americans in Paris away from us, and made us anxious to move out of the capitol to some place where we would have space to move around.”⁵¹ Contributing to their discomfort was the office’s location. Facing the Esplanade des Invalides, the office was off the main cruising route of the Paris taxis, and the only convenient access was to the Invalides. To go anywhere else required a long walk, not an enviable proposition in the hot Paris summer. Most of the members of Pershing’s staff, Harbord included, believed the offices were selected with the idea of speeding up the AEF’s eventual departure from Paris, which one could certainly imagine.⁵²

On the other side of the equation, the quarters secured for Pershing and his immediate staff proved more than adequate. Provided by a wealthy American, Ogden Mills, the mansion located at Number 73 rue de Varennes met all of Pershing’s needs and more. Dating back to the days of Louis XIV, the mansion had some forty rooms and magnificent gardens. The AEF commander moved in on 26 June, accompanied by

Harbord, the Inspector General, the Adjutant General, and his personal aides. The rest of the staff were left to find their own residences, often at considerable expense.⁵³

Getting to work in their new GHQ on 17 June, Pershing and Harbord turned their attention to the question of the press and the persistent group of news men that reported their every movement. Responding to desperate calls for information from home, American reporters sought out any news suitable for printing, whether the General Staff wanted it made public or not. Reports began filtering in through the newspapers of the stupendous preparations being made at home. Claims of hundreds of thousands of airplanes departing for France conflicted with official reports coming out of rue Constantine, causing further problems with Allied morale and consternation amongst Pershing's staff. Nolan knew that the "average professional soldier . . . distinctly distrusts the professional writer," but did not want to create an adversarial relationship with the press.⁵⁴ Instead, he sought to bring the reporters into the General Staff's confidence and exert more subtle controls on their reporting..

Knowing the importance of controlling information in wartime, the General Staff quickly moved to set up a system of censorship in the AEF. Harbord oversaw the issuance of regulations pertaining to censorship, taking special care to outline the reasoning behind the restrictions. Seeking to avoid making "the task of the enemy agents easier," the General Staff set up a rigid censorship system covering all forms of communication, whether they be within the AEF, with foreign entities, or communications with the United States.⁵⁵ All war correspondents fell under the purview of the Intelligence Section, with censors tightly controlling all news regarding the AEF. These restrictions eventually led to an embarrassing situation for Harbord a year later

when he commanded a brigade of Marines at the battle of Belleau Wood, but for the time being they worked to limit confusion and misstatements concerning the AEF.

Settling in

While the General Staff worked away at rue Constantine, Pershing received an invitation from the French War Office to send several officers to the front to observe preparations for an upcoming assault. Taking full advantage of the opportunity, Pershing designated Harbord, Palmer, and Captain James L. Collins for the task. Though the idea of visiting the front appealed to Harbord, he did not want to leave Paris with so much going on. With the first shipment of troops from the United States scheduled to arrive soon, his office still needed organizing, and a new mission from the Secretary of War had just arrived to aid in the development of AEF operational policies. Harbord amused himself with the thought of asking the French to wait, but thought “it would be unreasonable to ask Pétain to postpone even a small offensive because [the Americans were] not yet ready,” so he resigned himself to go.”⁵⁶

Leaving by train around noon on 24 June, Harbord and Captain Collins traveled to the headquarters of the French Second Army at Souilly, with plans for Palmer to join them later. During the five and a half-hour journey Harbord took in the wondrous French countryside, reflecting upon the land’s Napoleonic heritage, particularly the Emperor’s dramatic campaign of 1814. While lost in these thoughts, he noticed mostly women and children working in the fields, the only civilian men he saw being too old for military service. Even in this lush and fertile country, one could not escape the war.⁵⁷

Arriving at Bar-le-Due, roughly thirty miles south of Verdun, they made their way to Souilly and the headquarters of General Guillaumat, commander of the Second Army and a seventy-five mile arc of the line. Once there, Harbord was surprised to find no preparations being made for an assault. General Guillaumat explained that while he planned to go on the offensive, it was still several months away. All he could offer the two Americans was an overview of the last offensive in the region and a tour of the ground. A bit irritated at the apparent breakdown in communication between the front lines, the War Office, and the AEF, Harbord decided to stay and make the best of the situation.⁵⁸

Over the next several days Harbord traveled throughout the region, observing all manner of operations. He inspected the water supply system for the entire Second Army, witnessed the details involved in maintaining observational balloons, and experienced billeting for the first time. Of particular interest was observing the interrogation of German prisoners. Harbord found them the equally rugged and wretched figures one assumes an enemy to be. He watched as the French searched the prisoners for any papers or documents and then conducted general interrogations. At one point the interrogator pointed Harbord and Collins out to a German prisoner, informing him they were Americans come to join in the war. The young man could only smile, saying, "For me the war is over and it makes no difference."⁵⁹ Harbord was a long way from the overwhelming sentimentality of Paris and the hope surrounding the American Expeditionary Forces.

The visit also gave Harbord the invaluable opportunity of observing a functioning general staff in the field. He was struck by how efficiently it operated, with men

frittering about here and there with a look of assuredness, each expressing confidence in whatever task he was doing. When compared to the mass chaos of GHQ AEF, Harbord could not help but realize that the Americans had a long way to go before they could even hope to field a comparable organization. Even more shocking and impressive was the French Intelligence Section, with detailed maps of the entire Western Front including information on every German unit on the line scattered about. Harbord knew that Nolan would have undoubtedly marveled at the operation, but decided not to tell him, thinking he had enough on his mind.

Duly impressed with the French operation, Harbord decided to take advantage of his location and journeyed to Verdun, intending to see life in the trenches close up. Amazed at the city's magnificent fortifications, he could not help but question the logic behind the German offensive in 1916 that sacrificed hundreds of thousands of men and gained virtually nothing. As far as the eye could see, crosses marked the graves of the French defenders who fell by the thousands against the German onslaught. For a man new to this type of warfare, Harbord gave each side their due for enduring such slaughter. He felt a particular pride at the way the French stood firm on this uninspiring piece of land, looked the German straight in the eye and claimed: "You shall not pass." It was the very essence of martial spirit, and Harbord hoped his own countrymen could live up to the example of their ally.⁶⁰

Once in the trenches, Harbord got his first experience of artillery fire, having several German shells crash around him on various occasions. One of his guides pointed out how the battle showed the essential need for good coordination between the infantry and the artillery. To advance without adequate artillery support was suicide, the

Frenchman observed, and advised Harbord, “You must get [this fact] into the heads of your infantry, driving it in as a nail, as it were.”⁶¹ Harbord listened dutifully, but felt a greater need to appear comfortable in front of his guides. He had to fight the urge to duck as a shell whistled overhead. Had he paid more attention to his guide’s words, perhaps he would have made more of an effort to coordinate his own infantry and artillery when he commanded a brigade at the front, but that was still a year away.

When Harbord returned to Paris on 28 June, he learned of several important developments that had taken place in his absence. The first was the selection of the American front. In a short meeting between Pershing and Pétain, the American commander asked for and was given the Lorraine sector east of the Argonne Forest. Truly the only viable choice for an American sector, the Lorraine region did not have the prestige of either the British or French sections, but it did have several marked advantages. Chief amongst these was its location. A fair distance from the Channel ports and Paris, the likelihood that the Germans would launch a major offensive there was slim. Therefore, it could give the Americans the opportunity to gain valuable experience in the trenches before being called upon to conduct any large-scale operations.

The Lorraine region also proved a good choice in terms of logistical access. Though it needed a major road and rail system, the sector was less congested than the more western segments of the front, with both the French and British packed in along the line. The vast stretches of land offered plentiful locales for billeting troops as well as a greater supply of locally obtainable supplies. Additionally, the region had distinct possibilities for offensive operations. The St. Mihiel Salient, an extension of the line just east of Verdun, had been a continual irritant to the French since 1914. Its reduction was

just the sort of task a newly formed army would desire. Moreover, less than fifty miles behind German territory lay the railheads of Metz and Thionville. Any offensive that cut these lines had the potential to cause a general withdrawal of the German Army from the entire southern front. Finally, the area north of Lorraine was of vital economic importance to Germany's war effort. The valuable iron mines near Briery and the coal rich Saar valley provided raw material for German munitions production. To deprive Germany of either of these, or best of all both, would potentially cripple Germany's ability to continue the war.⁶²

Harbord also learned that the first American combat troops had arrived during his absence. The advance elements of the 1st Division, some 14,000 men under the command of Major General William L. Sibert, began arriving on 26 June at St. Nazaire.⁶³ Though technically a Regular division, the vast majority of the officers and men needed considerable training before they would be ready to go into the line. Over half of the company commanders had less than six months experience, pressing the need for the AEF to create a systematic school system in France to provide officers additional training on top of what they received in the United States. As a whole, the division contained only a spattering of professionals within its ranks. The War Department hoped these men would form a learned core around which the division could be built. With the small number of regulars available, the War Department needed to stretch them out as far as possible. Though sensible, the policy meant that no American division would arrive in France anywhere near combat readiness for several months.⁶⁴

Though delighted at the arrival of the American troops, Harbord found their appearance and training level most depressing. Nor could he muster much enthusiasm

for the division's commander. An engineer by training, General Sibert had little experience with the infantry during his career. He owed his stars to his work on the Panama Canal, and found more enjoyment in solving engineering problems than in building up his division. Given his lack of experience, Sibert's selection to command the 1st Division came as a surprise to more than one army insider. But even more troubling to Harbord was the fact that Sibert had a history of softness. He did not show the same personal and professional drive that Harbord and Pershing agreed would be necessary for the rough American divisions. Pershing eventually came to share Harbord's low opinion of Sibert as a division commander, and removed him in January of 1918. For now, however, the division took up billets around Gondrecourt and looked to begin a training regimen as soon as Pershing and the General Staff finalized one.⁶⁵

In an effort to give the waning French morale another boost, Pershing ordered one of Sibert's battalions to take part in the last great honor bestowed upon the Americans by the French: a celebration of the 4th of July. Thousands of Parisians lined the streets for a parade from Napoleon's Tomb at Les Invalides to Lafayette's final resting place a few miles away. Not a participant in the parade, Harbord took in the scene with Colonel de Chambrun and other officers from GHQ. The affair had a dual purpose. On the one hand, it honored the United States and its recently arrived men. At the same time, the event provided the chance to revel in France's grand military tradition a century after the battle of Waterloo. A French battalion led the procession into the domed addition to Les Invalides where the Emperor's crypt lay, followed closely by the indomitable Marshal Joffre, still close to the heart of the French people. When Pershing finally arrived, flanked by an aide and looking the very embodiment of martial spirit, the crowd erupted

in a thunderous cheer. Watching the reaction, Harbord battled with a mixture of pride and apprehension. “There is always a possible tragedy in the career of every general who starts to serve our hysterical inefficient people,” he confessed, “whose thousand activities at this moment seem to be moving along parallel lines instead of being converged on the one object, and whose idea of conducting the war seems to be to send crowds of individuals and commissions of every description to visit France, and to talk, talk, talk.”⁶⁶ It would not be long before such ceremonies would ring hollow if the Americans could not make more of a contribution to the war than a parade battalion, but for now it would have to do.

After the ceremonies at Les Invalides, the procession moved out to the tomb of Lafayette some three miles away. One can hardly imagine the scene, as flowers flowed from all sides, and the cheers never died away once they began. Awash in sentimentality, the event allowed the Parisians to celebrate their connection to the American nation. The Marquis de Lafayette, buried in American soil as per his request, tied the two nations together, linking the American and French people in a debt of honor. To all those present, it was clear that Pershing had come to repay that debt. Colonel Charles E. Stanton, chosen to speak because of his command of French, knew just what the moment required. After a standard Fourth of July speech of histrionics condemning the Germans for their part in bringing the war, he turned to the tomb and uttered the most famous American quote of the war, “Lafayette, we are here!”⁶⁷ It did not matter that Pershing was not the author, for everyone in the crowd and the nation assumed the sentiments were his. It was the perfect capstone for the coming of the AEF, and Harbord doubted he

would see another day like this one until the long sought victory celebration. Little did he know that such a celebration was still two years away.

Notes

- ¹ James G. Harbord, *Leaves From a War Diary* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1925), 25. Harbord establishes the Staff in his diary as the twelve senior officers and heads of departments accompanying Pershing. They were: James Harbord, Chief of Staff; James McAuley Palmer, Chief of Operations, Dennis E. Nolan, Chief of Intelligence; Benjamin Alvord, Adjutant General; André Brewster, Inspector General; Walter A Bethel, Judge Advocate; Daniel E. McCarthy, Chief Quartermaster; Alfred E. Bradley, Chief Surgeon; Harry Taylor, Chief Engineer Officer; Clarence C. Williams, Chief Ordnance Officer; Edgar Russel, Chief Signal Officer; and Townsend F. Dodd, Aviation Officer. General Orders No. 1, American Expeditionary Forces (AEF), 26 May 1917, *United States Army in the World War 1917-1919* 17 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1948), 16:1-2. [Hereafter cited as *USAWW*.]
- ² Harbord, *War Diary*, 20-22; John J. Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War* 2 vols. (New York: F.A. Stokes, 1931), 1:44-45.
- ³ Harbord, *War Diary*, 22.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.
- ⁵ "Book Chapters," Box 2, Dennis E. Nolan Papers, MHI.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷ Pershing, Harbord and the eleven officers making up the staff were put up at the Savoy as the guests of the British Government. The remaining officers also stayed at the Savoy as the guests of various clubs and societies. The enlisted men stayed at the Tower of London and the clerks lodged in various hotels. *Ibid.*, 23.
- ⁸ I.B. Holley, Jr., *General John M. Palmer, Citizen Soldiers, and the Army of a Democracy* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 281
- ⁹ Harbord, *War Diary*, 26.
- ¹⁰ Quoted in Pershing, *My Experiences*, 1:48; Harbord, *War Diary*, 26.
- ¹¹ Quoted in Pershing, *My Experiences*, 1:48.
- ¹² Holley, *General John M. Palmer*, 282.
- ¹³ "Book Chapters," Box 2, Nolan Papers, MHI.
- ¹⁴ Harbord, *War Diary*, 28.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 29-30.
- ¹⁶ Pershing, *My Experiences*, 1:50.
- ¹⁷ Harbord, *War Diary*, 31; Diary Entry, 10 June 1917, John J. Pershing Diary, Box 6-7, John J. Pershing Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.
- ¹⁸ Harbord, *War Diary*, 33.
- ¹⁹ Diary Entry, 12 June 1917, Pershing Diary, Box 6-7, Pershing Papers, LC; Quoted in Donald Smythe, *Pershing: General of the Armies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 17.

²⁰ Harbord, *War Diary*, 38.

²¹ Several members of Pershing's staff were already on their way to France on orders to begin inspecting ports for eventual use by the AEF. Diary Entry, 10 June 1917, Hugh Drum Diary, Box 9, Hugh Drum Papers, MHI.

²² Harbord, *War Diary*, 39.

²³ Quoted in Richard O'Conner, *Black Jack Pershing* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1961), 158.

²⁴ James G. Harbord, *The American Army in France 1917-1919* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1936), 78.

²⁵ Holley, *General John M. Palmer*, 281.

²⁶ Modern day Vietnam.

²⁷ Harbord, *American Army*, 79.

²⁸ Harbord, *War Diary*, 42.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

³⁰ Diary Entry, 13 June 1917, Pershing Diary, Box 6-7, Pershing Papers, LC; Harbord, *American Army*, 79.

³¹ Pershing, *My Experiences*, 1:59.

³² Harbord, *American Army*, 80; Harbord, *War Diary*, 43-44.

³³ Harbord, *American Army*, 82.

³⁴ Pershing, *My Experiences*, 1:60. The statement came as an aside when Ambassador Sharp was expressing his joy at Pershing's arrival.

³⁵ Smythe, *Pershing*, 21-22.

³⁶ Harbord, *American Army*, 82; Harbord, *War Diary*, 86; Smythe, *Pershing*, 21; *Army and Navy Journal*, 17 July 1948, 1275-82.

³⁷ Harbord, *War Diary*, 45-46.

³⁸ Smythe, *Pershing*, 22; "Les Armees Francaises, Tome V, 2d Vol., Annexes, 1st Vol.: Letter" *USAWW*, 2:1-2.

³⁹ Harbord, *War Diary*, 46.

⁴⁰ Smythe, *Pershing*, 22; Harbord, *War Diary*, 47, 49, 120-21; Pershing, *My Experiences*, 1:63.

⁴¹ Harbord, *American Army*, 84.

⁴² Pershing, *My Experiences*, 1:142.

⁴³ Harbord, *American Army*, 85; James G. Harbord, "Pershing: A Close-Up" *American Legion Monthly* (September, 1932), 54.

⁴⁴ Pershing, *My Experiences*, 1:63-64; Harbord, *American Army*, 85.

⁴⁵ Harbord, *War Diary*, 53.

⁴⁶ When the War Department studied the shipping problem in December of 1917, it estimated that the United States needed 1,920,000 gross tons for troop transport and 1,589,000 gross tons for cargo to land and supply an army of 1,00,000 men in France by July 1918. James A. Huston, *The Sinews of War: Army Logistics 1775-1953* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army, 1966), 350-51

⁴⁷ "Report of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-1, GHQ, AEF" *USAWW*, 12:169-74.

⁴⁸ The United States never fully entered into the Alliance between Great Britain and France, and thus had the official title of Associate power rather than a full Allied power.

⁴⁹ The Mission was composed of: Lieutenant Colonel James A. Logan, Quartermaster Corps; Lieutenant Colonel James R. Church, Medical Department; Major Frank Parker, Cavalry; Major John W. Barker, Infantry; Major William "Billy" Mitchell, Signal Corps; and Major Marlborough Churchill, Field Artillery. Harbord, *American Army*, 86.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁵¹ "Book Chapters," Box 2, Nolan Papers, MHI.

⁵² *Ibid.*; Harbord, *American Army*, 88; Holley, *General John M. Palmer*, 295.

⁵³ Many of the officers found accommodations with local families, giving them the opportunity to hear French spoken on a daily basis. Harbord, *American Army*, 89; Smythe, *Pershing*, 24.

⁵⁴ "Book Chapters," Box 2, Nolan Papers, MHI.

⁵⁵ General Orders No. 3, 28 June 1917, *USAWW*, 16:3-9. General Orders No. 13, issued on 13 July 1917, revoked the regulations established under General Orders No. 3 and 5 and established new guidelines for censorship.

⁵⁶ Harbord, *War Diary*, 56-57.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 62; Harbord to Pershing, 24 June 1917, Box 87, Pershing Papers, LC. Harbord wrote to Pershing, explained the mix up, and suggested that Palmer be held back in Paris.

⁵⁹ Harbord, *War Diary*, 65.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 68-70.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁶² Pershing, *My Experiences*, 1:79-86; *USAWW*, 2:42-43.

⁶³ In addition to the 1st Division, the 5th Marine Regiment arrived in France, its organizational status still up in the air. Pershing would not determine what to do with the Marines until August 1917. P Cables 133-S, 31 August 1917, *USAWW*, 2:35.

⁶⁴ George C. Marshall, *Memoirs of My Services in the World War 1917-1918* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976), 13-15, 19; Diary entries, 16-19 July 1917, Drum Diary, Box 9, Drum Papers, MHI.

⁶⁵ Harbord, *War Diary*, 83; Allan R. Millett, *The General: Robert L. Bullard and Officership in the United States Army 1881-1925* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975), 310; Harbord, *American Army*, 99, 192; Pershing to Sibert, 13 December 1917, Box 195, Pershing Papers, LC.

⁶⁶ Harbord, *War Diary*, 85.

⁶⁷ Pershing, *My Experiences*, 1:92-93.

CHAPTER IV

GETTING ORGANIZED (JULY - AUGUST 1917)

With the celebrations for the AEF's arrival beginning to wane, Pershing and Harbord finally began addressing the problem of building an organizational structure for American military operations in France. Everything needed attention, and the first order of business was to create a hierarchical framework for the AEF General Staff to work under. Harbord knew that the most pressing questions before them were also the most basic, and drew up a short list in a meeting with Pershing: "What shall be the ultimate total of our forces in France? What shall be the organization of the troops with which we fight? How shall they be supplied? What proportion of supply can be obtained in Europe? How shall shipments of supplies and troops be worked out with reference to each other? For what period must we prepare as the probable duration of the War?"¹ Pershing and the General Staff needed to establish set policies for these issues before they could even think about joining the fight in any meaningful way.

There were also smaller, more practical questions that needed addressing: What ports would they use? Should the AEF rely upon animal or motor transportation? Where would the training centers be located? What was the shipment schedule for troops and supplies? What types of arms should they use, and would they produce their munitions and armaments themselves or rely upon the Allies for aid? The General Staff needed to settle these questions early on to avoid serious problems later. Selecting the wrong port, such as one with poor rail access or insufficient draft capabilities, would slow the movement of troops and supplies for months to come. Troops could not be brought to

Europe in large numbers before the General Staff knew how to supply them. The longer it took to establish a training program for the AEF meant the longer it would be before the Americans could take up positions in the front lines. Over the next two months, Pershing, Harbord, and the General Staff worked to settle these issues and create an organizational structure for the AEF that would be ready when the War Department started sending large numbers of American soldiers to France.

Creating a General Staff

Before anything else, Pershing had to decide what size force he believed necessary to achieve victory. On 6 July he cabled the war department, requesting the creation of plans for “sending over at least one million men by next May.” Pershing envisioned such a force providing “practically half [a] million men for [the] trenches.”² A harbinger of things to come in terms of the relationship between the AEF and the War Department, Pershing did not explain how he arrived at the figure, nor did he state how the War Department should accomplish this goal. As seen in the previous chapter, the United States had an alarmingly small merchant fleet available to transport personnel and supplies to France. If Pershing considered this factor in his reasoning, he did not say so, but apparently assumed the Allies would provide the necessary shipping to make up for the lack of American tonnage. After studying the resources at hand, the War Department replied that tonnage existed for only 650,000 men on Pershing’s timetable, and even that would be difficult. Unconvinced, Pershing continued to push for his original figure, leaving the War Department to find a way to fulfill it. Both sides had a point, with

Pershing stating what he believed necessary to accomplish his mission and the War Department saying what was possible in the time allowed. They would need to find a common ground if they hoped to work together effectively. But at this early stage, Pershing had too many other concerns to worry about ruffling feathers at the home front, and the War Department lacked the backbone to stand up to the commander in the field.³

As Pershing decided on the size of force he wanted in Europe, the staff finalized the organizational makeup for the General Staff. Over the past month, staff officers had spent time observing the Allies, gathering information, and comparing procedures to determine what to emulate and what to ignore. For Pershing to effectively commence building an army in Europe he needed an effective General Staff to “conform to conditions [at hand] and enable the Commander-in-Chief to proceed with his planning.”⁴ When the AEF officers finally began constructing a staff organization, they soon found themselves in uncharted waters with few precedents to work from. The *Field Service Regulations [FSR]* of the U.S. Army, 1914, (the most current edition available in 1917), provided only a basic structure for forming a general staff. It outlined that the General Staff should be divided into three sections: combat (operations), administrative, and intelligence. These branches covered the specific needs of a combat operation in wartime: i.e. censorship, care for sick and wounded, disposition of forces, etc. The task of administering the day-to-day concerns of the army fell to the technical and administrative services (Adjutant General, Quartermaster, Chief of Ordnance, etc.), grouped together in the Line of Communications. Overseeing this organization was a Commander of the Line of Communications, whose duty it was to “relieve the combatant field force, as far as possible, from every consideration except that of defeating the

enemy.”⁵ Pershing’s staff studied this basic organization to see if it fit with the present circumstances in France, or if they needed a completely new system.

During the voyage on the *Baltic*, Pershing and Harbord had discussed a basic staff organization based upon what they presumed would be necessary once they reached France. They worked up a “skeleton outline of principles” that would become the “basis of the larger organization later adopted after a study of French and British general staff systems.”⁶ When looking at the organization outlined in the *Field Service Regulations*, the staff realized that the situation in France required specific modifications. In order to build an effective combat organization from scratch, Pershing needed a larger general staff with more centralized control. By the beginning of July, the staff finally began drawing up a system that utilized information gleaned from the allies, but remained a distinctly American creation. Issued as General Orders No. 8 [G.O. No. 8], 5 July 1917, the new organization followed the *FSR* by dividing Pershing’s headquarters into two branches: a general staff and an administrative and technical staff. Taking a page from the more dynamic General Staff utilized by the French, the AEF version totaled five sections, each headed by a chief of section.⁷ Transferring to the AEF from the Military Mission, James A. Logan assumed control of the Administrative section. Dennis E. Nolan remained as head of the Intelligence section, as did John McAuley Palmer with Operations. The two new sections added to the General Staff dealt with issues unique to the AEF. Given the current size and state of the Army, the United States needed to train a large body of men for operations in Europe. With a clear understanding that this training could not be isolated on the home front, the planners added a Training section, headed up by Lieutenant Colonel Paul B. Malone. Finally, the General Staff gained a

Coordination section, under the direction of W.D. Conner. This last, and possibly most vital section had the express purpose of coordinating all organizations within Pershing's command. Wherever administrative policies overlapped, or involved multiple sections or technical/administrative staffs, it fell to the Coordination section to maintain a unity of purpose for all involved and to settle any disputes that arose. Harbord remained as chief of staff, assisted by Frank R. McCoy who assumed the position of secretary to the General Staff.⁸

Pershing made good choices in filling out his staff personnel, as each man represented the best the U.S. Army had to offer. Ambitious, eager, and vigorous, they were just the sort of men Pershing wanted, and proved themselves every bit as capable as their European counterparts had been in 1914. The problem, however, was that it was now 1917, and the Americans were well behind the curve in military thought and experience and would suffer agonizing delays due to inexperience and inefficiency. Their relative lack of experience did not escape Major Hugh Drum, who admitted, "There is no doubt we lack men in power who have the faculty for organizing. . . . The use of a general staff is so new [and] strange to most of our people that they will have to play around with it for a while." Despite these concerns, he was confident "it will come out OK in time. There are good men working on it."⁹ Harbord was more kind in regard to the officers of the staff, which he considered the "very soul and sinew of General Pershing's organization." For all the faith Harbord had in Pershing, he knew that they would need an effective staff if they hoped to achieve any level of success. When looking at their accomplishments after the war, Harbord beamed with pride at how the original staff of three grew to an organization of over two hundred, eventually directing

an army of over two million men. “No army can be worth the name without an efficient staff, and in my opinion no General, considering all the circumstances, was ever better served in that respect than Pershing.”¹⁰

The other component of the organization created by G.O. No. 8 was an Administrative and Technical staff. It included the chiefs of some fifteen different Departments, Services, and Corps (e.g. Inspector General, Chief Surgeon, Chief Ordnance Officer, and Chief of Air Service, etc.). By far the most important of these, in terms of the functioning staff, was the Adjutant General’s Department, ably headed up by Colonel Benjamin Alvord, with the assistance of Robert C. “Corky” Davis. The staff, as a whole, knew and liked each other well enough, often dispensing with military formality and addressing each other by nicknames. Even Pershing was reduced to “J.J.P.” in inter-staff communications, though never to his face.¹¹

Aside from their ability, Pershing’s staff also displayed the darker side of professional ambition. Most of them were colonels, lieutenant colonels, or majors when they joined Pershing in France, and brought with them the self-confidence and arrogance of youth. They showed open contempt for older, more established officers who had not gone through the Army’s educational program (most notably the General Staff College at Leavenworth). With Pershing’s attention divided amongst organizational, political, and diplomatic concerns, he needed the staff to take hold of the AEF and mold it into the force he wanted. The staff reveled in their newfound authority, speaking in Pershing’s name with such regularity that an order from the General Staff became synonymous with the AEF commander’s wishes. Hence there developed an air of superiority amongst those closest to Pershing, most routinely directed towards anyone not serving at GHQ.

This brought considerable ire from officers in the line, who often took great offense to the officious tone and manners emanating from Pershing's headquarters. Historian Allan Millet writes that many AEF officers "often felt that Pershing was a military Torquemada, his staff the Inquisition, and they the heretics. Unless a general got along with Pershing's staff, he did not hold 'the Chief's' confidence and he might very well very well soon bid his command farewell."¹²

As chief of staff, Harbord took charge in keeping the staff happy and working, driving them to give Pershing their all so that he could concentrate on other matters. Harbord met with the section chiefs independently from Pershing, listening to concerns, complaints and grievances and worked out solutions. He accompanied Pershing to most of the important conferences to keep abreast of relations with the Allies, and recounted any developments, as well as his own impressions, to the relevant staff members. His main goal was to relieve Pershing of all unnecessary burdens concerning the staff and allow him to focus on the larger issues of command. In this role as coordinating agent, Harbord acted as an intermediary between the staff and Pershing, explaining Pershing's point of view to the subordinates, then turning around and pressing home the staff's concerns before the AEF commander. When the two sides differed, Harbord often fought vigorously for the staff's views. It was not uncommon for these deliberations to become heated, with both men pounding on the desk for emphasis. If Pershing was not swayed, it fell upon Harbord to explain the general's reasoning, massage any wounded egos, and make certain there was a continuity of policy. In his capacity to drive the staff, and keep everyone content and working towards the same goal, Harbord made the chief of staff the

second most important man in the AEF during those first months; Pershing being the first.¹³

For their part, Harbord and Pershing quickly fell into an effective work routine. They would meet everyday when able, discussing the latest needs and situations, Harbord relaying information from the staff and Pershing issuing his orders. For more mundane and routine work, they operated through a system of memorandums. Pershing would write up a memo containing several items that he wanted addressed and give it to Harbord, who then checked the items off upon completion, or wrote in some explanation for why it was not satisfied. Harbord would likewise write out memos, listing things that needed a decision which Pershing would return with his answers (often a yes or no). Thus the men could efficiently communicate with each other and address problems in a rapid manner.

Working in such close proximity gave Harbord an opportunity to know Pershing better than any other career officer in the AEF. He accepted that during the early days in Paris Pershing took on the role of his own principal staff officer, with Harbord acting more as his Deputy or Assistant. With so much to do, the staff worked long and hard, with little time for rest and relaxation, and there was little time for bruised feelings. The lack of troops and the overwhelming amount of staff work made it necessary for Pershing to spend many of these early days directly supervising the staff.¹⁴

After a month of working with Pershing, Harbord committed his feelings to his diary:

General Pershing is a very strong character. He has a good many peculiarities, such I suppose as every strong man accustomed to command is apt to develop. He is very patient and philosophical under delays from the War Department. He is playing for high stakes and does not intend to jeopardize his winning by wasting his standing with the War Department over small things,-relatively unimportant, though very annoying as they occur. He is extremely cautious, very cautious, does nothing hastily or carelessly. He spends much time rewriting the cables and other papers I prepare for him, putting his own individuality into them. He is the first officer for whom I have prepared papers who did not generally accept what I wrote for him. It is very seldom I get anything past him without some alteration, though I am obliged to say I do not always consider that he improves them, though often he does. He edits everything he signs, even the most trivial things. It is a good precaution, but one which can easily be carried to a point where it will waste time that might better be employed on bigger things, but is probably justified in the preliminary stages in which we are.

He thinks very clearly and directly; goes to his conclusions directly when matters call for decision. He can talk straighter to people when calling them down than any one I have seen. I have not yet experienced it, though. He has naturally a good disposition and a keen sense of humor. He loses his temper occasionally, and stupidity and vagueness irritate him more than anything else. He can stand plain talk, but the staff officer who

goes in with only vagueness where he ought to have certainty, who does not know what he wants, and fumbles around, has lost some time and generally gained some straight talk. He develops great fondness for people whom he likes and is indulgent toward their faults, but at the same time is relentless when convinced of inefficiency. Personal loyalty is strong with him, I should say, but does not blind him to the truth.

He does not fear responsibility, with all his caution. He decides big things much more quickly than he does trivial ones. Two weeks ago, without any authority from Washington, he placed an order one afternoon for \$50,000,000 worth of airplanes, because he thought Washington was too slow, and did not cable the fact until too late for Washington to countermand it, had they been so disposed, which they were not. He did it without winking an eye, as easily as though ordering a postage stamp,-and it involved the sum which Congress voted for National Defense at the beginning of 1898 just after the *Maine* was blown up, and which we all then considered a very large transaction.¹⁵

Despite their good relationship, Harbord found Pershing particularly trying at times. The AEF commander knew that some of his staff officers had intimate friends who would use those relationships to influence AEF policies. This knowledge made Pershing overly wary when listening to information being presented him when he was uncertain of its source and of what was not being said. Pershing took to the habit of sending out “trial balloons or smoke screens” on a subject to judge reactions, making it

impossible for Harbord, or anyone else, to know his true feelings on the issue.¹⁶ In that difficult first summer, Pershing accepted nothing out of hand, but had to be convinced before he decided on a course of action.

Another challenge to Harbord was Pershing's propensity to forget, or reverse without warning, some of his more mundane directives. While he held steady on the important decisions, the AEF commander would on occasion change his own orders on a whim, much to the chagrin of whichever officer had worked to satisfy the original plan. One such instance involved James Hazen Hyde, a wealthy American businessman living in Paris, who sought a commission in the AEF. Upon first hearing of Hyde's desire, Pershing accepted and ordered Harbord to arrange for a meeting with Hyde at which Pershing would offer the commission. After two days of trying, Harbord finally got in contact with Hyde and set up the meeting. Just before the scheduled meeting, Pershing called Harbord into his office and informed his chief of staff that he had changed his mind on Hyde's proposed commission. Exasperated, Harbord complained that it was now left to him to break the bad news after working for two days to set up and was only twenty minutes away. Pershing simply replied, "Yes, I know it. I am sorry for you, but I don't want him."¹⁷ Harbord was left to break the bad news to Hyde. Such were the duties of the chief of staff.

By far the most aggravating of Pershing's traits to Harbord was the AEF commander's complete lack of any concept of time. For one who demanded promptness and attention to detail, Pershing had little consideration for his own schedule, or that of others. Regarding this annoyance, Harbord lamented:

[Pershing's] great fault is his utter lack of any idea of time. He is without it, as utterly without it as a color-blind person is without a sense of color, or a deaf man is without the sound of music. He is most trying in that respect. An American untried Major General may not keep a Field Marshal waiting; or miss an appointment with a Prime Minister; or be an hour late to an Ambassador's dinner; and those of us immediately around him are forever his guardians and trying to get him over the line on time. He has a similar lack of comprehension as to guests, and with dinner prepared for ten may bring home sixteen.¹⁸

Even with these challenges, Harbord never faltered in his devotion to Pershing. Though he owed much to Major General Wood, Harbord realized that his future would forever bear the imprint of his service in the World War. Harbord needed Pershing to trust him implicitly if they were to be successful, and to gain that trust Harbord dedicated himself to Pershing's service, linking his career's rise or fall to the AEF commander.

The Baker Mission

There was little time to let the effects of G.O. No. 8 sink in before circumstances arose that threatened the stability of Pershing's authority in Europe. On 28 May, the same day Pershing sailed for England, the War Department sanctioned the creation of an independent mission to Europe to study the French and British war efforts and make recommendations for the proper organization of American combat forces. Led by

Colonel Chauncey B. Baker of the Quartermaster Corps with orders to “make such observations as may seem of value for the organization, training, transportation, operations, supply, and administration of our forces in view of their participation in the war,” the Baker Mission operated free from Pershing’s authority.¹⁹ Consequently, it had the potential to set military policy for the War Department and the AEF without Pershing’s approval. Historian Harvey DeWeerd rightly called the mission “one of [Secretary of War] Baker’s few unhelpful decisions” as it created competing agencies in Europe and made several on Pershing’s staff question the War Department’s thinking.²⁰

Immediately suspicious of the Baker Mission, Harbord worried that its recommendations, to be delivered to Secretary Baker in person, would carry more weight than those Pershing sent via wire. Should the two views differ, it was highly probable that Pershing would find himself tied to an organization he did not endorse. “The responsibility for the job would be [Pershing’s],” Harbord argued, “but the tools would be the choice of a Mission hurried through the Allied countries like a party of tourists. It was a situation that called for extreme tact. The Mission had to be lined up and the two recommendations must agree.”²¹ To Harbord’s relief, Chauncey Baker was a classmate of Pershing’s and had no intention of making any report to Washington without first conferring with the AEF commander and his staff.

The two groups came together for a conference that lasted the better part of 7-8 July. Pershing took no chances that the conference would decide any issue against his wishes, and overloaded the group with AEF officers. Of the thirty-one officers who participated, the Baker Mission supplied twelve while the AEF General Staff provided the remaining nineteen, including Pershing.²² The groups agreed to submit common

recommendations to the War Department, and Pershing assured that AEF officers would carry any votes. It proved a moot point for the most part, as the conferees quickly agreed on issues dealing with infantry. The only serious disagreement that arose regarded the proper amount of artillery allotted to each division. Colonel Charles P. Summerall, a fiery and outspoken member of the Baker Mission, argued vehemently that the organization favored by the AEF General Staff had serious deficiencies in its proportion of artillery to infantry. Summerall insisted that the AEF should adopt the smaller, more mobile style artillery used in the British Army over the larger French guns championed by representatives of the AEF Operations section. In words that Harbord thought came “as nearly to the limit of courtesy as I have ever seen an officer go and escape unrebuked,” Summerall contended that the AEF plan would put soldiers’ lives at risk unnecessarily.²³ Knowing that he had no authority over Summerall, Pershing kept his temper. He instead let Colonel Fox Conner from the Operations section argue the point. When no consensus could be reached, Pershing called for a vote, where the AEF position was carried, sixteen to five.²⁴

It was a tense moment for the conference and Pershing ably diffused it with his patience and forethought. But in doing so, he also supported a faulty policy that possibly cost the lives of thousands of American soldiers. Time would ultimately show Summerall correct in his thinking on the amount of artillery in the American divisions and its need for mobility. A year later at the battle of Soissons, American soldiers and Marines advanced with virtually no artillery support due to the artillery’s inability to displace fast enough. At the moment, however, Pershing was more concerned with securing the primacy of his and his staff’s views. Harbord readily concurred, believing

that the inflated numbers Summerall insisted upon were due to a misconception of British artillery. Like his chief, Harbord thought it more important that the commission support the organization Pershing recommended, calling it “the most critical moment of his command in some respects.”²⁵

With the disagreement over artillery settled, the conference proceeded to a conclusion without further incident. Just as Harbord had hoped, the Baker Mission-AEF General Staff conference produced a single set of recommendations for the War Department. Known as the General Organization Project, the conference report based its recommendations on a force of one million men, with the understanding that “the adoption of this size force as a basis for this study should not be construed as representing the maximum force which should be sent to or which will be needed in France.” The million man goal was chosen to allow for offensive operations to begin in 1918. The report stated that, “Plans for the future should be based . . . on three times this force, i.e., at least three million men,” to be filled within two years.²⁶

Once settled, the conference’s decision on the organization of American combat troops brought immediate skepticism, in particular the proposed size of an AEF division. With an operational strength of around 28,000 officers and men, the AEF division almost doubled the size of its Allied counterparts. There were serious concerns that the Americans were not up to the logistical challenges of supporting and maneuvering such a massive division, and questions about how well the American division could be used in conjunction with the smaller French and British units. The Americans, however, had several reasons for their choice of the mass division.

First, whereas the Allies utilized a smaller division due to limited manpower reserves, the Americans had to contend with a paucity of trained officers. Though training centers were quickly being established to furnish the necessary officers to lead the new army into combat, it would be many months, if not years, before they would be ready. Combat commanders and divisional staff officers were at a premium and American planners sought to stretch their limited resources by having fewer, larger divisions, requiring far fewer officers to operate.²⁷ In addition, few officers in the AEF put much faith in the ability of the National Guard. Pershing, in particular, had a low opinion of the Guard, perhaps remembering the debacle of its mobilization during the Spanish-American War. As such, AEF planners sought to reduce their reliance upon the Guard by grouping their troops together in large divisions commanded by U.S. Regulars.²⁸

The final, and ultimately most important factor supporting the larger division was Pershing's desire that the American division be able to remain in the line long enough to break out of the trenches and take the fight into the open. "We were engaging in trench warfare," explained Harbord, "and it was quite a problem to replace with another a division already in line" without risking battlefield continuity. In order to succeed where previous attacks had failed, the attacking division needed to remain in the line for several days "before [a] decision was reached."²⁹ As far as Pershing was concerned, the size of the American division and its ability to stay in the fight long enough to break through the trenches represented the key to ultimate victory in the war. After watching the combatants on the Western Front turn trenches into graves for three years, Pershing believed none had enough aggressive spirit left to free themselves from the snarled

network of trenches stretching across Western Europe and fight as men should: out in the open. “It was my opinion,” Pershing later wrote, “that the victory could not be won by the costly process of attrition, but it must be won by driving the enemy out into the open and engaging him in a war of movement.”³⁰ In their years of fighting, Pershing surmised, the Allies had become so inured to defensive warfare that they began to rely exclusively on machine-guns, hand and rifle grenades, mortars, and artillery at the expense of the common soldier with a rifle and bayonet. The result of this error in focus were the Allied trenches that consumed hundreds of thousands of brave soldiers. Pershing had no intention of making this same mistake. Instead, he would rely on the style of fighting described in the U.S. Army *Infantry Drill Regulations (IDR)*, which preached the primacy of the infantryman and his rifle.

In its most recent edition (1911), the *IDR* stated that “Attacking troops must first gain fire superiority in order to reach the hostile position.”³¹ The only method the *IDR* indicated for gaining this fire superiority was the massing of well-trained rifle fire. As James W. Rainey points out, “The 1911 edition of the *IDR* [sic] does not evince much appreciation of the lethality of the machine gun.”³² This is not a great surprise, as up to that point the United States had never been involved in combat that utilized machine-guns to the degree that the World War did. But even with this technological addition to the battlefield, Pershing believed that his infantrymen could overcome any position by concentrating their rifle fire, supported by the artillery, and push the enemy out of his trenches into the open where his army could be destroyed. In this instance, “[Pershing’s] professional psyche was bound to a faith in American marksmen, be they the masses of riflemen employed by [Ulysses S.] Grant in his bloody battles of attrition or the more

individualistic marksmen of Pershing's own experiences."³³ He could not envision ceding primacy on the battlefield to the machine-gun, or any other technological contrivance for that matter, and made it the mission of his officers to instill in the American soldier the necessary aggressive spirit to again make the rifle and bayonet masters of the battlefield. With a suitably motivated army, dedicated to the offensive, Pershing and his doughboys would succeed where the Europeans had failed; they would break through the German lines and carry the battle into the open, where victory was all but assured. This became Pershing's conception of "open" warfare, and he needed a massive division to accomplish it.³⁴

The argument supporting the staying power of this larger division came with several problems that Pershing and his officers, including Harbord, refused to acknowledge. The first was a simple matter of composition. The AEF division was made up of two brigades with an effective strength of eight thousand infantrymen, each scarcely less than the size a French or British division. If the Americans used one brigade on the front line and held the other in reserve, switching them out would present the same logistical difficulties as exchanging full divisions in the British or French Armies. While the American system kept the same command network in place, such advantages were questionable in an attack across no-man's-land where command and control were difficult to maintain.

More to the point, with the defense-in-depth³⁵ utilized along the Western Front, the larger division did not assure longer stays in the line. As seen time and time again, the principal reason attacks lost momentum was not due to a lack of infantry, as evidenced by the massive casualties they inflicted on the attacker, but because they

outran their artillery and logistical support. The mass division did not address this problem, but in fact exacerbated it by reducing the ratio of artillery to infantry from that of the Allies. In other words, more men would go over the top with less artillery providing them cover, making the likelihood of increased casualties considerably greater. Many American doughboys would die before AEF commanders learned this lesson. But with the AEF's combat troops still months away from entering the trenches, Pershing and his officers could advance any theoretical combat style they chose. If the Allies raised any opposition or points of contention, the Americans could simply write it off as another example of over-reliance on defensive tactics. Pershing had total control over how the AEF would fight, and no one could change his mind on the efficacy of "open" warfare, no matter how reasonable the argument.

At British G.H.Q.

With the conferences over and the policies agreed upon, the Baker Mission left for the United States on 11 July, bringing an added sense of relief to the officers in the AEF General Staff. Harbord was especially happy to see them go. He could never accept their presence in France as anything more than the Secretary of War meddling in the AEF's affairs, and found their persistence increasingly arrogant at times. Yet despite these feelings, Harbord held out hope that their visit would pay dividends in the end. "We shall now breathe more freely that they are gone, but while they have been of some bother I am sure their visit will make things easier for us after they return [to America] with the knowledge they have gained."³⁶ Perhaps they could instill in the War

Department the sense of urgency that now hung over the AEF with growing insistence. Again, Harbord could only hope.

Only time would tell, but for now the Americans took a moment of pleasure to witness their first Bastille Day on 14 July. Honoring the storming of the dreaded Bastille prison in 1789, the holiday represents the same revolutionary spirit to the French that the 4th of July does to Americans. For the members of the AEF, it offered another opportunity for social and official intercourse with the French. Seeing as how nearly a month after Pershing's arrival only one American division had landed in France, it was important to take advantage of any boosts to morale.

Harbord took considerable pleasure in the day's events. There was another parade through the streets of Paris, this time by representatives of various French regiments. Harbord noticed that the French troops were not provided new uniforms for the event, instead marching in their trench-stained clothes with bayonets fixed, presenting a very business-like appearance. Each man wore a chevron on his uniform indicating being wounded, with many showing multiple distinctions. They were an impressive sight, commanding a great deal of respect from the gallery.³⁷

The day concluded with an afternoon performance at the Théâtre Trocadero. Witnessed by an audience of three thousand, the performance was mainly musical and paid particular honor to the Americans. Harbord and the other staff members in attendance joined Pershing, the American Ambassador, the Military Governor, and the Prince of Monaco in a special box. The hall was draped in both French and American flags and the orchestra made a point to play both the "Marseillaise" and the "Star-Spangled Banner." An elderly woman sitting next to Harbord informed him that "the

Marseillaise' is the very soul of the French people. It is France. I can never hear it without tears."³⁸ For an American army slow to take shape, such patriotic fervor was needed to keep the Allies going until the Doughboys began to arrive.

That night, Harbord received a stark reminder of just how far they still had to go. At dinner, newly arrived Brigadier General Peyton C. March, commanding the 1st Artillery Brigade, described conditions in the War Department for members of the staff. He did not paint an encouraging picture, telling of piles of unopened mail six feet high in the Mail and Record Room of the Adjutant General's Office and a general lack of purpose in the entire department. Even more alarming was the news that it took six days for Pershing's telegram requesting March's presence in France to travel from the adjutant general to the chief of staff, a few offices down. March concluded by recounting how the acting chief of staff, Major General Tasker Bliss, wrote everything in longhand, spending hours on matters March thought should take but seconds. Such news weighed heavily on those present, who were themselves struggling with the ever-growing workload.³⁹

It was ironic that March delivered the distressing news of conditions in the War Department, for in the early months of 1918, Secretary of War Baker requested that March return to the United States to become the chief of staff for the U.S. Army with the expressed goal of improving conditions in the War Department, a task he carried out with ruthless tenacity. In doing so, March would draw the ire of both Pershing and Harbord, which eventually developed into a deep seated hatred between the men. At present, though, March was a member of the AEF, and quickly proved himself a valuable asset. Over the next several weeks, March toured the British and French artillery units while he waited for his troops to arrive. By early August, after the arrival of the 1st Artillery

Brigade, March moved his headquarters to Le Valdahon and set up an artillery training center, where he earned a reputation as a “driver with character.”⁴⁰

March was not the only member of the AEF to busy himself with tours of the French and British operations. Dennis Nolan and John L. Hines spent time in late July at British General Headquarters observing Intelligence operations. Though highly informative, Nolan found the British attitude towards the French disconcerting. When discussing what sort of permanent relationship the French intelligence officers should have at GHQ AEF, the British Chief of Intelligence responded curtly, “Don’t even give them a desk.”⁴¹ Nolan and Hines quietly noted that centuries of hatred did not simply melt away over a few years’ time, even during war.

A visit by Fox Conner and Hugh Drum to Pétain’s headquarters in late June also revealed Allied misconceptions regarding the AEF’s present abilities. Hoping to discuss plans for training facilities for the AEF, the Americans were surprised to find the French thinking only in terms of the 1st Division. When Conner informed them that the AEF needed facilities for a million men in France by the spring of 1918, the French fell deathly silent. They had no idea that the Americans required such extensive training, and asked for a recess while they work up some kind of solution. Eventually the French returned with a plan for the adjusted requirements, but both Conner and Drum could not help but note the difference between perception and reality concerning the state of the American Army.⁴²

On 20 July, Harbord accompanied Pershing and several other staff officers on their own visit to British GHQ.⁴³ Riding in two automobiles, the men made the ninety-mile drive to Montreuil, site of the 2d Echelon of British GHQ. Harbord found the

journey particularly enjoyable, as they rode through the ancient burial sites of the French kings at St. Denis, making two lengthy stops so as not to arrive too early. It was one of the few times Harbord worried about Pershing being early anywhere. Over the next four days, the group toured British G.H.Q., observing artillery operations, interviewing several soldiers, and generally socializing with their British counterparts. When presented to the various chiefs of sections, Harbord noted they all seemed to be major and brigadier generals, tarnishing the luster of his own recent promotion to lieutenant colonel just a bit. He did, however, have a most enlightening discussion with Major General Birch, Haig's Chief of Artillery. He told the AEF chief of staff that the artillery needed the confidence of the infantry to be successful. The only way it could be gained was by dropping its fire just over the heads of the infantry without raining shells down upon them. It was good advice, for the close cooperation between arms was a new facet of warfare and the Americans needed to become proficient at an accelerated pace.⁴⁴

The most important portion of the tour, of course, was the meeting between Pershing and the British commander-in-chief, Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig. The moment came on the evening of 20 July. Upon arriving at Haig's residence of Blendecques, an elegant chateau only a bit smaller than Ogden Mills's, the party was met at the door by Haig himself. Much to Harbord's delight, the two commanders hit it off immediately; not a surprise given how much they shared in common. Both were strong, handsome-looking soldiers, immaculately groomed with a reserved nature based upon a quiet shyness. Though friendly, neither went for the gushing sentimentality so prevalent amongst the French. Each had the particular task of leading an expeditionary force in a

foreign country. Haig found Pershing appreciative of the task ahead, writing in his diary that AEF commander had a “quiet gentlemanly bearing – so unusual for an American.”⁴⁵

As the two men talked, Harbord took stock of the moment. Ever the student of history, he found the contrast between the men intriguing. Haig, the old Norman captain, was the very embodiment of the Old World. Though small in stature, Haig had already secured his place in history as one of England’s most famous soldiers, and his proper manner and unbending determination were the very definition of the British. On the other hand there was Pershing, an untested quantity in the war, yet possessing great promise. The product of frontier stock, he was the very picture of the rugged American, with his strong jaw, steely posture, and gruff manner. It was a meeting between the old and the new, but with a sense of brotherhood between them as the representatives of the English-speaking nations. Harbord noticed more similarities between them as well:

They held the same ideas on discipline, realizing the importance of such aids as attention to personal soldier habits, daily shaving and bathing, smart turnouts, and meticulous care of leather and metal equipment. Both insisted on observance of the punctilio of courtesy between members of the military establishment. Both were men of the highest character, serious minded, loyal and patriotic. Each was coldly impersonal and sometimes impassive – the Scot preserving that certain reserve which seems to characterize the high-bred Briton; the American the certain aloofness of his cadet days.⁴⁶

The Americans returned to Paris on 23 July fully satisfied with their journey, and bolstered by the hopes of an amicable relationship with the British. Although serious disagreements between Pershing and the British leadership over the training and employment of American troops would strain relations over the next year and a half, for now all was well between the two commands. Inundated with accounts of the war weary French, it was refreshing to see a British Army firmly carrying its own load.

Line of Communications and AEF Supply

Prior to their visit to Haig's headquarters, the Americans worked to address the logistical concerns facing the American Expeditionary Forces. Even before their arrival in France, Pershing ordered studies of the shipping situation in France. He sent various officers on numerous inspections of French ports to see which facilities could handle the millions of men and tons of supplies that the Americans intended to bring to France. Not only did the ports need sufficient berths and storage capabilities to handle American soldiers and equipment, but they needed to have access to road and rail networks that connected them with the AEF's area of operations in Lorraine. The creation of an efficient supply system was of preeminent importance in the early days of the war, for mistakes could mean the breakdown of supply once the AEF began combat operations.

When the 1st Division moved to its training facilities around the village of Gondrecourt, it presented an early indication of the supply problems facing the AEF. Located over one hundred miles east of Paris and some four hundred miles from the French Atlantic ports, the challenge of keeping the division supplied was no small task.

When the French intimated their desire that other American units train in the same vicinity, the need for a working supply network became immediate.

In describing the organization of a supply system for field operations, the *Field Service Regulations* described a system operating within the continental United States. It broke down the theater of operations into two sections: the Zone of the Line of Communications, and the Zone of the Advance. The second of these was the purview of the field commander, or commanders, who directed supply to their individual units. The Zone of the Line of Communications (LOC) connected “all territory from and including the base to the point or points where contact is made with the trains of the combatant field forces.”⁴⁷ Commanding the entire LOC was a general officer, the Commanding General Line of Communications, with an assistant chief of staff representing him at the various bases within the network. This assistant oversaw the supply, sanitation, and telegraph services of the LOC, coordinated the rail system servicing the supply points, and commanded such troops as necessary to defend the supply lines. The *FSR* further envisioned that each field army would maintain its own line of communications linked to dedicated supply bases.⁴⁸

But the situation in France was more complex than that envisioned by the *FSR*. Here, the supply system had to support not an army but an expeditionary force of at least a million men, with plans for three million. Moreover, the system needed to be modified to take into account supplying an army across three thousand miles of submarine-infested ocean, operating in a foreign country the size of the state of Texas where millions of foreign soldiers were already fighting and maintaining their own supply system. And if

these challenges were not enough, the system needed to function immediately, regardless of whatever infrastructure it needed to create.

As with the basic organization for the AEF, the supply system presented some very basic questions that required complex solutions. What size of reserve needed to be maintained in the case of an interruption in the flow of supplies? How and where would the supplies be stored? How would tonnage be allocated for supplies and troops? What would the breakdown of supplies look like? How were supplies to be unloaded at the ports and then forwarded to the front or to storage areas? What would the ultimate supply organization look like? After an exhaustive study, the General Staff formulated a basic organizational structure for the AEF's supply system. On 13 July, General Orders No. 20 established that the "geographical limits of the [Line of Communications] will extend from the sea to the points where delivery of supplies is made to the field transportation of the combat field forces," with its headquarters located in Paris.⁴⁹ Whereas the *FSR* called for the LOC to be divided between a Base Section and an Advance Section, G.O. No. 20 made an alteration due to the four hundred mile span between the French ports and the American combat zones, breaking the LOC into three sections: Base, Intermediate and Advance. Additionally, the AEF would utilize not one but several Base Sections, each centered around a port or port network. While initially limiting itself to only three Base Sections, the LOC would eventually increase the number to eight.

Base Section	No 1	–	St. Nazaire
	No 2	–	Bordeaux
	No 3	–	London
	No. 4	–	Le Havre
	No. 5	–	Brest
	No. 6	–	Marseille
	No. 7	–	La Pallice
	No. 8	–	Italy

The Intermediate Section, based around the large supply depot to be built at Gievres, located about one hundred miles south of Paris, acted as the principle storage area for supplies for the AEF. From there, supplies could be better divided to meet specific needs for combat units. Closest to the troops was the Advance Section, located in the area occupied by the American troops in the *Zones des Armies*. The center point of the Advance Section was the Regulating Station at Is-sur-Tille, roughly one hundred and fifty miles southwest of Paris. The Regulating Station was a particular construct of the French rail system, and it presented a new challenge to American supply officers.

A major problem for the LOC AEF was command over the entire system. The goal of any supply organization is to relieve the commanding general of as much administrative work as possible in order to allow him to focus the majority of his efforts on directing combat operations. Prior to the creation of the LOC, supply in the AEF was left to the various technical and administrative services, but that system quickly proved ill-suited for the task due to a lack of coordination between the different agencies and commands in France. Under the LOC, all supply matters were ostensibly brought under the command of one man, the Commanding General, Line of Communications (CGLOC). Initially filled by Brigadier General R.M. Blatchford, the post rarely exerted the type of overall authority envisioned by the AEF General Staff. The problem stemmed

from the General Staff's decision to divide authority over various stages of the LOC between the Base Commanders, the Regulating Officer (who commanded the Regulating Station at Is-sur-Tille), the CGLOC, and the Coordination section of the General Staff. Though the CGLOC was responsible for the entire system, he did not have command authority over each stage. The rail lines fell under the direction of the Director General of Transportation, and the Regulating Stations were under the authority of the General Staff's Coordination section. Over the next eighteen months, the General Staff worked to improve the system, but it could not break away from this division of command authority, resulting in continual confusion and delays.⁵⁰

For a basic goal, Pershing and Harbord decided that, given the dangers of interruption of supplies over land and sea, the LOC needed to maintain a standing ninety-day reserve of food, clothing, and other supplies at all times. These would be divided in various storage facilities along the Line of Communication in France. It was a good idea, but the reality seldom matched the plan, and the supply system rarely reached half the stated goal. By 1918, a concession was finally made to the system's failings, and the reserve goal was reduced to forty-five days.⁵¹ Due to its unfamiliarity with maintaining an extensive supply network in a foreign country, the General Staff never established the lines of demarcation regarding control over supply. Instead, the General Staff and the CGLOC battled over operational authority, resulting in serious problems and confusion. The situation became so dire that Harbord took command of the entire LOC in August 1918, but even he could not make the system work efficiently before the end of the war.⁵²

Thankfully, the Line of Communication was not the only supply organization created in the AEF. Pershing realized early on that, considering the shortage of available

tonnage, it was important for the AEF to secure as many supplies in Europe as possible. Each supply department in the army had its own purchasing agents, who sought out the needed supplies and often found themselves in competition with other departments, as well as Allied purchasing agents. To stem the tide of competitive bidding and overlap in purchasing, Pershing created an organization to centralize control of the AEF purchasing agents. Known as the General Purchasing Board (GPB), it was headed up by a General Purchasing Agent (GPA), whose role was to act as the “representative of the C.-in-C. in liaison with the various Allied purchasing agencies and . . . co-ordinate and supervise all purchasing agents of the A.E.F.”⁵³ It was a bold move for Pershing. Prior to his decision, a board commissioned to study the problem advised against establishing such an organization. The board report suggested that creating a centralized agency to control purchases would be illegal due to the fact that Pershing had no expressed authority to do so. Undaunted, the AEF commander did it any way. He believed the GPB necessary for the success of the AEF, arguing that “an emergency confronted us and it was no time to discuss technicalities.”⁵⁴ He would simply rely upon his broad letter of instruction from Secretary Baker to cover him against any question of authority.

For the critical position of General Purchasing Agent, Pershing called upon one of his oldest friends: Charles G. Dawes. The former Comptroller of the Currency in the McKinley Administration, Dawes was a well-known and well-respected member of the American financial community, gaining renown as the head of the Central Trust Company of Chicago. He was a man of savvy leadership and irrepressible drive who hated inefficiency as much as Pershing did. His immense talents were highly desirable in Washington, but Dawes refused positions on grain boards and food committees,

preferring instead to do his duty in uniform. He secured a commission as a major in the 17th Engineers, ostensibly due to the fact that he had, years earlier, spent a few weeks as a surveyor for a small railroad in Ohio. But his real reason for coming to Europe was to serve with Pershing. In fact, Dawes' biographer Bascom Timmons postulates that "it is doubtful that Pershing would have established the [General Purchasing Board] if he had not felt that he had in Dawes the man who could accomplish the task he had in mind."⁵⁵

It was a wise choice, as Dawes proved himself invaluable to Pershing and the AEF. Over the course of the war, he and the GPB gathered some ten million tons of military material for the AEF, compared to seven million tons brought over from the United States. This was accomplished on a European continent supposedly stripped of any excess supplies.⁵⁶ Dawes went on to serve admirably on the Liquidation Commission, saving the United States millions of dollars during the postwar demobilization. "His was an extraordinary war career," Harbord wrote later, "and his usefulness to the American Expeditionary Forces can hardly be overstated."⁵⁷

For Dawes, to serve in the AEF was a dream come true. He idolized Pershing, writing in his journal, "Pershing is the man for this great emergency. He has immense faculty for disposing of things. He is not only a great soldier, but he has great common sense and tremendous energy."⁵⁸ Dawes held the unique distinction of being perhaps Pershing's oldest and closest friend. One could say that Pershing owed his career to Dawes, who, years earlier in Nebraska, advised the future AEF commander against resigning from the military to become a lawyer. Dawes achieved a rapport with Pershing unmatched in the AEF, which was a good thing due to Dawes's failure to make any effort to adhere to military protocol and behavior. One of Pershing's aides recalled times when

Dawes came to see Pershing, only to find the general in a meeting. Without batting an eye, Dawes would walk into Pershing's office anyway, causing the AEF commander to simply shake his head in amusement.⁵⁹

As Pershing's closest military advisor and confidant, Harbord found Dawes's initial appearance in the AEF somewhat troubling. Ever protective of his own relationship with Pershing, Harbord was leery of a potential challenge for the General's ear. The AEF chief of staff considered Dawes's rejection of military convention especially irritating, describing him as "outspoken and apparently impulsive, he generally thinks things over in detail and then puts them out in an impulsive manner."⁶⁰ Another irritation was Dawes's inability to wear his uniform correctly, often forgetting to button his top button. On one occasion, Dawes was standing across a road from Harbord, Pershing and Marshal Foch. Dawes noticed Pershing staring at him with a gleam in his eye indicating something was amiss with Dawes's appearance. Quickly scanning himself, Dawes could not find anything objectionable. Pershing then leaned over and said something to Harbord, who immediately crossed the street and began buttoning up Dawes's overcoat, including the top hooks, muttering, "This is a hell of a job for the Chief of Staff – but the General told me to do it."⁶¹

Despite these little annoyances, Harbord soon took a liking to Dawes. Over the course of the war the two men worked closely with each other and developed a close-knit friendship, spending many a night together enjoying the streets of Paris. For Harbord, Dawes became "one of the finest characters I have ever known; generous, high-minded, straightforward, courageous and very able. . . . He is a winning personality, very much of a special pleader, and master of the art of insidious approach."⁶² Dawes returned the

sentiment, saying, “There are no better men made than Harbord. A great soldier and a great man, he is a faithful, loyal friend to those in whom he believes, and the waning fortunes of a friend only make him his stronger advocate.”⁶³

Chaumont

With work picking up at GHQ, the officers of the AEF General Staff began to grow weary of their cramped quarters in Paris. Pershing was especially agitated with the constant interruptions from visitors and the toll Paris’s social distractions were taking on his command. One of his aides recounted in his diary Pershing furiously storming into the office swearing to “get out of Paris as soon as possible.”⁶⁴ On 31 July, Pershing, accompanied by Harbord, Colonel de Chambrun and Captain George S. Patton left Paris by motor car on a quest for a new location for GHQ AEF. The site needed to be within the *Zone des Armies* and not too far from where the American troops would train. After a three-day tour of locations including Vittel and Joinville they finally settled on the town of Chaumont.⁶⁵

Located roughly 150 miles east of Paris in the upper Marne, Chaumont was home to fifteen thousand citizens, but had added some twenty thousand refugees and garrison troops to its population. Its main attraction for the site of AEF General Headquarters was the existence of a large regimental barracks, the Caserne Damremont. They provided enough office space for the entire headquarters, and ample billet space in local housing for all but the enlisted men, who would be housed in temporary barracks. The French Regional Commander, Major General Wirbel, protective of his personal fiefdom,

objected to the move, arguing that the city was already at maximum capacity. On the other hand, the town mayor, M. Lévy-Alphandéry, supported the AEF's coming.

Satisfied with the location, Pershing ordered the GHQ moved on 1 September.⁶⁶

The selection of Chaumont turned out to be a good one. With the exception of the challenges of communicating with Paris over the antiquated French telephone system, the town met all the requirements for a general headquarters. Unlike their time in Paris, life at Chaumont quickly settled into a simple routine. Pershing's office was located on the second floor of the main building. Harbord was located across the hall, with easy access to both the C-in-C and the Secretary of the General Staff. Visitors to Pershing either went through his various aides or through Harbord, while those coming to see Harbord habitually went through the Secretary of the General Staff's office.

Harbord's daily routine began with a perusal of the day's mail, followed by a meeting with the five assistant chiefs of staff, the adjutant general, and the inspector general. Frank McCoy, secretary of the General Staff, was also usually present. The officers went over the previous day's progress and discussed new difficulties and challenges, with Harbord handing out instructions and advice. While the current military situation was the usual topic of the day, Harbord also took the opportunity to fill in the staff with Pershing's movements, as he was often on the road conducting inspection tours or meeting with the Allies. When Pershing was at Chaumont, he and Harbord met every day after the staff conference, at which time Harbord presented him with whatever item needed his signature, and received orders and decisions that required more explanation than available in written correspondence.

The move to Chaumont signaled a new phase in the General Staff. Through much trial and error, those in the upper echelons of command in the AEF began to streamline their workload. Harbord admitted the difficulties of those first few months, saying:

The summer of 1917 was a difficult one for all of us. In other days Staff officers were given a definite mission. This was not often practicable now, for none of us had the experience to be all-seeing and to be able to fix a definite objective for expanding problems. . . . Staff officers had to be given a situation with the expectation that they would do all there was to be done, and follow it to a logical conclusion, without more definite instructions, and generally without further guidance or more than quite desultory supervision. No one working under my supervision as Chief of Staff was expected to take to a superior for decision any matter that he was competent to settle for or by himself. . . . It could hardly be otherwise under such circumstances. *Time did not permit the Commander-in-Chief of his Chief of Staff to become submerged in an ocean of detail* [emphasis added].⁶⁷

With the basic organizational structure of the American Expeditionary Forces in place by the end of August 1917, its commanders could now turn their attention to bringing the divisions so desperately anticipated by the Allies. For Pershing and his staff, bringing the men and training them for combat would prove even more daunting a task than anything encountered during that first summer.

Notes

- ¹ James G. Harbord, *The American Army in France 1917-1919* (Boston: Brown, Little and Company, 1936), 90-91.
- ² Cable: P-30-S, 6 July 1917, *United States Army in the World War, 1917 – 1919* 17 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1948), 2:17. [Hereafter cited as USAWW.]
- ³ John J. Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War* 2 vols. (New York: F.A. Stokes, 1931), 1:118.
- ⁴ Harbord, *American Army*, 91.
- ⁵ War Department, Office of the Chief of Staff, *Field Service Regulations: United States Army, 1914 [corrected to April 15, 1917]* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1917), 131-32.
- ⁶ Pershing, *My Experiences*, 1:43.
- ⁷ The French General Staff was divided into four bureaus: Personnel, Intelligence, Operations, and Supply. Understanding their own state of unreadiness, the Americans added a Training section to their own General Staff to oversee training in Europe.
- ⁸ General Orders No. 8, 5 July 1917, USAWW, 16:13-24.
- ⁹ Diary entry, 9-31 August 1917, Hugh Drum Diary, Box 9, Hugh A. Drum Papers, MHI; For a complete copy of the original AEF staff organization see General Orders No. 8, 5 July 1917, USAWW, 16:14-24.
- ¹⁰ Harbord, *American Army*, 98.
- ¹¹ Edward M. Coffman, *The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 127.
- ¹² Allan R. Millett, *The General: Robert L. Bullard and Officership in the United States Army 1881-1925* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975), 315.
- ¹³ U.S. War Department, *Staff Manual, United States Army, 1917* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1917), 9-10; James G. Harbord, *The Chief of Staff in the Theater of Operations*, 6 April 1939, Army War College Curricular Archives, MHI, 5.
- ¹⁴ Harbord, *Chief of Staff*, 4.
- ¹⁵ James G. Harbord, *Leaves From A War Diary* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1925), 124-25.
- ¹⁶ Harbord, *Chief of Staff*, 4.
- ¹⁷ Harbord, *War Diary*, 127-28.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 125-26.
- ¹⁹ W. M. Wright to Chauncey B. Baker, 28 May 1917, USAWW, 1:55.
- ²⁰ Harvey A. DeWeerd, *President Wilson Fights His War: World War I and the American Intervention* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 205.
- ²¹ Harbord, *American Army*, 101.

²² The Baker Mission consisted of Colonels Chauncey B. Baker, William S. Graves, Charles P. Summerall, Dwight E. Altman, Mark L. Hersey; Lieutenant Colonels Hanson E. Ely, Edward D. Anderson, Kirby Walker, Sherwood A. Cheney; Majors Morris E. Locke, George S. Simonds, Frederick A. Ellison, and Captain James G. Quakemeyer. The AEF contingent was Pershing, Colonel Benjamin Alvord; Lieutenant Colonels J.W. Barker, Fox Conner, Robert H. Dunlap (U.S.M.C.), Harbord, William Mitchell, J.H. Parker; Majors A.B. Barber, Marlborough Churchill, Arthur L. Conger, Hugh A. Drum, Frank R. McCoy, H.E. Margetts, Dennis E. Nolan, Frank Parker; Captains J.L. Collins, William O. Reed and J.H. Shallenberger. *USAWW*, 1:108-109.

²³ James G. Harbord, *Personalities and Personal Relationships in the American Expeditionary Forces*, 29 April 1933, Army War College Curricular Archives, MHI, 4.

²⁴ Harbord, *American Army*, 101; Donald Smythe, *Pershing: General of the Armies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 36.

²⁵ Harbord, *Personalities*, 4.

²⁶ Report on Organization, 10 July 1917, *USAWW*, 1:93.

²⁷ Both the French and British G.H.Q. intimated that they preferred the larger size division planned by the Americans, but confessed that manpower limitations prevented their implementations. Harbord, *American Army*, 103; Fox Conner, "Divisional Organization" *Infantry Journal* (May-June 1933), 166.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 167; Smythe, *Pershing*, 38.

²⁹ Harbord, *American Army*, 103; Hugh Drum to Harbord, 20 July 1934, Box 9, Drum Papers, MHI.

³⁰ Pershing, *My Experiences*, 1:152.

³¹ War Department, Document No. 394, *Infantry Drill Regulations, United States Army, 1911* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1911), 100.

³² James W. Rainey, "Ambivalent Warfare: The Tactical Doctrine of the AEF in World War I" *Parameters* 13 (September, 1983): 34-46 [The quotation is on p. 36].

³³ *Ibid.*, 37.

³⁴ Rainey goes into a through explanation of why Pershing's tactical doctrines were doomed to failure from the beginning, which I will discuss in the chapters on Belleau Wood and Soissons. *Ibid.*, 34-38; Pershing, *My Experiences*, 1:152-54.

³⁵ This refers to the process of creating a multi-layered defensive position where a light force manned the advance trenches while the bulk of the defenders remained in trenches further to the rear. This system meant that the initial attack wave, with its accompanying massed artillery, would be directed at a lightly held position. Once across it, the full weight of the defenders could repel the attack more effectively.

³⁶ Harbord, *American Army*, 101; Harbord, *War Diary*, 93.

³⁷ Harbord, *War Diary*, 98-99.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 100-101; Edward M. Coffman, *The Hilt of the Sword: The Career of Peyton C. March* (Madison: The University Press of Wisconsin, 1966), 44.

- ⁴⁰ The statement is from the diary of George Van Horn Moseley, quoted in *Ibid.*, 45.
- ⁴¹ “Book Chapters,” Box 2, Dennis E. Nolan Papers, MHI.
- ⁴² Diary entries, 28 June 1917, 19 July 1917, Drum Diary, Box 9, Drum Papers, MHI.
- ⁴³ Accompanying them were Colonel Alvord, Captain George S. Patton, and two orderlies.
- ⁴⁴ Harbord, *War Diary*, 107.
- ⁴⁵ Quoted in Frank E. Vandiver, *Black Jack: the Life and Times of John J. Pershing* 2 Vols. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1977), 2:748.
- ⁴⁶ Harbord, *American Army*, 117-18.
- ⁴⁷ *Field Service Regulations*, 160.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 160-61.
- ⁴⁹ General Orders No. 20, 13 August 1917, *USAWW*, 16:52.
- ⁵⁰ James A. Huston, *The Sinews of War: Army Logistics 1775-1953* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1966), 356-87.
- ⁵¹ Harbord, *American Army*, 120; The reserve total achieved in 1918 by month was: January (23 days), February (33), March (37), April (54), May (59), June (72), July (65), August (59), September (48), October (49), November (58), December (71). The average reserve for 1918 was 52 days. Leonard P. Ayers, *The War With Germany: A Statistical Summary* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1919), 60.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*; Major General H.N. Sargent, *America's Part in the Great War: What the Americans Accomplished, and How Their Expeditionary Force in France was Organized, Equipped, and Maintained*, unpublished manuscript, Box 3-4, H.N. Sargent Papers, Manuscript Division, LC; Harbord, *American Army*, 120-24.
- ⁵³ General Orders No. 23, 20 August 1917, *USAWW*, 16:57.
- ⁵⁴ Pershing, *My Experiences*, 1:148.
- ⁵⁵ Bascom N. Timmons, *Portrait of an American: Charles G. Dawes* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1953), 168.
- ⁵⁶ Harbord, *American Army*, 127.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 126-27.
- ⁵⁸ Charles G. Dawes, *A Journal of the Great War: August 21, 1917 – August 2, 1919* 2 Vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1921), 1:20.
- ⁵⁹ Smythe, *Pershing*, 43.
- ⁶⁰ Harbord, *War Diary*, 353.
- ⁶¹ Dawes, *Journal*, 1:99. Dawes claimed to have heard reports of a photograph showing Pershing with one of his breast-pockets unbuttoned and vowed to scour all of France in search of the item to use in his own defense.

⁶² Harbord, *War Diary*, 353.

⁶³ Dawes, *Journal*, 250.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Smythe, *Pershing*, 45.

⁶⁵ Diary entries, 31 July – 2 August 1917, John J. Pershing Diary, Box 6-7, John J. Pershing Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.

⁶⁶ Harbord, *American Army*, 132-33; Harbord, *War Diary*, 139-40; Special Orders No. 81, 28 August 1917, Box 11, James G. Harbord Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.

⁶⁷ Harbord, *Chief of Staff*, 6.

CHAPTER V

BRINGING THE MEN, SLOWLY (SEPTEMBER - DECEMBER 1917)

The fall of 1917 marked a period of waiting and frustration for the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) and its Allies. The euphoria that accompanied the AEF's arrival the previous June was beginning to wane as the vast American manpower reserves were slow to materialize. As Russia crumbled under the tide of revolution, the entire Eastern Front drifted closer to collapse. Such a turn of events would allow the Germans to concentrate their remaining forces on the Western Front for a new offensive that could push the war weary Allies to the brink of annihilation. Gone were the days when the mere appearance of the American flag in France brought satisfaction. What the Allies needed were boots on the ground, and quickly.

For the Americans, progress came slowly. Though they had created an organizational structure for the AEF, it still needed fine-tuning, as officers showed themselves unsuited to their tasks and various policies proved unworkable. The poor state of the American Army prior to the war demanded a period of rapid catch-up to the Europeans, which meant losing valuable time. Compounding this was Pershing's desire that the AEF free itself from the mindset of trench warfare and work to break through the German lines and fight in the open. While a noble goal, this meant more time for preparation, as Pershing ordered an extensive training program for the coming AEF divisions. The time requirements for the American training policies also exacerbated growing problems between the Americans and the Allies. Irritation over American delays brought an increase in calls for the amalgamation of American manpower into

Allied units, which in turn led to an emerging hostility between Allies and the AEF leadership. Efforts to improve inter-allied relations culminated in the creation of an advisory board, known as the Supreme War Council, but this change was slow in coming and operated with varying degrees of effectiveness. The difficulties of coalition warfare were in full effect in the fall of 1917.

An additional challenge for AEF officers came from the growing disunity between their policies and goals and those of the War Department. As time passed, it became readily apparent that the two organizations were often at odds in their respective efforts to build up the American military presence in Europe. Disagreements over training, supply, and coordination with Allies threatened to further impede the American war effort, and caused considerable consternation amongst individuals both at home and abroad. The failure to fully address these issues caused a stark deterioration in the relationship between the War Department and the AEF in 1918.

These problems and difficulties made the fall and winter of 1917 the true Valley Forge of the American Expeditionary Forces. The full scope of shifting a peacetime nation and army to a war footing made rapid action impossible, and improvements had to be made under the watchful scrutiny of the British and French, who fought to take over control of the coming doughboys. If Pershing and the other officers of the AEF hoped to effectively contribute militarily in 1918, and to do so under their own flag, they needed to bear down and get to work, even as time, the AEF's most precious commodity, grew shorter with each passing day.

Growing Pains for the AEF

As the AEF General Staff settled into its new headquarters, it busied itself with details while awaiting troop shipments to fill the AEF's ranks. With the 1st Division arriving at the end of June, and the first units of the 26th (National Guard) Division coming in late September, the American supply system slowly creaked into motion. In the meantime, an odd assortment of troops arrived throughout August, including base hospitals, several engineer regiments, and eight air squadrons. But this slow trickle of soldiers sparked concern amongst the Allies, and brought added anxiety to the already overworked officers at Chaumont.¹ In an effort to improve coordination and communication, the Allies and the AEF maintained various liaison missions at their respective headquarters.² While the missions had value, Harbord grew weary of the inflated rank of the foreign officers assigned to GHQ AEF. Still a lieutenant colonel, Harbord found it irritating that, though Chief of Staff, he still had to rise and stand at attention for every foreign general who walked through the door. The generals often enjoyed this display and increased the frequency of their visits, slowing the pace of work and creating resentment amongst the AEF General Staff. Making the situation even more frustrating was the fact that Pershing had recommended Harbord and several others for promotion at the beginning of August, but had not received word as yet.³ Pershing resubmitted his recommendations in late September, and the promotions finally came through in early October. Though Pershing finally got what he wanted, the AEF commander thought the process unnecessarily difficult, and hoped the next go round

would be simpler. He would be sorely disappointed, as promotions became a constant battle between the AEF and the War Department.⁴

More troubling for Harbord than the promotion issue was the fact that, without an army to command, Pershing busied himself by supervising the General Staff. He fired off memoranda asking Harbord to look into this matter or that. He set up proper rules and guidelines for writing cables, going into such detail as instructing that they “be in the third person, and the personal pronoun first person should not be used except where absolutely necessary.” Pershing’s ultimate goal was to create a “regular scientific method of writing cables,” but he managed to annoy many on his staff in the process.⁵ Another memo banned small talk amongst General Staff and other staff officers concerning visits to the front, insisting that if there was anything of interest to report it would be done in a full briefing. “The time of our officers,” Pershing admonished, “is quite too precious to waste two hours listening to what might be said in ten minutes if details with which all are familiar are left out.”⁶

Through his increased attention to the workings of the General Staff, Pershing grew concerned over what he sensed was an inefficient handling of cables between the staff and the War Department. There seemed to be a habit emerging amongst the staff to hold onto questions for an indeterminate length of time, contributing to a general slowdown in communication. Expressing his concerns, Pershing told Harbord, “Let us not fall into the habit which seems to prevail in the War Department of allowing these things to become buried in the General Staff.”⁷ Seeking to defend his fellow staff officers, Harbord pointed out that the present arrangement of having all cables go through the Adjutant General caused the offending delays. Too often cables contained paragraphs

that needed forwarding to multiple sections and departments, which slowed their distribution. He further complained that, as chief of staff, he did not have an officer at his immediate disposal to supply information regarding cables that Pershing routinely inquired on. As a remedy, Harbord suggested that Colonel McCoy, the Secretary of the General Staff, should direct cable traffic due to his intimate knowledge of the inner workings of the General Staff.⁸

These myriad complaints were only natural given the newness of the General Staff. The AEF was in a vetting out period, and Pershing was committed to make it a first-rate organization. The trivial nature of some of Pershing's directives belies the seriousness of his feelings. As the AEF got down to work, Pershing had the opportunity to observe its officers in action for the first time and he did not like what he saw, particularly in the General Staff. The various delays and inefficiencies that seemed never-ending combined to instill in Pershing a belief that unless serious improvements were made, he would have to begin winnowing away the dead wood amongst his officers. "Either our officers are overworked," he told Harbord, "or else they are not the class of officers we would wish. Of course I know the latter, to a large extent, is unavoidably true."⁹ Anticipating the need to make some changes, Pershing requested that Harbord provide a clear report covering the current organization of the General Staff, including recommendations for officers that could be brought in. Though unfair to expect the General Staff to spring to life with a well-developed routine, haste required that Pershing dispense with niceties and push his officers even harder to perform to his standards.

Personnel Issues

Pershing did not confine his time to obsessing over the General Staff, but also made routine inspection trips throughout the AEF, often taking along his chief of staff. Initially the tours provided Harbord an opportunity to get out of Chaumont and experience the French countryside, but they also allowed him to better comprehend the inner workings and complexities of the vast organization they sought to create. If nothing else they provided a clearer perspective than could be gained sitting at his desk at Chaumont.

In late October, Harbord accompanied Pershing on a five-day tour of the Line of Communications, stopping first at the port of St. Nazaire, located at the mouth of the Loire River. One of the first ports to process American troops and supplies, it remained an essential link in the AEF supply chain throughout the war. This did not mean, however, that it was well suited for the task. Located in a small, walled harbor, with locks providing increased depth, the port could not handle a great number of ships. The presence of the unfinished hull *Paris*, which the French envisioned as the jewel of their passenger liner fleet, further hindered operations. The hull represented a great moral and economic gamble to the French, and it remained docked at the port until the last weeks of the war, despite American pleas for its removal.¹⁰

The next few days progressed in much the same way, with detailed inspections of various facilities, each repeating the same theme: operations were beginning to bog down. Whether due to inexperienced officers, insufficient facilities, inadequate rail service, or an overall lack of enthusiasm, the Line of Communications could not keep up

with the slow increase in troop and supply shipments. By the end of the tour, Pershing resigned himself to replace the commander of the LOC, Major General Blatchford, who had joined the group at Bordeaux. As a temporary replacement, Pershing turned to his West Point classmate, Brigadier General Mason M. Patrick, and eventually appointed Major General Francis J. Kernan to permanent command of the Line of Communications after securing War Department approval.¹¹

Other high-ranking officers were soon found wanting under Pershing's sharp eye. Consumed with his vision of an AEF officer, Pershing gave short shrift to those who did not measure up. The most prominent of these, Major General William L. Sibert, commanded the 1st Division now training near Gondrecourt. Though well liked by subordinates for his pleasant and even temperament, he did not possess the personal drive that Pershing wanted. Sibert's frumpy appearance and time-worn face that showed every one of his fifty-seven years also worked against him, countering Pershing's vision of the slim, robust officer. In addition, though a competent officer, Sibert had an air of indifference about him, running contrary to Pershing's desire for aggressive combat commanders. Sibert's promotion to major general surprised Harbord, and it stunned the AEF chief of staff when Sibert received command of the 1st Division. Harbord knew that such an officer would not last long in the AEF, the only question was the timing of his relief.¹²

That relief, however, became a slow, arduous process stretching over many months. Sibert had the unfortunate position of commanding what Harbord believed to be Pershing's favorite division. It was also the first division to arrive in France, and received considerable attention from both Pershing and the Allies. Every poor progress

report became a black mark against Sibert, further reducing Pershing's opinion of him. In early September, Pershing and French President Raymond Poincare, inspected the division. It did not go well. The soldiers did their best, but poorly chosen ground and inadequate preparation time combined to produce a shoddy review.¹³ Pershing surmised that Poincare's impression of the American troops "could not have been particularly favorable," and blamed Sibert for the embarrassment.¹⁴

On 3 October, Pershing's displeasure with the 1st Division finally boiled over. After observing a demonstration of an attack against an entrenched position, Pershing asked for Sibert's critiques. When neither Sibert nor a junior officer could provide satisfactory answers Pershing's patience ran out. As one witness described, the AEF commander "just gave everybody hell," with the brunt of his wrath falling on Sibert, who received a severe dressing down in front of several junior officers. Pershing's attack was so vitriolic that the division's acting chief of staff, Captain George C. Marshall, Jr., leapt to a torrid defense of his division and fellow officers. After a tirade that many present believed would result in Marshall's immediate removal, Pershing freed himself and withdrew. Much to Marshall's surprise, he remained with the division. In fact, Pershing made a point to take Marshall aside on future visits for a frank discussion of the division's progress. The future Army chief of staff quickly learned something that Harbord already knew: Pershing did not shrink away from criticism or direct speech from subordinates, so long as it had a point, and the officer delivering it got the job done.¹⁵

While Marshall gained from his encounters with Pershing, eventually becoming the General's protégé, Sibert did not. The day after his blowup, Pershing wrote a confidential letter to Secretary of War Baker, stating, "I fear that we have a some general

officers who have neither the experience, the energy, nor the aggressive spirit to prepare their units or to handle them under battle conditions as they exist to-day.”¹⁶ Enclosed with the letter was a memorandum listing several generals Pershing wanted recalled from Europe for one reason or another, with Sibert’s name listed prominently at the top. Baker’s reluctance to remove a prominent division commander kept Sibert in place for the time being, but he could not deny Pershing’s wishes forever. The final blow against Sibert came in December. Prompted by several negative reports from American visitors to the AEF, Pershing sent out a stinging letter to several of his officers under the heading: “Pessimism.” In it he wrote:

Americans recently visiting our training areas and coming into contact with officers in high command have received a note of deep pessimism, including apprehension of undue hardships to be undergone . . . a belief in the impregnability of [the enemy’s] lines . . . and generally have come away with an impression that the war is already well along toward defeat for our arms. . . .

While realizing that optimism cannot be created by order, it should be unnecessary to point out that such a state of mind on the part of officers in responsible positions is at once reflected among their troops, and it is not an over statement to say no officer worthy of command would give expression to thoughts of depression, much less communicate to untutored civilians false ideas of the morale of our troops. A conservative firmness and faith in our cause is not inconsistent with a serious estimate of an

enemy's forces or even of a grave strategic or tactical situation, but I hardly need add that a temperament which gives way to weak complaining; which views with apprehension the contact with the enemy; which carps at the individuality of our Allies, and querulously protests at hardships such as all soldiers must expect to endure, marks an unfitness for command of such an officer, and indicates his practical defeat before he goes to battle.

The officer who cannot read hope in the conditions that confront us; who is not inspired and uplifted by the knowledge that under the leadership of our chief executive, the heart of our nation in this war; who shrinks from hardship; who does not exert his own personal influence to encourage his men; and who fails in the lofty attitude which should characterize the General that expects to succeed, should yield his position to others with more of our national courage. The consciousness of such an attitude should in honor dictate an application for relief. Whenever the visible effects of it on the command of such an officer reach me in the future, it will constitute grounds for his removal without application.¹⁷

Pershing removed Sibert the day after sending the letter. Though sound in his reasoning, Pershing's methods left something to be desired. Historian Donald Smythe notes that the letter's original target was not Sibert, but Major General Clarence Edwards, the commander of the 26th Division and criticizes Pershing for unjustly characterizing Sibert as a defeatist. Right or not, Pershing wanted to deliver a shock to his officers,

letting them know exactly what he expected of them. He certainly got their attention. Marshall believed the move unfair and blamed Pershing's staff for trying to outdo the AEF commander in severity despite not knowing "what they were being severe about."¹⁸ Hugh Drum noted that with the relief of Blatchford, Sibert, and Major General William A. Mann, commander of the 42nd "Rainbow" Division, "the first step of weeding out poor material has started."¹⁹ He knew these three would not be the only ones to go. Sibert's replacement, Major General Robert L. Bullard, took particular note of his predecessor's fate, reflecting a newfound fear of Pershing in his diary: "[Pershing] is looking for results. He intends to have them. He will sacrifice any man who does not bring them."²⁰

Ever watchful of potential threats to the General, Harbord had a different reaction to Sibert's removal. He worried that Pershing's actions could have unforeseen political ramifications. Despite his inexperience leading troops, Sibert remained a physically vigorous officer, and his status as the second highest ranking officer on the regular list in Europe made his removal politically dangerous. Should Pershing's popularity falter, or should the AEF encounter unforeseen setbacks, the General would open himself up to attacks from the rear. Harbord noted that as the first relief from high command, "General Sibert's friends will not recognize its wisdom, so apparent to us here, and may claim that he was made a sacrifice in order to clear him off as a possible successor."²¹ Though no such claims materialized, it would not be the last time Harbord fretted over possible challenges to Pershing's authority emanating from the home front, nor the last time Pershing sent home a politically dangerous general.

The Case of John McAuley Palmer

While Pershing relieved officers he considered unsatisfactory, others began to show signs of fatigue, especially at GHQ. Perpetually overworked in their efforts to build an American army virtually from scratch, the officers at Chaumont had nowhere to turn for aid. The Allies were happy to offer advice, but often couched it in language reminiscent of a school instructor lecturing a pupil. They did not have time to baby-sit the Americans, and their officious tone often made the Americans reluctant to ask for help. Instead, they sallied forth on their own, operating without a net as it were, all the while holding the nation's reputation in the balance. Under these considerable stresses, it is little wonder that some of the Americans began to crack.

The most prominent member of GHQ AEF to run aground was the chief of Operations, Lieutenant Colonel John McAuley Palmer. Since their journey aboard the *Baltic*, no officer in the AEF worked harder than Palmer. As head of Operations, he needed to establish the policies for the rest of his colleagues to follow. Palmer carried the load admirably, but by mid July the strain took its toll and he suffered a mental breakdown, necessitating a leave of absence from general headquarters. As chief of staff, Harbord took the news particularly hard. Ever watchful of those on the General Staff, he sought to protect them as best he could. Harbord took responsibility for Palmer's state, admitting, "I have been piling too much on you," and looked for ways to lighten his load.²² Harbord instructed Palmer to take a break, ten days to two weeks and then return if ready. Even if laced with a bit of personal guilt, it was a most considerate offer. Harbord knew how important Palmer was to GHQ and the entire AEF, but he also took

into consideration Palmer's personal aspirations. Should he go down for an extended period, Pershing would have no choice but to replace him as head of Operations. Such a turn of events could effectively end Palmer's career, and Harbord wanted to spare his friend that fate.

Despite these good intentions, the senior medical officer, Colonel Merritte W. Ireland stepped in, saying that the measures Harbord prescribed were too little, too late, and instructed Palmer to take a more extended convalescence. Palmer took up residence in a hotel near Louis XIV's grand palace at Versailles and tried to regain his strength. Members of the General Staff, still a month from the move to Chaumont, visited often, aiding in Palmer's recovery. Harbord and Colonel Benjamin Alvord, the AEF's Adjutant General, even took Palmer to a wonderful dinner at the home of the French liaison to General Pershing, Lieutenant Colonel de Chambrun. The cure seemed to take, as Palmer returned to GHQ within a fortnight.²³

Palmer's case is a good example of the care and consideration Harbord exercised as chief of staff. He knew the strain his fellow officers were under and looked out for them as best he could. As Palmer's biographer, I.B. Holley Jr., states, Harbord "showed unusual sensitivity in his role as a leader of men. Correctly perceiving that Palmer's undeniable gifts were exploited best when his needlessly wavering self-confidence was bolstered, the Chief of Staff made a point of demonstrating his high regard overtly and officially."²⁴ In an effort to highlight Palmer's importance, Harbord left the chief of Operations nominally in charge of GHQ soon after his return while the chief of staff accompanied Pershing on a three-day tour of the front. But even with these reassurances, Palmer was not ready to come back. When GHQ AEF moved to Chaumont in

September, Palmer's health again failed him, necessitating another leave of absence. This one lasted over a month. Palmer journeyed to the coastal city of Cannes to recuperate, again buoyed by visitors and letters from friends. Harbord made it a point to try and keep Palmer's spirits high, even suggesting the possibility of an official trip to the United States as part of his recovery.²⁵ Despite the best intentions, however, Harbord let slip that Fox Conner, Palmer's assistant at Operations, was down with an appendicitis. As if this news was not distressing enough, Harbord added, "I think that things are very much in need of a leader in your Section, and wish you were back. To lose you and Fox Conner at the same time is a severe blow."²⁶ Though undoubtedly an effort to impress upon Palmer his continued importance and desirability, it instead caused a fit of nervousness, and pushed him to return to duty before he was ready.

His return was a happy one, celebrated by his compatriots at Chaumont. Harbord met Palmer at the train station and took him to the new headquarters where he enjoyed a dinner with the new members of the Operations Section, and caught up with his old co-workers. Harbord then pulled Palmer aside for a long talk after dinner, a tactic Pershing used when a new high-ranking officer arrived at Chaumont. Both knew that Palmer was not yet ready to return to the grind of GHQ, and discussed Palmer's temporary position as advisor to the commandant of the new General Staff School at Langres. Harbord wanted to do everything he could to keep Palmer in the loop, and to ensure that his confidence did not take another turn for the worse.²⁷

With the new position, Palmer knew that he could no longer direct the Operations Section. While he appreciated Pershing and Harbord's decision to keep him on as an assistant chief of staff through his periods of recovery, it was time for Fox Conner to

assume full control of Operations. Conner tried his best to bolster his former section chief's spirits, telling Palmer that "the problem with you is that for the last ten years you have done twice as much for the Army as the Army has done for you, and everybody knows it," but nothing could soothe his disappointment.²⁸ Harbord also tried to encourage his friend, holding out the possibility of a combat command upon his return, which would almost certainly bring with it a promotion to the rank of brigadier general. It was a touching offer to a man whose career looked to be slipping away from him. Palmer knew and appreciated his friends' efforts, especially Harbord's. In late November, Palmer wrote Harbord to keep him abreast of his progress. He assured the chief of staff that the duty was just what the doctor ordered, and made a point to express his personal gratitude for Harbord's faithfulness and support over the previous months. "I came over here," Palmer wrote, "full of admiration for you and glad of an opportunity to serve under you. But as things have developed I find myself under deeper obligations to you than anyone else in my acquaintance. If I were your own brother I could not have received more thoughtful consideration and kindness."²⁹

Palmer's strong emotions for the chief of staff reflect well on the latter's command style. Harbord used his strong sense of personal loyalty to maintain relationships with other officers, and to inspire them in order to utilize their abilities to the greatest extent. While he could breathe fire as well as the next man, Harbord often found such tactics detrimental in the long run. He instead used his warm and friendly nature to instill in subordinates a desire to perform. It exemplifies Harbord's method of driving the staff through inspiration rather than fear, which Pershing supplied in ample measures.

Emerging Problems with the War Department

With work and pressure mounting with each passing week, the last thing the members of the AEF needed was a lack of support on the home front. But like everything else in those confusing days, problems emerged at the most inopportune moments, adding a considerable amount of stress to an already difficult situation. In terms of the relationship between the War Department and AEF, the problems boiled down to the fact that both organizations were in a process of rapid expansion simultaneously, and neither was overly sympathetic to their counterpart's needs. The main point of contention between the two organizations was shipping. In early October, the AEF General Staff produced a Priority Schedule for shipments to France, breaking down the transport schedule for a one million man AEF into six phases in order "to provide a proper balance between the various elements of the expeditionary forces."³⁰ The first five phases would concentrate on the shipment of a complete Army Corps, including requisite numbers of Line of Communication troops and auxiliary personnel. The final phase included only LOC personnel, projecting the final size of the AEF at roughly 1,250,000 men after the schedule's completion.³¹

Problems quickly arose regarding the availability of the necessary shipping to fulfill the Priority Schedule's projections. Pershing believed that the Allies should provide additional tonnage to aid in the buildup of the AEF, but neither the French nor British supported transporting anything but combat personnel (hopefully to be added to their armies), and put pressure on Washington to acquiesce. Pershing flatly refused to

accept the persistent arguments for amalgamation, but continuing delays in shipping American soldiers to France worked to undermine his plan for an independent army. The AEF needed to show that it could build up a military force in a timely manner before the Allies would contribute any excess shipping, and to do so it required additional shipping.

Adding to Pershing's problems, the Supply Bureaus in the War Department continually interfered with AEF purchases, discussing AEF supply requests with the Allies, and generally creating a situation that Harbord called "co-operation in ignorance."³² Much to Pershing and Harbord's irritation, it appeared that the Supply Bureaus took Pershing's requests as little more than suggestions, basing the final decisions upon their own analysis. Even more shocking, it seemed either the Army Chief of Staff or the Supply Chiefs were referring supply questions to the Allied representatives in Washington. These officials sent the requests back to their home governments, who forwarded them on to Pershing for comment. Since Pershing started the cycle in the first place with his initial request, he found the process incredibly frustrating. "Such procedure," Pershing growled, "discredited my recommendations and placed my entire staff in an embarrassing position in the eyes of the foreign Government concerned, to say nothing of the delay in complying with our requests."³³

To Pershing and Harbord, the fact that the Supply Chiefs made their own assessments as to the AEF's real needs and advised the War Department and Allied representatives based upon those assessments, despite having the AEF commander's requests in front of them, smacked of gross interference with Pershing's command. Both men found the procedure illogical and an unnecessary challenge to Pershing's authority. An officer three thousand miles from the front could not know the daily needs of the

AEF, and to presume otherwise reeked of professional arrogance. Additionally, the practice allowed the bureaus, notorious for their desire for independence, to operate outside of Pershing's control and subverted the AEF's position as an autonomous command. The AEF was charged with conducting combat operations against Germany, and its success depended on getting the men to Europe, training them, and keeping them supplied well enough to carry out their mission. As Pershing saw it, the role of the War Department was simply "to furnish the army overseas what it asked for, if possible, as otherwise we could not be held responsible for results." Pershing at least acknowledged the possibility of the failure to meet all requests. Harbord took a far less amenable approach, insisting that the War Department "had small reason for existence at that time except to make it possible for the American Expeditionary Forces to do that for which they were sent to Europe."³⁴ Neither man could envision the War Department as anything other than a support organization for the AEF; a view that only grew stronger as the war continued.

Further contributing to Pershing's irritation with the War Department was the lack of information flowing out of it. As described by General Peyton March upon his arrival in France, the War Department and the Office of the Chief of Staff were distressingly slow in making decisions. Cables went unanswered for days, weeks even, causing further delays in France. When information was forthcoming, it did not suit Pershing's needs. In one example, the War Department continued to provide information to the Allies regarding troop ships before giving it to Pershing, creating a situation where the officers at GHQ AEF could get better information from the Allies than from their own government. Though embarrassing, the practice was also dangerous. Germany had spies

strewn across France, and the French were not known for their ability to keep secrets. Harbord made note of this fact in his diary, saying, “There are no secrets in France, apparently. . . . especially when they concern the queer and uncoordinated [sic] efforts of those amusing Americans who are trying to make war like real soldiers.”³⁵ In Harbord’s view, to entrust the French with information vital to the AEF undermined Pershing’s position, and made it easier for the Allies to go around the AEF commander and deal directly with the War Department. Though mildly annoying when dealing with shipping information, the policy could quickly turn serious if it involved more sensitive policies, like amalgamation.

For the moment, however, shipping continued to be the main problem facing the AEF. Harbord watched in ghastly amusement as horses arrived without harnesses; wagons without horses, trucks without engines, all accompanied by the occasional upholstered chair for some medical unit. Compounding the problem was a critical shortage of supply personnel. Ships sat in ports for days as they awaited unloading. Hugh Drum grew so concerned over the matter that he suspected they would soon be forced to transfer combat troops to supply duties, and halt all troop shipments until the labor situation could be straightened out. When supply troops did arrive, they often came sans tools, and had to wait idly for their equipment to arrive on a later transport.³⁶ Though Pershing understood the need for auxiliary personnel, there were simply not enough ships to fill the needs, and the AEF commander continued to focus on combat soldiers over support troops.

Some of the cargo arriving from the United States was so idiotic that it was almost humorous. Especially long pilings requested for dock construction were found

sawed in half to fit in a particular ship's cargo hold, thus making them useless. Another ship arrived loaded to the hilt with shavings for a cold storage plant, although tons of the material was easily attainable in France. An irate Pershing sent what was certainly a bewildering telegram, requesting no further shipment of "bath bricks, book cases, bath tubs, cabinets for blanks, chairs except folding chairs, cuspidors, office desks, floor wax, hoses except fire hose, step ladders, lawn mowers, refrigerators, safes except iron field safes, settees, sickles, stools, window shades."³⁷ One can only imagine his reaction at learning that a ship returning to the United States with 800 tons of sand as ballast, docked, loaded its supplies, and returned to France still carrying the sand in its hold. A dazed Harbord confessed, "Think of the shoes, the toothpaste, cartridges, socks, etc., etc., crowded out by 800 tons of French sand. Wow-wow, and then wow!!!!!!!!!!!!!"³⁸

The source of the supply difficulties was twofold. On the one hand, the War Department focused on raising and training troops above supplying them on the battlefield. The Allies could provide some of the supplies, with the rest finding its way to the front somehow. This mindset, more reminiscent of the nineteenth-century armies that subsisted off the land, impeded War Department thinking regarding the necessities of a massive army operating overseas. Department planners found it difficult to reconcile the conflicting demands of combat and logistics, and repeatedly focussed on the former to the detriment of the latter.³⁹

On the other hand, in their rush to get organized, Pershing and the officers at GHQ AEF added to their own problems in making supply requests. In their haste, AEF officers often sent confusing and conflicting requests to the War Department, who then had to decipher what was actually needed. Pershing asked for supplies for programs not

yet approved by the War Department, and exploded when his requests were not promptly filled. He changed requests as circumstances changed, but failed to understand the resultant delays these changes caused. In one case, the War Department received an urgent order for sixty five-ton gantry cranes in July 1917. The manufacturers went to work, constructing the cranes and preparing them for shipment. While under construction, one AEF board decided to cancel the order at the same time another confirmed it. In May 1918, as the first eight cranes were on their way to France, the AEF cancelled the order, leaving the fifty-two remaining cranes on the docks. By August, however, the War Department received word that the eight cranes that did arrive proved worthwhile and requested the remaining fifty-two cranes with all possible speed.⁴⁰ In another instance, Pershing put in a request for an eight-cylinder Liberty motor. Just as it was ready to go into production, he changed the order to a twelve-cylinder motor instead. After retooling, the company again started to begin production when Pershing changed his request back to the original eight-cylinder version.⁴¹ Such changes made it impossible for the War Department to efficiently meet the AEF's needs, causing Pershing to become even more frustrated.

While it is undeniable that war is a fluid entity, with ever-changing demands, one can hardly place all off the blame for delays in these cases on the War Department. It is more indicative of Pershing's view of the War Department's role in the military framework. As evidenced in earlier statements, Pershing considered the War Department as a support system for his forces in Europe. It was there to give him what he wanted when he wanted it (a view quickly disseminated throughout his staff). When Pershing published his memoirs after the war, he made a point to dwell upon every instance where

the War Department made some error in shipping, as though that was all it did.

Somewhat wounded by the criticism, Secretary of War Newton Baker complained that Pershing “saw his own problems but seems wholly to have failed to grasp ours.”⁴²

It is easy to sympathize with Baker, but in reality, he was a victim of his own creation. By giving Pershing a free hand in Europe, he established the precedent for the AEF commander to think of himself and his command as a truly autonomous entity. Chiefs of Staff Hugh Scott and Tasker Bliss added to this sentiment by subjugating their own authority to Pershing’s, and never standing up in the War Department’s defense. When Peyton March became chief of staff in March of 1918, he refused to kow-tow to Pershing as his predecessors had, with foreseeable results: the two men clashed routinely. But the ultimate blame must fall on Secretary of War Baker. It was his job to coordinate the military at home and abroad, and he failed to do so. From his readings on the Civil War, he believed it his job as secretary of war to give Pershing everything he needed and to stay out of his way. That may have been the case fifty years earlier, but in the summer and fall of 1917 the United States military needed coordination and direction, and it was Baker’s job to provide it⁴³

However, it is unfair to lay too much blame on any one individual for the difficulties encountered in the early months of the American involvement in the war. The main problem was that the United States simply was not prepared to go to war in April of 1917, and could hardly expect a smooth and rapid transition to a war footing. The Army’s logistical system, designed to satisfy a force of roughly 150,000, now had to recruit, train, equip, transport, and support millions of men within a year’s time. It was far too much to ask of any organization. The lack of preparedness in the prewar years

hamstrung the American military after the war declaration, and the Army General Staff, the Bureau System, and the War Department required complete reorganization simultaneous to the buildup of the AEF, which caused serious friction between the two organizations. Whether or not this situation could have been avoided is the subject of another study entirely.⁴⁴

Training

As problems emerged between the War Department and the AEF, events developed that fall that put increased pressure on the AEF to put soldiers in the line as quickly as possible. Circumstances looked bleak on the three major European fronts, forcing the Allies to take a more aggressive interest in AEF development. The British called off their Flanders offensive, which had raged since July and accomplished little more than costing a quarter of a million casualties. The French, still recovering from the disastrous Nivelle offensive of the previous spring and its resulting mutinies, resigned themselves to limited offensive operations until the Americans could enter the lines in numbers. In November, the Italians suffered a crushing defeat at Caporetto in northern Italy, retreating 70 miles to the Piave River and nearly losing their entire army in the process. Even more distressing, the success of the Bolshevik Revolution in overthrowing the provisional government of Alexander Kerensky meant Russia would soon withdraw from the Alliance against Germany. The collapse of the Eastern Front would release hundreds of thousands of German troops for an offensive in the West. Despite the jubilant rhetoric and warm feelings that accompanied American involvement in the war,

German successes brought an increased debate over the proper usage of the American Expeditionary Forces.

Unfortunately for the Allies, American soldiers were arriving slower than anticipated. On 1 October, the AEF had only 65,000 men in France. Though the figure continued to rise (to 104,000 in November and 129,000 in December), the rate of increase was so slow that it seemed the Americans would never reach the numbers necessary to turn the tide in the war.⁴⁵ Yet even with this slow buildup, the arrival of American soldiers brought to the forefront serious disagreements between Pershing and the Allies over training. Pershing concluded that ultimate success on the Western Front depended on the AEF's ability to free itself from the confines of the trenches and engage the Germans in the open. For all the advancements made in artillery and mechanization, Pershing still believed that success on the battlefield came down to a soldier and his rifle. He insisted that the Allies had allowed themselves to become bogged down in the trenches, both literally and figuratively. Three years of attrition had left them overly enamoured with the defensive, resulting in the goal of gaining territory supplanting the true objective of a military force, namely the destruction of the enemy's army.⁴⁶

To bring about a decision, [the enemy's] army must be driven from the trenches and the fighting carried into the open. It is here that the infantryman with his rifle, supported by machine guns, the tanks, the artillery, the airplanes and all auxiliary arms, determines the issue. Through adherence to this principle, the American soldier, taught how to shoot, how to take advantage of the terrain, and how to rely upon hasty

entrenchment, shall retain the ability to drive the enemy from his trenches and, by the same tactics, defeat him in the open.⁴⁷

In advocating “open” warfare, Pershing argued that, “while trench warfare [is] somewhat complicated so far as the work of staff is concerned, it makes relatively small demands upon initiative and resource of subordinate commanders and troops.” Offensives in trench warfare were set-piece affairs with limited goals, planned out on delicate timetables that sought to make war a carefully rehearsed routine. “Open warfare on the other hand demands initiative, resource, and decision upon part of all commanders from highest to lowest, and requires that all organizations be made into highly developed flexible teams capable [of] rapid manoeuvring [sic] to meet swift changes in situation.”⁴⁸ Pershing believed that too often gains achieved in trench warfare were lost because the soldiers’ training did not prepare them to exploit successes and carry the fight into the interior.

Harbord echoed his chief’s assessment of combat tactics on the Western Front. He could hardly fathom adopting the emphasis on trench fighting that dominated French and British training methods, and found their over-reliance on grenades and close quarter drill anathema to the American fighting spirit. He insisted that, “The authentic story of an Allied soldier with a rifle strapped on his back, chasing an enemy to get close enough to throw a hand grenade would never have been true of any American.” Such a circumstance would only prolong the stalemate that had gripped the Allies for the better part of three years. “Some day someone somewhere would come out of his trenches and

start forward,” Harbord argued, “and thus a stalemate would be broken and the War would eventually be won,” and he believed the Americans were the ones to do it.⁴⁹

For proof of his views, Pershing looked no further than the German breakthrough at Caporetto on the Italian Front. The Germans employed tactics developed by the German General von Hutier, whereby a short, violent artillery bombardment was followed by an attack of specially trained combat teams. Heavily loaded with machine guns, grenades, and implements for close-in fighting,⁵⁰ these teams probed for weaknesses in the Italian line, penetrated them once found, and then attacked strong points in the line from the rear. Once the holes in the line were secured, units of waiting infantry poured through the breeches, forcing the entire line to collapse. Such actions required a certain amount of boldness and aggression that Pershing could not help but admire. It was the exact type of operation he envisioned the AEF undertaking, once it was adequately trained to do so.⁵¹

The new German tactics were not a cure-all, however. Time would show that, while they could open tremendous holes in the line, it was difficult to maintain the initiative. As the troops pushed forward, the advance units began to outrun their logistical base, eventually causing the push to slow to a point where the enemy could rally his forces and present an effective defense. To effectively, and permanently, push the enemy out of his trenches required a massive, highly-skilled army with a well-oiled logistical network that could advance at a rate commensurate with the infantry. Likewise the artillery and support troops needed to be highly mobile, something not yet achieved on the Western Front. To achieve such efficiency, the AEF needed many months, if not years of training, and required the Allies to hold out until the AEF divisions completed

their preparations. It was an extraordinary expectation given that the Americans knew full well that the Allies were at the point of breaking and needed help immediately. If they did not know, the French and British were more than willing to tell them.⁵²

Undaunted by critics, Pershing pushed ahead with his plan to train the AEF for open warfare. To break out of the trenches, Pershing wanted an army thoroughly indoctrinated in aggressiveness. He refused to accept that the new machinery of war had rendered his infantry obsolete, and set out to prove himself right. To do so necessitated a sharp break from the training methods utilized by the French and British, which emphasized artillery and machine-guns at the expense of the infantry. Pershing put forth his philosophy on the general principles for training the AEF with a clear picture of what was expected: "All instructions must contemplate the assumption of a vigorous offensive. This purpose will be emphasized in every phase of training until it becomes a settled habit of thought."⁵³

Pershing insisted upon an ambitious program for the AEF, and, with the aid of his assistant chief of staff for Training, Colonel Harold B. Fiske, developed a multi-stage-training regimen designed to make up for the Americans' lack of military preparedness. Pershing wanted training in the United States limited to basic soldiering skills and instruction in the tenets of open warfare. When the divisions reached Europe, they would undergo an additional training period, this time focussing on the intricacies of trench warfare. There was a very practical reasoning behind this division. The wide-open spaces in the United States allowed for extensive exercises in movement warfare. Training facilities for trench warfare already existed in France, thus relieving the War Department of the burden of constructing them. France also presented the opportunity

for soldiers to serve in quiet sectors of the front, providing a level of on-the-job training impossible in the United States.⁵⁴

Once the soldiers were in Europe, their training would progress in three stages. As outlined in Pershing's final report, "One month was allotted for the instruction in small units from battalion down, a second month of experience in quiet sectors by battalions, and a third month for field practice in open warfare tactics by division, including artillery."⁵⁵ The plan took into account the advanced timetable under which the AEF was operating. In order to get the men to France as quickly as possible, Pershing agreed to train the first four divisions (1st, 2nd, 26th, and 42nd) in both open and trench warfare, with the later divisions following the three stage training schedule. The final goal was to have AEF soldiers receive between three and six months of training, three months of which would be in France, prior to entering combat.⁵⁶

It was an ambitious program, but problems quickly emerged that soon derailed the finely honed schedule Pershing envisioned. The first problem was the amount of training soldiers received in the United States. AEF planners assumed recruits arriving in Europe would have completed the preemptory four-week training program in the United States. Due to the considerable need to embark divisions as rapidly as possible, however, the War Department often cut corners on training. While irresponsible, it is understandable. Reports from France repeated again and again the dire circumstances affecting the Allies and their desperate need for American boots on the ground.⁵⁷

Some of the blame for deficiencies in training must also be placed on the decision to send whole divisions to France instead of unattached soldiers. When a division completed its training program in the United States, it underwent a culling as troops were

withdrawn for duty with the staff corps and as service as replacements for divisions already in Europe. This left holes in the divisions that needed filling, and the only source from which to draw were soldiers still in training. As more and more men went to France, the problem continued to increase, prompting Chief of Staff Peyton March to request that Pershing adjust the AEF program to make compensations for the varying levels of training in the new divisions, another case where the AEF or the War Department had to readjust their policies due to circumstances in the other organization.⁵⁸

A second obstacle to Pershing's training program was the AEF school system. Initially, Pershing intended American regimental, brigade, and division staff officers to receive supplemental instruction on staff procedures by observing the Allies. Though a good idea, the plan soon proved itself too ambitious. It required officers busy training on staff matters to attend the various 13 army-level schools established in France. Charged with training officer specialists from each division and corps, the schools also sought to turn out future instructors for the corps-level schools. As each corps became activated, it created nine additional schools to train replacements and unit commanders. Add to this a level of divisional schools training a core number of experts expected to provide further instruction to their division, and the entire system soon became overloaded.⁵⁹ Officers could hardly train with their troops, serve on Allied staffs, and attend courses at the numerous AEF schools simultaneously. To meet all of these requirements independently would take several months, further delaying AEF training. Pershing and the AEF Training Section struggled to find a workable solution, but time constraints continued to disrupt the program throughout the war.

A final complication in the AEF training program was the reliance upon the Allies for instruction that resulted in conflicting points of emphasis. As Laurence Stallings writes, “Neither the British nor the French wanted to revive an art lost when the Old Contemptibles perished; they thought exercises in minor tactics, where a rifleman did not feel isolated if he had no convenient trench to jump into, were a waste of precious time.”⁶⁰ If he could secure enough trained instructors, Pershing would not have to worry about what the Allies thought about American training procedures. But the miniscule number of trained officers and NCO’s in the AEF demanded reliance upon Allied instructors, at least in the beginning.⁶¹

As the situation progressed, Pershing and his staff grew increasingly dissatisfied with Allied training methods, particularly the French. In the summer of 1918, Fiske complained that the French were secretly seeking to undermine American training policy in order to “impregnate the American units with French methods and doctrine.” That the French instructors did not intend to follow AEF guidelines was well known, but only recently had a French officer admitted as much to Fiske. Neither the British nor the French had faith in the Americans to train their own men and Fiske believed the sooner they were taken out of the AEF training program the better. He summed it up succinctly: “An American army cannot be made by Frenchmen or Englishmen.”⁶²

Of course, the Allies considered American bull-headedness in refusing to rely upon their vast experience irritating as well. Had the Europeans not been fighting the war for three years now? Harbord noticed “considerable sensitiveness among the French about our not adopting *in toto* their methods of training to the exclusion of and even complete abandonment of our own.”⁶³ After inspecting the American 1st Division,

Georges M. Clemenceau, the next French premier, thought the division ready for immediate service in the line. When informed that the division needed more training, Clemenceau insisted that the Americans were missing the point. No soldier was ever *ready* for combat. What was important was that the French desperately needed some form of relief. The Americans had been in Europe going on six months now, and the French needed to see the doughboys at the front, not marching in the streets. With dramatic reverses on the Italian Front and the collapse of the Eastern Front the Allies wanted men, not excuses from the AEF. If the Americans could not deliver on their own, then the French and British were more than willing to take over control of the American soldiers until the AEF could catch up.⁶⁴

Amalgamation and the Problems of Coalition Warfare

When the United States entered the war, the French and British quickly began salivating over their new ally's vast manpower reserves. The Europeans understood that the American military had serious deficiencies that would take time to correct, and in the meantime, the French and British wanted to utilize American soldiers within their own ranks through amalgamation. The British military attaché put it clearly to Chief of Staff Scott, "If you ask me how your force could most quickly make itself felt in Europe, I would say by sending 500,000 untrained men at once to our depots in England to be trained there, and drafted into our armies in France."⁶⁵ The French Mission echoed the call for troops to be infused into their weakening divisions, if only for training purposes. Of course once in French and British units, it would take a considerable effort to

withdraw the doughboys, especially if they were engaged in combat. General Tasker Bliss pointed out to Secretary Baker: “When the war is over it may be a literal fact that the American flag may not have appeared anywhere on the line because our organizations will simply be parts of battalions and regiments of the Entente Allies. We might have a million men there and yet no American army and no American commander.”⁶⁶ The Americans decided early on that they would not allow the Allies to turn the United States into a “recruiting agency” for their own forces.⁶⁷

But while Baker and Pershing quickly rejected the idea of amalgamation, the Allies did not. As delays mounted in the arrival of American troops in the fall of 1917, both the French and the British began to look to amalgamation as a temporary solution until the AEF could adequately establish itself. The argument had merit. The Allies had the training facilities, and the divisional, corps, and army staff operations already in place to absorb American recruits. The AEF needed time to build its administrative and logistical operations, and to train its soldiers for Pershing’s goal of open warfare. With the collapse of Russia and the prospect of German divisions being transferred to the Western Front for a spring offensive, the idea of waiting for the Americans to build an independent force seemed a recipe for disaster to the Allies.⁶⁸

Additional arguments supported amalgamation, and the Allies made them. Raw American recruits were unsuited for service in the lines against a veteran German army. Such a circumstance would undoubtedly result in American mistakes costing lives needlessly. Better to have the Americans surrounded by veteran Allies, providing valuable experience before being called upon to carry the load themselves. Amalgamation could also solve the tonnage problem, as the United States would not need

to send over support troops, nor the multitude of materials needed to sustain an independent army. Tonnage was at a premium, and it made sense to the Allies to use it transporting America's most valuable commodity: combat soldiers. It was a valid point, especially given the above mentioned difficulties incurred by the AEF and War Department in their shipping program.⁶⁹

The Allies did not discount the arguments supporting the need to preserve the national identity of the American soldiers, but in their view circumstances warranted putting aside such concerns for fear that they would ultimately cost the Allies the war. Even Pershing's staunchest supporter, Harbord, conceded that the Allies had a point. "I have no doubt," he said "that as a Frenchman or a Briton my views on amalgamation would have been the same as theirs. From their standpoint their logic could have no answer."⁷⁰ Given the validity of the arguments, Pershing's opposition represented a considerable risk. Harbord admitted, "[Pershing] took the chance of being cursed to the latest generation if for want of his cooperation the War was lost. For the sake of history, and as the responsible man on the ground, he had to justify his refusal by something more than a mere gesture towards written orders."⁷¹

Harbord knew that Pershing's orders to maintain American identity and create an independent force for service in Europe constituted "the wall against which General Pershing braced his back for the long months of struggle to keep his men under their own flag."⁷² But it was not the only ammunition Pershing used to fight off amalgamation. Serious questions of national pride warranted consideration. How motivated would the soldiers be fighting for foreign leaders? What would amalgamation say about the capability of American officers? Additional arguments against amalgamation relied on

cultural factors. Irish-Americans were already distressed at the British treatment of Ireland during the war, and many doubted that they would serve under the British willingly. It was even more problematic to have Americans serve in French ranks given the language barrier. Amalgamation also posed a diplomatic threat to the United States at the peace table. Should the war end before the American flag appeared on the battlefield, the United States could be marginalized at the peace talks, a scenario President Wilson desperately wanted to avoid in this war for democracy. Finally, as the casualties mounted, it was uncertain how long the American people would support the war if it appeared that foreign leaders were using Americans as cannon fodder.⁷³

For all these reasons, Pershing continued to oppose amalgamation. It was not an easy fight, as the Allies presented an uncommonly unified front. As intelligence reports increasingly pointed to a major German offensive in the spring, General Pétain called for American troops to train with French divisions. His reasoning was to speed up the AEF's training so they could be called upon to block the coming offensive. But a French officer intimated to Harbord that "what [Pétain] really wished to do was to reinforce his depleted divisions with American regiments. The loss of [American] national identity in the war . . . meant nothing to him."⁷⁴ Hence the Allies used a variety of tactics to try and persuade, cajole, or simply get around Pershing in the struggle over amalgamation. Given the degree to which President Wilson and the War Department relied upon Pershing's judgement, it was clear to the Allies that they would have to either change Pershing's mind, or persuade the American leadership that he was wrong and change it for him. Consequently, as the Allies grew increasingly persistent, Pershing found himself fighting amalgamation both in Europe, and in a rear-guard action in the United States.

Like the French, the British used the issue of training as a way to push through amalgamation. Pershing contended that while the American recruits must be trained according to American doctrine, he would be willing to commit them to service with the Allies should an emergency arise. In December, the British took this small opening to suggest that Pershing turn over several battalions for training with the British army, at least until the present situation calmed down. Not wanting to provoke further competition between the French and the British over the prospects of using American troops, Pershing flatly refused.⁷⁵ Undaunted, the British came back with a significant modification. They offered to supply the tonnage necessary to bring the Americans over, provided they train with the British and serve in British units until the forthcoming crisis had passed. It was quite the carrot from a nation claiming to be on the brink of starvation due to the German submarines. Pershing replied with typical abruptness. If the British had tonnage available, why were they not turning it over for the shipment of entire divisions instead of just battalions? To Pershing, the British “were playing for advantage to themselves in the offering to transport our troops. . . . Their purpose was to build up their own units instead of aiding the cause in general by augmenting the number of complete divisions on the Western Front.”⁷⁶ It was selfishness personified, and Pershing would not compromise the integrity of his command to assuage the Europeans.

Compounding Pershing’s troubles with the British, signs emerged that he was beginning to lose the battle for amalgamation on the home front. On 18 December, Secretary Baker intimated that feelings in Washington were softening regarding Allied requests for American troops. Baker explained that, “Both English and French are pressing upon the President their desires to have your forces amalgamated with theirs by

regiments and companies.” Though not a great surprise to Pershing, the Secretary then dropped a bombshell. “We do not desire loss of identity of our forces but regard that as secondary to the meeting of any critical situation by the most helpful use possible of the troops at your command.” Pershing was dumbstruck. Though Baker’s message assured that the AEF commander still had “full authority to use the forces at your command as you deem wise,” he could sense his control over the AEF ebbing away.⁷⁷

Pershing’s fears were not unfounded. Yes Baker and President Wilson were committed to building up an independent American army in France, but they would not risk the collapse of the British and French armies in the meantime. Should the situation demand, they thought it only reasonable to use American soldiers in any way necessary to prevent a German victory. Pershing, however, could not disagree more. In his mind, the autonomy of the AEF was essential to overall victory, and any plan that threatened his command authority was tantamount to disaster. Though battered, he believed the French and British armies could hold off the Germans long enough for an American army to appear on the battlefield, and he was determined to hold his ground.

Not long after receiving the Baker cable, Pershing sat down with General Pétain to discuss the matter. Pétain called for the American 1st Division to go into the line immediately, and pushed for the rapid amalgamation of remaining American regiments into French divisions. Again Pershing took a defensive position, claiming that the 1st Division needed more time, and reiterated his objections to the entire idea of amalgamation. Pétain pointed out that under Pershing’s schedule, the 1st Division would receive eight months of training before going into the line. Amalgamation into French divisions, Pétain claimed, could cut that figure in half for future regiments. Given the

present threat and the need for haste, surely Pershing could see the logic behind Pétain's proposal. But Pershing remained unconvinced, thinking the plan simply meant "the building up of French divisions by American regiments and carried with it the probability that we should not be able to get them back" without crippling the French. The two men parted without any resolution, both knowing the issue was far from settled.⁷⁸

Pershing tried to reinforce his position by sending a cable to the War Department, spelling out his arguments against amalgamation. He stated explicitly:

Do not think emergency now exists that would warrant our putting companies or battalions into British or French divisions, and would not do so except in grave crisis. Main objections are first, troops would lose their national identity; second, they probably could not be relieved for service with us without disrupting the Allied divisions to which assigned, especially if engaged in active service; third, the methods of training and instruction in both Allied armies are very different from our own which would produce some confusion at the start and also when troops return for service with us. Attention should be called to prejudices existing between French and British Governments and armies, and the desire of each to have American units assigned to them to the exclusion of similar assignment to the other. Also each army regards its own methods as best and they do not hesitate to criticise [sic] each other accordingly. We have selected what we consider best in each and added it to our own basic system of instruction.⁷⁹

Despite Pershing's best hopes, however, the amalgamation issue persisted. Soon after his meeting with Pershing, Pétain sat down with French Premier Georges Clemenceau to formulate a policy for dealing with the Americans. Harbord records in his diary that, "with no warrant of military knowledge to justify him taking sides, [Clemenceau] sent a cablegram to Ambassador Jusserand in Washington to the effect that Pershing and Pétain could not get along." The cablegram also accused Pershing of being less than forthright in his description of the meeting to Clemenceau, which the Frenchman took great offense to. The War Department responded by cabling Pershing that the French Premier "stated that General Pershing had reported himself and General Pétain in substantial agreement after conference on this subject [amalgamation]; but General Pétain conveyed to M. Clemenceau an opposite opinion."⁸⁰ Upon reading the cable, Pershing became furious, both at the questioning of his honor and that the French were going behind his back to Wilson and the War Department. He wrote to the War Department immediately, insisting that the "French have not been entirely frank, as unofficial information indicates they really want to incorporate our regiments into their divisions for such service in the trenches as they desire." He assured Washington that he would have a "frank discussion" with Clemenceau on the entire matter and try to arrive at a "satisfactory agreement consistent with maintenance of our own national military identity."⁸¹

Pershing also directed his anger at the Clemenceau. He wrote the old Tiger a pointed letter, and enclosed copies of the various cables received from the War Department regarding Clemenceau's action. In polite but stern language, Pershing told

the Frenchman, “These questions must all be settled here, eventually, on their merits, through friendly conference between General Pétain and myself, and cables of this sort are very likely, I fear, to convey the impression in Washington of serious disagreements between us when such is not the case.”⁸² Not one to shy away from a fight, Clemenceau wrote Pershing the next day defending his actions. He informed the General that he wrote to his own ambassador in order to clarify their position regarding seemingly contradictory information, so that the ambassador could then accurately represent Clemenceau’s wishes to President Wilson and Secretary Baker. While assuring Pershing that he did not direct his statement to the American government, he defended his right to do so. Though to Pershing it may have seemed Clemenceau was splitting hairs, to the old politician it was an important distinction. Clemenceau concluded his letter, “I shall exercise all the patience of which I am capable in awaiting the good news that the American commander and the French commander have finally agreed on a question which may be vital to the outcome of the war.”⁸³

Whatever else Pershing may have thought, he could not deny that the aged French Premier still had some fight left in him. The letters indicate deep divisions over the amalgamation issue and the increasingly strained nature of the relationship between the AEF commander and the French government. While Clemenceau was clearly meddling, he believed his nation’s survival was at stake and Pershing’s inflexibility stood in the way of a possible source of relief. Pershing, however, cannot get off so lightly. He was naïve to think the amalgamation issue a purely military matter, with no political ramifications. Determined to stay out of politics, Pershing failed to grasp that his position as head of the AEF had clear political implications whether he acknowledged them or not. His saving

grace was the protection Secretary Baker continued to give him from more-skilled politicians.⁸⁴

Indeed, just when it seemed Wilson and Baker were reconsidering their position in favor of aiding the Allies, Baker indicated a growing concern that the French were being duplicitous in their dealings with the Americans. Though troubled by the reported rift between Pershing and Pétain, Baker told Wilson, “The disinterested ground urged by the French Ambassador, to the effect that it was for our good and was merely an accommodation on the part of the French, seems hardly to cover the whole case.”⁸⁵

Baker suggested that, without more information, they defer to Pershing on the matter and rely on his judgement, to which Wilson agreed.

With the decision to back their military commander, Baker and Wilson ensured that future discussions on amalgamation would have to go through Pershing. Though the issue was far from settled, Pershing could rest easy regarding support from Washington. Future discussions, and there were certain to be some, would be resolved according to his terms or not at all. It was a welcome respite, for there were other matters facing the AEF that winter that demanded attention.

Notes

¹ James G. Harbord, *The American Army in France 1917-1919* (Boston: Brown, Little and Company, 1936), 136.

² The most important liaison for the AEF was with the French, for several reasons. First, the AEF was operating in France, and needed extensive coordination for their logistical bases, training centers, and supply networks. Second, the proposed American sector abutted the French Army, making coordination of action essential lest a hole develop in the line. Finally, the language barrier made the possibility of miscommunication ever-present, and required a skilled group of liaison officers to ensure that the two associates clearly understood each other. Pétain's representative at Chaumont was Brigadier General Camille M. Ragueneau, while Pershing's man at French GHQ was Colonel Paul H. Clark. Donald Smythe, *Pershing: General of the Armies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 46.

³ Confidential Cable 80-S, 2 August 1917, Box 11, James G. Harbord Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.

⁴ Confidential Cable 172-S, 21 September 1917; Confidential Cable 206-S, 8 October 1917, *Ibid.*

⁵ Pershing to Harbord, Memorandum, 21 September 1917, *Ibid.*

⁶ Pershing to Harbord, Memorandum, 9 October 1917, *Ibid.*

⁷ Pershing to Harbord, "Confidential" Memorandum, 17 October 1917, *Ibid.*

⁸ Harbord's suggestions are typed at the bottom of Pershing to Harbord, Memorandum, 18 October 1917, *Ibid.*

⁹ Pershing to Harbord, "Confidential" Memorandum, 17 October 1917, *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Harbord, *American Army*, 162; For a detailed plan of the port facility see William J. Wilgus, *Transporting the A.E.F. in Western Europe 1917-1919* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), 111.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 163-64; Pershing, *My Experiences*, 207-12; James G. Harbord, *Leaves From a War Diary* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1925), 201.

¹² Allan R. Millett, *The General: Robert L Bullard and Officership in the United States Army 1881-1925* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975), 310; Harbord, *War Diary*, 201.

¹³ The officer in charge of selecting the ground, Captain George C. Marshall, Jr., was so overworked that he only managed to select the ground the night before, and did not notice that the ground was torn up from previous drilling, resulting in ankle-deep mud that made precision nigh impossible. Several of the units had had to march several miles to reach the field in time, and arrived looking anything but ready for review. Added to these logistical troubles was the fact that over two-thirds of the division had only received a month's drill instruction up to that point, having focussed on combat training upon arriving in France, and could not be expected to perform perfectly under the best conditions, which these certainly were not. Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Education of a General* (New York: The Viking Press, 1963), 151-52.

¹⁴ Pershing, *My Experiences*, 1:163-64.

¹⁵ In his confrontation with Pershing, Marshall convinced himself that he was in dire trouble, but took the opportunity to drive his point home. "I thought I had gotten in it up to my neck," he said in a interview in 1957, so "I might as well not try to float but to splash a little bit. I've forgotten all I said, but I had a rather inspired moment." Quoted in Larry I. Bland, ed., *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall: "The Soldierly Spirit" December 1880-June 1939* Volume 1 (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981),

121-22; The demonstration focused on a new method of attack developed by Major Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., son of the former president. Pogue, *George C. Marshall*, 152-54.

¹⁶ Pershing to Baker, 4 October 1917, Box 19, John J. Pershing Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.

¹⁷ Pershing to Sibert, 13 December 1917, Box 11, Harbord Papers, LC.

¹⁸ Pogue, *George C. Marshall*, 159.

¹⁹ Diary entry, 1 December - 31 December 1917, Hugh A. Drum Diary, Box 9, Hugh A. Drum Papers, MHI.

²⁰ Robert L. Bullard, *Personalities and Reminiscences of the War* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1925), 115.

²¹ Harbord, *War Diary*, 202-03.

²² Harbord to McAuley Palmer, [18 July 1917], chronological file, John McAuley Palmer Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.

²³ I.B. Holley, Jr., *General John M. Palmer, Citizens Soldiers, and the Army of a Democracy* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 306-7.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 308-09.

²⁵ Harbord to McAuley Palmer, 7 September 1917, chronological file, M. Palmer Papers, LC.

²⁶ Harbord to McAuley Palmer, 20 September 1917, *Ibid.*

²⁷ Holley, *General John M. Palmer*, 326-27.

²⁸ Fox Conner quoted in *Ibid.*, 334.

²⁹ McAuley Palmer to Harbord, 22 November 1917, Box 10, James G. Harbord Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.

³⁰ Priority Schedule, 7 October 1917, *United States Army in the World War, 1917 – 1919* 17 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1948), 2:53. [Hereafter cited as *USAWW*.]

³¹ The phase buildup proceeded as follows: Phase 1 (275,200), Phase 2 (267,490), Phase 3 (246,248), Phase 4 (231,743), Phase 5 (210,000), and Phase 6 (16,618). The final total came to 1,247,399, broken down between 883,442 in the five corps, 63,294 Army troops, and 300,663 Service of the Rear troops. See *USAWW*, 2:54.

³² Harbord, *American Army in France 1917-1919*, 139.

³³ John J. Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War* 2 vols. (New York: F.A. Stokes, 1931), 1:146, 183.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 183; Harbord, *American Army*, 139.

³⁵ Harbord, *War Diary*, 148.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 148-49; Diary entry, 15-23 October 1917, Hugh Drum Diary, Box 9, Hugh A. Drum Papers, MHI; Smythe, *Pershing*, 49-52.

³⁷ Pershing, *My Experiences*, 1:185.

³⁸ Harbord, *War Diary*, 149.

³⁹ Phyllis A. Zimmerman, *The Neck of the Bottle: George W. Goethals and the Reorganization of the U.S. Army Supply System, 1917 – 1918* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1992), 24-27; Russell F. Weigley, “The Elihu Root Reforms and the Progressive Era,” in William Geffen, Ed., *Command and Commanders in Modern Warfare: Proceedings of the Second Military History Symposium, U.S. Air Force Academy, 2-3 May 1968* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1968), 11-30.

⁴⁰ Frederick Palmer, *Newton D. Baker: America at War* 2 vols. (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1931), 2:17.

⁴¹ Smythe, *Pershing*, 52; For rousing defense of the War Department regarding supplies, see Peyton C. March, *A Nation at War* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Doran, 1932).

⁴² Newton Baker to Peyton March, 1 March 1931, Box 22, Peyton C. March Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.

⁴³ Baker’s father, a veteran of the Civil War, was also instrumental in instilling in his son a belief that civilians and politicians should keep out of the way of the field commanders in wartime. Smythe, *Pershing*, 6.

⁴⁴ Johnson Hagood, *The Services of Supply: A Memoir of the Great War* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1927), 22-27.

⁴⁵ For a complete outlay of the American troop buildup see Leonard P. Ayers, *The War With Germany: A Statistical Summary* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1919), 15.

⁴⁶ Pershing, *My Experiences*, 1:150-52; Frank E. Vandiver, *Black Jack: The Life and Times of John J. Pershing* 2 vols. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1977), 2:772; Bullard, *Personalities and Reminiscences*, 61.

⁴⁷ Pershing, *My Experiences*, 1:12.

⁴⁸ Cable P-952-S, 20 October 1917, USAWW, 14:306.

⁴⁹ Harbord, *American Army*, 185, 150.

⁵⁰ The Germans carried such implements as sharpened shovels, flame-throwers, bayonets with serrated edges, shotguns, and clubs with barbed-wire wrapped around one end.

⁵¹ Smythe, *Pershing*, 57; Pershing, *My Experiences*, 1:206-07.

⁵² For an analysis of American training methods and the problems of “open” warfare, see James W. Rainey, “Ambivalent Warfare: The Tactical Doctrine of the AEF in World War I” *Parameters* 13 (September 1983): 34-56, and “The Questionable Training of the AEF in World War I” *Parameters* 23 (Winter 1992-93): 89-103.

⁵³ Reprinted in John J. Pershing, *Final Report of John J. Pershing: Commander-in-Chief American Expeditionary Forces* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1920), 14.

⁵⁴ Pershing Cable 228-S, 19 October 1917; War Department Cable 352-R, 2 November 1917; all in USAWW, 14:316-17.

- ⁵⁵ Pershing, *Final Report*, 15.
- ⁵⁶ Pershing Cable 228-S, 19 October 1917; *USAWW*, 14:316; James W. Rainey, "The Questionable Training of the AEF in World War I" *Parameters* 22 (Winter, 1992-93): 89-103.
- ⁵⁷ Pershing Cable 990-S, 24 April 1918, *USAWW*, 14:322.
- ⁵⁸ War Department Cable 1259-R, 7 May 1918; War Department Cable 1543-R, 16 June 1918; in *USAWW*, 14:322-23.
- ⁵⁹ For a list of the Army and Corps schools see "School Project for American Expeditionary Forces," 30 August 1917, *USAWW*, 14:293-96.
- ⁶⁰ Laurence Stallings, *The Doughboys: The Story of the AEF, 1917-1918* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 27.
- ⁶¹ Edward M. Coffman, *The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 134-36.
- ⁶² "Memorandum for the Chief of Staff, Subject: Training," 4 July 1918, *USAWW*, 14:303-04.
- ⁶³ Harbord, *War Diary*, 206.
- ⁶⁴ Pershing, *My Experiences*, 157-58.
- ⁶⁵ Major General G.T.M. Bridges quoted in Smythe, *Pershing*, 8; Harbord believed Bridges deplored the idea of an American army in France, thinking it would create another weakening joint in the line. James G. Harbord, *The Preservation of American Identity in the World War*, 11 April 1932, Army War College Curricular Archives, MHI.
- ⁶⁶ Frederick Palmer, *Bliss Peacemaker: The Life and Letters of General Tasker Howard Bliss* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1934), 153-54
- ⁶⁷ Pershing claimed in his memoirs that the War Department accepted the Allied plan for amalgamation early on, despite clear evidence to the contrary from Bliss and Baker. Pershing, *My Experiences*, 1:33.
- ⁶⁸ Harbord, *War Diary*, 122-23; Harbord, *American Army*, 190
- ⁶⁹ Smythe, *Pershing*, 69; Thomas C. Lonergan, *It Might Have Been Lost: A Chronicle from Alien Sources of the Struggle to Preserve the National Identity of the A.E.F.* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1929), 9-10.
- ⁷⁰ Harbord, *American Army*, 190.
- ⁷¹ Harbord, *Preservation*, 4-5.
- ⁷² *Ibid.*, 4.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, 8; Smythe, *Pershing*, 70; Coffman, *The War to End All Wars*, 10.
- ⁷⁴ Harbord, *War Diary*, 215.
- ⁷⁵ David Lloyd George to Sir William Robertson, 2 December 1917; Fox Conner to Harbord: Memorandum, 5 December 1917, *USAWW*, 3:4,7.

⁷⁶ Pershing, *My Experiences*, 288-89.

⁷⁷ Confidential Cable 588-R, 18 December 1917, reprinted in *Ibid.*, 1:271-72.

⁷⁸ Les Armees Francaises, Tome IV, 1st Vol., Annexes, 1st Vol.: Report, 23 December 1917, *USAWW*, 2:105-06; Pershing, *My Experiences*, 272-73.

⁷⁹ Confidential Cable 433-S, 1 January 1918, *USAWW*, 2:132.

⁸⁰ Harbord, *War Diary*, 215; War Department Cable 588-R, 3 January 1918, reprinted in Pershing, *My Experiences*, 1:273-74; Pershing to Clemenceau, 5 January 1918, *USAWW*, 2:137.

⁸¹ Cable 467-S, 8 January 1918, *USAWW*, 2:148; Pershing, *My Experiences*, 1:274.

⁸² Pershing to Clemenceau, 5 January 1918, *USAWW*, 2:137.

⁸³ Clemenceau to Pershing [Contemporary Translation], 6 January 1918, *USAWW*, 2:140.

⁸⁴ Robert B. Bruce, *A Fraternity at Arms: America and France in the Great War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 152-154.

⁸⁵ Baker to Wilson, 3 January 1918, quoted in *ibid.*, 153.

CHAPTER VI

REORGANIZATION (JANUARY - MARCH 1918)

As the calendar rolled over to 1918, the AEF entered into the most precarious period in its short history. The Bolshevik Revolution the previous November saw the Eastern Front collapse as Russia exited the war. The Allies could only watch and wait as the Germans began shifting divisions to the West in preparation for a major offensive sometime in the spring. With the French and British reaching the end of their manpower limits, the pressure to amalgamate American soldiers into the Allied armies grew to new heights. The AEF commander-in-chief, General John J. Pershing, did what he could to maintain the independent identity of his forces in France, but the AEF's agonizingly slow buildup made it increasingly difficult to assuage the Allies. Though troop shipments promised to pick up over the next few months as draftees completed their training in the United States, it became readily apparent that the AEF's organizational and logistical structure was not ready to handle the increased load. When combined with the persistent delays in the War Department, it appeared that even after ten months in the war, the United States remained a long way from making a significant contribution on the Western Front.

With these challenges facing American policymakers, the first few months of 1918 became a period of examination and reorganization within both the American Expeditionary Forces and the War Department. In France, the AEF General Staff and the Line of Communications underwent serious overhauls to improve efficiency before the soldiers began arriving in larger numbers. Changes in the War Department centered on

the selection of a new chief of staff, and his consolidation of power in the Army General Staff. When the Germans finally launched their anticipated offensive in late March, both the AEF and the War Department had made significant administrative improvements, but an unforeseen side effect of these efforts was a growing rift between the two organizations.

Mounting Problems

The new year presented Brigadier General James Harbord with an opportunity to look over the staff organization created the previous July. As it was based loosely upon the doctrines put forth in the *Field Service Regulations*, Harbord found the AEF staff and supply system an excellent first effort given the inexperience of everyone involved. But Harbord noted a small problem: “As long as we had no troops it worked well.”¹ With the increased duties that accompanied the arrival of the AEF’s soldiers, the staff found itself stretched too thin, as organizations that looked good on paper proved unworkable in practice. Harbord spent the first month of 1918 studying the staff operation with an eye on making improvements before the troops began arriving in large numbers.

He soon found a fundamental problem in the initial organization’s utilization of Pershing. With staff officers creating their own services virtually from scratch, each man needed considerable access to Pershing to insure that their particular organization fell in line with his grand design for the AEF. Consequently, a number of officers felt entitled to take their problems directly to the commander-in-chief, or at the very least the chief of staff. Included amongst this group were the Adjutant General, the Inspector General, the

Chief Ordnance Officer, the Judge Advocate General, the Chief Quartermaster, and the Chief Signal Officer. Added to this list were new titular offices, such as the General Purchasing Agent, the Director General of Transportation, the Chief of Aviation, the Commanding General of the Line of Communications, and the five heads of the General Staff sections to name a few.² For each officer to receive just thirty minutes a day would consume half of Pershing and Harbord's daily schedule, not counting the time in and out of the office. Neither man could afford to dedicate that much time to the staff at GHQ, which meant the system needed streamlining.³

Harbord also worried that under the current organization, Pershing was too often dealing with details and minutia instead of focussing on building up the AEF. Not only did Harbord seek to lessen the amount of administrative chatter being pushed on the AEF commander, but he also tried to manage his own duties more effectively. This became more difficult when Pershing left GHQ AEF. On those occasions, Harbord assumed Pershing's routine administrative duties, putting off his own work in the process. He believed much of the work could be handled by a subordinate, and advocated creating an assistant or deputy chief of staff to do just that. Such an officer would allow Harbord to visit the troops more frequently, supervise training to a greater extent, form better relationships with higher level officers in the AEF, keep up with the progress of the schools, and do all the other things that required his attention as chief of staff. It would also provide better command continuity at GHQ. Under the current system, whenever Pershing and Harbord were both away from Chaumont one of the assistant chief's of staff filled in as chief of staff. None had the necessary knowledge or authority to make any but the most basic decisions, which caused the entire system to slow down. Harbord

wanted someone who could step in and keep things moving if he and Pershing were away, and suggested his old friend, Lieutenant Colonel Frank R. McCoy, the current Secretary of the General Staff for the job.⁴

While Pershing mulled over Harbord's suggestions, matters in the Line of Communications (LOC) began to reach critical levels. In a letter to the War Department in early January, Pershing warned of serious problems affecting the LOC base ports. The supply departments in Washington had failed to provide the material needed to build up the port facilities to handle the increased shipments from the United States. These delays put port construction several months behind schedule, resulting in docks not being ready to process the amount of tonnage coming into the ports. An acute shortage of rolling stock for the railroads also caused supplies to pile up in warehouses or on the docks (a common problem amongst the Allies, as rolling stock was in limited supply throughout France and Italy). The AEF requested engines and rail cars from the United States, but none were available at present. Adding to the congestion at the ports was the AEF's inability to direct incoming shipments to specific ports. Officials at home determined the final destinations for outgoing ships without any consideration for efficiency in the Line of Communications or port congestion levels. At one point there were some sixteen transports berthed at St. Nazaire, while the ports of Brest and Bordeaux had only three each.⁵

These were not the only problems causing delays in the LOC. Secrecy restrictions resulted in supplies being shipped without a clearly indicated final destination, forcing officials at the ports to search through orders to ascertain where to send the material. In one instance, fifty carloads of flour were sent seventy-five miles out

of the way before their ultimate destination could be determined. Once the error was discovered, however, a tug-of-war developed between the local French authorities and the Americans over the flour. After a month of arguing, during which the French refused to back-track any freight to free up the disputed train, the Americans consented and turned it over on the stipulation that the French replace it.⁶ Further gumming up the works were repetitious and overlapping supply requests from various AEF units. When the initial divisions arrived in France, they attempted to bring with them six months worth of supplies. The LOC did not possess the necessary storage and distribution network to handle the supplies at the time, so they were strewn about France, distributed anywhere there was room. Later, when the divisions looked for their supplies they were nowhere to be found. The divisional quartermaster then put in a request to the War Department for supplies that were already in France, only no one knew where. These same quartermasters would send multiple requests to the United States for the same items, usually from various stops along the line as a division moved to its billeting area. The authorities at home tried to fill each request as quickly as possible, resulting in surplus shipments clogging the supply lines. These shipments ran months behind schedule, with the end result being that by the time the supplies finally arrived, they were either no longer needed or ill-suited to satisfy the unit's updated requirements.⁷

Everyone at GHQ AEF was aware of the troubling situation in the Line of Communications, most of all Harbord. In November, he received a long letter from Colonel Johnson Hagood, chief of the Coordinating section of what was to be the General Staff, 1st Army, and commander of the Advance Section, LOC. Hagood possessed a gift for organization, and he was not afraid to offer his opinions on any given situation. In his

letter, Hagood spelled out what he perceived to be the requirements of the Advance Section, addressing the difficulties facing the entire Line of Communications, and offering up specific remedies. He began with a grand summation of the problems in the LOC:

1. The line of communications [L. of C.] is the most important problem now confronting the American army. Upon its successful operation, more than upon the successful operations of all other agencies combined, depends the outcome of the war. Both sides realize this. The Germans are trying to defeat the Allies by their submarine campaign against Great Britain and the Allies are trying to defeat the Germans by starving them out. It is common knowledge that the greatest weapon Germany has is her wonderful organization of supplies and transportation.
2. *Our own incompetence:* If the United States does not actually fail, its efficiency is certainly going to be tremendously decreased by the sheer incompetence of its line of communications, beginning in the U.S. and ending at the French front. This incompetence not only applies to the machine as a whole but, we may as well admit, applies to the individual officers and employees, none of whom has had experience in solving such a problem. In this, of course, I include myself. . . .

4. Not only has the L. of C. failed, so far, to function properly in the supply of our own men but it has so clogged the French railway yards, storehouses and quays in this section as to cause an official complaint to be made to the Commander-in-Chief, with the unofficial statement to me that they were being embarrassed in their movement of troops to the Italian front.

5. *How much longer?* The question naturally arises as to how much longer these conditions are going to last and as to whether or not, with troops arriving at the rate of 50,000 a month, we shall be in a better position to handle the problem a year from now that we are to-day.⁸

Of the problems Hagood spelled out, the most serious was a failure by GHQ to put enough emphasis on the LOC, favoring instead the more traditional line and staff organizations. The LOC needed total control over AEF supply, but bureaucratic obstinacy proved difficult to overcome. Hagood also lamented the AEF's failure to develop adequate plans for the creation of a suitable Advance Section, with clearly defined responsibilities, and a dangerous lack of facilities. The men in the Advance Section were working long hours, sometimes as many as twelve to sixteen hour days, with little opportunity to plan for the future. Without help from above, the situation would only get worse over the coming months.

To remedy the situation, Hagood offered several suggestions. He wanted more emphasis put on service in the Line of Communications by GHQ. Though unglamorous, an efficient logistical branch was essential to ultimate victory, and the men needed to

know that they were appreciated. The LOC also needed additional personnel. The AEF could not bring combat troops to France without the requisite support network already in place. The longer it took to secure additional auxiliary troops the longer it would be before the LOC worked properly. Better to delay operations now than to wait for the situation to deteriorate further, causing additional delays. Lastly, GHQ needed to establish a clear line of authority throughout the LOC. As in any military operation, it is essential that everyone understand who sits in authority in any given situation. The General Staff had created the Line of Communications without any consideration for how its varied and overlapping sections would interact over time. Consequently, unit quartermasters quarreled with transportation officers, who in turn fought with regulating agents, and so on and so forth. Without correction, the problem would only get worse as more and more troops arrived in France.⁹

All in all, Hagood's observations effectively described the confusion gripping the AEF's supply system. Though it fell on Pershing and his officers to provide direction, there was only so much they could do. The problems facing GHQ and the LOC were larger than anything they had previously experienced, and it showed. Established Army policies did not cover the challenges presented by the World War, so new solutions had to be formulated, which took time. In an effort to speed up the process in early December, Pershing put together a conference at Chaumont of several division quartermasters and Colonel W. D. Conner, head of the Coordination Section, General Staff. Included in the group was Johnson Hagood, whose knowledge of supply matters made him a logical contributor. After a prolonged discussion, Harbord took their suggestions and issued a new general order concerning supply.¹⁰

Issued as General Orders No. 73 (12 December 1917), the order stated that “the function of the L. of C. is to relieve the combatant field forces from every consideration except defeating the enemy.” It went on to instruct that “all agencies established for that purpose belong to the L. of C. unless otherwise specially assigned.”¹¹ This made the LOC an enormous organization, reaching from the ports to the trenches across multiple zones of authority. In an attempt to clear up responsibility in the LOC, the order divided AEF supply into three phases: procurement, care and storage, and transportation. Each one of these fell under a separate authority. Procurement was the purview of the Chiefs of Supply Departments, AEF, as well as the General Purchasing Agent, while the Director General of Transportation (DGT) handled all transportation matters. Although ostensibly responsible for the entire LOC, the Commanding General, Line of Communications (CGLOC) had command authority over only the care and storage of supplies. The Coordinating Section of the General Staff supervised the entire system, but the General Order did not clearly articulate the relationship between officers at GHQ and those commanding elements of the LOC, who theoretically reported directly to Pershing.¹²

Despite the provisions outlined in G.O. 73, the system still had serious problems. The most notable was what happened when supplies reached the Regulating Stations. All goods proceeding to the front had to go through a Regulating Station, which separated shipments and constructed supply trains for individual divisions. Commanding the Regulating Station was the Regulating Officer, who oversaw all supply movements in the Advance Section. Operating under the Coordination Section, General Staff, the Regulating Officer’s authority superceded that of both the CGLOC and the DGT. Thus,

the DGT lost control over transportation and the CGLOC lost overall control over supplies once they reached the Regulating Stations. This caused a considerable degree of frustration within the LOC, as it still bore any blame for supply problems despite not controlling their movements past a certain point, and both the CGLOC and DGT complained incessantly about being stripped of their authority. At the time, however, GHQ thought the new system a step in the right direction.¹³

The Hagood Board

As discussed in the previous chapter, following rapidly on the heels of General Order No. 73, Pershing decided to change the officer in charge of the Line of Communications. He brought in Major General Francis Kernan as the new Commanding General Line of Communication, who in turn selected Hagood to be his new chief of staff. Whether Hagood's letter factored into the decision is unclear, but he certainly made himself known as a man in touch with the specific problems and challenges facing the AEF's supply system. Kernan was impressed with the way Hagood carried out his duties as the Commander of the LOC, Advance Section, and thought him just the man to help straighten out the LOC.¹⁴ But despite the efforts to improve the efficiency of the Line of Communications, problems continued to surface. Soon after the issuance of General Orders No. 73, the CGLOC and the DGT began to clash over supply transport. When a load of feed took over two weeks to reach its destination Pershing sent a letter to Kernan expressing his displeasure over the continuing delays. The AEF commander informed Kernan that, even though the Transportation Department had taken over the

supplies, it was still the CGLOC's responsibility to make sure they reached their destination in a timely manner. Kernan and Hagood complained that under the current organizational framework, the CGLOC had no authority over transport, and the DGT had no authority over railheads, which were under the command of local military commanders. Compounding these problems were French railroad officials, who could trap a supply train in its tracks for days on end without any way for the Americans to move it along. The entire system was still an absurd mix of jumbled authority. The only thing for sure was who received the blame when supplies did not reach the front: members of the LOC.¹⁵

A further problem came with the relocation of the LOC's headquarters. While Pershing originally intended the LOC to stay with GHQ AEF, it became clear that Chaumont had neither the office space, nor the billets necessary to adequately house both organizations. For most of the fall the LOC Headquarters remained in Paris, but this proved unworkable for the same reasons as it did for Pershing's GHQ. When Kernan took over the LOC, he began looking for a suitable new home. The officers in the General Staff favored a move to Orleans, but Kernan pushed for Tours. One of the oldest cities in France, it was located one hundred miles south-southwest of Paris along the main rail line running between the ports of St. Nazaire, Brest, and La Rochelle and the Regulating Station at Is-sur-Tille.¹⁶ Sitting on the Loire River, Tours was about equal distance between Paris and the coast, and had good rail and road connections. Though the city dated back to the Roman era, it possessed a modern section with wide streets, ample parking, and street-car lines, in addition to buildings with the necessary electric and telegraphic infrastructure to support a bureaucratic organization the size of the

LOC.¹⁷ It was also conveniently located close to other AEF installations, such as the Ordnance Depot at Mehun, the Officer Reclassification Center at Blois, the Field Artillery School at Saumur, and the tremendous Intermediate Storage facility at Gièvres.

All of these attributes made it the perfect location to build what Harbord called the “second city of the American Expeditionary Forces – second only in rank, first in its military population and the humming multiplicity of its activities.”¹⁸ After ordering a brief inspection of possible locations, Kernan formally recommended Tours.¹⁹

Pershing’s approval came so rapidly that CGLOC had to check again just to be sure. He was unused to GHQ showing any willingness to listen to sound reasoning if the proposal conflicted with their original plan. The move finally came in early January, with Kernan and Hagood setting up their offices on 13 January. The population of the city quickly swelled, with some twenty thousand officers and soldiers assigned to Tours by war’s end, adding to the sixty thousand citizens of the town. In little time at all, Tours became the “heart of the largest military industrial enterprise ever undertaken by a nation.”²⁰

However, even with a new commander and a new headquarters, efficiency in the LOC remained a problem. By late January, it became clear that the problem was not isolated in the LOC, but hindered the overall organization of the AEF. The staff at the AEF’s various facilities, institutions, and field units were still too raw to handle their own administrative responsibilities, which meant that GHQ had to carry the additional load. The General Staff could handle things when Pershing and Harbord were both in the office, but should one be away (often touring some installation or unit or visiting Paris), the situation became unworkable. Brigadier General Robert C. Davis, the AEF’s acting Adjutant General, noted a “tendency on the part of the staff departments to centralize at

these headquarters much work which should not be handled here.”²¹ The chief of the Coordination section, W.D. Conner, called it “as faulty an organization as could have been set up,” and believed everyone at GHQ desperately wanted the entire system reorganized, including the commander-in-chief.²²

Though Pershing found the congestion of GHQ irritating as well, he was more concerned with the performance of his general staff officers. The problem, as he saw it, came down to training. General Staff training in the U.S. Army was a relatively new entity in 1918, and it did not address the challenges faced by the AEF in France.²³ “So faulty had been the training of the General Staff as members of a great directive group,” wrote Pershing, “that both individuals and the group lacked initiative and purpose for want of a clear conception of their tasks.”²⁴ Pershing tried to rectify the situation by giving well-defined powers of direction, but the General Staff’s organization simply did not meet the AEF commander’s approval. Changes needed to be made, and the time was rapidly approaching for action.

Growing increasingly weary of the congestion at Chaumont and the incessant struggles with minute details, Harbord welcomed any opportunity to leave GHQ and travel amongst the men. He longed to get away from paperwork and administrative minutia and feel like a soldier again. “We staff soldiers who are fighting the war at desks must throw a little camouflage now and then and at least give the impression of activity.”²⁵ One of his favorite destinations was the town of Nancy, with its good hotel, hot baths and beautiful buildings, and a night there provided a week’s worth of recuperation. But the sojourns were not always as relaxing as Harbord intended. There was always the danger of a random shell falling on one’s position (or an aimed one if the

party was not careful). Even the hotel in Nancy was not always secure, as Harbord experienced one night when the Germans conducted a moonlight raid complete with bombers and long-range guns. Shrapnel raining on the roof of Harbord's auto welcomed him into town, provoking his driver to advise that Harbord put on his helmet. The firing ceased when they reached the hotel, prompting the men to congratulate each other for surviving the raid.

Later that night the shelling began again, this time more concentrated. Harbord's sixth floor room was rocked from concussion blasts, one of which spoiled his bath by spraying glass from the window into the tub just prior to his entry. French anti-aircraft guns chased the bombers away, but they returned throughout the night. Harbord and his travelling companion, Colonel de Chambrum, took to sleeping in their clothing while they waited for the next raid. Despite the ever-present danger, Harbord could not help but feel exhilarated by the affair. He wrote later in his diary, "It was a lively night. Doubtless the thing to do [was] to get into a cellar, but how [could] a Brigadier General in the National Army do that!!"²⁶ The next morning they found that several bombs had landed within thirty yards of their room, and the pair decided to return to the safety of Chaumont.

Even with these tours providing Pershing and Harbord some respite from the hectic life in Chaumont, both knew the AEF organizational structure required serious revisions. In February, Pershing finally acted on his growing dissatisfaction with the LOC and the AEF's organization, directing Harbord to put together a committee to study the problem and find a solution. Harbord quickly set about selecting the board's members and outlining its mission. To chair the committee, Harbord set his sights on

Hagood, whose position as Kernan's chief of staff and previous calls for reform made him imminently suited to the task. Harbord brought Hagood to Chaumont on 8 February and spelled out the latter's assignment, which was to examine the "desirability of any changes in the present organization of the Headquarters A.E.F., including a revision of [General Orders No. 8]," which created the current AEF organization.²⁷ Luckily for Hagood, he had already begun thinking about ways to reorganize the General Staff and the LOC before Harbord's summons.

In late January, the LOC faced a distressing lack of general staff officers capable of improving the organization's efficiency. On 31 January, Colonel James Logan, chief of the Administrative section, GHQ, paid a visit to Hagood at Tours. The two men discussed the present state of the LOC, hoping to correct the problems caused by its shortage of general staff officers. Logan agreed to do what he could to locate officers for duty with the LOC, and told Hagood that there was a move afoot to restructure the LOC by bringing the DGT and the Bureau Chiefs into its operational folds.²⁸ A few days later, Hagood received a letter from Colonel George Van Horn Moseley, assistant to the chief of the Coordination section, GHQ, which echoed Logan's suggestion for strengthening the LOC. Moseley's letter also floated the idea of combining the Coordination and Administrative sections of the General Staff and bringing the headquarters of the LOC to Chaumont to be in closer contact with Pershing. Hagood supported the idea of bringing into LOC the General Staff's administrative sphere. He wrote to Moseley that he was "quite sure that with proper personnel I could organize the thing on a big scale and make it work." These discussions inspired Hagood to think the time was at hand to do something to correct the problems plaguing the GHQ AEF. He told Moseley, "I think

this a wonderful opportunity for substituting a sound military organization for one which is certainly a hodge-podge, and, in my judgement, sure to break down as soon as the strain begins to bear.”²⁹

Hagood’s boldness in criticizing the AEF’s organization to those responsible for its development is representative of his character. An efficient staff officer with tremendous insights into the workings of military organizations, Hagood was not timid in pointing out structural errors where he saw them. He was equally ready to suggest some remedy, often strengthening his own organization, that he believed would improve efficiency and streamline the organization in question. That his ideas were based on sound reasoning won him considerable support amongst his superiors, but also threatened to instill a sense of resentment in his colleagues. Hagood’s attitude that he knew best in every situation could be a bit overbearing, and eventually led to a clash with Moseley over control over the AEF’s logistics, but for now Hagood’s ability and self-confidence made him just the man to head up the reorganization of the AEF.

Dubbed the Hagood Board for its chairman, the board consisted of five officers representing different elements of the AEF. Hagood, from the LOC, was joined by Colonel A.D. Andrews of the Transportation Department, Lieutenant Colonel Frank McCoy of the General Staff, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Davis, the Adjutant General, and Major S.P. Wetherill, a bright young officer from the Quartermaster Department who was an efficiency expert from the private sector before the war. All agreed on a primary goal to “relieve that Commander-in-Chief from the immediate direction of the administration of supply and place direct and complete responsibility therefor upon some other authority,” and to “make such changes in the General Staff as were necessary to carry this

into effect.”³⁰ Meeting in Colonel McCoy’s office at GHQ, the board members examined written documents from various branches of the LOC and supply departments, and conducted interviews with essential members of the General Staff and the AEF supply bureaus.³¹ After a series of five meetings, the board issued its report on 14 February. They found, as expected, that a “great diversity of opinion and practice existed among the different chiefs of services with respect to the degree of personal responsibility assumed and methods employed in the matter of supply.” No where was there a single authority that could coordinate the various heads and branches of the AEF’s supply system. Many of those interviewed could not even agree on the current system of authority over supply matters.³² By way of reforms, the board made a series of suggestions addressing both the AEF’s supply system and the General Staff.

In regard to supply, the board reorganized the LOC into the Services of the Rear (SOR), with headquarters remaining at Tours. The board called for the transfer of the staff departments dealing with supply matters (i.e. ordnance, quartermaster, engineers, etc.) to the new organization, leaving the Adjutant General, the Inspector General, the Judge Advocate, and the new Chief of Tank Corps at GHQ AEF. The relocated departments would leave a representative at Chaumont to coordinate with the General Staff and act as liaison between Pershing’s staff and Tours. The CGLOC would become the Commanding General, Services of the Rear (CGSOR), and continue to report directly to General Pershing. Despite the push for concentration, the board deemed the General Purchasing Board more valuable in its present location in Paris, but suggested that the SOR supervise its activities.

In terms of the AEF's administrative organization, the board recommended key changes to improve efficiency. Chief amongst these was a re-designation of the General Staff sections, forgoing the traditional Administrative, Intelligence, Operations, Coordination, and Supply for the new titles: 1st Section, General Staff, 2nd Section, General Staff, etc. The new sections would carry the abbreviations: G-1, G-2, and so on, headed up by an assistant chief of staff (ACS, G-1; ACS, G-2; ACS, G-3, etc.). These new designations highlighted the General Staff's position as the AEF's controlling body, breaking away from the Army's traditional Bureau system. Additionally, the board provided each assistant chief of staff the authority to designate an officer to represent him in each General Staff section, improving inter-staff coordination and communication. A final modification to the General Staff was the addition of a deputy chief of staff, to act as chief of staff when Pershing and Harbord were both away from Chaumont.³³

These suggestions represented a significant departure from the hallowed *Field Service Regulations*. The CGSOR garnered more power over supply than anything previously seen in the American Army, which Harbord believed, “[gave] the Commanding General of the Services of [the Rear] an unequivocal definition of his mission; and [clothed] him in all the authority necessary to fulfill it.”³⁴ Given the report's stark contrast with established Army policy, the reforms required great care in implementation. When Harbord took the report to Pershing, the two worried that the bureaus, long-established in relative independence, would resist their incorporation into the SOR. Harbord wrote Hagood on the matter, reminding the board to “bear in mind that to obtain efficient and willing service on the part of the staff departments, care should be taken to leave them with as much initiative as possible and still insure

coordination.”³⁵ The board members took note of the concern, but decided that the bureaus would have to adapt to the new organization for the greater good of the AEF.

For the most part both Harbord and Pershing embraced the suggestions spelled out in the report. They wanted to make it clear that the “essentials of the organization of the service of the rear are the prompt procurement and forwarding of necessary supplies for the troops at the front.” To facilitate this mission, “The line of responsibility of staff departments should be as clearly defined as possible and the control of the general staff should be to the extent of insuring expedition and promptness in carrying out the purpose of this organization.”³⁶ Believing the board understood these concerns, Pershing ordered Harbord to commission a general order putting the report’s suggestions into effect. The result, General Orders No. 31 (16 February 1918), followed the board’s recommendations concerning the new organization of the General Staff and the Services of the Rear (renamed the Services of Supply in the final draft). The Services of Supply brought together the ten services that dealt with supplies on a regular basis.³⁷ The Commanding General, Services of Supply (CGSOS) was given command over the staff bureaus, but it was left to his discretion how he managed them. As Harbord explained, “It was not the intention to tie [the CGSOS’s] hands or to limit him in methods and means. He was told *what* to do but not *how* to do it.”³⁸ The CGSOS also gained control over the Transportation Department, which joined the Forestry Service and the Motor Transport Service to form a new Service of Utilities, which would hopefully solve the problem of competing authority between the DGT and the now CGSOS.³⁹

Though Hagood supported the new general order, he did not find it completely satisfactory. He saw a potential problem in the order’s provisions on the relationship

between the CGSOS and the new ACS, G-4 (formerly the chief of the Coordination section). Under General Order No. 31, G-4 retained supervisory authority over “[supply], construction and transportation in France,” and “[all] operations of the Services of Supply not assigned to other sections of the General Staff.”⁴⁰ But the CGSOS existed in an amorphous position reporting directly to Pershing, but also under the authority of G-4. With the SOS separated from GHQ by nearly two hundred miles, Pershing had no direct contact with his supply organization below the CGSOS. The logic of keeping Pershing and the General Staff separated from the SOS was deemed necessary to “prevent the Commander-in-Chief from availing himself of the personal services of the chiefs of services whenever needed.”⁴¹ Presumably the CGSOS was responsible for the AEF’s entire supply system, but his physical separation from GHQ and the ASC, G-4’s supervisory authority over supply allowed Pershing to rely on G-4 to administer the supply system. This created a situation where the CGSOS operated under the same ambiguous authority that the Hagood Board sought to eliminate. To avoid the problem, Hagood initially tried to move the bulk of G-1 and G-4 to Tours with the rest of the SOS, but both Pershing and the board rejected the idea.⁴²

General Orders No. 31 also failed to spell out exactly how the new supply system would work. What was the area of its authority? Who had responsibility for supply in the AEF? How would the Regulating Stations fit into the system? To answer these and other questions, the General Staff developed a new general order covering supply. Issued on 23 March 1918, General Orders No. 44, it established that the CGSOS was responsible for the procurement, storage, maintenance, transportation, and distribution of supplies. Much to Hagood’s dismay, the order also stated that “[the] general supervision

of all these functions is exercised by the General Staff, as a rule through G-4 thereof.”⁴³ Therefore, G-4 remained in supervisory control over the SOS, despite responsibility resting on the CGSOS. Though no different than any other large bureaucratic organization, this system had a significant defect. The CGSOS could direct all operations in the SOS under the supervision of G-4 if he had authority over the entire supply system. But he did not. The CGSOS’s command authority did not extend into the Advance Section where the combat units operated. Instead, his authority stopped at the Regulating Stations, where the Regulating Officer, under the authority of G-4, controlled all supply matters from the Regulating Stations to the trenches. The CGSOS retained administrative control over SOS personnel in the Advance Section, but he had no jurisdiction over supply operations. Hence, any supply problems experienced by the front line units were the responsibility of G-4, except that Pershing considered the CGSOS responsible for the entire SOS. This discrepancy would come back to haunt Hagood and the SOS in the fall of 1918 when Moseley (as ACS, G-4) increasingly took over responsibility for supply, directly challenging the CGSOS in the process. The fact that Harbord had assumed control of the SOS by that time made the situation especially divisive, and threatened to create a serious rift between GHQ AEF and the SOS at Tours. But in March, Pershing was happy with the new system created by General Orders No. 44, and quickly turned to other matters.⁴⁴

Personnel Matters

While the Hagood Board and the General Staff reworked the AEF’s administrative and logistical organizations, Harbord and Pershing worked on the problem

of finding capable officers for staff work throughout the AEF. The AEF had an embarrassingly large number of potential brigade and division commanders to choose from, but lacked units for them to command and trained officers to fill out their staffs. Pershing had to wait for the War Department to supply the soldiers to fill out the AEF's ranks, but, in the meantime, he took steps to secure more officers for staff work. At first he relied on the AEF's vast network of schools, capped by the General Staff School at Langres, to train officers. But these institutions could not, in and of themselves, provide the number of officers the AEF needed. Pershing, therefore, decided that the AEF had to make more efficient use of the officers it had. The AEF already had a reclassification system in place, located at the Reclassification Center at Blois, and Pershing ordered his Adjutant General, Robert Davis, and Inspector General, Major General Andre Brewster, to create a complex, multi-level system of evaluation and classification to discern what duties individual officers were most suited for. The pair worked up a detailed evaluation form that kept up-to-date information concerning an officer's performance on file, easily accessible by Pershing and the General Staff.⁴⁵

The system worked well for junior officers, but Harbord believed the AEF commander needed to make a more concerted effort in regard to the AEF's senior leadership. Though Pershing considered the relief of a general officer a serious matter, he did not have an established program to regulate it. Harbord thought the evaluation system could provide valuable information, and take a more active approach in molding the AEF's corps of general officers into a tight-knit unit. With Secretary of War Baker arriving soon in France for a tour of the AEF, Harbord believed Pershing should take the opportunity to discuss the matter with him, and made his case in a long memorandum:

I believe that the most important matter for you to consider just now and to discuss with the Secretary of War is the question of higher personnel. Certainly the time has arrived when you must cease to deal with divisions and other units and deal with Generals.

You are confronted with conditions where you have to exact results without partiality, favor or affection for the claims of any individual, be they based on seniority or any other thing except efficiency. The War Department has not denied any important request which you have made for promotions. Until they do deny such request, you are absolutely responsible in their eyes, in the eyes of the nation, for the selection of General Officers to command your units. You cannot divest yourself of this responsibility for selection. If any say that you have no proper material for Corps and Division Commanders, the inevitable answer is "Why do you not submit the names of the officers you wish?". The fact that individuals are sent to you in certain grades will be accepted as an excuse by neither the country nor the War Department if you have not secured yourself by presenting substitutes and denouncing as incompetents officers recognized to be such. . . .

If there is any General Officer in your command who has not your entire confidence, he should be relieved and your responsibility met by naming to the War Department the man you want for the place, if he is not already in your command. . . .

The time has come when you should in cold blood throw overboard all considerations of seniority and reach for the men you want if you have to go as low as the grade of Captain or lower to get him.⁴⁶

But as Harbord wrote out his vision for dealing with general officers, he began to waver a bit. He knew that Pershing had to be firm in getting the men he needed and putting them where he wanted, but Harbord began to worry that Pershing could alienate his senior officers by treating them too harshly. The AEF commander could not command if his generals did not respect him, and Harbord wanted to make sure that that did not happen. He knew that Pershing was not a warm individual, though he did have his moments, and wanted to make the General aware of how his senior officers felt about him. In a separate memo, Harbord softly explained:

[The current opinion amongst officers] is that you are considered to show little confidence in your Generals; that this lack of confidence is evident to the Generals themselves; that there is consequently not the close feeling which there should be on the part of those Generals toward you. They respect you and are afraid of you, but I fear are drifting into the latter attitude too much to the exclusion of a warmer feeling which means so much in the soldier business, and which you, better than any other man, know how to win when you choose to exert yourself. I think it is time to go after more personal loyalty and enthusiasm from your command.⁴⁷

Harbord's belief in Pershing's ability to win the loyalty of subordinates speaks as much to Harbord's own feelings as they do to his commander's personality. Pershing was a hard man, plain and simple, and though he did possess a certain charm amongst those closest to him, he would never be the beloved commander along the lines of a Robert E. Lee or even a Marshal Joffre. Instead, Pershing was fair (tough, but fair). From the very beginning he expected no more from his officers than he could do himself, and Harbord wanted his Chief to develop this persona further to secure a solid support base amongst his generals. To a certain extent Pershing did just this, personally reviewing each general's files and expressing his support for each man he considered valuable. When he found it necessary to remove a general, he preferred to transfer him to an unimportant command before sending him back to the United States so that the man would not leave Europe under a cloud of failure. Harbord believed Pershing's fair-mindedness could inspire loyalty and affection as well as a personable nature, and events seemingly supported this belief, as Pershing remained a revered figure amongst his General Staff officers and upper level commanders for decades after the war.⁴⁸

However, the more likely source behind the loyalty Pershing inspired was his perceived control over promotions in the AEF. As the war continued, the AEF commander increasingly believed he could dictate policy on promotions to the War Department; a belief that Harbord routinely encouraged. Though justified in his desire to manage his own officers, Pershing's perception of his command did not fit with the view that the AEF was only one part of the U.S. Army as a whole. As long as Baker and the chief of staff in Washington allowed Pershing to act on this conception of the American military structure there was no problem, but in March of 1918 a new chief of staff arrived

in Washington who had no intention of being Pershing's rubber stamp in the War Department.⁴⁹

Chief of Staff Peyton March

The efficiency problems that plagued the AEF in 1917 were mirrored in the War Department as it also expanded to meet the challenges of raising an army for service in France. One of the main problems was a lack of effective leadership in the Office of the Chief of Staff. Both General Hugh Scott and Tasker Bliss were near retirement during their tenures in the office, and neither possessed the force of character necessary to push the War Department through the pains of mobilization. Each believed his position secondary in importance to Pershing's, and considered it their primary duty to provide the AEF with all that it needed to carry out operations in Europe. Bliss even confessed later that he believed himself to be the "Assistant Chief of Staff to the Chief of Staff of the A.E.F."⁵⁰ In other words, he thought of himself as Harbord's assistant.

As Bliss closed in on retirement in September of 1917, Secretary Baker petitioned Pershing for his input on who should be the new chief of staff. Baker wanted Major General John Biddle, an engineer of long experience, for the position but also floated the possibility of Peyton March, whom the Secretary thought very highly of. Pershing approved of Biddle's selection, and thought March a good choice for assistant chief of staff. Baker agreed and brought Biddle to the War Department in the fall of 1917. But the Secretary soon discovered that Biddle lacked the ability to put the War Department on track, and requested in February that March be sent home.⁵¹

Arriving on 4 March, the new chief of staff immediately went to work putting the War Department in order. As those in the Washington and the AEF soon learned, March was an entirely different type of officer than his predecessors. A true martinet, he breathed efficiency and had little patience for those who could not keep up. Working up to sixteen hours in a day, he quickly transformed the lackadaisical War Department into a well-oiled machine, and forced the entire military engine in the United States to operate more efficiently almost by will alone. One subordinate observed, “[March] took the War Department like a dog takes a cat by the neck, and he shook it.”⁵² Decisions that had taken hours or days were now made in seconds, as March barked out orders and delegated responsibility to men he expected to do the job. His arrival in Washington marked a turning point in the American war effort, as he instilled a firm sense of direction in a War Department mired in delays and red tape that accompanied the massive buildup of the United States Army.

In many ways, March’s rise to chief of staff was the best thing to happen to Pershing and the AEF. Over the next few months, the rate of shipments increased precipitously. The number of soldiers sailing for France during March’s first month at the War Department nearly doubled the previous month’s total. By the summer, troop shipments rose to the level where 10,000 American soldiers arrived in France every day.⁵³ Yet despite his ability, March’s selection as chief of staff brought new challenges to Pershing and the AEF, and proved considerably irritating to Harbord. This is not to say that Pershing and Harbord did not recognize March’s ability, for they surely did. Pershing had known him for several years, and thought March “a very able man.”⁵⁴ After a visit to the artillery training center at Valdahon in the fall, Harbord commented in

his diary that he thought March “a live and energetic man, full of energy and aggressiveness,” who would “go far in the war if he gets a chance.”⁵⁵ When Baker requested him, Pershing replied, “He will be a difficult man to replace but I feel that you need the best man we can find, so I cheerfully let him go.”⁵⁶ But there was certainly a degree of trepidation at Chaumont upon hearing of March’s promotion. James C. Collins, Pershing’s aide, could not help but think March would be trouble for the AEF commander. He wrote in his diary, “I thought [March] would play General Pershing’s game as long as it suited him, but not a day longer.” Pershing admitted to another officer that he knew March was potentially troublesome, but believed him a capable officer.⁵⁷

The friction that arose between the generals stemmed from March’s attitude towards his new office. Whereas his predecessors viewed themselves as subordinates to Pershing, March considered himself the military head of the Army. While it is accepted policy today that the chief of staff is the highest position in the Army, the same could not be said in 1918. The position of chief of staff had existed for less than twenty years, and its role during wartime remained largely unclear. Nor was the relationship between the chief of staff and the line clearly defined. The concept of a military commander dictating policy to the armies in the field while he remained in Washington seemed ludicrous to many in the Army. There was a long tradition in the American military of the commander leading from the head of his army, and few officers could understand the logic of March’s presumed military seniority. For his part, Pershing rejected any challenge to his authority out of hand. He refused to accept any intermediary between himself and President Wilson other than Secretary Baker. Harbord supported Pershing’s view of the Army’s command structure and called March’s claims of seniority pure

“hallucination” brought upon by the “intoxicating aura that surrounds the office of the Secretary of War.”⁵⁸ Both he and Pershing conceived of the chief of staff as having direct authority over the War Department General Staff only. Any other actions he took were under the authority of the secretary of war. To Harbord, March was simply Secretary Baker’s mouthpiece in the Army, having no authorized voice of his own.⁵⁹

Much of the blame for the AEF leadership’s disdain for March’s position falls upon Secretary Baker. By allowing Pershing to operate with full autonomy, Baker supported the idea of the AEF as a separate entity from the rest of the U.S. Army. Baker thought of Pershing in the romantic mold of a Ulysses S. Grant, commanding from the head of his army without interruption from Washington. It is perhaps one of the reasons Pershing and the officers in the AEF believed Baker to be a great secretary of war. He did not understand the necessity of a single officer directing operations both at home and abroad. While the chief of staff should not make operational decisions for the combat forces, he did need the authority to synchronize the field operations and the efforts on the home front. But Baker refused to interfere with Pershing’s command of the AEF. Nor did he think it a matter of great importance that the chief of staff do so. He thought the conflict between March and Pershing was an “unimportant” row over military technicalities for which “nobody will ever attach the slightest importance.”⁶⁰ When Pershing failed to consider needs of the War Department when developing policies for the AEF, Baker became a victim of his own creation. He tacitly supported the position that Pershing could dictate policy to the War Department, and was then surprised when Pershing failed to understand its problems. But Pershing operated with blinders on, raging against any situation or circumstance that presented an obstacle to the AEF. He

did not care what the War Department needed to do, as long as it delivered supplies and soldiers to France and then stayed out of the AEF's way. Baker enabled this situation by his timidity to rein in the AEF commander, and in the process contributed greatly to the hard feelings that developed between March and the AEF.⁶¹

Just after March took over at the War Department, Baker arrived in France for a month-long tour of the AEF's facilities. Pershing and General Bliss, serving as the American representative on the Supreme War Council (SWC), met Baker in Paris and the two traded off escorting the Secretary to the SWC, Chaumont, and numerous installations in the SOS. While Pershing was away, many of his social responsibilities fell to Harbord, who enjoyed the distraction they provided from the daily grind of the war. When Secretary Baker came to Chaumont to meet with members of the General Staff before heading out to see the trenches, Pershing gave Harbord a chance for more time away from GHQ. The AEF commander needed to attend to other matters, so he tapped Harbord to accompany Baker on the next leg of his tour. Taking Colonel de Chambrun and Frederick Palmer of the Press Corps with them, Harbord and Baker left by motor-car on a two-day journey of the front. They headed to Lorraine, where the party saw elements of the 42nd "Rainbow" Division and the 2nd Division. Harbord found it amusing that the group tried to travel incognito since there was little secret about the trip, as the Secretary's necessary entourage and security detail attracted attention wherever they went. Baker made a good showing, though, as he calmly brushed off the occasional near-miss from artillery shells and took every opportunity to speak to the ordinary soldiers on what he called "the very frontier of freedom."⁶²

The group made several other stops over the next two days, at one point attending the funeral for a soldier recently killed by artillery-fire. When Baker learned that a young officer nearby was wearing an as-yet-unauthorized Croix de Guerre, he respectfully told the man, "If anyone questions your right to wear it, refer him to me."⁶³ Such displays caused Harbord's esteem for the diminutive politician to grow increasingly stronger as the tour continued, and he decided to show his and the AEF's appreciation for the Secretary. While visiting with the 2nd Division, Baker mentioned his desire to see a young soldier who had lived across the street from him in Cleveland and had enlisted in the Marines. Knowing that the Marine Brigade was a part of the division, Harbord made it a point to secure the boy's presence the next day, which Baker greatly enjoyed. He and Harbord spent much of the trip conversing on several topics, each man growing increasingly impressed with the other, and in the process laid the groundwork for a friendship that would last for many years after the war's end.⁶⁴

Upon arriving back at Chaumont, Baker had the opportunity to witness the first instance of friction between Pershing and March. On 14 March, the new chief of staff sent a cable to Pershing asking that thirty general staff officers be sent back to the United States, to be replaced with thirty officers from home. March wanted officers from both sides of the Atlantic to gain a better understanding of the issues facing their counterparts, and to give officers from home valuable foreign service credit to aid their careers.⁶⁵ Upon hearing the request, Harbord immediately raised a flurry of objections. As he understood it, March called for Pershing to surrender thirty officers from the General Staff at Chaumont, or just under half of the total number on duty there, for service in Washington. As compliance meant gutting the AEF's General Staff, Harbord thought the

request “a distinctly unfriendly act.” He told Pershing that, “It shows no consideration for your needs, and undermines your well-laid foundations, with what wild ambition in mind we can only guess. The best that could be said, if it is not hostile, is that it is selfish, inconsiderate, and ordered with no thought for your organization or intelligent comprehension of the task immediately before you.”⁶⁶ Harbord could not understand the logic behind replacing half of the AEF General Staff with officers new to the Western Front. It was a valid complaint if that was what March wanted to do. But Harbord misunderstood March’s request. The chief of staff did not want Pershing to eviscerate his own GHQ, but called for him to send officers from the numerous general staffs in the AEF. Such a program could be accomplished without causing much disruption in daily routines, and would provide valuable coordination between the War Department and the AEF. Of course, Harbord would have most likely objected to even this level of cooperation. He did not trust March, nor the War Department, and took offense to any suggestion that either could interfere with the operations of the AEF. “All you wish from America,” he wrote Pershing, “is such Staff Service there as will insure you a steady flow of troops and supplies. You do not want there a Staff dealing with any phase of your business here.”⁶⁷ As historian Donald Smythe has rightly stated, “It would be hard to find a more concise statement of a field command desiring independence from General Staff control.”⁶⁸

Pershing initially agreed with Harbord’s reading of March’s request, and sent a reply agreeing with the idea in principle but rejecting its implementation:

Coming at a time of prospective early German offensive and just as our first corps is about to take its place in our own sector it might be disastrous. The limited number of trained staff men at my disposition has already, as you know, been a serious handicap and has caused much anxiety. Training here in France under active conditions is absolutely necessary to prepare officers for work. . . . I earnestly recommend that you send over the number of staff men you can now spare for actual service and training here. As soon as possible thereafter, when these men have had some experience, I could return a like number to you for duty in Washington. This could be carried out within three or four months and the system repeated as often as advisable. . . . I do not fail to appreciate fully your difficulties but think the requirements of our fighting forces should be our immediate concern.⁶⁹

Remarkably, not only did Pershing refuse to send any of his officers to the United States, but suggested that March go ahead and send more staff officers to the AEF. Regardless of his statements to the contrary, the AEF commander showed little consideration for the War Department's problems, which he presumed to be minor compared to those facing the AEF. After March informed Pershing of the true stipulations of the plan, namely that the officers requested were not all to come from the General Staff at Chaumont, Pershing finally relented. He agreed to send the officers, but did so only half-heartedly. When the men arrived in Washington in May, only three of the thirty were deemed fit for General Staff assignment. Though frustrated by the AEF

commander's lack of cooperation, March could only accept Pershing's position and allow the plan to die. The chief of staff did not have the power to challenge Pershing directly without Secretary Baker's support (who was in France). Nor could he do so with the AEF about to go into the line to help block the long-awaited German Spring Offensive. March simply filed the situation away and went back to work. There would be other clashes, and March had no intention of being bullied by Pershing again, but for now he settled in to support the AEF as best he could.⁷⁰

While frustration simmered on both sides of the Atlantic, the German Army decided the time was at hand to finally make their long-expected push on the Western Front. The collapse of the Eastern Front and the subsequent transfer of thousands of German troops to the West gave the Germans their best advantage since 1914, and with food shortages gripping the German home front, the Germans decided to gamble on one last great offensive that would either bring victory or disaster. The only questions would be if the Allies could withstand the barrage, and if there were enough American boots on the ground to tip the balance once and for all against the Germans. The answer to both questions would ultimately be yes.

Notes

¹ James G. Harbord, *The American Army in France 1917-1919* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1936), 211

² In addition to those named were the Chief Surgeon, the Chief Chaplain, the Chief of the Gas Service (later the Chemical Warfare Service), the Chief Engineer, the Provost Marshall General, the Press Bureau, and the Chief of the Red Cross (amongst other welfare activities). See General Orders No. 8, 5 July 1917, *United States Army in the World War 1917-1919* 17 vols. (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1948), 16:13-24. [Hereafter cited as *USAWW*]

³ Harbord, *American Army*, 212.

⁴ Harbord also suggested Colonel W.D. Conner, but thought McCoy had broader staff experience and could run the Office of Chief of Staff better than any other officer at Chaumont. Harbord to Pershing, 8 July 1918, Box 11, James G. Harbord Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.

⁵ Cable P-445-S, 5 January 1918, *USAWW*, 2:138-39.

⁶ Johnson Hagood, *The Services of Supply: A Memoir of the Great War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1927), 51-52.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 50-53.

⁸ Hagood to Harbord, 15 November 1917, reprinted in *Ibid.*, 56-65.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Diary entry, 1 November – 1 December 1917, Johnson Hagood Diary, Box 1, Johnson Hagood Papers, MHI.

¹¹ General Orders No. 73, 12 December 1917, *USAWW*, 16:136.

¹² *Ibid.*, 136-40.

¹³ *Ibid.*; J.R. Kilpatrick, *The Regulating Station*, 3 December 1936, Army War College Circular Archives, MHI.

¹⁴ Diary entry, 1 November - 1 December 1917, Hagood Diary, Box 1, Hagood Papers, MHI.

¹⁵ Hagood, *Services of Supply*, 78-82.

¹⁶ The rail line out of the port at Bordeaux intersected the line running through Tours about fifty miles east of the city.

¹⁷ When the LOC first moved to Tours it took had 16,000 square feet of officer space in the Hôtel Métropole. By the end of the war, the LOC consumed over one million square feet of officer space in the city. Hagood, *Services of Supply*, 118.

¹⁸ Harbord, *American Army*, 211.

¹⁹ Other possibilities were Blois and Bourges, but Kernan settled on Tours. The fact that he had spent time in the city prior to the war may have influenced his decision. Hagood, *Services of Supply*, 104.

²⁰ Ibid., 105; Diary entry, 13-16 January 1918, Hagood Diary, Box 1, Hagood Papers, MHI; Harbord, *American Army*, 209-12.

²¹ Adjutant General, AEF to Inspector General, AEF, 15 December 1917, *USAWW*, 2:103. Davis pays particular attention to GHQ dealing with matters more properly addressed by the LOC: i.e. remount service, water supplies, electrical service, and the motor transport service.

²² W.D. Conner to Harbord, 6 May 1935, James G. Harbord Papers, New York Historical Society (NYHS).

²³ For a more detailed analysis of Army staff training, see Chapter 4 in Timothy K. Nenner, *The Leavenworth Schools and the Old Army: Education, Professionalism, and the Officer Corps of the United States Army, 1881-1918* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), 53-67.

²⁴ John J. Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War* 2 vols. (New York: F.A. Stokes, 1931), 1:322.

²⁵ James G. Harbord, *Leaves From a War Diary* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1925), 224.

²⁶ Ibid., 230-34. Luckily Harbord and de Chambrum came through the night virtually unscathed, though de Chambrum's head was cut by flying glass. All of this despite the fact that five bombs fell within feet of their hotel, destroying an adjacent building.

²⁷ Diary entry, 7 February 1918, Hagood Diary, Box 1, Hagood Papers, MHI; Harbord to Hagood, 8 February 1918, reprinted in Hagood, *Services of Supply*, 134-35. To aid the board in its endeavor, Harbord made available to them the replies to a circular Pershing sent out on 22 January inviting comments and criticism from members of the Chiefs of Sections, General Staff; division and brigade commanders; heads of administrative and staff services; and a report by the Inspector General.

²⁸ James Logan to Frank McCoy, 2 February 1918, reprinted in Hagood, *Services of Supply*, 130-31; Diary entry, 1 February 1918, Hagood Diary, Box 1, Hagood Papers, MHI.

²⁹ Hagood to George Van Horn Moseley, 5 February 1918, in "Miscellaneous Papers on the Organization of the American Expeditionary Forces," Box 5, George Van Horn Moseley Papers, Manuscript Division, LC; Diary entry, 4 February 1918, Hagood Diary, Box 1, Hagood Papers, MHI.

³⁰ Hagood, *Services of Supply*, 143.

³¹ Those interviewed by the board were: the chiefs of the Administrative and Coordination sections, General Staff, the Adjutant General, the chief quartermaster, chief surgeon, chief engineer officer, chief ordnance officer, chief signal officer, chief of the air service, Colonel Moseley of the Coordination Section, General Staff, and Colonel Bjornstad of the Staff College at Langres. "Proceedings of a Board of Officers Convened by Letter from the Chief of Staff, General Headquarters, A.E.F., February 8, 1918," 14 February 1918, *USAWW*, 2:204-06. [Hereafter cited as "Report of the Hagood Board."]

³² The chief quartermaster believed supply divided amongst seven different officials without any authority over the whole. The chief medical officer thought all responsibility over supply was already housed in the LOC, and the chief engineer thought their role to pass along requisitions from the combat troops to the LOC. None of them envisioned their being a unified, efficient supply system, however. Ibid., 205-06.

³³ Ibid., 205; Hagood took credit for the new designations for the General Staff sections, as well as the deputy chief of staff, even though Harbord suggested just such a position to Pershing a month earlier. Hagood, *Services of Supply*, 143; Harbord to Pershing, 8 January 1918, Box 11, Harbord Papers, LC.

³⁴ Harbord, *American Army*, 216.

³⁵ Harbord to Hagood, 14 February 1918, *USAWW*, 2:207.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ These were the Quartermaster Corps, the Medical Service, the Engineer Service, Ordnance, the Signal Corps, the Air Service, the General Purchasing Board, the Gas Service, the Service of Utilities, and the Provost Marshall Service. General Orders No. 31, 16 February 1918, *USAWW*, 16: 216.

³⁸ Harbord, *American Army*, 216.

³⁹ General Orders No. 31, 16 February 1918, *USAWW*, 16: 216.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 221.

⁴¹ "Report of the Hagood Board," 206.

⁴² Hagood, *Services of Supply*, 145.

⁴³ General Orders No. 44, 23 March 1918, *USAWW*, 16:250.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 250-53; James A. Huston, *The Sinews of War: Army Logistics 1775-1953* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1966), 260-61.

⁴⁵ General Orders No. 62, 16 November 1917, *USAWW*, 16:112-13; For a more complete discussion of the AEF's evaluation and classification system, see James Cooke, *Pershing and His Generals: Command and the Staff in the AEF* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1997), 61-73.

⁴⁶ Harbord to Pershing, Memorandum, 8 March 1918, Box 11, Harbord Papers, LC.

⁴⁷ Harbord to Pershing, Memorandum, 8 March 1918, Box 11, Harbord Papers, LC. [It is a separate document from the one cited above.]

⁴⁸ Cooke, *Pershing and His Generals*, 67.

⁴⁹ Edward M. Coffman, *The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 183-86; Richard O'Conner, *Black Jack Pershing* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1961), 222-27; Donald Smythe, *Pershing: General of the Armies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 93-94.

⁵⁰ Tasker Bliss to Pershing, 17 March 1921, Box 26, John J. Pershing Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.

⁵¹ James G. Harbord, "Personalities and Personal Relationships in the American Expeditionary Forces", 29 April 1933, Army War College Circular Archives, MHI, 6; Edward M. Coffman, *The Hilt of the Sword: The Career of Peyton C. March* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), 44.

⁵² Ibid., 64.

⁵³ Leonard P. Ayers, *The War With Germany: A Statistical Summary* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Officer, 1919), 37.

⁵⁴ Smythe, *Pershing*, 88.

⁵⁵ Harbord, *War Diary*, 152.

⁵⁶ Pershing to Baker, 4 February 1918, reprinted in Pershing, *My Experiences*, 313-14.

⁵⁷ James C. Collins quoted in Smythe, *Pershing*, 88.

⁵⁸ Harbord, "Personalities", 8.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 7-9.

⁶⁰ Baker to Harbord, 27 September 1934, Box 12, Harbord Papers, LC.

⁶¹ James E. Hewes, Jr., *From Root to McNamara: Army Organization and Administration, 1900-1963* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1975), 23.

⁶² Baker quoted in *Ibid.*, 234.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 236; Frederick Palmer, *Newton D. Baker: America at War* 2 vols. (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1931), 369; After the war, Baker helped Harbord secure the position of President of the Radio Corporation of America, which the latter held until 1930 when he became Chairman of the Board. See Harbord/Owen D. Young correspondence, Box 141, Owen D. Young Papers, St. Lawrence University.

⁶⁵ Cable A-915-R, 14 March 1918, *USAWW*, 2:239.

⁶⁶ Harbord to Pershing, 16 March 1918, Box 11, Harbord Papers, LC.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Smythe, *Pershing*, 94.

⁶⁹ Cable P-753-S, 19 March 1918, *USAWW*, 2:244-45.

⁷⁰ Cables A-1227-R, 2 May 1918 and A-1321-R, 15 May 1918, Cablegrams Exchanged Between General Headquarters, American Expeditionary Forces and the War Department, Record Group 120, NARA; Pershing to March, 5 May 1918, and March to Pershing, 6 June 1918, Box 123, Pershing Papers, LC; Coffman, *Hilt of the Sword*, 61.

CHAPTER VII

WEATHERING THE STORM (MARCH - MAY 1918)

The last weeks of March 1918 saw the eruption of the much-anticipated German Spring Offensive along the Western Front. Scrambling to block the most serious crisis of the war since the initial German advance on Paris in 1914, the Allies mounted a feverish defense against the German onslaught. To improve coordination, they moved to form a unified command structure under the leadership of French Field Marshal Ferdinand Foch, and stepped up their calls for the amalgamation of American soldiers in the Allied forces. General Pershing agreed to help, but continued his opposition to the wholesale infusion of AEF units into the Allied lines. He spent the next month wrangling with the Allies over shipping, AEF training doctrine, and the utilization of those divisions the AEF had ready for service.

AEF Chief of Staff James Harbord spent March and April splitting his time between overseeing the transformation of the AEF General Staff, helping Pershing deal with the Allies, and searching for his own combat command. After a year at GHQ AEF, Harbord tired of life behind a desk and wanted to join the fight in the greatest of all military struggles. After a month of searching, he finally secured a position with the 4th "Marine" Brigade, bringing a fundamental change to his service in the AEF and the structure of the Pershing's General Staff. For Harbord and the Allies as a whole, the months of April and May brought a turning point on the Western Front, as the combatants unknowingly approached the war's endgame. One of the critical questions remaining was the role of the American Expeditionary Forces in the endeavor.

The German Spring Offensive

On the morning of 21 March, the long awaited German offensive exploded through the Allied lines. In the Somme River valley, German artillery rained death and destruction on the British lines for five hours in such ferocity that the roar could be heard at General Pétain's headquarters some thirty-five miles to the rear. Utilizing the same tactics of penetration that secured the smashing victories at Caporetto and Riga, seventy-one German divisions slammed into twenty-six British divisions. Carrying light machine-guns, flame-throwers, satchel charges, and hand grenades, the German elite storm troops penetrated the British lines, turned, and then attacked the positions from the rear. The British quickly collapsed, opening huge holes for the German infantry to stream through. As the thunderstruck British reformed their lines, the Germans attacked again, overrunning the new positions as easily as the original, while their artillery displaced to bring the barrage ever-forward. Through repetition, the Germans opened a gaping hole in the line forty miles wide and advanced forty miles through a front that had remained virtually stagnant for three years.¹

The assault lasted the better part of two weeks before stopping due to exhaustion. It created a massive salient along the Somme, running between Vimy and Noyon, and threatened to cut the juncture point between the British and French Armies. If the Germans could take Amiens, twenty-miles to the rear, the severance would be complete, for the Somme ran bridgeless from Amiens all the way to the English Channel. This prospect sent the Allies into a panic. If the Germans could isolate the two armies, they

could defeat them in detail, or corral the British in front of the channel ports and turn their full force against the French. The Americans did not have sufficient numbers in France to make up the difference, and few on either side of the lines believed the French could stand up to the Germans alone.

Looking at the situation, Pershing knew that he could no longer reject all calls for amalgamation. The Allies needed aid, and the AEF commander had it to give. On 25 March, Pershing journeyed to Pétain's headquarters at Compiègne. Arriving after 10:00 p.m., he found the French general rather disheveled, looking more forlorn than at any point in their brief relationship. With the French about to shift their headquarters to Chantilly, Pershing recalled that "No time was wasted; everyone talked fast."² Pétain wanted to know what troops Pershing could give him. The AEF commander replied that Pétain could have the four dull American divisions now training in France, which the thankful Frenchman requested go into the lines immediately. Pershing agreed, but intimated that he preferred the units to combine to form a corps. Pétain rejected the idea given the inexperience of the American soldiers. Better to use them to relieve specific veteran French units then serving in quiet sectors. Sensing that it was not the time to quibble over details, Pershing acquiesced and quickly departed to oversee the movements.³

With Pershing away handling the crisis, AEF Chief of Staff James Harbord continued to improve efficiency at GHQ. Since the issuance of General Orders No. 31, Harbord created a set routine for the senior members of the General Staff. With a good portion of the staff now at Tours, Harbord brought together the remaining G staff, the adjutant general, the inspector general, and the judge advocate general for daily meetings.

Harbord ran the meetings, which began at 9:00 a.m. and lasted thirty minutes to an hour. Dennis Nolan, ACS, G-2, usually began with a ten-minute report on the most recent intelligence from the front, and then each ACS took turns updating the staff members about their own sections. Thus, Harbord kept everyone informed of the current situation in the various sections to improve staff coordination. When Pershing was at Chaumont, he met with Nolan directly after the meeting to go over the intelligence reports in detail. If he was away, Harbord handled everything.⁴

Harbord's management of the staff allowed Pershing to concentrate more of his time and energies on meeting the current crisis. He communicated frequently with Pétain, French Premier Clemenceau, and Marshall Sir Douglas Haig, commander of the British forces. But with all of these men involved in military decisions for the Allies, the system became too unwieldy to provide adequate coordination to block the German offensive. What the Allies needed was a unified command structure. To that end, a hasty conference at Doullens on 26 March 1918 brought together the senior Allied leadership, who voted to make Marshal Ferdinand Foch coordinator of Allied action on the Western Front.⁵ A month later the group decided that coordination during battle was not enough, and made Foch the Allied commander-in-chief. However, Foch's title was somewhat misleading. Though he had coordinate authority, Foch was not a commander in the same vein as General Dwight D. Eisenhower in the Second World War. Instead, Foch advised and coordinated activities between the Allies. He could suggest, plead, and cajole his fellow commanders, and direct their forces to the most needed points on the battlefield, but he did not have the power to set policy for either the British or the Americans.⁶

These restrictions prevented Foch from doing that which he most wanted: amalgamating the American soldiers into the Allied ranks. But this irritation diminished considerably when Pershing visited the new Allied commander-in-chief on 28 March to make an offer of American aid in the time of crisis. Leery of the American commander, Foch inquired as to the limits of Pershing's benevolence. In true martial spirit, Pershing replied, "At this moment there are no other questions but of fighting. Infantry, artillery, aviation, all that we have is yours; use them as you will."⁷ A few hours later, General Tasker Bliss, the American representative to the Supreme War Council, echoed Pershing's sentiments, exclaiming to Foch: "We have come over here to get ourselves killed; if you want to use us, what are you waiting for?"⁸ It was a remarkable offer from the men who had for so long blocked any form of amalgamation. Foch, Pétain and Clemenceau probably took Pershing's offer to mean a final capitulation on the amalgamation question. If so, they were mistaken. Pershing's offer referred only to those forces the AEF currently had in France, totaling four combat divisions. Since he had made the same offer to Pétain several days earlier, the current pronouncement represented no great change. Pershing remained committed to building up an independent American Army with divisions coming soon, but until they reached Europe, he would throw in what he had to help the Allies block the German advance. As it happened, the German offensive ground to a halt before Foch could use the American divisions, and with the crisis averted, Pershing returned to his policy of strict opposition to amalgamation.⁹

Searching for a Combat Command

As the German offensive pounded away at the British and French in the Somme, Harbord began to look for an opportunity to get into the fight. Though proud of his service over the past ten months, Harbord had several reasons for wanting to leave GHQ AEF. He longed to prove himself in combat. Over the course of his thirty-year career in the Army he had commanded only small cavalry and infantry units in San Francisco and the Philippines. The World War provided the opportunity to finally see combat on a large scale, and he desperately wanted to contribute his fair share in the contest. He could not spend the war behind a desk, as the “slavish nature of the staff work” was beginning to wear on him.¹⁰ The constant irritations, the never-ending bureaucratic morass, and the overall stress of building the American Expeditionary Forces made Harbord worry that he would either lose his strive for efficiency or break down completely as John McAuley Palmer had. Finally, Harbord desired professional advancement. Though a brigadier general in the National Army, he remained a colonel on the Regular list. He knew that to make his star permanent, he needed combat experience, for promotion came far quicker for those in the field commanding troops.¹¹

If Harbord needed any proof of this fact, it came when Pershing called for a list of recommendations for promotion to brigadier and major general. Harbord coordinated the compilation of a list of ten candidates for major general and seventeen for brigadier. He left his own name off the list, fearing it improper to push for his own advancement, but an assistant added his name to the final draft. Embarrassed, Harbord turned the list over to an amused Pershing, who stated that he had already intended to speak with Harbord

about the promotion. Pershing believed Harbord deserved another star, but confessed his own reluctance in forwarding the request due to their close relationship. The general did not want any charges of favoritism attached to his chief of staff and thought it better for Harbord to spend some time in a combat command before having his name sent to the War Department for promotion.¹²

The prospect of Harbord receiving a combat command caused Pershing to pause for another reason. For close to a year now, Harbord had been Pershing's most capable subordinate in the AEF, and the AEF commander had come to rely on Harbord to control the staff and act as a sounding board for Pershing's ideas and frustrations. Pershing never doubted for a moment that Harbord gave him all that any chief could ask for both personally and professionally. When Pershing expressed his feelings on the matter, Harbord replied that he had given the AEF commander "the best I have in me," but acknowledged his desire for a combat command.¹³ As reluctant as Pershing was to give up his chief of staff, he understood the need to prove oneself in the field. He could not deny his friend the chance for advancement simply to keep him at GHQ. While he hoped the move would not be permanent, expressing a desire to bring Harbord back to GHQ in three or four months, Pershing agreed to the transfer.

With Pershing's blessing, Harbord began looking for the best possible position opening soon. He knew that Pershing often held out the promise of a command for his subordinates as a reward for loyalty and service, and wanted to take full advantage of the policy before the AEF commander changed his mind. Even if Pershing was not interested in exchanging officers with the War Department, he did want a system of rotation within the AEF. The policy suited Harbord, who believed that the "military

doctrines of a nation are from and of the fighting line” and thought a good staff officer needed to know the challenges of field command. Those fresh from such duty could then “bring to the Staff the psychology and practice of the Line,” thus making him a more effective administrator.¹⁴

Harbord also knew that if he left the matter to Pershing it could be mid-summer or autumn before he gained an assignment. He feared that Pershing’s reluctance to let him go could cause the AEF commander to drag his feet, so Harbord decided to press the issue. On 31 March, he sent Pershing a letter outlining several options for his assignment, and suggested that Major General James “Dad” McAndrew, commanding the Staff College at Langres, come to Chaumont at once as his successor as chief of staff. Harbord did not want to leave his command assignment to chance. He wanted a position in which he could excel, and began looking for just such an opportunity. He did not have to look far. Brigadier General George B. Duncan, a competent officer whom Harbord had known since the Philippines, was on the list of those recommended for promotion and both Harbord and Pershing knew he would get it. This would open a space in one of the more experienced and high profile brigades in the AEF, 1st Brigade, 1st Division.¹⁵ Harbord wanted the assignment, pointing out to Pershing that “it will be an open-warfare proposition and I believe I know as much about that as any inexperienced American brigadier in France.”¹⁶ It was a fair statement given his intimate knowledge of Pershing’s vision for the type of combat doctrine. The fact that neither Pershing, Harbord, nor anyone else in the AEF knew exactly how to get the enemy out in the open if he did not want to go there did not enter into the conversation. Harbord believed in the tenet of

open-warfare, and felt confident that he could make it the fighting principle of the 1st Brigade.

Of course, Harbord knew better than to provide only one option for his assignment. He told Pershing that if the 1st Brigade was not available then he would like to be considered for the 51st Brigade. As a part of the 26th Division, the 51st Brigade had several attributes that made it ideally suited to Harbord. He suspected its commander, Brigadier General Peter E. Traub, would soon receive a promotion. With the division's other brigadier being a National Guardsman, Harbord thought the division could use a solid regular officer leading one of its combat brigades. More to the point, the 26th Division did not rate highly in Pershing's opinion. Both Traub and the division commander, Major General Clarence Edwards, received Pershing's "Pessimism" letter, and while neither had prompted further complaints from the commander-in-chief, they could still benefit from the addition of Pershing's number two man.¹⁷ Harbord had served under Edwards in the Philippine Constabulary, and did not share Pershing's low opinion of the man. He believed he could "exert a steadying influence under him in many matters," and hoped to turn the 26th Division into one of the AEF's finest.¹⁸

The 51st Brigade remained a fallback option, though, as Harbord kept his sights set on the 1st Brigade. He sought to improve his chances of getting the command by observing the Brigade's routine, and suggested that he join the division for several days. The request had an air of haste to it due to the fact that the 1st Division was moving towards the Amiens sector where it would most likely go into the line. With the division making a stop near Picardy for some additional training in open-warfare, Harbord wanted to join up before it was too late. Pershing could appreciate the need for haste, for he had

gone ahead and put Harbord's name in for promotion to brigadier general in the Regular Army. Chief of Staff Peyton March replied that there were no openings at present, but would hold Harbord's name for "future consideration."¹⁹ Recognizing that his concerns about Harbord's lack of combat experience were justified, Pershing approved Harbord's request to join the 1st Division for an observation tour.

Harbord left Paris on 5 April to join the 1st Division at Menaucourt. Upon his arrival, he found the 1st Brigade loading up for its journey to the training sector. This was Harbord's first experience travelling with a brigade, and he witnessed how the soldiers crammed into the standard French "Forty and Eight" rail cars (named for the number of men or horses they could carry). Harbord learned that the officers traveled in a day coach that held thirty-two persons. With thirty in their party, the quarters were a bit cramped. Not being one to frown at discomfort, Harbord "took a blanket out from my bedding roll, tied a handkerchief around my bald head à la Filipino-with-a-headache, and passed a fairly comfortable night in an erect position."²⁰ Having dealt with troop movements on a regular basis as chief of staff, Harbord now enjoyed watching the process up close. The fighting men constituted the heart of the American Army, and he was thrilled to be with them at last, even if it was only in an observational capacity.

Despite his enjoyment, Harbord also noted the logistical difficulty involved in moving nine thousand men, and the importance of coordination between units. Upon detraining, the various units in the 1st Brigade had to conduct several marches before reaching their billets up to thirty-five miles away. With rain turning the roads into muddy bogs, the marches became an exercise in misery. The confusion continued as the brigade arrived at its billets in stages, receiving various amounts of rest along the way. To make

matters worse, the long marches in the rain and mud brought many men, up to fifteen percent, to their billets with feet so sore that they required extra rest. The men remained in high spirits and attacked their training regimen with appropriate enthusiasm, but the delays along the route caused the units to receive varied levels of training as none began at the same time.²¹ Harbord watched this confusion with a sense of dismay, filing the knowledge away for future consideration. He stayed with Duncan's command in a local château near Trie-Château, studying the brigade for six days, and learning all he could about being a brigade commander from Duncan. He made the most of his time away from Chaumont, relishing the fresh air and the joys of riding a horse again. It was a heady and much needed vacation for an old cavalryman, and he enjoyed the experience so much that he forgot to keep in contact with GHQ, eliciting a friendly note from Pershing asking for word on the division.²²

Remembering that he was not on holiday, Harbord paid close attention to the training's emphasis on "open-warfare." Since the AEF's arrival in France, Pershing maintained that it would differentiate itself from the Allies by refusing to be hamstrung by a doctrine of trench warfare. The recent German successes appeared to vindicate Pershing's feelings on the matter. He noted that the British soldiers could not mount an effective defensive after the initial German thrust. "[The British soldiers] get out in the open and act as though they were suddenly thrust naked into the public view and didn't know what to do with themselves, as if something were radically wrong and that there ought to be another trench somewhere for them to get into."²³ Pershing could take pride in the fact that the 1st Division made plans to focus on the combat of movement so critical to "open" warfare. This initial plan called for three or four days of movement training

ending in a full division maneuver. Unfortunately for the Americans, the training came under the direction of General Micheler's French 5th Army. Even with the current crisis along the Somme, the French showed little interest in open warfare, and failed to provide a schedule for the training regimen. A frustrated General Duncan decided to set the program himself according to AEF doctrine, emphasizing company and battalion attack formations and close order drills. As the training progressed, however, a problem arose with the divisional maneuver. Though responsible for overseeing the exercise, the French failed to adequately survey the terrain before designating it for use. When the leaders of the 1st Division finally saw the ground, they found it covered in crops. Sensing it a bad idea to have doughboys trampling through French crops on a training exercise, they cancelled the maneuver. The Americans held a terrain exercise instead, which Major George C. Marshall called "mobile warfare adapted to emphasize the lessons which had just been learned by the French in opposing the enemy's great offensive."²⁴ Though not a full return to a trench warfare doctrine, the plan hardly fit with Pershing's desire for a commitment to aggressive movement. But like the rest of the AEF's training program, unanticipated hindrances forced a change in focus, limiting the amount of time spent learning open warfare techniques. These changes left the American soldiers with varied levels of training in both trench and open warfare tactics, but mastery (or in some cases basic competence) in neither. It was not an encouraging set of circumstances given the crisis of the German offensive, but the situation dictated that the men do the best they could.²⁵

As enjoyable as Harbord's time with the 1st Division was, work finally caught up with him on 12 April when he received word that Pershing sought to talk with him via

telephone. Since the nearest receiver was in Paris, some sixty mile away, Harbord set out at once. When he arrived in Paris he found that the General had already handled the matter himself and their urgent discussion amounted to a ten-minute conversation of Pershing explaining what he had done. He concluded their talk by ordering Harbord to go to Foch's new headquarters the next day. While a bit irritated, Harbord was glad to receive something to do that justified the trip. And since his car needed repairs, he decided to spend the evening in Paris before leaving the next day.²⁶

A night in Paris meant the opportunity to spend some time with Charles Dawes, whose company Harbord thoroughly enjoyed whenever the chance presented itself. The two enjoyed dinner and a bit of theatre, both reveling in the fact that Paris was still a delightful locale, despite the war. The evening also presented Harbord with a unique look into the character of the French people. During the show, an air alert sounded signaling the presence of enemy planes overhead. The manager of the theatre appeared and announced that with bombs falling on the city, the performance had to end. As the audience began to leave, the orchestra started to play the "Marseillaise," giving the moment a touch of peace and solidarity. Harbord marveled at the scene, wondering, "What can you, - if you are a Boche, - hope to do with a people like that? You drop your bombs . . . you kill people and maim others, but while you are busy with your little errand the French people are marching to the strains of 'La Marseillaise'; and no one can run away when the 'Marseillaise' is playing."²⁷ It was a stark reminder that, whatever frustrations he felt with the French leadership, Harbord could not help but admire these people who had endured so much already and yet continued to fight.

That same admiration was tested the next day, as the journey to Foch's headquarters devolved into an exercise in inefficiency and frustration. Thinking that Foch's headquarters was in the town of Beauvais, Harbord began the two-hour trip the next morning. After a pleasant ride, he arrived at their destination only to learn that Foch had moved fifteen miles away. Harbord and his driver set out at once, but when they reached the new location, an official said that Foch's headquarters was forty miles in the other direction. A frustrated Harbord set out again, growing increasingly irritated as the day went on. The confusion did not end when he finally found Foch's headquarters. One of the staff officers stated that Foch was away and would not return until 6:30 p.m. Though only 2:30 p.m., Harbord had little choice but to wait and hope that Foch would return earlier than expected. As with everything else that day, the initial information proved false. Harbord did not get in to see Foch until about nine-thirty that evening, met with the Allied commander-in-chief for about ten minutes, and was back at Trie-Château by 1:30 a.m., with a considerably less favorable impression of the French than the night before.²⁸

The long wait at Foch's headquarters was not completely fruitless, as it gave Harbord some time to consider his proposed assignment to the line. The more he thought about it, the more appealing the idea of the 1st Brigade became. As Harbord saw it, he was in a prime position to take over if Duncan was promoted. Harbord's time with the brigade showed him several things: which units Duncan considered strong and weak, the brigade's overall level of training, Duncan's method of dealing with individuals and units, and the coordination between the Infantry and Artillery. He could not think of a better officer to take over command should the spot open up. He wrote to Pershing

explaining these points and saying how the brigade “looks mighty attractive to me, and the chance of going in with this 1st Division is one that any man might covet.” He assured the general, “I believe I can deliver the goods if you give me the chance.”²⁹

After his marathon journey to see Marshall Foch, Harbord met briefly with the 1st Division commander, Major General Robert L. Bullard, who had just returned from the First Evacuation Hospital at Toul.³⁰ The two observed an exercise in “open” warfare training, paying particular attention to its impact on the skeptical French observers. Pershing had arrived in time to witness the exercises, and was suitably pleased with the division’s progress. The three men then retired to enjoy an extended chat to discuss the day’s events. Sitting in their shirtsleeves by a fire, they shared their general observations, which were favorable, and discussed the impending movement into the line. An orderly observing the men thought they could be mistaken for being back in the Philippines in the jungles of Mindanao.³¹ The next day, Pershing made an address to the division’s officers that captured the very essence of the AEF.

I believe that you are well prepared to take your place along with the seasoned troops of our Allies. But let us not for a moment forget that, while study and preparation are necessary, war itself is the real school where the art of war is learned. Whatever your previous instructions may have been, you must learn, in the actual experience of war, the practical application of the tactical principles that you have been taught during your preliminary training. Those principles are as absolute as they are immutable When confronted with a new situation, do not try to recall

examples given in any particular book on the subject; do not try to remember what your instructor has said in discussing some special problem; do not try to carry in your minds patterns of particular exercises of battles, thinking they will fit new cases, because no two sets of circumstances are alike; but bear in mind constantly . . . those well-established general principles, so that you may apply them when the time comes.³²

Pershing concluded his speech with patriotic flair, pointing out that “Our people to-day are hanging expectant upon your deeds” and assuring them that he and the American public held a “strong belief in your success . . . with a feeling of certainty in our hearts that you are going to make a record of which your country will be proud.”³³ The address was short and full of vigor, displaying the best of Pershing’s forceful personality. Colonel Hines likened it to a talk from a football coach just before his team took the field in the championship game. Harbord thought it “a very stirring talk made in that direct, simple manner which is supposed to appeal to the American soldier and in which General Pershing quite excelled.” Of course, some in the audience failed to become wrapped up in the moment, as a few lieutenants in the rear had to suppress a laugh when a bored teamster asked who it was speaking.³⁴

The London Agreement

Despite Harbord’s campaigning for the 1st Brigade, Pershing was not ready to make the move at the present, so Harbord ended his brief foray with the 1st Division and

reassumed his duties at GHQ. After a quick return to Chaumont, he joined Pershing for a trip to London after a stop at British GHQ to meet with Marshall Haig. A road weary Harbord met his Chief on 19 April for the trip to Haig's Headquarters with Pershing's aide-de-camp, Colonel Boyd, in tow. Once there, Harbord noted that Haig was beginning to show the strain of the war, as "there were a few more lines in his fine Scotch face than at our last meeting."³⁵ It was not a great surprise, considering the Germans had launched a second offensive across the Lys River in Flanders on 9 April. Though not as successful as the Somme campaign, the gains meant that the British were falling back on both ends of their front. If they could not stop the Germans, the British would have to establish a defensive position around the channel ports or risk being cut off from England.³⁶

The Allies spent an enjoyable evening discussing the current situation. Joining them was the outgoing British Secretary of State for War, Lord Derby, on his way to take over as the new ambassador to France. Harbord found Derby's frank statements regarding President Wilson's administration of the war a bit distressing. Derby believed the American government failed to give Pershing adequate support, resulting in the AEF commander being overloaded with responsibilities. "He thought seventy five per cent. of General Pershing's worries," Harbord recalled, "could be saved him by a different administration of our War Department."³⁷ An admitted supporter of autocratic rule, Derby thought it unfortunate that Wilson, who he viewed as the most powerful autocrat in the world, did not utilize his power more efficiently and was hampered by the War Department's practice of "passing the buck." Such talk must have been a unique experience for Harbord, whose own views of government ran further towards autocracy than he would like to admit. The evening ended with a good laugh as all agreed that

politicians could not be trusted with anything as important as war. This was quite the consensus opinion coming from the military heads of two thirds of the coalition fighting to make the world safe for democracy!³⁸

After bidding a fond farewell to Haig, Pershing and Harbord set out for London the next morning. They had not been in England since the previous June, and noted a sharp decline in the adulation that had greeted them on their first visit. They again stayed at the Savoy, enduring a brief moment of discomfort when they went to dinner and the orchestra began playing the American national anthem. As per custom, Pershing and Harbord stood at attention while the musicians labored through the song, presenting the sight of two American officers standing tall in the middle of the restaurant while other guests frittered about, making Pershing feel rather conspicuous. The embarrassment continued at dinner when they discovered they did not have the necessary coupons and had to borrow butter from the party of an American actress at the next table. It was not exactly how Harbord envisioned his return to England.³⁹

Pershing's party spent three days in London, making the rounds to see Ambassador Page, Admiral Sims, and various others. When they finally made it to the British War Office, they met with the new Secretary of State for War, Lord Milner and General Sir Henry Wilson, General Robertson's replacement as Chief of the Imperial General Staff. The purpose of the meeting was to go over the various shipping arrangements made over the previous month. In this regard, Pershing and Harbord found themselves at a decided disadvantage given their inefficient communication with Secretary Baker and the War Department. The problem arose from Baker's change of heart concerning the American shipping program for the near future. Before sailing for

home, Baker supported Pershing's decision to limit their agreement with the British for the shipment of infantry and machine-gun troops to 60,000 for the month of April, and to make no provisions for later months.⁴⁰ Once back in the United States, however, Baker had apparently reconsidered the plan. With the Germans catching the British off-guard at Lys, Baker sensed the emergency now represented a greater threat to the British than previously believed. Consequently, he approved a change to the previous agreement, allowing 120,000 infantry and machine-gun personnel to be shipped in British tonnage for the months of April, May, June and July. Historian Daniel Beaver called the new plan "a masterpiece of studied ambiguity" due to its pronouncement that it was "not to be regarded as a commitment from which the government of the United States is not free to depart when the exigency no longer requires it."⁴¹ But it did represent a much greater commitment to the British than the one Pershing had agreed to. It was also decided without the AEF commander's input, leaving Pershing completely in the dark as he met with the British.

Armed with the new agreement, Milner and Wilson sought to finally draw some concessions out of the resolute American commander. They spoke of the possibility of transporting some 750,000 men in British vessels by the end of July but questioned the ability of the United States to raise such an amount. Harbord found the figure "astounding," considering that there was "nothing in past records of troop transportation which justify the present estimate."⁴² The British routinely claimed that turning over as much as a freighter to the United States could threaten the entire British Isles with starvation. Now they were offering roughly twenty-five ships per month, capable of carrying 10,000 men each. Harbord could barely hold back his irritation. "Where has

such an amount of shipping been?" he later wrote to Pershing. "Why has it needed a German menace to the Channel ports to make it available?"⁴³

In Harbord's mind, the current crisis did not justify scrapping the entire plan for building an independent American army. Whatever claims the French and British made to the contrary, it was clear what they wanted: the full amalgamation of American infantry and machine gunners into their ranks. If the Americans allowed the Allies control over AEF training and shipping, even for a little while, it would tie the AEF to the Allies for the foreseeable future and further delay the creation of an independent American army.⁴⁴ Harbord could barely contemplate such a circumstance, telling Pershing, "It is not conceded that the end of the present emergency will be the end of the war. To secure a satisfactory peace the war must continue and American forces be built up to that end."⁴⁵ Pershing agreed with his chief of staff's assessment, and spent the remainder of the discussions blocking all requests for the expansion of the original plan. At the final meeting, the British played their trump card. They produced a telegram from Lord Reading outlining the new agreement approved by Secretary Baker. Though undoubtedly confused, Pershing handled it with his traditional calm. He stated that since he had received no word of the cable from his own government (which was true), he felt no obligation to honor the terms it stipulated. The stunned British were left with little recourse but to negotiate a new deal with Pershing. The final product, termed the London Agreement, allowed for the shipment of 120,000 infantry and machine gunners in British bottoms, but limited it only to the month of May. Any excess shipping would bring the artillery and additional troops necessary to complete the divisions.⁴⁶

Bolstered by Pershing's firm stance against the British, Harbord focused his attention on Washington. It angered him that the President and the War Department would commit the United States to a certain course of action and then "throw the responsibility for the really important decision on General Pershing by attaching his consent as a condition to the way it is to be carried out." It seemed another example the War Department working against Pershing and the AEF when it should be giving its full support. Harbord could not understand any agreement that Pershing did not agree to himself. The fact that neither he nor Pershing had received any word of the agreement with Lord Reading was simply the icing on the cake. Did the Administration not grasp the fragile nature of the British war effort? "I wonder if the President realizes," he wrote in his diary, "what it will mean to get a division or two annihilated under the British flag with Ireland in arms against conscription, and our people none too warmly inclined to the British Alliance, and our equally strong obligations to our other Allies, the gallant French."⁴⁷ Wilson appeared willing to sacrifice everything they had worked towards on this rash gamble with the British.

Harbord's frustration is understandable, to a point. Pershing had enough responsibilities and pressures weighing on him already without the Administration undercutting his authority. Dealing with the Allies was a constant headache as they continually sought to use the Americans for their own purposes, and the fact that the AEF continued to grow at an agonizingly slow rate did not help matters. Having Wilson, Baker, and the War Department setting policies that affected the AEF was a nuisance, and to do so without consulting Pershing was an added difficulty that few commanders would happily tolerate. However, whether Harbord liked it or not, the President was free

to negotiate any diplomatic agreement he saw fit. If the Secretary of War or the War Department made the AEF's job more difficult, it was unfortunate. But as much as Pershing and Harbord denied it, control over the American army, including the AEF, resided in Washington, not Chaumont. Whatever role Pershing had in American diplomatic decisions and the formation of policy was at the President's discretion. It was only by Pershing's good fortune that Wilson and Baker gave him as much control as they did.

When Baker learned the particulars of the London Agreement, he immediately retracted his agreement with Lord Reading and deferred to the AEF commander, believing he had a better understanding of the situation. Whether he knew that Pershing had yet to receive official notification of the original deal is unclear, but Baker recognized the problem of carrying out negotiations on both sides of the Atlantic. He recommended to President Wilson that, in the future, General Pershing should oversee all agreements with the Allies to avoid further confusion. Pershing and Harbord got the control they wanted, but both grew increasingly wary of the Administration in the process.⁴⁸

The Americans returned to France on 25 April, heading immediately to Sarcus and Foch's Headquarters to discuss the new arrangement. Foch echoed the British call for infantry and machine-gun units, which Pershing again refused. Harbord argued that if the AEF sent only combat troops it would be sometime in October or November before the necessary auxiliary troops could be brought over to form an independent American army. Foch conceded the need for the American soldiers to fight under their flag, but feared that the wait risked defeat in the present crisis, and ultimately the war. Pershing,

however, would not budge in his refusal to renegotiate the plan. He tried to assuage Foch's fears by detailing the particulars of the London Agreement. Though not happy with any deal that purported to help only the British, Foch finally signed off on the plan when Pershing told him of the additional tonnage promised by the British.⁴⁹

Thinking Foch satisfied for the moment, the Americans returned to Chaumont, where Harbord found the cable from the War Department that the British had sprung on them in London. Pershing was shocked to learn that he had been so poorly informed, and equally unsettled to read the full concessions made by his government. After reading the cable thoroughly, the AEF commander scrawled in the margins, "If this is not amalgamation, what is it?"⁵⁰ Though it superseded his own agreement, Pershing resigned himself to continue his refusal to allow for the amalgamation of his forces, assuming that Baker's intentions were misrepresented or confused in the memorandum.⁵¹ Harbord was not as generous. He believed it further proof that the War Department was actively working against the AEF. Since the proposed exchange of general staff officers between the War Department and GHQ, Harbord had grown increasingly suspicious of the new chief of staff, General Peyton March. He heard rumors that March left France feeling unappreciated by Pershing and GHQ. Considering the short shrift given to artillery in Pershing's vision of open warfare, this was not an unreasonable statement, but Harbord dismissed such thoughts. He told Pershing that "the Army Artillery apparently was not visualized by [March] as the important command which we know it to be."⁵² Harbord instead thought March ungrateful for his time in the AEF, and believed the chief of staff had become consumed with a desire for since taking over the War Department.

In this instance, Harbord is guilty of selective memory regarding March's tenure in the AEF. As chief of AEF artillery, March ran into difficulty with Pershing's staff over training policies and censorship restrictions. He also sought to have the chief of artillery made a permanent member of the General Staff. The plan died under opposition from GHQ in which historian James Cooke sees "the hand of James Harbord."⁵³ The General Staff did not willingly accept interference in creating policy, even from within the AEF itself. While it is unclear if March felt any animosity towards the staff at GHQ, there is evidence of friction in the relationship, with a sizable portion of it coming from Harbord's domain at Chaumont.⁵⁴

It now appeared to Harbord that March was allowing his supposed feelings of bitterness to affect his dealings with Pershing and the AEF. Just a week before, Pershing received a chiding cable from the chief of staff regarding promotions. Pershing had sent March a cable expressing his frustration over the current promotion list and requested that Congress hold off on confirmation hearings until the Secretary of War could review Pershing's reservations. March's reply lectured the AEF commander like an errant schoolboy:

The American Expeditionary Forces is only a part of the American army and whatever promotions to the grades of Major General and Brigadier General are necessary will be made by [the Secretary of War] from the entire army. You were directed to submit recommendations as were other general officers. . . . Your recommendations are regarded as especially valuable as far as they are limited to the American Expeditionary Forces,

but the efficiency of senior officers at home is determined by what there is actually accomplished here . . . The Secretary of War demands the utmost efficiency in his generals and is going to get it, regardless of rank and seniority in appointments. There will be no change in the nominations already sent to the Senate.⁵⁵

The cable's tone shocked Pershing, who quickly retreated from his earlier request in his response. He explained that he was very anxious regarding promotions, and thought it necessary that he and March "appear before the army at large as being in accord on this question of promotions, and we must reach a thorough understanding so that there may be a very clear policy."⁵⁶ Not wanting Pershing to back down too much, Harbord advised the General to take a different approach with the chief of staff. He suggested that in Pershing's first personal letter to March he should "play up the Army Artillery a little," thinking it "good business" to sooth March's perceived bruised ego.⁵⁷ Harbord did not care for March personally, but recognized that Pershing needed to remain on good terms with the chief of staff. In this regard, Harbord was doing his job as AEF chief of staff; he was protecting his commanding officer, even from the War Department. Pershing agreed to Harbord's advice in spirit, and though his next letter did not mention the artillery, it did convey a congenial tone. The brief dust up quickly subsided, but the relationship continued to strain under the clash of wills.⁵⁸

A Farewell to GHQ AEF

After addressing the issue with March, Harbord turned his attention to more pressing matters. He had been at his desk only intermittently over the past month, and the work piled up. Amongst the stack of papers waiting for him were the results of the latest round of physicals for general officers. Of the half dozen names on the list of generals found physically deficient, Harbord noticed one name in particular, that of Brigadier General Charles Doyen, USMC.⁵⁹ Doyen commanded the AEF's contingent of Marines, made up of the Fifth and Sixth Regiments, forming the 4th "Marine" Brigade. As a part of the 2nd Division, the brigade would soon go into the line and needed an able commander. Harbord gave Pershing his recommendations for the now vacant commands, again leaving his own name off the list. He suggested Brigadier General Robert Alexander for the Marine Brigade and Hines for the 1st Brigade.⁶⁰ Pershing, however, had a different idea. He sensed in the Marine Brigade a promising opportunity for his chief of staff, saying "he could give [Harbord] no better command in France than to let [him] succeed General Doyen with the Marines."⁶¹ With that it was settled. Harbord finally had his desired command, now it was now upon him to make good.

With his assignment to the line, Harbord joined a small exodus from the AEF General Staff, as several other members who joined GHQ in the summer of 1917 were leaving as well. After failing their physical examinations, Brigadier Generals Benjamin Alvord and Alfred E. Bradley were to returning to the United States. Lieutenant Colonel Robert "Corky" Davis and Colonel Merritte W. Ireland filled their positions as Adjutant General and Surgeon General, respectively. Others were leaving with Harbord for duty

with the troops. Colonel George Van Horn Moseley replaced Colonel William D. Conner as assistant chief of staff, G-4, and Major James L. Collins succeeded Colonel Frank McCoy as the Secretary of the General Staff. Pershing made a final change in the General Staff, approving the position of Deputy Chief of Staff. Colonel LeRoy Eltinge came on board in the new role.⁶²

With all of these changes at GHQ, Harbord agreed to stay on for a few days to oversee the transition and to bring his successor, Major General James McAndrew, up to speed. A graduate of the Military Academy, Class of '88, McAndrew commanded the AEF General Staff College at Langres before coming to Chaumont. Several years older than Harbord, one historian called McAndrew "less of a driver than Harbord," but thought his loyalty and ability to adapt to his commander's personality made him an excellent choice for AEF chief of staff.⁶³ Harbord knew McAndrew to be a highly educated officer of "admirable character" who thought Pershing a gift of Providence in the nation's time of need, and thought he would compliment the AEF commander well over the coming months.⁶⁴

McAndrew's addition as AEF chief of staff gave the AEF General Staff an entirely different character than the one Pershing had grown accustomed to. While Logan and Dennis Nolan remained at G-1 and G-2, the rest of the Assistant Chief's of Staff were different. Fox Conner permanently replaced John McAuley Palmer as head of G-3, Moseley took over G-4, and Harold Fiske oversaw training as assistant chief of staff, G-5. All were imminently capable and efficient officers, but the loss of Harbord deprived the General Staff of its coordinating force. For the first year of the AEF's existence, Harbord was the glue that held the staff together, soothing egos, defusing

potential problems, and driving the staff on to give Pershing all the support he needed. With a mixture of charm and ferocity, Harbord kept the staff running smoothly. He provided Pershing an outlet to voice his frustrations and a confidential advisor who was not afraid to speak his mind. With Harbord gone, a new dynamic developed within GHQ. An inner circle emerged within the AEF that operated as an advisory council to Pershing. Known as the “GHQ Clique,” it consisted of Fox Conner, “Corky” Davis, John Hines, and Malin Craig.⁶⁵ Conner and Davis remained at Chaumont while Hines and Craig gave Pershing an inroad into the needs of the line. The four communicated regularly on policy decisions and formed a wall of absolute loyalty and support around Pershing.⁶⁶ What allowed the group to function, and even necessitated it somewhat, was McAndrew’s managerial style. Whereas Harbord took matters into his own hands, issuing decisions rapidly and with Pershing’s support, McAndrew deliberated excessively and delegated much of his authority to the staff. Brigadier General Johnson Hagood noted that McAndrew and the new Deputy Chief of Staff LeRoy Eltinge “attend[ed] to too much detail themselves and [allowed] too much concurrent jurisdiction.”⁶⁷ McAndrew ran the General Staff like a democracy, giving the five assistant chiefs of staff a vote on promotions and requiring a consensus approval before an officer was detailed to the General Staff. Though it worked, McAndrew’s management by committee was a far cry from Harbord’s authoritative yet personable style.⁶⁸

While he planned to keep an eye on the General Staff after he left, Harbord directed most of his attention to preparing for his own departure. With Pershing attending a conference of the SWC at Abbeville, Harbord brought McAndrew to Chaumont to work out the last details of the change. When Pershing returned on the

evening of 4 May, the three men spent the better part of the next day working together to make the transition a smooth one. That evening Pershing and Harbord had a private moment to say their good-byes. Both recognized the significance of their separation, looking back at their time spent building an Army and getting it ready to fight. With the fight now at hand, it was only fitting that their relationship change as well. Pershing reiterated that he considered the move as only temporary, hoping to bring Harbord back to Chaumont within a few months. Knowing his own limited history commanding troops in the field, Harbord requested that Pershing not commit himself to such a promise, pointing out that should he fail in his command it would not do for him to return to the General Staff. On a brighter note, Harbord reminded the General that if he succeeded, he could be more valuable in the field than behind a desk. Regretting his promise to let his friend leave, Pershing attempted his own bit of levity, telling Harbord, "I'm giving you the best Brigade in France and if things don't work out I'll know who to blame."⁶⁹ With that, the two men parted with a handshake and a salute.

The next morning Harbord fulfilled his last duty, selecting his first ever aide-de-camp, a young lieutenant of Field Artillery, Richard Norris Williams. Educated in Switzerland and Harvard, Lieutenant Williams had attended the Field Artillery School at Saumer and served as an instructor at the French Artillery School at Senlis before the German offensive put it out of business. Harbord liked the young man and took great pleasure in his ability as a French scholar. On the morning of 5 May, the two men departed GHQ, heading east-southeast towards Verdun where his brigade held a portion of the line. Harbord would eventually return to Chaumont as chief of staff, but not for another year. For now, the promise of joining in the fight filled Harbord with joyous

anticipation. At long last, it was his turn to stand in the face of the enemy and direct men in combat, and in this he mirrored the AEF as a whole. He had spent the last twenty-five plus years preparing for this moment, but he held his excitement in check. There were hard days ahead, and Harbord knew that that his own success was far from assured.⁷⁰

Notes

¹ Donald Smythe, *Pershing: General of the Armies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 96-98; James G. Harbord, *The American Army in France 1917-1919* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1936), 242; S.L.A. Marshall, *World War I* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1964), 352-57

² Diary entry, 25 March 1918, John J. Pershing Diary, Box 6-7, John J. Pershing Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.

³ John J. Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War* 2 vols. (New York: F.A. Stokes, 1931), 1:256; Diary entry, 25 March 1918, Pershing Diary, Box 6-7, Pershing Papers, LC; "Memorandum Concerning Policy Which, Under the Present Circumstances, Should Govern the Utilization of American Forces," 29 April 1918, HS French File: 402-30.1: Memorandum, *United States Army in the World War* 17 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1988), 3:287-89. [Hereafter cited as *USAWW*]

⁴ Dennis E. Nolan Typescript, 102, Box 2, Dennis E. Nolan Papers, MHI; James J. Cooke, *Pershing and His Generals: Command and Staff in the AEF* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), 95.

⁵ The conferees included Lord Milner, British Secretary of State for War, General Sir Henry Wilson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, President Poincaré, Premier Clemenceau, Generals Haig, Foch, and Pétain. Pershing did not attend. Harbord, *American Army*, 243.

⁶ Robert B. Bruce, *A Fraternity of Arms: America and France in the Great War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 194.

⁷ Pershing quoted in Harbord, *American Army*, 244.

⁸ Bliss quoted in Ferdinand Foch, *The Memoirs of Marshal Foch*, trans. Bentley Mott (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1931), 270.

⁹ Smythe, *Pershing*, 102.

¹⁰ James G. Harbord, *Leaves From a War Diary* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1925), 255.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² "Memorandum of Conversation with General Pershing" 30 May 1918, Box 7, James G. Harbord Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Pershing remained committed to rotation between the Line and Staff throughout 1918. He wanted all of his General Staff officers to have the opportunity for service in the line at some point in time, and in this instance it was Harbord's turn. Harbord, *American Army*, 244-46.

¹⁵ Harbord was not the only person at GHQ interested in the 1st Brigade. Colonel Frank M. McCoy, the secretary of the General Staff also put in a request to take command of the brigade. Pershing denied the request, on the grounds that he was too valuable at present to be lost to a field command. Frank R. McCoy to James G. Harbord, Memorandum, 1 April 1918, Box 14, Frank McCoy Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 247; Harbord to Pershing, 31 March 1918, Box 11, Harbord Papers, LC.

¹⁷ Pershing's letter of 13 December 1917 went to Edwards, Traub, Sibert, and B.B. Buck. AEF GHQ, Office of CIC Correspondence, RG 120, NARA.

- ¹⁸ Harbord to Pershing, 31 March 1918, Box 11, Harbord Papers, LC
- ¹⁹ Confidential Cable 836-S, Confidential Cable 1077-R, 3 April 1918, Box 11, Harbord Papers, LC.
- ²⁰ Harbord, *War Diary*, 257.
- ²¹ Harbord to John J. Pershing, 11 April 1918, Box 87, Pershing Papers, LC.
- ²² Diary entry, 5 April 1918, Pershing Diary, Box 6-7, Pershing Papers, LC; Harbord, *American Army*, 247-49; Pershing to Harbord, 10 April 1918, Box 87, Pershing Papers, LC.
- ²³ Foch, *The Memoirs of Marshal Foch*, 248; Pershing, *My Experiences*, 1:354-55; Smythe, *Pershing*, 98.
- ²⁴ George C. Marshall, *Memoirs of My Services in the World War 1917-1918* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976), 77.
- ²⁵ Harbord to Pershing, 11 April 1918, Box 87, Pershing Papers, LC.
- ²⁶ Harbord, *War Diary*, 261.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 262.
- ²⁸ Harbord to Pershing, 13 April 1918, Box 11, Harbord Papers, LC; Harbord, *War Diary*, 263-65.
- ²⁹ Harbord, *War Diary*, 263-65. Harbord goes on to say that he thought the only man capable of taking over the brigade was Col. John L. Hines, who commanded the 16th Infantry Regiment, but his departure would leave the regiment without a suitable commander; Allan R. Millet, *The General: Robert L. Bullard and Officership in the United States Army 1881-1925* (Westport, CT; Greenwood Press, 1975), 334-35.
- ³⁰ Bullard was suffering from a case of neuritis that cause a considerable amount of pain in his right arm and shoulder. Knowing Pershing's stance on physically unfit generals, Bullard's staff had developed a cover story that the general had slammed his hand in a car door and required treatment. Harbord either did not know of the deception, or played along, reporting that he believed Bullard to be suffering some after effects of an anti-tetanus shot, but would be ready when the division went into the line. Harbord to Pershing, 13 April 1918, Box 11, Harbord Papers, LC; Millet, *The General*, 356. Historian James J. Cooke postulates that Harbord's complicity in accepting Bullard's explanation of his illness was part of a plan to have Harbord take over the 1st Brigade. If Bullard was relieved, Harbord would probably see his chances of getting the brigade greatly diminished. Cooke, *Pershing and His General*, 79.
- ³¹ Millet, *The General*, 356-57; Diary entry, 15 April 1918 Pershing Diary, Box 6-7, Pershing Papers, LC; Harbord, *War Diary*, 264-66.
- ³² Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, 1:393.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 394-95.
- ³⁴ Diary entry, 16 April 1918, John J. Hines Diary, Box 1, John L. Hines Papers, MHI; Harbord, *American Army*, 250; Millet, *The General*, 357.
- ³⁵ Harbord, *American Army*, 250.
- ³⁶ Diary entry, 19 April 1918, Pershing Diary, Box 6-7, Pershing Papers, LC; It was during this struggle that Haig made his most famous pronouncement of the war, stating, "There is no other course open to us but to fight it out. Every position must be held to the last man. There must be no retirement. With out

backs to the wall and believing in the justice of our cause, each one of us must fight to the end.” Quoted in Marshall, *World War I*, 366.

³⁷ Harbord, *American Army*, 251.

³⁸ Harbord, *War Diary*, 267-70.

³⁹ Diary entry, 21 April 1918, Pershing Diary; Harbord, *American Army*, 254.

⁴⁰ For the details of the agreement, see Notes of Conference at General Pershing’s Quarters in Paris, 7 April 1918, *USAWW*, 2:288.

⁴¹ Daniel R. Beaver, *Newton Baker and the American War Effort 1917-1919* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 140; Memorandum for Lord Reading from N.D. Baker, 19 April 1918, included in Cable: A-1184-R, 26 April 1918, *USAWW*, 2:351.

⁴² “Memorandum” n. d. (probably from April 1918), Box 11, Harbord Papers, LC.

⁴³ *Ibid*; *USAWW*, 2:340-41; Smythe, *Pershing*, 109.

⁴⁴ While the British offered artillery components for six full divisions, Harbord noted that with the American division doubling the size of the British one, the artillery contingent amounted to only three divisions. “Memorandum,” Box 11, Harbord Papers, LC.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*.

⁴⁶ The agreement also stipulated that the artillery would utilize French armament and train with the French until such time as it was ready to be integrated into the organized divisions. The tonnage allotted to bring over the infantry and machine gunners would be used in the following month to bring over the auxiliary men for the completion of the divisions. Pershing, *My Experiences*, 2: 5-6; Harbord, *American Army*, 254; P Confidential Cable: Cable 961-S, *USAWW*, 2:342-43.

⁴⁷ Harbord, *War Diary*, 271.

⁴⁸ Smythe, *Pershing*, 110.

⁴⁹ Harbord, *American Army*, 256; Report of Conversation between General Pershing and General Foch at Sarcus, 25 April 1918, *USAWW*, 2:348-50

⁵⁰ Beaver, *Newton D. Baker*, 142. Pershing also underlined the phrase, “useful cooperation at the earliest possible moment,” prompting his question in the margin.

⁵¹ Pershing, *My Experiences*, 2:8-9.

⁵² Harbord to Pershing, Memorandum, 28 April 1918, Box 11, Harbord Papers, LC.

⁵³ Cooke, *Pershing and His Generals*, 110.

⁵⁴ Edward M. Coffman, *The Hilt of the Sword: The Career of Peyton C. March* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), 47. Coffman notes that despite these differences, March’s relationship with Pershing appeared to remain friendly.

⁵⁵ Cable: A-1159-R, 23 April 1918, *USAWW*, 2:342; Upon reading the cable, Secretary Baker wrote at the bottom, “An excellent illustration of the way *not* to send a message!” Smythe, *Pershing*, 91.

⁵⁶ Pershing to Peyton C. March, 23 April 1918, Box 123, Pershing Papers, LC.

⁵⁷ Harbord to Pershing, Memorandum, 28 April 1918, Box 11, Harbord Papers, LC.

⁵⁸ Coffman, *The Hilt of the Sword*, 71; Harbord, *American Army*, 258-59. Harbord is much more pointed in his criticism of March concerning this issue in the 1936 book than he is in his *War Diary* or any of the wartime documents. He takes considerable exception to March's version of the event in *The Nation at War* (1932), particularly March's habit of taking the first person when referring to policy decisions (i.e. "I did this", "I denied that", etc.).

⁵⁹ Harbord to Pershing, Memorandum, 28 April 1918, Box 11, Harbord Papers, LC. The Medical Board also found the following Brigadier Generals incapacitated for field service: Benjamin Alvord, Jr., Alfred E. Bradley, M.D., Peter Murray, and Robert Walsh.

⁶⁰ Harbord to Pershing, Memorandum, 29 April 1918, Box 11, Harbord Papers, LC.

⁶¹ Harbord, *War Diary*, 278.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 278-79.

⁶³ Smythe, *Pershing*, 120.

⁶⁴ Harbord, *American Army*, 263; Smythe, *Pershing*, 120.

⁶⁵ Interview with Major General Irving J. Phillipson, 2 December 1947, Office of the Chief of Military History Collection, Army General Staff Interviews, MHI.

⁶⁶ The men would follow Pershing into the War Department after the war, with Hines and Craig rising to become Chief of Staff of the Army, and Davis becoming Adjutant General of the Army.

⁶⁷ Diary entry, 18 July 1918, Johnson Hagood Diary, Box 1, Johnson Hagood Papers, MHI.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*; Cooke, *Pershing and His Generals*, 84-85.

⁶⁹ Diary entry, 5 May 1918, Pershing Diary, Box 6-7, Pershing Papers, LC; Pershing quoted in Smythe, *Pershing*, 120; Harbord, *American Army*, 264; Pershing, *My Experiences*, 2:38.

⁷⁰ Harbord, *American Army*, 264; Harbord, *War Diary*, 279-81.

CHAPTER VIII
WITH THE MARINE BRIGADE (MAY – JUNE 1918)

May of 1918 brought with it a tenuous calm to the Allied powers on the Western Front. The first two acts of the German Spring Offensive had achieved tremendous territorial gains over the past six weeks, but failed to sever the line between the French and British Armies and did not isolate the British in front of the Channel ports. After their second offensive ground to a halt at the end of April, the Germans dug in to consolidate their new positions and rebuild their strength before resuming the attack. The Allies took this brief lull in German operations as an opportunity to form their own lines and prepare for future offensive operations of their own. With the Germans providing time to prepare, the Allies now sought men to rebuild their strength, and they again turned to the Americans as the most promising source of manpower. Scraping the bottom of their own manpower reserves, the French and British believed that only the immediate amalgamation of American soldiers into their own depleted ranks would enable them to block any future German offensive or launch their own counteroffensive. Ready or not, after months of rhetoric, argument and debate, it was now time for the Americans to make their mark. Though sympathetic to Allied concerns, American General John J. Pershing rallied his own considerable determination to maintain control of his forces and to hold out for an independent American Army. He would agree to lend aid in a crisis, but would not abandon his presidential mandate to show the American flag on the battlefields of France. It was a dangerous game, but Pershing committed himself to playing it. Everyone knew that the Germans would renew their offensive at some point.

The only questions were where, and could the Allies hold out long enough for the Americans to finally appear on the front in force.

For newly minted Brigadier General James Harbord, May was a turning point in his career. Serving as Pershing's chief of staff since the American Expeditionary Forces' inception, he had spent the last year organizing and managing the AEF General Staff. With Pershing's approval of a transfer to the line, the number two man in the AEF now faced the duty for which all military officers dream, a wartime combat command. All his training, all his years of service, everything he had ever worked for prepared Harbord for this moment. Much like the AEF, it was time for Harbord to toe the line in the face of the enemy. And like the army in which he served, Harbord had to work on an accelerated timetable that made adequate preparation extremely difficult. He would have only three weeks in his new command before moving to block the Germans' third major offensive in as many months, with the fate of the war seemingly hanging in the balance.

Backs to the Wall

Facing spectacular German gains across the Somme and in Flanders over the previous month, the Allies came together for the fifth session of the Supreme War Council on 1 May. Convening at Abbeville, the meeting included all the major players: prime ministers, war ministers, permanent military representatives, chiefs of staff, army commanders, and an assortment of others. Considering the rank of participants and the seriousness of the situation, Harbord called the meeting "one of the great historic conferences of the World War," and deeply regretted his inability to attend.¹ Had he

been there, Harbord would have witnessed a titanic struggle of wills between Pershing and the combined representatives of the Allied nations. After the near collapse of their armies under the first two German onslaughts, the Allies turned the meeting into a unified effort to persuade Pershing to accept the amalgamation of his units into the Allied armies. Taking their cues from the recent London Agreement between Pershing and the British, the French, led by Premier Clemenceau and Allied Commander-in-Chief Ferdinand Foch, pushed to have the plan for the United States to ship only infantry and machine-gun units to France in May extended to June and July. For two days, Pershing fought off every argument, every plea for reason, every challenge to honor and duty. At one point, the AEF commander stormed out of one meeting after pounding the table to emphasize his firm objection to the plan.² At another, he conceded a willingness to sacrifice Paris by falling back to the Loire River if it would secure the time needed to form his army.³

Though he sympathized with Pershing's desire to build his own army, Foch could not understand the AEF commander's intransigence with the very issue of the war at stake. British Prime Minister David Lloyd-George added that if the Germans could not be pushed back, then the Allies would surely fall. If that happened, history would forever remember that the United States failed to act at the crucial juncture because of Pershing's prideful opposition. Weary of the struggle, and recognizing the limited contribution of the AEF to date, Pershing finally agreed to a compromise. He would allow the London Agreement's provisions extended to June, but would not speak to July. He suggested the group meet again in a month's time to reevaluate the situation and see if it warranted continuing the new plan. Sensing that this was as much blood as they could extract from the stony AEF commander, the Allies begrudgingly accepted the proposal. The

Abbeville Agreement, as it was known, provided for the shipment of 130,000 infantry and machine-gun units by the British in May and another 150,000 in June. Whatever American shipping could be found would bring over the artillery and auxiliary troops to fill out and support the new divisions.⁴

As is the case in most compromises between two determined parties, neither side found the agreement reached on 2 May particularly satisfying. It failed to turn over control of American soldiers to the Allies, who believed it essential to their survival, let alone hopes for victory. The agreement also delayed the formation of an American Army, which Pershing thought equally necessary for an eventual victory. But each side had to accept half a loaf, for neither would fully abandon its position. As it worked out, the Allies came out ahead in the deal. They were able to infuse enough American units into their lines to block the next series of German offensives and launch a counterattack to erase the German gains. But the deal also created enormous difficulties for the AEF's Services of Supply. By placing the focus on infantry and machine-gun units and postponing the shipment of auxiliary and supply personnel, the agreement forced the numerically stagnant SOS to supply the ever-increasing AEF over the summer months causing serious confusion in the supply lines. When Pershing finally established the First Army, AEF, in August, the SOS would not have the necessary personnel to adequately support it. By the fall, the excess load on the SOS threatened to collapse the entire American logistical system in France. The Allies did not anticipate these problems, nor did they particularly care. They needed American soldiers in the trenches now. If that delayed the formation of an independent American Army, then so be it. The AEF needed

time, but the Western Front would not wait for them, and the Americans would simply have to make do.

The Marine Brigade

Soon after Abbeville, Harbord departed Chaumont and the General Staff to take command of the 4th Brigade, U.S. Marines. With his aide, Lieutenant Richard N. Williams, accompanying him, Harbord arrived at the 4th Brigade's Headquarters along the northern edge of the St. Mihiel salient southeast of Verdun on 6 May. In a simple ceremony he assumed command from the outgoing brigade commander, Brigadier General Charles A. Doyen, and met with his officers.⁵ The 4th Brigade consisted of the 5th and 6th Marines, commanded by Colonels Wendell C. Neville and Albertus W. Catlin, respectively. Harbord knew Catlin from the Army War College before both joined the AEF. He did not know Neville, but the two found they worked well together and eventually became close friends. As a new and untried brigade commander, Harbord felt somewhat apprehensive of his new subordinates. Both were Regular colonels in the Marine Corps, and had each earned the Congressional Medal of Honor earlier in their careers. Only a Regular lieutenant colonel of Cavalry, Harbord worried that his replacing the respected Doyen as brigade commander would not be well received.⁶ As though sensing Harbord's fears, Neville pointed out the Marine Corps motto, "Semper Fidelis," and promised that the new commander could depend on them to do their duty.⁷ It was a warm gesture, but it did not sooth Harbord's trepidation. The Marines knew that Harbord was Pershing's former chief of staff, and they understood that with him came the added

attention of the commander-in-chief and increased pressure to perform extraordinarily in combat. Likewise, Harbord knew that he was getting a top-notch brigade, filled with “a fine body of officers and men.” His status as an unproven entity with a considerable amount of expectations would make anyone slightly worried. Though not hostile to his coming, the Marines were not exactly thrilled. Harbord could only hope that, “If I make good I shall probably never know anything more about it that I do now.”⁸ With that, the men entered into a silent agreement to do their best to see that everyone benefited from the awkward situation.

There were other reasons for Harbord to be anxious about taking over the 4th Brigade. The existence of a Marine unit within the AEF was a point of some controversy and contention for members of both services. Soon after the United States declared war on Germany in April of 1917, Marine Corps Commandant George Barnett petitioned the War Department and President Wilson to include a unit of Marines in the original force sent overseas. Overloaded with the task of forming the initial American Expeditionary Forces, the War Department agreed to Barnett’s request, and the 5th Marine regiment accompanied the 1st Division to France in June 1917. Bound by War Department directive, Pershing had a certain level of misgiving towards the Marines. Though he admired their discipline and spirit, he was unsure how they would fit in with Regular Army units. Likewise, Barnett had concerns about sending his Marines to France with the AEF. He intended his men to fight, and worried that the AEF and War Department would relegate them to a second-class status once in France.⁹ They were valid concerns, for relations between the Marines and the Army remained tenuous during the summer of 1917. Though attached to the 1st Division, the 5th Marines was assigned to duty in the

AEF's support system, serving as sentries, guards, and various other tasks. It was not a malicious decision, simply an expedient one. The AEF desperately needed auxiliary personnel in those early days, and the Marines fit the bill. While the Marines accepted the duty as part of fitting in with the Army, their displeasure was obvious. When war correspondent Frederick Palmer asked a Marine sentry how he like his duty, the man replied tersely, "Very well, sir. It will fit me for a job after the war. I can wear a striped waistcoat and open cab doors in front of a New York hotel."¹⁰ The indignity proved only temporary, however, as the 5th Marines joined 9th and 23rd Infantry regiments to form the 2nd Division in October of 1917. When the third and final battalion of the 6th Marines reached France in February 1918, it and the 5th combined to form the 4th Infantry Brigade.¹¹

As the Marines sought to keep their place on the combat line within the AEF, they also worked to maintain their service identity. With the badge of honor, "First to Fight," inscribed in Marine Corps lore, the Marines of the World War made a concerted effort to distinguish themselves from the soldiers they served with. They wore their distinctive forest green uniforms with pride, setting themselves apart from their Army brethren. When those uniforms wore out, the Marines sowed their Marine buttons onto Army khakis, and attached insignias on their caps, helmets, or anywhere else they thought fitting. One needed to look only briefly at these figures emblazoned with the globe and anchor to recognize them as Marines. Commandant Barnett went a step further to maintain the Corps' identity. He made a special request to Pershing, asking that the Marine brigade be listed as the 4th Brigade (U.S. Marines), with each regiment keeping its service distinction. Recognizing the need to maintain the Marines' famous morale,

Pershing agreed. It seemed a small concession at the time, but the decision would come back to haunt the AEF commander when the Marines went into action near at Belleau Wood in late May 1918.¹²

Thus formed, the 4th “Marine” Brigade combined with the 3rd Regular Army Brigade under Brigadier General E. M. Lewis to form the 2nd Division, U.S. Army. The 2nd Division also consisted of the 4th, 5th, and 6th Machine Gun Battalions, the 2nd Field Artillery Brigade, the 2^d Engineers, the 1st Field Signal Battalion, and an assortment of support units and trains.¹³ Commanding the entire division was Major General Omar Bundy, with the aid of the tenacious Colonel Preston Brown as chief of staff. Eventually assuming the “Indian Head” insignia, the division began its training in late October 1917. Though a Regular division, the 2nd had an overwhelming number of new recruits in its ranks, who needed months of basic training in marksmanship, combined-arms coordination, and drills in both trench and open warfare.¹⁴ After an extended period of organization and basic training, the division finally began a training regimen in small units in January of 1918 under the tutelage both American and French officers. By early March, the division was deemed ready for more extensive training in trench warfare under French instruction, moving from its initial sector around Bourmont – Haute-Marne to the Sommerdine and Toulon region of Lorraine in Eastern France.¹⁵ The division’s regiments went into quiet sectors under the French 33rd, 34th, and 52nd Divisions. There they received their first taste of life in the trenches, conducting and repelling raids, enduring artillery-fire, and generally learning the tenets of trench warfare. After a two-month stint with the French, the 2nd Division made plans to recombine and move to a new

sector for training in “open” warfare. Such was the division’s status when Harbord joined.¹⁶

After taking command of the 4th Brigade on 6 May, Harbord went about adjusting to the routine of billet life. He learned that the men were unaccustomed to seeing a star in the front line and decided to make it a facet of his command style, touring the entire sector observing his men, and letting them see him. His quarters consisted of a small hut with two rooms, one for sleeping and an office, with a double-sided fireplace providing heat for both. The mess was considerably better than one had any right to expect in the field, as the Brigade Headquarters possessed a French chef who had worked at the Ritz-Carlton in London before the war. The French interpreter, Martin Legasse, ran the mess like a true Frenchman, bossing the chef around incessantly. Harbord took such pleasure in these men that they joined his permanent staff, staying with him for the rest of the war. He also acquired a new aide, Lieutenant Fielding S. Robinson, U.S.M.C., whose fondness for riding made him a welcome addition to Harbord’s growing entourage¹⁷

Having spent the previous year working to create the AEF and keeping pace with Pershing, Harbord found welcome relief in his new routine. The work was hard and the hours were long, but life in the billets had a quiet serenity about it that was noticeably absent from Chaumont. “It is fine to be able to know that your duty lies in certain established lines,” Harbord wrote in his diary, “and that your meals will be served when the hour comes, etc. I admire General Pershing more than any officer in the army, but his utter lack of consciousness of time and his irregular habits are extremely trying.” The physical labor of directing troops and the never-ending inspections were a welcome

change from the grind at GHQ, and though Harbord admitted that he may one day welcome a return to staff duty, he found life “much more enjoyable with the brigade.”¹⁸

The holiday could not last as events caught up with the new brigade commander. The absence of German activity gave Foch the chance to begin planning a counter offensive against the Somme salient. In keeping with his new position as Allied commander-in-chief, Foch wanted the 2nd Division to take part in the upcoming operations. It made sense, for after spending the last two months drilling in trench warfare, AEF inspectors reported the 4th Brigade “probably the best” American unit in France in terms of discipline and appearance.¹⁹ However, there was still much work to be done. For all its time in the trenches, the brigade still had serious deficiencies in its tactical proficiency, coordination of machine-guns and artillery in support of the infantry, and unit communication. No one denied that the Marines had spirit, but they needed considerable improvement in their attack skills, which only time and additional training could provide. Of course, time was one thing the Allies were running woefully short of, and the 4th Brigade would be called upon to move into the lines before most of these deficiencies could be addressed. The result would be the loss of many good Marines due to inadequate training.²⁰

Within four days of taking command, Harbord received word of the 2nd Division’s impending relief from the Verdun sector. In accordance with Pershing’s desire to have his units schooled in open warfare, the division was moving to the region surrounding Chaumont-en-Vixen, some thirty-five miles northwest of Paris, for additional training. Foch hoped that after a few weeks spent learning the techniques of maneuver warfare, the division would be ready to contribute to the reduction of the Somme salient. Though

Harbord had experienced a brigade movement with the 1st Division, this time he was responsible for the entire operation. Accustomed to having his finger on the pulse for the entire AEF, Harbord found the limited intelligence he received regarding the move disconcerting. He had no advance knowledge of his brigade's final destination or their eventual battle sector. The plan called for the final destination to be wired to the brigade en route.²¹ "With the usual ostrich precautions," Harbord recalled later, "apparently everybody in the world, except us who should have known, was told where we were going."²² Making matters worse, General Bundy ordered his brigade commanders to remain in place to oversee the entraining process while their units went ahead. Consequently, when the first trains began arriving at their destination, they had no commanding officer to direct their movements, assign billets, or begin training exercises. Harbord chafed at the idea that, "my Brigade Headquarters in the new area had no head, and every one did as he pleased and wasted four valuable days while I watched the guns and gunners get on their trains."²³ One of the hardest lessons Harbord still needed to learn was the lack of control he had over his men. Bundy set policies for the division, which Harbord had to follow, no matter how inefficient. He also had to learn the limits of command and control in modern war. Once in motion, there was only so much he could actually control given the brigade's size and problems with communications. Such lessons were all a part of the advanced learning curve Harbord had to work on with the 4th Brigade.²⁴

When Harbord finally reached the new region, he was delighted to see it was the same where he had served with the 1st Brigade in April. He found his headquarters established at Le Bout de Bois, the home of a local nobleman and his family, and took

full advantage of the setting to enjoy a more active lifestyle than the one he had at Chaumont. When not over-seeing the brigade's training, Harbord enjoyed the steady stream of teas, dinners, and entertainment supplied by the local gentry. In the meantime, the 2nd Division abandoned their training in fixed positional warfare and began conducting a series of field maneuvers, each growing in size and complexity. The goal was to have the entire division spend several weeks learning attack maneuvers free from the trenches, but events again conspired against the Americans. The division had reached the point of brigade maneuvers on 29 May when word began to spread that they would soon move out for the line. No one knew the circumstances or direction of the move, but it appeared that their training in open warfare was over after only two weeks.²⁵

On to Château-Thierry

During the 2nd Division's training at Chaumont-en-Vexin, the French worked out several plans for the its move to the front. The first developed in conjunction with the 1st Division's operations at the point of the Somme salient. Attached to the French X Corps, the division received permission on 25 May to seize Cantigny, a small town just west of Montdidier. Pushed back three days due to a German gas attack, the assault went off flawlessly, employing a combination of the 28th Infantry, the division's artillery, and a new entity on the American battlefield: tanks. During the attack's planning stages, the French intended to move the 2nd Division up to Cantigny to relieve the 1st Division after the operation. As with all things in war, however, the enemy had other plans.²⁶ Just before the assault on Cantigny, the Germans prepared to renew their offensive. The first

two attacks, across the Somme in March, and in Flanders in April had ground to a halt as the French rushed reserves north. The chief strategist behind the offensive, German General Erich von Ludendorff, wanted to either drive the British towards the sea, or extend the Somme salient and sever the connection between the British and French Armies. Both goals presented problems. The British were reinforcing their position in Flanders daily, and the Somme region provided too little cover for the necessary preliminary work. Ludendorff needed to draw the Allies' attention, and reserves, farther south to open Flanders and the Somme to a renewed assault. The best way to accomplish this would be an attack towards Paris. The French would respond in full to any threat on their capital, and pull their reserves away from the weakened British. After studying the lines, Ludendorff decided that the best place to make just such a push was across the Chemin des Dames north of the Aisne River. A naturally strong defensive position, the French and British had transferred several worn out units there to regain their strength. This made the region ripe for an attack, which the Germans carried out on 27 May.²⁷

The attack was a masterpiece as eighteen German divisions from three armies slammed into the French Sixth Army, a combination of seven tired French and British divisions. Crossing the Aisne on bridges left standing by the retreating French, and Germans drove twelve miles into the interior on the first day. By the end of the third day, the Germans had advanced thirty miles and were closing in on the Marne River for the first time since 1914. Ludendorff's grand diversion had resulted in the most spectacular gains on the Western Front since the first months of the war. If they could capture the Paris-Metz highway and cross the Marne, the Germans would be in a position to march on Paris. Though the operation was only intended as a means of drawing Allied reserves

away from Flanders, the gains were so great that Ludendorff changed his plans and decided to press the advantage with the hope of advancing on Paris and winning the war.²⁸

The German breakthrough did not initially alter the 2nd Division's planned move towards Montdidier. Scheduled to commence at 6:00 a.m. on 31 May, orders were issued covering every detail for the move. Billeting parties were sent ahead, and all the arrangements had been made except actually putting the division in motion. With the situation well in hand by 30 May, Harbord and his aide, Lt. Robinson, prepared for an afternoon ride. At the same time, a French staff car came racing to General Bundy's headquarters with orders for the division to depart immediately for Meaux, which would put it between the Germans and Paris. Bundy forwarded the orders to his brigade commanders and began making preparations to transfer the division's headquarters. Harbord first learned of the change when a sergeant came sprinting up with the new orders as he walked his horse back to the château. He immediately issued orders to his regiments to make ready to move out and started his headquarters staff packing at a furious pace.²⁹ With everything well in hand, Harbord hurried to Bundy's headquarters at Chaumont-en-Vexin, some twenty miles away, for a meeting of the division's senior commanders. Arriving at around 8 p.m., he was greeted with a scene of considerable excitement and confusion. Staff officers hurried past arranging for the new move, everywhere a sense of urgency gripping the officers. Bundy ordered the division's infantry units to embark by motor transport early the next morning, with the artillery, animals, and support trains traveling by rail. General officers were to proceed by motor-car to Meaux where they would receive further orders as to the distribution of their units.

The meeting finally broke up at midnight, leaving five hours for the commanders to get their men aboard the French *camions* taking them to the battle. It proved to be a very busy night.³⁰

As the Marines reversed their route of a few weeks past, Harbord and his staff headed out, stopping in Paris around 9 a.m. for breakfast, then proceeding on to Meaux where they arrived shortly after noon. Expecting to find a staff officer with orders, they instead found the city in the grips of a general panic. Rumors that the Germans were only a few miles away sent the city's citizens scrambling to evacuate, with retreating French officers and soldiers scattered about contributing to the confusion. Without any word as to orders, and not knowing when their next meal would come, Harbord and his aides found a small hotel café for a bite to eat.³¹ Orders were slow in coming, as the French had their hands full holding the crumbling Seventh Army together. Early that afternoon, Harbord finally received orders to move his brigade, if he could find it, north to the western bank of the Ourcq River, ten miles from Château-Thierry (on the western side of the new salient). Moving proved problematic, as "hundreds of refugees crowded the roads, fleeing before the German advance." The sight was equally heart wrenching and bothersome, as men, women and children hurried toward the rear, their faces showing a combination of terror and exhaustion. "Everything that a frightened peasantry fleeing before a barbarian invader would be likely to think of bringing . . . was to be seen on that congested highway."³² People crowded the roads with livestock and carts filled with all the worldly possessions they could carry. The Americans struggled through this sea of desperation, hoping to reach their positions before the Germans did.

Confusion gripped the French Sixth Army just as it did the citizens fleeing to the south and west. Over the next twelve hours, Harbord received two more sets of orders, one shifting his brigade east of the Ourcq, instead of west, and another several hours later redirecting them southeast to the vicinity of Montreuil-aux-Lions on the Paris-Metz highway.³³ One of the Marines on his staff tried to put the conflicting orders into perspective, telling the beleaguered general, “When it comes to the French, General Harbord, a good Marine never goes into motion until he gets the third edition.”³⁴ With night coming on, Harbord hurried off to turn his tired Marines around and point them towards their new destination. The Marines were exhausted, having been up nearly eighteen hours, and spending the entire day jammed into trucks. Harbord spent the next few hours on the road trying to get his men assembled, but it became increasingly difficult with night coming on. After a German plane bombed the highway, Harbord finally gave up and ordered his men to get some rest and be ready to move out at 4:30 a.m. Worn from the long day, Harbord made his way to General Bundy’s temporary headquarters a little after 1 a.m. for a couple hours of sleep.³⁵

Early the next morning the American column began moving towards Château-Thierry. After a brief rest, Harbord headed to the headquarters of French General Joseph Degoutte, commander of the XXI French Corps, to which the 2nd Division was assigned. Along the way he came upon the 6th Marines, who, after hours riding in the *camions* and marching on the dusty roads, looked “more like miners emerging from an all-night shift than like fresh troops ready to plunge into battle.”³⁶ The men had had little rest over the past twenty-four hours and no hot food, as the rolling kitchens were still en route. Nothing could be done, however, so Harbord pushed his men on with promises of rest

and food to come. As he watched the grumbling Marines begin their journey, Harbord decided to make his own way forward to see if he could find any information regarding their final destination. He overtook Colonel Le Roy Upton's 9th Infantry, 3rd Brigade, just a few miles shy of Montreuil. After receiving their orders, the regiment had abandoned the roads and marched all night through the French countryside. The decision worked well, as the regiment now constituted the most advanced unit of the entire 2nd Division. Harbord passed them and headed into Coupru, where he found the corps commander, General Degoutte, by 6 a.m. Still not knowing exactly where his men were going, Harbord inquired as to the location of the French lines and orders for the 4th Brigade. After a long pause and with a weary seriousness in his eyes, Degoutte replied:

Things have been going very badly with us. They have been pressing us since the morning of the 27th and have advanced over fifty kilometers in seventy-two hours. I know that your men need rest. Let them get something to eat. If it can be avoided I shall not call on you today. But it may become necessary. Your troops must be ready to go into the line any time after 11:00 if called upon.³⁷

Harbord assured the French general that the Americans would be ready then hurried out to deliver the orders to General Bundy. He need not have bothered, as Bundy, Upton, and Preston Brown arrived shortly for a meeting with Degoutte. The French commander restated his position, adding that he thought it best for the 2nd Division to head east towards Château-Thierry where the Germans were making a push

and prepare to make a counterattack. Considering the state of the division, Brown strenuously objected. Of the division's four regiments, only the 9th Infantry was in line, the other three being somewhere on the road. The division's artillery and supply trains were still a day away, and none of the men had received any rest or hot food to speak of, subsisting instead on their two day supply of rations. But Degoutte was unconvinced. A fervent apostle of the offensive oriented Marshal Ferdinand Foch, Degoutte wanted the Americans to go on the attack.³⁸ His front was in ruins, his men were exhausted, and he had been staring at defeat for the last three days. The 2nd Division's arrival brought with it a glimmer of hope, and Degoutte wanted to seize the advantage, whether the Americans were ready or not. Undeterred, Brown argued that if the French could only hold on till the full division came together, they would take over the line and block the route to Paris. Degoutte confessed that he doubted that the untried division could hold the line; better to use them going forward than waste them standing still. An incensed Brown replied, "General, these are American regulars. In a hundred and fifty years they have never been beaten. They will hold."³⁹ Degoutte relented and ordered the Americans to take up position along the Paris-Metz highway.

Having carried the argument, Bundy and Brown headed back to Montreuil where they met up with Harbord and General E.M. Lewis, the 3rd Brigade commander for a council of war at the Hôtel de Ville. While deciding on their order of battle, a French officer arrived with word that the Germans were making a push near the town of Bouresches, four miles east of Château-Thierry and almost two miles north of the Paris-Metz highway. He ordered Bundy to fill the gap with the 23rd Infantry or some other unit "without a moment's delay."⁴⁰ Bundy immediately ordered the 23rd put into the line, but

Brown informed the division commander that aside from reports that the regiment was on the march, no one knew its exact location. Bundy then turned to Harbord and told him to send in one of his regiments. Despite his men's road-weary state, Harbord agreed, and suggested that Bundy assign the 4th Brigade the section of the 2nd Division's line running northwest from the Pariz-Metz highway so as not to divide his command. Bundy agreed, and in doing so put the Marines in position for immortality when the division went on the attack five days later.⁴¹

Into the Lines

With his task before him, Harbord hurried out to find the 6th Marines, the closest of his two regiments to the front. He found them on the road just east of Montreuil, unloading rations from several trucks. Harbord ordered the trucks to throw out the rations on the road and head to the rear to pick up the trailing battalion. The other two battalions were to make all possible speed to the brigade's position between Le Thiolet on the highway and the little village of Lucy-le-Bocage. Once the battalions were on their way, Harbord headed to Lucy to meet with the General Michel, the commander of the 43rd French Division, currently holding the line against the Germans directly in front of the American positions. Once there, the Frenchman explained to Harbord that his men must "hold the line at all hazards." Harbord had just transmitted orders to his men when General Michel sent word that the Americans should dig trenches several hundred yards to their rear, "just in case." Indignantly, Harbord replied, "We will dig no trenches to fall back to. The Marines will hold where they stand."⁴²

Harbord quickly established his command center at an abandoned farm and spent the rest of the day directing his men into position. Just after 5:00 p.m., he reported to Bundy that the 6th Marines had two battalions in line, one running north from Le Thiolet to Triangle Farm, the other extending the line west from Triangle to Lucy.⁴³ Even with the arrival of the 5th Marines that night, it was a thin line. The men were tired and hungry, having traveled over seventy miles in the last thirty-six hours. To their front, the 48th French Division was slowly falling back in the face of the German push, meaning the untested 2nd Division would soon become the only fresh unit standing between the Germans and the road to Paris. News that the Germans had taken Château-Thierry that same day put even more pressure on the 4th Brigade to hold the line. The situation looked bleak indeed for the Allies as 1 June came to an end.⁴⁴

Unknown to Harbord at the time, elements of Major General Joseph T. Dickman's 3rd Division were holding up the German advance through Château-Thierry, providing time for the French divisions to the west to withdraw, and allowing the 2nd Division time to strengthen its lines. The day before, one of the 3rd Division's machine-gun battalions took up a position along the Marne River in Château-Thierry. After blowing up the remaining bridges, the valiant gunners deployed along the Marne's southern bank and repelled several German attempts to cross the river. The 3rd Division's infantry regiments meanwhile came up and helped plug the gaps in the French line, stopping the Germans at the Marne and forcing them to look elsewhere for a possible breakthrough. They decided to move west, directly in the path of the 48th French Division, backed up by the 4th Brigade (U.S. Marines).⁴⁵

With the 3rd Division making a stand to the east, Harbord's Marines spent most of 2 June digging in, displacing, and digging in again in an effort to shore up their lines. With all three battalions in position, the 6th Marines held a line over two miles long while the 5th Marines stood ready in division reserve. The 9th Infantry locked in the 4th Brigade's right flank, and elements of the 23rd extended the left flank northwest to Hill 142, just south of Torcy.⁴⁶ All told, by nightfall on 2 June the 2nd Division's three regiments held a line twelve miles long. Due to their proximity to the Paris-Metz highway, the position allowed only local defense in depth, but the units were slowly consolidating and strengthening their defenses. Communication proved difficult for the inexperienced division, made more problematic by unfamiliarity with the terrain. Harbord had to communicate with his regimental and battalion commanders through runners, who usually took too long delivering their messages if they got through at all. This problem continued to plague the 4th Brigade during the coming battle as the fog of war strained an already poor communication system.⁴⁷

During the night of 2-3 June, German General von Conta, commanding the IV Reserve Corps ordered an attack to create a breakthrough west of Château-Thierry. All day the French had stood their ground against German probes and now von Conta wanted to push through from Torcy towards Lucy-le-Bocage, eventually driving west towards the town of Marigny.⁴⁸ In their path was a small wood known as the Bois de Belleau, or Belleau Wood. Covering roughly a square mile of dense undergrowth, rolling, boulder-covered terrain, and thick trees, the wood ran north south about a mile-and-a-half in an irregular kidney shape, spanning roughly a half mile in the middle. It sat nestled between Lucy-le-Bocage to the southwest, the town of Bouresches to the east, and the town of

Belleau to the north. A small road ran between the wood and Triangle farm and from Lucy to Bouresches. Another road ran just west of the wood from Lucy to Torcy to the northwest. Though possessing no critical strategic significance, the wood offered excellent cover from which to launch an attack on the Paris-Metz highway and the surrounding area. It was a nice position to hold, but not one that anyone considered so important as to dominate the terrain and hold up the entire German offensive. Hence, as of 2 June the wood remained unoccupied, both sides planning to take it in the process of other operations. It would not remain obscure for very long.

The German assault on 3 June hit the French hard, causing the center of the 43rd Division to crumble under the pressure. Though the Germans failed to achieve a breakthrough, they did occupy Bouresches and pushed the French beyond Belleau Wood. By nightfall, the American lines were filled with retreating French soldiers. In the confusion, a French major approached Marine Captain Corbin and scribbled a quick order to retreat on a pad of paper. Corbin passed the note along to Captain Lloyd Williams, who snorted in disgust, "Retreat, hell. We just got here."⁴⁹ The sentiment permeated through the American line. They had not come this far to fall back in the face of the enemy without bloodying their noses. The Marines wanted a fight, and had no intention of leaving until they got one. That afternoon, a German barrage fell on the 4th Brigade's lines, followed by the initial wave of von Conta's advancing corps. With tremendous precision, the Marines and their rifles stopped the Germans cold, picking off men with deadly accuracy. Already slowing after several days of fighting, the Germans fell back before the withering fire from the fresh Americans. The display seemed to prove Pershing's faith in the individual soldier and his rifle, and gave Harbord a rather

inflated opinion of his men's capabilities. The Marines carried their first true encounter with the Germans not by their skill in the trenches or the support of the artillery, but by sheer tenacity. Harbord would come to rely on that tenacity in the coming weeks, often at the expense of his own men.⁵⁰

That night, General Degoutte studied the situation and deemed the 43rd Division too weak to stay in the line. He ordered it to withdraw, and called on the 2nd Division to take its place. The Americans moved through the French lines on the night of 3-4 June, with Bundy taking control of the sector at 8:00 a.m. that morning. It was just in time, for the Germans launched another attack against what was now an American position, which the Marines fought off as effectively as the day before. Each side lost roughly 225 casualties, but the action proved the Americans would indeed hold. It also proved that the German offensive, much like the previous two, was running out of steam. All along the salient, the Germans began to dig in and reform their lines. But Ludendorff needed to keep going. His great diversion looked so close to achieving ultimate victory that he could not abandon it and renew his efforts in the north. If the Germans could push into the plains west of Château-Thierry, they would have an open road to Paris, and could end the bloody carnage once and for all. But they needed to push further south before making the turn west, and in their way stood the remnants of a tired French army and a few American divisions. While Ludendorff searched for an avenue to Paris, the Allies mounted a stiff defense and counterattack, anchored by the Marines at Belleau Wood.⁵¹

Notes

¹ James G. Harbord, *The American Army in France 1917-1919* (Boston: Brown, Little and Company, 1936), 260.

² The meeting in question was a private discussion between Pershing, Clemenceau, Foch, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, Lord Milner, and Italian Prime Minister Vittorio Orlando. For full coverage of the conference see Donald Smythe, *Pershing: General of the Armies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 113-19; John J. Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War* 2 vols. (New York: F.A. Stokes, 1931), 2:20-37; *United States Army in the World War, 1917-1919* 17 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1948), 2:360-71. [Hereafter cited as *USAWW*]

³ Pershing, *My Experiences*, 2:28.

⁴ Smythe, *Pershing*, 116-17; Cable P-1042-S, *USAWW*, 2:379; Pershing to Newton D. Baker, 9 May 1918, Box 19, John J. Pershing Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.

⁵ Though upset at losing the brigade, Doyen was indeed ill. He returned to the United States and died before the end of the war. Harbord, *American Army*, 265; Frederic M. Wise and Meigs O. Frost, *A Marine Tells It to You* (New York: J.H. Sears and Company, Inc., 1929), 188.

⁶ Harbord, *American Army*, 264-65.

⁷ James G. Harbord, *Leaves From a War Diary* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1925), 280.

⁸ Harbord to Major General Clarence R. Edwards, 11 May 1918, quoted in Allan R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1980), 298.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 287-90; Harbord, *American Army*, 154; Pershing, *My Experiences*, 1:87; Edward M. Coffman, *The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 151-52; For a complete history of the Marine Corps's service in the World War see Edwin N. McClellan, *The United States Marine Corps in the World War* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1920).

¹⁰ Frederick Palmer, *America in France* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1918), 99

¹¹ The entire 2nd Division arriving in France in stages. The 5th Marines sailed in June, followed by the 9th and 23rd Infantry regiments, the 5th Machine Gun Battalion, the 2nd Engineers, and one battalion from the 6th Marines in September. Another battalion from the 6th Marines sailed in October, followed by the 15th and 17th Field Artillery units, the 2^d Trench Mortar Battery, the 4th and 6th Machine Gun Battalions, the 1st Field Signal Battalion, and Medical troops in December. The final battalion in the 6th Marines sailed in January 1918, along with the 12th Field Artillery and the division's trains. Oliver L. Spaulding and John W. Wright, *The Second Division: American Expeditionary Force in France, 1917-1919* (New York: Hillman Press, 1937), 6; Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 293-94; Palmer, *America in France*, 97-99; Pershing, *My Experiences*, 1:87-110.

¹² Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 294

¹³ The 2nd FA Brigade was composed of the 12th and 15th FA (75mm. guns), the 17th FA (155 mm. guns), and the 2nd Trench Mortar Battery. The 5th Machine Gun Bn was attached to the 3rd Brigade, while the 6th Machine Gun Bn. was assigned to the 4th Brigade. The 4th Machine Gun Bn. was kept separate as part of the Divisional Troops, along with the 2^d Engineers and the 1st Field Signal Bn. Spaulding and Wright, *The Second Division*, 1.

¹⁴ Eighty-seven percent of the soldiers and seventy-four percent of the marines in the 2nd Division were in their first year of service, and only five percent of the soldiers and nine percent of the marines were regulars with more than four years of service. *Ibid.*, 6-7; For comparative statistics regarding the 2nd Division and the rest of the AEF see Leonard P. Ayers, *The War With Germany: A Statistical Summary* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1919).

¹⁵ 202-10.7: Station List, *USAWW*, 3:491; "Instructions for Training with French" 181-56.3-52: Memorandum, 9 March 1918, *Ibid.*, 3:499-500.

¹⁶ For a more detailed description of the division's training in March and April 1918, see *Ibid.*, 19-28.

¹⁷ A graduate of the Virginia Military Institute, Robinson also stayed with Harbord for much of the war, until Marine Corps Commandant Barnett requested him as an aide. Harbord, *American Army*, 266.

¹⁸ Harbord, *War Diary*, 280.

¹⁹ 5th Section, General Staff, GHQ AEF, "Training Matters," 1 May 1918, G-3 Correspondence, AEF RG 120 NARA.

²⁰ Omar Bundy, "The Second Division at Château-Thierry," *Everybody's Magazine* 40 (March 1919): 9-20; Spaulding and Wright, *The Second Division*, 6-28; Albertus W. Catlin, *With the Help of God and a Few Marines* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1919), 30-60; Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 296-98.

²¹ War Diary, 2nd Div., 13-20 May 1918, Volume 6, U.S. Army, 2nd Division, *Records of the Second Division (Regular)* 9 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Army War College, 1924). [Hereafter cited as *Records*]

²² Harbord, *American Army*, 267.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Harbord, *War Diary*, 282-86

²⁵ Harbord, *American Army*, 268; Harbord, *War Diary*, 280-81; Bundy, "The Second Division at Château-Thierry," 10.

²⁶ For a complete description of the 1st Division's assault on Cantigny, see Allan R. Millett, "Cantigny, 28-31 May 1918" in Charles E. Heller and William A. Stoft, eds, *America's First Battles 1776-1965* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986), 149-85; Coffman, *The War to End All Wars*, 155-158; Allan R. Millett, *The General: Robert L. Bullard and Officership in the United States Army 1881-1925* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975), 360-68.

²⁷ Erich von Ludendorff, *Ludendorff's Own Story* 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1919), 2:249-51; Spaulding, *The Second Division*, 35-36.

²⁸ Harbord, *American Army*, 269; Coffman, *The War to End All Wars*, 158; Laurence Stallings, *The Doughboys: The Story of the AEF, 1917-1918* (New York: Harpers & Row Publishers, 1963), 77-85; Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 298-99.

²⁹ Robert B. Asprey, *At Belleau Wood* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 1996), 63.

³⁰ Harbord, *American Army*, 270; Bundy, "The Second Division at Château-Thierry," 12.

³¹ Harbord, *American Army*, 271; Harbord, *War Diary*, 287.

³² Harbord, *War Diary*, 288.

³³ The third orders came directly from the division's chief of staff, Colonel Preston Brown, who had spent the day at French Seventh Army headquarters trying to get a decision as to the division's deployment, and working up a considerable head of steam in the process. Preston Brown, Field Order No. 5, 31 May 1918, *Records*, vol. 1; Asprey, *At Belleau Wood*, 71-72.

³⁴ Unknown author quoted in Stallings, *The Doughboys*, 87.

³⁵ Harbord, *War Diary*, 290.

³⁶ Catlin, *With the Help of God and a Few Marines*, 83.

³⁷ Quoted in Harbord, *American Army*, 278.

³⁸ During the first battle of the Marne, Foch was reported as saying, "My flanks are turned; my center gives way; I attack!" He never said it, but the statement accurately conveys his deep commitment to go on the offensive whenever possible. Quoted in Smythe, *Pershing*, 99.

³⁹ Quoted in Spaulding and Wright, *The Second Division*, 42; Asprey, *At Belleau Wood*, 87-89.

⁴⁰ Spaulding and Wright, *The Second Division*, 42.

⁴¹ Harbord, *American Army*, 281-82; Bundy, "The Second Division at Château-Thierry," 13.

⁴² Harbord, *American Army*, 283.

⁴³ Field Message, 5:05 p.m., 1 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 8.

⁴⁴ Harbord, *War Diary*, 291-93; Harbord, *American Army*, 283-85; Catlin, *With the Help of God and a Few Marines*, 82-85; Asprey, *At Belleau Wood*, 92-98.

⁴⁵ Pershing, *My Experiences*, 2:62-63; Joseph Dickman, *The Great Crusade: A Narrative of the World War* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1927), 49-53; S.L.A. Marshall, *World War I* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), 372-75 [originally published New York: American Heritage Inc., 1964].

⁴⁶ For maps see *Records*, supplemental volume containing Operational Maps, Barrage Charts, and Sketches in Box 16, Harbord Papers, LC.

⁴⁷ *Records*, Vol. 5; Asprey, *At Belleau Wood*, 109-10.

⁴⁸ U.S. Army, *Translations of War Diaries of German Units Opposed to the Second Division (Regular), 1918. Château-Thierry* 4 volumes (Washington, D.C.: Army War College, 1930-32), Vol. 1.

⁴⁹ There is some confusion as to exactly who said this phrase, and exactly what was said. It has been attributed to Captain Williams, Colonel Wise, and Colonel Neville. There is also evidence that the phrase was: "Retreat, Hell, we have just come—Let the Boche retreat." Because Williams was killed ten days after the incident, preventing him from claiming authorship, and because he was the officer who first countermanded the French order to withdraw, I have given him credit for the phrase. As to the version, the choice was made out of personal preference. For further discussion of the quote, see Logan Feland, "Retreat Hell!" *Marine Corps Gazette* 6 (September 1921): 289-91; Asprey, *At Belleau Wood*, 120; Stallings, *The Doughboys*, 88.

⁵⁰ Spaulding and Wright, *Second Division*, 45-48; Asprey, *At Belleau Wood*, 121-24.

⁵¹ Harbord, *American Army*, 286-87; Asprey, *At Belleau Wood*, 123-30.

CHAPTER IX

BELLEAU WOOD (5 – 25 JUNE 1918)

Unbeknownst to those involved, 5 June 1918 began a minor shift in momentum in the sector west of Château-Thierry that would eventually resonate along the entire Western Front. A week before, the Germans launched their assault across the Chemin des Dames, advancing as far south as the Marne River. The offensive represented the most serious threat to Paris since the initial German attack in the fall of 1914. Luckily for the Allies, stiffening French resistance and the arrival of two American divisions sapped the strength from the German juggernaut, and brought the offensive to halt just shy of the Marne. All along the German line, the over-extended 7th German Army began digging in to concentrate their lines and give their worn soldiers a chance to rest and recuperate in anticipation of renewing the offensive to the west along the Noyon-Montdidier line on 9 June.¹ The brief respite gave General Degoutte, commander of the XXI French Corps the opportunity he had long awaited. After over a week of falling back in front of the German advance, Degoutte now had to chance to make a move of his own. Not content to repair his lines, the Frenchman deemed it time to attack.

The ensuing Allied counter-attack would involve the entire American 2nd Division in the region west of Château-Thierry. Of the division's two combat brigades, the 4th "Marine" Brigade, under the command of Brigadier General James Harbord, would engage in the epic battle for Belleau Wood. The battle would take part in three phases, as the Marines made their initial push to take the wood, which was unsuccessful, were temporarily relieved by a unit from the American 3rd Division, and then returned to

complete the capture of the wood. It would be the largest engagement of American Marines to date, and offered Harbord an opportunity to employ the “open” warfare tactics long trumpeted by Pershing as the solution to the static trenches cutting across France and Belgium. The effort would bring tragedy and glory to the Marines, and some hard lessons to their new commander.

Phase I: 5-8 June

General Degoutte’s attack plan of 5 June called for the 167th French Division, bordering the 2nd Division on the left, to attack toward the Clignon River. Units from the 2nd Division would advance on the 167th’s right, along the crest of Hill 142. The order continued that, “as soon as possible after the execution of the first operation . . . an analogous operation will be executed by the American 2nd Division, for the purpose of seizing the Bois de BELLEAU.”² The first phase of the attack was set for 3:45 a.m. on 6 June, or roughly twelve hours after the order was issued.³

Everything being equal, it was a good plan. If the French could gain the heights above the Clignon River, they would be in position to prevent a German surprise attack. Likewise, capturing Belleau Wood meant denying the enemy a position of natural concealment from which it could mount a strong defensive or launch future attacks. The problem lay in the timing. Just that day, the 2nd Division, and the 4th Brigade in particular, was in the process of reorganizing its lines for a strong defense. Harbord, who had moved his headquarters to La Loge Farm during the day, ordered several of his battalions to shift places that night in an effort to relieve tired units and strengthen his

lines. Not expecting to go on the attack, Harbord had no clear intelligence of the enemy, no good maps of the terrain, and spotty communications with his front-line units. To mount an offensive in its present state would be difficult for the 4th Brigade, but that is exactly what Degoutte called upon it to do.

With the exception of small trench raids and the 1st Division's actions at Cantigny, the 4th Brigade's assault on 6 June would be the first offensive action by the AEF in the war. The pressure to perform was immense; significantly greater in importance than the tactical objective warranted. Harbord claimed after the war that "every man in the Marine Brigade realized that America was on trial as to the courage and fighting quality of her sons."⁴ One of the German division commanders facing the Americans understood the moment as well, stating: "In the fighting that now confronts us, we are not concerned with the occupation or non-occupation of this or that unimportant wood or village, but with the question as to whether the Anglo-American propaganda that the American Army is equal to or even superior to the German, will be successful."⁵ Even General Ludendorff recognized the significance of the Americans arriving on the battlefield. If the Germans were to be victorious, they needed to maintain their momentum and stay on the offensive. This meant delaying the formation of the American Army as long as possible. Consequently, two days after the attack on Belleau Wood began, Ludendorff told his Army Group commanders: "American units appearing on the front should be hit particularly hard."⁶

Considering how much was riding on the operations of 6 June, one could reasonably expect the general commanding the action to take every care to see that the operations were planned, supported, and executed well enough to assure success. But

several factors conspired against Harbord at this crucial moment, including his own inexperience. First and foremost was the acute lack of time provided for preparation. Degoutte wanted an attack, and he wanted it on 6 June whether the Americans were ready or not. When the Americans requested more time to prepare Degoutte refused, claiming the need to strike before the enemy could reinforce his artillery. While a reasonable concern, Degoutte's desire to go on the offensive prevented him from objectively considering the effect of granting the 2nd Division more time to prepare. He wanted a fight and would not let American inexperience delay his chance.⁷ Second, the apparent scarcity of intelligence concerning the German forces, and a failure to pay attention to what *was* available, led Harbord to severely underestimate the forces opposing him. He relied upon French intelligence that reported Belleau Wood largely unoccupied, "except by a very short line across the northeast corner which was entrenched. Little or no reconnaissance or scouting appears to have been done . . . between June 4th and 6th . . . probably due to inexperience."⁸ There was intelligence available that suggested the wood was more heavily defended, but Harbord failed to seek it out. He believed success all but assured, and proceeded with the information at hand, not bothering to ascertain its accuracy.⁹

Finally, Harbord's understanding of combat tactics gave him a false appreciation for the abilities of his Marines to carry the field. A true believer in Pershing's advocacy of open warfare, Harbord seemed to know, without question, that his men could take their objectives regardless of the opposition. Their defense against the German attacks on 3-4 June proved the deadly capability of a motivated Marine and his rifle. While machine-gun and artillery fire were valuable tools for supporting the infantry, it was the rifle and

bayonet that would carried the day, driven forward by the irresistible *esprit de corps* of the Marines. Consequently, Harbord ordered little artillery fire in support of the attacks of 6 June. Hoping “not to attract [sic] the attention of the enemy,” only a sparse “raking fire” was ordered for the attack on Hill 142 during the night of 5-6 June, with the attacks preceded by five minutes of “violent annihilating fire. . . . [shifting] to more distant targets the minute the Marines jumped-off.”¹⁰ Harbord was putting the outcome of the attack in the hands of his Marines and their rifles. The next day would show that to be a mistake.

At 3:00 p.m. on 5 June Harbord met with division chief of staff, Preston Brown, to discuss the 4th Brigade’s role in the upcoming attack. Brown talked about using infiltration tactics in the attack as opposed to sending the men in waves, as well as the importance of coordinating the artillery to support the infantry. They were good ideas, but the 4th Brigade had no training in the style of attack Brown suggested, and liaison in the entire 2nd Division was spotty at best. Even so, Brown and Harbord were confident in the men and departed to their respective command centers to prepare for the attack. Apparently, they did not feel the need to discuss the second phase of Degoutte’s plan: the attack on the Bois de Belleau proper.¹¹

Harbord issued his Field Order No. 1, covering the first phase of the next day’s attack, at 10:25 p.m. on 5 June. It called for the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines (I/5)* under Major Julius S. Turrill to attack north from Hill 142 toward the Lucy-Torcy road. Elements of Major Benjamin Berry’s 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines would support the action on the right, in preparation for taking part in the supplemental attack on Belleau Wood.¹²

* Hereafter battalion designations will be abbreviated as such: battalion/regiment (e.g. - I/5 = 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, or III/7 = 3rd Battalion, 7th Infantry)

Harbord sent the orders to Colonel Neville, commander of the 5th Marines, who broke it down for his battalion commanders, at which time they noticed a glaring oversight. The orders assumed that the I/5 was in place and ready to attack. This was not the case, however, as several companies were delayed in getting into line. Nor had the battalion tied its flanks in with the French on the left or the III/5 on the right. Still, time would not wait, for at the appointed hour the artillery roared to life and the Marines went over the top.¹³

All things considered, the attack over Hill 142 went well. After stepping off at 3:45 a.m., the I/5 reached its objectives by 7:00 a.m. However, soon after the attack commenced, communication within the brigade began to break down. Telephones went down at 5:00 a.m., requiring reliance upon runners and field messages. This made it impossible for Harbord, or his regimental commanders, to attain any real-time intelligence about the attack. It would be a continual problem over the next few hours (in fact the next two weeks), as the phone lines worked only intermittently. Pressing on despite the sketchy communications, reports filtered in that both battalions had reached their objectives and were consolidating their positions with “a few men killed and a number wounded but only lightly.”¹⁴ The encouraging message prompted Harbord to send a celebratory note to Col. Neville at 9:00 a.m.: “I congratulate you and 1st Bn. and the 3rd Bn. on doing so well what we all knew they would.”¹⁵

Such reports gave Harbord what one historian called “a dangerously optimistic picture” of the battle.¹⁶ Turrill’s battalion had indeed reached its objective, but at a heavy cost. One company commander was killed, and the battalion lost numerous officers and NCO’s. The battalion outran the French on their left (not surprising considering the poor

liaison at the start of the battle) which required Harbord to authorize sending in a company from another battalion. Likewise, on Turrill's right the III/5 did not move as fast, leaving the entire I/5 exposed to German enfilade fire. All over the field, the Marines were holding on, but only tenuously. For the rest of the day the Marines and Germans battled on Hill 142. At one point, the Marines almost took Torcy, at another they were almost driven off the hill. The I/5 lost nearly half its numbers as casualties by day's end, forcing Harbord to send in another battalion to hold the position. Even so, the Marines held Hill 142 at the end of 6 June.¹⁷

The staunch German defense of Hill 142 notwithstanding, preparations for the second phase of the attack began the morning of 6 June. Strengthened by reports of the morning's actions, Degoutte ordered Bundy to initiate the second phase for that afternoon.¹⁸ At 2:05 p.m., Harbord issued Field Order No.2, covering the attack on Belleau Wood and Bouresches. It called for Berry's III/5, already holding the line to the right of Turrill's I/5, to turn and attack Belleau Wood from the west. At the same time, Major Sibley's 3rd Battalion, 6th Marines would assault the wood from the south with the aid of a company from Major Thomas Holcomb's 2nd Battalion, 6th Marines. Lieutenant Colonel Logan Feland, second in command of the 5th Marines, commanded the attack on the left, while Colonel Catlin, the 6th Marines commander, directed the overall operation. Once the Marines reached their first objective, Catlin was to shift his assault to the northeast and take Bouresches, with Berry's III/5 pushing through the northern portion of the wood to extend the line northwest out of Bouresches. As with the morning attack, no additional artillery was provided for either phase of the afternoon attack, again hoping to maintain the element of surprise.¹⁹

It was an ambitious plan. The entire 4th Brigade, minus one and a half battalions held in various reserves, would attack in a sweeping pivot to the northeast, anchored by the II/6's contact with the 3rd Brigade on the far right of the line at Triangle Farm. Both the III/5 and II/6 would advance nearly a mile through Belleau Wood, linking up in the middle of the wood, while staying in contact with the assault on Bouresches. The entire attack was precipitated upon Harbord's belief that the Germans did not hold Belleau Wood in strength and could be pushed out with "self-reliant infantry."²⁰ It was a grave mistake. As he wrote after the war, "The Bois proved to be very fully occupied, with many machine-gun nests, in positions well chosen among the giant boulders."²¹ But at the moment of decision Harbord relied on the intelligence provided him without taking the time to gain a better appreciation of what faced the 4th Brigade. What resulted from this haste was an unmitigated tragedy for the Marines.

At 5:00 p.m. on 6 June, the Marines launched their assault on the Bois de Belleau. Gunnery Sergeant Dan Daly, leading a platoon in the attack, spoke to his men and to history, roaring, "Come on you sons of bitches. Do you want to live forever?"²² Moving out "in beautiful line" of deployment, the Marines marched towards the Bois.²³ Major Berry's III/5 had to advance nearly a half-mile through a wheat field before reaching the edge of the wood. Halfway across the German machine guns opened up, tearing the beautiful lines to shreds, and only a few Marines made it to the wood. Reports filtered in to 4th Brigade HQ that "What is left of battalion [III/5] is in the woods close by. Do not know whether will be able to stand or not."²⁴ Major Berry was seriously wounded in the attack, but pressed on with the fight. The rest of his Marines did the same, braving the deadly fire and capturing a foothold on the wood's western edge.²⁵

To the south, Sibley's battalion had more success reaching the wood. Watching the attack, Colonel Catlin recalled, "I say they went in as if on parade, and that is literally true. There was no yell and wild rush, but a deliberate forward march, with lines at right dress."²⁶ Having less distance to travel in the open than Berry, Catlin watched Sibley's III/6 close in on the wood's edge. Just then a bullet tore into his chest, sending him to the ground. Though not dead, Catlin was critically wounded and was immediately evacuated to an aid station. Upon hearing the news, Harbord ordered Lieutenant Colonel Harry Lee to take command of the 6th Marines if Catlin was "too badly wounded to continue."²⁷

As Lee moved to take over the 6th Marines, initial reports began to reach 4th Brigade Headquarters. Though Harbord learned that Berry was badly injured, other reports made the attack appear a glowing success. Reports of Americans "on the road from Bouresches to Belleau" and occupying the town of Torcy combined with observations of Germans running in retreat to make it seem that the 4th Brigade had achieved a great success. Most of the reports proved erroneous, but clarification would take time and Harbord was well satisfied with his Marines at the present.²⁸ His feelings towards Lieutenant Colonel Lee were another matter entirely. After hearing that Lee was on the way to take charge of the 6th Marines at 7:34 p.m., Harbord wondered why he was receiving reports of units in the woods awaiting further instructions from the battle commander. At 8:55 p.m., he sent a blistering note to Lee explaining his displeasure:

I am not satisfied with the way you have conducted your engagement this afternoon. Your own regimental headquarters and this office have not had

a word of report from you as to your orders or your positions. Major Sibley under your command is asking your regimental adjutant for orders. Major Berry, over whom you should have asserted your authority, is reporting to his own regimental commander. I want you to take charge and to push this attack with vigor. Carry the attack through the woods from Hill 133 [on the northwestern edge of the wood] south along the Bouresches-Torcy road and send Sibley to take Bouresches. . . . If as reported Sibley had a small nest of machine guns surrounded in the wood, leave somebody to contain them, go around it and go on with the attack in the second phase. I want reports from you every fifteen minutes. Send them by runner if necessary. Major Sibley has had telephone connection with your regimental headquarters all afternoon.²⁹

It was a revealing note, speaking more to Harbord's ignorance of the situation than any failure on Lee's part. At present Lee was in Belleau Wood, trying to ascertain exactly what was going on for himself and did not receive Harbord's message. If he had, he could not report much, as the Marines in the woods were in total confusion. Contrary to reports reaching Harbord, the III/6 was nowhere near the wood's northern edge, but had barely breached the southern portion. Nor was Berry's battalion (III/5) anywhere near the eastern edge of the wood, as Harbord believed them to be. As was the case that morning, communications in the 4th Brigade had completely broken down under the fog of war on the evening of 6 June.³⁰

The only partially correct piece of intelligence to reach Harbord was a report that Marines had entered Bouresches and were holding the village temporarily. Elements of Holcomb's II/6 had indeed advanced on Bouresches that evening, taking a portion of the village by 11:28 p.m. Although there was some confusion as to exactly who commanded the Marines in Bouresches,³¹ the fact remained that Marines were there, and Harbord moved to support them. He ordered Colonel Lee to have Sibley link up with Berry, and then extend his line west to Bouresches. The order displayed Harbord's continuing misunderstanding of the situation. It assumed that Berry was in the eastern portion of the wood, which was false. Nor was Sibley's battalion for that matter. Compensating for these errors, Lee moved a company of engineers to support Sibley and sent another to bolster the Marines in Bouresches.³²

As night fell, Harbord finally gained some appreciation for the confusion in the woods. He sent his aid, Fielding Robinson, to deliver a message to Sibley and Holcomb instructing both men to hold their current positions and consolidate their lines. However, the order still betrayed Harbord's confusion regarding unit positioning, as it presumed Berry's III/5 to be somewhere near the northern end of the wood, which it was not.³³ As he ordered his two battalions in the Bois de Belleau to dig in for the night, Harbord moved to bring in one of his reserve battalions to reinforce the III/5's position. The 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines under Major Frederic Wise was waiting in reserve south of Hill 142. Harbord ordered it to move up the road towards Torcy and fall in line next to Berry's battalion, supposedly on the northern edge of Belleau Wood. The II/5 would then establish a liaison with Feland who was presumably with Turrill's I/5 somewhere around Torcy. After the war, Wise recorded his thoughts towards Harbord's directive:

That was the damndest [sic] order I ever got in my life—or anyone else ever got. It went on the calm assumption that all the objectives of the First and Third Battalion had been secured. . . . I was between the devil and the deep sea. If I didn't move, I knew I'd catch hell. If I did move, I knew I was going right down into Germany. It was dark as pitch. Finding Feland would be a miracle. . . . That might have been a fine order to have sent out on a maneuver field. I didn't see exactly how it was going to work in war. But, being disciplined, we started. I had received no word from Feland. Evidently my runners hadn't been able to find him.³⁴

Wise moved his battalion up the Lucy-Torcy road, with Belleau Wood to his right and a small wooded area on the slope of Hill 142 on his left. Just before the road bottlenecked between the two woods, the battalion came under heavy rifle and machine gun fire from the Germans still occupying the northern portion of Belleau Wood, as well as German artillery fire. Wise at first ordered his men to fall back, but they were reluctant to do so (true Marines to the end). Eventually he had the battalion take up position in the woods just west of the road and established a liaison with Berry's battalion.³⁵

With that the attacks on 6 June mercifully came to an end. In the twelve-hour span, the 4th Brigade suffered more casualties (just over one thousand officers and men) than the Marine Corps had in its entire history.³⁶ Berry's battalion was smashed up, and the others held on despite significant casualties. Harbord reported the tactical situation to

Bundy early the next morning. He intended to withdraw the III/5, having Wise's II/5 extend its line to make up the difference, and planned a general consolidation for the time being. Harbord went on to report, "No numbers as to casualties are available. Losses known to be heavy. . . . The Brigade can hold at present position but it is not able to advance at present."³⁷

The next day, 7 June, was equally harrowing for the Marines of the 4th Brigade still in the Bois de Belleau. German sniper and machine-gun fire continually harassed their lines, and German artillery rained several barrages down upon them, stretching their already tattered nerves. The dead and the dying laid about the ground, giving the wood the noxious odor of decay. Stretcher-bearers and medical corpsmen were overworked trying to retrieve the wounded. Food and water were scarce as support units drew enemy artillery fire whenever they attempted to enter the wood from the south. Adding to the misery, that afternoon the Germans launched a brief counterattack through the woods, which the Marines halted with a combination of rifle, machine-gun, and artillery fire at the cost of even more men.³⁸

Still not entirely convinced that the Germans held the wood in considerable strength, Harbord ordered Sibley to push his battalion forward early on 8 June in an effort to straighten the line running west from Bouresches to Hill 142. Thinking there were only "18 machine guns and some infantry in the woods," Harbord again ordered only preparatory artillery fire before the attack.³⁹ The Marines charged valiantly forward at the appointed hour on the morning of 8 June, and were again stopped by vicious machine-gun fire. By 12:30 p.m., Harbord finally decided to halt his battalions and conduct a general appraisal of his entire situation. He sent word to Sibley, "Get cover for

your men in the ravine (gully) at the south edge of the woods. Let your men rest. I will have artillery play on the wood.”⁴⁰

With the end to operations on 8 June, the Marines held a line running from Bouresches west through the southeastern edge of Belleau Wood, then up the wood's western edge turning west to Hill 142. The attack that was to carry the entire wood on 6 June had rapidly turned into a deadly struggle for mere yards of wooded, boulder strewn, machine-gun infested terrain. And unbeknownst to all involved, the fight for Belleau Wood was only just beginning.

Phase II: 9-16 June

Although the attacks by the Marine Brigade on 6-8 June failed to capture the Bois de Belleau, they did produce a significant amount of news reports hailing the Marines, proclaiming their exploits in newspapers around the globe. The reports also created considerable embitterment on the part of several Regular officers and a small controversy over what was actually happening around Château-Thierry. The grumbling arose due to Pershing's policy towards censoring all news from the front. Seeking to keep tight control over all information regarding his forces, Pershing had established strict guidelines regarding coverage of American operations. Reporters were forbidden to mention specific units, nor could they divulge the geographic origins of the troops involved. Such restrictions made for particularly bland copy and frustrated the press corps covering the AEF. But even without these draconian censorship regulations, the American experience in the World War up to that point provided only limited instances

of real news. There were only so many times reporters could describe men in training, and when the Americans did go into the lines it was in quiet sectors without any real opportunity for action. The attacks on Belleau Wood were the first major news story to emerge from the AEF in months, and reporters latched on to it with a frenzy.⁴¹

Contributing to the attention given the attacks on Belleau Wood was a modification of the AEF's censorship regulations. When the attack was made, reporters asked officials at G-2 in Paris whether the same restrictions regarding naming individual units applied equally to members of other services: namely the Marines. Thinking it reasonable to specify individual services, the censors allowed reporters to mention the Marines by name, so long as they did not provide specifics regarding units. The fact that there was only one brigade of Marines in France apparently escaped their attention, but the reporters were not about to point out this bit of information. With the eased restrictions, the entire action around Château-Thierry became a Marine affair. Headlines around the world proclaimed the Marines' exploits, describing courageous attacks, crumbling German resistance, and a general turn in Allied fortunes all along the front. As one contemporary in the AEF put it, press reports shouted Marines "until the word resounded over the whole earth and made the inhabitants thereof, except a few Americans in the army in France, believe that there was nothing in the 2nd Division, and, indeed, nothing in front of the Germans, but Marines."⁴²

The Marine legend also benefited from the wounding of war correspondent Floyd Gibbons. Following the brigades' exploits, Gibbons accompanied Berry's III/6 on its disastrous attack through the wheat field on 6 June. After sending initial sketches of the battle to the censors in Paris, with the intention to provide a more detailed account later,

Gibbons was critically wounded when a German bullet hit him in the left eye. In the confusion, word quickly circulated that Gibbons was dead, and the initial report became his “last story.” One of the Paris censors, who was a friend of Gibbons, released the dispatch without alteration as a tribute to the (erroneously) fallen reporter.⁴³

The coverage provided the Marines at Belleau Wood ultimately proved a source of embarrassment for Harbord. Though his Marines had shown remarkable courage in the attack, Harbord knew that they were not the only Americans fighting in the region and did not like the idea of his men receiving credit for the exploits of others. He wrote later, “The wounds inflicted by publicity received by someone else do not rate a wound stripe but they are a long time healing.”⁴⁴ Those wounds apparently cut deeply into Major General Robert L. Bullard, the commander of the 1st Division. At a dinner in Paris in the days after the battle, Bullard commented to Pershing, “‘I see that the 2nd Marines’ (emphasizing the 2nd as though that division was all Marines) ‘have won the war at Belleau Wood.’” Pershing understood the backhanded remark and indicated that he had already put a stop to such reports.⁴⁵

Regardless of its accuracy, the news emanating from Belleau Wood provided a much-needed boost to Allied morale. All over France people talked of the glorious Marines with an optimism not seen since the beginning of the German offensive two months earlier. Major Paul H. Clark, Chief of the American Military Mission at French GHQ, reported to Pershing that the French military commanders were abuzz with talk of the Americans near Château-Thierry. He described how these men, so critical of the AEF in the past, now believed that “the beneficial *moral* [sic] effect produced on the French troops at seeing Americans fighting at their side, and fighting with such success and

valor, could not be overestimated.” Likewise, Clark observed that “the presence of so many Americans, fighting vigorously, must be a very unwelcome and disheartening realization to the Germans.”⁴⁶

Ludendorff was not so quick to give credit to the Americans. He observed that, “At Château-Thierry, Americans who had been a long time in France had bravely attacked our thinly held fronts, but they were unskillfully led, attacked in dense masses, and failed. Here, too, our men felt themselves superior. Our tactics had proved sound in every way, our losses, compared with those of the enemy . . . had been very slight.”⁴⁷

Though technically correct in his tactical assessment, Ludendorff failed to grasp the strategic value of the American stand at Château-Thierry. So long thought to be a paper tiger, the weight of American manpower reserves was finally beginning to make an impact on the Western Front. When the French quickly blunted Ludendorff’s fourth offensive, launched between Montdidier and Noyon on 9 June, it appeared to all that the grand German push against Paris was losing steam.⁴⁸

With reports of the Marines’ success echoing along the front, Harbord knew that he could not let up the pressure on Belleau Wood. If nothing else, he had to secure the successes already reported. To do so, Harbord looked to correct some of the mistakes of the past. In a memorandum issued on 8 June, he outlined the problems he wanted rectified.

The following suggestions occur from considerations of the week’s fighting and are published for the information and action of company, battalion, and regimental commanders:

1. Reports that do not show the time of sending are worthless.
2. "Losses are heavy" may mean anything. Percentages or numbers are desired.
3. Figures or conditions that are only estimates should be so stated.
4. Flanks of positions and any important peculiarities such as re-entrants, salients and refusals, should be described by coordinates as far as practicable. Artillery cannot be called for with safety unless position of our infantry is accurately known. . . .
5. The number of Machine Guns and prisoners captured to hour of writing reports is information that ought to be included in them.
6. Dispersion of troops is the fault of beginners as pointed out by all military authorities, and has in our Brigade, with the length of our line, deprived us of the necessary echelon in depth.
7. Officers given a task must plan to execute it with forces at their own command, and not count on reinforcements which may not be available. Only a grave emergency not apparent when the task is begun will justify requests for help. Supporters have been thrown in during this first week at a rate not to be expected hereafter.
8. The enemy have been told that Americans do not take prisoners, which makes their men fight to the death rather than surrender when they think they will be given no quarter. This idea we do not take prisoners undoubtedly costs us many lives.

9. The heavy losses of officers compared to those among the men are most eloquent as to the gallantry of our officers, and correspond nearly to the proportions suffered by both the Allies and the enemy in 1914-15. Officers of experience are a most valuable asset and must not be wasted.
10. Recommendations for decorations should be made with discretion but as promptly as possible. The “extraordinary heroism” which calls for the [Distinguished Service Cross] must be liberally interpreted in case of officers and men who have met death or suffered the loss of a leg, an arm, or an eye in action.
11. The French Corps Commander has asked for recommendations for awards of the Croix de Guerre. This should be submitted promptly and in good faith.⁴⁹

Harbord's memorandum was a remarkable document given his own limited understanding of the events going on in the Bois de Belleau. It probably elicited choice words in response from unit commanders holding thin lines against brutal enemy fire, but such is war. At the very least, it shows Harbord trying to achieve better control of events. More appreciated by the men, however, was his decision to finally direct significant artillery fire on the wood.

Before the artillery barrage scheduled for 9 June, Harbord worked to reorganize his brigade. He shifted Major Maurice Shearer from command of the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines to the 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines, relieving the wounded Berry. He also ordered

Major Wise to withdraw the remnants of the II/5 to the west of the Lucy-Torcy road in anticipation of the artillery barrage. As for the men holding the line in the southern portion of the wood, Harbord initially called for Major John Hughes, now in command of the I/6, to move up to relieve Sibley's battered battalion. He later reversed the order and instructed Sibley to withdraw his battalion from the wood before the coming barrage. Elements of the I/6 would then move into position for an attack after the barrage's conclusion. At the moment, Harbord was unable to relieve Major Holcomb's II/6, desperately holding on to Bouresches, but informed the battalion commander that relief would come from Shearer's III/6 the following night.⁵⁰

At dawn on 9 June, Chamberlaine's guns opened fire on Belleau Wood. All 160 guns concentrated their fire on the southern portion of the wood, ostensibly clearing it of German resistance. An hour before the attack, the artillery would shift to target suspected machine-gun positions within the wood.⁵¹ While the artillery pounded away, the Marines prepared for the coming assault. At 6:30 p.m., Harbord issued Field Order No. 3, outlining the attack planned for 10 June. After a violent artillery barrage, Major Hughes's I/6 was to retake Sibley's line in the southern portion of Belleau Wood and then push north through the wood's narrow center where it would establish a new position just shy of the wood's northern section. Machine-gun fire from Bouresches would cover the eastern edge of the wood, protecting Hughes's flank⁵²

At 4:15 a.m., the brigade's artillery began to roll forward slowly, making way for the I/6's attack. After the battalion stepped off at 4:30 a.m., Hughes reported in: "Artillery barrage working beautifully." By 5:20 a.m., Colonel Lee sent word that "All quiet in Bois de Belleau." Twenty five minutes later he relayed word that a captain in the

advancing battalion thought the wood cleared of machine-guns. This was soon countered with reports of machine-gun fire from the center of the wood, but still things appeared to be going smoothly. At 6:20 a.m., Hughes's reported that his battalion had reached its objective and was consolidating.⁵³

Emboldened by the news coming in to his headquarters, Harbord ordered Hughes's to conduct a reconnaissance of the wood's northern section in anticipation of a renewed attack. Unknown to Harbord, however, Hughes's attack had not gone as well as reported. Hughes's unfamiliarity with the wood, combined with poor maps and the dense, rocky terrain contributed to the battalion commander mistaking his actual position. Instead of reaching his objective, Hughes had stopped his battalion at Sibley's former line, some 800 yards to the rear of the I/6's objective. Though some members of the brigade's intelligence service gained some inkling of this after conducting personal reconnaissance, their reports did not reach Harbord, and the general continued to press the attack.⁵⁴

In addition to the positive reports coming in regarding the attack, Harbord found another reason to press his advantage. In response to the German attack between Montidier and Noyon the previous day, the French requested the removal of a regiment of field artillery from the Belleau Wood sector. Harbord wired Division Headquarters that with the progress of the current operation, he planned to conduct another attack either that evening or the next morning and requested that the French artillery not be withdrawn for another 24 hours.⁵⁵

With time of the essence, Harbord set to work drafting orders for his next assault. Issued that evening as Field Order No. 4, the plan called for Wise's II/5 to again attack

the wood from the west, through the murderous wheat field. Thinking the I/6 positioned somewhere in the wood's center, Harbord's plan instructed Wise to establish a liaison with Hughes, and then to pivot his battalion left to make a drive north, where it would finally emerge on the wood's northern edge. It was a complex plan, relying on incomplete information and put together with a sense of urgency that prevented adequate intelligence. Harbord again called for an artillery barrage like the one preceding Hughes's attack that morning, but this time there would not be a full day of destructive fire laid down due to the French threat of withdrawing their artillery. The artillery units were further limited by having to adjust their fire so as not to hit the Marines already in the wood. These factors combined to make the barrage significantly less effective than the previous day's, reducing the likelihood of success for the attack.⁵⁶

On the morning of 11 June, Wise's 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines stepped off, attacking the Bois de Belleau from the west. Covered by a hovering mist, the battalion made it across the Lucy-Torcy road and halfway through the wheat field before the Germans opened fire. Unfortunately, the battalion commander did not realize that his men were headed straight into the German lines. He incorrectly believed that Hughes had cleared the area the day before. A sergeant sent by Hughes to find Wise described what he saw: "About half-way from our line in the southern part of the wood to where Wise was supposed to be, I heard a hell of a lot of firing. I climbed a slope, saw Wise and his command group in a wheatfield ahead. On his left and slightly forward the attacking waves were moving through the field, the men falling left and right."⁵⁷ The Marines valiantly pushed on through the deadly machine-gun fire and finally entered the wood.

What followed was the most controversial moment of the battle for Belleau Wood. Soon after entering the wood, Wise's command lost cohesion under withering German fire. The Marines pressed on, but failed to make the designated turn to the left, and instead drove straight through the wood's center. A little after 6:00 a.m., Wise emerged on the eastern edge of the Bois. Thinking it the northern rim, he sent word back to Brigade Headquarters, "All objectives reached and am mopping up with machine guns."⁵⁸ Not knowing the truth, Harbord reported to Bundy that "the northern half of the BOIS DE BELLEAU belongs to 5th Marines."⁵⁹

For the rest of the morning, reports filtered in describing a smashing, but erroneous success. Harbord was briefly concerned over unconfirmed reports that Bouresches had fallen to a German counter attack, but surer intelligence soon dispelled the myth. By mid-day, Harbord was convinced they had at last taken the wood. He sent a congratulatory message to Wise, saying:

The Division Commander is at Brigade Headquarters and sends his hearty congratulations to you and your gallant men. He says the task could not have been performed any better. The objectives of the Brigade have been attained everywhere after days of fighting which the Division Commander has never known to be excelled. To this I add my warm personal greetings and congratulations.⁶⁰

With all the congratulations and handshakes going around, however, no one seemed to wonder why the II/5 continued to face significant opposition, not even

Lieutenant Colonel Wise. For the rest of 11 June, Wise's battalion held a thin line across the center of Belleau Wood, and withered brutal artillery and machine-gun fire from the still potent German positions in the as yet unoccupied northern section. Wise increasingly sent word of growing casualties and the need for artillery support, which Harbord provided. But the brigade commander thought Wise to be nearly 1000 yards further north than he actually was, and the artillery fell well behind the German line. Still, Wise maintained that he had reached his objective and kept reporting that he was consolidating his position.⁶¹

For the next two days, the Marines in Belleau Wood fought on in what was thought to be mopping up actions. So sure were Harbord and Bundy of their success that they sent word to Pershing indicating that the Marines had reached the wood's northern and eastern edge. Pershing's headquarters wasted little time relaying the message to the waiting public, and the *New York Times* headline on 12 June reported, "OUR MEN TAKE BELLEAU WOOD, 300 CAPTIVES."⁶²

That same day, Harbord moved to finish off what he supposed was an already decided battle. His men were wearing out, and needed a break desperately, but Harbord understood that there was work remaining to be done (though he did not realize how much that truly was). He ordered Wise and Hughes to link up and push north in an effort to clear out the remaining Germans. Still, neither Harbord, Colonel Neville, commander of the 5th Marines, nor Wise understood how far south the II/5 actually was. In the ensuing drive, Wise soon learned how staunch the remaining German positions were. In vicious, hand-to-hand fighting, the II/6 pushed north until fatigue and casualties forced

them to stop. The battalion now held a line along the southern edge of the wood's northern third. In the process, Wise lost over sixty percent of his battalion's strength.⁶³

Though a bit of an exaggeration, it may as well have been true. Increasing casualties, fatigue, and a German gas attack on 14 June were wearing down the proud unit. Even Harbord's enthusiasm was beginning to waver. As though sensing this, Colonel Neville made an effort to brighten the brigade commander's spirits on one of his morning visits. Neville unceremoniously handed Harbord a pair of Marine Corps collar devices, saying, "Here, we think it is about time you put these one."⁶⁴ The gesture touched Harbord greatly, and after the war he recalled,

. . . I was as much thrilled by his brusque remark and his subsequent pinning them on my collar the next few minutes as I have ever been by any decoration of the several that have come to me. I wore those Marine Corps devices until after I became a Major General, and I still cherish them as among my most valued possessions. I think no officer can fail to understand what that little recognition meant to me, an Army officer commanding troops of a sister service in battle. It seemed to me to set the seal of approval by my comrades of the Marine Corps, and knowing the circumstances, it meant everything to me.⁶⁵

After the brief interlude, Harbord returned to the battle, but events were quickly showing that his men were reaching the end of their abilities. Mounting casualties and a general loss of momentum finally convinced Harbord and Bundy that the 4th Brigade

needed a rest. Though still proclaiming the spirit of his men to be high, Harbord accepted relief on his left by the 167th French Division. On 15 June, General Naulin, the new commander of the French XXI Army Corps after General Degoutte moved up to command the French Sixth Army the day before, agreed to transfer the 7th Infantry from the 3rd Division to the 2nd to provide relief for the 4th Brigade.⁶⁶

Harbord then prepared to withdraw his men. The decision to pull the Marines off the line was bittersweet for Harbord. He knew that there was still work to do in Belleau Wood, but he could not deny that the Marines had given their all and needed time to recover before retaking the field. Over two weeks of fighting, four of his battalions lost at least forty percent of their strength.⁶⁷ In writing to Bundy just before his brigade's relief, Harbord summarized his command's status, stating: "I am very glad to report that notwithstanding their physical exhaustion, which is almost total, and the adverse circumstance of gas, the spirit of the Brigade remains unshaken."⁶⁸ Whether writing for Bundy or himself the message was clear, the 4th Brigade could do no more. Though they were not finished with the Bois de Belleau, the Marines were moving to the rear for the time being for a period of rest and reorganization. The men received hot food, warm baths, new clothes, and replacements to swell their withered ranks. In the meantime, the 7th Infantry took over the heavy lifting in Belleau Wood.⁶⁹

Phase III: 17-25 June

Between 15-17 June, the 7th Infantry under Colonel Thomas Anderson relieved the 4th Brigade from its lines in the Bois de Belleau. As 3rd Division commander Major

General Joseph Dickman observed, “All three battalions of the regiment were in front line [sic], from Bouresches to Torcy, and under the command of a colonel of marines [sic].”⁷⁰ Much to Dickman’s and Anderson’s dismay, the 7th Infantry would not be directed by its own officers while in Belleau Wood. Instead, Colonel Neville took control of its dispensation, and Colonel Feland retained tactical command of operations in Belleau Wood. Dickman considered the breaking up of one of his brigades a poor strategy by the French. “It was bad military ethics and was bound to leave sore spots,” he wrote later. “But, the controversy was very great, and nothing could be gained by protest or controversy. We could only bide our time.”⁷¹

While the Americans exchanged Marines for soldiers, the Germans strengthened their positions in the wood’s northwest corner. By the time the 7th Infantry was in line, the Germans had created a massive machine-gun nest, with a full battalion occupying Belleau Wood, another in close support, and a third in reserve.⁷² Meanwhile, the 1st Battalion, 7th Infantry took up position in Wise’s old lines. Uncertain of the ground, and of their intended activities, the soldiers began rebuilding their trenches and laying wire. Upon hearing of their actions, Harbord sent a quick message to the commander of the I/7, Lieutenant Colonel Adams:

It is understood that you are wiring an east and west line through the woods between you and the party of Germans on whom you are supposed to exert pressure. It is not believed that you have anything to fear from any aggression on the part of these people and it is not desired

that you wire yourself in to prevent the pressure which it is desired you exert steadily until those people are killed or driven out.

There has been nothing heard from you in the way of reports since early morning. You are supposed to report at least once each day whether anything is happening or not to keep your C.O. informed of exactly what is going on.⁷³

Harbord was getting increasingly irritated. He wanted Belleau Wood very badly and began pressing those below him to secure the victory that had been reported just days before. He pushed for a new attack on what he still believed to be a relatively weak position in the wood's northwest corner, but as though falling into old habits, again failed to provide much artillery support. On 20 June, the soldiers made their first serious advance on the Germans. Like those of the Marines before them, the attack proved futile. Without artillery support the soldiers could not breach the German position, with its numerous machine-guns arranged in depth. Harbord was still not convinced of the German strength, and wired Bundy claiming the attack failed "because companies of the 7th Infantry fell back when a few casualties occurred."⁷⁴

Sensing the 7th Infantry was not up to the task, Harbord tried an appeal to honor as a motivational tool. He wired Lieutenant Colonel Adams the morning of 21 June, saying: "Your battalion will be relieved tomorrow night. Tomorrow morning is its only chance to redeem the failure made this morning. If you clear the northern half of the Bois de Belleau the credit will belong to the 1st Battalion, 7th Infantry, and will be freely given. The battalion cannot afford to fail again."⁷⁵ A bit resentfully, Adams prepared to attack,

but he made sure to express his concerns to Harbord beforehand. The battalion commander sent a confidential message outlining the German position, concluding:

Under the conditions noted I do not believe any attack without a heavy artillery fire preceding can move the guns from the woods. . . . The wood is almost a thicket and the throwing of troops into the woods is filtering away men with nothing gained. . . . I can assure you that the orders to attack will stand as given, but it can not succeed. This is only my individual expression and has not reached the ears of any one else.⁷⁶

In response to Adams's statement, Harbord ordered an artillery barrage of the northern wood from 2:00 a.m. to 3:15 a.m. He informed Adams that, "There will be irregular artillery fire around the northwestern, northern and northeastern edge of the Bois after midnight to prevent entrance from outside to lines vacated by you. Your troops will attack at 3:15 and capture or destroy the enemy."⁷⁷ At the designated hour, the soldiers of the 7th Infantry launched their attack. From the very beginning the operation ran into problems. Adams and the other battalion commanders deemed the artillery preparation "light in volume and ineffective," but charged ahead anyway. Confusion soon ensued as German artillery and machine-gun fire scattered the attackers. One company became so disoriented that it established a position outside of the wood's western edge. Harbord received the first news of the attack at 7:00 a.m. when Adams reported "everything is not going well." Major Jesse Gaston, commanding the 3rd Battalion, 7th Infantry, added that one of his companies was "all shot up to pieces."⁷⁸

Wanting to get a clearer understanding of what was fast becoming a disaster, Harbord moved up to the 5th Marines command position. While there he listened to the report of Lieutenant Helms, commanding Company A, III/7, who described the confusion in the woods. Harbord looked upon the man with suspicion, noting that, "This officer has no marks of any kind on himself or his clothing." Finally, word came at 11:25 a.m. that the attack had failed with losses totaling 170 men.⁷⁹ Harbord had had enough. He ordered Major Shearer to reconnoiter the lines in anticipation of sending the III/5 back into the woods that night. He then sat down to write his report to Bundy. In it he described the day's action and gave his general impressions of the 7th Infantry.

This whole situation arises in my opinion from the inefficiency of the officers of the 7th Inf. and the lack of instruction of the men. The 1st Bn. is untrustworthy for front line work at this time. The 2nd Bn. has given satisfaction in the south end of the Bois de Belleau where there has been nothing but watching required of it, suffering some casualties from shell fire.

The 3rd Bn. (Major Jesse Gaston) has accomplished what was required of it, except that it has shown no enterprise in carrying out orders for outpost patrols in the region between the LUCY-TORCY Road and the BOIS de BELLEAU. . . .The 7th Infantry needs a period of instruction under a strong commanding officer, with disciplinary drills and the weeding out of inefficient officers. It is unreliable at present.⁸⁰

It was an unfair assessment. Though the 7th Infantry was an untested unit, several factors combined to produce their failures in Belleau Wood. As General Dickman later argued in defense of his men, the 7th Infantry had not completed its training, for which it could hardly be blamed. Much like the Marines on 6 June, the operations of 20-21 June were the first time the unit was in action. They were not given adequate time to familiarize themselves with the terrain, which contributed to difficulties in orientation and coordination. And finally, the regiment received “inadequate artillery preparation, far below what was promised and expected.”⁸¹ Given these factors, one can hardly lay the full blame on the 7th Infantry for their performance. They fought hard, suffering 350 casualties in their two days of difficult combat, but could not overcome their own inexperience or the lack of support given them.

Harbord’s continuing uncertainty regarding the actual strength of the German position in the northwest corner of the wood should have caused greater concern to Bundy than the failure of the 7th Infantry to clear the woods. But the division commander had no better sense of the situation in the Bois de Belleau than his brigade commander, and he thus supported Harbord’s assessments. Content to blame the 7th Infantry for the failure of the 20-21 June attacks, Harbord sent Shearer’s battalion (II/5) back into the wood on 21 June. Estimates from Lieutenant Colonel Adams stated that the Germans had between 150 and 200 men in the wood, over ground that was “exceedingly rough, ravined [sic], covered with dense underbrush and all trails and paths in the direction of this stronghold seem to be covered by machine gun fire and in one or two cases by 37 MM [cannon].”⁸² Unfazed, Harbord advised Shearer that “by the judicious use of sharpshooting snipers you can reduce the German positions without much expenditure of

men.” The men were to go out in pairs, carrying water and rations, and “crawl out toward the German position exerting every effort, exercising the patience of Indians and waiting for shots without exposing themselves.”⁸³

Amazingly, Harbord believed that sharpshooters, without any support or artillery preparation, could overcome what by that time was a massive machine-gun nest covering every point of advance. As if to add insult to injury, Harbord told Shearer that, “It is not practicable to withdraw again and give further artillery preparation. With the sniping which should worry the enemy you should be endeavoring to get the machine gun nests surrounded so you can rush them when ready and put an end to them.”⁸⁴ This was “open” warfare at its finest, as Harbord understood it. A spirited infantryman with his rifle and bayonet could overpower a machine-gun through sniping and infiltration.

As Shearer prepared his men for another suicide assault, reports trickled in to Brigade Headquarters of the true German strength. Taking the initiative, Lieutenant Colonel Feland conducted a personal reconnaissance of the northern wood on 22 June and reported that the Germans actually held the entire northwestern portion. As though in disbelief, Harbord requested that Shearer send out a patrol to ascertain the actual situation. He instructed the battalion commander to “select men who will do what they are told and whose reports can be relied upon, and if possible get some positive identifications, dead or alive.”⁸⁵ When their reports matched Feland’s, Harbord almost exploded. In a remarkable example of passing-the-buck, he wrote to Bundy that he had “been misled as to affairs in [the northwest corner] of the woods, either consciously or unconsciously, ever since its first occupation by the battalion under command of Lieutenant Colonel Wise and later by the battalion of the 7th Infantry.”⁸⁶

Harbord was being more than a little disingenuous. While reports from the front were confused and often more optimistic than the situation warranted, the brigade commander relied too heavily upon those reports, even though they were from men under constant fire, operating in terrain that made accurate assessments almost impossible. Harbord had his own intelligence officers, but he failed to use them. Despite continually conflicting reports during the attacks, he did not take the time to gain a clear understanding of what was actually going on in the Bois de Belleau. He relied instead on the spirit and courage of his Marines to accomplish any task, no matter how difficult.

Holding true to form, Harbord pushed forward with his plans for an attack on 23 June. Still convinced that Shearer's men could dislodge the enemy with envelopment tactics, Harbord provided no significant artillery support to the operation. It was a lamentable error in judgment. The III/5 moved out and ran into the same machine-gun fire that blunted the 7th Infantry's attacks just days before. Shearer reported slow progress through the wood before being stopped by enemy fire. By 1:00 a.m. (24 June), Colonel Neville reported that things were "rather bad," with almost an entire company wiped out before Shearer eventually pulled his men back and dug in for the night. He wired headquarters the next morning, saying, as though in response to Harbord's orders, "The enemy seems to have unlimited alternate gun positions and many guns. Each gun position covered by others. I know of no other way of attacking these positions with chance of success than one attempted and am of opinion that *infantry alone cannot dislodge enemy guns* [emphasis added].⁸⁷

At last Harbord realized the impossibility of his orders. He called together his regimental and battalion commanders and the group devised a new plan. Shearer would

withdraw his men to a line further south in the wood, and then Chamberlaine's guns, supplemented by the French, would rain a destructive fire upon the northern wood from 3:00 a.m. to 5 p.m. Upon completion of the barrage, the III/5 would advance north slowly, clearing out any German positions not destroyed by the artillery. At the same time, Major Ralph Keyser, now in command of the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines, would move up between the III/5 and the French occupying Hill 142.⁸⁸

Just before dawn the next morning, the American guns finally brought their full fury to bear upon Belleau Wood. For thirteen hours, the guns pummeled the woods, making any German movement impossible. In the last hour, Chamberlaine's guns fired for maximum effect, obliterating the area so long fought over. At 5:00 p.m., the guns began a rolling barrage as Shearer's battalion moved slowly forward. They met pockets of German resistance, especially on the right, and took numerous prisoners dazed by the artillery barrage. Interrogations provided proof that the Germans had held the wood with three companies, and Harbord ordered Neville to send two platoons, or possibly a full company, from Sibley's battalion to strengthen Shearer's advance. Meanwhile Shearer continued to press forward, taking as many as 150 prisoners and losing a number of men in the exchange before the German batteries began firing on the wood, causing significant casualties in the American lines. Shearer wired Neville at 9:30 p.m. that three of his companies were either at their objectives or approaching them. He also reported: "Our casualties so heavy can't spare men to patrol to rear. Any counter attack by enemy would be fatal to us in our present condition. . . We have taken practically all of woods but do need help to clean it up and hold it. Do we get it?"⁸⁹

They would get it. As Keyser's battalion moved up from the west, Harbord ordered Neville to send a platoon to aid Shearer. It was a sound measure given Shearer's growing anxiety, but now it was a battalion commander's turn to overestimate the danger in front of him. While his men were still struggling with sporadic German resistance, Shearer did not realize that, for all intents and purposes, he had cleared the woods. Though his anxiety would last the remainder of the night, by the next morning Shearer finally sent the message so long anticipated at Brigade Headquarters: "Woods now U.S. Marine Corps entirely."⁹⁰

Mopping Up

The Marines of the 4th Brigade spent the next several days consolidating their long sought gains in the Bois de Belleau. Harbord's headquarters was inundated with visitors wishing to register their congratulations to the victorious brigadier general and his fine men. Notes arrived from General Pershing, Marshal Foch, and numerous others seeking to join in the celebration. Harbord, Neville and Lieutenant Colonel Lee each received the Croix de Guerre with Palm. On 30 June, the French Army Corps paid the Marines a lasting tribute, officially changing the name of the Bois de Belleau to the "Bois de la Brigade de Marine."⁹¹

The tributes were well intentioned, and received with due thanks, but the Marines of the 4th Brigade would gladly have exchanged all the bright ribbon and kind regards in France for a speedy exit from those death-strewn woods. It was not to be, however, as the 2nd Division was not yet through in the Château-Thierry sector. Not wanting to be

left out of the action, the 3rd Brigade launched an attack on the city of Vaux to the east of Belleau Wood on 1 July. Unlike the brutal and disjointed fighting that defined the Marine operations, the attack on Vaux went off like a training maneuver. The artillery was provided ample time to scout their targets, and the division's intelligence service created detailed maps of the city. When everything was in place, the 3rd Brigade's artillery and infantry took the city in a single day.⁹²

Harbord listened to his Marines grumble as they sat in their trenches while the 3rd Brigade prepared. Most of the men did not know why they were still in line, but they could guess. He noted that, "You could not possibly convince a member of the Marine Brigade that" they were not relieved earlier "because [General Bundy] had made up his mind to stay until the 3rd Brigade also had a chance to 'pull off a stunt.'"⁹³ Though an understatement of the Vaux operation, the frustrations are understandable. For close to a month his Marines had done the heavy lifting for the 2nd Division and they desperately needed relief. While they received the lion's share of the glory, it came at a price. In their month of fighting in the Meaux sector, the 4th Brigade lost 126 officers and 5,057 men (3,400 of those coming in Belleau Wood). The 3rd Brigade lost just over 3,000 men over the same period, bringing the casualties for the 2nd Division to just over 9,500 men. After enduring such losses, it is little wonder that both the soldiers and Marines of the 2nd Division desperately wanted to leave the region surrounding Belleau Wood, but they would stay in their trenches for another week, nursing their wounds and contemplating the events of the past month.⁹⁴

The action in Belleau Wood touched Harbord deeply. He looked upon the Marines of his command with a sense of respect and affection that would remain throughout his life. Without a sense of hyperbole, he believed that

The Marine Brigade had added another name to Tripoli, Mexico and China, and a score of others that are written on the tablets of Marine history and immortalized in the traditions of the Corps. . . .

More than the Bois de Belleau was at stake in those June days. More indeed than standing between the invader and fair Paris. It was a struggle for psychological mastery. The man from overseas was untried in the eyes of his Allies world; the man from over the Rhine had the prestige of victory on a hundred fields. Who now would prove the master in stubborn, hand-to-hand struggle? Who would first recoil when next they met? It was a small stage, perhaps, but the audience was the world of 1918. The odds in experience, in terrain and in prestige were with the Germans; the honors at the end lay with the American.⁹⁵

As to his own part in the battle, Harbord wrote years later:

The recollections of a Brigade Commander are only valuable as the testimony of an official reporter of the Homeric deeds of other men. The world is little concerned with the feelings of such a witness, and his impressions at the time. Yet it is true that the responsibility for orders that

send men into battle, when it may mean death to men that you know personally, when it may maim and destroy men with whom you have spoken within the hour, is not lightly borne by any man. It leaves invisible scars, and the very recollection of it brings a spiritual humility of soul that during a varied life has come to me in no other circumstance.⁹⁶

Harbord's sincere feelings for the Marines that were wounded or killed under his command are commendable, but such sympathies cannot erase the fact that much of the suffering in the Bois de Belleau came not only from staunch German opposition, but poor American tactics. Harbord's commitment to "open" warfare meant thousands of Marines charged directly into the face of German machine-guns with little or no artillery support, and were mowed down accordingly. Though his men lacked neither discipline, nor courage, they did lack the training necessary to carry out the type of engagement Harbord sought. Additionally, with its dense foliage, rocky terrain, and natural points of concealment, Belleau Wood was not suited to the tactics of movement and envelopment that Harbord called for. The fact that the Marines still tried is a mark not against them, but against their commander. However, while some in the AEF lamented the manner in which the 4th Brigade fought at Belleau Wood, to the victor go the accolades, and Harbord received nothing but praise from his compatriots and superiors.⁹⁷

Notes

¹ Erich von Ludendorff, *Ludendorff's Own Story*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1919), 2:271.

² French XXI Army Corps, Operations Order 81, 5 June 1918, *United States Army in the World War, 1917-1919* 17 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1948), 4:143-45. [Hereafter cited as USAWW]

³ C.G., 2nd Division to C.G., 4th Brigade, 5 June 1918, USAWW, 4:145.

⁴ James G. Harbord, *The American Army in France 1917-1919* (Boston: Brown, Little and Company, 1936), 296.

⁵ American Battle Monuments Commission, *American Armies and Battlefields in Europe, A History, Guide, and Reference Book* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1938), 49. [Reprinted by the Center for Military History, 1995]

⁶ Quoted in Ernst Otto, "The Battles for the Possession of Belleau Woods" *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* 54 (November 1928): 961.

⁷ Robert B. Asprey, *At Belleau Wood* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 1996), 140-41.

⁸ Harbord, *American Army*, 289.

⁹ For a good chronicle of the intelligence available see Asprey, *At Belleau Wood*, 157-63; Spaulding and Wright estimate that as many as a thousand Germans occupied Belleau Wood on 6 June, well-entrenched in a series of machine-gun, mortar, and sniper positions that made the wood a tremendously well defended. Oliver L. Spaulding and John W. Wright, *The Second Division: American Expeditionary Force in France, 1917-1919* (New York: Hillman Press, 1937), 53.

¹⁰ William Chamberlaine, "Report of Operations, 2d Field Artillery Brigade, 2d Division, During Month of June, 1918," 10 September 1919, Folder 33.6, Box 78, 2nd Division Historical File, RG 120, NARA; HQ 2nd F.A. Brigade, Orders No. 1, 5 June 1918, U.S. Army, 2nd Division, *Records of the Second Division (Regular)* 9 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Army War College, 1924), vol. 6. [Hereafter cited as *Records*]; Mark Grotelueschen, "The AEF Way of War: The American Army and Combat in the First World War" (Ph.D. diss., Texas A&M University, 2003), 167-68.

¹¹ Untitled summary of conversation between Brown and Harbord, 3:00 p.m., 5 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 4.

¹² HQ 4th Bg, Field Order No. 1, 5 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 2.

¹³ Asprey, *At Belleau Wood*, 144.

¹⁴ War Diary, 4th Brigade, *Records*, vol. 6.

¹⁵ Field Message, 9:00, 6 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 4.

¹⁶ Asprey, *At Belleau Wood*, 150.

¹⁷ Allen R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marines Corps* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1980), 301-02; E. N. McClellan, "Capture of Hill 142, Battle of Belleau Wood, and Capture of Bovesches" *Marine Corps Gazette* 5 (September 1920): 277-313; Asprey, *At Belleau Wood*, 142-59.

- ¹⁸ HS Fr. Files: XXI A.C.: 445-30.1: Order No. 87/P.C., 6 June 1918, *USAWW*, 4:359.
- ¹⁹ HQ 4th Bg, Field Order No. 2, 6 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 2; Harbord, *American Army*, 289.
- ²⁰ Grotelueschen, "The AEF Way of War," 168.
- ²¹ Harbord, *American Army*, 290; Colonel Catlin's later recollections directly refute Harbord's statement that intelligence reported the woods unoccupied. "We now stood facing the dark, sullen mystery of Belleau Wood. . . . It was a mystery, for we knew not what terrible destruction the Hun might be preparing for us within its baleful borders, nor at what moment it might be launched in all its fury against us. That the wood was strongly held we knew, and so we waited. . . . That something was going on within those threatening woods we knew, for our intelligence men were not idle." Albertus W. Catlin, *With the Help of God and a Few Marines* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1919), 103-04, 106.
- ²² Floyd Gibbons, *And They Thought We Wouldn't Fight* (New York: George H. Doran and Company, 1918), 245.
- ²³ War Diary, 4th Brigade, 6 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 6.
- ²⁴ Field Message, 6:10 p.m., 6 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 4.
- ²⁵ Berry was wounded in the arm, and had to be relieved later in the battle. Gibbons, *And They Thought We Wouldn't Fight*, 250; War Diary, 4th Brigade, 6 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 6; Asprey, *At Belleau Wood*, 174-75.
- ²⁶ Catlin, *With the Help of God and a Few Marines*, 115.
- ²⁷ Field Message, 5:54 p.m., 6 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 4; War Diary, 4th Brigade, 6 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 6; Catlin, *With the Help of God and a Few Marines*, 118-22.
- ²⁸ War Diary, 4th Brigade, 6 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 6; Asprey, *At Belleau Wood*, 192-93.
- ²⁹ Field Message, 8:55 p.m., 6 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 4.
- ³⁰ Field Message, 9:45 p.m., 6 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 4; War Diary, 4th Brigade, 6 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 6; Asprey, *At Belleau Wood*, 194-96.
- ³¹ The Field Message reported it to be Lieutenant Robertson of 96th Company, II/6, while in fact it was Lieutenant Cates. Field Message, 11:28 p.m., 6 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 4; Harbord, *American Army*, 290; Asprey, *at Belleau Wood*, 194.
- ³² Field Messages, 6 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 5.
- ³³ Field Message, 10:25 p.m., 6 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 4.
- ³⁴ Frederic M. Wise and Meigs O. Frost, *A Marine Tells It to You* (New York: J.H. Sears and Company, Inc., 1929), 209.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 209-12; Asprey, *At Belleau Wood*, 198-202;
- ³⁶ Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 302; Asprey, *At Belleau Wood*, 204.
- ³⁷ Report of C.G. 4th Brigade, 7 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 6.
- ³⁸ Field Messages, 7 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 5; Operational Reports/War Diaries, 7 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 8.

- ³⁹ Field Message, 3:00 p.m., 7 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 4.
- ⁴⁰ Field Message, 12:30 p.m., 8 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 4.
- ⁴¹ Asprey, *At Belleau Wood*, 215-17.
- ⁴² Robert L. Bullard, *Personalities and Reminiscences of the War* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1925), 209; For examples see the headlines of *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 6-9 June 1918; *New York Times*, 7-9 June 1918; *New York Herald*, 7-9 June 1918; etc.
- ⁴³ Harbord, *American Army*, 291.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁵ Bullard, *Personalities and Reminiscences*, 209.
- ⁴⁶ Paul Clark to Pershing, 10 June 1918, Box 1, Paul H. Clark Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.
- ⁴⁷ Ludendorff, *Ludendorff's Own Story*, 2:269.
- ⁴⁸ The goal of the fourth German drive was to straighten the line between Montdidier and Château-Thierry. Though Ludendorff had high hopes for the assault, the Allies were able to blunt the initial German advance. The Germans were able to make some territorial gains, but they had strategic impact on the sector and did not succeed in straightening the German line. *Ibid.*, 266-73.
- ⁴⁹ War Diary, 4th Brigade, 8 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 6.
- ⁵⁰ Field Messages, 8 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 4.
- ⁵¹ 2nd F.A., Report of Operations, 10 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 6; Grotelueschen, "The AEF Way of War," 170.
- ⁵² HQ 4th Bg, Field Order No. 3, 9 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 2.
- ⁵³ Field Messages, 4:00 a.m. – 8:55 a.m., 10 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 4.
- ⁵⁴ Asprey, *At Belleau Wood*, 246-47.
- ⁵⁵ Field Message, 10:05 a.m., 10 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 4.
- ⁵⁶ HQ 4th Bg, Field Order No. 4, 10 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 2; Grotelueschem, "The AEF Way of War," 171.
- ⁵⁷ Gerald C. Thomas, as described to Robert Asprey, quoted in Asprey, *At Belleau Wood*, 253.
- ⁵⁸ Field Message, 6:11 a.m., 11 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 4.
- ⁵⁹ Field Message, 7:00 a.m., 11 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 4.
- ⁶⁰ Field Message, 11:45 a.m., 11 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 4.
- ⁶¹ Field Messages, 11 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 4.

⁶² HQ 2d Div., Operations Report, 11 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 6; 2d Div.: 202-33.1: Operations Report, 12 June 1918, *USAWW*, 4:453; *New York Times*, 12 June 1918.

⁶³ Describing his unit to his wife after the battle, Wise could only say: "There aren't any more Marines." The statement was made when Wise was recuperating from exhausting he suffered in Belleau Wood. Luckily, his wife was in Paris, and Wise's superior's sent him their to recover his strength. Wise, *A Marine Tells It to You*, 244.

⁶⁴ Harbord recounts the event in a letter to Frank McCoy, Harbord to Frank R. McCoy, 11 July 1918, Box 14, Frank R. McCoy Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Asprey, *At Belleau Wood*, 292.

⁶⁶ 2d. Div.: 202-32.7: Order, 15 June 1918, *USAWW*, 4:478; Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 302-03; McClellan, "The Battle for Belleau Wood," 385-95; Maj. Gen. O. Bundy, USA, to C.G. AEF, 16 June 1918, G-3 Reports, AEF General Correspondence, RG 120, NARA.

⁶⁷ The III/6 (Sibley) lost 14 officers and 400 men, I/5 (Turrill) lost 16 officers and 544 men, the II/5 (Wise) lost 19 officers and 615 men, and the II/6 (Holcomb) lost 21 officers and 836 men. Operational Reports, 10-18 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 7.

⁶⁸ C.G. 4th Brigade to C.G. 2nd Division, 14 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 6.

⁶⁹ Harbord, *American Army*, 292; Asprey, *At Belleau Wood*, 295-303.

⁷⁰ Joseph Dickman, *The Great Crusade: A Narrative of the World War* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1927), 55.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁷² Asprey, *At Belleau Wood*, 301-02.

⁷³ War Diary, 4th Brigade, 18 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 6.

⁷⁴ C.G. 4th Brigade to C.G. 2nd Division, 20 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 6.

⁷⁵ C.G. 4th Brigade to C.G. 2nd Division, 21 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 6.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Dickman, *The Great Crusade*, 56.

⁸² War Diary, 4th Brigade, 21 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 6.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ C.O. 4th Brigade to C.O. 2nd Division, 22 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 6.

⁸⁷ War Diary, 4th Brigade, 22 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 6.

⁸⁸ After the II/5 withdrew from the line, Wise had a run in with Harbord. Both were considerably agitated, Harbord at being misinformed, Wise for having been instructed to make a suicidal frontal attack. The interview did not go well, with Wise shouting at Harbord, “If you had so much doubt about those woods being clear, why the hell didn’t somebody from Brigade come and take a look?” The rest of the discussion is lost, but it resulted in Wise’s relief for exhaustion and Keyser taking over command of his battalion. Wise and Frost, *A Marine Tells It to You*, 240-42. Asprey, *At Belleau Wood*, 323 [note #23]; War Diary, 4th Brigade, 24 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 6.

⁸⁹ War Diary, 4th Brigade, 25 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 6.

⁹⁰ War Diary, 4th Brigade, 26 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 6.

⁹¹ War Diary, 4th Brigade, 30 June 1918, *Records*, vol. 6; Harbord, *American Army*, 298; Asprey, *At Belleau Wood*, 325-26, 344-45.

⁹² Grotelueschen, “The AEF Way of War,” 175; Harbord, *American Army*, 293; Asprey, *At Belleau Wood*, 325-37.

⁹³ James G. Harbord, *Leaves From a War Diary* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1925), 307.

⁹⁴ John W. Thomason, Jr., “Second Division Northwest of Château-Thierry, 1 June-10 June, 1918,” Box 10, Rolfe Hillman Jr. Papers, MHI.

⁹⁵ Harbord, *American Army*, 298-300.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 295-96.

⁹⁷ One critic of the 4th Brigade was Major General Joseph Dickman, who blasted the operation in the Bois de Belleau after the war, calling it a “*glorious but unnecessary sacrifice* [author’s italics].” With the benefit of hindsight, he insisted that Belleau Wood would have been vacated after the offensive at Soissons a month later, and concluded that “The operations did show that American Regulars would obey orders, no matter how difficult the undertaking, and that they were sturdy fighters who would not shrink from sacrifices; all of which required no demonstration.” Dickman, *The Great Crusade*, 271-72.

CHAPTER X

THE TIDE TURNS: SOISSONS (JULY 1918)

With the successful stoppage of the German advance towards the Marne in June 1918, momentum on the Western Front shifted to the Allies. Allied Commander-in-Chief Ferdinand Foch deemed it time to take the initiative and reverse the German gains of the previous spring. Along these lines, Foch began planning his own offensive against the German position that most threatened Paris: the Marne Salient. The arrival of the Americans on the field at Château-Thierry provided Foch with a new weapon in his arsenal, and he looked to utilize the long awaited American divisions in the upcoming assault. Included amongst these would be the 2nd Division, the toast of France after its valiant performance in Belleau Wood.

But for all its recent fame, the 2nd Division was hardly ready for another major operation in July 1918. Its month of fighting in June had left the division battered and broken, with each of its combat brigades losing over forty percent of their strength. What the men of the 2nd Division needed most was time for rest, replenishment, and training. But events conspired against them, and the division would be called upon to play a significant part in what many historians argue to be the turning of the tide in the World War: the battle of Soissons.

For Brigadier General James G. Harbord, July 1918 proved to be the most glorious and heartbreaking of his career. Fresh off the successes as commander of the Marine Brigade in the Bois de Belleau, Harbord found himself promoted to major general, assigned command of the entire 2nd Division, and engaged in the type of “open”

warfare campaign long sought by General John J. Pershing. With the 2nd Division performing admirably in its short time in the lines at Soissons, Harbord began to think of future glories as a corps commander, and perhaps one day as commander of an army. But such dreams were not to be, as soon after the battle Harbord was pulled off the line to command the logistical services of the American Expeditionary Forces. So for Harbord, his two weeks commanding the 2nd Division were the culmination of his military career as a combat commander. Thankfully for him, they proved a remarkable two weeks.

Planning a Counterattack

For Ferdinand Foch, July opened with a sense of opportunity. The Germans had cut a massive salient in the French line from a point just west of the town of Soissons to Reims on the Paris-Metz Highway. But after a month of fighting their momentum was failing. Just days after the German advance across the Chemin-des-Dames, Foch and Pershing discussed the possibility of a counter offensive against the shoulders of the salient. The logical place for such an attack was the salient's western shoulder, south of Soissons. A successful thrust there would threaten the Soissons – Château-Thierry highway, which operated as the main artery supplying the German forces in the salient. If that artery could be cut, the entire salient would collapse. By mid-July, Foch moved to do just that.¹

What became known as the Aisne Offensive began with a letter from Foch to General Henri P. Pétain, commander of the French forces, on 14 June. In it Foch called attention to the critical highway and railhead juncture of Soissons and expressed a desire

to bring it under bombardment from the air and long-range artillery. Should circumstances permit, Foch suggested a counter-offensive targeted to cut the supply for the German forces operating around Château-Thierry. As if anticipating a change in fortune, Foch called for plans to be “prepared immediately, its execution being deferred until the time when the necessary forces may be assembled.”² Over the next month, the French High Command worked diligently to formulate a plan for Foch’s offensive operation against Soissons. Included in the process were French General Marie Emile Fayolle, commander of the French Group of Armies of the Reserve (GAR), and Major General Charles M.E. Mangin, commander of the French Tenth Army. What emerged was a grand operation involving four French armies (Fifth, Sixth, Ninth, and Tenth) attacking across the entire salient. The main drive would come from the Tenth Army southwest of Soissons, while the other three would make assaults along the southern end of the bulge.³

Meanwhile, Pershing continued to pester Foch for the establishment of an independent American Army, or at the very least the organization of an American sector. At a meeting on 10 July, Pershing pushed his plan, to which Foch responded that he intended to bring together thirteen American divisions at the end of July. The news certainly sounded good to Pershing, “but as to the details of carrying out this idea [Foch] was very vague. He said he did not see how we could proceed till we see what the Germans are going to do.”⁴ Pershing could only shrug and wonder how long the Allies would continue to cede the initiative to the Germans. As it turned out, it would not be much longer.

One thing Pershing definitely wanted was increased experience for his division and corps commanders, and this Foch would gladly supply. Hoping to utilize the most seasoned American troops in the coming attack, the French ordered the 1st Division moved from Beauvais north of Paris to Nanteuil, southwest of Château-Thierry as part of the American I Corps.⁵ Several days later, the 1st and 2nd Divisions were added to Mangin's Tenth French Army. The two divisions would be under the aegis of the American III Corps, commanded by Major General Robert L. Bullard who moved up from command of the 1st Division. The motivation behind the move was General Mangin's desire to utilize the massive American divisions, combined with a French Colonial division, as shock troops in his coming assault. Time was of the essence, and the American units immediately began moving to their new sectors.⁶ However, when Bullard took over his new command, he found III Corps little more than an organizational shell. It was seriously understaffed, functioning more as a paper organization than a combat command. Although he worked diligently to get his headquarters ready for the approaching operation, there was simply too much to do and not enough time. With the attack looming, Bullard decided to leave control of the 1st and 2nd Divisions in the hands of the Tenth Army.⁷

A potential obstacle to Foch's attack came when the Germans launched their fifth offensive in the Champagne-Marne region on 15 July. Timed to catch the French in the holiday lull after Bastille Day (14 July), the Germans sent three armies under the command of the German Crown Prince against the eastern edge of the Marne Salient from Château-Thierry to Rheims and along the line south of Mont Blanc running east of Rheims. Luckily for the Allies, intelligence gained from prisoners revealed the location

and hour of attack, allowing the French to instill a defense in depth, with the front lines held only lightly and the main strength located in the intermediate trenches to the rear. Consequently, the German artillery barrage on the night of 14 July fell on the sparse French front lines, and the German infantry ran into the ready the French defenders. After three hard days of fighting, the attack eventually collapsed.⁸

Though it did not last long, the German offensive threatened to derail the preparations for the Soissons attack and the entire Aisne Offensive. The reports from the front initially alarmed Pétain, who feared they were again on the brink of losing the Marne River, opening the route to Paris to the Germans. He ordered Fayolle to suspend the preparations for the Mangin operation so the reserves being assembled could be sent south of the Marne in case the Germans crossed the river. Included in this order was the 2nd Field Artillery Brigade from the 2nd Division, already on the road to Mangin's sector.⁹ When Foch heard of the order he immediately countermanded it. With the situation on the Marne temporarily under control, he did not want to cancel the entire operation. Spelling out his wishes plainly, Foch told Pétain that "there can be no question at all of slowing up and less so of stopping the Mangin preparations. In case of absolute and imperative necessity you will employ such troops as are absolutely indispensable to meet the situation, informing me at once."¹⁰ And so the attack would proceed. Of course, no one involved in planning the operation took the time to inform the men actually doing the fighting as to the details. Instead, they left such matters until later, resulting in several confusing days for the 2nd Division, which almost missed the attack entirely.

Taking Command of the 2nd Division

For Harbord and the Marine Brigade, July found them still entrenched along the line in the Bois de Belleau. Word finally came on 2 July that the 26th “Yankee” Division would relieve the 2nd Division within a few days. It could not come soon enough for the exhausted Marines and soldiers. Even after the fighting for Belleau Wood ended, the front lines were no place to rest. As Harbord noted in his diary, “There is little opportunity to sleep . . . shells burst every minute at night; there is the noise of one’s own artillery; the air is full of ‘going’ or ‘arriving’ [shells]; the officers and men in the front line in this region are without opportunity to wash their faces and hands . . . One of my majors did not have his clothes off for seventeen days.”¹¹ The men of the 2nd Division hoped they would be sent to a rest area, and rumors circulated that they would receive leave time in Paris, but such was not to be the case. The continued German threat necessitated keeping the division nearby, and it moved to the French Second Line, a few miles to the rear. That was enough for one Marine, who replied to the news without a sense of disappointment: “It’s enough to get out of here. This place is like the wrath of God!”¹²

Harbord moved his own headquarters from La Loge Farm to the village of Nanteuil-sur-Marne, located on the Marne’s northern bank. He had a lovely house about two hundred yards above the river, and enjoyed the pleasant surroundings tremendously. Though the sound of artillery still pierced the nights and German planes dropped bombs on the American positions, Harbord’s Marines did their best to relax. They lustily took

the opportunity to revel in the Marne, just below a bridge wired to explode in case the Germans pushed through the sector. Such is war.¹³

While the men rested, Harbord turned his thoughts to his own career. On 4 July, a letter arrived from his wife addressed to Major General Harbord. Still wearing only one star on his shoulder, the title raised an eyebrow or two. Pershing had revealed several weeks before that Harbord's name was being put in for a second star, but no word had come of it to date. He wrote playfully that, "while anything my wife says is official enough for her husband . . . one has to go through certain formalities before he can take over new rank and responsibilities, even on her say-so."¹⁴ Official word of his promotion came a week later. On the night of 11 July, Harbord was roused while reading in his quarters by news that someone wanted to speak with him outside. Irritated that whoever it was could not come indoors, Harbord made his way outside where he was met with an unexpected sight. Before him were his regimental commanders and their staffs, the 6th Marines band, and several hundred Marines gathered to congratulate him on his promotion. The band struck up the Marine Hymn as Colonels Neville and Lee presented Harbord with his new set of stars. A few minutes later, the officers went inside, "and we had what is usually on hand on such occasions in a land of vineyards."¹⁵

The next day Pershing arrived to offer his own congratulations. Several weeks had passed since the men had seen each other and they enjoyed a long talk over lunch. After expressing his complete satisfaction with Harbord's performance at Belleau Wood, the AEF commander explained that he was relieving the 2nd Division's commander, Major General Omar Bundy. In fact, Pershing had long been dissatisfied with Bundy and planned to make a change back in early June. The opportunity now presented itself to

remove an unsatisfactory division commander and replace him with a close friend and trusted subordinate.¹⁶ Content with their plan, the two men quickly settled into their old routine of discussing administrative matters in the AEF. Pershing described his displeasure at the recent list for promotions to brigadiers, particularly the absence of the names of some of his most loyal officers who had worked long and hard at General Headquarters.¹⁷ Being somewhat out of the loop, Harbord decided to look into the matter to see how his fellow officers reacted to the promotions. After several days, he felt confident enough to send Pershing a letter relating his general impressions. In the same frank manner in which he advised Pershing as AEF chief of staff, Harbord wrote:

I feel that you ought to know that the recent promotions to Brigadier General are the subject of very frank adverse comment among your troops. You cannot safely disregard public opinion in an army of Americans, and public opinion in this army demanded the promotion of such men as [Malone, McCoy, Manus MacCloskey, Preston Brown, Eltinge, Nolan, Fiske, Conner, and Upton]. . . . I do not know who is to blame, but you are held responsible as the channel through which the merits of the men who serve under you must be made known to the Secretary of War. Once your people think you do not reward merit by your recommendations, or that your recommendations are not followed by the War Department, your influence is on the wane. I speak plainly, but the situation in my judgement is serious and demands it. The April list of Brigadiers received unfavorable comment, but the last one has caused

more. . . . You are just now in the hard position of being discredited either way one looks at it. Either you are unappreciative of the fine work of men around you, or if not your recommendations do not carry weight at home.¹⁸

In truth Harbord knew exactly who to blame, but did not feel free enough to mention him by name, at least not in a letter. Writing in his diary several days later he felt no such restraints, commenting acerbically, “The amiable General March is not very strong for any of us who ventured to differ with him while on the Staff of the A.E.F.”¹⁹ The Army chief of staff was certainly becoming the villain to the hero Pershing in Harbord’s mind.

For now, however, Harbord had other matters of more pressing concern. With the understanding that he would take over the 2nd Division within a few days, it occurred to him that now would be a good time for a few days of rest and replenishment in Paris. A request for such a leave was quickly granted, and on 13 July he departed with his two aides and a Marine orderly in tow. Once there, Harbord gave his orderly several hours to enjoy Paris and set out to do some shopping of his own, having run low on some personal effects. As always Paris brought with it the opportunity to enjoy the company of Charles Dawes, who as General Purchasing Agent was making American supply acquisition in Europe his own personal fiefdom. The men had not seen each other since Harbord’s transfer to the line, but had kept up their correspondence. It was a good thing, too, for Dawes grew concerned when a rumor circulated during the fight in Belleau Wood that a general officer with the Marines was killed. When Dawes mentioned the rumor to

Pershing, the commander-in-chief responded, "There is no officer in the service who means as much of a loss to me." Relief came when Dawes learned that the officer was killed prior to a letter sent from Harbord on 8 June. Dawes cheerfully wrote his friend that, "as the letter was not postmarked 'Hell', we knew you were alive."²⁰ Glad to still reside in the land of the living, Harbord's party joined Dawes for a night of dinner and the theatre.²¹

The next morning, Bastille Day, Harbord reported in to GHQ AEF by telephone. In speaking to Chief of Staff James McAndrew, he learned that Pershing had issued orders assigning him to command of the 2nd Division that day, and wished Harbord to verbally relieve General Bundy if he arrived back at the division before the orders could be transmitted. As the division was presently only fifty miles from Chaumont, Harbord surmised that his time in Paris was at an end. He went that night to a dinner in his honor given by Dawes at the Inter-Allied club, and made plans to make for his new command the next morning. Events, however, hastened the timetable, for around midnight he received a telephone call from Colonel Preston Brown, the 2nd Division's chief of staff, informing him of an important conference the next day at French High Command where the 2nd Division commander was expected to attend. Thinking it best that the French receive the new division commander, Harbord sent his driver to the hotel where his aides were staying, to inform them of his plans to depart at 5:30 a.m. the next morning. With that he went back to bed for a few hours of anxious sleep before returning once more to the line. At present, he knew nothing of the plans for his division, nor did he realize that it would be called upon to take part in a major offensive in four days' time²²

The Road to Soissons

Harbord left Paris early on Monday, 15 July, heading for 2nd Division Headquarters at Chamigny. With the roads congested with marching soldiers and civilians out enjoying the holiday, it took most of the morning to reach the division. Once there, he relieved General Bundy, who, much to Harbord's irritation, took the rest of the day to gather his personal effects and exit the headquarters. Bundy's foot dragging made everyone uneasy and delayed Harbord's getting settled as division commander. "I regard it as a cardinal principle that when a man is relieved and ceases to be 'it,'" Harbord said, "the sooner he gets away the better. . . . General Bundy stayed until after dinner the day of his relief, forgetting several times that he was no longer in command."²³ Perhaps lacking the personal experience of being unceremoniously relieved made Harbord a bit unsympathetic towards Bundy, but the outgoing division commander's slow departure was only the first of many frustrations Harbord would endure during the next week.

Harbord's ascension to divisional command was not the only change in the 2nd Division since Belleau Wood. The commander of the 3rd Brigade, Brigadier General E.M. Lewis, was also promoted to major general and sent to command the 30th Division. Brigadier General Hanson E. Ely, late colonel of the 29th Infantry, 1st Division, took over command of the 3rd Brigade. In the 4th Brigade, Colonel Neville received his first star and took over command. However, with Neville sick in the hospital since their relief from Belleau Wood, Colonel Harry Lee ran the brigade in his place. The senior battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Holcomb, rose to command the 6th Marines, and

Colonel Logan Feland moved over to command of the 5th Marines. Colonel William A. Mitchell took command of the 2nd Engineer Regiment, and Lieutenant Colonel George A. Herbert replaced Colonel A.L. Conger on the division's staff. All of these changes meant that the 2nd Division would go into battle with a bevy of new unit commanders who had yet to establish themselves in their new positions.²⁴

Still awaiting Bundy's departure, Harbord went briefly to the conference at French High Command, but, as the German offensive had started just that morning, the French were occupied with other matters and Harbord left without gaining any knowledge of his division's orders for the next several days. He decided to return to Chamigny and familiarize himself with the division's status. He learned from the division's staff that the 2nd Field Artillery (F.A.) Brigade, now under the command of Brigadier General Albert J. Bowley, had been ordered on 14 July to move to the area around Betz where it would be at the disposal of the French Tenth Army.²⁵

The movement of the 2nd F.A. Brigade was a harbinger of things to come. Notified of the orders the evening of 14 July, Bowley directed his three regiments (12th, 15th, and 17th) to begin their all-night march to Betz, some twenty miles away.²⁶ The next morning, Bowley motored to the Tenth Army Headquarters at Chantilly seeking further orders for his brigade. There he met with General Mangin and received a brief synopsis of the plan for the offensive near Soissons (the first officer in the 2nd Division to do so). While awaiting his brigade's arrival, Bowley received orders from General Fayolle, commander of the GAR, directing his brigade to reverse its direction of march and return to the 2nd Division to aid in the defense of the Marne. By this time, his

columns were on the road approaching Betz, so Bowley issued orders for a counter-march that night after a few hours of rest.²⁷

The decision to have the columns rest proved felicitous, for another order arrived countermanding the return to the 2nd Division, and directing the 2nd F.A. to continue its movement to Betz. Unknown to Bowley, his brigade was caught in Pétain's attempt to halt preparations for the Mangin operation and return the reserves to aid in blocking the latest German offensive. Pétain issued the orders to Fayolle, who passed them along to Bowley before Foch stepped in and countermanded the suspension of Mangin's offensive. All of this went on above Bowley and his men, who luckily lost nothing in the confusion other than a little respect for the French High Command. Accepting the change as a minor irritation, Bowley issued the new orders for the men to resume their original movement, then waited to see if the French would change their minds again.²⁸

Back at Chamigny, Harbord was having even less success discerning what was going on with the division. The artillery units were gone and General Joseph Degoutte, commander of the French Sixth Army, ordered the divisional trains withdrawn to a point six miles away to make ready for a general movement to the west. "Thus when the new Division Commander joined on Monday [15 July] morning he found a command short of its artillery and trains," Harbord wrote in his diary, "and no one on authority who had the slightest information as to the purpose of those movements, or when the division might expect to be brought together again."²⁹ Word finally reached Harbord that evening that the entire division was to move the next day to an unknown destination presumably in the region west of Soissons. Responsibility for transporting the division fell to the French Sixth Army, with the Tenth Army handling the disembarkation.³⁰

The next morning, 16 July, the 2nd Division prepared to move: destination still unknown. Harbord issued Field Orders No. 14 that set the departure time for the infantry at 4:00 p.m., with the machine gun units and all trains to depart at 9:00 p.m. Division Headquarters would remain at Chamigny until the next morning, when it would move to Carrefour-de-Nemours.³¹ The rolling kitchens served the last hot meal that the men in the 2nd Division would have for several days, and then packed up for the journey. French *camions* attached to the Sixth Army began arriving around noon to transport the infantry, which departed at the scheduled time. Sensing no reason to remain, Harbord, his aides, and the division's chief of staff, Colonel Preston Brown, decided to head out for their new headquarters, intending to stop at the Tenth Army Headquarters along the way to find some divination as to their orders. Unsure of where the Tenth Army was, they decided to travel to Villers-Cotterêts, a town located just west of the Forêt de Retz [Forest of Retz], a large forest southwest of Soissons along the Maubeuge road. It was the only village of significance in the region and a likely spot to attain more information.³²

With his men and staff somewhere on the road, Harbord reached Villers-Cotterêts around 7:00 p.m. Along the way they learned that headquarters for the French XX Corps was at Retheuil, a few miles away, so the group made it their next destination. The trip took them through the Forest of Retz, a majestic old-grown forest of deciduous trees with thick undergrowth. The roads were filled with an assortment of travelers indicating the presence of some large military force operating in the region. Though the route covered only about five miles, the congested roads required several hours to navigate. Harbord finally arrived at Corps Headquarters well after dark, but found the corps commander, General Berdoulet, still awake. A most gracious host, the general invited Harbord and

his party to dinner, at which he explained that the 2nd Division was scheduled to contribute a major role in an attack at daybreak on 18 July, but could offer no other specifics. The news struck Harbord hard, and he recorded his thoughts in his diary a few days later:

A division of twenty-eight thousand men, the size of a European army corps, had been completely removed from the control of its responsible commander, and deflected by marching and by truck, through France to destination unknown to any of the authorities responsible either for its supply, its safety, or its efficiency in the coming attack. The French Corps Commander and his staff were unable to state the points at which the division would be debussed [sic] or where orders could reach which would move it promptly to its attack position. *This within thirty hours of a decisive battle.* [emphasis added]³³

Once again Harbord was in the position of having his troops moving to an engagement with little or no exact knowledge of what awaited them, and no readily apparent means of gaining any information given the alarmingly brief time frame they were working under. “That may be war,” Harbord later observed, “but it never happened to me often enough to convince me that it was common sense.”³⁴ The only assistance Berdoulet’s staff could provide was a copy of the Corps Attack Orders and a liberal supply of maps. This constituted the sum total of intelligence Harbord received before writing his own attack order. However, while at Corps Headquarters, Berdoulet’s

Operations Officer put Harbord in a rather awkward position by offering to write the battle orders for the 2nd Division. It was quite a situation for a new division commander. Harbord had no knowledge of the exact location of any of his units, nor did he have any idea of the order or location of their arrival. He knew the parameters of his command, and its objective, but had only cursory intelligence regarding the ground over which he was to fight, and the defenders opposing him. Before him was a man with the trust of the corps commander, who obviously knew more about the situation than Harbord did. He knew the ground, and the support units available, and could write orders that fit the situation better than any Harbord could produce. The success of the operation could very well hang on the 2nd Division completing its mission, and these orders might offer the best chance for success. Despite all of this, Harbord refused. “To draw Battle Orders requires not only professional knowledge and tactical judgement,” Harbord later explained, “but an estimate of the morale and efficiency of the commanders and units affected. It also involved a knowledge of the American temperament and character. No French officer had these special qualifications.”³⁵ The 2nd Division was Harbord’s responsibility, and it would succeed or fail under his command. However innocent and well-meaning the offer of aid, which it undoubtedly was, personal, professional, and national pride could not allow Harbord to accept. He thanked the officer and left, hoping that he was not making a terrible mistake.³⁶

Still unsure of his division’s location, Harbord decided to make for the village of Tailfontaine. Less than ten miles to the north of Villers-Cotterêts, Tailfontaine was serving as the temporary headquarters of General Bullard’s III Corps. Arriving after midnight, Harbord and Colonel Brown found a mimeograph machine, a few

stenographers, and a good deal of paper and set down to write attack orders for the division. Aiding them was a French officer attached to Bullard's Headquarters who had fought over the ground previously and offered some insight as to the terrain. Without adequate details, the officers approached the task as though trying to solve a map problem at the Staff College at Fort Leavenworth. Theoretically, they knew the area they were responsible for, their objectives, and the units chosen with which to get the job done. They needed only to study the map and the corps orders to develop a plan of attack.³⁷

As explained in the corps orders, the French Tenth Army would attack along a plateau between the Aisne River to the north and the Ourcq River to the south. Once taken, this plateau would allow the Allies to dominate the approaches to Soissons, effectively cutting the German supply line. Running out of Soissons were two major highways and several rail lines. The most important road was the Soissons – Château-Thierry highway, running north-south about five miles behind the German line of 18 July. The other road, the Maubeuge highway, which ran between Paris and Soissons, crossed the proposed path of attack from the northeast to the southwest, cutting through the 2nd Division's jumping-off point. The assembly area for the attack was in the Forest of Retz, which stopped just to the west of the German line except for one outgrowth that reached into the zone of attack on the northern end of the 2nd Division's proposed sector. The plateau itself represented the watershed divide between the Aisne and Ourcq Rivers. It was cut by deep ravines and several small roads that provided every natural advantage to the defense, and supplied abundant cover for the concentration and movement of reserves. Luckily, the terrain over which the 2nd Division was to attack was rather

forgiving. Once out of the forest there were wide fields of farmland all the way to the village of Tigny, five miles east of the starting line and just west of the Soissons – Château-Thierry highway. In between it and the jump-off line were several farms, and the small villages of Vierzny and Vauxcastille.³⁸

The battle orders for the XX Corps specified that the Tenth Army would attack with three divisions along a five mile front. The 1st Division, in place since 16 July, would occupy the northern portion of the line; the 1st Moroccan Division (French Colonial troops) would take up the center, and the 2nd Division would attack along the southern section. Two divisions, the French 69th and 59th, represented the second line of attack, following the main attack wave and operating as corps reserve. Each division would have its own artillery, reinforced by French artillery units. All three divisions were to attack eastward, followed by a general bend to the southeast in an attempt to turn the German flanks. Special attention was called to the boundary between the 2nd Division and the 1st Moroccan, which, for the first mile, ran through the outgrowth of the Forest of Retz and into a small wood known as the Bois de Quesnay. The dense woods required “particularly strong” liaison between the American and Moroccan divisions lest they become intermixed (which eventually happened). Seeking to preserve the element of surprise, no artillery preparation would be made. Instead, the divisions would attack behind a rolling barrage only. The orders concluded: “At H hour, supporting, counterbattery and prohibition fires contemplated in the plans of engagement will start with the utmost violence and infantry will rush up in groups made for speed, so as to get rapidly in touch with the enemy, to outflank him and to drive him back relentlessly.”³⁹

Early on the morning of 17 July, twenty-four hours before the start of the attack, Harbord issued Field Order No. 15. It placed the 3rd Brigade on the right (the 9th Infantry to the north and the 23rd Infantry to the south) and the 5th Marines on the left of the division's line of attack. The 6th Marines, 2nd Engineers, and 4th Machine Gun Battalion would be held back as division reserve. Each man would carry two days reserve rations, and 220 round of ammunition. To make up for the lack of preparatory artillery, the French provided two groupings of heavy tanks (twenty-seven tanks in each) to accompany each brigade. Harbord assigned the 11th Grouping to the 3rd Brigade, and the 12th Grouping to the 5th Marines.⁴⁰

With the attack order written, Harbord left Tailfontaine before dawn on 17 July to try and find his division. Only the 2nd F.A. Brigade's location was known, as it had arrived several days earlier. Making his way through the agonizingly narrow and crowded forest roads, Harbord first came upon Colonel Paul Malone, whose 23rd Infantry was the first unit to arrive. Harbord quickly gave him a copy of the attack orders and sent him off to get the regiment moving, then proceeded on his quest to find the remaining units. "The entire day of the seventeenth was spent by every officer of the staff, and by others hastily attached, in a desperate effort to gather up remnants, searching for lost platoons and companies, and in locating ammunition."⁴¹ One regiment was delayed along the route some two hours by a diligent French staff officer who demanded signing of a receipt for the successful transportation of 15,000 men. The American officers forcefully declined to sign on the basis that the movement was not yet completed. Two hours and numerous epithets later, the French officer relented and the American column continued on its way, having lost valuable time.⁴²

The corps orders called for the attack units to approach the jump-off line under cover of night so as not to arouse suspicion. As a result, the 2nd Division's infantry were unloaded an average of twelve miles from the German lines, requiring a forced night march to make it in time to follow the artillery's rolling barrage. To add to the excitement for the 5th Marines's machine-gun units, the French provided no motor transportation to the front, so the men had to carry their equipment across miles of plowed fields and dense trees in the dark of night.⁴³ Such was the glory of war. Only through superhuman effort were the men in the first wave able to reach the attack line when the artillery roared to life. The 9th Infantry did so with five minutes to spare, but elements of the 5th Marines had to double-time it to the line, at which point they kept running to keep up with the artillery. All of this with little to no sleep over two nights, no water except what they carried, and only reserve rations to sustain them. Such was the manner in which the 2nd Division launched their portion of the Battle of Soissons.⁴⁴

Soissons: The First Day (18 July)

At 4:35 a.m. on 18 July the French and American guns along the attack front unleashed a devastating fire. The Germans, caught completely by surprise, recoiled under the withering barrage and struggled to prepare for the coming infantry assault. The Americans in the 2nd Division stepped off under the blanket of artillery and pushed forward on a front nearly a mile long. The French tanks, supposed to aid in the advance, were held up on the congested roads of the Forest of Retz and did not make the attack line on time, but did come up later in the day. Even without artillery preparation, the

rolling barrage provided good support for the advancing units, and they all moved at a brisk pace.

Harbord's attack orders outlined three successive objective lines for the attack that day. Each line ran north-south with a distinct point of capture: the first being Beaufort Farm, the second Vauxcastille, and the third the village of Vierzy. The advance on the first objective called for a push to the northeast, then a turn towards the southeast for the drive to the second and third objectives. At the beginning of the attack, the division's artillery support could only reach as far as the first objective line. Once gained, the guns would have to move forward to provide cover for the assault on the second objective. Thus the attack required good liaison between the American regiments and the French forces on their flanks, as well as clear communication with the artillery to arrange for timely support from the displacing guns. But as seen in the attacks at Belleau Wood, unit liaison and communication with the rear were not the 2nd Division's strong suit, and the attack on 18 July proved no different.⁴⁵

The 2nd Division's three regiments pushed forward in good order towards the first objective after the initial scramble to reach the jump-off line. The first word Harbord received from the front was a report from an artillery observer who stated "Everything going satisfactory. The men went over in perfect order. Tanks have reached BEAUREPAIRE FARM. Enemy artillery fire extremely weak. Only few scattered shots have been able to be observed from this post."⁴⁶ The encouraging messages continued all morning. As at Belleau Wood, everything seemed to go swimmingly as the troops reached their first objective, the line running through Beaufort Farm, in short order. Just after 9:00 a.m., reports came in that the 5th Marines had advanced seven kilometers,

bringing it close to the division's third objective line.⁴⁷ The only problems reported stemmed from the battle's rapid preparation, resulting in the men running beyond their artillery support. At 9:55, Colonel Paul Malone, commanding the 23rd Infantry, sent a blistering message regarding the need for artillery ammunition to the 3rd Brigade headquarters:

Our artillery advances. We will advance as soon as it comes up if ammunition lasts. You shove that ammunition to those people with all possible speed; shove them 9 trucks right away and if necessary hold them there to see how she goes. . . . Get that ammunition to those people with all possible speed and get the artillery together in liaison with our infantry and pass the town of VIERZY and the trenches. Be sure that they get it. It is too important. We are going to change and come out there in a little while. Notify the troops we are coming. . . . Get word to the artillery some way or other.⁴⁸

Malone's urgent plea for the artillery to move up illustrates the basic flaw in the Soisson's battle plan. It called for the artillery, located well behind the jump-off line, to fire its initial barrage, displace forward, then begin firing again, all the while maintaining communication with the infantry so as not to fire on friendly troops. Just as at Belleau Wood, telephone communication with the advancing troops was exceedingly difficult, and most units had to rely on runners. When the men got through, which was not a given, it was usually hours after the message was sent, making the coordinates delivered

no longer accurate. Hence, once the 2nd Division passed its first objective line, it lost all effective artillery support.⁴⁹

Upon reaching the first objective, the attack orders called for the three regiments to turn to the southeast and push towards the village of Vierzy. Whereas the initial drive went particularly smoothly, unit cohesion soon broke down with the turn. Some units made the shift while others continued in their original directions, causing a massive breakdown of command and control as the exact location of units became impossible to determine. Elements of the 23rd Infantry turned too far south and strayed into the 38th French Division's sector. On the 2nd Division's extreme left, units of the 5th Marines crossed over into the 1st Moroccan sector to suppress fire coming from the village of Chaudun, eventually coming into contact with soldiers from the 18th Infantry, 1st Division. Units from both American divisions had crossed into the 1st Moroccan's front and were meeting in the middle, confusing the advance of the French colonials.⁵⁰

Though scattered and running beyond the effective range of their artillery, the 2nd Division continued to press forward, relying on overwhelming numbers and individual determination to carry the attack. The sheer violence of the 2nd Division's thrust shattered the German lines, destroying entire units in the onslaught, and creating a massive salient along the division's line of advance. Neither French division on the 2nd Division's flanks could keep pace with the Americans, resulting in the exposure of the 5th Marines and 23rd Infantry to deadly enfilade fire from outside their respective sectors. Colonel Logan Feland, commanding the 5th Marines, blamed the failure of the Moroccan's to keep up as the reason for his units' straying from their sector: "Those units of the regiment which went out of the sector did so in order to better attack the enemy

and were forced to do so by the presence of [other elements of brigades and divisions coming into our sector] and by the great narrowing of our sector at the first intermediate objective.”⁵¹

Contributing to the American confusion was the distance between the advancing infantry and the brigade and division headquarters. For most of the morning of 18 July, Harbord remained at his command position at Carrefour de Nemours, twelve miles to the rear. Both Brigadier Generals Ely and Neville, commanding the 3rd and 4th Brigades respectively, remained at their command centers in between Division Headquarters and the front line, but still well to the rear. With the absence of reliable telephonic or radio communication, all information had to be relayed by runners (either on foot or in whatever motorized vehicle was at hand). As described by an official history of the battle:

It is not too much to say that [on 18 July] liaison within the [2nd] division broke down completely, and that the usual means of communication failed to function from the first. Generals and colonels delivered their orders in person. . . . Over the action as a whole, the division command had no control whatever, nor any accurate knowledge of its progress except that obtained by the casual encounter of the division commander and brigade commander on the battlefield.⁵²

In an attempt to improve control of their units, Colonels Upton and Malone moved to Beaurepaire Farm as the front approached the second objective. Though 3rd

Brigade Headquarters remained well behind the lines, General Ely went forward to try and find his regiments. The same could not be said for Lieutenant Colonel Feland, who remained in the Forest of Retz, ostensibly still in communication with 4th Brigade. Whether he was actually in communication with the 5th Marines is unclear.⁵³

After reaching the first objective, what information Harbord received from his advancing units became sketchy at best. He knew the assault went off on time, and that it was doing well as shown by the steady stream of prisoners filing to the rear. Word came that the 5th Marines were held up on the division's left, and Harbord ordered the 4th Machine Gun Battalion sent in as reinforcement.⁵⁴ Around noon, he received orders from XX Corps directing him to press the attack. Sensing a breakthrough, Berdoulet instructed all three divisions in the Tenth Army to push forward to a line east of the Soissons – Château-Thierry highway, effectively securing the offensive's ultimate objective. Unfortunately for the men at the front, the officers at Corps Headquarters were receiving even less reliable reports than the division commanders, and believed that all three divisions were farther east than they actually were. Nor did they realize that the momentum gained in the initial assault was all but spent, but the chance for a breakthrough was too appealing and the French meant to press the advantage.⁵⁵

As though a concession to the confusion on the battlefield, the corps's orders directed each division commander to move his command position "as far forward as possible," and to redistribute the artillery "so as to support their infantry as close as possible."⁵⁶ Both were good ideas, but the second proved more difficult than the first. Without accurate knowledge of the exact location of the front line troops, any artillery support would be limited at best. Combined with the difficulty of movement, the

advancing regiments would be lucky to receive any artillery support at all, and most did not.

With the new goal in hand, Harbord set to writing the orders for the afternoon attack. Because the 5th Marines were scattered across the front, responsibility for the attack fell to the 3rd Brigade, with the 5th Marines and 6th Machine Gun Battalion providing whatever support they could. The 6th Marines remained in corps reserve, untouchable without the corps commander's permission, so the 2nd Division would have to launch their second attack on 18 July with virtually the same troops they employed that morning.⁵⁷

Unknown to Harbord at the time, there was a serious discrepancy between his orders for the afternoon attack and the actual situation at the front. While reports indicated both Vauxcastille and Vierzy taken that morning, neither was the case.⁵⁸ A small group of determined Germans still occupied a position in Vauxcastille, despite being bypassed by elements of the 23rd Infantry. The Germans would hold out for most of the day before eventually surrendering around 6:00 p.m., immobilizing the 23rd Infantry's right flank.⁵⁹ The situation in Vierzy proved a greater problem. With all objectives thought achieved, the new attack would advance from a line east of Vierzy. But reports of the town's capture were also incorrect. Evacuated during the initial American push, a German staff officer returned to the village at 11:00 a.m. and found it unoccupied. He immediately ordered elements from the German 14th Reserve Division to reoccupy the town, and by noon, the Germans had reestablished their position in Vierzy, just as Harbord was writing his orders for an attack further to the east.⁶⁰

At this point communication amongst the division and brigade commanders turned from confused to almost comical. Harbord issued his attack orders at 1:30 p.m. and sent them to the front. They never arrived, but the division commander did not wait. Having not heard from his brigade commanders for much of the morning, he set out for the front to discern for himself what was actually happening. Approaching Verte Feuille Farm, about three quarters of a mile past the jump-off line, Harbord ran into General Ely, on his way back from Beurepaire Farm to deliver a report to Harbord. As it turned out, Ely was the only reliable method of communication in the division.

At 8:30 a.m., Ely departed his Brigade Headquarters within the Forest of Retz and moved up to Chavigny Farm, just west of the jump-off line near the division's southern border. Arriving at 10:00 a.m., (the two-and-a-half mile trip took an hour-and-a-half) Ely established his Brigade Headquarters. He then departed for Beurepaire Farm, just under two miles away, seeking his regimental commanders. This time the journey took two-and-a-half hours, for Ely was forced to abandon his car along the way and travel by foot. He finally reached Beurepaire at 12:30 p.m. Once there, Ely met with Colonels Upton and Malone, receiving his first real intelligence reports of the day. With this information in hand, Ely turned around and headed to the rear at 1:00 p.m., intending to deliver the information to Division Headquarters. It was at this point that Ely met Harbord on the road near Verte Feuille. The division commander listened to Ely's report, then handed him a copy of the attack order, which Ely sent ahead by way of motorcycle and horseback. He left Harbord at Verte Feuille and headed again towards Beurepaire, finally arriving at 4:00 p.m., fifteen minutes behind the orders sent by horse (apparently the motorcycle never made it through). Once there, he found that the regimental

commanders had left, and it would be another half-hour before the attack orders could be communicated to them. Each replied that they could not possibly attack before 6:00 p.m., while the French tank officer at Beurepaire informed Ely that it would be 7:00 p.m. before his tanks would be ready. Ely instructed both Upton and Malone to attack with all possible speed, and told the tank man to come along as quickly as he could. Thus, for the better part of 18 July, communication amongst the 2nd Division's senior commanders relied on a brigadier general personally moving between the front and the rear. Though it worked, the situation was not exactly the scenario envisioned in the *American Infantry Drill Regulations*.⁶¹

The confusion did not end there. In two messages, one sent at 3:05 p.m. and another at 3:50 p.m., Brigadier General Bowley, commanding the 2nd F. A. Brigade, sent word to the division commander that he was setting up artillery positions between Beurepaire Farm and Vauxcastille. Bowley reported ordering the 4th Machine Gun Battalion, then held in reserve, to head for Vauxcastille and link up with either the 9th or 23rd Infantry, whichever was there. As it turned out the 23rd Infantry was still in Vauxcastille, along with several hundred Germans, and the 4th M. G. Battalion joined in the attack. Bowley also reported that Vierzy remained unoccupied by the enemy, and had at present a few French colonial troops in the village. This last statement was completely incorrect, but communication was such that no one knew exactly what was going on.⁶²

The only information Harbord knew for sure was that his advancing troops were running desperately low of water, rations, and ammunition. At 1:15 p.m., just before Harbord issued his order for a renewed attack, Colonel Upton sent a chilling message describing the status of his men.

Due to lack of sleep 3 nights, lack of food 2 days, no water 2 days, lack of ammunition and worn out condition officers and men, it is necessary that the 23rd and 9th Infantry and Marines be relieved tonight and allowed to have food, water and rest. After a magnificent fight all objectives attained; officers and men are dead on their feet. Losses fairly heavy.⁶³

Half of the message was correct. The men were running low on water, food, and rest and needed to be relieved. But, as described above, all of the objectives were not met. However, as in the Bois de Belleau, Harbord chose to focus on the positive and issued his attack orders anyway.

For the second attack, Harbord's orders stated, "The attack will be made on receipt of this order."⁶⁴ Given the confused state of the three regiments, no advance began before 7:30 p.m. Leading the 23rd Infantry, Colonel Malone received his orders to attack sometime between 4:00 and 5:30 p.m..⁶⁵ He assembled his three battalions along a ravine running west of Vierzy and prepared to move out. With support from some of the remaining French tanks and the regimental machine gun company, the 23rd Infantry attacked towards the southeast at 7:30 p.m. Two battalions bypassed Vierzy to the north while one battalion turned south to take the town. Though it received no artillery support, the regiment was able to push forward with the aid of the French tanks, eventually halting just over a mile east of Vierzy.⁶⁶

To the north, Colonel Upton formed up his battalions, along with the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines, and launched his attack by 7:30 p.m. With all three of his

battalion commanders dead, Upton pressed forward to the ravine north of Vierzy. He, too, received no artillery support, and the tanks assigned to his advance were late in coming. When they finally arrived, Upton ordered his men forward, under intense machine-gun and artillery fire. In the attack the II/5 became separated on the extreme left, opening up a large gap in the line. The infantrymen continued to press forward, but mounting casualties and the coming of darkness forced the regiment to halt at 9:00 p.m. along the heights to the west of Vierzy. With the help of members of the 2nd Engineers and several machine gunners, the 9th Infantry dug in on their extremely precarious position. Both flanks were exposed, and Upton could account for only 310 men between all three of his battalions. The rest were killed, wounded, or missing somewhere to the rear.⁶⁷

On the division's southern edge, Major Julius S. Turrill, commanding the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines ran into General Ely near Vierzy just after 7:00 p.m. Having attempted to enter Vierzy and been fired upon by the Germans still occupying the town, Ely ordered Turrill to rally his men and attack immediately. The Marines, numbering about 150 men, moved around the western edge of the town and attacked the southeastern corner. At the same time, Ely found Major Waddill leading the 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry, and ordered him to attack the town as well. Both units attacked at relatively the same time, the I/5 from the southeast, and the I/23 from the north. They met in the middle and captured all of the exhausted German defenders.⁶⁸

At Division Headquarters located at Verte Feuille Farm, Harbord waited anxiously for any word on the second attack. The first report came from Colonel Malone at 8:25 p.m., who stated:

Many machine guns have been captured, number not known. We must have food, water, medical supplies. Machine Guns, ammunition in large quantities sent to us in trucks at once. Urgent. Please inform me as to whether requests will be complied with. Also, send tonight picks, shovels and axes. Please inform if troops will be relieved tonight, they are utterly exhausted.⁶⁹

Harbord did what he could to send the requested supplies forward, but with roads hopelessly congested it would be hours before anything reached its destination. Meanwhile Harbord grew increasingly irritated at the lack of information reaching his headquarters. At some point that afternoon or early evening, Harbord unfairly vented much of these frustrations upon General Ely, the man doing the most to press the advance.

No reports from you today. As far as you are concerned we are in complete darkness as to what has been happening in your front. Reports from other sources indicate that your troops, with the Marines on your left, are occupying normal objective just beyond Vierzy. Is this true? What is the condition of your troops? Have you lost enough to seriously cripple you? We have instructions from the Corps to pass on to the [Soissons – Château-Thierry road] . . . when we have liaison with troops on right and left. Germans are reported in disorder and the division on your right

reports as being some distance ahead of you pursuing Germans now. Is the spirit of your men such that you can push on and take that road, either by using troops now in your front line or passing some of your rear battalions through? . . . What liaison have you with the marines on your left and the division on your right?⁷⁰

The message shows just how out of touch Harbord and his staff were on the afternoon of 18 July. At 10:00 p.m. he moved the Division Headquarters up to Beurepaire Farm and began making preparations for an assault the next day.⁷¹ He and his staff believed the front to be well established east of Vierzy, with the 9th Infantry on the left and the 23rd Infantry on the right. The 5th Marines were distributed somewhere between them. They also believed both flanks to be tied in with the respective French divisions.⁷²

In fact, the situation was much more desperate. The 23rd Infantry did hold a position along the southern front, but it was only loosely tied in to the 9th Infantry on its left. What was left of the 9th Infantry held a line a few hundred yards wide, supported by what machine gun units it could find. The 5th Marines was even more scattered than Harbord knew. One group (all battalion cohesion had completely disintegrated) held an isolated position along the division's northern edge just south of Chaundun. Another was roughly a half mile due east, facing north, with both flanks completely exposed. The rest of the 5th Marines were distributed amongst the 3rd Brigade. Both of the division's flanks were in the air, with the most extreme gap between the two groups of Marines to the north. The 6th Marines were now at Beurepaire Farm, having moved up that afternoon,

and the 2nd Engineers were in the vicinity of Vierzy. At the center of the confusion, the brigade commanders set up their command positions in Vierzy.⁷³

While the 2nd Division's attack on 18 July had shattered the German lines, it also wrought tremendous casualties on the three regiments making the advance. The 9th Infantry had ceased to exist, with less than four hundred men accounted for of the three thousand who began the day's assault. Though not as severe, losses in the 23rd Infantry and the 5th Marines were also heavy. Each lost nearly half their numbers, both officers and men, to confusion, straggling, and enemy fire. But despite these horrific figures, the 2nd Division made incredible gains on 18 July. The division advanced an average of four-and-a-half miles, well beyond that of the French divisions on its flanks or the 1st Division to the north, who advanced an average of three miles. It was an incredible feat, but at the cost of three regiments. However, the 2nd Division still had one regiment in reserve, and plans were already in the works for it to take over and continue the attack the next day.⁷⁴

Soissons: The Second Day (19 July)

To General Berdoulet of the XX French Corps the night of 18-19 July seemed alive with prospects for a tremendous breakthrough. All three divisions in the Tenth Army had made spectacular progress, smashing the German lines and approaching the operational objective of the Soissons – Château-Thierry highway. All that was needed, Berdoulet thought, was one more great push to cross the road and cut the German supply line into the Marne salient, and he ordered his three divisions to resume the attack on 19 July. Each would continue to push on until it could establish a position east of the

highway. In his attack orders, Berdoulet called special attention “to the fact that during the course of the attack the American infantry, which was brought up to its lines of departure under particularly hurried conditions (especially the 2d Div.), displayed remarkable endurance and keenness.”⁷⁵

Harbord received the orders to attack about midnight on 18-19 July. He immediately began writing his own orders, which he issued at 3:00 a.m. Harbord called upon the only fresh troops in the entire division, the 6th Marines, to constitute the main attack force. Though it was still in corps reserve, he appropriated it for the operation. He did not have permission from the corps commander to do so, but Harbord was never called to task for the move. His attack order specified that the 6th Marines would move up that night, pass through the lines held by the 3rd Brigade, and attack at 7:00 a.m. This was a modification of the corps attack orders, which set the attack for 4:00 a.m., but Harbord had to make the change to allow his men time to move into position along the still congested roads in the combat zone. The orders indicated the 2nd F.A. Brigade would begin a preparation fire at 6:00 a.m., but did not provide for a rolling barrage to precede the 6th Marines. As it turned out, the Marines would attack with almost no artillery support whatsoever.⁷⁶

The plan for the 6th Marines was in essence a repeat of that issued to the 3rd Brigade and the 5th Marines the day before. They would advance forward in an effort to cut the Soissons – Château Thierry highway, but this time one regiment was being called upon to do what three had attempted the day before, along a front exactly as wide. No significant artillery support was provided, and the division had only minimal effective troops available for reserves. For the most part, the Marines were on their own.

Further complicating the task was the fact that the element of surprise was completely gone. The assault on 18 July cut through the German 9th Army, but it was now reorganizing, moving up fresh troops, and preparing to defend the highway at all costs. On the morning of 19 July, the battered Germans held a line west of the highway with elements of at least three divisions. By the time the 6th Marines attacked, the Germans had largely rebuilt their defenses and replenished their numbers. As a result, the attack proved to be one of the rare times in the World War when attacking Americans were outnumbered by the German defenders.⁷⁷

The commander of the 6th Marines, Lieutenant Colonel Harry Lee, received his orders just after 3:00 a.m., and immediately called together his battalion commanders to discuss their plan of attack. At 4th Brigade Headquarters located at Beaurepaire Farm, the four men decided that the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines (Major Hughes) would take up position of the right, the 2nd Battalion, 6th Marines (Lieutenant Colonel Holcomb) on the left, and the 3rd Battalion, 6th Marines (Major Sibley) would act as the reserve.⁷⁸ With the order of battle settled, the men departed to begin the long march to the jump-off line some three miles away.

The three battalions made their way forward as best they could, but the roads were still so congested that by 7:00 a.m., the time set for the advance, the two attack battalions were only as far as Vierzy.⁷⁹ Colonel Lee held another conference with his battalion commanders just east of Vierzy to go over last minute details. Finally, around 8:15 a.m., the advance battalions began the attack, over two hours after the artillery began its preparation. As the 6th Marines crossed the wide open terrain between Vierzy and the front lines they fell under withering German machine-gun and artillery fire. Just as at

Belleau Wood, the Marines advanced straight into the torrent. The few French tanks supporting the attack drew additional artillery fire, and were either destroyed or abandoned within a few hours. Even so, Colonel Lee reported “Attack moving nicely” at 8:45 a.m., and again at 9:50 a.m., with the assurance of “casualties normal.”⁸⁰

Soon after crossing the 3rd Brigade’s line, casualties in the 6th Marines became anything but normal. The German fire shredded the American lines advancing in the open without any artillery support. The contact point between the I/6 and II/6 began to buckle, and Major Sibley sent in two companies to strengthen it. Both took heavy casualties before reaching the line, but continued the advance once there. Concerning news reached Harbord at 10:30 a.m., when a report from the 2nd Engineers stated that “Col. Upton says that Moroccan Division is not connected with his left and that it is in the air and is weak.” At the same time, the message indicated that the 6th Marines were in or near Tigny.⁸¹

Again, part of the report was accurate and part was not. The left was indeed open, as it had been since the previous evening, but the Marines were not in Tigny, nor would they be. The Germans held the town in some force, and blocked any advance with destructive artillery and machine-gun fire. Alarmed at reports of a weak left, Harbord ordered General Ely to send a battalion from the 23rd Infantry, thought to be in Vierzy, to support the left of the attacking line.⁸² Ely replied an hour later that the entire 23rd Infantry was in the line, and therefore could not move to the new position. He could send a battalion from the 5th Marines if Harbord wanted, but by this time the division commander had other things on his mind.⁸³

Despite early reports of everything going well in the 6th Marines, when the regiment passed beyond the 3rd Brigade's lines whatever momentum it had was quickly spent. Colonel Lee sent word to Harbord that, "Reports indicate growing casualties amounting heavy say about 30%. . . . 1st Bn. reports no French troops on right and are held up 300 yards in front of Tigny."⁸⁴ The II/6, supported by elements of the III/6, made a valiant push along the left portion of the line, but eventually had to halt just over a half-mile past the 3rd Brigade's lines. Various companies of the III/6 went into the line as needed, and by 11:00 a.m. all units in the 6th Marines were engaged. Along the southern end of the attack line, the I/6 bore down upon Tigny, pushing a small salient in the line north of the city, but could not enter. At 12:15 p.m., Lee sent out orders that if Tigny could not be taken, all units were to dig in and hold their present positions. By 1:50 p.m., Harbord realized the attack was over and ordered Lee to "dig in and entrench your present position and hold it at all costs. No further advance to be made for the present" and extended his congratulations to the 6th Marines for its "gallant conduct in the face of severe casualties."⁸⁵

Though the timing is unclear, reports indicate that Harbord decided to call for the 2nd Division's relief several hours before telling Lee to dig in. In a long letter to Berdoulet, probably sent around noon, Harbord explained the present situation.

The order of the XX Army Corps to the 2d Division to attack at 4 a.m. this date was received at 2 a.m. It was impossible to comply with the order to attack at 4 a.m. due to the delay in receiving the order. With the exception of the 6th Marines . . . and the 2d Regiment of Engineers . . . every infantry

unit in the division was exhausted in the fight yesterday. It was necessary therefore to make the attack this morning with one regiment, the 6th Marines, supported by a battalion of the engineer regiment, a force regarded by me as inadequate to the task, but no other was available. . . .

The attack has progressed favorably until the line has come to a north and south line approximately through TIGNY. It is held up on the right from the direction of PARCY-TIGNY, a place previously reported to us as being in French possession. On the left it is being held up and our left flank is threatened, due to the fact that the Moroccan 1st Division has not apparently advanced as far as CHARANTIGNY. . . .

I do not anticipate that my division will not be able to hold what it has already gained but I desire to insist most strongly that they should not be called upon for further offensive effort.⁸⁶

Thankfully for the men in the 2nd Division, General Mangin, commanding the Tenth Army, anticipated Harbord's request by half a day. At 5:45 a.m. on 19 July, he ordered the 58th French Division to move up from its position in reserve, "with the relief of the American 2d Div. in view."⁸⁷ Whoever ordered it, the only thing that mattered to the men in the 2nd Division was that relief was coming. That night, the 58th Division moved into the lines, and the 2nd Division retired for some much-needed and well-earned rest.

At the end of 19 July, the 2nd Division stood within rifle-shot of the Soissons – Château-Thierry highway; close enough for the artillery to begin shelling the German

artery. No other division advanced as far, as fast, or accomplished as much in the two days of fighting. But the gains came at tremendous cost. The 6th Marines suffered close to fifty-percent casualties. Combined with the losses of the previous day, the entire 2nd Division lost over four thousand men. Most of the men were without food or water for at least twenty-four hours, and were utterly exhausted. Unit cohesion had completely disintegrated, and communications were reduced to runners. Coordination between the artillery and infantry disappeared after the initial advance on 18 July, and liaison between units was marginal at best. But even with these problems, the operation was a smashing success.⁸⁸

Thus ended the 2nd Division's part in the battle of Soissons. The 2nd Moroccans and the 1st (U.S.) Division continued the drive for two more days, finally taking the Soissons – Château-Thierry highway on 21 July and consolidating their position. Soon afterward, the Germans began a general withdrawal from the entire salient. But even though the battle was a victory, opinions varied as to the part played by the 2nd Division. After the war, General Robert Bullard, commanding the III Corps, blamed the confusion in the 2nd Division and the scattering of its units on its rapid movement to the line and inability to conduct necessary reconnaissance.⁸⁹ Harbord took great offense to the criticism, and enlisted General Berdoulet to aid in defending his men. Berdoulet responded with a fine letter declaring: "Your troops at the moment of their retirement were absolutely in no greater or lesser disorder than the rest of the troops (French or others) which were relieved after a very hard battle."⁹⁰ As evidenced by the encounter between the 5th Marines and the 18th Infantry, both American divisions struggled with

unit cohesion, but that does not refute the fact that the 2nd Division indeed became scattered on the morning of 18 July.⁹¹

Harbord can hardly be blamed for the manner in which his division launched its attack on 18 July or the fact that it became strewn across the battlefield. Considering the confusing and haphazard manner in which it was brought into the line it is remarkable that the division performed as well as it did. But Harbord can be faulted for his continuing inability to manage operations once combat began. He stayed too long in the rear, trying to orchestrate a battle by telephone when they were working and by runner when they were not. As at Belleau Wood, he also remained too long in the dark as to conditions at the front. That he could write clear and concise orders based upon the information he had is evident, but much of that information proved flawed, and it fell to his subordinates to make the necessary adjustments, resulting in a breakdown of unit coordination, especially between the infantry and the artillery. Finally, Harbord's unwavering belief in tenets of "open" warfare too often resulted in the infantry advancing without sufficient artillery or machine-gun support. Though the Germans had shown the value of tactics based upon infiltration and movement, they required considerable skill in the execution, which the Americans did not possess. Harbord and his French superiors called on the 2nd Division to do more than it was reasonable to expect, given the division's limited training and experience. That it accomplished as much as it did was due more to the drive and courage of the individual soldiers than any skill and leadership shown by its commanding officer. Still, as after Belleau Wood, to the victor goes the spoils, and Harbord garnered all the personal and professional accolades that fall to a successful general after a victorious battle. He would have to enjoy them quickly,

however, for his time in the lines would end before the month was out.

Notes

¹ Donald Smythe, *Pershing: General of the Armies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 152; James G. Harbord, *The American Army in France 1917-1919* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1936), 306-17; Laurence Stallings, *The Doughboys: The Story of the AEF, 1917-1918* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963), 141-43; Oliver L. Spaulding and John W. Wright, *The Second Division American Expeditionary Force in France 1917-1919* (New York: The Hillman Press, Inc., 1937), 99-104.

² Ferdinand Foch to Henri P. Pétain, 14 June 1918, HS Fr. Files: 402-30.1: Letter, *United States Army in the World War 1917-1919* 17 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1948), 5:223. [Hereafter cited as *USAWW*.]

³ “Instructions for the Commanding Generals, Groups of Armies of the Reserve and Group of Armies of the Center,” 12 July 1918, HS Fr. Files: 403-30.1: Instructions, *USAWW*, 5:235-37; For a collection of the relevant French documents regarding the planning process, see *USAWW*, 5:223-40; Also, for an excellent narrative explanation of these documents, as well as a detailed description of the Battle of Soissons, see an untitled draft narrative of Soissons compiled by John Thomason in 1929 while serving with the 2nd Division Historical Association at the Army War College. There is a copy of the document [hereafter cited as “Soissons Narrative”] in Box 10, Rolfe Hillman, Jr. Papers, MHI.

⁴ Diary entry, 10 July 1918, John J. Pershing Diary, Box 6-7, John J. Pershing Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.

⁵ General, Commander-in-Chief, 3d Section, General Staff to Headquarters at NOAILLES Group of Armies of the Reserve and SEZANNE Group of Armies of the Center and French Military Mission at CHAUMONT, 11 July 1918, HS AWC: Pétain: Campagne Defensives: Pt. VI: Message, *USAWW*, 5:235.

⁶ James W. McAndrew to Robert L. Bullard, 8 July 1918, *USAWW*, 3:415-16; “Instructions for the Commanding Generals, Groups of Armies of the Reserve and Group of Armies of the Center,” 12 July 1918, HS Fr. Files: 403-30.1: Instructions, *USAWW*, 5:235-37.

⁷ Allan R. Millett, *The General: Robert L. Bullard and Officership in the United States Army 1881-1925* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1975), 380-83; For documents relating to the American III Corps, see *USAWW*, 5:582-97.

⁸ Included in the struggle was the American 3rd Division, who put up such a defense that it earned the sobriquet “the Rock of the Marne.” Stallings, *The Doughboys*, 114-138; Smythe, *Pershing*, 149-51; Dickman, *The Great Crusade: A Narrative of the World War* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1927), 79-130.

⁹ Pétain to Marie Emile Fayolle, 15 July 1918, HS Fr. Files: 700-30.9: Message, *USAWW*, 5:241.

¹⁰ Foch to Pétain, 15 July 1918, HS, AWC: Pétain: Campagne DefensivesL Vol. VI: Field Message, *USAWW*, 5:242.

¹¹ James G. Harbord, *Leaves From a War Diary* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1925), 306-07.

¹² John W. Thomason, *Fix Bayonets! and other stories* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1925), 43; HQ 2nd Div. Field Orders No. 11, 5 July 1918, Volume 1, U.S. Army. 2nd Division, *Records of the Second Division (Regular)* 9 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Army War College, 1924). [Hereafter cited as *Records*]

¹³ Harbord, *American Army*, 302-03.

¹⁴ Harbord, *War Diary*, 309-10.

¹⁵ Ibid; Harbord, *American Army*, 303.

¹⁶ Pershing's diary reveals his feelings on Bundy as early as 9 June, when he wrote: "General Bundy disappoints me. He lacks the grasp. I shall relieve him at the first opportunity." Diary entry, 9 June 1918, Pershing Diary, Box 6-7, Pershing Papers, LC; Pershing also had a low opinion of Colonel Preston Brown, the chief of staff of the 2nd Division, and desired to remove both he and Bundy if he could find a way. "Conference Memorandum for Chief of Staff," 9 July 1918, Private Papers of John J. Pershing, Box 26, Entry 25, RG 200, NARA; Bundy was initially sent into a state of limbo until eventually being assigned as a decoy corps commander in September. Smythe, *Pershing*, 152.

¹⁷ Some of those left off the list were: Colonels Frank R. McCoy, Dennis E. Nolan, Fox Conner, Harold B. Fiske, LeRoy Eltinge, and Paul B. Malone. Harbord, *American Army*, 304.

¹⁸ Harbord to Pershing, 17 July 1918, Box 87, Pershing Papers, LC.

¹⁹ Harbord, *War Diary*, 310.

²⁰ Charles G. Dawes to Harbord, 12 June 1918, Box 1, James G. Harbord Papers, NYHS.

²¹ Harbord, *American Army*, 305; Harbord, *War Diary*, 312.

²² GHQ AEF, Special Orders No. 195, 14 July 1918, Box 8, James G. Harbord Papers, Manuscript Division, LC; Harbord, *War Diary*, 312-14.

²³ Harbord, *War Diary*, 315.

²⁴ Thomason, "Soissons Narrative," 45.

²⁵ Group of Armies of the Reserve Telegram, 14 July 1918, HS Fr. Files: 409-30.9: Telegram, *USAWW*, 5:241.

²⁶ War Diary, 2nd Division, 14 July 1918, and War Diary, 2nd F.A. Brigade, *Records*, vol. 6.

²⁷ War Diary, 2nd F.A. Brigade, 15 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 6.

²⁸ Ibid; Thomason, "Soissons Narrative," 38-43.

²⁹ Harbord, *War Diary*, 316.

³⁰ War Diary, 2nd Division, 15 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 6; The French order is reprinted in Thomason, "Soissons Narrative," 46.

³¹ HQ 2nd Div., Field Orders No. 14, 16 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 1.

³² Harbord, *American Army*, 316.

³³ Harbord, *War Diary*, 318.

³⁴ Harbord, *American Army*, 317.

³⁵ Ibid., 321-22.

³⁶ The next day Harbord was offered another set of orders from General Dogan, commanding the 1st Moroccan Division, which would fight on the 2nd Division's left. Again Harbord politely refused, for the same reasons as the day before. Ibid.

³⁷ Harbord, *War Diary*, 319-20.

³⁸ For a more detailed description of the terrain, see Thomason, "Soissons Narrative," 23-26; Douglas V. Johnson, II, and Rolfe L. Hillman, Jr., *Soissons 1918* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 12-14.

³⁹ XX Army Corps (French), Operations Order No, 227, 16 July 1918, 201-32.7: Order, *USAWW*, 5:290-92.

⁴⁰ HQ 2nd Div., Field Order No. 15, 17 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 1.

⁴¹ Harbord, *War Diary*, 323.

⁴² War Diary, 2nd Division, 16 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 6.

⁴³ At 2:00 a.m. Colonel Brown, the division chief of staff, called XX Corps Headquarters to complain that the division's machine guns had not arrived yet. The French officer responded, "In that case count on them no longer; the terrible storm now on has caused the ditching of a great number of lorries, the circulation is absolutely stopped and we attack at 4:35 A.M." Unfazed, Brown replied, "All right, we'll take the Boche machine guns." Field Message, 2:00 a.m., 18 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 4.

⁴⁴ War Diary, 2nd Division, 17-18 July 1918, and War Diaries, 3rd & 4th Brigades, 17-18 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 6; Harbord, *War Diary*, 320-25.

⁴⁵ HQ 2nd Div., Field Order No. 15, 17 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 1; Mark Grotelueschen, "The AEF Way of War: The American Army and Combat in the First World War" (Ph.D. diss., Texas A&M University, 2003), 178.

⁴⁶ Field Message, 5:50 a.m., 18 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 4.

⁴⁷ Field Message, 9:14 a.m., 18 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 4.

⁴⁸ Field Message, 9:55 a.m., 18 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 4.

⁴⁹ Mark Grotelueschen writes that in addition to the problems with infantry-artillery coordination, the advancing infantry were not provided adequate machine-gun support, grenades, or rifle-grenades, and concludes that, "more than any other AEF attack of the war, this battle became a test of the offensive power of the rifle and bayonet." Grotelueschen, "The AEF Way of War," 178.

⁵⁰ Thomason, "Soissons Narrative," 91.

⁵¹ Feland is quoted in E.N. McClellan, "Aisne-Marne Offensive" *Marine Corps Gazette* 6 (March 1921): 78.

⁵² *Monograph Soissons*, quoted in Johnson, *Soissons*, 78.

⁵³ Journal of Operations, 2nd Division, 18 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 6; Operations Report, 3rd Brigade, 18 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 6; Operations Reports, 9th Infantry, 23rd Infantry, 23rd Infantry, 5th Marines, 18 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 7.

⁵⁴ Preston Brown to Major Edmund Zane, C.O. 4th M.G. Bn., [11:50 a.m.], 18 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 1; Zane reported the move complete at 12:30 p.m. Field Message, 12:30 p.m., 18 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 4.

⁵⁵ Thomason, "Soissons Narrative," 98.

⁵⁶ French XX Corps, Field Orders No. 233, 11:00 a.m., 18 July 1918, *USAWW*, 5:296-97.

- ⁵⁷ Division Commander to C.G. 3rd Brigade, Orders, 1:30 p.m., 18 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 1.
- ⁵⁸ Field Message, 6:50 a.m. and 9:50 a.m., 18 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 4.
- ⁵⁹ 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry, Operations Report, 18 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 7; The report states that the Germans surrendered at 5:00 p.m., but Thomason's narrative places the time about an hour later. Thomason, "Soissons Narrative," 100.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 103.
- ⁶¹ Operations Report, 3rd Brigade, 18 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 6.
- ⁶² Brig. Gen. A. J. Bowley, 2d F. A. Brig. to C.G. 2d Div., 3:05 p.m. and 3:50 p.m., 18 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 4.
- ⁶³ Field Message, 1:15 p.m., 18 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 4.
- ⁶⁴ Division Commander to C.G. 3rd Brigade, Orders, 1:30 p.m., 18 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 1.
- ⁶⁵ Malone reported receiving them at 5:30 p.m. while Ely reported them received at 4:00 p.m. Operations Reports, 3rd Brigade and 23rd Infantry, 18 July 1918, *Records*, vols. 6, 7.
- ⁶⁶ Operations Report, 23rd Infantry, 18 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 7.
- ⁶⁷ Operations Report, 9th Infantry, 18 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 7.
- ⁶⁸ Operations Report, 3rd Brigade, 18 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 6; Operations Report, 1st Bn., 5th Marines, and Operations Report, 1st Bn, 23rd Inf., 18 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 7.
- ⁶⁹ Field Message, 8:25 p.m., 18 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 4.
- ⁷⁰ Harbord to Ely, [no time indicated], 18 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 4.
- ⁷¹ Harbord, *War Diary*, 327; Journal of Operations, 2nd Division, 18 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 6.
- ⁷² Journal of Operations, 2nd Division, 18 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 6.
- ⁷³ All Operations Reports, 18 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 6,7; Thomason, "Soissons Narrative," 101-11.
- ⁷⁴ Operations Reports, 23rd Infantry, 9th Infantry, and 5th Marines, 18 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 7.
- ⁷⁵ C.G. XX (French) Army Corps, Operations Report, 19 July 1918, 201-32.7: Operations Report, *USAWW*, 5:297-98.
- ⁷⁶ HQ 2nd Div., Field Orders No. 16, 19 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 1.
- ⁷⁷ Thomason, "Soissons Narrative," 121-28.
- ⁷⁸ 1st Bn., 2nd Bn., 3rd Bn, 6th Marines, Battalion Histories, 19 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 7.
- ⁷⁹ Operations Report, Hq. Co., 6th Marines, 19 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 7; Operations Report, 23rd Infantry, 19 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 7.
- ⁸⁰ Field Messages, 8:45 a.m., and 9:50 a.m., 19 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 4.

⁸¹ Field Message, 10:37 a.m., 19 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 4.

⁸² Field Message, 11:45 a.m., 19 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 4.

⁸³ Field Message, 12:40 p.m., 19 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 4.

⁸⁴ Field Message, 11:45 a.m., 19 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 4.

⁸⁵ Field Message, 1:50 p.m., 19 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 4; 6th Marines, Histories, 19 July 1918, *Records*, vol. 7.

⁸⁶ Commanding General to Commanding General, XX Army Corps, Report of Attack, 19 July 1918, 202-36.6: Letter, *USAWW*, 5:336; Johnson, *Soissons*, 112-14; In a note Thomason indicates that the letter must have been written between 11:45 a.m. and 12:40 p.m. due to his statement that he had a battalion from the 23rd Infantry available to use to shore up the left flank. Ely later informed Harbord that the entire 23rd Infantry was in the line. Thomason, "Soissons Narrative," 139.

⁸⁷ Tenth French Army, Journal of Operations, 19 July 1918, HS Fr. Files: 420-30.4: Journal of Operations, *USAWW*, 5:281-82.

⁸⁸ The losses represented only 15 percent of the Division's total strength, but about 25 percent of the two infantry brigades. C.G. 2nd Division to Asst. Chief of Staff, G-3, GHQ, Subject: Operations Information, 30 December 1918, Box 31, 2nd Division Historical File, RG 120, NARA.

⁸⁹ Bullard went on to say, "How the 2nd Division troops ever reached their proper places in that black forest [Forest of Retz], Heaven only knows; but they did." He even describes an encounter with Harbord on 17 July. Bullard says the 2nd Division commander was up late drawing up orders and looking for his Division Headquarters. Bullard instructed him that the headquarters was wherever the division commander was, and told Harbord to just issue his orders, which Bullard says Harbord did. Robert L. Bullard, *Personalities and Reminiscences of the War* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1925), 217.

⁹⁰ Berdoulet to Harbord, 29 June 1925, reprinted in Harbord, *War Diary*, 328-29. One should note that Berdoulet describes the 2nd Division at the time of its relief, on the evening of 19 July, and not its status on the morning of 18 July.

⁹¹ Johnson, *Soissons*, 69, 176-77 [note 28].

CHAPTER XI

A HANDLE ON LOGISTICS (AUGUST - SEPTEMBER 1918)

For James Harbord, late July of 1918 was the high point of his career. Eighteen months earlier he was a major of cavalry, detailed to the Army War College to develop plans for a future war that no one was sure was coming. Now he was a major general, commanding an entire division in the greatest military conflict of the age. Adding to the moment, Harbord's command, the American 2nd Division, had performed well in the Soissons counteroffensive that, according to George C. Marshall, "swung the tide of battle in favor of the Allies."¹ As messages of congratulations came streaming in from AEF compatriots and friends back home, Harbord could see everything he had ever worked for in the military just over the horizon. Even General Pershing noted Harbord's growing reputation after the battle, remarking to the division commander, "It appears I have to congratulate you every time I see you!"² With the AEF soon to begin major combat operations of its own, the possibility of further advancement seemed likely, despite having commanded the division for a week. What was next? A corps command? A full army? If the war would only last long enough to provide Harbord the opportunity, there was no limit to how high he could rise as long as he kept performing. But, just as everything came within his grasp, events beyond his control conspired to shatter this wondrous scenario.

Tapped for S.O.S. Command

After a brief respite in the village of Perrefonds, the 2nd Division moved on 23 July to the vicinity of Nanteuil-le-Haudouin, located midway between Paris and Soissons. After weeks of marching and battle, the division needed a rest. Harbord's own headquarters had moved seven times since he took over command, and everyone was growing ragged. The division had lost nearly five thousand men over the past week and now found itself a full third below organized strength.³ Harbord hoped to garner some time for his men to regain their spirit and prepare for the full Allied offensive anticipated for the early fall. What he did not envision was his own departure from the line, but Pershing had plans for his most trusted subordinate.

Just as Harbord settled into his billet in Nanteuil-le-Haudouin on 26 July, a call came from Chaumont requesting Harbord's immediate presence. Unclear as to the purpose of the summons, Harbord departed at once with his Marine aide, Fielding Robinson, on the five-hour motor trip to General Headquarters. The journey took them through Meaux, whose slowly returning commerce presented a starkly different scene from the general panic Harbord encountered when the Marine Brigade moved through the town nearly two months earlier on its way to block the German drive towards Paris. Harbord tried to take it all in as the countryside grew increasingly familiar the closer they came to Chaumont. He pondered the meaning of his trip, finally deciding that the commander-in-chief either wanted to discuss the division's training or simply thought Harbord deserved the rest and a chance to visit with old friends. With these thoughts in mind, Harbord fully expected Pershing to have turned in when they arrived just after nine

that night. He was surprised, and not a little troubled, to hear that Pershing was waiting for him, despite the late hour. "I wondered a little if I had guessed right as to why I was summoned," Harbord admitted. "My conception had not seemed so urgent."⁴

True to form, Pershing wasted little time explaining the point of the meeting. The AEF commander, displeased with the Services of Supply (SOS) for some time, wanted Harbord to take over command of the AEF's logistical service as Commanding General, Services of Supply (CGSOS). The news fell on Harbord like a death sentence. Though a great responsibility, command of the SOS meant a departure from the front lines. Visions of a corps command fluttered away as Pershing laid out his reasoning for the move. He described a plan in the works in the War Department to reorganize the SOS; taking it out from under Pershing's direct command and placing it under a coordinate authority. Aghast, Harbord thought the idea "a perfectly impossible situation from any military standpoint except that which might desire the failure of the expedition and incidentally of Pershing."⁵ He immediately suspected Chief of Staff Peyton C. March as the source for the plan, but listened as Pershing filled out the details.

When he first learned of the plan to take the SOS from under him, Pershing began looking for a way to mollify the War Department. After contemplating the matter for several weeks, he decided that there was only one man he could trust to reinvigorate the SOS: Harbord.⁶ His reasons were threefold. First, Harbord's experience as chief of staff and relations with the staff gave him valuable knowledge of the AEF's inner workings and proved his ability to manage large organizations. Pershing needed a man who could put the SOS in order, and Harbord had shown himself capable of the task. Second, Harbord's newly won reputation as a field commander would bring a considerable boost

to morale in the AEF's floundering logistical branch. Mired behind the lines, the soldiers in the SOS needed to know their importance. The assignment of Harbord to command the SOS would show how critical Pershing considered the organization. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Harbord's favorable relationship with Secretary of War Baker provided a potential supporter for the move should other elements in the War Department object. Put more simply, for Pershing to retain control of his supply system, he needed his best, most experienced, and most loyal man to take over command of the rear. That meant Harbord.⁷

While Harbord blushed upon hearing that Baker had taken a liking to him, it could not soften the blow of Pershing's request. Like any soldier, Harbord wanted to remain on the fighting line; it was what he was trained to do and worked his entire career to achieve. Now, just as he reached the pinnacle, Pershing wanted him to step aside and return to the doldrums of an uninspiring command. It was an unfair request, and Pershing knew it. The commander-in-chief understood that he was asking a great deal of his former chief of staff, both professionally and personally. But the seriousness of the situation demanded action, and Pershing needed Harbord to accept. As the conversation meandered through various topics, he resigned himself to his fate. Though Pershing asked for an answer in the morning, Harbord said there was no need. "I was [Pershing's] man," he wrote in his diary, "and whatever my personal wishes they would go no farther than being willing to do anything he wished me to do in the way he wished it done."⁸

The next morning Harbord again told Pershing that he would go wherever the general needed him. The two men then sat down with Major General James McAndrew, the AEF chief of staff, and worked out a plan. After a brief talk, the three agreed that the change

should go into effect immediately and that Harbord and Pershing should meet at Tours for an extended tour of the SOS. When the meeting broke up, Harbord set out to pack up his former command headquarters with the enthusiasm of a man going to the gallows.⁹

He arrived at his little château just after midnight on 28 July with a heavy heart. He could hardly contain his pride at the 2nd Division's accomplishments over his short tenure. Prior to the battle of Soissons, people knew of the Marine Brigade but not the full division. Now, thanks to the events of 18 and 19 July, every American officer in France knew of the gallantry displayed by the 2nd Division. But Harbord could not even oversee the distribution of honors won over those two days; relinquishing that duty to his soon to be successor, Marine Brigadier General John A. Lejeune. The next day, Harbord attended the divisional luncheon he had set for his brigadiers, colonels and senior staff. The idea was to improve communication and camaraderie amongst the division's senior officers, but now it served as a farewell affair. Though bittersweet, Harbord consoled himself with his pride for the division and left with his coterie of personal aides and assistants as though in exile, accompanied by the sounds of the 23rd Infantry Band playing "The Twenty Third Infantry March."¹⁰

The Goethals Proposal

For Harbord, the worst part of his transfer to the Services of Supply was that it came in response to yet another effort by the War Department to meddle in Pershing's affairs. What Harbord did not know was how the idea came about, nor did he realize the level to which it was being discussed in Washington. The exact origins of what became

known as the Goethals Proposal remain a mystery. The clearest account is that the idea came from the combined efforts of President Wilson's most trusted advisor, Colonel Edward M. House, Secretary Baker, and Chief of Staff March to relieve Pershing of a portion of his massive responsibilities, allowing the AEF commander to focus most of his attention on military operations.¹¹ Colonel House's plan came out of consultations with President Wilson and Sir William Wiseman, a British official in Washington who thought the AEF supply system dangerously close to collapse and blamed the situation on Pershing's tendency to take too much responsibility upon himself. House agreed and suggested to Wilson in early June that Assistant Secretary of War Edward Stettinius and Vance McCormick, a prominent Democrat and chairman of the War Trade Board, be sent to France to relieve Pershing of the burdens of supply and diplomatic concerns. Wilson passed the suggestions along to Secretary Baker, who took the matter up with General March. The two men agreed with the plan in principle, but concluded that Stettinius, whose experience in banking did not lend itself well to military affairs, should be supplanted with Major General George W. Goethals. The builder of the Panama Canal, Goethals was currently the number two man in the War Department, heading up the Purchase, Storage, and Traffic Division. His experience with supply and managing large bureaucracies made him imminently qualified to take over the SOS.¹²

Thinking the plan well in motion, March told Goethals to prepare for a post in the AEF, but did not explain the exact nature of the position.¹³ The move proved premature, for Baker did not intend to make the change without consulting Pershing. Nor would he proceed if the AEF commander dissented.¹⁴ When March learned of Baker's hesitations he told Goethals to delay his preparations, but did not indicate that the proposal was

abandoned. Perhaps anticipating Pershing's reply, Goethals confessed to his diary that the news "put an end to any thoughts of going over."¹⁵

Pershing was not completely oblivious to the planning taking place in the United States. March had informed him of the Administration's concerns regarding his workload on 5 July, saying that, "It seems inevitable that a subdivision of your work must be made in the near future, which will take off your shoulders the burden of personal conferences with Prime Ministers and other diplomatic representatives . . . and release you to straight military duty, which, of course, is what you were sent there for."¹⁶ Concerned over the possible challenge to his position in France, Pershing responded by assuring March that diplomatic matters were of little burden, and that he did not think the situation required sending an official representative. Little else came of the matter, and Pershing continued to oversee diplomatic relations with the Allies.¹⁷

As for the idea of freeing the AEF commander of his responsibilities over supply, Pershing's response was less constrained. In a letter on 6 July, Baker outlined the Goethals Proposal, conveying the belief that "The American people think of you as their 'fighting General,' and I want them to have that idea brought home to them." The idea of having an officer sent to command the SOS without Pershing's request was bad enough, but Baker contemplated Goethals serving "rather in a coordinate than a subordinate relationship to you."¹⁸ Pershing was flabbergasted. The very concept of relinquishing control over the AEF's supply system seemed a violation of the most fundamental military principles. He told March that in reference to military matters in France, "There can be no dual command. It must be centered in one man."¹⁹ Pershing considered the idea of stripping him of his logistical base utter lunacy. Receiving

Baker's letter several days after March's, Pershing apparently thought the decision already made. At the very least he believed events in Washington were spiraling out of his control and he needed to take action. After meeting with Stettinius, who was already in France and could offer a better view of the current state of the War Department, Pershing decided he needed to make a change and made the call for Harbord to come to Chaumont. Once his former chief of staff agreed to the move, Pershing reached for his cable pad marked "RUSH RUSH RUSH RUSH"²⁰ at the top, and fired off an urgent message to Baker. In it he said, "I very much appreciate your desire to relieve me of every burden that might interfere with the direction of military operations. However there appears to be an exaggerated view concerning the personal attention required in handling the details of administration of this command." He assured the secretary that administrative details were not a drain on his time, and that when the AEF began conducting independent combat operations the General Staff could handle the added pressure on the supply system.²¹

Not content to let the matter rest with a cable, Pershing composed a long letter to Baker the next day outlining his position in greater detail. He explained that problems in the SOS were more the result of a lack of manpower than a poor organizational structure. The need to get American troops into the lines to help block the German offensive the previous spring caused cutbacks in the shipment of auxiliary personnel, which now resulted in the SOS being overworked. Pershing agreed that the time was at hand to address these problems in anticipation of the AEF taking over the heaving lifting in 1919, saying, "Our port facilities must be increased, our railroads must be improved, and we must have a large increase in cars and locomotives. These things must come more

rapidly from now on.”²² But he did not see how taking the SOS from his control would solve the problem.

In effect, what Pershing wanted was support from home, not interference. Considering Baker’s previous hesitancy in hindering his field commander, it was a well-phrased request. In regard to the Goethals Proposal, Pershing was more direct in bringing up Baker’s stated reluctance to interfere with matters at the front. “It has always been my understanding,” Pershing stated, “that you believed that full power should be given to the man on the spot and responsible for results.” He promised that “our officers and men are far and away superior to the tired Europeans,” and pleaded that “our organization here is working well.”²³ If only the War Department would provide the material and stay out of the way, Pershing had every confidence the AEF could achieve victory.

The general knew his audience well, for Baker accepted the AEF commander’s assertion that Harbord would “pull in the team,” so to speak, and agreed to hold off on sending Goethals for the time being.²⁴ But for all Pershing’s protestations regarding unity of command, the idea of extending War Department control over supplies to France was not as far-fetched as he made it seem. Neither the French nor British commanders in chief controlled their supply lines to the French coast. In the same areas where the SOS operated, Pétain had to work in conjunction with the Ministry of War, the Ministry of Transportation, and other agencies to supply his armies. Likewise, Marshal Haig had to rely on the War Office to deliver supplies across not only the English Channel, but the French countryside as well.²⁵

Additionally, Pershing did not control his entire supply line, as he seemed to suggest necessary for any field commander. He did not oversee supply decisions in the

United States, nor did he dictate shipping across the Atlantic, even with his continual insistence upon the Priority Schedule. The French ports appeared a logical line of demarcation between War Department and AEF jurisdiction, but even that did not mean the operational commanders controlled their own lines of communication. As set forth in General Orders No. 44, the SOS controlled supplies from the ports to the regulating stations. From there control shifted first to the Coordination section of the AEF General Staff (G-4) via the regulating officers, who relied on input from the corps and divisional commanders in directing supplies. The result was a bureaucratic nightmare of competing responsibilities and egos; hardly the smoothly running organization Pershing described to Baker. But whether the SOS worked efficiently was beside the point. It was a part of the AEF, which fell under Pershing's authority, and any abridgment of that authority represented a threat to his command. Instead, Pershing placed the entire matter on Harbord, whose unwavering loyalty would keep the final authority over the AEF precisely where Pershing wanted it: in his hands.

Touring the Services of Supply

Early on the morning of 29 July, Colonel Johnson Hagood, chief of staff for the SOS, received word that his commanding officer, General Francis J. Kernan, had been relieved as Commanding General, Services of Supply. The news left Hagood in shock. He had no knowledge of the conflict between Pershing and the War Department over control of the SOS and thought Kernan was doing a fine job. Hagood learned that Kernan would head up a special assignment in Switzerland at the War Department's

behest, but received no further information. With Pershing coming to Tours to oversee the transition, and without any explanation for the change, Hagood began preparing for the AEF commander's arrival.²⁶

Both Pershing and Harbord arrived by train that morning, meeting up at SOS headquarters. There Harbord watched as Pershing delivered the bad news to Kernan, who "was very loath to surrender his command."²⁷ Harbord tried to soften the blow, expressing great confidence in Kernan's work, but the departing general believed himself unfairly treated and resented losing what he thought would be his last command.²⁸ Kernan's removal threatened to diminish the already tenuous morale amongst the officers serving in the SOS. Pershing knew that the SOS was a vital part of the American effort in France, but he also saw that "even from the beginning the idea prevailed in the minds of its personnel, especially at the ports, that they were not exactly doing the work of soldiers."²⁹ Both he and Harbord tried to bolster morale amongst those officers staying on with the SOS, and spoke at length with the men. Harbord particularly worried about Hagood's reaction to the transition. He thought Hagood and Kernan had worked well together, despite the problems in the SOS, and wanted to emulate that relationship during his tenure as CGSOS. He knew of Hagood's concerns over fluctuating officer levels within the SOS and told the SOS chief of staff of his desire to "get the S.O.S. personnel more permanently established and . . . to speed up the work."³⁰

Pershing also spoke privately with Hagood, understanding that he was invaluable to the smooth transition between Kernan and Harbord. During a long walk that night, Pershing described the SOS's pivotal role within the AEF and promised to give greater attention to SOS concerns in the future. While grateful for the kind words, Hagood told

the commander-in-chief that “all that would be fine but that the lack of more substantial recognition in the way of promotions and so forth had very seriously handicapped our work.”³¹ Hagood believed Pershing needed to do more to make the SOS a desired career path, not simply a way station for men either hoping for something more or trying to salvage their careers. Though Pershing assured him that more promotions were coming, SOS officers continued to suffer from a lack of formal recognition for their accomplishments.³²

The next day, Pershing and Harbord departed for a tour of the principal ports and facilities in the SOS, taking a small group of senior SOS officers with them and leaving the rest to wonder exactly what was going on.³³ The first stop was Bordeaux in southwest France. Organized as Base Section No. 2, it was a massive territory, encompassing some fourteen French Federal Departments. The Bordeaux area contained the AEF’s primary forestry and sawmill operations, an artillery training center, remount and veterinary facilities, and several hospitals, along with the docks on the Gironde River. Also located near Bordeaux was the enormous classification yard and storage facility of St. Sulpice. Pershing strode purposely around the various facilities, performing spot inspections and gaining a general understanding of the current situation. Some operations were going well, while others showed definite need for improvement. Pershing fretted over the amount of personal luggage arriving from America and asked Harbord to look into it. Construction at St. Sulpice was coming along nicely, but Harbord found the situation at Bordeaux far from satisfactory. He said later, “There seemed to be more attention paid to what would now be called ‘public relations’ than to hustling freight off the ships and expediting their turn-around.” Harbord decided that he

would need to make a change and asked Pershing to transfer W.D. Conner to command the Base Section. “But he is commanding a brigade in the 32nd Division, fighting in the Vesle,” Pershing replied. Harbord politely reminded the general that he too had only recently been commanding a division in the region, to which Pershing gave a faint smile and said he would order the transfer. Conner came and performed admirably, eventually succeeding Hagood as SOS chief of staff after the Armistice, and Harbord as CGSOS the following May.³⁴

The next few days saw more of the same as Harbord and Pershing made their rounds. Traveling mainly by rail, they attached a flatcar to the end of the train so that Pershing could make impromptu speeches at various locales in an effort to improve overall morale, and, as Dawes put it, “to inspire the Service of Supply with increased enthusiasm and desire to accomplish.”³⁵ Harbord mused that, “[Pershing] had the story pretty well learned by the time we finished our tour of the ports.”³⁶ Of course not everyone was inspired by the C-in-C’s motivational skills. Pershing’s idea of a reward was a transfer out of the SOS to a combat division. While perpetuating the image of SOS duty as unworthy of a soldier, the idea of trading a safe job on the docks for a spot on the front line did not seem like much of a reward to some. After one such speech to a group of African-American stevedores, one of Pershing’s aides asked a corporal for his impression. The man thought long and hard and then, rather hesitantly, said that he was “very well satisfied” where he was.³⁷

At every location the group found centers and construction projects of tremendous size and complexity. The reception camp for arriving troops at St. Nazaire could handle sixteen thousand men, while the docks at Brest could unload ships as large as the

Leviathan, which delivered twelve thousand soldiers per trip when running at full capacity. The storage depot at Montoir covered some two thousand acres, utilizing two hundred miles of railroad track, and containing four million square feet of roofed storage and another ten million square feet of open storage. At other stops along the route the men observed various construction projects intended to provide the infrastructure necessary to support the millions of men expected in 1919.³⁸

By 3 August the group finished visiting the ports and moved into the interior. The first stop was the city of Blois, which served as a depot for unassigned officers arriving from the United States. These men, “commissioned misfits of all types” as Harbord called them, existed in a sort of limbo, being close to the war but without any part in it at the present. Blois was also the AEF’s Officer Reclassification Depot, providing a chance for officers deemed unsatisfactory at some point, usually in combat, to salvage their careers. Men found wanting under fire could still serve the AEF in the rear, especially in the SOS where experienced officers were at a premium. By December, Harbord would achieve almost total control of those officers sent to Blois, redistributing them as he saw fit.³⁹ Though Colonel Hagood believed Blois an asset to the AEF, providing a second chance to men on the verge of being sent home in disgrace, the center had gained an ominous reputation within the AEF’s officer corps. To be “blooeyed,” as it became known, was a mark of shame and more often than not signaled the end to a Regular Army career. As Harbord described it, “For many an American [Blois] was the grave of buried ambitions, the temporary home of the hopeless.”⁴⁰

That afternoon the group proceeded to the massive supply storage depot at Gièvres. Providing supplies to the front, either through the Regulating Station at Is-sur-

Tille or in direct shipments to divisions, Gièvres was the heart of the SOS's Intermediate Section. Unlike many of the port facilities, it was operating smoothly, handling an average of twenty-three hundred rail cars a day. In one instance, an order came in to the center at 8:15 a.m. calling for exactly 4,596 tons of supplies, comprised of 1,250,000 cans of tomatoes, 1,00,000 pounds of sugar, 600,000 cans of corned beef, 750,000 pounds of canned hash, and 150,000 pounds of dried beef. By 6:15 that night, 457 freight cars were loaded and on their way to Is-sur-Tille, filling the order to a tee.⁴¹

The party made several more stops before returning to Paris on 4 August to discuss their impressions of the SOS. Overall, Pershing was pleased with what he saw, with only a few installations needing serious attention. But the trip showed the AEF commander that the SOS had grown far beyond his own comprehension, even with its lack of manpower and supplies. What the SOS needed now, in Pershing's mind, was "coördinating direction, initiative, and driving-force."⁴² Confident that Harbord could provide these things, Pershing wrote to Baker several days later describing the trip in glowing detail. Despite a previous "lack of push in the S.O.S.," Pershing told the secretary he was confident in Harbord's abilities, stating that the new CGSOS "has taken hold in splendid fashion."⁴³ It was bit of an exaggeration. Harbord had only been on the job for a week's time, and spent it with Pershing on their tour. But Baker was satisfied, and decided to drop the Goethals matter entirely. Colonel House agreed, and the two men advised as much to President Wilson, who stated that in the future no decisions would be made without Pershing's consent. It was a tremendous delegation of authority, and exactly what Pershing wanted.⁴⁴

Taking Hold of the SOS

With the full weight of the AEF's supply system firmly upon his shoulders, Harbord moved quickly to secure greater authority for his command. He convinced Pershing to give him control over "all questions of automatic supply" for the AEF. Questions of policy, including those involving new types and scales of equipment and immediate control over military transportation would still be handled by the General Staff, but all other supply matters reverted to Harbord's command. To facilitate this, Pershing put the supply chiefs directly under Harbord, and allowed the new CGSOS to communicate directly with the War Department, freeing him from having to rout requests through GHQ.⁴⁵ Bolstered by his new authority, Harbord set about speeding up his command. He thought the entire SOS functioned adequately enough, and considered its organization "in the main efficient."⁴⁶ Likewise, the men at the base ports were doing their best to move the freight along with all possible haste, but low morale continued to plague the services. Moving freight was hardly satisfactory work for any soldier, no matter how important the job. The men needed routine reminders of their value, and a sense of worth in the AEF, which became Harbord's first goal as CGSOS.

One area where Harbord believed Kernan added to the poor morale was his propensity to spend most of his time behind a desk. When the former CGSOS did venture out on inspection trips he did so in a motor car, limiting his range and the amount of time he could spend in the field.⁴⁷ If Harbord wanted to improve performance in the SOS and improve the morale of its personnel, he believed he needed to spend a good deal of time away from Tours. "It is as important that the man who is doing his duty well

should be seen and told of it,” Harbord said, “as it is that the less efficient man shall be seen and told of his faults.”⁴⁸ To facilitate this, he ordered a special train from the Transportation Department set up to operate as a rolling headquarters. A remarkable piece of equipment, the train allowed Harbord to travel at night, inspect during the day, and cover the entire SOS with some frequency. It provided sleeping quarters for Harbord, his personal staff, chauffeurs, orderlies, translators, stenographers, etc., and had accommodations for ten or so officers Harbord brought along with him. These were usually SOS section chiefs or other heads of supply departments who could address specific issues as they came up.⁴⁹

Harbord made good use of the train, spending fifty-five of his first one hundred nights as CGSOS aboard. In a typical week, he spent three or four days on inspection trips. To communicate with Tours and Chaumont, the train contained a telephone and telegraph system that could be connected along the way. Harbord provided his own headquarters and GHQ AEF with a daily itinerary and worked to keep to it. When away from the train for any period of time, he had an aide remain behind to make daily contact with Chaumont and Tours to see if anything required Harbord’s personal attention. The system worked exceptionally well, allowing Harbord to “do a good deal of business right on the ground where business needs to be done.”⁵⁰

When not out on the rails, Harbord spent most of his time at Tours. He and his personal staff (his two aides, Norris Williams and Fielding Robinson, his Marine orderly, Lieutenant Moore, his interpreter, Martin Legrasse, and his cook and steward) moved into General Kernan’s former residence on the northern heights of the Loire, known as Maison Beaulieu. A few months later he moved farther back from the Loire to a lovely

mansion owned by the Princess de Croy. These splendid residences suited the old cavalryman well, and the Croy family provided a vibrant social life for Harbord and his staff.⁵¹

Another benefit of taking over the SOS was the chance it gave Harbord to work closely with the General Purchasing Agent, Charles G. Dawes. Brought by Pershing from civilian life to the AEF to secure supplies in Europe, Dawes was a master administrator. He was also a jovial and gregarious personality, whose inability to grasp the concept of military formality provided endless amusement for those around him. Pershing worried that Dawes would be deemed an “interloper” or a “climber” by regular officers, and reminded Harbord that Dawes was “too valuable a man to allow any staff officer to snub him or fail to appreciate the usefulness of his position.”⁵² Pershing need not have worried, at least as far as Harbord was concerned. The CGSOS found in Dawes a kindred spirit, thinking him “a winning personality, very much of a special pleader, and master of the art of insidious approach.”⁵³ Dawes returned the sentiment, considering Harbord “a dear, faithful, and loyal friend.”⁵⁴ The two men had made a point to get together in Paris as often as possible, usually to attend the theater or some other variant of the still vibrant Parisian nightlife, and Harbord now had the chance to partake in this distraction on a more regular basis.⁵⁵

Of course Harbord spent most of his time at the office in Tours, where he discovered that Kernan had left him a good and efficient staff. But it, too, suffered from the same low morale and lethargy found throughout the SOS. Filled with men sent back from the front, the SOS operated under the aura of failure, and the men running it seemed to suffer from a personal malaise. A powerful source of this depression was the lack of

appreciation shown to those in the SOS. Harbord took the matter up with Pershing soon after taking over, expressing the belief that, “The S.O.S. cannot be considered a kind of purgatory in which a man remains in a state of suspense until, by good or bad behavior, his final destination is determined. The S.O.S. must be made worth a soldier’s career.” The lift provided by Pershing’s recent speeches would soon wear off if they were not followed by more tangible rewards.⁵⁶

Harbord was even more pointed in assigning blame for some of the hard feelings amongst the SOS personnel to GHQ AEF (and to a lesser extent Pershing himself). “The War Department has been liberal in authorizing high grades in the organization for the SOS,” he argued, “but no names have been submitted from the AEF to fill them.” The situation was undoubtedly serious for Harbord to side with the War Department against the AEF. He even used the recent controversy of the Goethals Proposal to support his growing belief that GHQ was not paying enough attention to the men behind the lines. He argued that the War Department’s recent attempts to meddle with the AEF’s supply system were “indirectly” responsible for the recent increases in SOS authority, not a newfound appreciation for the services by Pershing or GHQ. Pershing made no direct response but did ask that Harbord “consider it an obligation” to come to Chaumont whenever circumstances allowed to keep the AEF commander “in touch with the whole machinery.”⁵⁷ While still unquestionably loyal to the AEF commander, Harbord was beginning to distance himself from GHQ AEF. Now responsible for the entire SOS, his focus shifted to its needs, and he was slowly realizing that many of the problems afflicting the organization were emanating out of Chaumont.

With Pershing still leaving the SOS to its own devices, Harbord moved to improve relations amongst his senior officers at Tours. Just as he had intended in the 2nd Division, Harbord organized a regular Sunday brunch at his château. Though not embraced by everyone (Hagood thought the affair “too stiff and formal” and balked at losing the day) the event showed Harbord’s sincere desire to improve morale within his own headquarters.⁵⁸ As part of his managerial style, he wanted to build up camaraderie among his officers, like in any combat unit. If the men would start thinking of themselves as a military unit, then perhaps it would rekindle their drive to perform. Harbord then turned his attention to motivating the men in the SOS to pick up the pace across the board, utilizing his administrative skills to achieve tangible results. Unlike Pershing, Harbord possessed a good understanding of motivation. Whereas the AEF commander offered a transfer to a combat unit as reward for service, Harbord offered extended leaves for units performing exceptionally well. He had bands play fast-paced music to help the workers keep a quick pace, and played upon the men’s homesickness by devising a competition between the stevedore companies working at the ports. Known as the “Race to Berlin,” the competition set up a system where each unit was judged against its previous accomplishments to see which was making the greatest improvement. The winning company would secure a spot on the first transport home after the war ended. Now here was a goal the men could get behind! Weekly statistics reported in *Stars and Stripes* were posted at each port and flashed on newsreels, keeping everyone informed as to which unit was in the lead. The scheme worked to perfection, as the base ports increased the amount of tonnage unloaded by roughly twenty percent between them

over the last two months of the war, a good indication of Harbord's skills as an administrator.⁵⁹

Notes

¹ George C. Marshall, *Memoirs of My Services in the World War, 1917-1918* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976), 123.

² James G. Harbord, *Leaves From a War Diary* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1925), 331.

³ Harbord reported the 2nd Divisions strength on 22 July to be 863 officers and 19,508 men, about ten thousand below its organized strength of 28,000. (The division was already five thousand below strength at the beginning of the Soissons battle.) James G. Harbord, *The American Army in France 1917-1919* (Boston: Brown, Little and Company, 1936), 342.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 345.

⁵ Harbord, *War Diary*, 339.

⁶ What Pershing did not tell Harbord was that he had apparently made the decision over a week earlier, when he wrote to Chief of Staff March assuring him that Harbord would be taking over the AEF's rear. John J. Pershing to Peyton C. March, 19 July 1918, Box 123, John J. Pershing Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.

⁷ Harbord, *War Diary*, 339-40; John J. Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War* 2 vols. (New York: F.A. Stokes, 1931), 2:179-80.

⁸ Harbord, *War Diary*, 340; Pershing, *My Experiences*, 2:180; When Pershing read Harbord's description of this meeting, he bristled a bit that Harbord "speaks of being sent to the SOS as going into exile." "Notes from Diary of General Harbord," Box 87, Pershing Papers, LC.

⁹ Special Orders No. 207, 26 July 1918, Box 8, James G. Harbord Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.

¹⁰ Colonel Paul B. Malone, commander of the 23rd Infantry, had brought the band for what he presumed would be a pleasant afternoon. Harbord, *War Diary*, 341-42.

¹¹ Another potential source of the plan was Assistant Secretary of War James D. Ryan, whose intentions were to secure for Goethals a much desired foreign duty, and in the process improve the AEF's supply system. Harbord to Pershing, 23 September 1918, Box 11, Harbord Papers, LC; Phyllis A. Zimmerman, *The Neck of the Bottle: George W. Goethals and the Reorganization of the U.S. Army Supply System, 1917-1918* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1992), 127.

¹² Edward M. House to Woodrow Wilson, 3 June 1918, Box 141, File II, Woodrow Wilson Papers, Manuscript Division, LC; Newton D. Baker to Wilson, 8 June 1918, Box 8, Newton D. Baker Papers, Manuscript Division, LC; Ray Stannard Baker, *Woodrow Wilson: Life and Letters* (New York: Doran, Doubleday & Company, 1935), 8:186-87; Frederick Palmer, *Newton D. Baker: America at War* 2 vols. (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1931), 2:231-36; James A. Huston, *The Sinews of War: Army Logistics 1775-1953* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1966), 364-65. Baker later stated that he recalled March suggesting that Goethals go to France instead of Stettinius, but could not be certain. Baker to Harbord, 23 December 1929, Box 12, Harbord Papers, LC.

¹³ George W. Goethals to George R. Goethals, 9 June 1918, Box 2, George W. Goethals Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.

¹⁴ Baker to Harbord, 23 December 1929, Box 12, Harbord Papers, LC; Zimmerman, *The Neck of the Bottle*, 126-27.

¹⁵ Appointment Book #3, 6 July 1918, Goethals Papers, LC; Harbord would later use the matter as proof that March was trying to sabotage Pershing's command, though there is little evidence to support the claim. As evidence for his attacks on March, Harbord noted that the chief of staff wrote after the war that he did not learn of the plan to send Goethals to Europe to command the Services of Supply until sometime in July, but that letters from Goethals to his son indicate that March discussed Goethals' possible transfer to the AEF in early June. While March's statements are confusing, they hardly prove Harbord's claims of some sort of Machiavellian scheme on the part of March to subvert Pershing's authority. Baker probably inadvertently fueled the fire by telling Harbord that, "It is, of course, possible my associates in the War Department had very much more definite notions about sending General Goethals than I had, or that some of the official dispatches from the War Department, even in my name, may seem to show more positive conclusions than I indicated to you in my previous letter [23 December 1929]. Many virtues, and I fear some crimes, were committed in my name without my knowledge . . ." Given Harbord's considerable hostility towards March, the accusations must be viewed with apprehension. Baker to Harbord, 30 December 1929, Box 12, Harbord Papers, LC; Peyton C. March, *The Nation at War* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1932), 193-96; Harbord, *American Army*, 354-55

¹⁶ March to Pershing, 5 July 1918, Box 123, Pershing Papers, LC.

¹⁷ Pershing to March, 19 July 1918, Box 123, Pershing Papers, LC.

¹⁸ Baker to Pershing, 6 July 1918, Box 19, Pershing Papers, LC.

¹⁹ Pershing to March, 19 July 1918, Box 123, Pershing Papers, LC.

²⁰ Frederick Palmer, *John J. Pershing: General of the Armies* (Harrisburg, PA: The Military Services Press, 1948), 256.

²¹ Confidential Cable, P-1522-S, 27 July 1918, *United States Army in the World War, 1917-1919* 17 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1948), 2:553. [Hereafter cited as *USAWW*]

²² Pershing to Baker, 28 July 1918, reprinted in Pershing, *My Experiences*, 2:187-191.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*; Baker to Pershing, 30 July 1918, Box 19, Pershing Papers, LC; Donald Smythe, *Pershing: General of the Armies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 164; In addition, Palmer argues that Pershing not only objected to the Goethals Proposal in general, but to Goethals specifically. He claims Pershing thought Goethals' strong-willed nature would make him insubordinate, and wanted him kept far away from the AEF. Palmer, *Newton D. Baker*, 2:330-35.

²⁵ Huston, *The Sinews of War*, 363-64.

²⁶ Diary Entry, 29 July 1918, Johnson Hagood Diary, Box 1, Johnson Hagood Papers, MHI; Hagood was never given a full explanation for Kernan's removal, but had to piece the events together from rumors and other informal sources. Johnson Hagood, *The Services of Supply: A Memoir of the Great War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1927), 259-60.

²⁷ Harbord, *War Diary*, 343.

²⁸ Diary entry, 29 July 1918, Hagood Diary, Box 1, Hagood Papers, MHI; Kernan would serve the remainder of the war in Switzerland as a member of the American mission to negotiate prisoner exchanges. He returned to France after the Armistice and served as a technical advisor on the American commission negotiating the peace treaty. After the war, Kernan received a promotion to Major General and went to the Philippines as commanding general. Henry Blaine Davis, Jr., *Generals in Khaki* (Raleigh, NC: Pentland Press, 1998), 212.

- ²⁹ Pershing, *My Experiences*, 2:194.
- ³⁰ Hagood, *Services of Supply*, 259.
- ³¹ Diary Entry, 29 July 1918, Hagood Diary, Box 1, Hagood Papers, MHI
- ³² Hagood, *Services of Supply*, 259.
- ³³ Included in the group were Brigadier General Edward Jadwin, head of the Division of Construction, Colonel William Wilgus, Deputy Director General of Transportation, and the irrepressible Charles G. Dawes, the General Purchasing Agent, who had joined the group at Tours. Charles G. Dawes, *A Journal of the Great War* 2 vols. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1921), 1:141.
- ³⁴ Diary entry, 30 July 1918, Pershing Diary, Box 6-7, Pershing Papers, LC; Harbord, *American Army*, 372.
- ³⁵ Dawes, *Journal of the Great War*, 141.
- ³⁶ Harbord, *American Army*, 374.
- ³⁷ Pershing, *My Experiences*, 2:197.
- ³⁸ Diary entries, 30 July – 2 August 1918, Pershing Diary, Box 6-7, Pershing Papers, LC; Despite this progress, delays in manpower and material resulted in many of the projects being finished only after the Armistice. Harbord, *American Army*, 371-76; Pershing, *My Experiences*, 2:194-200.
- ³⁹ General Orders No. 231, 18 December 1918, *USAWW*, 16:576-78.
- ⁴⁰ James J. Cooke, *Pershing and His Generals: Command and Staff in the AEF* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1997), 67; Harbord, *American Army*, 376.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 377; Donald Smythe, *Pershing: General of the Armies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 164.
- ⁴² Pershing, *My Experiences*, 2:203.
- ⁴³ Pershing to Baker, 7 August 1918, Box 19, Pershing Papers, LC.
- ⁴⁴ Smythe, *Pershing*, 165; Daniel R. Beaver, *Newton D. Baker and the American War Effort 1917-1919* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 166.
- ⁴⁵ General Orders No. 130, 6 August 1918, *USAWW*, 16:408-10.
- ⁴⁶ Harbord, *American Army*, 379.
- ⁴⁷ Harbord, *War Diary*, 349.
- ⁴⁸ Harbord, *American Army*, 379.
- ⁴⁹ In most cases, Harbord brought about six supply chiefs with him, usually Major General Harry Rogers (Chief Quartermaster), Brigadiers General Edgar Russel (Chief Signal Officer), Brigadier General Edgar Jadwin (Director of Construction and Forestry), Colonel Walter D. McCaw (Chief Surgeon), and Colonel William Wilgus (Transportation Officer). Harbord, *War Diary*, 351.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*; Harbord, *American Army*, 380.

⁵¹ Ibid., 383-85.

⁵² Pershing to Harbord, 26 August 1918, Box 11, Harbord Papers, LC.

⁵³ Harbord, *War Diary*, 353.

⁵⁴ Dawes, *Journal of the Great War*, 172.

⁵⁵ When Dawes read the statement in a draft of Harbord's *Leaves from a War Diary* claiming the book was originally intended for his wife, Dawes told Harbord that he knew as much from certain omissions within the text concerning their time in Paris of which Dawes had personal knowledge. Exactly what those "omissions" were one can only guess. Charles G. Dawes to Harbord, 7 October 1925, Box 1, James G. Harbord Papers, NYHS.

⁵⁶ Harbord to Pershing, 19 August 1918, Box 87, Pershing Papers, LC

⁵⁷ Ibid.; Pershing to Harbord, 26 August 1918, Box 11, Harbord Papers, LC.

⁵⁸ Diary Entry, 11 August 1918, Hagood Diary, Box 1, Hagood Papers, MHI.

⁵⁹ Harbord, *American Army*, 391-92. Harbord gave credit for the scheme to his aide, Captain Fielding Robinson, and Charles M. Steele of the Y.M.C.A; Hagood, *Services of Supply*, 265; Smythe, *Pershing*, 166; Alfred E. Cornebise, *The Stars and Stripes: Doughboy Journalism in World War I* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1984), 117.

CHAPTER XII

GRINDING DOWN (SEPTEMBER - NOVEMBER 1918)

When James Harbord took control of the AEF's logistical system, the Services of Supply, he instilled in it a new sense of purpose and professional vigor long absent from the organization. But for all his energy, drive, and managerial skill, there were simply too many critical problems affecting the organization and the American supply system in general. The shipping arrangements made the previous spring to block the German offensive now caused a serious shortage of personnel within the SOS. To make up the difference, the War Department needed to abandon the shipment of combat troops to Europe in lieu of auxiliary personnel. But fall 1918 also brought a critical shortage in shipping tonnage and transportation materiel in France. When added to the personnel shortages, it meant that there were not enough men in the SOS, nor were there enough ships to transport them and the AEF's increasing materiel demands, and there was not enough rolling stock in the SOS to adequately move the men and material once in France. All along the supply chain, the pressure of building and maintaining a complex network without adequate preparation or time to make sure it functioned efficiently was finally causing the entire system to grind down. The officers in the SOS and the General Staff tried to manage the system as best they could, but ended up engaging in a battle over authority. Thankfully, just before the entire system imploded, it was granted a reprieve in the form of the Armistice.

Personnel

As Harbord worked to improve efficiency within the SOS, he slowly came to realize the monumental task before him and the systemic problems gumming up the works in the AEF's logistical system. Since its inception, the most persistent and serious problem afflicting the SOS was a lack of adequate service personnel. At the very least, Harbord believed that one out of every three men in the entire AEF should be assigned to the SOS. In the summer of 1917, the General Staff calculated that an army of 1.3 million required twenty five percent of its numbers designated for the line of communications. Though both were minimum estimates, neither was achieved. By the end of August 1918, Harbord's first month in command, the AEF numbered 1,293,000 men, with less than 300,000 of which serving in the SOS, or just under twenty three percent.¹ As Pershing explained to Baker in July, the source of this shortage was the shipping program enacted the previous summer. When the Germans launched their massive offensive the previous spring, Pershing agreed to a modification in the American shipping schedule at Abbeville in early May. The plan called for the United States to ship 250,000 men, composed mostly of infantry and machine-gun units, to France over May and June.² This emphasis forced the reduction of SOS troop shipments to 15,000 in May and 25,000 in June (down from 25,000 and 55,000 respectively).³ These reductions exacerbated an already growing numerical deficiency within the SOS. The situation was made worse in late July when Pershing cut personnel even further by ordering that all soldiers serving within the SOS who were deemed fit for combat duty be transferred to the line.⁴ Shipments in July and August failed to make up the difference, resulting in a serious manpower shortage in the SOS by the first of September, just as the AEF was gearing up for its long anticipated independent combat operations.

Harbord could see disaster on the horizon if the SOS could not keep up. To achieve the War Department's goal of eighty divisions in France by June 1919, the SOS needed to increase the amount of tonnage unloaded by 150,000 tons each month. But without sizable increases in manpower, there was little chance for the SOS to reach that mark. Frustrated by the situation, Harbord confided to his diary that, "It matters not if our people at home build ships and send over men if we here are unable to unload the ships, and get the supplies to the front."⁵ He began requesting additional troops, but by 1 October the SOS still found itself short by over 80,000, or nearly twenty-two percent. For an army of four million men, the SOS needed to grow by 700,000 in order to account for twenty-six percent of the AEF.⁶

The personnel already assigned to the SOS proved equally problematic. In addition to the challenge of maintaining of morale for men stuck behind the lines when they desperately wanted to get into the fight, the SOS struggled with ever-changing personnel lists due to GHQ's inability to establish a "permanent, fixed organization."⁷ Too often GHQ shifted officers and enlisted men in and out of the SOS without considering the effects of the changes on SOS efficiency. The policy resulted in a lack of officers with sufficient experience to perform their duties, and a hodge-podge of enlisted men performing various tasks regardless of their training. Harbord observed that "Ribbon-counter jumpers are found in stevedore regiments, who never saw a ship before the one that brought them over; lawyers appear in engineer units; longshoremen in the forestry regiments; railroad men in labor battalions, etc., etc."⁸ Many of these men rarely lasted long in such assignments, and were routinely transferred to other tasks with equal disregard for their talents. The transitory nature of such employment resulted in a labor

force increasingly disconnected to the work before them, with little incentive to adequately learn their jobs. As Hagood told Harbord in August, "Almost every man in the S.O.S. considers his status more or less temporary and is in hopes of a change of duty."⁹ No one in the SOS was committed to the organization as a whole, and the entire system suffered as a result.

The situation grew decidedly worse when Pershing finally organized the American First Army on 10 August.¹⁰ The long anticipated event caused a mixture of pride and anxiety for the men in the SOS. No longer were they building an army, but now shifted to the role of supporting one in the field while it conducted combat operations. Within a few weeks, the First Army began the initial American offensive of the war, reducing the St. Mihiel salient just west of Verdun. Though cheered by news of American advances at the front, Hagood watched as the recent withdrawal of troops from the SOS to support the First Army began to have an effect on efficiency levels. He took it upon himself to draft a foreboding cable for Harbord to send to GHQ outlining the present state of the SOS. It was not a pleasant image. The cable described serious deficiencies in motor transport, railroad transportation, and an overall slowdown of construction projects throughout the SOS. To add insult to injury, just that day the SOS was ordered to supply two thousand men to handle ammunition for the First Army. "The SOS must have some immediate relief . . ." the cable read, "It is as much involved in the present push as is the First Army, as that army cannot get its food, clothing and ammunition unless the SOS continues to function."¹¹ Several days later George Van Horn Moseley, the assistant chief of staff, G-4, promised more troops as soon as they

could be made available. Till then the SOS would have to bear down and make due with what they had.¹²

Without help from GHQ, the SOS was stretched to the limit in terms of its capabilities and needed some form of relief, and soon. After looking into the situation, Brigadier General Fox Conner, Pershing's assistant chief of staff, G-3, agreed that the SOS was "reduced to the breaking point on account of demands made on it by the First Army." He pointed to the fact that in August the SOS unloaded 18,424 tons on average every day. By mid September, that number had fallen to 14,584 tons daily. To remedy the growing crisis, Conner suggested ceasing the shipment of combat divisions in December, and instead bringing over auxiliary troops to build up the SOS and other support services. Pershing approved the plan, hoping that it would ease the growing panic at Tours.¹³

It did not. Whatever promises GHQ made regarding additional troops for the SOS, the fact remained that with the First Army launching an offensive in the Meuse-Argonne on 26 September, the pressure continued to mount on the supply services. With additional rail and motor transportation being reassigned to support the offensive, the SOS found itself again asked to do more with less. Pershing continued to comb through the SOS for combat troops, assuring Harbord that it was only done "to meet an urgent situation which all must appreciate and which I think you can appreciate." The AEF commander also denied requests for the transfer of potential combat troops to the supply services, acknowledging the serious manpower crisis in the SOS, but insisting that the First Army's "needs of replacements are constant and daily? [sic] increasing and the demands for fighting men are of the utmost urgency at this moment . . . as you

undoubtedly know.”¹⁴ Ever loyal to his commander, Harbord promised that he and his organization would do their best to keep up the fight. He did, however, offer up a warning:

If the war ends this Winter no great harm will be done by delays in getting men to work. If it does not, the failure to keep up construction and other necessary work in your supply service will in my judgement make failure certain for your plans next Spring. Our only interest is that you know the need for men. We then loyally accept your decision.¹⁵

Harbord later admitted that if the Armistice had not occurred when it did, “there would have had to be a suspension of hostilities and movement until the supply and troop program could be brought back into balance.”¹⁶

A Crisis in Shipping

Pershing’s practice of stripping the SOS of personnel to support the operations of the American First Army at St. Mihiel belies his understanding of the serious problems affecting the SOS. He knew that the SOS needed more men, and he desperately wanted to get them, but as AEF commander he was juggling several balls at the same time, and had to work to keep everything going lest the entire system come crashing down. The goal for the ultimate size of the AEF that Pershing and the War Department agreed upon was eighty divisions by the summer of 1919.¹⁷ To accomplish this goal the Americans

needed the continued help of the British in supplying tonnage for the shipment of personnel. But in August, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George informed the Americans that “we shall not be able to continue our help as far as cargoes of merchandise are concerned and that we shall probably have to cut down the tonnage assigned for troop transportation.”¹⁸ Lloyd George explained that recent losses suffered at the hands of the German submarines required the British to reassess their commitment to the American shipping program. Hoping to take advantage of the British shipping while they still had it, Pershing cabled the War Department:

Most urgent that service of supply, auxiliary troops and replacements, sailing of which classes has been postponed in the past, should so far as possible have absolute priority over divisional troops. If this is not done the inevitable result will be the diversion of combat troops to service of supply duty which is undesirable from every point of view.¹⁹

Pershing echoed his calls for SOS and auxiliary personnel nine days later, adding that, “Until sufficient replacements are available in France to keep our divisions at full strength replacements should be [sic] all means sent in preference to new divisions.”²⁰ Chief of Staff Peyton March replied on 20 August that, “Divisions will be sent only when necessary to avoid shipping space going vacant. It is frequently impossible to secure sufficient S.O.S. troops to fill available shipping space. . . . All replacements called for by you are being shipped but they are often delayed by quarantine.”²¹ If March could find the men, he would ship them to France, but they were simply not available in the

numbers that Pershing wanted. The War Department could not make up for the deficiencies of the past in a month's time, no matter how urgent the situation.

As March and the War Department did their best to find additional personnel for the SOS and auxiliary services in the AEF, they faced an even greater problem. A lack of cargo tonnage had hampered the United States since its entry into the war, and the problem was only growing worse. A survey of the situation the previous December estimated that an army of 1,000,000 men in June of 1918 would require 1,920,000 gross tons for troop transport and 1,589,000 tons for cargo shipping. Unfortunately, the United States had nowhere near these numbers available. In 1914, 90-percent of American foreign trade was carried in foreign-owned bottoms, and the country had not been able to make up much of the difference when the combatants withdrew their shipping to cover their own war needs. Though progress had been made in constructing new ships and appropriating others, the United States still found itself facing a deficiency of 900,000 tons of shipping in September and October based upon the requirements of the eighty division program.²² For all of Pershing's urgent cables requesting additional men and materiel, and the need to keep to the schedule for having eighty divisions in France by June 1919, the War Department could no more pull cargo ships out of a hat than Harbord could labor battalions.²³

Considering the seriousness of the situation, Secretary of War Newton Baker deemed it necessary to journey to France to see what could be done to remedy the shipping deficiencies and make sure the American logistical system continued to function. Baker began contemplating the trip in August after the British indicated that they would curtail their tonnage allotments to the United States. General Tasker Bliss,

the American representative on the Supreme War Council, had written the secretary that, “If Marshall Foch will state that the 80-division program gives reasonable assurance of a final campaign next year I feel sure that the United States can demand and secure necessary tonnage. . . . If we cannot do this we must deliberately contemplate a campaign of 1920 with its untold losses in life and money most of which will be American.”²⁴

Baker could see that relations between the Allies were growing increasingly strained. “Every shipload of soldiers we land in France,” he wrote to a friend, “increases the complications of their supply and, quite confidentially, of harmonious cooperation with our allies.”²⁵ Hoping to mend the growing rift between the Allies and the AEF, Baker sailed for France at the end of August, arriving in France on 7 September.

Baker’s second visit to the Western Front gave proof of the tremendous work accomplished by the AEF. After witnessing the reduction of the St. Mihiel salient, Baker returned to his tour of the American facilities. On 19 September, Harbord joined the secretary’s party for an inspection of several installations in the SOS. Though Baker’s party was somewhat extensive, Harbord managed to secure an hour with the secretary for a private conversation. During the discussion, in which Baker did most of the talking, the secretary explained that he was the source of the Goethals Proposal. Intended as a sincere effort to relieve Pershing from many of his non-essential concerns, the secretary admitted that he realized the plan a mistake and promised no more interference with Pershing’s command. The discussion then turned to General March and the relations between he and the AEF. Baker was surprised to learn that many in the AEF were distrustful of the chief of staff and believed he was seeking to supplant Pershing as commander of the AEF. Baker assured Harbord that he had no intention of removing

Pershing from command, but in the event that the general should be incapacitated or killed, his successor would come from the AEF. “[If March] wished to be in the running,” Baker stated, “he would have to give up his position as Chief of Staff and return to France and take his chances.” The talk did much to quell Harbord’s fears, and he told Pershing that, “I think relations with the War Department will be greatly bettered by [Baker’s] visit here.”²⁶

What Baker did not tell Harbord was that he had been thinking of who would replace General Pershing should he be killed since the previous March. After asking Pershing for suggestions, which the general felt unable to give, the secretary made up a list of his own. It contained only three names: Major General Hunter Liggett, commander of the First Army as of October 1918, Major General Charles P. Summerall, commander of the 1st Division from July 1918 through October when he rose to command the V (U.S.) Corps, and Harbord. After his second visit to the AEF, Baker made his choice. “It was for Harbord, who as the pioneer Chief of Staff, the fighting commander at Belleau Wood, and the reorganizer of the S.O.S., had risen ably to his responsibility in each part and had given proof of the poise, initiative, judgement, and perspective that fitted him for command of the whole.”²⁷

Baker kept his thoughts to himself on the matter, however, and returned to the tour of the SOS. He was imminently satisfied by what he saw. Supply and training facilities that were only in the planning stages the previous March were now up and running, while other construction projects were underway with more in the planning stages. He could plainly see that “Harbord’s energy had given what was once called the “Service of the Rear” an *esprit de corps* of its own, and how,” with the help of his

assistants, “he had developed a team-play by every method known to the military and civil worlds.”²⁸ Yet everywhere Baker went he heard the common call for more material, more troops, more everything. And the constant cry for help that arose from the men in the AEF meant the need for more ships, which Baker hoped he could extract from the Allies.

This proved every bit as difficult as Baker had anticipated. In meeting after meeting with the Allies, he heard repeatedly that the British could not increase their aid to the Americans for fear that it would create a critical shortage in the transport of food supplies to the British Isles. The British agreed to honor their commitment to supply 200,000 tons for September and October, but would not acquiesce to the secretary’s requests for additional ships. They did, however, leave the matter open to further discussion if the United States would disclose all relevant information as to American needs and facilities. President Wilson agreed to the request, and Baker managed to persuade the Allies to establish several boards to oversee Inter-Allied supply procedures.²⁹ The secretary then wrote to Pershing that, “In effect this amounts to a present approval of our program with the reservation that in view of the constantly changing situation we are all free to meet any new crisis should it arise.”³⁰

Hoping to finalize the agreement, Baker went to meet with Allied Commander-in-Chief Foch several days later. Buoyed by positive reports from the front and behind the German lines, Foch was in a fine mood to receive the American secretary of war. Recalling Bliss’s cable about the need for Foch’s support to press for additional tonnage from the British, Baker asked the Marshal how many American divisions he believed necessary to win the war.

“Forty!” Foch replied.

“I think I must have misunderstood the Marshal,” Baker said to the interpreter. “Will you repeat the question and make sure he understands that I am referring to divisions to be in France for use in 1919?”

When the interpreter repeated the question, Foch replied: “I understood the Secretary, and my answer is forty.”

“But, Marshal, there are nearly that many divisions in France now, and General Pershing is urging upon me the necessity for 100 divisions in 1919.”

“I win the War with forty,” Foch replied.³¹

Amazed, Baker cabled Wilson that the “Army has renewed the attack and is progressing. Tonnage situation favorably cleared up.”³² Apparently mollified by Foch’s pronouncement, Baker returned to the United States several days later. However, he failed to discuss Foch’s assessment of the situation with Pershing and allowed the AEF to continue its calls for strict adherence to the 80-division plan. Even if the secretary had said something, it is doubtful that Pershing would have put much faith in Foch’s claims. The Allied commander-in-chief could afford to be optimistic; Pershing could not. If the war continued into 1919, it would fall on the AEF to carry the load against the Germans, and it was Pershing’s responsibility to make sure that they were ready. Foch could make whatever claims he wanted, but Pershing remained committed to building up the AEF, which required additional shipping. The AEF commander continued to call for increases

in the shipping program throughout October, but as the negotiations for an armistice grew more serious, the Allies refused to give any further aid to the Americans.³³

The Transportation Department

While Baker dealt with the shipping situation, Harbord looked to other factors contributing to the delays in the SOS. In addition to the difficulties facing him at the docks due to an acute lack of personnel, Harbord found serious problems in transporting supplies from the coast to the supply depots and beyond. Under the organization set by General Orders No. 44 the previous March, responsibility over supplies between the ports and the regulating stations fell upon the Commanding General, Services of Supply. But Harbord did not control the rail lines. Instead, administration for the American rail system in France fell to the Transportation Department, which operated under a convoluted mixture of authority between the CGSOS and G-4 GHQ.³⁴

At the ports, the Transportation Department representative, known as the Transport Officer, oversaw the unloading of ships and forwarding of cargoes to their destinations. The Section Base Commander, the official SOS representative, had responsibility for the labor and stevedore troops when they were not actually employed in unloading ships or loading trains. Consequently, the men passed between two separate commands every day on the journey to and from work. The base commander paid little attention to how well the men worked when not under his purview, and the transport officer cared little for what the men did during their off hours. That the two were inextricably linked did not factor into the equation. On personal observations of this

system, both Harbord and Pershing found it flawed. They believed making the Transport Officer part of the Section Commander's staff a more workable setup, and made the change that August.³⁵

This apparently simple solution ran into a larger problem: the quasi-independent status of the Transportation Department and its head, Brigadier General William W. Atterbury. Vice-President of the Pennsylvania Railroad before the war, Atterbury joined the AEF in September 1917 as Director General of Transportation [DGT] at Pershing's request. Inspired by the British model, Pershing believed the complex rail system the AEF needed required an expert to run it, and Atterbury fit the bill perfectly. Pershing found him "very familiar with the [AEF] situation, and his personality, his force, his grasp of the difficulties of the task and his willingness to undertake it appealed to me at once."³⁶ Anxious to do his part, Atterbury approached his new position like any other business enterprise, running the AEF rail system like a commercial operation. But the needs of a military rail network were not the same as a civilian one. Transport schedules needed to be malleable to adjust to changing conditions at the front and had to comply with the tenets of military procedure. Atterbury's position made it difficult for officers in the AEF to make changes on the run. The DGT reported directly to Pershing and could not be ordered to change the system by anyone but the AEF commander.

When Pershing began reorganizing the AEF's rear in December of 1917, he formalized Atterbury's position as DGT, giving him "charge of the unloading of freight and troops from ships at points of debarkation and of the transportation of all troops and supplies by rail." In addition, Atterbury was responsible for the "construction, maintenance and operation of such railroad lines and rolling stock as come within

American control.”³⁷ Pershing later put the entire Army Transport Service in Europe under the DGT’s control.³⁸ This made the DGT an integral part of the American supply chain, but he was not under the authority of the Commanding General, Line of Communications. This system continued until the overall reorganization of the AEF with the issuance of General Orders No. 31. Bending to Atterbury’s critics, the new organization brought the Transportation Department into the Service of Utilities under the coordinating authority of the CGSOS.³⁹ As described earlier, responsibility for unloading freight shifted to the CGSOS in March, but the DGT still oversaw the daily operation of the stevedores and other dock-workers. In July, the Transportation Department was finally amalgamated into the SOS on equal standing with the other supply services. But instead of supervising its activities, Kernan established a board to settle differences between the SOS and Transportation Department. Both Kernan and Atterbury, acting as “co-equal authorities,” selected their own representatives, while GHQ supplied a third member. Consequently, control over rail transportation remained split between competing authorities.⁴⁰

When Harbord learned of the board soon after taking over the SOS he could hardly believe Kernan’s complicity in giving away his own authority. Harbord did not intend to emulate his predecessor’s example, and moved to have the board abolished. He brought Atterbury and his staff in for a series of conferences in an effort to gain their support for the change. This proved a challenge, for the transportation officers believed that increased military oversight would impede their work. Harbord explained that he had no desire to interfere with how they did their jobs, much like he did not interfere with his staff surgeon’s treatment of patients, but he needed to supervise and coordinate their

activities with the rest of his command. After lengthy discussions, the CGSOS finally convinced the railroad men to give his system a try. As Harbord predicted, it proved more efficient in the long run.⁴¹

Conflicting authorities and personnel shortages were not the only problems plaguing the Transportation Corps that fall, however. Nor were they the most troubling. Of much greater concern was the lack of adequate rolling stock. Since the AEF first arrived in France it struggled to secure a sufficient number of locomotives and rail cars to support the coming divisions. This was added to the very real difficulties of operating in a foreign country with its own rail system that proved very different from the one the Americans were used to.⁴² Delays in developing a shipping program for the American buildup in France made it impossible to produce valid estimates regarding equipment requirements. Securing tonnage to transport locomotives and rolling stock proved equally difficult, and competition with the War Department added another obstacle for the AEF in securing rolling stock. When Pershing and the War Department settled on a rough plan for eighty divisions in Europe by June of 1919, the deputy Director General of Transportation for the AEF, William Wilgus, studied the equipment presently available and made requests for additional materials to support the anticipated buildup. He found that a force of four and a half million men required 4,000 locomotives and 98,000 cars to handle troops movements and supply. After further analysis, these numbers rose to 5,011 and 127,033 respectively.⁴³ Charles Dawes did his best to secure equipment in Europe to take the pressure off oceanic shipping, borrowing several hundred locomotives from Belgium, but the well was quickly running dry. Any future increases in the AEF's equipment would have to come from the United States.⁴⁴

In the face of frequent requests for additional locomotives and cars, the War Department simply could not keep pace with the demand. By the signing of the Armistice, shortages were reaching epidemic levels. To adequately move and supply an army of two and a half million men, the Transportation Corps required 1,833 locomotives and 43,919 cars.⁴⁵ As of 11 November, however, the AEF had in service only 1,329 locomotives (344 of them from Belgium) and 14,042 cars. Wilgus explained later that “in the closing month of the War, the American Army had at its service in France only 73 per cent of its locomotive, and 32 per cent of its car, requirements to the then existing front.”⁴⁶

These numbers paint an alarming picture of the AEF and its problems with rolling stock. The lack of trains meant that troop movement and supply had to rely more heavily on motor and animal transport, which also suffered serious shortages. That the AEF managed to keep supplies moving during combat operations at St. Mihiel and the Meuse-Argonne is a testament to the men serving in it. Though food supplies and artillery ammunition occasionally ran low, the shortages did not have any measurable impact on combat operations. But managerial ability and belt-tightening could not make up for a lack of equipment indefinitely. Cracks were already appearing in the dam during the Meuse-Argonne offensive in October. If the war lasted into 1919 the situation would only grow worse, as the arrival of new troops and the evacuation of wounded would put additional strains on the already over-taxed transportation system. Thankfully for those involved, the war ended before the entire system collapsed under the pressure, but that does not negate the fact that the AEF supply and transport system was fast-approaching a breaking point in October of 1918.

SOS v. G-4, GHQ

As the supply system in the AEF began to break down after the formation of the American First Army and the launching of combat operations, frustrations began to mount in the SOS that eventually led to increased tension with GHQ. The irritation of SOS officers was directed mainly at the use of regulating stations in the AEF's supply system. Borrowed from the French, the regulating station was a stopping point for all supplies heading to the front. Representing the transition between the Zone of the Interior and the Zone of the Advance in the AEF's logistical framework, it also marked the end of Harbord's direct authority over the SOS. Once supplies reached the regulating station, their management fell under the purview of the Regulating Officer. A member of the Fourth Section, General Staff (G-4), it was his duty to give "all orders for the railway movement of troops and supplies within the sector served by his regulating section, and to follow the movements through to completion."⁴⁷ Requests for troops and supplies emanating from the Zone of the Advance (or Zone of the Armies in the French system) went to the Regulating Officer, who oversaw their fulfillment. This included the daily automatic supplies for the front line units at the front, and any specific requests that emerged as units engaged in combat operations. To keep pace with the fluid nature of life at the front, the Regulating Officer stayed in constant contact with the corps and division commanders in his zone and the staff at GHQ. He also stayed in reasonably close contact with the various elements of the SOS, but did not take orders from them.⁴⁸

As organizations go, the regulating station worked passably well. It provided a point of contact between the unit commanders and the AEF's supply network, bringing a level of elasticity and mobility to the system. But for Harbord and the rest of the SOS, the regulating stations proved a continual source of irritation. When he originally signed off on the system as AEF chief of staff, Harbord had to think in terms of the AEF as a whole, and did not comprehend the particular difficulties General Orders No. 31 and 44 inflicted on the SOS. After becoming CGSOS, however, these difficulties became perfectly clear. In Harbord's view, the regulating stations "broke the line of necessary control over rolling stock sent to the Advance Section, S.O.S., jeopardizing our entire supply situation in the later months of our fighting at the front." It was not the regulating stations' existence that bothered Harbord, but rather the transfer of authority over supplies from the SOS to G-4, GHQ. Thus, six months after overseeing the creation of the system, Harbord now found himself in direct opposition to the view of supply held by GHQ AEF.⁴⁹

In regard to control over supply matters in the AEF, Colonel William D. Conner, assistant chief of staff, Fourth Section [G-4], General Staff, wrote after the war that "two schools of thought" emerged in the AEF concerning supply authority.⁵⁰ The first of these "schools," herein called the SOS System, represented Harbord and Hagood's conception of supply. First proposed in the Hagood Board Report the previous March, the plan called for the regulating officer at Is-sur-Tille, then the main regulating station in the AEF, to be brought under the authority of the CGSOS. Furthermore, it advised a distinct separation between the Service of the Rear [or SOS], and General Headquarters. Much like the current system, the board recommended that all planning and policy-making

affecting military strategy and international relations originate with G.H.Q., but in supply matters, it stated that “plans and policies affecting procurement, supply, and transportation should be initiated in the S.O.R.”⁵¹ Essentially, the plan called for transferring responsibility for administration and supply (G-1 and G-4) to the SOS at Tours while leaving control over intelligence, operations, and training (G-2, G-3, and G-5) with GHQ at Chaumont. Though it divided the AEF into two distinct administrative organizations, the plan would create a unified supply system in France, controlling troop movements and supplies from the ports to the trenches.

The second school of thought on supply, which Conner called the “Pershing system,” was the one actually implemented in the AEF. As outlined in General Order No. 31, the Commanding General, Services of Supplies occupied a position under Pershing’s direct authority, as expressed through the chief of staff, AEF.⁵² While this seemingly placed the CGSOS on a par with the five heads of the General Staff sections, General Orders No. 44 offered a clarification. It established that the CGSOS was responsible for procurement, care and storage, and distribution of supplies to the storage depots, but stated that “the general supervision of all these functions is exercised by the General Staff, as a rule through G-4 thereof.”⁵³ Thus, the CGSOS fell under the direct supervision of the assistant chief of staff, G-4. But exactly what that entailed remained unclear. Did it make G-4 ultimately responsible for supply, or did G-4 only oversee policy decisions, leaving supply operations to the CGSOS? This air of ambiguity left room for the members of the SOS, especially Johnson Hagood, to balk at G-4’s involvement in supply matters as an interruption in SOS authority.

Soon after Harbord took over as CGSOS, Hagood seized the opportunity to push for the split GHQ he championed six months before. He called for the establishment of a GHQ for operations and training at Chaumont and one at Tours for supply. Such an organization would elevate Harbord, as CGSOS, to a co-equal position with the AEF chief of staff. "The C.-in-C. should look directly to General Harbord in all matters of supply," Hagood wrote, "in the same manner and to the same extent that he looks directly to [Chief of Staff] McAndrew in all matters of operations and training. There should be no intermediary between General Harbord and the C.-in-C. any more than there is between General McAndrew and the C.-in-C."⁵⁴ Though Harbord initially rejected the suggestion as not representing Pershing's wishes, he eventually came to support the idea.

The difference of opinion came to a head in early October when Hagood received an advance copy of a general order under discussion at GHQ. Known hereafter as Moseley's Order for its author, Brigadier General George Van Horn Moseley, who replaced Conner as assistant chief of staff, G-4, the previous summer, the order proposed to transfer overall responsibility for supply in the AEF from the CGSOS to G-4, GHQ.⁵⁵ With Harbord away touring the SOS, Hagood immediately made copies of the proposed general order for distribution amongst the bureau chiefs and prepared two memoranda outlining the alternative scheme he had proposed in August. When Harbord returned several days later, he sat in on a conference of the bureau chiefs and the SOS general staff as they discussed the situation. Directed by Hagood, the conferees came down unanimously in opposition to Moseley's Order, and stated a preference for Hagood's plan should a change be deemed necessary. Their solidarity impressed Harbord, and though he did not support Hagood's plan in its entirety, he believed the idea had merit.⁵⁶

After the conference, Harbord composed a long telegram to General McAndrew expressing SOS concerns on the subject:

[The proposed order] confuses and divides responsibility; gives authority without responsibility in some cases, and holds Staff Departments and the S.O.S. generally responsible at the same time it curtails our authority. It is an actual reversal of the Commander-in-Chief's policy announced in August of throwing greater amount of responsibility with commensurate authority to Services of Supply. It reduces S.O.S. to mere unloading and forwarding agents from port to regulating stations and lends itself to the attempt already made to attach us to the War Department instead of to the Commander-in-Chief [a la the Goethals Proposal]. We are a unit in believing that the time has come when the activities of G-1 and probably G-4 should pass to the Services of Supply. We are in agreement to an alternative proposition which we believe will preserve the control desired by General Moseley and at the same time retain to S.O.S. the authority which should go with the responsibility for which, notwithstanding the General Staff control, the Services of Supply must ultimately answer at the bar of public opinion in the Army.⁵⁷

As he awaited a response from GHQ, Harbord forwarded Pershing a rumor that the Goethals Proposal was not yet dead. He described a supposed conversation between Chief of Staff March and General Goethals in which March stated, "By God, I have not

given up. I will put it over yet.”⁵⁸ Whether intended to reinvigorate Pershing’s distrust of the chief of staff, or to hasten a decision on the proposed general order is unclear. Whatever the motive, no response was forthcoming, and Harbord decided to make his objections to Moseley’s Order directly to the commander-in-chief. With Hagood in tow, the CGSOS made his way to Ligny on 28 October, which was serving as Pershing’s advance command center during the Meuse-Argonne offensive. Finding the AEF commander absent, Harbord held a conference with McAndrew, Moseley, Fox Conner, and Brigadier General LeRoy Eltinge, the deputy chief of staff, AEF. During the meeting, Harbord and Hagood vigorously argued their position against chopping off the SOS at the regulating stations, but could not convince their GHQ counterparts. Hagood believed the officers had already made up their minds, and blamed Moseley in particular for swaying their judgement. Sensing that he was fighting a losing battle, Harbord agreed to the order generally, “but a considerable amount of revision would be necessary.”⁵⁹

Believing the matter tabled for the present, Harbord was shocked two days later when he heard that a decision had already been reached. The source of this information was a letter from Moseley to Charles Dawes, stating that he had “just finished reading proof on our new order.”⁶⁰ Considerably agitated, Harbord cabled McAndrew to express his displeasure. If the report turned out to be correct, Harbord maintained it was not only a discourtesy, “but a very grave defect in our organization” when “a distant staff officer” could draw up an order completely changing the CGSOS’s command without any notification.⁶¹ McAndrew passed the telegram along to a stunned Moseley, who immediately sent a reply telegram to Harbord confessing the error in choosing the word “proof” instead of “revision” in his letter to Dawes. The matter was still under review,

Moseley explained, and no decision would be made without sufficient consultation with the SOS. "I would much rather lose my position here than your friendship," Moseley told Harbord, and he regretted that the misunderstanding "should have plunged me into difficulties with you."⁶² In this instance Harbord's reputation and position amongst the AEF hierarchy worked in the SOS's favor. Had it been anyone else, it is doubtful that Moseley would have been as concerned about ruffled feathers, but he respected Harbord and did not want to offend Pershing's former chief of staff. Apparently mollified, Harbord wrote to Moseley that, "There is no-one in the A.E.F. for whose ability and squareness [sic] I have a higher respect than yours." However, Harbord still had serious concerns regarding the proposed order, and expressed his desire that the officers at GHQ hold off on deliberations until Hagood and Colonel Henry C. Smither, the head of G-4, SOS, could make it to Chaumont. He also admitted that the constant reminders from GHQ that General Staff control needed to be maintained made him a little tired. "It always implies that there is no General Staff except that at G.H.Q.," Harbord explained, "while I know that I have here a General Staff as sincerely devoted to the General Staff idea; as patriotic and high-minded; and in the case of some of its members, as able as any of the men who wear the same insignia on their collar at G.H.Q."⁶³

Hoping to finally settle the dispute between SOS and GHQ, Harbord sent Hagood to Chaumont on 3 November to work with Moseley on revising the proposed general order. What resulted clearly represented Hagood's organization model. The new draft created two Chiefs of Staff, one for operations and one for supply along the lines of the organization originally suggested in the Hagood Board Report.⁶⁴ Hopeful that he could

gain approval for the revision, Hagood returned to Tours and composed an extensive attack against the original proposal, which he sent to Pershing.⁶⁵

The same day, however, LeRoy Eltinge told Pershing that, “I don’t think that there is any chance of General Harbord and General Moseley coming to an absolute agreement. – In my opinion, the system now in operation is working reasonably well. . . . Considering all the circumstances, I believed it would be better to file the papers and take no action for the present.”⁶⁶ Moseley echoed Eltinge’s sentiments. He was tired of having to “waste time to consider attacks from the rear,” and believed they should seek to improve efficiency in the SOS through other means. When Pershing finally reappeared at GHQ and asked what all the fuss was about, Moseley simply advised that they shelve the order. Consumed with the armistice negotiations, Pershing was more than happy to put an end to the infighting between Tours and Chaumont. He agreed to abandon the order and returned to planning for the end of the war, which came on 11 November when the Armistice ended the fighting.⁶⁷

Although the dispute over Moseley’s Order ended as much to do about nothing, it shows the level of confusion and frustration over supply that gripped the AEF in the final months of the war. Eighteen months after arriving in Europe, the Americans were still trying to get their supply system worked out. Even with an effective administrator like Harbord in command of the SOS, the organization could not overcome serious deficiencies in personnel and material. Add to this the confusion surrounding conflicting authority between the CGSOS and G-4, GHQ, and the system lurked ever closer to collapse in the fall of 1918. That the collapse was ultimately prevented by the Armistice should not overshadow the seriousness of the situation afflicting the AEF. Had the war

continued into 1919, it is doubtful that the AEF could have continued combat operations on the Western Front. In all probability, Pershing would have had to halt his armies and hold the line until his supply service could catch up, costing an unknown number of American lives in the meantime. As it was, Pershing, Harbord, and the rest of the AEF could bask in their accomplishments while relegating the problems to the judgment of history.

Notes

- ¹ James G. Harbord, *The American Army in France 1917-1919* (Boston: Brown, Little and Company, 1936), 400; James A. Huston, *The Sinews of War: Army Logistics 1775-1953* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1966), 365; Leonard P. Ayres, *The War With Germany: A Statistical Summary* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1919), 15.
- ² Confidential Cable, P-1124-S, 15 May 1918, *United States Army in the World War, 1917-1919* 17 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1948), 2:403-04. [Hereafter cited as *USAWW*.]
- ³ If one takes into account reductions in all auxiliary troops, such as artillery and aviation allotments, the total shortage for May and June totaled 393,000. Johnson Hagood, *The Services of Supply: A Memoir of the Great War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1927), 301-02.
- ⁴ SOS Gen. File: 37: Telegram, James McAndrew to CGSOS, 24 July 1918, *USAWW*, 2:547-48.
- ⁵ James G. Harbord, *Leaves From a War Diary* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1925), 347.
- ⁶ These figures are based upon internal numbers for the GHQ AEF, establishing SOS deficiencies at 82,794 as of 1 October 1918. G-3, GHQ, AEF: Fldr. 1309: Memorandum for the Chief of Staff, 29 September 1918, *USAWW*, 2:614-16.
- ⁷ Harbord to Pershing, 19 August 1918, Box 87, John J. Pershing Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.
- ⁸ Harbord, *War Diary*, 346-47.
- ⁹ Hagood to Harbord, 7 August 1918, reprinted in Hagood, *Services of Supply*, 272-78.
- ¹⁰ General Orders No. 120, 24 July 1918, *USAWW*, 16:393.
- ¹¹ Harbord to Pershing, 13 September 1918, reprinted in Johnson Hagood Diary, 13 September 1918, Box 1, Johnson Hagood Papers, MHI; Pershing recognized the SOS's contribution to the First Army's success, and wrote as much to Harbord, asking that he "extend to [the men in the SOS] our hearty congratulations and say that they share the success with us." Pershing to Harbord, 23 September 1918, Box 87, Pershing Papers, LC.
- ¹² Diary entry, 19 September 1918, Hagood Diary, Box 1, Hagood Papers, MHI
- ¹³ Fox Conner to McAndrew, 15 September 1918, and McAndrew to Conner, 16 September 1918, *USAWW*, 2:602-04; Conner's suggestion was in addition the current plan to suspend shipments of combat divisions for October. G-3, GHQ, AEF: Fldr. 1309: Memorandum for the Chief of Staff, 29 September 1918, *USAWW*, 2:614-16.
- ¹⁴ Confidential Cable No. 343-L.R., Pershing to Harbord, 21 October 1918, Box 11, James G. Harbord Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.
- ¹⁵ Harbord to Pershing: Telegram: 21 October 1918, Box 11, Harbord Papers, LC.
- ¹⁶ Harbord, *American Army*, 401.
- ¹⁷ There was some confusion on this number, however, as Pershing took it to mean eighty *combat* division while the War Department planned for eighty *total* divisions. Tasker Bliss to War Department, Cable No. 180-S, 14 August 1918, SWC: 315-3: Cablegram, *USAWW*, 2:571-73; Also see Chapter 18 in Donald Smythe, *Pershing: General of the Armies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 142-51.

¹⁸ David Lloyd George to M. Clemenceau, 2 August 1918, reprinted in Pershing to Peyton March, Cable: P-1567-S, 7 August 1918, *USAWW*, 2:566-67.

¹⁹ Pershing to War Department, Cable: P-1569-S, 7 August 1918, *USAWW*, 2:567.

²⁰ Pershing to War Department, Cable: P-1604-S, 16 August 1918, *USAWW*, 2:576.

²¹ March to Pershing, Cable: A-1859-R, 20 August 1918, *USAWW*, 2:581.

²² The Allies agreed to provide 200,000 dead-weight tons for American shipping in September and October. The United States had also seized several German ships and converted them to troop and cargo carriers, adding 300,000 tons to the American shipping fleet, and requisitioned 87 Dutch vessels sitting in American harbors, which added another 332,000 tons to the American total, but the loss of 870,000 gross tons of Allied and neutral shipping to German submarines in 1917 meant that these gains were not as significant as they appear at first glance. Construction projects promised to add 8,500,000 gross tons to the American merchant fleet, but delivery was not set to begin until March of 1919. Huston, *Sinews of War*, 350-52.

²³ For a description of the total buildup of the American trans-Atlantic fleet in terms of deadweight tons see Diagram 14, Ayers, *The War With Germany*, 39.

²⁴ Tasker Bliss to War Department, 14 August 1918, *USAWW*, 2:571-72.

²⁵ Baker to F.G. Goff, 16 August 1918, reprinted in Daniel R. Beaver, *Newton D. Baker and the American War Effort 1917-1919* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 172.

²⁶ Harbord to Pershing, 23 September 1918, Box 11, Harbord Papers, LC.

²⁷ Baker confessed his intentions to the war correspondent, Frederick Palmer, who also served as the secretary's biographer. Frederick Palmer, *Newton D. Baker: America at War* 2 vols. (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1931), 2:369.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:343.

²⁹ The boards were to address issues concerning war, shipping, munitions, food, and finance, and would permanently meet in Paris. Beaver, *Newton D. Baker and the American War Effort*, 176.

³⁰ Baker to Pershing, 2 October 1918, Box 19, Pershing Papers, LC.

³¹ The entire conversation is described in Palmer, *Newton D. Baker*, 2:348.

³² Baker to Woodrow Wilson, 6 October 1918, quoted in Beaver, *Newton D. Baker and the American War Effort*, 176.

³³ For a long discussion of shipping problems, see Note 2, Harbord, *American Army*, 427-28.

³⁴ General Orders No. 44, 23 March 1918, *USAWW*, 16:249-56.

³⁵ General Orders No. 105, 28 June 1918, *USAWW*, 16:363-66; Harbord, *American Army*, 387; Hagood, *Services of Supply*, 221-35; Smythe, *Pershing*, 165.

³⁶ John J. Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War* 2 vols. (New York: F.A. Stokes, 1931), 1:156; Harbord, *American Army*, 142-43; Frank E. Vandiver, *Black Jack: The Life and Times of John J. Pershing* 2 vols. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1977), 2:779-80; Hagood, *Services of Supply*, 75.

³⁷ General Orders No. 73, 12 December 1917, *USAWW*, 16:136-40.

³⁸ General Orders No. 78, 18 December 1917, *USAWW*, 16:146-47.

³⁹ General Orders No. 31. 16 February 1918, *USAWW*, 16:216-25.

⁴⁰ When Harbord took command of the SOS the board consisted of Brigadier General Arthur Johnson (SOS), Lieutenant Colonel Henry M Waite (Transportation Service), and Major Samuel P. Wetherill (of the Quartermaster Corps, but assigned as the GHQ representative). Harbord, *American Army*, 388; Hagood, *Services of Supply*, 212.

⁴¹ Harbord, *American Army*, 389-90; Diary Entry, 26-28 August 1918, Hagood Diary, Box 1, Hagood Papers, MHI. Hagood initially viewed the solution to the problem of dual authority at the ports as less than adequate, saying that Harbord's orders on the subject "[did] not add anything to the present situation. In fact, I think it rather weakens it." However, he eventually came around to supporting the plan, even assuming some of the credit for its implementation. Hagood, *Services of Supply*, 232-33.

⁴² For example, the simple task of coupling cars together was a challenge, as the French used different couplers than the Americans and were also accustomed to handling cars weighing only six tons. The AEF used cars weighing between fifteen and twenty tons. This made French estimates for speed and momentum incorrect, and resulted in a series of crashes on the rails before the problem was corrected. *Ibid.*, 237-38.

⁴³ William Wilgus, *Transporting the A.E.F. in Western Europe 1917-1919* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), 282-85. For a thorough examination of the locomotive and railcar situation in the AEF, see Chapter XIV "Locomotives and Cars."

⁴⁴ Charles G. Dawes, *A Journal of the Great War* 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1921), 1:62-67; The Belgians eventually loaned a total of 425 locomotives to the AEF, with only 344 of these actually seeing service. Wilgus, *Transporting the A.E.F.*, 282, 288.

⁴⁵ This did not included the requirements for supporting the Army as it advanced into German territory.

⁴⁶ Wilgus, *Transporting the A.E.F.*, 288.

⁴⁷ General Orders No. 44, 23 March 1918, *USAWW*, 16:249-57.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*; J.R. Kilpatrick, *The Regulating Station*, 3 December 1936, Army War College Curricular Archives, MHI.

⁴⁹ Harbord, *American Army*, 365. Harbord notes that when the suggestions of the Hagood Board, the basis for the present supply system, were put into effect, it was done "in such an imperfect way that much of their purpose was frustrated." A situation Harbord deemed "unfortunate." He did, however, acknowledge that William D. Conner, Assistant Chief of Staff, Fourth Section, General Staff (G-4), did not share this opinion.

⁵⁰ William D. Conner, *G-4, G.H.Q. and the S.O.S.*, 19 March 1936, Army War College Curricular Archives, MHI.

⁵¹ AG, GHQ, AEF: 341: Board Report, "Further Proceedings of the Hagood Board," 1 March 1918, *USAWW*, 2:224-26.

⁵² See Organizational Table of GHQ AEF, General Orders No. 31, 16 February 1918, *USAWW*, 2:216-25.

⁵³ General Orders No. 44, 23 March 1918, *USAWW*, 2:249-57.

⁵⁴ Hagood to Harbord, Official Telegram, 1 August 1918, reprinted in Hagood, *The Services of Supply*, 266-67.

⁵⁵ Despite the best efforts of the author, the exact text of Moseley's Order, if it still exists, remains lost amongst the mountainous material in the National Archives. As a result, I have had to infer the nature of the order's provisions. For this I have relied on the material from the following sources. SOS-GHQ Correspondence Cables, Entry 6, RG 120, NARA; "Memorandum: Conference between Gen. Moseley and Col. Payot (September 5)" C-in-C: Fldr. 175: Memorandum, 5 September 1918, *USAWW*, 2:595-97; "Miscellaneous Papers on the Organization of the A.E.F.," Box 5, George Van Horn Moseley Papers, Manuscript Division, LC; Hagood, *Services of Supply*, 321-34.

⁵⁶ Hagood, *The Services of Supply*, 321-26. Portions of the two memoranda, dated 17 October and 19 October, respectively, are included in Hagood's text.; Diary entry, 21 October 1918, Hagood Diary, Box 1, Hagood Papers, MHI.

⁵⁷ Harbord to McAndrew, Telegram, 21 October 1918, reprinted in Hagood, *The Services of Supply*, 326-27.

⁵⁸ Harbord to Pershing, 25 October 1918, Box 11, Harbord Papers, LC.

⁵⁹ LeRoy Eltinge to Pershing, Memorandum, 6 November 1918, Entry 6, RG 120, NARA; For Hagood's reaction to the meeting see Hagood, *The Services of Supply*, 328; Diary Entries, 28 and 29 October 1918, Hagood Diary, Box 1, Hagood Papers, MHI.

⁶⁰ In fact, the letter stated that Moseley had "just finished *proof reading* [emphasis added] our new order on staff arrangements, supply, transportation, etc., and we hope to have it in print in a few days." Whether made a mistake when reading the order, or there was simply an error in his telegram, the fact remained that he believed the order was already being prepared for Pershing's signature. Moseley to Charles Dawes, 26 October 1918, and Harbord to McAndrew, Telegram, 31 October 1918, Entry 6, RG 120, NARA.

⁶¹ Harbord to McAndrew, Telegram, 31 October 1918, Entry 6, RG 120, NARA.

⁶² Moseley to Harbord, 31 October 1918, Box 8, Harbord Papers, LC.

⁶³ Harbord to Moseley, 2 November 1918, Box 8, Harbord Papers, LC; Apparently the matter was settled, as least personally, for several days later Moseley wrote to Harbord expressing regret at Harbord's being turned down for promotion to Lieutenant General, suggesting that he take solace in having the single largest command in the AEF. "You certainly have made a great impression not only as to the efficiency of the S.O.S., but as to its esprit." Moseley to Harbord, 8 November 1918, Box 2, Moseley Papers, LOC.

⁶⁴ A draft of the revised general order is in SOS-GHQ Correspondence Cables, Entry 6, RG 120, NARA.

⁶⁵ Attached to the letter were several letters from the bureau chiefs and heads of services in the SOS. Hagood to Pershing, 6 November 1918, *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Eltinge to Pershing, 6 November 1918, *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Moseley to Clarence C. Williams, 10 May 1928, Box 5, Moseley Papers, LC.

CHAPTER XIII
EPILOGUE / CONCLUSION

After the Armistice

The Armistice of 11 November 1918 ended the fighting in the First World War, but for the AEF Services of Supply, the conclusion of combat operations brought with it a new challenge: reversing the American mechanisms of supply and transport to return the American Expeditionary Forces to the United States. The turnaround would not be immediate, however, as General John J. Pershing deemed it necessary to keep a sizable portion of the AEF in Europe in case peace negotiations collapsed and the fighting began anew. He called for a slow reduction, leaving thirty American divisions in France until 1 February 1919, after which they would start returning to the United States in stages.¹ The SOS had to revise its supply requirements so that it could continue to support the American soldiers in Europe before they could return home, while at the same time eliminating excess materiel and settling up matters with its numerous construction projects and supply facilities. It was a difficult undertaking, as the Allies were no longer willing to contribute aid to the Americans, but instead looked to attend to their own affairs and begin rebuilding their countries after long years of war and sacrifice. But even still, a sense of relief and exuberance filtered through the former Allies.²

For Commanding General, Services of Supply James G. Harbord, demobilizing the AEF was simply another part of his wartime service, and he approached it with the same drive that he had shown over the past eighteen months. But while his daily

concerns centered on reversing the supply system, his thoughts started to shift to more intangible aspects of the postwar period. Although he had become increasingly irritated at GHQ's attitudes towards the SOS during the final months of the war, Harbord began returning to his old role as Pershing's principal advisor and supporter. In this regard, Harbord took it upon himself to make the AEF commander aware of potential threats emanating from the United States. He understood that peace brought with it an increase in political maneuvering amongst the participants, and he wanted to make sure that Pershing sufficiently protected himself against attack. Throughout March and April, Harbord warned Pershing of individuals and factions within the War Department who were actively working to tarnish the general's reputation.³ Harbord feared the emergence of a movement both at home and in Europe to lay upon Pershing all of the blame for the difficulties the AEF experienced during the last months of the war, with the ultimate goal being Pershing's removal from command. Harbord even went so far as to compose a type of "enemies list" from which attacks were likely to come. It included, but was not limited to, politicians, the War Department, the Administration, the bureau chiefs, and the Allies. Harbord pointed out that in all previous wars there had been a "scapegoat" made of someone in the military organization as being responsible for all of the failures incurred during the war, and he did not want Pershing to fall into such a scenario.⁴

In addition to advising Pershing on how to approach the demobilization period, Harbord worked to support the general on his own. When Secretary of War Newton Baker came to France in the spring of 1919, Harbord met with him and discussed Pershing's future. The secretary was worried about bad feelings developing between the members of the AEF and the rest of the Army, and hoped to prevent such a division.

Pershing's treatment upon his return to the United States would impact many in the AEF, and Baker confessed that he did not know what to do with the AEF commander once the AEF returned home. At this point Harbord suggested that the only logical position for him was Chief of Staff of the Army. Baker agreed to the logic, but could not decide what to do with the current chief of staff, General Peyton C. March. Harbord advised that March be made commander of the new army of occupation on the Rhine, an idea which Baker admitted had merit and agree to consider. The two men then parted with Harbord feeling reassured as to the secretary's continued support for Pershing and the AEF.⁵

Of course, as Harbord dealt with rumors, machinations and positioning for the postwar era, the soldiers continued to return home. By the end of May, over 1,250,000 men had departed Europe for the United States, leaving the AEF with only five divisions committed to occupation duty. With the duties of the SOS winding down, Pershing finally found the opportunity to bring Harbord back to Chaumont, again as AEF Chief of Staff.⁶ With most of the AEF's soldiers already gone, Harbord and Pershing mainly concerned themselves with ceremonial duties and recreation. Horseback riding, tennis and the like were the primary orders of the day as Chaumont was slowly drained of its personnel. The greatest thrill for Harbord came in late June when he accompanied Pershing to Paris to witness the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. The occasion also gave Harbord the chance to meet President Wilson, the only time he did so. The president thanked Harbord for his service and mentioned a plan to send him to Armenia as the head of an American mission. The idea did not sound very appealing to the AEF chief of staff, but he did not have time to dwell on it as events in Paris occupied most of his time. On 14 July, Bastille Day, he joined Pershing in the Grand Parade for the Allied

Victory down the *Champs Elysee*. Riding behind the AEF commander, Harbord took it all in with a sense of awe and wonder. "It was a sight never to be forgotten," he later wrote, "and in that historic setting never to be seen again."⁷

The days of revelry finally came to an end in August when Harbord received word that he would, in fact, head up the American mission to Armenia. More than a little annoyed at the assignment, Harbord busied himself selecting a staff. He chose his old friend, Brigadier General Frank R. McCoy, as his chief of staff, and brought along Brigadier General George Van Horn Moseley to round out the GHQ AEF representatives.⁸ The duty came as a great disappointment to Harbord, for it prevented his returning to the United States with Pershing in early September. Before they parted, Pershing wrote a short but heartfelt letter of farewell to Harbord, saying:

Now that the time of your departure has arrived we are to separate officially, though only temporarily I hope, I can not let go without saying to you how much I appreciate your patriotism, your personal loyalty, and, above all, the highly efficient manner in which every duty has been performed by you. While of course this is a matter of record, I feel that I can not omit to say it to you in this way.

Personally it is difficult for me to say what fills my heart. Our relations in the great accomplishments of the American Expeditionary Forces, in which you have been my chief supporter, will always remain in my memory as one of the most precious souvenirs of my work at the head of the A.E.F.

I thank you again and again with all the feeling that I possess and wish you, as you already know, all the success in the world that I am sure is to be yours in the future. I only hope that we may be thrown in together again for as many years as possible in whatever work our government may see fit to assign us.⁹

With that the two men parted, ending an incredibly effective partnership that lasted more than two years. It would be another two years before they would be brought together again officially. In the meantime, Harbord served as head of the Mission to Armenia, and then as commander of the skeletonized 2nd Division at Fort Travis, Texas.¹⁰ Pershing spent the years fighting over the postwar structure of the Army and biding his time while Baker decided what to do with him. The general would have to wait until the next administration to become chief of staff, for Baker refused to push General March out of the War Department. Finally, in 1921, Pershing was appointed Army chief of staff by the new secretary of war, John W. Weeks.¹¹ One of Pershing's first orders of business was to recall Harbord from Texas to serve as deputy chief of staff, reuniting the two men with the task of directing the War Department.

Although Pershing had long desired the position of Army chief of staff, once he attained it he spent little time attending to his duties. One reason for this was the fact that after the excitement of commanding the American Expeditionary Forces, life behind a desk had little appeal for Pershing. A second, and more compelling explanation for his distaste for Washington, was that the General Staff and War Department that he and Harbord took over was very different than the one that General March had created during

the war. During the military emergency, March had finally broken the will of the bureau chiefs and firmly established the General Staff as the operating head of the U.S. Army. In the years since, however, Congress returned to its prewar distrust of the General Staff and, with the support of the revitalized bureau chiefs, stripped the General Staff of much of its power. When Pershing took over in 1921, he found that the General Staff no longer controlled the daily administration of the army, but was reduced to a planning organization. Hoping to make the best of the situation, Pershing tapped Harbord to head up a board to conduct a thorough evaluation and reorganization of the General Staff, which he did with a vengeance. As though seeking to wipe away General March's imprint on the War Department, the Harbord Board scrapped March's wartime organization and replaced it with one based upon the G system utilized by the AEF General Staff. The new system consisted of four branches (G-1: Personnel; G-2: Intelligence; G-3: Operations and Training; G-4: Supply) and a War Plans Division. As another swipe at March, the board established that in the next war, the chief of staff would take the field as the military commander, and the deputy chief of staff would remain behind to run the War Department as a subordinate to the field commander. The system remained in place until General George C. Marshall reorganized the War Department as chief of staff at the beginning of the Second World War.¹²

With the reorganization of the General Staff completed, Harbord began to tire of life in Washington. Though he was presumed to be the likely choice to succeed Pershing as Army chief of staff when the general retired, Harbord was weary of battling with a Congress that was growing increasingly hostile to the military with each passing year. As fate would have it, a new opportunity presented itself in the private sector in 1922.

Owen D. Young, chairman of the board of the Radio Corporation of America (RCA), contacted Harbord to say that the company was looking for a new President and was interested in him for the position. After considering the offer, Harbord initially rejected it, saying:

A man's duty is not done until it is all done, and the difficulties that now confront the Army; the hostility of the appropriating authority; the consequent worry and uneasiness that beset our whole personnel, seen to call for me to stand by even at this sacrifice. I have the confidence of the service I am sure, and to set the example of quitting in the face of adverse conditions where I feel that I can be a steadying influence, even at such pecuniary advantage to myself, is something I cannot bring myself to do.¹³

Despite these strong words, the lure of a new challenge, a relief from the headaches of Congressional politics, and the promise of a considerably larger salary continued to nag at Harbord for the next few months. He also learned that, due to the reinstatement of the regulations preventing an officer from serving with the General Staff for more than four consecutive years, he was not eligible to succeed Pershing should the general decide to retire. Though Secretary Weeks hoped to have the law repealed, Harbord finally decided that he had had enough with Washington and accepted Young's offer in October. He officially retired from the U.S. Army, his home and career for

thirty-three years, on 29 December 1922. Three days later, he became president of RCA.¹⁴

For the Radio Corporation of America, Harbord's acceptance of the presidency was a godsend. During the search to fill the position, Young made up a list of all the qualities he wanted in the next president. It read as follows:

1st. He should be well known both nationally and internationally and he should have made a place for himself as would enable him to speak with authority either to foreign Governments or to our own Government.

2nd. He should not be previously identified with politics because that would mean party alignment and partisan reaction.

3rd. He should not have been identified with Wall Street and the money interests because it is important that the American people should accept the Radio Corporation as an organization for service to American interests both at home and abroad rather than as an organization primarily to make profit for Wall Street interests.

4th. He should have had administrative experience and if possible business experience.

5th. He should be well known in Washington and in position to appear before Committees of Congress and before the Departments and have his statements of facts accepted without question. It is particularly important in this connection that no one should be able to question his

Americanism such as they have done in several instances in the case of our international bankers.

6th. He should be a man of public position whom to attack would be bad politics rather than good politics.¹⁵

Harbord fit all of these requirements perfectly. His impeccable reputation as an army officer and his war record gave him the credentials to address any audience from a position of prestige. Over the next twenty-four years, he aided RCA General Manager David Sarnoff in establishing the company as one of the giants in the American communications industry. In 1930, Harbord succeeded Young as chairman of the board, where he remained until his retirement in 1947.

During his postwar career, Harbord enjoyed a quieter life, but one filled with its own rewards. He traveled the country making speeches on the war and the future of radio. He also took up writing, publishing his wartime letters to his wife, Emma, in 1925 under the title, *Leaves From a War Diary*. He delivered lectures at the Army War College, and worked to expand RCA's operations into South America. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, he became involved the Republican Party, serving as the chairman of the Metropolitan Republican Campaign Fund Committee in 1929 and president of the National Republican Club in 1931. He and Emma also bought a house in Rye, New York, on the outskirts of New York City, in 1929 where they lived the rest of their lives.¹⁶ Personally, Harbord made the most of his latter years, traveling the country and abroad with Emma whenever possible, and keeping up his wartime friendships, particularly with Charles Dawes. The two men engaged in a running correspondence,

often writing to each other monthly, between the end of the war and Harbord's death in 1947.

Harbord's last great battle came in the 1930s when he rose to General Pershing's defense in a scuffle between the former AEF commander and his old nemesis, Peyton March. The conflict dealt with each man's memoirs of his service in the war. Pershing's text, *My Experiences in the World War*, published in 1931, was a dry defense of the AEF and an indictment of the War Department. Though it did not attack March directly, it did level considerable criticism at his organization and its supposed lack of support of the AEF. March responded a year later with, *The Nation at War*, in which he minced no words and attacked Pershing directly. Harbord wanted to respond with a book of his own, but was talked out of it by Newton Baker. Hoping to quell the dispute before it got too much out of hand, Baker suggested that Harbord write on his own experiences in the war, and cover the entire history of the AEF. Harbord agreed, and eventually published *The American Army in France 1917-1919* in 1936. Though not a direct refutation of General March's book, it still contained numerous barbs directed at the former chief of staff. Though the adage states that "time heals all wounds," such was not the case between March, Pershing and Harbord, as the men continued to despise one another for the remainder of their lives.¹⁷

A year after publishing his book, Harbord's life took a tragic turn as his wife, Emma, died after a long bout with pneumonia. Harbord did the best that he could to carry on, eventually marrying again at the end of 1938. With his new wife, Anne Lee Brown, daughter of famed Civil War general Fitzhugh Lee, Harbord kept to his quiet life in Rye. In 1942, he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant general on the retired list in

recognition of his wartime service. He continued as chairman of the Radio Corporation until poor health forced his retirement in 1947. On the morning of 20 August, that same year, Harbord finally passed away at the age of 81. He and Emma were buried in Arlington Cemetery, in the section reserved for America's senior military officers.¹⁸

The Military Manager

When the United States entered the World War in April of 1917, it did so with an army wholly unsuited to the task of waging war on the scale and level of complexity demonstrated by the armies fighting on the Western Front. The U.S. Army, miniscule by European standards of the day, had neither the manpower, organizational structure, nor planning policies to effectively contribute to the war without a long process of mobilization and reorganization. Operating on a steep learning curve, the War Department and the American Expeditionary Forces had to develop the organization and infrastructure to build, train, transport, supply, and operate a massive army the likes of which had not been seen since the American Civil War. That they had to do this in conjunction with Allies and in opposition to an enemy already operating at a significantly higher level of combat effectiveness and administrative proficiency only added to the challenge. The saving grace for the U.S. Army was a small coterie of well-trained, highly skilled officers who, though lacking in combat experience, possessed a degree of professionalism and administrative experience that prepared them for the task ahead.

This group of officers represented a new entity in the American military. Just as the industrial revolution caused the development of a new managerial class in American

business, so to did industrialization necessitate a managerial revolution in the American army.¹⁹ Built around the educational system created by the Root Reforms, most notably the Staff College at Leavenworth, and the administrative experiences in the occupation of Cuba and the Philippines, the American officer corps had developed new skills to meet the challenges of administering an increasingly complex modern military organization.²⁰ One such example of this new breed of officer was Major General James G. Harbord. His experiences during the war, and his ability to meet the challenges of administering and coordinating a massive military organization thousands of miles from the United States, are indicative of the managerial skills needed by officers in a modern army.

Harbord's greatest contribution to the AEF during the war came in his first stint as chief of staff between May 1917 and May 1918. While General John J. Pershing established early on the type of officers he wanted at AEF General Headquarters (young, physically fit, efficient, and full of personal drive), it was Harbord who molded the early General Staff into a workable organization. He assumed the role of Pershing's general manager, acting as liaison between the AEF commander and the General Staff, and utilized his administrative skills, as well as his ability to build a professional camaraderie amongst the senior officers, to create an effective staff system at GHQ AEF. Whereas Pershing commanded with a martinet's demand for efficiency, Harbord inspired those around him on a personal and professional level. He encouraged the members of the AEF General Staff to think creatively and to try various organizational models to find the best possible solution to the numerous problems facing them. When it became obvious at the beginning of 1918 that the staff system was not working, he helped conduct a complete reorganization, culminating in the issuance of General Orders No. 31 and No.

44. But this was only a part of Harbord's importance as AEF chief of staff. As Pershing's primary subordinate, Harbord acted as a buffer between the AEF commander and the myriad details under his command. Harbord directed staff operations, coordinated the activities of the branches of the General Staff, and kept all but the most important matters off of Pershing's desk, allowing the general to focus his attention on building up the AEF and coordinating its activities with the Allies.²¹

Pershing also utilized Harbord as his principle advisor, bouncing ideas off the chief of staff to gain perspective as to their feasibility, and encouraged Harbord to do the same with the officers in the AEF General Staff. When Harbord finally left GHQ AEF for a field command, his replacement, Major General James A. McAndrew, altered the dynamic of the General Staff. Less of a driver than Harbord, McAndrew managed by committee, delegating authority to the heads of the General Staff's branches (the G's). The system worked, but it lost much of the unifying coherence that came with Harbord's managerial style. Without Harbord, a small group of officers coalesced around Pershing to form a type of advisory committee. Known as the "GHQ Clique," this group formulated policies in the AEF for everything from training schedules to transportation networks. That such a group could exist reflected McAndrew's penchant for delegating authority, and showed Harbord's ability to develop a highly competent staff that knew its duties and could handle tremendous amounts of responsibility and authority in his absence. Harbord was the glue that held the early staff together, and when he left the bonds he had helped to form remained.

And yet Harbord's importance to the American effort in France in the World War goes beyond his time at GHQ. The breadth of his duties in the AEF covered the three

principal aspects of military operations: administration, operations, and logistics. Though he spent most of his time directing the General Staff, Harbord's tenure in the line and as the commander of the AEF's logistical system, the Services of Supply, is no less important to a study of the American Expeditionary Forces. In the second of these areas, combat operations, Harbord's experiences illustrate the difficulties associated with implementing Pershing's goal of "open" warfare. As seen in his command of the 4th "Marine" Brigade at Belleau Wood and the 2nd Division at Soissons, Harbord struggled to grasp the changes that a modern, industrialized war required of military tactics. A fervent disciple of Pershing's conception of "open" warfare, Harbord did not display sufficient appreciation for the need for effective battlefield communication either between advancing infantry units, or between the infantry and the artillery. Like Pershing, Harbord also failed to appreciate the level of firepower needed to carry off a successful operation without incurring significant casualties. Thinking that the rifle and bayonet would continue to dominate the battle line, Harbord sent men forward without sufficient support from either the artillery or the infantry's machine-gun battalions. In this manner, Harbord allowed his distaste for the defensive tactics utilized by the Allies to blind him to the lethality of fire that these weapons could bring to the battlefield, with the result being a large number of American soldiers advancing into a maelstrom without the necessary support. That many of these men died unnecessarily as a result can be traced directly to Pershing's poor tactical emphasis.²²

Although Harbord proved himself a rather ineffective combat commander, this fact should not negatively color an assessment of his performance as an officer in the war. Harbord's main contribution to the American war effort came not in the field, but in

the management of the AEF's administrative and logistical systems. His taking over command of the latter, the SOS, came in direct response to a movement in the Wilson Administration and the War Department to separate the AEF's logistical service from Pershing's direct control and establish it as a coordinate command. Seeking to block the move, Pershing called upon Harbord, his most trusted and effective subordinate, to take the reigns of the SOS. Harbord did just that in August 1918, assuming the position of Commanding General, Services of Supply, which he held until the following May. Given the task of instilling the same drive and efficiency into the logistical services that he brought to the AEF General Staff, Harbord performed well. He worked to create a renewed sense of pride within the organization, one that reflected the valuable place the SOS occupied in the makeup of the AEF. He increased the authority of the CGSOS over AEF supply and worked to improve efficiency in the SOS's numerous facilities. That the SOS was approaching a total collapse at the time of the Armistice was not the result of any failing on Harbord's part, but rather indicative of the systemic problems afflicting American supply during the entire war. The Americans never had enough tonnage, personnel, or resources to handle the ever-increasing load of maintaining a force the size of the AEF. That the SOS performed as well as it did, especially after the Americans began conducting independent combat operations in the fall of 1918, is a testament to Harbord's managerial ability.

At the most basic levels, the United States was unprepared for war in the spring of 1917. Years of neglect and lack of viable threats to national security had resulted in the U.S. Army being rendered a functionally weak institution in comparison to its European counterparts. The reality of the American army entering the World War meant that it had

to make up for decades of inattention as rapidly as possible. The level of unpreparedness caused the Allied powers to push for the amalgamation of American manpower into their respective forces, which brought another challenge to Pershing and the American leadership. Whether amalgamation could have ended the war sooner is debatable, but the issue obscures the fact that the dearth of available tonnage, the lack of ready manpower reserves, and the small number of trained officers in the U.S. Army meant that it would take a considerable amount of time for the United States to contribute to the war in a meaningful way. Many of the problems and frustrations that plagued the AEF grew out of the fact that it simply did not have the time to do everything it needed to do in an efficient manner. That the Americans raised, transported, and marginally trained an army of two million men to France in eighteen months time was a remarkable achievement, and the AEF should be judged for that rather than what it failed to accomplish on the battlefield.

As for James Harbord and the officer corps he represented? The experience of the First World War shows that war is no longer simply about a contest of arms, but rather is a highly technical endeavor that requires officers and soldiers with abilities ranging far beyond marksmanship and close order drill. Along with men such as John J. Pershing, Johnson Hagood, James McAndrew, W.D. Conner, Dennis Nolan, and George Van Horn Moseley, Harbord proved that the United States possessed men capable of leading a modern military force. Though limited in number, these men evidenced the fact that the U.S. Army was producing officers on par with the best in the world. They were the forerunners, and mentors, of Dwight D. Eisenhower, George C. Marshall Jr., Douglas MacArthur, and George S. Patton, all titans of the Second World War. The officers of

the First World War set the tone for American soldiers in the twentieth century, and their experiences showed that in the industrial age, warfare had grown so complex that it required a group of officers with the managerial ability to administrate a large, highly bureaucratic military force. This was as true in the fields of France in 1918 as it is in the deserts of Iraq today, and James Harbord was one of the first and best examples of this new breed of officer.

Notes

¹ The AEF had forty-two divisions in France at the time of the Armistice. The number would drop to thirty in 1 February 1919, with twenty-five remaining until 1 March 1919, fifteen until 1 April 1919, and ten until 1 May 1919. James G. Harbord, *The American Army in France 1917-1919* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1936), 549; Leonard P. Ayers, *The War With Germany: A Statistical Summary* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1919), 32-33.

² Luckily for the Americans, the European desire to rebuild opened up markets for excess AEF material and they bought over 800 million dollars worth of AEF supplies over the next two years. Harbord, *American Army*, 547.

³ In one letter, Harbord relayed claims that Pershing was “cordially hated” by the men in the AEF, and that he was absent the night of the Armistice and could not order a cease-fire for the next day, causing the loss of many men. Harbord to Pershing, 10 March 1918, Box 11, Harbord Papers, LC.

⁴ Also included were the Transportation Department, the Navy, grouchies, men with a casual knowledge and connection to the AEF (such as Ambassador Sharpe or General Tasker Bliss), and proponents of defensive tactics. To protect himself against such attacks, Harbord advised Pershing to begin compiling material for an official text that would highlight the AEF’s achievements and explain away its deficiencies. Harbord to Pershing, 5 April 1919, Box 11, Harbord Papers, LC; This eventually took the form of Pershing’s *Final Report* on the AEF. See John J. Pershing, *Final Report of Gen. John J. Pershing: Commander-in-Chief American Expeditionary Forces* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Offices, 1920).

⁵ Harbord to Pershing, 30 April 1919, Box 88, John J. Pershing Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.

⁶ General Orders No. 83, AEF, 26 May 1919, Box 11, Harbord Papers, LC. Brigadier General William D. Conner took over as Commanding General, Services of Supply.

⁷ Harbord, *American Army*, 564. The Allies repeated the parade in London five days later, on 19 July 1919, this time with the Americans in the lead due to their alphabetical primacy.

⁸ For a list of the other members of the Armenian Mission see Note # 5, *Ibid*, 572.

⁹ Pershing to Harbord, 16 August 1919, Box 11, Harbord Papers, LC.

¹⁰ For a record of Harbord’s mission to Armenia, see James G. Harbord, *Report of the American Military Mission to Armenia* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1920).

¹¹ For a description of Pershing’s experiences between his return to the United States and his ascension to the head of the Army, see Donald Smythe, *Pershing: General of the Armies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 264-74.

¹² For documents related to the Harbord Board and its conclusions see “The Harbord Board,” Box 1, James G. Harbord Papers, MHI; James E. Hewes, Jr., *From Root to McNamara: Army Organization and Administration, 1900-1963* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1975), 50-78; Otto L. Nelson, Jr., *National Security and the General Staff* (Washington, D.C.: Infantry Journal Press, 1946), 274-313; Francis T. Julia, Jr., *Army Staff Reorganization, 1903-1985* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center for Military History, 1987), 7-12.

¹³ Harbord to Owen D. Young, 27 February 1922, Box 141, Owen D. Young Papers, St. Lawrence University.

¹⁴ Harbord to Newton D. Baker, 28 March 1922; Baker to Young, 29 March 1922; Harbord to Young, 15 October 1922, all in *ibid*.

¹⁵ Young to Edward J. Nally, 25 October 1922, Box 5, Edward J. Nally Papers, Princeton University.

¹⁶ 1 September 1929, *New York Times*, 1; 11 November 1929, *New York Times*, 1.

¹⁷ For a more complete description of the postwar dispute between March and the Pershing/Harbord faction, see Brian Neumann, "Who is in Command Here? The March-Pershing Feud, 1917-1937" (MA thesis, Texas A&M University, 2001), 102-37; Donald Smythe, "Literary Salvos: James G. Harbord and the Pershing-March Controversy" *Mid-America* 57 (July 1975): 173-83; Donald Smythe, "The Battle of the Books: Pershing versus March" *Army* 22 (September 1972): 30-32.

¹⁸ 21 August 1947, *New York Times*, 23.

¹⁹ For a thorough analysis of the changes in management practices and organization in American business, see Alfred E. Chandler, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977) and Olivier Zunz, *Making America Corporate, 1870-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

²⁰ See Edward M. Coffman, "The American Military Generation Gap: The Leavenworth Clique in World War I" in William Geffen, ed., *Command and Commander in Modern Warfare* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1971), 35-43; Edward M. Coffman, "The AEF Leaders' Education for War" in R.J.Q. Adams, ed., *The Great War, 1914-18: Essays on the Military, Political and Social History of the First World War* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1990), 138-59; Timothy K. Nenner, *The Leavenworth Schools and the Old Army: Education, Professionalism, and the Officer Corps of the United States Army, 1881-1918* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978).

²¹ The relationship would be repeated in the Second World War, where Lieutenant General Walter Bedell Smith guarded the approaches to General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander. See Forrest C. Pogue, *The Supreme Command: The European Theater of Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1996); Russell F. Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany 1944-1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981); Dwight d. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1948).

²² See James W. Rainey, "Ambivalent Warfare: The Tactical Doctrine of the AEF in WWI" *Parameters* 13 (September 1983): 34-46; Mark Grotelueschen, *Doctrine Under Trial: American Artillery Employment in World War I* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001) and Mark Grotelueschen, "The AEF Way of War: The American Army and Combat in the First World War" (Ph.D. diss., Texas A&M University, 2003).

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