

OBJECTS IN THE MIRROR ARE CLOSER THAN THEY APPEAR

And out of good still to find means of evil.

John Milton "Paradise Lost", Bk. 1, L. 165

*There is a history in all men's lives,
Figuring the nature of the times deceased,
The which observed, a man may prophesy,
With a near aim, of the main chance of things
As yet not come to life, which in their seeds
And weak beginnings lie entreasured.*

William Shakespeare "Henry IV", Part II, Act 3, Sc. 1, L. 80

The cardinal difference between the Great War of 1914 and earlier European wars lay in its objective, which in turn changed its scale. For no longer were wars waged for the gain of a slice of territory somewhere, or like Bismarck's, for specific aims and with limited means: the war of 1914 was for "all or nothing." Germany, it was alleged, challenged Great Britain's status as the dominant power in the world save the Americas, and there was no consolation prize. The totality of a country's resources had to be subordinated to the goal of eventual victory, and in this sense the war of 1914 was the first "Total War", although the phrase itself would not be coined until twenty-nine years later. The winner-takes-all approach also accounts for the extensive lists of "war aims" that the contenders put together for the sake of convincing the public that the prize was worth the slaughter.

To a degree, by going to war the great powers of 1914 ordained the spectre of their own eventual demise. The Russian, Austrian and German empires were rent asunder by revolution, the Ottomans fell, France never recovered from her losses, and "Britain was never the same again after 1918 because the country had ruined its economy by waging a war substantially beyond its resources." (1)

But their fate was still hidden in early 1917. The entry of the United States into the war was to upset the balance, but since the U.S. Army in 1917 was composed of only about 107,000 mostly inexperienced troops, a decisive influx of newly trained units could not be expected before mid-1918. That the USA would not simply write off the credits extended to the Entente was clear: while the United States were well satisfied with the mercantile aspects of war alone, Allied failures on the Western Front in late 1917 and the collapse of Russia made active American participation inevitable.

The Entente by that time really was too big to fail, in the sense of being too big a customer for American exports. By 1916 merchandise exports had risen to 12 percent of US gross domestic product - double the pre-war figure and, indeed, the highest percentage in any year between 1869 and 2004. Around 70 percent of those exports were bound for Europe, going overwhelmingly to Britain and her allies. Even if the German campaigns of unrestricted [U-boat, ¶] warfare had not brought the United States into the war in April 1917,

Britain would surely have been bailed out financially, if not militarily. The alternative - as the American ambassador pointed out on March 5, 1917 - would have been to kill off transatlantic trade, which would be "almost as bad for the United States as for Europe." (2)

As for the German government, the February Revolution in St. Petersburg raised hopes that revolutionary Russia would eventually drop out of the war and Lenin and his comrades, accompanied by millions of Reichsmark, were entrained to St. Petersburg, where their conspirational activities developed, as Richard von Kühlmann of the German Foreign Office noted, "as we intended." (3)

If Russia could be brought to peace, Germany would have a chance to beat the Allies on a single, the Western Front, before US reinforcements could arrive in France. In many a respect it was unexpected that Germany, more impeded than aided by Austria-Hungary, had held out for the war's duration in the first place. In 1913, the key economic figures of the two camps were as follows: (4)

Allies (including USA)	Category	Central Powers
295.5 (392.8)	Population (million)	119.0
18.0 (49.8)	Steel Production (milliontons)	20.2
322.5 (863.5)	Energy Consumption (millions of tons coal equivalent)	236.4
30.3 (62.3)	World Manufacturing (percent)	19.2

One might speculate whether the original Allies, Great Britain, France and Russia, initially underestimated Germany's economic and military endurance based on suchlike figures, which seemed to define the limits of the enemy's capacities. The foremost advantage of the Entente was that they controlled the oceans and were able to impose a naval blockade on the Central Powers. In this war more than in any earlier one, economical factors decided, and Great Britain, as the strongest economical power of the original confederates, was expected to shoulder the heavy burden of providing her allies with money and supplies.

By April 1, 1917, indeed, inter-Allied war credits had risen to \$ 4.3 billion, 88 percent of which was covered by the British government. Although this looked like a repetition of Britain's eighteenth-century role as "banker to the coalition," there was now one critical difference: the sheer size of the trade deficit with the United States, which was supplying billions of dollars' worth of munitions and foodstuffs to the Allies ... yet required few goods in return. Neither the transfer of gold nor the sale of Britain's enormous dollar securities could close this gap; only borrowing on the New York and Chicago money markets, to pay the American suppliers in dollars, would do the trick.

This in turn meant that the Allies became ever more dependent upon U.S. financial aid to sustain their own war effort. In October 1916, the British Chancellor of the Exchequer was warning that "by next June, or earlier, the President of the American Republic would be in a position, if he wishes, to dictate his terms to us." It was an altogether alarming position for "independent" Great Powers to be in.

But what of Germany? Its performance in the war had been staggering. As Professor Northedge points out, "with no considerable assistance from her allies, [it] had held the rest of the world at bay, had beaten Russia, had driven France, the military colossus of Europe for more than two centuries, to the end of her tether, and in 1917, had come within an ace of starving Britain into surrender."

Part of this was due to those advantages outlined above: good inner lines of communication, easily defensible positions in the west, and open space for mobile warfare against less efficient foes in the east. It was also due to the sheer fighting quality of the German forces, which possessed an array of intelligent, probing staff officers who readjusted to the new conditions of combat faster than those in any other army, and who by 1916 had rethought the nature of both defensive and offensive warfare. (5)

These staff officers were quite aware of the essentiality of speed by mid-1917. No amount of bravery could hold out against the practically unlimited forces and supplies the USA could throw into the scales. Not only had the personnel of the German armed forces shrunk by over a quarter million compared to the apex of 5.4 million men in the summer of 1917, the necessity of releasing skilled workers to keep the armaments industries going further decreased the available manpower. (6)

As soon as the armistice with Bolshevik Russia was signed, OHL transferred ten of the better divisions from the east to the west each month, beginning in November 1917. (7) Only divisions of the 2nd and 3rd Reserve remained in the east to occupy the vast territories ceded by the Bolsheviks. The forces sent westwards were trained in the new tactical applications which to overcome the paralysis of trench warfare the German General Staff had developed over the last twelve months. The changes to be implemented concerned the artillery preparation before a battle and the choice of targets by the infantry when approaching the enemy's trenches.

The Western battles of 1917 had pointed out the relative strategic impotence of continuous artillery barrages. Even if a bombardment could be kept up for a week or longer, its value only diminished over time because it necessarily gave away the target for the subsequent offensive and allowed the enemy time to schedule countermeasures.

A German artillery specialist, Colonel Georg Bruchmüller, was given the task of preparing the artillery barrage for the German breakthrough at Riga in September 1917. In the course of his studies, Bruchmüller realized that a concentrated bombardment over a short period of time, executed with precision, might be preferable to a long but indiscriminate shelling, for the enemy would have no time to bring in reserves to the threatened part of the front.

In addition, Bruchmüller insisted on "registering" all artillery pieces and, contrary to Haig's positioning of artillery at Passchendaele, where over 2,000 guns had been directed at a sector of less than five miles of German front, demanded to deploy the artillery for the planned offensive along a front as broad as possible, to further impede the enemy's ability to anticipate where to direct his reserves.



THE MILLIONS OF SHELLS FIRED CREATED EERIE, ALIEN LANDSCAPES ... AS ABOVE DURING THE BRITISH ATTACK AT MESSINES, 1917...

... SO BELOW, FOR THE AUSTRALIANS AT CHATEAU WOOD, YPRES, ALSO IN 1917.



The emphasis of the German attack plan, however, was on speed. Nivelle had hoped, unrealistically, to overcome the German position on the Chemin des Dames the previous year in a few hours. He had lacked the trained troops and weight of artillery to bring his hope to realisation. Ludendorff now had the necessary troops and guns and a realistic plan.

The enemy was to be attacked both on a broad front - fifty miles - and in depth, the depth of the attack to be achieved by concentrating an enormous weight of artillery firing the heaviest possible bombardment at short, medium and long range in a brief but crushing deluge of shells, lasting five hours.

Ludendorff's bombardment force amounted to 6,473 field, medium and heavy guns and 3,532 mortars of varying calibre, for which over a million rounds of ammunition were assembled. All the guns, many of which had been brought from the east, were "registered" beforehand at a specially constructed firing range, producing data of each gun's variance from a theoretical norm which, when combined with detailed meteorological allowance for barometric pressure and wind speed and direction, would ensure, as far as was humanly possible, that all would hit their designated targets, whether enemy trenches or battery positions.

Explosive shell was also to be intermixed with varieties of gas projectiles, lachrymatory [tear gas, ¶] and asphyxiating phosgene, in a combination calculated to outwit the protection offered by enemy gas masks. ... It was with Bruchmüller's verified experiment [in Riga, ¶] in mind that Hindenburg had, at Mons on 11 November 1917, come to the decision to launch an all-or-nothing offensive in the west in the coming year. (8)

The German Staff had also set up teams to study possible tactical improvements for the infantry attack itself. Whether in open clusters, standard German tactic in 1914, or lines, the disastrous British idea of the Somme in 1916, advancing troops were inevitably mauled as soon as they came into the range of the enemy's machine guns. This deadly exposure to reduce was the aim of the new German INFILTRATION tactics.

The new assault technique was based on the following *modus operandi*: a short but most intensive barrage of artillery was to destroy the foremost Allied trenches and attempt to wreck the enemy's forward observation posts, thus slowing down his tactical intelligence gathering. After the five hours of the initial bombardment, a successive stream of

artillery fire was to creep over the Allied defence lines at a walking man's pace, pinning down the opponents while simultaneously giving the attacking infantry an opportunity to advance and, hopefully, cut the barbed wire barriers. At this point the second change in procedure was to take effect: the infantry pushing ahead was to detour around the enemy's strongholds, machine-gun nests or fortified positions and continue to advance in the direction of the least resistance, which should lead the attack deeper into the enemy's rear.

The old procedure had taught to stop at these points and wait until reinforcements could be brought up from the rear to deal with the problem. The new philosophy, to detour the enemy where he was strong and to attack where he was weak, i.e. in the rear, was expected to reduce casualties by fifty percent or more. The units that were trained in these new tactics soon acquired the appellation of "STORMTROOPERS". If the infiltrators could proceed, essentially unhindered, into the enemy's rearward areas, disrupting communication lines, destroying supplies and threatening command posts, the enemy's order of battle might be compromised enough to allow the attackers to achieve the desired breakthrough into open territory.

A Bavarian officer, Captain Herrmann Geyer, had consolidated the army's thinking on the new concept of "infiltration" - though the word was not one the German army used - and the obvious difficulties in his manual THE ATTACK IN POSITION WARFARE of January 1918, by which Operation Michael [the code-name for the first German offensive in March 1918,¹] was to be fought. It stressed rapid advance and disregard for the security of the flanks. (9)

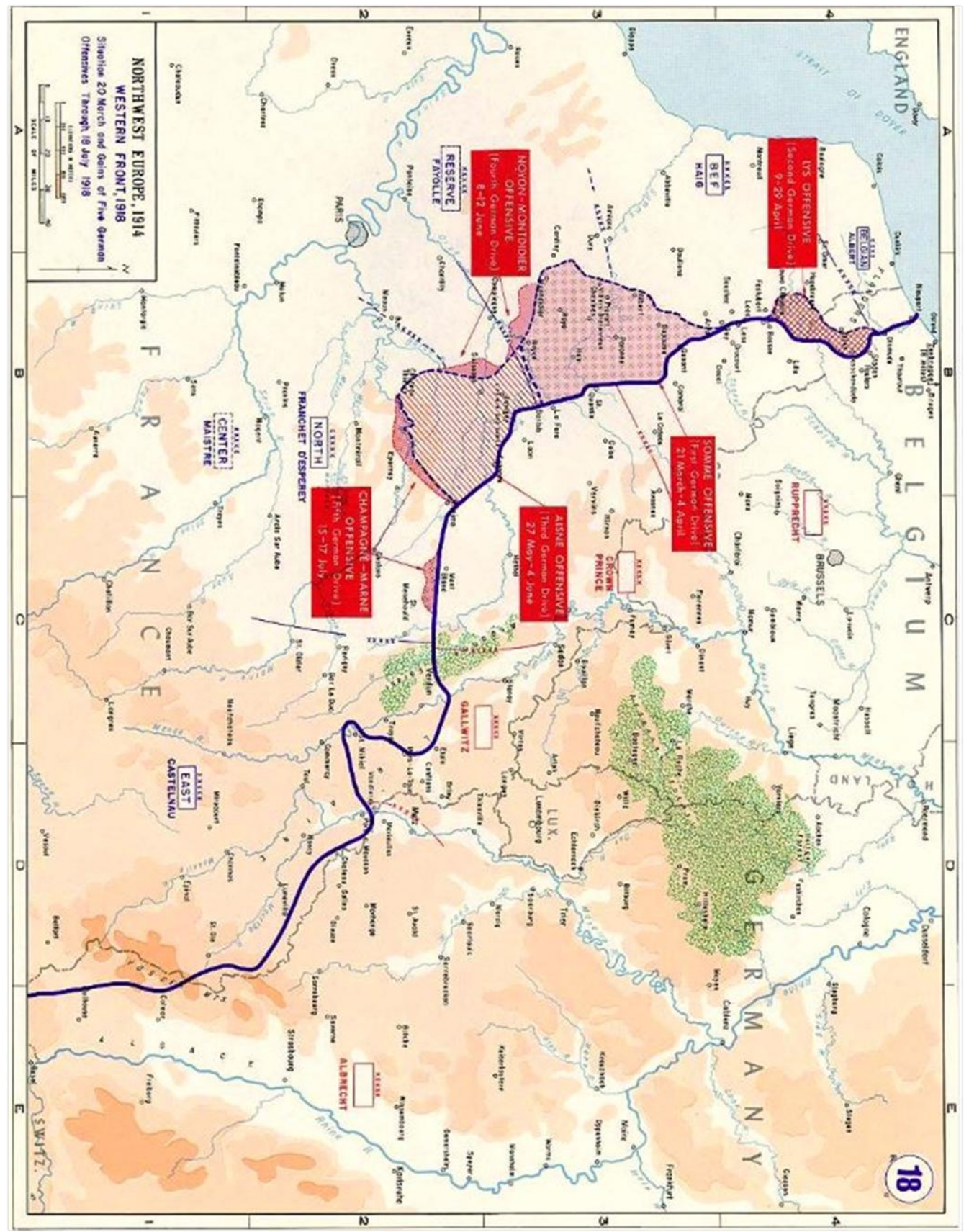
By March 1918, the forces opposite each other in the Western Theatre numbered 192 German against 178 Allied divisions, although OHL counted only 56 of them, the ones better equipped, as "attack divisions". (10) For "MICHAEL", Hindenburg and Ludendorff committed 62 divisions between Lens and La Fère, in the midst of which lay the old battlefield of the Somme 1916. They were opposed by 40 to 50 Allied divisions from the British First, Third and Fifth Armies and the French Third and Sixth, on a front of almost fifty miles.¹ The List Regiment from Bavaria, part of the 6th Bavarian Reserve Division, partook in "MICHAEL" and two further German offensives that followed in the spring and early summer of 1918; Corporal Hitler fought at the Somme, on the Aisne and on the Marne. It was in this time of frequent combat that he laid down the basis for his eventual decoration with the Iron Cross, First Class: the citation mentioned his courage, willingness and dependability.

"MICHAEL" kicked off on the morning of March 21, 1918, directing its main impetus, around St. Quentin, against the divisions of General Herbert Gough's Fifth British Army. Luck played a good part in the selection of the target and the resulting initial success, because Fifth Army had been badly mauled at Passchendaele in late 1917 and was not quite up to its old standards yet. In early 1918, the British army had followed the example of Germany and France and reduced its divisional strength from twelve to nine battalions. The reorganization schedule disbanded 145 battalions and distributed them piecemeal over the rest of the army, and Fifth Army, the most recently established, possessed a great many of these unlucky formations that had to change accommodation. Gough additionally faced a problem in obtaining labour to improve his trench system, which, at its southern end, overlapped with the French entrenchments. These were, alas, in the opinion of the British staff, nothing to write home about. (11)

Although the effectiveness of the German artillery proved somewhat more limited than Colonel Bruchmüller had hoped and British resistance remained motivated, the sheer weight of the assault slowly dented the lines and by the day's evening the British vanguard posts had been lost to an extent of nineteen miles. Losses remained high, though, on both sides, and the new infiltration tactics, while often working, revealed an unintended consequence. By their nature, they progressed in the direction of the enemy's least resistance, but not necessarily in the direction the operation was aimed at. Thus in late March and April, the Germans found themselves going over the old battlefield of the Somme, to Peronne and further west, again, and after having gained another twenty-odd miles along the river in the direction of Amiens, i.e. to the west, the attack ran out of steam.

¹ John Keegan enumerates 76 German against 28 British divisions, but the number of French divisions is not clear. (12)

MAP LXXV: GERMAN OFFENSIVES 1918



TERRITORIAL GAINS ON THE WESTERN FRONT BY THE GERMAN OFFENSIVES 1918

The nearer they approached Amiens, the more deeply did they become entangled in the obstacles of the old Somme battlefield, a wilderness of abandoned trenches, broken roads and shell crater fields left behind by the movement of the front a year earlier. The Somme may not have won the war for the British in 1916 but the obstacle zone it left helped to ensure that in 1918 they did not lose it. (13)

The exploitation of the enemy's least resistance had led the Germans into the wrong direction. Paris was south of Amiens, not west. OHL contemplated the problem and decided to redirect the axis of attack. 2nd and 18th Armies were turned southwest, to Paris, 17th remained aligned westward in the direction of Amiens and was to cut the connection between the British Third Army and the French forces to their south if possible, and 6th Army, on the German right, i.e. northern flank, was to swing northwest, to Arras and the North Sea harbours.

This separation of the German attack forces fatally reminded of Moltke's disastrous splitting up of the German right wing at the Marne in September 1914. Unbeknownst to the enemy, the weakness of "MICHAEL" was that the operation had been laid out, quite untypically, without a definite plan. It was hoped that, if everything went as planned and a few auspicious miracles occurred, the BEF could be rolled up by a flanking move and driven to the coast. In the alternative, if open territory could be reached, the troops could set their sights on Paris, again. "We will punch a hole," Ludendorff pondered. "For the rest, we shall see. We did it this way in Russia." (14) Hence, while each German army was able to, initially, "punch a hole", the progress that should follow was not clearly determined and the German formations found themselves manoeuvring ad hoc, which is, reacting to the enemy instead of dictating events. Although some German troops advanced as far as forty miles into enemy territory, they were outrunning their supply lines and could not form a cohesive advancing front. When the British army was able to launch a counterattack, if with limited objectives, at Amiens, by the Australian Corps on April 4, Ludendorff had to admit that "MICHAEL" had run its course and failed to bring a quick end to the war.

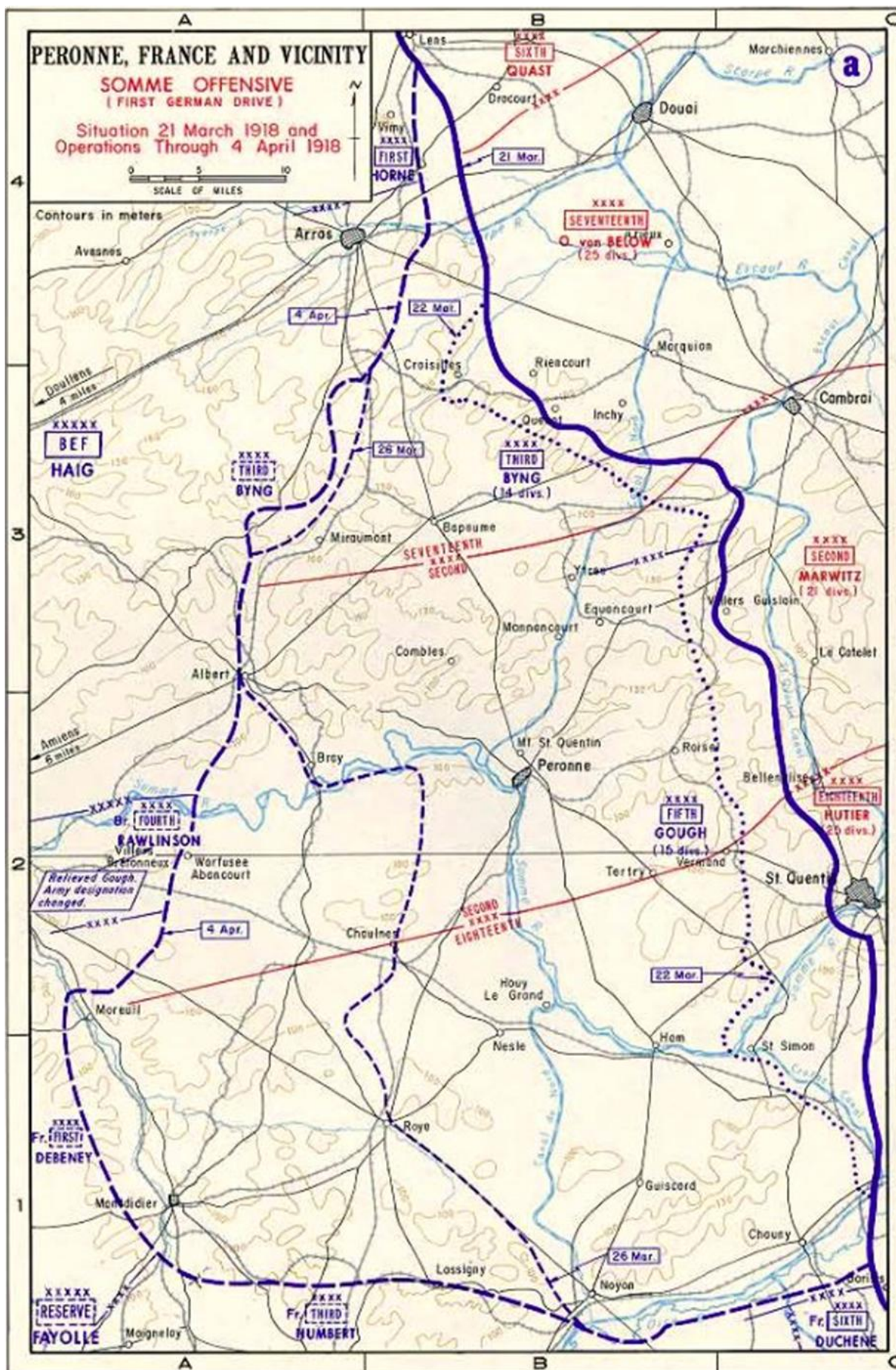
Some younger German staff officers felt that things were not improving. Major Wilhelm von Leeb, who was to become a Field Marshal in World War II, commented that "OHL has changed direction. It has made its decisions according to the size of territorial gain, rather than operational goals." (15) It was true that the initial advance of "MICHAEL" was swift, compared to the British experience at the Somme in 1916, but the German army could not win the war by occupying strategically worthless French terrain. For worse, losses had not diminished to the extent expected "MICHAEL" caused about a quarter of a million casualties on either side - and not only had they occurred among the best troops the German army had left and saved for the last, hopefully decisive, stroke, the Allies could easily refill their ranks with the arrival of 200,000 American troops per month while the Germans could not.

The early success of "MICHAEL" caused a crisis within the Allied staffs. It was resolved that in the face of the German thrust aimed at splitting the British from the French forces, which did indeed threaten to roll up the complete British front from Amiens to the North Sea ports, a single commander had to coordinate the two defending armies and control "the direction of strategic operations". (16) Ferdinand Foch was installed as Allied C-in-C on April 3, just in time to react to a shift in the German offensive.

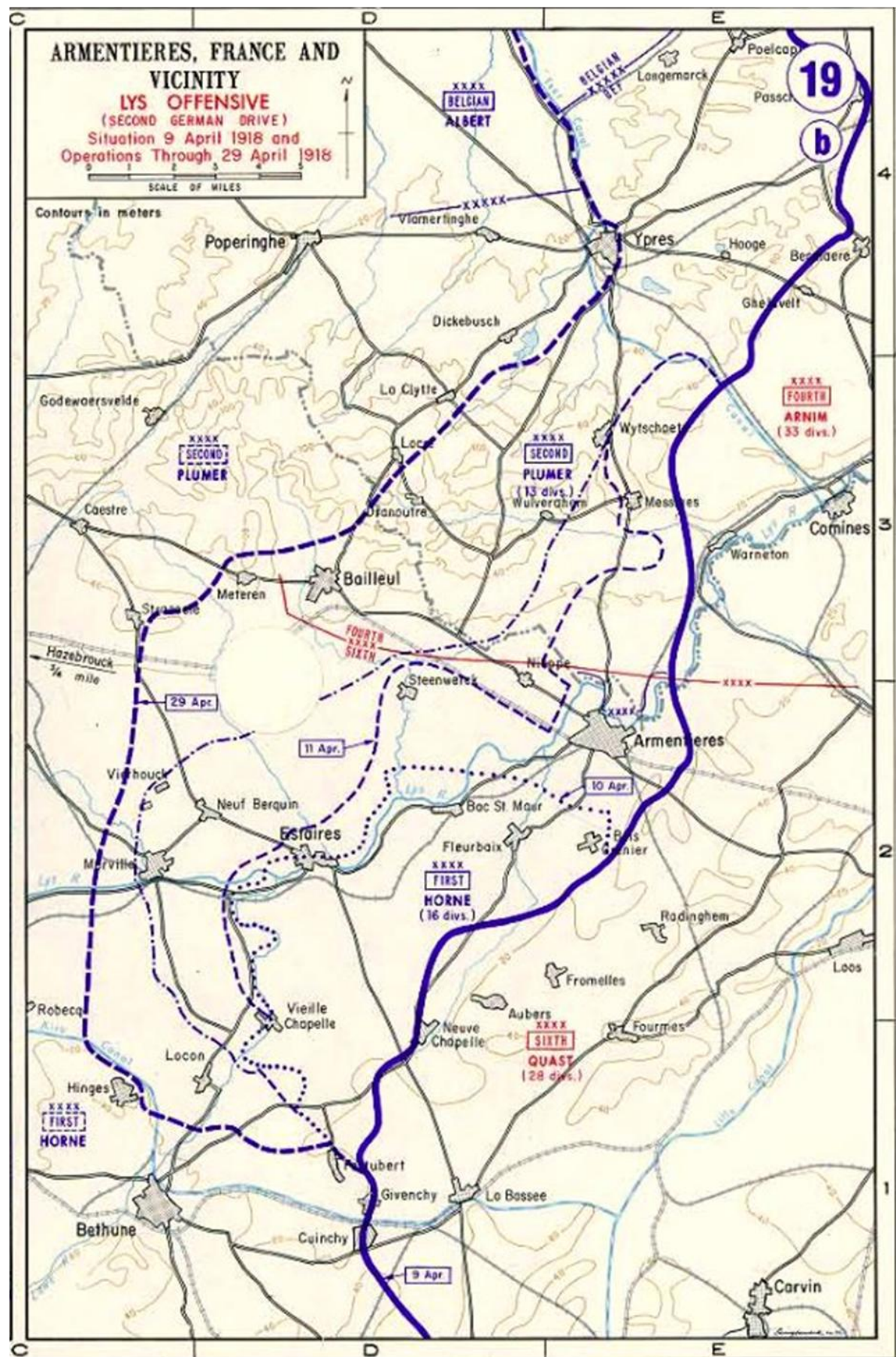
Although the Germans stood only five miles from Amiens on April 5, the makeshift defence set up by General Rawlinson's Fourth Army, which had relieved Gough's much damaged Third, held, and their steadfast resistance eventually compelled Ludendorff to seek out the alternate British target his staff had prepared for. It was Plumer's Second Army along the Lys River, fifty miles north, at Armentieres and Ypres. Operation "George" was to throw Quast's 6th and Arnim's 4th Armies against the lines of Plumer and Horne's First Army, with the objective to break through to the coast and thus envelop the northern half of the BEF.

The assault began on April 9 and, supported by a special artillery barrage à la Bruchmüller, succeeded again in breaking through the enemy's foremost positions. The territorial gains, however, were much more modest than at the Somme, ten or twelve miles at the most, due to the improvement in defence coordination effected by the recently unified Allied command. After having paid too high a price in blood, this second German offensive petered out as well. The medical services counted 303,450 casualties between March 21 and April 10, and the official report admitted that the

MAP LXXVI: FIRST GERMAN DRIVE AT THE SOMME



MAP LXXVII: SECOND GERMAN DRIVE AT THE LYS



attack "had not penetrated to the decisive heights of Cassel and the Mont des Cats, the possession of which would have compelled the [British, ¶] evacuation of the Ypres salient and the Yser position." (17) Again, the Allied forces were able to replace the losses within weeks, the Germans not at all. The offensive power of the German army, as well as the mood at OHL, was in extremis. A third offensive was prepared, this time against the French troops at the Aisne. The Germans still stood upon most of the Chemin des Dames, the ridge above the Aisne which the Nivelle Offensive had failed to conquer a year ago, and, with the advantage of the higher ground, an attack that penetrated into the open territory past the river could lead the German troops straight southwest to Paris, only seventy miles away, through the valley between the Oise river in the north and the Ourcq to the south.

This time a truly gargantuan stock of shells was accumulated for the opening salvos, two million shells for six thousand guns. The preparatory barrage had lasted only four hours before, on the morning of May 27, fifteen divisions of 7th Army descended at the French lines around Craonne, between Rheims and La Fère, opposed by the French Second and Sixth Armies, of Franchet D'Espèrey Northern Army Group. The initial German progress was as orderly as could be hoped for and the flat country afoot the ridge was reached within two days. Here the plan called for an intermediate halt while, to the north of the Chemin des Dames, a second attack was to issue against the British Fifth Army. If things went as planned, the forces between the two jaws of the German vise would be enveloped and destroyed. But the swift pace of the first two days proved too much of a temptation to Ludendorff: he turned 7th Army into the direction of Paris, advancing over the Aisne to Soissons, over the Ourcq to Chateau Thierry. Paris was only fifty miles distant.

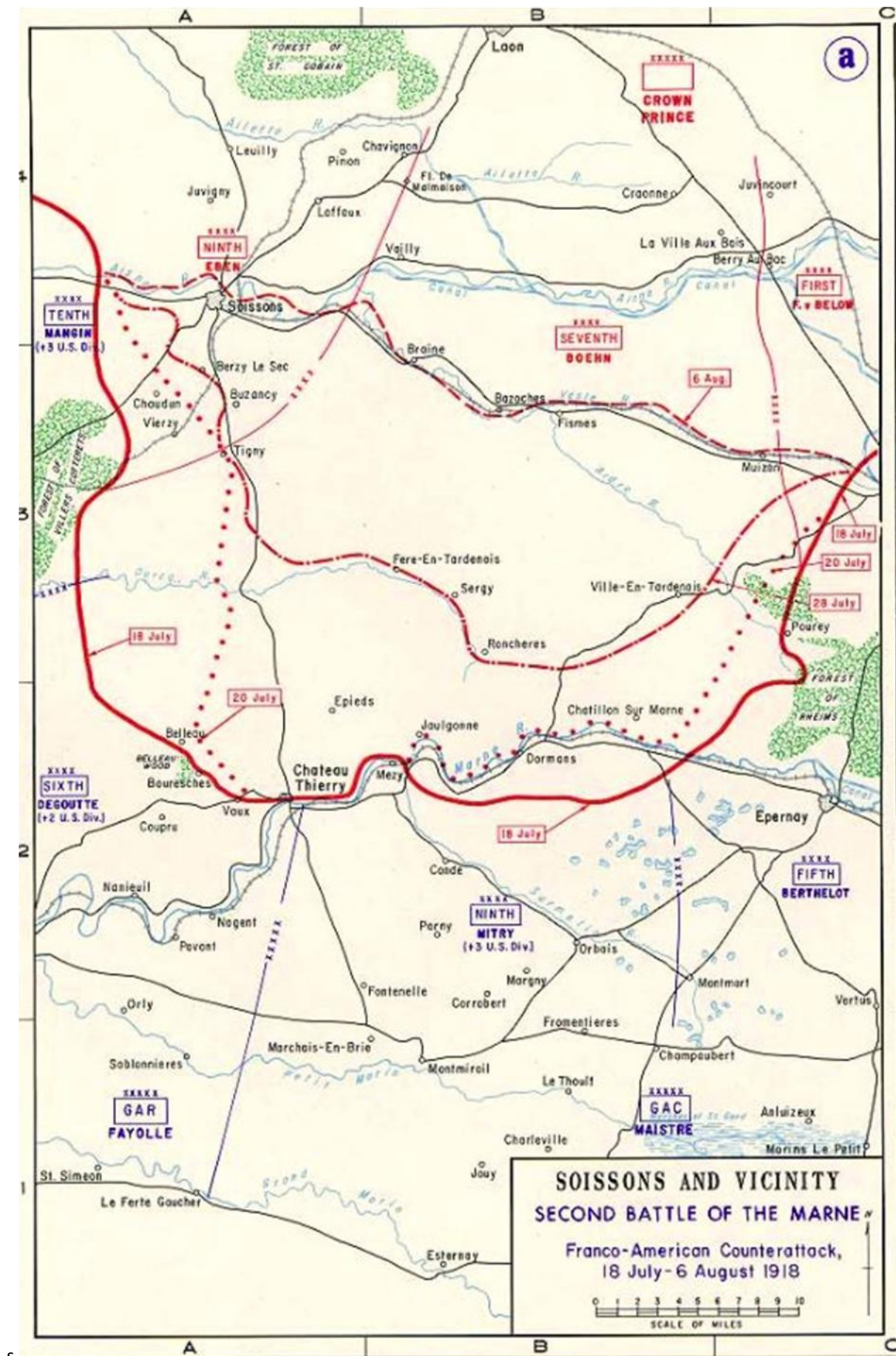
In the face of continuous Allied counterstrokes the drive bogged down again: three divisions attacked on May 28, five more on May 29, eight on May 30, four on May 31, five on June 1 and two more on June 3, among them the huge 2nd and 3rd Divisions of the American Expeditionary Force [AEF, ¶]. The Allies were unaware, however, that OHL had already given orders for a temporary freeze of the offensive on June 3, because the vanguard had once again outrun its supply lines as well as its artillery support. Worse was that hitherto the Aisne offensive had caused another 100,000 casualties, a number that told a growing minority of concerned general staff officers that the days of indiscriminate offensives were over. After a short standstill, the German offensive resumed on a more local level on June 9, with a two-pronged attack on the line Montdidier - Noyon - Soissons, along both sides of the Oise river [see Map LXXIII, p. 889]; but it was a strangely indecisive operation from the get-go and subsequently did not accomplish much. (18)

Against mounting opposition, Ludendorff and Hindenburg were still able to insist on a continuation of the offensive, although, or perhaps because, both their own as well as the German government's sense of reality seemed to dwindle. On July 3, a conference including the Kaiser, Hindenburg, Ludendorff and the civil government led by the chancellor, consented to a list of their minimum war aims, without whose acquisition no peace treaty could be discussed. The list not only itemized the retention of all the territories recently acquired in the east, which included Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and the Ukraine, it insisted, in the west, on the annexation of Luxembourg as well as the Belgian and northern French coal and iron fields plus the respective heavy industry belts. (19)



1917 - THE KAISER PRETENDS TO BE IN COMMAND.

MAP LXXVIII: SECOND BATTLE OF THE MARNE



The very last offensive strike of the German army in the war began on July 15, 1918, at Mont Blanc, on the eastern part of the Aisne position, aiming for the Marne. The leading edge of the about fifty under strength German divisions attacking succeeded, for the last time, in an initial breakthrough, and the Marne was crossed on the evening of the first day, against initially moderate resistance by the French Second and Fourth Armies.

But for once the Allies had developed accurate strategic intelligence about the German intentions and the divisions of General Boehm's 7th Army leading the assault, having reached Chateau Thierry on July 18, ran into a crushing counterattack the very same day. The salient at Chateau Thierry was surrounded by the French Sixth [General Degoutte], Ninth [Mitry] and Fifth [Berthelot] Armies, which were supported by five gigantic U.S. divisions, which added, at 28,000 men apiece, the equivalent of another army, about 140,000 men, to the scales of the battle. The German vanguard was attacked on both flanks and had to retreat on July 20, to avoid encirclement.

By August 6 the salient between Rheims and Soissons was eliminated and the German troops pushed behind the Aisne and Vesle for the second time after 1914 [see Map LXXVI, below, dashed red line, ¶]. The second failure on the Marne allowed the critical elements in the German General staff to articulate their opposition to further frontal attacks à la Ludendorff.

The field strength of the German army had shrunk from 5.1 million men to 4.2 million between February and July 1918 (20), and the availability of replacements, which, slim enough, could only fill one spot in three, was further decreased by the onset of the catastrophic influenza epidemic that had found its way from Africa to Europe in mid-1918 and, by 1920, was to kill more humans than the Great War had. More than a quarter million soldiers came down with the disease in the summer of 1918 and the serviceable manpower of the German army declined by a further ten per cent.

Again, Allied intelligence painted a quite accurate picture of the German situation and Haig and Foch prepared a vigorous Allied counteroffensive over the old Somme battlefield. Debeney's First French Army and Rawlinson's Fourth British Army, supported by the Canadian and Australian Corps and all the tanks the Allies could muster, 70 French and 530 British ones, (21) were to strike eastward from Amiens.

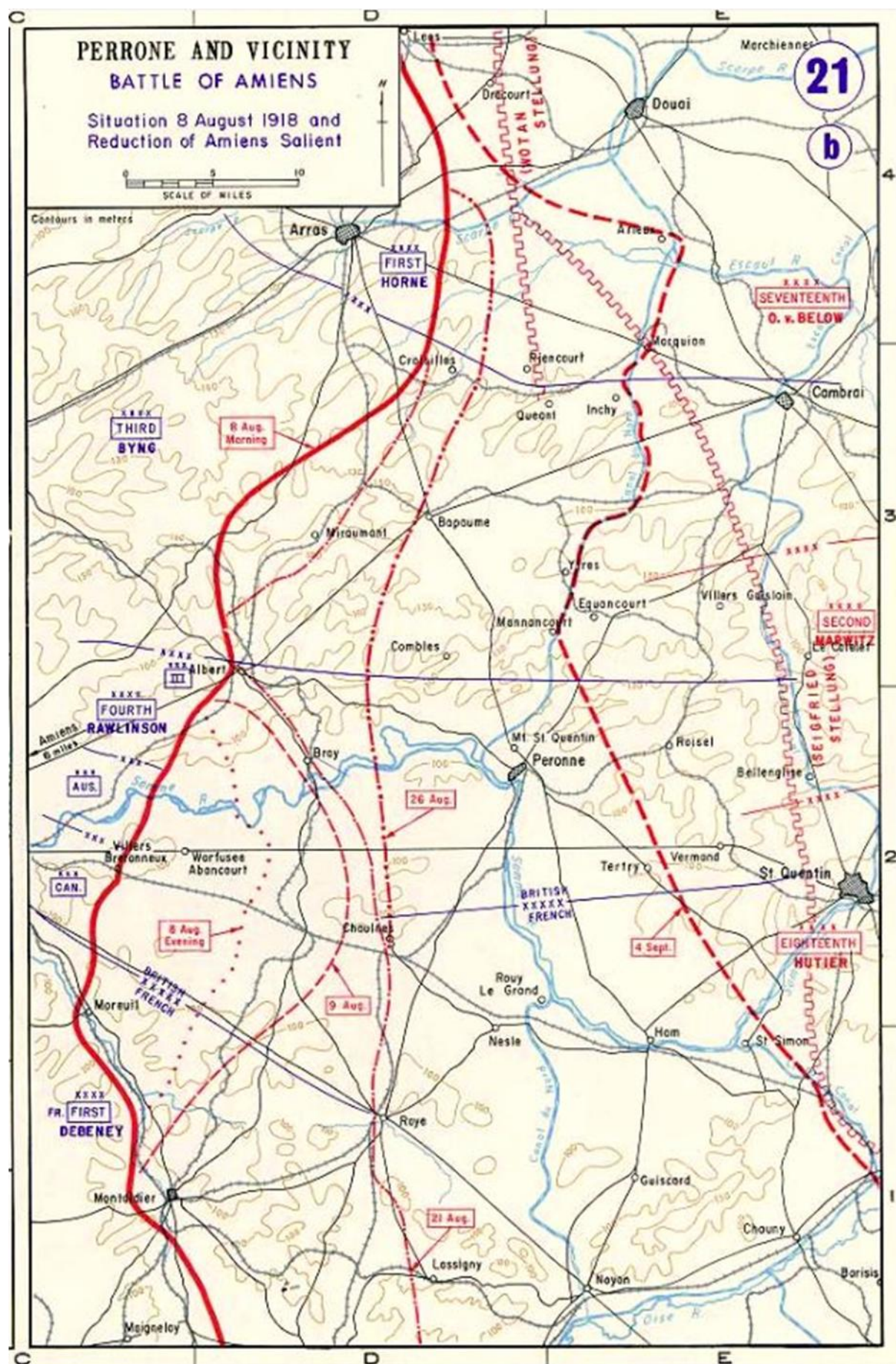
The assault opened on August 8 between Montdidier and Albert, and, quickly penetrating the improvised German defences, gained about eight miles on the very first day. By September 4, the Allies reached a line just west of Cambrai and St. Quentin, almost exactly where "Michael" had started five months earlier, in March.

Finally, and perhaps not surprisingly, the morale of the German troops diminished in the face of another 100,000 casualties suffered by September 5, and about 15,000 went into Allied captivity the opening day of the battle without offering much resistance. This was the day Ludendorff famously called the "black day of the German army": but given the terrible sacrifices of the German soldiers from 1914 to 1918, up to and including the losses incurred at Ludendorff's ill-designed frontal offensives, the verdict reveals more about the judge than the judged. (22)

At any rate, Colonel Lossberg, now principal operations officer, recommended a retreat to a new defensive line to be established at the Meuse but Ludendorff and his aides would not hear of it and ordered a slow recession to the "Hindenburg Line", a position between Arras and Rheims which they believed could be held for the winter, or until the situation improved. It did not. On August 30, the Western Front saw the initial appearance of the First U.S. Army as an independent unit commanded by General John Pershing. The new formation was deployed southeast of Verdun at St. Mihiel, where a salient created by the meandering Meuse had been held by German troops since August 1914.

The German forces in the St. Mihiel salient had already received their orders to withdraw past the river to the heights between Étain and Vandières, as a part of the withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line and were in the process of evacuation when, on September 12, the Allied offensive struck. The American I and IV Corps, over 100,000 men strong and supported by almost 3,000 artillery pieces, attacked the salient, eliminated it, and succeeded in taking about 14,000 Germans prisoner. The American press delighted in praise for the "doughboys" performance and ignored that the French "ungraciously attributed their success to the fact that they had caught the Germans in the process of retiring." (23)

MAP LXXIX: BATTLE OF AMIENS



Pershing did not publicly comment on the French mockeries but prepared, in cooperation with Foch, a second, bigger French-American offensive at Verdun and the Argonne Forest west of the town. The target of the strike was the critical railway junction at Mézières, northwest of Sedan, thirty miles behind the German lines.

On a front of approximately 22 miles, between St. Meneshould and the Meuse at Verdun, the French Fourth [Gouraud] and American First [Liggett] Armies deployed about 600,000 troops, supported by 5,000 guns, 500 tanks and the same number of aircraft. The attack opened on September 26 but laboured heavily against four German defence lines. Numbers one and two were negated in a week of fighting, but by October 3, the third defence line had stopped the Allied progress after less than ten miles had been gained. Pershing regrouped, but great success remained elusive and even his best divisions only made very slow headway. On October 12, the assault was halted for a major reorganization. The size of the U.S. divisions allowed the bisection of the AEF into two armies.

The Second U.S. Army, formed that very day and commanded by General Bullard, was deployed on the right wing of the Allied strike, at St. Mihiel. On November 1, the offensive was renewed, and while Bullard only made very modest gains of no more than two miles at the right wing, the First U.S. Army finally succeeded in punching through the last German Argonne defence line at Buzancy by November 3 and gained a line from Dun-Sur-Meuse to Chatillon-Sur-Bar [Map LXXIX, above, dash-dotted red line]. The target of the operation, Mézières, however remained well out of reach. Although German resistance was all but faltering in these last days of the war, American losses of the Meuse-Argonne offensive exceeded the German ones, 120,000 to 100,000, quite possibly due to their inexperience. But the die had been cast: nothing could belie the fact that Germany had lost the war.

Defeat on the western front came as a shock, particularly after the historic victories in the East where vast areas extending as far as the Caucasus had been conquered. Consequently there was a serious drop in morale even among the older soldiers. Disorders on troop and leave trains approached rebellion. Shots were fired from windows. Men disappeared at every station. Officers attempting to maintain discipline were attacked with stones and grenades. Revolutionary slogans such as "We're not fighting for Germany's honour but for the millionaires" were scrawled in chalk on the cars.

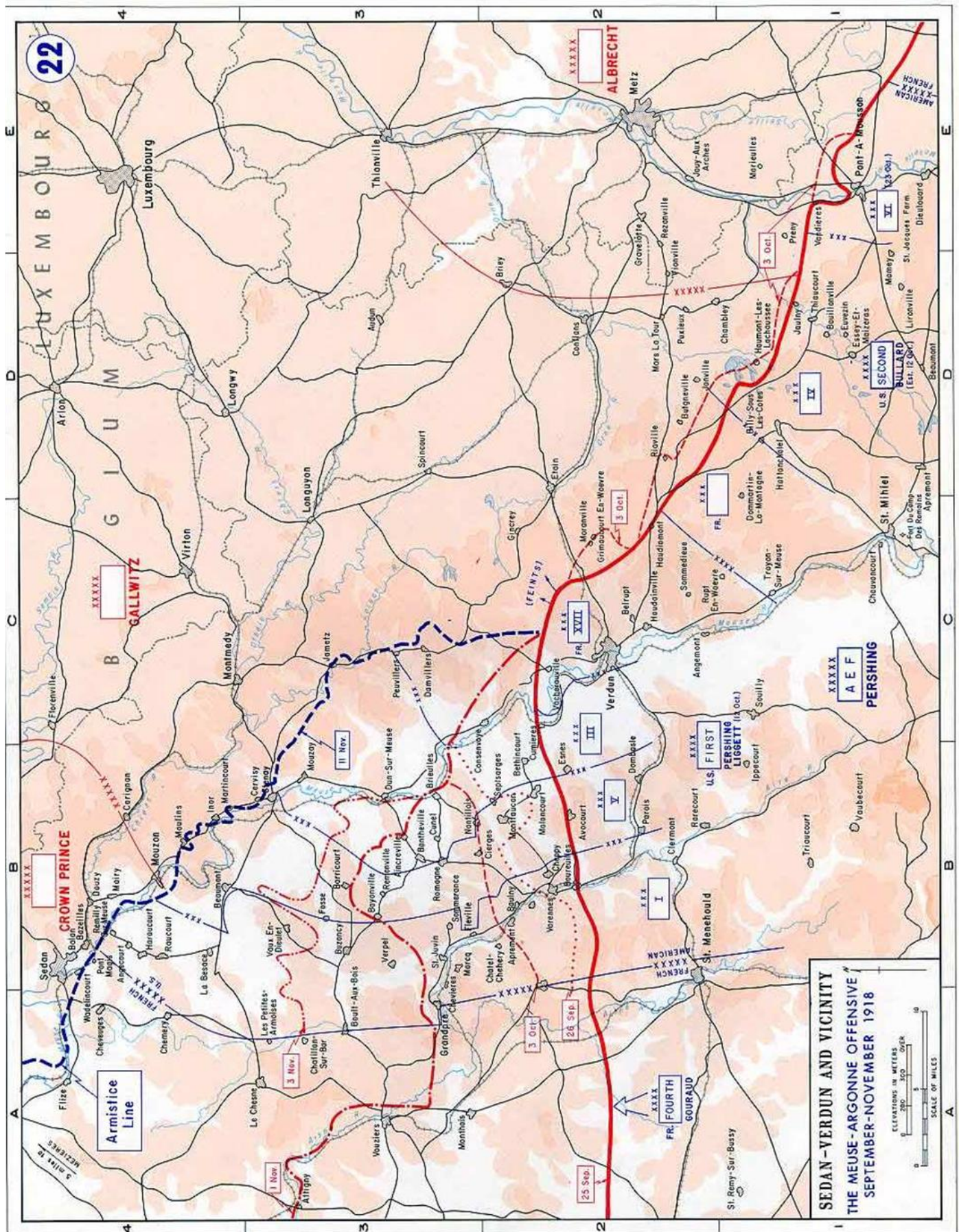
Four days after Hitler received his Iron Cross, an Allied counterattack [of the Australian Corps, ¶] in the dense fog smashed through the German lines at Amiens. Ludendorff sent a staff officer to the front and immediately moved reserves to the breakthrough area. As these fresh troops moved up, those falling back shouted insults: "Blacklegs! You are prolonging the war!" It was, Ludendorff wrote, "the black day of the German army in the history of this war." The Kaiser reacted dejectedly but calmly and remarked, "We must draw only one conclusion: we are at the limit of our capacities. The war must be ended."

A few days later Ludendorff and Hindenburg conferred with Wilhelm at Spa. When the Kaiser ordered his foreign minister to begin peace negotiations, Hindenburg protested that the army still held much enemy territory and Ludendorff excitedly exclaimed that there must be discipline on the home front as well as "more vigorous conscription of the young Jews, hitherto left pretty much alone." (24)

The impressions these developments made on Corporal Hitler, the dedicated soldier, are easily imagined. During his leave of January 1917, he had beheld the strike of the munitions workers in Berlin; now, facing the possibility of revolution and the disintegration of the army, it seems that he began to put the blame on the shoulders of unpatriotic elements, Reds and Jews. He did not yet, as he wrote later in *Mein Kampf*, deliver harangues, but clearly the inner equilibrium of his fanatic patriotism required scapegoats. Discussions in the trenches were in no way restricted to the vocal level; witnesses report that on at least one occasion he did actually beat up a fresh non-com who declared further resistance futile.

It was not yet spoken out, but in these days before the end of the war, the seeds of the deadly legend were planted, that the German army "had never been beaten in the field" but had lost the war due to treason at the home front - that the country was "stabbed in the back" by civilians, by Jews, Communists, Liberals and Freemasons. Moreover, as

MAP LXXX: ALLIED MEUSE - ARGONNE OFFENSIVE



Hitler claimed quite untruthfully later in *Mein Kampf*, these unpatriotic elements had caused the war in the first place and were thus responsible for the loss of the flower of Germany's youth in the trenches. A day of reckoning must come. With the exception of leave for convalescence and a few brief furloughs, Hitler had stuck in the trenches for over four years, and he had changed. The Hitler of 1918 was different from the somewhat dreamy yet excited youth that had stood on the Odeonsplatz in Munich the day the war commenced; the blue-eyed, "rapturous" volunteer was gone. The army had finally provided a home, a place to be, for Hitler, who since his mother died spent a decade in social limbo. Four years of danger, filled with service and the decorations to prove it, had bestowed a hitherto unknown degree of self-confidence on him: he had fought for his true love, Germany, and done well. The few photographs that have survived from this time show little of the juvenile Bohemian he once was, they depict a still somewhat dreamy but determined soldier going into his thirties.

In early 1918, the 16th Regiment was moved back to Flanders for the third time in four years, to the familiar area of Ypres. The troops dug in just south of the town, around the villages of Comines and Warwick, as they had done before. All through the day and night of October 13 to 14, Hitler's company faced a heavy British artillery barrage. At the approach of dawn, the cannoneers changed tactics and substituted gas shells for the common high-explosive rounds.

Soon a yellow-greenish cloud of chlorine gas languished over the German trenches. The gas masks provided only temporary relief for their absorption capacity was limited. After holding out for hours in the gas-infested dugouts, Hitler staggered semi-consciously towards the rear around seven in the morning, bearing the last dispatches of his wartime service, and delivered them to the regimental headquarter before he was transported off the combat area by a triage unit and delivered to an infirmary. He was in a military hospital in Germany two days later.

At the military hospital in Pasewalk in Pomerania there was a small group of German doctors who had studied the effects of chlorine gas and developed suitable techniques for dealing with their gassed patients. The burning pain in the eyeballs soon passed away, and within a week he was able to see dim shapes and outlines. As he lay in his hospital bed, it occurred to him that he would never be able to draw or paint again, and in fact, except for some caricatures and a few sketches, he never seriously practiced his art again.

He wondered what profession he would follow, and came to no conclusions. In front of him stretched only endless years of misery as an unskilled labourer working at a succession of menial jobs. At one time it was customary to assume that his blindness had a hysterical origin, but in fact chlorine gas can produce total blindness. ... Men died in convulsions in a few minutes, coughing up froth and blood from their poisoned lungs. Hitler was one of the lucky few who survived a gas attack without much physical damage.

The worst damage was mental, for he fell into a deep depression characterized by fits of weeping and periods of withdrawal, when he simply turned his face to the wall and spoke to no one, terrified by the thought that he might never see clearly again, that he had lost whatever usefulness he once possessed, and that he had nothing to live for.

The war was coming to an end in total defeat for Germany, and the thought of all the vain sacrifices of countless troops only deepened his depression. (25)

During the weeks Hitler recovered from the effects of the gas attack in Pasewalk, Germany underwent a striking metamorphosis.

Not since the Thirty-Years-War had the home front suffered so much from hunger and other war-related privations as it did from the winter of 1916/17 on. The reasons were twofold: the effects of the British continental blockade and the imbalance of the German war economy. The continental blockade is hardly ever mentioned in Allied historiography; even the index of such a meritorious work as Niall Ferguson's "The War of the World" mentions "Lusitania" (twice) and "submarines" but no "blockade", continental or other. Moreover, while Germany executed the "unrestricted" U-boat warfare, except for an episode in the spring of 1915, not until the spring of 1917, the Allied continental blockade was operative from August 1914 to 1920, far longer than the war. It is true that the U-boat campaign brought Great Britain close to starvation in late 1917, but this was mainly due to the Royal Navy's refusal to protect merchantmen with convoys; a reluctance which much increased the chances of the submerged hunters. It appears, however, that hardly any British

citizens died from malnutrition, a situation altogether different for the civilians of the Central Powers. The continental blockade starved to death approximately half a million, or more, German civilians, mostly women and children, and an unknown number of citizens of Austria-Hungary.

The aforementioned influenza epidemic that began in 1918, however, struck all belligerents and doomed 230,000 Englishmen, about the same number of Germans, and over 160,000 French. Direct effects of the war on the civil population were much the exception, and limited to victims of execution for espionage or sabotage and unlucky people hit by aerial bombs, but the typical number of victims in these categories could still be measured in the hundreds, not in the hundred thousands as in World War II. By 1916, Hindenburg and Ludendorff had taken over Germany in a military quasi-dictatorship and launched an impressive armament plan, the Hindenburg Program.

The announcement of quite fantastic production totals - doubling explosives output, trebling machine-gun output - led to all sorts of bottlenecks as German industry struggled to meet these demands. It required not only many additional workers, but also a massive infrastructural investment, from new blast furnaces to bridges over the Rhine, which further used up labour and resources.

Within a short while, therefore, it became clear that the program could be achieved only if skilled workers were returned from military duty; accordingly, 1.2 million were released in September 1916, and a further 1.9 million in July 1917. Given the serious losses on the western front, and the still considerable casualties in the east, such withdrawals meant that even Germany's large able-bodied male population was being stretched to its limits. In that respect, although Passchendaele was a catastrophe for the British army, it was also viewed as a disaster by Ludendorff, who saw another 400,000 of his troops incapacitated. ...

The final twist in the Hindenburg Program was the chronic neglect of agriculture. Here, even more than in France or Russia, men and horses and fuel were taken from the land and directed towards the needs of the army or the munitions industry -- an insane imbalance, since Germany could not (like France) compensate for such planning errors by obtaining foodstuffs from overseas to make up the difference.

While agricultural production plummeted in Germany, food prices spiralled and people everywhere complained about the scarcity of food supplies. (26)

The German leadership's relation to the military reality still seemed a dubious one, as an improvised conference at the Hotel Britannique in the famous Belgian town of Spa was to prove. Present were Wilhelm, Hindenburg, Ludendorff, Chancellor von Hertling, the young Austrian Emperor Karl and the Prussian Crown Prince. Less than a week after the "Black Day" of Amiens, Ludendorff had reverted to groundless optimism and when Karl clarified that the Austrians were at the end of their tether and unable to continue the war, Ludendorff proposed a stratagem of "gradually paralyzing the enemy's will to fight by a strategic defensive." (27) Once the enemy's fighting spirit was broken, the future peace settlement would allow Germany to retain Belgium, Luxembourg, Poland, the Baltic States and the Ukraine.

To achieve this "strategic defensive," Ludendorff demanded help to bolster the Western Front; Emperor Karl, diverted from his original purpose, found himself promising to send Austrian divisions to France. Hindenburg closed the conference by saying, "I hope that we shall be able to make a stand on French soil and thus in the end impose our will on the enemy."

A different appraisal of the situation came a few days later from army group commander Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, who wrote to Prince Max von Baden [the Kaiser's cousin, ¶], "By the mistaken operation beyond the Marne and the series of heavy reverses which followed - absolutely fatal both materially and morally - our military situation had deteriorated so rapidly that I no longer believe we can hold out over the winter. It is even possible that a catastrophe will come earlier." Emperor Karl returned to Vienna, and on September 10 - "like lightning out of a clear sky" - reverted to his original intention and addressed an Austrian peace offer to the United States. It did no good; Secretary of State Lansing immediately rejected the note. (28)

Despite the deteriorating situation at the home front - over a million workers had participated in strikes as early as in January 1918, and hundreds of women and children succumbed each day to malnutrition - the German army regained much of its spirit, and the subsequent Allied offensives launched in late September proceeded, "to Foch's irritation," (29) rather slowly. In the centre of the front, a combined Franco-British offensive advanced past the Hindenburg Line by the second week of October, but the attack in Flanders, around Ypres, struggled mightily against continuing resistance of Rupprecht's Bavarians and it took three weeks to capture Lille, only ten miles behind the front. The American offensives around Verdun and the Argonne Forest remained inconsequential for the outcome of the war: while the First U.S. Army was able to make good a few miles in the direction of Sedan, without ever reaching it, the Second U.S. Army made practically no gains at all east of the Meuse against Army Group Gallwitz.

But whatever defensive successes the German army achieved, they could only delay the loss of the war, not avoid it. The numerical strength of the defenders had shrunk to less than 2.5 million men by October, and few replacements were available although the German army continued to draft in fresh recruits until November 6. (30) It seems that on September 28, Ludendorff could no longer defy reality. After a tormented philippic against the Kaiser, the government, the army, the navy, and the universe that conspired against him, he informed Hindenburg that the war was lost and an armistice had to be secured forthwith. On the next day, a second conference was called at Spa; present were Wilhelm, Hindenburg, Ludendorff, Hertling and the new Foreign Secretary Paul von Hintze.

After protracted discussion, it was resolved that, in the face of the virtually unlimited American resources of men and materiel, the war could not be won. Germany's allies were at the brink of disintegration - Bulgaria had already capitulated and Austro-Hungarian as well as Turkish troops refused to fight - and no hope remained to avoid defeat. In these circumstances, the conclave set out to go on a little fishing expedition, to identify the most desirable peace terms that might be obtained. It was remembered that, on January 8, 1918, the President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson, had illustrated his ideas of peace and a new world order to the U.S. Congress and the world press in the famous "Fourteen Points".

The points essentially propounded an international order in which relations between nations must be transparent, colonial peoples should determine how and by whom they would be ruled, the seas would be open, free trade was to prevail, and a world government, a league of nations, would be formed. The Fourteen Points also set the price Germany must pay for peace. It must give up every inch of territory taken in this war as well as Alsace-Lorraine, seized from France nearly half a century before.² (31)

The participants of the conference perused with alacrity Wilson's words regarding the most decisive issues, those of financial consequences and of gain or loss of territories.

There shall be no annexations, no contributions, no punitive damages. ... National aspirations must be respected; peoples may now be dominated and governed only by their own consent. "Self-determination" is ... an imperative principle of action, which statesmen will henceforth ignore at their peril. (32)

Wilson's suggestions were deemed quite acceptable, but the Kaiser and the generals still entertained the hope that Alsace-Lorraine and Poland could be retained. However, as a public demonstration of Germany's instant peacefulness, the Kaiser accepted the resignation of seventy-five years old chancellor Hertling and, on October 3, appointed in his stead his fifty-one year old cousin, Prince Max von Baden.

Most histories depict the new chancellor as a "liberal" because Ludendorff called him that; but Prince Max was a liberal only in the sense that Nero and Caligula were liberals if compared to Attila the Hun. He was, of course, a staunch monarchist and had zero sympathies for liberal or, worse, socialist reforms, but he was not, like his brother-in-law Wilhelm, ignorant of reality. (33) He had, it was true, once served on the committee of the German Red Cross and in 1917 publicly mentioned the possibility of a negotiated peace, and thus he was far less compromised when contacting Wilson than, say, Ludendorff or Wilhelm himself would have been.

² Louis XIV had acquired these German provinces for France at the conclusion of the Thirty-Years-War, in the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.

Prince Max understood the urgency of decorating the German government with a few democratic faces; by yesterday, if possible. He approached the major parties of the Reichstag, and, by appealing to their patriotism, secured the support of the Liberals, the Catholic Centre and, for the first time in history, the SPD, two of whose deputies joined the Baden government. (34) The new administration set out to work on minor democratic changes to the old Imperial constitution and on October 5, von Baden notified the American government, via Switzerland, that Germany sought an armistice based on the Fourteen Points.

The first reply was received on October 8 from Secretary of State Robert Lansing, who imposed, on his president's behalf, the immediate withdrawal of German troops from the occupied parts of Belgium and France as an initial condition for an eventual armistice. Baden promised to fulfill the demand in his reply of October 12, and German evacuations began the next day.

On October 14, a second note, this time by Wilson, demanded the end of the "illegal and inhuman practices," (35) of the German submarines, and Baden managed to shut down the U-boats by October 20, against the bitter resistance of the admiralty. It must be noted, however, that neither Wilson nor any other U.S. representative ever demanded to shut down the, apparently legal and humane, continental blockade imposed by the Royal Navy.

A third note was received on October 16, and it did put the new chancellor into a quandary. Since it seemed to imply his cousin Wilhelm, Prince Max faced an awkward predicament. The memorandum demanded that the "arbitrary powers" which threatened the "peace of the world" were to be disposed of before formal negotiations could be initiated, which von Baden and his cabinet interpreted as demanding the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm at the very least, perhaps even the abolition of the monarchy and the establishment of a German republic. This diagnosis was supported by another missive that reached Berlin on October 23, and explained that if the United States "must deal with the military masters and monarchical autocrats of Germany, it must demand, not peace negotiations, but surrender." (36)

This clumsy message, quite unprecedented in diplomatic custom, was a political bomb of the biggest magnitude and occasioned consequences greater than perhaps any other diplomatic document of the 20th Century. At the time Wilson penned his note, diplomatic convention regarded the inner affairs of a sovereign country as a taboo which might be commented on, perhaps, in private whispers from ambassador to ambassador at informal functions, but not become the subject of an official note to the head of a government. For every German monarchist or nationalist, and there were still lots of them around, Wilson's note was an insult of epic proportion, an affront to the country's sovereignty and a pique to all those who had lost loved ones in the war. It was, literally, unheard of.

The catastrophic consequences of the note can hardly be exaggerated. Whether President Wilson had composed the missive in blissful American naiveté or in an ill-starred miscue, perhaps merely intending to strengthen the liberal and democratic elements in Germany cannot now be ascertained, but the results of his note provided, as we will see, a fantastic pretext and absolution to the guilty while the future German republic was fatefully tainted from her inception by having to shoulder the burden of a lost war she was not in the least responsible for.

The outcome of Wilson's note, without which the republic could not have been born in the same confused way, facilitated the creation of the two most resilient phantoms of subsequent nationalist, right-wing and finally Nazi propaganda, the myths of the "Stab in the Back" and the legend of the "November Criminals". As soon as the armistice was signed, the men responsible for the disaster disappeared: Wilhelm went to exile in the Netherlands, Ludendorff fled to Denmark, disguised in mufti and a false beard, and Hindenburg and the other prominent generals took to diving stations. The innocent representatives of the new republic which signed the armistice and, eventually, the peace treaty, were vilified as traitors and some of them subsequently murdered.

The unfortunate consequences of Wilson's note not only proved that the USA were "not quite as magnanimous as they had promised," (37) they created arguments which were to lead from the First directly to the Second War. It was uncalled for one state to dictate policy to another: we have seen how much the trifling matter of allowing a few Austrian detectives or not into Serbia to investigate Franz Ferdinand's assassination had become a *raison de guerre*. To make it worse, Wilson's procedures were deceptive and might be called extortionate - certainly not an auspicious start into his golden age of peace, love and understanding. His tactic of negotiation was *mala fide* from the beginning: designed to get

the opponent's most important concessions right from the start, and to get cheaply what otherwise would have to be obtained at great cost: the withdrawal of the German army from France and Belgium and the cessation of the U-boat campaign.

The problem was that Wilson's demands later allowed nationalists, monarchists and militarists alike to claim that the war had not really been lost: that the German army had "never been defeated in the field", since no foreign soldier, with the exception of Rennenkampf's and Samsonov's Russians in East Prussia 1914, had ever set foot on the Fatherland's soil. Hence the armistice was unnecessary and treasonous, as was the subsequent Treaty of Versailles, signed by the "November Criminals", i.e. the government of the German Republic that had stepped in after Wilhelm and his cronies had absquatulated themselves. Thus, the right-wing clamoured, the republic had signed away the nation's honour.

Prince Baden realized that the dismissal of Ludendorff, who, despite his deceptively spurious rank of First Quartermaster General was the real military dictator of the country, was priority number one, especially since the general had brazenly overstepped his authority. The day after Baden received Wilson's calamitous message, Ludendorff sensed an opportunity to prolong the war and hence his own authority. Since, against expectations, the German front had not collapsed after the "Black Day" at Amiens and the military situation had somewhat improved in the meantime, Ludendorff took the opportunity to address his troops in an order of the day. The bulletin defined the Fourteen Points and Baden's request for an armistice based thereon as a hidden "demand for unconditional surrender. It is thus unacceptable to us soldiers. It proves that our enemy's desire for our destruction, which let loose the war in 1914, still exists undiminished. It can thus be nothing for us soldiers but a challenge to continue our resistance with all our strength." (38)

An unknown staff officer moved quickly to suppress the circular, but one copy escaped destruction to reach OBEROST, the Eastern command, where the signal officer on duty, a Social Democrat, secured it and forwarded it to the party's headquarter in Berlin whence it found its way to the press. Ludendorff's unauthorized note was foul play at the very least, perhaps outright treason, and von Baden realized that any basis for peace negotiations would be compromised as long as the quasi-dictator remained in office. The broad support Baden enjoyed in the Reichstag enabled him to call upon the Kaiser and to make it clear that it was either Ludendorff or him. On October 26, Ludendorff and Hindenburg were ordered to Bellevue Palace in Berlin, where Ludendorff was forced to tender his resignation, which the emperor thanklessly accepted. Baden, who knew a double-dealer when he saw one, had prior to the meeting elicited Ludendorff's written admission that no chance remained to win the war by military means and hence could avoid the simultaneous firing of both the leading generals. When Hindenburg offered his own withdrawal from command, Wilhelm ordered him to remain. (39) The story goes, perhaps apocryphal, that when Ludendorff returned to his hotel room in the evening, he told his wife that: "In a fortnight we shall have no Empire and no Emperor left, you will see." (40)

Ludendorff's dismissal was overshadowed, however, by a number of major events that had transpired earlier in the month. Austria-Hungary fell apart. On October 6, the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes announced the establishment of a provisional government for a future state of the Southern Slavs, i.e. "Yugoslavia"; a day later the former German, Austrian and Russian Poles declared the rebirth, after 120 years, of a Polish nation, and on October 28 the Czechs and Slovaks affirmed their intention of forming their own republic. The Austrian Germans, left alone, suggested allegiance to a future greater German state, and, on November 1, Hungary cancelled the "Ausgleich" with Austria and the Habsburgs and declared itself an independent kingdom. (41)

The German army was still slowing down the Allied progress in late October, but, clearly, their stand was the next-to-last act of the drama: something had to give. In the event, it was the Kaiser's favourite toy, the navy.

With the German empire in its death throes, two groups in the German navy, first the admirals, then the seamen, took matters into their own hands. The submarine weapon had been sheathed but the High Seas Fleet remained a powerful force.

Enraged by the U-boat decision, Scheer and the Naval Staff decided to use the surface ships in one last offensive thrust, a bold variation on earlier unsuccessful attempts to lure the Grand Fleet over a U-boat ambush. The difference this time was that the Germans intended to fight a battle whether or not the U-boats had managed to reduce the Grand Fleet's numerical superiority.

Further, the German admirals did not care whether the High Seas Fleet won or lost; they cared only that it inflict heavy damage on the Grand Fleet. Hipper agreed with Scheer that "an honourable battle by the fleet - even if it should be a fight to the death - will sow the seed for a new German fleet of the future." Besides preserving honour, a battle that inflicted severe damage on the Grand Fleet might also influence the peace negotiations in Germany's favour. (42)

Kept secret from the German government, the scheme devised to bring everything that floated to bear against the Royal Navy: eighteen Dreadnought-type battleships, five battle cruisers, twelve light cruisers and seventy-two destroyers. The tactical plan was to tempt the Grand Fleet to pursue the High Seas Fleet over a barricade of mines and U-boats, which would reduce the British numerical superiority enough to allow the Germans to win the day or die in glory. To entice the British admiralty's attention, Hipper, promoted to Fleet Admiral, envisaged raids on British ports and bombardments of coastal cities. A special group of cruisers and destroyers was to rattle the British cage by sailing into the Thames estuary and attacking the local shipping. When the Grand Fleet descended to end the nuisance, the Germans would be ready. Scheer, now naval C-in-C, and Hipper both hoped that "a tactical success might reverse the military position and avert surrender." (43)

This was either remarkable optimism or complete delusion. Scheer approved Hipper's plan on October 27, and twenty-two U-boats headed out to set a trap. The rest of the fleet was called on to assemble in Jade Bay, where their unexpected presence caused ado galore. Instances of desertion had already occurred at Cuxhaven, and continued among the crews of the battleships that arrived in the bay during October 29.

The concentration of all the big ships in one port could not mean anything but an operation being laid on, and the scuttlebutt soon confirmed that the next morning would bring the order to weigh anchor. No sailor had doubts as to for what purpose. The crews of the battleships KÖNIG, KRONPRINZ WILHELM, MARKGRAF, KAISERIN, THÜRINGEN and HELGOLAND hoisted red flags and thus declared their insurrection; "on all these ships, seamen had no interest in 'an honourable death for the glory of the fleet'; they wanted surrender, discharge and permission to go home." (44)

Around 10 pm on October 29, Hipper found most of his fleet inoperative, and when, on the next morning, the mutiny spread to the battleships FRIEDRICH DER GROSSE and KÖNIG ALBERT, the sortie had to be aborted. To quench further insubordination, Hipper ordered the three battleship squadrons to separate and return to their home ports of Wilhelmshaven, Cuxhaven and Kiel. THÜRINGEN and HELGOLAND, however, did not move an inch, and Hipper called on a battalion of loyal marine infantry to have their crews arrested, shackled and imprisoned. (45)

Hipper's attempts at enforcing discipline only stoked the fire, and by dividing the battleship squadrons to three harbours he only succeeded in spreading disobedience further. When the 3rd Squadron arrived at Kiel on November 1, carrying chained seamen by the hundreds, it was greeted by four thousand rebellious mariners and dockhands that had helped themselves to arms by breaking into the well-stocked arsenals and demanded the captives' release. The next day saw the establishment of provisional sailors' and workers' councils, a call for a general strike by the union, and the taking over of port and town by November 4. A troupe of mutineers set out to arrest the commanding admiral, Prince Heinrich of Prussia, Wilhelm's brother, who...

... was forced to flee for his life, hiding behind a set of false whiskers and the red flag flying on his car. Even so, the car was shot at several times, the driver was seriously wounded, and the Prince was forced to take the wheel himself in a mad dash for the Danish frontier at Flensburg. (46)

Soon the mutiny fostered open calls for revolution, and as coastal vessels spread the message to the smaller port towns, the railways spread the germs of revolt over the country. Committees of revolting sailors and soldiers brought their demands to the burghers of any town they entered: an immediate armistice, the abdication of the Kaiser and the formation of a new, democratic and republican government. Still, the news was sketchy in many places, and in an attempt to find out exactly what had happened in Kiel, Prince Baden sent an embassy of two Reichstag deputies to the town: his friend Conrad Haussmann and the former butcher and journalist Gustav Noske, a representative of the Social Democrats. When the emissaries arrived at the town's railway station, they were greeted by a crowd whose apparent revolutionary resilience convinced Noske to hold an improvised speech in which he essentially promised the listeners that their demands were

soon to be met. The same evening he was able to inform Berlin about the details of the revolt, adding that the crowd had elected him to the post of revolutionary governor of Schleswig-Holstein. (47)



ON THE NIGHT OF OCTOBER 29 -30, 1918, THE SAILORS OF THE HIGH SEAS FLEET FIND OUT THE NEWS OF A PLANNED ATTACK UPON THE BRITISH GRAND FLEET - A POSSIBLE DEATH RIDE - AND ERECT THE BANNER OF MUTINY. REVOLUTIONARY SAILORS USE THE RAILWAY TO SPREAD THE NEWS (ABOVE, MUTINOUS SAILORS IN BERLIN), AND SAILORS, SOLDIERS AND CIVILIANS FORM SPONTANEOUS REVOLUTIONARY GUARDS AND COMMITTEES (BELOW).



In the meantime, suffering on the Western Front was much increased by the return of the so-called Spanish Influenza, which, despite the name, seems to have originated at Fort Riley, Kansas. (48) There had been an outbreak of influenza in the summer, subtracting about 400,000 soldiers from the already weakened German lines and perhaps a comparable number from the Allied trenches, but the second outbreak proved both more contagious and lethal. Arriving American troop ships brought the epidemic to the great debarkation ports; the soldiers infected the French, who in turn infected the British, and both their POW's in turn infected the Germans.

Oddly, the disease struck hardest at the fittest, particularly young men in their prime. Troopships laden with men packed closely together became floating pestholes. An American convoy arriving at Brest on October 8 in the midst of the Meuse-Argonne campaign had 4,000 men disabled by the flu, with 200 already buried at sea. Two hundred of the sick carried off the LEVIATHAN died within days. ...

The epidemic posed a dilemma for President Wilson. Since military camps had become hothouses for spreading the infection, orders for 142,000 men scheduled to report for induction late in September were cancelled. Should he, Wilson wondered, also cancel the embarkation of troopships?

On October 8, he met with the army's gruff chief of staff, General Peyton March, to ask his guidance. Both men accepted that to cram soldiers into the ships was to pass a death sentence on thousands of them. But Pershing was pleading desperately for replacements, especially since he had 150,000 men down with the flu. Just two days before Wilson and March met, Prince Max had made his appeal to the president to bring about peace.

Wilson and March recognized that the surest guarantee of defeating the Germans was to continue the deliveries of Americans to France, now swelling to an average of 50,000 weekly. How might the Germans react if they learned that the pressure was off because the American manpower pipeline had shut down?

March told Wilson, "Every such soldier who has died [from influenza] has just as surely played his part as his comrade who has died in France. The shipment of troops should not be stopped for any cause." The troopships continued to sail. (49)

On October 27, Prince Max signalled President Wilson that all his demands were to be met. Technically, it was of course not his decision but his cousin's Wilhelm, but Max had, cautiously, preferred not to inform the Kaiser of the clause in Wilson's demarche of October 23, which seemed to demand the abolishment of the monarchy. He would cross this particular bridge when he met it. When Turkey asked for an armistice on October 30 and Austria on November 4, Germany was alone in the war. The front still held, miraculously, but in the air hung the smell of revolution.

On October 29, Wilhelm left Berlin for the Supreme Command Headquarter at Spa, in the questionable belief that his presence close to the front would improve the soldiers' panache. But it was the absence, not the presence, of the Imperial person that set things in motion, which set free the rebellious entelechy in the capital, causing the final, decisive, and irreparable dissipation of the Ancien Régime.

"Reds are streaming with every train from Hamburg to Berlin," Count Harry Kessler, socialite, diplomat and Social Democrat supporter, recorded in his diary on 6 November. "An uprising is expected here tonight. This morning the Russian Embassy was raided like a disreputable pot-house and Joffe [the ambassador] with his staff, departed. That puts paid to the Bolshevik centre in Berlin. But perhaps we shall yet call these people back." (50)

By the first November week, the mutiny of the sailors had been followed by the insubordination of many garrisons, whose unwillingness to support the failing Prussian state eased the appearance of public uprisings. Local anarchists, Spartakists and Independent Social Democrats proposed various forms of revolution, and councils took over the administration of most big towns. In the first week of November, Red flags were carried through the streets of Hamburg, Bremen, Cologne, Duisburg, Frankfurt and München. But it was a curiously silent rebellion, the reports agree, that pervaded the streets; violence, nay, even overspirited discussion was strangely absent. That was to change soon enough. The Spartakusbund,

German's Bolsheviks in disguise, had quietly concentrated followers in the capital during the first week of November while their leaders, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, prepared the German revolution.

Liebknecht's Father Wilhelm had been a personal friend of Karl Marx and achieved socialist sainthood by becoming a co-founder of the SPD and editor of its newspaper, VORWÄRTS ["Ahead", ¶]. His son studied law and economy in Leipzig and Berlin before becoming, essentially, a lawyer for the socialist movement. He was elected to the Reichstag for the SPD in 1912 and was the sole member of the socialist camp to vote against war credits in August 1914. When it became clear that the rest of the party would at least temporarily support the government, and hence the war, Liebknecht began to seek sympathizers outside of the party.

For this objective he founded the SPARTAKUSBUND, the League of Spartacists, named, of course, for the Thracian slave Spartacus who had led the uprising against Rome in 72-70 BC. The SPARTAKUSBRIEFE ("Spartacus Letters"), the league's anti-war newspaper, were banned soon enough, and its founder and editor found himself at the Russian front, where he refused to fight and was consequently assigned to a burial detail. Released from service for reasons of health, he went straight back to anti-war propaganda and headed the Socialist Peace Demonstration on May Day 1916 through the streets of Berlin. This time he was charged with high treason and sent to prison for four years, but the sentence was commuted under Prince Baden's amnesty for political prisoners of October 1918. As soon as he was back on the streets, he "resumed his leadership of the Spartacists, in partnership with the Polish activist, Rosa Luxemburg." (51)

Frau Luxemburg was an early apprentice in the business of insurrection; she had been active in the illegal socialist and anti-Czarist movements in pre-war Russia since she was a schoolgirl. (52) Timely escaping the attentions of the Okhrana, she wound up in Switzerland where an affluent lover allowed her to study at the University of Zürich and to subsidize the illegal socialist parties of Poland and Lithuania. She was perhaps the most extreme socialist outside of Russia in these years, advocating global and remorseless revolution. She became a German by marriage in 1903, joined the SPD, and began to throw her weight behind the radical wing. Eventually, she became known as the factotum of the world revolution and was regularly thrown in jail, rescued by her old Swiss flame, and jailed again. She joined Liebknecht immediately after her release by Baden's amnesty and began to organize the revolutionary bureaucracy of the Spartacists.

This poisonous pair, like Lenin and Trotsky in Russia, saw the moderate Socialists of the SPD as their principal enemies. "The party must be recaptured from below," Luxemburg wrote, "by mass rebellion." Their allies were the antiwar left-wingers who had split from the main SPD in 1917 and formed their own Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD), and who were only slightly less extreme than the Spartacists. The moderate Socialists responded by sneering at them in VORWÄRTS, contrasting the "pathological instability" of Spartacus with their own "clearheaded and sensible calm." But while the moderate Socialists were maintaining their sensible calm, the Spartacists were meeting returning troop trains at the rail termini to beg or buy rifles, pistols and machine guns. (53)

Meanwhile, Prince Max faced the problem how to end the war and the monarchy without involuntary nurturing the revolution. He concentrated his final efforts on three decisive issues: the replacement of Ludendorff, the deputation of the executive power to a government able to guide the country peacefully through the many changes that were to follow and, prerequisite for the latter, the abdication of his cousin Wilhelm.

On November 9 he appointed General Wilhelm Groener, son of a NCO from Württemberg and a transportation and supply specialist, to Ludendorff's former post of Chief of Staff and - quite unlawfully - transferred his own office and authority as chancellor of the Reich to the forty-seven year old former saddle maker and chairman of the SPD, Friedrich Ebert. The remaining task was the most difficult. No civil, much less a government led by socialists, could exercise authority with the emperor still in office.

At this point, Wilhelm was at Spa, the imperial head full of foolish fantasies of how, as soon as an armistice was signed, he would lead his loyal armies back to Germany and restore order. What Prince Max back in Berlin recognized was that, far from a solution, Wilhelm's return was the problem. In Metz, the Allies' next target, 10,000 German soldiers had reportedly mutinied, formed a Soldier's Council, and taken over the city. Similar overthrows of the old order were erupting all over Germany. ... Peace seekers inside Germany

accepted that the only act that would prevent the masses from swinging over to the radicals was removal of the country's discredited monarch. (54)

In the last ten days since his arrival at Spa, Wilhelm had successfully managed to avoid the intrusions of reality and maintained that abdication was out of the question. Not quite used to being contradicted, the Kaiser refused to listen to the explanations of Prince Max's messenger Drews, Prussian Minister of the Interior. He had "no intention of quitting the throne because of a few hundred Jews and a thousand workmen. Tell that to your masters in Berlin." (55)

Baden recognized that he had to talk to his cousin in person. On the evening of November 8, he called Wilhelm on the telephone and tried to cut through the Kaiser's obstinacy by making clear that, in lieu of Wilhelm's abdication, civil war was to ravage the country. The emperor did not believe a word. It was inconceivable, he riposted, that the army would refuse to follow him. In addition, since it was Prince Max who had asked Wilson for an armistice, not Wilhelm himself, he felt quite unconcerned. "You sent out the armistice offer," he said, "you will also have to accept the conditions." (56) On the next morning, November 9, the leadership of the army, Hindenburg and Groener, called at the Hotel Britannique in Spa to pay their sovereign a final, necessary visit.

In Spa, on 9 November, the Emperor met the leaders of his army, the institution through which the Hohenzollern dynasty had risen to power, and to which it had always looked to sustain its dignity and authority. Wilhelm II still believed that, whatever disloyalties were being transacted by civilian politicians in Berlin, whatever affronts to order disturbed the streets, his subjects in field-grey remained true to their oath of military obedience. Even on 9 November he continued to delude himself that the army could be used against the people and the royal house preserved by turning German against German.

His generals knew otherwise. Hindenburg, the wooden titan, heard him out in silence. Groener, the workaday railway transport officer, son of a sergeant, who had replaced Ludendorff, found the sense to speak. He knew, from soundings taken among fifty regimental commanders, that the soldiers now wanted "only one thing - an armistice at the earliest possible moment." The price of that, to the House of Hohenzollern, was the Kaiser's abdication. The Kaiser heard him with continuing incredulity. What about, he asked, the FAHNENEID, the oath on the regimental colours which bound every German soldier to die rather than disobey? Groener uttered the unutterable. "Today," he said, "the FAHNENEID is only a form of words." (57)

In the chancellery in Berlin, unable to follow events in distant Spa, von Baden consulted Ebert on the situation on the streets. Ebert warned that unless the abdication could be effected with speed, a coup d'état by Spartacists and USPD became more likely every hour. Since Prince Max was aware that the monarchy was finished willy-nilly, he dictated, in antecedence of actuality, to an employee of the Wolff Telegraph Office in Berlin a message stating that "The Kaiser and King has resolved to renounce the throne." (58)

When the sensational cable was brought to the attention of the party in Spa within minutes, Wilhelm exploded in a diatribe against all traitors, civilian or military, but was forced to realize that the game was up. At 3:30 pm, on Saturday, November 9, 1918, he relinquished the throne, and the Second Empire had come to its end, forty-seven years and ten months after its inception in the Hall of Mirrors in Versailles. On Hindenburg's advice, Wilhelm left for exile in the early morning hours of November 10, to Castle Amerongen in the Netherlands, seat of Count Godard Bentinck, who would be his host for the next twenty-three years. (59)

Meanwhile events in the capital precipitated head over heels. Philip Scheidemann, vice chairman of the SPD, had rushed from the chancellery to the Reichstag to inform his colleagues of Ebert's appointment. Having a well-deserved lunch in the cafeteria, he was informed that Spartakus and USPD had summoned their followers to the Emperor's town palace, ostensibly for the proclamation of the revolution and the launch of the German Socialist Soviet Republic. Speed was of the essence.

Scheidemann stormed to the terrace outside the Reichstag library where he was cheered by a crowd vacillating between hope and apprehension. Improvising, Scheidemann informed the people about the Ebert appointment and the creation of a new, republican and democratic government, and ended his brief address with the words: "The rotten old

monarchy has collapsed. Long live the new! Long live the German Republic!" (60) Meanwhile, Spartacist delegations had appeared in factories, barracks and caserns and mobilized a crowd of thousands of supporters, who were marched to meet at the Royal Palace. Liebknecht greeted the revolutionary assembly from the balcony of the building, whence formerly the Kaiser had addressed his subjects:

"Comrades!" he cried. "The red flag flies over Berlin! The proletariat is marching. The reign of capitalism which has turned Europe into a graveyard is over. We must summon our strength to build a new government of workers and peasants, to create a new order of peace and happiness and freedom not merely for our brothers in Germany but for the whole world. Whoever is resolved not to cease from the fight until the Free Socialist Republic and the world revolution shall be realised, let him raise his hand and swear!" The crowd roared back "We swear!" But Liebknecht was two hours too late. (61)

Ebert had acted quickly and already persuaded the USPD, Liebknecht's sole possible supporters, to enter into a coalition with the SPD by offering the smaller party an equal share, three of six posts, in the provisional government. The new executive power was named Council of People's Commissars, and was expected to share the administration with the workers' and soldiers' councils of the capital until a national assembly could enact a constitution and subsequently install a legitimate government. Ebert's cautious manoeuvring also persuaded the liberal and Catholic interests in the capital and much of the country to support the formerly dreaded SPD as a mainstay of the new republic, and thus the government had at least the legitimacy of the popular backing.

That was, if the revolution could be kept at bay. This indeed seemed to be the case: except for a few skirmishes on Saturday evening and Sunday, November 10, Berlin remained quiet, and, the issue of a German republic now advanced from the realm of possibility to actuality, the eyes of the nation returned to the Western Front. The war was still going on, and the Allied Supreme Command had already scheduled the next offensive, against Metz, for November 14, and further attacks were planned far into 1915.

Pershing, now commanding close to two million doughboys, seemed to long for an augmentation of his military prestige by the conquest of Sedan, which was by far the most attractive target on the south-eastern part of the front. It was the town where the Prussian army had beaten the French in 1870 and taken Napoleon III and 100,000 poilus prisoners-of-war.

Prince Max had dispatched a delegation for the negotiation of the armistice to the French trenches near Haudroy on November 7. The party was headed by Matthias Erzberger, chairman of the German Catholic Centre Party, which supported von Baden's informal government. He was a known pacifist and the sole well-known face in the German deputation which, except for him, consisted of mid-level functionaries of the Foreign Service, Army and Navy. (62) The embassy was taken, by train, to a railway couch in the Forest of Compiègne, sixty-five kilometres northeast of Paris, and the expected gruff treatment delivered by Foch and General Weygand. The armistice conditions were as follows:

All occupied lands in Belgium, Luxembourg, and France, plus Alsace-Lorraine, held since 1870 by Germany, must be evacuated within fourteen days; the Allies were to occupy Germany west of the Rhine and bridgeheads on the river's east bank thirty kilometres deep; German forces must be withdrawn from Austria-Hungary, Romania and Turkey; Germany was to surrender to neutral or Allied ports 10 battleships, 6 battle cruisers, 8 cruisers, and 160 submarines. She was to be stripped of heavy armament, including 5,000 artillery pieces, 25,000 machine guns, and 2,000 airplanes.

The next demand threw the German delegates into despair. Though their people already faced famine, the Allies intended to paralyse the country's transportation by continuing the naval blockade and confiscating 5,000 locomotives, 150,000 railway cars, and 5,000 trucks. Weygand droned on through thirty-four conditions, the last of which blamed Germany for the war and demanded she pay reparations for all damage caused. (63)

The German delegation was given a seventy-two hours deadline and an opportunity to convey the Allied demands by radio to Berlin. Erzberger realized that the conditions imposed were far too acrimonious to be entrusted to radio, which might

be monitored, and only informed Prince Max that a courier was on the way. Then he asked for a preliminary suspension of combat until a reply was received, pointing out that four thousand lives or more a day could thus be saved. Foch refused, as a favour to Pershing, who, furious that his grand design of conquering Germany was being foiled, insisted on fighting to the last minute; to the greater glory of the American Expeditionary Force and his own command.

The Erzberger mission overnighted in the Forest of Compiègne near Foch's railway coach, drafting letters of protest they hoped might have a moderating influence on the Allied conditions. At 8 pm on November 10, they received a French report of an intercepted message from Berlin which confirmed Erzberger's plenipotentiary powers and authorized him to sign the instrument of truce.

A second message was received, from Hindenburg, verifying the authenticity of the first signal and instructing Erzberger to try to have the naval blockade lifted, for the sake of the starving women and children. At 2 am the next morning, November 11, the German deputation was led back to the railway car for a second round of discussions.

Foch, however, remained intransigent, and the sole moderation of terms Erzberger achieved was that the Allies "would contemplate the provisioning of Germany during the Armistice as shall be found necessary." (64) The cease-fire was signed just after 5 am in the morning, to take effect by 11:00 of the same day, six hours hence, and the meeting was adjourned. All that remained for the soldiers on both sides of the wire was to spend six more hours in their trenches and the slaughter would be over.

That is, for everyone except the AEF, which was directed by Pershing to continue the attacks scheduled for the day without regard of the armistice taking effect at 11:00? Since Foch had informed all Allied commanders, including Pershing, in advance of the conditions of the truce, it was clear that whatever ground could be gained in a last-minute offensive would be ground the German were obliged to give up within two weeks anyway.

Pershing did inform his regimental and division commanders that a ceasefire was to take effect on 11:00, but directed his chief of staff that, between 5:00 and 11:00, the AEF was "to take every advantage of the situation." (65) Nine out of sixteen U.S. division commanders on the Western Front interpreted the absence of specific orders as an incentive to launch the scheduled attacks; seven refrained from further jeopardizing their men lives and limbs.

Thus nine U.S. divisions attacked the enemy on the morning of November 11, and since the Germans were forced to defend themselves whether they wanted or not, almost 11,000 casualties were unnecessarily added to the total of the war's losses. With more than 2700 men dead at the end of these few hours, the last day exceeded the average daily toll of 2,000 dead by far.

Putting these losses into perspective, in the June 6, 1944, D-Day invasion of Normandy, nearly twenty-six years later, the total losses were reported at 10,000 for all sides. Thus the total Armistice Day casualties were nearly 10 percent higher than those on D-Day. There was, however, a vast difference. The men storming the Normandy beaches were fighting for victory. Men dying on Armistice Day were fighting in a war already decided. (66)

At 11:00 on November 11, 1918, the guns ceased fire along the Western Front. But it was only in the aftermath of the great conflict that the members of the old Imperial houses realized for how long, in truth, their relevance had diminished without their notice. For it turned out that the power of the Hohenzollern, Habsburg and Romanov dynasties had not ended in February 1917 or November 1918, but in the summer of 1914 or even earlier - in their driving the old continent into war and pestilence they had, alas, overlooked the shadows of nationalism and socialism lingering in the rear mirror, forces eager to embrace the Imperial inheritance.

Within days the victorious Allied armies repossessed Belgium, invaded Western Germany and advanced to the line of the Rhine River.

MAP LXXXI: FINAL ALLIED OFFENSIVE AND TERRITORIAL GAINS UNTIL ARMISTICE DAY

