

preceded by a number of tanks whose crews were provided with wire cutting torpedoes and other instruments for demolition of entanglements. This movement was made on a front of ten miles, and by noon some of the outer positions were taken. During the afternoon the advance was continued, and at daybreak on the following morning the retreat of a considerable body of the defenders was intercepted. Violent counter-attacks enabled a portion of the German forces to withdraw, but 16,000 prisoners and 443 guns were taken. All the ground necessary as a starting point for the projected advance down the Meuse was carried.

This series of operations is a notable example of well co-ordinated effort. It was only made possible by unity of command and a highly efficient service of supply and transport. An immense army of railway construction troops, foresters, artificers, and labourers of all descriptions was constantly employed on the lines of communication behind the advancing troops. Several hundred thousand unskilled labourers had been recruited in the African and Asiatic possessions of Great Britain and France and in China. The losses of the fighting troops had been severe, but they were rapidly replaced from the large reserves constantly pouring into France from England and the United States. The French had likewise organized and brought in from their African dominions fighting troops numbering nearly a million men.

It was next decided, after a careful discussion between the allied commanders, that four convergent and simultaneous offensives should be undertaken. These were as follows: by the Americans west of the Meuse in the direction of Mézières; by the French west of the Argonne in close co-operation with the American attack and having the same general objective; by the British on the St. Quentin-Cambrai front in the general direction of Maubeuge; by Belgian and other allied troops in Flanders in the direction of Ghent. It was anticipated that if these operations were successful the German forces opposed to the French and Americans would be forced back into the difficult hilly region of the Ardennes, while the British advance would strike at their chief lines of communication. In Flanders it was expected that the gradual weakening of the German forces would enable the Allies to clear the Belgian coast by a surprise attack. Much depended upon the success of the British advance in the centre, as the German system of defence was there most strongly developed and if it was once broken, their lines of lateral communication would be vitally menaced.

By launching these attacks in rapid succession along a front of one hundred and twenty miles, the enemy would be unable to shift about his reserves on interior lines of communication as he had done so frequently in the past with success. His troops would be nailed to their positions and if the Hindenburg line was once penetrated he would be driven from a defensive position where he had probably planned to remain during the winter.

As these operations were to commence from the right, the whole of the First American Army was transferred to the area behind the sector of the line between the Meuse and the western edge of the