

RUS IN VAIN THAT GERMANY MASSES FOR GREATEST BATTLE

Ludendorff Sees She Must Smash Allies Before America Gets Into Fray—Bolsheviki Not to Blame for Treaty That Frees Eastern German Troops.

Bonar Law "Still Sceptical" When All Others See Big Drive Coming—British Man-Power Problem Acute

Haig Threatens Resignation as Supreme War Council Orders Him to "Take Over More Line"—No Haig-Petain Plot Against Foch.

BY GEORGE H. B. DEWAR
Article VII.

Two sovereign facts early in 1918 transcended, in the judgment of German leadership, all minor military and political considerations. One is that France and Great Britain must be overwhelmed in 1918 before America can establish a formidable army on French soil; the other that the impending collapse of Russia as a great military opponent promises Germany a highly favourable—and probably at last—chance of forcing a decision on the Western Front.

"All that mattered was to get together (1918) enough troops for an attack on the west," wrote Ludendorff. The need was urgent to collect, for this end, "every man that could be spared from the various theatres" of the war.

The collapse of Russia offered Germany, a greater, a far speedier, prospect of victory in the first half of 1918 than the hope of American military development could give the Entente at that season. But to close finally with Russia was not as easy as many people without Ludendorff's knowledge and judgment imagined. The Bolsheviks spun out the negotiations. They angled for support outside Russia. They tried to induce the enemy to evacuate the country before the terms were finally carried out.

This did not suit German's plan for transporting in safety the bulk of her fighting troops and material to the Western Front for an offensive in 1918 before America could develop. Austrian and German socialist pleas for the poor Bolsheviks were therefore swept aside. The armistice was denounced; hostilities were resumed on the Russian front on February 14 and 1918. At once the Bolshevik leaders were brought to their knees, and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was imposed on them.

(In April 1922 Mr. Lloyd George reminded the Bolshevik delegates at Genoa that, by signing the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, Russia had enabled the Germans to transfer their divisions to the Western Front and to place the Allies there in grave danger. The Soviet delegates might have asked why the Allies, knowing perfectly well of this danger, took no steps to avoid it by strengthening their forces on the front until after the Germans had transferred from east to west the divisions required, and delivered their blow! The truth is the Bolsheviks were compelled to make peace with Germany on her own terms; whereas the British War Cabinet was not compelled to jeopardize the British Army, and the whole Allied cause, by withholding from Haig, between January and March 1918, the forces essential to defend their front, and at the same time deciding through the incompetent Council of Versailles that this front should be still further extended.)

It is to the credit of the British Press that the public was warned of the coming offensive; there were many references to it in newspapers through the winter of 1917-1918; and they came from authoritative sources at our front.

What view did the War Cabinet take as to the probability of a German offensive? Either they did not take the German threat seriously, or the members of that Cabinet differed from one another.

On March 7th, 1918, Mr. Bonar Law, leader of the House of Commons and a member of the War Cabinet, made this statement: "The offensive ought to be coming. The Germans have advertised it. They have advertised it to such an extent that if it is not carried out it will be rather difficult to justify the inaction to their people. They have also sent their troops to carry it out. But I myself am still a little sceptical about it." (The italics are the writer's.)

Mr. Bonar Law admitted that, within the last two or three months, the Germans had transferred about thirty divisions from the east to the Western front. He also said that our G. H. Q. was expecting the attack in a short time—though he added that various local commanders took "a most resolute view of the prospects."

On April 9, 1918, Mr. Lloyd George, without saying whether he, like Bonar Law on March 7th, had been a sceptic in this matter, claimed that the military staff at Versailles at the end of January and February had foretold the great offensive with extraordinary accuracy.

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Yet, despite this warning, of which he spoke in such high terms on April 9th, the War Cabinet had not thought fit to give the British Commander-in-Chief the troops necessary to meet or overcome the great German offensive.

Colonel Henderson, in his work The Science of War, declares that in all history there are few more glaring instances of incompetent statesmanship than the proposal of the British Cabinet in 1813, at the moment when Wellington was contemplating a campaign to expel the French from Spain—and was accordingly asking for more men, etc., to detach a large force in the vague hope of exciting a revolution in Italy.

Might he not have slightly modified his censure on the 1813 Cabinet had he lived to find the 1918 Cabinet, in face of this heavy enemy threat, deciding to extend its operations in a distant and subsidiary theatre of the war? For that is what did occur.

At the end of January 1918, the Supreme War Council at Versailles resolved on a greater effort, with more troops, in Palestine; and the resolution was reached despite the British Commander-in-Chief's warning that concentration of our resources was now absolutely essential in the vital theatre, where alone a decision could be reached by either side.

As to the Cabinet of 1813, it may have been indiscreet in thinking of sending troops to Italy; but Wellington was not at the time threatened by a mighty concentration of the enemy in Spain, as we in 1918 were threatened in France. Lord Liverpool and Palmerston his War Secretary strike some war figures when we come to contrast them with their successors in office a hundred and five years later!

When at the close of 1917, British leadership, in accord with the French and the Allied view generally, decided on a defensive policy for the first part of the coming year, its reason was simply that our divisions were, numerically below strength; whilst the Germans, on the other hand, were growing and growing in power. The question of man-power on the Western Front had become most grave.

The man-power problem should be considered coolly. It was one of the interminable controversies during the war, and by appeals to passion neither side succeeded in converting its opponents.

Many observers at home felt that too many men of the right age and physique for military service were being withheld by the tribunals and State authority; being allotted to tasks which, on emergency, might easily have been done by men past the military age, and by women.

Certainly the "combing-out" process must have become in 1918-1919 more drastic had not the British Army in France succeeded between August and November in breaking the German centre; for had our troops in France failed or faltered therein the war would have lasted into the next year, and we should have been forced to draw deeper on our remaining man-power resources.

The action of Ludendorff in shifting division after division from Russia to the Western Front from November 1917 onwards was a warning that we should be shortly engaged in heavy fighting, and must have on the spot ample resources for successful defence. Still the Government would reasonably expect to learn definitely its Commander-in-Chief's views on the subject before deciding what to do with the troops still at home.

Ireland and "an invasion" being duly allowed for, there remained at home a large surplus of men training or trained; and the point would be how large a proportion of these ought to be despatched to France to secure our front there?

Did the Commander-in-Chief early in January 1918 consider the Germans likely to risk very heavy losses by a great stroke against the Allies in France in order to secure a decision?

The answer to this is Haig took the view that the next few months would be the most crucial period, the Germans very possibly making a gambler's throw for a decision on the Western Front.

Therefore, we must expect to be attacked heavily, to be pressed back, losing ground and guns. We ought to prepare against casualties in the British Army amounting to a hundred thousand a month.

If, however, we were supplied with the necessary divisional strength, the Commander-in-Chief was confident the Army would hold it own.

Such was his view early in Janu-

ary 1918. The Government were in possession of it.

But between the beginning of January and the end of the third week in March, the fresh forces required to secure the British line did not arrive in France.

The Commander-in-Chief's warning to the War Cabinet was not acted upon.

The question of the line for two years past had been a delicate one between the Allies.

In the fourth week of September, 1917 the British were engaged in the Menin Road battle where the Germans replied with a series of powerful counter-attacks. The time was quite inopportune to raise again the line question.

Yet it was discussed in a conference at Boulogne on September 25th. The French Government pressed for an extension of our line and the relief of French divisions. The British Government assented. The British Commander-in-Chief was not at this conference. The matter should not at this conference and decided on—even 'in principle'—during his absence. How could the question of the adjustment of the line be well settled before the Allies had reached, for instance, some agreement as to the operations for the coming year?

However, it was explained that the conference at Boulogne had not decided to extend the British front but had merely expressed its desire to do 'in principle' and as far as possible what was desired by the French Government.

The French resumed the argument, pressed by their politicians in 1916, that the British Army, considering its numerical strength in France, was not fairly sharing the burden of the line with the French Army.

But that argument was not sound. It left out of the reckoning the fact that the whole of our front was a hard fighting, always dangerous, one; whereas a considerable length of the line held by the French was, by comparison, a non-fighting one. It is true that Nivelles had regarded as possible a German attack in Alsace-Lorraine even to Switzerland, and his successor also took—or seemed to take—that front seriously. An expectation of a German attack through Switzerland via Bel-fort oppressed French civilians. Yet no hard fighting actually occurred there after the early part of the war; and the Germans made no plans for such an attack. The truth probably is that danger of such an attack disappeared when the British Army became a great fighting force in the north.

But a new authority was now to attempt to settle this apparently interminable discussion, namely, the Supreme Council of Versailles. This body had come into existence in November 1917 owing to the collapse of the Second Italian army and the retreat to the Piave.

The British members of the Council were therefore reminded that, whilst part of the French front was in effect a non-fighting front, the whole of the British front was an active one: that the great offensives of the British in the second half of 1917 had taken the pressure off the French; that large numbers of our troops had been withdrawn for year and a half.

The British representatives were given to understand that, if the extension went beyond Barisis—which was the utmost that could be agreed to, and which would strain our man-power resources in France gravely—then the British Commander-in-Chief could not undertake the responsibility of defending the Channel ports. (This was equivalent to a threat of resignation—and it was so intended. What would

have happened in March 1918 if we had taken over the line to Berry-au-Bac?) The result was a verbal compromise. The Supreme Council did not exactly insist. It did not exactly desist. It resolved at the end of January that "in principle" the proposal should stand; but conceded that the question of when the extension from Barisis to the Ailette should be carried out must be left to Petain and Haig.

This closed the prolonged discussion on the line. At the end of January 1918 we completed the extension of our line to Barisis, and so had 125



LORD FRENCH AND SIR DOUGLAS HAIG. An unusual photograph showing the British commander in civilian clothes.

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miles of active front to hold. Seven weeks were allowed us by the enemy to do what we could, by the unceasing work of our troops who had been fighting through 1917, to reorganize the new front taken over. The time was inadequate.

Early in 1918, Petain and Haig, recognizing that the Germans were getting ready for their offensive, and the point of junction between the French and British Armies was one of danger, discussed plans for mutual support. If the enemy attacked the French heavily at or near this point, the British should intervene, and vice versa.

It has been stated that this was a private understanding between the British and French Commanders-in-Chief; and that it was concealed from Foch, the chief military representative of France at Versailles.

There is no truth in that. At the various meetings between the French and British representatives of G. Q. G. and G. H. Q. and other officers in both armies, Foch's representatives were frequently present, and naturally they followed the whole discussion closely. As many as forty British and French officers attended some of these conferences.

How Ludendorff Threw Titanic Army Into the World's Greatest Battle will be described in the Eighth Article of Mr. Dewar's Series on "Gen. Haig's Command," which will appear in the Whig next Saturday, Sept. 8, Amiens, Lower Somme Valley, and Separation of Allies Were His Objectives—How the British Intelligence Department contributed to defensive preparations—The Myth of Converting the Dead Into Soap—and Soup! Versailles Ideas to a German Point of Attack—Haig Rightly Guesses Time and Place—French Co-operation on British Right Breaks Down—Fog Ruins Allies' Chance in March 21st Attack.

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Mr. Fluddub, after trying to read the paper while his wife gabbled, laid it aside.
"I see a registration of motorists visiting the national parks shows there is an average of 3.45 persons per car."
"What about it?" snapped his better half.
"Nothing: I was just thinking," he insisted.
"Well, what were you thinking?"
"Nothing much, my dear. I guess I am the .45 person per car."