



(c) crown copyright

The Western Front:
German Attack.
The Present
Position.

1. THE Chief of the Imperial General Staff explained the situation on a map. Immediately south of the Somme the enemy had achieved a maximum advance in the last 24 hours of two to three kilometres. French divisions were coming up to oppose this advance. In the region of Montdidier the French had counter-attacked, and heavy fighting was going on in the streets of that town. The French attack west of Noyon was still proceeding.

Eighty-two German divisions had been identified, and the total number of enemy divisions engaged probably numbered 90, leaving from 5 to 8 entirely fresh divisions still to come in. After this the *roulement* would begin.

At a later stage in the meeting the Director of Military Operations reported that north of the Somme there had been no further enemy attacks, and the situation appeared to be well in hand. All the evidence tended to show that the enemy had received a severe defeat in his recent attacks on the Arras front. He was reported to be digging in on the line Thiepval—Aveluy. Between the Somme and the Ancre the Australians had the situation well in hand. South of the Somme we were holding a line of trenches west of Ignaucourt—western edge of Marcelcave—western edge of Lamotte-en-Santerre—west of Hamel, thence Sailly-le-Sec. On this portion of the front the enemy was holding a line of shell-holes, running roughly from Cerisy to east of Guillaucourt. The situation was generally quiet, with the exception that the enemy was shelling Corbie. Our artillery was in action east of Villers—Brettoneux. North of the Somme we now had six fresh divisions in reserve, and three quite fresh divisions in line. We had withdrawn 16 tired divisions, and it was estimated that the enemy had withdrawn 40. The total number of field and heavy guns lost by us was 879. The enemy claimed 1,100. This number, therefore, probably included old 15-pounders used as anti-tank guns, tank guns, anti-aircraft guns, and some French guns, number unknown.

The French Front.

2. The Director of Military Operations reported that the French General Headquarters, telephoning at 10 o'clock that morning, expressed themselves as well satisfied with the result of the fighting yesterday, which they regarded as a critical day. Heavy fighting took place along the Rivers Luce and Avre, the result of which was that part of the ground lost yesterday was regained. Demuin was recaptured, and the enemy was driven back to the western outskirts of Mézières. The French had entered Montdidier, and fighting was going on in that place. Between Montdidier and Lassigny both sides were digging in. There was no change east of Lassigny. There had been great enemy air activity south of the Somme, particularly on the part of scout machines.

Condition of the
Vth Army.

3. With reference to War Cabinet 374, Minute 7, the Prime Minister read a message which he had received from Mr. Churchill urging the importance of reconstituting the Vth Army.

The War Cabinet requested—

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff to send a special officer to France to ascertain what assistance could be rendered in the direction of reconstituting this army.

Mesopotamia.

4. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff reported that a telegram had been received from General Marshall, dated the 29th March, showing that the recent success at Khan Baghdadiya, in Mesopotamia (War Cabinet 376, Minute 2), had been even more important than was indicated by the enemy's casualties.

121
France
1944

W.C. 352
6.

The War Cabinet requested—

The Secretary of State for War to send a telegram conveying their congratulations to General Marshall and the troops under his command on this success.

Recruiting in the
Dominions:

Message to
Australia.

5. The War Cabinet had some discussion on the question of a further appeal to the Dominions for increased effort in recruiting, along the lines which would have to be adopted in this country.

In this connection Lord Derby said that he had seen Sir Edward Kemp on this subject, who had informed him that everything possible was being done in Canada, and that it therefore did not seem desirable to approach the Canadian Government officially, but urged that a personal telegram should be sent by the Prime Minister to Mr. Hughes on the subject.

The War Cabinet were of opinion that some message should be sent to Australia.

The Prime Minister undertook to send a personal message to Mr. Hughes on the subject.

General Foch's
Appointment:
Public
Announcement.

6. With reference to War Cabinet 374, Minute 9, the Prime Minister informed the War Cabinet that a message had been published in Washington from President Wilson congratulating General Foch on his new appointment. The Prime Minister added that the Press Bureau wished to know whether such messages were to be published in this country, or whether the British Government were going to make any announcement on the subject.

The War Cabinet were of opinion that an official announcement should be made in this country as soon as possible to the following effect:—

"That, with the cordial co-operation of the British and French Commanders-in-Chief, General Foch had been charged by the British, French, and American Governments to co-ordinate the action of the Allied Armies on the Western front."

The War Cabinet decided that—

President Wilson's message should be kept back from publication, and that the Foreign Office should inform the French Government that we are going to make an announcement immediately in our press.

Message to the
Press.

7. In addition to the announcement authorised in the previous Minute, the War Cabinet decided—

That a statement should be issued to the press in the sense that, since the commencement of the German attack, the War Cabinet has been in constant session. They have taken many decisions dealing with the immediate situation; they have dealt with the question of despatching reinforcements and guns to replace losses; they also have in course of preparation a series of measures for dealing with the situation in the future for the supply of large numbers of men and guns to maintain our army throughout the summer. These measures will necessarily take a few days to prepare, and they will be announced, so far as is in the public interest, when Parliament meets.

The War Cabinet also decided that—

The Prime Minister should settle the wording of these messages, and then they should be issued.

*Supd. tele.
55268 28/3.
to Col.
Mesopotamia*

*Vol. 350
2.
12
France
1949.*

Assistance by the
United States:
Meeting of the
Supreme War
Council.

2091.
- 3.

8. With reference to War Cabinet 377, Minute 7 (a), it was suggested that, should there be any reluctance on the part of the American Government to comply with the proposal put forward, it might be desirable to convene a Special Meeting of the Supreme War Council, either at Versailles or some place more convenient to General Foch, which should be attended by Generals Pershing and Bliss, and Mr. Baker, the American Secretary for War.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff said he was in favour of such a plan, having regard to the fact that President Wilson had all along been a supporter of the Versailles Council.

Withdrawal of
Men from the
Admiralty.

9. With reference to War Cabinet 372, Minute 22, the War Cabinet had before them an Admiralty memorandum in regard to the contribution of approximately 12,500 men by the Admiralty "A" firms (Paper G.T.-4067). In this memorandum it was pointed out that, unless the Minister of National Service diverted suitable substitutes to Admiralty firms quickly and in sufficient numbers, output would suffer seriously. The Admiralty, however, did not wish to oppose the contribution of 12,500 men, but merely to warn the Government of what would, in their opinion, be the consequences. The Minister of National Service recognised that an adjustment to marine engineering will be necessary not only as regards the men to be taken away under the scheme, but also as regards the additional men who will shortly be required. The memorandum also pointed out that there would undoubtedly be an outcry from the employers who are primarily responsible for the output of marine engines, which must be set off against any beneficial effect on the A.S.E. The Admiralty considered that the method of levy should be to take a uniform percentage of the total number of male employees of every engineering firm, and that before a pivotal man is called up the employer shall have a right to appeal. The Ministry of Munitions had stated that time would not permit of this protracted procedure.

The War Cabinet, in reaffirming their decision that the 12,500 men should be contributed, took the responsibility for whatever consequences might follow.

Russia:
Japanese
Intervention.

W.C. 386
9.

10. With reference to War Cabinet 369, Minute 9, the War Cabinet had under consideration Lord Curzon's Memorandum on the question of Japanese intervention in Siberia and our policy in Russia (Paper G.T.-4046).

Reference was made to the latest telegrams that had been exchanged between this country and America on the subject, as well as to telegram No. 291 from Tokio, and to Mr. Lockhart's recent telegrams from Russia (*e.g.*, No. 42) indicating the possibility that the Bolsheviks might yet be persuaded themselves to invite the assistance of Japan.

The view was expressed that it would be fatal if, now that M. Trotzki and the American Government were coming round to a view less hostile to Japanese intervention, the Japanese Government should decide not to intervene.

The War Cabinet decided that, if this had not already been done—

The Foreign Office should inform His Majesty's Ambassador at Tokio of the latest telegrams received from Mr. Lockhart, indicating that the Bolsheviks were regarding Japanese intervention in a more favourable light.

2. Whitehall Gardens, S.W.,
March 30, 1918.