

The German Debacle In the Marne Salient

By HILAIRE BELLOC

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LONDON, July 27.—To understand what is going on as a sequel to the allied victory of July 18 one must appreciate that the enemy is trying to "extricate" himself. We must understand this word extricate. Take an acre not much more than 25 miles across and less than 20 miles deep. Imagine on that are no less than at least 5 divisions crammed with their materials, their accumulated dumps for shells, their artillery including the heaviest pieces, their stores of food and provisions and all preparations for what, July 15, was the great offensive movement.

One must realize that each of these 35 divisions means at least 9,000 infantrymen and some 6,000 others, less only by the wounded and prisoners; and all this huge mass clamped in so narrow a space is compelled to retire through two points where the roads of the districts meet, Ferre-en-Tardenois and Ville-en-Tardenois, both of which are under direct fire at a comparatively short range, while the whole arc is under a converging fire from every side. That is the situation at the present moment on the Crown Prince's left. A more expensive one could not be conceived. The mouth of the pocket is not so narrow that the troops within are doomed.

Far from it, the mouth, is as any

tau Thierry. The German break through Soissons and Rheims, had left the Allies on the left of Soissons and thus thrust them into an awkward angle which could be attacked upon both sides.

Second, it had created another salient upon the east, of which Rheims was the point. This salient was much shallower than the other, and its angle was much more obtuse, its base broader and consequently it was less perilous to hold. Nevertheless, it was an awkward front, which could be attacked from the left or the right, east and southwest of Rheims.

The enemy at once took what was obviously the proper line of attack, and tried to break in the Western salient—that marked by the line of Montdidier, Rheims, Soissons, Chateau Thierry. It was, as I have said, the sharper one, and more difficult to hold. If the Boche had succeeded in breaking it in he would have captured the great masses of men and material within the salient, and would have been able to advance immediately within bombing range of Paris.

His effort to effect this was known at the Battle of the Metz, and it was fought from June 9 to 12. He failed. He was completely checked on the third day, and he gave up the attempt.

north in touch with the south and east. If, for instance, he had broken the line between the Main de Massiges and Rheims, so thoroughly as to get to Cezanne, within forty-eight hours, and to the Seine on the third day, the whole Allied line eastward right down to Nancy would have been imperilled. The enemy had been impossibly to anticipate such a result from the great success of his two main blows, and on the morning of July 15 he struck.

What happened may be told in sequence day by day.

First Check by American Troops

On the first day, Monday, two things happened. First, on his right, between Chateau Thierry and Dormans, the enemy crossed the Marne and got well on to the wooded heights to the south of the river. But his attempt to enlarge this success, which was upon a front of about eleven miles, and especially his attempt to enlarge it to the west that is, toward Paris, was checked by American troops. These counter-attacked on Monday afternoon with great violence and threw the enemy right back upon the river. The consequence of that brilliant piece of work we shall see in a moment.

Meanwhile on the other limb of the attack—the eastern one, between Rheims and the Main de Massiges—General Gouraud put into practice a new tactic, which proved entirely successful. We all know that the defensive has become organized more and more in depth during the past year—that is, that the main line of resistance has been put farther back from the front line. But General Gouraud had not only organized his defensive system very deeply, he had also determined that on the first shot he would yield ground and retire materially, and by trusting to a comparatively few isolated and strongly de-

could get another four or five miles further beyond the Marne he would have outflanked it. We have seen how on the day before, the Americans had stopped his attempt to extend westward, or toward Paris, the belt he had occupied south of the Marne. He was still free to extend it eastward toward Epernay, and throughout the whole of Tuesday his fight was aimed to effect this. Very little was done on that day.

On the third day, Wednesday, however, the enemy achieved something which looked like the beginning of a belated success for him. He pushed forward along the Epernay road until he got not around but abreast of the forest of Rheims. When darkness fell on Wednesday he was past the village of Montvotins, and not much more than six miles from Epernay. He had gathered at his decisive point a very large body of men and it looked for a moment as though the issue of the battle would turn upon the fortunes of the next day along this Epernay road.

Foch Effects a Complete Surprise

But the dawn of the fourth day, Thursday, brought a dramatic change in the whole situation, the causes of which is most interesting to examine. The Germans across the Marne and those fighting outward toward Epernay, where the greatest weight of men had been gathered, were facing southeastward and standing on the eastern side of the great pocket or bulge which runs from Soissons around by the Marne to Rheims, and which they had won by the end of May.

Directly behind them, on the western side of this pocket, Foch struck with French and American troops combined, and he effected a complete surprise. He broke through the enemy's first lines without preliminary bom-

U. S. Churches to Observe 4th War Anniversary as Serbian Day

WASHINGTON, July 27.—The

churches of America were called upon today by Secretary Lansing to observe tomorrow, the fourth anniversary of Serbia's refusal to meet the demands made by Austria, as "Serbia Day," and to give expression of their sympathy with their wronged people and their oppressed and dominated kindred in other lands and to invoke the blessing of Almighty God upon them and the cause to which they are pledged. High tribute was paid to the heroism of Serbians by Secretary Lansing, in the following words:

"On Sunday, the 28th of the present month will occur the fourth anniversary of the day when the gallant people of Serbia, rather than submit to the studied and ignoble exactions of a carefully prepared attack, were called upon by the war declaration of Austria-Hungary, to defend their homes against an enemy bent upon

their destruction. Nobly did they respond.

"So valiantly and courageously did they oppose the forces of a country ten times greater in population and resources that it was only after they had thrice driven the Austrians back and Germany and Bulgaria had come to the aid of Austria that their armies were compelled to retreat into Albania. While their territory has been devastated and their homes despoiled, the spirit of the Serbian people has not been broken.

"Though overwhelmed by superior forces, their love of freedom remains unabated. Brutal force has left unaffected their firm determination to sacrifice everything for liberty and independence."

In giving expression to sympathy to Serbia, Secretary Lansing urged the American people not to forget "the kindred people of the great Slavic race who now dominated and opposed

by alien races, yearn for independence and national unity."

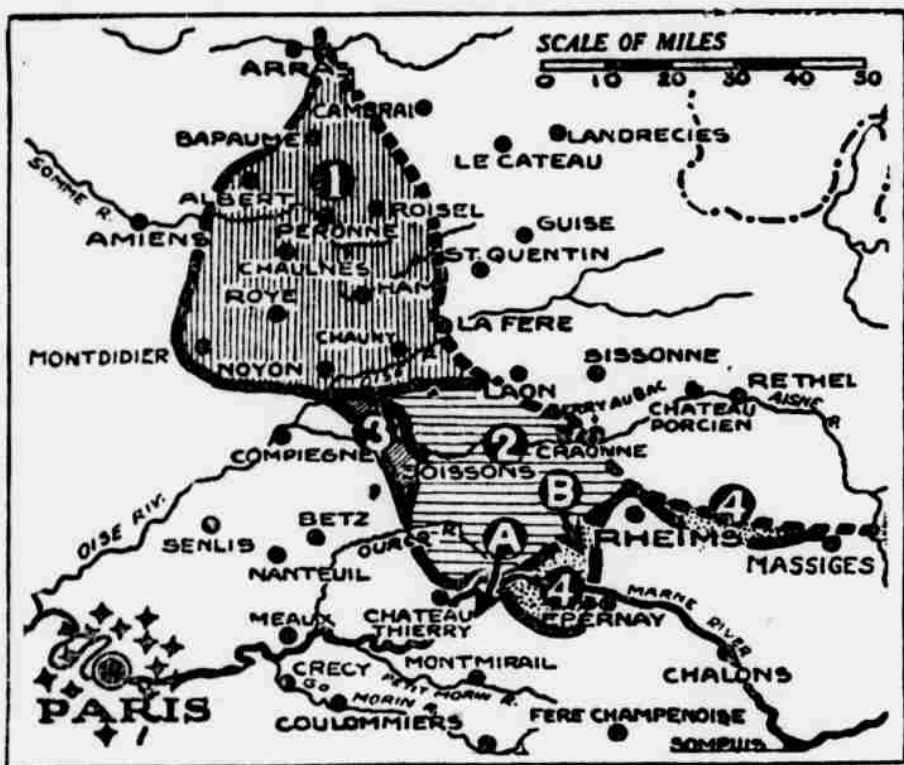
KAISER REFUSES TO RECEIVE LUXBURG

LONDON, July 27.—Emperor William has refused to receive count Luxemburg so that the former German minister to Argentina might justify himself, says an Exchange Telegraph dispatch from Amsterdam. The count handed in his report on his mission to Argentina to the foreign office Thursday. After the emperor had refused to see him he conferred with Admiral Von Hintze, the foreign secretary.

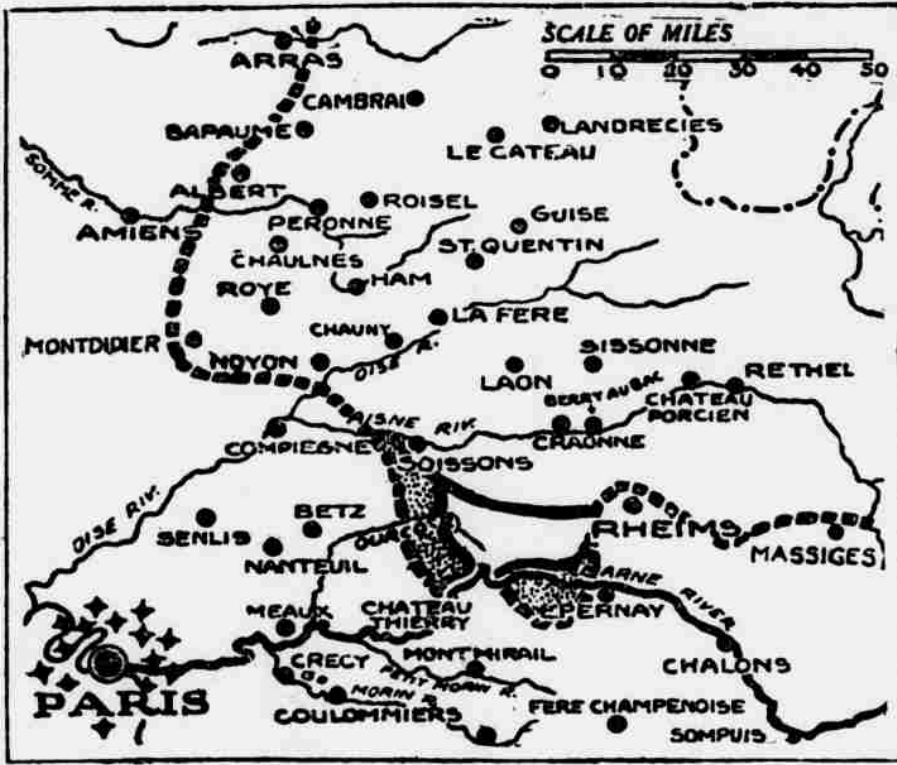
Count Luxemburg. It is added, has withdrawn from the diplomatic service.

South Sea Islanders in the remotest days got their fire by the friction of dry wood.

When Columbus came to America he found Indian fires burning. The Indians rubbed dry sticks together and quickly got a spark.



THE END OF THE GERMAN DRIVE FOR PARIS



These two maps show how Foch's Franco-American drive between Soissons and Chateau Thierry has ended the German menace to Paris. The left hand map shows how the Germans have advanced, the broken line showing the battle front prior to March 21; the shaded area being the ground won (1), in the drive starting March 21; (2), the Aisne battle; (3), the Battle of the Marne, when a little ground was gained by the main body of the attack—the smashing of the Montdidier-Soissons-Chateau Thierry salient—was defeated and (4), the latest drive, just before the counter offensive began. The arrows show (A), the primary purpose of the drive, to swing southwest around Chateau Thierry for Paris, which was blocked by the Americans' counter attack on Monday, July 15, and (B), the attempt to crush the Rheims salient, which was still in the balance when the counter offensive opened.

In the right hand map the broken line shows the front as it stood when Foch launched his counter offensive, and the shaded areas, the ground won from the Germans in the early stages of the battle. The heavy line north of the shaded area shows the place which is believed to be the first where the Germans can halt their retreat. It will be noticed that when they reach this line the "Paris front" will have disappeared and the two salients, east and west, will have been eliminated, making it impossible to renew the attack on Paris.

one can see by looking at a map, broader than the depth. But what the defeated enemy is condemned to by his position is enormous losses in proportion to those of his victorious assailants. He has to counter-attack ceaselessly, in order to preserve the centers of supply, and as I have said, he is under converging fire the whole time.

THE BATTLE which has been fought since July 15, though its full effects are not yet apparent, is the most clear cut episode that we have had upon the Western front since the victory of the Marne. I will describe it as best I can.

After a pause of a month, imposed upon them by their heavy losses, especially those on April 29, the Germans effected a very complete surprise and scored a success on May 27 which might have led to the very gravest consequences. They struck at a front about thirty-five miles north of the line uniting the towns of Soissons and Rheims. The very strong position known as the Chemin des Dames, which was in the hands of the Allies, was broken at once. At the first onset the enemy poured through a wide gap, took many thousands of prisoners and hundreds of guns, and in an exceedingly rapid advance in less than three days, reached the Marne at Chateau Thierry.

At one blow he had produced a bulge, pocket or salient, somewhat over thirty miles in length and also about thirty in depth. They had destroyed yet another sector of the old permanent front, and upon yet another new line of over eighty miles, (counting the whole of the way around from Rheims to the Marne, near Dormans down to Chateau Thierry and up to Soissons again) they had condemned the defence to the dangerous chance of maintaining itself in rapidly made trenches and to the hurried stemming of the tide of the German attack by putting in everything available in the neighborhood. Success Puts Allies in a Corner

Furthermore, this great success was probably unexpected upon the enemy's part, at least upon any such a scale. It brought him to within a few miles of Paris, and it further had two strategic results:

First, it put the Allies into a sort of a corner, marked by the towns of Montdidier, Moyon, Soissons and Cha-

There followed a pause of five weeks, just like the pause which followed the very heavy fighting in Flanders at the end of April. This delay meant several things. It meant, first, that the enemy was recruiting from his losses; second, that he was rearranging his forces for another effort at some other place; and third, that while making plans for that effort he was specially training troops hitherto held in reserve so that his shock when delivered should be finally decisive.

The rate of delivery of American troops, not only across the Atlantic to Europe, but actually into the line as fully trained and effective fighters, was increasing very rapidly, and therefore, we may be certain that the enemy admitted only the very minimum of delay possible. He attacked as soon as ever he could.

The day chosen was July 15, and the front chosen was the fifty miles between the Main de Massiges and Chateau Thierry, of which Rheims was the center. In other words, the enemy determined, after failing in his attack against the easier of the two salients created by his success in May, to make an effort against the more difficult one, of which Rheims was the apex.

Now let us estimate the enemy's object and what would have happened if he had succeeded. He had "mounted" an offensive on a very large scale. He was attacking a length of line greater by far than any he had attacked since March 21. He had ready for this attack at least fifty-eight divisions, of which no less than thirty were to take part in the first blow, the remaining twenty-eight to be held in reserve for a following up of his success the moment a breach should be made in the Allied line.

He had run the risk of a long delay, with the increasing menace of the American contingent, only because such delay ought to have made his success certain, through the repose it gave to his troops and the opportunity for putting in some special training.

The Result Enemy Had Anticipated

The two limbs of the sector of his attack (there was no direct assault launched in the immediate neighborhood of Rheims) were of about equal length, and they made upon the map a shape like the two limbs of a compass, very broadly opened, with Rheims as a hinge. If the enemy had crushed in these two limbs, or even one of them, we should have had the following results:

First, of course, a very heavy loss of men and material to the Allies, inseparable from such defeat.

Second, a nearer approach to Paris, because the enemy's extreme right near Chateau Thierry, when once thrown across the Marne, would, if it broke in the Allied line here, probably get as far as within bombardment range of the capital before the rush could be stopped.

Third and most important in the largest strategic view of this matter, his success would have cut the only remaining good railway system for keeping the Allied center and

fended posts, take the heaviest possible toll of this toll of the enemy.

The enemy's attack, therefore, when it came, was something like the thrust of a fencer who over-reaches himself as his enemy withdraws. But the metaphor is incomplete, because we must remember that in this case the thrust was not only a failure but was also murderously expensive. The probability that the fearful losses the Germans suffered on that Monday, east of Rheims, were added to by some bungling on the enemy's part. They were quite exceptionally high, and all that loss was incurred without anything to show for it except a mere piece of ground of little value.

Fought to Standstill the First Day

Very few prisoners were taken, and what is really extraordinary, no guns were captured, while the enemy's fifteen divisions of shock troops in this region were fought to a standstill before night. The check was a most serious one. Its gravity was recognized at once by the enemy's High Command, which broke the general in charge of these operations and replaced him at once by another. So ended the first day, July 15.

The second day, Tuesday, the enemy's high command, on surveying the situation, decided it might yet be recovered. The enemy probably hardly thought it possible to make good his attack east of Rheims, but he still believed it possible to make good on the western sector between Rheims and Chateau Thierry, and to crush in the salient in that way. To the north of Dormans, and in the northern part of the sector between the Marne and Rheims, is the formidable obstacle called the Mountain and Forest of Rheims—a group of high hills covered with woods. The enemy could hardly hope to force this, but he could turn it by the south or right, and if he

barbament and went right on through his defensive system to the very gates of Soissons, on the north, and up both sides of the Ourcq Valley, in the center. French troops, in the main, performed the first part of this operation and American troops the second.

The use of tanks had a great deal to do with this result; but the main reason, which is a most interesting point, was undoubtedly a miscalculation of numbers on the part of the enemy. It is perfectly clear that the enemy did not believe the Allies to be possessed of sufficient forces for a counter-offensive. Nothing else can possibly explain the lack of provision made on this front between Soissons and Chateau Thierry.

Offensive Completely Broken Down

The counter stroke was not intended to do more than it did. The Allies have not yet a superiority in numbers. They could neither prepare for nor expect a full breach in the enemy lines. They are still upon the defensive, but the results reaped by the blow struck just where it was conclusive. That blow put an end to the enemy offensive and turned it into a strategic break-down as complete as that suffered just before by the Austrians on the Piave.

The most advanced enemy units have been thrown back across the Marne and are still retreating. The whole elaborate scheme, planned for five weeks and launched with some two-thirds of the enemy's available force, has gone to pieces. It is a curious detail in the combined operation, that whereas the number of prisoners taken in the stroke and counter-stroke are about equal on the two sides, the Allies counted over 500 guns and the Germans not a single piece.

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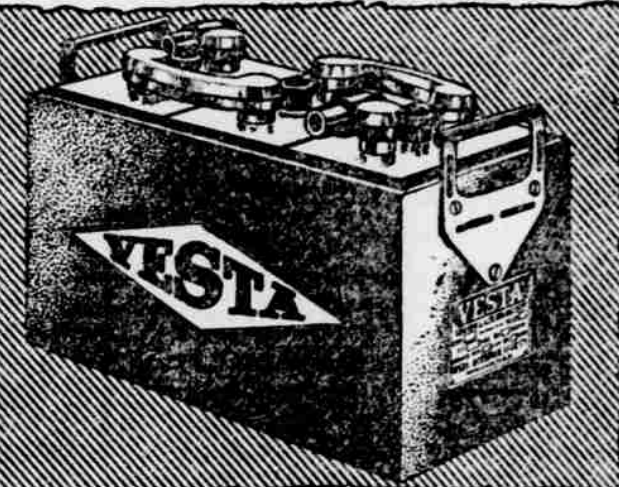
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