

**GENERAL PERSHING'S  
OFFICIAL STORY OF THE  
AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY  
FORCES IN FRANCE**

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General Pershing's Official Story of the American Expeditionary Forces in France by John J. Pershing

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**JOHN J. PERSHING**

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OF  
THE AMERICAN  
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THEIR INSPIRATION



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REPORT OF GENERAL PERSHING  
TO THE  
SECRETARY OF WAR



November 20, 1918.

My Dear Mr. Secretary:

In response to your request, I have the honor to submit this brief summary of the organization and operations of the American Expeditionary Force from May 26, 1917, until the signing of the armistice November 11, 1918.

Pursuant to your instructions, immediately upon receiving my orders I selected a small staff and proceeded to Europe in order to become familiar with conditions at the earliest possible moment.

The warmth of our reception in England and France was only equaled by the readiness of the commanders in chief of the veteran armies of the Allies and their staffs to place their experience at our disposal. In consultation with them the most effective means of co-operation of effort was considered. With French and British armies at their maximum strength, and all efforts to dispossess the enemy from his firmly intrenched positions in Bel-

gium and France failed, it was necessary to plan for an American force adequate to turn the scale in favor of the Allies. Taking account of the strength of the central powers at that time, the immensity of the problem which confronted us could hardly be overestimated. The first requisite being an organization that could give intelligent direction to effort, the formation of a General Staff occupied my early attention.

#### GENERAL STAFF

A well organized General Staff through which the commander exercises his functions is essential to a successful modern army. However capable our division, our battalion, and our companies as such, success would be impossible without thoroughly co-ordinated endeavor. A General Staff broadly organized and trained for war had not hitherto existed in our Army. Under the Commander in Chief, this staff must carry out the policy and direct the details of administration, supply, preparation, and operations of the Army as a whole, with all special branches and bureaus subject to its control. As models to aid us we had the veteran French General Staff and the experience of the British who had similarly formed an organization to meet the demands of a great army. By selecting from each the features best adapted to our basic organization, and fortified by our own early experience in the war, the development of our great General Staff system was completed.

The General Staff is naturally divided into five groups, each with its chief who is an assistant to the Chief of the General Staff. G. 1 is in charge of organization and equipment of troops, replace-



ments, tonnage, priority of overseas shipment, the auxiliary welfare association and cognate subjects; G. 2 has censorship, enemy intelligence, gathering and disseminating information, preparation of maps, and all similar subjects; G. 3 is charged with all strategic studies and plans, movement of troops, and the supervision of combat operations; G. 4 coordinates important questions of supply, construction, transport arrangements for combat, and of the operations of the service of supply, and of hospitalization and the evacuation of the sick and wounded; G. 5 supervises the various schools and has general direction and co-ordination of education and training.

The first Chief of Staff was Col. (now Maj. Gen.) James G. Harbord, who was succeeded in May, 1918, by Maj. Gen. James W. McAndrew. To these officers, to the Deputy Chief of Staff, and to the assistant Chiefs of Staff, who, as heads of sections, aided them, great credit is due for the results obtained not only in perfecting the General Staff organization but in applying correct principles to the multiplicity of problems that have arisen.

#### ORGANIZATION AND TRAINING

After a thorough consideration of allied organizations it was decided that our combat division should consist of four regiments of infantry of 3,000 men, with three battalions to a regiment and four companies of 250 men each to a battalion, and of an artillery brigade of three regiments, a machine-gun battalion, an engineer regiment, a trench-mortar battery, a signal battalion, wagon trains, and the headquarters staffs and military police. These, with medical and other units, made a total of over

28,000 men, or practically double the size of a French or German division. Each corps would normally consist of six divisions—four combat and one depot and one replacement division—and also two regiments of cavalry, and each army of from three to five corps. With four divisions fully trained, a corps could take over an American sector with two divisions in line and two in reserve, with the depot and replacement divisions prepared to fill the gaps in the ranks.

Our purpose was to prepare an integral American force which should be able to take the offensive in every respect. Accordingly, the development of a self-reliant infantry by thorough drill in the use of the rifle and in the tactics of open warfare was always uppermost. The plan of training after arrival in France allowed a division one month for acclimatization and instruction in small units from battalions down, a second month in quiet trench sectors by battalion, and a third month after it came out of the trenches when it should be trained as a complete division in war of movement.

Very early a system of schools was outlined and started, which should have the advantage of instruction by officers direct from the front. At the great school center at Langres, one of the first to be organized, was the staff school, where the principles of general staff work, as laid down in our own organization, were taught to carefully selected officers. Men in the ranks who had shown qualities of leadership were sent to the school of candidates for commissions. A school of the line taught younger officers the principles of leadership, tactics, and the use of the different weapons. In the artillery school, at Saumur, young officers were

taught the fundamental principles of modern artillery; while at Issoudun an immense plant was built for training cadets in aviation. These and other schools, with their well-considered curriculums for training in every branch of our organization, were co-ordinated in a manner best to develop an efficient Army out of willing and industrious young men, many of whom had not before known even the rudiments of military technique. Both Marshal Haig and General Petain placed officers and men at our disposal for instructional purposes, and we are deeply indebted for the opportunities given to profit by their veteran experience.

#### AMERICAN ZONE

The eventual place the American Army should take on the western front was to a large extent influenced by the vital questions of communication and supply. The northern ports of France were crowded by the British Armies' shipping and supplies while the southern ports, though otherwise at our service, had not adequate port facilities for our purposes and these we should have to build. The already overtaxed railway system behind the active front in northern France would not be available for us as lines of supply and those leading from the southern ports of northeastern France would be unequal to our needs without much new construction. Practically all warehouses, supply depots and regulating stations must be provided by fresh constructions. While France offered us such material as she had to spare after a drain of three years, enormous quantities of material had to be brought across the Atlantic.