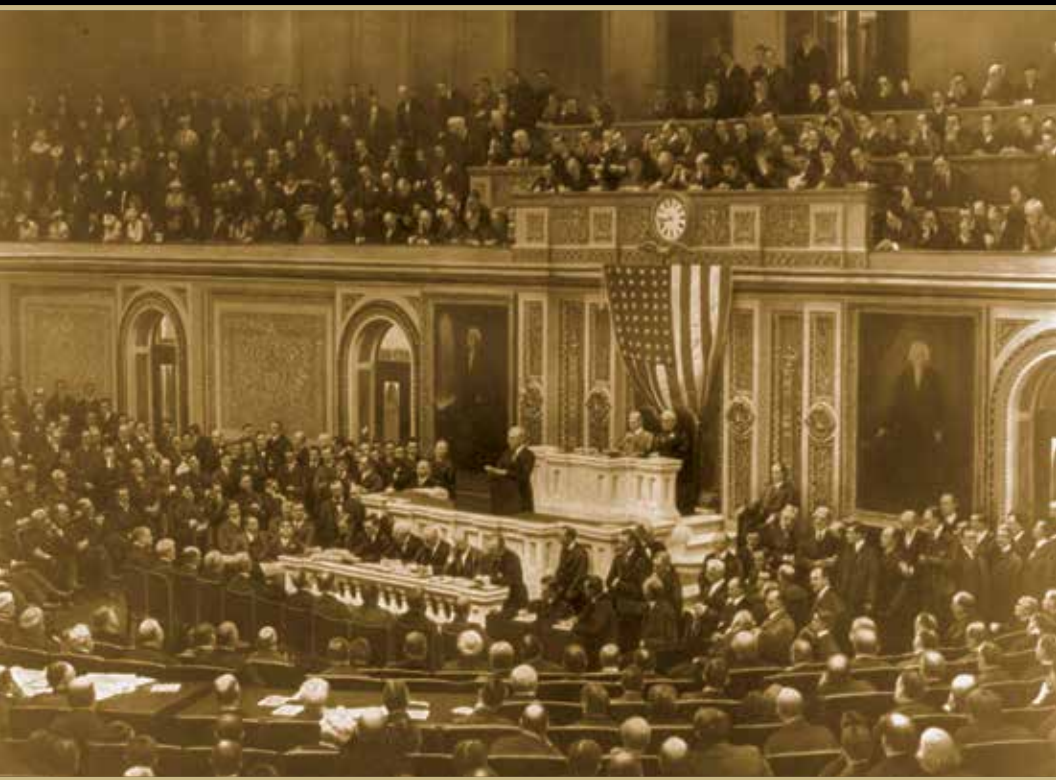




THE U.S. ARMY  
CAMPAIGNS OF WORLD WAR I



JOINING THE  
GREAT WAR

APRIL 1917–APRIL 1918



THE U.S. ARMY CAMPAIGNS OF WORLD WAR I  
COMMEMORATIVE SERIES

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Cover: *President Wilson asks for a declaration of war, 2 April 1917.*  
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**JOINING THE GREAT WAR  
APRIL 1917–APRIL 1918**

*by*  
*Eric B. Setzekorn*



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Center of Military History  
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# INTRODUCTION

A century ago, the great powers of Europe became engulfed in what was then called the Great War. It signaled a new age in armed conflict in which mass armies supported by industrial mass production brought an unprecedented level of killing power to the battlefield. By the time the United States entered the war in 1917, the combatants were waging war on a scale never before seen in history. The experience defined a generation and cast a long shadow across the twentieth century. In addition to a tremendous loss of life, the war shattered Europe, bringing revolution, the collapse of long-standing empires, and economic turmoil, as well as the birth of new nation-states and the rise of totalitarian movements.

The modern U.S. Army, capable of conducting industrialized warfare on a global scale, can trace its roots to the World War. Although the war's outbreak in August 1914 shocked most Americans, they preferred to keep the conflict at arm's length. The United States declared its neutrality and invested in coastal defenses and the Navy to guard its shores. The U.S. Army, meanwhile, remained small, with a regiment as its largest standing formation. Primarily a constabulary force, it focused on policing America's new territorial possessions in the Caribbean and Pacific as it continued to adapt to Secretary of War Elihu Root's reforms in the years following the War with Spain. It was not until June 1916 that Congress authorized an expansion of the Army, dual state-federal status for the National Guard, and the creation of a reserve officer training corps.

In early 1917, relations between the United States and Germany rapidly deteriorated. The kaiser's policy of unrestricted submarine warfare threatened American lives and commerce, and German meddling in Mexican affairs convinced most Americans that Berlin posed a danger to the nation. In April 1917, the president, out of diplomatic options, asked Congress to declare war on Germany. But the U.S. Army, numbering only 133,000 men, was far from ready. The president ordered nearly 400,000 National Guardsmen into federal service, and more than twenty-four million men eventually registered for the Selective Service, America's first

conscription since the Civil War. By the end of 1918, the Army had grown to four million men and had trained 200,000 new officers to lead them. As it expanded to address wartime needs, the Army developed a new combined-arms formation—the square division. Divisions fell under corps, and corps made up field armies. The Army also created supporting elements such as the Air Service, the Tank Corps, and the Chemical Warfare Service. The war signaled the potential of the United States as not only a global economic power, but also a military one.

In June 1917, the 1st Division deployed to France, arriving in time to parade through Paris on the Fourth of July. The first National Guard division, the 26th Division from New England, deployed in September. By war's end, the American Expeditionary Forces, as the nation's forces in Europe were called, had grown to two million soldiers and more than forty divisions. During 1918, these American “doughboys” learned to fight in battles of steadily increasing scale: Cantigny, the Marne, Aisne-Marne, St. Mihiel, and Meuse-Argonne, adding thirteen campaign streamers to the Army flag. Overall, in roughly six months of combat, the American Expeditionary Forces suffered more than 255,000 casualties, including 52,997 battle deaths (as well as more than 50,000 nonbattle deaths, most due to the influenza pandemic). The war that the United States entered to “make the world safe for democracy” ended with an armistice on 11 November 1918, followed by a controversial peace. American soldiers served in the Occupation of the Rhineland until 1923, before withdrawing from Europe altogether.

The United States will never forget the American soldiers who fought and died in the World War. America's first unknown soldier was laid to rest on 11 November 1921 in the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery, where soldiers still stand guard. The United States created permanent American military cemeteries in France, Belgium, and Britain to bury the fallen. To this day, memorials to their sacrifice can be found across America, and the date of the armistice has become a national holiday honoring all those who serve in defense of the nation. The last surviving U.S. Army veteran of the war died in 2011. It is to all the doughboys, those who returned and those who did not, that the U.S. Army Center of Military History dedicates these commemorative pamphlets.

JON T. HOFFMAN  
Chief Historian



# JOINING THE GREAT WAR APRIL 1917–APRIL 1918

America's entry into the World War in April 1917 presented the United States Army with its greatest challenge in the nation's history. For almost three years, the great powers of Europe had bloodied themselves in a vicious and brutal conflict that consumed men and materiel at a staggering rate. Millions had died on multiple fronts in what was the largest armed conflict yet seen in human history. The United States sought to remain neutral, but events in early 1917 conspired to pull Americans into a war they were unprepared to fight. The task of developing a force capable of playing a major role in the conflict presented the nation with tremendous administrative, logistical, and doctrinal challenges that would take more than a year to overcome. As a consequence, both the U.S. industrial base and its armed forces underwent a period of frantic—and often mismanaged—adaptation to the necessities of modern warfare.

This commemorative pamphlet examines the U.S. Army's involvement in the Great War from the declaration of war on 6 April 1917 through the initial phase of the German Spring Offensive in March–April 1918. On the home front, the War Department struggled to create the mechanisms to raise, train, and equip millions of new soldiers. American leaders faced a series of obstacles including a lack of facilities and materiel, poorly coordinated rail and shipping networks, and institutional bureaucracies that were not designed to wage war on such a large scale thousands of miles from the nation's shores. In meeting these challenges, U.S. civilian and military leaders fundamentally altered how the United States went to war, implementing a system of national conscription and linking the economy and society to the military to a degree far surpassing that of the Civil War. Never before or since have the U.S. armed forces experienced a comparable period of massive expansion coupled with unprecedented organizational transformation in such a brief period as during 1917–1918.

In Europe, the United States joined a military coalition well-versed in the methods of modern warfare but lacking in consistent

battlefield success. The American commander, General John J. Pershing, had to coordinate with foreign countries for training, logistical support, and operational planning. Nevertheless, he maintained total authority over American military operations in Europe, and his decisions ensured the development of a distinctive American military identity. This arrangement produced considerable friction and animosity as he rejected strenuous efforts to amalgamate American manpower into European armies, but he maintained the independence and integrity of what would be known as the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF). As in the United States, the U.S. Army had to overcome considerable obstacles in building up its forces in Europe, and American soldiers would face a steep learning curve once they entered combat.

Although the War Department struggled to rapidly expand the U.S. Army during its first year in the war, sufficient numbers of American soldiers arrived in France by the spring of 1918 for the AEF to play a role in blocking Germany's eleventh-hour push to win the war. Decisions made in that first year also established the infrastructure for a modern U.S. Army, capable of fighting alongside British and French forces and contributing to the final defeat of Germany. In the process, a generation of young officers, such as George C. Marshall, George S. Patton, and Douglas A. MacArthur gained valuable experience. They would build on many of those hard-earned lessons throughout the decades separating World War I and World War II. The period from April 1917 to April 1918 thus represents the birth of the U.S. Army as a global force and laid the institutional foundations of future American world power.

## STRATEGIC SETTING

During the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, rapid economic growth and the desire for increased international power prompted leaders such as Presidents William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt to develop a more activist American role on the global stage. By the early 1910s, the United States had become a burgeoning economic world power with massive industrial and commercial strength along with newly acquired overseas territories. However, despite improvements and increases to its navy, the nation retained a small army suitable only for constabulary duty. The United States also had no standing international partners, adhering instead to George Washington's call for the nation to "steer clear of permanent alliances." As European politics grew



increasingly unstable by 1914, the United States observed those unsettling developments from the periphery.

After the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria on 28 June 1914 led to military mobilization across Europe and declarations of war by early August, most Americans took solace that the Atlantic Ocean shielded the United States from the conflict. The *Chicago Herald* summed up the popular support for isolation from Europe's strife, "Peace-loving citizens of this country will now rise up and tender a hearty vote of thanks to Columbus for having discovered America." Germany's invasion of neutral Belgium brought Great Britain into the war and divided Europe into two great camps.

Britain joined France and Russia to form the Triple Entente, more commonly referred to as the Allied Powers. Opposed to them were Germany and Austria-Hungary, making up the Central Powers. President Woodrow Wilson believed that the immoral nature of European politics created entangling alliances that transformed a regional conflict into a global war that threatened world peace. The president delivered a Declaration of Neutrality to Congress on 19 August, calling on all citizens to remain "impartial in thought, as well as in action." However, between late 1914 and early 1917, the escalating conflict tested American traditions of isolationism as it threatened to draw the nation closer to the war.

The initial German offensive against France ended in September at the Battle of the Marne, after which both sides attempted a series of flanking maneuvers to gain the advantage. Neither side proved capable of overcoming the killing power that machine guns and rapid-firing artillery brought to the defensive, and the battle lines on the Western Front stabilized in a vast system of trenches stretching from Switzerland to the English Channel. This was a



*President Wilson*  
(Library of Congress)

new type of warfare with soldiers subjected to prolonged stress and danger with little chance for daring heroics or martial glory. Behind the trenches, the development of sophisticated supply systems that were able to support millions of men and massive levels of firepower and the ability to rush reserves to block any potential enemy breakthrough led to a vicious stalemate. On the broad expanses of the Eastern Front, Germany and Austria were locked in a brutal war of attrition with Russia where logistics and artillery shells counted for more than bravery.

To break the deadlock, the combatants attempted to smash through enemy lines with ever larger offensives. Attacks in 1915 saw tens of thousands of soldiers and hundreds of artillery pieces deployed along only a few miles of the front, trying to win through sheer weight of numbers and ordnance. The result was thousands of dead and gains measured in yards after weeks of constant fighting. Poison gas, first used by the Germans in April 1915 and later adopted by every nation, added to the daily misery and danger. By 1916, as the industrial economies of Germany, France, and Britain became fully geared toward war production, battles increased in scale and destructiveness. In the fight over the fortress of Verdun between February and December, the French and Germans suffered more than one million casualties combined. On the first day of the Somme Offensive on 1 July 1916, the British and French fired more than two million artillery shells into the German lines in support of nineteen divisions attacking along a twenty-mile front. Despite this colossal weight of numbers, the British alone suffered 57,000 casualties on the first day and did not break German defenses. By the time the Somme ended in mid-November, all sides had suffered more than a combined one million casualties while the front moved fewer than ten miles. As a result, Verdun and the Somme became synonymous with the slaughter and destruction that defined the Western Front.

As the stalemate in France continued, U.S. political and public opinion began to shift from neutrality toward support for the Allies. German atrocities in Belgium, at times exaggerated by Allied propaganda, shocked many Americans. Additionally, in early 1915 the Germans began an effort to isolate the British Isles by using submarines, known as *Unterseeboote* or “U-boats,” to attack British merchant shipping. The German campaign, which consisted of the unrestricted sinking of any merchant vessel bound for Britain, was portrayed by American newspapers as a cowardly and immoral method of warfare. On 1 May 1915, a German U-boat sank the

British liner RMS *Lusitania*, killing 1,198 people, including 128 Americans. After the attack, the *New York Times* called on President Wilson to “demand that the Germans shall no longer make war like savages drunk with blood.” Fearing that such action could pull the United States into the war, and concerned over British violations of American shipping rights, President Wilson continued his policy of neutrality. Seeking to take the moral high road, he proclaimed, “There is such a thing as a man being too proud to fight. . . . There is such a thing as a nation being so right that it does not need to convince others by force that it is right.” However, after the Germans sank the French passenger ferry SS *Sussex* in March 1916, Wilson threatened to break off diplomatic relations with Germany. In May, the Germans pledged to abandon unrestricted submarine warfare, though they reserved the right to attack legitimate targets such as armed merchant ships or those vessels carrying war materiel.

As Germany’s submarine campaign damaged its relations with the United States, America’s economic relationship with Britain and France expanded. Faced with a war of attrition, the Allies relied on American agricultural and industrial resources to support their war efforts. Despite a British blockade that severely cut American commerce with the Central Powers, U.S. trade with Europe more than doubled from 1913 to 1917. U.S. companies not only provided civilian goods but also war materiel. Bethlehem Steel alone supplied the Allies with over twenty million artillery shells between 1914 and 1918, while major weapons manufacturers like Remington and Winchester sold rifles and guns. Allied governments relied heavily on the U.S. banking industry for billions in loans to finance their war.

Despite the United States’ growing economic ties to the Allies, the American public still preferred that the nation remain neutral. The British government’s brutal suppression of the 1916 Easter Uprising in Ireland angered many Americans, as did its continued violation of American neutral shipping rights through its blockade of Germany. As the casualty lists grew during 1916, most Americans were thankful they had not been drawn into the carnage engulfing Europe. In November, President Wilson won reelection by a narrow margin, largely on the slogan, “He Kept Us Out of War.” However, circumstances changed rapidly in early 1917. Germany’s increasingly desperate strategic situation led to a resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare on 31 January 1917. This action broke the earlier German pledge to respect passenger



Mexico should enter into an alliance. In return for Mexico taking up arms against the United States, Germany would supply financial assistance. Once victory was achieved, Mexico could reclaim territory in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. The State Department released the telegram to the Associated Press on 28 February, and American public opinion turned sharply as many became convinced of German duplicity and aggressive intentions. No longer was the war seen as simply a horrific folly by the European powers, but rather as a clear indication of the danger of unchecked militarism. With the abdication of the Russian czar in February and the rise of a provisional representative government, Americans came to see the war as a struggle that pitted democracies against aggressive, authoritarian imperialists. Faced with this clear contrast, President Wilson addressed a joint session of Congress on 2 April, declaring his desire that

we shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest our hearts—for democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own governments, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for a universal dominion of right by such a concert of free peoples as shall bring peace and safety to all nations and make the world itself at last free.

On 6 April 1917, with concrete evidence of German hostility to the United States, to international peace, and to liberal democracy, Congress declared war on Germany.

### THE U.S. ARMY BEFORE THE WAR

The U.S. declaration of war was greeted by widespread public enthusiasm both within the United States and among the Allied Powers, which viewed American military assistance as vital to winning the war. Despite this temporary fervor, an objective assessment of the American military, especially the U.S. Army, revealed glaring deficiencies that could not easily be remedied. Army mobilization during the brief War with Spain in 1898 had been a debacle with poor coordination of transportation assets leaving thousands of troops sitting in Florida while the crucial battles were being fought in Cuba. In the words of Theodore Roosevelt, who served as a colonel in Cuba with the 1st U.S. Volunteer Cavalry (the famed Rough Riders), the American effort was “within measurable distance of a military disaster” due to

poor planning and logistical failures. On a positive note, although the U.S. Army in 1917 was small, it had already taken some steps toward modernizing and reforming itself.

The War Department had begun to create a more centralized and professional staff organization to handle mobilization of manpower and war materiel following the Spanish-American conflict. In 1899, Secretary of War Elihu Root began to reshape the War Department using European models. Root was convinced that “our trouble will never be in raising soldiers; our trouble will always be the limits of possibility in transporting, clothing, arming, feeding and caring for our soldiers, and that requires organization.” In 1900, Root expanded the number of cadets at the United States Military Academy (West Point) by over 40 percent, adding more trained officers to the Army. In 1901, he established the Army War College to train senior officers. Finally, in 1903 Root created a general staff in Washington, D.C., to increase coordination and streamline logistics. Root’s efforts helped design the organizational framework necessary to address the mobilization challenges of twentieth-century warfare.

Reforming the Army was complicated by the division of authority between the Regular Army and National Guard. National Guard units reported to their state government in peacetime, and their level of training and overall military competence varied. For decades, advocates of a stronger and more centralized Regular Army, such as Brig. Gen. Emory Upton, portrayed the National Guard as an ill-trained militia with limited use in times of war. Defenders of the National Guard, including many politicians, saw it as a cost-effective force, which also supported the American tradition of citizen-soldiers. The Militia Act of 1903, known as the Dick Act, addressed these competing viewpoints by establishing a much closer relationship between the National Guard and Regular Army. National Guard officers became eligible to attend Army schools, and federal funds paid for more intensive local drills. Moreover, five training days every year were to be joint National Guard and Regular Army maneuvers. In return, National Guard units were held to Regular Army standards and regulations. Despite these improvements, the Regular Army remained the core element of American war plans and preparations, with the National Guard providing vital support in the event of large-scale mobilization.

These reforms, however, did not offset the fact that the Regular Army consisted of fewer than 85,000 personnel in 1914. Eighty percent were serving in dozens of small garrisons throughout the

American West or manning coastal defenses in the continental United States, while the remainder was deployed to the Philippines, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and Panama. Following the outbreak of war in Europe, the Army General Staff recommended increasing the authorized size of the Regular Army from 100,000 to 230,000 men. Army officers also argued for compulsory military service of three to six months in order to create a large pool of trained reserve troops. Military leaders testified to a skeptical Congress that compulsory military service would “inspire [new recruits] with the spirit of patriotism and sense of duty and responsibility with which each generation must be imbued if we are to continue our high mission as a nation.”

Despite the Army’s increasing concern over a lack of trained manpower, political leaders were divided on how to balance American traditions with military requirements. Some, including Roosevelt and Root, supported a “preparedness movement” that advocated compulsory military training for all men when they turned eighteen. It was hoped that six months of training would provide a large pool of potential soldiers in the event of a major war, undercutting the need for a large peacetime army, which was both expensive and contrary to American values. Many in the Democratic Party argued that the preparedness movement was a partisan critique of Wilson rather than a coherent program, and they placed their faith in the well-established National Guard system. Disagreements over the proper direction for Army development grew so divisive that Secretary of War Lindley M. Garrison resigned on 10 February 1916, exhausted by political infighting and what he perceived as President Wilson’s lack of support for a comprehensive reform program.

During the debate, the nation deployed troops to the U.S.-Mexican border in response to Mexican rebel Francisco “Pancho” Villa’s attack on Columbus, New Mexico, in March 1916. Over 100,000 National Guard troops were mobilized to assist the Regular Army’s Mexican Expedition against Villa’s forces. The operation strained Army resources but provided a vital test of mobilization procedures and the integration of National Guard troops into the Regular Army command structure. Moreover, the logistical challenges in Mexico, which had a limited transportation infrastructure, helped spur the Army to adopt new technology, such as motor vehicles.

By early June, Congress settled on the compromise National Defense Act of 1916, which boosted U.S. Army strength to 175,000,

increased funding of National Guard units, and established a voluntary “summer camp” system to train reserve officers. These policy changes sought to build the largest standing army in U.S. history, but attracting qualified manpower through a volunteer system proved difficult. By the spring of 1917, Regular Army strength stood at only 121,000 men, with an additional 181,000 in the National Guard.

Overall, in early 1917, neither the military nor the nation was prepared for war in Europe. Army modernization and reform had come too slowly, and there was no precedent or well-conceived plan for a large-scale foreign deployment that could be taken from the nation’s historical experience. American military and political leaders had to confront wartime challenges through trial and error, and the U.S. Army would need to make fundamental reforms and organizational changes without time for careful study and analysis.

### AMERICAN MILITARY AND CIVILIAN LEADERSHIP

Once at war the Wilson administration needed to decide what form the American contribution would take. Although some Americans favored having only naval forces deploy to Europe to hunt U-boats and protect shipping, President Wilson and public opinion supported the mass mobilization of the Army. Wilson viewed the war as an opportunity to stamp out European militarism and autocracy and replace them with progressive and democratic governments. To do this and to secure America’s place in creating that new, postwar system, the United States needed to send an expeditionary force to Europe that could fight shoulder to shoulder with Britain and France. President Wilson relied on Secretary of War Newton D. Baker to oversee this effort.

Baker appeared to be an unlikely wartime leader. Born in 1871 into a family that supported the South during the Civil War, Baker’s intellectual gifts and hard work propelled him to a degree from Johns Hopkins University when he was twenty-one and a law degree two years later. Rejected from U.S. Army service in the War with Spain due to poor eyesight, Baker settled in Cleveland, Ohio, and became involved in progressive politics. He rose to become mayor in 1911 and campaigned vigorously for Wilson’s election the following year. After leaving office in January 1916, Baker was appointed secretary of war the following March. Baker’s selection was surprising given his lack of military experience, as well as his having at times declared himself a pacifist. However, he was a proven administrator with the drive and energy to reform the War



Department in response to the growing threat from Europe. The president left it to Baker to run the War Department when the nation went to war in April 1917 as Wilson had little personal interest in military issues.

As the secretary of war, Baker's position within the War Department was clear. The same was not the case as to the chief of staff of the Army. The General Staff Act of 1903 originally made the chief of staff the administrative leader of the General Staff, but it did not give him command authority over the entire Army. While the position rose in prominence over the next decade, the office's role in wartime remained unclear. The chief of staff in April 1917, Maj. Gen. Hugh L. Scott, told Congress, "There should be one



*Secretary Baker*  
(Library of Congress)

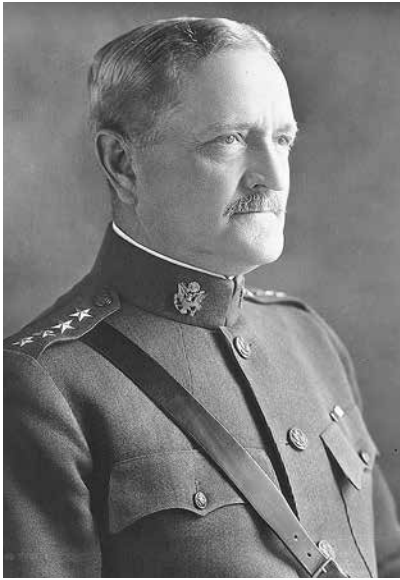
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and only one organ through which the Secretary of War commands the Army—the Chief of Staff." Although a sophisticated and well-educated officer whose experience dated back to the frontier wars of the 1870s, Scott was set to retire from active duty at age sixty-four in September. His replacement, Maj. Gen. Tasker H. Bliss, was a similarly distinguished soldier with over forty years of experience. Unlike Scott, Bliss believed that in wartime the chief of staff should function as an assistant to the field commander. Baker supported this view, going so far as to say that the secretary should "select a commander in whom you have confidence; give him power and responsibility, and then . . . work your own head off to get him everything he needs and support every decision he makes." In addition, Baker's Civil War readings led him to conclude, "The military man is commander-in-chief [and] civilian interference with commanders in the field is dangerous." To avoid this, Baker would empower the field commander with supreme authority and allow his decisions to set military policy for the War Department.

Selecting the right commander for the American Expeditionary Forces was of paramount importance. Secretary Baker needed someone who could handle both the complicated tasks of building an army thousands of miles from home and also command troops in battle. Due to communication difficulties (transatlantic telephone service did not exist until the 1920s), the AEF commander would need diplomatic tact and the complete confidence of the American civilian leadership to make major decisions without the need to consult Washington. However, like Scott and Bliss, the overwhelming majority of senior Army officers in 1917 had spent decades in the small, peacetime Army, slowly rising in rank due to strict promotion schedules based solely on seniority. Only two officers had the level of experience, character attributes, and talent to make a successful commander in France.

The first option was Maj. Gen. Leonard Wood. After entering the Army in 1886 as a surgeon, he took part in the last campaign to capture the Apache leader Geronimo, earning the Medal of Honor in the process. He commanded the 1st U.S. Volunteer Cavalry during the War with Spain and eventually rose to command a cavalry brigade. Wood also proved himself an effective administrator, holding civil-military governorships in Cuba and the Philippines before becoming chief of staff of the U.S. Army in 1910. As the only medical officer to serve as chief of staff, he helped to solidify the U.S. Army's General Staff and worked to centralize authority in the War Department. After stepping down in April 1914, he commanded several military departments within the United States. Despite this sterling record, Wood's outspokenness on political matters, along with his close relationship with former President Roosevelt, led both Baker and Wilson to distrust the general. In addition, Wood had chronic health issues due to weight and a recurrent brain tumor that led Baker to fear that he would not be up to the physical strain of command in France.

The other leading candidate for command of the AEF was Maj. Gen. John J. Pershing. Born in 1860, Pershing entered West Point in 1882 for the free education. Quickly adjusting to military life, he rose to become First Captain of the Corps of Cadets. After being commissioned as a second lieutenant, he held a series of assignments in New Mexico, Arizona, and North Dakota before returning to West Point in 1897 as an instructor. During the War with Spain, Pershing made a positive impression on Col. Theodore Roosevelt at the decisive battle for San Juan Heights during the campaign in Cuba. Pershing went to the Philippines



*General Pershing*  
(Library of Congress)

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in 1899, where he subdued the Moros on Mindanao before being assigned to several key administrative positions. In 1905, he served as military attaché to Japan during the Russo-Japanese War. That same year, he married Helen Francis Warren, the daughter of the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Wyoming Senator Francis E. Warren (Republican). Although still a captain in the Regular Army, Pershing's political connections and service record secured his promotion to brigadier general by President Roosevelt in 1906. This jump in rank over 862 senior-ranking officers led to some grumblings among his peers, but no one could discount his ability as a soldier. Pershing

went on to various commands over the next nine years in the Philippines and the United States. Tragically, in 1915 his wife and three of his four children died in a fire on the Presidio of San Francisco, California. While grieving, Pershing commanded the Mexican Expedition in 1916 in pursuit of Pancho Villa's rebel forces. Although the expedition withdrew in February 1917 with Villa still at large, the operation provided Pershing and the Army with valuable experience.

Pershing's record up to 1917 indicated his ability to operate in complex diplomatic and military environments where orders from distant headquarters had to be interpreted and modified to suit local conditions. He also had a background leading diverse commands, composed of volunteers as well as Regular Army and National Guard troops. Furthermore, Wilson and Baker considered Pershing to be trustworthy and nonpolitical because he had not publicly criticized the administration despite systemic supply and transportation difficulties that had plagued the Mexican Expedition. While he possessed no greater understanding than any other American officer of the type of warfare the U.S. Army

would face in Europe, Pershing had accelerated the adoption of new technology and equipment during the Mexican campaign and sought to modernize American forces along European models. Finally, his contemporaries viewed Pershing as a soldier of unyielding character and stern attention to detail who would not be intimidated by foreign leaders or the challenges of wartime command. All of these factors convinced Wilson and Baker that Pershing was the right man for the task, and they appointed him to command the AEF on 26 May 1917. He sailed for Europe two days later on the SS *Baltic*, taking a staff of sixty officers and about one hundred support personnel.

### THE AMALGAMATION DEBATE

Before the first American soldiers departed for Europe, officials in the War Department began working with the British and French to determine the manner in which Americans would be best used in combat. To their dismay, U.S. leaders learned that coordination and joint command had been a source of perpetual frustration for the Allies. The British and French had yet to develop a solid mechanism to align major plans, share intelligence, or develop a congruent, overall strategy for achieving victory on the Western Front. American entry into the war exacerbated this fundamental flaw in the Allied command arrangements. Further complicating the matter, the United States did not formally join the alliance against the Central Powers because President Wilson refused to link American economic and military power to the Allied cause if victory meant a reversion to status quo great-power politics. Instead, the United States would fight as an “associated power,” working with the Allies but pursuing its own national strategic objectives. These evolved over 1917 as Wilson’s goals expanded from defeating German militarism to establishing a new international order. In an address to Congress on 8 January 1918, Wilson espoused a statement of principles for peace, known as his “Fourteen Points.” The speech represented Wilson’s vision of creating an international system based upon democracy, free trade, and self-determination. Achieving this objective required an independent American military to provide the United States with diplomatic and strategic leverage once the war ended.

The state of relations between the Americans and the Europeans also influenced Wilson’s decision not to enter into a formal alliance. Many Americans in the early twentieth century

were deeply suspicious of Great Britain. It was the only power that rivaled the United States in the western hemisphere, and a British alliance with Japan formed in 1902 threatened to challenge America's growing interests in the Pacific. Strong anti-British sentiment among the Irish American population also made a close relationship with the British difficult, despite the shared language and President Wilson's Anglophile inclinations.

In contrast, the American public held warm and supportive opinions about the French. During the spring of 1917, American and French leaders repeatedly emphasized the historical alliance between France and the United States during the American Revolution. Deft French political maneuvers, including numerous public ceremonies welcoming American entry into the war, helped to solidify these feelings of mutual friendship. The arrival of a French military mission to the United States in late April 1917 provided the opportunity for speeches, parades, and laudatory press coverage of the new partnership. After appraising the situation, Secretary Baker wrote to President Wilson, "I think popular sentiment in our own country would approve cooperation with the French first rather than with the English."

Despite this stark difference in trust and respect between the United States and the Allied nations, the Europeans wanted American manpower as quickly as possible to fill their depleted forces. Marshal Joseph J. C. Joffre, who commanded the French Army until 1916 and was now a member of the French military mission to the United States, bluntly summarized the Allied position, "We want men, men, men." Each nation advocated the amalgamation of American manpower in some form into the Allied armies. French plans in 1917 proposed integrating 150 to 200 battalions of American soldiers into French regiments in order to stabilize the front lines until an American-led independent army could be created. The British, not hindered by language issues, sought to integrate American soldiers into existing units. Lt. Gen. G. T. M. Bridges, the British military representative in the United States, proposed immediately sending 500,000 Americans to England for training and placement in British Army units. Neither proposal appealed to the Americans.

The British and French plans for incorporating American manpower into their armies made military sense. The Allies already had the mechanisms in place for turning vast numbers of Americans into trained soldiers in a short amount of time. Amalgamation would allow scarce shipping to concentrate on transporting combat

troops rather than auxiliary support personnel. It would also ease the burdens on American officers, who were too few in number and inexperienced in handling complex staff duties or commanding large units on a grand scale. Despite these arguments, the Americans remained skeptical. Secretary Baker worried that favoring one nation over the other would create more political problems than military solutions. The Americans also looked unfavorably upon Allied military strategies and operational capabilities, which had produced millions of casualties over the past three years of bloody stalemate. Many believed that the British and French would use American manpower to create a colonial force on the model of the British “Sepoy” Indian Army or the French *Troupes coloniales* (Colonial Troops). “Col.” Edward M. House, a trusted adviser to President Wilson, remarked, “If once we merge with them, we will probably never emerge. The companies and battalions placed with them will soon be mere fragments . . . and will never get the credit for the sacrifices they make.” Most of all, without an independent army, the United States would not have the standing to shape a postwar settlement.

General Bliss expressed strong doubts that funneling American manpower into a war of attrition would produce a decisive result. He argued instead that U.S. troops should be trained and deployed as a cohesive force in order to strike “the final, shattering blow” against Germany. He also feared that accepting amalgamation would mean “when the war is over it may be a literal fact that the American flag may not have appeared anywhere on the line because our organization will simply be parts of battalions and regiments of the Entente Allies. We might have a million men there and yet no American army and no American commander.” The final argument against amalgamation was that the American public would not support its young men fighting and dying under foreign leaders or flags. Secretary Baker feared that high casualties among American troops under foreign command would rapidly erode home-front morale. Given these concerns, American leaders unanimously rejected large-scale amalgamation.

Secretary Baker implanted into his order to General Pershing, stating that

in military operations against the Imperial German Government you are directed to cooperate with the forces of the other countries; but in so doing the underlying idea must be kept in view that the forces of the United States are a separate and

distinct component of the combined forces, the identity of which must be preserved. This fundamental rule is subject to such minor exceptions in particular circumstances as your judgment may approve. The decision as to when your command or any of its parts is ready for action is confided to you, and you will exercise full discretion in determining the manner of cooperation.

This unprecedented delegation of power gave Pershing complete authority over all American soldiers in Europe and made him the final arbiter for American military policy on the Western Front. No other American field commander had possessed such sweeping powers and command authority in the nation's history. Pershing would utilize his position throughout the war as a bulwark against repeated Allied efforts to amalgamate U.S. forces. With Wilson's and Baker's support, Pershing committed to building an independent AEF. What he needed now was men.

### MOBILIZATION OF MANPOWER

Once Wilson decided that the United States would raise an independent army for service in France, the administration had to determine whether it would do so through voluntary enlistments or conscription. Voluntary military service had a special place in American beliefs, stretching back to the Minutemen of Lexington and Concord during the Revolutionary War. Conversely, conscription during the Civil War produced mass resentment and civil unrest, including the bloody New York City draft riot of 1863. Some popular voices, including former President Roosevelt, called for spurring enlistments by carrying on the tradition of forming volunteer units as seen in the War with Spain. Others advocated creating state-sponsored units for which governors could appoint officers as in the Civil War. Wilson and his advisers acknowledged these issues but ultimately decided that volunteerism would not produce enlistments in sufficient numbers. Wilson and Baker, with General Scott's support, wanted to maintain federal control over mobilization and sought a more reliable means of addressing the nation's manpower needs. Only conscription could meet these requirements.

Secretary Baker worked closely with Congress to overcome lingering concerns by developing a conscription policy that relied more on local authorities than on federal agencies. The resulting Selective Service Act, enacted on 18 May 1917, called for all males

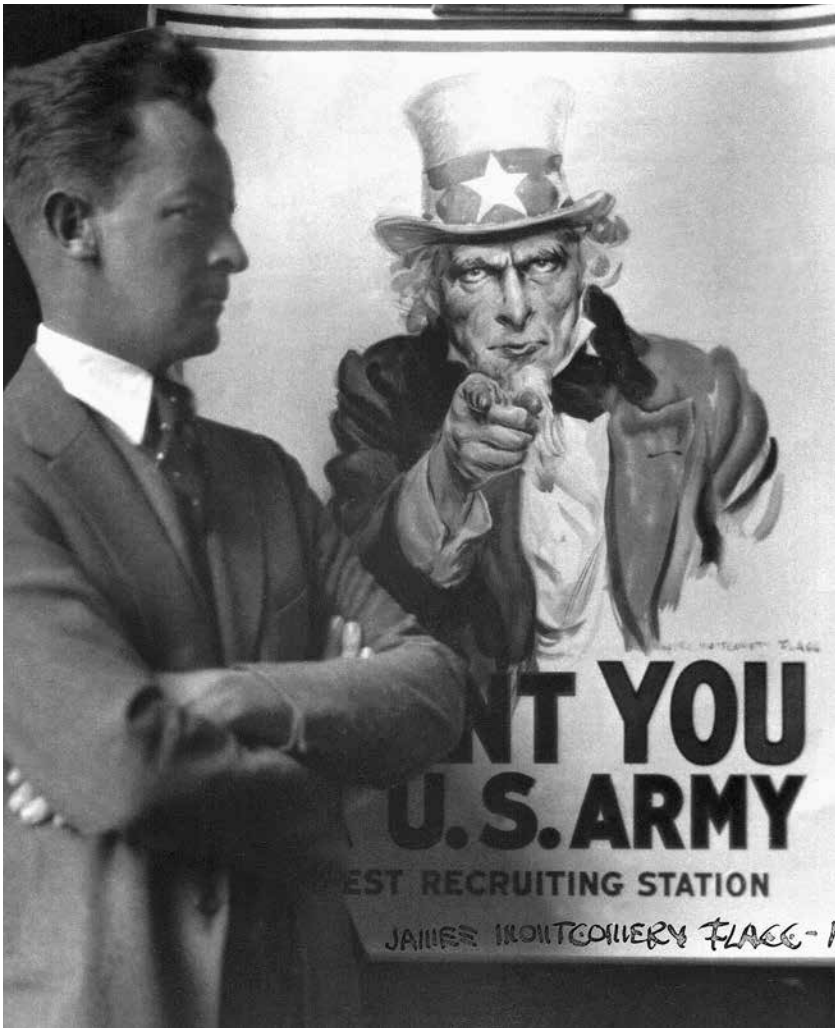


*Secretary Baker drawing a lottery number for the draft*  
(National Archives)

between twenty-one and thirty years of age to register with local draft boards on 5 June for military service. Draft boards classified men into five categories: eligible, deferred, exempted but available, exempted due to hardship, and ineligible. Several more registrations would be held in 1918, with the top age rising to forty-five. Overall, more than twenty-four million men registered over the course of the war, and 2.8 million were inducted into the armed services (comprising 66 percent of the 4.2 million who served). This included just under 370,000 African Americans, of which roughly 180,000 served in France in segregated units.

The draft law did not increase the size of either the Regular Army or the National Guard, but it did permit the president to fill each to its maximum authorized strength as set in the National Defense Act of 1916 and to federalize the National Guard. The core of the new legislation empowered the president to raise one million men through conscription as part of a new “National Army.” The War Department introduced a new numbering system to distinguish between the three organizations. The Regular Army would form into divisions numbering 1 through 25 as needed. Divisions drawn from the National Guard received numbers from





*James Montgomery Flagg and his most famous recruitment poster  
(National Archives)*

26 to 75. Finally, National Army units received numbers above 75. Both enlisted and conscripted personnel served in Regular Army, National Guard, and National Army units, and as the war progressed these designations lost much of their meaning.

Increasing the supply of capable officers proved more challenging as military authorities struggled to train qualified soldiers to satisfy the demand for tens of thousands of new leaders. The Army's traditional source of officers, the United States Military Academy, was not designed to produce large numbers of leaders in a short time frame. When the National Guard was called to federal service, more than 12,000 National Guard officers became available for assignment, but many of these men were ill-trained or judged to be medically unfit for lengthy wartime service. A partial solution to the problem came from an experimental program begun in 1915. The Army supported summer camps designed to introduce college-age men to the military lifestyle and teach them basic military skills. The program was subsequently expanded by offering "professional" men the opportunity to participate in a four-week course in Plattsburgh, New York. Famous participants included the mayor of New York City, John Mitchel; two members of the Roosevelt family, Quentin and Theodore Jr.; as well as the manager of the *New York Times*, Julius Ochs Adler. These programs proved successful, and almost half of the Army's new officers were commissioned following short-term training programs based on the Plattsburgh model. Even so, the Army struggled throughout the war to secure sufficient numbers of trained leaders capable of wartime service.

As the Army worked out its personnel issues it also faced a lack of facilities to accommodate the planned increases. Existing training camps could handle new enlistees, but not the proposed hundreds of thousands of new inductees. To address the problem, Secretary Baker ordered the creation of an independent Cantonment Division of the Quartermaster Corps to work with a civilian Committee on Emergency Construction to provide adequate training facilities within six to twelve months. By the summer, 200,000 civilian workers were constructing the new Army posts, each designed to hold 40,000 men for initial training. The quantity of construction material required by this immense building project was equivalent to building a city for 1.3 million people. When the Army began calling up thousands of newly drafted soldiers in September, their introduction to Army life came at one of thirty-two hastily built or expanded training camps. (*See Map 1.*)

Army camps in the United States focused on teaching basic military skills with special attention given to bolstering morale and instilling a patriotic spirit. When the first draftees and newly commissioned officers began arriving at the sometimes-unfinished

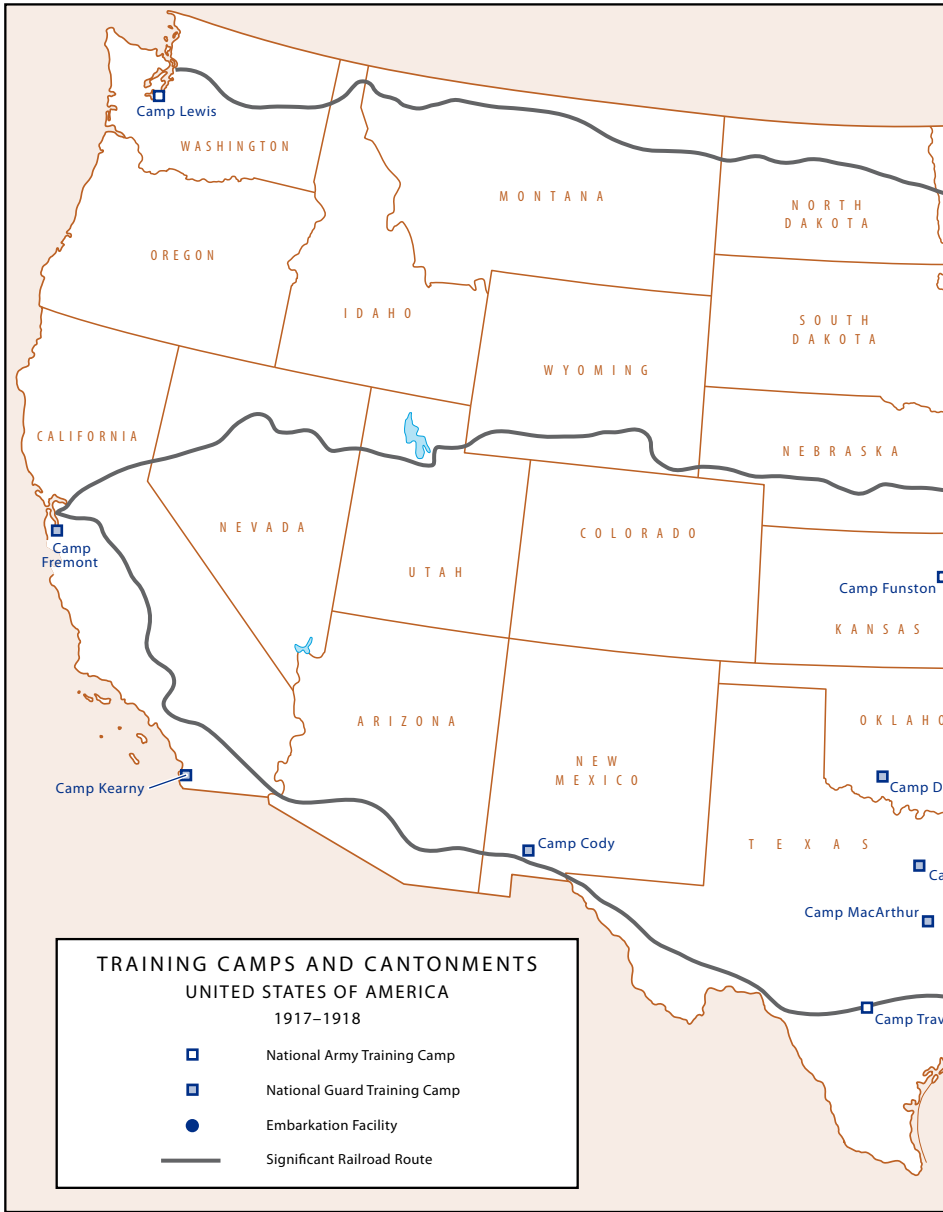


*Building a mock trench system*  
(Library of Congress)

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camps, they often had to drill in their civilian clothes for weeks while military supplies trickled in. Wooden “prop” machine guns and broomstick rifles were pressed into service due to a lack of actual weapons. While more than 700 British and French officers came to the United States to teach inductees battlefield tactics and provide firsthand accounts of trench warfare, a shortage of equipment and specialized facilities hindered detailed instruction. The six-month training program at the camps was designed to build military skills in stages. The first sixteen weeks of the cycle were focused on areas of rifle marksmanship, physical fitness, and close-order drill. Larger regimental, brigade, and divisional maneuvers occupied the final two months of training. On average, stateside camps devoted forty hours each week to military training, with time off on Wednesday afternoons and on the weekend from Saturday afternoon to Sunday evening. Once soldiers were deemed proficient in basic skills, they prepared for deployment to France, where they could receive more advanced training conducted according to the AEF’s training program.

In an effort to help draftees adjust to life in the military, new soldiers were given substantial moral inspiration in addition to their military instruction and training. War Department officials were sensitive to cultural stereotypes of Army men as heavy



**MAP 1**



drinkers and gamblers and were well aware of the rapid growth of public and congressional interest in military affairs. They hoped that offering “wholesome recreation” would limit criticism of potential misbehavior. Baker established the Commission on Training Camp Activities to advise officers on maintaining morale and providing instruction on moral issues. Civilian groups such as the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), American Library Association, local sports teams, and the Salvation Army used sporting events, lecturers, and libraries stocked with wholesome reading material to promote “social hygiene” among draftees. As part of this effort, no Army post allowed alcohol, and the Selective Service Act made it illegal to serve liquor to anyone in uniform. A popular training camp activity was organized sports, which had the added benefit of improving the physical fitness of new soldiers. The prewar Regular Army had often used sports as a way to build unit morale and cohesion, and the training camps continued the practice. Instructors organized boxing matches, track and field competitions, and baseball and football games. Because many newly drafted soldiers had previous athletic experience, these games often proved highly competitive and popular with the public. The Army football team from Camp Lewis, Washington, drew 25,000 spectators when it played a team of U.S. marines in the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California, on 1 January 1918. Regrettably, the soldiers lost to the marines 19-7.

Despite these attempts to smooth the transition into military life, many inductees struggled to adjust to the new environment and the overwhelming diversity among their new comrades. Most had never traveled more than a few miles from their homes, or encountered the vast array of nationalities and ethnicities within the United States. One new soldier from rural Tennessee, Alvin C. York, described his fellow trainees as “bartenders, saloon bouncers, ice men, coal miners, dirt farmers, actors, mill hands and city boys who had growed [*sic*] up in the back alleys and learned to scrap ever since they was knee high to a duck.” The bewildering mixture of regional accents and foreign languages soon prompted widespread English language classes to improve literacy and basic communication. The camps also provided assorted instruction in civics in an effort to turn the new soldiers into better citizens.

On completion of their training, soldiers boarded troop trains for the journey to the East Coast where they would await transport across the Atlantic. The largest embarkation facility was Camp Merritt near Tenafly, New Jersey, ten miles from New

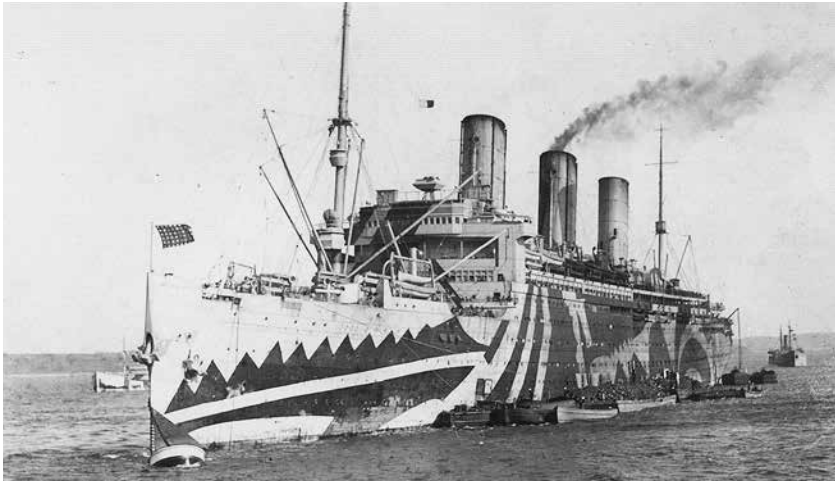


*Training at Camp Hancock, Georgia*  
(U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center)

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York City with easy access to the Erie Railroad and the West Shore Railroad. Constructed between August 1917 and June 1918, the sprawling 770-acre camp had space for more than 40,000 troops in 611, two-story barracks. Soldiers often stayed no more than forty-eight hours before transport by ferryboat to the main port in Hoboken. Prior to embarking, troops were issued new uniforms and individual equipment such as knapsacks. In the two-year period from the summer of 1917 through 1919, more than one million U.S. soldiers passed through Camp Merritt, out of the roughly 1.6 million who traveled through the ports around New York City. Newport News, Virginia, functioning as the secondary embarkation port for soldiers, processed nearly 300,000 personnel over the course of the war. Another 140,000 soldiers departed from ports ranging from Baltimore, Maryland, to Québec, Canada.

Securing adequate shipping for men and materiel proved another concern for U.S. Army planners, especially with German U-boats ravaging the British merchant fleet. Soon after the declaration of war, the U.S. government chartered seven troopships and six cargo ships, creating a transport fleet of 94,000 tons as of 1 July 1917. As the need for shipping increased, the Army



*SS Leviathan being used as an American troopship*  
(National Archives)

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began purchasing vessels at a rapid rate, growing the transport fleet to just less than 3.25 million tons by December 1918. These included 39 troopships, 38 animal transports, 18 refrigerated ships, 4 tankers, and 228 bulk cargo ships. The U.S. Army also occupied German-owned piers and leased new shipping space in the New York area. Seized German passenger vessels provided vital shipping space, with the luxurious passenger liner *SS Vaterland*, rechristened *Leviathan*, carrying more than 100,000 American troops to Europe between April 1917 and November 1918.

Even with these increases, the American transport fleet could not keep up with the demand, and the United States had to turn to the Allies for aid. While American vessels carried the bulk of U.S. materiel, they transported only 45 percent of American soldiers sent to Europe. The remainder traveled in foreign berths, with British vessels carrying 49 percent of soldiers bound for the AEF. Half of the Americans who went to France passed through Great Britain and had to be transported across the English Channel. The United States began operating a cross-Channel fleet totaling 7,000 tons of shipping in October 1917. This eventually grew to almost 340,000 tons by the end of 1918. Despite the increased size of the transport fleet and the continuing threat of German attack, the United States lost only 200,000 tons of shipping over the course



of the war, including 142,000 tons to enemy attacks. No troop transports were lost on the eastward journey across the Atlantic.

## BUILDING THE AEF, 1917

During their crossing, Pershing and his officers began what would be a six-week process to create the basic policies and organizational framework for the AEF. It was a new phenomenon, as the U.S. Army had never deployed overseas on such an enormous scale. In the words of historian James Cooke, they were “building something from nothing with very little time.” The Americans faced a steep learning curve if they were to assemble, deploy, and supply a world-class army in time to make a significant contribution to the war in Europe. They would rely a good deal on trial and error, at times utilizing an ad hoc approach that eventually proved unsuited to the challenges they faced.

Pershing and his officers used the opportunity offered by their transatlantic journey aboard the SS *Baltic* to decide a number of questions, including the size and organization of the units being built in the United States; the constitution of the AEF’s staff system and its function; the type of armaments and equipment the AEF would use; the order and priority of shipping men and materiel to France; the organization of their overseas supply system (initially known as the Line of Communications); the type of training their forces would need before entering combat; and, finally, how and where those forces would be employed. These issues would present a daunting task for even the most seasoned staff, let alone one just created from scratch.

Luckily, Pershing could rely on a generation of company and field-grade officers who had benefited from improvements in the U.S. Army’s educational system over the previous decades. Having trained at West Point, the schools at Fort Leavenworth, and the Army War College, they brought fresh ideas and a professional ethic to their duties. A small core of capable staff officers, such as Maj. John L. Hines, Maj. Fox Conner, Maj. John M. Palmer, and Capt. Hugh A. Drum, would form the backbone of the AEF. Moreover, along with men like Charles P. Summerall, Malin Craig, and Douglas MacArthur, the AEF’s officers would provide the U.S. Army with direction and leadership for decades to come.

To make and implement decisions on the myriad of issues facing him, Pershing organized what would become the AEF General Headquarters (GHQ). He first appointed Lt. Col. James G. Harbord

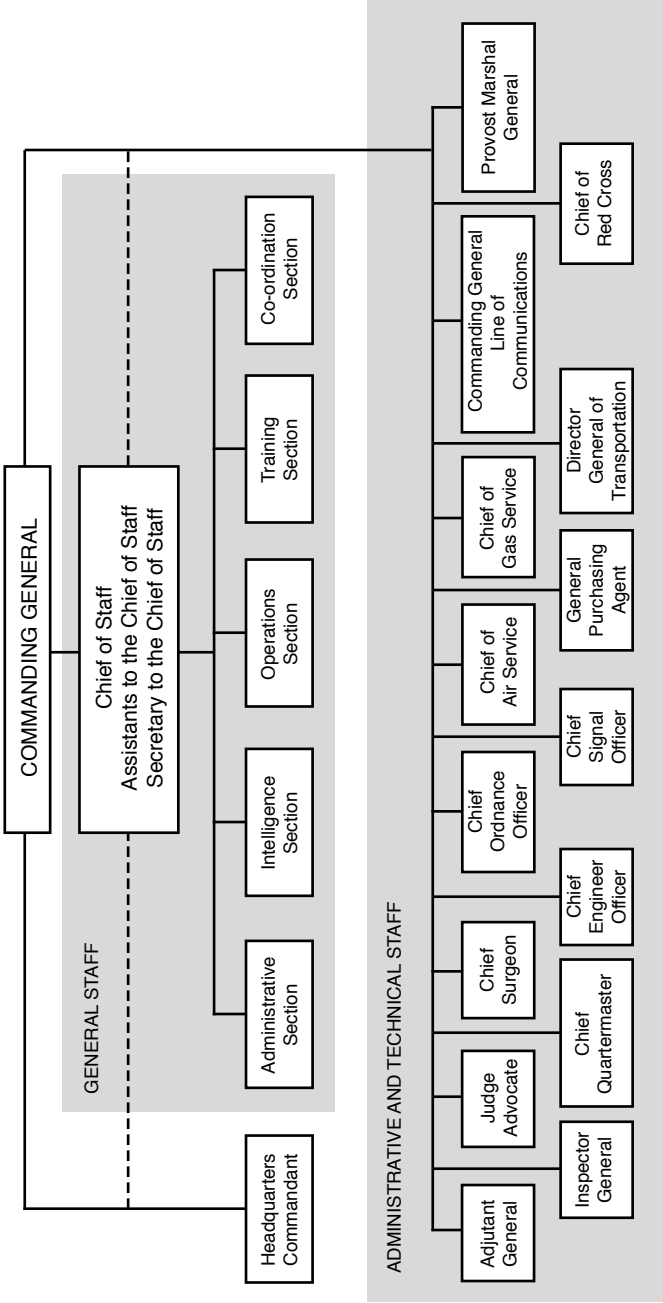
as his chief of staff. Given Pershing's cool and detached personality, Harbord served as the ideal foil, smoothing egos, easing tensions, and molding the staff into a coherent and efficient organization. Following the Army's *1914 Field Service Regulations* as a guide, the staff worked out what Pershing termed "a skeleton outline of principles" that would form the basis for a larger organization. Their initial plan called for a combat staff of three sections—Administrative, Intelligence, and Operations—each headed by an assistant chief of staff.

Senior American officers soon realized they needed to add two more staff sections—Training and Co-ordination. The Training Section would oversee specialized combat training in Europe, where they could expose soldiers to more realistic and strenuous conditions before sending them into battle. The Co-ordination Section was responsible for monitoring and assisting logistical services, ensuring that shipping and resupply efforts meshed with operations. The new system went into effect in early July 1917. The headquarters also would include an administrative and technical staff with fifteen different services, departments, or organizations, such as adjutant general, inspector general, and chief quartermaster (*Chart 1*).

After a four-day stop in England, Pershing and his staff arrived in France on 10 June, where they were met by a euphoric public desperate for relief after years of war and suffering. The overflow of emotion left the Americans shaken. Harbord noted that "it brought home to us . . . a full appreciation of the war weary state of the nation." Meeting with members of the French military and government, the Americans learned just how dire the situation was. The French Army was experiencing a series of mutinies that threatened to grind the French war effort to a halt following disastrous offensives launched in April. The American arrival boosted French morale, but the effects were unlikely to last if more U.S. soldiers did not follow shortly and in large numbers.

The French wanted the AEF to deploy 300,000 to 400,000 combat-ready forces by April 1918. To this end, Pershing sent a request to the War Department in early July that "plans [should] contemplate sending over at least one million men by next May." The number did not reflect the War Department's capabilities in terms of training or transportation, but the AEF commander left those details to be figured out at a later date. Instead he continued to plan on how his forces would be organized once they reached France. He and his staff were aided by an independent mission

CHART 1—ORGANIZATION OF HEADQUARTERS, AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCES, 5 JULY 1917



Source: *United States Army in the World War, 1917-1919*, vol. 16, *General Orders, GHQ, AEF* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1992), p. 14.

of twelve officers sent to France by the War Department to study the French and British militaries and make recommendations regarding U.S. policy. Led by Col. Chauncey B. Baker, the mission met in conference with Pershing's staff on 7–8 July. The combined group approved the initial call for a force of a million men by early summer 1918, growing to at least three million by mid-1919.

When considering the size of American divisions, AEF planners took into account both the need for combat power and the dearth of available officers within the U.S. Army. They settled this by designing a division consisting of 28,000 officers and men—two to three times the size of the depleted British and French formations—arranged in a “square” organization of two 8,500-man infantry brigades, each with two regiments. Regiments had three battalions, each with over 1,000 men at full strength. Each battalion included four 250-man infantry companies, along with a machine gun company, a supply company, and a headquarters company. The divisions also included a 5,000-man field artillery brigade with three regiments—two “light” (75-mm.) and one “heavy” (155-mm.). The large divisions enabled the use of mass to overcome enemy defenses while minimizing the number of officers needed.

The next two layers of commands consisted of corps and armies. Each corps supervised an average of four combat divisions with support units. Armies directed multiple corps. In the American Civil War, corps and army staffs were small because they were designed solely to coordinate actions and issue broad guidance. In the AEF, the corps-level staff would include 350 officers and men, while the army-level headquarters would have 150 personnel. These large staff organizations not only provided much more detailed instructions to combat units but worked to coordinate support units such as engineers, communications, and heavy artillery. Like the divisions, the sizes of the corps and armies were configured to facilitate the grinding down of German opposition by American manpower.

While the division, corps, and army organizational templates leveraged available manpower to generate combat power, it created problems in managing such large formations. Inadequately trained and newly commissioned junior officers were now commanding 59-man infantry platoons and 250-man companies. While corps and army staff sections were often manned by Regular Army officers, many held wartime responsibilities far above their peacetime experience. Systemic problems in maneuver and supply operations resulted as the sheer bulk of American units made

effective management difficult. In an attempt to maximize his scarce pool of trained officers, Pershing ordered the creation of “replacement divisions” assigned to every corps, which would act as a ready reserve of manpower and would feed trained soldiers into the combat divisions to replace losses. Pershing hoped this would allow his frontline officers to remain focused on the enemy by continuously adding fresh personnel rather than switching out units and commanders.

The flow of divisions to France brought up a sensitive issue for Pershing and the AEF regarding the type of units they were receiving. Throughout 1917 and into early 1918, the AEF absorbed numerous National Guard formations, which had deployed overseas while the large National Army of draftees trained. Pershing harbored growing reservations over the quality of the officers and men arriving in France as he established an AEF sector of the front line and formed the new GHQ system. The AEF commander’s concerns were rooted in the belief that National Guard combat units were neither well-led nor adequately trained because their officers were promoted based on political connections rather than merit. His views reflected those of most Regular Army officers critical of National Guard officers for being older and less professional in their training than their active-duty counterparts.

General Pershing believed that many senior officers in the Regular Army, and more especially the National Guard, would not be able to adapt to wartime demands: “I fear that we have some general officers who have neither the experience, the energy nor the aggressive spirit to prepare their units or to handle them under battle conditions as they exist today.” This problem was compounded by Pershing’s unprecedented decision to create a powerful GHQ. To fill his new staff, Pershing hand-picked many of the best and brightest officers in the Regular Army, and many field commanders, especially National Guard officers, struggled with the assertiveness, even arrogance, of the youthful GHQ staff officers. As a result, field commanders had to deal with not only the Germans, but also the sometimes equally difficult challenge of satisfying GHQ representatives carrying out Pershing’s orders.

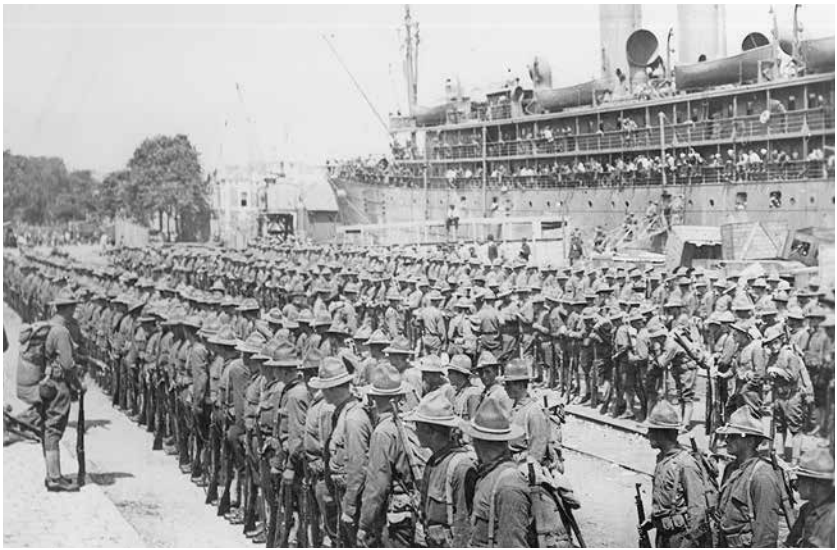
During the fall of 1917, Pershing formalized his officer evaluation system, ordering the creation of examination boards for officers who had “demonstrated unfitness.” When these boards were centralized in the French town of Blois, the doughboy slang phrase, “go blooey” (meaning to fail or break down), became a

feared term among AEF officers. With Pershing's firm support, the examination boards ruthlessly sacked and reassigned officers, sometimes after only days in their position. In 1917, roughly 10 percent of National Guard officers were discharged from federal service upon recommendation of Regular Army commanders. Over time, Pershing would attempt to replace nearly all National Guard division commanders with Regular Army officers, but political supporters of the National Guard, centered in Congress, frequently forced Pershing to back down.

After resolving the most pressing personnel and structure issues, the AEF planners began looking for a sector where they could build their independent army. Several factors went into the decision. First, holding a sector of the line solely with American troops would help protect the AEF from continuing British and French interest in amalgamation. Developing an independent sector also would simplify supply operations by enabling the AEF staff to develop an American-operated network of ports, railroads, and supply depots reaching from the coastal ports to the frontline trenches. An area along the Franco-German border known as Lorraine emerged as the natural choice. Located between Verdun to the northwest and the Swiss border, the region presented several areas for combat operations. Pershing believed his forces eventually could strike at a salient in the line around the town of St. Mihiel. Once they reduced the salient, the AEF could drive on the important town of Metz, cutting vital rail lines that supplied German forces to the west.

Additional considerations went into the selection of Lorraine as the area of American operations. The British were firmly committed to protecting Flanders, which shielded the vital ports on the English Channel. However, the logistical infrastructure within the region was so overloaded supporting the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) that placing a large American force in the area would have been impractical. As for the central sections of the Western Front, the French were unlikely to relinquish control over the regions immediately northeast, east, and southeast of Paris. They also had created their own supply system, which was incapable of supporting another large army. By choosing Lorraine, the Americans could not only keep clear of the political issues found along other portions of the front, but they also could construct their own training and logistical network.

As the first American units arrived over the summer of 1917, Pershing made plans to relocate his headquarters. He wanted to



*The first American troops arrive at St. Nazaire, France.*  
(National Archives)

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escape the limited office space and constant distractions that Paris offered, and he needed to be closer to his forces as they grew. In early September, he selected the provincial town of Chaumont, 150 miles east of Paris and 50 miles behind the front lines, as the permanent site for the AEF GHQ. The town sat at the convergence of several major rail lines and possessed enough office space and billets for all officers within the headquarters, as well as all of its enlisted personnel. Chaumont quickly became the hub of the AEF, with thousands of officers and men passing through it during the war. Its name eventually became synonymous in the AEF with the GHQ as well as Pershing's overall command.

### AMERICAN SOLDIERS BEGIN ARRIVING

In order to demonstrate the United States' full commitment to the Allied cause, the War Department hastily formed the 1st Division from several independent Regular Army regiments and sent it to France in mid-June 1917. Nicknamed the "Big Red One" because of its distinctive shoulder patch, the unit marched through the streets of Paris on 4 July 1917 to show the flag and



*American troops parading in Paris, 4 July 1917*  
(National Archives)

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provide a boost to French morale. The high point of the celebration came in a ceremony at the Marquis de Lafayette's tomb. A hero of the American Revolution and a symbol of the bond between the two nations (he had reportedly been buried in American soil), Pershing's appearance to pay his respects drove home the symbolism of the United States repaying its long-held debt. In a speech designed to make just such a point, an American officer proclaimed in French, "Lafayette, we are here!" The crowd responded with vigorous applause as they looked to the arrival of the promised American multitudes. Unfortunately, the wait would prove to be a lengthy one.

The 1st Division initially consisted of only 14,000 men; the final form for AEF divisions had yet to be established. The majority of its soldiers had served under Pershing during the 1916 Mexican Expedition. Despite the fact that many of its officers and noncommissioned officers possessed some military experience, the War Department added numerous raw recruits to bring the division up to strength before sailing. Its commander, Maj. Gen. William L. Sibert, was an engineer who had served ably on the construction of the Panama Canal but had never commanded



large numbers of troops. In August, the division adopted the square organization and eventually doubled in size as new units arrived. Like the rest of the U.S. Army, the 1st Division displayed America's military potential, but it would need time to become an effective combat force.

Three additional American divisions arrived in France over the course of 1917. The 26th Division (dubbed the Yankee Division) was formed from New England National Guard units federalized on 25 July 1917. Commanded by Maj. Gen. Clarence R. Edwards, many of these units also had served in the Mexican Expedition. They were among the first units mobilized by their home states after the declaration of war. The division was reorganized around the new square division template prior to sailing for France, with a small number of vacant positions filled by regulars. After a storm-tossed Atlantic crossing, exacerbated by poor food and cramped conditions, the 26th Division began to unload at French ports in late September 1917.

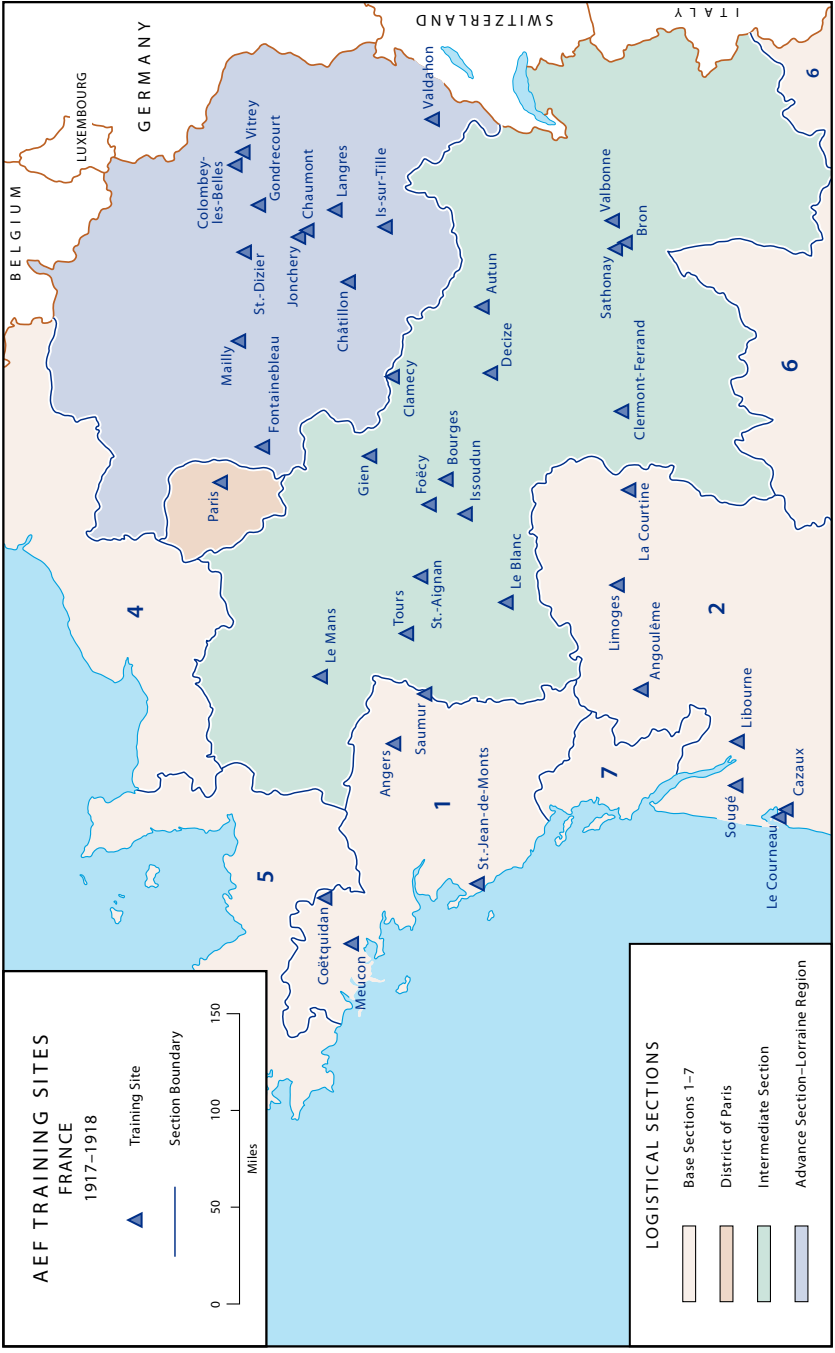
The regular 2d Division (known as the Indianhead Division) initially formed around the 5th Regiment (Marines), which had been sent to France over the summer. In late September, the War Department ordered two Army regiments, the 9th and 23d Infantry, along with the 6th Regiment (Marines), to France where they would form the 2d Division upon arrival. The two Marine regiments were joined together in France to form the 4th Brigade (Marines). The 2d Division established its headquarters on 26 October 1917 with Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Charles A. Doyen as its provisional commander. When the Army regiments finally arrived, Army Maj. Gen. Omar Bundy assumed command.

The last American division to deploy to Europe in 1917—designed to build broad public support for the war—drew on National Guard units from twenty-six states, including California, New York, Ohio, and Alabama, to form the 42d Division, also nicknamed the “Rainbow Division.” Brought together for training at Camp Mills, New York, the division overcame a rocky beginning, with frequent fights in camp between the soldiers from diverse backgrounds. Its composite units began arriving in France in November. One of the most famous American units of the war, its ranks included Douglas MacArthur, later chief of staff; William J. Donovan, founder of the Office of Strategic Services in World War II; and Father Francis Duffy, who would become the most highly decorated chaplain in U.S. Army history.

## TRAINING THE AEF

The units arriving in France in 1917 formed the core of the AEF, and they played a valuable role in refining the AEF's training system and combat doctrine. Pershing wanted at least 75,000 American soldiers ready to enter the trenches by April 1918. To bring these four divisions to combat readiness, the AEF had to develop a comprehensive school system. Designed to teach soldiers the realities of twentieth-century European warfare, it included programs ranging from grenade assault courses to corps-level staff-officer training. Especially important were technical schools for chemical weapons, machine guns, and artillery. Officer schools, such as a staff training center in Langres, gave newly commissioned officers a crash course in the organizational challenges of overseeing major formations of thousands of men. Graduates then rejoined their units for large-scale unit training and a period of shared frontline duty with a French division. Unfortunately for the AEF, these schools slowed the deployment of American troops to the front and hindered unit cohesion by separating junior officers and noncommissioned officers from their men for extended periods. Even so, the process was necessary and by the end of 1918 the system produced large numbers of well-trained personnel (*Map 2*).

Although new divisions underwent a sustained training program of twelve weeks' duration soon after arriving, their component parts did not train together. The AEF had directed that regiments and battalions take part in courses of instruction tailored for the various combat arms, particularly infantry and artillery. Infantry training occurred in three four-week increments, with the first focused on small-unit training, the second on battalion-level training with the French, and the third on brigade-level training and higher. The complicated methods of laying smokescreens and moving artillery fire ahead of the infantry as it advanced, known as a "creeping barrage," required highly technical training. As a result, American artillery units were detached for six weeks of intensive training in barrage techniques and fire-support principles. Once artillery units completed their specialized training, they rejoined their parent division for the second phase of infantry training. The original program survived only until the spring of 1918 when the situation on the front forced the AEF to curtail infantry training. Pershing did not, however, shorten the artillery training schedules. As a result, divisions entered combat during the conflict's final year without proper training in coordinating infantry and artillery, or



**MAP 2**

they were supported by French cannons until their own artillery component completed its training.

As the AEF's school system came into being, some U.S. units took advantage of the opportunities offered by "hands-on" experience. After months of rear-area training, the 1st Division jointly occupied a quiet sector of the front held by a French division. It was here that soldiers from the division fired the first American shot of the war on 23 October 1917. Two days later, they suffered the first American combat deaths of the Great War when three men were killed and eleven captured during a German trench raid. After four weeks on the front line, the Big Red One soldiers were pulled out for rest and recuperation. They were replaced by the 26th Division, which had received French weapons and training.

After initial familiarization with their new equipment, each American regiment was assigned a French battalion to assist in training. Although poor weather in December and January hindered the exercises, the Americans received the basics of what was called "trench work," consisting of grenade throwing, gas instruction, wire breaching, and bayonet drills. The collaborative effort fostered a sense of camaraderie between American units and French trainers.

Faced with the unfamiliar challenges of trench warfare, Pershing and his staff were compelled to adapt U.S. Army tactical doctrine to current operating conditions. After surveying the battlefields of the Western Front, Pershing concluded that to defeat the Germans the AEF needed to get out of the trenches and fight what he called "open warfare." The concept began with well-trained and aggressive infantry breaching enemy lines rather than the heavy artillery barrages and sophisticated fire support plans preferred by the British and French. Pershing thought Allied operational thinking flawed, explaining later in his memoirs, "It was my opinion that victory could not be won by the costly process of attrition, but it must be won by driving the enemy out into the open and engaging him in a war of movement." To achieve this, the AEF GHQ ordered that "all instruction must contemplate the assumption of a vigorous offensive. This purpose will be emphasized in every phase of training until it becomes a settled habit of thought." Creating a doctrine of open warfare set the tone for the AEF's combat training, emphasizing rifle marksmanship and offensive movement rather than trench-fighting techniques and mass artillery fires.



*American soldiers getting accustomed to trench conditions*  
(Library of Congress)

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The decision to develop an open-warfare doctrine also stemmed from a variety of internal factors that limited American willingness to copy the tactics and methods of more experienced French and British forces. Pershing was concerned that American forces, operating far from home, would become demoralized as well as ineffective in a largely defensive posture. In addition, positional warfare relied on staff work by experienced officers, coordinated artillery, and veteran NCOs in the trenches to gain an advantage over the enemy. The AEF was extremely weak in these areas, so adopting a doctrine of positional warfare based on firepower would only accentuate their deficiencies. Developing a distinct American doctrine also provided Pershing with further justification to oppose amalgamation of U.S. troops into British and French units. American units following a separate doctrine would have difficulty conducting operations under foreign command. At the same time, an independent doctrine entailed more training, further delaying the AEF's readiness for combat.

Whatever combat doctrine U.S. forces employed, the embryonic American supply system meant that they initially would have to train and fight with a hodge-podge assortment of weapons supplied by the British and French. General Pershing later remarked, "We were



*Lt. Val Browning holding the automatic rifle designed by his father  
(U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center)*

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literally beggars as to every important weapon, except the rifle.” Rifle production was perhaps the only bright spot in U.S. wartime manufacturing, despite the fact that the Army’s preferred individual firearm, the M1903 Springfield rifle, produced at the Springfield, Massachusetts, and Rock Island, Illinois, government arsenals, was difficult to manufacture. Fortunately, American firearms manufacturers had invested in the tooling necessary to mass produce an export version of Britain’s Lee-Enfield prior to 1917. As a result, three in four American troops in France carried the M1917 “American Enfield” while the remainder received the more accurate Springfield.

For many of its infantry weapons, the U.S. Army turned to legendary gun designer John M. Browning. His .45-caliber M1911 pistol proved itself an outstanding service weapon. In the close confines of trench warfare, with constant dust and debris, American soldiers greatly appreciated the M1911’s reliability and stopping power. The M1911 pistol remained the standard U.S. Army sidearm until 1985. Soldiers also used shotguns designed by Browning, including the Winchester M1897 and the Browning Auto5. These weapons proved so fearsome that the German government issued a formal protest in late 1918 stating that they

violated the rules of war and threatened to summarily execute anyone captured with one. The U.S. government rejected the claim and promised swift reprisals should the Germans carry out the threat. The war ended before the matter could be resolved, and no executions for the use of shotguns were ever recorded.

But the machine gun was most identified with the World War, and the U.S. Army again turned to Browning. In testing what would become the M1917, a .30-caliber heavy machine gun capable of firing 450 to 600 rounds a minute at a maximum range of 5,000 yards, the Browning fired 21,000 rounds continuously in forty-eight minutes without fail. Unfortunately, manufacturing delays slowed the weapon's production, and it only arrived on the battlefield in the last months of the war. The same was the case with Browning's light machine gun, the Browning Automatic Rifle M1918. Weighing in at 17 pounds, the weapon was considerably more portable than the 53-pound heavy machine gun and saw extensive service at the end of the war. However, production difficulties prevented many of these superb weapons from getting into the hands of soldiers early in the war.

As undesirable as it may have been to have to rely on French and British weapons, the arms they provided were mostly satisfactory. The French Hotchkiss M1914 and British Vickers M1915 heavy machine guns had proved themselves good and reliable weapons through years of combat. The same could be said of the British 3-inch Stokes mortar, a simple yet highly effective weapon used to good effect by American units. But one of the worst Allied weapons was the French Chauchat M1915 light machine gun. Designed to be portable so that soldiers could carry it forward into battle, the weapon was crudely designed. Its magazine had exposed slits on the sides (theoretically to allow soldiers to see how many bullets remained) that let in dirt and mud, leading to frequent jamming. The Chauchat was so poorly made that parts frequently were not interchangeable. Rather than repair it when broken, Americans often tossed the gun aside in favor of a more reliable bolt-action rifle.

As unsatisfactory as the Chauchat proved, the American infantry did not lack for firepower. An American infantry regiment commonly included 192 automatic rifles, which provided mobile firepower, and 16 heavy machine guns used for area suppression and defensive operations. For indirect fire support, each regiment had six Stokes mortars and three 37-mm. cannons. The Stokes mortar proved very popular with troops for its ability to lay

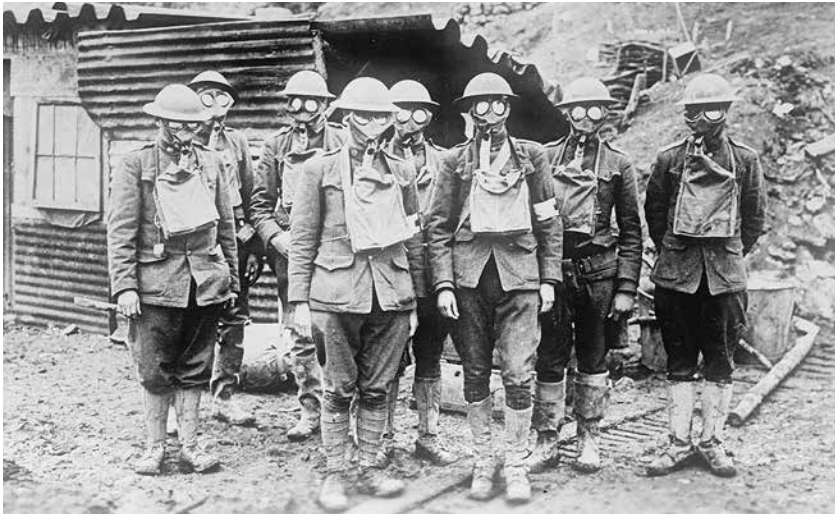
smokescreens and knock out enemy strongpoints with ten-pound shells that could be fired at a distance of nearly 800 yards. To maintain its autonomy, the AEF chose to purchase all of the weapons it received from the Allies outright, rather than accept them on loan. This decision enabled Americans to control the distribution of supplies, although it also caused delays in the transport, storage, and issuance of equipment to AEF units.

While American infantry employed an assortment of U.S. and European small arms and light weapons, the AEF relied exclusively on the Allies for larger and more specialized firepower. American units used an assortment of artillery pieces throughout the war, but the mainstays were the 75-mm. field gun (the famed French 75) and the 155-mm. howitzer. The artillery brigade of every AEF division contained forty-eight rapid firing 75-mm. guns to pummel enemy personnel and twenty-four howitzers to destroy fortified positions and strongpoints. Over the course of the war, the French supplied the AEF with thousands of artillery pieces and millions of rounds of ammunition.

The French also provided self-propelled fighting vehicles clad in bulletproof armor plating, known as tanks, originally designed by the British to push through enemy defenses. When it joined the war, the U.S. Army had minimal experience with those vehicles. Pershing created the AEF Tank Corps in December 1917 and put Capt. George S. Patton in command of a tank training center near Langres. The U.S. Army also set up a tank school under the command of Capt. Dwight D. Eisenhower at Camp Colt on Gettysburg National Military Park, Pennsylvania. Having no supply of American-made tanks, the AEF primarily used two-man light (6-ton) French Renault FT17 vehicles augmented by a few of the larger (28-ton) British Mark V designs.

French assistance also was essential to developing the U.S. Air Service. Prior to the American entry into the war, U.S. volunteers had won honors serving with the French in the Lafayette Flying Corps, which included the Lafayette Escadrille fighter squadron. The U.S. Army had been an early supporter of American aircraft designers, and Pershing used airplanes during the Mexican Expedition. Nonetheless, low prewar budgets and a patent war between the Wright brothers and Glenn H. Curtiss hindered American military aircraft development. Pershing authorized aviation officers, such as Lt. Col. William L. "Billy" Mitchell, to develop plans for 260 squadrons of American planes along with assorted balloon units. However, the U.S. Air Service arrived in France with no planes capable of engaging in combat and had to





*American soldiers wearing gas masks*  
(U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center)

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rely almost solely on European aircraft, including the French-manufactured SPAD S.XIII and the Nieuport 28C.1 biplanes. The Air Service expanded rapidly to 11,425 flying officers, but the only aircraft produced by the United States in quantity was the license-built British De Havilland DH-4 bomber, and substantial deliveries did not begin until the summer of 1918.

Finally, with highly sophisticated German attacks using new chemical agents becoming increasingly deadly, it was critical to sufficiently train American divisions in France to withstand mustard gas and blister agents. The U.S. Army once again turned to the French and British for assistance with this new type of warfare. Due to a lack of equipment, AEF units were forced to use whatever gas masks were available, making standardized training difficult. By January 1918, Allied instructors went to training camps in the United States to conduct courses on chemical weapons. Supervised by British and French instructors, American soldiers endured countless alarm drills designed to ensure that troops could don a mask within six seconds of an alarm being sounded. This training was often extremely uncomfortable, as World War I gas masks pinched the nose shut to ensure respiration occurred through the mouth air filter, and men only gradually

became accustomed to wearing the masks while sleeping. But the constant drilling and rehearsals were necessary if U.S. troops hoped to withstand enemy gas attacks.

### MEN AND MATERIEL IN THE AEF

For the majority of American soldiers, the wartime journey to France was their first, and perhaps only, opportunity to experience life outside the United States. Unaccustomed to military discipline, eager to see the sights and sounds of a foreign country, with limited diversions to spend their pay on in camp, and alcohol strictly forbidden, many soldiers sought any opportunity to get away from their training bases. The warm reception doughboys received from many French citizens also encouraged a great deal of interaction and fraternization. The AEF sought to encourage positive moral behavior, and Pershing especially was adamant about preventing American soldiers from succumbing to perceived looser French morals. War Department officials worried that American public support for the Army would decline if conscripted troops were exposed to immoral and potentially unhealthy off-duty activities. Furthermore, before the advent of penicillin, sexually transmitted diseases often meant a soldier had to be reassigned to light duties or given a medical discharge. Given these concerns, Pershing ordered a stringent program of lectures, bimonthly medical inspection of all personnel, and court-martial with forfeiture of pay for any personnel contracting a venereal disease. Unit disease rates also became a highly scrutinized part of officer evaluation reports. Even with these measures, instances of soldiers going absent without leave when not at the front, referred to as “French leave,” remained a problem throughout the war.

The inadequacy of AEF support facilities and the supply system also drove soldiers to slip away from their units in search of creature comforts. During their early months in France, American forces subsisted on a diet of British corned beef and hardtack, which could be combined into a hearty but bland cooked stew or eaten cold if required. Dissatisfied with this monotonous fare, soldiers scrounged and foraged whenever they could. The discovery of fresh eggs, bread, or prizes such as meat and cheese served as a welcomed distraction. Stories about adventures and exploits scouring the countryside for more nutritious sustenance became a recurring theme in the letters soldiers sent home from France.

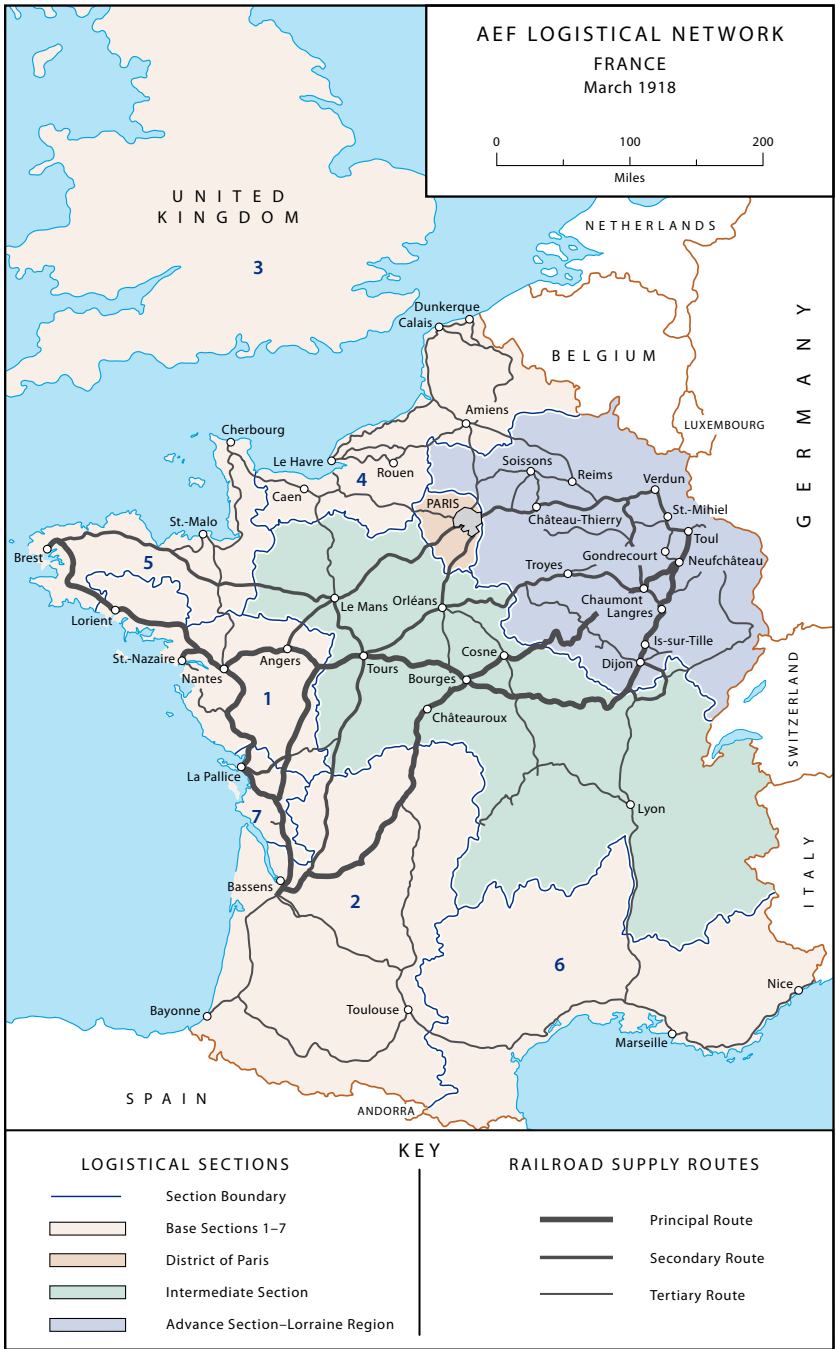
Food was just one of the enormous challenges involved in supplying the AEF. Pershing's staff understood how vital logistics would be to the war effort. Colonel Harbord later wrote, "The paths of glory—if there is any glory in modern war—led out of the Supply Service, not into it." Initially, American forces in Europe were totally dependent on their partners, especially the French, for supplies. With the projected strength of the AEF rising to over two million men by mid-1918, the AEF GHQ estimated that it would need over 45,000 tons per day to sustain its forces. Both Britain and France offered to ship and supply American combat troops but only on the condition that they be integrated into Allied units. Because the Americans rejected this proposal, the AEF needed to build its own independent supply system and logistical infrastructure—and it had to do so quickly. Accomplishing the mission demanded a great deal of ingenuity, but also a willingness to bend the rules on occasion.

Prewar U.S. Army policies did not specify how to supply an overseas army during wartime. Secretary Baker's decision to give Pershing complete authority over the AEF resulted in the creation of two separate American systems, with the War Department controlling supply and logistics within the United States while the AEF GHQ built its own network in Europe. Officers at the AEF GHQ forecast their requirements to the War Department months in advance and worked to sequence supply deliveries between the United States and France. Coordinating the two systems proved daunting, and problems continued throughout the war. Within the AEF's area of operations, disruptions in transatlantic shipping proved the primary issue. Pershing and his staff determined that they needed to maintain a ninety-day stockpile in France in order to keep the AEF functioning, though this was never achieved and was later reduced to forty-five days. Responsibility for receiving and storing supplies and getting them to the front fell to one of the technical bureaus: the Line of Communications (LOC).

The French initially assigned the Atlantic ports of St. Nazaire, La Pallice, and Bassens to the AEF, which eased congestion in the English Channel. It also meant that at the end of a lengthy sea voyage, American troops and cargo had to be unloaded, wait for available transport, and then journey across 400 miles of poorly maintained French railroads before reaching most AEF depots, a process that frequently resulted in confusion and delays. The problem became so severe that the AEF eventually bought railway cars and operated its own railway service. Logistics coordination

with combat forces also proved challenging. By August, Pershing and his staff decided to subdivide the AEF into separate combat and logistics elements. The combat-oriented force would continue to be directed from the AEF GHQ and encompass the battle zone, known as the advance section (*Map 3*). Technical and logistical operations remained under the LOC, which stayed in Paris after GHQ relocated to Chaumont in September. The LOC controlled all ports, supply trains, and depots from the coast to the railheads leading into the advance section. All facilities between the ports and the advance section were organized as an “intermediate section.” Along the coast, Pershing created nine “base sections,” each focused on a major port. The development of these different layers of control allowed commanders to focus on specific jobs, improving productivity and efficiency.

Even with the massive buildup of American production and transportation capabilities within the United States, the AEF could not rely exclusively on materials and supplies transported across the Atlantic Ocean. To this end, Pershing ordered the creation of a General Purchasing Board in August that could buy supplies in Europe. Although not technically authorized to establish such an organization, the AEF commander considered it a more efficient means for acquiring essential items. To head this new board, Pershing appointed his trusted friend, Charles G. Dawes, to be the AEF’s general purchasing agent. A prominent banker (and future vice president in the Calvin Coolidge administration), Dawes used his business acumen to cut through red tape and locate sources of supplies in Europe. He was particularly interested in acquiring bulky items, such as timber and coal, and even purchased 300 locomotives from Belgium. When criticized later for buying supplies at exorbitant prices, Dawes responded, “Damn it all, the purpose of the army is to win the war, not to quibble about a lot of cheap buying. . . . We weren’t trying to keep a set of books. We were trying to win a war.” By the end of the conflict, Dawes and the board purchased over ten million tons of supplies in Europe, compared to the seven million tons shipped from the United States. Talented and energetic businessmen like Dawes played a vital role in many aspects of the AEF’s development. Some were officially employed by the War Department while others worked through patriotic volunteer organizations. In one example, the railroad executive William W. Atterbury was commissioned a brigadier general and helped run the AEF’s railroad network. In another case, the War



**MAP 3**



*American trucks awaiting shipment to France*  
(National Archives)

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Department worked with the American Telephone and Telegraph Company to recruit hundreds of female switchboard operators, known as "Hello Girls," for deployment to France to overcome difficulties the Americans encountered with French operators. Two charitable organizations, the YMCA and Salvation Army, maintained a large presence among American soldiers. Both sent hundreds of civilians to France to help boost morale, providing goods such as stationary, chocolate bars, and cigarettes as well as offering various forms of education and entertainment. Living and working alongside soldiers, dozens of these civilians would be decorated for their bravery and commitment.

Service in the logistical branches was not free from danger, and logisticians remained first and foremost soldiers. In the fall of 1917, a small number of American engineers supported the British offensive at Cambrai, notable for including the first large-scale deployment of tanks. In the three months leading up to the operation, elements from three U.S. engineer regiments

constructed railroads near Cambrai. Once the offensive began on 20 November, they helped to extend the rail network forward. On 30 November, a German counteroffensive hit the southern face of what had become a British salient. The 11th Engineers (Standard Gauge Railway regiment) came under fire in the villages of Fins and Gouzeaucourt. Meanwhile, the 12th Engineers (Light Railway regiment) delivered ammunition to British artillery, and the 14th Engineers (Light Railway regiment) operated in the British VI Corps, providing ammunition to frontline units. The Americans suffered a few dozen casualties out of roughly 2,500 men supporting the operations. British Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, commander of the British Expeditionary Force, made special note of the “prompt and valuable assistance” the Americans provided British units during the battle.

Apart from the 1st Division in Lorraine and the engineers at Cambrai, the AEF had yet to make a notable appearance on the Western Front prior to the end of 1917. The four American divisions in France totaled less than 120,000 soldiers, a far cry from the million men Pershing wanted by late spring 1918. Progress had been made to build the apparatus to deliver vast numbers of American soldiers to the battlefields of France, with hundreds of thousands of men undergoing training and an immense logistical system under development. However, an unprepared U.S. Army in April 1917 and the rapid pace of mobilization resulted in mistakes both in the United States and in France. Many of the systems and policies instituted during the early months of the war were starting to prove incapable of meeting the challenges facing the Army. Those deficiencies had to be addressed in the coming months before the AEF could effectively take its place on the front lines.

## THE WAR DEPARTMENT: CHALLENGES AND REFORM

By the winter of 1918, the patriotic enthusiasm shown by the American public and the staggering expenditures authorized by the U.S. government had yet to produce significant combat power in France. Policymakers understood that it would take time to build a force, but the Army bureaucracy in Washington, D.C., struggled due to a lack of focus and oversight. Secretary Baker relied on trusted subordinates to handle details and delegated major areas of responsibility, while he concentrated on managing public perceptions. He also tried to implement progressive reforms by creating new oversight boards and review

panels, but their unclear lines of authority complicated the chain of command and confused subordinates. In one example, Baker rejected a major Army contract with the chemical giant DuPont for smokeless powder used in artillery shells because he objected to the company making high profits during wartime. He instead gave the contract to a company that was unable to produce powder until 11 November 1918, the last day of the war. These efforts to put political ideology over military expediency contributed to the War Department being overwhelmed by the challenges of modern industrial warfare for much of 1917.

The War Department's internal structure also led to rampant inefficiencies. The General Staff, which was responsible for war planning and interdepartmental coordination, numbered only forty-one officers in April 1917. The German Army, by comparison, used over 600 specially trained officers for the same functions. The General Staff was neither designed to provide the Army with firm, centralized command, nor to make policy decisions in a timely manner. As a sign of its early dysfunction, it took an average of six days for a telegraph cable from Pershing to reach the chief of staff's desk and another three to four days for the response to be sent back to France.

These problems went beyond the General Staff, due to the War Department's traditional reliance on autonomous bureaus to handle specialized issues. In peacetime, these bureaus competed for a share of the budget, and in wartime they often retained their focus on protecting bureaucratic "turf" at any cost. For example, the Ordnance Department ran arsenals at Springfield and Rock Island. Upon the declaration of war, the commander of the Rock Island Arsenal used his proximity to the stockyards in Chicago to corner the market in leather and refused to release supplies to other departments. In another case, the adjutant general had his staff make orders with every typewriter company in America, ensuring that only he had these crucial items. This decentralized system of narrow, bureaucratic interests was intended to prevent the concentration of power in any one body in order to block the rise of militarism. Unfortunately, the system proved ill-suited to addressing the challenges facing the U.S. Army in 1917.

Finally, the War Department struggled to find personnel possessing sufficient administrative skill. Pershing had selected a number of talented officers from the General Staff for service in France, and the continual demands of forming the AEF and its divisions put a premium on capable officers. Even the office



of the chief of staff fell victim to needs beyond Washington, D.C. General Scott held the position until his retirement on 21 September 1917, but he spent much of the summer on a mission to Russia observing the deteriorating military situation there. His replacement, General Bliss, officially held the office from 22 September to 18 May 1918 but that included several months in Europe coordinating with the Allies, leaving the staff without clear direction. During these lengthy absences, Maj. Gen. John Biddle served as acting chief of staff from 29 October 1917 to 16 December 1917, and again from 9 January 1918 through 3 March 1918. An engineer by training, Biddle refused to make major policy decisions until Bliss returned. The situation left the War Department adrift and mired in petty bureaucratic squabbles that did little to advance the war effort.

By December 1917, growing complaints and news reports of dysfunction within the Army led to a series of congressional investigations into mismanagement, fraud, and waste. Oregon Senator George E. Chamberlain (Democrat), chairman of the Senate Military Affairs Committee, bluntly condemned the Wilson administration and the War Department. Chamberlain declared, "Let me say that the military establishment of America has fallen down. There is no use to be optimistic about a thing that does not exist. It has almost stopped functioning. Why? Because of inefficiency in every bureau and in every department of the Government of the United States." Congress especially was alarmed at the poor conditions within the hastily constructed training camps that had resulted in outbreaks of contagious diseases at numerous posts. Thrown up during the summer of 1917, the camps often had rudimentary plumbing and heating systems that quickly broke down. When winter set in, troops who still had only summer clothing might wake in the morning to find snow piled on their sheets that had come through cracks in ceilings and walls. The result was a shocking rate of infection, particularly pneumonia, and many camps reported dozens of deaths per month.

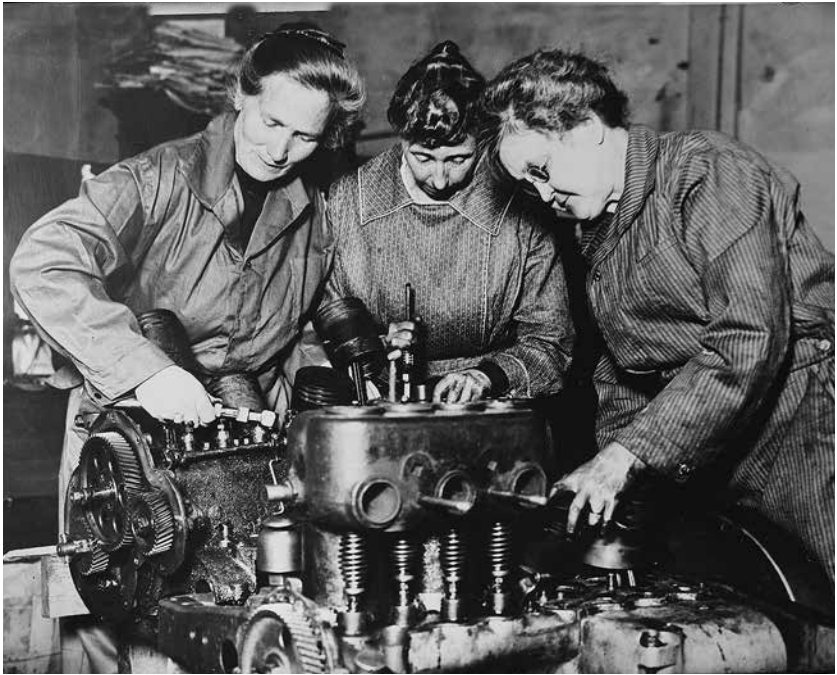
Congress also was critical of the poor management and accountability within the Army supply and transportation system. Army depots and posts only inventoried equipment when it was shipped, not when it arrived at its destination, resulting in tens of thousands of tons of supplies left sitting in ports, rail yards, or sometimes simply dumped outside a U.S. Army post without any record. In an extreme case of supply problems, soldiers training at Camp Custer, Michigan, were forced to take turns wearing shoes

for training because only half of the required shoes had arrived by the winter of 1917–1918.

The American railway network faced its own problems moving large numbers of troops and equipment to embarkation ports. Transporting the 1st Division in June 1917 required more than 110 special trains dedicated solely to carrying troops. Not long after, the Army was using one-quarter of the total passenger cars in the United States. Because of the shortage of suitable cars, troops traveling to Camp Merritt for embarkation to France often waited days or even weeks until railcars became available.

Failures by other government agencies contributed to the War Department's woes. In particular, the Federal Fuel Administration, which sought to coordinate the shipment and storage of oil and coal, created massive problems for railways and shipping due to poor management. The situation became so severe that all war-related industries east of the Mississippi were closed for five days in January 1918 due to a lack of coal. There were similar difficulties throughout American industry as it expanded to meet wartime needs. The Wilson administration had sought to coordinate this sector via a series of boards, such as the War Industries Board, Shipping Board, and War Trade Board, but progress was slow in coming for a federal government unaccustomed to direct involvement in the American economy. If the United States hoped to meet its objective of fielding and supporting an independent army in France, it needed change.

On 10 January, Secretary Baker defended the War Department with six hours of feisty testimony before Congress. "No army of similar size in the history of the world," he insisted, "has ever been raised, equipped, or trained so quickly." Even so, the secretary understood the War Department needed an infusion of new leadership. He increased the authority of Benedict Crowell, a financier recruited the previous November to bring direction to the War Department's dealings with American industry. Baker also recalled to active duty Maj. Gen. George W. Goethals, builder of the Panama Canal, to serve as quartermaster general. Goethals, in turn, recruited a group of influential bankers, railroad executives, and businessmen to conduct a complete audit and reform of the Army purchasing system. By April 1918, Crowell and Goethals had created contracting and regional purchasing systems that for the first time gave the War Department the ability to track purchases,



*Women working in military production in Detroit, Michigan*  
(Library of Congress)

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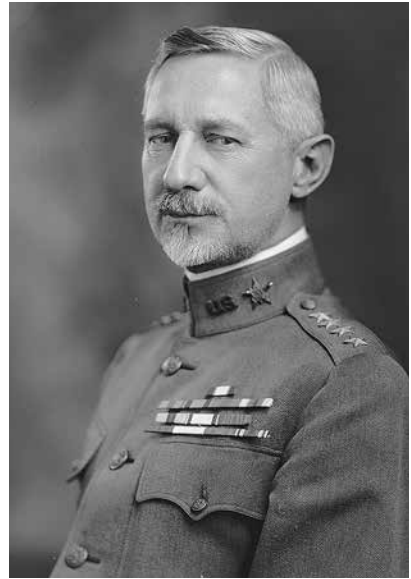
production, and shipping from the factory to French ports. They also provided more effective coordination with the War Industries Board and other federal agencies to improve efficiencies in production and supply.

In early March 1918, the War Department administration got a final, much-needed boost with the appointment of Maj. Gen. Peyton C. March as the acting chief of staff. (He took over the position outright in May.) A decorated veteran of the War with Spain, March was ten years younger than General Bliss and four years younger than Pershing. He had been a military observer in the 1904–1905 Russo-Japanese War and had spent several years serving in the War Department. As an artillery officer, he had an appreciation for the requirements of industrialized warfare. In July 1917, he had traveled to France where he took command of the 1st Division's artillery brigade, overseeing its initial training near Valdahon. A stern but effective commander, he eventually

became the chief of AEF Artillery before being recalled to lead the War Department. March understood the issues facing the U.S. Army both in France and in the United States and was committed to providing the War Department the direction and leadership it so desperately needed. This included taking firm control over Army policy, even if that meant coming into conflict with Pershing.

Irascible and blunt, March had a domineering personality and a demanding work ethic. Upon arrival at the War Department, he found the staff working a peacetime nine-to-five schedule with stacks of unopened mail and unsorted telegrams piled up outside office

doorways. March soon put the department on a wartime footing and instilled in the staff his own sense of purpose and diligence. Frequently the first man in the office, March expected ruthless efficiency. Any officer found wanting was replaced with someone who could produce results. Unlike his predecessors, March had a clear understanding of his position. He commanded the military elements of the War Department and thereby the Army. To that end, he eventually corralled the independent bureaus and centralized authority within the General Staff. His sole focus was to get as many men to France in the shortest time possible. When projecting the number of beds needed on troopships, March cut the requirement by two-thirds, stating that three men could share a bed by sleeping in shifts. In response to complaints that he was too harsh, March replied simply, "You cannot run a war on tact." The effort paid dividends when 100,000 men were shipped to France in April 1918, the first time the War Department reached that milestone. Troop shipments would not drop below this level for the remainder of the war, and by the summer months 10,000 Americans were arriving in France every day.



*General March*  
(Library of Congress)

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## STRATEGIC CRISIS ON THE WESTERN FRONT

While Baker battled Congress over the state of the war effort on the home front, events in Europe put growing pressure on Pershing to hasten the flow of American troops to the Western Front. The collapse of the Russian Army in September 1917 led to the overthrow of the Russian government by Vladimir I. Lenin's Bolsheviks. Allied uncertainties about Lenin were verified when the Communists agreed to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, signed on 16 December. By ending the fighting on the Eastern Front, the treaty enabled the Germans to transfer dozens of divisions to the west. The Allies suffered another setback when a combined German-Austrian offensive smashed the Italians at the Battle of Caporetto. From 24 October to 19 November 1917, the Central Powers pushed the Italians back more than sixty miles, capturing hundreds of thousands in the process. Italian failures eventually resulted in the deployment of British and French forces to Italy to stabilize the front.

The combination of victories for the German and Austro-Hungarian forces threatened to shift the balance on the Western Front in favor of the Central Powers for the first time in the war. Allied leaders expected a German spring offensive in 1918 directed either at Paris or the English Channel ports. After three-plus years of war, the ability of British and French forces to block a strong German assault was in serious doubt. Facing the possibility of defeat in the west, British and French leaders again pressed for the immediate amalgamation of American soldiers into Allied units. The British offered to handle all shipping requirements for 150 battalions of American soldiers, provided they were integrated into British units. Pershing continued to reject such proposals, leading the British and French to approach Secretary Baker and President Wilson to press the issue. Baker responded by telegraphing Pershing in December, calling on him to disperse American manpower "as you deem wise in consultation with the French and British Commanders-in-chief." Baker continued, "We do not desire loss of identity of our forces but regard that as secondary to the meeting of any critical situation by the most helpful use possible of the troops at your command."

Baker's message offered Pershing some flexibility regarding amalgamation, but it was unnecessary. Pershing already possessed the formal authority to employ the AEF as he saw fit, and he was unlikely to accept amalgamation unless ordered to do so by Baker or Wilson. The AEF commander said as much in an 8 January 1918

cable to the United States, stating, “Have expressed a willingness to aid in any way in an emergency but do not think good reason yet exists for us to break up our divisions and scatter regiments for service among French and British especially under the guise of instruction.” Pershing knew that the Allies had other sources of manpower, such as the nine British divisions operating against the Ottomans in the Middle East, or the fifteen British and French divisions bogged down on the Salonika Front in Macedonia. General Bliss, who was in France during December 1917 and January 1918 serving as the U.S. military representative to the Supreme War Council, supported Pershing’s position, arguing that “such a thing as permanent amalgamation of our units with the French and British units would be intolerable to American sentiment.” This left open the possibility of temporary assignment of American units to foreign control.

While this debate continued, President Wilson made a major speech to the U.S. Senate on 8 January 1918 in which he outlined his Fourteen Points for peace. These were much more far-reaching than the desire to “vindicate the principles of peace and justice” stated in the declaration of war in April 1917 or specific grievances such as submarine attacks. The AEF was the primary American tool to achieve Wilson’s expanded goals of a broad range of postwar political and economic reforms, but the president had to balance the weight of having an independent impact on the outcome of the war against the long-term reaction of allies who needed immediate assistance.

Ultimately, a combination of political pressure and the grave military situation forced Pershing to modify his original plans. Pershing accepted a British offer to ship and train six full divisions in an effort to accelerate the deployment of American troops, although after instruction they would revert to American command. These divisions would augment the two divisions shipped every month on American transports. In addition, Pershing allowed four American divisions to serve under French corps command in Lorraine, but the American commanders and their staffs remained in charge. Last, Pershing agreed to transfer four African American infantry regiments to the French, where they were incorporated into French divisions. The concessions helped smooth political relationships, but Pershing still commanded the vast majority of American troops and continued the plan to field an independent AEF.

As Pershing built up the AEF’s combat forces, he found his own GHQ struggling with the same types of inefficiencies that

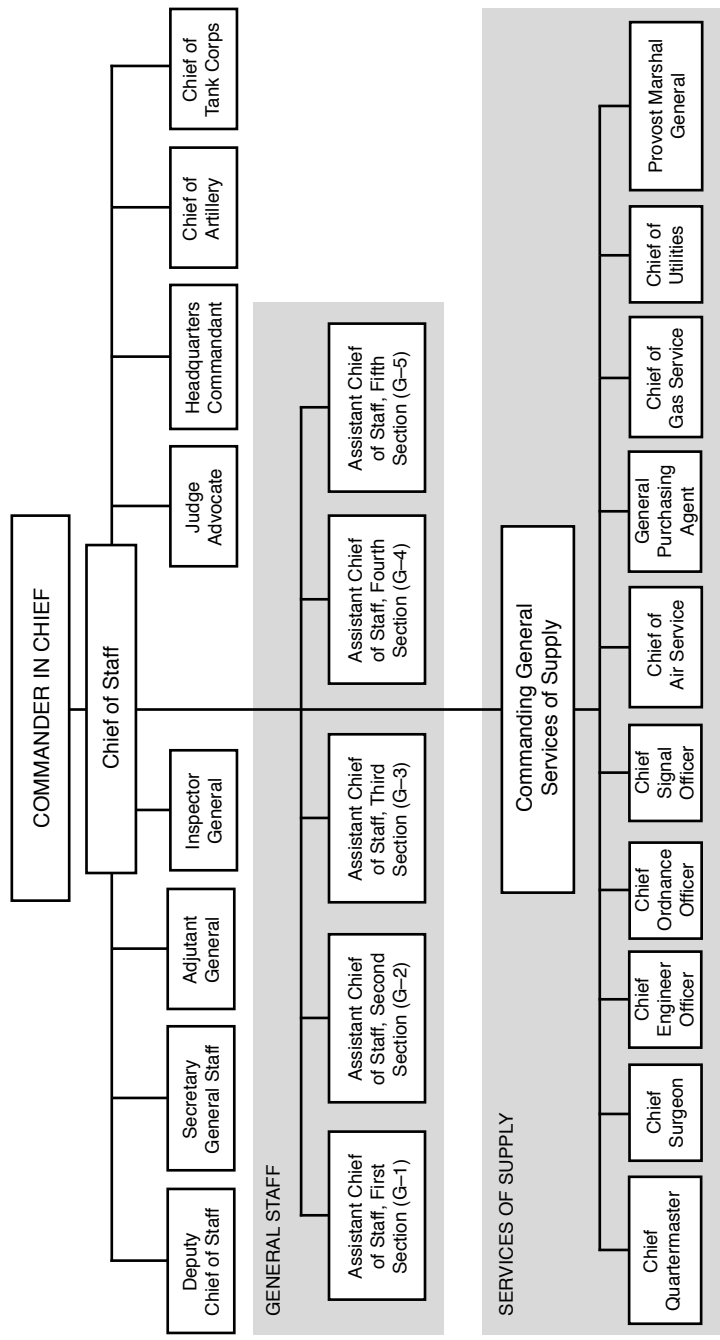
afflicted the War Department. Service bureaus continued to operate with conflicting levels of responsibility, the general staff's authority remained unclear, and, most importantly, too many people had direct access to the AEF commander. The first remedy was to move logistical services out of Paris. Chaumont was too close to the front to adequately coordinate the ports and railway networks and lacked sufficient office space for the entire GHQ. As a compromise solution, the logistics bureaus were relocated to the city of Tours in January 1918, 150 miles southwest of the French capital. The second phase of improving the AEF GHQ was a complete reorganization of the AEF headquarters, which Pershing approved in February (*Chart 2*). Most of the technical staff was pulled out of Chaumont and sent to Tours, where all logistics and support services were combined into the Services of Supply. The commanding general, Services of Supply, reported directly to Pershing and was charged with coordinating the administrative and technical staff in all matters related to procurement, supply, transportation, and construction.

At Chaumont, Pershing reformed the general staff by granting increased authority to his chief of staff, enabling him to direct the entire AEF in the name of the commander. Pershing also created a new deputy chief of staff, who would direct the staff if the commander and chief of staff were away from the headquarters. He redesigned the staff sections using what would become known as the G-system, with the general staff First Section becoming G-1, and the others G-2 through G-5, respectively. This system applied to all staffs down to the division level and has formed the basis of the U.S. Army's staff structure ever since. These reforms, coinciding with those taking place in Washington, helped to improve the Army's administrative and logistical capabilities just as its forces began to appear on the front lines.

## THE AEF JOINS THE FIGHT

On 16 January 1918, the 1st Division relieved a French division north of Toul. The division commander, Maj. Gen. Robert L. Bullard, established his headquarters at M n il-la-Tour and assumed full command over the sector on 30 January 1918. The first appearance of a complete American division holding a sector of the line marked an important step in the AEF's development. In February, the 26th Division deployed to a quiet frontline sector around Chemin de Dames, where it served under the temporary

CHART 2—ORGANIZATION OF GENERAL HEADQUARTERS, AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCES, 16 FEBRUARY 1918



Source: *United States Army in the World War, 1917–1919*, vol. 16, *General Orders, GHQ, AEF* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1992), p. 217.



command of the French Sixth Army. Although these were only two divisions, they provided a much-needed morale boost to both the British and the French and gave American soldiers the opportunity to experience life in the trenches on a large scale.

Once they reached the front lines, the doughboys came face-to-face with the front's horrid conditions. Winter weather and years of artillery bombardments had reduced the landscape to a barren sea of mud pockmarked by shell holes. The sectors used by Americans in February and March required backbreaking efforts to keep troops supplied with food and water. Random gas shelling produced a few casualties, but the soldiers had received effective gas masks and thorough training that prepared them for the danger. What they were not prepared for was the squalor. The trenches were filled with years' worth of the detritus of war. Enormous rats, fattened on discarded food and the bodies of the dead, tormented the men's sleep. Soldiers were soon infested with body lice, called cooties, which left troops covered in sores and scabs.

When not battling vermin, the men worked to repair and fortify the front. Digging parties often uncovered mass graves, containing partially decomposed and rotting bodies. In their down times, the soldiers lived on canned rations because of the danger chemical weapon attacks presented to field kitchens. Although food was often plentiful, water was difficult to transport and often in short supply. With local rivers and streams contaminated by poison gas and chemicals, bulky water containers had to be hand carried forward at night. One of the few comforts soldiers received came from the efforts of the Salvation Army, whose network of aid stations provided fresh food, hot coffee, and cigarettes. Often located in reserve trenches, Salvation Army dugouts were manned by American civilians and were highly praised by the troops. One soldier of the 26th Division remarked, "Greatest and best noncombat outfit, right at the line along with us. Wearing gas masks and helmets like us Doughboys, and made D.Nuts [doughnuts] right when the shells were flying"

The initial impression of the front line for many in the AEF was wretched conditions and unceasing effort rather than actual danger. The French advised the Americans to maintain a defensive posture and not to prompt German attacks by launching raids or aggressive patrolling. A young lieutenant on his first trip to the trenches remarked, "Far from being determined to sell their lives or their sectors as dearly as possible, [French troops] were primarily interested only in survival, in holding their areas as



*Soldiers traveling across France*  
(National Archives)

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cheaply as possible by being careful not to provoke “the Boche.” In contrast, American commanders sought to create a more offensive mentality among their soldiers and encouraged frontline units to gain experience by conducting numerous small attacks. Not surprisingly, these actions resulted in retaliatory German artillery bombardments, introducing the uninitiated doughboys to the terror of enemy fire. A member of the 1st Division described the experience:

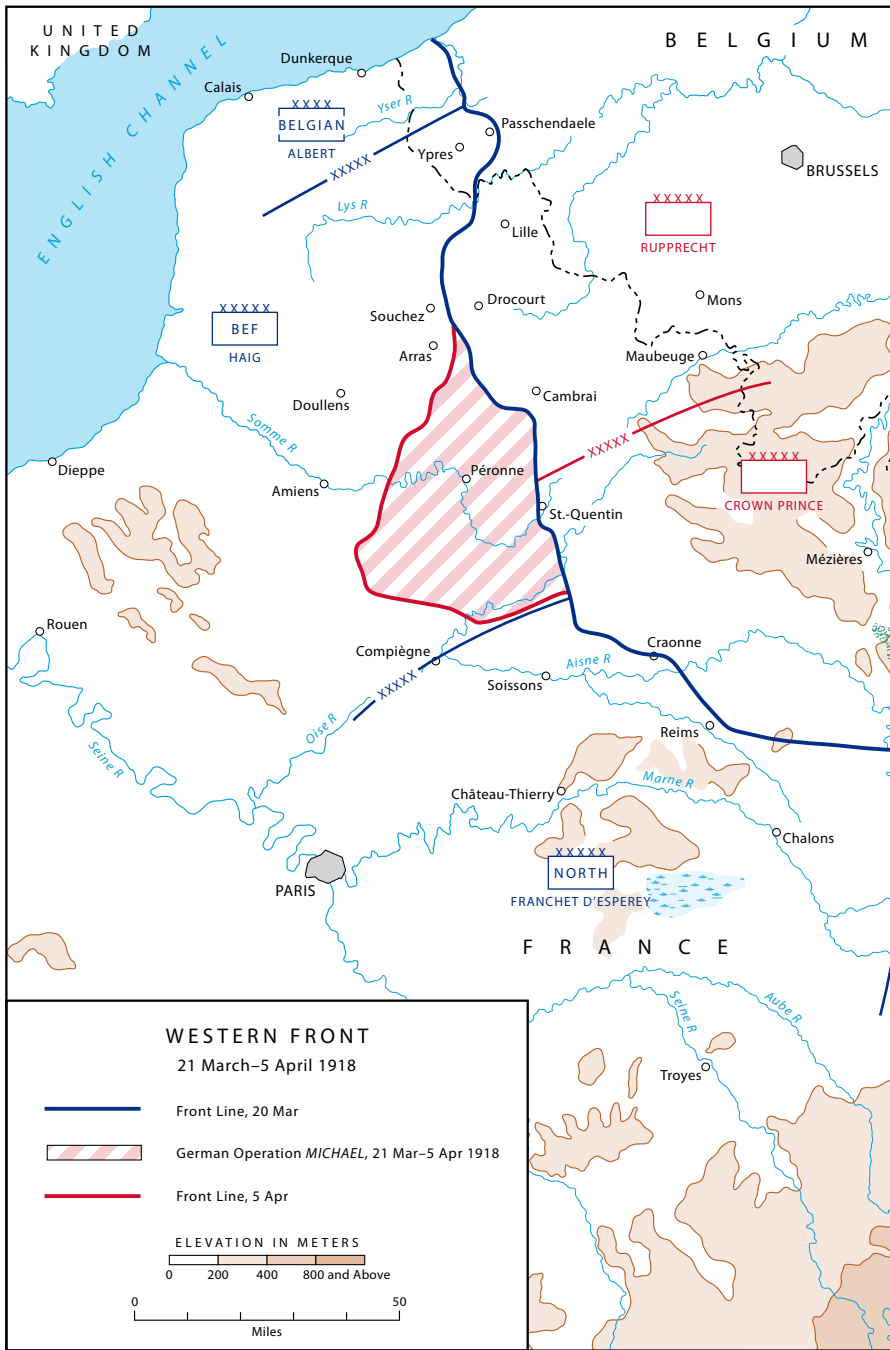
I saw a wall of fire rear itself in the fog and darkness. Extending to right and left a couple of hundred yards, it moved upon us with a roar, above which I could not hear my own voice. The earth shuddered. The mist rolled and danced. Sections of the trench began to give way. Then the explosives were falling all around me. The air was filled with mud, water, pieces of duckboard and shell splinters. As I dodged to shelter, the concussion from one blast knocked me forward on my face. Before I could get up, I was half burned by another explosion. I had been carrying my rifle in my left hand and pistol in my right. When I crawled from the debris, I could find neither weapon.

After a period in the trenches ranging from three to seven days, troops were normally rotated to the rear to recuperate.

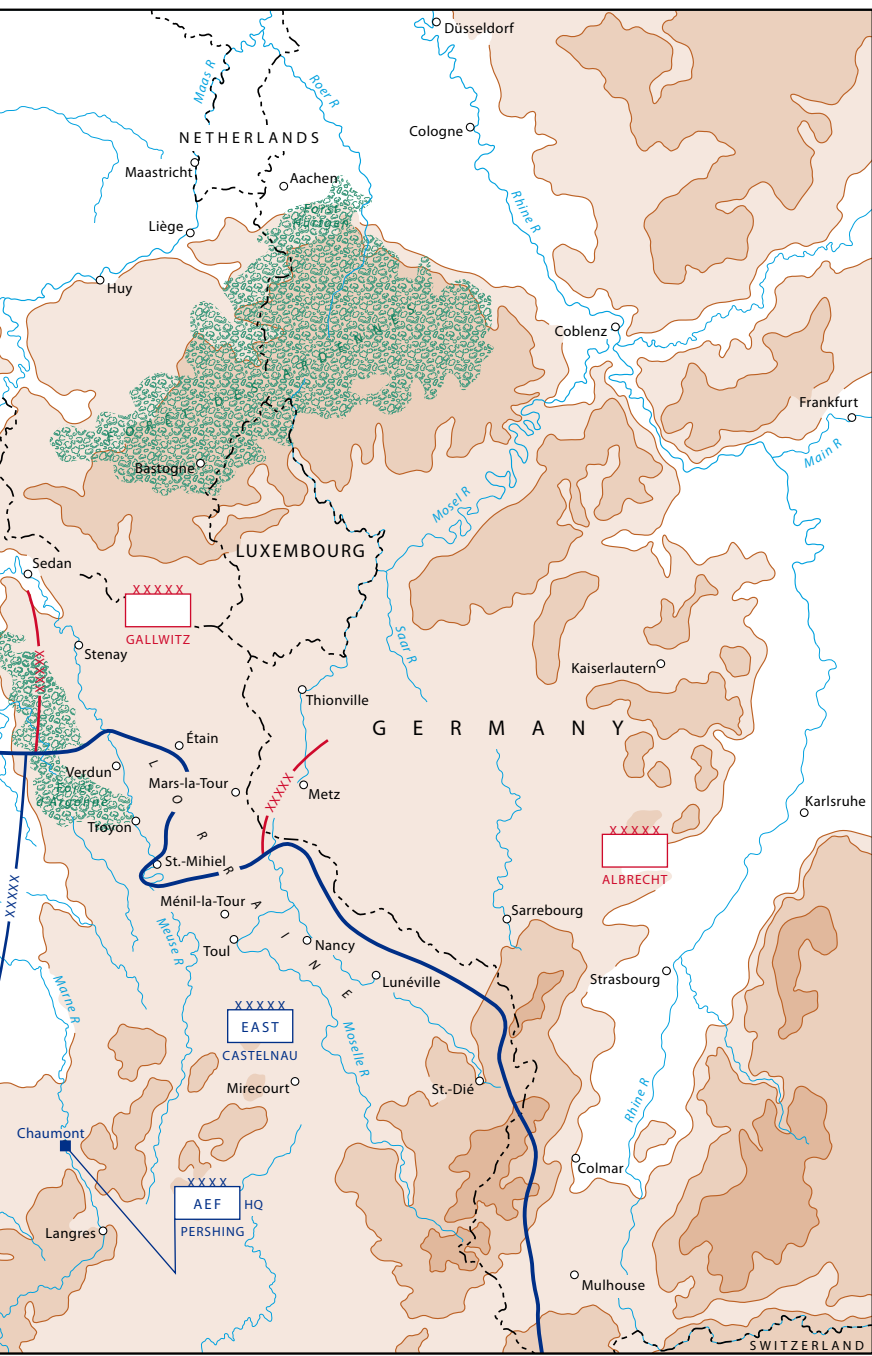
The carefully managed introduction of American combat troops to the front soon devolved into a frantic race against time, as the Germans readied their forces to launch a massive offensive aimed at ending the war. Only one American unit, the 1st Division, held its own sector, while the 2d, 42d, and 26th Divisions were paired with French divisions in a quiet sector for their final phase of training. The long-anticipated German Spring Offensive (termed the *Kaiserschlacht* or Kaiser's Battle) began on 21 March with Operation *MICHAEL* (Map 4). With reinforcements drawn from the Eastern Front, 192 German divisions outnumbered the 180 British and French divisions on the Western Front. After a massive bombardment by more than 6,000 guns, seventy-two German divisions smashed into the British in the Somme sector. German troops used infiltration tactics that relied on small groups of elite infantry bypassing strongpoints and moving quickly into the rear of Allied defenses, isolating frontline troops and disrupting communications. After a week of nearly constant attacks, the German Army had advanced more than forty miles, creating a huge salient in the line and inflicting more than 175,000 casualties on the British. The German efforts to drive a wedge between the British and French armies and push the British back to the English Channel appeared to be working. Although British forces rallied to block the Germans at Amiens, the threat remained severe. For the first time since 1914, panic gripped the Allies, who feared that the Channel ports or perhaps even Paris could be lost.

Faced with this new crisis, senior Allied military leaders, including Haig, French Field Marshal Philippe Pétain, and Pershing gathered at Doullens, France, on 26 March to plan a joint response. Pershing offered Pétain any AEF divisions that could be put into the line, freeing up veteran French troops to move against the Germans. The only condition Pershing had was that American units be attached to French corps as complete divisions, with their full headquarters staffs remaining in place. Before they could agree on a policy, the conferees agreed to elevate French Marshal Ferdinand Foch to the position of commander in chief of the Western Front. This was eventually increased in April to commander in chief of Allied armies, or generalissimo. The position did not include command authority over the different national armies fighting the Central Powers, but it did give him coordinating authority, aligning Allied efforts to a degree yet to be seen.

On 28 March, Pershing pledged to Foch that "infantry, artillery, aviation, all that we have are yours; use them as you wish. More will come, in numbers equal to requirements."



**MAP 4**





*U.S. Army engineers unloading steel rails for a narrow-gauge  
railway in France*  
(U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center)

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While the statement offered the possibility of amalgamation and greatly soothed anxious French and British nerves, very little actually resulted from General Pershing's rhetoric. The initial German offensive ground to a halt by 5 April, reducing the pressure on Pershing to accept amalgamation before he had to make any firm commitments.

American participation in British defensive operations remained limited despite the unexpected situation. The 12th and 14th Engineers maintained and operated light railways in the advance zone of the British Third and Fifth Armies and later helped to construct trenches north of Amiens. Elements from the 3d Division's 6th Engineers had been assigned to the British Fifth Army in February for bridge construction near the town of Péronne, France. When the Germans attacked, the engineers mined the recently constructed bridges over the Somme and withdrew with the British. After rigging an engineer dump at Chaulnes for demolition and preparing new defensive positions at Démuin, the 545-man detachment deployed to the front west of Warfusée-Abancourt on 27 March. They were issued British

rifles and joined British units to hold the line. For four days, they weathered intense shellfire and repulsed a German attack, suffering numerous casualties in the process. The 6th Engineers was finally withdrawn on 3 April. The 17th, 22d, 28th, and 148th Aero Squadrons also served in the Somme defense, operating as part of the British Royal Flying Corps. Altogether, just fewer than 3,000 Americans participated in this campaign.

The British withstood the German assault during Operation *MICHAEL*. Despite the temporary assistance of AEF units already serving in the area, Pershing did not have to commit significant forces to assist in defensive operations. But the German 1918 offensives were far from over. In the coming months, thousands of American soldiers would be called on to join the battle to block follow-on German attempts to win the war.

## ANALYSIS

Even with the benefit of a century of hindsight, the results of the American war effort after one year are difficult to assess. Crucial decisions by the Wilson administration set the tone for America's involvement in the World War. Given the state of the U.S. Army in April 1917, the president's decision to deploy an independent ground force to fight in France meant that the United States would have to undergo a lengthy mobilization period. The Americans risked allowing Germany time to defeat the Allies before U.S. soldiers could reach the battlefield in significant numbers. President Wilson chose to accept that risk in order to pursue the nation's strategic objectives. As a result, the Allies would have to hold on until the Americans arrived, even as Germany made adjustments to try and win the war before that happened.

In the United States, factors within the American military and enduring civil-military friction posed a challenge to the War Department, but many of the issues hindering the Army were the consequence of a lack of experience, organizational deficiencies, and the overall scale and pace of the mobilization. Unfortunately, critical problems in the buildup took too long to identify, and civilian and military leaders, particularly Secretary Baker and Generals Scott and Bliss, failed to provide clear direction to the nation's war effort. Although they took steps to ensure better coordination of vital areas like war production and training camp construction, the administrative lapses resulted in avoidable delays and unnecessary deaths. Even so, the War Department was

able to expand the U.S. Army to the point that it could contribute to the overall war effort by April 1918.

An assessment of General Pershing's role in the formation of the AEF is more positive. With the overall goal of developing an independent, functional army that could play a decisive role on the Western Front, Pershing and his staff worked diligently to create sufficient policies and doctrines for the AEF. Some of their decisions regarding training and the emphasis on "open warfare" eventually led to unnecessary casualties once the American soldiers entered combat, but there were few alternatives that would not compromise American command independence. Moreover, through his organizational design and military bearing, Pershing created the AEF to transform raw conscripts into a fighting force. His stubborn refusal to accept amalgamation in any but its most limited forms ensured that American forces would maintain their national character on the battlefields of France.

The difficult period from April 1917 through April 1918 laid the foundation for not only the AEF's contribution to Germany's eventual defeat, but also to the creation of the modern U.S. Army. Although the American mobilization's rapid pace resulted in a difficult baptism by fire once U.S. soldiers entered combat, the creation of the AEF signaled the arrival of the United States not only as a global economic power, but also a military one.







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For more information on the U.S. Army in World War I, please visit the U.S. Army Center of Military History Web site ([www.history.army.mil](http://www.history.army.mil)).

CAMBRAI 1917

SOMME DEFENSIVE 1918



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