

engaged almost every hour in concerting with the allies the necessary measures to assist the armies to deal with the emergency.

"The proposals which we intend submitting to parliament required very close and careful examination and I think there is this advantage in our meeting today, rather than immediately after the impact of the German attack, that we shall be considering these proposals under conditions which will be far removed from any suggestion of panic.

What Happened Not Clear

"I shall now come to the circumstances which have led to the present military situation. It is very difficult at this time to present a clear, connected and reliable narrative of what happened. There has been a great battle on a front of 50 miles—the greatest battle ever fought in the history of the world. Enormous forces have been engaged, there was a considerable retirement on the part of the British forces, and under these conditions it is not always easy for some time to ascertain what actually happened.

"The house will recollect the difficulty which we experienced with regard to Cambrai. It was difficult to piece together the story of the event for some time, and Cambrai was a very trivial event compared with this gigantic battle.

"The generals and their staffs are naturally engaged and have to concentrate their attention upon the operations of the enemy, and until the strain relaxes it would be very difficult to initiate the necessary enquiries to find out exactly what happened and to furnish an adequate explanation of the battle.

"However, there are two or three facts which stand out, and, in stating them, I should like to call attention to two things, which I think above all must be avoided. The first is that nothing should be said which could give information to the enemy; nothing should be said which would give encouragement to the enemy, and nothing should be said which would give discouragement to our own troops who are fighting so gallantly at this very hour.

"And the second question is that all recrimination at this hour must be shut out.

Position Before Battle

"What was the position at the beginning of the battle? Notwithstanding the heavy casualties in 1917, the army in France was considerably stronger on the first of January, 1918, than on the first of January, 1917. Up to the end of 1917—up to, say, about October or November—the German combatant strength in France was as two to the allies' three. Then came the military collapse of Russia, and the Germans hurried up their released divisions from the eastern front and brought them to the west. They had a certain measure of Austrian support, which had been accorded to them.

"Owing to the growth of the strength of our armies in 1917, when this battle began the combatant strength of the western front was only approximately, not quite equal to, the total combatant strength of the allies in infantry. They were slightly inferior in artillery. They were inferior in cavalry, they were considerably inferior and, what is very important, they were undoubtedly inferior in aircraft.

German Reorganization

"The Germans, therefore, organized their troops so as to produce a larger number of divisions out of the slightly smaller number of infantry and slightly smaller number of guns. They had fewer battalions in a division and fewer men in a battalion. That is entirely a question of organization, and it yet remains to be seen that their organization is better than ours. It is necessary to explain that, in order that the house should realize why, with approximately the same number of men, the Germans have a larger number of divisions on that front.

"According to all the facts which have come to hand as to the losses of the battle, that roughly represents the relative strength of the combatants on both sides at this moment. The Germans had, however, one or two important advantages. The first, the initial advantage, which is always commanded by the offensive, is that they know where they are to attack. They choose the ground; they choose the location; they know the width of the attack; they know the dimensions of the attack; they know the time of the attack; they know the method of the attack. All that invariably gives the initial advantage to the offensive.

Margin For Surprise

"The defensive has a general advantage. Owing to air observation, concealment is difficult. At the same time, in spite of all that, owing to the power of moving troops at night, which the Germans exercised to a very large extent, there is a large margin for surprise even in spite of air observation, and of this the enemy took full advantage.

"I should like to say one word here as to the difficulty which the infantry generals were confronted with in this respect. Before the battle the greatest German concentration was in front of the enemy. That was almost the full weight of the attack would fall on us. There was a very large concentration opposite the French lines. There was very little concentration—I am referring now to the German reserves—on the northern part of our line.

Night Movements

"After the battle began, immediately before the battle, the Germans by night brought their divisions from the northern part of the line where the attack took place. They also too, several divisions from opposite the French in the same way and brought them to our front.

"But it would have been equally easy for them, while concentrating troops opposite our front, to manoeuvre them in the same way opposite the French. I am only referring to that in order to show how exceedingly difficult it is for generals on the defensive to decide, in the face of their judgment, and where they ought to concentrate their reserves.

"I may just say a word here. This problem was a very closely studied one by the military staff at Versailles. I think it right, in justice to them, to point out that after a very close study of the German position and of the probabilities of the case, they came to the conclusion—and they stated their conclusion to the military representatives and to the ministers at the mouth of January, or the beginning of February—that the attack would come south of Arras; that it would be an attack on a very wide front; that it would be an attack on the widest front ever yet assailed; that the Germans would accumulate 55 divisions for the purpose of making

the attack; that they would throw the whole of their resources and their strength into breaking the British line at that point, and that their objective would be the capture of Amiens and the severance of the British and French forces.

Wilson's Conclusion

"That was the conclusion Sir Henry Wilson (chief of the imperial staff) came to and which was submitted at that time, two or three months ago, and I think that it was one of the most remarkable forecasts of enemy intentions that was ever made.

"As a matter of fact, the attack was made up, I think by about 37 divisions. It was an attack on the widest front that had ever been attempted. Its object undoubtedly was the capture of Amiens and the severance of the British and French forces. So that, almost in every detail, that very remarkable forecast has been verified in the event.

"Another remarkable prediction was that it might probably succeed to the extent of penetrating the British line to the extent of half the distance of the front attacked. They came to that conclusion from a close examination of offensives of war.

"There was another advantage. There was, first of all, the advantage which the Germans had from having the initiative. There was a further advantage they had, and this undoubtedly, was the greatest advantage, from having a united command opposed to divisions of the enemy, and which relied on to a very large extent for their success. They owe much of the success of this attack to this.

"It was reported to me on good authority that the Kaiser informed Ex-King Constantine: 'I shall beat them, for they have no united command.' Which shows that this was a further advantage they had, and this undoubtedly, was the greatest advantage, from having a united command opposed to divisions of the enemy, and which relied on to a very large extent for their success. They owe much of the success of this attack to this.

"With two separate commands the problem is a different one. It is most difficult to adjust the balance of risk, and the general is always naturally inclined to give himself and his army the benefit of any doubt. That may be because if anything goes wrong there he alone is to be held responsible for his own countrymen for the safety of his army.

Weather Aids Enemy

"The enemy had another incidental, but as it turned out, very important advantage—that of weather. Exceptional weather favored his designs. It was both dry and misty. The attack which succeeded was made on the morning of the 8th under ordinary spring conditions the ground would have been almost impossible.

"A wounded officer told a friend of mine today, a general, that under ordinary conditions no one could walk across the part which was traversed by the Germans at this time of the year. But it just happened to be absolutely dry and firm, and they walked across ground which no one has any right to expect at this time of year would be in that condition.

"Not only that, but the fact that it was warm increased the mist, and the Germans were actually in some parts within a few yards of our front line before anyone knew of their approach. It was quite impossible to observe them. This was a special disadvantage to us, inasmuch as our scheme of organization in that particular part of the line depended largely upon the cross line of machine guns and artillery. They had therefore a very special advantage, of which they made the fullest use.

"With regard to the battle itself, as I have already stated, it will take some time to ascertain the whole facts. At one time it was undoubtedly very critical. The enemy broke through between our third and fifth armies and there was a serious gap, and the situation was retrieved owing to the magnificent conduct of our troops. They retired in perfectly good order re-establishing the junction between the two armies and frustrating the enemy's purpose.

Superb British Valor

"The house can hardly realize, and certainly cannot sufficiently thank God for our country—our troops for their superb valor and the grim tenacity with which they faced overwhelming hordes of the enemy and clung to their positions. They retired, but were never routed, and once more the cool pluck of the British soldier that refuses to acknowledge defeat saved Europe.

"I am referring to the whole army, officers and soldiers. I mean the whole army and I draw no distinction. Their conduct has been one of incredible courage and great composure under the most trying conditions. I do not think that any distinction can be drawn between officers and men. I am referring to the British army, and that means all.

"And I specially refer to what one brighter general did. Some reference has been made in the press already to it, where at one point there was a serious gap, which might have let the enemy through. That was the case. Gen. Gough recalled.

"Until the whole circumstances which led to the retirement of the fifth army and its failure to hold the line of the Somme, at least till the Germans brought up their guns, and perhaps the failure adequately to destroy the bridges—until all these are explained—it would be unfair to describe the general in command of the army, General Gough. But until those circumstances are cleared up it would be equally unfair to the British army to retain his services in the field. It is necessary to recall to him until the facts have been fully ascertained and explained—the government by their military advisers.

"After the retirement of the fifth army the French reserves came up with remarkable rapidity, when their position before the battle is borne in mind. In fact, the speed with which, when the final decision was taken as to the real designs of the enemy, the French reserves were brought up, is the most remarkable feature of the organization in this war, and between the courage of our troops and the command of the army—the way the things were done—the fact that several hundred yards to the attack of the enemy—I think it right that it should be said about the army commanded by General Byng, what between the efforts of our soldiers and the loyal assistance given in true spirit of comradeship by the French army, the position is for the moment stabilized. But it is clear that the Germans, having gained an initial success, are preparing another and perhaps an even greater attack on the allied armies.

Big Initial Success

"Up to the present the enemy has undoubtedly obtained a great initial success. There is no good in not accepting the facts. It is from that basis we must begin to build. But he has failed so far in his main objects. He failed to capture Amiens. He failed to separate the French and British armies. But we should be guilty of great, it might be fatal, error, if we were to underestimate the gravity of the prospect.

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"I will now tell the house something of the measures adopted by the cabinet to meet the emergency. I have already explained what was done about French reserves. The cabinet look every step to hurry up reinforcements in order to fill up the gap in our armies. No such large numbers of men ever passed across the channel in so short a time. As the emergency was great, it was impossible to allow those who were summoned to France the usual leave to visit their relatives. It was with great reluctance that we found it necessary to cancel this permission, and nothing but the gravity of the position would have persuaded us to do so.

"The troops accepted the position in a manner which is worthy of the fortitude, courage and patriotism they have shown throughout the war. There was an understanding that boys under 19 years would only be used in case of emergency. We felt the emergency had arrived, and insofar as those who were over 19 years were concerned, those who had already received six months' training, we felt it necessary that they should be sent to France.

"As to the guns and machine guns which were lost, the numbers are grossly exaggerated. I am assured that they have also exaggerated very considerably the number of prisoners they have taken. The commander-in-chief assured me last week that it was a gross exaggeration. I am very glad to be able to say that the ministry of munitions were able to not only replace the lost guns and machine guns, but that they still have got a very substantial reserve. The same thing applies to ammunition. There is an ample reserve of ammunition both in this country and in France.

made for the fighting strength of the American army to be immediately brought to bear in this struggle, a struggle which is only now beginning to this extent, and it is no mere small extent, that the German attack has been held up. It has stirred up the resolution and energy of America beyond anything which has yet occurred.

"Another important decision taken by the allied governments I must also call the attention of the house to. It became more obvious after the battle than ever before that the allied armies were suffering from the fact that they were fighting as two separate armies and not as one united army. It was therefore a matter of great importance to have a unified command.

"But the inherent difficulties to be overcome are tremendous. There are national prejudices, national interests, national traditions, and national habits. The inherent difficulties of getting two in discussing this question. But if anyone needed conviction as to the wisdom of the policy, this battle must have supplied it. The merit we passed thru, by establishing the conviction without challenge, may, I think, be worth the price we paid for some time and had done our best to avert it.

"I respectfully suggest to the house that no good would come at this stage of the war if we were to continue to have separate commands to fight as one almost insurmountable, and it can only be done if public opinion in all these countries insist upon it as a condition of success. The Versailles conference was an effort at a remedy. How were the Versailles decisions carried out and the extent to which they were carried out, this is not the time to enquire.

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