HILAIRE BELLOC'S WEEKLY WAR SUMMARY

Britain's Most Distinguished Military Critic Discusses the Events on Western Battle Line

Foch Prevents the Enemy From Strengthening His Most Vulnerable Sector—A Trifling German Blunder That Changed the Enemy's Excellent Strategic Situation To An Extremely Bad One.

By Hilaire Belloc.

Author of "Elements of the Great War" and Britain's Most Distinguished Military Critic.

Copyright, N. Y. Tribune, Inc.

The enemy in full retreat claims "to have shaken off" the Allies. Such is the language of his last despatches, and there is a measure of truth in it.

It is true that he has left rear guards who have fought well and obstructed the pursuit. It is true that he has withdrawn the bulk of his forces between the Scarpe and the Oise to prepared lines, which are those of the old Hindenburg line up to Moeuvres and north of the Moeuvres the Canal du Nord. It is true that for five days, from the morning of September 3 to the night of the 7th, he has had a rest from direct attacks. It is true that he has at last conducted a true retirement in order, at the expense of his sacrificed rear guards and the loss in seven weeks, during which he was first hesitating and then hampered, of at least 400,000 men and at least 2,000 guns. But he has effected no general strategic change, and that is all that counts. His strategic situation is as bad as ever and unless he can change it to his advantage he is beaten.

Let me explain. Two things make up the strategical situation; the ground and the disposition of the troops. The obstacles in favor of the defence, the avenues of communication and the open space for the development of the attack, all such features are included under the term ground or terrain. The shape of the line on which your troops stand, either your choice or the enemy's, the distribution of strength along that line and all similar elements are included under the term disposition. These two elements between them decide the strategical situation and detetrmine whether it is favorable or unfavorable.

For instance, supposing in face of a somewhat superior enemy the shape of your line is straight, that over one-half is a formidable obstacle, such as a great forest, and over the other half is open ground; suppose your main line of communication runs close behind your front and nearly parallel to it; suppose that by some blunder or misfortune in the immediate past the bulk of your troops are bunched behind the obstacle and only a small portion of them are holding the open front of your line. That strategic situation is bad.

Most of your men are concentrated where they are needed least—that is, where obstacles impede an attack upon you and where your lines are naturally the strongest and can be held by a few men. Where there is no obstacle and where, therefore, an attack on you has the best chances of succeeding, in the open half of the line, it is just there you have the fewest men. If that half is forced back even a little way your enemy gets across your communications by which your army is kept alive and served with munitions. For these communications a main line railway, let us say, runs nearly parallel to your line and immediately behind it. But if the enemy does thus get across your communications, as in view of your faulty defensive it is probable that he will, then your army is at once deprived of food and munitions and in a military sense is destroyed. It must surrender or perish.

Such a strategical situation is a bad one. A general finding himself in that situation must try to change it into a good one before it is too late. His course of effecting such a course is clear. He must, above all, immediately redistribute his forces. He must, if he can, bring down most of his men from behind the obstacle where they are not wanted and put them on the open half of his line which needs most protection. He must also, if he can, establish a new line of communications not parallel to the front, but perpendicular to it, so that even if his opponents do effect some advance these communications will not be reached, but can serve him continually, even if he has to retire.

If a general can do these two things in time before the enemy is ready to attack in force, but especially if he can do the first, he has converted the strategic situation and changed it from bad to good.

The dominant fact now governing the whole of the vast operations in France is this: That up to July 15 the strategic situation of the German army was good, between July 15 and 18 it was doubtful, since July 18 it has been bad. It continues bad, and unless the enemy con convert it in time into good he will be defeated.

To understand why this is so one must look at the map of Western France— the simplest one will do—and appreciate how the armies stood before and after the critical dates of July 15 and 18.

The Germans first stood last March on a line which in its most general shape was made up of three branches, as I have previously described. First there was the stretch from north to south, leaving the sea at Nieuport, near Ostend, and coming over to the Oise River above Noyon. There the lines turned corner and ran generally from east to west as far as Verdun, passing near Soissons and Rheims and through the Argonne Forest. Then at Verdun the third branch began. The line turned another corner and ran south again past St. Mihiel, in front of Nancy and along the Vosges Mountains to the Swiss frontier. The main communications of this line for the Germans are two cheats of road and railway, one going back to the German bases through Belgium by way of Namur and Brussels to Liege and Cologne, and the other going through Lorraine by way of Luxemburg and Metz to the Rhine at Mayence and other crossings.

These main communications were on the perpendicular to the then main front, and were therefore well protected. Also, they could work in one with the other, each supporting the other by cross lines which joined them up in France. The Germans were superior in number of men and in fire power —that is, guns and munitions.

The Allies, on the other hand, had for their main communications by which they had to move munitions back and forth a set of roads and railways running parallel to their line and immediately behind it. Theirs was the main road system and railway running from Calais and Boulogne to Paris by way of Amiens. It was continued by the main road system, and railway running from Paris to Verdun and Nancy by way of Chateau Thierry, Espernay and Chalons. If these were cut the Allies would be compelled to serve their front by slower, roundabout lines, and even these would be in peril as the enemy advanced.

The enemy distributed his men wisely in viey of such a situation. His disposition was excellent for the attack which his greater numbers and possession of the initiative made possible.

He massed by far the greater part of his men in the large bulge or salient between the sea and the Forest of the Argonne, leaving only a quarter of them to look out for the southern part of his line. He thus had his whole weight where it could do the most work and he was free to attack either of the two fronts of his salient, between Noyon and the sea—on the Amiens front—or between Noyon and the Argonne on the Rheims front.

Both lay before him at his choice and his opponents could not say which would be chosen. He could strike westward or southward at will and he had ample room in which to manoeuvre. His great concentration here might be expected to force back the Allies and cut one or both of the two branches of their main lines of communication, that through Amiens or the one through Chateau Thierry. Further, such an advance directly menaced Paris. Again, this great force could strike now here, now there, from within the bend far more quickly than the Allies could move their forces around the outside of it to meet this new blow.

The German packing of men, then, in the salient of St. Quentin from the North Sea to Rheims was right and their strategic situation was good. They used it well. They first drove a heavy blow westward and put the Amiens railway out of use, then struck in the north and compelled the Allies to a difficult, long and costly counter concentration to save the Channel ports.

Hardly had that operation terminated than they struck southward on the other faces of the salient, reached Chateau Thierry and so cut the Allies' main eastern line of communication. With these advantages in hand and their foremost troops not thirty miles from the outer suburbs of Paris they prepared the final blow which was delivered on either side of Rheims on July 15. Short of a blunder they now had the war in their hands. American recruitment was reducing the Allied inferiority, but it had not yet given equality in numbers, and the initiative was fully in German hands.

Then they committed the blunder. It was a trifle. They failed to keep secret the hour of their attack. They failed to stop General Gourard's retirement of his main force east of Rheims. They failed to note the Franco-American concentration in the region of Soissons. July 15, therefore, they lunged into a void, not a complete void, of course, but a void full of guns, and threw away 50,000 men in two days for nothing. On July 18 they suffered a tremendous, unexpected blow on their open flank at Soissons, and immediately what had been an excellent strategic situation became and remained exceedingly bad.

The vast concentration of men in the north, which had been their strength in attack, became a congested mass and developed into a weakness of defence. The initiative passed wholly to the Allies and at the moment when the future showed a gradually increasing numerical superiority of men on the Allied side, as American recruitment poured in. The southern part of the line, from the Argonne to Verdun and the Vosges, which the German could neglect when the attack was imperilling the existence of the Allied armies, was now a most dangerous open flank. They must reinforce it at all cost, but they were not permitted to.

The Allied higher command struck blow after blow, each successively more to the north. Each had to be met by the Germans sending troops up and further northward, when their crying need was for reinforcements in the south. Their policy, if they could effect it in time, was clear. They must convert a very bad strategical situation into a good one, or at any rate one less bad, or they were doomed. To effect this they must retire so as to (1) shorten the line and (2) to save men to send south and eliminate the now terribly dangerous open flank between the Argonne and the Vosges.

The American reader can discover by a rough parallel on the map of his own country how bad the German strategical situation had become when the Allied attacks developed all the way from Rheims to Arras by the end of August.

Imagine an army on the defensive and facing westward in the state of Indiana Its extreme right rests on Lake Michigan, just east of Chicago. Its line thence runs south to Indianapolis and at first turns abruptly eastward to the neighborhood of Columbus, in the state of Ohio, whence it bends southward again and runs to the West Virginia mountains, beyond which, we will suppose, is neutral territory.

Imagine such an army to have three-quarters of its whole strength in the state of Indiana alone and only the remaining quarter stretched on all the remaining front through Ohio to West Virginia. Imagine its opponent to be fully holding it and even compelling it to retreat along all the Indiana front from the lake to Indianapolis and at the same time to be holding a very large force in Southern Indiana, Southern Ohio and Kentucky, with headquarters at Louisville, and this right wing to be increasing rapidly in numbers through continuous western recruitment which the defending army cannot match. The strategic situation clearly shows the decisive sector to be the thinly held line through the states of Ohio and West Virginia, and that is very roughly the position of the Germans in France today.

To retreat so as to shorten his line, then, and reinforce his ill held left is imperative to the enemy. But he is not retreating as he should if he were both politically and militarily free to act. The obvious policy in such a situation is to straighten the line as completely as possible and as rapidly as possible and send the men thus saved to reinforce the southern and eastern portion of your line. That means for the Germans in France a retreat to the line of the Meuse and the sending of thirty divisions at least—a prompt withdrawal might even save forty—to Lorraine.

But five things came in to spoil this policy. First and most important was the Allied strategy, which embarrassed, cramped and delayed the enemy's retirement. Next was the heavy loss in men, and, third, the peculiar value of the St. Gobain massif, which the enemy hesitates to sacrifice and the retention of which compels him to leave an open flank in the south. The fourth thing was the effect of the Ardennes on his communications, and lastly there was the political effect in the German empire and among Germany's allies of a great withdrawal, bringing the French, British and American forces to the neighborhood of the German frontier, rendering German territory more vulnerable to aircraft, probably losing the Belgian coast and sacrificing that territory which it had been hoped to hold as a bargain and an asset in negotiating peace.

The enemy planned a retirement as early as August 17. It should have been planned earlier. It was clogged for three weeks by the repeated extension of the attack northward. The enemy lost in its bewilderment and the necessity for repeated counter-attacks far more than the Allies. In prisoners alone he lost 150,000, while total casualties were some 400,000.

The St. Gobain hills and forest and the Chemin-des-Dames, Ailette Ridge, which all repose on the railway junction of Laon form an immensely strong position. To give it up boldly may be the better plan, but it is a great temptation to hold it and trust to luck. It cannot be forced. It can only be turned. The enemy has been tempted to hold it and his abandonment of it now would be proof of his failure. Yet his holding it condemns him to maintain a perilously open flank beyond Rheims and all the way to the Vosges.

He says to himself: "Suppose I did go back to the line of the Meuse, I should save a large reserve force undoubtedly, certainly over thirty, perhaps forty, divisions. But I have lost very heavily indeed, in the last seven weeks. My divisions are fatigued. The front of my retirement is enormous, and when I get back to the Meuse line the Ardennes will cut me in two."

Indeed, the enemy's railways and roads all run either north or south of the big deserted forest block of the Ardennes hills. If he goes back to the Meuse he has two separate lines of communication, not joined up, to feed him. He becomes in fact two isolated armies. Germany's national soil is menaced by such a retirement, and the whole highly artificial political situation, built up in the last fifty years on the prestige of Prussia, is shaken. So the enemy's Higher Command decided to fall back on the old Hindenburg line and hold to the St. Gobain-Laon pivot.

We have now to watch whether the compromise will make good or not. The test is the hill and forest of St. Gobain. It is clear that the Germans will not now abandon it unless they are compelled either by the Allied pressure in Cambrai or sudden action to the east of Laon, in Champagne or in Lorraine, or, which is least likely, by direct pressure against the pivot itself —for there the position is immensely strong.

If they give up against their will that Laon-St. Gobain position, the cornerstone of their outer line, the turning point where the front begins to turn east, it is proof that the war is decided for the Allies. If they hold it through the winter the decision is postponed. If they hold the St. Gobain hills they will try a counter-attack. If they fail to hold they cannot counter-attack.

PRUSSIAN GUARD CAVALRY REDUCED TO FOOT REGIMENT

Dearth of Horses Responsible For Changed Status of Once Famed Military Force.

(By Wilbur Forrest.)

Special Cable to The New York Tribune and The St. John Standard.

(Copyrighted.)

With the American Forces, Sep. 4—That proud Prussian Guard cavalry division which sometime ago submitted to the humiliation of a reduction to a foot soldiery on account of dearth of horses in the German army has suffered terrible losses in the line north of Soissons, it was recently indicated.

This division was one of the best known before the war for its spectacular uniforms and much photographed participation in German military maneuvers. The photographs of these horsemen have been printed probably in every American newspaper in the past ten years.

This division's latest part in the war is in the big battle that is now continuing between the Aisne and the Ailette.

The following order signed by its commander has just been captured:

"The general commanding this army group has expressed special satisfaction with the tenacity with which the division has maintained the positions confided to it. I join with all my heart in these felicitations and ask the officers and men that in the combats to come they make the same sacrifices to conserve at any price the pillars of the German western front confided to their guard."

Another captured document emphasizes the German armies growing difficulties on account of the lack of animals which are now forbidden in areas under fire. The surgeon of the thirty-third division complains bitterly that the wounded must be abandoned when the Allies are advancing because of the lack of horse transports and his inability to utilize anything but man-carried stretchers in regions where shells are dropping and bullets flying.

He further complains against the parismony with which the army dispenses its rare and precious automobiles which one cannot risk losing in the dangerous zones because they cannot be replaced.

WILSON TAKES GRIP WITH THE STRIKERS IN MACHINE PLANTS

Another Application of the Work or Fight Law—U. S. Government Takes Over Smith & Wesson Plant.

Washington, Sept. 13.—The war department has taken over the Smith and Wesson Company of Springfield, Mass., and will operate the plant and business to secure continuous production and prevent industrial disturbance.

The company recently gave notice that it would prefer to have the government operate its plant rather than abide by a decision of the war labor board enforcing collective bargaining.

Striking machinists at Bridgeport, Conn., have been notified by President Wilson that unless they return to work and abide by the wage award of the war labor board, they will be barred from employment for a year and draft boards will be instructed to reject any claim of exemption from military service based upon their alleged usefulness on war productions.

JAPS AND RUSSIANS ON BEST OF TERMS

Entente Refuses To Sanction Siberian Government - - - Committee in Charge At Vladivostok.

Vladivostok, Sept. 5.—(By the A.P.)—The Entente Allied authorities have refused to recognize the Siberian government headed by General Horvath, according to a semi-official announcement made today, and have appointed a committee of seven to administer the municipal affairs.

All misunderstandings between the Japanese and Russian authorities have been completely removed. The Japanese and Russian troops are fraternizing.

CURING SKIN TROUBLES

So many people, both men and women, suffer from skin troubles, such as eczema, blotches, pimples and irritation that a word of advice is necessary. It is a great mistake for such sufferers and those with bad complexions to smear themselves with greasy ointments. Often they could not do anything worse, for the grease clogs the pores of the troubled skin and their condition actually becomes worse.

When there are pimples or eruptions, or an irritating or itching rash, a soothing boracic solution may help to allay the irritation, but of course that does not cure the trouble. Skin complaints come from an impure condition of the blood and will persist until the blood is thoroughly purified. It is well known that Dr. Williams' Pink Pills have effected the best results in many forms of skin disorders and blemishes. This is due to the fact that these pills make new, rich blood, and that this new blood attacks the impurities that give rise to skin troubles and disperses them; so that Dr. Williams' Pink Pills cure skin disorders from within the system—the only sure way.

It should be added that Dr. Williams' Pink Pills have a beneficial effect upon the general health. They increase the appetite and energy and cure diseases that arise from impure blood.

You can get these pills through any medicine dealer or by mail at 50 cents a box or six boxes for $2.50 from The Dr. Williams' Medicine Co., Brockville, Ont.

STANLEY ADAMS TRIES IT AGAIN

Original 26th Soldier Has Enlisted in the Siberian Unit.

Stanley E. Adams, one of the original members of the 26th, who did his bit and on account of wounds was sent home, has re-enlisted in the Siberian unit in the hope of getting another crack at the Hun. The family of Pte. Adams have done their share, two brothers having been killed and another having lost a limb. Pte. R. G. Adams and Pte. Jerome Adams were both killed at Vimy Ridge, and Pte. Philip is now in Toronto, being fitted with an artificial leg.

Tell Your Wife Corns Lift Off

Doesn't hurt a bit to lift corns or calluses off with fingers.

Not a twinge of pain or soreness before applying, or afterwards. This may sound like a dream to corn-pestered men and women who have been cutting, filing and wearing torturous plasters. Yes! Corns lift out and calluses peel off as if by magic.

A small bottle of freezone costs but a few cents at any drug store. Apply a few drops directly upon your tender corn or callus, and instantly the soreness disappears; then shortly the corn or callus will be so loose that it lifts off.

Freezone dries instantly. It doesn't eat out the corn or callus, but just shrivels it up so it lifts away without even irritating the surrounding skin. Women should keep a tiny bottle handy on the dresser and never let a corn or callus ache twice.

BEECHAM'S PILLS

have a well deserved reputation as a safe and effective remedy for stomach ailments. They are

Quickly

helpful in bilious attacks, sick headache, dyspepsia, heartburn and constipation. They act gently and surely on the organs of elimination, purify the blood, tone the system and very quickly

Strengthen Digestion

Largest Sale of any Medicine in the World. Sold everywhere. In boxes, 25c.

$50,000 Squandered in Twelve Months

A New York heiress a year ago received $50,000 as a special bequest from her father. To-day not a dollar of that splendid provision remains. Expensive living and poor investments resulted in the whole of the money being lost in a single year.

This is a convincing argument for the Monthly Income system of insurance. Under these policies which are issued by The Mutual Life of Canada, the proceeds are payable in monthly instalments throughout life.

All worry and responsibility involved in investing the money is avoided—the Company attends to that—and there is no temptation to extravagance on the part of the beneficiary.

Had the unfortunate lady mentioned received her bequest in the form of monthly income, she would to-day have been happy and independent.

Write for Particulars of Mutual policies.

The Mutual Life of Canada WATERLOO ONTARIO

HUGH CANNELL, Provincial Manager
76-78 Prince Wm. St., St. John, N. B.

545

The Thrift Car

Overland

YOU can work faster, do more in less time, take on added duties and multiply your usefulness by adopting this modern time-saver, Model 90.

Its full-powered, lively motor will give you ample capacity with conservative gasoline consumption.

Fortunately, you are protected by our being able to take care of your service and parts requirements now and later.

Five points of Overland superiority:
Appearance, Performance, Comfort, Service and Price

Light Four Model 90 Touring Car *Model 90 Sedan*
Model 85-4 Touring Car

J. A. PUGSLEY & CO., Distributors,
45 Princess street. 'Phone M. 1969.

Willys-Overland, Limited
Willys-Knight and Overland Motor Cars and Light Commercial Wagons
Head Office and Works, West Toronto, Ontario
Branches, Montreal, Que., Winnipeg, Man., Regina, Sask