



St.-Mihiel and the Meuse-Argonne

"If we had fought by the book rules, we would have wrecked ourselves about every twenty minutes."

WHEN Marshall reported to Colonel Fox Conner, chief of the Operations Section of GHQ at the barracks of Domremont in Chaumont on July 17, 1918, the Germans were in the midst of what proved to be their last offensive on the Western Front. It was an attempt to broaden and deepen the Marne salient won in the May attack, and it was foredoomed. There was no possibility of surprise and no possibility of local superiority on such a narrow front now that Foch had the reserves to concentrate against it. The attack ground to a halt on July 18, and the French, with American divisions in the spearhead, began at once a counterattack. This battle, which the French called the Second Battle of the Marne, failed in its object of pinching off the salient as the Germans executed a skillful withdrawal. It began, however, the series of Allied offensives which steadily drove the enemy back all along the line and finally cost him not just ground, as in the past, but his power to resist. This was the final reckoning for the failure of the German spring offensives—the time when the balance of forces on the Western Front changed decisively and irreversibly in favor of the Allies. The Germans knew it.

But the Allies were not disposed to take victory for granted. Victory had been glimpsed before, only to be found a mirage. In the minds of the Allied commanders the decisive battle had still to be waged, and there remained strong disagreement over where and how it should be fought. At GHQ, Marshall set to work on plans to commit an American army in Lorraine initially to reduce the so-called St.-Mihiel salient. The idea was a year old and had been on the GHQ drawing boards ever since. Colonel Conner, Marshall's new boss, a towering, imperturbable, concise, Mississippi-born West Pointer, had himself selected the zone of attack and with Pershing and Colonel Drum defended its importance. Conner, fluent in French, had served with a French artillery regiment in 1911 and as liaison officer with the French mission to the United States shortly before we entered the war. At conferences with the French and General Pershing he had argued that the area, besides being off the main lanes of attack toward Paris and therefore ideal for independent American action, offered worthwhile prizes for offensive drives. Lorraine was one of the three historic invasion routes into France from Central Europe (the others being the lowlands of Belgium and the Belfort Gap). A successful attack here could threaten envelopment of the German line, provided the attackers could get past the formidable fortifications of Metz. More immediate prizes were the iron deposits in the region of Briey, which had been vital in sustaining the Kaiser's war machine through four years of war, and the communications system—the Paris-Nancy railroad, which the French wanted cleared for their use, and the roads and railroads to the north, which were main German supply lines.

The St.-Mihiel attack had long been accepted by the Allies, though reluctantly, for planning purposes. On July 24 General Foch at his headquarters at Bombon formally assigned Pershing the task. Pershing completed the organization of his First Army, which became operational on August 10. Pershing himself was in command, and Colonel Drum was his chief of staff.¹

This was not, however, the end of the matter. The turning of the tide in the second Battle of the Marne, along, of course, with the steady build-up of American forces, now flooding into France at the rate of more than a quarter of a million men a

month, had given Pershing his opportunity. But he had to fight again to keep it when presently it became apparent that the Germans had not just been halted but were mortally weakened. An Anglo-French offensive, beginning August 8 east of Amiens, in four days "gained a success unparalleled in their previous offensives within a similar period of time."² This was followed on August 18 by a French attack up the Oise and by British and Belgian attacks all along the left flank, undertaken in accordance with Foch's directive of July 24 to probe everywhere for German weakness. In fact German weakness appeared to be general, and so critical that on August 14 (unknown of course to the Allies) Ludendorff had recommended immediate negotiations for peace.

With the enemy retreating (though still in orderly fashion) all along the line, Foch wished above all to keep up the pressure to turn retreat into rout. From that point of view the American enterprise at St.-Mihiel, which had once appeared as a thrust capable of exploitation if it succeeded, now seemed only a diversion from the main battles. Foch near the end of August pressed Pershing to give it up and instead mix his troops with the French for a drive northeast from the Meuse-Argonne sector. Pershing, more determined than ever after the year's long wait to command his own army in battle, flatly refused. The meeting at Bombon became stormy. Foch pointedly asked the AEF commander, "Do you want a part in the coming battle?" Stubbornly Pershing replied, "Only with an American army." Foch observed that an American army could fight only if the French furnished supporting troops, above all artillery. Pershing reminded him that he was dependent on the French in that respect only because the French and British had insisted that he move chiefly infantry into France.³

Three days later, on September 2, the high command came together again and found a way out. Foch agreed that the First Army could go ahead with the St.-Mihiel battle but with limited objectives. As soon as the salient was flattened out, the army should be ready to take over a twenty-four-mile sector along the Meuse River and Argonne Forest, prepared for an attack in the direction of Sedan in conjunction with the French Fourth Army on its left. This was to be followed by a British-

French push on the general line, St.-Quentin-Cambrai, as Foch in his general order of September 3 directed unremitting attacks all along the line to keep the Germans on the move.

Since the Meuse-Argonne offensive was set to open on September 26 and the St.-Mihiel operation could not be ready before September 12, American staffs had to plan simultaneously for both battles and work out complicated movements of troops and supplies to nourish both. The problem would have taxed the most seasoned staff. First, it was essential that the St.-Mihiel attack succeed. Even though it had been downgraded to something like a sideshow, it remained the setpiece in which the American Army and General Pershing were to prove themselves. It didn't look easy. The salient had been created by the initial German drive in 1914. Two German corps advancing from the Woëvre plain had been checked at Verdun, north of St.-Mihiel, east of Commercy, and north of Toul. The resulting wedge, or "hernia," had resisted French counterattack in 1915 and had been fortified at leisure by the Germans since.⁴ Second, even with the best of battle good fortune, troops used in the attack could obviously not be shifted to the Meuse-Argonne sector in time for the scheduled offensive there. That meant that reserves would have to be moved across the rear of the attacking army—a difficult maneuver at best, especially when all movements had to take place at night without lights in order not to disclose the concentration to the enemy. Third, although there were troops enough—a half million in the First Army and reinforcements arriving daily—few were battle-tested and many not even wholly trained.

Plans for the St.-Mihiel attack emanated from both GHQ and the newly formed First Army headquarters. Many staff officers worked on them, and the plans were frequently changed; many were scrapped before they could be completed. But the chief impetus at this stage came at GHQ from Conner, who has been generally considered one of the more profound students of military history and doctrine in the Army.⁵ It was Conner who had Pershing's ear and his assistants who did the initial work on the St.-Mihiel plans. Marshall, promoted to full colonel on August 27, was associated closely in the early drafting with Colonel Walter S. Grant at GHQ. The two men submitted separate out-

lines on August 9, Grant suggesting a deeper penetration than did Marshall. (Conner adopted Marshall's concept and apparently directed both men to continue their efforts.⁶) In the next three weeks Marshall prepared at least three other versions of an attack on the St.-Mihiel salient, none of them in final form. At First Army the chief of operations, Colonel Robert McCleave, and officers of his section worked independently. In mid-August they were given the two August 9 plans, Marshall's plan of August 13, and a detailed artillery plan by Grant based "on a scheme by Marshall." Shortly afterward Conner also lent Grant to First Army, where he drew together the final package and drafted the battle instructions. Marshall, after reporting to First Army near the end of August, on detached service from Conner's section, reviewed the plan, wrote security instructions, and supervised the preparations of annexes to the field order.⁷

Before he went to First Army, Marshall had been busy on various other projects at GHQ, one of them a deception scheme to counteract the loose talk of American officers and men who, as the time of action neared, were openly boasting that "we are going to take Metz." Pershing's plan was to try to make the Germans believe that an attack was being mounted into the Belfort Gap a hundred and twenty-five miles south and east of the St.-Mihiel area. Marshall drew up the outline for the dummy operation to capture Mulhouse, and near the end of August the commander of VI Corps, Major General Omar Bundy, was directed to establish headquarters in Belfort to continue detailed work on it. He did so in the belief that the operation was in earnest, with orders to conceal his preparations. The orders, of course, were issued in full recognition that concealment of sudden battle preparations in that hitherto quiet sector would be impossible. Rumors, as expected, spread rapidly and shortly were given substance by an intelligence officer's calculated indiscretion in writing of the Mulhouse attack to General Pershing and leaving the new carbon paper he had used crumpled in his wastepaper basket. It was duly stolen. The Germans suspected a trick but felt they could not count on it; they recommended therefore that the Mulhouse area be reinforced.⁸

Much more important to the success of the First Army attack,

however, was the fact that the retreating Germans no longer valued the St.-Mihiel salient as a base for offensive action and recognized it instead as a defensive embarrassment. They were actually planning to evacuate it when the Americans attacked.

The main First Army effort was made against the southern face of the salient by the IV and I Corps with seven American divisions in line. On the west the V Corps with one French and two American divisions was to press in the hinge of the German line, while the all-French II Colonial Corps in the middle was to keep up pressure on the tip of the salient. Marshall's old division, the 1st, along with the 2d and 42d, led the main attack, which was immediately successful. By nightfall of the first day units in the main drive were beyond most of their second-day objectives. Progress on the west was slower but sufficient, so that Pershing ordered the 26th Division at the west hinge to join with the 1st advancing from the south at Vigneulles to pocket the Germans fighting at the point of the wedge. Vigneulles was occupied in the early morning, and by daybreak the 1st Division had closed off the remaining escape routes. By the end of that second day the salient had been pinched off. The clean-up, lasting until September 16, netted sixteen thousand German prisoners. The cost to First Army was thirteen thousand casualties.

The price of the victory suggests that the weakened Germans fought hard. First Army had reason to be satisfied with this, the first major American action under American command. If one man were to be credited for the success it would have to be General Pershing, who approved the project and assumed responsibility for it. That Marshall had a large hand in the planning, both in shaping the concept and in supervising the detailed orders, is clear enough. But again it was Colonel Conner who had envisaged the operations initially and who had furnished from his Operations Section at GHQ the planners who did most of the work on First Army's plans. Similarly it was Colonel Hugh Drum's responsibility as chief of staff of First Army to see that the staff worked smoothly to get the job done.

Marshall was fortunate to work with Drum, who was only a year and a half older but already a top staff officer associated closely with Pershing for more than a year. As Pershing men they

were to remain friends in the postwar years until at last they came into rivalry for the position of Chief of Staff of the Army. Son of an Army officer who was killed at San Juan Hill, Drum received a direct commission in 1898 by order of President McKinley in honor of his father's sacrifice. (Four such commissions were given.) As a result Drum was fighting in the Philippines while Marshall was still at VMI. He came to Leavenworth the year after Marshall left and was graduated an honor student from the two-year course. In 1914 he was a member of the expedition to Vera Cruz and later an aide to General Funston in Texas. He came to France with General Pershing as a member of his original staff and worked with Conner on long-range plans from the beginning.

Swift success in the salient and some signs of enemy disorder in the region north of the Rupt de Mad suggested the possibility of pushing on toward Metz. Marshall believed it could have been done and that Metz itself might have fallen by the end of September. At least he felt the initial lunge might have been extended had corps commanders sent infantry battalions with artillery support forward of their final objectives as they were authorized to do, and as Colonel Douglas MacArthur, chief of staff of the 42d Division, wished to do. But "none of the others had gathered themselves," and in view of Foch's insistence that the attack not be continued in force, Pershing and Drum "thought they should let well enough alone."⁹ From the commander's point of view the main prize—an offensive success—was in hand.

Furthermore it was only ten days to the Meuse-Argonne drive, for which preparations were already far along. Nine divisions were to be used in the initial three-corps attack from the Meuse-Argonne line. Altogether fifteen divisions had to move to the front before the jump-off. Supporting troops, including French and American artillery, air service, and tanks, as well as the manifold combat service units, swelled the number of men to be moved into position to about 600,000, of which at least 400,000 came from the St.-Mihiel sector. Altogether 428,000 were transported by truck; the rest walked. Since none of the infantry in the line could be pulled out and refitted in time for the first attack, fifteen fresh divisions were to be brought up. Of these, four were

in close reserve in the Lorraine battle area and three more came out of Army reserves stationed to the south. The others moved from elsewhere in France. Some of the artillery was to be shifted from St.-Mihiel even before the battle there was over. Some 3000 guns in all were moved into the line along with 40,000 tons of artillery ammunition, which had to be replenished at the rate of 3000 tons a day. Since the Americans were taking over a sector from French and Italian troops, 220,000 foreign soldiers had to be moved back over part of the same road net. And the roads to be used to shift the First Army west were just three, feeding through St.-Mihiel, Commercy, and Bar-le-Duc into the new battle area.¹⁰

General Foch and General Pershing both had doubts that the maneuver was feasible. Colonel Drum gave Marshall the job of doing it. He was to plan and supervise the shift of all troops out of the St.-Mihiel sector to the zone of the French Second Army, then holding the line the Americans would take over. Colonel Monroe C. Kerth, classmate of Marshall's at Leavenworth and now First Army deputy chief of staff, was charged with finding billets in the Meuse-Argonne. Colonel Grant was to make arrangements for the relief of the French Second Army.¹¹

Two days before the St.-Mihiel battle began, the units to be transferred were notified of the order in which they would pull out. But battle, even when successful, disrupts all neat plans. Changes had to be made at the last minute and units hurriedly alerted to move before their time in order to keep the allotted transports and road space filled. Since horse- and tractor-drawn artillery was much slower than the infantry in trucks, army, corps, and division troops were mixed in order to keep solid columns on the road. Even so, congestion was inevitable as worn-out horses—more than ninety thousand animals took part in the move—lagged or dropped dead in their traces.¹²

Marshall's office, where he sat nightly by his telephone, issuing orders and meeting emergencies, was upstairs in the town hall of Souilly, Pétain's headquarters during the fight for Verdun in 1916. Almost at his front door was the "Sacred Way," over which Pétain had moved 190,000 men and 25,000 tons of supplies in eight days to make good the promise: "They shall not pass." ¹³

The move Marshall now handled with the help of Colonel Grant, Captain Gorju (French Army Regulation Commission officer at Bar-le-Duc), the troop movements officers of First Army, II and IV Corps, and French staff officers, was larger if not so immediately critical.¹⁴ It required all his fine staff training and maneuver experience and something more—the ability to throw the book away when crisis or common sense demanded.

Many of the trucks used were borrowed from the French, and agreement for their use was often made "*en principe*." It was a phrase of slippery meaning Marshall discovered one day when a commitment *en principe* to move an entire division left part of the unit behind. He insisted thereafter on having his French colleagues spell out in writing precisely what they had in mind. Grateful for the French drivers who, already desperately tired from driving in support of recent French offensives, now had again to work day and night, he was disgusted to discover that some American staff officers objected to feeding the drivers at American messes. "We had to deal with them very drastically," he said later, "to make them wake up to the fact that we couldn't move our troops unless we fed these drivers." Whenever possible he tried to plan also to let them rest an hour or so between trips.

Some American officers were impatient with the makeshifts, which offended their sense of military order. An old friend from Leavenworth stood by one day while the chief of staff of a division explained to Marshall certain changes in the division's orders that he thought would facilitate its movement. Afterward the friend commented impatiently that in his view orders were issued to be obeyed and not thereafter to be discussed and altered. Had any such rigid formula been followed, Marshall commented later, "we would have wrecked ourselves about every twenty minutes." More serious was the sense of the fitness of things which led one division commander to reject French trucks when he discovered there were not enough to lift both of his brigades at once. The French obligingly reclaimed their trucks, and Marshall informed the division commander with crisp understatement that General Pershing would never forgive him.¹⁵

Despite all difficulties the job was done, thanks in large part to Marshall's energy, drive, skill, and perhaps above all his ability to

improvise coolly when things went wrong. Reporting the move a week after the war ended, he wrote with considerable satisfaction: "Despite the haste with which all movements had to be carried out, the inexperience of most of the commanders in movements of such density, the condition of the animals, and the limitations of the roads, the entire movement was carried out without a single element failing to reach its place on the date scheduled, which was, I understand, one day earlier than Marshal Foch considered possible."¹⁶ The job earned for him the nickname "wizard" and made another Marshall legend to add to that of the brilliant young tactician of the Philippines.¹⁷

The Meuse-Argonne offensive was planned as a two-army attack (the French Fourth on the left, the American First on the right) to cut the Lille-Metz railroad in the vicinity of Mezières-Sedan, or at least get close enough to interdict German use by artillery fire. If successful, it would push the Germans against the rugged Ardennes country and deprive them of their ability to move troops and supplies east and west behind their lines. In conjunction with French, British and Belgian offensives on the west, it could make the Germans unable to conduct an orderly retreat.

In recognition of the importance of the railroad, for four years the Germans had constructed and reinforced defensive positions to an average depth of 13 miles. Behind the first lightly held front line were other well-prepared positions of field fortifications, wire entanglements, trenches, and machine-gun emplacements: the first of these ran through Montfaucon to the Argonne Forest; back of it the Kriemhilde position, part of the Hindenburg Line, took in the Cunel Heights; the last line, Freya, extended along the ridge of the Bois de Barricourt, from which the ground sloped down toward Sedan sixteen miles away.¹⁸

The First Army report, which Marshall helped write, noted that "the region was ideal for defensive fighting, as it presented unusual difficulties from the viewpoint of the assailant. On the east the Côtes de Meuse commanded that river valley, and on the west the rugged, high hills of the Argonne Forest dominated the valley of the Aire River. In the center the watershed between the Aire and the Meuse Rivers commanded both valleys, with the

heights of Montfaucon, Cunel, Romagne, and of the Bois de Barricourt as natural strong points in observation stations for the enemy.”¹⁹ Broadly the American attack was to drive into the double defile of the Aire and Meuse Rivers under the eyes and guns of the enemy on high ground on each flank and in the center. The advance would be all uphill and through patches of heavily wooded country until the Americans reached the ridge north of Buzancy. Success of the attack as a whole for both French and American armies depended on success along the four miles of the front through the Argonne Forest. Marshall in 1919 described this as “the hinge of the entire Allied offensive, then pounding the Germans at various parts of the front. . . . The enemy must hold this part of the line or the withdrawal of the rest of his armies with four years’ accumulations of plants and material would be gravely imperiled.”²⁰ Consequently the Germans made doubly strong what nature had already shaped—in the words of General Liggett—as “a natural fortress beside which the Virginia wilderness in which Grant and Lee fought was a park.”²¹ Because of the difficulty and importance of the Argonne, the battle there, though involving only a small portion of the attacking force, overshadowed the rest. It was in the Argonne that Alvin York and the “Lost Battalion” won immortality.

On September 26, before daylight, twenty-seven hundred guns pounded the German defenses for three hours. First Army moved forward at five-thirty, nine divisions abreast, General Liggett’s I Corps in the Argonne on the left, General Cameron’s V Corps in the center, General Bullard’s III Corps pivoting on the Meuse on the right. Half an hour later the French Fourth Army attacked. Both flanks advanced. Bullard’s Corps captured the Germans’ second defense line; Liggett moved two or three thousand yards through the forest. That was something of a surprise. Marshall wrote later: “We drove right through [the enemy] barbed-wire entanglements and mastered the first-line defenses. . . . Our troops walked right over” the wire. Pétain could not believe it and afterward sent staff officers down to investigate the report. They found it true and, Marshall said, marveled “until they saw the size of our feet.” In fact the wire was found to be so

low and tightly massed that the infantry had no need for the bangalore torpedoes they carried to blast lanes through.²²

The value of the flank advances, however, was nullified by the inability of Cameron in the center to get up on the terrible "Mount of the Falcon" until the second day. By then the Germans had brought up reserves, so stiffening their defense that at the end of the month the attack everywhere was virtually stopped. Part of the trouble was the inexperience of some divisions. Six of the nine, in fact, had had little or no testing in battle before. Marshall observed that "young officers did not know how to regroup their men after the initial advance, . . . and when the time came to push on, they were unable to carry out their mission. . . . With better-trained divisions in line much greater progress would have been made at this period."²³ That was a penalty paid for the St.-Mihiel attack in which many of the more seasoned American troops had been committed. First Army suffered also from the weakness of its tank support. Of the 189 tanks (all light) attached for the assault, only 18 remained ten days later, because of battle casualties, mechanical difficulties, and the withdrawal of French units. Colonel William Mitchell's air force had 821 planes flying at the outset and controlled the air over the battlefield. But this advantage dwindled as the American forces moved farther away from the airfields.²⁴

For their massive attacks touched off by the Meuse-Argonne offensive the Allies could now draw on 217 divisions on the Western Front, of which 39 (with 3 more to come before the war's end) were American. Inasmuch as the American division was about double the size of the British division and the French division, which were also below strength, the American units in France near the end of the war looked impressive beside the 102 French and 60 British divisions and the 16 other Allied divisions. Opposed to the Allies were 197 German divisions, of which only 51 were classed by British Intelligence as fit—and all these were below strength.²⁵

Foch used his advantage in a series of drives which allowed the enemy no chance to rest. The American-French attack on September 26 was followed on the twenty-seventh by the French-British strike at the Cambrai-St.-Quentin line and on the twenty-

eighth by the Anglo-Belgian offensive in the Ypres sector. The Germans fell back along the Channel while in the center the Allies drove through the Hindenburg Line in the first week. Ludendorff and Hindenburg, having nothing left with which to reverse the tide, proposed that the German government ask for an armistice. A council of war beginning on the twenty-ninth led shortly to the resignation of Chancellor Hertling and his replacement on October 4 by Prince Max of Baden, who almost at once telegraphed President Wilson that he was prepared to negotiate peace on the basis of the President's Fourteen Points.

For the Allied command and Allied armies, however, this was not surrender and not the end. Pershing was to find the early days of October in some ways the hardest of the war. He was faced with the fact that only in his zone had the Allied forward movement been checked. There were good reasons which he was to cite in extenuation later: besides the greenness of some of his troops and the handicaps of bad weather and terrible roads, German reinforcements, he thought, had concentrated a third of the whole German defense force against him. He could point out, moreover, that Foch himself before the attack began doubted whether the Americans could get beyond Montfaucon before the end of the year.²⁶ In fact they did better than that in four days. Nevertheless he would have to agree that his attack must move again if he were not to hold up the progress of the whole front. He did not agree that the fault lay with the American command and firmly rejected Foch's proposal that the Second French Army be committed between the French Fourth and the American First to take command of American divisions in the Argonne.²⁷ Instead he decided to throw seasoned troops into his center corps where the advance had been slowest. Marshall was again charged with the movement. To get the fresh divisions in and the relieved units out it was necessary to build a road across the morass of no man's land. So vital was this road that when a regiment of heavy artillery used it against orders and tore it to pieces, the resumption of the attack had to be delayed a day and a half. Newly arrived American supporting units were also moved in to relieve some of the French groups. As the relief proceeded, Marshall was struck by the contrast between

the French who were "very, very tired and the Americans who were very, very cocky."

When the fresh attack jumped off on October 4, the veteran 1st Division, under command of Major General Charles P. Summerall, did particularly well in the Aire valley, while I Corps completed the clearing of the Argonne on the left. Summerall, Marshall said later, was "the nearest approach to the Jackson type that I saw in the war. And he was a wonder to watch when the fighting was on. . . . I never saw anything to beat him on a battlefield. I remember once he took around the British division commander who was going to relieve him. And when he got through walking around and talking like a cathedral, as he did, with shells breaking all over the place, this Britisher—who was accustomed to pretty hard fighting—came back and said he never wanted to make another inspection with General Summerall. He was really unconscious of any feeling of fear."

"The purpose of the battle between September 26 and November 1," Marshall wrote immediately after the war, was "to maintain a constant pressure against the Germans." Under that pressure the Germans steadily built up their forces from the fourteen divisions originally in line to about thirty-four in line and reserve by the end of October. Nevertheless First Army maintained a considerable superiority and by October 10 commanded over a million men (900,000 Americans, 135,000 French). The enemy had constantly to shift reserves to meet successive First Army attacks. "In this particular fighting," Marshall said, "while we could not launch attacks as co-ordinate as they might have been, given longer preparation, at the same time, by continually attacking the enemy he was becoming more disco-ordinate in his defense. . . . His regiments were being thrown into the defense as fast as they arrived, and so confused was he in his defensive tactics that elements of his divisions were scattered far apart and intermingled with other units." ²⁸

By October 16 First Army had taken the Romagne Heights within the Hindenburg Line. There the general advance halted, though probing attacks continued to keep the Germans off balance while Pershing planned a fresh offensive to capture Bazancourt and the high ground to the east.

He now had two armies in the field. The Second Army, created on October 12 with General Bullard in command, was assigned the sector between Fresnes-en-Woëvre and Port-sur-Seille east of the Moselle. Pershing on the sixteenth turned over First Army to General Liggett, a big man who had proved by his performance as I Corps commander that he was not, as some had alleged, too fat for field duty. Pershing himself assumed full-time duties as AEF commander-in-chief. General Liggett, Marshall's boss from Philippine days, moved Marshall up to First Army chief of operations, replacing Colonel McCleave. The change only recognized the fact that from the outset Marshall had been working closely with General Drum, and these two, for most practical purposes, had been functioning as the 'commanding general's chief tactical advisers.

During the preparation for the new attack scheduled for November 1, Marshall and General Drum were frequently at the front, going forward sometimes on horseback but more often by car along the "Sacred Way" from Souilly to the sector north of Verdun. There were additional units to get into place and problems of holding in position "exhausted, heavily suffering troops" already in line. And, as always, there were late changes in plan. A friend of Marshall's, the chief of staff of the 1st Moroccan Division, observed that the Americans, continually writing plans and amendments, were fighting "*une guerre des papiers.*" He was reminded by Marshall that he had earlier made the same complaint against his own, the French Army. That was true, "but," said the Frenchman, "you do a better job of it than even we do."

To force a quick decision, with the expectation that victory was within grasp, Foch gave the order for the November drive. Objectives were not to be limiting. "Troops thrown in the attack," he ordered in his instructions of October 25, "have only to know their direction of attack. On this direction they advance as far as possible, attacking and maneuvering against the enemy who resists, without any attempt at alignment, the most advanced units working to assist the advance of those who are momentarily halted." ²⁹

Foch's optimism, which Pershing shared, was at once borne

out. On the first day the Americans broke through the German lines. More remarkable, the momentum continued on the second day. A correspondent at First Army later wrote: "Staff officers in the front room of the Souilly *mairie* almost capered before the wall map as the thumbtacks and red string went forward to places that had seemed once as far away as Berlin. The drawn, sleepless face of Colonel George C. Marshall, chief of operations, lighted up as he went over with us the colored penciled lines on his own map and talked with happy sureness of 'where we would be next day.'" ³⁰

Success at the front multiplied supply problems behind the lines. Chronically short of transportation, the American armies "had tremendous supplies to bring up to the front" over roads that "were practically impassable," and at the same time had, Marshall reckoned, "176,000 sick and wounded to evacuate." "At one period," Marshall said in describing the battle, "we found ourselves running short of ammunition for some of our batteries. There were no trucks available to haul ammunition, and even if we had had trucks we could not have gotten them through on account of the terrific jam. But the problem was solved. A regiment of infantry going into line was turned around and marched back twelve miles to an ammunition dump. Every man in this regiment . . . came back carrying a shell on his shoulder. . . . When the 6th Division detrained at Clermont to be rushed up to the front they were faced with such an insufficiency of horses that it was impossible to haul all their equipment. . . . The men of this division took the place of the horses . . . and pulled their carts and wagons with them right up to the front." This, it turned out, was all in vain. Their heroic efforts brought them in position on the day the war ended, and they had to haul it all back again.³¹

The last days before the armistice had two points of special interest for Marshall. One was the night march of the 2d Division under Major General John A. Lejeune on the night of November 3, which pushed one regiment through the Forêt de Dieulet and surprised the Germans at Beaumont. The maneuver paralleled the action of the German Army at this spot in 1870, when they too surprised the enemy asleep in Beaumont. Philip Sheridan,

an observer with the Germans advancing from Bar-le-Duc toward Sedan, left an account of the attack which Marshall had studied at Leavenworth.³² The other point of interest was the mix-up over who should take Sedan.

With the fall of the Beaumont ridge and arrival of American troops within light artillery range of Sedan, the Germans began a general withdrawal. Pershing ordered pursuit "without regard for fixed objectives and without fear for their flanks."³³ Nearest to Sedan at this point was the 42d Division under I Corps, command of which had passed from Liggett to General J. T. Dickman. To the right of the 42d was the 1st Division under control of V Corps, now commanded by General Summerall. But Sedan itself lay within the French zone of action. Foch had in fact altered boundaries to assure that French units would liberate the city where France had suffered her bitterest defeat in 1870. In a pursuit situation, however, rigid boundaries could hamper the action, and General Pershing and General Maistre, commanding the Group of Armies of the Center, had agreed that if American forces outran the French, boundaries between them could be ignored. Maistre in fact, on November 4, had suggested that Americans might cross into the French Fourth Army zone on their left to help deal with German resistance.³⁴ The records do not show a clear understanding on Sedan, but it was Marshall's recollection shortly after the war that the French general had conceded that the military importance of Sedan was such that the Americans should occupy it if they could.³⁵ In any event Pershing wanted very much to take it; it lay dead ahead in the path of the American advance and it had been from the beginning the prize at the end of a long, hard road.

In the late afternoon of November 5 General Conner, Pershing's chief of operations, came into Colonel Marshall's office in Souilly and after some discussion of Pershing's wishes dictated this message: "General Pershing desires that the honor of entering Sedan should fall to the First American Army. He has every confidence that the troops of I Corps, assisted on their right by the V Corps, will enable him to realize this desire." Preparing this message for relay to the corps commanders involved, Marshall added: "In transmitting the foregoing message, your attention is invited to the favorable opportunity for pressing the ad-

vance throughout the night." He then held the message until either General Liggett or his chief of staff, General Drum, arrived. It was Drum, in fact, who came into the command post about an hour later. Assuming that Pershing and Maistre were in agreement on Sedan, Drum made the message clearer by adding: "Boundaries will not be considered binding." He completed the message in the usual fashion: "By command of General Liggett" and signed it himself with Marshall authenticating it. It went out by telephone at once to I and V Corps.³⁶

Under the circumstances the message had a heady effect on the commanders who received it. They were in pursuit of a beaten enemy. They had earlier been told to ignore exposed flanks and move fast. They had just witnessed the spectacular success of the 2d Division's night dash ahead of the main line and were advised now specifically to consider repeating that maneuver. As a result, Drum's amendment, intended merely to authorize a shift westward by the I and III Corps, was interpreted by both corps as an invitation to stage a race toward Sedan. Marshall said later, "It did not authorize a free for all, although that is what happened." ³⁷

General Summerall, not one to hold back when invited to dash forward, on November 6 took his orders in person to Brigadier General Frank Parker, commanding the 1st Division. General Dickman the same day alerted General Menoher's 42d Division, one brigade of which was now commanded by Brigadier General Douglas MacArthur. Parker notified Menoher that he was going to move on Sedan the next day without, however, making clear that he would cross into Menoher's zone. In fact Parker began moving that night. By morning 1st Division men, with Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., limping along on a partly healed wounded leg at the head of his 26th Infantry, were streaming through both the 42d Division and the French 40th Division on their left, in whose zone the prize, Sedan, actually lay. Troops of the 1st and 42d Division were soon mixed and the roads jammed. General MacArthur went forward to check. He ran into a 1st Division patrol whose commander, Lieutenant Black, thought MacArthur in his floppy garrison cap and non-regulation muffler looked like a German officer and arrested him. When word of this reached General Menoher he complained to First Army. His

chief, General Dickman, was already exploding with rage, fed by the suspicion that the dashing V Corps commander was trying to grab some additional glory at his expense. The French seemed calmer, but they reported to First Army that they might have to fire artillery into Sedan even if the 1st Division was in the way.

It was the French report that gave General Liggett his first news of what was happening. His temper flamed. He sent an order to his corps commanders to get their divisions back in their own zones at once and then ordered an investigation of the whole affair. But with the end of the war the inquiry was dropped. No one took Sedan. The French were unable to get in before the guns were silenced on November 11.

Since the consequences were nil, the incident reads in history like a kind of heroic farce. So General MacArthur apparently regarded it. He harbored no ill feelings against First Army officers for their part in the mix-up,³⁸ and Marshall said of MacArthur, "the main thing was that [he] was up there trying to press the attack and get it ahead." There were others, however, whose tempers never cooled. "The fight between Summerall and Dickman," Marshall commented long afterward, "was very intense and it went back to all sorts of jealousies. The real factors in the case were largely ignored, and it kept on in a senseless way for almost the rest of their service. It started from jealousy: They were jealous of General Summerall's great reputation which he had made in the hard fighting. The whole thing to my mind was out of place. The thing was, we were succeeding. We weren't there to fight each other. I didn't have much patience with it. But I wasn't the one receiving the animosity."

Even before the armistice was signed Marshall was scheduled to leave First Army. His new assignment was to be chief of staff of VIII Corps being formed at Montigny-sur-Aube for occupation duty. Pershing had put his name on a list in mid-October for promotion to brigadier general.³⁹ When the list reached Washington, Congress decided to delay approval until the Meuse-Argonne fight had ended. But the fight ended only with the war's end, and thereupon temporary promotions ceased. So it would be eighteen years before Marshall received the star which many

of his 1st Division associates, some once subordinate to him, won through positions of command.

He emerged from the war a temporary colonel, almost forty years old. He had lost ground to contemporaries in the race for rank—Drum, for instance, and MacArthur. For once, it might be said, his luck in timing had failed him. A few more months of war and he would have taken the biggest rank hurdle of them all into the company of generals. On the other hand he had solidly built his career and his reputation as a staff officer. In both tactics and logistics—in the planning of battle and in the organization and maintenance of large bodies of troops—he had developed a competence probably unexcelled by any other officer of his age in the Army. Having come over with the first convoy of troops and dealt with combat training and planning for the nearly eighteen months before the war ended, he was familiar with every major problem the fighting forces faced. As chief of training and operations of the 1st Division in its first year in France he had applied to training and combat his long experience in the handling of small units. As a member, and later as chief, of the Operations Division of First Army he had a key role in planning and supervising the movement and commitment of more troops in battle than any American officer would again achieve until General Omar Bradley established his 12th Army Group in France in 1944. It had been his job, one of Pershing's principal staff officers would later write, to "work out all the details of the operations, putting them in a clear, practical workable order which [could] be understood by the commanders of all subordinate units. The order must be comprehensive, yet not involved. It must appear clear when read in poor light, in the mud and rain. That was Marshall's job, and he performed it 100 per cent. The troops which maneuvered under his plans always won." ⁴⁰

If the immediate rewards seemed meager, the record was solid, exceptional, and enduring. The three chief contenders for nomination as Chief of Staff in 1939—none a graduate of West Point—had all worked in the top jobs on the staff of First Army: Drum, the chief of staff; DeWitt, the chief of supply; and Marshall, the chief of operations.