

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY



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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY ROTC MANUAL

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The Aisne-Marne Offensive. The area chosen for the Allied offensive was the Marne salient. Assault units were to attack along its entire front with the main blow directed at the northwest base of the salient near Soissons. Spearheading the attack was the French XX Corps composed of the U. S. 1st and 2d Divisions and the French 1st Moroccan Division. Since U. S. divisions were numerically stronger, the force actually was four-fifths American. Troop concentrations were carried out with the utmost secrecy some distance behind the lines. Only at the last moment were assault units rushed forward, one United States division moving at night over muddy roads and then into jump-off position at double time.

The attack was launched early in the morning of 18 July behind a heavy barrage. Surprise was complete, and the initial assault was so powerful that it quickly overran the German front lines and forward artillery positions. By 0800 Allied troops had advanced three miles and captured the high ground south of Soissons, thus assuring the fall of that stronghold and the ultimate success of the battle. Elsewhere along the front Allied forces, heavily reinforced with American divisions, made uniform progress. Realizing his position had become untenable, Crown Prince Wilhelm, who commanded the German armies in the area, ordered a gradual withdrawal from the salient. In order to save supplies and equipment, the Germans prepared successive defensive positions and stubbornly and skillfully defended them. By 3 August, with the salient evacuated, the Germans were in strong positions behind the Aisne and Vesle Rivers. Attempts on the part of the U. S. 4th and 32d Divisions to drive them from these positions failed and the offensive was over.

The battle had numerous and far-reaching results. It eliminated the German threat to Paris, upset Ludendorff's cherished plan to attack the British again in Flanders, gave the Allies important rail communications, demonstrated beyond further doubt the effectiveness of American troops on the offensive, firmly established Allied unity of command, and so dimmed German aspirations for victory that even Ludendorff thereafter no longer hoped for more than a stalemate. Most important of all, the initiative passed to the Allies.