**The Battle of Amiens**

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The Battle of Amiens, which started on August 8th 1918, proved to be the most decisive battle against the Germans on the Western Front. The Battle of Amiens was the first to incorporate an all-armed co-ordinated attack, bringing together artillery, tanks, infantry and aircraft.

 Amiens was of immense importance to the Allies as it was a major rail hub used to receive supplies for the front line and from where those supplies were moved out to where they were needed. In early 1918, Ludendorff ordered a major attack on the city. The German Army had been greatly strengthened by tens of thousands of troops who had moved from the Eastern Front to the Western after Russia pulled out of the war. These men had spent time fighting in Russia and were experienced and battle-hardened. Ludendorff planned to concentrate his forces in just one area of the Western Front and punch a hole through it that would force the Allies to move troops from elsewhere to support those facing the advancing Germans. Ludendorff planned to target British troops and push them to the English Channel. He believed that the shock to the French at losing their ally would be so great that they would surrender. The target for the German was Amiens and Ludendorff named his plan the ‘Emperor’s Battle’.

 His attack started at 04.40 on March 21st 1918. After a brief but heavy artillery barrage that lasted just five hours, German storm troopers attacked British lines still reeling after the gas and heavy explosive artillery attack. While the artillery attack only lasted five hours, it was the greatest concentration of fire in World War One up to that time – 6,500 guns and 3,500 trench mortars firing along a 46-mile front.

“Such Hell makes weak things of the strongest. No body was ever built to stand such torture.” - L/Cpl William Sharpes, 8th Lancashire Fusiliers.

At 09.40, storm troopers attack. Such was their preparation that these men – considered an elite within the German Army – had maps of British positions sewn onto the sleeves of their uniform. They only attacked weak spots and swiftly moved on. Infantry units followed on behind. By 12.00, 1/3rd of British troops facing the attack has been lost and it took until April 5th for the Allies to hold up the advance. Ludendorff’s men got to within eleven miles of Amiens. Between March 21st and April 5th, the Germans had advanced 28 miles as far as the town of Villers-Bretonneux. However, the success of the Germans was also their undoing. They had stretched their supply lines too far and the men at the very front of the ‘Emperor’s Battle’ were starved of much needed supplies.

The Allies took their time to regroup. By the summer of 1918, men from the American Army had reached the front line, thus countering the advantages the Germans had after the Russians pulled out of the war. One of the main targets of the Allies was Belleau Wood where the Germans had dug in. Belleau Wood was on high ground and gave the Germans there a major advantage over the Allies. On June 6th, men from the US Marine Corps attacked German positions in Belleau Wood. The wood itself comprised of tightly packed trees and the USMC got caught up in devastating inter-locking fire from well-placed German machine gun posts.

“The difficulty of Belleau Wood was that you never knew where the front line was.” - Sergeant Melvin Krulewitch, USMC.

It took six attacks by the US Marines to clear Belleau Wood and they lost 10,000 men. While the loss of men was grave for the US, the loss of such an important strategic position for the Germans was huge and it ensured that the Germans could not contemplate any further advance into France.

With the Germans out of Belleau Wood, the Allies could concentrate their efforts on repulsing Ludendorff’s attack. That task was given to Sir Henry Rawlinson. In July 1918, 350,000 Allied men were concentrated along a seventeen-mile front to the east of Amiens. They greatly outnumbered the Germans immediately facing them. Rawlinson, who commanded British troops at the ill-fated Battle of the Somme in 1916, had learned much since that battle – especially the value of tanks. The land he selected for the counter-attack was mostly dry and flat – ideal for tanks. Rawlinson ordered that the greatest concentration of tanks in World War One should be gathered at Amiens.

Rawlinson had not only learned a lesson about tanks. He was now a supporter of an all-armed co-ordinated attack using everything at the disposal of a commander. He ordered artillery commanders that no pre-shots would be allowed. This had been a common practice as it allowed an artillery team to get its ‘eye in’. However, it also pre-warned the enemy of a forthcoming infantry attack. Now they were ordered to use a map and mathematics to work out the range of their targets and that their first shot in anger would be at the target direct – not as a target finder. To compliment tanks and artillery, Rawlinson also planned to use aircraft from the newly formed Royal Air Force.

Rawlinson ordered a complete crackdown on security. German intelligence reports of an Allied build-up were ignored by Ludendorff who was convinced that they were wrong.

At 04. 20 on August 8th 1918, the attack began. Troops from Canada, Australia and Britain advanced under a creeping barrage from 700 artillery guns that advanced 100 metres every three minutes. Heavy tanks were used to attack well-defended German positions while smaller tanks – ‘Whippets – were used to probe the German defences. Rawlinson had set a target of an eight-mile advance on Day 1 of the attack – what would have been the largest Allied advance if his plan was successful. Rawlinson was helped by the weather. Early morning fog helped to disguise what the Allies were doing.

As the Allies advanced, 600 aircraft from the RAF attacked German positions dropping phosphorous bombs. The Canadian and Australian troops advanced five miles by midday. British troops in the hillier northern sector –where tanks found it more difficult to operate – fared worse but still advanced. Such was the success of the attack, Rawlinson felt confident enough to order 20,000 cavalry troops to advance. Cavalry had suffered very badly in the bogged down conditions of trench warfare but in this attack they took much land, though suffering heavy casualties. The sheer intensity of the attack overwhelmed the Germans.

“The Germans were surrendering everywhere. We knew it was going to be the end of the war.” - Major S Evers, Australian Corps.

The Germans lost more ground on August 8th than on any other day on the Western Front. By August 12th the battle had lost momentum but the damage suffered in the initial attack had been sufficient to critically damage the German Army. Ludendorff told Wilhelm II that the war was lost.

