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### GERMAN (LUDENDORFF) OFFENSIVES, MAR-JUL 1918

A Working Bibliography of MHI Sources

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## **OVERVIEW**

On 21 Mar, Ludendorff commenced a series of massive assaults intended to dislodge the British from their lines on the Somme and the French from the Aisne, and to directly threaten Paris. His ultimate intent was total German victory on the Western Front. Offensive actions continued through the summer, as additional forces redeployed from the Eastern Front to reinforced their beleaguered comrades in the west. Earlier in the month, Russia had signed a separate peace with Germany, allowing the eastern divisions to be rushed by rail to the trenches. American troops, their numbers increasing daily were released to British and French commands to help stem the German advance.

**Operation Michael (Second Somme):** Beginning 21 Mar, heavy German guns, mortars and gas shells rained on a 60-mile stretch of the British right flank from Arras to la Fère. Unable to withstand the heavily-supported infantry advance, the British Fifth Army fell back rapidly. Ludendorff's troops were virtually unchecked until Foch shifted French reserves to aid their retreating Allies. The attack was finally stalled on 5 Apr at Montdidier. On 23 Mar, more than twenty shells from extremely long-range German guns fell on the French capital, forcing many Parisians to begin evacuating the city.

**Operation Georgette:** Ludendorff halted operations on the Somme on 5 Apr, choosing to concentrate on the British lines to the north along the River Lys. His ultimate objective were the channel ports, to be reached by crossing the Lys, breaching the southern part of the Ypres Salient, and driving to the sea. On 9 Apr, reinforced by 2,000 tons of mustard gas and other agents, 14 German divisions attacked along a ten-mile front centered along Armentières on the Lys. Mirroring the March experience on the Somme, the British fell back, leaving a wide gap in their lines.

So dire was the British situation that on 12 Apr, Haig issued his famous Order of the Day, which stated in part "...Every position must be held to the last man; there must be no retirement. With our backs to the wall, and believing in the justice of our cause, each one of us must fight to the end." Three days later, Haig's troops evacuated Passchendaele Ridge; on 16 Apr over 1,000 New Zealanders were captured and four days later Germans released another 2,000 tons of poison gas.

**Operation Blücher** (**Third Battle of the Aisne**): Still hoping to achieve a sustained breakthrough of the Allied lines, Ludendorff launched yet another assault along a 24-mile front on 27 May. The initial target was four French divisions on the Chemin des Dames, followed by four more French and four British divisions between Soissons and Reims, reading the Aisne in less than six hours. By the next of the next day, a wide gap had been created in the Allied lines. By 30 May, German troops reached the Marne and were 50 miles from Paris.

By 1 Jul, Germans were 40 miles from Paris, the French government was preparing to leave the capital as thousands of their fellow citizens were already doing. Pershing continued to resist attempts by the French to assume control of his trained troops and British overtures to begin training green Americans in the UK. One million Americans were in France by Jul 1918; he did agree to commit troops where they were needed (170, 000 in June and 140, 000 in July), but insisted they would still be independent of permanent Allied command.

Champagne/Marne Offensive (Second Battle of the Marne): Information from German prisoners alerted the Allies to a midnight attack on 14 Jul in the vicinity of Chateau Thierry. French and Commonwealth troops, bolstered by the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 42<sup>nd</sup> U.S. Divisions reinforcing the Champagne front, barely held their positions. German troops threw bridges across the Marne in preparation for an advance to the southwest. French bombers attempted to reduce these bridges from the air, but ground troops had greater success. With massed infantry fire, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division foiled a German river crossing near Crezancy, earning the unit the nickname "Rock of the Marne." Italian troops drove Germans off their attack at Nanteuil-Porcy. German headquarters pondered the tenuous situation as the Allies counterattacked on 18 Jul.

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