

Introduction

While this website generally focuses on the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, the AEF Centennial Celebrations throughout Belgium and France in 2018 warrant a broader view. The timeline and statistics outlined in this spreadsheet attempt to quantify the size and timing of the AEF Build-up in France and Belgium and America's contribution toward victory.

The genesis of this spreadsheet was the author's six month stay in France in 2017; where it seemed few people knew the size of the AEF build-up and the extent of the AEF action in Summer 1918. Did this lack of knowledge stem from not knowing the facts, from language barriers, or from inherent bias? Most readers--including Americans--read only history from their nation's scholars and take it for the gospel truth. (Americans will read British authors too, and do the same.) It is a natural bias that each nation attempts to explain / justify its sacrifices; while downplaying the role that other nations played in winning the war.

Critics will argue that the U.S. joined the war too late; took too long to send troops and equipment; did a poor job of training its troops; and wouldn't let them be fed into existing units under foreign leadership. Proponents will argue that America's entry tipped the balance in favor of the Allies; that Germany exhausted itself in the Spring of 1918 trying to end the war before Americans arrived in large numbers; and that Americans advanced up the learning curve much faster than their European Allies had at the outbreak of the war.

Objectively, there are too few statistics for this spreadsheet to provide a definitive answer, and there is "ammunition" for both sides in the numbers presented below. For it took ALL of the Allies--France, England, Belgium and the USA--116 days to defeat an "exhausted" German Army. (The measurement dates used are 18 July, when Foch's French-American Aisne-Marne campaign was launched, to 11 November.) The role of the French Army is often maligned in English-language texts; yet at no time during this period did the war-weary French Army hold less than 50% of the Western Front. What is interesting is that, by late August, 1918, the AEF was holding as large a % of the Western Front as the BEF. (See page 6.) Also, by 11 November, 1918 the size of the AEF exceeded the "Peak strength" of the BEF in Flanders and France during the war; albeit there was a significant difference in training and experience. (See page 4.)

The Webmaster believes that an "objective" multi-national review of the last 116 days of the war remains to be written. Perhaps, a more fair comparison of the AEF to its Allies' Armies would be to look at the BEF's actions during the first 18 months of the war or during the period after which Britain's small, professional army was eliminated. Both nations had significantly smaller armies than Europe's major players.

Timeline of AEF Military Offensives in 1918

- 28-May** **Assault on Cantigny by the 1st Division, AEF**
--Coincidentally or on-purpose it was one year to the date that General Pershing left NYC bound for England and France.
--Town selected because it represented the furthest point of German advance during Operation Michael, 21 March - 5 April, 1918.
- Late May/Early June** **Portions of 2nd and 3rd Divisions rushed to the Marne to help stem the German advance during Operations Bluecher, Goerz and Yorck.**
--The best-known part of this is 2nd Division's attack at Belleau Wood.
- 18-Jul** **AEF Participation in the French Aisne-Marne Campaign**
--Was the first counter-attack by Allied troops launched after the failure of Operation Bluecher.
--Included the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 26th, 28th, 32nd and 42nd Divisions, AEF.
--By August 6 the German Army retreated north of the Vesle River between Soissons and Reims.
- 6-Aug** **AEF Participation in the French Oise-Aisne Campaign**
--Included the 32nd, 28th and 77th Divisions, AEF.
- 12-Sep** **St. Mihiel Offensive**
--Included nine AEF Divisions and four French Divisions.
- 26-Sep** **Meuse-Argonne Offensive**
--Initially involved nine American divisions in the line (excluding the three divisions held in reserve by the Army Corps.)

Remember that AEF divisions were more than 2x the size of a similar BEF or French division.

Cumulative Arrivals in Europe of American Military Personnel for the A.E.F.

Source: *American Armies and Battlefields in Europe*, page 502.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Arrivals in Month</u>	<u>Cum. Arrivals</u>
5/31/17		1,308
6/30/17	14,912	16,220
7/31/17	3,900	20,120
8/31/17	19,263	39,383
9/30/17	22,544	61,927
10/31/17	30,338	92,265
11/30/17	37,358	129,623
12/31/17	54,273	183,896
1/31/18	40,759	224,655
2/28/28	29,723	254,378
3/31/18	74,627	329,005
4/30/18	105,076	434,081
5/31/18	233,038	667,119
6/30/18	230,174	897,293
7/31/18	313,410	1,210,703 Largest individual month
8/31/18	262,487	1,473,190
9/30/18	310,765	1,783,955
10/30/18	202,663	1,986,618
11/11/18	71,057	2,057,675

Actual Combat Strength of the A.E.F.

Source: *American Armies*, page 502.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>% of Cumulative Arrivals Month</u>
3/21/18	162,482	49%
5/27/18	406,844	61%
8/10/18	822,358	56%
9/12/18	999,602	56%
10/12/18	1,078,190	54%
11/11/18	1,078,222	52%

Comments:

- 1) Actual combat strength includes only combat troops and excludes troops in the Services of Supply, headquarters, schools, hospitals, liaison service and other special services.
- 2) Essentially, a bit more than 50% of AEF personnel were considered combat troops.
- 3) This is a case where numbers alone do not tell the story: While the Doughboys were fresh, inadequate training and lack of experience greatly reduced their effectiveness. This has been documented in numerous books on the AEF. The Webmaster is currently reading Gene Fax' "With Their Bare Hands," and the author describes, in detail, the training deficiencies of the 79th Division.

Looking at the BEF for Comparison

The numbers on the previous page are only meaningful in the context of the strength of other nations on the Western Front during the same period.

In "Some British Army Statistics of the Great War" on Chris Baker's *The Long, Long Trail* website, he lists the "Peak strength (i.e. maximum at any one time)" of the BEF in France and Flanders at 2,046,901. Unfortunately, the article does not indicate when "Peak strength" occurred.

Thus, by 11 November, the AEF numbers equaled the "Peak strength" of the BEF on the Western Front; albeit with the caveat the American troops, while fresh, we significantly less seasoned.

The Webmaster would love to publish comparable numbers for the BEF strength in France and Belgium in 1918. Please alert him to a reliable source.

Looking at the French Army for Comparison

In his brief internet search, the Webmaster did not find any numbers for the French Army strength on the Western Front in 1918. Please alert him to a reliable source.

Miles of Western Front Occupied by Various Nationalities

Source: *American Armies*, page 501.

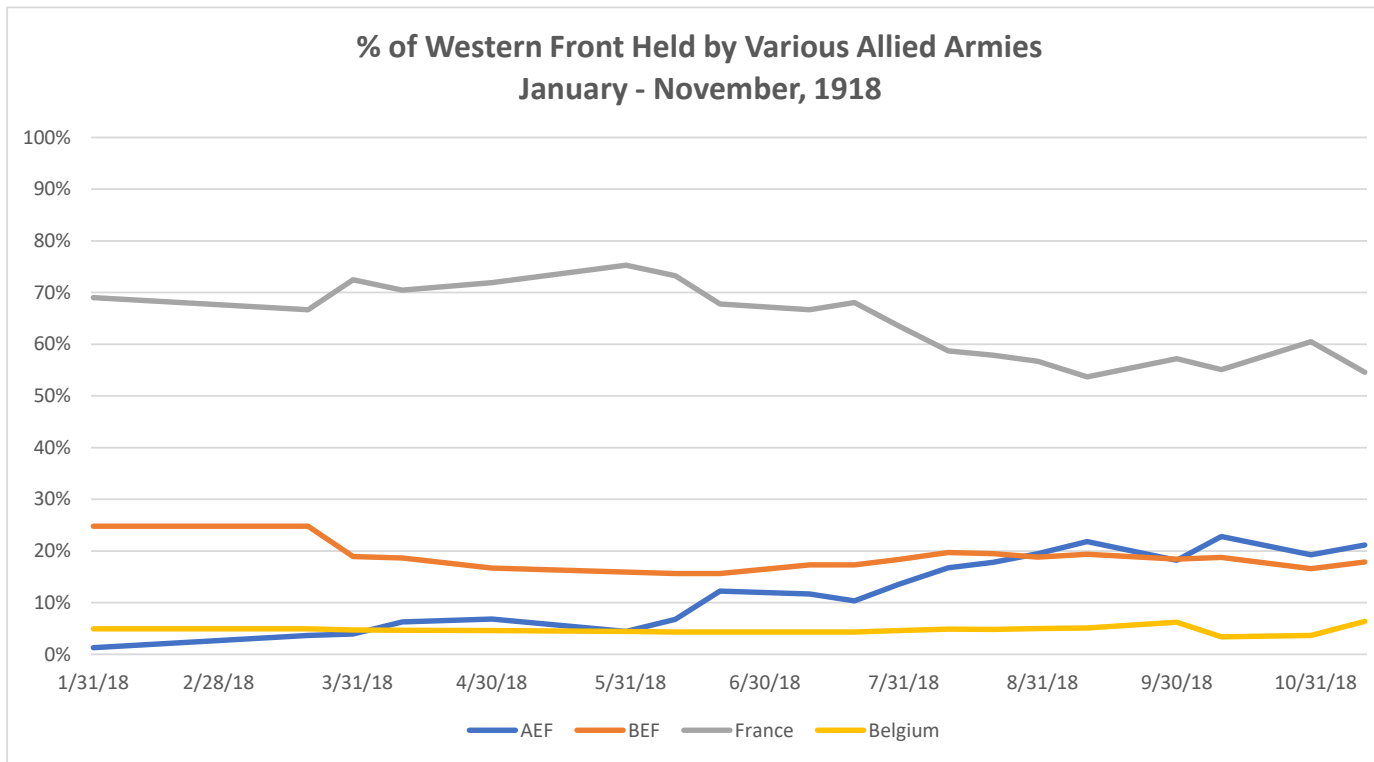
<u>Date</u>	<u>As a % of the Western Front</u>					<u>Absolute Miles Held</u>				
	<u>AEF</u>	<u>BEF</u>	<u>French</u>	<u>Belgian</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>AEF</u>	<u>BEF</u>	<u>French</u>	<u>Belgian</u>	<u>Total</u>
1/31/18	1%	25%	69%	5%	100%	6	116	323	23	468
3/20/18	4%	25%	67%	5%	100%	17	116	312	23	468
3/30/18	4%	19%	72%	5%	100%	19	92	353	23	487
4/10/18	6%	19%	70%	5%	100%	31	92	348	23	494
4/30/18	7%	17%	72%	5%	100%	34	83	358	23	498
5/30/18	4%	16%	75%	4%	100%	23	83	393	23	522
6/10/18	7%	16%	73%	4%	100%	36	83	389	23	531
6/20/18	12%	16%	68%	4%	100%	65	83	360	23	531
7/10/18	12%	17%	67%	4%	100%	62	92	354	23	531
7/20/18	10%	17%	68%	4%	100%	55	92	362	23	532
7/30/18	14%	18%	63%	5%	100%	68	92	318	23	501
8/10/18	17%	20%	59%	5%	100%	79	93	277	23	472
8/20/18	18%	19%	58%	5%	100%	85	93	276	23	477
8/30/18	19%	19%	57%	5%	100%	90	87	262	23	462
9/10/18	22%	19%	54%	5%	100%	98	87	241	23	449
9/30/18	18%	18%	57%	6%	100%	82	83	258	28	451
10/10/18	23%	19%	55%	3%	100%	101	83	244	15	443
10/30/18	19%	17%	60%	4%	100%	79	68	248	15	410
11/11/18	21%	18%	55%	6%	100%	83	70	214	25	392

Note: The Webmaster is not certain why these dates were selected by the publisher.

Absolute Miles change from 1/31/18 to 11/11/18:	77	-46	-109	2	-76
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Comments:

See page 6.



Comments

- 1) On an absolute basis, the Western Front "contracted" 76 miles as the German Army was pushed back. (See page 5.)
- 2) During that period, the AEF "added" 77 miles and the Belgian Army "added" 2 miles. The French Army "lost" 109 miles and the BEF "lost" 46 miles of front lines.
- 3) On a % of front held basis, the French Army declined from 69% in January 1918 to 55% in November 1918.
- 4) This is understandable, given where the AEF fought; which was largely dictated by natural supply lines.
- 5) On a % of front held basis, the BEF declined from 25% in January 1918 to 18% in November 1918.
- 6) While the benefit is difficult to measure; a reduction in frontage held would allow the beneficiaries to reduce the numbers of men needed in in the line at any time.
- 7) Beginning in late August / early September 1918 the AEF was occupying an equal to or greater percentage of the Western Front than the BEF.