

THE BATTLE OF AMIENS

VICTORIA

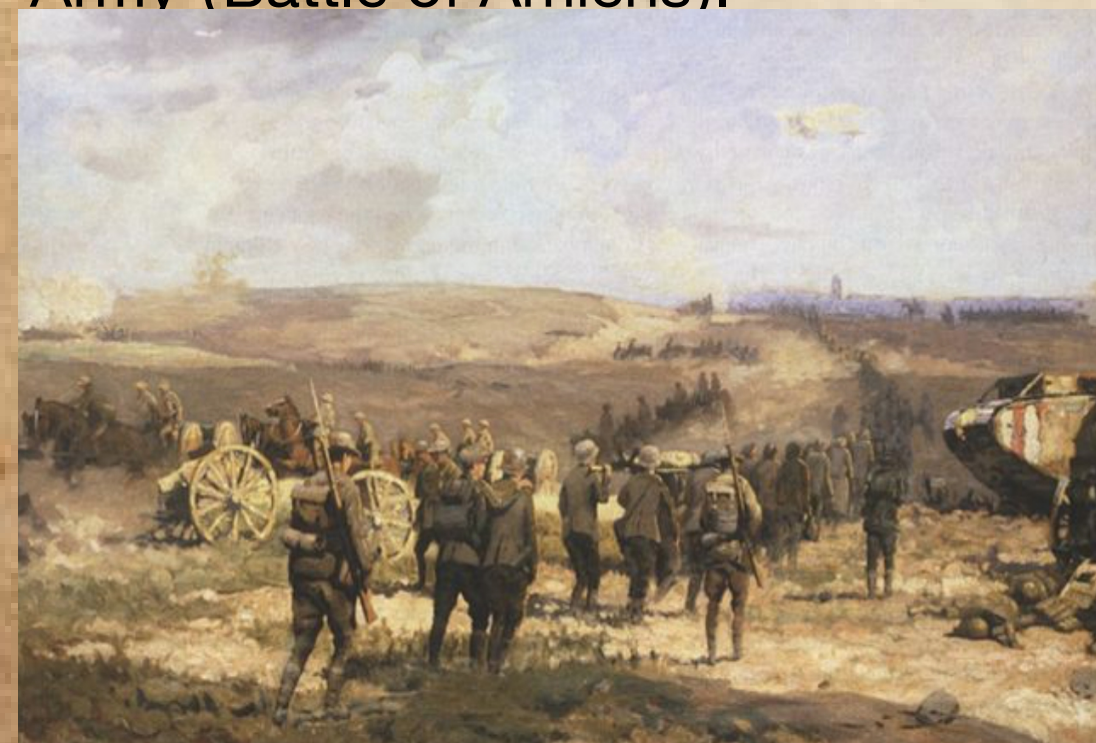


German prisoners are escorted to the rear near Amiens by Canadian cavalrymen. Library and Archives Canada photo.

Summary:

The Battle of Amiens was a victory for Allied troops, leading to the defeat of the German army on the Western Front. Field Marshal Haig, the Allied generalissimo, had selected the Amiens region of northern France for an offensive early in May 1918. Before the Battle began, the Allies launched many relatively shallow attacks on different parts of the German line, allowing the Germans no time for recovery(Greenhous).

The Battle of Amiens commenced at 4:20 am on the 8th August 1918 and ended on 11 August. The attacking force comprised the troops from Britain, Canada, France, Australia, and United State. The Allied troops began to attack without preliminary bombardment, but a creeping artillery barrage(Todman). The German army was shocked without any preparation and many of them were captured at the first chance.This Battle is described as the “Black Day of the German Army”(Battle of Amiens).



8th August, 1918 A painting by Australian official war artist Will Longstaff, in oil on linen, painted in 1918-1919 on a 107cm x 274cm canvas. This painting depicts shows German prisoners heading back towards Amiens, visible in the distance, off to the west from the artist's viewpoint, while artillery advances after the Allied armies.

Causes:

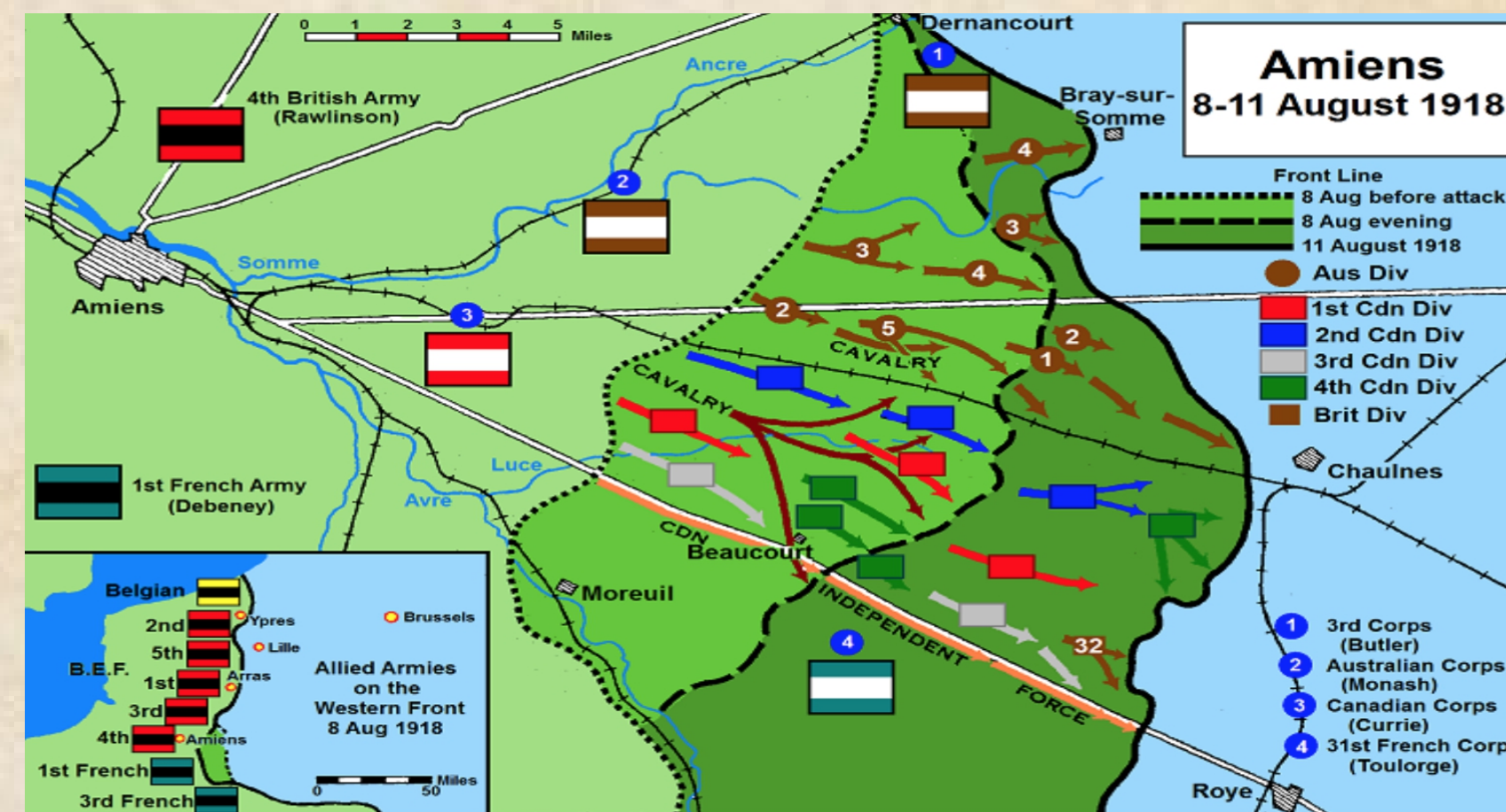
Underling: Amiens was a key position on the Western Front in WW1 which was the centre of vital road, connecting Paris with the north part(Walsh, 1). Supplies like food and munitions could be easily transferred to the front. This railway junction could have a great impact on the result of the war. Therefore, who ever controlled this city had a major advantage.

Immediate: By late July 1918, Allied forces held a superior position on the Western Front and German soldiers were exhausted in the wake of a stalled offensive on the Marne. That was a good chance for Allies to strike back(Tattrie).

Consequence:

Immediate: In retrospect, the Allies showed considerable improvements during the war, especially in tactics, coordination, technology and the leadership(Tattrie). Hence, the German force became inferior by comparison.

Long Term: The Battle of Amiens marked the start of the Allied counteroffensive of the Hundred Days campaign, which resulted in the end of the First World War.



Continuity and Change:

For Britain, this battle lifted the total-war economy. At that time, British industry was out-of-date. It comprised relatively large numbers of medium-sized firms working with antiquated technology(Battle of Amiens 1918). While old heavy industries like shipbuilding were strong, Britain was behind Germany in new industries like precision machine-tools. Thus, new state factories were built up to manufacture the shells, fuses, guns and boosted the economy. Ranking form -2 to +2, the Battle of Amiens is probably +1 for Britain.

However, the Germans had been ground down further. The effective blockage of German commerce from the Royal Navy created the famine condition. Nearly 750,000 German civilians died of hunger before the war ended(Battle of Amiens 1918) and many soldiers were motivated to surrender by the food privation. For Germany, the Battle is -2.

Evidence:

Before the Zero Hour, a Royal Air Force squadron “laid smoke screens over the battlefield” to hide the attacking soldiers on that “moonless night”(Greenhous). Thus, the assault were kept secret as long as possible. In three days, the Allies had advanced 8 miles (13km). More than 600 tanks, 2,000 artillery pieces and 1,900 aircraft were used during the attack. During the war, over 22,000 Allied soldiers were killed or injured, while the Germans lost more than 74,000 prisoners and casualties(Hickman).

Ethical Judgments:

In the course of the Battle, Britain imposed a blockade on Germany. This caused thousands of civilians’ death due to the food shortage. The total war made every civilian in the country become the target of the enemy. Those innocent people suffered a lot owing to the conflicts. They had to pay the taxes and give support to the country, but the government couldn’t even guarantee that the soldiers and citizens had enough food to live. What’s the meaning of the war? The greed of the sovereigns? The German sovereigns wanted to find a sense of contentment when they looked at the map of their colonies all over the world. Nevertheless, the military attrition weighed down citizens’ health. What really makes a country a great nation? Military force or the sense of happiness?



Mark V tanks pass by soldiers of the 3rd Canadian Division at Hourges, while German prisoners are escorted back by wounded assault troops on August 8th, 1918. Library and Archives Canada photo.

Historical Perspective:

Britain Media: The London Times wrote the description in August 1918,“Amiens was a great tactical victory. This battle changed the course of the war; it brought the end in sight!”

German Military Chief: Confronting the severe situation in the Battle, Germans were greatly outnumbered, and in the words of German military chief Erich Ludendorff, “depressed down to Hell.” When Ludendorff informed German Kaiser Wilhelm II of the German disaster at Amiens, the Kaiser replied, “We have reached the limits of our capacity. The war must be terminated.”

A British soldier: “You could’ve read a newspaper whichever way you looked - reflection from the gun fire,” recalled Private William Curtis, who professed amazement at the amount of artillery assembled for this operation. “We had to step over the wheels of the guns, between the hubs, to get forward, we are tired of fighting.”

Historical Significance:

The Battle of Amiens was historically significant for many reasons. In only three days, the Allies put Germany to rout and force Germany to move back 12km. Since then, Germany began to lose its land and finally **had no choice** but to sign up the armistice. This Battle involved **not only** Germany, France and Britain, **but also the colonies** like Canada and Australia. The impact of the event still **remains today**. It’s easy to find out the colonies that supported Britain and France to win the war during the Battle have already become developed and powerful countries. Although it seemed to put more burden on the finance of those countries, the needs of the armament improved the manufacture a lot, leading to the rapid growth of the economy. This Battle **revealed the importance** of the alliance because without the assistance from other countries, even Germany, one of the most powerful countries at that time, lost the battle at the end.

