

CHAPTER XXIX

THE WAR ENDS

TURKEY was not, however, the first of the Central Powers to collapse. The defeats of Germany on the Western Front had dispirited the Bulgarian Army. When attacked by the Allies from Salonica on September 15th, it was driven back and sought an armistice, which was signed on September 30th. It was this event combined with the defeats in Palestine that caused the Turkish government on October 20th to ask for an armistice.

The German and Austrian governments had already done so, by cable to President Wilson of the United States on the night of October 3rd. That step had been taken on the insistence of Ludendorff and Hindenburg. After the "black day" of August 8th they had arranged a conference at the Kaiser's headquarters at Spa, at which, on August 13th, they informed Wilhelm II and the government leaders that peace must be brought about by negotiation, the condition of the Army and Germany's allies being such that it could not now be brought about by force of German arms. The Kaiser then directed the Foreign Secretary to open peace negotiations.

But seven weeks followed in which nothing decisive was done; Hindenburg and Ludendorff, especially the former, inevitably spoke in such pompous terms of the German Army, and—when once they had thrown on the civilians the responsibility of making peace—so completely abstained from any part in that odious task themselves, that the ministers did not realise the urgency; instead they waited, as they thought was the common intention, for some temporary recovery by the Army

which would give a more favourable basis for opening negotiations than if this were attempted during a series of defeats.

But the defeats increased in frequency and gravity until, in the crisis that followed the Allied blows along the Western Front on September 26th-29th, the two military leaders were seized by an acute fear that their front might completely break at any hour. Ludendorff would hardly wait for the appointment of Prince Max of Baden, who at that moment was replacing Count von Hertling as Chancellor, and who—in view of the previous attitude of the High Commanders—found it hard to believe that the risk of catastrophe was so immediate as they now insisted. However, as they demanded, he sent the request to President Wilson because he feared that if he delayed longer they would send it themselves and so betray to the world their opinion that the position of their army was hopeless.

A few days later Ludendorff's anxiety about the front had diminished, and as the politicians had by then taken the responsibility of asking for an armistice, the military leaders became less definite about the urgency. Ludendorff undoubtedly wanted an armistice that would give his forces a chance to recover their breath, and he hoped that if the Allies' terms for it were too severe the German Army and people might be ready to make a last desperate resistance. In that case, he believed, dissension might arise among the Allies, sections of opinion in France, England and America becoming discontented at the "needless" prolongation of the war.

On October 28th, however, Austria, against which the Italians had at last launched their offensive, sued for a separate armistice; and in this crisis the German people turned against its leaders, whom it felt to be the last impediment to the longed-for peace. On October 26th the Kaiser, on Prince Max's demand, dismissed Ludendorff. On October 29th and 30th the crews of German

warships at Kiel, being ordered without their government's knowledge to put to sea to fight the British, mutinied. Two reliable divisions (the first being the 2nd Guard Division that had been surprised by the Australians at Mont St Quentin) were rushed to prevent the mutiny from spreading, but were too late to do so. The Austrian Armistice was signed on November 3rd. On November 5th arrived President Wilson's note saying that the Allies were willing to make peace with Germany on the basis (requested by Prince Max) of Wilson's Fourteen Points with two modifications, and that General Foch was empowered to arrange an armistice.

Since the breaking of the Hindenburg Line the Allied armies in France had continued to advance, defeating the Germans in several great offensives—though none as bloody as the preceding ones—and forcing back the enemy twenty to sixty miles across France and Belgium to Ghent, Mons, Mezières and Sedan. The Australian air squadrons were with the British to the end, as was much of the A.I.F.'s artillery (with the II American and, later, the IX British Corps) until the great battle of Le Cateau on November 4th. The Australian infantry divisions, after their rest, had begun again to move up to take over part of the British line beyond Le Cateau preparatory to the final thrusts when, on November 9th, British airmen, flying over French and Belgian towns, reported they could find no enemy to shoot at. The streets were thronged with people, German soldiers mingling among them.

A revolution, though almost bloodless, had happened in Germany. The Social Democrats had insisted that the Kaiser and Crown Prince must go; the workers in Berlin rose, and the troops would not fire on them. The Kaiser at his headquarters wavered; but Prince Max, receiving a message that Wilhelm II intended to abdicate, authorised an announcement that he had done so. Max himself handed over the Chancellorship to the Social Democrat

leader Ebert, who became President of the German Republic. Ebert, as his first action, had to hasten to Foch with Germany's acceptance of the Armistice terms. These, involving a retirement of German forces ten miles beyond the Rhine, the surrender of the fleet, and the practical disarmament of the Army and air force,¹ made it impossible for Germany to fight again in that war.

At 11 a.m. on 11th November 1918 all operations ceased on the Western Front. For the troops there the change went too deep for outward rejoicing; on the surface, life continued as usual except for the cessation of actual fighting. But in the back areas, as in London and Paris, the people and servicemen burst into demonstrations increasing in exuberance with the distance from the front. In Australia a false report from America set fire to public enthusiasm four days earlier, but that did not damp the genuine outburst of public relief when the true news arrived on November 12th; as in England, people flooded into the streets; flags broke out, bonfires blazed, bells rang, bands played, and for that day serious work was at an end.

The commanders of the A.I.F. were now suddenly faced by a problem in some ways opposite to that of the four previous years. It was certain that more than a year would pass before the last of the A.I.F. could be transported home. The Australian force had a reputation for admirable discipline in operations but for being less easy to handle when it had less to do. In place of the motive that had sustained it throughout the war—to make and keep itself fit to fight—there must be instilled a new motive to animate it during that trying year. The chief of its staff, Lieut.-General Brudenell White, had foreseen this, and besides initiating in 1917 the first investigations into demobilisation (with which the British War Office was

¹ The negotiations and terms are described in *Vol. VI, pp. 1045-7, 1049-52*. On November 10th the Kaiser, and on the 12th the Crown Prince, motored to Holland and were separately interned there.

then already concerning itself) he advised General Birdwood early in 1918 to authorise a scheme of army education. He was informed that the Canadians had already established such a scheme and he foresaw that it would expand into an activity of extreme benefit for the troops after the Armistice.

The task of devising and organising this scheme was given to an outstanding Australian, George Merrick Long, Bishop of Bathurst, who happened to arrive in France in May. As brigadier-general, with White's support and later Monash's, by Herculean labour, despite the concentration of commanders and troops on winning the war, Long succeeded in having a great part of his staff ready and his scheme authorised by the time of the Armistice. With the assistance of Mr Hughes and of British and other authorities it was extended (in a scheme of "Non-Military Employment"—more commonly known among the troops as "Non-Military Enjoyment") to the training of soldiers in industries, universities and technical colleges in Great Britain and even in America and France. A representative committee from the Australian universities under Professor E. R. Holme greatly helped. In England 12,800 Australian soldiers and nurses went through courses apart from lectures and classes at the depots. In France some 47,000 enrolled, but probably 10,000 was the greatest number attending classes at any one time. Though the education scheme, with both classes and instructors constantly due for demobilisation, achieved much less than had been hoped, it turned the thoughts of the A.I.F. to reconstruction; gave—even to those who did not take part—a sense of being cared for, and enormously helped the A.I.F. in a most difficult period.

The end of the war found Australian soldiers in almost every theatre of operations; besides 92,000 in France and 60,000 in England there were 17,000 in Egypt, Palestine and Syria; in Mesopotamia, Persia and Kurdis-

tan were the wireless squadrons and the Australians in the "Dunsterforce"; in Salonica Australian nurses staffed four British hospitals, and in India, ten. The task of repatriating the A.I.F. from Europe was entrusted by Mr Hughes to General Monash, who worked with a picked staff brought over from France. He at once grasped that, whereas in the operations of an army at war the immediate objective must be kept secret, in those of an army at peace it was of the utmost importance to see that each soldier, if possible, understood the plans and realised the care that was being taken for his rehabilitation and for building the nation's future. Birdwood, White and Long also had realised that the troops would inevitably look to their education officers to explain the government's plans for rehabilitation and to advise them as to their training. This important part of the scheme, however, was almost wrecked by the delay of the Australian government in sending particulars of its proposals. Though Birdwood frequently asked for these from November 1917 onwards, it was not until a year later—on the day of the Armistice—that, after very strong cables from Birdwood and the Official War Correspondent, the information arrived.

The demobilisation scheme was similarly hampered by the government's delay in deciding on the order of priority; pride in the A.I.F. led the government to favour the return of the men by regiments. Monash knew, however, that the troops, passionately longing for their return, clung to the principle of "first come, first go". The presence of Mr Hughes in London was of the utmost value to Monash at this time; the Prime Minister finally himself took the responsibility of provisionally agreeing to this principle.

Upon it, therefore, the scheme was based, and it was carried through without the disciplinary trouble that occurred even in the British Army. The longest-enlisted men had already just arrived in Australia on "Anzac

Leave", and the first step was to grant similar leave to the next batch. Monash next ordered each division to classify its men in order of their length of service, in "quotas" of 1000 each—that being a normal trainload, a normal shipload, and also a number readily organised as a battalion. Each "quota" was to have, if possible, its brass band, its education staff, and organised provision for recreation. They were brought successively to the camps on Salisbury Plain. Through the energy of Mr Hughes and of the transport staff, ships were allotted by the British Shipping Control much more quickly than had been expected; and as each ship became available a quota was called on to fill it. The 40,000 convalescents went separately, under medical control and arrangements.

Partly because of the urgent desire of the Australian government and of the A.I.F. itself to get on with repatriation, partly, it has been said, because the British Command preferred to have more docile troops in the army of occupation,² the Australian divisions in France had not been sent to occupy the Rhineland—only an air squadron and a casualty clearing station represented the A.I.F. there. The divisions remained, under command of Lieut.-General Hobbs, mainly among the friendly Belgian towns between Dinant on the Meuse and Charleroi.

There the force spent six months, quickly shrinking. In March 1919 the 1st and 4th Divisions were combined, and the 2nd and 5th. In May the last 10,000 were brought from France to England, where 70,000 were now on Salisbury Plain. In the Middle East the Light Horse recovered in Tripoli and Philistia from the worst of their epidemics. The 7th Light Horse Regiment and Canterbury Mounted Rifles were for a short time sent with other troops to occupy Gallipoli Peninsula. Part of the Light Horse was delayed in Egypt during March and April to

² This may possibly be true, but the official historian could find no recorded evidence of it, and some to the contrary (*see Vol. VI, p. 1072n*).

protect life and property against a revolt by the natives.³ Without a complaint the regiments abandoned their prospect of immediate home-coming and, after a few brushes, completely restored the country's quiet. In the summer they were embarked. Of the 155,000 Australian troops based on England, by the end of September only 10,000 were left. Over 15,000 soldiers' wives, fiancées and children were embarked without delay, mostly in "family ships" equipped with conveniences from playgrounds to baby powder.

The severest test to the discipline of the A.I.F. during demobilisation occurred when some of the troops on arriving transports found themselves quarantined almost within sight of their homes because of the discovery of, perhaps, one case of suspicious sickening for pneumonic influenza among 1000 men. But in only one such instance was there serious trouble—in most others the good sense of the men and the efforts of ships' captains and officers and quarantine authorities in organising recreation enabled this tedious delay to be borne with good humour; and as Australia was (to quote a report of the British Ministry of Health) "the only country which escaped, for at least some months, the terrifying type of influenza which, from October to November 1918, raged elsewhere", the soldiers' tolerance of this last trial was possibly of very great value to their nation.⁴

³ For the affair at Surafend, where Anzacs and some British troops, incensed by murders by the Arabs, destroyed a village and killed many of its men, see *Vol VII*, p. 787-790.

⁴ See *Australian Official Medical History*, by Col. A. G. Butler, *Vol. III*, pp. 782-5.