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"COURAGE, DASH, AND VICTORY IS FIRST DIVISION'S RECORD"

Story of American Regulars Who Led the Way to France and Whose Casualties of All Kinds Reached 23,974 including 715 officers.

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There is no Division of the American Expeditionary Forces that has failed to display in the face of the enemy the qualities of courage, discipline and efficiency which are acknowledged attributes of the American Army. It is natural and commendable that war-correspondents and local newspapers should loudly proclaim the achievements of the military organizations identified with and formed in their own communities. It would be an injustice to the rank and file of our citizen soldiery if their own sections failed to display pride especially in the combat divisions. Thus, New England honors the 25th Division, New York the 27th and 77th, Pennsylvania the 28th, Michigan and Wisconsin the 32nd, Kansas and Missouri the 35th, Ohio the 37th, and the Pacific States the 91st, to mention those of greatest losses.

It should be borne in mind, however, that certain organizations are entitled to general recognition for their soldierly merits as they present to the world by the men of their ranks a thoroughly homogeneous army, gathered from all sections and all races of our composite nation. These troops of the so called Regular Army, whose ranks are filled almost to a man by volunteers for service only in the great war. It is not generally known that the war casualties of these organizations - battle and disease - have depleted their ranks from 25 to 100 percent of their original personnel. These vast gaps have been filled by draft from the replacement divisions of selected men thus making the Regulars truly national organizations.

That the public may appreciate the fibre and metal of these representative troops formed by such a national consolidation it appears desirable and of timely interest that the achievements of a typical Regular Division should be briefly if somewhat inadequately described. For this purpose the First Division is selected, not that its bravery is superior, its discipline better or its morale higher than marked the others, but, because it was the first division to reach France, first to serve in trench warfare, first to fire a hostile shell, first to lose a man, first to capture a prisoner, first to repel a German raid, first to man any independent sector, and first to recapture a town (Cantigny) and hold it against all counter-attacks.

THE OFFICERS IN COMMAND.

Sailing from Hoboken in June, 1917, the First Division reached St. Nazaire, at the mouth of the Loire, on the 24th of that month. The Division 27,000 strong, was trained by General W. L. Sibert of Alabama, but went into actual war service under General Robert Lee Bullard, also of Alabama, with Colonel Campbell King, of Georgia, as Chief of Staff. The First Brigade, 16th and 18th Infantries, was commanded by General John L. Hines, of West Virginia, and the Second Brigade, 26th and 28th Infantries, by General Beaumont B. Buck, of Texas, the Artillery Brigade, the 5th, 6th and 7th Regiments of Field Artillery, was finally put under Colonel W. A. Holbrook, of Wisconsin. In addition there were the 1st Regiment of Engineers, the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Machine Gun Battalions, a Headquarters Troop of Cavalry, a Field Signal Battalion, and Medical units.

Unskilled in methods of modern warfare and unprovided with Field Artillery, the Division was scattered in suitable camps where they were intensively instructed by experienced officers from the French Army. That such training involved physical hardships, uncomplainingly endured, is evident from Major Palmer's statement that some of the men in want of new shoes drilled with their feet wrapped in sackings. The Field Artillery had to unlearn their own drill and acquire expert skill with the novel but remarkable French gun, the famous "Soixante-Quinze" 75 mm. A French officer commented on the high intelligence and extraordinary aptitude of his artillery pupils.

Three months later, with coming winter and almost continuous rains, the Division was inducted into trench warfare, serving under French command, a short distance southeast of Nancy. The usual horrors of trench life were experienced though their vitality and methods prevented any material increase in the sick. Here the first hostile shell was fired by Battery "C", 6th Field Artillery, on October 23, 1917. The Germans, on November 3rd, by a barrage cut off the advanced outposts, and captured 11 prisoners. The command rallying, repelled the enemy. Trench service rendered by battalion detail for ten days each, was marked with 56 casualties - 3 killed, 43 wounded, and 11 captured. One German prisoner was taken. The casualties herein given include killed, wounded, gassed, missing and prisoners but not by disease, accident, etc.

The trench apprenticeship was followed by independent service January 15 to April 3, 1918, about 12 miles northwest of Toul, in a sector near St. Mihiel. Here the First Division relieved the famous Moroccan Division, cooperating with the 69th French. The Toul service entailed constant losses with small chance of reprisal. The front was dominated by the St. Mihiel hills of which Mont Sec was the key, strongly held by German batteries within easy range. Major Palmer personally described the situation; "It was like sitting at the foot of a stairs and having the fellow at the top throw rocks at you from behind a curtain". Occasional incursions into No Man's Land whereby 11 prisoners were captured with machine guns and flame throwers. In this quiet sector the First Division had 352 casualties - 56 killed, 150 wounded, 127 gassed and 19 missing.

HASTILY SHIFTED TO PICARDY.

The vast and dangerous offensive launched by the Germans on March 21, 1918, called the Division into extremely active service. On March 28th General Pershing offered the American force in its entirety to General Foch and a week later the First made its great journey half across France to Picardy. It was a test of administrative ability met successfully by Pershing's quartermasters to move with its essential accompanying paraphernalia 27,000 men, 1700 animals, and 1000 wagons. Turning over its sector to the 26th New England Division, the First made this transfer of more than 300 miles and was in Picardy near Beauvais on April 13th. How it was done no one knows for the railroads were swamped with ammunition, reinforcements, supplies, etc. for three million men, while the roads - in awful condition - were jammed with ambulances, motors, fugitives and troops. Though it was near confusion, confounded between withdrawals before the enemy, evacuation of the occupied provinces, and transfers of troops to meet exigencies, the First got there both fit and equipped to fight.

Kept for a time in reserve, the First occupied the Cantigny front - April 25th to July 7th - three miles west of Montdidier, then strongly held by the enemy. The operations of the Division in this sector are popularly supposed to have been confined as far as fighting went to the capture of Cantigny which was a mere episode involving only one-fifth of the casualties here suffered.

The First was put in line opposite the very apex of the most German salient, with orders to hold it at all costs. If the front gave way Amiens, a few miles to the northwest, would fall and its railway system would be destroyed. The fatal effect would be the diversion to southern France of all the supplies needful for the British Army, which was then receiving from the Channel Ports everything needful for all forces north of the Somme.

Constant fighting, though on a small scale, continued almost daily until early June. The front had to be kept against preponderating and victorious enemies, who, hold both banks of the Avre, were within easy cannon shot of Amiens. The First not only gave no ground in the repeated attacks of the enemy, but it made them pay toll, capturing from its columns sixty prisoners and three machine guns. It paid dear, however, as its casualties - omitting those in the capture of Cantigny - numbered 140 officers and 4,183 men; killed 199; wounded 1,621; gassed 1,999; missing 49. The few missing show that the men fought to the last.

HOW CANTIGNY WAS TAKEN

The division commander viewed with dissatisfaction the occupation by the enemy of the village of Cantigny. Admirably organized and strongly fortified by the Germans, its high ground dominated both the American front and also sections in the rear. Whenever another advance was made, and it was daily expected, Cantigny was an excellent jumping-off place for a great assault. If it could be captured and held its value for a counteroffensive was strikingly evident. Preparations for its capture were systematically made.

At daybreak on May 28th the division artillery opened a terrific bombardment which drove the enemy to their shelters. At 6:30 A. M. the troops went over the top as the artillery fire pulled back to an initial barrage a hundred yards ahead of the moving line. Colonel Ely, with the 28th Infantry, and Lieut. Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., with a battalion of the 26th Infantry, moved forward with clock-work regularity, fifty-five yards a minute. Each man had food enough for two days, ample water, much ammunition, and intrenching tools. The town was taken within an hour, when began immediately the consolidation so essential, as counterattacks were certain. The engineer detachment wired under fierce fire the trenches occupied, while the men of the Signal Corps spread their cobweb lines to insure telephonic communication with the rear.

To take Cantigny was easy compared with holding it. Six counterattacks were made by the exasperated Germans without success. Fierce artillery fire soon reduced Cantigny to a mass of formless ruins, but the Americans held fast, repelling the enemy who ceased their efforts after losing over 1,300 men killed and wounded, besides 225 prisoners. The casualties of the First numbered 1,067; killed 199; wounded 652; gassed 200; missing 16. Heroically fighting after being wounded, Lieut. Colonel Maxey, Lieutenant Drum, and Corporal Finnegan were killed.

IMPORTANCE OF CANTIGNY CAPTURE

A small affair, seemingly, Cantigny's capture was a matter of great and international importance. There could not have been a more timely victory, for on that very morning the last German success was attained. Going over the top of the Chemin des Dames, their shock troops drove the allied forces down the Marne to Chateau-Thierry, and thus placed Paris in imminent danger

of capture. At this critical and disheartening period it fell to the lot of the First Division of the American Expeditionary Forces to prove to the anxious allied nations that a counter-offensive was possible, and that victory was yet to be gained for the free men of the world.

For a few days a part of the First Division turned from scenes of war to parade in Paris on July 14.

Three days later urgent orders put the First Division on the march. For four days and nights it went on without any regular rest, now on trucks, now hiking. Of the men's physical condition near the end one of its officers writes -- "The dismounted men would fall asleep in the gutter at every halt. The mounted men dozed in their saddles, and the animals could scarcely drag one foot after another. When a chance for food came most men hit the hay, though too tired to sleep." The afternoon found them ten miles in rear of the battle line, which they were ordered to occupy, so as to go over the top at daybreak.

Foch had perfected his plans for a counteroffensive. The march to their assigned positions had to be secretly made over unknown roads, through fields and forest, without a gleam of light, lest the enemy note the movement. To add to the troubles a thunderstorm soaked their clothing and made the shell-ruined roads veritable quagmires. In utter darkness thousands of men, hundreds of horses and of motor trucks, jammed the road in the most inextricable masses. It was feared that some units could not reach the line in time to go over the top, fixed at 4:35 A. M. One unit barely reached the front at 4:30 and went over almost exhausted.

IN FOCH'S GREAT OFFENSIVE.

It was known that the fighting would be desperate, as it involved attacks on fortified heights held by an enemy flushed with victory and confident of continued success. Hundreds of camouflaged nests of machine guns, heavy batteries in positions of natural strength, caused the enemy to believe their terrain impregnable. It rested on the courage and persistence of the American soldier to prove this a fallacy.

The division entered the counteroffensive under its new commander, General Charles P. Summerall of Florida, distinguished as one of the captors of Peking in 1900. It was sandwiched between the 153rd French on the left, and the veteran Moroccan division on its right with the Foreign Legion.

At 4:35 A. M. the First went over the top in extended order of five paces interval. The artillery, hitherto silent, started a rolling **barrage** which, systematically lifted a hundred yards a minute, drove the enemy to their shelters. Advancing as planned, and leaving small parties from time to time to clean up the snipers and machine guns, the main body attained its first objective and halted twenty minutes as allotted. Night found them at the third objective, about three miles advance, having smashed through the wire barricades and fortifications constructed the previous six weeks. Scarcely a thousand casualties, and more than that number of prisoners with many guns, were the record of the day. The 6th German and 11th and 42nd Bavarian Divisions were that night reinforced by the 34th and 28th Divisions, presaging warm work for the morrow.

On July 20th still another German Division, the 46th, confronted the First. As it had outrun the 153rd French in advance,

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the First Division was asked to take the village of Berzy-le-Sec, which had been assigned as a French objective. This village was a fortified place, which dominated the Soissons-Oulchy-le-Chateau Railway, and its capture meant the loss to the Germans of the entire salient. It involved desperate work, and that day failed. The fighting was intense, often at close quarters, when grenades, bayonets, knives, and even clubbed rifles were used. To and fro swayed the struggling masses, with slight and dearly gained advances by our men. The American casualties had now run up to 3,000, about the number of prisoners captured by them. With nightfall Berzy was still uncaptured, and the Moroccan Division was relieved, which was also the orders of the First, Sumnerall, however, told the corps commander that he had promised his men that they should go on and was unwilling to leave victory half gained.

VICTORY ON SOISSONS HIGHWAY

The losses of the 2nd Brigade had been enormous among its officers, as nearly all had been killed or wounded. However, on the morning of the 21st, General Buck paraded his exhausted and decimated command, and, walking down its front under heavy fire, led them in assault. They swept into Berzy-le-Sec, capturing its men, batteries, and machine guns, and winning the most important objective. Meantime the 1st Brigade had overrun the Soissons - Chateau-Thierry highway, leaving no hope to the demoralized enemy. Victory then and for the future was assured.

The perfidy and the contemptible methods of the Germans appear from a report by an officer of the Division. The moans of a wounded German attracted the attention of an officer in the advance, and in response to his pitiful appeals first-aid treatment was given. The officer went on to join his command, and a few hundred yards further a companion officer called out that he had been shot from the rear. It developed that the German, refreshed by first-aid treatment had crawled up to the shell hole and, resting his machine gun on the edge opened fire on our troops. Just punishment of the treacherous soldier was rendered needless. A German shell exploded and killed him.

One prisoner was brought in with his high leather boots full of grenades and his right arm adorned with a Red Cross badge.

The captured included 125 officers, 3,375 men; 75 guns, 77mm. and 150mm; 50 mortars; 300 machine guns; 2,500 rifles, with much ammunition and supplies. The price paid was the heaviest to date of any division, 7,840 in all; killed 1,252; wounded 4,771; gassed 274; and missing 1,543. One officer to every sixteen men was killed - an extraordinary proportion.

Many officers and men were cited by Division orders, and to others Distinguished Service Crosses were issued by order of President Wilson.

This victory of the First against six German divisions was naturally followed by recognition. Buck and Hines became Major Generals, and Holbrook a Brigadier. The Chief of Staff, Campbell King, was made Brigadier and succeeded by Colonel John R. Greely, General staff, who, cited "for distinguished ability while performing duties of grave responsibility", served in that position until the armistice was signed.

Quiet service for assimilation of about 8,000 replacements was had in the Saizerais sector during August, the casualties numbering only twenty-one. The St. Mihiel operation, Sept. 12 - 15 was not entirely the picnic that has been sometimes assumed. Familiar with this terrain from their earliest service, the First Division had an important share in the capture of the salient. Against resistance they advanced eight miles in nineteen hours, and their reconnoitering party twelve miles. Their casualties were 11 officers and 761 men. They captured 5 officers, 1,190 men, 30 77mm and 150mm guns, and much war material.

Moved up by easy stages the First Division took station at Cheppy, awaiting its fiercest fighting between the Argonne Forest and the Meuse River. A serious emergency arose, and its orders came. Entering this sector, it fought continually from Oct. 1 to Oct. 12, under conditions of undescrivable difficulties, over a terrain capable of easy defence and against the best German divisions, who knew that defeat meant the absolute loss of the war. The situation is best set forth by General Pershing in General Order 201, the only order devoted during the war to a single command. It begins:

"The Commander in Chief desires to make of record****his extreme satisfaction with the conduct of the officers and soldiers of the First Division in its advance west of the Meuse between Oct. 4 and 11, 1919."

The First Division paid a fearful price for its Argonne victory, the casualties numbering 8,554, of whom 117 were officers. Killed 851; wounded severely 2,664; wounded slightly 1,710; gassed 1,614; missing (mostly dead it is thought) 1,715, one of every three!

Ordinarily this would have been the end of a division for months, but the First answered promptly for an emergency in the operations against Mouzon and Sedan, (Nov. 3 - 8) where it sustained losses of 1,087, and captured fifty-four men, guns, etc.

Summarized, its war casualties, killed, wounded, gassed, and missing, aggregated 23,974, of whom 715 were officers. Its losses by disease are unknown, but the total replacements slightly exceed 30,000.

The Armistice signed, the First Division left Abincourt, near Verdun, six days later, and by a march of more than 200 miles occupied the Coblenz bridgehead on December 14. It was the first American force to cross the Rhine.