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Author: H. G. Proctor

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE IRON DIVISION, NATIONAL GUARD OF PENNSYLVANIA, IN THE WORLD WAR ***

HEADQUARTERS 28TH DIVISION
AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCES
FRANCE

27th October 1918.

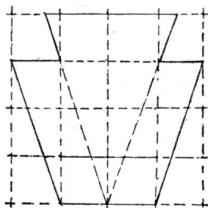
MEMORANDUM - RED KEYSTONES

A RED KEYSTONE has been designated as the distinctive insignia of this Division.

Keystones are to be worn on all coats and overcoats, including the trench and short coats worn by officers, and the Mackinaws issued to Engineers motorcycle drivers, etc., but not on the slicker.

A standard size of Keystones of selected color and quality of cloth has been adopted and contracted for by the Quartermaster's Department. These will be issued at the rate of two per man and no others will be worn. They are to be sewed on the left sleeve with red thread, the top to be on the line of the seam.

The proportions of a Keystone are shown below:



By command of Major General Hay:

W.C. Sweeney,
Chief of Staff.

THE IRON DIVISION
NATIONAL GUARD OF PENNSYLVANIA
IN THE WORLD WAR

THE AUTHENTIC AND COMPREHENSIVE
NARRATIVE OF THE GALLANT DEEDS AND
GLORIOUS ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE 28TH
DIVISION IN THE WORLD'S GREATEST WAR

BY

H. G. PROCTOR



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THE EVENING BULLETIN

TO THE
MOTHERS OF PENNSYLVANIA,
AND ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO MOURN FOR
LADS WHO LIE IN THE SOIL
OF FRANCE,
THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

FOREWORD

If love, admiration and respect, with a sense of personal gratification at seeing the hopes and predictions of years fulfilled, may be pleaded as justification for a self-appointed chronicler, then this book needs no excuse. It is offered with a serene confidence that it does justice, and nothing more than simple justice, to as fine and gallant a body of soldiers as ever represented this great commonwealth in action.

There must be, for the loved ones of these modern crusaders, as well as for the thousands of former members of the National Guard, who, like the writer, whole-heartedly envied the opportunities for glorious service that came to their successors in the organization, a sense of deep and abiding pride in the priceless record of achievement. To all such, and to those others to whom American valor is always a readable subject, whatever the locale, the narrative is presented as not unworthy of its cause.

H. G. P.

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CHAPTER I

MEN OF IRON

"You are not soldiers! You are men of iron!"

Such was the tribute of an idolized general to the men of the Twenty-eighth Division, United States Army, after the division had won its spurs in a glorious, breath-taking fashion at the second battle of the Marne in July and August, 1918.

The grizzled officer, his shrewd, keen eyes softened to genuine admiration for the deeds of the gallant men and with real sorrow for the fallen, uttered his simple praise to a little group of officers at a certain headquarters.

It was too good to keep. It was repeated with a glow of pride to junior officers and swept through all ranks of the entire division in an incredibly short time. The gratified and delighted soldiery, already feeling the satisfaction of knowing their task had been well done, seized upon the words and became, to themselves and all who knew them, the "Iron Division."

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The words of praise have been attributed to General Pershing. Whether they actually emanated from him has not been clearly established. That they did come from a source high enough to make them authoritative there is no shadow of doubt.

Furthermore, to make the approval wholly official and of record, there has come to the division from General Pershing a citation entitling every officer and enlisted man to wear on his left sleeve, just under the shoulder seam, a scarlet keystone, an unique distinction in the American Army. The citation called the Twenty-eighth a "Famous Red Fighting Division," but even this formal designation has not supplanted, in the minds of the soldiers, the name of "The Iron Division," which they regard as their especial pride.

And, to make the record complete, scores of the officers and men throughout the division have been cited for gallantry and awarded the Distinguished Service Cross by General Pershing, while others have won the French decoration, the Croix de Guerre.

So it is that the former National Guard of Pennsylvania has carried on the fame and glory which were the heritage of its fathers from the Civil War and from every other war in the history of the nation. At the cost of many precious young lives and infinite suffering, it is true, but that is war, whose recompense is that the victory was America's and that our men magnificently upheld all the traditions of their land.

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Regiments and smaller units of the division which did not get into the line in time for that first swift battle looked with envy upon their comrades who did and pridefully appropriated the division's new-found honors, announcing themselves "members of the Iron Division." And when their own time came, they lived well up to the title and reputation.

Held up to scorn and contempt for years as "tin soldiers," made the plaything of the pettiest politics, hampered and hindered at every emergency and then thrown in a sector where it was believed they would have a chance to become fire-hardened without too great responsibility falling to their lot, they met the brunt of the last German advance from the Marne, held it and sent the enemy back, reeling, broken and defeated, saved Paris and won the grateful and admiring praise of their veteran French comrades in arms.

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Throughout all the years of upbuilding in full belief that the time would come when they would have a chance to vindicate their faith in the National Guard system, a devoted group of officers and enlisted men remained faithful and unshaken. The personnel fell and rose, fell and rose. Men constantly dropped out of the service as their enlistments expired and the burden of recruiting and training new men was always to be met. It was discouraging work, but carried forward steadily and unflinchingly.

Persons who visited the National Guard of Pennsylvania in its training camps, especially the last one in this country, Camp Hancock, at Augusta, Ga., were impressed with the quiet confidence with which the older officers and enlisted men viewed their handiwork. Many of the newer men in the service, catching the spirit of confidence, voiced it in boyish boastfulness.

"These men are ripe and ready," said the older, more thoughtful ones. "They will give a good account of themselves when the time arrives. They are trained to the minute, and Pennsylvania never will have need to be ashamed of them."

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"Just wait until this little old division gets to France," bragged the younger ones. "The Hun won't have a chance. We'll show 'em something they don't know. Go get 'em; that's us."

And today, Pennsylvania, mourning, grief-stricken, but aglow with pride and love for that gallant force, agrees with both.

It is an odd coincidence that the Twenty-eighth Division of the German army should have been one of the most frequently mentioned organizations of the Kaiser's forces during the war and that

it, too, should have acquired, by its exploits, a title all its own. It was known as "the Flying Shock Division," and on frequent occasions it was disclosed, through the capture of prisoners, that the two Twenty-eighth Divisions were opposing each other—a fact eloquent in itself of the esteem in which the enemy held our Pennsylvania lads as foemen, for the "Flying Shock Division" was shunted from one end of the Western Front to the other, wherever a desperate situation for the Germans called for desperate fighting.

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In the heroic stand of the Pennsylvania Guardsmen may be traced one more instance of the truth of the adage that "history repeats itself." On the field of Gettysburg a handsome monument marks the crest of Pickett's charge, the farthest point to which Confederate fighting men penetrated in their efforts to break through the Union lines. Here they were met and stopped by Pennsylvania troops (the Philadelphia Brigade). Had they not been stopped, military authorities have agreed, the battle of Gettysburg almost certainly would have been lost to the Union. The whole course of the war probably would have been changed and the Confederacy would have been within sight of ultimate victory.

But they were met and stopped by the Pennsylvania troops. From that time the cause of the Confederacy was a losing one, and for that reason the monument is inscribed as marking "The High Water Mark of the Rebellion."

It is not inconceivable that, when the time comes to erect monuments on the battlefields of the Great War, one will stand at or near the tiny village of St. Agnan, in the Department of the Aisne, France, fixing the "high-water mark" of the German bid for world domination.

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Here it was, at this village and its vicinity, that Pennsylvania troops met and defeated the flower of the German army, halted the drive and sent the Huns staggering backward in what turned, within a few days, to wild flight. The Germans, in their first rush through Belgium and France in 1914, came closer than that to Paris, but with less chance of success. Then virtually everything was against them except the tremendous impetus of their forward movement. In July, 1918, everything favored them, and the entire world awaited with bated breath and agonized heart the news that Paris was invested.

When it seemed that nothing could prevent this crowning blow to our beloved Ally, the advancing Germans struck a portion of the line held by Pennsylvania's erstwhile despised National Guardsmen. Instead of news that Paris lay under the invader's heel came the gloriously thrilling tidings that the German was in retreat before our very own men, and that it was again Pennsylvania troops which had turned the tide.

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To get a proper perspective on the organizations comprising the Iron Division, it is necessary to go back a few years in the history of the National Guard, before the various reorganizations to which it was subjected. The division was a product of gradual growth since the Spanish-American War. After that brief conflict, the National Guard of Pennsylvania set out upon a new course of development almost as a new organization.

In 1916, it consisted of four infantry brigades of three regiments each; one regiment of artillery; one battalion of engineers; one battalion of signal troops; two field hospitals, three ambulance companies and one regiment of cavalry.

The call for service in the threatened war with Mexico, resulting in a tedious tour of duty at Camp Stewart, Texas, on the Mexican border, caused lively recruiting and the upbuilding of the units. This was nearly offset on the return home by the eagerness of officers and enlisted men, disgusted with the fruitless task assigned them on the border, to get out of the service. When America entered the war against Germany, however, recruiting again livened up, but in the meantime the tables of organization of the whole army had been so changed and the regiments so enlarged that it was necessary to send quotas of selected men to fill the ranks to the required strength.

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During the service on the Mexican border, a brigade of artillery had been formed and the number of infantry brigades was reduced to three. Also, a start was made on the work of expanding the engineer battalion into a regiment.

The division moved into camp at Augusta, Ga., from August 20 to September 15, 1917. The post was known as Camp Hancock. Here the drafts of selected men were received and the division was completely reorganized to conform to the new army standards. New designations also were awarded the units. It was necessary to reduce the number of infantry brigades to two, of two regiments each. The First Infantry Regiment, of Philadelphia; the Tenth, of Philippine fame, hailing from counties in the southwestern part of the state; the Sixteenth, centering in the oil country of the northwest, and the Eighteenth, of Pittsburgh, were chosen as base regiments, to retain their regimental organizations virtually intact.

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The Thirteenth Infantry Regiment, of Scranton and vicinity, was broken up and its officers and men turned into the First to bring the companies up to the required strength. In the same manner, the Third, of Philadelphia, was consolidated with the Tenth; the Eighth, from Harrisburg and vicinity, with the Sixteenth, and the Sixth, from Philadelphia and surrounding counties, with the Eighteenth.

The former First and Thirteenth became the 109th Infantry, in the new designations; the former Third and Tenth, the 110th; the former Sixth and Eighteenth, the 111th, and the former Eighth and Sixteenth, the 112th.

The former First Artillery, whose batteries were distributed through the state from Pittsburgh to Philadelphia, became the 107th Field Artillery; the historic old Second Infantry, transformed

into the Second Artillery during the border duty, whose home station is Philadelphia, became the 108th Field Artillery. The Third Artillery, which had been formed from the former Ninth Infantry, of Wilkes-Barre and the surrounding anthracite towns, became the 109th Field Artillery.

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The cavalry regiment disappeared. One troop, from Sunbury, remained cavalry, being attached to division headquarters as Headquarters Troop. The rest were scattered through different organizations. The 103d Trench Mortar Battery was formed almost entirely from among the cavalymen, largely members of the famous old First City Troop of Philadelphia.

The engineer regiment became the 103d Engineers, the signal troops the 103d Field Signal Battalion, and the field hospitals and ambulance companies became parts of the 103d Sanitary Train. In addition, there were formed the 103d Military Police, the 103d Ammunition Train, the 103d Supply Train, and the 107th, 108th and 109th Machine Gun battalions.

The 109th and 110th Infantry regiments were brigaded together under the designation of the 55th Infantry Brigade. The 111th and 112th regiments became the 56th Infantry Brigade and the three artillery regiments and the trench mortar battery became the 53d Artillery Brigade.

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There were other Pennsylvanians—many thousands of them—in the war, but no other organization so represented every locality and every stratum of society.



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FRANCE AT LAST! IRON DIVISION DEBARKING

After months of vexatious delays, the Pennsylvania Guardsmen acknowledged their welcome on French soil with expansive smiles which showed their pleasure at having come thus far on the Great Adventure.

And so the division went to France. The movement to a port of embarkation began in April, 1918, and the convoy carrying the eager soldiers arrived in a French port May 18th. The troops were separated by organizations, brigaded with British troops in training areas and entered upon the final phases of their instruction. The men were discouraged by their exceptionally long period of preparation. They felt within themselves that they were ready for the front line, and the evident hesitation of the military authorities to put them there was distressing. Many of them began to doubt that they would see actual fighting. They had longed and waited for so many months that it is no exaggeration, on the word of men who have returned, to say that their very dreams were colored with the keen desire to try their mettle on the enemy.

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According to the system worked out by the high command for bringing new troops up to front line caliber, they should then have gone into their own camp within sound of the guns, but behind the actual "zone of operations." There the division should have been reassembled and gotten to functioning properly and smoothly as a division, and then have been moved up by easy stages. It should have occupied one billet area after another, each closer to the lines, until it should actually have been under artillery fire behind the fighting line. Then, with its nerves tautened and having learned, possibly through some losses, how best to take care of and protect itself, it would at last have been sent into the front line, but even then not without some misgivings and it would have been carefully watched to see that it reacted properly to the new conditions.

In the progress of this customary routine, the work of assembling the division was begun a few miles northwest of Paris. Division headquarters was established at Gonesse, a little over ten miles from the heart of Paris. The infantry regiments and the engineers were scattered through a myriad of villages in the vicinity, billeted in houses, stables, buildings of any kind that could be turned to adequate shelters.

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Established thus, the organizations extended over a considerable stretch of territory. The 109th, for instance, was at Mitry and Mory, twin villages, but a short distance apart and usually referred to, for convenience, as one place, Mitry-Mory, eight miles by airline from division headquarters.

The 53rd Artillery Brigade still was hard at its training work miles away and the doughboys, surmising that they would not be withheld from action to wait for the guns, gave thanks that it was the old Second, and not one of their regiments, that had been turned into artillery. Men of the old Third, particularly, recalled that it had been generally expected, when there was talk of transforming an infantry regiment to artillery, that theirs would be the regiment to be chosen, and that the naming of the Second had come as something of a surprise.

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CHAPTER II

OFF FOR THE FRONT

The infantry regiments had been assembled during June and a long and a wearisome wait impended while other units moved into the divisional concentration. No leaves were granted to go to Paris, although the crown of the Eiffel Tower could be descried above the haze from the city by day and at night the searchlights, thrusting inquisitive fingers of light through the far reaches of the sky in search of prowling Hun airmen, seemed to point the way to joys to which all had long been strangers.

From the other direction came, when the wind was right, the dull rumbling, like distant thunder, which they had learned was the guns.

Longings were about evenly divided between the two directions. If they could not go up to the front, whither they had been headed for these many months, they would have liked to go to Paris. Failing of both the front and Paris, they would have liked to go "any old place away from here." Which is typical of the soldier, "here," wherever it may be, always being the least desirable place in the world.

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So the doughboys and engineers whiled away the long, warm days, drilling and hiking, doing much bayonet work, polishing and cleaning rifles and other equipment and variously putting in the time as best they could, and fretting all the time for a chance at real action. That may be said to have been one of the most trying periods of their long probation.

It may not be amiss to recall the general situation on the Western Front at this time. After a winter of boastful preparation, during which they advertised in every possible way that they expected to launch in the spring the greatest effort they had yet put forth to break through the Allied lines, the Germans, on March 21st, strengthened by hundreds of thousands of veteran soldiers released from Russia through the farcical Brest-Litovsk treaty, boiled forth from their lines on the fifty-mile front from Arras to La Fere.

This was an effort to force a break at the juncture of the French and British lines about St. Quentin. It did not succeed in this, but a great wedge was thrust out to become a grave menace to Amiens, an important British distribution center.

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Very shortly after this move was checked, the British army in Flanders was heavily attacked, on April 9th, in the region of Ypres, and thrown back so badly that Field Marshal Haig issued his famous appeal to the troops "fighting with their backs to the wall."

The British line finally held, and, French reinforcements arriving, began to react strongly in counter-attacks. Again the boiling western line simmered down, but on May 27th the German Crown Prince's army flung itself out from the Chemin des Dames, in Champagne, and by June 3d had reached the Marne at Château-Thierry. Here forces which made their way across the river were hotly attacked and driven back, and this drive came to a halt.

One week later, on June 10th, the fighting was renewed from Montdidier to Noyon in a thrust for Compiègne as a key to Paris. This was plainly an effort to widen the wedge whose apex was at Château-Thierry, but Foch had outguessed the Germans, knew where they would strike and held them. The attack was fairly well checked in two days.

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This was the situation, then, in those late June days, when our Pennsylvania soldiers pined for action within sight of Paris. The American army had been blooded in the various drives, but the Twenty-eighth Division had not yet had a taste of the Hun action. Marines, the First and Second divisions of the Regular army, engineers and medical troops, had had a gallant part in the defense of Paris, and even in defense of the channel ports, in the Flanders thrust.

Dormans, Torcy, Bouresches, Bois de Belleau, Cantigny, Jaulgonne, these and other localities had won place in the annals of American arms. Wherever they had come in contact with the enemy, without exception, the American troops had "made good," and won the high encomiums of their British and French comrades. Is it any wonder, then, that the Pennsylvanians chafed at the restraint which held them far away from where such great things were going forward?

It was at the critical juncture in March, the darkest hour of the Allied cause, that President Wilson, waiving any question of national pride, directed General Pershing to offer such troops as he had available to be brigaded with the French and English to meet the German assaults.

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The reason for this was simple. The American army had not yet been welded into a cohesive whole. Its staff work was deficient. It was merely a conglomeration of divisions, each possibly capable of operating as a division, but the whole utterly unable to operate as a whole. By putting a brigade of Americans in a French or British division, however, the forces of our co-belligerents could be strengthened to the full extent of the available American troops.

The American offer was promptly and gratefully accepted. Came the day, then, when our Pennsylvania men were ordered to move up to a sector below the Marne, there to be brigaded with a French army. The artillery brigade had not yet come into the divisional lines and few, even of the officers, had seen their comrades of the big guns since leaving Camp Hancock.

Of all this, of course, the men in the ranks knew nothing. To them came only the command to "fall in," which had always presaged the same weary routine of drill and hike. This time, however, when they found lines of motor trucks stretching along the road seemingly for miles, they knew there was "something doing" and word swept through the ranks that they were off for the front at last.

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When the truck trains got under way with their singing, laughing, highly cheerful loads of doughboys and engineers, it was not directly northward, toward Montdidier, nor northeast, toward Soissons, where the latest heavy fighting had been going on, that they moved, as the men had hoped, but eastward.

Through Meaux and La Ferte-sous-Jouarre they moved. At the latter place they came to the Petit Morin River and from there on the road followed the valley of the little river more or less closely. Through pretty little villages and, here and there, more pretentious towns they whirled, singing as the spirit moved them and waving cheery greetings to the townsfolk, who, apathetic at the sound of many motors, stirred to excitement when they realized the soldiers were "les Americaines."

After their period of inaction, the men enjoyed the ride immensely, even though a crowded motor truck careering at full tilt is not the most luxurious mode of travel, especially for those on the inside. It is, however, so much better than hiking that your soldier regards transportation thus almost as he would riding in a Pullman at home.

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When at last the column came to a halt, those in the vanguard learned the town at hand was Montmirail. Except that it was east of where they had been, this meant little. They had small idea of the number of miles they had traveled, but they knew from the looks of the country and from the attitude of the eagerly welcoming residents that they were not very close to the battle line.

Clustered all about the countryside for miles were countless villages. Part of the troops passed through Montmirail and went further east to Vauchamps. The trucks in the rear of the long column turned off at Verdelot. In the tiny hamlets centering about these three towns, the regiments were billeted.

Then ensued another period such as tries a soldier's patience to the uttermost—a time of waiting for something big to do and having all the time to carry on with what seem like trifling tasks.

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Here another feature of the advanced training was noted by the men. For weeks, now, they had been hearing the sound of the big guns at the front, but only as a low, growling rumble, so distant that, although it was ever present, after a day or so it became so much a part of the daily life that it was forced upon the attention only when the wind was from the northeast.

Here, however, it was louder and more menacing and by that token alone the men would have known they were closer to the front lines. Their surmises in this regard were strengthened by the added gravity of the officers and the frequency with which they were summoned to headquarters for consultation.

The Pennsylvania regiments were in a line some miles back of the front, which was held by French troops along the Marne. The distance between our men and the front lines then varied from ten to fourteen miles.

By the time the men had been in these billets three days, they were disgusted thoroughly with their failure to get farther. Hourly they grumbled among themselves at the delay, and told themselves it was "N. G. P. luck," to be held back so far at such a time.

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However, there came a break in the monotony for the 109th. The men of the various regiments had been arranging for a mild sort of celebration of the Fourth of July, with extra "eats," concerts, sports and other events. The 109th had gone to sleep the night of Wednesday, July 3d, to dream of the "doings" of the morrow, which loomed large in view of the deadly routine they had been following so long.

They were not to sleep long, however. Shortly after midnight they were routed out and the companies were formed. "Something was up," though the men in the ranks knew not what. Officers knew that an emergency had arisen to the north and that they were under orders to hasten there with all speed, presumably for their first action.

The lads stumbled from their billets, many of them no more than half awake, doubting, confused, excited, demanding to know, being told wild rumors by their fellows, the most credible of which was that the Germans had broken through in the north and that "the old Hundred and

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Ninth is goin' in to stop Fritz, an' we sure will do that li'l thing." Small wonder that there was more than a usual touch of asperity in the commands snapped out in the dark, or that the doughboys seemed able to handle themselves and their accoutrements less smoothly and smartly than usual. Off to the front at last, in the dead of night! What an experience for these Pennsylvania men!

That the emergency was real and that they were not merely the victims of another practice hike, soon became clear. Hardly was the column under way than the order "double-time" was given and off they went at the smart dog trot that takes the place of running for an army on the march. Only when men began to lag behind was the return to regular "quick-time" ordered. Officers and non-coms busied themselves with urging on would-be stragglers, keeping the ranks closed up and encouraging the men.

Hours passed thus. The thrumming of a motor was heard ahead and the column halted. A sidecar motorcycle appeared. Riding in the "tin bathtub" was a staff officer. He talked aside briefly with Colonel Millard D. Brown, of Philadelphia. His message was that the regiment would not be needed at that time and that it was to return to billets. [Pg 35]

A short rest was ordered. The men dropped almost where they stood, many not waiting to unslung their equipment. Not until daybreak was the order given for the return march. The men thought of the weary miles they had come in the cool of the night, glanced up at the scorching sun, remembered that lost Fourth celebration, and set off on the return march, slower and more wearisome than the northward journey, when every yard seemed a task to face.

It was not until the day was almost gone that the last company was safely back in billets. The Glorious Fourth—truly the strangest the men ever had spent—had come and gone. As they dropped into exhausted sleep that night, the last thought of many was of the familiar celebrations of the day at home and of what their loved ones had been doing.

When word had filtered through to the other regiments that the 109th was on its way to the front, the celebration of the Fourth had turned to ashes in their mouths and they very frankly were green with envy. When they heard the next day of the outcome of the move, they chuckled at the discomfiture of the 109th and regretted they had not put more "pep" into the events of the day before. [Pg 36]

Some days before this, several platoons of picked men from the division had been sent into a sector west of Château-Thierry for advanced training under fire with French forces. They were not expected to have a very hot time. The sector was extremely lively, but not just then flaming with activity, as were other places.

Two of these platoons, from the 111th Infantry, under command of Lieutenants Cedric H. Benz and John H. Shenkel, both of Pittsburgh, made an extraordinarily good impression on their French comrades. The sector continually grew hotter and hotter until the French, early in July, launched repeated attacks on the village of Vaux and on Hill 204, close by.

These two positions were particularly difficult, and the French went about their operations under the watchful eyes of the learning Americans with all the skill and craft that long campaigning had taught them. Finally, just about the time their own regiments back in billets to the east were growing stale from monotony, the Americans around Vaux were invited to occupy positions where they could observe closely the whole operation. The platoons from the 111th had made such a favorable impression on their French hosts that the commander of the latter made a proposal to them. [Pg 37]

"You will have every opportunity to observe the action," he said, "and that is all that is expected of you. If, however, you so desire, such of your numbers as care to may participate in the assault on Hill 204."

Participation in the attack was voluntary. Those who wanted to go were invited to step out of the ranks. The two platoons stepped forward as one man, went into the battle beside the French and under French command, laughing and singing, and covered themselves with glory. This was the first occasion in which units of the Pennsylvania Division had been in action, but as it was not under their own commanders it cannot properly be regarded as a part of the divisional activity. [Pg 38]

Word of this action seeped back to the regiments and created a profound impression. The doughboys talked about and envied their companions and pledged themselves, each in his own heart, to maintain that high standard of soldierly character when the moment arrived.

Meantime, the regiments had gone plugging ahead with their training work—rifle shooting, bayonet work, hikes and practice attacks succeeding each other in bewildering variety.

The work was interrupted July 5th by the arrival of messengers from brigade headquarters. The regiments were to move up in closer support of the French lines. Marshal Foch had shepherded the Germans into a position where their only possibility for further attack lay almost straight south from the tip of the Soissons-Rheims salient. The French forces there were expected to make the crossing of the Marne so hazardous and costly an enterprise that the Germans either would give it up almost at the outset, or would be so harassed that the push could gain little headway. In any event, the American support troops—including our own Pennsylvanians—were depended on to reinforce the line at any critical moment. And for that reason it was imperative that they be within easier striking distance. [Pg 39]

So, very early on the morning of July 6th, the bugles roused the men from their slumbers and word was passed by the sergeants to hurry the usual morning duties, as there was "something doing." No larger hint was needed. Dressing, washing, "police duty" and breakfast never were

dispensed with more rapidly, and in less than an hour after first call the regiments were ready to move.

The 110th, the 111th and the engineers moved off without incident, other than the keen interest aroused by the increasing clamor of the guns as they marched northward, to the new positions assigned them. Parts of their routes lay over some of the famous roads of France that had not suffered yet from the barbarous invaders, and made fairly easy going. At times they had to strike across country to gain a new and more available road.

A doughboy, pressing close to where a fine old tree leaned protectingly across the sun-baked road, reached up and pulled a leafy twig. He thrust it into the air hole in his hat, and laughingly remarked that "now he was camouflaged." His comrades paid no attention until he remarked later that it was a good thing to have, as it helped keep the flies away. Thereafter there were many grasping hands when trees or bushes were within reach, and before noon the men bore some semblance to the Italian Bersaglieri, who wear plumed hats.

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The going was not so smooth for the 109th, however. The farther the regiment moved along its northward road the louder and more emphatic became the cannonading. Both the officers and men realized they were getting very much closer to artillery fire than they had been. A spirit of tense, nervous eagerness pervaded the ranks. The goal of the long months of hard training, the achievement of all their dreams and desires, seemed just ahead.

They had passed the little village of Artonges, where the tiny Dhuys River, no more than a bush and tree-bordered run, swung over and joined their road to keep it company on the northward route. Pargny-la-Dhuys was almost in sight, when a shell—their first sight of one in action—exploded in a field a few hundred yards to one side.

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At almost the same time an officer came dashing down the road. He brought orders from brigade headquarters for the regiment to turn off the road and take cover in a woods. Pargny and the whole countryside about were being shelled vigorously by the Germans with a searching fire in an effort to locate French batteries.

The shelling continued with little cessation, while the 109th in vexation hid in the woods south of Pargny. The doughboys became convinced firmly that the Germans knew they were on the way to the front and deliberately were trying to prevent them, through sheer fear of their well-known prowess. For many a Pennsylvania soldier had been telling his comrades and everybody else for so long that "there won't be anything to it when this division gets into action," that he had the idea fixed in his mind that the Germans must be convinced of the same thing.

Three times the cannonade slackened and the heckled Pargny was left out of the zone of fire. Each time the 109th sallied forth from its green shelter and started ahead. Each time, just as it got well away and its spirits had begun to "perk up" again, the big guns began to roar at the town and they turned back.

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This continued until July 10th. When orders came that morning for the regiment to proceed northward, there was much gibing at Fritz and his spite against the regiment and little hope that the procedure would be anything more than another march up the road and back again.

Surprise was in store, however. This time the guns were pointed in other directions, and the regiment went over the hill, through what was left of Pargny after its several days of German "hate," and on up the road.

Just when spirits were soaring again at the prospect of marching right up to the fighting front, came another disappointment for the men. A short distance north of Pargny, the column turned into a field on the right of the road and made its way into a deep ravine bordering the northern side of the field. Ensued another period of grumbling and fault-finding among the men, who could not understand why they still saw nothing of the war at first hand.

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The discussion was at its height as the men made camp, when it was interrupted by a screeching roar overhead, followed almost instantaneously by a terrific crash in the field above their heads and to the south.

"Whang" came another shell of smaller caliber on the other side of the road, and then the frightful orchestra was again in full swing. Suddenly that little ravine seemed a rather desirable place to be, after all. Most of the men would have preferred to be in position to do some retaliatory work, rather than sit still and have those shells shrieking through the air in search of them, but the shelter of the hollow was much more to be desired than marching up the open road in the teeth of shell fire.

An air of pride sat on many of the men. "Old Fritz must know the 109th is somewhere around," they reasoned.

Three days passed thus, with the regiment "holed up" against the almost continuous bombardment. Little lulls would come in the fire and the men would snatch some sleep, only to be roused by a renewal of the racket, for they had not yet reached that stage of old hands at the front, where they sleep undisturbed through the most vigorous shelling, only to be roused by the unaccustomed silence when the big guns quit baying.

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Runners maintaining liaison with brigade headquarters and the other regiments were both better off and worse off, according to the point of view. Theirs was an exceedingly hazardous duty, with none of the relatively safe shelter of the regiment, but, too, it had that highly desirable spice of real danger and adventure that had been a potent influence in luring these men to France.

Liaison, in a military sense, is the maintaining of communications. It is essential at all times that organizations operating together should be in close touch. To do this men frequently do the seemingly impossible. Few duties in the ranks of an army are more alluring to adventurous youth, more fraught with risk, or require more personal courage, skill and resourcefulness.

At last, however, the tedious wait came to an end. Saturday night, July 13th, the usual hour for "taps," passed and the customary orders for the night had not been given. Toward midnight, when the men were at a fever heat of expectancy, having sensed "something doing" in the very air, the regiment was formed in light marching order. This meant no heavy packs, no extra clothes, nothing but fighting equipment and two days' rations. It certainly meant action.

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Straight northward through the night they marched. Up toward the Marne the sky was aglow with star shells, flares and shrapnel and high explosives. The next day, July 14th, would be Bastille Day, France's equivalent of our Independence Day, and the men of the 109th commented among themselves as they hiked toward the flaring uproar that it looked as if it would be "some celebration."

The head of the column reached a town, and a glimpse at a map showed that it was Conde-en-Brie, where the little Surmelin River joins the Dhuys. Colonel Brown and the headquarters company swung out of the column to establish regimental post command there. The rest of the regiment went on northward.

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A mile farther and a halt was called. There was a brief conference of battalion commanders in the gloom and then the first battalion swung off to the left, the third to the right and the second extended its lines over the territory immediately before it.

When all had arrived in position, the first battalion was on a line just south of the tiny hamlet of Monthurel, northwest of Conde. The second battalion was strung out north of Conde, and the third continued the line north of the hamlet of St. Agnan, northeast of Conde.

Then the regiment was called on to do—for the first time with any thought that it would be of real present value to them—that which they had learned to do, laboriously, grumblingly and with many a sore muscle and aching back, in camp after camp. They "dug in."

There was no sleep that night, even had the excited fancies of the men permitted. Up and down, up and down, went the sturdy young arms, and the dirt flew under the attack of intrenching picks and shovels. By daylight a long line of pits, with the earth taken out and heaped up on the side toward the enemy, scarred the fields. They were not pretentious, as trenches went in the war—scarcely to be dignified with the name of trenches—but the 109th heaved a sigh of relief and was glad of even that shelter as the Hun artillery renewed its strafing of the countryside.

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Runners from the 109th carried the news to brigade headquarters that the regiment was at last on the line. Thence the word seeped down through the ranks, and the men of the 110th and 111th and of the engineers got little inklings of the troubles their comrades of the old First and Thirteenth had experienced in reaching their position.

Roughly, then, the line of the four regiments extended from near Chezy, on the east, to the region of Vaux, beyond Château-Thierry, on the west. The 103d Engineers held the eastern end. Then came, in the order named, the 109th, 110th and 111th. The 112th was busy elsewhere, and had not joined the other regiment of its brigade, the 111th.

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CHAPTER III

THE LAST HUN DRIVE

Our Pennsylvania regiments now were operating directly with French troops, under French higher command, and in the line they were widely separated, with French regiments between.

The troops faced much open country, consisting chiefly of the well-tilled fields for which France is noted, with here and there a clump of trees or bushes, tiny streams, fences and an occasional farm building. Beyond these lay a dense woods, extending to the Marne, known variously in the different localities by the name of the nearest town. The Bois de Conde, near Monthurel, was the scene of some of the stiffest fighting that followed.

The real battle line lay right along the Valley of the Marne, a little more than two miles away, and the men of the Pennsylvania regiments were disappointed again to learn they were not actually holding the front line. That was entirely in the hands of the French in that sector, and French officers who came back to visit the American headquarters and to establish liaison with these support troops confidently predicted that the Boche never would get a foothold on the

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south bank of the river. The river, they said, was so lined with machine gun nests and barbed wire entanglements that nothing could pass.

That evening, Sunday, July 14th, runners brought messages from brigade headquarters to Colonel Brown, commanding the 109th, and Colonel George E. Kemp, of Philadelphia, commanding the 110th. There were little holes in the French line that it was necessary to plug, and the American support was called on to do the plugging.

Colonel Brown ordered Captain James B. Cousart, of Philadelphia, acting commander of the third battalion, to send two companies forward to the line, and Colonel Kemp, from his post command, despatched a similar message to Major Joseph H. Thompson, Beaver Falls, commanding his first battalion.

Captain Cousart led the expedition from the 109th himself, taking his own company, L, and Company M, commanded by Captain Edward P. Mackey, of Williamsport. Major Thompson sent Companies B, of New Brighton, and C, of Somerset, from the 110th, commanded respectively by Captains William Fish and William C. Truxal.

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Captain Cousart's little force was established in the line, Company M below Passy-sur-Marne, and Company L back of Courtemont-Varenes. The two companies of the 110th were back of Fossoy and Mezy, directly in the great bend of the river. The Dhuys River enters the Marne near that point and this river separated the positions of the 109th and 110th companies. Fossoy, the farthest west of these towns, is only four miles in an air line from Château-Thierry, and Passy is about four miles farther east.

The reason for this move was two-fold: Marshal Foch had manipulated his forces so that it was felt to be virtually certain the next outbreak of the Germans could be made only at one point, directly southwest from Château-Thierry. If the expected happened, the green Pennsylvania troops would receive their baptism of fire within the zone of the operation, but not in the direct line of the thrust. Thus, they would become seasoned to fire without bearing the responsibility of actually stopping a determined effort.

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The second reason was that the French had been making heavy concentrations around Château-Thierry, and their line to the east was too thin for comfort. Therefore, their units were drawn in somewhat at the flanks, to deepen the defense line, and the Pennsylvania companies were used to fill the gaps thus created.

French staff officers accompanied the four companies to the line and disposed them in the pockets left for them, in such a way that there were alternately along that part of the front a French regiment and then an American company. The disposition of the troops was completed well before midnight. The companies left behind had watched their fellows depart on this night adventure with longing, envious eyes, and little groups sat up late discussing the luck that fell to some soldiers and was withheld from others.

The men had had no sleep at all the night before and little during the day, but no one in those four companies, facing the Germans at last after so many weary months of preparation, thought of sleep, even had the artillery fire sweeping in waves along the front or the exigencies of their position permitted it.

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Eagerly the men tried to pierce the black cloak of night for a first glimpse of the Hun lines. Now and then, as a star shell hung its flare in the sky, they caught glimpses of the river, and sometimes the flash of a gun from the farther shore gave assurance that the Boche, too, was awake and watching.

About 11.30 o'clock, the night was shattered by a ripping roar from miles of French batteries in the rear, and the men lay in their trenches while the shells screamed overhead. It was by far the closest the Pennsylvania men had been to intensive artillery fire, and they thought it terrible, having yet to learn what artillery really could be.

Days afterward, they learned that prisoners had disclosed the intention of the Germans to attack that night and that the French fire was designed to break up enemy formations and harass and disconcert their artillery concentration.

The Germans, with typical Teutonic adherence to system, paid little attention to the French fire until the hour fixed for their bombardment. Midnight came and went, with the French cannon still bellowing. Wearied men on watch were relieved by comrades and dropped down to rest.

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At 12.30 o'clock, the German line belched forth the preliminary salvo of what the French afterward described as the most terrific bombardment of the war up to that time. The last German offensive had opened.

The gates to glory and to death swung wide for many a Pennsylvania lad that night.

That the French did not exaggerate in their characterization of the bombardment was shown in documents taken later on captured prisoners. Among these was a general order to the German troops assuring them of victory, telling them that this was the great "friedensturm," or peace offensive, which was to force the Allies to make peace, and that, when the time came to advance, they would find themselves unopposed. The reason for this, said the order, was that the attack was to be preceded by an artillery preparation that would destroy completely all troops for twenty miles in front of the German lines. As a matter of fact, shells fell twenty-five miles back of the Allied lines.

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For mile on mile along that bristling line, the big guns gave tongue, not in gusts or intermittently, as had been the case for days, but continuously. Only later did the men in the

trenches learn that the attack covered a front of about sixty-five miles, the most pretentious the Huns had launched. Karl Rosner, the Kaiser's favorite war correspondent, wrote to the Berlin Lokal Anzeiger:

"The Emperor listened to the terrible orchestra of our surprise fire attack and looked on the unparalleled picture of the projectiles raging toward the enemy's positions."

Pennsylvania's doughboys and engineers shared with the then Prussian War Lord the privilege of listening to the "surprise fire attack," but to them it was like no orchestra mortal ear had ever heard. Most of those who wrote home afterward used a much shorter word of only four letters to describe the event. There was, indeed, a strange unanimity about the expression: "It seemed as if all — had broken loose!"

Crouching in their trenches, powerless to do anything for themselves or each other, they endured as best they could that tremendous ordeal. The very air seemed shattered to bits. No longer was it "the rumbling thunder of the guns," to which they had been giving ear for weeks. Crashing, ear-splitting explosions came so fast they were blended into one vast dissonance that set the nerves to jangling and in more than one instance upset completely the mental poise of our soldiers, so that they had to be restrained forcibly by their comrades from rushing out into the open in their temporary madness.

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Paris, fifty miles away "as the crow flies," was awakened from its slumber after its holiday celebration by the sound of that Titanic cannonade and saw the flashes, and pictures were jarred from the walls by the trembling of the earth.

The regiments back in the support line were little, if any, better off than the four companies of Pennsylvanians up in the front line, for the Hun shells raked the back areas as well as tearing through the front lines. Men clenched their hands to steady shaking nerves against the sheer physical pressure of that awful noise, but officers, both French and their own, making their way along the lines in imminent peril to encourage the men, found them grimly and amazingly determined and courageous.

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As usual with the Boche, he had a schedule for everything, but it went wrong at the very start this time. The schedule, as revealed later in captured papers, called for the swinging of prepared pontoon bridges across the Marne at 1.30 o'clock, after one solid hour of artillery preparation, and the advance guards were to be in Montmirail, thirteen miles to the south, at 8.30 o'clock that morning.

As showing the dependence placed by the Germans on their own ability to follow such a schedule, it may be permissible here to recall that during the fighting an automobile bearing the black and white cross of the Germans was driven into a village held by Americans. It was immediately surrounded and a German major, leaning out cried, irascibly:

"You are not Germans!"

"That's very true," replied an American lieutenant.

"But our schedule called for our troops to be here at this time," continued the perplexed German.

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"They missed connections; that's all. Get out and walk back. You are a prisoner," snapped the American.

The anticipatory artillery fire of the French had so harassed the Germans in their final preparations that it was not until two hours after their schedule time, or 3.30 o'clock in the morning, that the pontoons were swung across the river and the infantry advance began.

The Prussian Guards led. The bridges swarmed with them. The French and Americans loaded and fired, loaded and fired until rifle barrels grew hot and arms tired. Gaps were torn in the oncoming hordes, only to be filled instantly as the Germans pushed forward from the rear. The execution done among the enemy when they were concentrated in solid masses on the bridges was terrific, and for days afterward the stream, about 100 feet wide in that section, was almost choked with the bodies of Germans.

The moment the enemy appeared, the excitement and nerve-strain of our Pennsylvania soldiers dropped from them like a robe from a boxer in the ring. Their French comrades said afterward they were amazed and deeply proud of the steadiness and calmness of these new allies. Their officers, even in the inferno of battle, thrilled with pride at the way their men met the baptism of fire.

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All the new troops going to France have been "blooded" gradually in minor engagements and have been frequently in contact with the enemy before being launched into a major operation. Virtually the only exception to this was the case of the seven divisions of the British regular army that landed in France and were rushed at once into the maelstrom of the first German onslaught in 1914, retreating day by day and being slaughtered and cut to pieces constantly, until they were almost wiped out.

It was the intention that the Pennsylvania troops should be carried by slow and easy stages into actual battle, too, but a change in the Boche plans decreed otherwise. Thus, Pennsylvania regiments, with the engineers fighting as infantry, found themselves hurled immediately into front line fighting in one of the most ambitious German operations of the war.

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The maximum German effort of the July thrust was made directly along their front. It seemed almost as if the enemy knew he faced many new troops at this point and counted on that to

enable him to make a break-through.

But Pennsylvania held. The great offensive came to smash.

Official reports compiled from information gathered from prisoners and made public afterward showed that the enemy engaged fourteen divisions—approximately 170,000 men—in the first line in this part of the battlefield. Behind these, in support, were probably fourteen additional divisions, some of which, owing to the losses inflicted on those in the front line, were compelled to take part in the fighting. No figures are available as to the number of French, but their lines were so thin that Americans had to be thrust in to stop gaps, and there were fewer than 15,000 men in the Pennsylvania regiments.

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CHAPTER IV

"KILL OR BE KILLED"

Nothing human could halt those gray-green waves in the first impetus of the German assault across the Marne. They gained the bridgeheads, and were enabled to seek cover and spread out along the river banks. The grim gray line, like an enormous, unclean caterpillar, crept steadily across the stream. When enough men had gained the southern bank, the assault was carried to the Franco-American lines.

Machine guns in countless numbers spat venomously from both sides. Rifle-fire and rifle-grenade and hand-grenade explosions rolled together in one tremendous cacophony. The appalling diapason of the big guns thundered unceasingly.

Up the wooded slope swept the Hun waves. The furious fire of the defenders, whatever it meant to individuals, made no appreciable impress on the masses. They swept to and over the first line.

Then, indeed, did the Pennsylvanians rise to heroic heights. Gone was most of the science and skill of warfare so painstakingly inculcated in the men through months of training. Truly, it was "kill or be killed." Hand-to-hand, often breast-to-breast, the contending forces struggled. Men were locked in deadly embrace, from which the only escape was death for one or both.

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One lad, his rifle knocked from his hands, plunged at an antagonist with blazing eyes and clenched fists in the manner of fighting most familiar to American boys. They were in a little eddy of the terrible melee. The American landed a terrific "punch" on the point of his opponent's chin, just as a bullet from the rear struck home in his back. The rifle, falling from the hands of the German, struck the outflung arms of the Pennsylvanian. He seized it, even as he fell, plunged the bayonet through the breast of his enemy, and, the lesson of the training camps coming to the fore in his supreme moment, he gurgled out the ferocious "yah!" which he had been taught to utter with each bayonet thrust.

The companies were split up into little groups. Back-to-back, they fired, thrust, hewed and hacked at the swarming enemy. No group knew how the others were doing. Many said afterwards they believed it was the end of all things for them, but they were resolved to die fighting and to take as many Huns with them as possible.

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Then came the great tragedy for those gallant companies. Something went wrong with the liaison service. It was such a thing as is always likely to happen where two forces of men, speaking different languages, are working in co-operation.

An officer suddenly woke to the fact that there were no French troops on the flanks of his command. The same realization was forced home to each of the four companies. The now famous "yielding defense" of the French had operated and their forces had fallen back in the face of the impetuous German onslaught. Four companies of Pennsylvanians alone faced the army of the German Crown Prince.

In the midst of that Gehenna of fighting, no man has clearly fixed in his mind just what happened to cause the separation of the line. Certainly the French must have sent word that they were about to fall back. Certainly the companies, as such, never received it. Possibly the runners conveying the orders never got through. Maybe the message was delivered to an officer who was killed before he could pass it on.

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Whatever the reason, the French fell back, and there were left in that fore-field of heroic endeavor only little milling, twisting groups, at intervals of several thousand feet, where our valiant Pennsylvania lads fought on still for very dear life.

The Boche hordes swept onward, pressing the French. The Americans were surrounded.

Captain Cousart and a handful of his men were severed completely from the rest and taken prisoners. Lieutenant William R. Dyer, of Carney's Point, N. J., and Lieutenant Bateman, of Wayne, Pa., at the other flank of Company L, and almost half a platoon met a similar fate. Lieutenant Maurice J. McGuire was wounded.

Lieutenant James R. Schoch, of Philadelphia, was next in command of Company L. Not far from him, Sergeant Frank Benjamin, also of Philadelphia, was still on his feet and pumping his rifle at top speed. From forty to fifty men of the company were within reach. The lieutenant and the sergeant managed to consolidate them and pass the word to fall back, fighting. [Pg 64]

Part of the time they formed something like a circle, fighting outward in every direction, but always edging back to where they knew the support lines were. They literally fought their way through that part of the Prussian army that had gotten between them and the regimental lines.

At times they fought from tree to tree, exactly as they had read of Indians doing. When they were pressed so closely that they had to have more room, they used their bayonets, and every time the Hun gave way before the "cold steel."

Here and there they met, singly or in small groups, other men of the company who had become separated. These joined the party, so that when, after hours of this dauntless struggle, Lieutenant Schoch stood in front of headquarters, saluted and said: "Sir, I have brought back what was left of L Company," he had sixty-seven men in the little column.

During the day other men slipped from the shelter of the woods and scurried into the company lines, but there were sad holes in the ranks when the last one to appear came in. [Pg 65]

Company M was having the same kind of trouble. A swirl in the fighting opened a gap, and an avalanche of Germans plunged through, leaving Captain Mackey and a dozen men utterly separated on one side. It was impossible for them to rejoin the company, so they did from their position what the men of Company L were doing, fought their way through the Prussian-crowded woods to their own lines.

Lieutenant William B. Brown, of Moscow, Pa., near Scranton, senior officer remaining with the bulk of the company, became commander, but his responsibility was short-lived. He, too, was surrounded and made prisoner.

Lieutenant Thomas B. W. Fales, of Philadelphia, now became commander of the little band, as the only officer left with the main body of the company. Lieutenants Edward Hitzeroth, also of Philadelphia, and Walter L. Swarts, of Scranton, had disappeared, prisoners in the hands of the Germans, and Lieutenant Martin Wheeler, of Moscow, Pa., also had been separated with a few men. [Pg 66]

There were thirty-five men in Lieutenant Fales' command. He rallied and re-formed them and they began the backward fight to the support line. They made it in the face of almost insurmountable odds and, what is more, they arrived with half a dozen prisoners. Enough men of the company had been picked up on the way to make up for casualties suffered during the running fight.

Lieutenant Wheeler, who had been cut off with part of a platoon early in the rush, ordered his men to lie down in the trenches, where they were better able to stand off the Germans. He himself took a rifle from the hands of a dead man and a supply of ammunition and clambered out of the trench. Absolutely alone, he scouted along through the woods until he found a route that was relatively free from the German advance.

Then he went back for his men, formed them and led them by the selected route, fighting as they went against such of the enemy as sought to deter them. All of this Lieutenant Wheeler performed while suffering intense pain from a wound of the hand, inflicted early in the engagement. After reaching the regimental lines, he had first-aid treatment for the wound and continued in the battle. [Pg 67]

Lieutenant W. M. R. Crosman found a wounded corporal who was unable to walk. He remained with the corporal and they became entirely isolated from all other Americans. They were given up for lost until the next night, when a message arrived that a patrol from another American unit on another part of the battle front, miles away, had brought in the lieutenant and the corporal, both utterly exhausted and almost unbalanced from their experience.

The lieutenant had dressed the corporal's wound roughly and then had started to lead him in. They became lost and wandered about for hours. At times the lieutenant carried the corporal on his back, when the wounded man became unable to walk. Again they were forced to take shelter in a thicket, when parties of Germans approached, and to lie, in imminent fear of death, until the enemy groups had passed on. Finally they heard voices speaking in English and came on the American patrol. [Pg 68]

A message came back to the regimental lines from the beleaguered, hard-pressed M Company for ammunition. Supply Sergeant Charles McFadden, 3d, of Philadelphia, set out with a detail to carry the ammunition forward. They were trapped in a little hamlet by the advancing Germans. McFadden sent his men back on the run, as they were badly outnumbered, but himself remained behind to destroy the ammunition to prevent its falling into the hands of the Germans.

He saw men approaching him in the French uniform and believed he was safe, until they opened fire on him with rifles and machine guns—by no means the first instance in which the Germans made such use of uniforms other than their own. Sergeant McFadden saw it was hopeless to try longer to blow up his ammunition and fled. He ran into a machine gun manned by

three Germans. He took them at an angle and before they could swing the gun around to bear on him, he was upon them. Two shots from his rifle and a swift lunge with the bayonet and the machine gun crew was out of the way forever.

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The Germans were coming on, however, and to reach his own lines, McFadden had to run almost a mile up a steep hill. A bullet passed through his sleeve, another through his gas mask, one through his canteen, four dented his steel helmet and another shot the stock off his rifle, but he himself was untouched. He had taken off his outer shirt because of the heat. As he came up the hill toward his own lines, his comrades, not recognizing him in that wildly running figure, opened fire on him. He dropped to the ground, ripped off his undershirt and waving it as a flag of truce, made his panting way into the lines.

The two companies of the 110th were passing through almost exactly similar experiences. Company B was surrounded and split. After a fight of twenty-four hours, during which it was necessary time after time to charge the Huns with bayonets and rally the group repeatedly to keep it from disintegrating, Captain Fish, whose home is in New Brighton, with Lieutenant Claude W. Smith, of New Castle, and Lieutenant Gilmore Hayman, of Berwyn, fought their way back with one hundred and twenty-three men. They brought with them several prisoners, and carried twenty-six of their own wounded.

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The rest of the company, surrounded in the woods, also made a running fight of it, but was scattered badly and drifted back to the regimental lines in little groups, leaving many comrades behind, dead, wounded and prisoners.

The same kind of thing befell Company C, of which a little more than half returned, Captain Truxal, of Meyersdale, Pa., and Lieutenants Wilbur Schell and Samuel S. Crouse were surrounded by greatly superior forces and taken prisoner with a group of their men.

Corporal Alvey C. Martz, of Glencoe, Somerset County, with a patrol of six men, was out in advance of the company stringing barbed wire right along the river bank, when the German bombardment began. They dropped into shell holes. At the point where they lay, the wire remained intact and the Hun flood passed around them. When the hail of shells passed on in advance of the charging German lines, they arose, to find themselves completely cut off from their comrades.

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"We've got to fight boys, so we might as well start it ourselves," said Martz, and his matter-of-fact manner had a strong steadying effect on his men.

Remember that it was the first time any of the youths had been face to face with the Germans. It was the first time they had ever been called on to fight for their lives. Less than a year before they had been quiet civilians, going about their peaceful trades. Martz had lived with his parents on a mountain farm in a remote part of Pennsylvania, six miles from the nearest railway. Add to this the fact that they had learned in their brief soldiering career to lean heavily upon their officers for initiative, instructions and advice, and what these men did attains epic proportions.

They came out of their shell holes shooting. No crafty concealment, no game of hide and seek with the Hun for them. Lest their firing might not attract enough attention, they let out lusty yells. Groups of Germans before them, apparently believing they were being attacked from the flank by a strong force, fled. The seven men gained the shelter of the woods. For two hours they worked their way through the forest, fighting desperately when necessary, and hunting anxiously for the place where they knew their company had been. It was not there.

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When, at last, they glimpsed American uniforms through the trees they thought they had come up with the company. But it was only Sergeant Robert A. Floto, of Meyersdale, Pa., of their own company, with half a dozen men.

Corporal Martz relinquished command of the party to Sergeant Floto. A little farther on they met another American, who joined the party. He was "mad all through" and on the verge of tears from anxiety and exasperation at his own helplessness.

"There were seven of us cut off from the company," he told them, "and we ran slap-bang into all the Boche in the world. I was several feet behind the other guys and the Fritzes didn't see me. It came so sudden, the boys didn't have a chance to do anything. When I took a peek through the trees, about a million Germans were around, and my gang was just being led back toward the river by two Hun officers. I figured I couldn't do anybody any good by firing into that mob, so I came away to look for help."

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"Guess we'd better see what we can do for those fellows," remarked Martz in the same cool, almost disinterested manner he had used before. Everybody wanted to go, but Martz insisted it was a job for only two men. As a companion he picked John J. Mullen, of Philadelphia. Mullen was not a former Guardsman. He was a selected man, sent from Camp Meade several months before with a draft to fill the ranks of the Twenty-eighth Division. But he had proved himself in many a training camp to be, as his comrades put it, "a regular fellow."

So Corporal Martz and Mullen, surrounded by a goodly part of the Crown Prince's crack troops, 3,000 miles from home, in a country they never had seen before, cut loose from the little group of their comrades, turned their backs on the American lines and hiked out through the woods toward Hunland to succor their fellows in distress.

The little prisoner convoy was not making great speed and the two Americans soon overtook them. The first torrent of the German advance had now passed far to their rear. The two Americans circled around through the woods and lay in ambush for the party. The prisoners, because of the narrowness of the paths through the woods, were marching in single file, one

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German officer in the lead, the other bringing up the rear.

"You take the one in front and I'll take that bird on the end," said Martz to Mullen. Martz was something of a sharpshooter. Once he had gone to camp with the West Virginia National Guard, just over the state line from his home, and came back with a medal as a marksman, although he was only substituting for a man who was unable to attend the camp.

They drew careful bead. Out of the corner of his eye Mullen could watch Martz, at the same time he sighted on his German officer. Martz nodded his head and the two rifles cracked simultaneously. Both officers dropped dead. The prisoners looked about them, stunned with surprise. Martz and Mullen stepped out of the woods. There was no time for thanks or congratulations. They hurried back the way they had come. The released men had no trouble arming themselves with rifles and ammunition from the dead lying in the woods. [Pg 75]

They soon overtook Sergeant Floto and his men. The party was now of more formidable size and as the Germans by this time were broken up into rather small groups, the Americans no longer felt the necessity of skulking through the woods, but started out as a belligerent force, not hunting fight, but moving not a step to avoid one.

A few hours later they joined another group of survivors, under Captain Charles L. McLain, of Indiana, Pa., who took command. He vetoed the daring rush through the Hun-infested woods by daylight and ordered that the party lie concealed during the day and proceed to the American lines after nightfall.

"We need a rear guard to protect us against surprise," said Captain McLain, and after what had gone before it seemed but natural that Corporal Martz and Private Mullen should be selected for the job when they promptly volunteered. With little further adventure the party arrived in the regimental lines after about thirty-six hours of almost continuous contact with the Germans. [Pg 76]

In each regiment the survivors of this first real battle of the troops of the Pennsylvania Division were formed into one company for the time being, until replacement drafts arrived to make up for the heavy losses.

This, then, is the tale of what happened when, as so many soldier letters have related, these four companies were "cut to pieces," and this is why L and M companies, of the 109th, and B and C companies, of the 110th, figured so largely in the casualties for a time.

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CHAPTER V

THE GUARD STANDS FAST

Back in the regimental lines, while the four companies were being mauled badly by the Germans, anxiety had gone steadily from bad to worse.

Enduring the storm of shells with which the Germans continued to thresh the back areas for miles, the troops did not have, for some time after the battle began, the excitement of combat to loosen their tight-strung nerves.

They saw the French come filtering out of the woods before them, and watched eagerly for their comrades, but their comrades did not come and, as time passed, it was realized the detached companies were having a hard time.

The vanguard of the Prussians reached the edge of the woods shortly before daybreak. Men on watch in the American trenches saw hulking gray-clad figures slinking among the trees close to the forest's fringe and opened fire. As the day grew the firing on both sides waxed hotter, and soon a long line of the enemy advanced from the shelter of the bois. They were met by a concentration of rifle, machine gun and cannon fire such as no force could withstand. The first waves seemed simply to wither away like chaff before a wind. The following ones slackened their pace, hesitated a moment or two then turned and ran for the timber. [Pg 78]

From that moment, our men were themselves again. They saw the Germans were not invincible. They themselves had broken up a Prussian Guards' attack. All their confidence, self-reliance, initiative, elan, came to the fore. They felt themselves unbeatable.

But one swallow does not make a summer, nor does one repulse of an enemy make a victory. Time after time the Germans returned to the assault. Groups of them gained the wheat fields, where they felt protected from the fire of our men. Obviously, they expected to crawl through the wheat until they were on the southern edge of the fields, where, lying closely protected, they could pick the Americans off at leisure.

Whole platoons of our men volunteered to meet this move and were permitted to crawl forward [Pg 79]

and enter the wheat. Then ensued a game of hide and seek, Germans and Americans stalking each other as big game is stalked, flat on their faces in the growing grain.

But the Germans were no match for Americans at this kind of thing. There is something—a kind of heritage from our pioneer, Indian-fighting ancestors, probably—that gives to an American lad a natural advantage at this sort of fighting, and scores of Germans remained behind in the shelter of the wheat when the tide of battle had passed far away, with the spires of grain nodding and whispering a requiem over them.

Before dawn of that fifteenth of July, word was received from Colonel McAlexander, commanding the 39th Infantry of the old regular army, which was in front and to the right of the 109th, that the Germans had crossed the river and penetrated the Allied lines. He added that if they gained a foothold in the Bois de Conde, or Conde Wood, a high, wooded tract just north of Monthurel, the position of the 39th would be seriously menaced.

Captain William C. Williams, commanding Company H, 109th, and Captain Edward J. Meehan, commanding Company D, of the same regiment, and both Philadelphians, were ordered into the wood. The companies were led out and took positions on both sides of a narrow ravine in the wood.

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Presently the French began to appear, falling back. First they came one or two at a time, then in larger groups. As they hurried by they gave some indication of the heavy fighting they had gone through and which still was going forward up toward the river.

Captain Williams took a platoon of his company to establish it in a strong position to protect the flank of the company. While doing so, the firing, which had been growing closer all the time, broke out right at hand and Captain Williams discovered he and his men were cut off from the company. The Captain was shot in the hand at the first fire and several of his men were wounded, but the Captain rallied his little party and they fought their way back and rejoined the company. Captain Williams was wounded twice more, but so serious was the emergency that he had a first aid dressing applied and continued the fight without further treatment.

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Both Captain Williams and Captain Meehan since have been promoted to the rank of Major and have been awarded Distinguished Service Crosses. Major Williams is an old regular army man. With the rank of sergeant, he was attached to the former First Pennsylvania Infantry as an instructor and served in this capacity during the Mexican border duty in 1916. Later he was commissioned Captain and assigned to command Company H.

A party of Huns made their way through the woods to a copse on the flank of the first battalion of the 109th, where they established a strong machine gun nest. From that position their fire was especially harassing to the battalion, and it was found necessary to clean out that nest if the position was to be maintained.

Accordingly Captain Meehan led Company D out from the shelter of their trench without the special protection of artillery fire. A piece of shell caught Captain Meehan in the shoulder and the impact half swung him around, but he kept on. Captain Felix R. Campuzano, also of Philadelphia, with B Company, went out in support of Captain Meehan's men, and Captain Campuzano was struck in the hand.

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Company D spread out like a fan and stalked that copse as smoothly and faultlessly as ever a black buck was stalked in the heart of Africa by an expert hunter. Occasionally a doughboy would get a glimpse of a Boche gunner. There would be a crack from the thin American line, always advancing, and virtually every shot meant one Hun less. There were few wasted bullets in that fight. The storm of lead from the machine guns was appreciably less by the time the Americans entered the shelter of the woods. Once they reached the trees, there was a wild clamor of shouts, cries, shots, the clatter of steel on steel.

Presently this died down and Americans began to emerge from the woods. Not so many came back as went out, but of the Huns who had crept forward to establish the nest, none returned to their own lines. Our men brought back several enemy machine guns.

Captain Williams, still with H Company in a well-advanced position, was pressed closely by Huns, but believed his position could be held with help. He despatched George L. MacElroy, of Philadelphia, a bugler, with a message to Colonel Brown, asking for assistance.

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Nineteen years old, and only recently graduated from his status as one of the best Boy Scouts in his home city, young MacElroy trudged into the open space before Colonel Brown's quarters, saluted and stood stiff and soldierly while he delivered his message. He looked very young and boyish, though his grimy face was set in stern, wearied lines under his steel helmet.

Colonel Brown read the message and started to give an order but checked himself as he noticed the messenger swaying slightly on his feet.

"My boy, how long has it been since you had food?" he asked.

The question, and particularly the kindly tone, were too much for the overwrought nerves of the lad.

"Forty-eight hours, sir," he responded, and then his stoicism gave way and he collapsed.

"Get something to eat here and take a sleep," said the Colonel. "You need not go back."

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"No, sir," was the reply. "My company is up there in the woods, fighting hard, and I am going back to it. Captain Williams depends on me, sir."

And back he went, although he was persuaded to rest a few minutes while a lunch was

prepared. He was asked to describe his experiences on that journey through the German-infested woods, but the sum of his description, given in a deprecatory manner, was: "I just crawled along and got here."

With such spirit as this actuating our men, it is small wonder that the Germans found themselves battling against a stone wall of defense that threatened momentarily to topple forward on them and crush them.

MacElroy was wounded slightly and suffered a severe case of shell shock a few days later. He was in the hospital many weeks and was awarded the French War Cross for his bravery.

Bugler MacElroy was by no means the only lad who did not eat for forty-eight hours. Those in the forward lines had entered the fight with only two days' rations. Many of them threw this away to lighten themselves for the contest. Subsequently food reached them only intermittently and in small quantities, for it was almost an impossible task to carry it up from the rear through that vortex of fighting.

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Sleep they needed even more than food. For five days and nights hundreds of the men slept only for a few moments at a time, not more than three hours all told. They became as automatons, fighting on though they had lost much of the sense of feeling. It was asserted by medical men that this loss of sleep acted almost as an anesthetic on many, so that wounds that ordinarily would have incapacitated them through sheer pain, were regarded hardly at all. When opportunity offered, more than one went sound asleep on his feet, leaning against the wall of a trench.

After that first splendid repulse of the German attack, the Crown Prince's forces, with typical Teuton stubbornness, launched assault after assault against our line. Officers could be seen here and there, mingling with the German soldiers, beating them and kicking them forward in the face of the murderous American fire.

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It was during this almost continuous game of attack and repulse that there occurred one of the most remarkable and dramatic events of the whole period. The Boche had been gnawing into the lines of the 110th, in the center of the Pennsylvania front, until it seemed nothing could stop them. Probably the most terrific pressure along that sector was exerted against this point.

For twenty-five hours the 110th had given virtually constant battle, and officers and men felt they soon must give way and fall back. Y. M. C. A. men serving with the Americans had established themselves in a dugout in the face of a low bluff facing away from the enemy, where they and their supplies were reasonably safe from shell fire, and from these dugouts they issued forth, with a courage that won the admiration of the fighting men, to carry chocolate, cigarettes and other bits of comfort to the hard pressed doughboys and to render whatever aid they could. Several of them pleaded to be allowed to take rifles and help withstand the onslaught, but this, of course was forbidden.

The Rev. Francis A. La Violette, of Seattle, Wash., one of the Y. M. C. A. workers, had lain down in the dugout for a few minutes' rest when he heard a flutter of wings about the entrance. He found a tired and frightened pigeon, with a message tube fastened to its leg. Removing the carrier, he found a message written in German, which he was unable to read. He knew the moment was a critical one for the whole line. He knew there were grave fears that the Germans were about to break through and that if they did there would be little to hold them from a dash on Paris.

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He rushed the message to headquarters, where it was translated. It was a cry of desperation from the Germans, intended for their reserve forces in the rear. It said that, unless reinforcements were sent at once, the German line at that point would be forced to retire. The pigeon had become lost in the murk of battle and delivered the message to the wrong side of the fighting front.

In half an hour word had gone down the line, and tanks, artillery and thousands of French troops were rushing to the threatened point. With this assistance and the knowledge that the Germans were already wavering, the Pennsylvanians advanced with determination and hurled the enemy back. Headquarters was dumbfounded, when prisoners were examined, to learn that six divisions of Prussians, about 75,000 men, had been opposing the Allied force and had been compelled to call for help.

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On the right of our line the enemy thrust forward strong local attacks, driving our men from St. Agnan, and La Chapelle-Manthodon. St. Agnan, three miles south of the nearest spot on the Marne, was the farthest point of the German advance. Almost immediately the 109th Infantry and 103d Engineers, in conjunction with French Chasseurs Alpin (Blue Devils), launched a counter attack which drove the Germans pell mell out of the villages and started them on their long retreat.

Just before this counter attack began the 109th was being harassed again by a machine gun nest, and this time Company K was sent out to "do the job." It did, in as workmanlike a manner as D Company had on the other occasion. Lieutenant Walter Fiechter, of Philadelphia, was wounded, as were several enlisted men.

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When the counter attack finally was launched Captain Walter McC. Gearty, also a Philadelphian, acting as major of the First Battalion of the 109th, led the advance of that regiment. They ran into a machine gun nest that was spitting bullets like a summer rain. The stream of lead caught Captain Gearty full in the front, and he dropped, the first officer of his rank in the old National Guard of Pennsylvania to meet death in the war.

His men, frantic at the loss of a beloved officer, plunged forward more determinedly than ever and wiped out that machine gun nest to a man, seized the guns and ammunition and turned them on the already fleeing Boche.

The Americans had discovered by this time the complete truth of what their British instructors had told them—that the Hun hates and fears the bayonet more than any other weapon of warfare. So they wasted few bullets. Rifle fire, they discovered, was a mighty thing in defense, when a man has a chance to steady himself and aim with precision while the enemy is doing the advancing. But when conditions are reversed, the best rifleman has little chance to shine in pressing forward in an attack, so it was the bayonet that was used this time.

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The men had gone "over the top" without a barrage, but they had the best protection in the world—self-confidence, which the Hun had not. The Prussians had had a taste of American fighting such as they had thought never to experience, and for thousands of them the mere sight of that advancing line of grim, set faces, preceded by bristling bayonet points, was enough. They did not wait to be "tickled" with the point.

Others, however, stood their ground boldly enough and gave battle. As had been the case for several months, they depended little on the individual rifleman, but put virtually their whole trust in machine guns and artillery. With their ranks shorn of their old-time confidence and many of their men fleeing in panic rather than come to grips with the Americans and French, there was little chance to stem that charge, however, and the enemy fell back steadily, even rapidly, to the Marne.

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CHAPTER VI

BOCHE IN FULL FLIGHT

It was in following up the German retreat from their "farthest south" back to the Marne, that our men learned the truth of what they had heard and read so often, that the German is as good a fighter as any in the world when he is in masses, but degenerates into a sickening coward when left alone or in small groups.

It was during this time, too, that they learned the truth of the oft-repeated charge that Germans were left behind, chained to machine guns so they could not escape, to hinder an advancing enemy and make his losses as heavy as possible.

Repeatedly groups of our men advanced on machine gun nests in the face of vicious fire until they were in a position to make a sudden rush and, on reaching the guns, were greeted by uplifted hands and bleats of "Americans, kamerads! kamerads!"

On the nature of the individual Americans depended what happened. Sometimes the Germans were released from their chains and sent to the rear as prisoners. Sometimes the bayonet was used as the only answer to such tactics. And who shall blame either action?

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When, as frequently happened, it was a case of man to man, the Pennsylvanians found that it was a rare German who would stand up and fight. Long afterward they told gleefully of finding, here and there, a Hun who bravely gave battle, for our men frankly preferred to kill their men fighting rather than to slaughter them or take them prisoner.

Some of the Americans were so eager to keep close on the heels of the retreating Huns that they did not stop long enough thoroughly to clean up machine gun nests and other strong points. Groups of the Boche hid until the main body of the Americans had passed on, then raked them from the rear with machine gun and rifle fire, snipers concealed in trees being particularly annoying in this way.

In scores of instances our men found machine guns and their gunners both tied fast in trees, so that neither could fall, even when the operator was shot. It was reported reliably but unofficially that machine gun nests had been found where the Germans, in the short time they had been on the ground, had arranged aerial tramways of rope from tree to tree, so that if a machine gun nest were discovered in one tree and the gunners shot, the guns could be slid over to another tree on the ropes and another group of men could set them going again.

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Many of the Huns "played dead" until the American rush was past, then opened fire on the rear. This is an old trick, but Allied soldiers who tried it early in the war discovered that the Germans countered it by having men come along after a charging body of troops, bayoneting everybody on the field to make sure all were dead. The Germans, however, knew they were safe in trying it with our men, for they were well aware Americans did not bayonet wounded men or dead bodies.

Sergeant McFadden, who has been mentioned before, was making his way through the woods with a single companion when he noticed an apparently dead Boche in a rifle pit. He got a glimpse of the face, however, and noticed the eyes were closed so tightly the man was "squinting" from the effort. McFadden jabbed his bayonet in the German's leg, whereupon he leaped to his feet and seized the rifle from the astonished American's hand. He threw it up to fire, but before he could pull the trigger, McFadden's companion shot him.

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At one point, below Fossoy, the Germans not only went back to the river, but actually crossed it in the face of the 110th Infantry's advance. Reaching the banks of the river, however, the enemy was within the protection of his big guns, which immediately laid down such fire that it was utterly impossible for the Americans and French to remain. Having had a real taste of triumph, the Pennsylvanians were loath to let go, but fell back slowly, unpressed by the Germans, to their former positions.

It was on this forward surge back to the Marne that Pennsylvania's soldiers began to get real first-hand evidence of Hun methods of fighting—the kind of thing that turned three-fourths of the world into active enemies of them and their ways, and sickened the very souls of all who learned what creatures in the image of man can do.

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They came on machine gun nests, in the advance between Mezy, Moulins and Courtemont-Vareannes, to find their comrades who had been taken prisoner in the earlier fighting tied out in front in such a way as to fall first victims to their friends' fire should an attack be made on the gunners. Men told, with tears rolling down their cheeks, how these brave lads, seeing the advancing Americans, shouted to them:

"Shoot! Shoot! Don't stop for us!"

They saw eight airplanes, painted with the French colors, swoop over the lines, soar low near a barn where a battery had been planted and drop tons of bombs, shaking the earth and demolishing everything about as if an earthquake had occurred. Fortunately in this instance, the battery had been moved to another location, but the same planes poured streams of machine gun bullets into the ranks of our men until driven off by machine gun and anti-aircraft fire.

Not the least of the difficulties of our men was the fact that the Germans mingled a certain quantity of gas shells with their high explosives and shrapnel. Ordinarily, soldiers learn to distinguish gas shells from others by the difference in the sound of the explosion, but in such a bombardment as this the sounds are so commingled that even that protection is denied.

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Therefore, it was necessary for the men to wear their gas masks almost continuously. While these are a protection against the poisonous fumes, they are far from being pleasant. Not only is it more difficult to see and breathe, but what air is inhaled is impregnated with chemicals used to neutralize the gas. Yet for hours at a time, the men had to go through the inferno of fighting under the handicap of the masks.

Men returned to the rear with great burns upon their faces, hands and bodies. From some the clothes were burned away almost entirely, and others reeled along like drunken men, nearly blinded. They reported that they had seen Germans in the woods with what looked like large tanks on their backs. As the Americans approached to give battle, these Huns turned short nozzles toward the oncoming soldiers, and from the nozzles leaped great streams of flame, extending as much as thirty feet.

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A part of the 111th Infantry confronted, at one time, a small wood, which the French believed masked a strong machine gun nest. A patrol was organized to reconnoiter the position, composed partly of volunteers and partly of men chosen by officers. One of the volunteers was Private Joseph Bennett, of Gulph Mills, Pa., near Norristown, a member of the headquarters company of the 111th. The party consisted of twelve enlisted men under command of a French lieutenant.

They advanced with the greatest care, their line extended to more than the normal skirmish distance. There was not a sign of life about the wood. Coming closer, they saw the body of an American soldier propped against a tree. The French officer signaled for the men to close in toward this point. As they did so, four machine guns, concealed by the Hun ghouls behind the American body, raked the thin line of approaching men with a terrific fire. Every man in the party except Bennett was killed instantly. Bennett fired one shot and saw one of the Boche plunge forward from his hiding place and lie still. Then a stream of machine gun bullets struck his rifle and destroyed it.

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Bennett flung himself to the ground and dragged himself to the body of the French lieutenant. He took a supply of smoke bombs with which the lieutenant had intended to signal the result of his expedition. Setting these in operation, Bennett heaved them over in front of the machine gun position. They promptly threw up such a dense cloud that the Gulph Mills man was able to stand up. Under cover of the smoke he advanced and threw hand grenades into the position, killing the remaining three Germans. Then he returned to his regiment, the sole survivor of the scouting party of thirteen men. The Distinguished Service Cross was awarded to him for that act.

Bennett had another remarkable experience. He is one of the biggest men in his regiment, standing a little more than six feet, and weighing about 200 pounds. He was with Private Joseph Wolf, of Pottstown, in the advance when they saw a sniper in a tree just drawing a bead on an American lieutenant. Bennett was almost directly under the tree, and coolly picked off the sniper. In falling, the body dislodged a second badly frightened German. Bennett, watching the grim little tableau, had not lowered his gun, and the live German fell directly on his gun, impaling himself on the bayonet. The force of the blow almost dropped the big American.

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The men of the 111th were no whit behind their comrades of the other regiments in the intensity of their fighting spirit nor in their accomplishments. Individuals performed the same kind of heroic feats, whatever regiment they called their own. In other words, all were true Americans.

Corporal William Loveland, of Chester, with Company B, 111th, single-handed, captured seventeen of the enemy, and was decorated for his bravery. He was so badly wounded in the last campaign of the war that he died November 5th.

It was a little later, after they had driven the Germans back to the Marne and had retired again to their original positions, that there came to the Pennsylvanians a highly pleasing estimate of their prowess as viewed by the British. A runner from division headquarters brought up a copy of a great London daily newspaper in which appeared the following comment:

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"The feature of the battle on which the eyes of all the world are fixed, and those of the enemy with particular intentness, is the conduct of the American troops. The magnificent counter-attack in which the Americans flung back the Germans on the Marne after they had crossed was much more than the outstanding event of the fighting. It was one of the historical incidents of the whole war in its moral significance."

One other bit of cheering news came to them, passing down through the various ranks from headquarters. It told something of what the intelligence officers had gleaned from the study of documents taken from enemy prisoners and dead. One of these latter had been an intelligence officer. He was killed after writing a report on the quality of the American troops and before he had a chance to send it along on its way to German great headquarters. Our men learned that in this report he had written that their morale was not yet broken, that they were young and vigorous soldiers and nearly, if not quite, of the caliber of shock troops, needing only more experience to make them so.

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With his troops back at the Marne and balked from moving southward, the enemy now tried to move eastward along the banks of the river toward Epernay. The checking of this move fell to other troops, chiefly French, while our men lay in their trenches, the victims of a continuous, vindictive bombardment, without apparent purpose other than the breaking of that morale of which the dead intelligence officer had written.

The men did not know what had happened. They knew only they wanted either to get away from that sullen bombardment or get out and do something. They were not aware that Foch had unleashed his armies between Château-Thierry and Soissons and that the enemy already was in flight from the Marne, the bombardment being designed to keep those terrible Americans in their trenches until the last Huns had recrossed the river to begin the long retreat northward.

Until July 21st, the Pennsylvania regiments hugged their trenches, nursed their minor hurts and their deadly fatigue, and wondered what was going on out yonder where the fate of Paris and possibly of the war was being decided. The roar of artillery had gradually died down and the men realized that the front was moving away from them. This could mean only one thing—a German retreat: and our soldiers were gladdened, despite the sad gaps in their ranks, with the knowledge that they had played the parts of real men and splendid soldiers in making that retreat compulsory.

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Uppermost in the mind of more than one old national guardsman, as evidenced by scores of letters received since that time, was the thought that the despised "tin soldiers" of other days had "come through" with flying colors, and had put their fine old organization well beyond the touch of the finger of scorn.

So, on July 21st, the regiments were ordered back out of the ruck of battle and away from the scene of their hard six days for a rest. They went only a few miles back, but it was a blessed relief for the men—too much and too sudden for some. Men who had come through the battle apparently unscathed, now collapsed utterly as their nerves gave way with the release of the tension, like the snapping of a tight-coiled spring, and more than one went under the physicians' care from that rest camp, miles away from German fire.

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Not all were allowed to rest, however. Details were sent to the scene of the recent fighting to clear up and salvage the wreckage of war, to hunt for wounded and to bury the dead. This was not the least trying of their experiences for the men engaged. The bodies of well-liked officers were dragged out from tangles of dead Huns and buried tenderly, each grave being marked by a little wooden cross on which was placed one of the identification disks taken from the dead man, the second being turned over to statistical officers for record purposes.

A week had passed since the first engagement, and the burying squads had no pleasant task, from the physical standpoint, entirely aside from the sadness and depression it entailed. The men got little touches of spiritual uplift from things they found on the battlefield. Such as, for instance, the body of little Alexander Myers, of Green Lane, Montgomery County, a private in Company M, 109th, who had been known in boxing circles about Philadelphia as "Chick" Myers. He was found with five dead Boche about him. And the body of Sergeant Coburn, of the same company, who had been married two days before he sailed for France, was found prone on an automatic rifle, with the ground before him literally covered with dead Huns.

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In the burial detail of the 111th was Harry Lewis McFarland, of Fallston, Pa., near New Brighton, a private in Company B. He had been grieving bitterly over the fact that his brother, Verner, had been missing since the company was cut up so badly in the first German advance. Moving about among the dead, he turned one over, face up. It was his brother. In his hands was his rifle, still clenched tightly. In front of him, in such position that it was plain he had done the

execution himself, lay seven dead Germans.

Such was the spirit with which our men fought and died, and such was the price they charged for their lives.

Back in the rest camp, the companies were mustered and the rolls checked off with the known statistics regarding those not present. Figures on the casualties of the 109th in those six days of action have reached this country. They show four officers and 75 enlisted men killed; ten officers and 397 enlisted men wounded; six officers and 311 enlisted men missing, a total of twenty officers and 783 men, or 803 casualties for the regiment, out of something more than 3,000 men—approximately twenty-five per cent of losses. The 110th suffered about as heavily, and the 111th scarcely less. The 103d Engineers had been more fortunate. Their hard time was yet to come.

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It was in this period that the weather changed. The fine, hot, sunshiny days gave way to pouring rains, which turned the roads into quagmires and added immeasurably to the miseries of the men. However, officers commented on the fact that there was little complaining. Men who had grumbled in the training camps back in America when the beans were cold for lunch, or when they had an extra hour's work to do, or when the wind blew chill while they were "on sentry go," now faced actual hardship with dauntless spirit and smiles. In some places the men marched through mud up to their knees. At night they slept in the open with the rain pouring on them. When the hot sun shone once more, their clothing steamed.

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More cheering news came to the men while they rested. The companies that had been in the front line with the French when the Germans drove across the river and had suffered the heaviest, were mentioned in special orders for their gallantry, and the report went down the line that several of the officers and men were to receive decorations.

With indomitable good humor, which served to cover their hurts to some extent—as many a small boy laughs to keep from weeping—officers and men made the most of things that struck a funny vein. In this connection, there was much "kidding" of Captain George M. Orf, of Philadelphia, statistical officer of the 109th.

Sunday, July 14th, Captain Orf received his discharge from the army because he had been found to be suffering from an ailment that unfitted him for military duty. He wrote a request at once for a re-examination and revocation of the order of discharge. Pending action on his request, he was, technically and to all intents and purposes, a civilian. Actually, he went right on with his duties, "carried on" throughout the German drive and the counter-attack, came through without a scratch, and stayed right with the regiment through further hard fighting and campaigning to August 9th. Then he received final word, a rejection of his appeal and orders to proceed home at once. During this period, his fellow officers declined to address him by his military title, but went out of their way to speak to him and of him as "Mister Orf."

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CHAPTER VII

BOMBED FROM THE AIR

After only a few days and nights of rest, the regiments were moved off to the southward a few miles, then turned sharply to the west, thus passing around a district that still was being shelled heavily by the Germans in an effort to hold the Allied force back until they could get their own materials out of the Château-Thierry salient.

Thus they came again to the Marne, which turns sharply south at Château-Thierry, and here they made camp again and received contingents of "casuals"—that is, men unattached to any regiments—who had been sent to fill up the depleted ranks. The shattered companies were refilled, Companies L and M, of the 109th, and B and C, of the 110th, becoming almost new organizations. The newcomers were made welcome and proved to be good soldier material, but few of them were Pennsylvanians.

The march was resumed July 24th over a road paralleling the railroad line from Paris to Château-Thierry, which followed the course of the river rather closely, except for its numerous bends. The doughboys were anxious to see Château-Thierry, which already, even among these lads who were out of touch with events in other parts of the war area, had loomed large in their talk. They had heard much of it and of the achievements there and in the vicinity of other American troops, notably the marines, and they were eager to see it.

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They saw it, however, only in glimpses from the far side of the river, for they kept on up the road and did not cross the river there.

That night they bivouacked in woods along the Marne. Here the 109th had its first taste of night air raiding. The regiment halted at the little town of Chierry, just east of Château-Thierry, but on the south bank. One battalion remained there, another crossed the river on pontoon bridges, left behind by the French and Americans now in pursuit of the fleeing Germans, and remained in the hamlet of Brasles for the night, and the third was ordered out to guard the bridges.

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About three o'clock in the morning sentries heard the whir of airplane motors, and fired their rifles. The sharpshooters of the regiment rushed to the edge of the woods with rifles and supplies of ammunition, and the anti-aircraft guns around Château-Thierry set up their baying. The 109th's marksmen tried a few shots, but the range was too great for effective shooting, and the flyers turned tail and disappeared in the face of the air barrage from the big guns before they got within good rifle range of our men.

Next day the regiments remained in camp, and that night another battalion of the 109th stood guard on the bridges. This time the flyers apparently had crossed the river to the east or the west, for they came up from the south, directly over the bridges at Chierry, probably returning from an attempt to raid Paris.

They rained bombs. There was no possible chance for the marksmen this time. Rather it was a question of keeping out of the way of the death-dealing missiles hurtling earthward. Again the anti-aircraft guns gave tongue, and after ten minutes or so of this explosive outburst the airplanes disappeared. Then the 109th learned something of the difficulties airmen experience in trying to hit a particular mark. Although the river had been churned to foam by the hail of bombs, only one bridge was hit and the damage to it was so slight as to be repaired easily.

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Early next morning, July 26th, the period of inaction came to an end. The regiments were ordered out on a route to the northeast, which would carry them somewhat east of Fere-en-Tardenois, in the middle of the Soissons-Rheims "pocket," which fell some days later.

Orders were for the Pennsylvanians to press along that route with all speed until they effected contact with the retreating enemy, and to exert all possible pressure to harass him and push him as far and as rapidly as possible.

Gradually, as the regiments moved forward, the sound of the firing became louder, and they realized they were overtaking the ebbing tide of Germans. Officers, having learned by bitter experience at the Marne the value of the British suggestion to do away in battle with marks distinguishing them as of commissioned rank, stripped their uniforms of insignia and camouflaged themselves to look like enlisted men. The officer casualties in those first few days of fighting could not be maintained without working irreparable harm to the organizations.

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Orders were issued to beware of every spot that might shelter a sniper or a machine gun. The regiments deployed into lines of skirmishers, greatly extending the front covered and reducing the casualties from shell fire. Patrols were out in advance, and every precaution was taken against surprise by parties of Germans that might have been left behind in the retreat.

The Germans still were using gas shells, and again the masks were inspected carefully and donned. Overhead, enemy aircraft circled, but Allied airman and anti-aircraft guns were active enough to keep them at a respectful distance. They were unable to harry the Americans with machine gun fire. Occasionally, a bombing flyer, protected by a covey of fighters, would get into what he believed to be a favorable position for unloosing a bomb, but these did no damage to the thin lines of our troops.

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At night they made their way into the forests and lay there. There was little sleeping, but the men were grateful for the rest. They evaded the vigilance of the airplane observers, so they were not molested by a concentrated artillery fire, against which the forest would have been poor shelter, but the continual roar of the artillery and the occasional shell that came with a rending crash into the woods effectually disposed of any chance to sleep. The men crept close to the trunks of the larger trees. Some dug themselves little shelters close to the trees, but the night was a terrible one, and the day, when it came, was almost a relief.

The regiments now were in a region where the Germans had been long enough to establish themselves, where they had expected to stay, but had been driven out sullenly and reluctantly, fighting bitter rear-guard actions the whole way. Our men had their first opportunity to learn what it means to a peaceful countryside to face a German invasion.

The wonderful roads for which France so long had been noted were totally effaced in places, sometimes by shell fire, often with every evidence of having been mined. Here and there were tumbled heaps of masonry, representing what had once been happy little villages, many of the houses centuries old. Trees and grape vines had been hacked off close to the ground, and often the trunks of trees were split and chopped as if in maniacal fury. Where the Huns had not had time to chop trees down, they had cut rings deep into the trunks to kill them.

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They saw the finest homes of the wealthiest landowners and the humblest cottages of the peasants absolutely laid in ruins—furniture, tapestries, clothing, all scattered broadcast. Handsome rugs were tramped into the mud of the fields and roads. It was as if a titanic hurricane had swept the entire country.

There had been no time to bury the dead, and the men actually suffered, mentally and physically, from the sights and the stench. At one place they came on a machine gun emplacement, with dead Boche lying about in heaps. Close beside one of the guns, almost in a sitting posture, with one arm thrown over the weapon as if with pride of possession, was an

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American lad, his fine, clean-cut face fixed by death in a glorified smile of triumph.

Scores of officers and men almost unconsciously clicked their hands up to the salute in silent tribute to this fair-haired young gladiator who had not lived to enjoy his well-won laurels.

It was about this time that the Pennsylvanians saw one of the few really picturesque sights in modern warfare—a touch of the war of olden times, which had been seen seldom since Germany went mad in 1914. Troop after troop of cavalry, some French, some American, passed them, the gallant horsemen sitting their steeds with conscious pride, their jingling accoutrements playing an accompaniment to their sharp canter, and round after round of cheers from the Americans sped them on their way to harry the retreating foe.

During a brief halt along a road for rest a part of the 110th Infantry took shelter under an overhanging bank while a sudden spurt of heavy enemy fire drenched the vicinity. There were few casualties and the officers were just beginning to congratulate themselves on having chosen a fortunate position for their rest when a large high-explosive shell landed on the edge of the bank directly above Company A. Two men were killed outright and several were wounded. Lieutenant George W. R. Martin, of Narberth, rushed to the wounded to apply first-aid treatment.

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The first man he reached was Private Allanson R. Day, Jr., nineteen years old, of Monongahela City, Pa., whom the men called "Deacon," because of a mildness of manner and a religious turn of mind.

"Well, Deacon, are you hard hit?" asked Lieutenant Martin, as he prepared his first-aid application.

"There's Paul Marshall, Lieutenant; he's hit worse than I am. Dress him first, please, sir. I can wait," replied the Deacon, who died later of his wounds.

The Pennsylvanians had thought they hated the Hun when they left America. They had learned more of him and his ways below the Marne, and they found their loudly-voiced threats and objurgations turning to a steely, silent, implacable wrath that was ten times more terrible and more ominous for the enemy. The farther they penetrated in the wake of the Boche the more deep-seated and lasting became this feeling of utter detestation. Not for worlds would they have turned back then. Had word come that peace was declared it is doubtful if the officers could have held them back. The iron had entered their souls.

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During the progress of all these events east of Château-Thierry, the 112th Infantry had come up and had been in the desperate fighting in the vicinity of that town, so that when the Franco-American attack from Soissons to Bussiares, on the western side of the pocket, began to compel a German retirement from the Marne, that regiment was right on their heels.

The 110th and the 111th were close behind and all three soon came into contact with the fleeing enemy.

In all their engagements the greatest difficulty the officers had to contend with was the eagerness of the men to come to grips with the enemy. Repeatedly they overran their immediate objectives and several times walked into their own barrage so determinedly that officers, unable to halt the troops so hungry for revenge, had to call off the barrage to save them from being destroyed by our own guns.

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The Pennsylvanians pressed on relentlessly. The 109th Infantry now was rushing up from the Marne to resume its meteorlike career as a fighting unit beside its fellow regiments of the old National Guard, and word was received that the 53d Field Artillery Brigade, commanded by Brigadier-General W. G. Price, Jr., of Chester, was hurrying up to participate in its first action.

Still other organizations of the Twenty-eighth Division hastening to the front were the ammunition train and the supply train. The division was being reassembled, for the first time after leaving Camp Hancock, as rapidly as the exigencies of hard campaigning would permit.

With the 112th and 111th in the van, the Pennsylvanians pushed northeastward after the Germans. It was at times when the Huns had stopped, apparently determined to make a stand at last, only to be blasted out of their holding positions by the Americans and continue their flight that, as so many officers wrote home, they "could not run fast enough to keep up with Fritz," and the artillery was outdistanced hopelessly.

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Repeatedly our doughboys had to be held up in their headlong rush to permit the artillery to catch up. It being useless to waste life by sending infantry against the formidable German positions without artillery support, our lines were held back until the struggling field guns could come up to silence the German guns by expert counter battery work.

The Pennsylvanians were wild with eagerness and excitement. None but the officers had access to maps, and hundreds of the men, having only hazy ideas as to the geography of France or the distances they had traveled, believed they were pushing straight for Germany and had not far to go.

One and all realized fully that, when they began their fighting, the Germans for months had been moving forward triumphantly. They realized just as well that the Germans now were in flight before them. Each man felt that to his particular company belonged the glory of that reversal of conditions. Thus, scores wrote home: "Our company was all that stood between the Boche and Paris, and we licked him and have him on the run"—or words to that effect.

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They were like a set of rabbit hounds, almost whining in their anxiety to get at the foe. Deluged by high explosives, shrapnel and gas shells, seeing their comrades mowed down by machine gun

fire, bombed from the sky, alternately in pouring rain and burning sun, hungry half the time, their eyes burning from want of sleep, half suffocated from long intervals in gas masks, undergoing all the hardships of a bitter campaign against a determined, vigorous and unscrupulous enemy, yet their only thought was to push on—and on—and on.

The likeness to rabbit hounds is not uncomplimentary or far-fetched. One soldier wrote home: "We have had the Boche on the run in open country, and it has been like shooting rabbits—and I am regarded as a good shot in the army."

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CHAPTER VIII

IN HEROIC MOLD

Captain W. R. Dunlap, of Pittsburgh, commander of Company E, 111th Infantry, and Captain Lucius M. Phelps, Oil City, of Company G, 112th Infantry, with their troops, led the advance beyond Epieds.

They came to the western edge of the forest of Fere, and into that magnificent wooded tract the Germans fled. The occasional small woods, dotting open country, through which they had been fighting, now gave way to heavily timbered land, with here and there an open spot of varying extent.

An American brigadier-general, who has the reputation of being something of a Haroun-al-Raschid among the men, left his dugout in the rear at night and went forward to the front lines to get personal knowledge of the dangers his men were facing. Scouts having reported that the Germans were preparing to launch an attack in hope of delaying our troops, the general started for a position from which he would be able to see the attack and watch our men meet it. He became confused in the forest and arrived at the designated observation post later than he had intended. He found it had been destroyed by a shell just a few moments before he reached it. Had he been on time he certainly would have lost his life.

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He took up another position and Lieutenant William Robinson, Uniontown, Pa., started to lead forward the first line of Americans to break up the German formations. Standing on a little ridge, the general saw the young officer, whom he had known for years, going among his men, cheering and encouraging them, when a huge shell burst almost at the lieutenant's feet. A party of his men rushed to the spot, but there was not even a trace of the officer.

"I'll sleep alone on this spot with my thoughts tonight," said the saddened general, and he did, spending the night in a shell hole.

The Americans battled their way in little groups into the edge of the forest, like bushmen. This was the situation when night fell, with a fringe of Americans in hiding along the southern edge of the woods. The forest seemed to present an almost impenetrable barrier, through which it was utterly hopeless to continue an effort to advance in the darkness.

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So scattered were the groups that had forced their way into the shelter of the wood that it was imperative headquarters should know their approximate positions in order to dispose the forces for a renewal of the assault in the morning. In this emergency Lieutenant William Allen, Jr., Pittsburgh, of Company B, 111th Infantry, volunteered to find the advanced detachments of our men.

Throughout the night he threaded his way through the woods, not knowing what instant he would stumble on Germans or be fired on or thrust through by his own men. It was a hair-raising, daredevil feat of such a nature that he won the unstinted admiration of the men and the warm praise of his superiors. When he found himself near other men he remained silent until a muttered word or even such inconsequent things as the tinkle of a distinctly American piece of equipment or the smell of American tobacco—entirely different from that in the European armies—let him know his neighbors were friends. Then a soft call "in good United States" established his own identity and made it safe for him to approach.

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As the first streamers of dawn were appearing in the sky off in the direction of Hunland, he crawled back to the main American lines, and the report he made enabled his superiors to plan their attack, which worked with clock-like precision and pushed the Boche on through the woods.

Corporal Alfred W. Davis, Uniontown, Pa., of Company D, 110th Infantry, was moving forward through the woods in this fighting, close to a lieutenant of his company, when a bullet from a sniper hidden in a tree struck the corporal's gun, was deflected and pierced the lieutenant's brain, killing him instantly. Crawling up a ravine like an Indian stalking game, Davis set off with blood in his eye in quest of revenge.

When he picked off his eighteenth German in succession it was nearly dark, so he "called it a day," as he remarked, and slept better that night for thought of the toll he had taken from the Germans to avenge his officer.

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In the woods the Germans fought desperately, despite that they were dazed by the terrific artillery fire. Hidden in tree tops and under rocks, with even their steel helmets camouflaged in red, green and yellow, it was difficult for the attackers to pick them out in the flicker of the shadows on the dense foliage.

While the attacking waves were advancing it was discovered that touch had been lost with the forces on the right flank of the 110th, and Sergeant Blake Lightner, Altoona, Pa., a liaison scout from Company G, 110th, started out alone to re-establish the connection.

He ran into an enemy machine gun nest, killed the crew and captured the guns single-handed. Then he went back, brought up a machine gun crew, established a snipers' post, re-established the communications, returned to his own command and gave the co-ordinates for laying down a barrage on a line of enemy machine gun nests he had discovered.

Toward nightfall of one of these days of desperate fighting it was discovered that the ammunition supply of the first battalion of the 110th was running low, and Corporal Harold F. Wickerham, Washington, Pa., and Private Boynton David Marchand, Monongahela City, Pa., were sent back with a message for brigade headquarters. When they reached the spot where the headquarters had been they found it had been moved. They walked for miles through the woods in the darkness and finally came to a town where another regiment was stationed, and they sent their message over the military telephone.

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They were invited to remain the rest of the night and sleep; fearing the message might not get through properly, however, and knowing the grave need of more ammunition, they set out again, and toward morning reached their own ammunition dump and confirmed the message orally. Again they refused a chance to rest, and set out to rejoin their command, which they reached just in time to take part in a battle in the afternoon. Such are the characteristics of the American soldier.

Somewhat the same fate as befell Epieds, which had been completely leveled by artillery fire, came to the village of Le Charmel. After violent fighting lasting two hours, during which the village changed hands twice, it was blown to pieces by the artillery, and our men took possession, driving the Germans on northeastward.

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The Pennsylvanians now began to feel the change in the German resistance as the Boche retreat reached its second line of defense, based on the Ourcq River, and the fighting became hourly more bitter and determined. This, as well as the dense forests, where the Germans had strung a maze of barbed wire from tree to tree, slowed up the retreat and pursuit. Also the density of the woods hampered observation of the enemy from the air and therefore slowed up our artillery fire.

The process of taking enemy positions by frontal assault, always a costly operation, gave way, wherever possible, to infiltration, by which villages and other posts were pinched off, exactly as Cambrai, St. Quentin, Lille and other places were taken later by the British farther north.

The process of infiltration from a military standpoint means exactly the same thing as the word means in any other connection. A few men at a time filter into protected positions close to the enemy until enough have assembled to offer battle, the enemy meanwhile being kept down by strong, concentrated fire from the main body and the artillery. Although much slower than an assault, this is extremely economical of men.

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During this progress from the Marne northward, the various headquarters had found some difficulty in keeping in touch with the advancing columns. A headquarters, even of a regiment, is not so mobile as the regiment itself. There is a vast amount of paraphernalia and supplies to be moved, yet it is necessary that a reasonably close touch be maintained with the fighting front.

The German method of retreat necessarily resulted in the Americans' going forward by leaps and bounds. Strong points, such as well-organized villages, manned by snipers and machine guns in some force, held the troops up until the German rear-guards were disposed of. Once they were cleaned up, however, the American advance, hampered only by hidden sharpshooters and machine guns in small strength, moved forward rapidly. It was reported, for instance, that one regimental headquarters was moved three times in one day to keep up with the lines.

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Most of the time, regimental, and even brigade, headquarters were under artillery fire from the German big guns, and it was from this cause that the first Pennsylvania officer of the rank of lieutenant-colonel was killed, July 28th. He was Wallace W. Fetzer, of Milton, Pa., second in command of the 110th.

Regimental headquarters had been moved far forward and established in a brick house in a good state of preservation. The office machinery just was getting well into the swing again when a high explosive shell fell in the front yard and threw a geyser of earth over Colonel Kemp, who was at the door, and Lieutenant-Colonel Fetzer, who was sitting on the steps.

A moment later a second shell struck the building and killed three orderlies. This was good enough evidence for Colonel Kemp that his headquarters had been spotted by Boche airmen, for the artillery was registering too accurately to be done by chance, so he ordered a move.

Officers and men of the staff were packing up to move and Lieutenant Stewart M. Alexander, Altoona, Pa., the regimental intelligence officer, was finishing questioning two captured Hun

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captains when a big high-explosive shell scored a direct hit on the building. Seventeen men in the house, including the two German captains, were killed outright. Colonel Kemp and Lieutenant-Colonel Fetzer had left the building and were standing side by side in the yard. A piece of shell casing struck Colonel Fetzer, killing him, and a small piece struck Colonel Kemp a blow on the jaw, which left him speechless and suffering from shell-shock for some time.

Lieutenant Alexander, face to face with the two German officer prisoners, was blown clear out of the building into the middle of the roadway, but was uninjured, except for shock.

It was this almost uncanny facility of artillery fire for taking one man and leaving another of two close together, that led to the fancy on the part of soldiers that it was useless to try to evade the big shells, because if "your number" was on one it would get you, no matter what you did, and if your number was not on it, it would pass harmlessly by. Thousands of the men became absolute fatalists in this regard.

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Major Edward Martin, of Waynesburg, Pa., took temporary command of the regiment and won high commendation by his work in the next few days.

It now became necessary to straighten the American line. The 109th had come up and was just behind the 110th. It had taken shelter for the night of July 28th in a wood just south of Fresne, and early on the morning of July 29th received orders to be on the south side of the Ourcq, two miles away, by noon of that day.

The men knew they were closely in touch with the enemy once more, but this time there was none of the nervousness before action that had marked their first entrance into battle. They had beaten back the Prussian Guard, the flower of the Crown Prince's army, once, and knew they could do it again.

Furthermore, there were many scores to settle. Every man felt he wanted to avenge the officers and comrades who had fallen in the earlier fighting, and it was a grimly-determined and relentless body of men that emerged from that wood in skirmish formation before dawn of July 29th.

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Almost immediately parts of the line came into action, but it was about an hour after the beginning of "the day's work" that the first serious fighting took place. Company M, near the center of the 109th's long line, ran into a strong machine gun nest. The new men who had been brought into the company to fill the gaps that were left after the fighting on the Marne had been assimilated quickly and inoculated with the 109th's fighting spirit and desire for revenge.

Although the company had gone into its first action as the only one in the regiment with the full complement of six commissioned officers, it now was sadly short, for those bitter days below the Marne had worked havoc with the commissioned personnel as well as with the enlisted men.

Officers were becoming scarce all through the regiment. Lieutenant Fales was the only one of the original officers of the company left in service, so Lieutenant Edward B. Goward, of Philadelphia, had been sent by Colonel Brown from headquarters to take command of the company, with Lieutenant Fales second in command.

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The company had to advance down a long hill, cross a small tributary of the Ourcq, which here was near its source, and go up another hill—all in the open. The Boche were intrenched along the edge of a wood at the top of this second hill, and they poured in a terrible fire as the company advanced.

Lieutenants Goward and Fales were leading the first platoons. The company was wild with eagerness and there was no holding them. Here was the first chance they had had since the Marne to square accounts with the unspeakable Hun, and they were in no humor to employ subtle tactics or use even ordinary care.

With queer gurgling sounds behind their gas masks—they would have been yells of fury without the masks in place—they swept forward. Lieutenant Goward ran straight into a stream of machine gun bullets. One struck him in the right shoulder and whirled him around. A second struck him in the left shoulder and twisted him further. As he crumpled up a stream of bullets struck him in the stomach. He fell dying.

Seeing him topple, Lieutenant Fales rushed toward him to see if he could be of service. He walked directly into the same fire and was mortally wounded. Goward managed to roll into a shell hole, where he died in a short time.

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The men did not stop. Led only by their non-commissioned officers, they plunged straight into and over the machine gun nest directly in the face of its murderous fire which had torn gaps in their ranks, but could not stop them. They stamped out the German occupants with as little compunction as one steps on a spider. The men came out of the woods breathing hard and trembling from the reaction to their fury and exertions, but they turned over no prisoners.

The machine gun crews were dead to a man.

Goward and Fales had been especially popular with the men of the company, and their loss was felt keenly. Goward was distinctly of the student type, quiet, thoughtful, scholarly, doing his own thinking at all times. He had been noted for this characteristic when a student at the University of Pennsylvania. Fales, on the other hand, was of the dashing, athletic type, and the two, with their directly opposed natures, had worked together perfectly and quite captured the hearts of their men.

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Both Goward and Fales are buried on the side of a little hill near Courmont, in the Commune of

Cierges, Department of the Aisne, their graves marked by the customary wooden crosses, to which are attached their identification disks.

From then on, the rest of the day was a continuous, forward-moving battle for the regiment. Every mile was contested hotly by Hun rear-guard machine gunners, left behind to harass the advancing Americans and make their pursuit as costly as possible.

Lieutenant Herbert P. Hunt, of Philadelphia, son of a former lieutenant-colonel of the old First, leading Company A of the 109th in a charge, was struck in the left shoulder by a piece of shell and still was in hospital when the armistice ended hostilities.

The 109th reached Courmont and found it well organized by a small force of Germans, with snipers and machine guns in what remained of the houses, firing from windows and doors and housetops. They cleaned up the town in a workmanlike manner, and only a handful of prisoners went back to the cages in the rear.

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It was in this fighting that Sergeant John H. Winthrop, of Bryn Mawr, performed the service for which he was cited officially by General Pershing, winning the Distinguished Service Cross. The sergeant was killed in action a few weeks later.

He was a member of Company G, 109th Infantry. All its officers became incapacitated when the company was in action. Sergeant Winthrop took command. The official citation in his case read:

"For extraordinary heroism in action near the River Ourcq, northeast of Château-Thierry, France, July 30, 1918. Sergeant Winthrop took command of his company when all his officers were killed or wounded, and handled it with extreme courage, coolness and skill, under an intense artillery bombardment and machine gun fire, during an exceptionally difficult attack."

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CHAPTER IX

THE CHURCH OF RONCHERES

Meanwhile, the 110th had been having a stirring part of the war all its own, in the taking of Roncheres. As was the case with every other town and village in the whole region, the Germans, without expecting or intending to hold the town, had taken every possible step to make the taking of it as costly as possible. With their characteristic disregard of every finer instinct, they had made the church, fronting an open square in the center of the town and commanding roads in four directions, the center of their resistance.

Every building, every wall, fence and tree, sheltered a machine gun or a sniper. Most of the enemy died where they stood. As was the case 99 times out of every 100, they fired until they dropped from bullets or thrust up their hands and bleated "Kamerad," like scared sheep, when our men got close enough to use the bayonet.

Some time before, however, the Pennsylvanians had undertaken to make prisoners of a German thus beseeching mercy, and it was only after several men had fallen from apparently mysterious fire that they discovered the squealing Hun, hands in air, had his foot on a lever controlling the fire of his machine gun. Thus, he assumed an attitude of surrender in order to decoy our men within easier range of the gun he operated with his foot.

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So it is small wonder that the men of the 110th went berserk in Roncheres and made few prisoners. They played the old-fashioned game of hide and seek, in which the men in khaki were always "it," and to be spied meant death for the Hun. From building to building they moved steadily forward until they came within range of the village church, when their progress was stayed for some time.

There was a cross on the roof of the church of some kind of stone with a red tinge. Behind it the Germans had planted guns. Three guns were hidden in the belfry, from which the bells had been removed and sent to Germany. Gothic walls and balconies, from which in happier days the plaster statuettes of saints looked down on the fair, green fields and peaceful countryside of France, sheltered machine gunners, snipers and small cannon.

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Sharpshooters of the 110th finally picked off the gunners behind the cross, but the little fortress in the belfry still held out. Detachments set out to work around the outer edge of the town and surround the church. When they found houses with partition walls so strong that a hole could not be battered through easily, sharpshooters were stationed at the windows and doors and they were able to hold the German fire down so well that other men could slip to the shelter of the next house.

This was all right until they came to the roads that radiated from the church to the four corners

of the village. They were not wide roads, but the terrific fire that swept down them at every sign of a movement by the Americans made the prospect of crossing them seem like a first class suicide. Nevertheless, it had to be done. The men who led this circuitous advance waited until enough of their comrades had arrived to make a sortie in force. The best riflemen were told off to remain behind in the houses and to mark down the peepholes and other places from which the fire was coming. Automatic riflemen and rifle grenadiers were assigned to look after the Huns secreted in the church.

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When these arrangements were completed, the Americans began a fire that reduced the German effort to a minimum. Our marksmen did not wait for a German to show himself. They kept a steady stream of lead and steel pouring into every place from which German shots had been seen to come.

Under cover of this sweeping hail, the men who were to continue the advance darted across the road, right in the open. They made no effort to fire, but put every ounce of energy into the speed of their legs. Thus a footing was established by a considerable group on the other side of the road, and the remaining houses between there and the church soon were cleaned up, so that reinforcements could move forward.

Still the church remained the dominating figure of the fight, as it had been of the village landscape so many years. Its stout stone walls, built to last for centuries, offered ideal shelter, and before anything further could be done it became imperative to wipe out that nest of snarling Hun fire.

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Using the same tactics as had availed them so well in the crossing of the road, a little band of Americans was enabled to cross the small open space at the rear of the church. Here a shell from a German battery had conveniently opened a hole in the solid masonry. It was the work of only a few minutes to enlarge this, and our men began to filter into the once sacred edifice, now so profaned by the sacrilegious Hun.

The bottom of the church was turned quickly into a charnel house for the Boche there, and then our men were free to turn their attention to that annoying steeple, which still was taking its toll. One man led the way up the winding stone stairs, fighting every step. Strange to relate, he went safely to the top, although comrades behind him were struck down, and he faced a torrent of fire and even missiles hurled down by the frantic Huns who sought to stay this implacable advance.

Eventually the top of the stairs was gained. A German under officer, who evidently had been in command of the stronghold, leaped over the low parapet to death, and three Huns, the last of the garrison, abjectly waved their arms in the air and squalled the customary "Kamerad! Kamerad!"

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Mopping up of the rest of the town was an easy task by comparison with what had gone before. Then, with only a brief breathing spell, the regiment swung a little to the northwest and reached Courmont in time to join the 109th in wiping out the last machine gunners there.

Now came an achievement of which survivors of the 109th and 110th Infantry Regiments—the Fifty-fifth Infantry Brigade—will retain the memory for years to come. It was one of those feats that become regimental traditions, the tales of which are handed down for generations within regimental organizations and in later years become established as standards toward which future members of the organization may aspire with only small likelihood of attaining.

This achievement was the taking of the Bois de Grimpettes, or Grimpettes Wood.

The operation, in the opinion of officers outside the Fifty-fifth Brigade, compared most favorably with the never-to-be-forgotten exploit of the marines in the Bois de Belleau.

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There were these differences: First, the Belleau Wood fight occurred at a time when all the rest of the western front was more or less inactive, but the taking of Grimpettes Wood came in the midst of a general forward movement that was electrifying the world, a movement in which miles of other front bulked large in public attention; second, the taking of Belleau was one of the very first real battle operations of Americans, and the marines were watched by the critical eyes of a warring world to see how "those Americans" would compare with the seasoned soldiery of Europe; third, the Belleau fight was an outstanding operation, both by reason of the vital necessity of taking the wood in order to clear the way for what was to follow and because it was not directly connected with or part of other operations anywhere else.

Grimpettes Wood was the Fifty-fifth Infantry Brigade's own "show." The wood lies north of Courmont and just south of Sergy. It is across the Ourcq, which is so narrow that some of the companies laid litters from bank to bank and walked over dryshod, and so shallow that those who waded across hardly went in over their shoetops. At one side the wood runs over a little hill. The 109th and 110th were told, in effect:—

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"The Germans have a strong position in Grimpettes Wood. Take it."

The regiments were beginning to know something about German "strong positions." In fact they had passed the amateur stage in dealing with such problems. Although, perhaps they could not be assigned yet to the expert class, nevertheless they were supplied with groups of junior officers and "non-coms" who felt—and justly—that they knew something about cleaning up "strong positions." They no longer went about such a task with the jaunty *sang froid* and reckless daredevilry that had marked their earlier experiences. They had learned that it did themselves and their men no good and was of no service to America, to advance defiantly in the open in splendid but foolish disregard of hidden machine guns and every other form of Hun strafing.

Yet when it came to the taking of Grimpettes Wood, they had no alternative to just that thing.

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The Germans then were making their last stand on the line of the Ourcq. Already they had determined on, and had begun, the further retreat to the line of the Vesle, at this point about ten miles farther north. Such places as Grimpettes Wood had been manned in force to hold up the Franco-American advance as long as possible. When they were torn loose, the Huns again would be in full flight northeastward.

Grimpettes was organized as other small woods had been by the Germans during the fighting of the summer: the trees were loaded with machine guns, weapons and gunners chained to their places; the underbrush was laced through with barbed wire; concealed strong points checker-boarded the dense, second growth woodland, so that when the Pennsylvanians took one nest of machine guns they found themselves fired on from two or more others. This maze of machine guns and snipers was supplemented by countless trench mortars and one-pounder cannon.

The taking of the hilly end of the wood was assigned to the 110th, and the 109th was to clean out the lower part. [Pg 146]

It was a murderous undertaking. The nearest edge of the wood was 700 yards from the farthest extension of the village of Courmont that offered even a shadow of protection.

The regiments swung out from the shelter of the village in the most approved wave formation, faultlessly executed. The moment the first men emerged from the protection of the buildings, they ran into a hail of lead and steel that seemed, some of the men said later, almost like a solid wall in places. There was not a leaf to protect them. Hundreds of machine guns tore loose in the woods, until their rattle blended into one solid roar. One-pounder cannon sniped at them. German airmen, who had complete control of the air in that vicinity, flew the length of the advancing lines, as low as 100 feet from the ground, raking them with machine gun fire and dropping bombs. The Pennsylvanians organized their own air defense. They simply used their rifles with more or less deterrent effect on the flyers.

The sniping one-pounders were the worst of all, the men said afterward—those, and the air bombs. They messed one up so badly when they scored a hit. [Pg 147]

It is a mystery how any man lived through that welter of fire. Even the men who survived could not explain their good fortune. That the regiments were not wiped out was a demonstration of the tremendous expenditure of ammunition in warfare compared to effectiveness of fire, for thousands of bullets and shells were fired in that engagement for every man who was hit.

A pitiful few of the men in the leading wave won through to the edge of the wood and immediately flung themselves down and dug in. A few of the others who were nearer the wood than the town scraped out little hollows for themselves and stuck grimly where they were when the attackers were recalled, the officers realizing the losses were beyond reason for the value of the objective.

Neither officers nor men were satisfied. Private soldiers pleaded with their sergeants for another chance, and the sergeants in turn besought their officers. The Pennsylvanians had been assigned to a task and had not performed it. That was not the Pennsylvania way. Furthermore there were living and unwounded comrades out there who could not be left long unsupported. [Pg 148]

A breathing spell was allowed, and then word went down the lines to "have another go at it." The men drew their belts tighter, set their teeth grimly and plunged out into the storm of lead and steel once more. It must be remembered that all this was without adequate artillery support, for what guns had reached the line were busy elsewhere, and the others were struggling up over ruined roads.

Again on this second attack, a handful of men reached the wood and filtered in, but the attacking force was driven back. It began to seem as if nothing could withstand that torrential fire in force. Three times more, making five attacks in all, the brigade "went to it" with undimmed spirits, and three times more it was forced back to the comparative shelter of Courmont.

Then headquarters was informed, July 30th, that artillery had come up and a barrage would be put on the wood.

"Fine!" said the commander. "We will clean that place up at 2.30 o'clock this afternoon." [Pg 149]

And that is exactly what they did. The guns laid down a barrage that not only drove the Germans into their shelters, but opened up holes in the near side of the wood and through the wire. The scattered few of the Pennsylvanians who still clung to their places just within the first fringe of woodland made themselves as small as possible, hugging the ground and the boles of the largest trees they could find. Despite their best endeavors, however, it was a terrible experience to have to undergo that terrific cannonading from their own guns.

Finally, the barrage lifted and the regiments went out once more for the sixth assault on the Bois de Grimpettes. The big guns had lent just the necessary added weight to carry them across. The Germans flung themselves from their dugouts and offered what resistance they could, but the first wave of thoroughly mad, yelling, excited Americans was on them before they got well started with their machine gun reception.

Our men went through Grimpettes Wood "like a knife through butter" as one officer expressed it later. It was man against man, rifle and bayonet against machine gun and one-pounder, and the best men won. Some prisoners were sent back, but the burial squads laid away more than 400 German bodies in Grimpettes. The American loss in cleaning up the wood was hardly a tithe of that. It was a heroic and gallant bit of work, typical of the dash and spirit of our men. [Pg 150]

After the first attack on Grimpettes Wood had failed, First Sergeant William G. Meighan, of

Waynesburg, Pa., Company K, 110th Infantry, in the lead of his company, was left behind when the recall was sounded. He had flung himself into a shell-hole, in the bottom of which water had collected. The machine gun fire of the Germans was low enough to "cut the daisies," as the men remarked. Therefore, there was no possibility of crawling back to the lines. The water in the hole in which he had sought shelter attracted all the gas in the vicinity, for Fritz was mixing gas shells with his shrapnel and high explosives.

The German machine gunners had seen the few Americans who remained on the field, hiding in shell holes, and they kept their machine guns spraying over those nests. Other men had to don their gas masks when the gas shells came over, but none had to undergo what Sergeant Meighan did. [Pg 151]

It is impossible to talk intelligibly or to smoke inside a gas mask. A stiff clamp is fixed over the nose and every breath must be taken through the mouth. Soldiers adjust their masks only when certain that gas is about. They dread gas more than anything else the German has to offer, more than any other single thing in the whole category of horrors with which the Kaiser distinguished this war from all other wars in the world's history. Yet the discomfort of the gas mask, improved as the present model is over the device that first intervened between England's doughty men and a terrible death is such that it is donned only in dire necessity. Soldiers hate the gas mask intolerably, but they hate gas even more.

So Sergeant Meighan, hearing the peculiar sound by which soldiers identify a gas shell from all others, slipped on his mask. It never is easy to adjust, and he got a taste of the poison before his mask was secure—just enough to make him feel rather faint and ill. He knew that if his mask slipped to one side, if only enough to give him one breath of the outer air, he would suffer torture, probably die. He knew that if he wriggled out of his hole in the ground, however inconspicuous he made himself, he would be cut to ribbons by machine gun bullets. So he simply dug a little deeper and waited. [Pg 152]

If this seems like a trifling thing, just try one of the gas respirators in use in the army. If one is not available, try holding your nose and breathing only through your mouth. When you have discovered how unpleasant this can be, try to imagine every breath through the mouth is impregnated with the chemicals that neutralize the gas, thus adding to the difficulty of breathing, yet insuring a continuance of life.

And remember that Sergeant Meighan did that for fifteen hours. And then ask yourself if "hero" is an abused word when applied to a man like that.

Furthermore, when in a later attack on the wood, Company K reached the point where Sergeant Meighan was concealed, he discovered in a flash that the last officer of the first wave had fallen before his shelter was reached. Being next in rank, he promptly signaled to the men that he would assume command, and led them in a gallant assault on the enemy position. [Pg 153]

There were other men in the 109th and 110th regiments who displayed a marked spirit of gallantry and sacrifice, which by no means was confined to enlisted men. Lieutenant Richard Stockton Bullitt, of Torresdale, an officer of Company K, 110th, was struck in the thigh by a machine gun bullet in one of the first attacks.

He was unable to walk, but saw, about a hundred yards away, an automatic rifle, which was out of commission because the corporal in charge of the rifle squad had been killed and the other men could not operate the gun. Lieutenant Bullitt, member of an old and distinguished Philadelphia family, crawled to the rifle, dragging his wounded leg. He took command and continued firing the rifle.

Five more bullets struck him in different places in a short time, but he shook his head defiantly, waved away stretcher bearers who wanted to take him to the rear, and pumped the gun steadily. Finally another bullet struck him squarely in the forehead and killed him. [Pg 154]

After the wood was completely in our hands, a little column was observed moving slowly across the open space toward Courmont. When it got close enough it was seen to consist entirely of unarmed Germans, apparently. Staff officers were just beginning to fume and fuss about the ridiculousness of sending a party of prisoners back unguarded, when they discovered a very dusty and very disheveled American officer bringing up the rear with a rifle held at the "ready." He was Lieutenant Marshall S. Barron, Latrobe, Pa., of Company M, 110th. There were sixty-seven prisoners in his convoy, and most of them he had taken personally.

That night the regimental headquarters of the 110th was moved to Courmont, only 700 yards behind the wood that had been so desperately fought for.

"We'll work out tomorrow's plans," said Major Martin, and summoned his staff officers about him. They were bending over a big table, studying the maps, when a six-inch shell struck the headquarters building squarely. Twenty-two enlisted men and several officers were injured. Major Martin, Captain John D. Hitchman, Mt. Pleasant, Pa., the regimental adjutant; Lieutenant Alexander, the intelligence officer, and Lieutenant Albert G. Braden, of Washington, Pa., were knocked about somewhat, but not injured. [Pg 155]

For the second time within a few days, Lieutenant Alexander flirted with death. The first time he was blown through an open doorway into the road by the explosion of a shell that killed two German officers, who were facing him, men he was examining.

This time, when the headquarters at Courmont was blown up, he was examining a German captain and a sergeant, the other officers making use of the answers of the prisoners in studying the maps and trying to determine the disposition of the enemy forces. Almost exactly the same

thing happened again to Lieutenant Alexander. Both prisoners were killed, and he was blown out of the building uninjured.

"Getting to be a habit with you," said Major Martin.

"This is the life," said Lieutenant Alexander.

"Fritz hasn't got a shell with Lieutenant Alexander's number on it," said the men in the ranks.

The shell that demolished the regimental headquarters was only one of thousands with which the Boche raked our lines and back areas. As soon as American occupancy of Bois de Grimpettes had been established definitely the Hun turned loose an artillery "hate" that made life miserable for the Pennsylvanians. In the 110th alone there were twenty-two deaths and a total of 102 casualties.

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CHAPTER X

AT GRIPS WITH DEATH

The village of Sergy, just north of Grimpettes Wood, threatened to be a hard nut to crack. The 109th Infantry was sent away to the west to flank the town from that direction, and the 110th cooperated with regiments of other divisions in the direct assault.

The utter razing of Epieds and other towns above the Marne by artillery fire, in order to blast the Germans out of their strongholds, led to a decision to avoid such destructive methods wherever possible, and the taking of Sergy was almost entirely an infantry and machine gun battle.

It was marked, as so many other of the Pennsylvanians' fights were, by the "never-say-die" spirit that refused to know defeat. There was something unconquerable about the terrible persistence of the Americans that seemed to daunt the Germans.

The American forces swept into the town and drove the enemy slowly and reluctantly out to the north. The usual groups of Huns were still in hiding in cellars and dugouts and other strong points, where they were able to keep up a sniping fire on our men.

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Before the positions could be mopped up and organized, the Germans were strengthened by fresh forces, and they reorganized and took the town again. Four times this contest of attack and counter-attack was carried out before our men established themselves in sufficient force to hold the place. Repeatedly the Germans strove to obtain a foothold again, but their hold on Sergy was gone forever. They realized this at last, and then turned loose the customary sullen shelling with shrapnel, high explosives and gas.

While the 110th was engaged in this grim work, the 109th recrossed the Ourcq, marched away down the south bank to the west of Sergy, and crossed the river again. Officers, feeling almost at the end of their physical resources, marvelled at the way in which the regiment—blooded, steady and dependable—swung along on this march.

Like all the other Pennsylvania regiments, food had been scarce with them because of the pace at which they had been going and the utter inability of the commissary to supply them regularly in the circumstances. When opportunity offered, they got a substantial meal, but these were few and far between. There were innumerable instances of men going forty-eight hours without either food or water. The thirst was worse than the hunger, and the longing for sleep was almost overpowering.

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Despite all this, the two regiments set off for the conquest of Sergy with undiminished spirit and determination, and the two grades of men, commissioned and enlisted, neither willing to give up in the face of the other's dogged pertinacity, spurred each other on to prodigies of will-power, for by this time it was will-power, more than actual physical endurance, that carried them on.

The 109th took position in a wood just northwest of Sergy and sent scouts forward to ascertain the situation of the enemy, only to have them come back with word that the town already was in the hands of the 110th, after a brilliant action.

The 109th now came to some of the most nerve-trying hours it had yet experienced, though no fighting was involved. A wood north of Sergy was selected as an abiding place for the night and, watching for a chance when Boche flyers were busy elsewhere, the regiment made its way into the shelter and prepared to get a night's rest.

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They had escaped the eyes of the enemy airmen but, unknown to the officers of the 109th, the wood lay close to an enemy ammunition dump, which the retiring Huns had not had time to destroy. Naturally, the German artillery knew perfectly the location of the dump, and sought to

explode it by means of artillery fire.

By the time the 109th, curious as to the marked attention they were receiving from the Hun guns, discovered the dump, it was too late to seek other shelter, so all they could do was to contrive such protection as was possible and hug the ground, expecting each succeeding shell to land in the midst of the dump and set off an explosion that probably would leave nothing of the regiment but its traditions.

Probably half the shells intended for the ammunition pile landed in the woods. Dreadful as such a bombardment always is, the men of the 109th fairly gasped with relief when each screeching shell ended with a bang among the trees, for shells that landed there were in no danger of exploding that heap of ammunition. [Pg 161]

The night of strain and tension passed. Strange as it may seem, the Boche gunners were unable to reach the dump.

In the night a staff officer from brigade headquarters had found Colonel Brown and informed him that he was to relinquish command of the regiment to become adjutant to the commandant of a port of debarkation. Lieutenant-Colonel Henry W. Coulter, of Greensburg, Pa., took command of the regiment.

Colonel Coulter is a brother of Brigadier-General Richard Coulter, one time commander of the Tenth Pennsylvania, later commander of an American port in France. A few days later, Colonel Coulter was wounded in the foot, and Colonel Samuel V. Ham, a regular army officer, became commander. As an evidence of the vicissitudes of the Pennsylvania regiments, the 109th had eight regimental commanders in two months. All except Colonel Brown and Colonel Coulter were regular army men. [Pg 162]

The 110th was relieved, and dropped back for a rest of two days, August 1st and 2d. The men were nervous and "fidgety," to quote one of the officers, for the first time since their first "bath of steel," south of the Marne. Both nights they were supposed to be resting they were shelled and bombed from the air continuously, and both days were put in at the "camions sanitaire," or "delousing machines," where each man got a hot bath and had his clothes thoroughly disinfected and cleaned.

Thus, neither night nor day could be called restful by one who was careful of his English, although the baths probably did more to bolster up the spirits of the men than anything else that could have happened to them. Anyway, when the two-day period was ended and the regiment again set off for the north, headed for the Vesle and worse things than any that had gone before, it marched away whistling and singing, with apparently not a care in the world.

It was about this time that the first of the Pennsylvania artillery, one battalion of the 107th Regiment, came into the zone of operations, and soon its big guns began to roar back at the Germans in company with the French and other American artillery. [Pg 163]

The guns and their crews had troubles of their own in forging to the front, although most of it was of a kind they could look back on later with a laugh, and not the soul-trying, mind-searing experiences of the infantry.

The roads that had been so hard for the foot soldiers to traverse were many times worse for the big guns. The 108th, for instance, at one time was twelve hours in covering eight miles of road.

When it came to crossing the Marne, in order to speed up the crossing, the regiment was divided, half being sent farther up the river. When night fell, it was learned that the half that had crossed lower down had the field kitchen and no rations and the other half had all the rations and no field kitchen to cook them. Other organizations came to the rescue in both instances.

At six o'clock one evening, not yet having had evening mess, the regiment was ordered to move to another town, which it reached at nine o'clock. Men and horses had been settled down for the night by ten o'clock and, as all was quiet, the officers went to the village. There they found an innkeeper bemoaning the fact that, just as he had gotten a substantial meal ready for the officers of another regiment, they had been ordered away, and the food was all ready, with nobody to eat it. [Pg 164]

The hungry officers looked over the "spread." There was soup, fried chicken, cold ham, string beans, peas, sweet potatoes, jam, bread and butter, and wine. They assured the innkeeper he need worry no further about losing his food, and promptly took their places about the table. The first spoonfuls of soup just were being lifted when an orderly entered, bearing orders for the regiment to move on at once. They were under way again, the officers still hungry, by 11.45 o'clock, and marched until 6.30 A. M., covering thirty kilometres, or more than eighteen miles.

The 103d Ammunition Train also had come up now, after experiences that prepared it somewhat for what was to come later. For instance, when delivering ammunition to a battery under heavy shellfire, a detachment of the train had to cross a small stream on a little, flat bridge, without guard rails. A swing horse of one of the wagons became frightened when a shell fell close by. The horse shied and plunged over the edge, wedging itself between the bridge and a small footbridge alongside. [Pg 165]

The stream was in a small valley, quite open to enemy fire, and for the company to have waited while the horse was gotten out would have been suicidal. So the main body passed on and the caisson crew and drivers, twelve men in all, were left to pry the horse out. For three hours they worked, patiently and persistently, until the frantic animal was freed.

They were under continuous and venomous fire all the while. Shrapnel cut the tops of trees a

bare ten feet away. Most of the time they and the horses were compelled to wear gas masks, as the Hun tossed over a gas shell every once in a while for variety—he was "mixing them." The gas hung long in the valley, for it has "an affinity," as the chemists say, for water, and will follow the course of a stream.

High explosives "cr-r-r-umped" in places within two hundred feet, but the ammunition carriers never even glanced up from their work, nor hesitated a minute. Just before dawn they got the horse free and started back for their own lines. Fifteen minutes later a high-explosive shell landed fairly on the little bridge and blew it to atoms.

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The 103d Field Signal Battalion, composed of companies chiefly from Pittsburgh, but with members from many other parts of the state, performed valiant service in maintaining lines of communication. Repeatedly, men of the battalion, commanded by Major Fred G. Miller, of Pittsburgh, exposed themselves daringly in a welter of fire to extend telephone and telegraph lines, sometimes running them through trees and bushes, again laying them in hastily scooped out grooves in the earth.

Frequently communication no sooner was established than a chance shell would sever the line, and the work was to do all over again. With cool disregard of danger, the signalmen went about their tasks, incurring all the danger to be found anywhere—but without the privilege and satisfaction of fighting back.

Under sniping rifle fire, machine gun and big shell bombardment and frequently drenched with gas, the gallant signalmen carried their work forward. There was little of the picturesque about it, but nothing in the service was more essential. Many of the men were wounded and gassed, a number killed, and several were cited and decorated for bravery.

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CHAPTER XI

DRIVE TO THE VESLE

When the Hun grip was torn loose from the positions along the Ourcq, he had no other good stopping place short of the Vesle, so he lit out for that river as fast as he could move his battalions and equipment. Again only machine guns and sniping rear-guards were left to impede the progress of the pursuers, and again there were times when it was exceedingly difficult for the French and American forces to keep in contact with the enemy.

The 32d Division, composed of Michigan and Wisconsin National Guards, had slipped into the front lines and, with regiments of the Rainbow Division, pressed the pursuit. The Pennsylvania regiments, with the 103d Engineers, and the 111th and the 112th Infantry leading, followed by the 109th and then the 110th, went forward in their rear, mopping up the few Huns they left in their wake who still showed fight.

It had begun to rain again—a heavy, dispiriting downpour, such as Northern France is subjected to frequently. The fields became morasses. The roads, cut up by heavy traffic, were turned to quagmires. The distorted remains of what had been wonderful old trees, stripped of their foliage and blackened and torn by the breaths of monster guns, dripped dismally. In all that ruined, tortured land of horror on horror, there was not one bright spot, and there was only one thing to keep up the spirits of the soldiers—the Hun was definitely on the run.

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Drenched to the skin, wading in mud at times almost to their knees, amid the ruck and confusion of an army's wake, the Pennsylvanians trudged resolutely forward, inured to hardship, no longer sensible to ordinary discomforts, possessed of only one thought—to come to battle once more with the hateful foe and inflict further punishment in revenge for the gallant lads who had gone from the ranks.

All the time they were subjected to long-distance shelling by the big guns, as the Hun strafed the country to the south in hope of hampering transport facilities and breaking up marching columns. All the time Boche fliers passed overhead, sometimes swooping low enough to slash at the columns with machine guns and at frequent intervals releasing bombs. There were casualties daily, although not, of course, on the same scale as in actual battle.

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Through Coulonges, Cohan, Dravegny, Longeville, Mont-sur-Courville and St. Gilles they plunged on relentlessly.

Close by the hamlet of Chamery, near Cohan, the Pennsylvania men passed the grave of Lieutenant Quentin Roosevelt, who had been brought down there by an enemy airman a few weeks before and was buried by the Germans. French troops, leading the Allied pursuit, had come on the grave first and established a military guard of honor over it and supplanted the rude

cross and inscription erected by the Germans with a neater and more ornate marking.

When the Americans arrived the French guard was removed and American soldiers mounted guard over the last resting place of the son of the onetime President.

Just below Longeville, the Pennsylvanians came into an area where the fire was intensified to the equal of anything they had passed through since leaving the Marne. All the varieties of Hun projectiles were hurled at them, high explosives of various sizes, shrapnel and gas. Once more the misery and discomfort of the gas mask had to be undergone, but by this time the Pennsylvanians had learned well and truly the value of that little piece of equipment and had imbibed thoroughly the doctrine that, unpleasant as it might be, the mask was infinitely better than a whiff of that dread, sneaking, penetrating vapor with which the Hun poisoned the air. [Pg 171]

The "blonde beast" had his back to the Vesle and had turned to show his teeth and snarl in fury at our men closing in on him.

The objective point on the river for the Pennsylvanians was Fismes. This was a town near the junction of the Vesle and Ardre rivers, which before the war had a population of a little more than 3,000. Here, in centuries long gone, the kings of France were wont to halt overnight on their way up to Rheims to be crowned. It was on a railroad running through Rheims to the east. A few miles west of Fismes the railroad divides, one branch winding away southwestward to Paris the other running west through Soissons and Compiègne. The town was one of the largest German munitions depots in the Soissons-Rheims sector and second in importance only to Soissons. [Pg 172]

Across the narrow river was the village of Fismette, destined to be the scene of the writing of a truly glorious page of Pennsylvania's military history. The past tense is used with regard to the existence of both places, as they virtually were wiped out in the process of forcing the Hun from the Vesle River barrier and sending him flying northward to the Aisne.

The railroad through Fismes and in its vicinity runs along the top of an embankment, raising it above the surrounding territory. There was a time, before the Americans were able to cross the railroad, that the embankment became virtually the barrier dividing redeemed France from darkest Hunland along that front. At night patrols from both sides would move forward to the railroad, and, burrowed in holes—the Germans in the north side and the Americans in the south—would watch and wait and listen for signs of an attack. [Pg 173]

Each knew the other was only a few feet away; at times, in fact, they could hear each other talking, and once in a while defiant badinage would be exchanged in weird German from the south and in ragtime, vaudeville English from the north. Appearance of a head above the embankment on either side was a signal for a storm of lead and steel.

The Americans had this advantage over the Germans: They knew the Huns were doomed to continue their retreat, and that the hold-up along the railroad was very temporary, and the Germans now realized the same thing. Therefore, the Americans fought triumphantly, with vigor and dash; the Germans, sullenly and in desperation.

One man of the 110th went to sleep in a hole in the night and did not hear the withdrawal just before dawn. Obviously his name could not be made public. When he woke it was broad daylight, and he was only partly concealed by a little hole in the railroad bank. There was nothing he could do. If he had tried to run for his regimental lines he would have been drilled like a sieve before he had gone fifty yards. Soon the German batteries would begin shelling, so he simply dug deeper into the embankment. [Pg 174]

"I just drove myself into that bank like a nail," he told his comrades later. He got away the next night.

Richard Morse, of the 110th, whose home is in Harrisburg, went out with a raiding party. The Germans discovered the advance of the group and opened a concentrated fire, forcing them back. Morse was struck in the leg and fell. He was able to crawl, however, and crawling was all he could have done anyway, because the only line of retreat open to him was being swept by a hail of machine gun bullets. As he crawled he was hit by a second bullet. Then a third one creased the muscles of his back. A few feet farther, and two more struck him, making five in all.

Then he tumbled into a shell hole. He waited until the threshing fire veered from his vicinity and he had regained a little strength, then crawled to another hole and flopped himself into that. Incredible as it may seem, he regained his own lines the fourth day by crawling from shell hole to shell hole, and started back to the hospital with every prospect of a quick recovery. He had been given up for dead, and the men of his own and neighboring companies gave him a rousing welcome. He had nothing to eat during those four days, but had found an empty tin can, and when it rained caught enough water in that to assuage his thirst. [Pg 175]

Corporal George D. Hyde, of Mt. Pleasant, Company E, 110th, hid in a hole in the side of the railroad embankment for thirty-six hours on the chance of obtaining valuable information. When returning, a piece of shrapnel struck the pouch in which he carried his grenades. Examining them, he found the cap of one driven well in. It was a miracle it had not exploded and torn a hole through him.

"You ought to have seen me throw that grenade away," he said.

In this waiting time it was decided to clean up a position of the enemy that was thrust out beyond their general line, from which an annoying fire was kept up constantly. Accordingly, a battalion of the 110th was sent over to wipe it out. [Pg 176]

The Rev. Mandeville J. Barker, rector of the Episcopal Church in Uniontown, Pa., is chaplain of

the 110th, with the rank of first lieutenant. He had endeared himself to officers and men alike by his happy combination of buoyant, gallant cheerfulness, sturdy Americanism, deep Christianity, indifference to hardship and the tender care he gave to the wounded. He had become, indeed, the most beloved man in the regiment.

He went over the top with the battalion that attacked by night on the heights of the Vesle. It was not his duty to go; in fact had the regimental commander known his intention, he probably would have been forbidden to go. But go he did. He had an idea that his job was to look after the men's bodies as well as their souls, and when there was stern fighting to do, he liked to be in a position where he could attend to both phases of his work.

The attacking party wiped out the Hun machine gun nest after a sharp fight and then retired to their own lines, as ordered. It was so dark that some of the wounded were overlooked. After the battalion returned, voices of American wounded could be heard out in that new No Man's Land, calling for help. Dr. Barker took his life and some first aid equipment and water in his two hands and slipped out into the dark, with only starshine and the voices of the wounded to guide him and, between the two armies, attended to the wounds of the men as best he could by the light of a small pocket torch, which he had to keep concealed from the enemy lookouts.

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One after another the clergyman hunted. Those who could walk he started back to the lines. Several he had to assist. One lad who was beyond help he sat beside and ministered to with the tenderness of a mother until the young soul struggled gropingly out into the Great Beyond. Then, with the tears rolling down his cheeks, the beloved "Sky Pilot" started back.

But again the sound of a voice in agony halted him. This time, however, it was not English words that he heard, but a moaning petition in guttural German: "Ach Gott! Ach, mein lieber Gott!"

The men of the 110th loved their "parson" even more for what he did then. He turned right about and went back, groping in the dark for the sobbing man. He found a curly-haired young German, wounded so he could not walk and in mortal terror, not of death or of the dark, but of those "terrible Americans who torture and kill their prisoners." Such was the tale with which he and his comrades had been taught to loathe their American enemies. Dr. Barker treated his wounds and carried him back to the American lines. The youngster whimpered with fear when he found where he was going, and begged the clergyman not to leave him. When he finally was convinced that he would not be harmed, he kissed the chaplain's hands, crying over them, and insisted on turning over to Dr. Barker everything he owned that could be loosened—helmet, pistol, bayonet, cartridges, buttons, and other odds and ends.

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"All hung over with loot, the parson was, when he came back," said a sergeant in telling of the scene afterward.

"The Fighting Parson," as the men called him, did not fight, actually, but he went as close to it as possible. On one occasion snipers were bothering the men. Dr. Barker borrowed a pair of glasses, lay flat on the field and, after prolonged study, discovered the offenders, four of them, and notified an artillery observer. A big gun casually swung its snout around, barked three times and the snipers sniped no more. Two or three days later, the regiment went over and took that section of German line and found what was left of the four men. "The Parson's Boche," the men called them.

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Toward the last of the action below the Vesle, a group of men of the 110th had established an outpost in a large cave, which extended a considerable distance back in a cliff—just how far none of the men ever discovered. After they had been there several days, Dr. Barker arranged to cheer them a little in their lonely vigil. The cave had been an underground quarry. The Germans had occupied it, knew exactly where it was and its value as a hiding place, and kept a constant stream of machine gun bullets flying past its mouth.

For three weeks it had been possible to enter or leave the cave only after dark. Even then it was risky, for the mouth of the cave was only about fifty yards from the German trenches and slight sounds could be heard. After dark the Hun fire was laid down about the entrance at every suspicious noise. Sometimes the men inside would amuse themselves by heaving stones outside from a safe position within, to hear Fritz turn loose his "pepper boxes."

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Despite these difficulties, Dr. Barker got a motion picture outfit into the cave and gave a show of six reels to the men stationed there, after which Y. M. C. A. men entertained them with songs and eccentric dances. Men who saw that performance, in the light of torches and flambeaux, will never forget the picture.

Toward the last there were sounds from the farther interior of the cave, and two American soldiers walked into the circle, blinking their eyes. Nobody gave much attention to them, supposing they just had wandered away a few minutes before, until one of them interrupted a song with the hoarsely whispered query:

"Got any chow?" Which is army slang for food.

"Aw, go lay down," was the querulous reply of the man addressed. "Ain't yuh got sense enough not to interrupt a show? Shut up, will yuh?"

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"Gee, but I'm hungry," came the answer. "I need some chow. We been lost in this doggone cave for two days."

Investigation developed that he was telling the truth, and Dr. Barker produced from some mysterious horn of plenty some chocolate, which the famished men ate with avidity. With the

natural, healthy curiosity of American youth, they had set out to explore the cave and had become lost in its mazes. Only the lights and noises of Dr. Barker's concert had led them out.

An instance of the attitude of mind of the Pennsylvania men, who felt nothing but contempt for their foes, and of how little the arrogance and intolerance of the typical Prussian officer impressed them, was given by members of the 111th Ambulance Company, working with the 111th Infantry.

Soldiers of Pennsylvania Dutch descent had amazed the Germans more than once not only by understanding the conversation of the enemy, but by their intense anger, almost ferocity, which they displayed on occasions when confronted with "the Intolerable Thing" called the Prussian spirit. Offspring of men and women of sturdy, free-minded stock who fled from oppression in Europe, they flamed with the spirit of the real liberty lover when in contact with the Prussian. [Pg 182]

A little group of the 111th's ambulanciers when carrying back the wounded, met a German major who was groaning and complaining vigorously and demanding instant attention. The contrast between his conduct and that of American officers, who almost invariably told the litter-bearers to go on and pick up worse wounded men, was glaring, but finally the bearers good-humoredly decided to get the major out of the way to stop his noise. He was not wounded severely, but was unable to walk, and they lifted him to the stretcher with the same care they gave to all the wounded.

Promptly the major began to upbraid the Americans, speaking in his native tongue. In the language of a Billingsgate fishwife—or what corresponds to one in Hunland—he cursed the Americans, root, stock and branch, from President Wilson down to the newest recruit in the army. [Pg 183]

Thomas G. Fox, of Hummelstown, Pa., one of the bearers, understood his every word and repeated the diatribe in English to his fellows, who became restive under the tirade. At last the major said:

"You Americans think you are going to win the war, but you're not."

That was too much for Fox and his companions.

"You think you are going to be carried back to a hospital, but you're not," said Fox. Whereupon the litter was turned over neatly and the major deposited, not too gently, on the hard ground. For some time he lay there, roaring his maledictions. Then he started to crawl back, and by the time he got to a hospital, he had lost some of his insolence.

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CHAPTER XII

IN DEATH VALLEY

Hun infantry in considerable force held Fismes. Their big guns had been moved across the Vesle, tacit admission they had no hope of holding the south bank of the river, but the strength of the force in the town indicated the customary intention to sell out as dearly as possible to their dogged and unfaltering pursuers.

Lying in the woods, or whatever other shelter they could find, our infantrymen for two days watched French and American batteries moving into position. It seemed the procession was interminable.

"There'll be something doing for Fritz when those babies get going," was the opinion of the Pennsylvania doughboys.

French and American forces already had crossed the river east and west of Fismes, which was almost the geographic center of the line between Soissons and Rheims. To stabilize the line, it was essential not only that Fismes be taken, but that the river crossings be forced and Fismette seized. [Pg 185]

Forward bodies of infantry continually had been feeling out the German positions in Fismes and on Saturday afternoon, August 3rd, reconnaissance parties from the 168th Infantry, formerly the Third Iowa National Guard, of the Rainbow Division, entered the southern edge of the town.

They clung there desperately until the next day, but the Germans deluged them with gas, which hung close because of the river and the heavy atmosphere, and it was deemed inadvisable for the small force to remain. Their reconnaissance had been completed and they were ordered to return to their lines. The information they brought back aided the staff materially in planning the general attack.

The Germans had placed heavy guns on the crests of hills one or two kilometers north of the

river, from which they poured in a flanking fire.

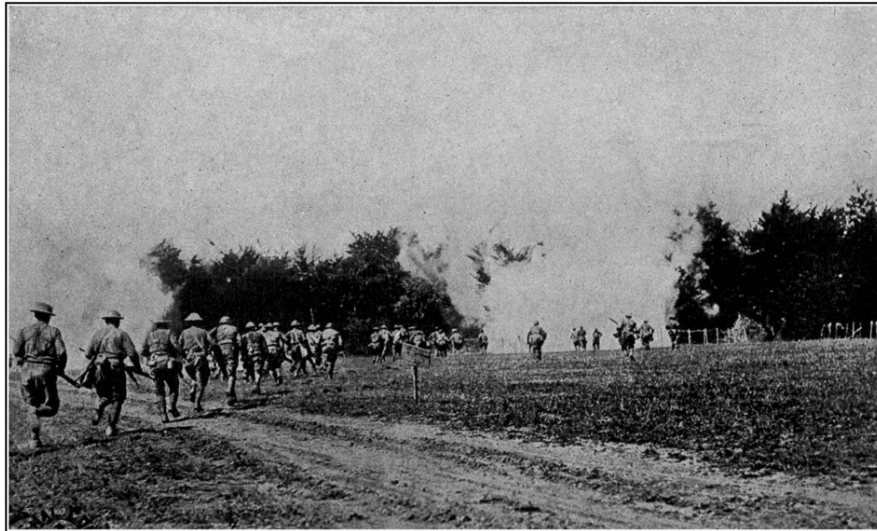
A few hours after the return of the men of the 168th, the massed French and American batteries turned loose with a racket that seemed to rend the universe.

The Germans had been dropping shells intermittently since daylight, but even this spasmodic firing stopped entirely under the hurricane of shrapnel, high explosive and gas shells from the Allied artillery, which swept the town, the river crossings and the country to the north. It was a case of "keep your head down, Fritzie boy," or lose it.

The artillery preparation was not protracted. After an hour or so, it steadied down into a rolling barrage and the first wave of attackers went over. The 32d and 42d (Rainbow) Divisions, exhausted, had been brought out of the front line and Pennsylvania's iron men slipped into place.

It fell to the fortune of the 112th Infantry to lead the advance on Fismes and, supported though it was by other regiments and by tremendous artillery fire, it was the 112th Pennsylvania that actually took Fismes.

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INTO THE MAW OF BATTLE

Pennsylvania Guardsmen attacking a German position in the Soissons-Rheims pocket. A bombing squad leads to blow up the German wire and open the way for the infantry waves which are seen following close, headed for the holes in the wire network.

There was the usual harassing fire from enemy machine guns and snipers, especially to the east, but these were silenced after a time and the 112th romped into the southern edge of the town. Then ensued a repetition, on a larger scale, of the street and house fighting that had been experienced before in other villages and towns.

Scouts crept from corner to corner, hiding behind bits of smashed masonry, working through holes in house walls and into cellars. A haze of dust kicked up by the shells hung in the bright sunlight.

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Every open stretch of street was swept by rifle and machine gun fire from one or both sides. Americans and Germans were so mingled that sometimes they shared the same house, firing out of different windows on different streets, and varying the procedure by attempts to kill their housemates.

As the Americans crept slowly forward, always toward the river, the Germans showed no slightest inclination to follow their comrades to the north bank, and it became apparent that they were a sacrifice offered up by the German command to delay, as long as possible, the progress of those terrible Americans. They had been left behind with no hope of succor, simply to sell their lives as dearly as possible. Quite naturally, they fought like trapped wolves as long as fighting was possible. When convinced they had no further chance to win, they dropped their weapons and squalled: "Kamerad!"

Two American officers and some wounded men worked their way into one of the houses. Inside, they found two unwounded men from Pittsburgh. Almost as the two parties joined forces, one of the unwounded Pittsburghers, venturing incautiously near what had been a window, stopped a sniper's bullet and fell dead. The wounded were made as comfortable as possible to await the stretcher-bearers and the two officers and one enlisted man started to investigate the house.

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They were crawling on all fours. They came into a dismantled room and raised their heads to look over a pile of débris. They looked straight into the eyes of two Germans. One had a machine gun, the other a trench bomb in each hand. These German trench bombs were known among our soldiers as "potato mashers," because they are about the size of a can of sweet corn, fastened on the end of a short stick. They are thrown by the stick, and are a particularly nasty weapon—one

of the worst the Germans had, many soldiers thought.

The German with the bombs was slowly whirling them about by the handles, exactly like a pair of Indian clubs, as one of the Americans described it afterward.

For the time you might have counted ten, there was not a movement on either side, because the men were so surprised, except that the German with the bombs kept whirling them slowly, around and around. The other German stood like a statue, but making funny, nervous noises—"uck-uck-uck"—in his throat. The Americans, telling about it later, frankly admitted they were too scared to move for a few moments, expecting every second the man with the "potato mashers" would throw them. [Pg 189]

The remarkable tableau ended with the crash of a rifle. The American private soldier had fired "from the hip." The German with the bombs bent forward as if he had a sharp pain in his stomach, but he did not come up again. He kept on going until his head hit the pile of débris, as if he were salaaming or kowtowing to the Americans. Then he collapsed in an inert heap on the floor, still holding his bombs.

The other turned and ran, stumbling through the wreckage, out through the little garden in which flowers and green stuff still struggled through the broken stone. As he ran, he cried in a curious, whimpering, muffled tone, like a frightened animal, his big helmet crushed down over his ears, a grotesque figure. He got out into the street, out into the open where machine guns and rifles still called from corner to corner and window to window. He was drilled in a dozen places at once and collapsed like a heap of dusty rags. [Pg 190]

There were innumerable instances of individual gallantry and of narrow escapes. In days of fighting when virtually every man performed a hero's part, it was impossible for anyone to keep track of all of even the more outstanding cases, and many a lad's deed went unnoticed while another's act brought him a citation and the coveted Distinguished Service Cross, the difference being that one was observed and reported and the other was not. A very small proportion of the deserving deeds were rewarded for this reason.

Among the narrow escapes from death, probably Lieutenant Walter A. Davenport, formerly of Philadelphia, established a record. A machine gun bullet struck his belt buckle, was deflected and ripped a long gash in the muscles of his abdomen. He returned to duty before his regiment, the 111th, had finished its work in Fismette, a few weeks later, and was slightly gassed. [Pg 191]

It was at Fismes that Captain John M. Gentner, of Philadelphia, acting commander of the first battalion of the 109th, was wounded. He had been commander of Company C, but took over command of the battalion when Captain Gearty was killed in the Bois de Conde, below the Marne. After he was wounded, Captain Gentner was made the subject of a remarkable tribute from men of his battalion. They wrote for newspaper publication a letter of eulogy, in which they said:

"The influence of Captain Gentner is still leading on the men of his battalion. None speak of him but in admiration and thankfulness for having helped them to be good soldiers. Daring, even brilliant, he led his men into seemingly hazardous attacks, and yet we felt a sense of safety. Other commanders say: 'I wouldn't send a man where I wouldn't go myself,' but Captain Gentner wouldn't send men where he would go himself. We looked upon him as a father. He has brought in wounded men from places where no one else would venture. He delighted in dangerous patrols and often regretted that his position prevented him from leading combat patrols. In places where food came to us rarely and in small quantity, he would claim that he had eaten when we knew that neither food nor water had crossed his lips for twenty-four hours. He was filled with admiration for his men—men who willingly would have followed him through the gates of hell, just because no trouble, no privation was too great for him to make his men comfortable." [Pg 192]

What a difference between that relationship of officer and enlisted man, and the sight our men saw of German soldiers being kicked and beaten with sabres by German officers in an effort to drive them forward into battle while the officers remained behind out of harm's way!

With their never-failing sense of the dramatic and their natural tendency to picturesquely appropriate nomenclature, our men named the valley of the Vesle "Death Valley" after the desperate fighting they encountered there.

And so they took Fismes, these gallant American daredevils. Slowly but surely they went through it, mopping it up in a scientific manner. It was costly—such warfare always is—but they wiped out one German post after another, driving the Huns to the very edge of the town on the north, where they held on desperately for a few days until the American occupation was complete, and the last German foothold was gone from the Soissons-Rheims pocket, which for two weeks had been the focal point for the eyes of the world. [Pg 193]

Even before the operation was complete, and in callous disregard of the men they themselves had left behind to impede the American advance, the Germans cut loose with a hot artillery fire from the heights north of the river.

They are not unlike the chalk cliffs of Dover, only not so high, these elevations along the Vesle. There were several high points on the north bank on which the Germans had observation posts, from which they could look down upon Fismes and the surrounding country as persons in a theatre balcony view the stage, and it was a terrible fire they poured in.

Already their big guns had been withdrawn to the line of the Aisne, which is only five miles to the north and therefore well within range. Lighter pieces in great number crowned the high ground nearer the Vesle, and machine guns held their usual prominent place in the German [Pg 194]

scheme. Once more they brought flame projectors into play, using them in this instance at what is believed to have been the greatest distance they tried to operate these weapons during the war. They accomplished little with the "flamenwerfer," however.

Night and day the gun duel continued. The French and American batteries methodically set about to break up the concentration of Hun fire. Monday, August 5th, the shelling became so violent that observation virtually was impossible and maps had to be used, the American gun commanders picking out German positions that had been marked down earlier.

German 105's and 155's (about four and six inches) hurled their high explosive shells. Shrapnel sprayed over the entire territory, and the American positions in the rear were heavily pounded and deluged with gas. The Germans shelled forests, crossroads, highways, clumps of trees and all other places where they thought troops or supplies might be concentrated or passing.

Every position in the American lines which ordinarily would have been good from a military viewpoint became almost untenable from the fact that the Germans, having so recently been driven out, knew the terrain and the positions accurately. It was as safe in the open as in the supposed shelters. [Pg 195]

No sooner had the occupation of Fismes been established completely than the Americans calmly prepared to cross the river and take Fismette, regardless of the German resistance. For some reason still unexplained, since after developments have made it clear the Germans had no real hope of stopping short of the Chemin-des-Dames, north of the Aisne, they made the taking of Fismette almost a first-class operation, even driving the Americans back across the river after they once had established themselves, and counter-attacking repeatedly.

Presumably, they had been unable to get away their vast quantities of munitions and supplies between the Vesle and the Aisne, and needed to hold up the pursuit while these were extricated.

As a first step in the crossing of the river, Major Robert M. Vail, of Scranton, commanding the 108th Machine Gun Battalion, operating with the 55th Infantry Brigade, sent over two companies of machine gunners. They waded the river, which was nearly to their armpits in places, holding their weapons above their heads. Others carried ammunition in boxes on their heads. They went over in a storm of shells and bullets, which took a heavy toll, but they established a bridgehead on the north bank and, fighting like demons, held it against tremendous odds while men of the 103d Engineers, ordered up for the work, threw bridges across the stream. [Pg 196]

It was in this work that units of the engineer regiment, particularly Company C, of Pottsville, were badly mauled. Working swiftly and unconcernedly in the midst of a tornado of almost every conceivable kind and size of shell, most of the time sustaining the discomfort of their gas masks, the engineers conducted themselves like veterans of years of service, instead of the tyros they actually were. Officers and men of the other organizations, watching the performance, thrilled with pride at the outstanding bravery of these heroic young Americans. Their own officers were too absorbed in their task to appreciate the work of the men until afterward, when they had also to mourn their losses. [Pg 197]

Methodically, working in water above their waists, many of them, the engineers thrust the arm of their bridge across the stream. Shells raged about them, churning the water to foam and throwing up geysers of mud and spray. Now and then a flying fragment of steel struck one of the toilers, whereupon he either dropped and floated downstream, uninterested in the further progress of the war, or struggled to the bank for first aid and made his way to a hospital.

The first bridge was nearly completed when a big shell scored a direct hit and it disappeared in a mass of kindling wood. Patiently and tenaciously, the engineers, deprived by their duties of even the satisfaction of seizing a rifle and trying to wreak a little vengeance, started to rebuild the structure.

Hampered by the German fire, the bridge building was slow and, the machine gunners having made a good crossing, infantry was started over the ford. The process of throwing men across was greatly hastened when at last the first bridge was completed. Other spans soon were ready, but the engineers knew no cessation from their task, for all too frequently Hun projectiles either tore holes in the bridges or wrecked them altogether. [Pg 198]

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CHAPTER XIII

STARS OF GRIM DRAMA

In Fismette, the Pennsylvanians ran into a stone wall of resistance. The enemy made desperate efforts to dislodge them and drive them back across the river. One counter-attack after another

was met and beaten off by the valiant little band of Americans, supported by the roaring guns on the heights to the south.

The Pennsylvanians had the double satisfaction now of knowing their own artillery brigade was mingling its fire with that of the other American and French batteries. On August 8th, Brigadier-General William G. Price, of Chester, rode up to regimental headquarters of the 109th Infantry and greeted his friends among the officers. He informed them that his brigade was immediately behind and that he was hunting division headquarters to report for action. A guide was assigned him and the General left in his motor car. Word soon spread through the infantry regiments that all the Pennsylvania gunners at last were in the fight.

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The weather turned wet again, varying from a drizzle to a heavy downpour, but never quite ceasing.

The penetration of Fismette went slowly but steadily on, in the face of strong resistance, the Germans reacting viciously at every point of contact. Here, as elsewhere along the front between Soissons and Rheims, the action consisted of a series of sharp local engagements, with considerable hand-to-hand fighting, in which American bayonets played an important role.

Amid the fever of battle and not knowing what moment may prove their last, men move as if in a trance. Hours and days pass undistinguished and unrecorded. With the fundamental scheme of existence shattered and with friends of years and chums of months of campaigning killed between sunrise and sunset, it is no wonder that men's minds become abnormal and their acts superhuman.

In quiet, peaceful homes it is impossible to understand this psychology. One may comprehend the mental shock sustained when a relative or neighbor or close friend falls victim to accident or disease, but that feeling is but distantly related to the effect upon the soldier when he realizes that a dozen, possibly half a hundred, of his comrades and close associates of weeks of work and recreation have been wiped out of existence in an hour—men with whom he had talked daily, possibly was talking at the time of dissolution.

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The same experience is repeated day after day with deep effect upon his mental, as well as his physical, state of being. Even in civil life, one learns that loss of sleep in time acts like a drug. After twenty-four or thirty-six hours without sleep, it becomes increasingly easy to do without further, until the limit of human endurance is reached and the victim collapses. Also, infrequent food and drink may be borne at increasingly long intervals. The condition is not infrequently described, accurately enough, as being "too hungry to eat," or "too tired to rest." Inevitably the reaction comes, and the longer the relief is postponed, the worse is the reaction. For this reason, the first day in repose for soldiers after a long campaign is usually worse than the campaign itself.

But while the deprivation of sleep, food and drink continues, it is undeniable that, though the physical being may support the loss with decreasing discomfort up to the point of collapse, the effect upon the senses is almost that of an opiate. Men lose their sense of proportion. Everything ordinarily of prime importance recedes into the background. The soldier is imbued with but one overmastering aspiration—to go on and on and on.

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It is no wonder that, in such case, he feels that his own fate is a small matter, as it is liable to be sealed at any moment, in the same way as that of his comrades; no wonder that he faces death with the same indifference as a man at home faces a summer shower.

This, then, is the state to which our Pennsylvania soldiers had now been reduced, and in consequence their deeds of personal heroism began to multiply. This was the period when individual men achieved most frequently the great glory of the service—citation and decoration for bravery in action. They had overstepped, individually and collectively, all the bounds of personal fear of death or injury.

The Germans hurled one fresh regiment after another into the inferno which was Fismette, in a determined effort to dislodge that pitiful handful of Americans which had found lodgment on its river edge. Five times fresh, vigorous forces, with hardly a lull, were hurled at the position. All the time the guns kept up an incessant cannonade, both of Fismette and Fismes and the back reaches of the Allied front, while the attacking forces were strongly supported by airplanes, artillery and machine guns.

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The tide of battle swayed back and forth as the Americans, reinforced at intervals by groups of men who succeeded in crossing the river, worked their way forward, only to be hurled back by vastly superior forces of the enemy, and hero after hero stalked, actor-like, across the murky stage. Some gallant acts were recorded and, duly and in due time, won their reward. Many more never were heard of, for the reason that participants and witnesses were beyond mortal honor, or else the only witnesses were part and parcel of the heroic act and therefore, according to the Anglo-Saxon code of honor, their lips were sealed. They could not tell of their own fine deeds.

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It was the 111th Infantry which came into its gallant own in the first penetration of Fismette, and its men took high rank in the heroic galaxy constituting the Iron Division.

Probably the most noteworthy deed of individual heroism was that of Corporal Raymond B. Rowbottom, of Avalon, Pa., near Pittsburgh, member of Company E, and Corporal James D. Moore, Erie, Pa., of Company G, both of the 111th.

They were on outpost duty together with automatic rifle teams in a house beyond the spinning mill on the western edge of Fismette. The mill had been one of the hotly contested strongholds of the Germans because of its size and the thickness of its old stone walls. The situation was such

that the loss of the firing post in the house would have endangered not only a battalion which was coming up under Lieutenant L. Howard Fielding, of Llanerch, Pa., but also would have made the whole military operation more difficult, if not impossible.

A flare thrown from a German post landed in the room where Rowbottom and Moore had established themselves, and in a moment the place was ablaze. This was on the night of August 12th. The flare had been thrown for the particular purpose of providing illumination for the German snipers and machine gunners to see their target. The fire that started from it not only answered this purpose better than the flare alone could have, but also distracted the attention of the American outpost and threatened to drive them from the house. [Pg 205]

There was, of course, no water in the house except the small quantity contained in the canteens of the men. With this absurdly inadequate supply and their own bare hands, fighting flames in a room as bright as day and under a heavy, concentrated machine gun and rifle fire, Rowbottom and Moore extinguished the blaze and then calmly resumed their automatic rifle work. For hours they went thirsty, until their throats were parched and their tongues swelled. For this deed, both men were cited and given the Distinguished Service Cross.

Five wounded men were left behind unavoidably when a detachment of the 111th was called hurriedly back from an advanced post which it was seen could not be held without too great sacrifice. Private Albert R. Murphy, of Philadelphia, a member of the sanitary detachment of the 111th, volunteered to go out after them. Despite seemingly insurmountable obstacles and constantly under vicious fire from scores of enemy marksmen, Murphy stuck to his task until the last man was back, although it took three days and nights of repeated effort. He, too, was cited and given the Distinguished Service Cross. [Pg 206]

A sergeant of Company C, 111th Infantry, was shot on August 10th and lay in an exposed position. Sergeant Alfred Stevenson, of Chester, a member of the same company, volunteered to go to the rescue. He successfully made his way through the enemy fire to the side of the wounded comrade. As he leaned over the man to get a grip on him so he could carry the burden, a sharpshooter's bullet struck him. Stevenson partially raised himself and said to the wounded man:

"Gee, they got me that time."

As he spoke the words, the sniper shot him again and he fell dead. The wounded man lay in a clump of bushes and between there and our lines was an open space of considerable width. When Stevenson did not reappear with the wounded man, Corporal Robert R. Riley, of Chester, a member of the same company, and two comrades asked permission to go after the two. [Pg 207]

At their first effort, all were wounded and forced to return. Corporal Riley's wound was not severe, however, and he insisted upon making another attempt. This time he reached the spot, only to find his old schoolmate, Stevenson, dead, and the man for whom the effort was made able to crawl back after having first aid treatment. Riley collapsed on his way back and was carried in by Private Edward Davis and sent to a hospital, where he recovered and was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

On August 10th, a detachment of men of the 111th captured some enemy machine guns and a quantity of ammunition. Corporal Raymond Peacock, of Norristown, a member of Company F, was the only man available who knew how to operate the enemy gun, a Maxim. He had just been so badly wounded in the left shoulder that the arm was partially useless. Nevertheless, he volunteered to go forward and operate the gun. He participated in a spirited assault, firing the weapon with one hand, until he was wounded again. A Distinguished Service Cross was his reward. [Pg 208]

An officer of the 111th called for a runner to take a message from Fismette back to Fismes. The path that had to be covered was pounded by big shells and sprayed with machine gun bullets, and the man who volunteered went but a short distance when he dropped, riddled like a sieve.

Undaunted by the sight, Private Lester Carson, of Clearfield, Pa., a member of Company L, promptly volunteered and was given a duplicate message. His luck held, for he got through over the same route, by an exercise of daring, aggressiveness and care, and delivered the note. He, too, won a Distinguished Service Cross.

For five days of the most intense fighting, from August 9th to 13th, Private Fred Otte, Fairmount City, Pa., a member of Company A, 111th Infantry, acted as a runner between his battalion headquarters in Fismes and the troops in Fismette. He made several trips across the Vesle under heavy shell and machine gun fire, and when the bridge was destroyed he continued his trips by swimming the river, in spite of wire entanglements in the water. For this he received a Distinguished Service Cross. [Pg 209]

Bugler Harold S. Gilham, of Pittsburgh, Company H, and Private Charles A. Printz, of Norristown, Company F, both of the 111th, not only volunteered as runners to carry messages to the rear, but on their return showed their scorn of the enemy by burdening themselves with heavy boxes of ammunition which was badly needed.

Sergeant James R. McKenney, of Pittsburgh, Company E, 111th Infantry, took out a patrol to mop up snipers. When he returned, successful, he was ordered to rest, but begged and obtained permission to take out another patrol.

Sergeant Richard H. Vaughan, of Royersford, Pa., Company A, 111th Infantry, was severely gassed and his scalp was laid open by a piece of shrapnel. Despite this, he refused to go back for treatment, but had his wound treated on the field and continued to command his platoon for four

days until relieved. He died later of his injuries, but a Distinguished Service Cross was awarded to him and sent to his father, Dr. E. M. Vaughan, of Royersford, together with the text of the official citation, which told the tale of the Sergeant's heroism and concluded with the statement:

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"By his bravery and encouragement to his men, he exemplified the highest qualities of leadership."

Corporal James V. Gleason, of Pottstown, Pa., Company A, 111th, was publicly commended and given the Distinguished Service Cross for his "great aid in restoring and holding control of the line in absolute disregard to personal danger and without food or rest for seventy-two hours." How terse and yet how graphic are these precise words of the official citation!

Lieutenants Walter Ettinger, of Phoenixville, who later was killed, and Robert B. Woodbury, of Pottsville, the former an officer of Company D, and the latter of Company M, 111th Infantry, spent three sleepless days and nights aiding and encouraging their men to hold a position.

On August 12th, the Germans delivered an attack in force, preceded by an intense bombardment and accompanied by a rolling barrage, which was too pretentious to be met by the small American force in Fismette. In the face of those onrushing German hordes, there were but two things to do—die heroically but futilely or retire. True to American army traditions, under which men never are required to lay down their lives uselessly, the American force slowly, reluctantly and stubbornly retired across the river.

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Instantly the Franco-American guns gave tongue. They laid down upon Fismette a bombardment which made the German effort seem trifling. With the walls falling around them, the Germans began to flee. And then the task of conquering that stubborn little village was begun again.

This second advance was led by a detachment of the 111th, under Captain James Archibald Williams and Lieutenant H. E. Leonard, both of Pittsburgh. They swam the Vesle under a hail of fire, for the enemy centered much of his artillery upon the bridges, and shrapnel and machine gun bullets fell upon them like rain.

Soaked from head to foot, the Pennsylvanians got a footing on the northern bank, only to find they were unsupported as yet on either flank. Undaunted, they plunged forward into a little ravine which seemed to offer some protection. On the contrary, they found there had settled into it most of the gas with which the enemy had been drenching the town. Various kinds of the poisonous vapor, mustard gas, sneeze gas, tear gas and chlorine gas, had accumulated there in a seething mixture, providing the worst experience with this form of Hun devilry the men had met.

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Gas masks were already in place, however, and forward they went on the run. Machine guns chattered angrily at them, and the gunners stood their ground until the flashing bayonets of the Americans were almost at their breasts. Then they either broke and fled or bleated the customary plea for mercy.

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CHAPTER XIV

AMBULANCIERS TO FRONT

While all this was going forward, shells had wrecked all the bridges over the river but one and it was so damaged as to be considered unsafe, so the little force in Fismette had to hold on as best it could until reinforcements could be thrown across. It was at this juncture that there entered into fame a new set of candidates for military decorations.

The men of the 103d Sanitary Train of the Twenty-eighth Division had been performing their arduous and perilous tasks in a gallant and self-sacrificing manner, but they now achieved the apotheosis of bravery.

In the cellar of a house in Fismette there had been assembled twenty-eight American wounded, and it was necessary to evacuate them across the river in order that they might reach hospitals and receive proper treatment. Five times the house had been struck by shells and Sergeant William Lukens, of Cheltenham, Pa., and a few other men had to scrape the débris off the wounded. Four times the comrades of Lukens had to dig him out when shells buried him under an avalanche of earth.

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Captain Charles Hendricks, of Blairsville, Pa., remained in the cellar three days and four nights, and twice was buried by shells.

The ambulance men who finally carried the wounded back across the river, after hairbreadth escapes and thrilling experiences, were headed by Captain George E. McGinnis, of Philadelphia,

and were members of Ambulance Company 110, formerly Ambulance Company 2 in the National Guard.

The advance party of rescuers set out for Fismes in a touring car. It was made up of Major Frederick Hartung, of Pittsburgh; Major Edward M. Iland, of Coraopolis, Captain McGinnis and Privates Walter McGinnis and Walter Frosch, both of Philadelphia, and all members of the medical corps.

Frosch was at the wheel. They took the road down the hill on the southern slope of the Vesle at breakneck speed, for caution was useless. They were in full view of scores of enemy gunners and their car at once became a target, being hit several times. Frosch drove on "without batting an eye," as the officers remarked. [Pg 215]

Over the unsafe bridge they rushed at top speed and, to the amazement of the watching Americans on the south bank, the structure held. Then the car tore up through Fismette to the dressing station, around which big shells were beating a terrible tattoo. The men hurriedly looked over the situation and then made a preconcerted signal to the ambulanciers waiting on the other side of the river.

When the signal was received, the ambulances came out from cover and dashed for the river. They were conspicuously decorated with the red cross, but that seemed only to make them a special target for the enemy. The machines were manned by James T. O'Neill, of Aldan, Pa.; James R. Gunn, Joseph M. Murray, Samuel Falls, Alfred Baker, Originnes Biemuller, known among his comrades as "Mike," James R. Brown, Jack Curry, Harry Broadbent, Raymond Onyx and Albert Smith, all of Philadelphia, and John F. Maxwell, of Williamsport.

On the trip into Fismette, the ambulances escaped a hit, miraculous as it may seem. They went around corners on two wheels, thundering and rushing through the narrow little streets littered with dust and débris, and came to a halt in the lee of the dressing station. Their crews leaped to the ground and set to work loading the wounded. [Pg 216]

The Hun artillerists and machine gunners vented all their varieties of hate on the gallant little group intent on an errand of mercy. It seemed as if the whole German army had determined they should not get their wounded back to Fismes. With more indifference to the fire than they felt for the clouds of flies which really annoyed them, the ambulance men worked quickly, smoothly and efficiently.

O'Neill was sent back to see if the bridge still was standing. Instead of contenting himself with making sure of this from the brow of the river slope, he bethought him of a cache of medical supplies near the river and continued on foot to the spot, carrying back with him a burden of needed stores. Officers, watching the splendid exhibition of cast-iron nerve through their glasses from the far side of the river, alternately cursed him for "a blazing young fool" and blessed him for being "the kind of young fool that does things." [Pg 217]

O'Neill reported that the bridge was still in place and at three o'clock in the morning the first ambulance was loaded and sent away. Captain McGinnis went with it. The second ambulance left a few minutes later. Broadbent and Maxwell still were loading. O'Neill had made another trip to the river to see if the bridge was all right.

The first two ambulances had just cleared the river when a shell landed fairly on the span and broke it through. O'Neill ran back to tell his comrades and as he arrived a big shell fell just outside the cellar. Broadbent was knocked down and deluged with earth at the entrance. He scrambled back into the cellar at top speed, but one of the wounded men in the ambulance, supposed to be too badly hurt to walk, beat Broadbent into the shelter.

One of the patients was wounded again in the leg and one of the ambulanciers held his hand over his cheek, where a screw from the side of the ambulance had been blown clear through. Three tires of the ambulance were punctured, the sides were perforated in a score of places and the roof was blown off by shell fragments. [Pg 218]

The patients were unloaded and carried back into the cellar to await a quieter moment. Repairs were made to the bridge and Captain McGinnis returned in a car and ordered the ambulances to get away. They started again at seven o'clock in the morning, but found the bridge again a mass of wreckage and had to return.

At last, at four o'clock in the afternoon, there came a lull in the enemy fire and two more of the ambulances began their perilous race across the river, the engineers having just completed the rebuilding of the bridge. For the second time they just cheated a big shell, which landed on the bridge immediately after the second car had crossed, and the structure was put out of service beyond hope of quick repair.

Thereupon the ambulanciers remaining in the Fismette cellar calmly proceeded to carry the remaining wounded on litters down the hill through the German fire, under protection of a well-organized defense by our fighting men. They forded the river, holding the litters above their heads, while shells threw up waterspouts and bullets pattered like hail all about them. [Pg 219]

On the southern bank, ambulances stood out in the open, backed almost to the water's edge, their drivers smoking cigarettes and watching and calling advice to the men in the water. Thus the last of the wounded were taken from under the noses of the enemy.

Captain McGinnis and most of the enlisted men whose names have been mentioned were awarded Distinguished Service Crosses. Most of them had worked seventy-two hours and many had absolutely no rest for forty-eight hours. Ten of their thirteen ambulances were demolished.

In organizing a protective offense to cover the evacuation of the wounded, First Sergeant Thomas J. Cavanaugh, of Pittsburgh, a member of Company D, 111th Infantry, distinguished himself in such a manner as to be awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

With a small force of men, he captured a building in the outskirts of the village and organized it as a strong point. He then took a position himself at a street intersection where, by stepping around the corner of the buildings one way, he was protected from enemy snipers and machine gunners, and by turning the corner, he was open to the fire sweeping in gusts down the road the ambulance men had to cover. Cavanaugh, when an ambulance was ready to move, stepped into the open, like Ajax defying the lightning. If the Germans were not firing heavily for the moment, he whistled a signal to the ambulance men that it was safe to go ahead. [Pg 220]

He was wounded by shrapnel, but refused to leave his post until he collapsed, an hour and a half after being struck. The next day, having had his wound treated, he insisted on resuming his position as a human target for the benefit of the ambulance men and their wounded.

Captain Edmund W. Lynch, of Chester, commanding Company B, 111th Infantry, who was killed a short time later, and Lieutenant Edward S. Fitzgerald, of New York City, exposed themselves in the same manner and for the same self-sacrificing purpose at other important corners.

And the fight for possession of Fismette went forward ceaselessly. A daring and clever bit of work by a party of Pennsylvania machine gunners under Lieutenant Milford W. Fredenburg, of Ridgway, Pa., an officer of Company D, 112th Infantry, had a considerable influence on the final driving of the enemy from the town. The lieutenant led his gunners filtering through the German lines at night, like Indians, a man or two here, another there. They assembled beyond the town, took shelter in a wood and when the fighting was most furious the next day they were able to pour in a disconcerting fire on the rear of the German forces. [Pg 221]

Lieutenant Rippey L. Shearer, of Harrisburg, with men of Company G, 112th Infantry, crossed the river in water up to their necks, in which the shorter men had either to swim or be supported by the larger ones. They had the center of the advance and captured a building which had been used as a tannery and had been a German stronghold. It was a desperately brave, although costly, bit of work for which the Pennsylvanians were highly praised.

Captain Fred L. McCoy, Grove City, Pa., commanding Company M, 112th Infantry, held the left flank. He and his men fought their way down the river bank to where an old stone mansion, known as the Château Diable, had been a thorn in the side of the American attack. They stormed and captured the building, taking thirty machine guns, a large quantity of ammunition and many prisoners. [Pg 222]

Captain Lucius M. Phelps, of Erie, Pa., commanding Company G, 112th, and Captain Harry F. Miller, of Meadville, Pa., commanding Company B, of the same regiment, led their companies in an advance east of the tannery until they were ensconced behind stout stone walls, from where they were able to turn their guns on the enemy stubbornly clinging to the northern fringe of the village.

The 103d Trench Mortar Battery, made up very largely of members of the old First City Troop of Philadelphia and representative of many of the socially prominent families of that city, entered its first general action. Under command of Captain Ralph W. Knowles, of Philadelphia, the battery advanced with the infantry, lugging their Stokes mortars across the river and up the hill. They set up their squat weapons and soon the deep-throated roars of the mortars hurling their immense bombs joined in the chorus that was beginning to sound the knell of German hopes of hanging onto any part of Fismette. [Pg 223]

West of Fismette, the broad Rheims-Rouen highway became, in the course of these operations north of the Vesle, an objective of commanding importance to the Americans for the purpose of breaking up lateral communications along the German line. Captain Arthur L. Schlosser, of Buffalo, N. Y., later killed, and Captain Robert S. Caine, of Pittsburgh, who went to France as lieutenants of Company G, 111th Infantry, on their own initiative started a raid which developed into a successful attack and resulted in the capture of the highway where it crosses the Vesle.

Captain Schlosser, who was almost a giant in size, carried a rifle himself and, instead of having his men advance in company formation, led them filtering through the woods in Indian fashion. He captured two Maxim guns and killed the crews and he and Captain Caine and their men held their positions against counter-attacks by the remnants of three German regiments. [Pg 224]

Not all the losses were confined to the attacking troops. The enemy artillery, continually shelling the back areas, took its sad toll of American life and limb. The 103d Engineers, who had been performing prodigious work in their own line, suffered the loss of their second in command, Lieutenant-Colonel Frank J. Duffy, of Scranton, Pa. As he stepped into a side car in front of headquarters on the evening of August 17th to make a tour of the lines, a huge shell exploded immediately behind, killing him and the cycle driver instantly.

Back on the hills south of Fismes, the Pennsylvania artillery all this time had been earning the right to rank in the Iron Division glory roll along with their doughboy comrades. At one time, just as a battery had geared up to move and the men already were astride their horses, a big shell dropped plump upon the lead team of one of the guns.

"Steady, men," called an officer, and the men sat their plunging, trembling horses as if on parade. It was an ideal time for a costly stampede, but the conduct of the artillerymen prevented this and won the highest praise of officers and men of other units who saw the occurrence. [Pg 225]

Two men were killed and three severely wounded and two horses were blown to bits. The wheel driver trotted to a first aid station to get help for the wounded men, while the regiment went on. After delivering his message, the driver obtained a supply of powder and shells and went on the gallop to the battery position to deliver the ammunition. Then he said to men about him:

"Now, if you fellows have all that stuff unloaded and one of you will help me down, I'll get you to tie a knot around this leg of mine."

Only then was it discovered that he had been attending to other wounded men and the ammunition needs of the battery with a bad gash in his own leg from a shell fragment.

Members of the headquarters companies of the artillery regiments maintained communications constantly, stringing telephone wires in the face of heavy enemy fire in almost impossible places. There was no thought of failing. When some men died in an attempt, others promptly stepped into the breach to "carry on."

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Still the German guns from their hilltops poured down their galling fire upon the American positions. Still the snipers and machine gunners hung on in Fismette and still the crossing of the Vesle under bombardment was so hazardous that an attack in force was impracticable.

The fighting in the streets of the town swayed back and forth until August 28th. That day the Germans came down out of their hills in a roaring tide. They boiled into Fismette and drove the small force of Pennsylvanians back to the river, where an amazingly few men managed to hold a bridgehead on the northern bank, and the town once more was German territory.

Then our gunners went systematically to work to level the place, for the high command had lost all hope of taking it by infantry assault without an unworthy loss of brave men.

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CHAPTER XV

A MARTIAL PANORAMA

But meanwhile great and portentous things had been happening elsewhere on the long battle line. Up in Flanders, the British troops, with American brigades fighting shoulder to shoulder with them, were driving the Germans eastward. Farther south, the French were hounding the fleeing Germans. And American forces around Soissons were pounding away in such a fashion as to make the positions along the Vesle untenable for their stubborn defenders.

The enlisted men knew little or nothing of this and even the junior officers were surprised when word came back from patrols on the north of the river on September 4th, that they met almost no opposition from the enemy. Even his artillery fire had fallen off to a little desultory shelling, so at once a general advance was ordered.

Roads in the rear instantly became alive with motor trucks, big guns, columns of men, wagon trains and all the countless activities of an army on the march. The sight of the main forces crossing the river was a wonderful one to the officers standing on the hills overlooking the scene, and one that they never will forget.

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The long columns debouched from the wooded shelters, deployed into wide, thin lines and moved off down the slope into the narrow river valley. Below them lay the villages and towns of the Vesle, pounded almost to dust by the thousands of shells which had fallen upon them during the weeks the two armies contended for their possession. The men went down the hill exactly as they had done so often in war maneuvers and sham battles at training camps. Only an occasional burst of black smoke and a spouting geyser of earth and stones showed it was real warfare, although even that had been so well simulated in the training that, except that now and then a man or two dropped and either lay still or got up and limped slowly back up the hill, the whole thing might have been merely a drama of mimic warfare. Many of the officers who watched did, in fact, compare it with scenes they had witnessed in motion pictures.

Despite the occasional casualty, the line moved steadily forward. On reaching the river, there was little effort to converge at the hastily constructed bridges. Men who were close enough veered over to them, but the rest plunged into the water and either waded or swam across, according to the depth where they happened to be and the individual's ability to swim.

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Once on the north side, they started up the long slope as imperturbably as they had come down the other side, although every man knew that when they reached the crest of the rise they would face the German machine gun fire from positions on the next ridge to the north.

Without faltering an instant, the thin lines topped the rise and disappeared from the watchers

to the south, and the fight was on again. The German machine gunners resisted and retired foot by foot, but the American advance was unflinching. It had been freely predicted that the enemy would make a stand on the high plateau between the Vesle and the Aisne, but the pressure elsewhere on his line to the west and north precluded the possibility of this and he plunged on northward.

The 109th Infantry made its crossing of the Vesle about two and a half miles east of Fismes, the regiment's position on the south of the river having been at Magneux. Its next objective point was Muscourt. The Germans confronting it had not retired so precipitately as those at Fismette and the regiment fought its way across the river and on northward, losing its third commander in the action.

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Colonel Samuel V. Ham, regular army officer, who had succeeded Colonel Coulter when he was wounded, led the firing line of the regiment across the river. He was so severely wounded that he was unable to move, but remained ten hours on the field looking after the welfare of his men. So conspicuous was his action that he was cited and awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the official citation reading as follows:

"For extraordinary heroism in action near Magneux, France, September 6, 1918. By courageously leading his firing line in the advance across the Vesle River from Magneux toward Muscourt, Colonel Ham exemplified the greatest heroism and truest leadership, instilling in his men confidence in their undertaking. Having been severely wounded and unable to move, he remained ten hours on the field of battle, directing the attack, and refused to leave or receive medical attention until his men had been cared for."

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The Pennsylvania regiments came onto the high ground, from which the lowlands to the north were spread out before them like a panorama, and in the misty distance, fifteen miles away, they could descry the towers of the Cathedral at Laon. This was, in a sense, the Allied promised land. It was defiled and invaded France and, furthermore, Laon, since 1914 had been the pivot of the German line, the bastion upon which the great front made its turn from north and south to east and west.

The five miles of hill, plateau and valley lying between the Vesle and the Aisne were not crossed with impunity. It was on the Aisne plateau that another company of the 109th wrote its name high on the scroll of honor.

A small wood below the village of Villers-en-Prayeres obstructed the advance of the regiment. It had been strongly organized by the Germans and was fairly alive with Boche machine gunners and snipers. Company G, of the old First, was ordered to dispose of it. The orders were carried out in what the official communique of the next day referred to as a "small but brilliant operation." Considering the small extent of the action and the fact that it was but an incident of the whole battle, the fact that it was mentioned at all in the official reports speaks volumes for the men who carried it out.

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The glory and distinction were won at a bitter cost. Company G, after the fight was over, ranked side by side with Companies L and M of the same regiment and B and C of the 110th for their splendid stand and heavy losses south of the Marne. There were 125 casualties in the company of 260 men. Included among them were Sergeant Frederick E. Bauer, Sergeant Graham McConnell, Corporal Thomas S. B. Horn, Private Charles A. Knapp, all of Philadelphia, and Sergeant John H. Winthrop, D. S. C., of Bryn Mawr, killed, and Lieutenant Harold A. Fahr and Sergeant Earl Prentzel, both of Willow Grove, Pa.; Corporal Theodore G. Smythe, Bugler Howard W. Munder, Privates Gus A. Faulkner, Charles Quenzer, Thomas Biddle, Robert C. Dilks, Frederick C. Glenn, Charles Lohmiller and Bernard Horan, all of Philadelphia, wounded.

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Private Paul Helsel, of Doylestown, Pa., a member of the same company, came out of the battle with six bullet holes through his shirt, two through his breeches, the bayonet of his rifle shot away and a bullet embedded in the first aid packet carried on his hip, but without a scratch on his person.

The Americans were subjected at times to a heavy artillery fire, especially while crossing the plateau. For about two miles it was necessary for them to advance in the open on high ground, plainly visible to German observers. There was little cover, and both heavy and light artillery swept the zone, but with slight effect and without checking to any degree the forward movement.

The advance of the Americans over the plateau was effected without material loss because, instead of advancing in regular formations, they were filtered into and through the zone, never presenting a satisfactory target.

The German stand on the Vesle had enabled them to remove the bulk of the supplies they had accumulated there and what they could not remove they burned. Vast fires, sending up clouds of smoke in the distance, marked where ammunition dumps and other stocks of supplies were being destroyed that they might not fall into the hands of the Americans. Thus it was that the progress from the Vesle presented a different aspect from that between the Marne and the Vesle, where the way had been impeded in places by the unimaginable quantities of supplies of every conceivable kind the Hun had abandoned in his flight.

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By September 10th, the pursuit had come to an end, as far as the Iron Division was concerned. The Americans and French were on the Aisne and the enemy again was snarling defiance across a water barrier.

The artillery regiments followed the infantry as far as the high ground between the rivers and there took position to blast the Huns away from the Aisne and send them rolling along to their

next line, the ancient and historic Chemin-des-Dames, or Road of Women.

Battery C, 107th Artillery, of Ph[oe]nixville, commanded by Captain Samuel A. Whitaker, of that town, a nephew of former Governor Samuel W. Pennypacker, was the first of the Pennsylvania big gun units to cross the Vesle. [Pg 235]

On the night of September 10th, the 107th was relieved by the 221st French Artillery Regiment, near the town of Blanzly-les-Fismes. The French used the Americans' horses in moving into positions. They discovered they had taken a wrong road in moving up and just as they turned back the Germans, who apparently had learned the hour of the relief, laid down a heavy barrage. A terrible toll was taken of the French regiment.

Lieutenant John Muckel, of the Ph[oe]nixville battery, with a detail of men, had remained with the French regiment to show them the battery position and bring back the horses. When the barrage fell, Lieutenant Muckel was thrown twenty-five feet by the explosion of a high-explosive shell, and landed plump in the mangled remains of two horses. All about him were the moans and cries of the wounded and dying Frenchmen. He had been so shocked by the shell explosion close to him that he could move only with difficulty and extreme pain. He was barely conscious, alone in the dark and lost, for the regiment had gone on and his detachment of Americans was scattered. [Pg 236]

Lieutenant Muckel, realizing he must do something, dragged himself until he came to the outskirts of a village he learned later was Villet. Half dazed, he crawled to the wall of a building and pulled himself to his feet. He was leaning against the wall, trying to collect his scattered senses, when a shell struck the building and demolished it.

The Lieutenant was half buried in the débris. While he lay there, fully expecting never again to rejoin his battery, Sergeant Nunner, of the battery, came along on horseback and heard the officer call. The Sergeant wanted the Lieutenant to take his horse and get away. The Lieutenant refused and ordered the Sergeant to go and save himself. The Sergeant defied the Lieutenant, refusing to obey and announcing that he would remain with the officer if the latter would not get away on the horse. At last they compromised, when the Lieutenant had recovered somewhat, by the Sergeant's riding the horse and the Lieutenant's assisting himself by holding to the animal's tail. In this way they caught up with the battery. [Pg 237]

Having reached the Aisne, the Twenty-eight Division now was relieved and ordered back to a rest camp, which they sadly needed, after about sixty days of almost unremitting night and day fighting for the infantry and approximately a month of stirring action for the artillery.

Thoroughly exhausted, but serene in the knowledge of a task well and gloriously performed, their laurels thick upon them and securely in possession of the manfully earned title, "The Iron Division," what was left of our Pennsylvania men turned their backs upon the scene of action and prepared to enjoy a well-earned period of repose and recreation.

It was not to be, however. Disappointments, of which they had been the prey for more than a year, dogged their footsteps. While on the road, moving toward a rest camp as fast as they could travel, orders reached the division to proceed eastward to where General Pershing had begun to assemble the American forces into the First American Army. The emergency which had led to the use of American brigades under French and British higher command had passed and America at last was to have its own army under its own high command, subject only to the supreme Allied commander, Marshal Ferdinand Foch. [Pg 238]

The men in the ranks were keenly alive to the fact that they were headed for a rest camp, and when their route and general direction were changed overnight and they set off the next day at right angles to the course they had been traveling, they knew something else was in store for the division. Not an officer or man, however, had an inkling of what time only brought forth—that the thing they were about to do was immeasurably greater, more glorious and more difficult than that which they had accomplished.

Grumbling among themselves, after the true soldier fashion when not too busily engaged otherwise, the men found some compensation in the knowledge that their herculean efforts of the past weeks were understood and acknowledged by the higher authorities. They cherished with open pride a general order issued by Major-General Charles H. Muir, the division commander. It was of special significance because he is a regular army officer, not a Pennsylvanian, and therefore not imbued with local or state pride, and also because before the war the National Guard was held in huge contempt by the average regular army officer. Here is what General Muir's general order told the men: [Pg 239]

"The division commander is authorized to inform all, from the lowest to the highest, that their efforts are known and appreciated. A new division, by force of circumstances, took its place in the front line in one of the greatest battles of the greatest war in history.

"The division has acquitted itself in a creditable manner. It has stormed and taken points that were regarded as proof against assault. It has taken numerous prisoners from a vaunted Guards division of the enemy.

"It has inflicted on the enemy far more loss than it has suffered from him. In a single gas application, it inflicted more damage than the enemy inflicted on it by gas since its entry into battle.

"It is desired that these facts be brought to the attention of all, in order that the tendency of new troops to allow their minds to dwell on their own losses, to the exclusion of what they have done to the enemy, may be reduced to the minimum. [Pg 240]

"Let all be of good heart! We have inflicted more loss than we have suffered; we are better men individually than our enemies. A little more grit, a little more effort, a little more determination to keep our enemies down, and the division will have the right to look upon itself as an organization of veterans."

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CHAPTER XVI

IN THE ARGONNE

So away they went to the southeast and came to a halt in the vicinity of Revigny, just south of the Argonne Forest and about a mile and a half north of the Rhine-Marne Canal. Here they found replacement detachments awaiting them and once more the sadly depleted ranks were filled.

The division was under orders to put in ten days at hard drilling there. This is the military idea of rest for soldiers, and experience has proved it a pretty good system, although it never will meet the approval of the man in the ranks. It has the advantage of keeping his mind off what he has passed through, keeping him occupied and maintaining his discipline and morale. The best troops will go stale through neglect of drill during a campaign, and drill and discipline are almost synonymous. As undisciplined troops are worse than useless in battle, the necessity of occasional periods of drill, distasteful though they may be to the soldier, is obvious.

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"A day in a rest camp is about as bad as a day in battle," is not an uncommon expression from the men, although, as is always the case with soldiers, they appreciate a change of any kind.

This rest camp and its drills were not destined to become monotonous, however, for instead of ten days they had but one day. Orders came from "G. H. Q.," which is soldier parlance for General Headquarters, for the division to proceed almost directly north, into the Argonne. This meant more hard hiking and more rough traveling for horses and motor trucks until the units again were "bedded down" temporarily, with division headquarters at Les Islettes, twenty miles due north from Revigny, and eight miles south of what was then, and had been for many weary months, the front line.

The doughboys knew that something big was impending. They had come to believe that "Pershing wouldn't have the Twenty-eighth Division around unless he was going to pull off something big." They felt more at home than they had since leaving America. All about them they saw nothing but American soldiers, and thousands upon thousands of them. The country seemed teeming with them. Every branch of the service was in American hands, the first time the Pennsylvanians had seen such an organization of their very own—the first time anybody ever did, in fact, for it was the biggest American army ever assembled.

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Infantry, artillery, engineers, the supply services, tanks, the air service, medical service, the high command and the staff, all were American. It was a proud day for the doughboys when showers of leaflets dropped from a squadron of airplanes flying over one day and they read on the printed pages a pledge from American airmen to co-operate with the American fighting men on the ground to the limit of their ability and asked similar co-operation from the foot soldiers.

"Your signals enable us to take the news of your location to the rear," read the communication, "to report if the attack is successful, to call for help if needed, to enable the artillery to put their shells over your heads into the enemy. If you are out of ammunition and tell us, we will report and have it sent up. If you are surrounded, we will deliver the ammunition by airplane. We do not hike through the mud with you, but there are discomforts in our work as bad as mud, but we won't let rain, storms, Archies (anti-aircraft guns) nor Boche planes prevent our getting there with the goods. Use us to the limit. After reading this, hand it to your buddie and remember to show your signals." It was signed: "Your Aviators."

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"You bet we will, all of that," was the heartfelt comment of the soldiers. Such was the splendid spirit of co-operation built up by General Pershing among the branches of the service.

To this great American army was assigned the tremendous task of striking at the enemy's vitals, striking where it was known he would defend himself most passionately. The German defensive lines converged toward a point in the east like the ribs of a fan, drawing close to protect the Mezieres-Longuyon railroad shuttle, which was the vital artery of Germany in occupied territory. If the Americans could force a break through in the Argonne, the whole tottering German machine in France would crumble. Whether they broke through or not, the smallest possible result of an advance there would be the narrowing of the bottle-neck of the German transport lines into Germany and a slow strangling of the invading forces.

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After the first tempestuous rush, there was no swift movement. The Yanks gnawed their way to the vaunted Kriemhilde line, hacked and hewed their way through it, overcoming thousands of

machine guns, beset by every form of Hun pestilence. Even conquered ground they found treacherous. The Germans had planted huge mines of which the fuses were acid, timed to eat through a container days after the Germans had gone and touch off the explosive charge to send scores of Americans to hospitals or to soldiers' graves.

To the Americans, not bursting fresh into battle as they had done at Château-Thierry, but sated and seasoned by a long summer of campaigning, fell the tough, unspectacular problem of the whole western front. While the world hung spellbound on the Franco-British successes in the west and north, with their great bounds forward after the retreating Germans, relatively little attention was paid to the action northwest of Verdun, and not until the close of hostilities did America begin to awaken to the fact that it was precisely this slow, solid pounding, this bulldog pertinacity of the Americans that had made possible that startling withdrawal in the north.

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So vital was this action in the Argonne that the best divisions the German high command could muster were sent there and, once there, were chewed to bits by the American machine, thus making possible the rapid advances of the Allies on other parts of the long front.

The Pennsylvania men looked back almost longingly to what they had regarded at the time as hard, rough days along the Marne, the Ourcq and the Vesle. In perspective, and from the midst of the Argonne fighting, it looked almost like child's play. Back home over the cables came the simple announcement that a certain position had been taken. Followers of the war news got out their maps and observed that this marked an advance of but a mile or so in three or four days and more than one asked: "What is wrong with Pershing's men?" It was difficult to understand why the men who had leaped forward so magnificently from the Marne to the Aisne, traveling many miles in a day, should now be so slow, while their co-belligerents of the other nations were advancing steadily and rapidly.

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A very few minutes spent with any man who was in the Argonne ought to suffice as an answer. Soldiers who were in the St. Mihiel thrust and also in the Argonne coined an epigram. It was: "A meter in the Argonne is worth a mile at St. Mihiel." The cable message of a few words nearly always covered many hours, sometimes days, of heroic endeavor, hard, backbreaking labor, heart-straining hardship and the expenditure of boundless nervous energy with lavish hand, to say nothing of what it meant to the hospital forces behind the lines and to the burial details.

September 24th, division headquarters of the Twenty-eighth moved up to a point less than two miles back of the front lines, occupying old, long-abandoned French dugouts. That evening Major-General Charles H. Muir, the division commander, appeared unexpectedly in the lines and walked about for some time, observing the disposition of the troops. He was watched with wide-eyed but respectful curiosity by many of the men, for the average soldier in the ranks knows as little of a division commander as of the Grand Llama of Tibet. Frequently he cares as little, too.

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The General cast a contemplative eye aloft, to where countless squirrels frolicked among the foliage of the great old trees, chattering in wild indignation at the disturbers of their peace, and birds sang their evensong upon the branches.



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BRIEFLY AT REST IN THE ARGONNE FOREST

Periods of rest in the inferno of fighting in the Argonne were not frequent, but this group of Iron Division doughboys was snapped by the camera during a lull, while they were grouped about the entrance to an old German dugout.

The Iron Division now was completely assembled, functioning smoothly and efficiently, every unit working as a cog in the one great wheel. The artillery brigade, which had made its bow to modern warfare in the Vesle region, was established on the line well to the rear of the infantry. It had rushed at top speed from the Aisne plateau, making some record hikes. The guns were

moved only by night and each day the weapons were camouflaged, usually in a friendly patch of woods. One night they made thirty miles, which is covering ground rapidly, even under the most favorable circumstances, for an organization with the impedimenta of an artillery brigade.

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There were times, in those long night marches, when the little natural light from a moonless sky was blotted out by woods through which the roads passed, and the artillerymen moved forward in absolute blackness. To have a light of any kind was dangerous, because of the frequent night forays by enemy flyers, and therefore forbidden. Patrols went along in advance to "feel" the road, and the men with the guns and caissons followed by keeping their eyes on the ghostly radiance from illuminated wrist watches worn by officers with the advance patrols.

When it came to the work of placing the guns for the preparatory bombardment of the offensive, the position assigned the Pennsylvania regiments was in a forest so dense that to get an area of fire at all, they had to fell the trees before them. But concealment of battery positions in a surprise attack is a vital consideration, and to have cut down hundreds of trees would have been an open advertisement to enemy observation planes of the location of the batteries.

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To overcome this difficulty, the trees which it was necessary to remove were sawed almost through and wired up to others, which were untouched, in order to keep them standing to the last moment. In order to get their field of fire, it was necessary for the men of some batteries to cut and wire as many as a hundred trees. In this way everything was prepared for the opening of the bombardment save the actual felling of the trees, and not the keenest eye nor the finest camera among the Boche aviators could detect a change in the character of the forest.

At dusk on the night of Wednesday, September 25th, the artillerymen cut the wires holding the trees with axes and pulled the monarchs of the forest crashing to the ground to left and right of the path thus opened up, leaving the way clear for the artillery fire. A total of more than a thousand trees were felled in this way for the three regiments.

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CHAPTER XVII

MILLION DOLLAR BARRAGE

At eleven o'clock that night, September 25th, a signal gun barked far down the line. The gunners of every battery were at their posts, lanyards in hand, and on the instant they pulled.

That has become known in the army as "the million dollar barrage," because enlisted men figured it must have cost at least that much. Whatever it cost, no man in that great army ever had heard the like. It ranged from the smaller field pieces up to great naval guns firing shells sixteen inches in diameter, with every variety and size of big gun in the American army in between. There had been talk in the war of a bombardment "reaching the intensity of drum fire." No drums the world ever has heard could have provided a name for that bombardment. It was overwhelming in the immensity of its sound, as well as in its effect. There were 3,000 guns on the whole front.

Toward morning, the twelve ugly, snub-nosed weapons of the 103d Trench Mortar Battery, under Captain Ralph W. Knowles, of Philadelphia, added their heavy coughing to the monstrous serenade which rent the night. They were in position well up to the front, and their great bombs were designed to cut paths through the enemy barbed wire and other barriers so the infantry could go forward with as little trouble as possible.

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Zero hour for the infantry was 5.30 o'clock on that morning of September 26th. Watches of officers and non-commissioned officers had been carefully adjusted to the second the night before and when the moment arrived, the long lines went over the top without further notice.

The former National Guard of Pennsylvania was but one division among a great many in that attack, which covered a front of fifty-four miles from the Meuse clear over into the Champagne and which linked up there with the rest of the whole flaming western front. The American army alone covered twenty miles of attacking front, and beyond them extended General Gourard's French army to the west.

The full effect and result of the artillery preparation was realized only when the infantry went over the top. The early stages of the advance were described by observers as being more like a football game than a battle. The route was virtually clear of prepared obstructions, although there was hardly a stretch of six feet of level ground, and the German opposition was almost paralyzed.

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The whole field of the forward movement was so pitted with shell craters as to make the going almost like mountain climbing. Over this field a part of the great battle of Verdun in 1916 had

been fought and the pits scooped out by the artillery of that time, added to those due to the constant minor fire since, lay so close together that it was utterly impossible for all the men to make their way between. The craters left from the Verdun battle could be distinguished by the fact that their sides were covered with grass and that once in a while a few bones were to be seen, melancholy reminder of the brave men who died there.

Seen from observation posts in the rear, the advancing soldiers presented an odd picture, dropping suddenly from view as they went into a hole, then reappearing, clambering up the far side. They jumped over the edges, often into a pool of stagnant water with a bottom of slimy mud, and the climbing out was no easy task, burdened as they were with equipment.

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It was now the season of the year when the days are still fairly warm, but the nights are keen and frosty. The men started out in the chill of the morning with their slickers, but as the day advanced they began to feel these an unbearable impediment in the heat and rush of battle and they discarded them. When night came they bitterly cursed their folly, for they were wretched with the cold.

The early morning was gray and forbidding. A heavy mist covered the land, hampering the air force in their work of observation, but overhead the sky was clear, giving promise of better visibility when the sun should heat the atmosphere and drive the mists away.

The infantry, with machine gunners in close support, went forward rapidly. They came to the first German trench line and crossed it almost without opposition. A surprising number of Germans emerged from dugouts, hands up, and inquired directions to the prison cages in the American rear. The Pennsylvanians were just beginning to feel the effect of the loss of morale in the enemy army.

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To the surprise of our doughboys, the artillery opposing them was weak and ineffectual. To this fact is attributed the great number of what are known as "clean" wounds in the Argonne fight—bullet wounds which make a clean hole and heal quickly. In view of the great number of men struck during this campaign, it is extremely fortunate that this was so. Had the German artillery been anything like what it had been in other battles, our casualty lists would have been much more terrible, for it is the shrapnel and big shells that tear men to pieces.

Beyond the first German line, which was just south of Grand Boureuilles and Petite Boureuilles, on opposite sides of the Aire river, the German defenses had not been so thoroughly destroyed and the resistance began to stiffen. Out from their shelters, as soon as the American barrage had passed them, came hordes of Germans to man their concealed machine gun nests. The lessons of the Marne-Aisne drive had been well learned by the Pennsylvanians, and there were few frontal assaults on these strong points, many of which were the famous concrete "pill boxes"—holes in the earth roofed over with rounded concrete and concealed by foliage and branches, with narrow slits a few inches above the surface of the earth to permit the guns to be sighted and fired.

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When the infantry came to one of these that spat flame and steel in such volume that a direct attack threatened to be extremely costly, they passed around it through the woods on either flank and left it to be handled by the forces coming up immediately in their rear, with trench mortars and one-pounder cannon, capable of demolishing the concrete structures.

The infantry passed beyond the area in which the artillery and trench mortars had wiped out the barbed wire and ran into much difficulty with the astounding network of this defensive material woven through the trees. The Germans had boasted that the Argonne forest was a wooded fortress that never could be taken. American troops proved the vanity of that boast, but they went through an inferno to do it. The wire was a maze, laced through the forest from tree to tree, so that hours were consumed in covering ground which, but for the wire, could have been covered in almost as many minutes. The men had literally to cut and hack their way through yard after yard.

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The towns of Boureuilles, great and small, were cleaned up after smart fighting, and the advance was continued up the beautiful Aire River valley in the direction of Varennes.

The Pennsylvania infantry was advancing in two columns. The 55th Brigade, including the 109th and 110th Infantry regiments, was right along the river, and the 56th Brigade, made up of the 111th and 112th, went through the forest on the left, or west of the river. On the right of the Twenty-eighth Division was the Thirtieth Division, consisting of National Guard troops of North and South Carolina and Tennessee, and on the left was the Seventy-seventh Division, selected men from New York State.

The town of Varennes stands in a bowl-shaped valley, rich in historic significance and, at the time our men reached there, gorgeous in the autumnal colorings of the trees. It was at Varennes that Louis XVI was captured when he attempted to escape from France.

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Coming up from the south to the high ground surrounding Varennes, the Iron Division forged ahead faster than the troops on their right could move through the forest. Before the officers and men of the liaison service could apprise the Pennsylvania commanders of this fact, they discovered it for themselves when a hot fire was poured in on their flank from German "pill boxes" and other strong points.

It was decided, since the troops were rolling onward in fine style, not to halt the division while the other division caught up, so Major Thompson was sent off to the east with a battalion of the 110th to look after that flanking fire. The battalion disappeared into the woods, and in a little while a sharp increase in the sound of the firing from that direction indicated that it was hard at work. After some time it came back into its position in the line. The other division had easier

going for a time as a result of the efforts of the four companies of Pennsylvanians, and the embarrassing fire from the right flank was silenced.

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After a number of the German "pill boxes" had been reduced and entered by the Pennsylvania troops, it was discovered that they were, like so many other German contrivances and devices of the war, largely bluff. In instance after instance, where the intensity of the fire from these places had led our men to expect a garrison of a dozen men they found only one. The retreating Germans had left a single soldier with a large supply of rifles to give the impression of a considerable force manning the fort. Prisoners said their instructions had been to fire as rapidly as possible and as long as possible and to die fighting, without thought of surrender.

When the Pennsylvanians forced their way to the lower crest of the ridge looking down into the valley where Varennes lies, the edge of the Argonne forest to the westward still was occupied by enemy machine gunners. Officers of the division stepped out from the shelter of trees and looked over the ground with their glasses to plan the next phase of the attack. German snipers promptly sighted them and in a moment bullets were singing through the trees above their heads and to both sides, but they remained unperturbed.

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"Get me an idea of what is over in that wood," said General Muir to his aides, and Lieutenant Raymond A. Brown, of Meadville, Pa., and Captain William B. Morgan, of Beverly, Mass., started out on the risky mission. Lieutenant Brown's pistol was packed in his blanket roll. He borrowed a rifle and a cartridge belt from a private soldier. Three hours later they returned and made reports upon which were based the next actions of the troops. They told nothing of their experiences, but Lieutenant Brown had added a German wrist watch to his equipment and Captain Morgan showed a pair of shoulder straps which indicated that the troops opposing them were Brandenburgers.

As they went down the far side of the hill toward Varennes, the Pennsylvania soldiers saw an amazing evidence of German industry. The whole slope was painstakingly terraced and furnished with dugouts in tiers, leading off the terraces. The shelters of the officers were fitted out with attractive porticos and arbors.

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As evidence of the hurried retreat of the Huns, who apparently had not dreamed the Americans could advance so swiftly through their leafy fortress, a luncheon, untouched, lay upon a table in an officer's dugout. At the head of the table was an unopened letter.

In another dugout was an upright piano, which must have been looted from the town and lugged up the hill at the cost of great labor. But, most astonishing of all, upon the piano was sheet music published in New York, as shown by the publisher's name, long after America entered the war. Our officers puzzled long over how the music could have got there, but found no solution.

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CHAPTER XVIII

"AN ENVIABLE REPUTATION"

Varennes itself was virtually a wreck by the time our men reached it. Most of the buildings were cut off about the second story by shell fire. An electric plant, installed by the Germans and which they had attempted to wreck before leaving, was repaired by Pennsylvania mechanics and soon was ready to furnish illumination for the Americans.

Crates of live rabbits, left behind by the Germans in their flight, were found by the Pennsylvanians and turned over to the supply officers, and in the evening an officers' mess sat down to a stewed rabbit dinner in the open square of the ruined town, in the shadow of the gaping sides of the wrecked church. In addition to the army ration issue, the meal and others for some days were helped out by a plentiful supply of cabbage, radishes, potatoes, cauliflower, turnips and other vegetables, taken from the pretty little gardens which the Germans had planted and carefully nurtured.

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While the Pennsylvanians were at Varennes, a great automobile came roaring down the hill from the south and slithered to a halt where a group of our soldiers had been lolling on the ground resting. They were not there by the time the car stopped. Instead, they were erect and soldierly, every man at attention and hands jerked up to the salute with sharp precision. For the flag upon the car bore four stars and it was all the men could do to keep from rude "gaping" at the tall, handsome man inside, who called to them pleasantly:

"What division is this?"

Most of the men were tongue-tied with surprise and embarrassment, but one responded:

"The Twenty-eighth, sir."

"Ah! You have an enviable reputation," was the reply from the man in the car. "I should like to lunch with your division today."

Which he thereupon proceeded to do. As the car passed on, a group of very red-faced private soldiers looked each other in the eye in a startled way and one voiced the thought of all when he said:

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"And that was General Pershing! And he spoke to us! Gee!"

The 103d Engineers again were covering themselves with glory in this Argonne drive. Time after time they were sent out to repair existing roads and construct new ones, often working right on the heels of the infantry, for only after they had performed their work could supplies be brought up to the fighting troops and the artillery maintain position to continue the barrage in advance of the infantry and machine gunners.

The 103d Supply Train, too, performed its work under incredible difficulties. Doughboys rarely thought to give a word of praise to the men of the big camions. More often their comment was: "Gee! Pretty soft for you fellows, riding around in a high-powered truck while we slog through the mud!"

But to those who knew of the trying night drives in utter darkness over roads which not only were torn to tatters already by shells, but which were subject at any time to renewed shelling; of the long stretches without sleep or food or drink; of the struggles with motors and other parts of the trucks which fell heir to every kind of trouble such things are liable to under great stress—only to that understanding few, and to the supply chaps themselves, were their activities regarded as subject for praiseful comment. Had the supply train "fallen down on the job" and "chow" not been ready at every opportunity—which truly were few and far enough between—Oh, then the doughboys would have howled in execration at their brothers of the big lorries.

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The same kind of credit was due as much and given as rarely to the 103d Ammunition Train, which kept all the fighting men supplied without stint and without break with the necessary powder and steel to keep the Hun on the run.

Even the men of the four field hospitals found themselves nearer the front than such organizations usually go. So well had the plans been laid for that opening assault that it was realized the hospitals would have to be well forward to avoid too long a carry for the wounded after the first rush had carried our men well beyond their "jumping-off-place."

The hospitals took position during the night and erected their tents, so they would not be subject to air bombing before the attack and so their presence would not betray the concentration of forces. French officers who passed along the American front inspecting it the night before the assault were amazed at this concentration, and so were the field hospital men when the bombardment was started and they found themselves far ahead of the big guns. In the morning they discovered, to their astonishment, that they had been thrust in between the first line of infantry and the support.

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Throughout the Argonne fighting, as they had done from the beginning of the division's activities, they performed their work in as thorough and capable a manner as did any of the organizations in the division, and found their chief recompense in the gratitude of the wounded and suffering who passed through their hands.

As the two Pennsylvania columns battered their way forward, a double liaison service was maintained between them, first by patrols of men and second by telephone communication. The service of communication was presided over by Colonel Walter C. Sweeney, chief of the divisional staff, originally a Philadelphian, but now hailing from Virginia.

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The circuit of communication was not broken once, largely because of the alertness and ability of Lieutenant-Colonel Sydney A. Hagerling, of Pittsburgh, the divisional signal officer, and the staunch, untiring and efficient work of the 103d Field Signal Battalion. Each brigade commander knew always precisely how far the other had advanced. Both regular army men, they united in giving full credit for the remarkably successful advance to the high quality of the troops, the superb handling of the artillery by Brigadier-General Price and the unexcelled teamwork of officers and men of each branch of the service and of branch with branch.

At one time, emphasizing this remarkable spirit within the division, Major-General Muir appeared in the front lines one morning, just as the first wave of infantrymen was about to go over in a charge against a machine gun nest. Standing talking to the regimental commander, General Muir fidgeted for a few moments and then said:

"I think I'll command one of those companies myself."

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To the amazement and great glee of officers and men, he did, the commander of the chosen company acting as second in command. Enemy shells landed all about the General, who manifested as much agility and energy as the youngest private. A shell fell within twenty-five feet of him, but fortunately it was a "dud," or one which failed to explode. There was vicious machine gun fire all about, but the nest was cleaned out and prisoners and guns were captured. General Muir rejoined the Colonel. He was breathing hardly faster than usual as he remarked:

"That was fine! It took me back to the old days in the Philippines."

A few days later, the General was out again among the troops, accompanied by Colonel Sweeney, Captain Theodore D. Boal, of Boalsburg, Pa., Lieutenant Edward Hoopes, of West

Chester, and Corporal Olin McDonald, of Sunbury, all of his staff.

German planes were hovering overhead and suddenly one of them dropped like a plummet to a few hundred feet above the ground and began to spit machine gun bullets at the group. A wounded soldier had just come out of the woods, stood his rifle against a tree and started back to a first aid station. General Muir seized the rifle, took careful aim at the flyer, about three hundred feet above, and fired twice. Whether he scored a hit could not be determined, but the airman fled after the second shot.

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In the course of the advance, the artillery went forward in echelons. That is, batteries from the rear moved up and took position in advance of other batteries which maintained the fire, passing between the guns on their way. After they were in position to fire, the one farther back ceased fire and the process was repeated.

The Pennsylvania artillery cut a swath two miles wide through the forest, doing their work so thoroughly that beautiful green hills which could be descried by powerful glasses in the distance were, by the time the beholders reached them, nothing but shell-pitted, blackened mounds, ragged with beards of shattered and splintered trees, looking for all the world, as men from the Pennsylvania mountain country observed, like the hills at home after a forest fire.

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When the artillery reached Varennes, which was, of course, not until after the infantry had gone far beyond, they ran into a severe enemy shelling. On October 2d, First Sergeant T. O. Mader, of Audenried, Luzerne county, a member of Battery A, 109th Artillery, performed the deeds which won for him official citation and the Distinguished Service Cross.

He helped to guide sections of the battery over a shell-swept road, when the fire was so severe that eight men were wounded and ten horses killed. The horse that Sergeant Mader rode was killed under him. The driver of a swing team had difficulty in controlling the horses of a section and Sergeant Mader sent him to another section and himself took charge of the fractious team. He continued with the section until he was so badly wounded he was unable to control the frantic horses. He refused to have his wounds treated, however, and continued to direct the gun carriages to places of safety. Then, disregarding his own condition, he requested the medical officers to give first attention to other wounded men. The official citation declared that "Sergeant Mader's conduct was an inspiration to the men of his battery."

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Another "second in command" was put out of action at this time, Lieutenant-Colonel Olin F. Harvey, of the 109th Artillery, being severely wounded in the leg by a shell fragment.

Beyond Varennes, the infantry found the going harder than before—much harder than anything they had encountered since going to France. The Germans had their backs to their boasted Brunnhilde line and fought with the desperation of despair to hold off the advancing Americans until their vast armies in the north could extricate themselves from the net Marshal Foch had spread for them with such consummate skill.

Montblaineville and Baulny presented but temporary problems to troops flushed with victory, and they pushed on toward Apremont, below which they suffered the first serious check of the drive. Once more there was need for tremendous effort and heroic endeavor and once more the Pennsylvania troops measured up to the need. Men who had distinguished themselves on the Marne, the Ourcq, the Vesle and Aisne lived nobly up to the reputations for bravery they had already established, and they were emulated in inspiring style by men whose names had not before figured in the division's record of honor.

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The trench mortar battery of the artillery brigade was rivaled by men of the trench mortar platoons attached to the headquarters companies of the various infantry regiments, who carried their heavy weapons through the almost fathomless mud, in and out of shell craters, exhausted by the heat of the days and the bone-chilling cold of the nights. In spite of their heavy burdens, the mortar platoons always were close at hand when the infantry stopped, baffled by the mazes of wire, and called for the "flying pigs" to open a path.

Men of every regiment filled stellar rôles in this smashing advance. Lieutenant Godfrey Smith, of Gwynedd Valley, Pa., overcame innumerable obstacles and passed through many dangers to establish and maintain telephone communication between the advance posts and the rear areas of the 112th Infantry. Color-Sergeant Miles Shoup, of Braddock, had charge of the runners and liaison work and displayed great personal bravery.

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Shoup had the reputation among the other men of bearing a charmed life and he was termed "a remarkable soldier" by more than one officer. In the advance of the morning of September 28th, Colonel Dubb became separated and Shoup volunteered to search for him. He located the Colonel after passing unscathed through a terrific artillery and machine gun fire, then returned the same way and organized additional runners to keep the communications intact.

At night the Germans suddenly opened a smart barrage with big guns and men of the 112th became scattered. Lieutenant Smith assembled the men while the fire was going on, finding them in various shelters. It was necessary to wear masks because the Boche was mixing an occasional gas shell with his shrapnel and high explosives, but Lieutenant Smith persisted until he had returned the men to their various battalion positions and reorganized the companies.

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On another occasion, Lieutenant Smith was laying telephone wire with a detail of headquarters company men. When the supply of wire ran out, he crawled through the woods to a German telephone line, within a short distance of German positions, cut the wire and brought back enough to continue laying his own line.

An officer of the 112th noticed that every time he called for a runner from any one of three

companies, it was always the same man who responded. The man was Private Charles J. Ryan, of Harrisburg, a member of Company I. When a lull came in the activity, the officer investigated in person, because the men assigned to act as runners should have taken turns and he suspected the others were imposing on Ryan, which is subversive of discipline. To his amazement, he learned from the unanimous accounts of all the men, including Ryan, that the latter had insisted that the other runners should let him take all the assignments to duty. The officer put a stop to the method.

France puts her clergymen into the army as fighting men, on the same basis as any other men. America exempts men of the cloth from military service, but offers them an opportunity to serve their country and humanity, as well as their calling, by acting as chaplains to the fighting men. As such, they are supposed to have nothing to do with the fighting. But there come times, in the heat and rush of battle, when quick action by the nearest man of ability and judgment points the way to victory.

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Such an occasion arose on the second day of the Argonne drive, when all the officers of a battalion of the 111th Infantry were incapacitated. Lieutenant Charles G. Conaty, of Boston, a Catholic priest who was a chaplain in the 111th, was the only commissioned officer remaining with the battalion. He promptly jumped into the breach and led the men in a victorious charge. Lieutenant Conaty had not long recovered at that time from the effects of gas which he inhaled while working close to the lines in the Marne-Vesle drive.

A German sniper wounded the "bunkie" of Thomas Corry, of Pittsburgh, a member of Company I, 111th Infantry. Corry started out to stalk the sniper in revenge. He spent the whole day at it and returned with half a dozen prisoners, all the snipers he had found except the ones who showed fight and had to be killed.

A major of the 111th at one time sent a runner to the 109th machine gun battalion to ask for immediate assistance. Company B of the gunners, under Captain Daniel Burke Strickler, of Columbia, Pa., set out at once with a guide. They followed the guide over one hill, but saw no sign either of the enemy or a hard-pressed battalion of their own men. At the bottom of the next hill, Captain Strickler called a halt and asked the guide if he were sure the battalion was at the top.

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The guide replied that they were hardly 100 yards away and started up the hill alone to make sure. He had gone not more than twenty feet when a masked machine gun battery opened up and the guide was shot to ribbons. Captain Strickler ascertained the location of the infantry lines from a wounded man who happened along on his way to the rear and started for them.

The infantry, however, had been having a hard time and had been directed to retire while the artillery laid down a barrage. Unaware of this, Captain Strickler led his men up the hill and walked into the edge of our own barrage, but the company escaped without the loss of a man.

The effect of the American pressure now was being felt far behind the German front lines, as was evidenced by the sheets of flame by night and clouds of smoke by day which signaled the burning of heaps of stores and the explosion of ammunition dumps far to the north.

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Advancing around Apremont, the 111th ran into difficulties and was delayed. Runners carried the word to the 55th Brigade and Captain Meehan and a battalion of the 109th were detached and sent over to help. They cleaned out the Bois de la T'Aibbe, which was strongly garrisoned and offered a next to impregnable front, so that when the 111th disposed of its immediate difficulties it was able to move up to the same front as the rest of the regiments.

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CHAPTER XIX

ENSANGUINED APREMONT

The taking of Apremont was the greatest struggle the division had in its fighting career. Much has been said and written during the war of "the blood-soaked fields of France" and "streams of blood." Officers who were at Apremont solemnly vouch for the fact that there was a time in that town when the water running in the gutters was bright red with blood.

And not all of it was German blood.

The town was held in force, much as Fismes and Fismette had been, and presented much the same problem. So strong was the position that every approach to it was covered by heavy concentrations of machine guns and snipers. No longer were one or two Germans left in a nest to fire many guns as fast as they could. The enemy had brought up strong reinforcements of comparatively fresh troops and gave every evidence of a determination to stand. Not until compelled to by superior force did he let go, and then it was only to launch one counter-attack

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after another.

It was at this time that Sergeant Andrew B. Lynch, of Philadelphia, won his Distinguished Service Cross by a remarkable piece of daring and self-sacrifice. A member of the headquarters company of the 110th Infantry, he was on duty with the one-pounder section of his company in a position slightly north of the village. Under orders he removed his guns to the rear and, after establishing the new position, was told that his commanding officer, Lieutenant Meyer S. Jacobs, had been taken prisoner.

Sergeant Lynch and Corporal Robert F. Jeffery, of Sagamore, Pa., organized a rescue party of five and instantly moved forward and attacked a German patrol of thirty-six men who had Lieutenant Jacobs in custody. Fifteen of the Germans were killed and Sergeant Lynch personally took three prisoners and released his Lieutenant, un wounded.

Immediately after the return to the American lines, Sergeant Lynch took command of seventy-five of his company who had been held in reserve. Drawing his revolver, the sergeant commanded the men to follow him, launched a fresh attack, drove the enemy back two-thirds of a mile and established a new line in a ravine northwest of the village. The official citation when he was awarded his cross remarked that "Sergeant Lynch's conduct exemplified the greatest courage, judgment and leadership."

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Lieutenant John V. Merrick, of Roxborough, Philadelphia, with D Company of the 110th Infantry, had gained an objective to which he had been assigned and was holding the western end of a ravine near Apremont. He found his men were subjected to both a frontal and an enfilading fire and were without proper shelter. He ordered a withdrawal to a safer position and while doing so he was struck through the elbow and hand by machine gun bullets.

Suffering intense pain, he declined to be evacuated and for two hours bravely and skilfully directed his men and brought them back to the company, together with stragglers from other units, who attached themselves to his party.

Captain Charles L. McLain, of Indiana, Pa., who had distinguished himself below the Marne, again came into prominence at Apremont. He learned that Company C, 110th, was without officers. His own company was in reserve. There was no superior officer at hand, so without orders he turned over command of his own company to a junior officer, took command of the orphaned C Company and led the first wave in a hot attack. He was wounded in the leg, but continued at the head of his men, hobbling along with the aid of a cane, until his objective was reached. Then he allowed them to send him to a hospital. Both he and Lieutenant Merrick recovered from their wounds and rejoined their regiment.

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In the fighting close to the village of Apremont, the men used shell craters instead of digging trenches, organizing them as strong points. An attack on the German positions was planned for 5.30 o'clock in the morning. About three hundred Pennsylvania infantrymen in the town were awaiting a barrage which should clear the way for them to advance.

Oddly enough, the Germans had planned an attack for almost the same time. The Pennsylvanians were heavily supported by machine guns. The Germans launched their attack first and the result was better for the Pennsylvanians than they had expected to achieve in their own attack and was won with less cost. The Germans came straight at the shell craters and were mowed down in rows. Those that managed to get by ran into the waiting infantry in the town and those who survived that fight turned and fled, right past the machine guns in the shell holes again. It was pitiable, officers said later, or would have been if the Americans had not realized that the Germans had so much to answer for. Hardly a handful of the several hundred Germans who began that charge lived through it.

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At last the Germans launched one great attack, in which they apparently had every intention of driving the Americans from the village and the surrounding positions and every hope of being successful. They came on confidently and with undeniable courage. The fighting that resulted was desperate. Our Pennsylvania men stood up to them like the gallant veterans they had now become.

The fighting was hand-to-hand, breast-to-breast. In many spots, man contended against man in a struggle as primitive, as dogged and as uncompromising as any fighting ever has been. When a contest narrowed down to one or two men on a side this way, there was but one outcome for the loser. There was neither time nor inclination on either side to surrender, nor time to take prisoners. Death, quick and merciful, for one or the other was the only possible eventuality.

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Our men fought like tigers, but the Germans outnumbered them somewhat and, after their first rush, had a certain advantage of position. The 109th Infantry bore the brunt of this attack. Major Mackey, who as Captain Mackey had won place in the fighting annals of the division in the battle below the Marne, was in his post command in an advanced position when the attack was launched. The "P. C.", as the army shortens post command, was in a cellar from which the house above had been almost blown away by artillery fire. With him were his battalion adjutant and a chaplain. He was keeping in touch with the rear and with the regimental post command by means of telephone and runners.

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The runners ceased arriving and the telephone connection was severed. Only then did the men in the cellar realize the attack was gaining ground and that they might be in danger. Suddenly from directly over their heads came the angry "rat-a-tat-tat-tat" of a machine gun, like a pneumatic riveter at work on the steel skeleton of a skyscraper back in God's country. Simultaneously, the bawling of hoarse-voiced commands in German told them that the visitors who had taken possession of the ground floor of their subterranean domicile were the pestiferous

Boche.

It is hardly necessary to add that Major Mackey and his companions kept quiet, expecting every moment to be called on to surrender. But Fritz had his hands full. Reinforcements were seeping up to the front line of the Americans and they were beginning to make a stand. Then the officers and men of Major Mackey's battalion saw what the Major had heard—the Hun machine gunners standing on the American "P. C."

It called for no special command. There was a wild yell of anger and defiance, and away the Pennsylvanians went to the rescue. The reinforcements were right at their heels. The Germans had shot their bolt and would have been compelled to retreat very soon anyway, but the plight of Major Mackey and the other officers hastened it. In a very short time the enemy was in flight northward once more.

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It was after this fight that Company H of the 109th buried twenty-four of its men, said to have been the largest loss in killed of any company in the division in one engagement during the war. The losses all through were exceedingly heavy. There were instances of companies emerging from the combat in command of corporals, every commissioned officer and every sergeant having been put out of action, and in at least one instance, a battalion was commanded by a sergeant, the major, his staff, the commanders and lieutenants of all four companies having been incapacitated. It was terribly costly, but it wrote the name of Apremont on the records of the division as a word to thrill future members of the organization.

From Apremont the advance veered over to the west, still following the course of the river, toward Chatel-Chehery. When the artillery reached Apremont it ran into trouble again. One battery of the 109th was shelled and knocked to pieces. Guns were torn from their carriages, limbers and caissons blown to bits, horses killed and a number of men killed and many injured.

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Colonel Asher Miner, of Wilkes-Barre, went out in person and assisted in rallying the gunners, bringing order out of chaos and directing the men to a new position. Speaking of Colonel Miner's presence of mind, his constant presence at the scene of danger, the care with which he looked after his men and equipment and his general efficiency and ability, Brigadier-General Price paid him a high compliment.

"Colonel Miner showed bravery upon many occasions," he said, "but it is when men do what they do not have to do that they are lifted to the special class of heroes. Miner is one of these."

It was but shortly after this that Colonel Miner was so badly injured in the ankle that his foot had to be amputated.

Just after leaving Apremont, fighting rod by rod, almost foot by foot, the infantry advance had a brisk engagement in the clearing out of Pleinchamp Farm. As was the case with the other farms of France which figured so frequently in the war news, this consisted of a considerable group of centuries-old buildings, built of stone with exceedingly thick walls, offering ideal protection for machine guns, snipers and one-pounders.

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The buildings were so situated that a force attacking one was open to hot fire from most of the others. It was cleared of the Germans in a brilliant little engagement, however, and our men began to close in on Chatel-Chehery. They were now in the act of driving their way through the Kriemhilde line, the second German defense line in that sector, which the Germans had predicted never would be broken.

The 112th Infantry again came to the fore in this work. Hills 223 and 244, named from their height in meters—names which are purely for military purposes and appear only on the military maps—presented formidable obstacles in the path of the regiment. It is not, however, the American way to stand about and talk of how strong the enemy probably is, so the 112th took another hitch in its belt, clenched its teeth and set out in a rush for Hill 244. Rather to their surprise, they swept over the eminence in their first rush. Neither machine gun nor rifle fire halted them. It was not the 112th's day to be annoyed and it continued to wipe out the German defense positions on Hill 223 in the same way.

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The night before this attack, Sergeant Ralph N. Summerton, of Warren, sat in a kitchen of the regiment, feeling about as miserable as one man may. He was suffering with Spanish influenza, and had upon his body and legs a number of aggravating wounds, inflicted when a German "potato masher," or trench bomb, went off close to him. He had refused to go to a hospital because he felt he was needed with the regiment, but he had upon his blouse two medical tags, indicating he had been treated for both the disease and the wounds.

Lieutenant Dickson, the battalion adjutant, and Lieutenant Benjamin F. White, Jr., a surgeon, entered and Summerton asked Lieutenant Dickson how things were with the regiment. The officer remarked that there were no officers to lead I Company in the attack next morning and Summerton started out.

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"You'd better either stay here or go to a hospital; you're a sick man," said the medical officer, but Summerton disregarded the advice, went to the company and assumed command and led the first wave in the assault on Hill 244 next morning. He actually was the first to the top of the hill, and performed the feat under the eyes of the brigade commander, although he was almost reeling from his illness and his wounds. Not only that, but after gaining the crest he continued to lead the attack until he got a rifle bullet through the shoulder, which put him out of the action.

The regiment came next against Chene Tondu Ridge, and here the whole division came to a pause. It took just four days to reduce that stronghold. It was a case where nothing could be gained and much lost by trying brute force and speed, so it was cleared of Germans by a regular

course of siege operations in the tactics with which the Pennsylvanians now were so familiar.

Some men spotted the German firing positions and concentrated their streams of bullets on them, while others crept forward to protected posts. These in turn set up a peppery fusillade and the others crept forward. So it went on, steadily up hill, steadily gaining, until, on the evening of the fourth day, the tired doughboys of the 112th lay down and slept on the crest of the ridge in token of their victory. They had redeemed it for France.

These were the chief defenses which had to be overcome before the troops came to Chatel-Chehery itself. There much the same kind of fighting as at Apremont took place, although not on so fierce and extensive a scale.

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CHAPTER XX

TOWARD HUNLAND

Near Chatel-Chehery, in the depth of the woods, the soldiers found a hunting lodge which prisoners said had been occupied for a long time by the German Crown Prince. They said that, unmindful of the great tragedy such a short distance away and for which he was at least partly responsible, he entertained parties of gay friends at the lodge and went boar hunting in the forest. That he was more or less successful was attested by several large boars' heads on the walls.

In the course of their progress up the valley, our men had captured a railroad which had been part of the German system of communications. With it were taken seven locomotives and 268 cars. The locomotives were of odd construction, to American eyes, having a big flywheel over the boiler, and on each a fanciful name was painted in German on the side of the cab. Locomotives and cars were camouflaged to make them blend with the trees, bushes and ferns of the forest. An effort had been made to wreck them, but four were easily repaired and in a few hours after they were seized men of the 103d Engineers had the railroad running full blast and performing valuable service.

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Our men also had taken a complete 15-cottage hospital. It was located attractively upon the side of a hill and winding paths connected the buildings, which were of red brick and painted concrete. In the modern operating room a gruesome sight was presented. Evidently the hospital force had fled in haste as the Americans approached, for upon the operating table lay a dead German with one leg amputated. The detached member and the surgical implements lay right at hand, indicating that the surgeons had deserted the man upon the table while operating, without a thought for his welfare.

Another valuable capture was an electrically-operated sawmill, with 1,000,000 feet of prepared lumber. All of these, together with a number of electric power plants, were immediately set to work for the benefit of the division, the mill and power plants under mechanics from the engineer regiment, the hospital under men from the sanitary train.

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Moving on from Chatel-Chehery, the division took Fleville and then came to the outskirts of Grand Pre, which promised to make itself worth the taking of any division and which did, indeed, prove quite a stumbling block.

Not for the Iron Division, however, for its service of fourteen days in that magnificent drive was regarded as enough for one body of men and it was ordered withdrawn. The organizations were relieved on October 9th and 10th and moved southward, crossed the Aire and came to rest in positions around Thiaucourt, sixteen miles southwest of Metz and about four miles back of the front lines. Division headquarters was established at Euvezin, several miles southwest of Thiaucourt.

The artillery was detached and sent scurrying away along the rear of the roaring battle line, where the Germans now were rapidly nearing the crash to cause which our men had done so much. Straight away northwest they traveled, mile after mile, and when they finally came to a halt the gunners, to their utter amazement, found themselves in that devils' cauldron of the whole war, Belgium.

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Here they were attached to the Army of Pursuit, which was intended to hound the retiring Germans to the last ditch, but the signing of the armistice intervened before they saw real action. The artillerymen had thought they knew something about devastation and desolation from what they had seen hitherto, but the sights in Belgium taught them that they knew little of such things. That ghastly, bleak, barren land, clawed to pieces like a carcass under the beaks of carrion birds by four long years of war, left the Pennsylvania gunners speechless with horror.

Back with the division, the men had but a day or two to rest in the billets about Thiaucourt. Then, just after the middle of October, the 56th Brigade moved up toward the front and took position on a line, Xammes, Jaulny, Haumont. They had now become a part of the Second American Army, which obviously was getting into position for a drive on Metz, and our men looked forward to more strenuous work.

The 55th Brigade was to have relieved the 56th in ten days, but this order was countermanded. The 55th instead moved up and took position on the left of the 56th, and it was approximately in these positions that the signing of the armistice found our men. In the meantime they had some smart action and a number of casualties, but the work was nothing which drew attention during the closing days of the world's greatest war. When hostilities ceased they were moved back somewhat and went into a real rest camp based on Heudi-court. On November 18th they achieved the right to wear a gold chevron on the left cuff in token of their having been six months in overseas service.

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Four days before this, however, on November 14th, the division was named as one of several to push forward toward the German frontier, to act in support of the Third Army, the American Army of Occupation. Disappointment at not having been made a part of the Army of Occupation promptly gave way to rejoicing at this new honor and fresh evidence of the confidence reposed in the Pennsylvanians by the High Command.

Some days before the signing of the armistice, General Muir had taken leave of the division with every sign of deep regret. He was going to take command of the Fourth Army Corps and Major-General William H. Hay succeeded him in command of the Twenty-eighth.

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General Muir once more took occasion to voice his admiration for the division as a whole and directed that special orders, commending each unit and mentioning some of the special feats it had performed, be issued to the commanding officers of the units. These were in turn reproduced by the commanding officers and a copy given to each man.

In concluding this record, probably nothing could be more appropriate than to quote the order of its fighting commander, citing its glorious action. The communication read:

"The Division Commander desires to express his appreciation to all the officers and soldiers of the Twenty-eighth Division and of its attached units who, at all times during the advance in the valley of the Aire and in the Argonne forest, in spite of their many hardships and constant personal danger, gave their best efforts to further the success of the division.

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"As a result of this operation, which extended from 5.30 o'clock on the morning of September 26th until the night of October 8th, with almost continuous fighting, the enemy line was forced back more than ten kilometers.

"In spite of the most stubborn and at times desperate resistance, the enemy was driven out of Grand Boureuilles, Petite Boureuilles, Varennes, Montblaineville, Apremont, Pleinchamp Farm, Le Forge and Chatel-Chehery, and the strongholds on Hills 223 and 244 and La Chene Tondu were captured in the face of strong machine gun and artillery fire.

"As a new division on the Vesle River, north of Château-Thierry, the Twenty-eighth was cited in orders from General Headquarters for its excellent service, and the splendid work it has just completed assures it a place in the very front ranks of fighting American divisions.

"With such a position to maintain, it is expected that every man will devote his best efforts to the work at hand to hasten that final victory which is now so near."

Transcriber's Note

Typographical errors corrected in the text:

Page 24 their's changed to theirs
Page 85 stubbornness changed to stubbornness
Page 88 dumfounded changed to dumbfounded
Page 297 Montblainville changed to Montblaineville

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