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Frederick Palmer**

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ARGONNE) \*\*\*

## OUR GREATEST BATTLE

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BOOKS BY  
FREDERICK PALMER

[ii]

THE VAGABOND  
WITH KUROKI IN MANCHURIA  
THE LAST SHOT  
MY YEAR OF THE GREAT WAR  
MY SECOND YEAR OF THE WAR  
WITH OUR FACES IN THE LIGHT  
AMERICA IN FRANCE  
OUR GREATEST BATTLE

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**OUR GREATEST BATTLE  
(THE MEUSE-ARGONNE)**

[iii]

BY  
FREDERICK PALMER  
Author of "The Last Shot," "America in France," etc.



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1919

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**TO THE READER**

[v]

During the war we had books which were the product of the spirit of the hour and its limitations. Among these was my "America in France," which was written, while we were still expecting the war to last through the summer of 1919, to describe the gathering and training of the American Expeditionary Forces, and their actions through the Château-Thierry and Saint-Mihiel operations. Since the war and the passing of the military censorship, we have had many hastily compiled histories, and many "inside" accounts from participants, including commanders, both Allied and enemy, whose special pleading is, to one familiar with events, no less evident in their lapses than in their tone.

This book, which continues and supplements "America in France," is not in the class of the jerry-built histories or the personal narratives. It aims, as the result of special facilities for information and observation, to give a comprehensive and intelligent account of the greatest battle in which Americans ever fought, the Meuse-Argonne.

In the formative period of our army, I was the officer in charge of press relations, under a senior officer. I was never chief censor of the A. E. F.: I had nothing to do with the censorship of the soldiers' mail. After we began operations in the field, my long experience in war was utilized in making me an observer, who had the freedom of our lines and of those of our Allies in France. Where the average man in the army was limited in his observations to his own unit, I had the key to the different compartments. I saw all our divisions in action and all the processes of combat

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and organization. It was gratifying that my suggestions sometimes led to a broader point of view in keeping with the character of the immense new army which was being filled into the mold of the old.

Friends who have read the manuscript complain that I do not give enough of my own experiences, or enough reminiscences of eminent personalities; but even in the few places where I have allowed the personal note to appear it has seemed, as it would to anyone who had been in my place, a petty intrusion upon the mighty whole of two million American soldiers, who were to me the most interesting personalities I met. The little that one pair of eyes could see may supply an atmosphere of living actuality not to be easily reproduced from bare records by future historians, who will have at their service the increasing accumulation of data.

In the light of my observations during the battle, I went over the fields after the armistice, and studied the official reports, and talked with the men of our army divisions. For reasons that are now obvious, the results do not read like the communiqués and dispatches of the time, which gave our public their idea of an action which could not be adequately described until it was finished and the war was over. We had repulses, when heroism could not persist against annihilation by cross-fire; our men attacked again and again before positions were won; sometimes they fought harder to gain a little knoll or patch of woods than to gain a mile's depth on other occasions. Accomplishment must be judged by the character of the ground and of the resistance.

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As the division was our fighting unit, I have described the part that each division took in the battle. The reader who wearies of details may skip certain chapters, and find in others that he is following the battle as a whole in its conception and plan and execution, and in the human influences which were supreme; but the very piling up of the records of skill, pluck, and industry of division after division from all parts of the country, as they took their turn in the ordeal until they were expended, is accumulative evidence of what we wrought.

The soldier who knew only his division, his regiment, battalion, company, and platoon, as he lay in chill rain in fox-holes, without a blanket, under gas, shells, and machine-gun fire, or charged across the open or up slippery ascents for a few hundred yards more of gains, may learn, as accurately as my information warrants, in a freshened sense of comradeship, how and where other divisions fought. He may think that his division has not received a fair share of attention for its exploits. I agree with him that it has not, in my realization of the limitations of space and of capacity to be worthy of my subject.

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There are many disputes between divisions as the result of a proud and natural rivalry, which was possibly too energetically promoted by the staff in order to force each to its utmost before it staggered in its tracks from wounds and exhaustion. One division might have done the pioneer hammering and thrusting which gave a succeeding division its opportunity. A daring patrol of one division may have entered a position and been ordered to fall back; troops of another division may have taken the same position later. There was nothing so irritating as having to withdraw from hard-won ground because an adjoining unit could not keep up with the advance. Towns and villages were the landmarks on the map, with which communiqués and dispatches conjured; but often the success which made a village on low ground tenable was due to the taking of commanding hills in the neighborhood. Sometimes troops, in their eagerness to overcome the fire on their front, found themselves in the sector of an adjoining division, and mixed units swept over a position at the same time. In cases of controversy I have tried to adjust by investigation and by comparing reports. I must have made errors, whose correction I welcome. To illustrate the full detail of each division's advance would require several maps as large as a soldier's blanket. The maps which I have used are intended to indicate in a general way the movement of each division, and our part on the western front in relation to our Allies.

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There may be surprise that I have not mentioned the names of individuals below the rank of division commander, and that I have not identified units lower than divisions. The easy and accepted method would have been to single out this and that man who had won the Medal of Honor or the Cross, and this or that battalion or company which had a theatric part. Indeed, the author could have made his own choices in distinction. I knew the battle too well; I had too deep a respect for my privilege to set myself up in judgment, or even to trust to the judgment of others. Not all the heroes won the Medal or the Cross. The winners had opportunities; their deeds were officially observed. How many men deserved them in annihilated charges in thickets and ravines, but did not receive them, we shall not know until our graves in France yield their secrets.

I like to think that our men did not fight for Crosses; that they fought for their cause and their manhood. A battalion which did not take a hill may have fought as bravely as one which did, and deserve no less credit for its contribution to the final result. So I have resisted the temptation to make a gallery of fame, and set in its niches those favored in the hazard of action, when it was the heroism and fortitude of all which cannot be too much honored. I have written of the "team-play" rather than the "stars"; of the whole—a whole embracing all that legion of Americans at home or abroad who were in uniform during the war. If I have been discriminate about regulars and reserves, and frank about many other things, it is in no carping sense. We fought the war for a cause which requires the truth, now that the war is over.

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I regret that it is not possible for me to give due acknowledgment to the many officers of our army who, during the actual campaign and since their demobilization, have facilitated the gathering of my material. For the preparation of the book I am indebted to the continued assistance, both in France and at home, of Mr. George Bruner Parks.

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## OUR GREATEST BATTLE

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# I

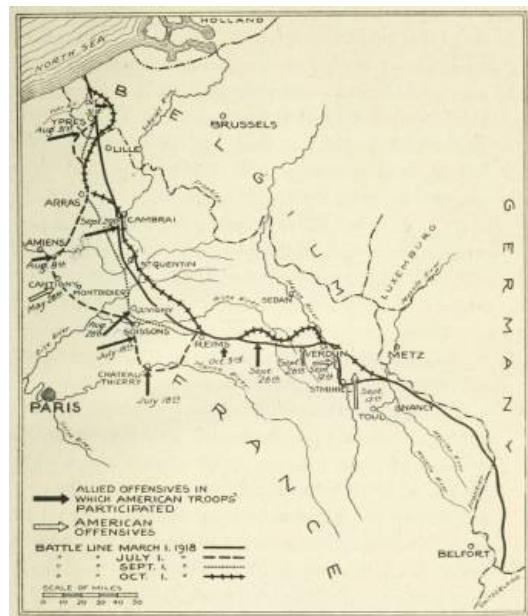
## A CHANGE OF PLAN

The original scope of Saint-Mihiel—A winter of preparation for a spring campaign—Which is cut down to two weeks—The tide turning for the Allies—The advantage of a general attack—And especially of numbers—The tactician's opportunity—Why the Meuse-Argonne—The whale-back of Buzancy—Striking for the Lille-Metz railway—All advantage with the defense—The audacity of the enterprise—The handicaps—A thankless task at best.

We were in the fever of preparation for our Saint-Mihiel attack. Divisions summoned from the victorious fields of Château-Thierry, and divisions which had been scattered with the British and French armies, were gathering in our own sector in Lorraine. The French were to assist us with ample artillery and aviation in carrying out our first ambitious plan under our own command.

After cutting the redoubtable salient, which had been a wedge in the Allied line for four years, we were to go through to Mars-la-Tour and Etain, threatening the fortress of Metz itself. This was to be the end of our 1918 campaign. Instead of wasting our energy in operations in mud and snow, we should spend the winter months in applying the lessons which we had learned in our first great battle as an army. Officers who had been proved unfit would be eliminated, and officers who had been proved fit would be promoted. All the freshly arrived divisions from home camps and all the personnel for handling the artillery, tanks, and other material of war which our home factories would then be producing in quantity, would be incorporated in a homogeneous organization.

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**MAP NO. 1**  
**AMERICAN OFFENSIVES AND OTHER OFFENSIVES IN WHICH**  
**AMERICAN TROOPS PARTICIPATED, MAY-NOVEMBER, 1918.**

The spring would find us ready to play the part which had been chosen for us in the final campaign. On the left of the long line from Switzerland to the North Sea would be the British Army, striking out from the Channel bases; in the center the French Army, striking from the heart of France; and on the right the American Army, its munitions arriving in full tide to support its ceaseless blows, was to keep on striking toward the Rhine until a decision was won.

In the early days of September, with our troops going into position before the threatening heights of the salient, and with the pressure of the effort of forming in time an integral army increasing with the suspense as the 12th, the day set for the attack, drew near, some important officers, at the moment when their assistance seemed invaluable, were detached from the Saint-Mihiel

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operations. Their orders let them into a portentous secret. They were to begin work in making ready for the Meuse-Argonne attack. While all the rest of the army was thinking of our second offensive as coming in the spring of 1919, they knew that it was coming two weeks after the Saint-Mihiel offensive.

This change of plan was the result of a conference between Marshal Foch and General Pershing which planned swift use of opportunity. The German Macedonian front was crumbling, the Turks were falling back before Allenby, and the Italians had turned the tables on the Austrians along the Piave. Equally, if not more to the point for us, the Anglo-French offensive begun on August 8th had gained ground with a facility that quickened the pulse-beat of the Allied soldiers and invited the broadening of the front of attack until, between Soissons and the North Sea, the Germans were swept off Kemmel and out of Armentières and away from Arras and across the old Somme battlefield.

The communiqués were telling the truth about the Allies' light losses; at every point the initiative was ours. The Germans were paying a heavier price in rearguard action than we in the attack. It was a surprising reaction from the pace they had shown in their spring offensives. All information that came through the secret channels from behind the enemy lines supported the conviction of the Allied soldiers at the front that German morale was weakening. [4]

Ludendorff, the master tactician, was facing a new problem. That once dependable German machine was not responding with the alacrity, the team-play, and the bravery which had been his dependence in all his plans. He had to consider, in view of the situation that was now developing, whether or not the Saint-Mihiel salient was worth holding at a sacrifice of men. He knew that we were to attack in force; he knew that in an offensive a new army is bound to suffer from dispersion and from confusion in its transport arrangements. If he allowed us to strike into the air, he could depend upon the mires of the plain of the Woëvre to impede us while the defenses of Metz would further stay our advance, with the result that his reserves, released from Saint-Mihiel, might safely be sent to resist the pressure on the Anglo-French front, either in holding the Hindenburg line or in the arduous and necessarily deliberate business of covering his withdrawal to a new and shorter line of defense based on the Meuse River. The German war machine, which had been tied for four years to its depots and other semi-permanent arrangements for trench warfare, could not move at short notice.

A generalization might consider the war on the Western Front as two great battles and one prolonged siege. For the first six weeks there had been the "war of movement," as the French called it, until the Germans, beaten back from the Marne, had formed the old trench line. Throughout the four years of siege warfare that had ensued, the object of every important offensive, Allied and German, had been a return to the "war of movement." After a breach had been made in the fortifications, the attacking army would make the most of the momentum of success in rapid advances and maneuvers, throw the enemy's units into confusion, and, through the disruption of the delicate web of communications by which he controlled their movements for cohesive effort, precipitate a disaster. The long preparations which had preceded the offensives of 1915, 1916, and 1917 had always given the enemy ample warning of what to expect. He had met concentrations for attack with concentrations for defense. The sector where the issue was joined became a settled area of violent siege operations into which either side poured its fresh divisions as into a funnel. Succeeding offensives, in realization of the limitations of a narrower sector,—which only left the advance in a V with flanks exposed,—had broadened their fronts of attack; but none had been broad enough to permit of vital tactical surprises after the initial onset. The attrition of the man-power of the offensive force had so kept pace with that of the defensive that the offensive had never had sufficient reserves to force a decision when the reserves of the defensive were approaching exhaustion. Moreover, the Allies had never had sufficient preponderance of men, ordnance, and munitions to warrant undertaking the enterprise, which was the dream of every tactician, of several offensives at different points of the front at the same time or in steady alternation. [5]

Now from Soissons to the sea the French and British were developing a comprehensive movement of attacks, now here and now there, in rapid succession. This drive was not a great impulse that died down as had previous Allied offensives, but a weaving, sweeping, methodical advance. Not only was German morale weakening and ours strengthening, but attrition was now definitely in our favor. Ludendorff's reserves were all in sight. His cards were on the table; we could feel assured that we knew fairly well how he would play them. Our own hand was being reinforced by three hundred thousand men a month from the immense reserves in the American training camps. We could press our initiative without fear of being embarrassed by serious counter-attacks taking advantage of our having overextended ourselves. [6]

Thus far, however, the Germans were still in possession of their old trench system, except at a few points; our counter-offensive had only been recovering the ground which the Germans had won in their spring and summer offensives. Now that the tide had turned against him, Ludendorff, if his situation were as bad as we hoped, had two alternatives, and a third which was a combination of the two. One was to fall back to the proposed shorter line of the Meuse. This would give him the winter for fortifying his new positions. As a shorter front would allow him deeper concentrations for defense and the Allies less room for maneuvers in surprise, it must be their purpose to prevent his successful retreat by prompt, aggressive, and persistent action. The other alternative was to make a decisive stand on the old line, where for four years the Germans had been perfecting their fortifications. If we should overwhelm them when he was holding them rigidly, we should have the advantage of a wall in fragments when it did break. The third plan was to use the old fortifications as a line of strong resistance in supporting his withdrawal. [7]

Broadly, this was the one that he was to follow.

Everything pointed to the time as ripe for the fulfilment for the Allies of the tactical dream which had called Ludendorff to his own ambitious campaign in the spring of 1918. Marshal Foch would now broaden his front of alternating attacks from Verdun to the North Sea, in the hope of freeing the Allied armies from trench shackles for a decisive campaign in the open. The American part in this bold undertaking was to be its boldest feature. [8]

If a soldier from Mars had come to Earth at any time from October, 1914, to October, 1918, and had been shown on a flat map the fronts of the two adversaries, he would have said that the obvious strategic point of a single offensive would be between the Meuse River and the Argonne Forest. This would be a blow against the enemy's lines of communication: a blow equivalent to turning his flank. If the soldier from Mars had been shown a relief map, he would have changed his mind, and he would have perfectly understood, as a soldier, why all the offensives had been in the north, from Champagne to Flanders, where breaking through the main line of defenses would bring the aggressor to better ground for his decisive movement in the open. He would also have understood why the front from the Argonne to the Swiss border had been tranquil since the abortive effort of the Germans at Verdun.

When Ludendorff undertook his great offensive of March, 1918, he did not repeat Falkenhayn's error, but turned to the north, where the Allies had made their attacks. In that Lorraine-Alsatian stalemate to the south, with the Vosges mountains and interlocking hills from Switzerland to the forts of Metz as the stronghold of the Germans, and the forts of Verdun, Toul, Epinal, and Belfort as the strongholds of the French, the odds were apparently too much against an offensive by either side to warrant serious consideration. Yet a watch was kept. Over the French mind was always the shadow of a possible German offensive toward Belfort; and, when the sector which our young army was to hold in Alsace and Lorraine had been first discussed in July, 1917, the French excluded the defense of a portion of the front opposite Belfort, with the polite explanation that they preferred to hold that themselves. But the Germans never did more than make the feint of an offensive in the south, which Ludendorff used in the winter of 1918 to draw off French troops and guns from the north: for the army with the numbers and the initiative of offense can always force the defense to waste movements to meet threats of attack. This was another advantage which the Allies could now use in keeping Ludendorff in doubt as to where our real blows were to be struck. [9]

The heights of the Saint-Mihiel salient, which look directly across the plain of the Woëvre to the fortress of Metz, may be said roughly to have formed the left flank of the Lorraine-Alsatian stalemate. They continue onward in the hills which are crowned by the forts of Verdun, and then across the Meuse River for a distance of twenty miles through the bastion of the Argonne Forest, where they gradually break into the more rolling country of Champagne. The Meuse winds past Saint-Mihiel and through the town of Verdun, and then, in its devious course, swings gradually to the northwest until, at Sedan, it turns full westward. [10]

Our new offensive was to be between the Meuse River and the western edge of the Argonne Forest. East of the forest is the little river Aire, and between its valley and the valley of the Meuse rises back of the German front a whale-back of heights, as I shall describe them for the sake of bringing a picture to mind, though the comparison is not absolute. The practical summit of the whale-back is to the eastward of the village of Buzancy. We may use Buzancy as a symbol: for it is only in a highly technical history that the detail of names, confusing to the general and even the professional reader, is warrantable. The summit of the whale-back gained, you are looking down an apron of rolling ground and small hills toward the turn of the Meuse westward past Sedan, where the German Army surrounded the French Army in the Franco-Prussian War.

To the northeast, readily accessible to attack, are the Briey iron-fields, which were invaluable to the Germans for war material. Along the valley of the Meuse after it turns westward, and along the Franco-Belgian frontier runs the great railroad from Metz to Lille, which is double-track all the way and in large part four-track. Incidentally this connected the coal fields of northern France with Germany, but its main service was to form the western trunk line of communication for the German armies in Belgium and northern and eastern France. It was linked up with the railways spreading northward into Belgium and southward toward Amiens and Paris in the arterial system which gave its life blood to the German occupation. If this road were cut, the German troops in retreat would have to pass through the narrow neck of the bottle at Liège. [11]

The dramatic possibilities of gaining the heights of Buzancy and bringing the Lille-Metz tracks under artillery fire had the appeal of a strategic effect of Napoleonic days. The German staff had been fully aware of the danger when, in their retreat after their repulse on the Marne, which the world saw only as the spectacle of the French Army inflicting a defeat on an advancing foe, it used its tactical opportunity for choosing, with comparative deliberation, advantageous defensive positions from the Argonne Forest to the Meuse at the foot of the whale-back. [12]

For future operations it was depending upon more than the elaborate fortifications of that line. Every hundred yards from the foot of the whale-back to the summit was in its favor in resisting attack. Higher ground leads to still higher ground, not in a regular system of ridges but in a terrain where nature cunningly serves the soldier. Nowhere might the defense invite the attack into salients with a better confidence, or feel more certain of the success of his counter-attacks. All roads, and all valleys where roads might be built, were under observation. Heights looked across to heights on either side of the two river troughs, heights of every shape from sharp ridges and rounded hills to peaked summits crowned by woods. Tongues of woods ran across valleys. Patches of woods covered ravines and gullies where machine-gunners would have ideal cover and



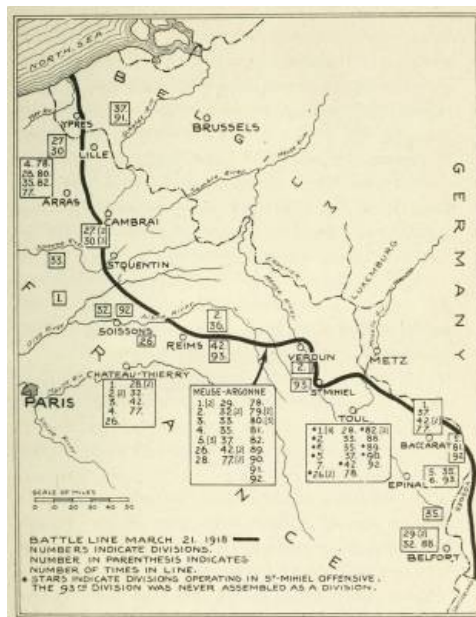
command of ground. Reverse slopes formed walls for the protection of the artillery. The attack must fight blindly; the defense could fight with eyes open.

Had the Allies attempted an offensive in the Meuse-Argonne sector in the first four years of the war, the long and extensive preparations then regarded as requisite for an ambitious effort against first-line fortifications would have warned the Germans in time to make full use of their positions in counter-preparations. All the advantage of railroads and highways were with them in concentrating men and material. It might not be a long distance in miles from the Argonne line to the Lille-Metz railway or to the Briey iron-fields, but it was a long distance if you were to travel it with an army and its impedimenta against the German Army in its prime. When attrition was in his favor in the early period, the German might well have preferred that the Allied offensive of Champagne, or Loos, or the Somme, or Passchendaele, should have been attempted here: thus leaving open to him, after he had inflicted a bloody repulse in this sector, the better ground in the north for a telling counter-offensive.

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Thus an Allied effort toward Mézières, Sedan, and Briey would have been madness until the propitious moment came. Had it really come now? Anyone who was familiar with the history of warfare on the Western Front might ask the question thoughtfully. Bear in mind that we had not yet taken Saint-Mihiel and were not yet certain of our success there; and that from Soissons to Switzerland the old German line was intact. North of Soissons we had broken into it at only a few points. In the event that they had had to make a strategic withdrawal, the Germans had always followed the tactical system of a full recoil to strong chosen positions, where they resisted with sudden and terrific violence and held stubbornly and thriftily until they began one of their powerful counter-thrusts.

[14]



**MAP NO. 2  
WHERE AMERICAN DIVISIONS WERE IN LINE, FROM OUR  
ENTRY INTO THE TRENCHES UNTIL THE ARMISTICE.**

Thus they had fallen back after their defeat on the Marne, from before Warsaw, and from Bapaume to the Hindenburg line. Again and again their morale had been reported breaking, and they had seemed in a disadvantageous position, only to recover their spirit as by imperial command and to extricate themselves in a reversal of form. The German Staff was still in being; the German Army still had reserve divisions and was back on powerful trench systems with ample artillery, machine-guns, and ammunition. Whether Ludendorff was to stand on the old line or withdraw to a new line, either operation would be imperiled by the loss of those heights between the Argonne and the Meuse. He must say, as Pétain had said at Verdun: "They shall not pass!"

In my "America in France" I have told of our project, formed in June, 1917, when we had not yet a division of infantry in France and submarine destruction was on the increase, for an army of a million men in France, capable of the expansion to two million which must come, General Pershing thought, before the war could be won. That far-sighted conception and the decision which was now taken are the two towering landmarks of the troublous road of our effort in France. By July 1st, 1918, we had a million men in France, or nearly double the number of the schedule arranged between the French and American governments. We should soon have two millions.

When the Allies called for more man-power, in the crisis of the German offensive of March, 1918, the British had supplied the shipping that brought the divisions from our home training camps tumbling into France. They were divisions, not an army; and in equipment they were not even divisions. They had been hurried to the front to support the British and French as reserves, and they had been thrown into battle to resist the later German offensives. There had been no niggardliness in our attitude. We offered all our man-power as cannon-fodder to meet the emergency. Across the Paris road behind Château-Thierry we had given more than the proof of our valor. In the drive toward Soissons and to the Vesle we had established our personal mastery over the enemy. We had pressed him at close quarters, and kept on pressing him until he had to

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go. The confidence inherent in our nature, strengthened by training, had grown with the test of battle. We had known none of the reverses which lead to caution. More than ever our impulse was to attack.

Château-Thierry had taught Marshal Foch that he could depend upon any American division as "shock" troops which would charge and keep on charging until exhausted. Now he would use this quality to the utmost. To the American Army he assigned the part which relied upon the call of victory to soldiers as fresh as the French on the Marne, and, in their homesickness for their native land, impatient for quick results. If a Congressional Committee, knowing all that General Pershing knew, had been told of the plan of the Meuse-Argonne, they would probably have said: "No leader shall sacrifice our men in that fashion. We will not stand by and see them sent to slaughter." [16]

The reputation of a commander was at stake. Should we break through promptly to the summit of the heights, then we might take divisions, corps, even armies, prisoners; but that was a dream dependent upon a deterioration in German staff work and in the morale of the German soldier which was inconceivable. The great prize was the hope of an early decision of the war; in expending a hundred or two hundred thousand casualties in the autumn and early winter, instead of a million, perhaps, during the coming summer. At home we should be saved from drafting more millions of men into our army; from the floating of more liberty loans; from harsher restrictions upon our daily life; from the calling of more women and children to hard labor; from the prolongation of the agony, the suspense, the horror, and the costs of the cataclysm of destruction. [17]

There were more handicaps than the heights to consider: those of our unreadiness. If we had failed, this would have meant the burden of criticism heavy upon the shoulders of the commander-in-chief, who would have been recalled. Dreams of any miraculous success aside, it was not the example of the swift results in a day at Antietam, or the brilliant maneuver of Jackson at Chancellorsville, but the wrestling, hammering, stubbornly resisting effort of the men of the North and South in the Appomattox campaign which was to call upon our heritage of fortitude. In that series of attacks which Marshal Foch was now to develop, our part as the right flank of the three great armies was in keeping with the original plan of 1917: only we were facing the Meuse instead of the Rhine. Without sufficient material or experience, we were to keep on driving, not looking forward to the dry ground and fair weather of summer but toward the inclemency of winter. There against the main artery of German communications we were to launch a threat whose power was dependent upon the determined initiative of our men. Every German soldier killed or wounded was one withdrawn from the fronts of the British and French, or from Ludendorff's reserves which must protect his retreat; and every shell and every machine-gun bullet which was fired at us was one less fired at our Allies. It was to be in many respects a thankless battle, and for this reason it was the more honor to our soldiers. [18]

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## II

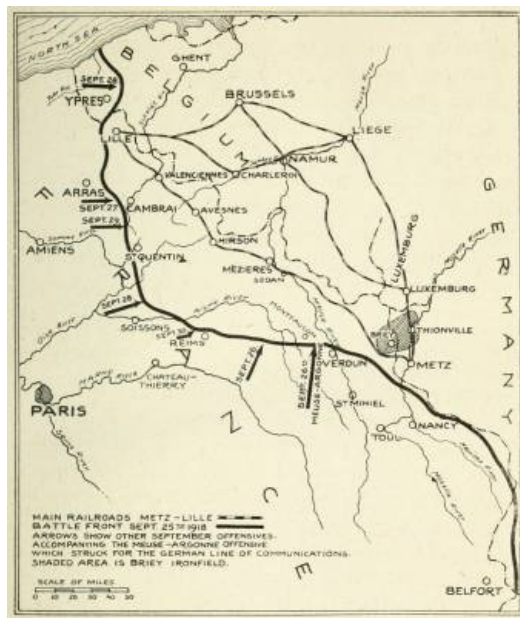
 [19]

### INTO LINE FOR ATTACK

The Meuse-Argonne and the Somme Battle of 1916—The British had four months of preparation—And a trained army—But a resolute enemy—Our untried troops—Outguessing Ludendorff—Prime importance of surprise—Blindman's buff—What it means to move armies—Fixing supply centers—Staffs arrive—Their inexperience—Learning on the run—Our confidence—Aiming for the stars—Up on time.

Comparisons with the Battle of the Somme, the first great British offensive, which I observed through the summer of 1916, often occurred to me during the Meuse-Argonne battle. In both a new army, in its vigor of aggressive impulse, continued its attack with an indomitable will, counting its gains by hundreds of yards, but never for a moment yielding the initiative in its tireless attrition.

The British were four months in preparing for their thrust on the basis of nearly two years' training in active warfare, with all their arrangements for transport and supply settled in a small area only an hour's steaming across the Channel from home. Behind their lines they built light railroads and highways. They had ample billeting space, and their great hospitals were within easy reach. They gathered road-repairing machinery and trained their labor battalions; built depots and yards; established immense dumps of ammunition and engineering material; brought their heavy guns into position methodically, and registered them with caution over a long period; set an immense array of trench mortars in secure positions; dug deep assembly trenches for the troops to occupy before going "over the top"; and ran their water pipes up to the front line, ready for extension into conquered territory. [20]



**MAP NO. 3**  
**OFFENSIVES OF SEPTEMBER, 1918. RELATION OF MEUSE-ARGONNE BATTLE TO THE DECISIVE ALLIED OFFENSIVE MOVEMENT.**

Their divisions had been seasoned by long trench experience, tested in the terrific fire of the Ypres salient and trained in elaborate trench raids for a great offensive. All their methods were as deliberate as British thoroughness required. Units were carefully rehearsed in their parts, and their *liaison* worked out by staffs that had long operated together. Commanders of battalions, brigades, and divisions had been tried out, and corps commanders and staffs developed.

On the other hand, the Germans knew that the British attack was coming. Their army was in the prime of its numbers and efficiency. They had immense forces of reserves to draw upon to meet an offensive which was centered in one sector, with no danger of having to meet offensives in another sector. We were striking in one of several offensives, each having for its object rapidity and suddenness of execution, over about the same breadth of front as the British in 1916; and against the Germans, not in their prime, as I have said, but when they had lost the initiative and were deteriorating. [21]

The increase of the skill of infantry in the attack, in their nicely calculated and acrobatic coördination with protecting curtains of accurate artillery fire, had been the supreme factor in the progress of tactics. As a young army we had all these lessons to learn and to apply to our own special problems. As we could not use the divisions that were at Saint-Mihiel in the initial onset in the Meuse-Argonne, we had to depend upon others from training camps and upon those which were just being relieved from the Château-Thierry area. Two of them had never been under fire; several had had only trench experience. They had not fought or trained together as an army. Many of our commanders had not been tried out. Some of the divisions were as yet without their artillery brigades; others had never served with their artillery brigades in action. By the morning of September 25th, or thirteen days after the Saint-Mihiel attack, all the infantry, the guns, the aviation, and the tanks must be in position to throw their weight, in disciplined solidarity, against a line of fortifications which had all the strength that ant-like industry could build on chosen positions. [22]

We had neither material nor time for extensive preparations. We must depend upon the shock of a sudden and terrific impact and the momentum of irresistible dash. If we took the enemy by surprise when he was holding the line weakly with few reserves, we might go far. Indeed, never was the element of surprise more essential. We were countering Ludendorff's anticipation that, if he withdrew from the salient, we should stall our forces ineffectually in the mud before Metz: countering it with the anticipation that he would never consider that a new army, though it grasped his intention, would within two weeks' time dare another offensive against the heights of the whale-back.

For our dense concentrations we had only two first-class roads leading up to the twenty-mile front between the Meuse and the Forest's edge. These were ill placed for our purpose. We might form our ammunition dumps in the woods, but nothing could have been more fatal than to have built a road, for to an aviator nothing is so visible as the line of a new road. Where aviators were flying at a height of twelve thousand feet in the Battle of the Somme, they were now flying with a splendid audacity as low as a thousand feet, which enabled them to locate new building, piles of material, even well-camouflaged gun positions; and the minute changes in a photograph taken today in comparison with one of yesterday were sufficient evidence to a staff expert that some movement was in progress. An unusual amount of motor-truck traffic or even an unusual number of automobiles, not to mention the marching of an unusual number of troops along a road by day, was immediately detected. [23]

All our hundreds of thousands of men, all the artillery, all the transport must move forward at night. To show lights was to sprinkle tell-tale stars in the carpet of darkness as another indication

that a sector which had known routine quiet for month on month was awakening with new life that could mean only one thing to a military observer. With the first suspicion of an offensive the enemy's troops in the trenches would be put on guard, reserves might be brought up, machine-guns installed, more aviators summoned, trench raids undertaken, and all the means of information quickened in search for enlightening details.

It was possible that the German might have learned our plan at its inception from secret agents within our own lines. If he had, it would not have been the first time that this had happened. In turn, his preparations for defense might be kept secret in order to make his reception hotter and more crafty. He might let the headlong initiative of our troops carry us into a salient at certain points before he exerted his pressure disastrously for us on our flanks. Thus he had met the French offensive of the spring of 1917; thus he had concentrated his murder from Gommecourt to La Boisselle in the Somme Battle. [24]

Not only had our army to "take over" from the French in all the details of a sector, from transport and headquarters to front line, but the Fourth French Army, on our left, which was to attack at the same hour, must be reinforced with troops and guns. The decision that the Saint-Mihiel offensive was not to follow through to Etain and Mars-la-Tour meant that French as well as American units and material must move from that sector to the Argonne. Immediately it had covered the charge of our troops the heavy artillery, both French and American, was to be started on its way, and, after it, other artillery and auxiliary troops and transport of all kinds as they could be spared.

"It sounds a bromide to say that you cannot begin attacking until your army is at the front," said a young reserve officer, "but I never knew what it meant before to get an army to the front."

He had studied his march tables at the Staff School at Langres; now he was applying them. Young reserve officers had a taste of the difficulties of troop movements. They had to locate units, see that they received their orders, and set them on their way according to schedule, with strict injunctions from "on high" to see that everybody was up on time. They had lessons in the speed of units and the capacity of roads which, at the sight of a column of soldiers on the march, will always rise in their recollections of anxious days. [25]

When haste is vital, unexpected contingencies due to the uneven character of men and materials break into any system. That is the "trouble" with war, as one of these young officers said. Everything depends upon system, and system is impossible when the very nature of war develops unexpected demands that are prejudicial to any dependable processes of routine. With urgent calls for locomotives and rolling stock coming from every quarter to meet the demands of the extension of the Allied offensive campaign over an unexampled breadth of front, the railroads, which were few in this region, could not transport troops and artillery which ordinarily would have gone by train.

Three road routes were available from the Saint-Mihiel to the Argonne region. Artillery tractors that could go only three were in columns with vehicles that could go ten and fifteen miles an hour. Field artillery regiments, coming out from the Saint-Mihiel sector after two weeks of ceaseless travail, were delayed by having their horses killed by shell-fire. The exhaustion of horses from overwork was becoming increasingly pitiful. They could not have the proper rest and care. In some instances they made in a night only half the distance which schedules required. When the deep mud, and outbursts of bombardment from the enemy, retarded the relief of troops, motor buses, which were waiting for them, had to be dispatched on other errands, leaving weary legs to march instead of ride. Military police, army and corps auxiliaries of all kinds, and various headquarters must be transferred. [26]

Officers who had hoped for a little sleep once the Saint-Mihiel offensive was under way received "travel orders," with instructions to reach the Argonne area by hopping a motor-truck or in any way they could. Soldiers, after marching all night, might seek sleep in the villages if there were room in houses, barns, or haylofts. Blocks of traffic were frequent when some big gun or truck slewed into a slough in the darkness.

The processions on these three roads from Saint-Mihiel represented only one of many movements from all directions to the Argonne sector. French units had to pass by our new front to that of the Fourth Army. A French officer at Bar-le-Duc, who had charge of routing all the traffic, was an old hand at this business of moving armies. He perfectly appreciated that curses were speeding toward his office from all four points of the compass where traffic was stalled or columns waited an interminably long time at cross-roads for their turn to move, or guns or tanks or anything else in all the varied assortment were not arriving on schedule time. By telephone he kept in touch with American and French units in the process of the mobilization, while he moved his chessmen on the rigid lines of his map. [27]

The "sacred road" from Bar-le-Duc to Verdun coursed again with the full tide of urgent demands; only this time the traffic turned off on the roads to the left instead of going on to the town. With each passing day, as the concentration increased, daylight became a more portentous foe. "No lights! No lights!" was the watchword of all thought which the military police spoke in no uncertain tones to any chauffeur who thought that one flash of his lamps would do no harm; some of the language used was brimstone and figuratively illuminating enough to have made an aurora borealis. Camouflage became an obsession of everyone who had any responsibility. Discomfort, loss of temper and of time were the handicaps in this blind man's buff of trying to keep the landscape looking as natural by day as it had in the previous months of tranquil trench warfare.

Traffic management was only one and not the most trying or important part of the problem. If the [28]

demands upon the Services of Supply were not met, failure was certain: our army would be hungry and without ammunition. In no department was the additional burden of the Meuse-Argonne more keenly felt than in this. New railheads must be established, and additional vehicular transport sent forward to connect up with the new front. Though the mastering of the objective in the Saint-Mihiel operation released a certain surplus, it was disturbingly small. The line established after the salient was cut had become violent. It would require large quantities of supplies as long as we should hold it; and it was already evident that the Meuse-Argonne offensive was to be a greedy monster which could never have its hunger satisfied.

Every hour that we kept the enemy ignorant of the strength of our concentration was an hour gained. The one thing that he must not know was the number of divisions which we were marshaling for our effort. They were the sure criterion of the formidability of our intentions. The most delicate task of all was the taking over of the front line from the French. Not until the stage was set with the accessories of the heavy artillery, the new depots, and ammunition dumps did the roads near the front, cleared for their progress, throb under the blanket of night with the scraping rhythm of the doughboys' marching steps, infusing in the preparations the life of a myriad human pulse-beats in unison. Our faith was in them, in the days before the battle and all through the battle to the end. Their faces so many moving white points in the darkness, each figure under its heavy equipment seemed alike in shadowy silhouette. In the mystery of night their disciplined power, suggestive of the tiger creeping stealthily forward for the spring on his prey, was even more significant than by day.

[29]

The men were prepared in the red blood that coursed young arteries, in their litheness and their pride and will to "go to it." They had their rifles, their belts full of ammunition, their gas masks, and their rations. It was not for them to ask any questions—not even if the barrages which would cover their charges would be accurate, if the tanks would kill machine-gun nests, if the barbed wire would be cut, and if their generals would make mistakes. Suspense, not of the mind but of the heart, lightened at the sight of their movement, so automatic and yet so stirringly human. The gigantic preparations of dumps, gun positions, and trains of powerful tractors became only a demonstration of the mighty energy of our industrial age beside that subtler endeavor which had formed them for their task and set them down as the pawns of a staff in a gamble with death. Might the big guns that the troops passed, grim hard shadows in ravines and woods, do their work well in order that the empty ambulances at rest in long lines might have little to do!

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By battalions and companies the marching columns separated, taking by-roads and paths, as their officers studied their maps and received instructions from French guides who knew the ground. By daylight they were dissipated into the landscape. The hornets were in their hives; they would swarm as dawn broke to the thunders of the artillery. Attacks were always at dawn; and dawn had taken on a new meaning to us since the morning of July 18th, when our 1st and 2nd Divisions, in the company of crack French divisions, had started the first of the counter-offensives.

The success of Saint-Mihiel had developed corps staffs which must now direct the Meuse-Argonne, while others took over the arrangements at Saint-Mihiel. Major-General Hunter Liggett, pioneer of corps commanders, with the First Corps was to be on the left; Major-General George H. Cameron, with the Fifth Corps in the center; and Major-General Robert L. Bullard, with the Third Corps on the right. Groups of officers making a pilgrimage in automobiles to the new sector were to be the "brains" of the coming attack; for our corps command was an administrative unit which took over the direction of a different set of divisions from those under it at Saint-Mihiel.

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The corps staffs had only four or five days for their staff preparations for the battle. It was Army Headquarters in the town hall of Souilly which set the army objective, the corps limits, and the tactical direction of the attack as a whole, while the corps set the divisional limits and objectives to accord with the army objective. At our call we had French experience of the sector, and in this war of maps we had maps. Our prevision in this respect was excellent. The French furnished us with millions of maps in the course of the war; we had our own map-printing presses at Langres; and we had movable presses in the field for printing maps which gave the results of the latest observations of the enemy's defenses. A snowstorm of maps descended upon our army, and still the cry was for more. Not only battalion and company, but platoon and even squad commanders needed these large-scale backgrounds marked with their parts.

Yet maps have their limitations. They may show the ground in much detail, but, even when the blue diagrams and symbols are supposed up to date, not the bushes where the enemy's machine-gun nests are hidden, or what the enemy has done overnight in the way of defenses. Nor are maps plummets into human psychology. Even when they have located machine-gun nests they cannot say whether the gunners who man them will yield easily or will fight to the death. If the British on the Somme, after months of preparation and study of the defenses of the sector, had more elaborate directions for their units than we, it does not mean that, considering its inexperience, our staff did not accomplish wonders.

[32]

Our corps commanders may have known their division commanders in time of peace, but they had never been their superiors in action of any kind. Their artillery groupings and aviation arrangements included French units as well as their own. There was no time for considering niceties in dispositions. Division commanders who had to arrange the details of their coöperation had never served together. They had scores of problems, due to the haste of their mobilization, to consider; for the burden of apprehension that pressed them close was of apprehension lest they should not be up on time. They and their officers went over the ground at the front, but they had not the time to make the thorough observation that any painstaking and energetic division commander would have preferred.

A division with all its artillery, machine-guns, and transport is a ponderous column in movement, with every part having its regulation place. One day in one set of villages and the next in another, the communication of orders and requirements down through all the branches is difficult, and the more so when you are short of dispatch riders, and there is a limit to what can be done over the field telephone. The unexpected demand for wires for our second great offensive must not find the signal corps unprepared; or a people as dependent on telephones and telegraph as we are, and so accustomed to having them materialize on request, would have been helpless in making war. The deepest tactical concern was, of course, the coördination of the artillery with the infantry advance. It is only a difference of a hundred yards' range, as we all know, between putting your shells among your own men instead of the enemy's.

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Reliable communication from the infantry to the aviator and his reliable report of his observations to the artillery and infantry is one of the complicated features in that team-play, which, in the game of death, needs all the finesse of professional baseball, a secret service, and a political machine, plus the requisite poise, despite poor food and short hours of sleep, for worthily leading men in battle. Some divisions that went into this action had not yet received their artillery; or again their artillery arrived from the training camp, where the guns had just been received, barely in time to go into position, so that an inexperienced artillery commander reported to an inexperienced division commander with whom he had never served. There were batteries without horses, which the horses of other batteries pulled into position after they had brought up their own. Battery commanders received their table of barrages and their objectives of fire, and, without registering, had to trust to observation by men untried in battle or by aviators who had never before observed in a big operation. Aviators had been trained to expect the infantry to put out panels, and they might say that the infantry did not show their panels, while the infantry would deny the charge. Such things had happened before. They would happen this time. They happen to the most veteran of armies, whose long experience, however, may have an excellent substitute in other qualities which we had in plenitude, as we shall see.

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All our own guns were of French make, with the exception of a few howitzers. The gun-producing power of the French arsenals supplying us with our artillery and our machine-guns—the Brownings were only just beginning to arrive—in addition to supplying all their own forces over the long front of their offensive was one of the marvels of the war and an important factor in victory. The majority of our planes were also of French make: not until August had the Liberty motors begun to arrive. The French had supplied us with additional aviation and tanks, as well as artillery, from their own army; but much of this was new. All the Allies, indeed, were robbing their training camps for the supreme effort that was about to be made from the Meuse to the Channel.

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While the public, which thinks of aviation in terms of combat, admired the exploits of the aces in bringing down enemy planes, which they looked for in the communiqués, the army was thinking of the value of the work of the observers, whose heroism in running the gamut of fire from air and earth in order to bring back information might change the fate of battles. Training for combat, perhaps, more nearly approximated service conditions than training for observation. A fighting aviator, with natural born courage, audacity, and coolness, who goes out determinedly to bring down his man, makes the ace. These qualities were never lacking in our fliers. They went after their men and got them, in a record of successes which was not the least of the honors which our army won in France. The observer had no public praise; he was always the butt of the complaint that he did not bring enough information, or that he brought inaccurate information. His complex responsibilities were singularly dependent upon that experience which comes only from practice.

Instead of applying the lessons of Saint-Mihiel at leisure, as we had hoped, to the whole army, we had to apply them on the run in the rapid concentration of divisions which had not been at Saint-Mihiel. Yet the supreme thing was not schooling. It was a seemingly superhuman task in speed. It was to have the infantry up on time even if the other units were limping. In this we succeeded. On the night of September 24th, from the Meuse to the Forest's western edge every division was in position. We had kept faith with Marshal Foch's orders. We were ready to go "over the top."

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The Marshal postponed the attack for another day. Rumor gave the reason that the French Fourth Army was not ready; possibly the real reason, or at least a contributory reason, was in the canniness of such an old hand at offensives as Marshal Foch. Ours was a new army under enormous pressure. Veteran armies were always asking, at the last moment, for more time in which to complete their preparations before attacking. Possibly the Marshal had set the 25th as the date with a view to forcing our effort under spur of the calendar, while he looked forward to granting the inevitable request for delay. At all events the respite was most welcome. Our staff had time for further conferences and attention to their arrangements for supplies, and our combat troops a breathing spell which gave their officers another day in which to study the positions they were to storm.

When I considered all the digging necessary for making the gun positions, or had even a cursory view of the parks of divisional transport, of the reserves crowded in villages and woods, of the ammunition trains, and of the busy corps and division headquarters, I wondered if it were possible that the Germans could not have been apprised that a concentration was in progress. Not only did pocket lamps flash like fireflies from the hands of those who used them thoughtlessly, but despite precautions careless drivers turned on motor lights, and some rolling kitchen was bound to let out a flare of sparks, while the locomotives running in and out at railheads showed streams of flames from their stacks, and here and there fires were unwittingly started. An aviator riding the night, as he surveyed the shadowy landscape, could not miss these

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manifestations of activity. If he shut off his engine he might hear above the low thunder of transport the roar of the tanks advancing into position, of the heavy caterpillar tractors drawing big guns. When the air was clear and the wind favorable, the increasing volume of sound directed toward the front must have been borne to sharp ears on the other side of No Man's Land. All this I may mention again, without reference to observations by spies within our lines.

On our side, we might try to learn if the enemy knew of our coming, and how much he knew. A thin fringe of French had remained in the front-line trenches, with our men in place behind them. Thus our voices of different timbre, speaking the English tongue in regions where only French had been spoken, might not be heard if we forgot the rules of silence, which were as mandatory by custom as in a church or a library; and besides, if the Germans made a raid for information they would not take American prisoners. They did make some minor raids, capturing Frenchmen who, perhaps unwittingly when wounded or in the reaction from danger, and subject to an intelligence system skilled in humoring and indirect catechism, told more than they thought they were telling. Information that we had from German prisoners left no doubt that the Germans knew at least that the Americans were moving into the sector, but did not expect a powerful offensive. This, as we had anticipated, was discounted as being out of the question on the heels of the Saint-Mihiel offensive. Our new army, the Germans thought, had not the skill or the material for such a concentration, even if we had the troops. [38]

In our demonstration that we did have the skill and the energy, and that in one way and another we were able to secure the material even though it were inadequate, we were peculiarly American; and we were most significantly American in the adaptable exercise of the reserve nervous force of our restless, dynamic natures, which makes us wonderful in a race against time. We strengthen our optimism with the pessimism which spurs our ambition to accomplishment by its self-criticism that is never satisfied. [39]

On all hands I heard complaints by officers concerning lack of equipment, of personnel, of training, and of time. But no one could spare the breath for more than objurgations, uttered in exclamatory emphasis, which eased the mind. I could make a chapter out of these railings. Yet if I implied that the unit, whether salvage or aviation, hospital or front-line battalion, tanks or signal corps, or any other, would not be able to carry out its part, I was assailed with a burst of outraged and flaming optimism. And optimism is the very basis of the psychologic formula of war. Americans have it by nature. We lean forward on our oars. Optimism comes to us from the conquest of a continent. It presides at the birth of every infant, who may one day be president of the United States.

Confidence was rock-ribbed in a commander-in-chief's square jaw; it rang out in voices over the telephone; it was in the very pulse-beats of the waiting infantry; it shone in every face, however weary. We had won at Château-Thierry; we had won at Saint-Mihiel; we should win again. The infantry might not conceive the nature of the defenses or of the fire they might have to encounter. So much the better. They would have the more vim in "driving through," said the staff. [40]

The objectives which we had set ourselves on that first day, after the conquest of the first-line fortifications, which we took for granted, were a tribute to our faith in Marshal Foch's own optimism. On the first day we were striking for the planets. In our second and third days' objectives we did not hesitate to strike for the stars. This plan would give us the more momentum, and if we were to be stopped it would carry us the farther before we were. Of course we did not admit that we might be stopped. If we were not, the German military machine would be broken; and any doubts on the part of generals were locked fast in their inner consciousness, for uttered word of scepticism was treason.

On the night of the 25th, when all the guns began the preliminary bombardment, stretching an aurora from the hills of Verdun into Champagne, our secret was out. From the whirlwind of shells into his positions the enemy knew that we were coming at dawn. With thousands of flashes saluting the heavens it no longer mattered if a rolling kitchen sent up a shower of sparks or an officer inadvertently turned the gleam of his pocket flash skyward. Along the front our infantry slipped forward into the place of the French veterans, who came marching back down the roads. [41]

"Gentlemen," said the French, "the sector is yours. A pleasant morning to you!"

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### III

## NEW AND OLD DIVISIONS

A military machine impossible in human nature—Regular traditions—National Guard sentiment—National Army solidarity—Divisional pride—Our first six divisions unavailable to start in the Meuse-Argonne—British-trained divisions—What veteran divisions would have known.

The Leavenworth plan was to harmonize regulars, National Guard, and National Army into a force so homogeneous that flesh and blood became machinery, with every soldier, squad, platoon, brigade, and division as much like all the others as peas in a pod; but human elements older than the Leavenworth School, which had given soldiers cheer on the march and fire in battle from the days of the spear to the days of the quick-firer, hampered the practical

application of the cold professional idea worked out in conscientious logic in the academic cloister. It may be whispered confidentially that all unconsciously their own training and associations sometimes made the inbred and most natural affection of the Leavenworth graduates for the regulars subversive of the very principle which they had set out to practise with such resolutely expressed impartiality. A regular felt that he was a little more of a regular if he were serving with a regular division.

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"We're not having any of this good-as-you-are nonsense in this regiment," said its Colonel, talking to a fellow-classman who was on the staff. "We're filled up with reserve officers and rookies,—but we're regulars nevertheless. We've started right with the regular idea—the way we did in the old —th"—in which the officers had served together as lieutenants.

By the same token of sentiment and association the National Guardsmen remained National Guardsmen. They also had a tradition. If they were not proud of it they would be unnatural fighters. While the average citizen had taken no interest in preparedness, except in the abstraction that national defense was an excellent thing, they had drilled on armory floors and attended annual encampments. Sometimes the average citizen had spoken of them as "tin soldiers"; and they were conscious perhaps of a certain superciliousness toward them on the part of regular officers. Drawn from the same communities, members of the same military club that met at the armory, they already had their pride of regiment and of company: a feeling held in common with Guardsmen from other parts of the country, who belonged to the same service from the same motives. Should that old Connecticut or Alabama or any other regiment with a Civil War record, and, perhaps, with a record dating from the Revolution, forget its old number because it was given a new number, or its own armory, because it went to a training camp? Relatives and friends, who bowed to the edict of military uniformity and anonymity, would still think of it as their home regiment. If Minneapolis mixed its sons with St. Paul's, they would still be sons of Minneapolis.

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While all volunteers felt that they were entitled to the credit of offering their services without waiting on the call, the draft men, who had awaited the call, had their own conviction about their duty, which, from the hour when they walked over from the railway stations to the camp, gave them a sense of comradeship: while they might argue that it was more honor to found than to follow a tradition. Their parents, sisters, and sweethearts were just as fond, and their friends just as proud, of them as they had been in the Guard. Aside from a few regular superiors, their officers were graduates of the Officers' Training Camps, who, as the regulars said, had nothing to unlearn and were subject to no political associations. Yes, the draft men considered themselves as the national army; and they would set a standard which should be in keeping with this distinction.

All the men assembled in any home cantonment, with the exception of the regulars, were almost invariably from the same part of the country, which gave them a neighborhood feeling. The doings of that cantonment became the intimate concern of the surrounding region. Its chronicles were carried in the local newspapers. There was a division to each cantonment; and in France the fighting unit was the division, complete in all its branches,—artillery, machine-guns, trench mortars, engineers, hospital, signal corps, transport, and other units. As a division it had its training area; as a division it traveled, went into battle, and was relieved.

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Before a division was sent to France its men were already thinking in terms of their division; they met the men of no other division unless on leave, and met them in France only in passing, or on the left or right in battle. In the cantonment the division had its own camp newspaper, its own sports, its separate life on the background of the community interest, without the maneuvering of many divisions together on the European plan until they were sent into action in the Saint-Mihiel or Meuse-Argonne offensive. Each division commander and his staff, who were regular officers, conspired to develop a divisional pride, thereby, in a sense, humanly defeating the regular idea of making out of American citizens a machine which could be anything but humanly American. Within the division, pride of company, of battalion, of regiment, was instilled, and the different units developed rivalries which were amalgamated in a sense of rivalry with other divisions.

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Every cantonment had the "best" division in the United States before it went to France, where rivalry expressed itself on the battlefield. The record of the war is by divisions. Men might know their division, but not their corps commander. Divisions might not vary in their courage, but they must in the amount of their experience and in the quality of their leaders. A division that had been in three or four actions might be better than one that had been in ten; but a division that had not been in a single action hardly had the advantage over one that had been in several. Our four pioneer divisions, which had been in the trenches during the winter of 1917-18 and later in the Château-Thierry operations, the 1st (regulars), and the 2nd (regulars and marines), and the 26th and the 42nd (both National Guard), were all at Saint-Mihiel. Their units were complete; their artillery had had long practice with their infantry; they had had long training-ground experience in France, had known every kind of action in modern war, and had kept touch under fire, rather than in school instruction, with the progress of tactics. If they were not our "best" divisions, it was their fault.

Of the two other divisions which had been longest after these in our army sector, the 32nd had just finished helping Mangin break through at Juvigny, northwest of Soissons, and the 3rd was at Saint-Mihiel. These six formed the group which General Pershing had in France at the time of the emergency of the German offensive in March, which hastened our program of troop transport.

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Now we were bringing to the American army five of the divisions which had been trained with the British, the 4th, 28th, 33rd, 35th, and 77th. From the British front the 77th had gone to



Lorraine, whence it was recalled to the Château-Thierry theater. The 4th and the 28th were ordered from the British front, after the third German offensive in June, to stand between Paris and the foe, and then participated, along with the 77th, in the counter-offensive which reduced the Marne salient,—or as the French call it, the second Battle of the Marne, a simple, suggestive, and glorious name. Château-Thierry had thus been a stage in passage from the British to the American sector, and the call for the defense of Paris had been serviceable to the American command as a reason for detaching American divisions, which the British had trained, from Sir Douglas Haig, who, as he is Scotch, was none the less thriftily desirous of retaining them.

The 33rd Division, remaining at the British front after the other divisions had departed, gained experience in offensive operations, as we know, which approximated that of the others at Château-Thierry, when, fighting in the inspiring company of the Australians in the Somme attacks beginning August 8th, the Illinois men took vital positions and numerous prisoners and guns. Though these four divisions, the 4th, 28th, 33rd, and 77th, had not had the long experience of the four pioneer divisions, they had had their "baptism of fire" under severe conditions, they knew German machine-gun methods from close contact, and they had the conviction of their power from having seen the enemy yield before their determined attacks. To Marshal Foch they had brought further evidence that the character of the pioneer divisions with their long training in France was common to all American troops. The National Guard divisions which had arrived late in France, though they had been filled with recruits, had, as the background of their training camp experience at home, not only the established inheritance of their organization but the thankless and instructive service on the Mexican border, where for many months they had been on a war footing.

According to European standards none of the divisions in the first shock of the Meuse-Argonne battle was veteran, of course; and the mission given them would have been considered beyond their powers. Indeed, the disaster of broken units, dispersing from lack of tactical skill, once they were against the fortifications, would have been considered inevitable. A veteran or "shock" division in the European sense—such divisions as the European armies used for major attacks and difficult operations—would have had a superior record in four years of war. Its survivors, through absorption no less than training, would have developed a craft which was now instinctive. They were Europeans fighting in Europe; they knew their enemy and how he would act in given emergencies; they knew the signs which showed that he was weakening or that he was going to resist sturdily; they knew how to find dead spaces, and how to avoid fire; and they had developed that sense of team-play which adjusts itself automatically to situations. All that our divisions knew of these things they had learned from schooling or in one or two battles. We had the advantage that that experience had not hardened our initiative until we might be overcautious on some occasions.

The battle order of our divisions for the Meuse-Argonne battle was not based on the tactical adaptation of each unit to the task on its front. We must be satisfied with placing a division in line at a point somewhere between the Meuse and the Forest's edge where transportation most favored its arrival on time. One division was as good as another in a battle arranged in such haste. The French Fourth Army was to attack on the west of the Argonne Forest; on its right a regiment of the 92nd (colored) Division, National Army, with colored officers, was to form the connecting link between the French and the American forces. For men with no experience under heavy fire, who were not long ago working in the cotton fields and on the levees of the South, this was a trying assignment, which would have tested veterans. Never before had colored men under colored officers gone against a powerful trench system. All the British and French colored troops had white officers, and our other colored division, the 93rd, which was attached to the French Army through the summer and fall of 1918, had white officers.

We come now to our divisions in place on the night of September 25th, with whom will ever rest the honor of having stormed the fortifications. When I consider each one's part I should like to write it in full. I shall mention them individually when that best suits the purpose of my chronicle, and at other times I shall describe the common characteristics of their fighting: in either case mindful of the honor they did us all as Americans.

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## IV

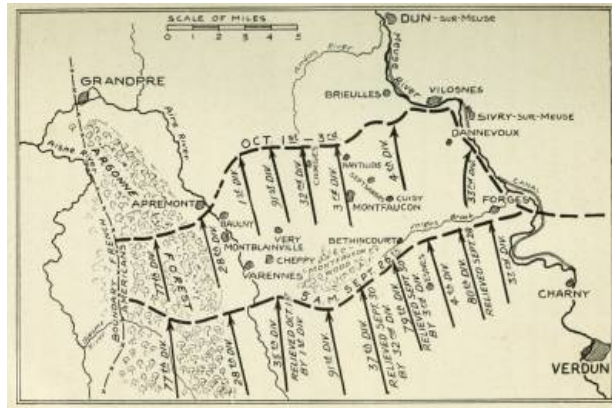
### THE ORDER OF BATTLE

The Metropolitan Division in the Argonne proper—Six weeks without rest—Direct attack impossible in the Forest—Similar history of the Keystone Division—Pennsylvania pride—Its mission the "scalping" of the Forest edge—The stalwart men of the 35th Division—Storming the Aire heights—Fine spirit of the Pacific Slope Division—A five-mile advance projected for the Ohio Division—North and South in the 79th Division—Never in line before, it was to strike deepest.

Three National Army divisions were to be in the initial attack. It was a far cry for the men who a year before had tumbled into the training camps at home, without knowledge of the manual of arms or of the first elements of army etiquette and discipline, to the march of trained divisions forward into line of battle in France. On the extreme left of the line was the Liberty Division, from New York City. The metropolitans were given the task of taking not a town, but a forest, with

which their name will be as long connected as with our largest city. Its left flank on the western edge of the Argonne Forest and its right on the eastern, the 77th had a long divisional front of over four miles; but it would have been unsatisfied if it had had to share the Forest. The Forest was its very own. The public at home seemed to have the idea that the whole battle was fought there. If it had been, the 77th would have had to share credit with twenty other divisions, which had equally stiff fighting in patches of woods which were equally dense even if they were not called forests.

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**MAP NO. 4**  
**DIVISIONS IN THE FIRST STAGE OF THE MEUSE-ARGONNE**  
**BATTLE, SEPTEMBER 26TH-OCTOBER 1ST.**

If the Forest were stripped bare of its trees, it would present a great ridge-like bastion cut by ravines, with irregular hills and slopes of a character which, even though bald, would have been formidable in defense. Its timber had nothing in common with the park-like conception of a European forest, in which the ground opens between tree trunks in lines as regular as in an orchard. If the Argonne had been without roads, the Red Indians might have been as much at home in its depths as in the primeval Adirondacks. Underbrush grew as freely as in second-growth woods in our New England or Middle States; the leaves had not yet begun to fall from the trees.

It had not been until September 15th that the 77th had been relieved from the operations in the Château-Thierry region. A new division, fresh from training at the British front and in Lorraine, it had gone into line in August to hold the bank of the Vesle against continuous sniping, gassing, and artillery fire; and later, after holding the bottom of a valley with every avenue of approach shelled in nerve-racking strain, it had shown the mettle of the Americans of the tenements by fighting its way forward for ten days toward the Aisne Canal. It had been in action altogether too long according to accepted standards, though this seems only to have tempered its steel for service in the Argonne.

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Ordinarily a new division would not only have been given time to recover from battle exhaustion, which is so severe because in the excitement men are carried forward by sheer will beyond all normal reactions to fatigue, but it would have been given time for drill and for applying the lessons of its first important battle experience. The value of this is the same to a division as a holiday at the mountains or the seashore to a man on the edge of a nervous breakdown. He recovers his physical vitality, and has leisure to see himself and his work in perspective.

Instead of knowing the relaxation and the joy of settling down in billets and receiving the attention of the "Y" and other ministrants, of having plenty of time to write letters home, and of receiving from home letters that were not more than six weeks old, the men of the 77th had long marches to make through ruined country, and were then switched about, in indescribably uncomfortable travel, on the way to the Argonne. The division commander made no complaint on this score; but it was a fact to be taken into consideration. The 77th was short of transport; its horses were worn down. Yet, faithful to orders, its artillery as well as its infantry was up on the night of the 24th. Owing to the length of its front, all four infantry regiments were put into line, which meant that there could be no relief for any units after they reached their destination.

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We admire hardy frontiersmen, of whom we expect such endurance; but what of these city-dwellers, these men from the factories and offices, short of stature and slight of body? Who that had seen them before they entered a training camp would have thought that they could be equal to carrying their heavy packs on long marches and undergoing the physical strain of battle? Their fortitude was not due altogether to good food and the healthy régime of disciplined camps; it was the spirit of their desire to prove that they were the "best" division because they were the "Liberty Division." Their hearty, resolute commander, Major-General Robert Alexander, was justly proud of them and believed in them; and they had excellent officers, who held them up by example and discipline to high standards.

Faith in the impregnability of the Forest, from ancient times a bulwark for which armies competed, had not led the Germans to neglect any detail in improving its natural defenses. In that area where for four years the French and the Germans had stared across No Man's Land at each other, the reasons for the enforced stalemate were almost as obvious as those for the truce between the whale and the elephant. Either army had at its back the cover of woodland, while the slopes about the trenches formed a belt of shell-craters littered with trunks of trees. Any attempt to take the forest by frontal attack must have been madness. Action in front must be only

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an incident of pressure, and confined to "mopping up," as action on either side forced the enemy's withdrawal from a cross-fire. This was bound to be our plan, as the enemy foresaw; we shall see that he governed himself accordingly.

The 28th Division, which had been on the left of the 77th in the advance to the Aisne, was again on its left. These had really been the first two American divisions to fight side by side under an American corps command, that of Major-General Robert L. Bullard. In the enterprise that they were now undertaking they had need of every detail of team-play that they had learned.

Some elements of the 28th, which was then just arriving in the Château-Thierry region, had been in action against the fifth German offensive; then it had been pushed across the Marne, where it had been put in by brigades and moved about under harassing circumstances in the ensuing counter-offensive. Later, having proved its worthiness for the honor, as an intact division it had taken over from the exhausted 32nd on the Vesle. Practically, from July 15th until it went to the Argonne it had had no rest. It had held not only the town of Fismes on the bank of the Vesle, but the exposed position of the little town of Fismettes on the other side of the river, during that period when the Germans were inclined to make a permanent stand there if their digging, their sniping, and their battering artillery fire, showered from the heights upon the 28th and the 77th in the valley, were any criterion. In the subsequent advance to the Aisne, and later in the transfer to the Argonne, the division had to submit to the same kind of irregularities and discomfort as the 77th, and to suffer in the same way for want of adequate transport and of leisure for studying its latest battle lessons for use in the next battle.

There is a general idea that such populous states as New York and Pennsylvania lack state pride, particularly in the sense of the southern states; but any state, whose National Guardsmen were numerous enough to form a complete division on the new war footing, had the advantage of the unity of sentiment of the old family, which does not have to include strangers at its board. The 28th's deeds were Pennsylvania's. It stood proudly and exclusively for Pennsylvania with her wealth and prosperity and all her numerous colleges, large and small, from Allegheny in the northwest to the University of Pennsylvania. The men were evidently capable of eating three and four square meals a day, and they looked as if they were used to having them when they were at home.

"What about politics?" the critic always asks about any National Guard division. If there were politics in the 28th it was so mixed up with marching and fighting—and the men of the 28th were always doing one or the other when I saw them—that it was unrecognizable to one so unused to politics as the writer. Certainly, it was a good kind of politics, I should say, in that Pennsylvania had taken a downright interest in her National Guard, which was now bearing fruit. The 28th's commander, Major-General Charles H. Muir, was a man of equanimity and force, who had the strength of character, on occasion, to stand up to an Army staff when he knew that its orders were impracticable. The staff respected him for his confidence in the judgment of the man on the spot.

The 28th's losses both in officers and in men in that excoriating progress from the Vesle to the Aisne had been the price of a gallantry which was a further reproof to the scepticism in certain quarters about the National Guard. Officers who had been killed or wounded had been replaced by young men who were often from the training camps though not Pennsylvanians; and in the fierce illumination of battle much had been learned about the qualities of the survivors. Some of these who had hitherto been called politicians had entirely overcome the aspersion. Others who had worn themselves out physically might be given a period of recuperation even if the division had none. The 28th had been indeed battle-trying in all that the word means. If it could have had two weeks before the Meuse-Argonne in which to digest its lessons, this would have been only fair to it as a division: though probably its determination would have been no stronger.

The 28th's front was from the edge of the Forest on its left to the village of Boureuilles on its right. Astride the Aire River it linked the Forest with the main battle-line. While maintaining its uniformity of advance on its right, its left had the same difficult maneuver in "scalloping" the eastern edge of the Forest as the French in "scalloping" the western edge. This meant that the 28th must storm the wooded escarpments which the Forest throws out on the western side of the Aire. On the eastern side of the valley were heights which interlocked with the escarpments. As one Guardsman said, the division had a worse job than a Democrat running for governor of Pennsylvania in an off year for Democrats.

Now the 28th could not succeed unless the division on its right took the heights on the eastern side of the Aire. If the 28th failed, then the whole turning movement of the Army offensive toward the main series of heights which formed the crest of the whale-back was endangered. On the right of the 28th was the 35th Division, National Guard from Kansas and Missouri, which must offer the courage and vigor which is bred in their home country in place of the battle experience which had been the fortune of the Pennsylvanians. Major-General William M. Wright had been the first commander of the 35th. He was a man of the world, most human in his feeling and sound in his principles of war, with a personality which was particularly effective with troops of sturdy individualistic character, who were unaccustomed by their tradition of self-reliant independence of thought to the arbitrary system which a regular army develops in the handling of recruits in time of peace. Leonard Wood had the same class of men from the same region in the 89th, which Wright later led in the Meuse-Argonne battle with brilliant results.

Soon after the 35th arrived behind the British lines, Wright's accepted knowledge of regular army personnel and his capacity for inspiring harmonious effort in any group of subordinates led General Pershing to set him the task of organizing corps staffs, among them the Fifth, which was

to develop exemplary traditions. Major-General Peter E. Traub, a scholarly soldier, fully equipped in the theories of war, succeeded him in command of the 35th. Traub's brigade of the 26th Division had received at Seicheprey the shock of the first attack in force that the Germans had made against our troops, where the quality which the young officers and men had shown in face of a surprise by overwhelming numbers, and their prompt recovery of the town without waiting on superior orders, had reflected credit on their brigade.

The physique and the good humor of the men of the 35th had been the admiration of everybody who had seen them after their arrival in the British area. The Guardsmen of Kansas had a fine tradition linked up with the career of Frederick Funston, who was in the fullest sense what is known as a born soldier. He was a combination of fire and steel; of human impulse and inherent common sense. His initiative was in tune with that of his Kansans. Through the authority of their faith in him he applied stern discipline.

With its left on Boureuilles and its right on Vauquois, the 35th must storm the heights of the eastern wall of the Aire under flanking artillery and machine-gun fire from the escarpments of the Forest, unless these were promptly conquered by the 28th. No finer-looking soldiers ever went into action. Their eagerness was in keeping with their vitality. Compared to the little men of the 77th, who were overburdened with heavy packs, they were giants of the type which carried packs of double the army weight over the Chilcoat Pass in the Klondike rush. Their inheritance gave them not only the strength but the incentive of pioneers. Whoever had the leading and shaping of such a body of American citizens had a responsibility which went with a glorious opportunity. The stronger the men of a division, the abler the officers they require to be worthy of their potentiality. Given the battle experience of the 77th, under a Pershing, a Wood, a Bullard, a Summerall, or a Hines, and a group of officers as such a leader would have developed, the work of the 35th would never have become a subject for discussion: but we shall come to this later on.

On the right of the 35th we had the 91st, National Army from the Pacific Coast, as the left division of the Fifth or center Corps, with its front from Vauquois to Avocourt. Its commander was Major-General William H. Johnston, a redoubtable fighter and vigorous for his years, as anyone could see at a glance. There was no question as to the character of his men, who were six thousand miles from home. Their physique was as good as that of the 35th, as you know if you know the region where they were called to service by the draft. Never before under fire, they were to fight their way through woods by a frontal attack, and then under the enemy's observation into an open ravine, and on through that up forbidding slopes. An appealing sentiment attached to this division from the other side of the continent, no less than to the 77th, from which it differed in its personnel as the Pacific Slope differs from the streets of New York. There were city men in its ranks, but not in the sense of city men from New York; and there were ranchmen, and lumbermen, and those among them who spoke broken English were not from tailors' benches.

On the right of the 91st was the 37th, Ohio National Guard under Major-General Charles S. Farnsworth, a regular officer of high repute, who was to take the division through its terrific experience in the Meuse-Argonne and afterward to Belgium. Why so excellent a division as the 37th should not have been earlier in France may be referred to geography, which gave an advantage to National Guard divisions from the seaboard states. The 37th had waited and drilled long for its chance, which now came in generous measure. After breaking through the trench system it must storm by frontal attack, for a depth of three miles, woods as thick as the Argonne; and this was only a little more than half the distance set for a single day's objective. Therefore, without previous trial in grand offensives, it was assigned a mission which would ordinarily have been supposed to be disastrous against even a moderate defense. The 37th was without its own artillery, but it had been assigned on short notice the artillery of the 30th Division, which, however zealous and well-trained, had not worked with the division or ever operated in a serious action, let alone protected infantry advancing for such a distance over such monstrously difficult ground.

On the right of the 37th was the 79th, National Army drawn from Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia. Major-General Joseph E. Kuhn, who was in command, was well-known as an able engineer officer. He had served as an attaché with the Japanese in the Russo-Japanese War, seeing more of the operations than any other single foreign officer; and he had been an attaché in Germany early in the Great War, afterward becoming president of the War College in Washington. Aside from this equipment his untiring energy, his high spirits, and his personality fitted him for inculcating in a division confidence in itself and its leadership.

The 79th, with men from both sides of Mason and Dixon's line, united North and South in its ranks. Since its arrival from the States it had hardly had time to become acclimatized. In place of its own artillery, which was not yet equipped, it had not even a homogeneous artillery brigade. Of American artillery (aside from seventeen of the French batteries upon which we were relying so largely for our preliminary bombardment) it had three regiments, less six batteries, from the experienced 32nd Division, and one regiment from the 41st Division. Though the 79th had never been under fire before, though it had only training-camp experience, it was expected, after taking the first-line fortifications, to cover the most ground of any division on the first day, and though it did not have to fight its way through any important woods it was to proceed along the valley of the Montfaucon road, passing over formidable ridges which were under the observation of woods on either flank capable of concealing any amount of enemy artillery.

## ON THE MEUSE SIDE

The ground of the Verdun battle—The Crown Prince's observatory—The Third Corps to move the right flank down the Meuse—Businesslike quality of the 4th Division—A marshy front and no roads—Swinging movement of the Blue Ridge Division—The Illinois Division to secure the right flank—Dominating heights east of the Meuse.

At this point let us consider the missions of the three corps. Liggett's First, with the 77th, 28th, and 35th Divisions, had the problem of the left flank, the conquest of the Argonne Forest, the valley of the Aire, and the heights of the eastern valley wall, which was so essential to supporting the movement of Cameron's Fifth Corps in the center. The Fifth, with the 91st, 37th, and 79th Divisions, was to make the bulge of the sweep toward the main crests of the whale-back. Its objective on the first day was the town of Montfaucon, whose whitish ruins on the distant hilltop pretty well commanded all the terrain on the corps front. Here the Crown Prince through his telescope, at the safe distance which was in keeping with the strong sense of self-preservation of the Hohenzollerns, had watched some of the attacks on Verdun.

This sector was near enough to the battleground of Verdun to have participated in some of the volume of shell-fire which had left no square yard of earth in No Man's Land, or for half a mile on either side of the trenches, untouched by explosions. The thicker the shell-craters, the more difficult it is to keep uniformity of movement. They are useful for cover for a halted charge, but for a charge that is intended to go through, as ours was, they meant that troops must pick their way over unstable footing. In view of the possibilities of French counter-attacks the Germans had hardly been negligent in perfecting all their defenses during the Verdun battle. [66]

The groups of woods south of Montfaucon and north and west of Avocourt was the heart of the German defense against the Fifth Corps. Against Cheppy Wood which covered Vauquois the French, in 1915 when small offensives were still the rule, had made many attacks in order to gain the dominating position of Vauquois; and later, in the Verdun battle and subsequent offensive operations by the French, the Germans had used the woods as shelter for reserves, which drew persistent shell-fire of large caliber from the French. A thick second growth had sprouted up around the shell-craters and broken timbers, which afforded concealment to the enemy and confused any platoon or company commander in keeping his men together and in touch with the platoon or company on either flank. [67]

The assignment of such an ambitious objective to these three divisions required an abounding faith in their manhood, initiative, and training upon the part of an audacious command. I may add that before the attack the Germans had taken one prisoner from the 79th Division, which they thus identified; they did not know of the presence of the other two divisions. As the 79th had never been in line before, they were warranted in thinking that a green division could be there for no other purpose than the usual trench training which we had systematically given all our divisions before they went into serious action. When the 79th came rushing on toward Montfaucon on the morning of the 26th, the enemy's surprise was warranted by all their canons of military experience.

The Third Corps on the right flank, with its right on the Meuse River, had in a broad sense the same mission as the First in supporting the main drive toward the whale-back by the Fifth. On its left in *liaison* with the 79th was the 4th, the only regular division in the attack, under Major-General John L. Hines, whose ability was later rewarded by a corps command. Regular divisions had a certain advantage in the assignment of experienced professional officers and in the confidence of the staff in the value of regular traditions which must be maintained. Though in detached units, the 4th had had a thorough trial in the Marne counter-offensive of July 18th to 24th. Then it had been swung round, and as an intact division had taken over from the 42nd, after the heights of the Ourcq were gained, for the final pursuit to the Vesle, where it had a taste of shells, gas, and machine-gun fire in the "pocket" before it was relieved by the 77th and started for Saint-Mihiel. The 4th was a thoroughly regular and singularly efficient division, disinclined to advertisement, doing its duty systematically and unflinchingly. [68]

At the outset of its advance it would have to cross marshy ground and the Forges Brook, from which the footbridges had naturally been removed by the enemy. On the left it was to keep up with the swift progress of the 79th, with its course dominated on the left by the Montfaucon heights, and on the right by the heights east of the Meuse—of which we shall hear much before the story of the Meuse-Argonne battle is told. There were wicked slopes and woods to be conquered. Indeed, its position on the right flank of the 79th confronted as stern and complex difficulties as that of the 37th on the left flank of the 79th.

On its right was the 80th Division under Major-General Adelbert Cronkhite, sturdy, thick-set, cut out of sandstone, who faced the world all four-square with his Blue Ridge men. The 80th had done well at the British front, and had been in reserve at Saint-Mihiel. Though it had its own divisional artillery and its units complete, this was its first experience in a drive through first-line fortifications for an extensive objective. If it had not so far to go as the 4th, its trying maneuver in swinging toward the Meuse included passing between the Juré and Forges Woods, which, unless cleared of the enemy, would enfilade its advance with machine-gun fire. [69]

The 33rd Division, Illinois National Guard, had the extreme right. I have mentioned already the preparation which the 33rd had had in the August offensive with the British. Major-General

George Bell was calm and suave, but a stalwart disciplinarian. Before leaving the States he had eliminated many officers who for temperament, physical disability, or other reasons appeared less serviceable abroad than at home. This enabled him to travel to France without excess baggage, and to arrive there with his organization knit together by a harmonious and spirited personnel. As for his men, they were from Illinois and of the Illinois National Guard, as you may learn in Cairo, Springfield, or Chicago, for Illinois had been one of the forward states in supporting its Guardsmen.

The 33rd was to swing up along the Meuse by noon of the first day, and to rest there as a pivot for the Third Corps,—a delicate operation. Its position was as picturesque as its record was various, in its service first with the British under the Australian Corps, then with a French, and later with an American Corps. If the war had lasted long enough the Illinois men might have been sent to serve on the Italian front, to complete their itinerary of military cosmopolitanism. At its back now was the Mort Homme, or Dead Man's Hill, whose mention in the communiqués during the Verdun fighting was frequent in the days when the world hung on the news of a few hundred yards gained or lost on the right or left bank of the Meuse. There under countering barrages from the quick-firers and the plowing by high explosive shells, Frenchman and German had groveled in the torn earth, mixed with blood and flesh, between the throes of hectic charges for advantage. The Germans won the hill, but eventually the French regained it. Then silence fell on the shambles where the unrecognizable dead rested, and above them rose not the red poppies of the poet's pictures, but weed and ragged grass from the edges of the shell-craters. [70]

Such was the texture of the rising undulating carpet unrolled to the northeast over the battlefield of Verdun. In the foreground it was variegated by the ruins of villages and those exclamation points of desolation, the limbless trees, which melted into its greenish-ashen sweep over the fort-crowned hills in the distance. Beyond them was the plain of the Woëvre; and beyond that was Germany. An occasional shell-burst showed that the volcano of war still simmered; its report was an echo of the crashing thunders of the past, which we were to awaken again in the valley of the Meuse. [71]

The Meuse seemed only a larger Aire, asking its way sinuously in this broken country. As vision followed its course past the German trench system in front of the Mort Homme and past the area of destruction, it was arrested by the bald ridge of the Borne de Cornouiller, or Hill 378. Mark the name! It will have a sinister part in our battle. Ten of our divisions were to know its wrath without knowing its name. Higher than any of the Verdun forts, except Douaumont, and higher than the heights of the whale-back, it had been in the possession of the Germans since August, 1914. From its summit observers could give the targets to the countless guns hidden in the woods and ravines of its reverse slopes.

An offensive against frontal positions resembles the swinging open of double doors, with their hinges at the points where the first-line fortifications are broken. The farther the doors are swung, the greater the danger of enemy pressure on the hinges, whose protection is the tactician's nightmare. In broadening his front of offensive operations by alternating attacks Marshal Foch may be said to have been opening several doors which were to become the alternately advancing panels of a screen. [72]

The Fourth French Army was the left flank of our army in the Meuse-Argonne. As its left, and therefore the left of the whole Franco-American attack, was making only a slight advance at the start, it was little exposed. Our Third Corps had the right flank of the whole movement, the Meuse River being the hinge, with the swing toward the west bank of the Meuse, which bends westward toward the heights of the whale-back on the Corps front. This gave it a frontal command of the west bank, while it put the German trench system on the east bank in the right rear of our line of general movement. Though the Meuse was an unfordable stream, and we held the bridgeheads to prevent any infantry counter-attack, this could not prevent cross-fire upon us from artillery and even from machine-guns. As from the Mort Homme one had a visual comprehension of the mission of the Third Corps, which was more informing, not to say more thrilling, than the study of maps at Headquarters, the inevitable question came to mind as to what was being done for our protection on the east bank. The answer was that French artillery and infantry were to undertake "exploitation." This was a familiar word, which could not intimidate the artillery on the Borne de Cornouiller. Forces in exploitation on the flanks, however encouraging in battle plans, form an elastic term in application, dependent upon what sacrifices they will make in the thankless task of diverting the enemy's fire to themselves. With the heights of the Meuse commanding one flank and the heights of the whale-back commanding the other, the Third Corps was to operate in the Meuse trough as in the pit of an amphitheater, striving to fight its way up the seats under a plunging fire from the gallery. [73]

Still, there was nothing else to be done. Someone had to take punishment on the flanks for the support of the drive on the center. The grueling which the Third Corps was to endure in advancing on one side of the trough of a river valley beyond the enemy line on the other was as certain to entail severe losses as was the mission of the First Corps against the Argonne Forest and down the valley of the Aire. The duty of all concerned, in an offensive which was organized in haste in the hope of winning a great prize by springing into the breach of opportunity, was not to hesitate in consideration of handicaps, but to minimize them as much as possible in the initial plan, and then to strike in fullness of confidence and of all the power at our command. The strategy of the battle was daring in conception, and resolute in execution. [74]

## WE BREAK THROUGH

French gunners at home in the landscape—Sleep by regulations in spite of suspense—“Over the top” not a rush—Difficulty of keeping to a time-table—Even with a guiding barrage—What barbed wire means—And the trench mazes beyond—Moving up behind the infantry.

The Pacific Slope, Kansas, Missouri, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and New York thus had the honor of the initial attack in our greatest battle, in which men from every state in the Union were to have a part before it was won. In that area of rolling country from Verdun to the Bar-le-Duc-Clermont road, which had been stealthily peopled by our soldiers, the swarming of their khaki was relieved by scattered touches of the blue of the Frenchmen who had come to assist us. Though ours was the flesh and blood which was to do the fighting—every infantryman was an American—the French were filling the gaps in our equipment which we could have filled ourselves, as I have said, only by delaying the Meuse-Argonne offensive until the spring of 1919 as we had originally planned.

Under their camouflage curtains in an open field, or in the edge of a woods, or under the screen of bushes which fringed a gully, the groups of French gunners seemed at home in a landscape that was native to them while it was alien to the Americans. When at rest their supple lounging attitudes had a certain defiance of formal military standards, as if French democracy were flouting Prussian militarism. When the order for firing came, the transition was to the alertness of the batter stepping up to the plate, and their swift movements had the grace and confidence of professional mastery which had long put behind it the rudimentary formalities of the drill-ground. They seemed a living part of the infantry, their pulse-beats answering the infantry's steps. Never were guests more welcome than they to our army. We could not have too many French guns—or cannon, as our communiqués called them in recognition of the unfamiliarity of our public with military terms—playing on the enemy's trenches and barbed wire in the preliminary bombardment which blazed a way for the charge. [76]

I have known the suspense preceding many attacks while the darkness before dawn was slashed by the flashes from nearby gun mouths and splashed by the broad sheets of flame from distant gun mouths. There is nothing more contrary to nature than that the quiet hours of the night should be turned into an inferno of crashes and, at the moment of dawn, when the world refreshed looks forward to a new day, men should be sent to their death. The suspense before the Meuse-Argonne attack was greater than before the Somme attack, when the British new army, after its months of preparation and nearly two years of training, was sent against the German line; it was greater than before Saint-Mihiel, our own first offensive. [77]

At Saint-Mihiel we had hints that the enemy would oppose us with only a rearguard action. Our mission would be finished with the first onslaught; we had only to cut the salient; the result was measurably certain, while in the Meuse-Argonne it was on the knees of the gods. The Germans could afford to yield at Saint-Mihiel; they could not in the Meuse-Argonne, where, if informed of the character of our plan, they might make a firm resistance in the first-line fortifications or at such points in them as suited their purpose in seeking to draw us into salients, to be slaughtered by enfilade fire as the French were in their spring offensive of 1917.

After the preliminary bombardment began at midnight, our American Army world, as detached in its preoccupation with its own existence, as much apart from the earth, as if it were on another planet, waited on the dawn of morning, which was the dawn of battle. The stars which were out in their distant serenity had a matter-of-fact appeal to generals to whom a clear day meant no quagmires to impede the advance. It was the business of all except the gunners and the truck-drivers, or of those speeding on errands to tie up any loose ends of organization, to try to force a little sleep. Even the infantry, with the shells screaming over their heads, were supposed to make the most of their inertia in rest which would give them reserve strength for the work ahead. [78]

This was in keeping with the formula which had been studied and worked out through experience. No one not firing shells could be of any service in smashing in strong points or cutting barbed wire. Particularly it behooved high staff officers and commanders to lie down, with minds closed to all thoughts of mistakes already made or apprehensions of future mistakes, in order to be fortified with steady nerves, clear vision and stored vitality for the decisions which they would have to make when they had news of the progress of the action. The plans for the attack were set; they might not be changed now; the attack must be precipitated. Aides protected their generals from interruption, and arranged that they should have food to their liking, and as comfortable a bed as possible. No genius composing a sonnet or a sonata could have been more securely protected in his seclusion than a corps commander. The rigorous drill which had formed the men in the front line to be the pawns of superior will was applied to keep the superior will in training for its task. [79]

General Pershing kept faith with the formula, and many others followed his example, though junior staff officers worked through the night. They were plentiful, and "expendable," as the army saying goes, as expendable in nervous prostration as were in wounds and death the young lieutenants who were to lead their platoons into the hell of machine-gun fire. Waiting—waiting—waiting while the guns thundered were the ambulances beside the road, the divisional transport, the ammunition and engineer trains, the aviators with their planes tuned up and ready, the

doctors and nurses at the dressing-stations and evacuation hospitals, and the reserve troops in billets. Officially through his orders everyone concerned knew only his own part, but all knew without asking that an unprecedented ordeal was coming.

It was easier for French and British veterans, familiarized by other offensives with the roar and the flashes of artillery, to relax than for Americans who were having the experience for the first time. With sufficient practice one may learn to sleep with a six-inch howitzer battery in an adjoining field shaking the earth. Many times during the Meuse-Argonne battle I have seen our own veterans giving proof of such hardihood; but on this night of September 25th it was not in human nature for all the thousands who were to have no sleep the next day or the next night to summon oblivion to their surroundings. Those who fell asleep slept with nerves taut with anticipation and in the consciousness of a nightmare, in which the rending thunders were mixed with reflection upon their own arduous efforts and their part in the future. Everyone was a runner crouched for the pistol-shot, as he awaited the dawn. The great test for which all had prepared individually and collectively for two years was coming tomorrow.

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With the first flush of thin light the observation balloons had risen in stately dignity from the earth mist, and the planes had taken to the sky and swept out over the enemy lines: the combat planes seeking foes and the observers to watch the progress of the charge or enemy movements or the location of batteries or of machine-gun nests which were harassing our infantry. Mobilization by the aviators for the offensive had not been hampered by the problems of one-way and two-way roads. They flew over from Saint-Mihiel the afternoon before or on the morning the battle began.

At 5.30, just as a moving man would be visible a few yards away, from the Meuse to the western edge of the Argonne, where we had our *liaison* with the French who advanced at the same moment, our men left the old French trenches and started for the German trenches. Everyone is familiar with the phrase "going over the top," yet despite the countless descriptions everyone who saw an attack for the first time remarked, "I didn't know it was like that!" The system of the advance on the morning of September 26th accorded with the accepted practice of the time. In their familiarity with the system soldiers and correspondents have taken it for granted that what was common knowledge to them was common knowledge to all the world. Only when they returned home did they realize their error, and learn that ignorance of fundamentals ingrained in army experience had made their narratives Greek to all who had not been in action.

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The average man is slow to yield his idea that a charge is an impetuous sweep. It sounds more real to say that "the boys rushed" than to say that they advanced with the sedateness of a G. A. R. parade on Decoration Day, which is more like what really happened. Indeed, they simply walked, unheroic as that may seem; and from high ground, or better still from a plane flying low, an observer saw to the limit of vision right and left men proceeding at a set and regular pace. The more uniform and the more automatic this was, the better. On closer view every man, except in height and physique, was a duplicate of the others, in helmet, in pack, in gas mask, in every detail of uniform, even in the way he carried his rifle with its glistening bayonet, which was the only relief to khaki on the background of somber-tinted earth.

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Every man, every platoon, and on through the different units to divisions and corps, was moving on a time schedule. A competition between companies to "get there" first would have resulted from the start in a hopeless tangle. If not literally, it may be said broadly that each company was to be at a given point on the map at a given hour; and if one company, or battalion or regiment, for that matter, outdistanced another, it was because it had kept its schedule and the other had not. In case it became "heady" and was on its objective in advance of schedule, it ran the risk of "exposing its flanks." At least that is the theory of the staff in its essence. An ideal army, according to the staff, would be at a given line on the map at 10.30, at another at 11.30, and so on. This might be possible if there were no enemy to consider, although it would require an adept army, as everyone who has ever drilled recruits well appreciates. He knows how long it takes to train them, and to learn how to direct a small force in carrying out satisfactorily a practice skirmish evolution over slightly uneven ground. The gregarious instinct of itself seems to break uniformity by drawing men into groups in face of infantry fire in battle for the first time, as well as eagerness to close with the enemy and gravitation away from the points of its concentration. Shell-bursts scatter them, casualties make gaps which lead to further disorganization.

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Could our army have had reproduced for its edification the confusion of the battle of Bull Run or of Shiloh, it would have realized the purpose of all the painstaking drill, the monotonous and wearing discipline, which made the well-ordered movement possible. Its very deliberateness in maintaining the coordination of all its units gave it a majesty in its broad and mighty sweep, which was more like the sweep of a great river than the cataract rush of the small forces of the old days, which the public still continued to visualize as a charge. I thought of it too as in keeping with the organization of modern life, in the trains entering and leaving a great city station or the methodical processes of a vast manufacturing concern.

How did our men know whether or not they were keeping their schedule? Did they look at their watches as they counted their steps? They had a monitor at first in the rolling barrage, that curtain of fire which preceded them. This was their moving shield which the guns far in rear provided for their guidance as well as protection. If they came too close to the barrage, they were exposed no less than their enemies to death from its hail.

We may have a comparison in marching behind a road sprinkler, with orders to keep just out of reach of its spray, which will be obeyed if the spray consist of nitric acid instead of water. The more guns the stronger the shield. We could never have an excess of guns as Grant had at the

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outset of the Wilderness campaign, when he sent many batteries of the short-range pieces of those days to the rear for want of room on a narrow front in which to maneuver them. Cæsar applied the first barrage in France in his tactical use of the shields of his legions, who owed their success to systematic training no less than we in the Meuse-Argonne. His men had to carry their own shields; the modern soldier has enough to carry without carrying his.

Suspense was most taut, it was agonizing, as every soldier knows, in the waiting hours ticking away into waiting minutes before the charge. As the final minute approached, the veteran, as a connoisseur in death's symbols, might find assurance in the strength, and apprehension in the weakness, of the supporting barrage laid down on the enemy trenches. Those of our men who had not been in battle before could have no such prescience. They did know that when they left their trenches the full length of their bodies would be exposed. They would march, rifle in hand, without firing, while only the shield of the shells from friendly guns screaming over their heads—the greater the volume, the sweeter the music—could silence the fire of rifles and machine-guns which had them at merciless point-blank range. Instantly they climbed "over the top," anticipation became realization. One ceased to listen to his heart-beats. The emotion became that of action. Suspense became objective, merged in responsibility for every man in watching where he stepped as he moved toward his goal, and for every captain and lieutenant in directing his company or platoon. [85]

The most careful maneuvering on fields at home was poor preparation for No Man's Land, which is like nothing else in the world except No Man's Land. Millions of soldiers know it through long watches over its dreary lifeless space, and more vividly through crossing it in a charge. For four years it had been the zone of death where no soldier from either side ventured except at night on patrol or in a raid or general attack. All this time shells had been pummeling it. The rims of craters, of sizes varying with the calibers of the shells, joined each other; old craters had been partly filled by later bursts. This continued pestling of the soil with nothing to press it down but the rain made it the more spongy in wet weather and the looser in dry weather. The heads of the men bobbed as they advanced, stepping in and out of craters, and wove in and out as they passed around craters. The rims often gave way with their weight, or they slipped on the dew-moist weeds that fringed them or upon some "dud" shell hidden in the weeds, as their attention was diverted from the ground under foot by the burst of an enemy shell or of one from their own guns which fell dangerously short. [86]

As our artillery, in order to preserve the element of surprise, had not "registered" with practice shots, it was firing strictly by the map; and, though its accuracy was wonderful, inexperienced gunners manning guns which had not had the allowances for error recently tabulated, were bound, in some cases, to send their shells wide of the mark. The big calibers might fail to destroy "strong points" that held machine-gun nests, or a battery of seventy-fives fail to cut the section of wire which was its assignment. For these mistakes the infantry must suffer. It is the infantry which always pays the price in blood for all mistakes; and the transfer of an officer to Blois or the demotion of a general officer would not bring back their dead.

Their immediate concern, as that of every infantryman had been in every charge throughout the war, as they crossed No Man's Land, was the wire entanglements. All the original wire, four years' exposure to the weather making its rusty barbs the more threatening, was still there in some form or other, though it had been ruptured or further twisted by previous bombardments whose craters only added to the difficulties of passage. Breaks had been filled by new wire, which rather supplemented the old than took its place. Additional stretches had been put out at intervals to reinforce the defense of vital points. A half-dozen strands will halt a charge in its tracks; here was a close-woven skein, from three and four to twenty yards in depth. Where the depth was greatest, it was most likely to have a continuous uncut stretch which the enemy had marked as a target for fire upon the arrested attackers. [87]

According to photographs of selected areas, which show a few bits of wire sticking out of a choppy sea of fresh earth, every square yard of which has been lashed by shell-fire, it would seem that artillery was accustomed to do as thorough mowing as a reaper in a field of grain. Even with treble our volume of artillery fire, taking treble the length of time of our bombardment, and with every shell perfectly accurate on its target, we could hardly have accomplished any such blessed result. The best that could be expected was that lanes would be opened at frequent intervals.

A break in the uniformity of advance appeared at once when one platoon or company had a clear space on its front while its neighbors had not. Suppose that for five hundred yards of distance the guns had completely failed and for five hundred yards on either side they had succeeded: then you had two exposed flanks sweeping forward into the trenches beyond, possibly against the enfilade fire of machine-gun points especially established for this opportunity. [88]

Where the guns had not done the work for them the men must do it themselves. If they had the torpedoes at the end of long sticks, resembling exaggerated skyrocket, they might thrust these into the meshes and explode them to gain the destructive effect of shell-bursts. If the artillery had made some breaks, they might, in their impetuosity to keep up with the rest of the line, try to pick their way. What young soldiers can accomplish in this respect is past all comprehension by elders who try to follow in their steps. The first wonder is how they were able to go through at all, and the second is how they had any flesh on their leg-bones after they had gone through. Their main reliance was on the hand wire-cutters, which had not been improved since Cuba and South Africa.

All the while that the soldier was snipping the strands and bending them back as he crawled forward, he was usually too near the trench to have any protection from the barrage, while from

the trench he was a full-size target at short range. War offers no more diabolical suspense than to this prostrate soldier in his patient groveling effort, when machine-gun fire is turned in his direction. He is in the position of a man lashed to a bulls-eye. Bullets sing as they cut strands of wire around him. He feels a moist warm spot on his leg or arm and knows that he is hit. Perhaps he tries to apply the dressing to the wound; but more likely he refuses to expose himself by any movement which will attract the gunner's attention. He may be hit again and again before the inevitable final bullet brings the last of his ghastly counted seconds of existence. The bones of men who were killed in this way—"hung up" in the wire—are all along the wire of the old trench line from Switzerland to Flanders. Or perhaps, when that patient wire-cutter has taken death for granted, the machine-gun suddenly diverts its spray to other targets, and he is safe.

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Such was the nature of the barrier of entanglements which had to be conquered by these young divisions of ours before they ever began fighting. Beyond its fiendish and elaborate skeins was a trench system equally elaborate in all its appointments for the real resistance. German officers and soldiers in occupation had taken all the interest in improvements, and the more as it concerned the safety of their own skins, of the most fastidiously scientific and progressive superintendent of a manufacturing plant. The latest wrinkles in the development of defensive warfare were promptly applied. After each trench raid or enemy attack, weak points that had appeared were corrected. Generals who came on inspection ordered changes suggested by their study of the ground. Regiments new to a sector brought fresh ideas and industry. Work was good for German soldiers, who were kept digging and building for four years in perfecting the security of these intricate human warrens.

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Any trench system, after allowing for an enemy's success in clearing the hurdle of the wire and in penetrating the trench system, and even for his successful occupation of considerable stretches of the front line, relied upon "strong points" and second lines in the maze of fortifications to make the gains futile, or only the prelude to a more costly repulse than if the attack had failed in its first stage. Let it be repeated that not one out of four of our soldiers had ever before stormed a first-class fortified line. They and their officers knew the character of its mazes only through lectures, pictures, maps, and imagination; but they were perfectly certain of one thing, and that was that their business was to clean the Germans out, and for this they were equipped with proper tools. In other words, when you saw a German emerging from a deep dugout where he had taken refuge from the bombardment, or appearing round a traverse, either kill him or gather him in.

The ardor and ferocity of our youth in a furious offensive mood was never more compelling in its results. Caution was not in our lexicon. If strong points held out, the thing was to go through them. There was no time to lose. The first wave must go on according to schedule, leaving those who followed to do the mopping up of details. Our faith was in our valor and destiny. In our progress the first-line fortifications were to be only another hurdle after the wire.

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In the course of this famous day, in seeking a personal glimpse of every aspect of the action, I was at Army, Corps, and Division Headquarters as the news came in, and I was three miles beyond the trenches with our advance against the machine-gun nests. Such a morning sun as is rare in this region eventually dissipated the thick mist which had been in our favor in concealing our attack from enemy observation, and against us in preventing our observation of the movement of our own units. It kept on shining, which was still more rare, in all the genial pervading warmth which we associate with its generous habit in this season at home, until midday found the air singularly luminous—luminous for this region—and the sky a soft blue. The generals could not have asked more; and to the medical corps it meant a blessing for the wounded. Judging by the weather that ensued during the remainder of the battle, the point that the sun of the Argonne exhausted all its beneficence on the first day and had to retire behind clouds to recuperate, in order to keep up the reputation of "sunny France" for future tourist seasons, seems well taken.

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Not only was the infantry advancing, but all the rest of the army, no longer obliged to court concealment under the cover of the night, had come aggressively into the open, the stealthy processes of preparation having given place to the thrill of battle joined. Where all efforts on preceding days had been directed toward a stationary theater, now all were directed to a traveling theater. A mighty organism of human and metal machinery, which had been assembling and tuning up its engines, had thrown in the clutch and was in motion.

Considering the volume of shells being fired at the Germans, the columns of motor-trucks loaded with ammunition now had an intimate appeal. The front had become a magnet drawing every thought toward it, with every waiting ambulance and vehicle expectant of an order to start forward. At the rear there was less traffic on the roads than during the period of preparation; but forward, close to the trench lines, roads that had been empty two days before were crowded. Machine-gun battalions in reserve and batteries of artillery which had carried out their assignment in the preliminary bombardment, and were moving forward to new positions where they could support the advance, were demanding right of way over divisional transport, which was clear as to its duty to keep as close to the infantry as orders would permit. The signal corps, unrolling their wires, also wanted precedence in order that division headquarters might have information; and the engineers had taken precedence over everybody with the compelling argument that unless roads were built no traffic could move forward.

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It was a familiar enough picture. To the jaded observer of war every glimpse only reproduced some scene which was part of a routine of which he was so weary that it made him desire, if for no other reason, the realization of the supreme hope that this should be the final offensive of the war. The great thing, though all the equipment and all the system seemed age-old because of

their associations, was that the personnel was new. A new knight had slipped into old armor, and taken up the sword from a tired if experienced hand. D'Artagnan had arrived from Gascony to add his young blade to the blades of the three Musketeers. On the part of everybody there was still the boyish enthusiasm of the beginner in a game.

Hundreds of officers who had been to staff schools, or enduring the S. O. S. in fractious impatience, now for the first time were at the front—the front of the Great War; and with them were all the men of the supply units, motor drivers, ambulance drivers, engineer battalions, military police, whose one thought was a sight of that "big show."

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The French gunners looked on smiling, as a middle-aged woman smiles over the enthusiasm of the débutante. Given the hour of attack, they knew by experience how long it would be before the first wounded and the first prisoners would come down the road. Soldiers who had never seen a German at close quarters perhaps had taken the prisoners; a young intelligence officer might be having his first experience in questioning them. To the French the prisoners looked like all the "sales Boches"; but we were discovering their characteristics afresh. Later came the severely wounded on stretchers which were slipped into the ambulances which bore them away. By nine o'clock in the morning we knew that except for a few strong points which could not hold out we were through the wire and through that elaborate trench system and out in the open, and still going on.

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## VII

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### IN THE WAKE OF THE INFANTRY

A successful surprise—The importance of traffic control in maintaining the advance—The "show" in the air—How the engineers built roads—And traffic blocked them—And colonels showed the traffic police how.

The veteran accepts his long service as a guarantee of efficiency; the novice is patient under instruction and open to suggestion. Our desire to do everything in the book, our painstaking individual industry under a meticulous discipline, and our willingness as beginners to learn had served us well before the battle in the concealment of our strength and plans from the enemy. There were so many of us and we were so swift in our onset that we gave the enemy the numbing shock which on many occasions the newcomer, springing aggressively into the arena, has inflicted by a rain of blows upon a hardened adversary who has appraised him too lightly.

If the Germans had made the most of their fortifications with their customary skill, the dam might have held against the flood; for it is the touch and go of impulse that decides in the space of a second between docile hands up begging for succor and a fury of resistance to the death. Suddenly brought to face overwhelming formations, the answering sense of self-preservation prevailed in the German trenches before the German officers and non-commissioned officers, had they been in the mood, could overcome the mass instinct of their men.

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The French on our left had presumably met more resistance than we in the first-line fortifications. Their attack was doubtless more professionally skillful than ours. Had they failed, for no other reason than that they had fewer men to the mile, the cost of a repulse would have been less for them than it would have been for us. The Germans knew that the French were massing west of the Argonne, and apparently accepted their attack as serious, while they thought that we would make only a demonstration. We had been right in our anticipation that they would not consider, for one thing, another major offensive by our army feasible so soon after Saint-Mihiel; or, for another, that Marshal Foch, while he was carrying on extensive operations in northern France, would have the temerity or the forces to undertake in addition such an extensive effort as that of September 26th.

Despite the honor in which open warfare was now held, a first line was still a first line, with its wire, deep dugouts and strong points, and all the approaches accurately plotted by the artillery through long practice in fire. A part of it might be readily taken at any time by thorough artillery preparation, but the victors in the early offensives had suffered enormous toll of casualties from shell-fire in organizing their new positions. Though the short artillery preparation, without registering, had proved efficacious against the Germans on July 18th and August 8th, when they were holding shallow trenches in ground which they had won in their spring offensives, it had not as yet been tried by the Allies—I may mention again—over any such length of front against the old trench system as in the Meuse-Argonne. It is only fair to say that we were not opposed in strong force, but, make any qualification you choose, by conquering twenty miles of first-line fortifications we had won a signal triumph which must have been a distressing augury to the German command.

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After our "break through" there was little answering artillery fire. We had drawn the teeth of immediate artillery resistance by going through to the guns. We had captured many guns; others were forced to fall back to escape capture, and they, or any that were hurried forward, would have had to fire, not at a settled trench line, but at infantry deployed and on the move. Meanwhile our infantry must be driven to the utmost of its capacity to make the most of the headway that we had gained.

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We had also to consider the dispersion and the fatigue which bring loss of momentum in an attack, just as a tidal wave spends itself in flowing inland. The farther our infantrymen went, the farther our transport must go to provide them with rations and ammunition. Thus the ability of our organization to continue the advance after the "break through" included the indispensable factor of efficient arrangements at the rear. As a division has twenty-seven thousand men, its daily food requirements are equal to those of a good-sized town, without including small arms and artillery ammunition and other material. People at home who were surprised at the length of time it took a division to march by on parade, without its artillery or transport, will have some idea of the road space required for a single division fully equipped for action and in motion.

Behind the old trench system traffic movement had settled into a routine, under the direction of policemen at the crossings, resembling that of a city. In our mobilization for the attack we had brought, aside from corps and army troops, nine divisions into the Meuse-Argonne sector. This led to the pressure which would appear in suddenly trebling the traffic of a city. Though the roads were insufficient, they were kept systematically in repair; quantities were known; we were forming up on a definite line of front. After the attack was begun, the defensive force was falling back upon its established and dependable arrangements. The offensive force—and this cannot be too clearly or vividly stated—had to build a city, as it were, by establishing new depots and camps, repairing old roads and building new roads, while traffic control in the area of advance was subject not only to the calculable requirements of a great street parade in a city, but to the incalculable requirements of a great fire and other emergencies which switch concentrations from one street to another. [99]

From a ridge in the midst of the old trench system in the center of our line, the nature of our task appeared as a picture, which my observation in threading my way through the streams of traffic in the rear filled in with detail. Ahead, except for occasional groups and lines appearing and disappearing in the wooded, undulating landscape, our advancing infantry seemed to have been dissipated into the earth. Their part after they were through the fortifications I shall describe in another chapter. The bridge between them and the rear was for the moment in the air, where Allied and German planes in prodigal numbers came and went on their errands of combat and observation. In the jam on the roads back of the trenches, thousands of men, of waiting machine-gun battalions and of stalled artillery, and drivers and helpers attached to traffic of all kinds, were looking aloft at a "show" which was worth the price of being packed in darkened transports, and almost worth the price of enduring army discipline. [100]

If they might see nothing of the battle going on behind the ridge, they had grandstand seats for the theatrics of war in the air, staged on the background of the blue ceiling of heaven. I was not to see the like of this scene again in such bright sunlight. The most jaded veteran never failed to look up at the sound of machine-gun firing, which signaled that the aces might be jousting overhead. Would one be brought down? There might be only an exchange of bullets between planes in passing; then one might turn to give chase to the other; or both begin maneuvering for advantage. In shimmering flashes the sunlight caught the turning wings of planes that tumbled in a "falling leaf" when at a disadvantage, caught the wings of planes that were crippled and falling to their death.

Duels were forgotten when a German plane with no Allied plane across its path swept down toward the huge inflated prey of an observation balloon. His telephone told the observer in the basket that it was time to take to his parachute. The sight of the figure of a man, harnessed to a huge umbrella, leisurely descending from a height of a thousand feet, divided attention with watching to see whether or not the gas within the thin envelope overhead broke into a great ball of flame. If not, it was brought down to take on its passenger again; and it could be lowered with incredible rapidity for such an immense object, as the wire which anchored it was reeled in on the spinning reel on the motor-truck. There was something very modern and truly American about a motor-truck in a column of traffic towing a balloon. [101]

Most fortunate of all the spectators were the men with machine-guns for aerial defense mounted on trucks. They both observed and participated in the game. Many of them were in action for the first time with a new toy. They did not propose to miss any opportunity to make up for having come late into the war.

"Haven't you learned the difference between an Allied and a German plane? You're shooting at an Allied plane," an officer called to a machine-gunner.

"Yes, sir," was the reply, and he stopped firing.

"Why didn't you tell him you couldn't hit it anyway?" remarked a passing wounded man, after the officer had passed on. "But don't worry. If they miss the plane, the bullets can still hit somebody when they fall."

Entranced as they were by the spectacle, all the men who had to do with the moving of the wheels of all the varieties of transport which overflowed the roads were only the more eager to press forward. The air was not their business. Their duty was over the ridge toward the front. The artillerists had particularly appealing reasons for impatience, as we shall see. They were using rugged language, which relieved their steam-pressure without changing the fact, which was being burned into the consciousness of the whole army, that as surely as a chain is no stronger than its weakest link, a road is no stronger than any slough which holds up traffic. [102]

The engineers had no time to spare for observing blazing balloons. Their labors in the old trench system, in contrast to the florid drama of the air, were a reminder of how completely earth-tied the army was, and how small a part of its effort was above the earth, even in the days when

communiqués paid much attention to aces. For a mile or more every road in the immediate rear of the old French trenches had been in disuse for four years while it was being torn by shell-bursts. For the distance across No Man's Land, it had become part of the sea of shell-craters. On the German side of No Man's Land were more trench chasms, and another stretch which had been blasted in the same fashion as the French side.

Shoveling would fill many of the holes; but shoveling required labor when we were short of labor, and time when every minute was precious. It was increasingly evident every minute, too, that trucks that carry three tons, and six-inch mortars, and heavy caissons were not meant to pass over any piece of mended road that had its bottom two or three feet below the surface. They insisted upon finding the bottom and remaining there until pulled out by other traction than their own. [103]

The division engineers were supposed to keep on the heels of the infantry, which they did with a gallantry which made amends for the inadequacy of their numbers and material. Their efficacy was dependent upon these two features and upon the prevision of the division command in mastering the problem beforehand. There were critics who said that some division staffs evidently expected their artillery and rolling kitchens to take wing; but the division staffs produced by way of answer the unfailing list of written orders on the subject, which could not be carried out. If the infantry were repulsed or checked, the engineers might share some of the fighting, as they had on more than one occasion. There seemed to be a universal apprehension, the engineers said, that an engineer might have a chance to sleep or rest, which would obviously ruin his morale. If, after the infantry had passed on, the enemy concentrated the fire of a battery on the road-builders, they were not supposed to be diverted from their labor, but to be prompt in filling new shell-craters. [104]

The lack of material ready on wagons for immediate movement to the front left them to gather what material they could on the spot. They could not use barbed wire, and in places that seemed the only thing in sight. They tore out trench timbers, which often proved rotten from four years in moist earth, they gathered stones where stones could be found and used these to make something more solid than loose earth turned by the shovel; and they sent hurry calls to the rear for trucks of material, which themselves might be stalled on the way forward in the jam of waiting traffic. The more sticks and stones filled in a bad spot, the more were needed as the earth underneath continued to yield. When a truck-driver saw that the truck in front, which belonged to his convoy, had passed through a rut, he determined that where his leader could go he could follow, and he drove ahead, cylinders roaring with all their horse-power. When he was stuck, he spurred them to another effort. Meanwhile his wheels were probably sinking, and he had delayed the mending of the break in any satisfactory way while the truck in front backed up to put out a towline, and all hands in the neighborhood added their muscular man-power to cylinder horse-power. The Germans had raised in the shell-torn earth of the trench system another barrier than that of their fortifications to a swift drive for their lines of communication. [105]

Their own limited opportunities in "passing the buck" did not exclude the engineers from easing their own mental, if not physical, burden by remarking with acid intensity that a little better traffic control on the part of some of the people who were complaining would help matters. No one who had been along the roads could deny that this point was well taken. If not the experience of other offensives, our traffic demoralization at Saint-Mihiel should have been a warning to us, though most of the men who had learned their lessons in that sector were still occupied there. We had the admirable example of the British transport, which, after confusion in the Somme battle resembling ours at Saint-Mihiel, had developed in practice under fire a system which seemed automatic.

The number of guns and ammunition-caissons and the length of a column of divisional transport were calculable quantities. Their order of precedence behind the infantry was largely a settled formula. The number of roads and their state of repair must be known not only on the map but by practical observation. Some were narrow country roads, which would accommodate only "one-way" traffic, and others would accommodate traffic going both ways. Having all these factors in mind, the program must include the disposition of labor battalions where they would be needed in making prompt repairs, when heavy trucks cut up roads, especially one-way dirt country roads. [106]

We had written out extensive instructions for traffic regulation, which were to be enforced by military police who were new to the task and insufficient in numbers. The same thing happened to the military police on September 26th as happened to the New York City police during the parade of the 27th Division, when the crowd broke through the police lines into the line of march. In this instance, when aggressive commanders of artillery and convoys saw an opening, they made for it without regard to traffic regulations, though their ardor may have meant only delay in the end.

Thus the military police had paper authority which they could not enforce. Their minds were kept in confusion by the confusion of personal directions they received from volunteer experts. They were overwhelmed in rank; and respect for rank had been drilled and drilled into them. A colonel is a colonel and a mighty man; a lieutenant-colonel is a mightier man than a major, who in turn outranks any captain in charge of a section of road. What was the use of proclaiming a road "one-way," when a staff officer appeared and declared it "two-way"? What was there to do when another staff officer appeared with an outburst against the disobedience of regulations that had interlocked traffic going both ways on this same one-way road? [107]

This is not saying that the personal initiative of a passing senior officer was not serviceable, when he confined his effort to breaking a jam, without reorganizing the system in one locality, and

thereby throwing it out of gear in other localities. With the best of intentions, colonels fresh from home who had not seen a large operation before were particularly energetic. Some of their remarks stirred memories of Philippine days when the transport of an expeditionary battalion was in difficulties. The burden of the world was on their shoulders. When they gave an order, they wanted no suggestive "But, sir——" from any captain or major, though they complained that reserve officers lacked both initiative and discipline. As each colonel departed in the blissful consciousness that it had taken a trained soldier to "straighten things out," the traffic officers, in the interval before another appeared with contradictory orders, might indulge their sense of humor with the reflection that numerous "fool colonels" must be wandering about France with a free hand in impressing their rank upon juniors.

The biggest "fool colonel" or general was he who, to avoid walking, took his car in the early part of the day across the freshly made road over the trench system, thereby delaying the carts of machine-gun battalions. When his car was stalled, he received about as much sympathy as the driver of a truck stalled on a road which did not belong to his division. Not being a colonel, the driver might be made the public object of language which did not consider rank or human sensibilities. [108]

In no result was the fact more evident than in our traffic direction that in making a large army we must crack the mold of a small army. In time our capacity for organization would make a new mold. Meanwhile, though it might be applied at cross-purposes, our American energy, adaptable, tireless, furious, and determined, must bring results. The many broken-down trucks in ditches beside the road were only the inevitable casualties of a prodigious effort. Let the infantrymen keep on advancing; we would force their supplies up to them in one way or another.

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## VIII THE FIRST DAY

[109]

Out in the open—The enemy limited to passive defense—And relying on machine-gunners—Their elusiveness—Problems of the offense—Slowing down—Up with the infantry—Why dispersion—*Liaison* up, down, and across—How keep the staff informed?—The spent wave before Montfaucon.

What of the infantry lost to view in the folds of the landscape? They were confronting the originals of the hills, woods, and ravines, whose contours on paper had been the definite factor in making plans, while the character and resistance of the enemy had been the indefinite and ungovernable quantity. As the day advanced, irregular pencilings, reflecting the reports of the progress of the fighters, moved forward on the maps of the different headquarters toward the heavy regular lines of the objectives which were the goals of our high ambition.

The loss of the first-line fortifications to the Germans could not be considered as serious as in an offensive in the first years of the war. Even as early as the Verdun battle, proponents of the mobile school of warfare, who had never been altogether silenced by the engineering school, had advocated a yielding elastic defense, which, after drawing the Crown Prince's Armies away from their depots, would counter by a sudden attack of the gathered French forces; but such a maneuver was too daring and contrary to the thought of the time, with its dependence upon rigid defense. Infantry had fallen into the habit of feeling "undressed" and helpless unless in trenches. When the soldier was forced into the open, he had hastened to hide his "nakedness" in a shell-crater, or instantly, in the very rodent instinct that he had developed, set to digging himself a pit. Since the German offensive of March, 1918, all the practice had been to wean the infantry away from settled defenses to the supple use of light artillery, trench mortars, and machine-gun units. Happily, as we know, the basic training of our infantry had been in keeping with this idea. [110]

In the palmy days of German numbers and vigor, the German High Command might have met our Meuse-Argonne offensive by the prompt marshaling of reserves for a decisive counter-attack against our extended forces with inadequate roads at their backs; but if Ludendorff realized the errors which our fresh troops might commit from inexperience, we realized, on our part, that he was too occupied elsewhere by Allied attacks to consider any considerable aggressive action on our new front, where his tactics must have in mind, obviously, the protection with a minimum cost of men and material of his lines of communication, in order to assure a successful withdrawal from northern France and Belgium. With our attack developed, his subordinate in the Meuse-Argonne sector, in carrying out this policy, would choose the points where he could gain the best results by concentrating the fire of the artillery at his command, and then depend upon the expert German machine-gunners for defensive warfare in the open, supported by such fragmentary defense lines as might be hastily constructed. [111]

According to the German intelligence report of our operation at Saint-Mihiel, our staff work had been immature, while our line officers did not know how to make the most of our gains. Without considering that at Saint-Mihiel we were under orders to stop on our limited objectives, and granting the Germans their view, no one will deny them the credit of knowing how to make the most of their tactical opportunities. The bellows of our accordeon was being drawn out as theirs was drawn in. With every hundred yards of advance our men were farther from their communications. Reports were accordingly the longer in reaching headquarters, and orders for

future moves the longer in reaching the line, while those of the Germans, as they fell back on their communications, were prompt.

It was not the first time that they had lost first-line fortifications. They knew by experience as well as observation what had happened to their first line under the powerful initial assault; and they knew what they had to do, in full dependence upon a staff system trained in practice to meet this as well as the other vicissitudes of war. The failure of their men in the front line to stand to the death was an irritating exhibition of deteriorating morale, which must be taken into consideration not only by the subordinate but the higher commands. Scattered and demoralized individuals and groups, filtering back in retreat, might be re-formed, or passed through advancing reserves to the rear for reorganization. Fresh machine-gun units, which had almost the mobility of infantry, could be readily placed at points already foreseen as most suitable. One machine-gun might hold up the advance of a company of infantry. The enemy was fully familiar with the details of a landscape studded with ideal machine-gun positions, the choicest being the edge of a woods on a hillside overlooking an open space. [112]

Some of our officers and men had met German machine-gun practice in open warfare in the Château-Thierry campaign and at the British front. As others knew it only under the limitations of trench warfare, the resistance which they now must face was familiar to them only through instruction. The German machine-gunner, having learned as the survivor of many battles the art of self-preservation at his adversary's expense, would wait all day and all night and even longer without a shot, until his target appeared in the field of fire assigned to him; wait as a Kentucky feudsman waits behind a rock for his enemy to appear on a road. Each gun was only one in a well-plotted array covering all the avenues of approach which any attacking force must follow. The guns disposed in front might precede or wait on the guns in flank in opening fire. [113]

There was nothing new or wonderful in this arrangement. Any soldier with a sense of ground and of natural combative strategy could work out a plan of interlocking fire; but the discipline and the training requisite to its proper execution, and the stubborn phlegmatic bravery which sticks to a machine-gun to the death, are not to be found at random on any page of a city directory or social register. The fact that a gun had begun firing did not mean that it could be immediately located. Sometimes when light conditions were right the flash was visible, unless the gunner had hung a piece of bagging, through which he could aim, to conceal the flash. The direction of the fire might be judged somewhat by sound, and also by observing the spits of dust in the earth or on the wall of a building. Judgment on this score was affected by the proximity of the passing bullets to the observer's person.

The more machine-guns were firing from different angles, the more difficult it was to locate any one of them by either method; and the more influential the human element. In the midst of their fire imagination easily multiplied the number of guns, which is one of the moral effects of their use. When a gun was located, the gunner might slip back behind the crest of a ridge, or he might have moved as a precaution, before he was located, to another position which had been chosen as his next berth, with pit and camouflage in readiness. [114]

An experienced aviator—always there is that word "experience" which has no substitute—might detect a machine-gun nest if he flew low; but not as a rule in woods or in bushes, or even in the open when covered with green branches. There were many machine-gunners and relatively few aviators. If a gunner thought that an aviator who flew low had seen him, he might have taken up a new position before the aviator's information had brought down artillery fire. The machine-gunner was a will-of-the-wisp with a hornet's sting, which could be thrown a mile and a half. Usually the price of locating him was casualties to the infantry, and still more casualties before he was taken, if he stood his ground. If the Germans had not enough machine-guns back of their first line for a complete interlocking defense on the first day of the battle—and they certainly had later—they aimed to place them where they could do the most good. [115]

Naturally the American Army, studying its chessboard, had taken into consideration the counter-moves of the enemy which would result from its attack. Of course the passage through the entanglements would lead to the first dislocations of *liaison*; the storming of the trenches to more; and the passage over the shell-craters to still more. After every offensive against the trench system, officers had studied how to avoid the slowing down of the attack after the first line was taken. This had led to passing the first wave promptly through the trenches and leaving a second wave to "mop up" by "breaching" dugouts and cleaning up points of resistance; and then to the system of "leap-frogging," in which, when the men in front had been weakened in numbers by casualties and lost their aggressive cohesion, fresh troops went through them to carry forward the attack. Reserves in passing through the lanes of the barbed wire and over the trenches and on to catch up with an advancing line also suffered from disorganization, which might be increased by strong concentrations of enemy shell and machine-gun fire.

A division commander had discretion as to how he would gain his objectives, which brings us into the field of tactical direction, as technical as it is vital to success. His dispositions were a test of his knowledge of his profession, and his handling of the division after it was engaged of his qualities of generalship. In some instances villages and strong points were passed by the main line of advance, and left to be conquered by special attacking forces. Instructions had not only to be elaborate but practical. [116]

Those captains and lieutenants, the company and platoon commanders, who were carrying out the instructions, must each be a general in his own limited field. The less experience his seniors had in preparing practical instructions, the more he might suffer for his want of experience in leading men in battle. With the conquered trenches behind him, he had to make sure that his

men were in hand, and if he had been allowed no time for reorganization behind his shield, that was an error; for barrages might move too fast, in expressing the desire of commanders for speed. At the same time, the line officer had to identify by the map the ground on his front which he was to traverse and the positions he was to take as his part in that twenty miles of pulsing, weaving, and thrusting line.

When you are seated before a table in calm surroundings, trying to follow the course of one company in an advance, you realize the limitations of your 1 to 20,000 map. It ought to be 1 to 10. More elements than any layman could imagine entered into the problem of the location of the command post from which a battalion commander was to direct the movements of one thousand men, or a regimental commander of three thousand, in action. All this, of course, represents sheer fundamentals in thoroughgoing military science; but we must have the fundamentals if we are to appreciate the accomplishment of our young army in the Meuse-Argonne battle.

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A prominent hill was easily recognized. If a village were in the line of your attack, that was a simple guide; but in a region where, unlike our country of scattered farmhouses, the farmers all live in villages, there was a paucity of buildings which might serve as landmarks. One of our men expressed the character of the terrain by saying that with every advance it all looked alike—hills, ridges, woods, and ravines; yet when you came close to the part which you were to attack it seemed "different from any other and a lot worse." We had to cross brooks and swamps as an incident to conquering the other features of the landscape. If we missed any kind of fighting on the first day of the battle, it was in store for us in the later stages.

Oh, that word *liaison*! That linking up of the units of the attack in proper coördination! Is there any man of the combat divisions who does not know its meaning or who wants to hear it again? It never came into slang at home in the same way as camouflage; but it is a thousand times more suggestive of the actualities of war. *Liaison* between the French and the American armies, between corps, divisions, brigades, regiments, battalions, companies, platoons, squads, and individual soldiers. *Liaison* between infantry and artillery and trench mortars and planes and tanks! If you did not have it, why, the adjoining commander might be as much to blame as you, at least, and you could say that he was altogether to blame. It may be said that the history of the war will be written in terms of positions taken, and of positions which were not taken because coöperating units failed to keep their *liaison*. They were not up. When I mention that there were difficulties of *liaison* in writing of any division, I am not saying who was at fault, as no one person was, perhaps, more than another.

[118]

Other generals might be promoted and demoted, but General *Liaison* remained the supreme tactician. "Establishing *liaison*" was fraught with more heartaches and brain-aches than any other military detail. Men prowled through the night in gas-masks under sniping rifle and machine-gun fire and artillery fire, to ascertain if the unit supposed to be on their flank was there: perhaps to receive a greeting from an officer hugging a fox-hole, "Why aren't you fellows keeping up with us?"

*Liaison* was most difficult in woods, though the fighting was not necessarily always the severest there. Men naturally took to the paths instantly they advanced into woods, and these, if they were not stopped by machine-gun fire, advanced ahead of those in the deep underbrush. A stretch of unseen wire might arrest a part of the line, without the men in *liaison* on the right and left, as they plunged through the thickets, knowing that it had been stopped. The sheer business of keeping any kind of formation was distracting enough, without the sudden bursts of machine-gun fire, which might be so powerful that there was nothing to do except to take cover and consider a plan for silencing or capturing the gun. Unless the casualties were so serious that it was suicidal not to halt and mark out a plan for capturing the nest, and as advancing was a sure way of locating machine-guns and a prompt way of overwhelming them, we swept on in the spirit of our instructions and impatience. Captured machine-guns littered the paths of our battalions, in tribute to the effect of our impetuous rush upon gunners who continued to forget their orders to stand to the death when they saw the tidal wave of our soldiers about to swamp them.

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As the day wore on and the enemy began to recover from the shock of the surprise of our initial onset, we encountered an increasing volume and fury of machine-gun fire from hill to hill across valleys, sweeping down ravines, plunging from crests and by indirect aim over crests, from village houses and from both directions where village streets crossed. At critical points it was supported by concentrations of shell-fire. Along that road, at the edge of this patch of woods, along that stretch of river bottom, the German's artillery laid down barrages over a space already swept by bullets, to hold positions by which he set as much store in his plans as we in ours.

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"Why aren't you getting on?" division commanders asked, or tried to ask—as communication did not always permit the message to arrive promptly—when the pencilings on the map were not keeping up to the schedule of progress toward the objectives. It was an easy question; the answer might be in the lack of resolution of a regimental or battalion commander, in the character of the resistance to his troops, or in their disorganization under new and severe trials. After further ineffectual efforts the battalion and regimental commanders might say that progress was impossible without reserves.

Should the division commander send them? Expending his reserves on the first day of a long battle might place him in a dangerous position in face of a later and graver emergency; but he had the word of a subordinate that they were necessary. Had that subordinate in his first serious engagement become too readily discouraged? What was the extent of his losses? They were a criterion for judging his balance of assets for continuing the attacks, though they did not include the exhaustion of the men, their mood of the moment, or the disruption of *liaison* of their units.

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The division commander might sit rigid with the front of Jove, which he thought was the chief item of the military formula, and say: "I want no excuses. Take the position!" Or he might keep on pressing in his reserves, in the determination that his division would be up on time; for Corps Headquarters were depending on him. The pencilings moving toward the corps objective were his record in the battle. If the pencilings were in a V-shape, that was bad. It meant that some of his elements were in a salient, in danger of being "squeezed."

Sometimes the pencilings were farther advanced than the troops. The wish being father to the thought, observers who saw a charge entering a woods took it for granted that it would go through the woods. Aviators sometimes mistook German soldiers in movement for our own; again they misread the maps, and placed our troops on a ridge ahead of their actual position. Company leaders might make the same mistake. The incentive to "get there" involved eagerness to send back word that you were arriving. A little group of gallant men who pushed through a wood or gained a crest might have been swept back by machine-gun fire by the time their proud report had reached division headquarters. Instead of having commanding ground as a "jumping-off place" for the next stage of advance, they might be hugging the reverse slope, exposed to fire from three sides immediately they showed themselves. [122]

Regular as well as reserve officers who had never before been in action were to prove again that no amount of study of the theory of war, invaluable as it is, may teach a man how to keep his head in handling a thousand or three thousand men under fire. West Point cadet drill, Philippine jungle and "paddy" dikes, Leavenworth staff school, army post routine, and border service had no precedent of experience for the problems of maneuver which they now had to solve. It was all very well to say that the men were all right; but another thing was keeping your men together. I saw a regular colonel violating, in a singular reaction to amateurishness, the simplest principle of organization—the same that keeps subordinates informed of the location of a business superior—by having no post of command where he or an adjutant could be found with orders or reports. Some colonels remained steadily at their headquarters, without absenting themselves for personal inspection in any emergency; others moved restlessly about the field, trying to apply to three thousand men the personal direction of a platoon commander. Every subordinate who witnessed such an exhibition by a superior was bound to lose confidence in the command. I am not thinking of a lack of physical bravery when I say that there were instances of colonels and brigadiers voicing pessimism in the presence of subordinates. They might have become good judges or good philosophers, but they were not meant by nature, at least in their lack of battle experience, to drive home an ambitious offensive movement. Others had too much blind initiative; they were the kind that would drive head downward at a stone wall. Others were amazingly cool, determined, and efficient. These the men would follow against any odds. [123]

Being human, our men who symbolized the pencilings on the map had muscles and nerves which were subject to fatigue. They had no visualization of their goals. If they could have been shown a flag on a mountainside, which they must reach before they "knocked off" for the day, the incentive for keeping on would have been more directly applied. All they saw was the slope or woods ahead of them. Their knowledge of the battle plan was limited to their orders to keep on going. After nights when suspense and suppressed excitement had allowed them little sleep, they had been going all day from 5.30 in the morning—going through barbed wire and trenches, over uneven ground, as they fought their way not only under fire but under the strain of that wearing mental concentration of trying to remember and apply all they had learned in their training and in previous actions. [124]

Physically, the task set for our troops had seemed almost superhuman. Many had taken enough steps to cover in a straight line twice the distance they had traveled. To the eye of a hurrying observer, these myriad figures, whether dashing toward a machine-gun nest, or ducking to avoid an outburst of fire, or coming wounded across the fields, had the attraction of the ardor and fearlessness of youth in battle, while they brought many thoughts which were as far from the battlefield as the homes that had sent them forth.

We might say "check!" to the Germans if we had taken Montfaucon at the end of the first day. Montfaucon was the highest point on our way to the Lille-Metz railway except the Buzancy heights. It was visible from the old first-line trench system at Malancourt and from the Mort Homme on the banks of the Meuse, and it looked forward over the ground of the projected second day's advance.

It happened that I knew by travel that day how far it was from Headquarters to the front line. I might feel as well as appreciate the reasons of the officer and the soldier for disappointing Headquarters when I came to the end of my journey, where the tidal wave, expending itself, had left a platoon of infantry, without touch with the units on their right and left, washed up in a sunken road on the reverse slope of a hill in front of Montfaucon. On the bare crest of the hill lay the bodies of comrades who had fallen when the watchful German machine-gunners aimed at the human targets appearing in bold silhouette on the sky-line. It would have been madness for a handful of men without support to continue on against such blasts of cross-fire. They had fallen back, bringing their wounded, to await orders. Apart from the opposition they had met, the irregular landscape over which they had advanced was sufficient explanation of their inability to keep their *liaison*. It made islands of the hills as it diverted the tidal wave into the channels of the ravines. Scattered American soldiers were moving about the neighborhood like hunters, beating up Germans who had taken cover among bushes and in holes. [125]

There was a recess in the battle in the vicinity, with stretches of several seconds when the countryside seemed quite peaceful. Then for another quarter of a minute, only a single machine-gun might be firing with deliberately precise intervals between shots. Suddenly the whole pack [126]

broke into full cry at the sight of quarry on the ridge which forms the southwestern approach to the town from the Montfaucon woods. We must have this ridge before we took the town. As I looked in this direction, I saw a line of our men appearing above the crest, each figure sharp against the light blue sky. Their intervals seemed at first as exact as the teeth of a comb; then the teeth began to drop out as figures fell. For a few seconds longer the survivors strove against the blasts before they drew back and faced right and moved along under cover of the slope, apparently seeking a less exposed portion of the crest for another attempt.

The machine-gun fire died down into spiteful irregularity until the line wheeled again toward the crest. Their heads were hardly above it when, with the unity of an orchestra answering the conductor's baton, the diabolical whirring rattle began again with all its previous volume. Evidently quite as many guns had this portion of the ridge under their fire as the other. This time the men did not persist. In proper tactical wisdom they disappeared from the sky-line as quickly as a woodchuck dodges into his hole.

We had now definitely developed the strength of the enemy at this point. Possibly we had located some of his machine-guns. At least, a battalion commander had learned enough to realize that he must undertake a deliberate method adapted to the situation for silencing them, which of course meant delay in pushing forward toward the day's objective the pencilings in one small section of the Headquarters map. Yet it was such details as this, revealed to me in a pantomime of vivid and stark simplicity and brevity, which taken together made the whole for that abstraction to the soldier which is called the High Command. [127]

"Is Montfaucon taken?" was the question of Headquarters when I arrived there in the evening. Some reports indicated that it was. This part of the line was the most extended, and its communications accordingly the most uncertain. There were other pencilings on the map which also had to be erased. If we had not gained all our objectives, this was not saying that we had not been astonishingly successful. Having, as it were, set out ambitiously to take the whole solar system between dawn and darkness, one of the planets still held out, with the fixed star of Buzancy heights in the distance.

There might be many small salients, but none of threatening importance in our new line. Despite the uneven battle experience of our divisions, all had done their part magnificently. Our gains were more than a mile on our flank to four miles in the center, where we had made the bulge toward the summit of the whale-back. How far had we expended our momentum in our initial onset? What was the traffic situation? What of the morrow? [128]

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## IX

### THE ATTACK SLOWS DOWN

The call goes back for artillery—And at night for the rolling kitchens—The staff interferes with sleep—Our part meant no stopping—Keeping at the roads during the night—Montfaucon on the second day—Then drive for the whale-back—Enemy resistance holds our exhaustion—Settling down in the rain to slow progress. [129]

Moving on their feet, with each man's course his road through the trench system and across the country beyond, the infantrymen, as they hourly increased their distance ahead of the part of the army moving on wheels, were calling oftener for artillery than for reserves. They needed shells to destroy machine-gun nests, to silence enemy batteries, and to make barrages to support their farther advance as resistance began to develop. There were equally urgent appeals for machine-gun battalions to meet the German machine-gun opposition in kind. Their spray of bullets, in indirect fire over the heads of the men in a charge, was another form of shield, the more desired when the protection of the artillery was lacking.

The machine-gunners, who called themselves the "Suicide Club," were soldiers both of the wheel and the foot. Their light carts did not have to wait on the stout passageway over the trench system which even the light artillery required. Yet some of them had been marooned, to their inexpressible disgust; for it was their part in an emergency to press on to the firing line through the shell-fire which may sweep the roads back of the infantry. The place of the artillery was as near the actual front as orders and traffic jams would permit. [130]

How the artillery chafed on the leash! Not only duty but the gunner's promised land was beyond the barrier of the trench system which stayed his progress. Open warfare called to him from the free sweep of the landscape. The seventy-fives had come into their own again as mobile living units which would unlimber in the fields close behind the moving infantry, instead of playing the part of coast artillery behind fortifications. There would be no need to bother about camouflage. They would move about so rapidly that the enemy could not locate them; or if he did—well, that was all in the game. Their protection and the protection of the infantry would be in the blasts overwhelming the enemy's fire.

"Why in ——" the infantry was calling to the artillery. "Why in ——" the artillery was calling to the engineers. You may fill out the blank space of this cry of mutually dependent units with the kind of language which was not supposed to be, but sometimes was, used in the presence of chaplains. The infantry changed the object of their impatience when night stopped them wherever the end [131]

of that long day's work found them. They were not thinking of supporting artillery fire for the moment. The late September air was chill, the ground where they lay was cold. Their appetites were prodigious from their hard marching and fighting. Their hearts and thought were in their stomachs. Wasn't it the business of rolling kitchens to furnish them warm meals? It was past supper-time. Where in — were those rolling kitchens? After dark they surely need not be held back in apprehension of being seen by the enemy's artillery.

Night had laid its supreme camouflage over all the area of operations. Under its mantle an activity as intense as that of the day must continue for all who supported the infantry. We might take an account of stock. Regimental, battalion, and company officers might move about freely along the front in familiarizing themselves with the situations of their commands. *Liaison* which had been broken between different units must be re-established. The ground ahead must be scouted. Platoons and companies which had become mixed with their neighbors, and individual men who had strayed from their units, must be sorted out and returned. Gaps in the line must be filled; groups that had become "bunched" must be deployed; groups whose initiative had carried them forward to exposed points might have to be temporarily withdrawn,—all by feeling their way in the darkness. The sound of machine-gun fire broke the silence at intervals as the watchful enemy detected our movements. A shadowy approaching figure, who the men hoped was the welcome bearer of that warm meal from the rolling kitchens, might turn out to be an officer who directed that they stumble about in woods and ravines to some other point, or creep forward in the clammy dew-moist grass with a view to improving our "tactical dispositions," which does not always improve the human dispositions of those who have to carry out the orders.

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Army Headquarters wanted information from the three Corps Headquarters. Each Corps wanted information from its three Division Headquarters, which in turn were not modest in asking questions of the weary fellows at the front. Exactly where was your line? What was the morale of the men? Were they receiving ammunition and food? When would the guns be up? What identifications of the enemy forces in your sector? Had many machine-gun nests been located? Was the enemy fortifying, and where? What was the character of his shell-fire? The high command had to consider the corps summaries of the answers in relation to its own news from other sources, communications from the French staff, reports from Army aviation and artillery, conjectures of the enemy's strength and probable intentions, and the general situation of transport in the Army area and the flow of supplies from the rear.

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The lack of information on some points was no more puzzling than the abundance of contradictory information on others. Staff heads must work into the small hours of the morning. They might rest after they had arranged their program for the morrow. The men at the front who were to carry it out were supposed to rest at night to refresh themselves for another effort at dawn. This was a kindly paternal thought, but how, even in the period of daylight saving, they were to find the time for sleep in the midst of re-forming their line and answering all those questions was not indicated. Whether they slept or not, whether their shields and food were up or not, they were supposed to fight from dawn to dusk on the 27th.

Our army, though our situation perhaps warranted it, might not dig in along the new line and hold fast while it recuperated after that long first day. Other double doors from Verdun to the sea were about to be swung open; other armies must be considered. Indeed the decision in this respect was not with our army. In a sense it was not with Marshal Foch, for the forces which he had set in motion to carry out his great plan had already prescribed our part, as we know. On September 28th the Franco-Belgians were to attack in Flanders, and Mangin's army was to move on Malmaison; on the 29th the Anglo-French armies, including our Second Corps, were to storm the Hindenburg line in the Cambrai-St.-Quentin sector; on September 30th Berthelot was to free Rheims from the west; and on October 3rd, Gouraud, with our 2nd Division, was to storm the old trench system east of Rheims. We must hold off reserves from their fronts. The more determined were our attacks, the more ground we gained on the way to the Lille-Metz railroad in this critical stage of Allied strategy, the more perturbed would be the enemy's councils in adjusting his combinations to deal with the other offensives. Though it might have been better for us to have taken two or three days in which to gather and reorganize deliberately our forces for another powerful rush which would have been a corresponding shock to the enemy, this was no more in the psychology than in the calculations of the moment. We were winning; we meant to keep up the winning spirit of our army. What we had done one day we should do the next. We and not the Germans must take possession of the commanding position of Montfaucon as the first great step in gaining the heights of the whale-back, should their resistance require delay in reaching our goal.

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Leaving the account of each Corps' and division's part in its sector to future chapters, I shall conclude this chapter with the results of the fighting of our army as a whole for the succeeding days to October 1st, when we were to realize that Saint-Mihiel was the quick victory of a field maneuver compared to the realism of war at its worst in the Meuse-Argonne. When night fell on the 27th, our transport direction appreciated still more pregnantly the limitations of our roads for our deep concentrations. Each road, where it passed over the old chasms of the trenches,—where the rats now had the dugouts to themselves, and the silence of a deserted village prevailed except for the rumble of the struggling trucks over the new causeways—was pumping the blood from the veins of the by-roads to the rear, through its over-worked valves, into the spreading arterial system of the by-roads in the field of advance. Once on the other side, the drivers felt the relief of a man extricated from the pressure of a crowd at a gate, who finds himself in the open. Lights being forbidden, night was less of a blessing and more of a handicap to the transport than to the infantry. The argument that it secured the roads from observation, which might mean

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artillery concentrations, had little appeal to the average army chauffeur. He was not worried about shell-fire. If he had not been under it before, he was curious to know what it was like.

Darkness only made road repairs more onerous and slow. The engineers could not see to gather material or where to place it to do the most good. Unexpected difficulties appeared in the midst of the shadows of men and vehicles. The most calculating of staff heads, who wished to neglect no detail in his instructions, had not suggested that anyone connected with artillery, signals, or transport should sleep until he had overtaken the infantry, except as drivers might take cat-naps between the fitful pulsations of traffic. Men at the rear who were mere passengers waiting on others to clear the way felt a certain disloyalty if they slept in the face of the hurry call from the front.

The partisanship of the spectators "pulling" for the home team is a faint comparison with the partisanship of war, with comrades asking for more than your cheers. The cry of "Come on! Take hold here!" in the darkness would instantly awaken any man, nodding in his seat on a caisson or truck, into welcome action. Now he had a chance really to help, instead of exercising telepathic pressure on the Germans. He ceased to feel that he was a slacker. Shoulders to the wheel with the last ounce of your strength! Timbers taken out of dugouts, stones dug out of the earth with bare hands to be filled into sloughs! Break a way, make a way,—but "get there!"

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As a people, when we want something done in a hurry, we are no more inclined to count the cost than to stint our efforts. Ditched trucks and caissons were the casualties of the charge of our transport, which was no less furious in spirit than that of our infantry. Moving a broken-down truck off the road of course meant delay for the trucks behind it; and it meant, too, that someone at the front would be asking in vain for the supplies that it carried. But that pitcher of milk was spilled; on to the market with other pitchers.

Anyone who thought that the going would be easy or troubles cease on the other side of the old trench system was soon disillusioned. The Germans had blown up some roads as well as bridges. Our own shells in the preliminary bombardment had made shell-craters and dropped trees as obstacles. We must not forget that for four years there had been a belt three or four miles wide beyond the old trench system from which any but army life had been excluded. No roads had been kept up except those which served a military purpose. The Germans, partly because of their rubber famine, had depended largely on light railways rather than motor-trucks for sending up supplies. Where they did not use a main road, it was of no interest to them how far it had fallen into disrepair. Maps did not take bad spots into account, and aerial scouting did not reveal them.

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Dirt country roads had been utterly neglected. We must use them all to meet the demands of our immense force. Our heavy trucks and artillery wheels soon cut them with deep ruts. When the engineers were not on hand, each battery and convoy negotiated a passage for itself and left those in the rear to do the same. Freshets had washed out some sections, and undermined others. Embankments had fallen away into swamps, where a side-slipping truck would sink in up to its hubs. If shoulders to the wheel failed when artillery striking across fields ran into ditches and holes, snatch ropes were used.

Each convoy must locate the unit which it was serving. The rolling kitchens that had worked their way forward could not deliver their warm meals until they had found the impatiently ravenous troops. Artillery commanders must grope about for their assigned positions, or wait until they were assigned positions. They must have their ammunition as well as guns up. Officers bearing instructions from the staff were as puzzled as the recipient about their meaning, as they studied the map by the discreet flash of an electric torch, and sought to identify landmarks shrouded in the thick night mist under the canopy of darkness. Lightly wounded men moved counter to the streams of traffic and of reserves, who might also be uncertain of their exact destination. Men with bad wounds in the body tottered across the fields and dropped by the roadside. Others who could not move must be found and brought in by searchers.

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It was not surprising that some of our leaders had not yet learned to apply in the stress of action and the conflict of reports the principle that when committed to one plan it is better to go through with it than to create confusion by inaugurating another which may seem better. Half-executed orders were countermanded and changed and then changed again; and this led to trucks trying to turn round in the narrow roads, and to eddies in that confused scene of the hectic striving of each man and unit to do his part. The effect suggested a premature dress rehearsal of a play on a stage without lights, while the stage-hands were short of sets and the actors were still dependent upon reading their parts.

When morning came, few rolling kitchens indeed had reached the objective of the men's stomachs with their cargo. Our heavy artillery was still struggling in the rear. Only a portion of our light artillery was up. Where our troops were fresh on the first day, they were now already tired. The Germans had made the most of the night. Their reserves which had arrived included the 5th Guard Division, already on the way when we began the battle. We needed our heavy artillery to pound roads and villages, and to counter artillery which the Germans had brought into action. Against the increase of German machine-guns we needed the rolling barrages of our light artillery even more than on the first day after we were through the trench system. Renewing the attack over the full length of our twenty miles of front, we were to advance with our moving shields irregularly distributed and vulnerable in most places. Any observer could see soon after daylight, in the widespread puffs of German shells on the landscape, that the inevitable had happened, as in all previous offensives. The enemy artillery had other targets than our infantry; he was laying a barrier to the infantry's support on the roads, halting the columns of traffic, forcing reserves to cover, and making new shell-holes in the roads to be filled by the transport

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and engineer workers.

The important thing on the second day was to take Montfaucon. On the ridges west of the town the German infantry, artillery, and machine-gunners were utilizing the positions which he had laid out months before the attack. He fought stubbornly here as in Cuisy Wood and on the hills on the left; but buffeted as they were, our men, under firm orders to keep on attacking, conquered both systems. This cracked the shell of the Montfaucon defenses. Before noon we were in the town. [141]

There are those who say that if we had taken Montfaucon on the first day, we might have reached the crest of the whale-back itself on the second or third day, and looked down on the apron sweeping toward the Lille-Metz railway. I fear that they belong to the school of "ifs," which may write military history in endless and self-entertaining conjecture. They forget the lack of road repairs; the lack of shields to continue the advance; and the interditory shell-fire which the enemy laid down on the ruins of the town and on the arterial roads which center there. If we had taken Montfaucon on the first day, I think that there would still have been a number of other "ifs" between us and the crest. Of course, once we possessed Montfaucon and its adjoining heights, the enemy's infantry was not going to resist in down-hill fighting, though he harassed us with artillery and machine-gun fire as we descended the irregular slopes of the valleys beyond.

Our ambition was soaring for a decisive success on the 28th. We had been delayed a day, but we should yet carry through our daring programme. Forced optimism saw our field artillery coming up, our roads improving, our transport somewhat more systematized, and tried to forget other factors; but the fatigue of all hands was greater; the vitality of our troops was weakening for want of proper food. Our heavy artillery, and indeed some of our light artillery, was still struggling in the rear. Our artillery ammunition supply was insufficient to feed the guns all the shells they would need when dawn proved that the Germans had brought up still more artillery on the second night. There were the heights of the whale-back before us, with the first great step in their conquest behind us. Attack was the thing, attack from the Forest's edge to the Meuse. The more time we gave the enemy, the more time he would have to fortify and bring up reserves. Necessity accepted no excuses from subordinate commanders. Drive, and again drive; keep moving; the enemy would eventually yield. He must yield. Once we broke his resistance, then the going would be swift and easy against his shattered units. [142]

The 28th was a critical day: the day when it was to be decided whether or not we were to fight a siege operation, or to carry the whale-back in a series of rapidly succeeding rushes,—though I think that the decision really came with the signs of developing resistance on the morning of the 27th.

Our divisions put in their fresh reserves; they would admit no word of discouragement. Artillerymen who had been at work for two nights and two days tried to bring their guns close up to the infantry. All the remaining tanks were called into service. With the forced burst of energy which may be mistaken for "second wind," we everywhere made gains. Our right had moved along the Meuse to south of Briuelles, which with the bend of the river westward narrowed our front. On the left we had reached Exermont ravine. On the 29th we tried for Briuelles; for Gesnes; for the ravine; and for the escarpments of the Forest, points which the attack of the third day had developed as the locked doors which we must smash through to give us purchase for another general attack. There was a certain fitfulness in these efforts, as of a fire dying down blown into a spiteful flame. In the trough of the Aire we were under the raging artillery fire from the heights on either side; and in the trough of the Meuse from the heights across the river and from the whale-back, which I shall describe in later chapters. In the valleys beyond Montfaucon and the neighboring heights we faced the first slopes of the whale-back, which were the covering positions for the Kriemhilde and Freya Stellungen, new trench systems utilizing all the natural strength of the heights as a main line of defense by an aroused enemy in strong force. [143]

Our army might now take counsel of necessity, if not of prudence. In the future we must hack and stab our way. Meanwhile we must have rest for the tired troops, or we must have fresh troops, before another considerable offensive effort. A hundred millions of population at home did not mean that we had unlimited trained man-power to draw on in France. Our divisional reserves were exhausted. Replacements were not arriving in sufficient numbers to fill gaps from casualties and sickness. We were not only fighting from the Meuse to the Argonne and holding the line of our new front at Saint-Mihiel, but we had four excellent fresh divisions just going into attack in British and French offensives, not to mention our divisions in tranquil sectors. If we had had more men for the front, we could not have fed them. If we had made a farther advance, we could not have kept our artillery and transport up with the troops. We needed more motor-trucks, horses, and every kind of equipment for that insatiable maw. If we had had more transport, we should hardly have had room for it. The arterial road facilities over the old trench system were as yet unequal to caring for the number of our troops. The bottle necks could not meet the demands of the bottle. Our appetite for victory had exceeded our digestion. [144]

Army reports which spoke of "poor visibility" referred to the morale of the men as "excellent." There was no question of the "poor visibility" or of the morale of men who were well enough to be in line, for they were always ready to fight. The chill October rains had begun. We could expect little more fair weather. When, already, one needed a heavy blanket over him in bed, our men sent into action, for mobility's sake, without blankets were shivering at night on the wet ground, not under the roof of the stars but in the penetrating cold mist which hugged the earth when it was not raining. This and the lack of proper food and of sleep brought on diarrhea, and the pitiful sight on the roads of the sick and gassed was a reminder of how quickly war may wreck the delicate human machine which takes so long to build. In a few days sturdy youth with springy [145]

steps in the pink of health had become pale and emaciated, looking ten years older as they dragged their feet in painful slowness.

Some divisions had suffered more exhaustion than others. All their reserves had been crowded in to meet an emergency. They had given to the limit of their strength in a few days, while others might spread theirs over weeks. At close quarters with the enemy we dug in, with machine-gun nests and defensive lines of our own to repulse his counter-attacks, while the message of our own piecemeal attacks, by which we sought to maintain our personal mastery over him, was: "We are only gathering our strength. This is our battle. We are coming at you again—soon." Thus established in our gains, in temporary stalemate, we might withdraw some divisions for rest. This meant fewer mouths to feed, lessening the strain on our transport. Other divisions had rest by the alternate withdrawal of regiments and brigades.

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### BY THE RIGHT FLANK

Two weeks of reconnaissance by the 33rd on the right—Surprising the enemy by charging through a swamp—Careful planning gives complete success by noon—Nothing more but build a road and wait—Two belts of woods in front of the 80th—The enemy must hold at the second belt—Which he does with enfilade artillery, gas, and a counter-attack from Brioules—More artillery support necessary before the defenses of the town, beyond the belts, could be taken—The 4th does its first bit in workmanlike fashion—But cannot get beyond the foot of the whale-back without its stalled artillery—The Corps digs in as it can and waits.

By the right flank, left flank, and center! Every action, whether fought by a thousand or a million men, resolves itself into these simple elements of strategic control, which is as old as war. In our Meuse-Argonne drive the right and left flanks elbowed their way down the two river valleys to the conquest of the approaches on either side of the heights of the whale-back, which the center was attacking in front. To think in these terms is to think in Corps; and to think in Corps is to think in divisions.

On the right of Bullard's Third Corps in the trough of the Meuse was the 33rd Division, Illinois National Guard. It was the first American division to arrive on the Meuse-Argonne line, taking September 7th-9th from a French division the sector which our whole Third Corps was later to occupy. A single American division assigned to such a broad front of quiet trenches would not arouse the enemy's suspicions that we were planning a major offensive. On the contrary, it might be an excellent mask for our battle preparations.

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Thus the 33rd had two weeks of actual trench occupation in which to familiarize itself with the enemy positions. These resourceful Illinois men, who had seen much and learned much in having already served with a British, an Australian, a French, and an American Corps, were just the kind to make the most of their advantage, being naturally of an inquiring mind and not timid, though shrewd, in their methods of inquiry. Before the attack, in making room for the other two divisions of the Corps in their stealthy approach, they were side-slipped to the right, where they faced the river bottoms of the Meuse. At their back was the scarred slope of the Mort Homme, and in their sight were the other famous hills of the Verdun battle.

The mission of the 33rd was as picturesque and appealing as its surroundings. As the hinge of the whole movement, on the pivot of the river bank, it was to swing round in a half circle until its front was secured on the Meuse, at a right angle to the German front line on the opposite bank. This was to be accomplished by noon, after which the 33rd had only to dig in and hold fast. My reference elsewhere to the difficulty of maneuvering troops even in face of no opposition particularly applies to this sweeping right wheel. There was the Forges brook, as well as the trench systems to cross. On the right of the line was the Forges Wood, and on the left was the Juré Wood, which gave cover for machine-guns, if they were not overcome, to play a flanking fire on the center. Forges Wood was the real problem. Its machine-gun nests were protected by formidable defenses where the Germans thought them necessary. At other points they depended upon morasses which they thought impassable; and they knew the river bottoms thoroughly as their avenue of advance in their repeated attacks for the mastery of the Mort Homme in the Verdun battle. However, the inquiring Illinois men made their own investigations most thoroughly, if covertly, without accepting the reputation of German thoroughness as a guarantee that there were no openings.

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As a result they not only disagreed with the German view, but took counsel of their conviction in strategy which was to lull the enemy in his own conviction of his security and of their amateurishness. They had time to work out the plan by thorough instruction in every detail. In the first stage of the advance they had to descend a steep slope and cross the Forges brook. There they were to halt on a road on the other side of No Man's Land, to form up for the final act any units that had been delayed or become mixed. Being an accurate, card-index kind of division, the 33rd's records show that the road was reached in fifty-seven minutes, and that at the end of twenty minutes every man was in his place according to schedule.

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With the left regiment swinging past the Forges Wood, this might have exposed its flank, if the

action of the right had not been properly timed; for everything depended upon each unit carrying out its part in the team-work punctually. Charging up to their hips in slime and up to their necks in water, the Illinois men proved that the swamps were not impassable. They took duckboards from the trenches and threw them over the stretches of barbed wire which protected the Wood where the swamps did not. Just as the defenders of the Wood were turning their machine-guns on the targets on their flanks, the right regiment "jumped" them in front. This gave them an opportunity for to-the-death resistance by firing in two directions; but they were too confused in the shattering of all their preconceptions to make use of it in face of those mud-plastered Americans springing bolt into their midst. They yielded readily. The swinging left had put the Juré Wood behind it, and, with only broken elements of the enemy now in its path, the 33rd had its whole line on the bank at noon. The right hinge of the Army secure, the maneuver had been so beautifully made and it was such a complete success that it attracted less attention than if the division had been obliged to endure the very hard fighting which skill and foresight had prevented.

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As the booty of its swift combing advance, the 33rd had taken 1,450 German prisoners, who wondered just what had happened to them and why, and seven 6-inch howitzers, two 110-millimeter guns, twenty pieces of field artillery, not to mention some trench mortars, fifty-seven machine-guns, a light railway, and a well-stocked engineer depot. The 33rd's own loss was 2 officers and 34 men killed, and 2 officers and 205 men wounded, and not a single man missing. To put it in another way, this division with its fondness for figures as the real test of military prowess, had captured nearly six Germans for every casualty of its own. This was certainly waging thrifty and profitable war.

In the matter of traffic, too, the 33rd with characteristic self-reliance proceeded to look after itself. General Bell, who had a pungent common sense, knew his men when he set them to paddling their own canoe. When congestion on the Béthincourt road, assigned to both the 33rd and the 80th Divisions, prompted the thought of making a road of his own, he did not take up the question with Corps, which, as this was not in the original plan, might ask the views of Army on the suggestion. A young engineer might be sent out to make an investigation. He might consider the danger of drawing fire, and other factors. Then he might return to Corps for further consultation. After this another young engineer might be sent out to superintend the construction. Before Corps knew anything about it, and in the time that procrastinating counsel might have occupied, the Illinois men, who did not need anyone to show them how to build a road while they had spades and elbow-grease, had one completed right over the Mort Homme.

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With its transport moving in good order and with its objectives taken, the 33rd might say, in the language which it had learned in training at the British front, "We've finished our job, and we're feeling quite comfortable, thank you." Except to put in a brigade to relieve the 80th and join up with the 4th Division—which was no small exception to the brigade—the 33rd had nothing further to do until, on the strength of the way it had carried out its mission of the 26th, it was ordered to cross the Meuse on October 8th in order to stop some of the flanking fire from the other bank—which belongs to another chapter.

Cronkhite's 80th, or "Blue Ridge" National Army Division, which was the center division of the Third Corps, was also to swing toward the Meuse, and had farther to go, though the Meuse bends inward toward its line of advance. According to the Army plan, the 80th was to have only one day's intensive fighting and swift advancing. On the night of the 26th the narrowing front of attack was to "squeeze" it out. Immediately ahead of them the Blue Ridge men had two miles of open hilly country, which facilitated maintaining their formations. Beyond this was a series of woods forming practically a belt, which offered cover at every point for machine-gun nests. Better still for the enemy's purpose in holding up a persistent attack—of the kind the Blue Ridge men were under orders to make and would make—beyond this, separated by another open space, was another belt of woods. When hard pressed in the first belt, the enemy could withdraw to the second, where his machine-guns would have another free field of fire.

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The Blue Ridge men were not abashed by hills and woods. They had been brought up among hills and woods. After breaking through the trench system in a clean sweep, by noon they were in the first belt of woods, though they had flanking fire from the Juré Wood on their right. They were up to schedule no less than the 33rd; but they had had only an introduction to what was in store for them. With the left of the intrenched 33rd as their pivot, they must take the second belt of woods between them and the river. On the river bank was the town of Brioules, where they were supposed to rest their left when the task was finished. Brioules did not appear to be far away on the map; but we were to be a long time in taking it.

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Fortunately the engineers—who deserve much credit for this—had a bridge over the Forges brook by nine in the morning for the artillery. This was good news to men looking across the open into the recesses of that second belt of woods, which appeared as peaceful from that distance as a patch in the Shenandoah valley. In a race against time—with the schedule burned into every officer's brain—the 80th could not wait for all the guns to come up. In the attack at three in the afternoon the front line of the division moved forward with drill-ground precision and the confidence of its morning's success.

Since the 80th's movement had stopped at noon, the enemy had had three hours in which to prepare his reception of the charge. In a sense the success of the 33rd was a handicap to the 80th that afternoon. It aroused the enemy to the gravity of his situation along the Meuse. His remnants of units retreating before the 33rd were swinging round in front of the 80th; reserves had been hurried across the river and from Brioules. By this time our plan was revealed to him along our whole front. The loss of more river bank had an important tactical relation to his

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defense of Montfaucon and the covering positions of the whale-back, toward which our Fifth Corps in the center was advancing rapidly. If he could hold his ground from the river bank to Cuisy, he might have our center in a salient. His determination to hold it blazed out from that soft carpet of green in cruel machine-gun fire, raking the open spaces. His artillery on the opposite bank of the Meuse, as well as on the near bank behind the second belt of woods and around Briuelles, opened fire immediately our charge developed under its observation. Undaunted, the Blue Ridge men pressed on across the open toward the machine-gun nests in the edge of the second belt, as toward a refuge in a storm. They took these, only to find that more machine-guns were echeloned in the recesses of the woods. Gas as well as high-explosive shells were falling in the first belt and at points where our reserves were concentrated. In openings or narrow stretches of the second belt where units were able to drive through, they looked out on more open spaces under command of machine-guns from ridges and thickets, while right and left any unit whose courage or opportunity had carried it too far was caught in enfilade by the fire of machine-guns which had not been mopped up.

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That night the 80th had its right up with the 33rd's intrenched left on the river. Its brave accomplishment on the remainder of its front was best measured by the powerful resistance it had met. The division, which was to have been squeezed out by the narrowing front, had to remain in line because the front had not been narrowed, after far harder fighting than it had anticipated. Transport congestion on the road which the 33rd as well as the 80th was still using was extreme. If the Blue Ridge men could not bring their supplies up by wheel they might by hand. Carrying parties brought up food and small arms ammunition by fording the brook past the stalled trucks.

There could be no question about the character of the next day's fighting. The enemy was serving notice of it throughout the night. The 80th's line needed re-forming. Its commander did not mean to send his sturdy, willing, lithe men to slaughter in the fulness of their youthful energy and ambition. They must have artillery protection. Their divisional artillery, operating with the division for the first time, required daylight for going into position and mastering its problems of fire in a task which was both beyond its strength and complicated, as was all the other detail of preparing for the attack, by the terrific enemy artillery fire spread from the roads in the rear to the front line.

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The shells from the German field-pieces were "small potatoes" compared to the "big fellows" that were arriving in increasing numbers. As the men listened to the scream of the large calibers and studied their bursts, they learned that these were coming not only from the front but from both sides. Enfilade machine-gun fire is bad enough, but enfilade artillery fire is still harder to bear. You may at least charge the machine-guns, but you cannot charge the distant unseen powers hurling high-explosive shells into your flank.

The Borne de Cornouiller, or Hill 378, which I took pains to describe in a previous chapter, was now having its first of many innings at the expense of the Third Corps at its feet in the trough of the Meuse. This bald height on the other side of the river looked across the river bottoms and the rising valley walls to the heights of the whale-back. If the observers on the Borne de Cornouiller saw a target which their guns could not reach, they signaled its location to the whale-back, which might have it in range; and the observers of the whale-back were responsively courteous. This accounted for the cross artillery fire which for weeks was to knife our men of the Third Corps with the wickedness of assassin's thrusts in the ribs.

From Hill 378 the 80th Division's movement of troops, guns, and transport in the open was almost as visible through powerful glasses as people in the streets below from a church steeple. As the 33rd was already dug in and could advance no farther except by crossing the river, the 80th was convinced that it was receiving as a surplus the allotment from over the Meuse which otherwise might have been sent against the Illinois men. A measure of the increase of artillery fire is given in the Third Corps report, which estimates that the enemy sent 65,000 shells into its area on the 27th, compared to 5,000 on the 26th. Against this long-range fire the 80th's divisional artillery was as helpless as against falling meteors. The Blue Ridge men must endure the deluge with philosophic fatalism. Their own gunners could only give them barrages, and concentrate on machine-gun nests and such field battery positions as were located.

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The deadly accuracy of the enemy's artillery fire, its wide distribution, blasting holes in the roads, loosing on infantry as it deployed, on convoys of artillery ammunition, and raking our front-line positions, only made it more important that the next attack should be well delivered and in force. So it was. At one in the afternoon, under the barrage of their artillery, trench mortars, and machine-guns which they had forced through to the front, the Blue Ridge men, with a dash worthy of the traditions of their fathers in the Civil War, gained their objectives, except on the left, where the 4th Division was having troubles of its own of a kind which the 80th could fully appreciate.

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Though in the second belt of woods, the 80th was not yet to be squeezed out. There was Briuelles to be taken yet, and the German reinforcements which were rapidly arriving required more attention than the other divisions of the Corps could spare from their own fronts. The German command decided that it was time that these Americans had a taste of offensive tactics themselves. Fresh German troops, advancing from Briuelles on the third morning, delivered a sharp counter-attack; but the Blue Ridge men had no patience with any attempt to drive them back from the ground they had won. They were of the "sticking" kind, as their forefathers had been. It was a joyous business, repulsing that counter-attack to the accompaniment of such yells as Union soldiers associated with Confederate ferocity. It was enlightening, too, in that it showed both them and their adversaries what a difference there is between charging machine-guns and



using them to stop a charge.

This incident of the German counter-attack—and the Blue Ridge men made it an incident—was a fillip for the defenders as they sprang up for their own attack, which began at 7.15, soon after the Germans were in flight. The object was to advance the left flank, which had been held up the preceding day, into Briouilles. The 80th's artillery concentrated on hills 227 and 281, which commanded the town, and the town itself, which is at a sharp bend of the river. It happened that the Germans were even more interested in holding Briouilles than on the preceding day. The low ground around it held a semi-circle of machine-gun positions. While the long-range artillery fire from flanking heights was heavier than before on the 80th's area, German field-guns on the other side of the river from Briouilles had the special mission of protecting the town. [160]

From the start the fighting was furious and at close quarters. The 80th made some headway in the morning, re-formed, and renewed its effort in the afternoon. Again and again parties attempted to rush the crest of 281, which not only commanded the town but was linked up with the town and the river bend in the tactical defense of the whale-back, which, after the taking of Montfaucon, the Fifth Corps was approaching in front. The ground before Briouilles was impassable. The valor of tired men had done all it could under sniping of machine-guns and all calibers of artillery. Before we could take Briouilles, we must have more guns and develop a better method of approach. In holding it the Germans might find some compensation for the loss of an engineer dump, estimated to be worth millions, which the 80th had taken. [161]

Sent in for one day's fighting, the division had fought for three days. Now it was withdrawn according to the original plan; but this did not mean that it was to go into rest. It was dog-weary, though not exhausted. When a brigade from the 33rd, which had been busy fortifying the river bank and sending patrols across the river, and generally keeping its irrepressible hand in, took over the 80th's front, the 80th's artillery was kept in the sector, one infantry regiment remained with the 4th in action, and the other three regiments were marched away as reserves for the 37th Division, which, after throwing in all its strength in conquering the deep Montfaucon Wood, was expecting a counter-attack by the enemy to recover a position which was vital in that area to his defense of the whale-back. As we had kept him too busy with our attacks for the counter-attack to materialize, the three regiments of the 80th had only the experience of that marching and counter-marching by which alarms and changing dispositions wear out shoe-leather and patience in the course of a mighty battle. The Blue Ridge men had advanced six miles, taking 850 prisoners and 16 guns, with a loss of 1,064 men in killed and wounded, as the introductory part of the service which they were to perform in the Meuse-Argonne. [162]

As the one regular division in line, the tried 4th, on the left of the Third Corps, would hardly be given the short end of the stick. There was no road in its sector. Once its transport was across the trench system, it had to switch back from the sector of the neighboring 79th Division to its own. This was a handicap characteristic of the stern problem of the 4th, which, if it failed, would set a bad example for inexperienced divisions.

Being forewarned of what was expected of his regulars, General Hines was forearmed in his prevision. Recognizing the miserable character of the Esnes-Malancourt road which the division was to use, the engineers of the 4th began work on its improvement early in the evening of the 25th before the battle began. In common with the two other divisions of the Corps, the 4th had to cross the Forges brook. Its left flank, in *liaison* with the 79th, faced the height of Cuisy, which was a flanking approach to the Montfaucon heights, and its right the practically continuous system of woods which joined up with those in front of the 80th. Thus it was a link between the swinging movement to the Meuse and the main drive, the mission of its left being to help force the evacuation of Montfaucon, and of its right to occupy the bank of the Meuse from Briouilles north to Sassey. [163]

The whole command was keyed up to great things when with a yell the men went over the top in the thick mist on the morning of the 26th. If not regular in the old sense, they took pride in being professional in skill, though most of the young officers, as in other regular divisions, were from the training camps. They did not belong to any part of the country. They were not National Guard or National Army, but just fighting soldiers who belonged to all America. Discipline was strict in this division. Its spirit of corps was in the conviction of its rigid efficiency. With hardly a waver in its methodical progress it had reached the Corps objective by 12.30. There it dug in, waiting until 5.30 for the division on its left, which was the keystone of the movement, to come up. Then the men rose again and went forward without any artillery support, only to meet what the divisions right and left were meeting in the rapidly stiffening German machine-gun defense, and to call for shields against murderous odds.

In their road-making across the brook and the trench systems the engineers had used 40,000 sand-bags. Early in the afternoon they had a passageway which permitted of the slow passage of transport between intervals of filling in the ruts cut by the heavy trucks; but two divisions, in the section of the line where the farthest advance was expected, were limited to road facilities inadequate for one. It can only be said that if it had not been for the diligence of the engineers the situation would have been even worse. [164]

The failure of the center to reach Montfaucon on the 26th had an intimate concern with the plans of the 4th the next day, when the positive orders for its capture required that the 4th should attack without its artillery, which was still laboring to get forward. From 7.30 until darkness, without their shields against the increasing artillery and machine-gun fire, the men continued their workmanlike advance. Didn't they belong to the 4th, which was as good as the 1st, 2nd, or 3rd, Regulars? When night came they had behind them the heights around Montfaucon. They had

gone through Briouilles Wood. They were also in the south edge of the Fays Wood, but when they tried to dig in there the machine-gun and shell-fire was too deadly to be endured. They had to fall back to the slope of 295.

Still their artillery was not up; still the order was to attack; and they attacked the next morning. The Germans attacked also; and were held. We were now against the strong covering positions on the slopes of the summit of the whale-back, where the Germans were organizing their Kriemhilde main line of defense. During the remaining days of September, the 4th cleaned up the Briouilles Wood, made itself secure in its defenses, and kept harassing the enemy with patrols. On the night of the 28th its artillery had arrived, though traffic congestion limited its ammunition supply, which it needed in great quantities to counter the enemy's artillery fire as well as his machine-gun nests. It was in range of many of the guns from the east bank of the Meuse which were so mercilessly harassing the 80th, and of course was receiving an immense volume of shells from all the heights of the whale-back. The division was short of supplies and it was tired, but there could be no thought of taking it out. It was to remain in line in a tug-of-war with the enemy until it took part in the general attack of October 4th, being all the while under that raking cross artillery fire that made the Corps sector a hell night and day. [165]

Contemptuous in their security, the observers from Hill 378, the Borne de Cornouiller, continued to exchange notes with the observers on the heights of the whale-back, as they looked down on the amphitheater, peering for targets into the wrinkles of the uneven landscape and soaking the woods which we occupied with gas. Our only hope of protection was to find ravines deep enough or with walls steep enough to enable us to dig pits which could not be reached by the plunging fire from three directions. These German gunners knew the roads which we must take at night in order to move our supplies to the front; the villages where our transport might halt; and the location or probable location of our batteries, while theirs were hidden. If we wheeled to attack to the right or left, we received shells in the back as well as in front. The first day of the battle, when the Corps had fired 80,000 shells against the Germans' 5,000, became the mockery of a halcyon past in face of the concentrations which now pounded the Corps from sources to which we could not respond with anything like equivalent power. [166]

If the men of the Corps who had to endure this plunging fire had heard the name of the Borne de Cornouiller, they would probably have called it "Corned Willy," the sobriquet which naturally came to the lips of our soldiers, who eventually conquered it on rations of cold corned beef. But they knew only that shells were coming from three quarters of the compass, while they asked "why in ——" our artillery did not silence the German artillery. The answer was that our artillery could not, until the Borne de Cornouiller and the whale-back were taken, which was not to be for another month. The Third Corps was to keep on trying for that town of Briouilles, while it kept on fighting in that wicked river trough, to support the attacks in the center. There was no use of growling. The thing had to be borne. [167]

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## XI BY THE LEFT

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German comfort in the Forest retreats—The 77th see-sawing through—The 28th plowing down the trough of the Aire—Scaling the escarpments of the Chêne Tondu and Taille l'Abbé—An enemy counter-attack—The 35th pushing four miles down the east wall of the Aire—Pushing through an alley to the untenable position of Exermont—Unjust reflections on the persistence of the 35th.

On the left flank the First Corps, composed of the 77th, 28th, and 35th Divisions, was having quite as hard fighting as the Third Corps on the right flank. The regiment of the 92nd Division (colored), National Army, forming the link with the French on the western edge of the Argonne Forest, buffeted in its inexperience by the intricacies of attack through the maze of trenches, was withdrawn after its initial service. It was better that the 77th should take its place in meeting the baffling requirements of *liaison* between two Allied armies.

In the trench system before the Forest, the "Liberty" men of the 77th met comparatively slight resistance, their chief trouble being to maintain the uniformity of their advance through the fortifications and across the shell-craters, over the tricky ground of sharp ridges and gullies littered with torn tree-trunks and limbs. The division staff had in vain sought opportunities for flanking maneuvers. A straight frontal attack must be made. "There's the Forest. Go through it!" paraphrases the simple orders of the division commander. This put the responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the young platoon and company commanders. They knew that they could depend upon one thing. There was nothing but forest ahead of them. They need not concern themselves with any open fields, though they would have their share of swamps and ravines, which would not lessen the difficulty of keeping their units in line through the thickets. [169]

If the French "scaloping" on the left of the Forest, and the 28th Division "scaloping" on the right of the Forest, did not drive in their protecting wedges, a cross-fire would hold the 77th's flanks back while its center, driving ahead, would be caught between the infantry and machine-gun fire from the Germans on either flank. If the French and the 28th fully succeeded in their mission, then, as we already know, all the 77th would have to do would be to "mop up" any Germans who

failed to withdraw in time from the pressure on either side. According to this plan the 77th was to have an easy time. The plan failing to work out, the 77th had anything but an easy time.

The Forest was held, as it frequently had been, I understand, by Landwehr troops. Some of the old fellows, who were not sturdy enough for real warfare, had spent months and even years there. They considered that they had the squatter right of occupation to the Argonne. There were theaters, rest camps, and well-appointed hospitals, with enough *verboten* signs along the paths to alleviate homesickness in a foreign land. Isolated in their peaceful solitude, where they could be cool in summer and comfortable in winter, they took the interest in adding to the comforts of their sylvan surroundings of a city man in his new place in the country. Positive artistry was achieved in the camp of the German commanding general. The walls of his office and sitting-room were wainscoted, with a snug ante-room where orderlies might attend and messengers might wait. The heating arrangements literally afforded hot water at all hours. A spacious dining-room was supplied from a commodious kitchen. If the French began putting over heavy shells, interrupting the German officers at their chess game or in reading the Cologne *Gazette*, it was only a few steps to a stairway that led to an electric-lighted chamber so deep in the earth that it was perfectly safe from a direct hit by the largest calibers. [170]

All the headquarters and camps were under canopies of foliage which screened them from aerial detection. Battalions come here from the death and filth and misery of violent sectors settled down to a holiday existence in an environment associated with a vacation woods. Of course there was a war in progress, but they knew it only through sending out detachments to keep watch and maintain the trenches in repair. The Landwehr men saw enough shell-bursts to say that they had been under fire. Indeed, one was occasionally wounded. There was no need of trench raids for information in a mutually accepted stalemate. To fire more than enough shells to keep up the postures of war might bring retaliation which would interfere with smoking your pipe and drinking your beer at leisure. [171]

After this pacific routine had been long established and so much effort and pains had been spent in improvements, appeared these outsiders of the Liberty Division in the rude haste that they might show in a subway station at home. They had no respect for the traditional privacy of a gentleman's country estate. However, the irritated occupants were no passive resistants. They had thought out in precise terms how they would defend their fastness against any such outrageous lawlessness. They knew every road and path, and how to make use of their ideal woodland cover. They might not be strong in the front line, but as the military men say they were "echeloned deep." [172]

There was no line of resistance in the first stages of the advance, but many successive points of resistance, ready to receive the invader in turn, punishing him severely in his slow progress if he were not repulsed. But even they in their chosen positions, covering avenues where the foliage was not dense, could not see far. This developed close-quarters fighting from the start.

As the Germans had particularly depended upon light railways in the Argonne, the roads, except transversal ones, had been neglected. This did not matter, so far as it concerned bringing up the artillery. There was no maneuvering artillery in the thick woods. Even if there had been, it could not get any angle of fire for shells which would burst short of their targets against tree-trunks. It was exclusively an infantry fight except for the machine-guns and the baby *soixante-quinze* or 37-millimeter guns, in which the heads of the Americans bobbed through the thickets in search of the hidden heads of the defenders. A platoon commander might not keep watch of his own men in the maze—let alone see what the platoons on his flank were doing.

On the first day the 77th had practically reached its objectives, on the second it was to suffer the same loss of momentum as other divisions. The "scaloping" on the edges of the Forest, however [173] valourous, could not keep up to schedule. If the Forest boundaries had been straight lines on a plain, the result might have been different. *Liaison* over the escarpments in the valley of the Aire and the hills and ravines on the left became a nightmare. Still the orders were "Push ahead!" to battalions or companies which were not up. If under this spur they advanced beyond their flanks, then the flanks were to "push ahead!" Thus in a process of see-sawing platoons and companies continued to make progress. The units in the middle of the Forest saw nothing but trees and underbrush. All the world was forest to them. Those who found themselves on the edge looked out on stretches of the great battlefield under puffs of shell smoke, and to the going and coming of aeroplanes in another world, and possibly were forced to seek shelter in the Forest by bursts of machine-gun fire to which they were exposed from other divisional sectors.

So it was not surprising that the men of the 77th, immersed in the Forest depths, should think that they were fighting the whole battle. They knew nothing of the "scaloping" tactics. Their horizon was confined to a few square yards. To them the Argonne had no appeal of a holiday woods. Sylvan glades, which the poet might admire, meant stumbling down one side and crawling up the other, with ears keen for the whipping sound which might signify that they were [174] in an ambush. They might not stop in for a nap at the rest-camps. They were not sleeping in those beautiful wainscoted quarters, but on the dank ground in the deep shadow of the trees which kept the sunlight from slaking moisture after the rains. The rolling kitchens were held up in the rear where the trucks cut deep in the saturated woodland earth, and hurdled over tree-trunks between sloughs, while the Forest made the darkness all the more trying as the weary engineers endeavored to hold up their end.

The infantry continued its valiant and persistent see-sawing. On the 29th they made a big swing on the right, and on the left took a *dépôt de machines*, or roundhouse, and the treacherous ravine south of Binarville in which it was situated, by hard and audacious fighting. On the 30th the

whole line again made progress, against machine-gunners who had cunningly prepared paths to give them visibility for a greater distance, and to draw the attackers into the line of their fire. They charged down the slopes of the Charlevaux ravine and its irregular branches, across the streams and swamps at their bottoms, and up the slopes on the other side—all this through woods and thickets, of course. The next day an even deeper advance was made over very irregular ground, while the right in triumphant ardor pressed forward, ahead of the left and center, across the Fontaine-aux-Charmes ravine and its branches and their streams until it was past the heights of the Chêne Tondu. As the Chêne Tondu was not yet wholly in the possession of the division on the right, the gallant victors deserved something better in their weariness than to be forced to retire by overwhelming fire in flank and rear from the commanding heights. The night of October 1st the "Liberty" men, after six days in which they had steadily advanced for a depth of six miles, held the line from the Chêne Tondu across the Forest to a point north of Binarville, its supporting flanks on either edge of the Forest in a deadlock.

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There was forest and still more forest ahead of the 77th. After it had conquered the Argonne, it might have a chance to take the Bourgogne Wood beyond on the way to the Lille-Metz railway. After this experience the New Yorkers ought not to be afraid to go into Central Park after dark when they returned home.

They may have thought that the 28th on their right was not keeping up to program, and the 28th may have thought that they were not; but neither had the advantage that I had of seeing the other in action during those terrible days. Astride the Aire river, having the trough as its very own, the 28th put a heart of iron into its first impact, and tempered it to steel in its succeeding attacks. The "scalloping" process which was its mission looked just as simple on a flat map as the swing toward the Meuse of the 33rd; but then, everything looked simple on the map, and everything for all the divisions might have been as simple as it looked if it had not been for the enemy. He was always interfering with our staff plans. If the Aire's course had been straight, and the valley walls had come down symmetrically to the river bottom, the 28th would have had straight open fighting, which is a satisfaction to brave men whatever the cost. A direct frontal attack was as out of the question for the Pennsylvanians as it was mandatory for the 77th. They must exhibit suppleness and cunning, or bull-dog grit was of no service.

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In full realization that the true defense of the Forest was on its flanks, the enemy developed strong resistance in front of the 28th on the first day. The Perrières Hill, a bastion in the first line of defense, honeycombed with machine-gun emplacements, held up the attack on the left as it swept its fire over the trench system on either side, covering the steep approaches for its capture which were studded with shell-craters and festooned with tangles of wire. The enemy also set store by the ruins of the town of Varennes in the valley, which were to become so familiar to all the soldiers who ever passed along the Aire road. At Varennes the road crosses the river in sight of the surrounding congeries of hills. Under cover of the ruins and the river banks the Germans had both seventy-sevens and machine-guns, which, well-placed as they were, failed of their purpose. It was now evident that the enemy would strive to hold every height on either side of the Aire with the object of grinding our attacks between the molars of two powerful jaws.

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For the German map plan was as simple as ours. It invited our initiative into the open throat of the valley and into blind alleys between the heights blazing with fire. The 28th was to interfere with the German plan just as the Germans were to interfere with the American. Plans did not seem to count. Nothing counted except tactical resource and courage in the face of shells which came screaming and bullets whistling from crests in sight and crests out of sight. Woods fighting was only an incident of the problem for the 28th, which took La Forge on the edge of Montblainville, only to find that the machine-guns in the Bouzon Wood on the west wall had an open field for their fire from three quarters of the compass.

The disadvantage of the 28th's sector from the start was that there was no screen of foliage to cover a deployment before a charge. On the night of the 26th the battalion which had been held up by the Perrières Hill was marched round, to carry out the plan of "scalloping," for an attack on the Chêne Tondu, which was an escarpment projecting out of the Forest into the valley of the Aire north of Montblainville, like a wood-covered promontory into a strait. It commanded the whole river valley and the Forest edge on its front. Its slopes were irregular, with every irregularity seeming to favor the defender, who at every point looked down-hill upon the attacker. Behind it was another escarpment, even stronger, the Taille l'Abbé. Between the two the enemy had ample wooded space for moving his reserves and artillery free from observation. Should the Chêne Tondu be lost, the enemy had only to withdraw with punishing rearguard fire to this second bastion. On the reverse slope of the Taille l'Abbé were hospitals, comfortable officers' quarters, and dugouts, while the artillery in position there could shoot over the Chêne Tondu with plunging fire upon its approaches. Along the heights of the Forest edge and other heights to the rear, other guns, as many as the Germans could spare for the sector, might find perfect camouflage and security.

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There were also the heights of the east bank of the Aire to consider. With the river winding past their feet they interlocked across the valley. Thus advancing down the valley meant advancing against heights in front as well as on the flanks. Stretching back to the whale-back itself beyond the heights of the east bank were other heights, even more commanding, whose reverse slopes offered the same kind of inviting cover for long-range artillery as the reverse slopes on the west bank. If a height on one bank were not taken at the same time as the corresponding height on the other, this meant murderous exposure for the men in the attack that succeeded. Therefore, thrifty and fruitful success required a uniformity of movement by the three divisions of the First Corps in conquering the heights of both banks of the Aire and of the Forest's edge.

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For the 28th the taking of the Chêne Tondeu was the keystone of the advance. Until it had this height, the 28th could not support the movement of the 77th in the Forest or of the 35th on the east bank of the Aire. The Germans had concentrated their immediate reserves on the Chêne Tondeu, and their guns on its supporting heights.

If the German staff had planned the woods in front of the main slopes of Chêne Tondeu, they could hardly have been in a better location for affording invisibility to machine-gun nests against a visible foe. To have taken the Chêne Tondeu by one fell rush, as our staff desired, might have been possible through sheer weight of man-power by the mustering of all the division's infantry against one sector of its front, supported by the artillery of two or three divisions with unlimited ammunition. The artillery of the 28th was not up. It was having the same trouble about roads as the artillery of other divisions. When the officers of the 28th scouted the avenues of approach in order to maneuver their infantry units economically, they found none which would not require that we charge across open and rising ground against an enemy whose strength our men were to learn by "feeling it" in an attack without adequate shields into concentrations of shell- and machine-gun fire which became the more powerful the more ground they gained.

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Availing themselves of every possible opening where the enemy's fire was relatively weak, they forced their way into the village of Apremont in the valley. As soon as this success was known to him, the enemy made up for any neglect in prevision by bringing guns and machine-guns into position to command the village. Wherever the Pennsylvanians made a thrust, if a savage reception were not primed awaiting them, one was soon arranged. Their maneuvers were further hampered by the bends of an unfordable river, which a direct attack for any great depth would have to cross and recross under the interlocking fire. Troops on the narrow river bottom were visible as flies on a wall. Every hour German resistance was strengthening in the Aire sector as in other vital sectors along the front.

Their guns up, the division attacked the Chêne Tondeu a second time in the vigor of renewed confidence and in the light of the knowledge they had gained of the enemy's dispositions. They won a footing; and then attacked again. Their effort now became incessant in trying to make more bites at close quarters, as they struggled for complete mastery. The Germans infiltrated back between our units, and we infiltrated forward between theirs. We might think that we had possession of ground over a certain portion of front, only to find that our efforts to "mop up" were thwarted. With Chêne Tondeu partly conquered in the search for advantage in maneuver, we moved on the Taille l'Abbé in flank; and there we found the Germans, thanks to their fresh reserves, in irresistible force. They were firing prodigal quantities of gas-shells wherever our men took cover in any stretch of woods they had conquered.

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The 35th on the east bank of the Aire was meeting with deadly opposition which held it back, as we shall see when its story is told. Maintaining *liaison* on the heights of the east bank with the 28th astride the river was fraught with the same elements of confusion as with the 77th in the monstrous irregularity of the escarpments on the Forest's edge. To which division belonged the khaki figures breaking out of a ravine in an effort to rush a machine-gun nest which held them at its mercy? One thing was certain: they must either advance or retreat. Under the whip of impulse as well as orders they tried to advance. Messages exchanged between neighboring division headquarters, under the pressure of the Corps command to get ahead, were dependent upon reports long in coming out of the recesses of the woods. Each division staff in its faith in the courage of its men, who were fighting on their nerves after sleepless nights, insisted that it was doing its part and would be up—and that, by God! it was up.

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The possession of the Aire heights was all important to the Army command, still undaunted in its ambition for the immediate conquest of the whale-back in those fateful days at the end of September. On the 29th two Leavenworth men from Grand Headquarters itself—while two regular colonels were sent to regiments—were put in command of the brigades of the 28th. One of the colonels was killed before he took over his command, and the other later in leading a charge. On the 30th the division was to make another general attack, supported by all available artillery and tanks; but a few minutes before the infantry were to charge, the Germans developed a counter-attack in force. Their troops were middle-aged Landwehr men, who made up in spirit what they lacked in youth. They had been told that theirs was the opportunity to help the Fatherland in a critical moment against these untrained Americans. The courage with which they persisted in their charge was worthy of a better cause. It recalled the freshness and abandon of German volunteers in the first battle of Ypres. Our infantry, already in line to advance over the same ground as the counter-attack, received it with a merciless fire which its ranks kept breasting in fruitless sacrifice. Our tanks, waiting to move forward with our infantry at the moment set for our own attack, carried out their program and literally rolled over many of the survivors of the charge in which our youth had learned some respect for age. Our attack was countermanded, and the next day was October 1st, which was to mark another period of the battle, as I have said.

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It had been a good policy in more senses than one to send regulars to take command of the brigades of the 28th. Assigned for the purpose of seeing that the division "pushed ahead," when they looked over the situation their conclusions were a supreme professional tribute to the magnificent persistence of the Pennsylvanians, who had already earned the sobriquet of the Iron Division in place of that of the Keystone Division. Short of food, without sleep, saturated by rain and gas, the men of the 28th had won their gains with superb and tireless initiative, and held them with grim tenacity. In a burning fever of loyal effort, their vitality had been ungrudgingly expended. They staggered from fatigue when they rose to charge. Not only was all the area of advance under shell-fire, but that road through Varennes which both the 28th and the 35th were

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using was exposed to ruthless and well-calculated blasts from many guns, disrupting communications and further delaying the congested transport. The new brigade commanders, with staff school education and staff experience, as became practical men when face to face with nerve and physical strain which put limitations of human endurance upon the will of the high command, accepted their lesson, which they applied by withdrawing units to give them rest, and having the units remaining in front "dig in," while processes of reorganization accompanied a phase of recuperation during the coming lull in the battle.

The same devoted offering of strong and willing men in the flush of aggressive manhood by the Kansans and Missourians of the 35th, on the left of the 28th, which had the heaviest casualty list of any division from September 26th to October 1st, was not to have the good fortune of such understanding direction. Kansas and Missouri took all their pride as well as their natural courage and hardihood into this battle. Their left flank was from the first on the heights to the east of the Aire in full view of the Forest edge and its escarpments. On the right they were swinging toward the heights west of Montfaucon. The particularly dense fog hugging the ground on their front in the first hour of their advance made the *liaison* between the battalions difficult from the start. The two formidable heights of Vauquois hill and the Rossignol Wood were masked by troops sweeping speedily by them on either side in brilliant fashion, and left to the battalions detailed for the purpose, which cleaned them up with thoroughgoing alacrity. Meanwhile the frontal line drove ahead against machine-gun fire in front and flanking artillery fire from the right until it was in the vicinity of Cheppy. [185]

As we already know, there had been trouble immediately in Varennes, where the 35th was linked with the 28th. The 35th received both shells and machine-gun fire from the high ground of the town and from the heights which were firing down on the 28th. Both division reports speak of having taken Varennes, which is well spread on the river banks. There was room enough for the troops of both to operate, with plenty of work for both to do before their common efforts had cleared the ruins of their infestuous occupants. The tanks also had a part in this success. Wherever there was anything like favorable ground in that irregular landscape, they did valuable service; and they tried to pass through woods and across ravines which only sublime audacity would have attempted—and sometimes they succeeded. Their visibility at short range to the numerous enemy batteries made any part in the battle by them seem suicidal. [186]

The formation for the attack was by brigades in column: that is, one of the two brigades in reserve behind the other that took the lead. On that first day, when a regiment of the frontal brigade was stopped by casualties, another was sent through it. The plan was to crowd in the eager men. It was their first big fight. They had impatiently trained for this chance. The individualism of these stalwart high-strung Middle Westerners was allowed full rein. To them a fight meant that you did not give the enemy any time to think; you forced the issue with smashing rights and vicious uppercuts at the start, a robust constitution receiving cheerfully and stoically any punishment inflicted as you sought a knockout.

Therefore flanking fire was only a call to pressing the enemy harder and having the business the sooner finished. There was no waiting for guns to come up, as Cheppy on the right was taken soon after Varennes on the left. Losses, particularly of senior officers, were becoming serious by this time; units, though scattered and intermingled in the fog, only wanted direction to go on. Having been reorganized and being supported by fresh battalions, the advance continued. By night the 35th's left was well north of Varennes, its right near Véry, and the approaches to Charpentry had been gained. On that first day the 35th, fighting against flanking and frontal artillery and machine-gun fire, had made four miles in mastering the east bank of the trough of the Aire; but it had paid a price which was a tragic if splendid tribute to the courageous initiative of its men. The artillerists were working hectically to bridge the little streams for their pieces; that one-way bridge which two divisions were trying to use through Varennes congested the other traffic. According to the division report, instead of proper rations for the troops, there was an issue of fresh meat and vegetables with no means for cooking. [187]

The divisional artillery was expected to be up by eight o'clock on the morning of the 27th to renew the attack, but higher authority could not wait on its support. In full realization of the strength of the enemy's artillery, Corps orders to advance at 5 A.M. must be obeyed, with only one battalion of light guns to protect the men in an endeavor that must be far more costly than yesterday's. The Kansans and Missourians were of the stock that can fight to a finish; and they were expected to fight to a finish. The 70th Brigade, whose units had already been engaged and had been all day under more or less fire and advancing behind the 69th, was put in front, with the 69th in close reserve, ready to take up the battle when the 70th had suffered too heavily. [188]

Overnight the enemy had reinforced the commanding position of Charpentry, which was the keypoint of his line of defense against the 35th. It sent down gusts of machine-gun fire while the increased enemy artillery on both flanks played on the open fields of advance, where, after the attack slowed down, the men continued to spring up and charge, in the hope that they had found an opening, only to be met with machine-gun fire from unexpected quarters. Tanks having been brought up and reorganization effected, another general rush was made, which aroused such a torrent of fire that the infantry, without their shields for advance, could only seek what protection they could dig or find in gullies behind banks or in shell-holes.

The artillery, which had worked ceaselessly all night and day to get forward, was now arriving, and with its support a new advance, which crowded in more troops, was undertaken at 5.30 in the afternoon. The artillery silenced some of the machine-gun nests, though it could not reach the enemy battery positions; but by the grace of their undaunted determination and energy the Kansans and Missourians took both Charpentry and the town of Baulny. In the darkness some [189]

daring units pressed through the Montrebeau Wood, while the main line dug in near Baulny to secure what protection it could from the shells whose flashes illumined vigorous spading, which had an incentive in the vicious singing of the fragments.

It had been another costly day, and the night that followed was ghastly for the wounded. They were gathered from the field under incessant bursts of machine-gun fire; and when they were brought in, the crowded roads made their evacuation horribly slow. The struggle to force ammunition and supplies forward over the main road did not relax in the area behind the troops, where all through the night the German artillery, which had the approaches to Charpentry and Baulny perfectly registered, kept up a fire shrewdly calculated to block a movement every time it started.

All the artillery was now up to support the troops being re-formed for another attack at daybreak, which was preceded by a counter-attack of the enemy which was promptly repulsed. More open spaces than yesterday must be crossed in full view of the enfilading batteries, particularly those firing from the west bank of the Aire. Ground was gained all along the front: ground important for the terrible day's work that was to follow. While the wounded, suffering from exposure, were walking back or being carried back across the shelled fields and along the shelled roads, the survivors must spend the night in leaving nothing undone to insure the success of the next morning's attack, which was to capitalize every atom of vitality remaining in this hard-driven division. Again the men were short of regular rations; and the fresh beef and vegetables which were again forced upon them could not be cooked. It was raw fighting, indeed, on raw meat and raw potatoes which was expected of the 35th. Incidentally the divisional transport was short fourteen hundred horses.

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The loss of officers in their gallant exposure to keep up the *liaison* of the units had continued severe. For this reason alone the 35th, which was having its first battle experience, was unprepared for a far less onerous task than that now assigned it. With nerve strength in place of physical strength, with will in place of adequate organization, the division was sent into a veritable alley, which could be swept by artillery fire from the Forest edge across the Aire as well as from the other flank and in front. The instant the attack began, the enemy guns concentrated with a pitiless accuracy and a volume of fire completely surpassing that of the other days. In places the advance was literally blasted to a standstill.

The village of Exermont which was the main goal was mercilessly exposed in that ravine where the enemy shell-fire had the play of a cataract through a gorge. Some men actually reached the village, but they could not remain there alive. Groups charging for what seemed cover only ran into more shell-bursts. The dead and wounded lay in "bunches" under the continuing blasts which disrupted organization, while officers in trying to restore it sacrificed themselves. There was no want of courage; but the division was undertaking the impossible. Every spurt of initiative was as futile as thrusting a finger into a stove door. Confused orders were further confused in transmission.

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When night of the 29th came, there was nothing to do but for the 35th to withdraw, for lack of any means of supporting them, its exposed units from Montrebeau Wood and Exermont. The ravine could not be held until the guns commanding it were silenced and fresh troops in numbers were summoned. A willing horse had been driven to its death. The 35th's units had been crowded into the front line until the only reserves it had were men too exhausted from fighting to move. On the 30th a defensive position was organized. A battalion of the 82nd Division, brought up with a view to renewing the attack, met a killing barrage which warned commanders that advancing one fresh battalion was only throwing more cannon-fodder into the ravine.

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Throughout the 30th the men of the 35th held their ground under continuous artillery fire, which could not keep many from falling asleep in their exhaustion; but they were awakened to retributive zeal by two German counter-attacks, their marksmanship being a warning to the enemy that though they had not the strength to advance they still knew how to shoot. On the night of the 30th the 35th was relieved by the veteran 1st Division. Gaunt and staggering, shadows of the sturdy figures which had advanced on the 26th, the survivors plodded back to rest billets, to find that in some quarters the view was held that the division had done badly. No more inconsiderate reflection upon brave men was ever engendered in the impulses of battle emotion, with its hasty judgment.

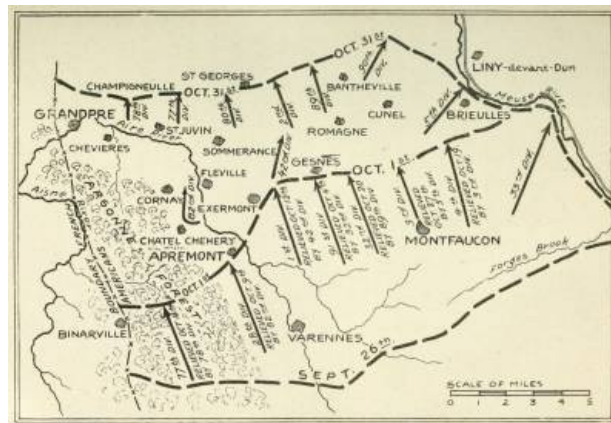
In an advance of over six miles the 35th had suffered 6,312 casualties. Nearly half of its infantry was dead on the field or in hospital. The other half was in a coma from fatigue. Every rod gained had been won by fighting against fire as baffling as it was powerful. To say that the 35th fought for five days as a division is hardly doing it justice. A division may be said to be fighting when only one brigade is in line while the other is resting. All the men of the 35th were fighting. There were soldiers who did not have five hours' sleep in that period of unbroken battle strain in the midst of the dead and dying. Only the powerful physique of the men, with their store of reserve energy which they drew on to the last fraction, enabled them to bear it as long as they did. Their courage and endurance and dash performed a mighty service in a most critical sector. Instead of being the object of any ungenerous reflections by captious pedants or commanders who did not know how to command, after they had given their generous all they should have been welcomed with a warmth of praise in keeping with their proud and justifiable consciousness that they had done their red-blooded best.

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## XII BY THE CENTER

The wooded front of the Fifth Corps—Where the Germans discounted the chance of an attack—Particularly by a division that had never been under fire—The Pacific Coast men through the woods for a five-mile gain—And, its artillery up, keeps on for nearly as much more—Into a dangerous position which cannot be held—The "hand-made" attack of the Ohioans—Surprise carries them in a rush through the pathless woods—Three days of unsupported advance against counter-attacks—Open country for the advance of the 79th up the valley to Montfaucon—And open country beyond toward Nantillois and the whale-back—The 79th "expended."

Cameron's Fifth Corps, which made the central drive head on to the whale-back, relied, in mastering the distance it had to cover on the first day as the "bulge" of the Army movement, upon the freshness of its troops, whose inexperience would be only another incentive to hold up their end. No aspect of the plan of our command was more audacious or more thrilling than the decision to expend in one prodigious ruthless effort the energy of the 37th, 79th, and 91st Divisions and their impatience for action accumulated in their long period in training camps.



**MAP NO. 5  
DIVISIONS IN THE SECOND STAGE OF THE MEUSE-ARGONNE  
BATTLE, OCTOBER 1ST-31ST.**

It was in this that we defied accepted standards; in this that we carried to the seemingly quixotic limit our confidence in our ability to transform on short notice citizens into soldiers who would go bolt from the drill-ground into a charge that was to take an elaborate trench system as the prelude of from five to six miles of advance in the days of mobile interlocking machine-gun fire. Anyone who was surprised that they did not go as far as they were told to go on the first day had forgotten the power of modern weapons in defense, and was oblivious of the military significance of the ground which the Corps had to traverse.

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The right division, the 79th, had before it a comparatively woodless stretch following the Esnes-Montfaucon road among the hills to Montfaucon, but the other two divisions faced the German trenches at the edge of a deep belt, or rather mass, of woods as dense as the Argonne, which, though broken by only one open space of a breadth more marked than a roadway, had sectional names—Montfaucon, Véry, Béthincourt, Cheppy, Malancourt,—each taken from the name of the nearest neighboring town. The store which the Germans set by these woods had been shown by their stubborn resistance to the attacks of the French for their possession in 1915.

When the Germans detected—as they did despite our care—unusual activity on our roads in this sector during the later stages of our preparations, they made the raid of September 22nd, already mentioned, which took a man of the 79th prisoner; but evidently they did not learn from him of the presence of the other two divisions. German prisoners said that an Allied attack was expected along the whole front from Metz to Champagne, but that it would be limited to the front-line positions—a feint, to cover the offensive from Soissons to the Channel. Certainly the enemy had no thought that we would try to storm the woods on the first day. On September 18th a memorandum of the 1st German Guard Division, in occupation of this sector, said:

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It is unlikely that the enemy will direct his attack against the wooded territory in Sector K (Cheppy Wood) or against the neighboring sectors on our left. He would have to meet an unknown situation, and to advance through the heavy underbrush of the woods, which are totally secured from observation, would be very difficult....

It is only in the case of a deliberate offensive against the whole front of the Group or Army that there should be any retirement to the main line of resistance (the Lai Fuon ravine).

The main line of resistance must be held in any event.

The Lai Fuon ravine really bisected the woods transversally into two masses or belts. In describing the action of the Corps, which had the mission of taking the ravine and both sections

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of the woods, I shall begin with the 91st Division, National Army from the Pacific Slope, on the left. The 91st had never been in any except a practice trench, or heard a bullet or shell fired in battle, when it went into position for the attack. On its left was the 35th of the First Corps, and on its right the 37th of its own Fifth Corps. For artillery the 91st had that of the 33rd, and a battalion from the 82nd. The fact that the 33rd was also using borrowed artillery in its own attack is sufficiently indicative of the character of the hasty and heterogeneous mobilization of our unprepared army for the battle.

The Pacific Coast men had traveled far, clear across the Continent and across the Atlantic. Traveling was in their line. If distance had kept them from reaching the front as soon as some of the eastern divisions, noticeably those praised New Yorkers of the 77th, they would show that they could move fast and stick in the war to the end. The pioneer heritage was theirs; they were neighbors to Alaska, who looked toward Asia across the Pacific: big men who thought big and were used to doing big things. Their people depended upon them for great deeds worthy of their homes beyond the Great Divide. As the National Guard divisions from the Pacific Coast had had the misfortune, through sudden necessities when they were the only available men in depot, to be cut up for replacement, the men of the 91st had as an intact division a special responsibility in upholding the honor of the Coast. [198]

They had the stamina which their climate breeds. They were under no apprehension that their inexperience in battle would not enable them to take care of the Germans they met, once they were through the trenches and in the open. As men of the distances, they had imagination which applied all their training to the situations which they would have to encounter. No veterans ever went into action with more confidence than these draft men. The roar of the surf on Pacific beaches, of the car-wheels from the Coast to New York, of the steamship propellers across the Atlantic, was the song of their gathered energy suddenly released in a charge.

The wire on their front had not been well cut; but what might have been a justifiable cause for delay they overcame in an intrepidity of purpose supported by a team-play which prevented confusion of their units. Happily the prompt taking by the stalwart Kansans and Missourians of the Vauquois hill positions commanding the 91st's field of advance, which had been the object of the French attacks in 1915, removed a formidable threat on their left. The Germans, who had been told that a division which had never been under fire was on their front, had no thought that it would attempt a serious attack. They were accordingly the more unprepared for the avalanche of man-power which came rushing at them. Relatively few in numbers, waiting on the 5th Guard Division to come up in reserve, they had a painfully urgent desire to start to the rear and meet it on its way forward. [199]

If the uncut wire had made progress slow for the men of the 91st at the start, once these fast travelers were past the fortifications, they stretched their legs in earnest as they rushed through the thickets of the first belt, which in their sector was the Cheppy Wood, in a practically unbroken advance. When they came out in front of the Lai Fuon ravine, they had the "jump" on the enemy on their front. He had not the numbers to form up for a determined defense on that main line of resistance which he was supposed to hold in any event. The best he could do was a skilful rearguard action. Speedy as they were, the Pacific Coast men could not force the enemy, who surrendered or withdrew after bursts of machine-gun fire, to close with the bayonet, as they desired.

Having fought their way through the Véry Wood, the narrowing spur of the second belt, which extended only part way across their front, they had now open hilly country, for the most part, before them. The men were warmed up for their afternoon's work. As they continued to gather in prisoners, as they pressed steadily ahead against rearguard resistance, they maintained the *liaison* of their units admirably. By nightfall they had advanced nearly five miles. The Coast might well be proud of its sons in their first day's battle. [200]

They had been fortunate in preventing congestion of their transport, and their artillery was fast coming up in support when they attacked with unbroken vigor the next morning. They were to find, as all other divisions found, that the second day was a different kind of day from the first. As all their power was needed on the 27th to support the 37th Division in its attack for the ridges protecting Montfaucon, all four regiments were put into line, with orders to go as far as they could, regardless of whether or not their ardor carried them ahead of the other divisions into a salient. They drove the enemy out of the positions which he had taken up overnight, and continued their advance in repeated charges against his increasing resistance. Parties charged into the village of Epinonville several times, to receive a blistering cross-fire from positions in flank and rear, and from the Cierges Wood, where the German machine-gunners looked down upon all the streets and approaches of the village.

Though its flanks were still exposed, the 91st was told to go ahead the next day, the plan of the Army command, as we have seen, being to use all the fight there was in every division on the 28th, when our ambition still dared an immediate conquest of the whale-back after the taking of Montfaucon. Switching now to a two-regiment front, after fifteen minutes of preparation by the artillery, which was all in position, the Pacific Coast men again attacked on the third day, which, in turn, they were to find different from the second. While the guns kept moving forward and striving to lay down protecting barrages and to smash machine-gun nests, they made a mile and a half against resistance hourly becoming more vicious and determined, taking Epinonville and entering the Cierges Wood, which was to earn such a sinister reputation. [201]

Despite the general results of September 28th, which had somewhat dampened its ambition for a prompt decision, the Army command, now seeking to drive a wedge into the heights between the

Aire and whale-back in order to break the chain of its covering defenses, ordered the 91st to continue attacking on the 29th. The two regiments in the rear, which had had a little rest, passed through the two that had been exhausted by the hard work in front on the 28th. Two battalions of the engineers, whose indefatigability had kept the roads in shape, were sent into line. As we know, the engineers were never allowed to be idle. If they had nothing else to do, they could fight.

The morning advance drove its point beyond the Cierges Wood, but was checked by merciless fire from Cierges village on the right. Though the front was in a salient, still the orders were "at all costs" to "push ahead." At 3.40 that afternoon, after forty minutes' preparation by the artillery, which was keeping faithfully up to the infantry despite the weariness of horses and men, the right once more moved forward with a vigor that was amazing after the four days' strain, and succeeded in passing through Gesnes and in gaining a footing in Morine and Chêne Sec Woods on its left. Every rod farther meant an increase of overwhelming cross-fire. Either there must be support on the flanks from the adjoining divisions, or this tongue of men thrust into furious cross-fire must be withdrawn. Support could not be given. The 35th Division on the left was stopped in the shambles of the Exermont ravine, the 37th on the right was facing counter-attacks. Accordingly on the night of the 29th the 91st fell back to the front of the morning's gains. The 32nd, which was to have such hard fighting in re-taking the positions which the 91st had temporarily held, was to relieve it on October 4th. During the 30th the 91st organized defensive positions, and until October 4th held its ground under continuous artillery and machine-gun fire as well as harassing blasts of machine-gun bullets from low-flying enemy aeroplanes. Though the men were suffering from exposure and diarrhea, the whole division was not to be relieved. The 181st Brigade, under Brigadier-General John B. MacDonald, was assigned to the 1st and 32nd Divisions to take part in the greater effort of fresh troops to break the heights between the crest of the whale-back and the Aire, which was to be such a brilliant and costly exploit. The 91st had advanced for a depth of nearly eight miles, and held its gains for a depth of nearly seven miles. [202]

It might be said that the 37th Division had had, as National Guardsmen, a longer military experience than the other two divisions of the Corps, and some trench experience in a tranquil sector, which, however, was slight technical preparation for the offensive action which it was now to make. If ever there was a "hand-made" battle, it was that of the Ohio men. For artillery they had the brigade of the 30th Division, which, after five days' hard marching when it should have been brought by train, arrived with its men exhausted and its horses utterly so. There were no French guns to assist this tired artillery brigade, operating with a division with which it was associated for the first time. [203]

Ohio's predilection for politics is well-known; and it has even been said that her National Guardsmen took some interest in politics. The politics of September 26th was Republican-Democrat-Socialist politics,—all the political genius of Ohio, town and country, from the river to the lake, armed, trained, and resolute. I have no idea what part these soldiers will play in the future of Ohio elections; but I do know how they fought in the Meuse-Argonne. It is something that Ohio should not forget. [204]

Their rush through the trench system was soon over. Ahead was the full depth of nearly four miles of the Montfaucon woods which I have already described. The old trench system was partly in the midst of woodland wreckage, caused by long sieges of artillery fire, of the same character as that facing the 77th in the Argonne Forest. In its attack through the thickets the 37th was to have the assistance of no scalloping movement in forcing the enemy's withdrawal from its front.

I have already referred to the enemy's conviction that our "untrained" troops would not have the temerity to attempt an attack which comprised the taking of this deep belt of woods; and do not forget that half way through the belt, which it really divided into two sections, was the Lai Fuon ravine. Here, as our troops emerged to descend the hither and ascend the opposite slope, they would be in full view; and here, in the edge of the woods on the far slope, the Germans had long ago organized the positions for that main line of resistance which the enemy memorandum of September 18th had said must be held in any event,—which did not include, however, the event of a drive by the Ohio men of the same swiftness as that of the Pacific Coast men on their left. [205]

Had the 5th German Guard Division come up a little earlier, had the Germans had time to mass reserves for the defense of the ravine, it seems impossible that it could have been conquered without a siege operation. The value of taking an enemy by surprise and audaciously following up the surprise was singularly illustrated by the rushing tactics of the Ohio infantry, who cleared the whole depth of the woods on the first day. When they were halted, it was not for long. Theirs was no cautious policy. Their reserves, keeping close to the front line, were ready instantly to add their weight in the balance in charging any refractory machine-gun nests. The Germans never had time to form up for prolonged or effective resistance. Their familiarity with the woods made retreat behind the screen of underbrush the more inviting in face of the numerous figures in khaki which they saw swarming forward through the openings in the foliage. Instead of a determined stand on the Lai Fuon line, there was only a rearguard action, fitfully though never clumsily carried out by the veteran Prussians, in their injured pride at having to yield to the American novices.

With no thought except to keep on going, when the Ohioans emerged from the woods into the open, they pressed on toward the commanding positions of Montfaucon on their right. The fact that there was nothing like a practicable road for their transport through the woods behind them now developed a handicap which they appreciated keenly in their eager appetites and the thought of shields for the next days' attacks. Though tanks and artillery were of no service in the woods, they were needed now. The tanks assigned to assist the Ohioans as they came into the [206]

open did not arrive until the evening, when they were short of gasoline. The artillery, by the use of snatch ropes, managed to bring up one battalion of guns to the south of the ravine.

When rain began to fall, it made the woodland earth soft, hampering the efforts of the engineers, who themselves labored without food all the day and all through the night and all the next day without pause, as they dug and chopped away roots and cut saplings for corduroys in making a passage through that four-mile stretch of forest—and *forêt* it was though called a *bois*—which separated the fighters from their beleaguered supplies. Signal corps carts, so necessary to lay the wire for the communications which would enable the infantry to send in reports and receive orders promptly, and the small arms ammunition carts, which would keep soldiers who were without their shields from being without cartridges as well, were forced through by dint of an arduous persistence in answer to the urgency of the call. Rolling kitchens with warm meals could do no more rolling than if they were hotel kitchens. Ambulances had to wait at the edge of the forest for wounded brought three and four miles on stretchers or plodding on foot or hobbling on canes and crutches made from tree limbs.

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Was this division, with its artillery, its ammunition trucks, and all its supplies waiting upon a road through four miles of the forest whose time of completion was uncertain, to attack the next day after all the exertion of working its way through the forest? Of course. The Fifth Corps was supposed to take Montfaucon on the night of the 26th. Montfaucon must be taken on the 27th, and early, too, or the pencilings on the maps would be fatally behind ambitious objectives in the center. To the west of Montfaucon in small patches of woods and on crests were the positions of the *Völker Stellung*, which the Germans had plotted, though they had done no digging, for the defense of Montfaucon; but the lines where trenches were to be dug and the points machine-guns were to occupy had been carefully assigned. Therefore units of reserves as they arrived would know exactly where to go without loss of time. Naturally, we wanted to attack this position while it was still weakly held. For all the Ohio men knew, the enemy might have already concentrated there in force, when without their artillery, machine-guns, or trench mortars, uncertain even of a constant supply of small arms ammunition, they began their second day's action at the break of dawn. In swift charges the right overran the ridges, overwhelming German reserves, who were arriving too late, on their way forward. By 11 it had patrols in Montfaucon, and by 1.30 in the afternoon it had cleared the enemy from the cellars as well as from the steep and winding streets of the town, which were littered with the *débris* of buildings that had crumbled under shell-fire.

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Against the left brigade the Germans did not depend upon defensive tactics alone. Their reserves, more prompt in arriving than on the right, counter-attacked at 9 A.M. to stem the brigade's advance. There was a pitched battle, a conflict of charges, for a fierce half-hour; but the brigade, putting in the last of its reserves, won the mastery, and at 9.30 was in pursuit of the enemy. An hour later its advance elements, running a gamut of artillery and machine-gun fire, were in the village of Ivoiry. Now turning their attention to the conquest of Hill 256 beyond the town, which was lashing them with plunging machine-gun fire, storming parties finally swept over the crest; but their exposure to the blasts which the enemy promptly concentrated made their position untenable. With the left holding its gains after this slight withdrawal, the center advanced at 5.45 and took a strong and threatening position which made the victory of the day more secure. The line at dark was along the Ivoiry-Montfaucon road.

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After the exhaustion of fighting its way through the forest on the first day, the 37th had used every available man on the second day. The engineers had now made a road through the forest. This, being unequal to caring for all the transport in a steady flow, was the more inadequate owing to the delays due to the repair of sloughs, which were always appearing at some point in its four-mile length. Hungry infantrymen lying on the moist ground were wondering if they would ever have the strength to rise again. The prodigal, hasty crowding in of reserves which necessity required had exposed all the troops to the widespread artillery fire and the long-range sweep of bullets, which caused many casualties.

On the next day, the 28th, the Army command, as we know, was to call for a supreme effort all along the line. Despite the tireless labor of the gunners with their snatch ropes, most of the 37th's artillery was still stalled where it could be of no service. Without their shields the Ohio men again rose to the attack at seven on the morning of the 28th. In half an hour they had entered the Emont Wood on their left and the Beuge Wood on their right. They continued on toward the village of Cierges until the blasts of fire from the heights and woods of the whale-back, not only upon the elements in advance but upon those in support, forced them to take cover. They were now within a quarter of a mile of the Cierges-Nantillois road. Meanwhile the Germans had been filling Emont Wood with phosgene gas to such an extent that it became untenable. In another attack at 5.45 P.M. the Ohio men encircled the wood. By dark their outposts were just south of Cierges.

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Gettysburg did not last three full days, but any veterans who fought throughout that battle will have some idea of what the 37th Division as a whole had endured on September 26th, 27th, and 28th. The division commander reported lack of food and a "condition of almost collapse" among his men, which did not weaken the determination of Corps or Army to expend any energy remaining in the 37th in another effort on the next day to "crack" the chain of heights between the Aire and the whale-back. How fruitless this proved only makes the final effort of the 37th the more appealing. The Ohio men were willing; they were willing, after shivering on wet earth all night without blankets, as long as they had strength enough to stagger to their feet,—and they might have had more strength if they had had more food. There was only one relieving feature of their situation, so unfavorable from the first. A German water-point equal to supplying the whole division had been captured. There was enough to drink, if not enough to eat: that is, for such

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units as the water-carts could reach.

Yet Corps and Army thought the 37th ought to be very cheerful. Hadn't they been assigned, on the morning of the 28th, ten small tanks to assist them in taking Cierges? The tanks were moving gallantly along the western edge of Emont Wood until the German artillery, from the heights which had them in plain view, concluded that they had gone far enough, and put them out of action. Then the German artillery turned its undivided attention to assisting the German infantry, concentrating its volume upon any attempt of the Ohioans, whose brains and legs were numb from fatigue, to storm particularly murderous flanking machine-gun nests. Patrols, creeping up ravines and dodging bursts of shells, succeeded in entering Cierges. They could not be supported by the artillery, which was now up, as it had run out of ammunition. Thus our guns were silent when the enemy started a counter-attack beyond Cierges; but the vengeful and accurate fire of the infantry soon sent the survivors of the advancing German wave to cover. Later the artillery, having received some ammunition, when it had an aeroplane signal of the Germans massing for another counter-attack, scotched it promptly. If the Germans could not budge us, we could not budge them. Every time we showed our heads in any effort for another gain, we stirred up a hornet's nest of bullets and offered a fresh target for a storm of shell-bursts. [212]

Late in the afternoon word came from the 91st, asking coöperation from the 37th in a further advance to relieve pressure on the wedge it had driven past the fronts of its neighbors. The fact that the message was two hours in transit was sufficient comment on the state of communication between divisions which had extended themselves to the limit of their power. The Ohio men who were already intrenching might still be willing to charge, but it was the willingness of the spirit rather than of the flesh. Had every gun and machine-gun on their front there on the threshold of the whale-back been silenced, and had they been ordered to march another two miles over that rough ground, a majority would have dropped in their tracks from exhaustion. There was nothing to do but stick where they were. This was as easy as for logs of wood to lie in their places. They fell asleep over their spades, and the bursts of high-explosive shells which shook the earth did not waken them. All they asked of the world was rest and food. [213]

Remaining in a stationary line all the next day, they had recovered enough strength to march back when the 32nd Division relieved them on the night of the 30th. At the cost of 3,460 casualties their rushing tactics, keeping the jump on the enemy, had taken 1,120 prisoners and 23 guns. Fatigue and sickness from exposure, as well as casualties, had worn them down. If they had fought with less abandon of energy, with less resolute and vivid spirit, their casualties would have been much larger. From the first they had thrown in all their reserves; and to the end they had fought with all their numbers in order to overcome the handicaps of their mission.

On the right of the Fifth Corps the 79th Division, National Army from the Atlantic Coast—Pennsylvania, Maryland, and the District of Columbia—was to have its baptism of fire at the same time as the Pacific Coast men on the Corps left,—a baptism preparing it for its memorable service later in taking Hill 378, or the Borne de Cornouiller, on the east bank of the Meuse. In place of its own artillery brigade, which had not yet received its guns, it had three regiments, less six batteries, of the veteran artillery of the 32nd Division, and one regiment of that of the 41st Division, National Guard from the Pacific Coast. [214]

As one of the two divisions which had never been under fire before, the 79th had been given the farthest objective of any division. The German trenches on its front were everywhere in the open, crowning a gentle ridge. The wire had been badly cut, but the Eastern Coast men made no more fuss over that handicap than their neighbors. When they came to the top of the ridge, they might see the field of their action, in its relation to the Army plan, spread before them. There was the route of their advance, following a valley with the ribbon of the Esnes-Montfaucon road at its bottom, and the distant ruins of Montfaucon on their high hill as distinct a goal as the stone column of a lighthouse on a shore. They were not only to take this on the first day, but to pass on down the slopes beyond, and, conquering patches of woods and ravines, carry their flying wedge to the foot of the heights of the whale-back. On the second day Army ambition designed to assail the whale-back itself, as we know. Well might these inexperienced troops have asked in irony: "Is that all you expect of us? Don't you think we can do it in the forenoon, and take the whale-back in the afternoon, so that we can get on to the Lille-Metz railway tomorrow?" [215]

As the 79th had open country to traverse, it ought to go fast. With adjoining divisions clearing the walls of the valley leading up to Montfaucon, it was supposed to be marching over a boulevard compared to the route which the 37th had in the Montfaucon forest. Indeed every division was given the idea that all it had to do was to keep deployed and moving according to schedule. As for the distance itself which the 79th had to travel, any golfer may measure it as two and a half times that of an eighteen-hole round, with a quarter of the distance through traps and bunkers, and the rest altogether in the rough of a surpassingly hilly course, while he carries a rifle and a soldier's pack and ammunition. In the immediate foreground was a belt of weed-grown shell-craters, their edges joining, the passage being further complicated by the ruins of two villages—Haucourt and Malancourt—within the area of the trench system. On the left, over the moist slippery weeds of the shell-craters, the men could not keep pace in the mist with the barrage, which had been made specially rapid in order to urge them to the rapid movement required; but this delay did not prove important.

From Montfaucon the German observers could see the wave of khaki figures distinctly as they came down the slope toward the valley. It was a sight to thrill any veteran with professional admiration of the drill-ground precision of these young soldiers in dipping and rising with the folds of the ground. There seemed not enough superfluous fat among the division's privates to have given a single war profiteer that rotundity with which we associate the corpulency of a [216]

parvenu's fortune. They were pantherishly lean, trained down to elastic sinews and supple muscles. In every eye there was a direct and eager glance, quick in response to any order. Looking at these thousands of athletes, with their clean-cut and intelligent faces, one was not surprised that the Army command thought that to such men nothing was impossible.

For the first three hours they made a parade of their daring mission as a flying wedge. They had only to continue to march, each man guiding by the man on his right and left, while the sun shone genially, and war, once they were through the trench system, was little more than a stroll across country in excellent company. The observers on Montfaucon might not gratify the appetite of their eyes by sending over barrages of shell-fire into such a distinct target. All the Germans' available artillery force, which was slight at that time, must be concentrated elsewhere. Let those American amateurs come on! There was trouble in store for them.

When the 79th came down into the valley, a hill in front of Montfaucon was now on the sky-line, instead of the ruins of the town. There were hills all around them, while they were exposed in the valley bottom. To the right in the 4th Division's sector was the hill and village of Cuisy, high points in a series of irregular commanding slopes. On the left was the Cuisy Wood, as the eastern end of the Montfaucon woods was called. So they were between the two Cuisys. The Cuisy Wood was in the 79th's sector. The machine-gun nests there served notice of one of the disadvantages of open country when they began firing from the cover on the visible foe. Checked by this fire, and forced to take cover in shell-craters and any dead spaces available, the Eastern Coast men found that whenever they showed themselves the air cracked and sung with bullets. This was the trouble that the Germans had in pickle for them; this was war in earnest. They were now without barrages. They could not close with the enemy in an abandoned rush through a screen of woodland: the enemy had all the woodland to himself. Moreover, they had to advance uphill over very treacherous ground. [217]

With the help of tanks and of the 37th exerting its pressure on the left, Cuisy Wood was taken after three hours' fighting; but valuable time had been lost. The center, striving to pass over the crest of Hill 294 in front of Montfaucon, was blown back by converging blasts from machine-guns. Cuisy and the ridges on the right, as threatening as those on the left, were not yet taken. The 79th was in an open area of interlocking fire, though in a lesser degree than the 28th in the valley of the Aire. There was confusion owing to errors which were not always those of the young officers and the men, only waiting in their willingness to go where they were told against any kind of resistance. One of the young officers, finding himself alone, as the morning mist lifted, in the midst of machine-gun nests, forced the gunners to surrender and to point out the location of sixteen other nests. [218]

In ratio to the importance of the thrust of the 79th was the responsibility of its senior officers, regimental and brigade. They had come to test in the field their ability as professional soldiers; when the amount of fat they had accumulated on their bodies and in their minds would have its influence on their endurance and judgment. There was contradiction in commands; uncertainty in decisions; higher orders were not carried out. In one case the natural military initiative of a tank commander gave the word to advance, which was all that the men wanted. Instead of reserves being sent in to keep the jump on the enemy by swift taking of positions, he was allowed time to recover his morale and bring reinforcements and machine-guns into position. [219]

Corps was displeased with this hesitation; Army equally so. They still had their eyes on the distant goal that they had set for the day's end. The 79th was told to press on at dusk and that it was expected to reach Nantillois and its full objective during the night. This, of course, required only the writing of a message. Without artillery support a regiment made a brave and fruitless attempt against a deluge of hand-grenades and interlocking machine-gun fire. During the night the division commander relieved a senior officer who had failed to carry out his orders, read lessons to others, and reorganized his command. The road across the two miles of trench system and of shell-craters, being used by two divisions, despite the work of the engineers was wholly unequal to demands. As it passed over a ridge the trucks, sinking into sloughs which seemed to have no bottom, were frequently blocked in the ascent.

The 79th had two battalions of artillery up when it attacked the next morning. Now it had its "second wind." The men were given rein. Practically without shields, neither shells nor hand-grenades nor bullets could stay their progress. On the right they began driving ahead under the flanking machine-guns of Cuisy before dawn at 4 A.M. On the left they started at 7 A.M. Their only *liaison* with their flanks was by mounted messenger, as their motorcycles were of no service until Montfaucon was reached. Their units intermingled with those of adjoining divisions, and advanced with them in that determined rush to "get there." By 11 A.M. the 79th had men in Montfaucon with those of the 37th. A regiment was re-formed and ordered to flank Nantillois on the right, but now, going down the north slopes, it was in full view of the artillery from the whale-back. The left was stopped in the Beuge Wood. It had been a day of incessant and wearing effort of the same kind that the 37th had suffered. The road was in better condition, the troops received some though not sufficient food. A hundred burros were invaluable in bringing up ammunition. [220]

The next day being the critical 28th, the orders were for the 79th to exert itself to the utmost. It was still advancing in country perfectly open to view from the whale-back and its covering positions. In the morning the regiments which had been in reserve, now being in front, proved that woods fighting was no monopoly by cleaning up all the machine-gun nests in the Beuge Wood and storming the ridge beyond Hill 268, and taking Nantillois before noon. Then they were re-formed and given a little time for rest,—if rest was the word for hugging cover under incessant shell-fire. With the aid of tanks two attacks were made on the Ogons Wood beyond Nantillois under the German artillery fire from the whale-back, which was at close quarters and as accurate [221]

as the plunging machine-gun fire which accompanied it.

The two tanks, so inadequate for their task, did not go far before both were hit. The infantry came near enough to the Ogons to realize that at the ratio of the increasing resistance our survivors who reached it would be hopelessly unequal to taking the machine-guns firing from its edge. Withdrawal was necessary to the south slopes of the crest in the rear, Hill 274, if the troops in their present position were not to be offered as sacrifice to the nests of artillery the enemy now had in position. Undaunted by the shell-fire on the road, the transport was able that night to reach Montfaucon, which was kept under such a heavy bombardment that there was no going farther without blocking the road with wreckage. Though in a trance of weariness, carrying parties brought the food and other supplies three miles through the zone of shell-fire to the front.

A willing horse was still to be driven for another day. The 79th was to be sent against the slopes of the whale-back. Morning revealed the enemy's artillery in still greater force; and there was mockery for the men as they breasted it in the sight of a German observation balloon, lazily floating above the whale-back and directing the guns in firing on any parties who might have found ravines or slopes out of sight of observers from the heights. All day the left strove for gains in fitful attacks, and gained some three hundred yards. The right, in a determination that shell-fire could not balk, reached the edge of the Ogons Wood. That was something; courage's final defiance in its exhaustion, before the thin line, which had looked into the recesses where the hidden machine-guns opened upon them, withdrew to their former position. The 79th was "expended," to use the military phrase; and the meaning of that was in the hollow eyes of pasty faces and in dragging footsteps. On the 30th its part was that of the other divisions from the Meuse to the Forest, hugging the pits it had dug under shell-fire. In the afternoon it was relieved by the veteran 3rd Division.

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Having brought the account of the battle down to the standstill which closed the first stage, we may now turn our attention to the American divisions which were engaged with Allied armies in other decisive attacks of this crucial period.

### XIII

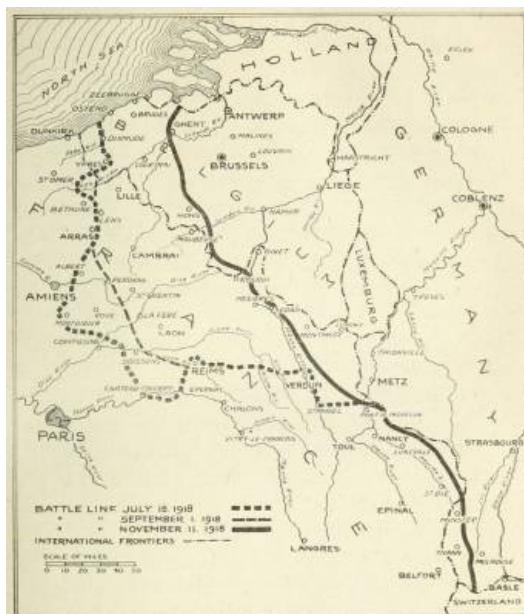
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## OVER THE HINDENBURG LINE

New York and the South on the British front—Up the Somme valley in the wake of the Australians—The Saint-Quentin Canal tunnel—Another ambitious plan—The simplicity of success in the attack of the 30th Division—The Pickett's charge of the 27th—A mêlée on the open slopes—In which the Australians take a hand—The German hinge at Bony holds—Australia carries on—The western front in movement—The British again in Le Cateau—Our part in the advance to Valenciennes.

The Scotch thrift of Sir Douglas Haig, in face of the demand for our divisions in our own sector and at other points along the line, had been able to retain two of the ten divisions which had been trained in the British sector: the 27th, or "Orions," National Guard of New York under command of Major-General John F. O'Ryan; and the 30th, or "Old Hickory," National Guard of the Southern mountain states, under command of Major-General Edward M. Lewis. These two, forming our Second Corps under Major-General George W. Read, were to have a spectacular part in the attack of September 29th against the Hindenburg line on the thirty-mile front between Cambrai and Saint-Quentin, which was to be the next of the thrusts in the development of the general offensive movement which decided the war.

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MAP NO. 6

## LINES REACHED BY GERMAN AND ALLIED OFFENSIVES 1918.

Second Corps Headquarters had been from the time of its organization in the British area. Neither division had served anywhere else than with the British. They had been isolated from the association of the American army in a world of their own within the British world. It was well that they should be there; that if we were to have divisions detached from our army some should be contributing their style of English to that spoken by English, Scotch, and Irish, by Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, and South Africans.

On August 30th-September 1st the two fought side by side for the first time as divisions in the Ypres salient offensive. They advanced for the depth of a mile, the 27th until its outposts were on the famous Kemmel Hill which the German attacks had won in the preceding April, and the 30th taking the village of Voormezele. They were now withdrawn and sent into training to digest the lessons of their first battle and to learn in practice maneuvers how to cooperate with tanks. After that post-graduate course they might be considered "shock" divisions, having the freshness of new troops plus an instructive experience. When they received their next order to move, they knew that they were to be used as such; they were going into a "big fight."

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Late in September they started across the old Somme battlefield, which the Germans had devastated in their retreat in the late winter of 1917 in face of the Anglo-French offensives. Here the results of war on the largest integral area in France were seen at their worst in a dismal, treeless landscape, pitted by the bursts of the countless shells fired in the Somme and Cambrai battles and the fighting in the period between them, and in the tidal wave of the great German offensive of March, 1918, which overflowed the desert of their making. The subsoil, having been mixed with the loam that once nourished succulent pasturage and rich fields of grain, now responded to sun and moisture in a subtropical growth of weeds and grass in a grizzly carpet, variegated by the gaping wounds in the earth of crumbling trench walls and great mine craters. Deserted tanks, and remnants of sheet-iron dugout roofs and of gun-carriages and caissons recalled as the débris of a dead world ghostly memories to all British soldiers, for at one time or another all had fought there, enduring the powers of destruction that made the wreckage.

Troops marching in this area, where man had at such labor and cost imitated the forces of earthquakes, volcanoes, and of chaos, found few billets. The villages were mostly level with the roads. Temporary buildings, with corrugated iron roofs and tar-paper walls, which would be called "shacks," had risen as the landmarks of pioneer hospitality. The two divisions marching toward the sound of guns through the silence where there was neither woman nor child living could people it with what reflections they chose on their way to battle.

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They were attached to the Australian Corps, which was company to their taste. There were no better soldiers than the "Aussies." Our men liked them not only for this but for other qualities which have a man-to-man appeal when men from the ends of the earth meet. In the coming attack we were to have more intimate reasons for liking them: the reasons born of the gratitude which one brave man owes to another who does not hesitate at hell's door to come to his aid when he is hard pressed.

Beginning with the Anglo-French offensive on August 8th, the five divisions of the Australians in their "leap-frogging" advance—and they were very expert at "leap-frogging"—had not been out of line as a Corps until they had fought their way clear across the devastated region from the high-water mark of the German tidal wave of March to the point from which it had started. In the free stride which they had brought overseas from their island continent thousands of miles away, now guided by a veteran's wisdom and cunning, they had won back all they had fought for on these Somme fields with an enemy whose measure they had always taken—an enemy who they knew now could never fight on the offensive again. They had suffered for four years the fatigue, the shell-fire, the machine-gun fire, the gas, which our army was to know for a brief period of intensity. Long service and army discipline, accepted as a means to an end, had no more influence in making them militaristic than a course in boxing changes the anatomy of the kangaroo. They were ever the Australians.

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Though the British had regained what they had lost in the spring, they were only back before the line to which Hindenburg had given his name, after he came with his Ludendorff from their victories in the east to prove that the western front was not necessarily the grave of German military reputations. German staff experts had chosen the ground which they had fortified at leisure behind their old Bapaume defenses during the winter of 1916-1917. German industry was then at its height, and German material was ample to carry out the plans for that elaborate system which was advertised by German propaganda as impregnable. In those days when all offensives in the west had failed, many military experts were inclined to accept this view.

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The portion of the Hindenburg line which the 27th and 30th Divisions were to attack had a distinctive character which might well relate its conquest to an action by such an integral force as our Second Corps, attached to another army. For six thousand yards the Saint-Quentin Canal, opened in Napoleon's time and used until the beginning of the war, runs in practically a straight line north and south under a ridge, whose crest, from the piling of the spoils of excavation, is almost as regular as an enormous parapet. The open canal being unfordable, this section, obviously inviting attack, was given particular attention in preparing the artificial defenses which the ground and the tunnel itself favored. The thickness of the earth over the stone arch was such that at no point had the largest caliber shell the slightest chance of successful penetration. In the tunnel, lighted by electricity, the number of reserves which could be accommodated was regulated by the extent of the wooden platforms laid across from wall to wall. It was said that there was room enough provided for a full division of infantry, which, while being entertained by

moving pictures to while away idle hours, would be perfectly secure from any bombardment until such time as their services were required, when they had prompt egress to their places assigned for a crisis through the openings to the reverse slope of the higher irregular crest in front. It was a most comfortable and adaptable arrangement, for which the French a century ago had done the spading. [229]

On the crest in front of the tunnel, of course, none of the provisions in dugouts, traverses, strong points, and barbed wire of a thoroughgoing trench system was lacking. In front of this crest over which the main Hindenburg line ran, at a distance of a thousand yards, was another ridge, which formed the first or outpost line. Any troops who took this forward line must move down an apron in full view of the trenches of the main system, in range of its machine-guns and rifles, and under its observation for the direction of artillery fire, which of course had this apron accurately plotted. Between the two ridges, utilizing the ravines, sunken roads, and irregularities of ground, the Germans had deep communication trenches, which, with the passages out of the tunnel, further connected up the system in facilities for the swift utilization of their troops in making the most of all the details of natural and artificial advantage of a position which had on its flanks the unfordable canal. But the defenses had not been well kept up, partly as a result of the deterioration of German industry in digging, and more largely because of Ludendorff's [230] commitment to mobile warfare by his March offensive.

I recollect that the first news we had at Army Headquarters in the Meuse-Argonne of the progress of the Second Corps said that our troops and the Australians had surrounded a division of Germans. In view of what happened, this report now has a tragic mockery. The plan of the attack was made by the Australian Corps. The 30th Division was to be on the right; it went into position on the forward ridge, which in its sector was not as exposed as in that of the 27th. When the New Yorkers went into position, they faced the unpleasant fact that the British whom they relieved had not advanced beyond their own old outpost line. This meant that they must make a preliminary attack on September 27th in order to gain their assigned jumping-off place for the main attack on the 29th. Their daylight charge went home in gallant fashion, but, exposed, when they reached the crest, to machine-gun fire and to the blasts of artillery fire from behind the tunnel, they fought all day on the Knoll and among the ruins of the buildings of Gillemont and Quennemont farms. In and out of trenches, "mopping up" machine-gun nests only to have others reappear from sunken roads and subterranean passages which were said to lead back to the canal tunnel itself, they paid heavy casualties for a persistence which left them that night and the next day hugging the slopes with the crest still unmastered. [231]

It was not on the cards that the main attack, which was only one of a sequence in the general offensive movement, should be delayed on this account. What was to have been taken in a small bite must now be taken in a big bite. The first ridge would be rolled under in the mighty wave which was then to sweep down the apron and through the barbed wire and trenches up the slopes and over the crest of the main ridge and of the tunnel and on into the open country beyond. The fighting vigor of our Second Corps, nursed in training for such a purpose, was to be expended in one morning's tremendous effort; and at noon the 3rd and 5th Australian Divisions were to pass through our two divisions and to continue the advance with all possible speed on the heels of the broken enemy. For the American was not the only ambitious staff when it took to marking objectives on a map. Most ambitious of all was Marshal Foch. Our two divisions had all the "Don Acks," or divisional artillery, of the Australians, a total, with the Corps artillery, of 438 guns, or one for every forty feet of their front, to make their shields; and beside an array of British tanks the only American heavy tank unit in France. With the American divisions' artillery [232] brigades, which had never seen the British front, supporting other divisions in the Meuse-Argonne offensive, who shall say that there was not coöperation among the Allies?

The attack of the 30th Division on the right of the Corps line against the Hindenburg position, on the morning of September 29th, was a complete success—a clean drive through for two miles and a half to its objectives. If the division's flank was not exposed as the 27th's was, if it had relatively better ground to traverse, without the handicap of having to take its jumping-off place before it began its real advance, this in no wise detracts from the honor that these men of the Southern mountains, ninety-five per cent of whom were of Anglo-Saxon origin, did their forebears in fighting as a part of the British army. They won more Congressional Medals of Honor, the highest tribute our nation can pay any officer or man for gallantry in the field, than any other division. All that they did was in character with the best traditions of their grandfathers who had fought under Lee and Stonewall Jackson. They had named their division "Old Hickory" in honor of another Jackson who was a Southern hero; and hickory is hard, tough, and springy wood. Called "poor whites" by the heedless, they were rich in the qualities that count in battle. There were companies of them which were sixty per cent illiterate when they came to camp, which calls for [233] thought on the part of the traveler in the "richest country in the world" who sees their faces at railroad stations or in their simple houses in the mountains.

Character and education, as we are not too often reminded, are not the same; and these men have character, which is sound in the warp and the woof, though it lacks frills and misses the motion pictures 'round the corner from the soda fountain. They were capable of education, too, not only in reading, writing, and arithmetic which they were taught in the schools established for them, but in military technique. What they learned they learned well. They did not think that any substitute "would do just as well" when it would not. If they were told to put out panels for the planes, they put them out, and in the way that they were told. Their discipline was in the devotion of the kind which kept the poorly fed, equipped, and clothed Southern armies resisting Northern power for four years, and the officers who led them were of a democracy which has its test in



more than mere platitudes.

They believed in their officers, but maintained their attitude of self-respect, that individualism developed from their surroundings, which separated them by as wide a gulf from regiments drawn from the swarming streets of a great city as could well exist in a country speaking a common tongue. With their drawling voices and romantic views, and their lean figures and clear eyes, it seemed to me that they gave a certain atmosphere of simple knightliness even to the processes of modern war. Their conscientious attention to all the details of instructions which taken together make the whole of battle efficiency, their accuracy of thought as accurate as their shooting, the confident hunter's zest with which they went straight at their foe, were contributing factors of more importance than any good fortune in their swift and positively brilliant advance through the defenses of one of the strongest positions on the western front. With surprisingly small losses, no day's work of any division of the American army deserves more praise than the Hickory's, both because of their own character and of that of their task. They did not think that they had done much. Their admiration was all for the British veterans on their right who had adroitly managed a crossing of the canal on rafts and had kept pace with their own movement. [234]

The story of the 27th on the left, for the very reason that it was not the kind of success which moves the pencilings on schedule time on the map in keeping with staff plans, was to exhibit those qualities of the courage of individuals and groups in distress against odds, of which we stand in awe as the supreme tribute to men as men in battle. The reports showed that all was going well at first. Under cover of foggy mist, which was most friendly in hiding the advance down the slope of both divisions, the 27th started off in the same admirable fashion as the 30th, following close behind its barrage. By noon not only was the 30th reported in Nauroy, beyond the canal, but troops of the 27th had been seen in Gouy and Le Catelet, practically one town, on the far side of the main ridge. Aviators later saw detachments of the Orions moving forward and Germans who were not convoys of prisoners moving in the opposite direction—a most suggestive spectacle. Divisional communications had been cut. The division staff could only wait on results, not knowing what orders to give. Such command as remained was with the leaders of the elements, their *liaison* broken, which were fighting their hearts out. There could be no more doubt of the 27th's capability than of the fearful situation in which it was placed. The New York National Guard had been known as among the best state troops, having received liberal support, while its commander was a permanent officer on the state's pay-roll, who gave all his time to the organization. On the Mexican border it had won high praise. Later, when the New Yorkers were given an integral division in our army in the war with Germany, both in their training at home and in France and then in their fighting in the Ypres salient, they enhanced their reputation. [235]

When I went over the field of the action of the 27th, I was struck with amazement at the results expected of them, and with awe as I visualized their effort, which like Pickett's charge owes its place in history not to the wisdom of generals but to valor—and that the valor of intelligence. While the British were to advance on the right of the 30th, they were not to succeed in advancing on the left of the 27th, where the canal, emerging from the tunnel's northern end, bends to the west, against the direction of the attack, across the Macquincourt valley, whose wall opposite the tunnel entrance has ravines and hillocks for cover. This area, covered with big shell-craters, sometimes half-filled in by other shell-bursts, included sections of communication trenches, machine-gun emplacements, dugouts, snarls of barbed wire, all in a chaotic disorder which had no system to the casual glance, except that every square yard of it was suited to desperate resistance by skilful soldiers. The 27th's left was to sweep across this valley over the ridge, and then throw out forces of exploitation for protection of its flank in face of the well-intrenched unfordable canal and the high ground behind it; after the canal tunnel had been taken, other forces were to swing north, while the British Third Corps, which had not been sent in a frontal attack against the open canal positions—over ground infinitely more difficult than at the other end of the tunnel,—was, with the aid of this support, to "join up." It could hardly be said of that plan, as of many others for swinging open the double doors against trench systems, that it even looked well on paper; but it was the plan adopted after thorough consideration by practical soldiers. [236]

The Germans, of course, had information that an offensive was in preparation on this front, and that it would include the ridge over the canal tunnel. With their reserves in the tunnel ready, they would wait on its development before sending them to the point where they would do the most service. Anticipating their prevision, our command gave instructions that as we reached the openings in the tunnel they were to be guarded, thus preventing the egress of the Germans except as prisoners from their great dugout, in the same manner that trench dugouts were breached in an attack. That this could not be done in face of the numbers of the enemy emerging after our first wave had passed is not a criticism of the men who fought all day to do it.

The "get there" spirit which animated all our divisions was supreme in the men of the 27th. As they descended the slope, after sweeping over the forward ridge, their figures distinct as the smoke-screen and the fog lifted, the German artillery sent a curtain of shell-fire, which kept pace with their progress, through the curtain protecting them. Machine-guns from the high ground across the open canal were turned on their flank with increasing fire; and their own tanks, on which they relied so largely for protection, were to suffer severe casualties from accurate enemy defense. Each infantry unit had no thought except to keep on going. Every survivor had his face set toward the goal. The forces assigned to secure the openings in the tunnel and to "mop up," straggling over the uneven ground and raked by machine-gun fire, could not advance against the stubborn resistance developed by the enemy emerging from his hiding-places after our barrage had lifted. On the right the men of the 27th, striving to keep up with the 30th, drove into the [237]

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main trench system about the ruined village of Bony, on the crest in front of the tunnel, and for all the accumulated effort of the enemy to throw them back from this vital hinge of his resistance, maintained their footing in a struggle that lasted all day. Passing over the northern end of the ridge, on the left, a battalion of the first wave, regardless of fire, reached the Le Catelet-Gouy villages, their final objective. It was their movement that the aeroplane observers had seen going in the opposite direction from German reserves coming into action. That battalion had kept faith with the plan which required swift action to make the most of the initiative gained, before the enemy could mobilize for defense after the shock of the attack.

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Naturally it had soon been apparent to the German command that there was no advance by the British Third Corps on the 27th's left up to the canal. Obviously this was the opening for reserves to frustrate the offensive. The German soldiers gradually losing morale as a whole were now to show their old form in one of those flashes of desperate counter-attack and resistance which was worthy of their regulation at its fiercest. It had always been characteristic of them that they fought best when they were winning; when the advantage was theirs. These veterans swarming out of the openings of the tunnel and up the Macquincourt valley on our exposed flank had their blood up. This was their Hindenburg line. They had been told that it was unassailable, and that any attack against it would break into confusion which would be their prey, an opportunity which was compensation for their retreats of the last month, arousing afresh their professional zeal in applying, in a field of a kind with which they were as familiar as prairie dogs with their warrens, all their skill in tactics of cunning infiltration under the support of their machine-guns. They were as old hounds who had been having hard hunting of late with little success, and whose appetites were whetted by the sight of a quarry.

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The report that we had an enemy division surrounded was probably founded on the observation of the counter-attacking parties of Germans observed between the battalion in Gouy and our main force. Wholly enveloped, the groups of this gallant unit—a Pickett's charge which had kept going until the remnants were swallowed up in the enemy's forces—could only surrender, when they saw gray uniforms on all sides, or, dodging from cover to cover, try to win their way back to their comrades. Other units, emerging into zones swept by unseen fire, sought any protection they could find. Others still tried to advance. "Mopping up" parties had to resist being "mopped up" themselves. The battle became a mêlée in front of the Hindenburg line; a free-for-all, in and out of burrows and craters; their general must trust his men to fight in the spirit in which he had trained them; and thus they did fight. Plunging machine-gun fire and hand-grenades sought out the wounded in folds of the ground and pits, while bullets whistled overhead. No platoon knew to a certainty what its neighbor was doing. Some bold man sprang out of shell-craters to seek close quarters or to try to reach a machine-gun, only to fall back dead into his companion's arms. Groups found that they were being slowly exterminated by scattering bullets, while any movement in any direction meant instant extermination. Always the spits of dust showed bullets coming in two directions—as ridge and valley wall looked down on them. The wonder is that they did not break into a panic. But that was not in the character of such men. On the contrary, they continued their efforts to advance. How many deeds of heroism, unseen by any observer, deserved Medals of Honor will never be known.

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If ever the determined faces of sturdy men coming up in reserve were welcome, they were those of the Australians, as they appeared for their part of the program—which was to "leap-frog" our troops and carry on the advance: to find that they had hot work in prospect from the moment they passed the tape we had strung for our jumping-off line. Our battalion in Le Catelet having been effectively cut off, the battalion which had kept its footing in the Hindenburg line at Bony stayed on, mingled with the oncoming Australians, for that night and another day of fighting. The Australians who had passed through the 30th Division, on its objective at Nauroy, for a farther advance to the next village of Joncourt, were obliged to relinquish their gains in order to bend back their line diagonally to join up with the mixed Australians and New Yorkers at Bony. The German hinge at that point was not to be broken until the next day; north of Bony the 27th's line that night slanted back, in order to face as far as possible the murderous fire on its exposed flank, to the outpost line from which they had been unable to advance. The 27th had suffered 4,000 casualties since September 27th. Now, as fast as units could be gathered and re-formed, it was withdrawn for reorganization, as was the 30th, leaving the Australians to finish the task. The fact that our Meuse-Argonne offensive had slowed down, and that at other points the progress of the general Allied movement was being stayed, may account, judging from German reports I have read, for a return of German staff confidence which was imparted to the German veterans, who, after their brilliant and savage use of their amazing opportunities against the 27th, kept up their resistance point by point for four days before the Australians had gained the complete objective set for the 27th on September 29th. It is never a pleasant task for any body of troops to have to do the work assigned to another; but the Australian staff had made the plan, and the "Aussies" accepted the legacy we had left with a spirit in keeping with their comradeship for the Americans. From our staff and our army, from the state of New York and our country, as well as from the men of the 27th, ever willing to give it with full hearts, they deserve the tribute due to their bravery and fellowship.

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I may add that this was the Australians' last action. After thirteen months of continuous fighting they were sent into winter quarters. The men who had been out from home since 1914—and the Americans who were homesick after three months in France can imagine what this meant—were just starting on their first home leave when the armistice came. May the recollection of how they fought at our side in a war to end war keep the friendship of the two peoples secure.

On the night of October 5th the 30th Division, which had suffered far less than the 27th, relieved

the Australians. The job was finished; on this part as on the rest of the British front, the once glorious Hindenburg line was left behind, suddenly become a somewhat frowsy irrelevance of deserted trenches, dugouts, shell-craters, and tangles of barbed wire. With its passing one knew that, for the northern half of the front, there was no question of stopping; careful, methodical planning, mindful of the necessary vigorous thrusts at the key positions of railway centers and canal and river defenses, would irresistibly sweep the enemy back to the Meuse line, while the slower movement "down below"—as the French and American fronts seemed from the north—

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would question his ability to stand even there. Not that there was to be any spectacular rush about the movement, though one looked expectantly at the fitness of the British cavalry, which was always kept ready; the German staff could be expected to handle itself in this its most serious emergency. The spectacular and amazing thing was the steady, unruffled forward movement of millions of men, glacier-like in its assuredness. The temper of victory revealed itself in the eyes and bearing of the men who had waited four years, and who now saw Ypres disengaged, Lille on the point of recovery, Lens, Cambrai, Saint-Quentin restored to France. Americans might feel out of place in the midst of rejoicings, the depth of which they could not measure because they had not known the suffering which had gone before.

The Second Corps was now to take part in the advance of one French and three British armies which, by November 1st, was to expand until the whole line from the sea to the Argonne was in motion. From north of Cambrai to south of Saint-Quentin the line was to reach its apex before Le Cateau in the attack of October 8th-10th; on the 14th the Franco-Belgian and British attack north of Lille was to start bringing the line up to this level; from the 17th to the 25th the southern British and French armies would again take up the offensive to the gates of Valenciennes, while the French armies "around the corner" on the right would have passed over the Saint-Gobain bastion and straightened out the corner.

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The plan of the advances in which the Second Corps took part was simple. The enemy had none but hastily organized defenses, and if he were pushed hard enough he would go. So the artillery was to be moved as far forward as possible to give the necessary protection to the infantry; the attack would start all along the thirty-mile front for generous objectives, and could be expected to go fairly well for two or three days, when stubborn resistance at various points would make it necessary to halt the advance until supplies were brought up and the resistance overcome in another general effort. The artillery declared that this was getting to be too much of an infantry war, nothing counting except keeping up with their giddy romp across fields. The infantry might have replied that they were pushing on so fast in order to keep the Germans from destroying the roads and light railways which the artillery and transport would be using. Not that I wish to imply that the infantry found it a giddy romp; there were always the machine-guns and the front-line artillery batteries, and, especially on the first day of the attack, a considerable quantity of "h-vic" shells, as they were called on the British front, from the large-calibre guns which were protecting the withdrawal of field-guns and material.

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There was no question, however, of the withdrawal. When the 30th Division, after two days of waiting on the two miles of Corps front which the Australians had handed over, started forward on October 8th along the south edge of the Roman Road to Le Cateau, it was able to cover three miles by noon, taking the fair-sized towns of Brancourt and Prémont, and a number of solid farmhouses and small copses, on the way. Enough guns were moved up over virtually undamaged roads to permit another start at dawn on the 9th; and the end of that day found the Southerners four miles farther on and in possession of the important railway center and large town of Busigny, which the enemy had relinquished practically without a struggle. Another mile was gained on the 10th, and the division line brought to the Selle river, which was not much of a river in the eyes of the Americans, but on which the enemy had obviously intended to call a halt. The railway yards in front of Le Cateau, in the sector of the Thirteenth British Corps on the left, gave violent resistance to any further progress on that side; the rearward movement of enemy field-guns had apparently stopped, to judge from the quantity of shell-fire and gas which now came over; and worried intelligence officers were doing their best to decipher the mystery of prisoners from eleven German divisions who had been taken on the two-mile front. Incidentally, it should be said that the Southerners had gathered in 1,900 Germans in three days, which was more than their share of the total of 12,000 prisoners captured by the three British armies.

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One who knew the dreary waste of the Somme battlefield, or indeed the level ruins of any part of the old trench line, might well rub his eyes when he came into this fresh landscape, where the Southerners seemed as much at home as if they had never seen mountains. One had forgotten, it seemed as if one had never known, that you could have war in a country where women and children walked about the streets, and lived in intact houses, and even went to shop, to school, and to mass. A Corps officer who had worked with Hoover in Belgium found a familiar task in distributing food to the four thousand civilians in the sector.

Stern fighting was to follow from October 17th for the weakened divisions, which had received no replacements to bring them up from half strength, and which could therefore, together, take over little more than a mile of front. Starting from the Selle river south of Le Cateau, they met a stubborn resistance until the stand made by the enemy in that town, which had seen a fierce British resistance in 1914 in the retreat from Mons, was overcome by the Thirteenth British Corps; then our Southerners and New Yorkers, having advanced four miles in three days, were relieved and sent back to the dreary Somme fields east of Amiens. Had it been necessary to fight a way into Germany, they would probably have been called on again for their manly share.

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As it was, they were the only American troops, aside from scattered units, which were not to be

gathered into the fold of the main American forces. That this isolation did not please them is understandable; but I suspect that it was good for them. There could not be the exaggeration of their part in the final victory which there might have been if they had had American food and had seen none but American activity about them. If officially the British made much of them, they realized that it was not only for what they had done but in honor of the country which had sent them forth to fight for the common cause.

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## XIV

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### DISENGAGING RHEIMS

The race-horse division in another spearhead action—Regulars and Marines—A division that had learned coördination—Trying for Blanc-Mont—One attack that cost nothing—An exhausted division reinforced by the new Southwestern division—Which keeps up with the Marines—The 36th learns fast—And pursues the enemy to the Aisne.

Ever the demand from all parts of the Allied line was for American troops. Their speed in attack had become a recognized factor in the plans of the unified command, which moved them about with an inconsiderate rapidity which was hard on shoe-leather and most uncomfortable. The very sight of the soldiers of our young army moving into a sector of their line before an action quickened the spirits of the veterans of the old armies.

If Sir Douglas Haig had two American divisions for storming the Hindenburg line, then General Gouraud, whose Fourth Army had broken the trench line for gains west of the Argonne Forest, in conjunction with our advance between the Forest and the Meuse, must have two divisions for the next step in the general offensive movement which was to disengage Rheims, in a drive northward from Somme-Py to the Aisne. These two included the 2nd, Marines and Regulars, the race-horse division, which had the longest experience in France of any regular division except the pioneers of the 1st. Our sore need of its veteran skill in the Meuse-Argonne had to yield to an urgent request, which amounted to a command, from higher authority. Naturally, the 2nd would have preferred being with our own army; but wherever it was it would fight well. It was to add to its laurels now in the rolling country of Champagne, where the deep strata of chalk under the light subsoil formed solid walls for defenses, accrued through four years of digging, as distinct on the background of the landscape as the white tape on a tennis court or the base-lines on a baseball diamond. Soldiers in blue or khaki, after fighting in this region in rainy weather, looked like men who had just come from work in a flour-mill, where they had been wrestling with the splashing mill-wheel. It was a custom to rub helmets with the chalk of parapets for the sake of invisibility.

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The action in which the 2nd was again, as on July 18th, to play the part of the spearhead was to cut the Rheims salient by thrusts on the sides, much as one would push in the roofless walls of a house on a man within, which is much more reasonable than trying to break up through the floor to get at him. The third German offensive of May had all but encircled Rheims from the west; had the last and unsuccessful offensive attained its end of a deep advance east of the city, Rheims would have been far behind the enemy's line. As it was, heroic resistance had saved the city, at the price of leaving it for four months in a salient as pronounced and as dangerous as the Ypres salient, which must be reversed and then broken. The reversal which would put the enemy in turn into a salient was started west of Rheims, on September 30th, by General Berthelot's Fifth Army; in a three days' advance his line, pivoting on the city, swung up from an east-west direction to a northwest-southeast direction, effectively turning the salient inside out. The line now ran for some twenty miles southeast past the edge of Rheims, turned east through Champagne for another fifteen miles to Aubérive, and then, as a result of General Gouraud's advances from September 26th, turned northeast to the northern end of the Argonne. A simultaneous attack by Berthelot, on the west face of this flat arc with a thirty-mile chord, and by Gouraud on the east face, would send the enemy scurrying back to a maximum depth of twenty-five miles to the line of the Aisne river, which here runs roughly east and west.

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From just north of Somme-Py, in the center of the up-slanting east face of the salient, the 2nd Division, attached with French divisions to the Twenty-first Corps, was to strike over chalk ridges and through woods northwest toward Machault. The attack was first set for October 2nd, but was postponed while the division spent this day in cleaning German recalcitrants out of a portion of the trench system taken over from a French division which had captured it. The Corps orders for the attack were then issued so late that there was not time to have them translated and written out, as the custom was, for the sake of accuracy which was considered indispensable to the teamwork of units; but they had to be sent orally to our two brigades.

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In the center of the field of attack was the Vipère Wood, which was known to hold many machine-gun nests. By a converging movement the Marine brigade was to pass this wood on the left, and the Regular brigade to pass it on the right in flank, and form line beyond it,—which was not a mission a general would assign to tyros who had not yet learned to maintain the *liaison* of their units in difficult fighting. In order to go into position, the Regular brigade had a night march around the rear of the line. Happily the men of the 2nd Division had had experience of this sort of thing. They had gone in on the run at Château-Thierry, and again in the crucial drive at Soissons on July 18th. It had been said that they did things best in a hurry, which may have led to their

being relied on as "hit-and-run"-experts; nevertheless they had an idea of their own that if they might have moved into line and looked over the ground a few hours before going into an attack, instead of charging when they were breathless from sprinting, they might have done equally well with slightly less nerve strain.

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As the French guides who were to meet the Regular brigade at dark and show it the way did not appear, which was a common failing with guides, the brigade had to grope about among shell-craters and communication trenches to find its jumping-off place, which was still partly occupied by the enemy. By 5 A.M. only six companies were in position; but by 5.50, the hour for attack, thanks to the owl's eyes and instinct of direction which seemed to be a part of the equipment of the 2nd, every company was up in order, ready for the charge. With tanks assisting against its machine-gun nests, they swept past the Vipère Wood. A loss of twenty per cent of their infantry did not interfere with their reaching their two-mile objective on schedule time at 8.30.

The race-horse proclivities of the 2nd, having been developed on no level speedway but over all the hurdles of modern defense against all arms of fire, were accentuated by the rivalry of the Regular and Marine brigades. The Marine was the better brigade of the two. All the Marines say so. I agree with them. The Regular brigade was also the better. All the Regulars say so. I agree with them. If the Marines were up to their objective, the Regulars must be; and if the Regulars were up the Marines must be, or die in the attempt. No ifs, or buts, or excuses of any kind except casualties were ever accepted in the 2nd for not advancing. And you must not lose life unskillfully, or your brigade might be convicted of not being as professional as the other,—and that would be a disgrace. The 2nd had been fortunate in its commanders. Major-General Harbord, a Regular, had leaned backward toward the Marines; and Major-General Lejeune, a Marine officer, who was now in command, leaned backward toward the Regulars. They were wise men, occupied with making the 2nd the "best" division in the army.

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Despite the trouble it met on the way from cross-fire and machine-gun nests in the Somme-Py Wood, the Marine brigade was also up on schedule time at 8.30. The two brigades had not been thinking much of their flanks; they were concerned in racing each other. While either considered the other incapable of its own stride, neither thought that any brigade in the world except itself could keep pace with the other. They were not surprised to find that the French were not up on their flanks; and the fact that the French were not, interfered with the success of another advance planned for 11 A.M., unless the 2nd were to drive into a salient which increasing machine-gun fire indicated as an unprofessional effort,—suicide not being professional with the 2nd unless one brigade should make it a custom which the other would have to follow.

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Though the French on the right might hold up their end in a further attack before noon, there was no chance that the French on the left could: with the Marine front line more than two miles in advance, the French were still occupied in trying to conquer the sinuous warrens of the Essen trench, which was acting an assassin's part in the rear of the Marines. Indeed, the Germans were counter-attacking, further intensifying the seriousness of the situation. The reserve regiment of Marines had other work to do than assisting the front-line regiment in a further advance. While its men, in helping the French division, were breaching dugouts, using their bayonets, throwing and dodging bombs as they rushed around traverses and met counter-rushes in an infernal hand-to-hand wrestle, and sending out chalk-plastered Germans in torn uniforms to join the groups of prisoners and wounded coming from the front, Marshal Foch sent a telegram of congratulation to the Corps, with word to press the advance.

At 4 P.M., when the reserve regiment of the Marines had finished its task in applying in savage hand-to-hand fighting, characteristic of the old days before open warfare became the rule, all its training in trench warfare, an order was given to obey that of the Marshal; but it hardly concerned the front regiment of Marines, which was without the support of the reserve regiment, while the retarded French on the flank, still fighting hard for their gains, were well to the rear. The reserve regiment of the Regulars, passing through the front regiment, made three-quarters of a mile, where it met machine-gun fire from both flanks. At 7.30, the French on the left having made progress, the reserve regiment of Marines, passing through the front regiment, made another hard-won gain against flanking fire, and in the darkness had to repulse two counter-attacks.

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It had been a great day even for the 2nd Division, with four miles of advance and a toll of two thousand prisoners; a day of systematic and masterly fighting which had added to its list of honors that of forcing the Germans forever out of the deep maze of the Champagne trenches. The trucks and the rolling kitchens as well as the artillery, which had never been far behind the infantry, were up that night; and the ambulances, in keeping with the race-horse spirit, running close up to the front, had made a record in their expeditious care of the wounded, who had been gathered with a promptness, in the fields under fire, worthy of a show drill at maneuvers. For if we had any division which knew how, and had reasons of long service for knowing how, to coördinate all its branches in action, it was the division which had learned its lessons in the taking of Belleau Wood, Vaux, and Vauxcastille.

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It need not be said that the program was to continue the advance the next day; but the Germans had been preparing overnight to impede its fulfillment with something of the same ferocity they had shown in the Essen trench. As usual in these days, after the Allied attack had spent its initial momentum in breaking them out of their fortifications, the Germans reacted by applying open warfare tactics on a second line of resistance. While the French were striving to come up on both flanks, the whole line was being deluged with shells and machine-gun fire. On the afternoon of the first day, the Marines by their customarily swift tactics had taken a portion of Blanc-Mont—the adjective being used before the name, contrary to modern French fashion—a hill which ran

back in an irregular shelf covered by patches of sparse woods. Well-made trenches, dugouts, and communicating trenches so easily dug and kept up in the firm chalk, were evidence of the German's appreciation of the hill's importance in the defense of their positions east of Rheims.

A congeries of machine-gun nests on its west slope, which was still untaken, by its enfilade fire from our sector had stopped the advance of the French on the left. Without waiting for them, and with a view to clearing the way for them, the Marines on the afternoon of the 4th, supported by their artillery, attacked this position. They tested out its strength well enough, in face of withering blasts, to learn that they must devise another plan of assault. This was a wise precaution, as the event was to prove. They spent the night in tireless and canny preparations for the next day's effort. Early in the morning a battalion started over the ridge. They did not want for shields; and their confidence in the accuracy of their veteran artillery led them to keep close behind the smothering fire of the barrage with a speed and agility in the systematic advance of their units which made a record even for the race-horse division. The German machine-gunners, as they saw that hurricane of bursting shells approaching, rushed to cover, which they hugged in desperate and prayerful intimacy as it passed over them. They rose, to find that a human whirlwind in its train was upon them. Without a single casualty the battalion had taken 213 prisoners and 75 machine-guns. The thing seemed miraculous; but there were the machine-guns, and there were the startled Germans who had thrown up their hands. When I went over the ground, still littered with equipment and scattered cartridge cases, that commanded every avenue of approach, I had an example which might well be quoted in all future text-books of how speed and skill may get "the jump" on an enemy. Here was certainly something, not to tell the Marines, but for the Marines to tell those Regulars, who, holding a large section of the line, could respond that though they had no theatrical exhibits to please the gallery gods they were having an affair of their own which might make any Marine thankful for his health's sake that he was climbing hills. [258] [259]

On the right of the Regular brigade the French had not yet taken Médéah farm, which was a perfect haven for machine-guns bearing on the Regulars' flank. The Germans, in this section, were fighting hard enough to atone for the easy surrender of their comrades on Blanc-Mont in their defense of the ridges in front of the village of Saint-Etienne-à-Arnes, the next landmark in the path of the 2nd's progress. The Marines found a thorn in the flesh in a strong point near Blanc-Mont, whose defenders refused to be stampeded. Enemy artillery fire was furious throughout the 5th. On the morning of the 6th, at 6.30, under another hurricane barrage, a regiment of Regulars and one of Marines side by side set out to take the last ridge before Saint-Etienne. This meant that something had to break. It was one of the occasions when professional spirit did not consider the folly of suicide, as the rival units charged side by side. They took the ridge with a loss that was estimated at thirty per cent, and dug in. The French on the left had forged ahead. Meanwhile, with the French on the right valiantly struggling against Médéah farm, and our Regulars checked, our line was at a sharp angle. [260]

It had been a grueling day for a division which notably never spared itself in its high-strung intensity; and four or five days seem to have been the limit of endurance for soldiers who were continuously fighting. Relief for the 2nd was due. On the night of the 6th the 36th Division, National Guard of Texas and Oklahoma, under command of Major-General William R. Smith, which was lately from home and had never been under fire before, began arriving. Its fresh and inexperienced battalions were now mixed with the tired battalions of the 2nd to learn the art of war at first hand from old masters, who included not only their comrades of the Regulars and Marines but the Germans in a very ugly mood. After a day of reorganizing and digging, while the French were in the outskirts of Saint-Etienne, the Marines on the left and a regiment of the 36th on the right charged Saint-Etienne on the morning of the 8th. The French were reported to have patrols in the town, but a portion of it at least seemed to be very much in the hands of the enemy. At least his machine-gunners, in the course of their supple infiltrations, had established themselves in the adjoining cemetery, which gave them a free sweep of fire across the ground of our advance, which was open fields without any more cover than a house floor. For half a kilometer the men of the 36th kept their line even with the veterans. The Marines entered the town while the men of the 36th were still in the open. [261]

It was the Southwesterners' first taste of machine-gun nests. They had no standards of previous experience for judgment as to the density of fire which would warrant a halt. Their orders were to keep on going; and they kept on. In front of them, as they crossed the open, was a wooded ravine. Our guns could not bombard it with any appreciable effect upon its nests, which were sending a tornado of bullets into the 36th's charge in addition to the shower of shells from the German guns. The Southwesterners who were meeting both bullets and shells for the first time did not fall back before this deadly combination of artillery and machine-gun fire, which would have dismayed hardened veterans at their best, until they had kept faith with Alamo traditions by losing a third of their numbers.

The 2nd's engineers now came up for a fighting part in protecting our hard-pressed flanks. We withdrew our front to the town, which we held. Meanwhile, though the French had taken Médéah farm, the division's right was still well back of the line of Saint-Etienne. All day of the 9th was spent in re-forming our position after the see-sawing conflict of the 8th; but the Germans, far from showing any signs of withdrawal, made a counter-attack on the French beyond Médéah farm and on our Regulars, who repulsed it with their rifle fire. [262]

The race-horse division, which had been hurried from the mud of the Saint-Mihiel sector without time to rest, had been doing a steeple-chase for nine days. Physical exhaustion claimed it for its own. As it withdrew, with casualties of 4,771 and the capture of 1,963 prisoners from eight

German divisions, the Regulars and Marines and the French of the Twenty-first Corps had the satisfaction of knowing that German guns had fired their last shot at the cathedral and the ruins of the city of Rheims.

The Texans and Oklahomans who now took up the battle were assigned the tired artillery of the 2nd, as they had no guns of their own. They lacked horses, transport, and nearly everything a division should have, except rifles, which were in the hands of men who knew how to use them. On the morning of the 10th their reconnaissance in force showed that the enemy artillery and machine-gun fire was as powerful as ever. It was hardly in the books that an inexperienced division should begin a movement in the dark; but the French being ready to advance on the left, the 36th began an attack that evening. [263]

The Germans, already preparing for retreat, still had large forces of field artillery in range. Evidently they were determined to take revenge on these new troops by expending in the rapid fire of a prolonged bombardment all they could of their ammunition, instead of leaving it behind to be captured. The accurate and moving sheet of death which was laid down upon the advancing infantry of the 36th was the kind from which men will withdraw in the sheer instinct of self-preservation. Indeed, a panic would have been excusable. But the lean tall Texans and Oklahomans had not come all the way from home to be in a battle at last with any idea of celebrating the occasion, or gratifying the Germans, by a retreat, because of a display of fireworks. Among the leaping flashes in the dark, with voices unheard and men revealed for an instant in shadowy outline, with officers who had the direction of units being killed and wounded, with gaps being torn in the line, there was bound to be some disorganization. But there was no faltering. The Texans and Oklahomans are not by nature panicky. They accepted stoically this screaming tumult of destruction. Particularly it was not the nature of the Indians among them to be distracted by a "heap big noise." Officers agreed that there was no problem except that of keeping units together. All the men wanted was to "get back" at the German, straight into his barrage. Pressing on as they closed up their gaps, the charging groups with the bit in their teeth took the village of Machault. [264]

The enemy resistance had suddenly broken. After this final spasm of splenetic reprisal, all the German guns were moving fast toward the Aisne. The Texans and Oklahomans did not waste much time over the machine-gunners who attempted a rearguard action, but "hiked" ahead for fifteen miles in a single day, as a reminder to the 2nd, which had considered them "tenderfeet," that in the matter of long-distance racing they yielded the honor to nobody. Bridges destroyed, machine-gun nests established on the north of the river, the German served notice that he was to make another stand. The Texans and Oklahomans enjoyed themselves in swimming across on scouting trips and in a period of active sniping gratifying to ranger inheritance. The last day they were in line they completed their brief service by cleaning up Forest farm, east of Attigny, in an uninterrupted rush which gave them the opportunity to make the most of their qualities, and in ejecting the enemy from a bend in the river which he still held. Their casualties were 2,651, and they had taken 813 prisoners and an engineer depot worth ten millions of dollars, which had supplied that section of the German line for four years. It was their only battle, but they had fought it in a way to make the most of it, in attest to the enemy of what might be expected of such a new division, if, fully equipped, it should take to the war-path again. [265]

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## XV

### VETERANS DRIVE A WEDGE

Skill essential to break the heights east of the Aire—The "per schedule" 1st Division—The much-used 32nd Division—A combined frontal attack on October 4th—A thin wedge to Fléville on the Aire—Which is broadened to the east the next day.

After this diversion to the accounts of divisions detached for other offensives, we return now to our own battle in the Meuse-Argonne, where we had learned to our cost in the two last days of September that no nibbling attacks at the close of a drive that had spent its momentum would serve our purpose against the gathering power of the enemy. There was no abatement in our industry as we rested our weary divisions still in line, replaced exhausted with fresh divisions, brought up fresh material, improved our road facilities, and tightened our organization during the temporary deadlock of furious nagging under incessant fire at the front.



**MAP NO. 7  
IN THE TROUGH OF THE AIRE.**

All thought centered, every finger moving about a map eventually came to rest, on the bastion of the heights to the east of the Aire river. To the west its fire swept across the river trough, where the Pennsylvanians of the 28th Division were in a vise, to the Forest where the New York City men of the 77th were held fast in their tracks; southwest and south it looked down upon Exermont ravine and the ground which the Missourians and Kansans had had to yield after the charges that had taken the last of their strength, leaving the 28th's flank in the trough further exposed; southeast upon Gesnes and Cierges, where the battalions of the Pacific Coast men of the 91st and the Ohio men of the 37th in their weariness had been stopped by its blasts; and to the east on the valley north of Montfaucon, where the Eastern Coast men of the 79th had expended the last of their reserves against the Ogons Wood, and beyond upon the stalwart 4th, which was also being shelled by the batteries across the Meuse, whose bank the Illinois men of the 33rd were holding.

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This mighty outpost locked the door to all the approaches to the whale-back. There was no use of pattering with Fabian tactics; it could be taken only by a spearhead drive. Though salients are the bane of generals, the only thing to do in this case was to make a salient. For this we must have troops of the mettle of Pickett's charge and the charge at Cold Harbor, whose courage would hesitate at no sacrifice, and whose skill and thrift would win victory with their sacrifice.

Our 1st was our pioneer division in France. It had fired our first shot in the war; had fought the first American offensive at Cantigny; had driven through with the loss of half its infantry to the heights of Soissons in turning the tide against the Germans; and in its swift and faultless maneuver in the Saint-Mihiel operation it had joined hands with the 26th Division to close the salient. Being a proved "shock" division, too valuable to be kept in a stationary line when another offensive was in preparation, it was immediately withdrawn from Saint-Mihiel and sent to the Meuse-Argonne area, where its presence in reserve was a consoling thought. At first the Army command considered expending it in a sweep up the east bank of the Meuse to take the heights which were raking our Third Corps with flanking artillery fire; and later considered using it to follow through the center, after the taking of Montfaucon, in a direct thrust at the whale-back. These missions had to yield to the more pressing one, which stopped all traffic to make way for its rapid march around the rear of the line on September 30th to take the place of the 35th in face of these monstrous heights.

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This division wasted little time and few words on sentiment. The hardships of war had become a matter of course to its survivors. Recruits who filled the gaps from death, as they were rapidly inculcated into its standards, absorbed the professional spirit. "You belong to the 1st, Buddy. And this is the way we do things in the 1st"—was the mandate of initiation into a proud company, which was facing its second winter in France. The only way to escape another winter in France was to win the war; and the way to win the war was by hard fighting. The regular field officers had been trained in a severe school; five out of six of the company officers were reservists. It was one of these young lieutenants, later killed in action, who characterized the views of the division when he said: "This is a mean and nasty kind of war, but it's the only war we've got, and I hope it's the last we'll ever have. The right way to fight it is to be just as mean and nasty, and just as much on the job, as the mean and nasty Boche."

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In command was Major-General Charles P. Summerall, who had led the 1st in the drive to Soissons. He is a leader compounded of all kinds of fighting qualities, a crusader and a calculating tactician, who, some say, can be as gentle as a sweet-natured chaplain, while others say that he is nothing but brimstone and ruthless determination. "As per schedule" are the first words of his divisional report, which is as brief and cold prose as I have seen, describing as hot action as I have ever known. He might be called "per schedule" Summerall, and the 1st the "per schedule" division.

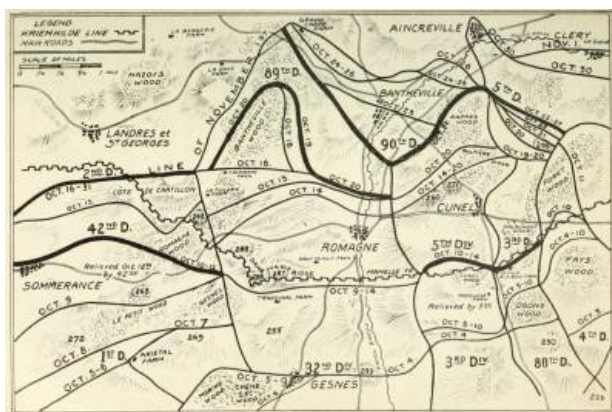


Another veteran division was to form the right side of the wedge: the 32nd, National Guard of Michigan and Wisconsin, under Major-General William G. Haan, a leader whose fatherly direction and "flare" communicated team-play and enthusiasm which an iron will could drive to its limit in battle. Iron was needed now: the iron of the spearhead, which would not blunt. The 32nd knew open warfare from its storming of the heights of the Ourcq in the Château-Thierry operations; and working its way over trench warrens from its three days' fighting as a division attached to Mangin's Army in the Juvigny operation north of Soissons. Sent from its first hard battle to its second without time for rest or replacements, it marched away from Juvigny, after losses of seven thousand six hundred men in the two battles, with half its requisite number of infantry officers and its infantry companies reduced to one hundred men. When it went into camp at Joinville, it had eight days, hardly enough to recuperate from its exhaustion, in which to train in its veteran ways five thousand replacements, before, with only two hundred men to the company—and half recruits, be it remembered,—and with each company short three officers, it was started for the Meuse-Argonne area. But it was considered—it must be considered—veteran by the Army command for this emergency, which was to give it a front of three miles in the place of the relieved 37th and 91st Divisions. The Arrow division, as it was called, which had twice pierced the German line, was to pierce it a third time before it was withdrawn again. [270] [271]

In comparison with the 32nd, the 1st was at the top of its form. It had not had heavy losses since its Soissons drive of July 18th-22nd. The two months' training of the replacements which it had then received included its experience in the Saint-Mihiel operation, which had been instructive without leaving many gaps in its ranks. On the 1st's front were the 5th Guard and 52nd German Divisions, which had come fresh into line. So veterans met veterans. The character of the opposition which the Missourians and Kansans of the 35th, whom the 1st had relieved, had faced, may be judged by the fact that for the four days in line before it advanced the 1st had daily average casualties of five hundred, while its men were hugging their fox-holes, readjusting their line, and throwing out patrols to gain information of service in the coming attack.

Immediately ahead of it was the Montrebeau Wood, which the Germans had been fortifying since they recovered it from the 35th; beyond that the deep broad Exermont ravine, guarded in the center by the Montrefagne, or Hill 240, with its crest crowned by woods which covered its slopes almost to the edge of the ravine. This was only the highest of the series of hills which extended west to east from the Aire valley across the sector of the 32nd. When the first series was taken, other hills still higher commanded the valleys and reverse slopes beyond, in a witchery of irregularities which had their culmination in a final congeries of wooded hills in front of the Kriemhilde Stellung of the whale-back, some six miles beyond the 1st's line of departure. Every open space was covered by interlocking machine-gun nests supported by artillery concentrations. Ravines were corridors for the sweep of fire; or if they gave cover their ends were sealed by fire. With its left moving along the eastern wall of the Aire, its flank naked to the fire from the western wall, the 1st was to drive a human wedge over these hills in order to gain one of the two sides of the trough, whose interlocking and plunging fire, as we have seen, had stayed the First Corps in the trough and in the Forest. Of course, the 1st would "go through" at the start. Its own record and standards compelled it to go through. It would make the wedge. What would be the result after the wedge was made? Unless the point of the wedge were protected by a spreading movement at its base, it would be crushed by pressure from both sides. Here the part of the 32nd became vital in gaining the hills on its front, which, remaining in the enemy's hands, would threaten the right of the 1st with a fire interlocking with that from the western wall of the Aire. In the valley of the Aire, of course, the Pennsylvanians of the 28th were to try to advance under cover of the 1st's thrust. If they were checked, and the 32nd were also checked, the Germans would not be slow to see or to improve their opportunity to force a repetition of the bloody result of Pickett's charge and of the assault at Cold Harbor. [272] [273]

The 1st and the 32nd were not the only veterans attacking on October 4th. There was to be an offensive along our whole line to engage the enemy at every point to support the prime object of making the wedge. The 1st started for its objectives at the same hour, daylight, as the other divisions. Its left overran the Germans of the 5th Guard Division in Montrebeau Wood, and swept down into the Exermont ravine. There the groups of dead of the 35th, killed by shell-bursts, gave warning against "bunching" that the men of the 1st took to heart. They did not move forward in dense formation, but in thin swift lines offering the enemy few targets, and those briefly. Orders were simple; responsibility direct and ruthlessly delegated. Company leaders knew what to do against machine-gun nests, and they did it, thanks to the fresh vigor and thorough training of the men. [274]



## THE APPROACH OF THE CENTER TO THE WHALE-BACK.

Quivering under the blows of the hammer of command and determination, the left was driven three miles that day, against fire from three directions manipulated by the cleverly conceived and cunningly executed open warfare tactics of the enemy: in and out of the folds of ground, uphill and downhill, taking machine-guns with barrels hot, as the German gunners fired until the last moment. That night it sent patrols into Fléville, a village on the bank of the Aire at the foot of a bluff, with the Germans holding the other bank three miles in their rear. The possession of Fléville was that of a name on the map, which read well in communiqués. Holding the high ground above it was what counted, in the same way that possession of the porch counts if you wish to throw stones at a man on the driveway below; and holding it in face of fire from flank and rear flank required men who would dig holes and stick to them. The wedge was made, but it was a sharp one of only one brigade front, as things had not gone as well as they might either with the right of the 1st or with the 32nd.

The right of the 1st crossing Exermont ravine under enfilade and frontal fire charged into the wooded slopes of the Montrefagne, or Hill 240. Twice that day we had the hill; and twice the Germans, reinforced, surged back and drove us off. Our men were saying that "every Boche who didn't have a machine-gun had a cannon"; for the enemy, realizing the value of every foot of ground, was using roving guns attached to his infantry battalions. We were doing the same. There were instances, in the course of this battle for the heights, when our infantry charges came within a hundred feet of field guns which the enemy boldly—and it seemed miraculously— withdrew under our rifle fire to the cover of reverse slopes. [275]

The repulse of the right of the 1st was of course intimately concerned with the situation of the 32nd, which was fighting against the same kind of tactics on the same general kind of ground, which had its own particularly refractory qualities. Before the attack the Arrows had entered Cierges, which they found unoccupied; but the German evacuation of the village only opened up a field of approach commanded by the strengthened defenses of the surrounding positions, which had already forced the withdrawal of the last of the reserves of the 37th and 91st in their final charges before being relieved. Thus the 32nd had its center in a kind of trough, commanded by heights and woods. Gesnes was its first goal; but to take Gesnes the positions east and west of it must be conquered. On the right the charge reached the summit of Hill 239, due east of the village of Gesnes, but could go no farther. To the west were the two woods Chêne Sec and Morine, forming a single oblong patch. The left charged them repeatedly, in vain. The Arrows were fighting with veteran will, but their charges could not proceed against the welter of machine-gun and artillery fire, while they were swept by bullets from German aeroplanes flying audaciously low. [276]

In all that long day of ceaseless endeavor, when its replacements were learning their lessons hot from the enemy's guns and rifles, the 32nd had been able to gain a little more than half a mile, with every rod counted. Its effort and that of the right of the 1st, let it be repeated, had been mutually dependent for success on their *liaison* in the hectic rushes of units for points of advantage over the treacherous ground. That is, if an element of one division made a gain, it must have the support of a gain by the other. Though the wedge made by the left of the 1st on October 4th was narrower than we had planned, we did have a wedge, and where we wanted it— on the wall of the Aire valley. We must not lose that wedge, though the 28th had been able to make only a slight advance in the valley. The dangerous position of the left of the 1st on the bluff above Fléville called for desperately hard driving the next day by both the 32nd and the 1st's retarded right.

In supporting the 1st's right, whose advance was so vital in protecting the entrant the 1st's left had made, the 32nd set its heart on gaining the block of the Morine and Chêne Sec woods and Hill 255 beyond. From midnight to the hour of attack, all the artillery of the 32nd pounded them, keeping the dark masses of the woods and the outlines of the hill flickeringly visible in the flashes of a stream of bursting shells, which it would seem no defender could withstand. At 6.30 three battalions of infantry began the assault of the woods, and over the fresh shell-craters, past smashed machine-gun nests, through a litter of fallen saplings and splintered limbs, they kept on until they reached the open. This was a triumph of incalculable value to the right of the 1st, and in turn to the wedge on the Aire wall. But when the charge started to go on to Hill 255, the artillery concentration could not stifle the irresistible machine-gun fire of the nests hidden in all the recesses of the forward slopes, or the guns on the reverse slopes and on the series of heights beyond. [277]

Meanwhile the center and right had passed the village of Gesnes through encircling fire, which, once they were beyond the village, grew to such volume that they were stopped. Demands went back for more shells from the divisional artillery,—demands which the artillery of three or four divisions and all the heavy artillery of the Army, which could alone reach the more distant enemy guns, could not have filled. However, the gunners gave all the volume in their power with all possible rapidity. Again the infantry moved forward to the attack; but our bombardment seemed only to have stirred up a heavier one in answer, and brought additional enemy machine-guns to bear. It was hopeless to try to go on. If the Arrows could not go on, it was folly to remain targets nailed to exposed ground around Gesnes, and accordingly they withdrew through the town, but still retaining the hard-won woods on the left, whose possession was essential to the success of the attack of the right of the 1st. [278]

The 1st's goal on the 5th was that wooded hill and the wooded slopes of the Montrefagne, which

had resisted the efforts of yesterday. During the night Summerall had appeared among his men, a dynamic, restless figure, insisting that there must be no failure on the morrow. With all the divisional artillery at play in a mobile pattern of fire, at once smashing the enemy machine-gun nests and advancing the shields where needed, the infantry in systematic charges continued making progress until the Montrefagne was theirs. When darkness came, they joined up with the left in line with Fléville. The wedge was this much broadened, its position accordingly stronger. As the 28th had still been unable to make much headway, the wedge could not be driven farther until the base was spread, without exposing a longer flank to the fire from the western wall of the Aire valley, and on the right from the sector of the 32nd, whose elements were in poor *liaison* that night with those of the 1st. So the men of the 1st, become cave-dwellers on the heights in their industrious digging, had one side of the Aire trough as far as Fléville,—and that was the intrinsic value of the wedge. The next step was to be the spreading of the wedge across the valley of the Aire itself, by thrusting in another fresh division between the 1st and the 28th at the base of the bluffs to assault the Forest escarpments. This movement would support the 1st, and would in turn be supported by the 1st's further advance. [279]

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## XVI

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### MASTERING THE AIRE TROUGH

West of the river—The 82nd Division called for—A difficult alignment—The outpost hills taken on the 7th of October—And the 28th cleans up the escarpments on its front—The all-American character of the 82nd—The enemy defends desperately the remaining escarpments—Repeated charges up the bluffs—Which are cleared by the 10th.

Hovering in reserve since September 26th, the 82nd Division, National Army, was now to have its turn to be "expended" in the battle. During its period of waiting it had two battalions severely shelled on the way to assist the 35th Division in an attack which was countermanded; and of course its engineers had been kept employed on the roads. No engineers in sight were ever out of work, from the beginning to the end of the battle. Previously the division, which had stayed but a brief time on the British front, had served during the summer months on the Toul front, where it had advanced on the extreme right flank of the Saint-Mihiel operation. Originally formed in the South, the 82nd had been called the "All-American" division because it had been filled with draft men from all parts of the country, though its training-camp associations remained Southern, and most of its officers were Southerners. Now it was chosen for the thrust in the valley of the Aire to spread the wedge which the 1st had driven. [281]

We know how the 28th Division threw its men against the Argonne escarpments in the first days of the battle. Since then it had remained in the trough of the Aire under continual flanking fire, while its units had alternate periods of rest; but after all it had endured, even its determination could not give it the vigor of a fresh division. On the 4th and 5th, while the 1st on its flank was advancing, and again on the 6th, while the 1st was dug in, it had kept up its attacks, with the net result that its left had made some further progress against the Taille l'Abbé of infamous reputation, and its right had advanced as far as Hill 180, a mile and a half to the south of the village of Fléville where the men of the 1st were hugging the bluffs, which formed a bastion in the trough interlocking the fire from either side.

Having moved down the valley of the Aire under the portion of the eastern wall which the 1st held, the 82nd was to face west and attack toward the western wall. Getting into position for the action was itself a ticklish business as a tactical maneuver for the infantry. The shell-swept road which it was to use for bringing its artillery and transport up this narrow passage under the enemy's flanking machine-gun nests, was already taxed with the transport of the 28th, which was still to go on attacking. The 28th had sworn that it would not leave the valley until it had taken the Taille l'Abbé. It had prior rights to that formidable escarpment. [282]

If ever a division needed capable guides, it was the 82nd on the night of the 6th. It had to slip past Châtel-Chéhéry on the opposite bank of the river, from which patrols of the 28th had been ejected in the day's attack, and on past Hill 223 and Hill 180 to a point near Fléville, in a winding, exposed passage. There were unexpected delays on the roads. At 2.30 in the morning the artillery was stalled, and some of the infantry was still at Varennes, five miles from its jumping-off place for the attack set for three hours later. Guides failing to appear, it was not surprising that the regiment which was to attack on the left, or south, against Hill 223 should have gone too far in the darkness, when a man was hardly visible ten yards away; and, after marching and groping all night, should have had to retrace its steps. With men exhausted and units confused, it arrived at its jumping-off line to find that not a single gun was up for its support. An advance according to schedule became out of the question.

By accepted canons this misfortune might have ruined the whole movement, or at least led to delaying the movements of the other units; but delays were out of the question. There was no time to communicate counter-orders to the 28th, which had gathered all its strength for a supreme effort whose success depended upon the coöperation of the 82nd. If the whole line could not go forward at daylight, then all of it that could must go. Fortunately the dark night, which had screened their movement from accurate fire by the enemy, was followed by a thick morning fog. This was opportune in partially screening an attack which must cross the river in face of the [283]

heights which they were to storm. The right, or north, regiment, as it started on time, had the advantage of the fog in its first rush. The men forded through water two and three feet deep; the officers who were leading pulled them up the steep banks on the other side. By 8.30 Hill 180, with its machine-gun nests, which had been one of the bulwarks defying the thin line of the 28th for nearly two weeks, was no longer in German hands. The men of the left regiment, starting at 9 o'clock against a still higher hill, 223, overlooking Châtel-Chéhéry, were swept at the fords by enfilade shell-fire and storms of machine-gun bullets in front, which made fearful gaps in their ranks. Under the spur of their delay, considering nothing except that they must make up for lost time, they plunged ahead, and once across they did not bother with any deliberate infiltration around machine-gun nests, but simply swept over them in headlong impatience. By one o'clock they had the hill, a portion of which had been reached by a small detachment of the 28th. They did not know whether or not the 28th had reached Châtel-Chéhéry until they saw soldiers of the 28th climbing the steep sides of Hill 244 back of the town. The fact that two-thirds of the men of two of the companies of the 82nd were killed or wounded was evidence enough that the 1st was not the only division willing to pay a price for gains when it was called upon to be a human wedge. This finished the day's work for the left regiment, except for a German counter-attack which received such prompt and efficacious attention that another was not attempted.

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The 82nd having taken over a portion of its line, the 28th had been able to concentrate its forces on the remainder. Though by all criteria the 28th should have been counted as already "expended," it had an access of energy at the prospect of attacking under more favorable circumstances the positions which had so long held it back. After building a footbridge across the Aire, the right regiment charged across the level toward the village of Châtel-Chéhéry, at the base of the heights. This time the Pennsylvanians meant to put more than patrols into the village. Lashed by gun-fire and whipped by machine-gun fire from the heights which had them seemingly at their mercy, units were riddled and their officers killed, with resulting dispersion as undaunted survivors sought for dead spaces and cover. The colonel in command fell mortally wounded by a machine-gun bullet while directing his men. His soldiers avenged him not only by taking and holding Châtel-Chéhéry, but that night they took Hill 244, the ridge following south to the Taille l'Abbé, silencing its galling fire on the river bottoms.

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So much for the right. The left regiment was again to attack the Taille l'Abbé. This, being farther south, and toward the rear, than Châtel-Chéhéry, which was in turn south of the 82nd's front, further illustrates the anomalous tactical situation and the interdependence of all the diverse and treacherous elements of ground and dispositions in the problem of supporting the driving of the 1st's wedge. In the course of their arduous ten days' effort to carry out the original plan of "scaloping" the Forest edge to protect the frontal attack of the 77th through the Forest, the Pennsylvanians had developed a sinuous line around the slopes which in places ran at right angles to our battlefield as a whole. It was a line with outposts holding ravines, and groups clinging to vantage points of all kinds, who, in their fox-holes, were the present masters of their destiny, isolated from communication by day and approachable only by silent crawling under cover of darkness. This process of infiltration had bent a shepherd's crook around the Taille l'Abbé. All the whittling of ten long days came to a head in the attack of October 7th, whose ax's blow cut deep into the Forest to La Viergette, past the south flank of the Taille l'Abbé, whose defenses must now crumple under the additional pressure from the north.

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While we are with the 28th, we shall follow its career through the Aire valley to the end. On the 8th neither the general situation in relation to the neighboring divisions nor its exhaustion warranted a general attack by the 28th; but it did not neglect a little chore, which gave it retributory satisfaction, in cleaning up the last of the machine-gun nests and any vagrant Germans remaining on the hateful Abbé. Its goal won, its honor avenged, it was now to have the rest which it had as fully earned as the name of the "Iron Division," which it was now being called. It was relieved on the night of the 8th-9th by the 82nd. In a marvelous endurance test of twelve days, in which the men had gone without cooked food under continual rains, the Pennsylvanians had suffered 6,149 casualties, while 1,200 officers and men had been sent to hospitals, ill as the result of the terrible strain and exposure. They had advanced over six miles. They had taken 550 prisoners and 8 guns in their plodding gains against fearful odds; and do not forget, as they will tell you, that they had also taken two German locomotives, most useful for bringing up supplies on a captured section of railroad which the engineers had repaired. The engineers particularly, and all the Pennsylvanians, were proud of that railroad—the 28th's own trunk line; but the proudest thought of these emaciated Guardsmen, as they marched away, was that they had not had to leave the conquest of the Taille l'Abbé to a fresh division. They had taken it themselves.

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Now Hills 223 and 180, which the 82nd had captured in its first day's fighting on the 7th, were as detached forts, nearer the eastern wall than the western, in a broad stretch of the valley. Their crests looked over a rolling stretch of bottom lands to the bluffs of the Forest's edge, which were so steep that the naked earth broken by landslides held only scattered dwarf trees and shrubs. Torrents dashed down the ravines during heavy rains. Scaling rather than assault was the word to describe an attempt at their mastery. Artillery was hidden on their crests, and machine-guns on their crests and in the favoring intricacies of the slopes.

Northwest from Hill 180 the village of Cornay nestled at the foot of an escarpment flung out from the Forest almost to the river's bank. This promontory made of the stretch of bottom a kind of bay. While commanding in rear and flank the farther advance of the 1st on the opposite river wall, it could also turn a flanking fire on any charge across the bay toward the bluffs in addition to the plunging frontal fire from the bluffs. Cornay must be taken in order to gain the valley as far

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as Fléville. On the way across the bay, either to Cornay or to the bluffs, any charge must cross the Boulasson creek, which was unfordable at points. Thus this bay was a *cul de sac*; but a visible one. The All-Americans knew what to expect on their way to the heights.

With its personnel varying from little men from the tenements to tall lean men of the cotton-fields, the 82nd had in its pride of corps the rivalry of community, region, and state. It was said that one city division had been careful in its sifting when it transferred an excess of its draft men to the 82nd. If so, the result shows how inspectors may err in judging by the measure of a recruit's chest whether or not he will have the heart of a warrior when good food reddens the blood pumped through the valves it strengthens, and drill and comradeship stiffen his fighting temper. The All-Americans might have no state or group of states that claimed them for its own; but the conviction that they were for all the states—all America—was the fostering spirit of the four days of unceasing attack, that were now to begin. [289]

On the 8th the south regiment, moving down the slope of Hill 223 and crossing the level, had reached the ridge beyond in two hours. By 5 P.M. it had fought its way to the possession of a portion of the ridge. Bitterly yielding to the power of the enemy's fire after companies, in characteristic all-America bravery, had lost half their numbers, it retired down the slope during the night to dig itself protection. The north regiment bridged and forded and swam the creek, and fought all day for Cornay and the heights to the westward. The Germans did not depend alone upon fire from the heights. Their machine-gunners were under cover of the bushes and knolls of the bottoms, contesting the passage of the brook, sweeping stretches of its winding course with flanking as well as frontal fire. Their roving field guns attached to battalions fired at point-blank range upon the infantry wave as it appeared on a knoll on the other side of the brook before Cornay, and the men face to face with the gunners bore them down and passed on. By six that afternoon they were in the town and up the slopes of the adjoining heights. There were not enough of them to hold what they had taken. All but forty men of two companies had been killed or wounded in crossing those deadly reaches of the river bottom. As darkness fell, bullets were spattering in every street in Cornay, and pelting down from the crest upon the All-Americans, trying to dig into the slope. Orders had to be given for withdrawal from Cornay and the most exposed ground, for a night of reorganization in the valley of the brook. [290]

A reserve regiment of the 82nd, having taken over the 28th's front, spent the next day under galling fire in swinging its line up level with the other regiments. Again a charge, running the gamut from the bluffs and in face of machine-gun nests in the village itself, entered Cornay at 11 A.M.; again we were slowly forcing our way up the heights where in places the men could climb only by drawing themselves up by bushes and dwarf trees. Reduced in number by the incessant drain of casualties, beginning to feel the exhaustion from three days' fighting and nights practically without sleep, they thought that this time they could hold their gains; but at dusk a German counter-attack launched right across the river bottom from Fléville to Cornay under a barrage of shells and machine-gun bullets, and by infiltration from the heights into Cornay, where our men fought from house to house in a confused struggle against odds, forced those of the advanced groups who did not remain to die in their tracks to fall back upon their reserves, who stood fast. The Germans depended much upon that counter-attack, and they made it at a time when the losses and exhaustion of the 82nd, of which they were fully aware, might well have led them to think that this young division would break under a sharp blow. Far from breaking, the 82nd, having savagely and promptly repulsed the counter-attack, was, despite its casualties, further to extend its front that night by taking over the eastern bank of the river from the 1st Division. [291]

October 10th was to see the culmination of the movement in the trough of the Aire, when the 77th, the pressure on its flank released, was to begin its final sweep through the Forest. It was to be a day of such retribution for the 82nd as the 28th had had in the taking of the Taille l'Abbé; hills and woods are the landmarks of divisional histories in this battle. The dead of the 82nd were intermingled with the dead enemy on the slopes and in Cornay, and in that stretch of the river bottom which in its exposure resembles more closely than the background of any other charge in the Meuse-Argonne battle the open fields which Pickett's men crossed in their rush up the slopes of Seminary Ridge. The gallant officers who led these men knew that they would follow, and Major-General George B. Duncan, who had taken command of the division before the battle, was serene and resourceful in his confidence. [292]

Along the embankment, along the banks of the creek, in little gullies and dips of that *cul de sac* of a bay, they had pegged down their gains as the jumping-off places for their assaults on the gallery of heights overlooking the stage of their indomitable tenacity. They were fighting against better than German veterans—German specialists. The prisoners they took usually yielded not in bodies but as individuals or small groups, wounded, exhausted, surrounded by dead. Two out of three of those in the Cornay region were machine-gunners or chosen non-commissioned officers who were trusted to fight to the death and make the most of their sacrifice by their skill. First and last the 82nd captured 277 machine-guns, as the harvest of its courage at close quarters.

On the morning of the 10th it brought its field guns close up behind the infantry, assigned roving guns to its battalions, and placed its Hotchkiss guns and its little 37's in the front line, which smashed machine-gun nests at point-blank range. Now the All-Americans took Cornay for the last time, clearing its streets and cellars; swept up the valley and over the ridge above Cornay; and sprinting patrols entered Marcq in the plain beyond, while from the conquered higher ground they looked down upon the bend of the river toward Grandpré, where it passes between the Argonne and the Boulton Forests. At last the trough of the Aire with both its walls was ours from Varennes past Cornay. The taking of the gap of Grandpré which brought us in face of the heights [293]

## XVII

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### VETERANS CONTINUE DRIVING

The 1st marking time—A fumble gives one height—Relying on the engineers—The triangle of hills—A tribute from the enemy—The Arrow Division also pointed at the whale-back—Which resists intact—Still the 1st goes on—"As good as the 1st."

As soon as the 82nd's attacks on the river bottoms were well under way, the 1st was to make another rush, driving its wedge ahead of the 82nd's front over the hills of the eastern wall. On the 6th, the day before the All-Americans took Hills 180 and 223, and the day before the Pennsylvanians of the 28th took Châtel-Chéhéry, the 1st was due to mark time; and so also was the 32nd—still holding the block of the Morine and Chêne Sec woods and withdrawn from Gesnes,—which was in turn dependent for further advance upon the movement in the Aire trough. The flanks of the two divisions, left out of *liaison* as a result of the viciously confused fighting of the 5th, must join up.

In the neighborhood of their junction, northwest of the Morine and Chêne Sec woods, the highest point was Hill 269, in the Moncy Wood. To the west 269 looked across all the hilltops to the Argonne Forest, and to the east almost to the Meuse. This distance of vision, it should be explained, did not mean observation of the slopes of the other hills or the low ground at their bases. Each hill which we had conquered or had yet to conquer on the way to the whale-back was only one of an interlocking series. Though none approached the spectacular formidability of an isolated height towering over a surrounding plain, Hill 269 was relatively very important because of its situation and altitude.

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The statement that the 1st was marking time on the 6th must be qualified by the activity of its patrols; for it was not in the nature or traditions of the pioneer division ever to dig a hole and sit in it all day, leaving the initiative to the enemy. It was always hugging him close, ready to jump for any opening that offered. A patrol kept on going until it developed enough resistance to warrant its withdrawal with the information it had gained. Also it took responsibility, and did not wait on orders if it found an opportunity of turning a trick. This seems an obvious system; but its application may vary in efficiency from experience to inexperience, from clumsiness to shrewdness, from foolish bravado to courageous and resourceful discretion. One of the 1st's patrols, in the course of linking up with the 32nd on the 6th, kept feeling its way through the Moncy Wood without any opposition until it came to the top of Hill 269. This was in the 32nd Division's sector; but veteran divisions do not stand on etiquette on such occasions. They know that in the gamble of battle the division which lends a helping hand one day may need a helping hand the next. In sending out the patrol, the brigade commander had made it small, as he did not want many men killed; for he appreciated what hidden machine-guns could do to the most agile group of scouts when the gunners held their fire for a propitious moment.

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We had caught the Germans napping on 269. The advantage we had gained resembled that taken of a fumble at football. Any "kid" lieutenant or any one of his men could see as well as General Pershing himself that this crest was worth holding; and that daring little group held it until relieved by two companies of the 32nd. Meanwhile the fumble had enabled the 1st to take the Ariétal farm, which formed a natural rallying point for enemy machine-gunners in the ravine between the Moncy and the Little woods (le Petit Bois). This was an advantage for the next attack second only to the occupation of 269, with which it had a close tactical relation.

On the 7th the 1st, which had been under the First Corps, was transferred to the Fifth, and its front extended to include Hill 269. It was now time for the division engineers, who had been working night and day on the roads, to cease their idling and begin fighting. The battalion which was sent to take over 269 from the 32nd was soon to find what store the Germans set by it, once they realized the blunder that had allowed it to slip out of their hands. The enemy's artillery proceeded to make this sharply defined cone a pillar of hell; but the engineers were used to digging, and they dug with a vengeance. They were also used to sticking on the job. In the face of counter-attacks, supported by a rain of shells and bullets of artillery and machine-gun barrages, they held their ground in the midst of fountains of earth and flying débris and frightful casualties, with that resolution in which every man, no matter how many of his comrades are killed, determines that he will not yield alive.

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After the driving of the wedge to Fléville and the taking of Montrefagne, the 1st had been badly shattered. The heavy rains had made the holding of the eastern wall of the Aire under the murderously accurate flanking fire from the western wall all the more horrible. Transport was being regularly shelled; woods, where reserves might take cover, were being gassed. Not only was the doctrine of the 1st never to yield ground taken upheld at every point, but it was continuing to improve its position on the 7th and 8th while it reorganized its available forces, steadily reduced by casualties, in an undaunted offensive spirit.

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The 28th having taken the Châtel-Chéhéry heights of the opposite valley wall, and the 82nd attacking the Cornay heights, the 9th was chosen as the day when the hammer should again begin pounding the wedge into the ramparts ahead. By this time the 1st had had over 5,000

casualties, representing more than one-third of its infantry. There was an old rule that when a third of your men were out of action it was time for retreat. This had ceased to apply in the Great War; it was hardly a view that Summerall would hold. The 1st had not yet finished its task, and he meant that it should be finished. There could be no question of fatigue, or excuses. More engineers were summoned into line; everything that veteran experience could arrange was ready. The ammunition supply and the transport were up; the hospital service was prepared for heavy casualties. Every man's jaw was set for a final triumphant drive which should finally clear the wall of the Aire.

The enemy's jaw was set too. He knew that our next rush would be a desperate effort to reach the main-line defenses of the whale-back. Indeed, this was our plan, which required that the 1st go about a mile and a half over even more formidable ground than in the drive of the 4th and 5th. On the 1st's right, Hill 269 in the Moncy Wood was safely held, if at a bloody cost. On the center and right the Montrefagne Wood ran northeast in the narrow tongue of the Little Wood. In this wood, about on a line with 269, was Hill 272, the highest of all the hills on the 1st's front, which we knew was strongly held and strongly fortified. The Little Wood, broadening beyond it, extended westward, while the ravine between it and the Moncy Wood (Hill 269) wound in the same direction. Well back in this portion of the Little Wood was Hill 263, which was at the apex of a triangle with 269 and 272 as the base. Our seizure of Ariétal farm in the ravine before it could be fortified enabled our men, thanks to the protection from our seizure of Hill 269, to establish themselves on the 7th and 8th on the slopes of the two other hills. Thus we were saved from a cross-fire in having to pass between the two base angles of the triangle toward the apex. We could take Hill 272, the remaining hill at the base, in flank. It was certainly good generalship which won this advantage for us, and poor generalship which lost it for the enemy. Once we had Hill 263 at the apex, it was downhill through the Romagne woods until we were before the Kriemhilde Stellung, which bent southward on the 1st's right in front of the 32nd's sector. To the west of Little and Romagne woods many patches of woods gave cover for machine-guns on the ascents of the Maldah ridge, which ran to the end of the Aire wall where the Aire bent sharply westward to the gap of Grandpré. However, the crux of the problem of the 1st on the 9th was the taking of Hill 272 at the western point of the triangle and 263 at the apex.

Being a gunner, Summerall believed in making the most of gun power. He had trained the artillery of the 1st, and knew its capabilities. This implied anything but penuriousness in the expenditure of ammunition. Throughout the 7th and 8th, day and night, the 1st's artillery had been "softening" the defenses of these two hills and of all the other positions with a concentrated bombardment, and placing ceaseless interdictory fire in their rear to keep them isolated from communication.

If ever infantry needed powerful barrages to protect its swift charges, it was on the morning of the 9th. Any failure to go home at any point might be fatal to the whole movement. As supple as the enemy, the 1st was using roving, or tramp, guns to counter his roving guns. The remainder of the divisional artillery was entirely concentrated in making shields in turn for the right, left, and center, which advanced successively instead of at the same time. The weather as well as the barrages was in our favor. A dense fog hid our waves from the enemy's observation. His machine-gunners in some instances could not see to fire until our men were upon them; in others, as the fog lifted on the exposed targets, our losses were ghastly without staying our progress.

Apart from the engineers, the division had only one battalion of fresh infantry in reserve. This battalion was sent against the highest of the hills, 272. Breaking through the fog, in bolt surprise, it took prisoner every man of the garrison of 272 who was not killed. As the curtain of bursting shells of the shield which our men were hugging lifted, the German lieutenant-colonel in command of the hill started out of his dugout, only to see the charge sweeping past its mouth, and, in turn, past all the dugouts where his troops had taken cover from the approaching tornado. He knew that all was lost; and he wept in his humiliation at being captured. It was the first time that the shock division to which he belonged had ever been on the defensive. He paid a soldier's tribute to the power and accuracy of the artillery fire of the 1st, which for two days had marooned him, without food for his men and unable to send them orders or to receive orders from his superior. He had not believed that in five years the Americans would have been able to develop such a division as the 1st; and one's only comment on this is that the men of the 1st were the same kind of men as in the other divisions. He had happened to meet the 1st, as any other division will tell you. German officers who met other divisions in the Argonne held the same view about them. Professional opinions from such experts were worth while.

Our attack on Hill 272 on the left and our possession of 269 on the right protecting their flanks, the troops which were making a head-on drive for 263 had an equally brilliant success, thanks to the same thoroughgoing, enterprising, and courageous tactics. Those on the left, with the enemy's plans upset by the loss of 272 and 263, wove their way through the patches of woods, conquering successive machine-gun nests until the Côte de Maldah was theirs in a sweep no less important as a part of the well-arranged whole, though perhaps less sensational. So much for the day's work of the 1st in the high tide of its career on October 9th.

We shall now take up that of the Arrows of the 32nd. On the 7th and 8th the 32nd had been busy sending out patrols and seeking to gain certain vantage points which would be useful in the next day's attack. It had established itself in Gesnes. Its own artillery was now back with the division, taking the place of that of the 30th Division, which, after its exhausting work in forcing its guns through the Montfaucon woods in support of the 37th, had still remained in line in support of the 32nd. In addition the artillery of the 42nd, or Rainbow, Division, which was now coming up in reserve, was placed at the disposal of the 32nd; for it could not have too much gun power if it

were to make any headway on the 9th. Nor could it have too much infantry. The 181st Brigade of the 91st, Pacific Coast, Division had not gone into rest when the 91st had been "expended" in the early period of the battle. It was now placed in line between the 1st and the 32nd, and despite their fatigue the Pacific Coast men were relied upon for nothing less than the assault of that Hill 255 whose galling fire had checked the 32nd's advance on the 5th.

The "side-slipping" of the division sector when the 1st relinquished the bank of the Aire and came under the administration of the Fifth Corps had not given the 32nd any easier task. Wasn't it a veteran division? Wasn't it used to being expended? The ambition of the Army command was in the saddle again, expecting the Arrows, with the artillery of two divisions in support, to penetrate immediately the Kriemhilde Stellung, or main defenses of the whale-back.

As the Kriemhilde bent south past the 1st's flank, it was within a mile of the 32nd's front. On the 32nd's left it was established in the Valoup Wood on the ridge of the Côte Dame Marie, a name of [304] infernal associations in the history of two veteran divisions. In the center it passed in front of the town of Romagne. To the right or east it continued on another ridge in the strong Mamelle trench. The plan was a swing to the left through Valoup Wood to take the Côte Dame Marie, and a swing to the right to take the Mamelle trench, encircling the village of Romagne, while the center on the Gesnes-Romagne road regulated its advance with that of the flanks.

It might have been carried out in one day, as an officer said, if the 32nd had had the artillery of five or six divisions and a score of heavy batteries from the French, while the men had been provided with shell- and bullet-proof armor. This heroic dream is mentioned in passing. More to the point is what the men of the 32nd accomplished; for they almost made the dream come true before darkness fell on the night of October 9th. They were the Arrows indeed—an arrow on the right and on the left—with the bow of determination drawn taut before the attacks were released. That on the left penetrated the Dame Marie, while the right penetrated the Mamelle trench where the meager numbers which formed the very tip of the arrow-head were stopped in a bout [305] of hand-to-hand fighting, while their comrades on the right and left were held up by the wire and the relentlessly increasing machine-gun fire. The center could not advance. Romagne was not encircled.

The 181st Brigade of the 91st had orders to hold during the attack on the 9th; then, as standing still appeared to be poor policy, it had orders to assault Hill 255, whose fire had stayed progress on the 6th. Later orders came that the support was unnecessary, but not until the Pacific Coast men were already started forward, only to have to dig in in face of annihilating fire. The next day, the Germans now evacuating Hill 255 under the flanking pressure of the 1st and 32nd, the Pacific Coast men mopped up the hill, captured the concrete blockhouse on the reverse slope, and then set out to mop up the Tuilerie farm, which was supposed to be taken. Unfortunately it was not taken. Between them and the farm was Hill 288, the highest of all, with an outpost of the Kriemhilde position in the form of a horseshoe organized in a sunken road with walls twenty or thirty feet high. Tunnels from the road allowed the machine-gunners to play hide and seek in going and coming to the slope. Their fire and plentiful gas and high-explosive shells checked the front line about three hundred yards south of the hill. The next day the brigade was to attack again in case there were enough artillery fire forthcoming to "soften" the hill; but there was not. [306] The Pacific Coast men were now relieved by units of the 32nd. Shivering for want of woolen underwear, rarely getting hot meals, their long service in the battle was over. Though many were ill, they refused to report on the sick list for fear that they would be transferred from hospital to another division than their own.

It was no less a policy of the Arrows of the 32nd than of the 1st Division never to yield gains. They were at close quarters with the Kriemhilde, and they proposed to remain there. The enemy's fully aroused artillery and machine-gun resistance to protect the points where the Kriemhilde had been entered prevented any headway on the 10th and 11th, while hand-to-hand fighting continued on the Dame Marie ridge. Before the 32nd was to conquer the ridge and take Romagne, it must make preparation equal to the task. This belongs to another stage of the battle. We are presently concerned with the fact that the Arrows had done their part in the costly operation that had conquered the heights into which the 1st had driven its wedge.

The enemy now withdrawing from the front of the 1st across the valley and low ground to the Kriemhilde, which was here farther north than in front of the 32nd, the 1st, in a movement of exploitation, with gratefully few casualties made a mile on the 10th, passing through the Romagne Wood and beyond the village of Sommerance. On the next day, feeling out the enemy positions with a knowing hand, the veterans learned that they could be taken only by fresh troops [307] in a thoroughly organized attack. The 1st had accomplished its daring mission; it had won a telling victory. Three-fifths of its infantry was out of action from death and wounds; the remainder had been fully "expended" in exhaustion or sickness. Surely no division in all our history had ever been in finer condition for battle, or fought with more discipline and skillful valor, or suffered more losses in a single action. "To be as good" as the pioneer 1st had been the ambition of all the divisions in the early days of our fighting in France. If some became as good, this is the more honor to them.

The affection of long association creeps in as I think of the 1st's first detachments arriving at Saint-Nazaire, or of its pioneer training on the drill-grounds at Gondrecourt in the days when there was a fear in our hearts that we might yet lose the war. The 1st had confidence without boasting, and dignity without punctiliousness; its pride kept it from dwelling on the excuses of unprotected flanks; it was on good terms with neighboring divisions and with the French: self-reliant, systematic, trying to live up to the fortune that had made it the first to arrive in France and was to make it the last to go home. It had expected to pay a heavy price for its crowning [308]



success; and paid it with an absence of grumbling which makes the sacrifice of life of a transcendent nobility, however worn and filthy the khaki it wears.

When relieved by the 42nd the 1st withdrew, after casualties of 8,554, in faultlessly good order from the line of the gains which it securely held.

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## XVIII

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### THE GRANDPRÉ GAP IS OURS

The "Liberty" Division trying to clear the Forest on its own—The battalion which refused to be lost—The "scalloping" succeeds—Out of the Forest—The 82nd across the Aire—The 77th takes Saint-Juvin, though not according to plan—And finally gets across the Aire to Grandpré.

Its line the breadth of the Argonne Forest, no division could have waited more impatiently than the 77th or "Liberty" Division of New York City upon the driving of the wedge on the eastern wall of the Aire and the clearing of the Aire trough, which, to serve its purpose, must be accompanied in turn by the progress of the "scalloping" movement of the French on their left. The "Liberty" men's apprehension lest they might not make the most of any advance on their flanks amounted to an obsession. If they halted, they found that the enemy had time to cut openings in the foliage to give his machine-guns fields of fire, string chicken-wire between trunks of trees, build elements of trenches on the opposite slopes of gullies, and play other tricks in the tangles of underbrush. The best way to keep the German out of mischief was to keep him on the move.

On the 29th and 30th of September the "Liberty" men had made good advances, as we know. In the early days of October, while there was a lull in the offensive on other parts of our front, they were having a very busy time. As the "scalloping" movement against the escarpments at either edge of the Forest was delayed, they would try to do without this elbowing assistance on their flanks. As for being "expended," this was out of consideration while half of the Forest was yet to be taken. No other division had any rights in the Forest. It was theirs, with the understanding that they prove the nine points of the law by taking possession of their estate. They must keep on fighting until they saw the light of the Grandpré gap at the end of its dark reaches. Such a state of mind is conducive to fighting morale. There was a personal property interest at stake.

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On the morning of October 2nd, they made a general attack of their own. On the right in the Naza Wood they ran into a system of detached trenches and machine-gun positions which were invisible until the bullets began to sing and hand-grenades began to fly, while their exposed flank left no doubt that the Germans were still in force on the Taille l'Abbé in front of the 28th. The objective of the left was the Apremont-Binarville road. Not only were the "Libertys" a "pushful" division, but there was never any lack of pushing by their commander. The battalion on the left was told to keep on going until it reached the road, no matter what happened on its flanks. It obeyed orders. After it arrived, it found that there were no Americans on one flank or French on the other. Only Germans. No messages came through from the brigade; messengers sent back disappeared in the woods to the rear, and fell into German hands.

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This was the incident of the "Lost Battalion." Technically, the battalion was not lost. It knew where it was on the map. Practically, it was isolated from the rest of the division—surrounded, besieged. Whether they are described as lost or not, the men of the battalion will not soon forget their experience. When they went into action, they had two days' rations. As most of them had eaten one day's on the morning of the 3rd, they had the other day's to last them—they knew not how long. They did not have to expend much energy, except on patrols and outposts. The thing was to avoid drawing fire and wasting their ammunition. If they rose from their fox-holes, where they were dug in among the roots of trees on the northern slope of the ravine below the road, a spray of machine-gun fire, or the burst of a shell, convinced them that sedentary habits are best when you are fasting. At the bottom of the ravine was a swamp which protected them on that side, while the crest of the ridge above the road protected them on the other. Their pleasantest diversion was watching shells which missed their aim, harmlessly throwing up fountains of mud in the swamp.

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Some of the shells were supposed to have been fired by the French, who were said to be under the impression that the battalion must have already surrendered. The Germans held the view that it ought to surrender, according to rules. When they sent in a messenger with the suggestion, supported by the gratuitous information that the battalion was hopelessly surrounded, it was received not even politely, let alone sympathetically, by the reserve major in command, who had gone from his law office to a training camp.

The major shaved every morning as usual. He never let the empty feeling in his stomach communicate itself to his head; he was as smiling and confident when he went among his men as if their situation were a part of the routine of war. He had disposed them skillfully; they had learned by experience where to dig in to escape fire; and they were amazingly secure, though they were surrounded. It became bad form to be hungry. When they put out panels to inform our aviators of their location, the panels only drew fire, and seem to have failed in their object as lamentably as the dropping of rations from American planes, which probably the Germans ate.

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Of course, the division was making efforts to reach the battalion, being stopped by machine-gun fire. The 77th was fast held during those five days. Meanwhile the 1st had driven its wedge along the wall of the Aire, and on the morning of the 7th the 82nd had begun its attacks in the valley, while the French were ready to move up on the western edge of the Forest. These successes, and the disposition of the 77th to take advantage of them, started the retirement of the Germans in the Forest. On the night of the 7th the survivors of the lost battalion rose from their fox-holes as the figures of Americans came through the darkness to their relief. Their first thought was food. Then they found that they had become heroes. There had been a compelling appeal to the imagination in the thought of this band of Metropolitans from city streets, stoically holding their ground when surrounded by German veterans in a forest in France. They did a fine thing, but no finer than many other battalions whose deeds attracted less public attention.

Now, with the forest edges being "scaloped" according to the original plan, the 77th might carry out, after two weeks of travail, its mission of "mopping up" as the pressure on its flanks was relieved. On the 8th it conquered the Naza positions, its right coming up even with the Taille l'Abbé. The next day, while the 1st was making its second great attack, and the 82nd was again attacking the Cornay heights, while the French were rapidly advancing on the left, the 77th swung ahead for a mile and a half. The Forest was now to be the 77th's for the marching. The retiring enemy offered only rearguard action from machine-guns and concentrations of shell-fire on roads and open spaces, which were mosquito bites after the kind of opposition which they had been facing. All they had to do was to keep up their supplies and ammunition,—and that was a good deal over the miserable roads,—and pick their way through the thickets and in and out among the tree-trunks, across ravines, on to the gap of Grandpré at the Forest's end. [314]

By this time they were at home in woodland maneuvers, or on the 10th they would not have made nearly four miles in formation, combing every yard of the Argonne's breadth as they advanced. That march showed a reserve of vitality in the city men worthy of the day when the 82nd in the valley had overrun the Cornay heights, and the 1st and 32nd had reached the Kriemhilde Stellung. Patrols, encountering no resistance, came out of the Forest to see the promised land. Another stride, and the division would be in the open, facing the gap. [315]

On the northern bank of the Aire, about half a mile beyond its sharp turn toward Grandpré, is the village of Saint-Juvin. The river bottoms here are broad and swampy between the slopes which draw together to form the walls of the gap. From the fronts of the 1st and 32nd Divisions the fragmentary trench system of the Kriemhilde ran northeasterly to a point just opposite the bend. Beyond this to the west the Germans depended upon the westward course of the river and upon the naturally strong positions on its northern side, culminating in the heights above Grandpré. The 77th's sector was extended slightly to the east to include Saint-Juvin, in order that the 82nd, which had taken over some of the front of the 1st, might undertake a movement against the Kriemhilde on the 1st's flank east of the river bend, passing Saint-Juvin on the east.

For four days the 82nd had been throwing its men into charges from the river bottom against heights, and wrestling against counter-attacks. Though it had conquered the trough of its northern course, the Aire river was still the nightmare of its evolutions. The left regiment remained facing the westward bend. The center regiment was to cross the northern course of the river, south of the bend, at Fléville, and join the right regiment, which was already across. This it did under heavy fire on the morning of the 11th, and, deploying, swung west in protecting the flank of the right regiment from the heights north of Saint-Juvin. [316]

The 82nd had already received enough shocks to be called a "stonewall" division, and had given enough to be called a shock division. It was not surprising, then, though wonderful, that the left regiment made two miles in face of the heights; or that the right regiment made a half mile more and by 8 A.M. had reached the Kriemhilde Stellung. Their exhaustion, instead of staying the All-Americans, appeared to give them a delirium of valor. When front lines were riddled by casualties, the second line "leap-frogged," and charged on into the machine-gun fire. One battalion had all its commissioned officers killed or so badly wounded that they could not move; another all but one. Non-commissioned officers continued the attack; but there was no hope at present of taking the Kriemhilde, with its fresh waiting machine-gunners in their interlocking positions supported by artillery, as the 32nd on the 82nd's left had found. The part of it in front of the 82nd was not to be taken in the general attack of October 14th—not until the final drive of November 1st. Exposed in a salient under cross-fire, the survivors of the right regiment were ordered to withdraw even with those of the center regiment, where, still under flanking fire in face of the heights, they held their ground. [317]

Meanwhile the left regiment was to cross the river westward of the bend, in order to assail the heights north and northeast of Saint-Juvin which commanded the village, and to protect the flanks of the other two regiments. The bridge near Saint-Juvin was down. A soldier going into attack under the weight of his pack and 220 rounds of ammunition cannot swim a river. Patrols searched up and down in the darkness in vain for a ford. When the engineers, who were called in, started building a footbridge, they were greeted by bursts of machine-gun fire which suddenly ceased. Instantly the infantry rushed on to the bridge, which was completed at dawn, the machine-gun fire was renewed with great accuracy and increased volume. Dead and wounded fell into the water; survivors leaped into the water and sprang up the opposite bank, facing the unseen enemy. Parts of two companies got across, and boldly started out to envelop Saint-Juvin. After losses of fifty per cent from annihilating machine-gun fire, the little band had to retreat across the river; but they had found that there was a ford near the ruins of the bridge.

Though worn down until its battalions hardly averaged the size of full companies, the left regiment was across by the ford early the next day, and charging for the heights northeast of [318]

Saint-Juvin, in the first stages of an action which was to carry on through the general attack of the 14th. In order to rid the flank of machine-gun fire, an officer led his men into the edge of Saint-Juvin itself, and took nests and prisoners. The right of the attack reached the Ravine of Stones, joining up with the center regiment in front of the Kriemhilde. There, in a wicked pocket, they stove off counter-attacks, and fought in and out with the Germans in a hide-and-seek in the treacherous folds of the slope.

In the general attack of the 14th the 82nd was once more called upon to show all the speed of a shock division fresh from rest in billets. Supporting the 42nd on its right, which began its three days of terrific storming of the Chatillon Ridge, where the Kriemhilde bends southward in a loop, the 82nd, with its infantry effectives less than half of normal strength, again attacked the Kriemhilde. It actually got through the Kriemhilde, but again was in a salient, and after further heavy casualties had to withdraw. On the left it had swept over Hill 182, the commanding height to the rear of Saint-Juvin, in coöperation with the attack of the 77th which I shall describe. As the All-American division, the 82nd was prolific in personal exploits. The sergeant who brought in 129 prisoners, and became more famous than the division commander, had a worthy comrade in the western "bronco buster," who, finding himself in face of a group of Germans on Hill 282, walked up to them, and, suddenly drawing his revolver, "took care" of the group. Then seeing a skirmish line of two hundred Germans forming, he picked up a dead German's rifle and shot the officer leading the charge, before he rushed back and brought up his machine-gun company to repulse the attack with the loss of half its numbers. [319]

Of course, the action of the 82nd was influential in the fall of Saint-Juvin, which the 77th, facing the westward bend of the river along the entire front, was to take by a neat maneuver, as its part in pressing the left flank of the Germans in the general attack of the 14th. It was concluded that the German, being a creature of habit, had probably arranged his barrage to protect Saint-Juvin from attack from the south. This was all the more likely against the heady Americans, who had a way in their exasperating energy of taking the bit in the teeth and driving straight through to an objective. With one battalion making a threat in front, the other, crossing the river—which it managed to do most adroitly—from the east, would encounter little opposition. The event turned out entirely according to anticipation, except that the battalion which was to make the threat in front got out of hand, though in a manner which was bound to give a thrill to their commander even in his technical reproof. [320]

After fighting two weeks in the Forest, the men of this battalion were feeling their oats, now that they were in the open. They did not see why the battalion on the right should have all the honor and excitement of taking Saint-Juvin, while they were making faces at it on the side lines. Their eagerness, according to the divisional report, turned the threat into an attack, with the result that they suffered from the barrage which the Germans laid down. At all events, they lost eight officers killed and twenty wounded in leading the men, who suffered in proportion, while the flanking battalion, with slight losses, entered the town on the afternoon of the 14th. The garrison tried to escape, but another little detail of prevision in the 77th's plan interfered. Accordingly the retreating Germans ran into our curtain of machine-gun fire which we laid down northwest of the town, and were captured.

After Chevières, a village on the south bank of the river, was also entered, the next nut to crack, the town of Grandpré on the other side of the river, was bound to be a bad one. It was a large town for this region, with a thousand inhabitants, resting against the bluff of the tongue of ridge which shoots out from the Bourgogne wood, which is the name for the southern end of the Boulton Forest. The character of this bluff and of the "citadel" will be of more concern when we come to the thankless and bitter experience of the 78th Division in their assaults. It is sufficient to say now that the bluffs and the houses of the town command the river bank and the narrow opening of the Aire valley to the southernmost projecting edge of the Argonne Forest. While the German on the defensive had machine-guns to spare for use in this Gibraltar, he would apply the tactics in which he was expert by making an attack on the town pay a heavy price, at small cost to himself. On the nights of the 10th and the 11th, some patrols crossed the river and entered Grandpré, to meet with a reception as hot as it was enlightening. It was evident that Grandpré was not to be taken by a few daring men. We must cross in sufficient force to hold, and then only when at least a portion of the machine-gun nests in the town had been silenced. However, the patrols had found a ford. [321]

From their heights on the north bank of the river the Germans were covering all the approaches to the town with artillery, trench-mortar, and machine-gun fire clear to the edge of the Argonne. Where we appeared in obvious avenues of approach, they brought down heavy barrages. The "Libertys" could not make a move in the open without being seen; but they kept on infiltrating forward with the rare canniness they had learned in fighting machine-gun nests through underbrush. By the morning of the 15th they were ready for the final attack. All day their artillery was pounding the town and approaches. All day they were maneuvering and advancing as they held the enemy's attention, until at dusk a detachment rushed the ford and entered the town. Other detachments built boat-bridges, and swam the river in the dark to add their numbers in making sure that we held what we had gained. All night plunging fire from the bluffs continued, and raking fire from the houses swept the streets, while the western and northern edges of the town were being organized to turn over to the 78th Division. [322]

Both river banks were ours; we had the gap, if not the citadel or the bluffs or all the buildings in the town, on the same day, it happened, that the British were at the gates of Lille. For nearly three weeks the "Libertys" had been in action. For all but five days of that time, they had been in the damp woods out of sight of the sun. In its taking of the Forest and of Grandpré and Saint-

Juin, and its subsequent advance to the Meuse after it came into line for a second time, the 77th had 4,832 casualties, and captured 720 prisoners, 3,200 rifles, and pieces of heavy and 16 of light artillery. Even now, when they were to have a holiday, they were not to leave the Forest which their valor had won, but to settle down in the comfortable rest camps in its recesses—much better than the roofless and torn walls of villages—which the enemy had built in the days when he thought that he had permanently occupied this part of France, and when no Prussian of the Landwehr or a shock division ever dreamed of being dispossessed by draft men of New York City, who at that time had never had a rifle in their hands. [323]

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## XIX ANOTHER WEDGE

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The Marne Division—A wedge in the east over open ridges—Magnificent, but not war—  
A footing in the Mamelle trench—Blue Ridge men hammering a way into the Ogons  
Wood—And into the Mamelle trench—A still hunt in a German headquarters—The dead  
line of the Briulles road.

Our First Corps was still on the left, with the trough of the Aire now behind it. Our Fifth Corps, including the 1st Division after its transfer from the First, was still in the center, and our Third Corps in the yet unconquered trough of the Meuse on the right. Departing from the arbitrary lines of the Corps, in following the movement for the conquest of the Forest and of the trough and the walls of the Aire to its conclusion, no mention was made of the other divisions from the flank of the 32nd to the Meuse. All had been attacking with the same vigor as those to the left.

On October 1st the 3rd Division, under Major-General Beaumont B. Buck, had relieved the 79th, going in beside the 32nd. Its part is given separately from that of the 32nd, which was in the same, or Fifth Corps, because it was also to drive a wedge in the general attack of October 4th. Be it the 1st or 2nd, or the 4th or 5th, the 3rd considered itself the peer of any regular division. It had become veteran without any trench service when it hurried to Château-Thierry to its baptism of fire, in the crisis of the third German offensive of the spring. I have described in my first book how, flanks exposed, it "stonewalled" on the Marne's bank against the fifth German offensive; and how, then swiftly crossing the Marne, it had joined our other divisions in the advance to the Vesle. Though its emblem was three white stripes on a blue field, indicating its three battles, it was sometimes called the Marne Division. The reputation for unflinching endurance and bold initiative which it had won was now to be further enhanced in an action whose toll of casualties was second—and then by only one hundred—to that of the 1st, which drove the wedge along the Aire. [325]

Having come from Saint-Mihiel, its replacements absorbed in its ways, its units all fresh and trained in coöperation, it marched along the road through Montfaucon which was ever under shell-fire, and down the slopes in face of the guns of the whale-back, following the path where the 79th had "expended" itself, with the spring of youth in its steps and confidence in the heart-beat of every man. Such was its pride and spirit that one would say that anything that this division could not do no other division could do. Judging by the sector and the mission to which it was assigned, this was also the view of the Army command. [326]

The line which it took over from Nantillois to the Beuge Wood was exposed to continual harassing fire. Before it were three bare irregular ridges, surmounted by commanding hills, with woods on the right flank. On the last of the three was the Mamelle trench, a part of the Kriemhilde Stellung. Army ambition, fondly contemplating the freshness and efficiency of the 3rd, saw it driving over those bare ridges, all the while under the guns of the whale-back, past flanking machine-gun fire from the wooded Hill 250 and Cunel Wood on the right. Piercing the Mamelle trench, it was to sink its wedge into the right flank of the whale-back, while the wedge of the 1st was sunk into the left flank. It was the precept of the Army that if you did not order a thing it would not be delivered. One never could tell. The 3rd might do a miracle. It had done something like a miracle on the banks of the Marne. The better a division was, the more was expected of it: which is only logical and human.

The open ground on the front was excellently suited for tanks. Forty or fifty would have approached a theoretically adequate number for the division's part in the general attack on October 4th. Unfortunately our troops had had little training in maneuvers with tanks, and the few which the French were able to spare for the 3rd were of relatively little service. For its artillery support, the 3rd had, beside its own brigade, that of the 32nd. This appeared quite generous on paper—but not in sight of those ridges. Their crests should have been ruptured by the high-explosive bursts of half a dozen regiments of heavy artillery, and received a shower-bath of shrapnel from half a dozen regiments of field artillery. However, there was the infantry—we could depend upon the "doughboys" even if we were short of artillery. [327]

As a substitute for natural cover, a smoke-screen was helpful in obscuring the aim of the enemy's machine-gunners as the charge ascended the exposed slope of the first ridge. This was taken in the morning under the cross-fire from Hill 250, which had resisted the attack on the right, while the enemy artillery fire from the whale-back searched the whole field of the advance. The dependable infantry, closing up the gaps in ranks torn by shell-fire, swaying, re-forming, and

rushing on, had accomplished this much; but there were the machine-guns from 250 sweeping the flank of the line on the ridge. The artillery was asked to pound 250; it did its best to answer this while it was answering other pressing calls. An effort to encircle 250 while it was being shelled was blasted back. No matter about 250; there was yet the second ridge to be taken; and the afternoon was young. Before nightfall the men of the 3rd had reached its reverse slope, and were digging in under shell-fire, while they received machine-gun fire not only from 250 but from Cunel Wood, which was now in flank of their advance. The Cunel was a small wood, but it was large enough for a host of machine-guns, and could not have been better placed for the German purpose.

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The next morning, October 5th, under artillery support, the men of the 3rd tried infiltration over the crest of the second ridge by all the tactics known to veterans. Apart from ample machine-guns and infantry in the trenches, the Germans had two field guns on the ridge, firing at point-blank range in directions where they would be of most service. Infiltration would not do. There must be artillery preparation, then a sweep over the crest behind the shield of a strong barrage. During the organization of this attack, there was no lull in the bitter and stubborn fighting. If lines became disarranged, there was no demoralization. The Marne division was second to no division. It meant to go through. The Cunel Wood must be cleaned up as a part of the program of taking the second ridge. A line of men, crouching, methodical, bayonets glistening, started across the open against the wood, and melted away in face of the spitting of the machine-guns. Unflinchingly another line advanced, and still another, and they too melted away under that blaze from the wood's edge. Artillery preparation for the assault of the second ridge at 5 P.M. had included the Mamelle trench on the third ridge, where the Germans were known to be in strong force. The crest of the second ridge was gained. One company, targets against the slope for shells and machine-gun bullets, kept on until it reached the little Moussin brook in the valley. The German machine-gunners had this perfectly registered under an aim that swept the reverse slope. If the company had continued advancing, any survivor who reached the Mamelle trench would have been taken prisoner. That night the machine-guns on 250 were mopped up, which removed one source of assassination in flank. The 3rd was not keeping up with the lines drawn for it on the map, but it was making gains and holding them.

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Fatigue and the drain from casualties were beginning to tell. It was evident from the number of Germans and machine-guns in the Mamelle trench that the enemy meant to fight desperately for its retention. There was no storming it without thorough artillery preparation until something was done to take care of Cunel Wood on the flank. In conjunction with the 80th on its right, the 3rd again charged Cunel's machine-gun nests. They made an entrance, only to find that the depths of the wood were plotted with machine-gun nests which began firing when the edge was taken. After the repulse of the main attack, a sergeant and twenty men of the 3rd stuck to their fox-holes. The following day they were able to withdraw in small groups. Meanwhile defensive positions were being organized on the second ridge. It was not a solacing fact to have the 32nd Division's artillery withdrawn at this juncture. In its place came a smaller force of French, who were welcome, but would have been more welcome if they had had more guns; but the British, the French, the Americans, and the Belgians, too, were using every available gun in the general offensive movement.

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On the 7th and 8th the 3rd remained dug in, preparing for the general attack of the 9th which on the Army's left was to free the Aire valley. That day the objective was to take the Mamelle trench and pass on through to the Pultière Wood. Meanwhile on the 8th there had been remorselessly close quarters work in attacks and counter-attacks in trying to take Hill 253 on the left, with the result that the end of the day left the two lines about seventy-five yards apart on the slope. Starting from the valley of the Moussin brook on the 9th, we swept into the Mamelle, overran it in places, lost parts of it, held other parts as the contest swayed back and forth. On the 10th it was hammer-and-tongs again, as we made further gains supported by barrages, only to find as the barrage lifted that the guns from the whale-back were bursting shells on our heads,—and units were again in salients of interlocking machine-gun fire. The advantage gained was not in distance, but in cleaning up some of the machine-gun nests, which allowed us to hold on to more of the Mamelle. The 11th was a repetition of the same ferocity of initiative and resistance in the same kind of wrestle. It had been a test of endurance in sleepless effort between the men of the 3rd and the Germans, and the grit of the 3rd had won.

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All this time the 80th on the left, which was swinging past the trench, was suffering from flanking fire from the machine-guns which the 3rd was trying to overcome. On the night of the 12th, the 3rd relieved units of the 80th, extending its sector. This frequent realignment in divisional sectors only made more difficult the repeated re-forming of the lines within the sector due to setbacks and casualties. The next day the elements of the 3rd which had taken over in the Peut de Faux Wood found themselves, after a terrific outburst of shell-fire, facing a strong German counter-attack. They had resisted German attacks before this on the Marne. At one point they withdrew from the line of the barrage; but when the barrage lifted, and they looked the enemy infantry in the eye at close quarters, they never budged.

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There may have been faults in the command of the 3rd in this baffling problem of tactics on open slopes and ridges where communications were under the fire of artillery from both the whale-back and the heights across the Meuse, but there was no fault in the dependable infantry. Here, as along the rest of the front in the middle of October, we were learning that the enemy, having lost advantageous ground in the defense of the whale-back, was to hold the final heights with all the more stubbornness. In the successes from October 4th to 11th the 3rd had won one of the most conspicuous. After two weeks in line its endurance was not exhausted. It was now to begin

preparing for the general attack of October 14th, which is another phase of the battle.

Support on its right flank, which had been essential to its progress, had been given by the peripatetic Blue Ridge men. The veterans of Stonewall Jackson's flying columns would have felt at home in the 80th Division. We know how well it had fought for three days in the initial attack that broke the old fortifications. On September 28th, when the 80th had been "squeezed out" of the narrowing Third Corps sector, its artillery and one infantry regiment had also remained in the fighting with the 4th Division, while the three other regiments had been marched around to be in readiness to assist the 37th in repelling a counter-attack against the Montfaucon woods. Now the Blue Ridge men were returned to become the left flank of the Third Corps on familiar ground. For such rapid travelers Army ambition had set a no less rapid pace on the map than for the 3rd. They were to keep on driving until they were through the Kriemhilde Stellung between Cunel and the Meuse. It was not fair to call them a fresh division, unless hard fighting and hard marching were counted a warming-up exercise, and going without sleep a tonic. [333]

The first of the many hurdles in the steeple-chase planned for them was the Ogons Wood, whose machine-guns had shattered the attacks of the 79th on September 29th; but this was ancient history in a battle whose processes were so swift. It happened six days ago. We were in a new era; we were making another general attack as powerful as that of September 26th. The clock had run down on September 29th; it was wound up again by the 4th. The 80th had only to repeat its own successes in the first three days of the battle, and it was in Cunel. The staff must always talk in this encouraging fashion; but there was no reason to believe that there were fewer machine-guns in the Ogons Wood than when the 79th had been repulsed. Possibly their number had been increased during the stalemate period from September 29th to October 4th. There was one way of finding out—by sending a wave of human targets over those open slopes toward the wood's edge. [334]

The machine-guns began firing with the mechanical regularity of a knitting machine, instantly the attack began. The Blue Ridge men were not surprised at this, or at receiving high-explosive shells from two directions. If they had not known from their own previous experience, the men of the long-suffering 4th Division on their right could have told them that once they were in the woods the German gunners would be slipping gas shells into their gun tubes in place of the H. E.'s used against them in the open. It was the quantity of shells and bullets that was unexpected. The enemy shell-bursts were keeping pace with them as automatically as their own barrages, and beyond their own barrage the enemy was laying down a stationary barrage awaiting their advance. Machine-gun fire increased with every step.

There was no continuing against such a shower of projectiles and hissing of bullets. A halt was called. A battalion of reserves was brought up while the artillery was told where to concentrate its fire; separated units were brought together, re-formed on a new line; tanks came up on the left to assist in the second charge at 5.30 P.M.; but the enemy had only held his fire, waiting for the second charge to start. It came nearer the Ogons, but when darkness fell the Blue Ridge men were still lying in the open, south of the wood, the enemy's guns still keeping up an intermittent galling fire, which was falling alike on the dead and the wounded and the survivors. Patrols filtered into the woods during the night—and the Blue Ridge men had a gift for such work—only to learn that a few enterprising scouts, in their stealthy crawling, if they wished to escape massacre or being taken prisoner, had to avoid drawing fire. [335]

Attack again! Keep on trying! The next morning all the machine-guns were ordered up to send a barrage of bullets over the heads of the charge into the edge of the woods. This had been efficacious on other occasions, but it was not this time, as the infantry knew instantly they rose to advance, when the deadly refrain from the edge of the woods showed no more diminution than the wrath of the guns from the heights. Ground was gained in places between the swaths of the machine-guns' mowing; but no part of the line penetrated the woods, though it was close to the woods when it was stopped. Attack again! Keep on trying! The enemy will break if you try hard enough! The wedge must be driven, whether through woods, over slopes, or through trenches. Again reorganization; again the line re-formed to make the most of gains; again the artillery ordered to concentrate on the woods for an attack at 6 P.M. This time the jumping-off place was so near the woods, that the Germans, when the barrage descended upon them, were as a rule disinclined to wait for the charge. Many who remained held up their hands. The men felt relief at being at last no longer a target in the open as they made swift work of mopping up the whole of the Ogons. [336]

The next day, the 6th, the divisional artillery assisted the 3rd in its efforts for the Mamelle trench. Patrols trying to reach the trenches north of the Ogons—which incidentally was being gassed—ran into an array of machine-gun nests, and brought back information about what was in store for the next attack; for the German, as we know, was much in earnest on the east flank of the whale-back. On the night of the 6th the brigade which had been in front during these two days was relieved by the brigade in reserve. On the 7th and 8th, while there was more or less of a lull in the battle everywhere except in the Aire valley and the Argonne, the 80th was busy with patrols, locating enemy pill-boxes for the information of the artillery, and preparing for its part in the general attack of the 9th all along the line—the attack that brought us up to the main line of defenses at many points—the third great attack of the battle. September 26th, October 4th, and October 9th are the three dates. [337]

The 80th did not start at daylight, the same hour as the 3rd on its left. Its thrust waited on the advance of the 3rd to a certain point. At 3.15 the word came for the 80th to attack. After fifteen minutes of furious artillery, the first wave rose and moved forward in face of the machine-guns, while the enemy brought down a curtain of shell-fire in front of the second wave when it rose, in

order to keep it from supporting the first, whose ranks were being rapidly thinned; but all the powers of destruction which the enemy could bring to bear could not stay the men of the fresh brigade in their hard-won stages of progress, now that the slopes and the Ogons were at their back. They took the strong point of the Ville-aux-Bois farm, and still going after dark they reached the Cunel-Brieulles road.

There was a familiar sound to that word Brieulles. The 80th on September 28th had attacked the hills in front of this town at the bend in the river. Brieulles was still in the enemy's hands, but the village of Cunel was ahead in the dark night. There must be numerous Germans in Cunel. In stealthy audacity two companies of the Blue Ridge men now turned a trick that would have rejoiced the heart of Jeb Stuart or Colonel Mosby. They slipped into Cunel very quietly, and returned with two crestfallen German battalion staffs—thirty officers and sixty men—whom they had caught completely by surprise. [338]

The next morning the enemy had his revenge of the kind which his hidden long-range artillery in its lofty positions out of reach of our guns might take. An attack was ordered for 7 A.M. As it was forming, and the morning light dissipated the mist, the watchful German observers were taking notes and passing the word to the gunners in Brieulles and in the Rappes and Pultière woods. The minute-hands were near the "H" hour on wrist watches, and the line ready, when a concentration of screams came from three directions, and geysers of earth and shell fragments and gusts of shrapnel had something of the effect of a volcanic fissure opened at the men's feet. Officers were killed or thrown down by the concussion in the midst of their hasty directions. Two companies were decimated, two others scattered in confusion, by this sudden and infernal visitation; but this did not mean that the Blue Ridge men were to give up making the attack. They reorganized and charged according to orders. The enemy guns which had caused such havoc in their ranks disputed their advance. Against this whirlwind they managed to go beyond the Brieulles-Cunel road, but could not hold their positions. The Germans made the road a dead line, and for days to come its ribbon was to be the clear gray background upon which human targets were clearly visible to their watchful gunners. The "pinch-hitting" 80th was the only division thus far that had been twice in the battle line of the Meuse-Argonne. Before it went in again, its infantry was to have a real rest, though its artillery, engineers, and ammunition train remained to support the 5th Division which took its place. [339]

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## XX

### IN THE MEUSE TROUGH

The bull-dog 4th—Enfilade shell-fire from a gallery of heights—Driving and holding a salient—A second try—As far as it could reasonably go—Reversing Falkenhayn's offensive—The 33rd builds bridges—To cross and join the Blue and Grey Division in a surprise attack—A bowl of hills—The Borne de Cornouiller holds out.

On the 80th's left during the advance of October 4th-11th was the bull-dog 4th Division, under its bull-dog commander, Major-General John L. Hines, which had been continuously in line since the first day of the battle. Hines had been trained in the school of the pioneer 1st. When he was with the 1st, he considered that it was the "best" of the Regular divisions. Since he had been in command of the 4th, he had changed his mind as the result of maturer judgment and more experience in the field. The 4th was now the "best" of the Regular divisions. The question of whether or not it was the "best" of all our divisions, including National Guard and National Army, so enlarges the field of rivalry that it must be left to the decision of divisional historians.

No one on the Army staff considered relieving the 4th before the attack of October 4th. If any man of the division thought of relief, he knew that the bull-dogs might not expect it when they were in a position where the Army could not afford to allow them to loosen their grip on the enemy. What incoming division could familiarize itself on short notice with that treacherous front in the trough of the Meuse river, which the 4th knew by experience? [341]

Its right rested in the woods on the west bank of the Meuse, while the German front line was four miles back on the east bank on its flank. Enemy machine-guns had hiding-places on the banks not only of the river but of the Meuse Canal, which follows the course of the river. Beyond the river bottoms, on the east bank, were many patches of woods on the first slopes, which brought field artillery within range of the 4th's front, while the heavy artillery in the ravines and woods around the Borne de Cornouiller, or Hill 378, was also in range. To this quite gratuitous bombardment, entirely out of our own battle zone, from the eastern gallery upon the pit of the amphitheater of the 4th's action, we had no means of replying. It must be accepted with the same philosophy as an earthquake or any other violence of nature. In front of the 4th's right flank was the town of Brieulles in the river bend, which held batteries of field guns, its surrounding swamps defended by machine-gun nests giving it the character of a fortress with a moat. To the left of it was the Fays Wood, facing more open ground, and back of that the frontal gallery of heights holding still more artillery, while on their left was the gallery of the whale-back. [342]

Campaigners who have been for a long time sleeping on doors and the hard ground, when they try a bed again find, as I found on one occasion, that it is so unnaturally soft that they lie down on the floor before they can sleep. The men of the 4th had become so accustomed to enfilade shell-

fire that they would hardly have felt at home without it. If they had been receiving shells from the rear as well as from front and flank, I think that General Hines would only have set his jaw the harder, and his bull-dogs would have said: "We thought we'd be hearing from you. Now we know the worst. But you can't make us let go." When they took a piece of woods from the Germans, it was immediately gassed. Some of them thought little more of putting on their gas masks than a baseball player of putting on his mitt. Already a veteran division when they came into line, they had taken an excoriating course in practical warfare which made their previous experience comparatively that of a grammar school. There could be nothing new in store for them in the attack on October 4th; they could be under none of the illusions of fresh troops in their first plunge into the cauldron.

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Army ambition chose to make them another wedge—we were falling into the habit of wedges as the only means to progress—which was to take the Fays Wood; then the Forest Wood (Bois de Forêt), by crossing open ground under the enfilade of Briuelles and all the guns on the other side of the Meuse. This may have seemed a reasonable mission for them, as they were already so hardened to flanking fire. Indeed the flank of this division was exposed in its drive down the Meuse valley in much the same way as the 1st's on the Aire wall, with the difference that its right carried down the slopes falling toward the river in plain view of the heights on the other side.

The 4th could be trusted to do not only its valorous but its professional best. In view of the galleries of guns overlooking the sector, it seems superfluous to say that it had not enough artillery support. The bull-dogs had given up calling for artillery assistance. They had been under superior artillery fire so long that they took it for granted that they would have to attack under support of artillery inferior to the enemy's when they drove their wedge into tiers of machine-gun nests; but they had in their favor their amazing capacity for judging where shells were going to hit and taking cover before they burst, for slipping out from under barrages without losing their heads, and thus keeping their formations, and for filtering in between concentrations. It was amazing how many German shells were required to make a casualty in the 4th; otherwise there would not have been enough men of the division left for a charge on the morning of October 4th, when their waves went forward with that suppleness of adaptability which is the difference between drill-ground and veteran precision.

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Their line of advance in the open plowed by shells, they carried all the machine-gun nests in the Fays Wood, put the wood behind them, and reached the Cunel-Briuelles road. So they had driven home their wedge, a very sharp-pointed one. Their left flank was exposed to the Ogons Wood, which the 80th could not reach in its repeated charges, and to the Cunel Wood beyond, which the 3rd had not taken, and to the guns of the whale-back. On their immediate front they faced the machine-gun fire from the western portion of the Peut de Faux Wood on their left, and on their right from a series of trenches on a ridge which supported the Kriemhilde, while the increasing volume of fire on both flanks emphasized the German intention to permit no rash American flying column to slip down the river valley in flank of the whale-back. Thus the advance was in the narrow angle of a murderously sharp salient on bad ground. This could not be deepened into the jaws of hell; it could not be retained except at a futile sacrifice. The bull-dogs could dodge shells from across the Meuse, but they could not dodge a hose play of machine-gun bullets coming from both flanks. If they managed protection in one direction, they could not manage it from the other. Skillfully making a virtue of necessity, they withdrew in the night to the line of the Ville-aux-Bois farm, where they were still in a salient, but one which their craft in taking cover and their tenacity could hold, and did hold against three determined counter-attacks under strong barrages against the Fays Wood. On the 9th the tactical plan required that they mark time until the 80th had reached a given point, as the 80th in turn waited on the advance of the 3rd. The day was overcast; it was already dusk at 5.40 P.M., when word was given for the 4th to charge as the start of three days' fighting more bitter than the division had yet known.

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Draw a line east and west through the 4th's front, and it would now have passed to the north of the Borne de Cornouiller, whose guns were throwing their shells into the right rear of the charge. Their fire was joined by that from all the other galleries, while the machine-guns from Briuelles swept a field of targets revealed by the light of bursting shells. Barrages of gas shells were laid across the path of the charge and into the woods ahead. This was particularly trying in the gathering darkness, over ground where landmarks could not be distinguished. The bull-dog did not take hold this time. There was nothing to grip except the murderous flashes. To go on was only to court a fearful casualty list and inevitable confusion and disorganization in the darkness, which could not be readily repaired.

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The troops were recalled, while the German gunners continued to shell the field of their advance, thinking that they were still moving forward. The next morning, they started early in order to have a full day before them. In face of the same kind of deluge of gas and shells, and trench-mortar in addition to machine-gun fire, and under the support of their own barrage, they made one bite of the tongue of Martinvaux Wood with its trench line on the right. They passed through the eastern portion of the Peut de Faux Wood, where the undergrowth was dense and there was no protecting men with a barrage. Advance elements charged across the ravine into the larger Forêt Wood; but it was hopeless to try to consolidate in the midst of gas and machine-gun fire from the depth of the wood. By this time the line was past Briuelles, whose guns and machine-guns were of course stabbing the flank at close quarters.

Briuelles, considering the cost of taking it, was not so important to immediate Army purpose as thrusting the wedge into the flank of the whale-back. So Briuelles, which was not to be ours until we won the whale-back three weeks later, had to be borne; and it was the way of the 4th to bear such thrusts in the ribs without flinching, as it prepared for another attack the next day under

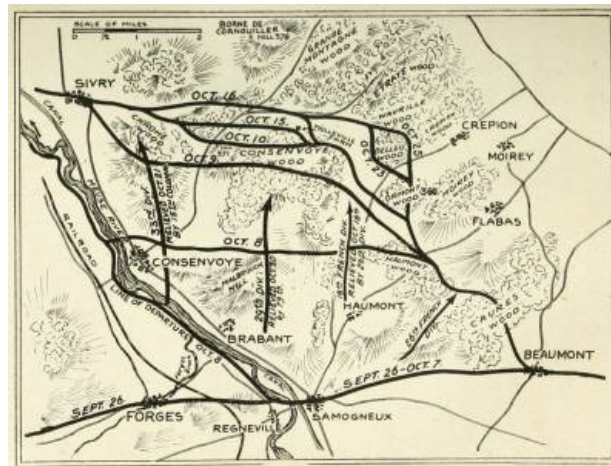
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the plunging fire from the galleries. Beginning again at 7 A.M., when it had finished its day's work it was through the gassed Forêt Wood, and had sent its patrols up on Hill 299 beyond. This was the high-water mark of its arduous and glorious part in the battle. It had gone as far as anything but tactical madness would permit, until the heights of the whale-back and east of the Meuse could be broken. Until October 19th, it held its gains under continual gassing and cross artillery fire.

Twenty-three days in the welter of the Meuse slopes, it had been able to remain all that time in gassed woods and ravines in cold autumn rains, owing to its character that made every ounce of energy answer a resolute will to well-directed ends; for this bull-dog also had something of the nature of the opossum and the panther. It knew how to spring. The depth of the division's advance was eight miles, and the marvel of this was that every yard since the first day had been gained in frontal attack against machine-gun nests protected by superior artillery fire. It had taken 2,731 prisoners and 44 guns, some of them of large caliber, with a loss of 6,000 officers and men killed and wounded. A proud division the 4th, with the right to be proud, though it had no parades in its honor, as its personnel came from all parts of the country, when it returned home.

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**MAP NO. 9**  
**DIVISIONS EAST OF THE MEUSE.**

During the latter days of its service, it began to realize that our own artillery fire was increasing. This seemed almost too good to be true, and of course, as the men remarked, it came after the 4th's offensive work was over. The fact was that our army was receiving more guns. It was also noticed that there was less flanking artillery fire. This was due not only to our attacks on the Romagne positions, which absorbed more and more of the attention of the German gunners of the whale-back, but also to the driving of still another wedge, this time on the east side of the Meuse—the wedge which at one stage of the battle the 1st was intended to drive before that on the Aire wall became more vital.

The farther we went, the more bitterly we realized the murderous handicap of a force advancing on exposed slopes on one bank of a river, with its flank at right angles to the other bank held by the enemy far back of its reserves. After the attack of October 4th on the right went forward naked to this terrible flanking fire, the French Seventeenth Corps, in support of the forthcoming attack of the 9th, including two American divisions, the 29th and the 33rd, under its command, was to make a drive from the old trench system at Samogneux—the start line of the German Verdun offensive of 1916, and opposite the line from which our army had started on September 26th—down the east bank of the Meuse. The French engaged at many points on the Allied front were short of troops; but despite all the calls from other points the high command had finally fixed its eye on the Borne de Cornouiller.

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Our Illinois men of the 33rd Division had been holding our side of the river bank, dug in in face of the other bank and the German flank, with only divisional artillery to answer the long-range artillery from the heights. Having won attention for its brilliant swinging movement which brought its front to the river bank on the first day of the battle, the 33rd was now to undertake a far more difficult, and a spectacular and daring, maneuver. Every veteran from Cæsar's day on the Rhine to Grant's and Lee's on the Potomac knows what it means to force a crossing of an unfordable stream under fire. In this instance it must be done under frowning heights, in the days when machine-gun bullets carry three thousand yards, and shells, according to the caliber of the gun, from three to seven times as far. There were to be two bridges; one at Brabant, 120 feet long, and one at Consenvoye, 150 feet long.

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In building their own exclusive road over the Mort Homme, which enabled the rolling kitchens to bring up hot meals to the infantry, the Illinois engineers had shown their capacity for "rustling," which they now applied in gathering material for their new task. In broad daylight, in full view of the enemy's guns which forced them to wear their gas masks, they brought their boards and timbers to the river bank and did their building. Shells were falling on their labors at Consenvoye at the rate of ninety an hour; but that did not interrupt their labors. Men fell, but others kept on the job. Punctuality was a strong point with the Illinois men. The bridges must be up on time, and they were.

The time of crossing depended upon the movement of our 29th Division, coming up on the east

bank as the flank of the advance of two French divisions. At 9 A. M. the 29th passed the word, and the regiment of the 33rd which had been assembled in the Forges Wood rushed for the bridges. Night would have been a more favorable time for crossing, perhaps; but that was not on the cards. All the divisional artillery was pounding the opposite bank as a shield, while the French artillery was also busy, and the advance of the infantry on the other bank was drawing fire. Thoroughly drilled for their part, the Illinois men lost no time in the crossing, which was effected with slight casualties. Now under command of the Seventeenth Corps, joining up with the flank of the 29th, it worked its way for a mile and a half up the river bank until it dug in at night on the edge of the Chaume Wood after a faultless day's work.

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In the operations east of the Meuse now begun, I shall describe only the actions of our own divisions. The 29th Division, under command of Major-General Charles G. Morton, had taken the name of the "Blue and Grey." Many of its Guardsmen were grandsons of veterans from New Jersey, Delaware, and Virginia. After nearly two months in the quiet trench sector at Belfort, it had been marched on the night of the 8th past the ruins of villages in the Verdun battle area for its initiation into two weeks of fighting, which showed that one side of the trough of the Meuse had no preference over the other in the resistance which the enemy had to offer.

A system of hills extending from the Verdun forts to the Borne de Cornouiller formed the walls of a bowl, which the French Corps in a fan-shaped movement was to ascend. Their slopes were wooded and cut by ravines commanding the bottom of the bowl itself, which was irregular, but everywhere in view of the heights. The 29th was to drive straight toward the Borne de Cornouiller. Upon its success on the first day, may it be repeated, depended largely the success of the 33rd's crossing of the Meuse. The farther away from the river, the stronger were the enemy's positions. Advancing without any artillery preparation, the 29th took the enemy completely by surprise. It was twenty minutes before he brought down his artillery fire. This gave the Blue and Greys a good start. After hot work at close quarters they captured Malbrouck Hill, which was a strong point in the German support trench system of Verdun days. Then passing across the open under increasing German gun-fire, they overran all the machine-gun nests in the dense Consenvoye Wood. There they were halted by orders to allow the division on their right to come up. Combat groups which had reached Molleville farm and the Grande Montagne Wood were called in, and the position consolidated during the night. The enemy by this time was fully awake to the plan of the Seventeenth Corps. He unloosed that torrent of shells and gas from the heights of the rim of the bowl which was not to cease for three weeks.

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Its right exposed after an advance of three miles on the 8th, digging in under the bombardment and repulsing counter-attacks, the 29th was not to attempt to advance on the 9th; but the 33rd had orders to go to Sivry on the banks of the Meuse, whose possession was most important. By noon it had fought its way through Chaume Wood, and by dark its patrols, infiltrating around machine-gun nests and under machine-gun fire from the slopes were in Sivry. All that night it was under gas and shell-fire. The next day it must make sure of Sivry. The 29th was to attack on its right in support. Despite the artillery concentrations on the whole movement laboring in the bowl, we were still to try to break through to the Borne de Cornouiller. This was a vain ambition, which the Illinois men and the Blue and Greys none the less valorously tried to achieve.

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The 33rd had brought more reserves across the river, which had to pass through powerful artillery barrages to relieve the decimated battalions at the front. They actually reached the ridge east of Sivry, right under the guns of that towering Hill 378 of the Borne de Cornouiller. On their right the 29th again and again charged for the possession of the Plat-Chêne ravine, which was a corridor swept with plunging fire from right and left and in front, and saturated with gas. Casualties were enormous, in keeping with the courage of this new division inspired by the heritage of both Blue and Grey. It was futile to persist in the slaughter of such brave and willing men; futile for the 33rd to try to hold the exposed salient of the Sivry ridge; but every shell they received was one spared our men on the slopes of the west bank of the Meuse. Austrian troops which had been holding the line against them were replaced by veteran Prussians and Wurtembergers, who knew how to make the most of their positions, and who answered attacks with counter-attacks. As the left flank which must not yield the river bank, the 33rd intrenched in the Dans les Vaux valley through the Chaume Wood. We were within a mile of the Borne, but what a horrible mile to traverse. The first stage of that detached battle east of the Meuse, so important in its relation to the main battle, was over. Its second stage I shall describe later.

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## XXI

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### SOME CHANGES IN COMMAND

John Pershing of Missouri following Pétain and Nivelles—Training his chiefs—The solidity of Liggett—From schoolmaster of theory to Army command—The wiry Bullard—His mark on the pioneer division—The inexorable Summerall, crusader, martinet, and leader of men—The imperturbable Hines.

When from the window of a luxurious office thirty stories above the pavement I looked down upon the human current of Broadway, and over the roof-tops of the tongue of Manhattan, and across the bridges to other roof-tops, and upon the traffic of bay and river, I thought of that little room, first door to the left upstairs, in the town hall of Souilly, where more men than all of

service age in all the city of New York had been commanded in two of the greatest battles of history. The "sacred road" to Verdun took the place of Broadway; the volcano of unceasing artillery fire, the place of the city's muffled roar.

In this little room Pétain had said, "They shall not pass," and so wrought that they did not pass; and Nivelles had shown me his maps and plans for the brilliant re-taking of Douaumont and Vaux in the fall of 1916, which was to make him commander-in-chief as the exemplar of a system of attack upon which he staked his reputation in the Allied offensive of 1917. In those days no one dreamed that American khaki would stream along the "sacred road," and American guns again set the hills trembling with their blasts; or that John Pershing of Missouri from this little room would direct the largest force we had ever sent into action in the battle which was to be the final answer to German aggression. [356]

The Chief of Staff's room, its walls hung with maps, was across the hall from the Commanding General's, as it had been in the Verdun days. Then as now it sent across to the General's desk slips of paper with the digested news of the battle, which he could follow by reference to his own maps. Now as then a cloistered quiet pervaded the building which had been the center of a small town. Orderlies stood on guard, and adjutants on guard above them. The lights behind the black-curtained windows burned late, as on the basis of the day's news plans for the next day's action were made—plans for another advance against the Germans, this time, instead of resistance to their advance.

"You never know what is in the C.-in-C.'s mind, and how it is coming out," said his aide. "When it comes, it comes quick and definite—just like the outburst of a bombardment for an offensive which has been weeks in preparation." [357]

He listened to many counselors; but the decisive counsels he held behind the locked doors of his own mind. Those who thought they knew what he was going to do knew least; those who received the most affirmative smile bestowed in silence might receive the most positive of negative decisions when the time came. He was charged with "snap" judgments on some things; and with unduly delaying over others—while he smiled over both criticisms. In all events his word was supreme. Men might contrive to defeat his orders, but no man dared dispute them. He had continued to grow with the growth of his army; his grip of the lever strengthened as the machine became more ponderous. Others might build the parts of the machine; he brought them together in his own way and his own time.

We had started with divisions; then organized corps staffs; then appointed corps commanders; then organized the staff of the First Army, now in the Meuse-Argonne, and afterward the staff of the Second Army, now at Saint-Mihiel. He was still commanding both armies as general in the field. When would he choose their commanders? Professional army gossip had an ear out for rumors. Possibly the Commander-in-Chief did not know himself; possibly he was waiting on the test of battle to find the two most worthy to lead. On the night of October 11th his choice was made; it was announced by his calling up some generals on the telephone. Two learned that they were promoted from corps to army command, two that they were promoted from division to corps command. [358]

It was no surprise to learn that Major-General Hunter Liggett was to have the First Army, and Major-General Robert L. Bullard to have the Second Army. Liggett, who was already a major-general of regulars, had been considered as a possible commander of the A. E. F. when we first decided to send an army to France. If ever a soldier looked as if he could "eat three square meals a day" without indigestion, it was Liggett. Over six feet in height and generously built, his majestic figure would attract attention in any gathering. There was a depth of experience shining out of his frank eyes, and he radiated mellowness, poise, and reserve energy. The army knew him as a thorough student, sound in his views, which he could express with compelling force. No one questioned that he had a mind capable of grasping military problems down to their details, and a resourcefulness in the "war game" as played at the War College which fitted him in theory for the direction of immense forces.

Large bodies move slowly, though with great momentum when they start, and the sceptic's question about Liggett was whether or not he had energy in keeping with his mentality. McDowell made excellent plans for Bull Run, and lost it. McClellan seemed an ideal leader, but lacked convincing power of action, though he built a machine which others were to direct. [359]

A full corps in the plans of the A. E. F. was six divisions; and when, early in 1918, Liggett was assigned to the Command of the First Corps, he had one division which had been in the trenches, and three others about ready to go into the trenches under the direction of the French. All the other corps which were to come would look to his example in pioneer organization. Settling down in the little town of Neufchâteau, he formed his staff and set to work organizing his G's of operations, intelligence, supply, transport, preparatory to taking over our first permanent sector.

Thus far his authority had been little more than paper routine under the French. He was a schoolmaster of theory. Then the March German offensive against the British left him with a corps staff which was a fifth wheel in present plans, just as he was about to have his sector. His best divisions were being sent to the Picardy battlefield while he remained at Neufchâteau, having an internal American authority over any divisions in the trenches in Lorraine, but even these were under the direct command of French corps. He accepted the situation in a manner in keeping with his mental and physical bigness. He kept on working on his "war college" organization at his headquarters while, operating under the French at the other side of France, his divisions were taking Cantigny and making a stand on the Paris road and on the Marne. [360]

The commanders of these divisions, however, were winning distinction for themselves through actual battle experience, and some of them would soon be taking command of our new corps composed of our rapidly arriving divisions, which raised the question if, when the time came to have a commander for the First Army, Liggett would not be passed over from very want of any except theoretical preparation. No one worried less about this than Liggett. He seemed anything but ambitious. Yet, pass over Liggett? That enormous, calm, thoroughgoing Liggett! He loomed tall as his six feet, and broad in proportion, at the thought. I always think of him leaning over a table studying a map, with the intensity of a student who was never mentally fatigued.

When was he to have any battle experience? If we were to have an integral army to attack the Saint-Mihiel salient, our corps commanders must have other than paper training. General Pershing arranged that Liggett take corps command of an American and a French division in the Marne counter-offensive. This brought him into close association with the French army command in the midst of a great movement. Later, in its operations at Saint-Mihiel, everybody said that "Liggett's corps had done well," and said it in the way that took for granted that Liggett was bound to do well. He is not the kind of man, as I see him, who sets people into a contagion of cheers, or the kind of man who makes enthusiastic enemies or equally enthusiastic partisans. Rather he is like some sound office member of a great law firm, who does not make speeches or appear in court, but who, other lawyers say, is the buttress of the firm's strength.

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I remember a distinguished civil official from home talking of our generals, and saying, when I suggested Liggett: "Why, he is the one I didn't meet," which was not surprising. A certain isolation that he had was due less to any personal exclusiveness than to the fact that he was a large body well anchored to his maps and his job.

In the Meuse-Argonne battle his corps had the wicked front on the left against the Argonne Forest and the valley of the Aire; and again he did well, leaving no doubt that he had energy as well as capacity, or that he deserved the three stars of a lieutenant-general which General Pershing now placed on his shoulders. Later, in the drive of November 1st, his maneuvering of our corps and divisions, in that swift movement in pursuit and in the crossing of the Meuse which gave us the heights on the other bank, seemed without a tactical fault in its conception and execution, and it warranted the use of the word brilliant in thinking of Liggett, who in the closing days of the war had the opportunity to show the cumulative results of his study of his maps from the days when he began sawing wood in Neufchâteau. He was a modest, sound soldier, an able tactician, and a delightful, simple gentleman, who did his country honor in France both as soldier and as man. His place at the head of the First Corps was taken by Major-General Joseph T. Dickman.

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Both he and Major-General Robert Lee Bullard, who received command of the Second Army, then holding our line won in the Saint-Mihiel operation, were broad-minded men of the world who would have made their mark in any profession. Physically you could make two Bullards out of one Liggett. My most distinct picture of him was of his slight figure in his big fur coat in the midst of winter rains and sleet, while his small head, with his close-fitting overseas cap, only made the coat appear the larger. In his command of the 1st in the Toul sector and in our first offensive at Cantigny, he had set his mark on our pioneer division. The French liked him, and he could speak their language with the attractive Southern accent of his boyhood days. He took the French *liaison* officers into his family and set them to work, and they became so fond of his family that one of them was overheard telling French staff officers what a lot they had to learn from the Americans. If Bullard could not eat three square meals a day, it did not interfere with his belligerent spirit. His brain was just as good a fighting brain as if he had eaten beefsteak for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. However bad his neuritis in the winter days, his blue eyes were always twinkling, and when he came into his mess and the officers rose, his smiling request that they dismiss the formality was all in keeping with the atmosphere of that division command.

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His dry, pungent wit was not affected when the doctor put him on a diet of an egg and a bit of toast. It always came back to the fact that war was fighting. We had much to learn from the French, from the British, from all veterans, and you could not be too brave or too skillful. If you made up your mind to lick the other fellow, you were going to lick him. When his neuritis was very bad at one time, he told General Pershing that he did not want to stand in the way of a successor. General Pershing replied that he would not forget the reminder; and remarked to someone else: "Bullard's division is doing well. The neuritis hasn't gone to his head." His body seemed to be made of elastic steel wire that always had the spring for any occasion, and the more fighting he had the better his health became. In the Argonne battle his neuritis entirely disappeared.

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He never seemed very busy. In the midst of battle you would find him appearing at seeming leisure; and his attitude always was: "What a fine, able lot of men I have around me! They do all the work for me." Thus he developed brigadiers out of his colonels.

When he corrected subordinates, it was with a simple phrase that cut through the fog of discussion. One day, before an operation, one of his colonels who was a little wrought up on the subject told him of a number of young officers in his regiment who might be brave, but who were not up to the mark of leadership. "You think it over coolly and make me a list of those you are sure about," said Bullard. "It's a matter for your judgment. Perhaps these officers will do better in some service that is not combatant, or perhaps they need a little lesson which will make them all right in some other regiment. Make me the list, and I'll have everyone on it relieved right away"—and you may be sure that the colonel made the list with care.

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The Third Corps had been tried out in the Marne salient. In the Meuse-Argonne battle it had

seized the bank of the Meuse to protect our right flank, and against superior raking artillery fire from the heights of the whale-back and across the river, on the slopes and in the woods of the Meuse trough, gained the Cunel-Brieulles road with an indomitable skill, which proved his contention that, however heavy the odds, if you make up your mind to lick the other fellow you will.

In the instances of Liggett and Bullard, both general officers before the war, high rank had shown its worthiness of higher rank in the swift merciless test of war's opportunities, while the other two officers who received telephone messages from the Commander-in-Chief had both been majors when we entered the war. I had first met Charles P. Summerall as a lieutenant in Riley's battery on the march to the relief of Peking. When I next met him, he had the artillery brigade of the 1st Division. He was given the command of the 1st when Bullard was given a corps. The way in which he sent the veteran division through toward Soissons in the Marne counter-offensive was a precedent for the way in which he sent it as a wedge over the Aire wall, which won him command of the Fifth Corps.

In the last days of the war no one of Pershing's generals was more talked about in the A. E. F. than he. His was a personality of the kind which was bound to make talk. No one ever denied that he was a fighter and that he knew his profession. He could make men follow him, and make men fear him. They called him a "hell-devil of a driver," but won victories under him. If he had started as a private in the French Revolution, and had not been killed too early in his career, I think that he would have had one of the marshal's batons which Napoleon said every private carried in his knapsack. If no general expected more of his soldiers than Summerall, no general expected more of himself. Sturdily built, of average height, he was tireless. He could go about the front all day, and work at headquarters all night; or go about the front all night, and work at headquarters all the next day. When officers and men were numb from fatigue, he gave an example of endurance as a reason for his further demands on their strength. "If you win, your mistakes do not count," he told a group of officers one day. "If you lose, they do. If you win, your men have their reward for their wounds and suffering, and those who have fallen have not died in vain. If you fail, your men feel that all their effort has been wasted. Do not fail. Go through!" [366]

It was said of him, as it was said of Grant, that he was not afraid of losses. Like Grant, he was a hammerer. Pershing could depend upon him, as Pétain could depend upon Mangin, to "break the line," and as Lee depended upon Jackson to arrive on time and ahead of the enemy. Considering the objectives he gained, his admirers regarded him as a master economist of lives, as he was, comparing what he gained for a given number of casualties with what many other divisions gained for their casualties. With an iron will be applied the principle that he who hesitates in war is lost. If you keep the upper hand, the enemy suffers more heavily than you. Summerall's standard was always what he was doing to the enemy, and his attitude toward the enemy was not that of a professional soldier who regards war as a game in which you are testing your wits against an adversary. He would at times exhibit a Peter the Hermit fervor when he spoke of his soldiers' crusade against the barbarians, or pointed out to them ruined villages and heart-broken peasants as another reason for charging again. With his staff around him in the midst of an action, he gave an impression of thorough grasp of their parts and his. In this, as in everything he did, he had a touch of the histrionic. He was most concretely modern in arranging his patterns of barrages, and at the same time it occurred to an observer that it would have taken only a change of garb and hardly of mood to make him perfectly at home among the knights before the walls of Jerusalem. By this time you will understand that he is of a type whose characteristics entreat a writer to fluency, and that there are several Summeralls. [367]

There was the Summerall who might turn up at any point on his front at any time and talk to his men, while an officer stood apprehensively by, wondering what might happen to him; a Summerall who rounded on officers and men for carelessness about details that would mean a habit of carelessness which would accompany them into action; a Summerall surprising young officers who considered him a ruthless driver by telling them that they were working too hard—when it seemed to them that they never could work hard enough to please him—and that they must not worry over their maps and orders in a way to keep them from getting enough sleep to insure the strength necessary for self-command and the command of their men. Again, he would speak of his men and particularly of their deeds of initiative with a gentle, worshipful awe, as if every one were greater than any marshal of France in his estimation; again, he would be telling his young officers that they could not be worthy of their men, but that he expected their most devoted effort to that end. The men would always follow if they knew how to lead. He made it an almighty honor and a responsibility to be a second lieutenant, and yet he would censure colonel, lieutenant, or private in a manner which assuredly no politician would ever use in order to win the vote of a constituent. When an officer and a number of men standing in a group were all hit by the same shell, he had a glaring example to demonstrate how untrained we still were when an officer would allow soldiers to gather round him and become a target for the enemy's artillery, thus losing their lives without taking a single German life in return. The sight of those bodies spoiled the victory for Summerall. He burned the picture in the minds of his men in the course of their drills. One lieutenant said that if the spirit of the officer who had been the center of the group could have been given the chance to come back to earthly life, he might refuse it in fear of the lecture he would receive from Summerall for his inefficiency. [368]

All the different Summeralls were the different strings to his bow in applying his teachings and gaining his ends, while he was unconscious of there being more than one Summerall. He was the A. E. F.'s negation of the propagandic habit of building up the characters of generals from one common attribute, when every one of them, whether French or British or American, was an [369]

individual human being.

When you went to Summerall's headquarters by day, you were pretty certain, unless there were a big action in progress, to find him absent, looking in on divisional, brigade, regimental, or battalion headquarters, moving about among the guns and transport and troops—wherever it pleased him to go in his insistence upon keeping in close human touch with the forces under his command. He left routine to his staff officers, and he expected much of his chief of staff. How his staff officers, hard master though he was, respected his ability!

He could be forensic on occasion, as he was searchingly brief at others. It was not beneath his military dignity to make a speech, either. On the day before the great final attack on November 1st, when the German line was broken, he was out from morning to night, gathering officers in groups around him and addressing his soldiers, reminding them of their duties on the morrow, when there must be no faint-heartedness. They must go through. When he returned to his headquarters, hoarse from talking in the raw open air, General Maistre, who had come from Marshal Foch, was there, and General Pershing came in a little later. Both asked the one question of Summerall: would he go through? He answered that he would, with the positiveness that he had been instilling into his troops. [371]

If he had ever failed in one of his drives, there would certainly have been a smash, but he made no blind charges. He wanted to know where he was going, and he wanted to be sure that he had his bridge of shells for the men to cross in their advance. He prepared his lightnings well, but when they were loosed he would not stay them.

Major-General John L. Hines, the new commander of the Third Corps, had been a colonel under Bullard in the 1st Division, and had commanded the bull-dog 4th Division in the Third Corps, under Bullard, in the trough of the Meuse. He was of a wholly different type from Summerall, with whom he shared the honor for swift promotion won in the field. It was said of him that he was the best linguist of the A. E. F., as he could be equally silent in all languages, including English. If the accepted idea of General Grant is true, he and Grant could have had a most sociable evening together by the exchange of a half dozen sentences, of which I am certain that General Hines would not have used more than his share.

He came to France with General Pershing as a major in the adjutant-general's office, where he served for some time before he was sent to a regiment. He seemed to be out of place at a desk. It was like asking taciturn Mars—and I suppose that Mars was taciturn—to do drawn work. Sandy of complexion, sturdily built, he had that suggestive quiet strength, militarized by army service, which we associate with Western sheriffs who do not talk before they shoot. Without his having said a word, you understood, by the very way in which he was taciturn, that if you were in a tight place you would like to have him along. I used to think that if a section of the floor had been blown up in front of his desk while he was signing a paper, the shock of the explosion would not have interfered with the legibility of his signature. There was something in his manner which soldiers would respect. They, too, saw that he would be a good companion in a tight place. When someone had a troublous problem on hand, he would say: "Let me have it. I'll take care of it." He took care of it promptly too, once he had the paper in his strong hands. [372]

Whether as a major or as a corps commander, he was quick to appreciate that a subordinate was preoccupied with unimportant things, and he had seen enough red tape in the old adjutant-general's office to know how to amputate it without too much hemorrhage. In common with Summerall he too had the endurance which no amount of work seems to faze, and that clarity of thought and readiness of decision which thrive on crises. He, too, went among his troops, impressing them with his cool, unchanging personality, his bull-dog tenacity, and his implacably aggressive spirit. [373]

Having spoken his messages over the telephone which called to greater service the adjutants who had served him well, General Pershing might move about his far-flung kingdom again, though he was not to be long away from the battlefield. Nothing in the A. E. F. was better regulated than his own time and movements. Wherever he was, his special train was waiting upon him. In these later days he had a car fitted up as an office, with aides and stenographers in attendance. When the train pulled out from a station, two automobiles were on board. They were in readiness when the train arrived at its destination. If he had only a hundred miles to go, it was covered in the night while he was asleep. The day's beginning found him where he chose to be, at Marshal Foch's headquarters, at the main headquarters at Chaumont, in Paris, or at either Army headquarters. If he wished to speak over the wires, they were instantly cleared of other messages. The President of the United States may only ask a senator or a governor to come to see him; but a word from the C.-in-C. for any officer to report to him at a certain hour and place was an order. One might come clear across France for the ten-minute conference which was set down in the schedule of appointments on the pad of the aide to the C.-in-C. The democracy had bestowed unlimited autocracy and responsibility, too, upon John J. Pershing. [374]

He had become the creature of this responsibility, determined to be equal to it, his human impulsiveness of other days now and then flashing out at the circle of authority that hedged him in, and his indignation cleaving with broad-sword blows the links of bureaucracy that plotting minds had forged around him.

At last after fifteen months his plans had achieved fruition. If he had not had imagination, he could not have visualized the structure before he began its building. Out of his window in that little room of the town hall, which had a significance that none of his other headquarters had, as he turned from his map he looked down upon the "sacred road" to Verdun, which was the main street of Souilly. Motor trucks came and went, and at one side of the town hall the staff cars

stood in military line, waiting upon the commands of generals and colonels whom they served. The houses of the little town had not room for all the office force of First Army Headquarters. This had overflowed into many temporary buildings with walls of tar-paper, where all the different branches, to the tune of the hosts of typewriters which was the "jazz" of staff command, worked and had their messes. They sent out the leading, if not always, perhaps, the light, through the battle area, where the trucks surged all night and all day on the roads, going forward laden with ammunition and food and returning empty, where the ambulances went forward empty and returned laden, behind the vortex of the struggle. How was all this power, and how were the men who exerted it on a twenty-mile front in France, brought from home? Long before Marshal Foch had summoned our troops to the attack in the Meuse-Argonne, General Pershing had made his plan of how they should be concentrated as the right flank of an Allied movement. To carry this out he was to depend upon another adjutant.

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## XXII

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### A CALL FOR HARBORD

Pershing's right-hand man—From the center of power to the field—Radical measures for the Services of Supply—Our own Goethals—Varied personnel united in discontent—Regulars and experts—Harbord's two problems of construction and morale.

As President, Theodore Roosevelt had made Pershing a brigadier over the heads of a small host of senior officers, and had likewise singled out Sims, who was to command in European waters. When he was forming his division, which destiny was not to allow him to lead in France, he chose for one of his brigade commanders James G. Harbord, then a major of regulars. Harbord was not a West Pointer; having begun his army career as a private, his rank was not high for his years when we entered the war. Had the competition of civil professions applied in the army, it is safe to say that he would have been a major-general already, and that some of the colonels who were his seniors would still have been lieutenants. It is only instruction that one receives at West Point or at any college; education is for the graduate to receive in after life, a detail he sometimes neglects. Harbord educated himself by study and observation in the leisure hours which army officers have for the purpose.

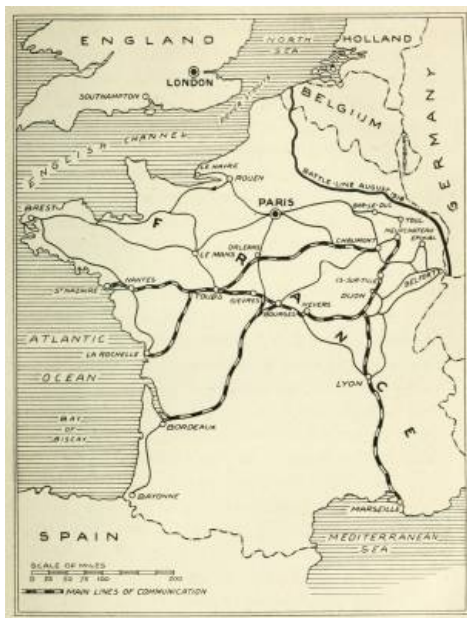
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One's first thought upon meeting him was to wonder why he should have enlisted in the regulars. He seemed to be the type that would have become in another environment a judge of the Supreme Court or the president of a university. After one came to know him, it was evident that he was in the army because he was naturally a soldier. He was also to prove to be the kind of organizer who in civil life is a good mayor of a great city or the efficient head of a large corporation.

As Chief of Staff of the A. E. F., he was Pershing's right-hand man for our first ten months in France.

It was not long before observers began to appreciate that he was one of the officers capable of "growing" with the growth of his task. One of the acquirements of his self-education was lucid and concise English, whether dictated to a stenographer or written on his little folding typewriter. When you brought a question before him, there was action, unfettered by qualifying verbiage. He did not "pass the buck" to the other fellow, according to the habit which army regulations and restrictions readily develop. When he went into Pershing's room, adjoining his, with a bundle of papers, and returned with them signed, there was finality. He could be tart as well as brief, in the face of prolix and meandering reports or memoranda. "If this man really had something to say," he remarked one day after he had read ten typewritten pages, "I wonder how many more pages he would require."

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**MAP NO. 10**  
**SERVICES OF SUPPLY. SHOWING PORTS AND RAILROAD**  
**COMMUNICATIONS.**

Next to Pershing himself, Harbord was most familiar with the planning and forming of an organization which would be equal to handling an unprecedented problem, three thousand miles from home. That story about the old quartermaster, who said that everything was going beautifully until a war came along and ruined his organization, had a most palpable application when a department which had carried on the routine of supplying our small regular army had to design a service equal to our demands in France. It was unequal to the task. A new and comprehensive system which experience had demonstrated to be suited to our needs divided the activities of the army into two territorial departments. One, that of the zone of advance, running from the outskirts of our training area in Lorraine to the front, was to have charge of the fighting. The other was to see that the fighters reached the front and were supplied when they arrived. His headquarters at Tours, the Commanding General of the new Services of Supply—the "S. O. S.," as the army knew it—was to be the head of a principality, of almost the breadth of France itself, under the kingdom of Pershing.

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One day, when at last our long period of drill and preparation was having the substantial result of making our pressure at the front felt in earnest, Pershing said: "I'm going to send Harbord to troops, but I shall have him back—" the plan being to have him back as Chief of Staff, I understood. Harbord had his desire, the desire of every soldier, for field service. A brigadier-general now, he was given the brigade of Marines in place of Brigadier-General Doyen, who had been invalidated home, where he died, as the result of his hard service in France. One week I saw him in the barracks building at Chaumont, surrounded by hundreds of adjutants, in the direction of the whole, and the next week I found him in charge of one part—but that a very combatant part—of the whole: with no stenographer, but writing his reports and orders on the little folding typewriter.

His new command required the tact of a man of the world as well as of a soldier among soldiers. There are no better fighters than the Marines; none prouder in their spirit of corps. The only Marine brigade in France was not pleased at the thought of having a regular in command. It wanted one of its own corps. Harbord had not been about among the officers and men many times before the Marines were saying, "Well, if we had to have an army man, we're glad we've got Harbord." By the time they were fighting in Belleau Wood, they had put their globe insignia on his collar, which he was proud to wear. He was adopted into the Marines, while regular officers were saying that he had better make his transfer official.

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His record of the battle was a model of military reports, which did not hesitate to acknowledge mistakes in detail, the point being that the Marines won the wood. Promoted to be a major-general and to command the 2nd Division (which included the Marines), he led the race-horse 2nd in the counter-offensive in the Château-Thierry operations, which was the turn of the tide against the Germans. After this success the next step for him seemed to be a corps command, and possibly the command of an army, in the course of the rapid promotions that were due to care for the immense forces now arriving in France. His division had only just been relieved, when he received a hurry call to go to Chaumont. When he arrived, Pershing looked him over to see how he had been standing the strain of two months of severe fighting, after his ten months of harassing strain as Chief of Staff. Harbord appeared fresh, and ready for another year's hard work.

"Harbord, I'm going to send you down to straighten out things in the S. O. S.," Pershing then told him....

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"Well, you see what my general has done to me," Harbord remarked a few hours later in an outburst to a friendly ear. "He's taken me away from my division,—but," he added, "he's my general. He knows what he wants me to do—" Then a toss of the head, and from that moment



his thought was concentrated on his new duties.

Things had been going badly in the Services of Supply. There was congestion at the ports; construction work was not proceeding. In view of the enormous demands which would arise when we should have two million men, instead of the million we had planned, in the autumn, the situation had suddenly become most serious. Washington, with our own ports sensitive to delays at those on the other side of the Atlantic, had about decided to send General Goethals to France to take charge of the Services of Supply as a co-ordinate commander with General Pershing. This was a radical departure. It meant two commanders in France instead of one, directly responsible to Washington. Such divided authority in such a crisis stirred the apprehension of every soldier lest in a great crisis the fighting branch should not be supreme over every other branch which served its will and necessities. The simplest of military principles required that the commander of the forces at the front must command the whole, or his fearful responsibility for needless loss of life rested on inadequate authority. [382]

Harbord, Pershing's right-hand man, was the counter to Washington's suggestion; that major of cavalry, whom nobody knew in the days when Goethals was building the Panama Canal, would prove that we already had a Goethals of our own in France. Without going over the ground of the pioneer stages of the Services of Supply, covered in my first book, the requirement upon which all transport depended was construction. We must enlarge the plant which France offered us for our needs. This meant building new docks to accommodate the requisite shipping, webs of spur tracks, immense areas of warehouses at the ports and others inland to accommodate our supplies; plants for assembling our railroad locomotives and cars brought from home; repair shops for them, and for guns and gun carriages, ambulances and aeroplanes and automobiles, motor trucks, and all other vehicular transport. More important still, there must be repair shops for human beings—enormous hospitals for caring for the sick and wounded, who might come by the hundreds of thousands in a single month. Hospital trains must be ready for their transport from the front. Enormous bakeries must provide hundreds of thousands of loaves every day. There must be barracks for the nurses and all the workers; barracks for the aviators and helpers who were drilling; lighters for disembarking troops when they arrived; camps, where they could spend the night ashore. Railroad sidings must enlarge railroad capacity; more spur tracks must be built wherever we had railheads at the front, and regulating stations which should dispatch the trains to the railheads. Around quiet villages must arise temporary cities of our building, connected with all the other activities in a system which was punctual and dependable. [383]

The S. O. S. had been arranged to meet the demands of an army in our own sector. Its plan was disrupted by the switching of our troops to Château-Thierry and Picardy to meet the German offensives. The mobilization for Saint-Mihiel brought us back to our own sector. After Saint-Mihiel came the Argonne concentration, called into being by the hope of a speedy end of the war through one supreme effort by all the Allies. Should our new troops, thrown in action without sufficient preparation, and the veteran troops, thrown in without time for recuperation after Château-Thierry and Saint-Mihiel, go without food and ammunition, we might have a disaster. The wisdom of our insistence that we could form and supply and fight an integral army, instead of infiltrating our men into the British and French armies, was on trial. Victory and our soldiers' lives were at stake. [384]

The battle was to be fought not only against machine-gun nests, but in the sweating effort of stevedores, of mechanics, and laborers, in the roar of foundries, in the rattle of trains far from the sound of the guns. For officer personnel in the S. O. S. we had first, of course, the regulars, those of the old quartermaster department and of the engineers, who would not ordinarily command troops, and those who could be spared from the zone of advance where every able fighting officer was required. These must be few, compared to the numbers of the whole. Second, we had all the men in the thirties, forties, and fifties, experts in every calling, who had come to France in their enthusiasm, in answer to the summons, in the days when the thing was for every man to serve in uniform in France. These were too old for combat, even if they thought they were not. They could not stand the physical hardship of the front, however brave their spirit. The S. O. S. was the place for them. There, or in building the organization of supply at home—which was primarily important—the nation could make the best use of their training in civil life. Third were younger officers, from the Guard or a training-camp, caught by the card-index system classifying occupations, and separated from their regiments because they were experts in some line of activity which was short of personnel in the S. O. S. They knew how to fight; but their knowledge of something else, their superiors thought, not they, was more useful to the nation. [385]

For mechanics we had all the men skilled in trades at home who were as ready to give up high wages for a soldier's pay, and to work double union hours, as they would have been to stick tight in a fox-hole against a counter-attack, if they had had the chance. These came in their thousands, living under conditions far more miserable, in contrast to their habits, than their officers—from railroad trains and shops, bakeries, cement factories, contractors' firms, and every industry on the list—the typical American army, which has made industrial America.

For labor we had all we could pick up abroad: able-bodied German prisoners, middle-aged and invalided French territorials, Senegambians, Turcos, Belgians, Spaniards, Chinese, Annamites. From home we had, aside from expert labor, chiefly the colored men, who had no rivals in "rustling" cargo. At the docks their giant strength and their good-natured team-play were supreme; but they were in evidence all the way forward to the shelled roads which they were repairing back of the front where their kinsmen had their place in line.

The feeling between the regulars and reserves, which I shall describe in general terms elsewhere, was bound to be most acute in the S. O. S. Suffice it to say for the present that it was [386]

a gospel with the regulars that they should hold all the high commands in the S. O. S. as well as at the front. It was granted that the regulars must be absolute in the zone of advance, and all reserves their pupils or "plebes"; but how was the manager of a great railroad, of a bakery, of a contracting firm, a chemist, a civil engineer who had built tunnels and bridges, or a business organizer, to feel that a regular officer was his superior in his own line? The answer of the regular was that only he understood how to coördinate all policy for military end,—the old, old answer of the inner temple of mystery, from the days of the Egyptian priests to the present. The regulars said, too: "How can we tell who is the real expert? These big men from civil life are jealous of one another. To appoint one over the heads of others would bring friction. We know war. Supply is a part of war. And we shall keep matters in our own hands——" and promotions, too, as the reserves might whisper.

A point which the regulars dwelt upon even more emphatically was that the reserve officers did not know discipline and army forms. Some of these reservists had directed thousands of men in organizations at home, without knowing how to drill a company. In their experience, building railroad yards and warehouses did not require military etiquette. The men under them held even stronger convictions on the subject. They were doing the same kind of work that they did at home, and amid peaceful surroundings. If they were workmen and not soldiers, why should they have to submit to all the distinctions between rank and file? Must they salute every man with a gold bar who happened to pass along, when he was no nearer the front than they? He was not their boss. What mattered, except that they were "on the job"? Why did not these officers pay more attention to getting the tools and material whose lack hampered progress? The officers could only turn to their seniors, who turned to other seniors, on through the channels of authority, to the lack of shipping, and to the plants at home, where the workmen were being driven equally hard, but did not have to wear uniforms and crook elbows in salute. As for army forms, the reserve officers were ready to comply with them if they could find that there was any settled system; but army forms seemed to change to meet the requirements, as the reservists sometimes thought, of delaying action, when that suited a commanding officer's idea.

Meanwhile, why should the assistant to the chief baker be an infantryman? Not that he wanted to be in the S. O. S.: he wanted to be at the front. Was the baking of bread taught only in the army? For the army, yes, thought the regulars. The complaints of the soldiers about the quality of the bread, which were warrantable, seemed to indicate that the regulars might have escaped blame by giving the responsibility to a civilian baker. A reserve officer whose business was automobile manufacture, serving in a repair shop under a cavalryman, did not deny that the cavalryman knew how to lead a squadron in a charge, but did he know about mending broken motor trucks? The civil engineer, who had once executed a contract for five millions, as he reported to a young West Point engineer who had been a lieutenant when we entered the war, might ponder the difference between theory and practice. A regular engineer lieutenant-colonel of twenty-nine said: "From what I have seen of the eminent civil engineers, I should think that they ought to be my subordinates." He was young; so was Napoleon at Marengo and Austerlitz. Both were soldiers.

When reserve officers, because of their expertness, were given authority, it did not mean that they were always able to exercise it. One who came to France under the express condition that he was to be supreme in his branch found that he was made a subordinate. What could he do? Resign? Resign in time of war? There was another to whom General Pershing said: "You go ahead. I give you carte blanche in your work." One day he was called on the carpet by his regular senior for acting on his own authority. "Who told you to do this?" asked the superior.

"General Pershing!"

"Well, then you better report to him. You go tell him you have been insubordinate, you haven't been doing things through channels, and see what he says."

This was putting the Commander-in-Chief himself to the test of regular loyalty.

"You tell that narrow-minded regular for me," said Pershing, "to leave you alone."

This did not mean that the reserve officer was left alone. He could not carry all his troubles to the busy Commander-in-Chief, as he struggled against the system.

The reservists, both officers and the whole force of workers, were not meeting as a rule the best class of regulars. A brigadier or a colonel in the zone of advance, who was wearing himself out physically and mentally, or who for less temporary reasons was not efficient, was relegated to the rear, with the idea that he might be good enough for the S. O. S. Yes, anything was good enough for the S. O. S., thought its pestered, nerve-racked workers. Was that colonel or brigadier, who had served his country for twenty or thirty years, to be made subordinate to some railroad man, civil engineer, or manufacturer, who had been in uniform only a few months? He might be sent home; but surely not on the invitation of General Peyton C. March, Chief of Staff in Washington, who had his own domestic problem in derelicts without the further annoyance of importations. So the colonel or the brigadier was cared for in the S. O. S., all the while feeling keenly his humiliation at not having command of a regiment or brigade in combat operations. If he were wise enough to serve his country and keep his health, he only signed the papers turned in by an energetic subordinate, be he regular or reserve; but if he were mischievous in his insistence upon authority, he clogged the wheels of organization,—which is not saying that he was not a worthy, honorable, and agreeable gentleman, even if he were not of much service in building a bridge or a warehouse in a hurry, or in forcing five days' rations through to a division at the front. Considering these things, and considering that every man tied to some humdrum task in the S. O. S. wanted to be up under fire instead of one, two, or three hundred miles away from the guns, it

is not surprising that the spirit of corps of the S. O. S. was not good. It was well that Harbord arrived in July; or he might have been too late.

## XXIII

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### THE S. O. S. DRIVES A WEDGE

Depending on Tours—The "front-sick" S. O. S.—Harbord not "Bloisé"—Getting his men together—Building morale—Troops as freight—Brest to the front—Construction figures—Atterybury's job—Sorting supplies at Gièvres—Hospitals and the product of war—Feeding the front from Is-sur-Tille—The point of the wedge at the railheads.

If one division at the front knew little of what another division was doing, how much less its men knew of what was doing in the capital of the Services of Supply at Tours, that ancient city in the center of France. Grand Headquarters in the town of Chaumont, and Army Headquarters in the village of Souilly, were relatively small office affairs, compared to Tours.

In place of tables of barrages, maps of trench sectors, photographs of combat areas, reports of hills and villages and lines of resistance taken, and the examination of prisoners, which formed the staple routine of a combat headquarters, there were tables of the daily amount of tonnage and the number of troops disembarked, maps of transportation systems and railroad yards, photographs of half-finished quays and vast piles of cargo, blue prints of the plans of a network of tracks running up to the doors of hospitals and warehouses, and reports from foresters getting out timber, from commanders of base sections and regulating stations.

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One thing, however, Tours, Chaumont, and Souilly, and every other headquarters had in common. That was the call for more guns, rifles, clothing, shoes, machine-guns, ammunition, engineering tools, balloons, aeroplanes, ambulances, automobiles, motor-trucks, and other material, which was passed on from Souilly to Chaumont, from Chaumont to Tours, and then home. "We are sending them," home responded.

"But hurry!" Tours cried.

"Clear your ports," home replied.

"Stop wasting space! Fully load your ships," said Tours. "Equip the troops in the way we ask! Send things in the order we ask! Put them aboard with some kind of classification. Don't throw steel beams on top of automobile parts and chemical apparatus! Pack your sugar and flour in bags that don't tear open."

If there had been a long-distance telephone across the Atlantic, steam might have risen to the surface from the scorching messages; but the wires we had stretched from Paris to Chaumont and to Tours and to the coast were used with a prodigality which was an evidence of the distrust of our own postal system.

The barracks that had been turned into offices at Tours had office space equivalent to that of a New York "sky-scraper" or of the Army and Navy Building in Washington. A private was as distinguished a person in the streets of Tours as in the streets of Washington. Nowhere, not even in the ordnance department at home, were more leather puttees and boots with spurs circulating between offices to maintain *liaison* between the combat units and the business end of war than at the general offices of that huge corporation at Tours. The officers worked hard all day without feeling that they had accomplished anything like as much as they would have in their own occupation at home. They wondered sometimes why so many of them were there. Everyone was thinking how to secure material and labor, and everyone had a sense of struggling with his hands tied behind his back against walls of cotton wool. There was a pitiful look in their eyes as they stood before their senior officers, pleading for a chance to go to the front and fight. Was this sitting at your desk in your spurs going to war in France?

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"Mother, take down your service flag, your son's in the S. O. S.," was the subject of a popular army song in France.

Not far from Tours was Blois—we shall have more to say about it—where officers whose seniors reported them unsatisfactory were re-classified and re-assigned. It was the channel of passage from the front to the S. O. S., and for officers in one branch of the S. O. S. who might do better in another. The danger of being sent to Blois was a shadow over every mind.

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Where the fighters were "homesick," the able-bodied workers in the S. O. S. were "front-sick" and "heart sick." All their selfish interest centered in escaping the misfortune of having to return home without having heard a shot fired. If they did not do well, there was no chance of their reaching the front; if they did well, they became invaluable to a senior who refused to let them go. Their restlessness and their feeling of general helplessness in fits of despondency led to a few cases of suicide.

When Harbord came to Tours, it was not by the way of Blois. He was no major-general of engineers or of the Q. M. C. who, however specially capable for his task, had not been in combat service. Here was Pershing's favorite adjutant, fresh from victories in the field, come back from the limelight at the front to help "count the beans and rustle freight." This of itself gave him a prestige that affected the state of mind of the whole organization. He must be a man of action;

and the S. O. S. wanted action. He knew his regulars and his reserves, and Headquarters at Chaumont, and the needs of the army from ship's hold to the fox-holes. The business men in uniform, with U. S. R. on their collars, did not care whether or not their chief was a Catholic or a Presbyterian. A regular or a reserve? Was he the man? [395]

He found the S. O. S. working in a series of compartments rather than departments. Though each was most conscientiously striving for coördination, different chiefs were in a mood that meant friction. Projects whose immediate completion was vital were not as far along as those whose completion could wait. Many were being constructed on too elaborate and lavish a scale by chiefs who had won a disproportionate amount of authority to carry out their ideas. They were enjoying the building of a plant that would last for twenty years, when the war might be won in another six months. Harbord did what Pershing would have done if the C.-in-C. had come to Tours; he was Pershing's man, as he had said. He grasped his problem, made his plan, and then set his adjutants to driving.

"The first time I went in to see Harbord," said one of them, "I knew that he knew his own mind, and that he was going to tell me what to do; and that I was going out to do it with the confidence that he would back me up. His 'no' to my suggestions was as convincing as his 'yes' that we were to have team-play—and that he was master."

His faculty of drawing men together was put in full play in some of the obvious methods of leadership which had been somewhat neglected in the S. O. S., where there had evidently been a policy that if you honestly follow the regulations all will come out well in the end. All the chiefs gathered at his house once a week for luncheon, where they found one another to be human. Instead of remaining at Tours, he left routine to his Chief of Staff, and spent three nights out of four on his railroad car in going and coming, with his office on board always in touch with Tours, while his inspections kept him informed of progress and aroused the enthusiasm of subordinates. The feeling passed that you were derelict if fate sent you to work in the S. O. S. The S. O. S. began to have the fighting spirit of corps of the front—that of an ambitious business concern. Harbord had not been a week in command before the S. O. S. was feeling a new force emanating from headquarters. They were calling to the fighters: "We're with you. Take more prisoners, so that we can set them to work. It means more supplies for you." That new commander who now had under him more than four hundred thousand men, and activities exceeding those of the largest of our trusts, would make every worker feel that he was contributing his part, not for his wage envelope, but for winning the war which had brought him to France. [396]

Our cargo was now flowing into every one of the ports of France south of Cherbourg, and overflowing into Marseilles in the Mediterranean too. The less that had to go to Marseilles, the more shipping time would be saved from the longer trip through the Strait of Gibraltar. We Americans like competition. The different Atlantic ports were started on a "race to Berlin" unloading contest; the stevedores of the port which won would be the first to go home. No Americans in France were more homesick than our colored men. When one was asked whether he would rather work at Bordeaux than at Saint-Nazaire, he replied: "Is Bordeaux any nearer home?" The "rustling" of cargo now became a game in which joyous calls were heard in common urging against any shirking which might delay the return of the workers to the levees and the cotton fields of their own southland. In tune with the Herculean mechanical effort of the giant American cranes, their Herculean muscular effort in its impetuosity was in imminent danger of removing the stanchions from the ships as well as the cargo. A British skipper who thought that he would be two days in unloading, and found that only one day was required, returned home to say that he was lucky to escape without having his ship's plates torn off and started toward the front. When bags of sugar were piled so high on one dock that several tons went through the floor into the water, it was a tragedy to people on sugar rations at home and to the sugar-hungry men at the front, but in the fever of effort to win the war by supplying two million men with their requirements for battle it was only an incident of the wicked extravagance of war, which led one of the stevedores to say that the sugar must count in the record as cargo discharged, while he did not think that it would make that old sea that had made him seasick so much sweeter that you would notice it. [397]

The impetus which the coming of Harbord gave to the S. O. S. implies no criticism of past accomplishment. His business was to "go through," as it had been at Belleau Wood and in the counter-offensive. An unfinished plant, preparing for an offensive in the spring of 1919, must be made equal to one in the fall of 1918. There had never been any lack of energy in the S. O. S. This was guaranteed by our national character, under the whip of war. All the while we had been making progress. The feeling of helplessness on the part of the workers had been due to ambition thwarted in gaining the full results of the supreme efforts which they were eager to exert. There had been no cessation of building; no cessation in striving to find in Europe every available article which would save transport, without reference to the cost—cost being the one thing that never made us hesitate. Every man accepted the idea that all the money in the world was ours. [398]

There was already an end to the confusion of the early days when the parts of a piece of machinery arrived on different ships. Tables of priority for each month were sent ahead to Washington, which might well think that the A. E. F. considered that the War Department had the magical power of pulling anything that it required out of a hat. Instead of sending his requisitions for material through Chaumont, Harbord now sent them direct to the War Department; he was the great administrative agent for the chief of G-4 at Chaumont, who coördinated combat and supply, holding the balance between the demands of the front and the wherewithal to meet them. There was increasing coördination at home, too, under the indomitable authority of General March. [399]

The wedges which our divisions were driving down the walls of the Aire and the Meuse rivers and against the Kriemhilde Stellung were only a part of the giant wedge of the supply system, with its bases as broad as the United States, which narrowed to the breadth of the Atlantic Coast of France from Brest to Bordeaux. Most of our troops arrived at Brest, where the harbor was deep enough for the draught of the mighty German liners which had been transformed into transports. Navy blue and army khaki swarmed on the docks where our sea and land forces met. Our destroyers sped out of the harbor to disappear on the horizon, and reappear as the protective scurrying guards of the transports which they brought safe into port before they slipped out to sea again, to see more freighters safe through the submarine zone under their agile husbanding. [400]

During the height of that transatlantic excursion season of ours the men on board slept in three shifts of eight hours each; they had two meals a day. Their warm bodies were close-packed, breathing into one another's faces, in tiers of low-ceilinged rooms, for from seven to ten days, after the healthy life of the training camps which had accustomed their lungs to fresh air. When the transport passed into the harbor mouth, and the submarine danger was over, as ants might swarm out of their runways to the top of a hill they swarmed on deck, where first- and second-class passengers had sauntered and promenaded, in solid masses of khaki, who formed the most valuable and superior first-class passengers America had ever sent to Europe. They had arrived. They made the harbor echo with calls and hurrahs. Theirs had been a passage which money could not buy or would want to buy for more than one experience; a passage not for pay or adventure, whose glamour was a sight of the sea and of France and of all they had read about the war. They were man-power, man-power by its thousands and millions, formed in a common mold no less than egg-grenades, their clothes cut according to the same pattern no less than their gas masks, the man-power which we had to give if we did lack artillery and aeroplanes, automata who were sentient parts of a machine responding to the mechanism of orders rather than of levers. Equipped, disciplined, trained, hardened, the preparatory processes of the training camps sent them to us for the final processes in France. [401]

Mighty lighters hurried alongside the transport, whose time must not be wasted while the hundreds of thousands of other passengers waited three thousand miles away. Swiftly, more swiftly than any but human cargo could be unloaded, they were disembarked, the decks and the hold becoming strangely empty with the resounding footsteps of the officers and crew in place of the hum of conversation and the atmosphere of human bodies crowded together.

Their confinement normally and charitably required that stiffened bodies and minds and suffocated lungs should have a period of relaxation and exercise. This indeed was a part of the original plans; but now when original plans had gone by the board in feeding in men to make the present the decisive offensive, though horses must be given rest, it was found that men who had been through a régime to toughen their human adaptability for what four-legged animals could not endure, could do without such consideration when they were needed as the minute men of the Meuse-Argonne battle. Shipped as freight from camp to pier, from pier on to transport, and then from Brest across France, which they saw only through the doors of box cars where they were packed as close as on board the transports, the one idea at every point was to hurry them along until they were delivered f. o. b. at the front. There, after coming from comfortable barracks, after the devitalizing closeness of transport and train, in a merciless climatic change, they could remain in the fox-holes in the chill penetrating mists and rains as they were still being hurried against the enemy, until death or wounds or "flu" or pneumonia or the dizziness of fatigue reported them as "expended." [402]

Caring for the passage of this human stream from the ports to the front was the first duty of the S. O. S. The next was to follow it up with supplies. Wherever men were they must be fed. La Pallice and La Rochelle were also being used; but the main Atlantic cargo ports were Saint-Nazaire and Bordeaux. Ships moved with a processional regularity to their places alongside the docks we had built. Our warehouses stretched out over the sandy reaches where an occasional vine appeared between spur tracks on the site of the vineyards for which we were paying, and which hardly brought as much wealth to Bordeaux as the money we were spending. Broken bags of flour, and broken crates of canned goods, were piled in separate warehouses; as they could not stand the journey to the front, they were used to feed the legions of the S. O. S. For there was an army larger than Grant had in the Appomattox campaign to be supplied between the ports and the front. Fields were filled with the parts of automobiles and trucks. Assembled, they started in long convoys across France to Saint-Mihiel or the Argonne, their drivers having a tour of the château country before passing over the Côte d'Or of Burgundy. All the parts of the railroad locomotives and cars arriving were assembled in the vast shops which we had built and fitted out with machinery according to the latest American models. [403]

We were supposed to have, but never had, ninety days' routine supplies in France for all our forces in France. Of these forty-five days were to be in the warehouses at the base ports. Sometimes trains were loaded at the ports and run straight through to the front. Normally, there were three changes in transit. At our service were all the arterial railroads of central France, and all the locomotives and cars that the French could spare, and all the broken-down French rolling stock which our mechanics could repair. Possibly no denial can ever overtake the report that we built a railroad clear across France; but we did nothing of the kind, and contemplated nothing of the kind. We built spur tracks and sidings and cut-offs; if all the track we laid, figured a statistician in G-4 at Chaumont, had been in line, it would have reached from Saint-Nazaire across France and Germany to the Russian frontier. [404]

All our building construction, if it had been concentrated in one standard barrack building, would extend from Saint-Nazaire as far as the Elbe river in Germany. We erected and put in operation

18,543 American railroad cars, and 1,496 American locomotives. Besides producing enough firewood to form an unbroken wall around three sides of France, one meter high and one meter broad, we sawed 189,564,000 feet of lumber, 2,728,000 standard gauge ties, 923,560 narrow gauge ties, and 1,739,000 poles and pit props. If all the motor vehicles we brought to France were put end to end, they would form a convoy two hundred and ninety miles in length. On the day that the armistice was signed we were operating 1,400 miles of light railway, of which 1,090 miles had been captured from the Germans. They handled 860,652 tons of material.

These figures, put together in a paragraph in passing, give an idea of the magnitude of the business which the army of the S. O. S. was conducting. It was an army which knew no excitement in war except work. The problem of sea transport which faced our ports at home was no more trying than the problem of railroad transport from our ports in France; *liaison* between combat units in action no more trying than the *liaison* between our American railroad men with their American training and the French railroad system. We were used to long distances and long hauls; the French, in a country no larger than some of our states, were used to short distances and short hauls. Impatient at first with their methods, we saw how they had come to be applied in France. Amazed at first at ours, the French came to appreciate how well our long heavy trains suited the wholesale business of war. The French seemed unsystematic, yet their worn locomotives and rickety cars managed to carry on an enormous traffic. When we applied our home tracer system for the first time on the railroads of France, the central offices might know the location of every car under their authority.

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Our railroad men, under Brigadier-General W. W. Atterbury, our railroad general, used to having at home all the supplies they needed, made victory possible by the way in which they patched and contrived in their energy and resource to meet the demands of the months of September and October, which were far beyond their calculations. They share the honors due to our pioneer railroad builders in the early days of the west, while they exemplified the type of men who operate our great systems of today, whether the engineer, the fireman or shop mechanic, the veteran superintendent, or the young fellow just out of a technical school. I wonder no less how they were able, with the rolling stock at their command, to forward all the tonnage we required at the front, than I wonder how we were able to take some of the positions of the whale-back.

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In his office at Tours, surrounded by his adjutants, who, though in khaki, were railroad men in every word and thought, and in the discipline which our home systems have established in webbing our country, Brigadier-General Atterbury had a command which in numbers belonged to a major-general. His discipline was that of a leadership which won loyalty. In all his perplexing situations, when he was striving for authority and material for an undertaking so strictly technical, he never passed on any animus to a subordinate. It is something for an officer to return from France with the respect which he had from his subordinates.

The train that started on the steel trail across France, leaving behind the hectic labor and the piles of cargo and the warehouses built and building, when it passed out of the region of the base sections came to the intermediate zone. In the regular routine it lost its entity when it ascended the "hump" which we had built at Gièvres,—that American hump, singularly characteristic of our system of labor-saving organization. Every car was loaded with material belonging to some branch of the army. One by one they were "dropped" down the incline, each being switched to a track, as its downgrade momentum, subject to the brakes, sent it—with the facility of letters tossed into mail bags by a railway mail clerk—where its contents belonged, whether to the door of an engineer, an ordnance, a signal corps, a medical corps, or a Y. M. C. A. or Red Cross warehouse, while the meat trains or others with perishable cargo went to our vast cold-storage plant. From the "hump" you looked out over a city of warehouses, of barracks, and other structures, with its guardhouse, its clubs, its motion-picture theaters, its military policemen, under a colonel who was mayor, common council, and king—all having been built in the open fields as a way station from the New York docks to the front.

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Here at Gièvres other trains were made up to continue the journey forward in answer to the daily requisitions of the regulating stations upon the intermediate reserves. War being a one-way business, all expenditure and no income, all loaded cars were going one way except those bringing lumber and ties that we were cutting from the forests for construction, salvage from the battlefield, broken trucks, and vehicles—and the hospital trains. Here prevision must be most sure. Man was the most valuable piece of machinery; his repair the most important of all repairs. We had enormous hospitals in the intermediate zone as well as at the base ports; and indeed all over central and southern France. The medical corps used great hotels and other buildings to care for the hosts of broken, gassed, exhausted, sick men from the Meuse-Argonne battle; but when we had to build we ran out spur tracks—deep was our faith in spur tracks—into open fields upon which rose cities of standardized unit hospital buildings, all of a color, all of a pattern, and also operating rooms and Y. M. C. A. clubs and theaters, under the autocracy of some regular surgeon who looked up from his desk at the chart on the wall showing the number of his patients and the number of vacant beds. The hospital trains ran up on the spur tracks, and hobbling wounded descended, and wounded who could not hobble were carried on stretchers to their beds—each a card-indexed automaton, no less than when he entered the training camp, as he would remain until he was demobilized or buried in France.

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So the trains of munitions passed the trains laden with the products of war, the knowledge of whose sacrifice is the only value of war. Right and left through the intermediate zone, from Orléans to the Mediterranean, were more repair shops, remount depots, training camps for aviators, tank crews, machine-gunners and carrier pigeons, each worker striving for the same purpose that shoveled the coal into the locomotive firebox or slipped a shell into a gun or a

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cartridge into a rifle. At Is-sur-Tille, near Dijon, was another "hump," which looked down on what seemed a training camp in its streets of mud: for there was mud in the S. O. S. as well as at the front—mud kept soft by the damp atmosphere when autumn rain was not falling, and deep by the trampling of many feet. Here, as at Gièvres, the train sent its cars on their way to the warehouses to which their contents belonged; here you felt at first hand the breath of the front in all its hot and pressing demands; here was the largest bakery, with cement floors and all up-to-date apparatus, directed by the head of one of our large bakeries at home, rolling out the round loaves with the ease of peas shelled from a pod. All night long, as at Gièvres and at the base ports, the switch engines coughed forth their growls as they shunted cars, and the laborers worked at loading and unloading. The officer in charge in his little office was directing as insistent an excursion business as ever fell to the lot of man. His nightmare, and the nightmare of all the regulating officers of the S. O. S., was moving cars. Every hour a car was needlessly idle was waste. This called for labor, and more labor—for more warehouse space, for more locomotives, for more sidings; but as they were not forthcoming, why, man and machine must be made to do more work. The excess strain on either was not considered. The pressure was the same as that for the relief of a city stricken by fire or earthquake.

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Beyond Is-sur-Tille at Saint-Dizier was another, a supplementary, regulating station for the Meuse-Argonne battle, which during the battle fed, apart from the troops in the Saint-Mihiel and other sectors, 645,000 men and 115,000 animals. Regulating stations did the detail, while Gièvres and the base ports did the wholesale. They saw that each division received its daily rations of food and ammunition. Each division had its "cut in" of cars, with all its daily supplies, which was made up a day in advance and sent to the divisional railhead. Knowing the needs of the divisions, a regulating station sent its requisition back to the big warehouse centers, while it always tried to keep on hand a small amount of all articles likely to be needed in haste. When we were swinging our divisions around for the Château-Thierry emergency, one division had seven railheads in eight days; its trains were on hand on each occasion. They must be; otherwise the divisions went hungry. All other demands must yield to the routine which brings the morning milk and the grocer's boy to the kitchen door.

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At the railhead you felt not only the breath of battle but that throbbing suspense and intensity of purpose which is associated with men in action. Here came the empty trucks and wagons from the front, and the ambulances traveling in their convoys on the crowded roads up to the zone of fire, while men worked in darkness. Here the wedge from home was narrowing under the hammer strokes, until you could feel it splitting the oak—the hammer strokes of the hundred millions, their energy, their prayers and thoughts.

Those empty trucks seemed ever hungry, open mouths, the mute expression of the call for more, and still more, of everything with which to keep up the driving—more replacements as well as material.

When the front wanted anything, it was wanted immediately. Improvise it, purloin it, beg for it, but send it, was the command that admitted of no refusal. If this officer could not get it, put another in his place who could. Officers when they lay down for a few hours' sleep had their telephones at their elbow, ready as firemen to answer the call. Men worked until the doctors ordered them to the hospital—that they must do. They could do no more. The S. O. S. could not send guns or tanks when it had none from home; but American resourcefulness surpassed its own dreams of probabilities. Harbord could well say to Pershing: "I've straightened out things in the S. O. S."

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## XXIV

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### REGULARS AND RESERVES

Isolation of West Pointers—College graduates not dissociated from the community—The monastic ideal of the founder of West Point—And the caste ideal—The officer a cleat on the escalator of promotion—Out of contact with America—Five years to make a soldier—A clan tradition—A blank check to the regulars.

Before our entry into the war our busy people had occasional reminders that we had a United States Military Academy for training army officers. Its gray walls on the bluffs at West Point were one of the sights of the Hudson valley to passengers on river steamers. There was an annual football game between the West Point and Annapolis cadets. As every schoolboy knew, both teams were better than those of the small eastern colleges, but not so good as those of the large eastern colleges. The cadets were in the inaugural parade. Their marching thrilled observers with an excellence which, however, is always expected from professionals, whether ballplayers, billiardists, actors, pugilists, circus performers, opera singers, or poets. It was the cadets' business to march well. Of course they were superior to amateurs in their own line. Investigations of "hazing" had also at one time attracted wide attention to the Academy. Some of us were horrified, and others of us amused—still others disinterested as long as they did not have to take the dose themselves—at reports of first-class men having to swallow large draughts of tabasco sauce in order to toughen their stomachs for the horrors of war.

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A community which sent only an occasional boy to West Point sent many boys to civil colleges. I

was one of the boys who went to a civil college, and knew how we felt in our time. We returned at the end of our freshman year with the attitude of "How little they know!" as we looked around our native town. During our college career we spent our holidays in home surroundings, which formed a break in college influences. At the end of our senior year we had the "rah! rah!" spirit of class, alma mater, and college fraternity, and a feeling that the men who went to the principal collegiate football rival were of a low caste. We were graduated full of theories and wisdom, and set out to earn a living and incidentally to demonstrate how little "they" really knew. By the time we were able to earn a living we concluded that "they" had known more than we thought.

In fact, we ourselves now belonged to the "theys" struggling in the great competition of professional and industrial life. We met men who had not been to college, who were the betters of college men. Having left college sworn to keep the fraternity first in our hearts and to write frequently to our friends, other interests and other acquaintances took our time. Meeting men from the deadly football rival, we found that they were the same kind of men as ourselves. We went to the annual football game and to class reunions where the old spirit revived transiently, and old memories were recalled as we met our old mates; but we found that we had not as much in common with them, beyond memories, as we had had in our youth. They had gone into different occupations, developed different tastes, and enjoyed varying measures of success. Some had become rich and famous; some had gone into politics; some had achieved respectable citizenship and some had failed. Jones at the head of the class had not done well; Smith at the foot had become a power in the world. Robinson, who had not been a remarkable scholar in his youth, was now a great professor. Brown, who had been a most serious student, was interested only in his golf score; Higgins, who had barely escaped expulsion for frivolity, was a serious judge. Larkin, who had been pointed out as a born leader of men at twenty-one, was a follower of meager influence. All this proved that college was only a curriculum in studies and basic character-building, while development came in after life from inherent vitality, persistence, latent talent, health, environment, and innumerable influences. [415]

The occasional West Pointer who returned home at the end of his second year with squared shoulders and chin drawn in had become far more dissociated from his surroundings than the freshman of a civil college. He too was thinking, "How little they know!" After his graduation, except for a rare visit to his parents, he had ceased to be a part of the home community. He was here and there at army posts, and serving in the Philippines. It was not unlikely that he had been a poor boy. I have known instances where boys had to borrow the money to travel to West Point. Many of the appointees had no particular call to the profession of arms; but they knew and their parents knew that from the day he entered the academy a cadet would not require a cent from home or have to "work his way," or win a scholarship. The nation took him under its wing. In order to receive an appointment it was well to know the local Congressman or a Senator, even in these days of competitive examinations. [416]

The appointment of poor boys to be officers had the appeal of democracy. It was a system devised in the days following the Revolution, when in England commissions in the red-coats were bought and sold, and only the sons of the gentry became officers. West Point, now well over a hundred years old, was at first an engineering school, but the real founder of the academy of today was Sylvanus Thayer, who had Prussian ideas of the same kind as von Steuben, drillmaster of the Revolutionary armies. He was of the old school of martinets, who proposed to establish in the midst of this pioneering, lawless, new country an institution where pupils could be caught young and so disciplined and formed that they would be worthy of the strictest European military tradition. In return for this privilege, the Congressman was to have the power of appointment. Congress accepted the idea. It did not interfere with the militia organizations, or any group of amateurs, or the conviction that any man in his shirt-sleeves and with a squirrel rifle was the equal of any European regular. At the same time it trained some really professional officers, who might become generals in time of war. Moreover, it was democratic; this was the compelling argument. America was opportunity; a poor boy might become a general; the Congressman might select the poor boy who was to be a general. [417]

The founder was a wise man and a stern one. He set the tradition which endured; he put the cadets into the uniform which we see in the cuts of Wellington's veterans who fought at Waterloo, and which they were to wear for a hundred years. He put a stigma upon being "dropped" from the Academy, which was a counter to family and political influence for a softer course. Doubtless he foresaw that when the graduates were through with these hard four years, they would be a unit for its continuance, particularly as they had not to go through it again. He had no illusions about democracy; he knew that democracy was the curse of military discipline. He believed in an officer caste; there could not be a good army without caste. If he could not have students from families belonging to the officer caste according to European traditions, he would make them gentlemen. They would be taught to dance, and initiated into a code of officer ethics and etiquette. In later times the Point had its polo team, a luxury which only rich youth could afford. [418]

This did not imply any relaxation of that severe régime in which theoretically only the fittest were to survive. The cadets might not smoke cigarettes or drink; they might not go skylarking to neighboring towns. Their every hour of drill, study, and recreation was counted. Far from the freedom of the elective course, every mind and body was filled into a mold a century old. Three-fourths of the study was scholastic; only a fourth, outside the drill, could be classed as strictly military: for the cadets were supposed to receive the equivalent of a collegiate education at the same time that they were being trained to be officers. With few exceptions their instructors were former graduates, called in from service with the army. Some of these might be rusty, compared to the experts of civil colleges, who gave their lives to specializing in one branch; but civilian [419]



teachers could not supply military discipline and atmosphere.

The boy who went to West Point was an average boy. At an impressionable age he entered a world as isolated and self-centered as that of a monastery. The effects of college and fraternity spirit were many times intensified. He had almost no opportunities of renewing the associations of civil life; all was of the army, for the army, and by the army. Though he served in the ranks as a cadet, he never served in the ranks as a soldier. His "How little they know!" was not to suffer the shock of competitive strife with the millions of other boys whom he was to lead as a general. His quality of leadership had been tested only in marks on drill and scholarship.

When he was graduated, he became an officer, his position assured for life. The fellows of his school days who went into professions had to have their way paid, or to work their way, through college and professional school, and then slowly build up a practice. All this the West Pointer had free, as the gift of his country, in the name of democracy. His income would be more than equal to that of the average graduate of our leading law and medical schools, with the certainty of sufficient pay to care for his old age when he was retired. Once an officer, he could lean back on his oars if he chose,—the hardest work of his career having been finished when other boys are beginning theirs. He became a cleat on the slow-moving escalator of promotion, waiting on the death and retirement of seniors or the expansion of the army. There were other cleats than those with the West Point marking, those of officers who had worked their way up from the ranks, and a larger class which had come in through examination; but the West Point spirit was dominant. The West Pointer was a West Pointer; his tradition the tradition of the army.

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Superb of health, and hardened of physique, the graduate, I should add, need not continue the West Point régime after his graduation. He might neglect exercise to the point that led President Roosevelt to issue his order compelling tests of physical endurance, which led to such an uproar in army circles. Roosevelt proceeded on the sound principle that capacity for enormous and sudden physical strain is a prime requisite—as the Great War so abundantly proved—for leading infantry on marches and in battle, and for sleeping on the ground.

Occasionally a West Pointer may have had some of his illusions about "they" amended by his colonel; but anything like a full revelation was out of the question. The young lieutenant, when he went to an army post at home or in the Philippines, found himself in the same isolated world of army thought and associations. The troops he commanded hardly put him in touch with the average of citizens. They were men who, in a country which did not feel the call to military service, enlisted for \$17.50 a month and the security of army life, oftener than for adventure or ambition. Between them and their officers there was as broad a gulf as between any officer class in Europe and their soldiers. All standards were set on the time required to drill these recruits and form them in the regular army mould.

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When officers met, ten or twenty years after graduation or receiving their commissions, they found none of the changes of fortune which alumni of civil colleges found. Everyone was in the same relative rank as when he became a second lieutenant. The army opposed promotion by selection, as that meant "political" influence and favoritism. Promotion by selection was against the law, except that the President might, if he chose, make a second lieutenant a brigadier or major-general with the consent of the Senate. The promotion of Wood, Bell, Funston, and Pershing to be brigadiers over the heads of many seniors led to no end of ill-feeling in the army, which made these ambitious and able officers the victims of an unpopularity which only time and the retirement of older officers could overcome.

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They had all distinguished themselves in the Spanish War, which had awakened us to a realization that though we had excellent regiments, which exhibited all the sturdy and dependable qualities of the regulars, we had no army organization. Under Secretary Root we developed the staff school and the school of the line at Leavenworth, and the War College at Washington, as a series of schools where ambitious officers could study tactics, specialize in different branches, form paper armies, and direct them in the field. The Staff College applied West Point industry. Its students worked long hours in the enthusiasm of mastering their profession. It was necessarily scholastic. I remember seeing, soon after the Russo-Japanese War, a combat maneuver of a few companies in the fields at Leavenworth. It was carried out in a manner that would have mortified a young reserve officer in France. Some of the soldiers participating had had two and three years' service. In wonted freedom of speech I suggested that with three months' training companies of college men, farm-hands, elevator boys, brakemen, firemen, clerks, and managers, drawn from civil life, could be taught to perform this maneuver better than we had just seen it performed. There was a chorus of protest, particularly from the older officers, who were saying that the trouble was that these men had not had enough drill: it took five years to make a soldier. Not all the younger officers joined in this view. One had the courage to express his opinion: "You're right—provided those citizens you mention put their hearts and intelligence into the job. Give them six months, with enough experts to train them, and plenty of war material to back them; shoot over them a few times—and I'd ask nothing better than to lead them." He was to live to see his heresy become orthodoxy; to see West Point receiving lessons in democracy from American soldiery.

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Upon our entry into the war, our officers might have been divided into three classes: (A), including about ten per cent of the whole, officers who were the best of the Leavenworth graduates: officers who had shown administrative ability and natural leadership; officers who were in touch with the world, alert, vital, with strong constitutions, and the capacity of meeting situations. These men would have done well in any occupation in civil life. (B), average officers, devoted to their duty, consistently efficient. These represented about forty per cent. They would have been moderately successful in civil life. (C), the remaining fifty per cent, of varying degrees

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of capacity. They included the officers who kept step and escaped courts, those without ambition, those who had not grown since they received their commissions, the fussy sticklers for etiquette without power of initiative, those who avoided any extra work, those who were never meant to lead men in battle. This class, with few exceptions, would not have been successful in civil life; not good lawyers or doctors, railroad men or mechanics. They would never have earned the pay they received anywhere but in the army.

Taken as a whole, the average was about the same as in any group of men; it was high, indeed, considering the absence of incentive and of competition. Then there were the unknown quantities in every class: the officers whose latent powers, hitherto undetected, came into play under the call of emergency; and the officers who disappointed expectations formed in peace when they were put to the test of war.

All of them were fellows in the life of the post, where the feminine element had its influence. Almost without exception they lived modestly on their pay. Everyone knew the other's income. The rank of wives was that of their husbands. The officer commanding was the head of the family. All the jealousies of any isolated community were in play. There was bound to be intrigue for good assignments, not only in Washington and favorite posts at home, but in the Philippines; but there was no such thing as corruption. The army was straight; its code of honor was unimpeachable, except in the influences for good assignments. There were hops and dinners, and visiting back and forth. Inner feelings might be strong, but they must be kept under the mantle of formal politeness; for you did not choose your companions. They were chosen by army orders. Everything was official, and what was not was rank.

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Talk at the bachelor messes and at all gatherings was about "shop": which left the outsider as detached as a railroad man attending a convention of chemists. The lack of common themes was one reason for absence of contact with the "they" of the outside world. The army register was the most read of books. It showed where all your friends were serving, and also you could reckon when you would receive your promotion, and when perhaps you might have a separate command, with husband and wife outranking all present and having to follow the views of no senior in matters of routine. Strong and biting criticisms were exchanged of fellow officers, whose nicknames of cadet days remained,—whether "Rusty," or "Poppy," "Wooden-headed Charlie," "Slow Bill," "Pincushion Pete," or "Noisy Tom." Smith had gone to seed. How Jones had ever been able to graduate from the Point was past understanding. Robinson managed more good appointments with less ability than any man in the service. All belonged to the army; in the presence of the outside world there could be no fault in the army. Officers stood together; they stood up for their men, no matter how mercilessly they "bawled them out" at drill. In the background at drill and in the barracks were the sergeants and corporals, the "non-coms," who shaped the "rookies" into soldiers, and who carried on all the routine drills. Old soldiers, they had fallen into the habit of army life. Their position in our democratic country lacked the importance that it enjoyed in European armies. In the offices were the field clerks, who ran the typewriters and carried on office routine.

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Among the officers the college spirit backing the football team for victory, and that of the secret society and of the trade-union, were inevitably, as in all officers' corps, united in the common fealty of self-protection. The army was always fighting for its rights against an unappreciative nation. Secretly it was always against each administration. Roosevelt was almost hated at one time. Later he was admired. Congress was regarded as a natural enemy which cut down appropriations. Civilian secretaries of war, who came into office without the slightest knowledge of the character of the military service, fell into the hands of a clique of officers close to the throne. Unless you had a friend among them, you might not count on good assignments, said the pessimistic of class C.

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The feeling that the army was underpaid was as common as that it was unappreciated. Officers, thinking only of the men in civil life who succeeded, complained that they could not associate with the outside world because they had not the money to keep up their social end. The dream of every officer was of a great conscript army, like the French or German. This meant promotion, of course, and that the army would count for something in the country, though the thought was not consciously selfish on the part of the best men. It was professional and natural human ambition, based on the conviction of the necessity of military training for every citizen. Without it an officer could not be a good soldier. It was a better spirit than that of the time-servers of class C, who were interested in promotion alone, and in passing the time.

The prospect of Japan taking the Pacific Coast was the main item of propaganda before the Great War began. Then Germany, or the victor in the war, was seen devastating our coasts, his great guns toppling our cities in ruins, and his infantry sweeping across country, perpetrating the horrors of Belgium. Any officer who knew his profession in the large, knew—despite the figures assembled for its proof—that the transport of forces for a successful invasion was out of the question; but such methods of making the flesh creep alone could awaken an indifferent public to the necessity of an adequate army and the value of military drill to our heterogeneous population. The regulars saw us depending against trained hosts upon citizens in shirt-sleeves and the undisciplined National Guard. "They" of the outside world were concerned only with their own prosperity—undisciplined, utterly without the military sense or spirit. War was a biological necessity. There had always been war, and there always would be war. One day we would find ourselves at war. The nation would call for soldiers, and the little band of regulars would go forth to sacrifice. Meanwhile, in the midst of ignorance, they would keep the altar fires burning, and remain true to the traditions of their profession.

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Then a miracle happened. The dream of the regulars came true. There were to be no political

generals: none were to be rewarded with commissions for raising regiments, as in the Civil War. We were to have the draft; all direction was to be left to the professional. The nation signed a check upon all our resources, human and material, to be filled out by them. Our people offered all they had in order to save civilization. Their thought was the interest of their souls, their country, humanity, and their future happiness and prosperity. [429]

To the army officers war was their occupation: a viewpoint entirely different. Glorious opportunity had burst the door of their isolation wide open, beckoning them to power. It was the same to them as if overnight the stocks in a land company had jumped a thousand per cent owing to the discovery of oil on its property. Majors and captains of classes B and C were to be colonels of regiments of three thousand men, more than colonels, and many brigadiers, had ever commanded. All the officers of class A might now carry out their theories in practice: they might aim for the command, not of paper, but of real armies in battle. Only a few had been in touch with the psychology of the country. The country was swarming in upon them. Was it surprising that some of class C and class B and even of class A felt, at the prospect of enlightening the ignorance of the manhood of all the United States, a constriction of cap-bands which had formerly been large enough?

For recruit officers of this enormous new army we turned to our colleges and technical schools. This was an educational test, but the only one that could be hurriedly applied. The average of the candidates for the officers' training camps must be as naturally capable as the average of army officers. They must possess a class A, drawn from men already tested in civil life, which would be equal in brain power to class A on the army list; and it must be relatively larger, considering how few army officers there were and how numerous were the educated, intelligent, and ambitious youth of our country. Among those who were only privates in the swarms of volunteers who enlisted immediately upon our entry into the war were privates to whom nature had given a natural capacity for leadership which no curriculum of a military school or civil college could supply; who were to take the leadership of companies out of the hands of men who had an "A plus" in calculus, surveying, and Latin. After the volunteers, the draft men began arriving at the training camps in excursion parties. [430]

"When I saw them piling off the train," said one regular officer, "the undisciplined sons of an undisciplined people, I wondered what they would do to us. They had not been in camp a day before I knew that they were going to play the game." It had never occurred to him, his horizon restricted from his juvenile days at the Academy, that there was discipline in the running of our railroads, our industries, our labor unions, our societies, our lodges, and in all the team-play of our sports; that we were all used to obeying orders in the process of earning a living or winning a baseball game. Those boys among the volunteers and in the draft were of the same kind as the boys who went to the Point to become members of the officer class. There had been no such military marvel in all history as the willingness of our people to yield authority which the British had granted only after painful stages of inveterate resistance. It was all inexpressibly magnificent; a better proof of strength and character than any form of routine military preparedness. Given such a spirit—a spirit the stronger for the dislike of military forms and the aversion to war—and we could no more fail of victory in the end than you can exterminate the Jewish race. Without that spirit nations decay and fail, for war does not form character: war only expresses the character formed in peace. [431]

Every volunteer and draft private, every would-be officer, realized his ignorance, as a neophyte about to be initiated into professional mystery. He had the willingness to conform, the eagerness to learn, of the neophyte. No teachers were ever safer from scepticism on the part of their pupils. The West Point discipline was applied. It taught the drillmaster's fundamentals of forming good physique and habits of strict routine. For this, great credit is due. This host of recruits, American in intelligence and adaptability, "playing the game," never able to answer back, rigid at salute, imbibing the instruction of class A or enduring the outbursts of temper in good army "bawling out" language from class C, formed a silent body of criticism which became increasingly discriminate with growth of knowledge. The instructors did not forget that the course at West Point was four years, though they did forget that three-fourths of the curriculum consisted of elementals learned at a civil school. They did forget their association with the "rookies" who became privates of regulars in time of peace. Holding fast to these criteria, they overlooked how fast the average youth of America could learn when he put his heart and mind into intensive study and drill. [432]

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## XXV

### LEAVENWORTH COMMANDS

Developing "staff work" in France—The younger men from Leavenworth schools in the saddle—The inner ring of the expert—Building the "best staff" at Langres—The obsession of promotion. [433]

So it happened that the little band of regulars did not go out to sacrifice in a body. They were scattered through the training camps as instructors, and they directed the expansion of our army organization. The officers of our General Staff in Washington had followed the strategy of the war on the maps, and studied its larger tactical problems in the light of such reports as were

received. Their own precepts and training led them to admire the German rather than the French army system; a majority, thinking at first that Germany would win, were accordingly impressed with the seriousness of our undertaking when we entered the war. They hardly realized that the Canadians and Australians, who were people of something the same character as ourselves, had developed from raw recruits divisions and corps which were without superiors. We had formed no plan for operating an army in Europe. We seemed to be unfamiliar with the static details of trench warfare, with the clothing and equipment required; otherwise all this information would not have had to be sent back by the officers of our pioneer force in France three months after our entry into the war. [434]

The training camps being established, and munition plants under way at home, we must prepare to command our forces when they were ready to take the field. "Staff work" was supposed the most expert of all the branches. In my first book I have already gone into the organization of our staff in France, formed on the plan of European staffs. What I have to add now comes in the light of later events, after the staff had been tried in battle, and in the light of the days of peace, when discrimination will not be misunderstood. In the early days in France a progressive officer said to me: "We must not go too fast in elimination of the unfit and promotion of the fit. It will upset the equilibrium. We must wait on evolution." It was General Pershing who had to maintain the equilibrium. He was a regular; and regulars regarded him as their general. He had to depend upon the men who had rank; and upon trained soldiers who knew the army system, in order to start his machine. One day, someone remarked to him, "But this officer is in a rut, and a winding rut, that does not permit him to see ahead, let alone over the walls." The General replied: "But he's one of my broad-minded ones. What do you think I do with my narrow-minded ones?" [435]

Possibly the tests, ever so swift in war, were swifter in France than at home. It was soon evident that some regular officers could rise to their tasks, and that some could not. Some of them had fallen into habits that did not permit long concentration of mind. They had not the physical vitality to endure long hours of labor. They were obsessed by small details, when they were suddenly given charge of a department store instead of a little store with one clerk for an assistant. Some were simply overwhelmed by their new burdens, or more possessed with the pride of authority than its efficient exertion. They were the ones who would show reserve officers that building a bridge or baking a loaf of bread or putting up a crane or organizing a laboratory was a different matter when you did it for the army. Some who had vitality and concentration were hopelessly lacking in capacity for organization. They were particularly impressed with their awful responsibility in having to train reserve officers not only in combat but in the Services of Supply. They would not admit that there was anything about the army which a reserve officer could do as well as a regular. The capacity of many for prolonged controversy over theory and for writing memoranda was astounding; a result of the days of talking "shop" and speculative discussion at the posts. Where naval officers have always a fleet in being, and are always on a war footing—which means a successful secretary of the navy if he will only sign the papers placed on his desk—army officers had only an army in imagination, which meant that a "successful" secretary of war must indeed be a great man. [436]

From the first there was a struggle in France between two elements: between the ruthlessly progressive and the reactionaries who were set in traditions; between the able, energetic, ambitious, enduring, and others who might have finer but not as aggressive qualities; between the men who were sure of themselves and those who were not. For his immediate advisers Pershing had to turn to the Leavenworth men, who had been trained in the theory of a large organization and who had used it as the basis of intelligent observation of the operations of the French and British armies. A Leavenworth man believed in Leavenworth men. He had enormous capacity for desk work which he had developed as a student at Leavenworth. A scholastic preparation thus became the criterion for practice in organization. Leavenworth men believed in the gospel of driving hard work; of rewards for success, and merciless elimination for failure—which is the basic theory of successful war. [437]

All armies are looking either back at the last war or ahead to the next. One element, leaning back on its oars, considers the lessons of the last war, if it were won, as setting all precedents for present policy. Another, usually the men who were not in the last war except as captains and lieutenants, considers that new conditions will again set new precedents in the next war. The officers in the forties in the days of the war with Spain and the Philippine rebellion, who chafed at the Civil War traditions of their seniors, now had command of divisions, while in the Great War the Leavenworth men who were in the thirties and forties were pushing up from below. If the later generation lacked rank on this occasion, it had power in France as the result of Leavenworth and the new staff system, while promotion by selection called its ambition.

Leavenworth graduates sat in the seats of the mighty on the right and left hand of the Commander-in-Chief; the tables of organization were of their devising; the orders signed by the Chief of Staff, which the divisional and the corps generals and all the generals of the Services of Supply had to obey, originated from this inner circle in the barracks buildings at Chaumont, which was surrounded with professional mystery. Divisional and corps chiefs of staff were Leavenworth men in touch with the inner circle. The disrespectful thought of these officers as the Leavenworth "clique"; but it was not the fashion to do much thinking aloud about them, such was their power. They did not think of themselves as a clique; not even the members of a secret society think of themselves in that way. They were a group of veterans, who if they had not the scars won in battle—we had had no great battles since the Civil War—had burned the midnight oil and played the war game together. They had, as volunteers, in order to learn their profession, when the people of the country knew no more of their existence than if they had been in a [438]

monastery, gone through a post-graduate course as rigorous as West Point itself. They thought of themselves as apostles, their voices unheard in a land saturated with pacifism and indifference, who, in fasting, prayer, and industry, had studied the true gospel in their holy of holies. They alone had conned the pages of the sacred books behind the altar where the regular army kept the sacred fires burning.

"War is the greatest game on earth," as one of them said. In this thought they had the same reason for enthusiasm in study as a chemist in his experiments or an architect in his building. In their school in the wheat fields of Kansas they were manipulating in theory forces which made a hundred million dollar corporation an incidental pawn. But they were dealing with the imaginary, and the managers of the corporation with the real. When the war came all their forces of imagination became real. [439]

To be a "Leavenworth man" meant a title to staff position, which you must take whether you wanted it or not. There were many excellent officers who never went to Leavenworth; officers who were masterly company, battalion, and regimental commanders, and who had the quality of natural leaders. They did not want to train for the staff. They preferred the line. Their ambition, nursed through the years of service, with never an assignment to Washington, was to make sure of a command in the field if war came.

"I had rather lead a battalion of infantry than be chief of staff of an army," as one of them said. Another said, early in the war, "I'm all for the Leavenworth men to do the chessboard work, but we'll find that they have studied so much that some of them don't know how to make decisions when they are dealing with a real instead of a paper army. I don't envy them. I obey their orders. I'll make a good regiment; that is all I ask—let me be with troops." He was right in saying that the men who stood high at Leavenworth ran the danger of being too academic for practical war, as surely as the best students at college are unfitted for practical business life. Yet all criticism of the Leavenworth coterie runs foul of the question: "What should we have done without them in France?" If you have to build a great bridge and there is no engineer who has ever erected one, why, it would be better to choose a man who had been through a first-class engineering school to make the plans, than to choose the contractors who got out the stone or sunk the caissons, or the financiers who furnished the funds. Every Leavenworth man had pet ideas of his own, as the result of his study, which he sought to apply when authority came to him, with inevitable interference with team-play. He had all the enthusiasm of a graduate of the Beaux-Arts who is given a million-dollar appropriation to build a state capitol as his first assignment. [440]

In relation to our little army with its scattered posts, their problem in making a great army organization was much the same as the transformation of Japan from medievalism to modernism, or amalgamating and improving all the small plants of individual business of fifty years ago in a year's time into a modern trust. The thing required broad vision. Some of them possessed it, but not all, even if they were Americans. Such was the loyalty of graduates to Leavenworth that I have heard them say that it was the best staff school in the world. A French officer might respond: "Perhaps, but we have had more opportunities for practice in handling large bodies of troops." The British and French staffs thought that our men were worthy of the highest praise; but they thought that our staff was inexperienced and sophomoric. They would not have been averse, as we know, to taking over the staff direction of our army, which, considering the feeling of the line toward the staff on all occasions, would have led to additional inter-allied friction. Relations would be smoother by having the resentment of the men who bore the brunt of casualties directed into home channels. [441]

The Leavenworth men, thinking as army officers and for the army, did not wish to yield power. They wanted to establish a staff system and a tradition for a large American force, in the hope that universal service would be accepted and continued, making the system permanent. Where were they to get the host of additional staff officers required for the armies, the corps, and the divisions in battle? A few student observers could be sent to the British and French staffs; but not a sufficiently large number when any outsider was in the way in the crowded quarters of a series of dugouts, or the ruined houses of a village. Moreover, Leavenworth wanted no system half British and half French, but one suited to our own army for all time. Leavenworth was always thinking of our military future. Following our national bent for excellence and this thought of the future, which led us to aim for the best gas mask, the best aeroplane motor, the best machine-gun, the best gas, the best of everything, Leavenworth proposed to make the best staff. To this tendency of ours to seek perfection the Allies might reply: "Perfection is all very well; but we have tested equipment, and a staff system the result of three years' trial, and time is valuable against the German." [442]

Just as the West Point system, which takes the "plebes" in hand, was being applied in our training camps, so Leavenworth staff college was reproduced in France in the ancient city of Langres, near Chaumont, which had been a fortress in many wars. Here regulars worked beside reserves, while the regulars had no special privileges except the first choice of horses to ride. Here they were to learn how to solve the tactical management of troops in action, the technique of all the different G's of the staff: G-1 and G-4, which had to do with transport and supply; G-2, which had to do with intelligence; G-3, with operations, and G-5, with training.

There was much to teach in that three months' course. How long will it take to reach all the units of a division, billeted in ten villages in an area of ten square miles, with an order for movement? How will it be sent? How will it be written after consultation with G-1, who knows the transport available? Which units will march out first? How long will it take to entrain those going by train? If the motor transport, and the horse-drawn transport, too, have to go overland, what roads will they take to reach their destination? Have the drivers their maps? In making a relief in the [443]

trenches, how long will it take to march up and complete the task?

Four German prisoners say one thing, four another, and three another. Take their reports in connection with aeroplane reports and general observation. What is your decision as to the enemy's strength on your front? Two additional divisions are suddenly brought into your sector. How are you to feed them? An attack is planned to pinch out a salient. How long is to be your artillery preparation? What its character? What points will you cover with the corps artillery fire? What with the divisional howitzers? There is your map with the information in G-2's possession for G-3 to consider in working out details. The infantry must be preceded by a barrage worked out with a mathematical accuracy, that will be practicable for the gunners and the infantry. All the fundamentals of technical knowledge were what arithmetic, algebra and geometry, and the strength of materials are to a bridge builder, in solving the problems presented to civilians, lawyers, engineers, and scholars of ages from twenty-five to forty-five, who worked them out and went to recitation in a school-room where they sat at little desks, as they did in boyhood days. [444]

The number of hours of study a student put in at Leavenworth had been a test of capacity—the reason for Leavenworth's existence. While officers who did not take the course were regarded somewhat in the light of outsiders, "We'll show these cits what it is to work," as one regular said. Langres was a very sweatshop in scholastic industry. It was a combination of learning and an infinite amount of clerical detail for men many of whom were used to having their details looked after by clerks. British and French officers, acting as instructors and lecturers, elucidated the problems on the blackboard. As one saturated with war on the Western Front listened to preachment of fundamentals, I was impressed with how much the average man who has not seen war, and has taken his conception of it from a soldier charging or firing a gun, had to learn before he had the a b c's of modern war.

One also wondered if all the hard work were always to the purpose. Practical Allied officers, who were always polite, thought that the students did so much grinding that they became dull and stale; we were trying to teach them too many generalities. A knowing regular said one day to a reservist: "You are too serious. The thing in the army is to make a show at this sort of gymnastics, —then use your common sense when you reach the front." This was in kind with a remark of one regular officer about another, whose information had led us astray: "I know him—a regular West Point trick. You must pretend you know, and be very definite in the pretense. That often gets over." It seemed to me one of the faults of the West Point system. [445]

The regulars had the advantage at Langres in that they had been ingrained in the military instinct, which is what is called the mathematical sense in a schoolboy who finds mathematics easy; but if the instinct were only that of cadet days and of company drill, and their minds had not grown, they suffered from the little learning which is a dangerous thing. Though the average Leavenworth man—not in all cases a class A man—did not see, despite the Canadian example, how anyone could become a staff officer in a few months when you had to study at Leavenworth for years, it soon became evident that some of these reserve officers with finely trained minds, used to the application and competition of civil life, were showing themselves the superior of the regulars. This in the scholastic sense, without considering practice in action. There was one Leavenworth man I knew who, though a master at solving problems in the classroom, seemed unable to solve any problem in action. Beside the Langres school we had a school of the line, and a candidates' school where men who had shown their leadership as privates in combat might be educated in theory for commissions. The reserve graduates of Langres were being sent out in the spring and summer of 1918 to be assistants in the G sections of army and corps and divisions. In a few instances they even became chiefs of section of division staffs. They were promised that one day they might wear the black stripe of the General Staff on their sleeves as the reward of efficient service. "Doping the black stripe" was the slang phrase for the grind at Langres. One day the reserve graduates might also have promotion, and one day, too, the reserve officers, captains and lieutenants and a few majors of the line, arriving with the divisions from the training camps—as our organization grew and was knit together—might also have promotion. [446]

About this time promotion was becoming a form of intoxication with the regulars. They must be cared for first; in due course, after the reservists became soldiers, the reservists would have their turn. New tables of organization were being devised which called for more high-ranking officers. Without rank the work could not be done, said his chiefs to the Commander-in-Chief, who once greeted one of them with the remark: "How many lieutenant-colonels must become colonels in order to do this job?" The regulars kept apart from the reserves, forming a group in their own world. In their messes the talk ran on promotions: each new list brought its tragedies for men who found themselves jumped, and its triumphs for those who had jumped them. If you were not frequently promoted, it was taken as a sign that you were not "making good." Promotion depended upon the good will of your superior, and sometimes, naturally and humanly, upon the fact that you might have served with him at an army post. Promotion became unconsciously corrupting. Some younger men who received their stars after swift passage through the lower grades hardly bore their honors with the equanimity of their elders. One chief of staff I knew had a Napoleonic grandeur. He hedged himself about with the etiquette of royalty. If he had been presented with a three-cornered hat of the kind that Napoleon wore, he would have accepted it in all seriousness. Unhappily his work was not of the Napoleonic standard. There was another chief of staff who was just the same man as a brigadier-general that he had been as a major. He never seemed busy; his work was always in order; his tactics were successful. He knew how to win men to his service, how to delegate authority. Had he been given command of an army he would have carried on in the same imperturbable fashion. [447]

"It will be hard on some of us regulars," he remarked, "when we wake up the 'morning after' and [448]

find ourselves majors back in the good old Philippines."

Naturally, in this environment, the reservists caught the contagion of promotion. If promotion were the criterion of having done your "bit," well, then, what would your friends think of you if you returned with the same rank you had when you left home? When you did return, you found that your friends could not remember whether you had been a major or a colonel. They were relieved if they might call you "mister" or Tom or George. It didn't matter to them what kind of insignia you had as long as you had been "over there," doing your bit. They had perspective which was hard to preserve in France.

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## XXVI

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### OTHERS OBEY

Misfit and unfit sorted at Blois—Clan again—What to do with the "dodo"—Making good after Blois—Its significance to the regular—The fear of Blois in its effect on the reservist—Faults of reserve officers—Feeling of the medicos—Staff propaganda—Getting to troops—Staff and line—Slow weeding out.

When the promotion disease was most acute, however, the word promotion never exercised over the army the spell of the word Blois. Though Blois was not mentioned in the press, it was as familiar in the secrecy of the army world as Verdun, Ypres, Paris, or Château-Thierry. Every officer who was uncertain whether or not he was pleasing his superior stood in fear of Blois, which was the synonym of failure. Downcast generals and lieutenants traveled together from the front to Blois.

What was to be done with officers who broke down in health, or who did not come up to the standards required in their work? They might be sent home; but white-haired generals and colonels who had reputations as able officers in time of peace were not wanted airing their grievances on the steps of the Army and Navy Building in Washington. There was an injustice, too, in placing on any officer the stigma of having been sent back from France, which would react on the many capable officers who were recalled from France in order to apply their experience abroad in furthering our preparations at home. Then, too, we needed the service of any officer who could do any kind of work in France. In the majority of instances it was not so much a question of being unfit as being "misfit." The thing was to put round pegs in round holes.

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The town of Blois near Tours became a depot for classification and reassignment of officers who had been relieved by their superiors. A Leavenworth man who was in charge had the power to reduce an officer in rank if he thought this were warranted. He secretly interrogated the arriving officer, who was told that his record would not be considered against him; his superiors might have been unjust to him; if he had "stubbed his toe," this did not mean that he would do it again. Though the plan was as logical as the transfer of an employee of a business from the manufacturing to the selling branch, the object of the attention felt the humiliation none the less. Despite all propaganda to alleviate its association in the minds of fellow-officers, "being sent to Blois" had only one generally accepted significance, which was wickedly unfair to many a victim. There were superiors who followed their subordinates to Blois; while the subordinates were later promoted, they sank into the desuetude of a routine position. Indigestion, a burst of temper, a case of nerves, of prejudice, of finding a scapegoat for a senior's mistakes, might start an officer away from the front with his unhappy travel order. I knew of instances where it was a tribute to the officer that he had been sent: a tribute to his honest effort, his initiative, his unselfish spirit in trying to do his duty under an incompetent, irascible superior, who himself should not have received the consideration of Blois but been sent to a labor battalion, in the hope that by a few hours of physical effort a day he might have earned a part of the pay and the pains his country had wasted on him.

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Considering how valuable was the regular's professional training for combat, and considering too that only half of the regular officers ever reached France, it was surprising how many regular officers were sent from the front to Blois. The percentage of regulars who failed in action was said to be as large as the percentage of reserves. The Leavenworth group, aiming to be impartial in the ruthlessness which they thought their duty, declared that when a man failed to make good he went, whether regular or reserve.

"If there's a reserve officer who can do my job better than I can, I want him to have it," said a regular colonel of thirty-five. "I'll give all I have and do my best wherever I am sent. That's service and duty. My country thought I was fit to be an officer. It paid me to serve where I could serve best. What is the use of holding to the clannish idea that any regular is better than a reserve? That isn't the idea of efficiency. If a man who has served only six months is better than a man who has served thirty years, the old regular ought not to growl. He ought to feel ashamed. He is beholden to his country for having given him a livelihood for thirty years. He could not have earned as good a one in any other occupation."

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He was the same officer who had spoken his convictions after my remarks at the maneuver at Leavenworth. Of humble origin, proving the democratic test by his conduct, he was an honor to the profession of arms,—as he would have been to any profession. The whole army recognized his ability. Of course no reserve officer or National Guard officer could be better than he; his

subordinates were proud to serve under him. If his reward could have been judged by a monetary standard, he earned all the pay he had ever received from the government by one month's service in France. He would return to a major's rank under mediocre officers, whose work he now directed from the staff.

Had he made the remarks which I have just quoted to reserve officers when any regulars were present, even his ability would not have saved him from the charge of disloyalty to the clan. So the strain on class A men in the staff or in the line was heavy. As Leavenworth men, the Leavenworth men stood together, thought the observing reserves—and with them, of course, I include National Guard officers—while the regulars, forming up against the magic inner circle, stood together as regulars in the magic outer circle. [453]

The human equation and friendships were bound to enter into the honest effort at impartiality. Here was a brigadier-general of fifty-five or sixty who had been your commanding officer at a post. He was hopelessly superannuated. There was no place of responsibility in keeping with his rank where his services would not be fatal to efficiency. No one desired to hurt his feelings. Diplomacy must arrange cushions for him. He was given a car, and aides, and sent about on inspections, to make reports which were received with serious attention, or he was given a first-class officer as chief of staff. One of these amiable "dodos," as the regulars called them among themselves—never in the presence of a reserve officer—complained, so the story ran, that "another general had a cut-glass vase for flowers in his limousine, and he had none." The strife for cars befitting rank was almost as vigorous as for promotion, while some regimental commanders rode in side-cars or cars of a "low rank"; but they, who passed through shell-fire and bumped over shell-craters, would not have exchanged their commands for the most luxurious of limousines flying along good roads out of sound of the guns. It was hard, indeed, that upstarts from Leavenworth in the name of John J. Pershing should consign to Blois, and from Blois to a base section of the S. O. S., veterans of thirty and forty years' service in the regulars. There was another method applied on one occasion, when a division commander told a brigadier who had mismanaged his command that his brigade would be cared for in the morrow's attack, and that he would have his chance to redeem himself in the manner of a brave man, by going "over the top." He went, of course, winning that respect which is given every man, regardless of age or ability, for unflinching courage. Others might have been given the same opportunity to win gold letters in the memorial hall at West Point as an enduring epitaph; but there were strong arguments against this. The incompetent were not fit for the serious business of combat organizations; men's lives could not be trusted to their direction. In case of death, the officer's widow would receive a small pension, while if he survived and was retired, he would receive retired pay enough to assure comfort to his family. [454] [455]

The human equation reappears. A reservist was a stranger, a regular might be an old comrade, calling on a senior's affection and the loyalty to clan, when the latter considered sending an officer to Blois. Still other influences might make a regular's shortcomings more easily forgiven than a reservist's. If a regular did not succeed in carrying out orders, as he was a professional, failure must be accepted as unavoidable. In a word, if Ed or John with whom you had served could not put the trains through or take a machine-gun nest, then it was impossible.

There was no such personal standard of professionalism to apply to a reservist. Success must be the only standard for him. On the other hand, I did not envy some Leavenworth men, who leaned over backward in being resolute to comrades, when they should revert to their original rank and be once more serving under officers whom they had commanded from the staff. "He's got it in for me," was an expression sometimes heard, as you will hear it in different forms in any class community. It was an excuse for having been sent to Blois. Meanwhile, new grudges were being formed. It was dramatic when a regular officer, who had been sent to Blois, upon reassignment to the front won his brigadiership in a brilliant action; but not so dramatic as when a National Guard brigadier, who had had his stars removed at Blois, refused a colonelcy in the rear, received a majority in the line, returned as a major to his own brigade, and was killed in leading his battalion gallantly in a charge. [456]

The heartbreaks among the regulars must be more lasting than among the reservists. War was the regular's profession. He returned to live with his reputation in the army world. The reservists returned to the civil world, where the war would soon be forgotten. This accounted for the greediness for promotion, which throughout the lives of regular officers would be the mark of their careers, while the guerdon of the future for the reservist was success in another occupation.

"Do these reservists want to jump in and take everything away from us, when they are in the army only for the war?" as a veteran regular complained when he was not receiving the promotion which he thought was his due.

The more subordinates you had, the more chance of promotion.

"Get a lot of young officers around you, form a bureau, and you will get a colonelcy in the new tables of organization," said one regular officer to another, both efficient, upstanding men.

Toward the end we did not lack officers in numbers for service in the rear. Our problem was to prevent unnecessary expansion in superfluities. Our American energy was under pressure. The thing for regular or reserve was to show that he was as busy as any Leavenworth man. Both the British and French said we had too many typewriters, and were prone to excess motion, despite our wonderful accomplishment. It was an obvious criticism, by officers in an established organization, of an organization which was in the throes of creation. Big men might work with a purpose; but little men might be flailing out their vitality on old straw, in order to make a "show" before the senior who might either promote them or send them to Blois. [457]



One day a reserve officer suggested to a regular senior, who had been laboring long and hard over a problem, a solution which could be expressed in half a dozen lines, leaving the execution of the policy stated to subordinates. That conscientious regular trained in Leavenworth industry shook his head. He sent in ten pages, after burning the midnight oil, which finally went up to Harbord himself. Harbord dictated a few sentences which duplicated the reservist's suggestion. "In line with my idea!" said the regular. There was no reason why the reservist should expect credit. He was in service to help in any way he could to hasten the end of the war.

I have in mind one regular staff chief, who won promotion and great credit because of his able subordinates. "He never knew," as one of the subordinates said. I am not sure that he was entirely unconscious, for he said: "These reservists have a lot of ideas. Of course they don't know anything about war." By the time the serious fighting began, they knew more than he knew. They were shrewd enough to let him think that their knowledge was his. [458]

Of course, he always held over them the fear of Blois and the promise of promotion. That fear of Blois killed many an officer's initiative. It made independent men into courtiers for favor from men for whom in their hearts they had no respect. The weak tried to play safe, as they studied a senior's characteristics. Lack of psychologic contact between the army post world and the world of the nation as a whole, and overwork, overworry, and lack of appreciation of their efforts sent many officers to Blois. It was one sure way of having a brief holiday. Young reservists especially became discouraged and fatalistic when they found that they were incapable of ever pleasing an irascible senior. Others who had the right kind of superior developed under his encouraging and understanding direction. All was a gamble in how commanding officers themselves developed under the test of war.

A certain suspicion of civilians of whom they knew so little had its inevitable influence in keeping regulars in all the important positions, even in the S. O. S. The army had to take the responsibility, and the army must therefore keep authority in its own hands. Was it surprising, considering the life they had led, that the regulars should think that civilians could not understand the honor and the ethics of the service which they had so jealously guarded against politicians and a misinformed public? Civilians were shrewd in worldly ways; they might use their positions for profit; they might inculcate bad gospel. I heard of no speculation in that enormous and scattered organization, buying such gigantic quantities of supplies. We may have been extravagant, but we were clean—very clean, compared to the political contracts of Civil War times. The regulars kept to the honest traditions, even if some of their officers had become "dead from the chin up," to use a regular army expression. As an observer I dare indulge in only a few of the regulars' tart sayings about one another, sayings which of themselves were symptomatic of our restless energy for achievement, and of standards which were formed on achievement rather than pretension. If there were any graft, it was that of desire for power, of travel orders to see the front and France, and of other human weaknesses which were an inevitable accompaniment of active ambition. [459]

It was my fortune to see the staff and the supply systems, to go in and out of the different headquarters, and on up to the front itself. I had the keys to the doors of all the many compartments, each immured by the nerve-racking pressure of its industry and exposure to death. I also saw the other armies at work. I knew the faults of reserves as well as of regulars. There were young officers of the line, good in scholarship and drill at the training camps, who, not from any want of courage but from inability, failed under fire. Floating in on the wave of the quartermaster and ordnance corps in the hasty granting of commissions was many a major and captain who was worthless. Some had never earned in their occupations in civil life the pay they were receiving as officers. These were most ambitious for promotion. They were always grumbling that their organizing capacity was not recognized. To the regular they were examples in point, proving the wisdom of expert control to the last degree. [460]

Other reserve officers who were specialists in a business or profession, now that they were at war, considered it a hardship to have to do the same work that they had been doing in civil life. Others by their propensities for unbridled talk offended the regular ethics of secretiveness. Others who had been regarded as men of ability in their occupations were living on their reputations no less than some of the older regulars. Under army conditions, in poor quarters on foreign soil, they seem to have had a further relapse. Men of reputation in civil life, who were used to having their work known through the press, once they were in uniform felt their helpless anonymity. Leavenworth, in its unfamiliarity with civil life, sticking fast to its prerogatives and its theory of war, said that all reserves, line and staff, should be given a hell's trial, and that those who survived would one day receive their reward—after all the regulars had been looked after, as the reservists remarked. [461]

Among the reserve officers were the physicians and surgeons, the most notable we had, in one of the most progressive of professions, who came to the aid of the army medical corps, which had to expand its organization with all the suddenness of the quartermaster corps. The standards of admittance to the army medical corps had been high; it had expanded its vision in sanitation in the Philippines, Cuba, and the Canal Zone; its practice was with soldiers in time of peace. The reserve medico, whether a great surgeon, a laboratory expert, or head of a hospital, was subject to a regular senior, often much younger than he, whose capacities might be first-class, or as inferior as his prejudices were numerous. No experts from civil life, in their sacred desire for efficiency, could feel the restrictions on their initiative more than the reserve medical officers; but be it said that we did build hospitals, we did equip them well, and, with General Pershing's resolute support, the exacting health discipline included precautions against that disease which has ever been the curse of armies. [462]

Leavenworth would have no advertising. Not only for reasons of military secrecy would censorship have no names mentioned, but also in keeping with the ethics of regular officers that publicity was unbecoming—a theory that was fine in the abstract, but in the application had to deal with human nature. The names of the Leavenworth men themselves, holding the fates of division generals in their hands, were unknown to the public and to the mass of the army. Not reports in the press, glorifying a unit or its commander, but the military judgment of superiors was to form the criterion of praise. Never, indeed, had such power come to a group of men as to the graduates of that sequestered school in the wheat fields of Kansas, in charge of two million men. It was interesting to watch how rapidly some of them grew under responsibility, how used they became to accepting power as a matter of course; and equally interesting how others remained scholars of Leavenworth, their vision still shut within its walls.

They directed policy to keep up morale. Their propaganda never forgot the army; and finally included, to my regret, that of hate and of atrocities accepted on hearsay. The Stars and Stripes, the A. E. F. newspaper, brought to France all the headlines, the snappy paragraphs, the cartoons, the slang, which knit California to Maine, to arouse our enthusiasm for the war. Our communiqués, much studied and revised, had facility in concealment in place of outright prevarication, which was the prevailing fashion to keep up the spirits of the public behind the army by assurances that it was the enemy who was making the mistakes and suffering the heavier casualties. Fashions in uniform received much attention, too, from those with that inclination of mind. The overseas cap, without a visor to keep sun or rain out of the eyes, was none the less distinctive. We might have designed a better one the day we started troops to Europe, if our staff at home had had information about European climatic conditions; but the number of things in which we might have shown prevision are too numerous to mention. They do not count now; for the war was won. The Allied communiqués were right. Our victory proves that the enemy made all the mistakes. [463]

Considering the many regulars used in organization and instruction in France, the number of regular officers who served at the front must be, if exception is made of the youngsters from West Point and the provisional regular officers, relatively small. Reacting to a "million men rising to arms in their shirt-sleeves," and to the popular conception of leadership as an officer rushing at the head of his men in a charge, Leavenworth held strictly to the idea of the chessboard system, which kept commanders, including regimental, in touch with their communications, instead of leading charges, the better to direct the tactical movements of their units. In the National Guard and National Army, the majority of the majors as well as the captains and lieutenants were from civil life; so, too, were the captains and lieutenants in the regular divisions, always excepting the regular officers, who did not average one out of six in the average regular battalion. [464]

No army staff was more given to the policy of alternating between line and staff than ours. Every officer on the staff felt that he had a right to lead a regiment or brigade before the war was over. Transfers were frequent. The result was gratifying to individual ambition. A line officer who had just learned field command took the place of a staff officer who was just becoming expert in his branch of staff work. The newcomer had to start in learning fundamentals when his predecessor had been under a strain to keep up with the rapid developments; but how could you deny Tom, who was once your lieutenant in the Philippines, his desire, after three months' confinement, to be "in it" for a while at the front? When he showed peculiar fitness for office work, the British and French would have kept him in an office. He had his daily exercise, and his periods of leave when he might recuperate from the mental strain, which was all the worse for a man whose heart was with the troops. The Germans, least of all inclined to consider the personal equation, had interchangeable corps staffs. When one became stale, it went into rest in the same manner as a division of infantry, while a fresh staff took its place. Their system was the same as having two office forces, interchanging at intervals, in a business where the offices were open night and day. We had not enough officers to allow holidays. All must serve double the usual office hours in any concern, Sundays included—work as long as there was work to do, snatching intervals of sleep. In this the Leavenworth men, I repeat, set all an industrious example. Their greatest fault first and last was lack of psychologic touch with the people of their country. They were too remote from the troops. "But you forget the men," as the C.-in-C. used to say to the chess-players. [465]

No staff can ever be popular with the line; and no line can ever satisfy the staff which works out its plans of attack on paper. The staff serves at a headquarters, and the line in the open under fire. The difference of the human equation is that between security and comfort, and death and hardship, which no philosophy can bridge. A staff officer who appeared at the front always looked conspicuously neat and conspicuously wise, as exotic as a man in a morning coat on a cowman's ranch. The line officer in earth-stained uniform, lean from his effort, eyes glistening with the fever of battle dangers shared with his men, as he entered a staff room to report was equally exotic in his surroundings, while he had a personal dignity whose chivalrous appeal no one could resist. [466]

Yet someone must do staff work. Some directing minds must arrange for the movement of the troops and their transport according to a system, and assure the presence of supplies and ammunition; someone must sit near the centering nerves of wire and wireless and telephone and messengers, and maneuver the units in battle. The more comfortable they were, the better they did their work, inasmuch as there was no reason for their sleeping on the ground when they could have shelter.

Everyone familiar with the statics of war on the Western Front knew that you might have a good lunch at a division or corps headquarters, and two or three hours later you might be floundering

in the mud, gas mask on, under bombardment. If you spent a day in the trenches, your feelings became those of the men who were there, you knew the nonsense that was written for public consumption in order to keep the public stalwart for the war, and you held visitors and staff officers who came sight-seeing in the kind of humorous contempt that those who "busted bronchos" held the tenderfoot in the days when realities in the wild west resembled the moving-picture shows of contemporary times. The officer relieved from staff duty for the front was subject to the same influence. He was not long in command of troops before he began abusing the staff for its preposterous orders, while the line officer assigned to the staff was soon talking about the incapability of the line to carry out his directions. [467]

Gradually slipping the round pegs into round holes and the square pegs into square holes, floundering and stumbling, but keeping on, the process of organization continued, while the resolute will of the Commander-in-Chief laid down the lines of policy. For him to give an order, as I have said, did not mean that it would be carried out. He himself was the victim of the system: one man dependent upon others for the execution of his plans, and largely dependent too upon inspections by others for reports of progress. His adjutants could form chains of influence of which he was unconscious. "Insubordination" is the most glaring of military offenses, next to timidity under fire. It cannot be openly practised; but within the bounds of any closed society the effects of insubordination can be gained. To trace responsibility in time of action is laborious through channels where officers familiar with the craft of "passing the buck" may spin red tape endlessly, though on other occasions they cut it with facility. Yet the phrase, "the C.-in-C. wants it," was the shibboleth of power. In war a democracy is right to confer autocracy. This means efficiency in concentration according as the character of its people is sound and efficient. The C.-in-C. and all progressive officers had to fight the influences inherent in autocracy, which eventually make permanent autocracy effete through formality and intrigue. [468]

The leaven was working; we were passing through the inevitable evolution which had been foreseen. The officers who had come through the schools and training camps, watchful if silent, had learned their fundamentals thoroughly and up to date, without having to unlearn pre-war teachings. They were finding, as the Canadians and Australians found, that, once on the inside, the art of making war was not such a profound technical secret as they had thought. They were now able to judge their seniors by professional as well as human standards. Regulars, of the type who felt their feet slipping, were naturally tenacious in keeping up the mystery, which was the capital of the inefficient. Regulars who were sure of themselves—having learned more of war in six months than in all their service—gladdened at the prospect of the fulfillment of their dream of a great army, which was equal to any in the world. They felt the fewness of their numbers on the top of this tidal wave of the nation's manhood in arms, which they must ride. An army has its public opinion, that of the mass of officers and men. Great leaders realize that this is supreme. Moltke courted it no less than Napoleon; Hindenburg sought to hold it, and lost it. The American army was becoming the country's army—the country as a whole trained to arms. The youth and the brains of the country making war its business had too large resources in leadership, once it had learned the technique of leadership, to submit to class rule. Your old regular sergeant, your old regular colonel must yield to the survival of the fittest in the competition of the millions. At the end of the Meuse-Argonne battle, excluding at the most twenty per cent of the regulars of sufficient rank for battalion and regimental command, I should say that there were five officers from civil life who were better than any regular in leading a battalion, and two or three better than any regular in leading a regiment. With the reservists I include the National Guard officers, though they had had military experience before the war. Arms was not their regular calling; but they were to prove that they were not amateurs. Our plans, as I have said, until the late summer all looked forward to a spring campaign. In the winter that preceded it there would have been many heartbreaks among the regulars; for the evolution no longer held in check would have had its fruition. The tidal wave would have broken through the barriers; we should have had many colonels and brigadiers from among the young officers from the training camps and the National Guard. [469]

Called to the Meuse-Argonne battle, without adequate preparation or equipment, our organization imperfect, remarkable as it was considering the circumstances, the burden of the leadership which meant success, as the account already shows, was with the officers from civil life. They led the combat units against the machine-gun nests. Did promotion matter for the moment to that sergeant who took over the platoon when his lieutenant was mashed by a shell or received a machine-gun bullet in the heart? Did it matter to the second lieutenant who was the only commissioned officer left to lead a company? To the boy captain, who had fought his way up from the ranks, or had not finished his college course before he went to a training-camp, as undaunted he took charge of a battalion and continued the attack? Staffs, sitting beside the telephones, waited on their reports. Did promotion matter to the men? I am weary of writing of staff and officers, who must have their part in the narrative. The men! We have heard much of them. We shall hear more. They won the battle—a soldier's battle. They saved generals and staff. It is their part which sent an old observer of wars home in pride and gratitude. [470]

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XXVII

AMERICAN MANHOOD

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Visualizing "over there"—Camping out in France—Unimportance of the leaders—Adopting "Jake"—America finding maturity—Playing the game—The coating of propaganda.

If one by one all the sounds at the front from the thunders of the artillery to the rumble of the columns of motor-trucks were to pass from my recollection, the last to go would be that of the rasping beat of the infantry's hobnails upon the roads in the long stretches of the night, whether in the vigor of a rested division, in rhythmic step going forward into line, or of an exhausted division in dragging steps coming out of line. It was mechanical and yet infinitely human, this throbbing of the pulse of a country's man-power.

Whether or not the draft boards were always impartial, whether or not favoritism provided safe berths for certain sons, I know that the fathers or friends who kept a young man of fighting age out of uniform or away from France did him an ill turn. He had missed something which those who went to training camps or to France were to gain: something not to be judged in terms of medals or bank balances. [473]

When the men returned from overseas, people wondered at their inarticulateness over their experiences. Subscribing to Liberty Loans and War Savings Stamps, eating war bread, making innumerable sacrifices, relatives and friends had been living in their habitual world, traversing the same streets or fields in their daily work, and meeting the same people,—and sleeping in their accustomed beds. The war news that they had read came through the censorship, speaking in the assuring voice of propaganda, which had men cheering and singing in battle. Their sons and brothers had been in another world, whose wonders, agony, and drudgery had become the routine of existence in the face of death, which was also routine. They had seen the realities of war behind the curtain, which had offered the pictures of war as it was designed to be seen by the public. There was so much to say that they found themselves saying nothing to auditors who did not know that the Meuse-Argonne was a greater battle than Château-Thierry, or that the S. O. S. was the Services of Supply, or the difference between rolling kitchens and the ammunition train. Some finally worked up a story which was the kind that friends liked to hear. Only when they had their American Legion gatherings would they be able to find a common ground where all their fundamental references would be understood. [474]

Much was written about the democratic results of millionaire and bootblack, farmer's son and son of the tenements, day laborer and cotton-wool youth, fastidious about his cravats, mixing together in the ranks. At the training camps our soldiers were on the background of home, and they were not facing death together. They knew their own country by railroad journeys and by living with men from different States; but some observers think that one does not really know his own country until he has seen other countries. The training camp had become a kind of home. Its discipline was modest beside that of France; there were no hardships except the hard drill and routine. In France our soldier had no home. He was always changing his boarding place, though never his task as a fighting man.

He did not see France as the tourist saw it, from a car spinning past finished old landscapes, between avenues of trees along roads that linked together red-tile-roofed villages, while his chauffeur asked him, after he had had a good dinner at an inn, at what time he wanted his car in the morning. He marched these roads under his pack, often all night long, while he was under orders not to strike a match to light a cigarette. He was drenched with winter rain when he was conducted to a barn door and told to crawl up into the hayloft, or conducted to a house door where he stretched himself on the floor in a room that had no heat. [475]

He was billeted in villages where the people had been billeting soldiers for four years. They wanted the privacy of their homes again as surely as he wanted to be back in his own home. The roads over which he marched he had to help repair, in winter rains, when old cathedral spires lacked the impressiveness which they had to the tourists because they looked as cold as everything else, and when picturesque, winding canals merely looked wet when everything was wet.

He knew other roads which were swept by the blasts of hell; he saw the beautiful landscapes through the mud of trenches and from the filthy fox-holes where he waited in hourly expectation of an attack; he knew the beautiful woods which fleck the rolling landscape with their patches of green as the best possible places for being gassed.

The hand of authority was on him even in his holidays—he, the free American. He might not go beyond certain limits when he went for a walk, for otherwise all our soldiers within walking distance of the largest town would spend the day there, to the discomfiture of discipline and French regulations. If he secured leave, it was not to the Paris of which he dreamed, but to the area which the army had prescribed. For months and months our men fought and marched, going and coming past Paris, without a glimpse of the city of their desire. That Paris was not good for them all the high authorities agreed; besides, their services were too valuable to be spared for sight-seeing. [476]

From the day of their arrival they were under the whip of a great necessity: first, of keeping the Germans from winning the war, and then of winning the war before Christmas came. In the last stages of the war, they bore more than American soldiers have ever borne—more than the British, in their own limited sector with its settled appointments a day's travel from England; more than the French, fighting in their own country with leave to go to their homes—their own homes—once in four months. Our men had a real rest only when they were wounded or ill and were sent back to the hospitals and rest camps.

When a soldier was not fighting, somebody was lecturing to him. His education was never complete. There was some new gas which he must avoid, some new wrinkle in fighting machine-guns which he must learn. As he had so much lecturing on the drill-ground and on the march and in billets about making sure that he did not destroy any property or take a piece of wood or use a tool that did not belong to him, the orators who came from the United States to tell him how to be "good" though a soldier, and how all the country admired him and depended upon him, were not so popular as they might have been, because he knew the character of his job by very bitter experience. How little such visitors knew of him—in his own world!

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As distinguished from the officers of commissioned rank, we spoke of the privates as the men; also as the "doughboys," a name which long ago the cavalry, looking down haughtily from their saddles, applied to the infantry, as kneaders of mud. There was a gulf between officers and privates, settled in old military customs, which at least at the front grew narrower as the old influences were dissolved in the crucible of fire. Many of the privates were superior to their officers. Many won their commissions in the training-camp of battle. I preferred always to think of the whole of generals, colonels, "kid" lieutenants, and privates as men. It was the whole that was majestic; manhood as manhood, which was supreme.

Officers, whether with one bar or two stars on their shoulders, were only the nails holding the structure of manhood together. They might be promoted and demoted; prune themselves on their rank; but the mighty current of soldiery was elemental as the flow of a river. Never had the part of any high commander been relatively less important than in this war; in no army was this so true probably as in ours. By running through a list of names in this age of universal ability, you might find a score of leaders for corps or army who might be better than those in the field; but fresh divisions of infantry were not in such easy call. The names of officers who commanded more men than Napoleon or Wellington had at Waterloo, Meade or Lee at Gettysburg, were unknown to the public. Never had a single human being, no matter how many orders on his breast, appeared more dispensable than in this machine war with its enormous masses of troops. We had two million men in France. Every officer and man counted as one unit in the machine, according, not to rank, but to the giving of all that he had in him. Manhood and not soldiering was glorified.

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It was the great heart of our men, beating as the one heart of a great country—simple, vigorous, young, trying out its strength—on the background of old Europe, which appealed to me. It was the spontaneous incidents of emotion breaking out of routine which revealed character. One day on a path across the fields near headquarters town, I met a soldier with a wound stripe who had been invalided back from the front. He was thick-set, bow-legged, with a square, honest face, and eyes slightly walled, and he was leading a bow-legged sturdy child of four years, whose one visible eye showed a cast resembling the soldier's own. The other eye was hidden by a drooping wool Tam-o'-Shanter about four sizes too large for the child's head, while his wool sweater and wool leggings were not more than two sizes too large. It was evident that a man and not a woman had bought his wardrobe, having in mind that the child was to be kept warm at any cost. The pair aroused my interest.

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"I heard all about adopting French war orphans through the societies," the soldier said, "and I concluded, when they sent me here, to pick out my own orphan. So I adopted Jake. Yes, I calls him Jake. You see, his father was killed by the boche and his mother croaked. He hadn't anybody to look after him, so I took over the job. Didn't I, Jake?"

Jacob looked up with an eye that seemed to consider this a wonderful world created by the soldier, and removed his finger from his mouth long enough to say "Yep," which he had learned in the place of "Oui."

"I'm going to take Jake home with me, and make him an American, ain't I, Jake? You're learning English too, ain't you, Jake?"—with Jake taking up his cue to prove that he was by responding "Yep!" again.

When they started on, I paused to look after them, with something catching in my throat, and as the soldier paused I overheard him saying:

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"I'm going to take you home. Don't you worry—I'm sticking to that, Jake. The French regulations will say that they ain't going to let you leave France when they're so short of kids over here, and the American regulations will say there ain't no room for kids on transports, and probably the censor will lip in too—but I'll bring you after the war if I can't now. You and me's fixed up a life pardnership, ain't we? You'll make a hit with my mother, all right. All you've got to do is look up at her just the way you're looking up at me and say 'Yep.' Oh, it'll be all right over there—no more of this war and regulation stuff!"

"Speaking a few words of French" could only open a chink in the barrier of language between our men and the French people. Wherever two Americans met they could begin talking without waiting on an interpreter. The common bond of language promoted the family feeling of the A. E. F. In all their relations our men saw with fresh eyes, in the light of foreign surroundings, how like they were, not only in uniform and equipment and ways of thought, but how distinctly American even the European born and the sons of European parents had become. Old differences disappeared in this new sense of a fundamental similarity. Men from the different parts of the United States came together not only in the combat divisions but around the docks and railway yards and wherever they labored in the Services of Supply. Kansas, Oregon, and Maine had adjoining beds at a hospital, while a doctor from Pittsburgh or Oskaloosa, or a nurse from New York or Cheyenne, looked after them. Reserve officers who had been lawyers, merchants, engineers, gang foremen, bakers, bankers, manufacturers, lived and worked together in keeping the army fed with shells and food.

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"The gang's all here," was as expressive of the soldier's feeling in the Great War as "There'll be a hot time in the old town tonight" in the little war with Spain. To all in whom there was the germ from which it could develop, the stern fighting and effort brought a sense of personal power, quiet, observant, undemonstrative; and their sense of the presence there in France of two millions of Americans—scattered far and wide, omnipresent in their energy, welded into one mighty organization, pulsing with the heart of the home country three thousand miles away, as California looked Maine in the eye in that common family—brought a new sense of national power. It occurred to me that the A. E. F. symbolized how a great overgrown boy of a nation, with a puzzled feeling about its expanding physique, had suddenly become a dignified, poised, self-respecting adult.

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The men knew why they were in France, even if they did not express it in the phrases of oratory or propaganda. Their logic was as cold as their steel, as vivid as gun flashes. They were in France to beat the Germans. The period for argument had passed for them. They had the business in hand. Their bitterness toward the foe was not as great as that at home. Why waste words on him when you had bullets and shells to fire at him? He was taken for granted no less than burglary and murder: a positive material force to be overcome.

Whether college graduates or street-sweepers, the privates were a guild as exclusive in its way—as it always has been—as a regular mess. They had voted themselves into their task. It was the will of the majority of their country that we go to France. The majority rules; general and other officers may act as legatees for the majority. The thing was to "play the game." Those who rebelled found that there was nothing else to do. They were in the machine's grip. "Play the game!" No phrase better expressed their attitude than this. It was a wicked, filthy, dangerous game. They had signed on for it; they would see it through.

Given this conviction, and no soldier will endure more hardship than the American. It was the bedrock of adherence to that rigid discipline which in our western democracy surprised Europeans. We saluted on all occasions—what a punctiliously saluting army we were!—and followed all the rules of etiquette that the experts said were necessary, and learned to take "bawlings out" with soldierly philosophy. As children know their parents, the men knew their officers' characters; a fresh replacement lieutenant was promptly "sized up," but final judgment was reserved until he had led them under fire, where he must stand the real test. It was a relief to them that they did not have to add an extra salute for every grade of an officer's rank. One salute would do for a general as well as a second lieutenant. Generals passed them on the road in cars; generals inspected them. They did not take much interest in generals, who were also a part of the game to them. Company and battalion commanders alone could make their personal leadership felt. They were the "heroes" when they were good, and rightly so.

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Officers made strange guesses sometimes as to what their men were thinking. The men were wiser than many officers knew; for they were the mass intelligence of America. They understood that the Stars and Stripes was propaganda; but it was interesting. They read it with avidity. Propaganda was one of the parts of the mysterious, ugly game. I have heard it compared to the coaching from the bleachers at a league game. The men smiled over the communiqué's records of actions in which they participated. Communiqués were a part of the game, helping propaganda to coach from the side lines. It would not do to say that a company had been sent by mistake into interlocking machine-gun fire to take a town which the survivors had to yield. When the men read the home papers, there was no mention of their losses or their suffering. One might think from the accounts that they were enjoying themselves immensely, and were quite comfortable in the fox-holes. This, too, was a part of the game.

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They were there to see the game through. The sooner it was through, the sooner they would go home. Veterans who had spent one winter in France did not want to spend another; those who had not did not care to try the experience. They had no more reason for liking France than a man who sleeps on the ground in Central Park in December, eating cold rations, under machine-gun fire, has for liking New York City. "I want to get back to the cactus!" as an Arizona man said. All were fighting to reach home and be free men again; freedom having a practical application for them. The longer they were in France, the more they felt that they were fighting for America. As Americans they were on their mettle. Such was the spirit that carried them as Americans through the Meuse-Argonne, which was the American army's battle.

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## XXVIII

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### THE MILL OF BATTLE

Wet misery—"Penetratin'er and penetratin'er"—The men behind the lines—Back to "rest"—Replacements as bundles of man-power—Reliefs in the fox-holes—Before and during an attack—Dodging shells—A struggle to keep awake—And "on the job"—Will, endurance, and drive—The wedge of pressure.

As the processes of the Argonne battle became more systematic, they became more horrible. They would have been unendurable if emotion had not exhausted itself, death become familiar, and suffering a commonplace. The shambles were at the worst during the driving of our wedges in the second and third weeks of October. The capacity to retain vitality and will-power in the

face of cold and fatigue, and not to become sodden flesh indifferent to what happened, was even more important than courage, which was never wanting. The thought of ever again knowing home comforts became a mirage; a quiet trench sector, with its capacious dugouts and occasional shell-bursts, became a reminiscence of good old days. Paradise for the moment would be warmth—just warmth—and a dry board whereon to lay one's head until nature, sleep finished, urged you to rise.

We were learning what our Allies, and the enemy too, suffered in the winter fighting of Verdun and the Ypres salient. The Europeans, we must not forget, were fighting in their own climate. They were used to having their oxygen served in the humidity of a clammy sponge pressed close to their nostrils; we to having our oxygen served in dry air. We suffered less at home when ice covered lakes and streams than in mists and rains in France at forty and fifty degrees. There is sunshine on snow-drifts and frosty window-panes in our northern States in midwinter, as well as on the shores of the Gulf of Mexico; but we never saw sunshine, as we know sunshine, in the Meuse-Argonne, though there were days which the natives called fair, when the sun was visible as through a moist roof of cheese-cloth. [486]

"I'd charge a machine-gun nest single handed, if I could first sit on a steam radiator for half an hour," one of our soldiers said.

It was summer during the Château-Thierry fighting; a kindly summer, resembling our June in the northern, or our April in the southern States. The enthusiasm of our first important action gave hardships a certain glamour. Men could sleep on the ground without blankets; the wounded did not suffer greatly from cold, if they remained out over night. Cold rations were tolerable. Clothes and earth dried soon after a rain. Fox-holes did not become wells on the levels, and cisterns on the slopes. Guns and trucks did not cut deep ruts beside the roads or in crossing the fields. Summer was ever the time for war in temperate climates; winter the time of rest. It was so in our Civil War. [487]

The battlefield was a sombre brown, splashed by liquid grays. No bright colors varied the monotony of the landscape except the hot flashes from gun-mouths; there were none overhead against the leaden and weeping sky except the red and blue of the bull's-eye of an aeroplane, and the gossamer sheen of its wings. Khaki uniforms and equipment, and the tint of trucks, automobiles, caissons, and ambulances were all in the protective coloration of the surrounding mud. A horse with a dappled coat, or with dark bay or black coat, shining in the mist, was a relief. The sounds were the grating of marching hobnailed shoes, the rumble of motor-trucks and other transport, the roar of the guns, the strident gas alarm, the bursts of shells, the staccato of machine-guns: all in an orchestrated efficiency which wasted not even noise in conserving all energy to the end of destruction—if we except the song of marching companies at the rear, and the badinage with which men diverted one another and themselves from their real thoughts.

There were the one-way roads where all the traffic was going in one direction, either to or from the front, all day and all night in orderly procession. Along the roads our negro laborers, who all seemed to be giants, kept filling in stones and shoveling in earth to mend broken places. They were in a marvelous world, whose diversions tempted a holiday spirit. They rested on their spades as they watched a general's car, or a big gun, or a tank, or one of a dozen other wonders on wheels pass by; or, the whites of their eyes showing, looked around at the sound of the burst of a shell or an aviator's bomb; or aloft at the balloons and passing aeroplanes and duels in the air. [488]

"How do you like this weather?" I asked one.

"It's ve'y penetratin' and ve'y cold, seh," he replied. "They say it keeps on getting colder and colder, and penetratin'er and penetratin'er, and spring nevah comes."

"It will not, if you don't work hard and win the war."

"I'm goin' to work ve'y hard. We've gotta win this war, seh; or we'll all freeze to death—only it's pow'ful hard keeping yo' mind on work, seh, when so much is goin' on."

Thus at the front the colored man kept open the passageway for the supplies which the colored man had unloaded at the ports. He was truly the Hercules of physical labor for us.

In the zone of battle, back of the infantry and artillery lines, many men had many parts, all under shell-fire and hardships; the rolling kitchen men, the ammunition train and ambulance drivers; the salvage men gathering up the overcoats, blankets, rifles, gas masks, and other equipment discarded in the course of an attack; and the much-abused military policemen, who made drivers keep their lights turned off, and insisted, in the latter days of their high authority, upon colonels' automobiles obeying orders, with the same impartiality that policemen at street crossings show in "stop" and "go" to the "flivver" delivery wagon and the limousine of the man who groans over the size of his income tax. [489]

Out of the shelled zone in the early morning the shattered companies of expended divisions came marching back from the front. Sometimes they broke into song. Usually they were too tired to sing; the recollection of what they had seen was too near for rollicking gayety, at least. They were going into "rest" in some ruined village or series of dugouts, or possibly into a village that had not been shelled; to be "Y. M. C. A.'d" and deloused, to receive fresh clean clothing and warm meals. There were no beds or cots for them, with rare exceptions, but floors and lofts, as we know. Of course, they were not rested in one day, or two or three, or even ten. They had given an amount of their store of reserve energy which it would take them a long time to renew. Drill began as soon as they had had their first long round of sleep. New officers took the place of the [490]

fallen: officers who often did not know their men or the battle. Replacements came to fill the gaps in the ranks, and share all the drills and the lectures which applied the latest battle lessons. Tired brains reeled with instruction.

There was a plan to return convalescent wounded to their original divisions, but in the pressure to hurry all available man-power forward to fill the greedy maw of the front it could be carried out only in a limited way. Thus, whether convalescent or newcomers, the replacements might come from a part of the country widely separated from that of the division which they were joining, and upon the division's welcome home to the locality of its origin by relatives and friends find themselves still far from their own homes. Maine was fighting in the ranks of a battalion from Chicago; New York in the ranks of a battalion from Kansas. The longer a division had fought, the less regional its character. The fortune of war never fell more unkindly than upon the National Army divisions which arrived late in France and were broken up for replacements, or, even in those final days when victory beckoned us to our utmost endeavor, turned into labor troops in the S. O. S. In that vital juncture, they went where they were most needed, which is a soldier's duty. I have seen groups of replacements, who had had so little training that they hardly knew how to use their rifles, moving up through the shelled area to find the battalion in reserve to which they were assigned. Only two or three weeks from American training camps, shot across France, strangers indeed on that grim field, they were man-power which could take the place of the fallen. [491]

In the late afternoon on the roads near the front one might see the troops of rested divisions marching forward to relieve expended troops. At Château-Thierry, our men, I know, went singing toward the line of shell-bursts. I am told that many put flowers in their rifle barrels and their button-holes. No doubt they did. So did the French and British in the early days of the war. There were no flowers on the Meuse-Argonne field, only withering grass and foliage. To sing was to attract the enemy's attention. The first enthusiasm had passed; our spring of war was over; our winter of war had come. Most of the men whom I watched going forward looked as if they appreciated that there was wicked, nasty business ahead, and they meant to see it through.

It was dark when they came into the zone where the transport had its dead line. The length of their march was often in darkness if we were making concentrations for an attack. Some went to their appointed places as reserves in the warrens dug on reverse slopes; others in cautious files, led by guides from the troops in position who knew the ground, went on until they came to the little pits where the outposts were lying, or to machine-gun posts which faced the enemy under the whipping of bullets and the bursts of shell-fire and gas. They were the very point of the wedge which all the strength of our nation was driving. Wet to the skin, filthy, hollow-eyed, the occupants gave up their places to the newcomers, whose officers located their positions on the map, and received local information from their predecessors about the character and direction of fire and many details. It was like a change of shift in a factory—all as businesslike as possible. [492]

How different this front from the days of stationary warfare, with the deep trenches with parapets of sand-bags! Individualism here returned to its own. Patrols must be sent out to keep watch of the enemy; machine-guns and riflemen must be ready for a counter-attack,—which were variations from that deadly monotony of lying in a wet hole in the ground, whether on a bare crest or among the roots of trees in a wood. Blood-stains, torn bits of uniform, meat tins, and hard bread boxes formed the litter around the fox-holes, which marked the stages of progress where we had dug in. The young officers had to creep from fox-hole to fox-hole, keeping touch with their platoons, and bearing in mind all the instructions, regardless of exposure to cold and fire. The men must not forget anything they were told. Their gas masks must always be ready; they must "stick to the death" when that served the purpose of their superiors. Nothing except war's demands could have won them to such willing submission to such a hideous existence. [493]

If there were to be an attack the next morning, then stealthily the men of the first wave came up to the line of the fox-holes and hugged the clammy moist earth, while they were to keep their spirits hot for their charge. Their officers had to study the ground over which they were to advance; consider the speed of the barrage which they were to follow; carry out amazingly intricate maneuvers,—not knowing what volume of shell and machine-gun fire would meet them as they rose to the charge in the chilliest hour of the day, at dawn, when the ground reeked in slipperiness from the mist. The night before an attack always had the same oppressive suspense, the same urgency on the part of all hands in trying to be definite under the camouflage of darkness—hazard omnipotent in its grip on every man's thought.

After the attack came the hurry call for artillery fire on points which had checked our advance; the summoning of reserves to add more pressure; the eagerness for exact reports from out of the woods and ravines where our men were struggling; the hurried flight of messengers running the gamut of machine-gun bullets; the glad news of gallant charges going home; the sad news of companies "shot to pieces"; the filtering back of the walking wounded, and the stretcher-bearers carrying those who could not walk; prostrate forms waiting on ambulances, and busy doctors at the *triaux*; all so habitual that its wonder had ceased even for our young army. [494]

If you were wary, studying your ground, eyes and ears alert, you might travel far in that region beyond the dead line of transport; or you might invite a burst of machine-gun fire at the outset of your journey. When it came, or the scream of a shell announced that it would burst in close proximity, as you sought the nearest protection with an alacrity that increased with experience, you indulged in that second of prayer, blasphemy, or fatalistic philosophy which suited your mood. Some men laughed and smiled; I do not think, however, that they were really amused. The farther you went, the more deadly the monotony. When you had seen the front once, you had seen it all, in one sense; in another, little. After that, going under fire was in answer to duty or



the desire to be nearer the realities. Every man was subjective at intervals. The less time he had to think of anything but his work, the more objective he was. One man might be killed when he left the parapet the first time he was under fire; another might go through showers of missiles again and again, and never receive a scratch. I have marveled, considering the number of men whom I have seen fall, how chance had favored me. The high-explosive shell I always found the most hateful with its suggestion of maiming for life. Bullets were merciful. They meant death, or a wound from which, except in rare cases, you would recover. Fighting in the open as our men did in the Meuse-Argonne, all their bodies exposed to machine-gun nests, the percentage of dead was often only one in six or seven, and in some cases only one in ten, to the wounded. In the Ypres salient, conspicuously, and elsewhere in the old days of trench warfare, when only heads were exposed above the parapet, and shells mashed in dugouts and struck in groups of men, the percentage was one in three, and even one in two. [495]

Those who saw our returned veterans parading in clean uniforms have little idea of their appearance in battle, their clothes matted with mud, their faces grey as the shell-gashed earth from exhaustion, when they had given the last ounce of their strength against the enemy. This picture of them makes a march over pavements, between banks of people rewarding them with cheers for what they had endured, seem exotic pageantry. No one can know except by feeling it the physical and mental fatigue of this siege battle. There was always the contrast of effort at high nervous pitch and the utter relaxation of moments of inaction. Memories of weary men prone on the earth, or lying on caissons or gun limbers, go hand in hand with memories of our bursts of "speed" when orders summoned weariness to another impulse of effort. Nature compelled sleep at times, even in the cold; and men awoke to find that they had pneumonia or "flu." It was not only the wounded, but the sick, who were dripping, painfully hobbling shadows along the muddy roads. The medical corps accomplished a wonder I do not understand in the low percentage of mortality. [496]

The battle was a treadmill. If there were men of faint hearts or dazed by fatigue, they had to keep on going. The number with an inclination to straggle was infinitely fewer than in the Civil War. Not only battle police but something stronger held them in their places in the machine: public opinion. We were all in it; we must all do our share. The spirit of the draft was applied by the common feeling. A soldier who might sham illness or shell-shock—which was rare indeed—if his malingering were not understood at a glance, must pass the test of a searching diagnosis. I have in mind such a case, of a soldier who came into a *triage*. [497]

"Well, what's the matter with you?" asked the medico, looking at him in gimlet intensity as their eyes met.

"Nothing, except tired, I guess. I'm feeling better. I'm going back to the front," was the reply.

The wonder is that there were not more men who succumbed, not to fear or fire but to the strain. There were instances of insanity, of temporary illusion, of mind losing control over body—shell-shock, or whatever you choose to call it—which sent a soldier back through sifting processes for specific treatment; but no soldier well enough to fight might escape his duty. Never, I repeat, were there so few who had any such thought; and this under conditions worse than Valley Forge. Where heroes of that day only knew want and cold in camp, they did not have to fight at the same time. The lack of warm food was alone enough to weaken initiative in men used to comforts and to being well fed. We tried to force the rolling kitchens up to the front, but it was impossible on many occasions. Division staffs might say they were up—and they were, in some parts of the line, but not in all. The men growled, of course. They had a right to growl. They growled about many things. The lack of artillery fire, the failure of our planes to stop enemy planes from flying low with bursts of machine-guns, orders that made them march and counter-march without apparent reason. They growled, but they kept on the job. [498]

I always think of three words to characterize the battle. Will, endurance, and drive: the will to win, the endurance which could bear the misery necessary to win, and the drive which by repeated attacks would break the enemy's will. It was the old accepted system; but its application is the test of the soldier in every cell of brain and body. The high command could supply the orders, but the men must supply the qualities which could carry out the orders.

"It's drive, drive, drive!" as one of the soldiers said. "All the way down from Washington, through Pershing, to the lieutenants, to us—and there's nobody for us to drive except the Boche"—an enemy who was a mighty soldier. We tried our steel against no inferior metal. To say otherwise is not to allow just tribute to ourselves.

All our national energy, our pride, came to a head in the fields of the Argonne. We can be ruthless with ourselves and with one another. We consumed man-power like wood in a furnace. Some men and divisions gave their all in the first period of the battle; others in a later period; others in the final period. The thing was to give your all. For officers there was always the fear of Blois; of being sent to the rear. I know of an officer who staggered at the door of division headquarters; and then stiffened and drew in his chin as he entered. [499]

"How are you?" asked his division chief of staff.

"All right. Never felt better."

Then his hand went out to the wall to keep him from falling. This was the right spirit. Yet he must have rest. He could no longer command three thousand men.

One day an officer might seem fully master of himself and his task; the next day he "cracked." Superiors, breaking under the strain, were unjust to subordinates who could not carry out orders

to take a series of machine-gun nests. Personal fortunes were subject to the "break in luck."

Favoring circumstances honored officers who perhaps had not done as well as those who were considered to have failed. Success was success; failure was failure. Time was precious.

"Finding that X— was not close enough up to his battalion, I immediately relieved him," was the matter-of-fact report of a colonel on a major, which meant tragedy to the major; the next day the colonel himself might "crack." The young lieutenants of platoons and companies, burdened with their instructions and maps, were the object of the accumulated pressure from senior officers. They could always charge. There was one sufficing answer to criticism—death. It came to many against impossible positions: yet not in vain. Every man who dared machine-gun fire added to the enemy's conviction of our determination to keep on driving until we had "gone through."

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## XXIX

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### THEY ALSO SERVED

From tambourine to doughnut—The "Y" and the canteen—Too much on its hands—  
Other ministrants—Manifold activity of the Red Cross—But not at the front—Honor to  
the army nurses—The chaplain's label immaterial.

Of the auxiliary organizations serving with the army the Salvation Army was nearest to the soldier's heart, and the Y. M. C. A., or the "Y," as the soldiers knew it, the most in evidence. When the pioneer Salvationists appeared in our training camps early in the winter of 1917-1918, some wits asked if they were to beat the tambourine and hold experience meetings in the trenches. Soon they were winning their way by their smiling humility. They were not bothered by relative rank, which gave some of the personnel of the other auxiliaries much concern.

"If there's anything that anybody else is too busy to do, won't you let us try to do it?" seemed to express their attitude.

After the fighting began, it was evident that on campaign their emblem was not the tambourine but the doughnut. When our soldiers came out of the battle, whom should they see standing in the mud of the shelled zone but the khaki-clad Salvation lassies, smilingly passing out doughnuts and hot coffee—free. The tired fighter did not have to search his pockets for money. All he had to do was to eat the doughnuts, and drink the coffee. That made a "hit" with him.

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The men workers of other auxiliaries went up under fire, and distributed chocolate and cigarettes. Yet nothing in their gallantry or devotion could have the appeal of the smiling lassies offering free doughnuts and hot coffee to a man just out of the shambles, when his emotions were gelatine to the impressions that would endure. The Salvationists were ready night and day to bear hardships and do cheerfully any kind of drudgery. There were relatively few of them; they filled in gaps, depending upon the personal human touch, which they exerted with admirable "tactics," as the map experts of the staff would say.

Possibly the soldier was a little unfair to the "Y"; possibly, too, the "Y" was the object of critical propaganda, while it neglected propaganda on its own account among our soldiers, though not at home. Where nothing was expected of the Salvation Army, everything was expected of the "Y." It must have motion pictures, singers, and vaudeville artists, and huts wherever American soldiers congregated from end to end of France; this was a part of the ambitious plan, although it could not get the tonnage allowance from home, or the supplies in France, to carry it out. Another part was that of really taking the place of a company exchange. Here the "Y" put its head in a noose; but not unwittingly. When the proposition came from the army to the "Y," its answer was in the negative.

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"Aren't you here to serve?" was the army's question. To this the "Y" could only say, "Yes, sir." At that time the army authorities—not foreseeing conditions which later developed—were applying the theory that gifts to the soldiers meant charity: as a self-respecting man he would want to pay for his tobacco, candy, or other luxuries.

The "Y" had no such generous fund as the Red Cross; it could not build huts and theaters, sell cigarettes, chocolate, sandwiches, pie, or furnish meals below cost. In the early days when our soldiers were hungry for chocolate, and none was arriving from home, the "Y" bought it at exorbitant prices in the local market, charging what it had paid. Later it had supplies from the quartermaster. As soon as a soldier appeared in a town, he asked, "Where is that blankety-blank 'Y'?" If there were no "Y" hut, canteen, or motion picture show, his conclusions were inevitable, and his remarks sometimes unprintable, especially if he could not buy his home brand of cigarettes. It was the "Y's" business to be on hand, no less than that of the quartermaster department to see that he was given his daily rations.

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He did not receive his pay more regularly than his mail. If he had no money, though he might go to the "Y" motion picture show, he could not get cigarettes, chewing gum, or pie. On one occasion when a "Y" truck loaded with cigarettes came to the rescue of the tobacco-famished at the front, the besieging purchasers, when they opened the packages, found a slip inside, saying that they were from a newspaper's free tobacco fund. The fat was in the fire. The "Y" might give away all that truck load of cigarettes as it did, return the money of the deceived purchasers, and it might give away a dozen trucks of sales cigarettes; but the explanation that the quartermaster

department had mixed the free cigarettes with sales cigarettes, the "Y" being officially credited for payment for all, could never overtake the circumstantial report of the "Y's" profiteering, which grew as it was helped on its travels, perhaps, by the "Y's" enemies.

If a division commander wanted an errand done in Paris, a check cashed, or any comfort or entertainment for his men, he called on the "Y," which was not "volunteer," but "drafted." No one ever stopped to think what the army would have done without the "Y" huts, motion pictures, theatricals, and canteens. [505]

After the armistice, when a large number of returned British and American prisoners arrived at Nancy, I recollect how the local head of another auxiliary organization called up the "Y" on the telephone, saying: "We're helpless. Can you do anything?"

"Send them on!" was the answer.

"There are eight hundred, all hungry. Have you food for them?"

"No, but we'll find it—" which was the spirit of the S. O. S. that kept us supplied in the Meuse-Argonne battle. Another type of "Y" man might, however, have thrown up his hands in despair.

The "Y" was an enormous and mixed force, criticized, reasonably I think, for lack of organization to keep pace with its ambitions. Its home administration seemed disinclined to take the advice of men experienced at the front in the choice of personnel. A novelist, a college professor, a lawyer, or even a regular "Y" secretary is not as good at running a lunch counter or a hut as a man who regularly runs a lunch counter or a hotel. A young woman who stood high at college might not be as useful in the kind of work the "Y" had to do as a practical housewife who might not have heard of Euclid, but who did know how to bake, sew, and cook. The soldier judged personnel by the way they came down to earth, as he had a very earthly job in his fox-holes and charges. I have gone into this detail because it became the fashion to give the "Y" a bad name, which was hardly deserved considering the large contract it had undertaken to fill. [506]

The Knights of Columbus also had huts and theaters, but did not attempt to cover the whole field. When K. of C. workers opened a counter or appeared with a truck at the front, the supplies while they lasted were free to all comers. The soldier who had no change was always looking for the K. of C. When he passed the "Y," which required money for the sweets or the tobacco he craved, the contrast in his mind was that between generosity and commercialism. He was allotting a large portion of his pay to his family in a time of war, when according to all he read everybody at home was subscribing liberally in order that the men who faced hardship and death might not go without comforts. As the K. of C. appeared in force with the army later than the "Y" and could profit by example, its workers were seemingly a little more practical than those of the "Y."

"Boys, we'll give you all we have. Never mind the money!" was their attitude. The Jewish Welfare Board seems to have been admirably forehanded and generous in its special attention to the soldiers of the Jewish race. [507]

We must not overlook the American Library Association, which had a free library in Paris. It circulated books throughout the army zone by a system which enabled the reader, if he were traveling, to return a book to any "Y" hut. If a book were lost, no matter. The thing was that our fighters should be served.

The Red Cross, having elaborate headquarters in Paris, was an enormous organization, managed with able statecraft, which covered a broad field of various activity. Its duties with the army never seemed as specific as those of the other auxiliaries. The old established Samaritan of our modern world, with immense funds and resources ready to meet any emergency when the call came, it opened free dispensaries and succored refugees; assisted civil populations as well as soldiers; ran some auxiliary hospitals, convalescent hotels, and hotels for officers; never selling, always giving, supplied hot coffee and lunches to soldiers en route across France; and "filled in" on a huge scale in the same way as the Salvation Army on a smaller scale. More of its workers were well-to-do and unpaid than in the K. of C. and the Y. M. C. A. Some of these—for the A. R. C., too, had its difficulties with personnel—were far more expensive, the practical comrades said, than if they had received large salaries. The Red Cross doctors and nurses were ready to supplement the regular army forces when occasion demanded. [508]

The popular idea that the Red Cross had anything to do with bringing in the wounded from the field, or with the dressing stations or ambulances, was quite erroneous. All the doctors and medical men in the front line, and all the stretcher-bearers who endured their share of gas, shells, and machine-gun blasts, of rains and mud, with heavy casualties; all the drivers of the ambulances along shell-infested roads; all the hospital corps men, on their feet twenty-four hours at a stretch at the *triaux*; all the teams of surgeons and their helpers, whose skill and tireless endurance saved lives—these were of the army.

There is no heroism finer than that of the stretcher-bearer; or of the surgeon and medical corps man in the front line. Their blood is not hot in pursuit or combat. They see the red bandages and gaping wounds, and hear the gasps for breath of the dying. Your medical corps man "took on for the war"; he was of the army machine. The work of our doctors is attested by the record of how successfully they patched up the wounded to return to the battle; of how they kept the stream of wounded flowing back to the hospitals in amazing smoothness, considering the unexpected demands of the battle.

There were not enough medical officers, hospital corps men, or nurses; but they made up for their lack of numbers under the most appealing of calls by giving the limit of their strength, no less than the soldiers. The honors to the womanhood which served in France go to our trained [509]

nurses in the army service. They did not report to a Paris headquarters when they arrived from home, but were hurried to their destinations on army travel orders; they knew none of the diversions of working in canteens or of automobile rides about the front. For weeks on end they were restricted to hospital areas; they were soldiers under army discipline, in every sense of the word. They had not only kindness in their hearts, but they knew how to be kind; they not only wanted to do, but knew how to do.

How their competency shone beside the frittering superficiality of volunteers who had not even been taught by their mothers to sew, or cook, or look misery in any form in the face, but who felt that they must reach France in some way in order to help, or rather to be helped! It was the difference between the sturdy workhorse drawing a load upgrade, and a rosette of ribbons on the bridle; between the cloth that keeps out the cold, and the flounce on the skirt; between knowing how to bathe a sick man, put a fresh bandage on his wound, move him gently, and what to say to cheer him; and knowing how to take a chocolate out of a box daintily. There was no time for ribbons or flounces during our greatest battle. We rarely had candy from the commissary, which fact however did require self-abnegation on the part of a few of the least serviceable of auxiliary workers, which might lead them to think that they were doing their bit.

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Hollow-eyed nurses, driving into bodies aching with fatigue no less energy of will than the exhausted battalions in their charges, kept the faith with smiles, which were their camouflage for cheeks pale from want of sleep. They often worked double the time that they would in hospitals at home, where they had their home comforts and diversions. When a soldier, with drawn, ashen face from loss of blood, reeking still with the grime of the battlefield, came into a ward, an American woman, who knew his ways and his tongue, was waiting to attend upon such cases as his. When he was bathed and shaved and his wound dressed, and he lay back glowing in cleanliness on his cot, his gratitude gave the nurse renewed strength.

After I had returned home, I heard one day on an elevated train a young woman telling, in radiant importance, of her "wonderful experience" as an auxiliary worker of the type to which I have referred, and of all the officers she had met. Seated near her were two nurses in uniform, furtively watching her between glances at each other. There were lines in their faces, though not in hers—lines left by their service. What she was saying went very well with her friends, but not with us who know something of who won the war in France. Many of these nurses—working double shifts in a calling which is short-lived for those who pursue it for any length of time—will not recover from the strain on mind and body of the generous giving of the only capital that most of them had. If you were not in France—in case you were and were wounded, you need no reminder—when you meet a woman who was in France, ask if she were an army nurse. If she says that she was, then you may have met a person who deserves to outrank some gentlemen I know who have stars on their shoulders.

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Then there were the chaplains. General Pershing had his own ideas on the subject. The chaplain was simply to be the man of God, the ministrant of religion, the moral companion without regard to theological faith, who might show, under fire, his greater faith in the souls of men fighting for a cause.

Bishop Brent, the chief chaplain, was not a militant churchman, but a man of the gospel militant; and so was Father Doherty, on his right hand, and all the other chiefs. You ceased to ask whether a man was Catholic or Protestant, Baptist or Methodist, Christian or Jewish. Clergymen at home might wonder about this, but they would not after they had served for a while as our chaplains served, close to the blood-stained gas-saturated earth, with the eternal mystery of the sky overhead. The chief chaplains were hard disciplinarians. The punishment which they meted out to one chaplain who strayed from the straight and narrow path was not comprised in army regulations. "Wasn't he a chaplain?" the chaplains argued. Hardest of all on him were the men of his own church. He had disgraced his church as well as his fellows.

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Yet despite the chaplains the men developed the habit of swearing; soldiers always have. War requires emphatic expressions. It destroys flexibility of expression—and "damn" and "hell" do seem the fittest description of a soldier's occupation.

"It's an innocent kind of swearing, though," said a chaplain. "It does not really blaspheme. It may help them in fighting the battle of the Lord against the German."

In the assignment of chaplains, of course, the plan was to place a Catholic with a regiment which was preponderantly Catholic; a Protestant with a regiment that was preponderantly Protestant; a rabbi with a regiment that had many Jews. When it was reported that the majority of the men of a certain regiment were not of the same church as their chaplain, a transfer was recommended. The colonel wanted to keep his chaplain, and suggested that he put the question to a vote, which he did: with the result that all the men of the regiment declared themselves of the same faith as their chaplain. This chaplain's religion, as it worked out in the daily association of the drudgery of drill and the savage ruck of battle, was quite good enough for them, without regard to the theological label he bore. He had faith, simply faith, and he gave them faith through his own work.

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Division commanders who were not religious men, but hard-hitting fighters, thinking only of battle efficiency, used always to be asking for more chaplains. I recollect during the Meuse-Argonne battle a division commander exclaiming: "Why don't we get more chaplain replacements? I'm right up against it in my division. I've had one killed and one wounded in the last two days. I'm going to recommend both for the Cross, but there's nobody come to take their places. You stir them up on this question at Headquarters."

The chaplain stouted the hearts of the fighters against hardship, cheered the wounded, administered to the dying, wrote letters home to relatives, went over the fields after the battle with the men of the Graves Registration Service, which had the pitiful and reverent task of gathering and burying the dead.

Our soldiers who knew religion at home as repeating "Now I lay me down" in childhood and the Lord's Prayer when they were older, as grace before meals, going to Sunday school, sitting in pews listening to sermons, and as calls from the clergyman, now knew it as the infinite in their souls in face of death, exemplified by the man of God who was wearing the uniform they wore, who was suffering what they suffered, who kept faith with the old thought that "the blood of the martyr is the seed of the church." [514]

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### XXX

## THROUGH THE KRIEMHILDE

No thought of peace at Souilly—The third attack—The Rainbow Division before Chatillon ridge—Three days of confused combat—Over the ridge—The Arrows sweep through Romagne—Outflanking the Dame Marie ridge—The new Ace of Diamonds Division—In and out—A corridor of fire—Knitting through the Pultière Wood—A fumble in the Rappes Wood—Which is finally "riveted"—The long-enduring Marne Division—Knits further progress. [515]

On the late afternoon of October 13th I happened to be in the stuffy little ante-room at Souilly, when, his great figure filling the doorway, Liggett came out from a conference with Pershing. His face was glowing, his eyes were sparkling as if he had seen a vision come true. We were planning to have four million men in France in the summer of 1919. Its new commander might think of his First Army, after three weeks of battle in the Meuse-Argonne, as only the nucleus of our growing strength.

A few minutes after he had left the ante-room General Pershing's aide received an item of news over the telephone from Paris. This announced that the Germans had provisionally accepted President Wilson's Fourteen Points. Thought turned from our own to other battlefields. Austria had practically thrown up her hands. Turkey was isolated and demoralized. Bulgaria had surrendered; the Serbs and Allied troops were marching to Belgrade; the Belgians were at the gates of Bruges, the British four days later were to enter Lille, and the French had taken Laon in the sweep across the open country. Was the end in sight? So long and so stubbornly had the German armies held out, so habitual had war become, that we who were close to the front saw vaguely as yet the handwriting on the wall which was so distinct to the German command. We knew that the Germans had many times dallied with peace proposals in the hope of weakening Allied morale. [516]

When I went in to see General Pershing, he turned to his big map on the wall, and ran his finger over the Romagne positions. "Liggett is losing no time. He's attacking tomorrow," he said. After he had referred to the plan, he fell to talking of the young reserve officers, their courage, the rapidity with which they had learned their lessons, of the fortitude and initiative of the men, who produced leaders among themselves when their officers fell in action. He had had to drive them very hard; this was the only way to hasten the end of the war. His voice trembled and his eyes grew moist as he dwelt on the sacrifice of life. For the moment he was not a commander under control of an iron purpose, but an individual allowing himself an individual's emotion. Then his aide came in and laid a little slip of paper on his desk, remarking that it contained the news of the German acceptance. I asked the general what he thought of the chance of peace. [517]

"I know nothing about it," he said. "Our business is to go on fighting until I receive orders to cease fire. We must have no other thought, as soldiers."

The only negotiations in his province and in that of the Allied armies were of the kind they had been using for four years: the kind which had brought the Germans to their present state of mind. The prospect of peace should make us fight all the harder, as a further argument for the enemy to yield speedily. Not until the day of the armistice did our preparations diminish, at home or in France, for carrying on the war on an increasing scale of force. Throughout October and the first ten days of November our cablegrams to Washington continued to call for all the material required for four million men in the summer of 1919. Indiscreet as it would have been to encourage the enemy by confessing to our paucity of numbers and lack of material in the summer of 1917, we might lay all our cards on the table in the autumn of 1918.

Liggett's attack of October 14th was our last effort which could be called a general attack before the final drive beginning November 1st, which broke the German line. The general attack of September 26th had broken through the old trench system for deep gains; that of October 4th, with the driving of two wedges on either side of the whale-back, had taken the Aire valley and the gap of Grandpré, and brought us up to the Kriemhilde Stellung, or main line of resistance of the whale-back; that of October 14th aimed to drive a wedge on either side of the Romagne heights, taking the Kriemhilde, the two wedges meeting at Grand Carré farm in their converging movement to deliver the heights into our hands. Thus Army ambition was soaring again. If it had succeeded, we should have been up to the Freya Stellung, another fragmentary trench system, [518]

the second and inferior line of resistance of the whale-back, and we might not have had to wait another two weeks for victory. The progress of the other armies summoned us, as it had at every stage of the battle, to a superhuman effort to reach the German line of communications, which might now mean a complete military disaster for the enemy.

The 32nd was still facing the Côte Dame Marie and the town of Romagne in front of the loop in the Kriemhilde. On its left was the 42nd, which had just relieved the exhausted 1st and was to drive the western wedge through the trench system of the Chatillon ridge and on through the Romagne Wood and the large Bantheville Wood. [519]

I have written so much in my first book about the 42nd, in its Baccarat sector, in its "stonewalling" against the fifth German offensive, in the Château-Thierry counter-offensive, that it seems necessary to say only that it was the Rainbow Division, the second of National Guard divisions to arrive in France, which had shown such mettle, immediately it was sent to the trenches, that it was given every test which a toughened division might be asked to undergo. Major-General Charles T. Menoher, who had been in command throughout its battle service, had the poise requisite to handling the infantry regiments from Alabama, Iowa, New York, and Ohio, and all the other units from many States, in their proud rivalry.

The Arrows of the 32nd, from Michigan and Wisconsin, now on the Rainbows' right, had been on their right when both divisions crossed the Ourcq and stormed the heights with a courage that disregarded appalling casualties. Neither the 42nd nor the 32nd would admit that it had any equals among National Guard divisions. After their weeks of fighting in the Marne region, the Rainbows had come out with staggeringly numerous gaps in their ranks as a result of their victory, which had been filled by replacements who were not even now fully trained. They had been in line for the Saint-Mihiel attack, but were brought to the Argonne to be ready in reserve when a veteran division should be required for a vital thrust. No sooner had they gone into line than they found that the enemy, taking a lesson from the success of the 1st and the 32nd and the 3rd, which had entered the Kriemhilde, had been improving his Kriemhilde line, concentrating more artillery and establishing machine-gun posts to cover any points where experience had developed weakness. The Kriemhilde had thus far resisted all our attacks. It combined many of the defensive advantages of the old trench system with the latest methods of open war defense upon chosen and very formidable ground. The 42nd was to storm one of its key points, the Chatillon ridge. [520]

Will any officer or man of the division forget the days of October 14th, 15th, and 16th? At the very start they were at close quarters, their units intermingling with the Germans in rush and counter-rush, in the midst of machine-gun nests, trenches, and wire entanglements, where man met man in a free-for-all grapple to the death. The rains were at their worst. Every fighter was sopping wet. It was impossible to know where units were in that fiendish battle royal, isolated by curtains of fire.

Summerall was now in command of the Fifth Corps. "Per schedule" and "go through" Summerall, who had driven a human wedge as a division commander, was to drive another as a corps commander. His restless personal observation kept touch with the work of brigade and regiment; his iron will was never more determined. [521]

The 42nd did not keep to the impossible objective beyond, but it did "go through" the formidable Kriemhilde, which had been our nightmare for three weeks, in one of the most terrifically concentrated actions of the battle. There was hard-won progress on the first day on the bloody slopes of Hill 288, while patrols, pushing ahead, found themselves under cross-fire which could not be withstood. When night came, the units in front were already exhausted in a day of fighting of the most wearing kind. "Attack again!" Wire which was not on artillery maps, swept by machine-gun fire, meant delay, but no repulse. The German resistance was unusually brave and skillful in making the most of positions as vital and well-prepared as they were naturally strong. The right, its units rushing here and crawling there to avoid the blasts of machine-gun fire, had put Hill 242 and Hill 288 well behind it on the second day, and had reached the gassed Romagne Wood. The center was held up on the slippery and tricky ascents of the Chatillon ridge, where the German machine-gunners stood until they were killed or so badly wounded that they could not serve their guns; and the German infantry, literally in a fortress stronghold, became more desperate with every hour throughout the afternoon, while dusk found the shivering and tenacious Rainbows dug into the sodden earth and holding their ground. Shattered units were reorganized, and fresh units sent forward for the attack of the next day, which took the ridge. The Kriemhilde Stellung was won. [522]

Those three days had been more horrible than even the Rainbows had known: days which have either to be told in infinite detail, or expressed as a savage wrestle for mastery. Few prisoners might be taken in such confused fighting, when the Germans stuck to the last to their fox-holes and their fragments of trenches. The path of the advance was strewn with German dead. Army ambition had gained much, if not its extreme goal. It had a jumping-off place for a final and decisive general attack. There remained nothing further for the 42nd during the next two weeks except to make sure that its gains were not lost. This required constant patrols and costly vigils under gas, artillery, and machine-gun fire, which were very wearing. On October 30th the division was relieved by the 2nd, which passed through it for the great advance of November 1st. The 42nd had suffered 2,895 casualties in this operation. It could retire after its victory, in full confidence that it had kept faith with the high expectations of its future from the day of its organization. It had brought great honor to itself as a division, to the whole National Guard, and to the replacement officers and men who had served in it. [523]

The 32nd's attack on October 14th was of course intimately connected with that of the 42nd. Having assisted the 1st to drive the wedge over the wall of the Aire, the Arrows had still enough vitality left to carry out their eager desire to complete the conquest of the section of the Kriemhilde on their front. They knew that they had a hard nut to crack, and they began its cracking by turning all the power of their artillery on to the German positions from noon of the 13th until 5.30 on the morning of the 14th, when, under as deep a barrage as the tireless artillery could make, they started for the entrenchments on the Dame Marie ridge, and the town of Romagne. Their left struggled up the slopes of the ridge, but had to halt and dig in, waiting for more artillery preparation to silence the array of machine-guns and guns which, despite the eighteen hours of bombardment, began firing almost as soon as the charge began.

On the right success was more prompt. By noon a battalion was past the village which had resisted so many attempts to capture it. Knowing Romagne of old, the right had executed a clever flanking movement, under the special protection of a flexible barrage, which outwitted the enemy. By 11.30 the village was in the hands of the swiftly moving Arrows, and entirely mopped up. Its name might now be inscribed on the division banners with those of Fismes and Juvigny. The Germans had arranged many bloody traps in the streets, but the men of the 32nd had taken too many positions from the enemy to be fooled by such tricks.

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The left meanwhile was burrowing into the steep and slippery sides of the Dame Marie ridge, with a blast of machine-gun fire grilling every head that showed itself. There are occasions when officer and soldier know that the odds are too great against them; when they halt and dig, from the same instinct that makes a man step back from a passing train. This was such an occasion. It looked as if the ridge could not possibly be taken in front, when the men on the extreme flank, quick to press forward instantly there was any opening in the wall of fire, saw their opportunity. The 42nd, with their first onrush halted, had kept on pushing, and they were driving the Germans off Hill 288, which had been pouring its fire into the ranks of the 32nd men facing the Dame Marie. This gave a purchase for a tactical stroke, which was improved before the German realized that he had fumbled, and could retrieve himself. A reserve battalion which was hastened forward slipped around to the left of the Dame Marie. With its pressure on the flank, and that of the center regiment, which had lost *liaison* on the left but had no thought of stopping while it could keep up with the right, the enemy was forced completely off the ridge by dark, and the advance pressed on into the woods beyond. The Arrows had now not only penetrated the Kriemhilde, but had gone clear through it. Too much gold can not be used in State capitals in inscribing the Dame Marie beside the heights of the Ourcq to glorify the deeds of the 32nd for the admiration of future generations. Despite its two weeks' hard service, it was to remain in line, —or rather to continue advancing for four days longer, as it grappled with the machine-gun nests in Bantheville Wood.

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On the night of the 19th-20th it was relieved by the 89th. All the survivors among numerous replacements which it had received after Juvigny could claim to belong to that fraternity of veterans, which, from the hour they marched down the apron of the Ourcq in parade formation in the face of the enemy's guns, had shown the qualities which make armies unconquerable. No division ever stuck to its knitting more consistently, or had been readier to take the brunt of any action. Its part in the Meuse-Argonne battle had been vital and prolonged. The number of its prisoners, all taken in small groups in desperate fighting, was 1,095, its casualties were 5,019, and it had identified the elements of nine German divisions on its front.

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On its right in the attack of October 14th a division new to the great battle had come into line—the regular 5th, under command of Major-General John E. McMahon. Its emblem was the ace of diamonds. The 5th was just as regular as the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, or 4th, and it had no inkling of a doubt that it could prove as ably as the other four that it was the "best" regular division. As a basis for its confidence was its record in Lorraine, where it had preparation for a larger role in its faultless taking of the village of Frapelle, when for the first time in two years the Vosges mountains had resounded with the bombardment of an offensive action. Officers and men had been thoroughly drilled. Uniformity had not suffered from the injection of inexperienced replacements. The 5th had both the ardor of the fresh divisions which had gone in on September 26th without having previously been under fire, and long trench service, which made the Aces the more eager to be in the "big show."

The command took them at their own estimate in a characteristic—an aggravatedly characteristic—fashion. If ever a division were warranted in losing heart on the ground that their superiors were "not playing the game" with them, it was the 5th, which was submitted to everything in the way of changing orders that is ruinous to morale. It was moved about without any regard to the chessboard rules of war. Doubtless this was necessary; but it was hard on the 5th, though it was only to confirm other people, including the Germans, in the opinion that the 5th was a great division.

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On the night of October 11th-12th a brigade of the 5th was ordered to take over the line of the 80th and a part of the line of the 4th. The sector was on the Cunel-Brieulles road, where the 80th had been checked, and under the flanking fire of the galleries of guns, on the right from east of the Meuse, on the left from the whale-back, as well as in front, which I have described fully in my account of the 4th division. Relief was not completed until after daylight, at 6.30 in the morning. Patrols were sent forward into the Pultière Wood when word came that the Germans were massing for a counter-attack. The 5th was preparing to receive them, and establishing itself in its sector, when orders came that it was to withdraw. Nothing irritates a soldier of spirit more than to be sent into position for action, and then to turn his back upon the enemy. Withdraw! The aces of diamonds to withdraw! They were willing to play the game, but they were filled with disgust at

such an order. After long marches from the rear, after spending the whole night in effecting a most difficult relief under continuous fire, after a day full of annoyances in organizing an uncertain line swept by shell-bursts, they were to march back, through the night in the gamut of the enemy artillery, which became increasingly active in evident knowledge of their exposure. Units had as much reason for becoming confused as they would have in a night attack. [528]

Disheartened at having to retreat—for that was the word for the maneuver—some showed less alacrity than in going to the front, while the filtering process of withdrawal under the cross-fire was bound to separate men from their commands. The language they used of course was against the German artillery, not against high commanders. A part of the relief had to be carried out in broad daylight in sight of the German artillery observers; indeed, it was not finished until noon. Without having made a single charge, the brigade had been exhausted and suffered many casualties.

The change of plan considered using the 5th as a fresh division, which it would not long remain if this kind of maneuvering were continued. Army ambition had decided that it was to be the eastern wedge in the converging attack to Grand Carré farm, of which the 42nd was to be the western. Hence a change of sectors for the 5th, which, after marching into hell's jaws and out again, was to be "side-slipped" into the sector of the amazingly tenacious 3rd, which, though it might well be considered "expended" by its severe casualties and long exertions, was to take over the wicked sector from which the 5th had been withdrawn. "Side-slipping" was almost as common and hateful a word in the battle as *liaison*. Consider a battalion as a bit of paper fastened by a pin to a map, and moving it right or left was a simple matter; but moving men under shell- and machine-gun fire, in the darkness, from one series of fox-holes to another with which they were not familiar, you may be assured on the word of any soldier, who lost a night's sleep, while soaked to the skin by the chill rain, and had his comrades killed in the process, was anything but a simple matter. [529]

Naturally the three divisions, the 5th, 32nd, and 42nd, were interdependent for success in this converging attack. As the veterans of the 42nd, doing all that veterans could do, were three days in taking the Chatillon ridge, and the regulars of the 5th could not bring to life their dead in the Rappes Wood to continue charging, either division had another reason than the unconquerable resistance on its own front for not keeping the schedule of high ambition.

According to the original plan, the Aces of the 5th, passing through the 3rd, were to advance across open ground in a corridor between the artillery fire of the Romagne heights and the flanking machine-gun nests of the Pultière and Rappes Woods, over which flanking artillery fire would pass from the heights east of the Meuse. The 5th's commander was to change the plan—another change with additional maneuvers, though a wise one—by attacking the Pultière Wood, which would save the Aces from some flanking machine-gun fire on the right. [530]

It should have been no surprise, after the commotion due to the "side-slipping," double reliefs, and counter-marching, that the enemy knew that an attack was coming. Only if he had lost all tactical sense would he have failed to foresee its nature. He was ready with all his galleries of guns, and with his machine-guns regrouped to meet the emergency, when the wave of the 5th, including troops which had been up two nights in making a relief, being relieved, and taking over again, began the attack, under insufficient artillery support, in all the ardor of their first charge in the great battle.

Our barrage had not silenced the machine-gun nests, which began firing immediately. The enemy's ample artillery shelled our echelons in support, causing losses and a certain amount of inevitable confusion, as they were forced to take cover and deploy. It also laid down a barrage in front of our first wave; but the Aces passed through the swath of the bursts in steady progress up the bare slopes under increasing machine-gun fire, and reached the crests of Hills 260 and 271. There they were exposed to all the guns of the galleries, and to machine-gun fire from the direction of Bantheville in front, from Romagne on the left, and the Pultière and Rappes woods on the right. To pass over the crest and down the slopes into the valley beyond was literally to open their arms to receive the bullets and shells. What use was it for the 5th's batteries to face around due east from the line of attack toward the enemy batteries behind the Borne de Cornouiller, which were out of their reach? [531]

The Pultière, the southern of the two woods, was about half the size of the Rappes, which was a mile long and separated from it by a narrow open space. The ground was uneven, sloping upward to hills which made the defense of their depths the easier. Our exploiting force sent into the Pultière to protect the flank of the main advance had not been strong enough for its purpose. After passing through flanking fire from the direction of Cunel, it was checked in the woods by the machine-guns concealed in the thickets, which also gave cover for machine-guns firing not only into the flank but into the right rear of the main advance. The next step was to take the Pultière by a concentrated attack during the afternoon, which drove forward until we had dug in face to face with the remaining machine-gunners in an irregularity of line which was always the result of determined units fighting machine-gun nests in a forest. The Aces who had won this much, their fighting blood fully aroused, proceeded to carry out their mission the next day, the 15th, of further relieving the flank of the advance on the hills, which was being sorely punished as it held to its gains under storms of shells. [532]

Now imperishable valor was to lead to a tragedy of misunderstanding. On through the northern edge of Pultière Wood, across the open space between the two woods in face of the machine-gun fire from the edge of the Rappes Wood, then through the dense growth of the Rappes, infiltrating around machine-gun nests, and springing upon their gunners in surprise, again charging them



full tilt in front, passing by many which were "playing possum," these Aces of American infantrymen, numbers thinning from death and wounds, but having no thought except to "get there," kept on until a handful of survivors reached the northern edge of the Rappes. This was their destination. They had gone where they were told to go. They dug in among the tree roots in the inky darkness, without the remotest idea of falling back, as they waited for support to come.

Now on the morning of that day, the 15th—after casualties had been streaming back all night under shell-fire from the bare hills which were being resolutely held with rapidly diminishing numbers,—it was found that the total remaining effectives of three regiments were only eleven hundred men, a hundred more than one battalion. Having asked the Corps for reserves, the division commander had attacked for the Rappes Wood as we have seen. The reports that came in to Division Headquarters from the morning's effort showed that we were making little progress in the wood, and were having very hard fighting still in the Pultière. The brigade commander ordered another attack on Rappes for the afternoon. This the division commander countermanded. In view of lack of support on his flank, the continuing drain of casualties and the situation of the division as a whole, he felt warranted in indicating that any units which might have made an entry into Rappes withdraw to the Pultière.

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The next morning patrols which reached the men who were in the northern edge of Rappes passed on the word that they were to fall back. The gallant little band, surrounded by German snipers, had not been able to send back any message. Weren't they of the 5th? Hadn't they been told to "go through" the wood? Was it not the regulation in the 5th to obey orders? Withdraw! Very well; this was orders, too. From their fox-holes where, so far at least, they had held their own in a sniping contest with the enemy, they retraced their steps over the ground they had won past the bodies of their dead comrades. Before Division Headquarters knew of their success, the evacuation of Rappes was completed.

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The night of the 16th the total rifle strength of the division was reported as 3,316, or a little more than one-fourth of normal. On the 17th Major-General Hanson E. Ely took command of the 5th. He was of the school of the 1st, long in France; a blue-eyed man of massive physique, who met all situations smilingly and with a firm jaw. The Pultière Wood was definitely mopped up during the day.

The brigade which had been in the 3rd Division's sector and suffered the most casualties and exhaustion was relieved. At least the 5th, weakened as it was by a battle in which the Aces fought as if they were the whole pack of cards, must hold the Pultière, and Hills 260 and 271. On the night of the 16th-17th the divisional engineers did a remarkable piece of work, even for engineers. They brought up under shell-fire and gas, and laid under shell- and machine-gun fire, two thousand yards of double wire to protect the tired infantry, which was busily digging in, against counter-attacks.

By this time, of course, the prospect of taking Grand Carré farm by the converging movement seemed out of the question. The farm was more than a mile beyond Bantheville, which was nearly a mile beyond the southern edge of the Rappes Wood. But when the 32nd reported progress in the Bantheville Wood on the 18th, and its patrols had seen no one in Bantheville, the 5th was sent to the attack again. Its patrols, which reached the edge of the town, found it well populated with machine-gunners, who might have only recently arrived. As for the Rappes Wood, all the cunning and daring we could exert in infiltration could take us only four hundred yards into its depths, where the Germans had been forewarned to preparedness by their previous experience.

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On the 19th the 5th held fast under the welter of shell-fire from the heights and across the Meuse, while General Ely straightened out his organization, and applied remedies for a better *liaison* between the artillery and the infantry. On the 20th, the idea of "pushing" still dominant, under a heavy barrage the 5th concentrated all its available numbers of exhausted men in a hastily formed plan for another attempt for the Rappes Wood. It made some two hundred yards' progress against the sprays of bullets ripping through the thickets. The 5th was "expended" in vitality and numbers after these grueling six days; but it was not to give up while the Germans were in the Rappes Wood. The Aces made swift work of its taking on the next day. Their artillery and that of the 3rd on their left gave the men a good rolling barrage. The enemy artillery replied in a storm immediately; but the Aces, assisted by the men of the 3rd Division attacking from their side, drove through the shell-fire and all the machine-gun nests with what one of the men called a "four of a kind" sweep. At 5 P.M. the reports said that the wood was not only occupied but "riveted." At 6 P.M. the enemy answered this success with a counter-attack, which the 5th's artillery met, in three minutes after it had started, with a barrage which was its undoing. Having consolidated Rappes and avenged the pioneers who had first traversed it, the 5th was now relieved by the 90th, and sent to corps reserve. The exposure had brought on much sickness, which increased the gaps due to casualties. Absorbing three thousand replacements, General Ely, reflecting in his personality the spirit of his men, was now to prepare them for their brilliant part in the drive of November 1st.

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The 3rd Division, on the right of the 5th, had had of course to submit to the same annoyance of "side-slipping" as the 5th in the interchange of sectors. Having assisted in driving one of the wedges of October 4th, it was now to continue under the shell-fire from the neighborhood of the Borne de Cornouiller across the Meuse in forcing its way still farther. It made slow and difficult progress in the eastern edge of the Pultière Wood and the Forêt Wood on the 14th, and, the division sector being swung east, as the 5th, in turn dependent upon the other divisions, had a misfortune in the Rappes Wood, not even the dependable infantry of the 3rd could make headway under flanking fire against the Clairs Chênes Wood and Hill 299.

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On the 16th Brigadier-General Preston Brown, one of the younger brigadiers, a well-known Leavenworth man who had been chief of staff of the 2nd Division in its stand on the Paris-Château-Thierry road, took command of the 3rd. His appointment was significant of how youth will always be served under the test of war. On the 17th nothing was expected of the division by the Corps; on the 18th it advanced in *liaison* with the 5th in the attack on the Rappes Wood, which only partially succeeded. Now that tough and dependable 3rd took over the front of the 4th Division, which had been in since September 26th, and with all four regiments in line its front reached to the bank of the Meuse from Cunel.

On the 20th, the day that the 5th was to take Rappes, General Brown now having made his preparations, the 3rd went for Clairs Chênes Wood and Hill 299 in deadly earnest, which meant that something would have to "break." It was characteristic of the handicaps under which every division labored that in crossing the open spaces on their way to Clairs Chênes the 3rd had flanking machine-gun fire from the machine-guns in the Rappes Wood, which had not yet been taken. The 3rd took Clairs Chênes, but the flanking movement planned for the taking of 299 could not go through. The next day General Brown converged two attacks upon 299 and 297. Two of the highest hills in the region, which had long been a vantage point for observers, were won, and the 3rd's line straightened out with veteran precision.

The 3rd had been going too fast these last two days to suit the enemy's plans of defense. He concentrated his artillery in a violent bombardment on Clairs Chênes, and under a barrage worthy of German gunners in their most prodigal days the German infantry, in one of those spasmodic counter-attacks which showed all their former spirit, forced our machine-gunners and engineers to withdraw. A regimental commander repeated an incident of the 3rd's defense of Mézy and the railroad track along the Marne, when he gathered runners and all the men he could find in the vicinity, and led them in a charge which drove the Germans out of the wood, and re-established the line. The Germans found what compensation they could by pounding Hill 299 all night with their guns; but that hill was too high and too valuable to be yielded by such stalwart dependables as the men of the 3rd. During the next five days, while our whole line was preparing for the drive of November 1st, the 3rd's active patrols even entered the village of Brieuilles on the river bank, which for over four weeks had been a sore point with us; but they were told that it was too dangerous a position to hold, and withdrew.

On the night of the 26th the 3rd was relieved by the 5th, now recuperated. It was a pity that the 3rd, after its wonderful record in the battle, could not have participated in the sweep of our battalions down the far slopes of the whale-back. In line since October 1st, four weeks lacking two days, it had paid a price for taking the Mamelle trench, and for all its enduring, skillful attacks under that diabolical cross-fire from the galleries of heights. Its casualties, 8,422, were more than half its infantry, and, taken in connection with the positions it gained and its length of service, are an all-sufficient tribute to its character.

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## XXXI

### A CITADEL AND A BOWL

Hopeless stabbing at the flanks—The Lightning Division at Grandpré—Vertical warfare—Scaling walls to the citadel—Stumbling toward Loges Wood—The All-Americans still doing their part—A bowl east of the Meuse—Approached through Death Valley—The Blue and Greys crawling toward the rim—The rough end of the stick for the Yankee Division—Belleau Wood a key point—General Edwards and the staff—Desperate grappling.

The enemy must make sure of holding our left in front of Grandpré gap, or we would swing toward the whale-back from that direction; he must not lose the heights east of the Meuse, or we would cut off his line of retreat across the river. This naturally called for violent pressure on his flanks in order to draw forces from his center, where we were going through the Kriemhilde Stellung. During the third week of October there was just as intense fighting for the "citadel" of Grandpré and for the heights east of the Meuse as for Chatillon and Dame Marie ridges, and for the Loges and the Ormont woods as for the Bantheville, Clairs Chênes, Rappes, and Pultière woods.

We shall first tell the story of our left, where the 78th Division not only drew the arrows to its breast but charged them in their flight, after, as we have seen in Chapter XVIII, the 77th, on the 14th and 15th, had accompanied the general attack in fighting to master the northern bank of the Aire. Sacrifice is the only word for the 78th's action. Without expecting that the division could gain ground, the Army command set it the thankless task of repeated attacks to consume the enemy's strength, which it carried out with superb ardor and fortitude.

The 78th, originally drawn from New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and parts of New York State, took its name of the "Lightning" Division from an obvious local source. Under Major-General James H. McRae, a skillful and modest commander, both in its training at the British front and in its occupation of the Limey sector north of Toul, where it made remarkably successful raids, it had shown that although it was not one of the best advertised of National Army divisions it was one of the most promising. Where other new divisions had had their first experience in the intoxicating

drive for three and four miles in the first stage of the battle, the 78th was to have no open field for its bolts of lightning, but must use them as hammer-heads against granite, when it took over from the 77th after the latter had made its lodgment in Grandpré.

Though we had the Aire trough, we were not yet through with the westward bend of the Aire river, where the bottoms are broad and swampy. A wedge-like escarpment projects down to the town of Grandpré from the heights of the Bourgogne Wood. This escarpment afforded machine-guns cover for firing east and west and into the town. Eastward, high ground sloping up from the river bottoms continues to the Loges Wood, which averages about three-quarters of a mile in breadth and depth, covering an eminence. In this sector, about two miles in length, the 78th on the river bottom faced commanding positions at every point on its front. To the Germans the Bourgogne Wood was a bastion against the right flank of the French Fourth Army in its movement toward Sedan, a barrier between our flank and the French, and the flanking outpost of the Loges Wood, as I have indicated, in holding us back from swinging northward toward Buzancy and cutting into the flank of the whale-back. [542]

Conditions in the relief of the 77th in the intense darkness on the night of the 15th were very mixed. Saint-Juvin on the north side of the river, to the right or east, was securely held. In Chevières on the south side of the river the Lightnings of the 78th report that they still had mopping up to do before they crossed. East of Grandpré the Aire has two beds, which made the crossing of the river bottom under shell- and machine-gun fire the more trying. In Grandpré the 78th found itself in possession of only a section of the town near the river bank on the morning of the 16th, and with only small detachments of troops across the river,—which it must cross in force under plunging fire before it reached the foot of the slopes. [543]

It simplifies the action which followed to divide it into two parts: the left brigade, operating against the Grandpré positions, and the right against the Loges Wood positions. I shall describe that of Grandpré first. A principal street of the town runs up the hill against the western slopes of the escarpment. Machine-gunners and snipers could go and come from the heights into the back doors of the houses, and pass upstairs to the front windows, whence they could sweep the street with their fire. The division knew the escarpment as the "citadel"; for this tongue of high ground on its eastward side was surmounted by the ruins of ancient buildings, with old stone walls which must be scaled, while the Saint-Juvin road, which runs past it, is on the edge of a swamp. The only way to attack the citadel from the town, which it absolutely commanded, was over a narrow causeway where a squad of men could not properly be deployed. My Lord's castle of olden times had an ideal position for holding the villagers on the river bank in meek subjection.

A vertical warfare ensued in Grandpré, the Germans firing downward from upper-story windows and the citadel, and the Americans firing upward. It took two days of house-to-house fighting, in and out of doorways, hugging the house walls, and taking house by house, before this town of a thousand inhabitants was cleared of Germans, whose tenacity in holding the town itself, when they had the citadel at their backs, was indicative enough of the store they set by their right flank. On the 19th, the town having been mopped up, and sufficient troops across the fords for the purpose, an attack was made on the citadel and upon the western slopes of the escarpment. Beyond the citadel a park extends for a distance of a quarter of a mile. Beyond that Talma Hill, and Hills 204 and 180, and Bellejoyeuse farm formed a rampart of heights at the edge of the wood. The 78th, wrestling with machine-guns in this small area, was to use enough tactical resource for a great battle. [544]

At 2 A.M. the Lightnings began the assault. The hour was chosen because darkness favored the plan, which must be that of scaling the walls of an ancient fortress. Two separate parties made the attempt on the walls. The enemy machine-guns from the Bourgogne Wood instantly concentrated on one party, a target despite the darkness, while a shower of bombs was thrown down upon their heads. The other party reached the top, only to be met by irresistible fire from machine-guns, which the artillery had not been able, for a good reason, to silence. The guns were dropped into deep dugouts during the bombardment, and hoisted by cables to turn on the advancing infantry, immediately the bombardment was over. This care in preparation was another indication of the value the Germans placed on the citadel and the hills at the edge of the wood. Under scourging machine-gun fire, the attack everywhere had to fall back, after severe casualties, except that the right regiment of this brigade took the Loges farm, between the Loges Wood and the Bourgogne Wood, which it managed to hold by skillful digging under cross-fire. [545]

For the next four days there were the usual patrols, while the 78th's artillery hammered the citadel and the hills. On the 23rd a small party, led by a lieutenant and three or four men, under a powerful rolling barrage finally scaled the walls of the citadel and rushed on to Bellejoyeuse farm, where they had a ferocious struggle with the garrison while waiting for the second wave of the attack to come to their support; but the second wave, having been stopped by a curtain of machine-gun and artillery fire, had to fall back to the northern edge of the park. The gallantry of that little band had not been in vain, as was that of the men of the 5th who went through the Rappes Wood. They had the citadel. There had been success, too, at another vital point. Talma Hill had been taken. The Lightnings on the left were having their reward for their arduous sticking to it in a warfare which was no longer vertical, though still at a great angle of disadvantage. [546]

Their jumping-off places having been gained, progress became more rapid in a series of thrusts. On the 25th, one party entered the Bourgogne Wood from Talma Hill. There was a gap of half a mile between them and the troops in the park. Both they and the men in the park held on against the worst the enemy's machine-guns and artillery could do, while it took two days' persistent fighting by other units to conquer machine-gun nests and snipers, to close the gap. On the 29th

Bellejoyeuse farm was taken; Hill 180 beyond it was taken; Hill 204 had already been stormed with the aid of the French. The left brigade of the 78th had finished the task.

The traveler who goes to the Meuse-Argonne battlefield, as he follows the road from Grandpré on his way up the valley of the sinuous Aire, would do well to take a long and thoughtful look at the sweep of open ground between the river and the green mass of the Loges Wood rising from its edge. Let him imagine the right brigade of the 78th crossing the river on the 16th, and plunging through mud knee-deep, as in the freshness of the youth of its men and its division spirit, without artillery preparation, and without time to organize an attack properly, answering the call of the Army to divert German strength from the fronts of the divisions in the center, it went across that exposed zone straight in face of the blaze from the machine-guns in the woods and the associated heights. Though the gray valley floor was sprinkled with the figures of the dead and wounded, the charge reached the edge of the wood; it had gained the foot of the stairs. [547]

Loges Wood was not only high ground. Its character and situation as well peculiarly suited it for defense. The wood was thick enough to prevent the artillery making a barrage to protect the infantry, and sparse enough to give hidden machine-guns in the thickets a free play. It was estimated that there were machine-guns at intervals of forty yards in the German first line of defense, not to mention the interlocking system in the depths of the woods. The ground itself was a series of ravines, resembling nothing so much as a corrugated iron-roof. Each formed a natural avenue for machine-gun fire. The machine-gunners in the woods were supported by plentiful artillery in the rear to concentrate upon the open spaces before the wood and on the irregular open slopes east and west, which were linked together in singular adaptability for the enemy's purpose. He was not, in this instance, to depend upon small groups of machine-gunners to fight to the death. Knowing from past experience that these would be overcome by our hammering tactics, he was prepared to keep on putting in reserves for counter-attacks to answer our attacks. Therefore Loges Wood was to become a cockpit. [548]

The problem of how to attack it was baffling. Of course, encircling was the obvious method; but this meant a longer exposure of the men in the open, while as they swung in toward the wood they would have cross-fire from the adjoining positions into their backs. The troops that had reached the edge of the wood drove halfway through on the morning of the 17th, but were withdrawn to make an attack from the west. The reserves sent to hold the line they had gained had a rough and tumble with a German counter-attack, and had to yield a hundred yards. The attack from the west under the flanking fire of Hill 180 managed to dig in and hold on the west side of the wood, level with the line in the wood. This was progress; but it was progress at a terrible cost. The position was too murderous, however thoroughly the men dug, to be maintained. The Lightnings must either go forward or back, or be massacred in their fox-holes.

On the morning of the 18th the support battalions passed through the front line, and, rushing and outflanking machine-gun nests, in a fight that became a scramble of units, each clearing its way as fast as it could, numbers of our men broke through to the northern edge of the wood. All the while the Germans, instead of holding fast to their positions, were acting on the offensive at every opportunity, infiltrating down the ravines, as they tried to creep around isolated parties, and again charging them. No commander could direct his troops under such conditions. It was a fight between individuals and groups acting as their own generals, of German veterans, with four years' experience in this kind of fighting, against the resourceful Lightnings. His artillery gassing the southern edge of the wood to keep back our reserves, the enemy kept forcing in more reserves in his counter-attacks, which gained weight and system until they forced our survivors, by ghastly losses, to retire to their starting point. [549]

Thus far the Germans were still holding the escarpment and citadel and the hills at the edge of the Bourgogne Wood, in line with the southern edge of the Loges Wood, and well south of its northern edge, while the Loges farm, between Grandpré and the Loges Wood, was an outpost of enfilade fire at close quarters. We know how in its night attack just before dawn, though it failed to take the citadel, the left brigade took and held Loges farm. The right brigade was to move at the same time on the wood. Though our artillery had tried to smash the nests, its shells had been unsuccessful among the trees, and when a frontal advance was attempted, it met heavier machine-gun fire than hitherto. At the same time we attacked the wood from another direction, trying for the eastern edge. The Germans had the wood encircled with machine-guns, however. Our charge, as it turned in its swinging movement, met their fire in face, and received machine-gun fire in flank and rear from the village and high ground around the village of Champigneulle. Driven back to its starting point, it closed up its gaps and charged again under this cross-fire of machine-guns and a deluge of gas and high-explosive shells which shattered it. [550]

The brigade had used up all its reserves; the division had none available; Corps could send none. By this time our divisions in the center had gained the Kriemhilde, and were consolidating their gains, and, therefore, events on other parts of the front had their influence in a Corps order to withdraw to the Grandpré-Saint-Juvin road. When the exhausted men in the gas-saturated Loges Wood were told that they were to retreat, they complained. They might be staggering with fatigue, and half-suffocated from wearing their gas masks, but they had been fighting in hot blood at close quarters for the wood. They did not want to yield to their adversary. They were critical of the command which compelled them to retrace their steps in the darkness, which was done in good order, across the levels spattered with the blood of their comrades who had breasted the machine-gun fire. [551]

Every bullet and shell which the men of either brigade of the 78th had received was one less fired at the heroic 42nd in its struggle for the mastery of the treacherous slopes and the wire and trenches of the stronghold of the Chatillon ridge. Their ferocious attacks, made in the hope of

gains which the Army knew were impossible, had served another purpose in convincing the Germans that our final drive would concentrate on this flank instead of on the Barricourt ridge to the east of the whale-back. In this final drive the 78th, after hard fighting, was to enjoy its retribution; for it took Loges Wood, and afterward knew the joy of stretching its legs in rapid pursuit for twelve miles. Its casualties were 5,234 for all of its operations.

While we are following the careers of the divisions before the attack of November 1st, we must not forget that the 82nd was still in line on the right of the 78th. It had reached the Kriemhilde on October 11th, and then in the general attack of the 14th penetrated the Kriemhilde, where it bends west from the Chatillon ridge, and it had taken Hill 182 and the other heights to the north and northeast which commanded the defenses of Saint-Juvin. As the result of these actions of determined initiative and heroic sacrifice, one regiment had 12 officers and 332 men fit for duty; another regimental commander reported that eighty per cent of his survivors were unfit for duty, and that the other twenty per cent ought to be on the sick list. However, they could be depended upon until they swooned. The effective rifle strength of the division was 4,300, or less than a third of the normal total for a division. Yet it attacked in support of the 78th's effort against Loges Wood. Then it settled down to holding its lines and patrolling.

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Provident General Duncan saved his exhausted men from a part of the strain by skillful front-line reliefs on alternate nights. As the All-Americans might not go into rest as a division, he established a rest camp of his own, where exhausted, slightly gassed, wounded, and sick men had clean clothing, baths, and plenty of hot food, which rehabilitated them into "effectives"; and this enabled him to keep the 82nd in line until the night of October 31st, when the exhaustion of its memorable service in the Aire trough was to rob it of the thrill of pursuing the enemy to the Meuse, which the now rested 77th and 80th, taking its place, were to know. It had taken 900 prisoners, and paid for its success with 6,764 casualties.

So much for the left flank. We have bidden farewell to the Aire valley, whose trough and gap were now behind us; but we were not to be through with the Meuse until the day of the armistice. I approach no part of our fighting in France with a greater sense of incapability than the battle east of the Meuse—a separate battle, so influential in the fortunes of the main battle, which has never received its share of credit. Here every feature of the main battle was repeated in a confined arena which recalled to me the assaults on Port Arthur. I have already described the early operations of the 29th and 33rd in driving the wedge, which we hoped would relieve our Third Corps from long-range flanking fire to which it could not respond; and how they had been checked in the quixotic mission of an immediate conquest of the Borne de Cornouiller, or Hill 378.

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As we know, the Borne, about three miles from the Meuse, was the supreme height of the eastern valley wall. Southward in the direction of the attack it sloped down into the steep-walled ravine of the Vaux de Mille Mais, whose eastern end gave into a series of ridges rising to the summit of Hill 370, protecting the Grande Montagne Wood in front as it protected 378 in flank by the Grande Montagne Wood and the famous Molleville farm. Thence an encircling ridge turning southward toward the Verdun forts formed the rim of a bowl. Had the German Army, as planned, withdrawn to the Meuse line, these hills would have been to their defense what the hills of Verdun were to the French defense in the battle of 1916.

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Once the heights were taken, except for a series of detached hills, the way was open to the plain of the Woëvre and to Germany. Back of them and on their reverse slopes the Germans had built barracks for their men, and assembled their material for the great Verdun offensive. On the crests and the near slopes they had built concrete pill-boxes at critical points, and arranged a system of defense in the Verdun days, when they had learned by experience the tactical value of every square rod of ground. The approach from the bottom of the bowl—which is a rough description—to the rim was covered by many smaller interlocking and wooded hills and ridges cut by ravines. There was no ravine, it seemed, no part of this pit which was not visible to observers from some one of the heights. The operation of the French Corps, under which our divisions operated, must be fan-shaped, sweeping up the walls of the bowl, as a wedge at any given point would have meant annihilation. The approach to the bowl for our troops was along a road through a valley, which was as warranted in receiving its name as any Death Valley in the war. On the French side of the old trench line this ran through an area of villages in utter ruin from the bombardments of the Verdun battle, then through Samogneux and more ruins, woods, and fields of shell-craters into the valley of the bowl itself.

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For five or six miles, then, stretched an area of desolation without any billeting places where troops could rest, except a few rat-infested and odorous, moist dugouts and cellars, roofed by the debris of villages. The young soldier who was going under fire for the first time, as he marched forward past that grayish, mottled, hideous landscape, might see the physical results of war upon earth, trees, and houses. When he came into Death Valley, he was to know its effects upon men. For two or three miles the road was always under shell-fire. By day visible to the enemy's observers, by night his gunners could be sure that guns registered upon it, if they fired into the darkness, would find a target on its congested reaches. It was inadequate to the traffic of the divisions engaged. Troops marching into battle must run its deadly gamut before they could deploy. It was the neck of the fan-shaped funnel of the battle-line. Transport was halted by shell-torn cars and motor-trucks and dead horses until they were removed, and by fresh craters from large calibers until they were refilled. There was no rest for the engineers; all the branches which were not ordinarily in the front line knew what it was to be under fire.

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The Illinois men of the 33rd, on the left, after they had crossed the river and reached the slopes of the Borne de Cornouiller on the 9th, could move no farther on their front until the rim of the

bowl was taken on their right. They stood off counter-attacks, and continued nagging the enemy until their relief on October 21st, forty-three days after they had gone into line on the left bank of the Meuse, and twenty-six days since, in the attack of September 26th, they had taken Forges Wood in their brilliant swinging maneuver which had been followed by their skillful bridging and crossing of the river. Now the division was to go to the muddy and active Saint-Mihiel sector for a "rest," relieving the 79th, which had had its "rest" and was to return for a part in the last stages of the battle. Even the much traveled, enduring, industrious, and self-reliant infantry of the 33rd had not had such a varied experience as the artillery brigade, which I may mention as a further illustration of how our units were moved here and there. It had been attached in turn to the 89th Division, the 1st Division, the Ninth French Corps, the 91st Division, the 32nd Division, the Army artillery, and finally to the 89th Division for the drive of November 1st, without ever once having served with its own division. [557]

While the 33rd had been maintaining its ground, under orders to attempt no advance, in the east of the Meuse battle, the Blue and Grey 29th, its regiments intermixed at times with French regiments, had been forcing the action among the ravines and woods of the Molleville farm region against the same kind of offensive tactics that the Germans were using in the Loges Wood, and for an equally important object in relation to the plan of our operations as a whole. All parts of its front line and its support positions were being continually gassed. The frequent shifting of its units in relation to the French, in an effort to find some system of making progress up the walls of the rim, were additional vexation in trying to keep organization in hand over such difficult ground, under such persistent and varied fire against the veteran Prussians and Wurtembergers, who were quick to make the most of every opening offered them.

A branch of the Death Valley road, the Crépion road, runs up the eastern slope of the bowl. The point where it passes over the rim was most vital. From a rounded ridge on both sides of the road for a stretch between woods you look down upon the village of Crépion in the foreground and receding slopes in the distance. This point gained might flank the Etraye Wood positions, the Grande Montagne, and eventually Hill 378, the Borne de Cornouiller itself. [558]

Commanding the southern side of the road and approaches to the summit was Ormont Wood, which rose to the crest of a very high hill, 360, only eighteen feet lower than the Borne, which was defended by pill-boxes. On the other side of the road were the Reine and Chênes woods. Beyond these was the Belleu Wood, on the same side of the road. Belleu and Ormont were key points. Belleu was to have as bad a name as Belleau Wood in the Château-Thierry operations.

On October 12th the Blues and Greys of the 29th, coöperating with the French, undertook in an encircling movement, which was complex in its detail, to take the woods on both sides of the roads. This aroused all the spleen of the German artillery. It drew violent counter-attacks from the German infantry, continued in two days of in and out fighting. Successive charges reached the edges of Ormont. There under a tempest of artillery fire they looked up the slope through the thickets toward the summit of 360, where the machine-guns were emitting too murderous a plunging fire to permit them either to advance or to hold all the ground they had gained. On the north side of the road Reine Wood and a part of Chênes Wood were taken against counter-attacks. This was encouraging. Though it did not seem to make the capture of Ormont easier, it opened the way for an attack on the 15th toward Molleville farm on the left and Grande Montagne on the right. Much ground was gained on the left, and some on the right, where the fire from the Etraye ridge stopped the advance. [559]

We were slowly working our way toward the rim, using each bit of woods or ridge which we won as a lever for winning another. All the while we were an interior line, attacking up a gallery against an exterior line whose ends could interlock their cross-fire. On the 16th, by dint of the sheer pluck of units dodging artillery concentrations and zones of machine-gun fire, and wearing down machine-gun nests, further progress was made on the Grande Montagne. The 29th, always under shell-fire and gas, had been attacking and resisting counter-attacks for eight days. It was not yet "expended" by any means; but it was glad to find that another American division was coming into the arena to relieve some of its own as well as French elements.

Had we any division whose veterans might feel, as the result of their experience, that they were familiar with all kinds of warfare, it was the 26th, the "Yankee" Division, National Guard of New England. As I have mentioned in my first book, the Yankees had learned not to expect a sinecure. Assignments which meant victory with theatrical ease never came to them. If four divisions were to draw lots for four places in line, they took it for granted that the worst would go to the 26th, which had become expert in gripping the rough end of a stick. The second division to arrive in France, the 26th was put into trenches, after a short period of training, in the ugly Chemin des Dames region, away from the American sector. From there it was sent direct into the mire of the Toul sector under the guns of Mont Sec, where it resisted the powerful thrust of German shock troops at Seicheprey. The length of time it remained in the Toul sector, and the length of the line it held there, might well have turned it into a division of mud wallowers; but it was able, on the contrary, to make some offensive thrusts of its own, and only longed for the time when it might have something like decent ground for an attack. From Toul it went to relieve the Marines and Regulars of the 2nd in the violent Pas-Fini sector on the Château-Thierry road, where, after more than two weeks in line, instead of having the period of rest and reorganization given to divisions before a big attack, it drove through to Epieds in the counter-offensive. Then at Saint-Mihiel, where it was with the French on the western side of the salient, by rapid marching it swung across to Vigneulles to meet the veteran 1st in closing the salient. [560]

If there were any replacements in the 26th who felt apprehension as they came up Death Valley, the older Yankees, in the name of all the mud, shells, gas, machine-gun fire, and hardships they [561]

had endured, soon gave them the heart of veteran comradeship by their example. Saint-Mihiel had been revenge for them. It had set a sharper edge on their spirits. Artillery and all the other units having long served together, the Yankees were to be "expended" as other veteran divisions had been for a great occasion in the battle—an occasion in keeping with their tough experience. It was not for them to have the straight problem of charging a trench system, but to maneuver in and out of these ravines and woods, facing this way and that against appalling difficulties. Maine forests, Green Mountains, White Mountains, little Rhode Island, and Massachusetts and Connecticut had traditions in their history in the background of the fresh traditions the Yankees had won in France. With the Blue and Greys already in, and the 79th coming, the east of the Meuse battle became somewhat of a family affair of the original colonies. The French had great respect for the 26th. Much was expected of it, and it was to do much.

It went to the attack immediately on the morning of the 23rd. On the left it coöperated with the 29th, which, feeling rejuvenated in the presence of Americans on its flank, concentrated its remaining effectives for an ambitious effort which carried the Americans through to the Etraye ridge, and even to the important Pylone, or observatory, before the advance elements were stopped. This was the high watermark for the Blue and Grey, splendidly won. Without trying to follow the detail of the maneuver, the 26th, as soon as it was known that its Etraye ridge attack was succeeding, put in a reserve battalion and rushed for the Belleu, that wood on the east of the Crépion road, just short of the vital point on the rim that I have mentioned. In the impetuosity of new troops in their first battle, and the spryness and wisdom of veterans, this battalion swept over the machine-guns and through the wood, which the 29th had already entered, to meet a savage reception. [562]

This was shaking the whole plan of German defense. It was an insulting slap in the face to German tactics. Just over the crest beyond Belleu, as I have already mentioned, the slope ran down to the plain of the Woëvre. The German had no shell-fire to spare now for the other bank of the Meuse. Batteries whose fire had been the curse of the Third Corps swung round in concentration on that exposed patch of woods. The machine-gunners in the pill-boxes and log-covered redoubts were reinforced by others. It was a wonderful thing to have gone through Belleu Wood; but in order to have held, the Yankees would have needed something less permeable to bullets and shell-fragments, and subject to gas, than a "stern and rock-bound coast" determination. The battalion had to withdraw from the wood during the night, which was illumined by a fury of bursting shells. [563]

The Yankees were now fairly warmed to their task. On the 24th they fought all day for Belleu Wood and Hill 360 in the Ormont Wood. A cleverly arranged smoke-screen protected their first entry into Belleu, when they advanced five hundred yards. The Germans knew well how to fight in that wood. They could draw back from their advanced line of fox-holes to their strong shell-proof emplacements, and call for an artillery barrage to blast our charge. Then they could gather for a counter-attack. Four times that day they rushed the Yankees under the support of their concentrations of artillery, which prevented our reinforcements coming up, and the fourth time they drove out our survivors. Attack again! New England would not accept the rebuff from Prussia. At 2.30 the next morning the Yankees charged the wood in darkness and rain, and they went through it, too.

There was no use of our artillery trying to crush the concrete pill-boxes defending the Ormont height on the other side of the road. They were invulnerable to shells, for the Yankees were facing, in most exposed down-hill positions, the latest fashion in mobile tactics in command of well-tested defenses on high ground. Trench-mortar fire in addition to machine-gun fire and shells shattered the two battalions which tried by all the suppleness of veteran tactics to reach Hill 360 on the 23rd. The next morning, after the usual night of shell-fire and suffering from cold on the wet ground, another attack did reach the hill, and fought in and out around it and in the woods, but could not hold it against the plunging fire of unassailable pill-boxes. [564]

On October 24th a new commander, Brigadier-General Frank E. Bamford, who was trained in the school of the 1st, came to the 26th. Some people thought that our army staff was not in very intimate touch with the situation in the bowl. Preoccupied with the main battle, it was harassed by the flanking fire from the heights east of the Meuse. It wanted possession of these heights before starting the next general attack. A veteran division had been sent to take them. Evidently harder driving was required from Division Headquarters of the 26th.

"Go through!" Individuals did not count; success alone counted. Officers had been relieved right and left for failing to succeed. "Go through!" Other heights had been taken: why not these? Perhaps someone had overlooked the fact that while the German army retained anything like cohesion or any dependable troops, its command would not yield this Gibraltar in covering its retreat toward Germany after it was out of Sedan and Mézières, and withdrawn from the whale-back; and this was all the more reason for our desiring Gibraltar. The relief of other divisional commanders created nothing approaching the stir made by that of Major-General Clarence R. Edwards. [565]

Well-known before the war as Chief of the Insular Bureau, possessing characteristics that were bound to attract attention, he had had command of the 26th from its organization. He went about much among his men. They all knew his tall figure. They and the line officers were bitter over losing him. If there had been a vote of the soldiers of the division on the question of recalling him, it would have been almost unanimous in his favor. The staff seemed to think that he was too kind to officers of a type which other division commanders relieved; that the success of the division had been due to the fine material in the ranks, which needed better direction; and finally that his long service had broken him down to a point where he had lost his grip on his

organization. In answer, his friends said that he had made the division out of the nucleus of many National Guard units and replacements. He had given it its original spirit of corps, and kept up its spirits under handicaps which would have demoralized many divisions. [566]

In the first two days the 26th had suffered 2,000 casualties. On the 27th they were sent into one of those ambitious attacks which look well on paper. To the right of Hill 360, which of course was on the rim, was a valley, and beyond that on higher ground the Moirey Wood, continuing the rim. Relying on veteran experience to carry out this daring maneuver, they were to swing around Hill 360, and into the valley, and take Moirey Wood. Such encircling movements had been carried out before; but their success had been dependent upon the relative strength of the positions to be encircled and of the forces occupying them, not to mention the volume of all kinds of fire on the flanks of the attack. This attack invited the reception that it met no less than a man who jumps into a rattlesnake's nest. The German army might be staggering to defeat, but east of the Meuse the German units were not yet in the mood to turn their backs to the heights, and retire to the plain. With a wonderful accuracy and system they poured the intensest concentration of artillery fire that even the bowl had known. All the guns on all the heights which could swing around upon any part of the bowl seemed to have only one target for shells of all calibers, mixed with gas, which is so hard on men who are clambering over slippery ground in violent physical effort. Units could not see one another from the smoke of the bursts, tearing gaps in the line, which was at the same time ripped by machine-gun fire from the pill-boxes. Every step forward meant more machine-gun fire in flank, and more of it in rear, without any diminution of the volume in front. It was not in human flesh to "go through"; and there was nothing more to be said on the subject. [567]

At the same time, on the other side of the Crépion road the 26th had sought to drive through Belleu Wood and over the ridge. If both attacks had succeeded, and could have held the ground gained, we might have won the battle; but we could not have held it under the artillery concentrations which the Germans were able to deliver, unless each man had a shell-proof pill-box of the weight of a trench helmet—an invention which would have ended the war before we ceased to be neutral.

We were not in full possession of Belleu Wood yet. Conditions there were indeed "mixed." Yankees and Germans were dug in in fox-holes in the northern edges, at points where either could watch the other. Back of the Germans were their trenches on the crest, and their interlocking pill-boxes; at their command always the infernal concentrations of artillery fire which could be brought down on a few minutes' notice. They still had the higher ground; they could slip back for rest into their bomb-proofs and camps in the valley. Many of our fox-holes were full of icy cold water, where the men had to lie—and did lie; for to show their heads was to receive a blast of fire. But the Yankees, all the while nagging the enemy by sniping and shell-fire, held on here and across the road under the same conditions. It was out of the question for warm food to reach the outposts, who received their rations by tossing biscuits from one fox-hole to another. [568]

On their military maps the French gave Belleu Wood, which the Marines had taken in the Château-Thierry campaign, the name of the Marine Wood. Belleu Wood or Ormont Wood might either be called the "Yankee" Wood, though the 29th might ask that one be called the "Blue and Grey" Wood, or Grande Montagne the "Blue and Grey" mountain. After having repulsed counter-attacks on previous days, depleted as it was in numbers, the 29th supported the attack of the 26th through Belleu Wood in an attack through Wavrille Wood, where it met irresistible fire of the same kind as the 26th had against Hill 360 and Moirey Wood.

The 29th's three weeks' service in the hell's torment of the bowl was now over. In its place came the 79th, National Army, which was also from both sides of Mason and Dixon's line, north and south mingling in its ranks. We know the 79th of old for its rush down the Montfaucon valley and over the slopes in the first stage of the battle. The isolation of units in slippery ravines and woods, and the depth of the shelled area, required two nights for relief. The 29th's 5,636 casualties were balanced on the bloody ledger of its record by 2,300 prisoners. This was a remarkable showing; testimony of harvest won by bold reactions against counter-attacks, of charges which made a combing sweep in their sturdy rushes, even when they had to yield some of the ground won. Man to man the Blue and Greys had given the enemy better than he sent; but not in other respects. They could not answer his artillery shell for shell, or even one shell to three. [569]

My glimpses of the battle east of the Meuse among the Verdun hills recalled the days of the Verdun battle, while the French were stalling, with powerful artillery support, on the muddy crests and slopes and in the slippery ravines. When they re-took Douaumont and Vaux, they had a cloud of shell-bursts rolling in front of the charge. We were going relatively naked to the charge. This had been our fortune in most of our attacks in the Meuse-Argonne, as our part in driving in our man-power to hasten the end of the war. There was something pitiful about our divisional artillery in the bowl, trying to answer the smashing fire of the outnumbering guns with their long-range fire from the heights. The artillery of the 29th for three weeks kept its shifts going night and day, while the veteran artillerists of the 26th had problems in arranging patterns of barrages to cover the infiltrating attacks which put new wrinkles in their experience. [570]

Of the 29th's wounded, thirty-five per cent were gassed. The whole area of the bowl was continually gassed. Sickness was inevitable from lack of drinking water, warm food, and proper care. While the Germans could slip back to billets on the reverse slopes, and to shell-proof shelters, let it be repeated that our men had to remain all the time under the nerve-racking shell-fire in the open, and under soaking rains that made every hole they dug on the lower levels a well. Some of the woods which they occupied were shelled until they could see from end to end



through the remaining limbless poles of the trunks. The desolation of Delville and Trônes woods in the Somme battle were reproduced; but the 26th and the 29th were there to attack, and they kept on attacking. The fire they drew was a mighty factor in the success of our thrusts in the main battle against the whale-back. It should be enough for any soldier to say that he served east of the Meuse. The 79th and the 26th, which remained in to the death, were to sweep over the rim into the plain, as we shall see.

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## XXXII

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### THE FINAL ATTACK

Stalwart 89th and 90th—Bantheville Wood cleaned up by the 89th—The 90th to the Freya system—The 5th, back in line, takes Aincreville and Brioules—America's two-edged sword—An aggressive army and the Fourteen Points—Would the German links snap?—A last push—The military machine running smoothly—Vigorous divisions in line—Veterans in reserve—"We will go through."

The rest of the picture, which had been done in the miniature of agonizing efforts for small gains, was now to be painted in bold strokes on a swiftly flowing canvas. During the last ten days of October, after the general attack of the 14th had slowed down, our preparations for the final attack included the taking of certain positions which would be serviceable as "jumping-off" places, and the arrival of two conspicuously able National Army divisions.

The 89th had been formed under Major-General Leonard Wood, which assured that the men of clear eyes and fine physique, drafted from Kansas and Missouri, would be well and sympathetically trained. If the division might not have Wood at its head in France, it was to have in his successor, Major-General William M. Wright, a leader worthy to exemplify the standards he had established. All the army knew "Bill" Wright, a man of the world as well as an all-round soldier, practical and broad-minded, who faced a problem or an enemy in all four-square robustness and energetic determination. In the Saint-Mihiel drive, and afterward in the Saint-Mihiel sector, the 89th had fully met the high expectation of its old commander and his admirers.

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His men were as devoted to Major-General Henry T. Allen, who had formed the 90th from recruits and commanded it in France. The six feet of "Hal" Allen were as straight, now that his hair was gray, and he was as spare in body and as youthful in spirit as in the days when he was a lieutenant of cavalry, or organized the Philippine Constabulary. He too was known to all the army, always "all there," whether on parade or in a stuffy dugout, or in any group of men at home or abroad. When he went among his tall Texans they said that they had a general who looked like a general. Both Allen and Wright were afterward rewarded with corps commands for their service in the concluding drive of the battle.

As for the spirit of the infantry of the 90th during all the battle, only three stragglers were reported from the whole division. They were from Texas, as they were prompt to tell you. They had shown in the mire of the Saint-Mihiel salient that men from a very dry atmosphere can endure penetrating humid cold as well as the hot sun. The sight of them, no less than of the 89th and other divisions from the Middle West, was an assurance that anemia does not flourish in their native States. Neither the 89th nor the 90th had received enough replacements to change their local character. Their regional pride was accordingly almost as strong as their divisional pride. Both, when they arrived in the Meuse-Argonne, were considered as "shock" divisions, so rapid had been their progress in efficiency since they had come to France.

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Taking over from the 32nd on October 19th, the 89th immediately proceeded to clean up the troublesome Bantheville Wood. Though the operation was entirely successful, it required severe fighting under other adverse conditions than machine-gun and artillery fire, which grew worse, the farther the infantry advanced. The roads through the wood, which was continually gassed, were impassable. Stretcher-bearers had to wade in mud knee-deep for the mile and a half of its length in bringing back the shivering wounded, and the men stricken with influenza.

When the Germans built that excellent bathing and disinfecting plant at Gesnes, they did the 89th a good turn. Taking care of over four thousand of our exhausted men, it was the adjutant of their fine physique in so conserving the strength of the division that it was able, after ten days of action and exposure which might well have "expended" it, to fight its way to the Meuse and across the Meuse in the ten days of advance from November 1st until the armistice.

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The 90th, taking over on October 22nd from the 5th Division in that violent sector of the Rappes Wood in front of Bantheville, under the cross artillery fire from the heights of the whale-back and east of the Meuse, its line joining the 89th on the left, made a spring for the village of Bantheville on the 23rd, capturing and holding it. The next day it drove ahead until it was up to the Freya Stellung, the second line of defense of the whale-back, with a precision that defied the enemy's artillery and machine-guns. The Freya was not as strong as the Kriemhilde, neither being of course a trench system in the former accepted sense; but the Freya had fragments of trenches and strong positions for machine-guns, linked together in characteristic mobile defense. Eager as the Texans were to attack the Freya, it was not in the plan that they should. They were to dig in and expose themselves as little as possible to the cross artillery fire, and "make medicine" for their part in the general attack, which would sweep over the Freya on November 1st. The

Germans tried several counter-attacks; but every one was promptly repulsed by the accurate fire of the Texans, whom the deluges of shells could not budge from their positions. [575]

Meanwhile the tried regulars of the 5th Division, which had come into line on the Meuse flank on October 27th, had a few chores to do before they were to carry out their brilliant programme in crossing the Meuse. I use the word chores, because the Aces, now refreshed and full of "pep," made their successes appear to be little more. We had not yet taken Brioules on the river bank, though it had been set as a part of the Army objective of the initial attack of September 26th. For four weeks it had been whipping our flanks with its machine-gun fire and protecting enfilading German batteries. After having vigilantly pushed forward aggressive patrols, which seized vantage points, in a rush in the darkness on the morning of the 30th, the 5th took Aincreville. That evening skirmishers went into Brioules, and cleared it of the enemy. To a point opposite Liny, where the river curved westward, we had straightened out our line on the Meuse bank, shortening our Third Corps front, which at the same time had cut deeper into the flank of the Barricourt ridge, the final crest of the whale-back.

This was cheerful news for our Army command. It was an augury confirming all our information in the latter days of October. The rapid advance of the other Allied armies to the west was having a pronounced effect. Indeed, during the second stage of the Meuse-Argonne battle, powerful as the German resistance had been, it was not that of full divisions, as a rule, but of elements of divisions hurried into line, their officers sometimes uncertain of the identity of units on their flanks, as they strove to obey orders to hold at any cost. An army, in its many units, is like a series of steel links. For over four years the German army had presented a front possessed of the alternate mobility of a chain and the rigidity of a steel wall. So rapidly was German morale now deteriorating that it looked as if the chain, worn by attrition, might snap in a confusion of scattering links. [576]

America's part in this juncture was that of a two-edged sword. One edge was preparing to strike with all our military force against the German front. It is needless to repeat how influential is psychologic suggestion on a soldier's mood. Our soldiers were forbidden to speak of peace; all thought of peace being as resolutely suppressed in the military mind as apprehension of defeat, when the German offensives in the spring had seemed to be threatening Paris. The average soldier, being a human being, and particularly the veteran who had survived many battles, if he thought the end were near, did not want to be the "last man killed in the war." The more he had endured, the more he wanted to live. So we must leave peace to the peace-makers. The war-makers must keep at war. The harder we fought in the days to come, the better we served the purpose of President Wilson, the Commander-in-Chief. [577]

The other edge of our sword was his Fourteen Points. The German soldier now knew that he could never undertake another offensive. Henceforth his back was against the wall. A soldier who submitted to the will of his superiors in full faith in their promises of victory, a soldier who fought peculiarly for victory on enemy soil, found his great organization, which he had been told was unconquerable, breaking, and himself yielding in disheartening retreat the ground that his sacrifice had won. He may have thought that he had fought in his country's defense by invading France; now he knew that defense had become a matter of the defense of his own soil. Would he fight to the last ditch? Would he resist on the Meuse as the British had at Ypres, and the French at Verdun, and the South at Appomattox? The question was for him, the soldier, to answer. It always is, in every war. Leadership and staff work can effect nothing, unless the soldiers are for battle. The aim of all the propaganda on both sides was to promote the fighting spirit of the masses at home and at the front. [578]

Germany still had millions of armed men, a great staff organization, and immense numbers of guns and quantities of ammunition. The organic disintegration was due to the mood of the Kaiser's atoms, his men. Strike a spark in them, flaming into desperate common defense as a people—and the German army might show as a whole something of the resistance to the death of individual units in the Meuse-Argonne. It was all very well to talk of a swift movement to Berlin; but the Allied armies were themselves becoming exhausted. They were running short of fresh divisions; they were hampered for lack of transport and horses. An army advances slowly against rearguard action alone. Between Berlin and the Allied soldiers, who knew the meaning of interlocking fire from machine-guns manned by small groups of men, were Luxemburg, the walls of the Moselle and the Rhine valleys, and all the stretch of country beyond the Rhine, which meant long lines of railroad communication, many bridges to be built, and an infinite amount of labor. If a million German veterans decided that it was better to die than to yield, though we should go to Berlin, we should have much fighting on the way, increasing the ghastly cost in lives and treasure which was swamping the world in blood and debts. A common view of German character during the war had held that once the Germans knew they were losing, their resistance would collapse; that they would fight well only when the odds were in their favor. This hardly accorded with their record under Frederick the Great. I think that with them, as with all peoples and all soldiers, much depended upon whether or not some event or train of events should have again aroused their passion. They lacked food; but a people in siege desperation will go hungry for a long time. [579]

It was a solace to the German soldier's mind, a tribute to his courage, for him to think that if America had not come into the war he would have won it from the other Allies. He had finished Russia and Rumania; he had France and Britain trembling, when a fresh and gigantic antagonist appeared against him. His retreats had begun just as American troops were making their force felt on the battle line. Despite censorship of the press, belittling our effort, despite the espionage of officers over their men, word traveled fast from German soldier to soldier. By talks with others

who had fought, if not by actual contact, every German soldier knew with what freshness and initiative the Americans fought. If we had been slow in preparing, once our enormous preparations came to a head in the immense numbers we were now throwing into battle, the effect was all the more impressive upon the German soldier, and through him upon the German people. [580]

This same America, which was now attacking with such increasing power, had made through its President the peace offer of the Fourteen Points, which had followed his speeches and notes during our neutrality, all to the same effect: that America—then considered weak and unmilitary—was not fighting in a war of conquest. The Fourteen Points guaranteed Germany from the dismemberment and subjection which the military caste had said would be her fate if she ever yielded to the Allies. After he awakened to his leaders' failure to give him victory, the Fourteen Points and associated propaganda were infiltrating into the German soldier's mind as effectively as German infantry infiltrated down a ravine or through a patch of woods. One hand of America driving a bayonet into his face, the other was offering him self-preservation in the rear. Why fight to the last ditch when such terms were offered? Three out of four German soldiers were accepting them in the sense that they were no longer fighting to the death in machine-gun nests. The war was over; they wanted to go home.

It was these two influences in the latter part of October and early November which were weakening the enemy's spirit on our front. Our conviction that this time we would break through waxed stronger every day. Our men thought of the enemy as groggy; another smashing blow would topple him. We, too, wanted to go home; we wanted an end of the horror and the hardship, as the days grew colder and the ground a moister bed. One supreme effort, and the orgy might be finished. The second stage of the battle had already passed, in our thoughts. We were entering a new stage, which should free us from the grim routine of siege. Something of the fervor of our preparations for the first stage, tempered and strengthened by the experience gained in the second, was in our preparation for the third. [581]

Originally Marshal Foch had set the attack for October 28th; but postponement to November 1st was found to be better suited for his plans. This gave us time to take Aincreville and Briulles, to bring up still more material, and further improve our arrangements. This time we were to have enough guns. More divisional artillery had come from the French foundries to the training camps, whence the waiting gunners brought them to the front. We had an increase of Army and Corps artillery, while Admiral Plunkett's bluejackets, with their long-range naval pieces which they wanted to take up as close to the enemy as if they were machine-guns, were cheering to the eye. Yet altogether we were to have only one hundred guns of American make in the battle; all the rest were of French make. Our columns of ammunition trucks, increased by the recent arrival of large numbers from home, seemed endless. Great piles of shells were rising beside the roads. The artillery of the 90th Division alone was to fire over 68,000 rounds in twenty-four hours on November 1st. All the artillery of divisions in reserve and in rest were brought up to the line. Artillerymen could endure longer service than the infantry. Those off duty might steal some sleep under shell-fire. This time we were to make a shield of shells, and a bridge of shells, too, for our troops. Despite our deep concentrations and the quantity of supplies moving, there was none of the confusion of the early days of the battle. Our staff heads had learned in a fierce school to control traffic. The machine was running comparatively smoothly—no military machine can ever run exactly so except in inspired accounts—equal to the extra and foreseen demand upon it. Our officers in the different headquarters were making their tables of barrages and the dispositions for attack with the routine confidence of clerks balancing a ledger. We were no longer new to war. [582]

The plan for November 1st was only carrying out the final stage of the first plan which our ambition had dared: a sweep over the last of the crests of the whale-back, and down the irregular descents toward the westward course of the Meuse and the Lille-Metz railway. On the left, the French Fourth Army was pressing against the western edge of the Bourgogne forest. Our left flank and their right flank were to "scallop" the forest, while it was filled with gas, instead of accompanying the flanking movement by a frontal drive, as we did in the Argonne. [583]

Our National Army divisions had come into their own, the National Guard divisions, which in the first and second stages had helped to pave the way for a glorious day, being in reserve, or "resting" in that muddy Saint-Mihiel sector. In Dickman's First Corps, at the left, were the 78th Division, still in line after the taking of the citadel and its ordeal in the Loges Wood; the 77th, come into line for a second time, after it had been in camp in its own Argonne Forest; and the peripatetic 80th, which had swung round from the Third Corps, come into line for the third time. Two divisions formed Summerall's Fifth Corps in the center: the veteran 2nd, which, after its service in helping to disengage Rheims, was back "home" in our army; and the 89th, which had made Bantheville Wood secure as its "jumping-off" place. In Hines' Third Corps on the right were the 90th Division, which had taken Bantheville, and the 5th, now masters of Briulles of evil repute and of Aincreville. Across the river with the French Second Colonial Corps, as an influential and thoroughly inclusive part of the whole movement, the 79th was preparing to start from Molleville farm to storm the Borne de Cornouiller, and the 26th, the only National Guard division in the front line, clinging to Belleu Wood and the edge of Ormont Wood, preparatory to rushing the eastern rim of the bowl. [584]

We know all these divisions of old. Their spurs had been won; they had tasted what Lord Kitchener called the salt of life in his message to the little British expeditionary force in August, 1914,—if the mud, the blood, the lice, the gas, the evisceration of battle is to have this name rather than that of the acid of death. We know, too, the three divisions in reserve, which had had

a longer experience. Some of their survivors had been toughened to the point of pickling by the salt of life. Two of them were National Guard, and one regular—the old dependables of the pioneers. It was good that they, and the 26th and the 2nd, too, among the pioneers, were to be in at the finish. Back of the Third Corps, in reserve on the right, was the 32nd, and of the First Corps on the left was the 42nd, both fit for any duty after the rest following their smashing blows which went through the Kriemhilde; and back of the Fifth Corps was the 1st, which, with usual promptness, had trained in its ways the replacements who filled the gaps of its more than 8,000 casualties in its October 4th-11th drive. It was now under command of Brigadier-General Frank Parker, who was a soldier of the school of the 1st, and as knightly a young officer as ever won promotion in battle.

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I should have said that these three veteran divisions were to be in at the finish only in the event of the checking or exhaustion of one of the divisions in front. Their part was to follow up the advance, ready to spring into an opening. They were a whip from behind in the Army policy, which meant this time not only to go through the enemy's final defense line, but to keep on going. The 42nd seemed to have drawn the most favorable position for its ambition, as the 78th was worn down by its attacks on the citadel and Loges Wood, and might have an initial nervous voltage to drive its legs, but not the reserve strength to remain long in pursuit. The 1st's prospects seemed very dismal. Do you suppose that Kansans and Missourians of the 89th were going to yield place to any division? As for the 2nd, fresh in line, it was the "best" of the older divisions. You may have that on official authority from its headquarters, and on the informal authority of every officer and man of the 2nd, and also from every transport horse or mule, if they could have spoken. The 1st was also the "best" division, as we know from equally numerous and valiant authorities. Anyone who cares to dispute either set of authorities, lacking, of course, information to justify his opinion, is left to his fate.

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Was the race-horse 2nd to allow the 1st to take one rod of its line of advance? Not while the 2nd had a corporal's guard able to march and fight; not unless the 1st could leap-frog the 2nd in aeroplanes. The 1st might do police duty and repair roads after it was tired out in trying to keep in sight of the 2nd's heels. Were the Texans of the 90th, who were just becoming warmed up to the Argonne battle, to allow the 32nd to do anything but trail in their wake? Was the regular 5th, which had taken a lien on the west bank of the Meuse, to accept assistance from National Guardsmen, even if they were the greedy and swift Arrows?

We had in this array of divisions—to pass a general compliment, as they passed few compliments to one another because the "bests" were so numerous—infantry which thrilled the most stale of observers with admiration apart from national pride. I had heard much of the "trench look" and the "battle face," which, as seen by civilians, sometimes puzzled men long at the front. I saw it, as I understand it, at Château-Thierry and during the Meuse-Argonne battle; I saw it, too, in the Ypres salient and at Verdun. It was sharp-featured, in keeping with lithe muscular bodies, with a smile that possibly took its character from that "salt of life," a direct look in the eye in answer to a challenge,—the face of a man who has seen the flight of things more dangerous than baseballs, who knows grinding discipline, roofless, fireless billets in midwinter, and the submission of self to a cause in the grimmest of team-play.

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Our infantry were ready, resolutely and confidently ready. All our gunners, there on the slopes, in the ravines and woods, in the midst of that array of guns, were ready to pour forth their hurricane of shells. Our machine-gun battalions, our medical, engineer, and salvage units, our ammunition trains, our rolling kitchens, were ready. General Maistre, who came from Marshal Foch to Fifth Corps headquarters the night before the attack, asked if we would "go through."

"We will go through," Summerall replied.

"Do you want to see my plans?" Summerall asked Pershing.

"No. I know them."

Summerall went out with him to his car.

"Will you go through?" Pershing asked him.

"We will."

Pershing put the same all-embracing question to Hines and Dickman, and received the same resolute answer. Corps commanders were only repeating the messages of division, brigade, and battalion commanders, who were speaking the thought of the men.

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"We will go through."

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## XXXIII

### VICTORY

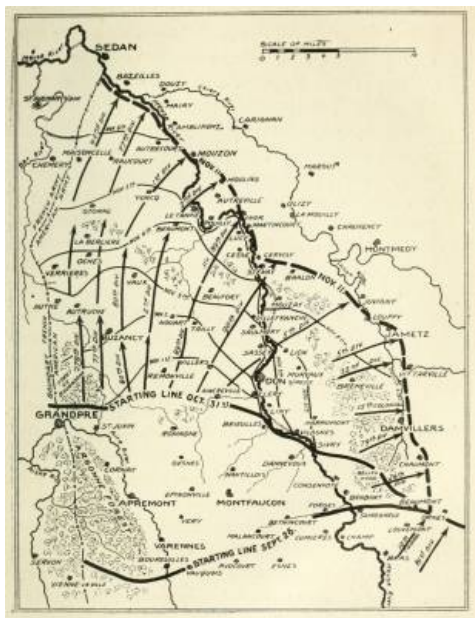
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A march of victory in the center—Held on the left—But full speed on the second day—The 89th stays in—Veterans in leash—The 90th to the river wall—The 5th pivoting—The Borne at last taken by the 79th—The 5th gets across the Meuse—Varying resistance to the main advance—Rainbows give way to French entry into Sedan—In motion from Meuse to Moselle on the last day—Isolated divisions in Flanders—Every village in

One who moved about in the days before and the night before the attack, from the railheads to the front, his vision embracing the whole panorama, no longer need talk of what America was going to do in the war. He saw what America had done since September 26th between the ruins of the old trench system and the Kriemhilde Stellung, and he knew that the army which was to spring into action at dawn on the morning of November 1st was the greatest in our history.

When the simmering volcano of routine artillery fire broke into eruption at 3.30, racking the earth with concussions and assaulting the heavens with blinding flashes, as the stream of shells from the larger caliber of the forest of guns passed over the streams from the smaller caliber, it seemed that all the Germans in the front line must be mashed into the earth. If the preliminary bombardment left any alive, then that monstrous curtain of shell-bursts in front of the advancing infantry, and the trench mortar fire, and the sheets of machine-gun bullets that increased the strength of the shield, must hold them trussed to the earth until it passed over them and our men were upon them.

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**MAP NO. 11**  
**DIVISIONS IN THE THIRD STAGE OF THE MEUSE-ARGONNE**  
**BATTLE, OCTOBER 31ST-NOVEMBER 11TH.**

So it was with the 2nd Division, where I followed up the advance. With the seeming facility with which the easier hurdles are taken in a steeple-chase, the wave of the 2nd had swept over the fragmentary trenches of the Kriemhilde system beyond Sommerance, where the great attacks of the 1st and the 82nd had died down, and our line had been little changed by the general attack of October 14th, which had mastered the Kriemhilde in the center. There were occasional enemy shell-bursts in patches of woods and on obvious points, fired by German guns, halting in retreat or before withdrawal from their old positions, and occasional bullets cracked by from the left in the region of the Bourgogne forest; but all this seemed only the venomous and hopeless spite of a rearguard action that was breaking into a rout. Only at long intervals did you see a prone, still figure in khaki on the earth; and our wounded were not numerous. German prisoners were being rounded up from bushes and gullies, and in gray files they were crossing the fields to the rear, as the combings of a drive which was moving as fast this time as the pencilings on the map of high ambition. Admired by the Allies for our speed, we were showing it now in legs unlimbered and free of the chains that had encompassed us for over a month.

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It had ceased to be a battle on the way to Bayonville-et-Chennery. It was a march, a joyous march of victory, more appealing than any city parade, you may be sure. Our guns and transport were coming along roads which were free of any except a rare vagrant shell-burst. Indeed, everything in the 2nd's sector was going according to schedule. It was good to be with the 2nd, as I had learned in June and July in the Château-Thierry operations. One stopped and watched for the figures ahead to appear in their mobile swiftness in open spaces, as they came out of woods and ravines. One knew by instinct that we were going over the heights and down the apron this time. The weather was with us, too. After the long period of chill rains and hardships, a kindly sunshine filtered through the leaden sky. There had been more thrilling days in the war, thrilling with triumph and apprehension for me: when I was in Brussels, before the German avalanche arrived; when I saw the British battle fleet go out to sea; when I saw the French driving the Germans back in the first battle of the Marne; when I saw the British and French in their retreat before the German offensives of 1918; when I saw our first contingent land in France. But the crowning day was the one which brought forth the confession of the German communiqué that we had broken the German line.

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This is not saying, though the Fifth Corps in the center reached its objectives, except for a few hundred yards at some points, that everything in the schedule went without a hitch along the whole front. Our movement was fan-shaped, swinging toward the loop of the Meuse in its bend westward. The center of gravity, as I understood the plan, was to pass from the Fifth Corps to the

First on the left, whose flank was on the Bourgogne forest, with an intricate tactical problem to solve in scalloping and flank maneuvers. Here we met severe resistance from the Germans, who were still inclined to hold their bastion. Though the 78th had pounded its old enemy, the Loges Wood, with shells of big calibers from heavy American and French batteries assigned to it, the Germans still clung to their machine-guns; and though the Bourgogne Wood was thoroughly gassed, it poured in a strong flanking fire, and even sent out one counter-attack. The 77th was checked by heavy casualties in its effort to storm Champigneulle. The 80th, also fresh and impetuously determined to let nothing stop it, found the Germans showing their old form in defending woods and hills, and had to repeat their attacks and repulse counter-attacks; for our left, which had the longest swing to make, was delayed, while our center, taking over the center of gravity as the result of its advance, had gone ahead for four and five miles.

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The Rainbows of the 42nd, in reserve with the First Corps, were fractious. Weren't they in sight of the rainbow's end of their year in France? Let them in, and they would take it. Fine troops the 78th, 77th, and 80th, no doubt, thought the Rainbows, but the 42nd was the 42nd, and belonged to a class by itself for this kind of work. The three divisions of the First Corps were not offering iridescent travelers in the rear a holiday on the path they had blazed. They were about to enjoy it themselves.

The enemy was making his stand on the left to prevent our wholesale capture of prisoners, when he found that the combined movement of the French and American armies would put him into a trap; but the next day he was out of the Loges Wood and Champigneulle, and retreating through the Bourgogne forest. All three divisions took up the pursuit, to make up for lost time—and catch up with the procession. They were to show that they could move fast, too. On the 2nd they made four and five miles, and on the 3rd they kept up the same gait, which was a marvelous performance in deployment and contact and endurance.

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The Fifth Corps in the center faced the final heights of the whale-back, the Barricourt crest. For its support it had an overwhelming concentration of artillery fire, which Summerall, the gunner, required in order to keep his word to "go through." Lejeune's race-horse 2nd surpassed its own record for speed, as we have seen. Not only did it take its own objectives, but it was called on to send support elements over to assist the left. It was glad to send support elements anywhere, if they filled a gap which the 1st might have filled.

The 89th, the other division of the Fifth Corps, was thrown head on against the Barricourt heights. Wright had been among his officers and men, making them feel that all the Mississippi valley was calling on them for all there was in them in this attack. They might have been gassed and mired in the Bantheville Wood, they might be tired; but their great day had come. They were "going through." The Stokes mortars kept up with the assault waves, even dragging wagons of ammunition with them; a brigade of artillery was following up the infantry two hours after the attack began. Prodigious effort had a road through the mire of Bantheville Wood by 10.30 in the morning, with all the divisional transport moving up. No less than those hard-shell veterans of the 2nd, the 89th went ahead from the start in the conviction that success was certain. Before that day was over they ran into nests of machine-guns which ordinarily ought to have repulsed the most gallant charge, but the waves of infantry, with supports fast on their heels, had tasted victory in its intoxicating depths, and they overcame every obstacle. That night the Barricourt ridge was ours; when the Germans stated that their line was broken, it meant that we had broken German resistance on the whale-back. The way was open to the Meuse, and Germans in front of the First Corps had better make the most of the darkness of the night of the 1st for retreat.

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As the two divisions of the Fifth Corps, the 2nd and the 89th, in the pell-mell rush to get the final crest, which was of such decisive importance in the strategic plan, had become extended, the shorter advances required of them during the next two days, which included some stout, if uneven, resistance, by the Germans, allowed them time to get transport in order and bring up more artillery. Those old hounds of the 1st, with their mouths watering, were moving as close up to the front as their schedule would permit, and straining at the leash. The 89th, having had such a grueling time in going over the ridge, and such hard marching after the exhaustion of cleaning up Bantheville Wood, might be considered nominally expended, if not in fact. When the Fifth Corps gave an order that the 1st take over the 89th's place, General Wright objected. Take out his Kansans and Missourians! They were only getting their second wind. They were coming as strong as a flood on the Missouri. The order was revoked; a second one later was scotched by the same effective protest. Meanwhile the General was up at the front, urging on his tired men with the persuasive argument of the Corps threat. So the 89th was to remain in until the finish, while the 1st, licking its chops and panting, swinging this way and that, was begging: "Just give us one bite!"

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Prospects were no better for the 32nd, in reserve with the Third Corps on the right. Everybody could not be in this battle; the 5th and the 90th were willing that the Arrows should study the ground they had won, but they might not participate in winning more. Ely's and Allen's men were preoccupied with that undertaking themselves, and too busy to look after tourist parties. Whereat the Arrows sharpened their points in impatience, as they pried forward, and tightened their bowstrings, ready for a flight if they could draw the bows which, if they had the chance, would show the divisions in front the character of veteran skill.

If the Fifth Corps took its objectives, you might be certain that General Hines of the Third Corps on the right would take his, and maintain his reputation for brevity by reporting the fact with no more embellishment than a ship's log. If he had written Cæsar's commentaries, they would have been compressed into one chapter. The former commander of the bull-dog 4th Division, who had been on the Meuse flank under the cross artillery fire from September 26th, knew his ground. As

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the Third Corps had its flank on the Meuse and was to swing in toward the river bank, it had the shortest advance of the three corps to make.

The Texans of the 90th, on the left of his Corps, had been fretting for a week in face of the Freya Stellung and the Andevanne ridge, which they were now to take. In one of his trips about the front, General Allen had had his artillery commander killed at his side by a shell. His Texans were the kind that would carry out his careful plans for the attack. Barrages were cleverly arranged; machine-gunners put on high points for covering fire. On the 1st the Texans made short work of the Freya Stellung, reaching their objectives at every point, and eager to go ahead. The Germans put in a first-class division against the Texans on the night of the 2nd; but that did not make any difference. It was a furious give and take at some points, but on the night of the 2nd they had Villers-devant-Dun and Hill 212. The next day, in face of only desultory shelling, it was a matter of tireless maneuver and scattered fighting, with the worst punishment from low-flying German planes, raking our lines with machine-gun bullets. That night the 90th was organizing on the Halles ridge, preparatory to striking for the river bank.

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The 5th, the right division of the Third Corps, as it pivoted on the Meuse bank, had patrols studying the river for a crossing at Briulles and beyond on November 1st. The next morning its left entered Cléry-le-Petit, a mile farther down the river from Briulles, and cleaned up the horseshoe bluff known as the Punch-bowl. Now we had word that the Fourth French Army, on the west, and our First Corps, on the east, of the Bourgogne forest, in their rapid pursuit were out of touch with the enemy. This prompted energetic measures by the 5th in crossing the river, which General Ely was to apply in dashing initiative that will hold our attention later.

By this time on that shell-cursed western slope of the Meuse where many of our divisions had fought under the cross-fire from the galleries, there was only an occasional burst. Apart from the taking of the whale-back, there was another reason—the action east of the Meuse, where our divisions, coöperating with the French, had sprung to the attack on the morning of November 1st no less energetically than on the main battlefield. The Yankees of the 26th, as the only National Guard division then in the front line, sharing the freshened confidence of the hour, put the survivors of all four regiments in line, their sector being now farther south, over the ridges and through the woods north of Verdun, where they were hampered by bad roads and mud, which was to give them a part in keeping with their record in the last acts of the drama. The 79th was making a maneuver up the slopes of the bowl which called for initiative and consummate tactical resourcefulness. Kuhn, who had formed the division and led it, knew his men. There was nothing they would not attempt. He knew his enemy, too. A great honor had come to the 79th, the honor of storming the Borne de Cornouiller, or Hill 378, the highest of all the hills we took in the battle, —"corned willy," as the soldiers fighting for it on cold corned beef called it.

[599]

There was no rapid pursuit for them, but wicked uphill work all the way, in three days of repeated charges. Starting from the Molleville farm clearing, they had to ascend the steep, wooded slopes of the Etraye and Grande Montagne ridges, and struggle down one side and up the other of that deadly Vaux de Mille Mais and other ravines, before they were in sight of the Borne. The German grew bitter in his resistance at the thought of having to yield this favorite height, which had given his observers a far-flung view, and his artillery cover to swing the volume of fire into the flank of our Third Corps. The Borne was a bald and gently rounded ridge, with the undulating plateau-like crest, facing the bare and steep slope which the 79th had to ascend, peculiarly favorable for machine-gun defense in front, while along the bordering road to the west, in the edge of the Grande Montagne Wood, machine-guns could sweep in flank the road and the whole slope. Piles of cartridge cases which had been emptied into our waves were silent witnesses of the fire the assaults of the 79th had endured when every khaki figure was exposed on the blue sky-line, a pitilessly distinct silhouette at close range.

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Checked at this point and that, taking advantage of each fresh gain in gathering their strength for another effort, the men of the 79th kept on until they had worked their way through the woods and finally overrun the crest. There in their triumph, as they looked far across the Meuse over the hills and ridges and patches of woods, they might see the very heights of the whale-back which had been their goal when they charged down the valley of Montfaucon on September 26th in their baptism of fire. That Borne was the crowning point of those frowning hills and ridges east of the Meuse, which bullet-headed Prussian staff officers, who dreamed of fighting to the last ditch, had foreseen as a line of impregnable defense on French soil, which should become as horrible a shambles as their neighbors, the hills of Verdun. They had a new and inexpressibly grateful relation now to the vineyards of France, her well-tilled fields, her flower gardens of the Riviera, and the security of the whole world—for everywhere the bullet-headed Prussian officer was becoming the protesting flotsam in the midst of a breaking army which he could not control. The 79th had gone as far as it was wanted to go in following north the course of the Meuse in that movement begun on October 8th when the 33rd crossed the Meuse and advanced on the flank of the 29th toward the Borne.

[601]

Now another division, the 5th, was to cross the Meuse. The Meuse bottoms were broad, as I have hitherto noted, and swampy in places under the heavy rains, and required that the Meuse canal as well as the river should be bridged. There were many points on the river bottoms as well as on the hills on the east bank where machine-gunners might hide. German units still being urged to stand felt the appeal to their skill of such an advantage of position; their commanders the value of holding all the Meuse heights they could to assist the retreat of the Germans on the west. The 5th, despite its daring efforts, was not to achieve a crossing until the 90th on its left had finished its longer swing. On the night of the 3rd our Third Corps measured eight miles of front on the river bank. For the 5th and the other divisions, as their fan-shaped movement toward the bend

[602]

brought each in turn to the river, it was a case of patrols finding openings by night between the tornadoes of machine-gun fire, where the engineers might do the building under the protection of our artillery. Material for the bridges had to be found or brought from the rear. In this our initiative and resourcefulness were at their best.

At dark on the night of the 3rd the attempts began. The engineers went to their hazardous task of working under fire, which is harder than shooting back at your enemy. They stealthily managed to put a footbridge across the river, but when they started to build another across the canal, they met a hurricane of machine-gun and rifle fire, while the German guns concentrating upon them forced their retirement. The engineers are a patient and tireless lot, who can wait until a burst of fire has died down and then start work again. By 2 A.M. they had two footbridges across the canal. When a small column of infantry tried to cross, they were blown back by the enemy, who had evidently been watching for the target to appear. The infantry dug in between the canal and the river. This much was gained at all events. [603]

At 9.30 the next morning came a message from the Corps, directing that "the crossing will be effected regardless of loss, as the movement of the entire Army depends upon this crossing, and it must be done at once."

There was nothing to do, then, but cross or die in the effort, without waiting for darkness. All available artillery was asked to pound the east bank of the Meuse until eight in the evening. At four in the afternoon the 5th started to lay a pontoon bridge across at Cléry-le-Petit, where the river was 110 feet wide and 10 feet deep. The pontoons were not blown up by shell-fire quite as fast as they were put in the water. Therefore the bridge was finally completed. Under a barrage of artillery fire two battalions made a rush to cross the bridge. The German artillery began tearing them to pieces at the same time that it was tearing the bridge to pieces.

Happily the 5th was not putting all its eggs in one basket. At 6.20 another party, without any artillery preparation, succeeded in crossing the canal as well as the river at Brioules, and once on the other side would not be budged from maintaining their narrow bridgehead in face of the plunging fire from the heights. Just below Brioules, another battalion, which was also favored, no doubt, by the German attention being drawn to the fragile targets of the pontoons, in the most unostentatious but expeditious manner got across by using rafts, duckboards, poles, and ropes, and by swimming. The water of the river was bitter cold, but we were winning the war, and every soldier in the Meuse-Argonne was used to being wet by rain. This sopping battalion made a lodgment in Chatillon Wood, and kept warm during the night by cleaning the Germans out of it. [604]

It appeared at midnight that the whole division would have to swing round to cross the river by way of Brioules; but before morning the left brigade, on the north, put pontoons over successfully during the night, and crossed a battalion; for the Aces of the 5th had taken the Corps order to heart. Never let it be said that the 5th was holding up the entire Army—if it really were. General Hines was a very taciturn man, as I have remarked; and the Army staff had studied foreign methods in propaganda.

By 8 A.M. there were artillery bridges over the Meuse at Brioules. Such speed as this ought to be encouraged by calling for more speed. Two brigades had detachments across the river. The next thing was to join up the bridgeheads and take Dun-sur-Meuse, and this immediately. General Ely, of square jaw and twinkling blue eyes, did not care who took it, so it was taken.

"Take Dun-sur-Meuse and the hill north of 292, and from there go to the east," he told one brigade. "Do not wait for the other brigade. Keep pushing up with that one battalion, and take that place." [605]

"Keep shoving your battalions through," he told the other brigade. "Don't stop, but go through Dun. Take the shelling, and take the machine-gun fire, and push things along. You are to go to Dun unless the other fellow gets there first."

Thus Dun and the heights were taken that day, and the 5th fully established on the east bank of the Meuse. It was an accomplishment admirable in courage and skill.

The spirit of rivalry shown by the battalions rushing for Dun was that of all the divisions sweeping down the apron of the reverse slopes of the whale-back toward the river. This apron was not a smooth descent, but undulating, broken by hills, ravines, and woods, where machine-gunners could take cover and force deployment. In many instances advancing was no mere maneuver. The 89th ran into strong opposition on the heights overlooking the Meuse, and in common with all other divisions could not answer the enemy artillery, as we did not want to fire into the inhabited villages on the other bank. The 2nd met strong resistance on the 4th, which required organizing a regular attack; but, of course, it went through. Lejeune was not a man to consider any other result, or his men inclined to waste time when the 1st Division was waiting in the rear to take the 2nd's place if it so much as stubbed its toe. As we know, on critical occasions, the 2nd did not worry about casualties. Its casualty list, whose total was the heaviest of any division in France, for the final drive was over four thousand. [606]

Enemy resistance varied with the mood of individual units. A few answered the professional call and the call of fatalism not to miss an opportunity to turn their machine-guns upon our advancing troops. Others asked only to escape or to surrender. The harder we pressed, the larger would be this class. Our own mood was that of the soldier who has his enemy in flight. Every blow was another argument for an armistice, and a further assurance of an early passage home. The elation of the chase eliminated the sense of fatigue. Abandoned guns, rifles, bombs, trench mortars, worn-out automobiles and trucks, all the stage properties of retreat were in the wake of that German army whose mighty organization had held the world in a fearful awe. We were



passing through a region where houses were intact and only a few shells had fallen in the course of our advance. Villagers in a wondering delirium of joy were watching the groups of German prisoners, too weary for any emotion except a sense of relief, of officers with long faces and a glazed, despairing look in their eyes, officers who were indifferent, and occasional ones in whom the defiance of Prussian militarism still bore itself in ineffectual superciliousness; and watching these strange Americans going and coming on their errands, and the passage of our troops, guns, and transport in an urgent procession which thought of nothing except getting ahead. [607]

The Commander-in-Chief having on the 5th directly urged all possible speed on the left toward the Meuse at Sedan, which was of course the farthest objective from our starting-point, those mouth-watering veteran hounds in reserve of the First and Fifth Corps at last had their leashes removed, and joined the pack in full cry. Taking the place of the 78th, the men of the 42nd knew now that there was a rainbow's end, and they meant that it should go to none other than the Rainbow Division. March is hardly the word for their speed; gallop is a better one. On the 8th they had reached Wadelincourt, a suburb across the river from Sedan, in their wonderful dash. Their Rainbow ambition having considered all northern France as their objective, they found that they were out of the American sector, and accordingly must be "side-slipped." The French took Sedan. There was historical fitness in the French poilus, in their faded blue, being the first troops to enter that town, where a French disaster, due to a travesty of imperial leadership, had glorified the Hohenzollern dynasty, which was now a travesty with its armies in dissolution. [608]

The 1st, swinging over to the left but still remaining with the Fifth Corps, had a long march before reaching the front of the 80th, which it relieved. When it received the word to go, it developed a speed which was sufficient reason for its being in at the finish, without depending upon its record in previous actions. Our pioneer veterans had two days and two nights in line, advancing ten miles. Then they were "squeezed out" by the "side-slipping" of the 42nd from before Sedan. From the morning of November 5th, when the call came to them, until midnight of November 7th-8th, their units had fought for forty-eight hours, and marched from thirty to forty-five miles. Will the race-horse 2nd please take note of this?

If the Arrows of the 32nd, the third of the veteran divisions in reserve, had had to go home without being in the final drive, when the 42nd was in it, our army staff would have been even more unpopular than it was. They, too, had this chance. As the Third Corps' front broadened with its advance over the heights on the other side of the river they took over a portion of the sector of the 15th French Colonials, where they were driving the enemy in most uncivil fashion when the flag fell.

The Texans of the 90th had to swing their right flank to the river bank in *liaison* with the flank of the 5th, and keep firm *liaison* with the 89th on their left. They faced very resolute fire from the other bank in their bridge-building, which had to be done under most troublesome conditions after some expensive reconnoitering, in which the Texans did not allow artillery or machine-gun fire to interfere with their pioneering audacity. On the 9th they had orders to cross. That night they went over their new bridge under a pitiless fire. While one detachment went into Stenay, which lies under a bluff, where it had a busy time in cleaning up the town, the other detachment pressed on into Baalon Wood. [609]

Meanwhile the Kansans and Missourians of the 89th had been preparing, at the same time with the 2nd of the Fifth Corps, to cross and take the heights of Inor. As soon as their outposts reached the bank, their patrols had begun swimming the river under machine-gun fire. They were assigned some German pontoons, which they transformed into rafts. The first was rowed across; the others were pulled across with ropes. Seventy-five men being crowded on each raft, they put one whole battalion on the opposite bank while footbridges were being smashed by the enemy artillery as fast as the engineers could build them. The battalion, having taken over a hundred prisoners, pressed on to Autreville. It goes without saying that the 2nd had also effected a crossing—and under equally trying conditions. [610]

Every battalion over the Meuse, every rod of ground gained, was considered a further argument for the Germans to accept the terms of the armistice now in their hands. Until the word to cease fire came, the Army would go on fighting; at dawn on the 11th, when the German delegates were signing their names on Marshal Foch's train our Second Army, weak in numbers and strong in heart, began carrying out the orders that had been planned in the Saint-Mihiel sector, where several of our veteran divisions had been resting after being expended in the Meuse-Argonne, and we had the 7th and 88th among our new divisions. On the right was the 92nd, colored, National Army, nearest of all our troops to the former German frontier, who were the first to cross it, I understand, in their successful charge. To say that the 28th and the 33rd were also in the action is sufficient. They were going ahead, and the German infantry was resisting with machine-gun fire which caused numerous casualties, and the German artillery was responding with a heavy bombardment at some points, when word was flashed through from Marshal Foch to our General Headquarters, and through to the Second Army, and out to the regiments and battalions, that at 11 A.M. hostilities would cease.

The Second Army advance was immediately stopped. Everywhere east of the Meuse our troops were advancing on the morning of the 11th. The 81st was engaged on the flank of the veteran 26th, which had been ceaselessly pushing the enemy over the hills since November 1st, and was now approaching the plain. The 79th, after taking the Borne de Cornouiller, had faced round in a rapid and brilliant maneuver, pressing over the rim of the bowl from the Grande Montagne and from Belleu Wood, in whose fox-holes three of our divisions had suffered, and moving down into the plain had taken Damvillers, and was now storming the last of the three hills between its line and the plain of the Woëvre. The men were wrathful at being stopped. They wanted to finish the [611]

job: to take the last of the hills.

At many points where our infantry units were far beyond our communications and infiltrating around hills and through woods, it took some time to reach the rapidly moving advance detachments with the news that they were to cease firing and go no farther. Particularly was this true in front of the Fifth Corps, whose skirmishers, having just crossed the river, were taking the bit in their teeth. A few elements were still engaging the German rearguard at eleven, unaware that the war was over, while on all the remainder of the front from Switzerland to Holland there was silence for the first time in four years—and the mills of hell had ceased grinding. [612]

Two of the divisions which had been in line on the first day of the Meuse-Argonne battle were in line on the last. Two others which had helped break the old trench system on September 26th, the 37th and the 91st, were to see the finish far from our army family, on the plains of Belgium. Isolated in an odd Flemish world of level fields broken by canals, the two were attached to different French corps in that Allied force of British and French and Belgians under the Belgian King, and under the direct command of General Degoutte, which had disengaged Ypres, recovered Ostend, Bruges, Roulers, and Courtrai, when on October 31st our men joined in that tide of victory which was soon to flow into Brussels itself. In three days they made eight miles against irregular rearguard action. In taking the low ridge commanding the Scheldt, they were under a heavy artillery reaction of the Germans in protecting the retreat across the river. The Ohioans on November 2nd, in face of the concentrations of gun-fire, were able to slip small detachments across on bridges improvised from tree-trunks and timbers taken from shattered houses, and eventually, that night, to pass over several battalions on a temporary footbridge; the 91st and the French divisions were unsuccessful in reaching the other bank except by this one bridge. The Pacific Coast men, with their usual intrepidity, were planning to swim the river, but after three days of continued advance, which included the capture of the large town of Audenarde, they and the Ohioans were given a rest by the corps commands. On the 10th they were put in line again, but they did not overtake the line pursuing the retreating enemy before his capitulation. [613]

Some American units, besides the 27th and 30th Divisions with the British, had been isolated from the first from the American family. American hospitals in base towns on both the British and French fronts were an evidence, from the days of our neutrality, of that work of war which knows no national allegiance. Volunteer ambulance sections, maintaining the traditions of the American Field Service, continued to the end to serve with French divisions; and indeed, many of the former volunteers who had preferred to prepare for commissions in the French army might be come upon unexpectedly in the horizon blue uniform. Engineer troops for which our Allies had made an early request might be buried in obscure parts of the front, to come to light only in the shadow of an emergency which, as at Cambrai and in the German March offensive, turned engineer troops into combatants; or again, as our own demands grew, to return to our own fold. Air squadrons, as well as individual aviators, served in valiant anonymity on Allied fronts, in many cases never seeing the American front, which yet wanted for aviation. So wide was the dispersion of Americans throughout France that it is safe to say that hardly a single commune of the country has gone without sight of the soldier from overseas. In due time the far-flung legions would all have come home to an integral army; but the problem of keeping in touch with units which believed themselves lost to the sight of their comrades was not a simple one, and yet a problem that must be faced. How was the motor park, isolated in French barracks at Epinal, or the forestry unit in the Jura or the Pyrenees, to be assured that somewhere in the inner circles of hierarchy its faithful service was being noted and appreciated? [614]

Most isolated of all, though they received due meed of honor from the French with whom they served, were certain colored regiments. Recruited from various National Guard organizations in northern States, they had arrived in a training area in France after a usual period of service as labor troops in the S. O. S., and were formed into a provisional 93rd Division, which was not, however, to be assembled. In the spring the regiments were assigned to various French divisions for trench service, at the request of the French staff, which had developed long experience with colored troops in many African campaigns. For this service the Americans were equipped throughout with French mustard-colored khaki uniforms, French rifles, packs, gas masks, and helmets, which still further accentuated their isolation. The varying fortunes of trench warfare in the Argonne and about Saint-Mihiel seasoned their experience for a due part in the repulse of the last German offensive, and in the offensive begun by General Gouraud's army west of the Argonne, at the same time with our attack to the east. Withdrawn with their divisions after a few days of advance which counted them as "expended," the regiments were sent to recuperate in the Vosges, whence they started on the short march to the Rhine after the armistice. [615]

We know how, in framing the armistice terms, as one after another strong demand was included, an apprehension developed in certain Allied quarters lest the Germans, with such a large army still in being, might become desperate and continue the war. When one read the terms, which surrendered the German navy and placed us in command of the Rhine bridgeheads, he knew how deep the two-edged sword had cut, and that the Allies had power in their hands to force complete submission to their will. It was a skillful and wise peace, bringing an end to the bloodshed and the agony. [616]

Only those who considered it to their honor or their profit could have wished to fight all the way to Berlin. The thought in the mind of every soldier was: "I still live; I shall not have to go under fire again;" in the mind of every relative of a soldier: "He is still alive." Through all the celebrations to come, it was a thought dominant in subconsciousness, if not publicly expressed. To some of our own newcomers, perhaps, who had not yet been in action, there was human

disappointment that they had arrived too late; though our veterans and the war-weary veterans of our Allies might tell them that they were fortunate in what they had escaped. Perhaps, too, certain of our officers, who had worked toward the vision of the spring campaign, when our recuperated divisions would be supported by the enormous quantity of munitions from home, and all our branches would be fully equipped, may have felt that they had been robbed of professional fulfillment. Not until spring would we have been able to undertake another offensive against determined resistance. On November 11th we had only two fresh divisions in reserve; we were depending upon green replacements, and our hospitals were full. If we had come late into the war, we had given the full measure of our strength in the final stage.

The forming of the new Third Army of Occupation under Major-General Joseph T. Dickman, drawn from our veteran divisions in a favorable position for the movement, and its long tour of police duty, is no more in the province of this book than the many journeys which the author made after the armistice: up and down the Rhine; into Brussels, to see the people welcome back their King; over the Ypres, the Somme, and the Verdun battlefields, as well as our own; along roads which had been for four years in sound of the guns, now silent; among our camps where our soldiers in the dreary, long, cold nights were impatiently marking time until their homegoing; through the Services of Supply, where I saw that vast machine we had built reversed, to the ports, where the tide of our soldiery was flowing outward instead of inward—the thought ever uppermost being that humanity might learn from this most monstrous example of war's folly how to avoid its repetition.

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## Transcriber's Notes

Obvious errors of punctuation and diacritics repaired.

Inconsistent hyphenation fixed.

Click on the maps to view high-resolution images.

P. 42: Divisonal pride -> Divisional pride.

P. 126: thirring rattle -> whirring rattle.

P. 143: There was a certain fiffulness -> There was a certain fitfulness.

P. 236: the field of the action of the 29th -> the field of the action of the 27th.

P. 367: will he applied the principle -> will be applied the principle.  
P. 530: his machine-gunes regrouped -> his machine-guns regrouped.  
P. 619: Australian 5th Divison -> Australian 5th Division.  
P. 627: Passchendaele (sse Battle, 1917) -> Passchendaele (see Battle, 1917).

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