

THE ATTACK ON SEPTEMBER 12

STRANGE as it may seem, the terrific din and awesome splendor of the four-hour cannonading had a soothing effect on the tense nerves of these lads going into their first battle. The German artillery reply had been negligible, as their gunners were too busy at this moment trying to get out of the way. So these Texans and Oklahomans crouched in their trenches, occupied during this fateful period more by curiosity over novel sights than by thoughts of impending action.

Promptly at five o'clock the irregular belching of the guns was replaced by the rhythmic roll of the 75's, shooting as though in cadence. The barrage had begun – the signal that the supreme moment had come! Simultaneously, the assault troops of the four regiments climbed from the trenches and took up their place in a continuous line that stretched across the divisional front, and formed a part of the 23-kilometer wave of men in khaki that engulfed the entire salient.

There was no hesitating, no holding back, in all that long line as it moved uniformly across No Man's Land. On the other hand, such was the impetuosity of the supporting troops that they were with difficulty kept at their proper distance to the rear of the front wave, and restrained from joining their comrades on the fighting line.

No one who has ever taken a look at No Mans Land on this front, and seen that twisting, treacherous maze of wire and the hundreds of pitfalls of ancient trenches, has failed to ask how it was possible for human beings to cross such obstacles in the face of hostile fire. French staff officers, sent by Marshal Foch, the Allied Generalissimo, to see this historic region in which thousands of "poilus" had given up their lives to advance the lines a few pitiable inches, gasped in astonishment when they heard of the facility with which American doughboys had surmounted such seemingly unconquerable difficulties. In fact, this achievement will always remain one of the most amazing features of the entire operation and the modest heroes who accomplished it, on reviewing this land of desolation, themselves wondered just how they did it. But it is sufficient to say that these men from the Southwest were natives of barbed wire's native States.

This problem of the wire was one to which the staff had given considerable thought. For more than a week preceding the attack patrols and working parties had been engaged nightly cutting lanes through the thick bands of entanglements. Owing to the fact that the 5th Division did not take over the front on which it was to attack until nearly midnight, September 11, troops of the 357th Infantry were required to prepare the path for that division as well as for themselves. The men had also been handicapped by a lack of heavy wire-cutters. In their eagerness to supply what was needed, G-1 office almost created a scandal by sending to Nancy, Toul, and neighboring cities to purchase this necessary article of hardware in the open markets. Not until September 10 were efficient cutters received through engineering channels. On the day preceding the attack about 400 of these instruments per brigade were in the hands of the men.

It might be stated that the domestic variety of wire-cutters known to almost every household in the Southwest is only a vest-pocket addition of the "de luxe" reproduction issued on this occasion. The tool was equipped with a handle about eighteen inches long. Little did the Texas and Oklahoma cowpunchers and stock-dealers expect, when they said "goodbye" to the plains on their way to join the round-up at Camp Travis, that the homely and prosaic wire-cutter would play such a big part on the Western front.

In order that the attack might be launched a complete surprise, the original orders of the 1st

Army did not contemplate an artillery preparation. On September 11 the four-hour preparation was ordered, one reason undoubtedly being the necessity of cutting as much wire as possible with high explosive. So, during the first two hours of this preparation, the artillery played on the back areas, principally with gas, in order to catch the German personnel in their trenches, dugouts, and camps but from three to five o'clock every available battery was directed on the enemy wire. However, this part of the program was not a great success. As the guns had not previously registered, and fired without observation or correction, the effect on the entanglements was practically nil.

The infantry plans also were drawn up to minimize the danger of the wire as far as possible. Owing to the width of No Man's Land, and the necessity of using a formation to get the men through existing lanes in the entanglements so that units would arrive intact in front of the enemy first position, it was provided that each platoon of the assault companies would be formed in "line of combat groups," that is, with each little group of riflemen and specialists in single file – while the support companies were to be in "column of half-platoons," a still more compact formation.

In each platoon four men were equipped with the big wire-cutters and told off with the sole mission of cutting wire so that the remainder of the platoon could pass through. This plan worked admirably. The scheme to detail engineers with Bangalore torpedoes to accompany the assault wave for the purpose of blowing up entanglements was carried out, but was not a great success for the reason that from the time that the American and hostile lines drew close together, and the battle waxed hot, all processes of wire-cutting proved too slow, and each soldier solved the problem for himself. Here the physical prowess of the men in the ranks saved the day, and the bands were cleared at one leap. In the mêlée the clothes of hundreds were torn to shreds, and some arrived on the objective so naked that it was necessary to send them to the rear for a new uniform in order to avoid freezing.

The wire proved most serious for Company G, 358th Infantry. Just as this company was picking its way through the sea of entanglements in front of Barnum Trench, 500 meters north of their jumping-off positions, it came under murderous machine gun fire from the right flank.



View of the region which was no Man's Land before the attack on September 12, taken from the take-off trenches in front of Fey-en-Haye. The assaulting battalions were forced to cross the maze of trenches and wire before getting at grips with the enemy.

RAPID ADVANCE ON THE LEFT

It was in the center of the divisional sector that the chief difficulty was experienced. On the two flanks the advance went off like clockwork, and the objectives were reached ahead of schedule. On the right, the 1st Battalion, 360th Infantry, commanded by Major W. H. H. Morris, quickly overcame all resistance and reached its objective by 6:30 A. M. The left flank of the 3d Battalion, 360th Infantry, commanded by Major J. W. F. Allen, moved into what had formerly been No Man's Land to connect with the 1st Battalion.

The 357th Infantry, on the left, made record time in attaining its objective. By 9:30 A. M. the line had been reached on the right, although there was still fighting to be done before it was occupied throughout.

The 1st Battalion, commanded by Captain (later Major) Aubrey G. Alexander, suffered numerous casualties soon after the jump-off. Lieutenant Roy E. Matthews, battalion scout officer, and Lieutenant J. McKenzie McIntosh, Company A, were killed early by machine gun fire. Just before reaching the Bois de la Rappe, Lieutenant Fred Regenhrecht, second in command of Company B, received wounds from a machine gun bullet that caused his death in a hospital several days later. Lieutenant Eldon Breedon, Company D, although wounded in his side by a machine gun bullet when the first German positions had been taken, stuck with his platoon and led them on to their objective.

The bitterest fighting the regiment experienced that day was in taking the reserve trenches in the Forêt des Vencheres just north of the ravine in which runs the road from Fey-en-Haye to Vieville-en-Haye. This ravine was later popularly known as "Gas Alley." It seemed that every approach was covered by machine gun fire, and it was necessary to scale a steep bluff in order to reach the position. Lieutenant James Manahan, Company A, was killed instantly by this machine gun fire. In the advance, Corporal Arthur H. Koch, Company A, although aided by only one private, flanked a machine gun nest killed, seven Germans and captured one German and three machine guns.

The 2nd Battalion, 357th Infantry in close support of the 1st also received its quota of casualties. Captain Richard Townsend, Company H, received a machine gun bullet wound during the advance in the woods which later caused his death. Lieutenant Donald McBride, Company E, received a machine gun wound in the leg, and Lieutenant John C. Donally, Company G, was wounded just before crossing the valley of the Stumpfager. To the 2d Battalion fell the duty of mopping up machine gunners who concealed themselves until the 1st Battalion had passed. Lieutenant Tobin C. Rote, Company F, single-handed, captured a gun and its crew. A short time afterward he was wounded by artillery fire.

The 2d Battalion assisted the advance of the 3rd Battalion, 358th Infantry, and temporarily closed the gap which their delay, in getting through the Bois de Friere, had created, by striking in the rear of the Germans in the vicinity of Moulin de Jaillard. When the 3rd Battalion finally arrived on the objective and connected with the 1st Battalion, 357th Infantry, the 2d Battalion withdrew to support position in the Tranchee Claude for the night.

1st Sergeant William G. Greenfield, of Company G, 357th Infantry, from Logan, Oklahoma, was wounded twice during the morning, but he refused medical aid until the day's job was over. He was awarded the D. S. C. for his faithfulness and the qualities of leadership he displayed in reorganizing groups of men which had become separated from their organization in the dense woods. Private Bart L. Shadrack, Company E, from Sapulpa, Oklahoma was also awarded the D. S. C. for his fearless action in attacking machine gun nests on two different occasions. The unique manner in which he effected one of

these operations was by rolling over the parapet after creeping up to the emplacement killing the gunners and capturing the gun.

DIFFICULTIES IN CENTER OF SECTOR

THE 3d Battalion, 358th Infantry seemed doomed to hard luck from the very start. While moving up to its jump-off positions it was caught in enemy artillery fire and somewhat scattered. Just before zero hour the battalion commander, Major Terry Allen, was wounded by shrapnel and taken to an aid station, the command passing to Captain Donald Gallagher. The story of Major Allen's adventures that day sounds like romance. He had been stunned by the explosion of the shell which wounded him, but on "coming to" he tore off the first-aid tag and rushed back in the direction of the fighting. En route, he rounded up small groups of men who had become separated from their unit, and while marching forward reached a small wood just in time to find some enemy machine gunners coming out of their deep holes to set up their guns and fire on our second wave. These men had been passed over by the assaulting line. Closing in with his small command, Major Allen engaged the machine gunners in hand-to-hand combat. After exhausting all the ammunition for his automatic pistol, he continued fighting with his fists until again badly wounded. In this mêlée Major Allen had come into possession of a German soldier's identification tag, which he dropped into his pocket.

In hurrying forward to catch up with the leading wave, he met a detachment of the 357th Infantry, who, not knowing Major Allen, were inclined to suspect him. Like the other officers, he had gone into the fray without any tell-tale insignia of rank; in the desperate encounter through which he had just passed his face had been covered with blood, some of his teeth knocked out, and his clothes torn. These circumstances, taken in connection with the presence of the Boche identity plate in his pocket, caused his detention until he was identified. Major Allen was then evacuated on account of his wounds.

Lieutenant Royal C. Harrington, Major Allen's adjutant, was so badly wounded by shell fire before H hour that he died two days later. Lieutenant Thomas J. Powell, Company I, was killed by a machine gun bullet during the morning.

The advance of the 3d Battalion was retarded by the difficult terrain, which was highly organized by the enemy, crossed iron gratings between the trees being a part of the defense scheme. While the battalion was slowly fighting its way up the wooded valley in the Bois de Friere, the 357th Infantry, on the left, and the 2d Battalion, 358th Infantry, on the right, had passed beyond it. The seriousness of the action here will be realized from the fact that only five out of the twelve officers who started with the battalion remained to consolidate the dearly won position.

During the advance along the hillsides and up the valley, men of the 1st Battalion in support became mixed with those of the 3d Battalion. Captain George B. Danenhour, commanding Company B, with characteristic aggressiveness and fearlessness, worked his company up the ravine to Jaillard Mill, arriving at the objective before the bulk of the 3d Battalion was up. As he still yearned for other fields to conquer, Captain Danenhour, accompanied by Captain Sim C. Souther, Company M, decided to mop up Vilcey-sur-Trey before nightfall. But this feat proved more difficult than was anticipated, and the advancing American scouts were stopped about 800 meters west of the town. There being no other shelter available, Captain Danenhour was forced to take refuge in the stream which trickled down the valley and to remain practically submerged in the cold water for hours. Early the next morning 2d Battalion scouts entered Vilcey from the south and were astonished to find twenty-six French civilians still in the town.

The 2nd Battalion, 358th Infantry, suffered heaviest in crossing the wire before getting at grips with the Boches. During the first hour of fighting, Major Ike Ashburn, battalion commander, was wounded in the neck by a machine gun bullet and taken to the rear unconscious, and two company commanders were put out of action. Captain C. W. Griggs, Company E, was severely wounded, and Captain Snowden M. Leftwich, Company F, received a machine gun bullet in the right arm, causing an amputation of the arm to be necessary. Captain John N. Simpson, Company G, took command of the battalion.

While Company G, on the right, was suffering terrific losses, the left assault company, F, weathered through the enemy first lines with only slight casualties, and by 7: 15 A. M. Lieutenant Raymond Leslie, second in command, had reached the objective with remnants of a platoon. This company rounded up 165 prisoners in the little valley near Camp de Ouest in the Bois de Friere. Difficulty was experienced with German snipers who had taken up positions in trees so as to command the paths through the woods. These paths or roadways, running systematically at right angles through the woods, are characteristic of carefully planted French forests. But these troublesome riflemen only furnished interesting sport for the "squirrel hunters" of the 179th Brigade. Corporal Wilbur S. Light, of Oklahoma City, out-sniped the snipers. His feat in picking three Germans off their lofty perch, and in killing three other Germans, was given recognition by an award of the D. S. C. Others added almost as many notches to their gun-stocks before all of the pests were cleaned out of the trees and hiding-places that day. Private Joseph A. Buffalo, of Big Cabin, Oklahoma, was also awarded the D. S. C. for his fine work after he had been badly wounded.

Company G continued to receive trouble from the right flank, and the entire 2d Battalion was not on the objective until about 2 P. M. Orders were then received to clean out La Poele, a network of trenches which had been a German strong point, and to embrace this position in the outpost for the night. Here the company suffered still further casualties from artillery, minenwerfer, and machine gun fire. Lieutenant Charles H. Hauser, Company H, from Eagle Pass, Texas, was killed on the ridge just north of La Poele by a minenwerfer shell.

The 3rd Battalion, 359th Infantry, the assault unit for the regiment, commanded by Major T. D. Collins, had been holding the line since September 8. It was necessary to "side-slip" further to the west for the attack. Due to a combination of untoward circumstances, – the lateness of the orders, the inability of some commanders to notify all their officers of the hour of the attack, the delay occasioned by the distribution of extra ammunition and rations late at night, the difficulty of finding one's way through rain, mud, and woods, – two platoons did not arrive at their jumping-off trenches until shortly before H hour.

The battalion assaulted in line of companies. Severe machine gun fire poured down upon them from the Quart-en-Reserve. But continued advance was made possible by the action of such men as Corporal Jesse W. Grisham, who, when Company L was held up by entanglements, jumped out of the trench without command, cut a pathway through the wire, signaled back its location, and moved to the right, continuing to cut paths and signal their position to the men of his company until killed.

Captain Walter Ferrol reached Camp du Ravin with a detachment of Company K early in the morning. During the day Captain Ferrol, Lieutenant Ben M. Davis, and Lieutenant Otto F. Zedler became casualties, leaving Company K without an officer. By 1 P. M. Companies K, L, and M held trench Rhenane and were patrolling beyond, but all withdrew to trench Rhenane for the night.

Lieutenant Charles D. Harned, adjutant, 3d Battalion, was killed, and Lieutenant Glen L. Brown,

Company L, received wounds which resulted in his death. Lieutenant Montgomery Fly, Company L, was rendered unconscious early in the advance by the explosion of a shell; but upon recovering, about two hours later, collected some scattered men and began mopping up machine gun nests run over by the assaulting troops. Lieutenant Fly himself killed two Germans, but received wounds in this action which later proved fatal.

The 2d Battalion in support, commanded by Major Birdsall P. Briscoe, also suffered very heavily. Owing to the severity of the fighting, the men of the 2d and 3d were considerably mixed. Lieutenant James R. Cunningham, Company E, who was picked off while giving a command to his platoon, was the first to go. Lieutenant Andrew K. Dunn, of Company C, was killed while passing through the wire. Captain Clinton C. Mason, Company G, received wounds which resulted in the loss of his left arm and left eye. Captain William B. Martin, Company H, received mortal wounds.



For four years the Germans had held these substantially built trenches just north of the village of Fey-en-Haye. The 90th Division, taking part in the assault that closed the salient of St. Mihiel, captured the trenches by a sudden attack on the morning of September 12, 1918.



Vilcey-sur-Trey

ALL OBJECTIVES TAKEN

By 2 P. M. our troops had reached the day's objectives all along the line, and were mopping up the

enemy positions in the woods which had been overlooked in the rush, and pushing out beyond the objectives. Not until several days later had all the German prisoners been smoked out of their holes and hiding-places. When the big artillery preparation came down at 1 A. M. the morning of the 12th, many of them sought cover and remained out of sight until the news was broken to them that their part in the war was over.

The success of the 90th Division was equaled by the other divisions further west, as is evidenced by Field Order No. 51, 1st Army Corps, issued the afternoon of September 12, which is quoted below:

“1. The enemy has been thoroughly defeated along our whole front. The number of prisoners taken by the corps amounts to more than 4000. A number of his guns were also captured. Every objective laid down by the army for two days was attained in one day under very trying weather conditions. The spirit and dash shown by the troops is very gratifying to the Corps Commander, and reflects credit upon all concerned.”

Such was the glorious fashion in which the 90th Division made its debut in the arena of combatant divisions of the A. E. F. Seven German officers – one a major – and 575 enlisted men passed through the divisional prison cage that day. The prisoners confirmed the order of battle that had been anticipated. Opposing the 357th Infantry and extending as far east as the valley in the Bois de Friere had been the 332d Reserve Regiment of the 77th Reserve Division. This division had been almost routed by the deep advance on its front. Prisoners were also captured from the 153d Landwehr Regiment, which held most of the front opposite the 358th and the 359th Infantry, and from the 94th Landwehr Regiment, opposite the 360th Infantry. Prisoners were not captured from the 68th Landwehr Regiment, the third regiment of the 255th Infantry Division, until later. The 68th Landwehr Regiment straddled the Moselle River.

It should be remembered that the majority of men composing the Division which had achieved this success had been in the military service approximately four months, while the officers were veterans of almost exactly a year's standing! Opposing these youngsters were the men of the 255th Infantry Division, most of whom were between the ages of 35 and 45; men who had received years of peace-time training in addition to their four years of service at the front; men who had long been in this particular sector and knew every foot of the terrain. Owing to the number of men from Alsace-Lorraine in its ranks – some of whom had deserted and come into our lines before the attack – it was rated only as a fourth-class division, but it was considered first-class for a purely defensive operation.

But the outstanding feature of the German defense was the organization of the terrain. This had been in 1915 one of the most bitterly contested spots on the Western front, and the elaborate system of artificial defenses which had resisted the fierce onslaughts of the French, not only were still intact, but had also been augmented and improved during the three years of comparative quiet. The trench system extended seven kilometers in depth from the front line to the elements of the Hindenburg line running westward from the vicinity of Pagny-sur-Moselle. The system consisted of deep revetted trenches and concrete dugouts, protected by a continuous mass of wire entanglements from one to two kilometers in depth. Even the dewberry vines conspired to augment the delaying power of these seemingly impregnable lines of defense.

The dugouts were marvels of comfort and convenience. Slight wonder the Germans had been content to sit down in a period of inactivity for four years and wait. In the Stumpflager, which was taken on the 12th, and at Camp Grollman and in the Norroy Quarries, which fell the second day, were discovered the most perfectly appointed homes, together with large quantities of stores.

THE NIGHT OF SEPTEMBER 12

BUT the operations were by no means completed by the cutting off of this slice of Boche land. The same corps field orders which felicitated the troops on the victory contained this second paragraph:

“The first phase is now completed. The next step is to organize the line attained for permanent occupancy. This means that the outpost line must be pushed two kilometers in front of the line being fortified and a whole position occupied in depth. This outpost must be established before morning, September 13, and the line of resistance completely laid out and the trenches dug. This position must be held against all attacks of the enemy.”

The attack is only half the battle: the modern soldier must know how to wield a spade as well as shoot a gun. There was no chance for rest after the wearying combat of the day. Every one was immediately put to work digging trenches along the line of the first day's objective, which was to be the main line of resistance of the new position. In addition, there was further fighting to be done in establishing the outpost two kilometers beyond the point which had been reached during the first day.

The difficulties encountered in fulfilling this last mission are illustrated by the experience of Lieutenant Bryan N. Mudgett, Company A, 357th Infantry. He succeeded in going more than a kilometer, but in doing so had slipped through the German lines and was completely surrounded. With a command of only two squads, he attacked and captured a battery, together with the non-commissioned officer in charge and seven of the crew. He fought his way back toward the American lines, losing only one of the prisoners, until he met the 3d Battalion of his regiment moving forward the next morning. On September 23 Lieutenant Mudgett received a mortal wound from artillery fire while on duty in the locality of this exploit.

Owing to the wooded nature of the terrain, and the fact that the infantry was rushed forward with maximum speed, the machine gun organizations had little opportunity to get into the action. In the 179th Brigade, the guns had been disposed as follows: the 357th Machine Gun Company was with the 1st Battalion of its regiment; the 358th Machine Gun Company was with the 2d Battalion, and the companies of the 344th Machine Gun Battalion were assigned in this manner: Company A to 2d Battalion, 357th Infantry; Company B, part to 3d Battalion and part to 1st Battalion, 357th Infantry; Company C, to 1st Battalion, 358th Infantry; and Company D to 3d Battalion, 358th Infantry. In the 180th Brigade the assault battalions of the 359th and 360th Infantry were supported by their respective regimental machine gun companies, and the 345th Machine Gun Battalion was disposed as follows: one company to the support battalion, 359th Infantry; one company to the 3d Battalion, 360th Infantry; and the remaining two companies in brigade reserve.

The machine guns were used in organizing the line of resistance. A counter-attack was feared the night of September 12-13, and the guns of the support battalions were moved forward to the main line, where part of them remained for defense during the remainder of the Division's occupancy of the St. Mihiel sector.

357TH INFANTRY FRUSTRATES COUNTER-ATTACK

THE next morning the 3d Battalion, 357th Infantry, when it passed through the lines to begin the exploitation, encountered the 106th Reserve Regiment, first-class Saxon troops. It appears that this regiment was the advance-guard of the 123d Division, which had been in reserve but was moving

forward to counter- attack. According to the German official report of the St. Mihiel operations, “The most advanced regiment of the 123d Division, which was already at Onville at 4:15 A. M., was sent to La Grange-en-Haye Farm at 5:45 A. M., therefore before the attack”; and “At 8:15 A. M. the commanding general gave permission to advance the foremost regiment of the 123d Division to the cross-roads two kilometers southwest of Preny and to send the rest of the division forward to Grange-en-Haye Farm” At 11 A. M. this division was ordered to make a counter-attack against the American right flank in the direction of Viéville-en-Haye.

The action of the 3d Battalion played a big part in frustrating this counter-attack. As the 123d Division became involved in the general defense, it was unable to launch its counter-attack in full force, although a slight attack was made the night of September 13 on the 5th Division front. The artillery supporting the 90th Division put down a barrage in front of the 5th Division sector, and helped break up this threatened danger.

From the statement of prisoners that it was the mission of the 106th Reserve Regiment to hold the narrow-gauge railway through St. Marie Farm at all costs, it appears that this regiment was covering the advance of the other elements of the division. The resistance which the Saxons offered to the advance of the 3d Battalion through the Vencheres forest was very bitter, and by nightfall the battalion had progressed only about 1500 meters, digging in along the narrow-gauge railway that runs through the forest from northwest to southeast. Throughout the night their positions were harassed by machine gun concentrations. The Americans replied, and the piles of German dead revealed in advance of the 3d Battalion’s position the next morning bore gruesome witness to the accuracy of their fire.

Major John M. True, commanding the 3d Battalion, had received his promotion to lieutenant-colonel just before September 12, but he put the notice in his pocket and told no one about it until after the fighting, as he feared he might not have the chance to lead his battalion were his promotion known.

The 1st Battalion exploited for the 358th Infantry. It passed through the 2d and 3d Battalions, which remained on the previous day’s objective, traversed the Vilcey-sur-Trey valley, drawing hardly a hostile shot, and entered the Vencheres forest. Only slight resistance was encountered. A few prisoners were captured. Major Dan Morgan Smith brought his men back for supper that night at the south edge of Vencheres, 1500 meters west of Vilcey-sur-Trey. During the night the battalion worked its way back through the woods to the St. Marie valley. The morning of the 14th was spent in organizing for defense the edge of the Vencheres woods overlooking this valley.

CAPTURE OF BOIS-LE-PRETRE AND NORROY QUARRIES

THE greatest advance on September 13 was made by the 360th Infantry, which enveloped practically the entire Bois-le-Pretre and inscribed the name “Norroy Quarries” on the roll of brilliant achievements of the Texas Brigade.

The notorious Bois-le-Pretre had been the scene of some of the bloodiest fighting of the war. In 1915 the French attacked with violence, with hopes of getting through the woods and working down the ravines toward the Moselle. The battle continued for months, and gains were measured in terms of yards. Later the Germans counter-attacked and wrested away all that had been won from them. The French are reported to have lost 123,000 men of whom 18,000 were killed, in this area. When all advance ceased in 1915, the opposing trenches were so close together that a sound above a whisper could be heard by the enemy. Gradually the contending forces pulled their outposts back, leaving trenches in No Man’s Land.

In drawing the plans for the St. Mihiel operation, the Norroy Quarries had been particularly feared. They were not included in the objectives of the attack, but were left to be dealt with by exploitation. However, on September 12 they were the objects of special consideration on the part of the heavy artillery in order to prepare the way for subsequent operations. Gas troops had also been provided, who promised to drive the garrisons from their defenses. But subsequent investigation showed that the artillery had been unable to make an impression on the German defenses, which included mined dugouts forty feet deep. Furthermore, the gassing program fell through on account of the fact that the first projector touched off blew up, killing the lieutenant in charge and many of his men.

Receiving permission the night of September 12 to exploit, General McAlexander organized an operation the purpose of which was to seize all the high ground south of Trey valley. The brigade was given the direct support of a battalion of howitzers, in addition to the light regiment covering the brigade front. The 360th Infantry was selected to make the attack.

Colonel Price pinched off this formidable spot neatly. During the night of the 12th, the 2d Battalion, commanded by Major Charles F. Kerr, which had been released from division reserve, passed through the 1st, and took up a position in the Bois-le-Petre along the Route de Bois Communaux. At 7 A. M. this battalion advanced northeast, simultaneously with the movement of the 3d Battalion due north. Their progress was strongly opposed by the enemy, who, protected in concrete pill-boxes, had not been affected by the artillery preparation. But, overcoming machine gun resistance, and ignoring the bursting of high explosives, the two battalions occupied and thoroughly mopped up the quarries by 5 P. M. Patrols from the 3d Battalion found the town of Norroy unoccupied. An outpost was established on a high point of land known as the Croix des Vandieres, although it was in the sector of 82d Division, which had not advanced.

Large quantities of stores, especially medical supplies and machine gun parts and ammunition, were captured. Among the spoils were minenwerfer, gas projectors, grenades, telephone repair kits, signal outfits, and German rations and equipment. The German dugouts, which had been abandoned in haste, provided the victorious Americans the most comfortable quarters they had enjoyed for many a day. There were recreation rooms with pianos and talking-machines intact; handsomely furnished dining-rooms with beautiful serving sets; and offices equipped with every convenience.

During the day, September 13, the 3d Battalion sent out patrols into the Bois-le-Presle, and at night moved forward to occupy the Tranchée de la Combe. The 2d Battalion was later moved forward to fill in the gap between the 3d Battalion, 359th Infantry, and the left of the 360th Infantry. On September 14 the outposts of the 359th were pushed forward to the edge of the woods overlooking the Vilcey-Villers valley. Lieutenant-Colonel E. K. Sterling, who had been division machine gun officer, took command of the 359th Infantry the night of September 13.

EXPLOITATION ON SEPTEMBER 14

BASED on the intelligence reports which he had received, General Allen decided, early on the morning of the 14th, to exploit more vigorously, with the view not only of advancing the outpost position, but of moving the main line of resistance northward also. The facility of the advance of the 358th Infantry, and the discovery by a patrol of the 359th Infantry that practically all enemy troops had withdrawn from Villers-sous-Preny and that the civilians were being evacuated, pointed to a retirement toward the Hindenburg line. Therefore, at 9 A. M. Field Order No. 4 was issued, stating: "We will continue our exploitation within the division sector north toward the Hindenburg line with a view to occupying a new

line of resistance.” The substance of this order had been previously telephoned to brigade commanders.

This proposal found a ready response in General O’Neil’s Irish fighting spirit, and two battalions from each of his regiments were soon on their way with orders to clean out thoroughly the country to the front. The two battalions of the 358th Infantry were ordered due north to Les Huit Chemins, whence they were to turn northeast to Preny. After this movement had got under way, definite orders from the corps made a change in plans necessary. Hence at 4 P. M. Field Order No. 5 was issued, stating that the line of resistance would remain as before, but strong reconnaissance would be pushed to the Hindenburg Line.

In the meantime the troops of the 179th Brigade had already taken up the advance. About 1:30 P. M. the 2d Battalion, 358th Infantry, moved forward from its position on the first day’s objective to support the 1st Battalion. At 4 P. M. the general advance on both regimental fronts began.

The 2d Battalion was chosen to lead for the 357th Infantry, with the 1st Battalion in support, just prior to the passage of lines, the 3d Battalion, which was still in front, was strongly assailed, two German battalions participating in the action. This attack was beaten off, Company L in particular distinguishing itself, the passage of lines was consummated, and the 2d Battalion took up the advance. Captain Lammons encountered opposition of the severest type. Machine guns in trees gave much trouble, but these were cleaned out by the heroism of men like Private Aaron F. Valentine, Company A, 344th Machine Gun Battalion, who, when the infantrymen of Company E were held up by a gunner firing from a tree in St. Marie valley, mounted his gun in the open and knocked the German from his perch. While he was setting up his gun, several hostile shots struck the tripod, one cutting the chain holding the trunnion-pin. Company F, led by Captain W. F. Cooper, and a platoon of Company E, led by Lieutenant H. G. Bradford, succeeded in crossing the valley and gaining the woods on the other side, but when darkness came the battalion drew back and occupied the holes which had been dug the night before by the 3rd Battalion, the ground to the front being held by patrols. During the night the 3rd and 1st Battalions withdrew to the line of resistance.

During the day the 5th Division also had resumed the advance on our left, and at 5:30 P. M. reported that detachments had reached Hill 361.4, an eminence just within our sector which covered the open ground across which it was necessary for the 5th to advance. This hill was popularly known as “Bill Jones.”

Lieutenant-Colonel Everington was in command of the two battalions of the 358th Infantry which started across St. Marie valley at 4 P. M. The Germans had discovered the presence of a considerable body of troops on this position and were making the edge of the woods hot with artillery. The 2nd Battalion, which had reached a position in the old German trenches along the east ridge of Vencheres, suffered particularly heavily. Here one shell killed Captain Sam R. Craig and wounded Lieutenant Albert J. Sergeant, both of Company A. Captain Henry E. Robertson, 344th Machine Gun Battalion, was wounded. Another shell blew off the arm of Lieutenant Murray N. McCune, Stokes mortar platoon of Headquarters Company.

Here, also, Major Ashburn received his second wound. He had been wounded and evacuated during the first hour’s fighting on September 12, but he would not stay in the hospital, and was back with the Battalion that night, returning command the morning of the 13th. This time a sniper got him through the leg, which put him out for the rest of the fighting. The masterly manner in which he led his companies, together with his pluck in resuming the fight, was recognized by the D. S. C.

Anticipating the American attack, the Hun had manned his defenses in the Bois la Dame and Bois de Villers, which overlooked the St. Marie Valley. Here existed a double line of wired trenches, reinforced with machine guns, which were unknown and unsuspected. Here the 94th Landwehr Regiment, from Hanover with orders to hold the hill at all costs, fought to the death. These troops were covering the retirement of the main body of enemy to the Hindenburg line. Men of the 2d Battalion, 358th Infantry, came out of the scrap convinced that the fighting of the first day of the attack was mere child's play to this desperate struggle in the dark.

By 8 P. M. remnants of the two battalions had reached Les Quatre Chemins, a prominent road junction which was mistaken for Les Huit Chemins, or "the Eight Roads." The remainder of the night was spent in exploring the woods and in disposing the outposts around Les Quatre Chemins. Captain Danenhour established the outposts for the 1st Battalion, and Captain Simpson commanded the 2d Battalion. Captain Hubert G. Peters, regimental operations officer, accompanied the advance.

The next morning orders were received to draw back. By mistake, instead of one battalion being pulled back, both started back. The 2d Battalion returned to the south edge of Vencheres for supper, then went into support position that night in the old German trenches on the east edge of Vencheres, where they had suffered such heavy casualties the previous day, remaining here three days. The 1st Battalion also came back, but, on reaching the Vencheres woods, again received orders to advance and establish the outpost line. Fortunately, by this time most of the enemy had withdrawn also, and our retirement for a short time occasioned no serious trouble. The 3d Battalion, 358th Infantry, was in reserve position during this time in the woods north of Moulin de Jaillard.

The 2d Battalion, 357th Infantry, resumed the advance about 2 o'clock the afternoon of the 15th. The advance across St. Marie valley was preceded by a short machine gun barrage by Company A, 344th Machine Gun Battalion, commanded by Captain Hans Runge. The valley was crossed and the woods to the north entered without serious opposition. Deserted minenwerfer, machine guns, and large quantities of ammunition were found. The 2d Battalion established liaison with the 358th Infantry near Huit Chemins (known as "White Shimmy"), and patrols from both regiments pushed out to the north edge of the Bois des Rappes.

Although the enemy had withdrawn from the Bois des Rappes, he was still holding Bois du Trou de la Haie and the slender necks of woods which jutted out from it. Machine gun positions in La Souleuvre Farm also caused trouble until mopped up about 7 P. M.



The 315th Engineers building roads across No Man's Land, north of Fey-en-Haye, about September 14



Men of the 315th Engineers and the 357th Infantry, building roads over old No Man's Land near Fey-en-Haye. The roads through Fey-en-Haye and Regnieville were obliterated by the years of artillery activity, and much work had to be done both during and after the drive, the workers being always under the eyes of enemy observers directing artillery fire.

180TH BRIGADE TAKES CÔTE 327 AND HILL 367.0

GENERAL M CALEXANDER made his dispositions in compliance with Field Order No. 5, 9 P. M., September 14, as follows: the 1st Battalion of the 360th Infantry would advance and organize an outpost position including Côte 327 and the Bois Chenaux; the 1st Battalion, 359th Infantry, to continue this outpost along Hill 367.0 and through the woods to the brigade left boundary.

Preceding the general advance ordered for the morning of September 15, strong patrols from both regiments aggressively scoured the country to the front during the night of September 14-15. In the 359th Infantry four platoons, one from each company of the 1st Battalion, were employed on this mission.

Two of these platoons, led by Lieutenant L. C. Davidson, Company A, and Lieutenant Raymond A. Schoherth, Company B, respectively, raided the trenches along the southeast edge of Bois des

Rappes. This remarkable feat, which was most skillfully executed, was particularly noteworthy in that it paved the way for the next day's advance, enabling the 1st Battalion, 359th Infantry, to cross the open valley without serious difficulty. In order to slip up on the Germans unaware, Lieutenant Davidson carried a German-speaking soldier with him to answer the sentry's challenge. The Hun was skeptical, however, when he received the reply 'Friends' in German, insisting that no patrols had been sent out from the lines. Lieutenant Davidson replied that his patrol had been out five hours, leaving before the sentry came on post. During this parley Davidson's men succeeded in cutting gaps through the wire, and all rushed forward simultaneously Davidson personally killed the sentry whom he had duped. About twenty Germans were killed, forty were captured, and the patrol took back with it several machine guns which would have proved murderous the following day had they not been "extracted" just in time.

Jumping off at 8:15 A. M., September 15, the battalion suffered only slight casualties and was on its objective at 11:56 A. M. In the Bois des Rappes a six-inch field-piece, three six-inch minenwerfer, and twenty machine guns, in addition large stores of ammunition, were taken.

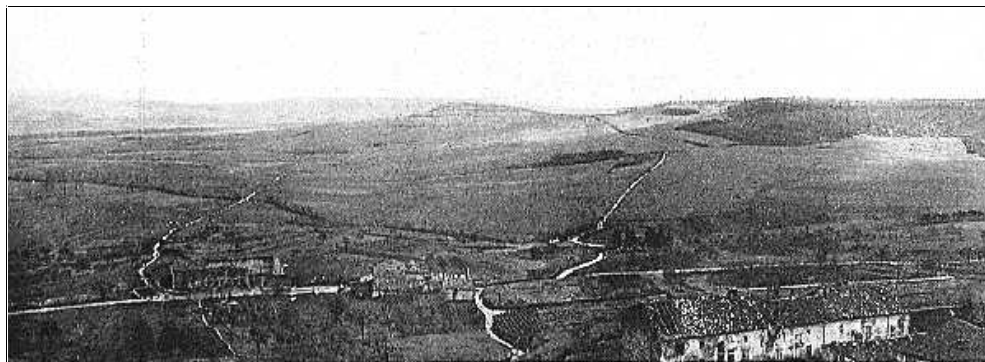
The 3d Battalion, 359th Infantry, followed the 1st in support on the morning of the 15th and took up a position in the Bois des Rappes. The 2d Battalion remained in the Tranchée de la Combe.

While the 1st Battalion, 360th Infantry, was moving forward on the night of September 14-15 to the jumping-off position in the woods overlooking Villers-sous-Preny, patrols from the 2d and 3d battalions were paving the way for its operations on the following day. A platoon from Company I, led by Lieutenant Joseph S. Barnett, surprised an enemy outpost on Côte 327 and captured two machine guns with their crews of six men each. These guns were operated by Sergeant Caphus Clark and Corporal Moore from this position during the advance of the 1st Battalion on September 15. Early on the morning of the 15th a second platoon from Company I joined Lieutenant Barnett's command. A patrol from Company K, after several daring adventures, reached the saddle between Côte 327 and Bois des Rappes. It was while on a patrol from Company M that Lieutenant Vernon D. Hart was killed. Detachments from Companies F and G entered the trenches on the east edge of Bois des Rappes and killed a number of Germans.

As a result of these courageous enterprises, the 1st Battalion was able to advance on the morning of September 15 without the stiff machine gun fire which would have proved deadly on any attempt to cross the open valley. By 10 A. M. the battalion had occupied the outpost position from Côte 327 to the point in the Bois des Rappes where contact was made with the 359th Infantry, and had reinforced the platoons of the 3d Battalion on Côte 327 itself. This movement across the valley naturally drew heavy artillery fire, and the outpost positions both in the region of Côte 327 and in the Bois de Chenaux were heavily bombarded.

This advance placed the outposts of the 90th Division at least four kilometers ahead of the 82d Division on the right. During the day of September 14 General Allen had talked to the commanding general, 82d Division, and an agreement was reached that the 90th Division would take care of Côte 327, which was in the 82d Division sector, if the 82d cooperated in the advance. On September 14 a battalion of the 328th Infantry, the left regiment of the 82d, established its P. C. in the cinema at Norroy; and on the following day, during the successful advance of the 1st Battalion, 360th Infantry, an attack was made on Vandieres, but did not succeed on account of heavy artillery fire. The neighboring division did not again attempt to advance. Upon relieving the 82d Division west of the Moselle on the night of September 16-17, the 360th Infantry established outposts in Vandieres.

The result of the occupation of this position by the 90th Division was that it was necessary to face east as well as north. And Hence the 3d Battalion at Norroy was in the outpost position as well as on the main line of resistance.



View of Bois de Rappes and Côte 327, taken from Preny after armistice.



Men of the 2d Battalion, 358th Infantry, passing through Vilcey-sur-Trey, on September 15, returning to reserve position after hard fighting in the Bois de Rappes.



View of Villers-sur-Preny

RECONNAISSANCE OF HINDENBURG LINE

ON the morning of September 16 General Allen ordered out daylight patrols with a view to reconnoitering the Hindenburg line. Very little headway was made, machine gun fire being encountered very soon after leaving our lines. After dark, however, the Germans withdrew their more advanced outposts, and during the night the 360th reached a point about 300 meters southwest of Pagny-sur-Moselle, while a patrol led by Lieutenant Floyd G. Betts, regimental scout officer of the 358th Infantry, surrounded Preny. Later on, however, the Germans strengthened their outposts in front of Pagny and Preny and along the camouflaged road running southwest from Preny.

This reconnaissance of the Hindenburg line was the finale of the forward movement. From that time on, efforts were devoted to the organization of the sector. On September 16 Colonel Hartmann moved his P. C. to a comfortable German dugout in the Stumpfleger. Captain Thomas B. Smith, a graduate of the third class of the General Staff College at Langres, who had been assigned to the 90th Division, joined the 357th Infantry the same day, and served as acting operations officer through the remainder of the war.

Colonel Leary had moved his P. C. on the second day of the fighting to old German dugouts in the valley in the heart of Bois de Friere, along the roadway from Fey-en-Haye to the Stumpfleger. Colonel Price remained at Le Petant Farm, and Colonel Sterling established his P. C. in the Bois-le-Pretre along the Fey-en-Haye-Norroy road. The Division P. C. moved back to Villers-en-Haye on September 17.

The P. C. of the 179th Brigade, which had been in a dugout on Tranchée de Cri Cri since September 14, moved to Mamey, and the P. C. of the 180th Brigade was established at Champ Clos in the suburbs of Pont-à-Mousson.

Going forward with the infantry and machine guns, and suffering the same hardships and dangers, were many special troops which played no small part in bringing about the success of the American troops. For example, the signal platoons of the regiments, which, in conjunction with details from the Outpost Company of the 315th Field Signal Battalion, maintained telephonic communication with battalion commanders despite the shelling which constantly chopped their wires, earned the praise received from all commanders. The trench mortar and 37 mm, platoons of the regimental headquarters companies, too, worked faithfully and were always prepared for any emergency, although the opportunity did not come for spectacular service. Owing to the weight of the mortars and the guns, the difficulty of carrying these weapons and a sufficient supply of ammunition was so great that there was not time to call them into action in an operation in which the infantry was rushing forward at the maximum speed in order to keep up with the barrage. In addition, in wooded country such as existed in the division sector, it was difficult to get sufficiently definite targets.

Too much credit cannot be given the wagoners of the regimental supply companies, who kept close on the heels of the fast advancing infantrymen with rolling kitchens, ration carts, and water carts. No division in the American Expeditionary Forces made a better record in getting hot food up to the men immediately after the fight. This was achieved in spite of the condition of the roads. No less important was the hauling forward of munitions. These achievements are noteworthy when it is recalled that both horses and drivers were frequently killed.

In no class of men was a stoical disregard for danger and hardship more evident than in the attitude of these drivers, the majority of whom had grown to manhood on the plains and stock farms of

Texas and Oklahoma. Wagoner Andrew Pennell, Supply Company, 358th Infantry, illustrates this characteristic unconcern for peril when duty is involved. While driving along a shell-swept road with supplies for the front, he was stopped by an M. P., who said:

“You can’t go up that road: it’s too dangerous.”

“Your road?” inquired Pennell.

“I’m in charge,” said the M. P.

“Well, the Germans are shelling the devil out of it back a-ways, and if it’s yourn, you had better go look after it.”

With this parting shot, the wagoner slapped his wheel team with the reins and was soon out of view on the road, on which shells were dropping intermittently.

Corporal Enos H. Rush, of the same company, was equally regardless of danger. He was ordered by Major Dan Morgan Smith, 2d Battalion, 358th Infantry, not to drive along a road in the St. Mihiel sector on account of the shelling. Like the other officers, Major Smith had removed all distinguishing insignia in order that he might not furnish too conspicuous a target for German snipers. Those who know Major Smith will realize that his huge frame is a large enough target without added attractions.

“I’m not taking any orders from any big fat private,” said Rush, “My wagon is needed up there and I’m going.”

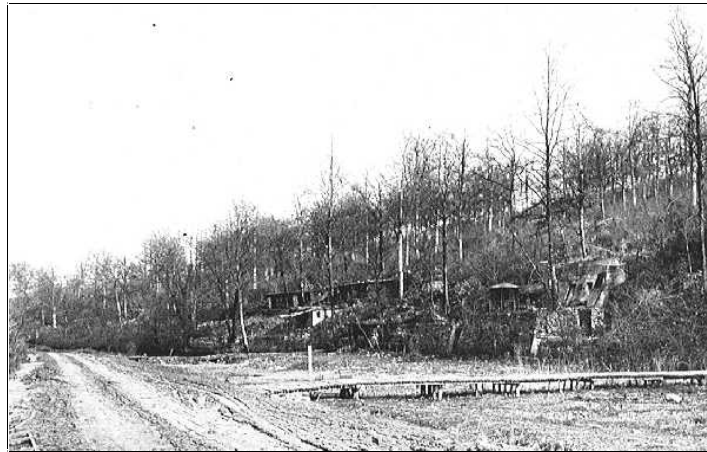
He did.

While practically all the efforts of the 315th Engineers were devoted to road work, as the opening up of lines of communication was recognized to be the matter of primary importance, detachments of engineering troops went forward with the infantry. One platoon of Company A, under Lieutenant P. M. Nicolett, and one platoon of Company C, commanded by Lieutenant R. A. Minter, accompanied the assaulting wave. These platoons were prepared to remove obstructions: but as the infantry chose to hurdle the wire, the platoons fought, filled trenches, cleared some wire, and brought up ammunition.

The remainder of Companies A and C, which were placed in the 179th Brigade sector under Major Harry F. Cooper, and Companies D and F, under Major E. A. Wood, operating in the 180th Brigade sector, opened trails for the passage of artillery, and immediately after the attack started work on roads. Companies B and F, which had been held as reserve under the Division engineer in the southwest edge of the Forêt de Puvenelle, were brought forward the morning of September 12 and also engaged on road work.



German dugout on the Stumpfager, used for a dressing station.



German dugouts in Stumpfager, captured by the 357th Infantry on September 12. The 1st Battalion, the assaulting unit of the 357th Infantry, suffered its heaviest casualties in crossing the road and gaining the bluffs on the north side. The P. C. Of the 357th Infantry was later located in these dugouts. Improvements noted in the picture, such as walks, steps and concrete construction, were the work of four years of occupancy by the Boches. After the drive of September 12 these dugouts were easy targets for German artillery and both buildings and roads were frequently shelled.