

THOUSAND MEN LOST WITHIN THREE HOURS

Order to Take Gesnes Costly
for 91st Division.

SEPT. 29 MEMORABLE DATE

Summons to Officers and Men of
181st Brigade Well Understood
and Soldiers Respond.

BY COLIN V. DYMENT.
American Red Cross Stationer in the Ninety-
first Division.

TWENTY-NINTH ARTICLE.
It was about 2:30 P. M., September 29, when the order came that cost the 181st brigade of the 91st division 1000 casualties in less than three hours. The order directed the brigade to take Gesnes. And it added three words. The three words were "regardless of cost."

The loss of 1000 men makes a big hole in a single division. The total casualties of the 91st in both France and Belgium were about 6500. Thus nearly one-sixth of them were inflicted by Fritz between 2:40 and darkness on the afternoon of the 29th in the right wing brigade alone.

After the futile attempt at advance between 7 and 9 in the morning and the withdrawal to the south slope of Miller hill, the men simply lay in foxholes and shellholes all the forenoon and the early part of the afternoon. Fritz shelled, the westerners dozed, cowered on their emergency ration, carved back the occasional wounded, took what the Hun sent and made the best of it, guarding meanwhile against the counter-attack that the Hun was too wary to make. In this way they were lying when 2:30 came.

There was to be a five-minute artillery preparation from the American guns, so the order said. The supporting artillery for the 91st in the Argonne was the 122d, 123d and 124th P. A., largely an Illinois outfit that had been rushed over from the St. Mihiel salient after the cleanup there of middle September. The 91st's own artillery, the 246th, 247th and 248th P. A., crossed with it to France and never saw it thereafter. The horses of the 122d, 123d and 124th were worn out from the St. Mihiel trip; they had hurried across to the Forêt de Hessey, 50 miles, without adequate rest and food; many had died; shells had killed many others; and every time one of them fell from exhaustion or wounds, just 800 more were thrown upon his fellows. It was hard, accordingly, for the guns to keep up. The sight of dead horses in very canyon was pitiful, and on the plateau on each side, and some of them were artillery nags. Transport troubles helped make the artillerymen back of the 91st the profane persons they were.

Order Fully Understood.
So, some have always said that the five-minute artillery preparation for the Gesnes attack never came, but part of it at any rate came, though largely drowned out by the German artillery; and in any event, there stands the order to attack at 2:40, after five minutes' artillery preparation, and take Gesnes "regardless of cost."

A sort of solemnity ought perhaps to have marked the hour preceding 2:40, but it didn't exactly. The officers knew what they were up against; the men who had heard of the order knew, too. Many softly swore as they waited. Others made jests—very good ones, some of them. A saving thing indeed in the Argonne was the western sense of humor. Captain Lige Worsham was there, among others, with the same old smile and the same old jazz. Worsham may have had as much as a single night's sleep since the 25th. "Boys, I'll be a picnic today. We'll get a lot of 'em," he had said to some of his men in the morning. To Captain Tracy of company G, 362d, he said just before 2:40, "Captain, we'll get the dogs, shan't we?" "Goodbye, Tiny, I'm off," replied Tracy, and went to his company. Because of Worsham's great stature and splendid proportions, he was known as Tiny to his associates. Tracy got to Gesnes before being wounded; Worsham got to 800 yards south of Gesnes.

Three-forty had come! It was up out of the foxholes and over the hog-back. Over the crest they went, wave after wave of big men from the Rocky mountain and Pacific coast states; a beautiful but terrible sight. It was terrible, too, to Fritz on the ridge just ahead, and except for a few bold spirits he promptly retired, sending up rockets. And in response to the rockets came the barrage.

Can eye see and mind grasp from these puny words what the 362d infantry and the 24th battalion of the 361st and the machine gun support then went through?

Fire on Three Sides.

The barrage struck the crest of the ridge soon after the first wave surmounted it. The men walked right on ahead through and out of it. Then it was that the German planes appeared and kept their artillery signaled, so that the barrage fell again upon smaller ranks and followed them up on the second ridge and over the top of it and down into the second hollow and up the third ridge and over the top of it and down the third ridge to the bottom in front of Gesnes—without heart.

Meanwhile, though the machine guns fled from in front clear back of Gesnes, those on the flanks did not have to, and from northwest to northeast at first, and later as the brigade still stumbled on, from the west and the east, they poured in their bursts of bullets; and finally, just before dark, so far had the brigade gone, it was possible to flank fire the remnant of troops from the southwest and southeast.

It may be remembered that in the 27th installment the location was described of the Bois de la Morine, a woods a mile west by southwest of Gesnes and in front of the 182d brigade of the 91st. The machine-gun nests and riflemen in the Bois de la Morine, together with some flank fire from their own left, and the fearful artillery fire from the hills back of Gesnes, prevented the 182d brigade from keeping up with the 181st and, in fact, from going farther than the Exermont road, several hundred yards in front of the Morine woods. Similarly, the 27th division at the 91st's right was unable to get through the village of Clerges, a German machine-gun stronghold. That is why the men who went into Gesnes had fire on three sides, and that is why they were told to retire that night.

Germans in Full Retreat.

Even before 5 o'clock numerous figures could be seen scurrying up the slope behind Gesnes. They were Germans, and the 247th machine gun battalion and the 362d machine gun company took considerable toll. They were in full retreat, whether in panic or whether by orders so that the 362d and 361st might be led into a narrow salient (about a mile wide) is hard to say; but doubtless in panic, for it was no goodly sight to a German to see relentlessly coming and coming men who had bayonets and who when knocked down often got up and went on again,



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and who though diminishing fast showed no signs of stopping.

Hoping to stop them, Fritz drenched Gesnes with gas shells. Yet the second battalion of the 361st and the 362d, all broken and scattered by now, went right on through Gesnes, or around to the sides of it, and it is actually true that there are living today hundreds of western soldiers who can truthfully say that they were among those who went up the hill back of Gesnes, dug themselves in, lay down in their holes and settled themselves for the night, ready to stay there till Hades should freeze.

A hard job lay ahead; the job of consolidating that new front line position. Here was a piece of platoon, over there part of a gun squad, every now and then a lone individual clean lost from his outfit, but still pushing on. There was no liaison, but there must be by daybreak, or the thin line would go. It was up to the officers to get a stout line established, for in the morning the Hun would surely counter attack.

Betterton's Fate Mystery.

But the job never was done. The second battalion headquarters of the 361st sent three intelligence men out to each flank, and these men returned with the news, about an hour later, that German machine guns were out on each flank and that the 362d had been told to go back. The 361st men, however,

had received no such order, and four officers who had got together were a unit for sticking it out in the position that had been won at such cost. Any way, First Lieutenant Cherril R. Betterton, battalion intelligence officer, had gone back just at dark to regimental P. C. with the battalion major, and Betterton was to return with any new orders. So the four lay down in their foxholes to wait for the morning. Now, the fate of Cherril R. Betterton is one of the mysteries of the 91st. To this day he has never been found. As recently as February, almost five months after his disappearance, the 91st dispatched Captain Minnick of company G, 361st, and two or three other men, from the embarkation area to the Argonne to look for traces of Betterton. They returned without news of the fine lieutenant, who was a University of Washington graduate and a Seattle man.

The lieutenant had reached regimental P. C. with the major, and had started back with the orders. They read that the 361st should retire like the 362d, since both flanks were exposed. With the lieutenant went a corporal of company G named John Cudd, a big, good-looking corporal. They were to make a tour of the new front line, notifying the broken units to return to the line of 3:40, a mile and a half retreat.

It was exceedingly dark on the night of the 29th, after the sunny day; clouds were gathering for the rain that soon began to splash on the wounded dead

out on the field. The Argonne is a hard country in which to go straight, and no light dared be shown. The lieutenant and Cudd stumbled along in the dark, unable to heed the appeals of the wounded. One of the tough things in war is that times come when wounded cannot be helped. The two men hurried over the shell-cut ridges as fast as they could, although Betterton was almost exhausted. Powerful physique though he had, he had fainted once in the afternoon, about 5:30 o'clock, upon return from an hour and a half reconnaissance, falling at the feet of his major but forcing himself up again almost at once. He had been up in Gesnes and got gas.

Challenge Comes in German.

At last, somewhere near Gesnes, they were challenged, and the challenge came in German. Both men dropped instantly. At close range a machine gun opened; and, true to the fine stuff of which he was made, Betterton in what were perhaps his last words thought of his man.

"Run for your life. I'm gone," he cried out to Cudd, and Cudd ran. By and by the corporal began to encounter Americans. "Lieutenant Betterton's been killed," he told everyone whom he met, and when he reported to headquarters he was crying with rage and grief; and he was by no means the only man who cried on the night after Gesnes; men cried when they had to give up the ground, and when they



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AT
MIDNIGHT
GOIN' FAST AND TONIGHT'S
THE LAST
"THE ROARING ROAD"
FEATURING
WALLACE REID

FOR THRILLS—
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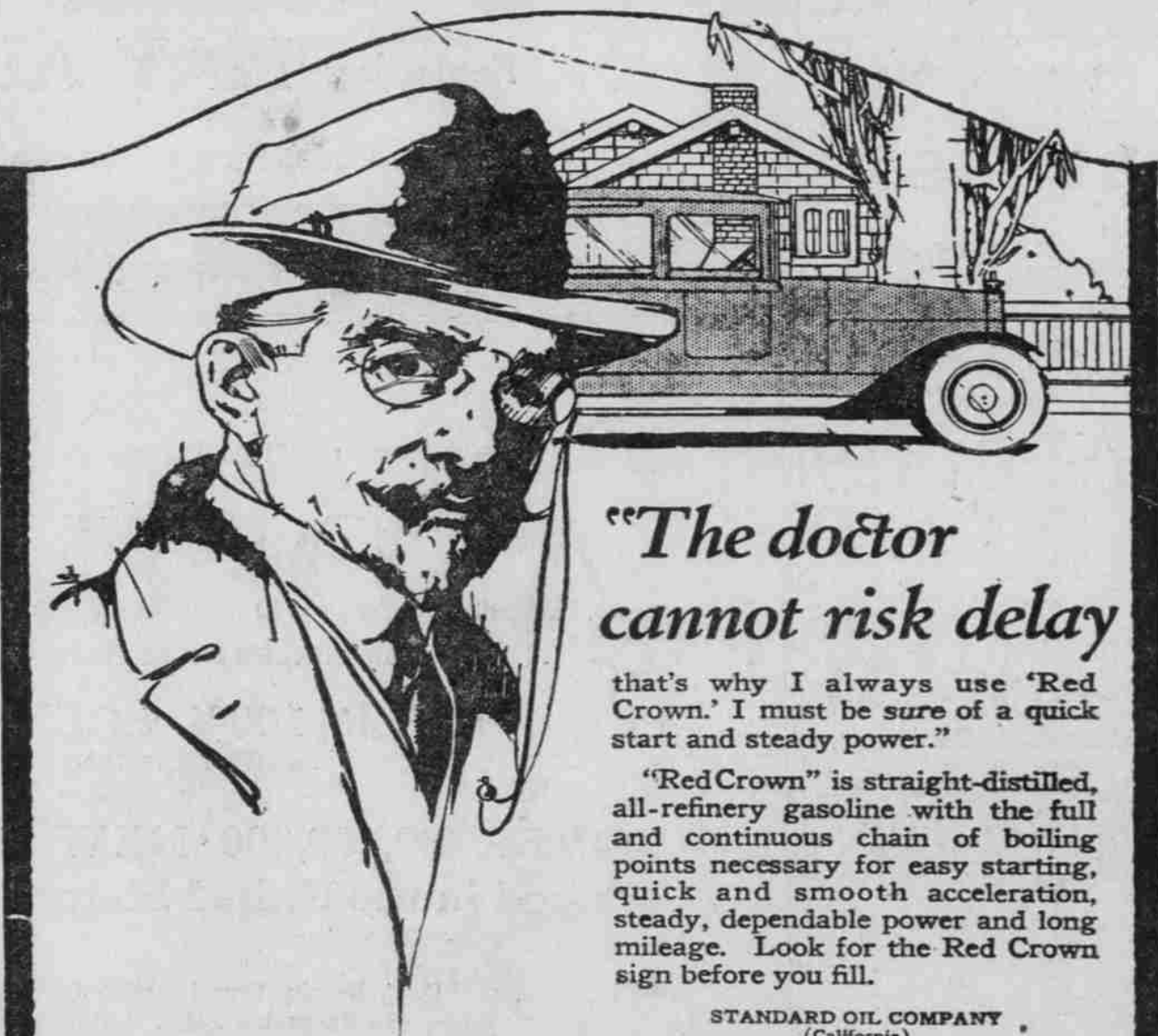
second battalion of the 361st after Betterton's disappearance.

office at Byron, Cal., was indicted by the federal jury here today on a charge of embezzling \$1500 from the postoffice. He was arrested in Seattle.

In the 26th installment Lieutenant Dymont will begin telling of the men who died in the great battle of Gesnes, and will describe the rescue of the

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