

91st Off to France July 6, 1918 to Write Proud History

Meuse-Argonne Push Among Bright Pages In Division Narrative

It was July 6th, 1918, when the crowded liners carrying the 91st Infantry Division, A. E. F., slid from their docks and started their perilous journey across the Atlantic. Twelve tense days passed, but finally at 6 p. m. on July 17 anchors were dropped at Liverpool. Other transports carried others of the fighting westerners to London, Glasgow, Southampton and La Havre. After a brief rest period the men were entrained for the interior of France.

By the first day of August the Division (less artillery) was settled in its final training area in the Department of Haute-Marne, with divisional headquarters at Montigny-le-Roi. For the same purpose the artillery Brigade went to Camp de Souge (Gironde) and Clermont-Ferrand (Puy-de-Dome). At these places the Division underwent incessant drilling and long hours of marching until it was declared ready for the "big push" ahead. On August 29, Major General William Johnston came to the Division as commanding general and on September 7 the Division moved to the vicinity of Gondrecourt, with headquarters at that place. It was assigned to the reserve of the First American Army during the St. Mihiel offensive, with headquarters at Sorcy.

Meuse-Argonne Offensive Prepared

The success of the St. Mihiel offensive being assured, the Division moved to Vavincourt on September 14th and a few days later to Autrecourt, where the staff learned its mission to smash through the Meuse-Argonne. Soon Ohio's 37th Division relieved the Westerners so that the 91st could prepare for the great Meuse-Argonne offensive. From that time on Ohio's 37th Division and the 91st fought side by side, climaxing with a brilliant drive across the lowlands of Belgium and affecting a general German retreat.

The 91st entered the Meuse-Argonne sector September 20, 1918, and suffered a few casualties due to raids by the Germans between that date and September 26, when it assumed the offensive. Nearly every division employed in the Meuse-Argonne had previously served either on the offensive or in some sector of the line on the defensive, but the 91st had no such preliminary experience under fire. In spite of this fact, the fighting 91st captured more artillery, machine guns and prisoners, and advanced a greater distance under fire than several divisions with much longer experience.

Pershing's Confidence Proves Well Founded

On the 25th General John J. Pershing, commander-in-chief, personally visited Major General Johnston to express his confidence in the men of the 91st before they marched into battle. On the first day the 91st broke through two German lines, penetrated past a third, and made an advance of eight kilometers. The enemy was driven from such key positions as Vervy, Epinonville, Gesnes, Eclisfontaine, Tronsol Farm and to a point within half a kilometer of the stronghold of Ivroly.

A great tribute was paid to the 91st by Commanding General George H. Cameron of the Fifth Army Corps in an order to General Johnston in which he said:

"At a time when the divisions on its flanks were faltering and even falling back, the 91st pushed ahead and steadfastly clung to every yard gained. In its initial performance, your division has established itself firmly in the list of the commander-in-chief's reliable fighting units. Please extend to your officers and men my appreciation of their splendid behavior and my hearty congratulations on the brilliant record they have made."

On October 4 the division was relieved by the 32nd division and went to the vicinity of Conrion.

One of the great honors given the division came on October 16 when, along with the 37th, it was named as America's contribution to the armies in Flanders which, under King Albert, were about to launch one last desperate drive at the enemy in Belgium. With these two American divisions were troops of Belgium, France and England.

Wild West Division Goes on Rampage

The 91st went over the top in the early morning mists of October 31. From that time on, until the very moment of 11 a. m. on November 11, the "Wild West Division" attacked and drove the enemy back in panic. By nightfall of November 1 the 91st held the outskirts of Audenarde; the next day the entire town was in the division's possession. Then in rapid order it took Welden, Petegem and Kasteelwijk.

On the morning of November 10, with the 182nd infantry brigade in the lead, the 91st division doughboys began pressing the fleeing Germans hard. They crossed the Scheldt river near Eyne and occupied a gap in the allied forward wall between Cauwenberg and Moldergem.

With only hours to go before the "zero hour" of Armistice Day, the 182nd Infantry Brigade took Boule-St. Blaise at the point of the bayonet, cracked into and through Hoogstraet, and had advanced beyond Moldergem when the order came to cease firing.

91st Division Cited By French General

Because of this valiant fighting, the following order was issued by Major General De Goutte who had resumed command of the Sixth French Army: VI French Army

H. Q. 11 December, 1918
General Order No. 31

"In addressing the Divisions of the United States Army who covered themselves with glory in the Chateau-Thierry offensive, I said that orders given by the Commanding officers were always accomplished irrespective of the difficulties arising thereby or the sacrifices to be made."

"I have found the same spirit of duty and discipline freely given in the 91st and 182nd Divisions, United States Army, which brings about valiant soldiers and victorious armies."

"On the heights between the Lys and the Escaut the enemy was to be held 'to the death'. The American troops belonging to these divisions, acting with the French divisions of the Flanders Army Group, smashed them on October 31, 1918, and after hard fighting threw them back upon the Escaut."

"Then in an operation of extraordinary daring, the American units crossed the Escaut under the enemy fire and maintained themselves on the opposite bank, notwithstanding enemy counter-attacks."

"Glory to such troops and to such commanders. They have bravely contributed to the liberation of a part of Belgian territory and to final victory."

"The great nation to which they belong can be proud of them."

"The Commanding General of the Army

-s- "De Goutte."

After the Armistice the 166th Field Artillery Brigade (less the

346th Field Artillery Regiment and the 316th Trench Mortar Battery) moved into Germany, occupying the village of Wittlich until February of 1919. Meanwhile, the infantry of the Division, after parading triumphantly with Ohio's men before cheering crowds in Brussels, patrolled the Franco-Belgian frontier west of Poperinghe from Beveren to Warande. On the 27th of December it moved to the American Embarkation Center near Le Mans, France, and on January 2, 1919, the 346th Field Artillery, first unit of the Division to board homeward bound transports, loaded aboard a steamer at Brest for home. The 316th Trench Mortar Battery sailed from St. Nazaire February 23rd and other units followed.

Division Headquarters Last To Leave France

Division Headquarters, last to leave France, sailed on April 6th. Final demobilization of the "Wild Westerners" was effected at Camp Kearny, California, Fort D. A. Russell, Wyoming, the Presidio of San Francisco, and at Camp Lewis in Washington.

While the Division served at Le Ferte Bernard, the following orders were issued to announce the name by which the Division was popularly known, the dis-

tinctive divisional insignia and motto:

1. The name "Wild West Division," by which this Division has been known since the days of its organization at Camp Lewis, Washington, in 1917, is officially recognized as the distinctive divisional name.

2. The distinctive divisional design, a green fir tree, adopted as a personal badge, to be worn by each soldier and man of the Division (O. O. No. 57, 91st Infantry Division, 1918) is emblematic not only of the foliage found in each State from which the personnel of the Division was selected, but the ever green and ever useful character of this foliage is emblematic also of the state of readiness and the degree of usefulness which has characterized, and should continue to be the aim of each unit of the Division.

3. Since this Division was ready to participate in the St. Mihiel operation while standing in the reserve of the First American Army; since it was ready to attack in the front line of the Fifth Army Corps, from Fort de Heuse, when the Commander-in-Chief launched his attack against the enemy's line of communications between the Meuse River and the Argonne Forest; since some of its units were already entraining for Belgium before others, marching from the firing line, had reached the railroad; since its units never hesitated to attack the most formidable of the enemy's defenses in Belgium; and since its members are now ready,

either to return to the United States and resume the pursuits of peace, or to continue their service whenever ordered by the Commander-in-Chief, the phrase "Always Ready" is adopted as the divisional motto.

By command of Major General JOHNSTON:

Henry C. Jewett
Colonel, General Staff, Chief of Staff.
Official:
-s- D. J. Coman.
Major, A. G., Adjutant.

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day soon to come when "Powder River, Let 'er Buck" will become the ringing cry on some distant battle field. We're proud of these men, proud of the officers who will lead them, glad that they have come to OUR community to serve. Medford, Jackson County—and all Copcoland pays tribute to the 91st Division upon the occasion of the re-activation of the division tomorrow at Camp White.

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EVERY man, woman and child in southern Oregon—and the entire nation—may well be proud of this fighting division—the 91st! Rich in traditions of gallantry and achievement at Meuse-Argonne and Ypres-Lys a quarter-century ago, the Pine Tree Division will again bring glory to our flag, our nation and our com-

munity. Under the leadership of resourceful, brilliant Major General Gerhardt, the 91st will give a good account of itself in the days ahead. Visit Camp White Saturday morning... You will be inspired by the ceremonies marking the re-birth of a grand fighting outfit—the 91st.

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