

26TH NOW ON WAY TO SWAP ANCIENT MAINE FOR ITS OWN

Departing Division Will Down East Homestead to Le Mans

91ST OUT, 80TH COMING IN

28th Settles in Forwarding Camp; 35th and 77th Soon to Clear Embarkation Area

When springtime came to ancient Maine last week it found the 26th Division—the Yankee Division—marching toward New England, marching toward home.

After six weeks in a land that always looked as if a deluge had just left it—the country of the Sarthe in the Le Mans embarkation area—the men of the 26th took to the roads on days when the sunshine longer than minutes, and they marched to the trains that were to take them to Brest with all the accompaniments of spring.

There were flowers in gardens that had been dreary all winter, and orchard trees were full blown with blossoms; and it all looked lasting, though more clouds, more drizzling rain, a winter kick-back, might be waiting just beyond the horizon. Shaking off their winter stiffness, the men of the 26th marched as if Boston were just around the bend in the road up ahead.

For six weeks the 26th Division had been hibernating in a dozen villages scattered between woods and fields in the countryside to the south of Le Mans. In Ecromoy were the division headquarters. Yank-ees, in name and fact, New England soldiers were living in Parisine le-Polin, Cerans-Boullefont, Yvres-Polin, Grand Luce, Pontvallain, Manstige and Requeil—little villages which have memories of more than a thousand years of war.

Soldiers No Novelty There

The coming of the Yankees was only an incident in the great pageantry of history that had been unfolding through the centuries in old Maine. The Gauls had contended there first. The river Sarthe had long been splashed by Roman legions; the Kings of England had sent armies to these hills and valleys during four centuries of a struggle to maintain their mastery over their continental possessions; the wars of the counts of Maine and Anjou and Normandy had seldom left the country at rest.

But the coming of the Yankees was more than an incident in the daily lives of the villages on the banks of the little streams. And now that the New Englanders were going home, there were being enacted little scenes in the ending drama of this war which were deep founded in human nature and human sympathies.

The Americans had been living by twos and fours in the stone houses that were the homes of French families.

There were little dinners served after mess hours that strengthened friendliness all round. And on the other hand, there was a new plenty of chocolate and strange candies in the villages that will be talked of in times to come. There were cantons in the front yards of village churches, and the schoolmasters of that whole district were facing the new problem of chewing gum.

So it happened that when it came time for the Yankees to leave, the villagers stood in groups watching their guests strap on packs, and waited until the columns swung out of sight down the roads. At the sidings where the trains stood, veterans of the first winter of 1918, men who had fought in the Vosges and on the Chemin des Dames, at Verdun, at St. Mihiel, in the Argonne, talked over the incidents of their last stay. "Why, they came out and cried like babies when I left," said one tall doughboy.

New England Home in France

The Yankee Division left behind it in Le Mans a permanent memorial, a vast but with 15,000 feet of floor space, so built, with a large fireplace and other features, that when fully decorated it will represent a real New England home. The building stands on the Place des Jacobins, the large square shadowed by the cathedral, and faced by the municipal theater and the sunken garden, which was once an arena where Roman gladiators trained. The building is known officially as the York Harbor YD Hut, but will be used by American soldiers as long as troops pass through the embarkation center. It will be operated by the Y.M.C.A. At the dedication of the memorial to the New England troops, at the New England Division was preparing for its return to the United States speedy plans were necessary to enable it to be present when its own building was completed.

Fireplace to Be Added

At the dedication the building waited only final decorations. A large stone fireplace will be the first added feature. Easy chairs and lattice doorways will be provided. The roof lines will be broken by bracket work. The cafe will have a specially decorated ceiling. The newly subdivided rooms will be heated and out, the walls to bear regimental insignia of the Yankee Division. The six trusses supporting the roof of the theater will each contain the shield of one of the New England States.

While the 26th Division was leaving the Le Mans area the 28th Division was getting settled in the forwarding camp, preparatory to moving for the coast, and preparations were being made to receive the 80th Division, which is to begin arriving about April 1. The 91st Division was clear of the Le Mans area last week.

The Le Mans area for some weeks past has held somewhat more than 100,000 troops, and it is expected that the area population will not be greatly increased from now on, as the adoption of new regulations will permit many divisions to go direct from their winter quarters to the embarkation ports.

The next division to leave the area will be the 75th, which will start moving for St. Nazaire about April 1. It is expected to take about 11 days to clear the area. The 77th Division is to move from the area to St. Nazaire and Brest the last half of April. The 35th is billeted in the Montfort area, the 77th in Sable and the towns surrounding.

The building of the York Harbor YD Hut is only one of the new provisions made for the care of homebound troops. The whole of the Promenade des Jacobins, adjacent to the square, is being filled with new barracks. A big restaurant has just been put into operation. Meals are served on the cafeteria plan. A detached company of soldiers attached to the Senior Chaplain's office is operating the hut.

The Y.M.C.A. has been operating a special rolling canteen service for troops quartered in the village through the Le Mans area. There are no permanent canteens, the trucks make stops at hours posted on a schedule. Hot chocolate, biscuits and other things are served.

KRIEMHILDE LINE BROKEN IN SECOND PHASE OF MEUSE-ARGONNE BATTLE

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Foret were, therefore, drawn back about a kilometer and the line consolidated in the ravine, or Foud-de-Ville aux Bois, on the north edge of the Bois-de-Fays, with the 39th Infantry protecting both flanks of the salient thus formed; on the right, to the Bois-de-Briettes, where it connected with the 47th Infantry of its own division; on the left, to the southern edge of the Bois-de-Ogons, where it had liaison with the 80th Division.

The position was obviously a dangerous one, and although the 80th Division finally took the Bois-de-Ogons on the 5th, after desperate fighting, the salient of the Bois-de-Fays was still pronounced, and the Germans made several violent counter-attacks to recapture it between October 5 and 9.

Briettes village and the trenches south of it, too strong to be taken by direct assault, still stood, and the plan was to turn them by pushing through the Kriemhilde-Stellung further west. Late on the afternoon of the 9th, the 30th Infantry, being in the front line in the Foud-de-Ville aux Bois, another attack was launched, in conjunction with the 80th Division.

The underbrush in front was very dense and it had, moreover, been saturated with gas by the Germans, obliging the advancing troops to wear their masks. Suffering from these difficulties and under heavy fire, the units became separated in the twilight and the attack was totally repulsed.

Undismayed, next morning the same troops, with those of the 5th Corps divisions further to the left, resumed the attack behind a barrage, and at noon were through the small woods north of the Briettes-Cunel road. In the afternoon they once more reached the Bois-de-Fort, only to find it again impossible to hold and drop back to the small woods for the night.

Patrols on Crest of Hill 299

Pushing on, however, with grim determination during the 11th, they finally conquered the Bois-de-Fort and at evening even had patrols on the open crest of Hill 299, nearly a half kilometer north of it. But this time Briettes was almost surrounded on the south, west and north, but, though on the south the enemy had abandoned part of the Teton trench, which was occupied by the 47th Infantry, from October 10, he still held the village, from which he could at any time escape across the Meuse.

On the morning of the 12th, the 8th Brigade, which had taken the Bois-de-Fort, was relieved there by the 4th Infantry, of the 3rd Division. The 7th Brigade, on the right, continued to occupy its positions without attacking until October 19, when it was relieved, on the line Meuse-River-Bois-de-la-Cote-le-Moret-Teton trench-Bois-de-Fays, by the 6th Brigade, of the 3rd Division. In its three weeks of hard front line fighting, the 4th Brigade had lost 4,695 officers and men.

Having experienced a brief period of rest from the evening of September 28 to that of October 3, the 80th Division went in again that night on a narrow front of less than two kilometers along the road extending east and west through the north edge of Nantillois, with the especial object of carrying the strong point of the Bois-de-Ogons, the 4th Divisions attacking at the same moment on the right and the 3rd Division on the left.

Advancing in columns of battalions with the 31st Infantry on the right, the 318th on the left, and one battalion of the 319th Field Artillery assigned as accompanying artillery, the 8th Division, against a withering artillery and machine gun fire from front and flanks, drove northward a kilometer and a half across two ravines and an intervening ridge until it attained the southern edge of the Bois-de-Ogons, beyond which it could not go, although a renewed attack, assisted by tanks, was made about 5:30 p.m.

To North End of Woods

At 5:30 o'clock on the morning of the 5th, the struggle was resumed and continued all day, the divisional artillery and also the 258th Regiment of French Artillery assisting. Finally, about 6 p.m., partly under cover of darkness, the front was pushed through to the north end of the woods and held that line.

The Ferme-de-Madeline itself was now ahead in the sector of the 3rd Division, and from noon of the 6th until 2 p.m. a French regiment of 1,500 men shelled the farm, after which the 80th Division made an attack on the trench system and concrete pillboxes east and northeast of it. The attack was repulsed, and during the ensuing two days no advance was accomplished.

About mid-afternoon of the 9th, the 319th Infantry, now in front line, attacked in conjunction with the divisions on the flanks. Directed by the works east of the Ferme-de-Madeline and by 8 p.m. was across the Briettes-Cunel road, from which line one detachment during the night seized the trenches about a kilometer north of the road at the west end of the Bois-de-Fays, while another detachment entered Cunel, surprised and captured two German battalion staffs, consisting of 20 officers and 69 men, and brought the prisoners back.

An attempt on the morning of the 11th to enlarge this success was, however, broken up by the desperate artillery resistance, and that night the line was relieved by the 5th Division, excepting the 155th Field Artillery Brigade, which remained in the sector.

Operation Against Cunel

The relieving division did not try to advance until the morning of October 14, when it undertook the hard operation of capturing Cunel, the Bois-de-la-Putriere, north of it, and the Bois-des-Rappes, still further north, all of which positions were effectively flanked up the sides of open hills or ravines from the organized villages of Romagne and Bantheville, in the valley of that Andon river which had given the 3rd Division so much trouble south of Cierges.

The advance was made with regiments abreast, the 9th Infantry Brigade on the right and the 10th on the left. On the latter flank the attack was stopped on the open ground by the German counter barrage and cross fire; on the right, the 60th and 81st Infantry, after suffering particularly heavy losses from the reverse fire across the Meuse while reducing Cunel, passed that village and cleared the Bois-de-la-Putriere by nightfall.

Organizing and holding positions here for five days under very exhausting conditions, the division attacked the Bois-des-Rappes on the 20th, but could only gain 200 yards, the First and Second Battalions of the 11th Infantry, however, completing the capture of the woods on the 21st and repulsing fierce counter attacks.

Next morning the division was relieved by the 90th Division and retired for a brief rest, though it returned to line again before November 1st.

The 90th Division on the afternoon of the 22nd advanced the First and Third Battalions to the 35th Infantry against Bantheville, which were able to take the village and the main ground for about a kilometer north of it, consolidating a line from the northwest corner of the Bois-des-Rappes across the Andon river to the northeast corner of the Bois-de-Bantheville. This line was held until the 21st and improved over the open hills and the valley to the northeast by the activity of patrols.

3rd Division at Hill 250

Though it had been in sector along the Nantillois forest road since September 30, the 3rd Division did not initiate any aggressive movement until the general attack of October 4, when at 5:25 a.m. it attacked from the Bois-de-Cunel, with the 11th Infantry on the right and the 4th on the left.

from the Bois-de-Cunel but from the Mamelie trench, northwest of it toward Romagne. But the attack was so costly and resulted in such slight progress that the next day the front could only be organized on the north edge of Wood 250, a gallant party of 20 men of Company C, 4th Infantry, under Sergeant Chambers, who had penetrated the Bois-de-Cunel, being drawn back under cover of darkness.

That night the 5th Brigade was relieved in front line by the 6th, and on October 8, the 30th and 38th Infantry tried, no more successfully than their predecessors, to recapture progress.

Enemy Regiments Extinct

Early on the morning of the 9th, however, the 6th Brigade, attacking at the same time as the flank divisions, finally went through everything in the immediate front, taking the Bois-de-Cunel, the Ferme-de-Madeline, the Mamelie trench and the pillboxes north of it, so that at night the left was nearly up east of Romagne, which the 32nd Division during the day had closely approached.

Several attacks on the following three days resulted in only slight gains, but information given by prisoners indicated that the incessant American offensive was literally burning up the opposing Germans, it being stated that the 45th and 49th German Infantry Regiments had been totally exterminated, while the 136th and 157th Regiments were rapidly approaching extinction.

On the night of October 11-12, the 80th Division, on the right, was relieved by the 7th Division, and the following night the 5th was in turn relieved by the 3rd, together with the left of the 14th Division, the front of the 3rd Division then extending from within one kilometer of the Meuse to the Romagne-Cunel road, a distance of about six kilometers, necessitating the placing of all the regiments on the line, from left to right the 4th, 30th, 7th and 38th Infantry.

At the same time the 5th Division was assembled for attack in the woods west of the Nantillois-Cunel road, and as it was to drive on the left, assisted by troops of the 6th Engineers, attacked the Bois Clair-Chenes, just east of the Bois-des-Rappes, took it, were driven out again by a counter-attack and again, at 6 p.m., the German command of Colonel Morrow, recaptured it with 115 prisoners.

Around the crest of Hill 299 and the tiny wood of La Me Noel, which were between the Bois Clair-Chenes and the northern part of the Bois-de-Fort, and down the long open slopes falling away to the Andon, were positions which it now became important to seize. During the following two days detached elements of various organizations of the 3rd Division gradually overran all of this region by means of operations whose gallantry was not the less distinguished because they were on a small scale.

Patrols on October 23 penetrated Briettes and found it at last evacuated as a result of the American encircling tactics, while on the same day other patrols reached Clerly-Petit, near the mouth of the Andon. Meantime, the 90th Division, which was now on the left, had opened Bantheville, and the whole front was

straightened out westward. During the night of October 26-27, the 3rd Division was relieved on its existing front line by the 5th Division and retired for a well-earned rest.

Taking over from the 37th Division between the Bois Emont and the Bois-de-Bugny on the night of September 30-October 1, and advancing the following day by patrol activity to a line north of Cierges, the 32nd Division had its sector changed on the eve of the general attack of October 4 by taking over, on the left, the sector of the 91st Division and turning part of the right of its own sector over to the 3rd Division.

With its 63rd Brigade on the right, the 64th on the left and the 55th Field Artillery Brigade in support, it advanced slowly during October 3 to a line just south of Genes. Next morning it jumped off against the Bois-de-Morine, across the Genes creek, but the attack was launched without artillery preparation and it got nowhere.

After Preparation Fire  
The following morning preparation fire was laid, the result being that the Infantry had smashed through the Bois-de-Morine before noon, taking 200 prisoners and many machine guns, and in the afternoon, in the course of hand-to-hand fighting, mopped up also the Bois-de-Chene-Sec, north of it.

That night the sector was again changed, a brigade of the 91st Division taking about one kilometer on the left, while the 32nd took about one kilometer of the 3rd Division sector on the right. The same night the 57th Field Artillery Brigade, which had been supporting the 79th Division and then the 3rd Division, was returned to the 32nd, its own division, relieving the 55th Field Artillery Brigade.

During October 6, 7 and 8 no advance was undertaken, but on the morning of the 9th, attacking with other divisions, the 126th Infantry on the right, supported by tanks, and the 125th Infantry on the left, advanced against the main Kriemhilde-Stellung, south southwest of Romagne. The 126th promptly broke through the wire and trenches and reached the outskirts of Romagne; the 125th, which was confronting the entrenched woodlands in the Bois-de-Valsouy and the rugged slopes of the Cote Dame Marie, could not make as much progress but reached the top of Hill 258, the southernmost spur of the Cote Dame Marie.

On the rest of the front the attack was stopped in front of the German wire, so that the advanced elements which had pierced it were unable to get on. On the center, though about 500 prisoners had been taken during the day, most of them in the enemy's trenches. The positions thus gained were held and strengthened on the following four days, during which the front was extended by the relief of the brigade of the 91st Division on the left, placing three regiments of the 32nd Division Infantry on the line.

To Edge of Romagne

These regiments, the 128th Infantry on the right, the 126th in the center and the 127th on the left, at 5:30 o'clock on the morning of the 14th followed a barrage in making a determined assault which carried the center through the wire and the right up to the edge of Romagne where, assisted by artillery and machine gun concentrations as needed to overcome special targets, detachments worked their way up the ravine south of the village and out upon the hillside west and north of it into such positions that the enemy was prevented from escaping over the open ground to the east. The mopping up of the village netted about 200 prisoners.

The left, which had not progressed rapidly in the morning, persisted, nevertheless, in pushing up the ravines on each side of the Cote Dame Marie, provided by a rapid and accurate artillery fire searching out the sensitive points ahead. In close and often hand-to-hand fighting through the underbrush and trenches, the 127th Infantry forced its way by noon to Hill 258, which it surrounded and took.

An irregular and disconnected line now existed from north of Romagne to the immediate front of the Cote Dame Marie, and by constant pressure this was gradually straightened and connected, the reserve regiment, the 125th Infantry, going in to reinforce the 128th

on the right. Similar tactics, continued through the 15th and 16th, resulted in carrying the front a distance of about two kilometers north of Romagne.

A 12-hour machine gun and artillery preparation in which two captured 77mm. guns, minenwerfers and the machine guns of six German companies were employed, was laid on the Bois-de-Bantheville, with a proportion of fire on the Cote-de-Chantillon woods, west of it, on October 17. The enemy then appeared to be gradually retiring, and strong patrols worked their way without heavy fighting through the Bois-de-Bantheville, an extensive tract of timber about three kilometers long and two kilometers wide.

By midnight of the 18th-19th, the left was on the northwest edge of the woods and the right was holding well up in the eastern part, although the flanks were echeloned back somewhat for purposes of liaison. On this line the division, less the 57th Field Artillery Brigade, was relieved on the succeeding night, October 19-20, by the 89th Division, the front at the time being two or three kilometers ahead of the general front. The vigor of the enemy's defense in this sector was well no doubt, as the depletion of his divisions, was evidenced by the fact that during its 19 days in line the 32nd Division had taken prisoners from nine different German divisions.

Lively Mopping Up Work

The 89th Division, during its ten days in the Bois-de-Bantheville between October 20 and November 1, did not attempt any general advance, but experienced some lively fighting nevertheless in ridding the woods of lingering machine gun nests and snipers which had not been completely mopped up during the preceding days.

Coming into the sector just east of the Aire river extending just south of the Bois-de-Montrebeau, with the powerful intrenchments of Exermont, which the 35th Division had been unable to overrun, just ahead of it, the 1st Division on the morning of October 1 was preparing to grapple with one of the strongest sections of the enemy's front between the Meuse and the Argonne forest.

The ground was being constantly subjected to heavy fire, and as far back as the ravine of Charpeny a number of men of the 18th Infantry were badly gassed during the night of October 1 while digging in ground which had been infested by gas shelling.

But preparations went forward steadily for participating in the general attack on the morning of October 3, the division going in with the regiments in line from right to left, 26th Infantry, 24th Infantry, 18th Infantry, and 16th Infantry, and each regiment with one battalion in front line.

The attack plans had been carefully prepared and they were carried out with grim precision and unflinching courage in the face of an opposition whose bitterness has seldom been equaled and at the cost of such losses as might well break the stamina of the very best of troops.

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the fierce resistance of four German divisions in the Bois-de-Montrebeau, in front of and in Exermont, and along the farm road northeast of it running through La-Neuville-le-Comte Farm, the front was on its first objective at 7:30 a.m., and held across the Bois-de-Boyon, the Bois-de-Cunel, the Bois-de-Bantheville, with a proportion of fire on the Cote-de-Chantillon woods, west of it, on October 17. The enemy then appeared to be gradually retiring, and strong patrols worked their way without heavy fighting through the Bois-de-Bantheville, an extensive tract of timber about three kilometers long and two kilometers wide.

Divisional Artillery Helps

The divisional artillery, however, assisted progress constantly by executing heavy concentrations of fire close ahead of the Infantry line as the latter reached its successive objectives.

During the 6th, 7th and 8th no marked progress was attempted except on the left, where the capture of the commanding crests along the edge of the Argonne by the 28th and 32nd Divisions relieved the 16th Infantry of the galling flank fire which had been sweeping it from these hills.

By the temporary attachment of the 1st Brigade, of the 91st Division, the front was this brigade holding its sector of the front, the rest of the line attacked toward Le Petit Bois and Hill 263, between the Bois-de-Meuse and the Bois-de-Romagne, in conjunction with the 32nd Division's attack on the latter wood. The enemy made a hard fight, but was driven out of Le Petit Bois and off the height before the day was over, the 1st Battalion of the 1st Engineers repulsing a counter-attack delivered during the course of the struggle against the right flank of the 2nd Brigade.

On the 10th the success was exploited up to a line between Sommeprance and the newly conquered woods. The enemy's resistance was considerably lessened, but no renewed attack was ordered, owing to the exhaustion and depletion of the troops, and during the night of October 11-12 the 1st Division was relieved by the 42nd Division, excepting the 1st Field Artillery Brigade, which remained in support of the relieving division. During its seven days in the line the 1st had advanced seven kilometers against the German 1st and 7th Guard Divisions and the XXXVIII, XLII, XLIII, LII and LXXVIII Divisions and the 11th Landwehr Division, had captured 1,407 prisoners and had lost a total of 9,277 officers and men, the greatest casualties suffered by any American division in the Meuse-Argonne offensive.

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