AMERICAN DIVISIONS PRESS FIERCE DRIVES EAST OF THE MEUSE IN LAST DAYS OF WAR

Continued from Page 1

westward bend at Vilosnes; this with their left flank, while further east they would take the Bois de Chaume and, in conjunction with the 58th Brigade, the Bois Plat-Chene, later coming up on the escarpments of the Grande Montagne. The 26th U.S. Division was, for the present, held in reserve at Verdun.

The attack was calculated to be a surprise and it went over the top without artillery preparation at 5:00 o'clock on the morning of October 8. A vigorous barrage was started, however, at the instant that the Infantry moved forward. The desired surprise was effected and the results of the first day were highly satisfactory. For the establishment of communications across the river, during the previous night the 18th Division Engineers at Samogneux and the Seventeenth Army Corps Engineers at Regneville had built bridges, while at dawn and under intense shell fire the 108th Engineers of the 33rd Division threw one bridge about 120 feet long across the river at Brabant and another at Consenvoye, later repairing the permanent bridge at Consenvoye, and these bridges the American troops utilized in carrying out their part of the attack. The 18th and 26th Divisions attained their normal objectives, the latter taking the Bois de Caures and approaching Flabas, the former going ahead about three kilometers into the Bois de Brabant.

The 58th U.S. Brigade, under command of Col. B. A. Caldwell, attacked from the canal bank with the 115th Infantry on the left and the 116th on the right and protected by an accurate barrage from the 158th F.A. Brigade. The advance pushed on rapidly and with few casualties, driving the enemy ahead and taking many prisoners, to a line through the southern part of the Bois de Consenvoye and around into the Bois de Brabant, on the edge of the Haumont ravine, where it had liaison with the rest of the 18th Division. It had broken through two intrenched lines and captured the formidable heights of Malbrouck Hill, and Hill 338. About 9 o'clock in the morning, two battalions of the 132nd Infantry of the 33rd Division crossed the river at Brabant and attacked north against the Bois de Chaume, taking the whole woods to its north edge, but later drawing back to the south edge to maintain liaison with the flank of the 58th Brigade, which was not so far north in the Bois de Consenvoye.

At evening of October 8 the Seventeenth Corps had made a good beginning. But a peculiar condition existed on this part of the front. It will be remembered that in an earlier reference to the general scheme of the German defensive zones across northern France, it was said that the first three of these zones virtually merged at Ornes, north of Verdun. Ornes, the village indicated as the approximate point of this merging, is only about five kilometers east of Beaumont, which the 26th Division was attacking.

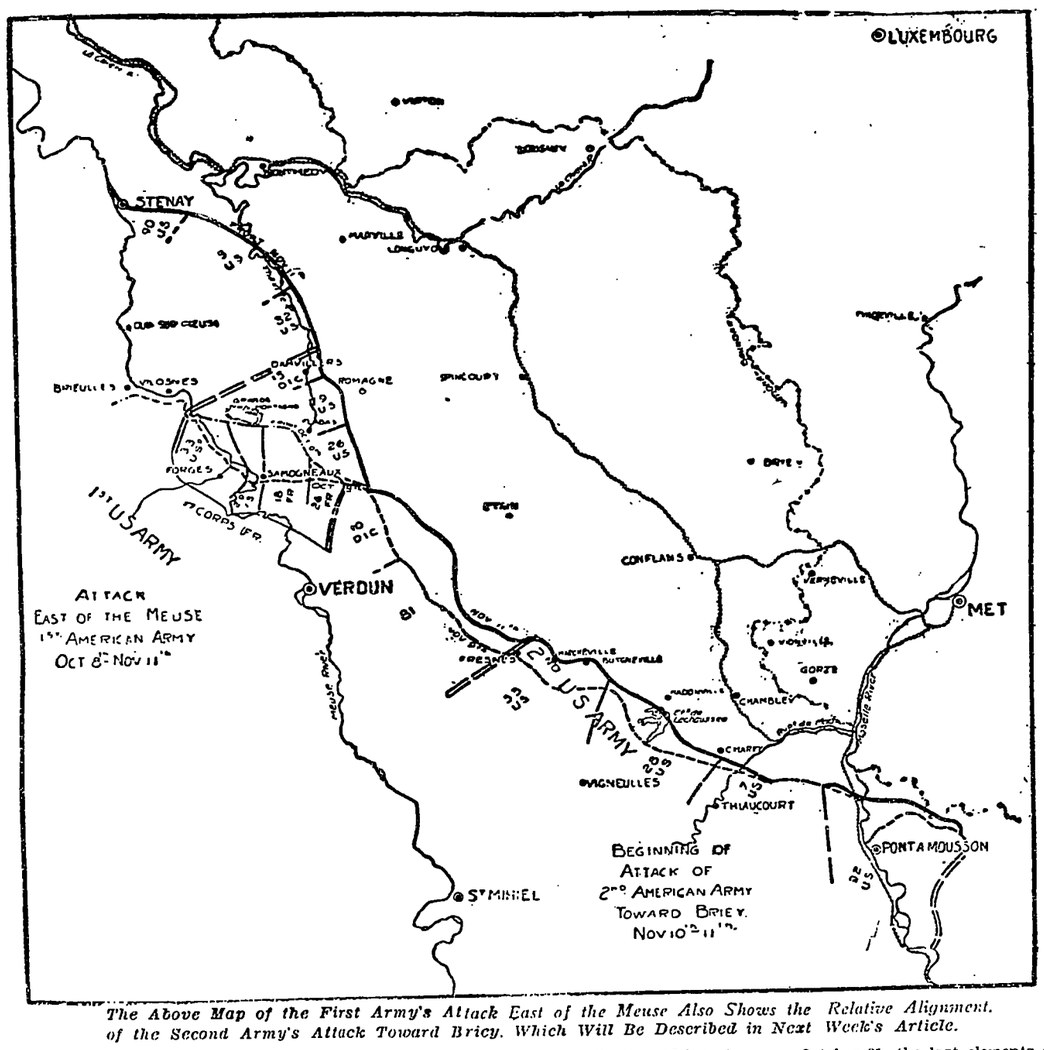
From Ornes the strongest portions of these defensive zones, the rear ones, extended northwest along the crests overlooking the plain of the Woevre, by Flabas, the Bois d'Ormont, the Bois d'Etrayes and the Grande Montagne toward Haraumont, Vilosnes and Brieulles, where the Kriemhilde Stellung crossed the Meuse. Consequently, in attacking north from Samogneux to Beaumont, the Seventeenth Corps, and especially the divisions of its right, were attacking in front of and almost parallel to these rear defensive zones, which had a flanking fire on the advancing troops and which, when finally reached, would have to be taken either by attacks delivered at an acute angle or else by changing front under fire.

German Resistance Stiffens

So soon as the Germans recovered from the confusion caused by the first surprise attack, that is, by the beginning of the second day's battle, their immense artillery and machine gun strength began to utilize the advantages of these conditions, and thereafter the progress of the French and American divisions was made more slowly and at heavy cost. But the progress accomplished amounted, in substance, to a gradual right turn on the pivot of the 26th French Division, near Beaumont, which, as the rest of the front advanced northeastward, slowly worked its left up toward Flabas, while the 18th Division, further west, swung on a slightly larger arc toward Crepion and Moirey.

The 58th Brigade, 29th Division, fought northward toward the Grande Montagne until it had elbowed out enough room between its right and the westward tending 33rd Division on its left for the entire 29th Division to occupy. Thereafter it turned its driving power east, toward the edge of the plateau above the Woevre as well as north, and when it was relieved on October 28 by the 79th U.S. Division the latter continued the pressure similarly until the entire environs of the Grande Montagne were cleared, when it struck eastward into the valley of the Thiente river against the strong line of heights just beyond it.

The 33rd U. S. Division drove north and northeast, clearing the eastern side of the Meuse, until about October 15, when it was relieved by the 15th Colonial Division (French), which continued the attack eastward on the left of the 29th and, later, of the 79th U.S. Division. The 15th Colonial Division was in contact on its left with the American troops near Brieulles, and when the latter, their right flank at last secured by the results of the whole offensive east of the Meuse, also crossed the river about November 5, the whole front straightened out and advanced northeastward toward the Metz-Mézières railway. Threatened on the north, the strong points at Flabas and Ornes, which had held out stubbornly, began to give way, and the 26th U.S. Division, which had relieved, first, the 18th French Division for an attack late in October in the terribly difficult country south of Grande Montagne, and, second, in November, took the sector opposite Ornes under command of the Second Colonial Corps, with the 79th U.S. Division on its left and the 10th Colonial Division on its right, was moving eastward close to Ornes, in the direction of Etain and Briey, when the armistice came into effect. Such, in brief outline, was the fan-shaped development, after the first day's attack, of an offensive operation which was decidedly complicated in detail, since it called for the constant introduction into line of new units as the front advanced and spread outward.



The Above Map of the First Army's Attack East of the Meuse Also Shows the Relative Alignment of the Second Army's Attack Toward Briey, Which Will Be Described in Next Week's Article.

Work of American Divisions

With an understanding of the general objects and development of the attack, it is possible to touch upon the work performed by the different American divisions participating in it. The 58th Brigade of the 29th Division lay on its line through the Bois de Consenvoye on October 9, because the 18th Division, to its right, was not far enough advanced to warrant a further attack. Consequently, when the attack was resumed on the 10th, the enemy was thoroughly prepared, and efforts, in conjunction with the 33rd Division on the left, to secure the whole of the Bois de Chaume and the Bois Plat Chene, were repulsed until toward evening, when part of the last-mentioned wood was secured. Next day against a fire, chiefly from the Grande Montagne and the Bois d'Etrayes, so terrific that it eventually cut down all the thick underbrush in the Bois de Consenvoye, the 58th Brigade, now under its own division command, pushed up to the south edge of the Molleville Farm clearing and consolidated positions thence west through the Bois Plat Chene which were held until the 15th. Meantime, on the 12th, the 57th Brigade, with the 114th Infantry on the right and the 113th on the left, endeavored to clear the Bois de la Reine and the Bois d'Ormont, in liaison with the 18th Division, but the resistance was very violent and little progress was made.

Attack With 26th

By the 23rd of October the division front, under very heavy losses, had struggled ahead to positions in the Bois de la Grande Montagne and southeast from there around the Molleville Farm clearing, and that morning at 6:15, after a strong artillery preparation, attacked eastward simultaneously with the 26th U.S. Division, which was now on the right. The ridge in the Bois d'Estrayes and the important observatory on its crest was captured and held against determined counter-attacks, the 26th Division, which was now fighting eastward against the maze of enemy defenses in the direction of Crepion, at the same time getting a footing in the Belleu Bois, the Bois des Chenes and the Boid d'Ormont. Consolidation of the positions gained occupied most of the succeeding five days, and on the 28th of October the 29th Division, which had here fought its first great battle, was relieved by the 79th Division and retired, having lost 5,796 officers and enlisted men in casualties and having captured 2,148 prisoners and much artillery and material and gained seven kilometers of ground in 20 days of as bitter fighting as troops were ever called upon to endure.

After its first day's advance into the northern part of the Bois de Chaume and the edge of the Bois Plat Chene, the 33rd Division did not register much further progress, for the reason that in its position an advance could only be made northward, and this was impracticable while the troops of the 29th Division and those further to the right were obliged to direct their efforts northeast and east. Movement north from the front of the 33rd could not be made without exposing the right flank until the Grande Montagne and the ravines and woods south of it should be cleared. So, although the bank of the Meuse was occupied up to Sivry by the 131st Infantry and although parts of this regiment and of the 129th made several tentative advances northward through the woods, they were obliged to rest finally on an entrenched line through the northern part of the Bois de Chaume, where, on October 21, the last elements of the division were relieved by the 15th Colonial Division and proceeded to the Troyon sector, where, in turn, they relieved the 79th U.S. Division. The losses of the 33rd Division had been 669 prisoners and enlisted men, while the prisoners taken amounted to about 1,200.

The 26th Division, coming into line in relief of the 18th (French) Division in the Molleville ravine on October 16-17, attacked on the 23rd in a generally northeastern direction through Le Houppy Bois and the Bois de la Reine against the Belleu Bois, on the left, the Bois des Chenes, in the center, and the Bois d'Ormont, on the right, the attack being made by the 52nd Brigade on the right and the 51st Brigade on the left, supported by the fire of the 51st Field Artillery Brigade.

As had been indicated, the country was rugged by nature and well fortified. Immediately before attacking, the 26th Division took over a part of the right of the 29th Division sector and, through a protecting mist, the 101st Infantry at 6:15 a.m. advanced in liaison with troops of the 29th Division up the Estrayes ridge and seized the observatory on its top. The 102nd Infantry pushed forward on the right and by mid-afternoon the front had occupied the whole of the Belleu Bois and the Bois des Chenes and the west edge of the Bois d'Ormont. Under very heavy artillery and machine gun fire, however, Belleu Bois was relinquished, and it was necessary the next afternoon to attack again, at the same moment that the 102nd Infantry advanced into the Bois d'Ormont. Fighting all the rest of the day and most of the following night against most bitter resistance, the 101st Infantry penetrated 500 meters into the Bois Belleu, only to be forced back finally by a fourth counter-attack after it had repulsed three of them.

In the Bois d'Ormont, the 102nd Infantry had a similar struggle and, although it got through the greater part of the woods to the base of Hill 360, in their eastern end, the enemy clung to this valuable observation point, from which he could see as far as the Meuse, and it could not be taken before dark. The attack was renewed the next morning, but the attacking forces were so depleted that they were not merely unable to make gains, but were gradually forced back by evening to the western edge of the woods.

After a very heavy artillery preparation a renewed attack on both flanks was delivered at 11 a.m., October 27. The 3rd Battalion of the 104th Infantry by 4 o'clock in the afternoon occupied all of the Bois Belleu definitely. The troops on the right again penetrated the Bois d'Ormont, but met by the most devastating enemy bombardment which had yet been experienced, though they clung to their gains through the night and a part of the next day, they eventually had to give them up and on October 28 the enemy still retained the Bois d'Ormont.

The 26th Division lay without further aggressive action, being relieved on its left by the 79th Division and, in turn, relieving the 26th French Division on its right, until November 7, when it resumed offensive operations on the front between Beaumont and the Bois d'Ormont, near which latter point it came in liaison with the 79th Division. This front was about five kilometers long and ran approximately north and south, with Flabas directly ahead on its left flank. The order of regiments from right to left was: 101st, 102nd, 103rd and 104th, each regiment with one battalion in front line. The enemy seemed on the point of retiring along this front and on the 8th, following up the indications, the whole 26th Division front advanced, taking Flabas and occupying the top of the ridge, facing northeast, which dominated the wagon road between Damvillers and Azannes.

26th Deflects Advance

That night orders were given by the corps for the 26th Division to deflect its advance toward the southeast in order to take Ornes northeast of it, cutting down in reverse through the enemy defenses about Le Chaume and l'Herbebois in order to reach those objectives and the further villages and towns toward Etain, in the plain of the Woevre. Advancing somewhat on November 9, the attack in the new direction was taken up with still greater vigor on the 10th and, in spite of strong resistance by machine guns in the enemy trenches at Le Chaume and l'Herbebois, it progressed steadily, especially on the left, where the village of Villers-devant-Chaumont, in the valley of the Thiente, was taken. During the night of November 10, the troops were reorganized so as to form three attack columns, the 101st Infantry being withdrawn to reserve, while the 102nd prepared to attack toward Ornes, the 104th toward Les Jumelles d'Ornes and the 103rd toward l'Herbebois. Following a preparation fire, this attack started at 9:30 in the morning of the 11th and was progressing very favorably when hostilities ceased at 11 o'clock. In its latest operations the division had lost 965 officers and enlisted men.

The Part of the 79th Division

Leaving line well to the north of Montfaucon on September 30 and entering it again on the night of October 28 at the southern edge of the Grande Montagne, the 79th Division spent most of the interval between these periods in the quiet Troyon sector, where its troops were gradually relieved by those of the 29th Division and in turn relieved the latter south of Grande Montagne and part of the 26th U.S. Division in the Bois Belleu and the edge of the Bois d'Ormont.

The 158th Infantry Brigade took the 29th Division sector with the 315th Infantry on the right and the 316th on the left, while the 157th Infantry Brigade, which did not completely relieve in the 26th Division sector until the night of October 31-November 1, had the 314th Infantry on the left, in the Bois Belleu, and the 313th on the right, in the Bois d'Ormont, with one battalion in the Bois des Chenes, between the other two woodlands. The 52nd Field Artillery Brigade, under Brig. Gen. George A. Wingate, was attached.

No general attack was attempted until November 4, though strong reconnoissances pushed out on the 3rd, immediately developed heavy resistance. At 6 o'clock on the morning of the 4th, under concealment of a heavy fog and preceded by the barrage which was laid after a strong artillery preparation, a general attack was launched. The 316th Infantry, in liaison with the 15th Colonial Division on the left, assaulted Hill 378, the westernmost spur of the Grande Montagne, which was well fortified and desperately held.

After a hard struggle the attack was repulsed, while the 15th Colonial Division was equally unsuccessful in trying to take Ville-neuve and Sillon-Fontaine Farms, near the crests of the ridges sloping down into the valley of the Meuse at Sivry. The 315th Infantry was unable to advance at all and the 316th lost some men as prisoners in a subsequent counter-attack.

Reports of the rapid progress then being made by the American divisions further to the northwest, however, were very encouraging and when the 316th, supported by three companies of the 315th, attacked again at 9 o'clock on the morning of the 5th, although it was at first held back, it persisted grimly and finally conquered Hill 378, while a violent counter-attack made by the enemy from Solferion Farm and the Canif Trench, further north, failed to recover any of the lost ground and was repulsed by artillery fire.

Although the divisions of the 3rd U.S. Army Corps got across the Meuse on the 5th and were slowly pushing toward the rear of the Canif Trench and the other parts of the enemy's Kriemhilde Stellung system extending from Damvillers to Vilosnes, he clung to this line with great determination, and the efforts of the 313th and 315th Infantry to get beyond Hill 378 during November 6 were all put down. But the continuation of the attack on the 7th brought better results. After an all-day struggle, the enemy's works and wire on the ridge of Les Clairs-Chenes and near Solferino Farm were broken through about 7 p.m., and at about the same time the 15th Colonial Division mastered Ville-neuve and Sillon-Fontaine Farms.

The heights along the Meuse, further west, having been taken by other divisions, the 79th was ordered to divert its offensive on the morning of the 8th to a direction almost due east, aiming to conquer the spurs of the plateau running out into the Woevre plain. The sharp change in direction involved making up provisional attack regiments out of the battalions as they lay in position after the battle of the previous day. This was accomplished by making up one regiment of a battalion each of the 315th, 313th and 316th Infantry, which was to attack on the left, along the ridge between the villages of Ecurey and Reville; and another composed of two battalions of the 315th and one of the 313th, which was to attack on the right along the ridge between Reville and Etraye.

With due artillery preparation and behind a barrage, the attack jumped off early in the morning, two battalions of the 26th Division advancing at the same time in the right sub-sector of the 79th. The enemy was moving out and by night the front had advanced about five kilometers and lay on the eastern edge of the heights, from which next day the movement was continued, without serious opposition, down into the valley of the Thinte river, coming to a halt before the elaborately fortified and extremely rugged line of heights extending from Damvillers southeast to Romagne; the Cote d'Orne, Cote de Morimont, Cote de Romagne and others.

On these heights, rising between 300 and 400 meters and supporting his last line of organized defenses, the enemy stood, and the 79th Division spent the day of the 10th in maneuvering up to positions near enough to assault them. On the morning of the 11th of November the attack was begun and the troops on the right had advanced beyond. Chaumont-devant-Damvillers, while the 315th Infantry was halfway up the slope of Cote de Morimont when, at 11 a.m. hostilities were suspended. Had these heights been taken, nothing remained in the way of defenses between them and the enemy's roccade railroad line at Spincourt, toward which the 79th Division was moving.

The 32nd Division returned to an active sector after a rest of about 20 days almost on the eve of the armistice, but it contrived, nevertheless, to put in one day of heavy fighting and the sort of progress it had been accustomed to making when on the offensive. Coming into line in a position between the 15th Colonial Division and the 5th U.S. Division as the front expanded in consequence of the northeastward advance from the Meuse, it lay on the night of November 9-10 between the villages of Le Petite Lissey and Breheville, on the eastern edge of the heights overlooking the Woevre. Thence at 6 o'clock on the morning of the 10th it moved down into the valley, the 128th Infantry on the right advancing toward Peuvillers, on the west side of the Thinte river, and the 127th on the left moving toward Boemont Farm, east of the river.

The enemy resisted strongly with both artillery and machine guns and the advance was a continuous, all-day fight which caused large casualties, including 215 wounded. But at evening the 128th Infantry had taken Peuvillers, pushed on beyond it into the edge of the Bois de Dombras and, meeting there a heavy fire, had dropped back again into the village, while on the left the 127th had cleaned up several woodlands in its sector, ending with the Bois de Lissay beyond the eastern edge of which it lay along the Thinte river. The front was well up with the 15th Colonial Division which, further to the right, was between Peuvillers and Damvillers and with the 5th U.S., further to the left, which had taken possession of Jametz.

On the morning of the 11th the advance was about to be resumed into the Bois de Dombras by the 128th Infantry and toward Boemont Farm by the 127th, when hostilities were ordered suspended. After 11 o'clock, however, the German artillery, probably through ignorance or misapprehension, opened fire on Le Petite Lissey village, causing a few casualties. The 32nd Division artillery immediately retaliated by opening on some of the known German battery positions and thereupon the enemy's fire promptly ceased. This was the last firing reported along the American front.

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The lieutenant stepped up to the colonel's desk.

"Sir," said he, "there's a discharged W.A.A.C. outside who would like to sign up for service in this department. Would you like to see her?"

"Hm," said the colonel. "All right."

The lieutenant stepped into the adjoining room and returned, preceded by a shy person in a tasteful blue costume. The colonel shifted around in his chair.

"Harrump! So you want to enter the employ of the department?"

"Y-yes, sir." The shy person was rather shaky as to voice.

"Well—er, no doubt—er—"

The colonel paused, astonished.

The shy W.A.A.C. had burst into quite unfeminine roars of laughter. Moreover, the lieutenant was trying to suppress a broad grin. So the colonel was half-way prepared for the shock when the W.A.A.C.'s blonde wig fell off and revealed a close-cropped doughboy head.

Down at Tours they've got an outfit that fools even the colonels. Although it has been in business only a comaratively short time, it has developed and produced to such an extent that it now operates under the title of "the play factory."

Multitudinous are the duties of the play factory. Its staff of expert playmakers, directors and managers, following the course conceded wisest, first catch the rabbit. From out on the highways and by-ways they gather the men who are to cavort behind the footlights. Then they sit up late and figure out whether the heroine shall die or marry the hero in the last act. Finally, they dress up the performers, coach them and send them out, with a blessing, to show the rest of the A.E.F. that the Army can get by on the show game without having to holler for reinforcements from the members of the perfesh who elected to do their campaigning along the subway trenches at Broadway and Forty-second.

The play factory was instituted after the armistice limited killings to the A.E.F. stage. Maurice Stewart, who used to line up shows for Morosco and Belasco back in the United States of America, is the boss director. The make-'em-to-order playwright of the plant is Sgt. Ted Syman. The rest of the busy staff are all veterans of many a dressing-room battle and have all seen service here and there in France.

By May 1 five big shows will have been produced by the Tours show shop, to say nothing of innumerable smaller affairs. The Tours agency does not book outside of the S.O.S. areas, although a number of its shows are in the Intermediate and Advance Sections, being directed while in this territory by the heads of the entertainment divisions in these sections.

The report of the Entertainment Bureau for the month of March shows that 10,658 theatrical performances were given during that period to audiences numbering a total of 7,352,660 people. Thus the play factory at Tours is established as one of the largest amusement enterprises in the world.

OVERHEAR IN BREST ABOVE TRAMP OF FEET

When the transport Leviathan hitched to her buoy in the outer bay at Brest, among her passengers to accompany the Secretary of the Navy was a colonel, whose left arm was decorated with three silver chevrons.

"In four weeks I would have gotten another chevron," he confided to a field officer as the party went ashore, "but I'm glad to be here even if all the soldiers seem to be going home."

The Provost Marshal at Brest and all of his flock of M.P.'s are exponents of proper dress and uniform. These M.P.'s can see a button which isn't buttoned and a cap which isn't regulation a mile away. But there are brave soldiers at Brest. One of them is a Quartermaster sergeant, who not only got married last week and walked past Base Headquarters with his cooing French bride clinging tenderly to him, but flaunted a pair of white kid gloves in the eyes of the sober M.P. who keeps the entrance to Headquarters cleared of all obstructions.

The M.P. gasped, for, as the sergeant passed, a general stepped out and spied the sergeant, who was wholly mindful of just one thing—that he had just been married.

"I didn't call him down," the M. P. explained later, "because he has been stung enough today. He's married, poor fellow."

Brest, in so far as privileges, such as entrances into cafes, buvettes and cognac shops are concerned, is strictly a gobs' town. For here the gobs can quench their thirst with something stronger than milk shakes. But for the soldiers it is defendu.

Now, however, soldiers are admitted to theaters, picture shows and other places of amusement where drinks are not sold. But the cafés and other shops where it is possible to say "cognac, vin blanc, vin rouge" without blushing or being geared at are still out of bounds. Good conduct passes are issuable to enlisted men, valid until 10:30 each evening. The former time limit was 9:30 p.m.

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