

A.E.F. DIVISIONS: THEIR RECORDS, THEIR MARKS

Seventy-Eighth Division

National Army of New Jersey, Delaware and New York. Arrived in France June 8, 1918. Activities: Limey sector, St. Mihiel front, Sept. 16 to Oct. 4; Grand Pré-St. Juvin sector, Oct. 16



to Nov. 5 (Meuse-Argonne offensive).

Prisoners captured: Six officers, 392 men. Guns captured: Four or more pieces of artillery, 43 or more machine guns. Total advance on front line, 21 kilometers.

Insignia: Crimson semi-circle crossed by a white streak of lightning which begins at upper right hand side of insignia and crosses to the lower left hand corner. The colors, crimson and white, are those of the division; the lightning is symbolic of "Lightning Division," the name adopted by division before leaving the States.

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The Grand-Pré Gap

HISTORY OF THE 78TH DIVISION IN THE WORLD WAR. Compiled and edited by Thomas F. Meehan, Secretary-Treasurer, Association of the 78th Division. Dodd, Mead & Company, New York.



THE 78th Division was created on paper by a War Department order in August, '17, and Camp Dix was selected for the creation area. At

the time Camp Dix itself was still only part created, and the National Army recruits who were to make up this outfit were still being collected in New York, New Jersey and Delaware. But by the end of September the division was in uniform, fairly well up to strength, and hard at work on squads east and west. By November all hands were anxious for the war to begin, but they soon found that for a young division Camp Dix was a more dangerous sector than any at the front. All through the winter they had to provide drafts for others ahead of them on the sailing list, until the organization fell back almost to a skeleton basis. When Ludendorff's spring offensive brought the hurry call at last, in April, fifty per cent or so of new recruits had to be rushed in to bring it up to strength in time to sail at the end of May.

Sailing from Halifax in British vessels, the 78th found itself one of the divisions advanced under temporary mortgage to the British Army. Landing in England, it was brought across to a training area behind Ypres, provided with jam and tea, trained, fed and equipped on a purely British basis, and settled down to life as a reserve division behind the British front.



The St. Mihiel operation suddenly pulled it across France into the waiting arms of the A.E.F. The artillery brigade got forward in time to help out in the great bombardment which opened the attack. The infantry, held in reserve, followed on the heels of the advance, and two days later took over the new front line of the Second Division, close up against the Michel Stellung, opposite Rembercourt. For three weeks the division held down this freshly staked-out claim, going through the usual post-St. Mihiel routine of trench raids and holding attacks. On October 3d it was suddenly pulled out, marched across the corner of the salient, and turned north to the Meuse-Argonne.

Here, on October 16th, the 78th went into line in a particularly nasty sector. The 77th, after scratching and biting its way forward clear through the Argonne, had come to anchor in the Grand-Pré gap. Our whole line across the gap lay in an open valley which was under perfect observation from the enemy positions on the heights to the north. These positions, the citadel of Grand-Pré, the Bois des Loges and the southern edge of the Bois de Bourgogne—gave complete cover to the Boche defenders; they were extremely strong natural positions, and were thoroughly organized for defense. The Bois de Bourgogne was a second Argonne, a great wooded area almost impossible to cross, sheltering the enemy line of communications, and allowing him to keep under perfect cover the troops awaiting to support the defense.

The whole corner was so strong and so important strategically that it formed the cornerstone of the general Kriemhilde-Brunhilde line on which the Germans had now fallen back. Holding it, they could pin down our left and the whole right wing of the French Fourth Army further west (they did so, in fact, until the American assault of November 1st broke the back of their whole line).

For its first experience in offensive battle the 78th had the difficult job of trying to loosen the enemy's grip on this cornerstone, and it had to begin not in the rush of a general offensive, but on its own, by a series of local attacks, which is a difficult basis for gathering in a key position.

The first of these attacks was ordered while the division was moving up into line in the night of October 16th, before all its front units had completed the relief, and before any of them had a chance to locate the enemy positions they were to attack. In spite of this rather unnecessary handicap the regiments on the right drove ahead into the Bois des Loges, and there in the tangled underbrush put up for three days a rough and tumble mix-up of the regular Argonne variety. But the Bois des Loges was a sort of Belleau Wood proposition; the Boche could easily feed in reinforcements and douse the whole place with continuous shell fire. The 82nd, next on the right, was held up in front of Champigneulle, so that the ground the 78th held in the Loges wood became an exposed salient, and the troops had to be ordered



out. Later on (November 1st) they made another gallant assault and again fought their way into the woods.

On the center and left the division kept up ten days' steady plugging, gathering in by degrees all the town of Grand-Pré, then the citadel, and finally the slopes leading up to the Bois de Bourgogne, so that it was able to establish its line firmly well within the edge of the woods. Here things were halted awaiting the general attack of November 1st, in which the 78th was to form the left flank of the whole attack, swinging its right around so as to face the eastern edge of the Bourgogne wood. This movement, for a variety of reasons, could not be pulled off, but the division lost no time next morning in following up the Boche retreat, and had pushed twenty kilometres to the north, when it was relieved on November 5th.

In dealing with November 1st, the divisional history makes no mention of the overwhelming advance of our center divisions, so that an innocent reader is left with the impression that the German retreat was due to the local situation on the divisional front. No such sleight-of-hand trick was necessary; the record of the 78th hardly required any such patching out. Coming into battle in a particularly difficult sector, at a point and at a time when the Boche was stiffening his resistance to the utmost, it put up an excellent fight, and well deserved the message that came from General Liggett: "The Army is very much pleased with the persistent, intelligent and successful work done by the 78th division in clearing up the ridges north of Grand-Pré."

The story of the division is told in a brief, clear and straightforward narrative, backed up by copies of all important field orders and plenty of clear sketch maps. Few divisional histories can show such an intelligent and interesting selection of illustrations; they show better than any possible description in words what "the ridges north of Grand-Pré" amounted to. To gain them cost the 78th some five thousand casualties—and no wonder.

T. H. THOMAS.