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A Prisoner of War in Germany

An American Officer's Experiences from His Capture on the Hindenburg Line to His Final Return to French Soil

By HARRY F. SULLIVAN

AT about 10 A. M. on September 26, 1918, Captain William E. Blaisdell, commanding the Third Battalion of the 106th Infantry, then in line about one and one-half miles west of the mouth of the Tunnel of the Nord Canal, between Cambrai and St. Quentin, the most important point in the German defence, sent for his company commanders.

At that time I was in command of K Company, 106th Infantry, and reported at battalion headquarters at 10:30 A. M. Captain Blaisdell told me I was honored by being given the hardest nut to crack that any company had ever attempted; that six ineffectual attempts had been made to break through at this point and that the next morning at 5:30 A. M. we were to break through and my post, the post of honor, was to advance on the left of the regiment.

There were but few maps available at this time and I was handed three. Before I left, Captain John F. Callahan, commanding M Company, was given his instructions and we talked over our plans for reconnaissance and plans for our advance.

Immediately upon returning I assembled my company officers. Lieutenants Willard M. Webster and Horace B. Scanlon, both of whom were posthumously decorated with the Distinguished Service Cross for their gallant conduct in this attack, and we studied our positions and all the landmarks on the map and those on our objective.

In the afternoon the orders for the attack were received and Lieutenant Webster and myself went to Zebra Post, where part of my company was stationed, and to Yak Post, where a second part was stationed, and assembled all the men who were awake and explained the plans, the purpose of the attack, the importance of our gaining the objective and the features of the ground, so that they would understand when they had advanced to the objective, and instructed them as to organizing, blocking of trenches, selecting



A. 106th Infantry, Twenty-seventh Division. He later was promoted to captain and transferred to Company K of the same regiment, which he was commanding at the time of his capture. He is now in the general insurance and real estate business.

THIS is the story of an American captain who went over the top in a hot sector, was rushed by some sixty Germans while in a shell-hole with two wounded men, shipped to the prison camp at Villingen, escaped, was recaptured, and remained in enemy hands until his release following the Armistice. It is a vivid personal narrative, told without embellishment but filled with all the thrills that go into the making of an exciting adventure. Mr. Sullivan went overseas as a first lieutenant in Company

of Lewis gun positions, mopping up and methods of resisting counter attacks.

The front assigned to my company was four hundred yards in width and the objective was a trench, a part of the old first line which was the farthest point east ever reached by the Allies up to that time. There were three trenches (boyaus) leading into this from the Boche stronghold, the great Hindenburg tunnel.

We came back and took men who were holding trenches at company headquarters and relieved them in small groups and explained all plans and intentions, as we did to the outposts. We then reconnoitered, taking two sergeants with us, and decided on our route to reach the jumping-off point, where we had been ordered to be one hour before the zero hour.

About 11 P. M. I received sufficient message maps to enable me to give one to each sergeant and also received a map showing the lifts of the barrage.

Plans were arranged to supply each man with two hundred rounds of rifle ammunition, five grenades, two days' rations, two canteens of water and a pick or shovel, all of which was to be carried in addition to rifle, bayonet, slicker and pack. Each man was thoroughly inspected to see that he had these articles. The non-coms carried additional equipment. The members of the Lewis gun team carried extra magazines, spare parts and in some instances eight hundred additional rounds of ammunition.

One detachment from an outpost got lost and roamed around for about an hour before we were able to bring them to the ammunition dump, where they were inspected and given their extra luggage.

The night of September 26 was very rainy and the men were not awakened until 2 A. M. of September 27. It was our desire that they sleep as much as possible because we all realized how hard a fight we were to have and did not know when we could expect to get sleep again.

At 3 A. M. Sergeant Major



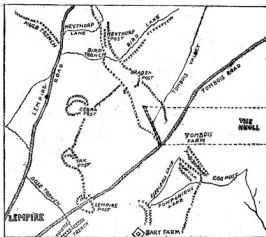
Captains Sullivan, O. E. Safford and Arthur House, and Lt. Col. Levi G. Brown, senior American officer captured during the war, from a photograph taken at Villingen prison camp

AT 5:15 A. M. I sent back a message to battalion headquarters that we were at the jumping-off place and were prepared to go. I then joined up with the company on my right, which was I Company of the 106th Infantry, and ascertained that a company of the 105th Infantry was to swing out and form a line to prevent the Boche from coming

At the minute of 5:30 bedlam let loose and our artillery fire fell directly in front of us. One minute before the zero hour every officer got set and jumped at the opening of the artillery to advance his men. The company advanced in two waves, two platoons in each wave, with a distance of approximately thirty to fifty yards between the waves. Before we had gone two hundred yards one of my sergeants rushed up to me and said that they were being held up by machine-gun nests. I ordered them to advance, as the barrage

Dead bodies were strewn throughout the advance, and the havoc wrought by the artillery and machine guns was terrific. No attention could be paid to the wounded. The object was to advance. The wounded would be taken care of later by the stretcher bearers.

This advance was made through a country most of which had formerly been farm land, but which was now
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THE JUMP—One of Captain Sullivan's company is indicated by parallel rows of dashes just at the right of the center of the map, and the dotted lines running from it mark the direction of the company's advance. The small crosses indicate the water surrounding the town of Empire, and along the row of crosses the road leads to the left-hand corner of the skirts of the village of Lempire. The names of the roads and positions are those assigned them during the long British occupancy of this sector, and are taken from the official British war map. The whole region shown is now generally known as the "domestic line," the knoll, which is pointed directly in the path of the advance. Scale: 2 inches, 1 mile.

We started to take prisoners before we had gone two hundred yards, and one of our greatest difficulties was in sending them back, as our companies at this time were very small and we did not want to let any of our rifle strength leave the line. But this was quickly solved because of the numerous

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full of shell holes, strongly fortified and protected with every sort of defence which the enemy could contrive.

The casualties in the advance line were very heavy. The Boche was hurling his potato masher grenades every second and I ordered the men to withdraw to shell holes. This was after I had had about fifteen casualties among

the forty men. Before leaving the trench we blew up machine guns, an anti-tank rifle and a minnenwerfer and took with us German grenades which we found there.

While we were engaged in this work, grenades were thrown at me which knocked me down, wounding me, and some of the men evacuated the trench,

believing I had been killed. I quickly recovered, however, and with the remaining men took a very good position covering the trench we had occupied, as well as the Hindenburg line, and caused many casualties to the enemy in their attempts to recapture the trench.

(To be continued)

