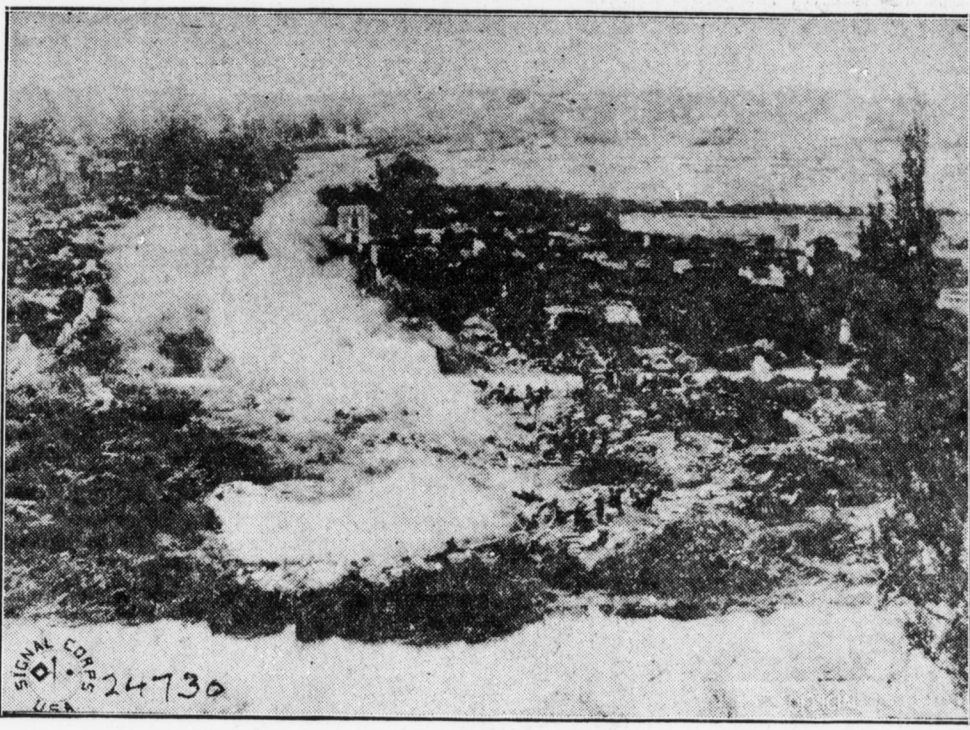


# TODAY—AND ONE YEAR AGO

## An Anniversary Story by Major Frank C. Mahin, of the Harrisburg Recruiting Office, Who Saw Service in France

TODAY Harrisburg is officially welcoming her veterans of the World War. Some of them fought the desperate Battle of Camp Travis, Texas, some the Battle of the Philadelphia Supply Depot, others the 2nd Battle of the Marne, the St. Mihiel, and Meuse-Argonne offensives, but wherever they served, they 'did their bit' to the limit of their ability. Some were lucky and got overseas in combat divisions, some thought they were going to be lucky when they were sent to France, but at one of their hearts in the S. O. S., without ever even hearing the distant boom of a gun. Many others, anxious to get over and fight never left the country and spent their time training or forwarding supplies. But wherever they served, whatever may have been their duties, or their rank in the service, they played the game like men and did what the Nation called on them to do. And furthermore, it was not, in most cases, the men's own fault that they did not get out of this country and have the pleasure of sleeping in the mud, or enduring shell and machine gun fire, or being hungry, wet and cold, or suffering the acute torture of many successive nights of hiking with everything they possessed loaded on their backs, nights of utter exhaustion, exhaustion to complete that every step was agony, and still the necessity existed to go on, and on they went.

A year ago to-day the first stage of the world's greatest battle, the Meuse-Argonne, was about completed. At dawn



BATTERY E, 108TH FIELD ARTILLERY (FORMERLY THE GOVERNOR'S TROOP) AT VARENENNES, IN THE ARGONNE FOREST LAYING DOWN BARRAGE ON GERMAN LINES; PICTURE MADE ONE YEAR AGO TODAY.



A 75 BARRAGING FOR THE ADVANCING INFANTRY IN THE MEUSE-ARGONNE BATTLE.

were up in rear of the assaulting troops getting ready to relieve them as soon as an opportunity presented itself. But our success had been so phenomenal, considering the difficulties under which the attacking troops had been laboring, that the high command did not want to last an indefinite period for us to relieve any of the assaulting units as long as they still retained any power for attack. As this was to be such a vital and tremendous offensive, scheduled to last an indefinite period, it was necessary to get the last ounce of driving power out of a division before a fresh division took its place. So again on the 29th the shattered, exhausted divisions tried to push forward and in places succeeded. By that night the advance had, in places, reached a depth of about nine miles and was up against the strongly fortified Kriemhilde Stellung. By that night some of the new divisions had reached such a stage of exhaustion that many of the men had passed beyond the limit of endurance, and were sneaking back from the front to get out of the awful fire. As a colored soldier said who had been up to the front, "dat ain't no place for no man."

**A Year Ago To-day**  
The 27th had been had enough, the 28th worse, but the 29th, a year ago to-day, was beyond description. The Boche by this time actually outnumbered our boys; they had several thousand guns up there, with their lines of communications untouched and actually shortened by our advance. Their supply of shells came up in an unbroken stream and I can assure you they kept right on moving, through the gun and over into our positions. Our guns were up in position as right as the long haul over awful roads it was impossible to get enough shells-up to give the Boche one-tenth of what they were giving us. And in addition our troops on the east bank of the river had not advanced any great distance, so the Boche artillery from that side of the river were shooting us up from the right. It was a case of being shot from the front but when you are being shot up from both sides it is beyond description.

The area in which our boys fought on the 29th were no trenches and very few dugouts. The men lay in shell holes waiting and hoping their relief would come up before they all died. Machine gun bullets were spitting dirt in on top of them, shells burst all around, it had become impossible to advance, most of them were too proud to go to the rear, and they were waiting, cold and waiting, waiting for their relief to come up. And during all of those days just past, everyone was busy, too busy to pay attention to anything but the work of his own particular job. For instance, no one had time to bury the dead; Boche and American lay as they had fallen throughout the length of the front line. The weather was cold, so there was no imperative need of immediate interment, and it was difficult enough to look out for and care for the living, with so many more lives trying to take care of the dead. Not for one minute was anyone disparaging the heroes who had given their all. And with all their efforts many Boche airplanes slipped through and flying only a few hundred feet off the ground they shot us up with their machine guns. Besides the weather was rainy and misty and that flying conditions most unfavorable.

**Guns to the Front**  
But as I said, during the night of the 28th our guns got through to the front. Eight, ten, and even twelve horses were hitched to a gun and with the aid of every man who could get a hand on the spokes of the wheels or to push the gun forward, they were hauled through the new roads that were being built. As a result the infantry got a little more help the morning of the 29th, and were enabled to make several excellent local advances. In fact during the day the whole line was pushed forward, in some places as much as a mile and a half. All day long the guns were coming through and even the 29th they were in action. The artillerymen realizing the necessity for haste worked to the limit of their endurance getting the much needed guns and shells forward, and succeeded to a marvelous degree.

But remember that two full days and nights had passed, during which time tens of thousands of fresh Boche troops had arrived and hundreds upon hundreds of guns. Also they had gotten their orders to fight to the death, with the result that it was harder to advance a hundred yards on the 29th than it had been on the 26th. The fun and excitement of the first day had changed to a miserable Hell. Without pause the Boche guns shelled us, there were enemy machine guns and every clump of bushes in every ditch, in every woods, in every fold of the ground. Enough guns of our own were not yet up to lay down an intense rolling barrage and even the 29th had been up, there wasn't enough ammunition for such a shoot. The result was that every foot we advanced was protected only by our own machine guns, 37 millimeter guns, and Stokes mortars, with some help from the artillery on special points. Every foot taken was at the cost of lives, taken by dogged endurance and courage. Besides everything was tired, wet, cold, plastered with mud, and beginning to get discouraged. Actually many of the men had reached the stage at which their only desire was to get killed as quickly as possible and have the misery over with. You who read this, if you were not up front in France, cannot conceive of the utter exhaustion, physical, mental and nervous, that the men were suffering by the third day. The constant shell fire, the concussion of exploding shells that knocked the breath out of you, the never ending expectancy of instant death, got everyone jangled, shattered nerves to such a point of tension that it was all you could do to keep from screaming out "For God's sake, stop minute and let me get my breath." But that is war to-day; get men on the ragged edge of a break-down and keep them there until they do break. The veterans reached a stage in which he is absolutely fatalistic; if the enemy shell him, 'well! they are shelling, and if they aren't shelling, 'well! they aren't; shelling, maybe they'll get you and maybe they won't. Don't think for a minute the veteran isn't scared, because he is, but he knows how comparatively seldom a bullet or a shell will hit a man, so he calmly takes the inevitable, whatever it may be, with little nervous strain. The recruit imagines every shell is going to hit him, and every bullet; he cannot see how anyone can come of the Hell of battle alive, with the result that in a couple days he is a wreck.

**Continued to Drive**  
By the night of the 28th a number of the veteran divisions from the St. Mihiel

How the Men Suffered  
If you think of the doctors started putting two entries on every wounded man's diagnosis card. The two entries were the nature and place of the wound and the other was "acute exhaustion." Everyone, be he general or colonel, private, corporal, or captain got those words "acute exhaustion." The diagnosis card was a regular baggage tag and carried five or six entries in it. The tag when filled in was tied in a buttonhole of the wounded man's coat and accompanied him clear back to the hospital. When he was released the tag was given him and he entered on the tag: "Up near the front you could always tell the wounded man, a wailing, wailing man, they limped painfully to the rear. And really, of all the men you saw up front the most cheerful were the wounded. They knew they were getting relief, they knew they were getting maybe for months. For the first time in many, many moons they were going to be clean, have three hot meals a day, and rest in a bed with two real home-made sheets on it, and though you may not realize it, those considerations were well worth a bullet through the arm or leg.

**One Great Battlefield**  
And as the days went on more and more divisions were relieved, those relieved were themselves in turn relieved. It got so that the whole country for miles back of the original front was filled with troops, ammunition dumps, supply dumps, aviation fields, and all the paraphernalia of 1,200,000 men. Divisions came out, rested and drilled,

[Continued on Page 14.]



MAJOR FRANK C. MAHIN

of September 26th, just fourteen days after the start of the St. Mihiel, the Americans went over the top in their second great offensive, the offensive which broke through to Sedan and cut the German lines of communication ending the war. On the west bank of the Meuse, extending from the river to include most of the Argonne forest, a distance of about 20 miles, nine divisions had attacked, accompanied where possible by tanks and protected by some two thousand American and French guns. The divisions in line from east to west were the 33rd (Illinois), 69th (Western Pennsylvania and West Virginia), 4th (Regulars), 79th (Eastern Pennsylvania and Maryland), 37th (Ohio), 51st (Far Western States), 35th (Missouri and Kansas), 25th (Pennsylvania), and 7th (New York City). On the east bank of the Meuse the 29th Division (New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland) was assisting, as was the 6th (New England) still farther east, but the first day or two these two divisions were not as actively engaged as the nine on the west bank. It is of interest to note that of these nine divisions the 29th was the Pennsylvania National Guard and the bulk of the 79th and 80th were Pennsylvanians. In the entire operation nearly 100,000 Pennsylvanians were engaged, about one thousand of whom were from Harrisburg itself.

**Objects of Battle**  
The object of this great battle, which was in full swing a year ago, was to draw the best German divisions to our front and to consume them. And that object was fully accomplished. During the 47 days the battle lasted, 37 German divisions were engaged and consumed. Furthermore, we drove in 54 miles, took Sedan and cut the main railroad running through Longuyon and Sedan, which carried practically half of the reinforcements and supplies for the German Armies engaged farther west and north. Our having "drawn" the best German divisions to our front made possible the spectacular advances of the French, British and Belgians. Such famous German divisions as the 2nd and 5th Guard Divisions, the 10th and 29th, were thrown in our way only to be "consumed." And it was 21 American Divisions that did the consuming of the 37 German. To be sure our divisions contained about twice as many men as the German divisions, but we were attacking over most difficult ground, the same ground that had brought about the disastrous German defeat of Verdun in 1916.

You remember the French motto at Verdun "On ne passeront pas" (They shall not pass), well! the Germans respected similar orders. They were told

to fight to the death, that if we broke through it must mean disaster, our disaster for the Vaterland, and the warning proved true, for it did. That they fought to the death everyone knows who participated in the battle and it is also proven by the fact that we only took 16,000 prisoners, most of them the first two days before the defense became so desperate. There were several times as many dead Boche on the battle fields as there were live ones in the prisoners' cages. And that we were paying too is shown by 120,000 casualties. What the German losses were has never been made public; they probably don't know themselves as their dead were mostly in our hands, as we were steadily advancing.

**First Big Gain**  
It was the first day, September 26, that we made the big gain. Some divisions made as much as six miles that day, across No Man's Land and through Boche barbed wire and trenches in an area of inconceivable desolation. The Germans knew we would reach sooner or later on the Verdun Front, but who, other than Americans would dream of putting over a big attack of reserve divisions, the 4th (Regular), September 12th and then two weeks later to a day starting another attack, which probably would be the turning point of the war. Of course it was impossible to swing the veteran divisions from the St. Mihiel to the Verdun Front in time for the attack. The best that could be done was get a number of them into reserve divisions, the 4th (Regular), September 12th and then two weeks later to a day starting another attack, which probably would be the turning point of the war. Of course it was impossible to swing the veteran divisions from the St. Mihiel to the Verdun Front in time for the attack. 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