

FIX BAYONETS!

The War at Close Range Described in a Remarkable Series by an Officer of the Marines

Cap. JOHN W. THOMAS, JR.

(Illustrated by the Author from Sketches Made on the Battlefield)

SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I—The author describes how the First battalion of the Fifth Marines are quartered near Marigny during the first part of June, 1918, when they are suddenly sent up north to relieve the First division, bearing the brunt of a tidal wave of Germans just breaking through for a great offensive. Part of the Fifth went Hill 148 from the enemy and wait there for the German counter-offensive they saw forming. While they are peering the Boche a detachment of Second engineers comes to their assistance.

CHAPTER II—A terrific German attack soon develops, wreaking fearful havoc among the marines, but not dislodging them. In the immediate vicinity other fierce encounters are reducing the American troops and forcing the necessity of replacements which arrive presently. On the sixth of June the Fifth runs into bitter fighting in the vicinity of Champillon for hours they try to oust the Boche from his stronghold in the woods and succeed commendably, but at great cost.

CHAPTER III—This narrative centers about the activity of the marines but really stands as a cross section of all the fighting done by Americans. After acquitting themselves marvelously at the Bois de Belleau and Hill 142 early in June, 1918, the First received replacements to cover horrible losses, fight some more and then are relieved, somewhat compensated for their heavy losses by a notable tribute to their fighting qualities issued by the general commanding the Sixth French Army, but the liberty in Paris which the battalion would have preferred is not forthcoming.

CHAPTER IV—Respite behind the lines is soon crushed by new orders to proceed far to the north in the Soissons sector, where the Germans are beginning a vast, new offensive. After an all night's grueling forced march the battalion finally arrives at the new front. Their orders are to get into touch with the Moroccan division fighting with the French forces.

Continued from last week

CHAPTER V

The Actual Charge at Soissons.

It was 4:35, the morning of July 18. Miles of close-in batteries opened with one stupendous thunder. The air above the tree-tops spoke with unearthly noises, the shriek and rumble of light and heavy shells. Forward through the woods, very near, rose up a continued crashing roar of explosions, and a murk of smoke, and a hell of bright fires continually renewed. It lasted only five minutes, that barrage, with every French and American gun that could be brought to bear firing at top speed. But they were terrible minutes for the unsuspecting Boche. Dazed, beaten down, and swept away, he tumbled out of his holes when it lifted, only to find the long bayonets of the Americans licking like flame across his forward positions, and those black devils, the Senegalese, raging with knives in his rifle-pits. His counterbarrage was slow and weak, and when it came the shells burst well behind the assaulting waves, which were already deep in his defenses.

The Forty-ninth company, running heavily, sodden with weariness, was plunging through a line of wire entanglements when the guns opened. A French rifleman squatted in a hole under the wire, and a sergeant bent over him and shouted: "Combien—how far—damn it, how you say?—combien—kilometre—a la Boche?" The Frenchman's eyes bulged. He did violent things with his arms. "Kilometre? kilometres? Mon Dieu, cent metres! Cent metres!" Half the company, still in column, was struggling in the wire when, from the tangle right in front, a machine-gun dinned fiercely and rifle-fire ran to left and right through the woods.

It was well that the woods were a little open in that spot, so that the lieutenant's frantic signals could be seen, for no voice could have been heard. And it was more than well that every man there had been shot over enough not to be gun-shy.



The Fighting in the Woods at Soissons Was Close and Savage.

trull of writhing khaki figures, but always carried two or three frenzied marines with bayonets into the emplacement; from whence would come shooting and screaming and other clotted unpleasant sounds, and then silence.

To left and right the lieutenant caught glimpses of his men, running, crawling, firing as they went. In a clearing, Lieutenant Appelgate, of the Seventeenth company, on the right, came into view. He waved his pistol and shouted something. He was grinning. . . . all the men were grinning. . . . It was a bon fight, after all.

Then little Tritt, his orderly, running at his side, went down, clawing at a bright jet of scarlet over his collar. The war became personal again—a keen sibilance of flesh-hunting bullets, ringing under his helmet. He found himself prone behind a great fallen tree, with a handful of his men; bark and splinters were leaping from the round trunk that sheltered them. "You"—to a panting half-dozen down the log—"crawl back to the stump and shoot into that clump of green bushes over there, where you see the new dirt—it's in there! Everything you've got, and watch for me up ahead. Slover"—to Sergeant Robert Slover, a small, fiery man from Tennessee—"come on."

They crawled along the tree. Back toward the stump the Springfields crackled furiously. Somewhere beyond, the machine-gun raved like a mad thing, and the Boches around it threw hand-grenades that made much noise and smoke. The two of them left the protection of the trunk, and felt remarkably naked behind a screen of leaves. They crawled slowly, stopping to peer across at the bushes. The lieutenant caught the dull gleam of a round gray helmet, moved a little, and saw the head and hands of the Boche who worked the gun. He pushed the sergeant with his foot and, moving very carefully, got his rifle up and laid his cheek against the stock. Over his sights, the German's face, twenty metres away, was intent and serious. The lieutenant fired, and saw his man half rise and topple forward on the gun.

Then things happened fast. Another German came into view straining to tear the fallen gunner off the firing mechanism. Slover shot him. There

was another, and another. Then the bush hollered like an ant-heap, and a fieldwebel sprang out with a grenade, which he did not get to throw. It went off, just the same, and the marines from the other end of the tree came with bayonets. . . . Presently they went on.

Later, working to the left of his company, the lieutenant was caught up in a fighting swirl of Senegalese and went with them into an evil place of barbed wire and machine-guns. These wild black Mohammedans from West Africa were enjoying themselves. Killing, which is at best an acquired taste with the civilized races, was only too palpably their mission in life. Their eyes rolled, and their splendid white teeth flashed in their heads, but here all resemblance to a happy southern dandy stopped. They were deadly. Each platoon swept its front like a hunting-pack, moving swiftly and surely together. The lieutenant felt a thrill of professional admiration as he went with them.

The hidden guns that fired on them were located with uncanny skill; they worked their automatic rifles forward on each flank until the doomed emplacement was under a scissors fire; then they took up the matter with the bayonet, and slew with lion-like leaps and lunges and a shrill barbaric yapping. They took no prisoners.

Back with his own men again, the company whittled thin! Was there no limit to the gloomy woods? . . . Light through the trees yonder!

The wood ended, and the attack burst out into the rolling wheatfields, where the sun shone in a cloudless sky and popples grew in the wheat. To the right, a great paved road marched, between tall poplars, much battered. On the road two motor-trucks burned fiercely and dead men lay around them. Across the road a group of stone farm-buildings had been shelled into a smoking dust-heap.

but from the ruins a nest of never-die machine guns opened flanking fire. The khaki lines checked and swirled around them, and there was a mounting crackle of rifle-fire . . . and the bayonets got in. The lines went forward to the low crest beyond, where, astride the road, was the first objective; and the assault companies halted here to reform. A few Boche shells howled over them, but the Boche were still pounding the wood, where the support battalions followed. The tanks debouched from the forest and went forward through the infantry.

In a hollow just ahead of the reformed line something was being dealt with by artillery, directed by the planes that dipped and swerved above the fight. The shells crashed down and made a great roaring murk of smoke and dust and flickering flames of red and green. The lieutenant, his report to the major dispatched, and his company straightened out, along with men from other units and a hand-

full of senegaise who had attached themselves to him, ran an expert eye along his waiting squads and allowed his mind to settle profoundly breakfast. (To be continued next week)



Type of Senegalese the Boche Feared Worse Than Anything Living.

They divined his order, they developed to the left, and they went forward yelling.

Suddenly Corbett, the platoon commander, leading to the left, turned and waved his arms. And through the trees he saw the Senegalese—lean, rangy men in mustard-colored uniforms, running with their bayonets all a-slant. He turned back toward his company with the sweetest feeling of relief that he had ever known; he had his contact established; his clever and war-wise company would attend to bringing it, no matter what happened to him.

The battle roared into the wood. Three lines of machine-guns, echeloned, held it. Here the Foret de Retz was like Dante's wood, so shattered and tortured and horrible it was, and the very trees seemed to writhe in agony. Here the fury of the barrage was spent, and the great trunks, thick as a man's body, were sheared off like weed-stalks; others were uprooted and lay gigantic along the torn earth; big limbs still crashed down or swayed half-severed; splinters and debris choked the ways beneath. A few German shells fell among the men—mustard-gas; and there in the wet woods one could see the devilish stuff spreading slowly, like a snaky mist around the shell-hole after the smoke had lifted.

Machine guns raved everywhere; there was a crackling din of rifles, and the coughing roar of hand-grenades. Some Boche guns were silenced by blind, furious rushes that left a

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