

PART CO. A, 115TH MACHINE GUN BATTALION PLAYED IN THE WAR

Detailed Account of Activities of Captain R. G. Cherry's Machine Gun Company, Composed Largely of Gaston Men--As Part of the "Old Hickory Divi on" These Men Played An Important Part in Breaking the Hindenburg Line and Distinguished Themselves for Bravery.

—By Capt. R. Gregg Cherry—

COMPANY "A", 115TH MACHINE GUN BATTALION A. E. F., A. P. O. 749.

December 15th, 1918.

Mrs. A. A. McLean,

Gastonia, N. C.

Dear Mrs. McLean—

Your kind letter received and greatly appreciated. It is always so very good to hear from Gastonia and learn how things are going in the home town. I know the people of the States are overjoyed with the signing of the armistice, considering such manner as it was exacted from Germany. France, England, Belgium, and all Europe—save Germany herself—are wild with joy. In all probability our Division has seen its last real fighting and has finished its work in France. At present we are quartered in the small village of Nouvillat, near the city of Le Mans. It was reported that we would be among the first Divisions to be sent back to the States, but the authorities have put the kibosh upon such talk and I think that we are here for the winter. At least we are counted among the thirty combatant divisions who are to remain in France until things become normal again. In spite of the fact that it appears that we will have to remain in France some months yet, I am extremely thankful and happy over the knowledge that eventually I shall be able to take back all those Gastonia boys who left their homes with me many months ago!

Since the rules of censorship have been relaxed in many instances I want to tell you some of the things we have been doing since leaving the States.

It will be remembered that this company was organized at Gastonia between the dates of June 25th and July 4th, 1917 as the Machine-Gun Troop, First North Carolina Cavalry. The maximum strength of such an organization at that time was four officers and ninety-one men. The Officers of the company were R. G. Cherry, Captain (Gastonia), William T. Council (Hickory, N. C.), First Lieutenant, Ben E. Douglas, (Gastonia, N. C.), and John K. Gray, (Tryon, N. C.), Second Lieutenants. Upon going to Camp Sevier, S. C. for training the strength of our company was raised to six officers and one hundred and seventy-two men, and the outfit became Company "A", 115th Machine Gun Battalion, 60th Brigade 30th Division, United States Army. 1st Lt. George E. Platt of Waynesville, N. C. was one of the additional officers added, and he brought forty good stalwart mountaineers from Haywood and Jackson Counties as his contribution. We received the remaining strength of the company through the draft from Cabarrus and Nash Counties of North Carolina. Major William R. Hoberston of Charlotte, N. C. was our Battalion Commander.

With such an outfit we put over the hard winter of 1917-18 at Camp Sevier undergoing training. In the meantime Lt. Council resigned his commission and 2nd Lt. Douglas was promoted to 1st Lieutenant, while 1st Sgt. John O. Rankin, Gastonia, N. C. was commissioned 2nd Lieutenant and Sgt. Martin H. Shuford made 1st Sergeant to replace Rankin.

On April 30th, 1917, Lt. Rankin, my self, and three Sergeants, Lawrence D. Nichols, (Charlotte), George W. Wilson, (Gastonia), and Harry O. Shueck, (Waynesville), were made a part of the Thirtieth Division Advance School Detachment and sent across via Hoboken, N. Y., and Brest, France. Our party left Hoboken on the steamship George Washington in company with the American and the De Kalb formerly the famous German raider the France Eitel Frederick. We landed in Brest, France on May 19th. Other than one submarine scare when about two hundred miles off the French coast our trip was uneventful and uneventful. I have never forgotten the attack by the German submarine. It occurred about 7:20 a. m. First there was the electric alarm in every compartment of the ship, then there was the siren whistle of the ship. This was the signal for everyone on deck. I had charge of five life boats and sixteen rafts on the deck, starboard side, and it was my duty to see that thirty-six officers and three hundred and fifty negro troops were loaded into the boats and on the rafts in an orderly manner. Everyone had gone through the formality of assembling on deck at their post many times before, in fact so much that the negro troops called the exercise "Drowning Drill." This morning everything went off like clock work. Submarine destroyers were on the job, darting here and there around the ship. On board everything was deathly quiet. Thus we awaited the order to lower boats, but the order never came. However, we were held on deck until daylight. During this wait upon deck many comical remarks were heard among the negro troops. One said to me: "Cap, for Lord's sake they ain't agwine to sink us?" I told him no, we were alright. He gave a deep sigh of relief and said to one of his comrades: "Well, nigger, Ise tellin' you the truth,

For the Children.

Too much care cannot be exercised in selecting a cough medicine for children. It should be pleasant to take, contain no harmful drug and most effectual in curing their coughs and colds. Long experience has shown that Chamberlain's Cough Remedy meets these conditions. It is a favorite with many mothers.

if I ever see land again, they's sho gotta build a bridge over the ocean or, Ise's a European nigger from now on!"

On May 5th, the entire Thirtieth Division entrained for Camp Merrit, N. J. My company was under the command of Lt. George E. Platt and the other Lieutenants. The outfit remained at Camp Merrit until May 10th when they entrained for England via Halifax, N. S. and Liverpool. The Division landed in Liverpool, England May 28th, 1918. During their trip over they had also been subjected to a submarine attack during which their ship crew threw overboard several depth bombs which resulted in damage to their own ship. All the pumps of the ship were put to work and the crew managed to get the Liverpool into dock safely.

Our Division (The Old Hickory) 20th and the New York Division (27th) became a part of the Second Corps under General Read, and while we were supposed to be a part of the Second American Army, we really were attached to and a part of the Second British Army. We were given British guns, British clothes, British rations, British horses and transport, and British instructors. In fact, in all but name we were in the British Army. We NEVER learned to wear a moustache, say "old chap," "old chum," to speak with nasal accents, or to talk in "bluddy, blighly," or even drink "ya four a'clock tea." We stuck to coffee, thought only of the "S. A.," and kept the spirit and fighting qualities of the real American soldier.

This is some about that we were given British instructors in our machine-gun work. The company was put through an intensive course of training, with permission for certain officers and men to visit the front for observation purposes. Lt. Douglas, and Sergeants George Van Dyke, Loin Britton and Clifton B. Jenkins were among those to go up from "A" Company.

On July 5th, 1918, our Battalion started for the front. We were three days on the hike, but finally arrived at Watou on the borderland of France and Belgium. Near Watou in an open pasture, sheltered in "pop-tents", within range of shell fire and subject to nightly air raids we established our rear headquarters. The place was called Camp Ritchie and remained our base as long as we were in Belgium. Soon after our arrival in Belgium Major Robertson was replaced by Major W. W. Pierce, (Goldshorn, N. C.), who has acted as our Battalion commander through the succeeding months.

On July 16th "A" and "B" (Asheville, N. C.) companies of our Battalion No. 2, but I am back with my company were ordered into the front line, which at that time extended between the ruined city of Ypres and Kennel Hill. Our trip to the line is vividly remembered. The early morning we marched from Camp Ritchie to Chinese Camp located just outside the ruined and deserted city of Popperinghe. We could not go closer than Chinese Camp in daylight. To do so would bring us under direct observation of the enemy who held all the high ground of the surrounding country. The roads were camouflaged even as far back as Ritchie Camp to prevent the enemy seeing traffic along the roads. In the afternoon about three o'clock the enemy began shelling the roads and back areas. Late in the afternoon I called the company together and cautioned them that this was their first trip into the lines, and that each and every one was expected to do his full duty—nothing less, no matter what happened! I asked if there was anyone who was afraid to go, it so, to drop out there. Real men nothing less were wanted. No one dropped out. All stood, and continued to stick thru the fighting months which intervened between July and the signing of the Armistice.

At 7:30 p. m. we left Chinese Camp to take up positions with the British along the Ypres-Comines Canal. It was a good two hours march. The boys were in a state of slight nervousness, but with a steady determination to gain that night. As darkness went down the enemy began to shell the roads with greater violence. Some shells fell in front of us, some fell behind us, so there was nothing to do but GO ON! Soon we began to feel a little more confident and took our situation as a matter of course. On the way down, in the midst of a hotly shelled area, we were held up by a regiment of Infantry on the road in front of us, and passed through a fifteen minute wait that was terrifying, to say the least. Lt. Rankin who was in command of the Second Platoon was dismounted, lost, and delayed nearly an hour by taking the wrong road which led to a place called Smythe Farm instead of following the column to our headquarters at Belgian Chateau. Finally his guide, a blighly Englishman, found his way out and led me the right road to our headquarters. Just as the entire company arrived at company headquarters the enemy put down a concentrated artillery barrage on an English battery of howitzers located about one hundred yards from our position. Some of his shells fell short and two Tommies were wounded while standing near my company. This almost "Put the wind up" some of my fellows, but nothing was said and no one of my company was hurt. In a short while all the gun teams had taken their equipment from the gun limbers and started for their nearest gun position. You can imagine my feeling of relief when about

two hours afterwards the platoon runners came in one at a time bringing me the message that all teams had reached their gun positions without casualty. Private Theon B. Ormand, of Gastonia probably the youngest and smallest soldier in the company, has acted thru the entire war as runner for the First Platoon. I remember this night in particular. Ormand was the first to bring back his message. He and the British Tommy who came back with him, came into my headquarters pulling and blowing—both had been running all the way for "Jerry" was simply shelling terrifically the entire area with gas and shrapnel. I asked Ormand if it wasn't pretty hot outside, he replied, "Not much, Captain, Sir"—but the Tommy who came back with Ormand broke into the conversation exclaiming, "Not much you're bloody, damn right, it's hot out there! I've been here three months and its the worst I've ever seen. There was a shell on the road behind us every step of the way up the plank road, and I thought he (Jerry) was going to get us!" In justice to Ormand it must be said that he has had a dangerous job, but one which someone had to do, and one which he selected himself and volunteered to do. He has carried messages thru high shell barrages of machine gun and heavy fire and while he has frequently been knocked down by the explosion and shock of shells, or had to lie on the ground, in mud and water while machine gun bullets whizzed over his back—there is no recollection by myself or his comrades where "Shine" Ormand has played the part of the coward or failed to do his duty in a single instance.

Major Lomack, a Scotoman, in command of the British company with whom we were associated, took me around to visit the gun positions during the night. We left company headquarters about one o'clock and returned at six thirty a. m. All the teams were in good shape. The men had water and rations and had become adjusted to their surroundings. All were eager to see the enemy. This being our first night's experience in the line, my Officers at this time were Lt. Rankin, of Gastonia, Lt. Peggalskie and Lt. De Wert of Illinois. Lt. Douglas was away at school, Lt. Gray was Battalion Supply Officer and Lt. Platt had been left back at the base.

Later the British withdrew and we were left entirely on our own. Lt. Douglas and Gray replaced Peggalskie and De Wert and I had my old company together operating upon our own hook. The task of supplying us with food, water, and supplies was ably managed by Sergeants Samuel S. McLean, Herbert Miller and Robert B. Hovis. And just here in fairness to these sergeants, it must be said that the company never lacked for its share of rations, or went without water, or other supplies which it was possible to get. These sergeants did the work of officers and did the job well. They were constantly under shell fire and especially subject to that worst of all nerve-racking pests, the night bombing plane, and were also subject to heavy fire when going to and from the front with supplies. In spite of their handicaps they never nessed an appointment or disobeyed an order. For their splendid work and whole hearted loyalty they deserve great credit.

It was a part of the Captain's duties to establish a company headquarters at which all platoon commanders could keep in communication with him, to lay out the general scheme of defense, to have general supervision of the entire company and to visit all of the gun teams at least once in twenty four hours. To make the entire tour around the guns it required from six to eight hours—depending upon the activity of the enemy. While making these trips I always took someone with me, usually Sergeant Shuford or Sergeant Wakefield went along. I remember one night John Queen, one of the company cooks was up at the front. He wanted to make the rounds. So he started out from company headquarters with a good nerve until we came to a long trail known as the "Brushy Road" which we had to follow about one and one half miles to get to two of the guns. The trail was perfectly level, except for the numerous shell holes, and the Boche always swept the road at irregular intervals with bursts of machine gun fire. The moon was shining very bright and you could see a man for more than five hundred yards. Suddenly, I heard a swish, swish, swish, sound close by us. I yelled to the cook, "Down, lie low!" After a bit the fire ceased, and I started ahead, but missed the cook. Upon going back to where I thought he must have stopped, I found him lying flat on the ground with his face buried in his hands. I asked him what was the matter? He says, "Lordy, Cap, I was laid down a long time before you said down, but I was going to wait here all night if you didn't say GET UP!"

Many things of interest happened during our stay along the front in Belgium. We occupied at some time, all the machine gun positions from Anzac Ridge to the Canal (Ypres-Comines). The fighting in Belgium while we were there was purely trench and position warfare— all our work was of a defensive character. Everything had to be done by night under cover of darkness. The slightest movement in day light was sure to be observed by the enemy and would bring down a hurricane of shelling when night came. The men lived in small hoxies and holes along the railway and canal bank like so many musk rats. Our principal food was "Bully Beef," cheese, coffee and bread. In the early morning after the guns were dismounted there would be all kinds of cooking utensils patented from petrol tins and mess kits. Each

Dollars and Cents.

Counting it only in dollars and cents, how much did that last cold cost you? A man may not always stop work when he has a cold, but perhaps it would be better if he did. It takes about ten days to get completely rid of a cold under the usual treatment. That time can be much shortened by taking Chamberlain's Cough Remedy and proper care of yourself, in fact, a bottle of this remedy in the house is a mighty good investment during the winter and spring months.

squad prepared its own food and some really good eats were prepared when the facilities available are considered. In disregard of all warning of danger, and in spite of the fact that any smoke would be observed by the enemy, the men insisted on making fires to prepare their food. They had to have something hot if it cost them their lives—and who could blame them?

The tasty menus read about in the big magazines, the poster and picture book covers showing the American soldiers going into the Y. M. C. A. but for a hot meal, the handing out of hot chocolate and of such stuff as dreams are made of, so far as my company or our battalion is concerned, I would not for the world dampen the ardor of a valiant worker for the Y. M. C. A. or War Work Campaign and such like—they are all—ALL GOOD, but so far since coming to France I remember two instances where Red Cross men gave tobacco, cigarettes and chocolate to the boys of my company, as for the others I remember nothing. I have not seen a Y. M. C. A. but since leaving the States—but I know they are here somewhere, for I have read about their work in the papers! The Y. M. C. A. man for our division is located at division headquarters, which is usually ten to twenty miles distant from our battalion. The battalion Supply Officer has through his own industry been able to purchase from the Y. M. C. A. tobacco, cigarettes, and a limited amount of candy which was resold to the men at what was called "Cost". I have not written the foregoing in the way of criticism, but it is well that the home folk be disillusioned and know some of the real truth, now that the war is over! Then too, it must not be forgotten that the American Y. M. C. A., Red Cross and War Work societies did their real work down on the American front. But I am convinced that many did most of their work in the back areas. "In and around" Paris, Bordeaux, Brest, Nice, St. Malo, Tons, Rouen and in so called "Leave areas" and about the bus stops and replacement camps. In such places where thousands of soldiers were kept and used as a part of the army but never got near the firing line or even a sound of the guns. Of course life with them was monotonous, but with fighting units there was something other going on to be expected at all times. The fighting unit have a little song about the men back in the Service of Supply which is for convenience called "SOS". The chorus of which goes as follows and carries its full meaning with it:

—Mother take in your Service Flag

Your son's in the "SOS"

It must also be remembered that we were with the British who had their own system of canteens, but as a matter of fact the usual but not universal practice the British declined to sell to American soldiers. When our boys attempted to buy the canteen worker would say: "We only have a little for our own chaps." But the boys didn't complain and were contented to eat their "Bully Beef", bread, cheese and hardtack and get a mixture from the rolling kitchen which they well named "Slumgully" after which to content themselves they would sing the following song, a parody on "Back Home in Tennessee" written by First Sergeant Robert F. Wakefield:

Back home in old N. C.

Just try to picture me

Down by my mother's knee

She thinks the world of me

All I can think of to-night

Is the very lights so bright

Nine-two's singing, shrapnel ringing

I've an awful fright

That mud around the dug-out door

Makes me want-a go home more
Old Fritz shoots like hell
He aims so "Bloody" well
Back home where they need me
You can imagine how they'll feel me
When I get back, When I get back
To my home in old "N. C."!
So much for the feeding of the men.

Herbert Miller, of Lincolnton is Mess Sergeant and is an excellent manager. He knows what he ought to get from the Quartermaster and how and what to buy from outsiders, and is always alert to the needs of the Company. Under his management there was accumulated a mess fund of more than two thousand dollars in the States, which has helped wonderfully since coming to France. Henry Miller of Gastonia is Chief Cook with Rufin Ayers of Nashville, N. C. and John Queen, of Waynesville, N. C. as able assistants. Then, too, there are Wesley McMahon, Ernest Platt and John Klutz the faithful "K. P.'s" who kept the cans buried and the pots and rolling kitchen shining. This was the kitchen staff that did the feeding. Suffice it to say, that the men when in the line lived on what could be carried up in sand bags and when out of the line on what could be prepared on a rolling kitchen. The cooks did well with what they had to do with.

During our operations in Belgium, "A" Company lost only one man. One afternoon about 5:30 Lieutenant Rankin, Douglas and myself had just been to one of the gun positions, with a view of changing it and had not been away more than seven minutes when a huge shell, a 22 lb. directly upon the position, completely destroying the gun and seriously wounding the gunner. This was Private Louie C. Wellborn, of Statesville, N. C., the first casualty of my Company. I have since learned that he will recover, but has lost one leg.

To Lieutenants Douglas, Rankin, and myself and their training efforts to instruct and look after the men of their platoons, must be accorded the success with which we went forth into our experiences in the Ypres sector with so few casualties. A distinct instance of their fidelity to duty is remembered, when on one occasion it was reported upon good authority that the enemy would put down a heavy artillery barrage and probably make an attack the following morning. Orders came that all Infantry detachments would be withdrawn from the out posts and the front line, and that so many of the Machine Gunners as the Commanding Officer deemed advisable. The Major Commanding the detachment of Infantry withdrew his troops until all Infantry was completely behind our Machine Gun positions all along the line. The Major met Lieutenant Gray down at his position and suggested that he withdraw his guns, but the Lieutenant promptly told him that Captain Cherry was commanding the Machine Gun Company and that he could not withdraw his guns unless ordered by his Commanding Officer, and stated that he did not think I would order the guns moved. Then it was that the Major sent for me. Upon reporting to his Headquarters the order regarding withdrawal was read and the Major stated that it was optimal and that he would leave me to handle the machine guns as I thought best. Immediately I sent a runner to each of the Platoon Commanders to leave their guns where they were—no matter what the Infantry did. That night between two o'clock and daylight I made my tour of inspection of the guns. I found Lieutenant Gray at the railway bank with his forward guns, his Platoon Sergeant, Edmund H. Bradley at his rear guns and all men standing to ready for any emergency. I found Lieutenant

Douglas on the canal at his forward guns with Sergeant Nichols at his rear guns and all men standing to ready for any emergency. I found Lieutenant Rankin in the same relative position with all men standing to for any emergency. It was rather a nervous situation I must admit to have all the Infantry completely behind and nothing in front except the enemy who was expected to attack at any time. But to have moved our guns would have rendered them practically useless in view of the fact that they were all sited under a prepared defensive scheme, and at any rate would have gained us nothing and would have been contrary to the principles which had been drilled into the men as machine-gunners, which was: Machine-Gunners stand fast!

Machine-Gunners fight to the last!
Luckily no attack was made and we were doubly right in not moving the guns. While in Belgium Lieutenant George F. Platt, was sent away to attend the Machine Gun School, and there during his course of training he lost his health and was transferred to a Replacement Camp. Also Sergeant Martin H. Shuford, went to attend the Officer's Training School, at Langres, France, where he received a commission as Second Lieutenant and was assigned to an Infantry Company in the New York Division. The transfer of Sergeant Shuford was a distinct loss to the Company, but it is pleasing to know that he has survived the war with an Officer's excellent record in his present Battalion. Sergeant Robert F. Wakefield of Charlotte, N. C. was made First Sergeant to replace Sergeant Shuford, and in justice to an appreciation of Wakefield, it must be said that during the trying months of the war he has made an excellent First Sergeant. He knows his job, and fills it to the full satisfaction of all concerned.

In the latter part of August 1918 we went to the Ypres sector and went to the little French village of Oaterville, near St. Eloi, where we were attached to the Fourth British Army and underwent a two weeks course of instruction, preparatory to going into the line on another front. On September 15th we moved to Rabempres, where after four days we hiked twelve miles one afternoon, were loaded in trucks, rode all night through the ruined cities of Albert, Arras, Perreux and other towns of the Somme Sector, finally stopping near the village of Tincourt, from which place we hiked seven more miles in the morning to a temporary camp. The fellows were "all in" and the Captain too!

On the night of September 25th "A" Company went into the lines taking up positions just in front of the villages of Hargicourt and Villerott. On the afternoon of the 27th we were told of the big stunt which would be pulled on Sunday the 29th. I was ordered to take "A" and "C" (Wilmington, N. C.) Companies and put down a Machine Gun Barrage on the left of our Divisional Sector. I was supposed to pick out my battery positions on the night of the 27th. With Lieutenant Douglas and Sergeant Taylor of "A" Company and Lieutenant Harbin of "C" Company, I started out to find the positions on the grounds which we had chosen on the map. Darkness soon came on, there were no trenches to follow, for this was the battle field fronting the famous Hindenburg Line, and it was a mass of shell holes with new ones being made every few minutes. We ran, crawled, and worked our way the best we could along and through the maze of shell holes looking for the place which filled the description of our barrage position—but could find nothing. After being out

(Continued on page 7.)

PRINCE ALBERT



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