

HISTORY OF CO. A

(Continued from page 6.)

for more than three hours the fellows began to get the least bit nervous, and, I think doubted if I knew where we were, or where we were going, or how to get back where we had come from! The front at this place made almost a semi-circle and every light could be seen on all sides. The only thing that we had to guide us was the moon. Wandering a long in this manner we were suddenly greeted by HALT! Each of us fell to the ground and felt for his gun. WHO'S THERE! came in perfect English—so we all got up and I answered friends. It was discovered to be one of the American outpost which we knew nothing of before that time. The only information the sentinel could give us was the direction back to his Company Headquarters, but added that he did not think we could find it in the darkness. It was absolutely necessary that we get back to the Company before daylight, so we made a second attempt. After wandering around for more than an hour we were halted the second time by the same sentinel. There was nothing to do but try again. This time we had been walking and dodging shells for about two hours when we suddenly found ourselves back in the road which we had left in the early part of the night. It was nearly 4 a. m. when we got back to Company Headquarters, day was beginning to break so the only thing we could do was to wait over until the next afternoon. It had been a bad night, but we were back safely and that was something to be thankful for.

In the mean time Lieutenant Rankin had been working most of the night with a detail hauling ammunition and supplies up to the place which had been designated as our ammunition dump. During the night he had been slightly wounded by the fragment of a shell striking him on the chin. One of Jerry's 4.2's fell close by and a part of the shell made an ugly gash in Rankin's chin. A gas shell followed close upon the first and came near getting him—but he stuck to his job until it was finished, and no one knew of his troubles until he came in the next morning with his chin bandaged.

On the 28th we located the barrage position, and in the afternoon late the Companies were brought up to prepare positions and carry up equipment. The enemy must have noticed the great activity along our entire front, for more than ever, he swept all roads and paths with shell and Machine Gun fire until it was practically impossible to take a Company in without getting some one hurt. In the early part of the night, Fred Dunn of Gastonia, was wounded by being shot in the left arm and shoulder by Machine Gun bullets. Also Privates Jeter R. Huffman of Meyersville and William P. Honeycutt, of Concord were gassed and had to be sent to the Hospital. The remainder of the Company under Lieutenants Dunsen and Rankin and "C" Company under Lieutenants Harbin and Fitzsimons worked all night getting things in shape. At Company Headquarters Lieutenant Gray, Sergeant Wakefield and Corporal Walters worked without ceasing upon the firing data and made all the gun charts and marked the maps for both Companies. It was no small job, every one had to work. Behind our positions artillery was massed until there was one gun for every ten yards of space upon the front. In our Division alone there were more than one hundred and sixty Machine Guns and over six hundred cannon of all sizes and descriptions massed to support the Infantry in the attack. There was everything from the light machine gun up to the big Howitzer which threw a shell weighing seven hundred pounds ready to take part in the barrage. At zero hour, 5:50 a. m. every gun opened fire. The Infantry went over the top. The earth seemed to rock under the veritable rain of lead, iron and steel. The heavens were aflame with the flash of guns. Along the front Jerry's "SOS" filled the air like so many rockets in the fire works of a Fourth of July celebration. The constant roar of cannon and the eternal rattle of machine guns furnished a protective barrage which enabled our infantry to go forward. A dense smoke and fog settled close to the earth and nothing could be seen even a few yards away. Soon streams of prisoners were coming to the rear looking for a guide to show them to the prison cage. The tanks pushed on, the Infantry kept going—THE HINDENBURG LINE HAD TO BE BROKEN! Soon the Infantry was on the outskirts of the town of Bellecourt under which the famous Cambrai St. Quentin Canal runs in a tunnel for over two miles. This was strongly fortified and offered a serious obstacle—but it did not stop our victorious Infantry. The tunnel was cleared and more than eight hundred Germans came out of their strong hold with hands up crying "Kamerad!" some times the cry was heard and some times it was not. No chance was taken for German treachery was too fresh in the minds of most soldiers and all had agreed that the best German was a dead German. Bellecourt was the limit of our machine gun barrage. It was not possible to fire at a longer range over the heads of our advancing Infantry. Orders came that all Machine Gun Companies should withdraw to defensive positions and prepare for a possible counter attack. We did so, but the counter attack never came. Things had moved so fast

that the enemy was simply swept off their feet and thrown back leaving the towns of Bellecourt and Nauroy in our possession and the Hindenburg line broke at a vital point for more than twenty miles. In justice to the men of "A" Company, it must be said, that in this attack, their first real big show, they acted as real veterans. Absolutely forgetful of self and safety, they did their job like brave men. Early in the morning two enemy airplanes passed over our positions and it was not long before the enemy's counter battery work came down on us. The men stuck to their guns with the most fidelity and fulfilled my highest expectations and hopes which had been builded during the long months of training. Of course, all safe guards in the way of sand bags, entrenchments, etc. were made around the guns to protect the gunners, but I have seen men of "A" Company during the firing mount upon the parapet in front of their gun refill it with water, lean over the top and remedy a stoppage; stop and re-check their aim, or reset their aiming mark with as much ease and apparent self control as an old woman changes her knitting needles.

During the barrage Monroe Wilson one of the mountaineer boys, a real fighter, was struck on the head by a piece of shrapnel from a shell which burst nearby. The blow knocked him from the gun and he fell on his side. He scrambled back to his feet with his head bleeding badly reported to Lieutenant Douglas saying: "The dam— Jerry knocked the fool out of me, and I hadn't fired but four belts (four rounds)!" Douglas afterwards reported to me that Wilson was the maddest man he had ever seen, but that he sent him to the dugout where first aid was applied and later he was sent to the Hospital. Wilson is back with the Company now.

Another incident which occurred during the barrage was the passing of the tanks. One tank driver made a short turn and ran squarely over Corporal Gibson's gun which was a gunner was firing, and came dangerously near crushing the entire team. In a few minutes a second tank started across the identical spot and a big shell struck directly upon top of the tank killing the Officer in charge and wounding several of the men. So, after all, it was lucky that the first tank had moved my gun team, otherwise they would have been the victims of the shell to which the tank crew fell a prey.

Just after we had finished the barrage and while the guns were being cleaned and reloaded, a shell fell directly on one of the guns. Sergeant John C. Williams from Bossesville, N. C. was blown about six yards away, an Automatic Pistol torn from his waist and absolutely de-sensitized, while he himself was badly shocked but otherwise not touched. The same shell did wound severely Private William Hill of Waynesville, N. C. and wounded slightly Private Stephen Amstutz.

Later in the day news came back that the Platoon of Machine Guns which had followed the Infantry in the attack had been lost and that the General directed "A" Company to replace the lost Platoon. With the Third Platoon under Lieut. Gray who during the barrage had served in the capacity of Second in Command and spent his time figuring out firing data, I started forward to find out something about the line so as to give all possible support to the Infantry. We worked our way forward leading the Platoon over the fresh Battle Field until we were fired on from the left rear by French Mortars and Machine Guns and were forced to take shelter in a trench which had been occupied a few hours before by the enemy. Upon further reconnaissance we discovered that the New York Division which was upon our left flank had not pushed as far forward as our Division and that the enemy was still strongly entrenched in a part of the tunnel in the 27th Area. So we took up positions protecting our left flank. After getting Lieutenant Gray's Platoon adjusted and safely in position I returned to where I had left Rankin and Douglas with the First and Second Platoon. That night the two runners, one of whom was Private Paul C. Broome of Stanley, N. C. who were carrying water and rations up to Lieutenant Gray, lost their way and to keep from wandering into the enemy's lines, spent the night in an open shell hole. They reported great experiences the next morning. The following day we were relieved by the Australians who leapedfrogged our Division for a gain of three thousand yards. During the relief on the night of September 30th I had two men wounded, both were from Illinois, and were transport drivers.

Our withdrawal from the line on September 30th marked the close of our first real battle. Many good Americans had paid the supreme sacrifice. Time shall never efface the happening of these two days from my memory. It was there that Captain Ben Dixon, and Sergeant Henry Carpenter and scores of others lost their lives. The whole thing seemed horrible, but in its frightfulness there is a thrilling fascination that fills the heart of those who were there, and came away. I have since often thought, that if it had been the will of God that I should be killed in this war—I would like to have died with those who fell at Bellecourt. For in that Battle, the men who took part learned one great philosophy of life! "They learned to die!" Their faces were turned toward the East, and as the sun sank to rest beyond the hills behind the twilight soon turned to pitch darkness, and even an atheist would have half-believed in God. For us the living there was no rest. We had to hold on with keen watch against the fierce shell and gun fire of a savage and vicious enemy. For the heroic dead fighting days were over, and around their silent forms hovered the benediction of that peace which passeth understanding. Every soul that winged its flight to eternity that day, had fulfilled its appointed work not in vain. Destiny sensed with necessity had so decreed the investment of their lives into the services of their country, and in return they had earned a great victory and left their Country's

honor safe!

We spent the night of the 30th at the Battalion assembly ground. The men sleeping under gun limbers and for the most part in the open with a constant drizzle of rain. The following morning we marched back to Roisel where all equipment was repacked. In the afternoon we proceeded to the valley behind Tincoart, and the following day we hiked fourteen miles, passing through Perronne, to our camp at Flaucourt. Here we spent three days and orders were received that our Battalion would go back into the line October 6, 1918. This necessitated a hike of fourteen miles back to Tincoart and Roisel where we reassembled at the Battalion assembly ground. There we waited until the 8th, when orders came that Captain Cherry would take the Battalion of four Companies forward to the valley lying between the villages of Joncourt and Estrees, the Australians having carried the line to that point. We started and everything went well until about 9 o'clock the enemy began bombing the roads from his night planes. The heavens were alive with the nerve-racking hum of hostile planes. Bright very-lights were dropped along the road by the enemy to aid him in the search for passing troops or transports which should be a target for his bombers. But somehow we arrived in the valley behind Joncourt with the entire Battalion including the Transport with no one injured. Then it was that the enemy seemed to concentrate all his evil efforts upon our Camp. I remember Lieutenant Douglas came to me and said: "Captain you will never get through the night here without getting some one hurt." I then notified all the Battalion to keep their men well scattered so that one shell or bomb could get only a few men in the event that any should fall in our Camp. The men were tired out from the long march and in spite of the surrounding dangers lay down on the ground, covered only by their raincoats and were soon asleep. Luckily no one was injured during the night. I had just laid down when an orderly came up with a message or order to Regimental Headquarters at once. Upon arriving there I was told of the attack the next morning at 5:20 a. m. My Company was to be in reserve and follow the forward Companies at five hundred yards. Soon all gun teams with fighting limbers were on the road. It was very dark with a heavy fog lying low on the ground, and we had no maps to guide us. We passed through the villages of Wincoart, Roncourt, Mouthorain, and Bruncourt, which had been captured the day before and arrived at Vaux Le Petit Farm where the Company was halted behind a hedge and orders given for them to eat their breakfast. I went forward with two runners to keep in touch with the attacking troops. The town of Premont was taken before 9 o'clock in the morning and little resistance was met until our troops reached the outskirts of the city of Bohain. The British Division on our right flank did not keep up and this left our entire flank to the enemy. "A" Company was then ordered forward to cover and protect the exposed right flank. The Company was soon moved as far forward as I thought the entire Company could go with reasonable safety, then with Lieutenant Douglas I went up to pick out our positions. On our way up Douglas and myself were caught in an Artillery Barrage which came near ending our part of the war. We had been working our way along a sunken road and were near an old house when the shelling began. As the barrage grew heavier we looked for shelter and at the particular time in question both of us were standing in the road looking in a dugout which had been vacated a few hours before by the enemy, undecided whether to go in or stand outside, when a shell struck squarely in the road a few feet away, and simply blew us into the dugout. We were both a little dazed over the shock at first—but after a bit Douglas, said: "D— Close Capt." and I agreed with him without argument. After finishing our reconnaissance the first Platoon under Lieut. Douglas took up positions covering the exposed flank and the Second and Third Platoons were held in an old quarry nearby. In their several positions the men dug holes in the ground and spent the night.

The following morning at 5:30 the attack was renewed. My Company moved forward covering the right flank of our Division. During the day the towns of Bohain, Busigny and Bequigny were captured. Nothing of importance happened to "A" Company during the day. That night we dug in and spent the night along a hedge surrounding an apple orchard near the town of Bohain.

The next day, October 11th, 1918, the attack was renewed and "A" Company was ordered to pass through the forward Machine Gun Companies and support the front line Infantry. The enemy had taken up position on the high ground overlooking Vaux Andigny. The British were not up on our right or on our left. This put our Division in the very nose of a silent which could be bombarded from three sides—front, right and left. The occupation of the high ground by the enemy, together with the fact that we were in a salient made the line practically untenable. In spite of difficulties the attack was renewed and the enemy driven from Vaux Andigny. Later in the day our Artillery support became weak and the increased advantage of the enemy as we neared his positions together with a great number of casualties among the Infantry forced our troops to dig in and hold the ground taken.

This was an eventful day with my Company. All the roads, paths, and fields were swept with shell and Machine Gun fire by the enemy. The enemy was firing

point blank through open sights with cannon at small groups and even single soldiers as they advanced upon Vaux Andigny. During the morning on our way down Samuel Setzer, of Gastonia, N. C. was shot in the mouth and painfully but not seriously wounded. Fred Thompson of Gastonia, N. C. had the "bully beef" portion of his own rations, which hung at his side in a sack, cut open as if by a can opener by the fragment of a shell which burst near by and another soldier in the Company had his overcoat riddled and cut by the fragment of a shell as bad as if he had backed into a buzz saw—but both were unhurt. Upon entering the village we saw quite a number of civilians who were overjoyed to see friends. Their haggard faces showed the effects of four years suffering. The enemy had ransacked and robbed their homes, barns, gardens and sows of every thing of value. Of what little was left they were willing to share with us. Some brought out coffee and gave the soldiers. They told us of the horrors they had been through under German domination. Among the dastardly German deeds they recounted was the taking away of more than one hundred young girls and women as hostages. This made the men of "A" Company feel that they had much to fight for, and they proceeded to do their job.

Later in the day, about 4:30, the enemy must have discovered that all his troops were clear of the village for he began to shell heavily. My Company was the only troops in the village. Along the railway in the valley about fifty yards from our positions was our Infantry; on the surrounding hill in a trench about four hundred yards from our positions was the enemy. As darkness came on the enemy increased his shell fire and mixed gas with his heavy shrapnel. It was a horrible night for us. In the early part of the night Mack D. Huffman, of Meyersville, N. C. while on duty at his gun had his leg nearly cut from his body by shrapnel. Later a shell struck one of our positions wounding John E. Black, of Gastonia, N. C. and Joseph O. Orent, of Michigan. Private Black was struck in the back by a piece of shrapnel and painfully injured, though not seriously. Black has not yet returned to the Company from the Hospital. Private Orent had his left arm shot off at the wrist, his left knee was absolutely shattered as if struck by a sledge hammer, and a piece of shrapnel the size of a hen egg passed through his right arm. In this terrible condition he was perfectly conscious and never murmured a complaint. I dressed his wounds and sent him to the A. I. Station. I knew he was mortally wounded but had hopes that his cool nerve and previous perfect health would keep him alive. The shock and loss of blood was too much. He never lived to see the morning sun, but passed away as the new day was breaking. In his death his parents lost a darling son, his comrades a good friend, his Company a brave and loyal soldier and his Country a hero who died for the supreme sacrifice.

The following day October 12th, 1918 our Division was relieved by the 27th Division, and my Company withdrew to the valley near the town of Premont. There we remained, sheltered in our "dugouts" until October 16th, when we were ordered to the line. During the intervening days the 27th had made no attempt to move the line and the enemy was now more strongly entrenched than before on the high ground overlooking Vaux Andigny. A determined attack was necessary to drive him back. I was ordered to take "A" and "B" Assault Companies and put down a Machine Gun barrage on the right sector of our Division. With the two Companies divided into four batteries of six guns each positions were taken up in an old quarry on the crest of the hill overlooking Vaux Andigny and Molain. Artillery was massed in the rear of us and at zero hour, 5:20 a. m. every gun opened fire. The Infantry went forward under the barrage and soon prisoners were coming back. The town of Molain, La Haie Mineresse and St. Souplet were taken before the day was half gone. After finishing our barrage "B" Company was withdrawn for reserve and "A" Company ordered to follow and give further support to the Infantry. Lieutenant Gray became ill with the "Flu" and was sent to the Hospital. This left me with Lieutenants Douglas, Rankin and James R. Minnish, of Marion, N. C. Lieutenant Minnish had been assigned to "A" Company some time previous, but had served in connection with the Transport. Instructions were left to have guns and ammunition put in order while with Lieut. Douglas and two runners I went forward to reconnoiter and keep in touch with the Infantry. I shall not soon forget this morning, October 17. Not because it happened to be my birthday, but because of the things Douglas and myself saw and encountered as we worked our way through the smoke across the new Battle Field. Along the way where the Infantry had been ordered to go over the top, there lay a dead American upon the average of one every ten yards. All with their faces to the front and many with their hands held up. All had met death suddenly from fierce shell fire and upon their cold pallid faces was indelibly written that determined expression which led the "Old Hickory Division" to victory where others failed. Their lives were not wasted but were "bought" by the enemy, for a few hundred yards ahead there lay more than two Germans for every wounded or dead American.

After getting the necessary information the Company was brought up by single platoons, and in this manner we continued to work our way forward protecting our right flank. As night came on the Infantry dug in along a line overlooking the La Selle River. "A" Company of course behind and on the right found fairly good quarters that night under the hay in a French Farmers barn located near the City of Molain.

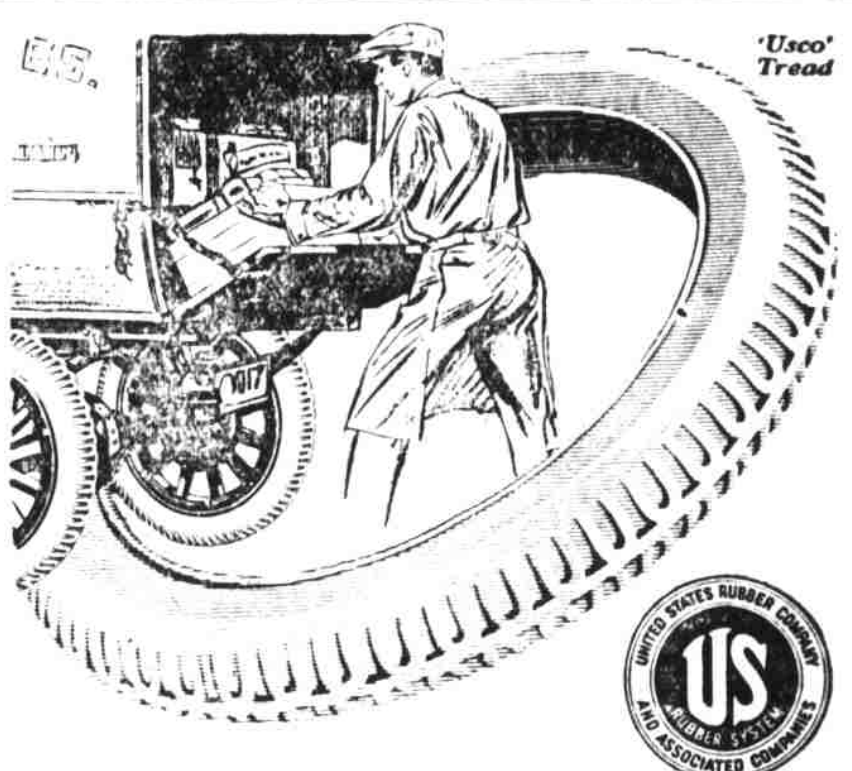
The following day at 5:30 the attack was renewed. The La Selle river was crossed and the town of St. Martin's River captured together with the main railroad system of our sector. Six guns of "A" Company were left in the edge

of the village and the remaining six guns under command of Lt. Rankin pushed forward to the railway bank. After designating the positions to be taken up by Lt. Rankin I returned to where I had left Lt. Douglas and had him place his guns in a sunken road located about five hundred yards behind the railway. After giving instructions relative to placing guns and figuring firing data I returned to the railway bank. In the meantime the British who had been behind us on the right made an attack and we got orders to assist them by firing on the town of Ribeaucourt. When our guns on the railway bank opened fire this brought down a heavy artillery barrage by the enemy. Many shells fell along the railways, but luckily no one of "A" Company was injured. After the guns on the railway had ceased fire I returned to the positions held by Lt. Douglas. Upon arriving at the "sunken road" it was discovered that everyone except three privates were gone. I inquired regarding Lt. Douglas and his platoon, and was told that the enemy's counter barrage had fallen directly upon the road and that Lt. Douglas had taken the men to another position. A number of scattered shells were falling in our area at intervals, but Corporal Griffing and myself sat down to eat dinner. The Corporal opened a can of beans and cut each of us a slice of bread. Suddenly a shell struck in the road nearby and covered our beans with dirt. Not to be outdone the Corporal cut each of us a second slice of bread and spread it with beans. No sooner done than those shells fell close by partially covering both of us with dirt. It did not take me further argument to decide that Douglas had been right in moving his platoon and it did not take persuasion to make us move out. All the men were moved to another position without loss of equipment or anyone being injured. As night came on the company dug in with Rankin's guns along the railway and Douglas along the edge of the village of St. Martin's River. That night the British complained that they had pushed slightly ahead of our Division on the right and our Infantry were ordered to make an attack at 11:30 p. m. This was a situation which to my knowledge never existed before, if in fact, it really existed at this particular time, for the "Old Hickory Division" was always ahead of its flank divisions.

Then, too, the midnight attack was something new, but in the midnight darkness our Infantry worked their way forward capturing the town of Ribeaucourt, and in the early morning pushed on through the town of Escallion and captured Maszenheim. I went forward to Ribeaucourt, following the right flank and keeping in touch with the Infantry. Positions for my Company and their road of advance were chosen and a guide sent back for the company, but orders came that we should remain along the railway in defensive positions during the day.

On the night of October 19th our Division was relieved and withdrew from the line and spent the night in the city of St. Souplet. The next morning all equipment was put in order and we marched back to Busigny and spent the night. Here Lt. Douglas was sent back as Battalion billetting officer to select an area for our camp. The Battalion proceeded to Ramcourt and spent the night of October 21st. Here Lt. Rankin became ill with the "Flu" and was sent to the Hospital in London, England. This left me with the entire company and one of floor. On the next day we moved to Tincoart and there entrained for the little French village of Bonny on the waters of the Somme River near Amiens. The company arrived at Bonny all dirty and completely exhausted, with some sick with the "Flu" including myself. The sick were sent to the Hospital, except myself. I remained with the company and under the faithful administration of good "Old Alec" in a weeks time I was in fair shape. The company were given clean clothes and a bath, something they had not had since they left Osterville in the early part of September. All equipment was cleaned, repaired and new men sent to the Division to replace those sick, wounded, or killed and all outfits put in shape to return to the line. BUT on November 11th the ARMISTICE was signed! To us located in a shell torn village, deserted of all civilians, the signing of the armistice was not heralded with the wild hurrah and the general celebration which characterized the demonstrations among those parts of the world inhabited by the civilian population. In Corbie and all the neighboring villages the church bells were rung with-

(Continued on page 8.)



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