



100th Anniversary of World War I

Meuse-Argonne

26 September 1918—11 November 1918



This MONTH in military history

- 1783 Treaty of Paris signed
- 1860 General Pershing is born in Missouri
- 1862 Battle of Antietam
- 1864 Atlanta is taken by General Sherman
- 1916 Tanks were first used in combat
- 1939 Germany invades
- 1949 Berlin Airlift ends.
- 1962 Soviet missiles begin entering Cuba
- 1980 Iran-Iraq War begins
- 2001 Terrorists strike the World Trade Center and the Pentagon

As A Matter of Fact

The conservatory at Quarters One housed a widely diverse assortment of plants; however, brutal Midwest Winters threatened these plants. After WWI, to combat the frigid temperatures, Commanding Officers would use excess wood stocks of 1903 Springfield rifles to keep the conservatory warm.

The colossal Meuse Argonne battle began with a battle of a different sort: a shouting match between General John J. Pershing and his immediate commander, French Field Marshal Ferdinand Foch. Foch had arrived on 30 August 1918 to discuss the upcoming campaign. Pershing and his staff were putting the finishing touches on an offensive that was designed to wipe out the German salient in the St. Mihiel area. To Pershing's surprise, Foch announced that he had changed his mind regarding the offensive. He now wanted Pershing to reduce the overall American offensive, at St. Mihiel, to little more than a demonstration then hand over command of two-thirds of the First Army's troops to the Allies.

Pershing's aides described the exchange as one in which Pershing absolutely refused to comply. "Do you wish to take part in the battle?" Foch yelled. "As an American army and in no other way!" returned Pershing. After more heated debate Foch backed down and agreed to let Pershing go ahead with the St. Mihiel attack. But Foch insisted on American support for a grand offensive in the Meuse Argonne region. Pershing vowed to finish St. Mihiel by mid-September, reorganize, re-equip, consolidate and move First Army's approximate 600,000 men, 2,000 field guns and 900,000 tons of ammunition and supplies 60 miles north then commit them to the

assault before the end of the month. After clearing the St. Mihiel salient in three days of fighting, the American Army began moving north to the Argonne sector. The movement was completed with enough time to step off on the Meuse-Argonne offensive on 26 September. The necessary troop movements included many untried divisions placed in the vanguard of the attacking forces due to their position in line of march.

The attack commenced at 5:30 AM on 26 September, a cool foggy morning, after a bombardment by 2,700 Allied guns. The AEF expended more ammunition during this single bombardment than in the entirety of the American Civil War. The final goal of the offensive was the capture of Sedan in hopes of crippling the German rail and communication network than ran in the area. The rail network consisted of a four-track railroad that sustained the Kaiser's armies to the north. Most of the initial assault made solid gains supported by American and French tanks as well as air support. Of the nine divisions that surged into the ominous fog on 26 September, only four, the 4th, 28th, 33rd and 77th, had served in the summer-long struggle to reverse the German spring offensive gains. Two divisions, the 79th and the 91st, had never even been in the front lines prior to this battle.

On the 27th, to the northwest, British and Belgian divisions started their offensive,

driving towards Ghent (Belgium). The scale of the overall offensive, bolstered by the eager, but largely inexperienced, U.S. troops, signaled renewed vigor among the Allies and sharply dimmed German hopes for victory. However, by 1 October 1918, the offensive was starting to stall due to heavy resistance and logistics problems. After some reorganization Pershing ordered a renewed assault along the entire American line. The Germans met the renewed attack with a ferocious resistance, resulting in an advance measured in yards. This phase of the fighting included the 77th Division's famed stand of the "Lost Battalion," where some 540 Soldiers of the Division were cut off and surrounded in the Ravin de Chaulevaux. Elsewhere, Corporal Alvin York of the 82nd Division captured 132 German Soldiers which he was awarded the Medal of Honor. American forces eventually began to break through the German lines finally achieving Pershing's goal for the first day of the offensive at a cost of 100,000 casualties. By October 31, the Americans had advanced 15 km finally clearing the Argonne Forest. The final days saw French forces seize Sedan and its critical railroad hub. By 6 November American forces captured the hills surrounding Sedan. The battle only ceased with news of the 11 November armistice which stopped the fighting as 11am.


September Trivia!

- ① Named after an American folk hero, which weapon did RIA produce capable of firing an atomic round?
- ② What was the only time in history the RIA Museum was closed down?
- ③ M1 Garand Serial Number 1 is located at Springfield Armory, where is Springfield Number 2 located?


Last Month's Answers

- ① 1 November 1918
- ② 4 July 1845
- ③ World War II

From the Archives



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ARSENAL WORKER TELLS OF BATTLE

Writing with a pencil and paper captured from a German lieutenant, Private E. H. Eberle, 1010 West Fifteenth Street, Davenport, formerly employed in the Armory shops, in a communication to Chas. Jack, an employee in DM4, tells some of the experiences he encountered recently while going "over the top." He is in a machine gun battalion.

After he captured the German officer during an engagement early in September, he took, in addition to the writing paper and pencil, a

pair of field glasses, a valuable revolver and a helmet, which he intended to keep as a relic. He was forced, however, to discard these later because of the weight, he states. "If we had stake wagons we could handle all the souvenirs taken from Germans, but carrying them is too tedious after a long jaunt," he writes.

The revolver which he took from the captured German later saved his life. "I had to throw it at a German to keep him down, until I could load my revolver," he narrates.

He states that his division at first encountered great difficulty in ousting the Germans, who were strongly fortified. The din of the machine guns and the fact that it was the first time that they had gone "over the top" made many of the fellows nervous at first, but the Germans were finally ousted from their position. "The noise is something I can't explain. Right now I can hear the shells bursting over 14 miles away," he states.