



THIS MONTH MILITARY HISTORY

- 1814 MAJ Zachary Taylor suffers the only defeat of his career at Credit Island.
- 1863 Excavation for the Clock Tower building began at Rock Island Arsenal.
- 1864 The 108th Infantry arrived at Rock Island to guard Confederate POWs.
- 1866 Excavation for Shop C, modern Building 104 (CHRA-NC), begins.
- 1877 The sun dial that is located at the end of Gillespie Avenue is dedicated.
- 1910 A chemical laboratory was established at the arsenal.
- 1918 Cora De Wilford becomes the first woman motorcycle driver at the arsenal.
- 1945 Italian POWs at Rock Island were sent to various ports for relocation.
- 1958 Standardization of the M386 Honest John trunk mounted launcher is achieved.
- 1969 Rock Island Arsenal is placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Battle of St. Mihiel 1918

104 years ago this month, the St. Mihiel Offensive (12 to 16 September 1918) would establish the unproven U.S. Army in the eyes of the French, British and opposing German forces. The offensive proved to be the first of its kind in many ways for the American Expeditionary Forces and would portend how the war would be fought. This would be the first and only major offensive that the American Expeditionary Forces independently led as an organized force separate from their Allies. The attack would also be the first time, to this point, that more than half a million American Soldiers were engaged in a single attack and would carry the distinction as the first attack that would officially use the D-Day designation in United States Army history.¹ The battle would occur along a 30-mile-wide German position that jutted 15 miles into Allied lines. D-day was set for 12 September 1918 and was announced by Field Order Number 9, First Army, American Expeditionary Forces, dated 7 September 1918: "The First Army will attack at H-hour on D-Day with the object of forcing the evacuation of the St. Mihiel Salient." The start of the St. Mihiel offensive would be a record-setting day for the Americans on a salient that had formed in 1914 and remained unbroken, even after repeated attacks by the French Army.

General John Pershing, the senior American Commander was junior in status to his British and French counter parts, at this point in the war, and he had to obtain French Field Marshal Foch's permission to take over an entire section of the St. Mihiel sector. The request was accommodated by leaving three American divisions on the Vesle front under French command during the offensive.² Pershing promised Foch that, in addition to other concessions, if the American Army carried out the St. Mihiel attack on its own it would be ready to disengage, move and re-engage with a much greater American attack in the Meuse-Argonne sector in approximately two weeks.

Colonel George Marshall, one of the planners of the St. Mihiel Offensive, wrote in his account of the battle: "About fifty thousand (50,000) casualties was the percentage normally to be expected and hospitalization was prepared accordingly. Nevertheless, if we suffered that many casualties during the brief period involved, the American people, not accustomed, as were our Allies, to such huge payments in human life, would have seized upon the criticism of any Allied official as a basis for condemning our own Commander in Chief."

The attack began at 5 a.m. on the morning of 12 September. Tactically, the terrain became the biggest threat to the attacking American forces. After five days of rain, prior to the attack, the ground became almost impassible to both the tanks and infantry. The weather section of I Corps operation order stated: "Visibility: Heavy driving wind and rain during parts of day and night. Roads: Very muddy."

Despite the weather reports by the evening of 12 September, most American troops attacking the salient's southern boundary were a day ahead of their scheduled objective. "The German resistance on this part of the front was disorganized by the rapidity of our advance and was soon overcome," Pershing wrote.³ By 6 a.m. on September 13, the Americans had entered Vigneulles from both the southern and western directions. "The salient was closed and our troops were masters of the field," Pershing declared in his account of that moment.⁴ By the evening of the September 13 First Army reached its final objective of the offensive, completely erasing the bulge of German-held territory that had existed for four years. The following day the German forces mounted several counterattacks; all were repulsed. As one observer, Sgt. Edwin Gerth, of the 51st Field Artillery noted "A Great Day for the Americans! Our infantry is still pushing 'em back. Many prisoners are going by. We were at guns all morning, but had to stay in camp all afternoon. We are out of range and await orders to move up. Steady stream of men and material going up constantly. Two of our boys sneaked off and went up to the old Hun trenches and brought back lots of Hun souvenirs-razors, glasses, pictures, equipment, etc."⁵

Through 16 September the American Army consolidated and mounted local operations around the new lines to secure their grip on the newly conquered territory. They would then initiate a handover to the French and conduct a follow-on movement to the Ardennes sector. Overall, as a relatively limited offensive, the St. Mihiel operation proved a huge success for the Americans. During combat operations the Americans inflicted German casualties of approximately 2,000 killed in action, 5,500 wounded in action took 15,000 prisoners and captured 450 pieces of artillery and countless machineguns. This cost included approximately 7,000 casualties for an attack that was expected to cost over 50,000 Soldiers. "On my visit to several corps and division headquarters the following day, I found all jubilant over the victory and overflowing with incidents of the fighting, reciting many feats of heroism among the troops," Pershing wrote.⁶



American supply trains pass German Prisoners.

TRIVIA

- 1 What officer planned the Army's move from St. Mihiel to the Argonne?
- 2 What would be the two battles to eclipse St. Mihiel in size of U.S. Army involved?
- 3 What was the distance that 500,000+ American Soldiers would have to move from St. Mihiel to Argonne?



The battle of St. Mihiel would become the first battle in the history of the American Army where they employed tanks on a large scale.

England

Germany

Russia

Tractor

Toaster

Bicycle

Thankfully we chose to copy the British in tank design.

1. Hanlon, Michael. "St. Mihiel Offensive". <http://www.worldwar1.com/dbc/stmihiel.htm>
2. Giese, Joseph, Captain. "Battle Analysis of St. Mihiel." Center for Military History. 2004
3. Ibid Hanlon
4. Adwar, Corey. "America Fought Its First D-Day 96 Years Ago Today, And It Was A Huge Success." Business Insider 12 SEP 2014.
5. Ibid Hanlon
6. Ibid Hanlon

