

# BLUE RIDGE MEN OF THE EIGHTIETH

## Summary of Official History of the Division from Virginia, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania in Picardy, St. Mihiel, and Argonne

### EPITOME OF OPERATIONS.

The 80th Division shared in the following operations of the American Expeditionary Forces:

- (1) Picardy Sector, France, July 23-Aug. 18, 1918.
- (2) St. Mihiel Offensive, France, Sept. 12-Sept. 16, 1918.
- (3) Meuse-Argonne Offensive, France, Sept. 26-Oct. 4, 1918.
- (4) Meuse-Argonne Offensive, France, Oct. 4-Oct. 12, 1918.
- (5) Meuse-Argonne Offensive, France, Nov. 1-Nov. 6, 1918.

ONE of the original twelve divisions of the National Army, the 80th, or "Blue Ridge," Division, was organized Aug. 27, 1917, at Camp Lee, Petersburg, Va. Its name was derived from the fact that the enlisted personnel of the division was drawn exclusively from Virginia, West Virginia, and the western part of Pennsylvania, the Blue Ridge Mountains being common to the three States named. The insignia of the division shows three blue peaks on a shield of khaki.

The division commander was Major Gen. Adelbert Cronkhite, and his Chief of Staff, Colonel William H. Waldron.

The 169th Infantry Brigade, Brig. Gen. C. S. Farnsworth, and the 314th Machine Gun Battalion were formed exclusively of the men of Virginia, to the 317th Regiment those of the western part of the State were assigned, and to the 318th those of the Tidewater or eastern section. The 169th Infantry Brigade, Brig. Gen. Lloyd M. Brett, composed of the 319th and 320th Regiments, were formed of the men from Pittsburgh and Westmoreland County, Penn. The personnel of the 313th and 315th Machine Gun Battalions was drawn from the more northerly region about Erie, and that of the 305th Engineers from the southern section of the Pennsylvania draft area of the division. The trains also were formed of Pennsylvanians.

To the 155th Field Artillery Brigade the men of West Virginia were assigned, those from the northern tier of counties forming the 313th, while the central and southern tiers of counties contributed, respectively, to the 314th and 315th Regiments.

The Headquarters Troop, Military Police, and 305th Field Signal Battalion were composed of selected personnel from the whole draft area.

### Changes in Personnel.

Brig. Gen. C. S. Farnsworth of the 159th Infantry Brigade was subsequently promoted to the command of the 37th Division, being succeeded in command of the 159th Brigade by General Jamerson, formerly in command of the 317th Infantry. Colonel Briant H. Wells, later promoted to Brigadier General, was relieved from command of the 318th Infantry and assigned to duty on the Supreme War Council at Versailles, while Colonel O. E. Hunt, commanding the 320th Infantry, was promoted to Brigadier General and transferred from the division. The 317th, 318th, and 320th Infantry Regiments were then commanded by Colonels Howard R. Perry, U. G. Worriflow, and E. G. Peyton, respectively.

May 17, 1918, the division began moving to France. Division Headquarters of the 318th Infantry embarked at Hoboken for Brest on the Leviathan, while all other elements shipped from Newport News, Va., for St. Nazaire, Bordeaux, and Brest. The troops embarked at the three ports mentioned during May 20 and 31, June 2, and June 12, after various adventures on the high seas which lent interest to the voyage. The Leviathan was unsuccessfully attacked May 30 at the very entrance to the harbor of Brest by a flotilla of German submarines, the strength of which was estimated at from seven to two craft.

From the ports of debarkation the division, less the artillery, was transported to Calais, where the troops exchanged American for British arms. Before the middle of June the division was assembled in the Samer training area, several miles east of Boulogne, under the tutelage of, first, the 16th, (Irish,) and then the 34th British Divisions, which had been reduced by losses to mere cadres. The artillery brigade, with the ammunition train, proceeded from the ports of Bordeaux and Brest to Iledon, near St. Nazaire, where it received its animals and most of its material. Remaining at Redon until the last part of July, the officers and men of the advance detail, composing the specialists, received training at the Artillery Firing School at Camp de Coquidan. Early in August the artillery brigade was assembled at the American training area of Camp Meucou, also near St. Nazaire, where it was to remain until the middle of September.

### Fighting with the British.

After the completion of its first phase of training under the British, the division was transferred southward to the Third British Army sector, with headquarters in Peauval. Until Aug. 20 it was posted along the secondary lines between Albert and Arras. During this period battalion units entered the front-line trenches of the Artois sector, between Aveuly Woods, on the right, and Arras on the left, both inclusive, being attached to the 4th, 5th, and 6th Corps.

But while the 80th Division was attached to the British for the dual purpose of its own training and the support of the British in an emergency, it participated actively in all the operations of the Third Army, with which it was serving. Several battalions were most seriously engaged with the enemy while holding important trench sectors: one battalion went "over the top" with the New Zealanders in an attack, and at the moment of relief two of the infantry regiments of the division were formed to take part in a large scale operation. The nature of its experiences during this period is evidenced by nearly 400 casualties in August alone.

Aug. 20 the move to the American sector was commenced. From the Artois sector the division was transported by rail through Amiens via Paris to the Fourteenth Training Area, between Chaumont and Châtillon-sur-Seine, where it remained in comfortable billets until Aug. 31. On Sept. 1 the division moved by rail to the Stanville and later marched to the Tronville area. While in the latter it composed the reserve of the First Army during the St. Mihiel operations of Sept. 12-15, except the 320th Infantry and the 315th Machine Gun Battalion, which were at-

tached to the 2d French Colonial Corps, and took active part in the operations.

At this time the 155th Field Artillery Brigade rejoined the division. Now began the concentration of the American First Army. On the night of the 14th the division was transported in buses to the vicinity of Ippecourt, where it fell under the command of the 3d American Corps. On the night of the 20th it again moved forward to the Bois la Ville. During this period preparations for the attack were completed, and reconnaissance of the sector assigned to the division was made. The troops, always moving under cover of darkness, were carefully concealed in the forests by day. By night, also, the troops were exercised in combat drills, and by day in the use of the newly issued weapons.

On the night of Sept. 24-25 the entire attack to first represent the division in the Meuse-Argonne offensive, was concentrated in the Bois Bourrus, near Germonville, while the 159th, or support brigade, was assembled in reserve in the Bois de Sartelle, near Fromerville, several kilometers west of Verdun. That night the 155th Field Artillery Brigade occupied its previously selected battery emplacements along the south slope of Dead Man's Hill. On the 25th orders were issued that the expected attack was to be made at 5:30 A. M. the following morning, and the troops were pushed forward during the night to their battle positions.

### Opposite Bethincourt.

Sleep was impossible on that night. A huge and brilliant moon hung in the sky, making the night almost as bright as day, but strangely exaggerating the silent distances. Off to the north loomed the outlines of the Mort Homme, about which spread in full view one of the most famous battlefields of history. At 11:30 P. M. the artillery of the American First Army opened its preparation.

The 3d Corps was formed for the attack with the 33d, 80th, and 4th Divisions in line, from right to left, with the 3d Division in reserve. The right of the corps rested on the Meuse itself, north of Verdun, which threw the 80th Division considerably to the west of the river, opposite the destroyed village of Bethincourt, from which its line of departure lay distant less than a thousand yards.

The mission of the corps was to attack northward in the direction of Meslères and break the hostile resistance between the Rau de Forges and the Bois de Forêt.

For this operation there were attached to the 80th Division, in the centre of the

positions, but they continued to advance, while the leading companies reached and entered the Bois des Ognons.

The divisions on its flanks failed to advance, the result being that the attacking battalion of the 80th Division was enfiladed from both flanks by machine guns, and encountered the concentrated direct fire of the hostile artillery upon the narrow front of the Bois des Ognons. The four accompanying French tanks withdrew immediately.

Throughout the day the position consolidated in front of the woods by the 318th Infantry was subjected to a constant bombardment with high explosive and gas shells, and hostile planes were most active.

At 6 P. M. on the 5th the division made another attack upon the Bois des Ognons. The enemy appeared to have been taken by surprise, and, though his machine guns were active, the usual hostile artillery fire did not fall upon the approaches to the wood in which the assaulting battalion managed to get a foothold. The position gained on the night of the 5th was improved on the 6th, which enabled the division on the left to press forward. Some advance was also made by the division on the right during the day.

### One Advance After Another.

On the night of Oct. 6-7 the 160th Brigade took over the entire front line of the division, and the 159th Brigade withdrew to the rear. During the same night the position in the Bois des Ognons was organized for defense, with the assistance of the 305th Engineers, while the artillery continued to pound the enemy's positions north of the wood, the preparation being continued on the 9th.

At 3:30 P. M. on that day two battalions of the 319th Infantry advanced, following closely a rolling barrage. By nightfall the front line of the division had reached La Villa au Bois Fme., and the attack was directed to be pressed as far as the Cunel-Brieulles road, which position was reached and held. Later on the same night two companies of the 319th filtered through the woods south of Cunel, surprised the gar-

ison of the town, and took two battalions of the 319th Infantry.

For this new attack the 159th Brigade was designated.

For some reason there was no artillery preparation upon the Bois des Ognons and the machine-gun zones on its flanks, but the barrage rolled forward slightly late and was closely followed by the 2d Battalion of the 318th Infantry.

Upon the support companies of this battalion the hostile counter-barrage fell as they were leaving their assembly

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with the 80th, 77th, and 78th Divisions in line from right to left, in liaison with the Fourth French Army on the left. On the right of the 1st Corps was the 5th Corps, the left flank of which the 80th Division was expected to cover in the advance.

The mission of the 80th Division on the first day of the attack was to seize the high ground north of Sivry-le-Buzancy, advancing between Exermont, Fieville, Sommathe, and St. Georges on the right, and Apremont, Chatel Chery, Cornay, Buzancy, (inclusive,) and St. Pierrefont (exclusive) on the left. The enemy held a very strong position with its front line roughly a few hundred yards south of St. Juvin and St. Georges.

The division marched twenty-five kilometers through the Argonne Forest on Oct. 30 and 31, and relieved the 82d Division along the line St. Georges-St. Juvin. Its own artillery had continued in the line with the 3d Corps when it was relieved, so that to it was now attached the 157th Field Artillery Brigade of the 82d Division, reinforced by two American and ten or more French batteries. Again the 160th Brigade, General Brett commanding, was selected to make the assault, while the 159th Brigade was held in reserve near Chery.

On Nov. 1, after an artillery preparation of unprecedented intensity which lasted two hours, the 319th and 320th Infantry, each in column of battalions, on the right and left, respectively, advanced to the assault behind the rolling barrage, in liaison with the 2d Division of the 5th Corps on the right and the 77th Division on the left.

Ahead on Its Own Initiative.

The 319th Infantry advanced rapidly and by nightfall had reached a point on the Buzancy-Bayonville road north of Imecourt, where connection with the 2d Division was established. On the left of the division heavy machine-gun and artillery fire had been encountered from the Ravine aux Pierres and the 320th Infantry had been unable to press beyond Allepont, or to keep abreast of the 319th. The centre and left divisions of the corps made no progress, so that the only advance made on Nov. 1 by the 1st Corps was made by the 80th Division.

A new and general attack by the First American Army was now planned for the purpose of breaking the rearward line of resistance which the enemy had successfully occupied after his initial withdrawals. The 1st American Corps, on the left of the First Army, was assigned the task of assailing the powerful German line between Grande Pre and St. Georges. The attack was to be made

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tioned, should deliver a flank attack upon it directly to the west on the following day. This was done at 6 A. M. and was completely successful. The 320th Infantry then advanced from Allepont practically without resistance, so that Vercel and Therorgies were reached during the morning. Several hours later the 77th Division, and on its left the 78th Division, moved up abreast of the 80th.

But while the divisional commander had undertaken of his own initiative to sweep the front on the left by a flank attack, he had not proposed to delay the advance on the right and thus fall behind the 2d Division. During the night of the 1st he had ordered the 317th Infantry forward from reserve, and on the 2d, at 10:15 A. M., it advanced to the attack. The strong position of Buzancy was carried, and before night on the 2d the line was established north of the town.

Achievements of the Autumn.

On the 10th of November official information was received that hostilities were to cease at 11 A. M. the following day, and the 80th Division was ordered to march on the 11th to Les Islettes area, whence it had moved forward.

During the twenty-three days it was engaged in the American sector the 80th advanced thirty-seven kilometers, or nearly twenty-four miles. It three times broke through the main enemy lines of defense on Sept. 26-27, on Oct. 4-12, and Nov. 1 and 2, respectively. It captured 103 officers, including three entire battalion staffs, and 1,710 men; 88 pieces of artillery of various calibres, and 641 machine guns, besides a vast quantity of small arms ammunition, equipment, and stores. This was accomplished with a total loss of but 210 officers and 5,494 men, including 37 officers and 592 men killed.

On Nov. 18 Major Gen. Adelbert Cronkhite, who had made and led the division throughout the war, was assigned to the command of the 9th Corps. He was succeeded by Major Gen. S. D. Sturgis.

Early in December, General Jamerson resumed the command of the 155th Brigade, and Colonel George D. Freeman was assigned to the command of the 318th.

With the gradual reduction of the American Expeditionary Force, many corps were disbanded, including the 6th, to the command of which General Cronkhite had been transferred from the 9th in March. This enabled him to be reassigned to the command of the 80th Division on April 12, and to return to America with his original command in May, 1919.