

The Standard Stripes

February 14, 1919

A.E.F. DIVISIONS: THEIR RECORDS, THEIR MARKS

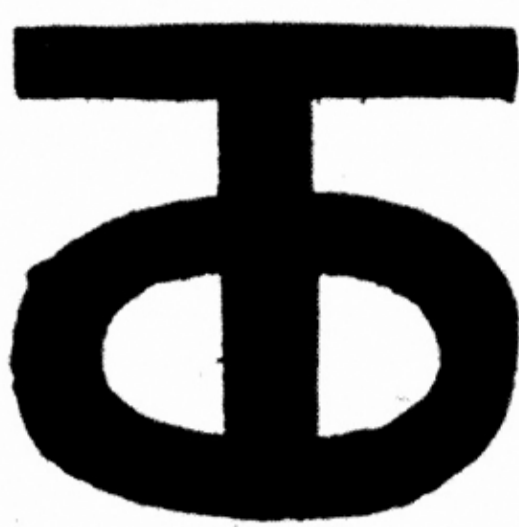
Ninetieth Division

National Army of Texas and Oklahoma. Divisional headquarters arrived in France June 23, 1918. Activities:

Sazerais-Haye-Puv-enelle sector, Aug. 24-Oct. 10; St. Mihiel operation, September 12-15; demonstration at beginning of Argonne-Meuse offensive, Sept. 26; Argonne-Meuse offensive, Oct. 19-Nov. 11.

Prisoners captured: 32 officers, 1,844 enlisted men. Guns captured: 42 pieces of artillery, 230 machine guns. Total advance on front line: 28½ kilometers.

Insignia: Red monogram "TO," standing for Texas-Oklahoma.



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Texas—Oklahoma*

THE story of the 90th Division, like that of the 89th, is made up of St. Mihiel and the Meuse-Argonne. In more ways than one, in fact, these two might be described as sister divisions. They came from roughly the same meridian of the further Middle West; both went over in the mid-summer rush of 1918, just in time to catch

their breath before going over the top in the St. Mihiel attack.

In this their first affair both did well, and both then had to stay on doing the dirty work of holding down our new claim just in front of the Hindenburg Line. They were brought up to the Meuse-Argonne at

the same time, attacked side by side in the final round of November 1st, and ended up the war by carrying their lines across the Meuse. No two divisions in the A.E.F. had such closely parallel records, and in the day of war-time nicknames they might well have been ticketed as the Trans-Mississippi Twins—Trans-Meuse *aussi*.

The 90th began at Camp Travis, Texas, late in August, 1917, the bulk of its material coming from Texas and Oklahoma, whence the monogram which formed the division insignia. This was an early start, but the advantage of it was lost in part next March, when a large part of the personnel was transferred to other divisions. "Practically every unit in the division was stripped to its staff and non-commissioned officers, cooks, and a few privates." But the division had the luck to keep the same commanding officer and the same chief of staff throughout—General Allen and Colonel Kingman opened up the shop at Camp Travis and carried on to the other side of the Meuse.

* HISTORY OF THE 90TH DIVISION, by Major George Wythe, division historian. Published by the 90th Division Association, A. J. Reinhart, secretary, 804 Southwestern Life bldg., Dallas, Tex. The De Vinne Press, New York City.

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Reaching France in July, the 90th rounded up in the region of Agnes-the-Duck for five weeks' intensive training. On August 21st it relieved the First Division in the eastern part of the St. Mihiel salient, where it joined in the attack on September 12th. This sector formed the corner of the American attacking front; the 90th had the mission of covering the advance of the 5th on its left, which meant advancing its own left four kilometers and marking time with its right. Next day, however, the right brigade sailed in as well, and gathered in at one swoop the Norroy quarries and the Bois le Pretre, a region famous ever since 1915, and one of the toughest corners of the whole salient. During the next few days the 90th pushed forward by vigorous shoulder thrusts to right and left. On the left it not only covered the flank of the 1st but pressed beyond it, occupying the whole of the Bois des Rappes. On the right it took Hill 327, overlooking Preny, and reached out into the sector of the 82nd occupying Norroy and Vandières.

The line had now been pushed up close under the Hindenburg defenses, and there followed a very lively period of stabilization. First of all the 90th had to extend its sector to right and left. On the right this meant holding the flank along the Moselle, and from across the Moselle the Boche had perfect views across the divisional sector, which allowed his artillery to enfilade in perfect comfort all the proceedings of the 90th, and even to take part of its lines under fire from the rear. All in all, it was a situation corresponding closely to that of the 3rd Corps in the Meuse-Argonne; one hard to endure and impossible to remedy.

Furthermore, as this corner of the salient threatened the outer lines of Metz, the Boche showed himself decidedly touchy. Even on September 12th his troops fought stubbornly on their support position; every stage of the 90th's advance was doggedly opposed, and when its new line was established the Boche brought down gas attacks which thoroughly drenched the Bois des Rappes. All in all, it was a strenuous existence merely to hold the line in this "quiet" sector, and when the division pulled out on October 10th it had stood 5,485 casualties.

Once out, the division hoped for a rest, but ten days later it was back in line in the Meuse-Argonne. It celebrated its arrival by cleaning out Bantheville and pushing forward so as to improve the jump-off line for the attack of November 1st. In this the 90th had a mission similar to that at St. Mihiel; it had again to cover the right flank of the main attack, to pivot on its right and swing its left forward so as to support the advance of the 89th next in line on the left. This time the operation was far more of an undertaking; it meant sweeping forward five kilometers uphill over bare exposed slopes and through woods, and rushing at the end the wooded heights above Andevanne. All this moreover absolutely had to be done—any hitch along the front of the 90th would have hamstrung the advance of the 5th Corps in the center.

There was no hitch. The Boche machine gunners, who were never quitters, held on even through the tremendous barrage of that morning, and the 90th had to fight its way clear up the hill. But it got there, and the Boche cleared out for the Meuse. The 90th reached the Meuse close on their

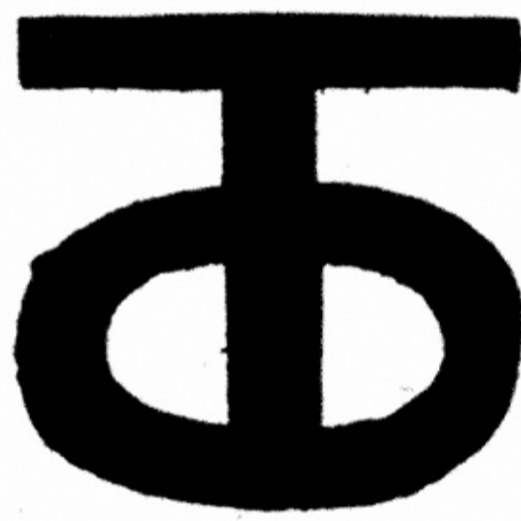
Texas—Oklahoma

heels, to find bridges down and the valley flooded. Patrols were got across promptly, but the division was not ordered across the river until November 9th. The engineers had repaired the bridge at Sassey; the division got quickly across and joined in the rapid advance of the 5th and 32nd east of the Meuse. Next day the 90th pushed its left north to the outskirts of Stenay, while its right after a sharp fight carried the hills overlooking the Meuse valley and occupied Baalon.

Both at St. Mihiel and in the Meuse-Argonne it required skillful handling to carry out the missions assigned the 90th Division, and to deal with a peculiarly difficult terrain. From the G3 point of view this should have made a peculiarly interesting story, and it can hardly be said that the author of the Divisional History has made the most of it. As far as it goes there is little fault to be found with his story, but it is almost too summary an outline. As a narrative of combat operations it cannot be called adequate; and whoever is on the search for a full and precise account of what the 90th did will have to turn to other sources. No field orders or reports are given; and the maps are not precise enough and do not give enough information (for example, they do not indicate the lines reached in either of the main attacks, September 12th or November 1st).

Altogether, the 90th Division deserves a fuller and better story.

T. H. THOMAS.



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