Then Came
SUMMERALL

BY FLETCHER PRATT

ON A wild, wet night in July, 1918, the men of the First Division lay in fox-holes along an uncertain front. They had attacked that morning, in company with the French Marocs and the Second Division, winning every objective; they were to attack again on the morrow, and as they tried to get some rest were roused by a voice booming at them from the dark. "Gentlemen," it said in accents of unmistakable sincerity and religious faith, "with God's help we will take Berzy-le-Sec tomorrow! Gentlemen, with God's help—" and then, as the owner of the voice unexpectedly landed on his ear in a shell-hole, "⁂?**$⁂?!!!%$⁂⁂*$⁂?⁂ !!!!!" in a blast that would have made a Missouri mule-skinner's hair curl.

The men in the fox-holes chuckled. "The old man's in good form." There was only one voice in the world that could achieve such a combination of faith and fury; and they all knew it belonged to a general of Division, probably the only divisional leader in the world who would go stumbling through the dark to encourage his troops in such a fashion—Charles Pelot Summerall.

All his life he has been combining the sacred and profane the way he did that night. As a boy he wanted to be a bishop,

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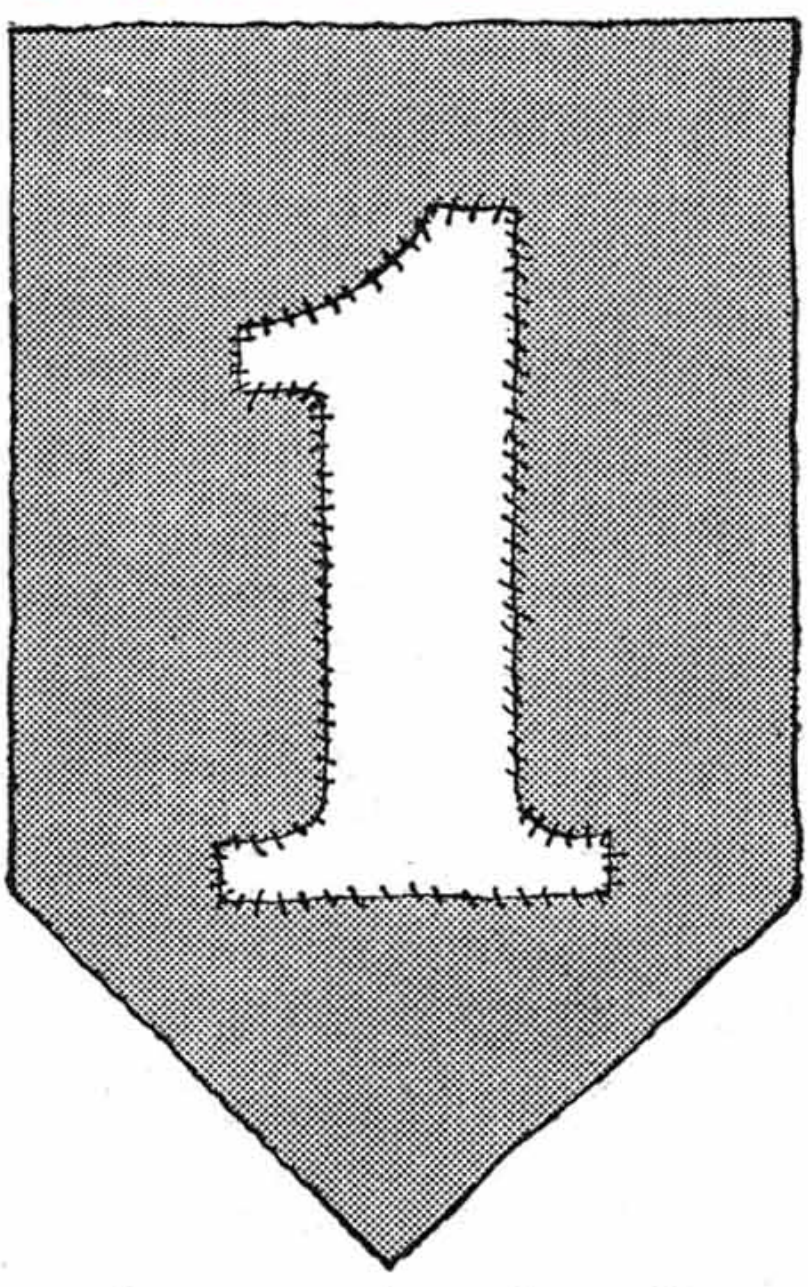

but turned out a bombardier; as a young man he went to West Point in preparation for a career in the church, and read theology before becoming an army officer; and today, a retired full general, he combines the presidency of a military college with the utterly unrelated hobby of being an authority on church music.

It takes such a combination to explain some of the unpredictable and startling incidents in a career that has left everybody wondering what to expect next. For instance, there was the incident down on the Toul sector, when as a brigadier of artillery he was inspecting battery positions on a winter night.

"Any drinking in your command?" he asked a battery officer.

"Some drinking, sir, but no drunkenness," was the reply and the words were hardly out before the door of the mess-shack popped open, and out came the battery cook, loaded to the eyeballs, to stagger over to the command group, regard Summerall with owlish gravity, and then, ejaculating, "My old captain from the Philippines!" collapse face down in the snow.

You might expect an explosion; everybody did. Instead Summerall picked up the prostrate veteran, brushed him off a little and handed him over to a staff man with orders to put the cook in the guardhouse for three days and then make him headquarters chef.

That was how General Summerall got the cook who later became famous for the wonderful things he could do with an old boot and a couple of carrots; and his treatment of the cook is one of the reasons why a good way of getting your head punched today is to suggest to a First Division man that Summerall was less than the best officer in the world.

BUT it is also getting away from the main point, which is how Summerall got that way. He started on the road to generalship in a peculiar fashion. Brought up in Florida during the Reconstruction period, he wished to enter the Episcopal church, and during his pre-college days won himself a scholarship at Hobart College, in Geneva in western New York State, which then rather specialized in preparing students for the divinity degree. But the scholarship covered only tuition bills, and during Reconstruction there was hardly enough money in the whole State of Florida to pay the living expenses of a young man in New York.

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Someone suggested a brilliant solution—why shouldn't young Summerall take one of the West Point appointments then going begging, get two, three or maybe four years of education at the Government's expense and then switch to the church later? It was done.

This was probably the first time in its history that the U. S. Military Academy had been treated as a pre-divinity school, and judging by the success of the experiment, it will probably be the last. The future general liked West Point; and when he was graduated, he felt he owed Uncle Sam some service in return for his education, so instead of entering the church at the end of his course, he went into the Fifth Artillery.

HE WAS still with the famous Reilly's Battery of that regiment when ordered on active service for the first time, in the Philippine Insurrection. There General Bullard, later to be his close friend and great booster, saw him for the first time during a battle, "a fresh-faced little man, pacing up and down on the firing line while everyone else kept under cover." The shots fired at the young artilleryman missed him; and in Bullard's opinion, it was his willingness to be shot at that made the subsequent infantry charge a success.

Young Summerall soon tried the same trick again under far more spectacular circumstances. His battery was one of the units sent from the Philippines to China for the Boxer Rebellion troubles. It arrived just in time for the attack on the famous Forbidden City, before whose age-old walls and huge gates the advance came to a halt. Against anything like reasonable numbers of occidentals the Chinese stood no chance; but the numbers were not even reasonably equal, about two or three hundred to one in favor of the Boxers, who had well earned their reputation for torturing prisoners and committing other forms of frightfulness. The attackers began to waver and their guns to miss; but at this moment up jumps Captain Summerall, runs through the storm of bullets to the gate of the Forbidden City, and on it chalks a huge cross as an aiming point. His gunners set their sights on it and opened up; down went the gates, in went the storming column, and the place was won.

Summerall received the Certificate of Merit, then the only military award short of the Medal of Honor, but he was not prominently heard from again till after the World War had begun. In the interval he had been engaged in a series of routine service assignments, mainly with the artillery, had been reading theology for recreation and the lives of generals for professional improvement. By 1916 he was a junior colonel, in charge of the field artillery activities of the Militia Bureau, and in that capacity was named recorder of a board appointed to consider United States artillery organization in the light of what was going on across the pond.

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HE WROTE the board's report. It was pretty complicated stuff, but when the big-wigs around Washington got the drift of it they began chewing nails, for this junior American colonel boldly said that all the generals in Europe were handling their artillery wrong. In essence he said that they were proportioning the guns in action to the number of men, trying to arrange that every man should have a shell-burst a few yards in front of him at any given moment during an attack.

Summerall remarked that a shell-burst was precious little protection if the enemy happened to be shooting at you. He wanted cannon enough behind every attack to put out the enemy's guns—big guns and machine-guns alike. Therefore, in an attack the number of guns should be proportioned to what the enemy had on the front and how they had the place organized. Therefore each Division should have a certain small amount of artillery, but the Corps and Army commands should have a lot more, and should push it into position to support every attack. Therefore also, as long as the artillery remained stationary, as most of it had so far, all offensives would be nibbling offensives; costly in blood and ammunition; the guns must get themselves legs, wheels or stilts and wade right in with the advancing infantry.

THE report got itself adopted and Summerall's name was mud with a lot of people. For about a year he was so unpopular he would hardly speak to himself on the street, but toward the close of that year we were in the war and there was a place for every officer, popular or not. Summerall's place was the command of the artillery brigade of the newly-organized 42d or Rainbow Division of the National Guard. The traces of what his report did to some people's feelings can be seen in the fact that several officers junior to him received divisional commands.

The history of what went on behind the scenes at (*Continued on page 40*) headquarters during the early months in France is still pretty uncertain and probably will not be fully known for many years. We only know that the 42d's artillery was good (as the Germans later testified); and that when General Bullard took over the First Division as it was about to go into the lines in the Toul sector in December, he found the artillery of that unit under command of an officer of great skill and reputation—but an engineer, who did not understand artillery and did not like it. Bullard asked General Pershing for a regular artilleryman, preferably Summerall or Lassiter. They gave him Summerall. In the first telephonic code made up for use on the front the name assigned to the new commander of the First Artillery Brigade was "Sitting Bull," and it has stuck to him ever since.

In that quiet sector there was not much

chance for Summerall to try out his ideas in battle, but he did have a chance to prove one of his pet theories—that artillery exists, not for itself, but solely to help and support the infantry. When they moved into the trenches the first thing he did was to discover that "the communications net was entirely inadequate." He cured the deficiency by having a new set of telephone wires installed for the guns, running from the forward infantry positions through a switchboard at artillery H. Q. direct to the batteries. A general order was sent down for the use of this set of wires; when requests for artillery support came from the men in the trenches, they were to be passed direct to battery without reference to the artillery or divisional staff.

On March 19th the Germans gave this system a tryout by staging a full-dress raid, a whole battalion of storm-troops coming over behind a surprise box-barrage. It was a method that had been used many times before in the war, and usually with success. Under the normal set-up, British, French or German, the attacked infantry would yell for help to its own H. Q., infantry H. Q. would refer the matter to artillery, artillery would get a couple of batteries on the job in time to inflict a few casualties on the raiding party while it was going home. This time it was different; the minute the German storm troops left their trenches they were crowned by one of the most destructive small shoots of the war. The raiding party never did get to the American lines, and before it could return to the safety of its own had lost all its officers and over half its personnel.

In the vast tumult of the war an incident like that bulked small, but it, and the fine work of Summerall's guns during the Cantigny operation in the spring, caught the eye of the general staff. When Bullard was moved up to a corps command on July 17th, General Summerall received the crack First Division as his own command; and twenty-four hours later, through a storm of tropical violence, the Division went into the Soissons attack, the first large-scale offensive under the Stars and Stripes.

From "Sitting Bull's" point of view the arrangements for that attack were thoroughly unsatisfactory. He had the normal artillery equipment for a World War Division, but this consisted of no more than the regular divisional guns with a small reinforcement from corps, and he did not think there were enough to quiet the German machine-guns on his front. There was no time for him to get more into position, and he was convinced that to attack with what he had would cost many lives. It was one of those cases so often met with in war where you're damned if you do and damned if you don't. What could he do?

He could remember a line from the memoirs of General Skobeleff, hero of the Russian-Turkish war of 1877. "Troops under fire from directly in front will not reply on an oblique." And this was the

fact he used. Instead of sending all the regiments of the Division over the top together, Summerall had each regiment attack in succession and covered the advance of each in turn with the entire artillery fire of the Division, some firing straight ahead, the others from angles out on the flanks. As Skobeleff had predicted the Germans replied only to the fire from straight ahead. The shooting from the wings, carried on without interference from the enemy batteries, overmatched them; with God's help and Summerall's, the First took Berzy-le-Sec, they took Chaudun, they took German battery positions where every man was killed around the guns, they outmarched the French on their left and the Marocs on their right, they reached their second objectives before evening of the first day. "That night," German Chancellor von Hertling wrote, "even the most optimistic among us understood that all was lost."

The attack still had an unsatisfactory feature; it slowed after the first rush. Summerall attributed this to the fact that the guns could not get forward rapidly enough to support the continued advance of his doughboys. When the Division moved down for the St. Mihiel offensive, he eliminated this difficulty by studying the sector maps for routes that would permit his cannon to move up during the early stages of the operation. These routes were in German hands; but they were carefully indicated to his artillerists and they were forbidden to shell any points on them, so that no matter how much the ground was torn up within the enemy lines during the preparation fire, there would still be solid ground for the advance of the guns. The system worked; four hours after the jump-off the First Division's artillery was already well beyond the original point from which the infantry had moved, firing barrages for the second successful attack of the day.

The general still believes the American Army could have gone right on into Metz; instead they went into the Meuse-Argonne. The part the First played there was to make that terrific attack on the Montrefagne and Fléville in the early days of October, a soldiers' battle, in which they met no less than five German Divisions in succession, two of them Divisions of Guards. As the First was marching back on the 11th October, Charles P. Summerall, who had come to France a colonel, received word that he had been appointed to command a Corps in the second stage of the Meuse-Argonne drive. The first order he issued was one putting the First's artillery back in line to help support the 42d, by which it had just been relieved.

His main problem was to plan a big attack for the first of November against the Kriemhilde Line, across the steep ridge of Barricourt and down to the banks of the Meuse. If that succeeded the Germans were done, for their lateral railroads would be gone, they could no longer sup-

ply the front north and west; and Summerall understood pretty clearly that it had better succeed or he was done, for General Pershing had given him four of the five most experienced Divisions in the A. E. F., with one big new unit which had done well at St. Mihiel. But now at last, as a corps commander, he could dispose of enough artillery.

He arranged for the Second and 89th to carry the attack, with the First and 42d in close support, and the 32d in corps reserve; but the artillery of all five Divisions was pushed forward to support the attack of two. Far forward, farther forward than artillery had been in the war before, even the heavy guns. "Whenever we saw one of those damn 75's," General McGlachlin says, the man who commanded the 155 heavies, "we decided we weren't far enough up and moved on." Never before had an attack been made with more than 125 guns to a Division; on this front there were 608 for two. To every German machine gun two 75's or a 155 were assigned; to every German battery a whole battery of heavies; and all the American guns were warned to keep silent till the attack began.

One final bit of preparation. In the earlier Meuse-Argonne attack the Germans had hurt the advancing infantry by pushing little knots of machine-gunners out through the curtain of preparation fire into the zone of the old no-man's land. This (Continued on page 42) time Summerall ordered his attack to begin with a retreat, every American pulling back 200 yards from the front line positions to give these German machine-gunners time to get set, after which the barrage would begin—at the *American* front line.

The war correspondents were called into corps headquarters to be told about the arrangements just before the advance began. They listened with respect, but one veteran was struck by the fact that certain usual arrangements were missing.

"But how are you going to deal with the counter-attack?" he asked.

Summerall looked at him. "Gentlemen, there will be no counter-attack."

As he finished the sentence the world rocked with the shock of 608 guns. He was right; there was no counter-attack; it did not have time to get organized. The Second and 89th were into German battery positions and had captured three regiments entire on the first morning; and on the second night of that whirlwind drive one German Division (the 15th Bavarian) came out of line with exactly 277 men left.

IT HAS been just Summerall's luck that the best things he ever did got him into the most trouble. Out of that November 1st victory, so rapid and complete, described by one German officer as "the best operation by any army during the war," grew the famous "race for Sedan" and the controversy that followed it. The Meuse River slanted across the V Corps front from right to left. When

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Summerall's right elements touched the river, his left was crowded over still farther to the left. They were far ahead of other American troops on that side, and of the French out beyond the Americans; beyond the flank lay German elements whose strength and position neither Summerall nor his commanders could know. If they went straight ahead, these Germans might take them in flank and rear; but if they kept on slanting leftward till they reached Sedan, they would cut the communications of those flanking Germans, who would have to surrender or get out of there quick.

That was the technical justification for the wild march to Sedan made by Summerall's men, in which his own First Division took the lead. A jawbone rumor, very common among the newspaper men then and later, says there was more than technical justification—that someone at G. H. Q. sent Summerall verbal assurances that if his troops got into Sedan everything would be all right in spite of the fact that he would be violating corps and army boundaries.

The First reached the outskirts of Sedan, but everything was distinctly not all right. The rush for Sedan was made by night, and in the dark, elements of the First crossed the front of the 42d, placing under arrest a man in American uniform and a funny hat who said he was General MacArthur, and who turned out to be perfectly right. When the hills around Sedan were reached there were the French coming up on the other side with fire in their eyes and the intention of bombarding the place whether there were any Americans in it or not. Their national pride would not allow anyone else to take the place.

There was a magnificent controversy afterward, and it has been going on ever since. It could not do any particular harm to Summerall's professional reputation; everything he said had been justified on the battlefield. But it formed a convenient peg on which a lot of people hung their personal dislike for the energetic and somewhat arbitrary general. However, it is worth noting that the men who know him best, the veterans of the First Division, get up and roar when his name is mentioned; and Father Duffy, who began by calling him "that old prooshan, von Summerholtz," ended by describing him as one of the finest and most intelligent men he had ever known.

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