The AMERICAN LEGION Weekly
November 7, 1919: p. 10

The Last Squad Carries On

Remnant of America's Overseas Army Is But a Shadow of the Greatest Expeditionary Force

By MARQUIS JAMES

IT would be crowding in ahead of the undertaker to announce the passing of the A. E. F. just now. Gone, it is true, are the great G. H. Q. from Chaumont, once an army in themselves, which a year ago commanded the mightiest expeditionary force the world has ever known. French infantry is back in the faded gray barracks on the hill. Yet the A. E. F. and the G. H. Q. thereof exist. They are one, and their station is a modest suite of rooms in the Post Office Building, Seventh and F Streets, Washington, D. C. You could put the whole works in the hallways of old B Building alone at Chaumont, and then have room enough to fall in a company on the stairs.

The swan song of the A. E. F. will come along soon enough, without any shoving from behind. There will be few words and no music. A little squib in the papers will say General Pershing's headquarters have been closed and their activities absorbed by the established bureaus of the Adjutant General's Office and the General Staff. The obituary of the A. E. F. will be swallowed up in the march of events, which are moving by in close column, platoon front, these days.

Little remains now but the name. It is classed officially as a "headquarters of record," which commands nothing save a skeleton of A Company of the famous General Headquarters Battalion, "Pershing's Own," which used to mount guard in the quadrangle at Chaumont at noon and do the honors when the medal barrages came down and drew the heroes out from cover. The duties of A Company are different now. Its men are swinging doors at the several G's, fetching papers to and fro, and performing general small office fatigue about the place.

The casual visitor at Seventh and F scarcely can credit the evidence of his ears when the guard in the hall tells him that these quiet little offices are all that

OldMagazineArticles.com

is left of the great G. H. Q. he saw in France last year when it was the nerve center of America's tremendous overseas armies. Of course, if one reflects that our military forces have shrunk by demobilization from more than 4,000,000 to less than 200,000 in eleven months—but who reflects in the twinkling of a second? We see the effect and are astounded; our minds grapple not for the cause. If this were not the case there would be fewer surprises in the world.

There are American troops in Europe, certainly, but they are not the A. E. F. They are, respectively, the A. F. G., meaning American Forces in Germany, and the A. F. F., meaning American Forces in France. The latter is pulling out for home as fast as the nature of its duties will allow; the former has settled down for a stay which may be for a few months or for many years.

THE A. F. F. is ruled from Paris and is largely a relic of the old S. O. S. Until recently prisoner of war escort companies were the biggest item in the organization, but the 64,000 German prisoners taken by the American troops during the war have been returned across the Rhine and their doughboy chaperones have put off for home. Eleven guard companies of the Army Service Corps still remain to watch over the millions of dollars worth of army property that is in the process of disposition. Most of this is being turned over to the French; the remainder is being brought home, if it is of any use; and if not, it is destroyed. Depot companies, administrative companies and miscellaneous units in charge of this work are scattered hither and yon all over the map of France—a man here, a squad there, a platoon yonder and a company somewhere else. The total numbers about 18,000 and headquarters are at Paris.

The aristocrats of the Continent, however, are the A. F. G., composed of line troops and their auxiliary units. They have adopted the old Third Army insignia, the red O encircling a white A on a blue background. All troops on duty at the Coblenz bridgehead sport this patch on their left shoulders, whereas in the old days only officers and troops connected with army headquarters were allowed to wear it. Other outfits wore their division or corps markings.

The A. F. G. numbers about 7,000 and is almost an independent command, as far as Washington is concerned. The commanding general, Maj. Gen. Henry T. Allen, receives general instructions from the Allied High Command, of which Marshal Foch is chief, and which directs the disposition of the British,

OldMagazineArticles.com

The Last Squad

French, Belgian and American occupying forces.

Coblenz is as busy as ever with the bustle of American activity. Two battalions of the Eighth Infantry are quartered in barracks in the city, and members of the various civil commissions are getting on the job to begin work as soon as the Peace Treaty is ratified. Recruits are constantly arriving to take the place of men who are being transferred or who are going home for discharge. The force is a volunteer one entirely. European service is a five to one favorite with men who are enlisting or reenlisting in the Regular Army here in the States. Siberia comes next, then the Philippines, Panama, Alaska and Hawaii.

THE scenes about Coblenz are about the same as when the old divisions were in the bridgehead. Old timers, with two or three gold stripes, are dropping in every day with the recruit detachments that come up from France. A look around tells them that the old place hasn't altered much. The Festhalle is still the social center for the enlisted men—dances, movies, Y. M. C. A. and soldier vaudeville the same as ever. Sentries pace the waterfront; the Stars and Stripes flash in a spanking breeze from the top of sullen old Ehrenbreitstein across the river. The bridge of boats is a curiosity to the newcomer, and the German inland merchant marine remains deprived of enough Rhine steamers to give our boys leave trips up and down the river. Allied planes hum overhead.

The M. P.s, with their red hatbands and trusty Colts, walk their beats and stand the same old traffic posts—and mix with the rest of the army just as much as ever, which is none at all. A little story about the Coblenz M. P.s reached this side the other day and it is worth retelling. About a month ago the news sped around the bridgehead that the M. P.s were going—actually going. Someone had seen their orders. Top sergeants grouchily confirmed their departure.

A buck approached an M. P. to get the dope right from headquarters. Actual fact, it was true.

The 278th Police Military Com-

"Germany'll have plenty of good machine gunners fifteen years from now," an American general once remarked.

OldMagazineArticles.com

The Last Squad

pany was going to f a l l in, count off, squads right and march away. The 278th was a famous company. Its black record of efficiency spreads from Sicily to the Rhine. Its men had nabbed A. W. O. L.s in almost every principal city in France and Italy before it took the Coblenz assignment last July. That the town should be without M. P.s seemed too good to be true—and was. A few days before the 278th shoved off a picked lot of reenlisted huskies were tolled off and formed into an M. P. unit which took over the old posts and beats.

But this situation left an opening for some of the bright boys who decided that with so many new M. P.s on the job a few more new ones wouldn't hurt. So, before the M. P.s could get acquainted with one another, brassards, campaign hats with red bands and sidearms became the fashion among A. W. O. L.s. Now the real M. P.s carry identification cards, and the absent buck is both A. W. and S. O. L.—same as ever.

The *Amaroc News* still is the official organ of the Rhine guard. The soldier still spends his time off duty about as before. Sports are a big item and the Americans still are snatching the lion's share of the honors from their compatriots among the British, down, and the French, up, the river. A horse show at Carnival Island, a track meet at Fortress Field, in Ehrenbretstein; baseball, football, boxing, tennis—all of the old pastimes. The same Y. M. C. A. girls, or others like them, pass out chocolate at a mark a throw at the Festhalle.

SPEAKING of marks bids mention of an occupation that is a departure from anything in Third Army days. It is profiteering; not on the part of the natives, for prices are scrupulously regulated by the army and profits pared down to what is fair. It is profiteering within the army, and not by the black jack and dice experts, either. A recent A. F. G. order reveals the situation.

A mark, which last spring was worth almost a dime, dropped as low as three cents this fall. The exchange fluctuates

OldMagazineArticles.com

from day to day, so a man may go to bed with five dollars in his kick and wake up with twenty, or the other way around Shrewd hombres seized upon this situation to do a little low financiering On a day when marks were up they would buy a postal money order at the A. P. O., made payable to themselves. When marks went down they would cash the order and possibly double their fortune in marks. Since a mark will buy as much at a *weinstube* when it is worth three cents as it will when it is worth nine cents, this was not a bad transaction. The order in question, however, forbids the use of the postal facilities in furtherance of such a scheme. This, does not hinder the Rhineland Yank from salting his mark pieces down in the old sock and waiting for the expected fall in the exchange rate, and thus doubling or trebling his wealth.

The Americans and "the Dutch," as they still call the natives, get along about as usual, which is not so bad. The Germans tell our people they deem it fortunate to be under American rule, rather than under the revengeful French or the harsh British. That is what they assured us when we went in last December. The remark made a better impression at the time than it did later when we began to visit around a bit and found the Boche at Mainz telling the French they were glad to be under the French, and how their hearts went out to their brethren who lived in the areas dominated by the Americans and the British; in Cologne it was the same story, only the British were the gentlemen among the Allies and the Yanks and French the barbarians.

The regulations against fraternization are as stringent as ever, but rarely is there any trouble reported along that line. Every once in a while steps are taken to insure that the ties are not too close. Too many American cigarettes found in German hands was responsible for a warning that unless the practice of bartering Q. M. supplies ceased, no more cigarettes would be sold at the commissaries. The arrest and punishment of Germans found wearing articles of the uniform broke up that practice, which grew common shortly after the old divisions pulled out. The frauleins, too, were stripped of their buttons and collar ornaments, which they rivalled the mademoiselles in displaying.

A COUPLE of weeks ago six stalwart young Germans filed into headquarters at Coblenz and froze to attention. One of their number advanced toward the assistant adjutant, passed out an Americanized version of the Prussian

OldMagazineArticles.com

salute, and reeling off a jaw-breaking list of Dutch names, announced in fair English that the aforementioned were recruits reporting for duty.

"Recruits; what for?" demanded the assistant adjutant.

"The United States army, your *Excellenz*," responded the spokesman.

And so it developed—almost. The Germans told an apparently straightforward story of how they had met a man purporting to be an American officer in Berlin on a recruiting tour. They had recently been discharged on the eastern front and eagerly signed what they thought were enlistment papers. They paid their own way to Coblenz to "report." The intelligence department is looking for the "recruiting officer."

While the A. F. G. does not find its duties too arduous, it is a necessary presence in the land of a not long-vanquished enemy, and there are frequent little flare-ups which are a guarantee against monotony. The American area is the old Coblenz bridgehead, which describes a semicircle, 60 kilometers in diameter, on the north side of the river. One battalion of infantry at a time goes on outpost. Battalion P. C. is down the river at Neuwied, where the headquarters of the Third Division used to be. A company also has headquarters there and extends its patrols north along the curved outpost line. At the opposite edge of the semicircle is another company P. C. at Montabaur, old headquarters of the First Division, where the white Montabaur Kasel looks down on the town from a hill The remaining two companies are strung out on the concave line between Mantabaur and Neuwied.

The Seventh Machine Gun Battalion, the Second Battalion, Sixth Field Artillery; the First Field Signal Battalion, the First Supply Train, A Company, First Engineers, and other units which make up General Allen's command, are stationed in and about Coblenz or at Ehrenbreitstein across the way.

A day's work may take in anything from arresting a waiter for short-changing a recruit to suppressing a revolution. It is easier to get the particulars of a short-changing case. An officer just back from the Rhine, however, tells of a large red flag that was brought into headquarters shortly before he left. It is a souvinenir of a little bolshevist busting expedition the A. F. G. staged at Luetz, a town in the Moselle Valley, south of Coblenz. A group of radicals, mostly young men recently in the army, ran the flag upon a 70-foot pole in front of the town hall, of which they took possession in the name of the "new revolution."

OldMagazineArticles.com

The Last Squad

The "new revolution" never got very much older than that. A couple of squads turned the young soviet out made its members haul down the flag, and dig up their "liberty pole" with picks and shovels provided for the occasion by the First Engineers.

And so moves life in the A. F. G., successor to the A. E. F. The same old life, amid the same old scenes, it flows serenely on, but rifles, belts and bayonets are on the rack in the squadroom.

The AMERICAN LEGION *Weekly*

OldMagazineArticles.com