

THE AMERICAN ARMIES IN FRANCE.

THE HISTORY OF THE A.E.F. By CAPTAIN
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Many books have been already written about the American divisions in France, but readers who desire in some 500 pages a clear, well-proportioned account of their operations will hardly find a better one than that of Captain Thomas. That he is in a position to compile one is due to the fact that he served from first to last with the 1st Division, and whilst at the intelligence course after the Armistice met officers of all the other divisions and learnt from them the part their formations had played.

The story begins with the training and gradual blooding of the divisions. The ideal originally aimed at was to have a corps of six divisions—four "combat," one in the training area, and the sixth near the coast to receive and organize drafts. Unfortunately events moved too quickly, and the system was never completely developed; but it formed the basis of the training. When the crash came in March, 1918, only six American divisions were in France—the 1st (Regulars), the 2nd (Regulars and Marines), 26th (New England National Guard), 42nd (Rainbow, so called because it was made up of units from all States of the Union), with the 32nd (Michigan and Wisconsin National Guard) just arrived and in a training area, and the 41st (Depôt). The first four, which had been trained under French instructors and gradually initiated by sending units into the line with French divisions, alone were ready and were actually holding parts of the French front. On March 28, with the supremest self-denial, General Pershing unreservedly placed at General Foch's disposal and command all the American forces; and until the first American Army was formed in September, 1918, he exercised no tactical command, and American divisions were part and parcel of French or British armies.

The Americans first gave a taste of their quality on May 28, 1918, when the 1st Division captured the Cantigny sector near Montdidier and held it against the special efforts made by the Germans to recapture it and shake the American *moral*. By the end of May there were eleven American combat divisions in France, including three more of Regulars and the first two of the National Army, both of which, with one Regular division, were training in the British area. The first striking feat of the American divisions came on July 15, 1918, when the 3rd, 28th, and 42nd took part in stopping the last great German drive. The author does not

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seem to know the story of the 28th Division at the passage of the Marne, told by a German officer (Kurt Hesse, see the *Literary Supplement* of September 4, 1919). The enemy already dreaded the Americans, but after this disaster fear was ever in his bones when he found them opposite to him. They soon added to their renown when on July 18 the 1st and 2nd Divisions on either side of the 1st Moroccan Division, of which the Foreign Legion formed part, all under General Mangin, made the surprise attack which flattened out the Marne salient Reims-Château Thierry-Soissons. The author claims that the idea of the surprise attack was due to General Pershing. The description of the advance in darkness and rain to the jumping-off position is one of the best pieces of writing in the book.

By September there were twenty-seven combat divisions in the A.E.F. in five groups: six training under the French, fourteen in the American Army area, one in the training area, four with the French near Verdun, and two with the British. The First American Army of three American corps and one French was now formed for the reduction of the St. Mihiel salient. General Pershing had under him more than 400,000 Americans, and, as the author points out, Grant's Army of the Potomac at its maximum strength numbered only 125,000.

Next came the great Meuse-Argonne offensive, with the American Army on a line from the Meuse to the western edge of the Argonne, on the right of the French Fourth Army. Beginning on September 26, it lasted six weeks. In three phases the Americans fought their way forward step by step some ten miles, and then wheeling to the right crossed the Meuse, so that by the evening of November 6 their left was close to Sedan. By this time, however, twenty-nine divisions were in the fighting line, with thirteen behind them, and there were two American armies under General Pershing's command. On October 8, when his front extended to seventy-two miles, from near Pont-à-Mousson to the north of the Argonne, he had formed a Second Army under General Robert Lee Bullard, and General Hunter Liggett succeeded the Commander-in-Chief in the First. When the Armistice came a grand total of 1,390,000 Americans had taken part in action, and there was a roll of honour of 50,280 battle deaths and 205,690 wounded.