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THE NEGRO IN THE WAR

How French and American Black Troops Performed Deeds of Valor on Many Battlefields

AMONG the factors which aided the allied and associated nations, including the United States of America, to fight their way to victory in the great war were the efficient services rendered by the dark-skinned Hindus from Britain's furthest dominions and the negro colonials of France—her Algerians, her Senegalese, and her Moroccans—whose fearlessness was domonstrated repeatedly on the battlefield—"black devils," the German soldiers called them, when, fighting like demons, they had forced the Kaiser's proudest shock troops to retreat before them. And America sent 80,000 negro citizens to do their part for the world's liberty. What they did was made manifest by citation after citation, the conferring by the French Government of many War Crosses, and the granting of many United States medals for distinguished bravery.

France for a long time struggled without the help of her black colonists, and the thought of the valuable man-service that was being wasted in her African and other colonial possessions, while French soldiers by millions were falling on red battlefields, was slow in coming to her. And yet, had she listened to the voice of Gallifet, Minister of War at the time of the Fashoda episode, and of Mangin, then a simple Captain, and of Gouraud, victor of Samory, she would, at the time the European war broke out,

try. Up to that time, it should be remembered, the 92d Division as a unit had never been in battle. Only the 368th Infantry had received the baptism of fire in the Argonne Forest.

The division's chance came in the drive on Metz. At 4 o'clock one Sunday morning (Nov. 10, 1918) they were notified that they were to be sent into action. Through the whole division echoed the fighting slogan of the "Buffaloes," the 367th Infantry: "See it through!"

The 92d began its advance at 7 o'clock from Pont-à-Mousson. Facing it was a valley commanded by the heavy guns of Metz, and by nests of German machine guns. The negro troops realized their first great opportunity. Fused by a species of race solidarity they plunged forward like a single man, swiftly, unfalteringly, through a veritable rain of shell-fire, heedless of their losses. Their objective for the day was Bois Fréhaut. Picked Moroccan and Senegalese troops of the French Army, striking for the same point, in an odd competition of black races on this day, were the first to arrive. The Germans, grasping the situation, pounded Bois Fréhaut with a heavy fire, and the Senegalese and Moroccans were finally compelled to retreat.

Of the American negro troops, the 56th Regiment was forced to withdraw, but not until after heavy loss. It was the 1st Battalion of the "Buffaloes," commanded by Major Charles L. Appleton of New York, with negro company commanders and Lieutenants, that was called upon to hold the Germans at bay while the decimated 56th retreated. The iron resistance which the Buffaloes made to the Germans on this occasion, in the face of a terrific fire, won for the battalion the Croix de Guerre. A little later Bois Fréhaut was taken by the 92d. The murderous fire directed against the swiftly advancing blacks could not deter them. The Stars and Stripes said of this fight:

> Probably the hardest fighting done by any Americans in the final hour was that which engaged the troops of the 28th, 92d, 81st, and 7th Divisions of the Second American Army, who launched a fire-eating attack above Vigneulles just at dawn on the 11th. It was no mild thing, that last flare of battle, and the order to cease firing did not reach the men in the front line until the last moment, when the runners sped with it from fox hole to fox hole.

Numerous officers and privates of the 92d were commended for meritorious conduct by General Orders. At the close of hostilities the negro division held the

Color by R. Cenderas

line Vandières-St. Michel-Xon-Norry. The 92d suffered a total of 1,478 casualties.

So the negro soldier, alike of Africa and of the United States, played his part in the great war. Along the northeast front, in Rheims, on the Marne, at Mont de Choisy, in the Argonne, before Metz, these troops held their ground or broke the enemy lines by their unconquerable tenacity. As a French writer put it, "they fought like demons, and they died like men."

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have been able to bring a large black army into the field against Germany.

In 1908 Mangin, then a Lieutenant Colonel and Chief of Staff of Western Africa, foreseeing the European conflagration which burst forth six years later, took up the idea again, but his proposals failed of acceptation; in 1910, however, a commission, headed by Mangin and composed of four colonial officials, was sent to Western Africa to study the possibilities. It stayed there nine months. On its return it reported that an annual contingent of 40,000 black troops could be depended on, and recommended the creation of seven divisions within four years. But when the war broke out France possessed only the two Algerian divisions originally planned.

TRAGIC FATE OF ALGERIANS

The history of these two divisions of black soldiers is tragic. The men went into a hell of artillery fire untested, and they proved their worth. The 2d Division, which reached the front first, came into contact with the enemy at Rheims at the end of September, 1914. The thunder of big guns seemed only to amuse them, and the carnage left them unperturbed. From Rheims they were sent to Arras. In this sector on Nov. 3 the battalion attacked "on ground as completely bare as a billiard table, cut every fifty yards by cana's five yards in width and two yards deep." For three days and three nights the Senegalese went forward under a frightful fire of artillery, infantry and machine guns, wading through canal after canal, wet to the skin, decimated by the terrific hail of projectiles, and ended with a surprise attack at 5 o'clock in the morning, in which when the whole front line was mowed down by the first and last German fire, those behind rushed forward and took the German trenches after a furious body to body struggle. Of the whole battalion only 3 officers, 5 non-commissioned officers and 120 men remained alive. So the second battalion of Algeria died on the field of honor.

The end of the first battalion was equally dramatic. It happened at Dixmude, a name made famous by Charles Le Goffic in his epic of the French marines. With these fought the Senegalese. On Nov. 10 they were defending, with the Belgian troops on the left and the cemetery of Dixmude on the right, the allied trenches, which were furiously attacked. The roaring field-gray tide poured suddenly upon them from the flanks. Two solutions faced them—to

surrender or to die at their posts. They chose the latter.

An extraordinary scene began. The madness of battle had seized the black soldiers, the intoxication of self-immolation. The mysterious call of their African blood was heard and hearkened to, and an elemental power, born of the barbaric life of the wilderness, lifted them above themselves. They roared forth to the amazed enemy their fury, hatred, and contempt. A hundred African dialects fused into a savage and unintelligible harmony. A vast chant of war and death, it rose and grew, became formidable, terrible, dominating all the battle, a funeral paean of the black warriors, *morituri*. And when the gray tide struck them they rushed forward, striking, killing, dying. The German troops could not finish with them. The German commanders brought up machine guns and from a distance of fifty yards mowed them down. Under the volleys the fierce hymn of war died away, and silence came. But history echoes with it still.

TROOPS FROM MOROCCO

Other territorial troops were raised in Morocco by General Lyautey. Some of them shared the fate of the Senegalese already described. "Imperfectly trained, but formidable fighters," went the record. Fully awakened now to the possibilities of her colonial possessions, France mobilized all available forces in Western Africa, in Senegal, Mauritia, in the Lower Sudan and sent a regiment into the furnace of battle at Champagne. The records tell of a cry used by one Captain Poupart to encourage white soldiers, who were wavering. "Come, men, another effort! See how the blacks are holding!" On Oct. 24, transported in automobile trucks to Arras, they advanced on the enemy from one parallel to another.

then across open country. The red flare of a burning mill illuminated the horizon. Then from the German trenches came suddenly a roar of fire. When it died away many black soldiers strewed the ground; but when the charge resounded the survivors rushed forward and swept like a wave to the German dugouts. The Germans were too many, however; the Senegalese too few. The blacks retreated without panic, and, reinforced by their reserves, held their lines. Six times in the night the Lavenir regiment attacked the enemy, sustaining many losses. The result was made manifest by the German papers, which admitted that the blacks were "good troops," had "fought well," and that their own soldiers "had never been attacked with such fury before." As a matter of fact, the black soldiers had saved Arras.

In the hell of Gallipoli, in 1915, the black troops of France fought also, and made the same record as elsewhere. But the man power of France was waning. A French envoy to Russia, who went to ask assistance of the Czar, complained of the wastage of human material. "The Germans," he said, "make war with machinery; we, with human breasts." Realizing that their resources were weakening, the French looked again to Africa. The creation of eight Senegalese battalions was planned for 1916, but the necessary mobilization law, for some inexplicable reason, was never passed. Special decrees, however, were subsequently issued, notably that of Oct. 9, 1916, by virtue of which a recruiting limit of 50,000 men was established. Raised hastily, this force, almost untrained, reached France in mid-Winter, and was amalgamated with other corps. At least a dozen battalions shared in the military operations of this period. The press recounted in detail the exploits of the Senegalese at Barleux, at la Maisonette, before Péronne, at the time of the offensive of General Fayolle on the Somme, and before Verdun under General Mangin.

At Douaumont, in the attack of Oct. 24, the fourth battalion of the colonial infantry regiment of Morocco (the regiment which, of the whole French Army, won the greatest number of citations) sallied forth from its trenches, only to meet a terrific fire of musketry and machine guns. Wavering for a moment, the two companies at the head of the battalion swept on again. Split in the centre by an enemy force, the Senegalese rushed ahead on either side, attacking on the first lines. Thanks to this heroic ac-

tion, the resistance of the Germans at Douaumont was broken after a furious struggle.

Again, on the western slope of the Fausse Côte, when the white soldiers, swept by machine-gun fire, took shelter, the 1st and 3d Companies of sharpshooters, all Senegalese, continued to progress, charged the machine-gun nest, and took it by storm. Inspired by the spirit of the black troops, the whole line renewed the attack, the Germans surrendered, and the German position was captured.

AT CHEMIN DES DAMES

The much-discussed offensive of April 16, 1917, a gigantic operation led by the British and the French from Arras to the Argonne, was disastrous not only to the French, but to the black contingents. The task of General Mangin was to take by storm the formidable position called the Chemin des Dames. Because of their achievements as shock troops, the fury of their advance under the most devastating fire, the black divisions were marked out for the first assault. At dawn they bounded forward and took the first German line within an hour, traversing a distance of from five to seven kilometers through a bewildering and formidable network of defenses. But somebody blundered. Halted at 10 o'clock in the morning before the second German line, bristling with machine guns, they were kept immovable all that day and night in trenches swept by glacial winds and clouds of snow. Their feet, unsued to European footgear and held like vices in their army brogans, became badly frostbitten, and on the morning of the 18th, when the 2d Colonial Corps moved forward, thousands of Senegalese could not follow. Whole battalions were thus put hors de combat. Then another blunder occurred. Many of these cases of frostbite were easily cured. Had the black soldiers been brought back a short distance to the rear, and only temporarily, they could have been used again in the great offensive. Instead of this, they were dispersed, and when at last they rejoined their corps, General Mangin no longer commanded his army and the offensive had been abandoned. By the end of May, 1917, the black battalions were distributed over all the front and relegated to obscure tasks. Some regained a regimental unity in quiet sectors, some participated in the few operations around Verdun in association with white colonial troops. The year 1917 was ill-omened for the black troops, as it was for all others.

THE DEFENSE OF RHEIMS

In 1918 the Senegalese, withdrawn from the front at the beginning of Winter, and reinforced by belated units, were reorganized in the camps of the south by a colonial General, who created the fine battalions whose strength the Germans experienced in the Spring of the same year. These black troops, veterans of two years' fighting, were given the task of holding the martyred City of Rheims. The Germans, planning to take the city by surprise, advanced between Rheims and Soissons, and were beating down the resistance of the French first lines when the Senegalese divisions arrived. The German soldiers, who had already tested the temper of their black adversaries, had no stomach for further fight, and withdrew. But on June 12 they began another furious assault from the east of the city, and succeeded in capturing one of its keys, the Pompelle fort. By a fierce counteroffensive the Senegalese drove them out headlong, and the Germans did not return to the attack.

These continued failures, especially in view of the fact that the German papers had divulged contemptuously the secret that Rheims was held "only by negroes and colonial troops," became serious for German prestige, and on June 18 the Crown Prince ordered his troops to take the city, at whatever cost. On a front of twenty-five kilometers from west to east, three first-line divisions assailed the circle of the French defenses, preceding the attack by a violent bombardment of asphyxiating shells. The German effort failed again. At only one point, to the north of Sillery, the enemy penetrated, but was driven out. "We were struggling," wrote a German officer, "against those negro soldiers, who hold like walls, wait for our men till they are within five yards, and throw themselves upon them."

When, by a surprise attack, the Germans finally succeeded in taking le Chemin des Dames, a capture which brought them in four days from l'Ailette to the Marne, there was panic in Château-Thierry, which was choked with fugitives and fleeing soldiers. All efforts to halt the rout proved vain. Only one General, renowned for his exploits in Africa, made an attempt to stem the tide of the advancing Germans. In the ruins of the castle he installed his Senegalese, with orders to defend it to the death. These orders were obeyed. Vainly the German wave beat against the old walls of the castle, while the evacuation of the town proceeded. When finally

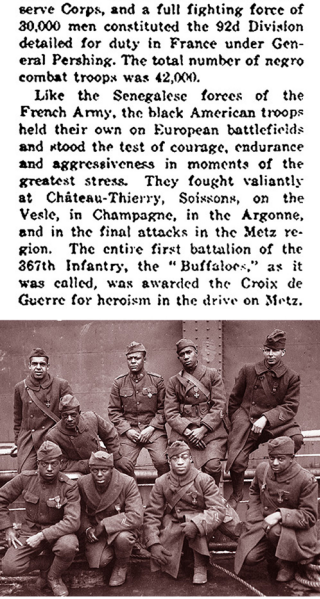
the object of the Allies was gained, the handful of Senegalese soldiers came forth, bearing their dead and wounded, under the eyes of the Germans, who were stupefied by the small number of their tenacious adversaries.

So the French blacks fought in the great European war, the first in which they had ever been allowed to share. Isolated cases of the panic of raw black troops, brought for the first time under the fire of big guns, cannot impair the record made by the black troops as a whole. They, too, were the artisans of the victory of France.

THE COLORED AMERICANS

The negro soldiers of the United States arrived late on the field of battle, but in more than sufficient time to make Germany feel the strength of their arm. In all 83,600 negroes were drafted for service in the National Army sent overseas. More than 626 of the 1,250 colored men who completed their course of training were commissioned as officers in the United States Army; nearly 100 negro physicians and surgeons received commissions as officers in the Medical Reserve Corps, and a full fighting force of 30,000 men constituted the 92d Division detailed for duty in France under General Pershing. The total number of negro combat troops was 42,000.

Like the Senegalese forces of the French Army, the black American troops held their own on European battlefields and stood the test of courage, endurance and aggressiveness in moments of the greatest stress. They fought valiantly at Château-Thierry, Soissons, on the Vesle, in Champagne, in the Argonne, and in the final attacks in the Metz region. The entire first battalion of the 367th Infantry, the "Buffaloes," as it was called, was awarded the Croix de Guerre for heroism in the drive on Metz.



The soldiers of this battalion received their baptism of fire in this attack; at the start they won honors which veterans of many conflicts had failed to capture. In other engagements three black regiments as units were awarded the Croix de Guerre, which bestows on each man the right to wear the coveted badge. When the fighting stopped, it was the negro troops who were nearest to the Rhine. Whether performing individual exploits, fighting in a single regiment, or doing battle in a division made up entirely of men of his organization the negro soldier rose to every test.

In the Argonne the 368th Infantry, colored, sent a volunteer runner with a message to the left flank of an American firing line. The way led across an open field swept by heavy enemy machine-gun fire. Before he had gone far, a shell cut him down. As he fell he shouted back to his comrades that some one should come and get the message. Another member of the regiment, Lieutenant Campbell, dashed across the shell-swept space, picked up the wounded private, and, amid a hail of German bullets, carried his man back to the American lines, winning by this achievement the Distinguished Service Cross and the promotion to a Captaincy. Under the same Lieutenant Campbell a few black soldiers, armed only with their rifles, trench knives, and hand grenades, moving over a road in the Château-Thiery sector, by a clever ruse and great bravery, captured a concealed machine gun that had been doing deadly work, killed four of the Germans operating it, and made prisoners of the other three.

DEEDS OF 372D REGIMENT

Four of the negro regiments first sent over, the 369th, 370th, 371st, and 372d, afterward organized into the Provisional 93d Division, were brigaded separately with French troops. The fighting record of the 372d may be taken as typical. The men had arrived in France on April 14, and had gone into training with the French on April 28. On June 6 the 372d was sent to the trenches just west of Verdun, and occupied the famous battle-swept Hill 304 and sections at Four de Paris and Vauquois. On Hill 304 thousands of French and German soldiers had fallen as the battleline swung back and forth. This hill was given to the negroes to hold, and they held it.

In the Champagne sector, with Montoir as the objective, the negroes cheered and sang when the announcement that they were going into battle was made.

The Negro in the War

From June 6 to Sept. 10, in the bloody Argonne Forest, the 372d bore the brunt of the terrific battle for weeks. They took an active part in the Argonne offensive, which lasted from Sept. 26 to Oct. 7. In the ordeal of this gigantic drive, the negro troops proved their fighting qualities in deadly striking power and stubborn resistance in moments of crisis, and made for themselves such a record that they won as a unit the coveted Croix de Guerre. The casualty list showed 500 men killed, wounded, and gassed.

Another regiment's record, that of the 369th, commanded by Colonel William Hayward, ex-Public Service Commissioner, is equally striking. The 369th was in the Champagne offensive as a part of the Fourth Army, commanded by General Gournaud, a few miles west of the Argonne Forest. The accomplishment of this regiment was described by Colonel Hayward in the opening lines of his official report:

> At 5:25 A. M. the assault was launched, an assault that kept assaulting so far as our division was concerned, for twelve days, in which we crossed rivers, captured towns, cut and climbed through acres and acres of barbed wire entanglements, stormed bluffs, ridges and hills for fourteen kilometers, all the way facing stubborn and terribly effective artillery and machine-gun fire. At the end of twelve days we came out with our division, what was left of us, which included twenty officers.

At the very end of the war the 369th won another distinction, pointed out by The Stars and Stripes, the organ of the American troops in France, in the following announcement:

> The furthest north at 11 o'clock [when the armistice went into effect, Nov. 11, 1918] on the front of the two armies was held at the extreme American left, up Sedan way, by the troops of the 77th Division. The furthest east—the nearest to the Rhine—was held by those negro soldiers who used to make up the old New York 15th, and who have long been brigaded with the French. They were in Alsace, and their line ran through Thann and across the railway that leads to Colmar.

NEGRO DIVISION IN ACTION

Soon after the 92d Division was thoroughly organized it took over the Marbache sector. The fury of these men's trench raids won from the Germans the sobriquet of "schwarze Teufel," (black devils.) By these raids they drove the Germans north beyond Erehaut and Voivrotte to Cheminot Bridge. To check these attacks the Germans tried to destroy the bridge, and flooded the coun-