

Upon the completion of the course at the French Academy we were taken on an extensive tour of the French front. The tour covered ground from the Somme battlefield to the Chemin des Dames. During the trip we learned how trench warfare was conducted and tactical examples of the battles which took place on the ground were explained, and later we realized how much we had benefited therefrom, and we learned to know our French comrades in arms.

After returning to the school we received orders to proceed to Rouen, France, to attend a two weeks course in pioneer engineer work at the British Royal Engineers' School at that place, after which we returned to Versailles and received assignments to Regular Army troops.

On December 1, 1917, I reported to the Headquarters of the First Regiment of Engineers and was assigned to duty with Company "F" of that organization. At that time the strength of the organization was 168 men per company and we received additional men shortly after to bring the strength to 250 men per company. By January 15, 1918, the replacements had all arrived and we were on our way to the front for the first time as a fighting organization. The First Division went from the Gondrecourt area to the Toul sector where they were brigaded with the French to receive their first instruction in actual trench warfare.

When we first went to the Toul sector it was known as a rest sector and was used by the French to rest troops who had been through severe fighting and it was very quiet. However, it did not take long for hatred among the American troops to become aroused after seeing the devastation which four years had brought in this area and soon the front became a comparatively active one. While we were at the Toul sector the Germans commenced their famous "Channel Port" drive on March 21 and drove in the Montdidier salient, and it looked as if they would reach their objective.

The First Division at this time had received a fair amount of instruction in actual trench warfare and likewise four other divisions of the American Expeditionary Forces had received similar instruction. On March 28, General Pershing placed at the disposal of Marshal Foch all of our forces to be used as he might decide. At his request the First Division was transferred from the Toul sector to a position in reserve at Chaumont en Vexin near the place where the Fifth British Army joined the French army. As German superiority in numbers required prompt action, since the junction between the British and French armies had been broken, the American First Division had gone into the gap at Montdidier salient on the Picardy battlefield on April 26, 1918. Tactics had been suddenly revolutionized to those of open warfare, and our men, confident of the results of their training, managed to hold the Germans close to Montdidier from which point they advanced no further.

The First Division consisted entirely of Regular Army Organizations; namely, the Sixteenth, Eighteenth, Twenty-sixth and Twenty-eighth Infantry Regiments; the Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Field Artillery Regiments, two machine gun battalions, and the First Regiment of Engineers. All of these regiments had men who had campaigned since the days of the Philippines and were in excellent condition for what was before them in view of the recent training they had had.

On the morning of May 28 this division attacked the commanding German position at the nose of the Montdidier salient, taking with splendid dash the town of Cantigny and all other objectives, which were organized and held steadfastly against vicious counter-attacks and galling artillery fire. Although local, this action had an electrical effect, as it demonstrated the fighting qualities of our men under extreme battle conditions, and also that the enemies' troops were not altogether invincible. The engineers organized strong-points behind the first line of infantry after the town was taken and the objective was reached, in order to withstand the counter-attacks which followed.

The taking of the town was done with comparative ease, but the counter-offensive by the enemy was bitter to withstand. However, the Germans did not pass the strong-points or regain the town after trying every means at their disposal to retake it. Shortly after the town was taken I was gassed and did not see