

Raymond Buma

Distinguished Service Cross for heroism at Cuisy, France

k.i.a. September 27, 1918 Bois de Septsarges, France

Meuse-Argonne Offensive

4th Division

39th Infantry

7th Brigade

Machine Gun Company

Enlisted Dec. 31, 1917. Arrived in France, May 1918 from Hoboken, NJ



Introduction:

Despite outrage over German destruction and atrocities, it took until April 2, 1917 for U.S. President Woodrow Wilson to call for war in an address to Congress.

“American ships have been sunk, American lives taken, in ways which it has stirred us very deeply to learn of.”

Wilson asked for war. Four days later, Congress obliged. By then, millions of Europeans had already died. There was a real deadlock. The U.S. entry changed everything.

It took more than a year for hundreds of thousands of young Americans to be ready for the front lines. When war was declared, the U.S. army was smaller than the Danish army and much smaller than the Belgian army.

The arrival of up to 2.1 million U.S. troops became an ever-bigger factor. They attacked and they were everywhere.

The final U.S. statistics are: 4.7 million service members; 53,402 killed in action; 63,114 other deaths in non-theater service; and 204,002 non-mortal wounded.

A century later, the landscape of the Meuse-Argonne where Raymond Buma fought, is still a patchwork of rich pasture and forests that once provided hiding for the American and German soldiers.

At a vital stage of World War I in the fall of 1918, the Meuse-Argonne offensive was the biggest and bloodiest operation of the American Expeditionary Force. It involved more than 1.2 million U.S. soldiers and lasted 47 days, with a loss of over 26,000 American lives. Raymond Buma was far in front of the enemy line when he was hit with a shell and killed in the Argonne. His body was brought back to the United States in 1921.

At such huge cost, the Americans drove the Germans back ever farther when, on Nov. 11, 1918 the armistice ended the fighting.

Today, only birdsong and the distant hum of lawnmowers break the solemn silence at the vast Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery. Days before the centennial, gardeners neatly clipped every edge of greenery and raked leaves left from winter. It is the largest American cemetery in Europe and memorializes 14,246 war dead.

Taken from the book:

THE THIRTY-NINTH INFANTRY IN THE WORLD WAR

COPYRIGHTED IN NINETEEN HUNDRED NINETEEN by COL. FRANK C. BOLLES, U. S. A. COMMANDING THE THIRTY- NINTH INFANTRY IN ACTION DURING THE WORLD WAR

In December, 1917, the War Department directed this Regiment to become a part of **the Seventh Brigade**, Fourth Division, which was then in the process of organization at **Camp Greene**.

Little did they realize then what an important part the Thirty-Ninth Infantry was to play in the Great War, not only as a unit of the Ivy Division, but acting independently as well. However, the wonderful spirit of pride in the organization and determination to succeed was evidenced by all ranks from the start, and with such a spirit the Regiment was carried through its hard period of organization and training, and its subsequent glorious career at the battle front.

The early period of training was handicapped in numerous ways. **The winter of 1917- 1918 at Camp Greene was one of the coldest on record in that section of the country.** The officers and men lived in tents, and the camp was practically a sea of sticky mud throughout the winter and spring. In consequence, little could be accomplished in the way of training, except indoor instruction. Specialists' schools were established throughout the Division, and instructors from the American and Allied armies conducted courses in the special weapons used in this war. Officers and non-commissioned officers attended these schools, and later instructed their own units in the various specialties. Several officers were also sent to the Infantry School of Arms, at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, where extensive courses in infantry arms were taught, and the successful graduates of this school later became instructors in the Division and Regimental schools.

However, the Regiment remained far below the authorized strength until early in March, 1918, when troops from almost every National Army camp in the country arrived and were assigned to the Regiment; when they sailed overseas the Thirty-Ninth was composed of men from every State in the Union.

On April 9, 1918, **Colonel Frank C. Bolles** arrived from the Hawaiian Islands and assumed command of the Regiment. The usual spirit, energy and force, which are so characteristic of the Colonel, were immediately taken up by all ranks, and the mold of the Thirty-Ninth was cast.

The result is now known to all — the Regiment was the Army's finest.

The persistent rumors which had been in circulation for some time — that the Fourth Division was to sail overseas — began to materialize in the middle part of April, when steps were taken to prepare the Regiment for the big journey, and towards the latter part of the month the glad news had been made known that movement orders were actually received.

On April 26th and 27th the Regiment entrained for Camp Mills, L. I., N. Y., arriving there at the end of a thirty-hour journey.

On April 29th an advance party of officers and non-commissioned officers from the Regiment sailed from Hoboken, some as advance agents, who met with the others on their arrival in France; others to attend various specialists' schools, who rejoined a few months later. During their stay at Camp Mills they received

replacements, eliminating men who were for physical or other reasons unfit for overseas service; drew new clothing and equipment, and made final preparations for the trip across.

The officers and men were granted permission to visit New York, and many of them saw that great city for the last time for many months to come — and some forever.

Raymond Buma was part of the Machine Gun Company.

He operated an M1917 Browning machine gun while on the front line in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, September 2018.

Raymond is featured in this article (link below) from the Army University Press concerning Non-Commissioned Officers:

<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/journals/nco-journal/archives/2018/march/infantry-squad-part-1/>

Date: Friday April 18, 1918

*To: Sister Grace Buma
Whitinsville, MA*

From: Raymond Buma

Dear Sister,

I received your letter a few days ago and was glad to hear from you. I received the box of fudge you sent me a few days before and it was fine and I want to thank you very much.

It was pretty hot over here today but we didn't have to work very hard. Our platoon went to the range all day and that is a snap.

We have nine to each gun and when one is shooting the rest watch him. How would you like to shoot a gun that shoots 600 shots a minute? I like to shoot them all day.

I had my picture taken last Friday but I won't be able to get them until Saturday afternoon because the studio closes at six o'clock and I can't get there before 6 on week days on account that we have to dull till 4:30 and we don't stand retreat until 6:30.

This company is about half regulars and half drafted men. A lot of them came from Camp Custer, Michigan, Camp Grant, Illinois, and Camp Lewis, State of Washington.

So there was a parade in Whitinsville for the third time.

They had a parade in Charlotte and there were about 30,000 men in line. We didn't go out. I think none of the Machine Gun Companies were out.

Have any more of the boys joined the Army from New Village?

I think we are going to have a picture taken of the whole Company and if we do I will buy one and send it home.

This is about all I know to write about tonight so I will close to love to all.

*From your brother,
Ray*

*39th Infantry 4th Division
Machine Gun Company
Camp Greene
Charlotte, NC*

May 1918: Sail to France

On May 10, 1918, Raymond Buma sailed from Hoboken, NJ to France on board the Duca D'Aosta.

At six o'clock in the evening of **May 8th**, "I" Company and the Supply Company **sailed from Hoboken** on board the Espagne, and exactly two days later the remainder of the Regiment cleared the same port, Regimental Headquarters, Headquarters Company and **Machine Gun Company (Raymond Buma's) aboard the Duca D'Aosta**, First and Second Battalions on the Dante Alghieri, and the Third Battalion (less "I" Company) on the Lenope.

An interesting fact of this trip of the **Duca D'Aosta** was that it was an Italian boat, in charge of the U. S. Navy, fitted out by English contractors, transporting American troops, with an infantry colonel (**Colonel Bolles**) in command of troops of an artillery regiment.

The Sixteenth Field Artillery which accompanied us on this trip proved to be very pleasant companions, and the cordial relationship then established ripened into mutual admiration and friendship between the two regiments. It was this same regiment which was to give us such gallant support in the actions in which both regiments took part later. As the ships silently left their berths, the troops stayed below decks, undoubtedly occupied with mingled feelings and thoughts of the past, present, but more than anything else — the future.

They were off towards the Great Adventure, and as the dark, sinister hulls gained speed, moving quietly over the waters east-ward, the first phase of the existence of the Thirty-ninth Infantry came to a close, and henceforth we became a part of the now famous American Expeditionary Forces.

Our Early Days in France

We were very fortunate in having had excellent weather during our entire trip across the Atlantic, and seasickness was confined to but a few men. Life aboard ship was far from strenuous, in fact it was a vacation for us, who had spent months in intensive training under very trying conditions, and were to spend many more under actual battle conditions in France.

Lifeboat and fire drills were held daily, and occasion-ally several times per day. Every officer and man was assigned to a lifeboat or a life raft, and when the signal for either boat or fire drill was given, every one would go by the most direct route to his proper station. Some of our men took turns as assistants to the officers on watch and proved to be considerable help to the ship's tired crew. Within a few days every one was well accustomed to the routine life aboard our transports.

From the time we cleared New York harbor each of us found a new and inseparable companion in the form of a life preserver, which we wore all day and kept close at hand during our sleep. No lights of any sort were allowed to be shown on ship at night, hence all port holes, doors., etc., were carefully closed or screened, and smoking on decks at night was prohibited. All these precautions were absolutely necessary, for we were crossing a huge body of water infested with enemy submarines, and all ranks realized that their first objective was France.

The great convoy of transports, artfully camouflaged, made a wonderful sight during the day on account of the various formations assumed from time to time, and a very impressive appearance in the darkness of the night. Hour after hour, and day after day, on we went towards our, then as yet unknown, destination.

We did not know whether we were to land in England or in France, but happy we were at the fact that each hour was bringing us closer to the battlefields.

When we entered what was known as the "Danger Zone" we were required to wear our life preservers at all times, and not to undress when retiring. Very soon after we entered this zone, the U. S. Cruiser West Virginia, which convoyed us thus far, was relieved by a few American destroyers. Upon the appearance of these small but powerful and speedy boats a feeling of relief permeated all ranks, and many a soldier on board the transports, who in the quietness of his home town had doubts as to the necessity of a large and powerful navy, had now all such doubts removed. The performances of these "Sea Dogs" demonstrated to us one of the many important duties, and the wonderful efficiency of our Navy.

Later on several more of these destroyers met us, and we then entered on the final stage of our journey. The entire voyage was quite uneventful, and it proved a pleasant disappointment to us not to have encountered enemy submarines.

A little after midnight on May 22nd, the troops aboard the Duca D'Aosta experienced a submarine scare. When the alarm was given the monotony of the boat drills was well rewarded by the magnificent manner in which every one went to his post quietly but quickly. There was no noise or confusion, each man knew his job and was prepared for it, but the alarm proved to be unfounded, and the doughboys went back to sleep. However, the discussions overheard the following day were very amusing, and some of the men's imaginations went so far as to believe that they had actually seen the submarine plunge into the deep for the last time, crew and all. Our exultations reached the climax when friendly balloons and aeroplanes welcomed us and when we caught the first glimpse of the shores of France.

Our dangerous journey across the Atlantic was nearing its end — and we were at last to set foot on the native soil of Lafayette. **All vessels transporting the Thirty-ninth Infantry arrived at Brest on May 23rd**, except the fast Espagne, which had already docked at Bordeaux on May 18th.

May 24, 1918

Our arrival in France was saddened by the death of Private First Class James L. Cannon, of "B" Company, aboard the Dante Alighieri on May 24th, by cause of pneumonia, and at this early stage of our stay in France we laid him to rest in Brest.

After spending two days in a rest camp near Pontanezan Barracks (on the outskirts of Brest), the Regiment (less "I" Company and the Supply Company), entrained for Calais.

During this journey a German aeroplane dropped two bombs near one of our trains. Fortunately none of our troops suffered casualties from this raid.

Sergeant Stanley Norozny, of the **Machine Gun Company (Raymond Buma's)**, however, has a pleasant recollection of this affair, for a fragment of an anti-aircraft shell came through the roof of his car and penetrated his mess kit.

May 28, 1918 – arrival in Calais

We arrived at Calais early in the morning on May 28th, and marched to an English rest camp on the outskirts of the city, where we were cordially and comfortably received by the British authorities. At this camp we turned in to the Quartermaster surplus clothing, and personal property was placed in barrack bags for storage. As we were to be brigaded with the British, our own rifles and bayonets were exchanged for British Lee-Enfield rifles and British bayonets.

We also went through lachrymatory gas chambers and **tested out our new British gas masks**, which each man had carefully fitted to him by old war veterans.

At Calais we were afforded an opportunity to see the effects of war, and of a modern war such as this one. Many buildings were ruined by aeroplane bombs, and it being a favorite city for air raids, not a few enemy bombing planes came over at nights and raided the city and vicinity. The anti-aircraft guns were kept quite busy, and did excellent work. It was pathetic to see women and children desert their homes at dusk for cellars and dugouts where they would remain overnight. Others would be seen standing in the doorways of their homes, watching the skies carefully and with anxious ears alert to detect any signs of approaching hostile aircraft.

May 29, 1918

While we were now in the war zone and still many miles from the front, **we nevertheless felt the presence of the enemy**. In the afternoon of May 29th the Regiment marched a few miles from the rest camp at Calais to Fontinettes Station, where it entrained. This march, while short in distance, was nevertheless one which is very memorable to us.

At that time we had no transport of our own, and the men had to carry all equipment on their person. The packs contained two blankets, over- coat, slicker, shelter-half, tent pole and pins, underwear, extra O. D. shirt, socks, bed sack, mess kit, bacon and condiment cans, toilet articles, intrenching tool, and extra pair of shoes. In addition to this heavy pack, each man carried his rifle, bayonet, gas mask, steel helmet, cartridge belt, 200 rounds of ammunition, and canteen filled with water.

Although burdened with this extremely heavy load, the march discipline was excellent.

After a three-hour journey, we detrained at Samer, where we were welcomed by a British military band, and had coffee served to us. Several units which remained at Samer overnight experienced another night air raid, which again brought home the grim realities of war. However, there were no casualties incurred. From Samer another difficult march was made to our new training area. Regimental Headquarters was established in Doudeauville, and the battalions were billeted in the nearby villages. "I" Company and the Supply Company entrained at Bordeaux on May 24th, and three days later reached Le Havre. Here the Supply Company turned in much of the regimental equipment it had brought from the United States. After five days' stay in Le Havre, the two companies proceeded by rail to Samer, where they rejoined the Regiment on June 3rd. In this area we received from the British — animals, trans- port, machine guns, automatic rifles, and ammunition. Assisted by a staff of British officers and non-commissioned officers, our training started.

We sent officers and N. C. O.'s to American and British schools to specialize in various subjects, and everyone got down to hard work with but one end in view, and that was to make of himself as an efficient part of the Army as possible. On account of the activity of enemy aircraft in this vicinity, it was necessary to do our training at such places as would afford concealment from observation.

The general state of apprehension in the Allied world that the Germans would break through to Paris, and the possibility that the Thirty-Ninth Infantry might be called on at any time to take part in the defense, keyed up the training.

Training in France

After nine days' stay in the Doudeauville area, we replaced the British equipment (except animals, transport, and gas masks) with American, including the favorite Springfield rifle. After a march of two and a half days, the First and Second Battalions entrained at Maresquel, and the remainder of the Regiment at Hesdin — for the Chateau-Thierry front to assist in the resistance of the threatened drive on Paris.

June 9-15, 1918

The movement from the Doudeauville area commenced on June 9th and was completed on June 15th, when the entire Regiment went into camp in the woods near Acy-en-Multien.

Here the **Seventh Brigade (Raymond Buma's)** was attached for training and defense to the Fourth French Infantry Division. Intensive training was at once resumed. Specialists' schools were established, and for the first time our men were given an opportunity to fire their rifles on a range. As there was no range available, we at first used tin cans tied to stakes for targets, but in a short time we constructed an excellent range which the Engineers laid out, and fired on ranges up to 500 yards.

Despite the fact that our men were mostly recruits and had no preliminary instruction in firing, the marksmanship and enthusiasm displayed by them in this work was very gratifying to all, and the results obtained were surprising to our own and the French officers.

We also sent detachments of officers and men for a short tour of observation and instruction with the Second Division and also with the French in the trenches. Our training schedule was interrupted from time to time by the so-called "alerts," which meant that the Regiment was marched to, and took up position in, the French trenches near the front, some twelve miles from our training area.

The Thirty-Ninth Infantry sector extended from the Collinace Mareuil road, exclusive, to the cross-roads 500 meters east of the Autheuil Church, exclusive, with Regimental Headquarters at La Grange-aux-Bois. In the midst of these preparations the Regiment celebrated, in historic fashion, Independence Day.

The Thirty-ninth Infantry was designated as one of the two Regiments in the Division to select a battalion to be sent to Paris to take part in the Independence Day parade participated in by various units of the Army at that city. This provisional battalion, composed of representatives of all units in the Regiment, under command of Major Winton, made a most creditable showing and was given a royal reception by the French people in their capital.

July 6-7, 1918

When these troops returned to the Regiment they found that their comrades had been sent to the "alert" positions in the trenches during their absence. Therefore, instead of marching from the train to their camp, they pushed on many miles beyond to take their place in line.

On the night of July 6th all units, except the Third Battalion, marched back to camp at Acy-en-Multien, while the Third Battalion remained in the trenches until July 7th, and then returned to the same camp.

During the Regiment's period of training in the trenches it was subjected to enemy shell fire. Wagoner John Lopes, of the Supply Company, has the distinction of being **the first member of the Thirty-Ninth Infantry to be wounded in action**. While driving his team near Thury-en-Valois, on July 7th, he was struck in the nose by a fragment of a shell.

July 14, 1918

The appreciation of our Allies was evidenced by the following communication sent on July 14th by the Commanding General, Second French Army Corps, to our Brigade Commander:

*"I feel sure that the fine American Army, which has already shown on the battlefields such brilliant military qualities, will contribute to hasten the day of the final victory. I feel especially proud to have under my command the **Seventh Brigade**, U. S. A., whose fine battalion I admired last 4th of July; and I beg you, General, to transmit to your officers and troops the wishes which I express for their success and for the greatness of the United States."*

An appropriate reply was at once sent by the Commanding General, Seventh Infantry Brigade. — B. A. P. To Brig. Gen. Poore From General Philipot, French Army Corps:

"My dear General Poore: Permit me to join you on this day when you celebrate the Independence of the United States. My French heart beats in unison with yours; is it not for our independence that we have fought for four years? Is it not to help us in this sacred cause that you have come to share our fortunes? That is why I unite in the same thought and in the same affection our two countries fighting for the same ideals of Justice and Liberty. Please accept, my dear General, the expression of my sincere wishes for the glory and success of your splendid Brigade and for its chief, and my sentiments of high consideration.

*Philipot,
Commanding Second Army Corps"*

HEADQUARTERS SEVENTH INFANTRY BRIGADE AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCES
France, 14th July, 1918.

*My dear General Philipot (Commanding Second French Army Corps.),
Permit me to extend to you, on behalf of the officers and men of the Seventh Infantry Brigade, our felicitations and best wishes on the occasion of your national holiday. It is fitting that France and the United States, the greatest republics in the world, should be engaged and united in an effort to maintain for mankind Liberty and Independence. We regard it an honor to serve under your command, and we hope we shall not be found wanting in any duty we may be called upon to perform. With the hope that your beautiful country will soon be rid of the presence of an enemy, I remain, Sincerely yours,
B. A. Poore.*

July 15-17, 1918

Advance Towards the Vesle River

ABOUT 8:30 o'clock in the evening of July 15th, after a very hard day on the target range, orders were received to move " up to the second line (French) positions.

The Regiment moved forward, going into camp at ha Villeneuve-sous-hury and Thury-en-Valois, with Regimental Headquarters at ha Grange-aux-Bois Ferme. This was the same area occupied by the Regiment when previously ordered to the "alert" position. During the entire day units of the Second Division Artillery had been passing Acy on their way to the Soissons front. It was evident to all that the Regiment was soon to see action. On the following day the regimental, battalion and company commanders, the first two accompanied by their staffs, were ordered to Autheuil-en-Valois (Headquarters of the Thirty- Third French Division) to make a reconnaissance of the front line.

The night of July 16th was spent by battalion and company commanders in reconnoitering the sectors assigned their units. The Second Battalion was assigned the area of Troesnes and Silly-la-Poterie. That night "F" and "G" Companies went into position, "F" Company at Silly-la-Poterie and "G" Company at hes Heureux Ferme.

The night following, July 17th, the Regiment completed the relief of the Ninth and Eleventh French Infantry Regiments. The sector occupied extended from the Ourcq River north, along the eastern edge of Troesnes, across the Savieres River, to the heights west of the river at Faverolles, exclusive. Each battalion placed two companies in the front line and two in support. The Second Battalion was on the right between the Ourcq and Savieres Rivers, with "E" Company on the east edge of Troesnes, its right on the river; "H" Company on left of "E," with its left prolonging the line into the quarry marked "Garr." "F" Company was in the Savieres valley in support of "H", and "G" Company was in the Ourcq valley in 25 support of "E."

July 17, 1918

On July 17, the Thirty-Ninth was put on the front lines to relieve the French 11th Infantry.

The Thirty-Ninth Machine Gun Company (Raymond Buma's Company) was assigned to the Second Battalion. The Third Battalion with one company of the Eleventh M. G. Battalion, occupied the center of the regimental sector from the west bank of the Savieres River in prolongation of the Second Battalion line. "M" and "K" Companies were in the front line with "I" and "L" Companies in support. The First Battalion and one company of the Eleventh M. G. Battalion held, as its sector, from Bucket Bridge on the right to Oigny Road, inclusive.

"A" and "B" Companies (Reoccupied the front line, supported by "C" and "D" Companies on the reverse slope of the hill 200 yards to the rear. The relief was made with great difficulty due to the darkness of the night. Owing to the blinding rain the men were compelled to hold on to one another while following the French guides up to the posts in the trenches. With the occupation of the new position as yet incomplete, orders were received during the night to attack early the next morning.

The attack was to be made in conjunction with the French for the purpose of capturing the Buisson de Cresnes immediately to the front. In the plan of attack, the French were to advance north across the Ourcq River to Noroy, and east from Faverolles across the Savieres River, so as to complete a "pincer" movement between Ancienville and Noroy.

The zero hour for the French attack was 4:35 a. m., while the Thirty-Ninth was to attack on orders expected approximately one hour later. The mission of the Thirty-ninth was to mop up the Buisson de Cresnes and consolidate its eastern edge. At 4:35 o'clock the next morning the French laid down a heavy artillery barrage.

The men of the Thirty-Ninth, who had never before been in a front line trench, listened to **the incessant whistling of shells over their heads**, and impatiently awaited orders to go over the top. The lines in this sector were, at most, only four or five hundred yards apart.

The Germans promptly replied to the French bombardment with so severe a counter barrage of artillery and trench mortars that communication became very difficult. It was only by exposing themselves to what seemed certain death that runners maintained liaison between the different units.

Not until the afternoon did this enemy barrage slacken, and in the attack, as is often the case, the execution was far different from the original plan. The French cautiously refused to allow all three battalions to go forward, despite numerous protests from the Regimental Commander. On the left the First Battalion was ordered to attack at eight o'clock, while the Third Battalion did not move forward until one o'clock. On the right, the Second Battalion had to wait until late in the afternoon before it started its attack. Peculiar and unexpected difficulties confronted the First Battalion. In its immediate front was the Savieres River, a narrow but deep stream with a quicksand and soft mud bottom. The banks on either side were marshy. A few men waded through, but practically the entire battalion moved forward in a thin line and crossed on logs which had been thrown across the stream.

The movement was a success because of its surprise to the enemy. The Germans' main resistance was facing the Ourcq River and not the Savieres, and was directed on the southern, not the western, edge of the Buisson de Cresnes. A German sergeant captured later in the day stated that the Germans did not think the Americans would be reckless enough to attack over the swampy Savieres, and had the greater part of their machine guns directed on the Ourcq River.

While ascending the hill beyond the river the Regiment captured its first machine gun. German machine gunners, camouflaged in a wood pile, opened fire on the left flank of "A" Company. Sergeant Robert D. Winters discovered the nest, rushed it, throwing a hand grenade. The wood pile fell over, disclosing the startled gunners, who before they could throw up their hands were riddled with bullets.

Another machine gun met in the day's advance was in a miniature glass house with sliding windows, built in the top of a tree. The gunner was quiet, waiting for the front line to pass so that he might open fire from the rear. One-half of a company had passed the tree without noticing the gun, when it was discovered by Private Fritz Carlson of "A" Company, who calmly placed his rifle to his shoulder, rested against a tree and fired; the enemy gunner pitched forward, headlong to the ground. The First Battalion had orders to clear the left or northern half of the Buisson de Cresnes. After moving out in the morning the battalion had encountered heavy rifle and machine gun fire. This resistance came principally from the right flank at the southern edge of the woods, where the enemy had prepared for an attack from the south.

As the Third Battalion was not to come up until later, two platoons from "B" and "C" Companies were thrown in to support "A" Company and cover its right flank. The First Battalion then charged the hill, and after two hours' hard fighting had captured one hundred men and several trench mortars and machine guns. Position for the night was taken up on the eastern edge of the Buisson de Cresnes. A part of the battalion occupied a

large German Field Hospital which had been elaborately fitted up with furniture captured in the nearby towns. At nine o'clock "K" Company crossed the Savieres River, the other companies of the Third Battalion remaining in position. At two o'clock that afternoon the battalion moved forward with "K" Company on the right and "M" Company on the left of the front line. "I" and "L" Companies were in support. Later "I" Company took position in the front line on the right. Moving forward, the hill directly to the front was taken and nine machine guns captured. The battalion continued the advance until the eastern edge of the Buisson de Cresnes (the regimental objective) was reached. Here the position was consolidated.

Not until 3:45 o'clock in the afternoon was the Second Battalion sent forward. During the entire morning the enemy had kept up an incessant rifle, machine gun and artillery fire, to which the battalion replied with rifles and machine guns. One machine gun nest that had been causing a great deal of annoyance was captured at noon by a skillfully led patrol from "E" Company under the command of Corporal Mark Reed. Captain Norton with "H" Company put up a stiff fight in the quarry where he was stationed. After jumping off, however, all opposition was overcome and the advance pushed forward. The "pincer" movement which the French had to effect was uncompleted in the afternoon; no French troops were even approaching Noroy from the south.

Early in the afternoon, when the Germans had stiffened their resistance, the French expected a counter attack in force and sent a request to Colonel Bolles for assistance in the vicinity of Noroy.

At three o'clock Colonel Bolles sent word forward that a glorious Allied victory had been won all along the line, and ordered the Second Battalion to move forward on the right, while the Third Battalion, with the First Battalion in support, was **ordered to capture Noroy**.

Lieut. Colonel Peck ordered "I" Company to advance on Noroy, the remainder of the battalion following in support. Advancing through heavy enemy artillery fire the assaulting troops entered the village, driving the Germans before them.

Not until the eastern edge of the town was reached was there hand-to-hand fighting. Here the Germans made a determined stand, but were finally routed after both sides had suffered many casualties. "I" Company took up position in Noroy. "K" Company, together with "L" and "M" Companies, moved up to a support position in the northeastern edge of the Buisson de Cresnes. The fall of Noroy closed the gap between the French units on the right and left, and, in connection with the cleaning up of the Buisson de Cresnes, culminated the French plans for this date.

July 18, 1918

On July 18, Raymond Buma's 7th Brigade of the 39th was ordered out of the trenches early in the morning. The entire line, stretching from the Aisne to the Marne River, went forward in a counter-offensive. Their objective: to drive the Germans back from territory they had recently gained in their Spring Offensive.

The attack went well. They had advanced 2.5 kilometers by mid-afternoon of July 18 when they were ordered to take the village of Ourq. The troops swept forward, cleared the village and took the hilltop northeast of it.

July 19, 1918

The troops remained in these positions during the night of July 18.

On July 19, the 39th fought again, captured the village of Chouy, not stopping their advance until 5:00pm.

At one o'clock on the morning of the 19th orders were received from the French to resume the attack at four o'clock. The following objectives were assigned the Regiment:

- First objective, 1 1/2 kilometers from the line of departure, direction of attack along a line ten degrees east of north;
- Second objective, along road Chouy-la-Sucrerie;
- Third objective, ridge, 1 kilometer southeast of the Chouy-la-Sucrerie road, covering a front of 1 1/4 kilometers.

For this attack, one battalion from the Twentieth French Infantry was assigned to the Thirty-ninth and acted under orders from Colonel Bolles.

In accordance with the French order, Colonel Bolles ordered the Second Battalion and the **Thirty-ninth Machine Gun Company (Raymond's)**, under command of Major Mitchell, to attack on a front of 550 yards, the right following the Ourcq River. The Third Battalion with "A" Company, Eleventh Machine Gun Battalion and detachment of one-pounders, Lieut. Colonel Peck commanding, was ordered to attack on a 550-yard front from the left of the Second Battalion. The battalion objectives were the same as the regimental objectives, outlined above.

In the capture of the third objective one battalion was to be in the front line with the other two arranged in depth. The First Battalion, "C" Company, Eleventh Machine Gun Battalion and a detachment of Stokes Mortars, under command of Major Terrell, constituted the reserve, and was ordered to march 600 yards in rear of the center of the first line. Headquarters Company (less detachments) remained with Regimental Headquarters. No advance was to be made beyond the third objective except upon additional orders from the Regimental Commander. The Second Battalion was designated as the base battalion; the rate of march, no yards in three minutes; the direction of march, 45 minutes south of east.

The axis of liaison was to be along the Troesnes-Noroy road; all trains were to be left until further orders. Regimental Headquarters was to be at Troesnes before the capture of the first objective, thereafter at Noroy. The zero hour was 4 a. m.

Great difficulty was experienced in getting the order distributed to the troops in sufficient time for the beginning of the movement. Despite this the attack was begun as directed. It was discovered later, however, that the French troops on the left which were to attack at the same hour had not received their orders in time to enable them to follow the barrage. In consequence of this the French order for the attack was delayed one hour. Unfortunately, this information did not reach us in time to stop our movement. The French barrage which was scheduled to start at four o'clock did not actually begin until one hour later. As a result of this delay our line, which had already begun the advance, was caught in the barrage and suffered many casualties. It was apparent to the troops that something had gone wrong, and that the fire from which they suffered was their

own artillery. Although this was only their second experience in battle, their morale was unshaken, and the advance continued as soon as the barrage passed.

At four o'clock the Third Battalion with "I" and "L" Companies in the front line, "K" and "M" Companies in support, advanced from Noroy without artillery preparation and captured a battery of enemy artillery in the gulch to the northeast of the town. Later the battalion was caught in the French barrage and suffered casualties. Nevertheless, as soon as the barrage passed, the troops moved forward until held up by machine gun nests in a wheat field to the front. Two nests were directly in front, one on the left flank and two on the right flank. Those in front and on the left flank were wiped out by rifle fire, and the two on the right were destroyed by a platoon from "L" Company. This platoon, led by Lieutenant Notrand, charged across the open field with fixed bayonets and cleaned out the nest, killing the machine gunners at their guns.

The wheat field was a network of signal wires, which when disturbed invariably brought on an intense enemy machine gun fire. Having cleared out the machine gun nests the advance was continued until the Chouy-La Sucrierie road was crossed. Here positions were established on the final objective as shown on the map. The advance of the Second Battalion was over very difficult terrain — marshes, hills, woods and the winding valley of the Ourcq. "E" Company was on the right and "H" Company on the left of the assault line, with "G" Company on the right and "F" Company on the left in support. The Germans began a heavy shelling of the area adjacent to the road running south of Noroy as soon as the assault line reached it. A "H" Company, nearest the river, advanced through dense woods and was unable to keep abreast of "E" Company, which continued the advance into a swamp, followed by "G" Company.

Very soon it was found necessary to move the two companies out of the swamp. They were suffering from German machine gun fire from the front, and our artillery fire from the rear.

Lieutenant Gluckman led "E" Company (less one platoon) well to the front and silenced three machine gun nests.

Major Mitchell, the Battalion Commander, with a platoon from "E" Company, supported by Sergeant Curran's machine gun section and "G" Company, and with such other men as he had gathered together while waiting in the swamp, pushed on to a point nearly south of Chouy. While making this advance, the platoon from "E" Company led by Lieutenant Davidson silenced four machine guns in the woods and field to the front. West of an old mill, Moulin de Croutes, much machine gun fire was encountered. At about the same time a line of Germans advanced over the ridge east of the Moulin de Croutes. When fire was opened on them they retreated down the valley of the Ourcq and surrendered to the French.

As the advance continued the Germans retreated with their machine guns to the shelter of the mill, a massive stone tower. Efforts were made to obtain artillery fire on the tower, and the lines were drawn back slightly for this purpose. In the meantime automatic rifle teams from "G" Company worked around to the rear of the mill to intercept the Germans when they should be driven out by the bombardment. The artillery failed to respond and the Second Battalion continued the advance with the Third Battalion. On reaching the mill it was found that the Germans had slipped out and surrendered to the French in the valley. The Second Battalion halted on the third objective and consolidated its position in support of the Third Battalion.

On the left of the Third Battalion, with "C" and "D" Companies in the front line, "B" Company in support and "A" Company in reserve, the First Battalion moved forward. Clearing the edge of the Buisson de Cresnes at four o'clock, the advance was continued to the road running north from Noroy, where it was held up for one

hour by our barrage. Bearing to the left the battalion continued the forward movement until a wheat field on the top of a hill was reached.

Here it was temporarily halted by heavy enemy machine gun and artillery fire, until the machine guns could be wiped out. In cleaning up the machine gun nests a number of casualties were suffered. Moving forward, after silencing the machine guns, the battalion advanced through the artillery fire, reaching Chouy late in the afternoon.

"B," "C" and "D" Companies remained in the village for the night, "A" Company taking up a position in rear of the bluff to the south of the town. During the night of July 19th-20th the Regiment was relieved and returned to the Buisson de Borny for a rest. The march back was made through the Buisson de Cresnes to Chateau Silly, La Poterie, Silly-la-Poterie, through La Ferte-Milon, arriving at Buisson de Borny Monday morning. Tuesday, Regimental Headquarters was established at St. Quentin. Wednesday night orders were received to march again and to be in reserve positions on a general line from St. Croix to Crissoles at eight o'clock the next morning.

At one o'clock the Regiment started via St. Quentin, Dammar J, Neuilly St. Front, Latilly, reaching our destination at the designated hour.

While passing Neuilly a German aviator flew over and after a game fight set fire to three French observation balloons.

With the other units of the **7th Infantry Brigade**, the 39th was assigned as a reserve of the VI Army.

Raymond Buma's 7th brigade of the 39th rested in Chouy that night, and on July 20 were relieved by French troops and withdrawn to Troesnes. They felt pride in successfully completing their first mission. It was their introduction to being under fire as they advanced toward strongly defended enemy positions, of exchanging fire for fire in heavy fighting.

In the 2 days of battle (July 18 & 19), the 39th suffered the following losses:

- **32 enlisted men killed, 14 officers killed, 234 enlisted men wounded.**
- **They gained 7.5 kilometers of territory.**

July 22, 1918

On July 22nd the **Seventh Brigade (Raymond Buma's)** was placed at the disposal of the Commanding General Fourth Division. **For the first time the Fourth Division was now going into battle under its own commander.**

As the Germans were pushed back to the north and east, our advance was made via Brecy, Artois Ferme, Beuvarde, Four a Verre to the Foret de Fere. A day and night were spent near Artois Ferme. Here the troops were camped in a wooded area and were very much crowded. This stay here will be remembered by all on account of the numerous false "gas alarms" given.

July 23, 1918

Letter from French General Philipot:

The 7th American Brigade ceases to be a part of the Second Army Corps.

The General wishes to extend to it his thanks for the timely help it brought him and addresses to it his best wishes in the pursuit of its glorious career. The General and the troops of the Second Army Corps will not forget the fine spirit and bravery of their American comrades in the course of battle; they salute the officers and soldiers who fell at Buisson de Cresnes and at Noroy.

The hardships and dangers suffered in common have made of our Allies of yesterday comrades in arms, and the memory of General Poore 's Brigade will abide with the Second Corps.

The General Commanding the Second Army Corps., Philipot

From General Tanant Commanding the Thirty-Third Division
To General Headquarters

“On the approval of the Commander-in-Chief of the American Expeditionary Forces in France, the Commanding General-in-Chief of the French Armies of the North and the Northeast cites an order of the Army Corps:

The Thirty-ninth Regiment of Infantry, U. S. Attached to the Division to hold the sector, was called on to take part in the battle of the day after its arrival.

Under the command of Colonel Bolles gave proof in receiving its baptism of fire of admirable bravery. Took the thicket of Cresnes and the village of Noroy; captured an enemy battery, a great number of Minenwerfers and machine guns, and made more than a hundred prisoners.

August 1, 1918 – German bombs dropped – 27 killed

The order came on August 1 for the 7th Brigade to move up and relieve the 42nd which had seen heavy action on July 30.

The men, supported by Corporal Raymond Buma’s Machine Gun Co. were again in front line positions.

The Regiment remained in the Foret de Fere until August 1st, taking up and strongly consolidating a position on the northern edge of the woods as reserve to the Forty-second (Rainbow) Division. While here the Regiment was subjected to heavy hostile artillery fire and suffered many casualties.

On August 1st the 47th Infantry of our Division, which was also supporting the 42nd Division, advanced in full view and captured Sergy; the 42nd Division also advanced, capturing Cierges. At eight o'clock that night the Regiment was taking up new positions in the Foret de Fere, preparatory to the advance the next day.

The First Battalion was in column of twos, the platoons ready to move, when a bombing plane came over. Flying almost on a line with the column, the aviator dropped a string of bombs so rapidly that the separate explosions could not be distinguished.

The resulting scene of death and horror was worse than battle. Every company in the battalion was hit, the total casualties amounting to 27 killed and 94 wounded. Apparently, the success of the enemy aviator was altogether accidental. He was searching for a battery of artillery which had done much damage during the day, and hovered for more than two hours over the woods, dropping bombs wherever he had reason to believe the artillery might be concealed.

On the night of August 2-3, the Fourth Division took over a sector in the front line relieving the Rainbow Division. The Thirty-ninth Infantry was assigned the sector extending from Fereline Chateau along the northwestern edge of the Foret de Nesles to Hill 191. The Second and Third Battalions with the **Thirty-ninth Machine Gun Company (Raymond's)** and "A" Company of the Eleventh M. G. Battalion were in the front line. The First Battalion was in support. The enemy had begun falling back from the south of the Vesle.

Pursuit was made both trying and difficult by reason of the oblique line of march through the dense forest. The advance was continued to the northern edge of the Bois de Dole, where it was arrested by heavy enemy machine gun fire. Later the Germans withdrew to more protected positions. Orders were received in the evening to organize strong advance guards for pursuit. The Thirty-ninth Infantry (less First Battalion), Companies "A" and "C," Eleventh M. G. Battalion and "A" Company Fourth Engineers formed the advance guard for the Seventh Brigade with Colonel Bolles as advance guard commander. The advance was ordered to be made via Cherry-Chartreuve, St. Thibaut, Bazoches, Haut Maison, and Bevies, and to establish a bridgehead in advance of the line Vauxcere — Blancy les Fimes. In heavy rain and pitch darkness the advance guard marched out in single file at 10 p. m. (August 3rd) via the Montbain Ferme road, Colonel Bolles leading. "E" Company constituted the advance party, the Second Battalion the support, the remainder of the Regiment (less the First Battalion) the reserve. The First Battalion marched with the main body. When the head of the column approached the Vesle valley the Germans shelled the woods and road heavily, compelling a halt. As the shelling did not let up, the advance was not continued and by midnight the men fell out along the road and snatched what rest they could under the circumstances.

August 4, 1918

On the following morning (August 4th), when it was found that the enemy artillery fire still blocked the advance, Colonel Bolles decided to go forward via the road from Cherry-Chartreuve to St. Thibaut. The same formation as on the previous day was ordered, but in the counter march, necessitated by the change in route, a gap developed in the center of the Second Battalion, into which the Third Battalion moved. "K" and "L" Companies were sent forward to reinforce "H" and "F" Companies.

Every advantage of terrain was with the enemy in the attempt to cross the Vesle at Bazoches. The approach to the Vesle valley was through a gulch about two hundred yards wide; this gulch and the entire valley was commanded by enemy observation from the hills north of the Vesle. The Germans had taken up position in strongly entrenched lines at Bazoches on the right bank of the river, and taking advantage of the natural

protection of the high cliffs on either side of the Vesle, machine guns had been so placed as to command both St. Thibaut and Bazoches. Hostile artillery and minenwerfers were directed on St. Thibaut and back areas, and kept up an incessant fire. Under such adverse circumstances the capture of the village of St. Thibaut was both difficult and costly. At eight o'clock in the morning "H" Company, the advance party, entered the village. After advancing to the northern edge there was a deluge of machine gun and artillery fire on both the village and the area to the rear. The support was quickly deployed and ordered to dig in. "R" company took position on the right of the road about a half kilometer from the town, "F" and "L" Companies 200 yards further back to the right and left of the road respectively. "H" Company in the meantime was meeting with spirited resistance in the northern outskirts of the town. Learning from a prisoner that the Vesle was very strongly held and that the Germans were in entrenched positions beyond the river, Colonel Bolles directed Major Mitchell, in command of the support, to go slowly. Major Mitchell then went forward to the village to make a personal reconnaissance.

German intrenchments were visible on the hill and numerous machine guns were reported in the vicinity of Bazoches. Colonel Bolles also went personally into St. Thibaut and established his P. C. there. Before noon Captain Slate had with great difficulty brought up a part of "I" Company and had taken up a position west of the town. Later during the day Captain Eddy brought up his machine guns, Lieutenant Plumley his Stokes Mortars, and Lieutenant Volmrich the one-pounder section. The following morning one of the one-pounders and one Stokes Mortar was destroyed by enemy trench mortar fire. Now after a stubborn fight St. Thibaut was in the possession of the Thirty-ninth Infantry. However, under direct observation of the enemy, and with his command of all approaches, it was impossible to advance in force across the river.

Numerous patrols were pushed forward and six patrols from "H" Company were successful in crossing the Vesle by 10:30 o'clock on the morning of August 4th. These men were the first troops of the Fourth Division to cross the Vesle River. During the night "F" Company and the remainder of "I" Company were brought up and ordered to take up position on the left of the town. "L" and "M" Companies had been moved to the high ground (Montague de Fere) one kilometer southwest of St. Thibaut. During the day of August 4th and the night of August 4th-5th the area occupied in and around St. Thibaut was subjected to a heavy hostile artillery, minenwerfer and machine gun fire.

August 5, 1918

On August 5, the 39th was ordered to first take St. Thibaut, then cross the Vesle River.

Although the troops met fierce resistance at St. Thibaut, the village fell to their onslaught by 11:00 AM.

Early in the morning of August 5th orders were received to attack at 5:00 a.m., the attack to be supported by artillery fire. Major Winton was ordered to advance with "F," "H," "I," and "K" Companies. No sooner, however, did the artillery preparation begin than the enemy replied with a counter barrage, covering accurately the area between the front line and the river. "H" and "F" Companies were unable to advance. Captain Slate moved "I" Company to the left and by advancing through dense barbed wire entanglements succeeded in reaching the river bank, where the company dug in; the right resting near the demolished bridge, the left extending to La Maladerie Ferme.

While advancing through the wire entanglements Captain Slate was wounded, but refused to be evacuated, and led his men forward to the river. Sergeant John W. Norton, commanding the fourth platoon, was also wounded during this advance, having his right leg shot off. Despite the seriousness of his wounds **Sergeant Norton** refused to be carried to the rear and directed the movement of his platoon until it reached the river bank. For the heroism displayed in this action he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

At nine o'clock the enemy shelling had practically ceased. Reports were also received that the French on the left had the night before given up their attempt to cross the Vesle, but that the Fifty-Eight Infantry on the right had that morning succeeded in crossing.

On receipt of this information Colonel Bolles ordered Major Mitchell to bring "G" Company up from the gulch and to have men from "I" Company, already on the bank of the Vesle, infiltrate across the river and intrench on the reverse slope of the hill. Replacements were to be sent forward from "G" Company for all the men "I" Company succeeded in getting across. Thirty-eight men from "G," "H" and "I" Companies (the greater portion from "I" Company) had succeeded in crossing by the ruined bridge, when at 1:15 o'clock our barrage lifted.

The enemy immediately came from under cover and concentrated machine gun and rifle fire on the crossing, making it impossible to get more men over the river. Enemy snipers did effective work along the sunken road west of the town, where innumerable unsuccessful attempts were made to come up with bridge timber and reinforcements for the firing line.

At this time Major Mitchell, who was directing the crossing of the Vesle, was seriously wounded by a sniper; despite his wounds he remained the balance of the day, working indefatigably to affect an advance. A short while before noon "F" Company moved forward from its position in the eastern edge of the town, but was forced by the intensity of the hostile fire to take cover behind the rail- road bank. So accurately was this area covered by machine gun fire that further advance was impossible. It was here that Lieutenant D. S. Grant was mortally wounded while attempting to cross the track. About noon efforts were made to bring other troops forward. "G," "H" and "L" Companies attempted the advance, but were held up by enemy artillery and machine gun fire. "H" Company, at the cost of many casualties, succeeded in getting the second platoon under the command of Lieutenant Eddy to the rail- road embankment. Later in the afternoon it was decided to make another attempt at crossing.

A signal rocket for a barrage was fired. The artillery responded, but as the barrage lasted only a few minutes, there was not sufficient time for the troops to move forward by infiltration. The enemy, however, replied with a heavy bombardment.

At five o'clock an enemy aviator flew over, locating the lines.

At half past five o'clock a number of machine guns from the Tenth and Eleventh Machine Gun Battalions, and the **Thirty- Ninth Machine Gun Company (Raymond Buma's)** laid down a barrage on the enemy positions.

Immediately the Germans replied with all their artillery, minenwerfers and machine guns, sweeping the woods, town and valley. Following this German troops in column of fours, commanded by a mounted officer, were seen coming down the hill to the northwest of the Vesle.

As they reached the lowlands, just west of Bazoches, combat formations were taken up. An attack in force was expected, but did not materialize. That evening all troops were ordered withdrawn from the village and valley

to allow the artillery to put down an annihilating barrage on the German positions. "K" and "L" Companies were left forward for outposts during the night.

While leading a patrol from "M" Company across the Vesle, Lieutenant Wood encountered a patrol, double the strength of his, under the command of a German officer.

A fight ensued in which the officer and a number of his men were killed, others being captured.

Lieutenant Wood and his patrol returned safely during the night.

August 6, 1918

On the morning of August 6th artillery preparation began and continued until late in the afternoon. The Commanding General had ordered Bazoches and Haute Maison, as well as any possible emplacements east, north and south of those towns "wiped off the map."

In the afternoon, after several hours of terrific shelling of these areas, engineers were sent forward to throw a bridge across the river. They were met by an accurate and deadly hostile fire, and were forced to abandon their attempt. Just before night the First Battalion received orders to cross the river to the right of St. Thibaut. Under cover of woods on the hill south of the village the Battalion formed in column of companies, "D," "B," "A" and "C" following each other at two hundred yards, each company in line of combat groups. A smoke barrage had been thrown in the valley to screen the movement, but as the movement was delayed two hours, this was of little benefit. The advance was only partly successful. Three platoons of "D" Company reached the river and remained there until the regiment was relieved. "B" Company and the remaining platoon of "D" Company advanced as far as the railroad bank. About nine o'clock "A" Company reached the river, but during the night withdrew to the railroad. "C" Company also advanced as far as the railroad embankment. During the night engineers cut telegraph poles, bound them together, and threw them across the river for a foot bridge. On these men from "D" Company crossed and engaged the enemy.

Corporal Marcheck was killed in this fighting.

August 7-8, 1918

The last of these detachments returned on August 7th, when the Regiment was relieved by the Forty-Seventh Infantry.

All companies moved back before dawn on the 8th with the exception of three platoons of "A" Company, which were left in the sunken road at the bottom of the hill to the northeast of the village. At ten o'clock orders were received to move back. By this time the enemy was sweeping the hillside with machine gun and trench mortar fire, but by infiltration the platoons succeeded in withdrawing, in full view of the enemy, without casualties.

While the infantry had been undergoing the hardships of battle, the Medical Detachment, undergoing the same hardships, were experiencing great difficulty in evacuating the wounded. As there were no dugouts or sheltered places, dressing stations were established in the village of St. Thibaut and a shed four kilometers to the south at Ferme de Filles. It was impossible for ambulances to come nearer than one and one-half kilometers to St. Thibaut.

In spite of these trying circumstances, the hostile fire, and the large number of casualties, the Regimental Medical Detachment succeeded in evacuating the wounded promptly. The spirit and bravery of the members of this detachment, in the performance of their duty, elicited from the soldiers the greatest praise and gratitude, and bound them to the Regiment with the strongest of human ties.

August 7, 1918

On the morning of August 7, the Regiment moved back to the Foret de Dole as support to the Forty-Seventh Infantry. Regimental Headquarters was established at Ferme des Dames. Here the Regiment remained until the division was relieved on August ninth.

Each night the Germans bombarded the Foret de Dole heavily, sending over a large number of gas shells. After the relief of the division, the Commanding General reviewed its record in a General Order, a copy of which follows.

France, August 14, 1918.

Officers and Men of the Fourth Division:

*After **twenty-seven days of marching and fighting**, our Division has been withdrawn from the front for a hard-earned and well-deserved rest, and for the first time during that period it is now possible to suitably record our achievements.*

*With our training period still unfinished, our infantry and **machine guns were rushed into line on the night of July 17th- 18th** to take part in Marshal Foch's now famous drive from the Marne. Under the able commanders of the One Hundred and Sixty-fourth Division, Seventh Army Corps, VI French Army, and side by side with our gallant Allies, battalions of the Eighth Brigade drove the enemy from Haute-Vesnes, St. Gengoulph, Chezy, Chevillon, Priez and Courchamps, with such pluck and vigor that over four hundred prisoners, eighteen guns and many mortars and machine guns fell into the hands of General Gauchel, who commended our troops for "splendid dash."*

At the end of two days fighting, the One Hundred and Sixty-fourth Division was the most advanced in the VI Army.

*Further north, our **Thirty-ninth Infantry**, under its own Colonel, took over a sector at night and was later cited in orders of the Thirty- third French Division for "magnificent ardour" and for the capture of the woods of Cresnes, the village of Noroy, an enemy battery, and a great number of trench mortars and machine guns, as well as over one hundred prisoners, including two officers.*

On July 23rd our troops were withdrawn and concentrated to resume a status of training, but under a sudden change of orders, were immediately marched to join the First Corps, U. S., and placed in second line behind the Forty-second Division, U. S., on the Ourcq. Here two battalions of the Forty-seventh Infantry suffered heavy losses when pushed up to reinforce a portion of the front line. On August 3rd, the Division passed through to the front, and operating for the first time under its commanders, continued the drive as far as the Vesle River. Here the enemy had established himself in force and successfully resisted further Allied advance.

The Ivy Division, baptized in full battle, has been christened a fighting unit. It has been tried out and has stood the test. With no preliminary experience in front sector, it took its full share in the greatest attack that has yet been launched by the Allied forces.

No soldiers have ever been called upon to stand a more gruelling grind upon their fortitude, endurance and morale than has been imposed upon the men of this Division by the fighting in the valley of the Vesle.

The Division Commander desires to express, in equal measure, his appreciation of the splendid co-operation of all branches:

- *To the Engineers, who under heavy fire and with heavy losses constructed bridges over the Vesle and, under shelling, maintained roads that made supply possible.*
- *To the Signal Corps, who labored day and night to maintain lines of communication.*
- *To the Medical Service, whose units were pushed forward to the firing line, working without rest to alleviate the sufferings of the wounded; and*
- *To our Chaplains, with their faithful parties, who carefully buried our dead.*
- *He desires to commend in no less degree the personnel of the Trains, who, from the opening of the campaign, have not failed on a single occasion to furnish the combatant elements with food and ammunition, and the*
- *Military Police, who, by intelligent traffic regulation, made it possible to supply a Division in a congested area over devious and difficult roads.*

The Division Commander is justly proud to command officers and men who have measured up to the highest standards of Americanism. We mourn our dead. For the living, there is the work of tomorrow. By Command of Major General Cameron : C. A. Bach, , ' Lieut. Colonel, General Staff, Chief of Staff. Official: Howard J. Savage, Capt. A.G.D., N.A., Acting Adjutant. Captain Richard G. Plumley Captain Robert W. Norton. Captain William K. Dickson"

AFTER a two days' rest, the Fourth Division moved by rail to the training area north of Chaumont, going into billets L at St. Blin. The Division now became a part of the American First Army. Here replacements were received to fill the gaps caused by casualties in the Vesle fighting.

Another problem now presented itself, none the less difficult because there was to be no fighting — a problem of reconstruction and rapid reorganization. Training schedules were resumed, but with added interest, the result of experience gained in battle, and knowledge of what was needed to solve the problems of the future. Particular emphasis was placed upon the essentials of control and discipline of smaller units, and upon target practice.

Everyone had come to realize to the fullest the value of the rifle in combat. Ranges already constructed were in constant daily use; while under the instruction of the more experienced, the replacements were making excellent progress. One month in a rest area was usually allowed to complete the work of reconstruction and training.

At this time, however, events were moving rapidly, and when orders were received to **move on August 31st** the Regiment was in splendid condition for active service.

September 1-11, 1918

On the 1st of September a move by trucks was made to Marats la Grande, where another week was spent in training. While here, on Sunday, September 8th, the Regiment was assembled and Memorial Services held for our comrades who had fallen in battle.

Another move by trucks was made on September 9th, the Regiment bivouacking at Bois de Behole, as part of the corps reserve in the St. Mihiel operation.

There was a seemingly endless march to an area south of Verdun, France along the Meuse River.

Men marched 74 miles carrying 84-pound packs through mud, often ankle deep, always wet and cold as the rain fell continuously from September 8-13. The men assembled two-man pup tents in the dark, slept on soggy, wet ground and ate cold rations.

Throughout the march the column had to move frequently into the ditches next to the road to allow long lines of supply trucks to equipment to pass.

Those vehicles often broke down or were bogged down in the mud, leading to long delays.

At the end of the march, the 7th Brigade was assembled for the St. Mihiel offensive – which would be the first attack launched solely under American control and commanded by General John J. Pershing.

*(from the Memoirs of Sergeant William Franklin Noble, Soldier in WWI, 4th Division, 39th Infantry, 7th Brigade)
Died November 11, 1979, age 91 in Albuquerque, NM. Buried, National Cemetery at Sante Fe, NM*

Heraldnet.com

Daughter, Elaine Noble Reas

September 12-13, 1918

The Thirty-Ninth was not actively engaged in the front lines, but during the night of September 12th-13th was ordered forward to close a gap in the lines.

The advance was made under the greatest difficulties; the night was as black as pitch, the rain fell in torrents, and the only road that could be used was blocked by French artillery and transportation moving forward.

After having marched approximately eleven miles in seven and one-half hours under these trying circumstances the Regiment reached its destination, Hill 376, west of Les Eparges, at 6:35 o'clock in the morning, September 13th. Before arriving, the gap had been closed and the Regiment went into bivouac in the woods in the vicinity of Hill 378, closely supporting the first lines. While in this position the men were under constant shell fire.

As a result of the success of the assaulting troops, the Thirty-Ninth was not ordered into action.

September 14-19, 1918

On the morning of September 14, the Regiment returned to its cantonment east of Houdainville. Here training was resumed and continued until September 19th, when a move was made to the vicinity of Lemmes.

By a series of night marches via Vignievville, Montzieville and Bethelainville the Regiment moved from Lemmes to Esnes — a part of the Meuse-Argonne front.

Here forces were being concentrated for the greatest single effort of any American army;

Here the Allied forces were preparing for the greatest of all offensives of the war.

An offensive which, before it was completed, extended from the North Sea to the Swiss Border, and which before its end was to see the great German military machine wrecked and ruined.

The Meuse-Argonne Offensive was the largest in United States military history, involving 1.2 million American soldiers. It was one of a series of Allied attacks known as the Hundred Days Offensive, which brought the war to an end. The battle cost 26,277 American lives and was the deadliest battle in American history.

U.S. losses were exacerbated by:

- **the inexperience of many of the troops,**
- **the tactics used during the early phases of the operation, and**
- **the widespread onset of the influenza outbreak called the "Spanish Flu".**

Meuse-Argonne was the principal engagement of the American Expeditionary Force during World War I.

The Fourth Division was assigned a sector west of Bethincourt. The advance was to be made from the line Hill Le Mort Homme — Hill 304, passing just east of Malancourt and Montfaucon, **skirting Septsarges and Nantillois**, thence inclining to the right to its final objective (the army objective), a line through Briuelles and the northern edge of the Bois de Foret.

Date: September 20, 1918

*To: Aunt Sadie Minkema
Webster, MA*

*From: Corporal Raymond Buma
39th Infantry, American Expeditionary Force, Machine Gun Company
Somewhere in France*

Dear Aunt,

I received your letter a few days ago and was glad to hear from you. I am in good health and taking good care of myself.

I've been on the line a couple of times since I've been here and seen Jerry get a good beating. Jerry is the nickname the Americans gave the Germans. So far I've come out of the scrap without a scratch, although some of them came mighty close, but you've to expect that.

You were right when you said that the Army wasn't so tiresome as the Machine Shop, although this on the jump business gets a fellow's goat sometimes especially in the morning when they wake us up from our dreams.

I was watching an arial battle a few days ago and saw a large German bombing plane brought down by an American aviator. They have the circus flyers beat a mile when it comes to doing stunts in the air.

I hope uncle likes his new job in Webster. Grace sent me your address in her letter which I received the same time as yours.

I am Corporal now.

I don't know what else to write about. Our letters our censored and anything the censor doesn't like he rubs out so I will close.

I hope everybody at home is in good health and give my best regards to Uncle and Jennie and Raymond.

Tell Raymond a little teamwork between the two of us we'll get the Kaiser sure.

From your nephew, Corporal Raymond Buma, Corporal 39th M.G.Co. American Expeditionary Force, France.

Note: The letter is dated September 20, 1918.

Corporal Raymond Buma was killed on September 27, 1918.

The letter is postmarked October 7, 1918

September 25, 1918

The Seventh Brigade was placed in the front line (Raymond Buma's) with the Eighth Brigade in reserve.

The Thirty-ninth Infantry, Company "A" Eleventh M. G. Battalion and two platoons "B" Company Fourth Engineers occupied the left of the brigade sector up to and including a line through Bois Eponge to the northern edge of Bois Camard. The Forty-seventh Infantry was on the right of the brigade sector.

At midnight, September 25, 1918, the Regiment entered the trenches at Esnes and marched three kilometers up communication trenches to the front line on Hill 304.

September 26, 1918

When ordered into action on September 26, Raymond Buma's brigade advanced through a narrow valley, meeting increased German resistance as they approached the town of Cuisy.

The 39th Infantry succeeded in overcoming the defenders and advance to the next village, Septsarges.

On September 26, Buma's brigade captured 1,700 prisoners and more than 40 guns.

Raymond Buma receives the Distinguished Service Cross for heroism at Cuisy.

At 2:30 a.m on the morning of September 26th our artillery commenced a bombardment, remarkable for its intensity and accuracy. The enemy positions which had been fortified and strengthened during a period of two years were pounded beyond recognition.

Under the protection of the barrage the Third Battalion, commanded by Major Terrell, took up a position in "No Man's Land" with "I" and "M" Companies in the as- assault line; "K" and "L" Companies in support. "F" Company was ordered to mop up for the assaulting battalion. The First Battalion, under command of Major Winton, was placed in support with "A" and "B" Companies in the front line, "C" and "D" in support, and took up position in the front line trenches. The Second Battalion, Major Baylor in command, was in reserve on Hill 304.

At 5:30 a.m. in the morning the line moved forward behind a rolling barrage. A dense fog obscured the movement of troops and caused great difficulty in maintaining lines of direction and contact with adjacent troops. Despite these drawbacks the assault was made with irresistible energy and determination. Hundreds of prisoners were captured, many machine and much heavy ordnance taken.

According to the plan of attack, the Third Battalion was to lead the advance to **Cuisy**, the intermediate objective. Here the barrage was to rest for thirty minutes to allow the First Battalion to "leap frog" the Third and carry on the fight.

In the dense fog the First Battalion had moved to the left and had come up against Montfaucon Hill, east of the village. This position was protected by a mass of barbed wire entanglements and strongly held by machine guns. The third and fourth platoons of "A" Company moved forward through a communication trench on the right, flanked the hill and captured more than one hundred prisoners.

At Montfaucon Hill Colonel Bolles and Lieutenant Johnson came up looking for the Third Battalion. Thinking that it had gone forward, Colonel Bolles ordered the two platoons from "A" Company to advance, and moved past Cuisy to Septsarges. In advancing the Colonel had reestablished liaison with the Third Battalion and directed that the advance be continued.

Arriving at Septsarges, Colonel Bolles established his headquarters there. No sooner, however, had he done this than **a number of Germans surrounded the place.**

Fortunately, Lieutenant Gordon with "L" Company arrived at this time and routed the enemy. After the two platoons from "A" Company had advanced from Montfaucon Hill the Germans came out of their dugouts and manned the trenches with machine guns.

Lieutenant Haney then led a platoon from each of "C" and "D" Companies around the right and flanked the hill again. The second flanking movement was more difficult and more costly than the first.

In the fighting "A" Company lost all platoon leaders, all of Headquarters platoon **except one man (Raymond Buma)**, and all but six sergeants.

However, when the advance was continued at three o'clock a large pile of disabled German machine guns was left on the field. And, although at great cost, our Regiment had made possible the capture of Montfaucon.

At the intermediate objective just south of Cuisy the Third Battalion halted, as ordered, for the First Battalion to come up and make the relief. While waiting for the arrival of the First the Third Battalion filtered into the town of Cuisy and cleaned it up, capturing more than six hundred prisoners, one battery of 77's and innumerable machine guns.

In advancing over the hill south of Septsarges the left flank was temporarily held up by heavy machine gun and minenwerfer fire from Hill 315 in the northern edge of the Bois de Montfaucon. At the same time the Germans attempted a counter attack from the direction of these woods. The second and fourth platoons of "I" Company with one platoon from "K" Company met the counter attack and broke it up. Just after the Germans had been driven back, a patrol from "I" Company led by Lieutenant Hammond captured fifteen prisoners, and recaptured three men of the First Battalion who had fallen into the hands of the Germans.

Before advancing it was necessary to set up machine guns from the Eleventh M. G. Battalion to neutralize the minenwerfer and machine gun fire from Hill 315 and Fay el Ferme. Due to the dense fog and opposition encountered on its exposed left flank the relief battalion did not arrive. The necessity for continuing the attack movement was so great that the Regimental Commander directed the Third Battalion, despite its losses and fatigue, to move forward as the assault battalion.

The advance was continued through the valley **just west of Septsarges.** Here German machine gun resistance was very strong, the first platoon of "I" Company being practically annihilated. Troops from "I" and "K" Companies immediately pushed forward and after bitter fighting wiped out the machine gun nests that were

holding up the forward movement. After clearing the valley of machine guns the battalion advanced to the corps objective (the ridge running east and west one kilometer north of Septsarges) and consolidated the position. "K" Company and one platoon from the Eleventh Machine Gun Battalion went into position facing west to protect the left flank. While here "K" Company supported by "I" met and repulsed three strong counter attacks made from the Ravin des Cailloux.

The halt on the corps objective was made in compliance with a previous Division order. This order required that the attack be pushed vigorously, "regardless of the advance of the Divisions on its (Fourth Division) right and left, to the corps objective, where it will halt and await (if necessary) the arrival, at the corps objective of either the right or center division of the V Corps." **The halt for more than one hour at the corps objective led the enemy to believe that the force of the attack had spent itself, and encouraged him to stiffen his resistance.**

A German battery of six pieces of horse-drawn artillery was distinctly seen moving towards our lines at a distance of 2,500 yards. Rifle and machine gun fire did not serve to arrest the movement.

Position under cover was taken 2,000 yards to the front and a heavy fire opened. The Regiment suffered a number of casualties. While leading his troops forward late in the afternoon **Major Winton was wounded** and the command of the First Battalion fell to Lieutenant Haney. The battalions took up position for the night as shown on map.

During the day, several air battles had taken place between the American and German planes, two machines on each side having been brought down in flames. In the end, however, our aviators gained the supremacy and forced the Germans to seek their own lines.

September 27, 1918

On September 27, the battle opened with an artillery barrage which the 39th Infantry followed until they were stopped and pinned down by heavy machine gun fire.

On this day, Raymond Buma is hit by a shell and killed near Bois de Septsarges.

From various accounts, it seems Buma's group had successfully advanced beyond their original objective. As they were strictly commanded to not proceed beyond this point, they sent word back and awaited further orders as to whether or not to continue the advance. Orders were not received for more than 1 hour. By that time, German troops refortified and began a heavy shelling of the American troops.

Because of this event, and similar events, American officers began to give greater autonomy to troops to advance beyond the original objective.

Early in the morning of September 27th, with the Third Battalion in the front line, the First Battalion in support and the Second in reserve, the advance was continued. "L," "I," "K" and "M" Companies were in the assault line. Troops from the Eleventh Machine Gun Battalion took position on the left to protect that flank.

Lieutenant Simpson of this organization **was killed** while trying to advance his guns. Soon after the advance began, the left flank and left rear were entirely exposed, and a heavy machine gun and artillery fire was put down on the lines from the left, left rear and front. On the right front, from woods and emplacements, a withering machine gun fire was poured into the advancing lines.

In spite of this veritable torrent of death, the movement continued until the road running east and west from **Nantillois** was reached.

At this point the machine gun barrage became so intense that the advance could not be pushed over the bald hill (Hill 266) to the front. The Third Battalion had advanced to a position beyond the Nantillois road and had begun to dig in along the road and to the north of it. **(It appears this is where Buma was.)**

The First Battalion followed in support, took up a position in the rear with some elements crowding into the Third Battalion. This presented a very vulnerable target to the Germans, who evidently had direct observation.

At this time Colonel Bolles directed that the line be thinned out from front to rear. **Before this operation could be consummated the German artillery on the left flank opened a direct fire with high explosive shells, causing heavy casualties in the line not yet stabilized. (It seems that this is where Buma met his fate.)**

This withering fire had a very disastrous effect on the elements of the line on the left flank, and resulted in some of them retiring to more protected positions. The other elements of the line took up the retiring movement, which resulted in crowding many men into the small valley just south of the Nantillois road. **Here they were subjected to a heavy German artillery fire, and a number of soldiers were killed.** In a short time the greater part of the two battalions had evacuated this position so dearly won.

Lieutenant Haney, with great presence of mind, and utter disregard of danger, endeavored to reform the line on the exposed position, but without avail. The receding troops continued to fall back until halted on the reverse slope of Hill 295. Here positions were taken for the night. Notwithstanding this retirement on the part of many elements, Lieutenant Haney succeeded in holding a portion of his company, together with other bolder spirits, in the position which was being evacuated.

A portion of the Eleventh Machine Gun Battalion also maintained its position on the hill until eight o'clock in the evening. At this time the Regimental Commander ordered the forward troops to join the Regiment.

During the day Colonel Bolles had worked side by side with Lieutenant Haney in effecting a reorganization. By exposing himself to the same dangers as the men, he had inspired them with his indomitable will to fight to the finish. For his "personal example of courage and fearlessness" in this action **Colonel Bolles was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.**

Lieutenant Haney was also awarded the same decoration for the gallant part he had played in the day's fighting. **Brigadier General Poore**, noticing the retirement, took his position in the front line, steadied the troops and established the line immediately to the left of Colonel Bolles and Lieutenant Haney. For his

exceptionably able grasp of the situation and his prompt and fearless action, he was later awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

Early in the day's fighting **Lieutenant Colonel Holliday was killed** while gallantly and fearlessly assisting in the advance. Colonel Holliday had been wounded in the leg by a machine gun bullet, and while receiving first aid treatment on the field so that he might continue the advance with the troops was mortally wounded at the base of the skull.

Throughout the day, probably the most severe in the history of the Regiment, the work of General Poore, Colonel Bolles and Lieutenant Haney stood out preeminent and contributed more to the maintenance of the morale and fighting spirit of the men than any other factor.

September 28, 2018

Notwithstanding the ill fortunes of the day before, the Regiment went over the top again at seven o'clock on the morning of the 28th.

Summary of September 26-October 12, 1918

The Thirty-Ninth Infantry had now been in the Meuse-Argonne Operation for seventeen days, (6) six days of that time (September 26th, 27th, 28th, and October 10th, 11th, and 12th) occupying the front line and making vigorous assaults.

An advance of eleven kilometers was made in the September fighting, and three kilometers in October, a total advance of fourteen kilometers against a most stubborn and determined enemy resistance.

On the 26th of September (**Raymond Buma D.S.C. in Cuisy**) the Regiment penetrated the enemy line deeper than any other troops engaged, and on the same day had made possible the capture of the important town of Montfaucon.

These successes had not been achieved, however, without heavy losses.

In the six days' engagements the Regiment sustained 1,187 wounded and 292 killed.

Though depleted in numbers, the spirit and morale of the troops was never higher. Those who had come through the fighting unscathed were filled with a determination to vindicate their comrades who had so bravely made the supreme sacrifice.

My Dear Mrs. Buma:

Among the duties that fall to the lot of the Chaplain is the painful one of helping to care for the heroic dead. And yet it is a rare privilege however painful it may be.

Life must necessarily be given in battle. It is therefore proper that the noble men who make the supreme sacrifice should receive the last honors that are paid to man.

In this great drive our Regiment was chosen to take and to hold a very difficult position. They took and held that position, but not without losses. Our men fought bravely, heroically.

In the course of the engagement, your son, Corporal Raymond Buma of our Machine Gun Co., fell upon the field of honor, a sacrifice for the cause of liberty and human justice. His life has not been given in vain. He is honored by his officers, his comrades and by all who love those principles for which Americans loyally stand.

As senior chaplain of this gallant Regiment, I extend to you our sympathy. I trust that you will not so much think of your son as dead, but rather as living in the hearts of those who knew him. He died in order that peace for all people and safety for all nations might be established in our world.

May the heavenly Father comfort and sustain you in bearing your loss.

Very sincerely yours,

*James R. Shanks
Chaplain*

Note:

The letter is not dated.

Corporal Buma was killed on September 27, 1918

A letter from Colonel F.C. Bolles of the 39th infantry to Corporal Buma's parents:

"Your son Raymond was hit by an enemy shell in the Bois-di-Sept-Sarges, Sept, 27, 1918 and was killed instantly. The fact that he did not linger and suffer should be a great consolation to you. He is buried near the place where he was killed with a number of his comrades.

His grave is marked with a cross on which is securely fastened with his identification tag. Furthermore, the grave is registered in the grave registration bureau.

He was a true American soldier of unusual courage and at all times proved himself worthy of every trust. He served his gun after the entire crew except himself had been killed.

When killed he was far beyond the infantry lines firing on the enemy.

Corporal Buma was admired and loved by all who knew him, both officers and men, and was recommended for a Distinguished Service Cross for his brave and gallant work."

The **Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery** is a 130.5-acre World War I cemetery in France located east of the village of Romagne-sous-Montfaucon in Meuse and maintained by the American Battle Monuments Commission.

The cemetery contains the largest number of American military dead in Europe (14,246), most of whom lost their lives during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive and were buried there.

The cemetery consists of eight sections behind a large central reflection pool.

Beyond the grave sections is a chapel which is decorated with stained glass windows depicting American units' insignias.

Along the walls of the chapel area are the tablets of the missing which include the names of those soldiers who fought in the region and in northern Russia, but have no known grave.

It also includes the Montfaucon American Monument.

In the spring of 1919, President Woodrow Wilson signed legislation allowing parents to choose between having their dead permanently memorialized at an American military cemetery overseas or returned stateside at governmental expense. They had until 1923 to make their decision.

According to the American Battle Monuments Commission (established after the war in 1923), the graves of 40.8% who died in World War I remain in Europe, while 59.2% of Americans killed were repatriated to the United States.

Raymond Buma's family decided to have his body sent back home. He returned via ship to Hoboken, NJ.

On October 21, 1921, a military funeral took place in Whitinsville, MA and his body laid to its final resting place in Pine Grove Cemetery.

Exhumation and Repatriation of Soldiers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R7d4ktpWNzQ&feature=youtu.be>

116,516 American soldiers died in WWI (53,402 killed in action; 63,114 other deaths in non-theater service); another 204,002 were wounded.

The debate over what to do with America's fallen soldiers began during the war itself, as grief-stricken parents and widows presented conflicting demands to the War Department. Many of these mourners insisted that the federal government repatriate the dead. Others regarded the removal of an American soldier from the supposedly sacred ground where he fell as unthinkable.

Former President Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919) publicly lent his support to the latter view after his son Quentin Roosevelt (1897-1918), a U.S. Army aviator, was killed in a dogfight on 14 July 1918. In an appeal to the War Department, subsequently published in *The New York Times*, Roosevelt expressed his family's attitude through an instantly famous metaphor: "We feel that where the tree falls there let it lie." Roosevelt's endorsement gave a powerful boost to the non-repatriation effort.

Nevertheless, pressure from the opposite camp, which held a numerical advantage, led Secretary of War Newton D. Baker (1871-1937) to make a fateful promise in September 1918. With little thought given to the enormous logistical and diplomatic difficulties that repatriation would entail, Baker publicly assured American families that their dead would be returned to them.

From Armistice Day 1918 through April 1919, the US Congress and the War Department struggled with the daunting implications of this pledge, and many civilian and military leaders looked for a way out. A powerful anti-repatriation organization emerged, known as the American Field of Honor Association, with none other than John J. Pershing (1860-1948), William Howard Taft (1857-1930), and Samuel Gompers (1850-1924) topping its roster of members. The Association argued against repatriation in principle, but also pointed out practical difficulties, such as the high cost involved and the health hazards posed by the transportation of so many cadavers. The organization also alleged that American morticians had unwritten the entire repatriation scheme.

An equally formidable lobbying group, the Bring Home the Soldier Dead League, squared off against the Association and continually reminded the federal government of Baker's promise.

These organizations waged a sometimes vicious war of words against one another in the American press until the spring of 1919, when President Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924) signed into law legislation predictably designed to please both sides. Parents could choose between having their dead permanently memorialized at an American military cemetery overseas or returned stateside at governmental expense, and they had until 1923 to make their decision.

In the end, more than 45,000 American families opted for repatriation, and throughout the early 1920s ships bearing flag-draped caskets, sometimes thousands at a time, landed in Hoboken, New Jersey, where military and civilian dignitaries, including President Warren G. Harding (1865-1923), were on hand to receive them. From there, the caskets went by rail to cities and towns across the nation, where a posthumous hero's welcome awaited each one. Behind the patriotic hoopla, however, were gruesome realities. For

understandable reasons, some of the caskets contained the wrong bodies, others no bodies at all – just body parts thought to belong to the same individual.

However, the decision to leave a soldier's remains in Europe offered no antidote to such indignities. Great Britain decided to leave its war dead in literally thousands of battlefield cemeteries – some with fewer than fifty individual graves – that generally corresponded with the actual locations where the inhabitants of these cemeteries died.

In contrast, the American Battle Monuments Commission, founded in 1923 and chaired by John J. Pershing, created seven centralized cemeteries in France and Belgium, one for each area where major American military operations had occurred, plus an additional cemetery in England.

This approach saved money (the upkeep of Great Britain's thousands of cemeteries necessitated a small army of gardeners), and by concentrating so many grave markers together served to amplify the scale of American sacrifice, which had, in fact, been modest in comparison with the millions of fatalities suffered by Great Britain, France and Germany.

However, the decision to centralize commemoration in this fashion also meant that the bodies that wound up in ABMC cemeteries had, in many cases, been unearthed and reburied multiple times by the Graves Registration Service before reaching their permanent resting place.

The repatriation debate revealed a deep fissure in national memory. To proponents of overseas commemoration, the rows upon rows of white crosses (interrupted here and there by a Star of David) at the massive ABMC cemeteries on the former Western Front represented America's noble sacrifices in the defense of civilization.

Keeping America's war dead permanently over there not only sent a strong message about Anglo- and Franco-American ties, but also symbolized America's new leadership role on the global stage.

In contrast, repatriation symbolized a rejection of this internationalist agenda. Once buried in local cemeteries, the dead took their place in a trans-historical narrative of American service and sacrifice that ignored the specific causes and results of the nation's intervention in the Great War.

Cemetery Policies

Dividing commemoration between the foreign and the domestic failed, by and large, to produce culturally resonant sites of memory. Policies implemented by the ABMC did not help matters. For example, fearing that battlefields like the Meuse-Argonne and St. Mihiel would become as cluttered with monuments as Gettysburg or Shiloh, the ABMC tried to block the erection of unit- or state-specific memorials and even dismantled many of the dozens of homemade monuments left behind by members of the American Expeditionary Forces. The Commission's head board also vetoed the idea of personalized inscriptions on grave markers. Thus, commemorative objects that might have carried special meaning for returning veterans were ruled out.

In place of these personal touches, the ABMC applied a rigid formula unlike anything in the history of American war remembrance up to that point. The Commission treated every area of major American operations – the Meuse Argonne, St. Mihiel, Chateau Thierry, etc. – in a consistent manner. Each became the site of an imposing central monument (a 200-foot-tall Doric column in the case of the Meuse-Argonne

battlefield), a nondenominational chapel outfitted with tablets that listed the names of the missing, and a single cemetery designed to look as gigantic as possible. Nothing else was allowed.

French-born architect Paul Cret (1876-1945), whose work blended the Beaux-Arts style with modernist elements, served as the head designer for the eight central memorials.

The Commission's scheme was elegant, and Cret oversaw the creation of some of the most spectacular pieces of battlefield architecture in all of Europe. However, because they valued grandiosity and consistency over intimate and specific meaning, the ABMC's memorials never lived in the public imagination as those erected by other nations did.

Gold Star Pilgrimages

The European half of American WWI commemoration achieved its greatest visibility in the early 1930s, after outgoing President Calvin Coolidge (1872-1933) approved a **federal program to send Gold Star mothers** (so-named because of the wartime symbol of the gold star, which signified an American fatality) **to visit their sons' graves overseas**. Widows of fallen soldiers, added to the legislation as an afterthought, were eligible as well, though not those who had remarried.

Between 1930 and 1933, 6,685 American women (a little more than half of those invited) participated in the Gold Star Pilgrimages, as these expense-paid trips to the cemeteries came to be known, and the solemn nature of their journey captured the nation's attention.

Tomb of the Unknown Soldier – Memorial Amphitheater at Arlington National Cemetery

On Decoration Day, 1921, four unidentified bodies were exhumed from graves in France. Distinguished Service Cross American soldier, US Army Sgt. Edward F. Younger selected one to be repatriated to the United States. After the four identical caskets were lined up for his inspection, Younger chose the third casket from the left by placing a spray of white rose on it. The chosen soldier was transported to the U.S. while the other three were reburied at the Meuse Argonne American Cemetery.

No one knew who the soldier was, but in an outpouring of grief, Americans reverently paid their respects as the body lay in state in the Capitol Rotunda in Washington, D.C.

He was no one's son. He was everyone's son.

On Armistice Day, November 11, 1921, the body of the unknown soldier was buried in the Memorial Amphitheater at Arlington National Cemetery.

President Harding officiated at the interment ceremonies, stating,

"American lays her wreath on the unknown soldier's grave; sure at least that he is her son."

The tomb has been guarded 24 hours a day, 7 days per week since 1937, including when the cemetery is closed and in inclement weather.

Compiled by Shelley J. Buma
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Great niece of Raymond Buma

Excerpts taken from the book:

THE THIRTY-NINTH INFANTRY IN THE WORLD WAR

***COPYRIGHTED IN 1919 by COL. FRANK C. BOLLES, U. S. A. COMMANDING THE THIRTY- NINTH
INFANTRY IN ACTION DURING THE WORLD WAR***

With emphasis added.

Updated March 2019