Heading for Action

The U.S. 9th Infantry Prepares for Battle

By R.L. Hillman, III

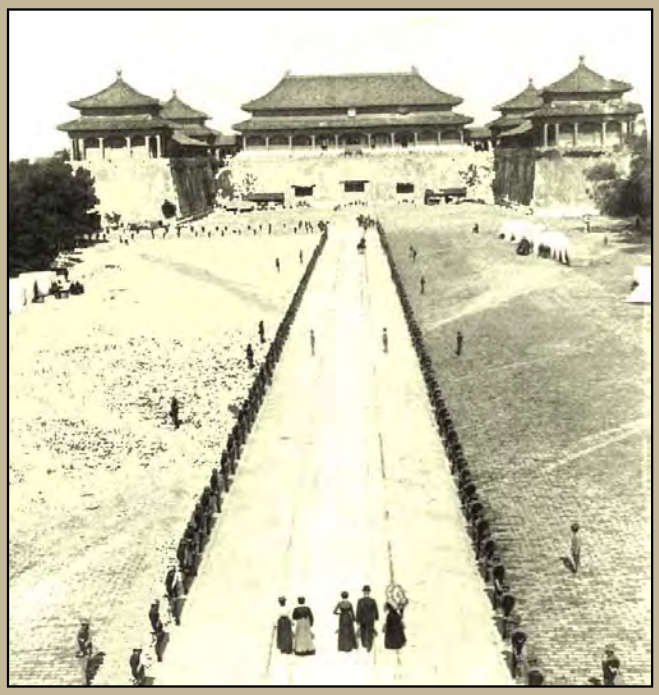
On 20 September 1917, the American Expeditionary Force's Ninth (9th) U.S. Regiment (MANCHUS) landed at Saint Nazaire, France with the mission of confronting and defeating Kaiser Wilhelm's German Imperial Army.
(Regimental History)

Heritage

The 9th was a regular U.S. Army regiment organized on 3 March 1855 at Fort Monroe, VA. It then moved to the northwest coast where it fought a variety of American Indian tribes before and during the Civil War. Following the Civil War, the 9th was engaged in the Indian Wars, labor disputes, and quiet garrison duty beginning in 1892 when it moved to Madison Barracks outside of Sacketts Harbor, NY. It was indistinguishable from its brother infantry regiments until the Spanish-American War in the "Empire Age." Then, in a short span of three years it became one of the most well-known and bloodied regiments in the U.S. Army.

On 1 July 1898, the 9th went up San Juan Hill, Santiago, Cuba, as part of the 1st Division of the Vth Corps. After recovering from the battle casualties and deadly tropical diseases suffered in Cuba, the 9th sailed to the Philippine Islands in March 1899. It went into action against the Filipino Independent Army on Luzon Island. Then history landed on the 9th again when it was ordered to China in June 1900 to become part of the Allied Relief Expedition. The Relief Expedition's objective was to rescue the foreign legations in Peking and Tientsin from the Chinese "Boxer" religious fanatics and the Imperial Chinese Army.

On 13 July 1900, the 9th attacked the old walled city of Tientsin as part of a joint operation with a United States Marine Corps battalion, regular Japanese Army units, and the British Royal Marines. While leading the regiment, the regimental commander, Colonel Emerson H. Liscum, a battle-scarred Civil War, Indian War, and Spanish-American War veteran, was mortally struck by a Chinese sniper's Mauser round. As he lay dying in a muddy ditch, Liscum issued his final order: "Keep at them, men! Keep up the fire!" "Keep up the fire" is still the motto of the 9th Infantry.



9th Infantry Guarding the Sacred Gate, Peking

All to no avail; much of the regiment was pinned down in the canals outside the walled city until rescued that night by one of its battalions. That day the regiment suffered over 90 casualties including the fallen heroic leader Colonel Liscum. The regiment then tended to its wounded, recovered its strength from the brutal summer drought/heat, and joined with the rest of the Allied Relief forces as they advanced to Peking, fighting and winning two skirmishes at Pei-tsang, which fell on 5 August 1900 and at Yang-tsun on 6 August. The 9th was part of the American forces that fought their way into the walled Imperial City in Peking on 14 August. It was this Chinese adventure that earned the regiment its nickname, the "Manchus". The Chinese service period is represented on its regimental crest with the imperial Chinese dragon centered in the crest.

9th Infantry During the Philippines Deployment

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The regiment remained in Peking and Tientsin as part of the occupation forces until May 1901, when it sailed back to the Philippines to continue operations against the Filipino i*nsurrectos*. Then history struck the 9th again. On Sunday 28 September 1901, Filipino i*nsurrectos* ambushed "C" Company in the village of Balangiga, Samar Island. The treacherous Filipinos inflicted over 70 casualties on the Americans including the company commander, the executive officer, and the company surgeon. The regiment finally left the Philippines in 1902, when it returned to Madison Barracks. Then, in 1907, the regiment was transferred to Fort Sam Houston, TX, where it was assigned routine garrison duty. The 9th did not participate in the Mexico Punitive Expedition. It remained stationed at Fort Sam Houston until 1917, when it was ordered to east coast garrisons, primarily Camp Syracuse, NY, to prepare for deployment to France to join the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) as part of the Allied forces in the war against the Imperial German Army.

To the Western Front

The 9th Arrives on the East Coast Prior to Embarkation for France

The regiment departed in two groups, the first left Hoboken on 7 September, the second left New York on 18 September On 20 September 1917, the first elements of the 9th Infantry disembarked from the *Kronprinzessin Cecilie* after landing at Saint Nazaire, France, while the remainder of the regiment landed in England on 3 October 1917.

The 9th, commanded by Colonel Harry R. Lee, boarded the infamous "40/8" trains to their training area at Bourmont, Haute-Marne, France. [Forty-and-eights: French, "quarante et huit," typically written *40/8* or 40&8, were French 4-wheel covered goods wagons designed to hold 40 men or eight horses. Introduced in the 1870s, they were drafted into military service in both World Wars. See the cover image.] Once the 9th arrived in Bourmont, it was incorporated into the 2nd Infantry Division as part of its 3rd Brigade, which was officially organized on 26 October 1917 following War Department orders dated 22 September 1917 constituting the division. The 2nd Division's units are shown in Table1 (page 2).

The 9th Infantry was joined in the 3rd Brigade with another regular U.S. Army regiment, the 23rd U.S. Infantry Regiment, which had been organized on 8 July 1861 at Fort Trumbull, CT. The United States Marine Corps' 5th and 6th Regiments constituted the 4th Brigade. Initially, Marine Corps Brigadier General Charles A. Doyen was the 2nd Division commander, but he was soon relieved of command for physical reasons. Army Major General Omar Bundy then took command.

Chain of Command, 9th Infantry Regiment

2nd Infantry Division Commanding General:

USMC Bg. Gen. Charles A. Doyen, then USA Maj. Gen. Omar Bundy

3rd Brigade Commander:

Bg. Gen. Peter Murray, then Bg. Gen. Edward M. Lewis

9th Infantry Commanding Officer:

Col. Harry R. Lee, then Col. Leroy S. Upton

First Battalion Commander:

Maj. Charles E. Livingston

Second Battalion Commander:

Maj. A.E. Bouton

Third Battalion Commander:

Maj. A.C. Arnold

In 1917, the U.S. Army's "square" divisions had a strength of 27,123 men which grew to 28,059 by June 1918. By contrast, the typical German division only had 12,000 men by spring 1918 after the years of fighting on two fronts. A French infantry division had 16,000 men, and the British Army's infantry division had 598 officers and 18,077 enlisted at the beginning of the war. The AEF had only four trained divisions in France by February 1918: the 1st U.S. Infantry Division (the first to France), the 2nd, the 26th ("Yankee Division," a National Guard formation), and another National Guard division, the 42nd ("Rainbow") Division. A fifth, the 3rd U.S. Division of regulars, would arrive by March.

When the 9th reached Bourmont, it had a strength of 56 officers and 3,430 men, with the official strength level of a regiment being 3,800 men depending on individual special units attached to it. Colonel Leroy S. Upton then took command of the 9th in February 1918. During this time, the regiment's officers were a mixture of West Point graduates, Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) graduates, and graduates of the newly established officer training sites, all with a varying degree of experience and exposure to combat. The enlisted men and non-commissioned officers were a mixture of experienced soldiers with time in China, the Philippines, and stateside, as well as draftees and volunteer enlistees.

Training Begins

Once established in Bourmont and the surrounding areas of Outremecourt, Sommerecourt, Nijon, and Vaudrecourt, and Soulacourt during the very cold, snowy winter, the 9th's men were billeted either with French families or in barracks built by the division's 2nd Engineer Train. If billeted with the local families, there was a one-franc payment for each officer and 20 centimes for non-commissioned officers and enlisted soldiers, paid to the family. Relations between the 9th's troops and the French citizens were either friendly or indifferent depending on the attitudes of both sides. One condition of the local living that the Doughboys didn't enjoy was the official attention ordered to prevent venereal disease. AEF GHQ General Orders No. 6, dated 2 July 1917 and No. 34, dated 9 September 1917, specifically warned the AEF troops not to get infected.

On a lesser scale of problems, the troops had to endure a harsh winter, bad food usually in insufficient quantities, and the lice and rats drawn to the encampments. Another complication for the 9th was the lack of winter clothing because the Quartermaster Corps kept the materials stateside for the troops in the training camps rather than the soldiers overseas.

Ludovicus van Iersel
9th Infantry Medal of Honor Recipient

During the winter months the 9th's battalions were shifted to other "quiet" French locations for special duties, including building railroads, guard duty, and protecting lines of communication. The 9th's primary mission at this time, however, was training. General Pershing regarded the activities of his Training Section as of the highest and most immediate importance, as soon as troops began to arrive. Pershing and his staff developed a strategic three-phase training plan for the divisions and replacement troops flooding into France to gain uniformity over the training and to make sure that it was "American army training." There were to be three months of individual training, a month of small-unit tactics and combined operations training with French units, and finally "divisional training" of the infantry and its attached artillery brigade before the new divisions would be sent into the line. This "France" training would be follow-on training provided to the new officers and the raw recruits in the United States.

General Pershing and the command staff realized that the U.S. Army was not prepared to face the battle-hardened German Army. Pershing wrote of the U.S. Army's situation in 1917: "We were totally unprepared for war and our army was inexperienced in the conduct of joint operations..." More critically from a political viewpoint, neither the French nor British allies' command leadership believed that the Americans were ready for the war.

The reality was that the 9th/2nd specifically, and the United States Army generally, faced enormous problems of manpower, equipment, and time as it trained to fight the Germans. Not the War Department, Army Chief of Staff, General Pershing's staff nor the American Army was prepared to fight the type of war that had cost the Allies hundreds of thousands of casualties in three years of stalemated and bloody fighting. The U.S. Army did not yet possess sufficient modern weapons such as machine guns, artillery, tanks, aircraft, or squad weapons. Nor did it have the training and experience in infantry/artillery coordination, and modern artillery. Furthermore, the U.S. Army did not have any current experience fighting at the division, corps, and army level of the ongoing conflict. In face of this brutal reality, and the likelihood of German offensives in the spring, General Pershing and his staff realized that they had to train the incoming U. S. Army as quickly as possible. They also came to the hard conclusion that they would need to lend our American divisions to the French to help stop the coming German offensives.

Major General James Harbord, a former chief of staff under General Pershing who commanded the 2nd Division when it was deployed west of Château-Thierry, complained that, "Mere training in trench warfare would not be enough for our officers when this event happened. This was explained to our French friends at length, many times over, but they took the opposite view. They criticized our theory and were unkind enough to do it to some of our visiting statesmen, as well as through channels to their own Government."

> The Americans went overseas well trained and equipped with their Springfield rifle and M1905 16-inch bayonet, and the Colt .45 pistol after years on the rifle/pistol ranges. Because of the rifle shortages discovered during the mobilization, however, many American troops were issued the British Enfield M1917 rifle, which was chambered to fire American .30-06 rounds used in the Springfield rifles.

The critical part of the "training" in the early months was that the French instructors were giving "hands-on," "live" instruction to the Americans on the new weapons that they were being issued from French stocks—the Chauchat 8mm light machine gun/ automatic rifle, the Hotchkiss Model 1914 8mm heavy machine gun, the Stokes 3-inch and 6-inch trench mortars, the 37mm anti-tank gun, flamethrowers, gas/ gasmasks (both British and French), grenades/rifle-grenades, signaling equipment, and tanks. Follow-on

American divisions received British Vickers Mk1 .303-inch heavy machine guns. Later in the war, the Americans were issued the first-class Browning M1917 .30 caliber light machine gun, and the Browning M1918 automatic rifle.

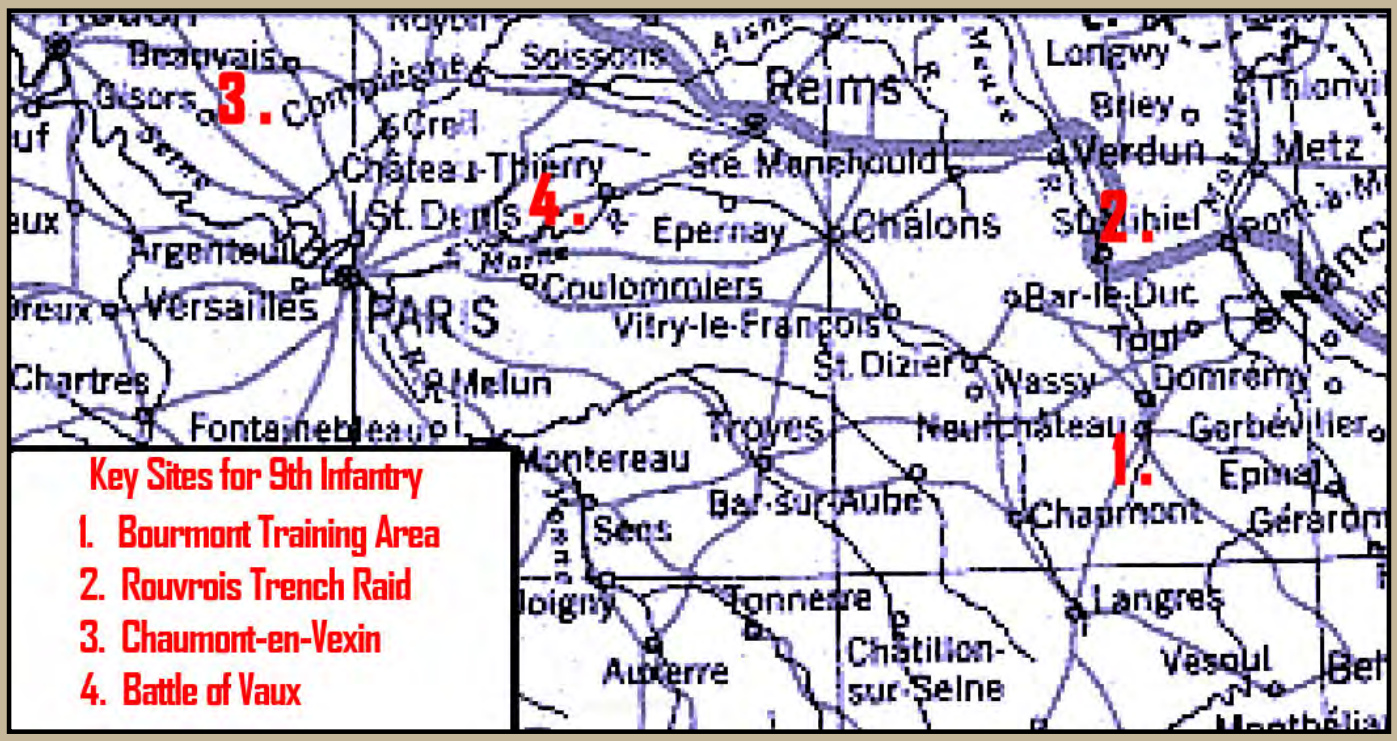
The training was conducted six days a week over eight hours and included physical training/conditioning, road marches with full gear, individual weapons training, target practice, and specific occupational training at the schools

AEF Headquarters Order No. 41, dated 24 September 1917, established the training schools for the new weapons and trench warfare at Gondrecourt, Saumur, and Mailly. Initially, the Americans attended French and British schools. Then the divisions attempted to do their own training, but this soon became impractical and inefficient because of too many differences in training. So, training was conducted both at the schools and locally with French advisors. The officers and non-coms were sent to training schools established at Langres by the War Department and controlled by the G-5 office of the AEF general headquarters (GHQ) command at Chaumont, France. Meantime, the 2nd Division's 2nd Field Artillery Brigade moved to the French artillery school at Le Valdahon where it trained to operate and fire its French-made, rapid-firing 75mm cannons and the Schneider 155mm howitzers.

Another important aspect of these training months was learning trench warfare, including the essentials of digging reinforced trench lines/dugouts/strong points, stringing barbed wire fences, sniping, and learning how to stage raids into the German trench lines to get prisoners or kill Germans. This ran contrary to Pershing's preferred doctrine of "open warfare" and that of the regular American army. The French did not believe in striving for accurate rifle fire or the aggressive use of bayonets in "open warfare" or maneuver warfare. Both the Army and Marine Corps had emphasized marksmanship prior to the war and were adamant about its importance as part of "open warfare". This was dismissed by the Germans, British and French because fortified machine gun positions and massed artillery fire were the main "killers" of the war. The American operational "attitude" was "offensive warfare at the point of the bayonet."

In the Line

Finally, on 17 March 1918, the 9th/2nd was ordered to begin its small-unit training and "divisional training" in trench warfare in the "quiet" Verdun area. The division took trains to their new operational areas in the Troyon-Toulon sector at Souilly, Ambly, Tilly, Bocquemont, and the nearby village of Thillombois.



Shortly afterward however, everyone's thinking about divisional training was turned upside down. The German Army's 21 March 1918 "Operation Michael" offensive, three armies against the British forces in the Somme Valley, blew through the British Fifth Army defenses. Advancing up to 40 miles into the British lines and destroying 15 divisions, the new threat forced the scrapping of the 2nd's training plan. The French and British forces stabilized the lines after the Germans "ran out of steam." However, a second German offensive launched on 9 April 1918 against the British forces in Flanders forced another British retreat and French adjustments in their lines.

In response to the British defeat and the frantic pleas for help, General Pershing agreed to send his less-than-fully trained American divisions into the line under French and British command. Pershing told General Foch "I have come to tell you that the American people would consider it a great honor for our troops to be engaged in the present battle; I ask you for this in their name and in my own. At this moment, there are no other questions but of fighting. Infantry, artillery, aviation, all that we have is yours; use them as you will…I have come especially to tell you that the American people will be proud to take part in the greatest battle of all history."

In early April the 1st U.S. Infantry Division deployed to the Montdidier sector in Picardy and was assigned to the French Fifth Army. Over the course of the war—despite the amalgamation controversy—Pershing "lent" the British and French numerous units up through the Armistice. The 2nd Division would be amongst these. Before their departure from the Verdun Sector, however, the division and its 9th Infantry would begin taking casualties. (Map pg. 7)

"Blooding Time"

March and April proved to be the 9th's "blooding" time. It endured German artillery fire, sniper fire, aircraft bombing raids, gas attacks, and German raiding parties. The 9th Infantry was deployed in trenches just north of the town of San Mihiel with the village Rouvrois and the Meuse River just behind them. The 23rd Infantry was deployed just to the right (south) by the village of Maizey.

The 2nd Division History notes that the enemy soon became aware the Americans had arrived: On 23 March, 2nd Lieutenant Moses W. Taylor of [E Company] 9th Infantry, mortally wounded while commanding a patrol, had been captured and identified as an American. On 31 March 31 a Frenchman straggled from a patrol and was taken alive entangled in the German wire, and upon being questioned he admitted the arrival of an American battalion. Therefore increased activity by both infantry and artillery was now ordered [by the Germans] on 7 April, and a raid on a large-scale planned. An officer of the 8th Landwehr Division reported: "Yesterday afternoon strange uniforms were observed in this region (mud-colored breeches, short jackets, and light caps). The troops were carrying full field equipment—probably Americans." On 5 April 1918, the Germans raided 9th Infantry trench positions as well as staging a raid against the adjacent 23rd Infantry's position.

Memorial to Lt. Moses Taylor, 9th Infantry, Vigneulles, France

The most memorable action for the regiment during this period occurred on the night of 13–14 April 1918. A 400-man German raiding party, composed of *sturmtruppen* and pioneers from the 272nd Reserve Regiment raided the 9th's positions posing as French Poilus fleeing from a gas attack. They managed to penetrate 700 meters into and behind the positions of Companies L and I. One officer and 13 enlisted men were killed, and another 102 Doughboys were wounded. Twenty-eight additional men were missing afterward and presumed taken prisoner. One US machine gun was captured. The 9th's men killed 40 Germans and took 11 prisoners.

Two of the Regiment's Men Wounded in the Rouvrois Raid

The 9th/2nd absorbed this harsh reality of dangerous trench warfare as training for their turn to attack the Germans. The 9th had been blooded *and* schooled by their enemy.

American newspapers later carried a report on the raid with such a positive "spin" on the results of what the German considered a successful effort on their part that it seems today almost like a piece of wartime propaganda:

About the second week of April the Germans launched a remarkable raid. Under cover of darkness about 500 Germans dressed in American and French uniforms and speaking French and English infiltrated into and through the lines. Before they were aware of the deception two companies of the Ninth found the enemy among and behind them. Despite the great disadvantages and confusion of uniforms, the little groups rallied. Then ensued a savage fight in the darkness. By daybreak the lines were cleared of the enemy. The Germans had suffered heavily—67 dead Germans were picked up in our trenches, and scores limped or were carried back to the enemy trenches. The American losses were unusually light. That was where the Second learned it could whip the Boche.

(***New York Evening Sun,*** 21 February 1919)

Needed Elsewhere

The 9th was sent back to a rest area at the end of April but would soon be needed elsewhere. In coordination with other American deployments in support of the Allies' response to the German offenses, the 9th/2nd was ordered to new positions along the Meuse River to relieve French divisions sent to halt the German offensive in mid-March and then subsequently moved into the line northwest of Paris around Chaumont-en-Vexin. During this period, the 9th shifted its battalions to meet emerging situations and to relieve battalions after time in the trenches. The 9th was also assigned a new commander, Colonel Leroy S. Upton, effective 1 June 1918.

At the end of May, the 9th/2nd was ordered into the line for the defense of the Marne River line at Château-Thierry. There, the French corps commander, General Jos. Degoutte, issued Order No. 81/P.C., dated 5 June 1918, to the French 167th Infantry Division and the 2nd Division to attack German positions at Clignon and Lucy-le-Bocage—inclusive of Belleau Wood—to straighten out Allied lines on 5 June. They were challenging the Germans' 197th and 237th Divisions. The following day, the 2nd Division's Marine Brigade launched their legendary assault on Belleau Wood.

Insignia and Major Battles of the 2nd Division

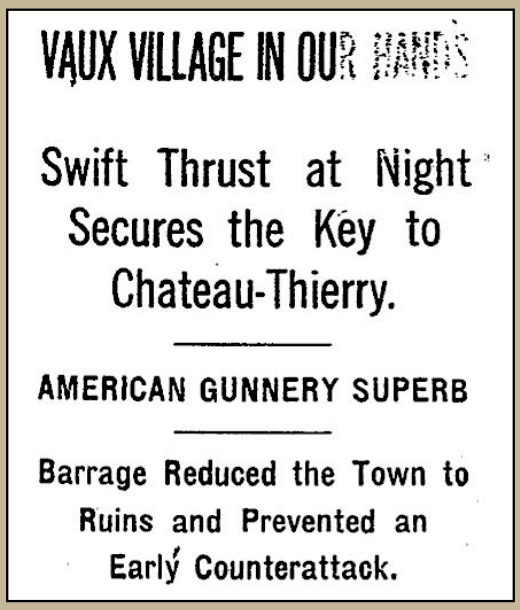
Members of the Regiment with Prisoners in the Ruins of Vaux

During their fighting for the Bois de Belleau, the front of the 2nd Division's 3rd Brigade, which included the 23rd and 9th Infantry, had been comparatively quiet, with the exception of the support lent to the Marines in securing the village of Bouresches. A notable exception was a German gas attack on the night of June 23–24, which caused over four hundred gas casualties. The position of this brigade had never been satisfactory, forming as it did a deep indentation. A plan evolved for a series of partial operations, each well supported by artillery, which would culminate in an attack on the village of Vaux. The final assault would be made in conjunction with a French assault on hard-to-capture Hill 204 on the right [east]. They would be supported by four companies of the U.S. 28th Division. The two infantry regiments would attack side by side with the 23rd on the left assaulting the Bois de la Roche and the 9th Infantry taking the village itself. (Map pg. 7)

The hour for the attack was fixed at 6:00 p.m. on 1 July. At 5:57 the rolling barrage fell; at 6:00 it began to move forward, 100 yards every two minutes, slowing down slightly after passing Vaux. The infantry followed closely. The artillery had done its work. Within one hour after the barrage was placed beyond the objective, all Germans remaining within it were killed or captured, and the Americans were digging in. The 9th had made its first victorious assault of the war.

As Mark E. Grotelueschen writes in ***Doctrine Under Trial: American Artillery Employment in World War I***:

The attack on Vaux was simply the ultimate demonstration of the division's ability to successfully plan and execute limited, set-piece attacks, making excellent use of those "trench-oriented" skills that had been absorbed during its training period with the French. At Vaux, the officers in the 2nd Division showed that they had learned first-hand at Belleau Wood what French officers had warned them: that effective artillery support was crucial to any infantry attack. Pershing's abstract "infantry-based" doctrine had come face to face with the reality of the Western Front, and the reality appeared to win the first battle.



VAUX VILLAGE IN OUR HANDS

Swift Thrust at Night Secures the Key to Chateau-Thierry.

AMERICAN GUNNERY SUPERB

Barrage Reduced the Town to Ruins and Prevented an Early Counterattack.

***New York Times*, 3 July 1918**

The Château-Thierry campaign prepared the 9th/2nd for its future battles at Soissons, St. Mihiel, Blanc Mont, and finally the Meuse-Argonne campaign. The 2nd Division would prove to be the most active and, consequently, hardest hit of Pershing's Divisions. After the war was over, the 9th/2nd was "awarded" the distinction of being part of the Allied occupation forces in Germany. They were sent to the Coblenz area around Bendorf-Am-Rheine, adjacent to the Rhine River near Leutesdorf, as part of the III Corps. The troops finally got to come home beginning in July 1919.

During the war, the 9th Infantry would spend 46 days in major operations and 106 days in defensive trench positions. It suffered 4,571 killed, wounded, and captured in France, over 100 percent of its manning level.