

Spring 2014

Vol. 27, No. 2

## History of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division in World War I (Part 2)

by Don Simpson

*In the previous issue of the Banner, we discussed the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division's activation, training and initial combat in the Chateau Thierry Sector. We continue the combat experience of the Division in this issue.*

After less than a two week respite from coming off the line after the battles in Belleau Woods and the Chateau Thierry Sector, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was alerted for offensive operations to reduce the Aisne-Marne salient created by Ludendorff's recent attack toward Chateau Thierry. The Division was to participate as part of a five division attack under the French XX Corps against the western shoulder of the salient to cut the Soisson-Chateau Thierry road and railroad; thus, cutting the German's line of communication. The Division attacked on the Corps right flank on 18 June and by dusk on the 19<sup>th</sup> had reached the high ground where artillery fire could be placed on the Soisson-Chateau Thierry road. Casualties to officers were high; one battalion was being led by a sergeant; another regiment was led by a captain.

On 15 July, BG Harbord was promoted to Major General and assumed command of the Division from MG Bundy. However, his tenure as Division Commander was short lived. On 28 July, General Pershing transferred him to command the badly managed Services of Supply. He was replaced by MG John A. Lejeune, USMC, who would command the Division to the end of the war.



*Right:  
American Infantryman  
1918*

*Continued on page 3*

## President's Report

This issue of *The Banner* continues the history of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division in World War I. The article by *Friend* and Board member Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Don Simpson covers the actions of the Division in one of the four wars in which the Division has fought. It is one of the most decorated divisions in the US Army. Units from the Division have performed with excellence in Iraq and Afghanistan and its soldiers have continued to add to the distinguished reputation of the Division.

Some memorable events have been or will soon be commemorated. Memorial Day and the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day have come and gone and the Army celebrates its 239<sup>th</sup> birthday on June 14<sup>th</sup>. These events are strong reminders of how much the military has helped shaped who we are as a nation, and how much the nation owes the men and women who have served and continue to serve. Museums such as ours help to remind an increasingly uninformed public of this fact. Thank you for your continued support of the Museum by your membership in *The Friends*.

As the military undergoes a drawdown in strength with the ending of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, funds available to the Museum through normal appropriated funding will also shrink, and supplemental funding from *The Friends* to assist the Museum will become more necessary. Last year, *The Friends* provided over \$18,000 to assist the Museum.

Our guest speaker for our Brunch meeting on June 29<sup>th</sup> at Patriot's Landing is Mary Cronk Farrell, author of "Pure Grit," a book about how American nurses survived battle and prison camp in the Pacific during World War II. Her presentation is titled "The Feminine Face of Courage." We hope you can join us for what should be a very interesting presentation.

Ian Larson

## Director's Report

Greetings Friends. Summer is fast approaching and visitor attendance is up and so is our support of unit training events and tours. We are now exceeding 100 visitors a day and should see around 300 visitors a day during the summer.

In January 2014, the museum underwent an organizational realignment. Rather than work for the Joint Base DPTMS, the museum's rating chain is now direct to the Center of Military History (CMH) – in order to align our museum like other Army museums in the system. Since our museum is designated as a Forces Command museum – a label that predates the establishment of Installation Management Command and the Joint Base, when the senior commander was also the post commander – so our new local alignment is with I Corps, although the majority of our local logistical support still comes from the base.

The museum continues to support all customers on the installation regardless of their affiliation as we have always done. In May 2014, the museum hosted the CMH Chief of Army Museums, Dr. Charles Cureton. It was a positive visit during which Dr. Cureton met with the I Corps DCG, MG Dahl, Joint Base Chief of Staff, Dr. Knight, 7<sup>th</sup> ID Chief of Staff, COL Walrath, and members of the Friends board of directors.

Local concern was the shortage of professional staffing at our museum, specifically the lack of a curator (which has been vacant for years), and Dr. Cureton stated that he would work to fill this vacancy. Dr. Cureton was favorably impressed with our operation and offered support to professionally revamp our galleries.

The museum staff is also working closely with base leadership on programs to commemorate the upcoming centennial of the establishment of Camp Lewis.

Some products which will be produced during the course of the centennial ramp up will be a video and a book which will detail the 100 year history of the post from a camp through JBLM. This will be a serialized product with "chapters" being released during the course of the endeavor and with the final consolidated products being released in mid 2017.

A component of the video is to include interviews with those having firsthand accounts of Fort Lewis' history. To this end, if any reader of this newsletter has an interest, or knows someone who might be a good resource for this project, please contact the museum.

Myles S. Grant



The next major operation the Division participated in was the St. Mihiel Offensive. St. Mihiel was located 145 miles east of Paris. General Pershing wanted Americans to participate in operations commanded and led by Americans rather than being piecemealed out to various British and French commands. By August 1918, he had formed the First American Army. The St. Mihiel Offensive would be an independent American operation.

The St. Mihiel salient was shaped like a right triangle; one leg ran north-south from Verdun to St. Mihiel; the other ran east-west from St. Mihiel to the Moselle River. General Pershing's plan was to attack north against the east-west leg of the salient with seven American divisions. These seven divisions were organized into two corps; IV Corps on the left and I Corps on the right. An eighth division, the 26<sup>th</sup> "Yankee" Division, was to attack from the northwest against the north-south leg of the salient. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was to attack on the left flank of I Corps toward the town of Thiaucourt. The Division crossed the line of departure at 0500, 12 September, with 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade in the lead; 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry on the left, 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry on the right. The Marine Brigade followed in support. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Artillery Brigade with three French artillery regiments attached fired a four hour preparation. At 0500, the artillery shifted to firing a rolling barrage in front of the advancing infantry

The infantry moved forward steadily as the Germans fell back. Thiaucourt was taken the first day and by the end of the second day the majority of the salient had been reduced. At that time, General Pershing began shifting forces toward the Meuse-Argonne sector for the next phase of the Allied offensive. On 15 September, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was relieved by the 78<sup>th</sup> Division and moved off the line. The St. Mihiel Offensive; the first time American units functioned strictly under American command; was a successful dress rehearsal for the larger Meuse-Argonne Offensive to come.

On 26 September, the First American Army and the French Fourth Army attacked north against the German line in what became known as the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. First Army's sector ran from the Argonne Forest on the west to the Meuse River on the east. The French Fourth Army was to the left of First Army. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, attached to the XXI Corps of the French Fourth Army, was given the toughest mission in the sector, to seize the Blanc Mont Ridge. The French had advanced three miles until stopped short of the ridge. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division attacked through the French, jumping off at 0500 hours on 3 October with both brigades attacking abreast. On the left the 6<sup>th</sup> Marines led, followed by the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines in support; on the right, the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry led with the 23<sup>rd</sup> following. French divisions were attacking on either flank.

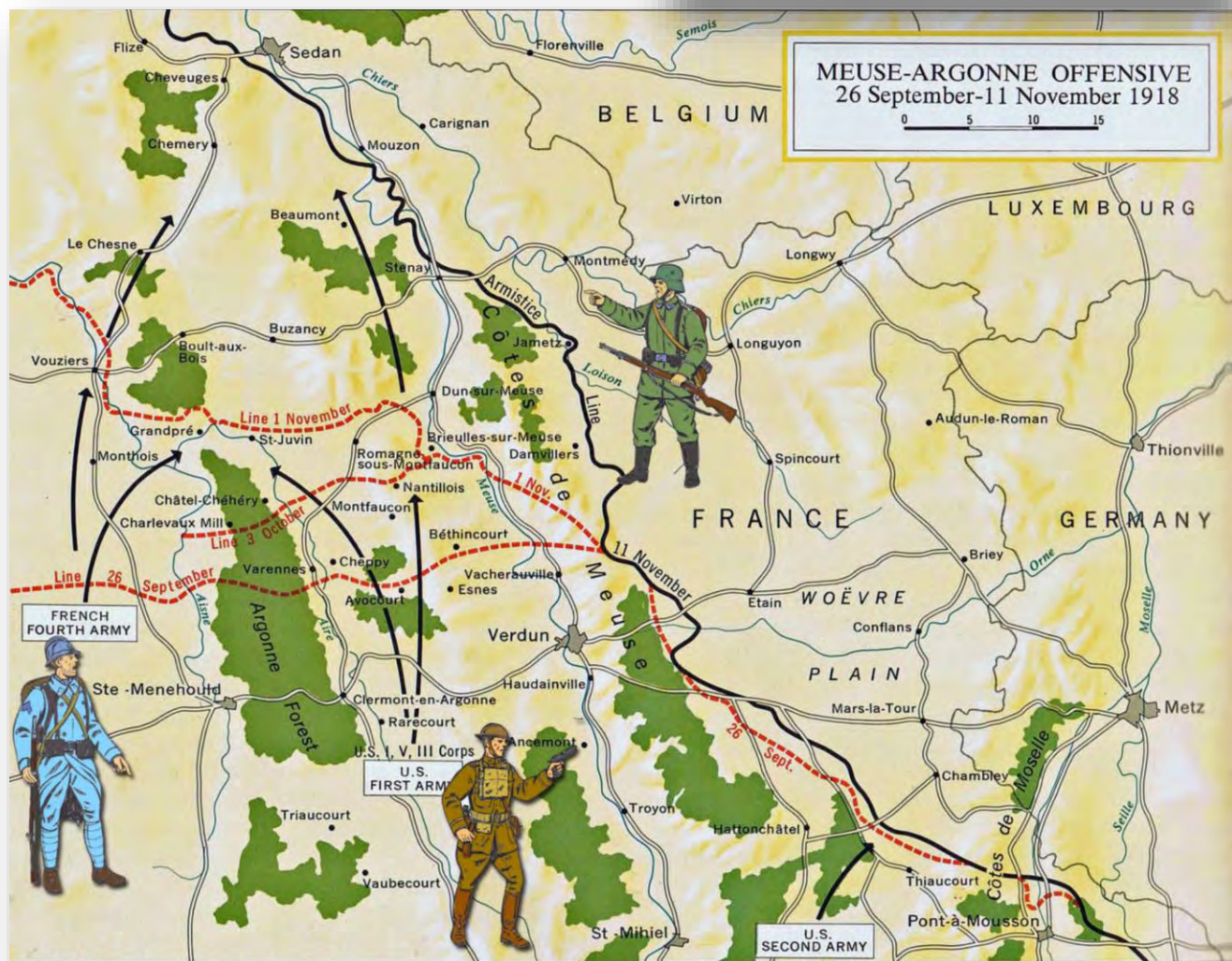
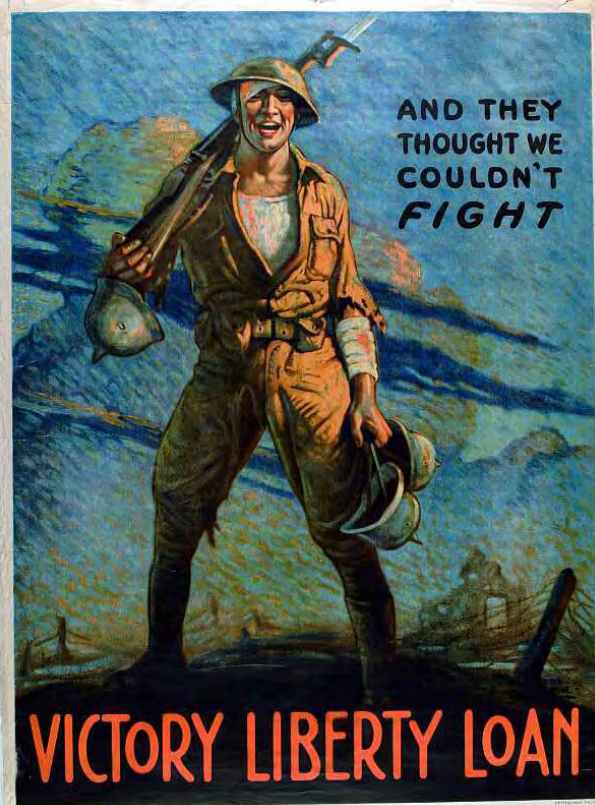
*Infantry attacks in the Meuse Argonne Offensive were supported by French FT-17 Tanks manned by US crews*





2<sup>nd</sup> Division units moved steadily against strong German resistance and quickly outdistanced the French on the right and left. As they moved forward, they were not only receiving heavy fire from the front but also from both flanks. In a little over two hours, the lead regiments were on top of the ridge. Only the most western portion was still held by the Germans. However, because the French attacking forces were lagging behind, the soldiers and marines were caught in what one Marine referred to as "The Box" and were receiving devastating fire from three sides.

Toward the end of the day, the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines had moved through the 6<sup>th</sup> on the left and the 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry had moved through the 9<sup>th</sup> on the right. The attack continued the next day, 4 October; a very bloody day for the lead regiments. The objective was now the town of St. Etienne to the north. The 5<sup>th</sup> Marines advanced to within one mile of the town taking heavy casualties in the process. At this point, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was halted until the French could catch up on the flanks.







*Members of a 37mm gun crew, 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment, 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, fight in the Argonne, 1918*

On 7 October, the 36<sup>th</sup> US Division began the relief of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and by 10 October the Division was pulled off the line. The Division suffered 7,800 casualties during the fight for Blanc Mont Ridge. Many veterans said it was tougher at Blanc Mont than at Belleau Woods. That confirms the adage that the last battle fought is always the toughest. Major General Lejeune said of the battle, "To be able to say when the war is finished that I belonged to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division and fought with it at Blanc Mont Ridge will be the highest honor that can come to any man".



The Division remained off the line until 31 October when they were ordered into the final phase of the Meuse Argonne Offensive under the command of the American V Corps in a sector north of Verdun. The direction of attack was north toward the town of Beaumont and the Meuse River. The Division jumped off at 0500 on 1 November with the Marine Brigade in the lead. The 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry provided support on the right flank. The 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry was in division reserve. Progress was steady and after two days the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade passed through the Marines and continued the attack. On 10 November, the Division arrived at the banks of the Meuse River and the Marine Brigade made a crossing. The following morning at 1100, 11 November, an armistice went into effect that ended the fighting. However, the lead attacking units did not get the word until two hours later. There was no great shouting or exultation amongst the attacking infantrymen and marines. Most just laid down and went to sleep. They had been in the attack continuously for eleven days and were dog-tired. The majority of the shouting and hoopla was in the rear echelon units; not in the infantry. They were just too tired.

*Left: Artwork by Captain Harvey Dunn, AEF Artist*

On 14 November, the Division was relieved by the 77th Division. On 17 November, they began movement to an occupation zone in Germany across the Rhine River from Coblenz. The Division was assigned to III Corps, Third US Army. They remained on occupation duty until July, 1919, when they returned to the United States. The Marine Brigade was deactivated and replaced by the Army 4th Brigade made up of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiments. The Division headquarters was located at Fort Sam Houston, Texas.



The American Army had gone from a force of 121,000 regulars and 181,000 National Guardsmen in April 1917 to over four million men at the end of the war. Two million of these men were in France; one million in the front line. This was an amazing effort on the part of our country to mobilize, train, and deploy to France this many men in the short period of nineteen months.

Of the forty-two divisions in France, General Pershing considered the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division to be one of the very best in the AEF. In a little over one year from activation, the Division had organized and assembled in France, equipped, trained and fought five of the bloodiest and most important engagements of the last six months of the war. They played their part in contributing to the final victory.



#### SOURCES:

Clark, George B. Devil Dogs: Fighting Marines of World War I. Navato, CA: Presidio Press, Inc., 1999.

Clark, George B. The Second Infantry Division in World War I: A History of the American Expeditionary Force Regulars, 1917-1919. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc, 2007.

Coffman, Edward M. The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I. Lexington, KY: The University of Kentucky Press, 1986.

Eisenhower, John S. D. Yanks: The Epic Story of the American Army in World War I. New York, NY: The Free Press, 2001.

Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Donald A. Simpson is co-editor of *The Banner* and a member of the Friends executive board. Don started his service in June 1962 as a Second Lieutenant in D Company, 2nd Battle Group, 39th Infantry, 4th Infantry Division at Fort Lewis and ended his career as a Lieutenant Colonel in June 1990 as the Director of Plans, Training and Mobilization.



# FRIENDS OF THE FORT LEWIS MILITARY MUSEUM

## GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

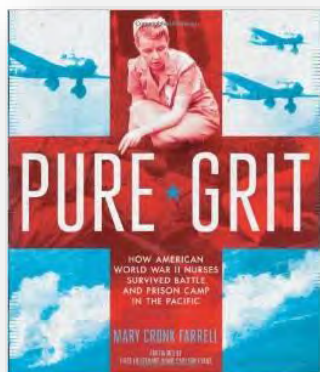
### 29 JUNE 2014

Place: **Patriots Landing, Olympic Dining Room**

Time: 1130-1215 Social Hour

1215-1330 Brunch

1330-1415 Program



Our June speaker will be the acclaimed author Mary Cronk Farrell. Her presentation is entitled, ***“The Feminine Face of Courage”***, which discusses military women in captivity. The program includes photos portraying the battles of Bataan and Corregidor and commemorates the story of these American heroines.

*Ms. Farrell is the author of, “Pure Grit, How American World War II Nurses Survived Battle and Prison Camp In The Pacific.”*



Please return your reservation form and check by Thursday, 25 June 2014.

Last minute reservations may be made by calling Paul Knoop at (253) 279-2598.

Return this form to LTC (Ret) Donald A Simpson, 6615 79th Street W  
Lakewood, WA 98499. Make checks payable to “The Friends.”

Cost of Brunch for members and guests: \$16.00 each.

Number of Reservations: \_\_\_\_\_ Total Amount Enclosed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Member: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Names of Guests: \_\_\_\_\_

**Residents of Patriot’s Landing do not need to make payment for the meeting,  
but are requested to make reservations for seating.**

## The Friends of the Fort Lewis Military Museum Board of Directors

COL (Ret) Ian Larson.....	President
LTC (Ret) Thomas Morgan.....	Vice President
Joseph Koczur, Jr.....	Secretary
LTC (Ret) Donald Simpson.....	Treasurer
LCDR Caroline Flint, USN .....	Member
SGM (Ret) Harry Schreiber.....	Member
COL (Ret) Paul Knoop.....	Member
COL (USAR, Ret) Patrick Powers.....	Member
LTC Erik Flint, USAR.....	Member
CPT Kristy R. Moore, USA.....	Member

The *Banner* is printed four times a year and is mailed to all members of The Friends of Fort Lewis Museum. Articles may be submitted to the Editor or left with the Director of the Lewis Army Museum. The Friends assume no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts or other materials submitted for publication. Contents copyrighted by The Friends; contact the Editor for permission to reproduce any portion.

Editor.....Alan H. Archambault  
Assistant Editors.....LTC (Ret) Donald A. Simpson  
COL (Ret) Paul Knoop

Visit the Friends web site for more information and purchases from the Cannon Shop.

<http://www.fortlewismuseum.com>



### ANNUAL DUES

<i>Individual</i> .....	\$10
<i>Family</i> .....	\$15
<i>Sustaining</i> .....	\$25
<i>Benefactor</i> .....	\$50
<i>Life</i> .....	\$100

**Please Continue to be a Friend  
of the Lewis Army Museum  
and Keep History Alive!**

1778-1783. America owes France the most unalterable gratitude



1917-1918. French Comrade your children shall be as our children  
**AMERICAN OUVROIR FUNDS. 681, FIFTH AVENUE, NEW-YORK**  
Annual Allowances for support and education of French War Orphans

**Friends of the Fort Lewis  
Military Museum  
PO Box 331001  
JBLM, WA 98433-1001**