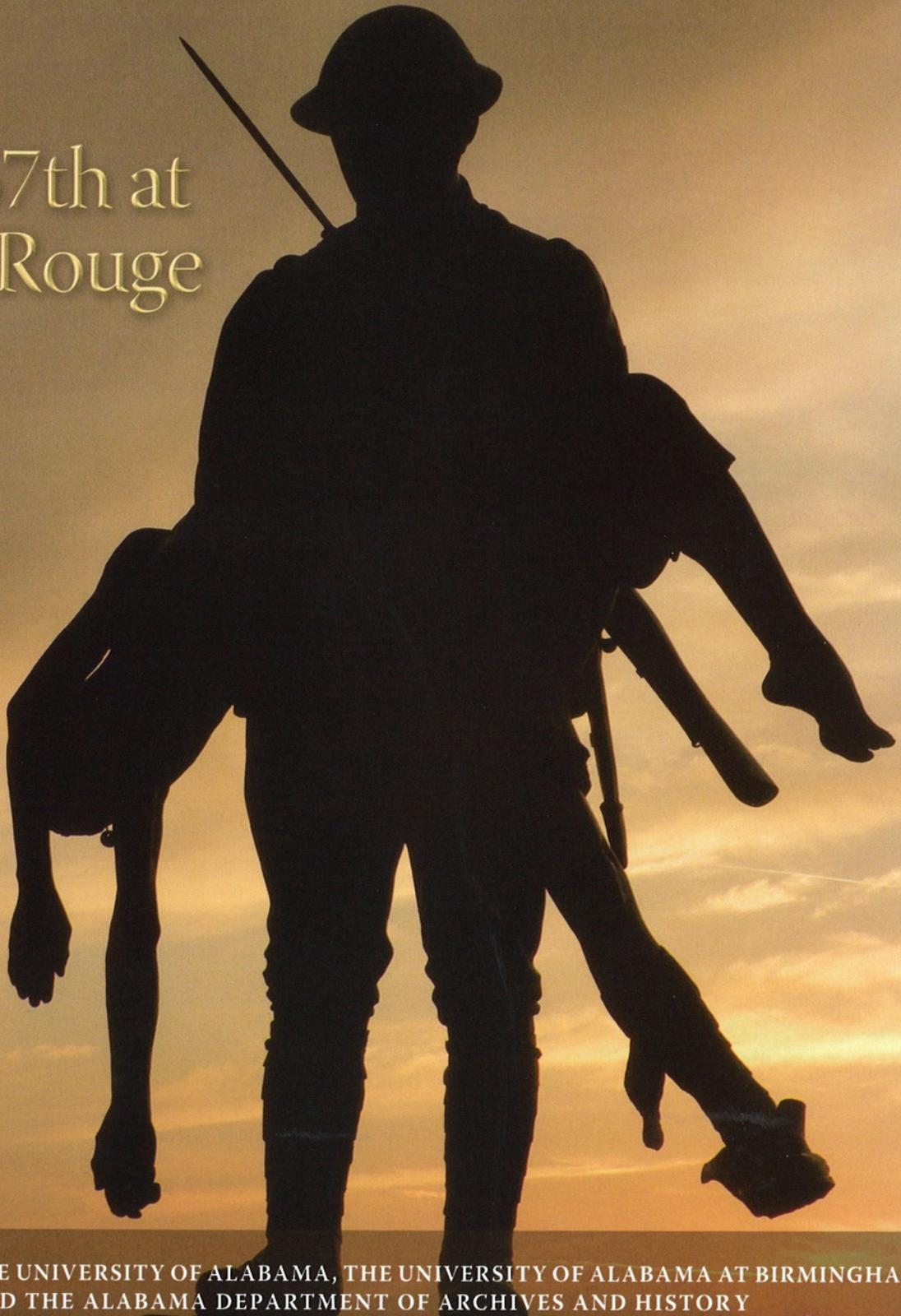


Alabama Heritage

The 167th at
Croix Rouge
Farm



PUBLISHED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA, THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM,
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Table of Contents



Cover: *The Croix Rouge Farm Memorial in France*
(Photo by Yannick Marques)
See article page 8.

DEPARTMENTS

6

Southern Architecture and Preservation
Main Street Alabama

44

Becoming Alabama
Quarter by Quarter
Calendar of Events

50

Alabama Women
“The WAC Is a Soldier Too”: Alabama and the Women’s Army Corps

54

Revealing Hidden Collections
Genealogical Resources
Available at the University
of Alabama

58

Portraits and Landscapes
Tung Trees in Alabama

60

Recollections
Hillwood:
Life in a Sawmill Camp

65

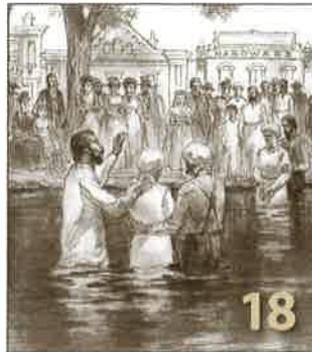
Reading the Southern Past
The Scourge of War

FEATURES

“SEND ME ALL THE ALABAMIANS YOU CAN GET”: THE 167TH INFANTRY AT CROIX ROUGE FARM

BY NIMROD T. FRAZER

In planning a massive World War One offensive that they believed would clinch their victory, the Germans had overlooked the resolve of the Allies bolstered by the support of the newly arrived Americans—including the Rainbow Division and its 167th (Alabama) infantry.



BIRMINGHAM’S MAX HELDMAN

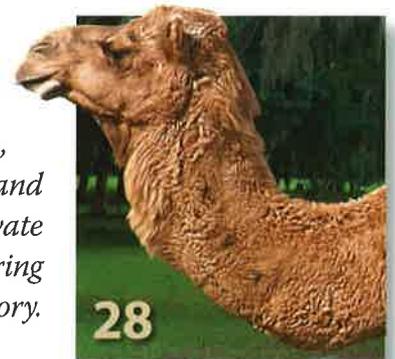
BY VIRGINIA POUNDS BROWN AND LINDA MCNAIR COHEN

Although his artistic pursuits took him to New York and Chicago, and his images appeared on the covers of national magazines, Max Heldman always considered Birmingham both his home and his favorite subject, one he drew throughout his career.

CAMELS IN CAHAWBA

BY LINDA DERRY

The appearance of camels in Cahawba, Alabama, in 1859 amused those who saw them as novelties and potential farm animals, but the story of the private importation of camels into the United States during the nineteenth century has a dark history.



THE LAST BOMBING: THE STORY OF NINA MIGLIONICO

BY SAMUEL A. RUMORE JR.

Moderate members of the Birmingham City Council received many racially motivated threats during the 1960s, but they were never the target of a bomb until one was left at the home of councilwoman Nina Miglionico.



LEFT: On November 12, 2011, a memorial by British sculptor James Butler was dedicated to the soldiers of the Forty-second "Rainbow" Division on the site of the Battle of Croix Rouge Farm. (Yannick Marques) RIGHT: Located to the south of the city of Fère-en-Tardenois, in Picardy, Croix Rouge Farm was the site of a pivotal battle fought on August 26, 1918. (National Archives and Records Administration)

“Send Me All the Alabamians You Can Get”

In planning a massive World War One offensive that they believed would clinch their victory, the Germans had overlooked the resolve of the Allies bolstered by the support of the newly arrived Americans—including the Rainbow Division and its 167th (Alabama) infantry.

By NIMROD T. FRAZER

Brig. Gen. Edward H. Plummer reportedly exclaimed, “In time of war, send me all the Alabamians you can get, but in time of peace, for Lord’s sake, send them to somebody else.”

ALTHOUGH THE UNITED STATES OFFICIALLY entered World War One (WWI) in April 1917, it took some time for American troops to reach the front. By June 1918, one million Americans had arrived in France, and they kept coming. Hoping to end the war before the United States could offer its full military strength to the Allies, the German high command planned a major offensive, the *Friedensturm* or Peace Offensive, for July. It targeted French and American troops in Champagne and along the Marne River. They expected to end the war and force the Allied powers to ask for peace, but the Allies had other plans. With the support of the Americans, they were ready to stop the German offensive—and some of those plans involved a feisty and tenacious group of soldiers from Alabama.

The Alabamians’ conduct at Croix Rouge Farm opened the road to the Heights of the Ourcq for the whole Rainbow Division and allowed it to push the Germans back on the other side of the Ourcq river, making the Alabamians responsible for one of the first successful offensives by the French and British armies toward pushing the Germans out of France.

Prior to becoming part of the Forty-second “Rainbow” Division and being sent to Europe, the Alabamians had earned a “rough and ready” reputation in five months of Advanced Infantry training on the Mexican

border under Brig. Gen. John J. Pershing. There, Brig. Gen. Edward H. Plummer, the district commander, reportedly exclaimed, “In time of war, send me all the Alabamians you can get.”

To be fair, it should be added that Plummer’s sentence continued, “but in time of peace, for Lord’s sake, send them

BELOW: Col. William P. Screws, with his ever-present cigar, at Montgomery’s Vandiver Park in 1917. (Josephine Screws McGowin) OPPOSITE PAGE: Brig. Gen. Douglas MacArthur, Eighty-fourth Brigade commander, and Lt. Col. Walter E. Bare survey the battle grounds at St. Mihiel. MacArthur wears his nonconformist cap and scarf and doesn’t carry a gas mask. (National Archives and Records Administration)





to somebody else.” This was not as negative as it sounded. The Alabamians, ripe with enthusiasm and energy, never shirked from a challenge—even those they did not necessarily have to take on. On the Mexican border, some fights broke out, whiskey was easily available, and bordellos, despite being off limits, remained a temptation.

COMMANDED BY FORTY-TWO-YEAR-OLD COL. William P. Screws of Montgomery, the 167th Alabama Infantry regiment had been shipped to France in November 1917 and moved to the Lorraine region. There, the unit trained under the French as part of the Rainbow Division, being twinned with French units to learn to patrol. By March 1918 it became the first unit responsible for one sector, albeit a rather peaceful one, of the front. There, under the Forty-second Division Chief of Staff, Col. Douglas MacArthur, the 167th endured multiple gas attacks, put patrols into no-man’s-land every night, and lived three months in and out of trenches, preparing itself for a series of harrowing battles. As Plummer had recognized early on, the Alabamians’ trademark energy and enthusiasm, which

could lead men into distraction and trouble when they grew bored, were the same qualities that allowed them to thrive in the chaos of war.

On June 28, 1918, the entire Rainbow Division was placed in reserve at Châlons-sur-Marne and assigned to the French IVth Army. In this assignment, it participated in the French-American victory that would be seen later as the real turning point of the war. After distinguishing themselves in Champagne and earning the nickname “Tigers” from the French, the 167th moved to Epieds in the vicinity of Croix Rouge Farm. There it would relieve elements of the battered and exhausted U.S. Twenty-sixth Division, which had been facing the Germans.

The Alabamians made a two-mile march on foot to Courpoil, then proceeded in a “combat approach march” formation for five miles. Neither regiment of the Eighty-fourth Brigade knew where the other was—a significant problem with a battle looming. When an Illinois artillery officer asked the infantry’s destination, he was told to see Screws, who he located “easily...because of the large cigar fiercely burning, which he always had in his mouth. He said, ‘Hello,



He said, “Hello, Bill. Where are you going?” Screws replied, not even taking the cigar out of his mouth, “Damn if I know, but I am on my way.”

Bill. Where are you going?’ Screws replied, not even taking the cigar out of his mouth, ‘Damn if I know, but I am on my way.’” Despite his bravado, the confusion was a troublesome, though common, circumstance of battle.

By nightfall the 167th’s First and Third Battalions, under Maj. John W. Carroll of Ozark and Maj. Dallas B. Smith of Opelika, respectively, had moved into the skirmish lines vacated by the weakened Twenty-sixth Division. The surroundings bore near-constant reminders of the hard-fought terrain, causing one soldier to write, “The sickening smell of rotting flesh and the acrid fumes of high explosive powder combined with the sickly sweetish smell of mustard gas to form a pervasive battlefield odor, especially noticeable in the low, damp places.”

Just ahead the Germans were defending a massive stone complex—Croix Rouge Farm, a critical terrain feature providing them with both cover and concealment. Its reinforcement had begun a month earlier when four anti-aircraft machine guns were dug in to the east. There the Germans had fought three Allied divisions to a standstill, and their machine guns and rifles stood ready to fire on anyone approaching. Additional German reinforcements had moved into position on July 23.

Little was known about the German positions, and one officer recalled being “in ignorance of where the enemy lay in strength.” Col. Douglas MacArthur, Rainbow chief of staff at the time, later reported that some of the Allied assumptions were incorrect and that “high command was just in error.”

Screws set up his 167th Post of Command (P.C.) in a tent behind the First and Third Battalions, in front of the reserve battalion commanded by Capt. Everette H. Jackson of Montgomery. The assault battalions tried to locate enemy troops but had no success. The First Battalion occupied a cleared forest that offered little protection, and the Third Battalion occupied thicker woods to the right of the First. Both positions were about a thousand yards west of the farmhouse and in range of dispersed German riflemen.

As night arrived on July 25, rain fell. Troops were exposed in the open, and cold penetrated despite its being July. The Rainbow Division headquarters reported all quiet; however, the Alabamians captured a handful of prisoners and German artillery fired preplanned concentrations. L Company’s Neil Ford, who was from Hamilton, Alabama, and had entered the army as an Auburn freshman, was killed by artillery shortly after midnight. Artillery support, which had been promised, did not arrive. Losses occurred even though the battle had not started.

Steak and coffee were brought up through incoming artillery concentrations at dawn on July 26. Screws sent a strong patrol to his left flank under Abbeville’s 1st Lt. Robert Espy. Later that morning Screws showed his battle plan to battalion and company commanders. Lt. Col. Walter E. Bare of Gadsden and the operations officer, Capt. Mortimer H. Jordan of Birmingham, were assigned positions behind First Battalion attackers. Their job was to reorganize casualties—men separated from their units—and disorganized units after the battle started. 1st Lt. John M. Powell, commander of I Company, Opelika, was given the same assignment behind the attacking Third Battalion.

The Alabamians’ sister regiment, the 168th (Iowa), was late getting into position, and when dawn broke the various battalions of it did not know one another’s locations. The First Battalion commander could not be located, and his men did not know their orders. A gap separated the Alabama and Iowa regiments until mid-afternoon. The two battalions of the Iowa regiment were to jump off, or start the battle, at 4:50 p.m., but orders were not delivered on time—a circumstance that left the Alabamians and the whole operation in jeopardy.

Rain continued to fall, but some German planes flew through openings in the overcast skies. Commanders of the Alabama and Iowa infantry regiments assembled with some artillery officers at about three that afternoon in Brig. Gen. Robert A. Brown’s Eighty-fourth Brigade P.C. Brown issued orders to jump off at 4:50 p.m. Screws protested as much as a

colonel could protest the order of a brigadier general, suggesting instead that troops fall back and bring artillery fire on the German position. He asked if the French at his left had orders to attack and was told they did not. Despite Screws's concerns, the orders stood. But the artillery never received "Brown's order to...fire a preparation and barrage," and chaos resulted.

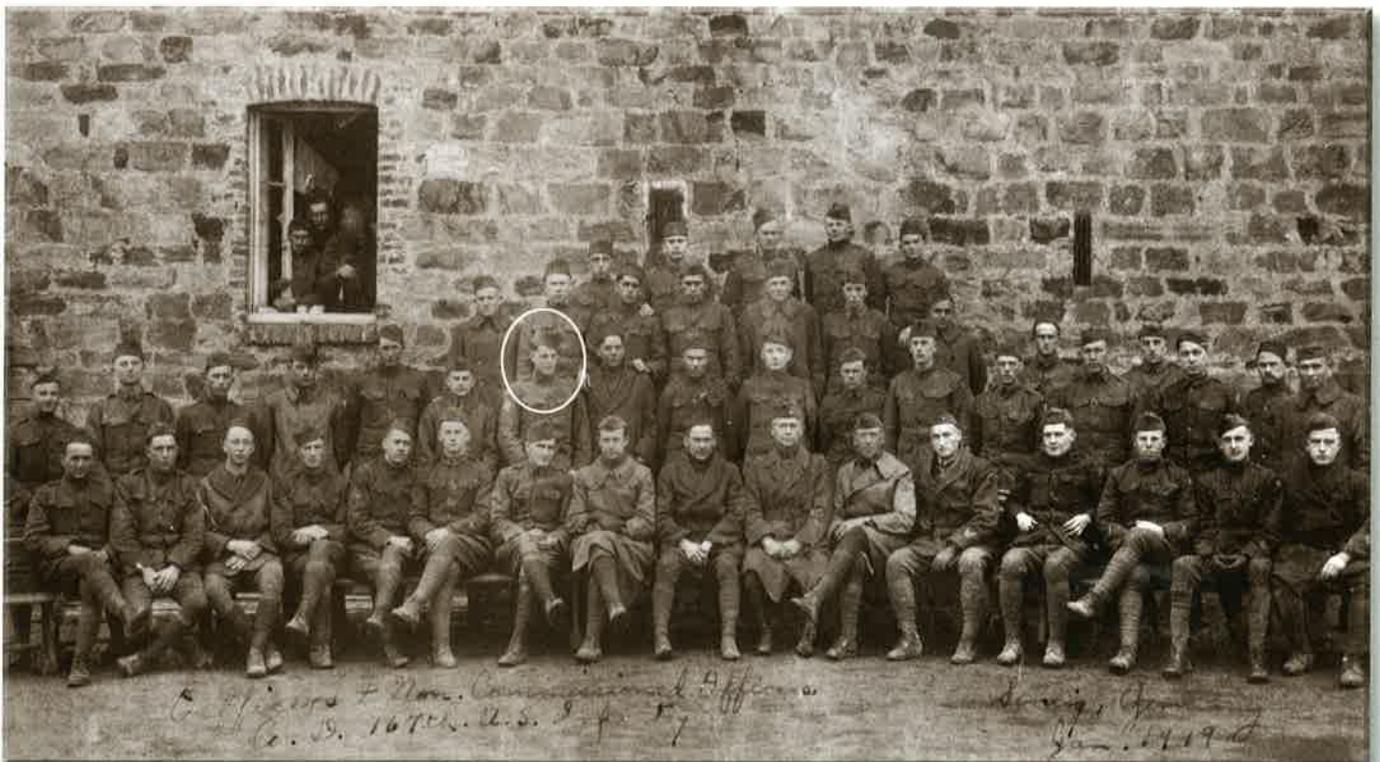
ALABAMA'S FIRST BATTALION HAD ORDERS TO attack across the open land between its skirmish line and the farmhouse. From there they were to head northeast until reaching the La Ventellette woods, about a mile away. The Third Battalion was right of the First Battalion with orders to cross the open land between it and the farm compound. From there it was to proceed east until reaching the woods about a thousand yards beyond.

Orders were issued to fix bayonets. The First Battalion jumped off at 4:50 p.m. and the Third Battalion at about 5:05 p.m., with the First moving fastest. Its assault force consisted of two platoons from Pell City's C Company and two platoons from Bessemer's D Company. Each was accompanied by a section of the Machine Gun Company from Montgome-

ry. Both elements passed at a run between Montgomery's A Company and Abbeville's B Company, which laid down rifle and machine gun fire. The four attacking platoons bounded forward, losing men from the beginning. The assault force survived for only a few minutes before being pinned down for more than an hour by German machine guns. German and Alabamian casualties covered the field.

Despite the horrific conditions, there were numerous instances of valor and courage. One soldier, Pvt. Ben Hope of D Company, was wounded in the head yet continued to advance until he received three additional wounds and died. He was awarded a posthumous Distinguished Service Cross for "extraordinary heroism." Dead and wounded were all over the place. Undaunted, Smith's Third Battalion picked up the charge toward the farmhouse started by the First Battalion.

Officers and non-commissioned officers of the 167th Alabama Infantry at Sinzig, Germany. The author's father Sgt. William Johnson Frazer (circled in white) and Sgt. Chester K. Scott (first row, first from the right) were from Greenville, Alabama. (N. T. Frazer Collection)



“As I was advancing a boy at my side was shot down by a German machine gun.... I will never forget the look on his face as he went down.”

They were accompanied by elements of Company B of the (Georgia) 151st Machine Gun Battalion. Smith recalled, “We hadn’t advanced a hundred yards toward the Croix Rouge Farm when it was a matter of hand to hand fighting...using both the bayonet, as we had been taught during so many hours of instruction, and the butt of the rifle, the latter being most effective.” The fighting proved brutal. I Company’s commander, Lt. John M. Powell of Opelika, died while leading his unit, which suffered about thirty dead and a hundred wounded.

Rather than a decisive attack with a quick, clear, and concise victory, the battle was a back-and-forth affair. L Company’s 1st Lieutenant Howe described the attack as unfolding by degrees when elements engaged, faltered, and tried again. 1st Lt. Henry L. Griggs, I Company, Opelika, stated, “...this was the hardest fighting my battalion had during the war and was the only hand to hand fighting I saw during the war.”

Norman L. Summers, Anniston, 1st Sergeant of M Company, wrote: “Some of our men were blown to pieces. Some had their arms and legs blown into tatters.... Shells were bursting on all sides...As I was advancing a boy at my side was shot down by a German machine gun...I will never forget the look on his face as he went down.” A captured German report written by their Battalion Commander Hildebrandt said that the American attack came in very thick lines with one infantry group north of the farm and one south, both with several machine guns. Hildebrandt wrote that two company leaders had, through binoculars, seen American reinforcements proceeding in col-

umns after the first assault failed within fifteen minutes. The Germans claimed that their own fire effectiveness continued to be good, inflicting overall heavy losses on the Americans attacking against their Sixth and Seventh Companies.

Still, Alabama morale remained high, and Maj. Claude M. Stanley, commander of the Iowan Second Battalion, later wrote of “hearing the Rebel Yell as Alabama soldiers held their rifles high and raced across the field” to his left. Borden Burr of Birmingham, wrote in his diary, “Wonderful nerve to see them run without protection through machine gun fire.”

EVENTUALLY, A LULL FELL, AND THE BATTLEFIELD went quiet for more than an hour before the First Battalion launched its second assault. The charge was made by men from B and D Companies who had not been in the first effort. The second effort started after 6:00



p.m., and unlike the earlier attack, it succeeded from the beginning. Two D Company platoons under Bessemer's 1st Lt. Ernest E. Bell and two B Company platoons under Abbeville's 1st Lt. Robert Espy rushed forward. Firing as they went, spread out across the field, the hundred men savagely fought German riflemen and machine gunners, killing them with the rifle, bayonet, pistol, and rifle butt. Driving remnants of German soldiers back, they sealed the fate of the troublesome machine gunners on the farmhouse's north and west sides.

Bell was wounded, and only twenty-three of his initial fifty-eight D Company men were left standing. Espy's group of fifty-two had eighteen survivors. Bare said that Espy's "platoon...was largely responsible for breaking up all the 27 machine gun nests in the edge of the woods by advancing in

On the day following the Battle of Croix Rouge Farm, the 167th moved to fighting on the heights of the Ourcq River. Here, the unit's dead lie strewn across the battlefield. (National Archives and Records Administration)

double time on the position." Screws stated that Espy's efforts saved the regiment.

Germans counterattacked, but the First Battalion remained undaunted. Major Carroll from Ozark shouted, "Save your fire men! We'll give 'em hell with the bayonet." Lieutenant Hackett said, "On that instant the fire of our men ceased and with bayonets fixed each man awaited the chance to impale a Boche on his 'toasting fork.'" But the casualties were steep—65 percent of Carroll's First Battalion was killed or wounded that afternoon. His D Company under Capt. Lacey Edmundson, Bessemer, had 80 percent casualties in the two assaults.

And victory was not a given. Pvt. Hayes of Opelika's I Company described the bleak Third Battalion scene south of the farmhouse: "Just as it seemed we were surely doomed by the heavy enemy attacks on our left and rear, the issue of the battle then hanging in the balance was suddenly resolved in our favor by unexpected help from two sources. 'Shorty' Wren, a former Auburn football player, and his detail came up with their small one-pounder cannon [mortar] to silence machine gun nests in front." With this assistance, the tide

suddenly turned, and "the entire American forces swept forward at bayonet point with great slaughter." The First Battalion continued forcing the German retreat, and Smith's Third Battalion continued its attack. A mixed group thrown together by Lieutenants Murphy and Kairn of the 151st Machine Gun Battalion's B Company charged the farmhouse from the south, as did Birmingham's K Company lieutenants, Roy Sharp of Ballinger, Texas, and Alan K. Smith of Birmingham. I Company's Second Lt. Harry I. Young also led small groups in charges. When Young was seriously wounded another force from the Birmingham and Opelika Companies charged.





Remnants of Alabama City's L Company swept forward. About twenty reached the compound around seven o'clock. Some members of F Company, 168th Iowa, joined the twenty survivors. Two Iowa machine gun lieutenants were there with twenty-five or thirty wounded. About that many died in the final fight. Expecting a German counterattack, the Americans moved the wounded to the woods in the rear when darkness fell. Combat slowed, drizzling rain continued, and a storm erupted at about ten o'clock. The retreating Germans burned stores and ammunition in the east, causing great lights and explosions. The German troops withdrew to what they called their Dora position beyond the Ourcq River, about six miles away. The Allies had taken Croix Rouge.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS COSTLY BATTLE WOULD become more clear over the next several weeks. Father Francis P. Duffy, Chaplain of the 165th (New York) Infantry, later called Croix Rouge Farm "the last stand of the Germans south of the Ourcq." The Alabamians had helped push back the Germans before they retreated on the other side of the Ourcq River.

But the victory held significant costs. Major Watts, the 167th's regimental surgeon, wrote in his report:

Night came on and with it rain, the terribly wounded men staggering along through the deep mud and cold water, stretcher bearers slipping and falling with the mutilated and sometimes lifeless bodies they carried....The wounded accumulated in great numbers, the aid stations were literally full of them, both Americans and Germans. Those who were unable to walk to the rear were made as comfortable as possible. Many of the wounded lay on the wet ground with practically no protection. The Germans had located us and seeing an ever increasing crowd started a heavy shelling, making two direct hits on the regimental aid post and killing one of the Hospital Corps men while he was in the act of administering morphine to one of his wounded comrades.

The wounded were being brought in during the entire night and were evacuated to the rear as rapidly as possible. The assault battalions advanced about a thousand yards

and gained their objective at a cost of approximately one casualty for each yard gained. For when the casualty list was completed the following morning, we sent a list to Regimental Headquarters of over eleven hundred names of wounded who had passed through the aid stations from 5:30 p.m. July 26 to 7:00 a.m. July 27.

The 162 Alabama dead at Croix Rouge Farm included two company commanders and three platoon leaders. The Germans lost 283 dead, many with bayonet wounds. Twenty platoon leaders from the 167th were wounded.

SUCCESS WAS SWEET FOR THE SURVIVORS. Two days after the battle Gary A. Roberts of Abbeville, wrote his mother from Base Hospital No. 15, describing how he killed several Germans, then adding, "Listen, I want you to put two stars by my picture on the wall and write it down in the Old Account Book where it will not be destroyed or forgotten.... Believe me it was some fun as well as exciting. Now I'm sorry I didn't get to kill one for each of you. Perhaps I can get more next time. The first one I got was for Mama and the other one was for myself for the trouble they have given this ole boy."

The war would go on for months, and the 167th Infantry would continue its distinctive record of hard fighting and success. From Croix Rouge Farm it advanced about twelve miles, driving the Germans before it. It provided the assault element to the Rainbow Division in the victory at St. Mihiel and completed its assignments in that battle on the first day. It received honors for cracking the Hindenburg Line at the Côte de Châtillon in what has been called the Rainbow Division's hardest battle. And after the war, the Alabamians and all of the Rainbow Division went to Germany as part of the Army of Occupation.

Although the Battle of Croix Rouge has received scant recognition from history books, military authorities understood its importance. Douglas MacArthur recalled, "The 167th Alabama assisted by the left flank of the 168th Iowa had stormed and captured the Croix Rouge Farm in a manner which for its gallantry I do not believe has been surpassed in military history."

ah



The Croix Rouge Farm Memorial

By Monique Brouillet Seefried

ON NOVEMBER 12, 2011, NEARLY A CENTURY after the beginning of WWI, a new American memorial was inaugurated on the site of the Croix Rouge Farm, to the south of the city of Fère-en-Tardenois, in Picardy, a region profoundly scarred by the fighting of WWI. It commemorates the historic Forty-second “Rainbow” Division, a National Guard Division, which claims to have seen more days of combat than any other American Division during the Great War.

This monumental bronze sculpture, by the acclaimed British sculptor James Butler, depicts an American soldier carrying a dead comrade. For Butler, the military pietà theme is at the core of this work. He notes:

My original idea was to portray the powerful bond between men on active service with a soldier carrying his dead comrade. However after working on the sculpture for some time the piece began to have a strong spiritual meaning for me. The dead soldier is limp as if his body had just been lifted from the battlefield. The figure holding the dead man began to have the presence of the Angel of Mercy. He is perfect—there are no battle scars on him and he is untouched by the grim conflict. I am not a religious man, but working on this sculpture I felt a strong spiritual guidance.

This memorial was erected on grounds that have remained unchanged since the days of the battle. The memorial was commissioned, thanks to the generosity of Nimrod T. Frazer, by the Croix Rouge Farm Memorial Foundation, an Alabama foundation that purchased what remains of the fortified farmhouse of the Croix Rouge and some of the land where the battle took place. Before being erected on these hallowed grounds, the memorial statue was exhibited in the courtyard of the Royal Academy of Arts in London during its 2011 Summer Exhibition.

The memorial includes the following inscription: “In filial piety, Nimrod Thompson Frazer erected this monument in the name of his father Sgt. William Johnson Frazer of Greenville, Alabama, a member of the D Company Assault Force.” The bronze casting was done by Black Isle Foundry located in Nairn, near Inverness, Scotland. The statue offers a moving tribute to the men who fought so valiantly.

Visitors are welcome at the memorial site; for more information, please see its website at <http://croixrougefarm.org/>.

President of the Croix Rouge Farm Memorial Foundation, Monique Brouillet Seefried, a French and American citizen, holds a PhD in history from the Sorbonne. (Photo of Croix Rouge Farm Memorial by Yannick Marques)

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