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GRAPHIC DESCRIPTION OF FIGHTING IN ARGONNE FOREST BY CAPT. RICHEY

He Was Himself Gassed and Unfitted for Duty. Officers and Soldiers Fought Like Veterans

Mrs. W. R. Richey, Jr., is in receipt of the letter below from her husband, Capt. Richey, of the 371st Infantry, which took part in the capture of the Argonne Forest, one of the strategic strongholds of the Germans in the Champagne sector. As is already known the 371st regiment is composed of negro soldiers mostly from this state, some of them being from this county. The regiment is commanded by white officers, among whom are numbered Capt. Richey, Lieut. T. D. Lake and Lieut. James C. Todd, of this city. Capt. Richey tells in this letter of the fall of Lieut. Lake, who was leading his men against a heavy machine gun and artillery fire when he was killed. In all probability he would have given the names of any of his men from this county if they had been killed. Leaving out the introduction and other lines of a personal nature, the letter was as follows:

As promised you last night, I am going to try and give you an accurate account of the big battle I was in and which began on Sept. 25, and is still in progress, and which battle, I think, will end the war.

We were just behind the front lines about 2-3 miles when at 11:30 in the night of Sept. 25th, the preliminary bombardment began. Of course we all knew it was coming but did not know the exact hour. I was at the time trying to catch a little much-needed

sleep, but after the big guns started roaring there was no chance for sleep. This bombardment continued during the entire night, and with the exception of a few intermitted pauses it has continued incessantly since, or until the time I passed out of hearing distance on my way to the hospital.

On the afternoon of Sept. 26th we received orders to move forward. We slept that night in a French Boyow (communicating trench) in the French front lines. I say slept, but there was no sleep, as it was raining and the noise from the guns would not let one sleep. The French had gone over the top and were pursuing the Huns. The night or afternoon of the 27th we went into the fighting zone, and our regiment relieved a French regiment, to continue the pursuit. First battalion went in first, morning of 28th, and met stout resistance. The wounded passed us all day going back to the dressing station, some with bullets through their arms, legs, shoulders, some with arms and legs cut off by high explosives, etc. In the meantime our battalion, laying in support, had been discovered by the enemy observers, and shells commenced to drop on us anew. The enemy had thrown shells on us the whole of the night before. Two of the shells fell in a shell hole that Teer and myself were in but failed to explode. If they had exploded both would have been blown

to atoms. Of course we moved our position. In the night of the 28th, while our brigade was relieving the first, the valley we were in was filled with gas and I was gassed at this time. I did not think much of it and did not even go to the doctor. Preston got a dose at the same time, but went to the doctor. On Sunday morning, Sept. 29th, my company went over the hill; the 1st battalion had been relieved by I and K companies, and were waiting in another valley for Maj. C. and my company to come up before going to the attack. We arrived at the position the attack was to start from at about 7:30, after having had a deadly artillery barrage on us over the hill. At 10 o'clock Sunday morning we were ordered to advance up a valley, but in the meantime an enemy plane flew down low, discovered our position, and signaled his artillery, which opened up on us and every minute seemed to be the last one. However, by rifle fire we brought the plane down, killing the pilot and observer, but not until he had given his gunners our location. This shelling continued until the time for our advance at 10 o'clock, and when we got started it grew in intensity until by the time we had advanced fifty yards, it was a regular barrage. About two hundred yards up the valley we came under the direct fire of the enemy's withering machine gun and rifle fire, and by this time, five enemy planes were flying over us shooting round after round from their machine guns on us. Of course we were in an unsheltered valley, with nothing to hide us from the enemy and presented a clean, clear and open target. Men were falling all around me, but the company never once faltered. They marched right on into the jaws of death. Shells were dropping, it looked to me like every second, making holes big enough to set a good sized barn into. The nearer the enemy we got, the more ef-

fective his machine gun and rifle fire got. Remember now, the enemy was hid behind bushes, trees and houses in a little village we were advancing on, and we had absolutely no target to shoot at. Long before we reached the village, we could see the cowards running up a steep hill beyond, leaving lots of machine guns to stick out, and believe me, when we did reach our objective and rounded the machine gunners, the negroes made quick work of them. They all held up their hands, but no kamamad for the men, they killed them unhesitatingly, and I did not try to stop them. The town was on a railroad, and about the time we all thought the victory was won and we could get a few minutes of rest, before going on, the artillery began on us again, and I saw one shell kill two of my men and seriously wound three others, who were sitting behind a rock pile. Then we discovered that we were flanked on three sides by machine gun nests. In other words we were trapped. We could not stick our head up. Teer, who had been wounded by a piece of shell before we started, came up about this time, white as a ghost, and I told him to go back. Preston, who joined us before we started, also had to leave at this point. In the meantime Parker had been shot through the fleshy part of his foot and Vinton through the hand. I was all in, could hardly get my breath, but I had to stay. Parker and Vinton also stayed. Jim Todd was not touched. We knew we had to go on, and some of us who had been wounded, remained, while Preston went in. I have seen Teer here in this hospital. He was operated on today. The slug had buried in his shoulder, and he really is in bad shape.

We remained at this railroad station all night in the rain, and flanked on three sides by machine gun nests. Lt. Rausen of I company was killed here and Tom Lake, whose company

had in the meantime come up into the valley, was killed by high explosive shell. That night (Sunday) the enemy threw large numbers of gas shells into the place we were in, and I was again gassed. The next morning (Monday), with half my company gone, most of them wounded, however, we got orders to move up the railroad track ahead. We went right into the machine gun nests, the operators of whom, when they saw our determination, left their guns and ran, and we had lots of fun picking them off. The fun did not last long though, because as soon as what few Germans who were left, got out of reach, here come another artillery barrage, worse than the one before, and as soon as we got in the open the machine guns opened up again. I believe every man in the German army carries a machine gun. We went ahead though and captured 6 big German guns (artillery). We reached the crest of another hill and were there held up. I had to crawl on my stomach for 300 yards, just like a snake. Every time I raised my body to make a move, zip, zip went the machine gun bullets. When we reached the hill, things died down a little and I was by this time completely exhausted. Our battalion was being relieved and four of my men carried me in. In all, during the two days, Sunday and Monday, our battalion advanced about five miles, without the aid of a single friendly artillery shot or any other help. We killed lots of Germans, captured lots of them and captured any quantity of material and six big guns. I left Jim Todd in command of the company with Parker and Vinton. Jim was all right when I left and I believe he got back safe, as we were to be relieved about the time I left. I am proud of all my officers and of all my men. The whole regiment fought like veterans and with a fierceness equal to any white regiment. This was the

first time any of them had been under aimed shell and machine gun fire, and they stood it like moss-covered old timers. They never flinched or showed the least sign of fear. All that was necessary, was to tell them to go and they went. Lots were killed and wounded, but they will go down in history as brave soldiers.

We were fighting with the French in the Champagne under General Gourrand. Tom Lake will be buried in the valley near the little town of Ardeuil, Forest and south of Monthois.

As for myself, I will never understand how I came out as well as I did. Of course I don't know what effect the gas is going to have on me. Don't know whether I will ever be able to go back into line or not. Am very short of breath, and my chest and throat feel right raw. I am very comfortably located. The hospital seems to be a good one. It is an officers' hospital, and is full, nearly all the patients being from our regiment.

I believe this offensive will drive the Germans out of France and that the war will be over pretty soon. God knows I hope so, for it certainly is hell on earth, if there is such a thing. With all the hardships I have been writing you about, all of them combined cannot equal one hour of this last. For four days and nights I was under deadly fire, and did not sleep two hours during the entire time, and it rained nearly all the time.

You can continue to write me in the same way. Even if I am given something else, or other work to do, I will have to go back to the regiment to settle up things, and besides I have told them to send my mail here.

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