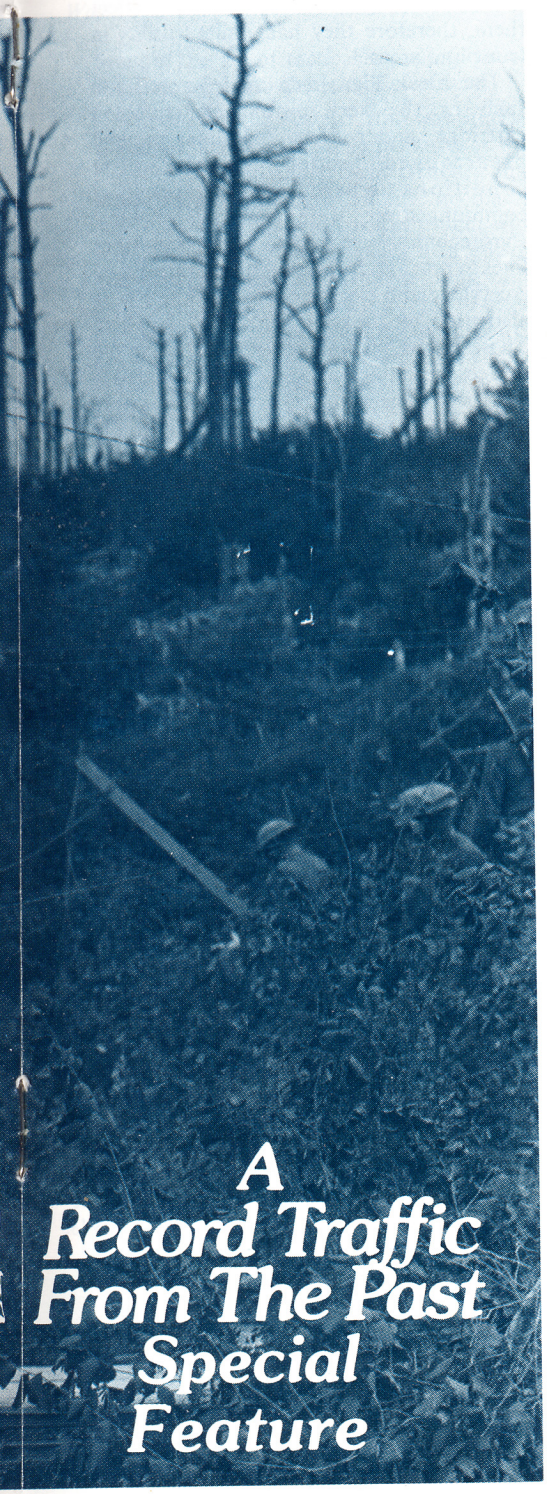
Signaling Souls On The Western Front

Members of the all-black 325th Field Signal Battalion string field wire in "no mans" land near Binarville, France, on the edge of the Argonne F

The story of the 325th Field Signal Battalion, the first all-black Signal unit in the Army, and the only black Signal unit to serve in World War I.

by Samuel A. Barnes



e Forest, 1 October 1918. (Photo: National Archives)

With a barking of orders and an exchange of salutes, the troops marched down the gang plank and formed into orderly ranks on the docks below. They presented a striking picture in their full battle dress, with their soldierly, no-nonsense carriage. They wore the famous doughboy uniform of General Pershing's American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) of World War I.

This unloading of troops was typical of any other in the American Army in 1918, except that these troops were members of the 325th Field Signal Battalion of the all-black 92d "Buffalo" Division. They were the first and only all-black Signal unit in the Army.

THE WAY IT WAS

The date was 19 June 1918, and the place, the equipment laden and troop swollen docks of Brest, France, a long way from the lively controversies that had led to the black Signalmen being there. The racial climate of America was bad for the black man at that time. Rigid racial segregation was the law of the land, and few blacks served in the military. Those who did serve were segregated and often discriminated against, within ranks as well as out. In spite of all of the injustices that were dealt to the black man in America at that time, at the call for volunteers for the war, black Americans were among the first to step forward.

Many Americans felt that black soldiers should not be used in the war in any capacity other than as laborers, stevedores, etc. Other Americans expressed doubts about the leadership ability of black officers and feared that black troops would not follow them in combat. In light of such prevailing attitudes of the times, it is easy to understand why some Americans also believed that blacks could not perform well in communications or other technical military occupational specialities. Such facts are not particularly pleasing to touch on, but that's the way it was at the time. The men of the 325th would do much to dispell many of these fears.

The action depicted in this account of the exploits of the 325th Signal and the black units they supported in World War I, is not meant to imply in any way that these black soldiers fought the war singlehandedly or that they fought any more gallantly or served any more honorably than any other Americans. Instead, this account of their combat activities illustrates the fact that they served gallantly and with as much honor and distinction as the reins of time and the bit of circumstance would permit. It must be fully understood that these troops fought as an integral part of the AEF and that all of the action they figured in was only a mere portion of some greater concerted effort and tactical scheme of the AEF. The mention of other black units here is only meant to put the actions of the 325th into accurate perspective relative to its actual combat support mission.

FROM WATER FRONT TO WESTERN FRONT

The men of the 325th must have filed off the troop transport, that day in June, with a sense of pride and purpose nothing could deter. They had a reason to do so. They had the important mission of providing communications for an infantry division in combat. This was not an easy task but it was one that they welcomed. They were glad to be headed for the western front.

The 325th was composed entirely of young blacks with a few exceptions. Major Irving Deems, the battalion commander, and Major Spencer and two or three line officers were white. The division Signal officer of the 92d Division, a lieutenant colonel was also white. Lieutenant W. G. Herbert and several other officers, and all of the enlisted personnel were black. This race/rank structure was typical of most so-called all-black units of the day.

Many of the men of the battalion were high school and college graduates, a considerable portion of them with backgrounds in electronics and electricity. A number of these men came to the unit from college campuses where they had studied electricity and electronics, both of which were considerable marvels at the time. Some were members of the Student Army Training Corps (SATC). Many colleges and universities participated in this program and had SATC contingents and detachments on their campuses. These institutions taught soldiers skilled trades with military applicability. Tuskegee Institute, Alabama and Western University, Quindaro, Kansas, were noteworthy among institutions that taught Signal related skills (e.g., electricity, electronics, etc.) to black soldiers.

Some of the men had no job related experience at all, and were enlisted from the ranks of porters, bellhops, chauffeurs, and the like, strictly as space fillers. It had been a discouraging task in the states to obtain qualified NCOs for the unit, but they were eventually identified. In time and with

Under the watchful eye of instructors, black Signalmen examine a mock message at a simulated "Regimental Forward Post", 1st Corps Signal School, Gondrecourt, France, 13 August 1918. (Photo: National Archives)

training and experience, all of the men became competent Signalmen.

Upon their arrival at Brest, the men of the battalion began to meet the rigors of war immediately. First, they went to Vitrey by train, then marched eleven kilometers at night to Morey without guide or interpreter. On the 29th they received orders to proceed to the AEFS 11th Training Area at Bourbonne-les-Bains to train with the French. They began the march (23 miles by speedometer), at 9 o'clock the next morning under full pack and reached the village at dusk, a record for the division. A brigadier general complimented the black Signalmen for the soldierly manner in which they entered Bourbonne.

TRAINING IN FRANCE

After a week of unloading freight cars, the Signalmen marched to nearby Voisey and got a first taste of what their future Signal duties would be like. Five Signal Corps instructors and four NCOs arrived at the unit to assist with its Signal training. The instructors were probably from the French Army Signal School at Chalons or the American First Corps Signal School at Gondrecourt. The NCOs were probably from "seasoned" Signal units in the area that had already experienced combat in France.

At Voisey, the unit was equipped with a large assortment of communications equipment, most of it French. The equipment consisted of buzzerphones, switchboards, projectors, pyrotechnics, pigeons, wire, Signaling panels, and flags. This equipment was distributed as appropriate between the radio (wireless telegraphy) company and the wire and outpost companies.

Within a few weeks, the unit obtained practically all of its equipment and supplies, and the Signalmen were drilled daily in the fine art of communicating with their equipment. In addition to their training, the Signalmen established a battery charging plant at Voisey. Practical communication connections in the area were made largely by utilizing existing French lines. The Infantry Signal platoons of the 365th, 366th, 367th, and 368th Infantry Regiments of the division also joined the battalion at Voisey and shared in its training.

EQUIPMENT AND RELIABILITY "OVER THERE"

The 325th Field Signal Battalion and other American Signal units as well, were equipped with a conglomeration of communications equipment with which to provide tactical communications support, but much of it proved to be totally unsuitable for the tactical situation at hand. Radio was in its infancy and had many shortcomings as a secure communications device. At the time, radio technology centered around an open spark gap and a crystal detector that sprayed its output across a wide spectrum of frequencies. The crystal-type receivers of the time lacked fine tuning and would pick up anything that happened to be in the air — American, allied, or German.

The term "radio" generally meant wireless telegraphy in those days, rather than voice radio as we know it today. There were generally two types of tactical radio sets in use in the field — the continuous wave set and the dampened wave set. The continuous wave set was used at higher headquarters because of the greater range capability and a more reliable tuning capacity. The dampened wave set was used within the Infantry Regiment, Artillery Brigade, and on airplanes. It was small and could be carried by hand when necessary.

The buzzerphone was another instrument used by the black Signalmen. It was essentially a telegraph instrument that could be adopted for use as a telephone when occasions demanded, by attaching a special device to it. The buzzerphone emitted a spark that interferred with telephone and telegraph traffic and that broadcasted its presence. For this reason, Colonel Edgar Russel, the Chief Signal Officer of the AEF, outlawed its use in forward areas except in extreme emergencies.

Ground telegraph or TPS (French for *telegraphic par le sol*) was also used by the 325th in France. This type of telegraphy used a ground-return circuit for communicating. It was implemented by driving two iron pins into the ground and connecting telegraph instruments to them. Intelligence flowed through the soil between the two pins which were located at two different terminating locations. Ground telegraphy was not too secure because German and American front lines were close together, and the Germans could easily pick up traffic over the ground-return circuit through induction. Ground telegraphy was used to communicate within the Infantry Regiment and in some cases from Regiment to Brigade.

Since most electrical communications means proved to be inadequate in the tactical situation, the command communications needs of the division were met chiefly by buzzers, messengers, and visual signaling. Signal flags had some shortcomings in that they could only be used in rear or secure areas; the Germans, as well as their intended receivers, could easily spot them. In many instances, opposing trenches were only a few yards apart across a "no-mans" land, and any movement at all usually brought on a hail of German lead in reply. Visual signaling devices had to be seen to be effective and movement was necessary to install or effect them, therefore they had limited utility in front line areas.

The black Signalmen used pyrotechnics such as the very pistol and trumblon cartridge, and rockets and flares to send prearranged (coded) signals under conditions where other means of communications were uncertain or slow. Pyrotechnics were used to signal from front lines to rear and from front lines to airplanes. Acetylene and electric projector lamps were also used by the men for visual signaling. These lamps, like all other visual signaling devices used coded signals. In addition, carrier pigeons were also used to supplement the communications systems installed by the men.

Of all the communication means at the disposal of the Signal Corps in World War I, wire communications were in the most demand and were the most widely-used. In the early stages of the war, American communications depended to a great extent upon French telephone and telegraph instruments, and throughout the entire conflict buzzerphones and switchboards were workhorses as well. Wire communications meant both telephone and telegraph, but the telephone was truly the backbone of divisional communications systems. Wheeled and tracked vehicles and German artillery and ambush patrols were hell on wire communications.

SIGNALING WWI STYLE

World War I had a chemistry and flavor all of its own. In support of it, a unique brand of signaling evolved, born partially by design and partially of necessity. Using the communications equipment at hand, in spite of its many shortcomings, the men of the 325th and other Signalers of the AEF

Two black 92nd Division soldiers, walk past the regimental headquarters at Bourbonne-les-Bains, France, Circa October 1918. (Photo: National Archives)

Black soldiers load Signal Corps wire spools onto a truck at Argonne, France, during World War I. (Photo: National Archives)

brought the art of tactical signaling out of the dark ages into the age of electricity.

The war on the western front was literally a war of "fronts". In some instances it was fought by small units from trenches that fronted on the many infamous "no mans" lands. In other instances it was fought with whole divisions pushing forward in unison towards the enemy from a long and constantly changing front line. In still other instances, men manned lonely and isolated outposts to listen for and observe the enemy and to warn of his movement and activity. In addition, numerous patrols were sent into and behind enemy lines to gather intelligence and to ambush or otherwise harass and disrupt enemy operations. In every case, the one essential element that was present was communications, and in every case it was a prime consideration.

When the Infantry left their trenches and went "over the top" on their numerous plunges into "no mans" land, many times Signalmen went over with them, stringing out their communications wire behind them. When the big divisions rolled forward through and beyond "no mans" land, and ploughed into the belly of the enemy, Signalmen were at their sides, and at times, out in advance of the Infantry extending their communications.

One of the most effective communications systems used by the Signal Corps for large-scale forward movement was the Axis-of-Signal Communications system. With this system needed communications were extended by wire along a common axis to the proposed advance locations of the various command posts and Signal centers of the divisions, regiments, etc. Contact was maintained with the old locations and the newer ones had to be completely set up and fully operational before the old locations were broken down or abandoned. In order to maintain continuity of communications and command and control, commanders and key personnel of advancing elements could tie in at various points along the axis and communicate during the move. At the same time, communications were maintained with lateral elements, and other signaling systems, such as radio, couriers, visual signaling, etc., were superimposed on the wire (telephone and telegraph) systems where appropriate. It was an impressive system; it rolled out almost automatically with its lateral lines branching out of a main stem that ran straight towards the enemy. Communications was indeed vital to the AEF and the American Signalman and his gadgetry was a familiar and welcomed sight on the western front.

IN THE TRENCHES OF ST. DIE

On 11 August, the 92d Division moved to Bruyeres in the Vosages Mountains, and the 325th moved into the trenches with it. At Bruyeres, the division waited for five days before relieving the American Fifth Division and taking over the St. Die Sector near the Lorraine border. In the days that followed, the Signalmen got their first taste of actual combat.

Combat action in the Vosages consisted largely of trench and gas warfare. The men occupied front line trenches and made daily and nightly raids on German front line trenches to harass and capture prisoners. The black Signalmen accompanied them on many of those raids. The Germans relied heavily on poisonous chlorine gas to repel them. The regiments in the trenches depended on the men of the 325th for their communications, which meant that the Signalmen had to go where they went, and at times had to fight when they fought. Such was the nature of ground warfare in those days.

During the relief, the newly captured town of Frapella remained unoccupied for five days except by one man, Private Alfred Blackburn of the 325th. Private Blackburn, isolated and alone, kept the lines in and working for the entire five days. The battalion recorded its first casualties during this period. Private J. G. Wartman of the outpost company was wounded, and two other members of the unit was gassed by the Germans.

The 92d held the St. Die sector for four weeks, and during that time, Major Deems visited the regimental, battalion, and company encampments daily to encourage and advise the men. Transportation was practically nonexistant, so Signal officers had to walk to the many outposts much of the time.

The French artillery complimented the performance of the 325th in the St. Die sector. It stated that it received better liaison communications from the 325th than it did from the Signal unit it replaced in the sector. On 2 September, during a raid at LaFontanelle, the men of the 325th kept information flowing by buzzerphone, as all other means of communications failed.

The men had several brushes with the enemy during their stay in the sector, but these contacts served only to help them gain more experience and confidence. Though some of the repairs they made were crude and slow, and though they naturally made some errors, the overall efficiency of the Signalmen increased with each detail they completed. On 20 September, the 325th left the trenches of the St. Die sector and headed for the Argonne Forest.

THE MEUSE-ARGONNE OFFENSIVE

In the Meuse-Argonne offensive, the 92d Division was held in reserve as a part of the American Fifth Army, First Corps. Only one platoon of the Signal battalion got into action in the Argonne. It supported the 368th Infantry Regiment, the only regiment of the division to participate in the Meuse-Argonne offensive. As a part of the French Fourth Army, the 368th was deployed with a French division just beyond the American front, and the Signal platoon was billeted temporarily with the French near Vienne-le Chateau. Lieutenant W. G. Herbert, one of the few black officers in the 325th was in charge of the platoon.

In the Argonne, the regiment and Signalmen were faced with the best troops the Kaiser had to offer, many of them holders of the Iron Cross. They were crack gunners and relentless fighters. They skillfully employed barbed wire entanglements, gas attacks, and deadly accurate shooting to provide a maze of death for the Americans and their allies to travel. The going was hard in the Argonne and many times the firepower of the Signalmen proved as much a premium to the regiment as their signalling did.

Black soldiers of the 92nd Division get a reprieve from incoming German artillery, as they lounge around a campfire in the midst of a completely demolished building at Pont-a-Mousson, France, 10 November 1918. (Photo: National Archieves)

The 325th Field Signal Battalion and the 55th Telegraph Battalion pass in review before General Pershing at Wittlich, Germany, 24 April 1919. (Photo: National Archives)

On the afternoon of 27 September, a party including the regimental commander, Lieutenant Herbert, and some French liaison officers, advanced beyond the battalion post in search of a location for a new command post. Soon they found themselves directly in front of a German machine gun nest. The colonel asked for volunteers to put the enemy position out of action. Corporal Charles S. Boykin and several other members of the Signal detail stepped forward readily.

The small party divided itself and maneuvered towards the enemy position. The Germans spotted the advancing Americans and directed machine gun fire at them. Corporal Boykin went down from a bullet in the head, and died immediately. The men continued their assault on the position with several other Signalmen falling wounded as they advanced. The Signalmen eventually overpowered the machine gun nest and captured eight prisoners and two machine guns in the process.

Two days later while in charge of a third battalion Signal detail during a general advance, Sergeant Henry Moody, also of the 325th, was shot through the head while laying lines. A private took charge of the detail and completed the mission. Moody died later in the hospital. Boykin and Moody were the first two members of the battalion to be killed in action

Many acts of heroism were performed in the Argonne by the Signalmen and the regiment. Casualties were extremely high, most of them resulting from poisonous gas and bullet wounds. Some men were killed or wounded as they scurried messages back and forth across open fields that offered no cover or protection and that were swept by heavy German machine gun fire. At no time during their stay in the Argonne, were the communications or the Signalmen interrupted for more than half an hour.

THE MARBACHE SECTOR

As other elements of the AEF mopped up the MeuseArgonne offensive, the 92d Division moved to the vicinity of Pont-a-Mousson on the Moselle River. There on 10 October, they took over the Marbache sector of Lorraine from the 167th French Division in support of Sixth Corps, US Second Army. The 325th took over all existing lines of communications in the sector along the banks of the Moselle River.

The Marbache sector was an active front, but the Signalmen performed their Signal duties in an admirable fashion, showing little regard for their own lives and personal safety. "No-mans" land was owned by the Germans and they were aggressive and on the offensive. The Germans held Belie Farm, Bois de tete D'Or, Bois Frehaut, Voivrotte Woods, Voivrotte Farm, Bois Cheminot and Moulin Brook.

The black doughboys of the 92d employed aggressive patrols in the area and raided all of the places named above, and Epley. They pushed the Germans north beyond Frehaut and Vosuroth to Cheminot bridge, which forced the Germans to try to blow up the bridge over the Seille River during their retreat. In their haste and desperation, the Germans failed to check the advance of the black soldiers, but they did succeed in flooding a portion of the adjacent countryside when they blew the bridge.

During the whole of this action, the black Signalmen moved with and often in advance of the combat elements of the division. They installed new lines, rehabilitated old ones, and made countless connections between the various elements of the division, many times while under enemy fire. This was no small feat, when it is considered that an Army sector extended over a wide area of many square miles, included in it scores of cities and towns. Coupled to this was the fact that transportation was limited practically to footpower and cars, because horses and motorized vehicles were scarce. The results of the offensive west of the Seille River was excellent. The Signalmen and other members of the division killed and wounded many Germans, and took many prisoners.

WIRE AND GERMAN FIRE ON MOUSSON HILL

The American Sixth Corps and other allies had important, observation posts on Mousson Hill. Dozens of lines ran between the scattered allied elements in the area and the important posts on the hill. All of the lines, except those belonging to the French, went by more or less independent routes from their originating points to a common switchboard on the hill. The hill was shelled frequently and the lines were broken often. German artillery did not discriminate between Signalmen and Infantrymen; its rounds fell with merciless abandon upon anyone who happened to be at the end of their trajectories.

On 24 October, the Chief Signal Officer of the 6th Corps and the Chief Signal Officer of the 92d Division, visited the observation posts on the hill. After a thorough investigation and evaluation, they decided to reroute all the lines up the hill along one main axis. They also decided to establish an advance information center on the hill under the supervision and control of Sixth Corps.

The next day, the black Signalmen started work on the project under the supervision of a Signal Corps officer. They saved a lot of time by using a long-buried French cable, which the Germans had failed to detect or destroy. The Signalmen found several good pairs in the cable, nine pair followed the main axis, part through the cable and part on a stake line. When the men completed the job, they ripped up and salvaged the old lines leading to the hill. The new arrangement simplified maintenance, reduced the probability of interception by wire tapping, and gave more satisfactory service than the old arrangement.

PREPARATION FOR THE GREAT DRIVE ON METZ

As the black Signalmen went about their daily Signaling chores in the Pont-a-Mousson area, preparation was being made for the great drive on Metz. At 3 A.M. on the morning of 10 November, the division Signal officer of the 92d Division was informed that the Second Army's offensive launching the great drive would begin four hours later, and that as a part of the Sixth Corps offensive, the 92d Division would attack between the Moselle and Seille Rivers. The great drive on Metz would mark the first time ever that the whole 92d Division intact would enter combat as a complete division. Before the men was an open valley commanded by the heavy guns of Metz and by a seemingly endless number of German machine gun nests, as well; a gauntlet of death designed for only the bravest of the brave, that demanded courage and valor, and that would give up in return only dead men or heroes.

Liaison arrangements were made and coordinated with lateral and supporting American and French units. Additional pigeons were sent to the regimental

command posts, and ten miles of heavy, twisted pair wire were sent to Pont-a-Mousson.

The Signalmen used the "axis-of-Signal-communications" system of extending the division's telephone communications for the offensive and extended the axis-of-communications of the division four kilometers north to the regimental command post near Bellaire Ferme. Though a heavy bombardment of deadly gas and high explosives was thrown into their midst by the Germans, the black Signalmen continued their work undaunted. At zero hour they had completed the system.

THE GREAT DRIVE

At zero hour (7 A.M.), the Second Army launched its attack on the famous Hindenburg line before Metz. The 92d Division attacked and held the line of Vandieres — St. Michel —Xon — Norray. The black Infantry and machine gun units were up at the front in the thick of battle. The all-black 167th Artillery Brigade laid down a barrage for the advancing Infantry that was a thing of beauty, in that it did not fatally entrap its own men as artillery sometimes did. Supplying communications through all this were the black Signalmen of the 325th.

The black Signalmen responded like true veteran communicators, and kept the fighting elements of the division in contact with each other. The 92d Division headquarters was moved to Ville-au-Val, as was the command post of the 183d Infantry Brigade of the division with its 365th and 366th Infantry Regiments, and 350th Machine Gun Battalion. By the time the division commander and his staff arrived at the new headquarters, the black Signalmen had already installed the necessary telephones and had them ready for use. Some confusion resulted because unauthorized persons interferred with three lines, but telephone communications were generally satisfactory throughout the attack.

THE CALL OF DUTY

That same evening, two regimental command posts were advanced to what had been the front line position. The Signalmen advanced with the companies and communicated with pyrotechnic projectors and prearranged signals. At the battalion headquarters, earth telegraph sets, buzzerphones, and pyrotechnic projectors were used, and a man stood by ever ready with his pigeons. One black pigeoneer remained so close to his commanding officer that the latter ordered him to a dugout to protect him and the pigeon.

On the first day of the battle of Metz, the first platoon of one of the companies of the Signal battalion (which company is unknown to this writer at this time), found itself at Pont-a-Mousson. Second Lieutenant R. H. Walker was in charge of the battalion switchboard at Pont-a-Mousson. Sergeant Rufus B. Atwood was seated in the dugout near the switchboard; Private Edgar White was operating the switchboard, and Private Clark the buzzerphones. Several other officers and men were standing in the dugout.

The Germans blistered the area around the dugout with a light artillery barrage, then lifted it. Next, they shelled Pont-a-Mousson with their big guns. The first shells hit on the edge of the city, but the Germans walked the rounds in and peppered the Signal battalion station.

Suddenly, a shell struck the top of the switchboard dugout, passed through the ceiling and wall and exploded, making havoc of the dugout. The switchboard was wrecked and the cable cut in many places. Lieutenant Walker rushed to the cellar and took command of matters with cool professionalism. He sized up the situation, organized the men, and took immediate action to attempt the reestablishment of switchboard communications.

Sergeant Atwood tried both the switchboard and buzzerphones, but neither would work. Lieutenant Walker ordered Private White to stay on the switchboard and Corporal Adolphus Johnson to stay on the buzzerphone. White nailed up the twelve-cord monocord board and brought in the severed lines from outside, one by one, and reconnected them to the switchboard.

By this time, the German shelling was fierce and deadly. Shells exploded all around the Signalmen and shrapnel filled the air like so many angry bees. One shell hit a nearby ammunition dump and caused the explosion of thousands of rounds of ammunition, and if things were not already bad enough, the terrific shock that resulted from the gigantic explosion knocked out the lights in the switchboard dugout.

In spite of the shelling, and now darkness as well, the men continued their work and in twenty minutes communications were restored. The dangerous post was a beckoning target for the enemy's big guns, but the Signalmen refused to leave their post. The military police arrived and ordered the men to abandon the station. Reluctantly, they did so, but the pigeon man defied the military police and went back and got his Signal equipment — his precious pigeons.

THE ARMISTICE INTERVENES

By the end of the first day, the 92d Division had advanced four kilometers from the line at Vandieres — St. Michel — Xon — Norray. This may not seem like much of an advance, but it was a considerable amount of real estate to cover considering the formidability of the obstacles encountered and the intensity and pulse of the battle. The City of Metz, considered by many military experts to be one of the strongest fortified cities in the world, was nearly in the grasp of the balck soldiers and the AEF, but the armistice intervened, and the magnificant assault ground to a halt. The armistice was signed at 5 A.M. on 11 November, and in less than one minute later the Signal Corps had gotten the word out to the armies that the fighting would stop at 11 A.M. At that precise time on the day of the armistice, the 325th Field Signal Battalion was still functioning successfully.

RETROSPECTIVE

It was a glorious day for the division. Casualties were heavy because the sector was strongly fortified and because the enemy had put up a strong resistance. Entire units of the division were decorated by the French with the Croix de Guerre for valor shown in the drive against Metz.

The 325th Field Signal Battalion was a success. Its duties had taken it into situations fully as dangerous as those encountered by the combat elements it supported. The men of the battalion, through their actions and deeds alone, had done much to dispell many of the doubts about their ability to function as soldiers and communicators. Through it all, they were inspired by that one ideal of the Signal Corps — get the communications through at any cost, but get it through!

Major Spencer, who was responsible for the formation of the battalion, the only black Signal unit in the American Army, was firm in his belief that blacks could do well as soldiers and communicators. He remained with the unit long enough to see his belief become a reality.

With a sense of pride and a feeling of accomplishment, in mid-1919 the men of the 325th boarded a troop transport for their trip home. With a barking of orders and an exchange of salutes they were on their way. As the shores of France and memories of the exploits performed on those shores grew smaller in the transport's wake, remembrances of home and the anticipation of reuniting with loved ones there grew larger proportionately in the minds of the men.

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Black troopers struggle to move a telegraph trailor, Souilly, France, 30 October 1918. (Photo: National Archives)