

## **WWI ERA FROM A NEW MEXICAN PERSPECTIVE**

As the twentieth century dawned, most of the state's traditional martial rivalries subsided. Conflicts of the past were replaced by new global wars that tested the resolve of all New Mexicans.

### ***PANCHO VILLA***

However, in the darkness of the early morning 9 March 1916 Francisco "Pancho" Villa raided Columbus, N.M. with approximately 485 men known as Villistas. The border town was garrisoned by one squadron of the Thirteenth U.S. Cavalry. Another 30 men from Company I, First N.M. Infantry, Deming, N.M. hearing of the raid and seeing the smoke, arrived at and took over some of the duties of the 13th, releasing more members of the regiment to chase the Villistas. Eighteen American soldiers and civilians were either killed or wounded. The Mexican irregulars' losses numbered approximately 100 with seven wounded and captured.

After the immediate threat of a return engagement subsided, the men of Company I returned to Deming where they and all of the other units of the N.M. militia were placed on active state service in their respective armories.

### ***PUNITIVE EXPEDITION***

From 16 March 1916 to 14 February 1917, an expeditionary force of more than 11,000 regular Army troops under the command of Brig. Gen. John J. "Black Jack" Pershing operated in northern Mexico in pursuit of Villa. Although this Mexican Punitive Expedition is considered a minor event in U.S. history, it is a story filled with adventure and intrigue. The origins of the expedition are rooted in the 1910 Mexican Revolution, when a rebel faction led by Francisco I. Madero, Jr., overthrew Mexico's dictator of more than 30 years, President Porfirio Diaz.

Madero's victory was short-lived. On 19 February 1913, Gen. Victorio Huerta arrested Madero and forced him to step down. On 22 February, Madero was presumed assassinated on orders from Huerta. A civil war erupted a few days later between Huerta's forces and supporters of Madero, who were led by Governor Venustiano Carranza and Pancho Villa. With a contingent of several

thousand men, Villa formed a military band known as the Division of the North and operated in the mountains of northern Mexico.



Francisco "Pancho" Villa

Source: <http://www.mexicomaxico.org/Caballero/pancho.htm>

President, Woodrow Wilson's administration refused to recognize Huerta because of the manner in which he had seized power, and it instituted an arms embargo on both sides of the civil war. But, when Huerta's forces appeared to be winning the civil war in early 1914, Wilson lifted the arms embargo by offering to help Carranza. This action had volatile consequences.

On 15 July 1914, Huerta resigned and moved to Spain. The United States and six Latin American nations then officially recognized the Carranza government on 19 October 1915. But, this insulted Pancho Villa and his followers, who had earlier parted ways with Carranza. Feeling betrayed the Villistas set forth on a course of retaliation directed mainly at Americans. In one instance, Villa's irregulars assassinated seventeen U.S. citizens aboard a train

traveling from Chihuahua City to the Cusi Mine at Santa Isabel, Chihuahua. Although this act infuriated the American public, it was the Villistas' next attack, the raid on Columbus, N.M., that caused the U.S. government to seek retribution.

Why Villa chose Columbus as a target for his most daring raid is unclear. The small town had only one hotel, a few stores, some adobe houses, and a population of 350 Americans and Mexicans. Most likely, Villa was enticed to attack Columbus because it was the home of Camp Furlong and the Thirteenth U.S. Cavalry. The Thirteenth had been garrisoned at Columbus since September 1912. At the time of the attack, the regiment comprised 500 officers and men, but only about 350 men were at the camp. Since Villa had numerous sympathizers living in Columbus and the vicinity, he had no trouble obtaining information on Camp Furlong's troop strength or other bits of intelligence. A local citizen also warned the Camp that Villa was nearby. As a precaution patrols and outposts of the camp were strengthened. The raid, consequently, did not profit Villa and his men. Besides killing a small number of soldiers and civilians, his men came away with a few horses and a meager amount of loot from the stores and homes of the town.

Both public outcry and pressure from the Army moved President Wilson to order the military to pursue Villa and punish him. General Funston, commanding the Southern Department, telegraphed the War Department the day after the raid, "I urgently recommend that American troops be given authority to pursue into Mexican Territory hostile Mexican bandits who raid American territory. So long as the border is a shelter for them they will continue to harass our ranches and towns to our chagrin." Wilson responded by directing Secretary of War Newton Baker to organize a punitive expedition.

The U.S. Army quickly made preparations to conduct the expedition. Troops and supplies poured into the newly established base command in Columbus, which was still recovering from the raid. was chosen to lead the expedition.



Brig. Gen. John J. Pershing

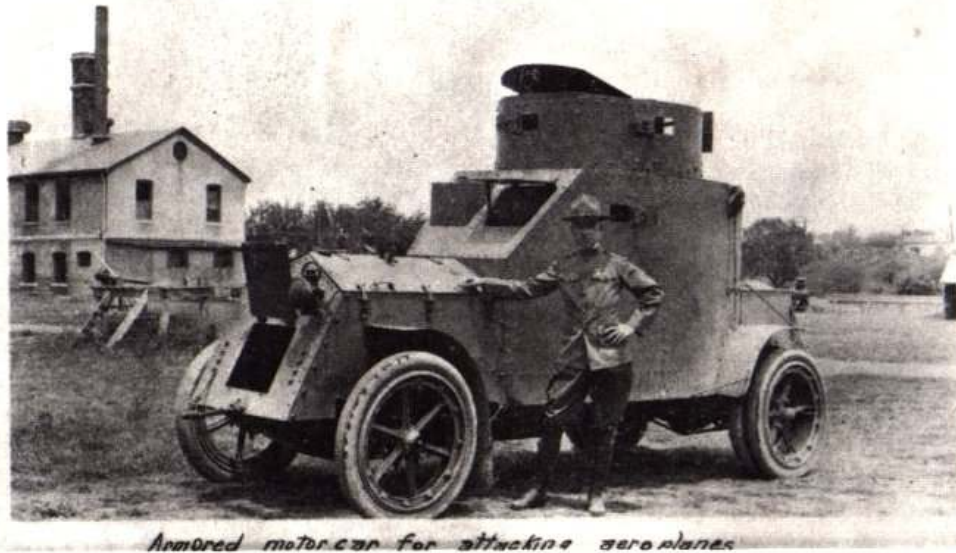
Source: <http://www.congressionalgoldmedal.com/JohnJPershing.htm>

By 8 April, General Pershing was more than 400 miles into Mexico with 6,675 soldiers. The expedition set up its headquarters in the town of Colonia Dublan, Chihuahua and its supply base on a tract of land near the Casas Grandes River. Having no idea how long the expedition would take or how much further he would have to penetrate to locate Villa, Pershing wanted to ensure that his Army was well supplied.

Logistically, the Punitive Expedition started as a nightmare. Nothing of this magnitude had been attempted by the U.S. Army since the Civil War. Denied the full use of the Mexican railway system, Pershing turned to his motor transport companies. However, the Army did not have enough trucks to transport the supplies stored at Columbus. And the roads depicted on available maps turned out to be nothing but trails that were impassable during wet weather. As a result, engineers had to rebuild many of the roads. The expedition also had to rely on mules and wagons to a large extent to keep supplies moving.

The Americans decided to test out some of their new military equipment out in the expedition against Villa, but they only succeeded in kicking up even

more dust for the Villistas to hide behind.



Source: <http://www.mexicomaxico.org/Caballero/pancho.htm>

Besides all of his trucks, motorcars, motorcycles, and armored cars, Pershing also mustered dirigible balloons and airplanes in his relentless quest to find Villa.

The airplanes sent for use by the First Aero Squadron proved to be inadequate because they did not have enough power to overcome the erratic winds or to climb high enough to cross the mountains of northern Chihuahua. Pershing complained in a report that "the aeroplanes have been of no material benefit so far, either in scouting or as a means of communication. They have not at all met my expectations. The further south Villa goes into the mountains the more difficult will be their tasks, and I have no doubt we shall soon be compelled to abandon them for either scouting the enemy or keeping in touch with the advance columns."



Source: <http://www.mexicomaxico.org/Caballero/pancho.htm>

Gradually the airplanes were replaced but working airplanes were not enough to locate Villa. Although a majority of the Mexican citizens encountered by Pershing's forces wanted Villa captured as much as the Americans did, their hatred for the United States was even stronger and they gave the U.S. forces few leads. After almost two weeks of pursuing aimless leads and fighting a few minor skirmishes, a squadron of the Seventh U.S. Cavalry fought 500 Villistas at San Gerónimo. There were no American losses, but several of the bandits were wounded. It was thought that Villa was among those wounded but this later proved false.

On 13 April, 1916, a detachment of troops from Carranza's Army attacked the American troops at Parral. Upon receiving reinforcements, they drove back the Mexicans. One American soldier was killed, and one was wounded. The Mexicans suffered 14 casualties. Pershing kept his men at Dublan and sent out scouting parties and detachments to locate Villa without success.

The National Defense Act of 3 June 1916 established the National Guard and units from Texas, Territory of New Mexico, and N.M. were called into service effective 8 May 1916. Units from the remainder of the states and the District of Columbia followed. By mid-June 130,000 regular Army and National Guard troops patrolled the vast border between Mexico and the United States to discourage further raids.

The National Guard troops were not intended to cross the border. Nonetheless, activities on the border were far from dull. The troops had to be on constant alert as border raids were still an occasional nuisance. Three raids were particularly bloody. On 8 May 1916, Mexican bandits attacked an outpost at Glenn Springs, Texas, killing one civilian and wounding three American soldiers. On June 15 bandits killed four American soldiers at San Ygnacio, Texas, and on 31 July one American soldier and a U.S. customs inspector were killed. In all three cases Mexican raiders were killed and wounded, but the exact numbers are unknown.

### ***FIRST N.M. FIELD ARTILLERY***

Battery A, First N.M. Field Artillery from Roswell arrived at Columbus on 12 May. This was the first National Guard Field Artillery unit on the border. The First N.M. Infantry followed, arriving in strength on 16 May.

Later, Battery A was ordered to Ft. Bliss in June where it received valuable training that enabled it to become one of the best known American Expeditionary Force units of World War I.

### ***FIRST N.M. INFANTRY***

The First N.M. Infantry spent eleven months on the border as the only National Guard organization attached to the Punitive Expedition. Parts of the unit were stationed at Columbus, Hachita, Los Animas and Elephant Butte, N.M.

At the town of Carrizal, Chihuahua troops from the Mexican National Army attacked two Troops of the Tenth Cavalry on a scouting mission on 21 June.

Tensions between the United States and Mexico were at a breaking point. Not since the Mexican-American War of 1846 - 1848 had the two countries come so close to war. Neither country was prepared for nor desired war. To avoid further incidents like Carrizal, Pershing ceased long-range patrols.

It was becoming increasingly obvious that Carranza's de facto government openly disliked the American presence in Mexico. Army chief of staff Maj. Gen. Hugh Scott and Funston met with Carranza's military chief, Alvaro Obregon, at El Paso and agreed to gradually withdraw Pershing's forces if Carranza would control Villa. By this point it was not really necessary for Pershing to send troops any further into Mexico. Villa's forces were badly depleted by casualties and desertion, and those who remained were largely scattered. Although the Villistas were still on the loose, they were not much of a menace.

The Punitive Expedition officially ended on the afternoon of 5 February 1917. Shortly after the withdrawal, various units of the National Guard were returned to their homes. But, small forces were maintained in Texas, Territory of New Mexico, and N.M. to "prevent further trouble from scattered bands of outlaws."

Despite its failure to capture Pancho Villa, the Mexican Punitive Expedition was deemed a success. Secretary of War Baker praised the efforts of Pershing and his men saying "its objective, of course was the capture of Villa, if that could be accomplished, but its real purpose was a display of the power of the United States into a country disturbed beyond control of the constituted authorities of the Republic of Mexico as a means of controlling lawless aggregations of bandits and preventing attacks by them across the international frontier. This purpose is fully and finally accomplished."

Subsequently, Villa was assassinated on 20 July 1923.

Most importantly, the Mexican Punitive Expedition provided military training experience for the tens of thousands of regular soldiers and National



Guardsmen who took to the field with the expedition. Pershing's experience during the Punitive Expedition and the death of Funston on 19 February 1917 made him the obvious choice as commander of the American Expeditionary Forces during World War I. Many of the same men who served with Pershing in Mexico, such as George S. Patton Jr., who would later achieve glory as an Army commander during World War II, accompanied him to France. Entry into the World War was merely a matter of time.

### ***NEUTRALITY TESTED***

Following the Punitive Expedition the threat from German and Mexican saboteurs and subversives presented a genuine danger. Border patrolling continued in order to keep arms from filtering into Mexico.

On 18 January 1918 in the Central Hotel in Nogales, Sonora, Mexico, Lothar Witzke, also known as Pablo Waberski, was taken into custody as a suspected German spy and saboteur. He had with him an encoded letter from the German consul in Mexico City charging him with undercover operations in the United States. It was this message, decrypted in Washington by Military Intelligence that led to his conviction for spying. The damning message read: "The bearer of this is a subject of the Empire who travels as a Russian under the name of Pablo Waberski. He is a German secret agent. Please furnish him on request protection and assistance; also advance him on demand up to 1,000 pesos of Mexican gold and send his code telegrams to this embassy as official consular dispatches." His death sentence, the only one to be handed down during World War I, was later commuted to life. Witzke was released in 1923.

A German-instigated clash between American and Mexican troops in the border town of Nogales in 1918 resulted in the death of five U.S. soldiers. Finally, American neutrality at the outset of World War I was shattered when a coded message from German Foreign Secretary Arthur Zimmerman to the Mexican government was intercepted by the Americans and deciphered by

British Intelligence. The Zimmerman telegram, which follows, proposed an alliance between Germany and Mexico in the event of war with the United States.

MAILED  
October 1-8-18  
W. L. Zimmerman, State Dept.

TELEGRAM RECEIVED.

By *Miss A. Eckhoff*  
Date *Oct. 27, 1918*

FROM 2nd from London # 5747.

"We intend to begin on the first of February unrestricted submarine warfare. We shall endeavor in spite of this to keep the United States of America neutral. In the event of this not succeeding, we make Mexico a proposal of alliance on the following basis: make war together, make peace together, generous financial support and an understanding on our part that Mexico is to reconquer the lost territory in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. The settlement in detail is left to you. You will inform the President of the above most secretly as soon as the outbreak of war with the United States of America is certain and add the suggestion that he should, on his own initiative, ~~write~~ <sup>invite</sup> Japan to immediate adherence and at the same time mediate between Japan and ourselves. Please call the President's attention to the fact that the ruthless employment of our submarines now offers the prospect of compelling England in a few months to make peace." Signed, ZIMMERMAN.

## ***WORLD WAR I***

Then, like a thunderclap that everyone had foreseen, but whose force none could guess, came war. A submarine attack on the British liner Lusitania cost 128 American lives and swayed public opinion in the U.S. toward joining the Allies in defeating Germany. More American ships were lost to German U-boats. On 6 April 1917, Congress declared war on Germany.

### ***FIRST NEW MEXICO INFANTRY***

World War I marked the first significant test of New Mexicans after statehood.

Out of federal service for only 20 days the First Infantry Regiment, New Mexico National Guard (NMNG), was mobilized again for World War I on 24 April 1917. In October 1917 the regiment was ordered to Camp Kearny, California where it joined the balance of the 40th Division composed of National Guard troops from California, Arizona, Colorado and Utah. Elements of the regiment where then reorganized into the 143d Machine Gun Battalion formed from its First and Second Battalions and the 144th Machine Gun Battalion comprised of its Third Battalion and the Machine Gun Company plus the 115th Train Headquarters and Military Police Battalion that was composed of the Regimental Headquarters, Headquarters and Supply Companies.

However, once the 40th Division reached its final destination at La Guerche, France the entire division was transformed into a depot division responsible primarily for training men as replacements for active divisions, which it performed with discipline and efficiency. Detachments of the division also guarded prisoners of war and provided ambulance, then known as sanitation, services.

### ***FIRST N.M. ARTILLERY***

"A" Battery of the First Artillery, NMNG was assigned to 146th Field Artillery Regiment, 66th Artillery Brigade, 41st Infantry Division. Sent to the front in July 1918 to help stop a German drive that had crossed the Marne River within 50 miles of Paris, France, the battery remained on the firing line at Chateau-Thierry, St. Mihiel, and in the Argonne with their French made mobile 155-mm guns until the Armistice, 11 November 1918.



M1917 155 mm Howitzer

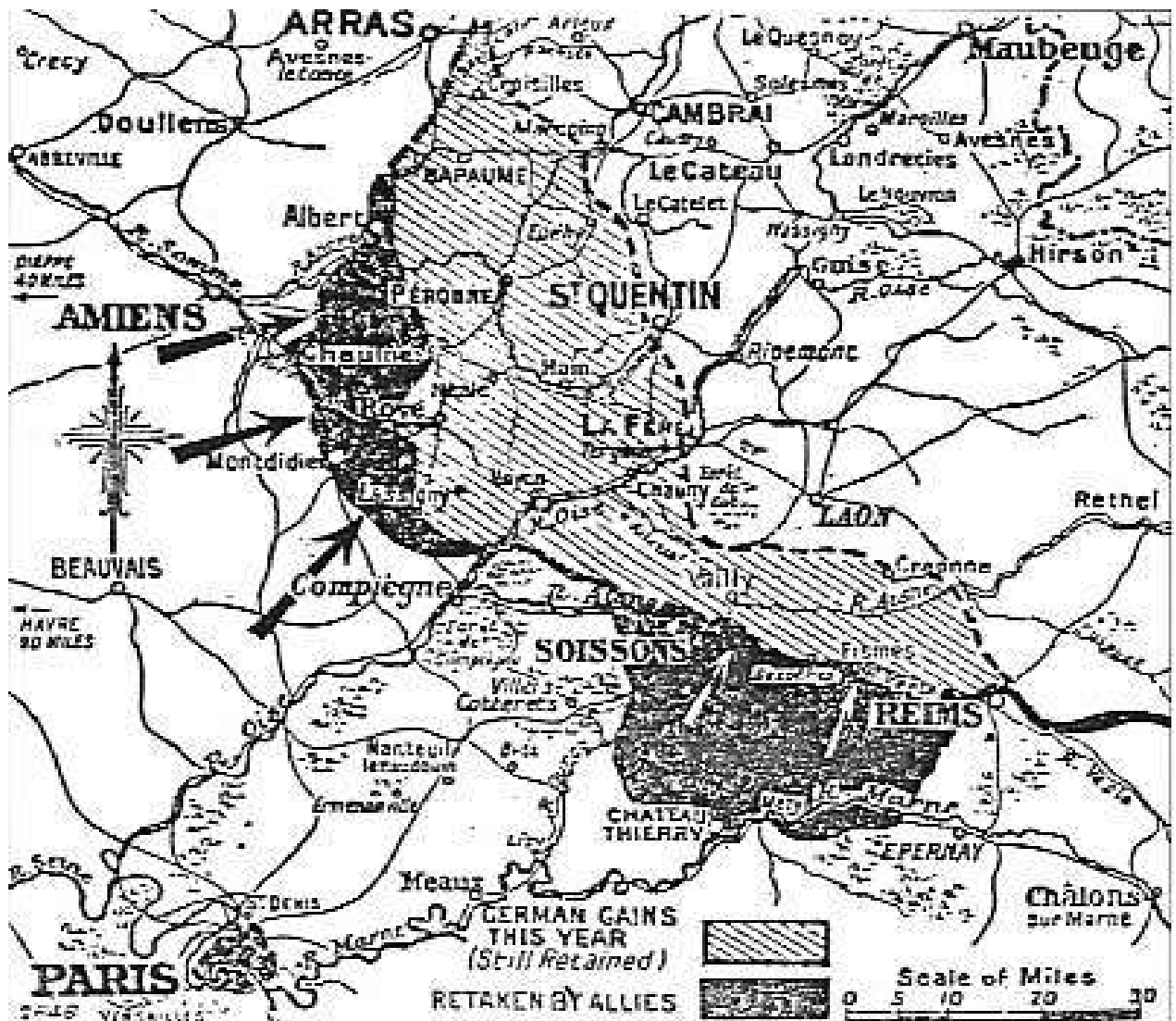
Source: <http://www.historycentral.com/ww1/TheBattleofMarne.html>

On 15 July 1918 despite the limited successes of his four previous offensives, the German commander, Gen. Erich Ludendorff, launched still another all-out assault on the Western Front. The battle of Marne was a massive attempt by the Germans to breakthrough on the West before American forces could arrive in large numbers. The Germans captured 1,200 square mile of territory, 90,000 prisoners and vast stores of weapons in the course of their offensive. But the German offense eventually became bogged down by early August. By then, tens of thousands of fresh American troops were arriving almost daily to reinforce an exhausted Allied army.

This attack, from both sides of Reims, was scheduled to reach the Marne River, east of Paris. On the German left flank the 1st Army and 3rd Army made

only small gains before being stopped at 11:00 AM by the French 1st. West of Reims, however, the German 7th Army smashed forward to the Marne between Chateau-Thierry and Epernay. A bridgehead nine miles long and four miles deep was seized south of the river before the advance was halted on July 17 by the French 9th Army, which had moved up to the east of the shaken French 6th Army. In the defense of this sector the American 3rd Division played a strong role. In all, 52 German divisions were held in check by 36 Allied divisions, 23 French, 9 American, 2 British, and 2 Italian. This so-called Champagne-Marne offensive was the last major German drive on the Western Front. Ludendorff's five separate attacks had cost him more than 800,000 casualties and so weakened his armies that the initiative now passed to the Allies.

On the day after the German offensive stalled, 18 July, the Allied commander in chief, Gen. Ferdinand Foch, launched a massive counterattack against the Marne salient. On the east and south the French 5th Army and 9th armies made secondary assaults. On the west the main attack came from the 6th and 10th armies. Supplementing the four French armies were 14 Allied divisions, 8 American, 4 British and 2 Italian. The 10th Army jumped off early in the morning, followed by the other armies in a counterclockwise direction. Aided by 350 tanks, the two western armies advanced from 2 to 5 miles on the first day. When their continued thrust into the salient threatened to cut the vital Soissons-Chateau-Thierry road, Ludendorff began to withdraw from the Marne. Soissons was liberated on 2 August. By 3 August the Germans had fallen back to a line along the Vesle and Aisne rivers at the base of the former salient. An American attack on 6 August found the enemy solidly entrenched. This closed the battle, which had begun with a German offensive and ended with an Allied victory.



**Second Battle of the Marne 8 August 1918**

Source: <http://www.worldwar1.com/maproom.htm>

On 12 September 1918 the newly arrived and activated American 1st Army of Gen. John Pershing formally took over the Saint Mihiel sector on 30 August. This was a salient jutting to the Meuse River southeast of Verdun that the Germans had carved out in 1914. After the two successful Allied offenses on the Marne River and east of Amiens during the summer, the Germans began withdrawing from the salient on 11 September. They were too late. Early the following morning 16 American divisions attacked, aided by French artillery and tanks and an air force of mixed units commanded by the U.S. Colonel William

"Billy" Mitchel. Two American corps, the I and IV, struck the south face of the salient, while the French II Colonial Corps hit the nose and the American V corps moved in from the west. Within 36 hours the surprised Germans were driven from the salient with the loss of 15,000 prisoners and more than 250 guns. Pershing suffered 7,000 casualties.

The American attack could have carried deeper into the German lines, but the offensive had been deliberately limited by the Allied commander in chief, Marshal Ferdinand Foch. Pershing's troops were now moved westward to the Argonne Forest to begin a major offensive.

With the elimination of the Saint Mihiel salient, the Allied commander in chief, Marshal Ferdinand Foch, stood ready to launch two all-out attacks against the Germans on the Western Front. The offensive was planned as a huge pincers: British and French armies attacking from the west, the American Expeditionary Force from the south. On 26 September Gen. John Pershing's 1st Army jumped off, three corps abreast, III, V, and I, from the Meuse River westward to the far side of the Argonne Forest. A few minutes earlier the French 4th Army had begun its advance on the left. Holding a defensive zone almost 12 miles deep were the German armies of Gen. Max von Gallwitz on the east, those of Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm on the west.

In hilly, tangled terrain, German resistance held the French army to a gain of nine miles during the first five days of the assault. The Americans pushed five miles along the heights of the Meuse but only two miles in the more difficult Argonne. After a pause of three days, the Americans resumed the attack on 4 October. For the next four weeks a series of grueling frontal attacks gradually pushed back the German defenders. This was the fighting that produced the famed Lost Battalion under Charles Whittlesey of the 77th Division. It is also here that Sgt. Alvin York single handily killed 25 German soldiers and captured another 132 prisoners. On 12 October Pershing divided his command. Gen. Hunter Liggett took over the 1st Army, while Gen. Robert Bullard assumed

charge of the new 2nd Army, which was making a secondary attack east of the Meuse. Finally, on 31 October, the Argonne Forest was cleared, marking a ten-mile American advance. At the same time the French 4th Army had reached the Aisne River, 20 miles from its starting point.

On 1 November the Americans and French resumed their offensive. By the time of the armistice, on November 11, the Allied units had moved forward another 21 miles to reach Sedan on the east and to within 6 miles of Montmedy, on the west. The battle cost the Germans 100,000 casualties, while the Americans suffered 117,000 casualties.

New Mexico's Battery A, 146th Field Artillery was cited by a letter from General Pershing for destroying the bridge at Chateau-Thierry, which served as the German's main line of communication. Its destruction materially contributed to the failure of the last great German offensive of the war. At the conclusion of hostilities, the four guns of the battery had fired in excess of 14,000 rounds each. That was more rounds fired in combat than all the other American heavy mobile field artillery combined. Ultimately, the men of the battery earned six battle stars for their Victory Medals and their commander, Lt. Colonel Charles M. Debremond, received the Distinguished Service Medal posthumously after succumbing in 1919 to the effects of poison gas inhaled during the battle of the Marne in July 1918.

During the peace that followed New Mexico's National Guard was reorganized in 1921 into the 111th Cavalry Regiment, the 120th Engineers, and Battery A, 158th Field Artillery.