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Laurels for 325th Field Signal Battalion

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LAURELS FOR 325th FIELD SIGNAL BATTALION.

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Only Colored Signal Unit in American Army Shows Rare Courage and Skill Under Fire—Maintaining Connection by Telegraph and Telephone as Dangerous as work of Combatant Regiments.—Croix de Guerre for 8th Illinois.

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By Ralph W. Tyler.

Accredited Representative of the Committee on Public Information.

ARTICLE X.

With the American Army in France.
In Yans, Dec. 20—One of the units of the American army to arrive here enroute for embarkation to America that has made good, without having the glamour and spectacular settings of combat is the 325th Field Signal Battalion of the 92nd Army Division, the only Colored signal unit in the American Army. While this battalion has not had to occupy front line trenches; make raids for prisoners, or march, in battle formation, into big engagements, it must not be supposed that it did not have a dangerous, and a very dangerous, duty to perform. The boys of this battalion had to string the wires for telegraphic and telephonic connections at times when the enemy guns were trained upon them; so, in many respects, their duty took them into situations fully as dangerous as combatant units. This battalion is composed of all young Colored men, save the Lieutenant-Colonel, Major, and two or three white line officers. They are all, with few exceptions, college or high school boys—not a few of them experts in radio and electric engineering, and those who were not experts in the work when the battalion was formed, are now most proficient men. Major Spencer, now Lieutenant-Colonel, who was responsible for the formation of this unit, was firm in the belief that Colored boys could make good, and he has remained with it long enough to experience his belief becoming a realization. After arriving at Brest June 19th, the battalion proceeded to Vitroy, and from that town began a four-day hike to Bourbommes-les Bains, a distance of more than 20 miles. From this point, it proceeded, after a few days, to Voisey, and at Voisey the boys got their first taste of what was to be, later, their daily duties. Here the radio company received its quota of the latest type of French instruments, a battery plant was established, and a full supply of telephones and wire was issued to companies B and C. Here too, the Infantry Signal Platoons of the battalion joined the outfit and shared in the training.

The first test of real courage given the men, and their first introduction into real fighting, in addition to stringing wires, and sending and receiving radio messages, came on the afternoon of September 27th, when a party of liaison men, including the Colonel and Lieut. Herbert, latter being Colored, advanced beyond the Battalion P.C. and at the suggestion of a French soldier, turned to the left. They soon found themselves beyond their lines, and directly in front of a German Machine gun nest. The Colonel divided his men into small groups and advanced on the enemy's position. This sortie resulted in the Signal boys capturing eight German prisoners and two machine guns, but the attack caused the loss of Corporal Charles E. Boykin, who did not return. Two days later, during general advance, Sergeant Henry E. Moody, of the Battalion, was mortally wounded while at his post. Boykin was killed outright, while Sergeant Moody died in the hospital from wounds received—these being the first two of the Signal Battalion to make the supreme sacrifice.

On the 10th of October the 92nd Division took over the Marbache sector, relieving the 167th, French Division, and here, also, the 325th Field Signal Battalion took over all existing lines of communications, and in the days following installed new lines, and maintained connections between the various units of the 92nd Division. This was no small duty, when it is remembered that an army "sector" extends over a wide area of many square miles, including in it from 50 to 100 cities and towns. The Marbache sector was and still is, ever since, and time and time again did these boys go ahead repairing lines, establishing new communications under shell fire, with no thought of personal danger—inspired only by that ideal of the Signal Corps man—get communication through at any cost, but get it through.