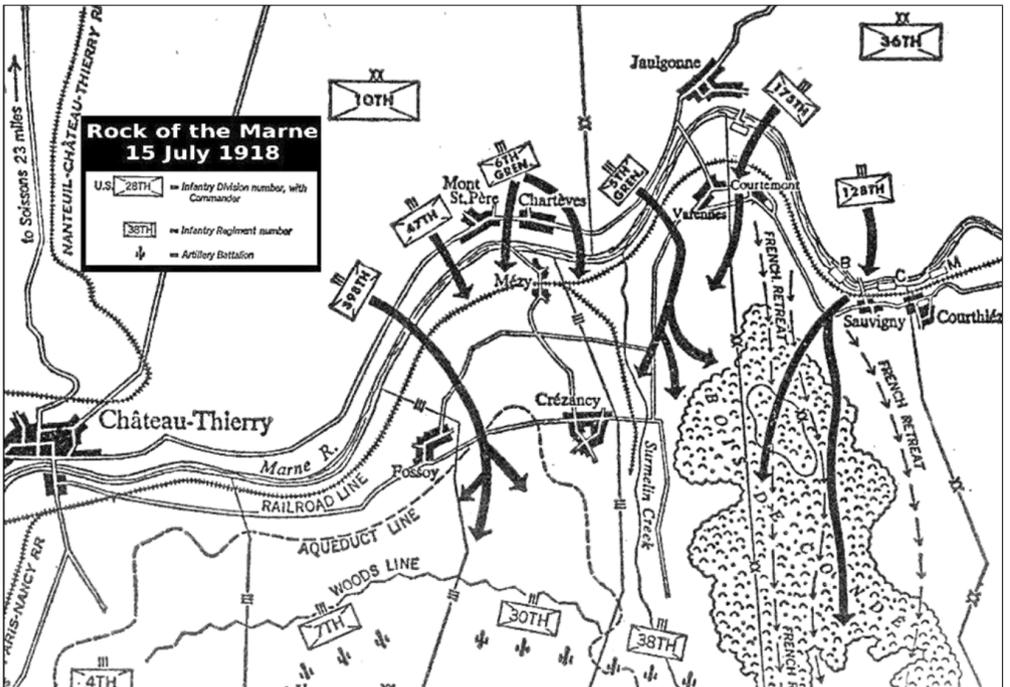


Men of the 3rd Division.

2nd Battle of the Marne (Source: Wikipedia: 2nd Battle of the Marne)



Rock of the Marne poster U.S. Army Center of U.S. History.



Rock of the Marne, from a lecture in the 1930s for the U.S. Army Infantry School at Leavenworth, Kan.

WWI Profile: James Isaac Jenrette 1894-1973

BY NORMA ECKARD

James Isaac Jenrette was born and raised in Brunswick County, NC. A partial family tree is located in Family Search. James had two brothers who also served – Wendell Vivian Jenrette, who served stateside in the Army, and Walter Regan Jenrette, who served in the Navy.

His WWI Draft Registration shows he was single, living in Ash, and working for his father on his farm.

James did not wait to be drafted, but enlisted in the Regular Army on Nov. 22, 1917, at Fort Thomas, Ky. He was assigned to Company G, 4th Infantry, 3rd Rock of the Marne/Blue and White Devils Division.

On April 6, 1918, Pvt. Jenrette boarded Great Northern [Source: Ancestry] at Newport News, Va., with the rest of his unit.

Pvt. Jenrette was present when his Division earned their nickname “Rock of the Marne” after famously holding back the Germans on the Marne River on July 14, 1918. Their commanding officer cried, “Nous Resterons La” (We Shall Remain Here), which became their motto. General Pershing called this stand one of the most brilliant pages in the annals of military history.

The 2nd Battle of the Marne (July 15 – Aug. 6, 1918) was the last major German offensive on the Western Front. The attack failed and marked the start of the relentless Allied advance, which culminated in the Armistice with Germany about 100 days later.

The Germans target was the salient, shown at left, in the shape of a triangle with Château-Thierry at the apex. The other sides, about 45 km each, were formed by the cities of Soissons and Reims.

Source of map, photo and descriptions below: The Journal of the World War One Historical Association: Rock of the Marne, from a lecture in the 1930s for the US Army Infantry School at Leavenworth, Kan.

The map shows the Marne River and the location of Pvt. Jenrette’s division, which was under French command. The 3rd Division is in the lower section of the map, which includes four infantry regiments: 4th, 7th, 30th and 38th. Pvt. Jenrette served in the 4th Infantry.

The Army’s defensive positions had not been completed before the enemy struck.

At midnight, July 14-15, the Germans began the artillery barrage. At 3:50 a.m. on July 15, the enemy began their advance.

With hard fighting occurring all around them, the sector occupied by the 3rd Division faced the severest fighting by the American troops.

The Marne River in this area is 30-40 yards wide and too deep to ford. There were no bridges, and forests concealed the enemy’s approach. The area being defended by the 3rd Division was a vantage point desired by the enemy due to its tactical and strategic point of view.

As the enemy began to cross the river, Pvt. Jenrette’s 3rd Division gave everything to prevent them from landing. Those Germans who succeeded in reaching the banks wiped out several platoons.

At 3:30 am the general fire ceased and their creeping barrage started behind, which at 40 yards only, mind you, they came with more machine guns than I thought the German Army owned.

The enemy had to battle their way through the first platoon on the riverbank, and then they took on the second platoon on the forward edge of the railway where we had a thousand times the best of it, but the [Germans] gradually wiped it out. My third platoon [took] their place in desperate hand-to-hand fighting, in which some got through only to be picked up by the fourth platoon which was deployed simultaneously with the third. By the time they struck the fourth platoon they were all in and easy prey.

It’s God’s truth that one Company of American soldiers beat and routed a full regiment of picked shock troops of the German Army. At 10 o’clock the Germans were carrying back wounded and dead [from] the riverbank and we in our exhaustion let them do it. They carried back all but six hundred, which we counted later and 52 machine guns.

We had started with 251 men and 5 lieutenants. I had left 51 men and 2 second lieutenants.”

Capt. Jesse Woolridge, Commander of Company G, 38th Infantry, 3rd Division.

A German officer’s impressions:

“I have never seen so many dead. I have never seen such a frightful spectacle of war. On the other bank the Americans, in close combat, had destroyed two of our companies. Lying down in the wheat, they had allowed our troops to approach and then annihilated them at a range of 30 to 50 yards. “The Americans kill everyone,” was the cry of fear on July 15, a cry that caused our men to tremble for a long time.”

Lieutenant Kurt Hesse, Adjutant, German 5th Grenadiers
By the end of July 15, the 3rd Division had not only stopped the two attacking enemy divisions, they had blocked the important Surmelin Valley and thereby halted the entire German advance. The last German offensive of the war had ended.

“A single regiment of the Third Division wrote one of the most brilliant pages in the annals of military history in preventing the crossing at certain points of its front, while on either flank the Germans, who had gained a footing, pressed forward. Our men were fighting in three directions, met the German attacks with counterattacks at critical points, and succeeded in throwing two German divisions into complete confusion, capturing 600 prisoners.”

General Pershing

Near Mézy, France, July 1918. Here the German Army made its last great attack of World War I. It struck in the Marne River area along the road to Paris, and the weight of the blow fell on the 38th U.S. Infantry Regiment under the command of MG Ulysses G. McAlexander of the 3rd Division. This was their first fight. Firing in three directions, blasted by artillery fire, taking all flesh and blood could stand, the regiments held on doggedly and threw the enemy back across the Marne. This defense checked the German’s assault and made an Allied offensive possible. General Pershing called it “one of the most brilliant pages of our military annals.”

Pvt. Jenrette’s NC WWI Service Card shows he was slightly injured on July 26, 1918. No details are available and it is not known when he returned to service.

The 3rd Division was not relieved until July 31, totaling a bruising 70 days in continuous front line service.

During the operations in the Marne area, the 3rd Division suffered the following casualties:

- 1,096 KIA
- 4,833 Wounded
- 1,777 Gassed
- 231 Missing
- 34 POW

In all, the 3rd Division was credited with the following operations:

- Somme defensive
- Lys defensive
- Aisne defensive
- Montdidier-Noyon defensive
- Champagne-Marne defensive
- Aisne-Marne Offensive
- Somme Offensive
- Oise-Aisne Offensive
- Ypre-Lys Offensive
- St. Mihiel Offensive
- Meuse-Argonne Offensive

Total number of battle casualties 16,456.

On Nov. 14, 1918, after the Armistice, Pvt. Jenrette transferred to Prisoner of War Escort until December 1918. According to his NC WWI Service Card, he returned on Dec. 31, 1918. The passenger list [Source: Ancestry] shows he boarded Ryndam for the return home on Dec. 18, 1918, with other sick soldiers. The excerpt below shows him classified as B-1 or “Available for limited military service.” Although unconfirmed, the likely reason is a temporary illness such as influenza. He was honorably discharged with no disability on Jan. 10, 1919.

Pvt. Jenrette’s NC WWI Service Card shows he was slightly injured on July 26, 1918. No details are available and it is not known when he returned to service.

He returned to farming at his family’s farm in Ash. Soon after, he married and raised a family, continuing to farm in

Brunswick County. Years later, his son, James Herman Jenrette, served in the U.S. Army after graduation from Mars College (now Mars University) in Asheville, NC.

James Isaac Jenrette passed away on Nov. 13, 1973, in Elizabethtown, Bladen County, NC. He was laid to rest in McKean Cemetery in Ash, NC, with other members of his family. Military honors are not displayed.

Sources:

Hemenway, Frederic Vinton (1919) History of the Third division, United States army, in the world war: for the period December 1, 1917, to January 1, 1919. Andernach-On-The-Rhine: M. Dumont Schauberg

The Journal of the World War One Historical Association: Rock of the Marne, from a lecture in the 1930s for the US Army Infantry School at Leavenworth, KS

If you would like to help us honor James Isaac Jenrette or another Brunswick County WWI veteran, email the Friends of Ft. Caswell Rifle Range at ftcaswellriflerange@gmail.com or go to caswellriflerange.com.

A future fundraiser, Oktoberfest, is tentatively scheduled for Saturday, Oct. 12, at the Caswell Beach town public service building (fire station) from 5 to 8 p.m. to raise funds for publishing the book of Brunswick County men and women that served in WWI; to continue historic preservation of the rifle range memorial; and to honor Brunswick County WWI veterans. There will be a dinner and dance with music by The Back Porch Rockers. More information will follow.

Another Roll Call is planned for Veterans Day on Monday, Nov. 11, at 11 a.m. beside the 1918 Fort Caswell Rifle Range Memorial in Caswell Beach. There is a need for volunteers to Roll Call WWI Brunswick County men that served in the Great War. Call (910) 278-7584 if interested.