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M I L I T A R Y H I S T O R Y

OPERATIONS OF THE SUPPLY SECTION, 3d BN 58th INFANTRY
(4th DIVISION) IN THE MEUSE-ARGONNE OFFENSIVE,
SEPTEMBER 26 - OCTOBER 6, 1918.

(Personal experience of a battalion supply officer)

Captain Benjamin B. Bain, Infantry

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Reliable, brief and accurate.

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A valuable study of small units in battle.
Accurate and reliable.

MARGINAL ABBREVIATIONS USED

Back	"The 4th Division: Its Services and Achievements in the World War."
Huidekoper	"History of the 33d Division, A.E.F."
Morrow	"The 58th Infantry in the World War, 1917-1918-1919."
Pershing	"Final Report of General John J. Pershing, Commander-in-Chief, American Expeditionary Forces."
Personal Records	"Recollections of the author of this monograph, supplemented by personal records in his possession."
Thomas	"The History of the A. E. F."

INTRODUCTION

At dawn September 26, 1918, the final conflict of "The War to end Wars" was launched. This offensive was a challenge to the Service of Supply. One of the outstanding questions in the minds of the higher allied commanders was, "Can the Service of Supply be maintained." (1)

(1) Pershing,
p 45

This narrative deals with the operations of a battalion supply section, the last link in that long and intricate chain comprising the System of Supplies. The personnel of the unit under consideration consisted of one officer and seventy-two enlisted men. The battalion supply officer, corresponding to S-4 of the battalion under the present tables of organization, commanded the section. The enlisted personnel was assembled from five separate organizations. One supply sergeant, one stable sergeant, one corporal, assistant supply sergeant, sixteen wagoners, sixteen assistant wagoners and one first-class private trained as an assistant veterinarian, were from the regimental supply company. One mess sergeant, four cooks and four kitchen police were attached from each lettered company. The train consisted of: (1) the ammunition section (4 ammunition limbers, British type), (2) Headquarters Section (one escort wagon R & B, one battalion mess cart and one medical cart, (3) Kitchen Section (4 rolling kitchens and 4 water carts). (2)

(2) Personal
Records

A large percentage of the command had been through the Marne-Aisne and St. Mihiel offensives. They were considered veteran troops. (3)

(3) Thomas,
p 240

OPERATIONS - SEPTEMBER 25 - OCTOBER 3

(4) Morrow,
p 92

Just before dawn September 25, 1918, the 58th Infantry went into bivouac in the Bois de Sivry. (4) About 8:00 PM, September 25, the battalion commander, 3d Battalion, assembled his staff officers and company commanders, handed a map to each one of them and issued an oral order, in substance, as follows: "There is no change in the enemy situation. The 4th Division will attack September 25th in column of brigades, the 7th Brigade in the assault echelon, the 8th Brigade in reserve. The 80th Division is on our right; the 79th on our left. The reserve brigade will advance with regiments abreast, the 58th on the left. Zone of action and direction of attack as plotted on the map you have just been issued. Time of attack - 5:30 AM. The regiment will march to its assembly area near Vigneville at 10:00 PM. (5) Packs will be rolled and turned over to the battalion supply officer who will store and protect them. Each man will be issued two extra bandoleers of ammunition and three hand grenades. The combat train, less the medical cart, will remain here. The medical cart will accompany the battalion. You are to warn your men that it will probable be three or four days before food or ammunition can be brought forward and that they are to exercise the utmost care in the conservation of each. The battalion supply officer will remain with the combat train. Are there any questions?" At this point I suggested that the two days' reserve ration carried on the combat train be issued to the soldiers. The company commanders supported this suggestion and the major ordered it executed. This placed four days' reserve rations in the hands of the soldiers.

(5) Morrow,
p 92

(6) Personal
Records

(6)

On the morning of the 23th I proceeded to the division ammunition and ration distributing point at Blercourt and replenished the supply of ammunition and reserve rations.

Shortly after 12 noon, accompanied by a mounted orderly, I rode forward along the Bethlainville-Vigneville-Montzeville-Esnes-Haucourt Road with the double mission of regaining contact with the battalion and to reconnoiter the route to be used when the combat train moved forward. About 2:30 PM, I established contact with the battalion as it crossed the Malancourt-Bethincourt Road. I left the horses with the orderly at Haucourt and accompanied the battalion commander to a trench area about 2000 yards south of Cuisy where the battalion halted for the night. (7) I was told by the battalion commander that the combat trains would not join the battalion during the night and directed to return to the bivouac. (8)

(7) Morrow,
p 97

(8) Personal
Records

On my return trip to the Bois de Sivry I followed the route over which I was later to move the combat train. In so doing I obtained a fairly accurate impression of the difficulties I was later to encounter. Words cannot picture nor can the mind conceive of the utter desolation that "No Man's Land" presented between the towns of Esnes and Malancourt. One must have seen it to understand. Every yard of the terrain had been struck by high explosives of various sized caliber. The road between these two towns had been completely destroyed. Near the town of Malancourt the road crossed the river Forges, on either side of which were low marshes. The incessant rain during the month of September had increased the river's menace as an

obstacle. Early in the night of September 25-26 the 4th Engineers had started reconstructing this road. By noon of September 26 they had it open for traffic. Ambulances, light artillery, and artillery ammunition trains were endeavoring to move forward. With the passage of each vehicle the road was constantly breaking down in various places. Traffic of necessity moved a few yards at a time, halted and waited until some vehicle that had stalled was moved or until a break in the road had been repaired. Ambulances left the road and endeavored to cross the open country. Men everywhere left their teams and went to the assistance of these ambulances. Transportation formed a solid line extending from Malancourt to about two miles south of Esnes. Such was the traffic congestion on the first night. (9)

(9) Back,
pp 170-171;
Morrow,
pp 95-97

On the morning of September 27, I again rode forward to reconnoiter and gain contact with the battalion. I gained contact at the point where I had left them on the afternoon of the 26th. At 10:30 AM, the battalion moved forward to a position on the reverse slope of hill 215, between Cuisy and Septsarges. (10) Shortly before noon, in compliance with instructions from Regimental Headquarters, the major ordered me to move the 3d Battalion combat train to Septsarges. The movement was to be completed before dawn September 28. In my forward movement I had left the orderly and mounts at Malancourt. I now proceeded from battalion headquarters east to the Septsarges-Cuisy Road, thence to Cuisy, following the road from Cuisy to Malancourt. I picked up the orderly and mounts and returned to the bivouac in the Bois de Sivry. With the exception of

(10) Morrow,
p 98

(11) Personal
Records

the last mile, I had covered the entire route to be followed in my forward movement. (11)

Arriving at the Bois de Sivry at 3:30 PM, I immediately assembled the supply sergeant, stable sergeant and the four mess sergeants, informed them of the situation and ordered them to be prepared to move at 4:00 PM. The supply officer of the 1st Battalion having gone on sick report, I was ordered by the Regimental Supply Officer to combine the combat trains of the 1st and 3d Battalions and move them forward as one unit. This caused a short delay in starting time. However, the combined trains moved out at 4:15 PM along the Sivry-Bethelainville-Vigneville-Monzeville-Esnes-Haucourt-Malancourt-Cuisy-Septesarges Road. No difficulty was encountered until approximately one mile south of Esnes. At this point the train caught up with traffic and progress consisted of a move of a few hundred yards and an indefinite halt. At 7:30 PM a heavy rain started to fall and continued in a steady downpour until early morning. (12)

(12) Personal
Records

At 8:00 PM, the head of the column arrived at the road junction in the town of Esnes. Here two military policemen were endeavoring to handle the traffic which was coming from two directions - west and south. One of them inquired of me what outfit I had. Upon being informed it was the combat trains of the 1st and 3d Battalions, 58th Infantry, he promptly replied: "You can't go through here. This road is reserved for ambulances and artillery." It was a difficult situation. There was traffic in front, behind and to the left of the train. In fact, there was no place to go unless one followed the column, which was moving forward. After

some further delay and conversation the military policeman directed me to the commanding officer of the Military Police in Esnes. I found a major in command to whom I explained: that I had been ordered by my battalion commander to move the combat train to Septsarges; that the train was being held up; that due to traffic congestion it could not be moved in any direction except to follow the forward column; that there was no place off the road where it could be moved; that any effort to extricate it from the column would cause an unnecessary delay in the whole column; that the soldiers were in desperate need of food and the train must go through. The major gave me a decidedly severe reprimand for being there, took my name and organization and authorized the train to go through. (13)

(13) Personal
Records

The column had moved about a mile, when some twenty yards off the road a battery of heavy field artillery started firing. Men and animals alike were blinded by the brilliant flash of the guns. The animals were frightened by the roar of the cannon and became difficult to restrain. A voice out of the darkness said, "Better stop and take it easy buddy. We have a five-minute barrage to fire. We'll help you straighten out after it's over." The five minutes seemed like eternity but eventually the firing stopped. The wagoners started untangling the animals, heading them in the right direction and inspecting the transportation for damages. One rolling kitchen required the replacement of a coupling and it was necessary to put a new tongue in an escort wagon. My mount had become entangled in the telephone wire running alongside the road and had

to be extricated. This accomplished, the column moved on and a short time later gained contact with the column ahead. It was now 9:00 PM. (14)

(14) Personal
Records

It required six hours to move from this point to the town of Malencourt. The delay was caused by the difficulty of crossing the river Forges. The road was continually breaking down. Wagons and trucks bogged down and had to be pushed out by hand. An engineer detail worked day and night keeping this part of the road in repair.

After passing Malencourt the column traveled at normal rate of speed until it had passed Cuisy. Here it met a French ammunition truck train moving in the opposite direction. The two columns stood idle for some time, while the French lieutenant expended all the expletives in the French language on the train commander and I gave him a counter barrage of the same high explosive in the English language. The argument was finally ended by the Frenchman uttering the usual expression, "But this is France." Fortunately, the terrain to the right of the road was in fairly good condition so that the wagon train was able to take to the open field and thus pass the truck train without mishap. (15)

(15) Personal
Records

About 5:30 AM it began to grow lighter. Dawn was at hand. The town of Septsarges was only a short distance away. I began to look for a camp site. About a thousand yards southeast of Septsarges I found a field completely surrounded by a thick hedge. I moved the two trains into this inclosure. The movement had been completed. It had taken fourteen hours to move fourteen miles.

The wagoners immediately started to groom animals, and to clean harness and transportation. The kitchen personnel set up their rolling kitchens and made preparations to cook breakfast in order to be prepared should the battalion commander order a hot meal. (16)

(16) Personal
Records

At 7:30 AM, September 28, I saw the 3d Battalion approaching the town of Septsarges from the south.

(17) Morrow,
p 98

(17) I joined the battalion commander at the head of the column, pointed out the location of the combat train, reported that the 1st and 3d Battalions' trains had been combined under my command and asked for instructions. I was directed by the major to return to the train and await further instructions. At 8:30 AM a runner from the battalion commander arrived with a written message directing me to deliver a cold meal of the field rations to both the 1st and 3d Battalions. It stated that animal transportation could be used and that the runner would act as a guide to the point of delivery.

The regiment had originally been equipped with British transportation and I was still using the British ammunition limbers. These vehicles are especially adapted to cross-country movements and require only two animals per vehicle for movement. I decided to use these vehicles. I took two limbers from each battalion, loaded the rations and, guided by the runner, started forward. The route taken was through Septsarges, thence across open country along the west edge of the Bois de Septsarges. In the meantime it had ceased raining, but a low mist obscured the sun and made visibility difficult. The guide proceeded almost to the crest of hill 295, northwest of the Bois de

Septesarges. Here he suddenly stopped, a blank expression on his face and said, "That's funny, they ought to be right here." I looked in all directions. Not a soldier was in sight. Suddenly the mist cleared, the sun came out, a large German observation balloon loomed up on the horizon due north and the barrage came down. The first shell registered a direct hit on one of the limbers. My horse bolted with me. When I got him under control and looked around the other three limbers were leaving the scene in as many directions. I saw the second limber stop, both animals down. The barrage ceased as suddenly as it had started. I proceeded to round up the train. The first limber had moved about twenty yards. The shell had struck directly under one of the mules, killing it and wounding the other one. The second span I saw go down were both killed. One soldier had been wounded and I sent him to the Aid Station in Septesarges. I found two other animals had been slightly wounded. The common horse-sense of an army mule in leaving the scene of action had saved the entire train from annihilation. With the remaining men and animals I moved the limbers, one at a time, along the western edge of the Bois de Septesarges to a point near where the first limber had stopped. I unloaded the rations, placed them in an old deserted trench in the edge of the Bois de Septesarges, posted a guard over them, and sent the transportation back to the bivouac. (18)

(18) Personal
Records

Accompanied by a runner I went forward to gain contact with the battalion. On the forward slope of hill 295 I found the commanding officer of Company C. He directed me to the command post of the 1st Battalion. I reported to the battalion commander what had happened

and where his food was located. He detailed a runner to go with me to the 3d Battalion Headquarters and to the place where the food was located. The command post of the 3d Battalion was in the northern edge of the Bois de Septsarges. I explained to the commanding officer of the 3d Battalion what had caused the delay in the delivery of food. He claimed that a second guide had been left at the northwestern corner of the Bois de Septsarges to guide the train to where the battalion had moved. Perhaps it is just as well that the guide disappeared as had the train gone farther forward the damage done probably would have been much greater.

The major detailed one platoon to carry the rations forward. I delivered rations to the command post of the 3d and 1st Battalions respectively and returned to the combat trains. On the way back I stopped at Regimental Headquarters in Septsarges and reported the position of the combat train to the Regimental Supply Officer. He informed me that the new division ration distributing point was located in the draw north of Cuisy, just off the Cuisy-Septsarges Road; that the division ammunition dump had been moved to the vicinity of the road junction near Fayel Farm on the Montfalcon-Cuisy Road and the brigade veterinarian had opened up an animal hospital at Cuisy. I was further informed that I was relieved from command of the 1st Battalion combat train.

Upon arrival at the camp bivouac I had an opportunity to inspect the camp site for the first time. It proved to be excellent. It was on sloping ground, close to a stream, within easy distance of both ration and ammunition distributing points. Five hundred yards away in the town of Septsarges was a flowing-well with

a constant flow of three or four inches. The hedge offered an excellent screen from enemy observation.

(19) Personal
Records

It was within a mile of the battalion position. (19)

It was now 1:00 PM, September 28. I ordered the mess sergeants to have a hot meal prepared by 6:00 PM and returned to the battalion command post. I reported that I would be prepared to serve a hot supper at 6:30 PM. The major informed me that the regiment would attack at 5:30 AM, September 29, passing through the lines of the 39th Infantry; that the 1st Battalion would make the initial attack; followed in column by the 3d and 2d Battalions in the order named. (20) He ordered two cold meals to be delivered with the hot supper. No difficulty was encountered in the delivery of the three meals. Marmite cans were used for delivering the hot meal. The ration limbers of the rolling kitchens were uncoupled from the kitchens and the marmite cans loaded in their proper place; cold rations, placed in gunny sacks and boxes, were also loaded on the limber. Two animals were used with each vehicle. The train consisted of four ration limbers and four water carts. A carrying detachment of twenty-four men accompanied the train. The food was delivered to Companies I, K and L without being carried by hand.

(20) Morrow,
pp 100-101

Company M presented a different problem. About midnight September 25-26 Company M with a platoon of machine guns from the Regimental Machine Gun Company attached, had been sent to the left flank of the Division Sector as a combat liaison group. It had progressed steadily along the left boundary of the sector and now held a position south of Nantillois, near the railroad tracks, east of the Ceptsarges-Nantillois Road. The

company commander had sent a message to the battalion commander calling for food and water, especially water. The distance from the battalion to this company was approximately one mile. It was unsafe to take animal-drawn transportation into that sector. Any supplies they received had to be carried by foot troops. The hot supper could be taken in marmite cans. Sergeant Robert Smith, supply sergeant of the combat train, had previously improvised a method for carrying cold meals. It consisted of stretching gunny sacks, shelter halves or blankets between two poles. A forked stick placed between the two poles near each end gave it the necessary tautness. Food placed on it was carried in the same manner as stretcher-bearers carry wounded men. With this device two men could carry one hundred fifty pounds of food without undue hardship. The cold meals were transported on these improvised carriers. The water was carried in marmite cans, obtained from the other companies after they had finished their supper. With the carrying party of sixteen men from the combat train I delivered a hot supper, two cold meals and water to Company M, arriving at 9:00 PM. (21)

(21) Personal
Records

On the morning of the 29th and 3d Battalion following the attack of the 1st Battalion halted and took up a position east of Nantillois. Company M advanced to a position on the division boundary, one thousand yards north of Nantillois.

The battalion remained in its position near Nantillois until the night of September 30-October 1, when Company L relieved Company A and B in the northern edge of Bois de Bieulles. During the morning of October 1, Company I relieved Companies C and D and took

(22) Morrow,
p 103

up a position six hundred yards southeast of the southern edge of the Bois de Ogons. Company K and Battalion Headquarters moved to the western edge of the Bois de Septsarges. Company M, having been relieved by Company F, joined Company K in the Bois de Septsarges October 2. The various companies remained in these positions until the night of October 3-4. (22) During the period September 29 to October 3, the battalion combat train performed routine duty. During daylight I made, daily, contact and reconnoitering trips to battalion headquarters. Each night a hot supper, two cold meals and water were delivered to the companies. This was accomplished in the same manner as has been previously described in detail for the night of September 28. Animal transportation was used as far as the northern edge of the Bois de Brieulles. From there carrying parties made up of the combat train personnel, supplemented by stragglers delivered it to the companies. It required an average of sixty men each night. All men except the necessary camp guard assisted in the delivery of meals. From the division distributing point in the draw east of Cuisy fresh rations were drawn daily. On the night of September 28-29 a French anti-aircraft battery took up a position a short distance east of the bivouac. The next day two enemy planes were shot down and a number of others forced to return to their own lines. The battery moved away during the night of September 29-30. About 9:00 AM, September 30, five large caliber shells were dropped in the center of the bivouac. Fortunately, only two of the five exploded. The three unexploded shells sunk out of sight in the soft soil. Three deep holes remained as mute evidence

of the havoc they might have wrought. I had just entered the bivouac with the ration train, dismounted and was holding the rein of my mount. The horse was killed. I ordered the stable sergeant to take all animals and move them a short distance to the northeast along the bank of the river Menomme where a few trees offered a screen. I then checked up on personnel and vehicles. I found one mess sergeant dead; one corporal was unconscious, evidently by concussion as I could find no wounds on his body. He tried to talk but no sound came forth. Three privates (two wagoners and one kitchen police) were wounded. I placed the corporal on a litter and sent him and all wounded to the 8th Brigade Aid Station at Septsarges. Two vehicles (a water cart and a rolling kitchen) had been rendered unserviceable. The stable sergeant reported that he had five wounded animals. I ordered them sent to the Veterinary Hospital near Cuisy. I then looked for another camp site but found that all satisfactory sites were already occupied. As no more shelling occurred I decided not to move the camp site. Thus ended the operations of the combat train, 3d Battalion 58th Infantry, during the first phase of the Meuse-Argonne. (23)

(23) Personal
Records

OPERATIONS - OCTOBER 4-6

During the morning of October 3, Headquarters of the 3d Battalion was moved forward to the northern edge of the Bois de Brieulles. (24) At 11:00 PM, October 3, I reported to the major at battalion headquarters that food had been delivered to all units of the battalion. While delivering the food, I had been informed that the company commanders had been summoned

(24) Morrow,
p 104

to battalion headquarters to receive orders for the attack. I arrived too late to hear the order issued but was given the following information by the battalion adjutant: the attack was to be resumed all along the front at dawn October 4; the regiment would attack with one battalion in the assault wave and two battalions in support; the 3d Battalion would make the initial assault, supported by the 1st and 2d Battalions abreast, the 2d on the right; the mission of the 3d Battalion was to capture the Bois de Fays, the Bois de Malaumont and the Bois de Foret. (25). It was a tremendous task.

(25) Morrow,
pp 106-107

I was ordered to establish, before daylight, an advanced ammunition dump in the northern edge of the Bois de Eriuelles. I decided to establish the dump immediately, thus avoiding any activity on the front just prior to the attack. The dump was established, a guard placed over it, and the ammunition limbers returned to the bivouac. This was completed about 2:00 AM.

At 1:00 PM, October 4, I went forward to regain contact with the battalion, stopping at Regimental Headquarters for information. I was informed that the initial attack had been successful; that the 3d Battalion had captured the Bois de Fays and Bois de Malaumont and crossed the Cunel-Brieuelles Road where they were held up by determined resistance of the enemy. I located the battalion command post at Fond de Ville Aus Bois. The commanding officer, Major Eugene Robinson, had been wounded early in the morning and Captain William M. Goldston was in command. The troops across the Cunel-Brieuelles Road in the southern edge of the Bois de Puit de Faux were fixed to the ground in fox holes. (26)

(26) Morrow,
p 110

They were under fire of infantry and machine gun weapons from three directions; shells of various caliber were registering on their position at frequent intervals. One wondered how long they could hold on. The battalion commander estimated his effective strength at approximately five hundred men.

With this information I returned to bivouac and prepared to deliver food during the night. The night of October 4-5 was dark and cloudy. On my way back from the front line position during the afternoon I had endeavored to pick up land marks to guide on during the advance at night. These were few and those few had now completely disappeared. I had as guiding marks the open space between the Bois de Brioules and the Bois de Fays, a second open space between the Bois de Fays and Bois de Malaumont and the Cunel-Brioules Road. The distance the supplies had to be carried had increased from approximately twelve hundred to over three thousand yards. It was a difficult job and I succeeded in getting completely lost in the Bois de Fays, and had to halt the detail. What should I do? Should I leave the detail and endeavor to locate the battalion? If I did this, would I not become hopelessly separated from the detail? Should I remain where I was and wait for daylight? These were some of the questions that raced through my mind. Fortunately a company commander of one of the companies of the 1st Battalion had heard the thrashing around in the brush and decided to investigate. With his assistance I started in the right direction and at 11:00 PM arrived at the battalion command post which was now in the northern edge of the Bois de Fays. (27) The battalion commander had just completed

the withdrawal of his troops from across the Cunel-Buieulles Road and established a line near the northern edge of Bois de Fays. Needless to say they were glad to see me. They were hungry and thirsty.

At 3:30 PM, October 5, a mounted messenger from Regimental Headquarters galloped into the bivouac and handed me the following message: "The 3d Battalion is desperately in need of ammunition. You will immediately deliver ammunition to them. Baker, Col." I immediately assembled the entire personnel of the combat section, explained to them that ammunition had to be delivered to the front line at once, told them that this was an opportunity for each one to be of some real service in winning the war and called for volunteers. It is to the credit of the detachment that every man volunteered. I eliminated the stable sergeant, the mess sergeants and cooks. This left a detail of one sergeant and forty-eight men. I formed the detachment in column of two and marched them to the advanced ammunition dump in the northern edge of the Bois de Brieulles, using a covered route through the western and northern edge of the Bois de Septsarges.

On the way forward I considered the situation. I had at my command a detachment that had frequently been under artillery fire but never under machine gun fire. They knew very little about combat formations and combat signals; they were not armed. I had only one noncommissioned officer, Sergeant Robert Smith. Control would be difficult. I had been over the terrain during daylight and at night. I knew the open ground between the Bois de Brieulles and the Bois de Fays would be

(28) Morrow,
p 111

the "danger area." It would be subjected to both machine gun and artillery fire. It had to be crossed. This open space was approximately one thousand yards in width; any troops crossing it were sure to be subjected to a demoralizing machine gun fire from the Bois de Ogons on the left flank due to the failure of the division on the left to take the Bois de Ogons, the left flank of the 4th Division Sector was exposed to fire from the Bois de Ogons. (28) The southern edge of the Bois de Fays offered an assembly point for reorganization. The plan had to be simple. I decided to advance in skirmish line until stopped by enemy fire and then move by infiltration, reassembling at the southern edge of the Bois de Fays.

Arriving at the ammunition dump I opened up an ammunition box, took ten bandoleers of ammunition, distributed it equally on each shoulder and directed the soldiers to do likewise. I organized the detachment into six squads and appointed a leader for each squad. From the northwestern edge of the Bois de Erioules I gave the following orders: "Our most difficult task is to reach those woods (pointing to the Bois de Fays). We will leave here in a skirmish line at the double. When you hear a blast of this whistle, stop and lie down. Squad leaders will then send your men forward one at a time. Move by short rushes. Move fast. Stop when you reach the edge of the woods and wait for my arrival. Sergeant Smith, you will be the first to advance and will take command at the edge of the woods. If Sergeant Smith is not there and I do not arrive, wait five minutes after the last man has arrived, find the telephone wire and follow it through the woods to battalion

headquarters. Do not bunch up. Are there any questions? Form a skirmish line and follow me at the double." The line had advanced approximately three hundred yards when machine guns opened up from the Bois de Ogons. The crack of bullets going over head indicated that the range was too long and the advance continued. Just after the line crossed the Nantillois-Erieulles Road the cracking ceased, followed by the dull thud of striking lead and the whine of a ricochet. A man on my left flank plunged forward on his face. The range had been corrected. I sounded a long blast on my whistle. At almost the same instant the enemy artillery barrage registered on the slope to our front. To reach the Bois de Fays we must pass through it. I looked around - the men were all down. I saw Sergeant Smith rise and move forward followed by a thin line of men. I moved over to the man who had fallen on my left. He was dead. I followed the last wave to the southern edge of the Bois de Fays. Sergeant Smith had arrived safely and had the detachment assembled. He reported forty-one men present. The Germans were now "straffing" the Bois de Fays. This fire was to continue for the next three hours. I moved the detachment in column of two to battalion headquarters and delivered the ammunition. The battalion commander looked at us in consternation and wanted to know why we were there. The battalion was not in need of ammunition. We checked up on the message center in an effort to find out when the message for delivery of ammunition had been sent; who had sent it and to whom it had been sent. There was no record. To this day it remains a mystery. Of the seven men who did

(29) Personal
Records

not get through, one was killed and the other six wounded. As far as I know all the wounded recovered. (29)

I sent the following message by runner to the stable sergeant: "Bring the food forward at the usual time. Use the kitchen personnel as drivers. I will meet you at the usual place in the Bois de Briouilles. After dark I marched the detachment back to the Bois de Briouilles, met the kitchen train, delivered the food to the battalion and returned to bivouac. They had done a good day's work.

No supplies were delivered to the battalion October 6. The usual delivery of food on the night of October 6-7 was dispensed with by order of the battalion commander. The battalion was relieved on the night of October 6-7 by a battalion of the 132d Infantry. (30)

(30) Morrow,
p 116;
Huidekoper,
p 97

A hot meal was served at the assembly area near Septsarges. A check-up on casualties showed the following: two enlisted men killed and eleven wounded, four animals killed and eight wounded; one water cart and one rolling kitchen rendered unserviceable.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

First, I wish to consider the traffic control between the towns of Esnes and Septsarges. Necessity required one road to accommodate the entire transportation of the 4th Division. Higher authority had endeavored to relieve the congestion by making it a one-way road as far as Cuisy. But, due to the heavy rains, the poor condition of the road, and the terrific amount of traffic, this failed to relieve the situation. It was a case of making the best of a bad situation. At the time the road was opened it was reserved for

ambulances and artillery. Later, through necessity, it had to be opened up to infantry trains. Some criticism might be offered as to the failure of higher authority to notify the military police, who were charged with traffic control, of the change in traffic priority. Before doing this, due consideration should be given to the many other problems of equal or more importance which required attention. It is my opinion that it was handled as efficiently as possible under the existing circumstances.

While the camp site at Septsarges was occupied for the first time under cover of darkness and through a necessity to get under cover prior to daylight, it turned out to be well suited for a train bivouac. It would have been unsafe and impracticable to locate it farther forward. The distance from the division ration, forage and ammunition distributing points was approximately one mile. A heavy hedge gave it concealment from enemy observation. It was located within five hundred yards of water. It was on the natural line of communication.

The unsuccessful attempt to make a daylight delivery with animal-drawn transportation was an error and I believe is open to severe criticism. It is true that the delivery was made to a reserve battalion and that, under ordinary circumstances, little or no difficulty would have been encountered. But this was not an ordinary circumstance. The division had advanced farther than the units on its right and left, thereby exposing both its flanks to enemy fire. The Germans had massed their artillery around this salient and were making a desperate attempt to stop the advance. The

3d Battalion was within a mile of the German line. Although it is true, that unforeseen circumstances caused the train to be halted near the crest of an exposed hill, it should never have been on that hill. The train was within easy range of light artillery fire. To expose animals to short range artillery fire during daylight is inexcusable. I believe that, in sending back the information that animal-drawn transportation could be used, the battalion commander erred. I, further, believe that the train commander should be severely criticized for failing to make a personal reconnaissance prior to moving the train forward.

I can offer little criticism of the delivery of meals under cover of darkness. Some may contend that two hot meals, supper and breakfast, and a cold lunch should be served daily to front line troops. My answer to this contention is that, "It all depends upon the situation." I believe that, in this particular situation, to attempt to make two deliveries of a hot meal each night would have failed.

The daylight delivery of ammunition to the front line was a success. It mattered little whether or not the correct combat principles were observed. The plan used depended entirely upon the willingness of the soldiers to carry on, individually, while being subjected to severe artillery and machine gun fire. It required explicit confidence on the part of his commander that they would go on. That they did so is a vindication of the officer's judgment and a tribute to soldiers' courage. - In any analysis or criticism the fact that the movement was not necessary must be considered. Perhaps it was a false rumor started by some soldier that gained

momentum as it was passed along, or it may have been a mistaken identity as to the organization that was in need of ammunition that caused the order for immediate delivery of ammunition to be issued. The origin of the report and why it was not checked prior to the issuance of an order will never be known. A lack of sufficient ammunition in a battle certainly calls for prompt action. Considering all the circumstances I feel that there should be no criticism of the action taken.

Normally the shelling of a bivouac is a signal to move. Whether or not ~~the Germans had actually located~~ the train bivouac on the morning of September 30, 1918 is still a question in my mind. Any attempt to analyze what the enemy knew or what they were thinking is mere conjecture. The fact remains that my decision not to move the camp site proved to be sound judgment in this particular instance.

The issuance of extra ammunition in the Bois de Sivry was necessary due to the fact that the combat train was to remain in that locality for an indefinite period. The issuance of an additional two days' reserve ration proved to be unnecessary, as the train moved forward and served a meal to the battalion on the third day following the night of its separation from the battalion. However, at the time the issue was made the time of the forward movement of the combat train was not known. If it was an error in judgment the error was in the right direction.

LESSONS

If it requires a horrible example of a colossal ~~mistake to teach a lesson,~~ this narrative is devoid of

lessons. However, from a thorough study of the various incidents pictured therein, I have arrived at certain conclusions that I would like to pass on to others for consideration:

1. Daylight movements of animal-drawn transportation should not be attempted in an exposed area within range of small caliber artillery fire.

2. The trained American soldier, given a mission to perform which calls for individual action, will accomplish the mission in spite of any danger involved.

3. The battalion supply officer should anticipate the future need of supplies by the battalion and be prepared to fulfill these needs.

4. The battalion supply officer should obtain accurate information on the status of all supplies by personal contact with the companies and attached units.

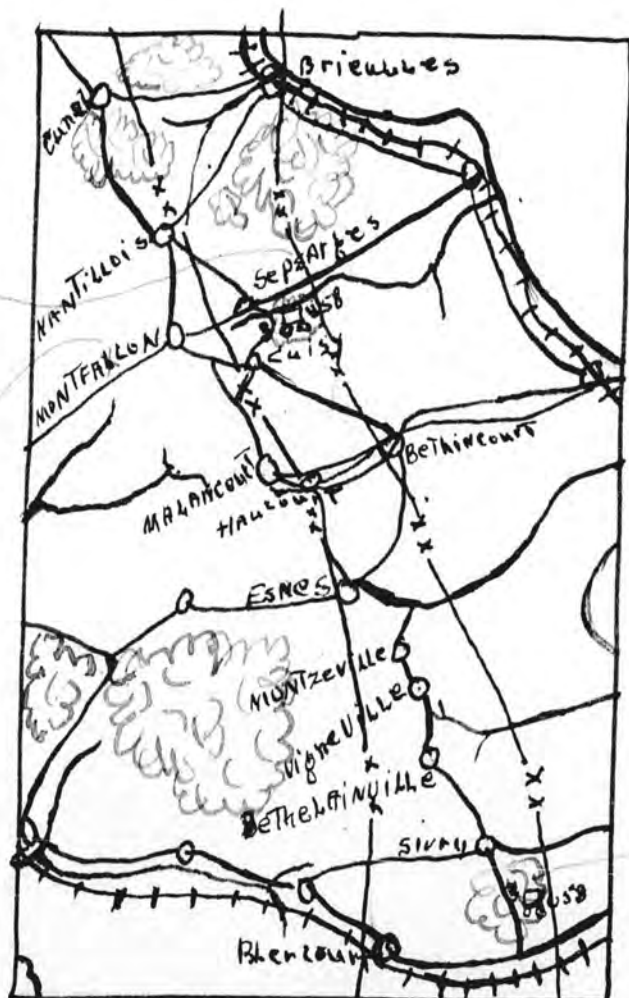
5. The personnel of the supply section should be used to make all delivery of supplies to the front line troops including that required to be delivered by carrying parties.

6. Train commanders must make a personal daylight reconnaissance of the route to be covered in a night movement. This reconnaissance should include the route to be taken by carrying parties in addition to that over which animal-drawn transportation must pass.

CONCLUSION

On the whole, the operations of the Supply Section, 3d Battalion 58th Infantry, September 26 to October 6, 1918 were successful. Some basic principles

of the Service of Supply may have been violated, but circumstances are not always the same and principles must be changed accordingly. The system used in the operations - if it can be called a system - was simple. It was flexible and mobile. The troops were furnished with the kind and the quantity of supplies needed. Supplies were escheloned in depth. Troops were not encumbered with unnecessary supplies. Finally, "the impetus of supply" was from the rear.



MAP # 1.

Bois de Montfaucou

Orange

