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THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
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ADVANCED COURSE
1931-1932

OPERATIONS OF COMPANY A
142d INFANTRY (36th DIVISION)
in the
CHAMPAGNE OFFENSIVE
October 7 to October 12, 1918.

(Personal experiences of a Company Commander)

Major Ben-Hur Chastaine, Infantry

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Mostly a duplicate of Mont Blanc monograph.

German Translations

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Bloor, Alfred W.

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A clear concise statement of the difficulties faced by the 142d Infantry and how it overcame some of them. An excellent source of information concerning the capture of St. Etienne.

MARGINAL ABBREVIATIONS USED

Blanc Mont	Monograph, Mont Blanc. (A collection of mimeographed documents)
Mono No 9	Monograph No 9. U. S. General Staff. War Plans Division. Historical Branch. (Meuse-Argonne-Champagne)
Otto	"The Battle at Blanc Mont" by Lieutenant-Colonel Ernst Otto.
Bloor	Operations of the 142d Infantry. Colonel A. W. Bloor.
Defensive	The Defensive Operations in the Champagne-Mont Blanc Operations, September 26, 1918, to October 9, 1918. (Translated from original German document)

NARRATIVE, ANALYSIS, AND CRITICISM

INTRODUCTION

Company A, 142d Infantry, was formed originally from two companies of the 1st Oklahoma Infantry (National Guard). Later its strength was augmented by personnel secured in the draft and by transfers from other units of the 142d Infantry. It arrived in France somewhat short of its authorized strength of 250 enlisted men and in its training area was still further depleted by 20 per cent of its then existing strength transferred to one of the other combat divisions as replacements. (1)

(1) Blanc Mont,
p 14

Thus its strength had been reduced to 141 enlisted men and 6 officers when, as a part of the 71st Brigade, 36th Division, it was moved by rail September 26, 1918 from the Thirteenth Training Area into the reserve of the French Group of Armies of the Center and attached, for the purpose of supply, to the French Fifth Army between Epernay and Chalons-sur-Marne. The 36th Division and the 2d Division (American) had been loaned to the French to augment the drive of the latter's Fourth and Fifth Armies under General Gouraud in the Champagne. Jointly with, and on the left of, the First American Army these forces had attacked in the Champagne on September 26. (2) The progress of the French attack had been stopped at Blanc Mont Ridge by October 1. (3)

(2) Mono No 9,
p 6

(3) Mono No 9,
p 6

At this point the 2d Division was moved into the line. In a daring and forceful attack from

October 1 to October 6, it not only carried the summit of Blanc Mont but drove the enemy down the north slope of the ridge and established itself in a salient whose most critical point was on a wooded knoll to the southeast of the town of St. Etienne-a-Armes, named by the Germans Blodnitz Hill and marked on the maps, Hill 160. (4)

(4) Mono No 9,
pp 18,19;
Otto,
p 120

The northern slopes of Blanc Mont Ridge were covered with a growth of pines which thinned out into open ground something more than a kilometer south of St. Etienne. From the edge of the timber to the village the ground sloped gently presenting a splendid field of fire to enemy troops in the eastern part of St. Etienne and on the rising ground to the northeast. Here the final efforts of the 2d Division met with such withering fire from small arms as well as artillery that further advance was stopped. (5)

(5) Mono No 9,
p 18

ENTRY INTO POSITION

In these positions they were relieved by the 71st Brigade. This brigade was moved in trucks from its area west of Chalons to the vicinity of Suipe^s and Somme-Suipe. From this locality it marched to a point about a kilometer south of Somme-Py the morning and afternoon of October 6, and that night moved into positions established by the 2d Division. The 141st Infantry took over from the 3d Brigade on the right and the 142d Infantry from the 4th Brigade (Marines) on the left. A battalion of the 9th Infantry remained in position with the 141st Infantry and a battalion of the 5th Marines with the 142d

(6) Mono No 9,
p 19

Infantry. (6) The 2d Field Artillery Brigade and the 2d Engineers remained with the 36th Division

(7) Mono No 9,
p 21

(7) throughout its operations in the Champagne.

The placing of experienced, seasoned troops in line with, and as a steadying force for, green troops here, as elsewhere, proved sound. It also acted as a spur to the pride of the new troops who became determined to do well under the eyes of their more experienced comrades.

It is well for us to bear in mind the quality of the troops of this new division and their leadership. They had never before been in contact with the enemy. They had never been under fire of any kind. They had no animals for transportation and no rolling kitchens. They went into action hoping that someone would loan them kitchens and animals for transporting food forward. They took over the mortars and 37-mm guns of the 2d Division (8) because they could not get their own transported from Somme-Suippe. These troops were equipped with the Browning Machine Gun and Browning Automatic Rifle, however, and had had some training with these weapons. They were one of the few organizations to use the latter weapon in actual combat. Only the officers and a limited number of enlisted men were armed with the automatic pistol. With few exceptions the junior officers had no more battle experience than the enlisted men. Through service on the Mexican border, through long and intensive training in the United States, and through even more intensive training in the area

(8) Mono No 9,
p 19

around Bar-sur-Aube the morale and discipline of both officers and soldiers were of a high order.

We cannot but question the wisdom of sending unseasoned troops like these into the attack against such positions as were held by the enemy at this point. The German Third Army had instructions to contest every foot of the ground and every attack was sure of the most determined resistance. (9)

(9) Otto,
pp 114,136,
162;
Blanc Mont,
p 15

They had spent a sleepless night October 4-5, shivering in trucks traveling from near Epernay to Suippe. Here they had rested in bivouac until the morning of October 6. Then leaving their field ranges at Somme-Suippe they had marched across the devastated area of slippery chalk and tangled wire from Somme-Suippe to Somme-Py. (10) Winding in and out along a trail that was no better than across country, they were tired from marching before nightfall. Their guides from the 2d Division were greeted at Somme-Py by a burst of enemy shelling and scattered to cover. From this and the fact that they had travelled into Somme-Py in trucks instead of over reconnoitered routes, they became confused and led the relieving columns over the wrong roads until nearly all the men in both regiments had marched throughout the night before arriving in their proper places to complete the relief. (11) All ranks were exhausted. As soon as they could dig a little shelter they fell asleep regardless of the fog and drizzling rain. Company A, 142d Infantry, was one of those to reach its position just at daybreak. (12)

(10) Bloor,
p 2

(11) Mono No 9,
p 20

(12) Bloor,
p 3

No one should be so interested in the success of a relief in battle as the party being relieved. The commanding general of the 2d Division should not have allowed the guides to go to Somme-Py in trucks without first having reconnoitered the routes over which they were to return with the relieving columns. A better plan would have been to have had guides from the 71st Brigade come forward, reconnoiter the routes for themselves, and then bring in their own organizations. In this respect the relief was huddled terribly. The utmost confusion reigned on the roads. Shell fire caused casualties that might have been avoided. Staff officers who should have been, and doubtless would have been, engaged in securing and studying maps and orders for the forthcoming attack, were busy through the whole night locating lost troops and getting them set back on the right roads. At least much of the final delay in getting orders to the troops may be blamed on the first night's confusion. (13)

(13) Bloor,
p 3

LOCATION AND DISPOSITION OF TROOPS

The 142d Infantry was organized in depth with its 2d Battalion on the firing ^{line} which ran from east to west along the St. Etienne-Orfeuil Road, across Blodnitz Hill, and then down the German trenches about a half-kilometer south of St. Etienne until it connected with the French 7th Division. Its 1st Battalion was in support on the hill or ridge known as Ludwig's Rucken, or Hill, about 1000 meters in rear of the 2d Battalion. Its 3d Battalion was in reserve on Blanc Mont Ridge.

Under the pine trees on Ludwig's Hill, Company A found excellent shelter from observation and small arms fire but all day long on October 7 it was subjected to constant harassing fire from German artillery. Men and officers burrowed into fox holes to secure what rest they could and at the same time protect themselves. Only one man was wounded. He was struck in the hip by a shell splinter and evacuated to the aid station along with some wounded from the other companies. The bursting of shell among the trees was constant.

The captain of the company had been one of the few to fall out on the march the night before. Arriving from headquarters, where he had been sent during the march to ascertain the possibility of securing food and water, the senior lieutenant found himself in command of the company. He had been told nothing of the plan of relief, had no map and none was available. At regimental headquarters he had been informed by the lieutenant colonel executive officer that the regiment probably would attack at dawn the next morning. Passing by the battalion command post he first learned that he was in command of the company, had pointed out to him the locations of the other companies in the battalion, and learned little else. The battalion staff had no other information that they could give him. It was then afternoon and they did not believe there would be an attack the next day.

(14) Otto,
p 89

The new company commander was told to hold himself in the immediate vicinity of his company and to refrain from reconnaissance that would take him away to any distance preventing his prompt return to the command post to receive orders. A runner guided him to his company area which he found to be on the reverse slope just below the crest of Ludwig's Hill.

(14) The 1st and 2d Platoons had been placed in the advance positions while the 3d and 4th Platoons were in support a short distance down the slope. Local security consisting of a double sentry was posted in each platoon and everyone else was ordered to get what rest they could. Two questions were asked by each platoon leader. They wanted to know if there was going to be an attack and could the kitchen force provide hot food. Neither question could be answered definitely.

The company commander made a brief reconnaissance which was limited to the ground immediately in front of his position and then spent the balance of the afternoon with his company waiting for information or orders from battalion headquarters. Late in the afternoon he went again to the battalion command post but found there was nothing to be learned. The night was spent in waiting. The enemy bombardment continued steadily although lessening somewhat toward midnight. It was still enough to make the men glad to remain in their holes.

In view of the scarcity of maps it was a mistake to hold company commanders to the vicinity of their command posts throughout the day

before an expected assault. They should have been ordered to make all possible reconnaissance of the ground during the daylight hours. No secrecy was to be maintained. The daylight march from Suippe to Somme-Py had told the enemy to expect a new attack. Even after spending most of the day in reconnaissance there still would have been plenty of time to receive orders in detail in the evening. With better knowledge of the ground, even with the limited instructions received at the last minute, much of the disorder that developed later could have been avoided.

VERBAL ORDERS FOR THE ATTACK

(15) Blanc Mont,
p 15

(16) Bloor,
p 4

(16a) Bloor,
p 5

Verbal orders for the attack were issued by the commanding general of the 2d Division to the commanding general of the 71st Brigade some time during the afternoon of October 7. (15) The brigade commander in turn summoned his regimental commanders and at 8:00 PM issued them a verbal order. (16) The battalion commanders were called to the regimental command post of the 142d Infantry at 3:30 AM, October 8, to receive their orders. These again were given verbally (16a) and as soon as they had their instructions they hurried back to their battalions to pass the order on to their companies. But too much time had been consumed in passing the order along from one of the higher command posts to another. It came to the companies too later to be effective.

(16b) Blanc Mont,
p 17

~~Hurry at the expense of efficient speed seems~~
to mark every step of this operation. (16b) The

division appears to have been too hurried in getting the attack off before it could prepare its written order and very necessary map information. Taxed as they were with tasks of getting lost troops in place after the confusion of the previous night the brigade and regimental staffs found themselves too hurried about the work of digesting the order and passing it along to the units lower down. This hurry finally left the company and platoon commanders without any clear picture of what was expected and caused needless casualties and confusion that are difficult to excuse.

Verbal orders all the way from division to platoons can hardly hope for proper interpretation at the end of such a long chain of communication. Certainly no farther back than the regiment there should have been a written copy of the order in time to check against and avoid errors in the battalions and companies.

The leader of Company A was summoned to battalion headquarters at 5:30 AM and before he could reach the command post the batteries of the supporting artillery already had begun to lay down their fire of preparation. (17)

(5:10 AM Oct 8)
(17) Blanc Mont,
p 15

Four company commanders crouched around a map on the ground near the entrance to the command post. On the map in bold relief a red arrow pointed the direction of advance. The names of some towns up ahead were given as possible objectives. None of

(18) Bloor,
p 5

us had ever heard of them and none of us remembered them at the time. Company B on the left and Company A on the right were designated as the leading elements of the battalion with Company B as the base. Company D on the left and Company C on the right were in battalion reserve. The leading companies were to follow the assault battalion at 1000 meters (18) and take advantage of cover the terrain might afford. No boundaries were given and no other information. There was not time. As the commander of Company A turned to go back to his company the German artillery's counter to our fire of preparation had begun. The attack had been scheduled for 5:15 AM. (19) It was then about 5:20 AM. ~~XXXX~~

(19) Blanc Mont,
p 15

The rapid and continuous concussion of the enemy's shells literally shook the ground and was deafening. Their prompt reply to our own fire is explained by the fact that they had an advance plan for putting down fire on our positions on this particular morning. (20) They were ready and the fire of our own artillery merely urged them to bring their plan into effect a little sooner and perhaps with a little greater intensity.

(20) Otto,
p 136

THE ATTACK OF OCTOBER 8

To his platoon commanders the leader of Company A delivered his order after dodging his way for 100 yards through the enemy's barrage. The platoons were directed to move forward in the order in which they were then formed. The 2d Platoon was charged with keeping in touch with Company B. All

were to start upon signal from and to follow the company commander. They were not to advance beyond the edge of the timber until they had been signalled to do so. This part of the order was given to make sure that they would not crowd too closely upon the heels of the battalion ahead. The direction of attack was pointed out as nearly as possible from memory. No compass bearing could be given but they were to keep to the right of the first town ahead. All of this was done in the midst of the enemy's barrage. Eager for more information yet all were even more eager to press forward out of the shelled area. Giving the platoon commanders a short time in which to pass their orders along, the company was started forward. These officers were never together again.

As the company moved north down the slope of Ludwig's Hill the odors of gas became strongly noticeable among the smell of the high explosives. Gas masks were adjusted but quickly removed when it was discovered that a light breeze was sweeping the gas away as rapidly as it was being formed.

Shortly before the foot of the slope was reached the lieutenant ordered his company to halt in the edge of the timber while he reconnoitered the open swale between his position and Blodnitz Hill. Back across the swale and into the trees came five of the six small tanks sent by the French to assist the regiment in its advance. This was the first knowledge the company had that tanks were to be used,

(21) Otto,
p 145

although we had seen them in the areas to the rear. The six had gone forward regardless of the actions of their supporting infantry. One of them had been put out of action on the flat to the east of St. Etienne by shell fire and the young French lieutenant leading the platoon had been killed. (21) Their assistance in the attack had been little or nothing.

Nothing was to be seen of the assault battalion. The rise of the ground on Blodnitz Hill was sufficient to hide it if it had advanced well beyond the crest. The reverse slope of the hill appeared to offer protection from all but high-angle fire. Enemy shell fire among the trees had not decreased. In addition the bullets of long-range machine guns were clipping the boughs of the pines and burying themselves with thuds in the tree trunks.

What should have been the action of the company commander?

He pointed out the slope of the hill ahead to the platoon runners, told them the company was to reform there, and that the rush across the open ground would be started upon signal from the company commander. Then he hastily wrote a message to his battalion commander, giving his location and the point at which he would reform his company. After this he waited for the return of the platoon runners, verified the fact that they had delivered their message and gave the signal to move forward. He watched all four platoons debouch from the woods and then followed.

The 2d Platoon disappeared into the old trench system on the west slope of Blodnitz Hill. The 1st Platoon halted near some trees just short of the hill crest. The two support platoons stopped a little further down the hill. Several casualties had resulted in the advance to this point but it was not until much later in the day that it was learned the lieutenant commanding the 3d Platoon had been taken to the rear suffering from shell-shock. Company B on the left had moved forward a little before Company A and apparently had halted in the old trench system still farther to the west and just south of St. Etienne.

Moving forward for additional reconnaissance the commander of Company A discovered at once that he was almost on top of the assault battalion. Company H, the right assault company, had been pinned to the ground by machine gun fire from the right before it had advanced 50 yards along the crest of Blodnitz Hill. The captain, a heavy man, had been wounded twice in the fleshy part of his seat when he sought cover in a fold of the ground. He had dragged himself and been assisted back to a shallow trench and here he told of the situation as he knew it. The greatest feeling of excitement seemed to hold sway. No one appeared to know exactly what was being done to advance the attack.

A little farther forward more definite information was obtained. The captain of Company F, whose company had been immediately in support of

Company H, pointed out that an enemy strong point on the northeast portion of Blodnitz Hill was holding up the advance of the entire regiment, that his men had become intermingled with the men of the other company in the pit prepared for a big gun emplacement just to the west of the strong point, and that just then he could locate no officers to help him. What appeared to be about 100 men could be seen crouching down under cover in and around the gun emplacement. Others were under cover near a line of pine trees which ran in an irregular row from the west around to the south of the strong point. Here the casualties had been heavy. The dead were scattered around in considerable numbers. The captain of Company F urged the lieutenant to take a platoon from Company A and assist in reducing the strong point.

What should the commander of Company A have done?

CAPTURE OF BLODNITZ HILL

After a brief discussion a plan was decided upon. The commander of Company A agreed to take two automatic rifles from his first platoon and place them in action near the corner of a low rock wall to bear upon the strong point. The captain of Company F was to direct the men from the big gun pit in a movement around the left flank and to the rear of the strong point. This plan was carried out. The two automatic riflemen poured a steady stream of bullets into the enemy's position while some of the riflemen working around to the flank and rear got near enough to hurl hand grenades. The garrison of

(22) Otto,
p 153

the strong point came out with their hands in the air. The number of prisoners reported was more than 100. This was what was left of the 2d Battalion, 368th German Infantry. They had been completely surprised by the Americans working around their right flank. Only a few were able to make their escape back to their own lines. (22) The commander of the enemy division realized their precarious situation on the hill and had made an effort to send them reinforcements. Messages calling for two companies of the 74th German Reserve Infantry Regiment to reinforce the position on Blodnitz Hill had not been delivered. It was reported that the messengers probably had been killed. (23)

(23) Otto,
p 155

CAPTURE OF THE CEMETERY

The sight of a considerable number of prisoners seemed to spur the attack all along the regimental front. A machine-gun crew from the 132d Machine Gun Battalion set up its gun on a mound just northeast of the big gun pit and opened a continuous and effective fire on the German positions in the cemetery and to the south of that point. This, combined with the aggressive action of riflemen along the west part of the regimental sector, resulted in a comparatively short time in the taking of more than a hundred additional prisoners from a depression and ditch near the southwest corner of St. Etienne and from the cemetery. The last named place had been carried with a rush. Its occupants were driven to the north bank of the Arnes and up the rise toward Machault.

South east (?)
see next page, top
17

Particular attention is invited to the enemy positions in the ditch and depression to the south-east of St. Etienne. The occupation of this ground had a vital bearing on the success or failure of the attack on the morning of October 8, and a vital bearing on the development of the combat for Company A.

On October 6 the French had entered the western edge of the town as had the Marines. Some fighting had ensued in the streets, the Germans disputing possession of the place. Once or twice they drove the French out only to have the latter force their way back in again. This continued through October 7. The French sent two requests for the Americans to take over the town from them but the Marines reported their patrols being fired upon from the east edge of the village and no determined effort was made by either the French or the Marines to gain whole and complete possession of the place. (24)

(24) Blanc Mont,
p 14;
Mono No 9,
p 21

on a.m. 8. Oct. 8

The half-possession of the town fixed the placing of the opening barrage. Rather than place it on the town with the possibility that it might fall on some of our own troops it was put down just north of St. Etienne and too far north on Blodnitz Hill. (25) The Germans in these positions were no more affected by these opening concentrations than the troops in our own assault battalion, if as much.

(25) Blanc Mont,
p 17;
Bloor,
p 8

Two plans for launching the attack lay open. One was to make sure of the possession of St. Etienne before the attack proper was started. Another and

perhaps better plan would have been to order the withdrawal of all allied troops from the village and let the barrage fall between it and our front line.

(26) Blanc Mont,
p 17;
Bloor,
p 8

(26) As it was, in the great haste to get the assault off, neither plan was adopted but the half-way scheme of sending a Marine detachment to occupy the town the night of October 7, was hit upon. Such a detachment could enter the town, report it clear of the enemy, and still leave the ground just to the east and southeast of St. Etienne occupied. This appears to be what happened. The detachment, headed by a lieutenant, was organized from among the Marines in the area of Company A and sent forward during the early part of the night. It reported itself in position (27) but no further record of its action has been set down.

(27) Bloor,
p 5

With the barrage properly placed the enemy positions on Blodnitz Hill, in the depression and ~~ditch~~^{ditch} adjoining the southeast corner of St. Etienne, and in the cemetery probably would have been carried in the first few minutes by the assault battalion. The bands of fire from Blodnitz Hill would not have wrought such devastation among the ranks of the 141st Infantry. The green troops of the support and reserve battalions would not have had the opportunity of so soon piling into the waves of the assault echelon.

The cemetery, the ditch and the depression had been occupied by the 1st Battalion, 149th German Infantry, the 12th Company of the same regiment, and

(28) Otto,
pp 145,156

part of the 4th Reserve Jager Battalion as well as the 3d Machine Gun Company. In the cemetery the Germans had placed machine guns upon and between the graves to excellent advantage. These guns had a firing range of between 500 and 1000 meters over an effective arc of about 180 degrees from southwest to northeast. (28) The prisoners captured in the ditch and depression were what was left of the 3d Company, 149th Infantry (28), with some men also of the 12th Company. When these places fell into the hands of the 142d Infantry the balance of the 1st Battalion, 149th German Infantry, retired so rapidly across the Arnes that it can best be described as a rout. Attempts to stop these men in the same positions with the 3d Machine Gun Company failed and they were only halted and reformed much farther up the hill toward the northeast. (29)

(29) Otto,
p 160

It is difficult to say just how far-reaching would have been the effect of a well-coordinated and well-controlled attack by the 71st Brigade at this stage but certainly the German troops here seem to have been in a panic. The fleeing remnants of the 149th Infantry imparted their panic to certain portions of the Jagers north of St. Etienne. (30) The effect of additional troops pressing the attack might have been to rout the entire German division. But the 142d Infantry had itself become too confused. It had been punished severely by machine guns and artillery through a whole morning and the 141st Infantry under similar punishment had not been able to come up.

(30) Otto,
p 160

SEPARATION OF COMPANY A

In the pressure of excitement following the capture of Blodnitz Hill the 2d Platoon, Company A, centered only on its mission of keeping abreast of Company B. When that company joined in the fire fight to reduce the German positions in the depression, ditch and cemetery the platoon had gone along with the general assault. The other platoons had remained on Blodnitz Hill. The two automatic riflemen after their effective service against the strong point had been returned to their platoon. The total casualties in the company could not be determined but several were reported. The company commander found himself still in control of three platoons but with the fourth one gone with the assault waves well to the north. By this time the vigor of our own artillery and that of the enemy had abated. All elements of the left assault companies were working their way across the Arnes and beyond, northeast of St. Etienne.

What should have been the next move of Company A's commander?

In view of the fact that two companies of the 2d Battalion already had entered the assault at this point it is hardly to be considered necessary that Company B also enter. When it did a decision had to be made by the leader of the 2d Platoon, Company A. He either had to continue forward with Company B or abandon it as a guiding unit. It is quite possible that

the enthusiasm of the moment carried his men out of his control and after that the developments of the fight prevented them from being extricated.

Practically all of these events had occurred during the morning. The reorganization of the company took place about noon. Then the company commander placed the leader of the 1st Platoon in charge of the platoons on Blodnitz Hill with instructions to remain there until further orders.

Taking his runners with him he set out on a reconnaissance across the flat ground east of the town to determine the situation at the Arnes and to try to locate his 2d Platoon. The situation was bad but he did not learn how bad until a short time before he reached the Arnes. Then it was easier to go forward than back. Before he had traversed more than half the distance strong bursts of fire from German heavy machine guns swept across the flat from the northeast. Progress could only be made by short rushes from one depression to another, or from shell hole to shell hole. As the south bank of the Arnes was approached the enemy began to send over a concentration of both heavy and light shells. One of the latter burst near enough Company A's commander to knock his feet from under him and send him sprawling to the ground with his lungs full of high explosive smoke. Seeing this the runners considered him dead and so reported to the next officer they met, as they continued forward in the search for better shelter.

Crawling and rolling into a deserted German grenade pit the commander of Company A was unable to do other than gasp for breath for a considerable time and even longer in regaining strength enough to move. In the pit he was joined by a few men of both the 2d and 3d Battalions and he learned for the first time that at least three of the 3d Battalion companies had joined in the attack against the cemetery. He learned that the assaulting troops had progressed a short distance up the north bank of the Arnes where they were establishing their lines among the stacks of lumber and other material of a German pioneer park and in the semi-dugouts of the German Fourth Main Line of Resistance.

Recovered sufficiently to walk the leader of Company A in a few minutes came across the commander of his 2d Platoon. The latter had been wounded badly in his hip and shoulder by splinters of high explosive and asked if he should go back to the aid station. He was able to point out but a few of his men.

The effort to locate his 2d Platoon was carried too far by the company commander. In justice to him it may be said, however, that during his initial progress across the flat there was hardly any firing and it appeared that the assault echelon was forging its way up the slope north of the Arnes. His decision was made partially with a view to ascertaining whether he should bring his company forward to the Arnes as well as to locate his missing platoon. When the enemy's machine guns first

(31) Defensive,
p 29

opened he could have turned back but when the artillery began its barrage the power of this decision was taken from him. The vigor of the artillery fire is accounted for by the fact that it was participated in by the German army artillery battle groups. (31)

THE COUNTERATTACK

(32) Otto,
p 162

Hardly had the 2d Platoon's leader started toward the rear when the enemy artillery, which had let up somewhat, again began in greater intensity. Then it lifted and the gray lines of advancing German infantry appeared on the right flank. Two battalions of the 159th Infantry were attacking from Mecklenburg Hill. They were assisted by the 5th Jager Battalion east of the St. Etienne-Machault Road, the 15th Jager Battalion west of the St. Etienne-Machault Road, and the 22d Jager Battalion from northeast of the cemetery. (32) This counterattack was supported by the 213th Infantry Division and elements of the 74th Infantry Regiment joined in on their own initiative, from the east, capturing 6 prisoners. (33)

(33) Otto,
p 148

Coming in from the right where no advance of the 141st Infantry had been made, this counterattack caught the right flank of the 142d Infantry in the air and rolled it up. The men on the exposed flank scurried to cover to the rear. This was afforded by our position on Blodnitz Hill but many continued on until they had reached the timber on Ludwig's Hill. To cover this retirement automatic riflemen and riflemen settled themselves in the shell holes along

a line from the cemetery to Blodnitz Hill and fired steadily into the ranks of the counterattacking force. The enemy halted near the head of the Arnes brook and again occupied the part of their Fourth Main Line of Resistance that had been wrested from them during the early afternoon. (34)

(34) Defensive,
p 29;
Otto,
pp 154,161

This was about 5:30 PM and darkness was coming on rapidly. Everywhere men were picking themselves up and moving to the rear. The commander of Company A had located two noncommissioned officers of his 2d Platoon as well as a few privates. Assisted by these men, by a Marine sergeant who had come forward with the attack, and by a few other noncommissioned officers of both the 2d and 3d Battalions, he formed a defensive group to the east of the town on a line that curved south from the cemetery and then southeast to Blodnitz Hill. He was joined by a lieutenant from the 3d Battalion who explained that all of that battalion had come forward with the final assault on the cemetery and like the left of the 1st Battalion had become hopelessly intermingled with the troops of the 2d Battalion.

CONSOLIDATION, NIGHT OF OCTOBER 8

Having set up his command post in the ditch the commander of Company A then set about locating his other platoons on Blodnitz Hill. In the darkness little was accomplished. Only a few of his men could be found and these had become separated from their platoons. From them something of the casualties suffered was learned. The losses from shell fire were

staggering. Later it was learned that the battalion commander had been severely wounded a short time after the opening of the attack in the morning, that all the officers of Company B had been either killed or wounded, that the senior captain of the battalion, now in command, had taken the leader of the 4th Platoon of Company A and placed him in command of the remnants of Company B, and that the leader of the first platoon had been ordered to assist in the organization of the positions on Blodnitz Hill. From this it can be seen that the personnel of Company A was scattered from one flank of the regimental sector almost to the other.

The regimental front had been elongated by bending to the north from Blodnitz Hill and then around to the northwest from the cemetery. In the locality where he had established his command post the leader of Company A had gathered about 25 of his own soldiers and had a scattering of about 40 others from all companies of the regiment. Stock was taken of the automatic rifles and these were placed along the front line of the new position. A support was organized under one of the sergeants and put in position near the command post. Patrols were sent out to the right and left to locate the units or provisional units on the flanks and other patrols were sent to the front through the entire night to maintain contact with the enemy.

The patrol to the right reported a provisional battalion on Blodnitz Hill. The patrol to the left brought back news that a detachment of Marines and Engineers had moved through St. Etienne and was assisting in the establishment of a line north of the town. This settled a grave point in doubt. It cheered everybody to know definitely that the town was in our possession and that the left flank was protected.

The night was cold and there was no food and no water. Reserve rations had been eaten before the attack started. All the food that could be found upon the dead, both German and American, was salvaged but this was scanty. The water was gone from the canteens and that in the wells of St. Etienne had been forbidden because of feared contamination. Seeking food and water many took advantage of the situation to move still farther to the rear under shelter of the woods.

To relieve this condition a carrying party was organized in the provisional group which must now be referred to as Company A, and sent back to Blanc Mont to secure rations and water. At first this plan did not succeed because the carrying party lost its way, but just before the dawn after the company commander had himself gone back as far as the command post of the 2d Battalion, enough canned meat, canned tomatoes, and bread were brought forward to allay the hunger and thirst of the company. No water was to be had but the tomatoes served as an admirable substitute.

(35) Mono No 9,
p 27

During the night a warning order was issued that the regiment would attack again at dawn. Later this was countermanded. The brigade commander did not consider that his regiments had sufficient organization to attempt an attack. (35) Other than this and the activity of the patrols the night was without incident unless the observation of several fires to the north could be counted. It was believed that these fires indicated the destruction of their own material by the Germans and that they were getting ready to withdraw. In the early hours of the morning some additional men of Company A joined their commander, bringing the total of his own men to about 40 and the total of his provisional command to about 80.

EVENTS OF OCTOBER 9

The new day was ushered in by a heavy bombardment from the enemy's artillery and some reply from our own. As the men stood to their alert positions the incessant explosion of shells made it practically impossible for them to raise their heads above the edges of the holes they had dug in the ground. Three were wounded in spite of the fact that they had burrowed into the chalky soil. The bombardment lasted with intermittent intensity all day.

About 11:00 AM a provisional battalion, formed mostly of men from the 3d Battalion but also of stragglers picked up in the woods to the rear, was launched in attack against the enemy positions near the head of the Arnes. A reported gap between the

(36) Bloor,
p 7

two regiments caused this attack although the grounds for it later proved to be erroneous. It debouched from the woods south of St. Etienne, passed through the forward line of the regiment, and continued about 150 yards farther when it was stopped by enemy artillery and machine gun fire. Here this battalion dug in and remained until sometime in the night when it was relieved by portions of the troops on Blodnitz Hill. Then it was withdrawn and moved to the north of St. Etienne where it took over the positions occupied by the Marines and 2d Engineers. (36)

The night of October 9 was passed by Company A in a manner similar to the night of October 8. It had not participated in the attack of the provisional 3d Battalion in the morning and remained in position. Occasional bursts of small arms fire from the enemy made their presence known along the Arnes.

EVENTS OF OCTOBER 10

Dawn of October 10 was like that of the day before. The artillery bombardment of our front lines was of great intensity but did not last as long as that of the previous day. It had practically died away before noon.

About 10:00 AM Company A was ordered by the regiment to move from its position into one that had been occupied by the Engineers and Marines in the cemetery and to extend the line to the east from that point. Because of enfilade fire down the ditch approaching the cemetery the move was to be made over

a route through the east edge of St. Etienne. In small groups of about a squad each the company was moved successively to the cover of an old shed in the town, then to an abandoned dugout, and then infiltrated one man at a time into the cemetery. The infiltration was made necessary through the fact that the gap between the town and the cemetery was under constant small arms fire from the German trench to the northwest. A few minutes after the cover of the shed had been vacated one of the largest of the enemy's shells completely demolished the place. But the move to the cemetery was made without casualties.

When the positions in the cemetery had been manned a few men were pushed out to the east but they immediately drew such a volume of small arms fire that the further development of this part of the position was left until nightfall. In this new position of the company a few light Maxims abandoned by the Germans were set up to command the approaches on the northeast and combine with the automatic rifles in strengthening the line of defense.

During the day an attack against the German trenches held by the 6th and 22d Jager Battalions north of St. Etienne had been attempted by a part of the 3d Battalion. But this attack was halted by heavy small arms fire before it could get started.

(37) The idea of an attack was retained however. During the night all troops in the front line were warned to be ready to advance at dawn. Later this was changed to an order that the 72d Brigade would pass through us and attack while we remained in position.

(37) Bloor,
p 8

Active patrolling again continued through the night and about 3:30 AM a patrol from Company A brought in a wounded member of their own company who had been cut off in the counterattack October 8 and had lain concealed from the enemy in one of their own dugouts since that time. Although badly wounded in the hip he had concealed himself and remained in hiding until after midnight of October 10. At that time the Germans evacuated the dugout. When he had crawled a short distance toward our lines his cries for help had brought the patrol to him. He was exhausted from his wound but gave us the valuable information that the enemy were deserting their Fourth Main Line of Resistance to take up another a few kilometers to the north. He had understood enough of their German to glean this in the dugout.

Additional indication that the enemy was withdrawing was given by the numerous mustard gas shells directed against St. Etienne. The streets and walls of the buildings were drenched with the liquid. Clothing of the messengers passing from the cemetery through the town and back again became saturated and two casualties of men in positions on the west of the cemetery were evacuated to the aid station. / But most of the graves in the cemetery were of German soldiers and officers and Company A in this position was bothered less by enemy artillery than at any other time.

REORGANIZATION OCTOBER 11

Just before daybreak an intelligence patrol from the 144th Infantry, came through the fog to the command post of Company A with the information that the 72d Brigade would pass through our lines and continue the advance. This actually took place about 10:00 AM, October 11.

Company A remained in position until late in the afternoon. Then an assembly was held near the crest of Blodnitz Hill. There the remnants of the company were all gathered together. A count of noses showed three officers and 73 enlisted men surviving of the six officers and 141 enlisted men who came into the sector.

The first hot food since the previous Sunday morning was served the company Friday night October 11, bringing to a proper conclusion the first and most important phase of Company A's participation in the operation of the 33th Division in the Champagne.

LESSONS

The importance of sending competent guides, thoroughly acquainted with their routes of approach, to guide relieving units into position, cannot be exaggerated. In this operation it vitally affected the manner of launching the attack and consequently the results obtained.

5 The steady influence of seasoned troops alongside green ones makes possible the maintenance

of the latter in the engagement even when things go terribly wrong.

Complete and thorough reconnaissance must be made and as quickly as possible. Where no maps ~~are~~ available the reconnaissance must be all the more thorough. Delay in the hope that maps and clarifying orders will be received before the reconnaissance starts is a false premise not to be excused. This oldest military lesson seems hardest to be learned.

Elements in support can advance properly with nothing more than a direction given and may even enter a fight with some success as long as everything goes well. But information of the plan of what is expected from the other units, the details that are set forth in every well written order, is of inestimable value in determining the right course to pursue when things start to go badly. This lack of knowledge of orders was one of the primary causes of entanglement and ~~confusion~~ confusion of personnel in the attack October 8.

Verbal orders at best are never as good as written ones. And verbal orders four times transmitted before reaching the leaders directly controlling the troops are hardly to be relied upon. But when necessity demands verbal orders, that same necessity usually demands speed in transmission. Therefore, verbal orders should be forwarded immediately to all concerned in their execution, no matter how fragmentary the orders may be. To wait for the order to be in complete form is hardly to be

considered where the time element is as important as it was on October 7.

Inexperienced troops under shell fire grow restive. The urge to move and go somewhere will overcome them. To keep them in hand, to maintain direction, and to preserve in mind the mission are severe tasks for leaders in all grades.

In the open with even a slight breeze blowing away from you, gas is not particularly to be dreaded.

Unless time is taken to coordinate the movement of tanks with foot troops, especially with inexperienced foot troops and a language handicap to be overcome, the efforts of the tanks are more than likely to be fruitless.

Under heavy fire, when leaders are killed or separated from their commands, men will crowd together and become excellent targets for artillery.

The reinforcement of assault echelons, already numerically strong, is of little assistance in itself and generally leads to heavier casualties. But the lending of fire power from points of vantage to enable the assault waves to move with greater freedom under its cover is apt to prove the deciding factor in the assault.

To be effective the barrage or concentrations must be placed so that the first defense lines of the enemy will be pinned down. Unhampered employment of enemy machine guns and other small caliber weapons can hold up an attack in the first stages of its

development so that the main objectives will not be reached and the mission will not be accomplished.

Divided responsibility is dangerous and rarely succeeds. The Marine detachment sent to occupy St. Etienne did not accomplish anything. It would have been better for the commanding officer of the 142d Infantry to have sent his own detachment there with specific orders what to do in the attack next morning.

The excitement of battle cannot be portrayed in words. It takes hold of personnel beyond the power of words to describe. The whole physical appearance of men changes. The capture of a position and prisoners is an electrifying moral force that galvanizes all ranks to action. It is a critical moment to be employed by leaders for directing and controlling their troops in efforts that promise the greatest results. It demands that all leaders be on the alert to anticipate it and be ready with a plan for its instant use.

Without supports and reserves little or no advantage may be taken of enemy weakness. The confusion, pronounced confusion, of the Germans north of the cemetery should have been pressed into a rout. Likewise the lack of supports and reserves to cover the flanks of an attacking force may change the whole aspect of the engagement. It did for the 142d Infantry.

With a platoon committed to action it is not practicable to try to extricate it. That platoon is

severed from the balance of the company for the time being. A favorable opportunity must be awaited to get it back. A company commander's position is with the main body of his force, or at least where he can control that main body.

CONCLUSIONS

Considering its inexperience in battle, the inexperience of its leader, its difficulties encountered in entering the engagement and the forces brought to bear to lessen its morale, the lack of definite orders for the assault, the non-coordination of infantry advance with the artillery barrage, and the nature of resistance offered by the enemy this first engagement of Company A may be regarded as a success. Veterans of many campaigns in the war declared that the German artillery fire around St. Etienne was as heavy as any they had ever seen if not the heaviest. Any advance by the company in the face of this fire could only be a success.

Mistakes made by junior officers, including the company commander, may be condoned in the light of this being their first experience against great difficulties. Seasoned leaders could have handled the company better but on the other hand green leaders as these certainly were, might have done much worse.

QUESTIONS

1. Company A, 142d Infantry first engaged in battle:

- (1) North of Blanc Mont Ridge in the Champagne
- (2) On September 26, 1918
- (3) Near St. Etienne-a-Arnes
- (4) In the defense of Blanc Mont Ridge.

Answer 2

2. Company A was a part of:

- (1) The 71st Infantry Brigade
- (2) The support battalion of the left regiment
- (3) The assault waves at the beginning of the attack October 8, 1918
- (4) The 36th Division (American) with the French Fourth Army.

Answer 3

3. The only mission given Company A in the attack October 8 was:

- (1) To press the attack against enemy positions on Blodnitz Hill
- (2) To follow the assault battalion at a distance of 1000 meters
- (3) To remain in position on Ludwig's Hill.

Answer 1

4. Company A's commander chose:

- (1) To advance his 1st Platoon around the right flank of the strong point on Blodnitz Hill
- (2) To support the attack of the assault battalion against Blodnitz Hill strong point with automatic rifle fire from a commanding position
- (3) To help reduce Blodnitz Hill strong point by frontal, with one platoon.

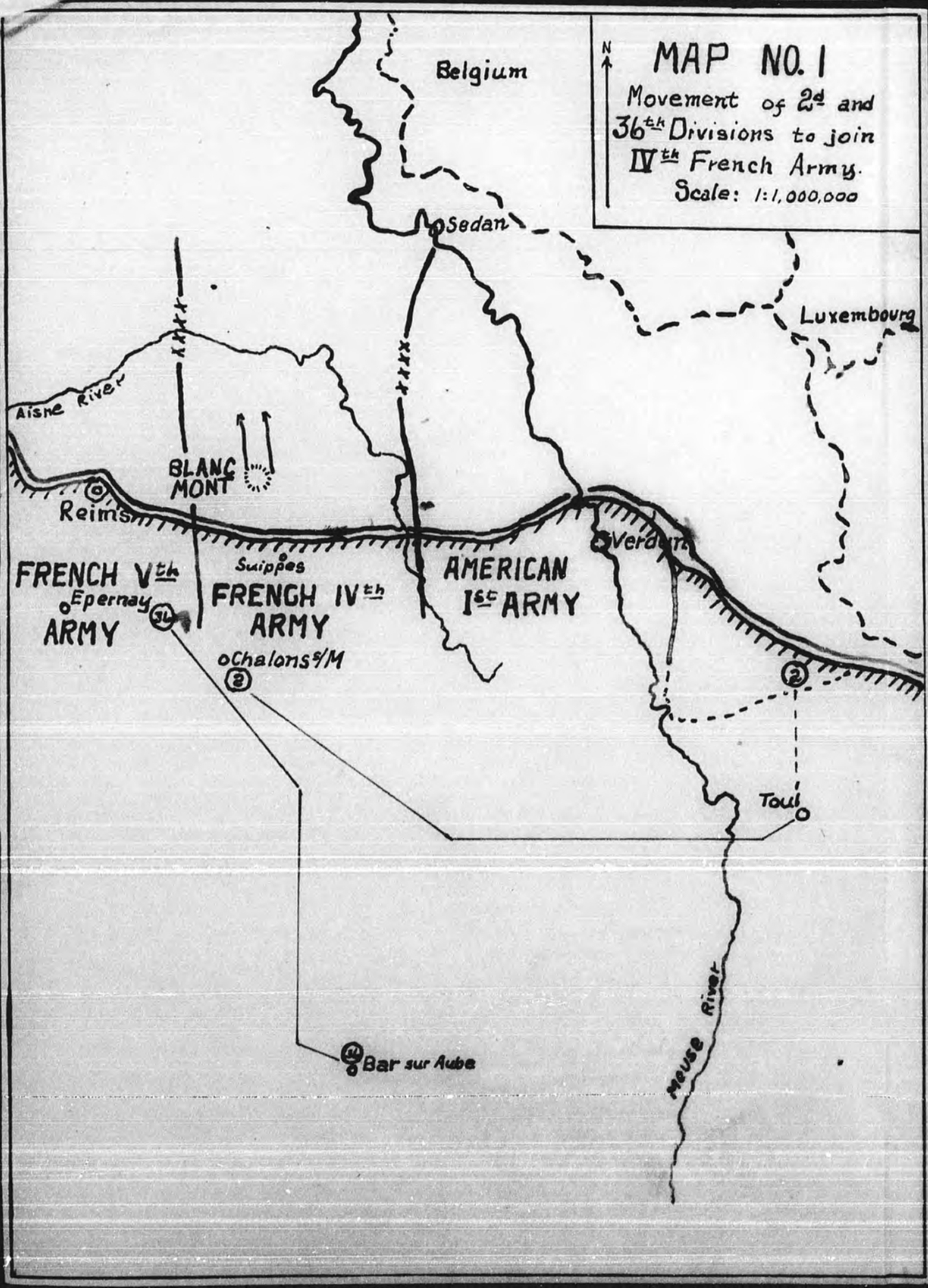
Answer 1

5. The 2d Platoon of Company A:

- (1) Was charged with keeping in touch with the company on Company A's left
- (2) Was left as a liaison group on Ludwig's Hill
- (3) Advanced with the assault waves against the cemetery.

Answer 2

MAP NO. 1
 Movement of 2^d and 36th Divisions to join IVth French Army.
 Scale: 1:1,000,000



Capt. Maj. Chastaine

HOHENZOLLERN HILL

To MACHAULT

OPERATIONS of COMPANY "A"

142^d INFANTRY
(36th Division)
in the

CHAMPAGNE OFFENSIVE

October 7-11, 1918.

MAP 2

SCALE:
1:20,000

One Kilometer

22^d Res
Jag. Bn
14th Inf
Regt
Oct 10

15th Res
Jag. Bn

16th Res
Jag. Bn

Oct 9-10

Oct 9-10

Oct 9

ARNES BROOK

St Etienne-
a-ARNES

BLEDNITZ HILL

To ORFEUIL

7th FRENCH DIV

LUDWIG'S HILL

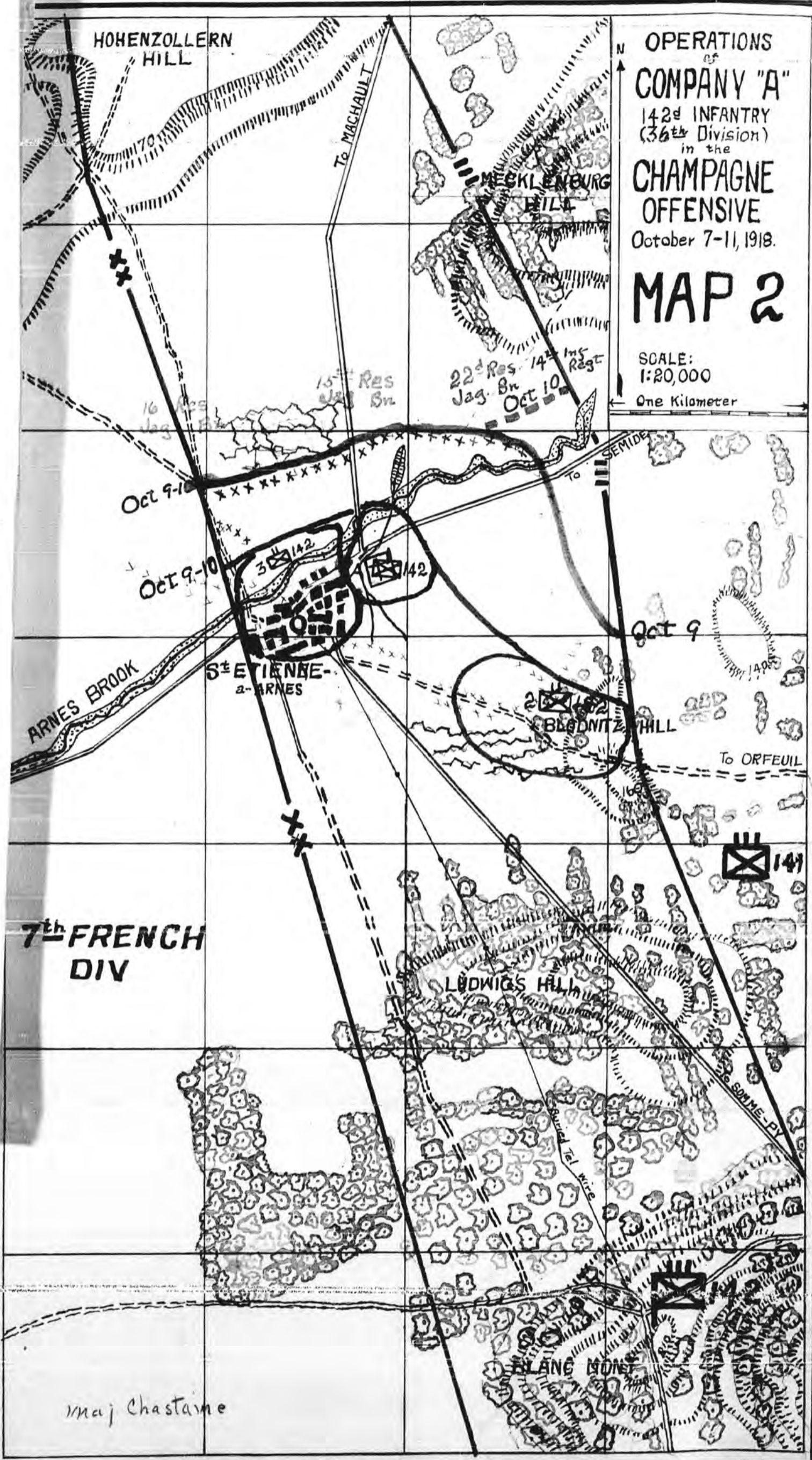
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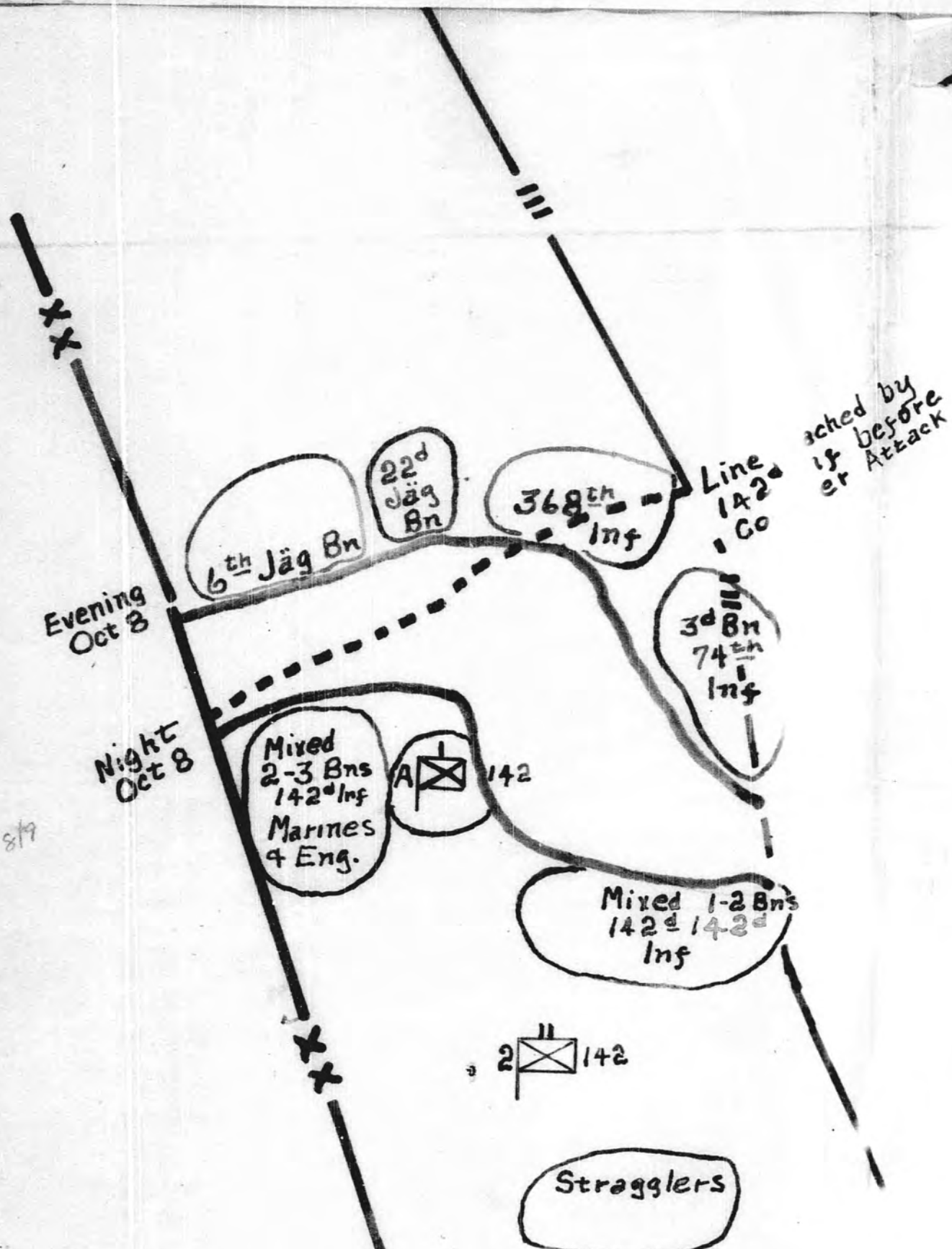
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142

BLANC MONS

maj Chastane

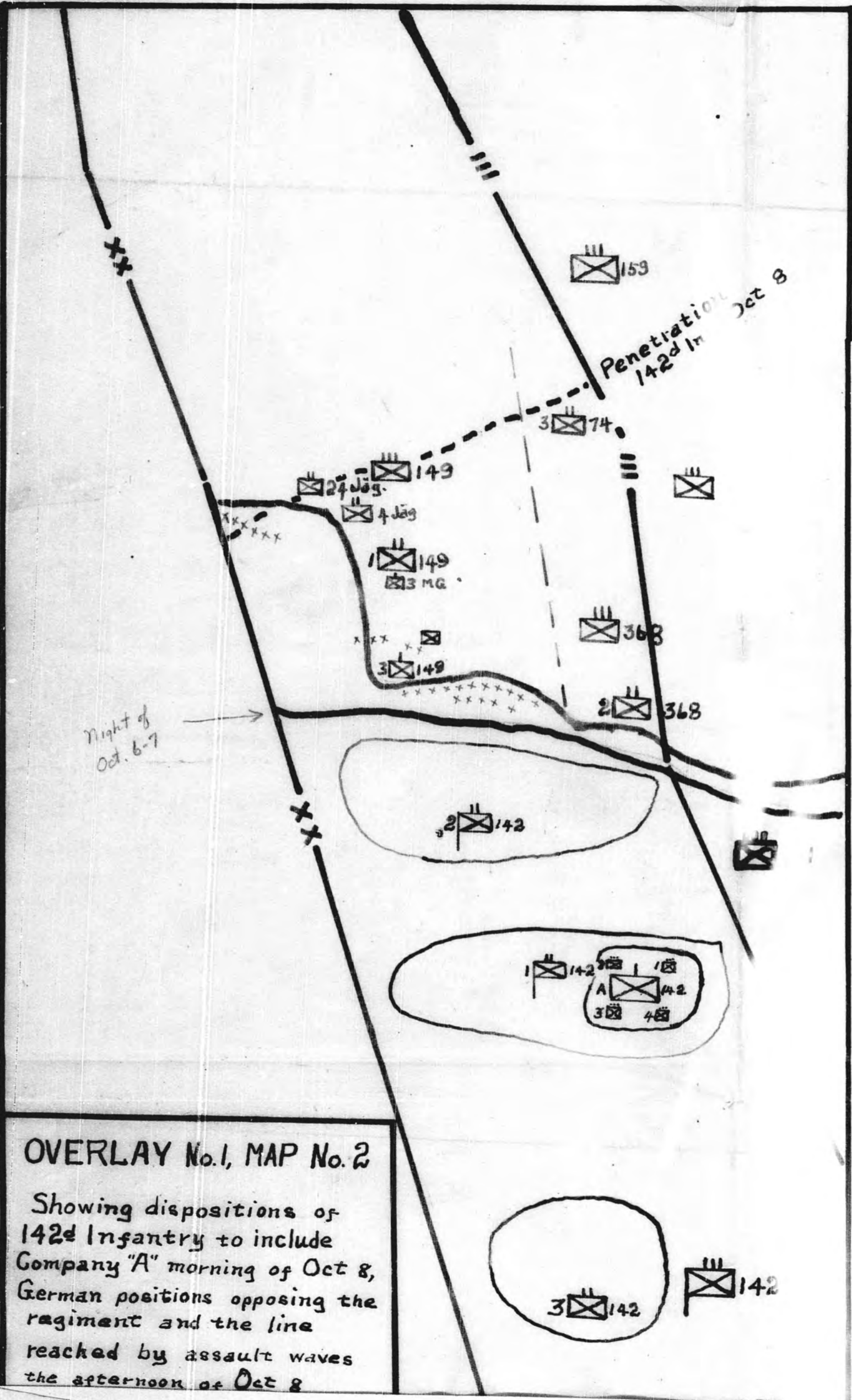




OVERLAY No.2, Map No.2.

Situation in 142^d Inf
 night of Oct 8.

maj. Chastaine.



OVERLAY No.1, MAP No.2

Showing dispositions of 142d Infantry to include Company "A" morning of Oct 8, German positions opposing the regiment and the line reached by assault waves the afternoon of Oct 8