

P.E. 3-5

THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
FOURTH SECTION
COMMITTEE "H"
FORT BENNING, GEORGIA.

COMPANY OFFICERS' COURSE
1925-26

OPERATIONS OF 37-MM PLATOON, 166TH INFANTRY, 42d DIVISION (U.S.)

CAPTAIN THEODORE BUNDY, INFANTRY

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Fort Leavenworth Operations Map
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(NOTE: This monograph was written from personal experiences of the author).

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F.O.C. - Field Orders, I Corps (U. S.)
F.O.D. - Field Orders, 42d Division (U. S.)
F.O.V.C. - Field Orders V Corps (U. S.)

OPERATIONS OF 37-MM. PLATOON 166TH INFANTRY (U.S.)

INTRODUCTION

In order to present this subject, it will be necessary to go back to the fall of 1917, when the 42d Division was organized. It was made up of National Guard troops from twenty-six different states and the District of Columbia. It received the alternate name of the "Rainbow Division" by which it was more commonly known. (1)

(1)
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In September 1917, the 42d Division was assembled at Camp Mills, Long Island, New York. Here a great many other officers were assigned to the division. (2) Fifty-nine were assigned to the 166th Infantry, of which I was one.

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Upon reporting to the Commanding Officer, he (Colonel Benson W. Hough) inquired into the qualifications of each new officer. Then, later in the day, an order was gotten out assigning these new officers to companies. It fell to my lot to be assigned to Headquarters Company.

Colonel Hough called me to headquarters and told me that I had been chosen to command the "One Pound Cannon Platoon", because I had several years experience in the U. S. Cavalry. He knew that there would be animals to haul the guns and I seemed best qualified to look after the animals. He could give me no more information about the organization of the platoon except that he thought that it would have one or two artillery pieces to accompany the infantry. So I accepted my fate of becoming an artilleryman after years of experience in the Cavalry and Infantry.

At that time the Headquarters Company was organized the same as a rifle company and could not be reorganized

properly until the Tables of Organization were received. This did not happen for nearly three weeks. Reasoning that I would need large, strong men in the platoon with a fairly good education, I began to make notes on the different men in the company. When the reorganization of the company took place I had a list of about seventy-five men that I wanted in the platoon. The Tables of Organization showed the platoon would have thirty-eight enlisted men.

The captain called the company officers together and explained the new organization of Headquarters Company. He then asked if any officers had any special qualified men that they wanted in their platoons. Being ranking 1st Lieutenant in the company, I was given first choice. My list of thirty-eight picked men was handed to the captain. As none of the other officers had made any choice of the men, the captain thought it quite a joke and assigned the entire list of the thirty-eight men to the 37-mm. platoon. These men were the cream of the company and later on, under battle conditions, these men distinguished themselves. Nearly all of them were decorated or cited in orders.

The conception of the platoon of the "One Pound Cannon", as it was then called, was that it was a large artillery piece and that suddenly they had become artillerymen. But when the guns were received in January 1918, everyone got a great surprise. The best comparison that can be made of the "One Pound Cannon" and a large artillery piece is "David and Goliath". Like David, the gun was small but very accurate.

ORGANIZATION

The organization of the 37-mm. platoon as authorized by Tables of Organization was:

1 officer and 1 officer attached,

3 sergeants,

3 corporals,

33 privates, five (5) of these to be teamsters.

Total - 2 officers and 38 enlisted men.

Animals - eleven mules or horses.

Equipment - three 37-mm. guns and ammunition carts (with tools, accessories and spare parts); two escort wagons (with tools, accessories and spare parts); two double sets of wheel harness; two double sets of lead harness; and three sets of single harness.

INSTRUCTION PREVIOUS TO OCTOBER 31, 1918

The platoon received ten days of instruction in the "School of Fire" at Chanoy, France in February 1918, and then went into the trenches with the regiment on February 22, 1918. (3) After receiving instruction in three different trench sectors, it took an active part in several major engagements.

OPERATIONS

On October 31, 1918, we find the 2d Battalion 166th Infantry with one platoon of machine gun company, 3-inch Stokes mortar platoon and 37-mm. platoon attached, holding the front line north of Somerance, France. An attack of the entire First Army (U. S.) was to be launched the next morning, November 1, 1918. Our regiment had been relieved on October 31 by the 6th Marines 2d Division, with the exception of the 2d Battalion and attached units. (4).

The command of the regimental sector passed to the Colonel

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(4)
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F.O.A. 85

of the 6th Marines at noon on October 31.

Orders had been received for the 2d Division to leapfrog the 42d Division. Upon the 2d Division passing through our lines the 42d Division would be relieved from active duty with V Corps. (5) At H hour plus one hour, it passed from V Corps to I Corps and became I Corps reserve. (6) H hour was designated as 5:30 AM, November 1, 1918.

A great amount of artillery had been massed for the attack. An intensive artillery barrage was put down on the enemy's positions for two hours before H hour. At H hour, a rolling barrage was started, which the infantry followed in the attack. Orders were given to break the resistance of the enemy by an intense barrage put down by all available artillery, machine guns and accompanying weapons. (7)

The special mission given our 37-mm. platoon was to fire on certain machine gun nests on the heights near St. Georges. To open fire at H hour minus ten (10) minutes and to fire until H hour plus twenty (20) minutes. Then to remain in position until H hour plus one (1) hour, at which time the platoon was to be considered relieved. Then to rejoin its company (Headquarters Company 166th Infantry) in a valley just north of Charpentry.

Plenty of ammunition was brought up and put at the gun positions. The platoon commenced firing on scheduled time. After firing about twelve minutes, one gun blew up. The other two guns completed firing as scheduled.

During my several years experience in handling 37-mm. guns, I have only seen four guns blow up, two under actual battle conditions and two during target practice. The barrel generally splits. A piece on top of the breech

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F.O.V.C. 86
(6)
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F.O. A. 88

(7)
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F. O.A. 85

housing about two inches square blows off, flying high and to the right. If, in firing, men are taught to keep low on the trails, there will not be much danger of serious accidents from guns blowing up.

At 6:30 AM, the platoon moved out of position, took the road from Somerance through Fleville to Charpentry and rejoined the company.

At this time many prisoners were being brought back, each sentry having charge of 50 or 60 prisoners. Traffic on the roads was terrible. Prisoners and elements of the 42d Division were moving back and artillery and other units were moving to the front. It took the platoon four hours to get back to Charpentry, a distance of about 10 kilometers.

Here the regiment remained in bivouac, resting for two days, November 1 and 2. (8) Then orders were received to move north on the main highways toward Sedan, keeping close behind the 78th Division. (9)

On November 3d, the regiment marched 18 kilometers and went into camp at Verpel. (10) The wagon trains were held up on the road on account of congested traffic and did not arrive until midnight. The result was that the troops went to bed without supper.

Not so the 37-mm. platoon; it had supper which consisted of hot baked (canned) beans, hard bread, jelly and hot coffee. The platoon had learned long before that it was not good to go to sleep on an empty stomach.

So months before, a corporal in the platoon had been appointed by members of the platoon as mess sergeant for the platoon. It was his special duty, in addition to his other duties, to have on hand at all times enough food for the platoon for two meals. This was made possible by the

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F.O. C. 87

(9)
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F.O. C. 88

(10)
VI
F.O. D. 51

members of the platoon making purchases in different towns and by acquiring articles otherwise. The members of the platoon as a whole were good rustlers. Anything that was not nailed down or locked up belonged to the platoon. Because of this, the platoon was known throughout the regiment as "Bundy and his 40 Thieves".

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It rained hard all the night of November 3-4, and orders were to move early in the morning. (11) The rain did not help road conditions. So an officer from each company was detailed to go with the wagons on November 4th and try to get them through earlier. It was my lot to be detailed to go with the wagons that day.

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Brieulles was the town scheduled for the next stop. The regiment arrived in Authe about noon. Here information was received that the town of Brieulles and vicinity was being heavily shelled by the enemy. The regiment was ordered to go into camp at Authe. (12)

About 2:00 PM, a heavy French artillery piece broke through a bridge and all traffic on the road stopped. For hours the wagon train sat on the road just a couple of miles from Authe. The troops were waiting for hot food but none came. To make it worse it started to rain.

While the trains were stalled, elements of the 6th Division (U.S.) came up from a crossroad and went into camp in an open field near our regimental wagon train. They pitched pup tents, built bonfires and the cooks started fires in their rolling kitchens to cook supper. Some of the officers with our trains went over to see the officers of the 6th Division and requested them to put out their fires. But they only laughed at our officers.

It became dark and had stopped raining. Some time

later, German bombing planes could be heard in the distance and coming nearer. Orders were given to unhitch the mules and take them in a direction away from the fires of the 6th Division.

The German bombers circled over the camp twice. Then came closer to the ground and turned loose about a dozen bombs. By this time our teamsters and mules were about a half mile away from the camp. When the bombs exploded, the ground around us fairly shook and some mules broke away from their drivers. But mules were soon caught again.

When the German bombers were gone out of hearing, the mules were taken back to the wagons and hitched. Not long after the teams were hitched, traffic started to move again. In a short time the trains were in camp at Authe but it was then 11:00 PM. A hot meal was served the troops about midnight and then again at 4:00 AM. X

Rumors had been out that the 42d Division was to relieve the 78th Division. But on the night of November 4-5, orders were actually received. The orders were for our division to overtake the 78th Division, pass through their lines and take up the pursuit of the enemy, who was reported to be in full retreat. (13)

(13)
XIV
F.O.C. 90

Early in the morning of November 5th we were on our way to carry out these orders. At Briouilles, the Germans had demolished the causeway (14) and had held up the 78th Division. This causeway was about 1,000 feet long, 20 feet high and crossed a marsh creek. In this artificial road were blown mine craters every 75 feet. It took the 117th Engineers (U. S.) a day to repair this causeway.

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The left regiment of the 78th Division crossed the causeway and right on its heels was the 166th Infantry. Our regiment got across about noon and pushed on to overtake the 78th Division. About 2:30 PM, our regiment passed

through their lines near Les Petites Armoises. We were again in the drive with the Fourth French Army on our left and the 165th Infantry (U.S.) on our right.

The 1st Battalion, with a platoon of the Machine Gun Company and the 37-mm. platoon attached, were the assault troops of the regiment. The 1st Battalion and attached units pushed on six kilometers through the town of Tanny and then through dense woods before dark. The assault troops spent the night in the northern edge of the Bois de Mont Dieu.

(15)
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F.O.C. 91

I Corps sent orders to the 42d Division to maintain a strong left flank guard. (15) The 166th Infantry was the left regiment of the division, so it became the duty of our assault battalion to protect its left flank. All along the left boundary of the regimental sector was a main highway which led to Sedan. This road followed along the east side of the Bar River and was in a terrible condition. All bridges were blown out and mine craters were blown at all road crossings and road junctions.

The special mission given the Machine Gun Platoon and the 37-mm. platoon was to assist Company "C" in protecting the left flank of the battalion

For the night of November 5-6, the platoon had all three guns in position in the northern edge of the Bois de Mont Dieu, at a point where an unimproved road leading to La Neuville crossed a small creek. During the night the trains had caught up and hot food was brought to the troops in the front line. The only way that wagons and transportation could get across the creeks was by locating fords or repairing bridges. So the supply company worked hard to get hot food to all troops by midnight each night. (16).

(16)
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At different times during the night loud reports were

heard like some one blasting, and later on we found out that it meant that bridges were blown up.

About midnight orders were received from the division, changing the left boundary from Chemery-Bulsom-Bazeilles (all inclusive) to Chemery-Chehery "Chehery-Sedan Road" (all inclusive). (17) It also ordered the pursuit of the enemy at 5:30 AM the next morning (November 6) and push the pursuit with the utmost vigor, reach the Meuse River and secure the bridgeheads at Sedan.

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and 91

The country was full of hills, woods and many little streams. To make it worse, there were not enough maps, only about 5 or 6 maps being sent to the regiment. Our orders said to go to Sedan and signs on the highways now read "Nach Sedan", meaning "To Sedan". But when you came to a creek and the bridge was out, it seemed to say "Not yet". Through this country began the famous race between the French and the American troops to take Sedan.

Early morning patrols entered La Neuville and gained contact with the enemy. Their machine guns were firing from a point on the railroad southeast of Chemery. A gun position was taken on a hill just northeast of La Neuville. Fire was opened up with extreme range and about 8 or 10 shots were fired, when the enemy machine ceased firing. About 30 more rounds were fired to make sure that the hostile machine guns were silenced. The platoon received word that our troops were advancing and by 10:30 AM, our assault troops were in Chemery.

(18)
I
P. 209

But not the 37-mm. platoon (18), for it was held up by flooded area between La Neuville and Chemery. The platoon went up creek looking for a ford, in order to get the mules and guns across. The stream was deep, although not over 30 feet wide.

After going up stream for about a mile a tree was found that had fallen across the creek. Axes were gotten off the carts, several small trees were cut down and bound together with wire. This then made another log, which was put across the stream a few feet from the fallen tree, making a foundation for a foot bridge. By laying limbs and brush across the logs and a little dirt on top, a substantial small bridge was made. The guns and carts were hauled across by hand. The mules were made to swim the creek.

To build the bridge took some little time but it had to be done. After crossing, the platoon moved down the north side of the creek and on to the road to Chemery. At the edge of the town the bridge across a large creek was gone. A corporal was sent in each direction, up and down the stream, to look for a way to get across. In a few minutes word came that the railroad bridge on the switch track into the town was intact. Also that close to the railroad bridge was a lumber yard. A few plank were laid across the bridge and the platoon moved into the town. ✓

Word was sent to the Regimental Supply Officer about the railroad bridge. By putting more planks on the bridge, the entire combat and field trains were able to effect a crossing at this place.

Upon getting into the center of Chemery, we found the men of the support company of the assault battalion sitting around the streets eating turnips. Pushing on through the town and up the main highway, the platoon soon caught up with the assault companies. We were greeted by Major Sampson (1st Battalion commander) with these words: "Just what I need, some artillery".

It was then 2:30 PM. The advance was held up by heavy machine gun fire from the hills near the crossroad of the

(19)
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Chemery-Sedan Highway and the Connage-Bulsom road. (19)
Also light artillery fire was coming from the hills just in rear of the machine gun positions.

Maneuvering through the heavy woods to the east of the main road for a position, the platoon soon came to the head of a small stream. Following close to the stream, we soon came out on the Connage-Bulsom road, but there was no enemy in sight. We were certainly surprised to find that we were within 200 yards of the enemy's former position. If the enemy had still been in that firing position, the platoon would have probably had heavy losses.

A runner was sent to Battalion Headquarters with the information that the enemy had retreated. The messenger was hardly out of sight when the assault companies appeared on the Connage-Bulsom road.

It was now 5:00 PM. The infantry advance had gotten away from its artillery support. On account of the road conditions it was impossible for even the light artillery to keep up to within supporting distance of the infantry. Lack of artillery support made it hard for the advance of our infantry against the hostile machine gun and artillery fire.

The men of the assault battalion were exhausted after going through woods and climbing up and down hills all day; the ammunition supply was getting low; so orders were given to dig in along the road for the night. The machine gun platoon and the 37-mm. platoon were moved to the vicinity of Connage and took up positions on the left flank of the battalion for the night.

About 7:00 PM, Colonel Hough sent orders to me to take part of my platoon and meet supply officer at the junction of the roads about half way between Connage and Chemery. He

was coming up with hot food for the front line troops, which had to be fed before midnight.

The men of the platoon were to help push the ration carts over the hills and assist in distributing the hot food. All troops were fed by 11:30 PM, but it was nearly 1:00 AM before the men were all back with ^{the} platoon in Connage.

About midnight, November 6-7, orders were received by regimental headquarters from division headquarters to push on at once. (20) The substance of these orders were:

"1. The enemy is still in retreat.

The I Army Corps continues the attack.

2. The 42d Division will continue the pursuit at once and will continue it day and night without halting. The Meuse will be reached and Sedan will be taken to-night. (November 7)."

The 3d Battalion, then in Chemery, received orders to move forward at once, taking with it a machine gun platoon; leap-frog the 1st Battalion, picking up the 37-mm. platoon as it passed through the lines of the 1st Battalion. These orders were received by the platoon soon after returning from delivering food to the 1st Battalion.

A runner from the 3d Battalion, notifying the platoon that they had started, never found the platoon. The platoon was in position outside of the regimental boundary, so did not see the 3d Battalion when it passed through the lines of the 1st Battalion. A runner from the 1st Battalion was sent to the platoon that the 3d Battalion had passed through their lines.

So we started out to catch up. This was about 3:30 AM, November 7. The platoon traveled east on the Connage-Bulsom road to the Chemery-Sedan highway and then turned north toward Sedan.

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As soon as we were on the main highway to Sedan, we found it crowded with French troops. It was a moonlight night (21) and by taking fast pace we soon passed these troops and caught up with the 3d Battalion.

About 6:00 AM, the assault battalion met with a little machine gun fire and some artillery fire. But it was not enough to interrupt advance of the troops.

About 7:30 AM, the platoon passed through Chehery. Just north of this town the troops were held up by heavy machine gun fire and increasing artillery fire. The enemy had decided to make a stand on the heights in front of Sedan. The valley between Chehery and Chevanges was raked by machine gun fire. The platoon was called upon to give assistance by fire on some of the machine gun nests.

The situation was critical. The assault battalion was pinned to the ground and those that were able had gotten into shell holes and ditches. There was no choice of positions. All high ground on three sides of the valley was manned with enemy machine guns and light artillery. It seemed to me that the time had come when the platoon must be sacrificed to save the battalion.

With this thought in mind, the platoon was moved boldly down the road toward Chevauges. About 8:00 AM, a firing position was taken in the ditch on the east side of the highway, and about half way between Chehery and Chevauges.

(22). The mules were put into the ditch on the west side of the road. Tall trees were on each side of the road, as is found on most of the highways in France.

Many machine gun nests were put out of action but still there were a great number left. The situation was relieved somewhat and the battalion advanced again, gaining a road running east and west through the northern edge of

the town of Chevauges. At 9:20 AM, the enemy resistance had reached a point where it was useless to try a frontal attack. The assault troops dug in along the road they had gained.

In the meantime, the platoon had moved up into the town of Chevauges and taken a position in an orchard in the northeastern part of the town. The ammunition supply was getting low, so 20 men were sent back to the wagons, which were in Chehery, to get more ammunition. It was deemed unwise to send mules and carts back for ammunition. It was about a mile back to the wagons, but it took the detail two hours to return with the ammunition.

At about 10:00 AM, the platoon moved to a better position on high ground just northeast of Chevauges. This was the last firing position taken by the platoon during the World War. X

A flanking movement was planned. The 3d Battalion was to hold their position. The 2d Battalion was to move on the left flank and the 1st Battalion was to move on the right flank of the 3d Battalion in an attempt to envelop both flanks of the enemy.

(23)
XVII
ps.229-235

At about 10:30 AM, elements of the 1st Division (23) were moving (in skirmishes) across the open field between our support battalion at Chehery and our assault battalion at Chevauges. These troops were later found to be the 3d Battalion 28th Infantry (24). They were drawing the fire from the enemy and causing many unnecessary casualties in our troops, in addition to their own. Upon reaching our 3d Battalion P. C., they were notified of our advanced position. They then moved their troops to the left into Chevauges.

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Ps.282,286,
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The flanking movement planned was not carried out, due to the intermingling of troops of the 1st Division. (25)
The assault battalion pushed on a little farther. At 2:00

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PM, the advance was stopped. The men were exhausted and the enemy fire was very intense.

The 165th Infantry on our right had had hard going through nothing but hills and woods and very few roads. They finally took hill 546 just east of Chevauges. This was the highest hill around Chevauges and Sedan. (26) On it was found a German observation tower. As soon as this was taken the enemy fire began to slacken and by 4:00 PM had ceased.

Orders were received that the Commanding General, 42d Division, had assumed command of all troops in the sector. So the elements of the 1st Division were withdrawn immediately (27). Another paragraph of the order said the 166th and 165 Infantries would be relieved as soon as the 40th French Division passed through our lines. This relief was completed about 3:00 AM, November 8, 1918.

A company from each of these regiments was invited to accompany the French into Sedan. Through a mix up, the company from the 165th Infantry never joined the French. Company "D", 166th Infantry, went with the French to the outskirts of Sedan (28) on November 10th, this company re-joined the regiment. (29)

The 37-mm. platoon, upon being relieved, marched back and joined the regiment at 5:00 AM at Chemery. The platoon was just in time to be the first in the mess line for breakfast, and after this the platoon was always called "Pound-Wonders". (30)

ANALYSES AND CRITICISMS

In analyzing this operation, the platoon had in mind at all times the objective, which was to crush the enemy and push on to Sedan. It always maintained the offensive.

Mass is shown by the fact that the assault troops at all times drove the enemy back toward Sedan. By having a narrow sector with one battalion of the regiment in the assault, and the other two battalions in support and reserve, gave the regiment a driving power which shows economy of forces. Enemy machine gun nests were routed by being out flanked, which brings out the principle of movement. The enemy was never surprised, because he took positions that made it possible for him to see our movements. The troops received a surprise when the enemy made a decided stand in front of Sedan. Security was observed at all times, by having advance patrols to the front and a strong left flank guard. Orders always stated to pursue the enemy and crush him. These orders were simplicity itself. The platoon always was willing to cooperate and carry out any mission given to it; from pushing ration carts to deliver hot food to assault troops to boldly exposing itself to hostile fire in order to save a battalion from deadly machine gun fire.

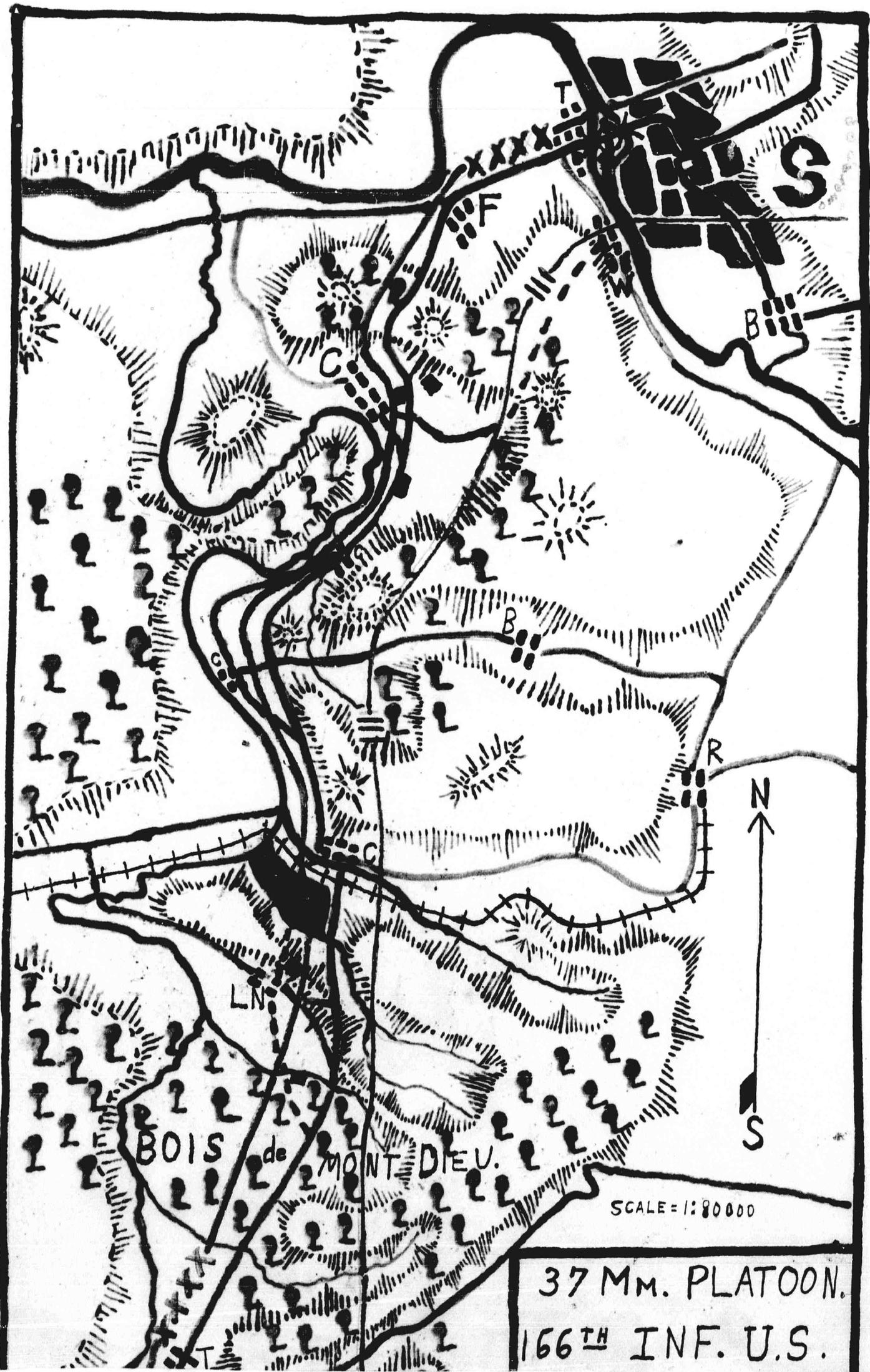
In the criticisms, there can be nothing said about the platoon except praise.

The only criticism is of the authorities higher up, who failed to furnish sufficient maps. Also it is not good policy for troops to be intermingled with troops of another sector.

LESSONS

1. That well trained infantry, without the support of artillery but having high morale, can drive back an enemy with supporting artillery that has a low morale.

2. The one great lesson that the platoon learned was that "In every advance, it is necessary to push."



SCALE = 1:80000

37 MM. PLATOON.
166TH INF. U.S.