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THE BATTLE OF CANTIGNY.

CAPTAIN GEORGE E. BUTLER, INFANTRY.

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THE BATTLE OF CANTIGNY.

INTRODUCTION.

A study of "The Battle of Cantigny" would be incomplete without including in it the events immediately preceding, with reference to the Allied situation and American participation in the World War, since these events were the sole justification for making this, the first American offensive, on a scale out of all proportion to the purely tactical gains to be had.

When the Russian Armies collapsed in 1917, the German Armies on the Eastern Front were transferred to the Western Front with the result that the German forces on the Western Front were practically doubled. This gave the Germans sufficient numerical superiority to give them the advantages of the offensive. Consequently the drives of March 21, 1918 and April 9, 1918 against the British 5th. Army were overwhelming successes. This brought on ^{one of} the most serious crises of the war and the consequent lowering of the moral of the Allies. (1) This crisis was so serious that in order to avert complete disaster the Allies were forced to accept the principle of "Unity of Command".

On March 26, 1918 General Pershing complimented Marshal Foch on his appointment as Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies and also placed at his disposal all the American troops and material in France to do with as he saw fit. (2). This led to the relief of the 1st. Division (American) from the Ansaerville sector, north of Toul, by the 26th Division (American) on April 3, 1918. The 1st. Division was then moved by rail to the vicinity of Chaumont-en-Vixen where it was given intensive training in the art of open warfare for two weeks, after which it was moved to the front and on April 24, 1918 it took over a sector of about three miles a short distance to the west of Montidier. (3) The Division was at this time attached to the 1st. Army (French) and saw most of its action in this sector as a part of the 10th. Army Corps (French) under command of General Vanderburg. (4).

(1) Pershing's
Final Re-
port,

Browne
Pillsbury,
page 42

(2) Pershing's
Final Re-
port,
page 32.

(3) Personal.

(4) G.O. 816c,
10th. Army Corps
(French)
Info. File 12.9

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The operation by the 1st Division, which succeeded in reducing the Cantigny salient and gave possession of the town to the Allies, was very important, not from the tactical gains which were entirely local, but for its political and psychological effect upon the Allies which were far-reaching. It was a promise of American aid which gave new hope to the soldiers and civilians of France and Great Britain (6).

(6) Frothingham, page 260
Halsey
page 127.

The metal of the American fighting qualities were sorely tried in this first offensive action and the brilliant success attained was undoubtedly a decisive factor in the decision of the Allied Commander-in-Chief to employ the 2nd. and 3rd. American Divisions in the all-important positions at Chateau Thierry and Belleu Wood (7). The immortal glory gained by these splendid Divisions was the fulfillment of the promise made at Cantigny and confirmed the impression created by the 1st. Division making possible the counter-offensive of July 18, 1918 the brunt of which was placed on American Divisions, without whom Marshal Foch would not have dared risk such a counter offensive since his own troops, including reserves, were sorely depleted. Had the 1st. Division failed at Cantigny, it is very doubtful if Marshal Foch would have placed enough reliance upon the American Divisions to entrust to them the important positions they later occupied. (8).

(7) Usher
page 286.

(8) Simmons
page 176.

GENERAL SITUATION. (PLATE 1.)

The sector which was taken over by the 1st. Division on April 24, 1918 was approximately five kilometers to the west of Montidier and faced the village of Cantigny from the south and west generally on low ground with the enemy holding the village and the high ground on which it was situated. It was different from the previous experiences of the division, as in all previous service at the front it had taken over old sectors which had been completely organized, while here it found itself in a position consisting of practically nothing but a series of foxholes in a field of uncut wheat or in woods, where the French troops had stemmed the German tide at the point of its furthest

advance during the offensive of March 21, 1918 and the subsequent

- (9) 1st. Division route of the British 5th. Army. (9) The sector was at this time still
History,
page 69.
- very active especially in artillery. The German Artillery sent over an average of 3,400 rounds daily and the American artillery returned the compliment with approximately three times that amount. The peak of this artillery fire was reached on the night of May 2-3, 1918 when the Germans sent over more than 15,000 mustard gas and high explosive shells within a period of $3\frac{1}{2}$ hours on the 18th. Infantry in the vicinity

- (10) 1st. Division of Villers-Tournelle causing some 850 casualties. (10)
History,
page 74.

The German lines opposite the 1st. Division were garrisoned by the 271st and 272nd. Regiments of the 82nd. Reserve Division. The 272nd. held the high ground to the north of the village and the 271st held the village and the area to the immediate south. Each regiment was disposed with one battalion in the front lines, one in support and the third in reserve. The support battalions were located in the vicinity of Bois de Framicourt and Bois de Lalval, with the reserve battalions about 12

- (11) 1st. Division kilometers to the rear. (11)
History,
page 77.

THE TERRAIN.

To the men of the division, who had spent the cold, rainy winter in the training area and in the mud of the Ansauville sector, the warm sun and dry ground of Picardy came as the realization of a beautiful dream. The country side was dotted with numerous small villages nestled in the low ground between the gently rolling hills covered with unharvested crops and with here and there small patches of well kept orchards and woods all laden with the full green foliage of Spring.

A veritable network of improved roads simplified the problem of transportation although those roads near the front lines had at the time of the Battle of Cantigny become badly torn up by the intense artillery fire so that it was hard for even a one mule ration car to pass. (12) The subsoil of the entire area was of chalk so that all the trenches in the sector had parapets of white (12)

- (12) Personal.

The village of Cantigny occupies the southern nose of a relatively high plateau, from which the greater portion of the terrain for several kilometers around may be seen. This position was the commanding feature of that section of the line and afforded excellent observation as well as cover for a concentration of troops and artillery in case its defenders contemplated an attack. The Cantigny plateau is bounded on the immediate south and east by fairly deep ravines. To the northeast of the village on another piece of high ground is the Bois de Lalval and to the south of the village across the ravine ^{of} the Bois de Cantigny and Bois Fontaine. To the west of the village on the western slope of the Cantigny Plateau is the Bois Suisse. All of these features were of military importance. (13)

(13) Personal.

DISPOSITIONS. (PLATE 2.)

The front lines of the two regiments of the First Division occupying this sector prior to the battle was from right to left as follows: Beginning at the Bois Celestin the line ran in a northerly direction through the Bois de Fontaine, around the eastern tip of the Bois de Cantigny which was the boundary between regiments. From here the line turned directly west and ran along the northern edge of the Bois de Cantigny to Bois Carre at which point it again turned north and passed through Bois Suisse and then up over the western slope of the Cantigny Plateau at a point approximately 600 yards to the west of the village.

The sectors to either flank were occupied by French troops.

Only that portion of the line to the north of the Bois de Cantigny was directly involved in the battle, although some of the reactions of the Germans after the attack was felt by the 26th. Infantry, which occupied that part of the sector to the south of the Bois de

(14) Personal. Cantigny. (14)

F.O.14
1st. Division.
April 23, 1918.
Info. File,
Cantigny
052-E-2.

PLANS AND ORDERS. (PLATE 3).

The railroad center of Amiens had been placed in a precarious position by the German drives of March 21, 1918 and April 9, 1918 and it was expected that the next German attack would have as its mission the capture of this vital spot. To meet this expected attack plans were made and preliminary orders were issued for a counter attack by three to five divisions, with the 1st. American Division in the center, to drive north in the area to the west of Montidier while another

(15) Testimony of force drove to the east from the area near Amiens. (15)
Colonel Greely,
and Captain
Caffey.

When this expected German attack did not come these plans were dropped. However it was apparent that the time had come to employ American troops in an offensive in order to show the people that American aid was at hand, consequently plans were formulated and orders were issued for an attack by the 1st. Division on the village of Cantigny with the mission of reducing the Cantigny Salient and occupying the high ground therein. (16)

(16) 1st. Division
History,
page 77.
Personal.

The plans for the attack called for the employment of one regiment of Infantry as the assault unit to be supported by the remainder of the division. For this the 28th. Infantry, under command of Colonel Hansen E. Ely, was selected. (17)

(17) Personal.

The scheme of maneuver was extremely simple. All three battalions were to be employed in the assault with each battalion keeping one rifle company in reserve, and each to have one machine gun company attached. The assault was to be made in three waves with two platoons of each company in the assault wave with the remaining two platoons in the support wave. The third wave consisting of a specially constituted fifth platoon was to carry material for the organization of the captured ground. The machine gun company was to follow in rear of the third wave. (18)

(18) E.O. 18,
1st. Division
May 20, 1918.
Personal.

The zone of action of the regiment was approximately 2,200 yards wide with practically no advance on the flanks and with a maximum penetration of approximately 1,600 yards in the center which included the village itself. (19).

(19) E.O. 18.
1st. Div.
1v.

The date and hour for the attack was announced as 6:45 A.M.

(20) Personal.

May 28, 1918. (20).

The plans for the Artillery, Machine Gun, and Heavy Trench Mortar support included the combined fire of the three divisional regiments of artillery reinforced by all the heavy artillery of the 10th. Corps (French), the massed fire of 56 machine guns of the 1st., 2nd., and 3rd. Machine Gun Battalions, and the employment of 12 Heavy Trench Mortars of the type commonly known as "Flying Pigs". The artillery was to fire for two hours prior to zero hour devoting the first hour to verifying adjustment and the second hour to heavy concentration on counter battery, interdiction and preparation fire. The preparatory fire on the village was to be intensified by the fire of the "Flying Pigs". At 6:43 A.M. a barrage was to be placed in front of the line of departure by the 75mm guns and the combined fire of the 56 machine guns. This barrage was to roll forward on a time schedule of 100 meters in two minutes until the western edge of the village was reached and then slow down to 100 meters in four minutes, until it reached the line established for the normal barrage in front of the objectives where it was to remain fixed and continue until zero hour plus 1 hour and 15 minutes. The heavy artillery was to continue its counter battery and interdiction fire for the same length of time. (21)

(21) Annex #3
F.O. 18, 1st.
Division
May 20, 1918.

The 5th. Group of Tanks (French) was to support the attack and were to precede the assault wave of the units whose sectors included the village. (22)

(22) Testimony of
Captain Wm. G.
Livesay 28 Inf.

A section of Flame Throwers (French) was also to support the attack and assist in cleaning up the strong dugouts and cellars of

(23) Testimony of the village. (23)
Capt. Wm. G.
Livesay 28 Inf.

There was no American Air Service available so that the attack was to be supported by the 42nd. Squadron of the French

(24) Testimony of Air Service. (24)
Capt. Wm. G.
Livesay 28 Inf.

The final objective as described in the division order for the attack, " Passes along the plateau of Cantigny on the slope facing the enemy." (25)

(25) F.O. # 18
1st.Div.
May 20,18.

The plan for consolidation was based on position in depth with a line of surveillance,lightly held,with the main line of resistance 150 to 200 yards in rear on the counter slope or at least on the flat top of the plateau. The cellars and dugouts which had not been completely destroyed were to be occupied and to form the line of redoubts. The accompanying machine guns were to be placed for flank fire,some in the line of surveillance,if suitable positions were available,the remainder to be escheloned in depth. (26)

(26) F.O.# 18
1st.Div.
May 20,18
and annex
#3 thereto,
May 24,18.

A very complicated system of communications was planned using telephones up to include Battalion P.Cs. Ground TelegraphsandRadio were to be used up to include regimental R.C. Panels were to used to mark out the front line for the air observer. (20).

(20) Annex # 9
F.O.18,
1st.Div.
May 20,18.

A very striking feature of this operation is that there were no written orders prepared below the division and that the division order with its numerous annexes and operations maps was as voluminous as one would expect for an army operation.In all the order included more than 100 typed pages, and left nothing to the initiative of the regimental commander except that he was authorized to exercise his own judgement as to whether " 1 shovel or pick, large ,should be carried by his men in the attack. All other articles of equipement to be carried by the men were specified by annex # 4 of the Order which concluded as follows "Blouses will be worn throughout.Blankets and rolls will not be carried." Even the location the regimental and battalion P.C.s following the attack were prescribed by the division order. (21)

(21) Annex #4,
F.O.# 18,
1st.Div.
May 25,18.
And Memo.
393,1st.
Div.May 19,
1918.

On May 24,1918 the 28th.Infantry ,which was then in the front line,was relieved by the 18th.Infantry, and was moved back to the reserve area in the vicinity of Maisoncelle for training for the attack. Here a piece of terrain very similiar to that upon which

Cantigny stood, was selected for the training. The impending attack was rehearsed three times, the first time with only the officers taking part; The second time with the officers and non-commissioned officers walking through it and the last time with all troops going through the maneuver. After each rehearsal detailed critiques were held and errors pointed out. A huge sandtable was constructed depicting all the known features of the fortifications of the village. In Addition All Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers were shown lantern slides of Aerial Photographs of the area over which the attack was to be made, at which time a detailed interpretation of each was made by a French Officer (29).

(29) Personal.

OPERATIONS.

The relief of the 16th. Infantry by the 28th. Infantry began on the night of May 26, 1918 when the 2nd. Battalion went into position in the Bois Suisse. The remainder of the regiment moved in and were all reported in position for the attack at 3:30 A.M. May 28, 1918. An incident occurred on the night of May 26-27, 1918 which caused considerable anxiety on the part of the entire division. The 2nd. Battalion had no sooner relieved a battalion of the 16th. Infantry than a heavy barrage was put down by the Germans and this was followed by a strong raid on the 2nd. Battalion 28th. Infantry as well as on the 1st Battalion 26th. Infantry in the Bois Fontaine. Fortunately no prisoners were lost by the 28th. Infantry but the enemy did succeed in making a slight penetration of the line held by the 26th. Infantry and took prisoner two members of the 26th. Infantry. It was so vitally important that the enemy obtain no information of the impending attack that Major Theodore Roosevelt in command of the 1st Battalion 26th. Infantry made an immediate counter raid in an attempt to recapture the two American prisoners. In this he was unsuccessful but did succeed in taking prisoner three of the Germans. The loss of these two prisoners was serious as it was not known how much they knew of the impending attack. However the fact that the attack was a complete surprise was

(30) Capt. Bennett
& Capt. Caffey
in the Capt.
R.C. Smith
Monograph.

fairly good proof that they did not tell all they knew. (30).

THE ATTACK.

Personal.

At 3:45 A.M. May 28, 1918 the artillery began a slow fire for adjustment and at 4.45 A.M. this fire increased in intensity and all artillery verified adjustment. At 5:45 A.M. all artillery, including calibres of 75mm, 155 mm., 250mm. and 280mm., and the heavy trench mortars started an intense counter battery, interdiction, preparation fire . At 6:43 the preparation fire ceased and the

(31) Col. H.E. Ely
Report of
2 June 1918.
Info. File
055-E-4.

rolling barrage was put down according to schedule. (31).

At exactly 6:45 A.M. the barrage lifted, the tanks lumbered forward and were immediately followed by the first wave of Infantry, which advanced under perfect control within 50 yards of the barrage taking advantage of all possible cover while waiting for the barrage to move on. Contrary to most of the historians the men did not advance in perfect alignment but rather by small staggered groups, advancing from cover to cover. All known dugouts and cellars had been plotted on each platoon commanders map and small groups of men had been assigned the task of policing each, so when the village was reached each group moved directly to its task and without the least confusion proceeded to mop up. (32).

(32) Personal.

The attack can best be described by treating each company separate as each had somewhat different conditions under which to operate.

Company "A" on the extreme right flank had perhaps the hardest task of all. Two platoons of this company swung out across the ravine from the old front line in the northern edge of the Bois de Cantigny and since this line was parallel to the direction of the attack the company had to pivot on its right flank and describe an arc of approximately 90 degrees to take its objective facing to the east. In making this swing the left of the company had to extend into the ravine to the south of the village which was under the enfilade fire of enemy machine guns located in the vicinity of

Fontaine sous Montidier. The company no sooner started its movement than it was swept by a storm of lead which inflicted severe casualties on it. All Officers were soon casualties and in the midst of this terrific fire the First Sergeant of the company took command and by heroic efforts managed to get the remnants of the company to its objective. (33)

(33) Capt C.T.
Senay 28 Inf.

Company "B" on the left of Company "A" attacked due east and joined up with the left of Company "A". This Company suffered heavy casualties while crossing the ravine from the same machine gun fire which raked Company "A". The two platoons in the second wave suffered most as its position 150 yards in rear of the assault wave left it in the ravine where the men tried to dig in under the heavy fire. Casualties were so heavy that these platoons soon moved forward and merged with the assault wave on the line of surveillance making it very densely held instead of the thin line planned. (34).

(34) Capt.C.T.
Senay 28 Inf.
Personal.

Company "C" was in battalion reserve and did not receive many casualties although it moved one platoon forward to the southeastern edge of the village near the Chateau where it helped to organize a strong point in conjunction with the battalion machine gun company. The remainder of the Company took position in the Bois Suisse. (35).

(35) Capt.C.T.
Senay 28 Inf.

Company "D" the left assault company of the 1st. Battalion jumped off from a position in the Bois Suisse on the western slope of the Cantigny Plateau, and as it did not have to cross the ravine it escaped the machine gun fire encountered by the other companies. This company did not come under serious fire until it had passed through the southern part of the village and reached the geographical crest near its objective, where the assault wave walked into heavy grazing fire from its right front in the direction of Fontaine sous Montidier. This company encountered very little resistance as all enemy were keeping to the dugouts and deep cellars. The platoons in the second wave did most of the mopping up in the sector which consisted principally of driving the enemy out of his dugouts by means of

hand grenades and automatic pistols. In one dugout alone two men of the company found 47 of the enemy and after killing 5 of them the remainder walked out and surrendered. (36)

(36) Personal.

Company "H" on the left of Company "D" had to pass through the center of the village and had practically the same experience as did Company "D" in that it encountered very little resistance and its principal task was to mop up the dugouts and cellars where it took many prisoners. This Company got slightly out of its sector in passing through the ruins of the village and failed to clean out the hedge in its left which concealed a few machine gun nests which fired into the right

(37) Capt. E.C. Johnson 28th Inf. flank of Company "E" which was on the left of Company "H". (37)

Company "E" on the left of Company "H" encountered the most resistance from the garrison of the village due partly to the gap left by Company "H" and partly to the fact that the preparatory artillery fire had not been directed at the cemetery. This Company encountered heavy fire from the machine gun nests along the Cemetery and along the hedge along its right flank. Material assistance was given the Company in overcoming these machine gun nests by the initiative of a sergeant in command of a platoon of the second wave of Company "F" which was on the left of Company "E". The Sergeant observing that Company "H" had left a gap on its left that was holding up the advance of Company "E", took his platoon around behind Company "H" and filled in the gap and by a flanking movement helped to overcome the nests. This action was practically the only organized resistance offered in the capture of the

(38) Capt. E.C. Johnson, 28th. Inf. village, and it was fought to a finish, very little quarter being given. (38)

Company "F" on the left of Company "E" encountered very little resistance in its advance and reached its objective with few casualties. However the slope of the Cantigny Plateau in its sector was much farther to the east than was shown by the map and when it tried to move out past the geographical crest it came under heavy direct fire of machine guns and light artillery from the vicinity of Bois Lalval and suffered heavily, attempting to overcome this fire by rifle fire. (37)

(39) Capt. E.C. Johnson.

Company "G" was the reserve Company of the 2nd. Battalion but had two platoons detached to follow in rear of Company "E" with the mission of "mopping up" that portion of the village which lay to the north of the Chateau. One Platoon advanced until it was on the northeast of corner of the village, then by an encircling movement from the east, worked back through the village. The other Platoon entered the village from the north and worked south until it met the ~~other~~ ^{FIRST} Platoon in the Public Square. The remarkable feature of this movement was that the platoon which entered the village from the east and worked back encountered the heaviest fighting, notwithstanding the fact that Companies "E" and "H" with a platoon of Company "F" had only a short time before advanced through this area. This task of "mopping up" proved to be a hard one as patrols worked at it constantly during the three days the 28th. Infantry occupied the village and the 16th. Infantry took some prisoners after it had

(40) Capt. C.R. Huebner 28 Inf. relieved the 28th. Infantry on May 30, 1918. (40).

Company "G", less two platoons moved forward with Company "C" 2nd. Machine Gun Battalion and organized a strong point about 400 yards east of the Cemetery. (41).

The 3rd. Battalion on the left of the regimental sector had Companies "M", "L" and "K" in the assault from right to left with

(42) Captain Wm.C. Livesay, 28th. Inf. Company "I" in reserve. (42)

Company "M" on the left of Company "F" encountered very little resistance and took its objective with only slight casualties. (43).

(43) Capt. E.C. Johnson. 28th. Inf.

Companies "L" and "K" never had a chance to advance beyond the old front line, due to the murderous machine gun fire from the left flank where the strongly entrenched positions of the enemy on the high ground west of Bois Lalval had not been reduced, as they were out of the zone of advance in front of the French lines. These Companies suffered heavy casualties in the attempt to move forward but were forced to remain in the old front line. This left the left flank of Company "M" exposed so that it had to fall back slightly to connect up with the right of Company "L". This made the new line

(44) Captains
C.R.Huebner
and E.C.John-
son 28th.Inf.

curve back sharply . (44).

One Platoon was detached from Company "I" in Reserve and established a strong point with the Machine Gun Company, at the Cemetary. (45).

(45) Capt.E.C.
Johnson,
28th.Inf.

During the attack and for the hour following, the American and French Artillery obtained complete supremacy over the enemy Artillery and maintained its advantage so well that very few if any enemy shells were received until after shallow trenches were constructed. (46).

(46) Personal.

The Flame Throwers were of material assistance in inducing the German garrison to leave their dugouts. (47).

(47) Personal.

Insofar as could be observed by the writer the tanks were of very little assistance since the resistance was negligible.

THE CONSOLIDATION.

As we have already seen, some of the Companies reached the Objective with only slight casualties and on the whole the ground was taken with exceptionally low losses. (48). However when most of the Companies reached the Objective they passed over the geographical crest and started to dig in they came under withering machine gun fire which just grazed the crest and caused severe casualties before they could intrench. (49). However all possible use was made of shell holes which were deepened and later connected up by the men in the holes digging toward each other. Needless to say that the work of digging in progressed rapidly. (50).

(48) Col.H.E.BLY
report of
2 June 1918.
Capt.Wm.G.
Livesay.

(49) Personal
Capt.E.C.
Johnson,
28th.Inf.

(50) Personal.

All of the Companies of the 1st.Battalion reached the objective and dug in. However Company "A" was in such an untenable position in the ravine, that it had to be withdrawn to its old line in the Bois de Cantigny, to escape annihilation. This Company should never ^{have} been required to move as it could cover the area by fire from the old position. After this Company was pulled back the ravine was covered by cross-fire of machine guns and rifles. (51)

(51) Captains
C.R.Huebner
and C.T.Senay,
28th.Infantry.
Personal.

Company "B" found a network of enemy trenches in its sector which were not occupied. It took advantage of them in the consolidation and as a consequence it suffered few casualties until the enemy artillery came down on the overcrowded front line. (52).

(52) Capt. C. T.
Senay 28 Inf.

Company "D" found itself on the highest nose of the Plateau and was forced to dig in under a fury of machine gun bullets which inflicted severe punishment on it. Within a few minutes after the objective was reached all seven Officers of the Company were casualties. Again the high calibre of the Non-Commissioned Officers was proven when a platoon sergeant took command of the Company and completed the organization of the position and held his ground during the first counter attack. (53)

(53) Personal.

In the Second Battalion all of the Companies reached their Objectives on scheduled time which was Zero hour plus 35 minutes. On the right of the Battalion Company "H" had almost the same conditions under which to consolidate as did Company "D" on its right, and suffered heavily while digging in. (54).

(54) Personal.

Company "E" was more fortunate in the terrain it had to consolidate, as it did not move across the geographical crest and had therefore some protection to the front while digging in, but still had a good field of fire for two hundred yards to the front due to the fact that the geographical crest was much farther out than was shown by the map. (55).

(55) Testimony
of Capt.
E. C. Johnson,
28th. Inf.

Company "F" followed the letter of the order and when it found that the slope of the Cantigny Plateau was much further out than had been thought tried to establish its front line on the very edge of the ravine between the village and Bois Lalval, but due to the heavy fire it received it had to be drawn back to the left of the line established by Company "E", where the support Platoons were already digging in. This left the entire company crowded into a single line, under aimed fire from the Bois Lalval. (56).

(56) Captain
E. C. Johnson
28th. Inf.

The 3rd. Battalion was as we have seen, less successful in its advance as Company "M" was the only one to advance past the old front line trenches. This Company found its left flank exposed so that it had to take up a line running nearly west to east from Company "L" to connect up with Company "F". In doing this its front line was drawn back almost to the strong point at the Cemetery and as a result this strong point which had been constructed in the shape of a cross was very prominent and drew heavy artillery fire which added to the heavy burden already imposed upon it by having to cover the terrain in two directions. (57)

(57) Testimony
of Lieut.
McKnolly 28Inf.

On the night of May 28th. direct orders were given to the Commanders of Companies "L" and "K" to move up and organize the original objective assigned. Although every effort was made to do this, it was found impossible to occupy the position after it was reached due to the deadly flank fire from the left. After the 28th. Infantry was relieved the 16th. Infantry made further efforts to straighten out this section of the line but it was never accomplished up to the time the division was relieved from the Sector in July 1918. (58). It would appear from the aerial photographs of the trenches that this area could not be occupied without an advance by the French unit on the left to clean out the enemy positions on the flank.

(58) Captain C.R.
Huebner 28 Inf.

The new German drive on the Chemin des Dames on May 27th. 1918 had been the cause for orders being issued withdrawing all the Corps Artillery from behind the 1st Division as soon as the attack was completed. Consequently within an hour after the attack all Artillery excepting organic was withdrawn from the division area. This left the troops in the new position with all counter battery work stopped so that the enemy immediately put down a heavy retaliatory fire which was very effective and the American casualties began to mount especially where the front lines had been overcrowded. (59).

(59) Col. Marshal
Col Ely &
Smith Monograph.

COUNTER ATTACKS

SEVEN

There were ~~six~~ counter attacks launched by the Germans in the three days of the battle in the attempt to drive the American out of their hard-earned positions. However three of these were more or less local in nature and did not advance with determination. (60).

Col Ely &
(60) Capt. Wm. G.
Livesay, 28 Inf.
Info. File.

The first counter attack was launched at about 9:00 A.M. May 28th. and was directed against the right of the First Battalion. However this was a poorly organized attack and was quickly broken up by the Artillery and small arms fire (61).

(61) 1st. Div.
History.
page 85.

At 5:30 P.M. of the same day the second counter attack came but it had hardly left the Bois Framicourt before it was caught under heavy artillery and small arms fire and was quickly broken up. (62).

(62) 1st Div.
History,
page 85.

Following the second counterattack the enemy artillery put down a heavy preparation on the American lines and at 6:45 P.M. came one of the well organized, determined counter attacks behind a rolling barrage with the Infantry in several waves. The American barrage was put down promptly but in spite of it the first wave of the German Infantry came to within a few yards of the American front line when the American Troops stood up in their shallow trenches and with deliberately aimed fire picked off all the enemy who had managed to get inside the barrage

(63) Testimony
of Lieut.
John H. Church
& Lieut Soren
C. Sorensen.
28 Inf.

((63). This attack was also launched from the Bois de Framicourt and was directed against the positions held by "B", "D" and "H" Companies and was completely repulsed with heavy casualties inflicted on the enemy most of which were reported as "killed" (64).

(64) Lieut
John H. Church
& Capt. E. C.
Johnson 28 Inf.

Two more counter attacks were reported ~~reported~~ between 6:00 A.M. and 7:00 A.M. on May 29, 1918. but were half hearted attempts and failed (65)

(65) 1st. Div.
History
page 86.

At 4:00 P.M. May 29th. the German artillery again put down an intensive preparatory fire which stopped suddenly without any further development for a time except for the fire of a German 77mm gun in the direction of Bois Lalval, whose fire was being directed by a low flying plane on the left of Company "F", where a machine gun had been placed in the front line. The fire of this gun was so accurate that the Commanding Officer of the Company gave the order for the men to move to the right of the Company sector to escape the fire. This order became confused and the men thought that it meant to move out of the trench to the right. Consequently the men went out and went back along the hedge and some crowded into the front line of Company "E". This was not a stampede however and the men were soon rounded up and readily returned to their trench. (66). Following this interlude at 5:45 P.M. another heavy artillery concentration was placed on the American positions and this was soon followed by a barrage in three waves. First came a wave of super-heavies, next a wave of heavies and next a thick barrage of 77's. This triple barrage was followed by the enemy Infantry in force bent on another counter attack. This one was well prepared and was launched from the ravine in the direction of Bois Lalval and was directed against Companies "E", "F" and "L", toward the spot where the incident related above concerning Company "F", which explained why so much trouble was taken to knock out a lone machine gun. The American barrage again came down promptly and it together with accurate small arms fire completely repulsed the attack with heavy losses to the Germans. (67). The strength of this counter attack was about one battalion. (68).

(66) Captain
E.C. Johnson
28th. Inf.

(67) Capt E.C.
Johnson 28 Inf.
(68) Col Ely
report of
2 June 1918.

The last counter attack came at 5:30 A.M. May 30th. from the Bois Lalval. A rolling barrage was put down and two waves of Infantry followed at 150 to 200 yards. The American troops took cover until the barrage passed over then came up before the enemy Infantry got too close

The American Artillery and Machine Guns responded again with a timely barrage which together with the small arms fire completely repulsed what proved to be the Germans last attempt to turn the Americans first offensive into a defeat (69).

(69) Capt. E. C. Johnson
28th. Inf.

This ended the Battle Of Cantigny and on the night of May 30, 1918 the battle weary and badly decimated 28th. Infantry was relieved by the 16th. Infantry and passed to the reserve area for a well-earned rest. (70).

(70) Col Ely
report of
2 June 1918.

GAINS AND LOSSES.

In the attack on Cantigny it took just 35 minutes to reduce the salient in the line and take from the Germans the best observation post in the immediate vicinity, with only slight losses. However it took three days to convince him that he could not retake the position. More important than any local tactical gain was the fact that at last the American Army was ready and able to take a portion of the burden from the shoulders of the Allied Armies. The total American casualties in the battle were 1,077 divided as follows killed 13 Officers and 185 men. Wounded and missing 32 Officers and 837 men. The German losses were estimated at 1555 divided as follows. Prisoners 4 Officers and 251 men. Killed 800 and Wounded 500.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM.

This attack was conceived and planned with the psychological and political results to be gained as the mission, rather than any tactical or strategical advantages. Such considerations are of course more important than the many errors made from a purely military point of view. There is no question that the operation was a complete and brilliant success when the real mission is considered. However if the operation were to be criticised from the military point of view it is questionable whether the Americans could be credited with victory. In the first place the claim that this was the first purely American Offensive would seem to be inaccurate when it is considered that more than half of the supporting Artillery was French; That the supporting Tanks were French; That the supporting Air Service was French;

That the heavy Trench Mortars were French and that the Flame Throwers were French. In the second place at least three times as many troops were crowded into a small attack as were needed or justified, resulting in excessive casualties; and in the third place it is doubtful if the attack as carried out was tactically sound when it is remembered what happened to Company "A" on the right flank and to Companies "L" and "K" on the left flank and the fact that the advance was so slight as to leave the enemy with his support and reserve units, together with his Artillery, in position ready to counter attack with as much power as was employed in the attack. However these purely military factors have very little weight in an action such as this, where the primary consideration was to make victory as certain as it was humanly possible regardless of the cost.

On the other hand the scheme of maneuver for mopping up the village was an excellent one and worked out very satisfactorily when it is considered how many deep cellars and dugouts were occupied by the enemy. Although it took several days to thoroughly clean up all the enemy in the town this was due solely to the fact that the artillery preparation was so violent that it was impossible to locate all the dugouts or for the enemy to dig his way out for several days.

The manner in which the troops quickly consolidated the positions and held their ground against determined counterattacks is undoubtedly deserving of the highest praise. The initiative and leadership shown by the Non-Commissioned Officers was one of the outstanding features of the engagement. The value of accurate small arms fire was never more strikingly illustrated than when the entire first wave of one counter attack was destroyed by this means.

The fact that the T.P.S. and T.S.F. used at regimental P.C. was continually drawing heavy artillery fire is proof that the runner is still the "first line" means of communication.

LESSONS.

1. When it is decided to attack a position which is strongly defended in depth, the advance should be made of sufficient depth to defeat and dislodge the enemy support and reserve units as well as his artillery.

2. It is a waste of men to crowd more units into the assault than is necessary to accomplish the assigned mission.

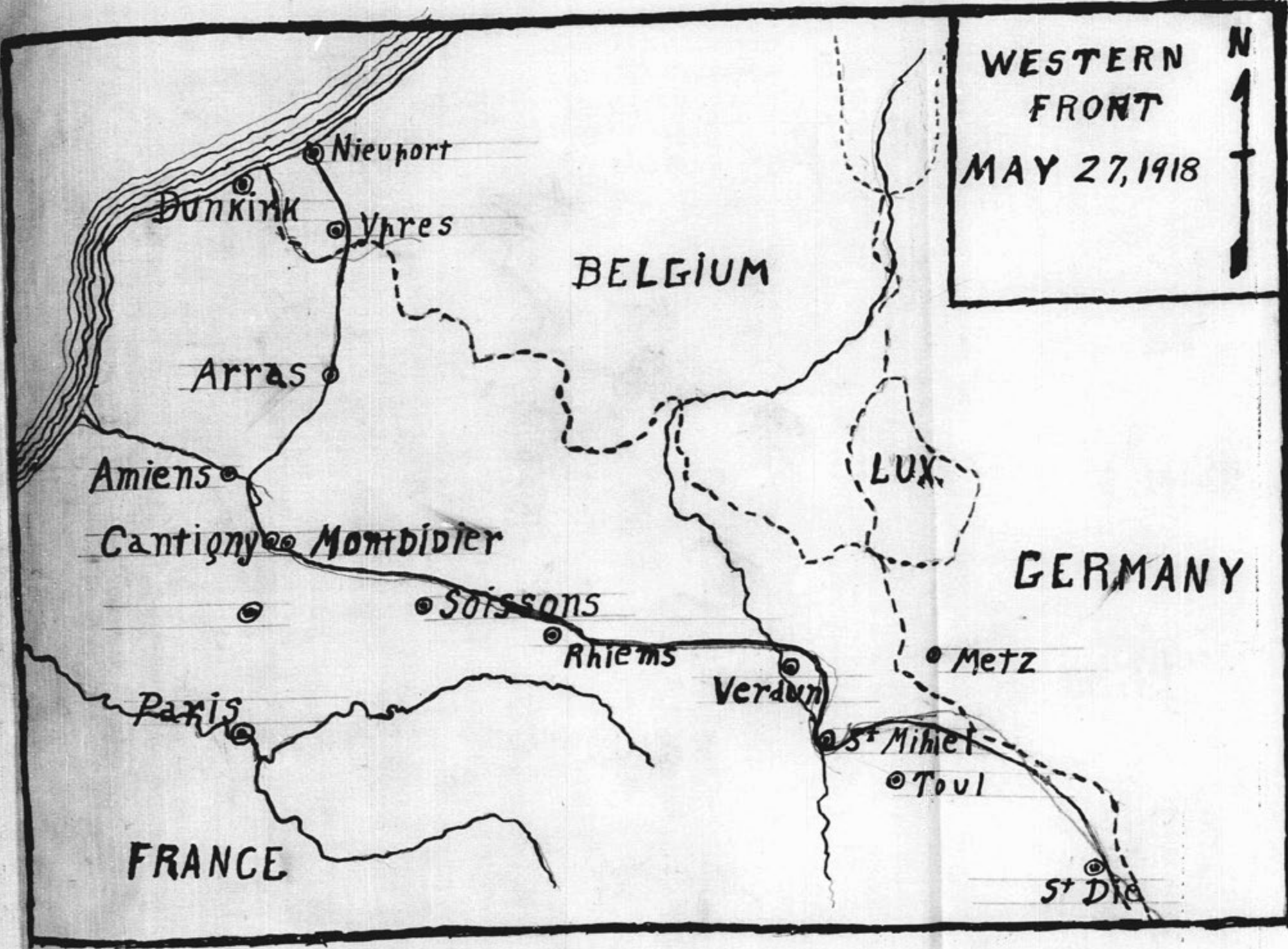
3. Defilated spaces which are subject to enfilade fire of enemy machine guns should never be occupied when they can be adequately covered by fire.

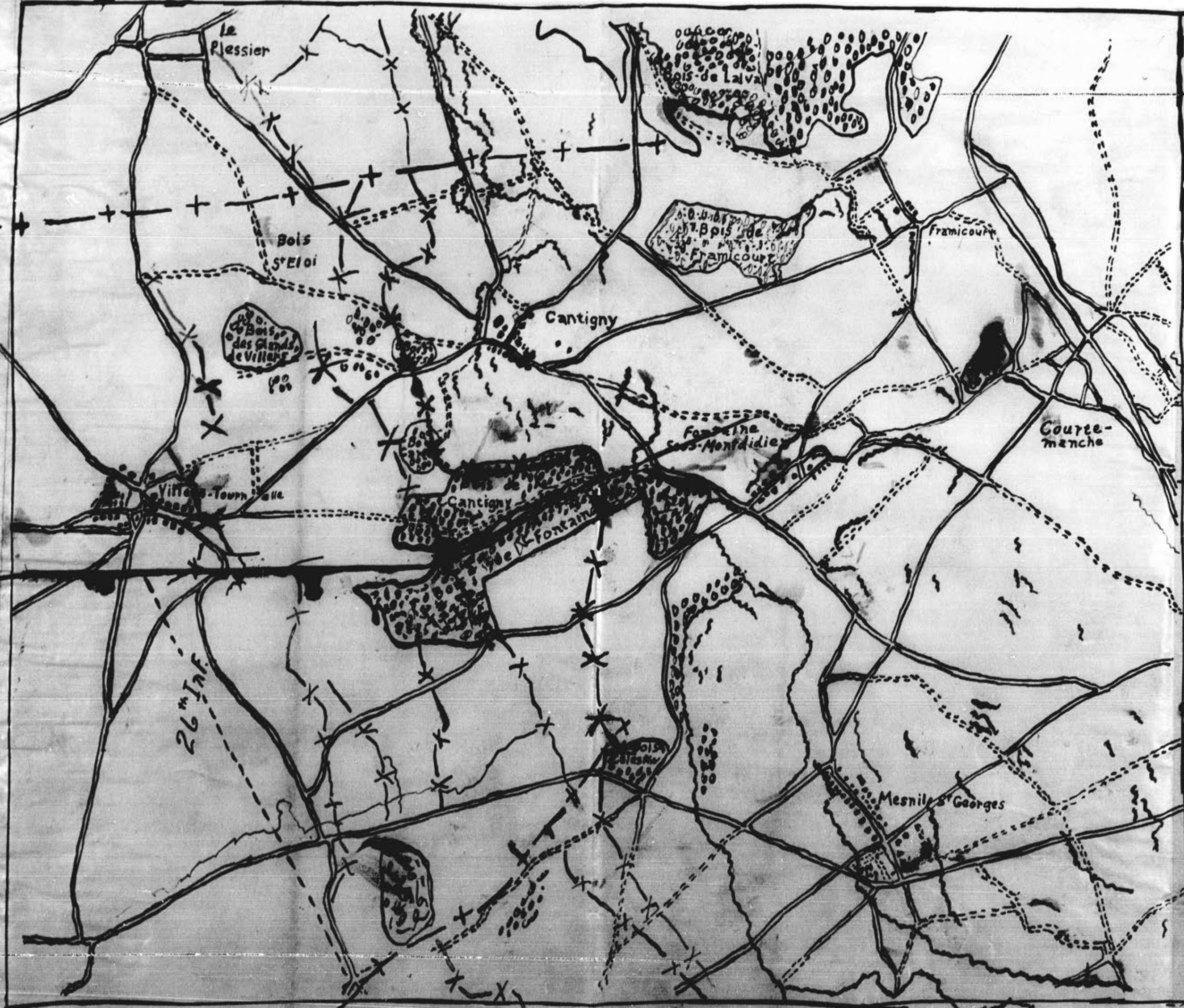
4. When an attack on a strongly fortified position is planned, it should be made of sufficient breadth to insure that the flank strong points are included in the zone of advance so that your flank is not offered to the flank fire of such a strong point.

5. When time permits all Field Orders should be written rather than verbal to insure that the smallest unit is fully informed of all essential facts.

6. Rifle fire from well-trained troops is of paramount importance to the Rifle Company in the defense.

7. Success or failure in battle is dependent upon the state of proficiency of the Non-Commissioned Officer and his ability to assume command when the Officers become casualties.





CANTIGNY

- German lines May 27-1918
- X-X-X American lines May 27-1918
- +--+ American Sector May 27-1918
- Regimental. Boundry
- X-X- French lines.



Scale = 1/20,000
 0 1000 yards

28th Inf

26th Inf

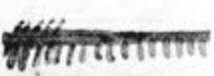
THE BATTLE OF

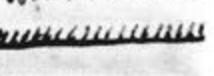
Cantigny

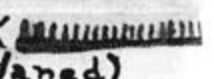
May 28th 1918 TO

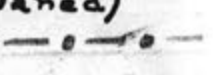
May 30, 1918


Legend

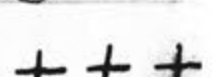
Line of Departure 

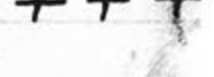
Final Objective 

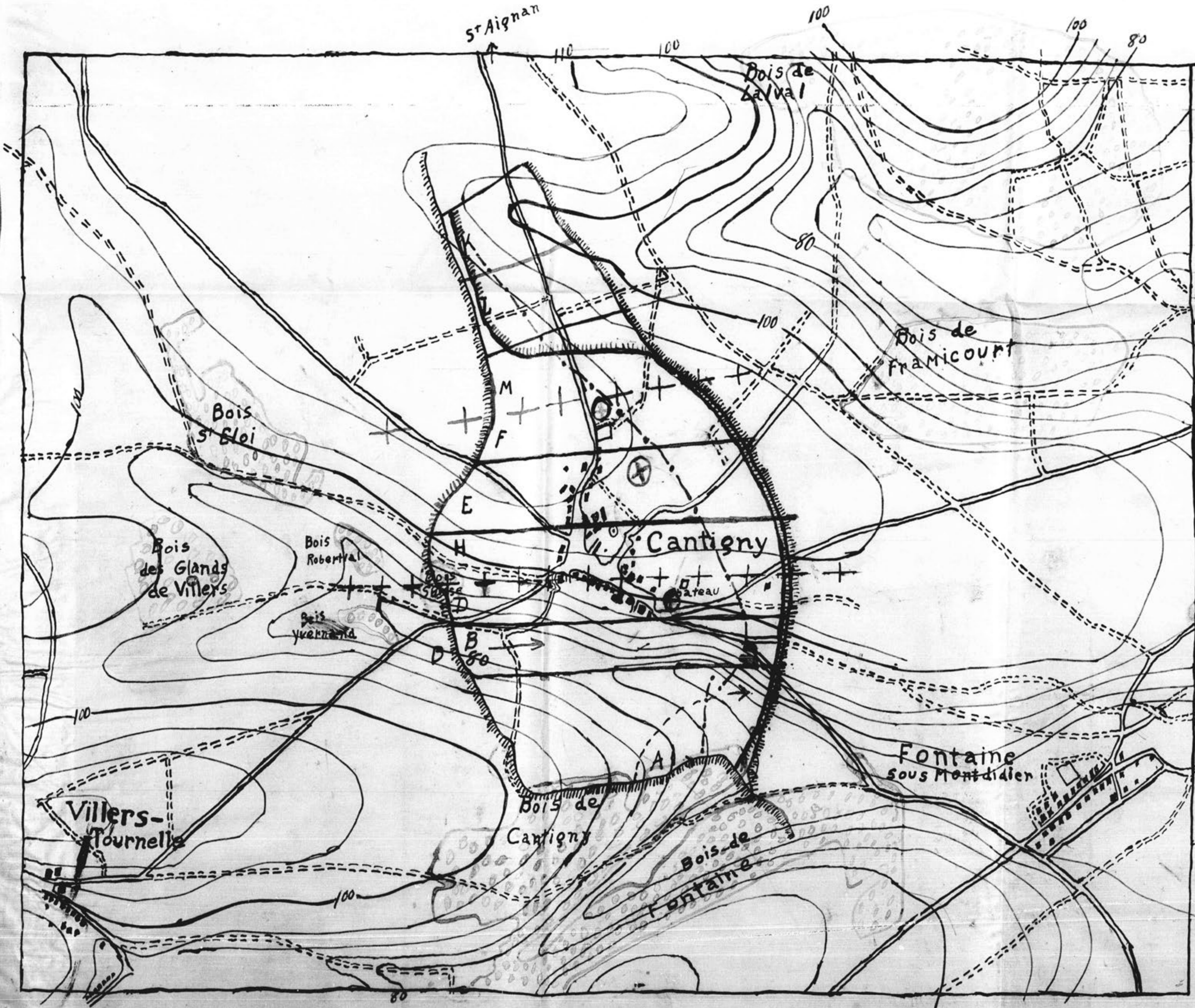
Front Line After Attack (As planned) 

Line of Resistance 

Strong Points (U.S.) 

Limit Between Bns 

Limit Between Co's 



Scale 1/10,000

V.I. = 5 Meters