

THE INFANTRY SCHOOL  
FOURTH SECTION  
COMMITTEE "R"  
FORT BENNING, GEORGIA

ADVANCED COURSE  
1929-1930

OPERATIONS OF THE 36 BATTALION  
117th INFANTRY (30th DIVISION)  
in the  
BRITISH OFFENSIVE TOWARD MAUBEUGE,  
October 5 - 8, 1918.

(Personal Experience)

CAPTAIN NATHANIEL E. CALLEN, INFANTRY.

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Marginal abbreviations are not used since the writer has found none of the above historical works to have any bearing on the actions of the battalion that is discussed in this monograph. While the works have been scanned by the writer, he has in all instances found his own personal experience the only reliable source. For this reason such is used as the source of the facts set forth herein.

## INTRODUCTION

This monograph is intended to be a simple narrative of a portion of the battle life of a small unit and it is not the thought of the writer to discuss in any way any of the major phases in tactics or strategy of the large units in connection with such action.

The 3d Battalion 117th Infantry, 30th Division was, as the numerical regimental designation indicates, a National Guard unit and as such the writer had served therein since the year 1906. The officers, N.C.O's and about 50 per cent of its men were for most part from East Tennessee, its pre-war station and home. Its ranks had been completely filled from <sup>by</sup> the first draft from the state of Iowa. These men proved most excellent soldiers and many of them were of course N.C.O's before the arrival of the Battalion in France in May, 1918.

The writer, as above stated, although having been with the battalion in some capacity since his teens, was not by far its oldest member in point of service. Other officers and many of the older enlisted men had seen longer service with it than ~~we~~ had he. We possessed, as did many similar units, a most inordinate pride in our organization, and all of us older members of course had a host of very near and dear friends of all ranks.

The incidents to be related in this story took place during the action of the British forces, which may be said to have begun on August 8, 1918 with what they termed, at first, "The Battle of Amiens", later "The Somme Offensive" and which is now termed by historians generally as "The British Offensive toward Maubeuge".

This <sup>battle</sup> action began at Amiens in August 1918 ended with the British in possession of not only Maubeuge but of the city of



Mons as well, that <sup>city</sup> of their heroic but useless defenses four years earlier. G.

In further explanation the reader is reminded that two of our American Divisions remained with the British Expeditionary Forces in France during their entire battle service. Our own 30th Division and the 27th Division N.Y.G. forming themselves into our II American Corps.

ACTIONS AND MOVEMENTS OF THE BATTALION JUST PRIOR  
TO THE PERIOD COVERED BY THE TITLE OF THIS  
MONOGRAPH

On September 29, 1918, this battalion as Brigade Reserve had participated in the battle of Bellicourt, more often termed the "Breaking of the Hindenburg Line".

During this action, its first major offensive, it had had a most valuable experience. Here it had been sent into the fight early with, first, the mission of "mopping up" Bellicourt, and second, the mission of attacking unexpected German resistance on the left of our left Brigade. The flank of this brigade was up in the air due to the fact that the attack of the 27th Division had not kept abreast of the 30th.

In both these missions it came into hand-to-hand conflict with the Germans so successfully as to make its morale, never very low, hit the ceiling. Following this action, the battalion, in conjunction with the remainder of the Division, had been withdrawn to assembly positions close in rear where it, together with other units, was patted on the back so to speak, by the corps and division commanders and informed that it was now being withdrawn for a well-earned rest.

In execution of this "rest plan", "billeting parties" were hurriedly assembled on October 1st and sent to the new areas.



On October 2d our regiment followed by marching. This march was completed, after marching all day under a heavy pack, at about 10:30 PM on the night of October 2d and we still found ourselves on the old Somme Battlefield, this time some several kilometres to the south of what had once been the town of Peronne. We had <sup>the ruins which</sup> marched almost 30 kilometres under packs and were thoroughly tired out; so without bothering ~~to~~ to locate even the limited shelter our billeting party had found, we curled up and slept. Such a night's rest, out of hearing of battle, worked wonders and early the next morning all were up for a hot meal, ~~and~~ to locate the new quarters, avail ourselves of a bath at a nearby stream, get into clean clothes, shave, and write home. In other words to enjoy all the privileges incident to a "well-earned rest".

We found that the area we had been given was indeed possessed of little accommodations in the way of shelter and during the day we had to resort to the pup tents for a camp. We could, however, have access to our kitchens and to plenty of clear, cold water for washing, baths, etc. Everyone <sup>pitched</sup>  ~~dug~~ in and by night a surprising amount of cheerfulness was noticeable throughout the command.

Since the British had no such an organization as a regiment we were seldom close to regimental headquarters (one of the few practices we liked them for) ~~and were now in a battalion area.~~

The only formation we held during the 3d of October was retreat, so far as the men were concerned, but plans had been made for drills, <sup>and inspections</sup> the following day.

On the morning of the 4th, however, just after we had assembled, the writer was called to regimental headquarters. Here he was informed that the command moved by truck on the morning of the 5th to new areas and that billeting parties moved out from regimental headquarters at 1:00 PM on trucks <sup>the same day</sup> this date. The regimental commander insisted that he knew nothing as to our

destination, but believed we were going to an area better suited to the needs of the troops and closer to some base of supply. This pleased each of the battalion commanders, all of whom insisted his battalion had the worst place in the area (as ~~they~~<sup>We</sup> were now located).

We did feel however that there must have been some very poor staff work in the beginning to have landed us in so bleak an area. Upon return to the battalion the officers were assembled and orders issued covering the billeting party: ~~issue~~. These parties of course consisted of One Officer per Battalion and one N.C.O. per company and since they exercised no control over the assignment of quarters, <sup>the kitchen</sup> ~~these~~ were seldom selected from among the best.

#### A MOVE BY TRUCK

On the morning of October 5th, the necessary embussing orders having been published the preceding night, we found our busses (motor trucks) assembled at 8:00 AM on the road through our area and <sup>the battalion,</sup> having previously <sup>been</sup> formed ~~up~~ in groups of four squads to the truck, were loaded and on the move into the general column by 8:20 AM. You will of course realize that our transport made the trip overland under the command of the Regimental Supply Officer.

In connection with this fact the writer permitted the Lewis Guns (with which each company was equipped) to be loaded on this transport. As it developed this was a most serious error and one of which more will be said later. With this exception however the troops were properly turned out with full equipment including 160 rounds of ammunition per man. In addition each squad had <sup>two</sup> ~~three~~ cooked meals and their "iron" ration.

Promptly at 8:30 AM our combined columns moved out and after <sup>a</sup> short time joined the tail of the other regiment of the brigade, similarly loaded, ~~and~~ which moved on upon our arrival. My own battalion brought up the last of this column. Moving in a

northeasterly direction we again passed through Perrone, but from there seemed to take a road more to the east. Since the Somme Valley had been fought over for the entire period of the war there was no vegetation and one could see for miles over its slightly rolling hills. This gave those of us in the rear an unusual opportunity to observe the tremendous length of the column used to transport an entire war strength brigade.

As the column continued, little thought was given as to our probable destination, nor were we particularly concerned since we felt that our guides (billeting party) would of course look out for us <sup>in the new area</sup> there. ~~Then too, Moves, without knowing our~~ <sup>unknown,</sup> destination, had by this time become a matter of routine. It was not until about 3:00 PM therefore that any of us began to wonder as to our destination. Upon giving the matter some thought, however, we agreed that we were not, as we had hoped, getting any further from the front or into any area occupied by the civil populace.

About 4:00 PM ~~however~~ we ~~again~~ came to the ruins of what had once been a town, but a ruin this time that suggested to us that we had been there before. This brought us to a more alert mind and we soon identified the town as Roisel. <sup>Roisel</sup> This was one of the towns we had passed through on our way into the lines before the battle of Bellicourt. It became evident now that our well-earned rest might not materialize and conjectures, <sup>as to probable destination</sup> became the sole topic of conversation. The worst we could decide was, that in view of our lack of time for reconnaissance, we must be moving up into positions <sup>in</sup> of readiness, pending our use within the next few days.

Having again struck our former route of advance we continued on it without further deviation and soon reached the town of Ronssoy, four kilometres from Bellicourt. Just after our column had cleared that point we were debussed and formed in march column on the road leading through Hargiecourt on Bellicourt.



*This point,*  
From ~~here~~, after a delay of some fifteen minutes, we took up the march.

#### A NIGHT MARCH ON THE FRONT

The writer does not recall the exact hour that we began this march but it was about sunset.

Since we used the British march regulations in our marches, and the writer feels that it might be of interest to give here a brief description of the salient points of march discipline according to the British regulations:

First, not more than four abreast. Second, the leading guide of each platoon marching as far to the right of the road as the footing was possible. Third, columns dressing to the right. Fourth, 50 yards between platoons. Note: No other distances were prescribed since the 50 yards would take care of battalions and companies. Fifth, company and platoon commanders in rear of their commands. Sixth, march fifty and halt ten minutes each hour. Seventh, upon the halt march clear of the road "by the right flank". Eighth, forbidden to close lost distance at the halt period. Ninth, fall in and fall out on time and not on command. Tenth, men in step within platoons and arms carried in a uniform manner.

It is interesting to note that after we had worked this system out that the men preferred it to our own route step. <sup>Paragraph</sup> Dusk was falling as we cleared Hargicourt and by the time we reached the outskirts of Bellicourt it was rapidly becoming dark.

In Bellicourt the head of the column ran into a jamb of British transport going to the rear, augmented by guns, caissons, and transport going forward, and a halt was forced. This halt continued for sometime and the writer moved to the head of the column in hope of securing some information from the regimental commander as to our destination. Upon arrival he found that the C.O. had been required to join the brigade commander at some point



and had left instructions with the Lieutenant Colonel that he would lead the regiment clear of the town, clear the road, and await orders.

With this information the writer rejoined his command.

### A VISIT BY GERMAN AIRPLANES

While in column off the right of the road and before the traffic jamb had been cleared up, we had our first and only experience of being machine gunned and bombed from the air while we were on the march.

Two German planes flying in tandem, *at a considerable distance*, struck the head of the leading battalion and traversed the column from head to rear, raking it first or in front of the nose of the plane with machine guns leaving a train of bombs in their rear. The two leading battalions, *together with the jambed transportation,* being on the streets of Bellicourt and unable to spread out, *together with the transportation column* suffered severely. Our own battalion, fortunately, was not so cooped up, being still clear of the town and *we* only had one man hit. This we felt was due, both to the fact that we were aware of what was coming and also to the fact that we did not have to stay put. We moved, *in fact* many too far away, from the line of flight. Also there was a slight bend in the highway at this point which threw the planes more to the left of the road. Transportation ~~however~~ did suffer considerable since they were on the side of the bombs (for which we were mighty thankful since it afforded us some additional shelter). Needless to say the planes were not molested and in addition to getting a relatively large number of casualties, both in men and animals, they also succeeded in completely blocking progress for some time on this particular road. ~~Needless to say~~ We had not been trained at that time in organized anti-aircraft combat. *so the planes were unmolested.* In addition to all this, they of course were informed that considerable numbers of troops were headed toward the front, *and* since they later shelled the forward areas vigorously ~~all night~~ until daylight.

Following a considerable delay we were <sup>able to clear</sup> ~~extricated from~~ this locality by using other exits of the town, and passing <sup>through</sup> Belli-cout, <sup>we</sup> moved off the road near the outskirts of Nauroy. (Our objective in our attack on the Hindenburg line September 29th) Here we were met by the Regimental Adjutant who informed us our troops were to fall out, eat their evening meal as soon as possible, and be prepared to continue the march. In addition he told us water tanks on trucks were in the vicinity and that men must refill canteens. <sup>↑ sentence only</sup>

Battalion commanders were to accompany him at once for a conference with the regimental and brigade commanders, who were <sup>then</sup> assembled in a basement in Nauroy. Here for the first time we learned that the destination of our own battalion was to be the front line <sup>still</sup> several kilometres to the northeast.

This of course was not welcome news especially as we had had no previous <sup>opportunity for</sup> reconnaissance. In addition we knew the military limitations of our billeting party and knew that the relief must be made under their guidance. We further recalled that we had no Lewis guns, having permitted their being sent overland by transport <sup>that</sup> ~~and~~ could not reach us for at least 24 hours more. (We of course said nothing of this, since there might develop some solution (less noisy)). *not clear*

#### ORDERS FOR THE RELIEF

Upon arrival at the headquarters of the brigade we found ~~there assembled~~ the brigade commander and staff, The regimental commanders of our own and the 118th Infantry, together with two Australian battalion commanders and some British artillery liaison officers.

The orders for the relief were given orally and were very simple, to be so difficult of execution. The plan was for one battalion from each regiment to take over the brigade front as 8

assigned, holding this line preparatory to a general assault. This assault to be launched as soon as the organization for a general advance could be ~~organized~~ <sup>effected</sup>. In general this organization for the general assault depended on securing a uniform "Start Line", displacing artillery into forward positions, repairing, reorganizing, and assembling tanks, together with the placement of assault and reserve troops.

We had returned to the line just at the time the assault in which we had previously engaged had spent its momentum and would therefore expect several days to elapse before a new drive could be ~~issued~~ <sup>be made</sup>.

Coming now to the more intimate details of the relief we were not surprised to learn that the relief was to be effected without delay, nor that the guides to be used were our billeting parties. This secrecy as to plan seemed to us ~~the~~ most useless since our problem would have been very much simplified had we ~~only~~ had the vaguest idea of our probable employment. Even with their limited knowledge of what was occurring, the troops already felt that they were getting a dirty deal by the way they had already been handled. (The British still seemed incapable of any other thought than that the rank and file were always to be ~~and were~~ <sup>and possessed</sup> herded as sheep. Some sort of low mentality that could not ~~posses~~ <sup>have</sup> an intelligent, independent, thought of their own). Knowing our men much better we knew the effect such tactics would produce and were not too kindly disposed, <sup>to absolute secrecy</sup> ourselves. We were well aware that, while it might not do to give away some secret military advice, we could pass out a general warning of secret operations and, following such confidences, take our men with us, cheerful and determined.

~~At the risk of taking too much space~~ <sup>The</sup> writer wishes ~~here~~ to voice his own mental queries of the time, ~~which~~ he could not see then (nor does yet see) just why the regimental and battalion commander, at least, should not have been told. In addition to



their being informed no good reason is known <sup>as to</sup> why the responsible officers should not have <sup>been sent forward on reconnaissance</sup> ~~been substituted~~ for an inadequate billeting party.

Much the same surprise seemed to be in the mind of the Australian major, who I found was to remain with my troops <sup>as</sup> ~~so~~ long as we wished, or so long as his own troops (those we were to relieve) remained in rest areas.

Much additional and apparently surplus information was now passed out (none of which had enough bearing on the case in question to be remembered) and we were given the map sheets covering the area, marked to show boundaries and positions and told to get in as soon as possible.

#### A RELIEF AT NIGHT

During the above, which as usual consumed much more time than was necessary, the troops had long since finished their evening meal, filled their canteens with water and had fallen asleep. Unfortunately their ~~period of~~ sleep was of insufficient length to do them good and arousing them did not improve their morale. The column was gotten on <sup>its</sup> ~~the~~ feet and <sup>on</sup> the road however with the least <sup>possible</sup> delay ~~possible~~ and were conducted through Nauroy toward Estrees where the Australian told me he had assembled my own guides, augmented by some of his <sup>own</sup> best men.

I would like to pay this officer the tribute here of saying that he certainly seemed the most practical, common-sensed officer I had yet met. He was quite open, too, in his general condemnation of the impracticable manner in which we were forced to make the relief and especially the delay caused in getting on to our new positions. His name or so much of it as the writer recalls was Major Marshall. He was a veteran of Gallipoli and had had a wide and varied experience. I might add here that he of his own free will remained with us until the 11th of October and certainly knew



how to help in such a way as to be ~~fully~~ <sup>a great help</sup> appreciated.

The guides met the column as planned on the further outskirts of Estress and from that point, due to the extreme danger of shelling, we left the road and split into companies which were then <sup>to be</sup> guided more or less directly across country onto their position in the line. Later these companies were broken up into much smaller units due to German artillery <sup>fire</sup> which began to fall in considerable concentration over the entire rear areas on our front.

During the march from Nauroy to Estress we had assembled all the company commanders at the head of the Battalion and, as we marched, had given them all the information we possessed together with marked maps. (Which the British issued down to include platoon commanders. Just before we broke up into smaller columns our orders and instructions were finished and their maps marked to show regimental C.P. (near Estrees) and the C.P. of the battalion, together with the O.P. (see attached position Map No. 1.) As we ~~had~~ discussed the enemy position Major Marshall had emphatically impressed on our minds the fact that any exposure or movement during daylight hours was practically impossible and also that any men not under cover by daylight would be immediately subject to close, well-aimed enemy fire. This advice was most timely and caused a night of earnest digging for most of the men. Company commanders were instructed to send in maps of their dispositions as soon as possible upon arrival therein. One more item of interest was that Major Marshall sent each of his companies we were relieving orders to turn their Lewis guns over to us. (This sounded better than it turned out to be as we only got fourteen and these badly worn.)

Upon completion of the talk and time consumed as noted and upon reaching the outskirts of Estrees then we sent each unit direct upon its sector. About ten minutes after we had split and at about 12:00 midnight the shelling heretofore mentioned took

place. Although companies split into units as small as section column each suffered casualties. In "M" Company a single shell, (reported as 8 inch) accounted for one lieutenant and sixteen men.

*not Do alternate*  
In our own group, which consisted of Bn Hq, Sig Det and Bn Med Det we lost two men on our way up. The shelling was heavy and included ~~the ground~~ <sup>fell</sup> as far back as three kilometres, ~~as it even~~ killed <sup>men</sup> in the Colonel's party and in the other two battalions over ~~two~~ <sup>three</sup> kilometres in rear of the front line. Our group reached its destination a few minutes after 2:00 PM <sup>AM</sup> and the companies at varying hours from 2:30 to 4:00 PM <sup>AM</sup>. ~~Most~~ Fortunately our left companies had a much shorter distance to go as they were formerly following the Mons Road <sup>S</sup> which ran through the left of our sector and even though it was a very dark night they could use this road as a guide. Had daylight found any of the first three companies from left to right without cover their casualties would have been very great.

*Signs*  
The company commanders had, as we, issued their information and instruction as they marched so that the men understood the urgent need of cover. Tired as they now were, ~~however~~, all dug more or less adequate "foxholes" who were not fortunate enough to take over cover from some Australian soldier. In this connection we outnumbered the Australians almost two to one. Under these conditions we had entirely too many men in the front line and no battalion reserve. Our battalion at this time numbered twenty-eight officers (counting two medical officers and one dentist) and a little more than a thousand men including medical and signal detachments.

Immediately following the relief of Major Marshall's similar groups, he advised that we construct as many wire circuits to each company headquarters as possible and the signal detachment began that work. These multiple circuits were then termed "ladder lines" and were most essential where the shelling was at all heavy.

*the completion of was*  
Reports of <sup>the</sup> last relief were <sup>received</sup> by 4:45 AM and outside of the minimum number of observers a battalion went to sleep not waiting to eat a breakfast they did not have and without hot tea (not coffee, British ration) they were too tired to brew. Our friend Major Marshall insisted he remain on the alert at the C.P. and we followed the example of the men. The Germans, however, usually very reasonable when not attacked, did not follow our example, for some of the men who, possibly due to their ignorance of the direction of the enemy, had failed to provide all-round cover, were casualties from snipers fire during the early morning hours. Others were not casualties because the Germans missed their first shots and were without targets for their second.

The battalion indeed awakened to a situation as bad as had been painted to them previously. Without the least exaggeration *Vague* on the part of the troops; a man seen was a man hit. S.

#### TERRAIN

*the*  
As <sup>the</sup> day dawned and the prevalent morning mists of the Somme Valley began to dissipate, we were for the first time in a position to take stock of the front we held. Unlike the "No Man's Land" heretofore confronting us in all our operations, we here for the first time, in our experiences, found ourselves on a terrain unmarred by war's blight. There were shell holes but not in sufficient numbers to obliterate the natural appearance of the landscape. Trees and buildings too were intact for most part as *S* were <sup>the</sup> roads. Viewing these manifestations of peace ~~and the innocence and placidity of the country~~, it was hard to believe that numberless foes were on the alert behind modern weapons within close range of our positions.

On our left front the scene was pleasing to the eye indeed, for we were so elevated as to look into the towns of Beau-revoir, Ponchaux, and Geneve and the roads and streets of these



towns (less the populace) made you feel that you would like to visit them. Rolling hills, carpeted with autumn grass, lay before us with an occasional small copse, where much of summer greenness remained.

Practically none of the country-side appeared to have been cultivated for a number of years and, for France, was almost devoid of hedges or fences.

That part of the terrain we occupied extended well down from the crest and across the face of a rather prominent hill which in turn extended entirely across our sector from flank to flank.

Exclusive of our right flank lay the town of Montbrehain, a considerable sized rural town, occupying the highest point of the hill whereon we were stationed. On our left flank several hundred metres beyond our left boundary was the town of Breauveoir, while <sup>Sh</sup> to our left, ~~from~~ <sup>front</sup> lay the twin villages of Ponchaux and Genevé. All these towns and villages, however, with the exception of Montbrehain, lay across a valley, a branch of which extended across our front in the direction of Montbrehain.

On the further bottoms of this valley to our front lay a railway grade and track. These tracks although in good repair showed no indication of having been in use recently. You will also observe from a look at the attached maps that we were in quite a network of improved and unimproved roads. The principal road extending from our left rear, running practically parallel to and within our sector, continued to the northeast to the city of Mons, a distance of about thirty-seven kilometres. This road was also the most direct route to Maubeuge, the objective of the British armies with <sup>g</sup> which we were operating. From our position our vision was limited to such an extent that the rising hills to our front and flanks brought our horizon to within one to ~~one and one half~~ <sup>Two</sup> kilometers in all three directions. Directly in front of our left company and across the floor of the valley stood an unusually large building, in good repair



which we identified as a "Sugar Factory". The roads and railway on our front passed over numerous fills and through corresponding cuts. To our immediate front at from eight hundred to a thousand metres lay a small copse, identified on the ~~map~~ <sup>Paletta ~~Palette~~</sup> as ~~Patelle~~ Copse, with a similar unnamed copse some four hundred metres in rear and slightly to its left.

*the present line which*  
From where we were observing this landscape one had the general impression of being in a soup plate or bowl slightly within the outer edge. The whole of this position or any position within the scope of our vision, with the exception of the buildings, cuts and fills, and especially that part we were occupying, was within open, clear, close vision and without ~~any~~ natural cover.

#### TROOP DISPOSITIONS

##### OUR OWN FORCES

Nothing good can be said of the position we involuntarily found ourselves occupying. We occupied a sector approximately three thousand metres in width, all of which was, in general on a plane, tilted toward the enemy and, as has been mentioned before, without natural cover. The very uniformity of the grassy slopes served, too, as a perfect background calculated to reveal to the enemy any disturbance incident to digging in. The German observers must have in fact been kept busy reporting the additional evidences of disturbed earth on the 6th.

As had been expected the lesser number of Australians we had relieved had constructed only sufficient cover for themselves and our troops on their arrival the previous night had sought cover not concealment.

"I" Company, occupying the left company sector had three platoons in old positions astride the Mons Road, with one platoon newly dug in back of its right platoon in support.

"K" Company had had a very limited sector (to which there

were no objections) and three of its platoon had dug in in echelon in rear of its front line platoon on the left center.

"L" Company had fallen heir to a small entrenched area and to a good position along the rear fill of a road traversing the sector from Geneve to Montbrehain. "M" Company was similarly situated with one platoon extending its line to the northeast.

The battalion O.P. occupied a well-constructed shallow shelter the Germans had constructed on top of the high ground in rear of the position occupied by Company "L". The battalion command post, however, as well as the aid station occupied a deep galleried shelter on the forward slope back of Company "I". Both the O.P. and the C.P. afforded excellent cover and observation, but, were poor centers of communication due to their exposure to enemy observation. In addition we later found that shells from enemy batteries could drop down the incline or steps, these ~~being pointed toward and~~ opening toward the German artillery.

As to the assignment of sector boundaries we were not well pleased, especially with the left boundary. Following up the valley to our rear at an angle from the Mons Road it excluded the town of Breaurevoir and Ponchaux, but included the ~~adjoining~~ <sup>adjoining</sup> village of Geneve and the sugar factory. Sh

Later events proved that the villages of Ponchaux and Geneve and the sugar factory constituted an inseparable tactical locality. The right boundary, so far as we were concerned, was perfectly satisfactory, excluding as it did the town of Montbrehain. The nearest supporting troops of our own units were more than two kilometers to our rear in the vicinity of the village of Estrees. On our right was the 118th Infantry of our own brigade and these troops occupied a line well to our front including the town of

Montbrehain. On our left and exclusive of at least the northeastern half of Breauveoir the British occupied the line. Our billeting officer had watched the British attack, on the afternoon of the 5th of October, in their efforts to gain this town and he had been the first to tell the writer of the location of their front line elements. This information was verified by Major Marshall when I met him. Sl

#### ENEMY FORCES

In making this report of enemy disposition, the writer is drawing on both the information he had of the period and upon his knowledge of their dispositions as revealed by our subsequent attack on the 7th Of October and the general offensive resumed on the 8th of October. at

Within the limits of our sector, beginning on our left, the Germans held a strong position of considerable depth along the fill on the railroad, a corresponding fill on the improved road just in rear of the railroad at this point and in Ponchaux and Geneve, all southwest of the Mons Road. To the northeast of this road they occupied the sugar factory together with other buildings just in rear and had a small force back of the fill on the improved road leading across our sector to Montbrehain. Another larger force occupied a and entrenched position just back of the sugar factory on the railroad. Sl

Near our center they had several platoons dug in along the railroad and foxes occupying Palotta Copse and the copse to its left rear. Their next and last elements on our immediate front occupied a flank of their line, refused toward Montbrehain, in a sunken road extending to the east from about the center of "L" Company's sector. A force of about one company in addition to <sup>troops on the</sup> ~~this~~ refused flank were dug in along the railroad fill between the right of "L" and the left of "M" Company.



We later found certain other German troops back of these but so far on the reverse slope of the hill to our front that they could have had no effect on our forces ~~where~~<sup>as</sup> we were then located. Each of the German positions mentioned were well supplied with both the heavy and the light machine guns, with their garrisons strong in riflemen as well. To our extreme left and almost in prolongation of our lines the German garrison of the railroad fill extended to the eastern outskirts of Breurevoir. In rear of this line of defense they held a position in strength in the cemetery just east of the town.

#### DAYLIGHT HOURS OF OCTOBER 6th

While daylight of October 6th found all dug under cover as ordered, many of the dispositions of the extra platoons (those for whom no cover existed) were faulty and did not provide sufficient cover from the enemy on our left flank. For this reason the battalion suffered some thirty or forty casualties when the morning had cleared sufficiently for the enemy to obtain good observation. Most of these among the platoons of Company "K" with some five or six in Company "I". Then too, this number was made so great by a few of the men exposing themselves contrary to orders. At least one man in every company seemed curious to verify the warning given about movement and in nearly every case he drew either machine gun or rifle fire.

The Germans used ammunition all during the day much as if they were celebrating. Certainly they had none of the battalion for targets after the first thirty minutes. They used, however, only small arms in this strafing, for which we were mighty thankful, since with our hasty entrenchment we would have suffered severely.

Dispositions, either by sketch or telephone as to positions of the companies were all in by eight or nine o'clock, and a map showing these was constructed. Fortunately our telephone communi-

tion stood up all through the day of the 6th and a mass of enemy information was sent in by both the commanding officers of Companies "I" and "K". Every company sent in some information during the day and our situation map soon took on the appearance of some of the old trench area. (The kind we had always had up to this time.)

The next subject upon which troops became very much interested in was: "When do we eat?" "We are out of water," "What are we to do with our wounded?" Now these queries are of such nature that they demand that the commander to whom they are addressed have some sort of an answer. The men had consumed their last cooked meal on the previous evening. They had marched about five and one-half kilometres to make a relief, after having been on the move since early morning, had dug themselves in prior to daylight, had suffered almost a hundred casualties during this time, and all on one canteen of water per man.

It was obvious that they could not eat during the day since no one could either get out for rations or water nor could any one get in with them. There remained but to tell them that we were in touch with regimental headquarters and that they were trying to locate the transport and would send forward food and water at dark. As to the wounded they could not be reached from without the companies, but we promised to try to get medical assistance to those whose suffering was too severe or to furnish medical attention to life and death cases if they had such cases among their casualties. Only one such case was reported and that of a man from "I" Company. Before one of the battalion surgeons had gotten his supplies together for the attempt to reach the company a second call informed us the patient was dead.

The company commanders had been instructed during the day to report to the battalion C.P. as soon as it was dark enough to permit movement (about 9:30 PM). This for the purpose of discussing both the situation and any plans for readjustment of troops that might seem desirable.

In the meantime the battalion commander had planned to make a reconnaissance of the dispositions as soon as movement was possible. This reconnaissance to be made in company with Major Marshall who confessed he knew little more than we of the terrain, since his forces had been stopped thereon during an attack on the morning of the 4th of October.

We were fairly well oriented of course from our day of observation and the map, but felt that an actual visit to the sectors of the companies was essential.

#### NIGHT OF OCTOBER 6th

Accordingly, just as dusk began to thicken into dark we left the C.P. and moving to the northwest gained the Mons road and crossed it toward the left of the sector. Here we turned and moved parallel to the road to the junction of the Mons and an unimproved road leading to Breauveoir.

As this was in the center of "I" Company sector we of course expected to see some sign of the company, but the men were so well dug in that none were visible in the increasing darkness. An unusual quiet seemed to have fallen over the entire front. In advance of our front line the Mons road has both a slight cut and a considerable fill before reaching Geneve, so finding that from our present position an outjutting spur of the ridge our troops occupied prevented our seeing a considerable extent of the front, we continued to move forward. Upon reaching a point some two hundred metres ahead of our lines and still on the north side of the road we obtained an excellent view of the position as far as "L" Company's sector.

While scrutinizing this and surrounding ground to the front and flank, we came into possession of some additional verification as to enemy dispositions which we could unquestionably accept as a fact. We were fired on by machine guns from our left and slightly to our rear. Needless to relate <sup>that</sup> the first burst, while uncomfortably



close did not hit and it would also be superfluous to add that by the time the second burst was fired we were a moving target. I mentioned when speaking of the terrain that it was not marked, as other fields we had been on, with a multitude of shell holes and that cover was scarce. This was brought home to us now very vividly for what we most wanted at that particular time was a convenient shell hole. The Germans kept firing. We kept ducking around until Major Marshall spied a shell hole and dived into it. Not to be outdone by one of our Allies and seeing no other, the writer went in on top of Major Marshall, only to find that the calibre of this shell hole was entirely too small to accommodate us both. In the meantime the Germans seeing us take cover, and possibly recalling the scantiness of any cover in that locality, kept burst after burst raking across the floor of the small area we were in. We, during this time, stayed where we were and were consequently held into a spot from which we could distinctly see the muzzle flash of their guns, of which we were able to select at least four. Two of these were in or near the cemetery on the eastern edge of Breau-revoir and two others either behind the fill on the railroad or back of that line on the improved road. During this time (I have no idea how long) the darkness, we were thankful to note, increased very rapidly and after what seemed an age the guns slackened their fire. Between bursts then we were able to withdraw and reach the shelter of our own lines with considerable information as to enemy dispositions forced on us. After traversing the lines to the right we headed back to the C.P. where we found the company commanders assembled. All of these officers had many things they wished to say but urgent orders from regimental headquarters, that, the battalion and company commanders report there without delay had been received some thirty minutes prior to our return and we were forced to postpone our conference.

### ORDERS FOR AN ATTACK

By this time it was pitch dark (about 10:00 PM) and taking the four company commanders I proceeded to the conference as ordered. Having never been at this C.P. we had considerable difficulty in locating it, not reaching there until after 11:00 PM. Upon arrival we found the colonel and his adjutant together with a British Artillery Liaison officer all very much perturbed at our delay.

We were at once informed that we were to attack at 5:10 the following morning in order to bring our position up with the 118th Infantry on our right and with the British on our left. Here the colonel was rudely interrupted by several of us at once, <sup>asking</sup> desiring to know who told him the British had advanced on our left. He replied that they, the British, had attacked on the previous afternoon, before our arrival and had captured the town of Breauveoir and advanced their lines to the towns of Ponchaux and Geneve. We in turn insisting <sup>ed</sup> that this was absolutely false, but that if they <sup>S</sup> had, that they had been firing on us all during the day with disastrous results to at least three of our companies. This information was promptly verified by the commanding officers of Companies "I", "K", and "L". This left the colonel quite excited and he called for the British Intelligence Summary for the period. This summary very clearly stated that the British, continuing their attack on the afternoon of the 5th of October, had captured the town of Breauveoir and had advanced their lines abreast of the town of Ponchaux. { To be perfectly frank, such statements were not uncommon on their part. This however was the first time such a statement had threatened American troops with catastrophe. Now we were faced with the <sup>S</sup> situation of having an operation ordered upon and by the very reason of this absolutely false report. The colonel was at a loss to decide what to do and we of course advised against any such attack.

On the other hand our orders coming from division through brigade were explicit and our mission To attack at 5:10 AM 7th October advance our lines to the line Ponchaux-Geneve-Montbrehain were clear-cut and definite. It was now midnight or thereabout. We knew the location of brigade headquarters, but not division, and being connected to brigade by telephone the colonel consented to call the brigade commander and inform him of the situation.

For this purpose he left us for a few minutes and upon his return informed us he was very sorry, but that it was too late to make any change of plans and that the attack must be made.

We were dumbfounded and with all the vehemence we could, <sup>S</sup> insisted that it could not be done. That to attempt to execute this would force the battalion to expose its entire lines in prolongation to strong positions held by German machine guns and riflemen during the entire advance, in addition to the fire coming from the Germans within our sector. We further pointed out that the objective, as designated, did not even permit our advance to all prepared enemy positions on our front but contemplated our digging into an unprepared position just a matter of a few hundred yards from where <sup>the enemy</sup> they lay unmolested <sup>in positioning</sup> and fired upon the men so engaged. I am sorry to relate here, however, that the colonel still felt it would be a reflection on the regiment if we did not make the attack and still insisted that it must be done. I frankly say, without meaning to criticize any higher authority, that none of the higher commanders, who by reason of their rank and duties, had <sup>M</sup> never felt the weight of fire from a well-disposed enemy, could visualize how serious this situation was. In a dim way this realization came to us that night as we tried from our subordinate positions to secure relief from so foolish and impossible orders.

Admitting our defeat in this protest, I now believe far too soon, we spent some time in studying the situation with a



view to its execution. We asked for tanks, which we could not get. We asked for support from our machine gun company, which was denied us on the ground that their use must be retained for the general attack on the 8th. We next consulted with the British artillery officer, who, cheerfully assured us that we would have a rolling barrage and all the fire we wanted. Here, however, we asked for a concentration on the left to include the area of the cemetery east of Breauveoir and the position known to be occupied by the enemy along the railroad, in the village of Ponchaux, all out of our sector, and he was very sorry but could not direct any fire there in view of the report that it was held by his own troops. This caused some heated conversation, which the colonel put a stop to, I suppose on the grounds of disrespect to our noble Allies (who certainly were frank enough to admit that our casualties were no concern of theirs, provided we accomplished their plans.)

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We then were assured that we could have all the artillery support we cared for within our sector and that at anytime during the day we could locate a target we merely had to get this officer on the phone and that he would arrange the fire we desired. This of course afforded us some comfort and we began to feel that if we made the jump-off with a rush and got through the enfilading fire from the left soon enough, that we might get dug in on the new line under cover of artillery fire in spite of the Germans. After discussing various ways and means we left the headquarters of the regiment with the understanding that we would attack, companies abreast, at the time and in the manner ordered. Just prior to our departure the colonel had called me aside and told me that he would, if the situation demanded it, send forward as many as two companies from the 2d Battalion as our battalion reserve, upon my request. I assured him then that I could see no use in this, but took advantage of his spirit of generosity and asked that he send up at once the trench mortar squad from the headquarters Company.

To this he agreed and this was done.

Little time remained upon our return to the battalion for any further discussion of the attack, but nevertheless we did use about 15 minutes before excusing the company commanders. During this period each company was authorized to hold out one platoon as a reserve ~~and~~ to furnish their advance assistance by fire ~~and~~ "K" Company was to hold out two or three platoons, due to its formation in echelon, under the direct command of its captain as battalion reserve. These platoons were to occupy the position vacated by "L" Company when it advanced. All assault elements were to advance with the utmost speed across the floor of the valley, carrying any forward enemy positions at the point of the bayonet and ~~seek~~ to crowd the artillery <sup>barrage</sup>, even if some casualties resulted.

With these parting instructions the company commanders, at about 3:30 AM, left to join their commands.

In the meantime the supply service had been functioning and thanks to Major Marshall who remained with the troops, all units had had food and some water. He had also advised the signal detachment as to further work on the communication lines and these were all working perfectly.

It was also a <sup>comfort</sup> ~~relief~~ to hear him damn the British luridly when we informed him of the orders under which we were to operate. Among other things <sup>he</sup> ~~stated~~ <sup>had been</sup> that it ~~was~~ their failure to keep abreast that had caused him to be stopped in the position we were in, etc. Little time now remained until the Zero Hour and nothing further could be thought of that could be done so we settled down to wait until 5:10 AM. During this wait we were informed by telephone that a wagon loaded with engineer tools was on the way up ~~there~~ and had just left Estrees. This was something, we must be frank enough to confess, we had not thought of, but at that time, and under the conditions they could do us no good since someone

else had remembered too late. (We sent out a man to stop the wagon, but it never arrived.)

In the meantime, however, the Mortar Squad had arrived and they were told to dig in near "L" Company, given a guide, and sent on their way. As this was in the immediate vicinity of the battle O.P., we expected to be able to direct their action later.

Just before ~~5:10 AM~~ <sup>*the time set for the attack*</sup> we moved, Major Marshall, the intelligence officer and myself to the O.P. We arrived there about 4:55 AM and ~~we~~ awaited the jump-off.

### THE ATTACK

As the final minutes ticked off I am sure that everyone was, as I, listening as much for the express-train-like roar that had in our preceding attack marked the arriving of a rain of shells on our front. Just at 5:10 AM and as the whistles of the company commanders signalled the move forward we heard a few small calibre shells pass over. These struck indiscriminately at varying ranges several hundred metres across the valley. We could not believe our senses. Was this the barrage under which we were to attack, or had some difference in time occurred? Still expecting each instant <sup>for</sup> an increase in fire we watched with sinking hearts the 75-mm H.E. explode on our front.

In the meantime the troops extended in a long irregular line up the valley began their advance. Suddenly the Germans positions opened <sup>sure</sup> and a perfect hail of small arms <sup>bullets</sup> fire enfiladed the lines. Machine guns and rifle fire from ranges varying from four and five hundred metres to a thousand or more. Fire from the railroad embankment; fire from the cemetery and eastern edge of <sup>sh</sup> Breauveoir; more fire from the sugar factory and the houses in Ponchaux and Geneve; fire from the front. How those men kept going for a minute in face of such a deluge is still a mystery to those of us who so anxiously watched their progress. Casualties could be



*Good* seen in many places as the lines advanced. Irregular now those lines and moving faster. No stops made to return enemy fire; that would have been futile. The enemy, firing as they were from excellent positions, covering a wide front that converged sharply on the left were in turn converging their fire. It was with a feeling of helplessness that we watched the progress of these lines and also with a feeling that it was being much worse than we imagined it could be. The machine gun fire from the left would open, rip up the line, and leave almost as many down as it left up. The men went over the top with bayonets fixed and carrying their pieces at high port could be seen struggling on. Soon small groups were formed on different parts of the field and these could be seen in rushes; at other places it was evident that under the shock of the wholesale killing, ~~affected~~, individuals and groups were taking cover. The first momentum of the attack was undoubtedly lost. From this point on it became evident that the further advance depended on the men's *muscle* leader, not on the orders or desires of any of the higher commanders, but on the company and platoon commanders, on section and squad leaders. Since this proved absolutely the case, the remainder of the attack will be discussed from the actions of these unit leaders, their success or failure.

During the period mentioned and during the few minutes it took the Germans to disrupt the attack of the unit as a whole, our own artillery support had continued in a meager and wholly ineffectual manner. The enemy <sup>*Artillery now*</sup> had opened heavily and the slopes of the hill and valley were being filled with exploding shells of all calibre.

#### ACTIONS OF COMPANY "M"

Company "M" on the extreme right of the sector advanced from its initial position without suffering the excessively heavy casualties of the other companies. This was due to the fact that they were well removed and practically out of range of the excellent

field of fire of the enemy on our left flank. As they dashed forward the left platoon, crossing the railroad, ran head on into a small group of Germans dug into the reverse fill of the railroad. The contact was so close to their original position that the enemy surprised them. However, both the left and left center platoons closed with a rush and killed this group (some 20 men) with the bayonet. The two right platoons had continued their advance but came under well aimed enemy fire on reaching the crest of the next hill. This fire was at such close range that these platoons were forced to retire ~~back of the forward~~ <sup>to the reverse</sup> slope. From this point several unsuccessful attempts were made to close with the enemy. During this period the left center platoon came forward and joined the other two. While these attacks were unsuccessful they served, however, to reveal the extent of the enemy line on their front as well as the location. I was informed at this time that they occupied a sunken road running to the east from the center of the sector and the enemy generally faced toward Montbrehain.

The leader of the right platoon of Company "M" however discovered that the ditches on an unimproved road to his immediate left could be used as cover to allow his platoon to creep forward. Led by this officer, who seemed to grasp the situation, they were able by crawling to pass over the point they had previously been forced back from. As they gained the point where this road crossed the top of the hill they found themselves in a cut about four feet deep that closed with a corresponding cut occupied by the Germans several hundred metres further on and on the northeastern slopes of the hill. This cut ended however soon after the road had traversed the topographical crest of the hill and here the platoon leader was forced to make other plans. His plan was most simple and direct as it was; simply to reform under cover of the cut facing the German positions some two hundred metres away and rush this position with the bayonet, supplement by hand grenades. After

assuring himself that all concerned understood the orders and were all set to go, he gave the orders "Follow me" and leaping out of the cut at a dead run headed for the German position. The men followed. The Germans were surprised but ready for such move and immediately opened with machine gun and rifle fire. This fire was so intense that the line wavered and tried to seek cover in the open. However, no cover existed and seeing their leader continuing his dash some of the more hardy men of the group sprang forward. By this time the lieutenant had distanced his platoon and considerably in advance continued until he was within a few yards of the sunken road occupied by the Germans. Here he began using his "Mills grenades", throwing them as he ran. This action slowed his progress slightly and he was joined by one of his sergeants who following the example of his commander resorted to the same measures. These grenades created the utmost havoc in the sunken road among the massed Germans. In the meantime the balance of the platoon released from the pressure of enemy fire by this <sup>diversion</sup> ~~division~~ rushed forward in time to see the lieutenant and sergeant leap into the German position and followed them in. This was too much for the Germans, especially in view of the fact that the other two platoons of this company were coming up at a run and those who had time to surrender did so. This position netted us in prisoners one officer and sixty-eight enlisted men and contained about forty dead Germans as well. It also contained six heavy machine guns cut well into the banks of the eastern wall of the fill. The casualties in the platoon led by this intrepid officer were very high and included the officer himself who died within a few minutes after the arrival of the remainder of his platoon from wounds received, unquestionably from his own grenades.

Three platoons of "M" Company soon occupied this line, which constituted the furtherest advance of the day. Their further <sup>g</sup> efforts to advance across our front being prevented by machine guns



from Poncheaux-Geneve and by rifle and machine gun fire from Paletta Copse and positions to the rear.

#### ACTIONS OF COMPANY "L"

Company "L", the right center company, was badly disorganized as it left the line of departure by enemy machine gun fire from its left. It continued the initial assault with a rush, however, until it came under an increased volume of fire from the sugar factory just south of Geneve. This slowed them up and they continued to advance by infiltration methods. After advancing about half way to the railroad to their front, they, like company "M", suddenly ran into a small group of the enemy (between forty and fifty in all) and closed with them. As they charged into this group all outside firing upon their lines ceased. As in the case of Company "M", ~~both~~ <sup>were</sup> our own troops ~~and the enemy seemed~~ <sup>however</sup> much surprised that they found themselves so close, ~~together~~ <sup>however</sup> the enemy were soon prisoners or casualties. Company "L" or rather two platoons of Company "L" <sup>here</sup> reorganized here and after considerable delay again attempted to advance. However when Company "M" gained possession of the sunken road to their front, two small groups of Germans along the railroad retired and their vacated positions were occupied by about a platoon of Company "L". They had lost all but one of their officers including the captain and as it was or had been a typical "one man company" it was scattered from their original position to the furthest point of its advance <sup>and badly disorganized.</sup>

#### ACTIONS OF COMPANY "I"

Company "I" on the extreme left of the sector, with two platoons on either side of the Mons road, <sup>was</sup> were faced with the most hopeless task of any of the companies. A glance at the attached sketch of enemy dispositions will show just how desperate were the odds they faced. To make the situation even worse, they all knew more or less what they must overcome to succeed within their own

to the ground by this fire and were fortunate to find a small dry gully to use as cover. This fire was being delivered at short range and from some higher point and the men, unable to advance, were also unable to completely cover themselves from the angle, <sup>from which</sup> the fire was coming. The company commander, sensing the situation, gathered a few men in sound of his voice (as I recall a sergeant, a corporal, a bugler and six or seven men) and explaining <sup>ad</sup> that he <sup>S</sup> was going to rush the sugar factory, gain an entrance if possible, and endeavor to clear the Germans from the building.

When he had issued these instructions he started the rush and the men, embued with some of their leader's courage, <sup>Sl</sup> followed. They gained, or part of them gained the shelter of the end of the building. From there no entrances could be found so still following the captain they moved around <sup>to</sup> the rear <sup>by</sup> to their right and here found a window just above their heads. As they neared this window they became aware of machine gun fire coming through it from some position on the inside. The captain crept up and threw in a grenade and one of the men another. With this the gun ceased to fire and it was a matter of seconds before they pulled themselves through the window and onto the ground floor. Here they found two machine guns, still hot from firing, but no Germans. This building (now empty of machinery) had open stairways against the farther wall that entered the floor above through a large square hole at the top of each flight. Upon noting this the captain organized several men into a bombing squad and the balance including himself as a mopping up party and started them toward the upper floors. Without going into detail it is sufficient to say that they surprised the Germans on the second floor and the third, which was a sort of a garret-like affair, and in a very short time they were in possession of the building and had four heavy and two light machine guns and a dozen of the enemy out of action.

From this most commendable performance, however, this

captain, carried away possibly by his own success and forgetting for the moment that his chief duty lay with his company as a whole and not with these few men he had with him, led the way through the further end of this building, carrying the fight to a small building just in rear. Here he and his men were again successful and still they kept going. They crossed the road at a dash, gained ~~egress~~<sup>entrance</sup> to a sort of a residence surrounded by a high brick wall and repeated their attack there. Again they were successful and again were started forward ~~ing on to continue~~. Just as the captain opened the rear door of this building to step out into the garden in the rear, he and the corporal who was following closely behind him were struck simultaneously by a single heavy burst of machine gun fire and almost ~~not~~<sup>riddled</sup> ~~into~~<sup>with bullets</sup> fell in their tracks. The remaining men lacking the high leadership of their captain and believing they were facing an attacking force of Germans, retreated over the route they had advanced until they regained the sugar factory. Here they found the remainder of their platoon ~~who~~<sup>which</sup> had followed them ~~when~~<sup>after</sup> they had been released from the fire that had held them up.

The platoon sergeant, ~~who~~<sup>who</sup> had ~~accompanied~~<sup>been</sup> ~~the~~<sup>been</sup> the company commander, now regained some control of his wits and disposed the men for the defense of the building. Upon investigation it was found that the second story windows overlooked a considerable portion of the German lines and several of the better shots posted in these windows were able to do considerable execution, especially against the Germans occupying the reverse side of the railroad fill south of Geneve. S

In the meantime of the two platoons that had advanced on the northern side of the Mons road, a mixed group of perhaps twenty men had reached the near edge of a bank around what seemed to have been some sort of a reservoir. Here their further advance was stopped by the enemy.



### ACTIONS OF COMPANY "K"

This brings us to the one platoon of Company "K" which had been used more or less to fill in between Companies "L" and "I" and were to advance between those units. The company commander had been seriously wounded during the first few minutes of the attack, however the platoon had advanced and the remaining men some, eight or nine, had gained the railroad near Company "L".

### POSITIONS GAINED

The reader is here referred to the sketch marked "Position gained by the attack" which it is believed presents a better graphic picture of results than could be portrayed in words.

### GENERAL DETAILS OF THE ACTION

By the time these positions were reached and while the events just discussed took place, it had become apparent to all that our further successful advance to the objective was dependent on our securing artillery assistance. This assistance to take the form of concentrations on the enemy positions that were ~~dominating~~ <sup>dominating</sup> the field. While we had soon after the "jump-off" talked to the colonel about more artillery support, we had not received any fire from our artillery since the first thirty minutes of the attack and that we had received <sup>which</sup> <sub>prior to that time</sub> had been of no value.

The regimental commander had replied to our various queries that he had taken the matter up with the artillery liaison officer who was going to arrange the fires and would let us know when to expect them. Finally about 10:00 AM we called again and by this time our discipline having been sorely tried we were very much more insistent. Nothing definite could be ascertained and we again described the situation, this time in detail and added that further attacks would not be ordered without artillery fire, <sup>which we required</sup> not only in our own sector but principally in the sector of the British on our left. We further stated that we had yet available sufficient men with

which to renew the attack and complete our advance, but that these men would not be ~~used~~<sup>used</sup> under present conditions.

With the understanding then that arrangements were being made to assist us as outlined, we in spite of the difficulties of the task gathered all remaining available officers (two lieutenants Company "K", one Company "L" and the intelligence officer and adjutant) and arranged plans to continue the attack should we get the necessary artillery preparation.

This never came. We made no further attack and the final lines remained as shown on attached sketch.

At about 12:00 noon the regimental commander called up to say that he had just learned that since the fire we had received early that morning, all artillery had been engaged in forward displacement and that none could be located in battery that could give us any assistance. He suggested sending us, however, another rifle company and we explained that the present German positions were without question fully able to wipe out the entire regiment before the objective could be gained and that we could not use rifle companies.

We suggest further that we could use the Regimental Machine Gun Company only to find that the command of that unit had been turned over to the Div M.G.O. who was organizing the machine guns of the division for the general attack of October 8th.

At 1:00 PM we passed out word for all units to hold what they had gained and to attempt no further advance unless ordered. Thus stopped the attack.

The Germans however for some reason were not so peacefully inclined for at 2:00 PM they launched a counterattack against the position taken from them by Company "M". This attack was launched from the east and had the position in almost perfect infilade. It would have doubtless succeeded had not several advance ~~positions~~<sup>elements</sup> of the 118th Infantry on our left taken it under fire so effectively

as to stop it almost as soon as it began. Again at about 2:30 PM a group of Germans from Ponchaux or that locality endeavored to retake the sugar factory, only to find that we too could inflict casualties with small arms fire.

At about 3:00 PM they again tried for Company "M"'s position, forming up in Paletta Copse in an attack against the face of the unit. Here they suffered severely, ~~being~~<sup>being</sup> taken frontally by Company "M" and on their right flank in enfilade by a platoon from Company "L" and <sup>by</sup> fire from some of the men in "K" Company's rear platoons. The balance of the daylight of the 7th was spent by both sides in sniping at each other and so ended ~~another~~<sup>the</sup> day's activities.

There were many incidents during the day that are most interesting from the standpoint of a narrative but that are not deemed as having sufficient military value to be written into this monograph.

The night followed without further activities ~~and~~ and at 5:15 on the morning of the 8th of October the "British Offensive toward Maubeuge" was resumed by all the army.

~~Also~~ The two remaining battalions of the 117th Infantry were compelled to start their advance from our original line, in that the one we had gained was so lightly held and with such gaps between units that they could not risk locating it in the dark.

This was quite feasible, however, since they timed their start to reach the barrage line in time to move with the barrage. Their only serious casualties resulting from the German counter-barrage which was terrific and served to increase the casualties of our <sup>own</sup> battalion, already stupendous.

#### RESULTS OF THE ACTION OF THE 7th OCTOBER

None of the results expected or contemplated in the order were obtained since the 3d Battalion suffered so many casualties and occupied the new line in such a manner as to cause troops forming for the general attack to form up in rear of the old positions.



CASUALTIES OUR OWN TROOPS  
OCTOBER 5th to include 7th.

4 company commanders

All the remaining officers except the intelligence officer,  
the dental officer, and two platoon commanders

540 enlisted men (a large per cent non-commissioned officers)

ENEMY TROOPS

German dead on the field morning of the 8th October  
within the lines held by the battalion: 68

Prisoners: 2 officers and 102 enlisted men

Captured material:

12 heavy machine guns

8 machine guns (light)

Small arms of German dead and prisoners.

Ground gained: See map attached.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISMS

Our first comment under this heading will be upon the long and useless march in withdrawing from the lines after the attack of the Hindenburg line. We would have gotten at least one more day's rest by having withdrawn to the assembly areas we had occupied prior to that attack. Commendatory orders promising a rest that was not possible also had a bad effect on morale. Troops should not be led to expect rewards unless there is a very sound reason to expect the fulfillment of the promise. ✓

The selection of a "billeting party" and the secrecy of our destination upon return to the lines worked a hardship on the command, preventing those of us charged with their welfare and comfort from properly providing for them. Also the request for a billeting party instead of a reconnaissance party was unnecessary and misleading. ✓

Some provisions for protection against air attack should have been made for infantry columns during the World War. Even rifle fire would often have served. This had not been taught up to this time

The habit of the higher command in assembling subordinate commanders upon all occasions for the purpose of issuing orders, while the troops wasted previous hours of darkness, the loss of which cost men their lives, should forever be discontinued. The higher officer should take his orders to the troop commanders instead of assembling them. This refers to the great amount of time lost in Nauroy, where each regimental and battalion commander was required to listen, not only to his own orders, but to similar orders for each of the other commanders. SH

The battalion commander assumed too much latitude when he permitted his Lewis guns and Lewis gun ammunition to be transported by his overland column, thereby depriving his organization of much needed fire power at a critical moment. Combatant troops should always be prepared to exert their maximum efforts at any time or place in the "theatre of operations".

The regimental commander did the troops a grave injustice when he issued orders for the assembly of battalion and company commanders at Estress on the night preceding an attack. He should have brought the necessary staff officers to the battalion C. P. and there issued orders. SH

The issuing of orders based on a supposed situation, when in fact that situation did not exist, will nearly always prove impossible of execution and costly in casualties. The battalion order for the attack on the 7th October was based on the claims of the British that they had gained certain ground they had never reached.

When ~~reports of~~ your own unit commander reports a situation, based on front line observation, that is at variance with other existing reports upon which operations are based it is the duty of the higher

command to make a personal reconnaissance to verify conditions for himself, and then to act for best interests of his own command. The writer has no way of knowing who initiated the order for his unsuccessful and costly attack of the 7th of October, but does know that only those officers on the front knew conditions and that neither the brigade nor regimental commanders had ever seen the front lines.

As a general rule the limiting of any objective to a line drawn in the midst of enemy on the defensive <sup>is</sup> ~~must~~ be impossible of accomplishment in that unless the attack penetrates all the enemy positions the men cannot hope to stop and dig in, especially in open warfare. In addition, an objective should include entirely some tactical locality. Nothing could be more impossible or more wasteful of manpower than to attempt to bite off a small portion of an organized enemy position, while the greater part of the enemy forces thereon are to be left unmolested, and free to continue to fire upon your forces without even the threat of an attack.

The general practice during the World War of insisting that, prior to any attack, the assault lines be formed up on a straight line so as to accommodate artillery barrages, cost many lives and as a rule, especially in small operations were poorly planned and uniformly unsuccessful. Salients and reentrants exist in an attack due to superior or faulty enemy dispositions. This means that further attacks on a small scale will simply be hurling more troops against the naturally strong portions of the enemy line and neglecting those weaker localities where success is possible.

As a historical example of such a costly operation, attention is called to the actions of the 27th Division in front of the Hindenburg line, where, in order to bring their front up to a selected line of departure, they attacked all day previous to the general action, failed absolutely to gain any of their objectives and lost the fighting power of one half of their division.



The orders for this attack are further criticized in that they left no prerogative of command to the battalion commander, being copied for most part from, or dictated by, the British command. In addition the British troops on the left should have been ordered to cooperate in the attack by at least taking care of the enemy in their own sector, thereby preventing those forces, unmolested by our attack, from inflicting on our troops such tremendous casualties. There was cooperation but it was always from American toward British units and never to my knowledge did it work both ways.

American commanders concerned are criticized for blindly following the instruction of the Allies with whom they were serving, when instructions were issued to American troops which they ~~then~~ <sup>Allies themselves</sup> ~~would~~ would not carry out.

The only remarks the writer wishes to make of the action itself is that under the conditions the troops did more than could be expected, ~~unless~~ <sup>unless</sup> ~~though their sacrifice and complete success,~~ had they gained every objective <sup>it</sup> would have been of no benefit toward winning the war. The operation had it succeeded was not worth one fourth of the lives lost. The ~~very~~ sketch of the relative positions and distribution of troops tells more vividly than words the hopelessness of the task. ~~and~~ In addition those same dispositions were marked on a map and formed the basis for the protest made at the time the order <sup>for the attack</sup> ~~was~~ issued.

### LESSONS

The Principle of Economy of Force was violated by the expenditure of twenty-one officers and five hundred and forty enlisted men without the proper fire support to make the accomplishment of their mission possible and also by making an attack at the strongest part of the enemy lines.

The Principle of Cooperation was violated by the British when they permitted the enemy in their sector to turn all their weapons against one of their Allies and continue to engage them

thus while they made no effort to assist. So far as could be seen the British on their positions never fired a shot on the 7th of October or moved a man, although they could unquestionably see all that was taking place.

The Principle of Mass was violated as well when, if the attack was of sufficient value to be undertaken, the necessary artillery fire power was not <sup>made</sup> available.

The spirit of the offensive was present within the attacking units at least at the time the attack was launched.

The Principle of Surprise could not be considered as entering into this operation since every phase could be seen at all times by the enemy.

#### CONCLUSION

Out of justice to the organization the writer wishes to add here that although this unit did not engage in combat on the day following this action, that upon the 9th of October it continued in attack as regimental reserve and passed from such early in the action, to be the first to <sup>reach and</sup> capture the towns of Busigny and Beoquigny (the regimental objective) by over an hour. From this day to the end of the war it continued most successfully to complete all tasks assigned in a most creditable manner.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

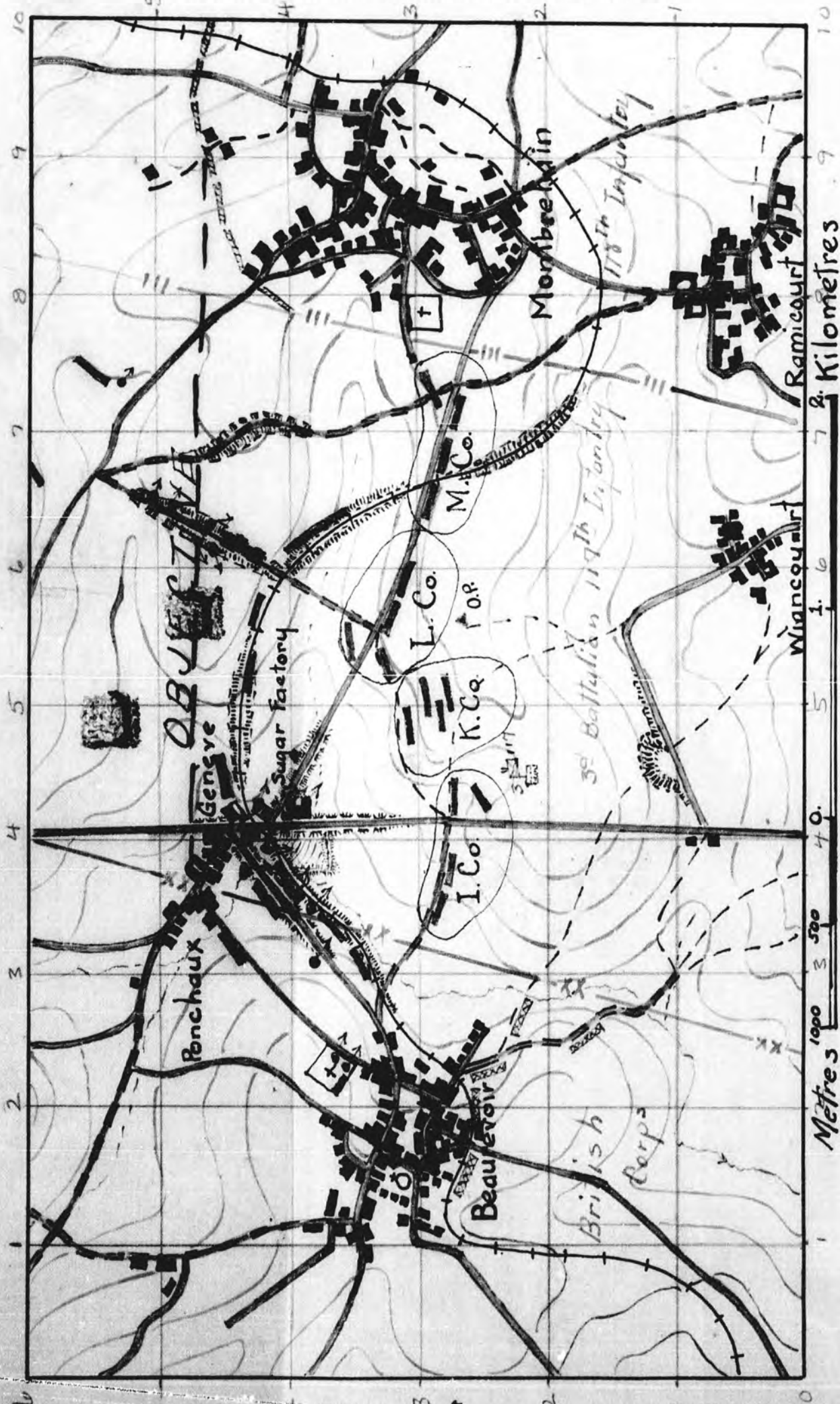
1. The battalion referred to herein was composed of troops from:
- (1) Texas
  - (2) East Tennessee & Iowa
  - (3) Kentucky
  - (4) New York.
- Answer 2
2. These troops were a part of:
- (1) The American 1st Div
  - (2) The 27th Division
  - (3) The 30th Division 2d Corps
  - (4) The 32d Division
- Answer 3
3. These troops were armed with:
- (1) British ordnance including especially the Lewis gun
  - (2) Springfield rifles and Browning automatic rifles
  - (3) ~~Chap~~-Chaut rifles and Endfields
  - (4) Browning machine guns.
- Answer 1
4. The Division to which this battalion belonged:
- (1) Had been sent from the American front
  - (2) Had served with the French
  - (3) Had just arrived from the United States
  - (4) Was one of the American Division that served throughout the war with the British Expeditionary Forces in France.
- Answer 4
5. The limited successes of this action were due to:
- (1) Insufficient troops
  - (2) The lack of an objective
  - (3) Loss of direction
  - (4) Insufficient artillery support.
- Answer 4



6. The German forces were stronger:
- (1) On the right
  - (2) In Montbrehain
  - (3) In front of our center
  - (4) On our left flank.
- Answer 4
7. This operation was ordered to:
- (1) Secure prisoners
  - (2) Straighten out our lines
  - (3) As a part of a general offensive
  - (4) To capture the sugar factory.
- Answer 2
8. Troops holding the left adjacent sector were:
- (1) Americans
  - (2) French
  - (3) British
  - (4) Our own brigade.
- Answer 3
9. Our excessive casualties were caused by:
- (1) German artillery concentrations
  - (2) German counterattacks
  - (3) Flanking machine gun fire
  - (4) Gas.
- Answer 3
10. The battalion attacked in:
- (1) Column of companies
  - (2) Two companies in the assault  
in reserve
  - (3) Three companies abreast
  - (4) Four companies abreast.
- Answer 4

1-15

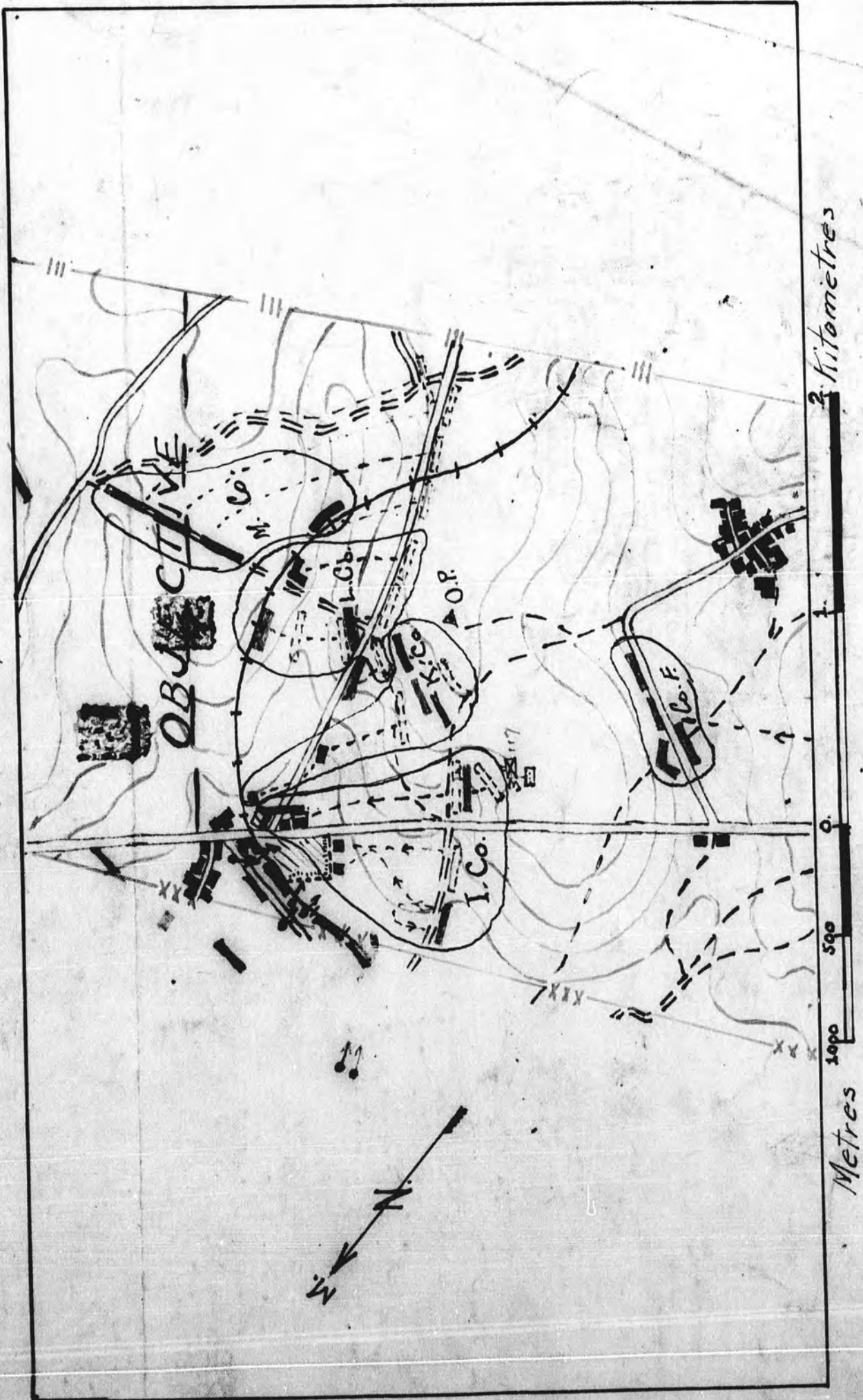
# 3d BATTALION 117th INFANTRY OCTOBER 5th TO 8th DISPOSITIONS PRIOR TO ATTACK



Y.I. 10 meters



3<sup>d</sup> BATTALION 117<sup>th</sup> INFANTRY  
NIGHT OCTOBER 7<sup>th</sup>  
POSITIONS GAINED BY ATTACK





# DISPOSITIONS PRIOR TO ATTACK



Metres 0 500 1000  
Y.L. 10 meters

Kilometres

1-16

THE INFANTRY SCHOOL  
FOURTH SECTION  
COMMITTEE H  
FORT BENNING, GEORGIA

COMPANY OFFICERS COURSE  
1924-1925

THE 30th DIVISION IN ATTACK ON THE HINDENBURG LINE NEAR BELLICOURT  
SEPTEMBER 23-29, 1918

Captain Nathaniel E. Callen, Infantry

1

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## FOREWORD.

In so much as the writer has relied to a very large extent on his own personal experience in the preparation of this monograph he feels that it would be well to state here just what opportunity he had in which to observe and certain circumstances that permitted this observation to be of a more comprehensive nature than usual observations made by participants in and during the course of an action they were engaged in.

First, and prior to the action covered, the writer as a field officer was detailed in the British G.H.Q. training area as coordinating officer between the infantry and tanks in their training for the offensive concerned.

Second, the writer's command did not engage in any of the action in the front line prior to D-day and his position near but not in the line permitted him to observe the attack of the 27th Division in their preliminary action to straighten out their lines from commanding ground near and in advance of their right flank.

Third, that during the attack on the 29th of September the writer's command, the 3d Battalion 117th Infantry was a part of the Brigade Reserve and as such occupied the high ground overlooking the terrain as far to the east as Nauroy it was also the nearest command to the attack, during the day until about 2:30 P.M. that was not engaged.

Fourth, that the writer's battalion was sent to the left flank of the division sector in the afternoon of the 29th as a supporting battalion to the 119th Infantry when it was held up due to the failure of the 27th Division to advance. The units on the right of the sector had by the time the 3d Battalion moved, reached their first objective.



THE OPERATIONS OF THE 30TH DIVISION IN THE BREAKING OF THE  
HINDENBURG LINE AT BELLICOURT, SEPTEMBER 23-29,  
1918.

INTRODUCTION.

Most of the monographs we have heard in the past, both at the school and elsewhere, have dealt almost entirely with armies and groups of armies. This has not furnished a very good reliable pattern for a monograph that is to concern a division only. In fact I find that to portray to you this subject, as I have come to see it, I will be forced to discuss some units even as low as a company. I had listened with unusual interest to other monographers hoping the while that I might fasten on the principles of monography, but must now confess that my subject is greater than I. The division I am to write about deserves a historian far better qualified.

Another explanation before we go further or reach a place where it would be less apt than here, is that, in studying this subject I find that much will have to be said of the 27th Division and its action, since these two divisions were allied in the offensive with which we are concerned.

Too, I would like at this time to introduce you as it were to the personnel composing this division, for unlike the other divisions of the American army it did not fight the war with you. It did not stop the German drive on Paris, nor help the American 1st Army at St. Mihiel or even reach the final American goal in the Meuse-Argonne. It seems also to have been rather short of press agents.

The backbone of the division was formed from the National Guard units of Tennessee, North and South Carolina, the majority of whom had just completed almost a year's training on the Mexican Border and were in excellent condition when recalled into federal service. The additional personnel required to fill the ranks to conform to the new

tables of organization were men of the first draft Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota and North Dakota.

(1)History  
of the 30th  
Division, by  
Col.Kerr,  
Chief of  
Staff.

A distinctively American division, with more than ninety-five percent of its personnel of American-born parents. (1) Few of these men were from the city, but for most part from the farms, logging camps, construction gangs, common laborers, etc. Their records of prior occupations could have furnished you anything that you might possibly want in the way of material to constitute a modern army except stenographers and company clerks. They could use the axe, the pick and shovel, the saw and hammer. They could drive and take care of teams, and for once there were plenty of blacksmiths and horseshoers. Better yet most of them were accustomed to looking out for themselves under unusual conditions.

When the divisional distinctive names became the order, the 30th Division selected for itself the title of "Old Hickory", Andrew Jackson's nickname, famous throughout the south as one of its most prominent warriors and statesmen, and a native born Tennessean, closely identified however with the histories of all the southern states represented by the division.

Later when the divisional insignia was ordered the division used a tab with a maroon background upon which was embroidered in blue the letters "O" "H". The "H" within the "O" in a horizontal plane with the cross bar of the "H" made with three XXX the Roman numeral for thirty.

I have already stated that the division did not at any time get into the American sectors, instead from its arrival in France until the war was over it was an integral part of some British Army or Corps. This came about under an agreement, for their respective countries, arrived at in Paris by Generals Pershing and Bliss and General Sir Douglas Haig in which it was agreed that British shipping would transport American troops to an extent as yet not dreamed possible, if in return the British Army in France might have (2) certain numbers of these American divisions (less their artillery and trains) to argument their rapidly falling man-power.

(2)General  
Harbord's  
War Diary in  
Sat.Evening  
Post, Edition  
March 1918.



Further that such troops would be trained under experienced British officers and noncommissioned officers, supplied by British agencies with everything required, except their distinctive articles of uniform. This included in articles furnished arms, transportation, rations and clothing. I might also add that they were even willing to stretch a point and give us our "Rum Ration" until someone put a stop to it.

General Pershing had tied another string to this agreement however when he insisted that the training of these units would be conducted along the lines laid down for our armies and that these divisions allocated to the British armies, would be administered insofar as pertained to anything but their tactical use in an emergency, to a headquarters of an American Corps, to be created and placed with the British for the specific purpose of commanding these units.

This resulted in the organization of our 11th American Corps, to which was assigned from time to time all the divisions who passed through the British areas. These divisions upon their arrival in France, usually by way of England, were first trained under the supervision of the 11th Corps for a short period, then moved up, in close support to the lines where they were sent in by small groups then, by companies after which battalions, under command of their officers, took over sectors between British battalions. All of the training was most thorough and there is no question as to its value to the command, including the miles of trenches dug in the support lines. Several tactical emergencies however arose during this time in which the British command was supreme and in some of these American troops were called upon to engage in operation of a minor nature. One thing though was prevalent though throughout the British army that was not good for the morale of our commands and that was the continual crying about the fact that the war was won already and that America had gotten in too late to save the situation. Further that the Germans were preparing to launch the final attack which we might expect any day and that they could not withstand another attack like the ones they had just weathered (German Offensive in the Spring 1918). Frankly

(3) Monograph  
10, W.D. 1016,  
2d American  
Corps in  
Somme Of-  
fensive, p 10.



our men had visions of this attack and no one left to stop it but a handful of Americans. (3)

Up to the time covered in this monograph the division had seen considerable service in the Ypres Salient in the trenches, and had engaged in a small advance now known as the Ypres-Lys Offensive from which we were withdrawn on the first of September and transferred as a part of the 11th Corps to the British G.H.Q. Reserve and were immediately put into intensive training, but in this case training that we could foresee was given in anticipation of offensive combat. There was nothing haphazard about the work we were doing now. First all units (battalions) were instructed in conjunction with heavy tanks in attack on highly entrenched areas. Next while other units worked with the tanks we would receive instructions in; marching fire with the Lewis guns and our rifles. From this we would go to grenade ranges where we would work with live grenades, signal rockets and message carrying rockets. Next it would be our turn to work out again with the tanks until we could almost carry on a conversation with them in Infantry-Tank Signals. The tanks using at that time a number of signal flags, each with a meaning as to some fact or condition when displayed and the infantry using prearranged rifle, hand and arm signals. Combined with all this were included additional instructions in formations, mopping up and the daily bayonet work. Nothing was said during this time to give us any hint as to where we were going or when.

This period of training lasted for about three weeks and on the 20th of September the corps was assigned to General Rawlinson's IVth British Army then composed of the Australian Corps and two British Corps. We were moved by bus to the vicinity of Tincourt a small town about seven kilometers east of Perrone where we arrived about 4:00 A.M. having ridden all night in the buses from the vicinity of Doullens. The village of Tincourt was practically destroyed and the command was distributed about and forced to do the best they could for shelter. We

now found that we were close behind the British Army in front of the Hindenburg Line and the question as to what we had been preparing to do was answered.

#### GENERAL SITUATION.

Since April 1918, when Sir Douglas Haig had issued his now famous "Backs to the wall order" the situation has been entirely changed. (3) The supreme War Lord, through his Army commander, Hindenburg, has had recourse to the same kind of an order. Such an order might have better expressed the German situation, driven back from the Marne, the St. Mihiel salient pinched out and the Allies preparing to strike all along the line with a blow that would put to final test the German claims to world power.

(4) Great Events of the Great War. Official Source Records by Horne & Austin, p 282. (4)

Within the sector we were now moving in the time had come when Hindenburg would see his boasted rallying line, the construction of which had begun in 1916, tested as to its strength. The line the Germans had constructed at their backs and where they firmly expected to remain on the soil of France until the Allies would be forced to permit them to sit instead of stand at the peace tables. (5)

(5) The last Four Months, Gen. Sir F. Maurice, P. 127.

Also a line that had been tested as to its strength by the Allies and especially by the British after the German strategic retreat in 1917 while the land forces of the Kaiser watched and waited for the submarine to win the war. How many times the German soldier had looked for some offensive he was called upon to perform to win the war as had been promised him. Say what you may of the German war policies and the German leaders that brought about the war, think of them with such hatred and contempt as you may, you cannot but admire the dogged patient bravery of her soldiers. How many times could we promise our American soldiers that did they do such and so it would win the war and fail them? Of course these promises were having their bad effect on the Germans too, there is plenty of (6) evidence of that also.

(6) The Cambrio Operations 1917, Sir. Douglas Haig's Reports, pp 151-173 incl.

At the time of the opening of the action to be described in this

monograph, this line had not only been reached by the British IVth Army between Cambria and St. Quentin but in its center it had succeeded in taking its outpost line at a point where the outpost line constituted a vital part of the whole defensive scheme; as you will observe later.

The breaking of this line at any point and especially here, left the German army, with its weakened man-power and morale, in such desperate straits as to insure, as it did, the speedy collapse of its whole military and political structure.

The morale of our Allies had steadily improved since the beginning of its successful counter offensive in July until at this time it was all that could be desired in any army and higher than it had been any other time since the war had started. Its man-power too was being argued beyond its wildest dreams by the American soldier, who had also proven his worth in battle. The supreme commander must have felt very much as some poor inventor, who after struggling along for years, with an idea that he knew to be perfect, but which he could not complete for lack of tools and facilities, suddenly finds unlimited means at his disposal.

Believing as he did in the offensive, to find that at last nothing stood in its way, that he could attack on a grand enough scale to satisfy even his most exacting demands, must have been a feeling that comes to few mortals.

His scheme for this offensive was on as grand a scale as his satisfaction at being able to direct it, the time had come when he could at last test the weakening effect of his "Hammer Blows" with one mighty blow from which the enemy could not hope to recover. Briefly then his

(7) Sir Douglas plan was as follows: (3)

Haig's Dispatches, p 277

Par. 31 and Buchan's History of the

World War, Vol. IV pp 363-364.

An attack under the command of King Albert of Belgium to be carried out with the Belgian Army, augmented by the addition of the 11th British



Army, under General Plumer, the Vth British Army under General Birdwood. This force to drive along the coast of the North Sea forcing the Germans from their possession of the channel ports and continuing their pressure on the German right wing.

A second powerful attack commanded by General Pershing with the American Army in conjunction with certain French forces in the Meuse-Argonne directed to cut the enemy line of communications at Sedan, and Mezieres.

A third and what appears to be the most powerful attack of the three, under General Sir Douglas Haig, with the 1st IIIrd and IVth British Armies commanded respectively by Horne, Byng and Rawlinson, directed at the center and aimed at the German lateral line of communication, which if reached cut the German Army on the Western Front in two.

All of the above to become effective on the 26th of September.

It is with the third of these attacks, namely the one directed at the German center that we are interested in at this time. Here as has been mentioned before, a continuation of the British offensive launched on the 8th of August had forced the Germans back to "Their Wall" their last defensive trench, from which if defeated they had nothing left upon which to retire. With this immense entrenched area at their backs they had always felt confident of maintaining their foothold in France and with this same line to fall back on they had not seen the necessity of constructing anything further. There can be no question but that had the German Army maintained its old time efficiency this last belief would have held good, for if any prepared defensive position could have stopped the Allies, this one would have done so. If they could not rely on this one others would not help. Following the battle of the Somme in 1916 they had deliberately laid out and constructed this position. One need not be told that it was the masterpiece of German trench construction. Built while miles from any enemy interference, sited front and rear, it appeared that the ground had

been built to fit the trenches instead of the trenches being built to fit the ground. Cement at least was always plentiful in Germany for they had used tons of it here.

Haig did not feel that he would be able to launch a simultaneous attack on his entire front, (a distance of over thirty miles) with the vigor it would require to break through this strong position. Therefore it was agreed that he should make his main attack on a front from where he connected with the French Army on his right, in front of St. Quentin, on a front of about ten miles, which was the front of his IVth Army under Rawlinson, effect a break-through at this point and then continue his efforts with his other armies on the flanks.

This decision did not lead, however, to what one might expect in his subsequent actions, for on the 27th of September under cover of a preliminary bombardment of some hours he actually launched his initial attack with his Ist and IIIrd Armies. This was done for two reasons: first, because his first and third armies were not actually up to the Hindenburg Line on their respective fronts, secondly, to give his IVth Army more time for artillery preparation.

I might add here that the attack of these armies was successful and that by the night of the 27th the Germans faced Haig's armies on their main battle positions.

The 30th and 27th Divisions had been transferred to the IV British Army under General Rawlinson on the 20th of September, had reached the army area by the night of the 23d and by the night of the 23d-24th the 30th Division was in the front line as was the 27th Division by the 24th-25th.

#### THE TERRAIN.

Let us now consider the terrain confronting these units and the details of the German defenses confronting them.

The face of the terrain was practically devoid of any natural cover, no trees or hedges, no cultivated fields and no houses to their flanks or rear. The whole country side as you will recall was suffering from what, for want of a better term, we might call a "Strategic Retreat," which as you will recall took place over a year previous to this time. In which it had been the order that nothing would be left standing that would afford cover of any kind for the enemy. There wasn't.

Some grass and weeds had <sup>no</sup> grown of course in the past year and of late the shell holes had increased in numbers. The crop of wire to the front however, was doing well and seemed to be carefully tended of unusual height and very thick, having been placed in successive belts as far as the eye could see. Spoil heaps that could be identified with the aid of the map and the proper azimuth as having once been little country villages. Practically nothing left which would have been of use as landmarks except the ground forms. Low rolling hills with for the most part narrow valleys, which at certain places, were deep enough to be termed ravines. These were cut into along their slopes in many places where in bygone days gravel and stone had been removed. Throughout all this section lay a network of narrow unimproved roads, fallen into disuse at least during the past year.

From the position occupied by the troops concerned in this monograph the ground sloped gently away in a more or less uniform grade for about a distance of a thousand yards to a valley just in front of Bellicourt and Riqueval. The St. Quentin Canal came into view in this valley just in the south edge of the little town of Riqueval where it passed out of sight to the south. The towns of Bellicourt and Riqueval were on the rising ground on the further side of this valley from our position.

From these towns the ground continued to rise in the same general easy slope to the east where, on its crest stood the town of Nauroy a distance of close to four thousand yards from our position in the front



line. At Nauroy the ground again sloped to the east and to the north so that the country immediately east of Nauroy was not visible. To the north of Bellicourt the ground rose in a slightly stiffer grade, terminating in a rather higher hill than the others in the vicinity upon which were located the spoil heaps that had once been the town of Bony. The valley just mentioned was the principal one in our foreground and from it spread the numerous small ravines mentioned. A better name for these so-called ravines might be "gullies".

Since the man-made defenses in this case fitted the terrain so closely it seemed almost a part of the ground itself we will discuss them here instead of under the heading of enemy disposition.

With reference to the accompanying sketch you will notice a fairly well defined ridge, upon the southern end of which is situated the town of Nauroy. From here it drops down just back of the town of Bellicourt, which lies in a sort of saddle, the other spur of which is the high ground to the north at Bony. From Bony on to the north this ridge continues to fall away until it reaches the town of Vendhuile. Through this ridge longitudinally and in direction a few degrees west of north, the St. Quentin Canal passes by means of a deep tunnel. This tunnel has its southern entrance at the town of Riqueval and its northern end at a point about twelve hundred yards south of Vendhuile, making the total length of the tunnel about six-thousand yards. You will realize too, that to tunnel through a hill to carry a body of water underground in a low rolling country that a considerable sized cut will be used before resorting to a tunnel, so picture at either end of this tunnel a cutting of from twenty-five to forty-feet deep with the surplus earth thrown up on both sides into high banks of from fifteen to twenty feet high. So at both ends of this tunnel, the canal which contained from six to nine feet of water and was about thirty feet wide, together with the depth of its cutting and its high banks, presented a military obstacle of no small value. On the right of our sector for a distance of almost five

front of it to a depth of several hundred yards, while the open canal north of the tunnel again served as a moat in front of his position. This system in general consisted of three lines of closely supporting trenches from which and between which ran numerous saps and communication trenches. Many of the approach and communication trenches had been prepared for firing and all trenches were very deep and wide. Little had been required in the way of reveting in the soil here due to its natural resistance and texture and the chalk beds and deposits.

Different too was his outpost line than those usually held and constructed in front of his defenses. While he as a rule, as did the rest of the combatants, he usually constructed one main line, or rather one general line, whereon he placed small strong points and combat groups, which he expected to use more for security than any real combat, on this line he had constructed two and three lines of trenches with strong points amounting to centers of resistance and capable of withstanding any organized offensive. In front of the tunnel you will notice the extreme care he exercised and the amount of labor he expended on this position. As usual there was a very necessary and laudable reason for this extra strength at this point.

His front main line and by main line I mean his battle position, was at the foot of a very long reverse slope, to his front lay a clearly defined ridge at from a thousand to fifteen hundred yards. Here we find his outpost line set almost uniform along the crest. While he held this outpost line observation in rear of it for the purpose of registering artillery fire was an impossibility, except of course by means of planes or captive balloons. In addition he prevented the enemy from observing and firing on any movements he might care to make.

Another reason for the additional strength at this point on his front was that the only place tanks could hope to cross his main lines was here where the canal passed under ground and afforded them a bridge upon which to cross.



thousand yards, parallels to and in front of his main front line positions, this canal barred the way to the advance of the units on our right.

On our immediate front, while the enemy has lost the canal as an actual physical barrier to an attack, has by his gopher-like proclivities, succeeded to his methodical satisfaction in incorporating it into his system for the defense of the area. Now since we have gone over this canal from the outside of the tunnel let us take the lid off as it were and see the uses he has put it to. First quarters for his garrison. Gathering up all the canal barges which in peace engaged in using this waterway, he has towed them into the tunnel and thereon built comfortable quarters for his men and officers. Secondly, protection against anything that artillery could put over. Thirdly, by tunneling from the tunnel to his key positions, he could at any time reinforce any part of his line without the necessity of exposing his men to do it. Electric lights added much to the needs and comforts of the garrison who would appear to have all that they could wish under the circumstances. There were however at least two bad features connected with this tunnel, neither of which appeared to the Germans as bad at the time the line was built as they did in mid-summer 1918. Of these we will speak again later.

One other point in connection with the tunnel was that in its construction for peace time use, air shafts had been installed about every three or four hundred yards along its masonry arched ceiling. On these exits the Germans had constructed a sort of super-pillbox of heavily reinforced concrete, nicely concealed in a spoil heap that marked an outline over the top of the tunnel. These of course could be manned at all times. This tunnel and the canal then had been used by the Germans as the backbone of his defensive works at this point in the Hindenburg Line. His main line of resistance incorporated the tunnel and the canal as a part of its defenses throughout its entire length. To the south of Ricqueval toward the town of Bellenglise his front line lay back of the open canal. From Ricqueval to the north in the tunnel sector his front line jutted out in



From almost up to the outpost line and scattered over his main battle position were numerous deep dugouts and pill boxes. These pill boxes were mutually supporting and within one to three hundred yards of each other throughout the entire battle position. The towns of Bellicourt, Riqueval and Nauroy had suffered little from passed artillery fire and in many of these houses, convenient to his front, he had constructed machine gun <sup>l</sup>implacements by building them within certain rooms of the house itself.

However, at the time the 30th Division reached the front Rawlinson's 17th Army had already captured all of this extremely protective outpost position from the left of the sector occupied by the 30th Division and including the sector of the next division on our right. On the left however, they had been unable to gain this ground and the position of the 27th Division was in the old British outpost line some twelve-hundred yards to the rear of the left flank of the 30th which was refused on this account. So at this time our own troops could look down on the German main line defenses (not a very encouraging view however) from our existing front line position, which occupied almost the geographical crests that had previously protected the Germans from observation and fire.

Looking down this rather gentle slope from the position of the division there were five sunken roads all converging from about the extent of the division sector on the town of Bellicourt. In between these roads lay three deep valleys, which being rather narrow were termed ravines. These converged on the German position in front of Bellicourt much the same way as the roads did and were supplied by the names given when the British had last faced the Germans in this position before the spring offensive. From right to left they were known as Bruy'ere Ravine, Quarry Ravine and Buckshot Ravine. The latter ran from within our position all the way down to the face of the slope and ended just about the first trench of the German position. A long ridge nosed down, almost in the exact center of the

division sector forming the high ground between Quarry Ravine and Buckshot Ravine, which was known as Sentinel Ridge. Straight down the center of this ridge ran a sunken road four to six feet deep and very narrow which was to constitute later the boundary between regiments.

While not conforming exactly to our present plan of defense the Germans had constructed in a general way on the corps front a system of Centers of Resistance or key defense positions. The names and locations of the most important of which I wish to fix in your mind at this time. From the extreme right of our position and moving left we find the first about the town of Nauroy, the next at Ricqueval and about the southern end of the tunnel, the next at Bellicourt, the next at Quennemont Farm, the next at the village of Bony, the next at Guillemont Farm and lastly, on the extreme northern edge of the corps sector the Knoll.

That it was the intention of the Germans when they first constructed the system to make these key positions I can not verify, but this they proved themselves to be is without question. The underestimation as to the strength of these in the 27th Division sector led to the failure of this division to gain ground beyond them on the 29th.

#### DISPOSITIONS.

The 30th and 27th divisions as has been previously mentioned, had taken over the lines from the British and Australians during the period night of the 23d-24th for the 30th Division and the night of the 24th-25th for the 27th Division.

The 30th Division relieved the 1st Australian Division in what was known as the Nauroy Sector and occupied the front line for an approximate distance of three thousand-seven-hundred and fifty yards. The 59th Brigade was in their front line and the 60th Brigade in reserve. Within the Brigade the 116th Infantry was in the front line and the 117th Infantry

in support. The 118th Infantry had its three battalions abreast in the line.

The same dispositions were made within the 27th Division which occupied what was termed the Gouy Sector about four thousand yards in width on the immediate left of the 30th Division.

Although it had been promised the American Corps that they would be able to take over the entire line as far advanced as the front of the 30th Division, that is in the Hindenburg outpost line, which would then constitute the Line of Departure, the 18th and 74th British Divisions had failed prior to their relief to get up on line with the Australians. (8)

(8) W.D. Records  
World War,  
Field Orders 16  
2d Corps, p 21,  
Par. 3 a.

Consequently when the 27th Division took over from the British divisions on the night of the 24th-25th they found that their front line was something better than a thousand yards back of the intended line of departure and the line occupied by the 30th Division.

This condition caused an order to be issued, effective on the 27th of September, at which time the 1st and IIIrd British Armies were to launch their attack, that they profiting by the heavy bombardment now going on and under cover, as it were of this major attack would advance and straighten out their line so that it would conform to the line held by the 30th Division. (9)

(9) F.O. 17, 2d  
Corps, par. 2.

Supporting them during this advancing of the line would be nine battalions of British field artillery and twelve heavy Mark V Star Tanks. The line they were to secure in the German outpost position was the old Hindenburg outpost Line and contained three of the Centers of Resistance mentioned while we were discussing the terrain, namely the Knoll, the Guillemont Farm and the Quennemont Farm. In addition these three positions were close enough to the position at Bony to interfere seriously with their successful occupation.

These strong points were highly organized defensive positions that



had definitely stopped the advance of the British prior to our arrival in the line and which had successfully resisted the combined efforts of the two British divisions to advance further toward them in several efforts made just before the 27th took over. True it seems highly probable that these divisions having gotten word of the proposed relief by American troops and having had many casualties at this point since they first confronted it, had failed to push the attack with the vigor required to reduce it. I do not mention this as a criticism of the British soldiers or their officers, for whom I have the profoundest respect, but call attention to it as an interesting physiological trait common to anybody of troops under similar circumstances. (10)

(10) Personal  
Conversation with  
British Officers  
relieved from  
Line. N.E.C.

It might also be of interest to know that it was a matter of common knowledge to all American troops serving with the British, that they were quite ready to permit the Americans elbow room on the front, under the general impression that it was time that we did some fighting after as they often expressed themselves we had waited four years to get in. This delay in entering the war never could be explained to the rank and file.

At any rate under the orders issued for the attack as just mentioned the 106 Infantry of the 53d Brigade undertook the attack on the morning at the same H-hour as that set for the attack by the armies on their left. The remaining Infantry regiment of the Brigade, the 104th was to act as a reserve in this attack. Briefly the attack was a complete failure and a costly one. It appears now in studying the affair that it was a serious operation gone into with insufficient supporting weapons, casual preparations, and poor formations.

The Germans concentrated more artillery fire on the advancing troops of the 106th than they had concentrated on the position they were attacking even though they were supposed to be advancing under a barrage. Of the twelve tanks that were supposed to take part in this operation about eight of them reached the <sup>start</sup> line and all of these were disabled

shortly after they started over by direct artillery fire. The regiment had attacked with its three battalions abreast on a front of four thousand yards against a prepared enemy defense in strength without any further scheme than to advance straight ahead.

The net result of this operation insofar as reaching the infantry start line for the main attack was nil. Some few men, better lead or bolder than their fellows, or luckier, did reach the objective between the strong points only to find themselves unable to move as the day wore on.

The 30th Division too had availed themselves during this operation of the opportunity to improve their position by raiding certain advance posts near their forming up line, Being a very small affair no artillery or tanks were used and their whole scheme worked out nicely.

Due to the fact that the Germans had gotten nervous during this activity or because they expected an immediate attack on their whole front, they had caused the regiments in the front line considerable casualties by their artillery fire throughout the day and had shown a general state of unrest with their machine guns. For this reason it was decided that present front line units should be relieved and their sister brigades take over. Also since the formation for the attack was to be heavier than the line was now held this would afford an opportunity to get the troops in position and use to their surroundings a day before the attack. This relief was effected on the night of the 27th-28th on the fronts of both divisions.

During this relief the line was taken over by units within the zones in which they were to advance on the morning of the 29th. Both divisions used the same formations for the attack; namely regiments abreast in the assault, one regiment in support (less one battalion brigade reserve) and one regiment (less one battalion brigade reserve) in divisional reserve. Regiments in the assault wave to attack with two battalions in the assault and one in support. This battalion in support was assigned a definite

mopping up mission during the attack.

Diagrammatically these units were then disposed as follows:

#### FIRST ASSAULT UNITS.

LEFT DIVISION	:	RIGHT DIVISION
27th	:	30th
107th Inf. 108th Inf.	:	119th Inf. 120th Inf.
24 heavy tanks	:	24 heavy tanks
105th Inf. 10 heavy tanks	:	117th Inf. 10 heavy tanks
106th Inf.	:	118th Inf.
	:	
	:	23 Brigades Field Artillery
	:	10 Brigades Heavy Artillery

#### SECOND ASSAULT UNITS.

2 Brigs. 3d Aust.Division	:	2 Brigades 5th Aust. Division
	:	
1 Brig. 3d Aust.Division	:	1 Brig.5th Aust. Division

Certain of the forward Brigades Field Artillery  
after firing in the following barrage.

13th Australian	Regiment)If break-thru
	)should be
5th Cavalry Brigade.	)effected.

Historians are by necessity vague about the German Divisions defending this front at this time due to the fact that divisions were being broken up and their personnel assigned to other divisions continually, however there were five divisions identified in sufficient numbers on the corps front during the 29th to state that the 2d Guard Division, 121st Division, the 185th Division, the 75th Reserve Division and the 8th Division at least were in the line opposing the 2d American Corps. As to their dispositions nothing seems to be definitely known. (11)

(11) Monograph 2d  
Corps, Capt.  
Vickers Hist. See  
W.D. and Personal  
Experience.

#### PLANS AND ORDERS.

As was stated in the situation the operations covered in this monograph formed a part of General Foch's plan to launch a triple offensive against the Germans, effective on the 26th of September. The



British plan in this offensive went into effect at about 9:30 P.M. September 26th when they commenced a heavy bombardment all along their front, a distance of more than 30 miles. Their next step in the plan then was the attack of their Ist and IIId Armies on a front of about 20 miles and their objective the front of the Hindenburg Line from where they joined the IVth Army at Vendhuile to a point about midway between Bethune and Douai. ~~a distance of about twenty miles.~~ This was to accomplish two general missions: first, to bring them up to the Hindenburg Line from where they could follow the lead of the IVth Army if it were successful. Second, to bring within range of their heavy artillery an important railway junction at Cambrai. As you know, this attack was successful. During this time the IVth Army to continue its heavy bombardment of the German positions and troops in its front where the actual break-thru was staged to take place. This artillery preparation was to start first with an eight hour concentration of persistent gas on the night of the 26th, next a prohibitive and wire cutting fire together with all possible counter battery work that they could find to do.

They were to keep the enemy below ground, prevent him from receiving any supplies or reinforcements and their heavies, which included many powerful naval guns specially assembled, to fire long range fire on some of his more important towns and railheads, which they had as yet refrained from firing on so that at the time of the attack the Germans would not have had time to rearrange his communications. The last six hours of this preparation to fall on the enemies' defensive positions with each gun firing at its maximum rate of sustained fire. One-thousand-six-hundred and thirty-four guns of all calibers were assigned on the IVth Army for this purpose together with orders for each division to employ two battalions of machine guns in a barrage on the enemy front lines. The attack of the IVth Army was to be delivered on a two-corps front. The IXth British Corps on the right and the IIId American Corps on the left. The front of the IIId Corps extending from Ricquenal (inclusive) on the south, a distance of about seven-thousand

five-hundred yards to the town of Vendhuile (exclusive). The front of the 30th Division extending some three-thousand-five-hundred yards north of the southern limits of the corps sector. And the remaining portion covered by the 27th Division. It will be noticed that the division sector included the southern end of the tunnel and about five-hundred yards of the open canal to the south.

The initial attack then was to be made by the American troops in the formation as explained under dispositions until they reached their objectives, (the green line), when the Australian forces were to leap-frog them and exploit the successes to the red line.

Within the 30th Division sector the assault waves with their mopping up battalions, were to attack straight to the front within their respective zones of action; the 117th Infantry (less 1 battalion) however was to follow the assault waves until they cleared the tunnel, where it was to deploy to its right and push the attack down the east side of the canal to the dotted green line. This provision was made to insure, if necessary, the crossing of the 46th British Division on our right. This crossing on their front was deemed doubtful due to the depth of the open canal in front of the enemy positions. For this reason it was expected that the 117th Infantry would have to clear their front before they would be able to make their crossing and advance in conjunction with troops on their left.

One company of the 117th Infantry and the regimental machine guns plus one officer and about twenty men from the right British battalion were to form a combat group, with orders to move down the right flank of the division sector abreast of the assault waves. This precaution was necessary due to the fact that the five-hundred yards of the open canal would otherwise have been left open since the attack of the right assault regiment was to cross over the tunnel and the direction of the advance of the remainder of the 117th Infantry was directed to cross over north of the tunnel mouth.



The tanks in the meantime had been moving up from the rail head, (to which point they had been shipped from different localities) and had spent the day of the 28th concealed about two-thousand yards in rear of the front line. These were to regulate their movements so as to reach the infantry start line at or a few minutes before the "H" hour. Any noise that they made in moving up was to be covered by our planes which were required to fly continually over our front lines from "H"-6 hours to "H". The supremacy in the air was established and had been maintained by the British for several months.

The artillery barrage was to fall in two lines, two-hundred yards of the infantry start line at 5:50 A.M. on the morning of the 29th remaining on its barrage line for 4 minutes, then lift in one-hundred-yard lift at the normal rate. On the first line and nearest the infantry the 3"-3" and "4".7" field pieces were to fire, using H.E. with instantaneous fuse and shrapnel, two-hundred yards ahead of these came the fire of the 5".9's, 6".0 and 7".2", using H.E. and instantaneous fuse. Artillery of greater caliber had a special concentration chart for controlling their fire, which was delivered on such points as the tunnel mouth and Riqueval, the town of Bellicourt and its defenses, the town of Nauroy and other centers of resistance known or suspected of containing heavy enemy forces. This fire was delivered from guns of 8".9".2" and up to railway seige guns and howitzer of 12" caliber. (12)

(12) Personal Talk  
with Btry. COs,  
during Prelimi-  
nary Bombardment.

Certain batteries had instructions to move up close to front lines in the early part of the night of the 28th which they could easily do, due to the fact that the front lines rested across the crest of a rather high ridge. From the front lines to the rear there was all dead space. Some of these batteries were within a few hundred yards of the front lines. These were to constitute the guns to cover the exploitation and cover the advance of other guns designated to move forward.

I would like to mention here certain difficulties to be overcome by the 27th Division to conform to its plan, which was a frontal attack,



for all units. However they had failed on the 27th as has been mentioned to advance their lines abreast of the 30th Division and were holding a general line in the old British outpost line something better than a thousand yards to the rear. The question had been taken up with different commanders and finally with the army commander about changing the barrage plans to conform to their existing line, but he, after consultation with the American Corps commander, decided that inasmuch as they had certain small units which had gotten up in the German outpost line, (the objective of their advance on the 27th) and who had been unable to withdraw that the plans for the barrage would not be changed. Although the C.O. 27th Division had hoped to advance his units prior to "H" hour, he had been unable to do so. This fact then caused the left division on the corps front to form up for attack over a thousand yards in rear of the artillery start line which fell beyond the strong points that had defeated the attack of the 27th.

In addition to the normal rolling barrage the artillery was charged with laying down and maintaining a smoke screen on the flanks of the corps sector along the right and left boundaries. This to be executed by dropping a line of smoke shells, one beyond the other, up a given line, then maintaining density by observation.

All units of the assault were to form on the taped line a H-10". All supporting units to move from their assigned positions so as to follow at a certain given distance. All units to form up in deployed formations to conform to the deployments used in training for the attack.

#### OPERATIONS.

Nothing interfered with the plans just outlined and at "H" hour everything had proceeded as planned. Units throughout the entire area however, suffered to a certain degree from enemy artillery, whose fire seemed to be distributed generally during the night over forward areas

without special missions, covering the front lines and about 2,000 yards in rear. During the afternoon preceding the attack persistent gas from heavies had been dropped into low area and areas covered by small growth in rear of front line, which were to serve as concentrations areas for our moving troops. For most part all our troops in rear of front line who moved forward to their areas as selected had to use the gas mask while occupying such points. Our front lines and line of departure were clear, however, of any gas. Thorough reconnaissance had been made prior to "D"-Day and all movements were carried out in a satisfactory manner. The night was clear, and cool, no moon, yet light enough to distinguish landmarks. The rearmost forces of our troops were within a thousand yards of the line of departure and the assault echelon of the Australians almost as far forward, with their succeeding elements within a belt of not to exceed 2,000 yards.

The tanks too were moving along at this time and passed our reserve elements about two hours before the attack was to start. Some field artillery as mentioned before was moving up just on the reverse of the crest on whose forward slope our troops in the line of departure were to form. All this stupendous and concerted movement, the intense artillery bombardment, noise of passing tanks, the hum of airplanes together with the ever present thought of what the morrow might bring forth, made sleep an impossibility for many. Everyone had a rather definite idea, especially the officers as to just what they were to encounter in the attack. Then too our British comrades had been careful to inform us of the supposed impregnability of the German position at this point. Intelligence reports indicative of the German strength and numbers, vertical and oblique air photographs, which had been supplied to include companies, had been carefully studied. The experiences of the 106th Infantry, 27th Division in their attempt to straighten out their line was known to everyone. The usual murmur of the troops for once was still and all waited until the dawn of their first big offensive. Never, however, have I seen the men more quick to carry out any task they were



to do, or more careful to do it correctly than that night. There was not even any indication of hanging back, each went promptly to his place and remained there silent and immovable. Most of the units had a very short distance to go to reach their designated forming up areas and all were well fed and well rested, having been sitting in the immediate area since the 24th. Officers, it is true, had been rather busy making reconnaissance to the front, assembling for conferences and even slipping over to the high ground on our left from which most of the sector of the 27th Division could be seen. Watching the fight there on the 27th of September was quite a diversion, but none too assuring either.

Sometime between 12 noon and 1 A.M. the artillery fire increased to a steady roar which comforting sound served to bolster up our spirits and lend encouragement as to the success of the coming attack. The sound was tremendous and indistinguishable too. Messages to higher headquarters were in that all units and tanks were in proper place or as in the case of the line of departure immediately in rear under cover by 3:00 A.M. and nothing was then left to do until "H" hour at 5:50. Enemy shells were still falling but few and far between since our drum fire had started. They of course knew of the attack and were either trying to improve their ammunition supply or their battery positions. Many of which we learned later had been seriously damaged and some destroyed by our past counter-battery fire.

An enemy bombing squadron came over and dropped some 25 lb. bombs hitting nothing so far as was known. Most all units had their gas masks on. In the east the sky began to show the approach of dawn and as the darkness lessened, we could see batteries arranging and improving their positions, stringing observers wire to the front and laying out ammunition. These we had been told upon inquiry were our counter-attack guns getting well up.

About 5:35 the bombardment began to lessen and by 5:40 the only



artillery we could hear must have been enemy bursts. It seemed painfully quiet. One of our planes passed up and down our front checking on our disposition along the tape. Units moved on the tape at 5:40 in most cases, under cover of the rapidly thinning darkness.

Enemy artillery fire began to fall just in rear of our front line fairly thick but did little damage since the jump-off tape was from 50 to 100 yards in front. Some fell among the men on the tape however, more on the men of the 118th Infantry in the front line and quite a number on infantry units in the support lines.

Promptly at 5:50 the barrage fell with a roar and the explosions of the field artillery shell could be heard all along the line, hardly had this registered on the mind when the heavies' curtain fell 200 yards further to the front. The next thing on the program was the enemy S.O.S. signal all along the line and these signals were answered promptly. Casualties became more plentiful and units on the tape hugged the ground 4 minutes, from the time the barrage fell until they moved.  $1\frac{1}{2}$  Minutes more before they were to move, yet some of the company commanders began getting them forward, closer to our barrage, to escape the enemy fire which came in promptly. Long range enemy machine gun fire began to come over the crest seeming to just graze the top and our rear units kept their heads down. "H"-hour and the barrage moved on and the troops broke into squad column behind, looking very much like the usual exercises. Suddenly we began to realize it was getting hazy. Next we saw a perfectly solid wall of smoke moving from right to left across our front cutting off our view of advancing troops as it passed over them. The ground mists, so prevalent in this section of the country began to rise and within 15 minutes nothing over six feet from one could be seen. Nothing could be heard now but a roar, nothing could be seen. Supporting troops with secondary and mopping up missions passed ahead with much confusion as to direction and formation. Wounded men, able to walk, began coming back. How was it going? They did not know. It had gotten so foggy they couldn't

Units in brigade reserve got orders to move to the forward slopes and occupy trenches as far forward as possible. The haze was even thicker. The writer, some few hundred yards ahead of his assembly position, followed a wire he had with him back to his battalion, leaving his intelligence officer there to help us again locate the direction. The battalion was gotten together, put into echelon section column, and started forward with instructions for columns to keep in touch. Hardly had the command begun to move until units began to get lost. The battalion was halted with some difficulty and columns closed in to a single column which practically amounted to a column of squads. Thus tied in, it again started forward marching by compass and avoiding such shell burst as could be located near at hand. We reached the most advanced trench just in front of the units holding the line with one casualty and he, not from shell fire, but from some stray machine gun bullet. We had missed our destination however some 400 yards to our left. This was soon reached and a number of wounded picked up. Here the battalion was to wait for further orders and secure and maintain communication with the front if possible. The battalion signal officer with a telephone line and 3 men started off to get in touch with front line, but just as he was to leave, the regimental signal officer came through carrying out the same mission and as his wire was longer he undertook this job.

Our first real news of any progress reached us when a supply tank came back carrying a wounded officer of the 120th Infantry he was carried to our battalion aid station and told us that the confusion among the units to the front was indescribable, but that they were working forward in spite of that fact, and that he had reached level ground somewhere to the front when he was hit with a machine gun bullet in his left shoulder. This meant to us who had studied the ground, that some of our units were either at or in the German front trench which ran along the opposite side of a narrow valley at the foot of the long forward slope we were on and a little over a thousand yards away. Since he had been



in the assault echelon and it must have been hit at least 30 minutes earlier, our troops must have closed with the enemy. The supply tank, by the way, had gotten lost and was almost  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile ahead of its intended laying-up area. Insistent calls kept coming in to our switchboard for information, and we were kept busy telling the Brigade and Regiment what little we could find out.

Finally some of the walking wounded came in who had been hit after they had crossed some trenches down at the foot of the hill. We were in some of the German trenches at least.

This kept up with bits of information here and there until about 9:00 A.M., when the wind commenced to strengthen and the flank battery shooting over smoke began to realize that they were getting it too thick. We had tried to get in touch with them through forward artillery observation officers, but they had no lines to anything but their batteries and even our brigade headquarters, which we were in touch with, either seemed powerless or thought it had to be this way and did nothing.

At any rate it began to clear up and when it did, our commanders of different units in the assault echelon found themselves in most every part of the field they could get in with everything from two or three men to a company with them. Some from other companies of the same regiment, some from other companies of other regiments. All through the German trenches around Bellicourt and Riqueval. Up against the high banks of the canal wall to the right of the sector, and from there on back almost to the start line, were scattered our men. The Germans too must have gotten a start for everywhere they could see were Americans. It didn't last long nor was there any questions as to who was going to win. Hand to hand, grenades in tunnel entrances, pistols, and even good old fashion fists soon pacified that part of the line. From our position we could see the whole show or enough of it to know what had happened and we felt



mighty good. Groups of prisoners began to go to the rear under usually about one American guard. Reorganization had to be accomplished though, for our objective had not been reached as yet. Although, I think every American soldier on that field would have promised you it would be within a few minutes at the least. Still for the 117th it lay almost 2,000 to the south down the tunnel for the right flank, and past the town of Nauroy for the 120th Infantry, and beyond Bellicourt for the 119th Infantry.

Very little trouble was experienced in getting the 117th away, for as soon as they saw a few of their comrades headed south they joined. This left the 120th Infantry and a few of the 117th on their extreme left at Bellicourt. These units formed rapidly and pushed the attack home toward Nauroy, very materially aided by three heavy tanks which were still going. Three other tanks had started down the canal, but one of these was hit by a shell almost as soon as it rounded the end of the mouth of the tunnel. By 12:00 A.M. the two above-mentioned units had succeeded in reaching their objectives and their success rocket signal went up. The mopping-up battalion of the 120th Infantry, however, was getting into some difficulty by this time with their task. Every spoil heap contained Germans. They were rounding them up faster almost than they could handle them. Using phosphorus grenades in deep dugout and in the tunnel entrances, however, was fast making these shelters untenable and they had entirely cleared the tunnel entrance, all the trenches and dugouts up into Bellicourt, a little over a thousand yards away, and were entering the town proper when the German heavy artillery opened on the town with such volume as to prevent their further work there. This left them only one other mission and that was to continue their work around the town through the trenches and join up with the mopping-up battalion of the 119th Infantry. At this point the writer received order from the Brigade Commander to proceed to Bellicourt and assist in mopping up the town. Hardly were these orders received

and before we had been able to put them into execution, when word was sent to reinforce the flank of the 119th Infantry on the left of the town and about 1200 yards to the north. These corrected orders put the battalion on the move toward our new designation. Moving laterally along the trenches we were then occupying across Sentinel Ridge thence north when we came onto the sector of the 119th until we could connect with these troops on their left flank. Our attention having been called away from our right, it began to be evident as we moved further to the north that things were not doing so well there. When we then reached the crest of Sentinel Ridge we found the road running longitudinally along its crest filled with artillery, caissons, and ammunition, trucks, all standing still, most of them concealed from our former position by the fact that they were in a cut for about a thousand yards. Upon inquiry as to why they were bunched up in such a manner and what they were doing, we were informed they had orders to move up to a position, further support the attack which they understood had reached its objectives. That they were held up, however, because the Germans had mined the road at Bellicourt and they couldn't get forward, out of the cut nor turn around in the narrow road. That some engineers were cutting around the mine crater and that they would soon move on, which fact, although not as they meant it, seemed obvious. It struck us then that to remain near this long column which was steadily getting longer and more dense, would be dangerous. So the battalion resumed the advance with instructions to get through the column anywhere they could as quickly as possible and reform on the other side. This was done and the men soon managed to get through. We left there as soon as possible and none too soon either, for suddenly the German heavies began to fall; most of them apparently taking effect on the road. One can hardly imagine the horrible effect of such a concentration on such a target. Some of the transportation and the guns were horse-drawn. Many of the teamsters, however, cut their animals loose and in some cases

sacrificed their own lives in so doing. Horses hit and down, men running away from the concentration, debris flying from the bursts, combined, made a never-to-be-forgotten sight. This one thing in size and effect surpasses anything else I have ever seen. All this time our units, deployed now in squad column, was moving along toward the spot indicated in our orders in a general northerly direction with a spur of high ground still cutting off our view to the left. As we began to cross the low ground near the head of the valley in which the town of Bellicourt lies, the artillery fire promptly switched from the transport column onto our advance. Falling, however, just ahead of our foremost element. This gave the leaders a chance to work around, scattering the columns, so to speak, in such a way that no shells succeeded in hitting any one column, although several men were hit with the flying fragments. The battalion kept moving and soon reached the high ground about 1,000 yards almost due north of Bellicourt from which point we were met with machine gun fire from our left, however, at some distance and few men were hit. Here we began to find the men of the 119th Infantry, but were unable to locate any officers at first. Leaving the command under cover in trenches which were or had been a part of the enemy's main line of defense, certain officers were sent out to locate the command we were sent to assist, and ascertain the situation. This was finally accomplished, but it was found that these units, instead of being in position toward the front of their sector, had been forced to deploy along its left boundary facing into the right of the 27th Division Sector from a point just west of the main Hindenburg position. They had been compelled to refuse their flank almost back to the start line. The remains of two battalions of the 119th Infantry were constituting a defensive flank. We learned at this time that the 27th had been definitely held up except for about two companies of one battalion, which were occupying a position facing Bony from the south. These two companies at this time were pinned in position by heavy volumes of



of machine gun fire from Bony.

It was the opinion of the officer who was then outlining the situation that a small detachment, less than a company, had continued the advance and were somewhere near Gouy, a small town almost in the center of the 27th Division Sector and on the objective. He also stated that the remaining battalion, 119th and the Regimental Machine Gun Company, were well up beyond Bellicourt and joined up with units of the 120th Infantry.

Instructions were received at this time (about 4:30 P.M.) for troops on this flank to hold and organize a defensive position with our battalion in support. We learned afterwards that this had been done to permit and cover the advance of the 3d and 5th Australian Divisions. Units of the 3d Australian Division passed by our left flank covering force about 5 P.M.

The 5th Australian Division, meanwhile, having started its advance promptly on the success signal of our right assault regiment and our right flank regiment which as has already been related, had secured their first objective about 12:00 Noon. This movement of the 5th Australian Division had put the 3d Australian Division in motion. By 5:30 further advance was halted all along the line in order to permit units to organize the ground so as to hold our gains. In the mean time, additional mopping-up parties were formed to more closely comb the ground to our rear. While not mentioned before, the Germans had been coming out through tunnel opening in small groups and were captured in the act of attacking from previously prepared concealed machine gun emplacements. Here I wish to say that historians, especially British, have stated in certain works that the Australians were forced to clear up rear areas during the day, and I would like to say here that such was not the case by any manner of means in the rear of the 30th Division. In so far as the 27th Division was concerned the Australians

did not on this date succeed in advancing the attack a yard ahead of the line the 27th Division was stopped upon. It is true that many isolated groups of Germans were taken prisoners on the 30th of September over the entire area, but having been in very favorable position to see the entire Division sector and the right portion of the 27th Division Sector, I am sure that had such been the case, some of the personnel of the division could have seen any fight the Australians might have engaged in. Therefore, it is my desire to go on record here, in the position<sup>ve</sup> statement, that at no time during the day were any units of the 30th Division endangered from having any enemy attack them from within the area through which they had advanced.

The 27th Division on our left failed to get through the Hindenburg line, that is history and correct, but that failure cannot for one minute be laid to the lack of fighting qualities on the part of the men.

Required to advance without artillery protection for the first thousand to twelve hundred yards of their attack against highly organized positions manned by trained personnel armed with numberless machine guns; the majority of their tank support knocked out within the first hour; the barrage falling on the zone of attack at least 30 minutes before any of them ever reached it.

The Germans provided with shelter in which nothing thrown from guns could reach them and having any where from thirty minutes to an hour to prepare their defense after our artillery ceased firing upon them; the morale of the entire division lowered by the unnecessary and unsuccessful local attacks made prior to "D"-day, attacks that should have been launched under no less careful preparation than that of the 29th; the answer to such action we have before we attack.

On the right of our division the 46th British gained the east bank of the canal and the Hindenburg line along this area by the afternoon

of the 29th and the lines were held as indicated on the attached operations map.

#### GAINS AND LOSSES.

To measure the gains in this attack in figures dealing with the number of men and guns captured or destroyed, is patently absurd. One and only one gain counted either from the German or the Allied viewpoint and that was that,

The final line upon which the German armies could hope to stand in the face of the Allies' continued offensive had been broken, and broken with it as the last vestige of German morale.

That his troops occupying possibly the strongest fortified line the world had ever seen, had given it up.

That another and the final German unbeatable mathematical conclusion had proven untrue. He believed and published that his Hindenburg line would hold, that it was impregnable but had lost it.

That the British led by American troops had opened the gateway that lead to Cologne.

The losses, (having succeeded so well), seem hardly worth mentioning so far as the 30th Division is concerned having been but about one-thousand-five-hundred officers and men killed and wounded of about eighteen-thousand or more actually engaged. Others gains, intangible perhaps but no less valuable, was the gain in the morale of the division. They had gained a morale big enough to carry them on in repeated attacks through thirty days of continued offensives in which some seventy per cent casualties did not stop, thus constituting the spear-head of the IVth British Army from the 23d of September until the 23d of October.



## ANALYSIS AND CRITICISMS.

Let us consider for a moment just what this action of the 30th Division meant to the Allied cause, why it was more important than many others and what it led to. Not exactly in winning the war, but in ending it. Place yourselves in the position of the German Army at this point. So long as he could keep intact this strong defensive belt, which extended from Lille in the north to include the line in front of the American drive in the Argonne, he still possessed the wall upon which to rest his back. So long as this line held he had a rallying point upon which to rely when defeat threw his armies back. Here he could hope to defeat forces in attack many times his strength. Even his older drafts were equal to a warfare that consisted of remaining at posts and firing on an attacking enemy.

Once this line was broken and the victorious armies swarmed through, many of his older men and division, worn and weary from war must be depended to fight in open warfare. The fact that during the later year of the war he had trained only his best division in war of movement while many 3d and 4th class division of Landwehr troops were trained and used as defense troops in quiet sectors, deprived him after this operation was completed, of thousands of men, who while they possessed a real military value as a trench garrison, became useless and almost an added weight of dead timber to his army. The moral effect of this penetration was felt by the entire German Army on the Western Front and especially those in adjacent sectors. They knew that they might expect attack from their rear if they held on. So as this attack penetrated the line and opened the gates to Maubeuge, their line of supply and reinforcement was cut in such a way that few could hope to withdraw.

To sum up the above in one sentence, this action ended all hope. Not just the hopes of the higher commanders, but the hopes of the private soldiers as well.

Let us look for a moment into the more local effect and try to arrive at the reasons for the success of the division's attack. We mentioned, in discussing the terrain, the ravines and sunken roads leading into the German positions from our front. A large part of the German defense plan for his machine guns was wasted on the morning of the 29th to account for these approaches. Again his plan was too inelastic for in the dense smoke and fog the men in the attack lines followed close on the tail of the tanks. Here was something upon which they felt they could guide. These tanks did not travel in ravines nor in sunken roads, but straight down the small crests and after the tanks came the men, led in some cases by their officers, often by noncommissioned officers, and in some instances on their own. Past training had much to do with this and what perhaps had more was the fact that troops could not hope to get forward through the successive belts of wire except where the tanks made a road. At any rate a large portion of the effect of machine guns was lost, following a plan that did not fit the then situation. The impenetrability of the screen made all the enemy defenses, except machine guns and artillery fire ineffective. Riflemen cannot be made to shoot when there is nothing to shoot at. Grenades are saved for targets also.

Then too, the intensity of the barrage kept many Germans in their too "protective" shelters. The infantry leaned on this curtain of fire until it reached the enemy main lines at least. When the Germans did come out it was too late. German prisoners stated that there was no living outside their shelter under the immense volume of fire delivered by the artillery and machine guns, so they had remained inside, hoping to get out in time when the barrage lifted. Several instances were reported where our men walked into the rear fringe of our barrage and were hit. The tanks too did all that could have been expected under the conditions. Few were hit by artillery fire during the morning, but many were stopped by trenches into which they had nosed that were too wide and deep to get out of. Others caught fire and had to be abandoned.



The fighting spirit of our men in this action was unusually good, for about the time they had pretty well over-run the enemy main position, the smoke and mists were blown from the battle field and they found themselves all mixed up with the Germans. Here again recent training showed up, for grenades were thrown like rocks in an alley scrape.

On the other side, while smoke doubtless made the assault successful in permitting our forces to over-run the German position, we should have been warned before hand as to its expected density. Having been on that field and later having been in a night attack, I can say without any qualification, that direction was more easily maintained at night. Then you have the stars at least. Here there was nothing but a white wall into which you could not distinguish a man at five paces. Nothing was found at all difficult in the right flank movement on the part of the 117th Infantry, since all men expected it and since there was a definite landmark upon which to base the movement.

Tanks, in addition to being an offensive weapon, on this day proved with their highly trained personnel to be capable of becoming an effective screen against belts of machine gun fire which had been laid on given lines. One of our company commanders twice led his men through such fire by bunching them against the side of a friendly tank.

The use of reserves and the exercise of command thereof by higher commanders might have been far more effective if the higher commander had known the exact conditions on the battlefield. Two battalions sent late in the afternoon to assist in clearing up a situation were pushed out without any further knowledge than that they were to join another regiment experiencing difficulties to their left front. Had they been launched straight to their left flank hours earlier, the objective of the division on our left would doubtless have been gained instead of their infantry start line. Had the 3d Australian Division been moved into the sector of the 30th Division and from there attack the flank of enemy resistance in front of the 27th Division, instead of trying to leap-frog them, a



different story could have been told.

Last but not least. Here was an engagement the preparation for which had been all that any army could ask, nothing was left to chance, everything moved on schedule, over previously reconnoitered routes like clockwork. All this perfection of detail up to "H" hour, the only thing that was controlled after "H" hour was the artillery barrage. Reserves occupying previously selected positions sat in them during the whole crucial action. Nothing was done in any way to change the course of the action, although the timely use of reserves was apparent even to the men themselves and they wondered with the officers why we were not permitted to use such obvious openings.

Another colossal blunder we must charge to some one was the useless exposure of transportation and artillery when they massed themselves on a long forward slope extending nearly 2,000 yards in plain view of the enemy simply because the old clockwork schedule said they would advance at such a time or when such a thing took place.

When all units have the same success signal and it is used on one part of the line only care should be exercised in believing that all units have reached their objective. The case in mind being the advance of the 3d Australian Division when only the troops in the 5th Australian side of the sector had reached their objective and sent up success signals.

The 3d Australian Division then moved up on the left without cover and were caught by the German machine gun fire and pinned to the ground with the troops of the 27th Division. Only succeeding in giving the enemy additional targets.

#### LESSONS.

That special training for a critical attack is of unlimited value.

That smoke for blinding the defense of a strong position is most useful, but that troops expected to advance under it should have warning as to its possible density.

That smoke used in conjunction with a heavy barrage in a part of the country wherein ground mists are prevalent in the early morning hours will completely cut off all vision.

That changes in the direction of an attack are only feasible provided some landmark exists whereon this movement may guide and where other troops can continue the frontal attack disengaging the unit that is to attack in the new direction.

That the actual physical presence on the field of battle of even general officers is essential to the proper use of forces assigned to his reserve and awaiting his command to engage in action. If other reasons more important prevent his presence then the command of the reserve should be delegated to some other officer who can be present and in position to direct the physiological movement, thus effectively employing their power.

GENERAL SITUATION MAP SEPTEMBER 25, 1918.

