

THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
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COMMITTEE "H"
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1-32

ADVANCED COURSE
1926-27

OPERATIONS OF THE THIRD BATTALION, 26th
INFANTRY, FIRST DIVISION, IN THE
SECOND AND THIRD PHASES OF
THE MEUSE-ARGONNE
OFFENSIVE

CAPTAIN LYMAN S. FRASIER, INFANTRY.

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Personal Experience

Copies of Situation Maps used by the Writer in the Campaign.

Statements of other Officers present with the First Division during the Engagement.

MARGINAL ABBREVIATIONS USED

Thomas	"History of the A. E. F."
Pershing	"Final Report of General John J. Pershing, Commander-in-Chief, American Expeditionary Forces"
First Division	"History of the First Division during the World War, 1917-19", Society of the First Division.
Von Gierhle	"Battle of the Meuse-Argonne"

INTRODUCTION

In July, 1918, the Allies assumed the offensive. The Germans were gradually pushed back along the entire front to the positions on which they proposed to stand. This line was known as the Hindenburg Line. The 1918 spring offensives had carried the Germans from the line almost to the sea on the north and to Paris in the left center. The early victories of this year had been costly for the Germans. The attacks of the Allies had weakened them still more. The American Army had become steadily stronger, better equipped and better trained. (1)

(1)
Thomas,
page 39

Marshal Foch had been placed in supreme command of the Allied Armies and his strategy was to reduce the Germans into submission by a series of rapid blows, giving the enemy no time to recover, and practically minimizing any possibility of the enemy maneuvering his reserves. (2)

(2)
Pershing
page 31

The Meuse-Argonne Offensive was planned to break the enemy's line of communications from Germany to France, known as the Sedan-Messieres railroad system. The American First Army was to be the right pivot of the Allied offensive. The American right rested on Verdun. (3)

(3)
Pershing
page 44

At the commencement of this offensive the First Division was placed in the Third Corps, in Army reserve. (4)

(4)
Field Order No. 39,
1st Div.,
AEF, 1918

No time was given for recovery from the participation of the division in the reduction of the St. Mihiel Salient, September 12th-14th. (5)

(5)
F.O. #38,
1st Div.,
AEF, 1918

SECOND PHASE, MEUSE-ARGONNE OFFENSIVE OCTOBER 4TH - OCTOBER 31ST

(6)

(6)
Pershing
pp. 39-40

PRELIMINARY MOVEMENTS AND ORDERS

The 26th Infantry, on September 26th, was bivouaced in the region of Nixeville, as part of the Third Corps, in the First Army Reserve. (7) The terrific cannonading farther

(7)
F.O. #26,
1st Army,
AEF., 1918

to the north could be plainly heard. The 1st Division passed into the command of the First Army Corps on September 29th, and was ordered to immediately relieve the 35th Division which was fighting at that time to the north of Cheppy and had suffered very heavy losses and was in some confusion. (8)

(8)
F.O. #30,
1st Army,
A.E.F.

The march of the 1st Division, to effect the relief of the 35th Division, was one never to be forgotten. It was raining, as usual. The night was very dark. The roads were very muddy and congested in places. Shell holes rendered them almost impassable at some points. However, the infantry made its way through, often using the fields and woods as highways. There were instances of machine gun units carrying by hand guns, fire control equipment and enough ammunition to go into action for as many as nine kilometers.

Information had already been given to the officers of the division that some confusion existed in the organizations of the 35th Division, but no one was prepared for what was found. The 35th had been fighting for five days against strongly fortified positions and a determined enemy. The advance had been over broken, wooded country, a condition which always tends to produce confusion of units. The casualties had been very heavy, especially among the officers. As a result command posts were to be found in but few instances. No definite line existed on the right of the 35th Division where the 2nd Brigade was to make its relief. No one could be found who knew where the enemy was except that he was in a northerly direction. The most definite information secured by the 26th Infantry was given by a young first lieutenant who was wearing no overcoat, blouse, helmet or gas mask. He rushed up to the commander

of the advanced guard of the regiment from out of the darkness and demanded a star gauged rifle, saying that he had located a German general in a tree and desired to shoot him out. (9)

(9)
Statement
to me by
officer who
commanded
the ad-
vance guard

In Very there found seventy wounded men of the 35th Division. No attendants cared for them; no light cheered them; no fire warmed the old church in which they were lying. There was no water for them. In many cases the first aid bandages had become very tight because of swelling and produced suffering that only those who have seen can understand.

Dead men, dead horses, and dead mules lined the roads, and one stumbled over dead men when he left the roads. It immediately became apparent that the 1st Division had not come to a "rest sector".

The 26th Infantry marched on the right of the division. The 1st battalion was leading, the 2nd and 3rd following in the order named. Verbal orders from the commanding officer, 26th Infantry, indicated that the regiment would attack at 4:00 o'clock A.M., on the following morning. The 1st Battalion was to establish contact with the enemy; the 2nd Battalion would form the support, and the 3rd battalion, the unit which will particularly be considered by this paper, was ordered to take position on the reverse slope of the high ground just north of Very in division reserve.

It is of interest to note here that of the patrol of two officers and seventy-five men sent forward by the 1st battalion to establish the positions of the enemy, but one officer and twelve men returned. However, the patrol had accomplished its mission and written one of the most

(10)
Statement
by Bn. Com-
mander of
assault
Battalion

glorious pages of the history of the 1st Division. (10)

The assault scheduled for 4:00 A.M., October 1st, was deferred and the battalion commanders were directed to make such dispositions as would enable them to meet counter attacks from the front, right flank, and to prepare such cover as would enable the accomplishment of the above missions and protect the troops as far as possible from the ravages of shell and machine gun fire. The enemy knew that a relief had been made and increased his volume of fire. (11)

(11)
Von Giehl

TERRAIN

The terrain over which the operation was to take place was what might be termed ideal fighting country. In general, the country was diversified by a series of ravines running practically parallel to the front. Patches of woods furnished cover for both defenders and attackers. Several commanding hills, more or less isolated from each other, made, it seemed, by nature for defense, dominated the battle field.

Three of these ravines were in our possession. This fact suited the division perfectly because it was customary, whenever the situation permitted, for the 1st Division to attack with regiments abreast, regiments in column of battalions. Therefore, it was possible to place the battalions in each regimental sector in separate ravines in order from front to rear, assault, support, reserve. As was usual the exterior reserve battalions were designated as division reserves and the interior reserve battalions as brigade reserves.

This description fits generally all the ground lying between the Aire River on the west and the Meuse on the east. On the west bank of the Aire the ground rises to

a plateau. This is heavily wooded and is known as the Forest of Argonne. This forest has furnished the American people a name by which this great battle will always be known. The ground to the east of the Meuse rises similarly but is not so heavily wooded and is more broken in nature.

GERMAN DEFENSES

The terrain we have seen, although admirably suited to battle, furnished a maximum of natural advantages to the enemy. The Germans had spent many months in preparing the defenses of the Argonne from the site of the fighting at Vauquois to the Kriemhilde Stellung, which ran generally from the Bois des Loges through the southern side of Saint Juvin Heights, south of St. George-Cote de Chatillon-Romagne to Briulles. They had not failed to use their vaunted skill in siting their artillery and machine guns to cover and enfilade every valley and open space over which the attacking infantry must pass.

At this time the hostile line ran from the Argonne east to Binerville, thence to the south of Apremont. Here it turned abruptly north to Apremont. From this point it continued toward the east, bearing slightly toward the north through l'Esperance to Eclisfontaine and Nantillois. From Nantillois the line bent more sharply toward the north through Briulles until it reached the Meuse River. (12) It represented the German main line of resistance and the chief defense of the Metz-Mesieres railroad. This knowledge simplified the conception but not the accomplishment of the mission of the 1st American Division. (13)

(12)
Pershing,
page 46

(13)
1st Div.
page 183

MISSION OF THE DIVISION

The mission of the 1st Division was to drive a deep wedge into the enemy's line by taking the high ground and commanding positions east of the Argonne Forest between the Aire Valley and the Meuse, thereby forcing the enemy to surrender the Argonne Forest. With that position in the hands of the First Army it would be an easier matter to drive the entire line between the two rivers forward and accomplish the Army mission. That mission was to cut the lines of communication which ran westward from Metz through Sedan and Mezieres. (14)

(14)
1st Div.
page 183

FORMATIONS AND BOUNDARIES

The right boundary of the division ran roughly from Eclisfontaine through the Ferme d'Arietal. The Baulny-Fle'ville road was the left. This sector was divided into four approximately equal regimental sectors.

The part of the enemy line in front of the division extended from Baulny to Eclisfontaine. Within the sector in front of us were the hills 212, 240, 272 and 263. Hill 240 is more often called the Montrefagne. These hills were to play an important role in the fighting of the coming days. (15)

(15)
F.O. #43,
1st Div.,
AEF 1918

The division formation was what was then known as the normal, i.e., in order from right to left: 26th Infantry, 28th Infantry, 18th Infantry and 16th Infantry. The regimental formation was column of battalions. (16)

(16)
F.O. #43,
1st Div.

The 91st American Division was on our right and the 28th on the left. (17)

(17)
F.O. #36,
1st Div.
par 3 (a)

The 26th Infantry, on the right of the division sector, was ordered to establish contact by means of mixed posts with the 91st Division on the right. (18) This

(18)
F. O. #43,
1st Div.

action, of course, was merely normal procedure, but is particularly interesting because of the difficulty involved due to the future failure of the 32nd Division to advance per schedule, and the effect of this upon the fighting of the 26th Infantry. The 32nd Division relieved the 91st Division on October 3rd.

OPERATIONS OF SEPTEMBER 30 - OCTOBER 3RD

We have now considered the general situation, the terrain, and some details affecting the 1st Division. It is now time that we consider the actions of the 26th Infantry and the operations of the 3rd Battalion, 26th Infantry, in particular.

The 1st Battalion was in assault in the ravine to the east of Chaudron Farm. The 2nd Battalion in support was deployed in the Charpentry-Eclisfontaine ravine. The 3rd Battalion in division reserve took advantage of the cover behind the road running to the northeast of Very. (19)

These positions, it will be remembered, were taken; the troops deployed and fox holes dug in the dead of night. There were no guides to help us. However, we discovered with the dawn that we were not far wrong in any respect, the leading battalion, only, having to change slightly its dispositions.

Entrenching tools were issued to us by the 1st Engineers near Very. We also received extra ammunition at this point.

From this point in the narrative the operations of the 3rd Battalion only will be considered, other units not being mentioned except when necessary.

There was no movement of the unit on the following three days. They were gruelling days and tested the endurance of the men to the extreme. We were harassed by

(19)
1st Div.
pp. 3 (a)
F.O. #43

the grazing bursts of shell fire from our front and right front day and night. At times the enemy used shrapnel. The hostile planes were active and any slightest movement on our part brought heavier shell fire. Often a German plane would dive and machine gun our positions. Other than for the effect upon the nerves of the men, however, this fire had practically no result, very few men being hit.

The battalion kitchens were in the creek bed at the bottom of the slope on which we were deployed. The hostile artillery devoted much attention to these kitchens but succeeded in destroying only one. Nine German planes appeared over us just before dusk on November 3rd and bombed the valley. One bomb struck one of the three remaining kitchens fairly, utterly destroying it. No one ever had any of the supper which had been steaming in that kitchen, waiting to be served as soon as the protecting darkness should descend. It was possible to issue rations before dawn and after dark /only, due to the necessity of keeping the troops under cover and preventing circulation. It is interesting to note also that the issuing was done at different points always somewhat removed from the kitchens in order to prevent possible locating of the kitchens through paths appearing on airplane photographs. The enemy did not use much gas on the positions of the battalion during this period.

The men were exercised by platoons at night. They were given silent setting up exercises and double-timed. They were required to keep shaved and to keep their arms spotlessly clean. Canteen cups served double purposes in those days. It seems like irony now to think that we required these things of men, all of whom were so soon to

struggle to the point of utter exhaustion and many of whom were living their last days on this earth, but it kept them in better physical and mental condition and helped to keep alive the discipline which is as vital as esprit to victory.

Daily during these days of inaction the battalion commanders conferred with the regimental commander. At these conferences detailed plans were made for co-operation and ^{for} every possible emergency which could be conceived. The complete understanding of the situation and the careful plans worked out at this time were of immense value later in the operation.

OPERATIONS OF OCTOBER 4TH

Promptly at 5:25 A.M., October 4th, the barrage fell, stood five minutes and rolled forward. The time for the attack had come. The 3rd Battalion, although in division reserve, was to conform to the movements of the regiment. (20) Packs had been rolled at 4:00 A.M. Connecting files to maintain contact with and proper distance from the 2nd Battalion in support had been in position since 4:30. We moved forward very slowly, marching by compass as we always did, halting from time to time for long periods. There was danger that the battalion would close up too much on the support battalion. It was very foggy and smoky. One could not see fifty yards. The scouts, acting as connecting files, were our only means of preserving formation.

Companies "I" and "K" deployed abreast, Company "K" on the right, led the battalion. Company "M" followed Company "K"; Company "L" was in rear of Company "I". The shell fire was so heavy that it was necessary to use squad columns throughout. A platoon from Company "K" covered

(20)
F.O. #43,
1st Div.,
AEF, 1918

the right flank. The casualties were not alarming during this stage of the advance. This fact was largely due to the familiarity of the squad leaders with shell fire. They had developed an uncanny ability to judge the points of impact of the shells which they could hear boring through the air. If the bursts were close the squad leaders had given the command "down" in time.

The atmosphere began to clear about 7:50 A.M. The battalion was now on the high ground one thousand yards northwest of the Rau de Baronvan~~g~~. We had come under the ground observation of the enemy. The artillery fire became heavier and more effective. It was easier now to maintain control of the battalion than it had been in the darkness and fog, making it safe to depart from the rigid formation and utilize all possible cover and routes of approach. By noon the battalion had reached the shelter of the ravine south of les Bouleaux Bois. The day had been costly for the regiment. There had been already eight hundred casualties. The commander of the 2nd Battalion had been killed. The commander of the 1st Battalion had been wounded but not evacuated.

At 3:00 P.M. the 3rd Battalion had advanced and occupied the positions west of the Bois Communal de Baulny which had been held by the assault battalion before the jump-off that morning. We were now under the fire of both artillery and small arms, the small arms' fire coming from the Trensol Farm. Elements of the 32nd Division could be seen attempting to reduce this position. The regimental commander sent a 37 mm. gun to the battalion commander. At the same time, the commanding officer of Company "A", 3rd Machine Gun Battalion, whose unit was ordered attached to the 3rd Battalion, 26th Infantry, for

the operation, reported to the battalion commander that his company was in les Bouleaux Bois ready to support the battalion. ~~X~~A platoon of guns was immediately worked forward, and in co-operation with the 37 mm. gun which was already in action against the enemy in Tronsol Farm, enabled the 32nd Division to capture that position. ~~//~~ The German artillery, however, immediately drove out the troops which occupied the farm but so far as we could determine it was not again occupied by the enemy.

*Cooperation
between
elements
with*

One platoon of Company "M" was faced to the right and positions were prepared to protect the right flank during the night. One platoon of machine guns supported the right flank. The remaining platoons were in position ready to fire on the crests ahead in event of a successful counter attack by the Germans during the night or at dawn.

The battalion kitchens had not moved and supper was served the troops that night from marmite cans carried forward on machine gun carts.

The battalion aid station had accompanied the unit forward throughout the day by three separate moves, taking advantage of such cover as had been dug by the troops preceding us. It is interesting to note here that all the medical enlisted personnel attached to the battalion had during this first day been killed or wounded.

OPERATION OF OCTOBER 5TH

BATTALION IN SUPPORT AND IN ASSAULT

The battalion commander was ordered to the regimental command post at 3:00 A.M. The regimental command post had by this time moved up to the little valley which opened into the Rau de Mayache southwest of the Tronsol Farm. He received verbal orders from the regimental commander

(21)
1st Div.,
F.O. #48

to the effect that the attack would continue at 6:30 A.M. The 1st Battalion which, during the night had been in close support of the assault battalion, would advance at 6:30 and capture the ground just southwest of the Bois de Money. (21) The 3rd Battalion, which had been given to the commander of the regiment for the operations of the day, would advance, leapfrog the 1st Battalion on the objective mentioned above and capture Hill 272 and the Cote de Maldah. ✓

At 6:00 A.M. an artillery lieutenant from the 7th Field Artillery reported to the 3rd Battalion commander with a 75 mm. field piece, horse drawn, which was to perform the functions of an accompanying gun. ✓ As soon as it had been discovered on the previous day that the infantry units could not follow the barrage as prescribed, the control of the artillery fire passed to the brigade and regimental commanders. There was an artillery liaison officer with the assault battalion commander as well as with the regimental commander.

Six tanks, covered from observation by the heavy fog of that early morning, passed through the battalion at this time on their way forward to assist the assault battalion in the attack at 6:30. It may be noted here that not one of these tanks reached the position of the assault battalion, being put out of action by hostile artillery fire before they could reach the forward position. Three of them were hit on the high ground northeast of la Neuville le Comte Farm; one was destroyed as it emerged from the woods in front of Hill 212, and two were almost consumed by thermite shells in the valley east of the St. Germain. Guns on Hill 240 were mostly responsible for the destruction of our tanks.

The battalion moved forward at 6:30. There was still considerable concealment given by the fog and smoke. This welcome blanket rapidly lifted, however, and by 7:00 o'clock the advancing troops were under direct observation of the enemy. A heavy, systematic barrage came down, covering the entire battalion. At the same time a steady enfilading machine gun fire came from the direction of the Bois de Moncy. This fire was estimated to be the fire of four guns. About every twenty minutes the fire of apparently a battery of artillery in the Bois de la Morine would be directed^{ed} upon the battalion. This fire was very severe and deadly but would last for not more than three minutes at a time.

The forward movement had to be made rapidly, too rapidly to permit of the use of the less exposed formations used in advancing on the previous day. Squad column was obviously the most economical formation for both forward and supporting companies because the amount of shell fire on all companies was approximately equal and the machine gun fire from the flank was directed at all parts of the battalion which came into view of the German gunners.

Casualties were becoming so heavy that the front of the battalion was extended to seven hundred yards and the depth increased to six hundred. However, the visibility was good and there were no thick woods through which the troops must pass, so little difficulty was experienced in maintaining control, direction and communication.

At 9:00 o'clock the forward elements of the battalion were descending the slopes of the valley east of St. Germain Farm. So many of the scouts who were acting as connecting files had been killed that we had closed up entirely too much upon the troops ahead of us before realizing the

situation. There could also be seen considerable movement of small bodies of the enemy in the edges of the Bois de Mency. The battalion was halted. The Battalion scout officer was sent forward to learn what was happening.

The machine gun company was directed to be ready to use two platoons in case of attack on the right flank. The third machine gun platoon and two platoons of rifle-men were ordered to move to the rear and to occupy Hill 200.

Telephone communication was attempted with regimental headquarters and with the forward battalions. No communication could be established. The signal corps sergeant, who had reported with a small detachment of signalmen to the battalion on September 30th, was now directed to immediately establish telephonic communication with regimental headquarters. Another detachment of men who had been trained in telephone communication as part of the battalion headquarters detachment was sent forward to repair the lines to the support battalion.

At this time a message came from the platoon commander, who with his unit was covering the right flank of the battalion, informing the battalion commander that an attempt had been made to drive in the platoon and that there was much activity in the Bois de Chene Sec and Bois de la Morine, indicating a possible concentration for a counter attack down the Rau de Mayache.

The scout officer returned with the information that the two forward battalions were practically occupying the same ground and that the attack was not advancing as rapidly as had been expected. Hill 212 had not yet been taken, and the right of the battalion had not yet fought its way through the woods.

~~There appeared but one course of action for the 3rd~~

Battalion commander. He immediately ordered a movement to the rear to the high ground northwest of the Tronsol Farm. The entire right flank of the regiment beyond the Tronsol Farm was exposed to the enemy. It was clear that the regiment did not have depth enough to provide elasticity or to organize counter attack in event of a flank attack. The enemy could easily come down the Rau de Mayache under cover and attack the rear battalion in reverse.

By the time the battalion had reached the high ground which would afford a position from which to resist this enemy maneuver telephone communication had been established with the regimental commander. He temporarily approved the movement mentioned above and came forward to the 3rd Battalion position. He definitely approved the disposition of the troops of the battalion and sent orders to the 2nd Battalion which was in support, but at this time somewhat merged with the assault battalion, to reorganize on a line with Hill 200. He then directed artillery fire on the Bois de la Morine and the Bois du Chene Sec.

Two of the machine gun platoons had for twenty minutes been raking the Bois de la Morine with fire. No more activity on the part of the enemy could be observed in this direction. The danger of immediate counter attack from our right rear had apparently passed.

During all this time the battalion had continued under heavy artillery fire from the front, steady machine gun fire from the right and occasional artillery fire from that direction.

The 7th Field Artillery, supporting the 2nd Brigade, was advancing most of its guns at this time to positions in the Rau de Mayache. The few guns remaining in position near Eclisfontaine could not support the assaulting bat-

talions and deliver much fire on our right flank at the same time. The accompanying gun with the 3rd Battalion had been destroyed, and the officer commanding and most of the crew killed as the battalion was moving over the hills opposite Tronsol Farm at dawn. No additional attempt was made during the battle to send an accompanying gun with a rifle battalion but the idea of keeping some guns where the fire could accompany the battalion in every situation was substituted and worked out most successfully as will be seen later.

It was 11:00 o'clock by the time the 2nd Battalion had taken up its position as ordered. The 1st Battalion, in assault, had at noon succeeded in driving the enemy from Hill 212 and from the woods to the east of the hill, and was organizing on the first of the day's objectives. The 3rd Battalion was ordered at this time to advance and continue the attack, passing through the 1st Battalion. We had reached the lines of the assault battalion at 1:15 P.M. Here information reached the battalion commander that a barrage would be laid on the southwestern portion of le Petit Bois, which covered the crest of the hill ^{beyond} ~~across~~ the valley which we had to cross, as soon as we moved forward and on the Farm d'Arietal. This barrage was to commence at 1:45, stand for fifteen minutes, then roll forward at the rate of one hundred yards every three minutes. This necessitated a nerve-racking wait of forty-five minutes under heavy artillery and machine gun fire delivered at short range from across the valley and enfilade fire of all arms from the Bois de Money, but it was too late to do anything about it. While we were waiting the machine guns of both battalions raked the enemy positions in front of us. Four machine guns and a field

piece were located in the small patch of woods eight hundred yards northeast of Hill 212. There was one 37 mm. gun with the 1st Battalion and one with the 3rd Battalion. These were both brought up, and after a brilliant duel, destroyed one machine gun and the field piece; not, however, without paying dearly for the success. X The action took place at a range of four hundred yards. One 37 mm. gun was destroyed after having fired its second round. Of its crew but two ammunition men escaped. The second round it had fired, however, had apparently fairly entered the aperture in the log emplacement from which one of the German guns was firing. The effect of this shell must have been very discouraging to the gun crew because as we found later the shell had shattered the water jacket of the Maxim and killed or wounded every member of the crew. This gun was, of course, silenced.

The gun which we had just lost had been using a shell hole for cover. The other 37 mm. was slightly defiladed by the rise which crosses the woods' road three hundred yards northeast of Hill 212 and had a clear field of fire through the opening in the trees. The muzzle blast of the field piece could be plainly discerned when the gun was fired. The howitzer officer now directed the fire of his gun on the position of the field piece. The Germans located him at the same time. The first shot of the 37 mm. evidently demoralized the gun crew of the field piece because, although the gun was fired very rapidly, the shells seemed to be fired in the general direction of the 37 mm. without direct aim or judgement. The 77 fired eleven rounds and but one of these took effect on the gun and crew. The breechblock lever was shot off, the gunner killed

and numbers two and three wounded. The officer commanding the howitzer unit now became the gunner and a loud explosion at the position of the German field piece announced the arrival of his second shot. The piece went out of action.

The barrage mentioned before began falling in front of us. It was scattered, but the best we could expect of the thin line of guns behind us. The commands, "Forward", pierced the uproar fifteen minutes later and the front line of the battalion moved down the slopes of Hill 212. There was no use for scouts now. We knew exactly where the enemy was. He knew exactly where we were. Machine guns and artillery which had hitherto awaited our advance opened fire from the woods across the valley and from the Farm d'Arietal. The front line did not make the first one hundred yards in three minutes. Very few of the men who were in that front line ever will travel again as fast as that. The second wave was decimated and soon became assimilated in the first wave. The artillery fire was now well forward of the valley. It became clear that there was but one thing to do and that was to rush across the valley and close with the enemy on the opposite side. There would be some chance there of gaining concealment as well as cover. The valley we had to cross was perfectly bare. There would also be some chance of escaping the artillery and machinegun fire which was coming from the Bois de Meney and Hill 269, enfilading our right flank.

Companies "I" and "K" were ordered to double-time across the valley. They were now deployed in three lines of skirmishers, the first two lines having merged into one. The interval between skirmishers was approximately ten yards. The valley was crossed. Two pieces of artillery

fired point blank from the edge of le Petit Bois at the advancing waves. Veritable sheets of steel from the machine guns on the hill across the valley and from the Farm d'Arietal swept knee-high over the ground, mowing down the advancing ranks and killing them after they fell. The enfilade fire from the right took a terrible toll. Nevertheless, the valley was crossed. Hand-to-hand fighting raged for a short time in le Petit Bois and at the Farm d'Arietal. Artillerymen were bayoneted at their guns. Machine gunners fell on the piles of their empty shells. At only one place did the enemy retreat. A few small groups attempted to escape from the Farm d'Arietal into the Bois de Moncy after having resisted until the last moment, but not more than a squad of them ever reached the cover of the woods. Thirty-five minutes had elapsed since the battalion had started its advance, yet in that short time nine officers and approximately one hundred and fifty men had been killed. The number of wounded was never determined. ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

There was no time to be lost. We could not even spare time to reorganize. There was the ever ominous dread of counter attack. We had to get far enough forward from the crest of the hill to meet such a possibility successfully. We had to gain enough ground to make room for the two supporting companies. These companies could not stay in or even enter the valley until room had been made for them. The fire from the right would be just as heavy as ever as soon as the support companies made their appearance.

The assaulting companies were directed to advance vigorously. Company "I", on the left, advanced to within four hundred yards of Hill 272. Company "K", on the right, advanced across the valley and was fighting its way up the

slopes of 263. Meanwhile Companies "L" and "M" had been ordered to advance. They crossed the valley in front of Hill 212 in squad columns, double timing over the three hundred yards which was directly under the observation of the enemy on the right and swept by fire from that direction. Once across, these companies took cover in le Petit Bois, the right rear company well in advance of the left.

While the battalion was crossing the valley in front of Hill 212 and advancing through le Petit Bois, Company "A", 3rd Machine Gun Battalion, had delivered heavy overhead fire on the edge of le Petit Bois and on the Farm d'Arietal. This fire was lifted as the troops advanced and finally rested on Hill 272. The machine gun company with the 1st Battalion had maintained a steady fire on the edges of the Bois de la Morine and the Bois de Moncy. One machine gun platoon had been ordered to advance with the support companies. This platoon took position in the edge of le Petit Bois at the head of the little valley running west from the Farm d'Arietal. The mission of this unit was to prevent the enemy from advancing toward the Farm d'Arietal and to fire on any enemy appearing on the western edges of the Bois de Moncy.

During all this time the artillery liaison officer who had accompanied the 3rd Battalion commander did excellent work. He controlled the fire of two guns. These guns were located in the Rau de Mayache southeast of la Neuville le Comte Farm. He had direct telephone communication with these pieces. This officer was an exceptionally excellent artillery officer and instead of giving targets to his guns he gave them the fire orders from wherever he happened to be. He destroyed many machine guns and two pieces of artillery which were located during the advance thus far.

His fire could not only be directed on all targets to the front but on targets located along the Bois de Mancy as well.

Company "I", the left front assault unit, had throughout the advance maintained a combat group of two squads on the left flank to maintain liaison with the 28th Infantry on the left. The troops on our left advanced simultaneously with us until they had reached the open ground six hundred yards beyond the Montrefagne. Fire from Hill 272 stopped them here.

It had been impossible to keep out a security detachment on the right flank because of the fire of our artillery and machine guns being delivered on the enemy positions never more than two hundred yards from the right.

The advance of the assault companies had now been halted by resistance which they were unable to overcome. The right assault company which was now well on the flank of Hill 272 had come under heavy enfilade fire from Hill 263. Enemy infiltration from le Petit Bois into the Bois de Mancy was observed. This strengthened the apprehension of the battalion commander of a counter attack from that position and he feared to order the support companies forward. He, therefore, telephoned the regimental commander and asked for a concentration of artillery fire upon Hills 272 and 263. The regimental commander arranged for thirty minutes of fire on these positions and ordered another advance at 4:00 P.M. Due to one of the misunderstandings which are bound to occur in battle, the fire which was to be directed on Hill 263 came down on the positions of the company which was on the flank of Hill 272. This fire was so deadly and demoralizing that the company commander did not wait for the order of the battalion commander but

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fell back across the valley. He cannot be criticized for this, since he lost forty in killed and wounded from friendly fire of the one hundred and twenty men he had left.

The other two machine gun platoons had come forward while the artillery fire was in progress and prepared to fire on Hill 272 from positions on the high ground east of Farm d'Arietal. The trees did not obstruct this fire.

✓ During all this time our positions were being raked by artillery fire from the front and right and by machine gun fire from the right, front and left front.

The leading companies assaulted again at 4:00 P.M., but this movement was futile. Three waves were mowed down as they emerged from the cover of the woods. Company "K", on the right, managed once more to cross the valley in its front. On the left, however, the farthest any man advanced was the commanding officer of Company "I". He fell sixty yards from the woods with a bullet wound in his head. Darkness was falling over the Argonne. There were now no officers, no non-commissioned officers and but twenty-eight privates left in Company "I", and one officer, two non-commissioned officers and forty-seven privates in Company "K". The battalion commander ordered the advance stopped and directed that the two front line companies dig in where they were. A section of machine guns was ordered forward on each flank. //

As soon as it was dark enough to afford concealment the assault and support companies were ordered to exchange positions. Our remaining 37 mm. gun and two 3 inch trench mortars were put in position along the eastern edge of le Petit Bois to cover the Bois de Mancy and the ravine running to the east of Hill 272. A combat group was established

in the Farm d'Arietal. Arrangements were made with the support battalion commander to cover the flank of the unoccupied territory between the assault and support battalions. The left flank was refused somewhat to connect up with the 28th Infantry. Listening posts were established. A combat patrol was ordered to observe any movements of the enemy in the ravine east of Hill 272. Orders were issued for two patrols to reconnoiter during the night. One was to go at 10:00 o'clock and reconnoiter the front of Hill 272; the other was to move out at 11:30 and reconnoiter the enemy's left on Hill 272. ~~✓~~

The battalion now awaited supper. The kitchens had been ordered to move up to the Rau de Maysche under regimental control as soon as darkness fell. This was done but the officer detailed to lead the carrying party failed to accomplish his mission. There was no food for the assault troops that night. Water was also scarce. The only water to be had was what was left in the canteens from the morning and from shell holes and from the dead. This shell hole water could not be drunk under any circumstances. It meant death or terrible suffering if the shell hole water had happened to have gas in it. It rained during the night. Many of the men caught water in their shelter halves. The eating of a reserve ration was forbidden except for such reserve rations as had been taken from the dead and wounded. ~~✓~~

The battalion aid station was located near the battalion command post which was within the woods at the head of the little valley leading west from the Farm d'Arietal. Our only medical personnel was a first lieutenant of the Medical Corps. We had no litter bearers. We had to depend upon slightly wounded men and on prisoners to carry back

the wounded. There were collected about this aid station and remained there during the night one hundred and twenty men wounded too severely to get themselves back. As much cover as possible was provided them.

The band of the regiment had been left in the rear echelon of the regiment with the first sergeants and company clerks at Nixeville. Members of the pioneer platoon had been sent forward by the regimental commander to carry out these wounded soldiers, but as in the case of the rations intended for the 3rd Battalion, they did not reach the position. Permission from the regimental commander was granted about midnight to send a detail of effectives from the battalion to the rear with wounded and to bring back breakfast. The surgeon selected about twenty-five of the wounded who had the best chance of recovery and several others who could make their way by being led and helped. These men were sent to the rear with the detail. It is interesting to note here that not more than two-thirds of the detail of effectives ever came back. Of course, some of them were killed or wounded by the shell, machine gun and mortar fire which swept the valleys. Some breathed too much gas in the valleys. However, it is believed that the majority of those who were missing when the detail returned at 4:00 A.M. with breakfast in marmite cans were not casualties but remained there when they once found themselves enjoying greater safety. It is undoubtedly a dangerous matter to send effectives to the rear unless they are highly trained, disciplined, and experienced.

Over eighty men died at this aid station, some of them living as long as three days after being brought in. The sight and experience will never be forgotten by those

who were present. It shows most convincingly how worthy are the present efforts of the Medical Corps to provide for more effective and certain evacuation of the field.

Communication in battle is always a most vital matter. The methods used in this fight should now be considered. Battalion commanders had been informed before the battle that their chief duty was to advance and that their next would be to keep in touch with regimental headquarters. If these two things were done the ground gained would undoubtedly be held. It was understood that the assault battalion commander was responsible for the line as far back as the support battalion. The support battalion would then maintain the line to the regimental command post. The telephone section of the regimental signal detachment assisted in the supervision of maintenance of the entire telephone line and in keeping the phones in order and the supply sufficient.

The scheme generally in use by the battalion commanders was to maintain what we then called a ladder line. This consisted of two sets of twisted pair. One set was laid about ten yards from the other or at any distance which would permit a lineman on patrol to observe both wires for breaks and ruptures. At irregular intervals this wire was bridged. The only difficulty met in bridging the two sets was in determining the proper connections. This was done by inspection. The linemen detailed to bridge the wires carried test sets. To keep the system working men were detailed as line guards and patrols. At all times, both day and night there would be one man patrolling each five hundred yards of wire. These guards would meet. Since no additional mention will be made of the system of commun-

location other than by runners and mounted messengers, it is proper to state here that the cost to the 3rd Battalion of maintaining telephone communication during the second phase of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive was seventy-four men. This number were killed or wounded on the duty mentioned. Many, of course, had to be detailed from the rifle companies by communication is vital. Had we not have had communication at all times the number of casualties which could have been charged to the lack of communications might have been seven hundred and forty instead of the seventy-four expended to maintain communication.

The artillery liaison officer had an artillery wire detail. For the most part he utilized the lines established by the infantry, but required some additional line. The ladder line has the advantage of being used as two separate lines also. He was very successful in maintaining communication with his guns and in transmitting fire orders. He used this same ladder system when he had to use wire in addition to the infantry wire.

Runners were depended upon entirely for communication between the companies and between the companies and the battalion command post. Runners and mounted messengers were depended upon for communication with regimental headquarters other than by telephone. The runner system is costly but it works, although an important message should be sent by at least two runners, one leaving some little time before the other. It was found, also, that it was advisable to place some distinguishing mark upon runners. When this was done all runners carried messages in a similar place so that some one else coming upon a dead or wounded runner could look for and find the message he had

M. J. [unclear]

been carrying and cause the message to be delivered. If no distinguishing marks were worn it was required that the runners carry the message pinned on him in a conspicuous place.

The method of ammunition supply used during this day's fighting was used throughout the entire battle, so it need not be mentioned again. The carts of the machine gun company were used to bring up both rifle and machine gun ammunition. The guns used by the 1st Division during the World War were Hotchkiss. These weapons did not use the same ammunition as the Springfield rifle. The horse line for the machine gun company attached to the 3rd Battalion was located under cover in the valley running east from la Neuville Forge Farm. The dump for infantry ammunition for the 26th Infantry was located in the Rau de Mayache, too far to the rear. Wounded men would be sent to the rear on the returning carts but not many could be sent in this way, because but one man could ride on a cart.

Later in the action when all other methods seemed to have failed, rations were sent up on machine gun carts. This idea proved very successful. The transportation of the machinegun was used freely throughout the entire action, yet by a careful use of cover and concealment very few animals were lost. The carts would have been capable of carrying out all the guns and the prescribed complement of ammunition for a machine gun company had there been a full number of guns when the battalion was relieved.

The ground gained by the 3rd Battalion during the fighting of this day had been but fifteen hundred yards. The cost had been nine officers and two hundred and forty men killed, and seven officers and three hundred and fifty

men wounded. These figures are obtained from a count of the dead on the field and from the records of the battalion surgeon. ✓

The losses on the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th of October had amounted to two officers and one hundred and twenty men killed and wounded. The strength of the battalion at midnight on this day was five officers and approximately three hundred and seventy men. Two of the five remaining officers belonged to Company "A", 3rd Machine Gun Battalion. Company "I" was now commanded by a sergeant. ✓

During the night there was no movement of any moment. Spasmodic bursts of machine gun and extremely heavy minenwerfer fire swept the area. Some of our telephone line guards met a German patrol on the slopes of Hill 212 and killed or captured all members of the patrol. The patrols sent out by the battalion accomplished nothing, both having been driven off with losses. Our own machine guns throughout the night fired intermittent bursts into the enemy positions and swept the intervening ground.

OPERATIONS OF OCTOBER 6TH

The rain had stopped during the night. A brilliant sun rapidly dissipated the friendly fog which wrapped and concealed the bodies of the dead and the living. Enemy activity on Hill 272, which could be observed from Hill 212, indicated that he was feverishly strengthening his positions there. The 3rd Battalion commander felt that if he had to take the hill he had better take it now. Although the Corps orders directed that the division hold its lines on this day without trying to advance, permission was given the 26th Infantry to attack the enemy on Hill 272. The proper plan of attack had become apparent on the previous

evening but darkness fell before it could be carried out.

As soon as the assault battalion had captured the Farm d'Arietal, a strong patrol from the support battalion advanced and seized Hill 263. The possession of this key position materially affected the enemy who was in the immediate rear of the right flank. It also afforded us some protection from a counter attack on that flank. The scheme of maneuver was to attack with the two strongest companies of the battalion through the woods southwest of Hill 263 across the valley just east of Hill 272 and assault the enemy's left flank on the hill. These two companies were to attack in column. The support company was to take care of any hostile resistance not in the immediate front of the assault company. The front line battalion of the 28th Infantry, on our left, was to cover the position with fire until the attacking troops should appear on the hill. Company "A", 3rd Machine Gun Battalion, which had still seven guns left was to cover the front of the hill with fire and also be prepared to fire upon any enemy appearing on the right flank. The machine gun company with the support battalion was in position on Hill 212 and could also assist by fire. This company could also fire into the valley just north of the Bois de Mancy. This fact was of tremendous importance because the possibility of an enemy counter attack from this direction was ever present and threatened the success of any maneuver which might be tried. It will later be seen just how important the presence of this company on Hill 212 was. The left front company was to extend along the entire battalion front and assist by fire while the left support company was to advance into the Bois de Mancy and take up a position on either side of the valley between the Bois de Mancy and

Company "A"

le Petit Bois to prevent any interference from the right flank. Two of our seven machine guns were sent to support this company. The battalion command post for this operation was to be on the nose four hundred yards northeast of the Farm d'Arietal.

Utmost confidence was placed in the artillery liaison officer. The 7th Field Artillery was to fire until the assaulting troops appeared on the crest of Hill 272. There was to be no preliminary firing. To deceive the enemy as to the exact purpose was more important than the damage to him which might be done by the fire of fifteen minutes or even of one-half hour's duration. A system of racket signals was arranged in case the telephone communication with the artillery should break down.

It was mid-day by the time permission to make the proposed attack had been obtained. It was 2:00 o'clock when everything was in readiness. The attack was launched as planned and all went well for a time. The artillery fire, the machine and rifle fire on the hill kept a heavy cloud of dust drifting from the enemy's lines. The assaulting troops reached the enemy's left flank and drove him from his position on that part of the defenses.

✓ However, battle does not always develop exactly as planned. The enemy plays his part too. At 3:00 o'clock he appeared in strength estimated to be a regiment (22) advancing to counter attack our right flank in the valley running east from Hill 212. Company "L", which had been sent to hold the right flank, had been somewhat demoralized by extremely heavy artillery fire. This unit offered little resistance to the enemy and was driven in. Company "M", which was supporting the assault company, broke and

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ran with the exception of about two squads which were held by the company commander and opened fire on the enemy. Company "K", in assault, seeing the enemy appearing in the right rear in such numbers, and seeing that the support company had given way, began to retreat from the ground gained. However, by this time a runner from the battalion commander had reached the company commander with orders that he stop the retreat at once. This was done and part of the position held. The battalion commander, at the time these happenings occurred, was across the valley and on the way to the assault company on the left flank of Hill 272. He had with him two runners. He should have had an advanced telephone but there was none to use. The men of Company "M" were in flight past him. Three of these men, who were old non-commissioned officers, stopped and with the help of these men collected about forty of the fleeing troops. In the meantime he sent the two runners by slightly different routes to the battalion command post with messages for the officer left there to telephone the commanding officer of the support battalion requesting the full fire of his machine guns on the valley down which the enemy was advancing and the regimental commander for artillery fire; then find the artillery liaison officer and inform him of the enemy's activity. The artillery liaison officer was known to be observing the effects of his fire from a tree in the southern end of le Petit Bois. From this position he would not be able to observe the activity on the right flank.

It developed that in the absence of the battalion commander the officer left in charge of the command post

had been killed. However, the runners telephoned the messages properly and promptly.

The two machine guns which had accompanied Company "L" had, of their own accord, halted and were firing into the enemy from a position on the western edge of the Bois de Moncy. The Germans not yet come into the zone of fire of the other machine guns with the assault battalion.

The forty men who had been stopped while in retreat had now been steadied, hastily organized and were thrown against the enemy from the fringe of woods north of the valley, throwing him into temporary confusion. The fire of the machine gun company with the support battalion now came down with uncanny accuracy and the enemy's ranks began thinning. It was necessary to withdraw slightly the group which had been organized from the troops in flight because of this machine gun fire. They withdrew in perfect order to a firing position one hundred and fifty yards up the hill, once more opened fire on the enemy, this time with more deadly effect than before.

About one company of Germans had entered le Petit Bois with the evident intention of driving out the group which had done such execution by attacking them in the flank. They outnumbered us three to one. There was but one thing to do. We had no support. We had no line of retreat. We had to attack them. This was done, the men firing from the shoulder and advancing very rapidly. The interval between the men was wide and produced the desired effect of deception and surprise upon the Germans. They fled in some confusion straight into the fire of the two machine guns which have been mentioned before, as having been sent with Company "L" to support the right flank

during the maneuver to capture Hill 212.

The casualties in the enemy ranks were very heavy. He had been caught while in a formation resembling our platoon columns. The Germans were now running about aimlessly, it seemed. At this moment the shells from the 7th Field Artillery began falling squarely in their ranks. The counter attack broke down and the Germans fled, but few of them escaped. They suffered approximately eight hundred casualties as a result of their attempt to counter attack us. The fleeing Germans seemed to avoid the wooded hills on either side of the valley which were not under our fire. The reason for this is not known.

It was now about 4:00 o'clock. Darkness would be falling shortly. Our situation was precarious. There were but three rifle officers left in the battalion. Of these, two were wounded. Company "M" was badly scattered. Company "L" was considerably confused. It was necessary to assemble what was left of these units as soon as possible. However, but three platoons of Company "M" were found. It was supposed that the other platoon had been captured or annihilated. However, after the battle the unit was located in an old quarry in a high state of demoralization. This was four days later.

Company "L", which by this time was assembled and steadied, was sent forward to relieve Company "K", which had suffered heavily. Company "K" was placed in support of Company "L". Company "M" was placed in support of Company "I", the left front assault company. The machine gun company continued to rake the enemy's positions with fire in the hopes of preventing any hostile formation until the battalion could again be put in condition to

meet an attack. Apparently this fire was successful because we were not again attacked except by the fire of the hostile artillery and machine guns.

We had gained a foothold on the slopes of Hill 272. We had practically destroyed an enemy regiment. On the other hand we had failed to accomplish our full mission and had suffered heavy casualties. The strength of the battalion that night was three officers and one hundred and eighty-two men.

A re-disposition was now made of our machine guns. All guns were placed on the right flank. Six guns remained in action. Two of these were sited to support Company "L", the right assault company, and the other four sited to cover the entire right flank from the Farm d'Arietal forward. A 75 mm. gun was moved forward to a position near the Farm St. Germain during the night.

Our food supply failed again on this night. The battalion commander was personally assured by the regimental commander by telephone that a hot supper was on the way forward. It did not arrive. The support battalion had the same experience, and after considerable heated telephone conversation the three battalion commanders and the officer detailed to see that food reached the forward troops were assembled in conference with the regimental commander. A dramatic and tense moment took place. The regimental commander spoke somewhat broken English. He said, in effect, "Dere is von officer here vet is a - - - - - . He will at vonce get himself out of my P.C." Needless to say that officer concerned with rations left and did not stop going until he was safe within the continental limits of the United States.

The machine gun carts were finally utilized as on the previous night to bring up food for the tired, hungry troops. ✓ In addition to bringing up food these carts worked nearly all night long in bringing forward machine gun and rifle ammunition. It might well be mentioned here that during the day these same mules had been used to bring forward machine gun and rifle ammunition carried in improvised packs made of shelter halves. By making use of defiladed approaches and cover not one single animal was lost, although they came forward to within three hundred yards of the front line.

It is also a matter of interest to record here that according to the amount of ammunition expended on this afternoon, each soldier apparently fired about two hundred rounds and each machine gun sent four thousand eight hundred bullets against the enemy. This amount of ammunition is very unusual since it has been the experience of the writer that to persuade the soldier to fire up to the limit of his endurance is one of the most difficult of all an officer's duties. It was accomplished by the constant urging of officers and non-commissioned officers. We tried to make the men understand that they could only save their lives by killing the enemy and that the best means at their disposal with which to kill the enemy was fire.

OPERATIONS OF OCTOBER 7TH

Nothing of moment took place on this day except that information was received that the 1st Division had been transferred to the Fifth Corps and that the sector would be extended on the right to the line - Hill 269-Tuillerie Farm. Patrols were sent out through the woods to investigate

conditions in this part of the terrain which we were soon to take over. These patrols met with little resistance and brought back several prisoners.

The troops were busied with improving their fox holes and with wiring their positions with wire which we had captured from the enemy. From two o'clock until four o'clock P.M. our positions were gassed heavily, making it necessary to suspend all work. Everything was in preparation to meet an attack of which we thought the gas might be a preliminary, but the attack never came. Darkness descended once more over the Argonne.

It is important that sometime during this discussion the attitude of troops toward gas be considered. The lack of fear and worry due to the gas spread over us by shell and projector fire was very striking. This can be contributed alone to the confidence in the gas mask and the discipline in the use of that piece of equipment which our non-commissioned officers had acquired from long experience, dating chiefly from Cantigny in May, 1918. This confidence in the protection of the mask and the ability of the soldier to survive gas if he observes the proper rules were given by our experienced non-commissioned officers to the entire unit. The writer remembers but two casualties as a result of the drenching they gave us that afternoon.

Our supper and our water supply came forward after dark. This time the carrying detail was in charge of a mess sergeant who had been a mess sergeant under General Jake Smith in the Phillipines. It would have taken a large contingent of the German Army to have prevented the delivery of food on this night.

OPERATIONS OF OCTOBER 8TH

At 3:00 A.M., for no apparent reason, the enemy opened a violent fire all along our lines, but nothing happened afterwards. Our machine guns returned the compliment and our artillery liaison officer gave his men some recreation in firing on known delicate positions in the German lines.

Just after this burst of fire along our lines orders from the regimental commander directed that the battalion once more attack Hill 272. (23) The orders did not say how the attack would be made but left this to the battalion commander. It was decided to attack at once, hoping that the enemy might be surprised while still sleeping comfortably in his trenches and shell holes. However, it was 4:00 A.M. by the time everybody and everything could be put in readiness for the attack.

The scheme of maneuver this time was that the whole battalion would hurl itself against the left flank of the enemy position. The gap left thereby between the 28th Infantry and the 26th Infantry would have to be chanced. It was felt that the 28th Infantry could take care of this in addition to its own sector. The plan was that the battalion would move with its depleted companies, two in assault and two in support, and that as soon as we had reached the crest of Hill 272 one company would face to the rear on the same position where the forty men had wrecked such havoc in the enemy's ranks two days' before, and protect us from any enemy appearing on our right rear.

✓ All might have gone well except for the fact that just as we were ready to move out the Germans opened a very heavy artillery fire over all our positions. The order "Cover" was given all along the line. This fire lasted for approximately one-half hour. However, we lost

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very few men because of the excellent protection offered by the fox holes which had been dug. ↙

It was nearly 5:00 A.M. and daylight when we could move. We moved but had not gone far up the slopes when we came into contact with machine gun outposts. Each gun was protected by about fifteen riflemen. These were gradually reduced but at the expense of time and at the expense of men. We could not afford to lose very many. //

One of the three remaining officers became confused now and left the field. He was not found until after the battalion had been relieved from the sector. This officer is not to be censured, however, because he had received a wound in the side on October 6th and a wound in the leg on October 7th, and had gallantly refused to be evacuated. It was fever and not lack of the offensive spirit which carried him beyond helping us. ✓ Three of the companies of the battalion were now commanded by sergeants.

We had reached a point just below the eastern summit of Hill 272 when our scouts rushed in and reported an enemy column advancing toward us from the direction of Hill 263 and another from the northwest over the summit of the position we were attacking. (24) The entire battalion was thrown into line, the left half facing northwest, the right half facing northeast. The enemy soon came into sight. It was our good fortune that we could fire our first few rounds into him before he could fully deploy. He was advancing in columns of twos at intervals of about seventy-five yards. We were favored again by fortune because in the meantime our artillery and machine gun observers had seen the approaching columns and opened fire very shortly after we had opened fire on them. We had taken no machine guns forward with us. There were now

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but four left and it seemed preferable that these four guns fire on the enemy's position while we were advancing, especially so since they could fire from their present positions in le Petit Bois just as well in case of counter attack as though they were with us. These guns would also in some measure fill the gap we had seen fit to leave between ourselves and the 28th Infantry.

We stopped the advancing columns but they also stopped our advance. We tried but it was impossible because no man succeeded in advancing more than fifty yards. There were not enough men left in the battalion to continue this sort of fighting. We could not stay where we were because the column advancing from the direction of Hill 263 was apparently a strong one and our right flank was in the air. If the enemy should succeed in eliminating us from the fight it would be an easy matter to roll up the flank of the 28th Infantry and possibly wreck the entire division, so it was decided to withdraw under cover of our own fire to the positions we had held the night before. This was done by withdrawing a few men at a time. The non-commissioned officers withdrew their men by name. Instead of advancing by leaps and bounds we retreated by leaps and bounds, keeping our right flank constantly refused.

In fairness to the troops which had fled two days before it should be recorded now that they fought well as could be asked of any troops. There was no question now in the mind of the battalion commander that they would hold to the end.

As soon as it became apparent to the Germans that we were retreating to the positions of the previous night they seemed to be satisfied and advanced no farther except that a few patrols came down through the woods to see if we were

still there. The reason that various patrols came within our fire to learn our dispositions is that so far as we know none of the members of the patrols ever returned to give information as to our whereabouts. The Germans in time assumed that we must be where we were and sent no more patrols.

At 11:00 o'clock A.M. we were heavily shelled with minenwerfer and 210 mm. artillery fire. This led us to believe that the enemy was firing his heavy ammunition rather than desert it if he should have to retreat, but this assumption furnished us our only consolation because none of us who survive will ever forget the headaches of that day from the terrific concussions of the exploding shells. This fire lasted until 1:30 P.M. After that the rest of the day was quiet except for occasional bursts of machine gun fire from the German or American lines. Sniping continued active, but we had by this time seen enough fighting to be judicious and did not offer ourselves as targets for enemy snipers unless necessary. The enemy was equally cautious and the casualties were not many after 1:30 P.M.

The strength of the battalion was now two officers and one hundred and eighteen men. One of the two remaining officers had been wounded painfully but not seriously. Probably twenty of the men were suffering from slight wounds.

Let us now diverge for a moment from the subject proper. It has been observed by the writer in many instances that there are some men in every unit who commence the first fight of that unit and also end the last fight. Therefore, these men who remained with us were worth in

fighting ability about one-half an ordinary battalion. It was evident now that the 3rd Battalion could never take Hill 272, but at the same time no fears were entertained that the Germans could ever take what ground we had gained unless he should be re-enforced by considerable numbers. The fact that there are in every fighting unit a certain number of men who can be depended upon, as a general thing, to begin and end all military operations should not be forgotten. The knowledge of this fact is of great moral value to the commander in the field when he is faced with the temptation to forget his mission.

Throughout the day artillery fire was kept up on the enemy positions on Hill 272, indicating to us that some new move was to be made. The enemy replied by shelling our lines and drenching us with gas, paying especial attention to the valleys.

At about 9:00 o'clock that night orders came to the effect that the battalion would be relieved by the 28th Infantry, and that the battalion would move to the right into the Bois de Money and support the 2nd Battalion, 26th Infantry, the right flank of our sector being the line: Hill 269-Taillerie Farm. (25) This movement was to be completed before daylight. The 28th Infantry battalion which was to effect our relief arrived about 3:30 o'clock A.M., on October 9th, whereupon the 3rd Battalion, 26th Infantry, moved to the right. We moved in four columns. The interval between the two main columns was about one hundred yards. Each column consisted of two companies, one following the other. Each company was ordered to form in column of squads and then to immediately from this formation form two columns of twos, a formation resembling closely the right and left formation utilized when a column of squads

(25)
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4th Army
Corps,
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is passing through a town when there is a possibility of being fired on. The interval between these subordinate columns was to be twenty-five yards.

A strong German patrol was encountered as the battalion moved across the ravine in front of the Farm d'Arietal. The members of this patrol were killed or captured before they could do any damage to us. The battalion then took position in the northern edge of the Bois de Money, just south of the valley running east from Hill 272. The 2nd Battalion was already in position across the valley in le Petit Bois.

OPERATIONS OF OCTOBER 9TH

The new attack ordered was to move forward at 8:30 A.M. A terrific artillery fire had been kept up on the enemy positions all during the night and since about 5:00 A.M. a machine gun barrage coming from at least fifty guns had swept over our heads against the Germans.

The 2nd Battalion, 26th Infantry, now in assault, started forward at 8:30 A.M. promptly, but had advanced but two hundred yards when it was stopped by machine gun fire from the right. The 3rd Battalion, now in support, was following at a distance of about three hundred yards in order: Company "L", left front; Company "M", right front; Company "I", left rear; Company "K", right rear. Company "A", 3rd Machine Gun Battalion, which now had and could man four guns, was following with the rear companies. Company "M" was ordered forward to the right flank to reduce the resistance which was holding up the assault battalion. The machine gun company was ordered to take the place of Company "M" temporarily in the battalion formation.

In about thirty minutes Company "M" had managed to flank the machine guns holding up the progress of the assault battalion and killed or captured all enemy personnel in the group. This had just been done, however, when a concentrated fire of 210 mm. guns fell upon this company and almost annihilated it before it could get out. Just why this should have happened has never been fully understood. It was probably merely a coincidence.

The 2nd Battalion now moved forward, the 3rd Battalion following. The support battalion did not follow, however, without casualties. It seemed that the enemy was using up all his heavy artillery ammunition. The entire area which we used in our advance was deluged with 210 mm. shells. Trees fell about us. Men were rendered unconscious by concussion. An entire squad would from time to time be blown from the face of the earth.

The advance was very slow. At noon the assault battalion was not more than half way up Hill 263. It was extremely difficult to maintain any communication with the assault battalion, the artillery fire being so heavy that wires were cut or ruptured as fast as they could be laid. Runners were killed or wounded almost before they started with a message. Finally, when at about 3:00 o'clock, all communication with the assault battalion had been lost the battalion commander of the support battalion started forward with three runners. He found the assault battalion at the moment when it captured the crest of Hill 263. The sight which rewarded us can be described only with difficulty. Out in front of us in the long stretch of open country between Hill 263 and Landres-et-St. Georges appeared in full flight three batteries of enemy artillery, two machine gun companies and about three battalions of

infantry. We had no machine guns on the top of the hill. We had no telephone communication with the artillery or regimental headquarters. We could only long to be able to send a squadron of cavalry to cut up the enemy fleeing in front of us. However, we did not have the cavalry.

It seemed advisable now that the assault and support commanders compare notes and determine upon what to do. Enemy snipers in front of us still made it dangerous to show one's self. It was found by actual count that there were with the battalion commander of the assault battalion but forty-three men and no officers. It was, therefore, decided that the best procedure would be to merge the assault and support battalions for the night, leaving one company and the machine guns with the support battalion to guard the right rear against possible enemy attack. It was known at this time that the troops on the right of the 1st Division had not yet advanced beyond Hill 269, although a battalion of the 1st Engineers had taken all the hill and vicinity. (26)

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✓ Many prisoners were taken that night by the support battalion. The prisoners seemed dazed and could hardly realize that they were actually captives of the Americans. They seemed so sure that their positions were so impregnable that they could not be captured.

The sniping of the enemy continued along the front and became serious. It was decided to select several men to crawl out and locate the snipers and kill them. This was done and it is interesting to note that all of the men selected returned to our lines except one. This merely indicates the value in killing power and self preservation of well trained and experienced men. This is most certainly an excellent example of economy of force.

During the night orders came to exploit the success gained. The 2nd Battalion was to continue in assault and the 3rd Battalion in support.

Troops from a regiment of pioneer infantry were sent forward during the night to evacuate our wounded. This experiment did not prove to be a success. The first lieutenant in command actually objected to letting his men come under fire, saying that they were not required to. Most of the wounded started back with the men of this pioneer infantry, who did actually come as far forward as our positions, were left in the way to be killed by shell fire or die on their stretchers from want of proper attention.

OPERATIONS OF OCTOBER 10TH

The 2nd Battalion, in assault, advanced at dawn to exploit the success. The sector through which the battalion had to advance was through the Bois Romagne. There was fighting all through the day but no serious resistance was met until the battalion had advanced through the Bois Romagne. It appeared that the enemy was now fighting for time. At about 3:30 P.M. the assault battalion reached the edge of the Bois Romagne, southeast of the Cote de Chatillon. The support battalion was at this time slightly in advance of the Sommerance road. The pressure exerted by the enemy on the right flank of the assault battalion for the high ground just south of the Cote de Chatillon became so great that it was necessary for the support battalion to send two companies to support the right flank of the assault battalion. Companies "K" and "I" were ordered forward. These companies, on the way forward, encountered considerable resistance; Company "K", which was now commanded by a sergeant, could stand the pressure no longer and retreated. A part of the

company was stopped, however, by the battalion commander. The rest of the company continued to the rear and was not put under control again until after the battle was over. Company "M" proceeded to the position to which it had been ordered and held it although one-third of the men remaining in the company became casualties in effecting the maneuver. This relieved the pressure on the assault battalion.

Orders from the regimental commander came at 3:00 A.M., on the morning of October 11th, to the effect that the 3rd Battalion which was, as has been seen, in support would relieve the assault battalion and continue the attack at daybreak. Orders for the attack were qualified, however, by the proviso that we would not advance beyond the edge of the woods until the 28th Infantry, on our left, had attacked and gained a position half way up the hill toward Landres et St. Georges. The 28th Infantry tried gallantly several times to do this but there was no possibility of it under the then existing circumstances. The attacking line would emerge from the woods only to be mowed down before any man had advanced fifty yards. The battalion had been badly depleted by an attack on the western slopes of Hill 272 on October 5th. It could not stand the losses that the proposed attack would cost. Three attempts were made but these heroic efforts came to naught and the battalion commander decided to attempt no further attack.

The assault battalion, 26th Infantry, now had but two officers and eighty-five men. The assault battalion of the 28th Infantry, on our left, which had tried so valiantly to advance toward Landres et St. Georges had not much greater strength. The two battalion commanders in conference decided to make such dispositions as would give

the best possible chance of holding their ground throughout the day. There were some two hundred men to cover a front of nearly eighteen hundred yards. Together the two battalions had nine machine guns. It is interesting at this point to note the number of automatic rifles which were to be found in the ranks. In the 3rd Battalion, 26th Infantry, a count disclosed the fact that there were sixty-three automatic rifles, although there were but eighty-five men left. Of course, the riflemen who had the automatic rifles had also with them the Springfields. Chauhats were also found at the machine gun positions.

At 10:30 A.M. a full strength battalion from the 32nd Division came in to take over part of the line on our right, extending from the unimproved road which ran from Landres et St. Georges past la Musarde Farm into the Bois Romagne to a point on the edge of the Bois Romagne under the Cote de Chatillon and directly south of the Tuillerie Farm.

The enemy artillery and machine gun fire became exceedingly heavy. The woods about us were being destroyed. We became apprehensive of enemy in our rear since our telephone line guards had met several strong patrols well in behind us. It was necessary to detach sixteen of our eighty-five men and a machine gun to take position at the point where the two unimproved roads running from Landres et St. Georges converge some four hundred yards from the edge of the Bois Romagne to guard against such a move on the part of the enemy. The support battalion was now in position twelve hundred yards behind us.

The battalion of the 32nd Division, on our right, had meanwhile been suffering very heavily from the artillery and machine gun fire of the enemy. At 3:00 o'clock the

battalion withdrew leaving us once more to hold the entire front. The reason given for the withdrawal of this unit was that the artillery of the 32nd Division was going to bombard heavily the Bois de Gesnes and the Cote de Chatillon. It became necessary, therefore, to change our dispositions to meet the possibility of the Germans coming in on our immediate flank. The eighty-five men had been reduced by this time to about seventy. Of these, two squads were protecting our rear. It appeared now that two more squads would have to be taken from the front line and faced to the right along the unimproved road through the woods which has been mentioned above to prevent the enemy from rolling up our flank. Accordingly two squads were deployed at intervals of about twenty yards between men along this road. Each man had a rifle and an automatic rifle. Two of our remaining machine guns were placed here also. The machine guns were to keep up an incessant fire through the woods to the right. These machine guns were directed also to move up and down behind the road under cover of a deep ditch in an endeavor to deceive the enemy as to how many guns we might have there.

These dispositions were not made one minute too soon because just as the line began extending along the road German scouts were seen through the trees. Our men were now in a vicious fighting mood and few if any of these scouts progressed any farther forward or to the rear. Groups of the enemy continued throughout the afternoon and until darkness fell to attempt to develop our position, but the fortunes of war were favorable for us and they were always driven off apparently convinced that we held the position with considerable strength.

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At 5:00 o'clock the regimental operations officer arrived with information that we would that night, at about 10:00 o'clock, be relieved by a battalion of the 42nd Division. (27) Never was the news of relief more welcome. However, we had to send guides to bring up the relieving troops. This again reduced the number of men with whom the line had to be held. Six dependable men were sent to regimental headquarters to act as guides. This detachment ran into a German patrol on the way to the rear and two of them were killed.

THE RELIEF

At midnight the relief was complete and sixty-eight men and two officers, one of whom had been twice wounded but not seriously, dragged their way back over the ground for which they had fought so hard to the Rau de Mayache, where they found the kitchens and hot coffee and stew. There had been no food for us on the night before. We had had no breakfast and no lunch except the few reserve rations we could find on the dead, but due to our wide deployment we had lost few men on this day, although the fire had been more than ordinarily heavy. During the day we had seen a German plane drop what we supposed to be food into the German position on the Cote de Chatillon. Many of the men wanted to go over and get it, but of course, nothing so foolhardy could be permitted. And so, the hot coffee and the hot stew tasted better that night than the finest of food in ordinary times but we could eat very little of it. Our stomachs had become inured to emptiness.

Before dawn we were well on the way towards Bar le Duc. We marched that morning ten kilometers to a so-called bivouac area which was at that time of the year a fine

example of a swamp. When the companies had been placed the only command given was "Sleep". Few of the men moved or were conscious until the sun rose and warmed them on the following morning.

ENEMY UNITS ENGAGED

During the participation of the 26th Infantry in the phase of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive just described we had faced the following German units: (28)

September 30th - October 1st

1st Guard Division with elements of the 53rd Guard Division in reserve.

October 2nd

1st Guard Division.

October 3rd - 4th - 5th

53rd Reserve Division, with elements of the 5th Guard Division in reserve.

October 6th - 7th - 8th

52nd Division, with elements of the 5th Guard Division in reserve.

October 9th - 10th

37th Division, with elements of the 5th Guard Division in reserve.

October 11th

41st Division, with elements of the 5th Guard Division in reserve.

THE MARCH TO THE REST AREA

It is a peculiar thing but a fact, and probably a not unusual experience, that the sixty-eight men had now increased to about one hundred and forty. Before the march to the Bar le Duc area where we were to recuperate was continued in trucks during the afternoon after we had been relieved, the strength of the battalion reached two hundred

(28)
German &
American
combined
daily order
of battle,
25th Sept. to
11th November,
1918,
And
Meuse-Argonne
Offensive
Map showing
daily position
of front line,
GHQ, May 24,
1919

and forty. Our increase was due to the men who had miraculously and suddenly discovered which way was north and had, therefore, found their proper organization. Some of them had, undoubtedly, been lost but most of them could be well characterized, as they were by the soldiers who had fought through the battle, sometimes in victory, sometimes in defeat - "Shell-hole Rats". It may as well be taken into the consideration of all officers who may be called upon to lead troops in battle that there will always be a certain number of these men who become conveniently lost and as conveniently find themselves when the show is over.

✓ Rumors that we were going to southern France to recruit and rest were current, but few of us believed in any such impossibilities. We had seen it all happen before. We knew that the only rest we could expect, until the war should end, was to be gained by observation of the principle that, "God helps him who helps himself". We were satisfied with this and asked no more.

At this time the regiment received about two thousand replacements. Most of these men were raw. They had had little, if any, military training. Many of them had never fired the rifle. None of them had ever fired the pistol. None of them had any idea of extended order as we knew it then.

We started immediately to instill in these new men the esprit which had carried us through many difficult situations. We believed in that esprit as we believe in our religion. It was a sacred thing. We commenced immediately to train these men to shoot and then shoot some more. We tried to impress upon them the fact that by shooting

they would most surely live to return to their homes. We used tin cans for targets. We impressed upon them that the idea was to hit and kill. We showed them on blackboards, borrowed from a French school teacher, what extended order formation looked like. We took what men we had left from the battle, from which we had just been relieved, and demonstrated to them what a small unit deployed looked like. Then we tried to do the same thing with the recruits. It was surprising how quickly they absorbed the ideas. Within four days we could do something. We could at least get into fighting formation. The recruits had fired also in the meantime at tin cans. Some of them had learned that they could shoot.

We had been out of the line but eight days when the division commander assembled all officers of the division, down to and including battalion commanders, and informed us that we would probably have to re-enter the line almost immediately.

Field Order Number 55, First Division, started us once more for the front. Just before we left General Summerall addressed each regiment separately, and to the 26th Infantry addressed his famous words, some of which are quoted here: "You have taken many kilometers from the enemy, but you are going to take more. You have gone many days and nights without food, but you are going more. You have suffered many wounds; some of you will suffer more. You have seen many of your comrades die." To one of our new recruits who had been detailed as a kitchen police and who, at the time, was standing on a ration cart in the fringe of woods bordering the field in which we were assembled, these apparently seemed high and mighty words for one man to use.

He could stand it no longer, and in a high-pitched boyish voice "sounded off", as the expression is used in the United States Army, "Who in the h---- is that guy?" The tension was broken. Every man in ranks wanted to laugh. A sense of humor is a vast asset to the American soldier.

THIRD PHASE, MEUSE-ARGONNE OFFENSIVE

(29)
Pershing
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NOVEMBER 1 - NOVEMBER 11

(29)

PRELIMINARY ORDERS AND MOVEMENTS

We marched again to the area we had left such a short time before. (30) We were carried in trucks for a part of the distance. The rest of the way we marched. We were to go in in support of the 2nd Division. On the way we passed by the flank of Montfaucon. The silence and desolation of this once impregnable stronghold impressed us as we passed.

(30)
F.O. #82,
1st Army
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OPERATIONS OF NOVEMBER 1 - 4

The artillery and machine gun barrage on the morning of the 1st of November was terrific. There is no word in our language to describe the fierce, savage, ominous effect of such artillery fire. The 2nd Division moved forward; we followed.

We were not subjected to any fire except that of airplanes bombing us at night and emptying their machine guns at us during the daytime. We bivouaced on the night of November 1st in the vicinity of Landreville. On November 2nd we advanced almost to Bayonville. The night of November 3rd found us in the Bois Folie, just east of Busancy. Darkness was falling on November 4th as we entered the Bois de Belval.

These were hard days for our transportation but our machine gun carts, rolling kitchens and the supply train were still with us. Often the mules were unhitched and the vehicles half-lifted, half-pushed across trenches,

shell holes and ditches by hand. For this purpose a platoon of riflemen had been detailed to assist the machine gun company.

OPERATIONS OF NOVEMBER 5TH

We had made ourselves as comfortable as possible in the Bois de Belval when orders arrived for the 26th Infantry to advance and take up a position along the Beaumont road, just north of la Forge Farm, in support of the left flank of the 2nd Division. (31) It was, indeed, a pleasure to fight alongside of a division for which we had so much esteem. The 3rd Battalion took up a position one and one-half kilometers from la Forge Farm, on the Beaumont-la Forge Farm road, arriving here about 5:00 o'clock on the morning of the fifth.

(31)
2nd Div.
Operations Report west of the Meuse, Nov. 1 to Nov. 11, 1918

During the afternoon planes from the ^RKichtofen Flying Circus, distinguished by the red noses of the machines, strafed us with machine gun fire several times but the only damage done was to one man who received a bullet through his ear. It is a coincidence, of course, but a curious thing that this man had just disobeyed orders and fired at one of the planes as the bullet hit him. Throughout the Meuse-Argonne Offensive we had been forbidden to fire upon aircraft because of the possibility that we might fire upon friendly craft as well as hostile, as we had done once before. Incidentally we met with far greater success in bringing down allied aircraft than German.

Supper was brought up that night by the machine gun company mules. Our kitchens were at this time at the intersection of roads in the Bois des Plaines. They could easily have been brought farther forward but there was no reason for so doing and we did not know exactly in what

direction our next move might be. We were no longer engaged in trench warfare but this was most certainly open warfare with a vengeance so far as fatigue and marching was concerned. We were, indeed, thankful that the fighting was no more severe.

OPERATIONS OF NOVEMBER 6TH

At 6:00 o'clock P.M. orders reached us to advance during the night and to be in position one thousand yards south of la Thibaudine Farm at 4:00 A.M. (32) The battalion was now in reserve. We moved forward about 5:45 A.M., having to wait for a few minutes until the battalion ahead of us had gained some distance. The orders under which we were marching forward indicated that the danger of counter attack from the left flank had passed, designated the 1st Battalion as assault battalion, the 2nd Battalion as support battalion and the 3rd Battalion as the reserve battalion. The assault battalion was to attack in the direction of and take Villemontry. The reserve battalion was to attack in the direction of and take Yonck when the assaulting troops had reached la Harnoterie Farm. //

The march was not easy. We encountered gas and wire. The roads were muddy and rough. The fields and woods we used in marching across country were little better than water soaked swamps. Few shells landed near us but it would probably have been better had there been more. It is disconcerting to march along silently through the rain and blackness of night, stumbling over wire and slipping in the mud and wondering when the next messenger of death is going to strike from the black wall ahead into which one is advancing. One of our men was later found dead where we had passed la Forge Farm. He was sitting by the

(32)
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side of the road in full field equipment. This particular soldier had fought bravely through the engagements before Hill 272. He had never whimpered, had never said that he was tired. However, he had marched his last kilometer, had fired his last shot and went peacefully and quietly to join those of his comrades who had died more violent deaths before him.

The orders were carried out in detail except that Yonck was found to be already occupied by troops of the 18th Infantry. The battalion was now disposed along the Beaumont-Yoneq road with its reserve in la Harnoterie Farm. We were digging in for the night when orders came that we would immediately march in the direction of Sedan and attack that place. Packs were to be discarded. We were to collect our wounded at the Beaumont-Yoneq - Beaumont-Mouzon road junction, post two men to guard and care for them and proceed immediately via the Stonne-Chemery Omicourt-Hannagne-St. Martin road. The 3rd Battalion was designated as the advance guard of the regiment and of the left column. There were ultimately to be four columns. ✓

AUTHORITY FOR THE MARCH TOWARD SEDAN

This move was made in accordance with a memorandum issued to the commanders of the units of the First and Fifth Corps by Lieutenant General Liggett, commanding the First Army, informing them that the Commander-in-Chief desired that the honor of entering Sedan should fall to the First American Army. (33) General Summerall, commanding the Fifth Corps, then directed Brigadier General Parker, commanding the First Division, to march upon Sedan and assist in capturing that place on the following morning. (34) These plans were part of the plan of the First Army.

(33)
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(34)
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1st Army,
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(35)
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Army, p. 74

This First Army plan had been approved in detail by the American Commander-in-Chief, who approved them because they agreed with Marshal Foch's objective. (35)

Our wounded were sent hurriedly to the designated place. Here we also dropped our packs and moved out.

Shortly after dark the battalion started on its last mission. The men had had no supper. It was raining a cold, desolate, penetrating rain. The roads over which we marched were what the soldiers called, "Shot to pieces". The men were so tired and worn out that it was necessary for the officers to shake them after the expiration of the hourly ten-minute halts. The officers did not dare sit down because of the utter sleepiness which fell upon them whenever they relaxed. We found that by standing against a tree we would be awakened by violent contact therewith if we should go to sleep and fall. We captured two German horses some two thousand yards southwest of Chemery but could not ride them because we would fall asleep and roll off. We had marched across the fronts of the 42nd and 77th American Divisions. (36)

(36)
Thomas
p. 353

It was dawn before Omicourt was reached. Just outside of this point the advanced guard surprised three enemy soldiers and it is said that he awakened them and then bayoneted all three before they could get into action. The bayoneted enemy were there to verify the story of the point.

About one thousand yards north of Malmy we captured a machine gun and four men. They did not awaken in time to offer resistance and could not understand how we happened to be there at that time.

The orders were that the main body of the advance guard would proceed in column of squads until resistance

should be developed. We were fired upon when the support neared Chemery. Although the point and flank patrols had not as yet developed any enemy in position except those who had been taken prisoners, we had taken the precaution to march with a column of twos on either side of the road. Therefore, the shells did not produce many casualties although we were forced to deploy somewhat and leave the road which slowed our advance.

The fire became heavier as we neared the town and two machine guns opened fire upon us from the hill west of the road. Our deployment was completed. The battalion passed Chemery and approached Omicourt, which we took at 7:00 o'clock A.M. The town had been in our hands for about ten minutes when a very aged French woman carefully extended her head from a cellar window, then crawled out but became so excited that she fainted. She had not seemed to mind the shells which were bursting in the streets and on the roofs of the houses or the bullets which were cracking and whining past her cellar window, although the knowledge that she was again under the protection of friendly troops was too much for her. She was carried back into her cellar but there was no time to care for her. She was apparently the only civilian in the entire town.

The high ground in front of Omicourt was immediately attacked. Heavy machine gun fire came from these positions. The artillery and machine guns on our flank had evidently withdrawn. Other batteries opened upon us from the direction of St. Aignan. A short, sharp fight took place in which the enemy was driven back upon St. Aignan. He seemed also to be moving his guns to the rear because by the time

we were within fifteen hundred yards of St. Aignan his artillery fire had considerably slackened.

Troops of the 40th French Division appeared from the west as we cleared Omicourt. We had not expected to effect a junction with any French troops and our surprise was complete. The French battalion commander insisted that he was to relieve us and take Sedan that night. This was news to us, and of course, required verification by our own superiors. Word was immediately sent back to the regimental commander and in the meantime the advance continued.

The German resistance now became very serious. The battalion had been advancing with one company deployed in line. This was Company "K". Company "M" was ordered to deploy on the right of Company "K". The advance was stopped temporarily until this could be done.

The French commander had with him a 75 mm. gun. He agreed to help us with this gun and put it into action. He then decided to attack with us, and after a conference, the two battalion commanders decided to continue the advance straight on St. Aignan with the 3rd Battalion, 26th Infantry, while the French would advance up the valley southeast of the town and assist our advance by attacking the left flank of the German position. This position was a very strong one since from the heights the enemy had an excellent field of fire and exceptional observation.

Company "M" was very slow in getting into position. Runners sent to discover the reason returned with the information that the company commander said he had nothing to report. Investigation by the battalion commander developed the fact that the company had been deliberately

held by the company commander for some time in the woods under cover instead of deploying as rapidly as possible. His answer was that one of the French sergeants had told him that an armistice was to be signed very shortly and that he had decided to disobey orders rather than let any more of his men lose their lives. The officer in question paid rather dearly for his action.

✓ In the meantime orders came from the regimental commander that the battalion would remain in place until further orders. Dispositions were made to meet a possible counter attack and patrols sent forward to learn the enemy's positions and strength. These patrols penetrated to within two hundred yards of St. Aignan and learned that the Germans were resisting with machine guns supported by light Maxims and arranged in checker-board formation throughout the woods.

The 3rd Battalion was now relieved by the 1st Battalion which had had some rest. Another advance was ordered. This battalion advanced half way up the steep hill to the town. The French battalion had now started to carry out the flanking movement agreed upon. The 3rd Battalion was in the woods south of the St. Aignan Farm in support of the 1st Battalion. The Germans now decided to evacuate the town and covered their retirement by very heavy artillery along the front of the position reached by the assault battalion.

It was now nearly 5:00 o'clock, and just as the advance was to be started again orders reached both the French and us that the attack would be suspended. Again we made dispositions to meet a possible counter attack and began to dig in for the night. X The French battalion

assembled at Omicourt.

Patrols from the assault battalion had penetrated well past St. Aignan while waiting for the French to gain their position and verified the fact that the Germans had evacuated it and were retreating toward Donchery. The enemy shelled the town heavily as soon as his troops had cleared.

ORDERS TO LET THE FRENCH TAKE SEDAN

Orders to turn over the sector to the French and to march back the way we had come the night before reached us as we began to dig in.

The regiment withdrew from the battle line for the last time in the World War, just as darkness was falling, on November 7th. We had eaten nothing all day but our kitchens had hot soup and coffee for us as we marched through Chemery. The bivouac assigned to the regiment was in the woods just south of Yoncq. Neither the muddy ground nor the cold nor the noise of the guns could disturb the dead slumber of these men who had marched and fought almost continuously for five days and nights with little food and little rest. Between 4:30 P.M., November 5th, and midnight, November 7th, the 26th Infantry had marched seventy-one kilometers - the record of the A.E.F. (37)

(37)
Thomas,
p. 353

GERMAN UNITS ENGAGED

During its participation in the Third Phase of the Meuse-Argonne the 26th Infantry engaged elements of the following German divisions: (38)

NOVEMBER 5TH

115th Division.

NOVEMBER 6TH

236th Division.

NOVEMBER 7TH

1st Guard Division.

(38)
German and
American
combined
daily order
of battle,
Sept. 25 to
Nov. 11, 1918
And
Meuse-Argonne
Offensive

Map showing daily position of front line.
GHQ, May 24, 1919

Early on the morning of the eighth the regiment marched for the Chateau de Belval. On the cold, bleak, battle-scarred hill-side the troops were destined to wait until the morning of November 11th. Daylight, on this memorable day, found us again marching toward the southeast. The rumor was that we were starting for Metz. The march was stopped at 11:00 A.M. We could not believe that we read correctly when a mounted messenger reached us with a note from the regimental commander which informed us that an armistice had been signed to take effect at 11:00 A.M., and that we would immediately go into bivouac in the Bois Folie. Some of our dead still lay unburied in this woods. The message reached us at 10:50 A.M. Almost immediately it was noticed that the noise of firing was dying out. No spectator will ever forget the fires the soldiers built on that famous night in the Bois Folie. The war was over.

On November 19th the Commander-in-Chief of the American Expeditionary Forces published General Orders Number 201, paragraph four of which is quoted:

"The Commander-in-Chief has noted in this division a special pride of service and a high state of morale, never broken by hardship nor battle."

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISMS

Although many mistakes were made and some minor defeats suffered, the participation of the 3rd Battalion, 26th Infantry, as part of the First Division, was successful. The fact that the unit was a part of one of the most highly organized and highly trained divisions of the A.E.F. contributed, of course, in no small measure to its success.

The success would have been far more quickly and easily gained had the attack been made as soon as the unit was in position on October 1st. If the advance could have been

made at once, depriving the enemy of the advantage of improving his positions and bringing up reserves, the ground gained would undoubtedly have been far more and the cost in men far less.

It follows, therefore, that whenever possible, the artillery of a division being relieved should remain behind to assist the relieving division until such time as its services can be spared. It follows, also, that highly trained and equipped engineers for repairing damaged roads and bridges are vital to the greatest success to be gained in an attack.

The first two days of the attack, during the Second Phase, show the necessity and value of co-operation between battalions in a regiment, between regiments in a brigade, between brigades in a division, and between neighboring divisions. No criticism can be made of the spirit of co-operation shown.

The proper use of machine guns was demonstrated and proved by the success of the machine gun fire. The third day of the fighting shows especially the tremendous power of these weapons in assisting the forward movement of the riflemen and in breaking up and repelling counter attacks. The fire of the machine gun company with the support battalion, on October 6th, is an example of the possibilities of long range indirect fire.

Fire of position of rifles was successfully employed. Without the assistance of the rifle fire of the 28th Infantry it is doubtful if the 3rd Battalion could have advanced at all on Hill 272 on the sixth.

The plan of maneuver employed by the 3rd Battalion in attacking Hill 272 was undoubtedly correct and failed

because the enemy position and the exposed flank was too great a problem for a more or less depleted battalion. We see that even highly rated American troops can be temporarily thrown into confusion and demoralized, but we see also that these same men can be rallied from flight and taken immediately back into action to distinguish themselves if the officers and non-commissioned officers take the proper action.

Throughout the action we find the American soldier brave and stubborn. We find properly trained infantrymen at all times full of the offensive spirit. Reserves were at all times properly used.

The fate of the tanks gives us two lessons. Tanks must be brought to their immediate attack position under concealment. Anti-tank weapons properly placed can successfully combat tanks if the tanks can be even poorly observed.

The use of the accompanying gun as it was conceived before the Meuse-Argonne Offensive is shown to be of doubtful value. It appears that a piece of artillery, especially if horse-drawn, cannot accompany infantry in the attack if it is observed or if the hostile barrage is heavy. Even concealment will not always save it.

On the other hand, it was demonstrated that a gun in such position and kept in such position as to be able to accompany the assaulting infantry with its fire is of the utmost assistance. This fire must be commanded by an able and aggressive artilleryman. This artillery liaison officer should at all times be as near the battalion commander as possible.

The 37 mm. guns and the 3 inch light mortars were properly used. The excellent results to be obtained from

well handled 37 mm. were exemplified.

The soldier's belief in the automatic rifle is a criterion of its value.

The system of communication was correct so far as the equipment we had would permit. The results of good communication in the 26th Infantry leave no question as to the vital necessity of this too-often neglected matter.

✓ The advance of the 4th, 5th and 6th are fine examples of the value of the concealment of fog and smoke to attacking infantry, especially so if the fog or smoke is on the enemy.

Each day's fighting proves that the infantry must be prepared to suffer heavy losses in attacking a prepared position, even if there has been artillery preparation. Apropos of this our experiences with the wounded should convince us that the Medical Corps is to be commended in its efforts to provide proper evacuation of the wounded in the future. Every assistance should be given it.

An officer, if at all seriously wounded, should not be permitted to remain on the field in command of troops for any length of time after being wounded.

The methods used to protect our exposed right flank appear to have been correct.

Every advance made should show the power of infantry to advance under its own fire when necessary. This should not be lost sight of because in the opinion of the writer the support given by the artillery was about what might be expected in future actions in which we may become involved. It must be remembered, too, that in this case our artillery co-operated with us to the limit of its ability.

It should be remembered when ordering infantry to

follow a rolling barrage that it is not always possible for the infantry to do this unless the artillery preparation has been complete enough and the barrage is sufficiently thick in proportion to the resistance offered by the enemy. //

The excessive straggling must be considered. First sergeants should be with their organizations to help in preventing straggling as well as to take over command of their units if the casualties make this necessary. /

The participation of the battalion in the Third Phase of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive demonstrates nothing which has not already been mentioned, except the endurance and marching power of infantry, even when insufficiently fed and with practically no sleep.

The battalion commander was at fault in the action before St. Aignan because he did not deploy two companies in the front line rather than one, although the terrain would have made this difficult at the time of the original deployment. He was also at fault in not pushing the advance more aggressively throughout, although it is true that one of his companies failed to co-operate properly. In a situation of this kind too much caution may lead to failure to accomplish the maximum possible success. The battalion accomplished its mission but at too great cost of men and time.

It is not within the proper province of a subordinate commander to criticize or question the reason or purposes of his superiors, but the reasons for the forced march on Sedan are not entirely clear. There were divisions nearer Sedan than the First. However, no participant in that memorable forced march ever regretted that he was present and the writer prefers to ascribe the reasons to the desire

to grant the glory of taking Sedan to a deserving division. It must be remembered, however, that the writer has shown that the capture of Sedan by the American Forces was a part of the general plan of maneuver approved by the Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies. The First Division was the freshest and strongest division present.

Suffice it to say that we are satisfied to have let the French have the glory of taking historic Sedan. It meant far more to them than to us. The American Forces had captured the hills commanding the railroad. That was our real mission.

LESSONS

The Principles of War are the final tests of the military art. We must be able to recognize and remember the fact when we see a Principle of War observed and properly applied or violated. These fundamental Principles of War are nine in number. We shall look into the application of each Principle separately.

(1) THE PRINCIPLE OF THE OBJECTIVE - This principle was most certainly kept in mind at all times. Never once did the division of which the battalion was a part swerve from its objective, the driving of a wedge through the German lines in the direction of Dun-sur-Meuse and Sedan. There is no instance where the battalion swerved from its objective.

(2) THE PRINCIPLE OF THE OFFENSIVE - This principle was surely observed constantly. This spirit of the offensive and the constant attempt to advance can be observed in all grades down to and including the private soldier.

(3) THE PRINCIPLE OF MASS - The Principle of Mass was violated unavoidably when the division laid inactive from October 1st to November 3rd. It was violated again when

arrangements were not properly made to get the tanks actually into action with the assaulting infantry. It was again violated when the battalion twice attacked Hill 272 without sufficient troops to accomplish its mission, when there were other troops which the brigade commander might have used to meet the situation. It was observed, however, to the extent that the battalion on each occasion used all its troops and fire power and all the fire power it could secure from neighboring units. The Principle of Mass was observed when the division attacked with all available fire power and troops on October 4th and October 9th. It was observed again in the attack of November 1st. It was probably not observed when the forced march on Sedan took place. The attack was made without our artillery, with tired and hungry troops, when the necessity of the attack is open to question. The battalion failed to observe the Principle of Mass when one company, rather than two, was deployed in the front line in the attack before St. Aignan. So far as morale, resolution, and the skillful use of weapons are concerned, the Principle of Mass was not violated.

(4) THE PRINCIPLE OF ECONOMY OF FORCE - In the opinion of the writer this principle was generally not observed by all American units participating in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive; certainly not in the unit especially considered. The desire to drive through at whatever cost caused many of us to lose sight of the Principle of Economy of Force. The battalion tried to observe this principle in the attack upon St. Aignan but since the attack was not as successful as it might have been, the principle could not have been properly applied.

(5) THE PRINCIPLE OF MOVEMENT - There can be no criticism made but that this principle was observed throughout, at times, almost too much so.

(6) THE PRINCIPLE OF SURPRISE - This principle was grossly violated when the attack was not made on October 1st. The division surprised the enemy by attacking him on the heights before Sedan. The enemy was also surprised by the attack of October 9th against Hills 272 and 263. The enemy was surprised also by the fact that the Americans could keep on attacking as they did in the face of such losses. We surprised the enemy by the manner in which we broke up his counter attacks on October 6th and 7th.

(7) THE PRINCIPLE OF SECURITY - We were not surprised at any time when we had the means at our disposal to prevent it. The observing of this principle saved us many times.

(8) THE PRINCIPLE OF SIMPLICITY - This principle was generally observed throughout unless the forced march on Sedan might be questioned.

(9) THE PRINCIPLE OF COOPERATION - Constant observance of this principle is one of the outstanding features of the entire campaign. Instances occurred where there were minor violations but these instances were few. We see the cooperation between companies, battalions and regiments, and between divisions. We see the excellent cooperation between machine gun companies and rifle companies. We see the perfect cooperation between the artillery and the infantry. Finally, even in a delicate situation, we see the cooperation between French and American battalions.

QUESTIONS ON THE OPERATIONS OF THE THIRD
BATTALION, 26TH INFANTRY, IN THE
SECOND AND THIRD PHASES OF THE
MEUSE-ARGONNE OFFENSIVE

1. (Q) What was the mission of the FIRST AMERICAN ARMY in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive?

(A) To break through the lines of the enemy between the Meuse River and the Argonne Forest and cut his line of communication known as the Metz-Sedan-Mezzieres Railroad.

2. (Q) What was the mission of the First Division in the second phase of the MEUSE-ARGONNE OFFENSIVE?

(A) To drive a wedge into the German lines north of Verdun in the direction of Landres-et-St. Georges, the result of which would tend to force the enemy to evacuate the Argonne Forest.

3. (Q) What hill, occupation of which by the enemy, arrested further advance of the 3rd Battalion, 26th Infantry, on October 5th?

(A) Hill 272.

4. (Q) On which of our flanks was the counter attack of October 6th launched?

(A) Right.

5. (Q) Did the third phase of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive commence on October 1st or November 1st?

(A) November 1st.

6. (Q) Which principle of war was the more violated during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, the Principle of the Offensive or the Principle of Economy of Force?

(A) The Principle of Economy of Force.

7. (Q) Was there an artillery liaison officer with the assault battalion of the 26th Infantry or not?

(A) There was.

8. (Q) On which flank of the First Division did the

26th Infantry operate during the second phase of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive?

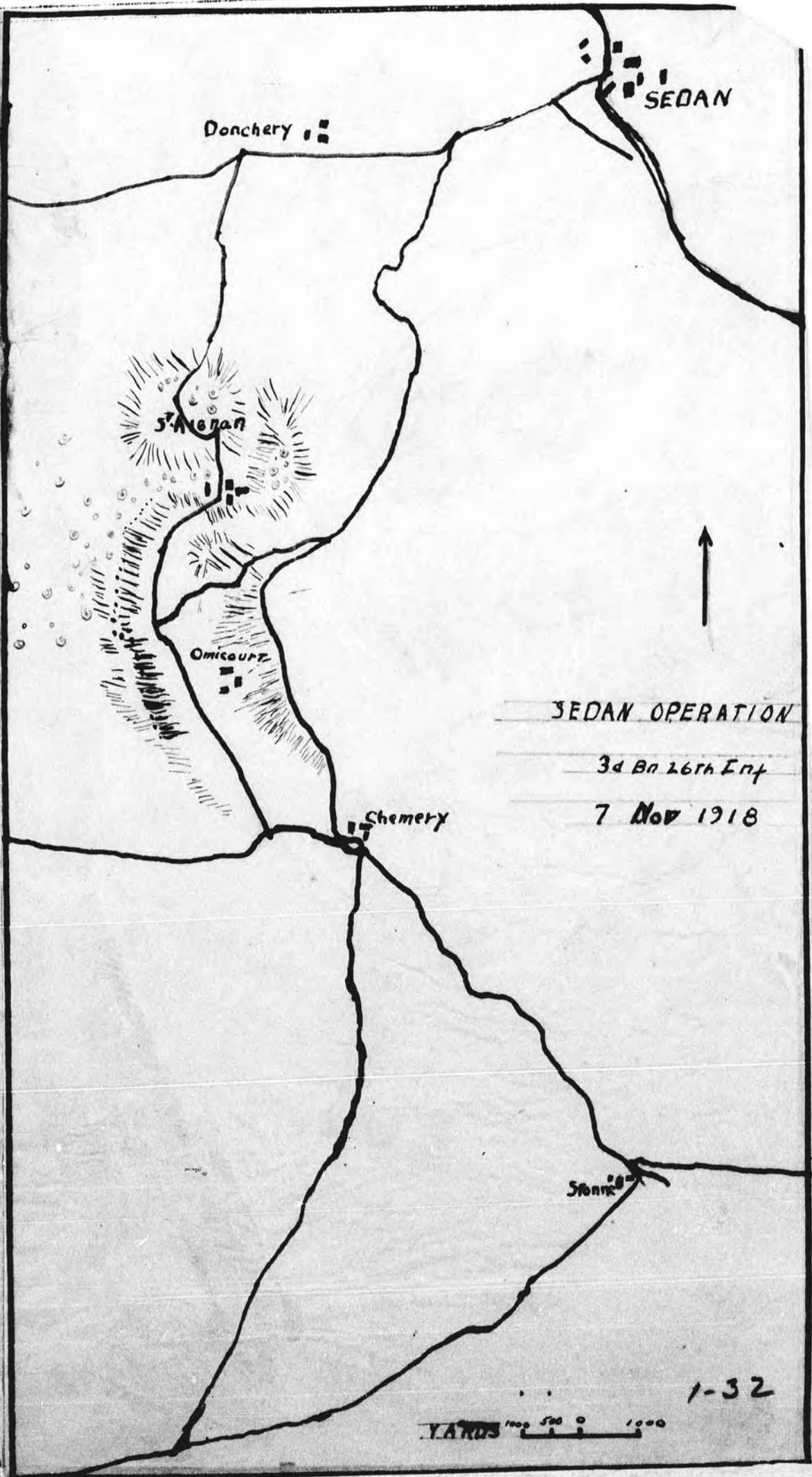
(A) The right.

9. (Q) Did the corps or the division commander direct the First Division to march on Sedan?

(A) The corps commander.

10. (Q) Was the advance of the First Division upon Sedan definitely called off because of the resistance of the enemy or because of the arrival of the French upon the scene?

(A) Because of the arrival of the French.



Donchery

SEDAN

St. Hubert

Omicourt

Chemery

Stonne

SEDAN OPERATION

3d Bn 26th Inf

7 Nov 1918

YARDS 1000 500 0 1000

1-32

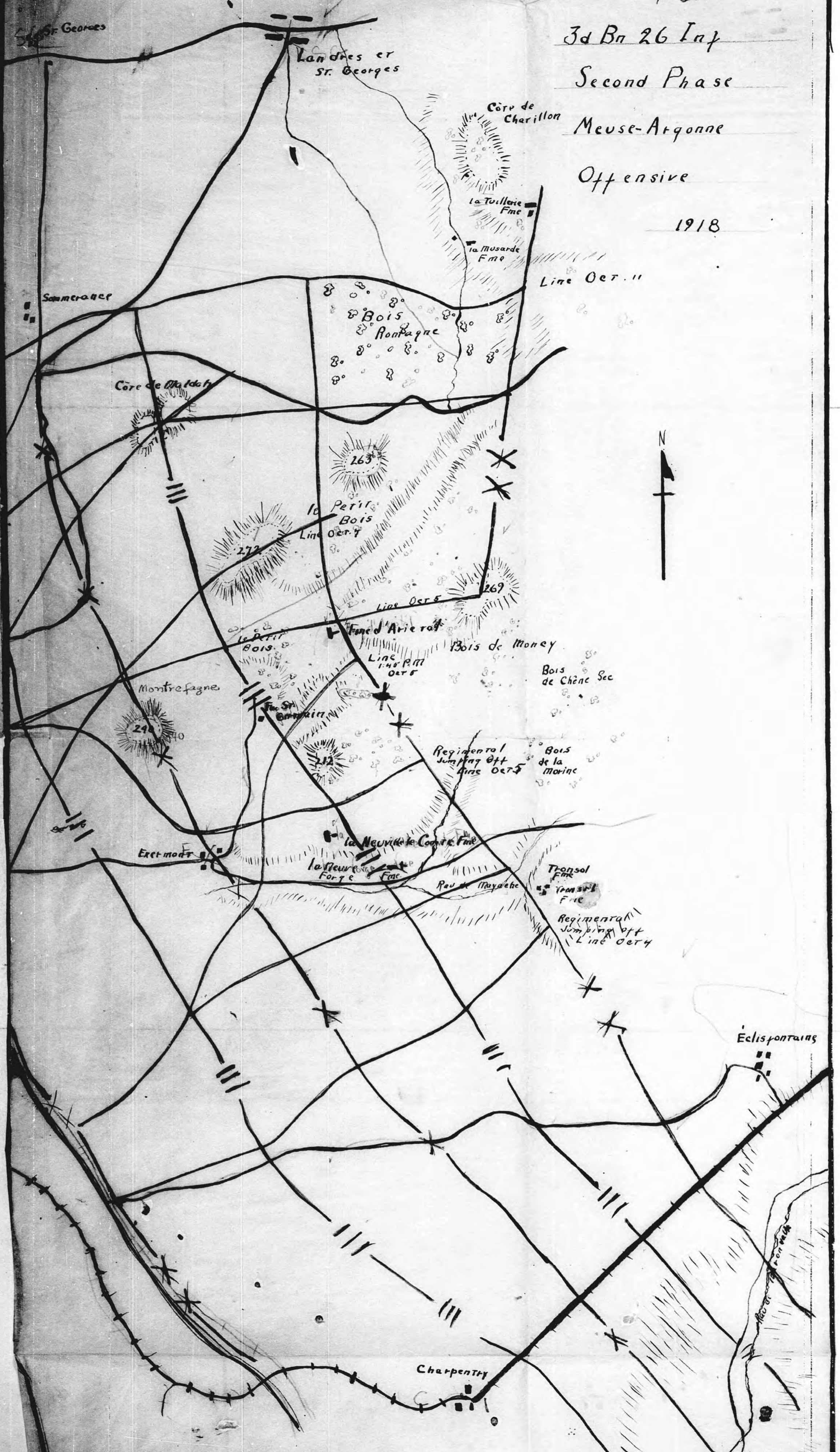
3d Bn 26 Inf

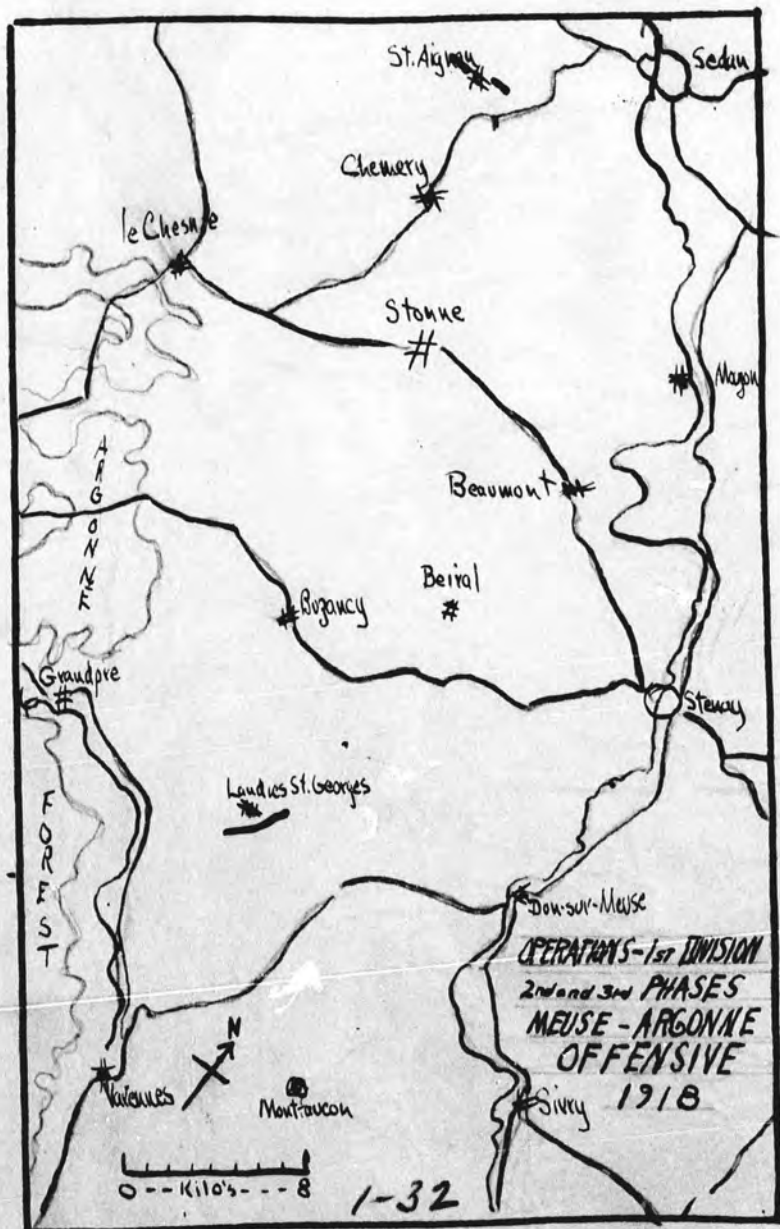
Second Phase

Meuse-Argonne

Offensive

1918





OPERATIONS - 1st DIVISION
 2nd and 3rd PHASES
 MEUSE-ARGONNE
 OFFENSIVE
 1918

1-32