

1-39

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

ADVANCED COURSE
1930-1931

301ST TANK BATTALION IN THE OFFENSIVE TOWARDS MAUBEUGE
SEPTEMBER 29--OCTOBER 23, 1918

(Personal Experience)

MAJOR ROGER B. HARRISON, INFANTRY

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"1. On the departure of the 301st American Tank Battalion, I wish to place on record my appreciation of the services it has rendered.

2. The Battalion has practically formed part of the British Tank Corps since April, 1918, and while fully maintaining its national identity, has cooperated with British troops and adapted itself to British methods with a spirit that deserves fullest recognition.

3. In the field, the 301st Battalion after experiencing heavy casualties in its first engagement at Bony, which might have deterred less determined troops, volunteered for the next action in which, as in subsequent ones, it inflicted heavy casualties upon the enemy at Brancourt, the Selle and Cambrai battle.

4. I feel I am voicing the opinion of all commanders and troops who have been associated with them, in expressing ~~sincere regret at the departure~~ of our American comrades and in wishing them all good fortune in the future.

H. J. ELLES,
Major General,
Commanding Tank Corps in the Field."

(S. O. 20, Hq. Tank Corps in the Field, February 15, 1919.)

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(Maps were traced from the original Battalion
Commander's Maps used by the writer during the
engagements and now in his possession).

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"Acotank", Philadelphia, E. A. Wright Company.

A history of the 301st Tank Battalion with particular attention to the actions of Company "A", written by a lieutenant of the Company. Accurate, detailed and unbiased. Contains copies of the Official Reports on all actions in which the Battalion was engaged.

Montgomery, E. A.

"Story of the Fourth Army in the Battles of the 100 days, August 8th to November 11th, 1918", London, Hodder & Stoughton, Ltd., 1920.

Compiled by a member of the staff of the Fourth British Army from accounts written by the staffs of corps and divisions that served in the Fourth Army, and from the records of the Fourth Army. An excellent general account, accurate, but little detailed. The author states that the brevity of the accounts relating to the II American Corps was due to inability to get any more information from the Corps.

O'Ryan, J. F.

"Story of the 27th Division", New York, Wynkoop Hallenbeck Crawford, 1931.

Written by the general officer who commanded the Division in France. Very detailed and lengthy. Generally accurate but inclined to favor the Division. He makes no unfavorable comment on the actions of any members or organizations of his Division. His references to the 301st Battalion are a brief "rehash" of the Battalion's own reports.

Price, Jack

"Tank Actions A. E. F.", Kansas City, Publisher unknown.

A verbatim copy of the official reports submitted by Tank Battalion and Brigade Commanders on the actions in which their organizations were engaged. The complete story of the Tank Corps' participation in the war. Accurate and authentic.

Harrison, R. B.

"Notebook". A notebook kept by the writer in which data was constantly recorded. The official reports of the Battalion Commander were compiled mainly from the data

recorded in this book.
Accurate and fairly detailed.
Made "in the field at the
time".

The following publications were consulted but proved to be of no assistance:

Rarey, G. H.

"American Heavy Tanks with
the British Offensive",
"Infantry Journal", Volume 31.

This article is a very general summary of the official reports of the 301st Battalion with a few personal experiences added.

Browne, D. G.

"Tanks in Action", London,
William Blackwood & Company,
1920.

A very interesting account of the experiences of a British Tank Lieutenant. His sole mention of the 301st Battalion was taken up with an expression of his disapproval of the lack of trained "batmen", mess attendants etc. to look out for the comfort of officers.

Fuller, J. F.

"Tanks in the Great War",
New York, Dutton & Company,
1920.

A general history of the development of the Tank and its use. It is accurate but very lacking in details.

Laffitte, R.

"Tank Corps from 1916 to
1918", Paris, Henri Charles-
Lavauzelle et cie, 1921.

A very brief history of the French Tank Corps and of the American Battalions that were equipped with French Tanks. It contains no mention of the 301st Battalion.

Stern, A. G.

"Tanks, 1914-1918; the Log-
book of a Pioneer", New York,
Hodder & Stoughton, 1919.

The story of the difficulties of the organization of the Tank Corps and the trials of development and production of the machines themselves. It leaves the impression of being the writer's alibi for not having done better on the production programme. Very brief mention is made of the battles in France.

Woolnough, F. G.

"Brief History of the Royal
Tank Corps", London, Gale
& Polden, 1925.

Best described by its title. A very brief, general account of Tank actions during the war. Accurate but too abbreviated to be of any aid.

Williams-Ellis,
Clough

"Tank Corps", New York,
Doran & Company, 1919.

An accurate, general history of the British Tank Corps in which the 301st American Battalion is mentioned. Fair and unbiased but too general to be of value (in this work).

Boraston, J. H.

"Sir Douglas Haig's Despatches
(December 1915-April, 1919)",
New York, Dutton & Company.

Verbatim copies of the despatches which are brief and concise.

Maurice, F.

"Last Four Months; How the
War was Won", Boston, Little,
Brown & Company, 1919.

A very general summary of the last four months of the war. It touches only the most salient points.

Doyle, A. C.

"History of the Great War;
British Campaign in France
and Flanders, July to
November, 1918", New York,
Doran & Company, 1920.

A fiction writer turned historian for the occasion. The general story is there but many details are inaccurate.

Thomas, Shipley

"History of the A. E. F",
New York, Doran and Company,
1920.

Compiled from official sources and accurate as to dates and facts but too brief.

MARGINAL ABBREVIATIONS USED

✓ Acotank	"Acotank"
✓ 4th Army	"Story of the Fourth Army in the Battles of the 100 days, August 8th to November 11, 1918"
NB RBH	"Note Book of Major R. B. Harrison, 301st Battalion, Tank Corps"
✓ O'Ryan	"Story of the 27th Division"
✓ Tank Actions	"Tank Actions A. E. F."

INTRODUCTION

By the time the United States entered the World War, Tanks had demonstrated their worth as an offensive weapon and it was essential that steps be taken to provide our army with this invaluable aid to the infantryman.

Recruiting for the Tank Corps was begun in February, 1918, and under the name 65th Engineers, the organization that was to become the 301st Battalion, U. S. Tank Corps, was assembled at Camp Meade, Maryland late that month. (1) Early in April, 1918, the battalion was sent to Wareham, England for a period of training in the British Tank School and here it remained until August 24, 1918, when it was sent out to France to be attached to a British Tank Brigade for a tour of service at the front. (2)

The original plan contemplated that the battalion would be equipped by the British and would remain with them until the weather became unfavorable for the use of Tanks, at which time it was to be returned to the American Army and equipped with the new Mark VIII Tank which was then being built. (3) The end of the war came before the latter part of this arrangement was carried out and the battalion saw all of its active service attached to and - to ~~all intents and purposes - a part of the~~ British Tank Corps.

(1) Acotank
p. 32

(2) NB RBH

(3) NB RBH

Due to a shortage of Tanks, the British were unable to furnish a complete armament for the battalion and the high water mark was reached with forty-seven Mark V and Mark V Star Tanks just prior to our first engagement.

The battalion spent the first two weeks of its stay in France in various moves; drawing Tanks and other equipment; and in convincing General Elles, Commander in Chief of the British Tank Corps, that it was ready for any task he might assign it. The day finally came when the Battalion was attached to the Fourth British Tank Brigade and was informed that its first assignment would be to lead the 27th American Division of the II American Corps in its assault on the Hindenburg Line on September 29, 1918.

ACTION ON SEPTEMBER 29, 1918

GENERAL PLAN

(See Map No. 1)

General
The Australian Corps with the II American Corps attached, was to resume the offensive in a general northeastern direction from their present front line. The II American Corps was to attack with both divisions in line, the 30th on the right and the 27th on the left. After breaking the Hindenburg Line, these divisions were to push on and capture Nauroy and Gouy. (The 1st objective). When this objective was taken, the 3d and 5th Australian Divisions were to pass through the 27th and

(4) NB RBH

30th Divisions respectively and capture the second objective. (4)

✓ (5) 4th Army
p. 152

The III British Corps, on the left, was to advance with the 27th American Division as far as the Canal. (5)

✓ (6) 4th Army
p. 152

After the 27th Division had been passed by the 3d Australian Division, it was to exploit to the left with one regiment (105th Infantry) to assist the III British Corps in crossing the Canal. (6)

✓ (7) O'Ryan
p. 301

The entire area was to be heavily bombed and gassed, more than a thousand guns being concentrated on a six thousand yard front. The attack was to be led by a rolling barrage consisting of high explosive (40%), shrapnel (40%) and smoke shells (10%), which was to continue to the second objective. (7)

✓ (8) Tank
Actions
p. 6

The 301st Battalion was allotted to the 27th American Division with orders to allot one platoon (5 Tanks) to each battalion of the assault regiments and two platoons (10 Tanks) to the regiment detailed for the flank offensive. The remaining Tanks of the battalion, seven in number, were to be placed in Fourth Tank Brigade Reserve. (8)

In compliance with these instructions, the companies of the battalion were assigned as follows:

A Company - 15 Tanks - to 108th Infantry on the right
B Company - 10 Tanks - to 105th Infantry for flank exploitation
C Company - 15 Tanks - to 107th Infantry on the left. (9)

(9) Tank
Actions
p. 6

PREPARATIONS

At a conference on the morning of September 19th the Commanding General, 4th Tank Brigade informed the Battalion and Company Commanders of the 301st Battalion of the general plan of the attack and, on September 25th, the Battalion Commander had a conference with the Commanding General, 27th Division at which nothing was accomplished. The Division Commander had a very poor opinion of Tanks and did not care to have them lead his troops due to the moral effect their getting blown up would have on his infantry. On the following afternoon - September 26th - there was a conference at Headquarters 27th Division during which the various details of the coming engagement were explained and Tank Company and Platoon Commanders were sent to get in touch with the Infantry Regimental and Battalion Commanders with whom they were to work. (10)

(10) Tank
Actions
p. 9

No time was available for any training with the infantry so that both the Tanks and the Infantry went into action with only theoretical knowledge of what to expect of each other and without that fundamental feeling of respect and confidence in each other's ability, so necessary for perfect team work.

AIR FORCE

The 8th Squadron, Royal Air Force was assigned to the Tank Corps for all air missions

(11) NB RBH

except photography and arrangements were made with this organization for noise planes to cover the last stages of the approach march and for contact planes during the operation. (11)

Due to the noise made by the Tank engine, it was necessary to find some means of preventing the approach of the Tanks becoming known and thus informing the enemy that an attack was about to be launched. Experience had shown the British that this could best be done by low flying planes as the noise of their motors was quite similar to that of the Tanks and the presence of low flying planes dropping bombs and using their machine guns on the ground troops was no novelty at this stage of the war.

RECONNAISSANCE

Due to lack of time and transportation it was not possible for all of the individual Tank Commanders to be brought up to observation posts where they could see a part or all of the territory behind the enemy lines. The Battalion and Company Reconnaissance Officers, however, made a very thorough and complete reconnaissance of the forward area and each Tank Commander was given three maps to take into action with him. These maps showed his route and objective; all known and probable obstacles such as sunken roads and wide trenches; the location of landmarks to help him keep oriented; and an abbreviated barrage table for his particular area. In addition to these maps, each Tank

(12) Tank
Actions
p. 6 to 8

Commander carried oblique air photographs of the area he was to cover. (12)

Routes to the front line were to be taped by the Company Reconnaissance Officers, and this was done by C Company but the entire detail of A Company was either killed or wounded by a shell while laying the tape and this route was not completed, the Tanks being led to the "jump off line" by members of the reconnaissance staff.

APPROACH MARCHES

When the battalion was detailed for this operation it was approximately twenty-five miles in rear of the front line and fifteen miles were covered by train. This was the only rail movement made by the battalion with its Tanks during the war and was accomplished without difficulty. The entire movement was made under cover of darkness and unloading was accompanied by a very noisy, but otherwise ineffective air raid.

For secrecy, all movements were made under cover of darkness and, on the night of September 27-28, the Tanks were moved to the vicinity of Villers Faucon, a distance of 10,000 yards.

All Tanks completed the move on schedule and were camouflaged before daylight. (13) The Tanks were given a final overhaul at this place and were completely filled with gas, oil and grease and, in addition, carried one half fill to be used just before reaching the start line.

✓ not shown
on map
(13) Tank
Actions
p. 9

The approach march from Villers Faucon to the start line covered 8,500 yards and was a very different affair from that of the preceding night. The latter part of the route was constantly shelled with high explosive and gas. No Tanks were put out of action by the enemy but the wearing of gas masks made it extremely difficult for the drivers to handle their Tanks in the dark.

Of the forty Tanks that started the march, one broke a track and five developed mechanical trouble, leaving thirty-four that actually crossed the start line at H hour. (14)

(14) NB RBH

CONDITIONS

Weather:

On the morning of D day, a slight mist hung in all the valleys in the area of operations, however this cleared by 7:00 AM and the remainder of the day was fair.

From H hour on D day until about 8:00 AM a slight breeze carried all smoke toward the enemy. From then until 10:30 the wind was either stationary or toward our troops and the entire battlefield was covered with a dense smoke from our own barrage. Tanks were unable to see their infantry and cooperation was practically impossible. (15)

Ground:

~~Ground conditions were good and offered~~
no serious difficulties for Tanks. The Hindenburg Line was expected to be a serious

✓ (15) Tank
Actions
p. 11

✓
(16) Tank
Actions
p. 12

obstacle but it was crossed without difficulty by the few Tanks that succeeded in reaching it. (16)

A number of Tanks were ditched in trenches and sunken roads but, in every case, this occurred due to the inability of the driver to see and could have been avoided with proper vision.

OPERATIONS

✓
(17) O'Ryan
p. 251

Before the attack could take place it was considered essential that the high ground along the general line Quennemont Farm - Guillemont Farm - The Knoll be captured and the entire battle was planned on the premise that this line would be in our hands prior to D day. (17) The infantry start line was placed along this general line with the artillery start line two hundred yards in front of it.

The III British Corps made numerous efforts to capture this line and reached their objective several times but were unable to hold out in face of the determined counter-attack that followed each of their efforts.

✓
(18) O'Ryan
p. 252

(18)
When the 27th Division took over this part of the line the desired ground was still in the hands of the enemy and the 106th Infantry, assisted by twelve Tanks from the 4th British Tank Battalion, was ordered to capture it. On September 27th this regiment

made a very determined attack and, while small parties reached their objective, their efforts fared little better than those of the British before them and the front line remained practically as before. (19)

(19) O'Ryan
p. 283

Due to the fact that numerous small groups of Americans were known to be holding out in the contested area and also that many American wounded were in the area and could not be reached, it was decided that the barrage would not be brought back to go over that area again on September 29th, but that it would come down as originally planned. The Infantry was instructed to leave their present positions in time to work their way forward and be on the designated start line by H hour. (20) This message reached the assault regiments of the 27th Division on the afternoon of September 28th and they immediately started to work their way forward to the designated line but met with so much resistance that the Brigade and Regimental Commanders held a conference and decided to wait until H hour the following morning before continuing. (21) This decision placed them from 500 to 1,000 yards in the rear of what was to have been their protective barrage, and, during the entire engagement on the following day, they were completely out of touch with it.

(20) O'Ryan
p. 300

(21) O'Ryan
p. 305

When the 107th Infantry attempted to leave their trenches on the morning of September 29th they were met by heavy enemy fire from the positions which were to have been in their

possession prior to the start of the battle and they and the Australians who were to pass through them on the first objective spent the entire day in a vain effort to establish themselves on what was to have been their line of departure for the initial assault on the enemy's position. (22)

(22) O'Ryan
p. 318

TANKS

On the morning of September 28th the Battalion Commander was informed that, due to the obscure situation on the front of the 27th Division, orders had been issued for the assault troops to leave their present position one hour before H hour and work their way up to the designated line of departure. As some resistance was expected the Tanks were to cross the present front line at H minus one hour and assist the infantry in reaching the start line. (23) This message was delivered by the Commanding General, Fourth Tank Brigade, in person and he was asked by the Battalion Commander what action should be taken by the Tanks in case the message failed to reach the infantry or that the infantry did not start as directed. The reply was to go ahead regardless of the infantry and arrive at the start line in time to cross at the first lift of the barrage and that the infantry would either be on the start line and ready to go with the battalion or would catch up with it before it had advanced very far. These instructions were

(23) NB RBH

promptly communicated to the Company Commanders and, by noon on September 28th, all Tank Commanders were thoroughly familiar with the new situation. (24)

(24) NB RBH

The Tanks crossed the infantry line at the designated hour but were informed that the infantry would not move out until H hour and, pursuant to the instructions of the Tank Brigade Commander, they moved on forward to the line of departure which they crossed at H hour - 5:50 AM. (25) This put the Tanks assigned to the 107th Infantry approximately 1,000 yards in front of the troops they were to aid and here they fought an independent action completely out of touch with the infantry they were to support and in violation of one of the basic principles of the employment of Tanks - Tanks must always keep in close contact with the infantry they are supporting.

(25) Tank
Actions
p. 10

"A" Company, on the right, had better success and succeeded in establishing contact with the 108th Infantry, to which it was able to render some assistance.

Early in the morning it became apparent that the attack was not progressing according to schedule and that the 105th Infantry would not be able to make the flank exploitation for which it had been detailed. It soon became necessary to use this regiment to reinforce the 107th Infantry which was being subjected to heavy counterattacks. (26) This change cancelled the assignment of the ten Tanks

(26) O'Ryan
p. 319

from "B" Company and the Company Commander immediately put them into action to assist in clearing up the situation on the left flank. Only two of these Tanks reached the Hindenburg Line, the others becoming casualties shortly after entering the battle.

The reports of the Tank Commanders were unanimous in stressing the difficulty of vision on this occasion. The dense smoke made it impossible to orient themselves; the drivers could not see where they were going and thus many Tanks were ditched in trenches and sunken roads that ordinarily would have been avoided; gunners could not use their guns effectively because no targets could be seen.

ANTI-TANK DEFENSES

The nature of the terrain in this general sector made it extremely difficult to use Tanks on any but the front of the II American Corps, the St. Quentin Canal presenting an impassable obstacle. On the II American Corps front the Canal went under ground through a tunnel and the Germans were well prepared for the advance of Tanks over this area.

In order of their effectiveness we met the following:

(a) Field and Anti-Tank Guns.- Firing with direct laying over open sights at Tank targets. These guns exacted a heavy toll from the battalion which, no doubt, would have been greater had not smoke blanketed the entire field.

(b) Anti-Tank Rifles.- Numbers of these were found on the battle field and they had no difficulty in penetrating the Tanks. However, the German soldiers did not like to fire them due to their heavy recoil. A few casualties were caused by these rifles but no Tanks were put out of action by them.

(c) Armour Piercing Bullets.- These were used in great numbers and all Tanks were pierced in numerous places. Most of the energy of the bullet was expended in getting through the armour and very little damage was done to the personnel and none to the machinery inside of the Tanks.

CASUALTIES

Casualties in this operation were very heavy both in personnel and in Tanks. The battalion lost three officers and seventeen enlisted men killed; fifteen officers and seventy enlisted men wounded; seven enlisted men missing; a total of one hundred twelve or approximately one third of the men engaged.

Of the forty Tanks scheduled for the operation six failed to get ~~it~~. Of the thirty-four that crossed the start line

16 received direct hits from artillery

or anti-tank guns and were destroyed;

2 were blown up crossing a British mine

~~field that had been put down some~~

months before and of which no information had been given to the battalion;

When were other two?

9 were ditched in various trenches and sunken roads;

(27) NB RBH

5 reached the Hindenburg Line. (27)

RESULTS

Both from the Tank and the infantry point of view the attack in the 27th Division sector was a failure. On the right the British and the 30th American Division had reached their first objective and the Hindenburg Line was broken. (28) On the right of the 27th Division's zone of attack the line had been carried forward by the success of the 30th Division. It then bent sharply backward to the left where it rested on what was to have been the line of departure that morning. (29)

(28) 4th Army
p. 169

(29) 4th Army
p. 167

The infantry at least had made some advance but the Tanks had accomplished nothing to compensate for the loss of their machines and personnel.

COMMENTS AND CRITICISMS.

In considering the action on the front of the 27th Division it must be borne in mind that this was a small, though important, part of the attack along the whole front which extended well down into the French sector. (30)

(30) 4th Army
p. 172

The principle of simplicity was violated in that two start lines were used for the infantry and what was supposed to be a minor operation was to be carried out before the main attack. The minor operation - the advance

to the designated line of departure by the infantry - proved to be a major operation and the delay in accomplishing it disrupted the entire plan in this sector.

The principle of cooperation was violated in the orders that placed the Tanks out of contact with the infantry they were to support and in the orders that caused the infantry to be so far behind their protective barrage that they derived absolutely no protection from it.

The plight of the 107th Infantry on the left appears to be due either to a lack of information or to faulty information of the true status of affairs in its immediate front at higher headquarters. Although the 106th Infantry had failed to consolidate the line of departure desired for this operation, the Australian Corps Commander assumed that the 107th Infantry would have no difficulty in advancing 1,000 yards in an hour before the main attack and would arrive at the start line in fit condition to take part in the main assault. Under the conditions as they actually existed, nothing but faulty information could have caused this erroneous estimate of the situation.

This same assumption caused the Tanks to be sent into action on the left flank completely out of touch with the infantry whose cooperation was essential to their success.

It appears that, in order to save the time necessary to clear up the situation in their

front and thus delay the general offensive and disrupt the time schedule of the higher command, the troops in this particular sector were sent into action under the most unfavorable circumstances.

The result of this action emphasized the necessity for the joint training of Infantry and Tanks. Had the 107th Infantry received the benefit of this training they would have realized that they were losing invaluable aid when they allowed their Tanks to pass through their lines at H minus one hour.

In view of the situation as it developed, there is ample room for doubt that the Tanks could have placed them on the designated line at H hour, but there can be no argument against the statement that great assistance could have been rendered the infantry in overcoming the storm of machine gun fire that swept over them when they attempted to go forward. All fifteen Tanks assigned to this regiment crossed its front line and passed on.

The survivors of this battle were thoroughly in accord with the statement that had been constantly made to them while in the British Tank School - "Tanks without infantry support can hold nothing".

The period immediately following the battle was spent in salvaging Tanks and equipment from the battle field. All Tanks had had very hard service and it was necessary for them to be overhauled before they could be used in

action again.

On the day after the battle, General Hankey, commanding the Fourth British Tank Brigade, appeared at battalion headquarters. He was greatly perturbed at our heavy losses and began to apologize for starting us out with such a difficult assignment as he was afraid of the effect our defeat would have on our morale. The battalion commander assured him that the morale of the battalion was unimpaired and that all the battalion asked was a chance to get their own back. As later events proved, this statement was repeated verbatim to General Elles, Tank Corps Commander in the Field, and our opportunity was given us on October 8th.

OPERATIONS ON OCTOBER 8, 1918

GENERAL PLAN

(See Map No. 2)

The Fourth British Army was to resume the offensive with the IX British Corps on the right, the II American Corps in the center and the XIII British Corps on the left. (31)

✓ (31) 4th Army
p. 193

Two objectives were given for this attack, the second being called the line of exploitation. (32)

✓ (32) 4th Army
p. 193

The 301st Battalion was allotted to the II American Corps and was to accompany the infantry as far as the first objective. Here Whippets were to take over the Tank assignment and carry on to the line of exploitation. (33)

✓ (33) 4th Army
p. 193

The attack was to be launched under cover

of a barrage which was to cover the advance as far as the first objective after which, special arrangements had been made for artillery support to the line of exploitation. (34)

✓
(34) 4th Army
p. 194

The II American Corps was to attack with the 30th Division in line and the 27th Division in reserve. (35)

✓
(35) 4th Army
p. 194

The 59th Brigade of the 30th Division was to lead the attack with the 118th Infantry on the right and the 117th Infantry on the left.

The 118th Infantry was to attack with two battalions in line and one battalion in reserve.

The 117th Infantry had one battalion in line; one battalion in reserve; and one battalion in brigade reserve.

One battalion from the 60th Brigade was moved to the vicinity of Joncourt and made subject to the call of the 59th Brigade for flank protection or use in repelling counter-attacks. (36)

✓
(36) Tank
Actions
p. 17

TANKS

Due to the heavy losses in Tanks on September 29th, the battalion had only twenty-three Tanks fit for use in this operation. No replacements were available and, to get something approximating normal combat strength in the platoons, the battalion was reorganized into two companies.

13 Tanks were allotted to the 118th Infantry on the right.

10 Tanks were allotted to the 117th In-

(37) Tank
Actions
p. 18

fantry on the left. (37)

PREPARATIONS

The usual conferences were held and the Tank Platoon Commanders arranged a set of signals by which the infantry could indicate to the Tanks what was holding them up and the general location of the resistance.

RECONNAISSANCE

Reconnaissance differed from the preceding engagement only in the important fact that all Tank Commanders were able to get forward to observation posts where they could see the country over which they were to operate back of the enemy's lines. This proved of great value in keeping them oriented during the attack.

APPROACH MARCHES

not shown on map
On the night of October 5-6 the Tanks moved up to the vicinity of Bellicourt, a distance of 9,000 yards. This march was accomplished without incident.

On the night of October 7-8 the Tanks made another march of 9,000 yards and crossed the "jump off line" at H hour which was 5:10 AM. The night was pitch dark and numerous sunken roads and wide trenches had to be crossed. During the last half hour, the battalion was bombed by air planes and heavily shelled but no casualties resulted. An enemy search light looking for our low flying "noise"

(38) Tank
Actions
p. 18

planes was a great aid in keeping direction as it was located in the approximate center of our objective and was in operation most of the night. (38)

Of the twenty-three Tanks that started, twenty jumped off at H hour, the other three going out on account of mechanical trouble.

COMMUNICATIONS

One wireless Tank operated with the battalion on this and also our previous engagement. This was an old Tank unfit for further fighting. It carried an officer observer and a wireless crew of two men. The set itself could not be used inside the Tank making it necessary to halt the Tank and put up the set before messages could be sent.

The Tank was given a fixed route and a time schedule, copies of which were given to all Tank Officers in order that they might know where to send runners. Due to the excellent weather conditions, the observer was able to send back much information of great value both to the Tank and the Infantry Headquarters.

Tanks carried pigeons on this occasion but they proved of no value. One pigeon message was sent which arrived at battalion headquarters about midnight, long after the officers who sent it had reported in person and informed the battalion commander of the contents of the message.

Due to the fine visibility, the contact planes were able to keep up a steady stream of messages throughout the engagement and the battalion commander had accurate information of the location and condition of his Tanks at all times.

CONDITIONS

(a) Ground.- The area covered was ideal for Tanks, there being no wide trenches and few sunken roads.

(b) Weather.- A slight breeze blew all smoke toward the enemy and atmospheric conditions were favorable throughout the engagement.

✓
(39) Tank
Actions
p. 20

(39)

OPERATIONS

The attack was entirely successful. The first objective was reached on scheduled time and, by 2:15 PM, the line of exploitation was in the hands of the attacking infantry. (40)

✓
(40) 4th Army
p. 195

All Tank Commanders report that they had excellent targets and much ammunition was expended.

Tanks worked in close cooperation with the infantry and the number of crushed machine guns and dead gunners testified to the aid they had furnished. One light railway bank was heavily held with machine guns, all of which were promptly handled by the Tanks. (41)

✓
(41) Tank
Actions
p. 20

The principal organized resistance came from Brancourt-le-Grand and here again, the

In conversation with officers of the 30th Division after this engagement, the battalion commander was informed that the Tanks had so simplified the advance for the infantry that many of them reached their objective without firing a shot.

The opinion of the Commander of the British Tank Corps is shown in the following note which was received shortly after the battle:

"Adv. Hq. Tank Corps

9th Oct.

My dear Harrison

A note to congratulate you and your fellows on the splendid results you got today.

I am more glad than I can say that you have had the opportunity of getting your own back on the filthy Hun.

Yours sincerely

Hugh Elles."

On completion of this engagement work was started getting the Tanks ready for the next assignment which came on October 17th.

OPERATIONS ON OCTOBER 17, 1918

GENERAL PLAN

(See Map No. 3)

The offensive was to be resumed by the entire Fourth British Army with the IX British Corps on the right, the II American Corps in the center and the XIII British Corps on the left. (44)

✓
(44) 4th Army
p. 203

✓
(42) 4th Army
p. 195

Tanks carried the infantry through the village. (42)

CASUALTIES

Casualties to personnel were very light in this engagement. Two enlisted men were killed while three officers and thirteen enlisted men were wounded; a total of eighteen.

Of the twenty Tanks that started
11 reached their objective and rallied;
4 received direct hits from artillery or anti-tank guns and were destroyed;
5 developed mechanical trouble and went out of action at various stages of the attack. (43)

(43) Tank
Actions
p. 20
NB RBH

COMMENTS AND CRITICISMS

This action was a decided contrast with that of September 29th. The Infantry and the Tanks started from the same line of departure at the same hour, working under the same orders. Close contact between the Tanks and the accompanying infantry was maintained at all times.

The 30th Division had worked with British Tanks on September 29th and showed the benefits gained by their experience on this occasion.

While the infantry could probably have made the same advance without the aid of the Tanks, there is no doubt but that they would have taken much more time to make the advance and would have suffered many more casualties.

✓ The II American Corps placed both divisions in the line for this attack, the 30th on the right and the 27th on the left.

✓ (45) 4th Army
p. 206

The attack had four objectives. (45) It was not expected that the fourth objective would be reached that day but it was given to provide a line of exploitation should the enemy resistance collapse. Tanks were to accompany the infantry as far as the third objective.

The artillery was to conduct a general bombardment from H minus 48 hours to H hour and was then to fire the usual rolling barrage for the attack. (46)

✓ (46) 4th Army
p. 207

The 301st Battalion was again allotted to the II American Corps.

✓ The 30th Division, on the right, advanced with the 59th Brigade - 117th and 118th Infantry - in the assault followed by the 60th Brigade - 119th and 120th Infantry - in support. (47)

✓ (47) 4th Army
p. 216

On the left, the 27th Division advanced with brigades abreast, each brigade being in column of regiments. The 53d Brigade was on the right with the 105th Infantry leading and the 54th Brigade was on the left with the 108th Infantry leading. (48)

✓ (48) 4th Army
p. 216

15 Tanks were assigned to the 30th Division.

✓ (49) Tank
Actions
p. 22

10 Tanks were assigned to the 27th Division. (49)

PREPARATIONS

The usual conferences at Corps, Division, Brigade, Regimental and Battalion Headquarters arranged the details of the operation.

AIR FORCE

In addition to their regular "noise" and contact planes, arrangements were made with the 8th Squadron, Royal Air Force for planes to watch for and bomb any anti-tank guns that could be located. Planes were to carry smoke bombs to assist in screening any Tank that might be in difficulty. (50)

✓
(50) Tank
Actions
p. 23

The Squadron was asked to make a low flying reconnaissance of the Selle River for the purpose of determining possible Tank crossings. This was promptly and efficiently accomplished. (51)

✓
(51) Tank
Actions
p. 23

RECONNAISSANCE

All Tank Commanders were taken to observation posts where they could locate land marks back of the enemy's lines.

The Battalion Reconnaissance Officer went out with an infantry patrol and succeeded in reaching the Selle River behind the enemy outpost line. He waded down the river and marked all possible Tank crossings on his map.

✓
(52) Tank
Actions
p. 23

(52)

not shown on map

APPROACH MARCHES

On the afternoon of October 15, the Tanks were moved to the vicinity of Busigny, a distance of 4,500 yards. They spent the next day under cover of the rail road bank at this place and moved out) about midnight, October 16-17, for the "jump off line". This march covered 5,500 yards and the heavy work the Tanks had been doing took its toll as five of them went out with mechanical trouble and did not get in the battle. (53)

✓
(53) Tank
Actions
p. 24

COMMUNICATIONS

Communications were exceedingly poor in this battle. Due to the heavy fog, planes could not fly, the observer with the wireless ~~Tank~~ could see nothing and runners promptly became lost. (54)

✓
(54) Tank
Actions
p. 24

CONDITIONS

(a) Ground.- Due to the excellent work on the part of the Battalion Reconnaissance Officer and the 8th Squadron, Royal Air Force, the Selle River proved to be a very slight obstacle to the Tanks. Two Tanks were ditched in crossing the river. One of these attempted to cross outside of the designated crossing limits and the other got mired in marshy ground approaching the river.

(b) Weather.- The weather was decidedly unfavorable for the use of Tanks and was largely

responsible for the poor showing made by the Tanks on this occasion. From H hour until noon - 5:10 AM until 12:00 - a heavy fog enveloped the field and it was impossible for the drivers to see where they were going and the gunners could not recognize targets to fire on. Compasses were used to keep the general direction and Tanks cruised through the fog in a vain effort to keep in touch with the infantry. By noon, when the fog lifted, the Tanks had used up their gasoline and were forced to leave the field just at the time when they could have been of real service to the infantry. (55)

✓
(55) Tank
Actions
p. 24

OPERATIONS

Due to the facts that the known crossings of the Selle River were in the 30th Division Sector and that the River was only about 500 yards in front of the 27th Division, that Division was notified that their Tanks would not join them until they were across the river. The Tanks were to cross in the 30th Division's sector and then work to the left and catch up with the 27th Division. (56) These Tanks crossed the river as planned but became lost in the fog and never gained contact with the Division.

✓
(56) Tank
Actions
p. 22

In the 30th Division's Sector the line was further from the river and the Tanks did good work in helping the infantry that far

(57) Tank
Actions
p. 22

forward but, after crossing the river, they too became lost in the fog and were of little assistance to the infantry. (57)

CASUALTIES

Casualties were slight in this operation. One officer and one enlisted man were killed while eight enlisted men were wounded.

1 Tank received a direct hit from artillery and was destroyed.

1 Tank caught fire and burned out.

2 Tanks were ditched.

8 Tanks developed mechanical trouble. (58)

✓
(58) Tank
Actions
p. 25

RESULTS

Only two Tanks reached their first objective. This was due entirely to the fog as only one Tank was put out of action by the enemy.

In spite of the adverse weather conditions, the infantry made progress and, by evening, had established themselves on their first objective. (59)

✓
(59) 4th Army
p. 217

COMMENTS AND CRITICISMS

Everything possible had been done to assure the success of this operation and the unusually heavy fog which caused the Tanks to fail could not be foreseen.

The Tank crews did their best under the circumstances but it would have been much

better for all concerned had the Tanks been held out of the engagement until the fog lifted. They would have then been able to assist the infantry in their final efforts of the day and the infantry advance undoubtedly would have been greater.

The failure of this operation to accomplish greater results was not caused by the violation of any basic principles but was due to the unusual weather conditions which prevailed and which could not be foreseen.

No replacements were available and, after this engagement, the battalion was reorganized into one company with only twelve Tanks fit for action and, with these, we fought our last battle.

OPERATIONS ON OCTOBER 23, 1918

GENERAL PLAN

This was a combined attack which was carried on by the First, Third and Fourth British Armies, the Fourth Army being assigned the task of forming a defensive flank facing East to protect the main operations which were to be carried out by the First and Third Armies. (60)

✓
(60) 4th Army
p. 230

There was to be no general preliminary bombardment by the artillery although specially ~~selected areas were to be bombarded and~~ counter battery work and harrassing fire would continue. (61)

✓
(61) 4th Army
p. 230

✓
(62) 4th Army
p. 230

The 301st Battalion was allotted to the IX British Corps which in turn allotted it to the 6th British Division. (62)

✓
(63) 4th Army
p. 232

The IX Corps was to attack with the 1st Division on the right and the 6th Division on the left. The movement of the 6th Division was to conform to that of the division on its left (25th British) and "it was to form an ever-lengthening defensive flank facing east, as that division gained ground." (63)

✓
(64) 4th Army
p. 232

As the moon was full and the nights very light, H hour was set at 1:20 AM in order to take the enemy by surprise. (64)

Only twelve Tanks were fit for action and they were divided into three platoons of four Tanks each. These were assigned as follows:

1st Platoon - 4 Tanks - Two missions

(a) To left battalion of the 1st Division;
then

(b) To right battalion, 18th Brigade,
6th Division.

2d Platoon - 4 Tanks - to 18th Infantry Brigade

3d Platoon - 4 Tanks to 71st Infantry Brigade.

✓
(65) Tank
Actions
p. 27

(65)

OPERATIONS

should have a map

This was a very simple operation and was accomplished without the loss of a Tank or a man. It is mentioned solely on account of the fact that it was the only night attack in which the battalion took part.

The moon light was very bright at H hour

and the drivers and gunners had no difficulty in seeing their routes and targets. Later clouds and mist came up and the enemy sent over a number of gas shells. The wearing of gas masks in the dark made it extremely difficult for the drivers and effectively silenced the gunners. However, the enemy put up a very little resistance and such opposition as was encountered was speedily overcome.

On this occasion Tanks proved that daylight was not essential to their operation and there is no doubt that they would have been used in other night operations had the war continued any great length of time.

COMMENTS

(General)

The battalion spent its entire active career as a part of a British Tank Brigade. All Tank actions in which it took part were planned by the British and very detailed instructions were received from Tank Brigade Headquarters usually days before any information could be obtained from the infantry with whom the battalion was to work.

All Tank actions were based on the doctrine that, to be effective, Tanks must be used in mass by surprise. Mass was always employed and Tanks were concentrated where it was desired to strike the hardest blow. Surprise, in many cases, was only relative. The prolonged bombardment prior to the assault on September 29th informed the enemy that an

attack was imminent but the intensity and duration of the bombardment was such as to give the enemy no indication of the hour of attack.

It was a foregone conclusion that Tanks would be used in any assault on the Hindenburg Line and that the sector most favorable for their use was where the St. Quentin Canal went underground. That the enemy was aware of this is shown by his elaborate and effective preparations to handle such an attack in this sector.

The attack on the front of the 27th Division was doomed to failure from the start and the only question is - would there have been any greater success if the infantry had started forward when the Tanks passed through them? This action on the part of the infantry would have brought on the battle in this sector one hour prior to the time it was scheduled to start but it would have given the infantry the aid of the Tanks in moving forward. It would have made little difference in the ultimate fate of the Tanks for the German defenses were such that Tanks were bound to suffer heavy casualties. The infantry launched their attack without any aid from the barrage and there is no question but that the Tanks would have overcome many of the enemy machine gun nests before they themselves were put out of action.

The attack on October 8th is an excellent

example of a well planned, coordinated attack working according to schedule under favorable conditions. The plan was simple and the artillery, Tanks and infantry worked with perfect cooperation against an enemy weakened by his previous defeats.

The operations on October 17th demonstrated that the best of plans and preparations do not always insure success. Everything that could be foreseen - even the possible collapse of the enemy's resistance - had been provided for, but the forces of nature smiled on the enemy and disrupted the attack.

For the Tank Crews, the only novel part of the operation on October 23d was the fact that they were in action against the enemy. All of their approach marches had been made under cover of darkness and many of them under worse conditions than they found themselves in when they crossed the "jump off line". Night operations with Tanks are possible but will always be accompanied by a gamble on the weather. If the moon shines, the Tanks will be able to function, otherwise, they will prove of little value until daylight.

LESSONS

The brief period of active service of the 301st Battalion covered practically all ~~phases of offensive combat during the war,~~ extending as it did from the assault on the strongly fortified Hindenburg Line to the

night attack on the poorly organized and lightly held lines opposite the 6th British Division.

The lessons most forcefully impressed on all members of the battalion were these:--

(a) To secure the best results, Tanks and infantry must train together prior to any operation in which they are to cooperate. It is highly desirable that the Tank Personnel used in this training be the personnel that will be used in the coming operations as the personal contacts made are a great aid in establishing mutual confidence in each other's ability.

(b) Tanks and infantry must maintain close contact at all times during an operation. This is more a responsibility of the Tanks than of the infantry. The Tanks, being in front, must maintain constant observation to the rear and, when contact with the infantry is lost, must move to the rear and pick them up.

(c) Tanks can dominate a position and force its defenders to take cover. They can not clear dug-outs and, if the infantry does not arrive to take possession of the position prior to the departure of the Tank, the defenders will resume operations as soon as the Tank departs and no good will have been accomplished.

(d) Infantry can be of great assistance to the Tanks. When anti-tank guns are discovered

they should be quickly engaged by the infantry and put out of action.

(e) In order to prove effective, Tanks must be used when visibility conditions are favorable.

(f) Forward reconnaissance by all Tank Officers is an invaluable aid. Visibility from the Tanks is poor at best and the meeting of land marks found before the battle is the best way a Tank Commander can assure himself that he is on the proper course.

(g) Smoke is a great aid in screening a Tank from enemy observation and is the best possible protection against anti-tank guns while these guns are being put out of action by the infantry.

(h) Tanks must take advantage of cover the same as infantry. Appearance on the sky line for any length of time will usually prove fatal.

Many defects developed in the Tank itself and these have long since been reported.

CONCLUSIONS

While the Tank most emphatically is not a cure all and an infallible solution of any and all situations that face the infantryman in offensive combat, when manned by properly trained crews, working with infantry trained to cooperate and take advantage of the opportunities they create, and used under conditions reasonably favorable to the machines

themselves, Tanks will prove an invaluable aid in enabling the infantryman to reach his objective. The nation that fails to develop this weapon to its fullest extent will find itself most seriously handicapped in the next war.

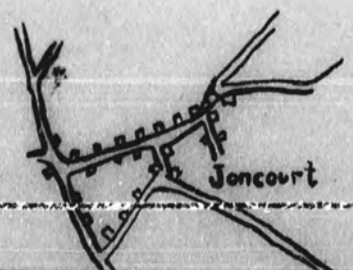
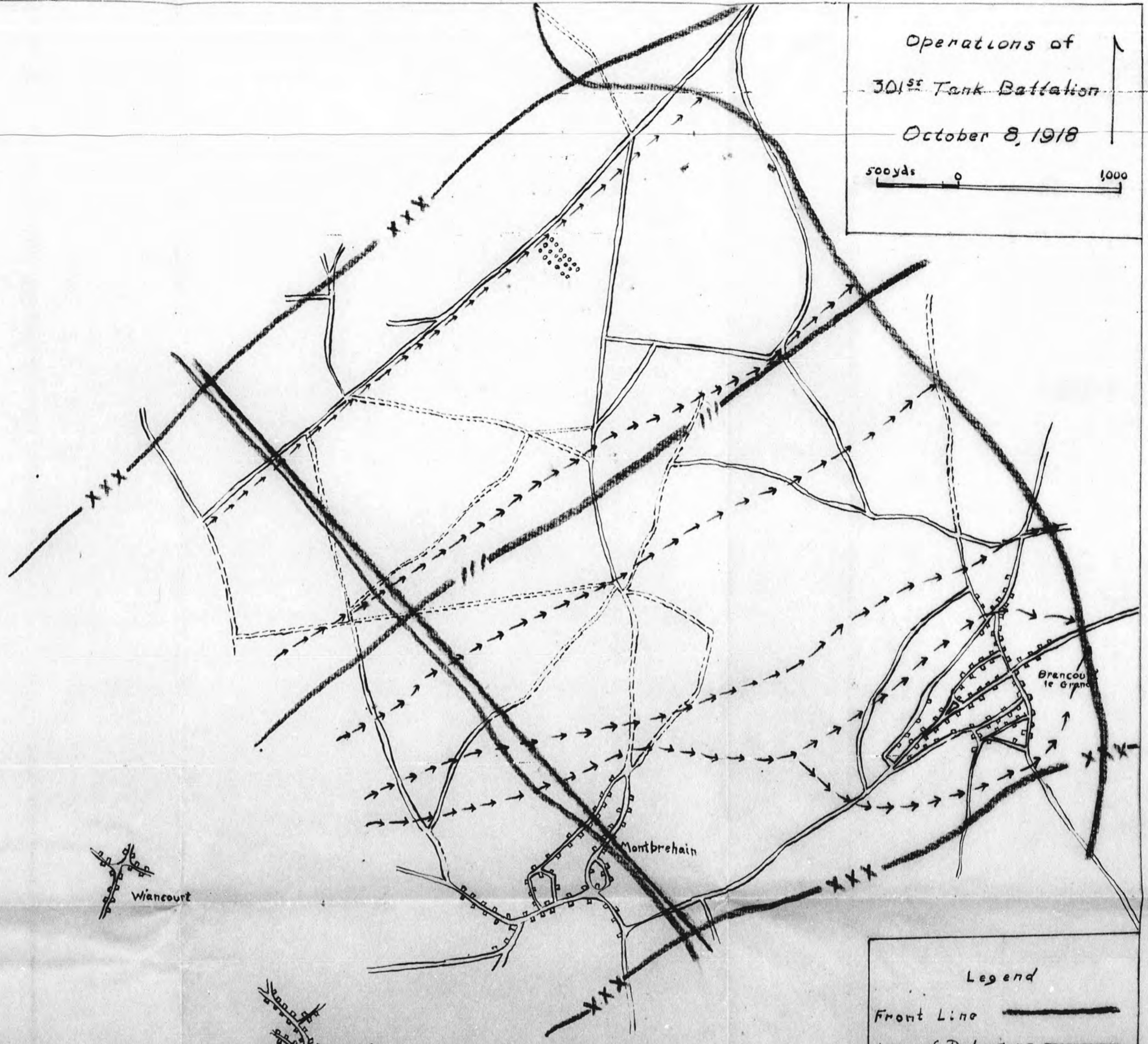
QUESTIONS ON THE OPERATIONS OF THE 301st TANK BATTALION

1. The preliminary attack to secure the line of departure for the attack of September 29th in the 27th Division's Sector was made by the
 - 105th Infantry
 - 106th Infantry (answer)
 - 107th Infantry
 - 108th Infantry.
2. The plan of the attack on the Hindenburg Line in the II American Corps' Sector on September 29, 1918 called for
 - a flank envelopment
 - a night attack
 - a double envelopment
 - a penetration. (answer)
3. For the attack on the Hindenburg Line on September 29, 1918, the 301st Tank Battalion was allotted to the
 - 3d Australian Division
 - 5th Australian Division
 - 27th American Division (answer)
 - 30th American Division.
4. In this attack, (Sept. 29, 1918), the regiment detailed for flank exploitation from the 1st objective in the 27th Division's sector was the
 - 105th Infantry (answer)
 - 106th Infantry
 - 107th Infantry
 - 108th Infantry.
5. In this attack (Sept. 29, 1918), the 27th Division
 - was successful
 - ~~failed~~
 - withdrew
 - had partial success. (answer)

6. The purpose of the attack in the 30th Division's Sector on October 8, 1918, was
to straighten out the front line
to create a demonstration
to follow up a previous victory and prevent the enemy's reorganization (answer)
for training.
7. In the engagement on October 8, 1918, the 301st Tank Battalion
started too soon
started too late
moved too fast and lost contact with the infantry
cooperated closely with the infantry. (answer)
8. In the engagement on October 17, 1918, the Tanks were unable to cooperate with the infantry on account of
fog (answer)
mud
rain
rivers.
9. In the engagement on October 17, 1918, the infantry had
one objective
two objectives
three objectives
four objectives. (answer)
10. In the engagement on October 23, 1918, the 301st Tank Battalion worked with
American troops
French troops
British troops (answer)
French and American troops.

Operations of
 301st Tank Battalion
 October 8, 1918

500 yds 0 1000



Legend

Front Line —————

Line of Departure - - - - -

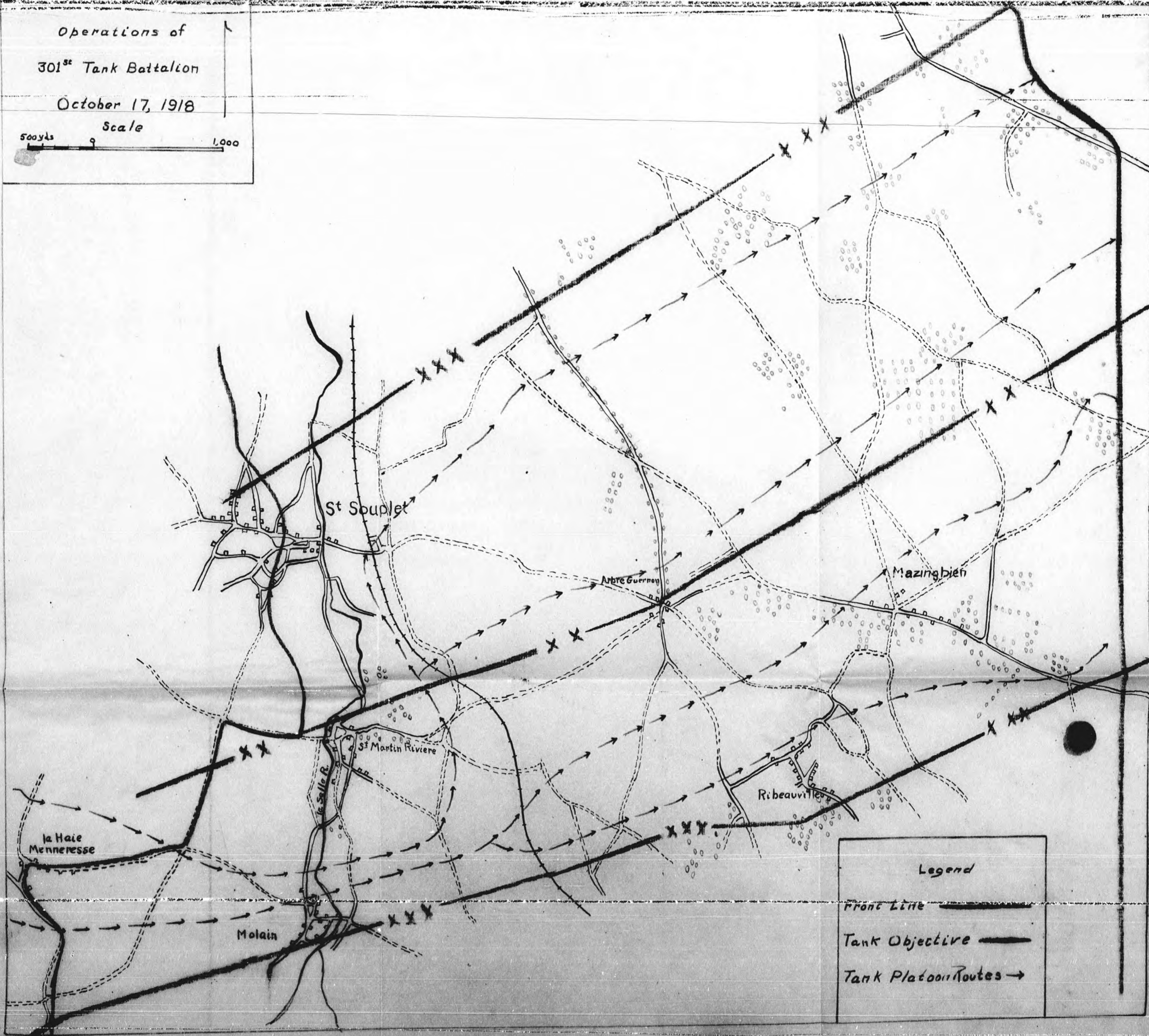
Tank Objective —————

Tank Platoon Routes → → →

Operations of
301st Tank Battalion

October 17, 1918

Scale
500 yds 1,000



Legend

- Front Line ———
- Tank Objective ———
- Tank Platoon Routes →