

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

1-42

COMPANY OFFICERS' COURSE  
1925-26

THE 2d BATTALION, 38th INFANTRY, 3d DIVISION  
(U.S.) AT THE MARNE. May 31, July 20, 1918

CAPTAIN EDWARD G. HERLIHY, INFANTRY

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MARGINAL ABBREVIATIONS USED

P.E. Personal Experience

3d Div.  
Hist.

Hemenway, Frederic V. Major "History of the Third Division".



Story 38th	Lovejoy, C.E.	"The Story of the Thirty-eighth"
M.S.B.	Lanza, Conrad H.	"The German Offensive of July 15, 1918"
G.M.	Wooldridge, Jesse W.	"The Giants of the Marne"

THE 2d BATTALION, 38th INFANTRY, 3d DIVISION  
(U.S.) AT THE MARNE. May 31 - July 20, 1918

1918

INTRODUCTION

It is human nature to be most deeply impressed by enterprises which have been conceived and executed on a grand scale. Even the student of military history is most interested in those campaigns and battles which involved large armies. Therefore, a study of the combat operations of such a small unit as an infantry battalion may seem superfluous.

It should be remembered that the greatest battle is nothing more than a series of minor engagements, more or less coordinated by the commander-in-chief. To know the combat principles of small units is a stepping stone to an understanding of the art and principles of war.

The operations of this particular infantry battalion have been chosen for analysis for the following reasons: First, the sources of information are abundant and authentic. Second, the conduct of the 38th Infantry of this occasion was cited by General Pershing in his official report to the Secretary of War, as "one of the most brilliant pages in our military annals." Third, many phases of the action are matters of personal experience to the writer.

This battalion, together with the other infantry units of the Third Division was unexpectedly rushed to the front on May 31, 1918, because of the deep penetration of the German Chemins-de-Dames offensive, which began on May 27th. Upon arrival in theater of operations, on June 3d, it was assigned to a position in the front

(1) line on the Marne River, (1)  
3d Div.  
Hist  
2-4

GENERAL SITUATION

German

At this time the German forces on the Western Front were in possession of the initiative. The German high command was in the

(2)  
H.286

"driver's seat". Divisions withdrawn from the Eastern theater gave Germany a superiority in available reserve divisions. (2) The previous successful offensives in March and May of 1918 filled the German General Staff with the hope of winning the war with a final drive on the Allied forces.

(3)  
M.S.B.  
429

The Chemins-de-Dames offensive had created the Soissons-Chateau Thierry-Reims salient. About forty German divisions were jammed into this limited area. Only one railroad was available for the supply of the troops in the salient, and it was less than 25 kilometers from the front in places. Any advance by the Allies against the edges of this salient would bring the railroad under effective artillery fire. (3) This situation, together with other considerations caused the German high command to decide that the next attack should be directed against Chalons and Reims, on a front extending from Chateau Thierry to the Argonne Forest. (4) On June 14th, Ludendorff directed the German Crown Prince, who was in command of the Group of Armies on this front, to submit plans for this attack. (5)

(4)  
H.289

(5)  
M.S.B.

12

### Allied

The military situation of the Allies in June 1918 was a source of great anxiety to the civil and military leaders of the nations seeking the defeat of the Central Powers. The powerful ally, Russia, had faded out of the picture. Italy was about to do likewise. The man power of France and Great Britian had been called upon to the limit. There seemed to be no way of stopping the powerful drives of the German Armies on the Western Front.

There were a few American divisions in France, but they were only partially trained, and had not been tested in a great battle. The only bright spot in the dark cloud was the fact that the Americans were arriving very rapidly. If the enemy could be held off until sufficient divisions arrived from America, the



Allies might still win the war.

The Allied Commander-in-Chief suspected the German plan for a final offensive. Throughout the month of June, intelligence information gradually traced out the direction and extent of the coming German attacks. On July 1st, Marshal Foch was in possession of information which convinced him that the next thrust would come in the direction of Paris and Abbeville. (6) By July 10th, the  
M.S.B. 432  
433  
Commander-in-Chief of the French Group of Armies of the North (later changed to Group of Armies of the Center) expected an attack to be launched in a few days which would include the battle front from the Argonne to Chateau Thierry.

#### PLANS AND PREPARATIONS

##### German

That portion of the German front opposite the 3d Division (U.S.) was held by the 23d Corps of the Seventh Army. On June 17th, in compliance with instructions from General von Boehn, commanding the Seventh Army, preparations were begun by the 23d Corps for its role in the coming attack. General von Kathen, commanding this corps, was charged with the mission of crossing the Marne at Jaulgonne and Charteves; seizing the line: Gland-St Eugene-Celle; and protecting the right flank of the Army. (7)

M.S.B. 38  
General von Kathen was given two first line divisions, one second and one third line divisions for this attack. The 10th and 36th Divisions were eventually designated to lead the attack.

The general plan for the attack called for the same tactics used in the two preceding offensives, a brief but powerful artillery preparation; a machine gun battle by the assaulting infantry; resistance to be broken up by artillery, rather than by reinforcement of the infantry; reserves thrown in where progress was good; limited objectives for the first day; units to advance

(8) without regard for the question of flanks. (8)

M.S.B.  
2-9

Over 80 batteries were assigned to the corps to insure the success of the dominating role of the artillery. The following time table was prescribed for the employment of this mass:

x to x plus 10. General surprise fire on infantry positions. All guns and minenwerfers on these targets.

x plus 10 to x plus 70. Reinforced artillery fight. All guns on hostile batteries.

x plus 100. Pioneers to start crossing the river.

x plus 70. to x plus 220. Infantry and artillery fight.

x plus 210. to x plus 220. Standing barrage on the railroad.

x plus 220. The rolling barrage starts. Rate of the

(9) barrage to be one kilometer in 50 minutes. (9)

M.S.B.

177

179

The artillery of the first line divisions was directed to follow the advance of the infantry in close support. Each infantry regiment was given one battalion of accompanying guns to function under the direct orders of the regimental commander.

Three light field howitzer batteries were assigned to each first line division for direct fire on suddenly appearing enemy infantry

(10) units or machine gun nests. (10)

M.S.B.

187

189

As has already been indicated by the artillery time table, the pioneers were to start building the bridges and preparing ferry crossings at x plus 100, or 1:50 A.M. Twenty pioneer companies, 2 corps and 8 division bridge trains were allotted to

(11) the Corps for the construction of the crossings. (11) Sites for the

M.S.B.

152

crossings were to be selected where the Paris-Metz railroad was farthest from the river, probably for the purpose of giving the infantry battalions room for deployment before reaching any enemy line of resistance. It was directed that the crossings be about 150 meters in width, and capable of permitting the use of three

(12) ferries. (12)

M.S.B.

122

126

In order to accustom the infantry to their role in the



scheme of crossing, embarkation and debarkation drills were

(13) practiced by the assault units on the Vesle River, near Fismes. (13)  
M.S.B.  
666

Documents captured from the Germans during the battle, show that the 10th Division was to attack on the right of the 23d Corps, with the 398th Infantry and 6th Grenadiers in the first line, and the 47th Infantry in reserve. Equally authentic information shows that the 36th Division was to attack on the left of the 10th Division, with the 5th Grenadiers and 175th Infantry in first line, and the 128th Infantry in reserve. The boundary between divisions was approximately the Surmelin Brook. The 6th Grenadiers were allotted crossing points between Mezy and the Surmelin. This regiment was charged with the capture of Mezy, Crezancy, and the heights west of the Surmelin. To its left in the zone of the 36th Division, the 5th Grenadiers were given ferry positions east of the Surmelin, and directed to seize Moulins, Paroy, Launay, and the

(14) high ground east of that stream. (14)  
M.S.B.  
508

#### American

When the 3d Division (US) arrived at the Marne it came under the command of the 38th Corps of the 6th Army. It was assigned a front line sector on the south bank of the Marne between Chateau Thierry and Varrennes. On its right the 125th (French) Division occupied the adjacent sector; on the left was the 39th (French)

(15) Division. (15)  
3d  
Div.  
Hist.  
3

The Group of Armies of the Center faced those of the German Crown Prince. It was on this front that the Allied Commander-in-Chief expected to receive the next German offensive. Reinforcements were placed behind the entire front from Chateau Thierry to the Argonne. A chain of second line divisions was placed in rear

(16) of those in the first line. (16) Any further study of the general  
M.S.B.  
431 plan of defense in connection with the subject in hand is of no value for the reason the Third Division had a different mission

from that of the general plan. Located as it was on the extreme western flank of the suspected German attack, it could not participate in the general scheme of "elastic defense". Orders of the 38th Corps required this division to check the enemy by a stubborn defense of the most advanced lines. (17)

(17)  
M.S.B.  
802

During the month of June the infantry regiments of the division were occupied with routine front line duties. Unnecessary reliefs, constant shifting of sectors, and combat operations of certain battalions outside of the division sector made it impossible for the division to execute a definite, coordinated plan of defense. Little intrenching was done, and few obstacles erected. Supported by French artillery, liaison between infantry and artillery was very unsatisfactory. About the only progress made was in the training and morale of the troops. (18)

(18)  
P.E.

Fortunately the Division regained control of all of its infantry regiments on July 2d, and reorganized the sector under a well studied plan of defense, published to the troops, as Field Order

(19)  
M.S.B.  
447  
451  
(20)  
P.E.

No. 7. (19) From the time this order was distributed until its provisions were tested in battle, earnest and well directed efforts were made to carry it into execution. (20)

The division subsector was divided into four sub-sectors by this order. As a result of this re-organization, the 38th was assigned the right sub-sector, with boundaries as follows: East boundary - the Marne River, 600 meters west of Varrennes-Moulins Ruine - Point (940-585)- Menthurel (exclusive) - Mentbazin (inclusive) - Pertibout Farm (inclusive). West boundary - Marne River at east end of Charteves Island - Crossing of railroad with Crezancy and Parey Road - Le Chanet - Le Donjen Farm - Mentavalart - La Fosse Gaudier Farm (all inclusive). The 30th Infantry, 3d Division (U.S.) occupied the adjoining sub-sector to the west. The 131st Infantry, 125 D.I. (French) held the sub-sector adjoining on the east.



Two general lines of defense were designated. The forward line was located along the forward slopes of the first hills south of the Marne and given the name of Acqueduct Line. This line marked the main parallel of resistance. A second line, called the Woods Line was established along the military crest of the second line of hills and constituted the support line. At a distance of about 5 miles south of the Marne was a second battle position, known as the Army Line, which was prepared and garrisoned by the reserve divisions of the Corps.

A strong outpost position was established in front of the main line of resistance, and given the name Railroad Line. This position consisted of a line of observation on the south bank of the river, and an outpost line of resistance along the railroad. (21)

(21)  
M.S.B.  
447  
451

The artillery was given the mission of delivering concentrated fire on suspected points of crossing on the river. One piece of light artillery was placed near the Acqueduct Line so as to deliver direct fire on the river at Mezy. Definite concentrations, or ~~barrage areas were prescribed, so that in the event of an attempted crossing, it was merely necessary for the infantry to send up a~~ rocket signal. S.O.S. barrage areas were established south of the river to be used in case the enemy broke through the Railroad Line, and these barrages were reserved to the call of regimental and battalion commanders, only. (22)

(22)  
M.S.B.  
469  
470

Forward observation posts were established in the vicinity of the Acqueduct Line by the artillery for the purpose of directing the fire on favorable surprise targets and adjusting on the river crossings. Liaison officers were sent to front line battalions in order to secure rapid information at the guns, of any German attempts at crossing. After July 6th, the division was being supported by its own artillery. It was a great relief to the men in the front lines to see American artillery officers there, ready



(23) to give the signal for the protective barrage. (23)

P.E.

The division commander specified certain general plans for the employment of machine guns. He directed that all portions of the Marne and the front of all infantry positions be covered with flanking fire. A minimum of at least two alternate emplacements for each gun was ordered, as well as a deep echelonment of the machine gun sections. (24)

(24)

M.S.B.

455

457

In these orders for the employment of machine guns the division commander prescribed principles which are now covered in training regulations, and so thoroughly understood throughout the infantry that it may seem superfluous to see specific mention made of them in a division defense plan. At that time, these principles were not so thoroughly understood, and it was absolutely necessary to define them.

Two companies from the Brigade Machine Gun Battalion were assigned to support each infantry brigade. The Regimental Machine Gun Companies were left under the control of Regimental Commanders. By July 12, the Division Machine Gun Officer had so well coordinated the emplacement of all the machine guns of the division that he was able to prepare a map showing the entire scheme of machine gun defense within the division. (25)

(25)

M.S.B.

458

Definite defense missions were assigned to each infantry regiment, and to the troops holding each line of defense. The troops on the Railroad Line being ordered to hold their position at all costs, even if surrounded. (26)

(26)

M.S.B.

463

Groups holding the Aqueduct Line were responsible for absolutely stopping any advance of the enemy beyond this line. The Woods Line was designated as the position from which the counter attacks of support battalions could be launched. (27)

(27)

M.S.B.

464

The mission given to the 38th Infantry was "the defense of the Surmelin Valley and resistance to enemy pressure from the East, in the event of the withdrawal of the troops on our right." (28)

(28)

M.S.B.

463

On July 12th the 38th Infantry was disposed as follows:

Companies G, H, and E, on the Railroad Line. Company F. in a position north of Moulins Ruine, overlooking the foreground of the

(29) French troops to the right. (29) Companies B. and D. on the P.E. Acqueduct Line in the vicinity of Paroy. The Third Battalion being

(30) posted along the Woods Line. (30)

M.S.B.

489

490

The Regimental Machine Gun Company, and Company A. of the 9th Machine Gun Battalion supported the regiment. With the exception of two guns on the railroad near Mezy, and two guns on the Crezancy-Warrennes road near the right boundary of the regiment, all supporting machine guns were echeloned in depth in rear of the Railroad Line.

The four forward guns were sited so as to enfilade the railroad and the area north of it. The remaining guns were posted so as to deliver indirect fire north of the river and to sweep the crossings.

They were also able to enfilade roads, ravines, and other avenues of

(31) approach within the regimental area. (31)

M.S.B.

455

458

The 2d Battalion occupied a front of about 1800 meters.

~~On July 12th, three companies held the Railroad Line.~~ Company G. held the left of line with one platoon on the river, one platoon on the railroad, and two platoons near Moulins. Company H. held the center with two platoons on the river, and two platoons on the railroad. Company E. with three platoons occupied both the river and railroad, and had one platoon in support at Moulins. Company F. had two platoons in the edge of the woods north of Moulins Ruine and two in Moulins.

Two machine guns were emplaced on the railroad about 200 meters east of Mezy where flanking fire could be directed along the front in either direction. Two guns were posted near the Crezancy-Warrennes road north of Moulins Ruine to sweep the railroad and river in both directions.

The plan of defense of the 2d Battalion was very simple. Troops on the river were to prevent a landing by the Germans with



grenades and automatic rifle fire. The groups on the railroad were ordered to stop any Germans who succeeded in landing, with rifle, automatic rifle, and machine gun fire.

The construction of continuous fire trenches was not attempted by this battalion. A line of rifle pits along the river at intervals of about 50 meters constituted the only shelter constructed there. These rifle pits were occupied at night by groups of four men each. During the day these pits were covered with brush, where needed to screen them from ground and aerial observation. A similar line of rifle pits were constructed along the forward slope of the railroad embankment. Small cave shelters were dug in the rear slope. During the day the shelters in rear of the embankment were occupied and the trenches camouflaged. Support platoons in the vicinity of Moulins constructed larger fire trenches, but occupied cellars in the village for shelter from artillery fire.

Very little progress was made in erecting obstacles. Best success was obtained on the river bank where low trip wires ~~strung in the~~ underbrush made approach to the rifle pits almost impossible, except from the rear.

It is believed that more care was taken in the matter of ammunition supply, than any other phase of preparation. Every rifle pit in the center company had 1200 rounds of .30 caliber ammunition in addition to the 220 rounds carried by the men armed with the rifle. Each trench on the river bank had 50 hand grenades. In addition to having all magazines for the automatic rifles filled, there was a box of 1780 rounds, in reserve, for each of the Chauchats.

From the time the division sector was reorganized until the German attack was actually launched, every indication pointed to the probability of an attack. Increased aerial activity, reduced enemy artillery firing, and the noise of wheeled transportation



near the north bank of the river at night, left no doubt in the minds of the men of the 2d Battalion as to the German intention to attack. Warnings were issued several times by the higher commanders to expect a drive on this front. (32)

(32)  
P.E.

#### OPERATIONS

##### The German Approach

As darkness settled over the valley of the Marne on the night of July 14th, 1918, the machinery of another great German offensive was set in motion. Infantry battalions began to move to their assembly positions; pioneers took up their task of getting the boats and pontoons to the crossings; artillery and minenwerfers batteries were laid and checked on their targets, for the initial concentrations. On the front of the Third Division two storm divisions moved toward their crossing points. Opposite the 2d Battalion, 38th Infantry, the 6th Grenadier Regiment marched on Charteves, and the 5th Grenadier Regiment set out for ferry positions opposite Moulins. (33)

(33)  
M.S.B.  
658  
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##### American Counter Preparation

At 11:45 P.M. heavy firing by the French and American batteries commenced. Telephone orders from the Army had reached Division Headquarters at 11:30 P.M., directing the artillery to lay down a counter preparation at once, as a German attack would be launched before daylight. All suspected enemy positions were immediately shelled by all batteries with gas and high explosive.

(34)  
3d Div.  
Hist. 10

(34)

##### German Artillery

Suddenly the sky burst into a sheet of flame. At 12:10 A.M. the German artillery had opened fire. In a few seconds shells were bursting everywhere south of the river. For a few

(35)  
Story  
38th  
75

(36)  
P.E.

minutes, the railroad, every woods and every village in the Surmelin Valley was ablaze with exploding shells. Eighty four German batteries were dumping ammunition into the sector of the Third Division in the hope of blasting all resistance out of the path of the assault troops, which were to follow. (35) As will be seen later, most of the force of this bombardment passed over the heads of the 2d Battalion. The Germans did not waste ammunition on a mere "outpost position". Their fire was directed on the wooded slopes of the Surmelin and on the villages and roads in the rear areas. (36)

#### 6th Grenadiers.

At 1:00 A.M. the battalions of the 6th Grenadier Regiment reached the Marne without losses. By 2:40 A.M. the 1st Battalion and part of the 2d had crossed the river. As the leading troops made their landing an American 1st Lieutenant was wounded and captured. A few minutes later all battalions were across. At 3:30 A.M. the regimental headquarters started for the south bank. While crossing, the regimental staff came under heavy machine gun fire from the east. On landing, the orderlies attached to this group raided a machine gun nest on the river bank. At 4:10 A.M. the regimental commander could hear heavy firing from the direction of Mezy and Moulins. It was reported to him, by the commander of the right assault battalion, that enemy counter-attacks had put the 1st and 2d Battalions in a dangerous situation. The reserve battalion was put into action. Protection from the rolling barrage was lost - it had advanced beyond the railroad according to schedule. The Americans gained such effective fire superiority that they stood upright on the railroad embankment and picked off individual men of the assaulting units. More and more Americans gathered near the Surmelin railroad



bridge and delivered a withering enfilade fire on the left flank of the regiment. From the heights of Moulins, machine guns delivered a deadly fire on both banks of the Marne. So desperate was the situation, that the regimental commander requested artillery fire on the railroad embankment. Men started to go back across the Marne. The ferries had stopped. Throwing away their arms they plunged into the river and attempted to swim to the north bank. Many who escaped the enemy fire while swimming, were shot down when they reached the other side. When the regiment was again assembled it number 5 officers, and 107 men; twenty one officers and 793 men had been killed, wounded, or captured. (37)

(37)  
M.S.B.  
658  
663

5th Grenadiers.

As this regiment rested in its assembly position in the Bois de Jaulgonne the American counter preparation drenched it with high explosive and gas. To these troops the American artillery fire seemed more intense than their own. The first battalion, which was ~~to cross on the right, suffered heavy losses while going to the~~ river. The pioneers had quit and left the boats several hundred meters from the Marne. The Infantry carried the boats to the river. Strong detachments of the enemy and numerous machine guns were pouring a hot fire into the boats from the other bank. No crossing here. The battalion moved east along the river and crossed under machine gun fire. The other battalions crossed opposite Varrennes, and succeeded in reaching the railroad. No Americans blocked the advance here. The attack battalions crossed the Crezancy-Varrennes highway and started up the slope toward Moulins. Suddenly, short range rifle fire from the right brought the attack to an abrupt stop. Down the hill came a wave of yelling Americans in a bayonet charge. Desperate machine gun and rifle fire did not stop them. The 5th Grenadiers fell back to the railroad embankment. It was poor protection from artillery fire, but it did



protect them from the deadly rifle fire. "Nothing could be done now but hold this line, in the face of a very superior enemy."

Lieutenant Kurt Hesse, 5th Grenadiers, in his account of the operations of the regiment at the Marne, describes the situation in the following words: "I have never seen so many dead; never have I seen such a dreadful war sight. On the other bank, the Americans, in close combat, annihilated two of our companies. Lying down in the wheat, they allowed our men to approach and then annihilated them by fire at a range of 30 to 50 paces. This enemy was cold hearted; this was already recognized; but this day he gave proof of bestial brutality."

Reenforced by troops from other units this regiment was content to reorganize its shattered battalions under the shelter of the railroad embankment. No further attacks were made against the Americans. Toward night it was able to improve its position slightly, due to the withdrawal of the 2d Battalion, 38th Infantry, to the Aqueduct Line. It ceased to be a factor in the attack about the same time the 6th Grenadiers were thrown back across the

(38) Marne. (38)

M.S.B.

664

673

2d Battalion, 38th Infantry

From the foregoing study of the operations of the German regiments attacking on the front occupied by the front of the 2d Battalion, 38th Infantry, it can readily be seen that the action was fought as two separate engagements. While one attack was being repulsed by the left of the battalion, another assault was being checked on the right flank. It is believed that these two phases should be described separately.

It should be remembered that the battalion had three of its companies in front line, and one company echeloned in rear of the right flank. Every company had its allotted area of defense. The battalion commander had no support companies. It was a company and platoon commander's fight.

Companies G. and H.

When the leading elements of the 6th Grenadiers reached the south bank of the river in front of Mezy, they met with desperate resistance from the front line platoon of Company G. 38th Infantry. (39) Lieutenant David C. Calkins of Company G. was surprised by the Germans, mistaking them for his own men. He was wounded and taken prisoner. Our own artillery was shelling the river bank, heavily. So desperate was the effort of this platoon to defend its position that every man in it was killed, wounded, or taken prisoner. (40)

(39)  
M.S.B.  
766

(40)  
G.M.  
35

Patrols from the 6th Grenadiers sent east along the river bank killed or captured the leader of the left flank platoon of Company H., and the garrison of two of its rifle pits. The company commander checked further envelopment of the threatened flank by posting automatic rifles there with orders to keep up a slow rate of fire in the direction of Mezy. (41) It is believed that the Germans thought this was machine gun fire, as their battle reports refer to it as such. (42)

(41)  
P.E.

(42)  
M.S.B.  
660

About 4:00 A.M., a line of men was seen coming from the river. It was too dark and misty to identify them. When a small party from the railroad advanced to stop them, thinking it was the river platoon of Company G. retreating, a large force of Germans opened fire. This started a fire fight along the railroad, which lasted for about two hours.

In a few minutes, so many Germans were advancing through the wheat field toward the support platoons of Company G. and H., that the cooling jackets of the automatic rifles were melted in an effort to stop them. Even the Springfields got too hot to handle. But the firing was accurate and the Germans began to hide in the wheat. (43)

(43)  
P.E.

With much difficulty Lieutenant Frank L. Young, commanding the left support platoon of Company H., managed to get his men to keep up a slow rate of fire into the wheat where the Germans were



hiding. Eventually, the men discovered that this kind of firing would flush a German occasionally, and that when he moved he could be killed with an aimed shot. Unfortunately, Lieutenant Young exposed himself too freely in moving along the railroad and was killed by an Austrian '88, which was firing point blank from across the river. (44)

(44)  
P.E.

Sergeant Unkauf, commanding the left front line platoon, of Company H, found the Germans getting in his rear at about 4:30 A.M. He could not fire toward the railroad without endangering the support platoons. He charged with bayonets and grenades, reaching the railroad with 60 prisoners. (45)

(45)  
P.E.

A few minutes after Sergeant Unkauf's platoon reached the railroad, Lieutenant Paul H. Flough joined it. He was its commander, but had been detached a few days before, to command a raiding party. Not understanding the situation, he thought the platoon had retreated from the river. He gave vent to his anger, by leading the platoon back across the wheat field to their trenches along the river. No doubt, this is one of the "counterattacks", which threw the 6th Grenadiers into confusion. (46)

(46)  
P.E.

About 5:00 A.M. the Germans were seen retiring toward the river along the eastern edge of Mezy. Captain John A. Minnis, Marine Corps, leading about 15 men of Company G, charged them with the bayonet. He captured 24 prisoners and killed at least that many more. When he returned to the railroad he reported that the wheat field was full of dead and wounded Germans, and that many of the enemy were jumping into the river. This officer had been attached to Company H. for a tour of duty as an observer. During the fighting along the railroad he commanded a platoon of Company G., whose lieutenant had been killed. (47)

(47)  
P.E.

About 5:15 A.M. a large force of men, deployed in several skirmish lines, was seen coming toward the railroad from



a woods about 800 yards to the left rear of Company H. Company D. 30th Infantry belonged in these woods. It was assumed that the 30th Infantry was launching a counterattack. Much to the great surprise of the troops on the railroad, this force opened fire on them with machine guns. The right support platoons of Company H. was directed to move to the branch railroad, south of Mezy, and drive them off. Lieutenant Ralph V. Bittchofsky formed his platoon behind the embankment while the Germans were still advancing. When the leading wave was about 75 yards away he lead his platoon over the embankment and charged. The Germans retreated to the woods with this platoon firing at them as they ran. (48)

(48)  
P.E.

After 5:30 A.M. no amount of firing into the wheat field dislodged any Germans. Small groups sent out from the railroad discovered a large number hiding in an irrigation ditch. An American machine gun was mounted so as to enfilade this ditch, but its fire was withheld until all the men along the railroad had been notified. This took quite a little time, but the results justified it. When the machine gun opened fire, the Germans came out of the ditch like ants out of a sand hill. As they left the ditch the riflemen shot them down. This incident closed the fire fight east of Mezy, except for sniping at the enemy north of the river. (49)

(49)  
P.E.

While the 6th Grenadiers were being driven back across the Marne, the 3d and 4th Platoons of Company G. were brought north to the railroad. Later, this company was reinforced by 30 men from Company A. 30th Infantry and 12 men from the trench mortar platoon of the same regiment. About 10:30 A.M. this company was attacked from the left rear by a large force of Germans. Captain Jesse W. Wooldridge, commanding the company ordered his men to take a position behind a row of rock piles on the south edge of Mezy. In spite of heavy minenwerfer and

(50)  
G.H.  
63  
64

machine gun fire he was able to break up the attack, capturing several prisoners. (50) It is believed that this attack was made by the 47th Infantry. The war diary of the 10th (German) Division states that the 47th Infantry was given orders at 8:00 A.M. to wheel to the left and attack the Americans who were pressing the 6th Grenadiers, in flank. (51)

(51)  
M.S.B.  
512  
513

The attacks on the left flank ceased, except for occasional heavy bursts of artillery fire along the railroad. Most of this shelling came from German artillery west of where the river makes a sharp bend to the south. It enfiladed the railroad perfectly. Fortunately, it was not as intense as the fire of our own artillery which began shelling from the rear. At one time, our own shells were falling on the rear of the embankment, while German shells were raking the top and front. Up to this time, nothing had shaken the confidence of the men. Losses had been heavy; dead and wounded were far more numerous than effectives; yet morale was high. But when our own artillery opened fire on the survivors, nerves gave way. A German attack after that experience would have been successful. (51)

(51)  
P.E.

At 4:30 P.M. Companies G. and H. were ordered to withdraw to the Woods Line. Covered by Companies E. and F., they proceeded south along the Surmelin to Parey, where they took up a position along this stream facing west. (52)

(52)  
P.E.

#### Companies E. and F.

(53)  
P.E.

On the right flank, where the river makes a long, sharp bend toward Jaulgonne, Company E. observed the first enemy attempts at crossing. At 2:30 A.M. large boats were seen crossing opposite the right flank of this company. These were sunk by automatic rifle fire, at short range. (53) Further up the river, a crossing was successful, as the French troops in that sector had withdrawn. When the fog and mist lifted, a bridge and several ferrys could be seen from the railroad. Rifle and machine





It was impossible to make another circle around the hill as the men were exhausted from the previous exertions. It was decided to stay in the trenches until it became necessary to retreat, and then fight a way back.

At 4:00 P.M. the company was reinforced by Company E., and the two companies were ordered to retire to the Aqueduct Line. By 6:30 P.M. they succeeded in fighting their way back to Parey, where a new line was established. (54)

(54)  
G.M.  
39-44

#### The 2d Battalion Withdraws.

The 2d Battalion was withdrawn from the railroad in order to shorten the front line of the regiment, which had previously been fighting in three directions due to the retirement of the 30th Infantry and the 125th D.I. (French). Enemy pressure on the battalion at the time of withdrawal was very slight. The retirement was made in a very orderly manner, although the left flank companies had to fight their way back. It occupied a position along the west bank of the Surmelin, extending north from Parey, during the night of July 15-16. About 5:00 A.M. July 16, the battalion was relieved, and took up a position near St. Eugene in regimental reserve.

#### Losses

During the engagement the battalion lost about 475 men. It had inflicted casualties of over 800 officers and men on the 6th Grenadiers. The losses of the 5th Grenadiers amounted to 60 percent, or about 600 officers and men. It is probable that the battalion caused some losses to other German units, especially the 47th Infantry Regiment. A fair estimate of the casualties in the German regiments which attacked on its front would be about 1500.

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In reviewing the results of the German attack against the

position of the 2d Battalion, 38th Infantry, we find that the general plan was based on the same tactics, used so successfully in the two previous offensives of 1918. It differed only in its disastrous failure to take the objectives assigned.

Many reasons can be given for the failure of this drive if the battle along the entire front is considered. However, we are limited to a study of the operations of those units involved in the attack and defense of the Surmelin Valley. Immediate causes need only be considered, and these are very apparent.

There can be no question about the tremendous effect of the Allied counter artillery preparation. Infantry units were disorganized; pioneers were delayed in preparing the crossings; communications were destroyed at a time when they were most vitally needed; and the morale of the attacking troops was greatly lowered. Failure to keep secret their plans for the attack caused the Germans to launch it under these unfavorable conditions, in violation of the principle of surprise.

attack in the Surmelin Valley was the totally unexpected resistance of the Americans on the river and railroad. Through failure of the German intelligence service it was assumed that the river was held only by small observation groups. As a result, the strong force intrenched there was undisturbed by the German artillery preparation, and succeeded in delaying the crossing. The German plan of attack was still further upset when the strong resistance at the railroad stopped the assault battalions, before they gained the protection of their rolling barrage. Through active patrolling and raids prior to the attack the Germans could have determined the strength of the defensive lines on the river and railroad, and could have weakened the defense of the elements holding these lines by artillery fire. By violating the principle of security the Germans suffered disastrous casualties and failed to take their



objectives.

Although German regiments to the right of the 6th Grenadiers and to the left of the 5th Grenadiers were able to penetrate the defense of the units on the flanks of the 2d Battalion, no successful effort was made in the envelopment of this unit. Compliance with the principle of movement would have enabled the reserve regiments of the 10th and 36th Divisions to have relieved the pressure on the regiments mentioned.

In plan, the Germans complied with the principles of the objective, the offensive, and mass. Through their failure to comply with the principles of surprise, security, and movement, the attack failed to get started and those plans were never realized.

The defense of the front assigned to the 2d Battalion succeeded in spite of several violations of sound tactical principles. Individual initiative, excellent marksmanship and indomitable courage of the American plus the more serious mistakes of the Germans saved the day for the defense.

The battalion had no support units; all companies were on the line of resistance. The battalion commander had nothing with which to meet the envelopment of his flanks; he functioned merely as an observer; the only thing he could do to influence the course of the action, was to order a withdrawal. The principle of economy of force was violated by this disposition of the companies of the 2d Battalion.

Due to the rigid provisions of that portion of the division plan of defense which prescribed the employment of machine guns too few guns, were employed along the railroad. When the regimental commander decided to hold the railroad in force, sufficient machine guns should have been emplaced in the vicinity of this line to furnish flanking fire along the entire front. Only four machine guns were actually employed on this mission,



although the battalion had a front of over 1800 meters.

In posting a strong line of observation along the river, the Americans complied with the principle of security. As has already been stated, this resulted in giving the defenders an early warning of the German attempts at crossing and served to seriously delay the assault. This principle was also observed when the flanks of the battalion were reenforced.

Smaller units had the "counter attack" complex. In their eagerness to comply with the principle of movement, the Americans made several bayonet charges when bullets would have served the purpose.

The principle of simplicity was observed in the plan of defense of the 2d Battalion. Seventy-five percent of the units of this battalion were placed in definite locations, intrenched there, and told to hold those positions. Nothing could be more simple. It has been pointed out that all companies of the battalion had no support units. The regimental commander gambled on the chance of these companies escaping the artillery preparation; he refused to gamble on the chance of being able to maneuver support companies in darkness or fog. By violating the principle of economy of force, and by observing the principle of simplicity he had the companies of the 2d Battalion where they were needed, at the time when they ~~when they~~ were needed.

Cooperation between units of the 2d Battalion amounted to more than the observance of a correct principle of war. Company F. made bayonet charges to its front and resisted machine gun fire from the rear in order to protect the companies along the railroad from envelopment. Company G. resisted a strong attack from its left rear for a similar reason. Company H. made a counterattack to the left rear against a superior force of the enemy, in order to protect the rear of Company G. These incidents

not only illustrate the principle of cooperation, but demonstrate the loyalty and 'esprit de corps' of the troops involved.

### LESSONS

The failure of the Germans to take their objectives, although their infantry assault was preceded by a powerful artillery preparation and a dense rolling barrage, proves that a courageous defender cannot be destroyed by artillery alone. It proves that the assaulting infantry must conquer the ground; that it must carry forward its own effective fire power; and that it must be able to wipe out enemy resistance with its own weapons.

Since the demoralizing effect of friendly artillery fire falling on its own infantry was an unfortunate feature of this operation, it should be made impossible for any person, other than the commanding officer charged with the defense of an area, to call for a barrage that will fall in that area.

*Some* This engagement shows that the envelopment of the flanks of a unit is not always an excuse for its retirement. An organization determined to hold its ground can do so in spite of its flanks being enveloped, unless the enemy has the real, genuine fire power, with which to shoot the defender out of his position. Too many enveloping movements are successful on bluff alone.

The greatest lesson to be learned from this battle is the value of individual marksmanship. The men of this battalion were not veterans; they averaged less than a year of service; their training had been hasty and incomplete. However, they had been thoroughly grounded in discipline and marksmanship. They endured four hours of heavy bombardment, confident in their ability to shoot down the enemy when he appeared. Attacked from the front, from the flanks, and from the rear, they maintained their position, outnumbered three to one, by the deadly accuracy of their rifle fire. The casualties inflicted on the 5th and 6th Grenadier

regiments by the men of this battalion should prove beyond all question of doubt that the rifle is still the major weapon of the infantry.



2ND BATTALION  
38TH U.S. INFANTRY  
MARNE  
1918

R.F. =  $\frac{1}{13500}$

0 100 200 300 400 500  
METERS

10TH DIVISION

36TH DIVISION

47TH INFANTRY

6TH GRENADIERS

5TH GRENADIERS

CHARTEVES



MARNE  
RIVER

MEZY



G-1

H-4

H-1

E-2

E-2

E-1

G-2

H-2

F-1

F-2

Surremain  
Brook

MOULINS

E-4

F-3

F-4

MOULINS  
RUINE

30TH INFANTRY

Co. K

30TH INF

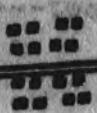
Co. D

30TH INF

38TH INFANTRY

125TH D.I.  
FRENCH

CREZANZY



PARDY





2ND BATTALION  
38TH U.S. INFANTRY

MARNE  
1918

R.F. =  $\frac{1}{40000}$

0 500 1000 1500 2000  
METERS

10TH DIVISION

36TH DIVISION

10TH LDW. DIVISION

238TH

MONT ST PERE

47TH

6TH

CHARTEVES

VARRENNES

MEZY

MOULINS

FOSBOY

CREZANCY

PAROY

BRASLES

GLAND

LAUNAY

MARNE

CHIERRY

BLESMES

LINE

125 D.I. FRENCH

ACQUEDUCT

LINE

30TH INFANTRY

38TH INFANTRY

WOODS

7TH INFANTRY

LINE

39TH D.I.  
FRENCH

4TH INFANTRY

ARMY

3RD U.S. DIVISION

