

3-46
THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
FOURTH SECTION
COMMITTEE "H"
FORT BENNING, GEORGIA

ADVANCED COURSE
1931-1932

OPERATIONS OF COMPANY E 58th INFANTRY (4th DIVISION),
IN THE MEUSE-ARGONNE OFFENSIVE,
SEPTEMBER 26 - OCTOBER 9, 1918.

(Personal experience of a Company Commander)

Captain John E. Hull, Infantry

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Leaves a hazy situation still in the dark.

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A resume of this operation written
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1920, and considered accurate as to
events and dates.

MARGINAL ABBREVIATIONS USED

Morrow

↙ "The Fifty-eighth Infantry in the World War."

Bach

↙ "The Fourth Division; Its Services and
Achievements in the World War."

Personal Notes

A resume of this operation written by the
author in 1920.

Huidekoper

↙ "History of the 33d Division."

INTRODUCTION

In writing a narrative of the operations of a rifle company in a battle the magnitude of the Meuse-Argonne, it is necessary at times to refer to the operations of the larger units to which the company belonged. In describing a cog, it is necessary to speak of the wheel.

The 58th Infantry (4th Division) had participated in the Marne-Aisne and St. Mihiel offensives, and at the opening of the Meuse-Argonne operations, was classed as a veteran organization in the A.E.F. It had been moved from the St. Mihiel area to the vicinity of Vigneville, as a part of the 4th Division, III Army Corps, in preparation for the Meuse-Argonne operations. Moving at night, by easy marching stages, the regiment arrived at this locality shortly after midnight on the night of September 25-26, 1918. (1) The packs of the men had been dropped at the last nightly halt in the Bois-de-Sivry. (2)

(1) Morrow, ✓
p 90

(2) Morrow, ✓
p 92

OPERATIONS, SEPTEMBER 26 - OCTOBER 3

In compliance with instructions from the Commanding Officer 2d Battalion, 58th Infantry, Company E was deployed on the southern slope of the hill just north of Vigneville. The company was a part of the division reserve, and remained in that position awaiting orders. (3)

(3) Bach, ✓
p 158

About 9:00 AM, September 26th, the company was moved forward, with the remainder of the regiment,

(4) Morrow, ✓
p 95;
Bach, ✓
p 167

in approach march formation, to Hill 304, north of Esnes. (4) In making this move, behind the assaulting troops of the 39th Infantry, the first view of the shell-torn battlefield was obtained. For four years the area between Esnes and Malancourt had been "no man's land." It is impossible to picture the devastation that had been wrought. No vestige of life remained. The ground was completely covered with shell holes. Skeletons, bleached white, that were passed on the way, would indicate by the remnant of a boot, in one case, that a German soldier had lost his life there, while in another, a rusty helmet by the bones, would show that a Frenchman had been killed.

Between Esnes and Malancourt, in normal times, flowed a small stream called the Ruisseau de Forges. Now, due to the constant shelling, this stream was a swamp. Across this stream between Esnes, Haucourt, and Malancourt, ran a road which was to be depended upon by the 4th Division for food, ammunition, and evacuation. (5) This road was so completely destroyed that engineers were digging into the ground at scattered points trying to locate the road bed. As we passed, one of the searchers called out that he had found it. On parts of it, already located, other engineers were placing sandbags in an effort to build it up. Signs of the impending tie-up in traffic were already evident. The road was completed shortly after noon on the 26th and traffic of all kinds started forward. (6) In no time it was in difficulties.

(6) Morrow, ✓
p 95;
Bach, ✓
p 169

(7) Morrow,
p 97

With the remainder of the 2d Battalion, E Company was placed on road duty to assist the engineers in getting traffic forward, and to the rear. (7) I took my company to the road between Haucourt and Malancourt. Only a sign identified these towns, so badly were they shot up. I revisited this scene in 1927 and the signs of the destruction were still evident. A few new buildings mark the village of Malancourt, while Haucourt no longer exists. On arriving at this scene, I issued orders to my men that in all cases when a vehicle stalled, excepting a loaded ambulance, and could not be moved under its own power, assisted by the detail of men at that point, it was to be upset or removed from the road. This order was carried out to the best of their ability, but in spite of super-human efforts to keep things moving, vehicles of all kinds moved at a very slow pace. Ambulances from the front, loaded with wounded, in some cases did not move fifty yards in twenty-four hours.

The company remained on this duty for two days and on the afternoon of September 28th was detached from the regiment and ordered on duty as a receiving depot for prisoners of war. I reported to an officer from III Corps Headquarters that afternoon in Montzeville, where I found several hundred prisoners of war with no one to guard them. I was informed that I would be responsible for them until they were delivered to the corps cages in Dombasle.

This assignment called for a duty in which I had had no experience. I organized my company into

three groups for the work. One platoon, under an officer, was sent forward to Cuisy, with instructions to place a squad in Septsarges, to escort captured prisoners to Montzeville. One platoon, under a sergeant, was designated to take the prisoners from Montzeville to the corps cages in Dombasle. The remainder of the company I planned to use as a guard for the prisoners in Montzeville, as they came in, until a large enough group collected to warrant being sent on to Dombasle. My first problem was to take care of the three or four hundred already collected in Montzeville. It was late in the afternoon when we arrived and I didn't want to send them off for Dombasle and have them on the road at night. I therefore placed a standing guard, with bayonets fixed, around the prisoners, with sentinels about five yards apart. I gave orders, that if any of the Germans tried to escape, they were to be summarily dealt with, with the bayonets. It was all unnecessary, as the prisoners had no idea of trying to escape and could have caused no damage had they done so. Thru my fear of something happening, I don't know what, I kept most of my company on its feet all night long, with the noncommissioned officers constantly inspecting this human picket fence. I divided the night with my remaining lieutenant, while the prisoners enjoyed the first night's sleep they had had for days.

I did learn one lesson during this period which benefited me; tho having learned it, I didn't make use of it at the time. An intelligence officer,

assisted by a French interpreter, questioned some of the prisoners, as they were brought in, with varying degrees of success. A German lieutenant from the 5th Bavarian Division was brought in, and upon his arrival, I conducted him to the intelligence officer. He was questioned thoroughly and browbeaten considerably by the French officer, in an effort to obtain some information. Thru it all, he sat mute and refused to say anything. In disgust the French officer told me to take him away. Walking back with him to the prisoner area, we passed a roiling kitchen steaming with hot food. I asked him in rather poor German if he was hungry and he replied in the affirmative. We stopped at the kitchen and obtained a cup of coffee and some good stew from the cook. Sitting down on the ground, we ate it together, and the German thanked me in excellent English, telling me how much he enjoyed it. One word led to another, and we had a very friendly chat, in which he told me lots more than the intelligence officer had asked him. Having gotten from him the information that the intelligence officer was seeking, I carefully kept it to myself, not realizing that the information I had, might have been invaluable to the corps commander.

On October 2d, my company was relieved from this duty and I reported to my battalion commander, with the company, just northeast of Septsarges. (8) This position we held until the night of October 3-4.

(8) Morrow, ✓
p 103

OPERATIONS OCTOBER 4-7

(Attack on Bois-de-Fays)

About 10:30 PM, October 3d, I was called to Headquarters 2d Battalion, 58th Infantry, in Septsarges, and received, in oral form, orders for an attack to take place at 5:30 AM, October 4th.

These orders were in substance as follows:

The line held by the enemy runs from Brioules on the Meuse River along the southern edge of the Bois de Fays and the Bois de Ogons. Our troops hold the line Bois de Brioules - Nantillois. The attack will be all along the line held by our army. We will be supported in the advance by machine gun fire from the Bois de Brioules and artillery fire from all along our rear.

This regiment attacks at H hour, moving on the Bois de Fays. The 3d Battalion, which will lead the attack, will advance along a thousand meter front in the direction indicated by the blue line on your map. The 3d Battalion will pass thru the western part of the Bois de Fays, the Bois de Malaumont, and on reaching the Fond de Cunel, or Cunel Road, will halt, reorganize, and advance thru the western edge of the Bois de Foret, halting at its objective, the northern slope of Cote 299, with its front extending from that hill, along the northern edge of the Bois de Foret, to the eastern edge of that woods. The 1st Battalion will follow in support of the 3d Battalion, at 1000 meters, its line of advance being the same as the left flank of the attacking battalion. Upon reaching

the Bois de Foret, the 1st Battalion will execute a column right, advance thru the woods, and take up a position on the eastern edge of the Bois de Foret.

This battalion will follow the 3d Battalion, in support, at 1000 meters, guiding on the right element of that battalion.

H Company will lead, followed at 100 meters by E Company, ~~and~~ ^{with} G and F Companies following at the same interval, in the order named.

Upon reaching the Bois de Fays, H Company will move to the right, taking up a position in the eastern edge of the woods.

E Company will move forward into the Bois de Fays until it reaches the Cunel Road, when it will turn to the right and advance to the eastern edge of the woods and take up position with one platoon to the north of the Cunel Road and one platoon to the south of it. Its front will be toward the town of Brioules.

G Company will follow E Company and take up a position in support of it, at about 500 meters, extending between the Cunel Road and the Fond de Ville Aux Bois.

F Company will follow G Company and take up position on its right, in support of H Company.

Each company will start the attack in the formation column of platoons in line of combat groups. Companies will maintain liaison with adjoining units at all times.

A 1st aid station will be located in the vicinity of Battalion Headquarters in the Bois de Fays.

Battalion C. P. will be at the head of G Company until the battalion has reached the Bois de Fays. Thereafter, it will be located on the trail running northwest-southeast thru the Bois de Fays in the vicinity of (11.3-83.9). (9)

(9) Personal
Notes

The battalion commander then directed each of us to move our companies to the jump-off position, prior to the attack. The position designated for Company E was on a hill just southwest of the Bois de Briuelles, about one kilometer east of Nantillois. The other companies of the battalion were to take positions in the Bois de Briuelles in that vicinity.

At this time I had in my possession a 1/20000 map of this area, on which had been marked the route and final objective of each unit of the regiment. This was invaluable to me as it was pitch dark, and no opportunity for reconnaissance existed. I looked over the map and returned to my company which was dug in in fox holes about three hundred yards northeast of Septsarges.

At this time two of my platoons were commanded by lieutenants, and the other two by sergeants. The total strength of the company was three officers and two hundred and twenty-one men. (10) In the company were three full blooded Germans. In the action that was to follow, one was to go thru unscathed, one was to die a painful death from high explosive shell wounds, while the third was to disappear, believed by his comrades to have gone over to the Germans.

(10) Personal
Notes

Assembling my platoon leaders and the First Sergeant, I gave them the instructions I had received, and designated the order of platoons. The 1st Platoon was to lead the company in the advance to the jump-off position and also in the attack. I instructed them also that we would move forward to the jump-off position as soon as they had their platoons ready to move.

We moved forward shortly in column of platoons, the 1st Platoon in the lead, in rear of Company Headquarters. Each platoon marched in column of twos without interval. About midnight, I halted the company near the crest of the hill where I had been told to go. Upon halting, I dispatched a runner to Battalion Headquarters with a message that we were in position. The men of the company made themselves as comfortable as possible under the conditions, and waited for zero hour.

After remaining in this position for about an hour, I began to wonder whether or not I had brought the company to the right place. I began to get anxious about the runner I had sent and, as he had not returned, I sent another with the same message, and additional instructions to return without delay. At the end of another hour or so, neither runner had returned, nor did they rejoin the company until daylight. By this time, I was becoming quite worried, and decided to send a noncommissioned officer. He disappeared for the night, as did the others.

About this time a runner came along asking for the company commander of E Company. He was directed to me and I asked him what he wanted. He told me that the battalion commander directed that we fall back to the road and reorganize. I asked him what road, and he answered, "the one about a quarter of a mile to the rear." I couldn't understand the reason for this and asked him to repeat again his message, and in asking him, I referred to my battalion commander, Major Cooke, by name. He replied that it wasn't Major Cooke ^{who} ~~that~~ had given him the order, but mentioned another major unknown to me. It suddenly dawned on me that he was from another regiment, and I asked him what organization he belonged to. He gave the number of an infantry regiment in the 80th Division, which organization was operating on the left of my regiment.

This episode did one thing, however; it convinced me that I was woefully lost. In a few hours' time, without moving at all, my mental condition had changed from one of confidence in myself, and a belief that I was where I was supposed to be, to a condition of uncertainty and mental agony. Endeavoring to hide my own doubts, I sent out a patrol under a noncommissioned officer, and it disappeared as did the runners.

I was later told by the battalion commander that not one of my messengers had reached him and that he had endeavored to locate me with runners, with the same result.

The question before me now ^{was} what what to do. I didn't know where I was, nor where to go to find other units of the regiment. I had a compass with me and did know the north and south directions. If I moved forward to the attack and found that I was out of my zone of action, my company might be cut off entirely from the rest of the battalion. If I sat still and let the attack go on without me, I certainly would not be carrying out my orders. As these thoughts passed thru my mind, zero hour approached.

Fortunately, the question was decided by another influence. At 5:25 AM, just before daybreak, a battery of artillery let loose from a few yards in our rear, with all guns, as a part of the short preparation for the attack. (11) My company sprang up as one man, and we moved forward. To order an attack to start upon the opening of a barrage, when the field artillery is in position close behind the infantry, is an excellent way to initiate it. The response by the men to the concussion of the guns near them is a spontaneous one. They unconsciously move away from it.

In a very few minutes day began to break. A heavy fog lay all about, thru which one could see only about twenty-five to fifty yards. (12) Feeling that in order to be safe as to my direction forward, I should move to the right, I ordered the platoons, now in line of squad columns or combat groups, to march at a right oblique. After proceeding about a

(11) Morrow, ✓
p 107;
Bach, ✓
p 183

(12) Morrow, ✓
p 107;
Bach, ✓
p 183

hundred and fifty yards, we could see the outline of a woods on our right, with men moving forward along its edge. I moved forward and inquired of one of the men what company he was in and he replied, H Company, 58th Infantry. To say that I was relieved, is putting it mildly. Immediately after this, I met my battalion commander, who told me he was certainly glad to see us, and walking along with me he told me that he had thought we were lost, and had planned to give my mission to G Company in case we didn't show up.

My company changed direction to the left oblique, and we followed H Company in our proper position.

The movement forward went along very smoothly for several hundred yards. Some firing could be heard to the front and left flank, but with the exception of an occasional artillery shell, we encountered no difficulties whatever. As we arrived at a point about one thousand yards south of the Bois de Fays, the fog lifted and visibility became excellent. Company H, in my front, was immediately stopped by machine gun fire from its left front. Soon after, I got a message from the company commander of that company, that he could not advance until the machine guns were put out of action, and asking me to assist him in accomplishing this. At this time, I was at the head of my company, about two hundred yards northwest of M. de L'Etanche farm. Moving up the rise to my immediate front, I could see that H Company was tied down by

(13) Personal
Notes

machine gun fire. Just then a machine gun opened up, laying down a band of fire a few yards in front of me. It was coming from the Bois de Ogons but just where, I was unable to see. I called to the commander of my leading platoon to come up to where I was, and told him about the fire against H Company, and that directly in our front, and directed him to send out a patrol of one automatic rifleman, a carrier, and two riflemen, to locate the machine gun firing across our path and put it out of action. (13) I could see that ~~by~~ moving my company about fifty yards to the right, we could pass around the nose of a ridge and probably escape these machine guns; I decided to do this and sent a message to Captain Marshall of H Company, that I had sent the patrol out, and that I was moving forward around H Company's right.

In one way, this maneuver was alright, in that it permitted me to advance directly towards the Bois de Fays. In another sense, however, it proved bad. As I arrived even with H Company, the machine gun fire which had been holding it up ceased, and it moved forward towards the woods. Realizing that if both companies entered the woods at the same time, H Company would have to pass thru my company to get to its objective in the eastern edge of the woods, I halted E Company until H Company had reached the woods. This exposed the company to view and possible fire from Briulles. The enemy took advantage of this and, as the last man of H Company disappeared into the woods,

machine gun fire began to sweep the trail running along the southern edge of the Bois de Fays, across which we had to pass. This fire seemed to be coming from the direction of Brioules and it was impossible to spot the guns. Faced with this situation, we moved forward to within fifty yards of the woods and crossed this fire-swept area in platoon rushes. Nearly everybody seemed to get thru and we halted for a minute just inside the woods to get the platoons straightened out. Here the six stretcher bearers detailed from the company took up, for the first time, their onerous duties.

Up to this time we had been moving in a column of platoons, each platoon in line of squad columns. This permitted good control, and presented a poor target. As we had encountered no rifle fire, it had been a logical formation. We had now, however, passed from open country into a very thick woods. The woods had been subjected to high explosive shell fire from our own artillery, prior to the attack, and was now receiving high explosive, shrapnel, and gas from the Germans. The density of the woods permitted observation^{of} only a few feet. Moving forward in the same formation we had used, would have meant confusion, loss of control, and mobility. Placing the company in columns of twos or files made it more vulnerable and open to surprise. I decided on the latter plan, however, and we started thru the woods by compass direction in single file. After a few minutes we came to a trail leading a little to the west of north.

The going was so difficult thru the woods, that I decided to try the trail. Had the enemy planted a machine gun at the other end of this trail, the operations of this company would have ended there and then. But fortunately he didn't, and the company moved rapidly thru the woods along the trail.

Machine gun and rifle fire could be heard to our front, and left flank, and at some distance on the right. We pushed forward at a good pace without encountering an enemy soldier and arrived at the northeastern edge of the Bois de Fays about 11:00 AM. (14) Following the edge of the woods under cover, we arrived very shortly at an open space, rectangular in shape, along the Fond de Ville Aux Bois. I halted the company and went to the edge of the woods, from which an excellent view to the north and east could be obtained. We had reached and passed the right or southernmost part of our objective. Assembling my platoon leaders, I directed the commander of the 1st Platoon to take up a deployed formation and move his platoon along the eastern edge of the woods in our left front, the Bois de Malaumont, to the Cunel Road and, moving east along that road, take up a position along the eastern edge of the woods, the Bois de Peut de Faux. The 2d Platoon was to take up a defensive position along the eastern edge of the Bois de Malaumont and northeastern edge of the Bois de Fays, as outlined in the original plan. I was to move the remainder of the company into the Bois de Malaumont and take up a supporting position south of the Cunel Road. Each platoon was told to get in touch with

(14) Bach, ✓
p 184

the units on its flanks. The frontage assigned to the front line platoons was far out of proportion to what they should handle, but it had been given me in the battalion order and I felt I should try to cover it. This order, issued by me to my platoon leaders, had been issued after the most meager reconnaissance on my part.

The 1st Platoon was forming up preparatory to moving out, when the commander of the 1st Battalion came up to me and, seeing what I was planning to do, advised strongly against my moving any farther forward. He informed me that the 3d Battalion had been stopped a few hundred yards to the north of our position. Going with him, we went to the commanding officer of the 3d Battalion, whose C. P. was a few yards farther west on the Fond de Ville Aux Bois. There I learned that the 3d Battalion had been stopped along the Cunel Road and was unable to proceed any farther. (15) The division on our left had not advanced as far as we had, and the commander of the 3d Battalion was considering withdrawing his front line to the Fond de Ville Aux Bois. He told me it would be useless and suicidal for me to move my company any farther forward.

Acting upon their advice, I revoked my previous order and issued a new one, placing the 1st Platoon in line along the edge of the woods, with its right resting in the northeastern edge of the Bois de Fays. (16) The 2d Platoon was placed on the left of the 1st, and both platoons were ordered to dig in. At this time, about 12:00 noon, Captain Marshall,

(15) Bach, ✓
p 184

(16) Morrow, ✓
p 110

commanding H Company, came up and told me he could not possibly hold his long frontage in the eastern edge of the Bois de Fays, that he had his entire company deployed in line with no support whatever. He asked me for assistance in organizing his line of defense and I agreed to help him. Two plans were open to do this. I could either extend my line to the right and connect up with his left, or I could give him a part of my company. He showed me on the map where his line extended. Between his left and my right was a gap of about five hundred yards. The defense of the eastern edge of the woods and that of the northern edge were two separate problems and I decided to give him one entire platoon to act under his command. The 3d Platoon was then ordered to report to Captain Marshall and remain under his orders until the attack proceeded, or until the platoon leader heard from me. This platoon remained with H Company thruout the remainder of this action.

The remaining platoon, the 4th, was then placed in support in the woods about one hundred yards in rear of the 2d Platoon. A message was dispatched to the battalion commander informing him of my actions and dispositions. In a short time the battalion commander came forward to my position, approved of my dispositions and told me to hold my present position at all costs. He informed me that the attack would not proceed for the present and that it was essential that the men dig in for the defense of the position.

Meanwhile, the enemy was shelling the woods severely but most of the shells were going over our heads and bursting further south in the woods.

On inspecting the platoons, I directed that a cossack post be pushed out at dark from each front line platoon to points I pointed out about one hundred yards in advance of this front. (17)

(17) Personal
Notes

During the afternoon of October 4th, C Company was moved into position on the left of E Company, and M Company was moved in along the eastern edge of the Bois de Fays in the interval between E and H Companies. At dark the advanced elements of the 3d Battalion were withdrawn to the Fond de Ville Aux Bois, leaving E Company holding the tip of the salient in the German lines. (18)

(18) Morrow,
p 110

Just at dusk a messenger came to me from the 1st Platoon with information that the enemy were advancing on our position. I ran over to the 1st Platoon and the platoon leader pointed out what appeared to be figures moving forward out of the southeastern edge of the Bois de Peut de Faux. (19) I cautioned the men not to fire until we could make sure who they were. In a few minutes what appeared to be a company of German machine gunners cleared the woods and advanced toward us in a column of twos. The suspense was too great for some of the men and first one and then all of them opened fire on the enemy column. The result was remarkable. The German company broke and started back towards the woods. ~~Altho some of them undoubtedly~~ escaped, it looked like they had been annihilated.

(19) Bach,
p 185

It was with great difficulty that the platoon leaders and I restrained the men from pursuing them, as they all wanted to **charge** after the retreating Germans.

Two things stand out clearly in my memory about this counterattack. One was the failure of a section of machine guns, located in our front lines, to open fire. When I called him to task about it, the officer in charge of them stated that he was afraid of disclosing his position. As a matter of fact they were not needed, but this officer lost the opportunity of a lifetime to fire on the ideal machine gun target. Had he opened fire, I don't believe a single German could have escaped.

The other incident pertained to an automatic rifleman. We were equipped with the French Chauchat automatic rifle. Directly in front of me, as the Germans advanced, was a soldier armed with a Chauchat on the ground in position to fire. Lying beside him on the ground was a German Mauser he had picked up somewhere during the advance. When I cautioned the men not to open fire for the present, he spent his time improving his firing position. I think it was his squirming around that **attracted** my attention. When the firing started, he slowly squeezed the trigger, and the gun failed to fire. He cocked it and tried again to fire it, and a second time it failed to function. **Jumping** up he took it by the muzzle and ~~wrapped it around a tree.~~ Grabbing up the Mauser, he got in a few **shots** before the target disappeared.

The next two days were spent in holding this position. No changes in E Company's dispositions were made. A regular system of communication between Company Headquarters, which was located in a dugout in the 2d Platoons front line, and Battalion Headquarters was operated. Each hour during daylight and every two hours at night, a runner was sent to Battalion Headquarters. Usually he carried a message that there was nothing to report. Other messengers were dispatched, as well, as emergencies arose.

The enemy attempted at several times to regain a foothold in the Bois de Fays. Most of these attempts were made against the troops farther west along the Fond de Ville Aux Bois. One other counter-attack was made against the eastern edge of the woods but it broke up as soon as fire was opened on it. (20) Enemy artillery shelled the Bois de Fays heavily for the remainder of the time we were in it, inflicting a great number of casualties on our troops. About 9:30 AM, October 6th, an enemy circus bombed the woods. (21) They passed directly over E Company, flying just above the tree tops.

About noon on the 5th I received orders from my battalion commander to be ready to resume the attack, upon word from him. The attack against the Bois de Foret by our regiment was to be resumed as soon as the 80th Division on the left came up even with our front line in the attack they were to make.

(22) This order was revoked late that afternoon and I was notified that my company would probably be relieved on the 6th.

(20) Morrow, ✓
p 115

(21) Morrow, ✓
p 115

(22) Morrow, ✓
p 113

This was welcome news as we were getting pretty well fed up on the Bois de Fays. Not only had the Germans made it as uncomfortable as possible for us with counterattacks, shelling, and bombing the woods, but we felt the shortage of food and water. The food problem had not become serious as yet, altho we had had none since October 3d except that which we carried with us. The lack of water, however, was keenly felt. The only source of water in that vicinity was a German pipe line about one hundred yards in front of our position. We tried to reach it at night but the enemy had machine guns trained on it, and after losing two men this way, I ordered the men not to try it again. We could see the water flowing from this pipe during the day and that rather aggravated our thirst. After the first day or so, I obtained water for the men by sending a detail to the rear at night with the empty canteens.

On the night of October 6-7, E Company was relieved, with the remainder of the regiment, by the 3d Battalion and Machine Gun Company, 132d Infantry.

(23) Morrow, p 116;
Huidekoper, p 97

Not volume

(23) Considerable noise was made by the relieving troops as they came in and by midnight, when I started to the rear with my company, the Germans had begun to shell the trails leading out of the woods to the south. As we moved south thru the Bois de Fays, I could hear the shelling at regular intervals. From the sound I could tell that we had to pass one point that he was shelling heavily. Just before we arrived

at this place, he opened up on it with a regular barrage of shells. We halted and dropped to the ground. The shelling stopped as suddenly as it began. I yelled back to my men that we would sit tight until the enemy had shelled it once more and as soon as the shelling stopped we would go past that point on the dead run. Almost immediately the shells came down again and after a minute or two, stopped. I jumped up with a yell and we went past that place as fast as our legs would carry us. All the men got by, but none too soon, for the shelling began again as regular as clockwork.

Just at daybreak, we reached our old position near Septsarges. Here I encountered something that was probably unique in the American army. While the company had been in the Bois de Fays, a direct hit with a high explosive shell had destroyed the company kitchen, killing two of the cooks. The Mess Sergeant had found out that a German rolling kitchen had been abandoned by the enemy, as he fell back, had commandeered it, and here it was steaming with stew.

As soon as the men had been fed a check up was made showing the casualties for the action in the Bois de Fays to be: one officer wounded, six enlisted men killed, and twenty-nine wounded. (24)

(24) Personal
Notes

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In the operations covered in this narrative, three incidents stand out: the movement into the jump-off position on the night of October 3-4; the

advance into the Bois de Fays; and the defense of the northeastern edge of the woods.

The first situation represents a mental condition which, to some degree, will occur very frequently in battle, especially in night movements. I think I have shown how easy it is for one to become, what I might term, mentally lost, as I was, on the night of October 3-4, when actually, I was at the point I had been told to go to. Fortunately in this case, I do not think the feeling of being lost permeated to the officers or men under my command. Had it done so, a bad situation might have developed.

In the second situation, my decision to move to the right of H Company, when that company was held up by machine gun fire just south of the Bois de Fays, is open to criticism. There is no way of knowing whether or not this movement caused the machine gun fire, from the direction of Brioules, to fall across our path. That we did enter the woods without serious mishap must discount any criticism of that maneuver. The formation taken up in the woods, as well as the fact that I chose a trail to follow rather than struggle thru the thick underbrush, in another situation might have been fatal. In this situation, however, I believe it was sound. We arrived at our objective comparatively fresh and without loss of time, which were the governing factors.

The decision to take up a position in the northeastern edge of the Bois de Fays rather than push

on to the Cunel Road I think was erroneous, even tho backed by the advice of two officers more familiar with the situation than I was at the time. Another company, thrown into the Bois de Malaumont at that time, might have changed the balance and permitted the 3d Battalion to at least retain its hold on the Cunel Road instead of withdrawing to the Fond de Ville Aux Bois at dark on October 4th as it did. The men would have gone forward had I given the word, splendid chaps that they were. They were formed up ready to move and altho the casualties probably would have been heavy, I feel that our objective would have been reached.

I cannot end this criticism, however, without saying that this entire regiment with certain troops from the other regiment of the 8th Brigade, the 59th Infantry, was in a pear-shaped salient extending a kilometer and a half into the German lines, surrounded on three sides by the enemy.

LESSONS

From my personal experience thru participation in this operation, and from a study of the operations of other organizations, engaged in the same offensive, certain lessons have been brought home to me. I would like to pass them on for what they are worth to others.

1. The enlisted man in our army will always be better trained proportionally than an officer trained after an emergency begins. I mean by that,

7. Relieving troops should be as quiet as possible in taking over a front line position.

8. Artillery fire, delivered at regular intervals on routes of approach, will be ineffective.

that he will be better trained to follow, than the short time officer is to lead. Especially is this true of men who have had their baptism of fire. I believe that undertrained troops will follow an able leader farther and accomplish more than trained troops under a poor officer.

2. Training of an officer should cover thoroughly and include some practical experience in night operations.

3. The mission or objective given one as his part to play must not be forgotten and, if it is possible to do so, it should be carried out as given.

4. The distribution of maps to subordinate commanders prior to this operation was ample. It is invaluable to a subordinate to have a map. All the information that can be given him will pay big dividends in the carrying out of your orders to him.

5. A prisoner of war should be treated with consideration and respect. If you desire information from him, this must be done. If you can feed him a good meal before you question him, you will obtain much more information.

6. A weapon, used by the infantry soldier, must be rugged and of simple structure, in order to stand up under campaign conditions. It should not have working parts exposed to the atmosphere. The Chauchat rifle, used by a number of the American divisions in the World War, was not a dependable weapon.

QUESTIONS ON THE OPERATIONS

1. In what battle did the capture of the Bois de Fays occur?

Answer: Second phase of the Meuse-Argonne battle.

2. What division captured the Bois de Fays?

Answer: The 4th Division.

3. How would you handle the situation if your company were detailed to keep traffic moving on a shell-torn road, necessary to the supply of the combat organizations?

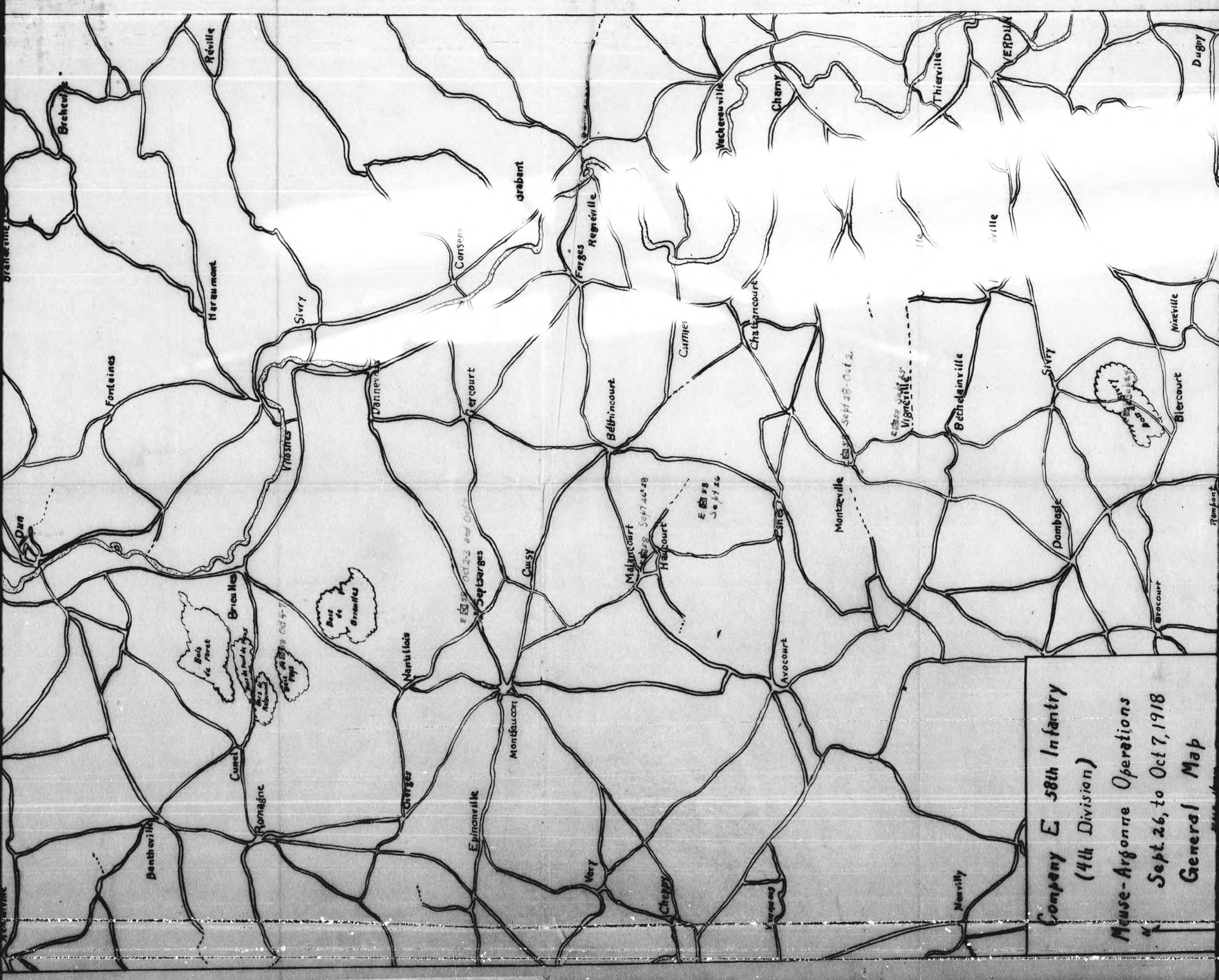
Answer: Repair the road if time permits. If not, assist vehicles by bad places with man power, and where that does not avail, remove all stalled vehicles from the right of way.

4. What tended to make the Bois de Fays a difficult position to hold?

Answer: It was a salient in the German lines.

5. How many counterattacks were launched by the Germans against the northeastern and eastern edges of the Bois de Fays?

Answer: Two.

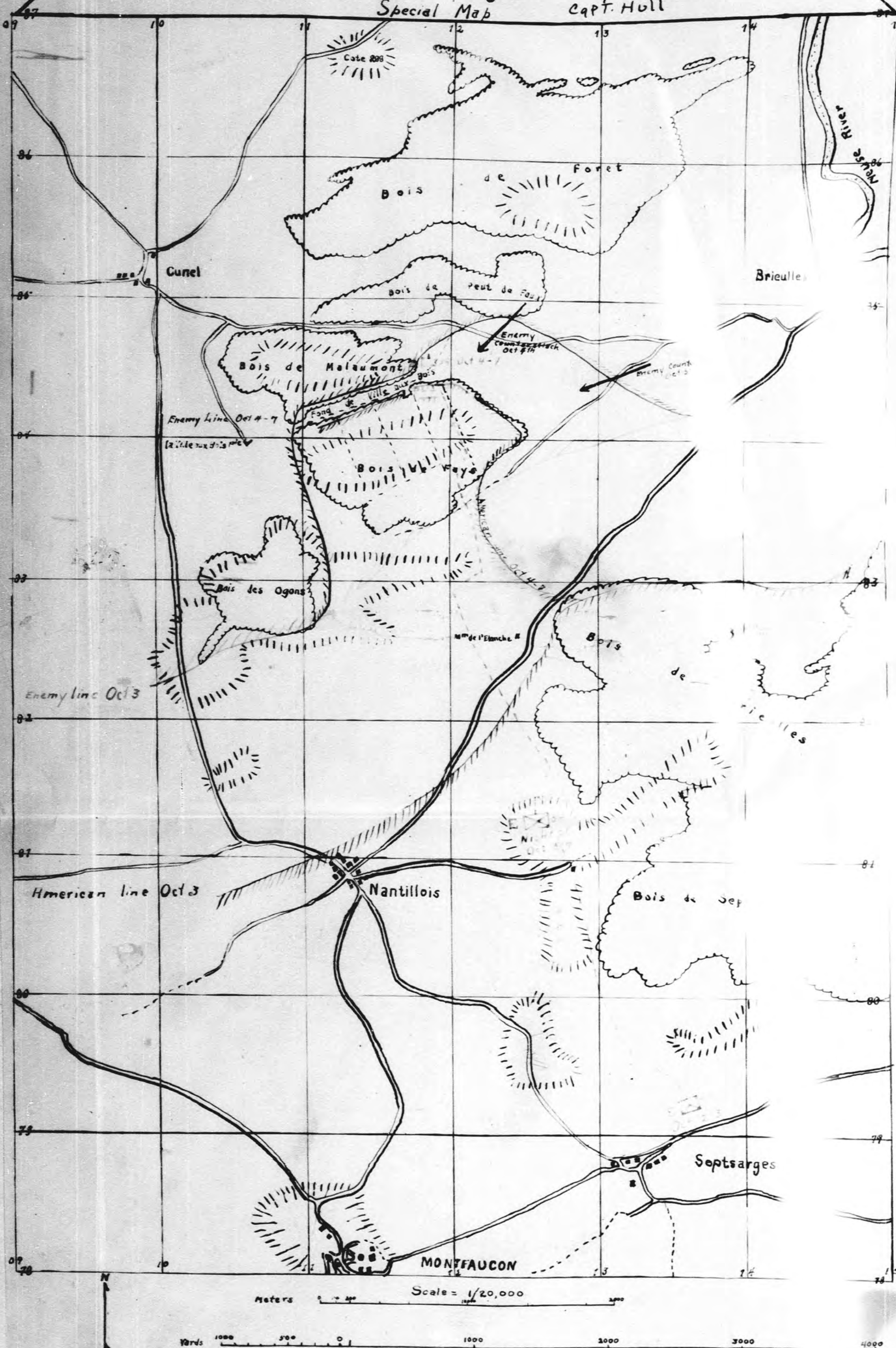


Company E 58th Infantry
 (4th Division)
 Meuse-Argonne Operations
 Sept. 26, to Oct 7, 1918
 General Map

Company E 58th Infantry

In the Meuse-Argonne Operations

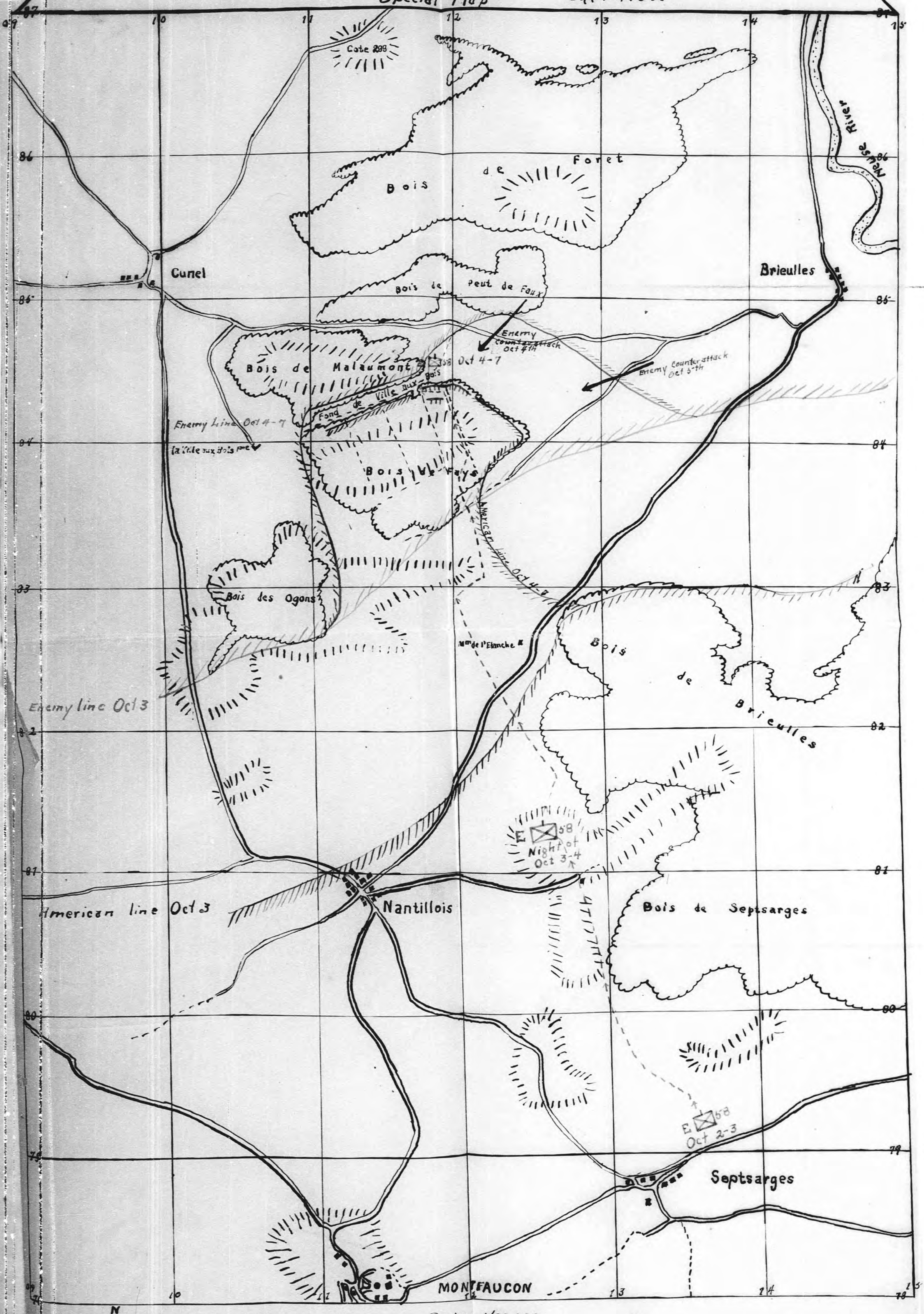
Special Map CAPT. HULL



In the Meuse-Argonne Operations

Special Map

CAPT. HULL



Scale = 1/20,000

Meters

