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OPERATIONS OF THE THIRD BATTALION, FIFTH REGIMENT  
UNITED STATES MARINES IN BELLEAU WOODS  
JUNE 5th to June 28th, 1918

CAPTAIN RAYMOND E. KNAPP, U.S. MARINE CORPS.

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INTRODUCTION

The Fifth Regiment, U.S. Marines was originally organized on June 14, 1914 for an expedition to Santo Domingo. After accomplishing the purpose for which it was organized, it was disbanded and was not reformed again until the United States entered the World War against Germany. Its reorganization came on June 1st, 1917 and was formed as follows: the first battalion, Major J.S. Turrill commanding, at Quantico, Va.; the second and third battalions, commanded by Majors F.M. Wise and C.T. Westcott respectively, at League Island, Philadelphia. The regimental commander was the late Brigadier General Charles A. Boyer, then Colonel.

The 3rd Battalion, Major Westcott commanding, with which this monograph is specifically concerned, was, as previously stated, formed at League Island, Philadelphia and was made up of the following companies: the 8th, Captain H.M. Smith commanding; the 16th, Captain E.W. Sturdevant; the 45th, Captain B.S. Berry; the 47th, Captain F.M. Barker. All of these companies, the 16th excepted, had been ordered up from duty in Santo Domingo, the 16th from Haiti. In these two countries, notably Santo Domingo, they had been almost continuously in the field rounding up gangs of bandits and political revolutionists. The troops had been under fire several times, and participated in several engagements and were, therefore, thoroughly seasoned troops. (1) The 8th company was the machine gun company of the battalion and was equipped with Lewis machine guns. It will be of interest to note here that the organization of the battalion was three infantry companies and one machine gun company, the organization which is now in effect in the Service.

(1)  
Testimony of  
Capt. N.L.  
Larsen.

On June 14th, 1917, aboard the U.S. Navy Transport Henderson, the battalion as part of the Fifth Regiment, sailed for France. The trip consumed thirteen days, during which time the men were taught the Army manual of arms, they having been drilling under the Marine Corps manual up to this time, and what extended order drill that could be taught in such a limited space aboard ship. Landing at Saint Nazaire on the 27th of June the battalion remained aboard ship until tents were erected and by July 3rd the entire organization was in camp, under canvass which they had brought with them, about two miles from town. Here the battalion remained performing duty as dock guards, fire guards, military police and other details incidental to Line Of Communication duty.

~~The battalion was moved shortly after its arrival to Camp #1~~  
a debarkation camp for troops arriving from the States. The machine gun company was ordered to turn in their Lewis guns and were sent to the town of Menancourt for a course in machine gun training with the Hotchkiss gun under the instruction of a detail from the Alpine Chausiers.

Meanwhile the other companies, the 16th, 45th, and the 47th performing their necessary but undesired duties were chafing to be released from their monotonous and varied duties and sent up to the Front. The situation is best explained by the following parody on one of the stanzas of the Marines Hymn. The original of the Hymn is:

Here's health to you and to our Corps,

Which we are proud to serve;

In many a strife we have fought for life

And never lost our nerve.

If the Army or the Navy

Ever looked on Heaven's scenes

~~They will find the streets are guarded by~~

~~The United States Marines.~~



The parody:

So here we are in Saint Nazaire,  
And our guns have rusty bores;  
We are working side by side with Huns  
And nigger stevedores.  
If the Army of the Navy  
Ever gaze on Heaven's scenes,  
They will find the roads are graded by  
The United States Marines.

Finally the 8th company rejoined the battalion and a short time afterwards the much looked for order arrived. On January 11th, 1918, after six months of "working side by side with Huns and nigger stevedores", the battalion was relieved and went to the Bourmont area where the Second Division was assembled, the 5th and 6th Marines forming the 4th Brigade.

In the Bourmont, or "day and night drill area", the troops were taught some new tricks in an old game. Long hours of drill was the routine and the men became thoroughly hardened and professionally fitted for the arduous hours that were soon to come. While the training engaged in familiarized the men with methods of trench warfare, this phase of training did not complete the program. Open warfare methods, with which the Marines were quite familiar, were taught in accordance with General Pershing's ideas. It is to this phase of training that the victories of the organization can be traced, for in practically all of their battles open warfare conditions existed, and by their superiority in this phase of fighting, they outclassed, outmaneuvered, and outfought the enemy.

Some of the officers of the battalion were sent to school at Gondrecourt from this area, for a months course in the new

methods of war. Several Army lieutenants were ordered to the battalion for training and were in turn sent to the different companies as company officers. It was in this area also, that the battalion was reorganized, the 8th company being ordered to the regiment there to be the regimental machine gun company. An infantry company, the 20th, Captain R.H. Platt commanding, replaced the 8th company. This company had come to France in the First Marine Replacement Battalion and were not the seasoned troops that the other companies were. Its nucleus was old non commissioned officers of previous service and the company at large volunteers, 70% of whom were students from the University of Minnesota. (2) Though lacking in experience, their morale was high and the battalion lost none of its efficiency by the change,

(2)  
Testimony of  
Capt. M.H.  
Silverthorne

March 14th saw the end of the period of intensive training in this area, for the battalion was ordered into a quiet trench sector in front of Verdun. Here the men became conversant with trench life and night patrols and wiring parties familiarized them with night work, and a raid on the 16th company, which was repulsed, gave them a taste of fighting.

The battalion moved out of its sectors of trench on May 14th it having been relieved by a French Regiment come lately from the Somme, and went to a position northwest of Paris, where as a part of the Second Division it was placed in reserve for the French Army. Preparations for the relief of the First Division were under way when plans were changed and the division moved in motor lorries to the Chateau Thierry sector and were thrown into line across the Paris-Metz highway near Montreuil-aux-Lions where a gap in the French lines existed. Here it helped to stop the German drive on Paris and fought in this area on the defensive until June 5th.

This last move and position brings the battalion to the eve of the battle for that then followed...

kilometers long and a kilometer wide, called Bois de Belleau just north of the Paris-Metz highway where it was to gain undying glory in the ensuing weeks.

#### GENERAL SITUATION

Before going into the details of the battle, it will perhaps, be best to glance at the situation which confronted the French High Command at this time. The German offensive of May 26th had reached from the line Ailette-Reims to, in part, Chateau Thierry-Vaux-Bouresches- Belleau Woods-Torcy-

Bussieres. (3) The French had not succeeded in stopping it and the German hordes were still coming on. However, American troops were in France and some divisions in readiness. More troops were arriving daily from the United States and Foch saw now that his reserves were at hand. That the Americans were fighters of dash and courage and tenacity was proven by the First Division which stood up under the test put to them by the French, who went so far as to take pictures of their

attack, by taking and holding Cantigny on May 28th. (4) Accordingly, with these facts at hand, the commander in chief set about to end this offensive by launching one of his own.

The weakest place in the German line was its right flank along the line Soisson-Chateau Thierry. (5) Accordingly the Xth French Army was ordered into position near Villers Cotterets, the 1st Cavalry Corps to the Ourcq, and the 2nd and 3rd American divisions, equal in strength to four French divisions, to strengthen the Marne River. The 2nd Division was placed in the southwest corner of the salient in the XXI Corps 6th French Army under General Daschenes and took up its position along the line: La Nouvette Farm-south edge Bois de la Marette Le Thiolet-Bois de Clerembauts-Lucy le Bocage- and Hill 142. Here was the line from which the division stopped the German advance on Paris and it was from this line also, that the 3rd battalion, 5th Marines made the initial attack on Bois de Belleau.

(3) History  
Great War  
Buchan P278

(4) Mil.Hist.  
World War  
Howland P269

(5) Hist.Great  
War Buchan  
P 278



The German troops, flushed with the almost unbelievable success of their drive, were on their way to Paris, their morale high. The French, on the other hand, were slowly giving way and retiring before the terrific onslaught of the German attacks, their spirit shaken, down the Paris-Metz highway towards Meaux. They were haggard and weary, their ranks thinned to almost nothing and their stretchers red with the blood of their comrades who had fallen in their desperate efforts to stem that tide of German arms. (6) The Marines on the other hand, had a spirit which equalled that of the victorious Germans. They had been waiting a year for this opportunity to present itself. The sight of the retiring French added rather to their determination, and when at last they were ~~ordered into their positions and stopped the advance,~~ they responded with that esprit de corps which has characterized the Marine where ever he has been. They beat off the German attack again and again, until at last the Germans realized that new troops were in the line that knew how to fight.

(6) Personally seen on the P<sup>M</sup> highway

#### TERRAIN

The terrain, over which the actions of the battalion are to be followed for the next three weeks now commands our attention. The country is a hilly one, profusely dotted with wooded knolls and hills, cultivated fields and the whole interspersed with villages and large farms. Chateau Thierry lies some eight kilometers to the south east on the banks of the Marne. Bois de Belleau proper, is a tangle of trees and shrubs with but one or two dim trails running through it. It is situated two kilometers from the Paris-Metz highway in a northerly direction and is two kilometers long and from one half to one kilometer in width. Its northern portion is full of large stones and boulders, tangled vines and shrubbery. This wild tangle of boulders and vines rose sharply from the

~~surrounding fields and made it a forbidding, and all but~~

impenetrable stronghold. It is broken by one very steep ravine and this together with the innumerable small gullies affords positions without number for groups of riflemen and machine guns.

Belleau Woods is in a hollow northwest of the town of Bouresches and due south of Belleau, from which latter town the wood takes its name. Here the hills slope very sharply to the wood. The hollow is marked by hills to the north and northeast and runs through the towns of Vaux, Bouresches, Belleau, and Torcy. All of these towns are connected with Chateau Thierry by a narrow gauge railway and the town of Belleau controls all of the cross roads leading to the Paris highway from the north and northeast.

#### HISTORY OF THE AREA

Let us digress for a moment and turn back the leaves of Time and see what has happened in this part of Sunny France in the years gone by. Hardly a century has passed but what this section of France has been in the public eye, for it will be remembered that Chateau Thierry is on the main highway from Paris to Metz and is but some fifty miles from Paris. This little section has been the battle ground of religious and military causes for centuries. In 1421 it was fought over and the town of Chateau Thierry was captured by the English. (7) Again in 1544 we see Charles V fighting in that vicinity. The year 1591 finds Spain the aggressor and the town pillaged. In the Wars of the Fronde the area and the town pillaged in 1652. The Campaign of 1814 finds this same territory the battle ground of Napoleon and looking closer we find him on February 12th of that year decisively defeating the Russo-Prussians under Blucher. (8) Now in 1918 we again hear the clash of arms and again we see that the French and Prussians are the opposing forces. History repeats itself, for Franco with her allies defeat the Hun as decisively as was done in 1814 just

(7) Encyclo.  
Britt. 11th  
Edit. Vol 5  
P 964

about a hundred years ago. Let us now see how this was accomplished.

#### DISPOSITIONS AND PLANS.

On the night of June 5th, 1918, the German line ran through Bouresches-Bois de Belleau and Torcy and was held by troops from the 460th, 461st, and 462nd Infantry Regiments all of the 237th Division, one of the units in the German Crown Princes' Army Group. (9) The 3rd Battalion 5th Marines occupied a line due west of Bois de Belleau and facing it at a distance of from one to one and a half kilometers. Their positions were taken along the eastern edge of three clumps of woods in "fox holes". The 45th company, now commanded by Captain Conachy was on the left, the 20th held the center, and the 47th, now commanded by Captain Case was on the right. The 16th company, under Captain Yowell, was in support of the battalion just off the right flank in a patch of woods facing Belleau Woods, which afforded excellent concealment and gave them a good field of fire. Battalion headquarters, with Major B.S. Berry the battalion commander, was in Lucy le Bocage. The 1st Battalion of the 5th Marines was on the left and the 3rd Battalion of the 6th was on the right.

While no plans of an attack were known by the battalion commander until late on the afternoon of the 6th of June, yet it is believed that it is fitting to speak of the plans that were later formulated at this time. They called for an attack on Bois de Belleau and the town of Bouresches by the 4th Brigade. The 6th Marines were to attack the southern portion of Bois de Belleau, drive the enemy from it, continue the attack and take the town of Bouresches which is located on the eastern side of the Bois de Belleau. The 3rd battalion 5th Marines was to attack due east, engage the enemy, destroy

(9) Personal  
and Sum. of  
Intel. HQ AEF  
June 1918.

er. Drive down out of the northern and central portion of  
eight



the woods and assist the 6th Marines in exploiting their success beyond the town of Bouresches.

#### OPERATIONS (Plate 2)

At 3.45 on the morning of June 6th, the 1st Battalion assisted by the 45th company from the 3rd Battalion, attacked and took Hill 142. This small gain now enabled the 1st Battalion to extend their lines in a direct prolongation of those established by the 3rd Battalion. A small gap that existed after the position on Hill 142 had been taken was filled by two platoons from the 45th company.

All through the day the battalion remained concealed in their positions overlooking the Bois de Belleau. With the exception of a few planes flying over the lines during the day there was no activity. Late in the afternoon, Captain Case, called the platoon commanders of his company together and told them that the battalion was to attack at 5 o'clock that afternoon. He pointed out the Bois de Belleau to the immediate front and told them that the company would attack the woods and push on through and before emerging on the western edge to halt and reorganise and await further orders from him. "Get your men out into position as fast as you can, we attack at 5 o'clock", he said and then pulling out his watch he added, "it is now 5.15. (10) Captain Case, it later developed, had received the orders just a short time before while he and the battalion commander had been looking over the terrain in the town of Lucy le Bocage.

The instructions were no sooner given than the platoons began to emerge from their positions out into the wheat field which their positions bordered and took up the assault formation as though they had been on the parade ground. The first and



on the left as most of the fire seemed to come from that direction and the front. No results were noticed from the men who were sent over so another detail was sent, this time six men. They farad no better than the first party. Finally an officer and ten men were sent across to clear out the gun and then get the center guns on the flank and clear them out so that the company could advance. The detail started across and arrived on the other side with the officer and three men to find the men of the other two details killed or wounded within a radius of some fifteen yards. A hasty reconnaissance of the area revealed the troublesome gun cleverly concealed in a tree. Its firing was brought to an abrupt close. Upon trying to exploit this success and out

placed so as to mutually protect each other and that if one were put out of action the fire of its protector would render the attacker helpless to go further. (11) Finding its advance held up the company deployed along the line already formed, put scouts out in their front and dug in so t as to prepare for the coming counter attack and hold the ground that they had taken.

The two platoons of the 20th company that had not been held up by the fire in the wheat field entered the woods with the 47th company and encountered the same reception. They likewise dug in and prepared to hold what they had gained. Darkness soon fell and found the two companies in line prepared for any emergency. After dark the men who had become separated from their companies during the advance in the woods were brought up to the positions and thus the line was strengthened. The line established ran across the southern portion of the woods from west to east and then southwest.

second platoons were in the first line and the third and fourth in support. The 20th company emerged from their position and took up the same formation and started the attack. The 16th company remained in its position in the woods off the flank as battalion support, the 45th company was still with the 1st Battalion. The attack being launched without any artillery support made the attacking lines an easy target for the German machine gunners and trench mortar crews who opened up a terrific fire against the attacking lines. However, despite all this fire the attack progressed down the slope and through the wheat, across the Torcy road to the southern edge of Belleau Woods. Several casualties had been incurred in crossing this kilometer of ground but upon entering the

~~of the woods, the Germans fell back and very few casualties~~  
were realized. Two platoons of the 20th company were held up in the wheat field by the enfilade fire of machine guns and were forced to stay there until nightfall. The 47th reached the woods and turned to go north to go through and drive the enemy before them. After advancing some five hundred yards, a cleared space opened before them into which they dashed with all speed. This dash proved costly, for hardly had they entered the trap, for trap it was, than a veritable rain of machine gun fire fell upon them and pinned them to the ground.

The trap was a cunningly devised one. It was about a hundred yards square and was cleared of all trees, they having been felled and the branches interlaced so as to form an abbatis. Paths which were easily discernable ran across it and down these paths machine gun and rifle bullets literally rained. Being unable to advance in the face of this withering fire, the company drew off to the right edge of the cleared space by crawling. The company commander quickly sized up the situation and sent four men across the open space to cut flank the guns

The 6th Marines, on the left of the battalion gave way to the left at the beginning of the attack and though they failed to assault the southern portion of the woods, they did however capture and hold Bouresches. As a result of this easing away from the direction of the attack the 3rd Battalion of the 5th automatically gave way also in maintaining liaison. The end of the days fighting finds the line advanced to the town of Bouresches across the fields east to the edge of the Bois de Belleau and across the southern portion and was held as follows: the 16th company on the left flank, it having previously been brought down from its support position, the 20th held the center and the 47th the right. The 6th Marines held the right flank and the town of Bouresches.

positions in Belleau Woods during this attack. These positions were formidably held by ingeniously placed and as ingeniously hidden machine gun nests, each nest so placed that it was self supporting and was interlaced by fire from its neighboring guns. In addition to these nests, trench mortars were placed in such positions as to cover the ground in the front and make any advance costly by their protective barrage. Artillery fire completed this well coordinated defense.

Consider now the means at hand which the attacking troops had to meet this formidable defense. Not a single artillery shell was laid down for the attack. There were no hand grenades, rifle grenades, trench mortars to aid them. Merely the rifle and bayonet and that insult to the name of automatic weapons, the Chau Chat rifle with which to carry on the fight and aid them to hold their objectives. The attack went for over a kilometer in the open against this position and in the face of the withering sheet of fire laid down on the assaulting troops yet they reached the edge of the woods and advanced



through it for a distance of about five hundred yards and held what they had gained. True, the casualties were great yet this is an example of what seasoned troops can accomplish.

The morning of June 7th opened with the battalion in the same position. The looked for counter attack had not come so the lines were well organized and the companies were there to stay. From prisoners taken during the action it was learned that some of the Germans mistook the troops for Canadians. As the day progressed and more prisoners were brought in, it was learned that they had been told by their (12) Personal. officers that the Americans took no prisoners(12) This then partially accounts for the stubborn defense that was put up and the small number of prisoners.

During the afternoon the battalion was relieved and was ordered back into the woods near Maison Blanche but on the south side of the Paris-Metz highway. On the evening of June 8th, the 45th company rejoined the battalion. The new battalion commander arrived in the person of Major M.E. Shearer; and his first duties were to reconnoitre the town of Bouresches with his company commanders preparatory to taking over the town from the 6th Marines.

The night of the 11th the battalion took over the town of Bouresches, the 47th and 45th companies actually occupying the town, the former on the left and the latter on the right. The 16th company was off to the right in extension of the 45th companies line, while the 20th was assigned to another battalion. The 6th Marines held the left flank and the 23rd Infantry held the right. The town was held by a series of strong points placed in buildings, along garden walls and behind barricades in the streets leading out of the town.

All remained tranquil in the town until the morning of the 13th. Shells had been dropped around the outskirts of the town and the lines of communication leading into it but so far



After their unsuccessful attack on the town, the Germans began in their methodical manner to reduce the town to dust. Gas shells were dropped into the ravines and fields behind the town and high explosive shells were dropped into the town proper. The dry streams which led to Triangle Farme and Lucy le Bocage received particular attention with yperite shells. Battalion C.P. also received its share of the shelling. It was located on the hillside due south of Bois de Belleau under a large rock. The shelling made it impossible to get communication through to it from the town and it was all but isolated, the telephone lines being cut again and again though Signal men were constantly working trying to keep it in repair.

~~On the night of June 12th the Battalion~~  
a battalion from the 23rd Infantry and in going out of the town it encountered its first real gassing. Mustard gas was thick in all the ravines and depressions and the paths and roads were constantly under shell fire. The move to the new positions were thus made difficult indeed as the troops all wore their gas masks and between the darkness of the night and the intensity of the shell fire the move was a costly one. The position taken by the battalion was in the woods northwest of Lucy le Bocage and it remained here until the 21st when it was again ordered into position in Belleau Woods.

Up to the 13th of the month some 450 prisoners had been taken in Bois de Belleau. These men were from six different regiments representing three different divisions, the 10th, 28th, and 237th. This in itself shows that the Germans meant to hold Belleau Woods and the adjoining area and they sent hundreds of troops there for that purpose. That it was of value to them is established by a German divisional order under the date of 6 June on the subject of Belleau Woods and

none had dropped into the town itself. Before dawn on the 13th a heavy barrage was laid down on and around the town and at dawn the Germans attacked from the Bois de Bouresches across the railroad to the town. They advanced in small groups and had machine guns with them. The 45th company's 1st platoon which held the southeastern edge of town and the wheat fields to the east saw little of the action but were almost blasted from their holes by the barrage. The other three platoons however, shared the fight with the 47th company. The attackers came down the roads leading into town while their machine gunners attempted to set up their guns in the wheat field on the eastern side. Those who came down the roads were soon picked off by the men behind the barricades. ~~They were managed to get into the town by getting~~ over the garden walls were put to the bayonet. One machine gun while being set up in the wheat field attracted the attention of one of the defenders of a corner of a garden. He fired at one of the crew with his rifle and hit the man and set off a pocket full of Very pistol shells that he was carrying. The rest of the machine gun crew seeing the rockets going off waited no longer but quickly ran back to their protecting positions in the woods.

The attack was all over in an hour and the Germans retired to their positions in Bois de Bouresches. The action was not heavy enough even to require the use of the town reserve, a unit made up from the 45th and 47th companies and held near the center of the town so that they could be sent anywhere in the defense of the town. The number of attackers in the German assault could not have exceeded a hundred men and although the capture of the town would have interfered with the lines of our communications, one wonders why a more persistent attack was not made.

is as follows: In order for the enemy (French) to hold Belleau woods it was necessary to sustain a foothold in the southern portion in order that communication could be maintained along the brook bed on the southern edges of the woods and the road which led from Lucy le Bocage to Bouresches. Therefore it became necessary to make plans for the defense of the woods.

In case of an attack the defenders were to repel them with machine gun, trench mortar and artillery barrages and fire from rifles and light machine guns. Forces were to be assembled in the town of Bouresches to attack the woods and out flank the positions. The defense also called for three lines of machine guns, one on the southern and western edge, one in the middle and the third on the eastern edge. To the 40th Regiment of the 28th Division was assigned the task of driving out any enemy who gained a foothold in the woods.

During this time, from the 8th to the 21st, the 6th Marines had succeeded in advancing the lines a considerable distance north in the woods so that now all but one quarter of the woods was in our possession. The Germans however, clung tenaciously to the part that remained in their hands. In their withdrawals they had taken their machine guns back with them and now the tip of the woods was full of machine guns both light and heavy.

The 7th Infantry, 3rd Division (U.S.) had been sent into the woods to take over the lines while the Marines were getting a much needed rest about three kilometers from the front lines. They had made an attack which had taken some ground but due to faulty leadership on the part of the officers the counterattack which followed almost routed them. A semblance of a line was organized and the 3rd Battalion 5th was sent in to the woods to take over the positions. Accordingly on the morning of the 21st the battalion, and company ~~of the 5th~~ with their seconds in command went up to reconnoitre the lines



and arrange for the relief. After ascertaining the information desired, and after having been subjected to a grilling shell fire on their way up and down the paths in the woods during which two officers were seriously wounded, they returned to the battalion and that evening under the cover of darkness effected the relief.

The lines were now peculiarly situated. They extended along the eastern edge of the woods for about three fourths of its length then turned sharply to the west. This formed a hook and at the bow of the hook the lines ran due west to the edge of the woods. The line along the eastern edge of the woods to the bow in the hook was held by the 6th Marines while the hook and line to the west edge was held by the 3rd Battalion of the 5th. In the battalion sector the line was held by the 16th company on the west or left at the edge of a little clear space, the 20th held the center and the 47th the right or the hook. The 45th was the supporting company and was in position along the east edge of the woods connecting with the 6th .

The morning of the 22nd revealed the fact that in some places the lines between the 16th company and the Germans were not more than fifty yards apart. A listening post had been established by the Germans in front of the 16th company from which an occasional rifle shot came and thus revealed its location. The positions as a whole were subjected to a heavy shell fire and several casualties were suffered from it. A little path that ran east and west through the woods was under machine gun fire from another little patch of woods along the Belleau- Bouresches road. All paths in the woods were kept under fire and as a result of it the food that came into the troops was very scant. The situation was

relieved somewhat by taking rations from the dead in the woods



who had fallen in the attack of the day or two before.

All during the night of the 22nd -23rd the Germans showed their nervousness. Machine guns opened from time to time and swept the areas in the front as one would play a hose. Trench mortar and artillery shells dropped into the woods at uncomfortably close quarters and rockets and star shells broke the darkness at frequent intervals. Patrols from the 45th company were sent out with propaganda pamphlets to the Germans and the morning of the 23rd dawned to see the bushes near the enemy lines decked with them.

The day was spent in the same manner as the previous one the Germans shelling all the time and keeping up their machine gun fire. Towards noon the company commanders were called to the Battalion C.P. and informed that the battalion would attack that evening at 5 o'clock without artillery. The attack would be by infiltration and an envelopment of the enemy flank by the 47th company. Grenades were to be issued to the men and it was thought that they would materially assist in the assault. At the appointed time the attack started, the handgrenades meanwhile having failed to materialize. As soon as the first man was seen advancing a sheet of machine gun fire swept over the line and the 16th company were pinned to the ground about twenty five yards in front of their positions. The other companies fared little better. The 47th made a little gain but not enough to make any difference and as soon as darkness fell the companies all resumed their original positions. Nothing had been gained but several casualties and the knowledge that unless artillery fire were forthcoming the northern portion of the woods would remain German.

No further attempts were made on the 24th to advance the line and the heavy shelling of the woods was indulged in by

the German artillery. At night however, the activity increased and it was seen that the Germans in the woods were very nervous. The men of the 16th company increased their nervousness by throwing stones toward the opposing lines and get under cover before the machine guns opened. The fire of one gun would start the line and in a few moments every gun in the sector opened fire for about five minutes and then ceased. This procedure was kept up well into the night and the men got to know the general location of the enemy's guns.

An attack order was received by the battalion commander on the next day. He called in the company commanders again and told them of the order. The plan was as follows: at 5.00

~~the 155mm artillery was to open fire~~  
on the enemy positions in the northern part of the woods assisted by the 75's. This firing would be kept up all night and the following day until four o'clock at which time it was to increase in intensity and at 5.00 o'clock cease and the infantry would advance. Thirty five hundred shells had been allotted for this mission.

At 4.00 P.M. on the 25th the troops were withdrawn from their positions and back far enough to be out of danger from the shorts. Promptly at 5 the artillery opened and it was music to the ear to hear an American shell going over. All night and the following day the heavy and light shells dropped into the woods at regular intervals of two minutes as had been arranged. At 4 o'clock the intensity increased, the men gathered their equipment and made ready and at 5 o'clock the line went forward, the companies attacking, the 16th on the left, the 20th in the center and the 47th on the right. The 45th was the battalion support and remained near the Battalion C.P. in a shallow ravine near the western edge of the woods. A line of outposts was fixed a hundred yards to their front

to hold up any enemy who might filter through.

Success almost immediately attended the efforts of the 20th and 47th companies who after a short but sharp fight gained their objectives on the northern edge of the woods. The 16th however, was again held up in the open space to their front the same as they had been on the 23rd. As the attack progressed they could gain no ground. Messages from the company commander came in telling of the predicament. He was ordered to get around the flank and then go forward. About this time the success of the 20th and 47th companies came to the battalion commander. Almost on its heels came a message from the 16th that said pressure was increasing in their front and that all efforts to get around the flank had met with no success. The situation now revealed itself. The attack on the night by the 20th and 47th had caused the enemy to fall back to the left and as a result of it the 16th was unable to advance. To overcome this situation the 47th was ordered to go around the tip of the woods to the west and encircle the enemy in front of the 16th. A short fight ensued in which the bayonet played a most convincing part. The enemy soon surrendered and some 200 prisoners including five officers were sent back to the battalion where they were put to work digging caves in the side of the ravine for the wounded and a part of them carried out wounded who could be moved. All during the attack the Battalion C.P. had been the target of the German artillery and the shells had dropped into the ravine making it extremely difficult to care for the wounded since a dressing station had been established there.

The shelling of the German positions in the woods had prevented rations from going in and had broken their morale. They had had cover from the shell fire under the rocks and in the ravine but the continual hammering soon wore them out. As



soon as the shelling had ceased they had come out of their protective positions with their machine guns but the suddenness of the attack had caught them only partially ready and not all of their guns were set up. Their resistance was short lived when they saw the bayonets and were quick in their cries of "Kamerad"

Shortly after the new positions had been organized, a counter attack was launched but the attack lacked spirit and aggressiveness and man power and it was easily beaten off. About midnight the guides who had been sent to the southern edge of the woods to bring in the relief appeared and the next two hours were consumed in getting the new defenders into their positions. The companies as they were relieved made their way out of the woods by different routes as had been prearranged.

Metz highway some eight kilometers from the recent scene of action. Here they were in reserve and the time was spent in getting cleaned up after the strenuous three weeks of action.

From this position the regiment was formed and relieved from the sector and took up another position along the banks of the Marne as Corps reserve.

To sum up now the operations of the battalion will give a hasty glance at what they accomplished during these twenty-one days of action, defined by G.H.Q. as a "local action". On their initial attack they had advanced against a position held by seven companies and then usual array of machine guns with two companies and had gained a foothold in the woods. Exploiting their successes they succeeded in pushing the line forward until the 26th saw the accomplishment of their original mission. In all there were a total of four German divisions in this area and the battalion defeated parts of all of them.

## ANALYSIS AND CRITISM.

The Germans advancing on their drive had made enormous gains and decided that their offensive must be carried on. The salient that they had formed was a dangerous and he set about to widen it. The set back he had received from the Americans at Cantigny and on the Paris - Metz highway and at Bois de Belleau are did not tend to increase his morale. They felt that the Americans must be smothered before the Allies could gain any confidence in them and further they did not want it known in the Fatherland that the Americans were on the lines in numbers. They must dispel any fear that their civilian population might entertain. They wanted to get the Americans out of the way in order that the line of communication near Chateau Thierry which was a railroad could be cut.

In order to accomplish this they set about to prepare defensive positions from which they could catch their breath while preparing to launch another attack. One of the positions selected was Bois de Belleau. This was organized to such an extent that it might well be called a fortification. Two first class divisions were assigned to the task of driving out the Americans and before the month was over four had been used. The success that they enjoyed has been outlined in the preceding pages.

The American plan was of course to deny the enemy passage. The morale of the troops was high, they were well trained and seasoned men. They compared in number favorably with the enemy divisions.

The best way to stop an advance is to snatch the initiative while an enemy is off his balance and drive him out. The German is at times a tenacious fighter and it took 21 days to convince him that we wanted his lines in Bois de Belleau.

The German troops, after having been told that Americans took no prisoners fought to the last man. They defended their positions to the end during the first few days of the action. The reckless courage of the American they could not understand and that the Marines were considered fierce fighters is evidenced by the name they gave him of "Teufel Hunden".

That the positions in Bois de Belleau were valuable from a military standpoint is evidenced by the divisional order which goes to some length in discussing the mode of defense. The four divisions which they kept there in the action termed by GHQ as a "local action" shows that they intended to hold at all costs. All of these troops were met by a brigade which was not engaged as a complete unit.

The American artillery, so far as supporting the ~~division attacks until the 25th were concerned, was almost a~~ myth. The nests of machine guns were known to be in position and artillery preparation in the first attack would have probably resulted in more ground in the woods being taken.

The fact that no grenades, trench mortars, nor 37mm guns were in the engagement, coupled with the lack of artillery support leads one to believe that the infantry were super men or that the strength of the enemy had been underestimated.

The German counter attacks were always preceded by artillery, machine gun, trench mortar fire but the counter attacks by the infantry did not come soon enough. The positions which they attacked had been consolidated and the defenders were ready to repulse them.

Finally the Germans succeeded in accomplishing nothing that they had set out to do. They had evidently underestimated the worth of American troops. However, in fairness to them, it could be exceedingly difficult to keep the position cleared of an aggressive enemy who possessed artillery and good active infantry.



## LESSONS

1. Infantry and artillery are nothing without each other therefore they should always be disposed to assist each other,

(14)Napoleon's(14)

XLVlll maxim.

2. In launching an attack, every available bit of fire power must be delivered on the enemy to keep him under cover until the advancing infantry can close with him.

3. The value of the infantry weapons should never be lost sight of and should invariably accompany the troops in the attack.

4. Never underestimate your enemy.

5. In the attack, the direction of it must be maintained else the troops on the flanks will not cover their objectives thus causing a gap in the line which will contribute toward the failure of the mission.

6. Counter attacks must come quickly and with sufficient force to accomplish its purpose before the defenders have an opportunity to reorganize .

7. Avoid paths and routes in an area just taken from an enemy, he knows their location and will harass them with fire.

8. Keep the next higher unit commander informed as to all that is occurring. His view of the battle is broader and he can dispose troops to the aid of others .

9. Continued fire from machine guns will eventually reveal their location.

10. To seasoned and well trained troops no mission is too hard to accomplish.

