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

2-6

ADVANCED COURSE  
1928-29

COMPANY "L", SIXTEENTH U. S. INFANTRY <sup>36</sup>

IN THE

AI SNE-MARNE OFFENSIVE <sup>21</sup>

JULY 18-25, 1918 <sup>16</sup>

(Personal Experience) <sup>21</sup>

MAJOR FRED M. LOGAN, INFANTRY <sup>21</sup>

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## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Society of the First Division "History of the First Division  
During the World War".

Accurate as to dates and general facts, but written to sell to members of that Division in order to satisfy the vanity of some former members and to perpetuate the memory of the organization.

Weed, Earl H., 1st Lieut.  
(Chaplain, 16th Inf.)

"The Story of the Sixteenth  
Infantry in France".

A readable little book to one who served with the regiment in France. Based on facts but not on accurate data. Written by the chaplain as a morale booster.

Monograph

"Soissons".

An excellent reference--but too general to be of much use in 'Personal Experiences' of units as small as a company.

Pershing, John J.

"Final Report of General John  
J. Pershing, Commander-in-  
Chief, American Expeditionary  
Forces".

Authentic, reliable, general.

Ryder, Charles W.  
Major, Infantry

Close study and conference with this officer who commanded the First Battalion, Sixteenth Infantry, during the major portion of the engagement. As authentic as the word of an officer and as reliable as the memory of a very interested officer who has given much time and study to the battle.

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## MARGINAL ABBREVIATIONS USED

1st Div Hist	"History of the First Division during the World War".
Weed	"Story of the Sixteenth Infantry in France".
Final Report	"Final Report of General John J. Pershing, Commander-in-Chief, A.E.F."
Ryder	Conference with Major Charles W. Ryder, Infantry.

NOTE.- Unannotated entries are based upon personal memory or personal experience.



## INTRODUCTION

During the winter of 1917-1918 the German high command realized that their submarine war had failed to starve the inhabitants of the British Isles and that, further, it had failed to prevent the flow of munitions from the United States to the Allies on the Western Front. But the most serious debacle of the underseas craft was their utter inability to stem the steady and ever rising tide of fresh replacements in the form of American Infantry divisions--whose combat mettle had already been tried and found amazingly good, and who were arriving in France and England by small increments, but from an inexhaustable reservoir.

It was obvious to the world that the Germans, in order to prosecute their present favorable military situation, must seek to obtain a decisive victory by land on the Western Front prior to the arrival of the American millions in France. (1) In fact, their entire chance of winning the war depended upon just such action--and none other.

(1) Final Report  
par 34

Elaborate plans were painstakingly drawn. The scheme of maneuver was completely shrouded in an impenetrable veil of secrecy. The "What" was common knowledge, but not the "When", "Where" or "How".

Italy, by the way, had been the recipient of particular German attention in the fall of 1917 and had been badly handled. So very badly had she been handled that France and England were required to keep several of their best divisions on the Italian front for moral and political reasons as well as for

(2) Final Report the security of the Allied lines. (2) This situation  
par 32

added to the inability of the Allied chiefs to correctly estimate the situation and forced the maintenance of French and British troops in fairly large numbers on the Italian front.

However, the world at large, and the Allies in particular, were soon to learn of the plans of the Germans for ending the war by their famous 'Peace Offensive' in the spring of 1918. They were to learn by bitter experience and terrifying <sup>RESULTS.</sup> reserves.

On March 21st the Germans hurled their masses of reserves against the right of the British Expeditionary Force and completely routed the British Fifth Army on the Somme. French reserves and an American division prevented the separation of the British and French Armies. An enormous salient was driven into the Allied line. The operation was a complete surprise and a great victory for the Germans. Exploitation of their salient was naturally expected as the next blow by the Germans, but, again the surprise element proved its worth when the German Army suddenly struck the British along the Lys on April 9th, and, in a few days, wiped out the British gains which represented years of terrible conflict.

With two deep salients driven into the British front it certainly looked as though the next German attempt would be based from the inner wings of one of two salients--thus converging the two smaller salients into one huge salient from which operations against the British right and the French channel ports could be based. It seemed as though

the German Army of 1918 (directed against all

things British) might be the inspiration of this German ferocity. This was the occasion which caused the Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force to issue his now famous appeal to his troops to hold their ground against all German onslaughts, "With their backs against the wall". The French denuded their line to furnish the needed reserves on the British front.

A month later, on May 27th, the Germans struck again--their most successful blow of the great Peace Offensive. And again they outwitted the Allies by their surprise. This time they launched their attack against the French left along the Aisne. By June 5th they stopped on the Marne at Chateau Thierry--the attack having petered out within itself. The Germans actually broke thru the French line and went as far as the endurance of their men would permit. Nothing else stopped them.

The Allies, at this time, experienced the very darkest days of the whole war. They could not seem to stop the German onslaughts. Paris moved to Bordeaux; political leaders wilted, but military leaders acted. The Allied command on the Western Front was unified with Marshal Foch as Generalissimo; Allied reserves in Italy were brought back to France; the United States was petitioned for more replacements; England was ready to turn over her vast merchant marine for the transportation of American troops. Regardless of the stupendous loss of human life and territory, as well as the resultant defunction of morale throughout the Allied world (the United States excluded) the Allied cause really gained more



than the Germans from this series of humiliating defeats. They gained unity of command and coordination of effort--both prime military principles essential to strategical success. From a strictly military viewpoint the situation was not nearly so drear as the rank and file of civilian and military laity believed.

With the unity of command and coordination of effort, the Allied commander-in-chief was able to apply another basic fundamental of war--that of the objective. Marshal Foch immediately laid plans for a great counteroffensive which should be delivered by the entire Allied strength against the German horde as soon as he could concentrate his strategical reserve and find the enemy in a disadvantageous position. He applied the Principle of the Objective in planning at once for the destruction of the enemy force.

Meantime, the Germans, flushed by their startling successes, bent their every effort toward the prosecution of their offensive gains and again and again attacked the Allied lines. Their real objective now disclosed itself (and indeed, it had not changed since 1914) as Paris. Their driving attack on the Montdidier-Noyon front on June 9th wilted before the French artillery concentrations and died a natural death with but little in return. Much bitter fighting ensued about the Marne salient. Every inch of the ground was contested by French veterans and raw American divisions which, by this time, were beginning to arrive in France and receive their baptism of fire.



The applied principles of war enumerated above now begin to show their efficacy. One great German offense had been definitely halted. The next enemy attack became known well in advance. Dispositions to frustrate the next attack met the German attempt of the Champagne-Marne on July 15th so effectively that the engagement has been conceded to be a real victory for the defenders.

Now was the time for the Allied commander-in-chief of strike! And he did strike. With his great strategical reserve massed well beforehand in the density of the Foret de Compiègne (between the Somme and Marne salients) Marshal Foch consummated his remarkable and daring plan for the launching of his great counteroffensive.

With the enemy definitely stopped in their tracks on the Champagne-Marne front, the Generalissimo lost no time in effecting his plan of maneuver. To General Mangin (later made Mareschal of France) he gave the First and Second American Infantry Divisions and the Second French Colonial Division (known as the 'Corps d'Elite' of the French army) as assault echelons for an attack against the weakened northern wing of the Marne salient.

This was the turn of the tide.

Allied armies were now to assume the offensive with view to the destruction of the German armies. Upon two American divisions and the finest French combat division were bestowed the honor and distinction of initiating this greatest counteroffensive the world has ever known. The 20th French Corps under Mangin, comprising the First and Second American Infantry

Special Map  
No 1.

produce at that time. Each regiment was personally selected by the commander-in-chief, General Pershing.

Now, the reason for bringing out this original organization of the First Division is to show why this particular unit should receive the greatest consideration and enjoy the fullest confidence of the commander of the American Expeditionary Force in France. In the first place, the personnel comprising this now famous division consisted of veterans of the campaigns in Mexico. In the second place, it was officered by regular army officers (though it is quite true that many were entirely without practical experience). In the third place there were no drafted men in the ranks, the replacements for war strength being entirely filled by high spirited men who voluntarily enlisted at the signing of our declaration of war against Germany. And, lastly, the most important feature, the noncommissioned officers were the very same men who had been the 'old time' noncommissioned officers of the regiments for years and years. In other words, the infantry organizations of the First Division were not denuded of their 'backbone' by the expansion of the regular army. While other regular army regiments were being robbed of all their older <sup>n</sup> and better men for either expansion or for officer candidate schools, the infantry regiments of the First Division were in France. The only losses of such valuable material was thro' combat casualty lists during the existence of the First Division as a combat unit in France. Is it to be wondered that such a division of the American regular army should be called upon to fulfill the mission of

Divisions with the Second French Colonial Division, was to be the spearhead to penetrate the <sup>e</sup>very heart of the enemy and render him a carcas upon which the rest of the armies of the Allies should vent their indignant wrath for months to come--until he should become completely devoured.

Included among other gallant troops honored by this distinctive selection was Company L, Sixteenth Infantry, U.S.A.

#### HISTORY

Now let us look back to see why this First American Division should have been so signally honored. Organized in May, 1917; in France in June, 1917; on the front line in October, 1917; a sector of its own in January, 1918; stopping a German drive in April, 1918; leading the Allies to a certain victory in July, 1918; turning defeat into victory in October, 1918; and leading the A.E.F. into Germany during November, 1918--such was this First Division.

The First Division was organized on paper just prior to May, 1917, but was not mobilized as a unit until several months later in France. Shortly before Christmas, 1917, the final replacements arrived to complete the war complement of the infantry regiments. The infantry components, in which we are now primarily interested, consisted of the 16th, 18th, 26th and 28th Regiments of the regular army. Each of these organizations had served for several years on the Mexican border and each had been called upon as a component of either the Vera Cruz<sup>2</sup> expedition or Pershing's expedition into northern Mexico. The officers and men of these regiments represented the best that the regular army of the United States could



"setting a true criterion" for the balance of the combat components of the American Expeditionary Force in France? As surely as the traditional history of the regular army of the United States is a history of self-denial, heroism, and gallantry--just as surely did that splendidly equipped division live up to the most cherished traditions of our regular army. It was a selected unit, with the mission of introducing upon the bloody battlefields of Europe the prowess of the American-in-arms.

Landing in France on June 17, 1917, and training a short distance behind the front lines with a dashing Chasseur division of the French army, the First Division was welded into a completed front line unit by the late fall of 1917. It acquired the 'esprit de corps' of the famous French division of 'Blue Devils' with which it was so intimately associated for months and months. It accepted the trust imposed by the commander-in-chief. It accepted the responsibility imposed upon it by the commander-in-chief, and it never failed.

Plied with tributes of praise and words of encouragement by the great leaders of the Allied nations, who made it their business to often review this strange phenomena of American combat troops actually in France, the morale of this little handful of America's First Division fared well indeed with an amazing rapidity which knew no bound. Lauded in person by such men as Clemenceau, Joffre, Foch, and Pétain, of France; Lloyd-George, Marshal French, and Haig, of England; Orlando of Italy, and Baker, Pershing, and Bliss of the United States, America's



## THE MARCH TO THE "JUMP-OFF"

Back in the fastness of the Foret de Compiègne events transpired with amazing rapidity. Company L had scarcely arrived to rejoin the Third Battalion when, sharply at 8:00 PM, the command began its forward movement. At first in column of squads--then, as the traffic became thicker, in column of twos--and finally, because of black dark, pouring rain, and terrific traffic congestion, in a single column of files along the side of the road. That march will ever be remembered by all ~~we~~ who experienced its hardships. Over twelve hundred men trudging forward to enter battle with hands joined because of the utter void of the blank dark; the rain pouring in torrents; vivid lightning crashing as an evil harbinger of the morrow; pounds of extra ammunition and equipment getting heavier and heavier with the soaking rain; endless columns of wheeled vehicles and tanks, four and five abreast, on the road, and crowding off the foot troops; congestion beyond description; impenetrable darkness; mud, slippery mud, above the shoe tops and weighing tons; three steps forward and a halt; delay after delay--maddening; Morrocans, Marines, motors and men in mud and murk groping doggedly forward to grip with gruesome fate. But the will to 'carry-on' impelled each man onward and onward!

Physical despair was more than counter-balanced, however, by the knowledge that the enemy must be ignorant of his impending danger. ~~The~~ surprise was a certainty, for never did a shell nor a plane from the Germans molest the surging masses

First also became America's Finest (in their own personal opinion)--which means morale of the highest type. Besieged by every newspaper correspondent anxious for home-news of America's only combat contingent on the front, the personnel of the division became rather fond of themselves as soldiers and were ready to show the world that the United States of America could turn out the finest soldiers in the world--as well as everything else which was classified as the finest in the world.

And thus we find the First Division, A.E.F., entering into battle at the head of the whole Allied world--changing the entire aspect of the trend of the war and adding to that vast storehouse of legend and tradition of the American soldier in battle, some of the most glorified actions and deeds of the regular army man.

The history of the First Division in France is too well known to bear repetition here. Briefly, its component units were First to be selected; it was First in France; First in battle; and Last to leave foreign soil. The First Division proudly and proficiently carried the sacred standard of the regular army of the United States to the embattled frontiers of civilization in France--and it heroically maintained the prestige of the regular army soldier before the critical eyes of the whole world.

Company L, Sixteenth Infantry, was an integral component of that First Division, American Expeditionary Force.

See marginal note, page 21

on that narrow road which led from Palesne, thru Mortefontaine and Couevres--on into Hell!

But still there remained to everyone that miserable feeling of helplessness and despair of reaching those assigned positions for the 'jump-off'--On TIME. These horrid thoughts added so to the physical and mental exasperation of all that the forward movement on that illstarred night is yet recalled in the memory of each survivor as more of a nightmare than a march!

At 4:30 AM, just five minutes before the 'zero' hour, the last man of Company L (which marched all night long at the tail of the battalion column) had arrived at his place in the Quarries immediately west of the little town of Couevres. A close shave!

The varying vicissitudes experienced by this company prior to its initial entry into serious offensive conflict are considered to be of sufficient interest as to warrant a brief tabulation:

Arrived in France on June 17, 1917.

In the 'Trenches' by November, 1917.

Continuous service at the 'Front' since January 15, 1918.

Almost three consecutive months duty before Montdidier.

Engaged at Cantigny.

Leading the Inter-Allied parade in Paris, July 4, 1918.

~~Engaging, immediately prior to battle,~~

Three days of carefree life in Paris

A 24 hour trip by French troop train, without food.

A 25 mile trip by truck, without food

A one hour preparation for the combat--  
cold food

A dismal, strenuous march of some 22  
kilometers--consuming  $8\frac{1}{2}$  hours

Arrival at the jump-off position 5  
minutes before the zero hour

Utterly no information concerning the  
mission of the company.

Thus we find Company L, worn by many vary-  
ing hardships and entirely uninstructed, at the front  
awaiting the sound of the first gun--the signal to  
move against a victorious German army.

#### THE BATTLE

A short five minutes respite there in those  
quarries of Couevres in the utter stillness of the  
tranquil break of dawn was sufficient to counteract  
all weariness and worry. The great opportunity was  
at hand. Restrained <sup>nervous</sup> ~~nervous~~ restlessness began to  
manifest itself. The very quietness of it all was  
the inspiration for a final accounting of personal  
conscience to the Almighty. Each man to his own  
thoughts in this hallowed moment--this moment of  
awful suspense.

Covert glances at illuminated wrist  
watches made the spirit of nervous restlessness even  
more manifest. Troubles and fatigue disappeared in  
the new eagerness for movement and action. That tense  
sensation which prevails at such supreme moments  
dissipated every pang of weariness and all thoughts  
of individual self-preservation. Strange sounds of

Refer to  
Special Map  
No 3  
(with overlays)  
Entire Engagement



the lesser insects produced weird and hitherto unheard sounds in the cavernous void. When, exactly at 4:35 AM--"BANG"--the first gun of the battle sounded immediately in rear--then, without its sound dying, the deafening roar of thousands of cannon of all caliber drowned even the first report of the opening gun--and the decisive battle of the great World War was on!

Again the silent, determined columns moved forward--but, now, with an animated resolution of purpose which could not be denied--even by all Germanic resources which had held the upper hand against the world for four years.

Down into the ravine of Coevvres midst an intensive artillery counterpreparation methodically and instantly placed by the thorough opponent; past high-walled gardens, whose walls were crumbling under the intensity of the heavy shelling; over the little stream, so full of mustard gas; up the steep opposite bank; and fairly on the way toward a surprised adversary, those columns went.

Being in the Third Battalion line, and designated as brigade reserve, opportunity for immediate hand-to-hand encounter with the enemy was, for the time, denied. However, the columns received every hostile attention in the form of increasingly accurate artillery concentrations. The same maddening sensation of being on the receiving end without the opportunity to strike back stood uppermost in the thoughts of every man. This fierce and dominant spirit even would launch itself upon the Hun!

Except for the casualties suffered and the sight of the wounded from the assault echelons returning as best they could, nothing of particular military interest transpired that first day. Many of the sights of a modern battlefield, however, were indelibly impressed upon the minds of all. The most inspiring thought of that particular moment was the awe which accompanied the sight of those returning wounded from the assaulting lines--"What was it like up there?" The awkward French (Schneider) tanks lumbered laboriously by--to be found a burning or crushed mass a few kilometers on. The French Dragoons--hundreds of them--with their dashing uniforms and long slender lances, huddled in a mass awaiting their opportunity. Incessant artillery shelling and increasing intensity of machine gun bullets notified that the Germans were wide awake and very much on the job--but such were the incidents of war which had long since been learned by the soldiers of the First Division. Long columns of German prisoners shortly passed thru to the rear--apparently in good humor and accepting the fate of war with almost French fatality. Some of the German prisoners carried American wounded on litters.

Only a few short halts interrupted the steady march forward. The surprise had caught the enemy unaware and the advantage was being vigorously prosecuted by the assault troops.

Since the Brigade Reserve Battalion had assembled some three thousand yards behind the actual 'jump-off' line of the assault battalion,

and since, after an advance of some twenty-five hundred yards (to the first objective) the second line battalion was to pass thru the first line battalion in order to add impetus to the attack, it was necessary for the reserve battalion to move forward at almost the double to close to supporting distance of the forward echelons. The first stop was made after clearing the Coeuvres ravine near the site of the former front line trenches. There was no necessity for any sort of reorganization, for every unit was intact. A burning French tank was crackling off to the flank. It may appear strange that a tank, consisting entirely of metal, should burn--but they certainly do. This particular one had a good start. The machine gun ammunition on the interior of the tank was exploding so rapidly as to give the impression of a pop-corn wagon busily engaged in the manufacture of its product.

The nature of the terrain at this point prevented observation to the front and flanks and it also obscured the command from the German observers and machine gunners--so a momentary lull ensued.

The First Battalion, in assault, had swept thru the surprised German first lines and had reached the first objective by 5:30 AM.

After a halt of twenty minutes the First Battalion continued its advance behind the intense rolling barrage, with Companies A and B in assault and C and D in immediate support. The resistance had stiffened considerably and many men fell in this next attack from the first to the second objective. The terrain here was particularly



favorable for defense. The sweeping valley was flanked, on the north by the formidable ravine of Missy aux Bois; on the south by the Trenchee de la Glaux, an old French trench which paralleled the axis of attack and it was traversed, just beyond the Missy aux Bois Ravine, by the important strategic Paris-Soissons Highway which, from <sup>which</sup> its position along the highest ground in the vicinity, completely dominated every approach.

The method of control of the assault battalion is interesting to note at this point since it concerns troop leading of the combat units in actual conflict. The Major commanding the battalion was wounded right at the very first forward move. The senior captain commanded Company B, which was in the assault wave, and assumed command of the leading elements of the battalion (Cos A and B) and delegated to the captain commanding Company C, in the support wave, the responsibility of handling the other half of the battalion which <sup>was</sup> following. Thus we find the battalion commander actually commanding a front line company and coordinating the effort of the other front line company--leaving the battalion as a whole and the two support companies and an attached machine gun company, in particular, to their own devices. All company commanders, however, were thoroughly acquainted with the situation and orders for the attack.

Now, let us see what occurred. From the position of the first objective, the Trenchee de la Glaux obliqued off to the right of the right boundary of the regiment. Receiving resistance from that

Overlay No 1  
Special Map No 3

Company B



trench, the two assault companies veered off to the right of their direction of attack, followed the trench to the second objective--and found themselves several hundred yards to the right of the position they should have occupied. Other assault echelons of the adjacent regiments had either conformed to this movement, or had themselves become confused by this trench--for all three arrived in the same relative order as at the start. The battalion commander realized his error and checked his position on his map. Meantime, the balance of the battalion had disappeared. So, here was this battalion commander away out of his sector with but a portion of his command. He reconnoitered and found the balance of the battalion in their proper places--having remained in the regimental sector and having rectified the error in direction committed by the battalion commander. The situation at this time was quickly rectified without military loss. The lessons of this episode point out distinctly that a battalion commander must command his unit as a whole--not its individual components. Furthermore, the loss of contact by the supporting echelon seems to indicate that the battalion of the World War was too bulky to admit of personal leadership of either the front line or support line commander--which is so essential in wars of movement and maneuver.

It was during this advance to the second objective that the regiment on the left began to fall behind. Since it was necessary to execute a passage of lines on the second objective in order to add a new impetus to the waning effort of the weary, dwindling

Special Map  
No 3.

ranks of the First Battalion, the Second Battalion was ordered to pass thru the First Battalion and resume the attack when the rolling barrage again started its forward movement. At this time the brigade reserve was tactically employed for the first time in the battle--it was moved forward and to the left in order to protect the exposed left rear of the assaulting waves and to maintain contact with the regiment on the left which had failed to overcome the fierce resistance in the Missy aux Bois Ravine. The Third Battalion accomplished its mission from positions along the boundary between brigades and in front of the First Objective line, where it remained the first night of the fight--the night of July 18-18.

Meanwhile the battle raged more fiercely than before. The hostile resistance was now thoroughly organized and was contesting every inch of the ground. Upon the passage of lines at the second objective the Second Battalion found itself under a murderous fire from the front, left and left-rear. However, the battalion doggedly pushed on and established itself on its objective by night-fall. This battalion was almost completely wiped out in that one attack. It remained ineffectual<sup>148</sup> during the rest of the four days of the battle. From the dominating positions along the Paris-Soissons Road machine guns poured a devastating fire into the advancing lines; machine guns in the tall trees which lined the road raked the determined little groups, while artillery observers from those same trees gleefully directed their deathly missiles

into their midst with unerring accuracy. Since the regiment on the left had been rather definitely stopped at the Missy aux Bois Ravine, the machine guns from the immense concentration which had been placed on the heights overlooking the town of Missy aux Bois were free to rake <sup>out</sup> the lines with an annihilating enfilade fire. The battalion was fully a kilometer ahead of the regiment on the left. Its losses were staggering. But it had accomplished its mission as per schedule.

Thus, after a successful attack which had penetrated the enemy lines more than five kilometers, the Sixteenth Infantry rested in position on the night of July 18/19.

In contrast with the previous night when ~~the very elements by their equal adversity had~~ assisted in screening the tremendous troop concentrations against hostile observation, this first night behind the German lines was a most beautiful, mellow, moonlight night. The Germans, now beginning to more actively recover from their initial surprise, became most active with their artillery and bombing planes. Their planes, in particular were busy in that glorious moonlight. They located the French Dragoons in a small depression in rear of the old German trenches occupied by the Third Battalion and staged a most spectacular series of raids. For the first time, men of the battalion could see the low flying planes silhouetted against the brilliant sky; ~~and for the first time, they observed the use of~~ flares in conjunction with air raids. ~~Next morning~~ that little depression was a scene of terrible carnage.



Many lances of those <sup>D</sup>gragoons were used in conjunction with blankets to improvise litters upon which the wounded were transported back to the rear.

Also, during that serene night, orders were recieved to continue the attack early the following morning. The First Battalion was to again lead the assault by passing thru the scant remnants of the Second Battalion. The entire division would attack at 4:00 AM.

If that night was a breathing spell for the attackers, it was surely a night of breathless activity on the part of the defenders. Fresh German reserves were rushed to stem the tide--but the gasping First Division could muster no outside assistance.

#### SECOND DAY

The attack of the second day was launched with clocklike precision. The rolling barrage and concentrations fell exactly when and where prescribed--and brought down a greatly intensified German counterpreparation. The stiffening resistance to the front effected by a night of preparation and by the introduction of fresh enemy troops and the ever widening gap on the left between the First and Second Brigades caused the weakened First Battalion to hesitate after its initial drive. The objective assigned to the 16th for the day's work was too ambitious, as it called for another advance of some five kilometers. With the failure of the Second Brigade to advance the impetus of the attack

all along the line was soon slowed down to a halt. During this attack the 16th had advanced her lines one kilometer--which left the Second Brigade more than two kilometers to the left rear.

The Third Battalion was moved forward again to protect the left rear of the brigade. It moved to another group of old German (or older French) trenches on the east slope of the high ridge along which the Paris-Soissons Road ran. From this position the battalion <sup>w</sup>as very close to the front line of the regiment on the left. Company L, on the left of the Third Battalion position, was subjected to the continuous artillery and machine gun fire which was directed against the front lines of the regiment to the left.

Shortly after an unsuccessful attack in the direction of the high ground southwest of Ploisy, troops of the regiment on the left retreated thru Company L. The men were not running--nor were they demoralized. They seemed to have become accustomed to retiring for reorganization for when they were stopped as they entered the area occupied by the Third Battalion they showed no desire to retire further. They were asked what they were doing going in their present direction and replied that they were retiring to cover to reorganize after having been repulsed in an attempt to advance against the Ploisy Ravine. When asked whether or not there were any officers with them, they replied that Captain (Blank) commanded the company. Soon Captain Blank arrived and gathered the remnants of his little flock together and calmly moved them by covered routes into the rear

of his own regimental sector. Such was the stuff of that First Division. It was inspiring to all who witnessed the calm return of that shattered group back to try again. The captain, by the way, was decorated with the Distinguished Service Cross and the French Legion d'Honneur for his gallantry during some phase of that battle.

→  
This portion, to page 25, should have been inserted between the end of page 9 and the beginning of page 10.

The company entered the great Aisne-Marne offensive under rather peculiar and most severe circumstances. As a result of a quite successful riaid on the German lines on the Montdidier front on July 4, 1918, it was selected to represent the 16th Infantry in the Inter-Allied Parade in Paris on Bastille Day (July 4, 1918) at which event components of the First Division comprised the American contingent. units of the First Division had been strenuously occupied before Montdidier for almost three months preceding this trip to Paris and upon relief had expected to find some respite from its continual routine of trench life on a very active front by at least a short rest in a billet area. In fact, it is believed that such a rest was a virtual promise.

With these ideas in view the company entrained at the Gare Champs de Mars in Paris on July 16th to rejoin the regiment--'en repos'.

After an unpleasant journey of some twenty-four hours on a French troop train the company detrained at the little station of Ourrouy on the southern border of the Forêt de Compiègne. The trip could easily have been consummated in less than three hours under normal circumstances--but,

Special Map  
No 2



as the event under discussion was effected overnight, the many stops were scarcely noted by the men of the organization who had become more thoroughly tired by the four days in<sup>g</sup> worshipping Paris than by all their arduous duty on the Montdidier front. To the amazement of all, instead of a nice 'rest area' the company rejoined the Third Battalion, 16th Infantry, in the density of the forest near the small town of Palesne, in the midst of seething activity which could mean but one thing to the seasoned campaigner--more front line.

But, one did not have to be a seasoned campaigner to learn that something 'big' was just about to happen--for it was the misfortune of the company to fall into the hands of incompetency right in the beginning. First, the trip from Paris which consumed some twenty-four hours--without food; secondly, the desertion of the Provisional 'Parade' Battalion commander who at once commandeered such trucks as were available at Ourrouy and left Company L to its fate without a single word of information or advice; thirdly, the fact that trucks, when they did arrive, some two or three hours later, were commanded by a person who had failed to learn of his destination; fourthly, a wild cross-country ride in trucks past all the rear concentration areas and right smack into Division Headquarters--just a few kilometers behind the front lines, and in broad daylight; fifthly, the retracing of route for some 22 kilometers back to the battalion assembly area which had been passed earlier in the afternoon; and lastly, the startling information that the company

was to leave the battalion assembly area within an hour for its 'jump-off' position on the Soissons front. Yes, incompetency was rife! But, in that ride to the front, enough had been seen to convince even the most conservative observer that something of tremendous import was brewing. The roads were crowded with every conceivable type of transport. In all directions every passable route of approach in the direction of the enemy was congested with traffic. The steady flow toward the front--with an utter disregard for secrecy meant but one thing--A BIG PUSH!

Fresh from the boulevards of Paris, without food for more than twenty-four hours, and with but one hour of preparation back in that dense

~~to be, Company E prepared for its greatest battle.~~

A huge roll of maps, overlays, orders and annexes the size of a Sunday edition of the New York Times was thrust upon the company commander while he was making a frantic attempt to change clothing and issue ammunition and all other of the multifarious equipments necessary for such highly concentrated modes of modern warfare to his troops. To have attempted to glean even the essentials from that roll of directives would have required, first, an hour for segregation and classification; and, then, another hour or so of orientation and study. So that was impossible.

Another surprising feature, though, proved to be rather a God-send--for it was learned that Company M had been so suddenly yanked away from the battalion (to act as ammunition carriers for the

machine gun companies of the brigade) that they had pulled out without food. Their rolling kitchen provided a splendid mess of cold beans and coffee for these ravished troops on the eve of battle. Grabbing ammunition, beans, first aid packets, grenades, rockets, reserve rations, Chauchot clips loaded with French ammunition, coffee, artillery dressings, advice, and information, was the work of but a short hour--but it represented the whole of the preparation of Company L for its greatest moment in France.

*Spill  
a round!*

The men were well enough prepared, though, for this attack--having been trained for just such an extingency for more than a year. But, to lead troops in battle, the officers should at least have been informed by the battalion commander concerning the mission, situation, and plan of maneuver, either before the march to the front line began, or during that march which lasted for more than eight hours. Anticipation on the part of an active thinking commander would seem to point to the advisability of providing a 'meeting' party at the detraining point where the elements of 'chance' (such as actually occurred) would have been eliminated and the commitment of troops to action with uninformed officers would have been obviated.

It was well that the Third Battalion, Sixteenth Infantry, had been designated as brigade reserve, First Brigade, for that action. There was that battalion with one company delegated to the ~~task of carrying ammunition for the machine gun~~ companies of the brigade (few guns of which were



able to keep up with the assault echelons of the charging infantry lines) and another company in complete ignorance as to what part it was to play in its most important action, to date.

After a couple of days, following the fighting echelons and taking all the heavy concentrations of artillery the Germans could muster, Company L was able to 'deliver' when finally called upon to replace the whole of the depleted regiment on the front line during the last two days of this furious five day fight.

It is a rather sad commentary, though, that troops which had received the benefits of such munificent training for just this sort of an emergency should be thrown into battle as a representative component of that glorious division with such meager information and instruction. The criticism, however, must be centered upon those charged with 'leadership'--not those dedicated to loyalty of purpose who actually composed the personnel of that organization, and were helpless.

*end of erroneous insert* →

By the time the division commander had time to learn of the results of the ordered attack for the morning and make the many necessary detailed plans for the continuance of the action to carry on with offensive actions which would attain the assigned objectives, most of the working day had passed. The situation demanded that the Second Brigade advance and close up that ever increasing gap which hindered the further forward movement of the First Brigade. The attack of the division as a whole was hinging backward on the failure of the troops on the extreme left to

the battalion shortly before its entry into action for the purpose of carrying ammunition for the machine gun companies attached to the battalions of the brigade. Company L was left alone as the reserve of the First Brigade. The machine gun company which had been attached to the battalion (Company B, 2d Machine Gun Battalion) did not accompany the Third Battalion in its movement to reinforce the assault line--it had become lost in its attempt to man-handle those heavy guns forward with sufficient speed to keep up with the lighter infantry which had charged forward so rapidly to avail themselves of the advantage of the initial surprise. The four guns of the company-- or of some company--which were present at the moment of departure of the battalion were left behind by design or neglect. These guns were commandeered by Company L.

In order to arrive abreast of the assault line in time for the attack it was necessary that the Third Battalion (less Companies L and M) leave the position of the brigade reserve about 4:30 PM. Assuming a normal attack formation the battalion moved out with companies abreast as though actually assaulting an enemy position. And, indeed, there was but little difference, for the enemy was so very close on the left flank that the command was under continuous fire all during the advance. The only difference being that there were no Boche in front to meet. Many men were lost in that hasty effort to close on the leading unit--advancing right straight across that broad-sweeping slope which gently swayed before the German observers and machine gunners--and with no natural cover. Cover

advance. The terrific opposition must be overcome at any cost. The reserve battalions of the 26th and 28th Infantry Regiments were accordingly released to those regiments from the brigade reserve and from the division reserve, respectively. To profit by the impulse of the attack of the Second Brigade, the Third Battalion, less Company L, was released to the 16th Infantry from Brigade Reserve.

The requirements of time and space delayed the time of attack to 5:30 PM--which later proved to be a wise decision, for it not only caught the Germans rather unexpectedly, but also left the dispositions for the night a more or less hazardous guess. Too much of a guess for the Germans to strafe the lines of the First Division for fear of inflicting casualties on their own troops.

The oddity of attacking at such a late hour gained the element of surprise which, together with the fresh troops thrown in with each regiment of the assault, resulted in the desired gains all along the line so that the division rested that night in positions which offered a good line of departure for the next day and which closed the dangerous gap on the left of the First Brigade to less than a kilometer. It also left the enemy without definite knowledge concerning the dispositions for the night--so that he was unable to shell, bomb or raid the lines.

The Third Battalion, 16th Infantry (less Company L) which had been placed at the disposal of the commanding officer, 16th Infantry, consisted of the 3rd Battalion, 16th Infantry, less companies I and K. Company M, as will be remembered, was removed from



was readily available on the right--perhaps not in the 16th Infantry zone of action, but surely in the 18th Infantry zone of action on the right.

Enemy machine guns which were located were immediately smothered by the fire of the four machine guns which had been left behind. This was done without order or agreement--as will so many assisting actions be accomplished on the battle line when neither time nor communication allow for plans. It was not known whether the fire from the rear would disturb the advancing line or not--for, surely such supporting fire would come unannounced and unsuspected. The young lieutenant in command of those guns had no idea as to their practical use. (Perhaps he was well versed in the theoretical employment).

Another interesting feature of control of small units in battle occurred at this time. Although the company commander had personally instructed each platoon leader that the battalion (less Company L) was to advance to assist the front line troops, one platoon of Company L which was to remain in position (under command of a very mediocre second lieutenant who had been commissioned direct from the ranks by some indulgent company commander as a result of his faithfulness, rather than for his intelligence or ability) very suddenly left its position and joined the advance of the remainder of the Battalion. Since this platoon was adjacent to the other companies of the battalion which were to advance, the merging of this platoon was unnoticed until it was too late to retrieve them. More will be heard of this platoon later. It will be well to

remember, at this juncture, that the platoon left without orders--rather, in spite of orders--because the incompetent platoon leader became rattled. Another specific instance to prove that the wartime organizations were too unwieldy to admit of individual control. (There must have been thousands of officers in the A.E.F. of the same mental caliber as this lieutenant--and, therefore, there must have been many, many incidents just the same as this one--and some of them perhaps caused the loss of many lives and of many tactical victories.)

It should be noted at this time, as well, that the company runners had to be changed. The bright young fellows who enlisted from high schools at the very outbreak of war, and who possessed the intelligence to ~~also~~ carry verbal messages, write their own messages and observe the terrain over which they passed proved to be so intelligent as to fail to return to the company command post when the sector was too hot. Also, they failed in physique. It was necessary to substitute resolute men of full growth who possessed extraordinary physical endurance as well as fearlessness and a sense of orientation. Such men may be found in almost any organization--but they will not be the bright young fellows who make the best impression as athletes during the training season behind the lines. Perhaps it would have been better to have trained all men as soldiers of the line--then, when runners were necessary, select them at the time for the job.

At the end of the second day the whole brigade had been burned up--except this one company

Brigade. The 16th Infantry, alone of those units with exposed flanks, was able to advance side by side with the more fortunate units whose flanks were not so exposed. But the 16th suffered the full consequences in casualties. Its battle strength was just about expended.

However, the attack was resumed at 2:00 PM--for it was imperative that the Paris-Chateay Thierry Road and railroad be cut in order that the Marne salient be made untenable to the Germans. Again the objective was the heights of Buzancy--some four kilometers ahead.

Desperate fighting and terrific bombardment prevented the full attainment of the objective on the third day. Shattered little groupments pushed resolutely forward in spite of all resistance and nightfall found the forward elements across the Paris-Chateau Thierry Railroad--but unable to move forward on account of the devastating artillery and machine gun fire which enfiladed the lines from the direction of Noyant.

Company L was moved forward to more closely support the weakened front lines. It moved to the military crest of the hill which overlooked the valley of the Crise River, just east of the Berzy le Sec-Lechelle Road. The movement was effected about 4:00 PM thru a very heavy shelling. Many casualties were incurred thru the absolute lack of a covered route of approach.

But, it was soon to be learned that the intensive shelling thru which the company had passed was but a mere bagatelle as compared to the murderous mass of high explosive which was being



which had arrived just prior to the scene of battle under the unfavorable auspices heretofore mentioned. But the brigade was leading the way for the division. It was advancing according to schedule against ferocious opposition kilometer after kilometer. Nightfall found the forward elements of the regiment solidly connected with the troops on the right and refusing its left to allow connection with the struggling regiment a kilometer or so behind its left flank.

Company L, 16th Infantry alone remained as the brigade threat. It had been ordered to maintain close support and, accordingly, had moved to the immediate rear of the front line elements as soon as the line became stabilized for the day. Again the company guarded that open gap to the left rear. Thus was the night of July 19/20 spent.

### THIRD DAY

The intermingling of units and individuals during the two days of combat, and the failure of elements on the north flank to overcome hostile resistance on their fronts caused such complexity of the situation that it was necessary to spend quite a bit of time to thoroughly locate the various elements of the division in order to plan for the prosecution of the attack and to arrange for its execution. The French division on the left of the First Division had met with such determined resistance that it was rarely able to keep abreast of the Second Brigade, in turn, with its exposed left flank <sup>which</sup> it impossible to maintain the pace set by the First

and Company L, to the last man, remained at its post.

When the shattered remnants of those two companies fled the German artillery pursued them-- passing thru Company L enroute, inflicting more casualties in a few minutes than had been experienced during the whole of the day.

This example of battlefield morale should never be passed by without deep consideration. It is the firm belief of the writer that as many casualties are inflicted upon infantry by loss of battlefield morale as by all other combined causes. For instance, had Company L joined that mad rout it would undoubtedly have been decimated, whereas, in fact, it was able to later represent the entire regiment for two days on the front line as the only ~~regiment remaining fully competent to perform~~ arduous combat duty. Nothing was ever heard of the fugitives during the following  $2\frac{1}{2}$  days that the regiment remained at the front.

Patrols soon established the fact that not only was there no counterattack brewing, but that there was not a single tank in sight--nor had a German tank ever been in existence, as far as any man of that command ever knew. Furthermore, the patrols learned that the fox holes down on the west embankment of the railroad fill under the hill contained the remnants of the First Battalion, who authoritatively stated that there were but few Germans in the immediate front--and that they were not likely to give trouble.

An attempt to later locate men of those demoralized units which had fled met with no success.

nurled by the carload into the thin lines to the front. It was absolutely the most terrific shelling that had been witnessed or experienced by any member of the whole command.

About four hundred yards in front of Company L, where the remnants of Companies I and K were attempting to dig in along a hedge row which ran in prolongation to the massed batteries emplaced upon the heights of Noyant, literally thousands of high explosive shells were falling every minute. It was apparent that nothing could live above ground in such a hail of screaming shell-fragments. There was no cover under ground.

This Hell-on-Earth became unbearable to those men up there along that hedge line. It was not surprising when the whole line broke in headlong flight--crazed! No orderly retirement this time--but dazed maniacs rushing to the rear--anywhere! Right thru the lines of Company L these poor shell-crazed creatures fled--throwing away all arms or equipment which impeded their progress and shouting, as they went, "The Germans are coming after us with tanks". The only officer left with those craven creatures was leading them--even outstripping them all--and <sup>w</sup>as shouting their battle-cry "They are coming at us with tanks".

The officer was a well known company commander of an adjacent Third Battalion company.

It required the stoutest hearts of a well disciplined regular army outfit to prevent the spread of the rout. Discipline prevailed, however,



It was presumed that they found the kitchens, alright. But this scouting about to the rear did disclose another intact company of the neighboring brigade. This company was informed of the situation insofar as known at the time and was requested to move to the north into its own zone of action in order to protect the left rear of Company L--which was entirely 'up in the air'. The invading company commander cooperated by stating that he took orders from his own immediate superiors only. He had a rather snug hole and was enjoying a savory snack at the time--so was completely satisfied that none of his superiors would find him away over there in the 16th Infantry zone of action. An interesting example of cooperation.

After dark, the men of Company L reverently buried their dead and wearily sank to rest.

#### FOURTH DAY

Due to the depleted infantry strength of the division the attack for the morning of the 21st was to be made in two phases in order to secure the maximum artillery support. At 4:45 AM the First Brigade was to resume its attack behind the rolling barrage with the mass of heavier artillery firing concentrations to protect the exposed left flank. Later, at 8:30, the Second Brigade attacked supported by all the artillery available in the sector and assisted by the flanking fire of the 16th Infantry on their right.

The attacks progressed as scheduled and

the final objective of the division was attained early in the morning by the first dash. The infantry of the division was so weak, though, that only one thin line of widely dispersed skirmishers constituted the entire strength of the assaulting wave--there were no longer supports or reserves available to the regimental commanders. The initial impetus of the attack carried this thin line on to the regimental objective--but left it high and dry two kilometers ahead of the nearest support and with a gap of about three kilometers wide open on its left which only artillery fire covered. The situation was serious indeed.

At this time Company I was placed at the disposal of the commanding officer, 16th Infantry, who immediately directed its forward displacement to relieve the elements of the regiment in the front line who were, by this time, unable to hold their gains of the morning and who had already relinquished some of that precious ground which had cost so dearly.

Thus we see a splendid example of the use of reserves. Held out until the very last moment, the reserve company was able to move into a critical point and save to the commander the whole of his gains.

In the broad daylight and under constant observation, the ground straight to the front was obviously to be avoided in the forward movement--such an approach had cost the Third Battalion so dearly out two days before, and the lesson was learned. A staff officer from Regimental Headquarters, who had delivered the order for the employment of Company L,

marked out a suggested route of approach under cover which led thru the sector of the regiment on the right and into the sector of the division on its right. This route was followed--and without discovery by the enemy or the loss of a single man.

As the company arrived at the point where the Chazelle-Visigneux Road crossed the Paris-Chateau Thierry Railroad many First Division troops were found in the deep fox-holes dug into the reverse slope of the high railroad fill. Here was located the remnants of Company B, 1st Engineers which had been attached to Company L for the movement to relieve the spent troops on the front. The short halt at this point allowed time for gathering in these wandering stragglers and allocating them to the platoons of the company. And, also at this point, was found the lost 3d Platoon which had so valiantly, and uselessly, detached itself from the company in the attack of the balance of the Third Battalion two days before. This platoon had accompanied the other units in the approach march, and, in the confusion of the heavy shelling had sought a covered approach--and had wandered away from the main body of troops. It had suffered many casualties, but had done nothing toward the defeat of the enemy. For two days it had wandered aimlessly about the battlefield--lost.

It should be remarked, at this time, that none of the stragglers picked up at this point were 'skulkers' in any sense of that word. They were tired, worn men who had become lost from their organizations and who were ready to follow the first leader who would direct them in some sort of united



the debouchment was made had been effected without the knowledge of the enemy, so the element of surprise assisted in preventing casualties as well as did the method of advancement across the dangerous area.

Upon arrival before the wheat field a battered, wild-eyed officer of the First Battalion was met. He stated the situation as well as he could--that the First Battalion had attacked in a single thin line of skirmishers and that they had gone thru the woods west and north of Buzancy, but that they had no supports and could not clean up the woods which resulted in the loss of many of their handful of men at the hands of snipers from the rear. No messages could be sent to the rear because the lurking German snipers in the woods ~~could pick them off as fast as they attempted~~ to get thru. He stated that the 18th Infantry was on the right and had entered the Chateau of Buzancy and captured a great many prisoners, but, because of lack of reserve strength, had been forced to give up the Chateau itself and had retired to the cover of the woods on the west. The helmet of this officer had been crushed on one side by a shell fragment which had been deflected by the helmet to cause an ugly wound on his shoulder--but he, too, was carrying-on at the front with no thought of leaving at such a critical time. His relief at the arrival of Company L was instantly apparent--but more for the safety of his worn little group of determined followers than for any personal reasons. ~~in fact, he volunteered to accompany Company L up to the front--which was some 800 to 1000 yards~~

effort against the enemy. Disciplined men of that division never gave up or quit as long as there was work to be accomplished. It is believed that the greater percentage of straggling during that engagement was the result of individuals becoming lost, by one reason or another, from their commands.

With the acquisition of the fragments of Company B, 1st Engineers, and the recovery of the 2d Platoon, Company L, the command was reorganized into five platoons. To each platoon was allotted sufficient stragglers to bring the strength up to about fifty men apiece.

The road which had been followed to the railroad embankment was under observation and enfilading fire of artillery and machine guns of the enemy from the direction of Anconin Farm, the <sup>Sucerie</sup> ~~Sucerie~~ and the heights of Noyant. By a still further movement away from the sector of the 16th Infantry a covered route thru woods was found and utilized for the continuance of the approach. The company followed the reconnaissance detachment in single file.

Arriving at the eastern edge of the woods, an open wheat field separated the command from the cover of the rather heavily wooded slopes of Buzancy. This wheat field was absolutely dominated by the machine guns located in the Anconin Farm, about 600 yards to the left, and by the artillery observation and machine guns on the heights of Noyant. The company crossed the wheat field without a single casualty by rushes of small groups from the cover of the woods on the west to the cover of the woods to the east. The movement to the edge of the woods from which

forward. He certainly deserved the rest which began at that moment.

One other officer of the First Battalion was found in the eastern woods--almost in a daze. He attempted to show the location of his men, but they had either been killed, captured, or wounded and sent to the rear.

The portion of the 16th Infantry which had attacked to the north of the woods and which had halted to dig-in out in the open were never seen.

Company L occupied the eastern and northern edge of the woods to the north of the Chateau of Buzancy where, in accordance with instructions, it organized the position for defense on three sides--~~front, left, and rear.~~ The right was secured by the 18th Infantry.

The woods which were occupied overlooked the Crise River valley and the town of Noyant to the north; to the east was a neck of the woods which reached to the German positions west of Rozieres and in the Chivry Farm--along the crest of the south slope of the Crise River valley; to the rear was the Anconin Farm and the Sucerie--all infested with German machine guns and snipers.

It was decided to hold the position occupied during the day and, at night, to return to the rear and clean out the wheat field and Anconin Farm--then to patrol to the left rear and gain contact with the regiment on the left.

During the day several local counterattacks were attempted, but all were repulsed with such ease that such actions became sporting propositions with



German machine guns in and around the area and turned them against the rear of the Germans in the Sucerie and in Noyant. The Boche certainly had his 'wind up' for he had been subjected to so many odd and unexpected attacks which had always succeeded. The new display of strength and activity from the south and to his rear<sup>r</sup> caused him further serious concern--and soon long columns were leaving Noyant--for the Fatherland. Many of these columns were quickly dissipated by the raking machine gun fire from the heights across the valley and all future retirements, if, indeed, there were any more, were made under cover and out of sight of the observers to the south.

A fresh corps thrown in at this time would ~~have cut off the entire Marne salient and have~~ caused the surrender of an army which lived to contest every inch of that salient--then to withdraw and meet the Allies on other fronts.

During the night the wheat field to the rear and Anconin Farm were cleared and connecting groups dispatched to make physical contact with the 2d Brigade. These operations were accomplished without incident. By morning the position was securely held from the eastern face of the woods adjacent to the Chateau of Buzancy--along the northern face of those same woods and overlooking the Crise valley--northwest ~~across the open valley just to the northeast of~~ Anconin Farm--to the road junction southwest of the Sucerie. The mission assigned had been fully accomplished in every respect.

Now, although the troops had sustained their

the men. The German method of counterattacking possessed no shock action whatsoever--merely an attempt by small groups to infiltrate forward thru the woods with light machine guns. There was no apparent coordination of these efforts, nor was there any cooperation on the part of other of their forces. A prepared ambush met each of these attempts and, as soon as the infiltrating groups had progressed to the desired point,--a rattle of musketry, and several more German machine guns were brought back to be turned on the hostile forces in Noyant who were opposing the 3d Brigade.

Becoming angered at the above described tactics, the Germans placed a medium sized minnow-~~er~~ in a shallow trench just to the south of Chivry Farm and began to merrily blast away. The explosions of these tremendous 'flying pigs' was awful in that thick wooded area--but the physical damage was nil. Nor was the moral effect noted, except to the extent of locating the weapon and sniping its crew as fast as they approached the gun. In this manner the gun was silenced by one sniper. Concussion of high explosives is presumed to exercise a great moral effect on troops--but when those troops are inured to the mental terrors of crashing shells and are more or less resigned to whatever fate may have in store for them during combat--the moral effect is entirely neutralized, as was exemplified in the incident mentioned above.

To make a still better appearance of arrival of fresh reinforcements, the company salvaged all the

high spirit of battlefield morale, it became a bit lessened by the rumors of relief by Scotch troops-- who failed to arrive during the night of the 21/22d.

#### FIFTH DAY

All was quiet on the fifth day--barely a shot from any source. Two Germans who had failed to find their way to their own lines *from* our rear were brought up and interrogated as amusement--but this incident was soon to be overshadowed by a more important event.

"Here is the PC", said a voice--and Mr. Scott of the Fifteenth Scottish Rifles, Kings Own *Scottish* Borderers introduced himself as reconnaissance officer for the division of Scots who would relieve the First Division during the night. The shouting was over. ~~The battle was at an end for company L--the Campbells were coming, at last.~~

Mr. Scott was a real Scot, with kilties--his own plaid being covered by the inconspicuous olive drab--and he possessed a wee flask of scotch which assisted materially in a thorough inspection of the position.

The relief during the night was effected without incident. A lieutenant (the one who had become lost from the company during the attack of the Third Battalion on the 19th) was left behind as liaison officer, and a noncommissioned officer was left for each platoon. The liaison detail was to remain with the Scotch for twenty-four hours. This incident is mentioned for the reason that an interesting story was brought back by the officer.



About dawn on the morning of the 23d the last of the tired troops wandered wearily to the kitchens which formed the rendezvous point for assembly in the depth of the Foret de Compiègne. For the men of Company L this was the first hot meal since leaving Paris on the afternoon of July 16th--one week ago.

No attempt was made to count noses or reorganize at this time, for, with the snapping of the nervous tension under which all had been 'carrying-on' during the last three days of the battle, men sank exhausted in the hundreds of little covered shelters which were to be found about the area. Rest at this time was worth more than anything else--and opportunity for rest was afforded since the trucks which were to convey the remnants of that glorious division back to rest and repose did not report until almost 4:00 PM.

Thus ends the narrative of the operations of Company L, 16th Infantry, in the Aisne-Marne offensive, July 18-23, 1918.

But the narrative would not be complete without the story of the officer who stayed up with the Scotch who had relieved the company. It seems that this particular division had been chasing rainbows around the outer rim of the Marne salient since the threat of July 15th. They had been placed in a strategic reserve on the southern portion of the salient in anticipation of the last of the German drives--and had been held there in reserve until the fate of that battle was secured. Then, after some

the war from German dominance to Allied initiative. It precipitated an Allied assault which was stopped only by the Armistice. It established beyond the peradventure of doubt (even by the opponent) the prowess of the United States of America in arms. It meant a sure ultimate victory for the Allies-- and a pure 'question of time' for the Germans.

The price paid by the 16th Infantry for its share in the glory of the great victory was some two thousand casualties.

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The spearhead drive which initiated the Allied counteroffensive that eventually brought the great World War to a conclusion was brilliantly conceived and daringly executed by the staff of the Supreme Command. At a time when the Allied cause was at its very lowest, the Generalissimo of the Allied armies on the Western front seized the opportunity to strike an almost invincible and irresistible invading army at its very weakest and most sensitive point. Knowing that the Germans were planning to strike another of their fierce blows against the sides of the Rhiems salient, the Allied commander quietly massed his strongest reserves in the vast Foret de Compiègne opposite the northern face of the Marne salient and awaited results. The German offensive on the opposite side of the huge salient was launched with all the dash of the former blows which had been so successfully struck against the Allied lines during the spring and early

deliberation, they were ordered to the northern part of the salient to relieve the First Division. The congestion of activities delayed their relief twenty-four hours and tired the troops considerably. As a result, after the relief of the First Division on the night of July 23/24 they were very tired and their morale was quite low. The officer who was left behind stated that, upon receipt of orders to attack at daylight the next morning, the officer commanding the battalion which had relieved Company L, simply tore up the orders with the remark that "We are too tired".

#### RESULTS OF THE BATTLE

In brief, the First Division made its commanding general an outstanding personage in military history. His brief reports to General Headquarters invariably read "As per schedule". He became known, for the time, as "As per schedule" Summerall. As a matter of fact the First Division, as a unit, had performed its missions "as per schedule"--which meant that the command had captured its objectives as ordered and on time.

The battle was a strategical and tactical victory for both the Allied Cause and the American Expeditionary Forces in France. The spearhead thrust into the sensitive vitals of the Marne salient caused the Germans, four days after the initial assault, to order the evacuation of the entire salient--thereby saving Paris and restoring the Allied morale. It changed the whole aspect of



summer. Marshal Foch still waited, patiently, until the whole of the German mass of maneuver and most of his reserve was committed to the futile action sixty kilometers to the south--then struck the death-dealing blow.

It is believed that an opportunity to crush the German army in the Marne salient was lost thru failure to provide available reserves behind this spearhead thrust which could have been thrown in at the decisive moment and, by the added impetus, could have completely cut off the troops pocketed deep in the salient--thereby saving many lives and much time.

The commanders of the British and American forces in France cooperated to the utmost in the delivery of this blow. Such cooperation would have been doubtful had not the Allies, in alarm after the German successes of the early spring, provided for unity of command on April 3, 1918--on which date Marshal Foch was named as Supreme Commander of the Allied forces on the Western front. In this particular battle were engaged one French Division, one Moroccan Division, one Senegalese Division, one Scotch Division and two American Divisions.

The ultimate success of the blow struck by the 20th Corps placed the initiative in the hands of the Allies for the first time during the war since the short period immediately following the First Battle of Marne. It further shattered the morale of the German army to realize, at last, the futility in their prosecution of the war--since the American entry in force. It was the morale factor which caused the

German nation more loss than the tactical victory and strategical gains resultant from that battle.

The United States of America placed, for the first time, her troops upon the battlefield in an offensive action. Those troops proved on that field that they would not be denied their objectives-- nothing would stop them. The war was lost for the German cause.

The command and staff, to the amazement of the older Allied veterans, proved worthy of the troops of the line.

Subordinate leaders, while rather crude in the finer methods of leadership, proved beyond any possible doubt that they were capable of leading their men onward to their objectives--and, furthermore, that they did it.

The bravery of the American soldier had never been doubted, but his ability to withstand the newer inventions and resulting horrors of modern warfare, which had been doubted, was now axiomatic. Indeed, his willingness to keep attacking and advancing, and his splendid endurance dispelled forever the doubts which had clouded the minds of the higher Allied commanders as to the value of the American soldier in offensive combat. We see later that the higher command, from the date of the Soissons fight, used every available American division wherever resistance was the greatest. We also find American troops on all the Allied fronts--to add offensive stimulus to the war weary veterans of the Allied nations.

Within the 16th Infantry there are a few salient points which might bear mention. In the

reserve. But, at the time the balance of the battalion moved from the temporary shelter of the trenches they occupied, the battalion commander motioned these men forward--and they went. The battalion commander did not realize that the men were from the company which he had designated to remain as <sup>S</sup>brigade reserve--and the weak officer in command of the platoon failed to notify him of his error. As we have already noted, that platoon wandered off--without instructions, became lost, and, for two days was wandering about the battlefield receiving casualties but taking no part in the defeat of the enemy. This example of poor leadership was occasioned by an incompetent in command of combat troops.

The value of morale and discipline was apparent in every phase of the attack. Defeated troops moving to the rear--but ready to accept re-organization and leadership and again resume the attack can be attributed to nothing other than discipline and morale. Again, the straggling remnants of the Second Battalion which were found digging-in at the railroad embankment who accepted without a murmur the attachment to platoons of Company L on its way to the front again showed the tremendous value of discipline. Many were the instances of men lost from their own organizations joining the nearest fighting unit and conducting themselves with valorous loyalty. Such conduct can surely be attributed to morale--alone.

The numerous instances of poor leadership where small groups would lose direction and become



first place it is thought that the command group should have interested itself in the presence of Company L during that battle sufficiently to have arranged for a 'fool-proof' method of its rejoining its battalion prior to the time the battalion was scheduled to leave its assembly area. A staff officer should have met the company at the detraining point and accompanied the organization to its assembly area where the officers and men could have been orientated concerning the plans and orders in sufficient time to thoroughly digest them all and orient themselves on the available maps.

It is thought that a serious error was committed when Company M was detailed to carry ammunition for the machine gun companies of the brigade. The company was dispersed--lost. Its presence on the battlefield did nothing, under the circumstances, to aid in the progress of the battle. Once dispersed, they could never again be collected until after the relief of the regiment from action.

Again, a small troop leading matter--the failure of the battalion commander to notify the attached machine gun company concerning their future actions at the time the Third Battalion (less Company L) moved to the attack on the afternoon of July 19th.

Of course the action of the platoon leader, 2d Platoon Company L, in accompanying the rest of the battalion was a great mistake. He had been informed of the situation and had been instructed that Company L would remain in position as a reserve

intermingled with the troops on the flanks, or where they would be led over open spaces covered by murderous enemy fire show lack of primary training on the part of subordinate leaders. It also goes to show that the war-time organizations were too large and bulky for the leadership of an individual.

One of the principal reasons why the machine guns were so ineffective--and so soon became lost from the battalion to which they were attached--was in the organic structure of the infantry and the machine gun companies. While excellent for training, the detachment of the machine gun companies from the battalions which they are to support makes for loose battlefield connections. The officers and men of the one unit do not know the officers and men of the other unit--the spirit of cooperation is lost.

Again, the infantry battalion commanders had had but little opportunity to become acquainted with the powers and limitations of the weapons of the machine gun companies--so, <sup>knew</sup> knew but little as to their employment. Furthermore, the battalion commanders were not accustomed to handling machine guns as attached units on maneuver, so, in some cases, completely forgot their existence in the heat of battle. And, last, but not least, the machine gun officers, in some instances, thought themselves superior to the infantry officer--which, naturally, disrupts cooperative efforts.

At one time a staff officer rode up on a horse to the head of a trench in which was located the headquarters of the Third Battalion. He dismounted and tied his horse to a nearby tree, and

entered the trench. He had hardly departed when a terrific concentration of hostile artillery fell on that trench--killing a medical officer, many wounded lying about his temporary aid station, and wounding one other officer and several of the men. This thoughtless action in the part of that staff officer caused much hatred to be built up against all staff officers--and distrust in everything that the staff did. Thus he defeated the cooperation of one organization, temporarily.

Keeping the remnants of the Third Battalion along the hedge line on the crest of the hill overlooking the Soissons-Chateau Thierry Road and Railroad while murderous artillery and machine gun fire was enflaming the well marked line was a very serious error which reflected most adversely upon the efficiency of the officer responsible. The command should have been moved either forward, down the slope to the protection of the railroad embankment, or to the protected right flank. Instead, the men stood the slaughter as long as human nerves could be expected to stand such a Hell on Earth--then fled in utter disorder. The command was never again reassembled during the battle.

There were numerous instances of officers leading small portions of their command to accomplish small, but important missions of machine gun nest destruction. As a result many of these officers became casualties and junior officers or noncommissioned officers were placed in command of the principal command. It would have been far better to have placed



those subordinate leaders in command of those smaller missions and have held the command of the whole unit to the logical commander. Furthermore, this continual wandering away on the part of commanders of all grades led to the difficulty of command and control--for, at times, it required hours to locate a commander in order to issue important orders.

Of the officers who remained unwounded after the battle, the majority had worn inconspicuous uniforms during the engagement. The ones who wore Sam Brown belts, or leather leggins--or even, who exposed themselves waving papers or maps--were the targets for the snipers and machine gunners. That type had but little opportunity to return from the engagement alive.

~~the different uniform is certainly identifiable in times~~  
of peace--but, on the battlefield it is believed that the presence of a live officer (who has served with the men of his command long enough to know them and to be known) is a great deal more enhancing to high morale and victory than a dead one who has done nothing to lead his men/<sup>than</sup> to wear a "different" uniform.

In the study of this battle it must be remarked that the units which went outside their zones of action in order to capture an objective, to knock out opposition which was raking their flanks, or to reorganize, usually fared much better in the matter of the greatest gains with the fewest losses. Boundaries are believed to be excellent--but as guides only. This battle proved that the hide bound rule of advancing straight to the front against opposition ~~just because someone says that in the~~ rear had placed boundary lines on his map is a very

costly practice on the battlefield. Men who might live longer and capture more enemy positions are thusly uselessly sacrificed. And, in battle, the time will always come when men are the commanders most valuable asset. As long as the units which are committed to action keep going toward the enemy and defeating his resisting groups--the battle will progress favorably regardless of boundaries. Assembly points along the line of advance where direction will be corrected are preferable to the strict lines of demarcation which hold attacking troops to confined suicidal frontal attacks.

It is believed that every officer in battle should make it his prime duty to report to his higher commander the negligence or cowardice of other officers whom he might observe in such practice. Higher commanders need such information in order to sift the truth of the accusation and rid the command of cowards, skulkers and unbalanced officers.

The men of Company L entered battle with but little knowledge of rifle firing. There were no ranges in France. The majority of the men had been in France over a year before they entered this great battle. So, as a final word, let it be stated, as an admonition, that battlefield morale is a greater influence toward winning battles (which win wars) than all the technique that could ever be crammed into an American soldier. Of course, the technique is vastly important--but, are we not, in our training, spending entirely too much time on technical training at the expense of any sort of battlefield morale

training whatsoever?

## LESSONS

Treating the lessons to be learned by comparison with the Principles of War, the following digest is offered:

### COOPERATION:

The entire Allied effort prior to the 'last ditch' mandates of the startlingly successful drive of the concentrated German army against the British on March 21, 1918 was piecemeal and disjointed in every respect. National jealousies led to a lack of unity of command and coordination of effort that is most amazing when we think of the type of the peoples concerned. And during this ~~whole period the Allies on the Western front were~~ uniformly unsuccessful in their attempts to gain the initiative even to the extent of preventing reinforcements of German troops on distant fronts at the expense of reducing the strength of the lines on the Western front. The only means of coordination of effort was expressed by the Allied Supreme War Council--composed largely of political leaders of the allied governments--which was empowered to recommend, only.

Unity of command naturally brought about cooperation of effort. In the battle of Soissons we find the troops of the principal allied nations, side by side, grappling with the enemy with equal determination. We find French <sup>u</sup>trick trains and ~~railroads~~ transporting troops of all the Allied powers without discrimination to play their part in



who had expended their strength in breaking thru line after line of hostile resistance at the most sensitive point on the whole front, yet it must be considered that, at that particular time, there was a great scarcity of reserves available to the Supreme Commander.

By massing sufficient troops in the fastness of the Foret de Compiègne while yet the possibility of their use on that front was a most uncertain proposition shows that Marshal Foch did have in mind the Principle of Mass.

#### MOVEMENT:

The concentration of masses of troops, munitions, materiel and necessities of huge operations in the short length of time consumed speaks eloquently, not only for the conceiving mind but also for the agencies of execution. This concentration was one of the most masterly in the history of arms. The delay of twenty-four hours in the arrival of the relieving Scotch Division should be attributed to conditions and circumstances rather than to adherence to a Principle of War.

#### ECONOMY OF FORCE:

By denuding his lines in front of the next well known hostile attack and placing his mass of reserve opposite a distant flank prepared to strike a decisive counterblow, rather than strengthening his defenses at the point where the main enemy effort would be concentrated, Marshal Foch boldly and masterly applied the Principle of Economy of Force to his command. This same principle was enunciated within the First Division by the withholding

the great battle. We find American artillery left behind its division, after relief, to assist a Scotch Division in its attack the day after relief. French tanks bravely sacrificed themselves in order to assist the advance of American infantry.

In the larger sense, the spirit of co-operation ran amuck.

Isolated cases of lack of cooperation are shown by failure of certain company commanders to render assistance to units of other organizations than his own--but these are too few to bear mention and they can generally be attributed to the cowardice or lack of initiative of decision on the part of an incompetent individual whom chance had misplaced upon the battlefield.

#### OBJECTIVE:

The Principle of the Objective was paramount in the minds of all from the very highest commander to the most insignificant soldier. Against great odds, and in spite of devastating fire the commanders and the troops pushed ever on toward their objective. None rested until the immediate objective was attained.

#### OFFENSIVE:

The whole battle is replete with instances and incidents which typify the action as a most striking example of proper application of the Principle of the Offensive.

#### MASS:

While the Supreme Commander may be criticized for his failure to have a sufficient mass of reserve available at the decisive moment to replace the

of one third the man power of the Infantry in reserve.

However, the principle was violated by the commander responsible for the detachment of Company M, 16th Infantry as ammunition carriers for the machine gun companies attached to the First Brigade.

By withholding Company L in brigade reserve, even after committing the balance of the battalion to action, the brigade commander applied, with splendid judgement, the Principle of Economy of Force. It was this little reserve which later was to hold the entire front of the 16th Infantry intact for two days.

#### **SURPRISE:**

"Surprise" was the watchword of the Soissons fight.

"Surprise" won that fight.

#### **SECURITY:**

The fact that no counterattack by the Germans succeeded and the fact that our troops had passed the German main line of resistance before they realized that there was a serious attack under way is indicative that the Principle of Security was practiced throughout the entire command during every phase of the battle.

#### **SIMPLICITY:**

Straight ahead--always! What could be more simple.



## QUESTIONS

1. Q. Which of the Principles of War made the Allied counteroffensive of July 18, 1918 possible of execution? Why?
  - A. The Principle of Cooperation, assured by the appointment of Marshal Foch as Supreme Commander of the Allied forces on the Western front.
2. Q. Did the organic composition of infantry brigades of the war-time organization violate any of the Principles of War?
  - A. Yes. The Principle of Cooperation, since the machine gun companies were separated, administratively and tactically, from the battalions to which they were normally attached for combat.
3. Q. Was the responsible commander justified in detaching Company M from its battalion on the very eve of battle? Reasons for answer, based upon subsequent events of the battle.
  - A. No. He violated practically every Principle of War by so doing. The later action of Company M in the Soissons Battle showed that the organization contributed nothing toward the defeating of the enemy.
4. Q. Were regimental and battalion commanders justified in mingling with and leading small combat units to specific objectives? State reasons for answer.
  - A. No. They not only deprived the command of the services of its higher leaders, but also caused delay in the chain of command thru their absences from their posts of command. Furthermore, they encroached upon the initiative of the subordinate leaders to whom such leadership should have been entrusted--thereby lowering the prestige of

such subordinate leaders in the estimation of their troops.

5. Q. What was the result of combat units leaving their zones of action, either by becoming lost or by design, in summing up such procedure as a whole?

A. Each time a combat unit left its zone of action it was driving the enemy before it. The defeat of the enemy is the objective of battle. In formations with great depth, the absence of an assault unit from its own zone of action did not materially affect the action within that zone, except to facilitate the advance of the troops following. The maneuvering outside the assigned zones of action resulted in the saving of many valuable soldiers who, by reducing flanking redoubts, or machine gun nests, were able to advance without casualties. Furthermore, many lives were reserved for later combat duty by circuitous routes, thru neighboring zones of action, in an approach from one hostile strongpoint to the next.

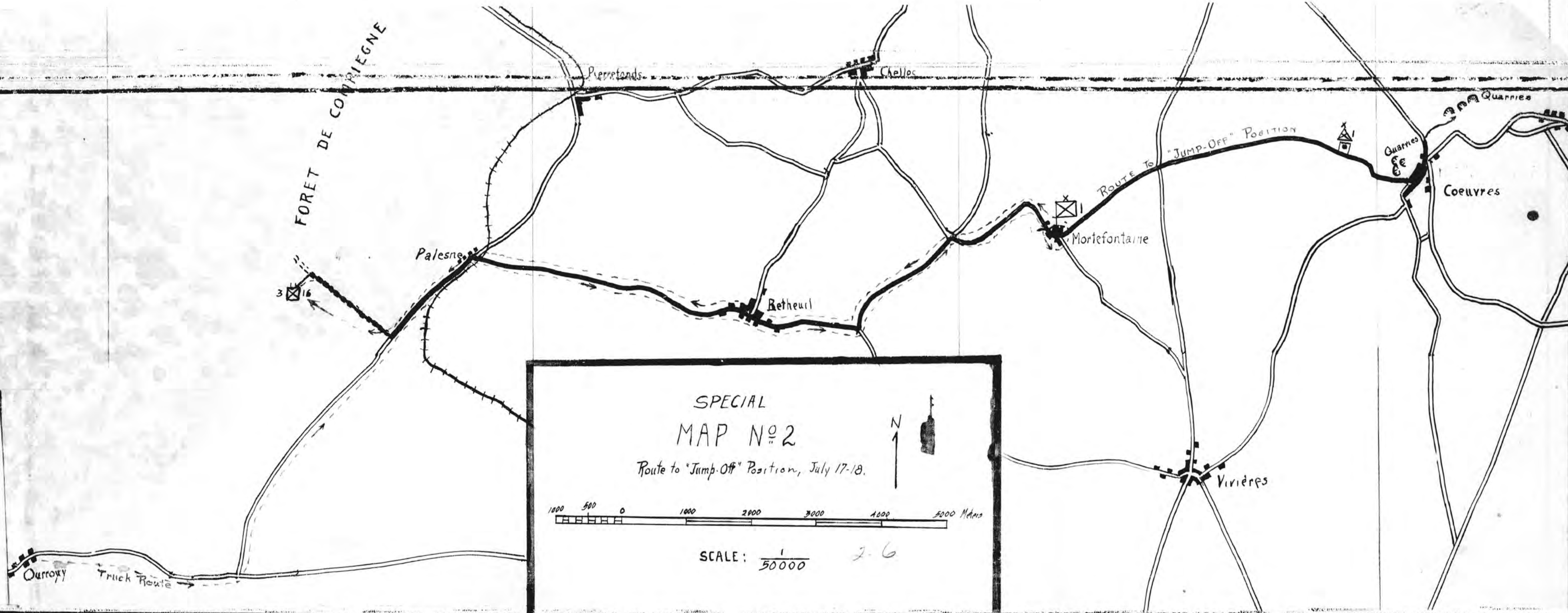
6. Q. What were the outstanding causes of the 'bolting' of an officer with two companies from the front lines on July 21st?

A. The high tension of the nerves of every man was greatly amplified by the terrific shelling received that afternoon from batteries which enfiladed their lines. Instead of moving to a secure locality, the troops remained there helplessly and were blown to pieces. The officer, who, no doubt, temporarily had lost his reason, precipitated the headlong flight--else the men would have remained there to the very last.

7. Q. What was the method employed by the Germans in their local counterattacks?

- A. The 'Infiltration' method--which consists of small groups pushing forward with light machine guns in an attempt to find a weak, or unprotected point in the hostile lines--then, to outflank his strong positions by flanking fire of the machine guns. There was no shock action to these counterattacks.
8. Q. What was the method employed by Company L on the 21st to repel the German counter-attacks?
- A. To allow the infiltrating groups to walk straight into an ambush--then to annihilate them.
9. Should Company L have effected physical contact by patrols during the daylight hours of the 21st with the regiment on the left which was about one kilometer to their left rear?
- A. No. All the contact that was necessary was maintained by observation and fire. The knowledge that Company L was located in its position should have been transmitted by the brigade.
10. Q. Can you explain the high battle morale possessed by the troops of the First Division during the Soissons fight?
- A. The high state of morale exhibited by the soldiers of the First Division during the Soissons fight was due primarily to the discipline which had been instilled in the command during the training period and the example of the higher commanders who stated that their position was one of pride--to represent the American nation at the Front. The men of the First Division were never allowed to forget that they were FIRST.





FORET DE COMPIEGNE

Pierrefonds

Chelles

Palesne

Retheuil

Mortefontaine

ROUTE TO "JUMP-OFF" POSITION

Quarnes

Coeuvres

Quarnes

Virières

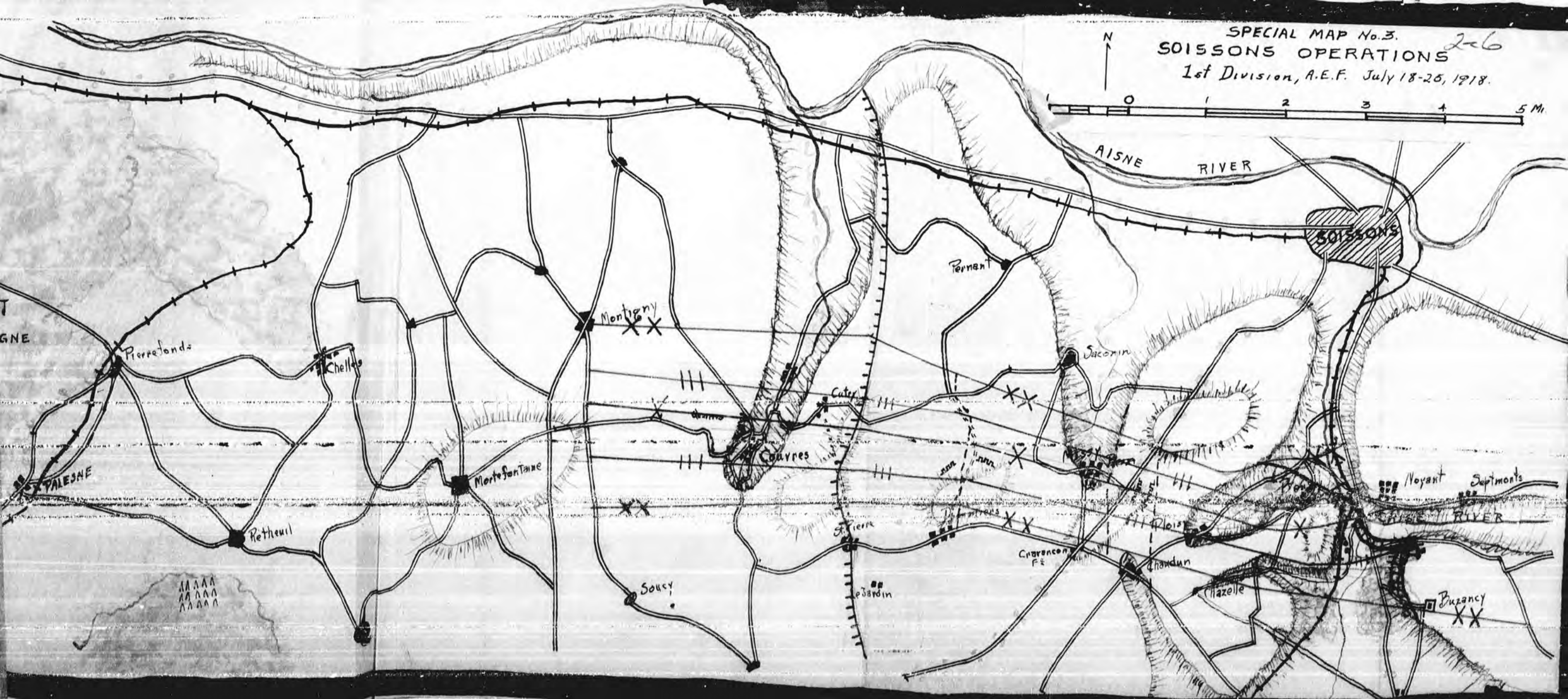
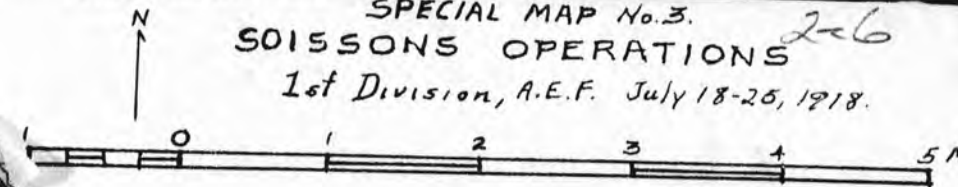
Ourroxy  
Truck Route

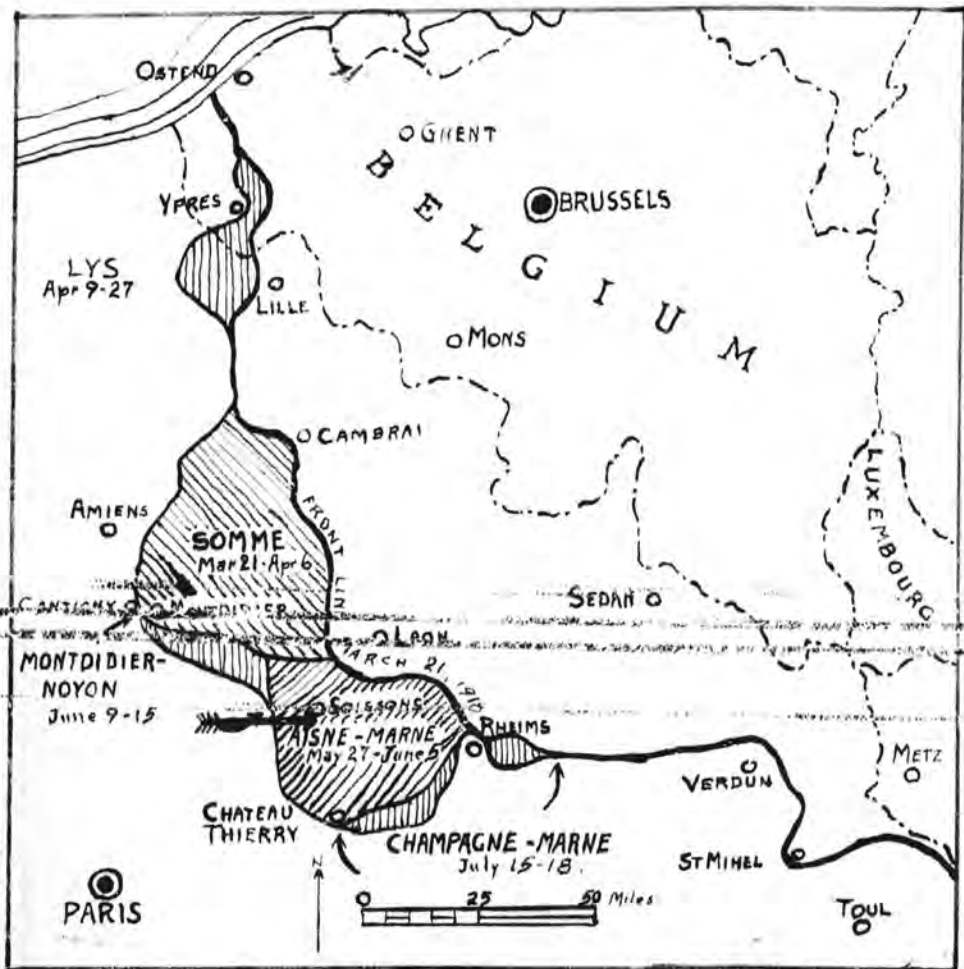
SPECIAL  
MAP N°2  
Route to "Jump-Off" Position, July 17-18.

1000 500 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 5000 Meters

SCALE:  $\frac{1}{50000}$  2.6

SPECIAL MAP No. 3. 266  
SOISSONS OPERATIONS  
1st Division, A.E.F. July 18-25, 1918.





SPECIAL MAP No 1

2-6

Western Front, July 18.

1918.

German Offensives Shaded.