

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

2-10

ADVANCED COURSE
1928-1929

OPERATIONS OF COMPANY "E", (78TH COMPANY), SIXTH REGIMENT MARINES
(2D DIVISION) AT BELLEAU WOODS, JUNE 1 TO JUNE 13, 1918

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE ✓

MAJOR ROBERT E. MESSERSMITH, USMC ✓

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MARGINAL ABBREVIATIONS USED

Battle	"A Guide to the American Battle Fields in Europe"
Horne	"The Great Events of the Great War"
Tide	"The Turn of the Tide"
America	"America in Battle"
Simonds	"History of the World War"
Thomas	"History of the AEF"
Brigade	"Diary of Fourth Brigade, Marine"
McClellan	"The United States Marine Corps in the World War"
Map	Rear of Monograph
Otto	"The Battles for the Possession of Belleau Woods, June 1918".

INTRODUCTION

Few American troops had arrived in France by the spring of 1918 although we had contributed money and supplies freely. The greatest need of the Allies was manpower, and gloomy indeed was their situation as Germany began the year with a firm determination to end the war before America's manpower could enter the conflict.

The German General Staff realizing the profound influence the actual entry of American forces into combat would have on the Allied morale, began their first offensive on March 21, 1918, against the British 5th Army at St. Quentin. This drive proved most successful for the Germans. (1)

(1) Battle,
p 10

Before the Allies had fully recovered, a second offensive was launched on April 8th against Armentieres, culminating at Mt. Kemmel. Again a huge salient was driven into the Allied line.

The Germans now had twice struck terrific blows against the Western Front and the Allies saved themselves from complete disaster by a narrow margin. Could the Germans launch another attack? Ludendorff, early in the year, declared he expected to sacrifice 400,000 men during the year and as yet he had suffered only about that number in total casualties. Many of these would soon be again available. Where would the next blow fall? (2)

(2) Horne,
Vol VI

SW 9 0 16
2
Marshal Foch expected the next drive of the Germans would be a thrust to Paris in the direction of Compiègne. He, therefore, prepared a counterattack in the region of Montdidier. Every detail for this attack including concentration of reserves was arranged during May.

(3) Tide,
p 41

(3)

General Pershing, realizing the grave necessity of the Allies for manpower, made his momentous decision to postpone temporarily his cherished plan of an independent American Army, and on March 28, 1918, offered all American troops to Marshal Foch to fight wherever placed. This same offer was renewed in May. (4)

(4) America,
p 1

The third offensive of the Germans came suddenly and with complete surprise. The break came east of Compiègne, instead of west, as had been estimated. General Pershing on May 18th informed Marshal Foch that he believed and estimated the drive would be made along the Chemin des Dames, but no action was taken. At 1:00 AM May 27th an intensive artillery barrage was placed along the Chemin des Dames and at 4:30 AM, fifteen German divisions advanced. These divisions comprised the 7th German Army under General von Boehm, operating along the Chemin des Dames in the direction of Soissons, in conjunction with the 1st German Army under General F von Below, operating to the east of the 7th Army with its left attacking Reims. (5)

(5) Tide,
p 41

The success of this offensive was even greater than that of the prior two offensives. The French and British wearied by fighting in Picardy and Flanders, were taken by surprise. The French troops found themselves surrounded by the "infiltration" method. Thousands were captured; their line was broken; from the Chemin des Dames they retreated to the Aisne, southward across the Vesle and the Ourcq, down to the banks of the Marne. Westward they fell back on Soissons to keep touch with the British line, but Soissons was lost and Reims flanked. (6)

(6) Horne,
America,
p 110

The drive within three days cut a deep salient into the Allied line with Soissons at the northwest,

REIMS at the north east

and Chateau Thierry at its southern point, with its apex flung across the road to Paris, carrying the menacing Hun threat once more within 40 miles of the French capital. May 30th, disintegration of the French forces set in and the Marne was reached in their retreat. On the night of May 31st, the Paris government officials seriously considered a second evacuation of Paris, and a flight to Bordeaux, as in 1914.

From this, one might conclude that the French were entirely "up in the air". Such was not the case. Marshal Foch when visited during these stirring days, appeared cool and calm. He was concentrating all available Allied troops to stem the tide and his plans were maturing favorably. He knew of the demoralization of the French forces immediately in front of the German horde but also realized that the German drive would have to slow up, along the Marne of its own momentum, due to difficulties of communications, supply and exhaustion of the troops engaged. Events proved that such was the case, as the same fifteen divisions which started the drive on May 27th were still engaged on June 1st.

SECOND DIVISION (REGULAR)

General Pershing again offered all available American troops to Marshal Foch to help stem the tide. The urgent need of every man gave the American Second Division (Regular) its great opportunity.

Marshal Foch impressed by the gallant action of the First Division, on May 28th at Cantigny, also the fact that the Third and Second Divisions, American, were available, on May 30th ordered these two divisions to fill in along the apex of the new salient to help stem the German advance. (7)

The Second Division was organized like all other American Divisions. Its army components came from the Regular Army. This division had attached to it as one of its infantry brigades, two regiments, the Fifth and Sixth Marines, organized as the Fourth Brigade. The Third Brigade consisted of the Ninth and Twenty-Third Infantry Regiments.

The companies of the Marine Regiments were numbered instead of lettered, as is customary in the army, until their arrival in France when letters were assigned. The companies continued to be designated, unofficially, by their numbers. The 78th Company became "E" Company and as such was in the Second Battalion of the Sixth Regiment.

The Sixth Regiment of Marines was organized in Quantico, Virginia during July 1917 with Colonel Catlin as its commanding officer. The writer was the third officer ordered to duty with the regiment, having been preceded by the commanding officer and Major Hughes-- later the commanding officer of the First Battalion. The officers above the rank of first lieutenant attached to the regiment all had over eight years commissioned service in the Marine Corps. The junior officers were nearly all graduates of recognized military colleges. The enlisted personnel were nearly all recruits except the senior noncommissioned officers. The recruits were volunteers and came from all the states, but a large proportion came from the northwest, and many were college men enlisted at their colleges. The 78th Company had seventy-two men, out of 250, over six feet tall. A wonderful company of men.

The 6th Regiment did not go to France as a unit.

The last unit to arrive in France was the Second Battalion.

This battalion landed at San Nazaire, February 5th, and was assigned billets in the village of Robecourt in the Second Division Training Area.

The Second Division was assembled as a unit during February 1918 in the Damblain--Chaumont la Ville--Brevannes Area. After a period of training under the French, it was moved to a quiet front line sector south-east of Verdun, March 17, 1918.

VEXIN

The Division was relieved May 13th from duty in the quiet sector and started open warfare training in the Vitry le Francois Area. This area being found unsuited for this form of training, the division moved via marches and trains to the Gisors--Chaumont en Vexin Area northwest of Paris. The 6th Regimental Headquarters and part of the Second Battalion, including the 78th Company of the 6th Regiment, were billeted in Serans. In this area, under ideal weather conditions, intensive open warfare training was conducted preparatory to either relieving the 1st Division or extending the line held by it.

May 30th--Memorial Day--many were the rumors heard, from the French civilians, as to the immediate action of the Division. Suppressed excitement filled the air and was written on every countenance. Impressive memorial services were held at noon, in the beautiful grounds surrounding the Chateau, the Headquarters of the 6th Regiment.

Dame rumor remained entirely unconfirmed although the air was so charged that one actually felt that a moment of monumental importance was approaching. Regimental Headquarters was without any information until about 5:00 PM, when it became alive with activity. The Division had

received word of a move and so informed the regiments.

The 6th Regiment sent out this order:

Headquarters 6th Regiment
Marine Corps, AEF
France, 30 May 1918.

Memo:-

1. Advance information official received that this regiment will move at 10:00 PM 30 May by bus to new area. All trains shall be loaded at once and arrangements hastened. Orders will follow. Wagons when loaded will move to SERANS to form train

By order of Colonel CATLIN:

F.E. EVANS, Maj., USMC,
Adjutant.

Field Order No 4, dated 30 May 1918, 9:30 PM covers the movement of the Second Division and designates the vicinity of Meaux as the destination.

TRIP TO THE FRONT

The regimental preparatory memorandum having been received, companies of the Second Battalion hastily loaded their wagons and cooked a meal to be carried on the trip by the men. The companies were ready long before the designated hour, however, no busses appeared and it was not until midnight that permission was received to return to billets. Reveille sounded at 4:00 AM.

The French busses driven by Siamese finally arrived by 6:00 AM, May 31st, but the eventful journey did not begin until 8:00 AM. Eight officers or twenty men constituted a bus load. The drivers had been on the road for 72 hours with little sleep and food; as a result many were the thrilling incidents enroute.

"The route lay over the battlefields of the

first battle of the Marne, the troops encountered the lamentable tide of refugees fleeing before the invader, and the debris of French divisions retiring after defeat". The road beyond Meaux was jammed with civilians and soldiers fleeing toward safety. Enroute, the Camions were greeted by the French in all the villages most enthusiastically and many were the flowers handed to us as we passed by.

(8) Simonds,
p 188

(8)

The busses passing through Meaux encountered French regulating officers and battalions were sent along different roads. Although the Second Battalion passed through Meaux during the afternoon of May 31st, it was break of day June 1st before orders were given to detrain at Montreuil aux Lions, about ten miles out of Meaux.

Orders were given to get into the houses and to keep out of sight, and sleep. However, the men soon found rabbits, potatoes, etc., and great was my surprise when my orderly brought me a meal fit for a king.

The meal having been eaten, a vain effort to sleep was made. The springless bus ride proved too much and my efforts to rest were interrupted by a regimental runner trying to locate the battalion commander with a message to get the battalion on the march at once towards the front.

Field Order No 5 issued by the Division at 7:40 PM 31 May, covers the concentration of the division and assigned the 4th Brigade to the support zone: La Ferte--Chateau Thierry Road--Coupru--Bezu--Charmont with division headquarters at Montreuil aux Lions. The division became part of the 21st French Army Corps under the command of General Degoutte and belonged to the Sixth French Army.

The French Commander desired to place units of the Second Division into line between French units. Major Gen-

(pointing). The remainder of the battalion was ordered into line from Triangle Farm to Le Thiolet on the Paris-Metz Road.

5 The 78th Company advanced immediately to the designated line. The first platoon, Lt. Seller,^S commanding, on the right; next the 2d platoon, Lt. Eddy, U.S. Army, commanding; the 4th Platoon, Lt. Adams commanding, on the left; the 3d platoon, Lt. Raleigh, commanding, was in support. The company, as we left the road, hesitated to cut the wire fences, and the idea of moving through the fields, beautiful with ripe grain, was all contrary to previous training.

It must now be explained that the regimental commander issued the order direct to the company commanders in the presence of the battalion commander. There had been no reconnaissance made by the regimental or battalion commanders and no time was given company commanders to reconnoiter before placing their companies into line. No maps were at hand except the one in the possession of the regimental commander. Triangle Farm, on the right, and Lucy-le-Bocage, on the left, were visible from where the order was issued, but no idea of the intervening ground could be gained. The company advanced with its 1st platoon guiding on Triangle Farm and abreast of the 79th Company which was to extend the line to the right from Triangle Farm.

When Triangle was reached it was found to be on a small hill. At the foot of the forward slope could be seen a road and railroad while well to the left there was a steep ravine, Lucy le Bocage could just be seen. The distance between Triangle and Lucy is 2400 yards. Boursches was nearly 1,000 yards due north from Triangle

eral Omar Bundy, the Division Commander, protested and insisted that the division enter the line as a unit. This was reluctantly consented to.

OCCUPATION OF LINE

General Pershing in his final report writes: "The Second Division, then in reserve northwest of Paris and preparing to relieve the First Division, was hastily diverted to the vicinity of Meaux on May 31st, and early on the morning of June 1st was deployed across the Chateau Thierry Road near Montreuil aux Lions in a gap in the French line, where it stopped the German advance on Paris".

This should prove conclusively that the division occupied a front line and not a support line, as is so often contended. The 78th Company, although covering only a small section of the front assigned the Division, at no time witnessed the retirement of French units. To those who were in the Division there is no question that a gap was filled instead of forming a support line.

The Second Battalion having been formed, marched to the Paris-Metz Road and there met Colonel Catlin the Regimental Commander, who had found about ten of the division trucks and having urgent orders to get his regiment into line, he ordered as much of the battalion as was possible into the trucks and led the way, eastward, on the Paris-Metz Road.

The first crossroad beyond La Ferme Paris, marks the entry of the Battalion into the fray.

The Colonel issued an oral order stating: "The Germans are advancing and as far as I know we are the only troops between them and an open gate. We will occupy a line and hold at all costs. The 78th Company to occupy a line and dig in from Triangle Farm (pointing) to Lucy-le-Bocage"

and separated by the almost impassable slope of the ravine mentioned.

The company commander of the 78th Company decided Lucy was too far away and that one company could not cover the distance properly; that the ravine would form excellent flank protection; and that Bouresches should be on his left flank. The line occupied is shown on map. The battalion commander approved of the line when he inspected during the night and another company closed the gap from the left of the 78th Company to Lucy.

Map #1

The company dug "fox holes" along the military crest, the right of the line being about 150 yards to the front of Triangle, and joined with the 79th Company. An excellent field of fire to the front and flank existed.

The line was occupied during the late afternoon, scarcely any hostile fire reached us and the men did little or no digging that night. The night was clear and warm and all except those on watch had a good sleep.

The Division Field Order No 6, dated 6:00 PM, 1 June 1918, Par. 3 (b) assigns to the 4th Brigade the sector Le Thiolet (exclusive) to Chateau de Belleau (inclusive). The orders are to occupy and hold the line. This order was followed by Field Order No 7, dated 3 June 1918, 3:00 PM, which simply goes into details covering the occupation of the line.

The 4th Brigade Commander at 5:00 PM, June 1st reported to the division that the 2d Battalion, 6th Marines were in line from LE Thiolet through Clerembauts Woods to Triangle Farm to Lucy le Bocage with orders to hold the line occupied.

JUNE 2d TO 10 JUNE

JUNE 2D.- The 78th Company dug in. German machine gun fire was quite heavy and artillery fire made itself felt. The enemy seemed to sense the presence of formidable troops opposed to them, for their attempts to advance were not spirited.

JUNE 3D.- Telephone communication was established. The division engineers dug a hole to be used as a PC, by the company commander.

JUNE 4TH.- All French units which were ahead of the Second Division line had passed through the line or were relieved by 4:00 AM. The command of the sector passed to the Second Division at 8:00 AM, and now the division, in truth, was on a most active front. Except for machine gun fire and an increase of artillery fire, the day passed quietly for the 78th Company. During the morning, the French Liaison Officer attached to the Second Battalion, was wounded while inspecting the company line. Casualties were few and the line was well placed. The company suffered from lack of water and food. The rations which were received were French issue and the Quartermaster sent to the front uncooked quarters of beef, coffee in the bean and only a little bread. The kitchens could not be used.

JUNE 5TH.- The Division Field Order No 8 of June 5th, 10:00 AM, prescribed a general rearrangement of the line due partially to French units having withdrawn and preparatory to attack planned for June 6th. The Fourth Brigade issued an order, in the form of a letter to the regiments, based upon the division field order. The Sixth Regiment was ordered to withdraw units of the 2d Battalion from Le Thiolet to Triangle Farm inclusive upon their relief by units of the 23d Infantry. This made the 78th Company

the right of the regiment.

The rearrangement of the division placed Belleau Woods and Bouresches in the center of the sector.

"Belleau Woods is actually an advanced position, useful as a cover if the offensive is to be resumed, but accepted by the Germans as the natural limit to their advance begun on May 27th and now ended as a consequence of the exhaustion of the troops and difficulties of getting up supplies, guns and ammunition." (9)

(9) Simonds,
p 190

June 2d marked the farthest limit of Von Boehm's success although he continued his efforts for another week but made comparatively small progress.

Belleau Woods and Bouresches were occupied by the Germans on June 5th and they soon made their presence known. It became a matter of pride to the Second Division to regain this woods and town, although of no strategic value and only of minor tactical use.

Why did the division fail to occupy these two localities between June 1st and 5th? The writer had been unable to find a reasonable answer.

The German line ran from the north bank of the Marne--Bois de Courteau--Monneaux--Vaux--western edge of Bois de Belleau. (10) The American line ran from the south bank of the Marne--Essomes--west edge of the Bois du Loup--Cragis--northeast edge of the Bois de la Murette--east edge of the Bois de Clerembauts--Lucy le Bocage--Champillon. June 5th marks the end of the Aisne Defensive in which the Second and Third Divisions participated.

(10) Thomas,
p 94

JUNE 6TH.- Fourth Brigade Field Order No 2 issued 2:05 PM, June 6th covers the attack of the brigade on Belleau Woods and Bouresches made at 5:00 PM. The division issued no orders for the attack and neither the 6th Regiment nor the 2d Battalion issued written orders to cover their phases

of the attack.

About 4:00 PM the company commanders of the 2d Battalion were assembled near Regimental Headquarters and at 4:30 PM the major gave a verbal order based upon the brigade order. The 78th Company was to remain in position until the 96th Company passed through its line and it was then to follow the advance of the 96th Company. The company commanders barely had time to reach their companies before the time of attack.

The plan and situation were hastily explained to the platoon commanders of the 78th Company. The attack was launched on time. The action of the attacking companies, to our left, was in full view of the 78th Company. The machine guns of the company fired on favorable targets. The 96th Company did not pass through the line of the 78th Company and at 6:00 PM the battalion commander was notified and information returned that the company was to remain in place and await orders.

The company was subjected to heavy fire but no enemy appeared in our front. At 9:00 PM a runner from Lieutenant James F. Robertson arrived with a message that he and twenty men of the 96th Company were in Bouresches and requested help. This message was at once sent to the major.

The company commander, 78th Company, reported the condition of the company as follows:

"Sellers has been wounded in groin. Most of his platoon is gassed pretty badly. Relief of platoon is necessary. Adams' platoon also has had a good deal of gas. Let me know what can be done."

Received 10:05 PM.

The attack against Belleau Woods was not successful. Fighting in the woods was from tree to tree, from rock to rock, every available spot concealed a nest of German machine guns, impossible to be destroyed by artillery or grenade fire, but had to be taken with the bayonet. The ground gained in the woods was held under the most adverse conditions.

The following message from the 2d Battalion to the regimental commander at 9:27 PM, describes the condition of the battalion: "Robertson says he holds Bouresches and woods to right, with most of company. Needs reinforcements. Zane has only one effective platoon left and can not advance. Will ask 23d Infantry to hold Messersmith's line and if they will do so, will send him into town. Our line of resistance from Lucy to Messersmith should be reinforced at once".

JUNE 7TH.- At 1:30 AM the battalion commander reported to the brigade: "23d Infantry asked me to advance line to Bouresches-Vaux Road which I declined to do, as it meant moving 78th Company forward and giving up their strong line".

✓ The Brigade at 10:10 AM ordered the line to run from Bouresches straight south to Triangle Farm. / In compliance with the order, the 4th Platoon of the 78th Company was moved to the right front and extended the line of the companies in Bouresches.

The Regimental Commander at 6:50 AM reported the 78th Company as having had eight (8) casualties. The first casualty suffered in this sector was Lieutenant Eddy, US Army, killed by shrapnel.

JUNE 8TH.- The company continued to hold the line under very heavy hostile fire and any movement was certain to be met by artillery or machine-gun fire.

JUNE 9TH.- A message from the 4th Brigade to the 2d Battalion at 2:43 PM: "When relieved to-night by the 3d

At dawn
Battalion, 5th Marines, march your battalion to the east edge of woods southwest of Lucy, south of the stream Gobert". The good news contained in this message reached the company at dusk.

An assembly point at La Cense Farm was designated and preparation for relief made. The relieving company arrived about 10:15 PM. The relief was effected without casualties but the enemy put down heavy artillery fire, seemingly sensing that a relief was taking place. The company arrived at the designated area about 3:00 AM, June 10th and had their first hot food since May 30th.

JUNE 10TH TO JUNE 14TH

JUNE 10TH.- The entire battalion was not relieved the night of June 9-10, the remainder of the battalion was relieved the night of June 10-11. Brigade Field Order No 4 issued at 5:45 PM placed the battalion in brigade reserve.

The day was spent by the 78th Company in an endeavor to get clean and a thorough overhauling of equipment. The YMCA appeared on the scene and made an effort to sell their wares, but a sudden stop was put to their activity and a free issue made of what they had in their truck

The brigade commander in his report to the division states: "The 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, has been in the line continually fighting since the night of June 1st". In reference to the condition of the brigade he reports: "Its line has receded nowhere and has everywhere advanced. Officers and men are now at a state scarcely less than complete physical exhaustion. Men fall asleep under bombardment and the physical exhaustion and the heavy losses are a combination calculated to damage

morale, which should be met by immediate arrangements for the relief of this brigade."

"The talk among officers and soldiers of the French Army, whom this brigade relieved, appeared to be that constant fighting for five or six days by them excused them for falling back before the enemy. This brigade has more than doubled the time which they considered exhausted them and has advanced against and held the enemy during all that time."

(11) Brigade (11)
P 33 &
34

JUNE 11TH.- The rest of the battalion joined the 78th Company during the early morning and was assigned by brigade as corps reserve and marched during the night of June 11-12 to La Sableonniere Wood (170.0-259.5) relieving the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines. The day passed quietly.

JUNE 12TH.- In Corps Reserve Area, the men found shoes, clothing and underwear that replacements had abandoned upon being ordered to the front. The men of the battalion were only too glad to replace their worn out shoes and replenish their empty packs. A fine rest was enjoyed and the nearby stream afforded an opportunity for bathing.

JUNE 13TH.- About 12:40 AM the battalion received a message from the brigade issued at 12:15 AM: "Information received of a possible attack on the Bois de Belleau from north and northwest to-night. Please move your battalion to woods northwest of Lucy (174.0-261.5) to arrive at 3:50 AM. Hold it in reserve in woods there pending further orders." The battalion arrived in the designated woods on time.

A statement made at brigade headquarters by a dying German officer, was to the effect that the enemy had brought up a fresh division and intended to attack at dawn. The 2d Battalion had barely arrived in position when a message from the brigade was received stating that the enemy had retaken Bouresches and ordering the commander of the 2d Battalion

to take two companies of his battalion and move to the woods southeast of Lucy with a view of counterattacking. The 78th and 96th Companies were sent on this mission and covered the dangerous two kilometers of open country to the position designated, in a very open formation and on the double. Fortunately, the enemy did not show any activity and the area was reached about 8:00 AM.

The battalion commander was notified upon the arrival in position that the reported capture of Bouresches was false. The two companies were ordered to dig in along east edge of the woods and await orders.

The brigade issued Field Order No 5 at 4:30 PM, ordering a rearrangement of the line. Paragraph 3 (b) "To carry out the foregoing arrangement of sectors the following movements of battalions will take place as soon as darkness permits, to-night, June 13th." "2d Battalion, 6th Marines to relieve 2d Battalion, 5th Marines in Bois de Belleau".

Word of this move was given to the 96th and 78th Companies about 5:30 PM, with instructions: that guides would report from the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines; that Mess Sergeants would bring hot food for the companies at midnight; that companies would not be withdrawn from their fox holes until just shortly before midnight; and, that the relief would be made about 1:00 AM, June 14th. The companies were ordered out of fox holes about 11:45 PM.

JUNE 14TH.- The mess sergeants arrived with sufficient food for a hot meal and enough for another meal which the men were to carry in their mess kits. Unfortunately, promptly at midnight the Boer put down upon our position a very heavy concentration of mustard gas. A number of direct hits were made. The food could not be eaten.

From nowhere a battalion of the 23d Infantry arrived and mingled with the two companies of the 2d Battalion. Immediately the gas shelling started, permission to move the companies into another area or to proceed with the relief was requested, but refused. Gas discipline was exceedingly difficult to enforce. Word was finally received to make the relief. Only one guide had reported and he went with the leading platoon. The other platoons were warned to keep closed up, but just as the march started a number of shells hit and broke up the formation. When the companies, 78th and 96th arrived at the place of relief, the condition of the men was such that the contemplated relief was impossible. Lieutenant Colonel Wise at 6:05 AM reported as follows: "Holcomb arrived with 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ companies at 3:00 AM, and other two companies badly broken up, from shells and gas. About 150 of these have showed up. My men physically unable to make another attack. Have just made another reconnaissance of the line and consider my present line unsafe unless whole woods are in our possession and not enough troops on hand and if these woods are taken there must be enough troops to hold them, or it will be the same story again; that is they will filter in. The woods are larger than shown. Request permission to withdraw slightly to make the line safer and that Holcomb be given more men as many of them here have had gas. Some (12) Brigade, gas here". (12)

p 47

The 78th Company suffered 110 gas casualties and about 40 killed or wounded. The company commander, 78th Company, was evacuated, blind from gas at 10:00 AM, June 14, 1918.

The 78th Company, from May 31st to July 5th lost

1 officer and 20 men killed, 3 officers and about 160 men wounded or gassed. No member of the company was captured by the enemy.

No history of the 78th Company would be complete without reference to the record of the brigade of which it was a part.

"While fighting was continuous and attacks and counterattacks were numerous, during the period June 6-26, 1918, inclusive, and all battalions served on the actual front, the Marines made seven (7) main attacks, as follows: At 3:45 AM, June 6th by the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, Hill 142 being captured; at 5:00 PM, June 6th by the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, 2d Battalion, 6th Marines and 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, Bouresches being captured and a foothold secured in the southern part of the Bois de Belleau; at 4:30 AM, June 10th by 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, an advance being made in the Bois de Belleau; at 4:30 AM, June 11th, by 2d Battalion, 5th Marines an advance being made in the Bois de Belleau; at 6:00 PM, June 12th, by 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, an advance being made in the Bois de Belleau; at 7:00 PM June 23d by 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, in the north of the Bois de Belleau; and at 5:00 PM, June 25th by 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, in the north end of Bois de Belleau, which resulted in the final clearing

(13) McClellan of the Bois de Belleau of the enemy." (13)

"Belleau Woods skirmish in the World War, was for the United States the biggest battle since Appomattox and the most considerable engagement American Troops had ever had with a foreign enemy. Not in the Revolution, the Mexican War, or the Spanish Conflict had as many soldiers par-

(14) Simonds, p 191, participated in a single battle". (14)

COMMENTS AND LESSONS

In a study of any element of the Fourth Brigade during its operation in the Belleau Woods area one is most strikingly impressed by the direct exercise of command by the brigade commander. Regimental commanders were more or less eliminated from the chain of command and orders issued directly to battalion commanders by the brigade. The system worked in a most satisfactory manner under the severe strain of active operations. This might be used as an argument to eliminate the regimental command from the present chain. At no time were orders issued directly to companies by the brigade but it so happens that the regimental commander in a number of situations issued orders directly to companies. In each instance where orders were issued directly to companies it was done to gain time and as a rule in the presence of the battalion commander concerned. The principle of cooperation was not strictly observed under existing chain of command.

Spelt
The 78th Company may have violated the principle of cooperation upon its entry into the line, in that it did not at once connect with the company in Lucy de Bocage. The company failed to receive cooperation in one case only. In a call for artillery fire by use of a rocket signal, the artillery remained silent.

The company had no real opportunity to exercise the principles of surprise, mass and economy of force.

Its movements on the field of battle were such as to protect the company from hostile fire and conducted in such a manner as to arrive with the greatest number of effectives. The principle of movement and security may

✓ have been violated the morning of June 14th, but if such criticism applies it is due to reflection 10 years afterwards. The company was always ready and anxious for battle and never lost sight of the fact that the Germans were our reason for being in France. The principle of the offensive and objective were always paramount.

The capture of Belleau Woods and Bouresches was of little strategic or tactical value to either the Second Division or to the Germans. It was rather a determination on the part of the division to show the caliber of American troops and a matter of pride for the Germans to check any advance attempted by the Americans. General Ludendorff on June 8th issued the following order to all army groups on the Western Front: "American units appearing on the front should be hit particularly hard in order to render difficult the formation of an American Army." The Second Division helped to impress the value of American troops upon the Germans. (1)

(1) Otto,
p 961

QUESTIONS

1. What system was used to evacuate wounded and killed?

Answer: To each platoon an hospital apprentice was attached--4 to each company. A man who was hit received immediate attention from the corpsman. If able to walk, the man made the best of his way to the Aid Station; if unable to walk stretcher bearers came to the company PC and got the wounded man. The man was carried to the company PC by members of his platoon. If enemy fire was too heavy the man as a rule was not moved until after dark. Men who were killed were examined by the corpsman and as a rule allowed to remain in their "fox hole" until evening when they were carried to a designated place.

2. How was ammunition supplied?

Answer: The company entered the line with belts filled and carrying two extra bandoliers of ammunition. Within two days after our entry into the line extra ammunition was sent in with the rations every night. This was carried from the battalion ration dump directly to the platoons. The 78th Company was fortunate enough always to have ammunition.

3. Were administrative reports made?

Answer: The company was required to report at least four times a day as to the number of casualties, the condition of the company and its activities. A record of events was required daily. The regular morning reports were not made.

The division learned a valuable lesson during this action. The large number of casualties among the officers, first sergeants and company clerks and the destruction of company records by shell fire, brought about what was known as the 20%.

Each unit before entry into an engagement detailed 20% of its strength and one officer to remain in the rear area. Company records and at least a clerk were also left with the train.

4. What system of replacements was used?

Answer: In the Marine Corps battalions were organized and trained in the United States and sent to France as units. These battalions were then sent to the front and the units disbanded. The men being assigned to companies in as large units as possible. These replacements acted like seasoned troops and General Harbord was forcibly impressed by their conduct.

Casualties when discharged from the hospitals as a rule were sent to their original companies.

The 78th Company had about 800 men on its different muster rolls during its service overseas.

5. Was there any opportunity to observe the effect of individual rifle fire?

Answer: Yes. This was especially true during the first five days. This was reported to Marine Corps Headquarters in detail by a French Lieutenant Colonel.

6. How was communication maintained?

Answer: From the company to battalion to regimental headquarters, telephone lines were run. Companies were not connected. In most cases battalions and regiments were not connected. Runners were largely used. The men of the signal corps deserve the highest praise and were as excellent a group as I have ever seen.

7. Did Marines fight in Chateau Thierry?

Answer: No. The name was applied to a sector. The 3d Division deserves all the honor and praise for the gallant fight in Chateau Thierry.

8. Why did Marines receive most of the credit for Belleau Woods?

Answer: The secrecy which GHQ enforced upon War Correspondents, which did not permit Correspondents to mention units or localities rebounded when a censor, during June, allowed the word Marine in a press dispatch. The newspapers at home jumped upon this tangible word and as a result they gave the Marines instead of the

division most of the credit.

9. Was it possible that a more advanced line could have been occupied on June 1st?

Answer: I believe this within the realm of possibility. The French were in Belleau Woods June 3d.

10. Could the attack on June 6th have been delayed?

Answer: I believe so and if delayed only for a day, better preparation could have been made.

