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THE INFANTRY SCHOOL  
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ADVANCED COURSE  
1928-29

THE FIRST BATTALION 61ST INFANTRY (U. S.)  
IN THE SECOND PHASE OF THE MEUSE-ARGONNE OFFENSIVE  
OCTOBER 12--21, 1918

CAPTAIN MERRITT E. OLMSTEAD, INFANTRY.

1

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Believed to be accurate.

Society of the Fifth Division

The Official History of the Fifth Division, U.S.A. Washington, Published by the Society of the Fifth Division, 1919.

Inaccurate in the same respects as are all organizational histories. Unfavorable actions little mentioned while favorable ones are exaggerated.

A brief History of Seventh Engineers, 5th Division.

Probably as accurate as any organization history. Does not cover anything in my monograph.

Monograph

Fifth Division (A collection of documents in mimeograph)

An uninteresting compilation of old orders. Probably accurate.

The Stars and Stripes

The Official Newspaper of the American Expeditionary Forces. Printed in France from February 8, 1918 to June 13, 1919. (March 28, 1919, pages 1 and 8: Kriemhilde Line Broken in Second Phase of Battle)

Quite general and brief. Apparently depended on division histories for information, therefore inaccurate as all division histories.

Thomas, Shipley

The Story of the A.E.F. New York, George H. Doran Company, 1920. (Pages 323-333.)

Interesting reading for former members of the First Division only. According to this author the First Division won the war while others took minor parts getting experience. Dependent on division histories for information, therefore inaccurate.

Palmer, Frederick

Our Greatest Battle: (The Meuse-Argonne), New York, Dodd, Mead and Company, 1919.

Accurate except for some extracts from unit histories. It is the most accurate of the histories assigned me for reference, but too general for my purpose.

Moss, J.A. and  
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America in Battle, with Guide to  
the American Battlefields in  
France and Belgium. Menasha, Wis.,  
George Banta Publishing Company,  
1920.

Fairly accurate but too general, dealing  
only in divisions and larger units.

Van Every, Dale

The A.E.F. in Battle. New York,  
A. Appleton and Company, 1928.  
(Pages 338-362.)

Uninteresting reading and not accurate  
as to facts. Too general dealing only  
in divisions and larger units.

Johnson, Thomas M.

Without Censor. Indianapolis, The  
Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1928.  
(Pages 260, 270)

Interesting and probably accurate but  
too general to be of any value in re-  
search of the actions of smaller units  
like a battalion.

American Battle Monuments  
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A Guide to the American Battle Fields  
in Europe. Washington, Government  
Printing Office, 1927. (Pages 124-  
127.)

Accurate but too general for small units.

A.E.F.

General Staff College. Staff Ride,  
Part 2: The Operations of the  
Third Army Corps on the West Bank  
of the Meuse.

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General Staff. Intelligence Section.  
The German and American Daily Order  
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1918, including the Meuse-Argonne Of-  
fensive. Chaumont, France, 1919.

Brief and inaccurate in some respects,  
due to units reporting the advance of their  
farthest patrol as their advanced line.

U.S. General Staff, War Plans  
Division. Historical Branch Brief  
Histories of Divisions, U. S. Army,  
1917-1918. (Pages 12-13, Fifth  
Division.)

✓ Because of brevity they are more reliable  
than their detailed sources; the divisional  
histories.

McClure, Lowe A.

✓ (Colonel, 61st Infantry, 5th  
Division) The 61st Infantry in the  
Meuse-Argonne, Oct. 10-Nov. 11, 1918.  
(3 pages, typewritten)

✓ Fairly accurate, being dependent to a  
certain extent on the reports of others.

Elkins, John W.

(Captain, Headquarters Troop, 5th  
Division) Report on Meuse Argonne  
Oct. 14--Oct. 27, 1918.

✓ Accuracy not known as I have no first  
hand knowledge of actions of units  
covered in this report. Too brief to  
be of much value.

*No abstractions*

## INTRODUCTION

In order to have a proper appreciation of the actions of the 1st Battalion 61st Infantry during its participation in the Meuse-Argonne offensive covering the period October 12--16, 1918, a brief outline of its previous training and battle experience should be known.

The 61st Infantry was organized June 10, 1917 at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania from detachments of the 7th Infantry as nuclei. (1) There the companies were recruited to an average strength of 150 by volunteers coming largely from Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, and Kentucky. It was not until about December 1917 that the Selective Service draft supplied the necessary numbers to bring the companies to the prescribed strength of 250. (2)

Training during the summer at Gettysburg and during the fall and winter of 1917-18 at Camp Greene, Charlotte, North Carolina was quite similar to that conducted in all of our war-time camps of that period. Most company and battalion training was conducted by the newly commissioned war-time officers, who had little or no previous military service or experience. The particular battalion in which we are interested had during the greater part of that period a first lieutenant as commander. He was the same officer who later commanded it during much of its later operations. A regular army major was assigned just prior to its departure for France on March 16, 1918. He remained with the battalion during its rear area training and its successive entries in sectors in the Vosges Mountains and the St. Die fronts, being

(1) Fifth Div.  
History,  
p. 50

(2) Personal  
Knowledge

transferred just prior to its entry into the St.

(3) Personal  
Knowledge

Mihiel offensive. (3)

Very little actual battle experience had been gained prior to the battalion's entry into the Meuse-Argonne offensive. Not being in the assault brigade at St. Mihiel its role had been a minor

(4) Fifth Div.  
History,  
p. 115

one. (4) Much of the value of this experience was lost by transferring several of the officers to other units and the detailing of others to schools, including the major who had just been assigned prior to the St. Mihiel drive. Thus one of the company commanders took command of the battalion leaving only one company commanded by a captain. No company had more than three officers including the newly-commissioned officers from the schools at Langres.

Following the St. Mihiel operation the battalion received some replacements and then underwent about two weeks training in the vicinity of Toul.

#### MEUSE-ARGONNE, OCTOBER 12-16, 1918

Early in October, the Fifth Division moved to the theater of the Meuse-Argonne operations in the vicinity of Montfaucon. Being assigned to the Third Corps, the division was ordered to relieve the 80th Division which occupied the line between Cunel and the Bois-de-Foret. The relief to be effected during the night of October 11/12. (5)

(5) History of  
AEF, Thomas,  
p. 317

The area to be taken over by the Fifth Division had been the scene of terrific fighting throughout the previous week and the ground was a

right in the area of the Fourth Division where it was prepared to relieve that part of the Fourth Division which was in the 80th Division sector. Accordingly the colonel changed the order of battalions, placing the second in assault, the first in support and the third in reserve, (when found). At this juncture it became known that the machine gun company which had been attached to the 2d Battalion had been left in the Bois de Malancourt. The order was again changed placing the 1st Battalion in assault, the second in support, and the third in reserve. (14) (15)

(14) Capt. LB  
Glasgow

(15) Maj. JF  
Enlert

Thus the 1st Battalion 61st Infantry drew a leading role in the first of a series of perhaps the worst troop leading actions of the American Expeditionary Forces.

Not being able to determine definitely from the commander of the 80th Division composite battalion the location of his front line, the battalion commander of the 1st Battalion 61st Infantry sent Company A forward as a patrol to locate the line, effect the relief and report its position. This was accomplished by about 3:00 AM, October 12th. About daylight Company C was sent forward to take position on the right of Company A, Company B was placed about 400 yards in rear of Company A, and Company D held in the Bois de Fays as battalion reserve. The attached machine gun company took position just in rear of the center of the battalion along the Cunel-Brieulles road north of the Bois de Malamaunt. (16)

(16) Capt. LB  
Glasgow

As the line taken over from the 80th Division was about a kilometer in rear of that reported as held, the brigade commander ordered an attack so as



churned mass of shell-holes. West of the Meuse the Germans were back on their third and strongest line, the Kriemehilde Stellung. (6) East of the Meuse the 33d French Corps had not kept abreast of the American advance on the west bank, but was about seven kilometers to their rear. This exposed the two right American divisions to direct enfilade artillery fire from the heights east of the river. (7) (8) (9)

(6) Fifth Div.  
History,  
p. 131

(7) Fifth Div.  
History,  
p. 133

(8) America in  
Battle,  
Moss and  
Howland,  
p. 245

(9) Our Great-  
est Battle,  
Palmer,  
p. 527

(10) 380-D-1  
Col LA  
McClure,  
p. 1

(11) Capt RF  
Dark

The 61st Infantry was ordered to take over the right half of the division with the 60th Infantry of the same brigade on its left. (10) That part of the sector assigned to the 61st Infantry was held by the 2d Battalion of the 47th Infantry, Fourth Division, and a composite battalion including men of all four of the infantry regiments of the 80th Division. (11)

Preparatory to the relief of those units by the 61st Infantry, the regimental commander had sent forward on October 10th, from the bivouac area in the Foret de Hesse the 3d Battalion with instructions to reconnoiter the area and be prepared to effect a prompt relief. The remainder of the regiment followed the next day, stopping at noon in the Bois de Malancourt. There it halted until nightfall. Resuming the march at dark it arrived at the command post of the composite battalion of the 80th Division in the western edge of the Bois de Fays at about midnight. (12) (13) Knowing that an advance would soon be ordered, the regimental commander had planned to effect the relief with the 3d Battalion on the front line, the second in support, and the first in reserve. However, he was unable to locate the 3d Battalion which was exactly where it had been sent. It was not more than a kilometer to his

(12) Fifth Div.  
History,  
p. 131

(13) 380-p-1  
Col LA  
McClure,  
p. 1

- (17) Lt Col RW Kingman to advance the line to that reported. (17) The order was to attack at 6:00 AM, October 12th. No artillery preparation or support was requested as the advance was so short that it was expected that an early morning attack under cover of the usual heavy fog would be more effective than one supported by artillery. However, the order was so late in reaching the 1st Battalion 61st Infantry that that unit did not launch its attack until about 7:00 AM. (18) (19) By this time the fog had lifted and its protection was lost. The battalion of the 60th Infantry on the left had started its advance a few minutes earlier.
- (18) Capt LB Glasgow  
(19) Fifth Div. History, p. 135

The formation of the battalion for the assault was <sup>the</sup> same as previously started for the occupation of the line. Company A and Company C in assault with Company B following Company A at about 400 yards. Company D in addition to remaining in the Bois de Fays as battalion reserve was given the added duty of carrying rations to the remainder of the battalion. The position of the attached machine gun company along the Cunel-Brieulles road just in rear of the two assault companies, had been assigned by the battalion commander upon the recommendation of the machine gun company commander. (20) It was a suitable position for a defense of the line taken over. The advance, however, immediately masked any possible fire from the position selected. The commander made no effort to advance his guns in close support of the rifle companies, but preferred to remain in position without firing a single shot in support of the attack. (21)

(20) Capt LB Glasgow

(21) Personal Knowledge

In spite of the lack of machine gun or artillery support and the loss of the cover of the fog, the advance once started, became quite rapid. A lively machine-gun and rifle fire was immediately met. Enemy shells began falling along the line just left and followed the advancing lines at about two hundred yards. The latter however, only served to speed up the advance as all preferred to stay ahead of that steadily advancing curtain of bursting high explosive. (22)

(22) Personal Knowledge

*Not marked*

Arriving at the crest of the open ridge east of the small St. Christophe woods, heavy machine gun fire from the Bois de Pultiere was received by Company A, the left assault company. This caused only a momentary check in its advance as the battalion of the 60th Infantry which was still in advance of the 61st, soon entered those woods and relieved pressure from that source. Hand-to-hand fighting was necessary before the enemy was dislodged from the half dug trench system west of the Bois de Foret. Several prisoners were taken in this fighting, and what was estimated as about 75 of the enemy attempted to surrender to men of Company A, but the latter fearing a ruse of some sort, opened fire in their midst. Several were killed, with the bulk getting away in the woods. (23)

(23) Personal Knowledge

After clearing up the trenches and the western end of the Bois de Foret, the advance was just being resumed when a runner from regimental headquarters arrived at Company A with verbal instructions to drop back to the original jump-off line. (24) The company commander, fearing that some

(24) 380-D-1  
Col LA Mc  
Clure, p.1

mistake had been made, questioned the runner and finally informed him to return and get a written message signed by an officer before he would comply with such an order. Although he did not drop back, he did, however, halt the advance of his company and got it back into the partially constructed trenches from which the enemy had just been driven. Here, he organized with two platoons in the front line and two in support for defense. (25)

(25) Personal Knowledge

By the time Company A had taken position in the trenches it was noticed that the battalion of the 60th Infantry, which had advanced so brilliantly on its left, was beginning to withdraw from the Bois de Piltiere and from Cunel. (26) The company commander now began to believe that the withdrawal order he had received was authentic. It was apparent that the battalion of the 60th Infantry had also received such an order. Certainly, nothing else could have made it withdraw so precipitately after having broken through the enemy's main defenses and having him in flight. The commander of Company A still decided to hold his position until he could get in touch with the battalion commander. However, events now took such a sudden turn that he had little opportunity to reach the battalion commander for some hours. (27)

(26) Fifth Div. History, p. 137

(27) Personal Knowledge

The Germans, seeing the sudden stop and withdrawal of the battalion of the 60th Infantry, were not long in taking advantage of the changed situation. They began filtering back and setting up their machine guns along the edge of the Bois de Piltiere and in the open ground east of those woods. Soon they were placing a deadly fire on the retreating Americans. As

their fire drove the latter to cover in shell holes or other depressions, their artillery settled on the lines and drove them out again. Between these two fires the withdrawal was anything but an orderly maneuver, and was proof indeed that a withdrawal in the face of an alert enemy is a much more hazardous undertaking than is an attack. The company commander of Company A realized that the least he could do would be to cover the withdrawal with fire. He therefore immediately ordered his company to open fire on all enemy machine guns in sight. Several were put out of action while others were sent to the cover of the woods. (28) He also became even more thoroughly convinced that he himself wanted to make no such withdrawal.

(28) Personal  
Knowledge

As the retreating battalion disappeared over the ridge to his rear<sup>^</sup> and the Germans began appearing on his exposed left flank the commander of Company A became seriously concerned with the security of his own unit. Not having been able to reach his battalion commander by messenger, he took charge of the local situation in his own way. He personally went back to Company B where he pointed out the situation and instructed that company to fill in the gap created between his left and the right of the 60th Infantry which he explained should be about a kilometer to his rear. The company commander of Company B attempted to carry out those instructions. However, in the difficult maneuver of facing his company to the left and at the same time prolonging his line to the rear, he became subjected to the same devastating fires as had the withdrawing battalion. The result was that he did not stop his lines until reaching the

60th Infantry where he simply prolonged<sup>n</sup> its line while he attempted to collect many of his scattered troops in the woods to his rear. (29)

(29) Personal Knowledge

The commander of Company A seeing the failure of Company B to cover his exposed left and rear, placed a sergeant in command of his two left platoons and gave him similar instructions as those given Company B. The result was exactly identical with the first, with the additional ill luck that he was now short two platoons. The company commander now personally took charge of his remaining support platoon and after considerable difficulty succeeded in placing it on the exposed flank and facing to the left thereby refusing his line and thus providing the necessary flank protection. However, it by no means covered the gap between him and the unit to the rear. (30)

(30) Personal Knowledge

It was mid-afternoon by the time the above-mentioned operations were completed. Little else could be done as the entire brigade area was receiving a terrific bombardment both from the front and right flank. (31) (32) To further add to the worries of exposed units, two enemy planes strafed our lines at frequent intervals.

(31) Fifth Div. History, p. 133

(32) 380-D-1. Col LA McClure, p. 1

Several messages were sent to the battalion and regimental commanders giving the situation and asking for information, but with no response. Toward evening it was learned from the battalion adjutant that the battalion commander had been severely wounded early in the morning. (33) The commander of Company A being the next ranking officer the command of the well

(33) Capt LB Glasgow

scattered battalion fell to him. He immediately started into the woods to his right to learn the situation of Company C. He found that only its left assault platoon and the battalion intelligence scouts were on his right. After the death of its company commander early in the advance the three remaining platoons under a lieutenant had gone too far to the right, stopping in the Bois de Foret in the sector of the 4th Division. (34)

(34) Capt RF  
Dark

During the night of October 12/13 the battalion commander went to the rear to locate Company D, the attached machine gun company, and other scattered elements of his command. He was also in search of the colonel, as he had sent much information, but received none in reply. (35)

(35) Personal  
Knowledge

The attached machine gun company was found still in its original position along the Cunel-Brieulles road north of the Bois de Malaumont. (36) Those elements of Company B and of the two platoons of Company A which had been detailed to protect the gap, which their leaders were able to stop before entering the Bois de Malaumont, were in line to the left of the attached machine gun company. Those men who had entered the woods had become lost and continued aimlessly on to the rear being later returned as stragglers, except for some who attached themselves to artillery and other units in the rear. (37)

(37) Personal  
Knowledge

Upon finding those units of his command <sup>a</sup> along the Cunel-Brieulles road the battalion commander made no immediate disposition of them as he heard further rumors through them that he was not supposed to be as far advanced as Company A and Company C then were. In fact he was even told that the division was

not in the right sector but was going to be immediately pulled out for an attack farther to the west. He therefore decided to make no changes until he could get something authentic from the regimental commander. He thereupon resumed his search for Company D and the regimental commander. The former he did not find that night. Neither did he find the latter, but toward morning found the regimental executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel L. A. McClure at the advanced command post in the Bois de Fays. (38)

(38) Personal Knowledge

At the advanced regimental command post the battalion commander learned that the attack of October 12th was a mistake. Furthermore, he was ordered to withdraw his battalion that afternoon to a position near Nantillois, and be prepared to attack early the next morning, October 14th. (39)

*Fitzhugh*  
(39) 380-D-1  
Col LA  
McClure

The withdrawal of the battalion as well as that of the entire brigade was to be effected in daylight without a relief by any other unit. It was arranged, however, that the gap left should be taken over by the 3d Division extending its line to the right. The 3d Division, however, had leaders who knew that such maneuvers as daylight withdrawals or moving by the flank in daylight in contact with the enemy was a much more difficult task than it appears on a map. They effected the maneuver that night. (40)

(40) Fifth Div.  
History,  
p. 139

The separate withdrawals of the six battalions of the 9th Brigade which began about mid-day of October 13th brought down an intense artillery bombardment. (41) By mid-afternoon as the 1st Battalion 61st Infantry was preparing to withdraw an intense shelling settled on its lines. After a few

(41) Capt JE  
Cole



minutes the shelling began to advance, and was immediately followed by a fierce counterattack. Luckily this battalion was still in position. It looked for a time as if the battalion could not hold against the enemy assault against both its front and exposed left flank. The attack against the front was stopped within about a hundred yards of our lines by rifle and automatic rifle fire. On the left flank, the left platoon of Company A was able to stop it only after a fierce hand-to-hand struggle. (42)

(42) Personal  
Knowledge

After the counterattack the battalion made no attempt to withdraw but held its position until dark. It is believed that by this battalion's repulsing the counterattack and holding its position until dark the enemy was kept out of the sector thus allowing a unit of the 3d Division to take it over that night without any difficulty.

That part of the battalion still at the front was withdrawn shortly after dark and moved to its assigned assembly position preparatory to the attack early the next morning. The battalion commander spent practically the entire night looking for the remainder of his men. A few were found with other units around Nantillois including about 60 or 70 men of Company D. It was now learned what had happened to Company D to cause its loss to the battalion throughout October 12th and 13th. According to the story of the First Sergeant who had stopped the group found at Nantillois, that company had been the victim of leadership of the worst sort. The company had been ordered into a covered position in the Bois de Fays as battalion reserve by the battalion commander. The

company commander being of the irresponsible kind, had allowed his men to move about his area at will during the day of October 12th, thereby disclosing their position and numbers to a low flying enemy plane. There could be only one result. A heavy artillery concentration was immediately placed on their position. The company commander being under heavy shell fire for the first time lost his wits and started for the rear with the shouted order to his company, "Men we've got to get out of here". His entire company naturally followed. According to eye witnesses, this movement soon became a stampede, as the artillery concentration followed and remained in its midst. The First Sergeant was able to stop little more than a platoon and held them in a position just east of Nantillois until found on the night of October 13/14. The remainder of the company, less casualties, eventually found its way to the kitchens further to the rear. From there they were later brought back to the front by the military police. (43) The company commander has not yet been found.

(43) Personal Knowledge

(44) Fifth Div. History, p. 139

The battalion had entered the lines October 12th with companies averaging about 220 men. (44) They now averaged about fifty or sixty. The known killed and wounded per company was little more than fifty to sixty. Those reported missing constituted the greatest loss. This loss was brought about by faulty troop leading during those two days and also due to the lack of sufficient junior officers. One officer cannot control 200 or more men and perform the difficult movements called for on October 12 and 13th.

Thus we see one of the battalions of what historians have called a fresh division prepared for the attack of October 14th. (45) It was composed of little more than 200 men of shaken morale, having had only one cold meal in two days, and having undergone a most terrible baptism of fire during those two days of nightmare of October 12th and 13th.

For the attack of October 14th by the 5th Division, both regiments of the 10th Brigade and the 60th Infantry of the 9th Brigade were placed in the assault. The 61st Infantry was to follow in reserve, with its 1st Battalion given the special mission of maintaining connection with the 60th Infantry. The latter was on the right flank and had the mission of capturing Cunel and clearing the woods to the north. (46)

The formation for the advance of the 1st Battalion 61st Infantry was the usual one with two companies in assault and two in support, (as it was then called). The attached machine gun company was to follow the support units at 400 yards. (47)

The attack was launched so as to pass through the lines of the Third Division at 8:30 AM, October 14th. As in the case of the relief of the Eighteenth Division on October 12th, the line actually held by the Third Division was considerably in rear of the one specified in the attack order. (48)

Naturally the supporting artillery fire was too far in advance of the infantry to be of much assistance. Assault units immediately met heavy resistance with the result that the 11th Infantry in the center was drawn slightly to the left against Hill 260 west of the Bois de Pultiere, whereas the 60th Infantry on the

(45) Our Greatest Battle,  
Palmer,  
p. 523

(46) Fifth Div. History,  
pp.143-145

(47) Personal Knowledge

(48) Fifth Div. History,  
p. 143

right, was drawn slightly to the right against the resistance coming from Cunel and the Bois de Pultiere. This created a gap which was promptly filled by the 1st Battalion 61st Infantry in fulfillment of its mission. The battalion materially aided the 60th Infantry in the capture of Cunel and the southern half of the Bois de Pultiere, where the advance was definitely stopped by heavy resistance about mid-day.

(49) 380-D-1  
Col LA  
McClure  
p. 1

(49) This resistance had not been there on October 12th when the battalion of the 60th Infantry had reached about the same line after breaking through the main resistance around Cunel. However, the Germans given two days, had the woods strongly organized. By this time Company A had lost its last officer, a recent graduate from Langres, who had been assigned just before the attack that morning. Company B still had the two officers with which it had entered the Meuse-Argonne offensive on October 12th. Company C had only the second lieutenant who also had just reported from Langres. Company D had lost both of the two lieutenants who had started the attack with it. The losses in the enlisted personnel had not been so great as on the two preceding days. However, those losses told heavily on the already reduced companies, their average strength at the end of day, being only about 40. It was therefore necessary to reorganize.

(50) Personal  
Knowledge

(50) As to the losses in the attached machine gun company it is not known, but probably small as that unit again failed to follow the advance to a position from which

(51) Mr. Sgt. WB  
Morris, ISD

it could render support. (51) Had it followed the battalion into the woods it could have been of much assistance from positions along the western edge. Especially

could it have assisted the advance of the Eleventh Infantry on the left in its attack on Hill 290.

It had become apparent during the fighting of October 14th that the remainder of the Bois de Pultiere and the strongly fortified Bois de Rappes to the north must be reduced before any further advance across the open ground to the west could be made.

(52) Our Greatest Battle, Palmer, p. 531

(52) Accordingly, a new attack against those woods was ordered for the next morning, October 15th. For this attack the entire 9th Brigade was assigned, with the 60th Infantry on the right and the 61st Infantry on the left. The formation of the 61st Infantry was column of battalions in the order: First, Third, and Second. As Company B and Company D had been in the assault on October 14th, Company A and Company C, (left to right), drew that assignment for this attack, with Company B and Company D following in support. The attached machine gun company could not be located in time for the attack. (53)

(53) Personal Knowledge

The time of the attack had been ordered at 7:30 AM. However, due to the late arrival of orders and the difficulty of extracting the partially engaged Second and Third Battalions from the front of the 10th Brigade, the attack of the 61st Infantry

(54) Fifth Div. History, p. 154

(55) 380-D-1 Col LA McClure p. 1

was not launched until 8:00 AM. (54) (55) Again the artillery support was soon too far<sup>n</sup> ahead of the advancing infantry to be of much assistance. Moreover, the 60th Infantry which was to clear the eastern half of the woods, made no advance, sending forward only an officer's patrol. (56) (57)

(56) Capt JE Cole

(57) Capt FO Schmidt

Thus the 1st Battalion 61st Infantry started forward with both flanks becoming more exposed as it

advanced. After most sanguinary fighting of about an hour it reached the northwestern edge of the Bois de Pultiere. Here it faced its real task; that of taking the Bois de Rappes. Thanks to the initiative of Major Rivet, who moved his battalion (3d) to the right and came up abreast of the 1st Battalion at this point. (58)

*Sign*  
(58) Fifth Div.  
History,  
p. 155

Following a short reorganization on the northern edge of the Bois de Pultiere, the advance was resumed. By infiltration through a withering machine-gun fire, the battalion was able after about an hour to cross the clearing between the woods and gain a foot-hold in the Bois de Rappes. Here the advance had to be made through a veritable network of wire and other cleverly constructed obstacles. Lanes for machine gun fire had been cut through the woods, which seemed alive with those powerful defensive weapons. Enemy snipers fired from the trees. (59)

(59) Capt JE  
Cole

In spite of these seemingly insurmountable obstacles and after telling losses and much confusion, the assault lines were able to reach the northwestern edge of the woods at about noon. (60) To gain this, the fighting had been even more sanguinary than that in the Bois de Pultiere. Not more than a dozen prisoners had been taken by the battalion.

(60) 380-D-1  
Col LA  
McClure,  
p. 1

The northern edge of the Bois de Rappes being the final objective for the day, a reorganization of the fragments of the battalion was necessary. This was begun at once, and positions assigned for an all-round defense as both flanks were again in the air and the woods to the rear still alive with the enemy. (61)

(61) Personal  
Knowledge

Only Company A, Company C, and Company D had reached the objective and their total strength did

not exceed 75 men. The two officers starting with Company C and Company D had become casualties. Company A was still commanded by the sergeant who had started with it in the morning. He was the only sergeant left in the company. Company B could not be located until long after midnight of October 15/16, when it was found to be also on the northern edge of the woods but several hundred yards to the right with the 2d Battalion. As it had started as the right support company, it had become diverted toward enemy resistance on its exposed flank and had late in the afternoon joined up with the 2d Battalion. The latter had passed through the 3d Battalion which had become disorganized and demoralized after the loss of Major Rivet and three of his company commanders. (62) (63)

(62) Capt JE  
Cole  
(63) Fifth Div.  
History,  
p. 155

It was during the fighting in the Bois de Rappes that two more most unfortunate and regrettable incidents in the history of the 1st Battalion 61st Infantry as well as that of the entire Fifth Division occurred. The first was caused by a loss of liaison between the assault battalions and the regimental commander. Practically no information of his battalions reached the colonel throughout the forenoon except from wounded men. From these he learned that the Bois de Rappes had been entered, but that further advance was practically at a standstill until some artillery support was given to help break the resistance. When this information reached the brigade commander, a box-barrage of short duration beginning at 12:30 PM was arranged for. (64) This barrage came down without any warning to the three companies of the 1st Battalion which had shortly before arrived on the northern edge

(64) Capt JR  
Hodge

of the woods. Before the companies could take cover within the woods, one of our shells killed the last sergeant in Company A and three men near him, and wounded another. (65) Few things can demoralize men more than to be shelled by their own artillery.

The other and most regrettable incident occurred later in the day. Immediately following the death of Major Rivet and one of his company commanders nearby, demoralization and confusion due to the lack of a leader apparently ensued in the 3d Battalion. At any rate, the battalion adjutant, shell-shocked and alone and believing all was lost, became panicky and started for the rear. Arriving at the regimental command post in a state bordering on collapse, he gave the colonel the first information which seemed authentic since the attack had been launched. Unfortunately he gave information which was far from the actual facts. After telling of the loss of his battalion commander, and of the company commanders he added that the battalion was practically wiped out and that what few men were left were retreating. He probably saw only those men near him who would naturally follow him to the rear. Without attempting to verify the information he had just received, the colonel himself started to the rear. Arriving at the brigade command post in a state of excitement and panic approaching that of his informant, the colonel repeated the bad news. (66)

However, he made it worse by including his entire

(67) Lt Col RW Kingman regiment in the retreat. (67) (68) Fortunately, the

(68) Fifth Div. History, p. 156 brigade commander could not put much faith in such a



report. He directed that the troops be reorganized and pushed back to the northern edge of the Bois de Rappes. The division commander upon hearing the same information however, countermanded the order of the brigade commander, and personally directed no further advance into those woods that day. He further directed that the 9th Brigade organized its advance line on the northern edge of the Bois de Pultiere. This necessitated the withdrawal of the 1st and 2d Battalions of the 61st Infantry from the woods they had so dearly won, although information of their positions had reached rear echelons before their withdrawals were completed. (69)

*Spill*

(69) Fifth Div.  
History,  
p. 157

In addition to the damage to the morale of his men caused by the regimental commander's faulty report to his superiors, his report being overheard by liaison officers of the adjacent divisions, the news was immediately broadcasted to the entire American Expeditionary Forces, that the Fifth Division had run. Such a report, coupled with the sight of so many stragglers from the daylight juggling of troops on October 12th and 13th, led many to believe that the Fifth Division really had left the lines. (70) Nothing could be more unjust to the brave men of that excellent division who gave their lives, lost their limbs, or went hungry and cold through those and succeeding days until the Armistice gave them their first real relief. It was not even fair to the stragglers themselves. They were the victims of perhaps the worst troop leading in the A.E.F. Many of those same stragglers after returning to their units, performed deeds of bravery and valor of which any unit might well be proud.

(70) Maj Cook

The withdrawal of the 1st Battalion 61st Infantry from the Bois de Rappes was effected during the night of October 15/16. It was halted and reorganized on the northwestern edge of the Bois de Pultiere where it remained until relieved by a battalion of the 11th Infantry on the night of October 17/18.

The battalion had entered the operations covering the period October 14-17th with eight officers and a little over 200 men. It came out with only two officers and about 100 men. As to results, it had little more to show than for October 12-13th. It had aided in the capture of Cunel and the Bois de Pultiere, captured a few prisoners, and had temporarily relieved the pressure on the 11th Infantry from the western edge of the Bois de Rappes. (71)

(71) Personal  
Knowledge

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

There is much that can be criticized in the actions of October 12-13th. Only a few of the most outstanding mistakes are covered below.

The order for the attack was given too late to reach the lowest units before the time the attack was to be launched. As a result the attack was launched an hour late and after the protecting fog had lifted. (72) If necessary to advance the lines at all on October 12th, the objective should have been at least the northern edge of the Bois de Rappes. It is believed that those woods could have been much more easily captured that day when the battalions were almost at full strength and of high morale.

(72) Personal  
Knowledge

The order for the halting of the advance and

withdrawal to the line of departure was ill-advised. Higher commanders were apparently not familiar with the situation at the front.

The daylight withdrawal ordered on October 13th was far more costly than any subsequent attack. The actual casualties were great enough, but the greatest loss was from straggling due to the loss of control and confusion in the woods where men became separated from their leaders and wandered aimlessly on to the rear. Loss of morale was an outstanding result also. (73)

(73) Our Greatest Battle;  
Palmer,  
pp. 526, 527

Of course a great many unnecessary losses occurred before the withdrawal from the sector on October 13th. These were due to the fact that too many men had been placed in a too restricted area, and not allowed to push far forward instead of being moved about the area. (74)

(74) Personal Knowledge

The action of Company D in leaving its position in reserve was due entirely to leadership of the worst sort. In the first place, the company commander should have placed his company in such formation as to offer a poor target. Then he should have had his men dig individual holes for further protection against shelling. Lastly, he should have forbidden all movement about the area during daylight. Failing to take these measures, he was not justified in taking his company to the rear when the artillery concentration descended upon him. He should have moved it a short distance to a flank and taken the precautions which he had failed to observe in his first position.

The initial position assigned to the

attached machine gun company upon the recommendation of its commander was faulty. The moment the advance was launched his <sup>i</sup>fore was masked. He should have followed the advance closely until over the ridge to his front. There he would have found excellent positions for both overhead and flanking fire, which was much needed throughout October 12th and 13th. (75)

(75) Personal Knowledge

*Sigs*

The actions during October 14-17th furnish even more that deserves of adverse criticism than those of the two preceding days. Again we see the attached machine gun company failing to follow the initial assault to positions from which it could have rendered much needed assistance. In fact, it remained so far behind that the battalion commander could not locate it during the night of October 14/15 to use it in the attack the following morning. (76) That company commander has not been found yet either.

(76) Personal Knowledge

The shelling received by the 1st Battalion in the Bois de Rappes from its supporting artillery and its subsequent ordered withdrawal therefrom, are attributable to a loss of liaison with the next higher headquarters. For this condition both the battalion and regimental commanders are to be criticized. Certainly had the true situation been known at higher headquarters in time, there would have been no order to withdraw to the northern edge of the Bois de Pultiere. Units in rear would have been pushed forward to completely clear the Bois de Rappes and help the advanced units consolidate the line at its northern edge.

## LESSONS

(1) A battalion at almost war strength relieved one much depleted during the night of October 11/12. This placed many troops in a rather restricted area, thus affording excellent targets for the enemy artillery. This is a violation of the Principle of Economy of Force. It also violates the Principle of Movement in that maneuver is restricted.

(2) Although being overwhelmingly superior in numbers and morale to the enemy confronting it on October 12th, the 1st Battalion 61st Infantry was given a too limited objective thereby violating the Principle of Mass.

(3) The Principle of the Objective was violated in this same attack in that the taking of such a limited objective contributed very little to the success of the operation as a whole. This same principle was again violated in the ordered withdrawal from the Bois de Rappes on October 15th in that nothing was contributed toward the success of the operation as a whole.

(4) Had the orders for the attack of October 12th been issued in time to reach the lowest unit concerned before time for the attack, the advance could have taken advantage of the cover of the early morning fog. Assault units thereby would have been able to come to close quarters with the enemy before he was aware of any advance. This delay in orders caused a loss of opportunity to employ the Principle of Surprise.

(5) In stopping the advance on October 12th with the enemy withdrawing, and before decisive results were obtained, the Principle of the Offensive was violated.

(6) The battalion commander violated the Principle of Cooperation in ignoring the order to withdraw on October 12th. However, this principle was observed by Company A when it placed its fire on enemy machine guns which were firing on the withdrawing battalion to the left of that company.

(7) Following the withdrawal of the battalion on the left of Company A, two unsuccessful attempts to protect its exposed left and rear were made, before this was finally accomplished. In this the company commander observed the Principle of Security. Again this principle was observed on October 15th, when upon reaching its objective on the northern edge of the Bois de Rappes, the battalion was immediately disposed for all-round defense.

(8) The ordered withdrawal from the line during daylight on October 13th was anything but a simple maneuver. It brought on a counterattack which added complications and necessitated waiting until dark before its completion. Had all units been relieved and withdrawn under cover of darkness, the Principle of Simplicity would have been observed.

## QUESTIONS

1. Q. Why did not the attack of October 12th take advantage of the cover of the early morning fog?  
A. Orders arrived too late.
2. Q. Did Company D comply with its orders to remain in the Bois de Fays as Battalion reserve?  
A. No.
3. Q. Did the attached machine gun company support the attack of the 1st Battalion 61st Infantry in its attack on October 12th?  
A. No.
4. Q. Which constituted the greater loss to the 1st Battalion 61st Infantry in its actions of October 12-13, killed and wounded or stragglers?  
A. Stragglers.
5. Q. Did the 1st Battalion 61st Infantry have its full strength assembled for the attack of October 14th?  
A. No.
6. Q. Did the 1st Battalion 61st Infantry carry out its mission of maintaining connection with the 60th Infantry during the attack of October 14th?  
A. Yes.
7. Q. Did the attached machine gun company support the attack of the 1st Battalion 61st Infantry on October 15th?  
A. No.
8. Q. Did the 1st Battalion 61st Infantry reach its objective on the northern<sup>n</sup> edge of the Bois de Rappes on October 15th?  
A. Yes.
9. Q. Did the commander of the 1st Battalion 61st Infantry keep his regimental commander informed of his advance in the

Bois de Rappes?

A. No.

10. Q. Did the 5th Division run from the front at any time during the actions of October 12-17th?

A. No.



Capt. Olmstead. Copy #1.

2-12

