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

ADVANCED COURSE
1931-1932

Operations of the 1st Battalion 39th Infantry
(4th Division), in the Aisne-Marne Offensive,
July 18-20, 1918.

(Personal experience of a Battalion Scout Officer)

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Captain Walter B. Smith, Infantry

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
Title page.	(Unpaged)
Table of contents	i
Bibliography.	ii-iii
Marginal abbreviations used	iii
Introduction.	1
The General situation	1
The Special situation	2
July 18	
Objective and plan of attack.	5
Dispositions made by the battalion commander.	6
Events immediately preceding attack	6
Crossing the Savieres River	7
Capture of the Euisson de Cresnes	9 9
Consolidation and halt for the night.	12
July 19	
Regimental and battalion attack orders.	13
Delay and difficulty.	15
The capture of Chouy.	16
Food and relief	20
Analysis, criticism and lessons	21
Conclusion.	25
Questions on the operation.	27
<u>MAPS</u>	
General Map - The Aisne-Marne Salient, July 17, 1918.	29
Special Map No 1 - Troesnes, Faverolles and vicinity. (with two overlays)	30
Special Map No 2 - Chouy and vicinity (with one overlay)	31

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MARGINAL ABBREVIATIONS USED

Bach

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

39 Inf.

"The History of the 39th U.S. Infantry during the World War."

Poore

"History of the Seventh Brigade during the World War - 1918."

INTRODUCTION

This is the account of a battalion in its first contact with an enemy. The part which it played in the Aisne-Marne offensive was not an important one, nor were the results it obtained conspicuous, but the unit itself was typical of the partially trained American army of 1918 and is equally typical of the troops which American officers may expect to command in the early stages of any future war. To the military observer, therefore, its efforts are not without interest, since they present for his analysis the actions and reactions of the very material with which he will (most probably be called upon to work.

THE GENERAL SITUATION

During the first days of July, 1918, the allied commander-in-chief had made preparation for a Franco-American offensive between the Aisne and the Marne, with the object of reducing the Marne salient and thus relieving the menace to the capitol. The date for this offensive had been fixed at July 18. The great German attack of July 15-16, east of Rheims had in no way disturbed this plan, and the counter-offensive began as originally scheduled. However, to add all possible force to the blow against the German flank, additional troops were attached to General Mangin's Tenth Army on the northern extremity of the salient, and to the Sixth Army immediately south of, and supporting the Tenth. (1)

(1) Bach,
p 69

To provide this additional force it became expedient to utilize certain American divisions whose training had not been entirely completed. One of the American units selected for this service was the 4th Division. The 39th Infantry Regiment of this division was attached to the 33d Division, II Corps, Sixth French Army (2), and on July 16, was directed to relieve the 9th and 11th French Infantry Regiments, which were then occupying a position in the front line of the Marne salient extending from a point just north of the Ourcq River, at the eastern edge of Troesnes to a point two kilometers due north on the heights west of the Savieres River at Faverolles. (3) It is the 1st Battalion of this regiment whose movements we are to follow.

3) Poore,
p 18

3) Bach,
pp 69-70

THE SPECIAL SITUATION

Like the rest of the 4th Division, the 1st Battalion, 39th Infantry was a regular organization only in the sense that it was a unit of the regular establishment. A scanty sprinkling of noncommissioned officers represented the training and traditions of the "old army." The men, principally volunteers, had been in uniform somewhat less than eight months, and many of them had had no opportunity to fire a service rifle before their departure from the United States. The officers had but little more experience than the men, with the exception of the battalion commander, who was a "veteran" of two years' service.

The battalion arrived in France in May 1918. It had some preliminary instruction in a British area,

but it was transferred to the Marne almost before it had well entered upon its schedule of training. While in reserve billets it had some further work under French instructors, and finally for two days occupied a reserve position in rear of a French division. So far it has never seen, much less had the opportunity to measure its strength with, an enemy. Action, however, appears imminent. The regiment has been ordered into the line. The 1st Battalion has been assigned the left of the regimental position, its sector extending from the fork of the Fosse aux Demoiselles, north of Buchet (on the right) to the Oigny Road on the left.

4) 39th Inf.
p 26

(4) (See Special Map No 1). On July 16, in company with the regimental commander, the battalion and company officers reconnoitered this position, and now, on the night of July 17, the battalion is moving forward in the valley of the Ourcq, apparently destined for an actual tour of duty in the front line.

This night, which preceded the morning of the Aisne-Marne offensive, was a terrible one. Under torrents of rain the roads had become morasses. The darkness and the insecure foothold were obstacles which were rendered more formidable by the long lines of artillery and transport which crowded the roads. Loaded down with packs, rations and ammunition, and blinded by the driving rain, the men were compelled to hold on to one another to avoid losing their way; and the company lines stumpled forward at a snail's pace after their French guides.

In a daylight reconnaissance, the routes of approach had seemed easy and unmistakable, - the positions well marked. Nevertheless, the night relief was made with the utmost difficulty, and it was after eleven o'clock when the companies reached their areas. Companies A and B occupied the front line, with Company A on the right. Each company covered approximately one half of the battalion sector. The line of observation extended along the Faverolles-Troesnes road, while the main line of resistance followed the Fosse aux Demoiselles. Companies C and D, in support, went into position on the reverse slope two hundred yards in rear of the main line of resistance. One platoon of Company C, 11th Machine Gun Battalion, supported each of the front line companies, and the remainder of the company was posted with the support. The battalion staff moved into a command post built in a high cut bank on the Fosse aux Demoiselles at about the center of the battalion position. (See Overlay No 1 - Special Map No 1.)

By 11:30 the wet and tired men had settled down to catch such sleep as they might. The adjutant checked the trench stores; the scout officer manned his observation post and verified the maps and the battalion commander, with a sigh of thanksgiving, reported the relief complete. Ten minutes later a runner from the Regimental C. P. brought orders for an attack at daylight.

OBJECTIVE AND PLAN OF ATTACK

Diagonally across the front of the position now occupied by the battalion, and some four hundred yards from the line of observation, flowed the Savieres River. Beyond the Savieres was the Buisson de Cresnes, a densely wooded ridge stretching from Ancienville on the northeast to Troesnes on the southwest. It was garrisoned, so the intelligence journal stated, by a Saxon battalion, plus one company of machine guns. If strongly organized it would constitute a formidable obstacle. This wood was the objective assigned the regiment, and the 1st Battalion was directed to clear the northern half. The attack was to be made in conjunction with the French, who were to advance north across the Ourcq River to Noroy and east from Faverolles, across the Savieres River, through Ancienville, thus completing a "pincer" movement between Ancienville and Noroy. (See Overlay No 2 - Special Map No 1). By pinching out the Buisson de Cresnes the French command presumably intended to eliminate the strongest part of the enemy opposition and to make the going easier for the Americans;- in effect, giving them their first taste of war in a comparatively painless dose. Zero hour for the French was set at 4:30 AM; for the Americans at 5:30 AM. (5) The attack was given a direction by magnetic azimuth. The 3d Battalion of the 39th was to attack on the right of, and abreast of, the 1st Battalion. Boundaries between battalions were not defined.

(5) 39 Inf
p 26

DISPOSITIONS OF THE BATTALION COMMANDER

Reconnaissance at this late hour seemed out of the question, and the startled battalion staff turned to their maps. The Sarre River appeared to be a rather insignificant stream which would offer no serious obstacle. The Buisson de Cresnes looked difficult, but it was theirs to take, and the battalion commander decided on a normal attack formation with Companies A and B, deployed, in assault and Companies C and D in support:- the support, in line of section columns to follow the assault waves at a distance of about one hundred yards. Company C, 11th Machine Gun Battalion was directed to follow the right support company. The Faverolles-Troesnes road was given as the line of departure.

EVENTS IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING THE ATTACK

"At 4:30 AM, July 18, seventy batteries of French

the 1st Battalion, never before in a front line trench, listened to the roar and crash of the shells, and seeing the German positions only a few hundred yards away concealed in flying debris and the smoke of the explosions, congratulated themselves that it was the enemy and not they, who were sustaining the terrific fire."

(6) Their self-congratulations were short-lived.

Hardly had the French infantry left their trenches when the German artillery and trench mortars replied with a severe counter-barrage on the American line which lasted for two hours.

) Bach,
p 70

At 5:15^{AM} while the assault companies were preparing to move forward, word was received changing the hour of attack to 8:00 AM. (7)

(7) 39 Inf
p 26

CROSSING OF THE SAVIERES RIVER

At eight o'clock the battalion cleared the line of departure and moved down the long wheat-covered slope toward the Savieres River. The bombardment had ceased almost two hours before, and not a sound came from the enemy. The morning was so bright and so still that it became difficult to believe this was anything more than a field maneuver. At a brief halt, made to rectify the alignment, men began to light cigarettes and adjust their equipment. Then the assault companies broke through the fringe of trees, and scrambled down the bluff to the river.

Immediately they encountered serious and unexpected difficulties. There was never a situation better suited to illustrate the principle that map reconnaissance must be supplemented by reconnaissance on the ground. The Savieres River, which had appeared so innocuous on the map, was swollen by the heavy rains to twice its normal width and depth. Its banks on either side had become deep swamps.

Wading when they could, and scrambling over logs and debris when the water became too deep to wade, the men of Companies A and B attempted to make their way across. The two companies promptly became mixed in a hopeless confusion not two hundred yards from the enemy position, while their floundering, splashing and shouting

made noise enough to alarm every German in the Marne salient. The battalion commander surmized instantly that the enemy inactivity must be caused by the attack having come from an unexpected direction and that undoubtedly in a very few moments the battalion would be under heavy fire. He therefore took prompt steps to protect his disorganized front line. He directed the company commanders of Companies A and B to push combat patrols, with automatic rifles, across the river as quickly as possible, and to advance these patrols to positions from which they could cover the crossing of the first two companies. One of the company commanders had anticipated this order, and it was fortunate that he did so. As the first patrol, a corporal and two automatic rifle teams of Company A reached the south bank they saw a German machine gun crew hastily dragging a heavy machine gun to the edge of the woods overlooking the river. Before the gun could open fire the American corporal, one of the largest men in the regiment, seized an automatic rifle and moved rapidly toward it, firing from his shoulder as he advanced. The other auto rifle went into action almost as rapidly, and their combined fire killed or drove off the German gunners. On the left a patrol from Company B disposed of another gun which had been hastily brought into action. This first burst of fire awakened the men to their situation and expedited their crossing more than any amount of expostulation from their officers could have done. A few waded and swam, but almost the entire

battalion moved forward in thin lines on logs which were thrown across the deeper part of the stream.

The difficulty experienced by both officers and men in realizing the gravity of their situation prior to the first exchange of shots is rather well illustrated by an incident which occurred at that time. On the morning of the attack the battalion scout officer, feeling that some concession to formality was required on the occasion of his first battle, had put on his best (and only other) uniform. The battalion adjutant had somewhat dubiously followed suit. In their progress across the river they were stepping very gingerly from log to log, balancing and holding on to each other in great concern lest they wet or muddy their clothing. An instant after the first machine gun bullet cracked over their heads, however, both these gentlemen, without being conscious of the slightest muscular effort, found themselves lying half submerged in a pool of muddy water behind the very log ^{from which} they had been making such efforts to avoid falling ~~from~~ an instant previously.

CAPTURE OF THE BUISSON de CRESNES

Once across the river, the assault lines were reformed and the battalion entered the Buisson de Cresnes from its western edge, meeting with little opposition. This lack of opposition was explained by a German sergeant who was captured later in the day. The enemy, not expecting that any one would be sufficiently daring (or foolhardy) to attempt an attack

over the flooded and swampy Savieres in broad daylight, had massed their guns and organized the ground for defense on the northern and southern approaches to the wood, where the ground was firm and the cover favorable to an attack. The battalion, though involuntarily, had the advantage of surprise. As the attack penetrated more deeply into the wood, however, the enemy machine gun fire increased in intensity and Company A began to suffer casualties from rifle fire from the southeast edge of the wood. At the same time the company commander reported that he was unable to obtain contact with any units of the 3d Battalion on his right flank. To protect this exposed flank the battalion commander detached one platoon from each of the support companies and placed them on the right of the battalion, facing southeast, where they promptly became engaged in a fire fight with German infantry on the southern edge of the wood. At the same time the battalion scout officer was sent with a small patrol to locate the 3d Battalion and to inform its commander of the 1st Battalion's position. Upon reaching 3d Battalion's headquarters, which was by no means where he expected to find it, the scout officer learned that the attack of this battalion had been further delayed by orders from French Divisional Headquarters, and that the 1st Battalion was, to all intents and purposes, operating independently. (8) This information was conveyed to the battalion commander.

(8) 39 Inf
p 27

The 1st Battalion, its assistance not required, reoccupied the eastern edge of the Buisson de Cresnes. (See Overlay No 2, Special Map No 1). Here the men dug foxholes and shelter trenches to give themselves some protection from the shell fire which came down on the position at intervals and which caused a number of casualties. The battalion remained in this position during the night of July 18-19, its front and left flank covered by patrols and outposts. The capture of Noroy closed the gap between the French units on the right and left of the regimental sector and this, with the capture of the Buisson de Cresnes, culminated the plans of the French command for July 18.

JULY 19

REGIMENTAL AND BATTALION ATTACK ORDERS

On the following morning, July 19, at 3:50 AM, orders were received for the resumption of the attack. Three successive objectives were designated:-

First: A line $1\frac{1}{2}$ kilometers from the line of departure.

Second: The Chouy-la-Sucriere Road.

Third: A ridge one kilometer southeast of Chouy-la-Sucriere Road covering a frontage of $1\frac{1}{2}$ kilometers.

In the capture of the third objective one battalion (the 3d) was to be in the front line, with the 2d Battalion in support and the 1st Battalion in reserve.

progress of the action, while the support platoons, feeling that they were being cheated of souvenirs and fighting both, kept edging closer to the assault wave. Naturally disorganization resulted, but in spite of it the machine gun nests were reduced one at a time and after two hours of hard fighting the crest of the ridge was reached. Here enemy resistance broke, and the somewhat battered battalion, almost without further opposition advanced to the northern edge of the wood and halted for the reorganization which it badly needed

CONSOLIDATION AND HALT FOR THE NIGHT

While these events were taking place, the "pincer" movement which the French had undertaken to effect, had not proceeded according to schedule. No French troops had been able to approach Noroy from the south, and the French division commander, fearing counterattack from this strong point, requested assistance from the 39th. (9) At 3:00 PM the regimental commander sent word of a great allied victory and ordered the 1st Battalion to support the 3d Battalion in the capture of Noroy. The men of the 1st Battalion now realized for the first time that they had been engaged in a major offensive instead of in a local operation. Cheered and excited by this news they moved out to support the attack on Noroy. The 3d Battalion, however, took the town with a rush after some hand-to-hand fighting in which both sides suffered rather severely. (10)

(9) Bach,
p 72;
39 Inf,
p 29

(10) 39 Inf,
p 30

Meanwhile, the two platoons on the right had overcome their opposition. In view of the change in situation these platoons were made to constitute a covering detachment for the right flank. The senior platoon commander was directed to keep them together and to move forward on the right of Company A, holding the group in readiness to repel any counterattack from the southeast.

The assault companies continued their advance toward the tangle of woods along the ridge which was the backbone of the Bois de Cresnes. Here the defense was a well organized machine gun net. The Germans had cleverly concealed their guns and had made full use of fire breaks and trails for laying down bands of fire. The Americans however, were rapidly acquiring wisdom in taking cover and in working their way around the flanks of the guns instead of blindly rushing them from the front. Unfortunately, fighting of this nature requires the breaking up of units almost into independent patrols, with a consequent loss of control by company and platoon commanders. The first excitement and tension having passed off, each piece of abandoned enemy equipment became an object of general interest, and much discussion and wrangling ensued over its possession, while the bolder spirits persisted in poking about on their own in the hope of uncovering, if not a live German, at least a dead one who might be despoiled of his buttons and insignia. The men who came into possession of these souvenirs became, for a time, more concerned with their safe-guarding than with the

One battalion of the 20th French Infantry was attached to the regiment to assist it in the attack and was to act under the orders of the regimental commander. The regimental order placed the 2d and 3d Battalions in line, each on a front of 350 yards. The 1st Battalion, with Company C, 11th Machine Gun Battalion attached, constituted the reserve; and it was directed to march six hundred yards in rear of the center of the first line. The rate of march was given as 110 yards in three minutes and the direction of attack forty-five minutes south of East. Zero hour was 4:00 AM. (11)

(11) 39 Inf,
p 30

The battalion attack order was very simple. With less than ten minutes at his disposal between the time of receipt of the order and zero hour, and with some of the company commanders almost five hundred yards away, the battalion commander did the only possible thing to insure compliance with the regimental order. He sent a field message to the commanders of Companies C and D, which read as follows: "Move out in section columns - clear edge of woods 4:00 AM - direction 45' south of East - C on right, D on left." Similar brief messages were sent to the other company commanders with instructions to follow the front line companies in support. The problem was simply to set the units in motion in the right direction, at the appointed time, and the action taken had the desired result. The battalion commander, from the edge of the woods, had the satisfaction of seeing Companies C and D emerge almost on the minute. He then sent runners to assemble

the five company commanders, and as the battalion advanced he read the regimental order and finished his instructions.

During the night the Germans had reorganized and prepared new defenses, and the resistance had naturally stiffened. Nevertheless, the attack made satisfactory progress and the assault lines reached the first objective at 5:00 AM. Here they met with a disheartening and unnecessary check.

DELAY AND DIFFICULTY

At about 5:15 AM, a message was received by the regimental commander, that the French troops on the left had not received the attack order in time to enable them to comply and that the French attack would be delayed till 5:30, and would be preceded by a barrage. Hurriedly messages were sent back to tell the French that the first objective was already taken and to advance the barrage. It was too late. In a few minutes the barrage fell. (12) Fortunately most of the shells burst beyond the front line, but a number dropped on the advance units, causing casualties. Even the 1st Battalion in its support position suffered. Rockets and flares were fired, but without effect. It was, of course, apparent to the men that something was wrong, and that the fire from which they suffered was from their own artillery, ably seconded by the German machine guns to their front. They sat tight, however, and held what they had, and when the barrage lifted

(12) Bach,
p 74

some forty minutes later, they advanced again with determination and apparently with unshaken morale. (13)

A few minutes before the resumption of the advance the 1st Battalion moved into the line to cover that part of the regimental front left vacant by the delay in the French attack. This move placed it on the left of the line abreast of the 3d Battalion and facing the town of Chouy. The route of advance lay over rising ground covered with a heavy stand of wheat to the crest of a small ridge line, from whence the ground fell away in a long gradual slope dotted with small wooded thickets, which offered excellent concealment for machine guns. The Germans had taken full advantage of the possibilities of these thickets, and had scattered machine gun nests through the wheat. The open ground was under artillery observation, and the machine gun defense was supported by the fire of light artillery. The meanderings of the Ourcq River in places made the frontage assigned the regiment too narrow for the formation adopted, but the unequal rate of advance compensated for this, and although units frequently crowded into the areas of those adjoining them, no serious results occurred.

THE CAPTURE OF CHOUY

On approaching the ridge line the advance of Companies C and D was held up by heavy machine gun fire, and the "cleaning up" tactics employed on the previous day had again to be resorted to. This time, however, partly on account of the more open terrain, and partly because of greater steadiness and experience,

the units held well together and retained their general position and alignment. After the two assault companies crossed the ridge and advanced down the slope towards Chouy, several of the enemy machine guns which had held their fire and had been undiscovered, opened on the support companies, forcing them fully to deploy, and so delaying their advance that they lost contact with the assault companies. The battalion commander hurried forward to regain contact with his advance elements; and he reached them just as Company D on the left was entering the town. Chouy was on fire and had been evacuated by the Germans, who could be seen moving over the next ridge line at a distance of about a thousand yards. Because of the heavy and accurate artillery fire which was falling upon it, it was impossible to occupy the town at this time.

On the eastern edge of the Chouy - La Jucriere Road was a long high cut bank which offered perfect protection. Company C was already sheltered by this cut, the direction of its advance having taken it to the south of the town. Company D was therefore moved by the right flank and placed under shelter on the left of Company C, pending the arrival of the support companies. Hardly had they reached this protection when the enemy artillery, which had been harassing them during the day, poured a perfect rain of shells along the front of both companies. The cover of the bank was perfect, and although for about fifteen minutes the top of the cut and the area in their rear, seemed one continuous explosion, neither

company suffered a single casualty. At first the men were startled and somewhat unnerved by this unusually heavy fire, but as soon as they realized their safety they regained all their self-confidence and were inclined to regard the situation as a joke on the German artillery. The officers, however, were much concerned for the safety of the two support companies, from whom nothing had been heard, and the battalion commander was about to make the attempt to send runners back to reach them, in spite of the heavy shell fire, when Company B suddenly appeared on the crest of the ridge over which the assault companies had passed with much difficulty some time before. The two companies were deployed in depth, Company B in skirmish line and Company A in its rear in section columns. Out of touch with the situation to their front, the senior company commander had placed them in assault formation and they were advancing on Chouy, thinking that it might still be in the hands of the enemy.

No sooner did Company C become visible than the German artillery switched its fire and concentrated on the splendid target which it presented. None of the officers or men who witnessed the scene which took place during the ensuing five minutes will ever forget it, and on the writer at least, it made a greater impression than anything else which occurred during his participation in the war. The long skirmish line of Company B advanced slowly, preserving its alignment and interval, the men holding their rifles at "high-port", as they had been taught to do, and never moving

faster than a walk. It seemed that a shell fell among them almost at every step, throwing up clouds of smoke and dirt and bowling men over like ten-pins. Most of these men got up again, took their place in line and continued the slow advance. Their formation contributed to the casualties received, the parallel lines of skirmishers getting the full lateral effect of each burst. In proportion to the volume of fire, the actual casualties were small, but the moral effect was certainly terrific, and the steadiness shown by the men was nothing less than marvelous. For almost five hundred yards the company advanced under this punishment without increasing its rate of march, the men finally breaking into a run when they saw their comrades crouched under the bank and caught their frantic "double time" signals.

Company A was spared the difficulty of this advance by an interesting expedient. Since no other communication was possible, one of the battalion signal men stood on the top of the cut bank and with his wig-wag flag signalled repeatedly "halt - go back". This signal was caught by the company commander as he crossed the ridge and he immediately drew his company back under cover.

By this time, also, our supporting artillery had begun to reply to the Germans; the French gunners manhandling their pieces down the slope and into the cover of a thicket about two hundred yards in rear of the battalion position with the greatest energy and

courage. So accurate was their fire that after some ten minutes of counter-battery work, the German guns went out of action. The line now occupied constituted the final objective of the day for the 1st Battalion. The 3d and 2d Battalions were not subjected to heavy artillery fire, and they continued their advance to the final objective:- the ridge line about 800 yards southeast of the Chouy-LaSucrerie road, which they attained at about 2:30 PM. Contact was quickly established with these two battalions and the companies of the 1st Battalion were reorganized in preparation for an advance the following morning. A line of observation was established along the front of, and about 150 yards distant from, the battalion position. Each company reinforced this line with two combat groups of one squad each, - Company B covered the right flank with one section and Company D placed a platoon in Chouy with several small combat groups on the eastern edge of the village.

FOOD AND RELIEF

At dusk the mess sergeant and his carrying party appeared with a plentiful supply of hot food and fresh water. The men, their nervous tension relaxed, realized suddenly that they had not eaten since three AM, and they fell on the rations like hungry wolves. Morale was high. Relaxed and with full stomachs, the events of the day did not seem half so terrible in retrospect. The cooks and the men of the rear echelon were given a full account of the operation by each

separate section, and modesty and verity went by the boards, while the strength of the enemy and the number of prisoners taken increased in geometrical progression with each telling. Officers and men felt themselves veterans.

There was some excuse for their self-satisfaction. The battalion had received its baptism of fire in full battle and had acquitted itself respectably. Before daylight on the morning of July 20 it was relieved.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM AND LESSONS

(a) Training.

As previously stated, the battalion was a partially trained unit which might not have been placed in an attack except for the exigencies of the situation. Its state of training at the beginning of the action, however, was at least equal to, and possibly slightly better than, that of the average infantry battalion of 1918, due to a leavening of regular noncommissioned officers. It was certainly as well trained as any similar units which we will be able to place in the field in an emergency. Lack of training was responsible for the disorganization in crossing the Savieres River, in the progress through the Buisson de Cresnes and for the temporary loss of control by officers and noncommissioned officers. Unquestionably a thoroughly trained battalion could have delivered this attack much more expeditiously and with fewer losses. These defects are to be expected. It seems to the writer, however, that the advance of one company under heavy

shell fire on the second day of the attack, is a striking object lesson of the surprising steadiness which can be displayed under the most trying conditions by men of little service, if, such training as they have received was thorough and well directed. Nothing but discipline will put green men through a situation like that described, and the sight of it cured at least one observer of any tendency to discount the value of disciplinary exercises.

(b) Information.

Through no fault of its own the battalion, and the rest of the regiment for that matter, operated without adequate information. On three occasions this lack of information might have produced serious results:- the first, when the unexpected difficulty of crossing the Savieres River was encountered, ~~might~~ ^{which} easily have resulted in complete annihilation; - the second, when the attack was continued without the knowledge that the attack of the 3d Battalion had been delayed, ^{which} resulted in an exposed flank and a dangerous position;- the third, when the attack on the second day was launched without the knowledge that the French attack had been delayed, ^{which} resulted in casualties from our own artillery; a serious delay in the advance; and might well have proved fatal to the whole plan.

(c) Reconnaissance

It seems trite even to mention personal reconnaissance, but the situation encountered in the crossing of the Savieres River was, as pointed out,

made to order to demonstrate the necessity of supplementing map reconnaissance with ground reconnaissance. Even at night, and during the short time intervening between receipt of the order and the hour for attack, patrols from the battalion scout section, if pushed to the front, would have discovered that the river offered a much more formidable obstacle than it appeared to do from the map.

(d) Security

During the attack on the Buisson de Cresnes, the battalion was forced to take steps to protect its exposed flank when it began to suffer from enemy fire. Had an effort been made to contact the units on its right and left immediately at the jump-off, it would have been discovered that this flank was exposed before actual contact with the enemy was made. In his dispositions during the remainder of the action, however, the battalion commander seems to have complied fully with the principle of security.

(e) Surprise

In its attack on the Buisson de Cresnes, the battalion, involuntarily it is true, took advantage of the principle of surprise. The tremendous effect of surprise is very clearly demonstrated by the fact that the attack was a success even in spite of the obstacles encountered and the resulting delay and disorganization, simply because the enemy had expected no attack from this direction and had made no provision to meet it.

(f) Dispositions

The dispositions made by the battalion commander were tactically sound throughout the entire action. Decisions were made quickly and carried out effectively. The formations were simple and provided deployment in depth. One serious criticism can be made. No use of any kind was made of the attached machine gun company during the attack. It simply tagged along with the support echelon and wore itself out dragging its guns and equipment. This fault was a common one, and was due to a defect in organization. The battalion to which the regimental machine gun company was attached, knowing the officers intimately and having confidence in them, always made good use of their guns. The battalions to which units from a separate machine gun battalion were attached seldom made use of them. In the situations described, a number of very favorable opportunities occurred for the use of machine guns, but invariably the battalion and company officers relied on groups of riflemen and auto rifle men. It is only fair to say that experience soon corrected this fault.

(g) Orders

The orders issued by the battalion commander were brief and simple. Brevity, as a matter of fact, was forced by the delay in receipt of orders from higher headquarters. The order for the second day's attack was the shortest possible field message, later enlarged verbally. Nevertheless, it was effective.

The experience of the officers throughout this operation, and particularly during the first day indicates that in an attack over broken and heavily wooded country the most that can be done is to give the units a direction of attack, get them started on time, keep them in contact with one another, and hope for the best.

CONCLUSION

The writer, in referring to this operation some ~~days~~^{times} ago, spoke of it as a "comedy of errors." This remark has been very much regretted. In living over again the events that are described herein he has rediscovered a number of errors, but the comedy is conspicuously absent. As a matter of fact, viewed even in the light of subsequent experience it is believed that both officers and men did well.

Conspicuously emphasized by this brief engagement are three facts which have already been pointed out but which will bear repetition:-

First: That in an attack over broken and unfavorable terrain, success is utterly dependent on the leadership of the squad, section and platoon leaders.

Second: That unforeseen and unexpected difficulties will be the rule, rather than the exception, and that almost as many of these difficulties will result from the mistakes of our own people as from accidents of terrain or operations of the enemy.

Third: That American soldiers, whose training, in comparison with our present standards, appears very mediocre indeed, will, if such training as they have received has been thorough and intelligent, meet these difficulties with firmness and courage.

QUESTIONS ON THE OPERATIONS OF THE FIRST
BATTALION, 39th INFANTRY, JULY 18-20, 1918

(Note: To be effective these questions must be asked during the oral delivery at the points where the situations to which they refer occur.)

I. At the point where two front line companies fall into confusion in their first attempt to cross the Savieres River, the battalion commander should:

- (1) Withdraw and reorganize for another attempt.
- (2) Move the battalion by the flank to a more favorable approach.
- (3) Protect his disorganized line by pushing forward contact patrols.

Answer: (3)

II. When the right assault company reported inability to gain contact with the battalion on its right, and began to suffer from rifle fire from that direction, the battalion commander should have:

- (1) Stopped the advance temporarily until the battalion on his right could come abreast of him.
- (2) Continued the attack but protect the right flank with a strong covering force while trying to make contact with the adjoining battalion.

Answer: (2)

III. When only eight or nine minutes were available between the receipt of the attack order and zero hour, the battalion commander should have:

- (1) Written a hasty combat order.
- (2) Put the battalion in motion at the proper time and issued his order after it had started to move.
- (3) Hastily assembled the company commanders and given a rapid verbal order.

Answer: (2)

IV. In summarizing-- In the peculiar situation which existed at this time, was or was not an attack without preliminary reconnaissance justified?

Answer: It was not; Reconnaissance should have been made.

V. The commander of a company in attack caught in the open in skirmish line by heavy artillery fire (as was Company A in the second day's attack) should have immediately:

- (1) Withdrawn to cover behind the crest of the ridge in his rear.
- (2) Changed his formation to line of small columns and advanced rapidly.
- (3) Halted and taken cover.

Answer: (2)

THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT COMMANDANT
FOURTH SECTION

Fort Benning, Georgia
May 19, 1932.

MILITARY HISTORY - GRADES ON WRITTEN MONOGRAPH

Capt. Walter B. Smith, Inf

1. Use of bibliography and sources: ▲
2. Narrative: ▲
3. Illustrations: ▲
4. Analysis, criticism and lessons: ▲

Total Grade: ▲

The grades under the different headings are furnished students solely for their information. In arriving at the final grade the grades under the separate headings are used as guides without weighted values.

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U S ARMY

Operations of the 1st Bn 39th
Inf (4th Division) in the Aisne-
Marne offensive, July 18, 20,
1918. (Personal experience of
a battalion scout officer)

Capt. Walter B. Smith, Inf

THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
Fort Benning, Georgia
1931-1932

Grade

A
~~CAT'S FACTORY~~

WRITTEN MONOGRAPH -- COMMENT SHEET

1. Use of bibliography and sources: It was apparent that the author had some difficulty in obtaining sources dealing with the operation of his unit. However, the best available were selected and utilized. On the other hand, the evaluations of the sources consulted were somewhat too brief to permit the reader to estimate their value.

The referencing followed the school instructions. The majority were properly taken from Bach and Hall's "Fourth Division History; Its Services and Achievements in the World War," and Cole and Eberlin's "History of the 39th U.S. Infantry in the World War." Many statements of fact were without any reference, but this was doubtless unavoidable due to the scarcity of authoritative sources. On page 8 the reference from Bach is given as a quotation while, in fact, it was a paraphrase by the author of the second paragraph on page 70 of Bach. In general, however, the referencing was accurate and indicated care and precision on the author's part.

2. Narrative: The organization of this portion of the monograph was particularly commendable. The account was clear and descriptive. No irrelevant events or extraneous details were included. The reader, therefore, was able to follow, without interruption, the progress of the battalion from the unit's early training to the conclusion of its first action in battle. The situations, from which the lessons were drawn later, were excellently depicted.

Some carelessness was apparent in the spelling of proper names; for instance, Sucriere was spelled in three different ways.

3. Illustrations: The maps were of outstanding workmanship. The general map and the two special maps with overlays, fully illustrated the author's text - all places mentioned in the text being shown on the map. The writer in this respect meticulously followed the instructions in regard to preparation of maps and is to be commended for the care, precision and ability which they show.

4. Analysis, criticism and lessons: The author's method of discussing the principal events of his narrative under headings such as "Security," "Surprise," "Dispositions," "Orders," etc., was excellent and served to emphasize the main points of military value. Also, he properly restricted himself to the operations of his battalion and omitted any discussion of the regimental or larger unit problems.

The conclusion, which was brief and effective, was utilized to further impress upon the reader the three chief lessons to be learned from the monograph.

5. Remarks: The monograph was well written.
AN OUTSTANDING MONOGRAPH.

Operations of the 1st Bn 39th
Inf (4th Division) in the Aisne-
Marne offensive, July 18-20,
1918. (Personal experience of
a battalion scout officer)

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THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
Fort Benning, Georgia
1931-1932

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THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
Fort Benning, Georgia
1931-1932

Grade A

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2. Narrative: The organization of this portion of the monograph was particularly commendable. The account was clear and descriptive, ~~proceeding in logical progression with the actions of the 1st Battalion 39th Infantry, on July 18 and 19, 1918.~~ No irrelevant events or extraneous details were included. The reader, therefore, was able to follow, without interruption, the progress of the battalion from the unit's early training to the conclusion of its first action in battle. The situations, from which the lessons were drawn later, were excellently depicted. (Some carelessness was apparent in the spelling of proper names; for instance, Sucriere was spelled in three different ways.)

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4. Analysis, criticism and lessons: The author's method of discussing the principal events of his narrative under headings such as "Security," "Surprise," "Dispositions," "Orders," etc., was excellent and served to emphasize the main points of military value. ~~He also~~ ^{also he} ~~wisely~~ ^{prudently} restricted himself ~~solely~~ to the operations of his battalion and omitted any discussion of the regimental or larger unit problems.

The conclusion, ~~although~~ ^{which was} brief and effective, was utilized to further impress upon the reader the three chief lessons to be learned from the monograph.

5. Remarks: The monograph was well written throughout, ~~and the author is to be commended for the effective and pleasing style employed.~~

Cap An outstanding monograph.

THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT COMMANDANT
FOURTH SECTION

Fort Benning, Georgia
December 15, 1931.

MILITARY HISTORY MONOGRAPH -- COMMENTS ON ORAL PRESENTATION

Captain Walter B. Smith, Infantry.

Delivery: The speaker's delivery was clear and effective. His words were well chosen, accurately and distinctly delivered, and were properly directed toward his hearers. An occasional change of pace and additional force at times, would have made the delivery still more effective.

Holding of interest: The accuracy of the delivery and interest-holding qualities of the presentation, together with the unusually pertinent and wise selection of material, maintained the interest of the hearers at the highest pitch.

Clearness: The account of the operation was unusually clear, due to the excellent combination of oral delivery and vivid portrayal on the map.

Emphasis: Emphasis was well placed on the tactics and leadership of small units and the methods by which successful results were achieved. The presentation emphasized most effectively the value of surprise, reconnaissance, discipline and cooperation.

Utilization of time: The presentation was exceptionally well planned and organized.

Charts and illustrations: The speaker's maps were outstanding in their design, effectiveness and general utility. Especially is it noteworthy that their scale was such that the operations of the small units and the details of the terrain stood out vividly. The excellent coordination of the narrative with the operation of out-puts added further to the clarity and effectiveness of the presentation.

Instructional value: The situation selected by the speaker for solution by the class was well chosen - whether or not to carry out the attack as ordered. It was well built up and properly discussed. However, the technique of asking the question was faulty in that the name of the student to answer the question was called before the situation and question were stated.

The speaker's description and discussion of the methods so effectively employed in overcoming machine-gun resistance in the woods, in crossing open terrain, in employing the use of cover to the maximum effect, and in achieving surprise by doing the unexpected, together with other highly instructive instances, gave the presentation an outstanding instructional value.

REMARKS: It is worthy of mention that this presentation was well coordinated with those of other speakers on the operations of the 4th Division.

AN OUTSTANDING PRESENTATION.

THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
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THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT COMMANDANT
FOURTH SECTION

Fort Benning, Georgia

MILITARY HISTORY MONOGRAPH - GRADES ON ORAL PRESENTATION

Capt. Walter B. Smith, Inf

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1. <u>Delivery:</u> | A |
| 2. <u>Holding of interest:</u> | A |
| 3. <u>Clearness:</u> | A |
| 4. <u>Emphasis:</u> | A |
| 5. <u>Utilization of time:</u> | A |
| 6. <u>Charts and illustrations:</u> | A |
| 7. <u>Instructional value:</u> | A |

Total Grade: A

03/7

THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT COMMANDANT
FOURTH SECTION

Fort Benning, Georgia

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MILITARY HISTORY MONOGRAPH -- COMMENTS ON ORAL PRESENTATION

Captain Walter B. Smith, Inf.

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7. Instructional value: The situation selected by the speaker for ~~presentation to~~ ^{solution by} the class was well chosen - whether or not to carry out the attack as ordered. It was well built up and properly discussed. However, the technique of asking the question was faulty in that the name of the student to answer the question was called before the situation and question were stated.

The speaker's description and discussion of the methods so effectively employed in overcoming machine-gun resistance in the woods, in crossing open terrain, in employing the use of cover to the maximum effect, and in achieving surprise by doing the unexpected, together with other highly instructive instances, gave the presentation an outstanding instructional value.

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AN OUTSTANDING PRESENTATION.

Capt. Walter B. Smith.

1. Delivery: The speaker's delivery was ~~extremely~~ ^{clear and} effective. His words were well chosen, accurately and distinctly delivered, ^{and} ~~they~~ were properly directed toward his hearers, ~~at all times~~. ^{An occasional change of pace, and additional force at times, would have made the delivery still more effective.}
2. Holding of interest: The accuracy ^{of the delivery} and interest-holding qualities of the ~~delivery~~ ^{presentation}, together with the unusually pertinent and wise selection of material, maintained the interest of the hearers at the highest pitch.
3. Clearness: The account of the operation was unusually clear, due to ^{the} excellent combination of the oral delivery and ^{the} vivid, ~~graphic~~ portrayal ^{on the map}.
4. Emphasis: Emphasis was well placed on ~~the essential~~ tactics and leadership of small units. ~~It is noteworthy that the speaker selected points and actions which demonstrated successful tactics and leadership instead of emphasizing mistakes and errors which have little or no considerable instructional value, though negative in character.~~ ^{and the methods by which successful results were achieved...} ~~His presentation emphasized the value of surprise, reconnaissance, discipline and cooperation.~~ ^{most effectively}
5. Utilization of time: The presentation was exceptionally well planned and organized.
6. Charts and illustrations: The speaker's maps were outstanding in their design, effectiveness and general utility. Especially ^{is it} noteworthy that their scale was such that the operations of the small units and the details of the terrain stood out vividly. The excellent coordination of the narrative with the operation of cut-outs added ^{further} to the clarity and effectiveness of the presentation.

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The speaker's description and discussion of the ~~varying~~ *methods so effectively* ~~types of tactics~~ employed in overcoming machine-gun resistance in ^{the} woods, in crossing open terrain, in employing the use of cover to the maximum effect, *and in achieving surprise by doing the unexpected;* ~~the value of surprise when complete;~~ together with other highly instructive instances, gave the presentation an outstanding instructional value.

An outstanding presentation.