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M I L I T A R Y   H I S T O R Y

OPERATIONS OF COMPANY M 23d INFANTRY  
(2d DIVISION)  
IN THE ATTACK ON VAUX, JULY 1-2, 1918  
(Personal experience of a Platoon Leader)

Captain Harry W. Caygill, Infantry

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## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Records of the Second Division (Regular). Eight volumes published from 1924 to 1928 by the Second Division Historical Section, Army War College, Washington, D. C.

These records comprise war diaries, journals, and other official papers of the organizations which constituted the 2d Division, American Expeditionary Forces. The compilation also includes a very valuable collection of field messages, official and semi-official reports, etc., all of which are uncensored. The value of these records in the study of the operations of the 2d Division during the World War is obvious.

Translations: War Diaries of German Units Opposed to the Second Division (Regular). Still in course of publication by the 2d Division Historical Section, Army War College, Washington, D. C. Three volumes of this series have been published to date; the fourth volume has been compiled, but as yet has not been placed in the hands of the public.

By their very nature, these translations of records of German corps, divisions, brigades, regiments, and battalions which opposed the 2d Division on the Western Front, cannot be dispensed with by any student of the operations of that American combat division.

NOTE:- In the preparation of this monograph there was also used data contained in a personal communication, recently received, from the officer who commanded Company M 23d Infantry on July 1, 1918. Likewise considerable use was made of papers, maps, airplane photographs, etc., in the personal files of the author. Where statement of fact is not authenticated by marginal reference - the case frequently throughout this paper - the reader is asked to understand that the writer's sources of information were those mentioned in this note.

### MARGINAL ABBREVIATIONS USED

|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| Ger. (preceded by number) | Translations: War Diaries of German Units Opposed to the Second Division (Regular). |
| Recds. 2d Div.            | Records of the Second Division (Regular).   |

SITUATION OF 8th COMPANY 402d GERMAN  
INFANTRY REGIMENT ON JULY 1, 1918

Map No. 1

The Bois de la Cote 192 - a small woods 1200 meters west of the village of Vaux, which in turn lay on the Paris-Metz highway somewhat over three kilometers west of Chateau Thierry - was held, on the morning of July 1, 1918, by the 8th Company of the 402d German Infantry.

Map No. 2

The 8th Company, a unit of the 2d Battalion, was the right flank company of the 201st Infantry Division. At the cross roads 250 meters north of the woods were elements of the 6th Company of the same battalion, with two machine guns, acting as a contact group between the 402d Infantry and the neighboring

Map No. 1

regiment on its right. To the east, in the Bois de la Roche, other units of the 2d Battalion were in position. Vaux and the western slope of Hill 204, which dominated the Paris-Metz highway, were held by the 402d Infantry's 1st Battalion. The division's sector extended as far to the east as the city of Chateau Thierry, inclusive.

The 8th Company maintained contact with battalion headquarters and with units to the rear and flanks by means of runners and a signal lamp.

For defensive purposes there were in the woods two small mine throwers and three machine guns. Enemy attacks on the Bois de la Cote 192 during June had come from the west; the machine guns on July 1 were emplaced on the western edge of the woods. (1)

(1) 10th Ger.  
Inf. Div.  
Vol. 3, 1  
Doc. 11, ?  
June 6-7

The 201st Division had taken over the Vaux-Chateau Thierry combat sector during the period from June 17 to 19. It was not until June 27, however, that the 8th Company, as the result of reassignment of

division boundaries, moved into the Bois de la Cote

(2) 201st Ger.  
Inf. Div.  
Vol. 3,  
Doc. 49,  
June 18

192. (2)

Morale of German Troops

The division commander had no misgivings as to the combat value of his troops. On June 30 he reported:

After relief from the sector near St. Mihiel the division during the first half of the month was constantly on the go, due to five changes of billets. This inured the troops to marching and to the hardships which are part of bivouac life. Beginning on June 17 the division took over the combat sector Chateau Thierry from the 251st Division. The relieved division had moved into this position while attacking and therefore practically no trenches or other defensive installations had been constructed. The last two weeks were therefore given over to the most strenuous kind of work. The intrenching of the position was made very difficult by the very active enemy and the very lively enemy artillery fire which fell on the constructed trench sections and rear area. On the average the daily casualties amounted to 30 men killed and wounded. In spite of all this the morale of the men and their physical condition....is good. (3)

(3) 201st Ger.  
Inf. Div.  
Vol. 3,  
Doc. 49,  
June 30

Condition of the 8th Company's Defenses

While consolidation of the 8th Company's positions had been undertaken, the project was by no means completed when the division commander rendered his report. Trench traces had been dug to a depth of from two to three feet on those edges of the bois exposed to enemy attack. In the fields in front of the trench traces there had been placed a few barbed wire entanglements. Substantial emplacements had been constructed for the machine guns. These were under excellent cover from aerial observation, and, to their front, lanes had been cut through the trees and brush so as to afford frontal and flanking fields of fire. The construction of substantial dugouts had been

started, but as yet shelter from the incessant artillery fire of the enemy was inadequate. The members of the 8th Company occupied little more than covered holes in the ground near their firing positions, except those few who were so fortunate as to be assigned a half dozen small splinter proof shelters just in rear of the woods.

#### 8th Company on Passive Defense

The 8th Company was on the passive defense. On May 27 the German Seventh Army had attacked the French and British positions between Soissons and Rheims. Four days later it had blasted its way thirty-three miles to the northern portion of Chateau Thierry. The troops of the Seventh Army - in this area under command of the IV Reserve Corps (Corps Conta) - continued their attacks with depleted numbers. By June 2, although exhausted by the exertions of their rapid advance, they had cleared the enemy from all of Chateau Thierry north of the Marne; by June 4 the Bois de Belleau, Bouresches, Vaux, and the summit of Hill 204 were in their hands. (4)

Map No 1

(4) IV Ger. Res. Corps, Vol. 1, Doc. 10, Items 34-43

Resistance to the advance of the Corps Conta stiffened perceptibly. On the evening of June 4 the corps commander issued an order which read, in part:

Corps Conta, which is charged with the protection of the left flank of the Seventh Army during the attack of the Seventh Army's right flank, is compelled to temporarily assume the defensive, after positions most suitable for this purpose are captured. I insist that all commanders inform their troops, leaving no doubt in their minds, that our attack up to this time had passed far beyond the objectives that were first assigned, and had achieved far greater successes than had been anticipated. The offensive spirit must be maintained even though a temporary lull in the attack seems to exist. We are the victors

and will remain on the offensive. The enemy is defeated and the high command will utilize this great victory to the fullest extent. (5)

(5) IV Ger. Res.  
Corps, Vol.  
1, Doc. 10,  
Item 187

193

The corps commander directed that preparations be made for the seizure of Le Thiolet and Bourbetin on the Paris-Metz Road as positions most suitable for the temporary defensive.

The Corps Conta, however, soon found itself on an enforced defensive. On June 6 the enemy attacked the Bois de Belleau and Bouresches. The village was lost to the Germans, as was the southern portion of the woods. Continuous assaults followed on the Bois de Belleau until, on June 26, the woods was completely evacuated by the German troops. To the east, in the meantime, the enemy had advanced his lines to the northern edge of the Bois de la Morette and to within a few hundred meters of the village of Vaux.

Map No. 1

On June 23, higher headquarters - now the VIII Army Corps - directed that the combat activities of the 201st Division be reduced to the minimum, "in an inconspicuous manner, and that aside of complete assurance of readiness for defense, it was to extend only to watching and observing the enemy." (6)

Therefore, on July 1, the 8th Company was engaged primarily in consolidating its positions for defense and observing the enemy.

(6) 201st Ger.  
Inf. Div.  
Vol. 3,  
Doc. 50,  
June 23

July 1-15

#### Available Information Concerning the Enemy

In the ravine running from Bourbetin toward Monneaux, some 250 meters south of the Paris-Metz highway, were enemy lines. The Bois des Clerembauts to the west was also occupied by the enemy. The 8th Company's opponents were Americans of the 2d Division, so the 201st Division had been informed when it entered the lines around Vaux.

Map No. 1

What manner of fighting men were these soldiers from across the seas?

The Americans were "still novices of the lowest grade in the game" so far as attack tactics and training in open terrain warfare were concerned, a regimental commander had reported on June 12. He stated that the tactical training of the men could be classified as inferior, that leadership by both junior and higher commanders lacked skill, that attacks were very energetic but not coordinated, and that commanders did not know how to utilize advantages gained. (7)

(7) 237th Ger.  
Inf. Div.  
Vol. 4, Doc.  
79, Items  
130-131 &  
175-177

Discussing the defense tactics of the Americans, however, the German regimental commander reported that their training in rifle marksmanship was "remarkable," that once they broke through the German lines they settled down behind rocks and by their rifle fire broke up every counterattack until dislodged by the use of hand grenades. (7)

An intelligence report of June 22 likewise made comment upon the effectiveness of the Americans with the rifle. When occupying positions close to the German lines, snipers and sharpshooters appeared who were very much on the alert and fired upon every German soldier who showed himself, a method of combat which resulted in many losses and had "quite a disturbing effect on our men." In the attack, however, continued the report, the Americans were totally inexperienced, made very little use of their fire arms, attacked in mobs, and did not hold their ground when subjected to severe machine gun and rifle fire. (8)

(8) 237th Ger.  
Inf. Div.  
Vol. 4,  
Doc. 79,  
Items 182-  
185

July 1 - The 8th Company's Day of Doom

The members of the 8th Company enjoyed a night of comparative peace on June 30-July 1. Soon after daybreak, however, there fell on the Bois de la Cote 192 enemy artillery fire of unusual intensity. By 9:00 AM the opponents' guns were registering systematically on the 8th Company's positions. From the woods it could be seen that the units of the 2d Battalion in the Bois de la Roche were also suffering from intense shell fire, that Vaux was encircled in a cordon of bursting high explosive shells. (9)

(9) 201st Ger. ✓  
Inf. Div.  
Vol. 3, Doc.  
50, July 1.  
&  
402d Ger.  
Inf. Regt.  
Vol. 3, Doc.  
53, July 1.  
&  
1st, 2d, 3d  
Bns., 402d  
Ger. Inf.  
Vol. 3,  
Doc. 54,  
July 1

The bombardment continued unabated until 1:00 PM when the enemy's artillery activity increased to systematic fire for destruction along the whole front of the 402d Infantry. Harassing fire fell on the approaches to the Bois de la Cote 192 and isolated the company from battalion headquarters. The members of the 8th Company hugged their inadequate shelters; several were killed or wounded by shell fragments. (9)

Just before 6:00 PM, drum fire fell on the Paris-Metz Road, throwing poplar trees high into the air. A barrage of crunching steel rolled through the fields towards the Bois de la Cote 192, creating a great screen of dust which hid the roadway from sight. Planes with strange new markings darted overhead. (9)

The barrage approached the woods, reached the southern edge. Rifle bullets whizzed erratically through the brush, fired by unseen hands behind the curtain of smoke and whirling dirt. The barrage thundered its way through to the northern edge of the bois.

Noncommissioned officers prodded panic stricken soldiers from their shelters to meet the attack bound to come. A gunner rushed to his machine gun in the southwestern portion of the woods, struggled frantically so to change its position as to cover the roadway leading from Cote 175, fired one short burst. An automatic rifle chugged in the brush near the machine gun's position. The gunner slumped over his gun.

Shouting figures, clad in yellow-brown, appeared everywhere in the woods. Several cried in perfect German: "Surrender! Surrender!" The company's acting officer, wounded, fled to the rear. The feldwebel, surrounded by Americans, darted through their lines into the field. One rifle shot rang out; the feldwebel dropped in his tracks. Leaderless soldiers of the 8th Company, seeking to flee to the rear, found their avenues of escape closed.

By 6:30 PM, the 8th Company was one in little more than name only. Eight of its enlisted personnel lay dead in the Bois de la Cote 192, several, horribly wounded by shell fire, lay moaning in their shelters, sixty were on their way to Bourbetin as prisoners of war.

SITUATION OF COMPANY M, 23d U.S. INFANTRY  
PRIOR TO ATTACK ON BOIS DE LA COTE 192

Company M of the 23d U.S. Infantry had participated in the attack of June 6 which had resulted in the loss to the Germans of the village of Bouresches and the southern edges of the Bois de Belleau. In this engagement the company had suffered heavy casualties. The following week it was severely gassed with a resultant disastrous loss in personnel. By the middle

Map No. 1

of June, two weeks after entering the sector northwest of Chateau Thierry, there remained with the unit only one officer and less than two score soldiers of the organization as constituted on June 1. ✓

#### Character of Replacements

Replacements were received during the period June 15-17 for reorganization of the company. These were noncommissioned officers and soldiers from the 41st National Guard <sup>DIVISION</sup> - intelligent youths of excellent physique. All had undergone several months of training in small arms fire; the noncommissioned officers, the most of whom had seen National Guard service on the Mexican border, had received instruction in the firing of German weapons. The morale of these replacements was high. They required only front line experience to become excellent combat soldiers.

Map No. 1

For eight days, beginning June 18, the reorganized Company M, still at reduced strength, held a support position in the patch of woods immediately south of the Bois de Belleau, overlooking Bouresches. Relieved from this support position on the night of June 26-27, the company reverted to the reserve and went into bivouac in woods to the south of the Paris-Metz highway.

#### Receipt of Untrained Replacements

While in the reserve bivouac, on June 28 there were received additional replacements to bring the company to authorized strength. Half a hundred of the latest arrivals were drafted enlisted men, French-Americans from Louisiana who had reported to their training camps barely six weeks before they found themselves members of a company serving in an active

? *division*  
sector on the Western Front. Few of these Louisianans had ever fired a rifle, service or otherwise; none were soldiers except in name. June 29 was spent in the reorganization of the company into the normal four platoons.

#### Reconnaissance of Bois de la Cote 192

In the evening of June 29, the company commander of Company M received instructions from the 3d Battalion's commander to accompany the latter on a reconnaissance of the German positions between the Bois de la Cote 192 and Vaux. With the unit commander were to go his four platoon leaders, three of whom were sergeants. Proceeding to the Bois de la Morette before daybreak on June 30, the reconnaissance party of Company M entered the ravine leading east from Bourbetin which was held by a company of the 9th U.S. Infantry. Here the entire day was spent in a detailed reconnaissance of the Bois de la Cote 192 and the Bois de la Roche and the approaches thereto.

Report had it that on July 4 Company M would participate in an assault on the Bois de la Cote 192. On the return journey to the company's bivouac, the company commander formulated plans with his only lieutenant for such instruction for the Louisiana replacements in rifle and automatic rifle marksmanship and the use of rifle and hand grenades as would be practicable in the short period of four days.

#### Orders for the Attack of July 1

No sooner had the company's reconnaissance group reached the bivouac than there was placed in the hands of the company commander the attack order. The assault would be made at 6:00 PM the following day.

The company would move into its position on the line of departure during the early morning hours of July 1.

(10) Recds. 2d  
Div. Vol. 3.  
Field Order  
No. 43, 23d  
Inf.  
&  
Recds. 2d  
Div. Vol. 5.  
Messages  
23d Inf.  
June 30

(10)

French troops were to attack Hill 204; two American battalions, one from each of the 9th and 23d U. S. Infantry Regiments, were to assault the German lines from Vaux to the Bois de la Cote 192, both inclusive. Company M, on a frontage of 350 meters, would constitute the left flank during the attack, its exposed flank to be protected by a strong combat patrol from the battalion's support company. The final objective assigned the company was the northern edge of the Bois de la Cote 192. (10)

The artillery plan for the engagement called for several hours of fire of destruction on the German positions and neutralization by gas, followed by a raking of the barrage zone from 5:00 PM to 5:57 PM, with high explosive and shrapnel. Then for three minutes a barrage would be laid down 200 meters in front of the line of departure. Thereafter it would advance 100 meters every two minutes until the assaulting troops had entered the southern edges of the woods, whereupon it would advance 100 meters every three minutes. Five hundred meters beyond the objective the barrage would remain fixed from 6:32 PM, gradually decreasing.

The rate of advance for the infantrymen would be 100 meters every two minutes from the line of departure to the southern edges of the woods, thereafter 100 meters every three minutes until the objective had been attained.

Information Concerning the Enemy

Map No. 2

Company M lay in the Bourbetin-Monneaux ravine throughout the morning and afternoon of July 1, intermingled with a unit of the 9th Infantry which later was to move east down the ravine to participate in the attack on the village of Vaux. During the course of the long, wearisome day, the company was visited by agents of the 9th Infantry's combat intelligence group. The Bois de la Cote 192 was held by approximately a company of the 201st German Infantry Division, so Company M's officers were informed. Three enemy machine guns were located in the bois, their normal fields of fire being in the direction of the Bois des Clerembauts. The troops on the other side of no-man's-land were German-Poles. "A bush-league outfit," stated an intelligence sergeant, from which had come several deserters into the lines held by the 9th Infantry.

Map No. 2

To the company officers also were issued airplane photographs of the Bois de la Cote 192 and a large-scale map which disclosed the purported normal positions of the enemy machine guns as being on the western edge of the woods, barbed wire entanglements to the southern front, and individual rifle pits leading from the Bois de la Cote 192 to the Bois de la Roche. In the field midway between the two woods were two machine gun emplacements.

To the untutored eye of the lieutenant, the airplane photographs showed little more than very distinct paths along the edges of the Bois de la Cote 192 and connecting that woods with the Bois de la Roche, and a number of short, indistinct paths from the northern edge of the woods to the roadway leading to

the German rear. The platoon leader's surmise was that the well marked trails were those used by enemy contact patrols at night; that the indistinct lanes were short cuts from the woods to the roadway.

The timely receipt of this information concerning the enemy permitted study of the map and airplane photographs by every noncommissioned officer of the company.

#### The Company Attack Order

The company attack order was issued verbally on the line of departure where the company commander was enabled to point out to his subordinates the objective and the approaches thereto. Three platoons were to form the assault wave, the platoon commanded by the only lieutenant present to be the center and guiding unit. The sergeant platoon leaders of the right and left assault platoons were to be under the direct command of the lieutenant. The fourth platoon was to constitute the support, under direct command of the company commander. The assault platoons were to attack with one section in the front wave, followed at fifty meters by the second section.

The company commander had given serious consideration to the launching of an attack by a unit which, with the exception of barely more than a dozen soldiers, had never participated in offensive action - a company which had in its ranks half a hundred totally untrained men. His decision, expressed in the company attack order, was that in the event of a wavering of the assault lines during the advance, marching fire - partially aimed fire from the hip while in motion - would be employed at such time as the lieutenant thought advisable.

With the danger of accidental discharge from rifles held by men with no training in mind, the company commander directed that the commissioned platoon leader maintain throughout the company's assault wave a straight line; that the barrage should be followed closely - at as nearly 200 meters as possible. ✓

#### Situation as to Supplies

For the attack and consolidation of positions thereafter each soldier had been issued one large tool, a pick or shovel. In addition each enlisted man carried two sandbags, one of which was employed as a grenade carrier. Rifle and hand grenades had been issued, but tromblons for the rifle grenades had not reached the company prior to the hour designated for the attack. The troops had left their bivouac with cartridge belts and automatic rifle clips filled with ammunition. The two additional bandoleers of ball ammunition which, according to the regiment's attack order, were to be carried by each soldier, failed to arrive at the line of departure.

#### The Hour Preceding the Attack

Shortly before 5:00 PM, the troops of the 9th U. S. Infantry, who were to participate in the attack, began their movement in the Bourbetin-Monneaux ravine toward their line of departure in front of Vaux. This activity was noted by the watchful observation posts of the 401st German Infantry on Hill 204. (11) At 5:00 PM, German artillery fire crashed into the ravine. The left assault platoon of Company M was caught in a rain of steel, seven men being killed and fifteen wounded. Runners from battalion headquarters in Bourbetin reported to the battalion commander that

(11) 201st Ger.  
Inf. Div.  
Vol. 3,  
Doc. 50,  
July 4

(12) Recds. 2d  
Div. Vol.5.  
Messages  
23d Inf.  
July 1

✓ Company M had been shot to pieces and could not be located. (13)

As the supporting American artillery began to rake the barrage zone with high explosive and shrapnel, however, the German bombardment gradually abated. Sufficient time remained for a hasty reorganization of the shattered and bewildered left platoon.

At 5:57 PM, the falling barrage dropped in front of the line of departure with a deafening roar. The company commander rushed up to his lieutenant and handed him a long French rifle, tromblon attached. He shouted: "Just got this. American planes are cooperating. When they fly over you dropping six white balls, fire this. They will be asking where you are. Flare in here will answer: 'We are here.' Wait 'till you get to your objective. Lots of luck. Good bye."

#### THE ATTACK

✓ Six o'clock. The barrage moved forward and dropped on the Paris-Metz highway. The assault waves of Company M clambered from the ravine and marched forward. The attacking troops were in perfect alignment when they reached the state highway. Ahead thundered the barrage, obscuring the Bois de la Cote 192 by a whirlwind of smoke and flying dirt.

The lieutenant gazed skyward for the American planes. He saw none. His faith in cooperating planes, American or otherwise, being nil, he deposited the cumbersome French rifle at the foot of one of the few poplars still standing on the highway, and continued more lightheartedly on his way.

The assault wave crossed the Paris-Metz Road and entered the fields. To the east for over a

kilometer stretched the long line of olive drab figures, bayonets flashing in the evening sunlight. The alignment was that of the parade ground. Ahead ponderously rolled the barrage. So far no reaction from the 201st German Infantry Division.

Four hundred meters from the southern edges of the Bois de la Cote 192. Suddenly, even above the roar of the barrage, was heard the deadly "put-put-put" of the German machine gun. The fire, it appeared, was being directed from the Bois de la Roche. The company on the right wavered. One hundred meters further on, the right platoon of Company M, a sergeant of which was wounded, slowed down its rate of advance; its right flank bent backward.

Two hundred meters from the Bois de la Cote 192, the command "Marching fire" was given. Rifle and automatic rifle fire broke out. Almost instantaneously the alignment of the three assault platoons was restored. The rate of advance speeded up, somewhat dangerously so. The barrage rolled into the southern portion of the woods. It lifted, and almost on its heels, the assault sections poured into the Bois de la Cote 192 at a run.

#### The Objective Reached

Ten yards within the woods, one heavy with underbrush, the lieutenant lost control of the three platoons. The fight within the woods, what little there was of it, became a squad affair. Some resistance was encountered from those members of the 8th Company who had found time to reach their firing positions in the southwest corner of the bois before the Americans swarmed into the woods. The squads speedily overcame

this opposition by the use of the rifle, automatic rifle, and hand grenade.

For the most part, however, the 8th Company's soldiers, still stupified and bewildered from the effects of the rolling barrage which had just passed over them, emerged from their shelters with hands raised in token of submission. Especially was this so when German speaking Americans shouted at the doors of shelters: "Come out and surrender! Everything will be alright." ✓

Map No. 2

The airplane photograph and combat intelligence map had disclosed to all noncommissioned officers the fact that through the left center of the woods ran a roadway to the north; that by guiding on this roadway the company's objective would be reached. Therefore, lost squads soon found themselves on the final objective line. Here they cut off the escape of those members of the 8th Company who sought to escape to the north.

Paths through the woods, leading to the rear of the 8th Company's position, were liberally marked with signs such as: "To the Command Post," "To the Signal Station." In mopping up the woods, these markers proved of great value to the personnel of Company M who had some knowledge of German.

Less than twenty-five minutes after the zero hour, the commander of the assault platoons found himself on the final objective at the station of the signal lamp. Ten minutes later all three assault platoons had reached the northern edge of the woods, and the company's lieutenant was in conference with the sergeant commanders of the right and left assault platoons.

Maps No. 2 & 3

A contact patrol, sent out from the center platoon, discovered that the indistinct lanes shown on the airplane photograph as running from the north edge of the woods to the roadway were not short cuts, as had been imagined, but the approaches to dugouts. In them were captured additional prisoners, wounded by the artillery fire of the day.

Overhead an American plane flew up and down the final objective line, signalling frantically: "Where are you? Where are you?" The lieutenant bethought him of that French rifle at the foot of the poplar tree on the Paris-Metz highway, 800 meters to the rear. His solution to the problem was to place in the field in front of his position, at distances of thirty meters, three white panels. These constituted his map and his undershirt ripped into two pieces. Satisfied, the American plane circled, the pilot waved, and the plane was off.

#### CONSOLIDATION OF CAPTURED POSITIONS

Map No. 3

The lieutenant commanding the assault platoons, for consolidation of the captured positions of the 8th Company, assigned to the right platoon one half of the northern edge of the woods, the center platoon the remaining half as far as the roadway, exclusive. To the left platoon was assigned the northern part of the wood's western edge from the roadway, exclusive, covering the ravine leading from the northwest. The sector covered by the right platoon was later enlarged somewhat when the lieutenant withdrew from the front line one section of the center platoon for counterattack purposes.

### Use of Captured Weapons

The marching fire, during the assault, had been of great moral benefit; that was indisputable. However, it had seriously depleted the supply of available small arms ammunition. A counterattack was expected momentarily.

Over sixty German rifles had been taken. Ample supply of ammunition for these rifles was available in the ammunition dump of the 8th Company, located without difficulty by means of the direction signs systematically nailed to the trees by conscientious Germans. Furthermore, the three machine guns which intelligence reports had stated to be in the woods, had been captured. To each platoon was issued twenty German rifles, to the right platoon two German machine guns, and to the left, one captured gun. Noncommissioned officers, with experience in the handling of German machine guns, were placed in charge of the weapons. Other noncommissioned officers gave hasty courses in rifle marksmanship with German rifles to the squads.

The company commander, on a reconnaissance of the front lines, approved of the plans for consolidation, and informed his commissioned assistant that, for protection of the company's left rear, he would move one section of his support platoon into position along the unimproved road along the western edge of the woods.

### Reinforcements for the Consolidation

Map No. 3

At dusk a machine gun section arrived at the Bois de la Cote 192. Its two guns were placed in position near the northern edge of the woods. By nightfall a detachment of engineers had arrived, and, under the protection of a patrol of riflemen from Company M,

were erecting barbed wire entanglements 100 meters to the front of the new positions. / On the company's left flank, a strong combat group from the battalion's support unit patrolled the fields. Lacking only ball ammunition for their Springfield rifles and tromblons for the rifle grenadiers, Company M's platoons by 2:00 AM, were awaiting with comparative composure the expected counterattack.

#### The Counterattack

The counterattack - a mismanaged affair for which countermanding orders were issued at too late an hour - came at 3:15 AM, in the dim light of the morning of July 2. (13) The counterattacking troops were repulsed and well nigh annihilated by American artillery and machine gun fire. None of the counterattacking elements of the 402d Infantry, which had launched its attack from the Bois des Rochets to the northeast of the line now held by the Americans, came within effective range of the Bois de la Cote 192. No further reaction, other than sporadic and ineffective artillery fire, was felt by Company M's garrison in the Bois de la Cote 192 prior to the relief of the unit on the afternoon of July 3.

#### Casualties

/ Company M's casualties during the attack, exclusive of those suffered in the ravine just prior to the assault, were but three soldiers slightly wounded - a noncommissioned officer of the right assault platoon, and two privates of the support platoon.

Prisoners of the 8th Company stated that of their combatant personnel not more than a dozen had

(13) 201st Ger.  
Inf. Div.  
Vol. 3,  
Doc. 50,  
July 4  
&  
402d Ger. ✓  
Inf. Regt.  
Vol. 3,  
Doc. 53,  
July 2

escaped being killed, wounded, or made prisoners. In the attack and counterattack, the 402d Infantry lost thirty per cent of its combatant strength. In fact, so badly had the regiment been treated that on July 3, by regimental order, the 1st and 2d Battalions were consolidated into two companies, each with but two officers and approximately 130 other ranks. (14)

(14) 402d Ger.  
Inf. Regt.  
Vol. 3,  
Doc. 53,  
Items 19-20  
and Combat  
Report

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#### LESSONS

The foregoing narrative deals with a minor attack of a small unit with limited objective. Nevertheless, there may be drawn from the story some lessons which, it is believed, are a little out of the ordinary. Summarized these are:

1. Organizations on the defensive must not base their estimate of probable future enemy operations on, to use race track vernacular, "past performances." Prior American attacks on the Bois de la Cote 192 had come from the Bois des Clerembauts. The machine guns of the 8th Company, on July 1, 1918, were so emplaced as to cover the approaches to the company's positions from the west. The American attack came from the south with the result that the machine guns were practically impotent. They were in the hands of the attacking forces before they could be placed in position for effective fire. Apparently no alternative positions had been selected for these very important auxiliary weapons. The carelessness of subordinate commanders in this respect may have been occasioned by intelligence reports to the effect that the Americans were inferior in attack tactics, that their attacks were not coordinated. Granting this supposition to be true, the 201st German Infantry Division erred and erred gravely.

No attack of the World War was better coordinated than that of July 1.

2. Untrained replacements are a greater handicap than no replacements. By an unkind trick of fate the majority of those soldiers killed and wounded in the Bourbetin-Monneaux ravine prior to the assault were from the group of replacements received on June 28. They had been killed in action, not before having fired a shot at the enemy positions, but before even knowing how to use the weapon with which they were armed. Their assignment to a division engaged on an active front was a ghastly administrative error.

3. Training of troops in the manipulation of enemy weapons is of considerable advantage. The members of Company M were not put to the test of actually firing the weapons captured on July 1. The moral effect, however, on the riflemen of having with them captured weapons for which there was an abundance of ammunition, was great. Especially was this true of the captured German machine guns.

4. The immense value of the detailed reconnaissance, availability of combat intelligence maps and airplane photographs, and the receipt of intelligence reports on the positions of the enemy, his distribution of weapons, and his morale, is so obvious as to require no discussion. At no time after 6:00 PM, on July 1 were the assault platoons of Company M encompassed in the "fog of war." They knew where to go, how to get there, and what to expect when they arrived. It is realized, of course, that seldom will opportunity be afforded for the accumulation of such detailed information concerning the enemy.

5. Post-attack inspection of the airplane photographs indicated quite clearly the probable presence of enemy shelters, dumps, or other installations at the end of these indistinct pathways disclosed by the photographs. So far as known, however, no member of the assault platoons had received instruction in the interpretation of aerial pictures. Fortunately, on July 1, this was a matter of little consequence.

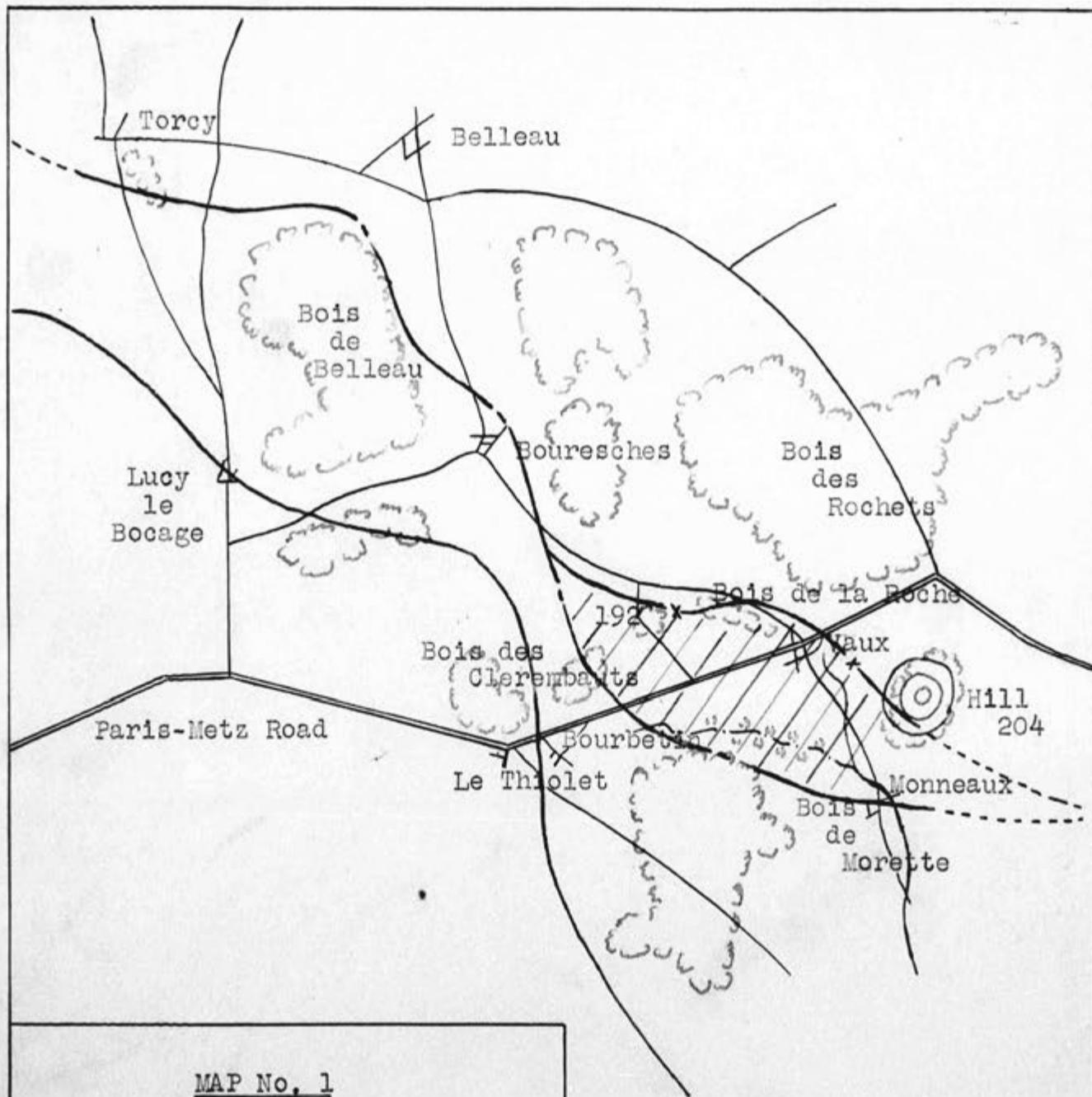
6. The penetration of the Bois de la Cote 192 and the rounding up of prisoners was accelerated greatly - if actual casualties were not avoided in "cat and dog" fights - by the presence of soldiers who spoke the German language. At this very time, however, in the United States there were being waged frantic campaigns for the elimination of instruction in German in the schools and colleges. Instruction in the use of the enemy's language should be encouraged in time of war, if not in institutions of learning, certainly in the military service.

7. Well marked routes to command posts, munitions dumps, and other installations are of unquestioned value in maintaining effective communication. Direction markers, however, have Frankenstein characteristics when a defensive position is attacked by the enemy. It is suggested that code directions might better serve a combat unit which had reason to expect attack or counterattack.

8. Marching fire's effect is mostly on the side of morale, where it is great. It disturbs the "shootee." The "shooter," permitted to return the fire of his opponents, ineffectually it is true, gains confidence; he is giving something for what he is called

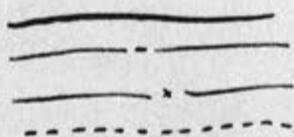
upon to take. The disadvantage of this type of fire is, of course, an overly rapid expenditure of ammunition - a very grave handicap in the attack. Assault fire - which has replaced the partially aimed, semi-rapid marching fire - demands aimed shots at slow rate of fire. Assault fire partially solves the problems inherent in any method of rifle or automatic rifle fire employed just before the enemy's lines are reached.

9. Preservation of alignment in woods is out of the question. Having seen some prior combat service in woods, the assault wave commander was seriously at fault in failing to make any provision for change of formation upon the entry of his units into the Bois de la Cote 192. Fortunately for him, on this occasion the opposition was demoralized, combat intelligence and reconnaissance had been such that scattered units could hardly fail to attain the final objective line.



MAP No. 1

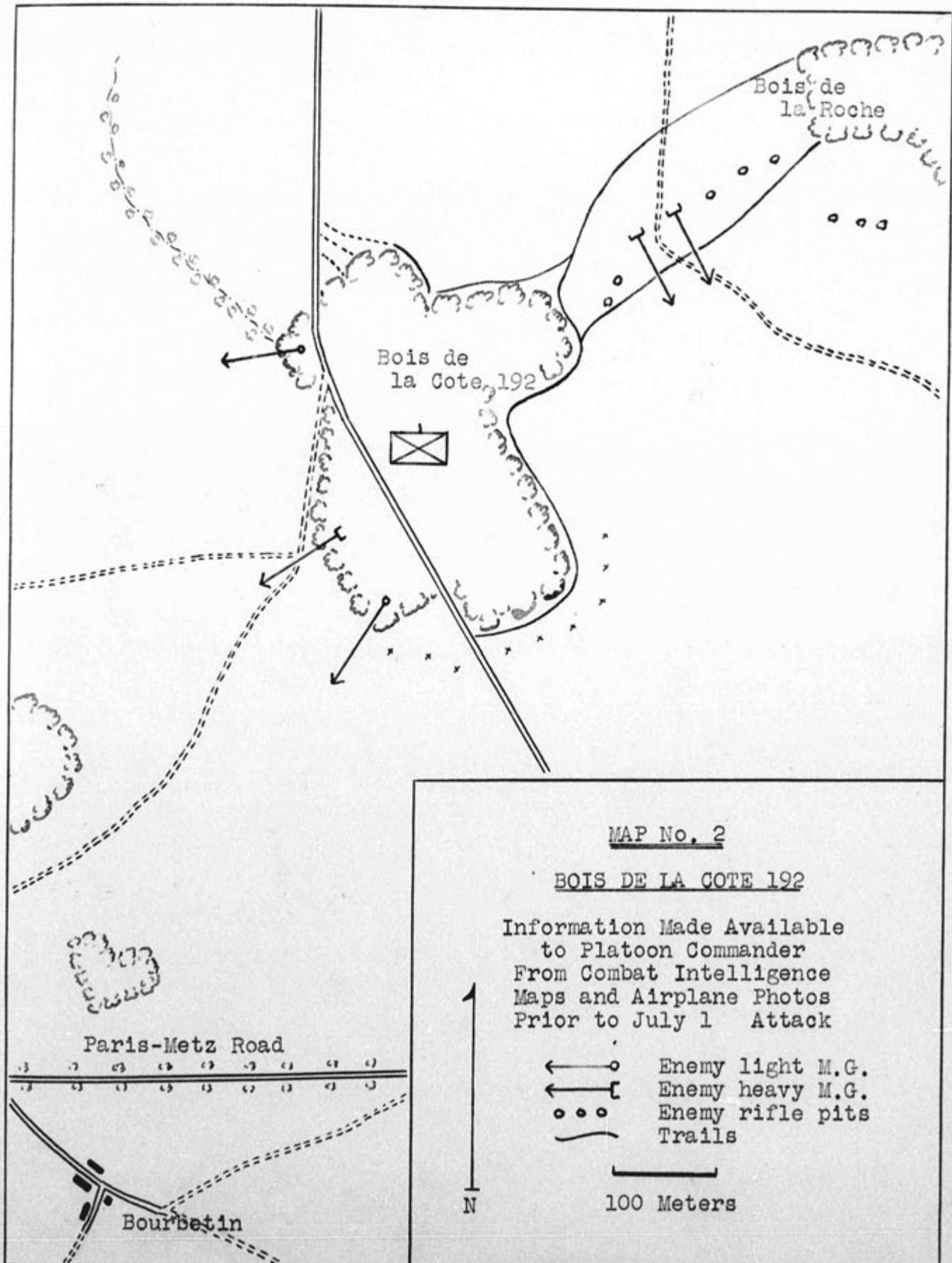
SECTOR OF SECOND DIVISION  
NORTHWEST OF CHATEAU THIERRY



American Lines on June 5, 1918  
 American Lines on July 1, 1919 a.m.  
 American Lines on July 2, 1918 a.m.  
 Adjoining French lines

1000 Meters

*Capt. Caygill.*



MAP No. 2

BOIS DE LA COTE 192

Information Made Available  
to Platoon Commander  
From Combat Intelligence  
Maps and Airplane Photos  
Prior to July 1 Attack

- ←○ Enemy light M.G.
- ←[ Enemy heavy M.G.
- Enemy rifle pits
- Trails

N

100 Meters

*Capt. Caygill.*

