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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 23d INFANTRY IN
THE SOISSONS OFFENSIVE
July 16-25, 1918.

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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 23d INFANTRY
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INTRODUCTION

General Pershing states that "The place of honor in the thrust toward Soissons was given to the 1st and 2d Divisions along with chosen French divisions." (1) The 23d Infantry occupied a place of honor in the 2d Division as one of the assault regiments.

In the World War, with its countless battles and millions of men engaged, the action of any regiment might seem comparatively insignificant. But the larger battle is made up of many smaller ones, and is there not a great deal to be learned in a study of the action of the smaller units upon whose success depends the success of the whole army?

It is believed that this thrust toward Soissons is of great interest and importance for many reasons. First, because it proved that American troops were capable of fighting offensively in large numbers by the side of the best allied divisions. Was it not here that the deadlock on the Western Front was broken? The attack was made before the German morale had been broken and under the most trying conditions.

An attempt will be made to tell of the part played by the 23d Infantry in this attack. To the narrator of the experience the realization is ever present that there were other regiments fighting shoulder to shoulder, doing their bit just as nobly, - the 9th Infantry, the 5th and 6th Marines, the regiments of the 1st Division and those of the 1st Moroccan Division.

(1) Pershing's
Final Report
p 11

Let us go back for a moment and pick up the thread of events leading up to this battle, for it is of especial importance that we know the conditions under which it was fought.

GENERAL SITUATION

The third German offensive of 1918, initiated May 27th and concluded June 5th, succeeded in thrusting forward from the Aisne between Compeigne and Reims a great salient, the apex of which rested at Chateau Thierry and Reims as the three corners and Fere-en-Tardenois in the center. The main road communication of the salient ran between Soissons and Chateau Thierry, paralleling the west face at a mean distance of about 10 kilometers. (2)

(2) Wise,
Turn of the
Tide, p 111

The line, having now been stabilized, the problem of the enemy was how the success, which had had no decisive results, could be exploited.

The attack of July 15th on the west and south sides of the salient, which had as its purpose the rolling up of the French armies in the east on Verdun, was successfully resisted by the French and Americans.

east (?)

The war was then at a standstill on July 16th. General Pershing urged Marshal Foch to use the Americans and strike at the hinge of the Marne salient. (3) Marshal Foch, it seems, had already such a plan in view. His mass of maneuver was on the west side of the Marne salient ready for such a situation. The counterattack must be delivered at once to the 7th German Army, now fully committed to the attack to the east. (4)

(3) Shipley,
Thomas,
pp 132-134

(4) Wise, p 128

The German Command's view of the situation was similar to that of Marshal Foch. Marshal von Hindenburg

says that it was essential for the execution of his plans in the Reims region that the western flank of the Marne salient should stand firm. He thought that the German offensive of the 15th of July would provoke counter measures on the part of the French reserves concentrated in the neighborhood of Villers-Cotteret. But, he had made plans to meet it, he thought. While the troops, placed between Soissons and Chateau Thierry, were not "fresh", they had fought so brilliantly in other battles that they were regarded as fully equal to the task. The sector between Soissons and the Ourcq was considered the greatest danger point. (5)

(5) Hindenburg,
V. 2,
p 198

Thus, we see that the German troops in front of the point of the main attack were not mediocre. They were selected and placed in front of the vital spot of the salient.

(6) Ludendorff's
Own Story,
V. 2, p 312

Ludendorff confirms this statement. He speaks of them as having been considered especially reliable. (6)

On July 15th, a very important change in the command of the 2d (U. S.) Division took place. General James J. Harbord succeeded General Omar Bundy as division commander. Brigadier General Hanson E. Ely, recently of the 1st Division, relieved Brigadier General E. M. Lewis. (7)

(7) Personal
Experience

PLANS AND ORDERS

The hinges of the salient, Soissons and Reims, offered to the allies the two most promising places for attack. The main, and practically the only, lines of communication in the salient ran between Soissons and Chateau Thierry. A small penetration southwest of Soissons would cut these.

Marshal Foch decided to strike east from the vicinity of Soissons between the Aisne and the Ourcq Rivers, sweep the plateau overlooking the valley of the Crise and thereby sever the main artery of communications. The task, once accomplished, would make the salient untenable for the mass of Germans therein. (8)

(8) Shipley
Thomas,
pp 132-133

To strike at Reims would have been to strike directly into the front of the largest and strongest forces in the salient. (9)

(9) Shipley
Thomas,
p 133

Speed and secrecy were to be the keynotes of this operation. Never before in the course of the war were preparations for such a large operation conducted with more secrecy (10) nor with more rapidity.

(10) Wise,
p 132

The forces were to be concentrated in the large forests southwest of Soissons on the evening before the attack. The Foret de Retz was admirably located and suited for this, as we shall see later. (11)

(11) Personal
Experience

Confusion under the circumstances would be inevitable. The risk was enormous. The Germans had a preponderance of men and guns. (12) There were forty enemy divisions in the Marne salient. The objectives assigned were limited. Marshal Foch did not desire so to commit himself to the action as to bring on a general battle at this time. He was, rather, trying the enemy out. Had he not said, "Enough tactics, enough strategy. Let the victory come where it will"? (13)

(12) Shipley
Thomas,
pp 132-133

(13) Wise,

Three divisions were selected to make the main attack southwest of Soissons, namely the 1st and 2d American Divisions and the 1st Moroccan Division (The Foreign Legion was a part of this division) one of the best "shock" divisions in the French army. (14)

(14) Shipley
Thomas,
p 135

General Mangin, the great attacking general of the French army was given command. The three divisions formed the 20th Army Corps of his 10th Army. These divisions were chosen from **over** one million men around the Marne salient. (15)

(15) Shipley
Thomas,
p 134

THE SITUATION IN THE 23d INFANTRY

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From June 1st to July 8th the 23d Infantry held a sector northwest of Chateau Thierry. Deployed here, with its right near Bourbelin on the Paris-Metz Road and its left in the town of Bouresches to the north, it had been in the fight for about forty days, - a fight in every sense of the word. From June 1st to the 5th at the very apex of the salient driven by the German attack of May 27th, it had helped to stop the march on Paris. This, in itself, was considered by the Commander-in-Chief a major operation as attested by the battle clasp issued therefor.

On June 6th, in conjunction with the marine brigade on the left, it had attacked with one battalion, two companies of which were practically annihilated. From then until the Vaux attack its mission was simply to hold. The strain in this sector was most severe. The harassing fire of the enemy artillery with gas and high explosive was practically continuous. In one gas attack the regiment suffered over two hundred casualties. It was what might be termed an active sector. (16) The report of casualties suffered gives some idea of the ordeal, - 208 killed and 1334 wounded. (17)

(16) Personal
Experience

(17) Battle
Casualties
A.E.F.
Official
Document

Replacements were received in the line. They had had practically no training in the art of war. They did not know how to use the rifle, and it was necessary to teach them to adjust the gas mask. But to offset this

the regiment had a great asset. There was the nucleus of old regular soldiers of the regiment. Most of them were noncommissioned officers. Under them the new comers soon learned the ways of the infantryman at the front and caught the spirit of the regiment. The field officers were from the regular army. Most of the others were young officers who had just come into the service for the duration of the war.

Upon being relieved from the front lines the regiment was ordered to organize and hold a part of a second position along the line Montreuil-Druisy with regimental headquarters at St. Aulde on the Marne River. Although the regiment had been withdrawn from the front lines it was in no sense of the word at rest. (18)

(18) Personal
Experience

THE CONCENTRATION

The 23d Infantry was carrying out the mission of holding the second battle position, when at midnight 15 - 16 July, orders were received requiring readiness to move at a minute's notice. Units were notified and turned out under arms and equipment about 2:00 AM. After waiting an hour or two the men were sent back to their billets to rest. (19)

(19) Testimony,
Capt. Rankin

About 8:00 AM, July 16th, orders were received to the effect that the regiment, less all animal-drawn transportation, would be moved by French trucks at 4:00 PM.

The infantry embussed at Les Davids on the Montreuil-La Ferte Road. The trucks were late, and it was not until 9:00 PM that the move started. The destination announced was Marcilly. (20)

(20) Personal
Experience

✓ The horse-drawn transport of the regiment was pooled into one convoy and ordered to proceed to Betz via St. Jean-les-Jumeaux, Trilport - Germigny - Vareddes. Further orders concerning their movements were to be received at Etrepilly. (21)

(21) F.O. 48,
23d Inf.

Two trucks were assigned by Division Headquarters

(22) Personal
Experience

to Regimental Headquarters to carry signal and engineer equipment. (22) Each battalion carried two rolling kitchens

(23) Maj. C.B.
Elliott,
Personal
Experience

with them in the camions. ✓ (23) French Anamite soldiers were the camion drivers. It seemed quite strange that these slant-eyed orientals of old Asia should be driving

(24) Personal
Experience

young America on to battle. (24)

The regiment moved on through the clear moonlit night in the slow, rumbling French camions. In some way the impression had been created among the men that they were moving to a much deserved rest area near Paris. Probably the wish was father of the thought, as it was in many cases when rumors turned into firm beliefs.

Crepy was passed. It aroused some suspicion. It looked too deserted for such a large town. At so late an hour of the night a lifeless appearance would seem natural in any town; but this one felt as if it were not far from the front. It was not normal. Still the belief prevailed that a rest area near Paris was the objective.

(25)

(25) Personal
Experience

✓ When the regimental commander, Colonel Paul B. Malone, arrived at Marcilly ahead of the column, no French officer could be found who knew the destination of the 23d Infantry. A French officer was finally found in an automobile by the road, who said that orders would be received at La Fontaine-les-Nonnes. After considerable delay and effort Colonel Malone did find an officer in

(26) Report of
Operations
23d Inf.,
July 17, 18,
19, 1918.

a corner of this town, who furnished a guide and informed him that the train was to move to La Plesne. (26)

On to La Plesne the regiment moved. Finally the trains arrived a little after daybreak near the western edge of the Foret de Retz. The regiment debussed while Colonel Malone and his Staff sought someone who knew where to go. ✓ The bright summer sun had begun to peep through the mist and large trees of the forest. It was quiet, serene and peaceful. Only in the humming of an airplane, so far overhead that its markings couldn't be distinguished, was there a sign of the nearness of the front lines.

✓ A French officer was found, who said that he knew the regiment's destination. He directed us along a road running north into the forest. So the regiment marched along this route for about an hour, when we learned from another French officer that we were going in the wrong direction. A countermarch was executed. The place whence the start was made was reached. Here a road running easterly into the Foret de Retz was taken. The countermarch, as usual, did anything but help the morale of those by whom it was executed. ✓

The forest, which had been a royal hunting ground in past days, was magnificent with its towering trees. It looked cool and restful. One could not help but think that any place in it would make an ideal camp site. Many paths ran off from the road, as they do in most French woods. The road, itself, was ~~of~~ dirt. It would have been of sufficient width for two-way traffic had the sides not been so soft. ^{of (?)}

The order of march was as follows: Headquarters Company, 3d Battalion, 1st Battalion, 2d Battalion. The

Supply Company, the Machine Gun Company, the Stokes Mortars, and 37-mm guns were "somewhere in France" but their exact whereabouts was not known. As has been stated before, all animal-drawn transport was marching overland.

No breakfast had been served. The last meal had been eaten in the old area.

The march was being conducted in the normal way with fifty minutes marching and ten minutes rest.

After a few hours the hot July sun became most effective. The walls, made by the towering trees on either side of the road, seemed to cut off every breath of air. It was damp and muddy underfoot. It was extremely hot and sultry. All of which, added to the all-night ride in camions and the lack of breakfast, began to make the journey, at least, uncomfortable. The men, especially the recently arrived replacements, began to drain their canteens. There was no water to refill the canteens.

The march became more and more trying on these men who had been in the trenches for more than a month. Quite naturally it should. They lacked sleep, food, and water. They were marching on a slippery, muddy road on the hottest kind of a July day.

Until a little before noon no other troops had been seen. Only a staff car now and then to run the foot soldier off into the ditch.

Some tanks were passed, parked in the woods on the side of the road. The idea that a rest area was the objective began to vanish. Then some light artillery passed. As the column moved on, the roads became jammed with tanks, trucks, artillery, and infantry. The whole place fairly seethed with men, animals, and materiel. (27)

(27) Personal
Experience

(28) Report of
Operations,
23d Inf.

Colonel Malone had met the division commander about 10:00 AM, who handed him a copy of Field Orders No 15, Headquarters 2d Division. He returned to the column to urge it on with all possible rapidity in order to get as near the jump-off line as could be done. (28)

At 12 noon, July 17th, the regiment halted by the road for a rest. It was here that news was received that an attack was to be made. Nothing had been known before. Little was known now except that an attack was to be made at daybreak the next day from the eastern edge of the forest.

About 12:30 PM, the regiment again took up the march to the east through the forest along the Route du Faite.

By 4:30 PM, the entire regiment had reached Division Headquarters at Carrefours de Nemours. The battalions were moved off into a clearing just to the north of the crossroads, whence they took cover in the forest.

The machine guns, Stokes mortars and 37-mm guns had not yet arrived. The men carried only 100 rounds of ball cartridges in their belts. There were neither hand nor rifle grenades. (29)

(29) Personal
Experience

PLANS AND ORDERS OF THE 23d INFANTRY

In the meantime the regimental commander had returned to Division Headquarters. Maps (only enough for the regimental and battalion commanders) were secured, a conference was held with the artillery commander, the Chief-of-Staff, and his assistants, and plans were drawn up for the attack. (30)

(30) Report of
Operations,
23d Inf.,
July 17-19,
1918

The Field Orders of the 2d Division for the attack were dated "17 July 1918, 4:30 AM", but were not received by the commanding officer, 23d Infantry, until 10:00 AM.

The boundaries assigned were as follows:

Northern: Puiseux - le Translon - Charantigny - Villemontoire.

Southern: Point 1000 meters south of Carrefour Montgobert - Vauxcastille - Vierzy (inclusive) - Hartennes-en-Taux (inclusive).

Division between brigades: Point 1 kilometer north of Chavigny Farm - Point 1.2 kilometers northwest of ~~Beaurepaire Farm~~ - Point 1 kilometer north of Vierzy.

The division was to attack with brigades abreast, 3d Brigade on the right and 4th Brigade (less 6th Marines) on the left. The 6th Marines and 2d Engineers constituted the Division Reserve.

There was no plan of maneuver, with the exception of the attack being carried out in three phases, the capture of each objective marking one phase.

Division Headquarters were to remain at Carrefour de Nemours until the final objective was reached, and then moved to Carrefour Montgobert.

Briefly the division orders assigned a zone of action to each brigade, told the location of the enemy, and stated the time of attack. (31)

Before all of the troops had arrived at Carrefour de Nemours the field orders of the 23d Infantry for the attack had been written (3:15 PM, July 17, F.O. No 49, Hqrs., 23d Inf.). They were based on the orders of the division and were in substance as follows:

(31) Field Order
No 15, 2d
Div., A.E.F.
July 1918

"The enemy holds the line through the eastern part of the Bois de Retz from near the Trench de Bade, along the Laie Grande Veneur to Carrefour Aumale, thence to Carrefour-du-Conservateur. The allies attack in the direction of Fere-en-Tardenois, 1st Division on the left, 2d Division on the right, and 1st Moroccan Division in the center of the 20th Army Corps on "S" day at H hour.

The regiment attacks on the right of the division. First objective, a north and south line through Beurepaire second objective, a north and south line through Vauxeastille; and third objective, a line just east of Vierzy. (A rough sketch was attached to show zones of action and objectives).

The regiment will move at 8:00 PM tonight and take up positions for the attack in three echelons, from front to rear, 2d Battalion in advanced trenches now held by French in front of position to be assaulted; 1st Battalion in vicinity of Chavigny Farm, and 3d Battalion in eastern extremity of Foret de Retz.

All three echelons will move off in the attack, which will be preceded by a large number of tanks and follow barrage at 300 meters.

Each soldier will secure two extra bandoliers of ammunition when passing dump on the way to the front tonight.

Advance P.C. of Regiment at Chavigny Farm."

The 3d Battalion (Reserve) was ordered to furnish one company as a combat liaison group to operate on the right of the assault battalion. (32)

(32) Field Order
No 49, 23d Inf.,
1918.

The first feature which strikes one is the zone of action which changes abruptly 45 degrees to the right at Beurepaire Farm.

There was to be no artillery preparation. At 4:35 AM, fire was to be opened without previous registration.

As we see from the orders, little or nothing was known, or at least divulged, concerning enemy strength or his dispositions.

At about 4:30 PM, the battalion commanders and staff assembled and issued the above orders. The battalion commanders ordered their battalions to get ready.

At 5:00 PM, a French staff officer arrived to accompany Colonel Malone, Major Fechet (2d Battalion) Major E. C. Waddill (1st Battalion), and Major C.B. Elliott (3d Battalion) on a personal reconnaissance. The posts of command of the French troops which were to be relieved during the night were visited. They were not at least averse to being relieved immediately. Upon returning the regimental and battalion commanders found the roads blocked and jammed with all kinds of traffic trying to move in both directions. Seemingly, there was no control. It was 8:00 PM before these officers rejoined their troops.

Arrangements were made to place a large ammunition dump at Carrefour du Cerf.

The problem which confronted the regiment was to move over 3000 men through the forest for a distance of about 9 kilometers to the jump-off position. It seemed impossible. (33)

(33) Personal
Experience

The battalion commanders had only a brief time with their officers to issue orders and explain the attack.

Let us take an example of what happened in the 2d Battalion which was to be the assault battalion. Major Fechet was able to secure one copy of the map. He placed

it on the ground where some twenty officers could look at it, some from the north side, some from other points of the compass. The Major pointed out the jump-off line, the first, second, and final objectives and the zone of action. Captain Rankin, then a lieutenant in command of an assault platoon of Company "E" states that it was the last time that he or any others of his battalion saw a map. The Major was called to regimental headquarters and a brief explanation was all his officers had of the attack. Company officers returned to their companies and explained all that they knew of the situation to their

men. (34)

(34) Testimony of
Capt. Rankin

TERRAIN IN THE 2d DIVISION SECTOR

The Foret de Retz was admirably suited for the concentration of large forces. Its towering trees prevented aerial observation, its many roads and paths allowed movement of infantry, at least, in any direction. The front line ran along its eastern extremity. In going east from the forest one encounters a broad, open plateau, gently sloping up until it suddenly drops off in the valley of the Oise. The plateau is crossed by numerous deep and precipitous ravines which are not seen until one is nearly on them. The most important of these is the Vauxcastille ravine running from Vierzy to Vauxcastille and thence north across the sector. It has a depth of about 120 feet and constitutes a difficult obstacle with its steep, wooded sides. The large open fields were covered with full grown wheat and stretched as far as the eye could see.

The farm houses, as well as those in the towns, were made of stone. There were many caves in the Vauxcastille ravine and in Vierzy. A railroad tunnel ran from Vierzy to Lechelle. Any number of men could be placed in these caves.

The important Soissons - Chateau Thierry Road paralleled the edge of the forest at a distance of 10 kilometers.

In general the terrain decidedly favored the defense.

THE MARCH TO THE JUMP-OFF

The regiment, with battalions in order in which they were to attack, took up the advance about 9:00 PM. Rolls were left behind under guard. The stripped pack with rifle belt and bayonet were carried. The band was left at Carrefour de Nemours. In acting as stretcher bearers in the last engagement, many of them had become casualties, and, in order to have any band at all, it was necessary to keep them back.

So far no meals had been served. Little, if any, water had been secured.

All of the afternoon the roads were becoming more and more jammed with traffic of every description. There were huge French camions loaded with ammunition, artillery, tanks, ambulances, machine gun carts, and foot troops. One could hardly imagine how so many men, animals, and materiel could be assembled in one place in such a short time. But were there not 67,000 men, 5000 animals, and 300 vehicles concentrating in the forest, who would within 10 hours be attacking? The great artillery fire, which was to be executed, called for countless rounds of ammunition. Every minute the jam grew worse. The infantrymen were already being shoved off into the ditches. The underbrush was too thick in the forest for marching. It seemed as if utter chaos would result, if, as a matter of fact, it did not already exist. It was

as if the waters of Niagara had been deflected into a hose. It was becoming dark and had commenced to rain.

The strictest march discipline was to be maintained. It was forbidden to light a cigarette. Silence and every precaution was required to keep the enemy unaware of our approach.

The terrific electrical storm accompanied by a driving rain added to the confusion and what seemed insurmountable difficulties. The imagination can hardly be stretched enough to conceive of the situation. Nothing was visible at a pace. The men were drenched. They were forced to march in the muddy ditches beside the road. Now and then even this route was obstructed by a mule, or a truck, or a caisson, which had been shoved off the road. It was necessary to form a column of files which seriously elongated the column. To avoid being lost, each man had to catch hold of another's pack. When a break occurred in the column it had to be halted until the break closed. Otherwise the end which had broken off would have been lost. It was next to impossible to find one's direction. There was a perfect network of roads. The darkness and rain prevented location by map. The only hope was to read the signposts. The battalion commanders were the only ones who knew the way. The others had had no chance to make a reconnaissance. The lightning was about the only circumstance in favor of the struggle to get forward. By its flashes some observation could be obtained. This intermittent brilliance helped considerably. But for it, the situation at 4:35 AM would probably have been quite different. Colonel Malone with his Staff had proceeded to the P. C. of a French regimental commander near the Carrefour de Montgobert. Noncommissioned officers were stationed along the way as guides to

help as best they could to give the troops the proper direction. (35)

(35) Personal Experience

At 2:30 AM, the regimental adjutant, Captain Lluffrio, reported to the regimental commander that all battalions had passed the ammunition dump at which he had been posted. (36) Lieutenant Wisener of the 3d Battalion had put down his gas mask to help issue ammunition. The sergeant next to him picked it up in the darkness and issued it as a bandolier. (37)

(36) Report of Operations, 23d Inf.

(37) Testimony, Major C.B. Elliott

The men were moving on the proper routes. The French troops were sending in the most disquieting reports to the effect that our troops were lost in the woods.

At 3:30 AM, the sergeant major of the 1st Battalion reported to the regimental commander that Companies A and B of his battalion had been lost in the woods, and that he thought only a small portion of the battalion had reached the jump-off position. About this time the battalions of marines under Lieutenant Colonel Feland passed the P.C. It seemed futile that an attack would have any chance under these conditions. The regimental commander personally took charge of Companies A and B and led them to their position. A French guide had led the regimental headquarters astray, but it got back on the right path and came out of the forest at the proper time and place.

(38) Personal Experience

(38)

At 3:15 AM, the troops of the 2d Battalion began to march in double time in order to get to their position. The French guides were insufficient and practically of no value. About 4:15 AM, the 2d Battalion began to run into French troops who retired. At 4:30 AM the battalion arrived at the jump-off line - only five

(39) Testimony of minutes before it was to move off into the attack. (39)
Capt. Rankin

The other battalions had practically the same experience in getting to their positions. Had not a very great feat been accomplished in simply getting to this fight?

The 3d Battalion arrived at its position at 4:25 AM, and began to cut the wire (French) in its front so that it could advance. (40)

(40) Testimony of
Major C.B.
Elliott

The 9th Infantry had been more fortunate so far. It had arrived at its jump-off position early in the night.

The 5th Marines on the left of the 9th Infantry were a little late in getting to their jump-off position. They were deploying when the enemy barrage fell, and began their advance twenty minutes thereafter. (41)

(41) Marine Corps
Gazette,
March 1921,
p 79

FORMATION OF THE REGIMENT FOR THE ATTACK

The frontage of the 23d Infantry averaged about 1/2 kilometer. The regiment formed for the attack in column of battalions. The 2d Battalion, assault battalion, was formed with two companies in the assault and two in reserve. (E and F Companies in the assault, and G and H Companies in reserve).

Assault companies were formed with all four platoons in line, each platoon deployed in four waves of one section each. Therefore, the platoon leader had a narrow front and a great deal of depth, which facilitated control and aided his power of penetration. The company commander had no maneuver unit, however, under this system. (42)

(42) Testimony of
Capt. Rankin

Each regiment was supported by four battalions of assault artillery of three batteries each, or a total of 48 guns, = 1 gun to approximately every 20 yards of front.

The 38th French Infantry Division (Colonial) was on the right of the 23d Infantry.

This was the line-up for the attack.

THE ATTACK

Exactly at 4:35 AM, the zero hour, as the gray dawn was just breaking, the powerful artillery concentration opened up. The noise was so terrific that at a pace one could actually not hear another yell at the top of his voice. (43)

(43) Personal Experience

The men of the 2d Battalion debouched from the edge of the forest and the small ravine just east of Chavigny Farm, following the barrage at about 100 meters. 300 meters was the distance ordered.

No sooner had our barrage come down than enemy rockets went up, calling for their barrage, which came down immediately. So far no tanks had appeared.

(44) Testimony of Capt. Rankin

Instead of advancing at 100 meters per two minutes, the men began to run forward. (44) Not even considering what they had just been through, one perceives that their dash and spirit were remarkable beyond description.

In the words of the division commander, Major General Harbord,

"Nothing in all history is finer than the spirit with which those men went forward, **tired**, hungry, and thirsty, and pushed the Germans back. At Gettysburg when Pickett's charge was failing on the 3d of July, 1863, the high tide of the Confederacy broke and receded at a little stone wall on the heights, over which few men went. At the very spearhead of the charge was a Confederate captain of whom it is said that on reaching the wall he stood on it for a moment in the withering Union fire, and

turning waved his hat at his men and shouted: 'Come on, you -- . Do you want to live forever?' That was the spirit in which the Marines, the 9th and 23d Infantry, went toward the Soissons-Chateau Thierry Road this 18th of July, 1918." (45)

(45) Maj. Gen.
Harbord,
Saturday
Evening Post
March 28,
1925,
p 133

After an advance of about 500 yards the enemy outpost line was encountered, which consisted of a few fox holes. The line was very thinly held. There was no wire in front of it. It was easily overcome, the garrison being either killed or captured. (46)

(46) Testimony of
Capt. Rankin

The surprise was complete. Prisoners soon began to stream back. Some wounded were coming in to the aid station established by Captain Martin of the 3d Battalion near Chavigny Farm. (47)

(47) Personal
Experience

(48) Testimony of
Maj. C. B.
Elliott

The battalions had closed up to pass under the barrage. (48) The attack moved forward rapidly across the great wheat fields which stretched as far as the eye could reach. The wheat was about the height of a man's chest. On the right of the regiment was a wooded ravine, running parallel to the axis of attack. Wounded men passing regimental headquarters reported that the attack was going well, that the advance was so fast at times that one could hardly keep up with it.

At 5:00 AM, regimental headquarters was established in the ravine near Chavigny Farm. Prisoners continued to arrive. At 5:30 AM, a division staff officer arrived to take notes on what happened. He left shortly afterward. This was the last that was seen of any of the higher headquarters for some time.

A photographer from division headquarters started out, but, having left his plates behind, soon decided that he would have to return for them.

Messages began to come to the Post of Command of the regiment. At 6:28 Colonel Upton reported that everything was going well with the 9th Infantry, and from that time on the closest contact was maintained between the 9th and 23d Infantry by runners.

At 6:30 AM, Major E. C. Waddill, commanding the 1st Battalion, reported that the advance was progressing all right.

About 6:25 messages from Major Fechet and Captain Farragut Hall reported that the first objective had been taken at 4:50 AM. Three kilometers had been covered in 15 minutes.

The fight around Beaurepaire Farm, while it did not last long, was, nevertheless, severe. It was well defended by trenches, and machine gun fire swept the open fields to the front. Casualties were quite heavy. No wire to amount to anything had been encountered so far.

(49) Personal
Experience

(49)

The 9th Infantry took the Farm itself as the

(50) Testimony of
Capt. Rankin

23d Infantry was coming up on the right. (50)

After all the confusion of the night before, things began to brighten. The most stubborn resistance was being overcome by the doughboy equipped only with his rifle and bayonet. The Chauchat rifle had already been abandoned by those who had carried it at the outset. A Springfield looked more attractive. The artillery barrage until this time had been excellent.

The enemy barrage consisted mainly of concentrations on the approaches; although a thin barrage was passed through in the open. A great deal of air-burst shrapnel was being used.

The advance had been pushed where the going was good. If a squad could get ahead, it drove on. Likewise the platoon and company. In this process of infiltration enemy islands of resistance were still holding out, at times, as far back as 500 yards behind the assault lines.

In attacking Beurepaire the assault and support companies of the 2d Battalion had become intermingled. Even parts of the 1st Battalion were getting up into the front line.

At Beurepaire the direction of attack changed about 45 degrees to the right. Even after the most frantic efforts of the officers, parts of the battalion continued in the original direction, going over into the 9th Infantry sector.

A change of direction by an assault unit under the heaviest fire, the impossible, did not daunt the battalion. On they drove. The more the opposition, the harder they fought. One wondered what forces could spur human beings on to such heroic efforts. There were some who straggled and dropped back, but they were few. The courage and self-sacrifice, displayed by the individual and the whole, were an inspiration. ✓

At 6:45 AM, the post of command of the regiment moved to Beurepaire Farm. The 9th Infantry also made this their headquarters.

Some of our artillery was already moving forward at a gallop in the fields east of Beurepaire.

French tanks were moving up under heavy enemy artillery fire, which succeeded in knocking out several of them. They were mostly the larger type of French tank in which 75's were mounted.

The first objective (Beaurepaire) having been taken, the attack shoved on. The resistance became more and more stubborn. From here on contact with the 38th French Division had been lost. It had fallen behind the cyclonic attack of our troops. (51) Provision had been made for this. Company L, 3d Battalion, had been detailed as a liaison group on the right of the division. (52)

(51) Personal Experience

(52) Testimony of Major C.B. Elliott

The fighting became terrific around the precipitous banks of the wooded Vauxcastille ravines. A perfect network of machine-gun nests covered the ravine and open fields to the east. When they could be located they were attacked by small groups outflanking them; but locating them was the difficult part. The unit under fire was receiving it from a position in front of another company. The ravine would have been extremely difficult to cross when not under fire.

Baron Richthofen's famous "circus" paid a visit about this time. These salmon colored planes came swooping down extremely low over the infantry. They used their machine guns, and threw bombs over the side at the infantry. Although few casualties were inflicted, they were a bit troublesome. The orders were that they shouldn't be fired on by riflemen lest positions should thereby be revealed. Everyone was to lie motionless, face down. However, these orders were not strictly carried out. Enemy aviation remained very active throughout. Few allied planes were seen. There were no infantry contact planes. Germany mastered the air as far as the doughboy was concerned.

Major Fechet and Captain Hall of the 2d Battalion both reported that the crest overlooking Vierzy

had been reached some time between 9:00 and 9:30 AM. Our troops were on the north, west and southwestern approaches to the town.

Captain Hall sent a very laconic message about this time. His company was held up in front of Vierzy. As well as it can be remembered, it contained three words, "Shoot up Vierzy".

The second objective had been captured after an advance of six kilometers of hard fighting. In this rapid advance many machine guns and prisoners had been left behind. Units had become badly intermingled. It was necessary to clean up and reorganize.

All day the fighting kept up around the Vauxcastle ravine and Vierzy.

Some of the wounded were bringing back the most alarming reports. Man after man claimed that he was practically the last of his platoon, in command of which he had fallen.

The 1st and 2d Battalions had become intermingled. Parts of the 1st Battalion had been fed into the 2d Battalion throughout the day.

There had been no communication with higher headquarters until this time. Within the regiment control and dissemination of information had not amounted to much. Runners were the only means of conveying orders or information. (53)

(53) Personal Experience

Up until 5:00 PM, it was estimated that we had captured 800 prisoners, including many officers, 2 batteries of field artillery, and 100 machine guns. (54)

(54) Report of Operations, 23d Inf.

Our casualties had been heavy, but not out of proportion to the magnitude of resistance which had been overcome.

THE SECOND ATTACK

Early in the afternoon of the 18th, General Ely met General Harbord by chance at Beaurepaire Farm. General Harbord, having been informed of the situation, ordered a second attack to be launched at 4:30 PM. It was this hour before General Ely could find the commanding officers of the 9th and 23d Infantry. (55)

(55) Monograph;
Soissons

Colonel Malone states in his report on the operations that he received the orders at 5:30 PM. (56) It is my memory that the orders were received considerably after the time for the attack. (57)

(56) Report of
Operations,
23d Inf.

(57) Personal
Experience

The division order was dated 18 July 1918, 1:30 PM., and was in the form of a message to the Commanding General, 3d Brigade. (58) Therefore, at least three hours had been consumed in getting it as far as regimental headquarters. It would seem that such an important order could have been sent through ~~to~~ its destination more quickly.

(58) Field Orders
of 2d Div.

The orders of the division stated that, "Our cavalry, with some infantry and trucks, have been pushed to the front in pursuit of the enemy." (59) Some French cavalry had been seen in the fields west of Beaurepaire, but none had been seen or heard of, prior to this time, "pursuing" the enemy. (60)

(59) Field Orders
of 2d Div.

(60) Personal
Experience

The 3d Brigade supported by the 5th Marines and 6th Machine Gun Battalion were ordered to make the attack upon receipt of the division order. The attack was to be supported by the Field Artillery Brigade. (61)

(61) Field Orders,
2d Div.

The orders of the 3d Brigade were to resume the attack at 6:00 PM, with the eastern extremity of the Bois d'Hartennes as the objective, with the 23d Infantry on the right and 9th Infantry on the left.

The 23d Infantry was ordered to capture Vierzy and push on in the direction of Tigny. Fifteen French light tanks were to support the attack of each regiment. Also one regiment of artillery was to support each infantry regiment.

(62) Field Orders 3d Brigade to support the 23d Infantry. (62)

(63) Report of Operations, 23d Inf. Let us consider for a moment the condition of our troops. They were exhausted from continuous marching and fighting for over a month. (63) They had not had food or sleep for forty-eight hours. The canteens of the Bosche soldiers were the only supply of water which had been secured up ^{to} this time. Water supply in the area had been gassed.

Though disorganized, they were victorious. All of the normal objectives, except the town of Vierzy - a veritable stronghold of machine guns and men - had been captured.

The 1st and 2d Battalions and parts of the 3d Battalion, which now held Vauxcastille ravine, were mixed. The 9th and 23d Infantry Regiments had, themselves, become somewhat intermingled. (64) The remainder of the 3d Battalion was at Beaurepaire Farm. (65) ✓

(65) Testimony of Major C.B. Elliott The French on the right appeared to be fighting for the woods southwest of Vierzy.

(66) Report of Operations, 23d Inf. It was impossible to start the attack at 6:00 PM. (66) This was the opinion of both Colonel Malone and Colonel Upton. The tank commander wanted more time than the infantry. Colonel Malone, before leaving Beaurepaire, held a conference with the French captain commanding the supporting tanks. Also the French Colonel, commanding a cavalry regiment, rode up. It seems that his orders were to break through near Vierzy if our attack was successful.

One could hardly imagine a more impressive sight than this regiment of cavalry in approach formation in the wheat fields west of Beaurepaire. What a comparison there was between them and the doughboys! The cavalryman was superbly mounted, immaculately uniformed, and well equipped. The regiment looked as though it were on parade. The long lances glittered in the evening sun. The doughboy was ragged, covered with mud, his clothes torn. His face was drawn and tense, showing the strain of his hard task. He looked determined, capable, and powerful. Upon him rested the fate of the army.

Glancing further over these wheat fields, one could see practically all of the combatant arms. There were tanks, artillery, airplanes, cavalry and infantry.

At 6:30 PM, the regimental commander had moved forward to Vauxcastille ravine to organize the battalion for the attack. Preparations were made hurriedly. By 7:00 PM, the attack had started and soon it reached the crest overlooking Vierzy.

The regimental commander was with the assault waves when the attack started. He believed that the time had come when he should be with the men personally to help them on. At this stage personal command was absolutely necessary. Other means did not exist. Much of the success of the attack is no doubt due to his bravery and untiring energy. The average officer of his rank could not have stood the physical strain to which he had subjected himself.

The French troops on the right could not be seen. Whether they attacked or not is not known.

In the ravine, just west of Vierzy, a battalion of Moroccans and 15 tanks were found. How or why the Moroccans happened to be there was and remains a mystery.

The tanks moved forward out of the ravine into the open wheat fields to join in the attack of the infantry. As soon as one would debouch it would draw a hail of shells. The Germans were using direct fire from short ranges on these. It was remarkable how any of them passed through the fire. Only a few were stopped at this point. They pushed on out to the front of the infantry. The tanks drew so much fire that the infantry ran to keep in front of them, and the tanks went all the faster to get to their proper position in front. (67)

(67) Personal
Experience

The 9th Infantry was advancing on the left in excellent order.

The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, which was supposed to be in reserve, "shoved off" to an early start and entered the town of Vierzy. The commanding officer of this battalion sent the following message the next day (July 19th) to his regimental commander:

"5:15 PM, yesterday, received my orders to support 3d Brigade for an attack at that hour. Took my support, consisting of 49th, 16th and 20th Companies to Vierzy. Arrived before the 23d Infantry, and with 8th Machine Gun Battalion attacked the town. When half way through, 23d Infantry came up and continued the attack. Now in support to 23d Infantry.

(68) Marine Corps
Gazette,
June 1921

(Signed) Lay " (68)

It was thus that the town of Vierzy was captured. However, it is undoubtedly true that the capture of the high ground to the north of the town aided considerably.

Just prior to the capture of Vierzy General Ely was moving forward to establish his post of command in the town, when he suddenly encountered the Marines and some 23d Infantrymen held up just outside. He ordered them to advance and take the town. This was done as stated above.

The number of prisoners captured in Vierzy ran into the hundreds. The large caves and tunnel were literally full of them.

The artillery support failed to materialize, as was to be expected. There was no liaison between the artillery and the infantry. In fact very little existed anywhere. How could it under the circumstances?

Under the conditions any attack would be ragged. However, this one, as far as the smaller units were concerned, was well organized and handled. The formation and conduct of Captain Farragut Hall's company, passing through the wheat fields near the town of Vierzy, under severe artillery fire was perfect. It marched through this fire, which was directed chiefly at the tanks, without faltering.

The small fast French tanks were of a great deal of assistance in reducing enemy machine gun resistance. When a machine gun was located, the information was given to a nearby tank which went straight for it. But the tanks suffered heavily. In going over this battlefield after the war about 15 disabled tanks were seen in the vicinity of Vierzy. (69)

(69) Personal
Experience

✓ By 8:30 PM, the attack had passed on to the front of Vierzy. Fast approaching darkness prevented further advance toward Hartennes, the objective.

The machine gun and artillery fire died down. Only here and there a machine gun would sputter for a moment. The advance was halted and the troops ordered to dig in along a line about 1 kilometer southeast of the eastern edge of Vierzy. (70)

(70) Report of
Operations
23d Inf.

The 9th Infantry, after advancing 1 kilometer without any resistance, was held up by flanking machine gun fire from the Bois Lechelle. (71)

(71) Report of
Operations,
9th Inf.

The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, was in reserve at Vierzy.

At 8:00 PM, the machine gun company, 23d Infantry, had joined Major Waddill (1st Battalion, 23d Infantry) and were now occupying position in the line. This was our first machine gun support. The Stokes mortars and one-pounders had not yet arrived.

The regimental command post moved to the old tower north of Vierzy.

Flares indicated that the 2d Division was in a pronounced salient. Casualties had been heavy. The wheat fields were strewn with our wounded as well as with Germans.

During the day the wounded, who had not been found and carried back to the collecting station, lived in the hope that they would soon be located. In the full wheat, which hid them, they didn't murmur. But now that darkness was falling their hope of being found was vanishing. They began to cry for help. One could hear them all over the fields, Germans, Moroccans and Americans. It was a most pitiful and distressing condition. As many as possible were gathered together near landmarks so that they could be found ^{by} the medical personnel. The manner in which the wounded bore themselves in the midst of their

terrific suffering left no doubt as to the courage of our soldiers. There was never a grumble. Early in the day the prisoners were required to carry the wounded back. But up until the afternoon the roads were too blocked for transportation to pass and they could not be evacuated any further than the aid station. Medical officers worked until they were exhausted. Every possible effort was being made to get the wounded out. Ammunition trucks were used, the ambulances having been caught in the road jam.

One man with his arm nearly shot off, holding it with his other hand, ran by an officer and said,

"Hey, buddy, where is the aid station?"

He was told where it was. The man hadn't known that he was speaking to an officer, and immediately upon recognizing him, he begged the officer's pardon for calling him "buddy". Of course the officer would not have cared what he was called. But the incident shows the utter self-forgetfulness and soldierly qualities being exhibited everywhere by our men. ~~(73)~~

(73) Personal Experience

Tower (?)
At midnight the regimental command post moved from the town down into Vierzy. The command posts of both the 3d and 4th (Marine) Brigades were also in the town.

Remnants of the 2d Battalion were found here. It had suffered tremendously in the attack.

The 2d Engineers were aiding in organizing the ground now held by our 1st Battalion in front of Vierzy.

(74) Report of Operations, 23d Inf.

(74)

A reconnaissance by the regimental commander at dawn of the 19th showed Major Waddill's 1st Battalion to be holding the line, with his left at a point 1 kilometer east of the cemetery in Vierzy to a point 1 kilometer

to the south. The 9th Infantry, in the abandoned French trenches south of Charantigny, was in contact with his left. Some Moroccans were in the gap between the regiments. The remnants of the 2d Battalion were ordered to dig in on the right of the Moroccans. ~~(75)~~

(75) Report of Operations, 23d Inf.

To show how little was known by the men, about our supporting troops, the following account of a controversy between two American soldiers might be told.

Private Smith made the statement that the Moroccans (they wore a red fez) were not allies, that they were Turks. Private Jones took issue with him, and they carried the matter to the company commander for settlement. He informed them that the Moroccans were allies and not Turks. Private Smith disappointedly exclaimed,

"Well, I got a few of them, anyway! "

For the truth of his claim I will not vouch.

The 38th French Division was in the vicinity of Montreboeuf Farm, about $1\frac{1}{2}$ kilometers to our right rear.

The 3d Battalion was located at Beaurepaire Farm, where it had been since the morning of the 18th.

(76) Testimony of (76)
Maj. C. B.
Elliott

The 1st Battalion 5th Marines and 23d Machine Gun Company (Marines) were in Vierzy as support.

The lines were within 3 kilometers of the Soissons - Chateau Thierry Road.

At 3:00 PM of the 19th of July, the division commander ordered another attack. It was to be made by the 6th Marines and 6th Machine Gun Battalion (Marines) with the 2d Engineers as reserve. The attack was to be supported by the 2d Field Artillery Brigade, the preparation to begin at 6:00 AM.

All of the heavy tanks at the disposition of the division commander were to support, the light tanks being held in reserve.

The attacking troops were to effect a passage of our lines at 7:00 AM.

Liaison on the right was to be assured by the 6th Brigade of Dragoons (French). (77)

(77) F.O. 16,
2d Div.,
July 1918

Preceded by tanks, the 6th Marines debouched from the ravine around Vierzy out into the open fields behind our lines about 8:30 AM. The enemy immediately laid down a heavy barrage, which fell in rear of our lines on the tanks and marines. As the attack moved on the barrage followed it.

Here came the French tanks, the Marines, and an enemy barrage through our lines. Also, about this time the enemy put down a long range machine gun barrage which fell on us. The casualties inflicted on the Marines and our men in the fox holes was terrific. The Marines, of course, being above ground suffered most. The tanks passing over our lines caused some anxiety in that it was difficult to stay down with the chance of being rolled over. The attack pressed on under terrific fire.

(78) Personal
experience

(78)

A halt was made after the attack had passed about 1 kilometer beyond our lines. The casualties had so reduced the regiment that further advance was impossible. (79) ~~X~~

(79) Marine Corps
Gazette,
June 1921,
p 236

This places the lines just to the east of Tigny and 1 kilometer west of the Soissons - Chateau Thierry Road, which marked the end of the advance of the 2d Division.

During the night of the 18th and early morning of the 19th our animal drawn transport arrived - the Stokes mortars, 37-mm guns and supply company. They had done their best to get up to the regiment and, although nearly exhausted, began to work with all of their effort to get food and water to the men, who had had neither for the past 60 hours except what they carried themselves.

(80) Personal
Experience

(80)

The supply officer of the 3d Battalion, Lieut. Stokely, (later killed in action) gave a fine example of the spirit of the supply company. He pushed forward with food and water for his battalion, believing that it was in Vierzy. Finding out upon arrival that his battalion was not there he announced that he was there to feed a "any infantrymen" and so he did. (81)

(81) Testimony of
Maj. C. B.
Elliott

After getting the food forward all of the difficulties had not been overcome. Much of the food was "gassed" and rendered unfit. It seemed as though fate was against us in the matter of getting food and water.

VIERZY

Vierzy had a peculiar attraction for both headquarters and troops. Everything seemed to gravitate toward it. It was the only way to the front without passing through the Vauxcastille ravine. As has been stated before, the 3d and 4th Brigades, the 6th Marines, and 23d Infantry all had their command posts there.

The town was under constant artillery fire, much of it the fire of guns of large calibre - even 210's.

Naturally many casualties were suffered. One of the worst catastrophes of the fight happened here.

Major Elliott had brought his 3d Battalion up from Beaurepaire Farm to the outskirts of the town in

preparation for a relief of a front line battalion.

Having received orders from the regimental commander, he assembled all of his officers except two (Lieutenants Askham and Mitchell) at the regimental command post to issue his orders, there being only one map available. One would have thought the position was absolutely defiladed from artillery fire. It was behind a steep rock cliff about sixty feet high near the entrance to a cave wherein was located the regimental command post. All of a sudden a large shell (about 210-mm) exploded nearby. Twenty-six officers and men became casualties - fifteen killed and eleven wounded. Of these, three officers of the 3d Battalion were killed and three wounded. Among the wounded was Major Elliott, the battalion commander. (82)

(82) Testimony of
Maj. C. B.
Elliott

There were only two officers left with the 3d Battalion. It was therefore necessary to send officers from the regimental staff to help command.

The 3d Battalion, however, did not effect a relief. At 5:00 PM, July 19th, the division received orders to the effect that it would be relieved by the 58th French Division.

THE RELIEF

(83) Personal
Experience

The relief was completed by 2:00 AM. (83) The 6th and 11th Tirailleurs (Senagalese) relieved the 23d Infantry. (84) One could hardly have seen those black troops, as they approached in the dark, had it not been for the whites of their eyes.

(84) Field Orders,
2d Div.

One platoon of the machine gun company was practically wiped out during the relief. While assembling on the road near the cemetery in Vierzy, they suddenly came under heavy high explosive and gas. Lieutenant Battle, commanding the platoon, was among those killed.

The units which moved via the fields instead of the roads fared better. One battalion, at least, came out without a single casualty.

However, all of the trouble was not over. Enemy airplanes, which had been harassing all day at low altitudes, didn't quit at night.

After entering the Foret de Retz it was necessary to march on the road (Paris-Maubeuge). The enemy planes swooped down and bombed the road all during the night. One plane would fly down in advance of the others and drop huge flares, suspended by parachutes, which would light up the country as clear as day. Behind came the bombing plane. As soon as a plane was heard coming, a whistle would be blown, at which signal all the men would take cover in the ditches beside the road.

Finally we met a Y. M. C. A. man with chocolate and cigarettes. He was fairly mobbed. I don't know how long his supply lasted, but it couldn't have been long.

Upon reaching Carrefour de Montgobert, the destination for the night, the men literally threw themselves on the ground beneath the trees, utterly exhausted, and slept.

The next morning, July 20th, the regiment marched to Carrefour de Nemours where it secured equipment which had been left behind. About 2:00 PM, the march was resumed in the direction of Viviers.

Upon arrival the troops were bivouacked in the woods in the vicinity. The men had no more than gone to sleep when orders were received to march on St. Etienne by Taillefontaine and Pierrefonds. The area, now occupied, was needed by an incoming division (Scotch).

The regiment remained at St. Etienne until July 25th, when it left at 7:00 AM by marching for Ormoy-Villers.

The German airplanes visited us at St. Etienne and paid their parting respects with a few bombs, which caused no casualties. They hardly awoke us.

GAINS AND LOSSES

looks like 5 miles to me
The enemy lines were penetrated at their most sensitive point to a depth of seven miles in one day under the most difficult and trying circumstances that could have confronted a command.

(84) Report of Operations, 23d Inf. The regiment had captured 75 officers and 2100 men. (84) Among the captured were 5 doctors and many Red Cross men - two-thirds of the prisoners captured by the entire division.

It had encountered 10 enemy infantry regiments as identified by prisoners. They were the 14th, 18th and 23d Regiments of the 14th Division; the 138th and 139th of the 42d Division; the 218th, 219th and 200th of the 47th Division (the unit holding the line in our front); the 169th and 170th Regiments of the 115th Division. Among other units were the 29th Artillery Regiment and a battalion of telephonists.

(85) Report of Intelligence Officer, 23d Inf. Captured materiel included 100 machine guns, 2 batteries of 150-mm guns, 5 batteries of 77-mm guns, 1 battery of 210-mm guns. (85)

The effect of the battle upon the tactical and moral situation on the western front was far-reaching. Was it not the Gettysburg of the World War?

Let us first see what the enemy has to say about it as expressed by Von Hindenburg and Von Ludendorff.

Von Hindenburg states that reservists were thrown in to help decimated front line troops; that many heroic deeds were done, but even such heroism could no longer save the situation. It could only prevent utter catastrophe. A deep penetration was made at his most sensitive point - southwest of Soissons. The single line of railroad communications was seriously threatened.

He goes on to say that the situation could not be allowed to remain, that the battle threatened to use all of his reserves, that it was necessary to evacuate the salient and say good-bye to the Marne. It was a most grievous blow to him not from the purely military standpoint but from that of professional pride.

"How the enemy would rejoice if the word 'Marne' were to mean a reversal of the military situation for the second time! Paris, and indeed France, would breathe again. What would the effect of the news be upon the world? We realized how many eyes would follow us with envy, hatred and hope."

He further admits that the initiative of his armies was lost, that there could be no illusion about the far-reaching effects of this battle and the retreat. The decisive blow which had been planned against the

(86) Von Hindenburg English had to be abandoned. (86)
Vol. 2,
pp 198-203

Such admissions by a Prussian field marshal must have been bitter to him. Initiative lost, ground lost, and morale lost! Had he not practically admitted defeat? He had.

Von Ludendorff's admissions are not so frank. He states, however, that the situation north of the Ourcq made withdrawal in the south necessary; that the attack

was a complete surprise; that the German strategic position in the salient was a critical one and could not possibly be held permanently; that a new attack on Reims was impossible. (87)

(87) Ludendorff,
Vol. 2,
pp 312-314

Let us see what our commanders thought.

General Harbord praises the division highly in General Orders for its attack by side of the gallant Moroccan Division and for its bearing aloft the best traditions of Regulars and Marines.

General Bullard also cites the division in General Orders on their behavior beside the veteran French, complimenting it highly on the results obtained under trying condition.

General Pershing states that the result of this counter offensive was of decisive importance, and that due to the magnificent dash and power displayed on the field of Soissons by our 1st and 2d Divisions the tide of war was definitely turned in favor of the allies.

(88) Marine Corps
Gazette,
June 1921,
p 217

(88)

General Orders Number 318 of the 10th French Army, signed "Mangin" is self-explanatory.

"Officers and N.C.O.'s and soldiers of the 3d U. S. Army Corps.

Shoulder to shoulder with your French comrades, you were thrown into the counter offensive battle which commenced on July 18th. You rushed into the fight as though to a fete. Your magnificent courage completely routed a surprised enemy and your indomitable tenacity checked the counterattacks of fresh divisions. You have shown yourselves worthy sons of your great country and you were admired by your brothers in arms." (89)

(89) Marine Corps
Gazette,
July 1921,
p 226

citation (?)

This situation was among those which gave the regiment the fourragere de la Croix de Guerre.

The above citations indicate the important results obtained.

It is a matter of common knowledge that from this day until the end of the war the German Army was on the defensive and that not a single attack in force was again delivered by them, which is more than a mere coincidence.

Our losses were 1479 men and 37 officers, - terrific for two days of fighting. But for the results obtained, the lesses were not heavy. Many more officers and men were captured than were lost. The strength of the regiment at the beginning of the attack was approximately 99 officers and 3400 men.

There is no record of any of our men having been taken prisoners.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

An analysis of this battle is easy as compared to a criticism. There were many things done, which were violations of accepted tactical principles, and there were erors, maybe, of omission; but in view of the conditions, neither can be criticized. Was not the attack an overwhelming success, and is that not the criterion by which to judge?

General Pershing states that the tactical handling of our troops under the trying circumstances was excellent throughout the action. (90)

Let us first analyze the battle. The mission of the American troops of the 20th Army Corps was two-fold - tactical and moral. Tactically, the mission was

(90) Pershing's
Final
Report,
p 11

to cut the heart of the enemy communications in the Marne salient and thereby cause the enemy to withdraw therefrom. Morally, the mission was to give concrete proof of the fact that American troops were capable of successful offensive action in large numbers beside the best European "shock" troops, and, thereby, to give heart to our sorely tried and tired allies.

We had no machine guns, Stokes mortars, nor one-pounders. We had no information of the enemy, no time for reconnaissance, and no maps other than for battalion commanders.

Our troops could not be considered fresh at the beginning of the fight. They had fought hard northwest of Chateau Thierry for 40 days, and moved by truck and marching for 36 hours without food, water, or sleep, and were filled with green replacements. Utter confusion and lack of control by higher commanders existed before the attack. Their morale, notwithstanding, was high. They had the will to fight, - to make good. We outnumbered the enemy at the beginning by 5 to 3.

It has been shown that the enemy considered the point of attack most important and placed "dependable" troops there, - troops which had performed "brilliantly" before. Their defensive dispositions were according to the latest doctrine. They were formed in depth with mutually supporting islands of resistance. Machine guns covered the front and flank of each successive position by flanking fire. They intended to hold this ground at all costs, and, to do so, threw in division after division to stop the tide. Their morale was high, as shown by their stubborn resistance and their recent successes.

Contrary to the expressions of many authors, we were not opposed to a mediocre force holding an unimportant front. The opposite was true. One must at least give the Germans credit for some tactical ability.

Would not an academic comparison of the forces favor the enemy?

Von Hindenburg states that his outpost line was too heavily held and that in the retirement of so many men through the main line of resistance the morale of its garrison was naturally weakened. (91)

(91) Hindenburg,
Vol. 2,
p 199

Now, working under these conditions, let us see how the fighting was done.

The battle was a cyclonic dash, sweeping everything before it. It was characterized by the speed, dash, initiative, and reckless abandon of, especially, the company officers and men.

The first objective at 3 kilometers distance was reached in 15 minutes, and by nine the advance had gone 6 kilometers after a change of direction of 45 degrees and against the most stubborn resistance, as evidenced by casualties of both the enemy and ourselves and the great number of prisoners.

There was little maneuvering in the sense of outflanking or enveloping enemy positions. Each unit drove straight forward. Where the going was good the enemy lines were penetrated, the salients thus caused being connected up in rear of the enemy resistance, thereby "pinching it out". The four-unit organization of battalions, companies, and platoons seemed to be admirably suited to this simple and direct method of attack. A penetration having been effected, the two support units could attack toward each flank; whereas, with only one

unit in support, this could only have been done in one direction. It was more direct and simple than an enveloping or flank attack.

Of course units became quickly disorganized. Here, again, the four-unit organization showed its suitability. The support units, being of the same size as the assault units, the support could pass to the assault without lessening the number of men to a given front. ✓

When possible, small groups of men were sent to outflank machine guns or isolated enemy resistance. The main difficulty was in locating the machine gun, giving the trouble. It was usually firing from the front of an adjacent company.

In brief, the attack resolved itself into an infiltration by small units. ✓

The change of direction of the attack caused confusion and was a most difficult maneuver to execute under fire. It is believed that it would have been better if the support battalion had "leap-frogged" the assault battalion at this point. ✓

It is to be especially noted that the attack was made without the support of machine guns, trench mortars, and one-pounders; that there were no grenades; and that the automatic rifles were not used. ✓

Communications broke down from front to rear, especially in the higher echelons. The division order for the second attack took five hours to get to the battalion, as an example. Little information came from the troops in line, but less, or none, found its way forward from the division and brigade headquarters. Just a word about the general situation, some praise, or anything

would have helped to raise the confidence of assault units. Liaison with the artillery, after the opening stages, didn't contribute to any practicable results.

Due to the breaking down of communications and the inevitable confusion which will always exist in such a battle, the fight was in the hands of the company officers, little influence being exercised by higher commanders after it was once launched. The regimental commander found it necessary personally to control the second match.

attack (?)
Artillery support in the initial stages of the attack was excellent, but in the latter stages it broke down from lack of communications. When it existed, the barrage was followed very closely, and this no doubt contributed largely to the success of the early stages.

Enemy aviators were particularly bold and successful in harassing the infantry, night and day.

The second attack lacked artillery support, but was supported by French tanks which were of great assistance in reducing enemy machine gun resistance. This resistance having once been located, the information was given to the tanks, the tanks would then reduce it.

LESSONS

1. Direction of attack should be straight when possible.
2. Commanders of units being moved should have knowledge of their destination.
3. Attack orders must be clear, simple, and short.
4. Orders must be in the hands of troops, who are to execute them, in time to allow the troops to make necessary preparations for the execution thereof.

5. Higher and lower commanders should share an equal responsibility in keeping each other informed of the situation at all times.

6. Reconnaissance should be continuous throughout the fight, before, during and after.

7. When technical and other means of communication fail, commanders must immediately effect personal control.

8. The square formation (four-unit) is best suited for modern offensive action.

9. The success of an attack depends largely upon the sympathetic cooperation between artillery and infantry, and to that end they should be closely and constantly in liaison.

10. Ordinarily, against a well trained enemy an attack of infantry without the support of artillery produces losses out of proportion to the gains.

11. The confusion of modern battle makes it imperative that only the simplest plans of offensive action be adopted.

12. An attack should be pushed at the weakest point in the enemy line, the salients, thus formed, being connected up in rear of the enemy resistance.

13. On the defensive every effort must be made to keep enemy penetration from widening. Counter attacks of units as small as platoons have little or no results; they would do better to hold the ground they occupy.

14. An outpost line should ordinarily be lightly held - by patrolling, if possible.

15. Much can be sacrificed to gain a surprise.

16. Roads and villages should be avoided, when possible, in the artillery zone.

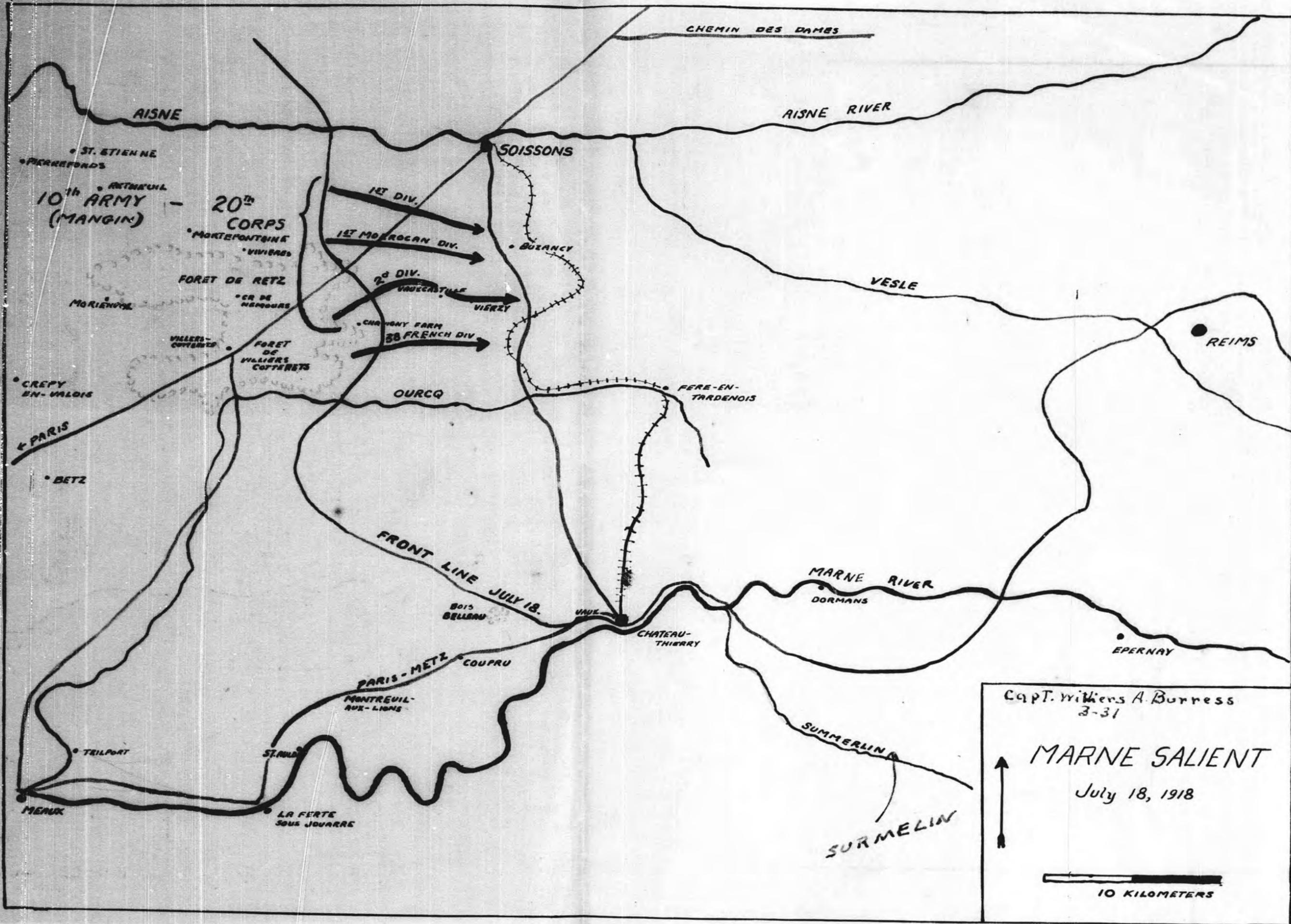
17. The assembling of a large group of officers in battle is most dangerous.

18. Infantry, officers and men, from the regimental commander down, must be capable of undergoing the terrific physical strain of battle.

19. Supports and reserves within the regiment should not be tied down to particular localities, but should follow as the situation demands.

20. The basis of good infantry is the aggressiveness and spirit of its officers and men, and in peace time training the development of these qualities should be stressed above all else.

21. Finally, the human being in the form of the infantryman with a rifle and bayonet remains the dominant figure on the field of battle.



Capt. Withers A. Burress
2-31

2^d DIVISION

SOISSONS OFFENSIVE

July 18-20, 1918

2 KILOMETERS

1ST MORROCAN

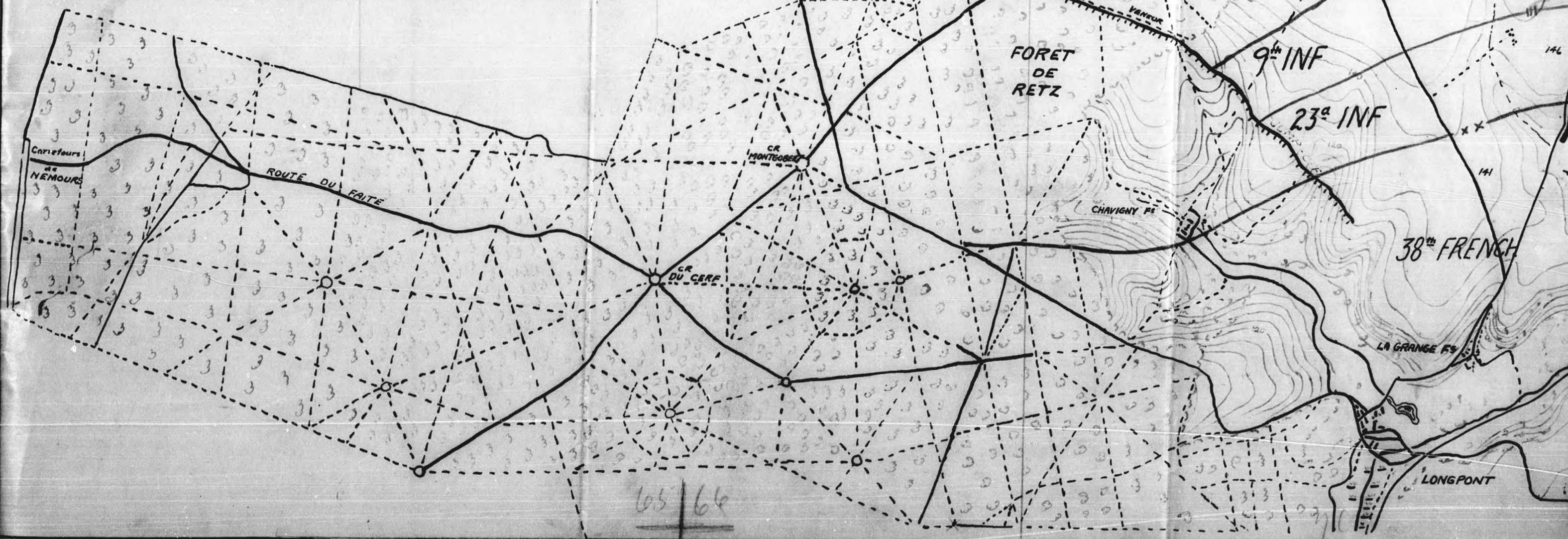
MARINES

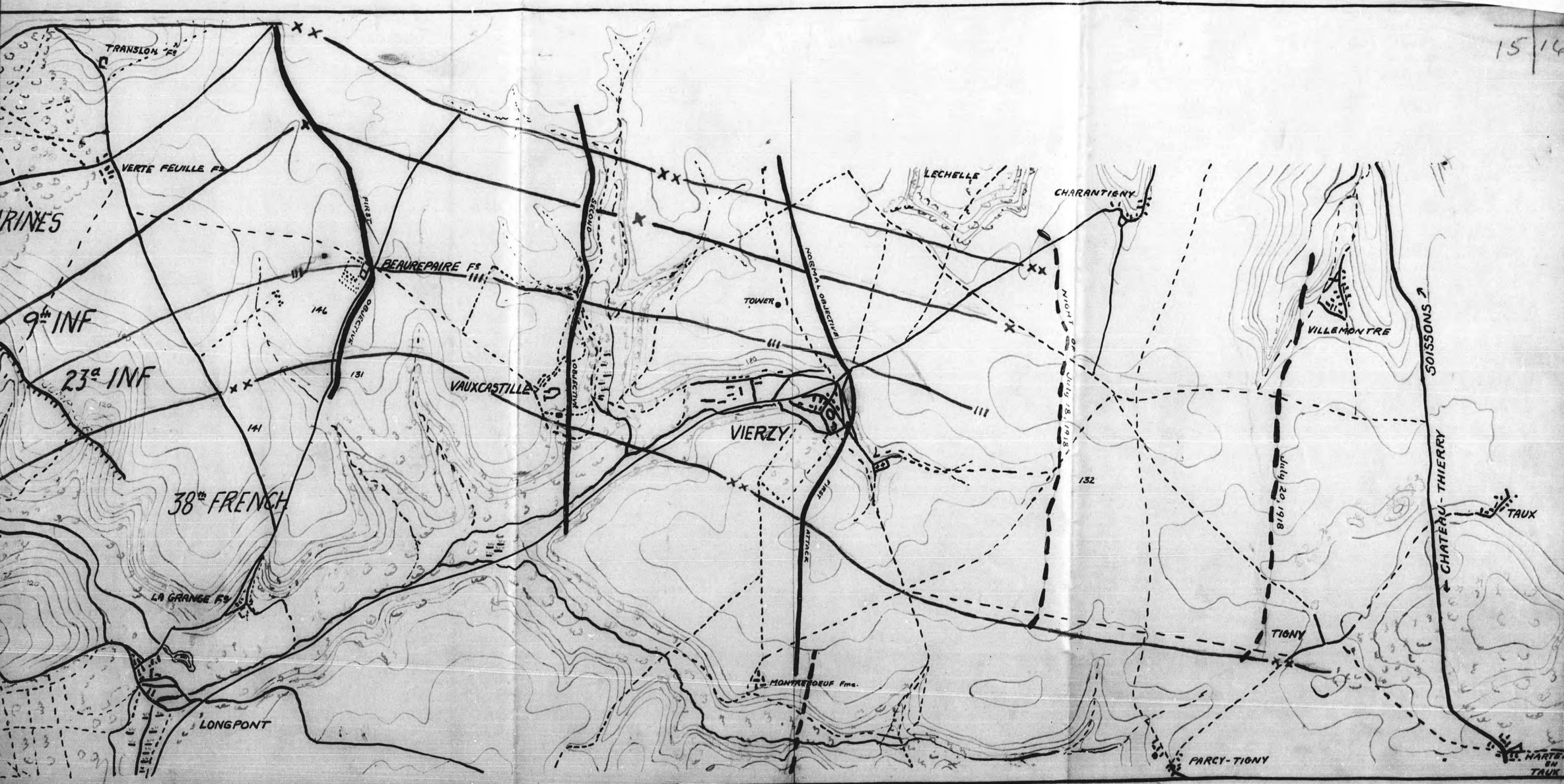
FORET DE RETZ

9th INF

23rd INF

38th FRENCH





IRINES

9th INF

23rd INF

38th FRENCH

TRANSLOX FS

VERTE FEUILLE FS

BEUREPAIRE FS

LA GRANGE FS

LONGPONT

VAUXCASTILLE

VIERZY

LEHELLE

CHARANTIGNY

VILLEMONTRE

SOISSONS

CHATEAU-THIERRY

TAUX

PARCY-TIGNY

TIGNY

TOWER

MONUMENT DEUF Fms.

FIRST OBJECTIVE

SECOND OBJECTIVE

FIRST ATTACK

NORMAL OBJECTIVE

NIGHT OF July 18, 1918

July 20, 1918

146

141

131

120

132

120



The ARGONNE SECTOR

Showing advance of 47th Infantry from Sept. 26 to Oct. 18, 1918.

LEGEND

Improved Road ——— 2nd Class Road ———

Trail - - - - -

Zone of Advance - Regtl. Bndry. - - - - -

Scale 1:20,000

1-10

To Library

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THE 23D INFANTRY SOUTHWEST OF CHATEAU-THIERRY
(Personal Experience of a Regimental Operations Officer)
MAY 30 TO JULY 9, 1918

CAPTAIN WITHERS A. BURGESS, INFANTRY

1

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Contains official documents such as messages, field orders, operation reports, and war diaries. Excellent and authentic source material.

Thomas, Shipley ✓

History of the A.E.F. New York, George H. Doran Co., 1920

Contains no details of this operation. Its generalities appear to be accurate.

Stars and Stripes: The Official Newspaper of the A.E.F. (Dec. 13, 1918, pages 1 and 6; Chateau-Thierry. First Great Test of Yank and Boche.

An accurate article seeming based on official data.

Williamson, S.T. ✓

Messages Paint a Vivid Battle Scene. (New York Times Magazine, June 3, 1928, pages 4, 5, and 23.)

An accurate and well written account of the action of the 2d Division based on official messages and reports of the 2d Division (Mattfeldt). Brings out nothing of tactical importance.

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The Aisne and Montdidier--Noyon Operations with special attention to the participation of American Divisions. (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1922.) Monograph No 13.

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Wise, Jennings C. ✓

The Turn of the Tide. (New York, Henry Holt and Co., 1920.)

Not accurate as to details but pictures the general situation well.

Otto, Ernst, Lt. Col.,
(German Army, Retired)

The Battle for the Possession of Belleau Woods, June, 1918. (U. S. Naval Institute proceedings, Nov. 1928.)

Right
A description of the German side of the operation containing quotations from their official orders, etc. ~~Written~~ mainly for Marines to read, although it incidentally mentions other American troops of the 2d Division and activities of Germans opposite them.

Maj. C. P. Hall, Inf.

Testimony based on their

Capt. James O. Green, Inf.

actual participation.

Capt. C. E. Moore, Inf (Retired)

Personal experience of the writer.

MARGINAL ABBREVIATIONS USED

Mattfeldt, (Vol (No)	Mattfeldt, Clyburn O. Compiles. Records of the 2d Division (Regular) 1924 (Vols. 1-8)
Wise	The Turn of the Tide
Stard and Stripes	The Stars and Stripes: Dec. 13, 1918. Official newspaper of the A. E. F.
• Monograph No 13	U. S. Army War College, Historical Section; The Aisne and Montdidier- Noyon Operations.
Bundy	The 2d Division at Chateau- Thierry. (In Everybody's Magazine, March, 1919.
Otto ✓	The Battles for the Possession of Belleau Woods, June 1918. By Ernst Otto, Lt. Col., German Army, published in the U. S. Naval Institute Proceedings, Nov. 1928.
Williansom	Messages Paint a Vivid Battle Scene, New York Times, June 3, 1918.

INTRODUCTION

The operations of the 23d Infantry along with other regiments of the 2d Division southwest of Chateau-Thierry stand out in our part of the World War not so much from a purely tactical standpoint as they do in other respects. The entry into action of the 2d Division at this time and place was ~~characteristic~~ ^{dramatic}. These were dark days for the Allies. The question in the minds of every French and English soldier was what can the Americans do to help. The 1st Division at Cantigny had given a good account of itself but here at Chateau-Thierry the eyes of the world were focused. Here was not only the opportunity but the necessity for showing the world that the American soldier was at ~~hand~~ ^{least} the equal of any fighting man on the battle fields of Europe. The German soldier had been told by his officers that the Americans could not fight and they had nothing to fear from him. This engagement, then, must be studied in the light of the real mission which was to prove that we could fight.

In considering the duties of a regimental operations officer it is believed that they can be best brought out by first describing the actions of the regiment and then relating his duties.

GENERAL SITUATION

On May 27, 1918, the Germans launched their third major offensive of the year. (1) Sweeping down between Soissons and Rheims, they crossed the Vesle and the Ourcq, forming a huge triangle, the apex of which rested on the Marne at Chateau-Thierry. To

(1) Monograph
No 13

the east the line ran along the north bank of the Marne to Dormans, thence towards Rheims. The western face included Chateau-Thierry and Soissons.

At the end of three days, following the initiation of the attack, 15 German divisions had advanced to a depth of nearly 60 kilometers. French troops, meeting the onslaught, had fought gallantly, and on May 30th, depleted, worn out and demoralized, they were still in contact with the enemy. Would the Germans now exploit their success by driving west toward Paris or would they cross the Marne to

(2) Wise, p. 52 the south? (2)

Chateau-Thierry, about 60 kilometers (38 miles) from Paris, was now the nearest point in the front line to Paris. The Paris--Metz Road leads directly from Chateau-Thierry to Paris. (3)

(3) Personal Experience

At this time the 23d Infantry, a regiment of the 2d Division, was in billets with its headquarters at Chateau-Bertichere, near Chaumont-en-Vexen and just a short distance north of Paris, in army reserve. For a week, here, it had undergone open warfare training, in which mobility was stressed. Prior to this, the regiment had been in a quiet sector southeast of Verdun for about two months during the spring.

It was now prepared to move north to relieve the 1st Division around Cantigny, when this third German offensive of the year commenced. (4)

(4) Personal Experience

Orders were suddenly changed. The 2d Division was ordered to move to the vicinity of Meaux. At about

(5) Bundy, p. 12 midnight, May 30/31 (5) the 23d Infantry received orders to embuss at 5:00 AM. The machine gun company and all animal-drawn transportation was ordered to move by rail.

To the regiment, its exact destination was unknown.

(6) Mattfeldt
F.O. 35
23d Inf.
1918

At 5:00 AM, May 31st, it was on its way. (6)

Well rested, the men were in high spirits. Little did they realize what important things were happening. It was not known at the time that nearly a million people had left Paris or were about to leave. Nothing could better indicate the despair and depression of the French people than their flight from Paris. (7)

(7) Williamson
N.Y. Times

The Germans only needed to repeat the performance of the past three days and they would be on the outskirts of the capital.

The camions, moving slowly over dusty and worn macadam roads, reached the northern environs of Paris. Civilians lined the road and cheered. Young girls threw flowers to our soldiers. This was a new experience, but much to the liking of the men. A moment's reflection permitted understanding of the reason for this spontaneous outburst. To the spectators, who lined the road on either side, these passing troops represented the hope of a nearly defeated French nation.

These were dark days for the Allies. All eyes were turned towards the Americans, and, at this time, towards the 2d Division in particular.

The scenes, through which they passed on May 31, 1918, could never be forgotten by members of the 2d Division, and impressions, gathered on this day, played an important factor in the conduct of our men in the subsequent engagement.

We reached Meaux. The streets were literally filled with refugees. Here they were being loaded

on trains and sent to the rear. Late in the afternoon the column passed through Meaux and proceeded to the northeast. The road was crowded with those unfortunate Frenchmen who had been driven from their homes by the Boches. All of them were old men, women, and children. Some drove horses or oxen, hitched to carts, which were filled to capacity with household furniture and personal effects. Others of the refugees struggled along, carrying their burdensome loads. It was not uncommon to see a mother carrying a baby, with small children following. Some were exhausted and could move no further. A sadder and more pitiable sight could not be imagined. One was at once brought to the realization of what France was suffering and what it had endured for four years.

As far as the eye could reach, one saw on this side of the road our truck column, and, on that, a solid line of refugees. This scene was before us for hours until we finally ran into French cavalry moving towards the front to fill a gap in the line, left by depleted French infantry. Ambulances were passing. It was altogether a different scene from that which had been offered by the move into line southeast of Verdun.

On reaching May-en-Moultien about dark, we realized that we were close to the front. Artillery fire could be distinctly heard and the sky was lit by the flash of guns, burning villages and dumps.

We bivouacked in the fields beside the road where we were subjected to a terrific air attack. It was a bright moonlight night, and the German planes,

dropping bombs, came swooping down ~~over~~ the roads ~~over~~ which we had just traveled. Why there were practically no casualties in the regiment will always be a mystery. Several bombs seemed to strike in the midst of our troops. The disturbing effect of such an attack on morale was considerable. ✓

Here in the fields, we awaited further orders. (8)

(8) Personal
Experience

MAY-EN-MOULTIEN TO MONTREUIL-AUX-LIONS

✓ Shortly after midnight of May 31, the regiment was ordered to march on Montreuil-aux-Lions, a distance of about 25 kilometers (15 miles). The 23d Infantry, at the tail of the column, marched all day with the remainder of the division. Montreuil was reached late in the afternoon, ^{where} ~~when~~ the division headquarters had established itself. The Chief of Staff, Colonel Preston Brown, stood on the steps of the Mairie and gave instructions as the troops passed.

On passing this town the regiment took up an approach formation south of the Chateau-Thierry Road to march to its position in the vicinity of Ventelet Farm and Coupru as division reserve. Then it ~~went~~ into bivouac, having arrived about 5:30 PM.

The past two nights and days had been a period of both physical and mental strain. To the fatigue, occasioned by marching, was added the excitement of all that had been seen and the mystery regarding our part in the complex situation. ✓

From Montreuil-aux-Lions on, French soldiers lined the roads and the fields. Again a pitiable sight. They were obviously worn out by the terrific strain of

their fighting all the way back from the Aisne and the Chemin des Dames. It appeared that their hopes and spirits had been crushed, and that they believed there was nothing to stop the Germans from going on to Paris. The arrival of the enemy within the capital meant to a French soldier defeat. A few of the French soldiers yelled to our men "Finis la guerre," and similar expressions. However, the majority simply raised their eyes as the regiment passed as though they were regarding, "boys being sent to do a man's work." The poilu had his doubts about the Americans' ability. Could they take their place beside veteran French regiments and against seasoned German troops, and hold ground? In short, could they really fight? This is what he wanted to know, and herein lies the importance of what followed. ~~X~~ The Allies needed new hope, and, if the American soldiers could prove themselves battle-worthy here, a changed morale would visit millions of men who had lost hope. Therefore, to our mission of holding the road to Paris was added another responsibility--that of showing what the Americans could do in the way of fighting.

For the next forty days the 23d Infantry had as its mission to hold certain pieces of ground, but whosoever reads of their operations should keep in mind that other mission. It accounted for much that was done, which, ordinarily, from a purely tactical standpoint may seem to have been unwarranted. (9)

(9) Personal
Experience

Let us see what the Germans thought of the situation. Major General von Boehm, commanding the 28th German Division, said in his order of the day on June 8th, "An American success along our front,

even if only temporary, may have the most unfavorable influence on the attitude of the Entente and the duration of the war. In the coming battle it is not a question of the possession of this or that village or woods, insignificant in itself. It is a question of whether or not the Anglo-American claim that the American army is the equal or even the superior of

(10) Otto, p.951 the German army is to be made good." (10)

Ludendorff says, "The Americans on the front must be hit particularly hard in order to render difficult the formation of an American army."

This, then, was to be simply a fight to see who was best man, the German or American soldier. *

COULOMBS

~~At~~ At midnight, June 1/2, 1918, the commanding general, 21 French Army Corps notified the 2d Division that a gap of 4 kilometers existed in the vicinity of Gandelu between French units. (11)

(11) Monograph
13, pp.
18-19

A memorandum to Colonel P.B. Malone, commanding the 23d Infantry, dated June 2 and signed by Colonel Preston Brown, Chief of Staff, directed Colonel Malone to proceed to the vicinity of Gandelu and take up a position there under the direction of General Michel, commanding the 43d French Division. To the 23d Infantry was attached the following:

1st Battalion, 5th Marines

5th Machine Gun Battalion

1 Company, 2d Engineers. (12)

(12) Memo.Hqrs.,
2d Div.,
2 June 1918

A message, dated 3:00 AM, 1 June 1918, from General Michel directed the 23d Infantry and attached troops to proceed quickly via Platriere, Grand Cormont,

Ecout Pleut, Les Glandons.

At Glandons one battalion was to be sent to the north edge of the Bois de Vaurichart to establish liaison with the left of the 43d French Division on the ridge north of the Bois de Veully and to establish a line to Premont (inclusive).

The remainder of the column was directed to continue via Germigny to Coulombs.

At Germigny one battalion was to be sent to hold the line Premont (exclusive) to Moulin du Rhone (inclusive).

At Coulombs one battalion was directed to hold the line Brumetz--Moulin-du-Rhone and at Brumetz, to establish liaison with the 7th French Army Corps.

The remainder of the detachment was to constitute the reserve at Coulombs.

French troops were to be expected in front of this line and contact with them to be gained upon arrival on the line. (13)

(13) Message
Gen. Michel
to Col.
Malone

These were the instructions under which the 23d Infantry was to operate.

At midnight, June 1/2, preparation for the move were commenced. At 6:30 AM, 2 June, Colonel Malone informed the commanding general that the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, had turned north at Les Glandons. The 23d Infantry had left its bivouac area at about 4:30 AM.

At 7:50 AM, 2 June, the 3d Battalion 23d Infantry had turned north towards its objective.

The regiment marched parallel to the front and at a mean distance of about 4 kilometers from

the enemy. So far the enemy had not interfered. At many times the road ran along the forward slopes near the tops of the hills, and it was quite plain that we could be observed by the enemy. However, time would not permit us to take the longer and safer route further to the rear. A gap existed. Time was all important.

Before noon the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, the 3d and 1st Battalions, 23d Infantry, were in line. The 1st Battalion had marched 16 kilometers and the regiment as a whole a mean distance of about 13 kilometers. (14)

(14) Personal
Experience

It would be well to stop here a moment, and consider the terrific strain which the regiment had undergone. Awakened in their billets at about 2:00 AM, May 31, the regiment had embussed, ridden all day until about 9:00 PM, when May-en-Moultien was reached. Upon arrival here, it was harassed by airplane attacks while bivouacked in the fields. Shortly after midnight it was again put on the road for an all day march, which ended at about 5:30 PM near Coupru, a distance of about 25 kilometers. About 3:00 AM, 2 June, it marched to the north to fill a gap between two French Army Corps. Upon arrival in its new position, it had to dig in, organize patrol, and remain active throughout the day and night. The reserve ration was all it had. The kitchens were not to be seen for some time to come. The 1st Battalion went into its position under fire and had several casualties before it had completed its dispositions. In spite of these hardships the morale was excellent. (15)

(15) Personal
Experience

ORGANIZATION OF THE COULOMBS SUB-SECTOR

By 11:00 AM the regiment with attached troops was in position and well organized to withstand an attack. It was disposed as follows:

The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, 1 Company, 5th Machine Gun Battalion, and 1 Platoon, Company C, 2d Engineers, held the line from the northern edge of the Bois de Vaurichart to Premont.

The 3d Battalion, 23d Infantry, 1 Company, 5th Machine Gun Battalion, and 1 platoon 2d Engineers attached, held the line from Premont to the northwestern edge of the woods just north of the Moulin du Rhone.

The 1st Battalion, 1 Machine Gun Company, 23d Infantry attached, the left of the 3d Battalion to Brumetz (inclusive).

The 2d Battalion, 5th Machine Gun Battalion less 3 companies attached, was regimental reserve at Coulombs, at which place regimental headquarters was located.

The 167th French Division was on our left and the 43d French Division on our right with elements of it and other French troops in our front, including some French cavalry which was at the time fighting on foot.

The Germans in our front were, of course, in contact with the French troops. The exact location of their lines was not known to us. Several reports were received to the effect that they were concentrating in the vicinity of Hautvesnes and Veully.

TERRAIN AT COULOMBS

The country in general was open and rolling. Here and there were small woods, generally along the stream lines. Our line ran along a high ridge from the Bois de Vaurichart to just south of Brumetz, at which point Clignon creek crossed it. This creek ran from east to west into the Ourcq about 6 kilometers to the northwest. Observation from our position was very good. The high ground across Clignon creek could be observed from as far back as Coulombs. However the enemy had an equal advantage in this respect. (16)

(16) Personal
Experience

ACTIVITIES IN THE COULOMBS SUB-SECTOR

The mission of the regiment had been partially accomplished. It had filled the gap. To the 23d Infantry there yet remained but the task of holding in case of an attack which should drive in the French covering force.

The first day passed without incident except for occasional shelling of our position, which resulted in a few casualties. (17)

(17) Personal
Experience

Easily, in the morning of June 3d, two attacks from Hautvesnes toward Germigny were defeated.

(18) Mattfeldt
Message,
Col. Malone
3 June 1918

(18) These attacks never reached our line. ✓ About dusk on June 3d another German attack was started from the vicinity of Hautvesnes. At short intervals, small groups of men could be seen running from cover to cover. The attack, thus begun, never reached our lines. ✓ It was broken up by the fire of the French 75's, quickly placed on vital points.

The remainder of the time in this sector was spent in making adjustments in positions, in establishing communications, and in getting organized generally.

~~A~~ shortage in machine gun ammunition was repaired when some 500,000 rounds were finally obtained.

Telephonic communications were established between regimental and battalion command posts. The heterogenous character of troops on the right rendered the establishment of liaison with them very difficult. There were French, Marines, and our infantry, all under different commanders.

The messages, sent and received during this phase at Command Post, 23d Infantry, were extremely numerous. They constitute a book of respectable size. A liaison officer from the regiment was with Headquarters, 43d French Division. Numerous unimportant messages were received from him. (19)

(19) Personal
Experience

It may be interesting, here to consider the organization and working of the staff during this period, which was filled with activity, although there was no actual fighting.

The Regimental and Battalion Headquarters were similarly organized. There was an operations officer whose duties correspond to those assigned the office to-day. In the regiment, he was a captain. In addition to his other duties, he had the command of the headquarters company.

A first lieutenant was intelligence officer. His immediate superior was the operations officer.

There was a supply officer for the regiment, a captain, who also commanded the supply company, and, in each battalion a lieutenant supply officer. However, the supply officer could not be considered purely a staff officer. Practically all of his time was spent in actually delivering supplies. Therefore, in the regiment, the adjutant, in addition to his personnel duties, was from the viewpoint of the staff, responsible for supply also.

There were no executive officers. The lieutenant colonel of the regiment had charge of the "rear echelon", the train and supply company.

The communications officer was the platoon commander of the Regimental Headquarters communications platoon. Both as a company officer and as a staff officer, he was under the operations officer.

Thus we see that under the operations officer were the intelligence officer, communications officer, and gas officer. In addition the 37 millimeter guns and the Stokes mortars came under him as a staff and command function.

On the march the operations officer commanded the Regimental Headquarters company, which, at that time, contained about 350 men. In a battle situation, he had the added duties of operations officer, or, as he is known to-day, the plans and training officer.

Instructions to the staff from the regimental commander for writing orders were that he would write paragraph 2; the intelligence officer, paragraph 1; the operations officer, paragraphs 3 and 5; and the adjutant, paragraph 4. After the order was completed, the operations officer checked it and carried to the

colonel who made changes, if necessary, and then signed it. This system worked well with officers of short experience as staff officers. Certain orders were, of course, written by the colonel himself. (20)

(20) Personal Experience

THE 23D INFANTRY RETURNS TO THE 2D DIVISION

On the night of June 4/5 the regiment and attached units was relieved from the French command and rejoined the divisions which was holding a sector astride the Chateau-Thierry-Paris road.

Field Order 8, 2d Division, issued at 10:00 AM, June 5, gave the plan of occupation of the sector. The 4th Cavalry Division (French) was on the right and the 167th Division (French) was on the left. It held the line southeast corner of Bois de Lamaretie--Bois de Clerembauts--Lucy-le-Bocage Wood, northwest of Lucy--800 meters north of Champillin. From right to left the units in line were as follows: 9th and 23d Infantry (less 2d Battalion) of the 3d Brigade, the 6th and 5th Marines of the 4th Brigade.

One battalion of the 23d Infantry was division reserve, and one battalion of marines, corps reserve. Each brigade had one battalion of the 2d Engineers as reserve.

The 2d Field Artillery Brigade with attached French units supported the division. (21)

(21) Personal Experience

Boundary between brigades was the line, Triangle--Hill 201--Coupru--Ventelet Ferme--La Langue Ferme, all to the 3d Brigade.

The right boundary of the 23d Infantry was the line, RJ 175 (exclusive)--Bourbelin (exclusive)--^{THIOLET} Lethiolet (inclusive)--Domptin (exclusive). (22)

(22) F.O. 12
3d Brigade
June 8, 1918

Left boundary of the 23d Infantry was the left boundary of the brigade.

The 23d Infantry held the line from Paris--Chateau-Thierry Road (inclusive) to Triangle (inclusive) with the 3d Battalion on the right and the 1st Battalion on the left, each occupying one half the regimental front. The 2d Battalion was in division reserve at La Langue Ferme.

Attached to the 23d Infantry were Company C, 5th Machine Gun Battalion and Company C, 2d Engineers. The engineers, upon completion of assigned entrenching duties were ordered to station with the brigade reserve. This left the 23d Infantry holding about 1800 meters of front with two battalions and an attached machine gun company. The other battalion of the regiment was in division reserve. There was at this time no regimental reserve.

The Command Post, 23d Infantry, and Regimental Headquarters company were located in Couprou.

The regiment was supported by the 2d Battalion, 15th Field Artillery. A liaison officer of that organization was on duty at the 23d Infantry Command Post.

(23) Personal Experience

ORGANIZATION OF THE SUB-SECTOR, JUNE 5-6

The next day and a half were spent in general organization of the sector.

Communications were stressed. Telephones connected the battalion to Regimental Headquarters and to supporting artillery. Arrangements were made for pyrotechnic signals.

The buzzerphone, the ^{T.P.S.} ~~Telegraphé par le Sol~~, ^{T.S.F.} and the ~~Telegraphé sans Fil~~ were installed at Battalion

and Regimental Command Posts. The two French Instruments, functioning poorly, proved unreliable. The buzzerphone did work well, but communications were maintained chiefly through the use of runners and telephones. Lateral communications ^{were} ~~was~~ through the Brigade Headquarters switchboard.

A platoon of Signal Corps troops from the division signal company was attached to the communications platoon of the regiment.

In the Regimental Command Post, there were four 'phones, all on the same table. At any time in an extraordinary situation, the commanding officer would place one staff officer at each of three 'phones. He required an officer from the front line to be on the other end of each. In this way he could hear from and talk to all at once, so to speak. The fourth 'phone connected the Regimental Command Post with Brigade Headquarters.

Nothing of importance happened in the engagement until the afternoon of June 6.

Patrols were active in gaining information of the enemy in front, and in gaining contact laterally.

The details of supply and administration were worked out.

The operations officer was busy with the various activities, included in his duty, with maps for the commanding officer, and with details attendant on the organization of the sub-sector. Ordinarily, all messages from the front line were delivered to the operations officer, who, in minor matters, took necessary action without bothering the colonel. He

also prepared nearly all of the outgoing messages.

TERRAIN

A study of the terrain occupied by the 23d Infantry and adjacent troops, shows that, in general, our positions were separated from those of the Germans by a stream running from Torcy through Belleau to Bouresches, where it branched in three parts. On both sides of the stream-line there are broad, open and rolling valleys, dominated on each side by rather high wooded hills. In the sector of the 6th Marines, the hills, topped by the Bois de Belleau dominate the valley to the north. In the sector of the 23d Infantry, the ridge, Le Thiolet--Triangle dominates the ground to the east. In front of the 9th Infantry, which occupied the Bois de la Murette. The town of Bouresches which was captured by the Marines and later occupied by the 23d Infantry is in a valley on a slight salient between the Bois de Belleau hill and Triangle. These two features and a narrow ridge between the two stream-lines, running southwest from Bouresches, dominate the town. It then appears that, with the Germans on the high ground in the Bois de Belleau, Triangle was the key to the whole position, and that the Marines, in order to establish a good defensive position along the general line, must capture the northern edge of the Bois de Belleau. Seizure of this wood was, of course, accomplished later. The town of Bouresches had no importance either to the enemy or to ourselves.

The enemy position was, at first slightly better than ours, thanks to their possession of

Hill 204 and a part of the Bois de Belleau. The occupation of line to the immediate front would have improved the position of the 23d Infantry.

Hill 201 should be noticed as an excellent reserve line feature.

ATTACK OF JUNE 6, 1918

At 2:00 PM, June 6, Major C. P. Hall, Adjutant, 3d Brigade, saw Colonel Preston Brown, Chief of Staff of the 2d Division, who gave Major Hall orders to the effect that the 4th Brigade was going to attack in the direction of Bouresches at 5:00 PM of that day. (24) The order directed, "The 23d Infantry will maintain close tactical liaison ~~and~~ during the attack to prevent a re-entrant angle in the line near Triangle Ferme." Time of order--

(24) Testimony
Maj. C.P. Hall

3:15 PM. (25)

(25) F.O. 13
3d Brigade

Gram { Major Hall, leaving Colonel Brown at 3:30 PM and arrived at the command post, 23d Infantry, at Couprou at 4:00 PM. He showed this order to Colonel P.B. Malone. Major Hall then took Colonel Malone in his car to the Command Posts of the 1st Battalion (Major E.C. Waddill) and of the 3d Battalion (Major C.B. Elliott).

Colonel Malone issued orders to both of these battalions for their part in the attack.

It was now nearing 5:00 PM, the time for

(26) Testimony the 4th Brigade to attack. (26)
Maj. C.P. Hall

Evidently orders were received by the Commanders of the 1st and 3d Battalions to attack, whereas a study ~~of the order~~ of the situation and of the order of the brigade would indicate that

only a slight advance, if any, was required of our 1st Battalion, which held Triangle Ferme. This point of the line was on quite a hill, overlooking Bouresches, and, if "tactical liaison" meant "supporting distance", the retention of the hill would have fulfilled our mission. It is not known exactly what objectives were assigned, but, according to my recollection, both battalions were to advance to the general line Bouresches--Hill

(27) Personal Experience

192. (27)

The division commander, Major General Omar Bundy, states that the battalions of the 23d Infantry seeing the Marines attack, eagerly entered the fight; that he did not intend for the 23d Infantry to attack, but his orders seem to have been misunderstood, and that the battalion commander, who made the advance, was ordered to retire. (28)

(28) Bundy, p.

At about 9:00 PM that night, Colonel Malone returned to Brigade Headquarters and said that he had made a mistake in attacking. Later, in Germany, at a conference, held by the commanding general, 2d Division, to determine certain historical events, Colonel Malone assumed full responsibility for the attack. (29)

(29) Testimony
Maj. C.P.
Hall, Inf.

So much for the orders for the attack. It is a certainty that both battalions did attack, and that the one stationed furthest from the Marines, which was supposed to be the pivot of this "tactical liaison", did most of the attacking. (30) ~~XXXX~~

(30) Personal Experience

After Colonel Malone's visit to the Command Posts of the 1st and 3d Battalions, 23d Infantry, on the afternoon of June 6, a buzz of activity prevailed

Spill

the regiment.

Both battalion commanders assembled their company commanders, who double timed to the Battalion Command Posts. There orders were issued. (31)

(31) Testimony of Maj. C.P. Hall and Capt. James O. Green

The 3d Battalion attacked at 5:50 PM with Companies M and K from right to left in assault and Company I in reserve. (32)

(32) Mattfeldt Messages Maj. C.B. Elliott

Captain James O. Green, commanding Company M, was able to secure only two of his platoons, the others being on outpost duty. (33)

(33) Testimony Capt. James O. Green

Company commanders literally gathered their companies together on the run, took up a combat formation, and started towards the enemy

(34) Testimony Capt. James O. Green

lines. (34) Major Elliott received a message from one officer, Lieutenant Legg, asking that an objective be assigned him, as he did not know what

(35) Mattfeldt Messages Lt. Legg 23d Inr.

his was. (35)

There was no artillery support. A machine gun company, one-pounder and Stokes mortar were ordered to support the attack. Lieutenant Kammerling, commanding the one-pounder and Stokes mortar, was killed while emplacing the guns.

Attacking from the eastern edge of the Bois des Clerembauts, the troops advanced over rolling open wheat fields. The Germans were in the woods further to the east.

The advance of the 3d Battalion started in good shape. At first, little resistance was met. However, when the battalion was deep in the wheat fields and in a position favorable to the German machine gunners, they opened fire from the front and flanks causing terrific casualties.

The advance continued until Company M

- (36) Testimony reached the Bois de la Roches. (36) Contact was lost
Capt. James on the right and left of the 3d Battalion.
O. Green

The casualties of the two assault companies had been so heavy that Company I (Captain C.E. Moore)

- (37) Mattfeldt was ordered to reinforce Company K. (37) This was
Messages not done because later the battalion was ordered by
Maj. C.B. Elliott higher authority to retire to its former position. (38)
(38) Personal Experience

The 1st Battalion received its orders for the attack at 4:00 PM, but did not attack because the Marines, as far as the 1st Battalion could see, did not attack. At that time, the Marine company on the left said that it had been designated as support. However, at 6:30 PM, Major Waddill saw some of our troops on the ridge north of Hill 192 and decided to gain contact with them. These troops were no doubt from our 3d Battalion. Consequently, at 7:00 PM the 1st Battalion attacked and 9:30 PM the objective had been reached and the troops, while suffering heavy machine gun fire from the woods northeast of Bouresches, began to dig in.

Having advanced the left beyond the Marines, it was subjected to heavy enfilade machine gun fire.

At 3:45 AM, June 7th, the battalion, under orders of higher authority, started withdrawal to its former position. (39)

- (39) Mattfeldt Messages The marine company on the left of the 1st
Maj. E.C. Battalion did not advance and had no orders to
Waddill advance. It held the line between Triangle and

- (40) Testimony Bouresches. (40)
Maj. Messer- In this operation the 3d Battalion lost
smith, U.S.M.C.

8 officers and 165 men, practically all from two companies, K and M. The 1st Battalion lost 8 officers and 75 men. 6 officers of Company D became casualties. ~~The total number of casualties was 16 officers and 240 men.~~ (41)

(41) Mattfeldt
Report of
CO 23d Inf
to CG 3d
Brig.

The German artillery fire was terrific, especially in the vicinity of Triangle.

All during the night, various rumors were afloat in the regiment. It was reported that Company M had been annihilated and that Captain Green, the company commander, had been killed or captured. It was reported that the Germans had infiltrated through the gap left by Company M. The regimental operations officer was ordered to form a detachment of all men around the Regimental Command Post, and to take post on the hill just to the east of Coupru. With dawn came understanding that the original position was intact, most of the excitement having been in rear of the front lines. Captain Green reappeared during the morning.

It should be mentioned, here, that Company C, 2d Engineers, took part in this affair and suffered heavily along with the infantrymen of the 23d. (42)

(42) Personal
Experience

The 3d Battalion was so badly shot up during this attack that relief for it was requested. On the night of June 7, it was relieved by the 2d Battalion, less Company A. The 3d Battalion took ^{post} ~~part~~ at La Langue Ferme as brigade reserve. (43)

(43) Mattfeldt
Memo, 23d
Inf. 7
June 1918

No tactical advantage was gained in this fight. It did build up in the regiment a confidence in itself. It believed that it was capable of offensive action. It had not only attacked and

advanced under the most adverse circumstances, but it had held, cheerfully, after being ordered to give up ground that it had captured and all of this under terrific artillery and machine gun fire.

JUNE 7, TO JUNE 30TH

This period was not marked by any outstanding event of importance. Patrolling was extremely energetic, but otherwise it was simply a case of holding a defensive position. ✓ Simple as it was, it was difficult. ✓ The harassing fire of enemy artillery was continuous. It was not exceptional for well over a thousand high explosive and gas shells to fall in our sub-sector in one day. The feeding of troops in the line became extremely difficult. ✓ (44)

(44) Personal
Experience

On June 8th at 12:30 PM an enemy attack against our front preceded by infantry and artillery fire was repulsed at about 400 yards from our trenches by artillery and rifle fire. The attack extended to our left towards the Marines. (4b) Only a few casualties resulted in the neighborhood of Triangle. ✓

(4b) Mattfeldt
Vol. 5
Messages
23d Inf

On the night of June 13/14 the sub-sector held by the 23d Infantry was altered by taking over Bouresches on the left and giving over to the 9th Infantry the front of one company on the right. Our 3d Battalion relieved a battalion of Marines and a company of the 1st Battalion. The 2d Battalion extended its front to the left relieving the right company of the 1st Battalion.

The 1st Battalion was ordered into regimental reserve. ~~X~~ Company I relieved 2 companies of Marines in Bouresches. (46)

(46) Mattfeldt
Vol. 5

This place became the center of much activity and concern. Here the line formed a salient at the junction of three ravines. It was dominated by the high ground at Triangle, Belleau Woods and the intervening nose. It appears to have no tactical value. The Germans held the railroad station and had perfect observation into the town. It was ~~certainly~~ ^{continuously} subjected to artillery and Minnenwafer fire, the town being actually show down on the company which held it with ~~terrible~~ ^{heavy} losses.

The streets were swept by enemy machine gun fire and in order to move from one place to another it was necessary to go through holes in the walls of the houses. ~~X~~(47) Communication with it was extremely

(47) Testimony
Capt. C. E.
Moore, U. S. A.
(Retired)

difficult. It could be entered by day only by crawling along the bottom of a stream bed. At night the approaches were subjected to constant shelling. Evacuation of wounded became so great a problem that a medical officer was sent to the town to stay

(48) Personal
Experience

with the company. (48) An ambulance came every night and evacuated the wounded. ~~X~~

On June 14th the enemy put on an especially heavy gas attack on the 3d Battalion which, alone, suffered 135 casualties. (49)

(49) Mattfeldt
Vol. 5
Messages
23d Inf.

It must be borne in mind that all during the period the regiment was subjected to heavy fire, especially that of the artillery. Casualties, though not particularly heavy in one day, constantly

mounted up to a high total. Replacements were necessary and were fed into the organizations, sometimes those actually in the front line. These men had had little or no training. They were usually held in the reserve position a day or two where they were taught to put on their gas masks and the mechanics of firing a rifle. The casualties among replacements due to lack of training was somewhat higher than among the older men. (51)

(51) Personal Experience

On the night of June 19/20 the 1st Battalion relieved the 2d Battalion, the latter going into reserve. This was accomplished without incident.

(52) F.O. 42
23d Inf

(52)

The organization of the regiment was generally as follows: Two battalions in line with one in brigade reserve. Each front line battalion with two companies in the front line and one in reserve. One company was taken from each of the front line battalions for regimental reserve. Organization in depth with flanking machine gun fire was stressed. Within the front line battalions the reserve company relieved a front line company at regular intervals.

(53) Personal Experience

(53)

On the night of June 24/25 the 3d Battalion and attached troops was relieved by the 1st Battalion and similar attached troops. The relieved battalion constituted the division reserve (54). It was not to be here long. In a few days it took part in the Vaux attack. (55)

(54) F.O. 42
23d Inf

(55) Personal Experience

THE VAUX ATTACK

The 3d Battalion which had attacked on June 6th without any preparation or fire support was now to attack in an engagement which stands out on account of the thorough preparation and arrangement of every detail.

Masses of artillery and mortars were to support the attack and all during the day prior thereto delivered destructive fire on sensitive enemy positions--especially the small town of Vaux which was razed to the ground by the fire on the day of the attack.

A reentrant angle existed in the line with its apex at Le Thiolet. The mission, therefore, was to straighten out the line between Bouresches and Hill 204 by the capture of Vaux, the high ground west thereof and hill 204. But, as a reason for the attack it seems more likely that psychology of the time was to be the determining factor. An American success would be good news for the 4th of July. The position now held, from a purely tactical standpoint, was all right. (56)

(56) Personal
Experience

Let us look at the terrain for a moment. Vaux is in a ravine running perpendicular to the front. On its right is the dominating Hill 204 the crest of which was held by the Germans. For Vaux to be tenable Hill 204 must be held by friendly troops.

To our left of Vaux there is a steady rise along the Paris--Metz Road to Bourbelin. All of the ground to the front is commanded by the high ground on the southern edge of the Bois Brulits. Nearer to

our line we see the important town of Vaux and the Bois de la Roche to the northwest thereof. A glance at the map will show that no improvement of could be obtained by a line within the reentrant angle now held by the 3d Brigade. (57)

(57) Personal Experience

The enemy held the line Vaux--Bois de la Roche with its 402d Infantry, 201st Division. One battalion in the front line, one in support in the Bois ^{BRULITS} ~~Brulits~~ and one in rest billets farther to the rear. There was some wire and trenches along the Paris Road. The position was organized in depth.

(58) Bundy, p. 20 (58)

The plan was for the attack to be made by three groups. On the right the French were to take Hill 204. In the center a battalion of the 9th Infantry would capture Vaux and on the left a battalion of the 23d Infantry would capture the Bois de la Roche. (59)

(59) Personal Experience

The 23d Infantry selected the 3d Battalion for its part of the job. Attached to it were Company D, 5th Machine Gun Battalion, Company G, 2d Engineers, 1 section Stokes mortars and 1 section 37-mm gun. (60)

(60) F.O. 43
23d Inf

The artillery support can best be described by sketch which appears at the end of this paper. The 3d Battalion moved forward with 3 companies, less 2 platoons, in the assault, Company L as the center, Company I on the right, and Company M on the left. Company H with 2 platoons attached constituted the reserve along with Company C, 2d Engineers which was to assist in the consolidation of the position. The attack was preceded by

a rolling barrage.

Every officer and man was informed of his part. Oblique airplane photographs were furnished to all officers showing the ground over which the attack was to be made. Every detail was arranged.

Promptly at 6:00 PM, July 1st, the attack commenced. The battalion deb^oached from the Bourbelin--Monneaux Ravine following a rolling barrage.

Immediately after the attack started prisoners began to come in. The attack advanced in perfect order and by 8:00 PM all units were on their objective and were at work consolidating their position. With all of the artillery fire there were Germans and machine guns left to fight and heavy casualties were inflicted upon us. Company I was hit especially hard. The regiment lost one of its finest officers here. Captain C.E. Moore, commanding Company I. Severely wounded, he stayed on the field until forced to retire. Before this attack his company had held Bouresches for about two weeks and had suffered heavily there. He was recommended for promotion and to be cited in division orders but failed to be promoted.

Company M which had been nearly wiped out on June 6th was a new outfit, but gave a good account of itself. It was commanded by Captain James O. Green.

The battalion had advanced its lines 1 kilometer on a front of 1000 meters. It captured over 133 prisoners, 13 machine guns, and 2

^{nwerfers}
Minnewaifers. Its casualties were 1 officer and 23 men killed, 3 officers and 143 men wounded, and 47 men missing.

At 12:30 AM the battalion was subjected to a strong counterattack supported by artillery which was repulsed. The battalion was relieved on the night of July 2/3 by the 9th Infantry. (61)

(61) Personal Experience

Some idea of the strain through which this battalion had been may be realized by its casualties. Prior to the Vaux attack the situation was as follows:

	<u>Officers</u>	<u>Men</u>
Strength May 31st	34	945
Present strength	20	996
Casualties	18	507
Replacements	4	524

This brings its total casualties to 22 officers and 650 men. (62) (65% of its total strength in officers and men)

(62) Mattfeldt Vol. 7

JULY 2 TO JULY 9

This period was not marked by anything exceptional. The regiment continued to hold its sub-sector as readjusted by the Vaux attack.

On the night of July 8/9 the 23d Infantry was relieved by infantry elements of the 26th Division and took over a sub-sector in the 2d

(63) Personal Experience

Battle Position in the vicinity of St. Aulde. (63) The regiment had been in line for 38 days. During this time it was actively engaged continuously. It was subjected to terrific artillery bombardments, gas attacks, and attacks by the enemy infantry. The

(64) Personal
Experience

villages and woods had been destroyed along the line
which it held. (64)

DUTIES OF A REGIMENTAL OPERATIONS OFFICER

The organization of the staff of the regiment has already been described.

Prior to entry into this sector a great deal of emphasis had been placed on staff functioning within the regiment. As far back as the winter of 1917 training had been commenced in this connection.

The introduction of a large staff in the infantry regiments and battalions was, of course, a new thing to our army. As a matter of fact staff work in all echelons as it is now accepted had not been developed in our service. However, the necessity for a staff in infantry units became apparent even in ^{preliminary} ~~preliminary~~ maneuvers. It was obvious that the colonel and his adjutant could no longer cope with the mass of details connected with the operation of a modern regiment in modern warfare.

There were some serious obstacles in the way. First, it was a new thing and like all new things in the army, it was looked upon with suspicion. The adjutant, jealous of the traditions of his office, did not like the idea of lessening the scope and importance of his position. This was gradually overcome. Next was the inherent distrust, and it may at times even amount to pure hate, of the line officer for the staff officer.

Spelt
The first duties, then, if the operations officer was to eradicate these ideas by being of some real assistance. In general the duties

performed were those as laid down in our staff manual to-day. The operations officer handled all details connected with operation and ran the command post. With the many activities in this sector, the march to Coulombs and return, taking over its sub-sector, reliefs, patrols, lateral liaison, details of artillery support, the job soon became a busy one. In this connection it should be noted that the operations officer was also the commanding officer of the regimental headquarters company and in this capacity was responsible for communication--quite a task in itself.

A few of the exceptional duties assigned to the operations officer in this engagement may well be mentioned as a basis for future expectations. On the night of June 6th he was placed in command of all men around the command post to form a detachment to hold ground in front of an expected enemy breakthrough. The same thing also happened at Coulombs when the situation was thought to be worse than it was during an enemy attack. It is believed that during a tense situation as these the operations officer could have been better used to help in the control and maneuver of the regiment.

Who?
With the assistance of other members of the staff the operations officer prepared all orders with the exception of a few very important ones which the colonel prepared in detail himself. After preparation orders were, of course, examined by the colonel. All messages having to do with operation were prepared by him as well as operation reports. The operations map with plans of artillery and

machine gun fires were kept by him.

On several occasions the operations officer was sent on reconnaissance for the colonel as for example when the regiment took over Bouresches, and to visit the battalion commanders.

On one occasion when a memorandum with regards to the treatment of mustard gas cases which included a warm bath was, at the direction of higher authority, sent to battalion commanders the operations officer was subjected to expected ridicule. One could not get a bath of any kind. It was difficult enough to obtain drinking water. Even a change of clothing was unheard of.

Routine reports as to casualties, activities, and conditions, are troublesome to all commanders. Consequently the operations officer in obtaining these reports for the colonel had some difficulties.

There were no journals, as we have them to-day, kept. A record of events of importance was kept for use in making out reports on operations. However, the main source for these reports was orders and messages which are to-day sufficient for the preparation of a history of the event.

During the Vaux attack which took place in the 9th Infantry sector the operations officer was sent to the headquarters of that regiment to report on the operations directly to the colonel of the 23d Infantry. Colonel Upton who commanded the 9th Infantry seemed to object seriously to smoking in his whereabouts as evidenced when I lit a ~~cigarette~~ *spell* in his dugout. It was only after some pleading that he permitted me to remain and

carry out my mission.

A French officer, Captain Marcel Claude, was attached to the regiment and worked with the operations officer. His assistance to all of the staff with his four years of war experience, was most helpful. He was an officer of highest type and was highly respected and liked in the regiment. (65)

(65) Personal Experience

One of the main duties of the operations officer was to arrange for artillery fire, especially in case of emergency. This was done through the artillery liaison officer, Lt. Frasier, of the 2d Battalion 15th F.A. who was constantly at our command post. It may be said here that the relationship between the 23d Infantry and its supporting artillery grew more cordial steadily and there was created in the entire regiment a confidence in the supporting artillery which lasted throughout the war. (66)

(66) Personal Experience

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISMS

The regiment had as its mission to hold its assigned sector in the 2d Division along the road to Paris and to prove to the Allies that the Americans could fight and would fight. It accomplished its mission. It did not relinquish an inch of ground to the enemy and on the other hand it carried the fight to the enemy.

There may have been and there were, errors, violations of accepted tactical principles. There is much to be commended and little to be condemned.

Over a hundred and fifty prisoners and many

machine guns were captured. ✓ There were many extraordinary acts of bravery on the part of both officers and men and with insufficient recognition therefor in the way of decorations and promotions.

The regiment participated in two attacks. On June 6th it advanced without support artillery, and with no time for preparation, suffering frightfully. In conjunction with the 9th Infantry it attacked in the vicinity of Vaux and was completely successful.

✓ In these thirty-eight days of fighting it suffered immensely. Of all ranks there were 208 killed and 1565 wounded.

Nine days after being relieved it participated in the offensive south of Soissons with signal success. This speaks for itself. (67)

(67) Personal Experience

It inflicted heavy casualties upon the enemy as evidenced by the number of different regiments which opposed it. While it is not known exactly which German organizations confronted the regiment the number which confronted the division is indicative. These were as follows:

197th Division	relieved	June	9th	
237th Division	relieved	June	11th	
10th Division	relieved	June	15th	
28th Division	relieved	June	21st	
5th Guard Division	--Date	relieved	not known	
231st Division	"	"	"	"
87th Division	"	"	"	" (68)

(68) Stars and Stripes
Dec. 13,
1918.
p. 6

Let us see what the higher commanders and others on both sides thought. Von Hindenburg says in part: "How the enemy (Allies) would rejoice if

the word 'Marne' were to mean a reversal of the military situation for the second time! Paris and indeed, France, would breathe again. What would

(69) Von Hindenburg, Vol. 2 pp. 198-203

the effect of the news be upon the world?" (69)

"The death defying boldness of the Americans, their impetuous onslaught, and their tenacious endurance, were all recognized by the opposing troops and

(70) Otto, p. 961

produced a great impression." (70)

The entrance of our American division into a decisive battle at such a vital point was dramatic. The incident was of most importance to the morale of the Allies. General Bliss wrote General Pershing that he had heard from the French and English that the Americans at Chateau-

(71) Monograph No 13 p. 20

Thierry had saved Paris. (71)

Did not saving Paris mean saving France?

Of course these comments apply to the whole 2d Division in which the 23d Infantry played its part shoulder to shoulder with the marines and the 9th Infantry.

In the regiment there was the finest spirit of loyalty, team work, and eagerness to play their part. During the engagement there was not a single officer relieved from command. The cooperation of the supporting artillery and machine guns was excellent. The best relationship and spirit existed between the marines, the 9th Infantry, and the regiment. A friendship was established between these regiments that should last forever.

With such a situation and after such a

success it is difficult indeed to criticise adversely anything. ✓ From a purely tactical standpoint the attack of June 6th by the 23d Infantry may have been a mistake. It was not necessary to attack to carry out our mission of "tactical liaison" with the unit on our left. When the whole is considered it is believed that the attack was worth its cost.

In the use by the brigade and division of one battalion of the regiment as reserve the colonel was left without a proper reserve and the integrity of the unit was not preserved. This will be the case most likely, when there are so many echelons between the battalion and the division.

✓ In the organization of the ground there was a tendency to depend on the engineers to too great an extent. Trenches and wire were not as systematically constructed and sited as they could have been with troops better trained in this work. ✓

The general defensive scheme and disposition of troops was excellent and in general coincides with our teaching to-day. Many absolutely green replacements were received in the front line. This practice should be avoided. ✓ They were unable to protect themselves properly.

In conclusion it must be said that this regiment, with other troops of the division, wrote one of the most brilliant and dramatic pages in the annals of our military history. A defeat here would have crushed the morale of the Allied armies.

LESSONS

There are a number of lessons to be learned. Many of the Principles of War do not apply in this case with a regiment holding a defensive sector. Those that do apply will be discussed ~~here~~ along with other lessons derived from the experience here.

(1) The Principle of the Objective.-

This principle was observed throughout. The objective was to hold and carry the fight to the enemy.

(2) The Principle of Economy of Force.-

A study of the dispositions in the regiment shows that the line was held with as few troops as practicable. Each battalion held a front of about 1500 yards. Front line battalions were regularly relieved and rested.

(3) The Principle of Movement.-

This was observed by the placing of reserves at points from which counterattacks could be launched.

(4) The Principle of Simplicity.-

This principle was observed throughout. The plan was simply to hold a certain line. Each front line battalion was given its half to hold.

(5) Principle of Security.-

Patrolling was vigorous throughout and on no occasion was there a surprise of any nature. The attack on our position on June 8th was stopped 400 yards from our position. Prisoners were taken and information of enemy plans in our front was excellent.

(6) Principle of Cooperation.-

On June 6th when it was learned that the marines were to

attack and that the regiment was to maintain tactical liaison it cooperated fully. It not only maintained liaison but jumped into the attack itself.

Other lessons of a practical nature are:

(1) Ordinarily, against a well trained enemy, an infantry attack without the support of artillery produces losses out of proportion to the gains. This is evidenced by a comparison of the attack of June 6th and the Vaux attack.

(2) In an infantry regiment all elements should be adaptable to movement by the same means, whether on foot, movement by motor transportation, or rail. Moving to this sector the regiment was separated from its transportation including its kitchens. This happened on nearly every move to an important engagement. Machine guns and howitzer weapons become separated when there is a movement by truck.

(3) On the defensive every effort should be made to prevent an enemy penetration from widening. Counterattacks by small units are seldom effective and are of little or no value. A small unit would do better to hold its ground. This was shown at Vaux when the Germans tried counterattacking with small units. It amounts to being defeated in detail.

(4) The use in orders of vague and indefinite terms is dangerous. On June 6th the regimental commander attacked when ordered to maintain 'tactical liaison'. We are prone to produce technical terms with very fine meanings

which are subject to various interpretations.

(5) The basis of good infantry is the aggressiveness and spirit of its officers and men and in peace the development of this should be stressed above all else. In this engagement troops with little experience and training accomplished wonderful results mainly by ~~this~~ *their* esprit and aggressiveness.

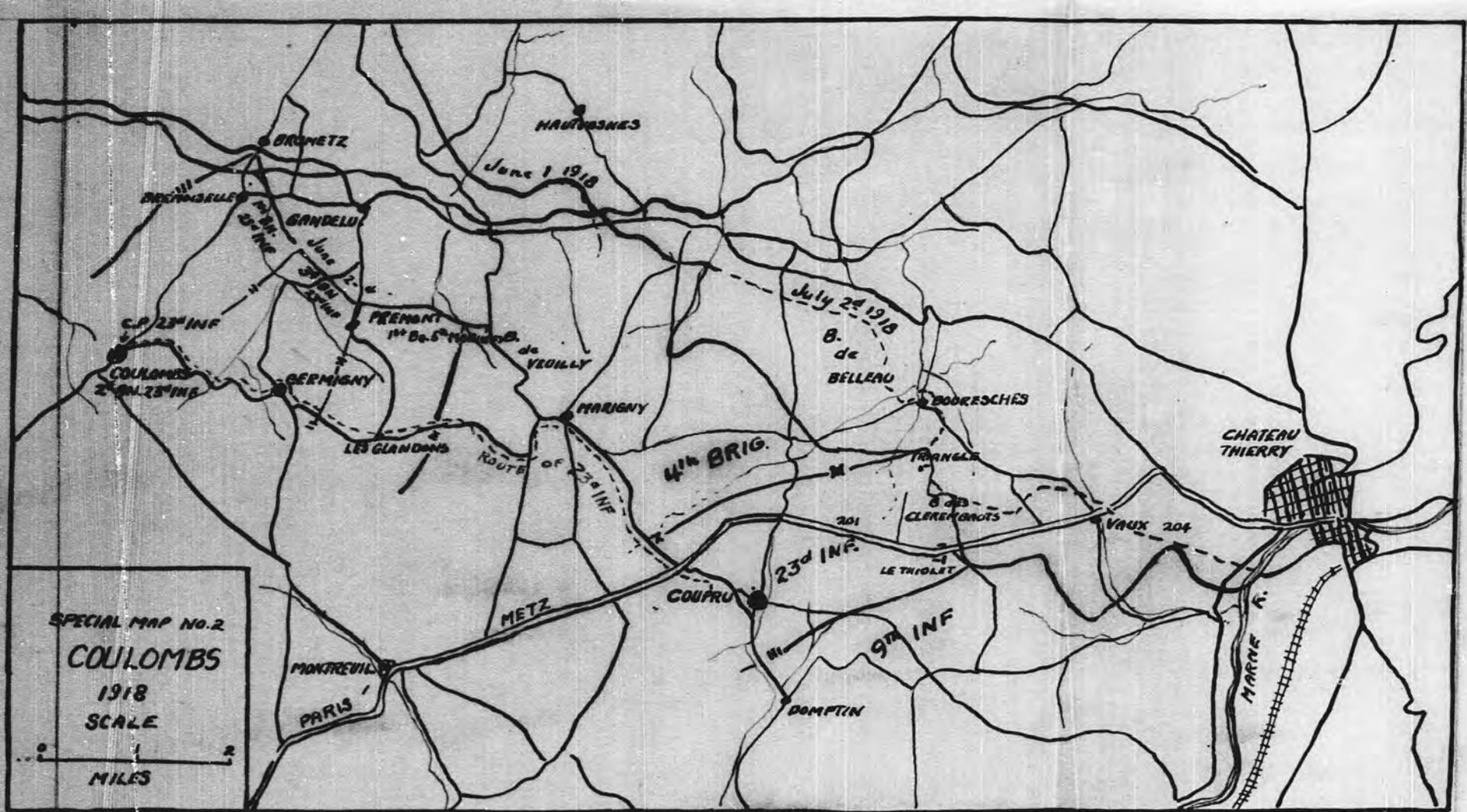
(6) Assault fire in advancing against enemy resistance which cannot be seen, such as in woods, is very effective.

The report of a platoon leader in the Vaux attack states that when under heavy enemy fire he ordered his platoon to take up assault or marching fire against the unseen enemy position and the resistance subsided immediately.

(7) Finally, the human being in the form of an infantryman with a rifle and bayonet remains the dominant figure on the modern field of battle.

QUESTIONS

1. Q. Where, with respect to the town of Chateau-Thierry, was the 23d Infantry during June 1918?
A. About 3½ miles west of Chateau-Thierry.
2. Q. What were the designations of the four infantry regiments of the 2d Division.
A. 9th and 23d Infantry, 5th and 6th Marines.
3. Q. Where was the 23d Infantry from June 2d to June 4th and what was its mission?
A. In the vicinity of Coulombs with a French division filling a gap in their line.
4. Q. By what units was the Vaux attack made?
A. 3d Battalion 23d Infantry, one battalion 9th Infantry, and French troops.
5. Q. How did the 23d Infantry get to the Chateau-Thierry sector?
A. By trucks and marching.
6. Q. What is the name of the town at which the command post of the 23d Infantry was located from June 5th to July 9th?
A. Coupru.
7. Q. What were the casualties of the 23d Infantry in this engagement?
A. 208 killed, 1565 wounded.
8. Q. How far from Paris was the position held by the 23d Infantry?
A. 38 miles.
9. Q. How many days was the 23d Infantry in the front line?
A. 38 days.
10. Q. A regiment of what division relieved the 23d Infantry?
A. 26th Division.

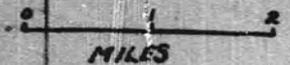


SPECIAL MAP NO. 2

COULOMBS

1918

SCALE



MILES

SPECIAL MAP NO. 3

COUPRU

FRANCE

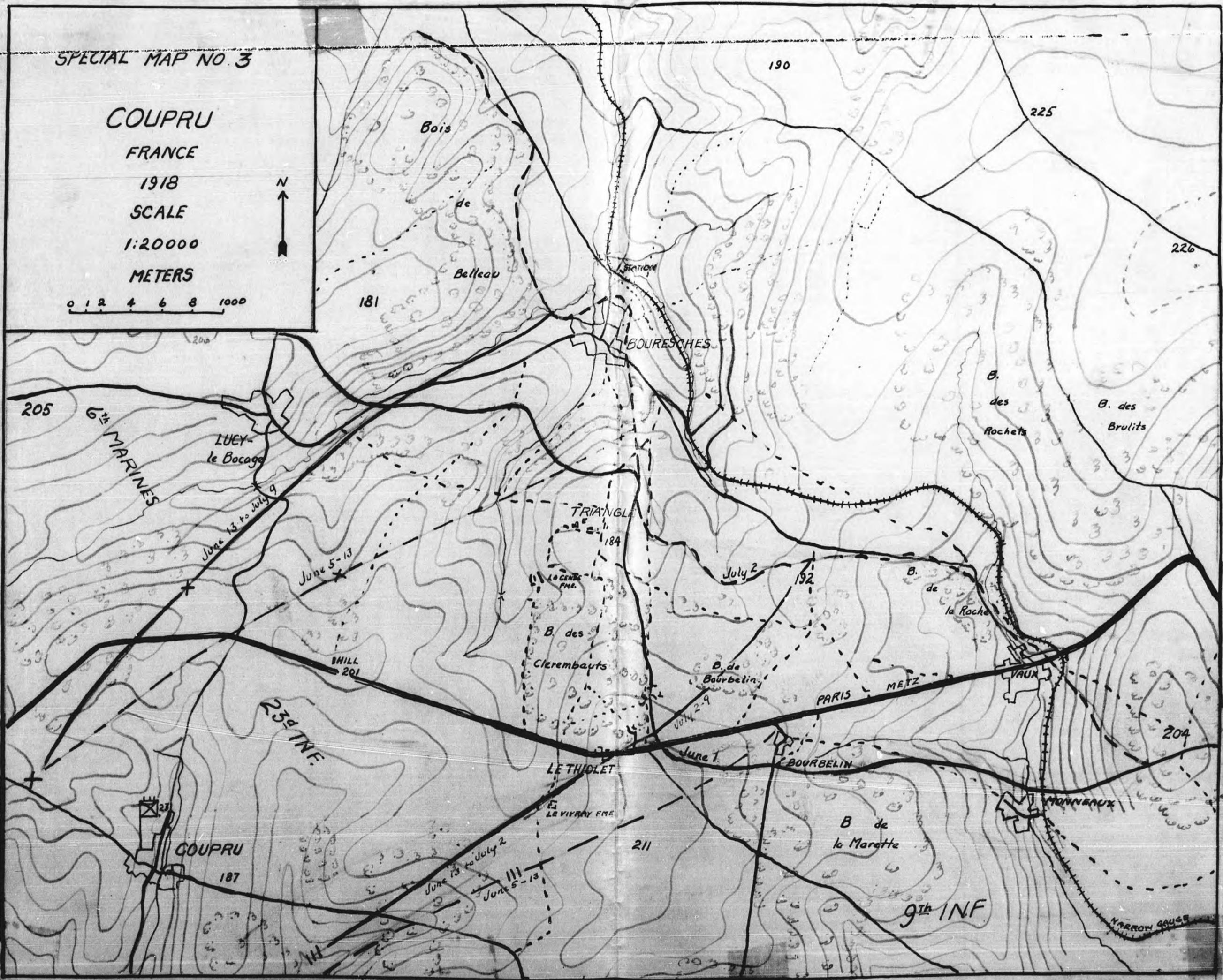
1918

SCALE

1:20000

METERS

0 1 2 4 6 8 1000



OVERLAY NO.1

VAUX ATTACK

