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OPERATIONS OF THE MACHINE GUN COMPANY, 16TH INFANTRY (1ST DIVISION) DURING THE SECOND PHASE, MEUSE ARGONNE OFFENSIVE

September 30-October 12, 1918

(Personal Experience)

CAPTAIN ALBERT B. HELSLEY, INFANTRY

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Brief, accurate, and concise.

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Accurate as to dates, boundaries, zones of action, and statements of fact.

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Prejudiced in favor of efforts and results of British Forces. Accurate as to dates.

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Valuable mainly for source of facts pertaining to S. O. S. Author is ardent friend and admirer of General Pershing and is apt to be prejudiced in some of his conclusions.

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Statements of the following officers and noncommissioned officers who were present with the 1st Brigade, 1st Division during the Second Phase, Meuse Argonne Offensive:

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MARGINAL ABBREVIATIONS USED

Pershing	"Final Report of General Pershing"
Hartzell	"The Meuse-Argonne Battle", A Monograph written March 29, 1919, by Captain Arthur E. Hartzell, W. D. Document, 1919.
Buchan	"A History of the Great War", John Buchan
Dawes	"A Journal of the Great War" Charles G. Dawes
REC	"World War Records 1st Division A. E. F."
Hist	"History of the 1st Division"
251 Div.	"Histories of the 251 Divisions of the German Army which participated in the War (1914-1918) W. D. Document # 905.

I. INTRODUCTION

In this discussion of the operations of one company during one phase of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, it is believed that the reader will receive a much clearer picture if he is thoroughly familiar with the plans of the Higher Command, the mission of higher units, the terrain to the front and on the flanks, the concentrations and dispositions of the enemy, and the situation of supporting units and of units to be supported. For this reason I will set forth below a detailed statement of the situation pertaining to the 1st Division A. E. F. on September 30, 1918.

PLANS OF THE ALLIES

Early in September 1918, it was decided by Marshal Foch that the advantageous situation of the Allies, resulting from their successes during July and August, should be exploited to the utmost by vigorously continuing the general battle and extending it eastward to the Meuse. All of the Allied Armies were to be employed in a converging action. The British armies, supported by the left of the French armies were to attack towards Cambrai; the center of the French armies west of Rheims would continue the action already begun to drive the enemy beyond the Aisne; and the American Army supported by the right of the French armies

would direct its attack on Sedan and Mezieres. (1)

(1) Pershing p. 40

IMPORTANCE OF AMERICAN FRONT TO GERMANS

The portion of the front (extending from Port-Sur-Seille, east of the Moselle, west to include the Argonne Forest) (2) occupied by the American Army was of the utmost importance to the Germans. (3) The Briey iron basin which was vital to their success was menaced by any attack on this front. (4) An attack pushed northward in this sector to Sedan and Mezieres would cut the enemy east and west line of railway south of the Ardennes, thereby separating the German armies in France and Belgium, preventing movements of troops, munitions, and supplies from one part of the line to another, and would force a withdrawal from France and Belgium to the River Meuse. (5) In order to safeguard the troops facing the British and French armies, it was imperative that General Von Der Marwitz (commanding the German troops on this portion of the front) hold his position; doubly so, because reduced manpower was compelling the German High Command to shorten its front. The only way to shorten the front successfully was to swing the entire line in a northeasterly direction on Von Der Marwitz's Army as a pivot. If this front could be made to give way before the line had been swung back, the German armies faced disaster. (6)

(2) Pershing p. 41

(3) Hartzell p. 22

(4) Ibid p. 20-21

(5) Buchan Vol. IV p. 361

(6) Pershing p. 44

TERRAIN AND ENEMY CONCENTRATION IN AMERICAN FRONT

The American Army had to reckon with on its front not only the enemy's elaborate artificial defenses, which had been constructed with methodical study and prodigious labor, but also the natural features of the terrain, which greatly aided the Germans. (7) The country northwest of Verdun was the roughest on the entire fighting line, embracing the Argonne Forest and the wooded ridges west of the Meuse. The dominating heights east of the Meuse were covered with heavy artillery, which could deliver oblique fire on the western bank. The heights within the Argonne Forest were used as positions for both artillery and machine guns, which could fire into troops advancing east of the Aire River. Between the Argonne and the Meuse are the heights of Montfaucon and Exermont which afforded perfect observation and which had been heavily fortified. The east and west ridges abutting on the Meuse and the Aire River valleys, each with its groups of trees, afforded the Germans excellent machine gun positions for the desperate defense which the importance of the position would require them to make. North of Montfaucon and Exermont densely wooded and rugged heights constituted natural features favorable to defensive fighting. (8) In fact, the American Army had been given the hardest part of the line. Its defenses were nearer together and stronger;

(7) Pershing p. 44

(8) Pershing p. 44-45; Personal Experience

it was the most difficult in topography to attack; and in addition had behind it by October 4th the greatest and most determined concentration of the enemy then existing in France. (9) Defeat of the Germans in this sector would be fatal to them, but their Commander-in-Chief considered the seven miles of the Siegfried System and the difficulties of the terrain through which an attacking army would have to force its way, ample protection of the vital area beyond Sedan. (10)

(9) Dawes p. 189-190

(10) Buchan Vol. IV p. 363

THE ATTACK OF THE AMERICAN FIRST ARMY

On September 26, 1918, the American 1st Army on the right and the French 4th Army on the left had pushed forward along the front ~~and were~~ resting on the River Meuse and extending forty miles to the west. (11) Thus began the execution of the plans that Marshal Foch had decided upon earlier in the same month. (12) The American 1st Army attacked on its front from the River Meuse to within the western portion of the Argonne Forest. The 3d, 5th, and 1st Corps were in line from right to left. Each corps had three divisions in line and one in reserve. In addition there were three divisions in the Army Reserve. It was the purpose of the Army Commander to make the deepest penetration in the center. (13) The attack of the Americans was not expected at this point by the Germans; the front lines were thinly held, and great gains were made

(11) Buchan Vol. IV p. 363

(12) Pershing p. 40

(13) Pershing p. 46

during the first days of the operations. The German High Command upon realizing that the American offensive was more than a holding attack, knew full well the danger of any considerable penetration at this front, and rushed every available man to the sector. (14) On September 28th, the German reserves began to appear in the line and the attack slowed down. They developed a powerful machine gun defense, supported by heavy artillery fire, and on September 29th made strong counter-attacks with fresh troops, which in several cases were successful in driving the Americans back from positions recently taken. By the evening of September 29th, the situation on the American front had changed greatly. The German main line of resistance had been reached and ~~this~~ their center of resistance had been [illegible] those in the center had suffered very heavy casualties. The right of the battle line had been unable to advance that day; on the extreme left, only a slight gain was made; and in the center, the forward elements of three divisions had been driven back. The front line of the American 1st Army was approximately, Bois de la Cote Lemont-Nantillois-Apremont-southwest across the Argonne. (15) (See Special Map No. 1) On the night September 30-October 1, the 1st Division relieved the right division (the 35th) of the 1st Corps. (16)

(14) Buchan Vol. IV p. 365

not on map

(15) Pershing p. 46-47

(16) F.O. 44 1st Div. 1918 REC Vol.

TERRAIN PERTAINING TO 1ST DIVISION

One of the deciding influences in the success of any military operation is the terrain. The country over which the 1st Division was ordered to advance offered the maximum difficulties. On the left of the Division sector is the River Aire, a small stream, with its valley from 100 to 300 yards in width and from which, rises abruptly, the wooded hills of the Argonne on the west, and on the east the succession of ridges and hills over which this division advanced. The right boundary crossed an exceedingly broken terrain with large wooded areas and high hills, all of which, offered excellent positions for flanking fire. The zone of advance consisted of a succession of ridges and hills, at the top of each were woods, in which the enemy artillery and machine guns were concealed. The southern slopes of the majority of these hills and ridges were bare, thereby affording ideal fields of fire for the defenders. Of these the first reached is the Montrebeau Woods, whose reverse slopes reach down to the Exermont ravine, which extends across the entire division front, from east to west. This ravine was subjected to enfilade fire from the Argonne on the west and the high wooded hills to the east. Just north of the ravine is a group of hills, some three miles in depth, and three miles in width and which seemed to

have been piled in there together so as to make this place impassable to any assault. This group of hills, the most formidable of which are the Montrefagne and 272, was the key position commanding the whole front of the American 1st Army. During the four days immediately preceding the attack of the 1st Division, the Germans had greatly strengthened these positions, which seemed almost insurmountable, because of the terrain alone. (17)

(17) Personal Experience Hartzell p. 17-18; Hist. p. 183-184

THE ENEMY

German morale was not as high as it had been a few months or even a few weeks previous. The German armies however were fighting with the fury of despair to delay their retirement. The German soldier was not as sure of himself nor of the success of his cause as he had been, but he never fought harder nor more desperately. (18) Machine gunners remained with their guns, firing into the assaulting lines until killed or captured. The Germans expected to break down the American offensive by the most stubborn machine gun and artillery defense that had been known since the beginning of the War, and they well knew, how to take full advantage of every favorable feature of the terrain. (19) There were at this time no better German divisions than some of the ones met by the 1st Division during this attack. The 52d German Division reinforced the front near Exermont on September 28th and was in line

(18) Buchan Vol. IV

(19) Personal Experience

on October 4th. It was one of the best German divisions. (20) The 5th Guard Division was a first class division which had held the left of the 1st Division sector since September 27th. The troops of these two divisions had delivered successful counter-attacks on this same ground against an American division on September 29th and had forced a withdrawal from the Exermont ravine. Their morale was quite high. (21) The 1st Guard appeared in the line on October 3d in support of the 5th Guard and was withdrawn on October 8th after it had most of its battalions reduced to the strength of a company. (22) The 37th which was considered a first class shock division moved to the vicinity of Exermont from the east on October 5th. (23) The 41st, a second class division, reinforced the front near Sommerance on October 9th. (24) Elements of the 28th Reserve Division, one of the best of the German Divisions, of the 53d Reserve, and of the 2d Landwehr Division, were also identified on the front of the 1st Division during the attack. (25)

(20) 251 Div. p. 503

(21) Hist. p. 182

(22) 251 Div. p. 21

(23) Ibid p. 128

(24) Ibid p. 449

(25) Ibid p. 63, 381 and 510

THE MACHINE GUN COMPANY 16TH INFANTRY

During 1918 the American Army organization provided for one animal drawn machine gun company for each Infantry regiment, an animal drawn machine gun battalion of four companies for each Infantry brigade, and a motorized machine gun battalion of two companies for

each division. In the 1st Division three machine gun companies had been organized within each Infantry regiment during the summer of 1917. (Previous to that time each Infantry regiment had had one machine gun platoon only). The Machine Gun Company 16th Infantry was organized from Company M of its regiment and for several months in 1917 was designated Company M. For a few weeks during December it was named the 3d Machine Gun Company 16th Infantry and upon the organization of the brigade machine gun battalions about December 29, 1917 and the Regiments loss of its other two machine gun companies, the company of this study became the Machine Gun Company 16th Infantry. (26)

(26) Personal Experience Hist. p. 36

During the entire period of this company's existence it was treated as a step-child by the various senior officers under whose command it happened to be. The Commanding Officer 16th Infantry was responsible for administration and supply -- quite often various Regimental Supply Officers forgot to include its strength on ration and forage returns. On one occasion (April-May 1918) it had remained in the front line of an extremely active sector for 21 days during which time other units of the Brigade were in the front line 7 days, in support position 7 days and in reserve position 7 days -- this because it had not been thought of when orders for the relief of Infantry battalions had been issued.

Sometimes when out of the line, the Commanding Officer 2d Machine Gun Battalion (the Battalion of the 1st Infantry Brigade) was made responsible for its training, but more often the Company Commander alone prescribed and supervised training. At no time was the Commanding Officer of any battalion to which the Company was attached during combat cognizant of nor responsible for the training of this company for combat.

The company was organized into a headquarters group (forward and rear echelons), the company train and three platoons. Each platoon had a headquarters group and two sections -- each section was commanded by a sergeant and was comprised of two squads. Each squad consisted of twelve men, two of whom were in charge of the two mules and carts of the squad and operated during combat with the Company Train. The company was armed with the French Hotchkiss machine gun one to each squad and each man had an automatic pistol for individual protection. (27)

(27) Personal Experience

The company, as well as the other units, of the 1st Division had received its early training in the Gondrecourt area. It had gone into the Sommerviller Sector for ten days in November 1917, and there had seen for the first time a close up view of trench warfare. For the next six weeks it underwent an intensive period of training, and on January 18, 1918 took over the machine gun positions in

a portion of the Ansauville Sector at the base of Mont Sec, and remained in either front line or support positions in this sector until March 13th when it was relieved and returned to the Gondrecourt area for rest and more training. (28) Early in April, it moved with the Division to Picardy and went into its first extremely active sector -- the tip of the salient just south of Montidier. It took part in the capture and defense of Cantigny. It was with the assault battalion of the 16th Infantry near Soissons and during the period July 18-23 lost 75% of the officers and 60% of the enlisted men of the forward echelon. (29) It then moved to the Saizerais Sector northwest of Toul and during August alternated between the front line and the support area of a quiet sector. Here replacements were received and all available time both in and out of the front line was devoted to training. (30) This period of training should have been especially valuable to the commanders of battalions and higher units in applying the experience gained at Soissons in the employment of machine guns. Orders issued by the Division and Brigade Headquarters indicated that the higher commanders had profited to some extent by the mistakes of earlier days, but there were very few signs that Infantry battalion commanders had learned a great deal concerning the handling of the machine gun company that would be a

(28) Personal Experience; Hist. p. 62

(29) Personal Experience

(30) Personal Experience; Hist. p. 145

part of their battalion in combat. Upon the relief from the Saizerais sector the Division moved to the area of Vaucouleurs and the company was attached to the 2d Machine Gun Battalion for ten days, during which time, it received "coordinated special instruction". During this ten days valuable instruction was received by members of the company, but no effort was made to train Infantry battalion commanders in the employment of the company.

(31) Personal Experience

(31) The company was attached to the 1st Battalion 16th Infantry during the St. Mihiel offensive, received but few casualties and gained much valuable experience. When the 1st Division had accomplished its mission on September 14th and had become a part of the Corps reserve, the company went into bivouac in a thick woods and used the next few days for training of individuals and squads. The movement towards the Argonne had already begun; and on the nights of September 19th and 20th, the Company moved with its regiment to a woods near Souilly. Here it was learned that the 1st Division would be a part of the Army reserve for the offensive that would begin within a few days.

not on map

One of the officers and a number of the men who had been wounded in July had rejoined the company. The 95 recruits that had been received in August had been fairly well trained as individuals and had become valuable parts of their squads. The Company Commander

had been a student for the ministry; another had stolen cattle in Mexico and driven them across the Rio Grande (both were good soldiers). The slums of cities, the mountains and plains of our west, small towns and farms were represented. The group was cosmopolitan -- and typically American. They loved their country, but did not fight for love of country, nor for honor, nor for glory, nor for pay. They fought because they had been trained to fight. The company was full strength, was well trained, had ripe experience and was on September 25, 1918 at the height of human efficiency as a unit of a first class fighting machine. (32)

good

(32) Personal Experience and Opinion of the Author

II. THE BATTLE

It is deemed appropriate in this study to consider all the movements and actions of the Company from its receipt of orders to move forward on September 29th until its relief on October 12th. For convenience, I shall in this monograph deal with the Battle as: 1st, the approach march and preparation (September 29-October 3); 2d, the first part (October 4th to 7th); and 3d, the second part (October 8th to 12th).

1. THE APPROACH MARCH AND PREPARATION.- The Company had on the night of September 27th-28th marched with the 1st Battalion 16th Infantry to which it was attached for the next operation to

and one platoon leader had joined the company before the St. Mihiel offensive, had received their training under fire, and had become acquainted with and had gained the respect of their men. The Second-in-Command, who, also commanded the Third Platoon, had received two months training at a British Machine Gun school in the fall of 1917 and had led his platoon during its training and through all its actions. He had been wounded during July and had rejoined in the Saizrais Sector. The leader of the Second Platoon had been with the Company since January, 1918, and was the only officer of the Company who did not become a casualty at Soissons. The majority of the noncommissioned officers were soldiers of the regular army who had had instilled in them the traditions of the 16th Infantry; each of them had learned his duties under enemy fire and was a real leader of men. Some had been wounded on other battlefields and were more valuable because of that experience. All members of the company had become physically hardened, had been thoroughly disciplined, and had learned to accept the dangers and hardships of campaign as a matter of course. They came from every race and creed; their educational qualifications varied from the highest to the lowest; some had been drafted, some had enlisted (either previous to or after the declaration of war), and some were National Guardsmen. One

the vicinity of Nixeville, and had gone into bivouac in a wood that was six inches deep in mud and muck. (33) It was to this muddy wood, on the afternoon of September 29th, a cold rainy, dreary day, information came that orders had been issued assigning the 1st Division to the 1st Army Corps and ordering it to move that night to the vicinity of Neuvilly.

(33) Personal Experience

(34) About 3:00 PM the General commanding the 1st Infantry Brigade went to the C. P. 1st Battalion 16th Infantry and after a short consultation with the Battalion Commander had the officers of that Battalion and of the Machine Gun Company 16th Infantry assembled. He told them that the 35th Division had failed and was then falling back; that the 1st Division would be rushed towards the 35th Division sector in trucks that night as far as Neuvilly and then would continue the [illegible] by marching the following day, and relieve the 35th Division and that our division would continue the attack. He then made a short talk, outlining in a general way the task ahead of the Division and expressing his desires as to the conduct of his Brigade. All of his remarks were made in such a manner that the confidence and determination of his hearers were increased. The Battalion Commander then announced dispositions within the Battalion and issued orders as to entrucking and the movement of the trains. (35)

(34) Personal Experience; FO 301st Army, 29 Sept. 1918

(35) Personal Experience

The Company had a hot meal and marched to the entrucking point some 4 or 5 kilometers from the bivouac area. The march began at dark which came early. The entrucking point was reached on time but the company had to wait on the side of the road for five or six hours for the French truck train which was late because of congested roads. Guns, tripods, and 2500 rounds of ammunition per gun were carried by the men, the animal transportation moving by another route. (36) The company rolling kitchen was carried on a truck of the Division train and reached Neuvilly before the trucks carrying the company. The company reached the vicinity of Neuvilly by 9:30 AM September 30th and detrucked south of Neuvilly on the Neuvilly-Aubreville Road and marched to the woods east of Les Cotes De Forimont, using the eastern road out of Neuvilly -- total distance 5 kilometers. (37) The Company kitchen had already reached this area and a hot meal was ready upon the company's arrival.

(36) Personal Experience; Table I Annex to FO 42, 1st Division 29 Sept. 1918 REC

While the Company was eating the Company Commander received verbally from the Battalion Commander and passed on to the Platoon Leaders the following information: that our Division would relieve the 35th Division that night and would attack at daybreak, October 1st; that the 16th Infantry would be the left regiment of the Division with its left resting on the Fleville-Baulny Road; that the 1st Battalion

(37) Personal Experience; G-3 Memo 1st Div. 29 Sept. 1918 REC

16th Infantry would be in Division Reserve and would assemble in the Very River ravine. The Battalion Commander had ordered the Company Commander to follow the rear rifle company as rapidly as possible from that area to the Very and had assisted him to plot the route of march on a 1/80000 map. The route was along unimproved roads through the Foret de Hesse and Bois de Cheppy to Cheppy, thence along the Buanthe River to the valley of the Very. (38) (See Special Map No. 2)

/ not on map

(38) Personal Experience

The march from the vicinity of Neuvilly to the assigned area in the Very ravine (about 16 kilometers) was one that will never be forgotten by the men who made it and survived the events of the following days. It was a dark afternoon with rain falling at intervals. The Company moved out from Les Coates De Forimont about 1:30 PM in a column of twos with the Company Commander at the head of the column and each platoon leader in rear of his respective platoon. Each man carried in addition to his full pack, helmet, gas mask, pistol, belt and pistol ammunition, a machine gun or tripod or two boxes of machine gun ammunition each containing 250 rounds -- total weight from 80 to 100 pounds. It was an unimproved road, muddy and filled with shell holes, up and down slippery hills, across streams, whose bridges were gone, through tangled wire and old trench systems. Often men would slip in the mud and

fall -- platoon leaders and sergeants not so heavily loaded would help them up and assist them back to their place in the column that was ever moving forward. Some men were not physically able to stand the strain -- platoon leaders and sergeants carried a portion of their loads for a time, thereby resting them. A few men did not have the moral courage necessary to make the effort required -- words of encouragement kept them moving. One, a moral degenerate, who had bought cognac from a French-Chinese truck driver and had gotten drunk the night before, refused to get up after the second halt. Two black eyes and threats of more delivered by his platoon sergeant got him forward. The town of Cheppy was passed through by nightfall. By 7:30 PM the valley of the Very was reached and we dug individual fox holes on the northern slope for protection against enemy artillery which was active. (39) (See Special Map No. 2).

(39) Personal Experience

About 9:00 PM, September 30th, the Company Commander received a message from the Commanding Officer, 2d Machine Gun Battalion, informing him that the Company would form a part of the 1st Brigade reserve under orders of the Commanding Officer 2d Machine Gun Battalion, and ordering him to follow the machine gun company of the Brigade reserve battalion (the third line battalion of the 18th Infantry) which would form on the southern slope of Hill

218 at the beginning of the attack at day-

(40) Personal Experience; Field Messages 2d MG Bn. REC Vol. XV

break on October 1st. (40)

The map showed that the top of Hill 218 was about 1500 yards from the location of the company (See Special Map No. ~~2~~ 3). The area then occupied by the Brigade reserve battalion was unknown. The men of the company had gotten no sleep the night before and were physically exhausted from the efforts of that day. No one knew the demands of the following day. In order to assure his men of as much rest as possible, the Company Commander decided to allow them to sleep until a time after midnight to be determined later, and to take one of his platoon leaders, reconnoiter a route to Hill 218, calculate the time required to march the company there, find out the time of attack (which he did not know) so as to cause the company to be awakened as late as possible, so as to be in the position ordered when the attack began. While the company comander and platoon leader were making this reconnaissance ~~the Company Commander,~~ they met the Commanding Officer 1st Battalion 16th Infantry ~~was met and he~~ who informed the Machine Gun Officers that the order for attack on October 1st had been annulled.

(41) Personal Experience

(41)

The members of the Company slept and rested in their fox holes until late afternoon of October 1st. Water was plentiful, but there was no food excepting reserve rations. Platoon leaders were authorized to allow their men to eat ½ of one day's ration each. (42)

(42) Personal Experience

At 2:30 PM October 1st, the Commanding Officer 2d Machine Gun Battalion, sent from the C. P. 1st Brigade, 400 meters east of Charpentry the following message to the Company Commander Machine Gun Co. 16th Infantry: "In accordance with orders Brigade Commander your company will operate as a special Brigade Reserve. You will report to me by 6:00 PM this date for instructions. Your company will move to vicinity Brigade P. C. this evening. RANSOM." (43)

(43) Field Messages 2d MG Bn REC Vol. XV

The Company Commander started to the Brigade C. P. about 4:30 PM and instructed the Second-in-Command to move the company forward by a path following the right ~~hand~~ bank of the Buanthe River, starting at dusk. This was done and the Company Commander met his company at the western entrance of the ravine running from Charpentry to Epinonville. (See Special Map No. 3). In accordance with orders, the company upon arriving in the ravine began to dig individual fox holes on the slope just south of the Charpentry-Eclisfontaine Road and about 300 meters east of Charpentry. To the west of and adjoining the area occupied by the Company, ~~was~~ were a number of troops belonging to the rear echelon of one of the regiments of the 60th Field Artillery Brigade (35th Division). In the bottom of the valley, unprotected from view, were two large circular picket lines with some 50 or 60 horses tied on each line, and they had been under enemy

aerial observation that afternoon. At about 7:30 PM the enemy began to shell the western portion of the ravine with high explosive, shrapnel and gas shells of light caliber. Reconnaissance was hastily made to the east by the Second-in-Command, and it was found that within 400 yards the ravine veers abruptly to the north. The slope there is much steeper, and the enemy was not shelling that part of the ravine. The Company was moved to this more sheltered location, and the only casualties suffered by it that night, were 3 or 4 men slightly gassed. The artillery troops made no attempt to move nor to move the horses amongst which shells were falling. The enemy secured a number of direct hits on the two picket lines; one exploding shell set fire to the hay in the center of one line. During the night, the Artillery unit, lost, one officer killed, thirty odd men killed and wounded, and eighty odd horses killed outright or wounded so severely that they had to be killed. (Thereafter that ravine was known to the soldiers of the Machine Gun Company 16th Infantry as, "Dead Horse Valley"). The Artillery left a large quantity of canned food which was enjoyed by the machine gunners the following day. (44)

(44) Personal Experience G. O. # 3 1st Division 1920

At daybreak on October 2d in compliance with verbal orders from the Commanding Officer 2d Machine Gun Battalion, the Company Commander and the three platoon leaders

reconnoitered the high ground north and south of the Charpentry-Eclisefontaine Road and selected battle implacements to be occupied in case of an enemy attack. (45) (See Overlay No. 1, Special Map No. 3). Platoon sergeants and squad leaders were taken under cover to these positions and detailed verbal instructions as to each man's duties in case of an enemy attack were issued by the platoon leaders. The remainder of the day was employed by the men of the company in deepening and making safer the fox holes dug the night before and in resting. Enemy artillery continued active, but the portion of "Dead Horse Valley" occupied by the Machine Gun Company, 16th Infantry, was protected by the steep slope. (46)

(45) Personal Experience, Field Messages 2d MG Bn. REC. Vol. XV

(46) Personal Experience

C. THE BATTLE - FIRST PART (OCTOBER 4TH TO 7TH).- THE DIVISION'S MISSION, ZONE OF ACTION, OBJECTIVE:- The 1st Army, during the 1st Phase of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, had driven a salient into the enemy territory between the Argonne Forest and the Meuse River. However, the enemy still held the heights within the Forest, and as long as those heights were in his possession the salient was untenable. If a deep wedge could be driven into the enemy's territory along the high ground east of the Aire River, the Germans would be forced to evacuate the Forest and the whole line could thus be carried forward. To drive this wedge was the mission of the 1st Division. (47)

(47) Hist. p. 184

Its boundaries were: on the right (east) the line Very (inclusive)--Eclisfontaine (exclusive)--Sommerance (inclusive)--St. Georges (inclusive); on the left (west) Baulny (inclusive)--Baulny-Fleville Road. Boundary between brigades was the line Very-Exermont-Hill 240 (all to 1st Brigade). The 1st Brigade was on the left and had from right to left the 18th and 16th Infantry Regiments. The Jumping Off Line was the Road L'Esperance-- point 185, thence northeast to Tronsol Farm. The Corps and Division objective was the line, Fleville--(exclusive)--Cote de Maldah. (48) (See Overlay No. 2, Special Map No. 3).

(48) F. O. 47 1st Div. 1918 REC Vol.

MISSION OF MACHINE GUN COMPANY 16TH INFANTRY:- The mission of the Machine Gun Company 16th Infantry, as a Special Brigade Reserve, was to replace forward guns; to fill gaps; to protect flanks and to organize the ground for defense when forward movement is stopped. (49)

(49) Field Message from C. O. 2d MG Bn to Div. M.G. Officer Oct. 2, 1918. REC VOL. XV

SUPPORT BY FIRE AGAINST MONTREBEAU WOODS:- During the forenoon of October 3d, the Commanding Officer 2d Machine Gun Battalion went to the C. P. Machine Gun Company 16th Infantry and told the officers of that company that the attack would probably begin the next morning; that the 16th and 18th would meet heavy resistance from the Montrebeau woods; and that he desired the Company to deliver indirect overhead fire into the Montrebeau from positions on the ridge, south of Chaudron

Farm. He ordered the Company Commander to take the platoon leaders to the area south of Chaudron Farm, select and stake out gun positions, calculate indirect fire data, move the company to the positions after dark and transport 10,000 rounds of ammunition per gun thereto before 2:00 AM October 4th. The positions were selected and staked out and data for indirect fire was computed. (50)

(50) Personal Experience

During the afternoon, the Company Commander was called to the C. P. 1st Brigade and was told by the Commanding Officer 2d Machine Gun Battalion, that the Brigade Commander had disapproved his plans for indirect fire support, but ordered the company to support the attack with direct overhead fire on the near edge of the Montrebeau from the gun positions selected from H hour until fire was masked by our troops. The Company Commander was cautioned not to open fire, unless the visibility was good. (51)

(51) Statement C.O. M.G.Co. 16th Inf. to Author Oct. 3,1918

The Company moved to the selected position immediately after dark, prepared the emplacements, secured 120,000 rounds of ammunition from a burning and exploding dump in Charpentry, and transported it as far as possible by mule carts, and the remaining distance to the gun positions by hand. Several men, including the Platoon Sergeant and a section sergeant ~~from~~ of the same ~~one~~ platoon, were wounded by enemy artillery fire during the preparation of these emplacements.

(52) Personal Experience

(52) At 12:30 AM October 4th the Commanding Officer 2d Machine Gun Battalion sent the following message to the Company Commander: "H - 5:25. Open with the artillery. No preparation fire. Execute direct overhead fire on near edge of Woods until fire is masked by our troops. Raise and search woods for 5 min. Mission of support then ceases. Acknowledge. RANSOM." (53) (See Overlay No. 2, Special Map No. 3). All was ready at H Hour. The advancing troops could not be seen because of fog and smoke -- and the Company could not fire. The fire power of 12 machine guns was not used to support the attack. (54) The attacking battalions of the 1st Brigade needed all the supporting fire possible against the Montrebeau that morning. Enemy machine guns placed in the northern edge and within the woods caused heavy casualties and slowed down the advance of both regiments. (55)

(53) Field Messages 2d MG Bn. REC Vol. XV

(54) Personal Experience

(55) Hist. p. 187

The Company Commander kept to a minimum the number of casualties in his company by ordering the Second-in-Command and all enlisted men excepting 3 men per gun squad and one noncommissioned officer per section to take cover on the reverse slope just south of the gun positions before the attack started. The enemy's barrage came down on our positions as soon as the attack began. His artillery barrage was considerably thickened by machine gun fire. When he realized that he could not

support the advance of the Brigade, the Company Commander moved his men and guns to the reverse slope and joined the remainder of his company. Six men were wounded immediately after H hour. These men were given first aid and placed in a sheltered location. A message was sent to the Commanding Officer 2d Machine Gun ~~Company~~ Battalion informing him of the failure of the company to support the Brigade and giving the location of the company. (56)

(56) Personal Experience

At about 10:00 AM, the Platoon Leader 2d Platoon, who had been serving as Liaison Officer at Headquarters 1st Brigade brought a verbal message from the Commanding Officer 2d Machine Gun Battalion, ordering the company to move forward to a position on the reverse slope just north of Chaudron Farm and to remain there until further orders. This move was made promptly and without casualties. (57)

(57) Personal Experience

THE SITUATION ON AFTERNOON OF FIRST DAY.-

The 16th Infantry had been able to reach the Corps and Division objective by the afternoon of October 4th. Advance elements dug in just south of Fleville after having driven the Germans out of that town. On the right the 18th Infantry was facing northeast and was in contact with the 2d Brigade. The 28th Division on the left of the 1st Division had attacked that day also. The right of its line had been carried forward by the success of the 16th Infantry to the Fleville-Baulny Road where the

not named on map

Rau de Exermont crosses. From this point their front extended almost due south to Apremont. The heights west of the Aire (Cornay, Hills 180, 223 and 244) were still occupied by the Germans. Heavy fire from light artillery located on these heights on the left flank of the 16th Infantry made the position of the 1st Brigade extremely precarious. (58) (See Overlay No. 3, Special Map No. 3).

(58) Personal Experience

At 4:45 PM October 4th, the Commanding Officer 2d Machine Gun Battalion sent the following message by runner: "To C. O. M. G. Co. 16th Inf. Counterattack expected from direction of Fleville. Put company into position covering wood, ridges and valley of Aire. Am making reconnaissance for your positions with Young. Ransom." (59)

Messages 2d MG BN REC Vol. XV

To comply with this order the Company was placed in position in three lines; one platoon north of the Granges Farm-Exermont Road, one north of the Camp Drachen ravine, and the third north of the L'Esperance-Chaudron Farm Road. (See Overlay No. 3, Special Map No. 3). All platoons had excellent fields of fire and the Company would have been able to assist greatly in breaking up any counterattack from direction of Fleville. Positions were occupied before dark and emplacements were dug and camouflaged during the night. (60)

(60) Personal Experience

The following extract from a letter

written by the author on October 6th, concerning the events of October 4th is quoted: "---- as soon as darkness came, each company ration cart with cooked food in air tight cans came forward, was met by runners and guided to its company. Mail from home had been received at Division Headquarters that day and with the food for the M. G. Co. 16th Infantry came the mail also. The next morning as soon as it was light, the men in their little muddy holes in the ground, were reading letters from loved ones in the U. S. A. while the German shells whistled and whined overhead."

OCTOBER 5TH -- 7TH:- The right regiment of the 1st Brigade and both regiments of the 2d Brigade again attacked at daybreak on October 5th with the purpose of bringing those units on line with the 16th Infantry. The 16th Infantry was ordered to hold its position until the 18th Infantry had reached the Corps objective. (62)

(62) F. O. 48
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The positions occupied by the Machine Gun Company 16th Infantry on the afternoon and evening of October 4th were not entirely satisfactory to the Commanding Officer 2d Machine Gun Battalion who, accompanied by the Company Commander, made an inspection of the positions early the following morning. As a result of the inspection all platoons were ordered to move to new positions; one west of Granges Farm, one just east of the Baulny-Fleville

Road and about one kilometer north of Camp Dracken ravine, and one just north of the Camp Dracken ravine and about one kilometer east of the Baulny-Fleville Road. Platoon leaders reconnoitered these new positions and caused their platoons to filter in, one squad at a time with about 100 yards intervals between men when crossing open places. The German artillery on the heights west of the Aire was very active, had excellent observation, and would sometimes fire at one man crossing the top of the ridges east of the Aire. All platoons were in their new positions with approximately 2,000 rounds ammunition per gun by 2:30 PM. Four or five men in the company became casualties during the move. The Company C. P. was in Camp Drachen ravine. (63) (See Overlay No. 4, Special Map No. 3).

(63) Personal Experience

The Company Commander sent the following message by runner to the Commanding Officer 2d Machine Gun Battalion at 1:25 PM October 5th: "Position reconnoitered and squads filtering in slowly. Am told we are in view of Boche from heights at Chatel Chehery. Machine Gun fire and barrage to left rear. I connect up on left with 109th Regt. xx x x x BETTS." (64)

(64) Field Messages 2d MG BN. REC Vol. XV

The runner who carried the above message was wounded in the arm by artillery fire before he had gone 500 yards from the Company C. P. but continued to the Brigade C. P. and delivered his message before going to the first-aid station. (65)

(65) Statement of runner to author in Jan. 1919

During the night of October 5th-6th emplacements and fox holes were dug deeper, more ammunition was brought up by carts from the rear, hot food was gotten forward, and the Company was in excellent positions, and its members in the best condition possible to carry out its mission. (66)

(66) Personal Experience

The enemy artillery fire from across the Aire increased in intensity on October 6th, showing that the enemy was bringing up fresh batteries and was getting plenty of ammunition. In addition to his "77's", he also used many Austrian "88's", a gun with greater velocity and lower trajectory. Quantities of gas were fired into the ravines of the area also.

The Company remained in the same positions during October 6th and daylight of the 7th. There was no movement near platoon positions during the day. One man per gun was on [illegible] position at all times; other members of squads slept and rested in fox holes nearby. There was no systematic shelling of the platoon positions during these two days, however the entire area was covered by enemy artillery at frequent intervals. (67a)

(67a) Personal Experience

Due to the success of the 1st Brigade in pushing into the enemy's lines east of the Aire River the 82d Division was enabled on the morning of October 7th to assault from the Baulny-Fleville Road due west across the Aire and take the heights which had been

endangering the left flank of the 1st Division. By evening the attack of the 82d Division was a success and the Machine Gun Company 16th Infantry was no longer needed in the positions it had occupied since October 5th. (67b)

(67b) Personal Experience

3. THE BATTLE -- SECOND PART -- OCTOBER 8TH TO 12TH.- THE MACHINE GUN COMPANY 16TH INFANTRY REJOINS ITS BATTALION: About 7:15 PM October 7th the Company Commander and the Second-in-Command (who also commanded the 3d Platoon) were sitting in a fox hole (the Company C. P.). A shelter half spread over the top kept out some of the rain that was falling and allowed them to smoke. The 82d Division had driven the enemy artillery from the hills west of the Aire, making the vicinity of Camp Dracken a much safer place than it had been for the previous 60 hours. The company ration cart had come up with hot coffee, food and cigarettes about 6:00 o'clock. In spite of the mud in the bottom of the fox-hole, the rain outside, and the never ending sound of German shells going to the rear, the situation seemed fairly comfortable to the two officers who were discussing the probability of being relieved soon -- and a trip to Paris. A voice was heard asking the sentry where the Company Commander was. It was the Commanding Officer 2d Machine Gun Battalion and he informed the two junior officers that their company would

join as quickly as possible the 1st Battalion 16th Infantry which would attack the next morning. Both company officers were soon relieved. Within 48 hours, one was in Heaven and the other was en route to southern France, in an ambulance. (68)

(68) Personal Experience

The Commanding Officer, 2d Machine Gun Battalion had sent the following message at 6:00 PM October 7th: "To: C. O. 16th Inf. M. G. Co. Assemble your Co. in vicinity of your P. C. immediately in preparation to join your Bn. which will attack in the morning. RANSOM." (69) The runner who carried the message had gotten lost, and did not arrive until after 8:00 PM.

(69) Field Messenger 2d MG BN REC Vol. XV

The Company Commander was directed to send his Second-in-Command to meet the Commanding Officer 1st Battalion 16th Infantry at the C. P. 18th Infantry at Exermont as soon as possible for the purpose of receiving orders; to withdraw his company from the positions there occupied, and to move without delay to Exermont, where he would meet his Second-in-Command, who would by that time have the orders for the company. The Second-in-Command immediately took his blanket, and musette bag and started to Exermont accompanied by an orderly. (70) The Company Commander sent a runner to each platoon C. P. with verbal instructions to roll packs and assemble at the Company C. P. with full packs, guns and as much

(70) Personal Experience

ammunition as could be carried. The Company was assembled by 8:45 PM. It was then raining and the ground was very muddy. The route to be followed was only a trail. Thinking that blankets, which were water soaked and heavy would not again be needed until after the attack, the Company Commander ordered that all blankets be left near Camp Dracken, and sent instructions to the supply officer to bring up carts and take them to the rear echelon. The Company marched across fields, along the northern edge of the Montrebeau Woods and joined the 1st Battalion 16th Infantry on the unimproved road, Chaudron Farm-Exermont. (71)

(71) Statement of C. O. M. G. Co. 16th Inf. to author Oct. 9,1918

The Second-in-Command followed the Baulny-Fleville Road to crossroads east of La Forge, then La Forge-Exermont Road to Exermont. (That two kilometers of narrow road from the crossroads to Exermont was literally jammed with transportation,--Ford ambulances, rolling kitchens, ration wagons, water carts, ammunition carts and liberty trucks, all without lights were attempting to go in both directions. German artillery was very active from the direction of Bois De Moncy and enfiladed this road over which two regiments were being supplied. A direct hit on a rolling kitchen was witnessed a short distance from Exermont. Pieces of men, mules, food and kitchen were thrown in every direction and the road was made impassable. Hot coffee was thrown

over one man who was wounded otherwise and his suffering was intense. A Ford ambulance was driven around the road jam and took the wounded to a dressing station). Soon after the Second-in-Command Machine Gun Company 16th Infantry arrived at the C. P. 18th Infantry the C. O. 1st Battalion 16th Infantry arrived and reported to the Commanding Officer 18th Infantry. It was learned that 1st Battalion 16th Infantry had been released from Division Reserve and had been turned over to the Commanding Officer 18th Infantry. It was also learned that the attack would not be made on the following morning. The Battalion with its attached Machine Gun Co. was ordered to move through Exermont and go into bivouac in the Bois de Boyon on the southwestern slope of Montrefagne. After the receipt of these orders the Battalion Commander rejoined his Battalion and the Second-in-Command rejoined his Company in the ravine south of Exermont. After a halt of about an hour the Battalion with its machine gun Company in rear moved in column of files through Exermont to the Bois de Boyon, where each man dug individual fox holes. A guide from Headquarters, 18th Infantry was furnished each company. The guide furnished for the Machine Gun Co. 16th Infantry lost his direction before the company was out of Exermont and was useless. Upon arrival in The Bois de Boyon, the Battalion

Commander notified Company Commanders that the front line was within a few hundred yards; that absolute quiet must be maintained and no lights would be permitted. The following day was cloudy and overcast until the afternoon when observation became good for short periods.

(72) Personal Experience Statements of Major C.W. Ryder and Major L. R. Boyd

(73) Message from Hq. 1st Div. to 5th AC 5:30 PM 10/8/18 REC Vol. XII

(74) Same as (72)

(72) Enemy airplanes were active over the front line of the Division, during the afternoon. (73) Artillery fire was intense at times against the crest of the Hill 240 and all along the line to right and left, but it is remarkable that very few shells fell in that part of the woods occupied by the 1st Battalion 16th Infantry. (74)

SITUATION, MISSION AND PLAN OF ACTION ON OCTOBER 8TH:- The 82d Division on the left was slowly but surely driving the enemy from the eastern edge of the Argonne, but the situation with the division on the right of the 1st Division was not so good. For tactical reasons Corps boundaries had been changed on October 7th and the control of the 1st Division had passed to the Fifth Corps. The 181st Brigade of the 91st Division, although tired and reduced in strength by recent fighting, was attached to the 1st Division, and the zone of action of the Division was extended on the right to the line Hill 269 - Tuillerie Farm; on the left it was bounded by the line Fleville-Sommerance. The mission of the Division at this time was to

assist the 32d Division by clearing out Le Petit Bois, Hill 263 and the Bois de Romagne in its zone of action. (75) Within the Division: the right boundary of the 1st Brigade (less the 1st Battalion 16th Infantry) passed to the west of Hill 272; the left boundary of the 2d Brigade ran along the eastern end of Hill 272; the zone of action of the 1st Battalion 16th Infantry (under orders of the Commanding Officer 18th Infantry) included Hill 272. The first objective of the battalion was a line passing north of Hill 272, the second, was a line passing north of the Cote de Maldah. (See Overlay No. 5, Special Map No. 3). "H" hour was set at 8:30 AM October 9th. (76) The Divisional Commander had decided to expend his last reserves.

(75) Hist. p. 203

(76) F. O. No.49 1st Div. 1918 PTO Vol.

TERRAIN AND ENEMY CONCENTRATION IN FRONT OF 1ST BATTALION, 18TH INFANTRY. Hill 272, a long hog back affair running east and west lay squarely across the sector of the Battalion. Its crest rises over 200 feet above the broad plains to the south and west, giving unobscured observation and field of fire to the south, southeast and southwest. Le Petite Bois covered the eastern slopes of the hill; the southern and southwestern slopes were barren; small irregular patches of woods and brush were scattered over the remaining portions. The raise was gentle to the base of the hill where the slope became steep and difficult.

(77) Personal Experience Statement Majors Boyd and Rider

(78) Statement of Majors Ryder and Boyd

(79) Story 16th Inf. in France

(80) Personal Experience Statements Majors Boyd and Ryder

(81) Statement Major Ryder

(82) Ibid

(83) Hist. p. 200

(77)

The Cote de Maldah is about 1250 yards to the north of Hill 272; its crest is also covered with small irregular patches of trees and although not so high as the crest of Hill 272 it completely dominated the northern slope of 272 and the wooded ravine lying between. (78)

Hill 272 completely dominated the eastern portion of the Division zone of action and that of the division on the right as well. Its flanks slopes and crest had been fortified with machine guns and direct fire 77 mm. guns by the Germans, who well knew that it was a most important key position. The personnel for its defense were protected by elaborate dugouts and trenches. (79) Small thickets near the base of the hill held machine guns and small caliber minenwerfers, which had been so sited as to cover all routes of approach. (80) A strong enemy machine gun nest known to be in the woods at 176 (in front of the 18th Infantry) was extremely dangerous to the left flank of the battalion. (81) Several officers, who studied the defenses of this position, within a few days after the attack, estimated that the Germans had used not less than 50 machine guns in defense of Hill 272. (82)

On October 5th the 26th Infantry after taking Arietal Farm, suffered heavy losses and was stopped by fire from Hill 272. (83)

On the same day the 28th Infantry had been unable to advance further because of artillery, machine gun, and rifle fire from Hill 272. (84) Three attempts were made on October 7th and 8th by elements of the 2d Brigade to assault this position but all had failed. (85) The History of the 1st Division states: "Hill 272 which had defied all efforts to advance was by far the most dangerous of the enemy's positions". (86)

(84) Hist. p. 201

(85) Hist. p. 202-204

(86) Hist. p. 204

THE OPERATIONS:- About noon October 8th the Battalion Commander assembled his company commanders; gave them all the information he had and issued verbal orders as to dispositions. The Battalion would assault within its zone of action from the front line then held by the 28th Infantry; with Company B on the right and Company C on the left in assault. Companies A and D from right to left in support. The Machine Gun Company 16th Infantry would follow the support wave by bounds at from 300 to 400 yards distance. Heavy artillery concentrations had been promised in front of the Battalion. The Battalion Commander, then took his company commanders to the top of Hill 240 to reconnoiter routes of approach for the attack. This reconnaissance was short; the party was observed by the enemy on Hill 272 and he quickly scattered them. Very little of importance was seen. (87)

(87) Statement of C.O. M.G. Co. 16th Inf. to author on Oct. 8, 1918 Statement of Majors Ryder and Boyd

Early on the morning of October 8th the

Company Commander had gone to Exermont and had telephoned to the C. P. 1st Brigade and asked the C. O. 2d Machine Gun Battalion to get a message to the Company's rear echelon, giving the Company's new position and instructing the Supply Officer to get hot food up as soon as darkness came that evening. (88). During the afternoon the Supply Officer came to the position of the Company in order to find its location, and learn the best route in. (89) Just before dark the afternoon of October 8th an officer brought the following message from the Commanding Officer 2d Machine Gun Battalion to the Commanding Officer Machine Gun Company 16th Infantry dated 4:15 PM October 8th: "You will make disposition for the defense of Montrefague. Men from the Headquarters Cos. 16th and 18th Infantry will report to these [illegible] to support them. In case of counterattack, the position must be held at all costs. Your other 8 guns will take part in to-morrow's operation. Get in touch with Hqts. 18th Inf. and insure that Inf. support joins your 4 guns. RANSOM." (90)

In compliance with the above order the 1st Platoon was assembled, its leader was given his instructions and the platoon consisting of one officer and about 35 (enlisted) men started to the top of Hill 240. (91) The platoon arrived at the crest of the hill after dark; its leader selected as good

(88) Statement of C.O. MG Co. 16th Inf. to author on Oct. 8,1918. Field Message from C.O. 2d MG Bn. 8:30 AM 8 Oct. to S. O. 16th Inf. MG CO. and from Lieut. Wheelin 11 AM 8 Oct. to C.O. 2d MG Bn. Vol. XV REC

(89) Personal Experience

(90) Personal Experience; Field Messages 2d MG Bn. REC vol XV 1st Div.; Operation Instruction No. 72 Hq. 1st Inf. Brig. Oct. 8, 1918

(91) Personal Experience

positions as possible in the darkness, and started the men digging emplacements for the guns and fox holes for themselves. The ground was rocky and made difficult work preparing emplacements. Enemy shells fell upon the crest of the hill all night and caused several casualties. No counterattack developed; the darkness of the night and fog the next morning made observation impossible and the guns of that platoon did not fire. When attack commenced the next morning the enemy artillery fire against the crest of Hill 240 was terrible. Within an hour, 3 guns had been blown to pieces, the platoon leader had been killed and all but 5 or 6 of the men of the platoon had been killed or wounded. The 18th Infantry had moved forward about 8:30 AM. About 9:30 AM October 9th a noncommissioned officer of the platoon assembled the remaining 5 or 6 men of the platoon, took the one gun and as much ammunition as they could carry and moved to the right in search of his company. (92)

(92) Statement of survivors to the author in Jan. 1919

At dark on October 8th the battalion moved through the Bois de Bayon to a clearing about one-half mile northwest of Exermont. Here the ration and water carts for the rifle companies were met; but in spite of all the precautions that its company commander had taken, there were no rations for the Machine Gun Co. 16th Infantry.

The Company Supply Officer had failed to

arrive. When the situation was made known to the commanders of the rifle companies, plenty of food and hot coffee was provided for all. This incident affected the morale of the men considerably. They felt if the ration carts of the rifle companies could get through theirs could have arrived also. (93) It was learned later that rations for the Machine Gun Company had passed through Exermont in plenty of time but the Supply Officer had gotten lost north of Exermont and could not find the company. (94)

(93) Personal Experience

(94) Statement of Mess Sergeant to author Jan. 1919

After all had been fed the company, (less 1st Platoon) moved out in single file in rear of the Battalion to the southern end of Le Petite Bois arriving there about 11:00 PM. Each man dug an individual fox hole and tried to rest and sleep. German artillery concen-

[illegible] on the northern slope of Hill 240, only a few hundred yards away, but very few shells fell on the southern end of Le Petite Bois, and there were no casualties in the Company (less the 1st Platoon). Rain fell as usual; the night was cold and disagreeable, blankets had been left at Camp Dracken; there were no overcoats -- the men had been moving forward from one position to another, living in mud and wet clothes, dodging shells themselves and listening to the agonizing groans of their more unfortunate companions for nine days. The strain physically and

mentally had been great. They were tired. All knew that a hard job had to be done next day and were anxious for "H" hour to come and get it over with. The two platoon leaders of the company lay in the same fox hole awaiting day. The leader of the 2d Platoon said, "This is the last night I'll be in this hellish mud. I'll get mine to-morrow". He was right. (95)

(95) Personal Experience

The attack of the 1st Battalion 16th Infantry was set for 8:30 AM October 9th. There was an exceedingly heavy fog that morning. One could not see more than 25 yards in any direction when the attack began. (96)

(96) Personal Experience Statements of Majors Boyd and Ryder

The Company Commander had instructed each platoon leader to follow the support companies at about 350 yards, the Second Platoon ~~leader~~ to move along the left of the Battalion sector and the Third Platoon to advance in the right of Battalion zone of [illegible] He also gave each platoon leader a compass bearing. Each officer had a fairly good compass and a 1/80000 map that had been wet for nine days and couldn't have been of much assistance in broad daylight. The Company Commander decided to accompany the Second Platoon.

The line of fox holes occupied by the 2d and 3d Platoons for the few hours preceding the attack was at an angle of 90 degrees to the line of departure. In order to reach its position for the jump off the 3d Platoon had

to follow in single file a little ravine for about 150 yards, then change direction to the right and go up a very steep slope, along a narrow path, through a strip of exceedingly thick wood for 300 yards and reform in a small open space. Two rifle companies had preceded this platoon along the same route. Our barrage and the enemy's artillery and machine gun fire had come down before the last elements of the rifle companies had started up the path. At the designated time the platoon commander, 3d Platoon, moved out at the head of his platoon, which was in column of files with about five paces between men. The fog was so heavy that he could not see beyond the fourth man in column. When the open place in which the platoon was to reform was reached it was found that he had only four men with him. These men were instructed to remain there while the platoon leader went back and found the remainder of his men. Upon reaching the ravine, he discovered that the fifth and sixth men in the column had been killed and the seventh man had lost his nerve and ducked in a shell hole. The men following thinking the platoon had been ordered to take cover, had done so. The platoon leader lifted the seventh man out of the shell hole by the back of his neck and after administering a few swift kicks, started him up the path with the gun of one of the men who had been killed. The platoon

was re-formed and moved forward without further trouble, but 20 minutes of precious time had been lost. However, by pushing ahead as rapidly as the endurance of the men carrying guns, tripods and ammunition would permit the distance lost was gained before the platoon was needed.

The platoon leader used his compass frequently. Features of the terrain upon which to march could not be seen. Artillery fire, machine gun bullets and minenwerfer shells seemed to be coming from all directions. Every few minutes a man would be hit, if he had enough strength, he would crawl into a shell hole, of which there was an abundance, and administer first aid, otherwise he was left where he fell. Frequent halts had to be made to keep squads from being lost in the fog. As a result the Platoon Leader moved too far to the west and the first riflemen encountered belonged to Company D, the left support company. The Platoon closed upon Company D at the foot of the steep part of Hill 272 and well to the left of the Battalion's zone of action. The Platoon Leader caused his men to take cover in shell holes and accompanied by his runner moved forward with the intention of finding out exactly where he was. (97) After going about 200 yards through the fog, he stumbled upon the Company Commander, Company D. The

(97) Personal Experience

fog lifted temporarily about that time. An enemy machine gun nest in our left rear was firing into Company D and causing casualties. One or more minenwerfers was being fired from the strong point also. The Company Commander Company D ordered one of his platoon leaders to take two squads of riflemen and to work around a flank and clean out the enemy strong point and ordered the Machine Gun officer to assist him. The fog was then in patches; visibility was good up to 200 or 250 yards for a few minutes at a time -- the next few minutes one could not see farther than 50 or 60 yards. The two platoon leaders agreed to assemble their men and meet at a big rock some 150 yards to the right rear. Both went in search of their platoons. The Machine Gunner double timed to his platoon, assembled one section (2 squads) and got them to the prearranged meeting point as quickly as possible. Two men were killed or wounded by machine gun bullets en route. The Company D officer had not arrived with his patrol. A minenwerfer shell killed another man. The fog became heavier at that time and the Platoon Leader rushed his men and their guns about 125 yards to the rear to a position from which they could fire into the chump of trees without danger to friendly troops, and ordered the guns mounted in shell holes. While the guns were being mounted visibility again

became fairly good and two enemy machine guns, at least one minenwerfer and 5 or 6 Germans could be seen in emplacements about 250 or 300 yards away. They were firing hurriedly. The Platoon Leader was hit by a machine gun bullet before his guns got into action but he was able to direct the fire of his guns into the enemy position until it was silenced. Soon 5 or 6 riflemen, evidently members of the Company D patrol were seen to the left. They were firing into the clump of trees also. The 16th Infantry machine gunners and riflemen were evidently observed by the enemy on the upper slopes of Hill 272. A deluge of machine gun bullets and minenwerfer shells (it must have been aimed short range fire) fell on the area and all but 2 or 3 of the machine gunners were hit. (98) The other section of the 3d Platoon suffered as heavily as the other platoons. By 10:30 AM the Platoon had become a squad. (99)

(98) Personal Experience; Statement of Major Boyd; G. O. 4, H.D. 1923

(99) Statement of Survivors to author in Jan.1919

The 2d Platoon accompanied by the Company Headquarters group had advanced about one kilometer when it closed up on the support wave. The rear elements of the rifle company were entering a little wood. The machine gun platoon went to the left, skirted the end of the woods and turned to the right again. When the northern edge of the woods had been reached, two enemy machine guns in fox holes on the left flank and only 50 or 75 yards away

but invisible in the fog, opened up. The fire was low, the bullets striking the men in the ankles first. When a wounded man fell his body was soon riddled with bullets. The Company Commander and the Platoon Leader were among the first to fall and both were killed almost instantly. There wasn't time to set up the guns of the platoon -- the Platoon Sergeant pulled his automatic pistol and began firing in the direction of the German machine guns. Other men of the Platoon did the same without orders. The Germans were soon hit and the action ceased. The Platoon Sergeant took stock and found that 2 officers had been killed and 27 men had been killed or wounded in that one spot within 3 or 4 minutes. He reorganized his platoon into two squads, took two of his guns and as much ammunition as could be carried, and continued up the slopes of Hill 272. He ran into the survivors of the 3d Platoon with one gun within a short time and caused them to join his platoon and went to the top of the hill. When the top of Hill 272 was reached he had 18 or 20 men, 3 guns and about 3500 rounds of ammunition. He found the Battalion Commander and informed him of the situation. The Battalion Commander ordered him to place his guns in positions ~~to go into a position~~ on the forward slope of Hill 272 and support the troops in the valley as much as he could. (The rifle companies had by that time reached the ravine to the north and the assaulting elements were moving up the

slopes of Cote de Mal Dah). The Sergeant, then commanding the Machine Gun Company 16th Infantry, placed his three guns on the north-eastern slope of Hill 272 and was ready to carry out the orders of his Battalion Commander. All three guns were in action that afternoon against groups of the enemy that could be seen some 1200--1500 meters to the north. (100)

(100) Statement Sergeant Sedusky

The skeleton squad from the 1st Platoon found its way to Hill 272 late that afternoon and went into position on the north slope. (101)

(101) Statement of Survivors to Author in Jan.1919

During the night of October 9th-10th an officer who had commanded the company for a few days in July was sent forward and took command. He reported to the Battalion Commander and was ordered to keep his guns in position on Hill 272. These positions were occupied until the relief of the Division on the night of October 12th-13th. During the period October 1st-12th, the Company lost all of the officers and 75% of the enlisted men of the forward echelon. (102)

(102) Statement of Capt. Wheelen

CRITICISM

The Brigade Commander by going to his battalions and talking to his officers before the Divisions moved into the line, exhibited qualities of leadership to a very high degree. The mere fact that the Brigade Commander himself had found time that day to go through the rain and mud and talk to his lieutenants and captains, increased their morale. He talked

only a few minutes and did not use a superfluous word. He imparted to his junior officers some of the earnestness and will power and determination which he possessed. His selection of a time for direct contact with his junior officers was most appropriate.

The approach march of the Machine Gun Company 16th Infantry on September 30th indicated that the Company had been well trained and disciplined.

By moving his company a few hundred yards to a flank on the night of October 1st, the Company Commander no doubt prevented many casualties. Again on the morning of October 4th he applied the Principle of Economy of Force by causing all members of his company, excepting the minimum required to operate the guns, to take cover in a sheltered location nearby during the period that it was known the enemy protective barrage would come down. In both of these instances the Company Commander prevented needless loss of man power.

During the period October 2d-7th (both dates inclusive) the primary mission of the Company was security -- before the attack security of the Brigade front and after the attack security of a refused flank was obtained by the use of this company. The Brigade Commander handled the Company through a staff officer (the Commanding Officer 2d Machine Gun Battalion) who had made a thorough study of the use of Machine Guns and who was familiar

with their capabilities and their limitations. With one exception (which I shall discuss in the next paragraph) the missions assigned the company during this period and the manner of the accomplishment of those missions can not be criticized adversely. The positions selected by platoon leaders on the afternoon of October 4th were not the best positions that could be found. They were good positions, however, and were selected and occupied without delay. Had a counterattack been delivered from the direction of Fleville that evening or the following morning as was expected, the Company could have assisted greatly in preventing the left flank from being driven back. The counterattack was not made and with more time for daylight reconnaissance better positions were found and occupied. A more striking example of the logical use of a machine gun company in the security of a refused flank did not occur in the history of the 1st Division. (See Overlays Nos. 3 and 4. Special Map No. 3).

It is believed that the disapproval of the plans for indirect overhead fire support of the 1st Brigade during the early stages of the October 4th attack was a mistake. It was known beyond any question of a doubt that the Montrebeau woods was strongly held and its defenders would offer stubborn resistance. It should have been learned from previous experience that had there been no fog, the smoke

of battle would have prevented aimed overhead fire during the attack. It is thought that in refusing to allow indirect machine gun fire support, the Brigade Commander underestimated the strength of the position to his front, or overestimated the effect of the friendly artillery barrage, or had no confidence in the ability of his machine gun company to deliver indirect fire. In any event, it is my opinion that in this case he violated the Principle of Mass.

. The rear echelon of the Company functioned well throughout the operation. From the arrival of the Company train in the Brigade Area (October 3d) the Supply Officer exhibited resourcefulness, energy, courage, and determination. With the exception of the night of October 8th, hot food arrived at the position of the Company always soon after dark. On that night the Supply Officer became lost for an hour or more and failed to reach the Company before it moved. That situation is apt to arise often during combat and is most unfortunate because the lack of hot food daily decreases the morale of troops to a great extent.

The 1st Battalion 16th Infantry and the Machine Gun Co. 16th Infantry attached (approximately 1,000 men) was placed in bivouac in the Bois de Boyon during the night of October 7th-8th and the daylight of October 8th. This force was within a few hundred yards

of the German front line and could have been practically annihilated by enemy artillery had it been discovered. German airplanes were active over the front lines during the afternoon. The fact that the bivouac was not discovered indicates good discipline and training. The fact that fewer shells fell in the occupied part of the woods during that period than on previous days appears to be an act of Providence. No tactical reason for the concentration of these troops in this small area so near the front line is known. The Commander who sent them there accepted a tremendous responsibility and in my opinion made an unsound decision.

The Company Commander Machine Gun Company 16th Infantry was killed by the same burst of enemy fire that killed one of his platoon leaders. The Company Commander's presence was not required with any one platoon at that time. He should have been with the Battalion C. P.

The Platoon Leader, 3d Platoon, Machine Gun Company 16th Infantry allowed himself to become confused in the fog and led his platoon too far to the left. It is likely that the casualties of the platoon were higher because of this fact. Because of his having moved to the left, however, he was in position to assist Company D by silencing an enemy strong point.

The actions of the Platoon Sergeant, 2d Platoon are worthy of special commendation.

When his platoon and the Company Headquarters Group came under fire of two enemy machine guns 50 or 75 yards away, his Company Commander, Platoon Leader and the majority of his men were killed or wounded, he led his men in knocking out the German gunners with automatic pistol fire, reorganized his remaining men into two squads and moved on up the hill towards the objective. He met a small group from another platoon of the Company and made them into another squad. When he had arrived at the top of Hill 272 he found the Battalion Commander, reported and received his orders. By his initiative and leadership he preserved for the use of the Battalion Commander the fire power of three guns and organized a position on Hill 272 which would have been of inestimable value should the Battalion not have been successful in its attack against the Cote de Maldah.

The fog of October 9th made possible the success of the attack of the 1st Battalion 16th Infantry. It is my opinion and the opinion of all officers who participated with whom I have discussed the attack that had visibility been good at H hour the Battalion would not have been able to advance 300 yards. The German machine gun -- minenwerfer -- light artillery defense system of this position and all other key positions in this sector was highly efficient. They were broken down it is true, but the cost was tremendous.

The disposition of his Machine Gun Company by the Battalion Commander, 1st Battalion 16th Infantry on October 9th must be criticized adversely. He did not need the fire power of that company and could not use it advantageously until he had taken the crest of Hill 272. When the Battalion made its attack against the 2d objective he did need the fire support of machine guns and there were ideal positions on the crest of Hill 272 from which fire could have been delivered -- if he had had machine guns available. But the old system of causing the machine gun company to follow the support wave had again been used and had again proved its worthlessness. There was no machine gun company when one was needed. The fire power of the Company and its potential value had been thrown away because of lack of knowledge.

LESSONS

Well trained and well disciplined troops can undergo hardships and dangers for extended periods and so long as physical endurance exists can always make another supreme effort.

By conserving the strength of troops and providing for their rest whenever possible a commander insures a more efficient response to necessary demands upon their endurance.

When tactical requirements do not prevent, troops should be moved out of areas being shelled.

When machine guns are available and the

features of the terrain permit, attacking troops should be supported by machine gun fire against positions that are known to be strongly defended. The smoke of battle (if artillery concentrations are being used) will make direct overhead fire support impossible.

Machine Guns are extremely valuable to fill in gaps and to protect exposed flanks.

Machine Gun units should not be required to follow closely attacking units. They should be held under cover until the objective is reached and should then be rushed forward to assist in the organization of the ground for defense or to support the movement to the next objective by fire.

The effect of hot food upon troops' morale is very great and plays a very important part in the success of an operation.

Fog increases the difficulty of control of units; causes units to close up; but reduces casualties by preventing the defending force from using aimed fire. When the fog lifts suddenly, however, casualties will be very high due to units being closed up.

A Commander who is also a leader of men can greatly increase the efficiency of his command by talking to junior officers at appropriate times.

CONCLUSION

The operations of the Machine Gun Company 16th Infantry was a success. Mistakes were made it is true and many of the mistakes made increased the casualties of the Company. In every instance those mistakes were the result of lack of knowledge that comes with training. If the lessons taught by our mistakes will be learned by the platoon leaders and company commanders of the next generation, the excess suffering caused by our errors will not have been in vain.

QUESTIONS ON THE OPERATIONS OF THE MACHINE GUN COMPANY 16TH INFANTRY IN THE SECOND PHASE MEUSE ARGONNE OFFENSIVE

1. The Second Phase of the Meuse Argonne Offensive began

   (1) September 26th

   (2) October 4th

   (3) November 1st — Answer 2

2. The 1st Division was at the beginning of the Second Phase Meuse Argonne Offensive

   (1) In the front line

   (2) In reserve — Answer 1

3. The left Brigade of the 1st Division during the Second Phase Meuse Argonne Offensive was the

   (1) 2d Brigade

   (2) 1st Brigade

   (3) 103d Brigade — Answer 2

4. During the Second Phase Meuse Argonne Offensive the 1st Division was commanded by:

   (1) Fiske

   (2) McArthur

   (3) Parker

   (4) Hines

   (5) Summerall — Answer 5

5. The success of the 1st Division in the Second Phase Meuse Argonne enabled

   (1) The 28th Division to capture Grand Pre

   (2) The 26th Division to capture Sedan

   (3) The 82d Division to attack due west across the Aire River — Answer 3

6. Is the following statement correct or incorrect?

Machine guns are very valuable weapons for use on an exposed flank. Answer Correct

7. Insert the most nearly appropriate words appearing below in the blank spaces in this sentence:

The terrain northwest of Verdun is _____.

Level - rolling - hilly. Answer Hilly

8. Is the following statement correct?

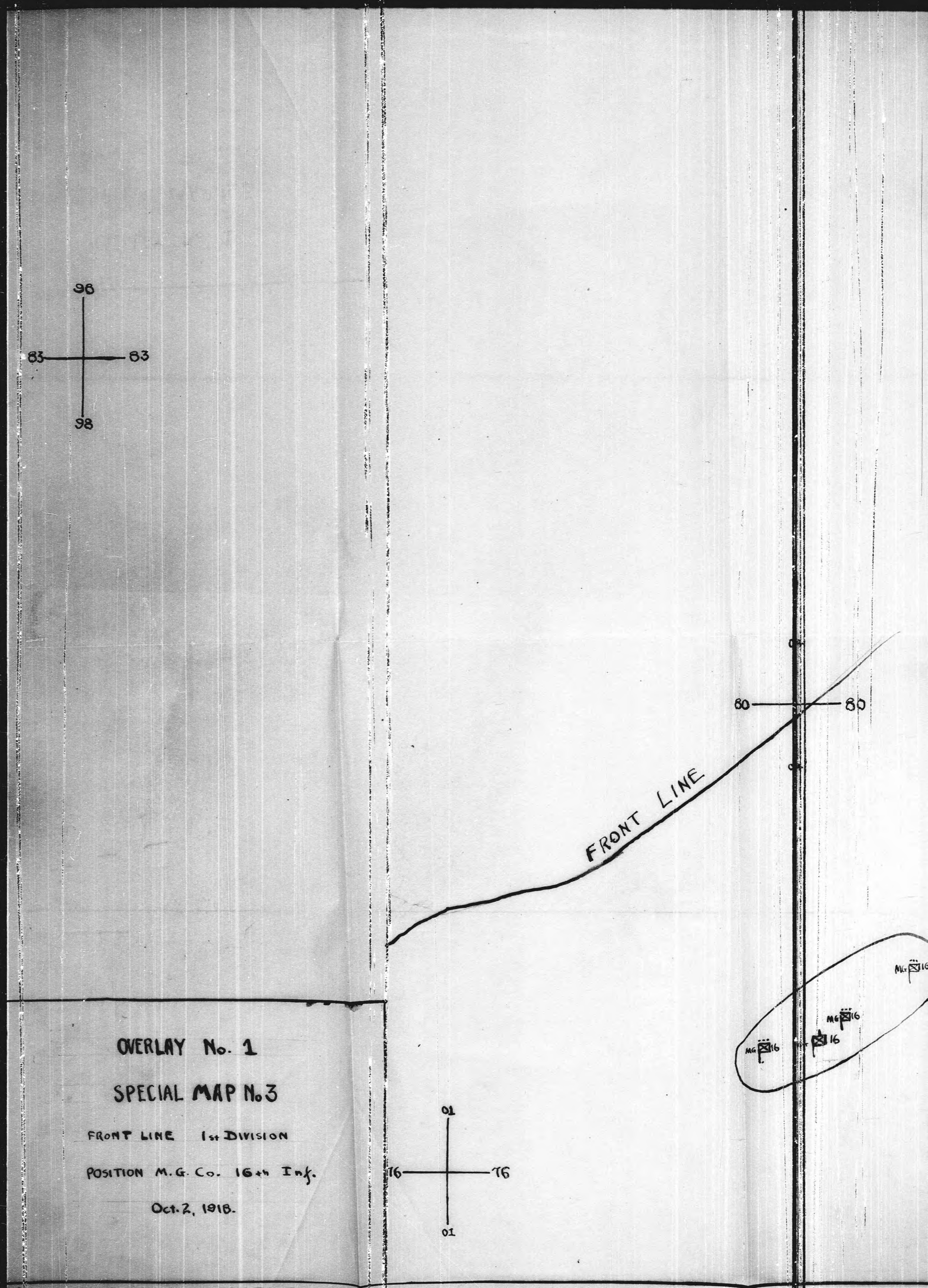
The 1st Division AEF was a part of the American 3d Army on October 4, 1918. Answer No

9. Is the following statement correct?

The Aire River is on the western edge of the Argonne Forest. Answer No

10. Is the following statement correct?

The 16th Infantry was the only unit of the American 1st Army that reached the objective assigned on October 4, 1918. Answer Yes



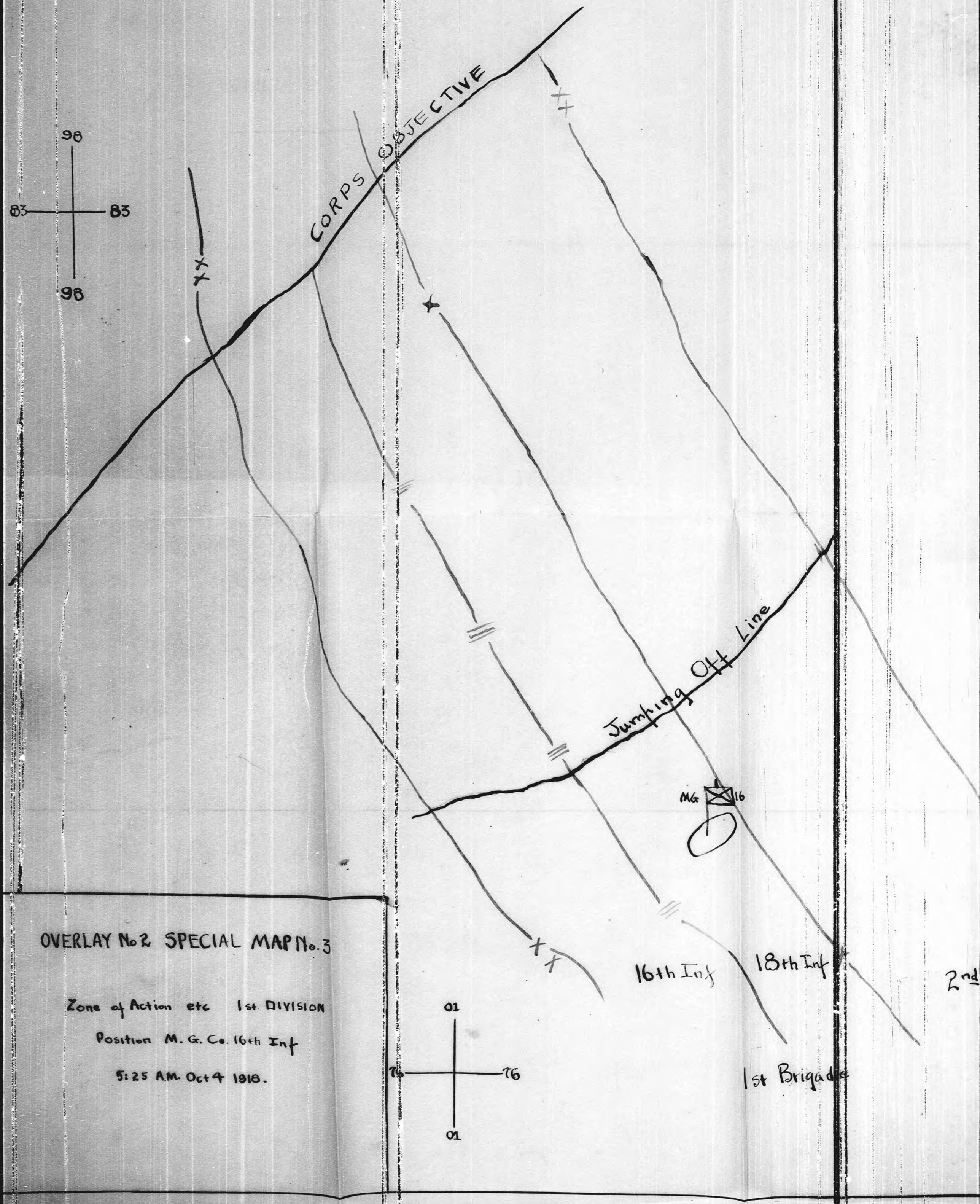
OVERLAY No. 1

SPECIAL MAP No 3

FRONT LINE 1st DIVISION

POSITION M.G. Co. 16th Inf.

Oct. 2, 1918.

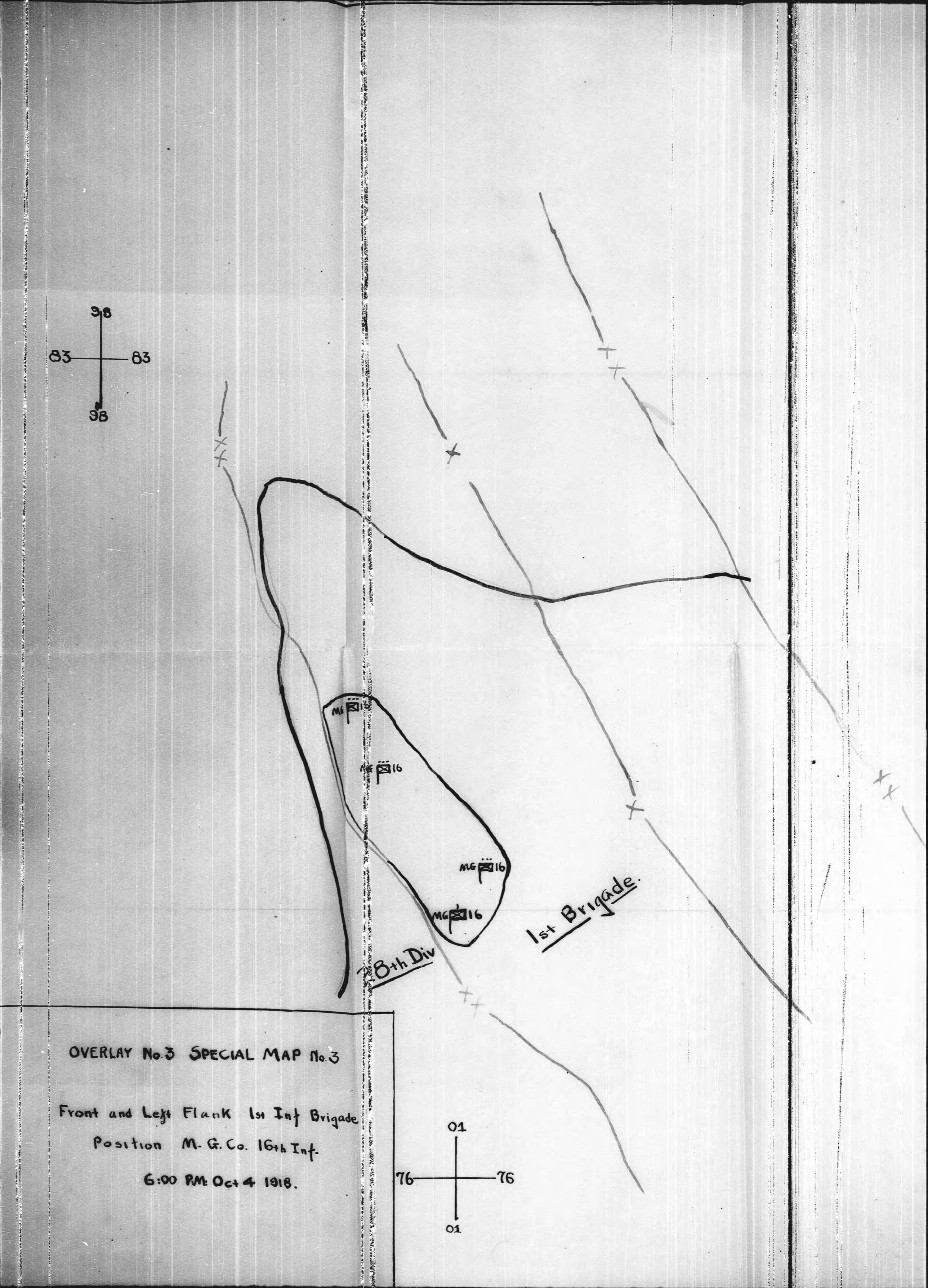


OVERLAY No 2 SPECIAL MAP No. 3

Zone of Action etc 1st DIVISION

Position M. G. Co. 16th Inf

5:25 A.M. Oct 4 1918.

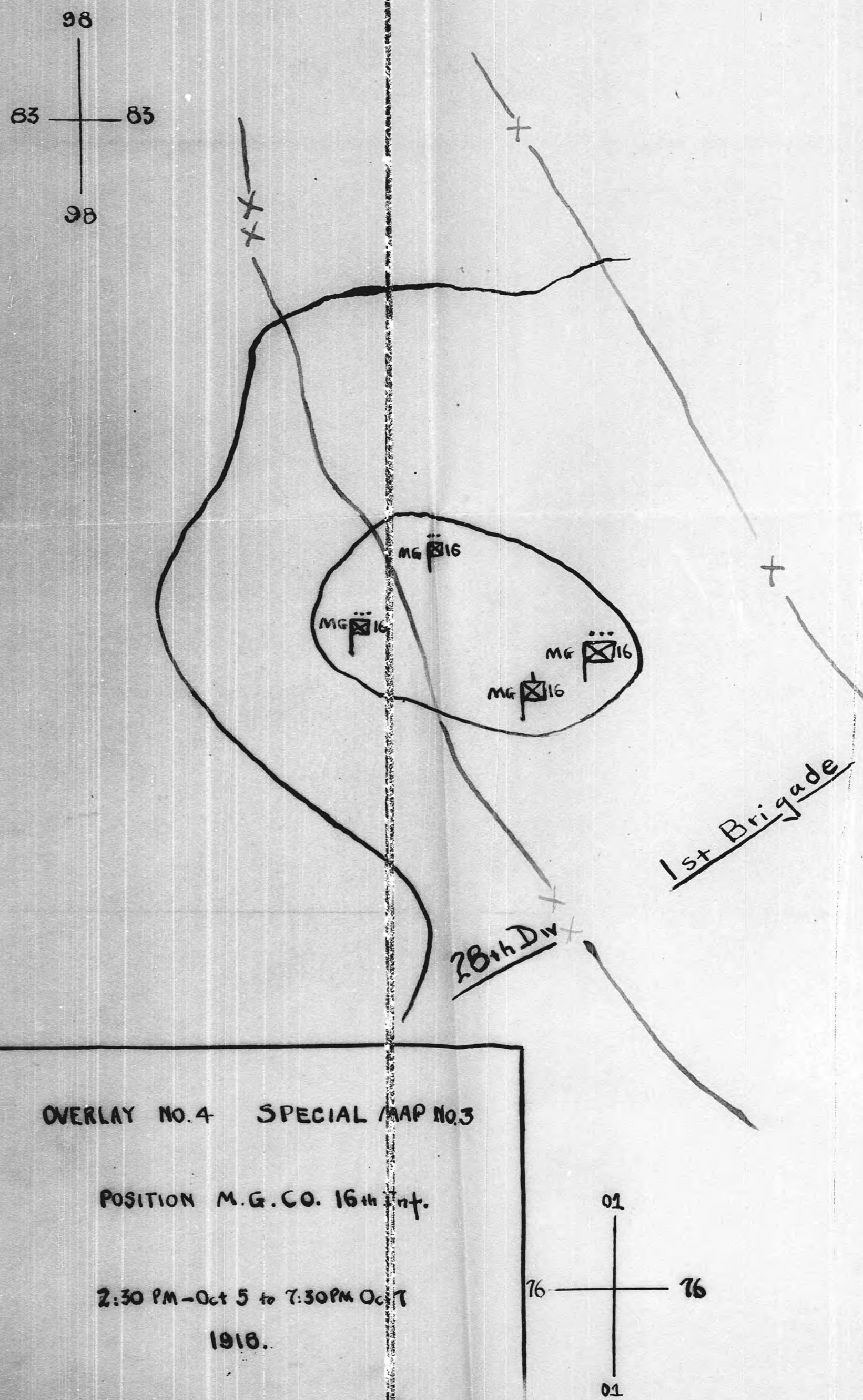


OVERLAY No. 3 SPECIAL MAP No. 3

Front and Left Flank 1st Inf Brigade

Position M. G. Co. 16th Inf.

6:00 P.M. Oct 4 1918.

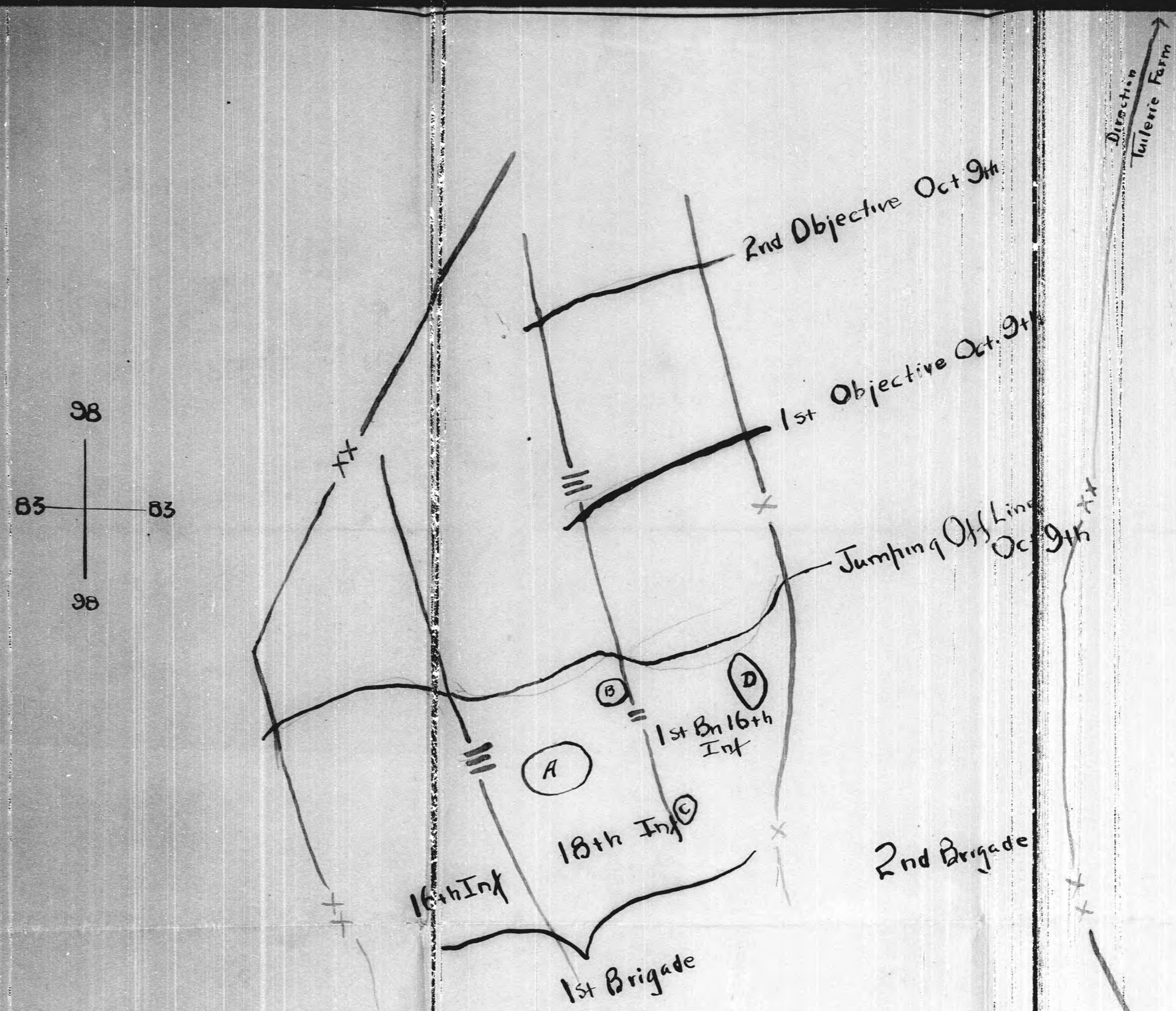


OVERLAY NO. 4 SPECIAL MAP NO. 3

POSITION M.G. CO. 16th Inf.

2:30 PM - Oct 5 to 7:30 PM Oct 7

1918.



OVERLAY No.5 SPECIAL MAP No.

The Attack of 1st Bn. 16th Inf

Oct. 9, 1918.

Area A = Location 1st Bn. 16th Inf and M.G. Co 16th Inf from 1:00 AM until about 5:30 PM Oct 8th

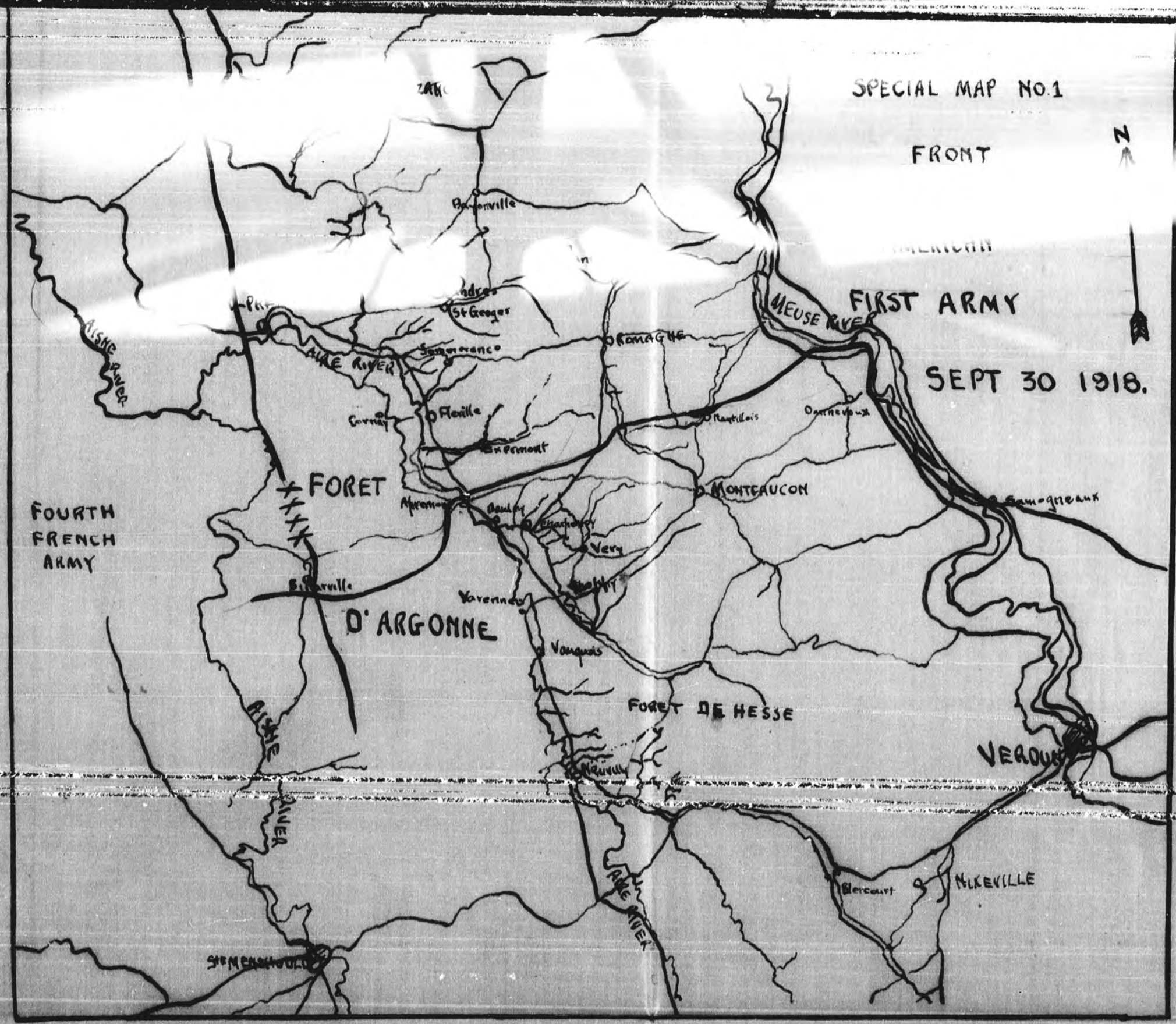
Area C = Area in which companies were fed evening of Oct 8th

Area B = Position of 1st Platoon M. G. Co 16th Inf from about 6:00 PM Oct 8th until about 9:00 A.M. Oct 9th.

Area D = Location of M.G. Co. 16th Inf (less 1st Plat.) from 11:00 P.M. Oct 8th until H Hour.

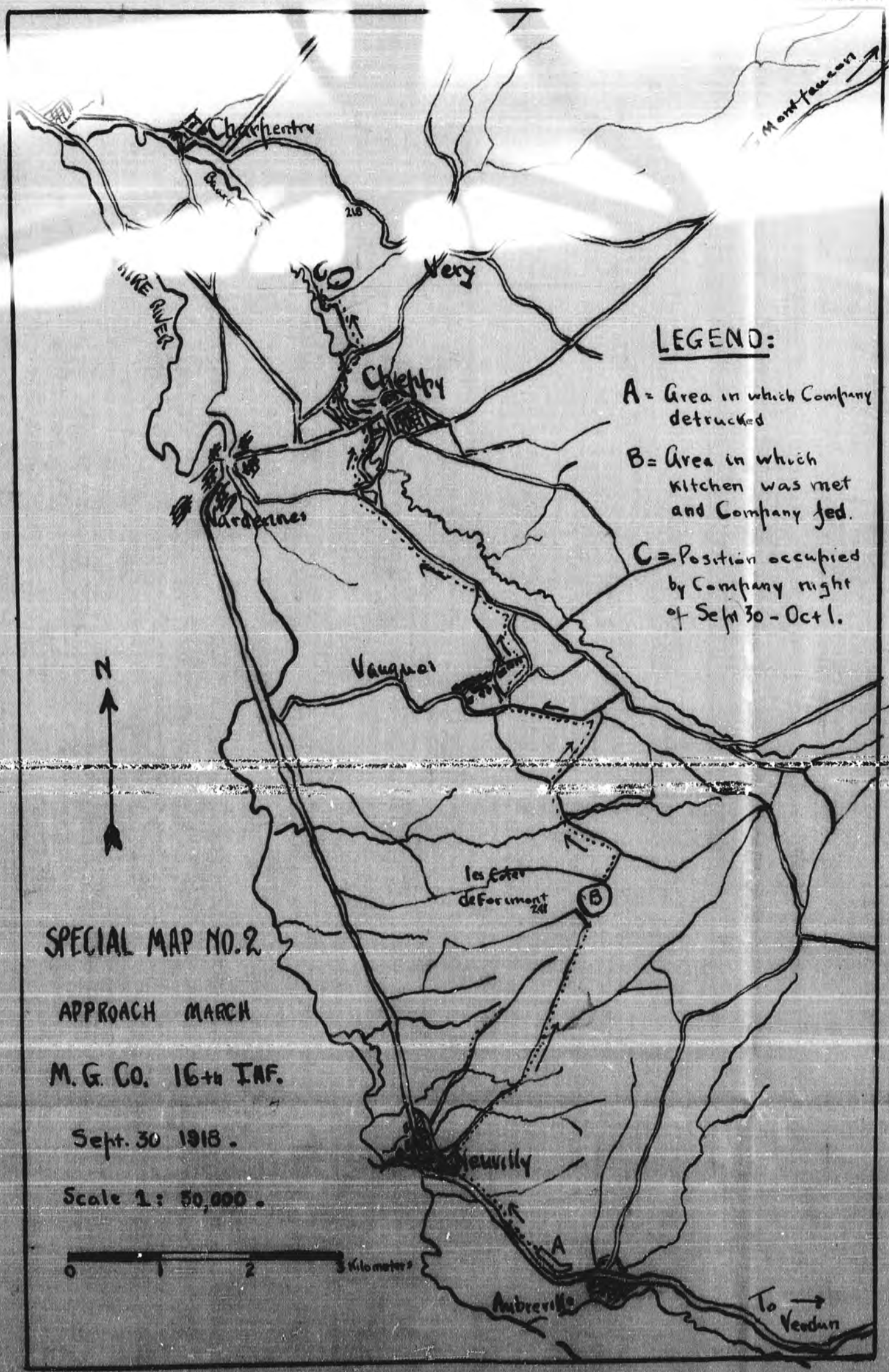
76

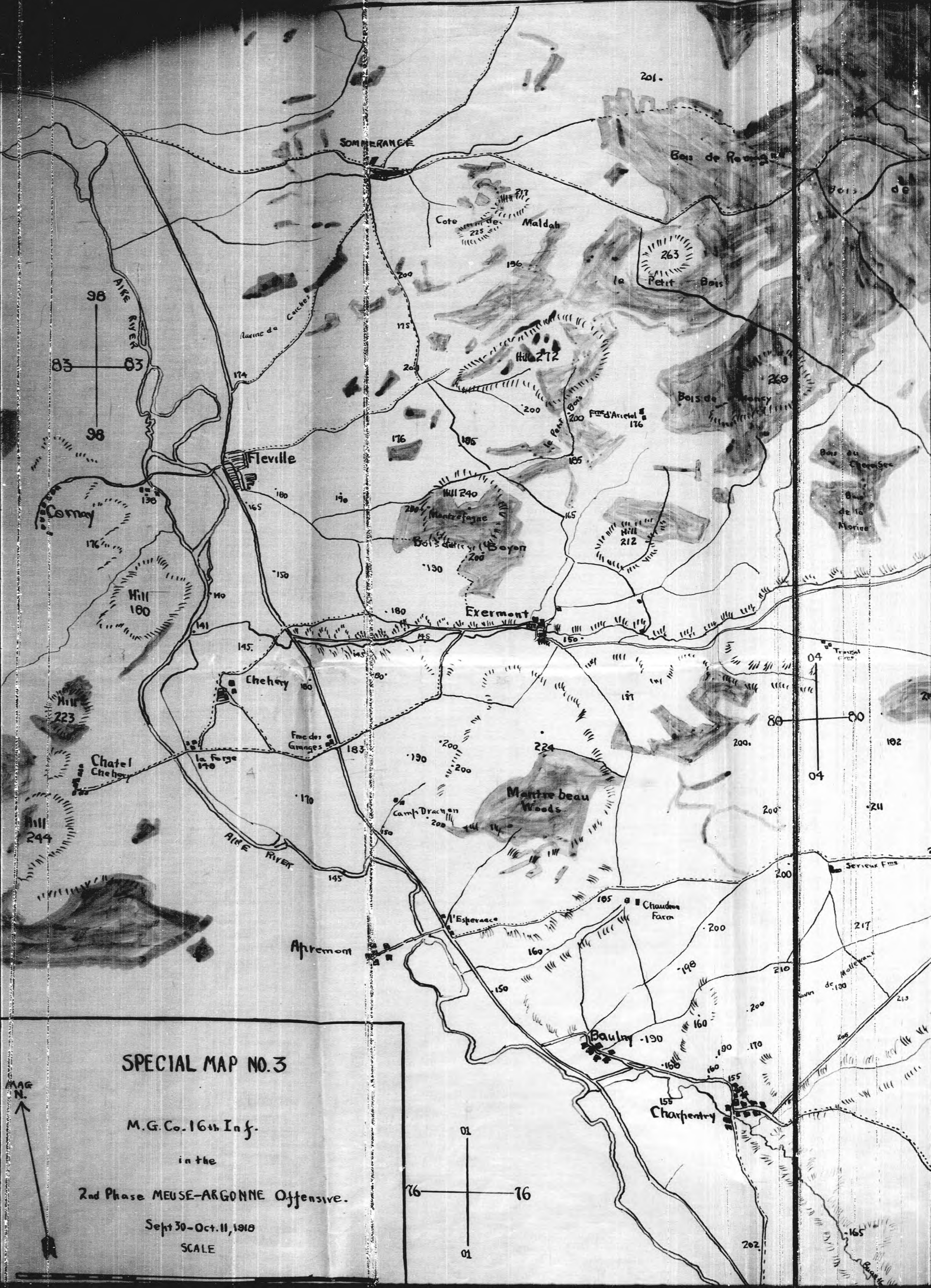
01



SCALE 1:200,000

0 5 10 15 20 25 KILOMETERS


Montfaucon
Charpentry
Very
Chiphy
Vaugnois
les Eter
de Forimont
B
A
Ambrevile
To
Verdun
N
LEGEND:
A = Area in which Company detrucked
B = Area in which kitchen was met and Company fed.
C = Position occupied by Company night of Sept 30 - Oct 1.
SPECIAL MAP NO. 2
APPROACH MARCH
M. G. Co. 16th INF.
Sept. 30 1918.
Scale 1: 50,000.
0
1
2
3 Kilometers


SPECIAL MAP NO. 3
M.G. Co. 16th Inf.
in the
2nd Phase MEUSE-ARGONNE Offensive.
Sept 30-Oct. 11, 1918
SCALE
MAG N.
SOMMERANCE
Cote de Maldah
Bois de Romagne
le Petit Bois
Bois de Romagne
Bois de Cheppy
Bois de la Morine
Bois de Cunel
Ferme d'Arrelel
Fleville
Cornay
Hill 180
Hill 223
Hill 244
Hill 272
Hill 240
Hill 212
Montrefagne
Bois de Beyon
Exermont
Chehery
Chatel Chehery
la Forge
Fme des Granges
Camp Dracken
Montrebeau Woods
l'Esperance
Chaudron Farm
Apremont
Baulny
Charpentry
Serieux Fms
Transel Line
Aire River
98
83
83
98
04
04
80
80
01
01
76
76