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MILITARY HISTORY

OPERATIONS OF COMPANY G, 18TH INFANTRY (1ST DIVISION),
IN THE AISNE-MARNE OFFENSIVE, JULY 18-JULY 23, 1918.

(Personal Experience of a Company Commander).

MAJOR F. W. HUNTINGTON, INFANTRY

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First Division
Historical Section

"World War Records: First Division, A.E.F., Regular, 1918". Volumes XII, XV and XVI. Prepared by the Historical Section, Army War College.

A collection of the official records of the First Division, A.E.F., based upon original documents. It is an accurate account of the First Division's operations in France so far as the documents contained therein are concerned. Some records are evidently missing.

Society of the
First Division

"History of the First Division during the World War, 1917-1919". The John C. Winston Company, Philadelphia, 1922.

An historical work based upon the official records of the U.S. War Department and the First Division. It is accurate in its statement of fact, and depicts the operations of the Division in an illuminating manner.

MARGINAL ABBREVIATIONS USED

- 1st Div. "World War Records: First Division, A.E.F., Regular, 1918". By the Historical Section, Army War College.
- WD War Diary, 2d Battalion, 18th Infantry. Contained in Volume XVI, World War Records: First Division, A.E.F., Regular, 1918.
- Hist "History of the First Division during the World War, 1917-1919. Compiled by the Society of the First Division.

INTRODUCTION

On July 9, 1918, the 18th Infantry, with all other elements of the 1st Division, was relieved from duty in the Cantigny Sector and placed in rest in an area 18 kilometers north of Beauvais. (1) Here the regiment expected to enjoy a well earned rest after a long tour of active service.

(1) 1st Div.,
Vol. XII
Operations
Report
7/27/18,
par. 1(a)

However, such was not to be the case for on July 11th orders were received to move again. The 2d Battalion entrucked the night of July 13-14, arriving at Palesne, Foret De Compiègne, July 16th, by night movements. (2) Here, after enduring the discomforts of a crowded truck jolting over the war-worn roads at a uniform speed, regardless of holes and bumps, which was almost as exhausting as marching on foot, the battalion went into bivouac until the night of July

(2) 1st Div.,
Vol. XVI,
WD 7/14/18
and 7/16/18

17-18. (3)

(3) Hist. p 102
Map #1

At this time Company "G" had a full complement of officers, and lacked but a few men of having a full company. Since the latter part of June the company had been part of the regimental reserve, and had taken full advantage of every opportunity to perfect its training. There were a large number of noncommissioned officers who had been in the army for a number of years, and had been with the company thru all its work in France. The replacements received while in the Seicheprey and Cantigny sectors had been fully trained and many of those who had been wounded had returned to the company. The morale and esprit was high, and it is doubtful if the organization was ever at a higher point of fighting efficiency than at this time.

Little or nothing was known of the enemy situation.

Map #1

It was common knowledge, of course, that the enemy had driven a big salient in our lines south of Soissons, and we had heard that an enemy attack in force, on the 15th of July, had been repulsed by our forces.

We also knew that our 1st and 3d Battalions had moved up toward the front on the night of the 16th-17th of July for the purpose of relieving front-line units on the following night. (4)

(4) 1st Div.,
Vol. XII,
Operations
Report
7/27/18,
par.1(c)

The company commanders were informed by the battalion commander on the morning of July 17th, that the Division would attack the following morning, that the battalion would be in Division reserve, and would start marching to its initial position that night at

(5) Hist.p 407 7:30 PM. (5)

Light packs were prescribed, an inspection was made to see that all men had their reserve rations, and extra ammunition was issued. The men were then told to get as much sleep and rest as possible.

Inquiry of the battalion commander revealed the fact that he either could not or would not inform the company commanders as to where our initial position was to be, nor were any maps of the sector available for issue to organizations.

This, then, was the situation on the eve of the entry of the 2d Battalion into the Aisne-Marne offensive; which, as subsequent events proved, was the turning point of the World War in favor of the Allies.

To summarize at this point: it will be noted that the company had been transported by trucks for a considerable distance, approximately 155 kilometers, under extremely fatiguing conditions; that it was well trained and equipped; that it contained seasoned person-

nel and was approximately at full strength; that the morale and esprit was high, that some opportunity had been given for rest after its tiresome journey; and finally that little or nothing was known of the enemy situation, the same being true regarding knowledge of the mission of our own forces, and of the terrain over which the company was to operate.

MARCH TO INITIAL POSITION OF DIVISION RESERVE NIGHT
OF JULY 17-18, 1918

Map #1

Promptly at 7:30 PM, Company "G" moved out with the 2d Battalion from Palesne, marching in an easterly direction.

This march to the initial position in division reserve is one that will forever stand out in the minds of the men who made it. Shortly after starting a storm of tropical intensity broke. Lightning flashed, and thunder reverberated as tho a heavy cannonade was in progress. A torrential rain poured down, soaking the clothing and equipment, and increasing the burden already carried by men dazed from fatigue and loss of sleep. The roads were crowded with what seemed an inextricable mass of men, animals, vehicles and other impedimenta. Two columns trying to move toward the front and one to the rear. Amid all this tangle and confusion the men pushed forward, slipping and falling, barely able to see the man in front of them. How the writer ever kept control of the company this night is beyond his comprehension, for one minute the company was in column of twos the next in a column of files, or vice versa. The only answer seems to be discipline and the desire of the men to reach the front. Finally, after marching along trails and across country,

(6) Hist.p 107

French guides appeared out of the morning mist to guide the battalion to its initial position. (6)

Map #2

During this weary march the thought uppermost in the minds of many was: "What time is zero hour and will we be in position in time?" At precisely 4:35 AM, July 18th, as the battalion was marching along the edge of the ravine west of Coeuvres-et-Valsery, the ground seemed to open at one's feet, and the barrage had started from the guns massed in the valley below. The effect was electrifying, fatigue disappeared as if by magic, and the men started singing and cheering. The discomforts of the long, tiresome march were forgotten and the men were eager and anxious to carry on.

ACTIONS - FIRST DAY - JULY 18

Map #2

By 4:45 AM the battalion reached its initial position in a large cave on the slopes of the ravine west of Coeuvres-et-Valsery, and in a few minutes the entire battalion had been placed therein.

Map #2

However, the last man had hardly taken off his equipment when the battalion received orders to follow the support battalions and take station just east of the line of departure. From there the battalion was to move to a position just east of the road Glaux Fme-Tilleuil de la Glaux, upon departure of the regimental reserves from the second objective, which was a line extending from Cravancon Farm to the eastern edge of the Missy Aux Bois ravine. (7) None of the foregoing information was transmitted to the company commanders. They simply knew they were to follow in the wake of the advance in a direction that was due east.

Map #2

(7) 1st Div.,
Vol. XVI, WD
7/18/18;
Hist. p 407

As the battalion descended the steep slopes of

Map #2

the ravine west of Coeuvres-et-Valsery into the valley, in which the town is situated, Company "G" took up an approach march formation with the first and second platoons leading, and the third and fourth following at a distance of approximately seventy-five to one hundred yards; all four platoons in platoon column with an interval of about fifty to sixty paces between them. This formation was due to the fact that enemy artillery of heavy caliber was still firing in the valley with a certain degree of regularity. The other companies in the battalion had adopted the same formation. The battalion advanced in a similar manner, Company "G" being the left rear company.

Map #2

After an arduous ascent of the precipitous slopes east of Coeuvres-et-Valsery, the battalion halted for a short rest on the broad plateau about 2500 yards southeast thereof. During this halt a battery of 75-mm guns came galloping up into position and opened fire on the apparently rapidly retreating enemy. Needless to say the battalion resumed the advance very shortly.

The march continued, with the same formation as noted above, until 10:30 AM. At this time the battalion was approaching the western edge of Dommiers. Here the battalion went into bivouac just west of Dommiers, south of the Coeuvres-et-Valsery--Dommiers road and north of the Lorient--Dommiers road. (8)

(8) 1st Div. Vol. XII, Operations Report, 7/27/18, par. 2 (b); Map #2

Areas were soon assigned the companies, and shortly after the halt everyone was asleep except the guard. During the approach to the bivouac area evidence of a hasty retreat by the enemy was seen on all sides in the shape of abandoned equipment and materiel

of all description, and the large number of dead and wounded.

Map #2

About 6:00 PM French Cavalry was seen approaching from the west along the Coeuvres-et-Valsery road. It continued to pass the bivouac area for about two hours. It presented an enthralling and never to be forgotten sight to those who saw it, especially after dark when men and animals were silhouetted against the bright moon. From whence this cavalry came, or where it went, no one ever knew, for we never saw it again. At the same time that the cavalry was passing a large number of tanks could be seen moving toward the front just north of the cavalry column.

The battalion remained in bivouac the rest of the night, without gaining any further information of the enemy. Though there were unconfirmed rumors to the effect that our brigade (1st Brigade) had gained all objectives at the expense of heavy casualties. No food or water reached the men during the night and they had to be cautioned constantly about drinking water from wells, streams, etc. (9)

(9) Hist.p 120

ACTIONS - SECOND DAY - JULY 19

About 6:30 AM the next morning the battalion commander called the company commanders together and informed them that the battalion would move out in thirty minutes "in that direction" (pointing east).

(10) 1st Div.
Vol.XII,
Operations
Report,
7/27/18

(10) Promptly at the appointed hour the battalion moved out in the approach march formation used during the 18th. As we moved forward to our new position further evidence of the hasty retreat of the enemy noted on the day before was seen in the form of abandoned field guns, transport, heavy machine guns, etc.

Map #2

About 8:30 AM we came in sight of the Paris-Soissons highway, which was easily identified by its borders of tall trees. The shelling along the road was so heavy that most of us thought that our front line must be established there. However, after a short halt, the march was resumed, with the battalion still in column of platoons. The battalion had hardly cleared the road just north of Cravancon Fme when it was greeted with a perfect hail of machine-gun bullets. Fortunately the ground had a growth of grass 18-24 inches high in which the men immediately took cover, still in column of platoons.

Map #2

The sound of rifle and machine-gun fire could now be heard from our left front and even some voices, which indicated to us that we must be pretty close to the front line. Here the battalion stayed, pinned to the ground by machine gun fire which just cleared the top of the grass, until about 1:00 PM. At this time orders were received to move to the rear. By this time the intensity of the machine-gun fire had materially decreased, in fact almost stopped. The orders to move to the rear were received from the battalion commander in person who had called the company commanders together. Why the battalion was moved so close to the front ^{LINE} was never known. The only explanation in the writer's opinion is faulty staff work on the part of the division, or lack of information of the situation by the staff.

Map #2

In a few minutes the battalion started to the rear, recrossing the Paris-Soissons highway without any casualties. In fact no casualties were suffered

by Company "G" during the time the battalion was pinned to the ground. After the battalion, marching west, had cleared the Cravancon Fme-Missy Aux Bois road the battalion commander ordered a change of direction to the north. Here it was forcibly brought to my attention that troops once deployed are hard to control. The company was marching with two platoons in front and two in rear, in platoon columns with about seventy-five paces interval, and the same distance, between platoons. The company commander with company headquarters was marching approximately in the center of the above described formation at the time the battalion commander's signal to change direction was seen. The company commander's whistle signal was not heard by the commanders of the leading platoons, nor by any members of these platoons. It was only by sending runners to the commanders of the leading platoons and ordering them to halt that it was possible to indicate to them that perhaps their attention should be directed to the rear at times in order to receive any signals that might be intended for them.

Map #2

The battalion was finally halted in the area just south of Missy Aux Bois, between the Cravancon Fme-Missy Aux Bois road and the La Glaux Fme-Missy Bois road, about 2:30 PM. Up to this time the company commanders had not seen a map of the terrain over which we were operating. We knew that we were in the vicinity of the Paris-Soissons road and that the enemy was somewhere east of us. Neither did we know in whose zone of action we were.

Map #2

Very soon after halting a battery of light

(11) Hist.p 124 artillery galloped up and went into action a short distance north of our position. (11) This caused the enemy to send up a balloon to the north. It was not until just before dark, however, that any enemy shells fell in our area, and there were very few of those. So our fears of being subjected to a heavy enemy counterbattery bombardment came to naught, much to our relief.

Map #2

(12) 1st Div.
Vol. XVI,
WD 7/19/18 The battalion remained in this area until about 9:30 PM when it was again ordered to move to the rear. There being little or no shelling at this time the battalion moved out in route column, arriving at the crossroads at Tilleul de la Glaux approximately at midnight. (12) (NOTE: The time of arrival at the crossroads at Tilleul de la Glaux differs from that shown in the reference. It could not be otherwise, since the battalion was not placed at the disposal of the Commanding General 2d Brigade until July 20, as indicated by all other accounts of this engagement.)

Shortly after arriving at this new position the men were ordered to dig fox holes, since the enemy had a large number of planes in the air that night, and it was feared that our position at the crossroads would be subjected to aerial bombardment if any area was.

ACTIONS - THIRD DAY - JULY 20

Shortly after 2:00 AM our suspicions regarding an aerial bombardment materialized. At this time two enemy planes were heard overhead. The men were immediately told to lie down, remain motionless and keep their faces down. These orders had no sooner been given

when one plane dropped a flare which seemed to light up the landscape as if it was broad daylight. In a few seconds we could hear the peculiar sound of the approaching bombs. As a result of this attack the battalion lost its trench mortar and 17 men, three bombs making almost direct hits on the area occupied by this unit. No further incident happened to mar the night's rest, and the men got what sleep they could.

Shortly after daylight a lone Austrian 77-mm gun started firing on our position with great regularity. Practically every time a shell landed a man was wounded or killed. Fortunately, for the wounded, the road north from La Glaux Fme appeared to be part of the route travelled by the division ambulances, for those whose wounds were so severe that they could not walk were picked up here by the ambulances. It was indeed a nerve racking morning, for every one could not help but wonder if the next shell would land in his fox hole.

During our stay in this position the companies were disposed northwest, northeast, southeast and southwest of the crossroads; Company "G" occupying the southeast area. It was not thought by the writer at the time, nor have the intervening years changed his views, that this was the best disposition possible. However, those were the orders and they were obeyed without question. During the period from daylight until about 1:30 PM several trips were made to the battalion command post, which was located right at the crossroads, by the company commander in search of information about the situation. The other company

commanders did likewise, but nothing could be learned. We were especially interested in learning the meaning of the heavy artillery fire which had started at 12:00 noon.

At 1:45 PM all company commanders were summoned to the battalion command post and informed that the 2d Brigade was to attack Berzy-le-Sec at 2:00 PM, and that our battalion had been placed under the orders of the

Map #2

(13) Hist. pp 128 and 410; 1st Div. Vol XII Operations Report 7/28/18. par. 2(e)

Commanding General 2d Brigade. (13)

The battalion was formed and deployed in the approach march formation used on July 18th, Company "G" being the left front company, first and second platoons leading. At 2:00 PM the battalion moved out across

Map #2

country, ^{Bois-}guiding its left on the Tilleul de la Glauz-Missy Aux₁ Ploissy road. As the battalion started to cross the high ground about 1400 yards southeast of Missy Aux Bois a veritable hail of shells greeted it. One shell landed in the center of the left leading platoon, killing or wounding about 25 men and dazing the remainder for a few minutes. The battalion continued to advance with but few more casualties, finally arriving on the high ground southeast of Ploissy shortly before dusk, where it spent the night.

Map #2

From this position Ploissy could be seen to the north, and Berzy-le-Sec to the northeast. Rumors began to fly thick and fast, the two most persistent being that we were to be relieved that night, and the other that we were to attack Berzy-le-Sec. In the meantime the men, without being told, began to dig fox holes for themselves in the areas assigned to them.

Map #2

In Company "G" the company was placed in position as in a section column formation with the platoon commanders

between the section columns. It was felt that this formation would facilitate finding men in the dark, give better control to the platoon commanders and minimize losses in the event that the plateau was shelled unexpectedly.

(14) Hist.p 132 No information was forthcoming from battalion headquarters relative to plans for the morning, so everybody went to sleep to try and get as much rest as possible before we started marching again, for it seemed as if we had done nothing but march and countermarch ever since the beginning of the battle. Some food and water was received during the night, which put the men in much better spirits. (14) They also felt that tomorrow must surely bring them to grips with the enemy they had apparently been chasing like a will-o'-the-wisp.

ACTIONS - FOURTH DAY - JULY 21

About 3:15 AM the company commander of Company "G" was awakened by a runner from battalion headquarters who told him that he was to report to the battalion commander at once.

Getting to his feet he called for the 1st Sergeant, told him where he was going, and that he was to awaken the rest of the officers, inform them where he had gone and have them assemble at the company command post and await his return. Ordering the assembly of the company officers was entirely unconscious on the part of the company commander, partly or wholly induced, it is presumed, by the memory of the length of time it had taken to assemble the company the day before, when the battalion had been ordered to support the 2d Brigade in

Map #2

its attack on Berzy le Sec.

Taking a runner with him, the company commander stumbled off in the darkness in the direction of battalion headquarters, wondering what was going to happen. Upon his arrival he found the other company commanders assembled, including the Commanding officer of Company "C", 2d Machine Gun Battalion. While waiting for the battalion commander to return, who we were told had hurriedly left for regimental headquarters a few minutes before, speculation became rife as to what the battalion was going to do next. This continued until the battalion commander returned at 4:15 AM.

He said: "Are all the company commanders present?" Upon being told they were, he continued as follows: "Our battalion has been released from division reserve. Companies G and H return to regimental control. Company F is attached to the 2d Brigade, and Company E will report to the Commanding General 1st Brigade as brigade reserve." (15)

(15) Hist.p 134

"The regiment attacks at 4:45 AM in its zone of action. First Battalion on the right, Companies G and H on the left. Company G in assault, followed by Company H at 500 meters. (16) Line of departure: Paris-Soissons railroad."

(16) Hist.p 134

Map #2

"Battalion headquarters will be in the woods just west of the railroad".

"It is now 4:25 AM".

"Does everybody understand?"

"That is all."

Turning to the company commander of Company "G" the battalion commander said: "Here is a map of the

Map #2

sector. Your objective is the high ground north of Buzancy. When you arrive at the railroad you and the company commander of Company "H" orient yourselves and determine your direction of advance. Be sure and maintain contact with the 1st Battalion on your right. A runner from regimental headquarters will guide you to the railroad. That is all."

After receiving these orders the company commander of Company "G" told the company commander of Company "H" that he would see him at the railroad, and hurried back to his company.

Upon his arrival at the company command post he told the company officers that "G" and "H" companies had been returned to regimental control, that they were to attack in conjunction with what was left of the 1st Battalion at 4:45 AM, with Company "G" in assault, and Company "H" in support, and that he would give them further details upon arrival at the railroad, which was the line of departure.

The men were hurriedly awakened, the company formed in platoon columns, the third and fourth platoons leading. Just as the company was formed the guide from regimental headquarters arrived and the company moved off in the semi-darkness.

As the company commander followed the guide he wondered if the guide would find the railroad, if he would arrive before the 1st Battalion started to advance, and how the company would conduct itself. Proceeding almost at a run, with the men slipping and falling down the steep slopes amid the thick underbrush of the last few hundred yards, the company arrived at the railroad at 5:05 AM.

Companies G and H were halted on the west side of the railroad, and the officers of both companies gathered around the company commander of Company "G" on the railroad, and the map he had spread on the ground. The railroad at this point was about 10 to 15 feet above the level of the ground. Scarcely had the officers assembled when several bursts of machine-gun fire from the left flank made them hurriedly seek cover to the west of the railroad. Here the officers oriented themselves and the direction of advance was determined. They were then informed that the objective for the day was the high ground north of Buzancy, and that contact must be maintained with the 1st Battalion on the right.

Map #2

No signs of the 1st Battalion could be seen so two scouts were sent south along the railroad to see if they could locate it. Pending their return the platoon commanders informed their platoons of the orders that had been issued. Shortly after the enemy machine guns started firing from the left flank a heavy barrage was laid down by the hostile artillery extending east from the railroad for about 250-300 yards. In view of this the platoon commanders were directed to form their platoons in two waves, each wave being deployed in line of squad columns. Company headquarters being located in the center of the company between the four platoons. The company had one section of machine guns from the 3d Platoon, Company "C", 2d Machine-Gun Battalion, attached to it, and two first aid men from the battalion medical detachment. The section of machine guns was ordered to march on the right flank of the company abreast of the rear of the right rear platoon. (17)

(17) 1st Div.

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When the two men returned who had been sent to locate the 1st Battalion and reported that they could not find it, the company commander of Company "G" decided that both it and the 16th Infantry, which was on the left flank, must have advanced at zero hour in order to take advantage of the rolling barrage which our artillery had laid down. (18) So, at 5:20 AM, thirty-five minutes after zero hour, he gave the command "Forward". Not a soul moved. The company commander looked at the company in astonishment and wondered if they were going to refuse to advance thru the heavy barrage the enemy was laying down in front of them. So he blew his whistle, commanded "Forward" and gave the arm signal "Forward, March". Same result, nobody moved. He stood dumbfounded for what seemed an age to him, and then dashed up the railroad embankment to the railroad tracks, blew his whistle again, called "Follow Me" and disappeared the other side of the railroad. In a few seconds the scouts of the leading platoons appeared, followed by their platoon leaders and the advance had started.

The advance for the first 400-500 yards was over very swampy ground and thru high underbrush. The fact that the ground was so swampy is believed to have been a great factor in reducing the casualties in the company while advancing thru the heavy hostile barrage, since the shells penetrated the ground quite a distance before exploding.

Map #2

Crossing the valley and leaving Visigneaux behind, the advance continued up the slope toward Bois Gerard. During this part of the advance, thru a wheat field not yet harvested, the company came under heavy

machine-gun fire from the left flank, suffering a number of casualties; but continued the advance to the road along the western edge of Bois Gerard. Here the company was halted and reorganized. During the reorganization contact was made with the French on the right. The company commander was also informed that the platoon commanders of the rear platoons had been killed crossing the railroad, and that the first aid men had been so badly wounded that they could not continue the advance. The sergeant in command of the machine gun section told the company commander of Company "G", on inquiry, that he was having a hard time keeping up, but that he would do his best.

When the reorganization was completed the advance was resumed with the two leading platoons having their first waves deployed as skirmishers, and their second waves deployed in section columns. The two rear platoons followed in section columns. Before resuming the advance the men had been cautioned that the 1st Battalion was probably in front of them, and to be on the watch for any signs of it. Up to this time nothing had been seen of the 16th Infantry.

Map #2

The advance continued thru the Bois Gerard without encountering any opposition, but as the company emerged from the eastern edge of the woods it came under severe machine-gun fire from the left flank and front. However, the forward movement was continued and the enemy machine gun crews retreated faster than the company could advance.

Map #2

When the western edge of the woods bordering the western side of the Soissons-Chateau Thierry road

was reached the company was halted, in order to check hurriedly on its formation, intervals, distances and approximate losses, before continuing the advance thru the next woods.

While this hurried reorganization was taking place, an enemy plane, flying just high enough to clear the tree tops, flew over the company and turned east. It had hardly disappeared over the trees before a terrific concentration of enemy artillery was laid down on this area. This concentration caused at least fifty per cent of the casualties suffered by the company during the day. It also caused Company "H" to suffer large losses.

Those of the wounded who could walk were told to go to the rear, locate an aid station and inform the personnel at the aid station of the number of men too severely injured to walk.

The remainder of the company was quickly moved into the edge of the woods, halted and hastily reorganized again, and the advance continued.

By this time the company consisted of but two platoons. The leading platoon deployed in two waves, the first wave in squad columns and the second wave in section columns. The rear platoon deployed in section columns echeloned to the left, as we still had not made contact with the 16th Infantry. What remained of the machine-gun section, it had suffered about fifty per cent losses by this time, was also placed on the left flank.

The men, tho visibly fatigued by the morning's advance over the rough terrain that had been traversed thus far, were eager to push on and come into actual

contact with the invisible enemy that had killed or wounded their comrades who had been their "bunkies" for the last nine to twelve months.

Map #2

The advance continued slowly thru dense woods and thick underbrush, encountering machine-gun fire from the front and left flank, tho not able to actually see the enemy who kept retiring in the face of our steady advance. The Soissons-Chateau Thierry road was reached and crossed, and the company emerged into a wheat field that had been harvested. While crossing this field heavy machine-gun fire was received from our left and left rear, tho no signs of the enemy could be seen, even with field glasses.

Map #2

The company pushed on until the unimproved road in the eastern edge of the woods 300 yards northwest of the Chateau De Buzancy was reached. Here a halt was made and three outposts established in front of the company consisting of one rifleman and one automatic rifleman each. A patrol of four men was sent to the right flank to see if the 1st Battalion could be located. Orders were issued to reorganize the company and ascertain the number of men present.

At this time, 10:30 AM, the company commander of Company "H" joined the company commander of Company "G". He was informed what actions had been taken by Company "G", and was asked how many men Company "H" had left. He replied that Company "H" had 35 men, exclusive of the machine-gun section which had been reduced to 9 men. At this point the company commander of Company "G" was informed that 30 men of the company were present, and 10 men of the machine-gun section with their guns.

When the company commanders learned that they had lost approximately 80 per cent of their men who had started in the attack they decided to stay where they were until they learned where the units were who were supposed to be on their flanks. At this junction the patrol sent out by Company "G" returned, and stated that the 1st Battalion had been located along the unimproved road running southeast from the road that the company was now on.

Just as the patrol completed its report, the 1st Lieutenant commanding the 1st Battalion walked up. He stated that he had 60 men, that his battalion had taken about 200 prisoners from the Chateau De Buzancy, but that he had been unable to hold the chateau due to the fact that the French had not come up on his right, and the town of Buzancy was too strongly held for him to attack, besides it was out of his zone of action anyway.

Map #2

A decision was reached by the three officers to notify the regimental commander of the situation, also the commanding officer of the 2d Battalion, sending them at the same time sketches indicating their position. The sketch showing the position occupied was deemed doubly necessary, for in addition to informing the regimental commander of the extent of their advance during the morning, it was hoped that it would stop our artillery from firing into our rear. Since no Very Pistols were on hand it had been impossible to signal the artillery to increase its range, and no friendly planes had called for a display of panels indicating the location of our front lines.

Arrangements were also made by the company

Map #2

commander, Company "G", and the commanding officer, 1st Battalion to establish a liaison post at the junction of the unimproved roads, so that contact might be maintained between the two forces. These arrangements having been completed, Company "H" was moved up and extended the line to the north as far as the improved road leading east from Chaudun, with the machine guns attached to both companies located on the extreme left flank where they could fire to the right front, front and left flank.

After checking the dispositions that had been ordered, the company commanders of G and H Companies started on a personal reconnaissance of the left and left rear to try and find out what had become of the 16th Infantry. By this time it was about noon and shells, apparently from our own artillery were still falling in rear of our position. In addition, intermittent machine-gun fire was being received from the left and left rear. However, our position was well concealed and no casualties were suffered from these sources.

Map #2

The two company commanders proceeded north along the unimproved road their companies were occupying to the Chaudun road, and thence west along the northern edge of the woods until they reached the northwestern edge, 250 yards east of the Soissons-Chateau Thierry road. Here they halted and, with their field glasses, surveyed the country to the north and northwest. Berzy-le-Sec could be seen and everything appeared to be quiet in that vicinity. for no signs of heavy artillery fire could be observed. Still no signs of any of our forces could be observed

Map #2

Map #2

on our left flank. It was during this reconnaissance that the company commander of Company "H" was wounded and had to be evacuated. This brought the casualties among the officers of the companies up to 70 per cent. A total of seven out of ten having been killed or wounded since the beginning of the morning's advance.

Upon his return to the company command post the company commander of Company "G" dispatched another message to the battalion commander, stating that up to 12:45 PM no signs of the 16th Infantry had been seen and that his left flank was up in the air.

About this time an enemy plane flew low over the position, but the men were so well concealed that it is not believed that the observer saw anything. From then until the company was relieved, the next day, an enemy plane flew over the position during daylight about every two hours. Evidently nothing was ever seen by it, for no artillery fire was brought to bear on our position.

At 2:15 PM two or three stray shells landed in the area occupied by the machine guns, killing or wounding twelve men, and putting all the guns out of action. This was a great blow to us, as we had depended upon them to protect our left flank in case of an attack from that direction.

However, at 2:30 PM the 16th Infantry with a few Engineers arrived and extended our left flank to the northwest. (19) The battalion commander was immediately notified that the 16th Infantry had made contact with the company.

Shortly after this a message was received from

the battalion commander stating that the regimental commander directed that our position be held at all costs. The company was informed of these directions, and the men immediately started digging fox holes.

During the night hot food and water was received which aroused the men's spirits considerably, tho they were somewhat disappointed when they learned they would not be relieved as had been promised. (20)

(20) 1st Div.,
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Sentinels were doubled during the night and pushed out farther in advance of our position in order to prevent a surprise enemy counterattack, whom we felt must know where our position was. However, nothing occurred and the men received a fairly good night's rest.

ACTIONS - FIFTH DAY - JULY 22

Nothing of any moment occurred in the sector during the day. Enemy planes continued to fly over the position, but saw nothing. About 9:30 AM the battalion and regimental commanders, accompanied by the reconnaissance parties of the 15th Scottish Division, arrived to make a reconnaissance of our position and complete plans for our relief that night.

The remainder of the day was occupied in resting and burying the dead.

ACTIONS - SIXTH DAY - JULY 23

At 1:00 AM the company was relieved by a company

(21) Hist.p 138 of the 15th Scottish Division (21) and proceeded to the
Map #1 battalion bivouac area in the Foret de Villers Cotterets near the crossing of the Soissons-Paris and Coeuvres-et-

(22) 1st Div., Valsery - Longpont roads. (22) The company arrived at
Vol. XVI, its bivouac area about 8:30 AM, marching from its
WD 7/25/18

Maps #1 & position to Visigneux-Chazelle-Chandun-Soissons-Paris
#2 V/A

Road-bivouac area.

Map #1

(23) 1st Div.
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Here hot food was waiting, and after eating all slept from exhaustion. At 7:00 PM the company entrucked for Vinantes, arriving there early the next morning, July 24. (23)

LESSONS

In the foregoing narrative some attempt has been made to stress the salients of omission or commission. These might be further discussed as follows:

1. Prior to an attack unit commanders should have all possible knowledge of the enemy situation, and the terrain over which their units are to operate. This presupposes an opportunity to make a ground reconnaissance, or at least a map reconnaissance. They should also be acquainted with the missions of their own unit, the next higher unit, and of adjacent units. This naturally includes a knowledge of their initial position in the attack, and the hour that the attack is to start. Prior to the attack on July 18th the company commander of Company "G" knew only that his company was to be a part of the Division reserve, and that the Division would attack sometime on the morning of July 18th. If he had had further knowledge of the situation as outlined above, it is believed that he would have had greater confidence in himself, and would have been in a better position to carry out the orders of the Division commander in the event that the battalion commander became a casualty.

2. In connection with the foregoing it is to be noted that the company and all elements of the division were concentrated in the sector for the attack

but about thirty-six hours before the attack. Little chance for ground reconnaissance was therefore afforded, and the same situation will probably be present in any future war, especially at the outbreak of hostilities, or in a mobile situation. But, it is believed that more information should have been given unit commanders, since it was available, and every effort should have been made to supply at least the company commanders with maps, if intelligent action was to be expected of them in operating over terrain with which they were absolutely unacquainted.

3. We are taught that the commander of a reserve keeps himself informed by: .

a. Personal reconnaissance and observation from advantageous points of the terrain.

b. Information received from higher headquarters.

We are also taught that the reserve commander maintains close liaison with the headquarters of the unit which he is serving as reserve, in order that he may be promptly informed of changes in the situation. Whether or not the reserve commander observed the foregoing in this instance the writer is not prepared to state. However, it can be said that at no time while the company was part of the division reserve was it ever informed as to where it was located on the terrain, nor to where it was going during the various moves made while acting in that capacity. To the writer's knowledge no routes of approach were reconnoitered to the forward areas in the division zone of action. If they were they were not communicated to the company commanders. Due to the writer's ignorance

of the actions required in such a situation he made no determined effort to obtain any information regarding the above mentioned subjects. Needless to say, if a similar situation should occur in the future all facilities at his command would be employed to obtain the required information.

4. Our Field Service Regulations state that: "The distance of a reserve from the units which have been committed to action varies with the extent to which clearness exists as to its employment." In view of this principle it is hard to understand why part of the division reserve was moved east of the Soissons-Paris road, just north of the Cravancon Fme, early on the morning of July 19th, where it was pinned to the ground by machine-gun fire for approximately three hours. The only possible explanation is that it was an error on the part of the division staff. It had had twelve hours in which to secure ^{relative} information/to the location of our front lines and of the enemy situation. This, coupled with the fact that the battalion was later in the day moved to the rear, gives further credence to the supposition that the division staff erred by unnecessarily exposing part of its reserve to the chance of incurrung severe losses.

5. Again, we are told that "reserves should never be crowded into a position which the enemy may shell suddenly." This principle was most certainly violated in a flagrant manner by ordering the battalion to take station at the crossroads Tilleul de la Glaux late in the evening of July 19th. Here two very important arteries of communication crossed, and it is fair to assume that the enemy was cognizant of

Map #2

Map #2

this fact. This presumption was vindicated later by the fact that the battalion was bombed in this position during the evening, and received constant fire from the enemy artillery the next day as long as it remained there. Quite severe losses were sustained by all units in the battalion during its occupation of this area. While the writer does not contend that reserves can always be placed where they will not come under hostile fire, still, it is believed that such a sensitive point as the one in question should not have been selected; in view of the fact that other positions in the immediate vicinity were available that afforded much better protection and cover.

6. The means of attempting to gain and maintain contact with the units on the right and left of Company "G" during the attack have been fully discussed during the narrative. It is sufficient to say that it is a vital principle that should never be neglected on the part of any commander. In this instance the methods employed appeared to be the only possible solution due to the fact that the company was thirty-five minutes late in starting the attack.

7. Today we are taught that machine-gun units support the advance of rifle companies, and are not attached to them, as was the case during the Aisne-Marne offensive. In view of the tremendous losses that were sustained by the personnel of machine-gun organizations in endeavoring to maintain the same rate of advance as the rifle companies it is felt that the present principles of employing machine guns are correct. ~~In fact, the serious losses sustained~~ by these units in this battle was the cause of an

investigation in an effort to prevent a recurrence in future engagements. As a result of this investigation, and the report thereof, the writer employed his machine-gun company in the battle of St. Mihiel in essentially the manner that is now prescribed for similar operations.

8. The matter of leadership and battle psychology was rather fully discussed in relating the events of July 21st. It is felt, however, that in times of stress the leaders will more or less unconsciously select a course of action to be pursued. It may or may not be the correct one, but the subordinates will generally follow it in view of the fact that some action has been taken. That is what they require, someone to guide or lead them.

9. The formations used by Company "G" in advancing the attack on July 21st were selected at the time in view of the rough, wooded, swampy terrain over which the company was required to advance. It was thought that these formations would facilitate control and lessen the chances of incurring casualties. In view of the enemy dispositions, especially of machine guns, it is not believed that any other formations would have materially decreased the losses suffered. Although they might have been lessened by advancing more slowly and cautiously.

10. Today we stress close liaison between the infantry and the artillery. That is as it should be, and had it existed then to the degree for which we strive now, it is believed that our casualties would have been materially decreased. However, both the infantry and the artillery learned in this battle the

necessity for better contact with each other, and as time went on both improved considerably in this respect.

CONCLUSION

In view of the lessons learned and the experience gained in the Aisne-Marne offensive, the writer is driven to the conclusion: that in war most situations that confront a commander are abnormal, rather than, as many of us are prone to expect, normal ones. Thus, it is only by thorough training in times of peace, of himself and his troops in the science of war can a commander hope to prepare himself to act intelligently when he is suddenly confronted with a situation requiring action.