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ADVANCED COURSE ✓
1928-1929

OPERATIONS
of the
FIRST BATTALION, 28TH INFANTRY in the
in
REDUCTION OF ST MIHIEL SALIENT, SEPTEMBER 12TH AND 13TH, 1918

Battle of St. Mihiel

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Society of the First
Division

History of the First Division During
the World War. The John C. Winston
Company, Philadelphia, 1922.

As accurate a story of the division as could
be written from the sources available.

Written from a limited number of sources and
full of organizational pride. A good account
of the division's participation in the opera-
tion.

McMaster, J.B.

The United States in the World War,
1918-1920. D. Appleton and Company,
New York, 1920.

Brief and general. Over patriotic because
written for text book use by a school
historian. Generally accurate.

McCormick, R.R.

The Army of 1918. Harcourt, Brace
and Howe. New York 1920.

Too brief to give more than the basic facts.
Written to sell.

Michelin et Cie.

The Americans in the Great War. Vol 2.
The Battle of St. Mihiel. Michelin and
Company, Clermont-Ferrand, 1920.

A tourist guide. Very general but containing
some pertinent facts.

Liggett, Hunter

Commanding an American Army. Houghton,
Mifflin and Company, Boston, 1925.

Interesting but brief and very general. Written
by one of the most distinguished generals of
the AEF, who was in a position to learn many
inside facts.

Hindenburg, Paul von

Out of My Life. Harper and Brothers.
New York and London, 1921.

Very brief and general. Pro German. The book
is interesting and reveals much of the enemy
side of the story.

Johnson, Thomas M.

Without Censor. The Dobbs, Merrill
Company, Indianapolis, 1928.

Gives an interesting picture written in
newspaper style, from experiences and hearsay,
rather than consultation of sources. Some
of the battle stories are much overdone.
Superpatriotic and written to sell.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Thomas, Shipley

The History of the AEF. G.H. Doran Company, New York 1920.

✓ The book was written soon after the war by an officer of the First Division, who was allowed to consult all available War Department records. The manuscript was submitted to a number of prominent army officers for concurrence or correction. Its account of the St Mihiel battle is general and all too brief. Not enough sources were examined, particularly those of the enemy. The author exhibits divisional pride and probably divisional prejudice. Undoubtedly the book was written to sell.

Page, A.W.

Our 110 Days Fighting. Doubleday, Page and Company, Garden City, N.Y. 1920.

✓ Brief and incomplete. Written from only a few sources and without consulting the enemy literature on the subject. Written to sell.

Pershing, John J.
General

Final Report of General John J. Pershing, Commander-in-Chief, American Expeditionary Forces. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 1920.

✓ Correct insofar as it could be made by compilation of official reports and the personal experience of the foremost American general of the war. Very general. It is doubtful if all official reports were accurate. They were only accumulations of the data available at the time. The actions of all smaller units were not then known and are not yet known.

Pershing, John J.
and Liggett,
Hunter

Report of the First Army, American Expeditionary Forces. General Service Schools Press, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 1923.

✓ Accurate insofar as official compilation would make it. Very general and brief.

Palmer, Frederick

America in France. Dodd, Mead and Company, New York, 1919.

✓ Interesting and generally accurate. Written by a newspaper man with an eye to his audience and sales volume. The author personally observed many of the events narrated.

von Giehl, Hermann
Oberst Lieut.

The Struggle for the Salient of St.
Mihiel.

✓ Gives some interesting glimpses of the German side of the battle. Pro-German and having limited knowledge of the American actions.

Simonds, F.H.

History of the World War. Doubleday,
Page and Company, Garden City, N.Y.
1917-1920.

✓ General and brief. German sources not consulted. All American sources not consulted. Written to sell.

First Army

Field Orders and Reports.

✓ Official and accurate insofar as they go. Operations of smaller units fragmentary, due to verbal orders and no written reports.

First Division

Field Orders of the First Division,
1918.

✓ Official and accurate insofar as they go. The many verbal orders can never be reassembled.

28th Infantry

History of the 28th Infantry, Germany
1919.

✓ Interesting and of real value although highly regimental. Written from few sources by members of the regiment during occupation of Germany.

26th Infantry.....

History of the 26th Infantry, Germany
1919.

✓ Interesting and of real value although highly regimental. Written from few sources by members of the regiment during occupation of Germany.

Adair, Gerwen C.
Major, Infantry
Reserve

Narrative Letter of Operation of St.
Mihiel.

✓ The author commanded Company D, 3d Machine Gun Battalion, attached to the 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry for the operation.

Butler, George,
Captain, USA

Narrative Letter of the Operation of
St. Mihiel.

✓ The author commanded Company D, 28th Infantry, during the St. Mihiel Operation.

Corby, Don,
Lieutenant,
Infantry Reserve

Narrative Letter of the St. Mihiel
Operation

✓ The author commanded Company A, 28th Infantry during the St. Mihiel Operation.

Gams, Ernest R.
Lieutenant,
Infantry Reserve ✓

Narrative Letter of the St. Mihiel
Operation.

The author commanded Company C, 28th Infantry,
during the St. Mihiel Operation.

MARGINAL ABBREVIATIONS USED

Michelin	The Battle of St. Mihiel
Thomas	History of the AEF
First Division	History of the First Division
Pershing and Liggett	Report of the First Army
Simonds	History of the World War
Hindenburg	Out of My Life
FO, First Division	Field Orders, First Division
Johnson	Without Censor

INTRODUCTION

A discussion of the participation of any minor unit in a major operation would be pointless if not correlated with the bigger scheme of things. For that reason considerable space has been devoted to a description of the St. Mihiel Salient, its reason of being, and the military incidents leading up to the First American Army offensive of September 12, 1918, known historically as the St. Mihiel Offensive.

In relating the participation of the 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry, the chronological narrative form of discourse has been adhered to. Events are described, from memory and notes, as they occurred. These events have all been rechecked for accuracy, several times, by discussion with other participants in the operation. Numerous letters concerning the operation are in the writer's files. This correspondence is being increased and each additional letter further confirms and elaborates the material already consolidated. Some of the included battle-field incidents may seem to be merely good stories. It is believed that each of these stories is of value in painting the picture of the operation and that each illustrates one or more points of military interest.

THE SALIENT

The French-German frontier of 1914 paralleled the Meuse and Moselle rivers. In 1875 the French had fortified this region. (Plate 1.) A line of forts was built along the heights of the Meuse for the purpose of holding the bridges across this stream and allowing French armies to concentrate in and around Neufchateau. (1) This line of fortification sacrificed the great plain of the

(1) Michelin
Vol II,
p 9

Woevre, with its fertile farm lands and the vast iron fields around Briey. (The greatest known iron deposit in Europe.) The Germans frowned on all French proposals to fortify the Woevre plain itself and it was only held by strong garrisons of Chasseur troops. (2) The Germans, however, erected a fortress chain from Thionville, on the north, to Metz on the south, and made Metz one of the most extensive fortified areas in existence, an ulcer in the side of France, from which was launched the masses of troops that captured the salient and were designed to encircle the French right wing.

(2) Michelin,
Vol II, p 9

The salient was created in the fall of 1914 by Bavarian troops, attacking in conjunction with the armies of the German Crown Prince in an effort to isolate and capture Verdun. (3) This great strategic prize being denied them the Bavarians consolidated their gains, with the point of their thrust resting upon St. Mihiel. (4) This position offered a maximum of natural strength. A massive range of hills known as the heights of the Meuse followed the Meuse river to the mouth of St. Mihiel. It then swerved northeast along the western edge of the great Woevre plain. These hills commanded vast stretches of country, giving observation and excellent concealed gun positions. The forward slopes were strengthened by a succession of deep

(3) Thomas,
p 204

(4) Michelin,
Vol II, p 11

trenches, with frequent concrete machine gun pill boxes. Deep galleries in the reverse slopes of the hills provided shelter for supports. The city of St. Mihiel and the great hill containing the fort of the Roman Camp formed the apex of the salient. From St. Mihiel east to the Moselle river the line passed over a succession of marshes, lakes, ravines, and dense woods.

- This great easterly space was dominated by the lone sentinel of Mont Sec, otherwise known as Hill 380. (5) The salient afforded the Germans an excellent base from which to launch an attack. They had free use of the Woevre plain and easy movement for troops through the Spada Pass, running westward from Vigneulles to the south of Verdun. The salient barred to the French the use of several important railroads and was a constant menace to their rear. The French made repeated efforts to regain this lost territory in 1915 but all assaults were bloodily repulsed with heavy losses upon both sides. (6) The French alone admit 40,000 deaths. Numerous and populous military cemeteries in the region graphically testify to the severity of this fighting. When the futility of further assaults became apparent the sector stabilized after April of 1915. (7) American troops were trained in the salient soon after the first divisions were organized in France. As plans for the use of an American army, under American command, materialized it became evident that this army would operate on the right of the active front, in the general vicinity of Verdun. From this region attack could be either directed north against the German main line of communications or east against important railroad lines and the iron fields essential to the munitions center of the Ruhr valley. General Pershing had already developed a plan for an advance on Metz and the Briey Basin. (8) To carry out any of the operations indicated the Allies must needs regain the uninterrupted use of the Nancy-Commercy and the St. Mihiel-Verdun railroads. This necessitated the reduction of the salient. (9)
- (5) 1st Division, p 152
- (6) Thomas, p 206; 1st Division, p 153
- (7) Michelin, Vol II, p 13
- (8) Pershing & Liggett, pp 10 & 11
- (9) Pershing & Liggett, p 10
- Handwritten:* S.V.

To grasp the magnitude of the task one need only note the dimensions of the salient. It was 22 kilometers deep, 39 kilometers across the base and 65 kilometers along its face. (10) It included an area of about 150 square miles.

(10) Michelin
Vol II, p 15

GENERAL PLAN

General Pershing's primary plan was to create an American Army. (11) This ambition had been postponed due to Germany's possession of the initiative and her capitalization of this factor into a series of gigantic drives that nearly won the war for her. (12) The Allies regained the initiative and a preponderance of reserves on July 18, 1918, and then only was there an opportunity to form the American First Army. (13) On August 11, 1918, Headquarters, 1st Army were moved to Neufchateau and work was commenced on the details of the plans for the St. Mihiel operation. (14) To explain the movement of troops and supplies a dummy attack was staged against Mulhouse and the enemy was given opportunities to learn of this latter. He took his information in good faith and diverted several divisions of reserves to the upper Rhine region. (15) The Germans, however, had recognized the untenability of the salient against a serious attack and had laid plans for a withdrawal to a prepared line across its base. (16) The knowledge of this plan undoubtedly affected the state of mind of the defenders and accounts for the alacrity with which the salient was emptied when the assault came. (17)

(11) Pershing &
Liggett, p 1

(12) Pershing &
Liggett, p 1

(13) Simonds, p 218

(14) Pershing &
Liggett, p 11

(15) Pershing &
Liggett, pp
14-15

(16) Michelin,
Vol II, p 18

(17) Hindenburg,
Vol II, p 223

THE ARMY PLAN

The army plan for the reduction of the salient contemplated a main attack from the south in a northerly direction and a secondary attack from the west in an easterly direction with the objective of pinching in at the base of the salient, joining the two forces, and cutting off all troops contained within. The 1st and 4th Corps (1st Corps on the right) were to attack from the south. The 5th Corps was to attack from the west. The interval between the American Corps was filled by the 2d French Colonial Corps, temporarily under General Pershing's command, which was to cover the interior flanks of the two American attacks and mop up the salient as the attack progressed. (18) September 12th was set as D-day and H-hour was 5:00 AM for the southern attack and 8:00 AM for the western attack. (19) The colonials were to follow up the southern attack an hour after it was launched. Bombardment of the enemy positions by 2900 guns of all calibers was to commence at 1:00 AM.

(18) Pershing & Liggett, p 23

(19) Pershing & Liggett, p 27

(20) Pershing & Liggett, p 26

(20)

PLAN OF THE FIRST DIVISION

The 1st Division was the left division of the southern attack. Its front extended from Xivray to Seicheprey with a zone of action of about twenty-five hundred meters width. (21) The mission of the division required it to overcome all enemy resistance in its zone of action and, in so doing, protect its own left flank as well as that of the southern attack. (22) During the forward movement the left flank would be dominated by the formidable mass of Mont Sec, which was some distance out of the zone of action. The jump off line was part of the

(21) First Division, p 154

(22) FO No 3a, 1st Div.

old sector that had been occupied by the division from January 18th to April 1, 1918, and was thoroughly known to the nucleus of officers and men who had been present at that time. This sector had been strengthened by much new construction that extended back as far as the Beaumont-Rambucourt ridge.

On the enemy's side were several lines of trenches and a thicket of wire. The woods had been made nearly impassable by wire construction. Two new lines of wire had been put in in the vicinity of Nonsard, about 8 kilometers behind the front line. The Madine river, in front of this rear line formed a difficult obstacle with steep banks and of considerable depth. This new line was beyond the initial range of American artillery. It was reported to be strongly held and supported by numerous batteries. Severe fighting was expected here.

(23) First
Division,
p 154

(23) Between the outpost lines, the Rupt De Madt, a creek reported as unfordable, and with steep banks; gave the Germans excellent machine gun and observation positions. Both the Rupt De Madt and the Madine were reported to be filled with wire. Behind the Rupt de Madt were extensive woods and some small lakes. North and west of Nonsard were several good sized dense forests. The German 10th Division, rested and trained, occupied the division zone of advance. (24)

(24) First
Division,
p 156

The order of regiments from left to right was 18th Infantry, 16th Infantry, 28th Infantry, 26th Infantry. Each regiment had one battalion in assault, one in support, and one in reserve. The interior third line battalions were in brigade reserve. The third line battalion of the 26th Infantry was in division reserve.

(25) First
Division,
pp 156-157

(25)

(26) First
Division,
p 158

The division had additional artillery attached for the operation. Its artillery strength was 120-75-mm guns, 40-155-mm howitzers and 8-8-inch howitzers. (26) In addition to barrage and concentration fires in the zone of advance, the artillery was given the mission of blinding observation from Mont Sec by smoke concentration. This was successfully done.

(27) First
Division,
p 158

A battalion of 49 Renault tanks, with American personnel, was attached, with primary missions of breaking lanes in wire and destroying machine guns. (27) These tanks were an excellent moral support and several times were of material assistance to the infantry. Some of them were lost at the water hazards of the Rupt De Madt and the Madine. The survivors ran out of fuel in the vicinity of Nonsard and, due to failure of resupply, became immobilized.

(28) First
Division,
p 159

A provisional squadron of the 2d Cavalry was held in readiness for exploitation of any breakthrough. (28) Accompanying guns were ordered to follow in close support of assault battalions. Regimental 37-mm guns and Stokes mortars were attached to assault battalions.

(29) FO No 36,
1st Div.

Objectives: The 1st objective was an east-west line along the south bank of the Rupt De Madt to Richecourt, to be reached at 5:20 AM. The second objective was an arbitrary line north of the enemy's old trench system, to be reached at 5:40 AM. The third objective was an east-west line through the northern edge of the Bois de Rate, to be reached at 11:00 AM. The fourth and first day's objective was the Nonsard-Lamarche line. The second day's and army objective ran through Vigneulles. (29)

(30) Liggett &
Pershing,
p 28

Advance to the first day's objective and to an intermediate objective on the second day was by corps command. Advance to the army objective was by army command. (30)

OPERATIONS OF THE FIRST BATTALION

The First Battalion, 28th Infantry, was a typical infantry battalion of the First Division. Originally composed of regular army soldiers, hardened by service on the Mexican Border, it had an efficient group of well-trained noncommissioned officers. It received its baptism of fire in the premier American offensive, at Cantigny, on May 28, 1918. This action, with its 30% casualties, tempered the gaunt, tanned, youthful soldiers who had been forged into super-fighting men by the merciless training imposed upon them in the memorable winter of 1917-18. The Foch counter-offensive of July 18th reduced the battalion to about forty men per company. In late August raw replacements, fresh from the draft camps of the homeland, filled the companies to strength. Few of these men had any conception of the military scheme of things and they were particularly deficient in knowledge of the handling of weapons.

The battalion consisted of four rifle companies of 250 men each, a headquarters and headquarters company, and attached personnel. Battalion headquarters included the battalion CO, adjutant, supply officer, chaplain, surgeon and artillery liaison officer. The headquarters company contained an intelligence section, commanded by a sergeant, a supply section and an administrative section. For the purposes of the attack various troops were attached. They included: (a) Company D, 3d Machine Gun Battalion, equipped with very effective Hotchkiss, air-cooled machine guns. This efficient unit was commanded by 1st Lieutenant Gerwin C. Adair. (b) The Howitzer platoon of the regimental headquarters company. This platoon was to assist initially the

advance of the 2d Battalion and revert to the 1st Battalion during a passage of lines on the third objective. (c) An accompanying 75-mm gun. This gun was to operate initially with the 2d Battalion and revert to the 1st Battalion at the passage of lines. (d) An artillery gun crew, to be used in manning captured enemy field pieces. (e) A party of signal corps troops, to handle technical communication. (f) A party of engineers, to facilitate advance of the infantry by engineering means.

The battalion had only two lieutenants to each rifle company. The solitary captain of the battalion was in command. Of the total of ten combat officers only six had been in action. Four were very recent arrivals from training camps in the United States.

The battalion was trained at Mont L'Etroit near Saulxures in the Vaucouleurs area of Lorraine. The new men were instructed in rifle marksmanship by having them shoot, under individual supervision, at empty tomato cans inverted on stakes, driven in the ground at a distance of about fifty yards from the soldier. This system taught them to load, aim and fire the service rifle. About two hours a day ~~was~~^{were} devoted to tactical formations. During this training period the entire division rehearsed its part in the drive, going through a gigantic maneuver over steep and wooded terrain, as a unit. The morale of the new men was none too high. ~~The old timers regaled them with ghastly tales of Soissons and other places, and consequences were none too desirable. There were a number of self inflicted wounds and at least one suicide in the fortnight prior to the operation.~~ On September 2d the battalion was marched to an assembly point at which it

was to be entrucked and transported to the wooded area near Boucq. The trucks were delayed in arriving at the rendezvous. A Boche aviator arrived before they did receiving able guidance from a brilliantly lighted staff automobile. The pilot dropped several large bombs and then made off. No casualties were inflicted but the attack demoralized the men for the time being. The troops remained near Boucq, in the Foret de La Reine, for several days. During this time equipment was checked and a loaded auto rifle clip and two rifle grenades were issued to each soldier. German aviation kept the night air throbbing with the interrupted drone of their motors and a number of bombs were dropped on or near the battalion. No casualties resulted. These bombs did not always detonate and it was not unusual to find a long, finned projectile part buried in the earth. On September 6th the battalion was moved forward to the Faux Bois de Naugisard. This woods was about five kilometers from the proposed jump off line. It was crowded with troops. Kitchen sections were with battalions. There was a steady drizzling of rain and circulation in the woods kneaded earth and water into a sodden, gripping mass. Battalion headquarters (combined office and billet) was an elephant iron shelter and in the dimness of candle light the cavernous interior had the semblance of the body cavity of some antedeluvian monster.

There was constant apprehension of both shelling and bombing on this compact mass of humanity, but none came. Great efforts had been taken to maintain secrecy during the concentration. Troop movements were made only under cover of darkness and day circulation was carefully restricted to covered areas. Numerous guards enforced this require-

ment. The American light tanks concentrated in this area, and it was a novelty for the doughboys to see greasy mechanics preparing the lumbering monsters for their battle effort. On the night of September 7th the 2d Battalion moved to a defensive position before Beaumont but was withdrawn to the Faux Bois de Naugisard on the night of the 8th.

Orders for the attack were received during the day of September 11th together with maps for battalion headquarters. All officers were assembled at battalion headquarters and several hours were devoted to discussing, planning and finally directing the projected operation of the battalion. The regimental plan of attack was battalions in column, 2d Battalion, Major Huebner, in assault, 1st Battalion, Captain Senay, in support, 3d Battalion, Major Cron in brigade reserve. The battalion plan of attack was normal formation; B and D Companies in assault, B Company on the right. A and C Companies in support, C Company on the right, frontage about 600 yards, depth about 600 yards. Battalion headquarters and attached personnel were to be about in the center of the mass. The Machine Gun Company was to follow in trace in center rear of the battalion. No CPs or axes of communication were designated. There was no plan of technical communication. All liaison was maintained by runners, except in artillery, the liaison officer of which presumably had wire communication with his batteries. The regiment used mounted messengers successfully. On several occasions the adjutant-- Captain Livesay--rode in to check the progress of the attack. All animals of the battalion were left with the rear echelon when the battalion moved into jump-off position.

Late in the evening of September 11th the bat-

talion was moved to the vicinity of ^{the} Beaumont quarries^{es}. Troops were in position at midnight with three rifle companies in the trenches in front of the quarries and one rifle company, C Company, and the machine gun company in the quarry itself. Here in the quarry was also the regimental PC. The night was very dark. There was a downpour of drenching rain and underfoot was a quagmire of sticky mud. Desultory shelling punctuated the march into position. Fortunately the shells sank well into the spongy ground before exploding. As it was, several men were wounded and one company threatened to stampede, being held in line only by the strenuous exertions of a few good NCOs. The battalion accomplished this move in column of file. Company commanders thoroughly understood the plan of attack. All company commanders had done a long tour of trench duty in the sector in January, February, and March. The few surviving veterans were familiar with the terrain. Watches had been synchronized. A base company had been designated. All was set for the jump-off at 5:00 AM. Troops of the relieved 89th Division were well in motion on their way to the rear where they were to back up the First.

At 1:00 AM there burst forth the most violent barrage yet experienced by the battalion. The darkness was turned into a resounding quivering light by which one might see to read. A thunderous roar that shook the very bowels of the earth broke the stillness and a deluge of shattering shells spread havoc over the enemy lines. Every known battery position was drenched with gas by at least two heavy guns or howitzers. Every located machine gun position was given the metal of either one heavy or two light guns. Trenches, command posts and billets were pounded by concentrations of high explosive shell. (31) With a persistence

(31) First
Division,
pp 161-162

that was appalling in its volume the convulsion continued. During four hours nearly three thousand guns rained a million shells upon the enemy line. Earth and air shuddered under the shock of this continuous series of concussions, which resulted from the detonations of shell ranging from tiny 1.5 inch whiz-bangs to tumbling, barrel like projectiles from 16-inch railway guns. The waiting infantrymen were rendered jubilant by the spectacular drama and all along the line the men burst into cheers and song like children on a holiday. Cries of "let's go" clarioned from eager throats and these words became the battle cry of the First Division. The Germans responded very feebly. Many of their guns were out of position, preparatory to withdrawal.

*To what?
during in
arty?*

Zero hour approached and as the night drew to its close the air became very cold. Nearly all the men were chilled to the bone. Several collapsed. In the shelter of the quarry great fires roared and from them steaming buckets of coffee were sent up and down the line, saving many men for the morning's effort. Around one fire were gathered the battalion headquarters and some company officers whiling away the hours before attack, perchance the last few hours on earth, in song and story. Favorite among the songs, but sung in rollicking vein, was "Just Before the Battle Mother". One of the singers was dead at 5:15.

At 5:00 AM the barrage came down and the advance started. It was very foggy and visibility was poor. The Germans harassed slightly with thinly scattered shell fire and some machine gun fire but this was not serious enough to affect the advance of the troops. The battalion followed

directly in trace of the 2d Battalion and at a distance of about three hundred yards. The companies were in small columns with normal intervals and depth. The dense wire between the lines offered very little resistance. The wire had weakened through rusting and many of the posts were so brittle that they snapped off readily and allowed the wire to be pressed down on the ground. In some cases men actually walked over the masses of strung wire. There was no trouble in maintaining the rate of advance of twenty-five yards per minute. The Rupt de Madt had been dammed near its source, by the engineers, early in the evening. (32) This appreciably lowered its level. It was found clear of wire and proved to be less than waist deep but with steep slippery banks.

(32) First
Division,
p 160

The 2d Battalion took its first two objectives with little resistance and pushed on towards the third objective; the east-west line through the northern edge of the Bois de Rate. Here occurred the only organized fight within the regimental zone. The Bois de Rate and the adjacent woods, the Quart en Reserve had been strongly fortified. From their southern edges poured a hail of machine gun bullets, causing some casualties. Everyone took cover in the battle plowed ground and the 2d Battalion responded with fire, bringing its howitzer weapons into play. The 16th Infantry, on the left, had more difficult terrain to overcome and was not in sight. A Company was sent to the left to outflank the enemy by penetrating the woods to his right. One or more tanks also waddled towards the woods. In the face of this and under the belaboring of the stakes bombs the Boche decided to quit and eighty-five prisoners filed out with hands well elevated. Some enemy casualties were found in the woods.

The 2d Battalion was now, at 10:00 AM, on the objective at which a passage of lines was to take place. As this maneuver was scheduled for 11:00 AM and was coordinated with an extension of the rolling barrage there was nothing to do but to hold the 1st Battalion back until that hour. At 11:00 AM the 1st Battalion passed through the 2d and took up the assault. It was found that the howitzer weapons had used up all their ammunition in the fight for the 3d objective and so they were left behind to resupply. The scheduled barrage did not materialize, probably due to the fact that the depth of penetration had exceeded the initial range of the light artillery, and that their forward displacement had not yet been accomplished.

From this point the ground gradually descended over an extensive meadow to the Madine River and then rose rapidly to a commanding position to the right of Nonsard; the expected line of German resistance. The space to be crossed was about two kilometers wide and absolutely open. Company commanders were nervous and needed encouragement before crossing this potential death trap. The battalion scouts were sent well ahead of the front line and it was indeed reassuring when they were to be seen boldly silhouetted on the skyline of the objective; the Nonsard-Lamarche road. With this cheering guarantee of security the battalion now advanced freely.

When half way across the meadow Germans were seen less than two kilometers to the left filing along the Belle Osiere Woods. They seemed to be moving into position across the battalion front and some distance beyond Nonsard. A single field piece, with caisson and out rider, was galloping madly hither and yon on the same

flank. These enemy elements did not fire on the battalion, being probably more concerned with their own safety than with ours. Some tanks were intermingled with the battalion and the attention of one of them was directed on the enemy. It is not easy to get the ear of a tank crew with the tank running under battle conditions. If one dashes in front of the tank he may be either shot or run down. If one approaches from the flank or rear and raps on the turret he is suspected of being a machine gun bullet. The tank selected contained a lieutenant. He took the information casually and then went on in a different direction. No doubt he had a specific mission and did not intend to be diverted from it by the chance of a dog fight far out on a flank. A request was then sent to the commanding officer, 2d Battalion, asking that a company be sent out to protect the left flank of the 1st Battalion. E Company was immediately sent to the left and covered the remainder of the advance to Nonsard. Enemy shell fire had now ceased. The day had brightened. Visibility was good.

Approaching Nonsard two soldiers were killed by one of our own 155-mm shells. The infantry was advancing faster than the artillery knew.

Just as the battalion reached the hillside of its objective a vicious machine gun fire was directed at it from the church tower in Nonsard, at a range of only a few hundred yards. The battalion scouts were in the town but the adjoining regiment was still far to the rear. Bullets whipped through the mass of troops and lashed dust sprays over a considerable area. But only for an instant! Nearly coincident with this German fire the entire flank burst into flame and a shower of missiles rained upon the stone face of

the tower, most prominent object in town. Chips and dust flew viciously in a whirling cloud. Under cover of the fire, patrols were sent in to take the lurking enemy. Meantime the flanking company from the support battalion reached the town and an ambitious tank started one pounder marksmanship against the tower window. Fritz quit cold and the patrols brought in five forlorn prisoners, one of whom was retained as an industrious and efficient orderly for the headquarters mess, until the battalion left the salient to enter the Meuse-Argonne. The battalion, now on its objective, was consolidated in depth along the Nonsard-Lamarche road. Fox holes were dug and outposts established. The woods a kilometer to the front were reconnoitered by the battalion scouts and liaison was established with the units on the right and left. On this line were found newly prepared artillery emplacements and in front of it was a wide dense belt of new wire which had not yet been made continuous. In Nonsard were a few French civilians and a German canteen full of Turkish cigarettes and other stores. In the houses were German blankets and various other equipment. Word of these stores spread through the battalion and stragglers began to prowl into the village to pillage and loot. Soon the number of these men became noteworthy. It was necessary to establish a heavy guard to hold the men in place. For more than two hours the enemy horizon had been blackened by thick towering masses of smoke indicating that Fritz was pulling out and burning everything behind him in accordance with the well known orders of the German General Staff. Patrols reported nothing of consequence to our front for a depth of at least a mile. The regimental adjutant had ridden up and he was asked why we couldn't go

ahead while there was no resistance and we had the advantage of good light in which to pierce the dense woods ahead. He responded that the regiment wished to push on but higher headquarters were not yet ready. Shortly thereafter a message was received that 8,000 Germans were forming up somewhere to our front and to be prepared to resist a counterattack. We had a perfect position with machine guns well sited and would have welcomed the sight of an advancing mass of enemy infantry but the counterattack did not materialize. Subsequent inquiry developed the fact that the columns, reported by air service, were actually Germans but that they were already prisoners.

About 2:00 PM the division machine gun officer appeared in the battalion position. He remarked that it would be a good time to send out cavalry. He was told that it would have been a better time several hours earlier. He departed rearward. Shortly afterward, about 4:00 PM a sorry looking force of the 2d Cavalry ambled up the road and disappeared into the Bois de Nonsard. Occasionally the ~~st~~ident chatter of machine gun fire was heard in the general direction of the cavalry penetration. Otherwise nothing happened for about an hour and then the intrepid horsemen limped back a sorry sight. Their mounts were anatomical curiosities, containing all the known types of horse unfit for military service. (It is believed that these mounts were culls reluctantly yielded up by our French brothers in arms.) So far as I can determine this cavalry reconnaissance accomplished nothing. Infantry stragglers whose curiosity drove them to follow along in the wake of the mounted men reported that after

penetrating about a mile the head of the column was fired into by a sniper and a trooper killed. When this happened the column did a to-the-rear movement. The doughboy stragglers went ahead, killed the enemy sniper, took some souvenirs and then straggled on back. The following morning the two bodies were seen as had been described.

About 7:00 PM orders were received to advance to a narrow guage railroad, now named the Decauville Road, about three kilometers ahead, and to send one company to cut the standard gauge railroad at Vigneulles. As the advance entered the woods darkness fell. Some confusion resulted and the balance of the night was spent in reestablishing contacts and control. The narrow gauge railroad was occupied, by two companies, about 9:00 PM. In the move forward B Company was completely lost and advanced well beyond Vigneulles. The company suffered no losses and rejoined the battalion the following afternoon. (September 13th.) C Company was ordered to go forward and cut the standard gauge railroad in the vicinity of Vigneulles. It was pitch dark, there was no opportunity to study maps and there were abundant signs of an active enemy. The company advanced on the Nonsard-Lamarche Road, the boundary between the 28th and the 16th Infantry and allotted to the 16th Infantry. As the company started through the outpost line a field officer of the 16th Infantry halted it and asked where it was going.

The company commander stated his mission. The 16th Infantry officer then said, "You can't go out this road. It's in the zone of the 16th Infantry. No one can go ahead of our front line and not be fired on."

The lieutenant commanding C Company responded, "You have no authority over me. My orders are to go forward. I'm going. Fire and be damned." There was no shooting done. The company took up a position astride the Vigneulles-St. Benoit Road, cutting the railroad near that point, and remained in position until relieved by the advance of the regiment the next morning.

It is desired to emphasize the difficulties of penetrating the Nonsard and Vigneulles Woods, and reaching distant objectives, after complete darkness had settled down. The battalion was untrained, underofficered, had been in operation for twenty one hours and had received its last cooked meal twenty four hours before. The woods were very dense and partly swamp. There were numerous billets and obstructions. The movement was accomplished in small columns. Some resistance was encountered on the trails and resulted in enemy casualties in killed and wounded.

A number of prisoners were taken including a German major and four lieutenants, who walked into a machine gun trap that had been posted just off of the road to Vigneulles. Four cyclist guides of companies retiring from Mont Sec were dismounted by a pole placed across the road and captured. Their bicycles had curious spring suspended rims instead of rubber tires and could be heard for a long distance. Several cocks were caught trying to make a getaway on a hand car on the narrow-gauge railroad. A combat patrol from D Company intercepted a small wagon train of medical supplies on the front of the company. The patrol killed an officer, two noncommissioned officers and two men and captured a dozen prisoners.

The battalion scout platoon remained out in front

that night in the midst of German elements. Everything was in confusion and large numbers of the enemy were moving in front of the battalion. The rumble of wagon trains was heard all night, on the main road beyond the regiment to our left.

At 3:15 AM of September 13th the 2d Battalion passed through the 1st Battalion and advanced through the woods to Vigneulles, in small columns, arriving at about 7:00 AM. The 1st Battalion followed in close support. This advance was apparently quite unexpected, for steaming hot food was found in the enemy kitchens.

The battalion scout platoon reached Hattonville at 6:20 AM and there captured five Austrian prisoners, including a lieutenant. They barely missed capturing a staff automobile, firing into it as it scurried out of town. The platoon then proceeded to Hatton-Chatel where it met elements of the 26th Division at 7:15 AM and established the crest of the St. Mihiel drive. From Hatton-Chatel the platoon proceeded on to Vieville, Billy and St. Maurice, entering the latter at 1:00 PM and returned to the regiment with valuable reconnaissance information.

At noon on the 13th the rolling kitchens were driven up, and the men had their first hot meal since the jump off.

On the morning of the 13th the battalion commander was informed that 35,000 Germans, caught in the salient, might attack at any time from the wooded heights south of Hatton-Chatel. The two battalions dug in side by side, facing the interior of the salient. There was a splendid field of fire, particularly for machine guns, but the information was false and all labor was in vain. During the day the converging advance of the 42d Division and the French Colonial Corps pinched out the 1st Division and the

troops were withdrawn to the shelter of the Bois de Vigneulles and Bois de Nonsard, where they occupied German shelters. The officers were luxuriously housed in bungalows built for German leaders. However rest in these buildings was somewhat disturbed by the occasional dropping of eggs by night flying Boche birds and the whine and crash of shells from a long range German gun. Isolated groups of the enemy were found far behind the lines for several days after the conclusion of the attack. All kinds^{of} supplies and equipment were found in these wooded areas. Men in the battalion formed a band, using captured musical instruments.

The division was re-equipped and rested in this area. Results had been gratifying. The division had advanced 14 kilometers in 19 hours and some of its elements had advanced 19 kilometers in 32 hours. Among the spoils of war were 6 officers, 1190 men, 30 guns, 50 machine guns, and quantities of stores. The losses were three officers and ninety men killed, 10 officers and 431 men wounded, 5 men missing and five men captured. (33) The First Battalion had suffered a total of about thirty casualties, including three killed. One of these latter was 2d Lieutenant Frank A. Howe, a gallant young officer, newly arrived from the training camps of the United States.

(33) First
Division,
p 168

RESUME

Attention is invited to the peculiar problems of the ~~battalion commander in this operation~~ and to the actions taken in their solution. The status of training was particularly unsatisfactory and time and facilities were obviously inadequate to remedy it. The battalion was under-officered. The morale of the troops was low but im-

proved as the operation progressed. All tactical problems were solved effectively and in a minimum of time. These included, envelopment of the enemy in the Quart en Reserve by A Company, passage of the lines and transference of the battalion from the support to the assault echelon, reorganization on the first day's objective, and the night advance to the Decauville Road, through formidable woods. The special operation of the company, ordered forward to cut the standard gauge railroad was successfully carried out. Finally the battalion scout platoon, under the capable leadership of sergeant, later Lieutenant Joe Hurd, wrote one of the most brilliant pages in the history of the regiment.

Cooperation and coordination with adjacent regiments was poor. There were several clashes with the 16th Infantry, one of which has been related. There was friction with the 26th Infantry which culminated in some questionable reports made by that regiment. As an aftermath to these occurrences the commanding officer of the leading battalions of the 16th and 26th Infantry, during the night of September 12th and 13th, and the commanding officer, 26th Infantry, were relieved of their commands, directly after the operation was concluded.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

It is unfortunate that the original plan of attack at St. Mihiel had to be revised, by the direct order of Marshal Foch, who had tactfully yielded to the demands of General Haig, that all Allied forces combine in a converging, coordinated attack on about October 1, 1918. (31) This change subordinated the attack to the Meuse-Argonne Offensive and nullified any opportunity of

(31) Johnson,
p 30

(31) Pershing &
Liggett,
p 16

(32) Johnson,
p 96

exploiting the successes gained. (31) Marshal Foch rigidly held the American advance to phase line objectives, (32) and it is obvious that this dictum resulted in an inelasticity of tactical form which permitted the enemy to make a leisurely escape from a most embarrassing situation. Front line battalions were held back until the German forces were free from peril, even though their leaders pleaded for orders to advance. It is impossible to penetrate the maze of political intrigue out of which emerged the larger decisions of the war. However it is doubtful if the Allied leaders would have relished the gaining of a stupendous victory by inexperienced American troops and the future historical comparison of this victory with their own four years of fruitless effort. It was far better to fight a grand coordinated battle in which all participants might divide the glory of a final victory.

Mass mental processes must be given consideration in a study of the operation. In any war we are apt to over estimate the prowess of the foe and unwarranted rumor will often have weight in the making of decisions. Our army had long studied and emulated that of Germany. We entered the war filled with respect for and awe of her magnificent military machine. It might be said that we expected to meet a ruthless, nearly invulnerable antagonist who drank blood and spit fire. By midsummer of 1918 we had caused this super-individual, to drink fire and spit blood but even yet we were loath to forego the conviction that the German would not do something

dreadful to us if he had the chance. The dread of German counterattack on September 12th and 13th is evidence of this. Our true objective was the German Army, yet, with odds in our favor, we doubted our abilities to meet the rush of a surprised foe. This psychosis may have had something to do with the long delay in advance on the afternoon of September 12th, when every battle sign cried out that a great victory was within our grasp.

Another adverse factor was the inertia that resulted from impregnation with the doctrines of trench warfare. Limited objectives and phase lines had been so long the rule that when the golden opportunity of a break through came and the swift unhampered movements of open warfare were in order the staffs of higher commands were too slow to act. Tactical opportunities are the exception and when they arise the leaders of minor units must be free to seize them and wring from them the last penny of their worth. This ~~he~~^{they} cannot do if bound by phase line objectives.

The initial success was not exploited. Army and corps staffs seem to have been slow to grasp the fact that the bulk of the garrison of the salient lay within the hollow of their hands. There were forebodings for the integrity of the front lines in the event of enemy counter-attack. What of the reserves? The situation on the front was well in hand and the strength was two battalions deep, eager for a clash. The road from Nonsard to Vigneulles lay open and distinct and at twelve noon of September 12th a squad could have marched along it to the forest edge looking out upon Vigneulles. It was at

(33) von Giehl

this hour that the German commander issued the order for the evacuation of the salient. (33) It will be remembered that the salient was only 22 kilometers deep at its apex. The most seriously threatened German troops were less than five hours march from safety and had good roads to march on. To close the bag necessitated an immediate advance. At this crucial time the left of the IVth Corps was held in position for seven hours. There was an abundance of reserves. The First Division had three reserve battalions and behind the First Division was the Third Division. One battalion from all this mass could have taken Vigneulles by 3:00 PM and doubled the number of prisoners and increased the amount of stores taken in the operation. To have done so would not have been at variance with Marshal Foch's orders.

The mechanics of the operation were excellent. Troops showed a high enough degree of training to carry out any maneuver that they were called upon to do. Weapons were skillfully used, particularly the howitzer platoon weapons. In the fight at the Quart en Reserve they were the deciding factors and the Stokes' mortars, in particular, were chiefly instrumental in causing the surrender of 85 prisoners. However at the passage of lines it was discovered that the ammunition of these weapons had been exhausted making them of no further value in the attack.

The chain of command was poor. The specialized staff was unknown in units below the division. Junior commanders did not fully grasp the significance of the operation, beyond the fact that it should develop into a good scrap, and senior commanders were not forward in control of the operations. Neither regimental nor brigade

commanders were seen in the battalion area at any time during the first day. The regiment fought as battalions, as at Soissons, and was only held together by the personal efforts of its adjutant. Wire communications failed to function as did all other mechanical means. Runners proved equal to all demands of the operation.

LESSONS

The St. Mihiel Operation evidences the violation, to some degree, of nearly all the basic tactical principles. This is to be expected under the circumstances. The original plan of attack was changed shortly before the attack took place. Changes in plan are generally unfortunate, particularly when they do not improve the original plan. Then too, our army was green. It had sprung into being overnight. We were unfamiliar with the staff work involved in a war of the first magnitude and had far too small a group of officers trained in staff duties. If we had been even more advanced we would still have violated most of the principles most of the time. The German Army, than which none greater has ever been assembled, constantly violated basic tactical principles, as did also the French and the British.

The principle of the objective was violated when we failed to make our objective the enemy army. The operation was governed by phase lines. Because of the phase lines we lost contact and with loss of contact our objective vanished into thin air. When contact was again gained the enemy had reorganized.

The principle of the offensive was violated when we ceased to be continuously aggressive. From the army viewpoint we may have maintained the offensive but it

hardly seemed so to battalion commanders who were held for seven hours in a position ready for further advance.

The principle of mass was violated. We had a preponderance of numbers and should have used reserves to exploit our initial successes. It is believed that greater results could have been gained from our mass if the northern attack had been stronger.

The principle of economy of force was ignored. We attacked in dense vulnerable masses across generally open ground. Roads were congested with an interlocked heterogeneous welter of motor and horse-drawn vehicles. There was no road discipline and military police detailed as traffic regulators were ignored. If the enemy had contemplated a stubborn defense, with his normal strength of emplaced artillery, our losses would have been disproportionate to results gained. A few attack or bombardment aircraft would have caused havoc. In a battle of maneuver we did not apply the methods of maneuver but threw a series of dense waves, mechanically regulated by a time schedule, across a terrain peculiarly suited for successful defense by numerically inferior forces.

The principle of movement was poorly applied. Troops were held back at the most favorable times for advance. Forward displacement of artillery and supplies was far too slow.

The principle of surprise was initially splendidly applied. However the advantages gained were not utilized and surprise was lost as the operation progressed.

The principle of security was generally adhered to. Security used was adequate for the situation. It might have been inadequate had the enemy been more aggressive.

The plan was simple and workable. It is unfortunate that it functioned through timing rather than contact.

Cooperation was poor. Adjacent units thought only of themselves. There was no inclination to assist mutually in the pressing of the attack.

QUESTIONS

1. What was the mission of the First Division?

Answer: To advance within its zone, protecting its own flank and that of the southern force.

2. What was the plan of the First Division?

Answer: To advance with regiments abreast, in column of battalions. To have the left regiment extend along the division left flank to protect the left of the army.

3. What dominating, isolated terrain feature threatened the division left?

Answer: Mont Sec.

4. What town was the key to the salient?

Answer: Vigneulles.

5. What important German city lay near the salient?

Answer: Metz.

6. Did the Germans intend a stubborn defense of the salient?

Answer: No.

7. Was the attack highly centralized or was it decentralized?

Answer: Highly centralized.

8. Was the principle of surprise effectively used?

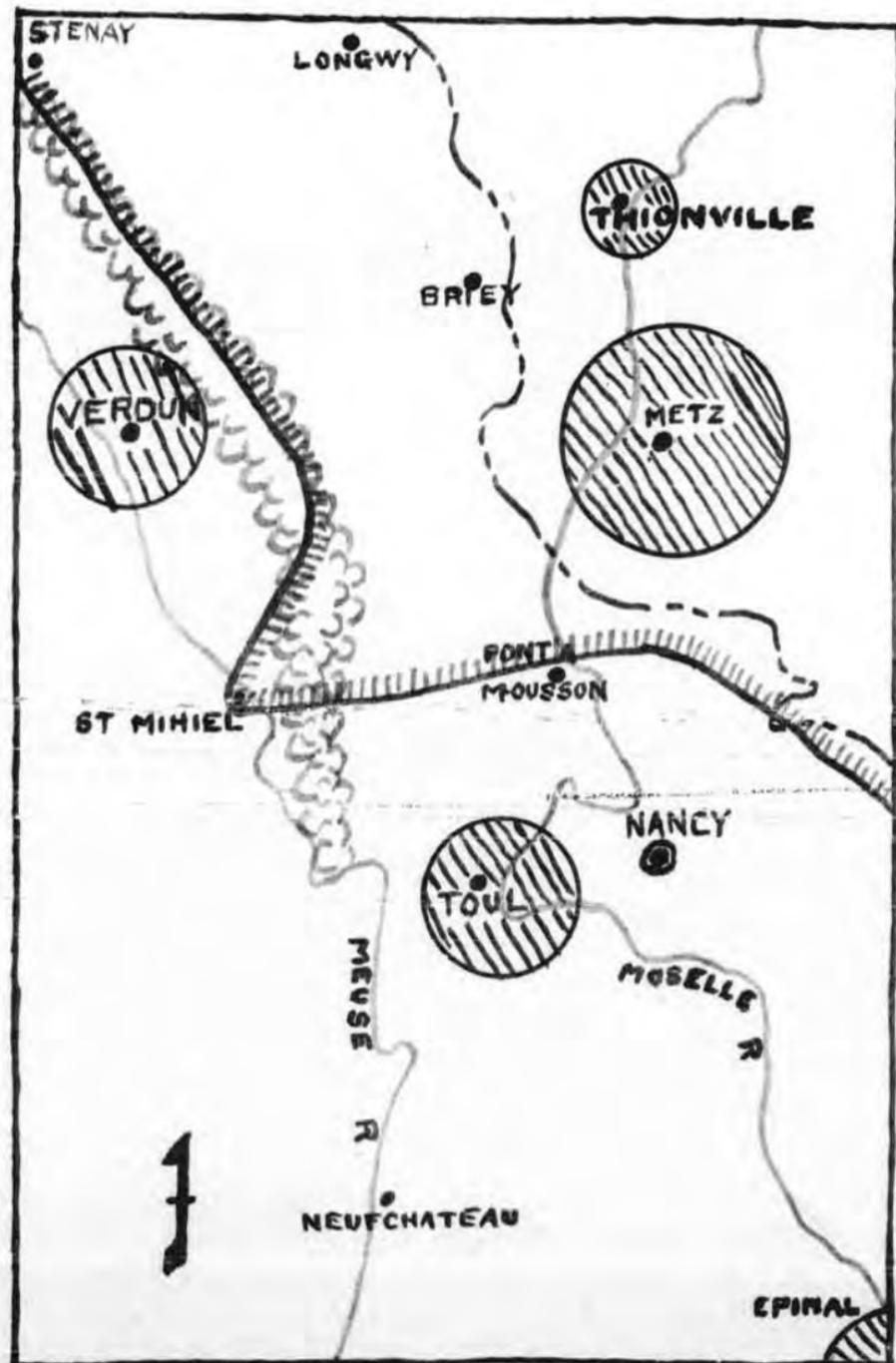
Answer: Yes. Initially.

9. Was there a preliminary bombardment or did the artillery fire start at zero hour?

Answer: Preliminary bombardment.

10. What two important rivers crossed the salient?

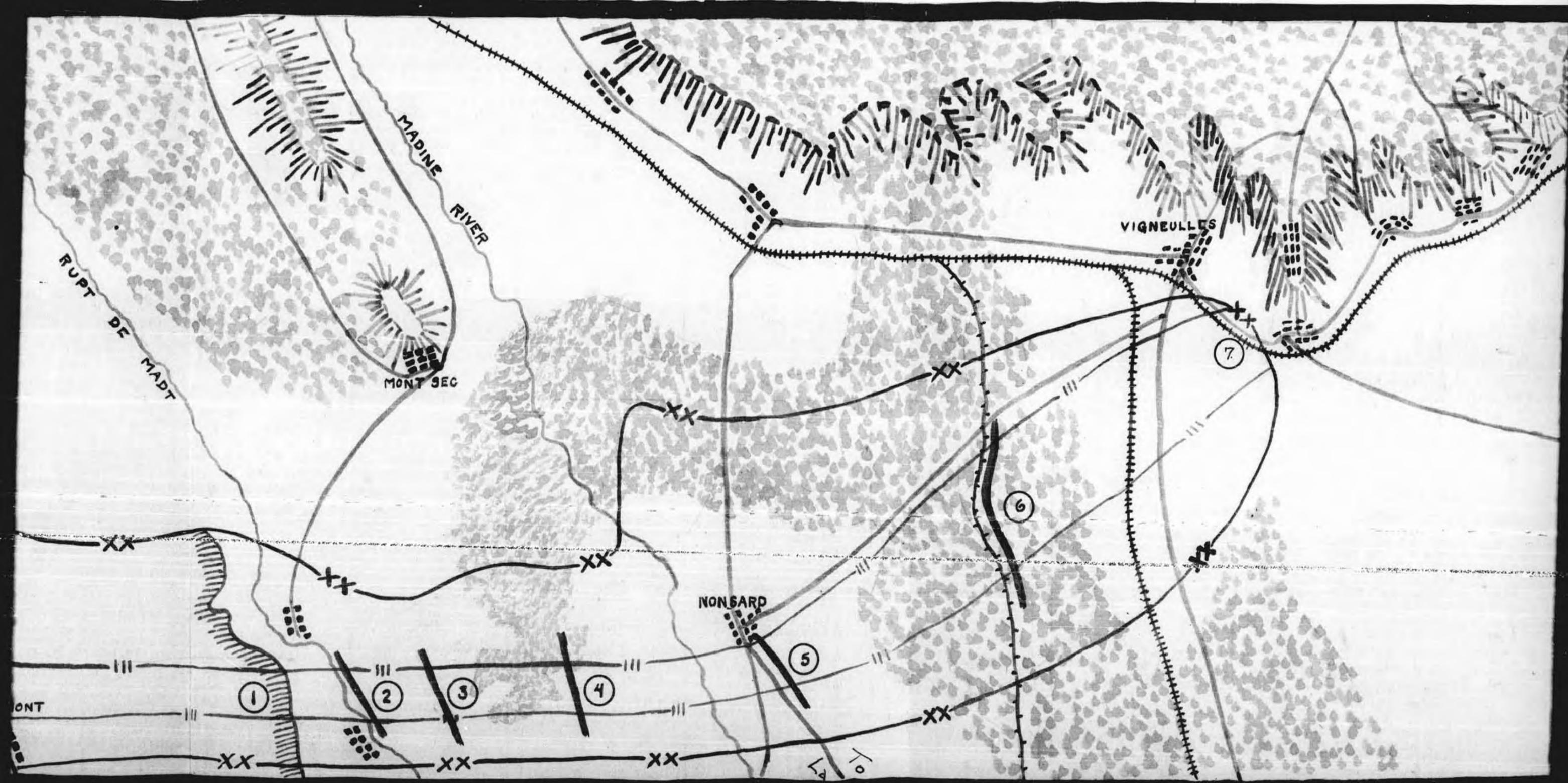
Answer: Meuse and Moselle.



REGION OF ST MIHIEL SALIENT, 1918

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KILOMETERS



OPERATIONS FIRST BN., 28th INF., ST MIHIEL, 1918



- ① LINE OF DEPARTURE.
- ② 1st OBJECTIVE.
- ③ 2d. OBJECTIVE.
- ④ 3d OBJECTIVE.
- ⑤ 4th OBJECTIVE., 1st DAY'S OBJECTIVE.
- ⑥ OBJECTIVE OF DECAUVILLE ROAD.
- ⑦ 2d DAYS OBJECTIVE. ARMY OBJECTIVE.