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OPERATIONS OF CO B 3D MG BN (1ST DIVISION) IN THE AISNE-MARNE OFFENSIVE, JULY 16 - JULY 23, 1918.

(Personal experience of a company commander)

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Accurate, brief account of personal experiences.

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MARGINAL ABBREVIATIONS USED

Division	"World War Records 1st Division." 25 volumes.
Vol.	Volume.
Diary	Personal diary, C.W. Yuill.

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INTRODUCTION

It was 12:00 noon July 16, 1918. Company B 3d Machine-Gun Battalion attached to the 2d Battalion 26th Infantry, 2d Infantry Brigade, 1st Division had detrucked at about 8:00 AM in the vicinity of Palesne and bivouacked beside the road in the Foret de Compiegne. The machine guns and combat ammunition had been carried in the trucks. and were present with the company. The company transportation was enroute.

Map #1

SITUATION, NOON JULY 16, 1918

Not shown

The company had been billeted one night in the village of Montagny in the Dammartin en Goele area, when orders were received at 4:30 PM July 15, 1918 to entruck at Eve at 7:00 PM. The company had proceeded by marching at 6:00 PM from Montagny. The company transportation had just reached the area on July 15, 1918 and had assembled with the animal-drawn transportation of the 26th Infantry. It expected to arrive during the night of July 16-17.

The destination or purpose of the move was unknown. Some thought that the division was enroute to Paris but the general belief was that the division was moving to some place in reserve to meet an enemy attack. The route, about 65 kilometers in distance, had been generally north. Artillery fire had been heard to the right and then, when heard to the north. ~~At this time~~ the truck train turned to the east. It was then known that a position was to be taken near Villers Cotterets or Compiegne. The day of July 16 was gray and cloudy. The trucks transporting the company had entered, at dawn, the forest they were now in.

While waiting that morning, the opinion was

formed that the division would relieve a French division.

Character of Troops

This company had been organized from the 3d Battalion 28th Infantry in 1917. When the infantry brigades were reorganized this company with its entire personnel had been transferred to the 3d Machine Gun Battalion. It was at full strength, 172 men and 6 officers, and had had few replacements since its organization, and those were experienced men. All officers had been in command of their present commands since January 1, 1918 with the exception of one officer who had been surplus in the company and who had replaced the platoon leader of the 3d Platoon. That platoon leader was evacuated with a sore toe from Montagny when the orders for entrucking on July 15 were received. All officers knew the men of the company and the men their officers. The company had been attached to the 2d Battalion, 26th Infantry for two weeks but had had contact with that battalion in the trenches. The duties of the officers were, one company commander, one 2d-in-command, three platoon leaders, one transport officer. The company was equipped with the French Hotchkiss Machine Gun. Thorough training had been given in the fire of the Hotchkiss machine gun and in addition all men had learned to fire the German heavy and light machine guns. The noncommissioned officers and runners had been trained to read maps. The entire company had been seasoned in trench warfare, construction and occupation of machine-gun emplacements, and in movement. Morale was high. After the orders for reconnaissance

were received the 1st sergeant and company clerk begged the company commander to allow them to go into the line, but it was decided by a flip of a coin, that the company clerk might go.

OPERATIONS, NOON JULY 16 - 4:00 PM, JULY 17

At 12:00 noon all the 26th Infantry battalion and company commanders were directed to report to Regimental Headquarters. At this conference the 2d Battalion was notified that its battalion and company commanders would reconnoiter the front line east of Cutry, probably preparatory to an attack. Forty-eight riflemen were directed to be attached to the machine gun company as ammunition carriers. The reconnaissance party would assemble in the battalion area at 2:00 PM and would be met by a French guide to conduct them forward.

Map #1

The machine-gun company commander notified the 2d-in-command of the reconnaissance, ~~and~~ entrusted his personal papers and valuables to the 1st sergeant, and with the four rifle-company commanders and the guide, proceeded forward on foot at 2:00 PM. The battalion commander was sick and unable to go.

Enemy observation of the rear areas was prevented due to the weather which permitted the reconnaissance party to take the most direct route forward. The party arrived in rear of the position to be reconnoitered before dusk. Reconnaissance at that time could not be made since the trench system had been only hastily constructed and movements on the plateau could be observed by the enemy. At about 10:00 PM, four guides arrived for the rifle-company commanders but none for

officers were immediately notified that an attack was scheduled for July 18 and that the machine-gun company would support the 2d Battalion, 26th Infantry which was the assault battalion.

The machine-gun company commander then went to the 2d Battalion Headquarters and there found that no orders had been received and the battalion commander had not arrived. A machine-gun company runner was left at the battalion headquarters to notify the company commander when orders were received and he returned to his company. The company and attached riflemen were checked and directed not to leave the area of their platoons without authority of an officer. The carts had not arrived when the company moved forward at about 9:30 PM. The night before. The guns and ammunition had been left in the battalion dump in compliance with orders from the brigade and were to be loaded on the machine gun and ammunition carts and to be brought forward late in the afternoon of July 17 to join the company. (1) They were to come forward with the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry. The company commander withdrew from the company to a grass area near by to get some sleep but a French tank approached. He narrowly escaped being run over and decided to rejoin the company officers.

(1) ~~F.O. No 170~~ Division Vol 2, 2d Inf. Brig; OP Sect. No 170, 16 July

GENERAL SITUATION, 4:00 PM, July 17

At 4:00 PM the battalion commander arrived with the orders of the 2d Brigade. (2) A copy of the brigade order and five maps of the area, scale 1/20,000 were given to the machine-gun company commander. The battalion commander then dictated to the machine-gun company commander the following order:

(2) Division Vol 2, 2d Inf Brig; Op. Sect. No 170, 16 July

the machine-gun company commander. He made the reconnaissance by himself in the dark but the location of the sector machine guns was not found. The night was so dark that any reconnaissance could be of little value. The 2d Battalion company commanders assembled at 1:00 AM where they had been met by the guides, and then moved to the command post of the French regiment holding the area that had been reconnoitered. It was located in a chalk mine near Cutry. Par On arrival at the command post information was given by the French staff that the Tenth Army under General Mangin would attack on July 18 and that the 1st Division would participate in the attack. The 2d Battalion, 26th Infantry would attack from the positions reconnoitered.

The dispositions of the French, holding the front east of Cutry, were pointed out on a large-scale map. Information also was received that the 2d Battalion 26th Infantry was moving forward during the night to some place near Roy St. Nicolas. Par The reconnaissance party started back to rejoin their battalion just before dawn because of the darkness and the battalion moving forward. Dead Moroccans were seen where they had fallen. It was realized that this ground had recently been hard fought for, and dead Americans also would soon be added to the dead already there. Roy St. Nicolas was reached at about 12:00 noon. An American Military Police Company Kitchen was operating in the village. The machine-gun company commander stopped there, got a sandwich and a cup of coffee and the location of his machine-gun company. The company was found in a small area bivouacked and scattered in the bushes. Company

Map #1

"The regiment designates the 2d Battalion as assault battalion, the 3d Battalion as support, and the 1st Battalion, reserve. The 2d Battalion will attack in accordance with orders in its sector, F and H Companies in assault, F Company on the right; E and G Companies in support, E Company on the right. E Company will consolidate the 1st objective. Your machine-gun company supports the battalion. You know how to do it better than I do. Make your own dispositions. Your command post will be with the battalion command post. The battalion forms on this road (pointing) at 7:30 PM, prepared to move forward." One of the maps was marked in accordance with the battalion commander's map and then the machine-gun company commander returned to his company.

Map #2

Not to be used

Map #1

Company headquarters, platoon, section and squad leaders were directed to assemble immediately. Maps were issued to the officers and marked, and the brigade order studied. Verbal orders were issued from the brigade order showing in detail from the map, the plan of attack of the 1st Division and the object of the attack, which was to drive a wedge into the western edge of the Marne salient to force the enemy to withdraw, and perhaps cut them off from their line of communications to the rear. The regimental zone of action was pointed out on the map and also points to guide on: Raperie on the left of the zone of action, Tilleul de la Glaux on the right of the zone of action. This latter place was on the road which limited the 1st objective. On the left of the zone of action there was a draw leading to the Missy aux Bois ravine. On the right there was another draw leading in the same direction. Special emphasis was placed on the spur in the Missy aux Bois ravine.

Map #3

"The 2d Battalion attacks with the following formation: F and H Companies assault companies, F Company on the right. E and G Companies support companies, E Company on the right. The assault companies each attack with two platoons in the assault and two in support. The platoons in the assault each attack with one section in the assault and one in support.

SPECIAL SITUATION, 4:30 PM, JULY 17, 1918

This company supports the 2d Battalion, 26th Infantry within the zone of action.

The 1st Platoon.- One section will follow the center of the right assault company. One section will follow the right flank of the right support company. The leading section will engage targets to its front, the other section to the right flank.

The 2d Platoon.- One section will follow the center of the left assault company. One section will follow the left flank of the left support company. The leading section will engage targets to its front, the other section to the left flank.

The 3d Platoon,-in support, in line of squad columns, will follow the center of the battalion at a distance of 200 yards.

Overlay No 1
Map No 2

Positions for the assault are shown on the map.

On the assault to the 2d objective the 1st and 2d Platoons will go into firing positions on the edge of the Missy-aux-Bois ravine and fire overhead fire until the leading wave of the rifle companies reach the forward slope of the ridge in the ravine, at which time one section from each platoon will move forward

and occupy the ridge in front and take up firing positions. On the capture of the ridge the remaining section of each platoon will move forward to the ridge, and take up firing positions. Overhead fire will be used to assist the rifle companies. Immediate steps will be taken to secure enemy machine guns in the area of the platoons. These guns will be turned in their positions and their fire used to supplement the fire of your guns, and when possible, used exclusively. One section of each platoon will cover the right flank and one section of each platoon the left flank. These positions will be organized for defense.

The support platoon will move forward to the 1st objective and there take up defensive positions against counterattack until the rifle companies have cleared the plateau, at which time it will move forward to the edge of the Missy aux Bois ravine and engage enemy targets on the eastern slope of Missy aux Bois ravine and on the heights beyond. These positions will be organized for defense.

Overlay #2, Map #2

Positions are shown on the map.

In case a leading section becomes engaged it will be leap-frogged by the following section. In case a leading platoon becomes engaged it will be leap-frogged by the support platoon.

Every enemy target will be engaged.

Ammunition will be used sparingly.

Squads will use their guns energetically and boldly.

You know the chain of command. In case of casualties each automatically replaces the next senior and the junior will be notified.

by supervision from in rear. Great pains were taken to make certain that all casualties among leaders would be immediately replaced by the next junior, and that constant check among them would keep the company organization. Bold and energetic use of machine guns at all enemy targets was urged because it was thought that machine-gun targets would appear. It was believed that all officers and noncommissioned officers knew the mission of the machine-gun company and the 2d Battalion, as well as the mission in general of the attack.

The platoon commanders of the 1st and 2d Platoons were excellent machine-gun officers. The 3d Platoon was commanded by an officer of much less experience. The brigade order to organize the 1st objective prevented the machine-gun company from assisting the 2d Battalion forward to the 2d objective. (4) The terrain selected by the machine-gun company commander offered ideal positions for overhead fire to support the attack, and the tactical location gave the battalion machine gun defense, in the valley, to its flanks, to the front, and to the rear, which positions on the 1st objective did not give. One platoon of machine guns in support could check a strong counterattack. It was presumed that strong enemy forces would be encountered in the Missy aux Bois ravine due to its excellent shelter. The enemy would need all the fire power it could get in that area. and the battalion terrain offered excellent machine-gun defense.

(4) Division Vol VIII, 2d Inf. Brig; Op. Sect. No 170

OPERATIONS, 6:30 PM, JULY 17--9:00 AM, JULY 18

It was 6:30 PM, July 17, 1918. The 1st Battalion was due to arrive. All company liaison men were sent out to locate the company transport.

Guns and ammunition will be checked upon their arrival at this point.

The 2d in command will be at the head of the support platoon.

The route to the assault positions is as shown on the map. This company forms at the rear of the 2d Battalion and follows them. A guide will be furnished the company at Ferme de Pouy.

Map #1

The company forms here at 6:15 PM prepared to move out. Equipment, light packs. Carts will be taken forward. Canteens will be filled.

The company command post will be with the 2d Battalion command post.

It is now 5:30 PM."

Comments

The formation designated to be used by the 26th Infantry, support battalion following the assault battalion at a distance of from 200 to 500 yards, (3) required that the machine-gun company remain directly behind the battalion to prevent intermingling of units. This reduced seriously the maneuvering ability of the machine-gun company. It was assumed that ammunition carts could not be used during the movement forward since they would interfere with the movement of the support and reserve battalions. Their use was not contemplated except by contact at night or at favorable opportunities. The addition of four riflemen per machine-gun squad as ammunition carriers was thought to solve the problem of ammunition supply. The ammunition these men carried was to be used first and the riflemen released to their companies. No provision was made to drive men forward or hold squads together

(3) Division, Vol VIII 2d Inf. Brig; ~~Op. Sect. No 170~~ F.O. No. 34

The location of the carts enroute was not found. The battalion commander was notified. The rain ceased and the sky cleared. At 7:15 PM the company formed and moved to the column of the 2d Battalion, and the liaison men were instructed to lengthen their search. It appeared that the company, if it moved with the 2d Battalion, would move into position without machine guns or ammunition. The battalion commander was again notified that the carts had not arrived. The column was delayed about ten minutes but then moved off. The machine-gun company remained in position waiting until the last second for their carts. When the battalion had moved forward about 500 yards the second in command was directed by the company commander to move the company forward and instructed that if the carts could not join the column they would join the company immediately in rear of the attack positions.

As the company commander neared the crossroads at Roy St. Nicolas, leading elements of the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry approached and the company transport officer was seen coming across country. Company liaison men had found the transport officer and were directing him forward. The carts were rushed forward to join the company. By rapid marching the company was overtaken. Enroute the transport officer was given the situation and his direction as to how to supply rations and ammunition. The machine-gun company was broken into route column, the 2d in command bringing up the rear. His duty there was to frequently check the column. The mules and mule drivers were badly fatigued from five days and nights of marching. The

gun squads were comparatively fresh. The company commander had been sixty hours without rest. Progress was hindered by a hard rain which turned to a drizzle, making the night very dark and movement slow. The French guides were picked up at the Ferme de Pouy by the rifle companies, but there was no guide for the machine-gun company. As the tail of the company column passed the farm, that area was shelled. Immediate check was made to the rear to find out what had happened. There were no casualties. On return to the head of the company it was found that the column had turned north and the route lay across a field. There seemed to be no trail, the ground was soft and slippery. This condition, ditches and wire entanglements impeded progress and especially that of the carts. Contact was maintained with the next preceding company by company headquarters and the carts aided forward by the gun crews. A hard surfaced road was reached and the rifle companies moved faster. The interval between the rifle company and the machine-gun company increased while the machine-gun company was still on the soft field.

The rain ceased, the sky was still overcast.

Map #1

When the western edge of the Cutry ravine was reached the machine-gun company commander decided that further movement forward of the carts might be heard by the enemy. Due to the rattling of the wheels on stones and the constant urging of the twenty-four cart drivers, the noise was considerable. No chance could be taken on drawing additional enemy fire so a message was sent forward that the machine-gun company had halted to

take the guns and ammunition off the carts and would proceed by hand. The battalion column moved on.

The company liaison men were sent out to attempt to maintain contact but due to the darkness it could not be maintained. While the guns and ammunition were being unloaded and delayed somewhat by the attached riflemen, who were totally inexperienced, final instructions were repeated to the transport officer. The platoons reported and the column then moved forward in column of twos with as much distance between squads (10 yard intervals) as the darkness permitted. As the column progressed the liaison men were picked up and the final direction of the battalion column pointed out. The roads were unfamiliar not having been reconnoitered, and the location of Cutry and the 2d Battalion were unknown. The company commander was fearful that he might become a casualty before being able to get his company into position.

Map #1

Following the road which was presumed to lead to Cutry, the company arrived in a town. The surroundings were unfamiliar. The liaison men again were sent out to attempt to locate the battalion and the company commander and two runners went out. They took a road which was expected to lead to the position. This turned out to be correct. When the battalion was located it was going into position. The liaison men were sent back to bring up the company. The Battalion Command Post was located by the machinegun company commander and verification made that the two front line companies were in position. A hurried reconnaissance was made to ascertain the positions of the support companies and when the machine gun company arrived the 1st and 2d Platoons were

The 2d in command moved to the side of the company commander for comfort. He was directed to move to the flank but as he did so an enemy shell knocked him down. He came running back with the remark, "You can't get me away from you again!"

The location of the command post gave poor observation for machine-gun targets due to both the enemy S.O.S. which seemed to be thinning out, and the supporting barrage. The company commander with two runners decided to move forward in the battalion formation for reconnaissance and better observation. After passing through the enemy S.O.S. zone there was a moment of deathly stillness. Then one of the runners was killed by a machine-gun bullet.

It was immediately observed that the center of the battalion was not up with the barrage. One supporting gun, probably caliber 105, was about 200 yards behind the barrage. This part of the line was following its burst. The units on the flank and in rear were directed by the machine-gun company commander to move around and in front of this gun. They were led by him. Nearing the front with this group, a scared rabbit jumped up and ran toward the enemy line. The attention and fire of almost a section was directed to the rabbit until stopped by the machine-gun company commander. Groupings about the size of sections also began to form. These were dispersed. The machine-gun platoons were still proceeding in their proper places in the formation, and with few casualties.

A red rocket was sent up from the enemy line. The machine-gun company commander, recognizing this as the same S.O.S. signal, ran forward to the edge of the

notified to go into the positions selected, and shown the approximate directions. The support platoon was directed to its positions behind a cut and report was made to the battalion command post at 4:20 AM that the machine-gun company was in position. From 4:20 AM to 4:25 AM the company commander rested. (5) The battalion commander then gave instructions regarding the command post. It would remain in the present location until the 1st objective was reached, at which time it would move forward. At 4:25 the Battalion commanding officer said, "Let's go up on the plateau and watch the jump-off." The sky was getting lighter but the ground was still dark; as the light grew stronger the waiting battalion began to take form and then single-starred red rockets rose from the enemy line. The enemy artillery S.O.S. broke upon the waiting troops, many were wounded. The minutes dragged anxiously when suddenly the sky to the rear, the west, was lit up at one blast. The barrage had commenced. When the barrage burst in front of the line it was an automatic signal to advance. The infantry arose and the front line moved forward with a yell to follow closely their barrage. The machine-gun company commander waited to check the three platoons of his company and observe that they were in their proper position. Undue casualties had not occurred in any one platoon. The battalion commander was seen moving forward to the left front. It was realized then that the battalion command post was to be a moving one. The machine-gun company commander then detailed a liaison corporal and one runner to report to the battalion commander as liaison agents. He established his command post with the 2d in command.

(5) Diary

barrage and when one enemy appeared at the position (a distance of 200 yards) from which the signal was sent, fired at him with his pistol. He fell. The enemy barrage was shortened and the battalion again passed through the enemy barrage. This was the last barrage and the last red rocket. Stopping at this point to drop back to a better reconnaissance position, one of the riflemen attached as an ammunition carrier was observed, covered with blood and in charge of six or seven prisoners, passing to the rear. He was stopped and his prisoners were directed to go to the rear. Apparently this rifleman had rejoined his company before his machine-gun ammunition had been used. It was realized that his example might be typical of about 50 per cent of these attached riflemen.

The center of the battalion was again held up.

Map #2

On investigation a short trench was observed about 200 yards to the front. The machine-gun company commander directed his orderly to move quickly to the flank and come up in rear. The instruction was carried out and he captured the trench. (6) The machine-gun company commander moved forward. He and his orderly were then on the Raperie--Lorient Road. It was observed that the battalion on the right, 16th Infantry had not progressed beyond that road. Further observation revealed an enemy machine-gun nest in a covered, hastily-constructed emplacement, four hundred yards to the front of the battalion. One embrasure faced toward the northeast. One gun of the support platoon was directed into action on this embrasure. One clip (20 shots) was fired. One shot only hit the lower edge of the aperture. The

(6) Division Vol XXII-XXIII Citation Charles Cameron Co B. 3d MG Bn

Map #2

effect was watched. Immediately the enemy, about twenty in number, started pouring out with their hands held up. The 16th Infantry again advanced. Again the machine-gun company commander moved ahead for reconnaissance. As the 1st objective was reached by the leading wave it was observed that the 1st wave was over-running the line. The machine-gun company commander ran forward and halted the line on the immediate flanks, and issued directions to stop the extreme flanks. The 1st objective was an unimproved road which was almost obliterated, and consequently hard to recognize.

Map #2

The machine-gun platoons were observed halted and going into firing positions. The machine-gun company commander established his command post in the front line, and with his liaison men dug in with mess kits. Enemy machine-gun fire was heavy and grazing. One enemy 77 caliber gun only was firing on the front line, moving along the line at regular intervals of about fifty yards. His space was calculated and movement made of a few yards to avoid his fire. An Algerian from the French division on the left moved across the front with an automatic rifle looking for the enemy and roamed back again. The battalion commander was observed making a reconnaissance along the front line, and upon his approach the machine-gun company commander stepped out of his fox hole and notified him that the machine guns were disposed as previously planned. A message arrived--"The Platoon Commander 1st Platoon wounded. Platoon sergeant in command." The platoon sergeant was capable, and left in command.

Overlay #2
Map #2

When the standing barrage was lifted the 1st and 2d Platoons moved forward in accordance with their schedule and entered the Missy aux Bois ravine. The 16th Infantry on the right apparently were progressing on their schedule. The machine-gun company commander waited to move forward with the support platoon. Upon arrival in rear of the road leading south from D'Arly an American battalion was observed to halt and retreat from in front of Cravanéon to a position in rear of a slight slope. It reorganized and prepared to attack again. The support platoon was put into firing position and shots registered on Cravanéon. It was thought that an enemy counterattack from that point might be in progress. The battalion moved forward again and when their attack appeared successful, the support platoon was directed to move quickly to its selected positions at the edge of the ravine. This platoon immediately found targets to the left flank in the ravine but none on the plateau east of the Missy aux Bois ravine. The company commander moved into the ravine and to the ridge in front to establish his command post. The 1st and 2d Platoons were firing at targets as they appeared in the valley on both flanks and to the front. Extra men from the gun crews had already seized enemy machine guns and were firing these in long bursts. The positions were being organized. The rifle companies masked the machine-gun fire to the front as the 2d objective was apparently taken. The situation on the immediate right was obscure due to trees and bushes, but American riflemen were to the right flank. The progress of the attack on the left

Overlay #3
Map #2

were present. All guns had fired and ammunition was available for a counterattack.

OPERATIONS 9:00 AM JULY 18 - 4:30 AM JULY 19

After the 2d objective had been taken the 3d Battalion 26th Infantry was not observed passing to the final objective as scheduled. Troop movements forward took place to the right. This was found to be the 3d Battalion. A Report was received from a rifleman that an enemy machine gun on the right was shooting from a cave and firing at troops as they passed toward the front, and causing heavy casualties. A machine-gun liaison man reported that he knew the location, and conducted the company commander to a position immediately above it. Grenades were secured and dropped with no effect. Two rounds of Stokes mortar ammunition were secured from the 28th Infantry. These were ineffective. The aid of a passing French tank was requested but it could not reach the position and keep its own mission. The runner was then notified to form a guard around this cave, to approach under cover and attempt to keep down their fire. At about 4:00 PM the occupants surrendered after the first six men had been killed in their attempt to come out. The woods and bushes were searched for other enemy emplacements but the result was heavy loads of souvenirs and much barter.

A battery of French 75-mm guns went into position in rear of the 2d Platoon and commenced firing during the morning. A message was recieved that the platoon sergeant of the 2d Platoon was killed. A French cavalry squadron was seen moving forward on the right

Back of continuing Observe

flank was confused. Check of the positions revealed that the guns were properly placed.

Comments

The tactical disposition of the machine-gun company was believed to be correct considering the terrain, the depth of the battalion and the position of the support battalion. Every enemy target that was seen was engaged and the advance of the battalion, as well as the advance of the battalions to both flanks, was aided effectively. It was learned that the machine-gun company could not be effectively commanded if its command post were confined to the battalion command post. Command of the company demanded that targets be picked up quickly, missions assigned effectively, and units coordinated. A liaison group at the battalion command post was sufficient. The command post should be about in the center of the command during the advance. Ammunition carried by the squad was sufficient for missions of direct fire in the attack. The prearranged platoon positions taken up gave to all guns excellent fields of fire and a coordinated defense. The front of the battalion on the 2d objective was covered as well as the Missy aux Bois ravine to both flanks. The rear and both flanks were covered by the support platoon. The use of enemy machine guns, twelve, to supplement the company guns gave strong machine-gun defense and saved ammunition. More enemy machine guns were available but could not be manned. So far as was known there was no straggling.

A hurried check of the personnel revealed few casualties among the men of the machine-gun company but only about twenty-four of the attached riflemen

and its action watched. On arrival at the front line it received heavy fire and turned back.

At dusk the machine-gun company commander moved forward to the battalion command post. He reported his positions and the status of the company. He made a reconnaissance along the front line and then to the command post of the 3d Battalion which was found on the right of the 2d Battalion. Information was received that their attached machine-gun company, Company A 3d Machine-Gun Battalion, had no officers left. On return to the company command post the 2d in command of Company B was directed to report to the 3d Battalion and assume command of Company A. That company also had no reserve rations.

OPERATIONS 4:30 AM to 10:00 AM JULY 19

At 4:30 AM, July 19, a message was received from the liaison group at the battalion command post that the battalion was attacking. The messenger was directed to return to find out if the company should move forward. The 1st Platoon was notified to assemble prepared to move forward. The reserve Rifle Company, Company E, was notified that the 2d Battalion was attacking and advised that they should move forward. The liaison group signalled back with their wig-wag flag to move forward. The most direct route, along a path over the left face of the ridge, over the bridge and up the trail was taken. Upon arriving at the plateau, infantry were observed beyond the Paris-Soissons Road. On approaching the Paris-Soissons Road the Commanding Officer 26th Infantry was seen. It was thought that the Regimental command post was at that point. The following conversation took place: "I am in command

of the machine-gun company supporting the 2d Battalion 26th Infantry". "Move your company forward immediately to support. They need you". "Where is the 2d Battalion?" "Straight forward". "Will you give me a guide?" "No, I have no guides. Send your liaison men out as feelers."

The machine-gun company commander designated one runner to remain behind and explained to him that the 1st Platoon under the command of the company commander was moving forward. "Signal the other two platoons to move forward and take positions on the plateau behind the Paris-Soissons Road." The company commander started forward leading the platoon which had been formed in line of squad columns upon arrival on the plateau. They moved forward about 100 yards when enemy machine guns fired at them. Rush by squads for fifty yards was taken up until the top of the slope was reached. There were a few riflemen on the reverse side of the slope and also some dead. The 1st Battalion was seen on the right flank. As the platoon appeared on the crest the enemy machine-gun fire increased. A ripe wheat field lay in front. Advance was now made by rushing 25 yards, one man at a time. This drew enemy fire. It was decided immediately to advance by crawling forward through the wheat. One hundred and fifty yards were covered by the platoon crawling together. This crawling began to draw fire. The company commander then, with his two runners and two sergeants who were not carrying machine-gun equipment, went out as scouts followed by the gun squads. Finally no movement could be made by an individual without drawing fire which raked below the top of the wheat. An unoccupied, short

Overlay #1
Map #4

and hastily-built trench was encountered. The guns were placed in firing positions in the trench. Then riflemen who remained with the platoon were sent ten yards to the left flank to prevent a surprise attack from that flank. Visibility was limited to about twenty feet. It was presumed that the 2d Battalion might be still further to the front and that this enemy detachment had come in behind their left flank. It was apparent that there was a strong enemy force within about thirty yards. Riflemen could crawl to this point and then rush the trench. A message was sent back.

"Machine Gun Company.
Supporting 2d Battalion.

To C.O. 26th Infantry

M. G. Company stopped 800 yards N. of Paris-Soissons Road by enemy fire. Enemy located 60 yards to the left front. Send infantry or artillery support and can keep on advancing.

Signed Yuill
Comdg."

After the messenger left friendly artillery began falling about twenty yards in front of the position. Enemy artillery began falling twenty yards to the rear. Overs and shorts from both fires fell on the trench. This friendly artillery was not in response to the message because that message could not have arrived. The company commander made a short reconnaissance during the fire; which was made possible by the enemy seeking cover from the artillery fire. The exact location of the enemy could not be determined.

was 800 yards in front of the front line with no field of fire. It was believed that a platoon of infantry could have moved forward by infiltration and taken the enemy trench with few casualties. It was impossible for the machine-gun platoon to capture the trench with their pistols without deserting their machine guns. The gun positions, finally taken up, did not have sufficient depth for the most efficient defense, but were suitable for an attack formation. The enemy terrain was ideal for machine-gun defense.

Rolling ground offered excellent positions and the entire front could be covered by machine guns.

OPERATIONS 10:00 AM to 5:30 PM JULY 19

Enemy targets were again sought out. One enemy 155 caliber gun which had been shooting down the Paris-Soissons Road from the left, was located and one machine gun was directed to the left flank, to attempt to put it out of action. Machine-gun fire failed to dislodge it. At this time an American artillery battery galloped across the Paris-Soissons Road on the right, unlimbered and fired shrapnel to the left flank near the machine-gun target. They then withdrew. The machine gun was brought back to its position. Additional direct fire targets could not be found. At 4:00 PM the machine-gun company commander with two runners, again rejoined the command post of the 2d Battalion. Occasional intense enemy machine-gun fire from the left front swept the intrenched area. Observation of the front from the battalion command post was excellent.

Enemy had been seen and reported by rifle platoon commanders organizing positions, but this was

The messenger returned with the following information: The 2d Battalion is behind the Paris-Soissons Road. The battalion commander wants machine gun support from that position. The platoon was withdrawn to the Paris-Soissons Road and guns were placed in position there. The location of the 2d and 3d Platoons was checked, and reconnaissance made for the 2d Battalion command post and better locations for the machine guns. The battalion command post was found to the left flank and behind the Paris-Soissons Road. It was in a shell hole. The 2d Battalion apparently had slipped, during the attack, to the left flank. The 2d and 3d Platoons could support the battalion from their positions. The 1st Platoon was shifted to the left, to the right center of the battalion, for better positions.

Overlay #2
Map #4

Comments

No orders were received by the reserve rifle company or the machine-gun company for the attack. The order to attack had been received by the Commanding Officer 26th Infantry at 3:00 AM. The orders received were to attack at 4:00 AM. (7) Information of the attack was received through the machine-gun liaison group at the battalion command post. The brigade orders to organize and defend the 1st objective had been violated by the machine-gun company taking forward positions. To again move forward meant to leave the assigned mission. Movement forward was delayed due to lack of orders. Finally the company moved in bounds at the initiative of the company commander. This proved to be a proper movement. Improper directions caused unnecessary casualties, and a platoon of machine guns with little shock action was lost to defense because it

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not reported to the machine-gun company. These could have been engaged and the enemy driven from these positions either by direct or indirect fire.

ATTACK 5:30 PM

It was ~~now~~ 5:30 PM July 19, 1918. The situation
(8) Diary was unchanged. (8) At 5:45 PM a messenger from the regimental command post dived into the 2d Battalion command post. The message was:

"Hq. 26th Infantry

To C.O. 2d Bn.

Attack at 5:30 PM, capturing Ploisy Ravine and height beyond. Artillery lifts at 5:30 PM. Azimuth of attack 114°.

Sgd."

The battalion commander asked the machine gun company commander, "What time is it now." "5:45, fifteen minutes late now." "What is the direction?" "That way (pointing)." "I'll take the right, you take the left. Let's go!" The machine-gun company commander sent one runner to the machine-gun platoons and one to the left company with the verbal message, "attack immediately." He followed the battalion commander to the Paris-Soissons Road, moved to the right to view the machine-gun company, ~~and~~ blew his whistle and gave the arm signal, "Forward". As some men saw the signal,
Overlay #3 Map #4 he turned and moved slowly toward the left front. The machine-gun company arose slowly and started forward to the left oblique. The squads organized and the company formed in a line of squad columns directly behind the company commander. Ricochet shell fire was received from a battery of heavy artillery to the left flank. Intense machine-gun fire came from the front.

The pace, slow at first, was increased to a run. As the left center of the battalion sector was reached the approximate azimuth direction was taken. The company halted behind a slight ridge for a two-minute rest, followed by reorganization. The objective of the attack was stated.

There was no infantry in front or on the left flank. Infantry were seen moving forward on the right flank. The platoon commander of the 3d Platoon was reported killed. The platoon sergeant was in command. The company moved forward at a run. As they reached the crest of the slope the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry was seen coming over the hill, moving across the front of the 2d Battalion. They were being rapidly thinned out but they were not hesitating. Shouted directions and the arm signal for their change of direction was given by the machine-gun company commander. This was obeyed. The machine-gun company proceeded on. They halted in a sunken road and reorganized. A battery of enemy light artillery had commenced firing from the front. The heavy artillery had ceased fire, Casualties were becoming serious. Two runners only remained with the Company Headquarters, An aid station was established into which wounded riflemen started pouring. Canteens were dry and the wounded left to suffer from thirst. The company commander's orderly reported, "I am wounded. Private Erskine takes my place."

To decrease losses it was determined to send one platoon forward under the remaining officer and the two other platoons to follow in support. The 2d Platoon officer came to get his instructions with the remark, "Hell of a Day! Eh?" "Take your platoon across to the

valley. I will follow with the other two platoons at 100 yards." "That is suicide." "Start immediately." While leaning against the road watching the platoon leave the trench a shell knocked the company commander down. When he arose the 2d Platoon had advanced about fifty yards. The other two platoons were directed to move forward. The enemy artillery was now covering the movement with shrapnel. After advancing a hundred yards the company commander was again knocked down. When he awoke the company was halted waiting for orders. The platoon in front was halted. The command "forward" was given. The company commander moved forward rapidly to make a reconnaissance, and found the 2d Platoon leader wounded. The platoon leader was notified that the wounded would be cared for upon the capture of the objective. The company was moved forward to the next slope which overlooked the plateau. There the Ploisy ravine could be seen and, through a gap in the bushes and trees, the heights beyond were visible. The enemy were leaving their intrenchments. "Action front" and "commence firing" was given. None of the enemy escaped.

The 3d Platoon was directed to remain in position to cover the Ploisy ravine and the heights beyond. The 1st and 2d Platoons were directed to move forward into the valley following the company commander. He ran forward through the valley and on to the heights beyond. American riflemen were moving into the valley on the right and onto the slope beyond. When the two platoons arrived in the shelter of a steep bank the remaining sergeant reorganized them and then reported to the company commander, "I am wounded." "You are the only sergeant left. Can you go on?" "Yes." "Take the guns

INCIDENTS FOLLOWING THE ATTACK

An Algerian liaison platoon reported to the company command post. The machine-gun company commander drank the platoon sergeant's wine and then directed him to report to the American troops in the valley to the left. A captain of the 28th Infantry arrived alone and showed evidence of, and talked about, his narrow escapes until told to organize the 28th Infantry and move forward on the slope on the left flank of the 26th Infantry. A member of the 28th Infantry was questioned concerning the location of the command post of the 28th Infantry Battalion on the left. Later the 28th Infantry regimental commander appeared and asked, "Where is the C.P. of the 28th Infantry Battalion?" The location was given. "Do you know where it is?" "Yes." "Lead me to it." "Follow me." The valley intervening was intensely shelled. The company commander ran directly to the dugout, followed by the colonel. The company commander immediately turned back and ran to his command post. It was now dusk. On his return a staff car came from the direction of Missy aux Bois. They asked of the company commander, "Where are the Algerians." "On our left." "Have you seen them?" "Yes." "Is the 1st Division in liaison with them?" "Yes. One of their platoons was here. They were sent to the 28th Infantry in the valley to our left and directed to keep contact with them." The platoon sergeant of the advance platoon returned wounded a second time. He gave the location of the guns. Request for him to return in the staff car was granted. Reconnaissance and check of the infantry and machine guns was made. Flank protection for the guns was assured.

This may have been responsible for their loss of direction. Par The infantry was so exhausted on arrival at the objective that great difficulty was had in reorganizing. Par Fortunately, nothing was known of the scheme of the division order for attack and objective. The advance of the battalion would have been delayed(9) and more casualties suffered in consequence of delay because the 28th Infantry was aided by the enemy positions being flanked. The objective, the heights west of Ploisy ravine, was overrun due to misunderstanding and the heights east of the valley were captured. Command of the 2d Battalion was not assumed by the machine-gun company commander in spite of his seniority, because there were no other officers left with the machine-gun company. The riflemen were under a capable lieutenant. Par The reorganization of the gun squads during the advance was remarkable. In spite of 50 per cent casualties within thirty minutes, eight out of twelve squads arrived with their complete equipment and ammunition. It was especially noted that the company horse-shoer and a recently relieved mule driver, both considered unreliable men, were present. They carried full boxes of ammunition. One corporal had picked up his assembled gun and tripod and was moving forward with the platoon. Par The machine-gun company commander still does not know what action was proper during the attack at 5:30 PM, July 19. The enemy defense quickly showed itself in the sector of his advance to consist only of machine guns and artillery. The exact location of the light artillery and the machine guns could not be determined. The attack was successful.

(9) Division Vol II G-3, 1st Div Memo, July 19, 1918

forward. Take firing positions with the advance elements of the battalion, one section cover to the left flank, one section cover to the right flank. The left flank appears most dangerous." The two sections advanced. The company command post and observation post were established at the eastern edge of the valley. The senior officer remaining with the rifle companies was a 1st lieutenant. He was notified to organize the slope with the riflemen and told that four machine guns were moving into the front line. Their positions and fields of fire ~~was~~ were pointed out. The lieutenant was notified that the machine-gun company commander would retain command of the machine-gun company to support the battalion.

Overlay #4
Map #4

Comments

Due to the attack order being received after the time scheduled for the attack, the battalion did not make a coordinated attack. The enemy were not defending closely with riflemen and the shock action of riflemen was not required for the advance of the machine-gun company. Enemy riflemen could have prevented their advance. It was not realized until the first halt was made that the left rifle company would not advance immediately. A reorganization was intended at that halt.

It was believed that the machine-gun company should be well forward to drive out enemy artillery and machine guns, as machine-gun fire was more effective at those targets than rifle fire. Par At the jump-off the 1st Battalion was facing northeast. The right flank of the 1st Battalion had been farther advanced than the left.

Assistance in reorganization of the infantry front line was given. Three men were left at each gun and all other men were sent back to care for wounded and to return with ammunition that had been dropped during the advance.

At dusk a Y.M.C.A. truck came to the valley with chocolate and cookies. The truck was unloaded and left. Additional machine-gun ammunition was received when rations were brought forward during the night of July 19-20. Ammunition was distributed and the men fed in reliefs. Inquiry as to why ammunition had not been brought forward on the night of July 18-19 was excused on the grounds that road congestion in the rear areas prevented carts being brought forward. It was rumored that the 1st Division was to be relieved on July 20.

A company commander from the 3d Battalion took over the command of the 2d Battalion.

On the morning of July 20 enemy fire on the infantry lessened but enemy artillery fire was more accurate in the bottom of Ploissy ravine. The situation on the left in the ravine appeared safe from counter-attack from that direction. Runners were sent out to notify the 3d Platoon to move forward to the eastern slope of the ravine. As the machine-gun company commander stood waiting in his observation post, enemy shell fire commenced and repeatedly knocked him down.

Overlay #5
Map #4

On its cessation the platoon arrived and was conducted to its new positions by the company commander.

At about 2:00 PM the 3d Battalion, 28th Infantry was observed moving forward in approach formation and being shelled by enemy artillery. On inquiry as it

passed, it was found that they were making an attack leap-frogging the front line. There was to be a general attack. No information had been received concerning this attack. (10) The 2d Battalion had not moved. The movement of the 3d Battalion was watched. There was a hay shed on the summit of the slope to the front; as this was approached intense enemy fire stopped the advance. No ground was gained.

(10) Division Vol II G-3 Hq. 1st Div July 20 1918 721

Word drifted to the infantry as a message from the division commander, "The 1st Division will continue to attack. The infantry is never exhausted." The machine gun company commander's reactions to this was, "The infantry is exhausted and I am exhausted."

CONFUSION

During the night of July 20-21 information was received from the 2d Battalion that the consolidated 1st and 2d Battalions as one unit would attack to the right of Berzy le Sec at 8:30 AM, July 21. (11) The 3d Battalion would remain in support. The 2d Battalion machine-gun company would remain in reserve.

(11) Division Vol II, G-3 Hq. 1st Div July 20, 1918 723

Orders were issued to the two front-line sections. The 1st and 2d Battalions are to attack at 8:30 AM. This company is in reserve.

Left section, upon the capture of the hill to your direct front, move your guns forward to the forward slope of the hill and to the left of the hay shed. Assist the infantry advance by fire on the plain southeast of Berzy-le-Sec. One section will be on the right of the hay shed. The 3d Platoon will remain in reserve in their present location.

Right section, move forward upon the capture of the hill to your direct front, occupy positions to the right of the hay shed. Assist the infantry advance

Overlay #6 Map #4

by fire on the plain southeast of Berzy-le-Sec. One section will be on the left of the hay shed. The 3d Platoon remains in their present location.

The 3d Platoon was informed of the situation and directed to remain in position.

At 8:45 AM the two sections moved forward to their positions. The right section encountered enemy on going into their position, but with pistol fire killed them and went into position.

The situation in front was confused and no fire could be used in direct support of the battalions. Some fire during the first stages of the attack was delivered on the designated area.

Comments

The machine-gun company was so reduced by casualties that an advance could not be made by the eight guns. It would have been necessary to reduce the number of guns to four at most to attack.

The enemy terrain was wooded and cut by steep banks and slopes. Close support for the attack could be of little value. Increased enemy resistance and fire indicated a new line of resistance through Noyant.

Map #4

On the afternoon of July 20-21 the 2d in command returned to the company, having been relieved by the company commander of the company to which he had been attached.

Relief

On July 22 orders were received that the 1st Division was to be relieved that night. There would be no replacement relief for the machine-gun company, but it would automatically be relieved at 8:00 PM. The transport would be waiting at Cravançon. The company was assembled prepared to move to the rear, when enemy

rifle and, moreover, men prefer to be with their own organizations. They rejoined at the first opportunity. Carts were improperly used. They could have been held in readiness in the ravine at Cutry and brought ammunition forward during July 18 to the gun positions on the 2d objective. They also could have been held in the Missy-aux-Bois ravine and furnished ammunition for indirect fire from the Paris-Soissons Road. Upon arrival of the company at Ploisy ravine the carts should have advanced to the Ploizy ravine.

The ammunition problem in succeeding engagements was solved by a transport corporal and runner following the company. The ammunition carts moved from cover to cover in rear. When the machine-gun company went into position a company ammunition dump was immediately established and the empty carts returned for additional ammunition. Casualties were few and the ammunition supply always ample. Impetus of supply must come from the rear and from within the company. Casualties among runners, lack of time and fatigue, prevent a search being made for the transport. The stabilization of a situation allows the transport to remain farther to the rear.

The machine-gun company command post must be in a tactical location from which the platoons may be commanded. The location may or may not be the same as that of the battalion command post. Close liaison, however, must be maintained by a machine-gun company detail at the battalion command post. This group must consist of an energetic officer or noncommissioned officer, and two runners. They must have the confidence of the battalion commander, and in case of lack of time, be able to analyze the situation and inform the machine gun-company commander.

rockets appeared from beyond Berzy-le-Sec. It was believed that a counterattack might be in progress. All guns were sent back to their positions to wait. The ammunition had been left in place because there were only sufficient men to carry the guns. Nothing developed and the guns were again withdrawn. There were two officers and twnety-six men remaining with the company.

Elements of the relieving division were passed enroute to the rear. The gun carts were picked up. The march was slow because of the fatigue of both officers and men and the column arrived at the assembly area in Bois de Retz at daylight, July 23, 1918.

Not Alone

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Limited objectives gave valuable time for reorganization, both for the attacking and defending troops. This time probably was more valuable for the defending units than for the attacking. It was the writer's opinion formed when one machine-gun platoon advanced about 700 yards in front of the front line with only one casualty, that organized infiltration should be used. It was believed for example, that the entire area west of Ploisy ravine and east of the Paris-Soissons Road could have been captured by infiltration from the right flank and with few casualties. The wheat field gave excellent concealment and a poor field of fire for defense against infiltration.

SPECIAL CONCLUSIONS

To attach riflemen to a machine-gun company as ammunition carriers was a waste of man power. The rifleman ammunition carrier was handicapped by carrying a

All runners must be intelligent, be able to read maps for directions and deliver important messages ~~verbally~~ orally. Important messages only must be sent. Two runners should be used if possible but they must be depended upon to go alone to the proper place, either by day or night.

There were many opportunities during this attack for the employment of overhead and indirect fire of the support and reserve machine-gun companies of the brigade. This fire was not utilized. There was also no coordination of the machine-gun defense of the brigade.(12) The War Diary of the 3d Machine-Gun Battalion reports on July 20, 1918, "Usual routine duties."

(12) Division Vol XVII No number

Organizations must be maintained until they disappear and their location must be known at all times by the next higher unit.

Orders should reach a machine-gun company as soon as possible. Time is required to give data for their fire and to take up suitable firing positions. Attached units frequently are forgotten in the excitement of action, or the commander fails to realize that this unit may require more time to move than a rifle company.

The efficiency of a unit varies with the amount of information. The situation must be known by two or more persons of the unit. There were occasions when all information of the action to be taken was known in the battalion by the battalion headquarters only. More frequently within a company only the company commander knew. Casualties in that group produced the embarrassing situation of going to some unknown destination and

not knowing what to do if they got there.

Close support of the assault battalion by a machine-gun company can render great assistance in the attack. The principles of this support are:

Bold and energetic use of machine guns, and positions well forward in the formation.

Engage every enemy target that appears.

Constant reconnaissance.

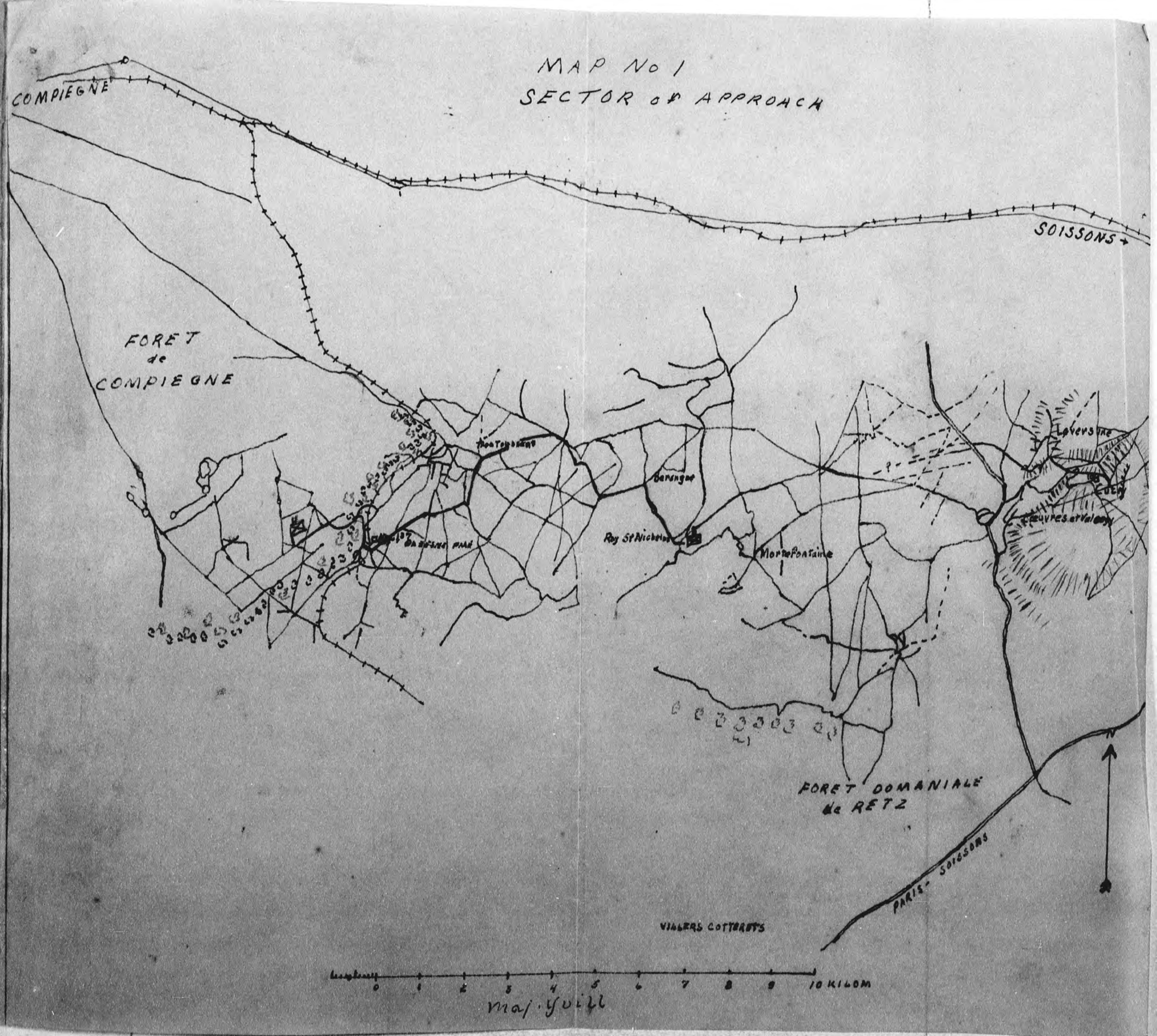
Well trained crews who can replace any casualty.

Observation of enemy and friendly movements.

Machine gun fire:

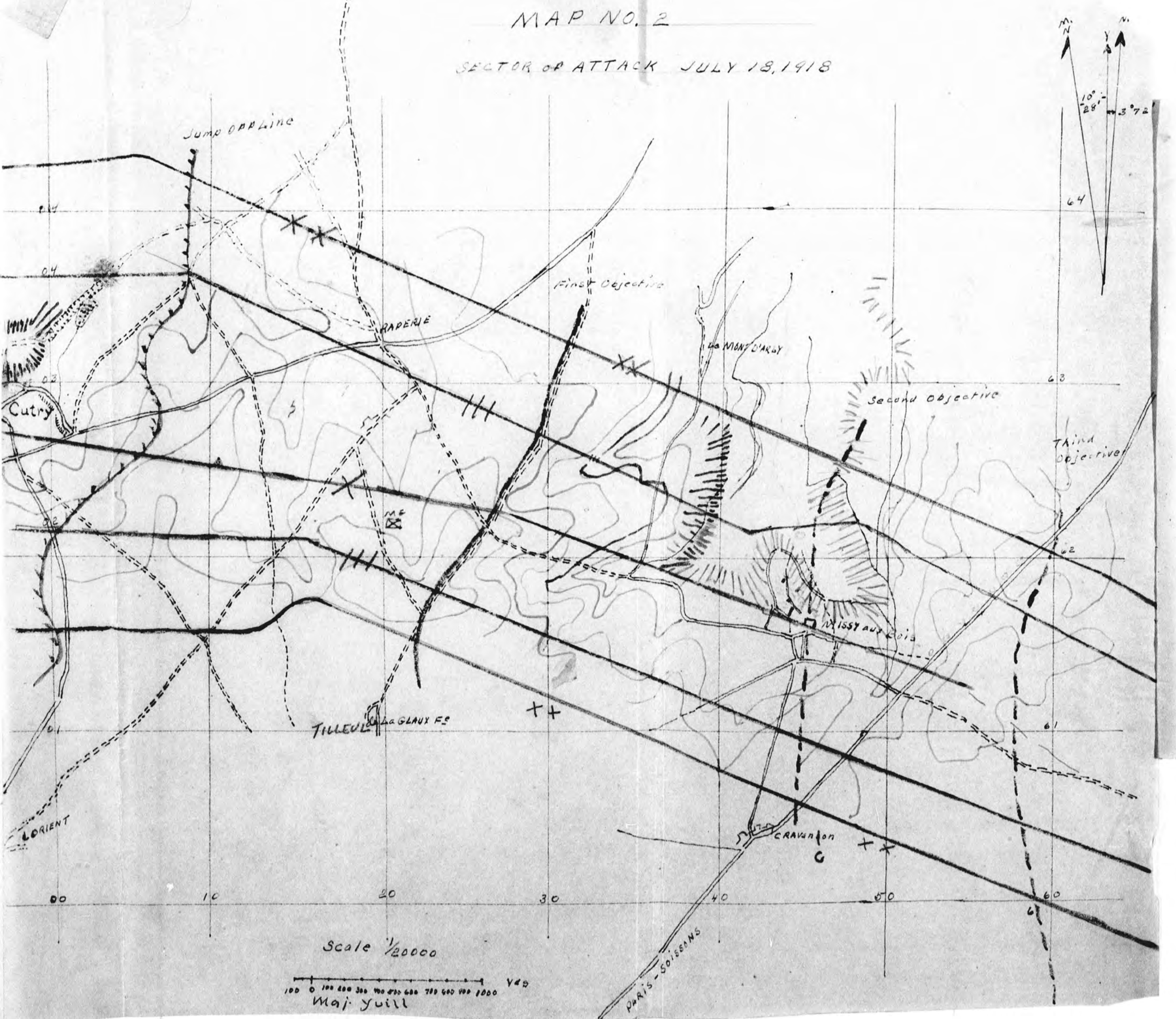
Hastily organized positions can be smothered by machine-gun fire and the occupants of the position prevented from firing. An accurately located machine gun in these positions can be destroyed or prevented from firing. The French maps, scale 1/20,000 were of sufficient accuracy for indirect fire.

The solution of the problem of ammunition supply combined with closer liaison made later support by the machine-gun company much more effective. Par The infantry was never exhausted.


MAP No 1
SECTOR of APPROACH
COMPIEGNE
SOISSONS
FORET de COMPIEGNE
Berenger
Roy St Nicholas
Mortefontaine
Levergne
Oeuvres et Valeny
FORET DOMANIALE de RETZ
PARIS - SOISSONS
VILLERS COTTERETS
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 KILOM
Maj. Squill

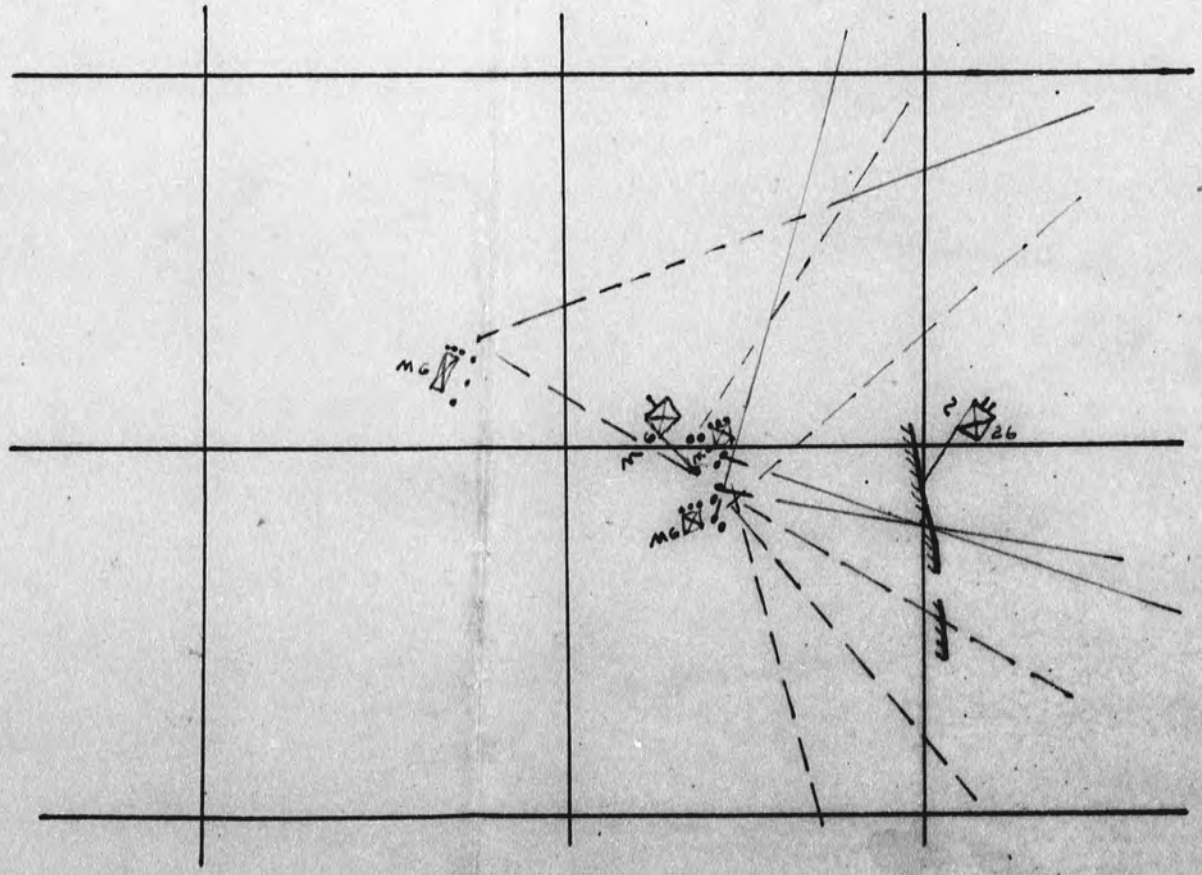
MAP NO. 2

SECTOR OF ATTACK JULY 18, 1918



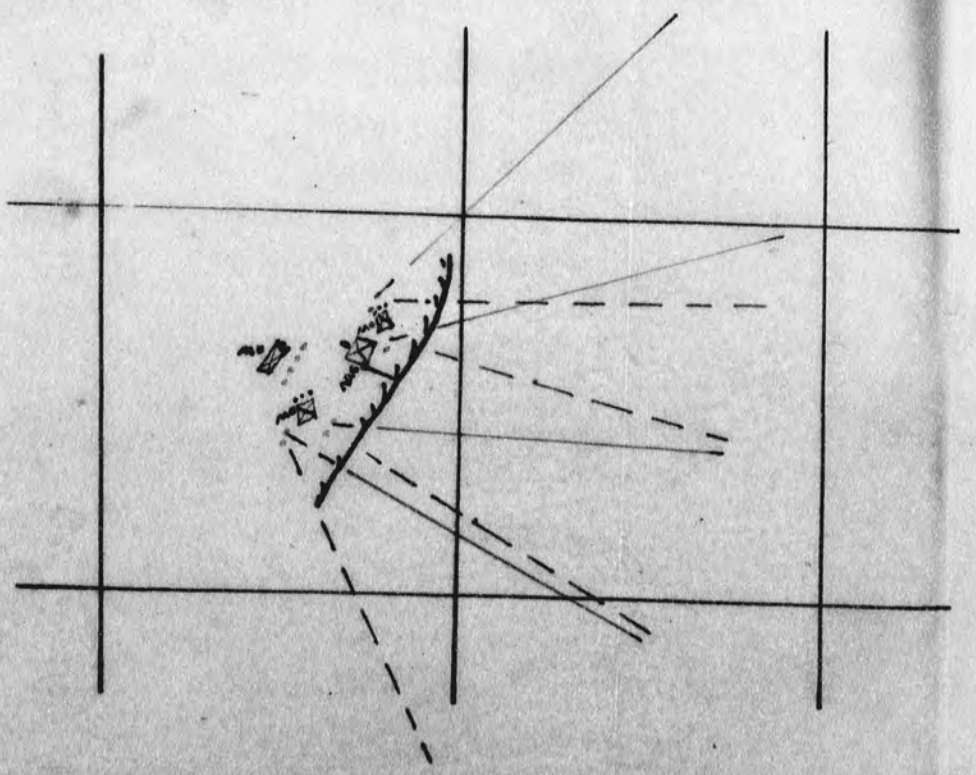
OVERLAY No. 3

MAP No. 2



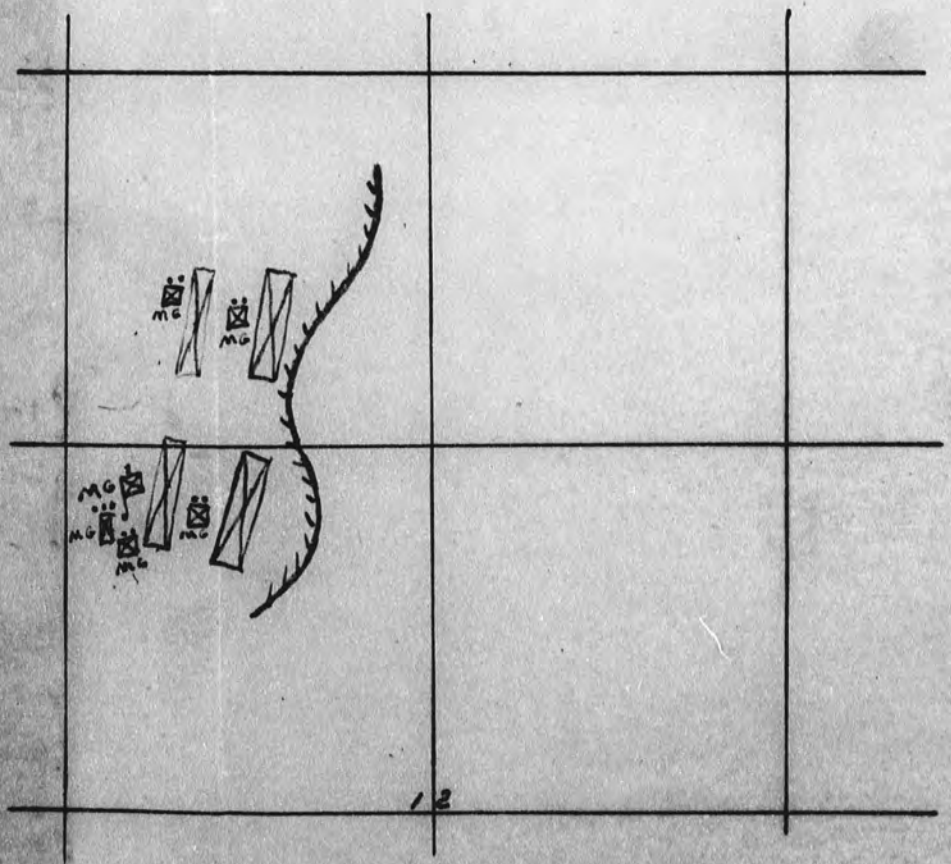
OVERLAY NO. 2

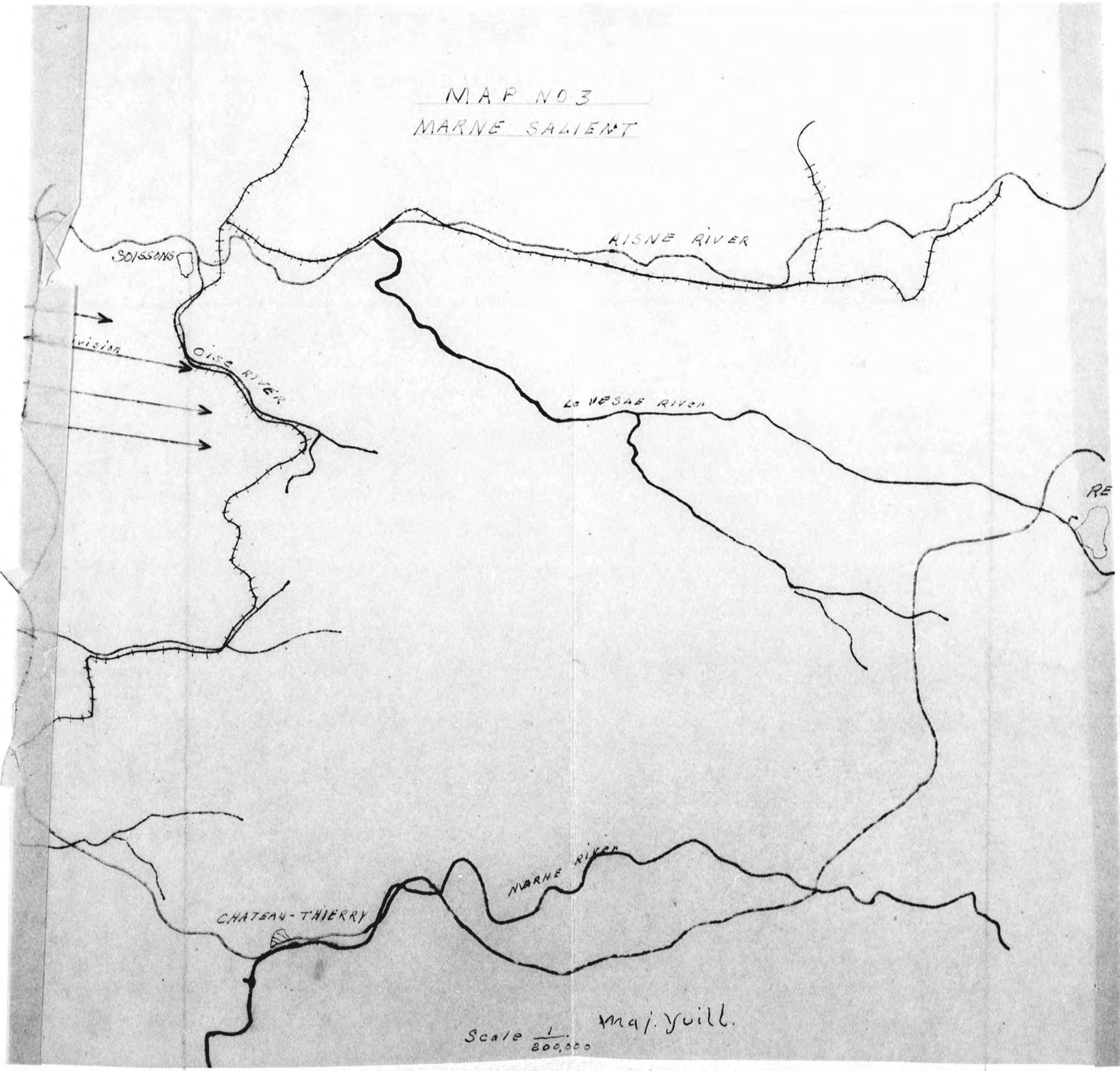
MAP NO. 2



SECTION

OVERLAY NO 1
Map No. 2




MAP NO 3
MARNE SALIENT
SOISSONS
AISNE RIVER
Division
OISE RIVER
LE VESLE RIVER
RE
MARNE RIVER
CHATEAU-THIERRY
Scale 1/200,000
Maj. Quill.