

## Chapter XXII: *Battle Reconnaissance*

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*Infantry commanders of all grades are responsible for continuous reconnaissance.*

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**D**URING combat, leaders always seek information that will answer such questions as: "Does the enemy occupy those woods?" "Where is Company B?" "Is that hill held by the enemy?" "Where is my left assault company?" "I see hostile movement to my right front—what does it mean?" Usually, answers to such questions will be obtained by reconnaissance—reconnaissance to determine not only the enemy situation but the situation of our own troops as well.

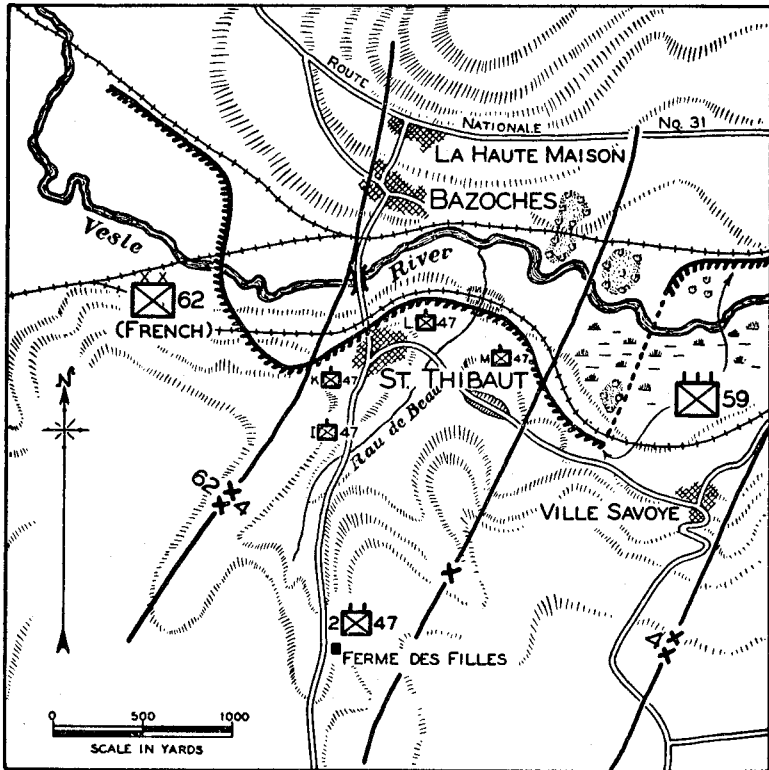
The subordinate infantry commander has at his disposal only one sure means by which he may secure timely and vital information—infantry patrols. A well organized and properly conducted infantry patrol may operate successfully in spite of unfavorable weather, poor visibility, and difficult terrain.

Successful patrolling demands the highest of soldierly virtues. Therefore, the selection of personnel for an important patrol must not be a perfunctory affair. The men should be carefully selected and only the intelligent, the physically fit and the stout of heart should be considered. One careless or stupid individual may bring about the death or capture of the entire patrol or cause it to fail in its mission. The moron, the weakling and the timid have no place in this hazardous and exacting duty.

In the scheme of continuous reconnaissance, reconnaissance by the commander plays an important part. Personal observation, coupled with accurate information from other sources, enables him to make correct deductions from the past, prepares him to act promptly and effectively in the present, and permits him to anticipate the future.

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EXAMPLE 1. For two days the U. S. 47th Infantry, in conjunction with other troops, had made a determined effort to establish a bridge-head across the Vesle near St. Thibaut. Actually, the 2d Battalion had effected a crossing early on the



*Example 1*

morning of August 7, 1918, but it had been subjected to such terrific punishment that it was no longer capable of effective offensive action. It was therefore ordered to withdraw to the vicinity of the Ferme des Filles.

In the events that followed this withdrawal, patrols from the

3d Battalion of the 47th Infantry played an important part. The battalion commander tells what happened in the following paragraphs:

During the early evening of August 9, the 2d Battalion withdrew. This move left the 3d Battalion holding all of the 7th Brigade front along the narrow-gauge railway embankment south of the river. Contact was established with the 59th Infantry on the right and the French 62d Division on the left.

Although the day of August 10 was quiet compared with the three previous days, there was some sniping and a little artillery fire on St. Thibaut.

About 4:00 p.m. the regimental commander informed the battalion commander that a reliable report from the aviation indicated that the enemy had evacuated the area to the front and was hurriedly retreating to the Aisne River. He then directed the battalion commander to take up an advance-guard formation and move at once in pursuit of the enemy until contact had been gained.

The colonel was told that the battalion was now in close contact with the enemy and that ground north of the Vesle could be gained only by a well-organized attack. The colonel insisted upon the reliability of the information he had received, and pointed out the embarrassment it would entail if the enemy slipped away undetected. It took a great deal of talking to convince him that there were yet enough of the enemy to the front to stop an advance-guard march.

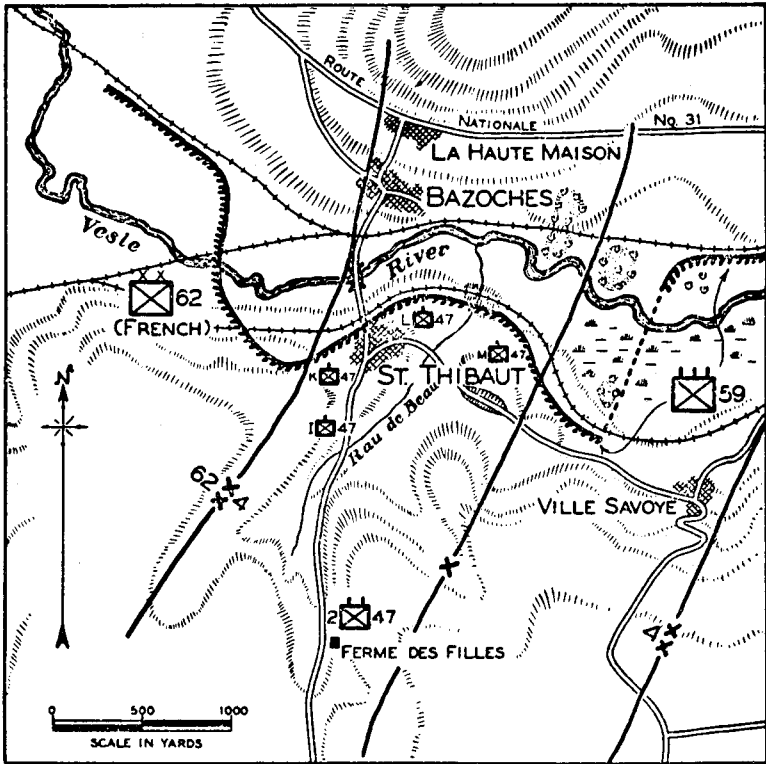
As a result of the discussion with the regimental commander, the 3d Battalion was directed to send out patrols and to follow them up with the battalion if the enemy was found to have evacuated the area to the immediate front.

After conferring with the company commanders and explaining the regimental commander's instructions, five patrols were selected, each composed of one noncommissioned officer and one private.

These men were selected for their fitness for reconnaissance-patrol work. They were equipped only with pistols, gas masks, and canteens. They were assembled before dark at points where the area to be covered could be seen. Their instructions were to cross the Vesle, penetrate to the high ground north of the Route Nationale, and find out whether or not the enemy had evacuated the area to the front. They were further instructed to report to the battalion command post immediately after completing their reconnaissance. These patrols were distributed along the front at five different points. The area to be covered extended from the St. Thibaut—

Bazoches road (the route of the left patrol) to a point more than 1,000 yards east of St. Thibaut.

Company commanders were ordered to start the patrols as soon as it was dark enough to hide their movement.



*Example 1*

In the meantime each company was told to be ready to move out, if the reported evacuation was indeed a fact.

About 10:00 p.m. two of the patrols which had tried to cross the Vesle at and near Bazoches, reported back with information that this town was held by the enemy. This word was transmitted promptly to regimental headquarters.

Between 10:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. two other patrols reported that they were unable to cross the river because of the enemy on the

opposite bank. The leaders of these patrols said that they had remained on the river bank for some time observing the movements of the enemy on the other side. The enemy, they said, appeared to be concentrating troops just north of the river, particularly in a patch of woods just north of the railway and about 800 yards east of Bazoches.

About midnight one member of the patrol from Company M, whose route was on the extreme right, reported in. He was very excited; in his hand he had a Luger pistol and the shoulder strap from a German uniform. He reported that by working well into the sector of the 59th Infantry, he and his corporal had reached a point about 300 yards south of the Route Nationale and about 1,000 yards east of la Haute Maison. Here they stopped because of enemy traffic on the road. He stated that while they were lying in wait, they had seen the Germans unload some sort of weapons on small wheels and move them south toward the river. He also stated that several small groups of enemy soldiers came in along this road and turned south toward the river. As the returning patrol was passing through some woods north of the river and about 400 yards west of the left boundary of the 59th Infantry, it encountered a large number of German soldiers. The patrol was discovered and fired on. There was some fighting at close quarters during which the private killed a German from whom he took the shoulder strap and the pistol. The corporal was shot through the neck, but made his way into the lines of the 59th Infantry where he had been left for first-aid treatment.

From the information gained by the patrols it was quite evident that the enemy was not retiring. Actually, it looked as if he intended to attack.

This information was transmitted immediately to the regimental commander by runner and telephone. Runners were also dispatched to the 59th Infantry and to the French with messages giving the substance of the information.

Early the next morning the enemy launched an attack against the 3rd Battalion which was easily and quickly repulsed.

*From the personal experience monograph of Captain Hurley E. Fuller, who commanded the 3d Battalion of the 47th Infantry.*

**DISCUSSION.** This example is an excellent illustration of the effective employment of small infantry patrols in battle reconnaissance.

The location and activities of the enemy had to be discovered at once. Patrols were the surest and quickest agency that could

get this information. Not one patrol but five were ordered out; this increased the chances of success and insured coverage of the entire front. The patrols were of minimum strength and made up of specially selected men. Each patrol had a definite mission and a well-defined objective—the Route Nationale—which could be easily located even at night. Each patrol was shown during daylight the area over which it was to operate. Their equipment is also worth noting, particularly, the substitution of pistols for rifles.

The fact that only one patrol actually reached the objective is unimportant. All patrols brought back valuable information. Those that were unable to cross the river brought back conclusive evidence that the enemy was still in position in considerable force and that no withdrawal was in progress. Moreover, the information gained by two of these patrols, together with the report of the one which did succeed in crossing, made it clear that, far from contemplating a withdrawal, the enemy was about to attack.

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EXAMPLE 2. On March 22, 1918, the German 229th Reserve Infantry attacked to the west. After driving forward a considerable distance, the attack was brought to a halt near Saulcourt. Since it appeared that the British intended to stand and make a fight here, the Germans decided to find out where the enemy would offer the most resistance before they resumed the attack. The regimental commander promptly dispatched a patrol to determine the location of the enemy's new main line of resistance. This patrol consisted of a lieutenant, an ensign as second in command, one light machine-gun squad and one rifle squad. Machine-gun and minenwerfer fires from the regiment were to assist the patrol.

The patrol moved forward about 11:30 a.m. As it neared A (shown on sketch) it came under fire from a machine gun and suffered two casualties, one being the leader. The ensign then

took charge and, not wishing to become involved in a fight, withdrew the patrol to the rear. This action was facilitated by the covering minenwerfer fire which was placed on the machine gun near A.

After a 500-meter detour the patrol again crawled forward and near B surprised and captured two enemy sentries. It then moved a short distance south to an old trench which it followed until it came under heavy fire from the direction of C. The patrol leader now halted the advance, got out his map, and showed his men just where they were and where he wanted them to go. He then ordered them to fall back, individually, some 300 meters, then move south across the road and assemble near the road junction at D. This was done. Meanwhile, hostile fire continued on the area that had been vacated.

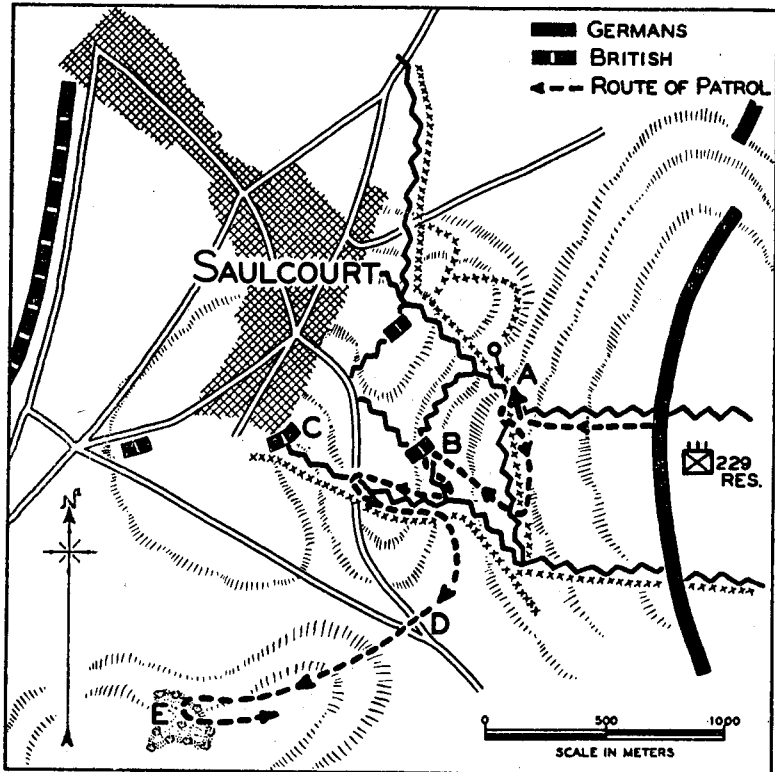
From D the patrol leader saw that the British held Saulcourt, but it did not appear that the town was occupied in force. He noted that British outposts were stationed directly east of the town, but did not appear to extend far to the southeast, since he could locate no enemy near D. Having satisfied himself on these points, he then moved his patrol to the small wood at E, taking great pains to avoid hostile observation.

From E he saw only small British detachments along the southeast edge of Saulcourt, but 600 yards west of the town he saw strong hostile forces digging in. Their south flank did not extend far beyond Saulcourt.

The patrol leader immediately led his patrol back to the regiment. It had been gone two hours. The leader reported that Saulcourt was held by a British outpost, that the main line of resistance was 600 yards in rear, and that there seemed to be a gap in the British defenses south of the town.

Based on this report, the division to which the 229th belonged attacked without delay, making its main effort on the south. The attack succeeded with slight losses.

DISCUSSION. The article from which this example was taken attributes a large part of this successful attack to the lead-



*Example 2*

ing of this one patrol. The paragraph of the German infantry regulations with which the article dealt says:

Reconnaissance may never be omitted during battle. No difficulties of terrain and no exhaustion of troops or leaders should cause it to be neglected.

Careful reconnaissance requires time, but unless the information acquired reaches the commander in time to be acted upon, the reconnaissance is valueless.



The patrol in this example was led with vigor and determination. When it encountered resistance it moved back and tried elsewhere; it did this several times. It did not become involved in a useless fight nor did it permit enemy outposts to prevent it from accomplishing its mission.

The fact that there were no British near and east of E, although negative information, proved of decisive importance.

Finally, the patrol leader got his information back in time for it to be acted upon. That is a requirement that can never be repeated too often.

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EXAMPLE 3. On July 20, 1918, three battalions of French Chasseurs attacked eastward toward the Bois Manuet in column of battalions.

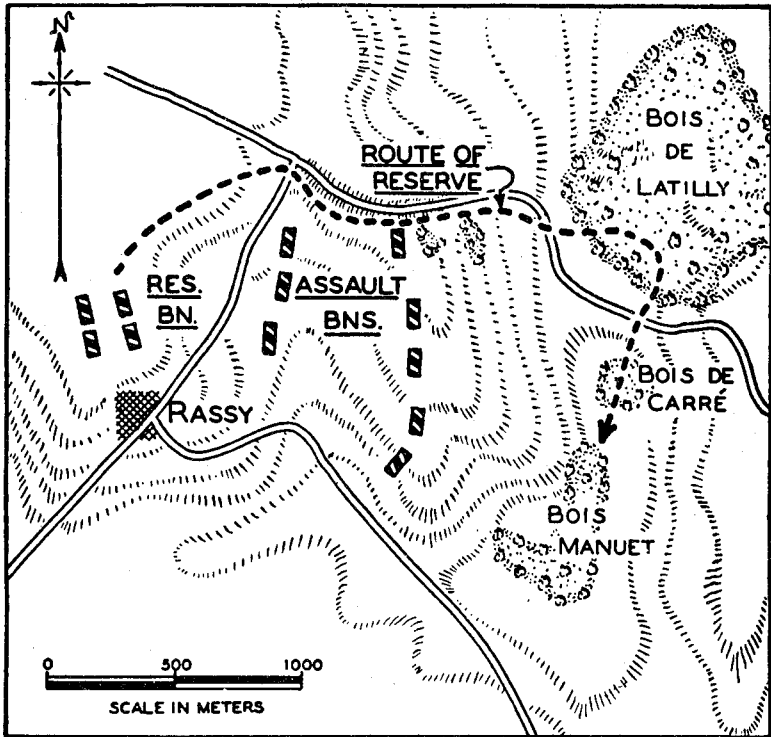
It soon developed that this wood was not the lightly held objective the French had expected to take so easily. In short order the leading battalion and the one immediately behind it were nailed to the ground by a murderous machine-gun fire. So heavy was this fire that even liaison between companies of the same battalion was almost impossible. There was no question about it—the French attack had been definitely checked.

Now just about this time the commander of the reserve battalion moved forward to acquaint himself with the situation. He found the commander of the leading battalion in a shell hole on the crest northeast of Rassy. This officer had been wounded and could give little information beyond the fact that his entire battalion seemed to be pinned down and that the enemy resistance from the Bois Manuet was very strong. One of his companies had gone astray.

It appeared that if any advance were to be made it would have to be made by the reserve battalion.

The commander of the reserve battalion continued his reconnaissance. To the north he discovered a slight depression and what appeared to be a covered approach leading toward the

Bois de Latilly. Nearby crests were swept by enemy fire but, so far as he was able to determine, no fire reached this approach. He therefore concluded that it was possible to advance by this



*Example 3*

route and decided to order his battalion forward. To cover his advance and to be sure he made no mistake, he ordered a number of small patrols to move over the selected route. These were to be followed at a considerable distance by half the battalion. Meanwhile he had made all necessary arrangements for covering fire on the enemy.

The patrols reconnoitered the route and found it protected

from hostile fire. The battalion commander followed near the head of his half-battalion which moved in single file. When this force reached the southern edge of the Bois de Latilly, a patrol which had been sent to the east edge of this wood reported that it had found there the missing company of the assault battalion. The battalion commander at once ordered this company to provide security to the east and then sent back for the remainder of the battalion. Upon its arrival he established a base of fire perpendicular to the enemy front, and attacked southward.

The Bois Manuet was quickly taken from its defenders—a fresh German battalion.

While the casualties in the original assault battalions were heavy, the reserve battalion lost only eight killed and twenty-three wounded during the entire day. The German battalion seems to have been almost destroyed in its fight against the three French battalions.

*From Infantry Conferences at l'École Supérieure de Guerre, by Lieutenant Colonel Touchon, French Army.*

**DISCUSSION.** This is an excellent illustration of the value of personal reconnaissance by the commander. Going in turn to each of the assault battalions, the commander of the reserve battalion gained first-hand information of the situation, obtained a good view of the terrain to the front and flanks, and was thereby enabled to formulate a sound plan for the employment of his unit.

Having formulated a plan and selected a tentative route of advance (which he had personally discovered), he ordered small patrols to precede his battalion as reconnaissance and covering groups. As a result of his own reconnaissance, he was more than reasonably certain that the route selected was suitable for his advance, but he took the additional precaution of sending forward patrols.

The success of the maneuver may be directly attributed to the careful reconnaissance made by this battalion commander.

**EXAMPLE 4.** On July 15, 1918, the Germans struck southward across the Marne at the U. S. 3d Division. The German plan of attack called for the 47th Infantry to remain in division reserve until the 6th Grenadiers had cleared the south bank in the vicinity of Mézy. The 47th would then cross.

The 1st Battalion of the 47th Infantry reached its assembly position north of the Marne after suffering relatively heavy losses from American artillery fire. Extracts from its report on subsequent operations follow:

The 1st Battalion, which was to be the first unit of the regiment to cross the Marne . . . assembled at 5:00 a.m. to march to bridge L-1. Its effectives at this time numbered 11 officers, 49 noncommissioned officers and 244 men (these figures include the 1st Machine-Gun Company).

The battalion staff, the 4th Company, part of the 3d Company, and the 1st Machine-Gun Company then proceeded to the Marne and crossed by bridge L-1. The 1st and 2d Companies and the rest of the 3d Company had been seriously delayed by heavy enemy fire and did not follow until much later. . . .

Since the enemy's infantry did not contest the passage of the river and since the division had ordered the 6th Grenadier Regiment to clear the village of Mézy and the woods south of bridge L-1, the battalion advanced in route column. Still moving in this formation the battalion plunged into a wheat field a short distance south of the Marne. Its leading elements had penetrated about 200 meters into the high wheat, when they were suddenly taken under heavy and highly effective rifle and machine-gun fire from the direction of the Mézy—Mont-St. Père road and from the woods south of L-1.

It not yet being daylight and the fog still prevailing, the position of the enemy could not be definitely determined. But in spite of the low visibility the battalion immediately met with heavy losses. The 4th Company, which was the foremost unit, suffered especially. On account of the high wheat, the men were only able to fire from the standing position; and whoever raised his head above the wheat was almost always hit.

All six guns of the machine-gun company immediately assumed the highest possible firing position and opened fire. But the enemy was apparently well dug in . . . and the wheat too high even for the highest firing position of the machine guns. Therefore no

effect was obtained, despite the concentrated fire and the liberal expenditure of ammunition. Within a few minutes one man of the machine-gun company had been killed and eight wounded. . . .

A further advance was useless without the support of escort artillery and trench mortars which were not on hand. The attack of the battalion gradually slackened and finally came to a standstill, since the men, even when crawling, were hit by enemy riflemen posted in trees.

In these circumstances, the machine-gun company could no longer hold its ground. Accordingly it withdrew . . . and took up a new position close to the southern bank of the river. But here, too, no fire could be delivered owing to the high wheat. Since it was absolutely essential that something be done, the company retreated to the high ground on the north bank which permitted commanding fire. But low visibility still prevailed, and nothing could be seen from here either.

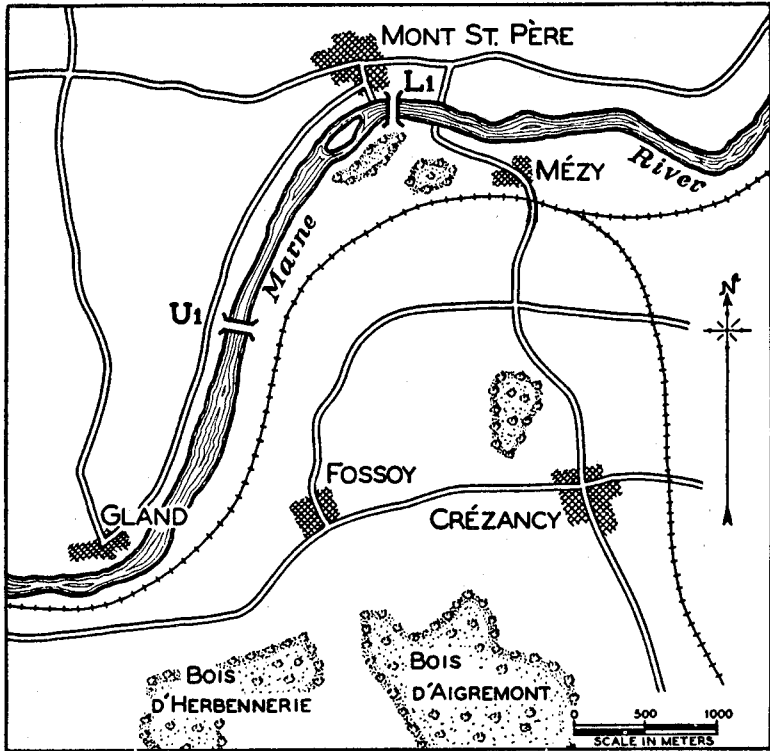
Meanwhile the 3d and 4th Companies suffered heavily from rifle and machine-gun fire and finally even from rifle grenades and shrapnel. The battalion commander, who was at the head of the battalion, now crawled back to report to the regiment and ask for auxiliary weapons. These weapons . . . could not be brought up. . . .

Finally all men of the 3d and 4th Companies who could crawl back did so and took up position on the north bank of the Marne. The adjutant having been killed and the battalion commander and orderly officer wounded, details of the subsequent action of the battalion can not be determined.

Elements of the 1st and 2d Companies do not seem to have crossed the Marne. The report says the effective strength of the battalion at this time was reduced to that of a small company.

Let us now turn to the 2d Battalion of the 47th which was dug in north of bridge L-1, and see what part it played in this attack. Early in the morning it supported the advance of the 1st Battalion by fire from the north bank. At 9:45 a.m. it received orders to cross the Marne by bridge U-1 (assigned to the 398th Infantry) and flank the machine-gun nests at the railway embankment and in the woods north of the railway. Here is this battalion's account of what followed:

Personal reconnaissance by the commander of the 2d Battalion showed that U-1 could not be reached under cover, and that a march to that point would probably cause inexcusable losses in view of the



*Example 4*

well-directed fire of the French artillery. The battalion therefore decided to cross at L-1, and obtaining permission from the regiment to do this, assembled its units and crossed in the following order: 8th, 7th and 5th Companies, two platoons of the machine-gun company, 6th Company, one platoon of the machine-gun company. The 8th Company extended to the left on the southern bank and opened fire on Mézy and the edge of the wood. The 7th Company followed and extended to the right. Both companies attempted to advance, but at once came under heavy rifle and machine-gun fire.

A patrol under the command of Lieutenant Hoolman now succeeded in gaining contact with the 398th Infantry on the right and an

## INFANTRY IN BATTLE

NCO patrol was sent out to establish liaison with the 6th Grenadiers on the left.

The 6th Company now extended the front to the right, overwhelmed the enemy and took possession of the foremost wooded section (just south of L-1). The advance was made under heavy enemy shell fire. The battalion then attacked the next wooded section. Here it was taken under machine-gun fire at close range but . . . succeeded in carrying the wood and dispersing the enemy. It then took the railway embankment and the terrain immediately south of it, and connected up with the 398th Infantry on the right. This done, it reported that it had reached its objective and asked whether it should continue to advance and whether it could expect support and extension to the left.

Patrols were sent out to the south and to the east. Sergeant Hentschke in command of a small patrol advanced to a point east of Fossoy, found the terrain free from enemy troops and saw a German skirmish line enter Herbennerie Wood. This patrol took several prisoners, destroyed a field piece and a light machine gun, and brought back two badly wounded grenadiers. It also found that Mézy was not occupied by the enemy.

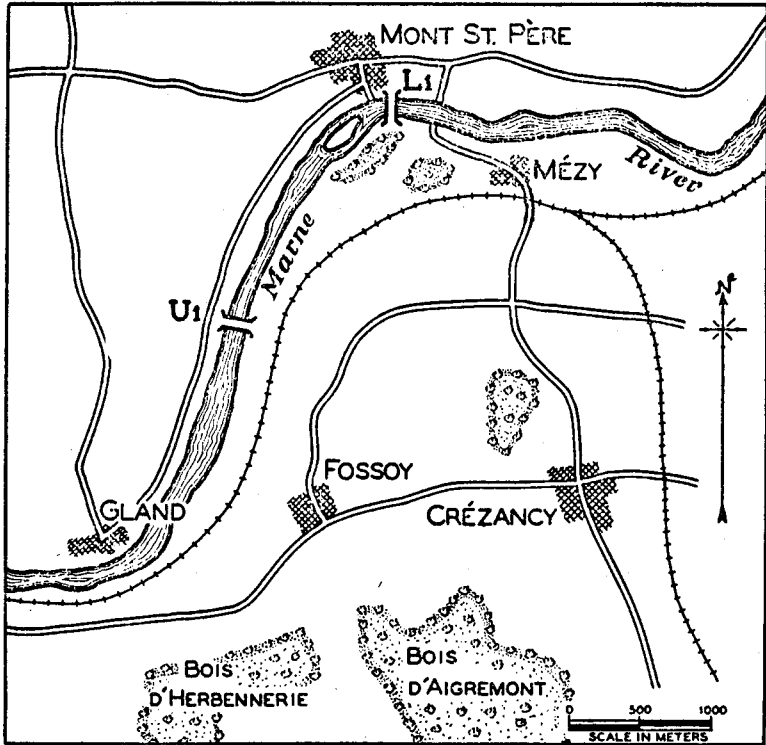
The battalion was now informed by the regiment that no further support could be given. A patrol was again sent to Mézy to protect the left flank. It was fired on. The hostile group, which was not particularly strong, was dispersed by a platoon of the 6th Company, but at considerable cost.

Since no contact could be gained with the 6th Grenadiers, close liaison was maintained with the 398th Infantry, and dispositions for the night were agreed upon.

On the morning of July 16 this battalion, acting in accordance with orders issued during the night, withdrew to the north bank of the Marne without suffering any loss in the movement.

The report of the commander of the 3d Battalion of the 47th Infantry tells why the 2d Battalion commander considered it impracticable to make the crossing at U-1 as ordered on July 15. According to the map it appeared possible to cross at U-1. The order from higher authority specified that the 2d Battalion, followed by the 3d, would move under cover of the woods from its present position to bridge U-1. The 3d Battalion report states:

The entire slope west of the Mont-St. Père—Gland road was shown



*Example 4*

on the map as wooded, while in reality it was completely bare and could be observed at all points by the enemy. Moreover, the road leading from Mont-St. Père to U-1 was under heavy artillery fire.

The 3d Battalion commander also made a personal reconnaissance, and in addition sent out an officer patrol to investigate the situation before he acted on the order to cross at U-1. He reached the same conclusion as the commander of the 2d Battalion.

*From the battle report of the 47th Infantry.*

**DISCUSSION.** These reports afford an interesting compari-



son of the separate advance of two battalions over the same ground on the same day.

From the account of the operations of the 1st Battalion it is apparent that little or no actual reconnaissance was attempted on the south bank of the Marne. The battalion commander undoubtedly assumed that the 6th Grenadier Regiment held the ground to his front and would furnish ample protection for his crossing. The assumption was logical but, after all, it was only an assumption and should have been verified. As it happened, the 6th Grenadiers had been virtually annihilated.

The subsequent actions of the 1st Battalion furnished the realization of the machine gunner's dream—to catch troops in route column at close range.

The ruinous losses suffered by this battalion are wholly attributable to a lack of proper reconnaissance.

By contrast, the actions of the 2d Battalion stand out as a shining example of how it should have been done. The personal reconnaissance of the battalion commander disclosed the folly of an attempted movement to the U-1 crossing. The prompt deployment of the battalion as soon as it gained the south bank, coupled with the active employment of reconnaissance and contact patrols, minimized losses and prepared the way for an effective attack.

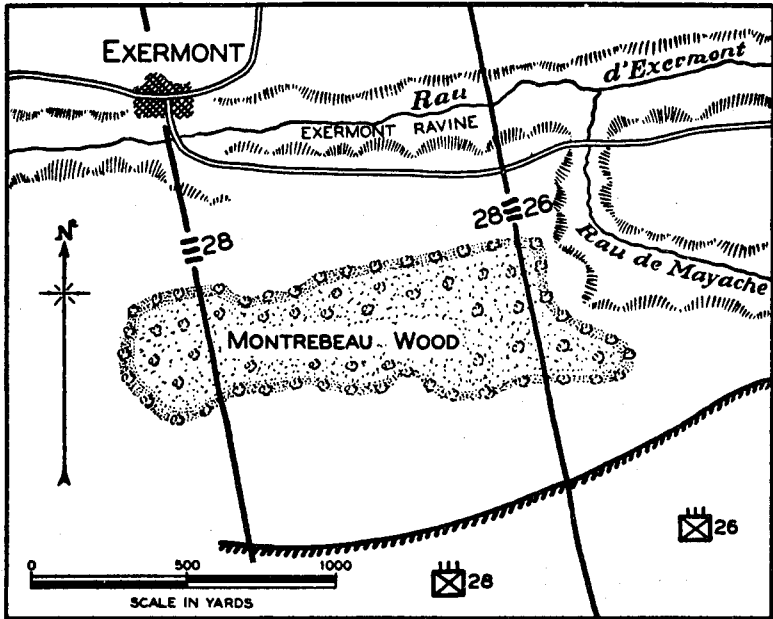
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EXAMPLE 5. During the Meuse-Argonne offensive the U. S. 26th Infantry, part of the 1st Division, relieved troops of the 35th Division along the general line indicated on the sketch. The regiment was in contact with hostile patrols but the location of the enemy's main defensive position was unknown.

Before daybreak on October 2, front-line battalion commanders received an oral order to penetrate the enemy screen to their front with strong combat patrols and locate the enemy's defensive position. This order, which originated at corps head-

quarters, was based upon a report from the French that the Germans had withdrawn.

In compliance with this order, the commander of the right-



*Example 5*

flank battalion sent forward a patrol of two officers and 70 men. Anxiety for the safety of the patrol caused him to include a corporal and private from the signal detachment with a breast reel and a telephone.

Of the two officers and 70 men who set out, only one officer and twelve men returned. What happened is best described in the personal diary of the surviving officer.

The patrol left battalion headquarters about one hour before sunrise and advanced in double file to the line of outguards. At the line of outguards it deployed in two waves, the first wave as skirmishers, the second in squad columns about 50 feet in rear. The fog

was thick. The two officers marched between the skirmish line and the line of squad columns.

When the patrol had advanced about a half-kilometer, it was fired on by several machine guns from Montrebeau Wood. Lieutenant X ordered the patrol to double-time to a draw just ahead of us. We advanced at a run to the Rau de Mayache and up the crest of the hill on the other side. Several men fell; we saw nothing to fire at. At this point the patrol was stopped by machine-gun fire from the left, the left-rear, and from across the Exermont Ravine. Suddenly a nest of two guns about 40 yards in front of us opened up. Lieutenant X, the patrol leader, was killed, so were a number of men who tried to rush the nest. It was finally put out and two Boches killed. Fire was so heavy that we had to dig in where we were. Men were falling on all sides.

At this time Corporal Y cut the telephone in. I got the battalion commander and told him what a mess we were in. He said to hold where we were. The fire from the woods to our left-rear became so heavy that I sent Corporal Z and six men to work their way against it. They succeeded in putting out one light machine gun and reported the woods heavily held.

About one hour later some 30 Boches were discovered immediately to our rear. Part of the patrol faced about. Just then we saw Captain A coming forward with a part of his outfit and the Boches withdrew.

About 1:00 p.m. orders were received to withdraw to the line of outguards. We had about 20 men left who were deployed on a front of 200 yards. I managed to get 12 survivors back to the line of outguards and reported my arrival to the battalion commander.

*From the personal experience monograph of Major Barnwell R. Legge, who commanded a battalion of the 26th Infantry.*

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The losses suffered by this patrol are appalling. Indeed, had the battalion commander not thought to include the little signal detachment there would probably have been no survivors left to tell the tale. In that event the patrol would have failed in its mission and its sacrifice been useless.

All along the front, American patrols drove through the enemy screen, took their losses and came back with vital infor-

mation. Major Legge sums up their work in this statement:

Although the cost was great, the patrols had accomplished their mission: information was now available to lay the barrage for the initial attack.

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**CONCLUSION.** It is not likely that infantry leaders will ever find an adequate substitute for the infantry patrol. Through it and through it alone is the small unit able to find timely answers to the myriad questions that arise in battle. The higher echelons are primarily concerned with the larger point of view; to them the problems that confront the battalion and the company are microscopic. But even when they do receive information of vital interest to the smaller front-line units, it seldom reaches those units in time to be of value.

There are no two ways about it—patrols are the eyes of the small infantry unit. Sometimes these patrols will discover just where the enemy is and just what he is doing. This, of course, is information of the highest value. But more often than not, they will bring in only negative information; they will report that the enemy is *not* in such-and-such a place and is *not* doing this, that, or the other thing. To the intelligent leader, information of this type is frequently of the greatest importance and he will impress that fact on his patrols.

As for the leader himself, he must never lose sight of the value of patrols nor allow this important duty to degenerate into a routine, slipshod, you-do-it-sergeant affair.

Since the success of a battalion, a regiment, or even a division, will frequently depend on the conduct of one small patrol, patrols must be hand-picked, carefully instructed, and given a clear, definite mission. These three things play a vital part in the borderland between success and failure.

When to send out patrols, their number and their strength, are matters that must be determined by the situation. Of course,

there is such a thing as over-patrolling; sometimes a reconnaissance enthusiast will exhaust his command through incessant, unwise, and unnecessary patrolling. This error, though serious, is rare. Usually it is a question of under-patrolling. In this connection, the old saying is a good guide: "When it is apparent from the situation that patrolling is unnecessary, send out patrols anyway."

## Chapter XXIII: Counter-Orders

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*Rapid changes in a situation often require rapid changes in decisions. Therefore counter-orders will be frequent and should be accepted as normal incidents of battle.*

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**O**NCE MADE, a decision should not be changed except for weighty reasons. Infantry commanders, however, are constantly confronted with changes in the situation that demand new schemes of maneuver and consequently new orders. With such kaleidoscopic suddenness does the situation veer and shift that it is not unusual for a subordinate unit to be ordered to initiate a certain line of action only to have the order countermanded before the action has gotten under way.

When counter-orders do occur it becomes a paramount duty of all leaders to curb irritation and the instinctive tendency to criticize. Success in combat is certainly not rendered more likely by the muttered criticisms of junior officers—criticisms which rapidly and seriously affect the moral tone of a command.

Responsibility for changing a mission rests squarely with the commander. When the march of events has invalidated his original assignment he must of necessity take the new situation into account. Behind every counter-order there is usually a valid reason. If we are able to adopt the French proverb, "To understand all is to forgive all," we shall meet changing orders with greater equanimity.

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**EXAMPLE 1.** On September 5, 1914, the 2d Company of the 57th Infantry, part of the 14th Division, which in turn was part of the German Second Army, made a long march to the south in pursuit of the retiring French. The 14th Division, on the right of the army, passed east of Montmirail.

The 2d Company crossed the Petit Morin and spent the night in a small village south of the river. At daylight, September 6, heavy cannonading was heard to the south. But instead of marching toward the sound of the guns, the 14th Division turned about and moved to the north.

Consternation spread through the ranks of the 2d Company. The men could not find out why they were required to march to the rear. They had never done so before. About noon word passed that the division was in army reserve. A little later the column halted along the main road from Château-Thierry to Fontenelle. Good spirits soon returned, for the men felt that the battle must be going well if the reserve was allowed to rest. At dusk the sound of artillery firing died down.

In the early morning of the following day, September 7, these troops made a short march into a wood near Artonges. There they encountered badly damaged supply wagons returning from the front. The drivers told of a German retreat, of heavy casualties, of defeat. The men again became apprehensive.

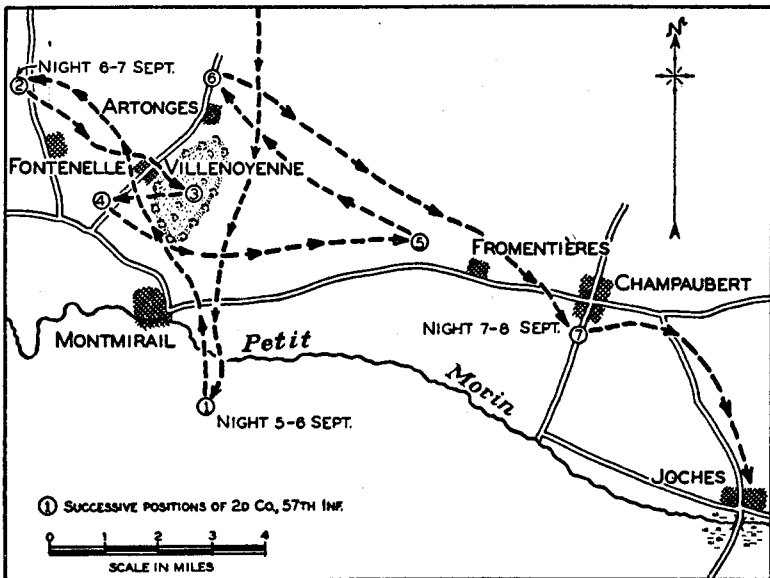
At 8:00 a.m. the 2d Company marched to Villenoyenne and began digging in. The situation was baffling. They had been driving the French to the south. Suddenly they had marched to the north with ominous rumors of a German defeat. Now the whole division was digging in facing to the west. Where could the First Army be? Leaders sensed a certain anxiety among the men.

At 11:00 a.m. orders arrived directing that intrenchment cease and that the division start a forced march on Fromentières to the east. The march was long and difficult. Again and again the column had to cross long trains of ammunition and supply wagons going to and from the front.

At 1:00 p.m. the column was halted, although it had not yet reached Fromentières. Orders had been received to counter-march on Artonges. These bewildering changes reacted badly on the men. It appeared to them that the higher commanders were unable to decide on any course of action.

Artonges was finally reached at 5:00 p.m. Officers and men sat about discussing the events of the day, trying to deduce their meaning. At 8:00 p.m. the command was informed that the French had penetrated the left wing of the army and that during the night the reserve would march to their assistance without rest and without regard for march casualties.

It was very dark when this forced march began. Part of the



*Example 1*

route led across country. Once more the direction of march was east. The impression gained headway among the troops that the battle was going badly. At 1:00 p.m. on September 8 the reserve reached its destination near Champaubert. The men dropped to the ground in the sleep of exhaustion. In three hours they were aroused. They had expected to attack at daylight; instead they continued the march to the east. No one knew why. Arriving at Joches definite orders were finally received to attack to the south.



Now let us consider the reasons for these movements. The German Second Army and the First Army on its right were directed to execute a wheel to the west. The left or east wing of the First Army was, on September 5, farther advanced to the south than the Second Army. Therefore, if the wheel were to be made, the right or west element of the Second Army (the VII Corps consisting of the 13th and 14th Divisions) was superfluous at the front at that time. Consequently it was designated as army reserve and ordered to move north to Montmirail.

On September 6 all corps marching to the south were engaged in heavy fighting. The 14th Division remained in army reserve. A French attack from the direction of Paris against its right flank had caused the First Army (on the night of September 2) to shift troops from south of the Marne to the north to meet the threat to its flank. Thus the 14th Division heard rumors of defeat.

The gap resulting between the two armies, being protected only by cavalry, was a weak spot. It was obvious, therefore, that the right flank of the Second Army would have to be refused. Only the left wing would continue the attack. In this plan the 14th Division, situated behind the right wing, was allotted the task of securing the right flank. Accordingly we saw it digging in, facing west.

Meanwhile a desperate battle had begun along the entire army front. No decision was reached. Reports of the situation in front of the gap between the First and Second Armies did not appear critical at this time. The army commander naturally wanted his reserve centrally located. Hence the march to Fromentières.

In the meantime new messages reached the army which forced it to guard its right flank. The 14th Division again marched back to the threatened right wing.

On the evening of September 7 fresh intelligence indicated that the French had penetrated between two corps of the Second Army. The only available reserve had to make that difficult

night march. Later the situation cleared up and the danger to this particular portion of the front disappeared.

On the morning of September 8 it was thought that a weak point had been located in the hostile front. Owing to the situation on the right flank it was imperative that a decision be reached promptly. Hence the troops of the army reserve were awakened after three hours' sleep, marched farther to the east and ordered to attack.

*From the personal experience monograph of Captain Adolf von Schell, who commanded the 2d Company of the 57th Infantry.*

DISCUSSION. There is no question that these apparently aimless marches affected the fighting capacity of the troops. Undoubtedly morale suffered. Perhaps the army commander changed his mind too often. Perhaps he jumped at conclusions too quickly as reports filtered in. But regardless of whether or not each of the decisions was best, each move corresponded to a definite conception of the situation. They were not the result of a commander's whims but an honest effort to meet the situation as understood at army headquarters.

Such counter-orders are virulent irritants, but leaders, by precept and by example, may do much to instill calmness and fortitude in accepting these inevitabilities of war.

1 1 1

EXAMPLE 2. During the early days of the Meuse-Argonne offensive the U. S. 30th Infantry (3d Division) was held in the Bois de Hesse in corps reserve. The men lived in shell holes with little or no protection from the unending rains.

For two consecutive days order followed order with weary monotony—"be prepared to move at a moment's notice." Finally, at 9:00 p.m. the night of September 29-30, an order was received directing that packs be rolled and that the regiment be held in readiness for an immediate move. After a two-hour wait in a torrential rain, a new order arrived stating that no move

would be made that night, and that men would be permitted to pitch tents.

One hour later, at midnight, a third order was received directing the battalions to be ready to move in thirty minutes. The movement actually took place at 3:30 a.m.

*From the personal experience monograph of Major Turner M. Chambliss, who commanded the 2d Battalion of the 30th Infantry.*

**DISCUSSION** Frequent changes of orders seriously affect morale. Men lose confidence in their superiors. "Order—counter-order—disorder" is more than a pungent expression. Pointless vacillation, whether by the lieutenant commanding a platoon or the general commanding an army, cannot be too vigorously condemned. Only the exigencies of a changing or obscure situation can justify the serious effects of the counter-order.

In this instance the apparent indecision was probably the result of varying information concerning the situation of the 79th Division. The 3d Division relieved the 79th on September 30, *making a daylight relief*, upon the receipt of information which indicated, or which was interpreted to indicate, that the situation of the 79th was critical.

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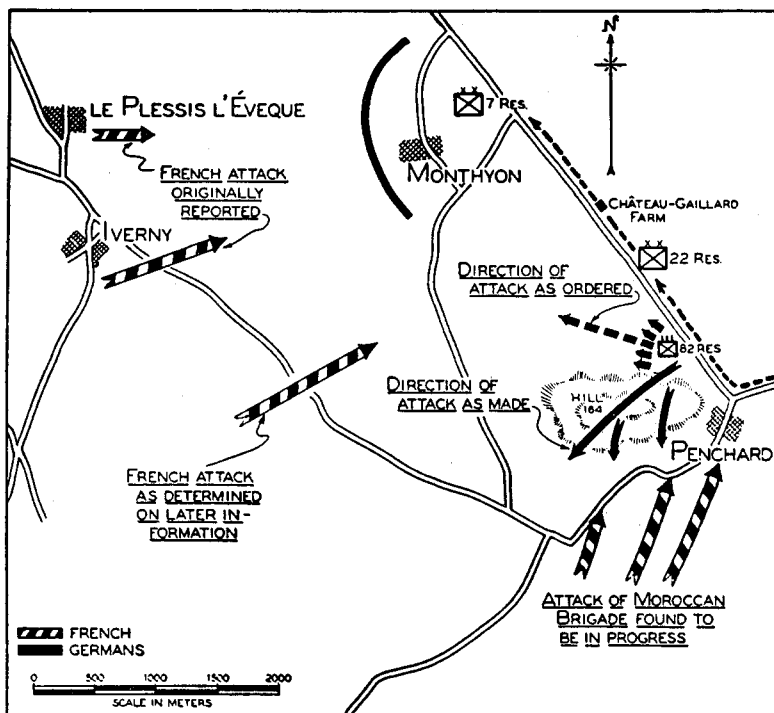
**EXAMPLE 3.** The 82d Reserve Regiment, part of the main body of the German 22d Reserve Division, marched south toward the Marne on September 5, 1914. It was part of the IV Reserve Corps which had been assigned the mission of protecting the flank of the German First Army from the direction of Paris.

About noon the troops were going into bivouac in accordance with their orders when a counter-order arrived directing the column to march west to Penchard. A short time later firing was heard to the west.

The 7th Reserve Division, north of the 22d, had become en-

gaged with the French near Monthyon. The 22d was ordered to advance in echelon on its left. Accordingly, on reaching Penchard, the leading elements of the 22d Division turned northwest toward Monthyon.

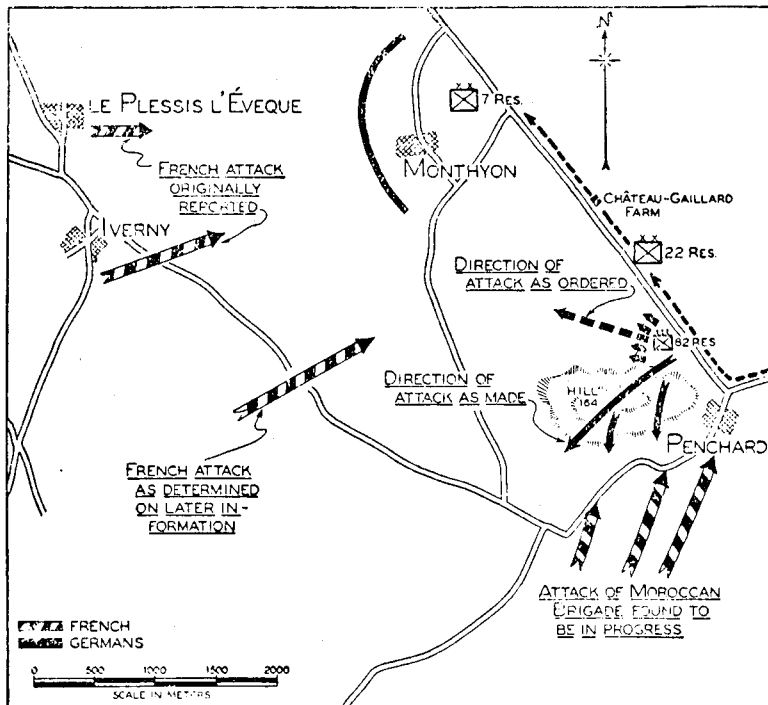
The French were reported in the vicinity of Iverny and le-



*Example 3*

Plessis-l'Évêque. The 7th Reserve Division, whose units were deployed and considerably intermingled, was near Monthyon. The 82d Reserve Regiment was still near Penchard when a hostile advance was noted driving from the south of Iverny toward Château-Gaillard. This threatened to take in flank the 7th and 22d Divisions which were moving on Monthyon.

The 82d Reserve Regiment had been ordered by the division commander to attack at once in the direction of le-Plessis-l'Évêque. The regiment was deploying under cover of the valley northwest of Penchard. Orders had been issued, plans had been made, and officers were studying the terrain to the northwest.



*Example 3*

Then just as the regimental commander was about to launch the northwest attack he learned that strong hostile elements were advancing from the west on Penchard and Hill 164. Violent firing was heard to the west and southwest.

The regimental commander promptly abandoned the objective and direction of attack assigned him. He caused his entire regi-

ment to face to the southwest and attack straight over Hill 164.

The 82d reached the south and west slopes of Hill 164 as the Moroccan brigade entered Penchard from the southwest. Some leading elements of the Moroccans had already reached the slopes south of Penchard and were approaching Hill 164. Others, having reached Penchard, opened fire on the German trains that congested the road, and caused a panic. The 82d Reserve Regiment took the Moroccans in flank and rear, re-established the situation and drove the enemy back.

*From the account by Lieutenant Colonel Koeltz, French Army, in "La Revue d'Infanterie," October, 1930.*

**DISCUSSION.** Here we have a case where an infantry commander who was ordered to do one thing, disobeyed, and did something entirely different. He was ordered to attack to the northwest and take a French attack in flank. Instead he attacked to the southwest.

He took the responsibility of disobeying a definite order because he realized that the order had been given in ignorance of the existing situation. He felt sure that he was doing what his superior would want him to do, and that there was no time to ask for instructions.

The troops, of course, received numerous counter-orders. "We are going to halt for the night." "No, we march to the west—why to the west?" "We are to attack to the northwest." "No, we attack to the southwest."

The counter-order directing the turn to the west and continuation of the march just as the troops were going into their announced bivouacs, was the result of a decision by the corps commander, General von Gronau, who had the mission of protecting the right flank of the First Army from the dangerous direction of Paris. The situation was obscure and General von Gronau ordered an attack to clear it up. He struck the Sixth Army of General Maunoury as it moved forward to get into position for a decisive attack on September 6.

The counter-order issued by the commander of the 82d Reserve Regiment to attack to the south and southwest, instead of to the northwest as the regiment was preparing to do, was based on information received after the first attack order was issued.

Had the 82d blindly followed its original orders the Moroccan brigade might well have secured Penchard and Hill 164, thereby taking both the 7th and 22d Reserve Divisions in flank and rear.

In both cases counter-orders were the manifestation, not of vacillation, but of aggressive leadership of a high type.

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CONCLUSION. It is an error to think that counter-orders indicate a lack of resolution. Many of them, probably most of them, result from the obscurity of war. In mobile warfare we know the situation will invariably be vague. As information filters in to the higher commanders, changes in dispositions will be required. The information on which these changes are based will seldom reach the lower units at the time. They will read about it in a book after the war. Counter-orders, therefore, should be regarded as normal, accepted cheerfully, and passed downward with an air of confidence.

## Chapter XXIV: *Action and Morale*

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*Action, physical and mental, is an efficacious  
antidote for battlefield nervousness.*

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A SOLDIER pinned to the ground by hostile fire, with no form of activity to divert his thought from the whistling death about him, soon develops an overwhelming sense of inferiority. He feels alone and deserted. He feels unable to protect himself. With nothing to do but wait and with nothing to think about but the immediate danger that surrounds him, his nerves rapidly reach the breaking point. Inactivity, therefore, constitutes a most serious danger to his morale.

By diverting the attention of the soldier through some simple mental or physical expedient, this nervous tension may be materially reduced. The leader, by thinking objectively himself and by causing his men to perform tasks involving thought and movement, may successfully combat the intense mental strain of battle. So too will simple, matter-of-fact actions by a commander tend to instill in the men a sense of confidence and security.

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EXAMPLE 1. On August 22, 1914, the 6th Company of the French 116th Infantry attacked over open ground toward the little town of Maissin. Although the men were in their first fight and were obviously nervous, they drove steadily forward under a galling machine-gun fire. Finally they reached a wheat field on the crest near Maissin where the enemy's rifles and machine guns definitely brought the company to a halt. The instant a man lifted his head a spray of bullets cracked ominously through the wheat.

But where was this enemy? That was a question that no man in the 6th Company could answer. Although they had made their advance under a harassing fire and although they were now



nailed to the ground, they had yet to see a single enemy target. In fact, the company could not even tell where the fire was coming from. Bit by bit, nerves stretched toward the breaking point; the situation on the crest grew electric.

And then the company commander saw two or three Germans near the edge of Maissin. Immediately he ordered his company to open fire on the outskirts of the town—*each man to fire only six rounds.*

The company opened up with a will. One soldier near the captain fired his six shots with the greatest deliberation. Then, with the empty cartridge cases in his hand, he turned and asked: "Captain, shall we save the empties or throw them away?"

The crisis had passed and the company was again well in hand. Their subsequent attack succeeded.

*From "The Battle of Ardennes," by Major Pugens, French Army.*

**DISCUSSION.** The captain saw that his men were becoming dangerously tense. They were in their first fight. They had been advancing under enemy fire and were pinned to the ground with no good target before them.

He wanted to give them something to do, something that would occupy their minds. He did not want them to dig in for that might stop the attack; furthermore, such a procedure was at variance with the French ideas of 1914. The two or three Germans seen near Maissin did not present a target which warranted the expenditure of much ammunition; therefore, the company commander did not permit his men to fire at will. Instead, to settle their nerves, he ordered them to fire by counted cartridges. This gave each man a task on which he had to focus his attention and at the same time reasserted the control of the leader.

The incident of the soldier and the empty cases shows that the company commander succeeded in his aim. He had prescribed a first-rate sedative.

EXAMPLE 2. In August, 1916, German reinforcements were rushed to the assistance of the Austrians who had been thrown far to the rear by General Brussilov's pile-driver offensive. Shortly after the Germans put in their appearance several of their units were ordered to move forward and occupy a reserve position. Austrian noncommissioned officers were detailed as guides. One of the German companies, led by its Austrian guide, moved forward under cover of darkness and eventually reached a large shed. Here it was halted and the men slept until morning.

When dawn broke the company commander found that this shed was located about 200 meters from an Austrian battery and therefore was very likely to suffer from Russian artillery fire. He had just sized up this situation when he looked up and saw a Russian observation balloon hovering to his front. In spite of the all-too-apparent danger, he felt that the situation as a whole demanded that the presence of the Germans remain a secret. He therefore decided to keep his men hidden in the shed until the balloon went down.

Almost immediately the Russians began to shell the Austrian battery. One out of every three or four rounds fell short, striking near the shed. The company commander noticed that his men were becoming increasingly nervous. Some of them on excuses of one sort or another, tried to obtain permission to leave the shed. When the captain did not allow this, the men lapsed into a sullen silence; not a word was spoken. Minute by minute the tension grew. The company commander saw that action of some sort was necessary. Therefore, he called the company barber, sat down with his back to the Russian fire, and directed the barber to cut his hair. He had the most unpleasant haircut of his life, but the effect on the men, however, was splendid. They felt that if their company commander could sit down quietly and let his hair be cut the situation could not be as bad as they had imagined. Conversation started up; soon a few

jokes were cracked and before long some of the men began to play cards. After that no one paid any attention to the shells. Even when two men were wounded by shell fire, the morale of the company was not noticeably affected.

*From a lecture by Captain Adolf von Schell, German Army, at The Infantry School.*

**DISCUSSION.** In discussing this and other incidents of a similar nature, Captain von Schell stresses the importance of causing the individual soldier to do something. He says:

As soon as a soldier does something, he becomes master of the situation. . . . When men have been on the defensive for a long time, send out patrols even if there be no special reason for patrols. The patrols instill a sense of self-confidence and superiority. Inactivity and waiting undermine morale and rub nerves raw.

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**EXAMPLE 3.** On August 22, 1914, the French 7th Division, advancing in route column, suddenly encountered Germans near Ethe moving south and west. The French had not expected any serious engagement that day.

The battle opened at close range in a pea-soup fog. In the murk and obscurity units soon became intermingled and disorganized. Neither side knew anything of the situation. Perhaps that should be amended, for the French did know one thing: they knew that everywhere they went they met Germans.

The 11th Company of the French 103d Infantry had been one of the first units to blunder into the unsuspected enemy. It had fought hard but without any idea of what was going on. Later in the morning, when the fog began to lift, this company could find no other French units. But, for that matter, they were unable to locate the enemy either.

Bullets cracked about them from several directions, but no one had any idea where they came from. The enemy seemed to have vanished into thin air. This company, in its first fight, felt completely isolated.

The company commander tried to determine his objectives and locate targets while death struck around him. His company had already suffered appreciable losses, including several platoon and section leaders. Finally, he noted a wood about 1,000 yards away and decided that it might harbor some Germans. Accordingly he ordered his company to open fire on it.

He did not expect any physical effect from this long-range fire directed against the edge of a wood. Indeed, he didn't even know whether or not the enemy was in the wood. He opened fire for one reason—to quiet the nerves of his men.

A little later other French troops deployed along a crest near the 11th Company. These men had scarcely deployed before the ubiquitous enemy blasted their front with violent rifle and machine-gun fire and at the same time struck them in rear with a furious cannonade. These new arrivals lost little time in staging a withdrawal. The crest was not healthy.

The captain of the 11th Company saw this withdrawal, but since he had received no orders he held his company in its position. A bit later two German battalions assaulted the abandoned crest. Their attack broke down completely, due to the flanking fire of the 11th Company from one side and of two stray machine guns from the other.

The repulse of this attack probably exerted a decisive influence on the fight, for it kept a German brigade from taking a large part of the French 7th Division in flank and rear at a critical moment.

*From "Eibe," by Colonel A. Grasset, French Army.*

DISCUSSION. The unexpected situation in which the men of the 11th Company suddenly found themselves was undoubtedly nerve-wracking. The wise company commander, wishing to occupy their minds, ordered fire against a distant wood. Colonel Grasset emphasizes the fact that this fire was ordered primarily for its moral effect. Although he does not

specifically set forth the resulting effect on the men, the events that followed speak eloquently.

This company, having been given a dose of soothing syrup, remained to face and *stop* an attack by two German battalions although the rest of the French had withdrawn. In so doing it played a decisive rôle in the fight of the 7th Division.

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EXAMPLE 4. At 4:35 a.m., July 18, 1918, Company D of the U. S. 16th Infantry jumped off in the Aisne-Marne offensive. At the outset it was a support company of an assault battalion. A few minutes before the scheduled hour of attack the Germans opened a violent bombardment which appeared to be directed at Company D. The troops were tired; they had undergone a difficult and fatiguing march to the front; the company commander and his men, facing this hostile bombardment, felt that the outlook was far from encouraging. Suddenly the American barrage opened!

This American barrage was the most inspiring incident of five days of fighting [writes the company commander]. We who had been depressed and who had dreaded the formation of the company under the German barrage now jumped up and hurried to our places. It was a great relief to have something to do—the officers to supervise the formation and the men to get into their proper places.

Many had been killed and wounded by the enemy's barrage. Several squads had to be reorganized while shells were still falling in the immediate vicinity.

During the first part of the advance I was surprised to see every man smoking a cigarette. Then I heard someone call out, "Over the top with a cigarette!" I remembered, then, that the company had been issued a tobacco ration the previous evening and that I had cautioned them all to save one smoke, so each man could start "over the top with a cigarette." This gave the men something to think about during the first few minutes. The badinage that arose, while still under the barrage, relative to the comparative worth of several popular brands of cigarettes, proved that the idea was not without merit.

The advance continued. Losses in the company became increasingly heavy from artillery and long-range machine-gun fire.

After several men of the company had been blown up by shells, I noticed that a spirit of uneasiness became dominant. Men stopped at the sinister whine of an approaching shell; ranks began to sag; the threat of the shells was uppermost in the minds of the troops. To divert their attention I decided to try some disciplinary measures of the drill field. I moved from front to rear, and by dint of vigorous whistle-blowing and considerable yelling, dressed up the lines. Whenever a man strayed out of formation I called to the platoon or section leader to dress his outfit. It was not long before each man was paying more attention to his place in line than to machine-gun bullets or shell fire. I noticed a good deal of talking among the men, accompanied by puzzled glances in my direction. I overheard such remarks as "Must think we're on the drill field," "What the hell's eating him?" etc.

The company moved forward without faltering, even when a shell landed squarely on a column composed of a lieutenant and his platoon headquarters.

The attack progressed successfully and later Company D became engaged as an assault company. On July 19 the attack was continued. On this day, as Company D approached a slight rise northeast of Chaudun Farm, it encountered machine-gun fire from front and flanks. Here is what the company commander says:

The machine-gun fire seemed to be coming from the wheatfield that crowned the rise, so I passed the word along the first line that the leading platoons were to charge toward the top of the hill. The orders miscarried somewhat for, as I jumped up, the entire company advanced. The machine-gun fire did not vary in its intensity and a few men fell. The support platoons advancing in squad columns had the misfortune, however, to have a shell land on a column in which a platoon leader was marching.

The charge, which had started at a run, soon slowed down to a jog, due to the difficulty of climbing the incline over the slippery grass. The line was walking when the crest was reached. Still we heard the machine guns firing. They were farther to the front. We had now come under observation, and a few bursts in our ranks convinced me that our charge had been premature.

Now that the company was unable to advance, the company

commander found that both he and the men were becoming intensely nervous. He thereupon directed one platoon to dig in near the crest of the hill and took the remainder of the company about 100 yards to the rear and ordered them to dig in there.

I found it was a great relief to be busy, so my striker and I dug a shelter in a new shell hole. I worked until I was wet with perspiration. The extreme nervousness which had seized me after our capture of the hilltop then left me.

Shell fire continued on our position and casualties were numerous, although the company was now dug in below the surface of the ground. I found in my inspection trips, however, that the exercise had calmed the men to such an extent that they were joking about which platoon would receive the next enemy shell.

*From the personal experience monograph of Major Leonard R. Boyd, who commanded Company D of the 16th Infantry.*

**DISCUSSION.** The incidents described in this example deal with measures taken by a company commander to reassure his men and allay their tension during critical periods of an action.

In each instance the remedy consisted of giving the men something to do and something other than their troubles and dangers to think about. It should be noted that at the time the company commander required his men to dress their lines in parade-ground fashion, the company was in support and not in assault. In this case the serious drawbacks that usually accompany rigidly dressed lines and columns, applied only to a limited extent. The company commander here considered that the moral effect on his men far outweighed the disadvantages inherent in an extreme regularity of formation. Says Major Boyd:

The mental effort of the men to maintain alignment while under heavy fire, and their secret amusement at their leader's idiosyncracies, made the element of personal danger a secondary matter.

Major Boyd comments on the ineffectiveness of the rifle fire during the first few hours of the attack. Owing to excitement many men failed to set their sights; others set their sights and never used them; still others shut both eyes and jerked the trig-

ger. He noted that later in the action the rifle fire was much steadier and far more effective.

Movement [he states] applied to individuals will frequently afford a tense and apprehensive man a physical means of letting off steam. If the man is required to perform heavy labor, personal danger is readily forgotten. However, when shells are exploding near an unoccupied soldier he is unable to push back waves of fear. He crouches and waits; and for him the battle will probably degenerate into an unending series of "waits."

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**CONCLUSION.** Until recently, armies fought in comparatively close order. Masses were held together by drill and by discipline. The enemy was in plain view. Now we usually struggle against an invisible enemy. We no longer fight in masses but in small groups—often as individuals. Therefore the psychological reaction of the individual is more important than ever before.

In war, the soldier is the instrument with which leaders must work. They must learn to play on his emotions—his loyalty, his courage, his vanity, his sense of humor, his esprit de corps, his weakness, his strength, his confidence, his trust. Although in the heat of battle there is no longer time to prepare soldiers for the violent impressions of war, there are, however, two simple means by which a leader may lessen tension: He can do something himself that will give the men a feeling of security; or he can order his men to do something that requires activity and attention.



## Chapter XXV: *Night Attacks*

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*Success in a night attack depends largely upon direction, control, and surprise.*

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**T**HE THOUSAND-AND-ONE contingencies that an attack by night gives rise to must be foreseen and provided for. Especially must careful provision be made for maintaining direction, for preserving control and for insuring secrecy.

Owing to the power of modern armament, night attacks will probably be more frequent in future conflicts. Positions which infantry has failed to take by day may sometimes be successfully stormed by night. Particularly will darkness aid in the passage of areas that enemy fire denies by day.

Night attacks have their place but they are by no means a panacea for avoiding the difficulties of modern combat. They present many difficulties all their own. Imperfectly trained and partially disciplined troops will seldom succeed in these operations. Even seasoned veterans, led by experienced commanders, have often failed to overcome the dangers of the dark.

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EXAMPLE 1. During the opening days of the First Battle of the Marne, the German Fifth Army suffered so heavily from French artillery fire that its infantry was unable to close with the enemy. In order to come to grips, the army ordered a night attack on a twenty-kilometer front for the night of September 9-10. Portions of four corps participated. One of the units engaged in this action was the 30th Infantry of the German 34th Division.

On September 9 this regiment, which had just received a number of replacements, was in reserve near Bulainville. That afternoon the colonel received the division attack order. In this order

the 30th Infantry was directed to launch its attack from the vicinity of Amblaincourt, which was believed to be occupied by the French. The small hill about 1,800 meters southwest of Issoncourt was assigned as the regimental objective.

Realizing that the Bunet stream would have to be crossed, the colonel promptly dispatched an officer patrol to reconnoiter for crossings. Before dark this patrol returned with the necessary information.

At nightfall the regimental commander assembled his officers and issued his order. The regiment would attack with the 2d and 3d Battalions abreast, the 2d on the right. The 1st Battalion would be in reserve. The 2d Battalion was to move forward along the west edge of Chanel Wood and then turn eastward following the south edge toward the objective. The 3d Battalion would move on the objective by guiding on the north edge of the wood. Weapons would not be loaded and there would be no firing. Silence was mandatory. Necessary commands would be transmitted in whispers. First-line battalions would advance "with units well in hand, preceded by a thick line of skirmishers."

By midnight the 30th Infantry and adjacent troops had reached attack positions north and west of Amblaincourt without alarming the French. Rain was falling. The advance began. As the leading elements neared Amblaincourt there was a sudden burst of firing. Immediately everyone rushed toward the town. There were no French there. In the confusion some straw piles nearby caught fire, revealing the milling Germans to the French, who actually occupied Chanel Wood and who promptly opened a heavy fire. The German assault units forthwith fell into the greatest disorder, and the 30th Infantry became intermingled with the 173d on its left.

In spite of the confusion and the heavy fire, most of the men of the 30th and some of the 173d pushed on toward the dark outline of the Chanel Wood. They crossed the Bunet, the water reaching to their breasts and sometimes to their necks. Emerging

from the stream they charged the wood in one confused mass. They reached the edge and hand-to-hand fighting followed. German accounts state that an irregular fire came from all sides, that no one knew friend from foe. Neighboring units had lost direction and there were even men from other corps mingled with the troops of the 30th. About 2:30 a.m. the Germans were in possession of Chanel Wood, but their losses had been enormous. The history of the 30th Infantry says:

The most complete disorder reigned after the incidents of Chanel Wood. Near Anglecourt Farm there were units of the 30th, 173d, 37th, 155th, and even Württembergers (XIII Corps). Officers strove to organize at least squads or half-platoons, but the smallest group, as soon as formed, became lost in the obscurity. It was only along the southern edge of the Chanel Wood that sufficient order was reestablished to continue the advance. . . .

The 8th Company managed to push on and capture several cannon after a hand-to-hand fight with the gunners. Unfortunately, they had to withdraw soon afterward, having come under an intense fire from their own comrades.

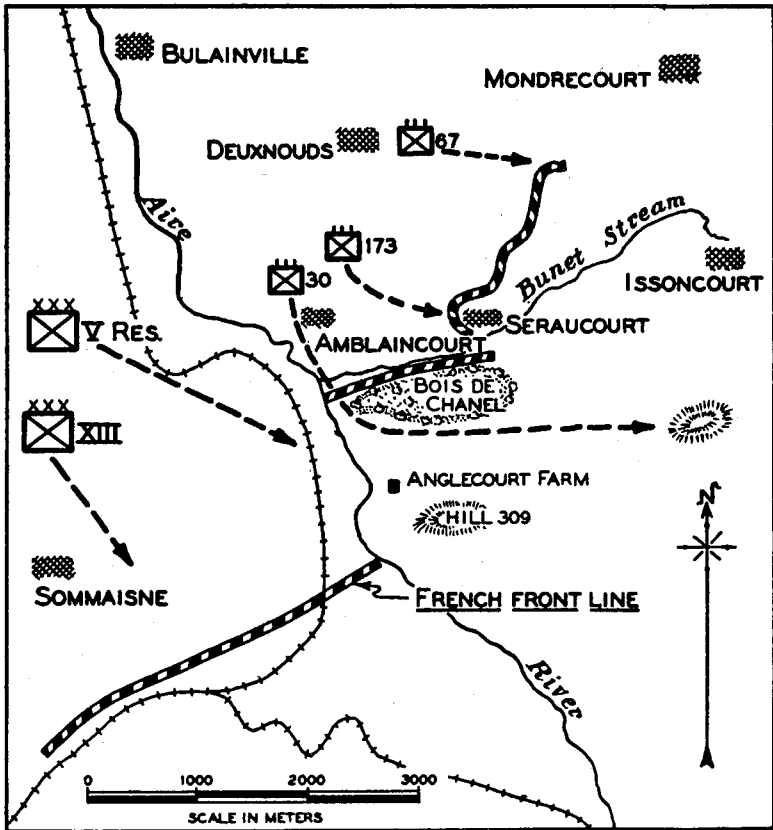
At daybreak the 30th Infantry, completely intermingled with the 173d, held the line: northeast corner of Chanel Wood—Hill 309. Although ground had been gained, the attack was considered a failure.

On September 12 a German colonel who commanded a unit in the same division with the 30th Infantry, met the German Crown Prince, who commanded the Fifth Army, and asked permission to speak frankly regarding this attack. This being granted, he said, "Imperial Highness, one more night attack like that one and the Army will be forever demoralized."

*From an article by Colonel Étienne, French Army, in "La Revue d'Infanterie," August, 1927.*

**DISCUSSION.** The history of the 30th Infantry refers to this night as "St. Bartholomew's Eve." In the memory of the survivors, it was the most terrible of the entire war.

Although the incontestable bravery of the German troops achieved miracles, the action was doomed before it began.



*Example 1*

Subordinate commanders were not given an opportunity for daylight reconnaissance. The infantry was not opposite its objective at the jump-off. The objective itself was more than 6,000 meters away with the intervening terrain unknown. As a crowning touch the regiment was ordered to execute an abrupt change of direction—this in the dead of night and at the height of the attack. To demand that the 30th Infantry, in a night attack, take Amblaincourt, capture Chanel Wood, then change direction

and push on to a distant objective, meanwhile maintaining control, was more than demanding the impossible; it was presenting an unequivocal invitation to disaster.

By their very nature, night attacks should have limited objectives. The results may be exploited by day.

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**EXAMPLE 2.** On the night of October 6-7, 1914, the French 2d Battalion of Chasseurs moved by truck to Vrely, where it arrived at 7:00 a.m. There it was attached to the 138th Brigade. At 2:30 p.m. it was ordered to march on Rouvroy in order to participate in a night attack by the 138th Brigade. Another attack, coördinated with this, was to be launched from Bouchoir toward le Quesnoy.

The 138th Brigade planned to attack with the 254th Infantry on the right, the 2d Battalion of Chasseurs on the left, and the 251st Infantry in reserve. The dirt road between Rouvroy and Hill 101 was designated as the boundary between the 254th Infantry and the 2d Battalion of Chasseurs. The terrain between Rouvroy and Parvillers was flat and presented no difficulty to movement at night.

The 2d Chasseur Battalion was an élite organization. However, as a result of previous fighting, its effective strength had dwindled to about 150 men per company. Most of the battalion's six companies were commanded by noncommissioned officers.

At 5:45 p.m., with dark closing in, the battalion moved forward through Rouvroy. Not more than an hour had been available for reconnaissance. Information was vague. It was believed that Parvillers was held by the Germans.

The 2d Chasseurs formed for attack as follows: Two companies deployed in one long line of skirmishers, preceded by patrols. Four companies followed in second line. These four companies were abreast, each having two platoons leading and two following. Platoons were deployed in line of skirmishers. The distances ordered were:

150 meters from the patrol to the first line.

200 meters from the first line to the second line.

50 meters between leading elements of second-line companies and their supports.

The machine-gun platoon was placed fifty meters behind the left of the third line.

Shortly after dark the battalion advanced on Parvillers. As the advance neared Hill 101, one of the patrols ran into an enemy outguard which promptly opened fire. Many of the French answered this fire without knowing what they were shooting at or why. Soon, firing became general.

The two leading companies halted. Instantly a cry of "Forward!" rang through the darkness and this was caught up and echoed by hundreds of voices. Abruptly the second-line companies rushed forward, charging pell-mell through the leading companies, one of which followed. A terrific uproar ensued, punctuated with shouting and cheering.

The rush reached a trench 250 meters northwest of Parvillers. The defenders had fled, leaving weapons and equipment, but the enemy farther in rear had been warned. Suddenly three 77-mm. cannon, 150 meters behind the trench, opened at point-blank range on the French. By the flashes, German artillerymen could be seen serving the guns. The French in front of the battery stopped, but those on the right closed in and captured the three pieces.

In great disorder the advance continued toward the village. As the French moved forward, their left flank came under fire of enemy machine guns located near the road junction 600 meters northeast of Parvillers. By this time all French units were hopelessly intermingled, several company and platoon commanders had become casualties and in many places the French, confused by the dark, were firing on their own troops. The attack wavered and stopped.

It was 11:00 p.m. With much difficulty noncommissioned of-

ficers rallied a few scattered groups and occupied the conquered trench. It was realized that further concerted action by the battalion was impossible.

Meanwhile, the right assault company, which had not followed the general movement, was still under partial control. The battalion commander ordered it to a central position 600 meters northeast of the trench to cover the withdrawal of the battalion. When the order to withdraw was given, voices, whistles and bugle calls were heard. Firing continued during the entire movement, but eventually the battalion managed to extricate itself and reform in rear of Rouvroy. It had suffered in the neighborhood of 300 casualties.

The entire French attack failed.

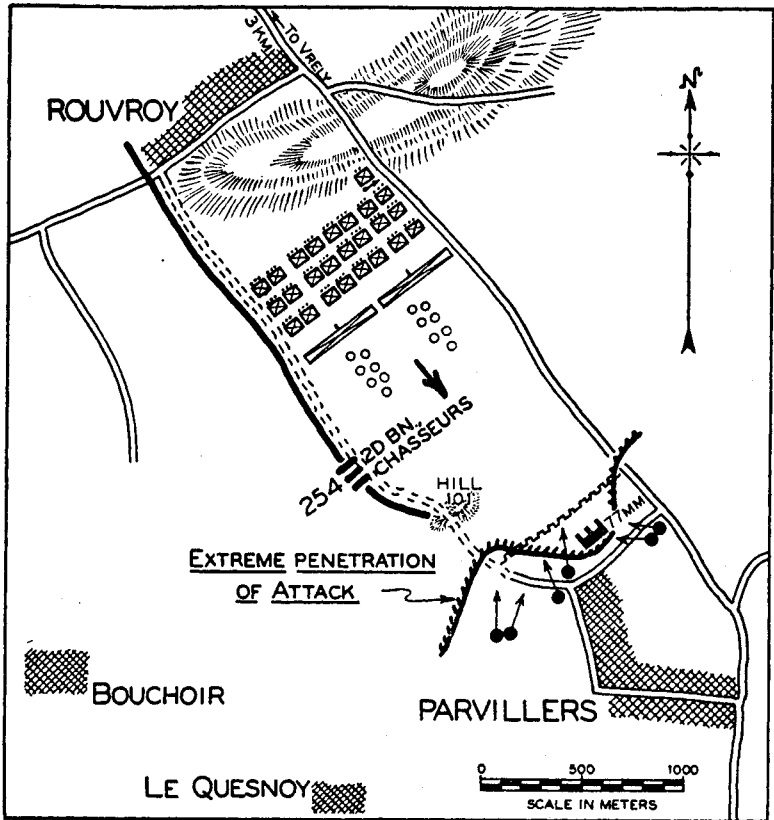
*From an article by Lieutenant Colonel Jeze, French Army, in "La Revue d'Infanterie," June, 1924.*

**DISCUSSION.** In this engagement the French solved the problem of direction but failed completely in the coëxisting problems of control and surprise.

As a matter of fact, the direction phase practically solved itself, for the roads paralleling the advance on Parvillers made any great loss of direction virtually impossible. Unfortunately, no kindly terrain feature could eliminate the remaining difficulties.

It was inevitable that this widely scattered formation should result in loss of control. At night, distances and intervals must be diminished and formations kept compact. In this instance, section columns or even larger groupings would unquestionably have gone a long way toward keeping the battalion in hand. Particularly was a compact formation mandatory here since most of the company and platoon leaders were noncommissioned officers with little or no experience.

The patrol that encountered the hostile outguard on Hill 101 should have closed with the bayonet without firing. It failed to do this, and firing soon became general. The usual results fol-



*Example 2*

lowed: once started, the firing could not be stopped; officers were unable to get the leading elements to continue the advance; and the attacking units fired into their own troops.

The second-line companies, with due courage but with undue cheering and firing, charged. The tumult, the firing and the onrush of hundreds of men from a distance gave the Germans ample warning. It was an attack—an assault that had started too far off. The French lines, revealed by their cheering, were



swept by machine-gun fire. In the utmost confusion the assault wavered to a halt.

Loss of control through a vicious formation, and loss of surprise through yelling and firing, had wrecked one more night attack.

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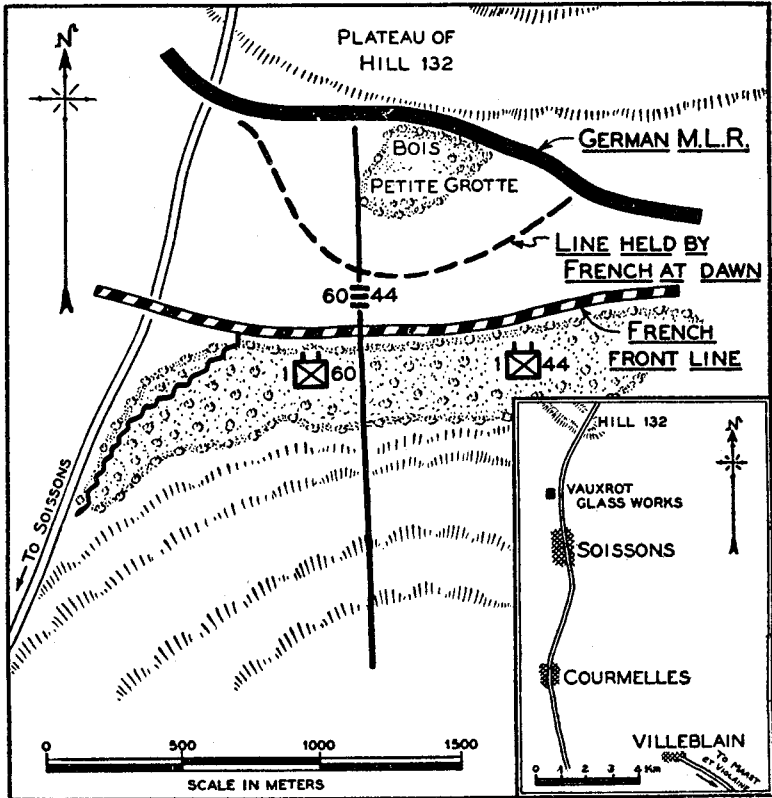
EXAMPLE 3. On January 12, 1915, the French were attacking northward near Soissons. At 7:00 a.m. the 1st Battalion of the French 60th Infantry, which was in reserve, marched from Villeblain to Maast-et-Violaine where it arrived at 10:45 a.m. There it received an order to move back to Courmelles which it reached at 8:00 o'clock that night.

At Courmelles the battalion commander was told that his battalion and a battalion of the 44th Infantry would immediately move forward and retake Hill 132 which had just been captured by the Germans.

No large-scale maps were available and no one in the battalion knew the terrain or the exact location of the hostile positions. The order received by the battalion commander more than met the requirement of brevity: "Attack when you get close to Hill 132." The information he received was equally helpful: "The enemy is on Hill 132. He will shoot at you." Someone, however, was thoughtful enough to provide a guide to conduct the battalion to the French front line.

The two battalions cleared Courmelles at 8:30 p.m. and two hours later reached the Vauxrot Glass Works where they dropped packs. They now marched along the road in single file. Soon the guide turned off into a communication trench that was knee-deep in mud and blocked in several places by fallen trees. At these blocks the column was broken and the companies became disorganized. In consequence, considerable time had to be spent in reorganizing platoons when the front line was reached. It was 3:30 a.m. before the attack formation could be taken.

The 1st Battalion of the 60th Infantry was directed to form with two companies in assault and two in support, each company in column of platoons, and each platoon deployed in line of



Example 3

skirmishers. When the company commanders attempted to form up they found that entire platoons were missing and that those on hand were badly intermingled and completely out of control. Voices were raised, commands shouted, and questions yelled back and forth in the darkness. Here and there matches were lit to check compasses. German flares became increasingly frequent.

At 4:00 a.m. the attack jumped off—but in places only. Firing began almost at once. The troops were poorly oriented. They did not know where to go or where to stop. There was no liaison. One assault company lost direction. The company behind it pushed on and the two became hopelessly intermingled. German artillery and machine guns opened a withering fire on the disorganized units, forcing them to halt, take cover, and wait for daylight.

At daybreak it was learned that the battalion of the 44th had jumped off at a slightly later hour. The attack of both battalions failed. The losses in the 1st Battalion of the 60th Infantry were exceptionally heavy.

*From an article by Lieutenant Colonel Jeze, French Army, in "La Revue d'Infanterie," June, 1924.*

**DISCUSSION.** This attack is a conspicuous tragedy of error. A deliberate effort at failure could not have been more thorough. The troops, having spent the day in marching and countermarching, were exhausted when the attack was launched. The precipitation with which the battalion was engaged precluded proper preparation, particularly reconnaissance. Indeed, the troops were in the dark figuratively as well as literally, not even knowing the exact location of the hostile position. Add to this the lack of control at the jump-off, the unsuitable formation, the lighting of matches, the shouting and firing, and we have a situation that not even a Bonaparte could retrieve. Direction, control, and surprise were simply non-existent.

As Colonel Jeze concludes:

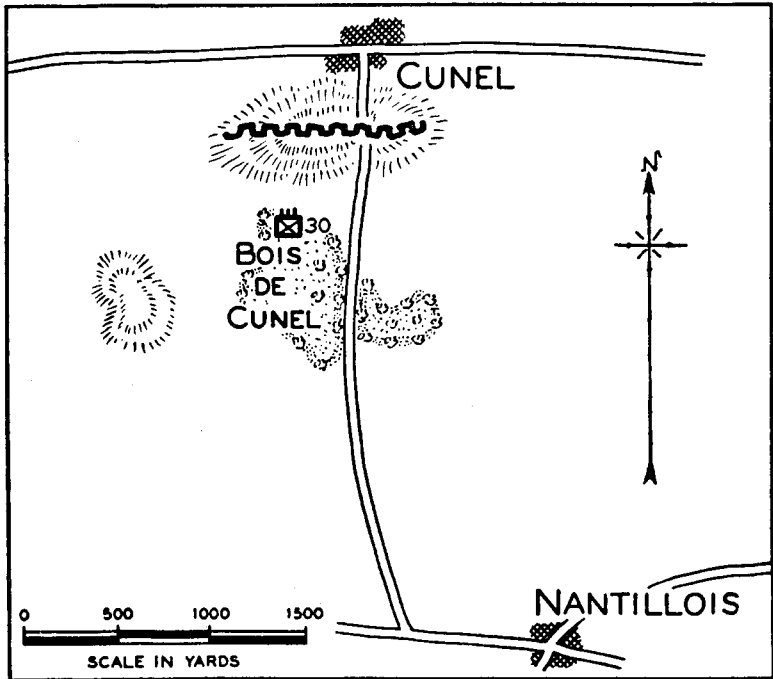
In doing exactly the opposite of what was done, they would not have been far from realizing the most favorable condition for the success of the operation.

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**EXAMPLE 4.** On October 10, 1918, the 2d Battalion of the U. S. 30th Infantry was in reserve in the Bois de Cunel. On the

previous day, as an assault unit, it had reached the north edge of the wood and was therefore somewhat familiar with the terrain beyond.

Early on the 10th the 1st Battalion of the 30th Infantry had at-



*Example 4*

tacked to the north, but after advancing a short distance had been pinned to the ground in front of a German trench located north of the Bois de Cunel. It was ordered to withdraw to the woods, reorganize and resume the attack at 7:30 p.m., assisted by a new artillery preparation. The withdrawal began shortly after dark, but in the process the battalion became so disorganized that it was unable to launch the attack at the designated hour.

Now since the division commander had ordered that the trench 800 yards north of the Bois de Cunel be taken on the 10th and since the 1st Battalion had failed to do this and was unable to make a second effort in time, the 2d Battalion of the 30th Infantry and one company of the 7th Infantry were directed to attack the hostile position at 10:00 p.m. The northwestern edge of the wood was designated as the line of departure for the 2d Battalion and the northeastern edge for the company. There would be no artillery support.

After all units were in place the battalion commander assembled his company commanders and explained the attack plan in detail. The battalion would attack with three companies in assault and one in reserve. Since the frontage was large and since all organizations had been depleted some forty per cent in previous fighting, each company would employ three platoons in assault and one in reserve. The assault platoons would deploy as skirmishers with intervals of two to five yards. The reserve company, formed in line of squad columns, would follow the center assault company at 100 yards. The machine-gun company attached to the battalion would remain in place until the enemy had been driven from the trench, then move forward and assist in the organization of the captured position.

The attack was launched on time. Exactly two and a half hours had elapsed since the Germans had been subjected to a heavy artillery preparation, following which the attack of the 1st Battalion had failed to materialize. When no attack followed this 7:30 p.m. bombardment, the Germans apparently concluded that the Americans would make no further effort that night.

The advance of the 2d Battalion was slow and cautious. Secrecy had been stressed. German flares went up frequently. Each time one began to illuminate an area, all men remained motionless, resuming their movement only when the flare died out. This method of advance was continued until the assault units were close to the hostile position. Finally the movement

was discovered and machine-gun and rifle fire ripped into the assaulting units from front and flanks. But the Americans were now too close to be stopped. In a swift charge they closed with the enemy, overcame a determined resistance and captured part of the disputed trench. The Germans, however, still held portions of the trench on the flanks.

By this time every vestige of organization had disappeared. Many company, platoon and section leaders were casualties. The reserve company was completely intermingled with the assault companies. All was confusion. Immediate steps were taken to reorganize the battalion, while a message requesting reinforcements was sent to the regimental commander.

At 2:30 a.m. the battalion commander reported to the regimental command post. He informed the colonel that the 2d Battalion was now occupying the trench in the zone of the 30th Infantry and had established contact with the company from the 7th Infantry on the right, but that reinforcements were necessary on the left, where the enemy still held the trench in considerable force. One company was promptly dispatched to this dangerous flank and after severe fighting drove the enemy from his position.

At 6:00 a.m. the strength reports of the units that had made this attack showed the following effectives:

Company E, 30th Infantry:	1 officer, 30 men.
Company F, 30th Infantry:	40 men.
Company G, 30th Infantry:	1 officer, 20 men.
Company H, 30th Infantry:	1 officer, 27 men.
Company G, 7th Infantry:	1 officer, 10 men.

Not all of the missing were casualties. Many men who could not be accounted for had merely lost their way in the darkness.

*From the personal experience monograph of Major Turner M. Chambliss, who commanded the 2d Battalion of the 30th Infantry.*

DISCUSSION. Here most of the conditions essential to the success of a night operation are evident:

The battalion knew the terrain.

It was close to its clearly defined line of departure.

It was placed opposite its objective.

The objective was limited and was unmistakable even in the dark.

The troops had not been engaged during the day and were therefore comparatively fresh.

Details of the attack were carefully explained by the battalion commander.

The movement was made in silence, great care being taken to avoid alarming the enemy.

The attack was made at a time when the Germans had concluded that no further effort would be made that night.

All of these factors made for success.

On the other hand, the extended formation contributed to the loss of control; and the subsequent confusion and intermingling of the reserve company with the assault units necessitated a call for help to clear up the situation on the left flank.

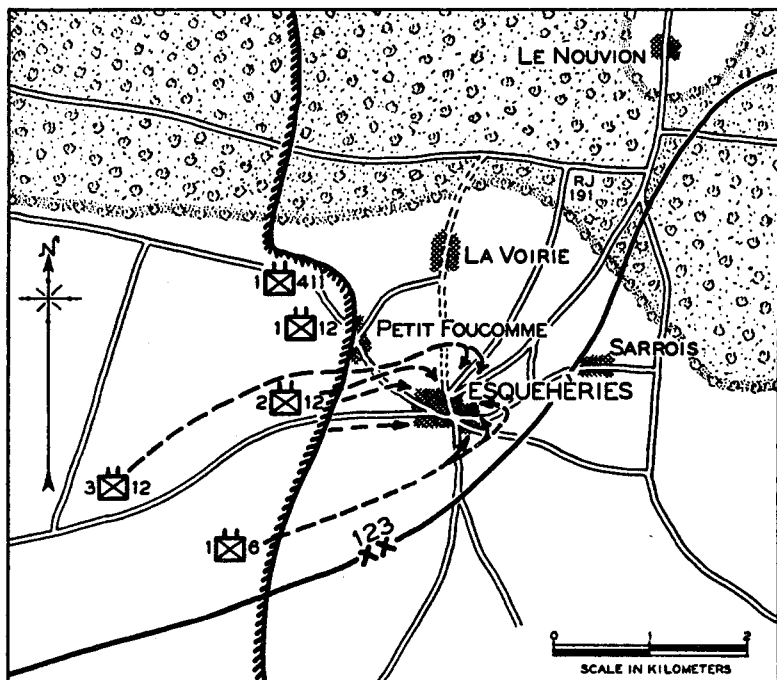
The figures giving the effective strength of units indicate the disorder which may attend even a successful night attack. True, the companies were depleted at the start but, even so, the small effective strength at the conclusion of the operation is striking.

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EXAMPLE 5. Late in the afternoon of November 5, 1918, the French 123d Division, which had been attacking to the east, was stopped west of Esquehères. The troops were on the verge of exhaustion, but despite this, the 12th Infantry, with the 1st Battalion of the 6th Infantry attached, was directed to prepare an attack to take Esquehères without delay.

The colonel of the 12th Infantry issued orders for an attack at dark. The 2d Battalion was directed to attack the town from

the west, encircle it on the north and seize the exits toward Petit Foucommes and la Voirie. The 3d Battalion was ordered to pass north of the 2d Battalion and hold the exits leading toward RJ 191 and le Nouvion. The 1st Battalion was told to



*Example 5*

push forward to the le Nouvion road and occupy a position where this road entered the forest. The 1st Battalion of the 6th Infantry was directed to seize the southern exits of Esquehères and those leading toward Sarrois. After securing these exits the attacking battalions were then to strike toward the center of the town.

The commander of the 1st Battalion received this order at 8:00 p.m. and immediately sent for his company commanders.



At 9:00 p.m. none of them had yet reached the battalion command post. In the interim the battalion commander learned that the 1st Battalion of the 411th Infantry, on his left, had received no order to attack. The night was pitch dark and rain was falling in sheets. There was no road or trail to guide him to his objective; he would have to advance three kilometers across country over terrain that bristled with thick hedges. Considering his men incapable of such an effort, he requested authority to remain in position until daybreak. This was granted.

The 2d Battalion also received this order about 8:00 p.m. Its commander at once endeavored to get in touch with adjacent battalions to arrange details. He was finally informed that the 1st Battalion had received authority to delay its advance until daylight. He was unable to get in touch with any other unit.

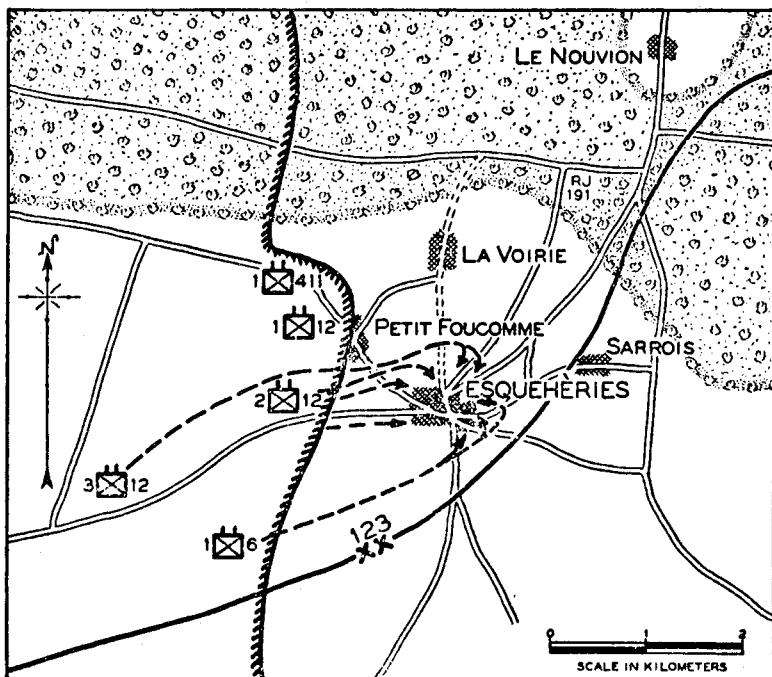
Undeterred by this, the battalion commander issued his order. The 5th Company was directed to move forward until it reached the Petit Foucommé—Esquehèries Road, which it would follow to the town. The 6th Company was ordered to advance until it reached the dirt road leading from la Voirie to Esquehèries, then follow that road to the town. The 7th Company, which had been in reserve, was directed to send one platoon down the road that entered Esquehèries from the west. This platoon would attack and capture the western part of the town. The rest of the 7th Company was directed to remain in reserve.

The company commanders protested that their men were extremely fatigued, the rain heavy, the night dark, and the terrain unknown. The battalion commander was obdurate. He stated that the operation would be carried out according to his order and that the movement would start as soon as the 3d Battalion arrived.

At 11:00 p.m. the 10th Company of the 3d Battalion put in its appearance. Its commander stated that at the start of the movement it had been the rear company in the 3d Battalion column, but that now he had no idea where the remainder of

the battalion was. After a further fruitless delay the commander of the 2d Battalion directed his companies to move to the attack without waiting for the 3d Battalion.

Shortly after the attack jumped off the remaining units of the



*Example 5*

3d Battalion arrived. The men were exhausted, the companies disorganized and the officers unoriented. The battalion commander thereupon decided to remain in position until dawn.

Meanwhile, the 2d Battalion had moved out at 1:00 a.m., much later than had been expected. Darkness and the heavy rain made the forward movement slow and difficult. The 5th and 6th Companies did not reach the north edge of the town until daylight. The 1st Battalion of the 6th Infantry encountered

similar difficulties and did not reach the southern exits until 5:00 a.m. However, the one platoon of the 7th Company which had been ordered to attack from the west and which had a road to guide on, advanced rapidly and captured the western part of Esquehèries. When this happened the Germans evacuated the entire town, leaving this one platoon in undisputed possession.

*From an article by Major P. Janet, French Army, in "La Revue d'Infanterie," April, 1928.*

**DISCUSSION.** The failure of the attempted encirclement of Esquehèries is instructive. Four battalions were ordered to participate in the operation. So great were the difficulties that two did not even make a start, while the other two, with the exception of one platoon, did not arrive within striking distance of the objective until daylight.

This one platoon had a positive means by which it was enabled to maintain direction, namely, the road that ran past its initial position straight into the town. Other units, lacking points on their routes that could be readily identified, spent the greater part of the night in a disheartening game of Blind Man's Buff.

Again it is pointed out that of four battalions ordered to the attack only one platoon closed with the enemy. And yet this single platoon captured the objective.

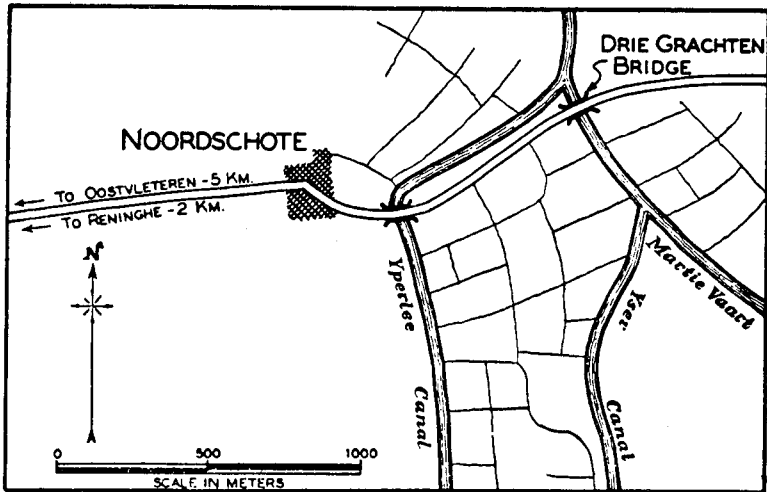
This operation graphically demonstrates the following facts: troops who are to take part in a night attack should be familiar with the terrain; the ground should not present too many obstacles to movement; the troops should be close to and opposite their objective; the axis of advance should be clearly marked and unmistakable; and finally, the troops involved should be in good physical condition and imbued with a high morale.

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**EXAMPLE 6.** On November 11, 1914, the French 121st Infantry was entrucked and moved to the north where a great battle was in progress along the Yser River.

In three months of war the 121st Infantry had been both lucky and successful. Morale was excellent. As an added touch, many officers and noncommissioned officers, wounded in earlier fights, had recently returned to the regiment.

About noon the 121st arrived at Oostvleteren. Here it was



*Example 6*

directed to march to Reninghe where further orders would be issued.

At Reninghe at 4:00 p.m. a division commander informed the colonel:

Your regiment is attached to my division. The Germans have crossed the Yser Canal between the Drie Grachten bridge and a point 800 meters south of it. There is nothing in front of Noordschote to prevent their rapid progress toward Reninghe.

At 1:00 a.m. tonight the 121st will attack and drive the enemy over the Yser

The XX Corps will be on your right and a regiment of Zouaves on your left. There is a gap between them. Their flanks are near the canal.

You will find the colonel of Zouaves at Noordschote.  
Carry on without further orders.

The regimental commander designated the 2d Battalion, supported by a machine-gun platoon, to make the attack.

Noting from his map that the terrain between the Yser and Yperlee Canals appeared extremely difficult, the battalion commander determined to make a personal reconnaissance. Saddle horses having just arrived, he mounted all his company commanders and moved rapidly toward Noordschote. Finding no one there, the party climbed to the second story of a house and studied the terrain. Although dusk was closing in, enough light remained to show that the problem of reaching the Yser with troops at night would present grave difficulties. The intervening terrain was a quagmire, interlaced with small canals and large ditches, which would obviously make the maintenance of direction and control extremely difficult. No French units could be seen. Apparently there were some Germans near the Yser Canal.

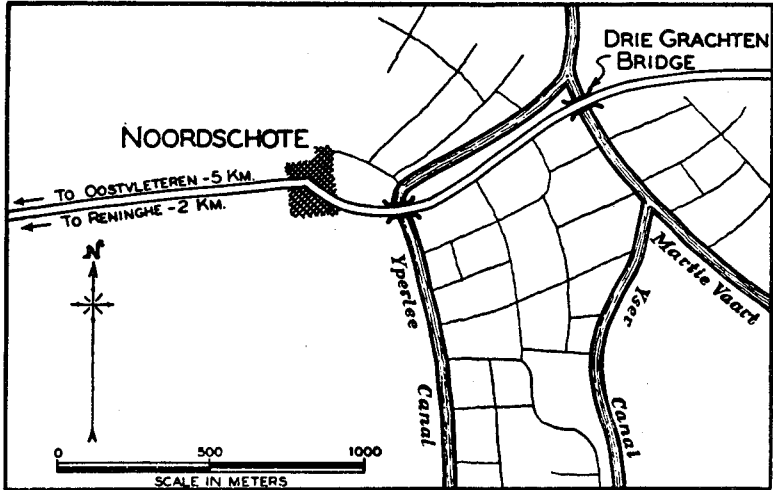
Following the reconnaissance, the battalion commander issued an oral order for the attack. He directed the battalion to move forward without delay to Noordschote and to form by 11:30 p.m. along the Yperlee Canal with three companies abreast, their right 400 meters south of the Noordschote bridge, and their left just north of the Yperlee bend. Patrols would be sent out to seek liaison with units on the flanks. Reconnaissance of the canals directly to the front was limited to 200 meters in order not to alarm the enemy. Two companies were directed to search Noordschote for light material such as ladders and planks which could help them across canals.

At 12:15 a.m. the 8th Company would move out along the ditch 400 meters southeast of and parallel to the Noordschote—Drie Grachten Road and follow this ditch to the Yser.

The 6th Company, starting at 12:30 a.m., would at first follow the ditch just south of the road, then incline to the right and march on the junction of the Yser and the Martie Vaart.

The 5th Company, at 12:40 a.m., would follow the road, or the ditch just north of the road, and attack the Drie Grachten bridge.

The 7th Company and the machine guns were to remain east of Noordschote in reserve.



*Example 6*

The battalion commander further directed that there be no firing, that leading elements wear a white brassard, and that particular attention be paid to control—each company moving in a single column, preceded by an officer patrol.

About 6:30 p.m. the battalion started its march on Noordschote. In the meantime the battalion commander had reported the results of his reconnaissance and his plan for the attack to the regimental commander, who approved his dispositions but informed him that he was going to try to have the attack postponed twenty-four hours.

At 8:00 p.m. the battalion commander met the colonel of the Zouave regiment at Noordschote, which still appeared entirely deserted. The Zouave commander stated that he knew rein-

forcements were coming but not that a night attack was contemplated. He added that he could not furnish any guides who knew the terrain in question. There was no evidence of the XX Corps to the south.

The battalion reached Noordschote at 8:30 p.m. Efforts to find the commander of the front-line battalion of Zouaves on the left failed. However, the few Zouaves in the vicinity were notified of the proposed action of the 121st and told not to fire. A few tired soldiers of another unit were found just north of the Noordschote—Drie Grachten road, and their commander, a noncommissioned officer, was informed of the plan to attack. To questioning, he replied that he knew nothing of the terrain south of the road but believed that the water in the ditches would be about a meter deep. At 11:00 p.m. patrols reported that water in these ditches was breast high.

Just at this time an order was received countermanding the attack and directing the battalion merely to hold its ground. All companies were immediately notified.

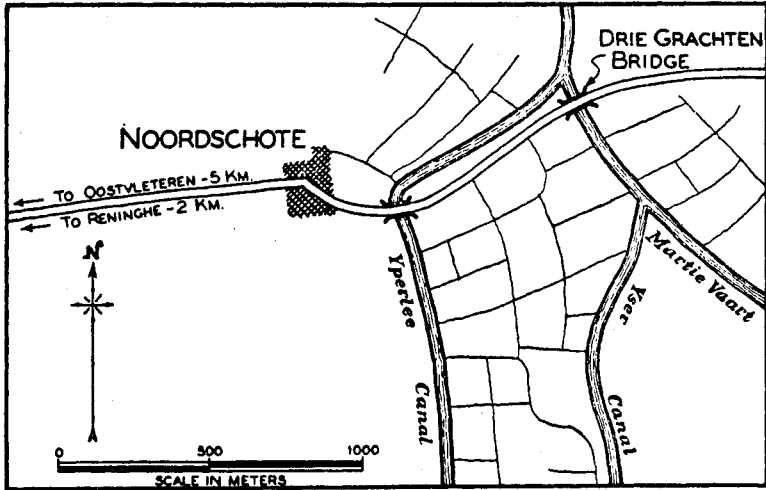
At 11:10 p.m. a patrol reported that it had gained contact with the XX Corps to the south and found it in a state of complete confusion; no one there knew where any units were.

At 12:30 a.m. came a new counter-order directing the attack to be launched at 3:00 a.m. The battalion maintained all its previous arrangements with the exception of the times at which companies were to move.

The 8th Company moved forward at 2:15 a.m. At 2:30 a.m. the captain of this company reported that it was almost impossible to cross the canals. Several men had fallen in and were unable to climb out of the sticky mud. He added that in such conditions movement to the Yser would require several hours, that many men would be lost en route and that there would be no surprise. Having implicit confidence in this company commander and feeling that he would not exaggerate difficulties, the battalion commander immediately ordered:

The 8th Company will follow the 6th and on reaching the Yser, move south to its objective.

The 6th Company moved out on the Noordschote—Drie Grachten Road and followed it almost to the Yser before turn-



*Example 6*

ing south. A few minutes later the 8th Company followed the 6th. The 5th Company then moved by the same route to the Drie Grachten bridge.

The attacks of all three companies succeeded.

The Germans, completely surprised, were thrown back over the Yser without more than a shot or two being fired. The battalion captured 25 prisoners and suffered no losses.

*From an article by Lieutenant Colonel Baranger, French Army, in "La Revue d'Infanterie," April, 1929.*

**DISCUSSION.** This attack succeeded despite conditions which might easily have led to failure, such as fatigue of the troops, the almost impassable state of the ground, the confused situation of adjacent units, and the confusion of the night.



on the scene after dark.

Why did it succeed? *Direction! Control! Surprise!*

The column formation in which the advance was made facilitated control. Each company was preceded by an officer patrol; thus, when contact was first made, it was made by a group under a responsible leader.

The road and the Yser guided the troops to their destination. In the original order these companies were to advance abreast, each in a column and each following a specified ditch. When this was found to be impracticable, all used the road.

Extreme precautions were taken to obtain surprise. Despite the obvious desirability of ascertaining the state of the terrain, the battalion commander limited reconnaissance to 200 meters to the front in order to avoid alarming the enemy. In the advance he insisted on silence and prohibited firing.

Finally, the battalion consisted of good troops and determined leaders, and as a result of success in three months of war, a feeling of mutual trust and confidence had been established.

"The symphony in black was not known to this battalion," says Colonel Baranger.

/ / /

**CONCLUSION.** Night attacks can not be improvised; to have even a reasonable chance of success they must be planned and prepared down to the last foreseeable detail. Among the many things the leader must take into consideration in planning a night operation, the following are particularly important:

Night attacks should preferably be undertaken by fresh, well-trained troops in good physical condition. The troops must be under control at the start.

The objective should be well defined and easily recognized in the dark.

The units making the attack should be able to form opposite the objective and at no great distance from it.

Generally speaking, there can be no maneuver. Each attacking column must drive through to its objective without regard to the progress of adjacent units.

Routes of approach should be clearly defined and unmistakable in the dark.

Subordinate leaders should be given adequate opportunity for daylight reconnaissance.

The formation should facilitate the maintenance of direction and control. This means a column formation in the early stages and, as the enemy is approached, a line of small columns preceded by patrols. The skirmish line is undesirable.

A strong leader with a few determined men should head each column. A reliable officer or non-commissioned officer should bring up the rear.

Orders must be explicit. Every subordinate leader should know the objective; the compass direction of attack; the formations that are to be taken up; the exact mission of his unit; the signal for the assault; action in case the enemy is not surprised; locations of rallying points in the event the attack is repulsed; action upon carrying the enemy position; and the means of identifying friendly troops. Subordinate leaders should pass this information on to their men.

Secrecy and silence are essential. There must be no firing, no yelling, no smoking, no striking of matches. Absolute silence should be maintained until the attack erupts in the enemy works.

Night attacks are difficult operations. They are frequently the expression of a vigorous leadership which, regardless of difficulties, is determined to carry through to a successful conclusion. But despite the vigor of the leadership, these attacks will usually fail unless extreme attention be accorded that military trinity of the night: *direction, control, and surprise.*

## Chapter XXVI: *Miracles*

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*Resolute action by a few determined men is often decisive.*

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**T**IME AND AGAIN, numbers have been overcome by courage and resolution. Sudden changes in a situation, so startling as to appear miraculous, have frequently been brought about by the action of small parties. There is an excellent reason for this.

The trials of battle are severe; troops are strained to the breaking point. At the crisis, any small incident may prove enough to turn the tide one way or the other. The enemy invariably has difficulties of which we are ignorant; to us, his situation may appear favorable while to him it may seem desperate. Only a slight extra effort on our part may be decisive.

Armies are not composed of map-problem units, but of human beings with all the hopes and fears that flesh is heir to. Some are natural leaders who can be relied upon to the limit. Some will become conveniently lost in battle. A large proportion will go with the majority, wherever the majority happens to be going, whether it be to the front or to the rear. Men in battle respond readily to any external stimulus—strong leadership or demoralizing influences.

Thus we sometimes see companies of 170 or 180 men reduced to fifty or sixty a few minutes after battle has begun. Such a company has not been reduced two-thirds by casualties; it has suffered, perhaps, but not in such heroic proportions. Every army contains men who will straggle at the first chance and at the first alarm flee to the rear, sowing disorder, and sometimes panic, in their wake. They tell harrowing tales of being the only survivors of actions in which they were not present, of lacking ammunition when they have not squeezed a trigger, and of having had no food for days.

A unit can be seriously weakened by the loss of a few strong characters. Such a unit, worn down by the ordeals of battle, is often not a match for a smaller but more determined force. We then have a battlefield miracle.

It is not the physical loss inflicted by the smaller force, although this may be appreciable, but the moral effect, which is decisive.

The familiar exploits of Sergeant York and Lieutenant Woodfill afford striking examples of what one or two individuals can accomplish in combat when resolute action is accompanied by tactical efficiency.

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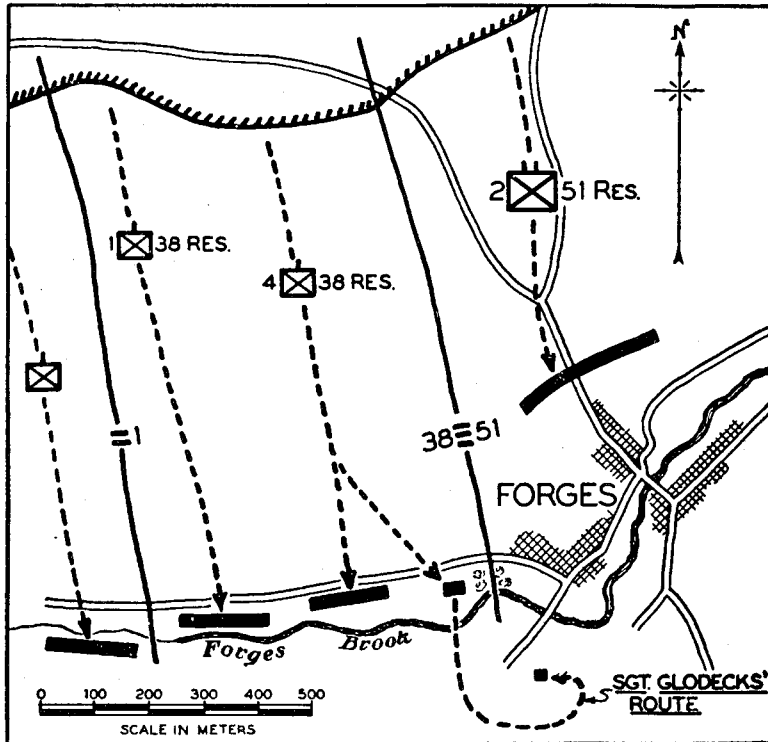
EXAMPLE 1. On March 6, 1916, the German 38th Reserve Regiment attacked to the south. The 1st Battalion of the 38th Regiment was ordered to take the high ground south of the Forges Brook while the 2d Battalion of the 51st Reserve Regiment (on its left) took Forges.

The 4th Company, the left assault company of the 1st Battalion, reached the Forges Brook where it was held up by machine-gun fire from the village of Forges on its left flank. The 2d Battalion of the 51st was still engaged in a hard fight to the left-rear against the defenders of the village.

Sergeant Glodecks, with three men, was on the left flank and somewhat separated from the 4th Company. A few fruit trees afforded him concealment from the direction of Forges. By careful observation Glodecks discovered that the principal fire holding up the 4th Company came from a house southwest of Forges.

He briefly told the men with him what he had learned. He then told them that he had decided to infiltrate forward and take this house from the rear. At his command the men made a quick rush to the Forges Brook. They waded the icy, breast-deep stream, crawled forward past the house, turned to the left and prepared to attack. Their movement apparently had not been discovered.

At Glodecks' command the four threw grenades, then rushed the house from the east. They surprised and captured twenty Frenchmen. This allowed the 4th Company to advance.



*Example 1*

Glodecks and his three men advanced northeast through Forges taking their prisoners with them. A party of eighteen Frenchmen was surprised and captured as a result of the unexpected direction of this small group's advance. Continuing through Forges, Glodecks' party took 130 more prisoners. This permitted the 2d Battalion of the 51st to capture the town.

*From an article in "Kriegskunst im Wort und Bild," 1929.*

DISCUSSION. The moral effect of a sudden attack from the rear caused the French to give in at a time when they were offering stubborn resistance to an attack from the front. They had undergone hours of bombardment. They had faced a violent attack. Perhaps some of their natural leaders had become casualties. At any rate, their will to resist suddenly broke.

Why didn't the French laugh at the Germans and disarm them? There were enough Frenchmen, even unarmed, to have overpowered their German captors. Physically there was nothing to prevent it; morally there was much.

Evidently the German sergeant was a determined man. The account says he had the confidence of all the men in the company, and was known as a clear-thinking soldier. His three comrades were either men of the same caliber or, as is often the case, the determination of the sergeant had been contagious.

/ / /

EXAMPLE 2. On the afternoon of August 22, 1914, the situation of the French 7th Division appeared desperate. Its leading brigade (the 14th) in Ette, was almost surrounded. Units were intermingled, casualties were heavy and the town was on fire. The French 13th Brigade was south of the Jeune Bois with Germans on three sides. German artillery on the heights north of Ette ruled the battlefield and had cut communication between the two French brigades. A German force, estimated as a brigade, was assembled at Bleid, after having annihilated a flank-guard battalion of the French 13th Brigade. French artillery support had been ineffective.

Captain Bertin and his company of some eighty men were in the Bois de St. Leger where they had been cut off from the rest of the French. He decided to make a detour to rejoin his own troops. About 2:00 p.m. he reached the edge of the woods as shown on the sketch.

In front of him, at close range, he saw German batteries firing to the south. German local reserves were scattered over the terrain. Groups of German officers were observing the action in and

around Ethe. The French company had not been seen. Bertin knew almost nothing of the general situation.

Captain Bertin and his company attacked. They captured two batteries, shot down horses and gunners, and pushed on toward the west—almost to the command post of the German 10th Division. Here a counter-attack by hastily gathered runners, engineers and infantry, led by the German artillery-brigade commander, finally dispersed the French company. Most of the French were killed or captured. Only a few managed to escape.

Let us now note what followed. The commander of the German 10th Division became worried about his left flank. The German 53d Brigade at Bleid belonged to another corps and there had been no communication between these troops and the 10th Division. Actually, the 14th Brigade in Ethe was almost at the mercy of the German 10th Division and the French 13th Brigade was about to begin a withdrawal to escape a threatened double envelopment.

Fortunately for the French, the commander of the German 10th Division did not realize this. He had received pessimistic reports concerning the unit on his right and now his left seemed to be threatened. For all he knew, the attack of Bertin's company might be the forerunner of a powerful French effort against his left flank. Late in the afternoon he ordered a withdrawal of the entire division to the woods north of Ethe. The French division escaped.

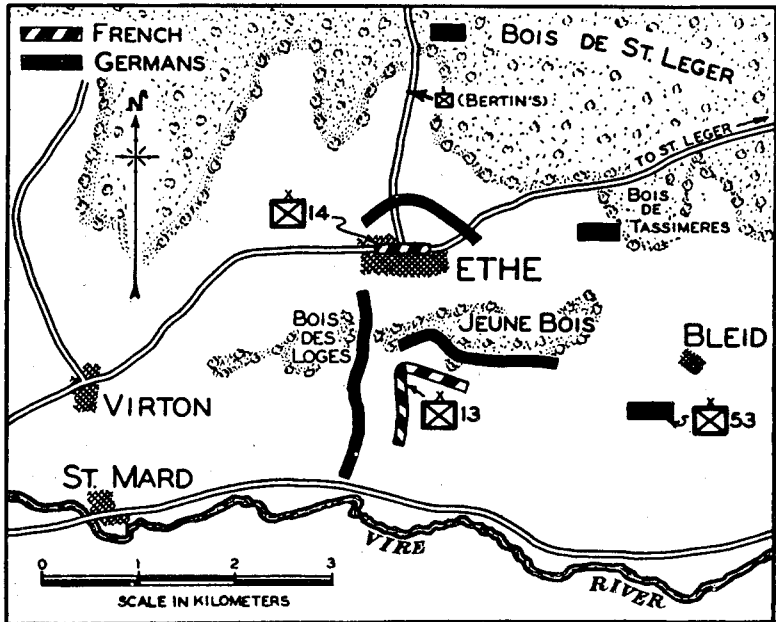
*From "Ethe," by Colonel A. Grasset, French Army.*

**DISCUSSION.** The commander of the German 10th Division did not realize the death-grip he had on the French. Pessimistic reports from corps, the death of the chief of staff at his side, heavy losses, and the failure of communication with the unit on his left contributed to his gloomy impression.

The psychological effect of Bertin's attack coming at this time undoubtedly played a great part in the German commander's decision to withdraw. Emerging from the forest, shooting down gunners and horses, pushing right up to the divisional com-

mand post, this company destroyed itself, but in so doing it probably saved the French 7th Division.

In this case the French captain could not realize how far-reaching his decision might be. He did not know the desperate situation of the French or the strength of the Germans. He was



*Example 2*

alone and unsupported. He knew that the chances were against the ultimate escape of his company. Yet fortune offered him an opportunity to do a great deal of damage to the enemy and he did not hesitate to seize it.

1 1 1

**EXAMPLE 3.** On July 31, 1918, the 1st Battalion of the U. S. 47th Infantry attacked northward near Sergy, with Company B on the right. During the attack, the unit to the right of the 1st Battalion was temporarily held up; this left the battalion's right



flank exposed. At once this flank came under a murderous enfilade machine-gun fire and at the same time the enemy smashed at it with artillery fire from the right-front. The battalion was stopped in its tracks and casualties began to pile up. In the right platoon of Company B the platoon leader was killed and all the noncommissioned officers killed or wounded.

Private Walter Detrow saw the situation and immediately assumed command on the right of the company. Forthwith he led that part of the line forward in the face of heavy machine-gun fire. The company slowly fought its way forward, destroying machine-gun nests and their crews. By noon it had reached the road leading from Nesles to Fère-en-Tardenois.

*From the personal experience monograph of Captain Jared I. Wood, Infantry, who commanded Company B, 47th Infantry.*

DISCUSSION. The successful advance of Company B may be directly attributed to the leadership of Private Detrow. While he did not achieve a spectacular personal triumph, his action nevertheless multiplied the real strength of the Americans with him many times. His spirit and determination so inspired the rank and file that an officerless unit which had been shot to pieces under the deadly enfilade fire of machine guns, drove forward and destroyed those guns and their crews.

If an organization loses its commissioned and noncommissioned personnel it usually ceases to function as an effective combat unit. And yet, in this instance, the action of one private galvanized a moribund command and swept it forward to victory. Detrow, promoted to sergeant, was killed in action in October, 1918.

EXAMPLE 4. The Germans attacked the British at Cambrai on November 30, 1917. The 2d Battalion of the 109th Infantry drove deep into the British position but was finally stopped a short distance east of Gonnelleu by British machine guns.

Brave attempts to push on failed. Squad and platoon leaders reported that the support of accompanying weapons and artil-

lery was necessary if further progress was to be made. The regimental commander tried to get artillery fire but the British and Germans were too intermingled. Accordingly he arranged to resume the attack with the support of heavy machine guns and minenwerfers.

The 5th Company of the 110th Infantry, which had been following in reserve, was now pushed forward into the front line with orders to attack a machine-gun nest at A. The following arrangements had been made:

Two German heavy machine guns from positions near C sought to neutralize the British machine-gun nest at B. Artillery fired on another machine-gun nest located about 800 yards northwest of A. A minenwerfer in a shell hole at D fired on the nest at A.

Under cover of this fire the 5th Company attacked. Some elements went straight forward, while small groups tried to work around the flanks of the nest at A.

Sergeant Gersbach of the 5th Company led a squad on the right. Each time a minenwerfer burst on the British nest, Gersbach and his group made a short rush forward. Meanwhile, the German machine guns beat down the fire of the enemy nest at B and eventually silenced it. Gersbach and his group progressed slowly. Several men were hit, but the others, encouraged by the example of their leader, continued on. Meanwhile, a similar group was working around the left flank.

Gersbach finally reached a trench leading to the nest at A. With two or three men he turned to the left, attacked the nest with hand grenades, and captured it. The breach thus opened in the British defenses was widened, and the 109th Infantry continued its attack successfully. The fight for the nest at A lasted two hours.

*From an article in "Kriegskunst im Wort und Bild," 1928, dealing with the historical basis of the German regulations.*

**DISCUSSION.** The German article from which this example is taken deals with the continuation of the attack within a hostile

position. In his discussion the author says: "The squad leader, supported by the fire of heavy infantry weapons and acting in conjunction with neighboring rifle and machine-gun squads, continues the attack from nest to nest, seeking always to strike the enemy resistance from the flank."

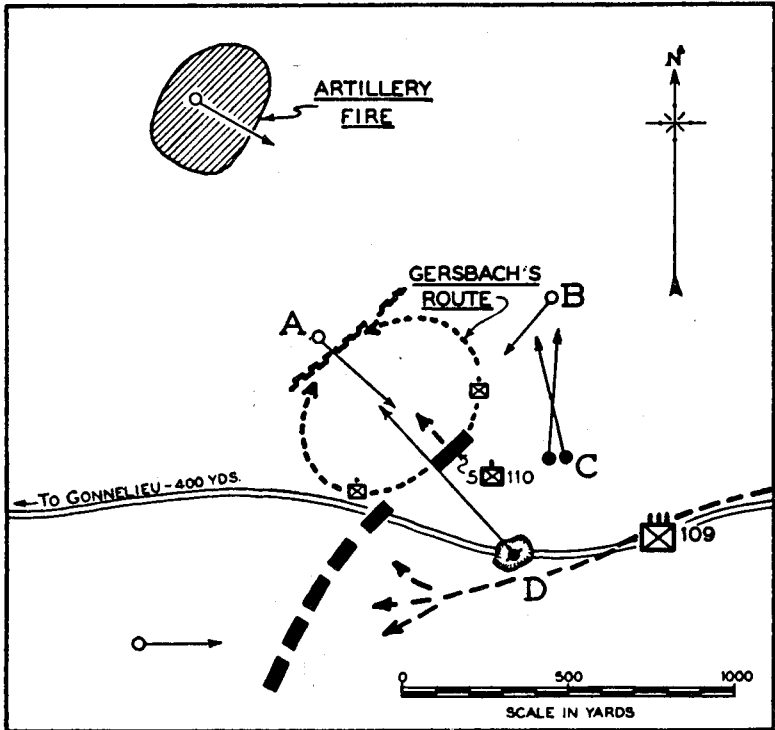
The article states that in the heat of battle the troops themselves discovered the suitable methods of carrying forward the attack within the hostile position. It emphasizes the necessity for coördination of effort, the support of minenwerfer and heavy machine guns to neutralize enemy nests, and then adds, "Success, however, was always brought about through the flanking action of courageous small groups."

This minor incident in a great battle illustrates four things. First, the difficulty of getting artillery support on the nearest enemy once the hostile position has been penetrated. Second, the action of the leader in coördinating his supporting weapons with his attacking riflemen. Third, the use of machine guns to neutralize the enemy on the flank and the use of curved-trajectory weapons to fire on the position being directly attacked. Fourth, the fact that such fights frequently develop slowly and last a long while.

Coördination is important, supporting fires are necessary, but above all there must be the determined leaders and the "courageous small groups."

**CONCLUSION.** One of these examples rivals the case of Sergeant York. Four men take more than 100 prisoners and decide a battalion combat. Another demonstrates the moral effect on the enemy of determined action by a group of men. A third illustrates the effect that the courage and initiative of one man may have on many. And one typical case portrays a brave enemy overcome by the flanking action of "courageous small groups." The first two examples are more striking in that one decided a battalion fight and the other may have saved an entire division. During the World War the last two, with slight variations, were reproduced hundreds of times.

Who can tell the ultimate effect of the courageous and resolute action of one of these small groups? Occasionally the result on



*Example 4*

the battle as a whole is clear-cut, and then we read of a battlefield miracle. Were we able to examine all battles through a military microscope it is probable that we would almost always find the small seed of victory sowed by a determined leader and a handful of determined men.

## Chapter XXVII: *Optimism and Tenacity*

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*Optimism and tenacity are attributes of  
great leadership.*

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**B**ATTLE IMPRESSIONS tend to weaken the will of a commander. Casualties, confusion, reported failure, exaggerated stories of actual conditions, all batter at the rampart of his determination. He must consciously resist these onslaughts; he must deliberately take an optimistic view. Otherwise he, and his unit with him, will bog down in a mire of discouragement and despair.

Tenacity demands relentless pursuit of the end to be gained. Only a higher commander can relieve a subordinate of the responsibility of expending the full power of the force at his disposal in the effort to achieve victory.

Tenacity does not necessarily mean dogged persistence in a given course of action. A change of methods may be desirable. In the language of Marshal Foch, the will must be powerful without being pig-headed and stupid; it must have suppleness and the spirit of adaptation.

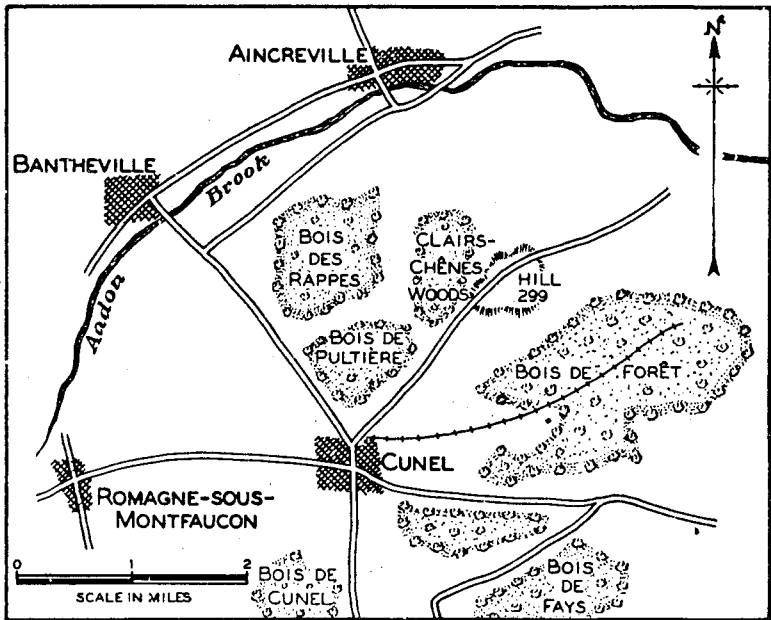
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EXAMPLE 1. At 8:00 a.m., October 15, 1918, the U. S. 61st Infantry, which had suffered heavily in previous fighting, attacked to the north in column of battalions with the Bois des Rappes as its objective.

About 9:00 a.m. the 1st Battalion (in assault) reached the northwestern edge of the Bois de la Pultière. Both flanks of this unit being exposed, the 3d Battalion, which had been in support, was moved to the right and abreast of the 1st. The capture of the Bois des Rappes, which was the real task, still lay ahead.

About noon Companies A, C, and D gained their final objec-

tive—the northwestern edge of the Bois des Rappes—and began to reorganize. Although victorious, this battalion had been literally shot to pieces. Companies A, C, and D, together could muster no more than seventy-five men. Company B could not be



*Example 1*

located. While noncommissioned officers in command of companies struggled to effect a reorganization, American artillery blindly dropped shells on the remnant of this shattered battalion.

The 3d Battalion, upon the loss of its leader and three company commanders, had become completely disorganized and had been passed through by the 2d Battalion.

Liaison between assault elements and the regimental command post failed. No information reached the regimental commander throughout the morning save from the wounded. These

stated that although the Bois des Rappes had been entered, the attack had been stopped and artillery support was necessary to break the hostile resistance.

Some time later a staff officer of the 3d Battalion, unnerved by the terrific casualties, arrived at the regimental C.P. in a state bordering on collapse. He gave the colonel what appeared to be the first authentic information. He reported that his battalion commander and three company commanders were casualties, that the battalion itself had been practically annihilated, and that the few survivors were retreating in confusion.

Without verifying this disheartening news, the colonel immediately went to the brigade command post and repeated it. Although this report created the impression that the entire 61st Infantry was retreating in disorder, the brigade commander none-the-less directed that the troops be reorganized and pushed back to the north edge of the Bois des Rappes.

By this time, however, rumors of disaster had reached the division commander. Acting upon these rumors, he promptly countermanded the order of his brigadier, directed that no further advance be made into the Bois des Rappes that day, and ordered the brigade to organize its front line on the northern edge of the Bois de la Pultière.

Pursuant to this order the 1st and 2d Battalions withdrew, abandoning positions which had been won at great sacrifice. Some days later the Bois des Rappes was retaken at the cost of many lives.

*From the personal experience monograph of Captain Merritt E. Olmstead, Infantry.*

**DISCUSSION.** This example dramatically illustrates the error into which commanders may fall if they base their estimate of the situation upon the reports of wounded and shaken men who filter to the rear. Such men are naturally discouraged. Frequently they come from a point where things are going badly and they assume

that the same conditions exist everywhere. Moreover, they are prone to justify their own action in abandoning the fight by painting a dismal picture of disaster.

In this example a great contrast existed between the actual situation and that which was reported to higher commanders. The division and brigade commanders believed that the entire 61st Infantry was a broken and beaten unit, retreating in confusion. Actually, the 1st Battalion was on its final objective, battered and disorganized—but victorious—and the comparatively fresh 2d Battalion had passed through the 3d in order to continue the attack. Unquestionably the 3d Battalion was in a state of great confusion and undoubtedly some of its men were retiring, but even if the entire battalion had been withdrawing it would not have compromised the situation, for it had been passed through and was no longer in assault. No crisis existed that would have precluded its reassembly and reorganization.

True, the situation had its unfavorable aspects, but the fact remains that success was at hand. Some of the higher commanders, however, could see only the black side of the picture.

There are three points in this illustration worthy of categorical emphasis. First, a subordinate should not add to the troubles of his superior by indulging in unduly pessimistic reports. The situation as known should be accurately and exactly reported without any pessimistic assumptions or opinions.

Second, when discouraging information is received, particularly if it comes from wounded men or stragglers, it should be materially discounted. In no case should it be taken at its face value without corroboration.

Third, it may always be safely assumed that the enemy is also in difficulty. We know that in this engagement the Germans were in great disorder and confusion. The fact that the depleted 1st Battalion held its position all day, not withdrawing until nightfall was, in itself, indicative of the fact that the enemy had been fought to a standstill.



EXAMPLE 2. At 7:00 a.m., October 20, 1918, troops of the U. S. 3d Division attacked the Clairs-Chênes Woods. Their division had been in the front line for approximately three weeks and during this period had suffered enormous casualties. The troops had reached a point verging on exhaustion. Although their repeated attacks had met with some slight success they had won no striking victory.

The attacking force on October 20 comprised the 1st and 3d Battalions of the 7th Infantry (which were consolidated and organized as a provisional company of 301 men), two companies of the 6th Engineers, and one company of the 4th Infantry. The attack penetrated Clairs-Chênes Woods and, at about 8:15 a.m., the advanced elements reported that they had reached the northern edge of the wood. These leading troops were numerically weak and were not closely followed by supporting units. Those Germans who still remained in the woods were quick to take advantage of this and soon succeeded in working their way around the flanks and filtering through the sparsely held American line. A confused and obscure situation resulted. After hard fighting some of the Americans of the support units began to withdraw.

To all appearances the attack had failed and reports to that effect reached the commanding officer of the 7th Infantry. Assembling all available men in the vicinity—150 all told—and personally taking command of this nondescript detachment, he counter-attacked into Clairs-Chênes Woods. Despite severe losses from machine guns and minenwerfers, this party gained the northern edge of the woods and joined the few remaining men of the advanced elements. Three German officers and 112 men were taken prisoners and the Clairs-Chênes Woods passed definitely and finally into American hands.

The next day this aggressive officer was placed in command of an operation directed against Hill 299. At noon the depleted 7th Infantry, Company E of the 4th Infantry, one bat-

talion of the 38th Infantry, three companies of the 6th Engineers, and a few machine guns—all that was available of the spent 3d Division—moved to the attack.

The disputed hill fell, but almost coincident with the moment of success—when all available infantry had been committed to the action—word came in that the enemy, driving from the northeastern edge of the Bois des Rappes, were attacking Clairs-Chênes.

Some of the troops holding this hard-won wood withdrew. Streaming back to the 7th Infantry command post in the northern edge of the Bois de la Pultière, they reported that the Germans were attacking in force and that the line had been broken.

All available troops having been committed, the commanding officer of the 7th Infantry, with three members of his staff and sixteen runners and signalmen, moved forward at once, picking up a few stragglers on the way. "Come on, now, we're going back to the front," he called. "We're going to get the old line back again."

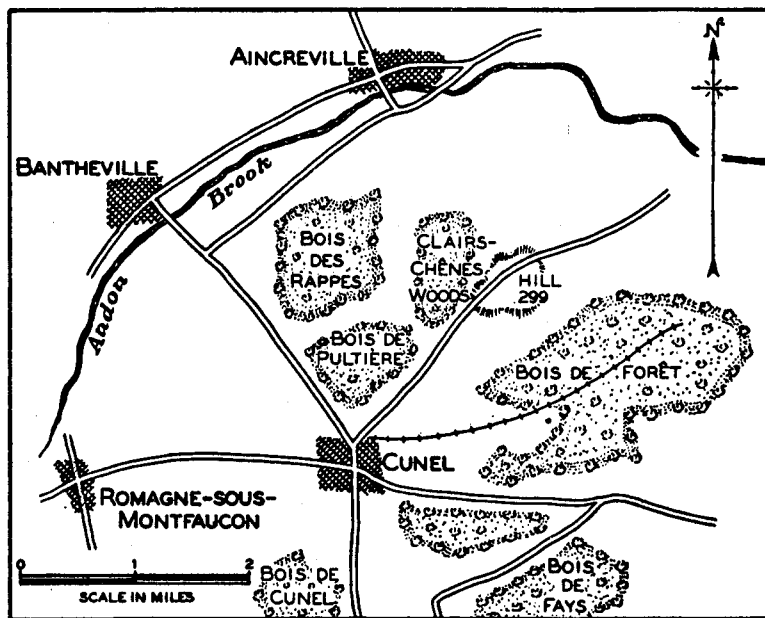
Under shell fire the little party continued its advance until it reached the point where the attack was reported. Here it captured a small German patrol but found no evidence of the strong hostile attack that had been reported.

*From "History of the 3d Division."*

**DISCUSSION.** The commanding officer of the 7th Infantry displayed marked resolution in the operations on these two days. On the first day, after a brief initial success, the bulk of his force failed. The attack had become disorganized. Men were moving to the rear individually. A commander lacking in tenacity would, in all probability, have contented himself by sending back a report of failure supported by sundry and assorted reasons. But this leader gathered a small detachment, made one last effort, and succeeded.

At the crisis of the operation on the second day the situation

again seemed desperate. Men were streaming to the rear. A strong German attack was reported to be striking toward the flank of the 7th Infantry. There were no troops to meet it. Again rising to the emergency, this same energetic officer, with his



*Example 2*

staff and a handful of runners, moved forward to the threatened locality. There he found the situation far less critical than it had been painted. The few men with the colonel were sufficient to restore it. The point is this: had not some troops moved forward, had not this leader imparted his own courage and optimism to the men, the position might well have been lost.

This example portrays a commendable reaction to pessimistic reports. The commanding officer did not accept them blindly and send back word of defeat and disaster; neither did he ignore them. Instead, he investigated at the head of a small improvised

force and in each instance this proved sufficient to restore the situation.

✓   ✓   ✓

EXAMPLE 3. On October 2, 1918, elements of the U. S. 77th Division attacked northward in the Argonne Forest. A force under the command of Major Charles W. Whittlesey, consisting of headquarters scouts and runners of the 1st and 2d Battalions of the 308th Infantry, Companies A, B, C, E, G and H of the 308th Infantry, two platoons of Companies C and D of the 306th Machine-Gun Battalion, and Company K of the 307th Infantry, reached its objective east of the Moulin de Charlevaux. Company K of the 307th Infantry joined the command after the objective had been reached.

Neighboring units and supporting troops had been stopped far short of the line reached by Major Whittlesey. The Germans quickly seized this opportunity to work their way behind this isolated unit and cut its communications with American troops to the rear. This force—known to history as the Lost Battalion—was cut off and surrounded. It had only one day's ration for four companies.

Upon reaching his objective, Major Whittlesey had organized for defense. Enemy artillery shelled the position. This ceased after a time and trench-mortar fire followed. An attempt to establish contact with the rear failing, the situation was reported by pigeon message and the force disposed for all-around defense.

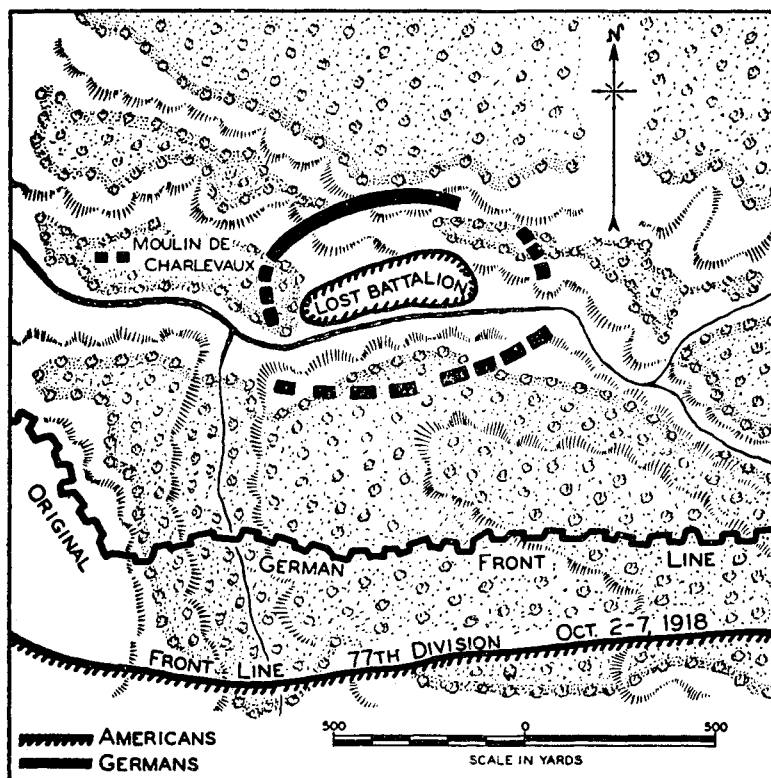
The following message was then sent to all company and detachment commanders:

Our mission is to hold this position at all cost. Have this understood by every man in the command.

Fire from enemy machine guns and trench mortars continued. About 3:00 p.m. the next day (October 3) the Germans launched a frontal attack supported by fire from the flanks and rear. The leading assailants got close enough to throw grenades, but the attack failed. About 5:00 p.m. another attack came from

both flanks. This too was repulsed but with heavy American losses.

By way of medical assistance the Americans had three Medical Corps enlisted men; no medical officer had accompanied the out-



*Example 3*

fit. All dressings and first-aid bandages were exhausted on the night of the 3d.

Daylight of October 4 found the men tired and hungry. All, especially the wounded, had suffered bitterly from the cold during the night. More enemy trench mortars went into position

and opened a steady fire, causing heavy casualties. Scouts reported that the Germans were all around the position in large numbers. No word from the rear had been received. Again the situation was reported by pigeon message.

During the afternoon of the 4th an American barrage, starting in the south, swept forward and settled down on the position, causing more losses. German trench mortars added their shells. At this time the last pigeon was released with a message giving the location of the force and stating that American artillery was placing a barrage on it.

American planes flew over the position and were fired on by the Germans. About 5:00 p.m. a new German attack was repulsed. Water was being obtained from a muddy stream along the ravine below the position. Often a canteen of water cost a casualty, for the enemy had laid guns to cover the stream. Guards were therefore posted to keep men from going to the stream during daylight. A chilly rain the night of the 4th added to the discomfort.

About 9:00 p.m. a German surprise attack failed. The wounded were now in terrible condition and, like the rest of the force, were without food.

Indications of American attacks from the south had been noted, but no relief came. Actually, several battalions of the 77th Division had been almost wiped out in valiant but vain efforts to reach the Lost Battalion.

During the afternoon of October 5, French artillery located to the southwest opened a heavy fire on the position. The Germans waited until the French fire lifted and then launched another attack which the Americans again stopped.

Shortly after this, American airplanes attempted to drop packages in the position but their aim was bad and the packages fell in the German lines. The men realized that this was an effort to get food to them.

Bandages for the wounded were now being taken from the

dead; even wrap-leggins were used. It became increasingly difficult to get water.

On the morning of October 6 the enemy's rifles and machine guns started early and his trench mortars again took up their pounding. Another American airplane came over and dropped packages, but again they fell in the German lines. Soon afterward there were signs that the Germans were forming for another attack, but this was broken up by American artillery fire.

During the afternoon of October 6 a murderous machine-gun barrage plastered the position and took a heavy toll. This was immediately followed by an attack which, though beaten off, added to the roll of dead and wounded.

By this time ammunition was running low. But despite everything, courage and morale remained high. The men were determined to fight to a finish.

About noon on the 7th another attack was repulsed. At 4:00 p.m. enemy firing ceased. From the left flank an American soldier appeared limping toward the position. He carried a long stick with a piece of white cloth tied to it. This soldier had been captured while attempting to obtain a package of food dropped by the airplanes. He brought a letter from the German commander, neatly typewritten in English.

SIR:

The bearer of this present, Private ——— has been taken prisoner by us. He refused to give the German intelligence officer any answer to his questions, and is quite an honorable fellow, doing honor to his Fatherland in the strictest sense of the word.

He has been charged against his will, believing he is doing wrong to his country, to carry forward this present letter to the officer in charge of the battalion of the 77th Division, with the purpose to recommend this commander to surrender with his forces, as it would be quite useless to resist any more, in view of the present conditions.

The suffering of your wounded men can be heard over here in the German lines, and we are appealing to your humane sentiments to stop. A white flag shown by one of your men will tell us that

you agree with these conditions. Please treat Private —— as an honorable man. He is quite a soldier. We envy you.

Major Whittlesey made no reply, oral or written. He ordered two white airplane panels which were being displayed to be taken in at once. Nothing white was to show on the hillside.

The fiercest attack of the siege followed. Wounded men dragged themselves to the firing line, and those who could not fire loaded rifles. The enemy used flame throwers in this attack, and nearly took the position. But finally he was driven off.

At dusk on the 7th it seemed impossible to hold out. Only two machine guns were left of the original nine. No gunners remained to man them. Ammunition was almost exhausted. The next attack would have to be met with the bayonet. There had been no food since the morning of October 3d. The water obtained was slimy and bad. Still these men were willing to fight on.

That night the enemy withdrew and American troops arrived soon afterward. One hundred and ninety-four (194) men out of the 700 that jumped off on the morning of October 2 were able to walk out of the position. Many of these were wounded.

Despite the desperate situation and the hardships, the morale of the Lost Battalion had not been broken. Inspired by their leader, the men were determined to fight to a finish.

*From the personal experience monograph of Captain Nelson M. Holderman, who at the time commanded Company K of the 307th Infantry.*

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EXAMPLE 4. On the afternoon of August 22, 1914, the French were engaged with the Germans in the Belgian Ardennes. It had been a meeting engagement, or rather several meeting engagements—division against division and corps against corps—without much connection between the various combats.

Late in the afternoon, five separate French commanders made pessimistic decisions based on reports of what had happened to troops other than their own. In each case, the actual situation and action taken by the Germans did not correspond to the fears



of the French commanders. In each case the French decisions hurt the French. They occurred in five adjacent columns, each decision being a separate one, and each made at approximately the same hour.

The commander of the 7th French Division at Ette, finding his division cut in two and fearing that he was about to be enveloped on both flanks, withdrew the rear elements of his division, leaving the advanced elements to their fate. The forward half, although engaged against superior numbers, fought so well that the Germans withdrew at dark.

On the left of the French 7th Division was the 8th. This unit had been surprised early that morning in the fog near Virton. Confused fighting followed. The corps commander, charged with protecting the flank of the more advanced unit on his left, suddenly decided that he would do this very well from a position in rear and forthwith ordered a withdrawal. His troops however, were hotly engaged and a large part never received the order. At dusk, assisted by troops of an adjacent division, these uninformed soldiers attacked and captured the German front line. Previous decisions prevented exploitation.

Elements of the French II Corps were engaged against the flank of the Germans fighting the French 8th Division. Late in the afternoon a strong attack was about to be delivered, but was called off because a few Germans were seen on the north flank. Actually, these Germans were merely a few stragglers who had become lost in the confusion of battle. Had the French gone through with their attack they would have found no enemy on their flank.

Going to the left, we find the French 3d Colonial Division, late that afternoon, cut in two; half of it north of the unfordable Semoy, half of it south. The north half, with both flanks being enveloped by superior German forces, was in a desperate plight. At this point the 2d Division of the Colonial Corps arrived and found itself in position to take one of the German pincers in

flank and rear. So far the Germans here had enjoyed a numerical superiority. Now the tables were about to be turned—a French victory, or at least a draw, was within sight. But the vision faded, for at the crucial moment the corps commander halted the attack and took up a defensive attitude. Pessimistic reports from his left column (the 5th Colonial Brigade) and from units on his flanks had undermined his resolution. For this irresolution of their corps commander the 3d Colonial Division paid a heavy price—the destruction of that half of the division north of the Semoy.

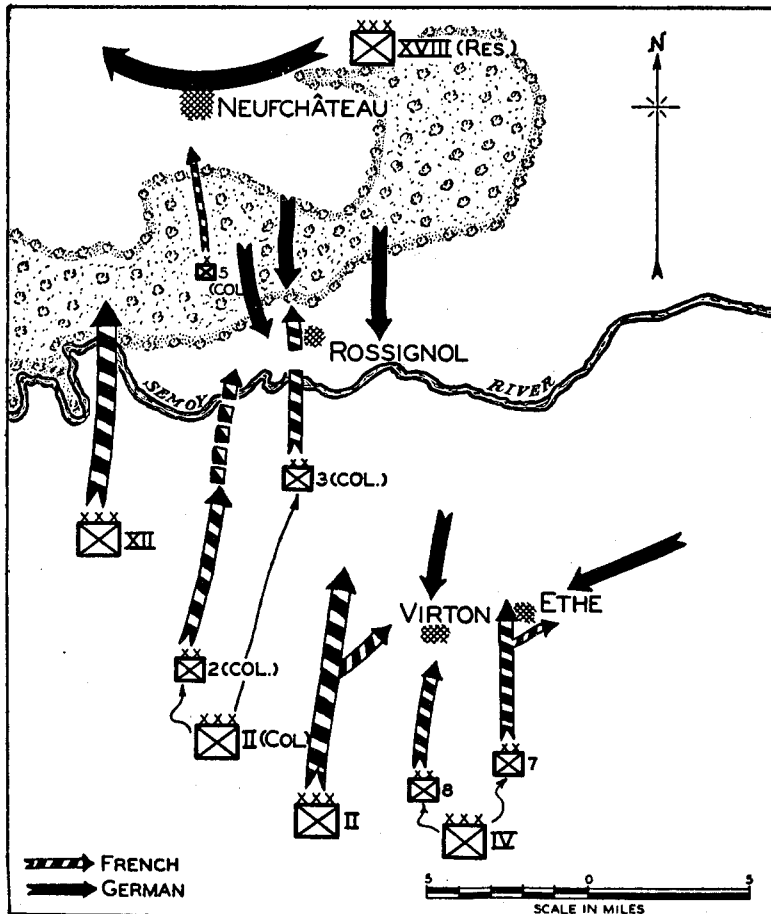
Let us see what had happened to the 5th Colonial Brigade (left column of the 3d Colonial Division). This unit had struck head-on into the flank of the German XVIII Reserve Corps at Neufchâteau. Although it had been terribly hammered and driven back, it had fought so hard that by 5:00 p.m. the German attack had been stopped, and the enemy had decided to quit for the night. The Germans thought they were facing at least a division, possibly a corps. Nevertheless, the French brigade commander sent back word that he was withdrawing after a hard fight. This caused the French corps commander to suspend his attack near Rossignol. The 5th Brigade, however, seems to have had a temporary change of heart. Its withdrawal was made later, and largely as a result of reports that the XII Corps on its left had been engaged and that elements were withdrawing.

As a matter of fact, the XII Corps had met little opposition and at the time was even considering launching a pursuit. During the night it withdrew due to the situation of units on its flanks.

*From the accounts "Ethe," "Virton," and "Neufchâteau," by Colonel A. Grasset, French Army; "The Genesis of Neufchâteau," by Major Pugens, French Army; and French official documents.*

1 1 1

CONCLUSION. In the case of the Lost Battalion we see a



*Example 4*

marvelous record of endurance, a soldierly acceptance of conditions and a determination to accomplish its mission. Of the examples quoted, this is the only one in which rumors of disaster and exaggerated stories and reports do not figure. Had the battalion commander and his subordinate leaders shown even a momentary weakness, that weakness would have been reflected

in their men. But there was no weakness in those leaders or in the men they led. The story of their fortitude and tenacity will always live.

The other examples show the action of leaders when confronted with pessimistic reports. Where such reports were accepted at full value, the result is frequently disaster.

Consider the battles of Maghaba and Raza, in which the British defeated the Turks. In each case the British commander made the decision to break off the fight. In each case before the order could reach the front line the victory was won.

At Maghaba it appears that a large portion of the credit should go to General Cox, who commanded the 1st Australian Light Horse. When he received the order to retire he turned on the staff officer who brought it and shouted, "Take that damned thing away and let me see it for the first time in half an hour." Half an hour later victory was assured.

Scharnhorst, when consulted in regard to the appointment of Blücher to high command in the Prussian Army, asked:

Is it not the manner in which the leaders carry out the task of command, of impressing their resolution in the hearts of others, that makes them warriors, far more than all other aptitudes or faculties which theory may expect of them?

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