

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL OKLAHOMA
Edmond, Oklahoma
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The Battle of Belleau Wood: America's Indoctrination into 20th
Century Warfare

A THESIS

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By

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Edmond, Oklahoma

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The Battle of Belleau Wood: America's indoctrination into 20th Century Warfare

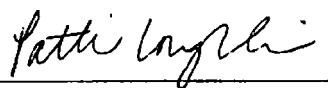
A THESIS

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By 
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I have a rendezvous with Death
At some disputed barricade,
When Spring comes back with rustling shade
And apple-blossoms fill the air--
I have a rendezvous with Death
When Spring brings back blue days and fair.

It may be he shall take my hand
And lead me into his dark land
And close my eyes and quench my breath--
It may be I shall pass him still.
I have a rendezvous with Death
On some scarred slope of battered hill,
When Spring comes round again this year
And the first meadow-flowers appear.

God knows 'twere better to be deep
Pillowed in silk and scented down,
Where love throbs out in blissful sleep,
Pulse nigh to pulse, and breath to breath,
Where hushed awakenings are dear . . .
But I've a rendezvous with Death
At midnight in some flaming town,
When Spring trips north again this year,
And I to my pledged word am true,
I shall not fail that rendezvous.

-Alan Seeger

Killed in action July 4, 1916 at Belloy-en-Santerre, France

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There are many people who deserved my gratitude in writing this thesis. My interest in this topic stems from a long history of wanting to understand the mindset of the men who fought at Belleau Wood nearly a century ago. My real connection to the human side of this story came on March 14, 2004 when I met 104 year-old William Eugene Lee. In 1918 Lee was an eighteen year-old private serving with the 51st Company, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment at Belleau Wood. During our visit I realized that this frail man before me represented the last living memory of an American story which has earned an iconic place in American military history. The images of that death-riddled wilderness had not left his memory even at the eve of his death. The nearly nine intervening decades had done very little to ease the nightmares that he undoubtedly carried with him ten days after our visit when he took his final breath on this earth. My understanding of this battle as a human story came to a fruition on the day that I met Eugene Lee. I will forever be thankful to him.

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participation in combat will forever change a man. No matter what he does in the intervening years, he will never forget the horrors of those days under fire. I hope that this work will perpetuate the memory and experiences of those men who were forever changed by their terrifying days in Belleau Wood.

Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
LIST OF MAPS AND PHOTOGRAPHS.....	viii
ABSTRACT.....	ix
INTRODUCTION.....	1
HISTORIOGRAPHY.....	6
Chapter I- Germany's desperate hours.....	24
Chapter II-Movement to the front and the pending battle.....	37
Chapter III- Learning the Ways of 20 th Century Warfare.....	76
Chapter IV-The Failed Assault on Belleau Wood.....	94
Chapter V-Assault on the Town of Bouresches.....	117
Chapter VI- Conclusion and Aftermath of a Costly Day.....	156

List of Maps and Photographs

Belleau Woods: Where the Marines Stopped the Kaiser on his way to Paris.....	6
Appendix A Map of situation on June 1, 1918	34
Appendix B Map of area around Belleau Wood	40
Appendix C Map of Les Mares Farm.....	69
Appendix D Map of attack on Hill 142.....	80
Appendix E Map of 3 rd Battalion, 5 th Marines attack on Belleau Wood.....	100
Appendix F Map of 3 rd Battalion, 6 th Marines attack on Belleau Wood.....	122
Appendix G Formation of 3 rd Battalion, 6 th Marine Regiment during attack on southern edge of Belleau Wood June 6, 1918.....	122
Appendix H Map of 2 nd Battalion, 6 th Marines attack on Bouresches.....	134

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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ABSTRACT: The battle of Belleau Wood serves as a microcosm of the American experience in the Great War. Several misconceptions surrounding the battle, born largely out of its propaganda value, created a legacy that overshadows the significance of the battle as a baptismal of modern twentieth-century warfare. The experience, unprecedented in the annals of American military history, placed largely inexperienced troops into a situation where poor decisions, inferior tactics and faulty communication methods delayed orders and sent unsuspecting men into a cauldron of chaos and terror.

Historians have painted a picture that implies that the battle had epic ramifications in that it halted the German drive on Paris. This myth is born out of the desire of the American Expeditionary Force commanders to obtain a decisive victory on the battlefield. Belleau Wood provided that opportunity and gave birth to a legendary story of American military arms devoid of the dreadfulness and futility that characterizes so much of the fight. These depictions

overshadow the horrific nightmares of the fighting that men carried with them through the remainder of their lives. Those terrible sights and sounds baptized participants and an entire nation into the horrors of a new age of warfare.

The main focus of this thesis rests largely on first-hand accounts of the fighting at Belleau Wood. Examination of several eye-witness reports and unpublished memoirs and oral histories reveal the true cost which bought in blood the glory that dictates most interpretations of the engagement. This work also assesses human stories behind this epic battle in context to the common myth which depicts the fight simply as the engagement which saved Paris.

Introduction

The Legacy, interpretation and significance of Belleau Wood

The flickering glow of illumination shells created an eerie view of the seemingly lifeless landscape. Shattered trees, silhouetted on horizon in a grotesque posture, embodied the carnage and devastation that took place weeks earlier. Belleau Wood was relatively quiet on this warm July night. The momentary brightness appearing from the illumination rounds fired from behind German lines far beyond Belleau Wood interrupted the tranquility. Burial details, working under the light of the glimmering flares lazily descending to the earth, carried out the grizzly task of dealing with the numerous corpses strewn throughout the broken landscape. Many of the dead had been exposed to the summer heat for days and even weeks since the twenty-six day struggle to capture the woods had ended. One veteran remembered:

They laid like flies everywhere. I saw them hanging dead in barbed wire, cuddled behind trees with head and shoulders stuck part way in the ground, fives tens, huddled in groups. These countless hordes of lifeless forms were causing us not end of trouble. It became impossible for us to any longer stand the smell of decomposed bodies. They had by this time turned a sort of bluish black.¹

First Lieutenant Howard I. Potter commanding G Company of the 2nd Battalion 104th Infantry Regiment took two men from his burial detail that had been working throughout the night to the battalion commander's dugout to describe a scene encountered earlier that evening. The men, while walking over the broken landscape looking for dead men entangled in the shattered undergrowth, came upon the body of twenty-five year old Private Edwin Porter Kishler of the 16th Company 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, which was the outfit responsible for

driving the last contingent of German troops out of the northern edge of Belleau Wood on June 25, 1918.

Kishler was killed on June 25, 1918 and remained unburied for weeks. The scene remained indelibly etched into Potter's memory when he wrote, "The circumstances described gave a very vivid picture of the manner in which Mr. Kishler met his death."² The memory of that night in Belleau Wood in July 1918 compelled him to record his experience in a letter sent to the Commander of the Metropolitan Post of the American legion six years later. In his description of the encounter, Potter wrote:

He [Kishler] had apparently been commanding a platoon as sergeant or acting sergeant. The platoon was rushing a machine gun nest on the side of a hill and the members of the platoon had been practically wiped out. The machine gun was located between two large rocks at the crest of the hill and Kishler had started out, after the other men had been killed, to rush the nest with an automatic rifle. He had another Marine carried clips of ammunition. The other Marine was lying dead about twenty yards from the machine gun nest and every automatic clip had been emptied. About ten yards from the enemy machine gun post Kishler was lying dead over a rifle with bayonet fixed, and when we turned him over there were at least a dozen bullets in his chest. The picture made it evident that he had exhausted every automatic rifle shot he had and then attempted alone to rush the nest with a bayonet. He had gotten within a few paces of the nest when the pattern of the German machine gun got him in the breast and he fell right over his rifle.³

The positioning of Kishler's body embodied the sheer desperation and savagery which characterized the battle for Belleau Wood. Potter and his detail covered up the other members of Kishler's platoon lying nearby, but left Kishler's body unburied until this futile yet heroic act would be recorded.⁴ Such an account is a microcosm of the unbridled experience of the American military at Belleau Wood.

Renowned author John Keegan identified the Somme region of North Central France as a strictly British sector due to the unprecedented sacrifice and carnage that occurred there in the

latter half of 1916.⁵ Savage fighting in the entire region claimed nearly 450,000 British soldiers from ninety-nine divisions. The melancholy legacy of such a sacrifice became, like the butchery experienced by the French at Verdun, a standard by which the bloodshed of the Great War has been measured. While historians undoubtedly agree that the United States' contribution to the First World War paled in comparison to other belligerents, one small region of French woodlands provided the American army a setting for what became an iconic engagement defining the American experience in World War One.

Belleau Wood, a name etched into the high pedestal of United States Marine Corps lineage and well known in the annals of American military history, has been directly associated with the deliverance of Paris during the tumultuous German offensive through the Chemin des Dames region. For over ninety years historians and authors have written about the significance that the battle of Belleau Wood played in stopping what has been described as an unobstructed strike towards the French capital, often at the cost of revealing the stories of tremendous suffering and human loss that characterized this engagement. The traditional portrayal of the fight for Belleau Wood was largely born from its propaganda value, which dictated the perceived significance of the engagement. The United States Marine Corps particularly sought the exploits of the publicity offered by this engagement due to the organization's significant participation in this battle. This important factor has largely ignored the notion that the battle provided the American military its brutal indoctrination into the harsh realities and industrious killing efficiency of modern twentieth-century warfare where acquisition of objectives set a costly and terrifying precedence. The heavy loss of life was due to obsolete communication methods, delayed movement and inferior tactics in, what became by mid-1918, an increasingly mobile war.

Nearly every historian who has written about the battle largely ignored a very fundamental circumstance that minimizes the strategic significance which ultimately changed the connotation of battle. They also fail to even allude to the notion that the battle is significant since it provided the American Army an unmatched experience in the nature of twentieth-century warfare, where new tools such as machine guns and quick-firing artillery led to an unprecedented level of killing efficiency. Instead the concept that the battle's most significant aspect is the instrumental role it played in halting the German drive to Paris remains largely pervaded in modern interpretation. General John Pershing, commanding the American Expeditionary Forces summed up his perception of the battle when he stated, "The Gettysburg of the war has been fought."⁶ Since this battle has historically been part of Marine Corps history, interpretation of the battle has largely emanated from that organization's analysis of the battle's significance.

The human story of the battle has in many ways, died with the generation that fought it. Never before had American troops entered a battle where their tactics had been rendered obsolete by such a heavy margin. Belleau Woods set the standards by which the American Army would carry out the haphazard tactics of conducting battle in France during the Great War. Such methods carried men, unnecessarily, to their death and created a new level of chaos and terror for the men who survived to carry with them the nightmares and horrors of seeing friends die in such a barbaric and undignified manner.

The story of the battle for Belleau Wood cannot be complete without trying to piece together the human side of the battle. Several academic examinations of the battle have pieced together the military strategy and tactical significance this engagement played in the overall course of the war. In the process of such studies, somewhat sanitized portrayals of the human

experience covered up the terror and chaos experienced by the young men who fought desperately to take the woods.

A common representation of the battle is one which puts battle-hungry Americans on the move against the best trained soldiers Germany had ever fielded. In this portrayal, the underestimated U.S. troops attain blatant triumph over there highly experienced and unwavering enemy. Much of this imagery originates from the propaganda the battle offered to the United States and specifically the Marine Corps, the organization which participated in most of the fighting for the woods. This depiction has been perpetuated with very little retrospective examination of the value the battle played in providing the American military an unprecedented experience.

This work attempts to make the unprecedented human experience the chief instrumental factor that made the battle so unique. Several personal accounts of the engagement exist either in published form or buried in archives and untouched for decades. Piecing these sources together creates a narrative exhibiting how twentieth-century warfare took lives and often innocence from the men who participated. This side of the fight remains largely nontransparent in most studies. American bloodshed in the fields of France during the Great War has been microcosmically represented through the precedence set by the battle for Belleau Wood. Telling that story cannot be completed without examining the human side of the suffering and terror experienced by young Americans who entered into a foray worse than they could have imagined.

Historiography

The legacy of Belleau Wood



This painting entitled, “Belleau Wood: Where the Marines stopped the Kaiser on his way to Paris” was painted by Frank Schoonover. It appeared in the April 1919 edition of the *Ladies Home Journal*.

Ninety years after the last American serviceman left the shell-scarred wilderness of Belleau Wood, several misleading inclinations and oversights in the significance of the engagement pervades most major works regarding the overall significance of the battle. First, the idea that the American stance, by sheer determination, was the sole factor that single-handedly stopped the Germans from reaching Paris is a misleading concept largely born from the propagandist opportunity the battle provided for the untested Americans. This analysis fails to account for key changes in the nature of the German offensive, in addition to the quality and make-up of the ranks of enemy troops facing the Americans.

Second, the battle delivered a harsh lesson to an American military that haphazardly conducted battle in the age of rapidly-advancing twentieth-century warfare. Specifically, the

misuse and lack of coordinated artillery fire hindered any American ability to effectively conduct offensive maneuvers. The fluidity of combat that U.S. troops were involved in used communication techniques compatible with static warfare and rendered largely obsolete by the rapidly changing battle lines. The ensuing loss of life and confusion that followed offered a unique and terrifying experience for the Americans, yet to be fully documented. This valuable point is overwhelmingly ignored in the battle's historiography. To appreciate the misunderstandings of this event, one must comprehend the manner in which the American public received the battle at the time and how misperceptions have remained codified by several historians who have attempted to document the significance of the battle. Examination of the historiography of the battle, these major miscalculations combined with some of the never-utilized primary sources paint a more accurate picture of this engagement.

Upon examining the activities of the American Expeditionary Forces in France (AEF), one could contend that the U.S. offensive at the village of Cantigny on May 28, 1918 provided the Americans their first true indoctrination into twentieth-century warfare since it preceded the American assault at Belleau Wood by nine days. The assault on Cantigny, however, followed a period of six days of calculated rehearsal, fresh troops, and an abundance of precisely-coordinated artillery fire and tank support. 386 French Artillery pieces unloaded nearly 5,000,000 pounds of ammunition on the lightly held village in the days preceding the American assault. The attack also focused on maintaining a lightly-held position, static for days, allowing the Americans and French to gather valuable intelligence information.

General Pershing and other French and American dignitaries, present for the coming American assault, assumed a position of safety several miles away to watch this highly glorified test commence.¹ The attack waves of infantry moved towards the village of Cantigny at 6:45

a.m. and encountered a shot-up German battalion. Most of the enemy troops sought shelter in the cellars throughout the village. Fewer than one hundred American casualties were recorded in the assault. The overwhelming majority of the casualties occurred on the following days from heavy artillery fire while the Americans held their position. The ensuing offensive encountered a German battalion. Most of the enemy troops sought shelter in the cellars throughout the village. Fewer than one hundred American casualties were recorded in the assault. The overwhelming majority of the casualties occurred on the following days from heavy artillery fire while the Americans held their position.

The significance of the attack is widely accepted by historians and authors such as John S. D. Eisenhower, Edward G. Lengel and Joe Perisco as a victory designed and carried out for the sole purpose of obtaining confidence and acknowledgment, by America's allies of the AEF's legitimacy. The fight for Cantigny simply had the luxuries of time and resources in order to ensure its success. The battle for Belleau Wood, characteristically, shared none of these factors.

The publicity and media coverage of the American assault on Cantigny was quickly overshadowed by the massive German offensive launched across the Chemin des Dames region on May 27, 1918, which initially penetrated nearly four miles deep into the French and British lines.² In addition to the overshadowed press coverage, rigid censorship at the hands of General Pershing's policies chopped up correspondents' reports into confined and subjugated dispatches.³

From the moment the first reports of fighting in the region of Belleau Wood reached the home front, the media covered the assault on Paris, which appeared to be in extreme danger. Headlines splashed across the front pages of newspapers from the largest metropolitan settings to the smallest rural districts echoed the euphoria of what was seen as the single encounter to

determine the outcome of the war. In turn this exhilaration collectively rallied American jubilation behind what was depicted as an epic engagement legitimizing American participation in the war to end all wars.

Coverage of the American involvement in the war due to General Pershing's rigid approach to censoring information wired back to the United States by war correspondents. In an effort to thwart German intelligence from gauging the average number of American troops present in France, no mention of division by numbers could be made. The media could not identify whether or not units were made up of regular troops or National Guard troops. No mention could be made which state units hailed from since many divisions were organized by states. There could also be no distinction made between particular occupations such as infantry, artillery or engineers.⁴ Pershing's rules were non-negotiable and violators were quickly stripped of their credentials.

The removal of large volumes of dispatches submitted by reporters covering the fight at Cantigny were followed by similar restraint by the AEF censors during the fighting a few days later in the town of Chateau Thierry which was located about seven miles southeast of Belleau Wood.⁵ During this brief fighting, reports covering the action were so drastically reduced by the censor's pen that the action received barely any mention in the press. Don Martin, a reporter from the *New York Herald*, cabled a furious dispatch to his home office complaining about the rigid censorship by saying, "Impossible to send real news. Correspondents hobbled every way imaginable. Situation inexcusable. Must be remedied. Press treated absolutely no consideration."⁶

As the fighting in Chateau Thierry waned after the German seizure of the town, the media's attention was diverted seven miles westward to the developing battle for control of Belleau Wood. Coverage of the American Second Division revealed that the unit was comprised of Marines and Soldiers. Correspondents were quick to point out that Marines made up a separate service and that nothing prohibited mention of the different services. Pershing's headquarters staff agreed in a rare moment of negotiation and decided to shift the element of their censorship policy forbidding the mention of branches such as infantry and artillery to be compatible with this development.⁷

The announcement of the amendment to the censorship policy was announced just days before the June 6th American assault to seize Belleau Wood. The timing of these circumstances created a prime publicity opportunity for the American war effort. Finally American troops were being placed in the path of the German drive on Paris, an assault that appeared to be the most legitimate threat facing the French capital since that First Battle of the Marne in 1914. The scenario could not be more theatrical in premise or any more obstructive to the historical context and interpretation of the real significance of the battle, which place untested American troops in an unprecedented situation where a brutal baptism by fire became inevitable.

The prolific opportunities available with the AEF's amended censorship policy and the developing engagement west of Chateau Thierry began to draw in several correspondents. Floyd Gibbons, an accredited war correspondent from the Chicago Tribune, had already made a name for himself by covering the hunt for Pancho Villa in 1916, surviving the February 17, 1917 sinking of the British passenger liner *Laconia* by a German U-boat. Gibbons had already published several reports covering American units occupying trenches in active sectors as part of the Overseas Depot training.⁸

The action near Chateau Thierry prompted Gibbons to converge upon the scene on the morning of June 6, 1918. He arrived at the front a few hours before the Second Division carried out the assault on Belleau Wood.⁹ Gibbons immediately joined one of the attacking regiments just before the assault commenced. Gibbons, aware of the importance of the coming attack, followed the doomed assault troops and was subsequently wounded in the process. The experience that day was pivotal for Gibbons who later published a book that contained the first eye-witness account of the battle and perpetuated the euphoric essence reflected in the propagandistic media coverage of the battle. His 1918 book, *“And They Thought We Wouldn’t Fight,”* provided a portrayal of the campaign which many subsequent works echoed.

The battle of Belleau Wood has not received much scrutiny to separate the misleading essence attached to it by the propagandizing media from the cold reality and tragedy of this new-age of warfare. The prime opportunity to tell the American public that their sons and husbands were forefront in the seemingly desperate struggle to keep German troops from marching through the streets of Paris was the big story long sought after. Furthermore, the propaganda opportunity this situation offered to the Marine Corps remains even more significant in the perpetuation of the misinterpretation of this battle. The common perception of this engagement has been born largely out of a Marine Corps analysis of this battle. Most of the works published about the battle have, in some way, had a link to the Marine Corps and very little has been done from that perspective to analyze the battle devoid of the propaganda-driven documentation which has largely dictated the misguided position this battle has assumed in the parlors of American military history.

Historians and authors remain consistent in perpetuating two main misconceptions born out of this propaganda opportunity ardently materialized by the American press. The first

misconception involves an inaccurate assessment of the German ability to continue to exploit the initial success of the offensive that led to the fight at Belleau Wood. The other major oversight is the tragic handling of offensive actions by the Americans at Belleau Wood and the ensuing experience that resulted from such injudiciousness.

The earliest reports to reach the United States appeared on the front page of newspapers nationwide and relayed the perceived threat on Paris. On June 1, 1918 the headlines in *The Daily Capital Times* from Jefferson City, Missouri reported “*ALLIED LINE HOLDING GERMANS AT MARNE, BELIEVED THE GREAT DRIVE ON PARIS HAS BEEN BLOCKED FOR THE TIME BEING.*”¹⁰ *The Des Moines News Times* in Des Moines, Iowa reported on the same day “*CRISIS AT MARNE IS TENSE, HUNS CHECKED BUT ATTACK ON EITHER FLANK.*”¹¹ In New York *The Syracuse Herald* contained a headline stating, “*GERMANS STOP SOUTHWARD DRIVE ON MARNE, BUT GAIN NEW GROUND IN THRUST ON PARIS.*”¹² At the time no one could have known that the posture of the German drive in that sector had significantly changed before an American counter attack could have begun, yet casualties from the assault on Belleau Wood, that occurred on June 6, 1918, were higher than in any other American engagement up to that point. Author John Toland summed up the initial media coverage of the war stating, “To read these papers, one would have thought it was the most important battle of the war.”¹³

Initial reports were full of euphoria and even inaccuracies, including the immediate capture of territory that actually took nearly one month and thousands of casualties to obtain. This accompanied misleading assessments of German forces facing the Americans in that sector. In an account of the battle which appeared in *The New York Times* on June 9, 1918, Edwin L. James stated: “*MARINES DRIVE GERMANS BACK; FOE SENDS UP CRACK DIVISIONS;*

AMERICANS' ADVANCE FOR TWO-THIRDS OF A MILE ON 600-YARD FRONT PUSHES ENEMY TO FRINGE OF BELLEAU WOOD—PERSHING CONGRATULATES

COMMANDER."¹⁴ *The Lima Daily News* in Lima, Ohio reported on June 7, 1918 "AMERICAN MARINES ON MARNE FRONT DEFEAT CRACK TROOPS OF PRUSSIANS."¹⁵ These are the first reports that the Germans in the region were among the best the Crown Prince Frederick William Victor Augustus Ernest had among his ranks, an inaccurate assessment upon further examination of the few surviving German documents.

The Germans in that sector were among the ranks of General Richard Von Conta's IV Reserve Corps, a part of the German Crown Prince's own army. They were initially comprised of hardened veterans and ranks of elite German shock troops; however, the heavy casualties sustained in the previous five days of battle leading up the engagement with the Americans at Belleau Wood had drastically reduced the ranks of the German units to abysmal proportions. When losses were replaced, they came from whatever conscripts and inexperienced troops were available, a significant development in placing the American experience at Belleau Wood into an accurate context.¹⁶

The chaos of battle and the hastiness with which orders were issued and carried out by the Americans gave rise to one of the most significant misconceptions to initially come out of the battle. Although recent historians have reassessed the evidence regarding initial combat reports and correctly reconstructed the order of battle, the nostalgia triggered from these colorful and inaccurate narratives remains the nucleus of the battle's significance for many authors and historians. Numerous times throughout the coverage of the campaign dispatches falsely reported the capture of key objectives. *The Democrat Tribune* in Jefferson City, Missouri stated on June 7, 1918, "*MARINES HOLD GROUND; HAVE NOT BEEN ROUTED FROM SPLENDID*

RESULTS OF YESTERDAY-HOLD ADVANTAGEOUS POSITION. THE ENEMY CRUSHED BY THE SWIFT AND ACCURATE FIRE OF THE "HUSKIES"- SHOW WONDERFUL MORALE IN THE FACE OF FIRE."¹⁷ In fact the Americans had been thrown back from the woods, their central objective, with an unprecedented number of casualties. *The Daily Free Press* in Carbondale, Illinois reported as early as June 7, 1918 that the Marines had captured all objectives attacked.

Another important oversight in the historiography of the battle is that nature of the Germans facing the American Second Division. The German assault drove a wedge in the French lines so deep that they occupied almost the same ground occupied during the famous Battle of the Marne in late 1914. Retrospective examination of the few available German records reveal that the German drive in that sector had out run its ability to sustain such an offensive and the threat to Paris had greatly been reduced even before American and German troops exchanged the first shots in and around Belleau Wood. The German Army's ability to supply forward lines, mounting casualties greatly slowed the offensive.

The newspapers, responsible for the majority of the erroneous information read in American homes, painted a largely misrepresented American perspective of the battle, which bred the legacy of misinterpretation persistent in the present time and largely at the cost of comprehending the true horrors and brutality of what occurred in that rural sector of French farmland.

The notion that the engagement single-handedly saved Paris became so associated with the battle among the opinion of the American public that a monograph written in 1919 by the U.S. Marine Corp's chief historian Major Edwin McClellan stated:

Without minimizing in any way the splendid actions of the Twenty-sixth Division at Seichepray and Xivray in April 1918, or the brilliant exploit of the First Division at Cantigny on May 28, 1918, the fact remains that the Second Division, including the Marine Brigade, was the first American division to get a chance to play an important part on the western front, and how well it repelled this dangerous thrust of the Germans along the Paris-Metz highway is too well known to be dwelt upon at any length in this brief history.¹⁸

Building on the precedence of such a theory, numerous authors and historians, many of whom were participants in the battle, assessed the significance in much the same way. General Robert Lee Bullard, a West Point graduate and commander of the Second American Army in France, wrote:

But through a tidal wave of retreating humanity, our Second Division (Regulars and Marines) moved forward, stiffened by the knowledge that only they stood between Germany and Paris from which one million persons fled in hopeless consternation. A tactical distraction had become a great strategic victory. A wedge, fifty miles across the base and thirty-five miles in depth, had a point driving toward the very heart of France, the capital which was also the dominant rail center and the home of the war industries. How gloriously our men stood, halting that wedge, blunting the tempered, cutting edge which was made up of Germany's best shock troops, the world shortly knew. So well, indeed, that when some weeks later leave became possible for our hard-boiled Marines, they were literally kissed off the streets of the capital they had saved, and by men and women alike.¹⁹

Bullard's 1936 book largely addressed the overall credit by the French and British Governments he felt was denied to the American Expeditionary Forces. The battle of Belleau Wood very much anchors this argument by Bullard's emphasis on the war-altering significance of the engagement.

Lieutenant Colonel Frederick M. Wise led a battalion of Marines at Belleau Wood and became one of the more colorful characters to emerge from the campaign. Wise recalled his interpretation of the situation in the face of the German drive, one that changed very little eleven years later when he wrote his memoirs of the chaotic engagement. Wise wrote, "Later we learned that in stopping the German attack at Les Mares Farm, our battalion had thrown back the

last attack of the great Chateau Thierry drive and had stopped the Germans at the closest point they ever got to Paris after America entered the war.”²⁰

Brigadier General Albertus W. Catlin, a tough impetuous Marine veteran who survived the 1898 explosion of the *U.S.S. Maine* in Havana harbor, led a regiment of Marines during the battle. In his 1918 book entitled *With the Help of God and a Few Marines*, Catlin wrote,

At the point nearest Paris the danger was acute. It seemed as though nothing human could prevent the German from attaining his objective. A cry for help arose. An American division was rushed to the front and thrown into the fray. Half of this division was composed of Marines, who were given the post of honor and danger at the center. Could they stem the tide that threatened to engulf the capital of France? They were virtually untried, and they were called upon to whip the flower of the Kaiser’s army, flushed with victory and enjoying all the advantage of momentum.²¹

Brigadier General Catlin’s emblematic inquisition reflects the perceived peril of the situation and if the theatrical title of the book does not propagate enough grandeur, Catlin expelled any misunderstandings when he wrote:

This was, as a matter of fact, one of the tensest and most critical moments of the war, for if the Germans had broken through at Chateau Thierry and had thrown their vanguard across the Marne, it is difficult to see how anything could have stopped them before they reached the defenses of Paris. The delay occasioned by the stubborn resistance of the French and Americans at Chateau Thierry gave us a chance to organize the defensive strategy which culminated in the battle of Belleau Wood and the thrusting back of the German hordes.²²

Clearly Brigadier General Catlin emerged from the school of thought that believed the American presence was the only lifeline that kept German troops from marching through the streets of Paris, a considerable exaggeration of the situation.

Most of these early works echo the incomplete argument that the German drive on Paris was unwavering in momentum. These accounts embody the legacy of misinterpretation set forth

by the propaganda value of the battle. None of these authors bring into question the methods used to conduct offensive operations against the enemy holding Belleau Wood and the surrounding area.

Among the earliest personal narratives of the battle was the 1925 book, *Fix Bayonets*, by Captain John W. Thomason Jr. In this body of work, Thomason uses his experience as a Marine replacement officer combined with information told to him by comrades to portray the battle of Belleau Wood as seen from his company's perspective.²³ This account eluded, for the first time, the true terror that characterized the American experience at Belleau Wood. However theatrical this portrayal may appear, for the first time it introduced a very human element to America's most renowned battle of the Great War.

Thomason's later work about the battle is one of quite a bit of mystery. In 1927 the commandant of the Marine Corps, Major General John A. Lejeune, appointed then Captain John W. Thomason Jr. to join a group of U.S. Army officers for the purpose of documenting and writing an official history of the Second Division during its time in France. Thomason traveled to Europe to research the records of German units as well as French units involved in the battle. Thomason's work on the campaign was from a broad perspective, offering little to no personal accounts. Upon close investigation, Thomason found numerous shortcomings in the conduct of the operation by several officers at all levels. This seemingly righteous American battle was not what it appeared to be in all the mainstream periodicals and literary works, and Thomason's project began to expose these deficiencies. Many officers who were the center of these battlefield blunders were still, by 1927, in service and among the ranks of the Army's senior officers. Any negative portrayal of the most famous single-engagement of the war for the Americans was met with the sharpest of criticism, especially when officers, whose careers were

made by their participation in the battle, became the subject of questionable battlefield decisions.²⁴

By 1929 the project had been abandoned by Thomason after submission of a transcript of his work. In a letter, Thomason stated that he “had no intention of submitting a whitewashed account of what had transpired.” He also stated “an unbiased investigation of source materials had revealed that in certain instances some of the Division officers had not exercised proper judgment; moreover, the evidence had shown that on occasion others were professionally incapable of coping with the situation.”²⁵ This work, unreleased until 2006, is extremely unique as it provides historians a very detailed summarization of the greater picture from both the American and German perspectives by using archival records for the first time. Since a few works on the battle have utilized the archival copy housed at the Marine Corps Library in Quantico, VA before it was published, Thomason’s project, in many ways, set the precedence for future historians to examine this battle in a manner devoid of the propagandist inclinations. Had his study been completed and released to the general public within a decade after the battle, perhaps the United States would have a much different perspective on the battle for Belleau Wood.

Later works analyzing the greater significance of the battle reiterated the same commonly-held interpretations of the overall importance of the battle, portraying some of the deficiencies initially exposed by Thomason’s body of work. The first of these bodies of work, *At Belleau Wood*, was published in 1965 when Robert Asprey, a former Marine Captain. Asprey, utilized access to numerous veterans who held senior command positions, detailed the battle while contextualizing its significance in the overall opposition to the German drive towards Paris. Asprey described the battle for Belleau Wood as the first true test of the American ability

to hold what was believed as the most crucial plot of ground against the German drive, while opposed against a very capable and determined German army. Although he makes several inferences to the true weakened state of the German army at Belleau Wood he never seems to consider it as a significant development in the course of the battle.²⁶ Asprey also neglects to make a link to the precedence established by the fighting as the unconventional means used by the Americans. Despite the weakened state of the German army, they still inflicted heavy casualties on the American military, perhaps a testament to the inefficiency of American tactics and an implication as the deadly capabilities of modern twentieth century warfare.

Though the battle has taken a backseat to the monumental engagements of other wars, it is an engagement that has not wavered in yielding subject material for military historians and authors in recent years. Nearly every major body of work covering the battle has come within the last forty years. Contemporary studies have done little to dispel the myths emerging from the propaganda value that originated from the reporting of the battle. The most recent study about the battle was published in 2006; a book entitled *Miracle at Belleau Wood*. Author Alan Axelrod discusses how the battle perpetuated the emergence of the modern Marine Corps and its reputation as the United States' premier fighting force. While his study is a legitimate examination of the propaganda value of the battle, he fails to address that the nostalgic interpretation is caters to the misconceptions that have continually emerged from a collective failure to examine all of the available sources including German and American. Axelrod's work cites only one primary source and an assortment of secondary works. This mirrors the same misconceptions that emerged out of some of the earliest works. *Miracle at Belleau Wood* based its argument on the fact that the odds were in every way against the Americans at Belleau Wood and that the stance against repeated assaults of Germans were the supreme factor in stopping

their drive to Paris. In reality the Germans in that sector lacked resources needed to sustain a drive to Paris and the Americans already stood in that path.

George Clark examined the battle of Belleau Wood in his 1999 book, *Devil Dogs, Fighting Marines of World War One*. Clark built his work largely from the same sources and argument used by Asprey. Clark also credits the Americans with the salvation of Paris without alluding to numerous other important factors that contributed to the weakness of German forces and the inevitable failure of their drive towards the French capital. Clark examined all the major campaigns the Marines participated in during World War One, but also contributes good source material to relaying the personal side of the battle through a plethora of primary accounts, though few of his personal accounts of the battle, stray outside of those used by Asprey.

The widely accepted portrayal of the battle of Belleau Wood is echoed even in most general histories of America's involvement in the war. In a 1980 book entitled, *No Man's Land*, author John Toland discussed how small-scale the battle was by World War One standards, yet it also provided such morale boost to the American Expeditionary Force because, while the battle raged, French and American commanders believed it to be the most significant engagement involving the vanguard of the German assault on Paris. Toland highlights one very important fact: even before the Americans could launch their initial counterattack on Belleau Wood, General Erich Von Ludendorff, who planned, commanded and carried out the German drives that spring, had called off all offensive operations along the Marne.²⁷ This meant that the bitterly contested month-long engagement for control over Belleau Wood was simply an effort to dislodge a German defensive position and no longer was Paris in such grave danger.

Belleau Wood has not been limited to literary interpretation. The popular interpretation of the battle can be seen in numerous images that have emerged from the nostalgia of the battle. Frank Schoonover, a noted American illustrator, painted a series of war images for the Ladies Home Journal that appeared throughout 1919. Among these graphics is one that appeared in the April 1919 edition that has become one of the many symbolic images of the battle. The initial caption of the painting states, “Belleau Wood: Where the Marines stopped the Kaiser on his way to Paris.” Today the image dons the walls of numerous lecture halls and military bases worldwide. It is one of the most identifiable images of the battle and will be a large mural in the background of the planned Belleau Wood exhibit at the National Museum of the Marine Corps. The increasing recognition that this painting receives perpetuates the myth of saving Paris.²⁸

In terms of historiography, Belleau Wood is unique in that the published firsthand accounts of the battle are numerous. Many of the contemporary works are eye-witness accounts and published diaries of the battle. While these sources provide a microcosm of the American experience at Belleau Wood, the accounts detract from the context of the battle. Most portrayals of the greater picture by those who experienced the battle first-hand are reverberations of inaccurate context during the fight and often devoid of retrospective analysis. While armed conflict is described as an unprecedented purgatory confined to a few dozen meters within the immediate front and flank by the men who experience it, primary perspectives portray a battle that must be epic in scale regardless of the context in which it occurred. While these works attest to the horrific nature of combat, their existence, jointed with the clear perspective of the battle’s overall significance, contributes a unique understanding of the costly nature of twentieth-century warfare; even for the most nominal acquisitions. In this sense, Belleau Wood is a unique American story for never before had American troops experienced the terror of such killing

efficiency for what comparatively was an objective relatively and retrospectively minimal in significance and assaulted using such reckless methods.

The most crucial source, relied heavily on throughout this study, completely absent in every other major body of work about the battle of Belleau Wood, are the endless boxes of archival material spread over libraries and archives across the United States. These documents tell the story of the true nature of chaos, violence, confusion and terror that describe the battle in unbridled brutality and accuracy. First, *The Official Records of the Second Division Regulars* are a series of nine books published in 1920 by the Adjutant General of the U.S. Army.²⁹ Each volume contains thousands of pages of the actual correspondence, after action reports, and field orders issued at every command level. These documents paint a true picture of the perception of the fighting as it occurred as well as the confusion and miscommunication throughout the battle. These works are located in only a dozen libraries around the country.

The individual personnel records located at the National Personnel Records Center of the National Archives in St. Louis, Missouri hold documents describing in lurid detail individual acts for which personnel were decorated as well as the nature of wounds sustained by casualties. This source also includes sworn affidavits by battle participants regarding the actions of individual troops in question. Located in College Park, Maryland are the records of the Adjutant General of the Army that include the alphabetical files of the Graves Registration. These documents reveal details regarding each individual serviceman killed overseas. These reports document the initial burial of those killed, the condition of the body and most importantly numerous eye-witness accounts surrounding the circumstances of individual deaths.

Located at National Archives One in Washington D.C. are the personal correspondences between officers at all levels and the American Battle Monuments Commission in what was used to develop the series of *Summary of Operations*, published for every American division that saw action in France.³⁰ These records describe the comprehended analysis of the engagement from the perspective of junior officers at the time of the battle and retrospective summaries that those men came to understand in the intervening years after the battle. Collectively these records depict the raw human side of this event never previously included in any study. Piecing together accounts and secondary studies yields a detailed viewpoint as to the human cost resulting from this carelessly managed indoctrination into twentieth-century warfare and a more accurate comprehension of the context of this unique American military experience.

Chapter I

Background, Germany's desperate hours

John Keegan described the Great War as a European tragedy.¹ Perhaps the greatest catastrophe resulting from the war emerged from the precedence of carnage established by the tactics used in twentieth-century warfare. This fact is crucial in understanding the context in which the battle of Belleau Wood occurred. Comprehension of the events of the Great War before 1918 reveals that the military experience was a unique one even by World War One standards. American troops did not experience the true nature of horror that the war offered before 1918. The conflict eroded from its theatrical pre-war inception in the late summer of 1914 into a stagnant stalemate of trench warfare where death became assiduous and impersonal. Americans did not largely experience the typical stalemate and attrition that described trench warfare on the western front as the nature of combat rapidly changed with the large-scale arrival of U.S. troops. The nature of war, by 1918, had become a mobile race to capture objectives, yet death still presented itself in industrious ways never before experienced by uninitiated American troops.²

By 1918, the war on the western front had put several exhausted armies in the thralls of desperation. The British, who spent 1917 carrying out several highly costly and virtually ineffective offensives, were holding their sector in conjunction with very rudimentary coordination with their French counterparts, who remained stagnant and centered on their own sector. The highly-welcomed declaration of war by the United States boosted the morale of the Entente powers. Their hopes were soon countered when assessments as to the arrival of American troops in effective numbers were projected to take much longer than expected. Added

to this disenchantment was that General John Pershing, commander in chief of all American forces in France, refused to budge to pressure by the French and British to place American units under their command. Acting on strict orders and his own personal vision for America's role in the war, Pershing would carry the United States into the fight as a unified army, not as piecemeal cannon fodder for their weary and decimated allies.³

While the entrance of the United States into the war brought welcomed enhancement to the morale of the French and British, it placed the German high command in a bit of a strategic vice. Field Marshall Paul Von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff, his first deputy, oversaw all military operations for the German army. Together they believed the scales must be tipped in favor of the Germans by 1918 or the weight of American industrial and personnel potential would break their backs. Catering to this desire was the mass exodus of the Russian army from the eastern front, freeing millions of German troops for a decisive blow on the western front.⁴

In the first few weeks of 1918, Ludendorff and Hindenburg hashed out a vague yet decisive plan of action to determine the outcome of the war. This preparation relied on sheer manpower, seeking to disenfranchise the weak coordination between the French and British. Because the British spent much of the previous year taking the fight to the Germans and posed the greatest threat, Ludendorff made British forces the initial target of his plan. He planned a massive offensive in the west in the area of the Fifth British Army south of the town of Arras, France. This plan would strike British forces along the single longest-stretched section of the English front held by fewer troops than any other in the British Expeditionary Force. This area would also dissect any tactical liaison between the French and British. This would enable the Germans to swarm the British forcing them to the coast.⁵ As the offensive materialized, another

assault was set to be carried out in the North against the British First and Second Armies in the vicinity of the old Ypres battlefield.⁶

Code-named Operation Michael and Operation St. George, Ludendorff and Hindenburg enlisted the utmost secrecy in preparation for the assaults. These attacks would utilize an overwhelming and sudden volume of pre-registered artillery as well as a new tactic recently introduced by the Germans; infiltration. This method was carried out by special troops known as *strumtruppen*. These soldiers were organized into small units able to penetrate deep into enemy lines while bypassing certain objectives for the main force that followed close behind. Once the enemy's lines were compromised, these troops, using weapons such as flame throwers, light machine guns and light trench mortars, could immediately disrupt rear area echelons while the main enemy force, already bypassed, met the brunt of the main assault force.⁷

At 4:40 a.m. March 21, 1918, nearly 6,000 German artillery pieces commenced the largest bombardment of the war.⁸ Shells of every kind from gas to high explosive pounded the trenches of the British Fifth and Third armies over a thirty-mile stretch. Up and down the sector phone lines rang constantly, alerting the same warning of an overwhelming level of incoming fire and gas shells. "It sounded as if the world were coming to an end," recalled Lieutenant Herbert Sulzbach, a German artillery officer.⁹ "Machine gun posts were blown sky-high along with human limbs," recalled one British soldier of the Fifth army.¹⁰ "Men were coughing and vomiting from the effects of gas, and men were blinded. The whole earth around us turned into an inferno-akin to the Three Divisions described in Dante's description of hell."¹¹ By 9:35 a.m. three entire German armies were lined north to south waiting for the attack order. *Sturmtruppen* units had moved out and taken the British lines under mortar fire. By the early afternoon the forward British lines had been penetrated and overrun.¹²

As three German armies continued to press through deep into British lines, Ludendorff made what would be the first of several strategic errors. While the initial goal of the offensive was to separate the liaison of the British and French sectors, Ludendorff decided the front of the attack should be expanded to exploit weaknesses in the British lines. The extension of the battle front placed increasing strain on German supply and artillery support necessary to sustain the initial momentum. The strategic cities of Amiens, a crucial railway junction, and Arras were not taken nor were liaison between the French and British broken. While the initial overwhelming success of Ludendorff's operation appeared to be a tremendously one-sided victory, it failed to achieve its objectives and cost the Germans over 230,000 casualties. Nearly seventy German divisions had been exhausted. Particularly hard hit were the *Sturmtruppen* formations.¹³

Operation Michael also alerted French, British, and American forces that better coordination and liaison between command structures was desperately needed. General Ferdinand Foch, whose official title had been chief of general staff was appointed Generalissimo, an official position overseeing the operations and coordination of the Entente powers. From that moment on "General Foch is charged by the British and French Governments to coordinate the action of the Allied Armies on the Western Front. He will work to this end with the Generals-in-Chief who are asked to furnish him with all necessary information."¹⁴ While each nation maintained command of their armies, no longer were they operating independently of each other. Foch was quoted as saying "I would fight without a break. I would fight in front Amiens. I would fight in Amiens. I would fight behind Amiens. I would fight all the time." The previous statement reflects how strong-willed the French were over even minor objectives.¹⁵ The quote is also perhaps reflective of the significance of major cities such as Paris; an objective weeks away from falling into the crosshairs of another of Ludendorff's master-minded plans.

Following the devastating Operation Michael offensive, the Germans launched their second large-scale offensive code-named Operation Georgette. The target was the very northern portion of the British sector held by the British First Army with the goal of placing vital channel ports at risk. On the morning of April 9, 1918 following a massive artillery barrage, the German Sixth army tore through a sector of the line held by a corps of Portuguese troops. 6,000 became prisoners and the remaining 13,000 fled from the front lines into the rear sector.¹⁶ Terrified that the ports were under threat, Commander-in-Chief of British forces, Field Marshall Sir Douglas Haig, pleaded with General Foch, the newly appointed Generalissimo of the Entente powers, to release French reserves to the area. Foch refused; believing that to limit the defenses of Paris would have been too risky. Commander of the American Expeditionary Forces, General John J. Pershing, also refused to commit the minimal and untested troops he had in country. Pershing, adhering to strict orders not to relinquish command and control of U.S. troops unless under American dominion, did not share the panic that overcame British high command. On April 11, 1918, Field Marshall Haig issued a message of desperation to his engaged armies: “With our backs to the wall and believing in the justice of our cause, each one of us must fight on to the end . . . Every position must be held to the last man. There must be no retirement.”¹⁷ While the German drive continued against stiff British resistance, Ludendorff’s assault never reached the enemy ports and faltered at another tremendous cost to German ranks.

The British suffered nearly 236,000 casualties and committed fifty-three of the available fifty-nine divisions, but as heavy as these numbers appeared, England could replenish the losses and add the gradual increase of arriving American troops. The Germans suffered nearly 300,000 casualties and lost the majority of their best-trained troops.¹⁸ Casualties were particularly heavy among the elite shock troops. For as much psychological advantage as

Ludendorff's offensives claimed, they came at a fearful toll of men and material, most of which could not readily be replaced in a timely manner, if at all. Ludendorff was slowly feeding his armies into a grinder with little or no decisive results. German morale began to slump according to Colonel Albrecht Von Thaer, a member of Ludendorff's staff who visited the front many times, pointed out that dwindling spirits from such tumultuous losses trickled down the ranks: "The morale influence on the troops has passed to company commanders and junior officers and NCO's."¹⁹ Need for relief came from every unit. Losses that were replaced were done so with lesser quality soldiers, often young conscripts or older men who lacked experience.

While Operation Georgette failed to break through to the ports, Ludendorff had not abandoned the target as a likely objective for another offensive. Ludendorff's problem was that the area controlled by the British had been bolstered with nearby French reserve units. In order for Ludendorff to launch and sustain another offensive in this region, French reserves had to be lured away from the sector. Perhaps vigilant to the value and imperativeness that Paris held-the only strategic objective that could prompt General Foch to take away from the defense of the ports-the chosen region for the attack was a twenty-two mile stretch of line along the formidable Chemin des Dames ridge line roughly between the towns of Soissons and Rheims, north of the Aisne River Valley, about eighty miles northeast of Paris. The name given to this attack was Operation Blucher, in honor of the Prussian Field Marshall Von Blucher who, ironically enough, in 1814 crossed this ridge line from the south and met Napoleon's army at Craonne.²⁰

Operation Blucher was intended as a limited offensive to draw French reserves away from the British sector, while appearing as an assault on Paris. The region of Chemin des Dames, a quiet sector, held only four battle-torn British divisions. The ridges were very rugged and nearly impassable, a factor taken into consideration by the French, who drastically

underestimated potential enemy threats in the region. While French and British units converged on this quiet sector to rest and replenish, German forces had spent nearly a month preparing an attack under utmost secrecy. German units mobilized and moved only at night as not to catch the eye of aerial observation. Routine night raids in enemy lines revealed little-to-no indication that the Germans were contriving a major assault, due to extra precautions the Germans took to avoid capture during periodic night raids. Whenever French and British forces fired routine artillery barrages on likely enemy crossroads and supply routes, German guns remained silent as not to give away their presence. Lessons of the previous two offensives had been addressed. More machine guns were issued to assault, supply and transport units to thwart an air threat posed by British and French fliers. Drills in open warfare maneuvering were carried out in rear sectors.²¹

The German Seventh Army, under the command of General Max Von Boehn, consisted of six German corps amassed along the region north of the Chemin des Dames ridge. Few of the twenty-nine German divisions in line, however, were of first-rate attack order. The ranks of these units were second-rate and sector-holding troops or comprised of divisions virtually exhausted in the two previous offensives.²² The condition of the German soldiers had been significantly weakened compared to the days leading up to the previous offensives. Captain Fritz Wiedemann, a German officer, was tasked with analyzing troop morale among the line units. Captain Wiedemann found a large number of his regiment desperately needed time to recover before heading back into action; when this fact was brought to the attention of his division commander, it was announced that the attack would commence as scheduled. Captain Wiedemann responded in his memoirs and summed up that the decisions being made by the German high command were playing with the lives of thousands of men not yet ready to go back into action.²³

Despite the concealed preparations for the offensive, plenty of signs emerged that should have created enough warning to ready a deep defensive line by the French and British. The first bit of evidence came in an alarmingly accurate report issued by a member of General Pershing's own intelligence section. Captain Samuel T. Hubbard Jr., a 1907 Harvard graduate, pieced together the daily flow of information arriving from front line units and envisaged a major enemy assault in the vicinity of Laon, France, which sat nearly centered on the sector the Germans planned to attack. Captain Hubbard's report, approved by General Pershing, was sent immediately to the French high command.²⁴

Captain Hubbard believed the Germans saw the area along the Chemin des Dames as extremely difficult for the French and British to reinforce in response to an assault, the same reason his theory was dismissed by the French and British, who believed the enemy could never traverse such terrain. This qualm materialized in a reply that, according to Hubbard, stated, “. . . they [the French] had expressed considerable doubt that the American intelligence service could be correct in their summary of what the Germans might do. . .”²⁵ the second, albeit late, piece of evidence came on the eve of the attack. As the sun set on the evening of May 25th, two days before the attack, soldiers of the French 22nd Division set out on a routine raid of the German trench line. The raiding party penetrated deeper into the enemy lines held by the German 197th Division of the VIII Corps where an officer and a sergeant of the third battalion, seventh Saxon regiment were captured. These two enemy soldiers revealed everything they knew about the pending assault. This pivotal evidence did not reach higher headquarters until the afternoon of May 26th, only hours before the attack was to commence.²⁶ By that time the Germans had abandoned the art of concealment and as French observation balloons surmounted the horizon,

enemy formations made their way to the jump-off point. The sector deemed “quiet” weeks before would, in the next few hours, be transformed into a shell-torn inferno.

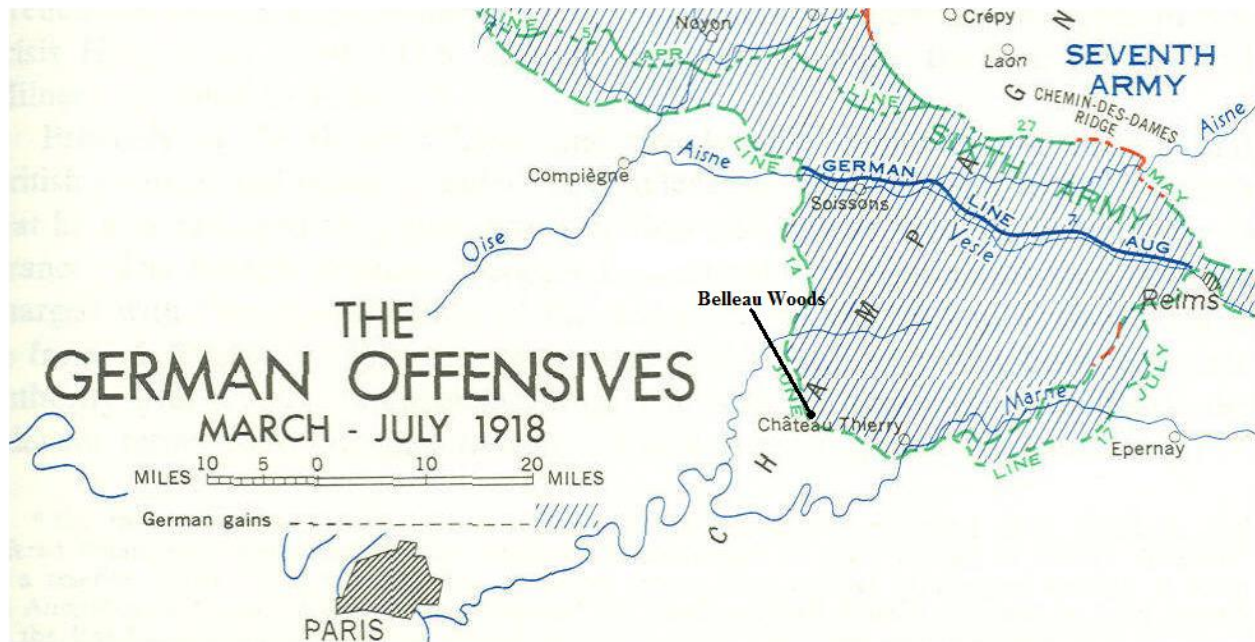
Across the ridges of the Chemin des Dames stood 1,321 batteries of German artillery. As the pocket watches all across German lines struck 1:00 a.m. on May 27, 1918, firing commenced with unprecedented ferocity. Across the rolling valley southwest of the ridges, a young British staff officer named Sidney Rogerson recalled the terrifying moments when the shells began to fall in the lines occupied by the British Eighth Division. “The earth shuddered under the avalanche of missiles . . . Ever above the din screamed the fierce crescendo of approaching shells, ear-splitting crashes as they burst . . . The dug-outs rocked, filled with the acrid fumes of cordite, the sickly-sweet tang of gas. . . It was a descent into hell.”²⁷

After hours of heavy artillery fire, German infantry began their advance. By 5:30 a.m. German forces had driven French resistance off the ridges. Four hours later, Germans crossed onto the banks of the Aisne River where pontoon bridges provided crossing. Hours into the great offensive, alarming details began to reach French headquarters and the figures were appalling. Civilians inside Paris caught word of the impending threat posed towards their beloved city. The situation eerily resembled the situation of the summer of 1914.²⁸ German acquisitions that day exceeded expectations. In the west, the crucial town of Soissons was under threat; in the east, the town of Rheims fell into German crosshairs. In the center of Ludendorff’s lines, the German IV corps made the biggest gains and closed in on a crucial piece of high ground near the River Vesle where the French sixth army began a fighting retreat.²⁹ The momentum of the offensive continued on into the pre-dawn hours of May 28 and made Ludendorff wonder if such a limited and diversionary offensive might be enough to materialize into a sustained push onto the Marne River and into the French capital.

The French government was in a panic. French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau believed the capital was in peril and pleaded with General Foch to act quickly.³⁰ Foch, the brilliant military mind, did not show alarm. He believed that Ludendorff's latest assault was an effort to divert French forces from the region of Flanders in the west. He also realized that if the main thrust of Ludendorff's drive were to converge on Paris, the Germans would dangerously expose their flank to the French Tenth Army. Nonetheless, members of the French government needed consoling with a proactive move. The decision to stiffen the resistance on the flanks of the enemy's advance was made by Foch. As units arrived they were fed into battle in the east near Rheims and in the west along the heavily wooded valley north of Soissons.³¹ As May 28th eroded into dusk, the advance of the Germans along the flanks had slowed significantly. Ludendorff, displeased with progress that day, attempted to resume the pace his troops had displayed the day before and fed precious reserves into the fray.³²

As French units arrived, they were flung into the fight almost as sacrificial objects to jam the German war machine. Thirty-seven French divisions participated in the fighting and five days into the offensive seventeen were exhausted. Two French divisions were so decimated they had to be absorbed into other outfits.³³ French reserve units took positions along the flanks of the German push, stemming the progress made in these regions at a high cost. In the center, the French Sixth Army continued a steady retreat against the German Seventh Army. This development created a deep salient along the German axis of advance. The southward depth of the bulge, spearheaded by General Richard Von Conta's IV Corps, had greatly exceeded its width and made resupply and logistics a dire problem for the advance units of Ludendorff's offensive. This salient also exposed the flanks of Ludendorff's forward units ultimately causing the failure of the offensive (See Appendix A). Despite this precarious situation, Ludendorff

insisted that the Marne River be reached by May 30, 1918 and he continued to feed valuable reserve units into the salient to ensure this would occur.³⁴



Appendix A. Map of situation on June 1, 1918

The region around Rheims, the eastern portion of the German push, remained resolute after the French bolstered the line with the newly arrived French Fifth Army, adding to German difficulties in penetrating to the Marne River. This allowed General Foch to concentrate solely on the center and western portion of the threatened area. The French drafted up plans for an immediate counter-offensive in the west near Soissons that could succeed only if the German drive in the center became stymied. While French units continued to plug the elongating salient, General Philippe Petain, commander-in-chief of the French Army, pleaded with General Pershing to release any available American divisions to assist in stopping the German drive in the center of the front. General Pershing realized the desperation of the current state of affairs and agreed to release the Second and Third Divisions, the two most readily available in the

American Expeditionary Forces.³⁵ His decision bred into the annals of American military history an engagement that became the legacy of the American experience in the First World War, one shrouded in lore and inculcated by pageantry at the cost of the true significance of the coming engagement. At the time, the efforts were to save Paris. Retrospectively, the pending battle revealed to an unsuspecting American army the true cost and harsh realities of modern twentieth-century warfare.

The events that occurred from June 1-6, 1918 provided the inexperienced American military with their first extensive campaign, but lessons learned came at a brutal cost. The United States Army would learn that the employment of artillery had to be done with specific methods in order to be effective against a fortified defensive position. Specifically the use of saturating and rolling artillery bombardment that preceded an infantry advance was needed against well fortified enemy troops. Since units became more mobile and front lines constantly changed position methods of communication needed to be immediate since battle situations change rapidly. The use of electronic field telephones provided troops with a much faster means of correspondence, but they were difficult to operationally maintain in mobile warfare and their use often gave way to foot messengers. During the American assault on Belleau Wood, this proved a fateful dynamic. The use of assault formations required specific tactical employment in the face of terrifying and deadly weaponry such as quick firing artillery and machine guns. These armaments rendered previous infantry assault methods obsolete.

American troops learned all of these lessons under extremely difficult circumstances at Belleau Wood. The experience was unprecedented for the United States military; never before had American troops faced these combined lethal components of twentieth-century warfare and the techniques they used leaves behind a story of unique and unprecedented terror, carnage and

tragedy in the chronicles of American military history. While America rejoiced in the perceived glorious performance of the American Marines at Belleau Wood, the shattered souls and broken hearts of the battle's participants emerged from the ruins with the horrific experience forever etched into their minds. Devastated families received little word of the exploits of sons, brothers and husband's whose death often came in the most violent and undignified method. Never before have most of these experiences been juxtaposed to the often celebratory atmosphere pervading historical analysis of the battle. These examinations often cloud the human story of the men who experienced the horrors of Belleau Wood.

Chapter II

Movement to the Front and the Pending Battle

As the sun sank low on the evening of May 30, 1918, orders to move out to the threatened region south of Chemin de Dames reached the American Third Division. Immediately a motorized machine gun battalion mobilized from their training area and headed for the perilous sector. In the vicinity of Chaumont-en-Vexin, nearly fifty-six miles from the threatened sector, the American Second Division enjoyed a rare day off. The 27,000 men of the division were the most unique out of the entire American Expeditionary Force since the organization consisted of Marines, Navy corpsman and regular Army soldiers.¹ One the two infantry brigades were made up entirely of nearly 14,000 Marines.² The calm of the afternoon came to a sudden halt when a French staff car churned up the dust in front of the division headquarters. Orders were delivered to Major General Omar Bundy, the division commander, for his unit to immediately depart for the endangered region.³

As the Second Division assembled for action, the German drive neared the Marne River along the outskirts of Chateau Thierry. In the center of the city, the 7th Motorized Machine Gun Battalion of the 3rd U.S. Infantry Division took up positions south of the Marne River overlooking the town's only remaining bridge; all other crossings had been destroyed by French forces in order to prevent the Germans from gaining access to regions south of the river. On the afternoon of May 31, 1918, German troops attempted to cross the bridge but met heavy resistance. The French and American stance in this area caused the Germans funneled the spearhead of the assault, and the focus of the drive shifted west of Chateau Thierry into the rolling countryside dotted with small chateaus and scattered woods. The French, however, gave

stiff yet futile resistance in this area, but bought precious time and wore down the Germans who had been on the advance for nearly five days with little rest.

In the predawn hours of May 31, 1918, men of the Second Division stood in formation with equipment staged awaiting the convoy of vehicles. Sergeant Gus Gulberg recalled the grumbling voice of the company first sergeant demanding, “Pack up and be ready to shove off in ten minutes,” but after twenty and then forty minutes, Sergeant Gulberg and his men plopped down on the side of the road and went to sleep.⁴ “We stood by, as usual, all night,” recalled Captain John West.⁵ Lieutenant Elliot D. Cooke, an army officer attached to the 18th Company of the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, grew tired of the endless waiting and went to sleep along with the other men of the company.⁶ A few of the convoys disembarked on schedule but only a portion of the allotted transports were actually made available. The logistics of moving the entire division so abruptly became increasingly complicated. The division’s artillery units would be transported by train, however the horse-drawn machine gun units would be forced to move on foot.⁷

By early morning small, tarp-covered flat-bed trucks called “camions” arrived to transport the infantry. The journey to the volatile front pervaded in the memories of the men who experienced it. Nobody knew the division’s destination, but the ranks were never short of rumors. Private James R. Scarbrough of the 83rd Company, 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment recalled, “I remember the talk on the way there was that the Second Division was moving into place for some kind of big offensive, but they said something like that before every one of our moves.”⁸ Bitterness gripped Private Scarbrough and his comrades Private Eugene O. Clark and Private Walter Clark. The crowded group of men managed to find a moment of humor in the ensuing chaos. Scarbrough remembered the mood when he recalled:

I remember E.O. saying he wished the generals would let us just train in one spot if all they were going to do was let us train. . . It was like they wanted the Marines to keep away from the fighting and keep all the glory for France! E.O. was talking in this funny French accent and pretending to be a French general. He said that he was Generale' Pierre Coon-Ass from Pair-ee!⁹

Laughter erupted from the back of the crowded truck. Humor was a luxury the men still possessed since they had no idea what was in store.

The vehicles rode through the night. "Sleep was out of the question," recalled Sgt. Havelock D. Nelson.¹⁰ The closer the vehicles got to the front, the slower the pace. An endless stream of stunned refugees fleeing the front slowed the transports to a crawl. The roads became increasingly impassible due to "not only military traffic of every description, but crowds of old men and women, middle-aged women, girls and children carrying bundles, pushing wheelbarrows, baby buggies or pulling small wagons heaped high with clothing and small household articles."¹¹ The scene was the first real look at the desperation of the situation and the war became real for many of the young Americans. "It was not just an adventure; it was serious. This sight, more than bullets, proved that. No one spoke but everyone had many thoughts," wrote Captain West.¹²

While the Second Division gradually converged on the front, the Germans continued their steady push towards the banks of the Marne River west of the town of Chateau Thierry. Elements of the German 231st Division seized control of a crucial hill just east of Chateau Thierry. Denoted by its height in meters, occupation of Hill 204 gave the Germans the tactical advantage of observation over the surrounding area. Elements of Von Conta's IV Corps also occupied several of the surrounding villages including Vaux and Belleau.¹³ The apex of Ludendorff's drive towards the Marne channeled into a ten-mile front, anchored by Chateau Thierry in the eastern most part of the summit (See Appendix B).



Appendix B. Area around Belleau Wood

The small villages of Belleau, Bouresches, Torcy, Champillon and Lucy-le-Bocage were centered on this sector. These particular chateaus would, in the following weeks, be the center stage of the Second Battle of the Marne. Situated between these villages was a nearly square-mile stretch of thick woodland known as Bois de Belleau (Belleau Wood). The forest, very much identical in the present day as it was just before the battle, is dominated by sloping ravines, rising high ground in the north and south. Rolling slopes are dotted with massive boulders and heavy undergrowth, a natural defense barrier for anyone who occupies it. On the evening of June 1, 1918 the Germans realized this value and ordered the objectives for the next day, June 2, 1918 to be the towns of Bouresches, Lucy-le-Bocage, and Champillon to include Belleau Wood.¹⁴

After a twenty-hour of ride to the front in crowded vehicles, the first elements of the nearly 25,000 troops of the Second Division arrived. Orders were sent to the Brigade of Marines

to operate south of the Paris-Metz road, the main vessel through the sector. The Second Division's brigade of Army regulars were to operate north of the highway where the main action had developed.¹⁵ Despite these orders, the situation was changing hourly as developments came into the headquarters of the French 21st Corps in command of the sector. Control of the Second Division passed over to the French, who sought to feed the American units into the line as they arrived, a strategy the Americans adamantly opposed. A long and restless trek to the front, the fact most men had not eaten in twenty-four hours, and that none of the Second Division's artillery or machine guns had arrived made the scenario futile. American and French commanders reluctantly agreed that U.S. troops would create a reserve line behind the fledgling French fighting north of the Paris-Metz. The Americans would be thrust into the line as they arrived.¹⁶

As thousands of vehicles of a seemingly endless convoy came to a brief halt, men of the Second Division disembarked in a town several miles southwest of the front. They began scavenging the deserted village for anything to eat. Chickens, pigs, and form of livestock became a meal. Men got desperately needed sleep. “. . . but the sleep was short, for, at twelve o'clock noon, a bugler blew assembly. Back in the trucks we went for a short ride,” recalled Captain West.¹⁷ One man, Private Alfred Schiani, a tough nineteen-year-old from Brooklyn and member of the 18th Company, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, recalled a desperate situation while the trucks stopped along the road briefly. “I developed nature's urge for relief. I told the sergeant my situation and he advised me to leave all the equipment on the truck and if I was lucky I could catch the last truck. But the last truck unfortunately went by. I had no idea where my outfit was going, nor the means to get there.” As the trucks continued in convoy, Schiani discovered where a rear headquarters was located and ran over to it.

“I walked in unannounced, and was suddenly in front of the headquarters staff. They were bent over maps, evidently going over the next day’s operations, when suddenly one of the officers noticed me, and asked me what I wanted. I had told him what occurred, he blasted out, ‘Get the hell out of here, and get back to your outfit immediately.’”¹⁸

After hours, the seemingly endless convoy stopped and delivered the men of the Second Division to a point a few miles southwest of the front lines where they would march towards the front. Marines moved in column towards the distant rumble of battle. The 96th Company, 2nd Battalion, 6th Marines adjusted equipment while standing in a hasty formation along the side of the dust-choked road. The order to fix bayonets echoed through the ranks as the company moved into the knee-high wheat fields towards their position.¹⁹ The 2nd Battalion, 6th Marines began their movement to the eastern sector of the front near a patch of woods identified as Bois de Clerembauts.

Once in position, the battalion immediately dug in. Sprinkled along the battalion line were heavy model 1914 French Hotchkiss machine guns of the 6th Machine Gun Battalion. Due to anticipated onslaught of the German drive in this particular area, two machine guns of the 77th Company of the 6th Machine Gun Battalion were situated north and south of the Paris Metz road in the vicinity of Le Thiolet.²⁰ The 9th Infantry Regiment of the Division’s other brigade already occupied a sector of the line east of the 2nd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment. At 4:00 p.m., a French plane spotted isolated German units moving west from the area south of Hill 204.²¹ The French perceived this sector of the front to pose the greatest threat the earliest units to arrive were immediately sent to this location.²²

East of the threatened section, the 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment moved into position just to the west in the vicinity of Lucy-le-Bocage, including the woods to the west of the village. Corporal Warren R. Jackson of the battalion's 95th Company recalled, "We left the road to our right to turn into some fields. Toward evening we were deployed and resumed the march through the field of ripening grain. Coming upon rising ground, we saw a village ahead. As we advanced, two of the men, who had brought along bottles from the cellar, had to be separated in a drunken fight."²³

The town Jackson referred to was Lucy-le-Bocage and it was, recalled Jackson, a place of serenity with sunlit walls and green gardens virtually abandoned on that bright June day. "The sole occupants were a few French hospital corpsmen. These men cheered us by reiterating the predictions we had heard along the road that Paris would be taken in eight days."²⁴ According to Jackson the 95th Company was issued more ammunition before moving out of town into position.²⁵

The main enemy pressure shifted from the east to the northeast. The 6th Marine Regiment was positioned along the eastern side of the salient, and the newly arrived 5th Marine Regiment and the 23rd Regiment of the Second Division took up positions in back of the line ready to move to any threatened portion of the line. A massive gap was discovered in the western sector of the front and Lieutenant Colonel Wise's battalion received orders to move out towards this gap first thing in the morning. Prompting his four company commanders, Lieutenant Colonel Wise recalled, "I explained to them that there was no doubt the line was broken and the French were on the run. Soon we would be up there trying to stiffen them and that there was no doubt they would start filtering back through us."²⁶

As the sun surmounted the horizon on June 2, 1918 the Second Division's position began to materialize under frantic and perilous pandemonium. The division's logistics and support elements trickled to the front. Members of the division's engineer battalion joined the front-line units. The division surgeon, Lieutenant Colonel Richard Derby, summoned to division headquarters, received orders to begin medical evacuations of the front line. Forward field hospitals were put in operation even though they lacked ambulances for evacuating the wounded. Lieutenant Colonel Derby sped away from the headquarters building in a motorcycle, headed southwest for the small village of Bezu. Made up of fewer than fifty buildings, the town had a small church and adjoining two story schoolhouse on the north end of the village's winding street. Derby recalled his arrival in the small town and the signs that an immediate evacuation had taken place.

The schoolroom and church were used as Field Hospital One. The floor of the church, with the pews removed, became a room for the litters of wounded that would surely flood in. In the schoolroom, blankets quartered a section of the area as a resuscitation ward, undoubtedly a place where many Marines' soldiers and corpsman would later take their final breath. In the courtyard, a tent served as decontamination area for victims of gas attacks.²⁷

The situation remained chaotic, accurate maps were scarce, and few officers at every level possessed any credible information as to the layout of the division. Lieutenant Colonel Feland, a member of the 5th Marine Regiment headquarters company, scouted the center portion of the line north of the towns of Marigny and Champillon to develop an understanding of the front. To his surprise, the gap discovered earlier spanned for nearly two miles on the left flank of the 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment. Working his way along the line, Lieutenant Colonel Feland came upon a French unit so decimated that a regimental commander was manning a machine gun. All around the area, French troops looted nearby farmhouses and when Lieutenant

Colonel Feland tried to round them up, the French commander told him, “Looting is very bad at times like these. Everything goes. As soon as we can reorganize, we shoot a few of them and it stops.”²⁸

In response to this discovery, Colonel Wendell C. Neville commander of the 5th Marine Regiment, jumped into a staff car and rushed to area where Lieutenant Colonel Wise’s battalion had staged. That morning Lieutenant Cooke saw a disheveled column of French troops making their way past the company. “Retreating before the Boche for six days had left them utterly spent. I offered a cigarette to one of lieutenants and asked him how things went. He regarded me from a pair of eyes sunk to an unbelievable depth far into his head. ‘My frien’ lose the gun and the bullet, yes, but save the shovel. Neyer lose the shovel -never.’”²⁹

Shortly afterward, Colonel Neville’s staff car pulled up to the 2nd battalion’s bivouac sight. The colonel approached Lieutenant Colonel Wise and pulled from his pocket a map and a written order. “You’ve got to get out of here right way,” Neville told Lieutenant Colonel Wise. “If you don’t hurry up, the Germans will get there before you do. When you get there stick. Never mind how many French come through you.”³⁰ Immediately bugles sounded assembly and the men of Lieutenant Colonel Wise’s battalion assembled into formation. The battalion shuffled down the dirt road. The long file of Marines marched into the outskirts of the town of Marigny. Sporadic German shells greeted Lieutenant Colonel Wise’s men as they moved through the village; no injuries or casualties were reported. North of the town the battalion stopped and prepared to move into position when another barrage of German artillery exploded with a violent shatter in the treetops, raining shrapnel down among the ranks. As men stood in shock, Captain Lester Wass, commander of the 18th Company screamed, “Get going! What do you think this is, a kid’s game? Move out!”³¹

Lieutenant Colonel Wise established his command post a few hundred meters behind his battalion, in the chateau of Marigny, in the seclusion and shelter of a wall in the village cemetery. The battalion expanded along the front to fill the two-mile gap in the line. A small cluster of buildings known as Les Mares Farm stood in the center of the battalion sector. Surrounding the farm on either side was open pasture for several hundred meters. The western flank of the line dug in along the tree line of thick woods. The eastern flank took cover in a forest as well. Throughout the line a few French Chasseurs remained in position.

Lieutenant Colonel Wise's Marines dug in along their dangerously thin line. "There wasn't a sign of a trench anywhere, nor any time to dig one. There wasn't a bit of adequate shelter. I gave orders they were to dig individual fox holes-little scooped-up hollows similar to a grave but about a foot deep, with earth piled in front for a parapet."³² Cooke remembered these shelters were "made according to the owner's individual taste, or idea of safety."³³ Many Marines had long abandoned their entrenching shovels, a decision that would come to haunt many men in the days to come. Men used any and all improvised resources to get below earth. Private John C. Geiger of the 43rd company recalled, "We got the order to dig in. We used the lids of our mess gear and bayonet for tools. Say, you'd be surprised to know how much digging you can do under those circumstances."³⁴

Even with the gap filled, Lieutenant Colonel Wise's flanks failed to make contact with either unit in the east or west, causing tension for days to come. Stretched out in a thin line, men dug in six to seven feet apart from one another, the battalion lacked any machine guns to bolster their position since much of the division's machine gun companies were still marching overland on foot. Only three companies of the Marines 6th Machine Gun Battalion were present, but they were sent into line east of the division sector. Behind Lieutenant Colonel Wise's troops, a

battery of French seventy-five millimeter cannons fired salvo after salvo at the unseen Germans to the north, down the sloping valley. Due to the instability of this sector, Brigadier General James Harbord, commanding the Marine Brigade, requested that any available machine guns from the 6th Machine Gun Battalion move with all haste to bolster Lieutenant Colonel Wise's line.³⁵

In the eastern portion of the division sector, Captain John A. West and his third platoon of the 79th Company had dug in. Next to Captain West's platoon, Corporal Pike and the second platoon of the 79th Company sat entrenched along the forward slope of a hill. By mid afternoon, German observation balloons had surmounted the horizon and distant German guns began to fire on that portion of the line. In the distance, the earth rumbled dully, then again and again. Soon the sudden and violent screech of incoming shells rippled across the valley. West's men continued to dig deeper into the ground. Shells seemed to land almost on top of each other as they crept closer to the lines. A shell hit along the parapet of a fox hole, blowing Private William Dingle of Chicago, Illinois backward killing him instantly and breaking his Springfield rifle in half.³⁶ Another round exploded and killed Private William H. Brown.³⁷ The barrage increased and quickly encompassed a large area. Along the Paris-Metz near Le Thiolet, Private Charles Francis Brown made a sudden dash for a dugout about 100 feet from the north edge of the Paris-Metz road at the sound of the first incoming round. According to Captain William B. Croka, commanding officer of the company, "Brown was struck by the shell just shy of the dugout and killed instantly."³⁸

The sudden German barrage was not isolated along the eastern sector of the lines. Around the small village of Le Voi du Chatel, members of the 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment commanded by Major Berton Sibley concealed in the surrounding woods. Private

Scarborough's 3rd platoon of the 83rd Company fell under the onslaught of German shells and he vividly recalled the horror when he wrote:

We were concealed in the woods and not making much commotion so I don't know if somebody saw us or they were just shelling everywhere. That's what it looked like to me, not a deliberate attack by artillery but just pot, shots, harassment with German 77's, three-inch guns. Still, it found its mark and three of our men died. One of the men was John W. Collins of Clarksburg, West Virginia who'd left his studies hoping one day to be a lawyer . . . The second was Frank Snow of Anniston, Alabama, a friend of mine who could have joined the Army and stayed right in his hometown at Camp McClellan. He wanted to be a Marine and was so proud just to be a part of the unit. Frank wasn't twenty yards away from me when the shell hit. He just came apart. There wasn't enough left of Frank Snow to fill a grease can. There's a little white cross at Belleau Wood with his name on it, but I don't know who or what they buried there.³⁹

Sergeant Darel J. McKinney recalled Snow's platoon was commanded by a Gunnery Sergeant. Once the shells started falling, the Gunnery Sergeant ordered the men to separate into squads and to take shelter. He separated the squads about fifty yards apart in attempt to limit damage. The squad which Private Snow belonged became isolated in the open by the heavy bombardment and about ten Marines were wounded.⁴⁰ Among the wounded was Joseph M. Flanagan of Bellwood, Illinois, one of Scarborough's friends. Flanagan was a company runner, and according to Private Scarborough, he was "slight of build, a wiry kid, but he could run like a bird could fly." A piece of shrapnel had virtually disemboweled the seventeen-year old. "The shrapnel had torn him straight through in the abdomen. Part of his intestines was outside, and the smell was terrible."⁴¹ Flanagan was carried away to a field hospital where he succumbed to his wounds two days later. The third Marine Scarborough saw die in the barrage was Gunnery Sergeant James Clair Wertz of Lewiston, Pennsylvania, a sea-going veteran of the fleet Marine Corps and rigid disciplinarian whose incessant demands of a uniformed and clean appearance won the admiration of his men. "Seeing his dead, broken body shook our confidence."⁴²

Corporal Frederick W. Hill and Sergeant Major Herbert H. Akers from the 6th Regimental headquarters company were also caught by another barrage in La Voi du Chatel that morning. Corporal Hill recalled:

We came in for a great ‘panning’ from Boche artillery fire for several hours and some were too close for comfort. Akers and I had several come so close over us that we could feel the ground ‘bounce’ when they hit. A few very close ones were ‘duds’ and did not explode. One ripped up the road about twenty feet from us and about six feet from Major Sibley, and then failed to burst. If there ever was a miracle this was it.⁴³

The heavy artillery complicated every task needed to stabilize the lines and greatly hampered contact between units and headquarter elements from battalion-level all the way up to division. Since communications were non-existent at that point, runners had to be used until the phone lines could be installed. Sergeant Thomas J. Kelly, a five-year veteran of the Marine Corps, was in charge of guiding the Sixth regiment’s wireman to various strategic points where phone lines would be established. The exposed detail of men was in particular danger due to the active German guns targeting the newly arrived division. As German shells fell throughout the line, one round landed near the twenty-eight-year old throwing him to the ground. Shrapnel had torn a massive gash through the bicep of his right arm and another piece had torn a small superficial hole through the tricep. Another shard of metal had lacerated the lower portion of his left leg. As he struggled to his feet, Kelly, with his tunic bloodied and torn, shrugged off the assistance of his comrades who attempted to carry his pack for him. The small detachment of Marines pressed on towards the positions that needed phone lines. Kelly finally returned back to La Voi du Chatel after escorting his details into position and only then was evacuated to an aid station.⁴⁴

Compounding the increasing menace of German artillery was the fact that the heavy French 155-millimeter gun batteries had exhausted all available ammunition preventing any retaliation on the German guns. This problem would not be remedied for thirteen hours; only sixty 75-millimeter guns were available to provide artillery support. In the fringes of the woods, occupied by the 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, the enemy artillery also claimed victims. The majority of German shells struck the line occupied by the 76th Company. Two Marines were killed and several wounded including Private Harold Alfred Brooks, who died when the concussion of an exploding shell crushed his left leg and led to severe internal bleeding.⁴⁵

Despite the lack of available heavy artillery support, some of the light French field guns responded to the German shelling. Private Jackson of the 95th Company recalled the retaliation focused to the northeast on either the village of Belleau or Torcy:

We could see across the valley a mile or so away. In an open field where a house, set about with large spreading trees, and a small, thick wood a stone's throw distant. The house seemed to be the object of our artillery fire. Every few seconds a shell was dropped in the vicinity of the house, throwing clods and dust into the air, leaving where the shell struck an irregular mass of black smoke. Such was the distance between us and the falling shells that we did not hear the explosion until some seconds after the black puff appeared over the place where the shell had dropped. The shells had been dropping but a short time when, following the fall of a shell close to the house, half-crouching, hatless figures began to scamper in abandoned haste across the open space to the plot of wood-running for their lives. The sight was novel; strange to say, even amusing! Why I was affected by this tragic scene in the way I was I do not understand . . . Yet it was sport now to see these fellows, much like we were and with similar hopes and ambitions, running a race with death.⁴⁶

During the remainder of the day, Jackson and his comrades made numerous movements to stabilize the line and in doing so often came under a random barrage of stray machine gun rounds that, according to Private Jackson, “zipped through the twigged roof of our dugout.”⁴⁷

The shelling slowly dwindled and the Germans began to branch their assault on the division's eastern flank occupied by the 2nd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment. Corporal Pike, a member of the 79th company's 2nd Platoon, watched as the Germans came into view from the east: "The attack began with widely spaced skirmishers making short, individual rushes toward us, then dropping quickly into the ground cover, making them practically invisible. The rushes were of such short duration that a defending rifleman had not enough time to get an enemy in his sights before he disappeared."⁴⁸ Corporal Pike watched the spectacle before him helplessly; days before, a decree stated that all Marines not carrying an automatic weapon would carry a rifle and bayonet. Corporal Pike had previously carried just a pistol. This new order meant he was hurriedly issued whatever rifle was available. He received a rifle with a broken front sight that swiveled from side to side and was of no use except to hold a bayonet and according to Corporal Pike, "as far as bayonets were concerned, at no time have I ever looked with favor on them as a method of adjusting differences between people."⁴⁹ As the encroaching Germans came within range of the guns of the 79th company's 2nd platoon, they fired furiously. "I noticed a young Marine on my left," recalled Corporal Pike,

lying in the clover and firing his rifle madly, obviously too rapidly to be aiming carefully at anything. I crawled over to him and exercising my, up until then, dormant office of corporal, cautioned him about wild firing and urged him to pick a target and continue to follow it until he dropped it. Keep a bead on where the enemy dropped out of sight and when he comes up again be ready for him. After several attempts, he knocked over one of the attackers. I remember we both shouted, and I am sure we both felt as if we had just won the war.⁵⁰

To the west of the 79th Company, the 78th Company under the command of Captain Robert E. Messersmith watched the same line of German troops moving through the waving

waist-high wheat. Private Thadeus B. Allen, a member of the company remembered the disarray as the German shelling ended, miraculously with no casualties:

The German barrage lifted . . . The men about me were cursing and swearing in that choice collection of profanity that belongs to the Marines . . . The German troops were clear of the woods. On they came with closed ranks in four lines. One looked at them with almost a friendly interest. No particular hate or fear . . . The fingers bit into the rifle.⁵¹

‘Hold your fire,’ was the command sent up and down the line according to Allen.

The next I recall is firing. Firing. Firing. My fingers were tearing greedily at more ammunition . . . I began to fire slower, looking for my mark, making sure of a hit. The Huns now appeared to be on top of us and then all of the sudden, there was nothing more to aim at. A few scattered groups with hands up, racing for out lines were shouting ‘Kamerad! Kamerad’⁵²

According to Allen, those Germans racing towards the 78th Company lines in surrender came under the onslaught of German machine gun fire by their own men far to their rear which killed several enemy troops.⁵³ Adding to the firepower of Major Holcomb’s battalion were several Hotchkiss machine guns of the 77th company dispersed along the battalion’s lines. These guns laid down lethally accurate fire into approaching Germans as they advanced into the open wheat fields southeast of the town of Bouresches.

The fighting of the day gave way to disarray. All along the lines false reports surfaced. No one had a complete grasp as to what the larger picture looked like. At 3:00pm that afternoon, Brigadier General James Harbord received a telephone report from the French high command that the right flank of the American line had begun to give way. Harbord, the ever-impetuous leader, prompted Colonel Albertus Catlin, commander of the 6th Marine Regiment, to reiterate to his men that the line must be held at all costs. Harbord also explained that lack of operational telephone communication with his regiments was creating serious problems.⁵⁴ Such quandaries

delayed movements, clouded the accuracy of reports and limited the steady flow and utilization of information, and in this case allowed the accuracy of such messages to remain unclear for prolonged periods of time. For forty minutes Harbord fretted over the reports about his right flank until shortly afterwards, the phone lines at the 6th Regimental Headquarters became operational. Major Thomas Holcomb, commanding the battalion which occupied the flank in question, personally telephoned Harbord to inform him that the reports of his battalions withdraw was erroneous. Major Holcomb colorfully added, "When this outfit runs it will be in the other direction, nothing doing in the fall back business."⁵⁵

In an effort to stabilize the line and establish liaison, men of the Second Division, largely deprived of sleep, denied food and exposed to harassing yet deadly artillery, constantly shifted their position in line and began to dig in only to receive orders to move out again as the fighting went on throughout the late afternoon. The valley beyond the 2nd Division line echoed with the intertwined crescendo of rifle, machine gun, and shellfire. Billows of white smoke lifted in isolated spots beyond the tree lines and along the heights north of the division's lines. At 8:00 p.m. a pilot named Lieutenant Harmon reported that a German regiment was massed in the woods two miles to the north and had taken the high ground. At 8:45 the same pilot reported German troops moving south and stood just a mile north of the position occupied Major Maurice Shearer's 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment. Soon after this, men of the 95th Company moved towards the northern fringes of the woods they occupied where they paused to fix bayonets and awaited further orders. While this was going on, Private Jackson recalled the pandemonium of the assault occurring to the north. From this area, several surviving French soldiers fled south through the lines occupied by Jackson's battalion.⁵⁶

A raging machine gun battle was going in the valley below us; however, a cloud of white smoke overhung it, so we could only hear. A part of us were sent along a fence to our right. We met excited groups of French soldiers. These men were evidently bent on getting out of the fray. Further down the fence was a dead French soldier and then another. Both of them wore their sky-blue overcoats and their packs. One lay on his face. I couldn't tell where either had been hit, but here on the ground were two French whom in the past months we had regarded as invulnerable-dead. The sight of those two dead soldiers was a thousand times more impressive. Appalling!⁵⁷

By dusk German elements had penetrated into the northern fringes of Belleau Wood, and by 7:00 p.m., the Germans had seized the village of Bouresches. German occupation of the town meant the French in Belleau Wood had a dangerously exposed flank and the decision was made to abandon the woods, which the Germans immediately occupied. By 1:35 a.m. German forces established forward observation posts along the southern edge of the woods, a few hundred meters from American lines.⁵⁸ For the previous two days, the Americans held a reserve stratum to augment the decimated French.⁵⁹ At 9:30 a.m. the next day, command of the sector was to pass to the American Second Division under Major General Omar Bundy. Due to the German success that day, June 2, 1918, a vanquished French Corps commander planned a counterattack for the following day to vindicate the situation and attempt to retake the positions that were lost postponing the passing of command.⁶⁰ The French line withered with every stand and counter they attempted. Many French units were fragments of already depleted and exhausted groups. Throughout the sector, French troops used the darkness of night to effectively pull back and filter through the line of the Americans behind them. For days the French fought valiantly, often to the last man, allowing the American line the necessary time to stabilize.

In the depths of night on June 2-3, 1918, elements of the Second Division attempted to make physical contact with other outfits on both flanks. This meant more movement; more sleep

deprivation, and more hardship. The constant movement, not conducive to even brief moments of rest, as well as the lack of food and general ignorance of the situation at hand began to take a toll on the morale of men of the 95th Company. According to Private Jackson, “The mud-begrimed exterior and the emptiness within, along with the continued sleepless nights, coupled with the belief that we were not getting a square deal, resulted in grumbling.”⁶¹ One Marine of the 95th Company, Corporal William C. Ferris had, up until the company moved to the present front, remained under guard pending charges for a mutinous statement made weeks earlier. Jackson described Ferris as “affable and inoffensive, one of the best soldiers in the company, though one of the youngest.” Due to the young corporal’s charges, he was forced to enter the front unarmed. Despite an effort to acquire a weapon from a casualty, Ferris remained without a rifle for the next several days.⁶²

The night and predawn hours of June 2-3, 1918 also allowed for movement of German raiding parties actively seeking the lines. French survivors of the days’ shattered stance against the Germans also used the concealment of night to sporadically stroll through American lines. French troops passed through the 95th Company’s lines in the darkness. German raiding parties operating nearby and trigger-happy Marines posed a real threat to French stragglers. One German raiding party advanced upon the portion of the 95th company’s line occupied by Gunnery Sergeant Peter Morgan’s platoon. This was near a section where several French troops were filtering back through the line. An alert Marine observation post spotted the shadowy figures in the dim moonlit sky. With the French soldiers approaching in the vicinity, a potential fratricidal disaster loomed. Gunnery Sergeant Morgan, realizing the danger posed to the approaching French, maneuvered along his men and pointed out the exact direction for his men to direct their gunfire. When the German patrol approached to within 200 yards, Morgan’s

platoon fired precisely on the avenue of approach of the enemy. Muzzle flashes illuminated the tree line and shattered the night's silence for several terrifying seconds. The German patrol immediately wilted and broke into a panicked retreat.⁶³

German guns remained active well into the darkness shelling pre-registered targets, including woods and villages. During the night, Lieutenant Colonel Wise, situated at his battalion command post behind the cemetery wall in the city, watched the slow and steady glowing haze in the darkened sky as fires erupted in the village of Marigny as result of exploding shells. Lieutenant Colonel Wise's battalion had yet to make any contact with units east and west of him. His unit was already stretched dangerously thin and could not extend the flanks any further. To reinforce this line, Major Berton Sibley, commanding the 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, received orders to dispatch the 82nd Company north toward the troubled area.⁶⁴

Major Sibley's battalion had moved out from the woods during the night as Germans were sure to bombard the wood during the night. Corporal Harry Collins of the 82nd Company recorded in his diary, "Had two or three narrow escapes from German shells. We spent the night out in an oat field."⁶⁵ Private Scarbrough recalled, "That evening they moved us out of the woods and we slept in the open field to avoid being shelled. They woke us up in the middle of the night to move again. It wasn't that hard because we were just sleeping under the stars, and with all the artillery fire around, you couldn't sleep anyway."⁶⁶

Reports describing the location of German lines were sketchy during the day since the line appeared to be so fluid. In the midst of the confusion throughout the ranks, some efforts were made to scope out not only the American lines but the German lines as well. A small patrol led by Lt. C.C. Gulliver, a U.S. Army officer of the 2nd Division general staff, set out on a

reconnaissance mission just before dawn on June 3, 1918. Moving north from the direction of Lucy-le-Bocage, the detachment tried to avoid silhouetting themselves in the moonlight along the inclined slope to the southwest of Belleau Wood. The patrol succeeded in pinpointing German activity less than a mile north of Lucy-le-Bocage.⁶⁷ As the dawn grew near, fewer French troops remained in line, but the coming counterattack and subsequent delay in the passing of command of the sector proved vital to the Americans who still lacked divisional artillery support and a large number of their machine gun companies.

The roadways leading to the sector remained choked with traffic from both civilian and military personnel.⁶⁸ The 73rd Machine Gun Company of the 6th Marines was one of those units caught in the mayhem. Private Einar A. Wahl, a twenty-four year old machine gun squad leader in the company, recalled the grueling trek to the front.

Motor trucks were to have transported us, but they didn't seem to have enough to carry us all even though there were hundreds continually passing. So it was a case of hike again for the seventy-third and several other Marine companies. That hike is pretty much a blur. I hope I will never have to do one like it again. We had one rest from twelve noon until nine in the evening of the first day.⁶⁹

Eventually trucks became available later in the day. Wahl recalled,

Did those trucks look good to us! Tired out beyond description, we didn't care where we were or where we were going, just so we could ride. We learned from the weary, dust-covered drivers (many of whom hadn't slept for several days) that the situation was serious and that we were badly needed. We bumped along all night at a tremendous speed, passing the long lines of dim-shaped wagon trains, truck trains, cannon, troops, and the poor refugees, who, of course, were bound in the opposite direction.⁷⁰

Similar problems slowed most of the division's artillery. As late as 2:45a.m. June 3, 1918, elements of the 12th Field artillery regiments had passed through the town of Montreuil

and were still several miles away from their designated position between La Voi du Chatel and Le Ferme Paris.⁷¹ Sergeant Joseph J. Gleeson of 'D' Battery, 12th Field artillery recorded in his diary of June 3, 1918, "Men and horses about exhausted, but we have to get up there quick. Hit the hay at about 6 bells; slept until 11:30; up and now ready to meet the Boche although very tired. No real sleep for four days. Went into position."⁷²

At dawn on June 3, 1918, the French initiated their anticipated counterattack with the few broken ranks that remained, but as quickly as it started, it fell apart as German guns shredded the columns as the French advanced in the open fields just beyond American lines. At 7:11 a.m. a French reconnaissance pilot dropped a message over friendly lines stating, "The French infantry could not pass the road one kilometer north of Lucy-le-Bocage because the Germans had this road spotted."⁷³ German units on the eastern portion fronting the second division continued to show signs of increased activity, noted by Lt. Lautier who flew a reconnaissance mission at 10:00 a.m. over Belleau Wood. The Lieutenant reported, "Some organizations have been noticed in the Bois de Belleau, just a few isolated vehicles in the rear lines of enemy."⁷⁴

The French assault centered on German forces north of the positions occupied by Lieutenant Colonel Wise's battalion. Behind them French batteries of 75-millimeter field guns began sending rounds at a low trajectory towards the enemy lines. Down the slopes along the horizon, small flashes and subsequent blossoming billows of smoke dotted the valley, were shortly followed by the thud of the explosion in a bizarre display placing Lieutenant Colonel Wise's men in the middle of the firing line. Along the slopes, exhausted and depleted French troops pressed forward with the promised yet wasteful counterattack. German fire incessantly tore into the French. A few men managed to get in close to the German lines, but were either cut down by the withering fire or retreated back to the lines. German artillery responded to French

batteries firing south of Wise's battalion, on the outskirts of Marigny and soon its position became inundated with exploding shells.

Lieutenant Colonel Wise had just come from his command post on the outer edge of town to inspect the situation along his battalion front when German shells began to fall intermittently throughout the village. Early into the advance, some of the French Chasseurs, a name given to the light infantry, began a steady retreat near Champillon.⁷⁵ Wise entered the woods where his 43rd and 18th companies had taken up position the day before. On the extreme left of the line, Captain Lester Wass's 18th company had dug in along the woods' northern face and reported German movement down in the valley to the north and throughout the clumps of woods 800 meters beyond the front. Several Marines of the 18th Company noticed to the distant enemy movement and open fired with steadily aimed shots. In front of the lines, Captain Wass cautiously led Wise to the edge of the exposed tree line and, through a pair of binoculars, pointed out a cut in the distant woods where the Germans could easily move their heavy Maxim machine guns as well as any small field pieces. Forward command posts also reported enemy movement in front of the battalion's line.⁷⁶

To the east of the 18th company, Captain Murray of the 43rd also spotted the Germans carelessly moving along the tree line down the slope. Private Walter Cook moved out of the cover of the woods to an advanced position in the tall wheat beyond the company's location. Once in place, Cook patiently watched through the waving stalks of wheat. Steadily he made out occasional shadows lurking in the tree line several hundred meters down slope. Placing the telescopic sights of his rifle on the distinguishable human form, he slowly squeezed the trigger until the weapon recoiled into his shoulder followed by the crack of the rifle's report, muffled in the open valley and faded with the distant sound of shots elsewhere along the line. As the

shadowy adversary crumbled to the forest floor, Private Cook quickly reworked the bolt of his rifle and scanned the tree line for another roaming German soldier. During the course of the afternoon, Cook remained out front and took down anywhere from twelve to eighteen Germans menacing the woods in the valley below.⁷⁷

Along the battalion lines, numerous Marines, some with scoped rifles, took careful shots at visible enemy troops in the valley below. The sniping accomplished by Marines of the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment attracted the attention of other members of the battalion as well as a few French troops. Second Lieutenants Chester H. Fraser and Fred H. Becker, United States Army officers assigned to the 18th Company moved to the east side of the battalion's line to witness the exhibition of marksmanship.⁷⁸

As the sniping occurred along the battalion lines, several German shells sailed by with an abrupt and uncanny scream and detonated in succession. Lieutenant Colonel Wise noticed German observation balloons surmounting the horizon. Shortly after he entered the lines, several more shells dropped in the woods and adjacent fields. Exploding just behind where he stood, shrapnel and concussions wounded several Marines. The woods shuttered under the violent barrage. Marines rushed for cover, huddling under the feeble protection of hastily dug holes. Lieutenant Colonel Wise later recalled shells indiscriminately soaring what seemed only a few feet over head into the woods. "Right over my head a shell burst. I saw a Marine a few feet away crumple up. A shell fragment had torn away his thigh."⁷⁹

Beyond the tree line occupied by the 43rd Company, a detachment of the battalion's intelligence section maintained a forward observation post. All day this position remained exposed to the stray rounds of German machine guns and now fell under the same artillery

pounding as the rest of the company. Private James Hodges, a former house painter from Detroit, ran from the open space between the company's line and the forward outpost. He suddenly tumbled to the ground in the wake of a detonation as shrapnel tore through the twenty-six year old who immediately fell dead in the tall grass.⁸⁰

While the rate of fire increased and rounds seemed to land almost on top of each other, Lieutenant Colonel Wise ran east to the neighboring company, also under the same heavy fire and suffering casualties. One of the wounded, Gunner James Gallivan, had a large portion of his upper thigh and knee torn away. Lieutenant Colonel Wise, witnessing litter bearers hastily evacuating Gallivan, noticed a pale whitish demeanor in the face of the stunned old veteran who burst out with a monologue of profanity to mask his agony as he was hurriedly taken out of the woods amidst exploding shells.⁸¹ Fragments of hot steel twirled through the air with a hideous sounding whine. Those that missed their mark succeeded in piercing the nerve of helpless Marines desperately trying to tear at the earth and get below it. Dirt, twigs and soil soared through the air in a melee of dust clouds and debris coupled with the deafening concussions that accompanied each incoming round. The experience penetrated beyond the auditory senses and into the very core of one's psyche, even for those too distant to experience the shriek of lethal steel chunks coursing through the air. The long desired and likely unanticipated distant confrontation with the enemy had abruptly materialized for the men of the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment.

For many it was more than they had bargained for. It was a baptism of modern-age warfare more terrifying than they had anticipated. Two other Marines of the 43rd company were wounded and one killed during the barrage. One man, Private John M. Russell, convulsed so uncontrollably following the incessant storm of artillery fire that he was taken to the rear as a

victim of shell shock.⁸² The increasingly intense volume of artillery directed on the battalion's position suggested German balloons had spotted the commotion occurring in Lieutenant Colonel Wise's line.

As the onslaught ensued and gradually dwindled, Lieutenant Colonel Wise continued his reckless journey further east over to the position occupied by Captain Blanchfield's 55th Company. Blanchfield tentatively held their section of the line, which spread into the concealed confines of the farm grounds where men also hunkered down in their rapidly dug holes. This area offered no fortified protection and German shells had long sent men scrambling for their lives. In front of the company's position was a forward observation post that offered a favorable field of fire as well as advantageous vantage point. This position, established by First Lieutenant Lemuel Shepherd, was several hundred yards in front of Les Mares Farm, upslope from Hill 165. Earlier that morning, Lieutenant Shepherd sought permission from Captain Blanchfield to take several men forward to claim this advantageous position. Once in place, Lieutenant Shepherd left a sergeant in charge of the command post and moved back to Les Mares Farm, where he remained into the late afternoon. Lieutenant Shepherd's role was to rove from the main line to this outpost with the latest observations. French Chasseurs still held a position at the farm. A French Major in charge of the remnants of the two French battalions gave Wise a relatively bleak outlook. According to Lieutenant Colonel Wise, the French Major declared, "It looks blue. The whole German army has broken through. I don't think we will be able to stop them. What are you going to do?" Lieutenant Colonel Wise sternly replied, "Our orders are to stick."⁸³

During the bombardment of Colonel Wise's lines the French counterattack, nearly a kilometer to the north, had come under extreme fire further down the valley. The withering German barrage cutting into the French ranks also soared into the lines at Les Mares, and the

rounds sailed overhead on the crest of the ridge where Les Mares was located. The farm, situated on the high ground, resembled a hornet's nest as German rounds zipped and cracked from distant machine gun barrels far down the ridge. Gunfire and artillery rounds landed along the defilade south of the buildings sailing over Wise as he moved from the shelter of the farm. He recalled sprinting back to his command post at Marigny to avoid becoming a victim of stray German shells and stray machine gun rounds soaring all around him.⁸⁴

German shells also targeted the town of Marigny. Buildings that had stood for centuries shattered under the German bombardment, a spectacle Wise watched helplessly from the huddled seclusion provided by the cemetery wall at the northeast edge of the village. Just north of the village, the battalion aid station operated under the command of Navy commander Lester Pratt, also under heavy shellfire. The facilities proximity to the line occupied by Wise's battalion was crucial to getting the wounded treated and evacuated to a hospital. Despite the dangers, the steady flow of wounded could be treated almost immediately.⁸⁵

Once at his command post, with regimental phone lines operational Wise called Lieutenant Colonel Feland's headquarters located near a rock quarry 300 meters northwest of Wise. During his visit to the front earlier in the afternoon, Wise learned that no contact had been made with the 6th Marine Regiment to the east or the 23rd Army Infantry regiment in the west. According to Lieutenant Colonel Wise this detail caused quite a bit of concern among the 5th Marine Regiment since every available soldier and Marine was already holding an extremely tenuous position on the front and no other troops were readily available to secure this weak point. Wise was asked if his Marines would be able to hold the line in place with the men he had available and he promised the regimental command staff his battalion would hold their current position at all costs.⁸⁶ During the conversation, Neville advised Wise to find the extreme left of

the regiment east of his position. If a gap still existed, Neville advised Wise to extend his already thin line toward it.⁸⁷ In addition to his exposed flanks, Wise still lacked significant machine gun support along his sector of the front. Several machine guns were in route to bolster the very few guns operating up and down the line, but they too came under heavy artillery fire as they converged on the lively front.

Private Einar A. Wahl of the 73rd Machine Gun Company had arrived in the village of La Voi du Chatel earlier that morning and, following an exhaustive trek to the front. The company was allotted a few hours sleep before continuing north to take up a position in line. German shells interrupted their already restless nap. Private Wahl recalled:

Managed to sleep for a couple hours, but the roar from artillery and machine guns in front became increasingly heavy as the day advanced that rest was impossible. Stretchers with wounded French Marines began coming up from the lines. Ambulance after ambulance dashed and dashed back again. We realized that we were at last in the thick of things. About noon a couple of high-explosive shells dropped near us. Then another and another. We were caught in an enemy artillery barrage that lasted about two hours. Our first casualty occurred then; Corporal Johnson was hit by a piece of shell through the back, and died a few minutes afterwards. We sought shelter everywhere, falling flat on our faces as we heard shells come screeching down. We just had to lie flat wondering if the next was going to get us. One shell landed about fifteen feet from me and exploded. I heard a scream at the same time and looked up. It had landed in a hole where two chaps from another company were lying. Several of us rushed over to the spot and pulled them out. They were horribly cut up, but not dead. A horse tied to a tree about five feet away was killed instantly. I can't begin to describe my state of mind-you will have to imagine it. We were getting our first real taste of the horrors of war.⁸⁸

Four Hotchkiss machine guns of the 81st Machine Gun Company quickly arrived to strengthen the battalion's line. They moved west, the left side of the line where Captain Lloyd William's 51st Company took up a position. This part of the line also fell under the barrage. On arrival, the gun crews carried the heavy tripods of the machine guns out beyond the cover of

the tree line and set up a forward position. When the German barrage targeted the 51st Company's sector, these machine guns were caught in the open. Believing the barrage foreshadowed an infantry assault, several men stayed with the guns as the intensity of the incoming artillery fire increased. Detonating overhead, shell fragments of all sizes rained down on the Marines out in the open. Suddenly a shell detonated near one of the guns instantly killing Private Floyd H. Deckro. Three more men were wounded by the heavy volume of incoming fire and lay helpless as the ferocity of exploding shells forced the remaining machine gun crews to lay flat on the ground.⁸⁹

As shells fell on the 51st Company, the French withdrawal through the American lines drew a withering barrage of enfilading machine gun fire. A stray round caught Private William Theodore Hayden in the open, tearing through the twenty-one year olds left groin, luckily missing the femoral artery. Hayden was immediately bandaged amid the snap of bullets overhead. Artillery exploded with increasing frequency. Shells continued to drop, one on top of the next while Marines continued to maintain their positions. Moments into the volley, twenty-two year old Corporal Karl W. Locke fell, severely wounded out in the open. Immediately, three Marines rushed out into the open amidst the deafening pound of incoming rounds and deadly shrapnel to rescue the gravely wounded man. Twenty-two year old Sergeant James Henry Parsons and two other men grabbed Corporal Locke and made a cumbersome dash to the shelter of a hastily dug hole. Another shell exploded nearby, killing the already wounded Corporal Locke. The concussion threw the other three Marines to the ground. Miraculously, Sergeant Parsons was untouched; the other two men were severely wounded. Private Hayden, his painful wound hastily bandaged, hobbled out to help drag the wounded to safety.⁹⁰

The French counterattack had long since ended as the German guns increased their range to catch the fleeing French. A heightened intensity of the barrage alluded to the Marines that an enemy ground assault might follow. When the salvo momentarily died out along his company's position, Captain Williams sent an urgent message to Lieutenant Colonel Wise stating, "All French troops on our right have fallen back, leaving a gap on our right. Two platoons of the 95th Company have reported to fill the gap. Request that additional men be ordered to fill the gap at once."⁹¹

The mass French withdrawal put the 2nd division into increasingly direct contact with the Germans, especially near Captain William's company. This location also held the 5th section of the 15th Machine Gun Company manning a Hotchkiss machine gun. Shrub and vegetation in this area was thick enough to keep the crew well concealed, and Gunnery Sergeant Carl H. Horton found an opening in the undergrowth that offered good observation and an optimum field of fire. The detachment, which included Privates Maurice Jackman, Hood L. Haynie and Jason W. Thurston, had been in position since the day before. Heavy enemy activity that afternoon put the men on an anxious alert. Occasionally, rounds snapped overhead as German gunners tried to feel out their position. Private Haynie recalled, "Sgt. Horton kept peering over the shrubbery every little while to see if he could spot the enemy that was firing." After gazing through the opening at one point, he straightened up a bit from his crouched position to roll a cigarette. As soon as he stood, a muffled snapping sound rippled through the air. The robust gunnery sergeant indolently wilted to the ground. A sniper's bullet had entered Horton's left side near the shoulder, severing his spinal cord, deflecting through the lung and exiting the right side of his torso. Horton lay on the ground wide-eyed, bleeding profusely, and gasping for air. His men rushed to his side as he lay there paralyzed from the waist down. Litter bearers arrived

immediately and rolled his flaccid body onto a stretcher, rushing him to a field dressing station nearby.⁹²

During the retreat of French troops through the line later the evening of June 3, 1918, a French Major approached the company's second in command, Captain William O. Corbin, and told the young officer the Germans were not far behind and to pull his line back. Corbin incredulously ignored the order. Thinking the young American did not understand his broken English, the French officer wrote on a piece of paper a direct order to retreat. Corbin took the message to Captain Williams. As his eyes followed the hastily scribbled text with bewilderment and disbelief, Captain Williams, according to Lieutenant Colonel Feland and First Lieutenant Joseph A. Hagen, reacted with astonishment, and exclaimed, "Retreat, hell we just got here."⁹³ Amid exploding shells and the haunting drone of stray and concentrated small arms fire, William's briefly discussed the situation with one of his platoon leaders, First Lieutenant Joseph A. Hagen. Captain William's then summoned twenty-nine-year old Private John Francis Russell to use his back as a desk top to write the following message to Lieutenant Colonel Wise, "The French major gave Captain Corbin written orders to fall back - I have countermanded the order- kindly see that the French do not shorten their artillery range- 82nd and 84th companies are on their way to fill the gap on the right of this company- Lloyd W. Williams, Captain U.S.M.C."⁹⁴

West of Captain Williams' 51st Company, the increased concentration of artillery inflicting shock upon the 51st Company continued at varying levels of intensity at Les Mares Farm and Blanchfield's 55th Company. During the bombardment, a volley of shells crept toward the small cluster of farm buildings. Lieutenant Shepherd's detachment of men holding a forward post, in place since the morning, was enacted under the idea that they would fall back once the artillery fire increased in frequency, a sign that an attack would follow. Lieutenant

Shepherd, under the permission of Captain Blanchfield, took his orderly and inched back out towards this forward position just as enemy artillery rained down. The barrage fell dangerously close to Lieutenant Shepherd and one of his orderlies. The concussion of incoming rounds swept the ground like a violent windstorm of unprecedented intensity. Ducking and dropping to the ground along the way, Lieutenant Shepherd recalled one shell slamming into the ground about six feet in front of them tossing dirt forward; it did not explode, a miraculous stroke of luck. Once the barrage passed them, the two men finally reached the beleaguered outpost of men cowering amidst the incessant pounding of enemy artillery that gradually slacked in intensity. In the distance, figures obscured by the drifting haze of smoke sifting across the slope came into view.⁹⁵ Lieutenant Shepherd's outpost, fourteen strong, watched as evenly spaced rows of German helmets bobbed in and out of view a kilometer away along the irregularly-sloped ground.

The French assault earlier in the day had virtually broken and most of the surviving Chasseurs had made their way back through the lines held by Wise's battalion. The enemy artillery had long slackened in intensity which meant that the enemy infantry would more than likely be on the assault. Several hundred meters back at Les Mares Farm and in the eastern portion of Bois de Veully the men of the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment watched the columns of enemy troops close on high ground centered on the farm (See Appendix C). Some men moved out of the shelter of the farm buildings across a narrow farm trail into the fronting field where they laid prone. Other men hunkered down in their fighting holes as shouting men relayed the order to hold fire until commanded. Private Paul Bonner, a twenty-year old clerk from New York City recalled,

We ran up a road toward a hill and as we reached the top, I saw my commanding officer, Captain John Blanchfield, standing at the side of the road. ‘The devils are coming on,’ he shouted. ‘You have been waiting for them for a year; now go get them.’ He was shouting in his Irish brogue and his blood was up. He thrilled every one of us. We ran across a wheat field and dropped in it.⁹⁶



Appendix C. Les Mares Farm

Lieutenant Colonel Wise had just left the shelter of his command post along the cemetery wall at Marginy and moved up the road towards the farm after the latest barrage had thinned out. “I reached the crest and stood still. A long way off over those grain fields I could see thin lines of infantry advancing. I realized that I couldn’t give an order that would be of any

help. Everything to be done had been done. I stood there and watched them come . . . I was frozen, but fascinated.”⁹⁷

Further southeast of Les Mares Farm in the village of La Voi-du-Chatel, Colonel Catlin and his regimental adjutant; Major Frank E. Evans watched the German advance towards Les Mares farm from a second-story window. According to Colonel Catlin the Germans moved down a gradual slope and advanced by platoons from the north and northeast. The German counterattack had already driven right through whatever isolated French soldiers remained near Hill 165. The Chasseurs who survived their vanquished assault made a hasty withdrawal, stopping only for moments to get off a few shots, all in hopes of hindering the slow and steady pace of the enemy.⁹⁸

Once the enemy came into view of the 55th Company in front of the few farm buildings at Les Mares, they allowed the Germans to approach within relatively close range. Private Bonner recalled, “We all looked to see that our rifles were loaded. From somewhere along the road we got the command to fire. Sharpshooters only, I thought I heard them say, but everybody fired.”⁹⁹

According to Evans, once the firing began, it was incessant.¹⁰⁰ The sound of pulsating American machine guns pierced the open fields with a haunting undulation echoing across the valley. Shells burst along the slope searching for advancing columns of German troops. A sudden flash of white smoke appeared; a second or two later a dull crushing thud as the crash of detonation became audible to the distant spectators. Occasionally, a blossom of white smoke would engulf part of the German column as a shell found its mark. Rifle fire from the line of

Lieutenant Colonel Wise's men as well as heavy machine gun fire from the Hotchkiss guns tore into unsuspecting German soldiers in a chaotic spectacle.¹⁰¹

According to Private Bonner, "Those Germans just melted away. Whole columns went down and the others scattered to the right and left. They were utterly stunned and surprised, and there was not an answering shot."¹⁰² While the 55th Company's main line received little return-fire, the advance observation post of Lieutenant Shepherd's detachment had quite a different experience. From the confines of the little knoll where he established a forward operating post, Lieutenant Shepherd and his small detachment watched as the enemy closed the gap. "We held our fire until they got within 300 or 400 yards. We had no machine guns, nor any artillery."¹⁰³ To gain a better view without exposure, Lieutenant Shepherd leaned against a tree at the top of the knoll. Shepherd vividly recalled the incident.

By now the Germans had worked their way around the hill. We opened up with everything we had. They opened up with a machine gun they had worked into position. The first blast hit me in the neck. It spun me around. My first reaction was to see if I could spit. I wanted to see if the bullet had punctured my throat and figured if I could spit I was alright. I could spit.¹⁰⁴

The encroaching German formations withered, and eventually the few survivors made a hasty retreat by dusk.

As darkness set in on the evening of June 3, 1918 men of Private Jackson's 95th Company slogged through the thick woods to the east of Lieutenant Colonel Wise's battalion to close the gap between the two units. Private Jackson remembered stumbling upon the bodies of dead Frenchmen sprawled along the forest floor in the darkness as his company spread out to form a line. One Marine, Sergeant Wilbur Summerlin, was "ransacking their packs, and I don't know what else, to get whatever suited his fancy."¹⁰⁵ Private Jackson described his initial shock at watching this. "I was amazed at his coolness and unconcern in doing what it took me weeks to

learn to do, and then with a great sense of relief when I had finished the job.”¹⁰⁶ As Private Jackson trudged away from this sight, he came upon yet another ghastly scene. He wrote in his memoirs:

Before I knew it I was at the edge of an opening in the bushes and trees, and at my feet was a large hole six or eight feet across. In the hole were the mangled bodies of three Frenchmen. Against the back of the hole on the side nearest me leaned one of the bodies, nearly bolt upright, with the head and neck almost gone. The body of one of the other men presented a sight scarcely less ghastly. The combined odor of the high explosive gas, which still lingered there, and the decaying bodies, sent me hurriedly away.¹⁰⁷

By dawn the American artillery was operational in the rear of the line greatly strengthening their presence by providing firepower to a thinly-held sector. According to the diary of Sergeant Joseph J. Gleeson of ‘D’ battery 2nd Battalion 12th Field Artillery, the French 75-millimeter guns began to fire a barrage at 3:00 a.m. on the morning of June 4, 1918. They maintained their steady fire until 9:00 a.m. According to Private Warren Jackson, German guns were also very active. Once the guns of the 2nd Division commenced fire, their shells fell short.

Few of the shells went more than a hundred yards beyond our lines, and some hit in our positions. Knowing the experienced Germans outnumbered us, continually harassed by their artillery fire, and then to have our own guns threatening us with annihilation every moment-the anguish we suffered could not be described. What in the world could be the cause of this bombardment by our own guns? Why was the range not raised? We asked one another the questions in vain.¹⁰⁸

The German probe along the line waned under the fire by the Americans. The French, all but annihilated, managed to buy the 2nd Division precious time. Unbeknownst to the French and Americans, the seemingly successful offensive of the German Army was very much a blunder. Ludendorff’s ability to launch additional offensives elsewhere, which had been his initial plan, failed because the Germans committed too many resources to the present drive west of Chateau Thierry. The drive was initiated under the pretense that it was to serve as a diversion to and

when the first vestiges of success were felt, Ludendorff decided to press on with the offensive. “A tactical distraction had become a great strategic victory,” said General Robert L. Bullard in describing the initial phase of the German offensive.¹⁰⁹

The decision to continue to exploit the initial success of the drive diverted supplies meant for other planned offensives. When the pace of the attack slowed down, they continued to feed precious provisions on continuously congested thoroughfares, creating immense supply problems and slowing the pace. The corps commander, General Von Conta, realized his units were worn down. Evidence of this appears in official German documents when he sent out a memorandum to his officers stating:

We are compelled to temporarily assume the defensive, after positions most suitable for this purpose are captured. I insist that all commanders inform their troops, leaving no doubt in their minds, that our attack up to this time had passed far beyond the objectives that were first assigned, and had achieved far greater success than had been anticipated. The offensive spirit must be maintained even though a temporary lull in the attack seems to exist.¹¹⁰

Casualties had mounted from the beginning of the offensive on May 27, 1918. Adding additional mere burden was the hardened resistance by the French and American line. The flanks of the German 7th Army's drive had slowed significantly at Rheims and Soissons, allowing the center of General Von Boehn's 7th Army, consisting of General Von Conta's corps facing the American 2nd Division, to advance into an increasingly narrow front now thirty miles deep and lacking any protection on the flanks. Supplying this region was arduous. According to Crown Prince Kaiser Wilhelm, “the difficulties of supply, which could only be brought up to the divisions engaged in that attack by motor and horse transport, made themselves felt to an increasing degree.”¹¹¹

Since resources used to sustain the Chemin des Dames front were intended to aid the offensive of the German 18th Army on the British front led Kaiser Wilhelm to declare:

In view of this situation my Army Group staff as early as June 3 opposed the continuation of the offensive [Chemin des Dames] in the form of open warfare. The attack must not be resumed except after systematic preparation and then only at a particularly favorable point, or in parts of the line where local straightening out was necessary. The resumption of the offensive in a southwesterly direction was to await the result of the attack on the southern front of the Eighteenth Army.¹¹²

Ludendorff's offensive resorted to a leap frog advance, applying pressure from one front to the next. At that moment General Von Boehn's 7th Army was to stand at ease, while the 18th Army in the west made its leap forward on a different front. Major General A.D. Von Unruh, Chief of the General Staff, 4th Reserve Corps, stated

Though we told ourselves and our men, 'on to Paris,' we knew this was not to be . . . Our casualties were increasingly alarming; ammunition was running short and the problem of supply, in view of the large demands, became more and more difficult. It became all too clear that actions so stubbornly contested and involving us in such formidable losses would never enable us to capture Paris. In truth the brilliant offensive had petered out.¹¹³

In reality, this was a very limited engagement; something noted the author Robert Asprey who stated:

In terms of comparative casualties the two-day action appeared relatively insignificant-it cost the Germans of Corps Conta just over 200 casualties, the Americans of the Second Division slightly more than 250. Such small actions, however, can sometimes lend a war a new direction: a German breakthrough would have greatly altered the subsequent fighting, undoubtedly to the enemy's benefit. Contrarily, his failure marked the turning point of the southern offensive.¹¹⁴

Contemporary examination of this phase of the battle portrays the American stance in the region around Les Mares Farm as a desperate linchpin that plugged the German pathway to

Paris. Author Edward Lengel, wrote of the engagement, “Together they held a six-mile front, stopping a heavy German assault on June 4 that brought the enemy to within fifty miles of Paris, legend has it that when a French officer told a Marine captain to retreat, the American snarled: ‘Retreat, hell. We just got here.’”¹¹⁵ This largely ignores the weakened condition of Ludendorff’s forces.

From this moment, subsequent actions by American forces were against a defensive German flank, not the apex of the German thrust: a major and crucial factor for placing the battle that followed into context. This development is noteworthy as the American advance would disrupt miniscule expansions of the newly postured German defense flank. This information was unknown to the Americans or French, yet their stance in this region went down in history as the primary factor stopping the German drive on Paris. The assault that occurred two days later, one donned in lore and legend, more than anything revealed to the American military the true cost of offensive operations in twentieth-century warfare providing United States troops with a horrifyingly unique and unprecedented experience.

Chapter III

Learning the Ways of 20th Century Warfare

The suspension of German offensive operations in the region west of Chateau Thierry does not appear in any of the available records to be known by either the French or Americans. Nonetheless, two developments had greatly improved the situation for the Americans and French. First, a fresh division of French troops arrived to relieve the extreme west flank, reducing the front of the 2nd Division and resulting in better liaison and communications. Second, American artillery and machine gun support had arrived in significant numbers, strengthening its defensive capability of the region. Despite the large American presence in this region, the Second Division still remained under the command of French General Jean Degoutte's XXI Corps and all major command decisions over this sector fell under his scrutiny.

On June 5, 1918, General Degoutte decided his forces would launch a counterattack against enemy positions the following day. The high ground the Germans attained on June 4, 1918 provided a commanding view of the territory below. Additional German assaults were possible from this region, a dangerous factor that needed consideration. Despite improvement in the situation, much of the 2nd Division was still shifting in an effort to solidify the weak points of its positions. Reinforcement of the sector continued well into the night. Phone lines remained largely inoperable for almost every unit from the regimental level down to the company and communication came by runner, greatly prolonging movement of troops. General Degoutte's orders for counterattack came amidst the chaotic rearrangement of the line.

At 3:00p.m. June 5, 1918, French headquarters issued the order for the French 167th Division to advance north in conjunction with the west wing of the Second Division. The

Americans' objective was to move with the French and seize the elongated ridge denoted Hill 142 north of the town of Champillon.¹ Orders filtered down to the Marine Brigade and Brigadier General James Harbord was tasked with designating the unit to undertake the assault. As message runners scrambled along the lines locating necessary officers, orders for the attack were greatly delayed. Finally at 10:25 p.m. June 5, 1918 the headquarters staff of the Marine Brigade sent word of the attack to the designated unit. The 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, commanded by Major Julius Turrill, would carry out the assault scheduled to begin at 3:45a.m. June 6, 1918.²

Due to the earlier panic that gripped Lieutenant Colonel Wise over the sector held by his battalion days earlier, Major Turrill's men had been dispatched to help strengthen the line. On the afternoon of June 5, Major Turrill had only two of his four companies in line and was awaiting relief by elements of the freshly arrived French division. Situated in the town of Marigny, nearly two kilometers from where the attack was to take place, Major Turrill recalled, "Then about one or two o'clock on the morning of the 6th we got orders to go up and make an attack on hill 142."³ Major Turrill had only a few hours in the darkness of night to assemble 975 men of his battalion and move them to the jump-off point from which the assault would begin. The objective had not been reconnoitered. Two of his companies were in line several hundred meters north scattered in a thick patch of woods making only half of his battalion ready to assemble for the pending attack.⁴

Major Turrill's two available companies in of the town of Marigny formed and moved out in the predawn hours of June 6, 1918. Marching through fields they came toward the outskirts of the village of Champillon. Here the companies came to a halt. None of the designated machine gunners sent to support the battalion's assault had yet reported to Major

Turrill. Only the 15th Machine Gun Company was available to assist. The other had not arrived in position.⁵ Only two of the battalion's four companies stood poised for orders; the other two had not been relieved from their position nearly two kilometers away.

Captain Jonas Platt, a replacement who arrived only hours before, stood among his men and awaited the next set of instructions and awaiting for food to be brought up to the line. Platt's introduction to front line duty granted him no spare moments to acclimate to his new unit. He recalled the pandemonium that morning.

Just then the captain stumbled toward me with orders to put the company into combat formation. We formed into a bulbous group in the darkness. No one was depending on supplies, for they were not coming up. Everything was too frenzied, too new, too hurriedly organized to hope for them. We formed to go through fields, a ruined village and then into woods, where we deployed⁶

According to Captain John Thomason, "The platoons came out of the woods as dawn was getting gray. The light was strong when they advanced into the open wheat, now all starred with dewy poppies, red as blood."⁷ Gunnery Sergeant Gerald Finnegan, a member of the 49th Company, used the tip of his bayonet to force open a salvaged can of salmon and skewered the meat with his blade to hastily devour the morning meal. "When you are quite through with your refreshments, you can damn well fix that bayonet and get on with the war!," belted out an enraged lieutenant, who caught the Finnegan consuming what turned out to be his final meal.⁸

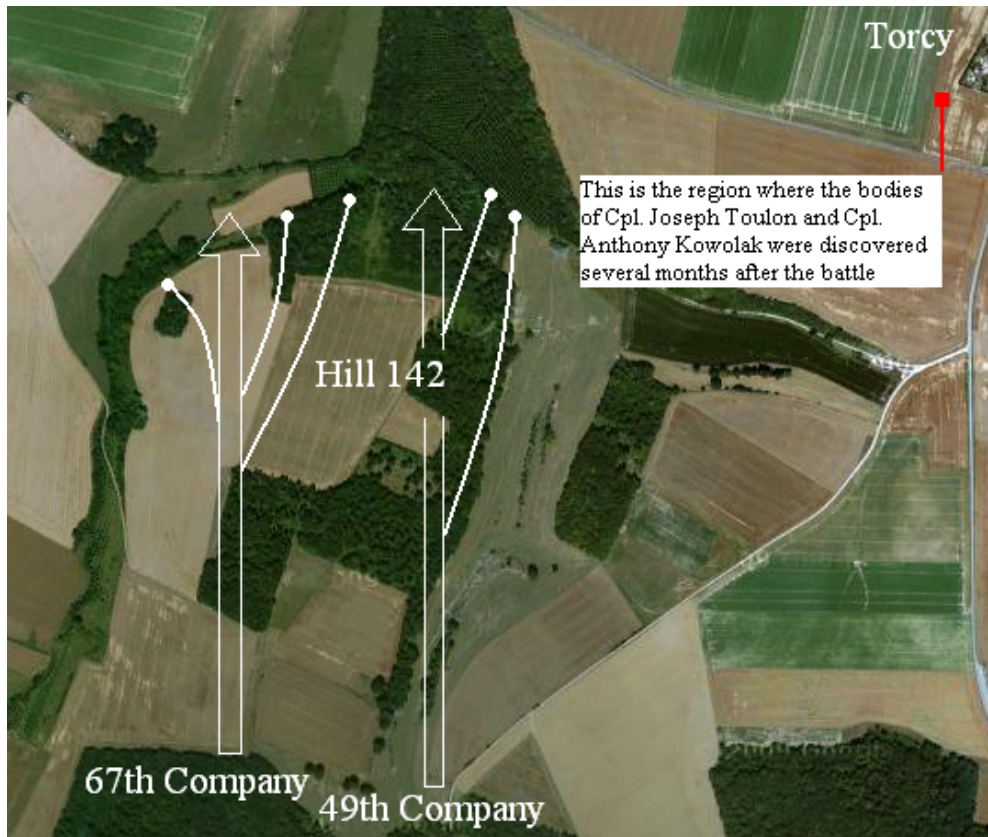
The two available companies fanned out, and according to Major Turrill, "I had the 49th Company, Captain George Hamilton, on the right and First Lieutenant Orlando Crowther commanding the 67th Company on the left."⁹ Before Major Turrill could signal attack, his men were twenty-five meters past the jump-off point and beyond the concealment of the woods. Faced with the crucial decision of letting the attack commence or waiting until his full force arrived, Turrill gave the order to proceed since the battalion's supporting machine guns were set

to fire a preliminary volley timed exactly at the moment of attack.¹⁰ As whistles signaled the advance, Private Walter H. Smith of the 49th Company recalled:

At four a.m. we went over or rather charged forward since there were no trenches to speak of and the fighting was all in the open or in the woods. There wasn't a bit of hesitation from any man. All went forward in an even line. You had no heart for fear at all. Fight-fight and get the Germans was your only thought. Personal danger didn't concern you in the least and you didn't care.¹¹

As the men advanced beyond the tree line into the open field, Major Turrill came up to watch his men amble down slope into the wheat. Another dark looming wood stood a couple hundred meters across the open field (Appendix D). Behind the advancing Marines, minimal machine gun support chattered away in search of the German positions. Major Turrill recalled, "There was a barrage from some machine guns; I remained in the jump-off trench until the fourth wave of the two companies disappeared into the woods."¹²

The apex of the Marine attack on the hill was a rather weakened position for the Germans who established a liaison on the hill between two German regiments. The attack by the Marines centered on a position held by one German platoon. Across the field, in the western edge of the facing woods, Second Lieutenant Bezon, commanding that platoon in the 9th Company of the 460th German Infantry Regiment, heard the distant whistle across the field, signaling the American advance. According to Bezon, ". . . we were ready."¹³ He witnessed the formations of Americans emerging out of the distant tree line and immediately signaled for artillery support by firing three red flares into the sky.¹⁴



Appendix D. Map of attack on Hill 142

As the two companies of Marines crept further across the open field, the fronting tree line came alive with a blaze of Maxim machine gun fire. Immediately men in the first wave of the 67th Company dropped in the wheat as rounds snapped violently all around them. The initial burst caught the Marines off guard and according to Second Lieutenant Bezon, caused the Americans to fade into “disordered masses.”¹⁵ Private Andrew Champion of the 67th Company was an assistant gunner on an automatic rifle team. As the German machine guns swept the field, Private Champion saw his gunner, Private Harry Y. Flynn slump into the tall wheat as bullets tore through his abdomen. Before he could react, the same burst wounded Private Champion, sending him to the ground. His friend, Private Flynn, painfully wounded, lay nearby and died about fifteen minutes later.¹⁶ Private John L. Carver recalled the horror when he saw

his friend, Private Russell J. Wakefield, killed as machine gun bullets shattered his skull. “He was one of my pals and I was right along side of him,” said Carver.¹⁷

Men in the 67th Company fell wounded and dead by the dozens. Private George E. Fesler advanced toward the distant tree line with his platoon. When he peered from under the brim of his helmet he saw his comrade, Private Walter L. Haynes, fall dead as a bullet passed through his forehead.¹⁸ Private Fesler then saw Corporal William J. Flaherty’s dead body lying nearby.¹⁹ Casualties in Private Joseph M. Baker’s platoon were inflicted by one of the three German guns in the nearby tree line. Members of the platoon scattered for cover. Private Baker made a dash through the meadow at an angle towards the muzzle flashes emanating from the facing woods. Dropping in the wheat, Baker took careful aim and fired his rifle at the machine gun crew nearby. One of his rounds killed the enemy gunner. Several men in Baker’s platoon continued to advance on the tree line. Private Baker repeatedly worked the bolt of his weapon until he had exhausted all five rounds. He sprang up and began to close the distance on the machine gun from the side. Distracted by the chaos out in front, the remaining German crewmen evidently did not see Private Baker approaching until he stood nearly on top of them thrusting his bayonet into the remaining enemy, killing all of them.²⁰

Simultaneously, Captain George Hamilton’s 49th Company in the east did not fare much better. “Hadn’t moved fifty yards when they cut loose at us from the woods ahead- more machine guns than I’d ever heard before,” recalled Hamilton in a letter home weeks after the incident.²¹ Captain Hamilton maneuvered among his men urging them to get on their feet and press forward toward the tree line. As the pulsating whip of machine gun fire sailed indiscriminately over the fields, the wounded lay writhing in the wheat. Slowly and collectively small groups made small advances for the tree line. Sergeant William Van Train charged

through the field that morning with Hamilton and witnessed the ghastly efficiency of the machine guns as he saw Privates Edmund J. LaBonte, Henry Penney and David Tartikoff all cut down by the murderous fire. Private LaBonte was shot through the head and died instantly. Private Joe G. Oliver recalled his good friend Private James McQuiddy slumping into the wheat after a bullet had passed through his abdomen.²² Suddenly, a piercing shriek added to the crescendo of gunfire as German shells began to drop in the field.

Before the Marines could infiltrate the woods in great numbers, German troops decided to relinquish their position, fleeing the woods on Second Lieutenant Bezon's orders. As they filtered back toward their main line, they were mistaken for Americans and came under fire from their own guns.²³ Several of Lieutenant Bezon's men did not hear the order to pull back and remained in the first tree line where most were either killed or captured. One German sergeant held off the onrushing Americans with grenades as another man took the last functioning German machine gun and withdrew out of the woods. Even though they inflicted heavy casualties, German soldiers in the first patch of woods were a mere picket line sent out as observers. The primary German defenses stood at the other end of a second wheat field in a fronting tree line.²⁴

The 49th Company battled their way deeper into the woods. Captain Platt remembered, Machine guns rattled and dropped. There we started to form again, while I tried to count my men. Suddenly a machine gun far ahead opened up spitefully, but there came no whine of bullets. Inasmuch as I had the only two hand grenades in my unit, I crawled ahead a bit to see what was happening. There, grouped about a captured German machine gun, were ten of my missing men having the time of their lives, banging away with this captured gun at anything that looked boche.²⁵

The front elements of Captain Hamilton's group in the west edge of the assault pressed through to the north side of the initial patch of woods where, according to Hamilton, "we came to an open field-a wheat field full of red poppies-and here we caught hell. Again it was a case of

rushing across the open and getting into the woods.”²⁶ Captain John Thomason recalled one unidentified officer, pinned down in the first wheat field, and stuck his head just above the stalks of wheat for better observation. The officer sent a corporal and his squad to maneuver around one machine gun.

‘Get far enough past that flank gun, now, close as you can and rush- we’ll keep it busy.’ The corporal judged that he was far enough and raised with a yell, his squad leaping up with him. He was not past the flank; two guns swung that way, and cut the squad down like a grass-hook levels a clump of weeds. . . They lay there for days, eight Marines in a dozen yards, face down on their rifles.²⁷

One squad of Marines from the 49th Company made it inside the woods and immediately drew the attention of a German machine gun, which killed and wounded several men of the group. Private John Kukoski unflinchingly charged toward the enemy gun alone with his bayonet-tipped rifle. The enemy, completely taken by surprise, threw their hands up in the air and surrendered to the twenty-nine year old private.²⁸

The Marines of the 49th Company encountered the 10th Company of the 462nd German Infantry. Shattered by the sudden assault, the company of Germans broke but an adjacent company situated in the woods across the ravine to the east of the hill opened fire with several machine guns and quickly took a toll on the 49th Company.²⁹ Captain Jonas Platt made a dash for the tree line, lost his footing and stumbled to the ground. He eventually caught up with the rest of his company who advanced quickly through the fire-swept field. “When I reached the woods I was the whole command! The rest were gone, planted and hidden so effectively that even I couldn’t locate them. Gradually I rounded them up and tied them to one spot with emphatic remarks.”³⁰

Captain Hamilton advanced with his company through the second forest. He later admitted, “After going through this second wood we were really at our objective, but I was

looking for an unimproved road which showed up on the map. We now had the Germans pretty well on the run except a few machine gun nests. I was anxious to get to that road, so pushed forward with the men I had with me-one platoon.”³¹ The objective, the second patch of woods, bordered an unpaved road, but the maps used did not show this road.³² Hamilton led his remaining men down the slope of the hill into the open pasture beyond the objective and on all sides machine guns opened up with devastating results. “I lost heavily here I came out unscratched. I was pushing ahead with an automatic rifle team and didn’t notice that most of the platoon had swerved off to the left to root out the machine guns.”³³

Second Lieutenant James M. Garvey, leading the remnants of a platoon of the 49th Company, advanced into an open field beyond the second patch of woods. Dotted with wood piles, the area was infested with German machine gun nests. Private Robert D. Morgan, carrying a Chauchat automatic rifle, pushed forward with Second Lieutenant Garvey along the wood piles. “Here, Morgan,” he said, “I’ll poke my tin hat around this side, and you watch and see if you can get the Chauchat on them.”³⁴ As Garvey stuck the helmet out something violently struck it from the tip of his rifle, causing the weapon to vibrate sending a fierce tingle through his fingers. Corporal Morgan let loose with the automatic rifle. Seconds later, an odd noise from just above the crouching Second Lieutenant caused him to look up. He watched Corporal Morgan slump toward the ground with his hand still grasping the pistol grip of the rifle, which descended butt-stock first. Corporal Morgan’s helmet slid from his face to reveal that a volley of enemy bullets blew his head off from the eyes up.³⁵

Captain Hamilton’s men had gone beyond their objective and now found themselves mixed with the Germans. Fighting quickly developed into hand-to-hand combat. Running down the slope, Private Jessie Tompkins came face to face with an enemy combatant. He immediately

shot the German soldier as another appeared. Private Tomkins immediately shot him. Almost simultaneously he felt a blow from behind when a third enemy soldier delivered a vicious strike with his rifle. Corporal Joseph C. Toulson immediately came to Private Tompkin's aid and thrust his bayonet into the opposing German and, without hesitation, continued to sprint down the slope.³⁶ Corporal Ambrose Hughes found himself engaged with an enemy soldier and suffered a ghastly wound through the groin that severed his femoral artery. He lay wounded bleeding profusely as the company vigorously pressed the attack on the enemy.³⁷

Fighting developed beyond the second patch of woods but several Americans remained engaged inside these woods and German infantry and machine guns concealed in nearly every tree and entrenched in covered pits continued inflicting heavy casualties on the 49th Company. Men seemed to wilt to the ground with every bit of ground obtained. Sergeant William Van Train witnessed Sergeant Arthur Russell's violent death when a bullet smashed through his head.³⁸ Private William H. Smith wrote,

We reached the edge of a small wooded area and there encountered some of the Hun infantry. Then it became a matter of shooting at mere human targets. But the Germans soon detected us and we became the objects of their heavy fire. We received emphatic orders at this time to come back. German machine guns were everywhere; in trees and in small ground holes and camouflaged at other places so they couldn't be spotted.³⁹

Some Marines of the 49th Company, who were now desperately trying to consolidate their position on the northern slope of the hill, began to dig shallow foxholes upon the verbal orders of thirty-nine year-old Gunnery Sergeant Charles Hoffman. As bullets snapped over head amidst the chaos, Gunnery Sergeant Hoffman looked to the east and to his disbelief saw twelve German soldiers crawling on their stomachs towards his men. The enemy combatants dragged behind them five light Spandau Machine guns. Gunnery Sergeant Hoffman screamed a warning

to his troops as he raced toward the approaching enemy troops. Before the two leaders of the enemy detachment could react, Hoffman jammed his bayonet into the first combatant. Without hesitation, he pulled the blade out and skewered the second enemy soldier, causing the remaining German troops to abandon their guns and retreat back down the east slope of Hill 142. If the detachment had been able to emplace their guns, it would have certainly obliterated the remaining Marines of the 49th Company.⁴⁰

Private William H. Smith noticed a German soldier a short distance away. Sprawled across him were two of his dead comrades, and according to Smith:

He was in a sitting posture and was shouting ‘Kamerad, Kamerad.’ We soon learned the reason. He was serving as a lure and wanted a group of Marines to come to his rescue so that the kind-hearted Americans would be in direct line of fire from machine guns that were in readiness. Before I knew what I was doing and before I realized that everyone was shouting at me to stay back I bobbed up out of my hole and with bayonet ready beat it out and got that Kamerad bird. It seemed but a minute or so before I was back. But, believe me, there were some bullets whizzing around. They came so close at times I could almost feel their touch. My pack was shot up pretty much but they didn’t get me.⁴¹

Several men of the 49th Company established a defensive position on the north side of the hill. Other members of the company continued the assault; oblivious to the objectives. Beyond the northeastern side of the hill, some survivors of the 49th Company continued the attack and ran head on into part of the 12th Company of the 460th German infantry. This group of enemy soldiers were situated near Torcy as reserve and raced towards the hill when they discovered the Americans had broken through the main line. The German 12th Company split into two groups to assault up both sides of the hill. The eastern group attacked Captain Hamilton’s men causing him to order the survivors to pull back. Captain Hamilton had been just south of a road north of the hill and as he advanced towards it, believing it to be the objective, most of his men had

shifted to the left to deal with machine guns that were delivering enfilading fire. “It happened, however, that there was a town just a few hundred yards to the left and while most of the Germans had left, one company was forming for a small counter-attack.”⁴²

Captain Hamilton, realizing that his company stood beyond their objective, continued to the order his men to pull back. “It was a case of every man for himself. I crawled back through a drainage ditch filled with cold water and shiny reeds. Machine gun bullets were just grazing my back and our own artillery was dropping close.”⁴³ Captain Platt bounded down the side of the slope looking for Captain Hamilton. When he approached the exhausted company commander, Captain Platt inquired as to his platoon strength to which Captain Hamilton told him to take his survivors and establish a defensive position. Captain Platt had only a few from his platoon but had located twenty stray men from another depleted platoon. Racing back towards his shattered and patched command, a distant sniper fired on him, Bullets kicked up dirt and encouraging Captain Platt to accelerate his pace.⁴⁴ Panting heavily from his close encounter, the Captain rounded up his men, most of whom were ransacking the enemy corpses for souvenirs. “Working my way along as best I could, I found my men-practically every one of them-squatted down beside a dead German, relieving him of a belt buckle or iron crosses.”⁴⁵

Not every member of the 49th Company heard Captain Hamilton’s order to pull back to the original objective. Small and unorganized groups of Marines blindly advanced down into the valley where they drew unrelenting machine gun fire from all sides. Corporals Joseph C. Toulson and Anthony S. Kowalak continued to brave the fire and positioned their automatic rifles on the outskirts of the town of Torcy, nearly a kilometer beyond the battalion’s objective, far behind enemy lines (See Appendix D). Accompanying the two Corporals was Private Charles C. Steinkamp. According to Corporal Abbie D. Atkinson and Privates Frederick

Bodwell and Jessie Tompkins, the three men ran all the way towards the small village of Torcy.⁴⁶ A French aviator even spotted what he believed were Americans advancing on the town.⁴⁷ Moments after seeing Corporals Toulson and Kowalak and Private Steinkamp continue through the valley out of sight, Corporal Atkinson saw a signal flare go up in the air, a sign requesting reinforcements. Due to the chaos and the withdrawal toward the 49th Company's initial objective, reinforcements would not be sent. No news of Corporals Toulson and Kowalak and Private Steinkamp materialized until their remains were discovered months later.⁴⁸

Private William Smith and a group of men from the 49th Company continued the blind advance, oblivious to the orders to pull back. "I saw one Dutchman stick his head out of a hole and then duck. I ran to the hole. The next time his head came up it was good night Fritz."⁴⁹ As Smith and an unidentified sergeant ran along the hill, a German soldier fired at the two men. "A bullet got the sergeant in the right wrist. I got the German before he dropped back into the weeds. Every blamed tree must have had a machine gunner."⁵⁰

First Lieutenant Orlando Crowther and survivors of his 67th Company on the western flank of the assault emerged from the second patch of trees into the open amidst a hornet's nest of machine gun fire. Almost immediately a slug tore through the thirty-four year old lieutenant's arm. In the mayhem of the moment, Crowther refused to let anyone tend to his wounds until the enemy gun emplacement was silenced. He maneuvered his men toward the German machine gun position. As the men ran at intervals toward the enemy position, the German crew had exhausted its ammunition and abandoned the weapon. Immediately the men rushed the gun and picked it up off the sled mount and brought it back to the company's position.⁵¹ Lieutenant Crowther's Marines pressed forward toward the nose of the hill and came across German reinforcements.

The western half of the 12th Company, 460th German Infantry met the survivors of Crowther's 67th Company. Some Marines continued to advance while others pulled back to the crest of the hill as German fire tore through the ranks. Small groups of Marines engaged in close combat with German troops on the western slope. With the recently captured enemy machine guns and abandoned boxes of ammunition in tow, Crowther shouted for men to push the captured weapons forward and lay down a base of fire on the advancing enemy. He moved along the line giving instructions until a burst of enemy gun fire tore through his body killing him instantly.⁵²

Private Eric Kitchens, a member of Crowther's contingent, recalled that everyone had dropped to their stomach as machine gun fire screamed over head.⁵³ Private Eric A. Goldbeck stood up amidst the snap of bullets and began firing at the German gun crew and killed the gunner, just as a burst of fire killed him. As the men lay pinned to the ground, more German guns continuously poured a large volume of fire in their direction. Private John Harris moved forward to lay down a base of fire from his Chauchat automatic rifle when suddenly a stray round passed through the twenty-year-old in the upper and lower jaw, shattering his teeth and mandible.⁵⁴ The overwhelming enemy gunfire created pandemonium among the exposed survivors of the 67th Company. Crowther's death left the survivors leaderless. Captain Francis S. Kieren appeared on the scene with a few stragglers and assembled a team to outflank the enemy gun emplacements. One of Kieren's men, Corporal Frederick H. Fox, suffered a gunshot through the shoulder and he was immediately ordered to the rear for treatment. As Corporal Fox stood up to make his way to the rear, another stray round struck him in the temple, killing him.⁵⁵

Kieren's primary goal was to silence the enemy guns that hindered the 67th Company's assault. According to Kieren, Sergeant John V. Fitzgerald offered to go out as a decoy to draw

fire so the guns could be taken from the front. Earlier, Fitzgerald had suffered a deep gash in his face from a combatant's bayonet; now he set out across the open field running through the waist-high pasture. Instantly, the enemy gunners spotted him and swung the barrel of a Maxim gun his way. With bullets kicking up clods of dirt and dust, the remainder of the company charged straight at the machine gun. As Fitzgerald attempted to outrun the traversing field of enemy gun fire, a burst struck the twenty-seven-year-old in the upper right thigh just under the pelvis. Another round blew open his left thigh. As he fell one more slug passed through his right wrist shattering several bones. Fitzgerald, bleeding profusely, managed to lay flat on the ground out of enemy sight.⁵⁶

The remnants of the 67th Company desperately tried to stem the large volume of enemy fire. Private Harris, despite the severe amount of blood loss from his facial wound, regained his senses and managed to bring his automatic rifle to his shoulder and squeezed off a burst of fire at the Germans. He continued to fire his weapon until he lost consciousness.⁵⁷ Other members of the company desperately tried to silence the enemy guns. Captain Kieren and Gunnery Sergeant Charles J. Smith noticed Private Pleas Parker out in the open maneuvering into a very exposed position. The twenty-one-year old had dragged his Chauchat automatic rifle with him and proceeded to fire the awkward weapon at the enemy gun emplacement during the duration of the counterattack.⁵⁸

As Private Parker and other members of the company tried to break up the enemy assault, one group of Marines, caught in the open when the enemy initially opened fire during the counterattack, remained isolated and in very bad position. Pinned to the ground as Maxim machine gun grounds cracked overhead, Corporal Prentice Geer assumed control of the isolated detachment and peered over his shoulder as he lay prone in the wheat. Ordering his men to

follow close behind, Corporal Geer sprang up out of the tall wheat and charged the enemy gun. Before the enemy could traverse the weapon on the advancing Marines, Corporal Geer and his men overran the position and the crew immediately surrendered. Following the capture of this gun, the enemy counterattack faltered.⁵⁹

Just over one hour into the attack, Captain Platt moved his men back to the spot of the originally designated objective. “I started out to see what was ahead, suddenly to stop short as I came on a First Sergeant and twenty men from another company—all that was left of a platoon. ‘Chuck,’ I said to my newly found First Sergeant, ‘who’s your commanding officer?’ ‘Me,’ said Chuck simply. ‘All the rest are deados.’”⁶⁰ First Sergeant Daniel “Pop” Hunter was the man speaking to Captain Platt. First Sergeant Hunter planned to take his men across the road ahead with emphatic zeal, the same road that Captain Platt’s platoon had just pulled back from. Captain Platt discouraged the overzealous First Sergeant from his actions. “I can’t give you a command, because the worst punishment for disobedience is death. And you’ll get that if you go after that road.”⁶¹

Back at the battalion’s initial jump-off point, Major Julius Turrill encountered First Lieutenant Walter Galliford who commanded a platoon in the 66th Company. The French finally relieved the other two companies in Turrill’s battalion and they were on the way from the battalion’s position of the previous day. Major Turrill immediately moved forward with First Lieutenant Galliford’s platoon. They advanced through the woods where the Marines began the attack over an hour earlier. As they entered the first open field, Turrill noticed that the dead and wounded lay intermixed with each other, scattered throughout the open pasture.⁶²

The remainder of the 66th Company eventually arrived from the battalion's previous position and Major Turrill directed them to the western edge of the hill. Shortly after, German troops began to ascend the western slopes in an attempt to counterattack again. Private Albert Powis of the 66th Company recalled:

Ahead of us was a field of almost ripe wheat. About 500 yards away was a big gully holding the Germans. We would aim and fire slowly and large gaps would appear in the lines. Some of our men would run out to use the bayonet on them and the Krauts would shoot them down. Our officers kept yelling that our men should stay in their hole.⁶³

The 17th Company also arrived from the battalion's previous position. The delayed relief of the battalion meant that the assault on Hill 142 utilized half the intended manpower. Major Turrill immediately put the 17th Company in line on the east side of the hill, next to the remnants of Captain Hamilton's men. Private Onnie Cordes remembered arriving on Hill 142 that morning and seeing his friend Private Edward M. Butler of the 67th Company make his way to the rear. "He was shot in the wrist. Although this Butler lad had a bad wound in his hand, he did not go to the rear, but instead he assisted in caring for the more severely wounded that were lying all about."⁶⁴ As the company moved forward to bolster the weakly-held line, the enemy machine guns delivered a storm of bullets. Powis recalled the melee when he wrote:

We were now in a terrible machine gun barrage and I at once threw my pack away containing a couple boxes of hardtack. With rifle, belt, helmet and gas mask I stooped as low as possible and started through an open field which was being continually swept with machine gun bullets. Bang, a bullet hit my helmet but glanced off. Another hit my cartridge belt, but fortunately did not go through.⁶⁵

The arrival of the remaining companies in Major Turrill's battalion as well as needed machine gun support meant that Major Turrill's Marines held this little patch of rolling hill top

and forest, but the price was staggering. The 67th Company suffered 119 casualties out of a total strength of 244 men. The 49th Company lost 101 men out of a total strength of 240 men. The remainder of the battalion lost ninety-six men. A total of 349 men fell in the capture and defense of Hill 142.⁶⁶ More Americans died on the hill in the days that followed, but the events on the morning of June 6, 1918 revealed to the Americans that the price, even for miniscule objectives, would be high when contesting machine guns using obsolete methods of assault, no preparatory artillery barrage, and a hastily-planned attack. Objectives were not clearly defined and the assaulting formations were heavily undermanned. These factors cost additional lives, but these aspects plagued the American attacks which occurred later that day and reinforced the same harsh realities.

Most works covering the skirmish on Hill 142 address the lack of artillery, delayed movements and poor communications. Most authors, however, do not link these flaws as the cause for the exponential casualties suffered by the Americans who were realistically assaulting a weakened German position. The success on this position also perpetuated the commencement of offensive operations later that day, which relied solely on the attainment of the assault on the hill. The rapidity which the subsequent actions would be carried out prohibited any assessment as to adjustments needed to avoid such bloodshed. The slaughter of the morning's assault on Hill 142 would play out repeatedly on other places on the battlefield. The anatomy of the methods used in this and later attacks centered upon the acceptance of mass troop expendability. This is fundamental in understanding the uniqueness of the human experience of this engagement, a focus absent in most studies of the battle.

Chapter IV

The Failed Assault on Belleau Wood

In accordance with General Degoutte's counterattack order issued the day before, the second phase of the assault on June 6, 1918 involved the eastern flank of the 2nd Division advancing forward in order to consolidate the new line established from the gains made by the western flank on Hill 142. Vague verbal instructions regarding this second phase were communicated to Colonel Wendell C. Neville, commanding the 5th Marine Regiment and Colonel Catlin commanding the 6th Marine Regiment earlier, but it was not until 2:00 p.m. on June 6, 1918 that the details of the attack reached Colonel Catlin. He recalled, "The orders to attack at 5 o'clock were written at brigade headquarters, about three kilometers in the rear, at 2:00p.m. At 3:45 p.m. a copy was handed to me by Lieutenant Williams, General Harbord's aide, who came up by motorcycle."¹

Colonel Catlin had also been tasked with commanding the entire second phase of the plan that afternoon, which called for the 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, commanded by Major Benjamin S. Berry, to advance east from the woods northwest of the village of Lucy-le-Bocage and assault Belleau Wood.² Simultaneously, the 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, commanded by Major Berton Sibley, was ordered to advance its left in conjunction with the right of the Berry's Marines and sweep through the southern half of Belleau Wood and assault the village of Bouresches. The 2nd Battalion, 6th Marines would consolidate to the progress of Sibley's right flank and support the advance. Once the three battalions captured their objectives, they were to advance further east beyond Belleau Wood and Bouresches and seize the narrow-gauge railroad in the east.

Success relied heavily on one factor: the Division believed Belleau Wood would have to be taken by surprise. No artillery preparation was outlined, but according to Brigadier General James Harbord, the French intelligence section informed him that Belleau Wood was not occupied except for a few Germans in its northern end, and that he considered a surprise attack, without extensive artillery preparation, practical.³ The records do not indicate that any extensive reconnaissance was made to verify the enemy strength in the woods. According to Colonel Catlin, “It had been impossible to get patrols into the woods, but we knew they were full of machine guns and that the enemy had trench mortars there. So far as we knew, there might have been any number of men in there, but we had to attack just the same, and with but a handful.”⁴ The conflicting evidence should have served as a precursor to disaster.

The French information regarding the woods could not have been more inaccurate. Two battalions of German soldiers from the 461st Infantry Regiment spent the previous two days to developing a defensive stronghold of the woods while remaining completely out of view. The thick tangle of trees and undergrowth created a near- impenetrable bastion for the defenders.⁵ The village of Bouresches, located southeast of Belleau Wood, remained in control of the 2nd Battalion of the 398th German Infantry Regiment, but served only as an outpost manned by only a single company of troops. The majority of the battalion dug in on the high ground east of the town.⁶

While the Marines of Major Turrill’s battalion desperately clung to control of Hill 142, the moment of assault on Belleau Wood and Bouresches grew near. All but one of Major Berry’s companies was situated in the woods several hundred meters west of Belleau Wood. At 7:00 a.m., the 45th Company of Major Berry’s battalion had been ordered to advance north immediately from their location to help relieve the tremendous enfilading enemy fire bearing

down on Major Turrill's battalion on Hill 142. Captain Peter Conachy, commanding the 45th Company, immediately dispatched the 1st and 2nd Platoons to advance north in efforts to help Major Turrill's men. According to Captain Conachy, "1st Platoon reached the road and was held up, dug in and consolidated, 2nd Platoon never started, they were held up by fire superiority of machine guns from woods, although this platoon ably supported the 1st Platoon by covering fire thereby enabling Lieutenant Hope to advance to the road, which was an ideal jump-off point."⁷

Lieutenant Edward S. Hope, a young Army officer leading the 1st Platoon of the 45th Company, recalled the commotion off to the west as Major Turrill's battalion initiated the pre-dawn assault on Hill 142. "They had already started on our left, so I organized four waves at once and just as I sent the first ones across, the Boche machine guns opened up. I felt my legs suddenly knocked from under me. One of the men near me took my puttee off and stopped the blood with a bandage."⁸ Eventually Lieutenant Hope's platoon made it to the road and dug in. They signaled for rifle ammunition and grenades, neither of which could be brought forward. "On account of the exposed position I would not order a man to take ammunition out, as a live Marine is better than a dead or wounded one any day," recalled Captain Conachy.⁹

One Marine, Private Robert F. Higley, saw the predicament of the exposed men. He grabbed bandoliers of rifle ammunition from other Marines. Slinging six of them across his body, he dashed several hundred meters across the field as machine gun rounds searched for him. Sprinting among the men laying prone along the roadside, he dropped one bandolier among a few of the men and repeated this as he continued down the line. He collapsed in exhaustion from the terrifying ordeal. Private Higley noticed Sergeant Robert D. Foote Jr. had been severely wounded and needed to get medical attention fast. Perilously gazing back hundreds of meters across the gunfire-swept field where the rest of the company remained, Private Higley, still

exhausted from the terrifying trip, picked up his weapon and crawled over to Sergeant Foote. He slung both his and Sergeant Foote's rifle on his back and dragged the wounded Sergeant several hundred meters back to the company's line. Miraculously, both men made it back unscathed.¹⁰

Before Captain Conachy could regain command of the two engaged platoons, a battalion runner found him in the woods and delivered a message directing him "to report to the C.O., 1st Battalion, upon reporting I was ordered to prepare and stand by for a general attack, in conjunction with the 1st Battalion, objective-Torcy, the attack to take place at 5:00 a.m., June 7, 1918."¹¹ When Captain Conachy returned to his company's position in the woods, they had already moved out to assemble for the assault on Belleau Wood.

Communications, poor as they were, caught the battalion off guard when the order to attack finally arrived. Colonel Catlin vividly recalled the dilemma.

I was supposed to direct Berry's movements, though he had also received the orders from his own regimental headquarters. I telephoned at once to Berry's P.C. [Post of Command] at Lucy, but his battalion was beyond reach and he himself in the woods in the rear, a mile away. It had been impossible on account of the heavy shelling, to run a telephone out to him. I sent runners, but I was sure they couldn't reach him before the attack would have to be made.¹²

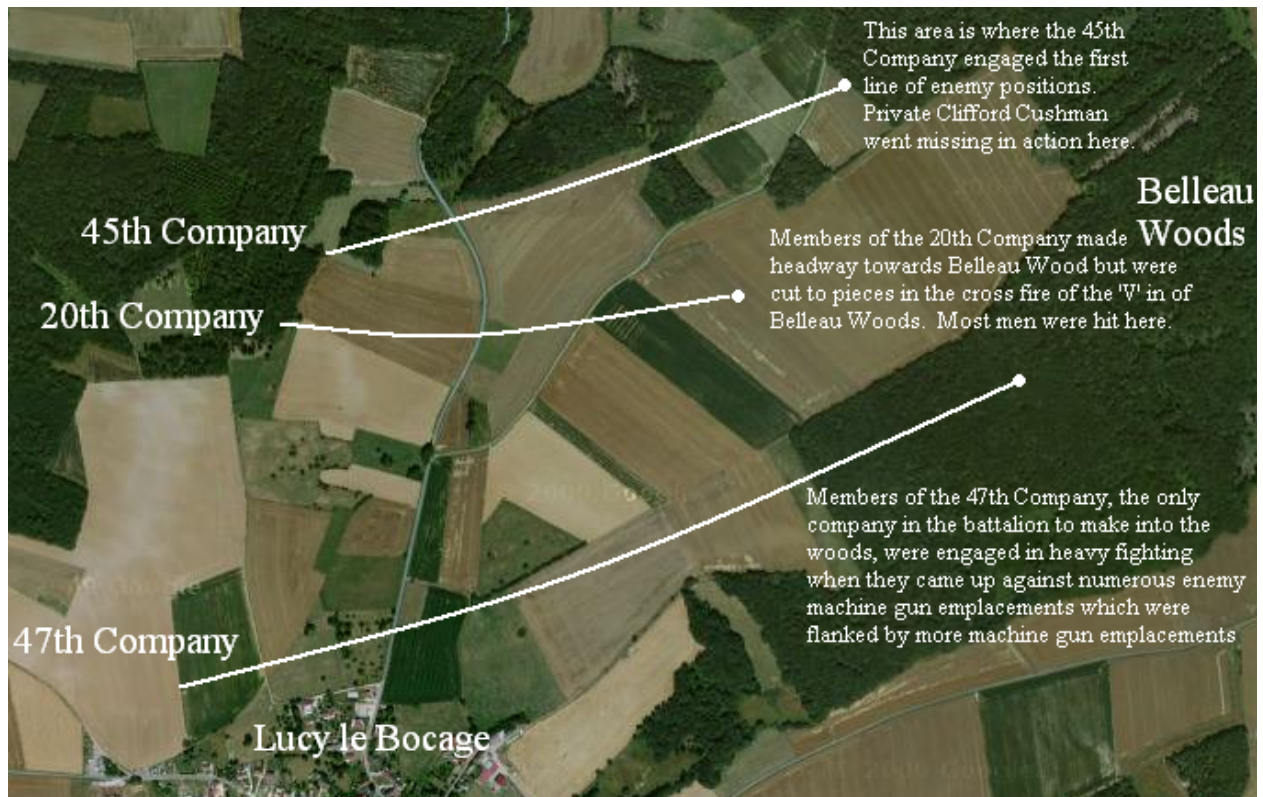
Second Lieutenant George V. Gordon, who commanded a platoon in the 16th Company, remembered standing with another officer in the woods, noting a small bit of artillery fire on the eastern horizon. According to Second Lieutenant Gordon, "We were watching the shells as they dropped along the edge of the woods across the wheat field. 'I wonder what this is about,' his friend said, as several more landed. 'They must have spotted something over there.'"¹³ Just as Second Lieutenant Gordon and his comrade witnessed the spectacle several hundred meters to the east, Captain Henry Larsen, the battalion adjutant, came running over to Second Lieutenant

Gordon and shouted, “Get your platoons ready immediately, you should have started across with the barrage.”¹⁴ Before Second Lieutenant Gordon could mass the platoons of the company, Captain Larsen sent him orders to remain in place, as the 16th Company would hold a reserve position.

Similar orders reached three of the four platoons in the 45th Company. Men had assembled, in Captain Conachy’s absence, under the command of Second Lieutenant Thomas H. Miles and moved the platoons towards the jump-off point where the attack would commence. “Imagine my predicament,” recalled Captain Conachy when he returned to find his entire company advancing through the field ahead. “I had been ordered to prepare for an attack, and when I returned I found only one platoon left.”¹⁵

Phone lines did not connect most of the front line units with headquarters detachments in the rear. Orders arrived much too slow to be effectively carried out. The pace and fluidity of the lines created even greater demand for immediate communication. The situation suggested tragedy even before the planned assault commenced. The small volume of artillery was meant to harass whatever enemy held the woods and did not resemble the pulverizing level of bombardment necessary to suppress and destroy enemy positions while the assault waves closed in on their position. Further, the artillery fire preceded the infantry assault by too much time. None of the assault waves were in position, much less aware that an attack was to occur, and when they did carry out the assault, the enemy would likely be prepared to resist them. Delayed communications and the feeble artillery support only amalgamated the looming catastrophe for the Americans. Based on the little intelligence available it was believed that the woods were very lightly held.¹⁶

The general advance called for Major Berry's battalion to assault from the east into the western face of Belleau Wood. Since several of the 45th Company's platoons remained in support of Major Turrill's battalion on Hill 142 only three of the four platoons comprised the left flank of the attack, the 47th Company, commanded by Captain Philip T. Case on the battalion's right flank, and would advance eastward towards the southern portion of Belleau Wood. In the center of the battalion was Captain Richard N. Platt's 20th Company; they were ordered to hit the center of the western tree line of Belleau Wood. The 16th Company under, Captain Robert Yowell would remain in reserve (See Appendix E). The 45th Company was not the only outfit caught off guard by the order to attack that afternoon. Most men in the battalion remained oblivious to the pending assault. They had spent the day in the cover of the woods several hundred yards west of Belleau Wood. Some rested and others enjoyed the gracious gift of cigarettes delivered to them earlier in the day by Chaplain John J. Brady, who personally toured the front lines.¹⁷



Appendix E. Map 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines attack on Belleau Wood

Chicago Tribune reporter Floyd Gibbons and Lieutenant Arthur E. Hartzell, an Army officer from the Intelligence and Censorship Bureau arrived in the sector that day and they traveled toward the 3rd Battalion’s position to cover the first major assault by American troops. Earlier that day, Gibbons had jockeyed for a good position to cover the developing action along this particular front. When the two men sought permission from Colonel Wendell C. Neville, the 5th Marine Regiment commander, to move closer to the front lines, he exclaimed, “Go wherever you like. Go as far as you like, but I want to tell you it’s damn hot up there.”¹⁸

Many men, including officers, remained oblivious to news of the impending attack. First Lieutenant Raymond Knapp of the 47th Company recalled,

All through the day the battalion remained concealed in their positions overlooking the Bois de Belleau. With the exception of a few planes flying over

the lines during the day there was no activity. Late in the afternoon, Captain Case called the platoon commanders of his company together and told them that the battalion was to attack at 5 o'clock that afternoon.¹⁹

After Captain Case pulled out a map of the area, he fingered the objective and looked up from the sprawled chart to the east, pointing across the sloping wheat field to the distant tree line of Belleau Wood. "Get your men out into position as fast as you can we attack at 5 o'clock." According to First Lieutenant Knapp, the Captain pulled out his watch and remarked, "It is now 5:15."²⁰

The 20th Company remained concealed in St. Martin Woods, the battalion's jump off point. Sergeant Merwin Silverthorn, while scavenging through the forest for souvenirs, recalled, "A quarter after five, the lieutenant said, 'we were supposed to attack at five o'clock, so we have to assemble and ease across this road into a narrow band of woods.' The objective was a road on the other side of Belleau Wood."²¹ Excited by the fact they were finally getting in the fight, Silverthorn walked over to his college friend from the University of Minnesota, Sergeant Stephen Sherman, and shook hands "happy and exultant in the fact that at last we were 'going over.'"²²

Situated in a fox hole deep in the confines of St. Martin Woods, Private Sigurd Swenson and his friend Private Ole Counts had just awoken from a brief nap and decided to eat the first little bit of food either of them had enjoyed in days. "We just got through eating and word passed that we were to go over," recalled Swenson. The company had already begun to form up while Privates Counts and Swenson, struggling to put on their gear, dashed nearly 200 meters to the edge of the forest. "Ole was right next to me in the first wave," recalled Private Swenson.²³

Immediately, the endless lines of Marines stepped out from the covering tree line into the field poised for the attack. The platoons, according to First Lieutenant Knapp, “took up the assault formation as though they had been on the parade ground. The 1st and 2nd Platoons were in the first line and the 3rd and 4th in support.”²⁴ The other companies in the battalion took up a similar configuration. Private Carl B. Mills, of the 20th Company recalled, “Well the zero hour is getting close and I see the officers watching their watches. We were on our way in open formation. Everyone seemed to be in his place.”²⁵ When reporter Floyd Gibbons appeared among the ranks of the men awaiting the assault, one Marine officer looked curiously at the brassard on Gibbon’s arm and asked him, “What are you doing here?” Gibbons earnestly replied, “Looking for the big story.” Stunned by his seeming ignorance, the officer turned his attention away from Gibbons back towards the distant woods and calmly proclaimed, “If I were you I’d be about forty miles south of this place, but if you want to see the fun stick around. We are going forward in five minutes.”²⁶

As the first wave marched forward toward the edge of St. Martin Woods, the battalion’s jump-off point, Corporal Robert M. Fischer and his college friend Sergeant Frank J. Tupa, both of whom enlisted together as students at the University of Minnesota, joked with each other at the prospect of getting killed as they adjusted their gear. “What should I tell your father,” asked Fischer as he looked over at Tupa. “Tell him I did my part,” exclaimed Tupa. “What shall I tell yours, Bobbie?” Fischer, with a smile on his face, glanced over at his friend and said, “Tell him I was a good boy.”²⁷ Platoon commanders glanced to the left and right of the formation. Satisfied every man was in place, they blew their whistles, signaling the advance.

The brief preliminary American artillery had long ceased and now the ominous western face of Belleau Wood appeared across the open field. Stretching from north to south, the tree

line spanned more than a mile. “Now then we started off in trench warfare formation, the only formation we knew, which consisted of four waves with the first wave and all waves holding their rifles at what is called the high port, not even aiming or firing or hip firing or anything like that.”²⁸ The first two waves, separated by about seventy-five meters were followed by the next two waves 150 meters behind. The last two waves were replacements, an arrangement designed for the expendability of men according to Sergeant Silverthorn, “When they got all killed, there’s the third and fourth wave.”²⁹

As the battalion moved forward, the guns of the 77th Machine Gun Company supported the advance with a barrage that swept the western face of the woods, and the assault slowly progressed. Sergeant Silverthorn stated, “Bayonets fixed, moving at a slow steady cadence that we had been taught to move, because theoretically a barrage is shooting in front of you, and you don’t want to go too fast or you’ll walk into your own barrage.” The bombardment of machine gun fire stopped as the 20th Company moved down the slope into the ravine running north-south through the wheat field. Before they could cross the road that traversed the countryside, the Germans defending Belleau Wood opened fire. “There are really no heroics about it,” recalled Floyd Gibbons. “There is no bugle call, no sword waving, no dramatic enunciation of catchy commands, no theatricalism- it’s just plain get up and go over.”³⁰

“Hell broke loose as we marched in skirmish,” recalled Private Mills. “There was too much to see of the battle field to say one saw anything for sure.”³¹ To the left and in front of the company, the tree line exploded with the pulsating-whip of machine guns.

It was teeming with machine guns; I mean it seemed that way. And nobody, literally nobody was firing a shot at these Germans. They had us enfiladed. They were to our left front; and as we got out far enough, we were perfectly enfiladed

from them. So it was obviously like a shooting gallery and not a single Marine of ours firing a shot. We weren't trained that way. We went on.³²

Men of the 20th Company's first wave fell immediately. Private Joseph Bridge of the 20th Company recalled how the initial burst of fire struck Private Lee L. Fry in the stomach.³³ Moments later, Private Bridge also suffered a wound. Private Willis Rummel heard a loud pinging sound as a bullet tore through the helmet of Private Thurman Worstall and came out the other side of his head, killing the "old man of the company."³⁴ Private James N. Allen also collapsed dead when a bullet hit him in the head.³⁵ Numerous machine gun bullets hissing and cracking over head, but the company continued to push forward.

The Marines realized the terrifying capability of the enemy guns when in one sweep of the fronting fields German machine guns cut down a number of 20th Company men. Corporal Fischer, leading an automatic rifle team, was ten yards away from his dear friend Sergeant Frank J. Tupa. "Good god he fell, something told me," recalled Tupa as he saw, from the corner of his eye, Corporal Fischer stumble and disappear into the wheat.³⁶ He had been struck by a bullet that pierced his aorta and died almost instantly. Tupa fell wounded a short time later. Another Minnesota student, Private George B. Sellars, suffered mortal wounds when bullets shattered his right leg above and below the knee.³⁷ Several yards back, Sergeant Stephen Sherman's mangled body lay in the fields along the path of trampled wheat with his commander's whistle dangling from the pocket of his tunic. He was instantly killed by an exploding artillery shell.³⁸

Private Mills was also wounded after the enemy guns opened fire.

I was struck on the right calf, a flesh wound that felt just like a mule kick. I found myself on the ground and everyone was down. The signal was given to move on. I made one lunge and found myself on the ground again. Then Wham! I took a machine gun bullet in my left knee and I began to see that this was no dream or kids stuff.³⁹

Private Mills crawled through the tall stalks of vegetation to see if anyone else needed assistance, but “the machine gun had done a thorough job in putting the men out of commission.”⁴⁰

Sergeant Silverthorn recalled, “Well, of course, as soon as we came out of this first belt of woods in my platoon, there were only six people who got across the first seventy-five yards. All the rest were killed or wounded. I mean we were down in a ravine which was perfectly enfiladed and just bloop, a few machine guns and that was it.”⁴¹ A lieutenant in Silverthorn’s platoon crawled over to him and hollered above the deafening noise, “Where the hell is my platoon?” “Well his platoon was mostly killed and wounded,” recalled Silverthorn. The lieutenant ordered Sergeant Silverthorn to stay together, but when the stunned officer said, “I’m going on back.” Sergeant Silverthorn thought to himself, “Here’s where you and I part company, because we just got across this place, and that’s the last thing I’m going to do- go back.”⁴² Sergeant Silverthorn eventually spotted the remnants of another platoon that had crossed the ravine near an area that offered improved protection.

In the first wave, Private Sigurd Swenson’s platoon advanced only three-quarters of the way across the field when he was struck by a machine gun bullet. “I couldn’t go any further,” recalled Private Swenson, who began to go in and out of consciousness. “When I came to I was lying on my back.” The remainder of the platoon, including Private Swenson’s friend Private Ole Counts, had advanced another twenty-five yards before they dropped behind the protection of an embankment to catch their breath. “Ole was laying right there resting and looking back toward me. He didn’t want to recognize me because he couldn’t help me,” remembered Swenson. Moments later as the group began to rush forward, a burst of fire also struck Private Counts who fell back. “I saw him fall,” remembered Private William Wagoner. Private Thomas

Barwick went to the aid of Counts. “I spoke to him but he never answered a word, he died an hour later from loss of blood.”⁴³

German machine gun fire emanating from the front and left of the 20th Company did not abate. Two decimated platoons remained pinned in the wheat field (See Appendix E). Enemy guns situated in front of one of the pinned platoons delivered devastating fire and both Second Lieutenants Percival Wilson and Ernest Toomey were wounded. The leaderless detachment was in trouble. With reserves desperately needed, First Sergeant John Grant sprang up from the cover of the wheat to make his way back to the rear and request that the remainder of the battalion press forward. The thirty-three-year old scrambled back west over the ravine. Silhouetted above the tall stalks, another burst of fire searched the horizon on which he traveled and killed the First Sergeant before he got across the field.⁴⁴ Gunnery Sergeant William H. Mack immediately assumed command and attempted to take his men forward in order to assault the machine gun nest.

Sergeant Silverthorn crawled over to a group led by Gunnery Sergeant Harry Gay. The assembly slowly advanced over the brim of the ravine by small group rushes. Simultaneously, “the Gunnery Sergeant got wounded, I attended to him and saw where the bullet had entered the back of his shoulder blade and hadn’t come out.”⁴⁵ Sergeant Silverthorn bandaged the wound and reassured the wounded man that his injury was not bad. “But I never expected to see him again,” he claimed.⁴⁶ Another man, Corporal George O. Bissonette, writhed in pain and bled heavily after bullets had blown his left foot and thigh open. Corporal Bissonette remained with the remnants of the group instead of attempting to go to the rear for treatment.⁴⁷ Several wounded men lay exposed as the enemy guns continued to pour out a heavy volume of fire. Private Hollis E. Empey sprinted forward towards one of the wounded men and tried in vain to

get him out of the firing line. The shattering bombardment was too much and Private Empey could not safely reach him.⁴⁸

The wounded could not be treated while the enemy machine gun fire remained too intense. The field behind the remnants of the 20th Company was scattered with wounded and dead Marines. In the open field, about 130 yards from the western face of Belleau Wood, Pharmacist Mate Second Class, Frank C. Welte, a hospital corpsman attached to the 20th Company, worked feverishly to treat the numerous wounded strewn throughout the field. Welte was overwhelmed with the number of wounded and had just treated four Marines as machine gun bullets continued to pass overhead. He calmly filled out their casualty tags and began to crawl through the wheat towards a fifth wounded man when a stray machine gun round tore into his right heel. Suddenly a shell detonated nearby and the concussion threw him to the ground. Welte recovered from the momentary distress of the explosion and noticed that he had sustained shrapnel wounds from the blast. He continued to apply field dressing to the other wounded man and pulled out a casualty tag from his pouch. Welte began to fill out the tag when another stray machine gun round struck him in the head knocking him to the ground. He remained conscious though the bullet had passed through his skull. "Turn them over to the chief," muttered the mortally wounded corpsman as he handed the five tags to the wounded Marine.⁴⁹

Commanding a shattered detachment of survivors from the 20th Company, Sergeant Silverthorn ordered men to move forward a little bit at a time. "We'd run just as fast and as far as we could, and then we'd drop from exhaustion. About the second rush that we got, is when I dropped to the ground, I felt that I'd hit my knee on a rock; and I looked down and found there wasn't any rocks. I found that a machine gun bullet had creased my knee."⁵⁰ As he crouched down in the tall wheat, Silverthorn looked around and noticed his small detachment had been

reduced to himself and another Marine, Private Francis Green, who carried a Chauchat. “So after observing the condition I was in, I told him to move into Belleau Wood where that automatic rifle was needed. I decided, ‘I’m going to stay right here where I am until it is dark and get out under cover.’”⁵¹ He crawled towards the shelter of a plowed strip of earth that had a slight raise. Machine gun bullets nipped off the tops of the wheat stalks just above his head. Every second, the situation grew more precarious and he decided to make a sudden dash for the shelter of the tree line of Belleau Wood about 200 yards away. While he made his way there, Sergeant Silverthorn encountered Sergeant Luther W. Pilcher who had been severely wounded in the stomach. Silverthorn told Pilcher to remain where he was and that he would be back after dark.⁵²

On the left flank of Major Berry’s battalion, three platoons of the 45th Company pressed toward the northwestern face of Belleau Wood. Second Lieutenant Thomas H. Miles, in the absence of Captain Conachy earlier the morning, assembled three out of the four platoons that made up the company, left one in reserve and moved into the open field. The company advanced parallel to a small cluster of trees to the left, a finger jutting out towards Belleau Wood, but it would not conceal them from the ferocity of the enemy guns. As soon as they stepped forward, enemy artillery fire blanketed the wheat. With a violent collision that shook the ground and echoed across the rolling pasture, dirt and debris littered the field, leaving massive charred divots in the waving fields of wheat. The bombardment suddenly increased. Second Lieutenant Thomas Miles, out in front of his advancing platoons came under the barrage. After advancing a few hundred meters across the field, a shell, screaming through the air and slammed into the ground with little warning. The projectile detonated nearly underneath the twenty-six year-old. The resulting explosion blew him apart.⁵³ An increasing volume of artillery shells fell among the

company as they pushed forward. Private Frank P. Millage remembered standing close to Corporal Carl Stiekle, the company's officer's mess cook, when a shell landed nearby, killing him.⁵⁴

As the company pushed closer to the tree line of Belleau Wood, German machine guns erupted. Gunnery Sergeant Benjamin Geary saw Private Charley Frehse knocked back as a bullet went through him. As he staggered, another round struck him followed instantly by a third that hit him in the chest before he slumped to the ground.⁵⁵ Machine gun fire cut down nearly anyone who dared expose himself. First Sergeant William P. Higginson and Gunnery Sergeant Harold Todd also became victims of the enemy machine guns.⁵⁶ Corporal Benjamin Strain, a hotheaded squad leader, looked over his shoulder and urged his men forward. Corporal Strain, who only a few months before stood trial for telling a senior enlisted man to "kiss my ass" barely shifted his focus in front of him when a torrent of bullets struck the twenty-one-year old in the head and face, splitting his upper jaw in half and instantly killed him.⁵⁷ Men immediately dropped to their stomachs into the wheat in order to escape the sweeping machine gun fire. While men lay prone under the relentless volley, shells continued to land seemingly everywhere.

Eventually the survivors of the 45th Company, after crossing the road running between Torcy and Lucy-le-Bocage, worked their way toward a square patch of woods about a hundred meters from the western face of Belleau Wood. Beyond this patch of forest lay the first line of German machine gun pits. A few 45th Company men managed to get to this enemy position despite the murderous gunfire. Private LeRoy Harned remembered, "We charged and reached these pits but were subjected to a terrific fire. Many of the boys were hit before gaining these pits." Private Clifford S. Cushman reached the first enemy entrenchment and was immediately struck by gunfire. "He fell half in and half out of the pit in a sitting position. I do not think he

was hit very hard this first time for he sat there, reloaded his pistol and alone cleaned out the pit on his right.”⁵⁸ Private Harned then witnessed Private Cushman single-handedly kill six enemy troops occupying the adjacent hole. “I can personally testify to this as I was within feet of him at that time,”⁵⁹ remarked Private Harned, three months after the engagement. Private Cushman was hit again and rolled over on his side. Regaining his senses, the wounded private immediately cried out for water. “About this time things got a great deal hotter, and that was the last time I saw Cliff alive,” claimed Private Harned.⁶⁰

Along the first line of enemy positions, the fighting became hand-to-hand. One of the few men of the company who successfully made it to the first line of German redoubts was Private Grover C. Bowers. He noticed one wounded Marine kill a German officer with a trench knife. According to Private Bowers the enemy officer had just drawn his pistol in an attempt to finish off the injured American. Private Bowers himself fell wounded moments later.⁶¹ Numerous enemy troops fled their dugouts, leaving some of their light machine guns behind. According to Harned, several of the German machine guns were turned against the fleeing enemy. Several enemy officers surrendered, seemingly happy to be out of the fight.⁶² The few men left of the 45th Company realized that the position could not likely be held. Several started to filter back to the company’s original position (See Appendix E). While Private Harned desperately tried to work his way back through the open field, his friend Private Frank McCarthy fell wounded in the side and back.⁶³ Many of the wounded decided to wait until darkness to get back to the jump off point. Several others lay in the field incapacitated, unable to move.

On the extreme right flank of the assault, Captain Philip Case’s 47th Company advanced with the rest of Major Berry’s battalion. The company took fire from the front left and suffered approximately thirty casualties while crossing the field.⁶⁴ Floyd Gibbons watched the squads

advance with about four yards between each man. They would rush forward for about fifty feet and drop flat on the ground as another squad sprinted forward.⁶⁵ The German guns hammered the 47th Company as they neared the tree line. Suddenly, the lead elements encountered a wire fence that stretching a great distance in front of the woods. Sergeant Oliver D. Bernier noticed the obstacle fronting the company. The twenty four-year-old ran forward as dirt from the impact of machine gun fire flew in all directions. Explosions from German trench mortars dropping in the field did not stop Sergeant Bernier. When he finally reached the fence, he struggled with it until it broke and came down. The company continued their advance on the woods.⁶⁶

Because the 47th Company advanced on the southern edge of Belleau Wood, they had a shorter distance to travel in the open field and were able to penetrate the strip of woods protruding west. This sector of the woods was not held by a significant number of Germans, and 47th Company was able to veer to the right in an effort to establish contact with the left wing of the 6th Marine Regiment nearby. First Lieutenant Raymond Knapp remembered:

The 47th reached the woods and turned to go north to go through and drive the enemy before them. After advancing some 500 yards, a cleared spaced opened before them into which they dashed with all speed. This dash proved costly, for hardly had they entered the trap, for a trap it was, than a veritable rain of machine gun fire fell upon them and pinned them to the ground.⁶⁷

Floyd Gibbons, situated at the battalion's jump-off point, recalled seeing the men reaching the woods but all that could be heard above the pounding machine gun fire was shouting. "Then we knew that work was being done with the bayonet."⁶⁸

"The further we went, the thicker were the Dutch Machine guns," remembered Corporal Victor M. Landreth. "Our left flank was open and we were getting flank fire. Machine gun bullets were sure thick and lots of one-pounders and trench mortars."⁶⁹ Several men maneuvered

on the guns. One of these men, Second Lieutenant Joseph A. Synnott, was instantly killed when the flanking machine gun cut him down.⁷⁰ Unbeknownst to the men of the 47th Company, they had sauntered deep into an intricate enemy ambush. “The trap was a cunningly devised one. It was about a hundred yards square and was cleared of all trees, they having been felled and the branches interlaced so as to form an abbatis. Paths, which were easily discernable, ran across it and down these paths, machine gun and rifle bullets literally rained.”⁷¹ Survivors of the company worked their way to the right edge of a clearing in the woods on their stomachs. Captain Case examined the situation, and sent four men to cross through the open area of the woods to deal with the gun on the left.⁷² First Sergeant Edmund Madsen and two other men, sent forward by Captain Case, tried desperately to attack the machine guns situated in the heavy underbrush; when First Sergeant Madsen was just feet away, a sudden volley of fire killed him instantly.⁷³

Captain Case sent six more men forward and they met a similar fate. Knapp recalled the horrific scene when he wrote:

Finally an officer and ten men were sent out across to clear out the gun and then get the center guns on the flank and clear them out so that the company could advance. The detail started across and arrived on the other side with the officer and three men to find the men of the other two details killed or wounded within a radius of some fifteen yards. A hasty reconnaissance of the area revealed the troublesome gun cleverly concealed in a tree.⁷⁴

One man, Private Winn, lay in the underbrush awaiting the section to clean out the machine gun nest. A platoon leader shouted for Private Verne Gardner to deliver a message. As soon as Gardner stood up to make his way over to the platoon commander, a shot rippled through the forest. Fifty feet away, Private Winn saw Private Gardner slouch lifelessly to the ground.

The surviving members of the detachment eventually succeeded in silencing the menacing machine gun.⁷⁵

Captain Knapp remembered the majority of the 47th Company being held up by the enemy resistance and “deployed along the line already formed, put scouts out in their front and dug in so as to prepare for the coming counterattack and hold the ground taken.”⁷⁶ With the afternoon growing late, most of the men had consumed all of their water. Private Joseph Sanderson saw the body of a dead German soldier sprawled out in the open just beyond his position. Attached to the dead combatant was a canteen and Private Sanderson began to crawl out to retrieve it. “We told him to keep down, but we needed the water,” recalled Private Harry G. Reckitt. Before he could reach the corpse, a sniper’s bullet blew his head open, instantly killing the man many knew simply as “Scotch.”⁷⁷

Several runners tracked back to the company’s jump-off point looking for Major Berry. One of these messengers came across reporter Floyd Gibbons and Lieutenant Hartzall who were watching the main assault waves of the 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment advance toward Belleau Wood. The courier decided to stay with Gibbons and Lieutenant Hartzell. The three men spotted Major Berry with a few men from his battalion headquarters group preparing to advance toward Belleau Wood behind the main assault. Major Berry gave the men permission to advance forward with him and his headquarters detachment.⁷⁸ The group advanced through the field and reached the road bisecting the field where several of the company’s wounded men sought cover. The Major Berry and his group reached a patch of the field that formed an apex into the woods.⁷⁹ Each side of tree line along this apex contained very active enemy machine gun positions. Major Berry ordered the group to follow him at small intervals at a time to limit exposure to the torrent of gunfire as they rushed towards the forest. Bullets kicked up dirt all

around Gibbons as he followed the Major into the increasingly ferocious gunfire. “Get down everybody,” screamed Major Berry.⁸⁰ Laying flat on his stomach and face, Gibbons heard an unusual commotion out in front. Secluded in the cover of the waist-high wheat, Gibbons had lost sight of Lieutenant Hartzell. When Gibbons lifted his head up he saw Major Berry struggling to get to his feet, clinching his left wrist and shouting, “My hand’s gone.” A single bullet had hit him in the elbow traveling parallel to his forearm and sunk deep into his palm tearing away the flesh along his ulna bone. Major Berry ran back towards Gibbons but dropped into the cover of the wheat just short of Gibbon’s position. In a labored and agonized voice Major Berry muttered, “We’ve got to get out of here. We’ve got to get forward. They’ll start shelling this open field in a few minutes.”⁸¹

Gibbons tried to guide Major Berry toward him without peering above the stalks. Gibbons crawled towards the Major. He tried not to move the foliage as it would surely draw enemy fire. Gibbons Suddenly felt a burn on the upper part of his left arm as he crawled on his belly, propped up on his elbows. A bullet had pierced his left bicep muscle. “I glanced down at the sleeve of my uniformed coat and could not even see the hole where the bullet had entered. Neither was there any sudden flow of blood.” Gibbons continued to move forward. Another round clipped the top of his shoulder and sent another stinging sensation down his arm. Gibbons recalled the fear he felt when he reached the wounded officer and saw the agony splashed across Major Berry’s face.⁸²

Enemy fire increased with every little movement. Gibbons burrowed his left cheek to the ground in order to remain as flat as possible. He moved his helmet to the right side of his face as he inched towards the Major. A crash described as a “breaking glass bottle into a porcelain bathtub,” stunned Gibbons. The initial shock caused him to raise his head up off the ground but

he instantly placed it flat to again as bullets snapped through the stalks of wheat overhead. He felt the left side of his face with his right hand. “My fingers rested on something soft and wet. I withdrew the hand and looked at it. It was covered with blood.”⁸³ The pain in the left side of his head was excruciating. A bullet had ricocheted off the ground and entered Gibbon’s left eye cutting it in half, splitting his eye lid open, and exited out of his forehead, fracturing his skull.

Gibbons, in an effort to find Lieutenant Hartzell began shouting for him. Lieutenant Hartzell discovered that Gibbons had been hit and asked to the severity. Gibbons replied that he was not hit very badly. “Where are you hit,” shouted Hartzell. Gibbons replied that he had been shot in the head. “In the head, you damn fool,” hollered an angered Hartzell. “How the hell can you be alright if you are hit in the head?”⁸⁴ Gibbons could not easily move as the pain began to intensify. The injured side of his face lay in the dirt, and in order to rest more comfortably. Gibbons pulled his gas mask bag out from underneath his prone body. He removed the bag’s harness from around his neck and managed to place the satchel underneath his face so he could rest his head upon it. The enemy guns remained active while Gibbons lay there helplessly.

Twenty feet away to Gibbon’s left, another wounded Marine lay unconscious. The injured man still donned his pack and occasionally writhed around in order to roll over on his back but the pack obstructed his movement. Every bit of commotion drew the wrath of a nearby enemy machine gun. Eventually the unidentified Marine managed to get on his back with his satchel still strapped tightly to his back, hoisting his chest up into the air. Suddenly enemy guns spotted him and as bullets struck his exposed chest, the buttons from his coat flew off and one of the, straps from his pack split in half. His now lifeless body flopped over to the side, shredded by the horrendous enemy gunfire.⁸⁵

The 4th Marine Brigade headquarters knew very little regarding the progress of the assault and several reports coming in from the field contradicted each other. Ten minutes into the attack, a message was dispatched from Lieutenant Colonel Harry R. Lay stating, “That the men went over the top in fine shape, proper deployment around the edges of Bois de Belleau- and no casualties.”⁸⁶ Another message sent later that afternoon by Captain Henry Larsen claimed, “Three platoons of the 45th Company only a few men returned.”⁸⁷ Hours would pass before any definite information would paint even the faintest clarification regarding the status of the companies involved in the attack.

Chapter V

Assault on the Town of Bouresches

In accordance to the second phase of the attack order on June 6, the east wing of the brigade prepared to assault the village of Bouresches. The task fell to Major Berton S. Sibley's 3rd Battalion 6th Marine Regiment. Instructions stated that the battalion would advance from the area around Lucy-le-Bocage and move east. The left wing of Major Sibley's battalion would sweep through the southern fringe of Belleau Wood in an effort to connect with Major Berry's 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, while the right half moved parallel to the road that ran from Lucy-le-Bocage to the village of Bouresches. Along this path, a steep ravine ran east between the southeastern corner of Belleau Wood and Bouresches. The 2nd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment was tasked to tie in with the right flank of Major Sibley's battalion and while still maintaining contact with the 23rd Army Infantry Regiment in the east.

The constant movement of the previous days, in addition to the terror of constant shell fire, made rest nearly impossible. Men grabbed brief moments of sleep during momentary lulls in the constant movement of the ranks. Private Scarbrough, whose company had moved into a position in the pre-dawn hours of June 6, 1918, managed to catch a few hours of sleep until word of a pending advance spread through the company rumor mill. First Lieutenant Louis Timmerman commanded Private Scarbrough's platoon in the 83rd Company and had just returned that morning from regimental headquarters located nearly a kilometer southwest of the 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment's position.¹ As Lieutenant Timmerman arrived he noticed Private Scarbrough sound asleep and woke him. "I was going to let you sleep in," joked Lieutenant Timmerman, "but I thought you'd be sore if you missed a chance to shoot some

Germans today.”² Private Scarbrough, in a post-sleep daze, glanced up at the officer, “I told him he was confusing me with [Private Edward J.] Steinmetz, who over heard my remark and said, ‘Hey Jim, I was killing Germans in my dreams too!’”³

Colonel Catlin, who had been tasked with overall command of the attack by both Major Berry’s battalion and Major Sibley’s men, discussed the pending attack with Sibley and Major Thomas Holcomb, whose 2nd Battalion, 6th Marines were to keep in touch with Sibley’s right. “With a map in hand,” recalled Colonel Catlin, “I explained the situation to them without trying to gloss over any of its difficulties and gave them their orders. I found them ready. As we stood there, Sibley’s battalion was filing into a ravine, getting into position. The two majors passed on the oral orders to the company commanders.”⁴

Major Holcomb’s orders called on him to dispatch one company of his battalion to move through the town of Bouresches, the initial objective of the assault, and connect with the 23rd Infantry Regiment on the extreme eastern flank of the division. “I detailed the 96th Company, Captain Duncan, to this duty.”⁵ Major Holcomb ordered the 79th Company, under the command of Captain Randolph T. Zane, to support the assault of the 96th Company. The 80th Company received directions to support Major Sibley’s. The 78th Company of the 2nd Battalion was to remain in reserve.⁶

Major Sibley recalled the haste and obscurity characterizing the entire operation. His battalion had assembled on the area with vague details; he had to relay the few-known particulars of the pending assault to his company commanders. “There was no other information concerning the enemy or the terrain and as there was no time for scouting, the company commanders were shown the above order, also their objectives on the map, and were conducted

to the line from which the battalion would start the attack.”⁷ Despite the sketchy information available, Major Sibley readied his four company commanders for the assault with no time to spare.

First Lieutenant Louis Timmerman remembered that Captain Alfred Noble, leader of the 83rd Company, pulled all platoon commanders together.

When Noble spoke to us he gave us the following instructions which I jotted down in a little notebook: we were to go through the woods which lay ahead of us-this turned out to be the Bois de Belleau-having gone through the woods we were to take the town of Bouresches which we could see from where we were because it lay along a road which led from approximately near the field that we were forming in down through an open lowland that skirted the edge of the Bois de Belleau.⁸

The men of the 2nd Division remained oblivious to the pending attack leading to speculation and rumors among the ranks. Word of a definite attack quickly dispelled any gossip. “Our sergeants told us to get everything in order and that we would make an assault on the woods at 5 o’clock that evening,” recalled Private Scarbrough. “Men checked and rechecked their weapons. Some ran their bayonets and fighting knives down their arms to see if it was sharp enough to shave the hair off.” Being always particular about being clean shaven, Private Scarbrough remembered packing his shaving kit and a leather strap and hoisted his strapped on his combat pack.⁹ Private Havelock D. Nelson’s platoon of the 97th Company had not yet joined the rest of the battalion. Their platoon commander, First Lieutenant Kennedy, an Army reserve officer, frantically assembled the men of his platoon to join the rest of the company nearly two kilometers away.¹⁰

Corporal Joseph Rendinell of the 97th Company recalled, “we were ordered to leave everything but our emergency rations.”¹¹ He also witnessed seven enemy observation balloons

take to the sky on the eastern horizon. First Lieutenant Ralph W. Marshall, commanding the 4th platoon, called for Corporal Rendinell as he adjusted his gear. The corporal rushed to Lieutenant Marshall, who reached into his pocket and pulled out a large clumped-up piece of paper. As the lieutenant unfolded the awkward diagram, he pointed to a particular spot as Corporal Rendinell gazed over the officer's shoulder. "See this line," remarked Marshall. "It's this little ravine, about four-feet deep. Take any three men you want and go until you see Germans and find out where their machine gun nests are and keep ahead of our line about 500 feet and send runners back so we'll know where they are."¹² Confounded by this seemingly suicidal task, Rendinell recalled, "I said a little prayer. It didn't look to me like there was any chance of coming back at all. My buddies from my old company said goodbye and wished me luck and I could tell they didn't ever expect to see me again neither."¹³

That afternoon Captain David Bellamy of the 6th Marine Regimental Headquarters Company, feeling similar fate might befall him, scribbled a brief diary entry stating:

I feel as though I ought to write some possible finals, but am unable to work myself into that frame of mind. Not that I can't foresee the danger, but no matter what the exigency, I like to go on as if nothing were happening or about to happen to upset things. But still I am full of feelings for those who love me and who are watching my every move with tender anxiousness.¹⁴

Before the attack that afternoon, Colonel Catlin and a Captain Thibot Laspierre, a French officer attached to the 6th Marines, moved through the town of Lucy-le-Bocage to a forward position where the colonel could watch the assault. As he passed through the town he walked through the left side of Major Sibley's men awaiting the assault in a ravine. "The men seemed cool, in good spirits, and ready for the word to start. They were talking quietly among themselves. I spoke to several as I passed."¹⁵ As the men shifted their attention to the almighty

Colonel Catlin, a man seemingly larger than life, he belted out, "Give 'm hell boys!" Colonel Catlin added, "The men knew in a general way what was expected of them and what they were up against, but I think only the officers realized the almost impossible task that lay before them. I knew, and the knowledge left me little comfort. Perhaps I exposed myself unduly," recalled Colonel Catlin, "but I was anxious about Major Berry and it seemed necessary for me to get as near his command as possible and to keep an eye on the whole proceeding."¹⁶

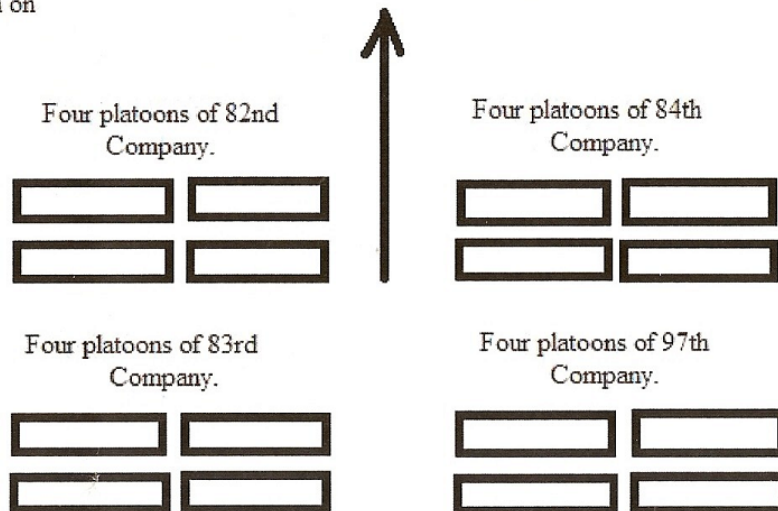
The battalion fanned out in the wooded area on the southeastern outskirts of the town of Lucy-le-Bocage. According to Private Scarbrough, "Most of the regiment was deployed in this shallow trench area about 500 yards from the woods, more or less, that afternoon. It was to be a timed assault."¹⁷ The formation had two of the battalion's companies abreast from each other moving two waves per company. Each wave was composed of two platoons, an assembly perfectly obsolete against the awaiting machine gun defenses. Major Sibley's diary entry reflects the details of the battalion's layout. "The 82nd Company and 84th Company in the front line- Lucy-le-Bocage to Bouresches and the 84th Company being on the right of this ravine. The 83rd Company was placed in support of the 82nd Company and the 97th Company in support of the 84th Company, all companies were in a four-wave formation."¹⁸ (See Appendix F) This configuration maintained a wide front and spread the ranks out to cover a broad amount of ground. The ranks were in wide rows and men had attached bayonets to their rifles; intending to engage their adversaries at close quarters. The extended front of the formation provided a large target for the defending Germans. The idea of the assault was to close upon the enemy and maintain liaison with the flanks. This method did not take into account the capability of machine guns defending an enemy position nor the great distance over open ground required to obtain the

objective; a deadly miscalculation. The tactic was obsolete by World War One standards, but the Americans had not yet learned that lesson (See Appendix G).¹⁹



Appendix F. Map of 3rd Battalion, 6th Marines attack on Belleau Wood

3rd Battalion, 6th
Marine Regiment's
assault formation on
June 6, 1918.



Appendix G. Formation of 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment during attack on southern edge of Belleau Wood June 6, 1918

From the narrow ravine the battalion looked across the flowing field of wheat nearly 500 meters toward the edge of Belleau Wood. Private Scarbrough recalled the moment the battalion began the advance. "Then at 5p.m. somebody at the top gave the signal and it worked its way down to the lieutenants and sergeants and we with echoing hollers and the blowing of whistles, we moved out."²⁰ The battalion advanced at a steady pace in what Private Scarbrough remembered as, "wheat that was almost up to our shoulders. I remember going into the wheat, the sun shining and the stalks crunching under hundreds of boots. I watched Lieutenant Timmerman plodding through the stalks, his gas mask around his chest and cane in his hand, stepping high like he was in deep mud."²¹ Private Scarbrough smiled at the display, amused. He then shifted his attention to Corporal Edwin J. Larsen who walked next to Private Scarbrough as if to get a reciprocated reaction at Lieutenant Timmerman's awkward movement through the field. "Larsen sternly reminded me to keep my eyes front."²²

Far beyond the battalion's advance, Corporal Rendinell, who had earlier been sent forward to locate the enemy machine gun emplacements, cautiously moved into the seclusion of the gorge. Together with Privates Allen H. Howe, Wilbur F. Moore and another Marine advanced along the ravine concealed along the northern bank. The three men crawled further along, keeping a distance of several yards between each other, Private Moore far back. If the other three men were killed or wounded, Private Moore could make a run for it and get word back to the company. Creeping slowly, Corporal Rendinell came to a corner in the gully. "We hunched along with our heads down. I spotted a bunch of Heinies around the bend of the ravine. I signaled back to Private Moore, he rushed back to headquarters and then the attack started."²³

Major Sibley's men had barely begun to descend the sloping field toward the woods when the pounding beat of distant machine guns emanated from the far tree line. Taken by

surprise, the battalion immediately suffered casualties. The 84th Company on the front right of the battalion formation had advanced parallel to the roadway, which ran down along a ravine, as they pushed towards the town of Bouresches. The sunken path gave little cover, but one platoon from the 84th Company tried to seek shelter in this depression. The enemy fire from the woods had torn into their flank and the company had to deal with the heavy enemy machine gun fire before they could push toward the town.

Private Bernard Kallin remembered, above the thundering pulsation of machine guns, orders came for the platoon to advance to the left, towards the woods. The battalion began to move toward the tree line a few men at a time. About twenty-five meters away, Private Kallin watched Corporal Earl M. Collier labor his way up the grade carrying his automatic rifle. Near Collier, Corporal Harry W. Elliot also struggled up the slope. Private Kallin recalled, “As they came out of the roadway, a machine gun opened up on them and both of them fell.”²⁴

Numerous rounds struck Elliot, instantly killing him. Private Wilfred R. Le Beau saw Collier fall and immediately realized he was dead. Struck several times, bullets had blown his head open and shattered his lower jaw. Before his lifeless body fell to the ground, the same volley of rounds hit him in the left side of his chest, shattering the shoulder blade as well as his left lower leg.²⁵ The front two companies scampered toward the woods in small groups. The open field offered no cover from the storm of enemy bullets.

The 83rd and 97th, trailing behind the 82nd and 84th Companies also advanced into the teeth of the enemy gun fire, which swept the field from left to right. “I remember thinking the bullets sounded just like crickets, loud crickets,” remembered Private Scarbrough.²⁶ The screams of men shouting orders and calling for medical attention mixed with the pounding sound of machine gun fire. The battalion’s field of view became greatly hindered by the tall wheat. “I

saw a man fall in front and to the right of me, and right away the man behind him stepped up to take his place.”²⁷ Sergeants and officers yelling above the whine of bullets cracking over-head, urged their men to continue the advance.

The front two companies suffered heavy casualties, littering the field as the two rear companies continued to advance on the southeastern tree line of Belleau Wood. Private Scarbrough remembered, “Nobody stopped to help the fallen, we were ordered to keep up the lines and replace the gaps.”²⁸ Private Carl Williams was in front of Private Scarbrough during the advance. “He fell right in front of me, and I double-timed into his spot, looking down at him as I went. I couldn’t see where he was hit, but he didn’t move.”²⁹ Private Edward A. Graham, standing next to Private Williams, saw him fall after a machine gun bullet went through Private William’s chest.³⁰

The battalion moved on the left side of the ravine where the ground was lower than the ridge and they made perfect targets for German gunners inside Belleau Wood. Major Sibley’s men had nowhere to hide in the open field, while deep inside the forest, a thickly-wooded hill provided perfect concealment in the for the Germans firing down on the advancing Marines. “It was un-nerving,” Private Scarbrough thought in vain, “why weren’t we taking cover?” “I could hear sergeants shouting ‘keep moving! Fill in!’ It’s funny I found myself praying, but not for safety. I was praying for the nerve to keep going, not to give up, not to let my unit down.”³¹

The experience was indelible. In a 1990 interview, 100-year-old John Groff, who was at the time a twenty-eight-year-old Gunnery Sergeant in Lieutenant Timmerman’s platoon, vividly recalled the horror. “Men were bleeding and begging that something be done for them, and we couldn’t do it. We had to go forward or we would have been wounded.”³² Captain Alfred H.

Noble above the roar of the battle shouted, "Straight ahead, what are you waiting for," recalled Groff. "We were more afraid of our senior officers than we were of the Germans. It was pretty bad business."³³ The battalion had to keep moving in order to seek the cover of the tree line and have a fighting chance against the Germans. The open field was too dangerous and offered no concealment.

The battalion pressed on amidst the withering fire. Private Scarbrough tripped over something in the middle of the field. When he looked over his shoulder he realized he had stumbled over the body of another Marine. "It was a lucky too, because as I hit the ground I felt the shockwave of a string of bullets run right down my neck. That's no exaggeration either. I had on a light backpack and at least three rounds ripped right through my pack."³⁴ Suddenly he felt like something had just hit him in the face and stunned him. The incredible pain in his head and neck convinced him that he had been shot. "I felt around my neck and I wasn't hit. Then my knuckles scraped against the jagged rim of my helmet and I understood what had tried to snap my neck. A machine gun bullet had come so close to hitting me that it went through the rim of my helmet."³⁵

Private Scarbrough lay there shocked and looked again at the body he had just fallen over. The corpse was riddled with bullets. "It scared the hell out of me. I felt like I was right there at death's doorway and this guy was inside while I was still outside." Before Private Scarbrough could gain his senses Corporal Marion M. Collier, advancing nearby, violently grabbed the scared Private's shirt and screamed for him to get on his feet and push forward. "I stood up to one knee, pushing myself away from the dead man with my other leg." Private Scarbrough, in the fog of chaos, began advancing the opposite direction of the attack. He noticed the rest of the

company coming towards him and recalled, “Somehow, in the bullets and fear, I still had time to be embarrassed for my disorientation.”³⁶

Private Scarbrough sprinted to Corporal Collier to find out where to get back in formation. “I hollered to him but he didn’t hear me, so I ran up to him and grabbed his shoulder. ‘Corporal!’ I yelled.” Suddenly Collier fell back into him. As he looked at the corporal, Private Scarbrough saw the round hole in his chin. “It looked like a dimple in his lower chin except that his jaw had shattered and his lower teeth were now a jagged line of chips, bone and blood across his face. He didn’t move at all and his eyes were absolutely as clear as they had been a minute ago when he spoke to me, but he was gone, no doubt.”³⁷

Private Havelock D. Nelson, whose platoon had been delayed in joining the rest of the 97th Company, recalled approaching the battalion as they advanced on the woods.

About half way across, a tremendous uproar of artillery, machine gun and rifle fire burst loose and continued without a break. The attack had started and we were not there! Faster we walked toward the woods ahead of us. I caught a glimpse of the skirmish lines moving to the northeast through the wheat fields on the other side of the woods. Shells were bursting in those lines so rapidly that they could not be counted, but the lines appeared to me to be as straight as on a drill field. I did not know then that only a few minutes before those two lines had been four lines!³⁸

The 97th Company began to advance in rushes of fifteen yards at a time, following behind the 84th on the right side of the ravine. The torrent of machine gun fire laid waste to the left flank of the company in addition to the devastating German artillery that began to inundate the field. Immediately a machine gun bullet struck Corporal Neil S. Shannon passing through the muscle of the left leg, entering the inside thigh of the right leg and shattering the femur bone. Bleeding severely from his wounds, Shannon slowly dragged his Chauchat rifle with him through the wheat for several yards. Eventually the twenty-eight year old managed to make his

way to safety along an embankment skirting the lower tree line of Belleau Wood. Corporal Shannon remained with his company until evacuation became possible.³⁹

The artillery fell with increasing ferocity on the battalion, and the 97th Company bore the brunt of it. Despite the danger, Private William H. Saylor crept forward in the field dragging his telescoped-rifle with him. He eventually positioned himself prone in the open field and began to search for targets nestled in the distant tree line. Suddenly, heavy German trench mortars known as “minnievihffers” announced their arrival with their terrifying signature scream. They crashed to the earth with horrendous results.⁴⁰

Burrowed down in the field, Corporal Joseph L. Burns was fifteen yards away from Private Saylor when the earth shook underneath him. A trench mortar made a direct hit on Private Saylor. Sergeant William J. Delany recalled, “I saw Private William Saylor actually blown up in the air about twenty feet by a German Minniewhiffer, like one of our trench mortar shells. He had his insides blown right out and died at once, never knew what hit him.”⁴¹ The explosion had literally decapitated him, blasted his torso apart, and removed his right foot.⁴² Sergeant William T. Scanlon, situated about twenty feet from Saylor, recalled the sight. “His body goes up in the air like the roots of a blasted tree. I can pick out his legs, arms and body. My eyes seem fixed and follow the upward movement and watch the parts coming down. Bits fall on me. It is the first direct hit I have seen.”⁴³ The man known by his comrades as “Alarm Clock Bill” died in the most horrific way and those that were there never forgot it. “Everybody remembered his death because he was the first man to be killed by direct hit,” remembered Captain Thomas T. McEvoy, commanding the 1st Platoon of the 97th Company.⁴⁴

The German artillery fire quickly turned the open field into a perfect kill-zone as deadly chunks of shrapnel flew sailed through the air. Men cowed under the barrage. Movement across even the smallest open stretch took extreme courage. The torrential incoming of shells became too much for Private William R. Cassady to emotionally handle. He was slightly wounded and began to psychologically breakdown from the debilitating condition commonly known as “shell shock.”⁴⁵ Virtually paralyzed by fear, Private Cassady got his focus back in a matter of minutes and advanced through the shrapnel-strewn field.⁴⁶ Sergeant Scanlon remembered, “I don’t want to get up, but I force myself. I see other figures move. We are just starting forward when Major Sibley’s voice comes to us, clear across the field from the woods: ‘Ninety-Seventh Company, stand fast!’”

Held up, the company decided to dig in just south of the middle of the tree line of Belleau Wood. “Here we halted and were told to lie down,” remembered Sergeant Havelock Nelson. The company had begun to dig in when he heard Private Harry R. Hensell cry out in pain. “This was almost as big a surprise to me as it had been to him, because I had been feeling reasonably safe and had noticed nothing coming our way but some stray overhead shots.” Grasping his knee, Private Hensell writhed in pain. Sergeant Nelson tore open the pant leg of his trouser and found a bullet had lodged into the skin above the knee. “The bullet was so near the surface that it could easily have been lifted out with a sharp knife. However amateur surgery being prohibited, I took his first aid packet and tied the wound up for him.”⁴⁷

The remnants of the company took refuge behind the protection of a crest at the forest’s edge. Survivors looked back toward the field and saw several wounded men struggling to make it to safety. A few men braved the gun fire to assist these casualties. Privates William T. Nappier, Paul S. Dreyer and Walter L. Burroughs worked their way through the field as machine

gun fire continued to snap overhead. Miraculously they escaped the deadly barrage. Privates Leon D. Huffstater and John M. Worrell realized that their assistance in aiding the wounded was also desperately needed. Both men crawled to their commanding officer and above the howl of gun fire, asked permission to help bring in the wounded. Permission was granted. Both men then crawled out into the kill-zone and managed to drag several men towards the cover of the tree line. While traveling through the fire-swept field a shell detonated behind Private Worrell; knocking him to his stomach. A large piece of shrapnel tore into his back along the lower lumbar region and embedded next to the spine. The injured Private lay partially paralyzed.⁴⁸

While the 97th Company halted in the ravine south of Belleau Wood, survivors of the other three companies entered the dark tree line of Belleau Wood. Private Scarbrough recalled lying in the field contemplating his next move.

I pulled myself up by my rifle again and felt this intense pain, like I had a sharp rock in my shoe. Only it wasn't in my shoe, it was my knee. I sat back down and then quickly thought it better to lie flat. I felt down and lifted my knee up to see what was wrong. It was swollen like a grapefruit and my pants were torn. I decided to give it a go and see if I could get to the woods. I started at a crawl for a couple hundred yards.⁴⁹

Eventually the battalion's survivors were immediately deterred from attacking Bouresches, the initial objective, and entered the ominous tree line of Belleau Wood to look for the hidden enemy machine gun emplacements.⁵⁰

Moving simultaneously with Major Sibley's battalion, Major Thomas Holcomb's 2nd Battalion 6th Marine Regiment initiated their advance, centered on Captain Donald Duncan's 96th Company. The battalion's assault intended to conform to the right half of Major Sibley's

battalion to seize the town of Bouresches. The 79th Company under Captain Randolph T. Zane had orders to move behind Captain Duncan's Company. The 80th Company, according to the assault plan, received directions to move in behind Major Sibley's Marines. The right half of the 80th Company, led by Captain Bailey M. Coffenberg, were to advance east parallel to the southern tree line of Belleau Wood while the right half would follow the right wing of Sibley's men into the southern edge of the forest.⁵¹

Earlier in the morning, Captain Duncan's company moved into a patch of woods about a mile south of the town of Bouresches. According to First Lieutenant Clifton B. Cates most of the men believed the company had moved to the rear to get a rest; they would soon be sorely let down. At about 4:30 p.m., thirty minutes before the attack was to commence, orders detailing the attack reached the company commanders who were spread out over a great distance. Major Holcomb recalled an even more precarious announcement. "We received orders to attack at 4:55p.m., and the order stated that the Second Battalion would go over the top at five-five. This gave us only ten minutes to issue the necessary orders to the troops concerned, an apparent impossibility, although it did not prove to be so."⁵²

Pandemonium rippled through the 96th Company on receiving the orders. They had a great distance to cover in order to be in position to begin the assault. Details about the assault remained incredibly unclear since most officers did not even know the objective. First Lieutenant Cates recalled the orders had been "very ambiguous," but there was no time for clarification.⁵³ First Lieutenant John West, who commanded the 3rd Platoon of the 79th Company, stood with his men in a cluster of woods situated away from the rest of the company. A courier ran up to the lieutenant with a message ordering him to report to the company command post immediately. When West arrived he found the other three platoon commanders with Captain

Randolph Zane situated around a map sprawled out on in the grass. Captain Zane quickly delegated orders to the men. First Lieutenant West's 3rd Platoon was told to advance towards the southern face of Belleau Wood and make an oblique movement behind Major Sibley's men and follow them at a 500-yard interval into the town.⁵⁴

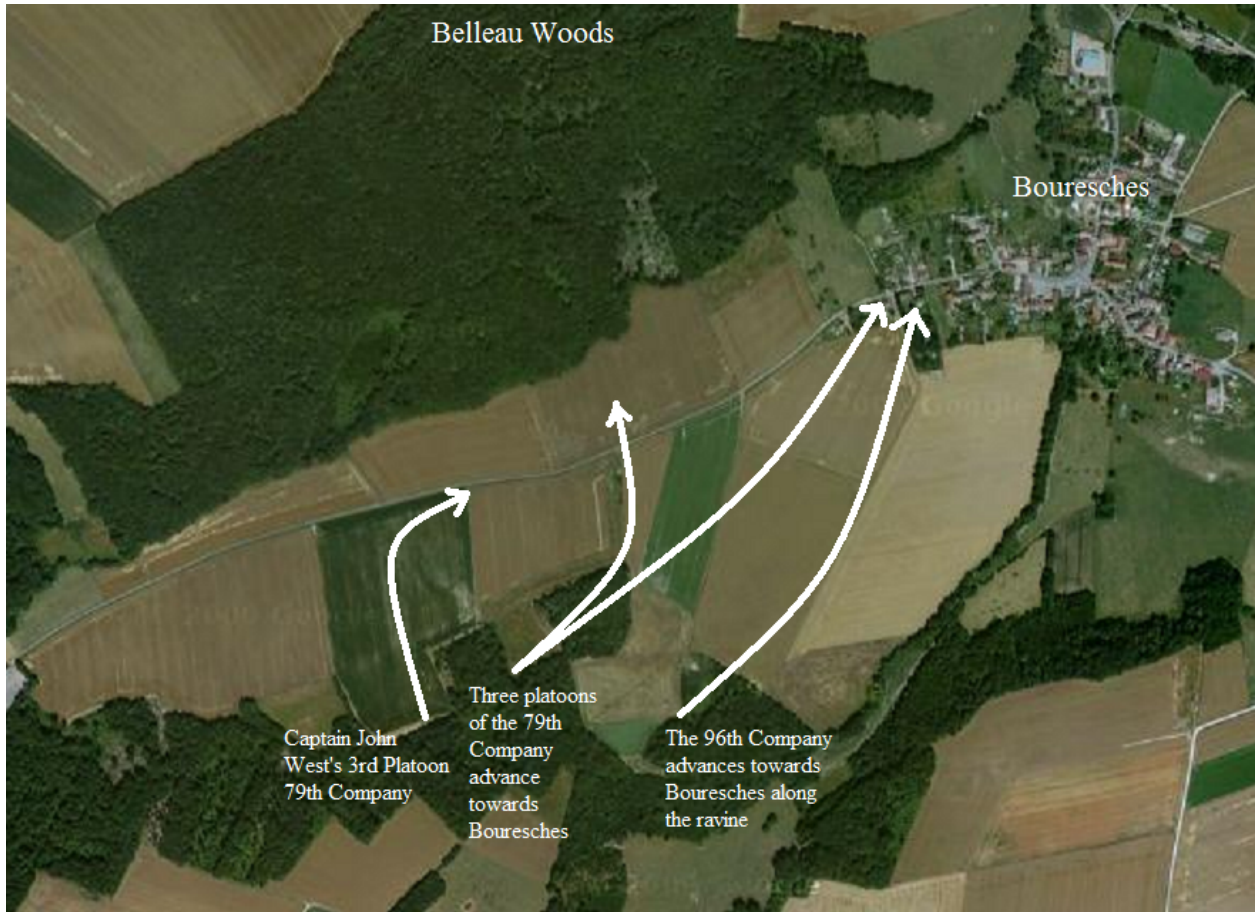
The attacking platoons immediately moved into position. Corporal Lloyd Pike of the 2nd Platoon, 79th Company noticed members of the 96th Company who had made the tiring journey to their jump-off point with the utmost haste huddled among the trees waiting for the initiation the of the assault. Several German observation balloons remained silhouetted on the eastern horizon and an occasional shell fell upon this patch of forest. The Marines remained perfectly visible on the high crest, overlooking the open field they were about to cross.⁵⁵ Corporal Pike's platoon reached the cover of some trees as the 2nd Division's artillery, positioned several kilometers behind the front line, responded to the enemy guns.

Last minute details of the pending advance reached Captain Zane and in order to convey the new information to his platoon commanders, he tasked his second-in-command, First Lieutenant Graves Erskine, to take the new data over to the 2nd and 4th Platoons. Erskine, who formerly command the 2nd Platoon, arrived just as the first supporting artillery shells collided into the distant southern edge of Belleau Wood. From the seclusion of their wooded jump-off point, the men of the 2nd Platoon cheered above the distant crash that echoed across the valley, content that the Germans were finally on the receiving end of misery.⁵⁶

The supporting fire did not go unanswered. Sergeant Romeyn P. Benjamin recalled several shells landing among the 2nd Platoon of the 79th Company. Sergeant Benjamin lay prone and buried his head into the ground as the terrifying and familiar scream of an incoming shell

permeated the air. The explosion, which Benjamin remembered being softer than he anticipated, sent dirt and debris in all directions. As he cautiously raised his head he saw the lifeless bodies of Privates Rozaire D. Rivard and Edward H. Wendell sprawled nearby. They had not taken cover in time and the blast had blown both men's heads to pieces.⁵⁷ Near the mangled body of Private Wendell, Private Harvey S. Brown found the dead man's mess kit blown out of his pack. He ran over to pick it up and placed it in his own satchel for later use. Corporal Glen G. Hill remembered a shell exploding just behind him where his brother, Corporal Sydney Hill, stood. Fearing that the blast had killed Sydney, he ran over to find his brother, Sergeant Robert E. Barrett and several other corporals casually sitting in a dugout. The men were hastily eating a last-minute meal of Argentine beef and French bread as shells exploded nearby. One man inside the foxhole said to Corporal Glen Hill, "Come on down and join the party. You might as well die on a full stomach."⁵⁸

Just before the anticipated jump-off, Second Lieutenant Clifton Cates scrambled together his 4th Platoon of the 96th Company and began to move his men west along the battalion's position to a starting point where they could best advance to make up the battalion's extreme left platoon. Earlier, Second Lieutenant Cates received orders from Captain Duncan to move toward Major Sibley's men and maintain liaison. Moving through the ranks of the 79th Company, Captain Randolph Zane wasted no time in snarling at Second Lieutenant Cates to clear his men out of the way.⁵⁹ The rest of the 96th Company emerged into the open field sloping 600 yards towards the valley below where the red-roofed and walled buildings of Bouresches came into view through the haze of smoke blanketing the field as occasional shells burst in the wheat. As the 5:00 p.m. arrived, officers looked at their watches and signaled the assault (See Appendix H).



Appendix H. Map of 2nd Battalion, 6th Marines attack on Bouresches

The 96th Company advanced from the tree line in a formation where each platoon made up four skirmish lines. Enemy machine guns began working over the ranks of Marines as they emerged from the tree line and several men in the first waves fell wounded. Sergeant Benjamin of the 79th Company watched as the columns of 96th Company men pressed out of the woods into the open field. Sergeant Benjamin remembered, “There was a tremendous noise and a continual hum of bullets. I could not think. I felt as though my stomach was melting in my body.”⁶⁰ Corporal Glen Hill watched the advance from the seclusion of a shell hole while he ate a quick meal with his brother Sydney. “As they were crossing the field you could see the exploding shells and incessant whine of machine gun bullets and the men dropping along the way.”⁶¹

The 1st Platoon of the 96th Company, commanded by First Lieutenant George B. Lockhart, advanced on the company's extreme right. The rest of the 96th Company pivoted on the advance of Lieutenant Lockhart's platoon. Moving through the field, the company veering to the right, the 1st Platoon advanced ahead of the rest of the company. First Sergeant Al Sheridan, a childhood friend of Captain Donald Duncan, the company commander, recalled, "I was in the 1st Platoon and our platoon was on the right flank of the company, so we advanced a little too fast for the rest of the company and Don came over and made us halt 'til the rest of the company got on line with us."⁶²

Captain Duncan stayed with and advanced on the right flank of the company along the sector of Lieutenant Lockhart's men. Smoking a straight-stemmed pipe from the side of his mustached mouth, Duncan carried a cane and was, according to Sheridan, "the coolest man on the field" as machine gun bullets began to snap over head.⁶³ Above the thud of exploding shells and hissing rounds, Captain Duncan walked adjacent to First Lieutenant Lockhart when First Sergeant Sheridan turned to his old friend and sarcastically hollered, "Do you think we will see much action?" Captain Duncan, smiling, said, "Oh yes we will give and take but be sure you take more than you give."⁶⁴ Moments later an enemy round tore through Captain Duncan's abdomen and his pipe slipped out of his lips as the thirty-five-year old captain slumped to the ground. Immediately First Sergeant Sheridan ran to his aid, followed by First Sergeant Joseph A. Sissler.⁶⁵

Lieutenant Junior Grade Weedon E. Osborne, a naval dental surgeon who had already pulled several men of the 96th Company out of the firing line, saw the two men struggling to get the wounded captain to safety. He ran over and helped move Captain Duncan to shelter. The gravely wounded company commander grasped his stomach in agony as litter bearers reached

the shelter of a nearby tree line. “We no more than laid him on the ground when a big eight-inch shell came in and killed all but myself,” recalled Sheridan. The explosion knocked First Sergeant Sheridan to the ground, his life spared only by the helmet on his head which deflected a large shell splinter.⁶⁶ The concussion of the blast killed Lieutenant Junior Grade Osborne instantly. The same explosion dismembered First Sergeant Sissler.⁶⁷ Stunned by the horrific scene and the divine intervention that spared him from so much as a scratch, First Sergeant Sheridan regained his composure and ran quickly back toward the advancing 1st Platoon.⁶⁸

The enemy guns situated in the town laid waste to the first wave of the 96th Company. Several German guns were situated in front of the southwestern wall of the town and still more were situated along the rising high ground behind the town just in front of the small-gauged railroad track.⁶⁹ One particular Maxim fired from the bell tower of the village church. According to Second Lieutenant Joseph C. Grayson of the 79th Company, most of the first wave of the battalion fell dead or wounded within the first three minutes of the assault.⁷⁰

Casualties grew exponentially as the second wave of the 96th Company filled the vacancies left by the decimated first wave. Shells exploded with increasing ferocity. Private Harold I. Turney recalled, “I had gone perhaps one hundred yards from our starting point, when bang! There was an explosion before me, and I dropped with several pieces of shrapnel in my groin and leg.”⁷¹ Men immediately went to the prone position as the intensity of the German machine gun fire increased with every advance. Private John T. Miller remembered the screams of wounded men crying for help above the roar of battle.⁷²

On the right edge of the 96th Company, Second Lieutenant Clifton B. Cates’s men remained pinned to the ground. “The machine gun bullets were hitting around and it looked like

hail, hitting around so my first thought was to run to the rear. I hate to admit it, but that was it.”⁷³ Second Lieutenant Cates then noticed Lieutenant James Robertson advancing the remaining members of the company to the right into the cover of the ravine that ran to the edge of the village. Robertson, evidently aware of the danger facing the company while they lay exposed in the field stood up amidst the snapping bullets and waved his pistol in the air in order to get everyone’s attention. He signaled for the remnants of the company to follow him into the ravine. Second Lieutenant Cates looked over to the right and saw Robertson rallying the company. Second Lieutenant Cates recalled, “We really didn’t know where we were going but this town was right in front of us with a ravine on our right.”⁷⁴

As the survivors of the 4th Platoon began to maneuver to their right, Private Earl Belfry, who had suffered a slight wound, struggled through the wheat as rounds continued to search the crest of the hill. Private Raymond Ross ran toward the ravine as a stray bullet perforated his left leg just above the knee sending the twenty-year-old stumbling to the ground. Second Lieutenant Cates worked his way to the right as the other survivors of his platoon also ran half-hunched over towards Lieutenant Roberts. Halfway across the open field, Second Lieutenant Cates felt a tremendous impact that knocked him to the ground and soon lost consciousness. A single machine gun bullet hit the young Second Lieutenant on the crown of his helmet. As he fell to the ground, Second Lieutenant Cates landed on the rim of his helmet knocking it off his head.

Simultaneously the 79th Company began the advance just as the last wave of the 96th Company cleared the seclusion of the woods. Corporal Glen Hill watched the spectacle of the 96th Company’s advance and noticed Lieutenant Wallace M. Leonard attempt to roll a Bull Durham cigarette as his shaking hands caused most of the tobacco to fall out.⁷⁵ Still stunned by the spectacle of seeing Privates Rivard and Wendall killed in front of him, Sergeant Benjamin

heard the voice of Lieutenant Leonard shout, “All right 2nd Platoon, stick with me!” The twenty-three year old Lieutenant led the columns of his platoon out of the woods. Sergeant Benjamin immediately recovered his composure and took over half of his platoon leading them out of the woods in columns of twos.⁷⁶ The other half of the platoon, led by Sergeant Roland D. Baldwin, advanced to the edge of the starting line in a similar formation.⁷⁷ Out of the woods, Lieutenant Leonard drew his pistol and fired a shot into the air and according to Corporal Hill, “with the most unmilitary command said, ‘Come on men, for God’s sake don’t fail me now.’”⁷⁸

As the platoons of the 79th began their advance, Captain John A. West ran from the company headquarters back to his men to find the other platoons already advancing on his right. Captain West’s orders called for him to advance behind Major Berton Sibley’s battalion. Immediately Captain West summoned Corporal Alfred O. Halverson. Squatting near the corporal and pointing across the open field, Captain West ordered him to take his squad of twelve men across the open ground to fall in behind Major Sibley’s 3rd Battalion. Following close behind Corporal Halverson’s group, another squad advanced followed by the remaining two squads of Captain West’s platoon. The platoon pressed forward into the teeth of the enemy fire at intervals. Each squad moved a few meters and then dropped into the wheat. The platoon advanced north toward the southern fringe of Belleau Wood (See Appendix H). Second Lieutenant West fell into the formation next to Gunnery Sergeant August T. Ziolkowski in the center of the platoon.⁷⁹

From the town of Bouresches, enemy guns tore into the right front flank of Captain West’s platoon while fire from the high ground inside Belleau Wood took a tremendous toll. Major Sibley’s men had passed across the front of Captain West’s men; most of them had disappeared into the southern fringe of Belleau Wood. As the platoon pushed south in desperate

attempt to link with the 3rd Battalion, Captain West recalled coming upon numerous dead and wounded men from Major Sibley's battalion. German artillery eventually targeted this sector of the field and began to drop shells with increasing intensity. "Our own wounded were crying for first aid and stretcher bearers. There were none. I remember tying the puttee strings to stop the blood of a Third Battalion man. He had been shot through the calves of both legs by machine gun fire from Belleau Wood. Just a kid he was, crying hard."⁸⁰ Captain West continued to work his way along the line of his men now pinned to the ground. Eventually he worked his way back to the area of this wounded man only to find that a shell had killed him. West stared momentarily at the lifeless body sprawled out in the wheat, both legs blown off.⁸¹

Several men of the 3rd platoon worked their way through the lines to help the wounded. No stretcher bearers were available. Sergeant Ziolkowski and Private Luther A. Ersland desperately attempted to treat wounded men whose screams emanated from everywhere. Captain West came upon a ghastly scene when he discovered the mangled bodies of Privates John H. Kaiser and Horace Ward. Both men died instantly when a single enemy shell burst nearly on top of them. The two men lay next to each other. Captain West remembered Private Ward's vigorous spirit and enthusiasm, and now the smallest man in the company lay lifeless among the waving fields of wheat with a massive hole through the right side of his head.⁸²

Further down the line Captain West found Private Roy A. Trow, a grenadier. Captain West recalled the terrible scene when he saw Trow's "stomach and testicles shot away by a shell, a mass of blood." He tried to help him but soon Trow lost consciousness. Believing he had expired Captain West moved to another wounded man. As he passed back over the seemingly lifeless body, he heard Trow cry out for help. Four other men came to assist, using a discarded pack in the field, formed a make-shift stretcher. Amidst the hellacious fire, the Marines dragged

Trow away through the wheat several hundred meters back to the jump off point where a makeshift field hospital catered to the increasing flow of horribly wounded men.⁸³

Back at the jump-off point next to this field hospital, a dugout in a cluster of trees, members of the battalion's thirty-seven millimeter gun crews, under the command of First Lieutenant Clyde P. Matteson, fired a tremendous barrage into the distant buildings of Bouresches. The fire of these guns commonly known as "one-pounders," attracted the attention of numerous enemy shells. Privates Alton R. Vanlaningham and Alva C. Tompkins and Corporal Carlos E. Stewart pushed their gun crews forward to a more exposed position and continued to unleash withering fire on the enemy-held town. Among these crews was Private Ronald T. Chisholm, who had suffered a minor wound the day before. He chose to remain with his gun crew instead of seek evacuation to an aid station.⁸⁴

Shells continued to explode in the open field and Privates Edmund T. Smith, Walter E. Rider and Walter A. Gross continued to run out into the open to supply the thirty-seven millimeter guns with ammunition despite the terrific volume of artillery fire.⁸⁵ As the gun crews continued to fire into German positions a cluster of shells landed in succession near one gun crew. An exploding round riddled Private Alvin H. Harris with shrapnel. Fragments of the shell penetrated the twenty-four year old Marine's stomach and legs in fourteen places. Despite the terrible pain, he refused to be treated and maintained a continuous volume of fire from his gun.⁸⁶

As First Lieutenant Leonard's 2nd Platoon advanced in the center of the company, Corporal Glen Hill surveyed his men to ensure the platoon front was even. He moved out next to Corporal Lloyd Pike and Corporal George P. Hunter. Corporal Hunter, an unshaven Marine who, at any given time, seemed to have a mouthful of chewing tobacco, had always boasted that

he'd be home in time to celebrate Thanksgiving. As shells exploded and machine gun bullets cracked overhead, Corporal Pike turned to Corporal George P. Hunter and shouted, "Say Hunter, do you think you'll be back in Washington for Thanksgiving dinner?"⁸⁷

Corporal Pike recalled the two columns of the platoon advancing over a gradual incline. Since Corporal Pike's automatic rifle crews were dispersed among the various squads, he had no specific assignment. As the platoon surmounted the crest of this ridge everything broke loose. "The column seemed to disappear in front of me," recalled Corporal Pike. Survivors spread out into skirmish formation.⁸⁸ Corporal Hill recalled two men in his squad fell wounded. One man, shot through the chest, and the other hit in the stomach, asked Hill what they should do. Corporal Hill, helplessly yelled at his men to lie down and try and crawl back toward the platoon's jump-off point.⁸⁹ The man next to Sergeant Romeyn Benjamin fell wounded when a bullet entered his shoulder and exited the side of his body. Sergeant Benjamin crawled over to this wounded Marine and began to apply pressure dressing to the wound. "In doing so I exposed my head and promptly received a bullet that glanced off my left jaw and severed my helmet strap."⁹⁰ As soon as he dressed his own wound, Sergeant Benjamin resumed care to the wounded man. Several other wounded men crawled back towards the line, attracting the attention of distant enemy machine guns. Sergeant Benjamin decided that he would wait until darkness to attempt to bring in his wounded comrade.⁹¹

Corporal Glen Hill had advanced about halfway across the field when he suddenly felt a terrible concussion underneath him. "My left leg crumpled under me. I tried to get up but fell over. I was out for a little while and when I came to was too weak to open my first aid kit. So I lay with my head down hill, wrapped my thigh and knee as tightly as I could with my puttee." A single bullet had hit Corporal Hill directly in the knee cap and shattered his lower femur and

exited through the back of the thigh. As the blood poured out of his leg saturating the puttee, he began to lose consciousness.⁹²

The platoon remained pinned as German machine guns inundated the tops of the wheat stalks. Corporal Pike recalled:

I don't believe we lay there in that hail of machine gun bullets and artillery shells very long before we heard the voice of Colonel Albertus Catlin shouting through his field megaphone, 'Dig in where you are and hold what you've got.' The words were quite clear when he turned his megaphone towards us, and then grew weaker as he turned his megaphone in other directions.⁹³

Sprawled prone on the ground, he removed his pack to find a tool to dig into the ground. He had long since discarded his cumbersome entrenching shovel only to regret that decision. As he rummaged through his pack he found his mess kit, a suitable instrument to scoop out clumps of earth. Corporal Pike noticed that a lone bullet had punctured his pack and gone clean through his mess kit. Examining the rest of his body, Corporal Pike realized how close he'd come to being hit when he discovered bullet holes in his left cuff and right trouser leg, one of which grazed the inside of his right leg leaving a red burn on his skin.⁹⁴

Shortly after Colonel Catlin ordered the 79th Company to dig in, his observation post came under intense fire. With no field phone to get updates on the advance, Colonel Catlin resorted to standing atop a small rise of ground protected only by a cluster of shrubbery. Near the road leading out of Lucy-le-Bocage, Colonel Catlin's position was extremely exposed. He watched the assault through his binoculars oblivious to the numerous bullets snapping, flinging dirt in the air as they hit the ground around him. Several guns of the 6th Machine Gun Battalion continued to fire an enfilading barrage along the southern edge of Belleau Wood as well as into

the distant village of Bouresches. Their fire continued to draw a reply from the unseen German guns in the woods.⁹⁵

Suddenly a sniper's bullet struck Colonel Catlin in the chest. "It felt exactly as though someone had struck me heavily with a sledge. It swung me clear around and toppled me over on the ground. When I tried to get up I found that my right side was paralyzed."⁹⁶ Captain Thibot Laspierre, a French officer attached as a liaison to the Regiment, stood by Colonel Catlin.⁹⁷ He immediately tended to the wounded Colonel. Pharmacist Mate 3rd Class Oscar S. Goodwin and Sergeant Sydney Colford Jr. ran toward the wounded officer as enemy bullets kicked up earth around them.⁹⁸

Private John L. Tunnell, a runner from the regimental headquarters company, headed out very early in the assault looking for Colonel Catlin carrying a message that the German shell fire included gas rounds of which many of the masks were ineffective against. Smoke from the artillery shells blanketed the field, causing the young private to become disoriented. Eventually he reached regimental headquarters only to learn that Colonel Catlin had advanced toward the front to witness the assault. Finally he came to Colonel Catlin's forward command post moments after he had been wounded. Private Tunnell recalled blood streaming from the Colonel's chest. Bullets snapped all around as leaves from the shrubbery gently drifted to the ground. Colonel Catlin, with men at his side looked up and saw the stunned Private and in a feeble voice said, "Down here lad, quickly."⁹⁹

Eventually word that Colonel Catlin had been wounded reached the nearby dressing station in Lucy-le-Bocage where Lieutenant Frederick R. Hook, a Navy surgeon, and his assistant rushed northeast of the town with a stretcher towards the wounded officer. When the

two men reached the wounded Colonel, Lieutenant Commander Wrey G. Farwell, the Regimental surgeon already on the scene, had just administered a hypodermic dose of analgesic to ease the pain. Lieutenant Colonel Harry Lee, second-in-command of the regiment, soon arrived at Colonel Catlin's side. When Lieutenant Colonel Lee asked if he could help, Colonel Catlin simply replied, "No, just carry on and carry out the previous arranged plan." Colonel Catlin then asked for his dispatch case and maps. These documents were scattered about and Lieutenant Hook's assistant rushed over to gather them. They were given to Lieutenant Colonel Lee who immediately headed out to oversee the assault on Belleau Wood and Bouresches, which was still underway.¹⁰⁰

Most of Major Holcomb's men remained pinned down in the field. The 2nd Platoon of the 79th Company had dug in, impatiently waiting for someone to assume control of the situation. Many of the wounded men exposed in the field were hit again as the enemy guns repeatedly swept the field. Several of the dead, littered along the pasture, were hit again as their lifeless corpses twitched each time a barrage of rounds hit the bodies.¹⁰¹ Deluged by enemy gunfire from the town of Bouresches as well as from the southern fringe of Belleau Wood, Lieutenant Leonard noticed one particular enemy gun in the edge of the woods had significantly obstructed the advance. He crawled over to Corporal Pike and crouched low in the undergrowth, trying to point out the position to him. The two men removed their helmets to be less conspicuous and popped their heads up above the short ground cover for only a few seconds to avoid drawing the enemy gunners' attention. "I couldn't see the machine gun," recalled Corporal Pike. Lieutenant Leonard extended his arm and pointed towards the tree line as Corporal Pike looked intently at the edge of the forest. Suddenly the gun position fired and the foliage around it vibrated in the wake of the muzzle blast.

“I do not recall any orders being issued, but obviously the lieutenant wanted me to silence that enemy machine gun, if possible. I do not recall my feelings at the time, but in retrospect I can see that nothing I might do would leave me in any more precarious position than the one I was already in.”¹⁰² Corporal Pike, crawling on all fours, managed to rally his gun crew from the meager shelter of the stalks of wheat. Shouting above the bedlam of incoming shells, Corporal Pike, an automatic rifleman, and an ammunition carrier made a quick fifteen yard dash through before collapsing to the ground as a barrage of enemy bullets sailed overhead. The three men continued this daring escapade until they found a large shell hole about seventy-five yards away from the tree line concealing the enemy position.¹⁰³

The crater provided scanty concealment, but the three men dug in deeper using mess kits and other improvised tools to improve the cover the depression provided. Each time one of them raised their head above the edge of the hole there was a swift and violent reply of enemy machine gun fire. The men had long since discarded their helmets believing it provided little protection and simply gave off a glare visible to the lurking enemy. In the mad rush toward the shell hole, the automatic rifleman had been shot in the face and bled profusely. Corporal Pike and the ammunition carrier tried to stop the bleeding. The crater provided very little room to maneuver and each time someone attempted to move positions, they had to crawl over one of the other occupants, drawing the wrath of the enemy guns. Corporal Pike vividly recalled his concern regarding the slow pace of the ammunition carrier. “Each time he raised his head to look out, he withdrew so slowly I was afraid he would be hit.”¹⁰⁴

Eventually Corporal Pike pulled the Chauchat automatic rifle up to the edge of the crater and fired a quick burst at the enemy, again receiving a violent reply. Corporal Pike continued to fire short bursts and ducked to avoid the expected retort from the enemy. The ammunition

carrier decided to take over the weapon and maintain the steady fire on the German position. Maneuvering to change position required one of the men to hop over the other and briefly expose themselves to the enemy. The wounded automatic rifleman remained out of action and lay in the hole bandaged and bleeding while the other two men valiantly attempted to silence the enemy gun. Again the ammunition carrier moved slowly each time he fired a burst. His final movement proved to be too slow as a burst of the enemy machine gun struck him in the head instantly killing him. The tightly confined position left the dead man's body pressed against Corporal Pike and the wounded gunner. Eventually Corporal Pike pushed the corpse away, and it flopped lifelessly to the edge of the crater. The commotion again drew a hail of enemy bullets. Corporal Pike remained the only man in the group capable of firing the weapon, but the enemy's fire superiority left little hope that the present strategy of silencing the enemy gun would be successful. Corporal Pike took the dead man's rifle and slowly sighted in on the grey-clad figure just inside the tree line and fired a single shot. "Perhaps I got the enemy gunner with the first shot. I only remember seeing his head drop forward to the left side of his gun, and the little grey top to his cap looking toward me like a bull's-eye on a practice target." Corporal Pike fired again at the top of the enemy gunner's exposed cap. He noticed that the grey cap got dark as it became saturated with blood. Even though the main enemy threat had been neutralized, Corporal Pike realize that his position remained dangerously exposed and with one severely wounded man to tend to, he decided to wait until a few hours until darkness to attempt any movement.¹⁰⁵

The remainder of the 2nd Platoon, 79th Company remained pinned down in the field. First Lieutenant Graves Erskine noticed a wounded man crawling back toward the rear area. This young man was trying to evacuate himself. As the wounded man got closer, Lieutenant Erskine

saw the severity of the injury. A bullet had blown the young man's nose off. Erskine immediately dressed the man's wounds up and told him to take a message back to Captain Zane stating that the platoon was pinned down under horrific fire.¹⁰⁶ Twenty minutes later, with the blood-soaked bandage still plastered across his face, the young Marine braved the withering fire once more to make his way toward Lieutenant Erskine. The exhausted man looked at him and said, "I told the Captain what you said and he said, 'get going goddammit!'"¹⁰⁷

Pinned down near Lieutenant Erskine, a squad of grenadiers led by Corporal Thomas A. Gragard sought cover in the field. The Grenadiers were tasked with carrying satchels of grenades or mills bombs in order to destroy lightly fortified enemy emplacements. Gragard rose above the stalks and walked forward to find a good position for his squad. Suddenly, a bullet struck Gragard who fell mortally wounded next to Private Elmer Asher. Private Harvey S. Brown recalled, "I saw him killed. He was right in front of me. I was taking a message back and passed right by him."¹⁰⁸ "After that," remembered Corporal Harry Fletcher, "he was delirious and moaning."¹⁰⁹ Private Oscar H. Rankin, one of Gragard's dear friends, saw his comrade slump into the wheat. Private Rankin, a school teacher who left his career to enlist in the Marine Corps, earned the nickname "the preacher" by his platoon. He had a peaceful reputation and often led religious services for the platoon. After Gragard fell dead, according to Lieutenant Erskine, Private Rankin "sprang to his feet and swore as no person had ever sworn." Private Rankin took over the squad and pressed forward, enraged at the loss of his friend.¹¹⁰

On the extreme east side of the 79th Company, Captain Charles Murray's 4th Platoon came under the same terrible fire. According to Sergeant Vernon M. Guymon and Private Ora R. Allen, Lieutenant Murray suffered severe gunshot wounds to both arms and remained pinned to the ground unable to move. About the same time, enemy snipers targeted the wounded and

anyone who unduly exposed themselves. Private Elbert E. Brooks saw the wounded Lieutenant struggling to move, but without the use of his arms, he remained dangerously helpless and exposed. While Sergeant Guymon dressed Lieutenant Murray's wounds, Private Brooks immediately came to the Lieutenant's side, removing all the equipment restricting his commanding officer while in the prone position. Bullets continued to crack in the air just above the men's heads. Suddenly two stray rounds struck Private Brooks in the hip. Oblivious to the wounds he continued to work on the wounded officer and succeeded in removing all of Lieutenant Murray's gear. Private Brooks then managed to hoist and strap Lieutenant Murray on his back using the officer's gear as a harness. Private Brooks then crawled through the wheat toward the battalion aid station. Miraculously the two men arrived at the aid station where the Lieutenant received immediate medical attention and Private Brooks was marked for evacuation. The wounded twenty-three-year old refused to leave and immediately made his way back toward the company's pinned down position.¹¹¹

While the 79th Company remained pinned in the open field, casualties mounted rapidly. A shell exploded next to Private Raymond W. Boone and a piece of shrapnel abruptly amputated two fingers on his right hand as another piece lacerated the back of his right hand. Another fragment sailed clean through the twenty-three-year old's upper lip.¹¹² Another round exploded near Corporal David L. Spaulding and Corporal Harry B. Fletcher but both men refused to go to the rear.¹¹³ Several rounds struck First Lieutenant William A. Worton, the company's executive officer. He first suffered wounds in the neck and shoulder. While he lay wounded enemy artillery shells inundated the surrounding field. A single piece of shrapnel tore into Lieutenant Worton's chest.¹¹⁴

While The 79th Company remained pinned in the open field, the 96th Company continued to move east toward the concealment of the ravine on the battalion's right. Led by First Lieutenant James Robertson, the survivors quickly followed their commanding officer without any idea where they were headed. Second Lieutenant Clifton B. Cates, who lay briefly unconscious from the machine gun round that glanced off his helmet, recovered his senses. "I put the helmet on, looked around and my first thought was to run like hell to the rear cause I couldn't see anyone around me except wounded and dead." Suddenly, he saw four men in a ravine to his front right. He got on his feet and ran towards them, staggering to the ground two or three times. Second Lieutenant Cates eventually reached the ravine where one of the men noticed a large swollen knot on the Second Lieutenant's head. He began pouring a smuggled canteen of wine over it. "Don't pour that over my head, give me a drink of it," remarked Second Lieutenant Cates.¹¹⁵ He picked up a discarded French lebel rifle and took the four men down into the ravine towards the town of Bouresches. Several enemy troops came into view and the five men fired on them, but missed as the German soldiers disappeared out of view.¹¹⁶

Lieutenant Robertson emerged from the western edge of the village with the remnants of Cates's 4th platoon. From the outskirts of the center part of town, Cates hollered out towards Robertson. He evidently could not hear the Second Lieutenant's shouts so Cates blew his whistle immediately grabbing Robertson's attention. Looking intently towards the sound, he spotted Cates waving him over. He took his men toward Cates's position and turned them over. "All right take your platoon in and clean out the town and I'll get reinforcements," said Lieutenant Robertson. Cates thought the order was, "a hell of a thing."¹¹⁷

Second Lieutenant Cates entered the town to find Corporal Nicholas C. Flynn and Sergeant Earl Belfry manning an automatic rifle. Most of the German troops that still occupied

the town remained in the northern edge. The village was segmented into three streets: one going north, one northeast, and one northwest. Second Lieutenant Cates tasked Gunnery Sergeant Noyes V. Moore to take eight men to clear the street that meandered toward the northwest corner of the village. He then ordered Sergeant Earl Belfry, who had already been wounded, to take the northeastern corner of the town. Second Lieutenant Cates took the remainder of the platoon straight north through the center of the village. “We’d gotten just about half way down when we ran into some enemy and a machine gun opened up on us,” recalled Second Lieutenant Cates.¹¹⁸ Instantly a bullet went through the brim of his helmet and grazed his ear. He lunged for the cover of a stone wall as another round glanced off the top of his shoulder, nicking his second lieutenant’s insignia. Another enemy gun crew on the northeastern side of the town opened fire while men moved from house to house. A bullet hit twenty-year old Sergeant Belfry in the arm, fracturing the humerus bone. Several other men fell wounded.¹¹⁹ Private Herbert D. Dunlavy saw one enemy gun open fire down the street and managed to single-handedly charge the enemy position and capture the crew.¹²⁰

Second Lieutenant Cates pulled his men back out of the firing line and established four defensive posts until reinforcements could arrive. Twenty minutes later the remnants of the 96th Company entered the town. Soon thereafter survivors of the 79th Company made their way to the edge of the town. Privates James H. Hale, Oscar H. Rankin, Mike F. Lindsey and Lee Patton advanced beyond the rest of the company and took up position along the left flank of the town opening fire on the exposed enemy. Sergeant James J. McClelland led a small group of automatic riflemen toward another flank of the town and directed a deadly barrage on several exposed enemy positions. Lieutenant Leonard entered the town with several survivors of the 2nd Platoon. They maneuvered down one of the streets beyond the defensive positions established

by Second Lieutenant Cates's men. Lieutenant Leonard's group came upon a German machine gun position and spread out as it fired. Maneuvering from wall to wall and building to building, members of the 2nd Platoon succeeded in killing the enemy crew and captured the gun. Immediately, the deadly pulsation of gun shots echoed off the sides of the buildings as another enemy gun fired from the bell tower of the village church. Lieutenant Leonard and three men immediately charged up the narrow stairway of the structure, swarmed through the opening into the bell tower and, using bayonets, killed the crew of the enemy position.¹²¹

Eventually Lieutenant Graves Erskine brought up the remnants of the 2nd Platoon of the 79th Company. As he entered the outskirts of the town several of the enemy guns had already been captured, except one on the edge of town, which continued to fire. Lieutenant Erskine, with his pistol drawn, approached the enemy gunner from behind and kicked him in the shoe. Startled, the German soldier stood up, slung his weapon over his shoulder, and surrendered to Lieutenant Erskine. With a shaking hand, Lieutenant Erskine trained his pistol on the husky adversary. He turned the enemy soldier over to the control of Private Frank L. Slattery who escorted the German to the rear. When Private Slattery returned soon after, Lieutenant Erskine grew suspicious. "Slattery, you shot that prisoner," inquired Lieutenant Erskine. Astounded by the Lieutenant's accusation he replied, "How did you know?" Lieutenant Erskine gave the young man a tongue lashing to which he replied, "Yes, but I haven't had a chance to kill one of those bastards all day, all they are doing is killing us, and I can't go back to Minnesota and tell them I didn't kill a German."¹²²

Frustration got the best of the men who had been on the receiving end of the German guns all day. Hatred took over and prisoners were often disposed of as inhuman elements. "The Hun is a queer breed. They're all alike. We have them in Massachusetts and we're sorry for it,"

commented Lieutenant Leonard to a reporter a few days after the engagement at Bouresches. “When things are going their way and they have a great unbroken organization they are all right, but leave them to their own resources, with an ebb tide, and they turn tail because they’re cowards.”¹²³ The better part of two German companies had inflicted severe casualties on a battalion of American Marines only to flee the town. The majority of the enemy stragglers had been killed or captured by the survivors of the 2nd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, but no definitive figure exists explaining the number of German casualties. In the wake of the assault, the field behind the American survivors inside of the village was dotted with 110 wounded men the bodies of twenty of their dead comrades.¹²⁴

The sun slowly set on the western horizon and the crescendo of distant gun fire tapered off. Several of the dead and dying lay scattered throughout the fields fronting Belleau Wood and the village of Bouresches. Numerous wounded lay helpless in the pasture during the assault as any movement in the open view of the enemy gunners meant almost certain death. “One man in particular,” recalled reporter Floyd Gibbons, “had a long, low groan. I could not see him, yet I felt he was lying somewhere close to me.” With darkness setting on several of the walking wounded made their way to safety. Gibbons and his escort Lieutenant Hartzell remained pinned down in the field for nearly three hours before attempting to get back to the rear sector for help. “I thought that hour between seven and eight o’clock dragged the most, but the one between eight and nine seemed interminable,” recalled Gibbons. “The hours were so long, particularly when we considered that a German machine gun could fire three hundred shots a minute.”¹²⁵ At one point in the field, Gibbons, unsure whether he would survive the ordeal after losing his eye earlier that afternoon, gave Lieutenant Hartzell some final words to tell his wife.¹²⁶

Confident that the sky remained dark enough to move, Gibbons began to shout through the field in order to locate Hartzell. Weak from loss of blood, Gibbons remained on his stomach and every time he turned his head, the pain became almost too much to bear. He requested the Hartzell crawl towards him while Gibbons did his best to move toward the sound of Lieutenant Hartzell's voice. When Lieutenant Hartzell reached the gravely wounded reporter he asked him to raise his head up so that he could see the wounds. Gibbons hesitantly worked up the energy to get up and look through a hazed sense of vision towards his comrade. "I wanted to know how it looked myself, so I painfully opened the right eye and looked through the oats eighteen inches into Lieutenant Hartzell's face. I saw the look of horror on it as he looked into mine."¹²⁷

For nearly twenty minutes the two men crawled through the field toward the point that they advanced from earlier that day. The journey was an agonizing one for Gibbons who continued to lose blood from his ghastly wound suffered earlier in the day when a stray enemy machine gun bullet ricochet off the ground, entering his left eye, and exiting out of his forehead. With every step upright, the pain increased as he moved with the assistance of Lieutenant Hartzell through the looming shadows of the woods on the opposite side of the field in front of Belleau Wood. The two men stopped momentarily and Gibbons removed a soiled handkerchief from his pocket as Hartzell bound the wound on Gibbon's head. The two men finally reached the safety of a dugout about a mile behind the woods where a Navy corpsman tended to Gibbon's wound.¹²⁸

In the pasture west of Belleau Wood, the cries of wounded echoed through the darkness enticing numerous men to head out in effort to locate anyone still alive. Corporal Charles J. Bonifacino and Drummer John Balogh of the 45th Company stealthily crept through the shadowy field looking for survivors of their company. The two men stumbled across Private Charley

Frehse who had been severely wounded by three machine gun bullets earlier that day. Corporal Bonifacino and Drummer Balogh attempted to lift the injured man up onto the stretcher but Private Frehse objected. "I won't live let me die here," cried the terribly injured man. The two litter bearers knew that there was a minimal chance of his survival so they obliged his request and sometime during the night Private Charley Frehse died from his wounds.¹²⁹

Sergeant Merwin Silverthorn, who had suffered a gunshot wound to the knee, remained secluded in the tree line of Belleau Wood. Since the darkness now provided Silverthorn concealment from the enemy guns, he worked his way back through the field to the road leading to the village of Lucy-le-Bocage. Once inside the deserted town he located the dressing station in the basement of a building where he had his wound treated. Silverthorn refused to return to a rear hospital until he had gone back out to find his gravely wounded friend Sergeant Luther W. Pilcher who he promised he would locate after dusk. Sergeant Silverthorn took a stretcher from the aid station and convinced another Marine to accompany him as he hobbled out of the building into the streets of Lucy-le-Bocage towards the field that sloped down towards Belleau Wood.¹³⁰

When Silverthorn closed on the edge of Belleau Wood he began to holler out Pilcher's name. Enemy guns, which had been silent since the sun went down, fired in the general direction of Silverthorn's careless summons. "Of all the screwy situations," thought Silverthorn, "here you got out of this thing once. You're right back where you started from." He immediately ceased the vocal search for his comrade. Slowly creeping through the wheat in the estimated area where Pilcher had been earlier that day, he finally found him. Silverthorn exclaimed, "Pilcher, here we are. I've got a stretcher. We're going to take care of you now."

He knelt beside his friend and shook his motionless body. He quickly realized that he had already died. “That was quite a shock,” remembered Sergeant Silverthorn.¹³¹

Inside the town of Bouresches, survivors of the 79th and 96th Company assembled into formation in an effort to figure out which men were still present. Lieutenant John West arrived in the village just after darkness. His 3rd Platoon assembled for an informal roll call. West began to read off the names. A brief silence followed after West shouted the name “Miller.” He called the name out a second time. Then an unknown voice from the assembly stated, “He’s in town, Lieutenant.” Immediately Corporal Clarence J. Wante, a hard-nosed Irishman from Chicago sarcastically shouted, “To hell he is, what hotel he is stopping at?” The men in formation burst out into laughter. Lieutenant West could not believe that after all the horrors of that day his men could ever find anything to laugh about. In about four and a half hours, Captain West’s platoon had been reduced to half of its initial strength.¹³²

Chapter VI

Conclusion and Aftermath of a Costly Day

The day had been a very costly one for the Americans. Not only had they failed to capture Belleau Wood, the Marine brigade continued to pass on grossly inaccurate information regarding these objectives. At 6:23 p.m. a wireless message from 5th Marine Regimental headquarters falsely stated that the town of Belleau had been captured.¹ At 7:10 p.m. the 4th Marine Brigade headquarters relayed a message stating that “the attack went very well indeed—even beyond our most sanguinary expectations. Marines have taken Torcy, Bouresches, including the railroad station. They are on the Belleau Road. Casualties have been light.”² These dispatches relayed dangerously inaccurate information. This information would be taken into consideration when committing reinforcements and carrying out future attacks. The Marines had not captured the railroad station. They had not captured Torcy nor had they made it to the road that ran from the town of Belleau to Bouresches. Belleau Wood remained very much in enemy control, and the casualties were the heaviest the Americans had suffered in the war to that date. All the information emerging from the chaos and confusion of battle painted a very different picture than what actually occurred.

Aid stations situated along the rear of the lines were overwhelmed. Lieutenant Colonel Richard Derby, the division surgeon, described the scene when he entered the dressing station of the 6th Marine Regiment. “Passing through several overlapping ponchos hung in the doorway to conceal the interior lighting, I was first blinded, and I mean literally, by the bright candle-light from within. The small room was the scene of intense activity.” Everywhere inside the small facility wounded men received medical attention. Lieutenant Colonel Derby noticed the clamps

on the arm of a badly wounded man whose brachial artery remained severed and exposed. Major Farwell worked day and night without a pause to tend to the wounded. Those stabilized men were taken to the cellar to await an ambulance to remove them back to a rear area to receive sustained treatment. The aid stations remained under artillery fire throughout the day and late into the night. Nearly 750 men passed through this single station in less than twenty-four hours. Derby noted, “Having exhausted their strength they worked on their nerves, automatically doing what instinct dictated. These were days in which men worked until they dropped and then rose to work again.”³

The division was largely unprepared for the number of casualties suffered. Managing the logistics of caring for casualties proved a daunting task. Even burying the dead was an overwhelming duty as many of those killed lay where they fell for days. The battle continued as the burial process began. As the fighting persisted for weeks, men remained unburied for days, weeks, and even months.

Private Elton Mackin, a replacement in the 67th Company who arrived two days after the attacks on June, 6, 1918, recalled that one of his first tasks along the front lines was one of the most unforgettable. On June 10, 1918 the 2nd Engineer battalion dug a long shallow trench to serve as a mass grave for the numerous dead from the assault four days earlier on Hill 142. Corporal Earl P. Wilson stood in the trench while a few men passed the bodies down to be laid out. Private Mackin remembered Corporal Wilson’s patience regarding the squeamishness that overcoming some of the replacements of the company. Private Mackin came across the body of a Marine who had been shot above the eyes. He noticed the chinstrap of the dead man’s helmet remained tightly in place. When he picked the body up by the shoulders of the tunic and swung

the corpse towards the stretcher, the man's helmet fell off as his brains splashed across Private Mackin's shoes.⁴

The remains of Corporals Anthony Kowalak and Joseph C. Toulson were located on August 1, 1918. The two men had advanced well beyond the remainder of their company on the morning of June 6, 1918 when the 1st Battalion 5th Marine Regiment was tasked with taking Hill 142. The two men had been recorded as missing in action until their remains were found in a depression in a farm field outside the town of Torcy. Today Corporal Joseph Toulson rests in the Aisne Marne Cemetery on the northern part of Belleau Wood.

The remains of Private James Irving Dodd, who died in the late morning of June 6, 1918 on Hill 142, remained unburied for five days. Sergeant John Nelson remembered that Private Dodd's remains lay in the open for days and some of the other men tried to cover his mangled body with brush, even using the dead man's overcoat but the artillery fire remained intense for the days following the assault and they could not bury him.⁵

The process of notifying loved ones began as soon as the identity of the dead could be verified. In Ohio five days before the fateful assault on June 6, 1918, Private James Dodd's mother sat down to write him a letter in which she stated, "I will answer your welcome letter dated April 14th surely was glad to hear again from you and to know you are well and enjoying life as best you can." On June 28, 1918 a telegram arrived at the Dodd house in Akron, OH informing the family of Private Dodd's death. Nearly two months later, the undelivered letter arrived back in Ohio. On the afternoon of June 17, 1918 a Western Union delivery boy brought a yellow envelope to the house of Corporal Robert M. Fischer's Aunt Minna Fischer. The letter sent from the office of the commandant of the Marine Corps said:

Deeply regret to state that a cablegram received from abroad advises that Corporal Robert McCaughlin Fischer, Marine Corps, was killed in action on June sixth. Body will be interred abroad until end of war. Please accept my heartfelt sympathy in your sorrow. Corporal Fischer nobly gave his life for his country.⁶

A few blocks from the Fischer residence on Colfax Street the father of Sergeant Stephen Sherman received a similar telegram notifying him of his son's death. Sergeant Sherman was a classmate at the University of Minnesota with Corporal Fischer. The two men had enlisted together along with over 100 other students. One June 8, 1918 Caroline Carpenter sent two letters to her son Private Stanley D. Carpenter. One of the letters accompanied a tablet of blank paper and envelopes for him to write letters home. Twelve days later she received a Western Union telegram at her home in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania stating that her only son had been killed in action June 6, 1918. On August 4, 1918, the unopened parcel she sent her son two days after his death arrived back to Ms. Carpenter, forcing her to relive the heartache felt months before when she initially received the devastating news.⁷ The family of Corporal Joseph Toulson received a telegram on July 16, 1918 informing them that their son remained missing in action. These same scenarios played out thousands of times across the country. The death of sons, husbands, and brothers spelled out the true cost of this new age of warfare.

Amidst the carnage and tragedy of June 6, 1918, dispatches from the battle continued to propel a misled and inaccurate picture of the American baptism in this war. MARINES IN GREAT CHARGE OVERTHROW CRACK FOE FORCES donned the front page of the June 7th edition of the *New York Herald*.⁸ The *Reno Evening Gazette* claimed, HUNS TAKE FLIGHT BEFORE FIERCE ADVANCE OF UNITED STATES MARINES.⁹ In a June 9, 1918 *New York Times* article entitled, DECLARES OUR MEN DOMINATE GERMANS. An unidentified

correspondent went so far as to claim, “The operations on June 6 in advancing our line gave us a view of the enemy which permitted us to exploit the situation.”¹⁰

The attention devoted to the battle also made Floyd Gibbons a household name. News of his wounds reached the United States and appeared on numerous front pages nation-wide. When Gibbons returned to the United States he assumed a near celebrity status and became a voice for the war effort. He participated in numerous speaking engagements and made public appearances across the country. His interpretation of the battle, perhaps more than any other account, dictated the context which the engagement would be placed by the American public. Gibbons summed up the beginnings of a misunderstood legacy when he wrote:

On that day [June 6, 1918] and in that event there materialized the German fears which had urged them on to such great speed and violence. In the eleventh hour, there at the peak of the German thrust, there at the climax of Germany's triumphant advances, there at the point where a military decision for the enemy seemed almost within grasp, there and then the American soldier stepped into the breach to save the democracy of the world.¹¹

The attack of June 6, 1918 was doomed from the beginning due largely to the haste with which it was carried out. Although the attacks did not entirely fail, it fell short of its main objective, Belleau Wood. An advance with limited success came at an exorbitant cost. Several issues contributed to this fact. First, delayed communication methods between units proved obsolete in this fast-paced style of war. Most of the 2nd Division's field telephones remained out of service due to the heavy volume of enemy artillery fire that severed unburied lines, resulting in the obsolete use of messengers carrying correspondence on foot.

Secondly, the limited artillery fire incorporated into the strategy of assault was largely ineffective and not used in an advantageous manner. The swiftness which assaults were planned

and the short notice given to the attacking battalions, did not allow for proper coordination and planning with the artillery. The method of employing artillery did not seek to destroy enemy positions but merely harass them enough to allow the infantry to close in on their position while meeting limited resistance. Since news of the planned assaults usually reached the attacking companies at the last minute, this method of artillery bombardment failed.

Finally the tactics used by the infantry were ineffective against the desired objective and contributed largely to the high number of casualties suffered. They were designed to delay rifle fire until assaulting men could engage the enemy at close range even though these formations had to traverse hundreds of yards of open field. This tactic relied on the use of several waves of troops in depth grouped close together in order to maintain better command and control while remaining extremely exposed. The proximity of the men in rank inadvertently catered to the defense of the enemy who utilized machine guns and quick-firing artillery to overwhelming effectiveness.

The haste with which French General Jean Degoutte pushed the counterattack accounts for the disarray and confusion that caught so many of the Marine battalions and companies off guard. The assault on Hill 142 was carried out with half the intended number of Marines due to the inability to effectively communicate within companies, battalions, and regiments in a timely manner. An attack order arrived only a few hours before the offensive was to begin and with his battalion divided, Major Julius Turrill had no option but to carry out his orders with very limited strength. There was also no time to orient platoon commanders as to the desired objectives nor were an abundance of maps available for the men to familiarize themselves with the terrain. Similar communication breakdown affected the assault of the western face of Belleau Wood later on that day. Many of the platoon commanders in the 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment did not

even receive the order to attack until minutes before the scheduled advance, long after the preliminary artillery bombardment ceased.

The decision to limit the preliminary artillery that precluded the assault and ineffective deployment of the little artillery that was directed on the enemy lines, enabled the Germans to remain in position and heavily resist the American assault. For reasons unexplained, the concept of rolling artillery was not used by the Americans. The meager presence of artillery batteries and the haste with which assaults were carried out may have disabled any calculated coordination between the infantry and artillery. This idea places the most intense fire in a front of an advancing column of troops and increases as the formations advance upon the objective. Instead the obsolete idea of interdiction fire was used to isolate the target and prevent any reinforcements from getting to the point of attack. Thirty minutes before the attack was to occur, the supporting artillery barrage was to shift focus to “fires of preparation and destruction.”¹²

In some cases, such as the assault on Hill 142, artillery support was replaced by brief machine gun fire concentrated on the objective; this had little effect on damaging enemy positions.¹³ The limited artillery placed on the German positions was scant at best and not heavily concentrated on enemy positions in accordance to the prevailing idea that Belleau Wood needed to be taken by surprise since General Degoutte’s headquarters believed the woods were lightly held.

The artillery methods, as obsolete as they were, also had no definitive targets to focus on since virtually no reconnaissance seems to have occurred which may have alluded to where German fortifications might have been. The supporting fires also ended much too soon before the advance of American troops, allowing the Germans time to effectively engage the assault, but

gave the alert that an attack could be expected. German Lieutenant Colonel Ernst Otto, a participant in the battle remarked, “The enemy’s intentions were obvious, as his artillery fire became more intense, particularly in the region east and north of Bouresches. The attack of the 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines, and the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, 6th Marines, late that evening, was therefore not at all unexpected by the Germans.”¹⁴ The results turned into disaster for the advancing columns of Americans.

June 6, 1918 was the costliest day for the American military in the First World War to that point. The first large-scale American counterattack of the war amassed a toll unlike anything experienced in the twentieth-century. On June 6, 1918 1,087 Marines of the 2nd Division fell in battle, of which over 350 died or went missing in action.¹⁵ The 3rd Brigade of the 123 soldiers of 2nd U.S. Infantry Division also died. An unknown number of soldiers were wounded. Before the battle ended nearly a month later, the Second Division suffered nearly 9,784 battle casualties.¹⁶ Never before had the Marine Corps suffered such tremendous loss of life. In fact, the Marine Corps had suffered a combined 878 battle casualties in all of the nation’s major military engagements since the American Revolution.¹⁷

June 6, 1918 more than any other day baptized the United States military into the way modern combat were waged since tactics, communication methods, and hastily planned assaults transferred into poor coordination and led to extremely high casualties. The American public, however, were exposed to a portrayal of the battle shrouded a misunderstood context born of the propagandistic approach in covering the engagement. The battle remained an ineradicable memory for the men who fought. The industrious and inhuman capability of twentieth century warfare brought unprecedented killing efficiency to the battlefield and created a terrifyingly unprecedented experience for American troops.

Introduction, The Legacy, interpretation and significance of Belleau Wood

¹ Daniel Morgan, *When The World Went Mad: A Thrilling Story of the Late War , Told in the Language of the Trenches* (Boston: The Christopher Publishing house, 1931), 34-35.

² Official Military Personnel File for Private Edwin P. Kishler, National Personnel Records Center St. Louis, MO. (Hereafter referred to as Military Personnel File, NPRC.) Letter Howard I. Potter to Major Harry C. Miller dated November 3, 1924.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1976), 209.

⁶ James C. Russell and William E. Moore, *The United States Navy in the World War* (Washington D.C.: Navy Pictorial Bureau, 1921), 258.

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¹ Robert L. Bullard, *American Soldiers Also Fought* (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1936), 31. Note: General Robert L. Bullard commanded the 2nd Army in France during the war.

² “Heavy Drive in the South, Terrific Attacks Force French and British to Give Way, “*New York Times*,. 28 May 1918, 1.

³ Robert B. Asprey, *At Belleau Wood* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 1965), 216.

⁴ Ibid, 215-216.

⁵ The fighting at Chateau Thierry is often mistaken as the battle for Belleau Wood due to the close proximity of the two locations. The initial fighting in Chateau Thierry involved an American Machine gun battalion holding and eventually destroying the only bridge crossing the Marne River.

⁶ Emmet Crozier, *American Reporters on the Western Front 1914-1918*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 219.

⁷ Asprey, *At Belleau Wood*, 217.

⁸ Note: Part of the training of American troops in France involved a training program known as the overseas depot. This consisted of French and British instructors who were veterans of earlier fighting in the Western Front, instructing American troops in the handling of new weapons such as the French M1914 Hotchkiss Machine Gun, hand grenades, and the CRSG M1915 Chauchat automatic rifle. Part of the training involved the occupation of trenches in an active sector and participation in daily activities such as laying barbed wire in no-man’s land and carrying out night raids.

⁹ Floyd Gibbons, *And They Thought We Wouldn’t Fight* (New York City, NY: George H. Doran Co., 1918), 305.

¹⁰ “ALLIED LINE HOLDING GERMANS AT MARNE” (*New York Times*, 1 June 1918).

¹¹ “CRISIS AT MARNE IS TENSE” (*Des Moines News Times*, 1 June 1918, 1).

¹² “GERMANS STOP SOUTHWARD DRIVE ON MARNE,” (*The Syracuse Herald*, 1 June 1918, 1).

¹³ John Toland, *No Man’s Land* (Garden City: Double Day Inc., 1980), 272.

¹⁴ “MARINES DRIVE GERMANS BACK” (*The New York Times*, 9 June 1918, 1).

¹⁵ “AMERICAN MARINES ON MARNE FRONT DEFEAT CRACK TROOPS OF PRUSSIANS,” (*The Lima Daily News*, 7 June 1918, 1).

¹⁶ *Translation of War Diaries of German Units Opposed to the Second Division (Regular)*. Vol.1 *Chateau Thierry 1918. War Diaries and Annexes, IV Reserve Corps, 1-2 June*, (Washington: Army War College, 1930-32), N.P.

¹⁷ “MARINES HOLD GROUND; HAVE NOT BEEN ROUTED FROM SPLENDID RESULTS OF YESTERDAY-HOLD ADVANTAGEOUS POSITION.” (*The Democratic Tribune, Jefferson City, MO*. 7 June 1918, 1)

¹⁸ Edwin McClellan, *The United States Marine Corps in the World War* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1920), 41.

¹⁹ Bullard, *American Soldiers Also Fought* , 36-37.

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- ²⁰ Frederick M. Wise and Meigs O. Frost, *A Marine Tells it to You* (New York: J.H. Sears and Company, Inc., 1929), 206.
- ²¹ Albertus W. Catlin, *With the Help of God and a Few Marines* (Garden City: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1918), 9.
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ John Thomason, *Fix Bayonets!* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), 1-66.
- ²⁴ John W. Thomason Jr., *The United States Army Second Division Northwest of Chateau Thierry in World War I* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2006), 5-8.
- ²⁵ Thomason, *The United States Army Second Division Northwest of Chateau Thierry in World War I*, 2-3.
- ²⁶ Asprey, *At Belleau Wood*, 38.
- ²⁷ Toland, 272-273.
- ²⁸ Frank Schoonover, "Belleau Wood: Where the Marines stopped the Kaiser of his way to Paris," *The Ladies' Home Journal*, April 1919. 17.
- ²⁹ *Records of the Second Division (Regular)* volumes 1-9, (Washington: The Army War College, 1927.) N.P.
- ³⁰ American Battle Monuments Commission, *Second Division Summary of Operations in the World War* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1944)

Chapter I. Background, Germany's desperate hours

- ¹ John Keegan, *The First World War* (London, UK: Hutchinson, 1998), 3-23.
- ² Eric Von Ludendorff's three major offensive operations beginning in March dictated the nature of combat in 1918 where elaborate trench works became obsolete since the fluidity of the lines put troops on the move constantly.
- ³ Toland, 95.
- ⁴ Keegan, 375-376.
- ⁵ Toland, 10.
- ⁶ Ibid, 137-140.
- ⁷ Randal Cray, *Kaiserschlacht 1918, The Final German Offensive* (London, UK: Osprey Publishing, 1991), 32.
- ⁸ Toland, 15.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Ibid, 18.
- ¹¹ Ibid, 18-19.
- ¹² Ibid, 20.
- ¹³ Cray, 90.
- ¹⁴ Ferdinand Foch, *The Memoirs of Marshal Foch* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Doran, 1931), 262.
- ¹⁵ Asprey, *At Belleau Wood*, 38.
- ¹⁶ Toland, *No Man's Land*, 143.
- ¹⁷ Keegan, 405.
- ¹⁸ Robert B. Asprey, *The German High Command at War, Hindenburg and Ludendorff Conduct World War I* (New York, NY: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991), 397.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Robert Asprey, *The German High Command at War* (New York, NY: William Morrow and Company Inc. 1991), 412.
- ²² Thomason, *United States Army Second Division*, 15.
- ²³ Toland, 234-35
- ²⁴ Asprey, *At Belleau Wood*, 49-50.
- ²⁵ Samuel T. Hubbard, *Memoirs of a Staff Officer 1917-1919* (Tuckahoe, N.Y.: Cardinal Associates Inc. 1959), 36.
- ²⁶ Sidney Rogerson, *The Last of the Ebb* (London, UK.: Greenhill Books 1937), 24.
- ²⁷ Ibid, 28-29.
- ²⁸ Toland, 243. In the summer of 1914, the Germans advanced almost along the exact same route as they had in the spring of 1918. In what became known as the first battle of the Marne, the French fought what was deemed a battle to save Paris
- ²⁹ Toland, *No Man's Land*, 242.
- ³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid, 244.

³² Rogerson, *The Last of Ebb*, 140.

³³ Oliver L. Spaulding and John W. Wright, *The Second Division American Expeditionary Force in France 1917-1919*, 38. (New York, NY. The Hillman Press Inc., 1937), 36.

³⁴ Rogerson, 140-41.

³⁵ John J. Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, Vol. 2 (New York, NY. (F.A. Stokes Co., 1931), 189

Chapter II. Movement to the Front and the Pending Battle

¹ The 4th Marine Brigade, as it was designated, consisted of the 5th and 6th Marine Regiments and the 6th Machine Gun Battalion. Each Regiment had 3 battalions which each had 4 companies of about 255 Marines and Navy Corpsman (medical personnel) each. The Marine Corps was too small to comprise its own individual division available for combat in France. A brigade was the largest available.

² Major Edwin McClellan, *The United States Marine Corps in the World War*, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing office, 1920), 10.

³ Spaulding and Wright, *The Second Division American Expeditionary Force in France 1917-1919*, 38.

⁴ Gus Gulberg, *A War Diary*, (Chicago: Drake Press, 1927), 22.

⁵ John West, *Belleau Wood*, n.d., Personal Papers collection, Alfred M. Gray Research Library, Quantico, VA. (Hereafter cited at West, *Belleau Wood*, Gray Research Center)

⁶ Elliot Cooke, "We Can Take It, We Attack," *Infantry Journal*, (July-August 1937): 2.

⁷ American Battle Monuments Commission, *Second Division Summary of Operations in the World War* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1944), 6.

⁸ Byron Scarbrough *They Called us Devil Dogs* (N.P. 2005), 63. Note: This was an unpublished proof copy of the book furnished to the author by Byron Scarbrough.

⁹ Ibid, 63-64.

¹⁰ Havelock D. Nelson, "Lucy-Le-Bocage," *Leatherneck*, February 1940, 10.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² West, *Belleau Wood*, Gray Research Center.

¹³ *Translation of War Diaries of German Units Opposed to the Second Division (Regular)*. Vol. 1.

¹⁴ Ibid, *War Diaries and Annexes, 231st, 237th, 10th and 197th Divisions*, N.P.

¹⁵ *Records of the Second Division (Regular)* Vol. 1, *2nd Division Headquarters Field Orders* (Washington: The Army War College, 1927.) N.P.

¹⁶ Spaulding and Wright, *The Second Division American Expeditionary Force in France 1917-1919*, 40-41.

¹⁷ West, *Belleau Wood*, Gray Research Center.

¹⁸ Alfred Schiani *A Former Marine Tells It Like It Was And Is*. (New York: Hearthstone Books, 1988), 22.

¹⁹ *The 96th Company, 6th Marine Regiment in World War I*, 1967, USA CGSC Ft. Leavenworth Library, Ft. Leavenworth, KS., 50.

²⁰ Thomason, *United States Army Second Division*, 39.

²¹ *Records of the Second Division*, Vol. 4. *Operations of the 6th Marines*, N.P.

²² American Battle Monuments Commission, *Second Division Summary of Operations in the World War*, 7.

²³ Warren R. Jackson, *His Time in Hell, A Texas Marine in France: The World War I Memoir of Warren R. Jackson*, ed. by George Clark (Novato, CA: 2001), 88.

²⁴ Ibid, 89.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Wise and Frost, *A Marine Tells it to You*, 195.

²⁷ Richard Derby, *Wade in, Sanitary*, (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1919), 59.

²⁸ *Records of the Second Division*, Vol. 5. *Operations of the 5th Marines*, N.P. (These records are broken down by division, brigade, regiment and battalion structure and no page numbers are listed)

²⁹ Cooke, "We Can Take It, We Attack," 5.

³⁰ Wise and Frost, *A Marine Tells it to You*, 196.

³¹ Cooke, "We Can Take It, We Attack," 5.

³² Wise and Frost, *A Marine Tells it to You*, 195.

³³ Cooke, "We Can Take It, We Attack," 5.

³⁴ Catlin, *With The Help of God and A Few Marines*, 85.

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- ³⁵ *Records of the Second Division, Vol. 6, Field Orders 4th Brigade (Marines)*, N.P.
- ³⁶ West, *Belleau Wood*, Gray Research Center..
- ³⁷ Muster Rolls, 79th Company June 1918.
- ³⁸ Burial File of Private Charles F. Brown Record Group 92 Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD. (Hereafter referred to as Burial File, RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.)
- ³⁹ Scarbrough *They Called us Devil Dogs*, 63.
- ⁴⁰ Burial File of Private Frank Snow, Eye-witness statement by Sergeant Darel J. McKinney. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.
- ⁴¹ Scarbrough *They Called us Devil Dogs*, 64
- ⁴² Ibid.
- ⁴³ Kemper F. Cowing and Ryley Cooper Courtney, *Dear Folks At Home* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1919), 154.
- ⁴⁴ Official Military Personnel File for Sergeant Thomas J. Kelly, NPRC St. Louis, MO. (Hereafter referred to as Military Personnel File, NPRC.)
- ⁴⁵ Burial File of Private Harold Alfred Brooks. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.
- ⁴⁶ Jackson, *His Time in Hell*, 85.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid.
- ⁴⁸ Colonel Lloyd E. Pike, *The Battle For Belleau Wood, As I Remember It About 60 Years Later*, 1977, Cantigny Museum Library, Wheaton, IL, 8.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid, 8-9.
- ⁵¹ Hamilton, Craig and Louise Corbin *Echoes From Over There* (New York: The Soldiers' Publishing Company, 1919), 14.
- ⁵² Ibid.
- ⁵³ Ibid.
- ⁵⁴ *Records of the Second Division, Vol. 4. Operations of the 6th Marines*, N.P.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid.
- ⁵⁶ Jackson, *His Time in Hell*, 90-91
- ⁵⁷ Ibid.
- ⁵⁸ Ernest Otto, "The Battles of Belleau Wood," *Leatherneck Magazine*, January 1929, 13. *Records of the Second Division, Vol. 4. Operations of the 6th Marines*, N.P..
- ⁵⁹ Thomason, *United States Army Second Division*, 65.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid, 66.
- ⁶¹ Jackson, *His Time in Hell*, 90-91
- ⁶² Ibid.
- ⁶³ Official Military Personnel Files for Gunnery Sergeant Peter Morgan, NPRC.
- ⁶⁴ *The History of the Third Battalion, Sixth Regiment, U.S. Marines*, (Hillsdale, MI., 1919), 13.
- ⁶⁵ Harry Collins, *The War Diary of Corporal Harry Collins* (Pike, N.H., 1996), 15.
- ⁶⁶ Scarbrough *They Called us Devil Dogs*, 65.
- ⁶⁷ Thomason, *United States Army Second Division*, 66.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid.
- ⁶⁹ Cowing and Cooper, *Dear Folks At Home*, 140-41.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid.
- ⁷¹ *Records of the Second Division, Vol. 4. Operations of the 6th Marines*, N.P.
- ⁷² Spaulding and Wright, *The Second Division American Expeditionary Force in France 1917-1919*, 253.
- ⁷³ *Records of the Second Division, Vol. 4. Operations of the 6th Marines*, N.P..
- ⁷⁴ Ibid .
- ⁷⁵ The term *Chasseur* literally translates to hunter. The term was used to identify the units responsible for small offensive action.
- ⁷⁶ Wise and Frost, *A Marine Tells it to You*, 198-199.
- ⁷⁷ Official Military Personnel Files for Private Walter Cook, NPRC.. Note: On December 10, 1918 during the postwar occupation of Germany, Cook was recommended for the Medal of Honor by then Captain George F. Hill. Note: Several Marines were armed with telescopic rifles. There is no documentation existing of any formal sniper

training existing in the Marine Corps at that time. Every Marine was to qualify at the range as one of three designations. Marines, even today, prides themselves on being a primary rifleman, regardless of the occupation they formally hold.

⁷⁸ Cooke, "We Can Take It, We Attack," 5.

⁷⁹ Wise and Frost, *A Marine Tells it to You*, 199.

⁸⁰ Official Military Personnel Files for Private James Hodges, NPRC.

⁸¹ Wise and Frost, *A Marine Tells it to You*, 201.

⁸² Muster Rolls 43rd Company, June 1918.

⁸³ Wise and Frost, *A Marine Tells it to You*, 199.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ *The Medical Department of the United States Navy with the Army and Marine Corps in France in World War I, It's functions and Employment*, (Washington: Bureau of Medicine and Surgery U.S. Navy Dept. 1947), 204.

⁸⁶ Wise and Frost, *A Marine Tells it to You*, 200-01.

⁸⁷ *Records of the Second Division*, Vol. 5. *Operations of the 5th Marines*, N.P.

⁸⁸ Cowing and Cooper, *Dear Folks At Home*, 141 The Marine mentioned by Wahl was Corporal Louis W. Johnson who was killed June 3, 1918 and buried later that day at La Voi-du-Chatel.

⁸⁹ Official Military Personnel Files for Private Floyd Deckro, NPRC.

⁹⁰ Official Military Personnel Files for Private William T. Hayden, NPRC.

⁹¹ George Clark *Retreat, Hell! We Just Got Here: A brief biographical sketch of Lloyd W. Williams*, (Pike, N.H.: The Brass Hat), 10.

⁹² Burial file for Gunnery Sergeant Carl H. Horton, eye-witness statements by Maurice Jackman, Hood L. Haynie, Jason W. Thurston and F. Moriarty. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD. Note: Gunnery Sergeant Horton died 27 days later on June 30th.

⁹³ Clark, *Retreat, Hell We Just Got Here!*, 11.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Lemeul Shepherd interview by Robert Aspery, August 18, 1963, Marine Corps Oral History Collection, Gray Research Library Quantico, VA.

⁹⁶ Hamilton and Corbin, *Echoes From Over There*, 69-70.

⁹⁷ Wise and Frost, *A Marine Tells it to You*, 202-203.

⁹⁸ Catlin, *With The Help of God and A Few Marines*, 92.

⁹⁹ Hamilton and Corbin *Echoes From Over There*, 70.

¹⁰⁰ Catlin, *With The Help of God and A Few Marines*, 92.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Shepherd interview.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Jackson, *His Time in Hell*, 95.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 96.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 97.

¹⁰⁹ Bullard, *American Soldiers Also Fought*, 36.

¹¹⁰ *Translation of War Diaries of German Units*, Vol. 1, *War Diary, IV Corps, 4 June*, N.D.

¹¹¹ Asprey, *At Belleau Wood*, 132.

¹¹² Ibid, 132-33

¹¹³ Rogerson, *The Last of Ebb*, 146.

¹¹⁴ Asprey, *At Belleau Wood*, 129

¹¹⁵ Edward Lengel, *To Conquer Hell, The Meuse-Argonne, 1918*, (New York: Henry Hold and Company, 2004), 45.

Chapter III. Learning the Ways of 20th Century Warfare

¹ Thomason, *United States Army Second Division*, 80.

² Letter from Major Julius Turrill to American Battle Monuments Commission, Dec. 11, 1918, RG 117.4.2, Box 17, National Archives College Park, MD. (Hereafter referred to as letter, Major Turrill to ABMC, Dec. 11, 1918.)

³ Ibid.

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- ⁴ *Records of the Second Division, Vol. 5. Operations of the 5th Marines*, N.P.
Note: Turrill's report to Lieutenant Colonel Logan Feland gives his battalion strength at 975 men present.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Jonas Platt, "Holding Back the Marines," *The Ladies' Home Journal*, September 1919. 28.
- ⁷ Thomason, *Fix Bayonets!* 9.
- ⁸ Ibid., 10.
- ⁹ Letter, Major Turrill to ABMC, Dec. 11, 1918.
- ¹⁰ *History of the First Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, U.S. Marines*, (Pike, NH, n.d.), 11.
- ¹¹ "Heroes of Belleau Come Back Smiling," *Recruiting Bulletin*, September 1918, 5.
- ¹² Message sent from Major Turrill to Colonel Neville, 7:00p.m. June 6, 1918 *Records of the Second Division, Vol. 5. Operations of the 5th Marines*, N.P.
- ¹³ *Translation of War Diaries of German Units, Vol. 1, War Diaries and Annexes, 237th Division-report 460th Regiment of Infantry-6 June, Bezon Report*, N.P.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Burial File of Private Harry Y. Flynn. Eye-witness statement by Andrew Champion. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.
- ¹⁷ Burial File of Private Russell Wakefield. Eye-witness statement by John L. Carver. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.
- ¹⁸ Burial File of Private Walter L. Haynes. Eye-witness statement by George E. Fesler. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.
- ¹⁹ Burial File of Corporal William J. Flaherty. Eye-witness statement by George E. Fesler. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.
- ²⁰ Official Military Personnel Files for Private Joseph M. Baker, NPRC.
- ²¹ Cowing and Cooper, *Dear Folks At Home*, 126.
- ²² Burial File of Privates Edmund J. LaBonte, Henry Penney, David Tartikoff and James McQuiddy. Eye-witness statement by William Van Train and Joe G. Oliver. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.
- ²³ *War Diaries and Annexes, 237th Division-report 460th Regiment of Infantry-6 June, Bezon Report*.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Platt, "Holding Back the Marines," 28.
- ²⁶ Cowing and Cooper, *Dear Folks At Home*, 127.
- ²⁷ Thomason, *Fix Bayonets!* 17.
- ²⁸ Official Military Personnel Files for Private John Kukoski, NPRC.
- ²⁹ Thomason, *United States Army Second Division*, 85.
- ³⁰ Platt, 28
- ³¹ Cowing and Cooper, *Dear Folks At Home*, 127.
- ³² The author's examination of French War Department maps used by the regimental headquarters, which now reside at the Alfred Gray Research Center in Quantico, VA., verifies that these maps did not designate the unimproved road; the 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment's prescribed objective. By June 6, 1918 there were two roads that ran parallel to each other; however the maps used do not designate which are unimproved and which are not. This created confusion for Captain Hamilton in determining which road was actually designated as the objective.
- ³³ Cowing and Cooper, *Dear Folks At Home*, 127.
- ³⁴ Thomason, *Fix Bayonets!*, 19.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Burial File of Corporal Joseph C. Toulson. Eye-witness statement by Jessie Tompkins. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.
- ³⁷ Burial File of Corporal Ambrose Hughes. Eye-witness statement by Sergeant William Van Train. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.
- ³⁸ Burial File of Sergeant Arthur Russell. Eye-witness statement by Sergeant William Van Train. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.
- ³⁹ "Heroes of Belleau Come Back Smiling," 5,
- ⁴⁰ Medal of Honor Citation. Official Military Personnel Files for Gunnery Sergeant Ernest Hoffman, NPRC. Gunnery Sergeant Hoffman was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his actions on Hill 142.

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- ⁴¹ “Heroes of Belleau Come Back Smiling,” 6.
- ⁴² Cowing and Cooper, *Dear Folks At Home*, 127.
- . The town Hamilton is referring to was Torcy.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Platt, “Holding Back the Marines,” 28
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.
- ⁴⁶ Burial Files of Corporals Joseph C. Toulson, Anthony S. Kowalak and Private Charles W. Steinkamp. Eye-witness statements by Jessie Tompkins, Abbie D. Atkinson and Frederick Bodwell. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.
- ⁴⁷ *Records of the Second Division, Vol. 5. Operations of the 5th Marines*, N.P.
- ⁴⁸ Burial Files of Corporals Joseph C. Toulson, Anthony S. Kowalak and Private Charles W. Steinkamp. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD. Note, these three men were carried as missing in action and only the burial file of Anthony S. Kowalak gives definitive dates as to when his remains were discovered and buried, August 1, 1918. Jessie Tompkins claims to have been alongside Toulson when he was killed by machine gun fire outside Torcy at about 11:00a.m. that morning. Today Steinkamp’s remains are unaccounted for and he is officially carried as missing in action. Jessie Tompkins claims to have seen his burial place marked by his dog tag hanging from the hilt of his bayonet that was stuck into the ground at the head of the grave. Joseph Toulson rests today in the Aisne-Marne American cemetery in Row B, Plot 06, Grave 67.
- ⁴⁹ Heroes of Belleau Come Back Smiling,” 6.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid.
- ⁵¹ Reports on the Deaths of Officers, 5th Marine Regiment, October 4, 1918, RG 117.4.2, National Archives Washington D.C., Eye-witness statement by Captain Frank Whitehead.
- ⁵² Ibid.
- ⁵³ Burial File of Private Eric A. Goldbeck, Eye-witness statement by Private Eric Kitchens. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.
- ⁵⁴ Official Military Personnel Files Private John Harris, NPRC..
- ⁵⁵ Burial File of Corporal Frederick H. Fox. Eye-witness statement by George J. Hutton and William J. Ameling. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.
- ⁵⁶ Official Military Personnel Files for Sergeant John V. Fitzgerald, NPRC. Official Recommendation and eye-witness statement for the Distinguished Service Cross by Captain Francis S. Kieren submitted on January 28, 1920.
- ⁵⁷ Official Military Personnel Files for Private John Harris, NPRC.. AEF and 2nd Division Silver Star Citation for Private John Harris.
- ⁵⁸ Official Military Personnel Files for Private Pleas Parker, NPRC. Recommendation for the Distinguished Service Cross witnessed by Captain Francis S. Kieren and Second Lieutenant Charles J. Smith
- ⁵⁹ Official Military Personnel Files for Corporal Prentice Geer, NPRC.. Distinguished Service Cross Citation.
- ⁶⁰ Platt, “Holding Back the Marines,” 28.
- ⁶¹ Ibid.
- ⁶² Message sent from Major Turrill to Colonel Neville, 7:00p.m. June 6, 1918, *Records of the Second Division, Vol. 5. Operations of the 5th Marines*, N.P.
- ⁶³ Albert Powis, “A Leatherneck in France 1917-1919,” *Military Images*, September-October 1981, 12.
- ⁶⁴ Onnie Cordes, *The Immortal Division* (Palm Beach: Merriman Press, 1990), 9.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶⁶ 4th Marine Brigade Muster Rolls June 1-30, 1918.

Chapter IV. The Failed Assault on Belleau Wood

- ¹ Catlin, *With The Help of God and A Few Marines*, 85.
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Thomason, *United States Army Second Division*, 96.
- ⁴ Catlin *With The Help of God and A Few Marines*, 110.
- ⁵ *Translation of War Diaries of German Units, Vol. 1, War Diaries and Annexes, 237th Infantry Division, June 4-6*, N.P.
- ⁶ Ibid. *War Diaries and Annexes, 10th Infantry Division, June 4-6*.

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- ⁷ Captain Peter Conachy to American Battle Monuments Commission, September 16, 1930, RG 117.4.2, Box 17, National Archives Washington D.C.
- ⁸ Captain Edward S. Hope correspondence to his father dated June 16, 1918. RG 117.4.2 Box 190, National Archives
- ⁹ Captain Peter Conachy to American Battle Monuments Commission, September 16, 1930
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Ibid. Evidentially plans to exploit the initial assault on Hill 142 were underway. General Degoutte sought to capture not only Belleau Wood, but advance beyond it in an effort to establish a line on the high ground north of Belleau Wood. This phase of the attack was to commence only after the objectives of June 6, 1918 were captured.
- ¹² Catlin *With The Help of God and A Few Marines*, 109.
- ¹³ Asprey, *At Belleau Wood*, 173.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Captain Peter Conachy to American Battle Monuments Commission, September 16, 1930.
- ¹⁶ Thomason, *United States Army Second Division*, 95.
- ¹⁷ *The Medical Department of the United States Navy*, 205-06.
- ¹⁸ Gibbons, *And They Thought We Wouldn't Fight*, 307.
- ¹⁹ Captain Raymond E. Knapp, *Operations of the Third Battalion, Fifth Regiment United States Marines in Belleau Wood June 5th to June 28th, 1918*, (paper presented at the Company Officers Course Ft. Benning GA: 1924-1925), 10.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Lieutenant General Merwin Silverthorn, interview by Benis Frank, Quantico, VA, 1973, Marine Corps Oral History Collection, Gray Research Library, Quantico, VA.
- ²² Cowing and Cooper, *Dear Folks At Home*, 118.
- ²³ Burial File of Private Ole Counts. Eye-witness statement by Sigurd Swenson. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Carl B. Mills, *My First Impressions as a Marine Recruit*, (Sonoma: n.p., n.d.), 11.
- ²⁶ Gibbons, *And They Thought We Wouldn't Fight*, 308.
- ²⁷ Letter Frank Tupa to Dr. William Fischer dated October 13, 1918. Correspondence provided to the author by the Fischer family of Winona, MN.
- ²⁸ Silverthorn, interview.
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ Gibbons, *And They Thought We Wouldn't Fight*, 309.
- ³¹ Mills, *My First Impressions as a Marine Recruit*, 11.
- ³² Silverthorn, interview.
- ³³ Burial File of Private Lee L. Fry. Eye-witness statement by Joseph Bridge. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.
- ³⁴ Burial File of Private Thurman Worstall. Eye-witness statement by Willis Rummel and Howard Jacobson. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.
- ³⁵ Official Military Personnel Files for Private James N. Allen, NPRC..
- ³⁶ Letter Frank Tupa to Dr. William Fischer dated October 13, 1918.
- ³⁷ Official Military Personnel Files for Private George B. Sellars, NPRC..
- ³⁸ Official Military Personnel Files for Sergeant Stephen Sherman, NPRC.
- ³⁹ Mills, *My First Impressions as a Marine Recruit*, 11.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ Silverthorn, interview.
- ⁴² Ibid.
- ⁴³ Burial File of Private Ole Counts. Eye-witness statement by Sigurd Swenson, Thomas Barwick and William Wagoner. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.
- ⁴⁴ Official Military Personnel Files for First Sergeant John Grant, NPRC.
- ⁴⁵ Silverthorn, interview.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ Official Military Personnel Files for Corporal George O. Bissonette, NPRC.
- ⁴⁸ Official Military Personnel Files for Private Hollis E. Empey, NPRC.
- ⁴⁹ *The Medical Department*, 47-48.

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- ⁵⁰ Silverthorn, interview.
- ⁵¹ Ibid.
- ⁵² Ibid.
- ⁵³ Reports on the Deaths of Officers, 5th Marine Regiment, October 4, 1918, National Archives Washington D.C.
- ⁵⁴ Burial File of Corporal Carl Stiekle. Eye-witness statement by Frank P. Millage. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.
- ⁵⁵ Burial File of Private Charley Frehse. Eye-witness statement by Benjamin Geary. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.
- ⁵⁶ Muster Rolls, 45th Company June 1918.
- ⁵⁷ Burial File of Corporal Benjamin Strain. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD. Official Military Personnel Files for Private Hollis E. Empey, NPRC.
- ⁵⁸ Burial File of Private Clifford S. Cushman. Eye-witness statement by LeRoy Harned. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid. Private Cushman's remains were never reportedly buried. On June 28, 1921 a study of ten graves marked, "unknown" had dental records compared with those in Private Cushman's file but no match was ever made. Today Private Cushman is carried as missing in action.
- ⁶¹ "Wounded Belleau Wood Heroes Study New Trades in Spacious Hotel-Hospital at Lakewood," *Recruiters Bulletin*, December 1918, 35.
- ⁶² Ibid.
- ⁶³ Cowing and Cooper, *Dear Folks At Home*, 166-67.
- ⁶⁴ Victor M. Landreth, letter of June 7, 1919, Landreth Personal Papers Collection, PC 1750, Personal Papers collection. Alfred M. Gray research library, Quantico, VA.
- ⁶⁵ Gibbons, *And They Thought We Wouldn't Fight*, 309.
- ⁶⁶ Harry R. Stringer, *The Navy Book of Distinguished Service* (Washington D.C.: Fassett Publishing Co., 1921), 150-151.
- ⁶⁷ Captain Knapp, *Operations of the Third Battalion, Fifth Regiment*, 10.
- ⁶⁸ Gibbons, *And They Thought We Wouldn't Fight*, 309.
- ⁶⁹ Victor M. Landreth, letter. Note: One-pounders refer to a 37mm gun used by the Americans. The weapon was ideal for the destruction of lightly fortified positions such as machine gun nests. The Germans had a similar weapon, often referred to as a one-pounder by the Americans.
- ⁷⁰ Reports on the Deaths of Officers, 5th Marine Regiment, October 4, 1918, National Archives Washington D.C.
- ⁷¹ Captain Knapp, *Operations of the Third Battalion, Fifth Regiment*, 10.
- ⁷² Ibid.
- ⁷³ Catlin, *With The Help of God and A Few Marines*, 348.
- ⁷⁴ Captain Knapp, *Operations of the Third Battalion, Fifth Regiment*, 10.
- ⁷⁵ Burial File of Private Verne Gardner. Eye-witness statement by Harlan H. Winn. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.
- ⁷⁶ Captain Knapp, *Operations of the Third Battalion, Fifth Regiment*, 10.
- ⁷⁷ Burial File of Private Joseph Sanderson. Eye-witness statements by William Oliver, Christie Collopy, Harry G. Reckitt, Matt Griffen. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.
- ⁷⁸ Gibbons, *And They Thought We Wouldn't Fight*, 310.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid.
- ⁸¹ Ibid., 310-11
- ⁸² Ibid., 313
- ⁸³ Ibid. 314
- ⁸⁴ Ibid. 317
- ⁸⁵ Ibid. 319
- ⁸⁶ Message from Lieutenant Colonel Harry Lay to Headquarters 2nd Division 5:40pm June 6, 1918. *Records of the Second Division*, Vol. 4. *Operations of the 6th Marines*, N.P..
- ⁸⁷ Message from Major Harry Larsen to 4th Marine Brigade headquarters. No time indicated. *Records of the Second Division*, Vol. 5. *Operations of the 5th Marines*, N.P.

Chapter V. Assault on the Town of Bouresches

- ¹ Louis Timmerman, interview by Robert Aspery, April 23-24, 1964, Marine Corps Oral History Collection, Gray Research Library Quantico, VA
- ² Scarbrough *They Called us Devil Dogs*, 68.
- ³ Ibid. 68-69.
- ⁴ Catlin, *With The Help of God and A Few Marines*, 110-11.
- ⁵ Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Holcomb to Joel D. Thacker Muster Roll Section Headquarters Marine Corps, Dec. 12, 1918, RG 117.4.2, Box 17.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Berton Sibley, *Diary of Berton Sibley* (n.p. 1917-1919), 4. Personal Papers collection, Alfred M. Gray research library, Quantico, VA.
- ⁸ Timmerman, interview .
- ⁹ Scarbrough, *They Called us Devil Dogs* 69.
- ¹⁰ Nelson, "Lucy-Le-Bocage," 10.
- ¹¹ J.E. Rendinell and George Pattullo, *One Man's War: The Diary of a Leatherneck* (New York, N.Y.: J.H. Sears and Company, Inc, 1928), 97.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Ibid, 98.
- ¹⁴ *Diary of David Bellamy, 1888-1960 covering periods of service October 23, 1917 to August 22, 1919.* Personal Papers collection, Alfred M. Gray research library, Quantico, VA.
- ¹⁵ Catlin, *With The Help of God and A Few Marines*, 110-112.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Scarbrough, *They Called us Devil Dogs*, 70.
- ¹⁸ Berton Sibley, *Diary of Berton Sibley*, 5.
- ¹⁹ This tactic is designed to control movement and does not utilize that tactic of infiltration or fire by movement. It narrowed the amount of firepower at the front of the advancing columns. It required men to close on the enemy before firing upon them. The French and British had long abandoned it and now the Americans were learning that same harsh lesson.
- ²⁰ Scarbrough, 71
- ²¹ Ibid, 72.
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Rendinall, 98-99.
- ²⁴ Burial file of Corporal Earl C. Collier and Harry W. Elliot. Eye-witness statements by Bernard Kallin, Wilfred W. Le Beau, Arthur Porche and Albert Ellerhorst. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ Scarbrough, *They Called us Devil Dogs*, 72.
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ Burial file of Private Carl Williams. Eye-witness statement by Edward A. Graham. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.
- ³¹ Scarbrough, *They Called us Devil Dogs*, 71.
- ³² Yolanda Rodriguez, "Marine History Pays a Visit in Dress Blues, *The Los Angeles Times*, 17 February 1990, B1.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ Scarbrough, *They Called us Devil Dogs*, 71.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Ibid., 72.
- ³⁷ Ibid.
- ³⁸ Nelson, "Lucy-Le-Bocage," 10.
- ³⁹ Official Military Personnel Files for Corporal Neil S. Shannon, NPRC.
- ⁴⁰ Burial file of Private William Saylor. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.

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- ⁴¹ Ibid. Eye-witness statement by William J. Delaney and Joseph L. Burns. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.
- ⁴² Ibid.
- ⁴³ William T. Scanlon, *God Have Mercy On Us* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1929), 17-18.
- ⁴⁴ Burial file of Private William Saylor. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.
- ⁴⁵ Shell shock is the term used during World War One to describe a temporary psychological phenomenon where exposure to extremely traumatic events causes a mental breakdown often characterized by a variety of traits ranging from delayed reaction and other emotional symptoms to physiological such as extreme twitching or convulsing. Today the condition is officially labeled “Combat stress reaction” by the U.S. Army. This condition should not be confused with Post Traumatic Stress disorder, which is long-term.
- ⁴⁶ Record files for Private William Roscoe Cassady, NPRC.
- ⁴⁷ Nelson, “Lucy-Le-Bocage,” 10.
- ⁴⁸ Official Military Personnel Files for Privates John M. Worrell, Walter L. Burroughs and Paul S. Dreyer, NPRC..
- ⁴⁹ Scarbrough, *They Called us Devil Dogs* 73.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid.
- ⁵¹ Captain Bailey M. Coffenburg to American Battle Monuments Commission, April 18, 1930, RG 117, Box 190, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
- ⁵² Joseph C. Grayson *A Record of the Operations of the Second Battalion, Sixth Regiment, Marines*, n.d. RG 117, Box 190. National Archives, Washington, D.C.
- ⁵³ Clifton B. Cates, interviewed by Robert Aspery, June 25, 1963, Marine Corps Oral History Collection, Gray Research Library Quantico, VA
- ⁵⁴ West, *Belleau Wood*, Gray Research Center
- ⁵⁵ Pike, *The Battle For Belleau Wood*, 12.
- ⁵⁶ Graves Erskine to American Battle Monuments Commission December 9, 1926. RG 127 Entry 240, Box 55. National Archives, Washington, D.C.
- ⁵⁷ “June 1918.” *The Marines Magazine*, July 1919, 6. Burial file of Private Edward Wendell Eye-witness statement by Earle W. Davis. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.
- ⁵⁸ Letter Glen Hill to Mr. G.M. Neufeld History and Museum Divisions Headquarters Marine Corps Quantico, VA. January 17, 1979. National Archives, Washington, D.C.
- ⁵⁹ Cates interview.
- ⁶⁰ “June 1918,” 6.
- ⁶¹ Letter Glen Hill to Mr. G.M. Neufeld. National Archives, Washington, D.C.
- ⁶² Letter Al Sheridan to Mrs. Wiley Cox of St. Joseph, MO August 14, 1918. RG 127 Entry 240, Box 55. National Archives, Washington, D.C.
- ⁶³ Ibid.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid.
- ⁶⁵ Letter Al Sheridan to Mrs. Wiley Cox. National Archives, Washington, D.C.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid.
- ⁶⁷ Burial files of Lieutenant Junior Grade Weedon E. Osborne and First Sergeant Joseph A. Sissler. No eye-witness statements. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD. Report of burial described virtually no damage to the corpse of Lieutenant Junior Grade Osborne. He was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions in attempting to save Captain Duncan. First Sergeant Sissler’s body appeared to have massive trauma to the abdominal region blasted open, shattering several ribs.
- ⁶⁸ Letter Sheridan to Cox.
- ⁶⁹ Grayson *A Record of the Operations of the Second Battalion*. National Archives, Washington, D.C.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid.
- ⁷¹ “Says He Likes Parris Island Better Than He does Paris, France.” *Recruiters Bulletin*, July 1918, 6.
- ⁷² John T. Miller, “Why I Hate a German,” *What Our Boys Did Over There By Themselves*, (New York, 1918), 120.
- ⁷³ General Clifton B. Cates, interview by Benis Frank, Quantico, VA, 1973, Marine Corps Oral History Collection, Gray Research Library, Quantico, VA.
- ⁷⁴ Clifton B. Cates, interviewed by Robert Aspery.
- ⁷⁵ Letter Glen Hill to Mr. G.M. Neufeld. National Archives, Washington, D.C.
- ⁷⁶ “June 1918,” 6.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid.

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- ⁷⁸ Letter Glen Hill to Mr. G.M. Neufeld. National Archives, Washington, D.C.
- ⁷⁹ West, *Belleau Wood*, Gray Research Center
- ⁸⁰ Ibid, 6.
- ⁸¹ Ibid.
- ⁸² Ibid. Burial file of Private Horace Ward. No eye-witness statements. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.
- ⁸³ West, *Belleau Wood*, Gray Research Center, 6.
- ⁸⁴ Captain Clyde P. Matteson to the American Battle Monuments commission, April 7, 1930, RG 117 Box 90, National Archives, Washington. Official Military Personnel Files for Corporal Carlos E. Stewart, Privates Walter A. Gross, Edmund T. Smith, Walter E. Rider, Alton R. Vanlaningham and Alva C. Tompkins, NPRC.
- ⁸⁵ Official Military Personnel Files for Corporal Carlos E. Stewart, Privates Walter A. Gross, Edmund T. Smith, Walter E. Rider, Alton R. Vanlaningham and Alva C. Tompkins, NPRC.
- ⁸⁶ Official Military Personnel Files for Private Alvin H. Harris, NPRC. Note: Private Harris was evacuated to a field hospital and died three days later on June 9, 1918 from his wounds.
- ⁸⁷ Letter Glen Hill to Mr. G.M. Neufeld.
- ⁸⁸ Pike, *The Battle For Belleau Wood*, 13.
- ⁸⁹ Letter Glen Hill to Mr. G.M. Neufeld.
- ⁹⁰ "June 1918." *The Marines Magazine*, 7.
- ⁹¹ Ibid.
- ⁹² Letter Glen Hill to Mr. G.M. Neufeld. National Archives, Washington, D.C.
- ⁹³ Pike, *The Battle For Belleau Wood*, 12-13.
- ⁹⁴ Ibid.
- ⁹⁵ Catlin, *With The Help of God and A Few Marines*, 119.
- ⁹⁶ Ibid.
- ⁹⁷ Ibid.
- ⁹⁸ Official Military Personnel Files for Sergeant Sydney Colford Jr., NPRC.. *The Medical Department of the United States Navy*, 221.
- ⁹⁹ J.D. Tunnell, "Belleau Wood," Marine Corps Personal Papers collection, Alfred Gray Research Center, Quantico, VA.
- ¹⁰⁰ "The Wounding of General Catlin." *The Marines Magazine*, July 1919, 20.
- ¹⁰¹ Pike, *The Battle For Belleau Wood*, 13.
- ¹⁰² Ibid, 15.
- ¹⁰³ Ibid
- ¹⁰⁴ Ibid
- ¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 16-17.
- ¹⁰⁶ General Graves B. Erskine, interview by Benis M. Frank, October 1969 Marine Corps Oral History Collection, Gray Research Library, Quantico, VA.
- ¹⁰⁷ Ibid
- ¹⁰⁸ Burial file of Corporal Thomas A. Gragard. Eye-witness statements by Elmer Asher, Harvey Brown, Harry Fletcher. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.
- ¹⁰⁹ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁰ Graves Erskine to American Battle Monuments Commission. December 9, 1926, RG 117, Box 190, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Official Military Personnel Files for Private Oscar Hocker Rankin, NPRC..
- ¹¹¹ Official Military Personnel Files for Private Elbert Ellsworth Brooks, NPRC. Eyewitness statements regarding this action by Captain A.R. Shinkle, Private Ora R. Allen and 2nd Lieutenant Vernon M. Guymon. Private Brooks was recommended for the Medal of honor but his award was down-graded to the Distinguished Service Cross and later the Navy Cross.
- ¹¹² Official Military Personnel Files for Private Raymond W. Boone, NPRC..
- ¹¹³ Official Military Personnel Files for Corporals David L. Spaulding and Harry B. Fletcher, NPRC.
- ¹¹⁴ General William A. Worton, interview by Benis M. Frank, 1973, Marine Corps Oral History Collection, Gray Research Library, Quantico, VA.
- ¹¹⁵ Cates, interviewed by Robert Aspery.
- ¹¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁷ Cates, interviewed by Benis Frank.
- ¹¹⁸ Cates, interview by Robert Asprey.

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- ¹¹⁹ Clifton B. Cates to American Battle Monuments Commission November 22, 1926. RG 117, Box 190. National Archives, Washington, D.C.
- ¹²⁰ Official Military Personnel Files for Private Herbert Dilard Dunlavy, NPRC..
- ¹²¹ “How Lieutenant Leonard did his bit at Bouresches,” Newspaper clipping, undated, Leonard Alumni Records Amherst University.
- ¹²² Erskine, interview by Benis M. Frank.
- ¹²³ “How Lieutenant Leonard did his bit at Bouresches,” Clipped article appearing the “Lieutenant Leonard file”
- ¹²⁴ June 1918 Muster Rolls 78th, 79th, 80th and 96th Companies.
- ¹²⁵ Gibbons, *And They Thought We Wouldn't Fight*, 320.
- ¹²⁶ Ibid.
- ¹²⁷ Ibid, 322.
- ¹²⁸ Ibid, 322-23
- ¹²⁹ Burial file of Private Charley Frehse. Eye-witness statements by Charles J. Bonifacino and Benjamin Geary. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.
- ¹³⁰ Silverthorn, interview.
- ¹³¹ Ibid.
- ¹³² West, *Belleau Wood*, Gray Research Center

Chapter VI. Conclusion and Aftermath of a Costly Day

- ¹ *Records of the Second Division, Vol. 5. Operations of the 5th Marines*, N.P.
- ² *Records of the Second Division, Vol. 6. Field Orders 4th Brigade (Marines)*, N.P...
- ³ Derby *Wade in, Sanitary*, 68-69.
- ⁴ Elton E. Mackin, *Suddenly We Didn't Want to Die*, (Novato: Presidio Press, 1993), 44.
- ⁵ Burial file of Private James Irving Dodd. Eye-witness statements by John Nelson. RG 92, Records of Graves Registration Services, National Archives College Park, MD.
- ⁶ Correspondence Joseph Fischer to author February 11, 2007, Western Union telegram provided to author by the Fischer family of Winona, MN.
- ⁷ Letter Caroline Carpenter to Private Stanley Carpenter June 8, 1918. Author's collection
- ⁸ “MARINES IN GREAT CHARGE OVERTHROW CRACK FOE FORCES” (*New Herald*, 7 June 1918, 7).
- ⁹ “HUNS TAKE FLIGHT BEFORE FIERCE ADVANCE OF UNITED STATES MARINES” (*Reno Evening Gazette*, 7 June 1918, 1).
- ¹⁰ “DECLARES OUR MEN DOMINATE GERMANS,” (*New York Times*, 12 June 1918, 1).
- ¹¹ Gibbons, *And They Thought We Wouldn't Fight*, 286.
- ¹² Message from 21st Army Corps headquarters to 2nd Division headquarters 12:15pm June 5, 1918. *Records of the Second Division, Vol. 4. Operations of the 6th Marines*, N.P.
- ¹³ Major Turrill to Colonel Neville, 7:00p.m. June 6, 1918. *Records of the Second Division, Vol. 5. Operations of the 5th Marines*, N.P.
- ¹⁴ Ernst Otto, “The Battles for the Possession of Belleau Wood, June, 1918,” *United States Naval Institute Proceedings* 54, No. 11 (November 1928),948.
- ¹⁵ 4th Marine Brigade Muster Rolls June 1-30, 1918.
- ¹⁶ Spaulding and Wright, *The Second Division American Expeditionary Force in France 1917-1919*, 83.
- ¹⁷ Chuck Lawliss, *The Marine Book, A Portrait of America's Military Elite*. (Thames and Hudson Inc., 1988), 194.

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