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THE INFANTRY SCHOOL  
FORT BENNING, GEORGIA

ADVANCED COURSE  
1932-1933

MILITARY HISTORY

OPERATIONS OF 3D BATTALION 7TH INFANTRY

SEPTEMBER 29 - OCTOBER 9, 1918

(Personal Experience)

CAPTAIN H. D. AYRES, INFANTRY

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

F.O. 45, 3d Division

F. O. No 45, 3d Division P.C.  
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F.O. 9, 5th Brigade

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*Not used*

History

? History of the 3d Division,  
United States Army, in the  
World War for the period  
December 1, 1918 to January,  
1919. Printed by M. Dumont  
Schauberg, Cologne, Germany.

A compilation of the efforts of four officers of each unit, narrating the activities of the various units. Although in some instances the record was written by officers who were not present during certain actions, the records were available and information was received at first hand and it is believed to be fairly accurate.

## INTRODUCTION

On September 29, 1918, the 3d Division, as part of III Corps Reserve, was located in the vicinity of and south of, ~~Avocourt~~ Avocourt. The 7th Infantry, part of the Division, was bivouacked in the northeastern edge of the Bois de Hesse. ~~It~~ There the 3d Battalion, about whose activities this narrative will attempt to deal, was like a spirited horse, champing at the bit, because they were not forward where the action was taking place. Expected orders to advance had not arrived, so while awaiting these orders, let us look briefly at the condition of this battalion.

The physical condition and the morale of the battalion was high. After a baptism of fire on the Marne at Chateau Thierry, Belleau Woods and the Aisne-Marne offensive, they had been in a rest area for several weeks where replacements filled up the companies to full strength and some training was done. The strength consisted of 20 officers and about 1200 men. They then had marched and trucked during the St. Mihiel, and the beginning of the Meuse-Argonne offensive. During this period the replacements had passed through this hardening process and had become imbued with the spirit of the 7th by this time. Many of the officers and a few of the noncommissioned officers had been with the organization since its early training days in Camp Greene. Discipline was good and equipment in good order. They had been expecting for some time orders to advance because the 3d Division had been tried and in their pride in its achievements, they knew it could be depended on.

## BOIS DE HESSF

The time had been spent in resting and cleaning up and oiling equipment and in some training, such as was possible to give under cover, hidden within the edge of the woods by day and shivering during the chilly nights. The weather was rainy and cold. Combat formations and technique of bayonet and grenade and trench warfare were stressed.

## ADVANCE TO THE FRONT

At last the orders came transferring the 3d Division to the V Corps and ordering a move by marching to the north edge of Bois de Montfaucon in Corps Reserve. The battalion officers were assembled and the situation, as it applied to the regiment, explained. The V Corps had been having hard fighting since the beginning of this great offensive.

It appeared very probable that once in that Corps, we would again soon see action. The V Corps was composed of the 82d, 79th and 32d Divisions.

The attack had been progressing fairly well despite the stubborn resistance of the enemy. We had heard Montfaucon had been taken but only after several casualties had been suffered. The front line was somewhere north of the town.

The orders pertaining to the movement were read and instructions given. The regimental order had been issued to conform to a march table and set the time to begin the march at 8:00 PM 29 September, 1918. The 3d Battalion the last in the column.

The battalion order was given to all companies to be ready to move out at 8:30 PM. L Company had already gone forward with the Pioneer platoon of Headquarters Company to find or make a way through the wire and to station guides to prevent organizations going astray.

The battalion had been marching at frequent intervals at night for some time past, so it was with little confusion that the 3d Battalion was in the column and on its way at the time set.

#### THE MARCH TO MONTFAUCON

Map 1  
Overlay 1

What a night. We had experienced plenty of hard going but this was the worst. It was raining hard. The route led across the shell torn ground of the old front line near Avocourt. What had once been roads were torn and shattered by artillery fire and heavy loaded vehicles traffic. With the rain, they became ~~mud~~ masses of mud. In rain and darkness, through gaps in the wire, stumbling in and floundering out of shell holes, down and up again, the going was hard. Here is a road, the going will be easier, but it is a false hope. A few yards and we turn off into the open along a trail where the rate of advance becomes a snail's pace. It is impossible to go any faster. No one who made that march will ever forget it. If ever an organization needed good reliable guides, it was that night. The difficulties had been foreseen, however, and the higher command had done their part well. After an interminable night, the march came to an end and around 5:00 AM 30 September the regiment had reached its objective.

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There was no rest, however, for at 6:30 AM orders were received for the regiment less the 3d Battalion,

Machine-Gun Company, and Supply Company, to make a daylight relief of the 313th Infantry of the 79th Division.

From the crest of the ridge at daylight the shattered town of Montfaucon could be plainly seen off to the north, and in the foreground the area over which the 79th had passed in its gallant effort to reach the army objective. The ridge was exposed and the enemy artillery became very active, so the Battalion was moved into the position assigned to it in a ravine south and east of Montfaucon, where it became 5th Brigade reserve.

IN 5TH BRIGADE RESERVE

September 30 to October 3

Here it remained while the advance battalions dug in and reorganized the line. A battalion P.C. was established and phone connection with Brigade established. The time was occupied with resting, drying out clothing and blankets -- a general cleaning up, and in some training. Burying dead men and animals was also one of the unpleasant jobs that had to be done. Both a light and a heavy German machine gun were found and some instructions were given in the manipulation of these weapons.

Here also for the first time we saw the new weapon of the A.E.F., the Browning automatic. A number of them were found, cleaned and put into condition. Some of the noncommissioned officers who had been to school at Chatillon had some knowledge of the manner in which these rifles operated and were able to instruct others. This new weapon appeared to be far superior to the

*Chauchat* →  
Chauchaut, the automatic weapon with which we were armed and which was of a different calibre. Orders were issued that the French auto rifle would not be discarded as there was much of this ammunition on hand and supply was becoming, daily, a more and more difficult problem. All the companies in the battalion acquired some Brownings and ~~extra~~ magazines

Orders were issued for company instruction in airplane signal communications, flares, rockets, grenades and gas mask. ✓ One morning an order was received to furnish to the supply officer a salvage detail for the purpose of policing up the area, burying some dead soldiers and horses of the 79th and salvaging materiel. This brought loud complaints from the men detailed. What did they mean -- police up a battlefield. Why didn't the 79th do it? It was done, <sup>however</sup> and considerable equipment was recovered and the area was certainly more sanitary.

The scout and intelligence and signal officers all carried on instructions with their groups and reconnoitered the area forward. We learned of the advance of the regiment and that severe casualties were suffered going down the open slopes from the heights of Montfaucon to the valley of the Andon <sup>and</sup> to the Bois de Beuge, where along the north edge of the woods one battalion was in the front line and one about 800 yards south of the woods. ✓

Enemy airplanes were very active and several aerial duels were witnessed. The outcome or finish of the fight we did not see, as they passed into the clouds. Sometimes as many as ten and fifteen German

planes would fly over and it was the signal to take cover. Our observation balloons in our rear positions were visible and it was to drive these down that several single planes attacked them.

It was astonishing how quickly the <sup>balloons</sup> ~~they~~ could be brought down when threatened. On one occasion a plane was brought down by rifle fire and fell over near 5th Brigade P.C.

WARNING ORDER - OCTOBER 3, 1918

Receipt of information that an attack would be made at H hour October 4, 1918 by the V Corps came from Brigade Headquarters on the afternoon of October 3d and that the Battalion would move forward with the attack.

Later that night the copy of F.O. No 45, 3d División P.C. was received. All officers were assembled and the situation explained by the battalion commanders. Instructions were given to issue extra ammunition, two days reserve rations and grenades and check made of signal equipment, flares and rockets.

The battalion commander was ordered to brigade P.C. and upon his return about 9:00 o'clock the officers were again assembled and final orders were given.

First, breakfast was ordered for 3:30 AM. The battalion supply officer was present and told to make it a good hot one as it might be the last one for several days. The kitchen section was under the charge of this officer, who at the time remarked in his characteristic way, "You'll get your chow all right if you let me know where you are. I'll get it up there to you".

1  
F.O.#45  
3d Div.



As we were to follow the support battalions, gradually closing up to 1,000 yards, companies were ordered to be assembled ready to march at 4:25 AM October 4. Formation in column Scout officer, I -- Battalion Commander and Staff -- <sup>Co-5</sup> K -- L -- M -- <sup>Med. Det.</sup> initially.

Upon clearing the woods and passing over the Montfaucon-Ivoiry road, the advance would be made in two columns over the open ground in approach march formation. The route to be taken was Bois de Montfaucon--Trail leading northwest to Montfaucon--Ivoiry road, then trail leading generally northwest toward Cierges. The general area had been reconnoitered by the scout officer and his guide and the battalion commander during a trip to the Regimental P.C. near Bois de Beuge. The battalion commander had remarked that the ground over which the regiment had marched was too open and exposed and he was taking this route because it offered more cover, if a little longer.

All arrangements were made for the move that night and figuring on a little rest, we turned in. Along came the regimental <sup>and Brigade</sup> order designating <sup>as</sup> assault unit <sup>the</sup> 2d Battalion, <sup>in</sup> support <sup>the</sup> 1st Battalion at 800 yards, reserve battalion, <sup>the 3d</sup> to follow support at 1,000 yards until called for by the regimental commander.

The Brigade order had given no boundaries between regiments, but the regimental order gave Hill 241 <sup>7</sup> (south of road) west edge woods 268, west edge of woods 250, west edge of Bois de Cunel as the eastern limits of 7th Infantry. Western limits same as Division.

The 2d Battalion was to move to the west and be in position at 4:25 AM prepared to attack an hour later. Just what the result of the movement was to be, we did not realize at the time; although the battalion commander

remarked that it didn't look good to him. Perhaps a move to the flank can be made in maneuver, but in war and under fire, it results in heavy losses.

After a few fitful dozing periods, the hour to march came around. Men were awakened, soon finishing breakfast, and later forming up and at 4:25 with comparative little confusion, we started the march. Again it began raining. In another hour it should be light enough to see the way and by that time we should be somewhere near our position, which was 1500 yards southeast of Cierges.

There was little chance of losing our way. The Scout officer was leading and had posted guides. But reconnaissance in the daytime and movement at night or in fog are two different things as it later proved, though no harm resulted. Provision had only been made for the period of march in the darkness, after 5:30 AM it would be light enough to distinguish landmarks so there was no need of guides. All went well for the first hour and with the Scout Officer and a small detachment, companies in column of twos on both sides of the road (if it could be called a road) <sup>we [reached]</sup> ~~reaching~~ the ridge along which was the Montfaucon--Ivoiry Road and followed the reverse slope toward that town. About 5:30 the battalion commander said we should turn off now and get down the slope under cover. Going up to the head of the column, the scout officer assured us that the lost guide would soon meet us and anyhow it was beginning to get light. So it was and a fog was also banking up and visibility was very poor -- not over 50 yards. All terrain features looked alike. ✓ The battalion commander was worried but kept on. It was

approaching 6:00 o'clock and we should be close to our position but were still on the ridge. He ordered a change of direction, <sup>N.W</sup> and a short while later the fog lifted and in the distance a small village appeared. This could not be Cireges? We saw some soldiers. As they approached, they asked "Is this the 32d Division?" They were from the 37th Division and expecting to be relieved and said the town was Ivoir. We were somewhat off our route but that can't be helped now.

On through the town we went. Again we replied to questions "No, this is not the 32d" and heard the information "The front is up there about a mile". For a long time artillery and machine guns had been heard to our front and flanks but whether ours or the enemy's, we could not tell. We knew when our barrage started. There was no chance of not knowing the direction of the front (follow the sound of the guns was all that was necessary).

Once in the open field an open formation was ordered and the companies moved off to both flanks to get intervals. I Company was on the right, K on the left and L and M and Battalion Headquarters -- with medical section and bearers -- following at 300 yards.

Visibility began to get better. It was now around 7:00 o'clock. Occasionally we could get glimpses of the high ridges to the north. We were now oriented but had not made contact with the support battalion and had not contacted any 32d Division on our left. A strong combat liaison group was ordered sent out from I Company to locate the 7th and another one from K Company on the left flank to connect up with units of the 32d Division.

Continuing on, we passed down into the Andon Valley. Shells began to fall here and there close by. The fog still hung low in the valley. We should be in contact any time now with support. There is heavy firing. It is now around 8 o'clock. After a brief halt, we move forward. The fog begins to dissipate in the valley and more shells come among the battalion. Several men are hit and the first aid men get to work. Visibility is still fair, but we don't see any troops moving. Again a halt. The platoon of I Company is now seen working ahead. We arrive near the southwest edge of Bois Emont and moving along the slopes we finally get across the Rav de Andon and are under the cover of the south slope of Hill 254. Now, we begin to see our infantry and learn what has happened. The attack has been stopped -- later we learned why in detail. We learn that the advance Regimental P.C. is located in Cireges and it is hot up there. They <sup>Kermans</sup> have machine guns and artillery registered on the crossroad <sup>and</sup> on the open space east of the town and <sup>are</sup> harassing continually.

#### FROM BRIGADE RESERVE TO THE REGIMENT

We started up the road and met the combat liaison platoon of I Company returning from the direction of Cireges. They had been nearly into the town and were returning to join the battalion.

The lieutenant reported that he had met the colonel and the adjutant and that the colonel had told him "to go find the 3d Battalion and get it up here".

A few minutes later we met the colonel and

learned the situation.

The attack had been stopped. The left flank was open. Both the 1st and 2d Battalions were committed and all mixed up and both had been all shot up. The enemy machine gun and artillery had been terrific and accurate. The line, while not definitely known, was from Hill 241 west and bending south to Hill 239.

The information as I recall it was meager and very indefinite.

The colonel ordered, "Get your battalion into position and be ready to attack west of the Cierges-Romagne road on order. The rest will be given you later".

#### GOING INTO POSITION

The first decision was the selection of the assault units and to get something in the gap on the left. The battalion commander ordered, "Get K Company up and all the company commanders". Going back to where the battalion was halted, the battalion was found taking advantage of such cover as was possible, on the south slope of Hill 254--about 800 yards southeast of Cierges--near the road. They were not directly exposed to fire but were not concealed from planes and were bombed and machine gunned by a number of planes that swooped over the hill, but little damage was done. The company commanders and platoon leaders saw that there was no bunching. There was little difficulty in getting the officers together and we went on back toward Cierges. K Company had begun to move forward and in a few minutes was just south of the exposed part of the road which for about 100 yards was subjected to machine-gun fire.

Map 2  
Overlay 2

Map 2  
Overlay 2

It halted there under cover.

Followed by the battalion headquarters group, we doubletimed across and a P.C. was located in the cellar of a shattered building on the north edge of the town. It was not the best place, but it was cover from anything but a direct hit. Constructed by the enemy, the entrance unfortunately for us faced the wrong way, but this was barricaded with railroad ties and steel rails and was quite safe. The shelling was still heavy. ✓ The church steeple in the town was still standing and it was an excellent aiming point, even if the Germans had not known the country, *which they had held for nearly four years.*

The battalion commander here briefly told the officers what he had heard of the situation from the colonel and continued, "Get I and K Companies into position right away. I on the right, K on the left along the road. Bring them into the town in small groups. Get under cover quickly." By noon these companies were in line west of the town under cover of shallow trenches and along the road. L and M Companies remained along the road <sup>near Hill 254</sup> A patrol had been sent from K Company to obtain liaison with the 32d Division. A messenger with a message soon returned. The 126th Infantry had been located. This was relayed to Regimental P.C. and doubtless relieved some anxiety. ✓

Map 2  
Overlay 2

7TH INFANTRY SITUATION OCTOBER 4 AT 11:00 AM

In the advance P.C. we learn the situation in a little more detail and get the plan *for* the attack that afternoon.

Map 2

Enemy strongly intrenched on Hill 250--Hill 253 and high ground east and west of Romagne. Machine-gun fire is coming on the left flank from Bois de Valoup

and on the right flank from Hill 250--Woods 250 and Woods 268.

The attack has stopped on the right. From all accounts, the 4th Infantry attack had fared little, if any, better than the 7th. Units of the 1st and 2d Battalions were intermingled. The left front was covered by two companies of the 8th Machine Gun Battalion from position on Hill 241 and south of Hill 239. F Company south of Nantillois--Cierges road--part of G Company and some units of H Company on the southwest slopes of Hill 241 north of the road. B Company is on east part of Hill 241.

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Incessant machine-gun fire sweeping the ridges and firing down ravines prevented communication with the advanced units.

In conjunction with the 126th Infantry, the entire regiment was going to attack at 4:40 under cover of a smoke screen. The 3d Battalion on the left, the other units on the right.

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Mission: to sweep across the exposed ridges under cover of the smoke and take Hill 253 and trench Mamelle *and* organize for defense against a counterattack.

*The 3rd* Battalion to hold out a reserve. There was to be no artillery preparation. The Division artillery was steadily firing on the enemy positions, *but shortly after noon this fire ceased.*

#### RECONNAISSANCE

Going <sup>3d Bn</sup> back to the P.C. ~~where~~ we find the company commanders. Maps are scarce and of the hatched type. Some few of the Verdun A had been received, but mostly we had Verdun B. There was usually one map to a

company, so personal reconnaissance frequently became necessary. Let us take a look at this terrain and the features as the battalion commander sees it.

Despite the shells falling in and around the ruined town, we work forward to where we can get a view of the terrain. Stretching northward over a shallow valley is the Cierges--Romagne, <sup>Road - the right (East) boundary of the</sup> <sup>Bn.</sup> In the distance some houses - which is Romagne perhaps  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles distant. Paralleling the road 250 yards west is the Rau de Andon, a small stream, here at Cierges, about 10 feet wide and in places 4 feet deep and flowing north. 200 yards west of the stream a narrow gauge railroad divides the sector and makes an easily located boundary between companies.

To the west the map shows a road running north into Romagne, <sup>our western boundary is beyond that road.</sup> Directly in front and to the west 500 yards is a hill for an O.P. now occupied by the guns of 2 platoons of C Company 8th Machine Gun Battalion. There is our zone of action to the Rau de Coup. To the west a series of irregular ridges sloping gently down to the valley of the Rau de Andon. To the east are three ridges parallel to the front, each ridge bare of trees, and surmounted by commanding hills covered with woods. These <sup>woods</sup> are in the 4th Infantry area. The spurs of these hills point to the west and slope gently down into the valley. All of these slopes and ridges and the Rau de Andon form formidable obstacles. The ground had the appearance of a horse-shoe with the toe to the north. Fire, to be expected from all parts <sup>of these ridges</sup>, converging in the center.

The strength of the enemy was not known. Not much infantry had been observed. Well concealed



trenches and machine guns were known to be sited on the hills to the east, Hill 253 and further north, trench <sup>was</sup> Mamelle. Heavy fire had been delivered on the attacking forces in the morning from all points.

There was practically no cover except the little afforded by the folds in the ground, <sup>and shell holes</sup> ~~These~~ <sup>from fire</sup> from the front, but <sup>were</sup> subject to plunging <sup>and flanking</sup> fire from the hills, to the east, that dominated the valley.

It looked like a hard proposition. However, it might not be as hard as it looked. ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

A call took the battalion commander to the regimental P.C. and on his return the details of the attack were given. About 3:00 o'clock the major returned from <sup>regimental</sup> P.C. The verbal order as given to the company commanders was short, simple and plain. As nearly as I can recall after fourteen years it was about like this: "We attack at 4:40 PM to-day with the regiment, under cover of a smoke screen. The 126th Infantry will attack on our left. There will be no artillery preparation. You all know as well as anyone where the units of the 1st and 2d Battalions are on Hill 241 and to the right front. The mission of the battalion is by frontal attack to capture the trench Mamelle and the high ground near Romagne. To assist with fire on Hill 253 the capture of that position. Assault companies I on the right, K on the left. Boundary between companies the narrow gauge railroad. L Company in support will follow I Company. M Company will be moved into the positions occupied by I Company when the attack begins and remain in reserve. Move forward in successive thin lines. <sup>Rate of advance 100 yds in 4 minutes.</sup> Keep going while the smoke lasts. First aid station will be in Cierges. P.C. remains for the present

here. I will be with the support line of K Company. Drop all blanket rolls. Any prisoners to the Regimental P.C." The company commanders left after expression of good wishes all around.

Promptly on time the smoke shells began to drop about 1500 yards ahead -- plenty of them and in a very few moments it had the appearance of fog coming up. The men leave their positions and start to advance. Enemy machine-gun and artillery fire begin to come down on the valley and the slopes. The advance continues. Another line comes out -- looks almost like extended order drill. Men advancing slowly. They continue to come widely spaced, <sup>and in almost</sup> perfect formation and shortly after with several runners we follow in the attack and work over to K Company. The smoke keeps getting thicker. The Battalion commander orders a strong combat group out on the left flank from K Company. The smoke is getting so thick visibility begins to get poor. Voices are heard yelling to keep contact. / We pass by the guns of the 8th machine-gun unit who are firing a barrage on Hill 253.

K Company begins to get casualties from fire from the right flank. I Company is almost screened from view.

There is constant yelling now. The smoke is so thick it is hard to see more than fifteen or twenty yards. Casualties are more frequent. Smoke shells begin to drop and seem to burst close by. The wind is blowing the smoke back in our line. A runner brings a message from I Company, "Smoke shells falling short -- tell them to raise the range." The message is sent back to Regimental P.C. It is clearer back there. Suddenly, the air begins to clear and the shells stop falling. There are the enemy lines but we are not close

enough to deliver fire. He sees us and a deluge of fire from automatic weapons is flung at us. With direct observation ~~from~~ the hills, artillery is brought to the edge of the woods and fired point blank. The smoke has blinded our lines and not the enemy. It is not possible to advance and face that fire. Casualties are increasing and the order is given to K Company to dig in. I Company in the valley had not suffered as much as K Company on the slopes, but a runner brought a message, "Cannot advance further -- am digging in. Fire from the front and both flanks causing many casualties. G Company is digging in." No message had been received from L Company but they had been moving slightly east of the road to get some cover. The enemy fire slackened some. Orders were sent to all companies to advance. A message was relayed from Regimental P.C. O.P. that a counterattack was forming up in a trench near Hill 235.

It was at this time that a demonstration was made of the result to be obtained by a courageous combat group with automatic fire power. A corporal and a private who were well out to the front had seen a number of the enemy forming up for a counterattack and from their position had fired and driven the enemy back. They continued to fire until one was killed by a machine-gun bullet. A short time later orders came from the regiment to halt the attack and consolidate the position. The attack had been stopped.

Runners were sent to the companies with instructions to dig in and hold.

The attack had melted away under the withering well directed enemy fire from the heights. It was not

more men that were needed. No advance could be made up that valley until either the artillery had blasted away the defenders or they had been maneuvered out.

The position of the enemy lines was developed more fully. Messages began to come into the P. C. where we had returned, giving locations of enemy guns and requesting fire on them. Guns of the enemy were sited so the fire swept the crests of the slopes and down the ravines. There was no getting men forward until these guns were put out of ~~operation~~. The artillery batteries are firing on such targets as are given them-- so are the machine-gun companies. Positions for our machine guns are limited.

The darkness falls but with little cessation of firing. An effort is made to move forward, some little advances are made to less exposed positions. Some units draw back until an irregular line of outposts is established. Messages begin to come in of the general location of the line. I Company was entrenched due west of Hill 241. K Company about 300 yards south of Hill 239. L Company had two platoons on the southwest slope of Hill 241 and another platoon along a trail 300 yards south of I Company. M Company was still in Cierges, having moved up during the attack. Report of the line, was sent to Regimental P.C. Wounded were brought in by the litter bearers.

Orders were sent to <sup>the</sup> advance companies to advance patrols forward under cover of darkness, but little was accomplished. There was no hot chow that night to the advance units.

#### ACTION ON OCTOBER 5TH

The positions were held all day. There were

Map 2  
Overlay 2

attempts to advance, some units moved forward slightly to a little better cover. Holes were deepened. Each attempt at movement brought down enemy fire. The enemy had perfect observation and he was very alert.

Messages are continually received from Headquarters ordering patrols out to push forward. The order is sent out and a message comes back "Can't advance without artillery. This has turned out to be a tough spot."

#### ATTACK ON THE 5TH OCTOBER

At last the higher command realizes that the enemy position cannot be taken without artillery, for orders were received for resuming the attack by the brigade with several hours <sup>artillery</sup> concentration on Hill 250--Woods 250--Bois de Cunel and Trench Mamelle. This fire continues and when the 155's begin to drop on the enemy line the advance starts, slowly at first. The enemy is very stubborn and continues to fire. Suddenly the flank fire from Hill 250 and Woods 250 ceases. Has the 4th Infantry taken the position? Had the resistance of the enemy defensive groups been broken? At any rate, the cessation of the fire permitted the battalion to advance. L Company commander had taken advantage and pushed forward and beyond the Rau de Coup.

M Company was ordered up in support of L Company who had advanced to the lower slopes of Hill 253 west of **RE** 223. About 8:00 PM the position of the units of the battalion was K Company west of narrow gauge railroad 500 yards southeast of Hill 235. I Company astride Rau De Andon, east of K Company. M Company advancing and nearing the battalion P.C. which had been moved to Cierges--Romagne Road--Trail Junction east of Hill 241.

Map 2  
Overlay

Orders were issued to move I and K Company east of the Andon. This necessitated a short march to the south. The platoons of I Company and K Company were ordered to assemble near the P.C. K Company arrived first and was sent into the line on the left of L Company.

I Company arriving later was put into position west of Company K. <sup>the</sup> A Message from Regiment ordered patrols into Romagne and across the Rue de Moussin. Patrols were sent out. Later, around midnight, a message from I Company reported patrols had met heavy fire and were unable to advance, *and Trench Mamelle was strongly held.*

The battalion was now entirely east of the Rau De Andon and an obstacle limiting maneuver was eliminated. The battalion P.C. was established in an old dugout near some aviation sheds near the Trail Junction--Cierges Romagne Road. In taking stock of the situation, the greatest advance had been made after 5:00 PM. Almost without resistance Hill 253 had been occupied. Patrols are pushed forward but are unable to cross the crest of the hill, being met with fire from machine guns. Orders are issued for the consolidation of the position. The actual line is not yet well known. The supply officer arrives at the P.C. and says there is plenty of hot food on the supply wagon and he will bring it up as far as he can but don't want to risk the animals. He is instructed to bring it up at 12:00 o'clock and a platoon of M Company who are moving up are held to carry food. Orders are sent out to have carrying details ready to get the food from the rear of their positions. The commander of M Company came in to the P.C. to get some

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additional instructions regarding the exact location. A runner from L Company was sent with the leading elements to guide the company in. The orders given, he left shortly after to go with his company. A few minutes later a runner came in and said that the captain had been killed. We all felt shocked for he was very popular and well liked by both men and officers. He was a fatalist and had a premonition of his death during the war.

More messages came in from Headquarters. "Where is the front line? Get information back. Has Hill 253 been taken?" About 11:00 PM the battalion commander, accompanied by the adjutant and two runners started up to make a personal reconnaissance of the lines. The battalion commander was not one to stay in a dugout. Giving orders, he exposed himself to see at first hand whether or not they had been fulfilled and what was the reason they had not or could not be carried out. His actions, in being in the forward positions, had a wonderful effect on the morale of the men. They recognized him as a leader.

Following the trail northeast we went over the western slope of Hill 241 across the Rau de Coup -- a ravine which we knew was likely to be a bad position again if Woods 250 were recaptured the next day.

The night was broken by the put put of machine guns at irregular intervals. Was some nervous machine gunner imagining that some enemy patrol was approaching or was it part of the plans of defense? Was he firing at some of our patrols? Flares and caterpillar rockets were frequently sent up by the enemy and whenever one went up, we hit the ground for as soon as they burst

high up in the air and began to float away, the surrounding area was lighted with a ghastly effect. As soon as they went out, we went on, the darkness more intense than ever. Our pistols were ever ready to our hand. No telling when we might run into a patrol. Several officers were missing, killed or captured -- we had heard only that evening. Too, we might be mistaken as enemies by some of our own men. We were getting nearer to the upper slopes now, advancing cautiously, when suddenly a flare went up. We hit the ground. The shadow of a man was outlined for a moment, then disappeared. Reasonably sure that it was one of the men of K Company, we lay quiet trying to locate the exact spot where the silhouette had been seen. Then a voice was heard. "Who the hell's there?" The Battalion Commander said, "What company is this?" "K Company", came back the answer. Getting up, we approached the soldier, alert, though he must have been nearing exhaustion from loss of sleep and exposure and little food. He was one of the sentinels of a combat group out of the left flank of K Company. As we approached closer, he said, "What the hell are you doing up here? The Heinies are just over the hill there." "I am the Battalion Commander," <sup>the major replied,</sup> "Where is your Captain?" "Back that way about seventy-five yards." <sup>the soldier answered,</sup> We had almost passed through the lines. Going over to the company P.C., we found there two officers huddled in a shell hole. Nearby some runners and further off another shadowy group. It was found that the company had moved further up the hill and the outposts <sup>were</sup> well out in front. Contact was established between the three companies on the hill. The main thought in their minds was "When is chow coming up?" They had not received the message



to send back carrying parties behind the lines to the trail crossing Rau de Coup.

"Where is I Company" Have you seen the Captain of I Company? He was up here just after your message came notifying us that a patrol was going forward. He said he was going to try and go across the Rau de Moussin. Heard nothing since except plenty of heavy firing toward Romagne." Two platoons of I Company are down the slope about 50 yards and further west on the spur. We located L Company who had their line well outposted and found M Company further down the slope. On our way back we met the carrying party stumbling along carrying marmite cans of food, two men to a can suspended on a pole for that purpose. The detachment for security relieved the carrying party at intervals. There was plenty of food that night, but, too, there were lots of hungry men on that hill. They were cautioned to be quiet for a light machine gun sneaked up to an advantageous position could create disaster with a few bursts.

Arriving at the P.C., we found a can of food and it was consumed with scant ceremony. One hot meal a day is about all that could be expected in a situation like this. If there was some covered approaches to the position, more hot meals could be delivered even though men in position did not want to draw the fire of the enemy by moving.

#### REPORT FROM PATROLS

Message from I Company. The patrols had returned from toward Romagne. They were met with heavy fire and it appeared that it was still strongly held.

Some time later a message came from I Company

stating that a platoon had gone across the Rau de Moussin but had been fired on. They advanced and met heavy fire and had to remain there for some time. As soon as the intensity of the rifle and machine-gun fire abated, they drew back. Trench Mameille was strongly occupied. This information sent to the regiment brought the order, "Withdraw I Company to Hill 241. Take up a position there. The support battalion is being withdrawn." This would leave the left flank open as we had lost contact with the 32d at the time the companies had been moved east of the Rau de Andon.

The order was given for I Company less 1 platoon to withdraw to reverse slope of Hill 241 and for one platoon to remain on the west slope of Hill 253 north of bridge over the Rau de Coup to cover the flank.

#### ACTION ON OCTOBER 6

There was little action after daylight. Movements did not bring the heavy fire it had the day before. In the afternoon, heavy artillery concentrations were placed on Bois de Cunel and around Romagne and during this action the three companies on Hill 253 moved closer to the crest.

The battalion intelligence officer reported a fire northwest. An O.P. had been pushed up to Hill 253 and a field telephone installed there. The phone installation had been made by order of the new regimental commander, the old one having been transferred. The night of October 6th was spent in pushing outposts further up the hill. The front line now was a number of small combat groups that were mutually supporting, who occupied the enlarged shell hole or the shallow pits that had been dug with intrenching tools. That night

also some wire was put up and trenches and shelters deepened.

There were indications that the enemy on the right were being hard pressed. The artillery concentration is now on the Bois de Cunel. Attempts are made to cross the crest of the hill. Snipers are located, machine gun positions located and fire requested from the artillery, whose liaison officer is now with the battalion commander. Coordination is now beginning to bring results. The artillery has been given a mission and is carrying on. A message from L Company that a machine gun had been located in an old artillery emplacement, giving the coordinates, was given to the liaison officer and in a few minutes a concentration was put on that position that effectively stopped the enemy activity there.

There was no further movement by the battalion. "A" Company of the 1st Battalion, we had learned, was in the vicinity of the road bend a kilometer northwest of Cierges. All during the 7th of October, we lay under cover. The weather was warmer during the day. A check-up of companies was begun. If Bois de Cunel was taken, we could move on to trench Mamelle, but no attack could stand flanking fire from the woods of Bois de Cunel

#### RELIEF BY 38TH INFANTRY

That afternoon, we had word that no chow would come up, the line was to be taken over by the 38th. The 6th Brigade was going to attack in the morning. Just about dark a reconnaissance party from the 3d Battalion 38th Infantry arrived at the P.C. Guides and other details of the relief were arranged. A message from <sup>7th Inf</sup> headquarters <sup>stated</sup> that I Company would stay

in position and be relieved by the 126th Infantry, who were taking part of the sector, ~~our~~ regiment moving to the east.

The companies were notified of the relief and instructed to come out in small groups and to avoid any grouping at crossroads in the vicinity of prominent terrain features. Precautions were taken to avoid casualties during the relief. The 3d Battalion had been caught once before, <sup>on the Marne,</sup> There would be no repetition. The Battalion P.C. was moved back to the first location in Cierges, and the units of the 38th began to arrive in and move forward. There was considerable shelling during the period before midnight and after that an occasional one would burst nearby with annoying regularity. The companies came out -- a platoon of K Company -- the company headquarters. They were directed to the assembly position in a defiladed ravine (south of Cierges) where the kitchen sections were serving hot coffee and doughnuts. Shelling became more brisk. A column nearing the cross roads halts with the head of the column at the intersection. A shell bursts on the road close by. Cries of pain mingled with shouts of "Keep down". More shells came over into the fields but exploded with no harm. Into the P.C. limps the Captain of L Company. Both he and his 1st Lieutenant and 5 men of Company Headquarters are casualties. Two officers hurt through a momentary let up of the usual precautions.

The sector having been taken over and the relief finally completed, all units at the assembly point and accounted for, the battalion began to march to the rear to take up ~~position~~ in division reserve. By daylight

we had reached the position in the ravine near Montfaucon which we had left a few days before and safely under cover, had breakfast and then slept. I Company was still in the line. The afternoon was occupied in checking records and reports, cleaning up and reorganizing. The regiment called for strength reports. Reserve rations and ammunition were issued. The next day, October 9, shortly after daylight "I" Company arrived having been relieved early in the morning. A final check shows there are 660 effectives present -- non-effectives, 157 -- casualties - killed, wounded and missing -- 3 officers, 281 men.

Orders came to get ready for a move. The regiment is going back again. The brief interim has been a help. Squads and platoons are reorganized. It is going to be hard on I Company, however. They had little rest -- marched right out, turned around and marched right back again.

Orders came for the regiment to take up a position in readiness south of Woods 250. Here we were back in the woods that the 4th Infantry, our sister regiment in the brigade, had fought so hard to capture. There was plenty of evidence there of the desperate nature of the fight that had taken place. Here the 3d Battalion remained throughout the 9th of October in readiness and on the next afternoon, October 10, at 4:00 PM, the Battalion, which had been placed at the disposal of the

commanding general 6th Brigade, came at last to close grips, in hand-to-hand combat with the enemy and in capturing Hill 255 partially evened up the score of the previous week.

#### COMMENTS

As a whole, the actions of the battalion commander leave little to criticize. His presence well forward during an attack might be censured by some, who think that his presence at the P.C., from which the situation can be controlled, is more important than the value of his presence to the advancing troops.

Security.- It is believed that the measures taken in the approach march and the attack seem to fulfill the principle of security.

Orders.- Orders were generally verbal, short and concise.

If any criticism is to be made, it could properly be directed at his staff who originally were trained for company officers and now with less than a year of service are trying to overcome their inexperience with zealous effort.

Morale.- The morale of the battalion throughout the entire action was high. Efforts to lower this by German propaganda dropped from <sup>AIF</sup>~~air~~planes while in the Bois de Montfaucon had the opposite effect. The spirit of the older men of the 7th was quickly transmitted to replacements. The actions of the battalion commander during the attack were inspiring and helped morale.

Training.- The battalion was only partially well

trained. Replacements after the Marne engagements were poorly trained. There was scarce time to do more than touch the high spots. Efforts were centered on training noncommissioned officer material, and it brought results. The staff was not well trained and there was no one to train them.

Tactical Principles.- The violation of certain tactical principles that experience has taught are reasonably correct, is certain to bring dire results in most cases.

The movement to a flank in the presence of the enemy is a violation of one of these principles.

The result of the attack, October 4th, made by the regiment after such a movement is another example of what can be expected. The attack was stopped. The assault battalion suddenly found itself in the assault line with units of both battalions intermingled. Heavy casualties resulted. Control was lost and so was the day.

Information.- Information must be collected by the advance units and sent back in time to be of value. Units in contact with the enemy must keep the senior commander advised of the situation and any changes in his dispositions. The reverse is also true. This recalls a message that was received from a front line lieutenant. It states, "I have not enough information. I do not know where the front is. I do not know what is on my right or left." This not only brings out the fact that information is vital, but that under conditions that were bewildering, a leader may become confused and not know what is happening or what to do about it. Here was a unit that should have been securing information. The unit was guided up into position, patrols sent out

and messages began coming back.

### LESSONS LEARNED

Positions occupied strongly by machine guns cannot be taken by frontal attack, but must be taken by movement around them. If the terrain is open, dominated by ridges both to the front and flanks which are held by the enemy, then the flanking movement must come from adjoining and supporting troops.

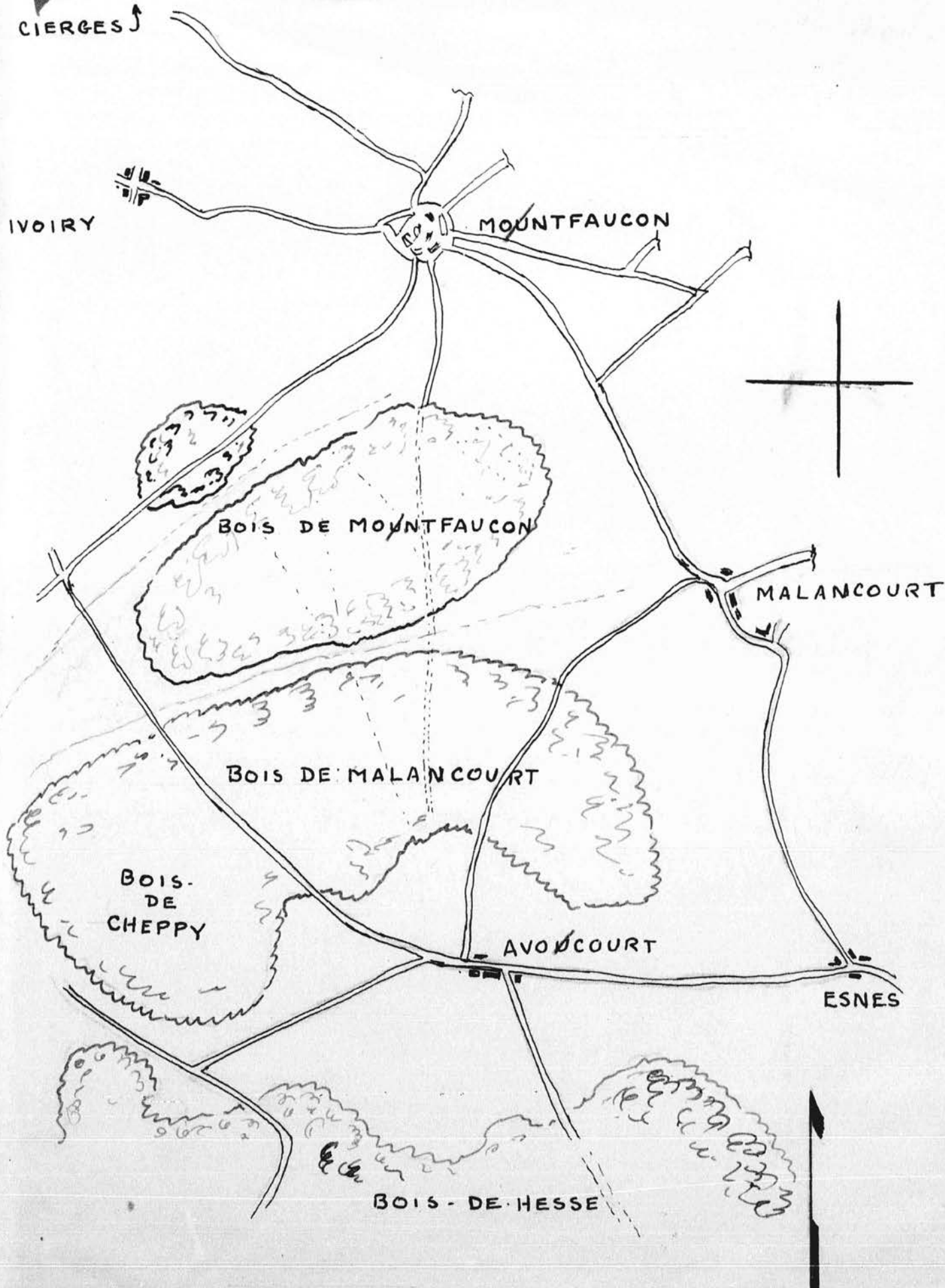
In a situation where maps are small scale and the area unfamiliar, personal reconnaissance becomes more than ever of vital importance. When observation points are held by the enemy, then the map will be used and errors in disposition will be made.

### CONCLUSION

The American soldier, even though inadequately trained, can be expected and relied upon to go forward despite errors of higher command. The leader of the smaller groups is the factor of success or failure in the attack where the terrain is difficult. When control becomes lost, then the action goes wrong. Control of the smaller units is of the utmost importance in all attack situations.

*Infantry cannot be expected to advance, against strongly defended positions, in which Machine guns are cleverly sited, without the strong support of Artillery.*



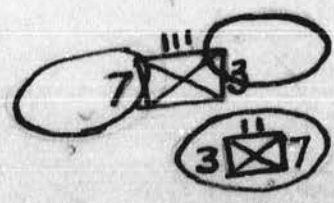


OPERATIONS MAP 3d-Bn-7th Infantry  
 MEUSE ARGONNE- Sept. 29 - Oct. 3 - 1918

1000 500 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 - ?

MAP-Number 1  
 Capt. H. D. Ayers

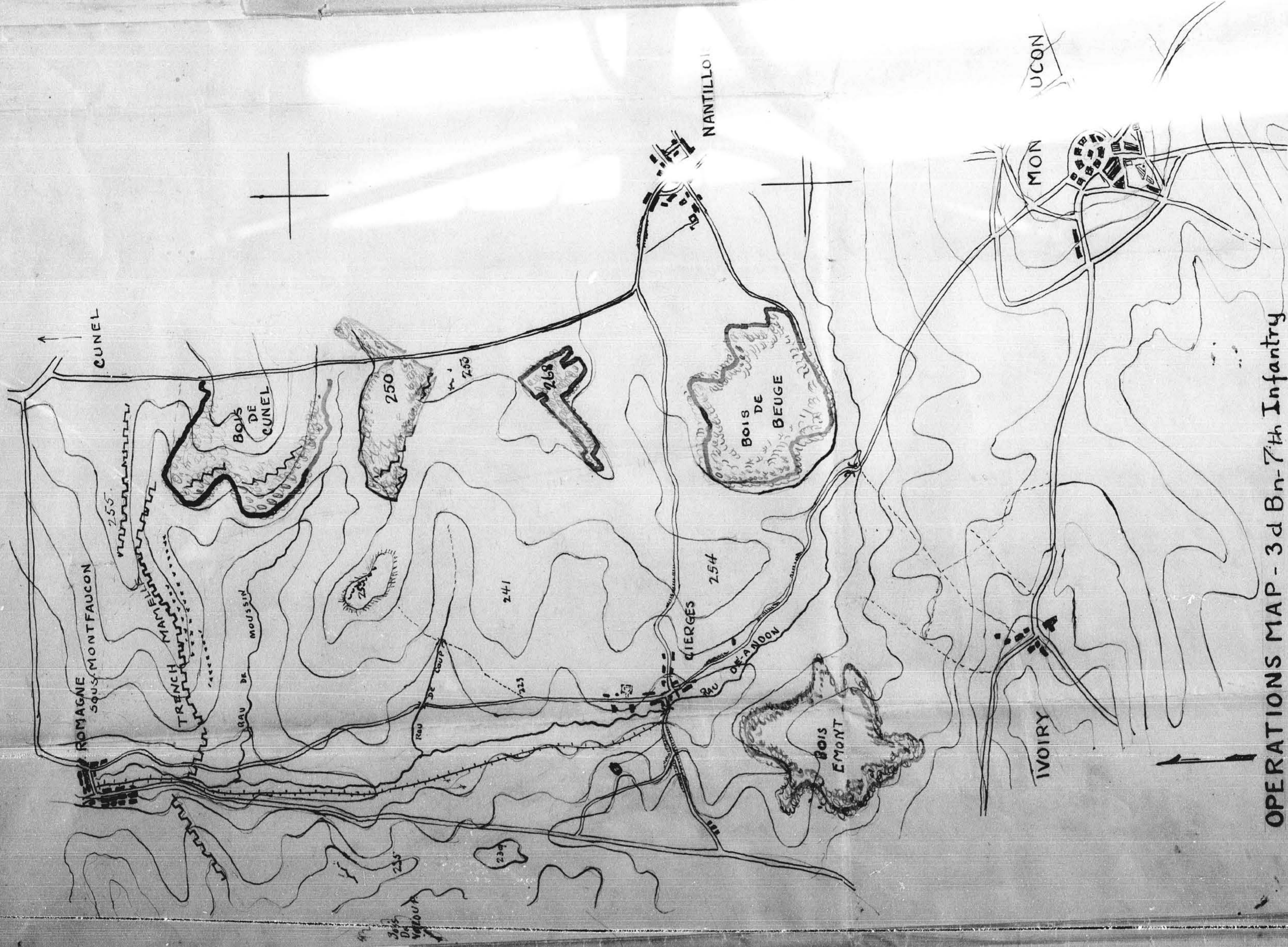
5-AM  
September-30  
to  
October 4-  
4:25AM



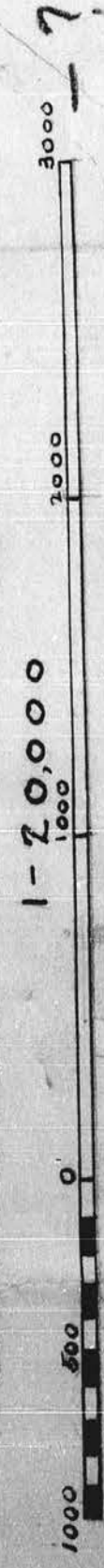
8.-PM.  
September 29

Overlay  
#1.

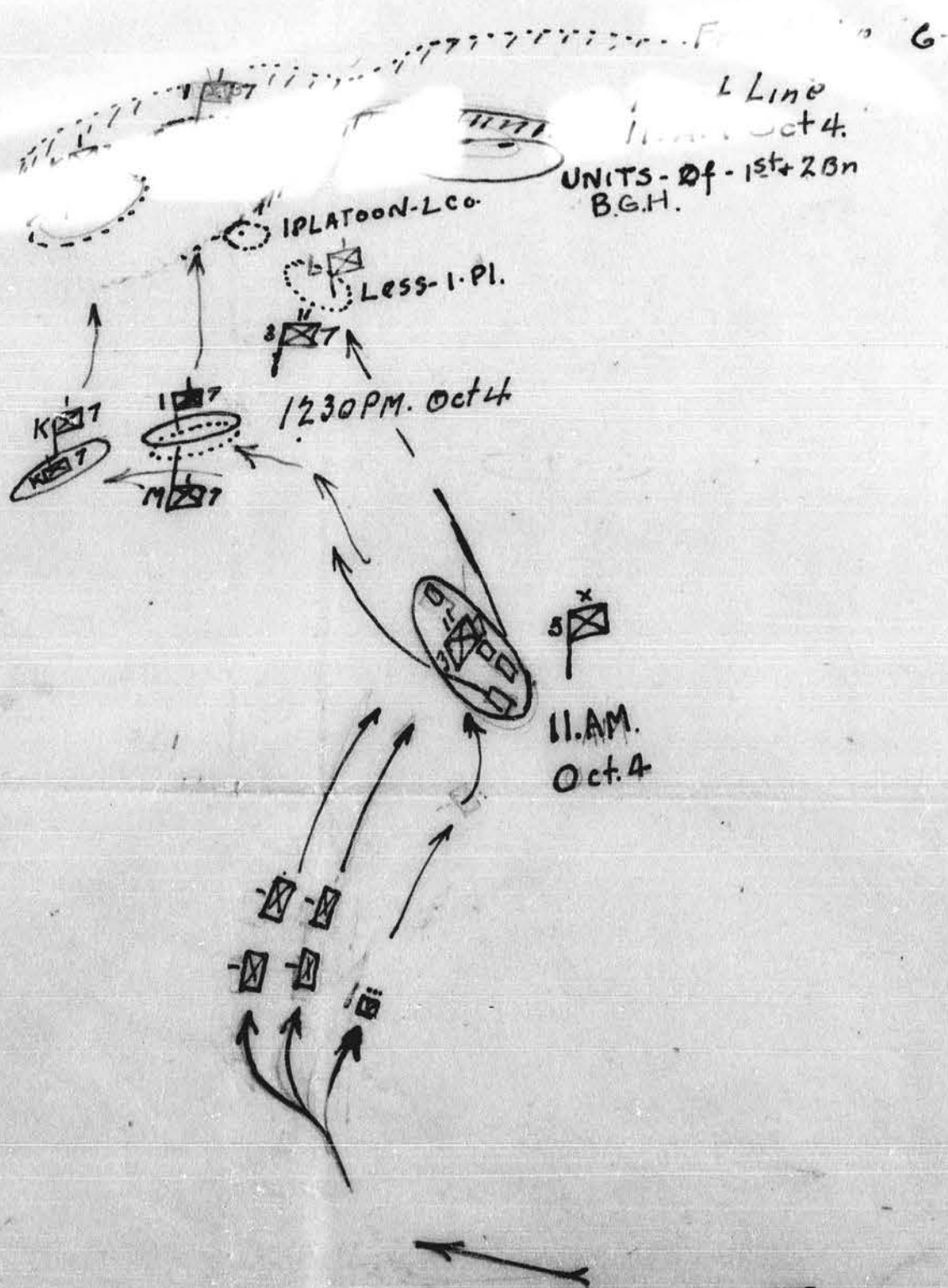
Legend  
○ AREA  
→ ROUTE  
Capt. H. D. Ayers



OPERATIONS MAP - 3d Bn - 7th Infantry  
 MEUSE-ARGONNE - October 3-10-1918



MAP-No. 2  
 Capt. H. P. Ayers

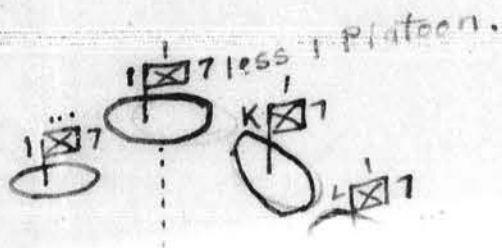


#2 - Overlay. Map 2  
 OPERATIONS - 3rd Bn 7th Inf  
 4:25 AM October 4 - to 5 P.M. Oct. 5 -

- Positions prior to 4:40 P.M. Oct 4
- ⊖ Positions after 4:40 P.M. Oct 4 - until October 5 - 5 P.M.
- indicate direction of advance

3 11 7 4:25 AM  
 Oct 4

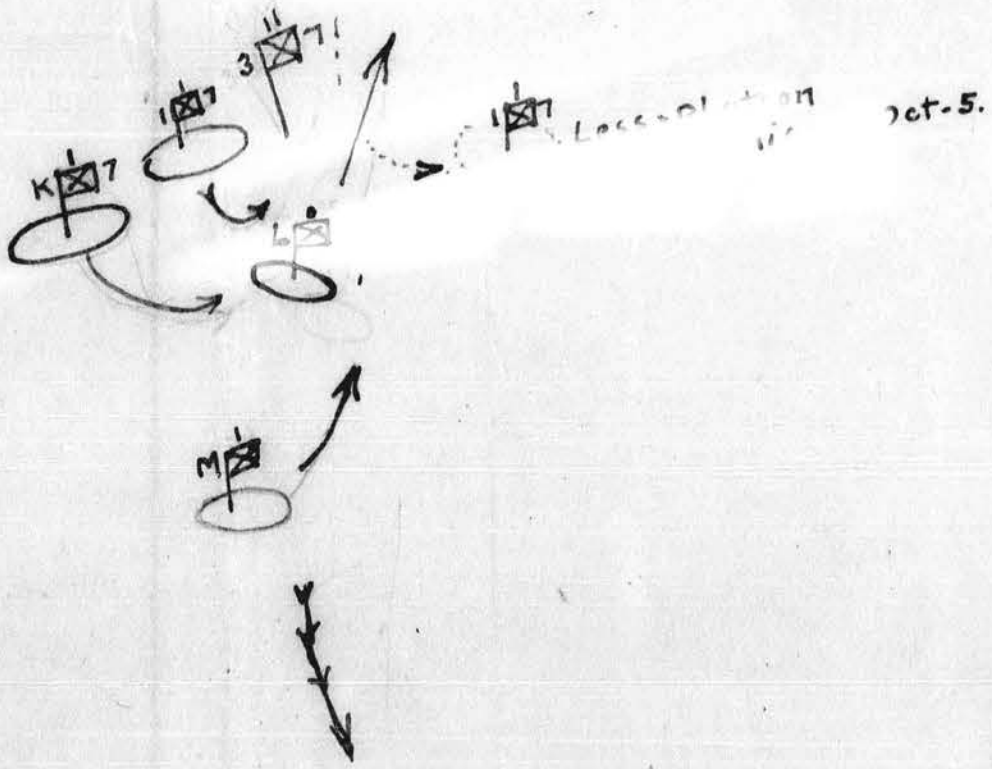
Capt. H. D. Ayers



Operations after Midnight - Oct 7/8 - until relieved.



October 9 - NIGHT in reserve.



ILLINOIS

Route of Advance October 9

Route of withdrawal NIGHT - 7/8 - Oct.

UCON

#3 Overlay - Map No 2. Operations - Oct 5 - 5PM. to October 9 - 1918.

Area occupied by I company Route Taken

October 8 - to Afternoon Oct 9