
HISTORY of THE 308th INFANTRY

By

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Chapter 6 The Argonne

CHAPTER VI

The Argonne

I

REFERENCE has been made to the individual soldier's ignorance of the War beyond his immediate observation. Nevertheless the army was an enormous and elaborate piece of machinery in which even the humblest private was a cog-wheel fitted to some larger unit than himself, in turn fitted to a still larger unit, and so on, with the result that each part of the vast machine was related to all the rest. Therefore it is possible to look at any military operation, such as that of the Argonne-Meuse Offensive, from a number of points of view. This action, lasting from September 26th to November 11th, might thus be regarded as a part of the vast operations along the whole Western Front. Then proceeding downward in order of importance of the component parts, one great individual wheel would be the American Forces as a whole. Then in turn, one could proceed to the 1st American Army which constituted the attacking force on the Argonne-Meuse Front, then in turn to the 1st Corps, and to the 77th Division, which made a part of this Corps, and so on down through brigade, regiment, battalion, company, platoon, and squad to the individual private.

First then, what was the situation of the Western Front as a whole at the time that the 308th Infantry marched back from the sector described in the last chapter? By the beginning of September, General Foch had decided that the great-unified attack by the forces of the Allies and the United States should begin. In the north, this was to be made by the British; in the center, by the French; and to the south an American army was for the first time to attack as an independent unit on a large sector. In this great attack upon the Hindenburg Line, which was to end the War, it was the part of General Pershing, after the reduction of the St. Mihiel salient on September 12th, to push north towards Sedan and to cut the German communications, the railroad line running southeast from Maubeuge to Metz. At the time of the attack, the American army consisted of three army corps, each containing three divisions. The 1st Army Corps, on the left of the American Forces, contained in order from

left to right the 77th, 28th, and 35th Divisions. To the left of the 77th were the French under General Gouraud. Finally the position of the 308th, at the beginning of the attack on September 26th, was next to the French, that is to say, on the extreme left of all the American forces.

An historian of the War has thus pictured the situation on the Western Front: "Actually Foch will use Pershing for his right hand and Haig for his left, while Petain's force will furnish the kick, the savate permissible in French boxing." Since the 77th was given the honor of holding the left flank of the American Forces, and the 308th held the left flank of the 77th, we might consider the Regiment as the thumb of Foch's right hand-under-standing of course the hand held back up and clenched into a fighting fist.

The same authority speaks of the Argonne-Meuse advance as follows:

No battle area on the Western Front is more difficult to describe than the Argonne-Meuse sector. The Argonne itself, with its densely wooded regions, recalls vividly the circumstances of the Wilderness campaign in the Civil War, and the country over which the New York division advanced would have awakened many memories in the minds of the veterans of Grant and Lee. The area between the Aire and the Meuse, with its high and wooded hills and its deep and marshy valleys, bounded on the east by the Meuse, strikingly recalls that country where Gates's army first halted, then broke and captured Burgoyne's army in the campaign which led to the surrender at Saratoga. And in this region between the Aire and the Meuse there is much which recalls the woods and hills of eastern Massachusetts and the points of cover from which the "Minute Men" assailed the British Redcoats on their retreat from Concord and Lexington on April 19, 1775.

In advancing from south to north, Pershing's army moved through a corridor rather more than twenty miles wide at the start and narrowing as the Meuse inclined westward to a point which was exactly at Donchery, where, in the Chateau de Bellevue, Napoleon III capitulated in 1870 after the disaster at Sedan. In this corridor the American difficulties were these: from the west they were assailed by a flank fire delivered by the Germans from the heights and forests of the Argonne which were impregnable to direct attack; a similar fire was delivered from the east, from the heights of the Meuse on the right bank of that stream; in front they were faced by an enemy posted in an indescribable tangle of wooded hills, marshy bottoms, and deep ravines.

The last words quoted will probably strike some of those who fought in the forest as scarcely doing sufficient justice to the difficulty of the terrain. It was rather a jungle than a forest, with heavy undergrowth, high coarse snake grass, deep ravines, and old trenches and wire everywhere. Rainsford's picture is admirable:

A bleak, cruel country of white clay and rock and blasted skeletons of trees, gashed into innumerable trenches, and seared with rusted acres of wire, rising steeply into claw-like ridges and descending into haunted ravines, white as leprosy in the midst of that green forest, a country that had died long ago, and in pain.

So much for the general situation when the time approached for our Regiment to play its part in the greatest battle in which Americans have ever participated.

After the relief in the Vesle Sector in the middle of September, there was, of course, much talk of possible orders to a rest area. This time the rumor certainly seemed justified. With the exception of ten days required for the journey by train and camion from Lorraine to the Vesle, the 308th had been continually in the front line from June 20th until September 15th. Casualties and illness had played havoc with the daily strength reports. Now the Personnel Adjutant had an opportunity to check up numbers without the interruption of shellfire. He found that the Regiment needed twelve hundred and fifty enlisted replacements, and that many of the companies were reduced to one commissioned officer. The men who remained were considerably tired out, and more than ready to believe the rest area rumors. These, however, were to be rudely dashed, when the Regiment was ordered to the woody slopes between St. Menchould and the southern edge of the Argonne Forest.

2

Since the present writer was to take no part in the events which follow, and is obliged to rest entirely upon the testimony of others, he has decided to employ in this part of the history considerable quotation from some informal notes later furnished him by Lieutenant Colonel Whittlesey. No apology seems needed for the personal tone used, though it must of course be understood that the notes were written with no thought that they would be published as they stand.

When you were wounded [his notes begin] I was in charge of the Brigade Reserve about three kilos south of you. We were on the reverse slope of a hill south of Blanzky. The Reserve was the 1st Battalion and a detachment of machine guns, (305th, I think) plus our own machine gun company. First, we were ordered to relieve the 3rd Battalion, but after making the reconnaissance for the relief with the Captains- Whiting, Lewis, Schenck, Knight,-we were held for an attack, which it was expected we would take part in along the plateau east of Revillon, commanding the Aisne. We moved our position northeast on the high land along the road leading to Merval. There we were grouped with the 307th-a battalion under Blagden-but we only stayed there a day or two, and before the attack came off our Division was ordered out for the concentration of the Argonne.

The 308th was ordered to march out and camp at a spot 15 kilos or so south of Fismes-named Vezilly, I think. We were supposed to start about midnight when the relief was complete. But during the afternoon, two Italian battalions sent up officers and they squabbled with each other as to which was going to make the relief. I hurried off to Regimental Headquarters of the 307th, (our own Headquarters had gone south) to get the news straightened out; but to my horror, when it came night up pops both of the Wop battalions, -and such a milling around in the dark! So finally I sent off my battalion and kept a dozen men (runners, etc.,) with me-stuck one Italian battalion in place, and spent the rest of the night trying to lodge the other. It was a pretty discouraged Wop commander, when we finally had to go away.'

So along about 5 A.M., these dozen runners and I started off on our hike south of twenty kilos or so. The Germans were shelling Fismes in a desultory way as we passed through. All I remember of it is the flimsy plank bridge-two planks wide-across the Vesle in the center of the town, and an estaminet with the roof knocked off, but a good sign saying "Open for Business." My brother who drove a camion for the French, the summer before, used to drive through Fismes -which was well in the rear then-and says he remembers this good inn and its

wine. Their trucks used to go across Villers le-Prayeres (the Aisne) where you were, and up to the Chemin des Dames.

South of Fismes we came to a balloon station, then cool woods, and we slept for a couple of hours. Then up-and it was hot as hell on the road-and we kept on hiking over those endless hills through that hot day till about mid-afternoon, when we found the 308th.

It was in a fine rolling meadow country near a tiny town and we had the bliss of getting up pup tents and really sleeping like Christians, and getting clean. . . .

Dear old Lieutenant Colonel Smith had bought a lot of grape marmalade at his own risk, which he was selling to the men at cost. So there were some bright spots.

We were there maybe a day-perhaps two-then at night they stuck us in busses-aimed God knows where. Kept on going all night-lovely moonlight. I remember passing through Epernay at three or four A.M. and how beautiful the city looked with its high walls and gardens behind. Also there was a Frenchman that could get hot coffee off the radiator of his camion-which helped. It was fixed so you drew it off through a rubber tube-pretty fine.

The trip was mostly along those gorgeous Roman roads-planes and poplars. It was day when we debussed. Each Battalion was in a separate village, about 15 kilos south of St. Menehould (just south of where we were to start in the Argonne). My recollection-which is bad-is that our towns were Epense, Dampierre, and Dommartin., Anyhow it was one day of fair peace. Bob Hass got rabbits for dinner in one house,-and duck in another. The woman of the, house who gave us the good duck dinner said the Germans had been through the village in the first year of the war, and had been very quiet and decent.

Ken Budd joined us that day' back from the hospital. It was a jolt to him to see what - had been doing to every one's spirits. But good old Lieutenant Colonel Smith was easing off things as usual. . . .

Then just as every one got to bed-having been in busses all the night before-there came the usual order to get them all up again and hike to a place on the edge of the forest four or five kilos south of St. Menehould. It was drizzling rain with the roads up to your ankles in mud-for we weren't permitted the highway. So we hiked all night, very tired, and got into the edge of the wood a little after day. They were nasty wet woods, but we could get up the pup tents, and it wasn't so bad. . . . It must have been Sunday, for I remember the Padre and our Episcopal chaplain had services in a pleasant hollow.

Maybe we were a day or two days there. Then we had a night hike north to Florent, and believe me it was a hike. Tremendous number of stragglers from some of the other regiments. All night we were passing the French coming out, lazying along in groups of three or four in their sensible way, while we had to keep the column closed up in our prison formality.

You know all about Florent-it was later Division Headquarters-how the presence of the Americans in the area was supposed to be unknown to the Boche-so that neither officer nor man could set foot in the streets by day-and this a good 10 kilos behind the line! So the men were packed in barns like sardines, and had to pay Frenchmen to bring them water and soup

and cigarettes. Every one pretty ugly. . . . We battalion commanders had to go to the jug at night and account for each of our victims.

They made me do a reconnaissance of our jumping off place in the line. They gave us French helmets and overcoats-Whiting, Schenck, Lewis and me-and we hiked the ten kilos north to the trenches. You should have seen the Frenchmen laugh when we passed-for, all the overcoats were the same size-and on Ed Lewis and me they did not look just alike-that was fun anyhow. And you should have seen the place the French were holding! At Harazee: it was on the north slope up from a little river. We went down the long decline to the bottom of the valley, and across the river through just the tiniest remains of a town that looked as though it had been destroyed in the middle ages. The trench system seemed as though it was a relic from some earlier war. One French company was holding what a regiment had held three years before. Stabilized warfare they called it. And there were whole systems of mossy caved-in trenches, with wonderful plank construction dugouts that made my mouth water. But we never got a chance at them in the end. Every man could have had an apartment to himself.

After the reconnaissance we hiked at night to a camp² in the woods about half way up to the trenches. Here there were barracks and it wasn't so bad [Whittlesey's notes conclude on this phase], except that to keep us busy-now the men had their first chance to stretch-they made us dig at some silly trenches, that never would or could see war.

3

On the afternoon of September 25th, Field Officers and Company Commanders of the 77th Division learned what was about to happen. Assembled at the Division Headquarters dugout in the Bois des Petits Batis, north of Croix Gentin, they heard General Alexander outline the plan for the advance which was to be I shared with all the allied troops "from Switzerland to the North Sea." It was explained that the success depended upon the leadership of the officers-that the valor of the men was unquestioned. Yet on the last two days before the attack, the 308th Infantry received about twelve hundred and fifty replacements. Their lack of training was as unquestioned as their valor. They were fine material -largely Westerners of the 40th or 41st Divisions from Iowa, Idaho, Arizona, and California-but entirely un-broke to the matter of war. Some had been less than a month in France; some had been in the service about forty days, most of which they had spent in travel. Company I, which may be regarded as typical, had only about seventy men left after the Vesle, and it received one hundred and ten of these replacements.

Many of the new men had no reserve rations and there was no way to get them. Men took the jump-off into the Argonne battle who did not know how to use a hand grenade or to work the magazines of their rifles.

And they issued us bombs [says Whittlesey], and at the last second, after dark of the night when we were to pull out-with no candles available and every one set to go- they tried to issue some new-fangled rifle grenade affair -very complicated with a tail.

And there was also issued Training Memorandum No. 1, dated September 21st; "Questions For A Battalion Commander To Ask Himself Prior To Taking Over And While Occupying A Portion Of The Front Line." There were only thirty-three of these questions-but one of them had six subdivisions. They were of a soul-searching nature, suggestive of an almost morbidly

meticulous introspection. Somehow they sounded a little like Thomas A Kempis-though perhaps without all of the common sense which is the mark of the genuine mystic. Perhaps some of these questions may have been rather grimly recalled a week later,-such for example as No. 23: "What is the condition of the enemy wire and of our own wire? In connection with our own wire are the routes of egress known to all for use in patrolling, etc.?" There was a similar devotional manual for the lower in rank: "Questions A Platoon Leader Should Ask Himself On Taking Over A Trench And At Frequent Intervals Thereafter." It was apparently supposed that the troops would be in action for only a day or two, and in accordance with the Divisional Orders, all shelter halves, blankets, overcoats, and rain coats were bundled up and left behind.

As the twilight of the 25th deepened, orders reached the 1st and 2nd Battalions to move from their rest positions in the woods which they had been holding for the last two days, to the caves along the road at La Harazee, and thence to the take-off in the trenches to the north. The woods were horribly muddy. Three machine gun men are said to have broken their legs slipping off the duck board in the darkness. Finally the troops hiked by road to the front line trenches and got placed there by 3 or 4 A.M. In the bitter cold of the morning of the 26th, they waited for the barrage which was to precede their advance. At 2.30 A.M. it began, participated in by more than 2,400 pieces of artillery along the whole American front. It is said that the actual weight of ammunition fired to clear the Argonne was greater than that used by the Union forces during the entire Civil War.

The barrage lasted for three hours, then increased to an intense preparatory bombardment for twenty-five minutes. At 5.30 the jump-off was made. All four Regiments of the Division were in the front line. As already mentioned, the 308th was at the extreme left. Company E of the 307th was on our right and the 38th French Corps on our left. A combat liaison group, composed of members of the 38th French Corps and of members of the 368th (Negro) Infantry, 92nd Division, should have been in operation here, but failed to keep up. This unit did not start until 3 P.m. and did not advance after the first day. The 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Battalions of the 308th advanced in the first, second, and third lines respectively, the Battalion Commanders being Majors Whittlesey, Budd, and McNeill. Companies A and D of the 1st Battalion were in advance on the right and left respectively with their 1st and 3rd Platoons ahead. Companies B and C followed in support. The 2nd Battalion was ordered to follow the 1st at a distance of from 300 to 500 yards, "being careful not to mingle with the first line." Captain Breckinridge commanded the 3rd Battalion, which was Brigade Reserve. Two platoons of Company I were assigned for liaison with the 307th on the right and two with the 368th and French on the left.

4

One participant has described the start:

At 5.45 the Major said, "Let's go!" He boosted the lieutenant to the parapet and was in turn pulled up by hand to take his perch on the edge of the weirdest panorama of mist and mystery that mortal imagination could conjure up. No Man's Land, which should have beckoned straight into the heart of the Argonne, was shrouded in a thick, white fog. It seemed to close in from all sides on that little infantry company, isolating it entirely from the colossal Allied advance, and nullifying, in one chilly breath, all the carefully planned instructions in regard to liaison, the vital necessity of keeping in touch.

Beyond and through the fog the flashes of bursting shells flickered. The ear was confused by the muffled echoes of friendly artillery. The eye was confused by the haze, which kept from vision all objects more than 100 feet away and curiously distorted the few stumps and posts that clung to the side of the slope at their feet. It was almost as though the infantry was asked to go over the top blindfolded. Even more depressing than the lack of vision, however, was that dank breath of the Argonne, saturated, until by dawn the atmosphere had passed mellowness, with the odor of stagnant, muddy pools, hiding beneath treacherous carpets of tangled wire grass and bringing to the nostrils of the new crusaders a reminder of the awful slaughter which had left another carpet on this mutilated soil in those historic days when a barrier of horizon-blue poilus had hurled back the Crown Prince's army.

A dark blotch down below the steep slope on which the major and the lieutenant stood proved to be an abandoned French trench thirty feet deep, filled with coils of rusty wire and spanned by a single log, all that remained of a foot-bridge. Reconnoitering to the right and left failed to reveal any other means of advance.

Thus this particular battalion headquarters went into action, the major, his adjutant and some fifty runners and signalmen swaying uncertainly, like tight-rope walkers, as they cautiously crept across this one log, to disappear in the mists of the unknown beyond out there. Company B followed even more slowly, platoon by platoon and squad by squad. The log began to shrink, chipped by the gougings of many hob-nails. It became an increasingly difficult feat to hold a chauchat rifle in one hand, a can of "monkey meat" reserve rations in the other, and to feel one's perilous way across this only visible connection between the jumping-off place and the battle itself.

According to the artillery plan, the rolling barrage of 75's, beginning at 5:55, was to advance every five minutes in 100 meter bounds. Hence, during the forty-five minutes that one infantry company was making the first fifty meters in the Argonne Drive, the protection of supporting artillery jumped ahead nearly 1000 meters.

This phase of the attack did not worry the lieutenant, however. He had seen neither the barrage schedule nor the field order and he had other things to think about. Once across that initial obstacle, he had assembled his company and assisted the platoon leaders in taking up the designated formation, two platoons in front and two in support, each in platoon column so the men might keep in touch. After starting them off by compass bearing, he had sent runners out to find the major. These runners disappeared in the mist, which had swallowed battalion headquarters.

First one platoon and then another lost contact with the company, although the advance was made at snail's pace with frequent verification of direction by the compass. A few trench mortar shells from the enemy fell in the ravine on the shoulder of which Company B was crawling. There were no other evidences of opposition. But everywhere were signs of disintegration.

The fog persisted even when attacked by the first rays of the sun. Shouts arose through the mist.

"Hello-who axe you?" some sergeant hailed from the bottom of the ravine.

"Company B," answered one platoon working about in circles on the slope.

"Where in hell is C Company?" inquired another detachment, floundering through the scrub brush to the left. No one answered-no one knew where he himself was, to say nothing of volunteering information to others.

Three hours after the major had boosted him over the top, the lieutenant in command of B Company had advanced a kilometer with two platoons intact. The other two were lost and the major was lost. Runners sent out to locate them had not returned.

Two shapes loomed up ahead through the mist.

"Halt! Who's there?" the lieutenant shouted.

"Colonel Smith," came the reply. "Where's the major?"

The lieutenant colonel and the regimental intelligence officer had been sent forward by the regimental commander to find out whether the battalion had jumped off on the zero hour. No messages from the major had reached regimental headquarters, although it later developed he had started several of them down the runner lane, hastily organized during the night.

"I found one of your platoons crawling around up ahead there and I told the sergeant to put them in a trench and try to find you," the lieutenant colonel said. His wrapped puttees were in shreds and miniature red rivulets on his shins showed he had traveled rough-shod over wire entanglements and brambles to catch up with the first line of the attack. He and the captain and their bulging map cases disappeared as they retraced their steps toward the north.

Regaining contact with his third platoon, the lieutenant consulted his compass and started off again. In another hour he bumped into C Company, also lost in a trench, which seemed to be the German first line on the extreme left of the regimental sector. B Company did a left, face and went due west for half an hour, and then turned north again.

From the faltering procession of stretcher bearers, evacuating wounded slowly down a long communication trench, the lieutenant learned that the major and two companies had halted two kilometers ahead. He soon joined them. Battalion headquarters had been established in a concrete dug-out in a German third line trench, within 400 yards of the corps objective indicated for the first day. This blue-penciled objective line, incidentally, drawn several days before at Corps Headquarters without accurate knowledge of the terrain, ran right through a plot of swampy marshland, incapable of organization for defense against a counter-attack. The major had pulled his two advance companies back a short distance, therefore, and ordered them to dig in while he endeavored to get in touch with the regimental P. C.

5

During the advance of the first day, the conditions of which have just been described, the 1st and 2nd Battalions crossed a number of trench systems, running east and west, and indicated on the maps furnished by the names Ludwig, Magdebourg, Suede, Kronprinz, and Cimetière. On the right, Companies A and D finally reached the so-called Karl or Karlplatz trench, a splendid system of defense. There had been little resistance, but the wire clippers were in constant use on account of the tangled barbed wire spread everywhere through the

thick underbrush, and causing very slow going.

After taking the Karlplatz trench and reorganizing, the forward companies mentioned advanced for about three hundred yards. Now in the afternoon the enemy for the first time gave determined resistance south of Moulin de Momme Mort, about a mile southeast of Binarville. In Company A, Lieutenant Patterson, Sergeants Walsh and Foote, with five others, were killed, and twenty-three were wounded. D also suffered casualties. However, these losses were small compared with later ones, and the successfully made objective and the quiet of most of the afternoon, broken only by fifteen minutes of fire at sundown, were to contrast very favorably with the days to follow. The 1st Battalion Headquarters was located in the elaborate German concrete pavilion and dugout on the Karlplatz trench that was later to become Regimental Headquarters.

Efforts to re-establish liaison between the 1st and 2nd Battalion during this evening and night were unavailing. The 2nd Battalion at 5.30 P.M. with Companies E, F, and G, as well as D Company, established itself in the Courlande trench to the west of the 1st Battalion. This old German trench was some ten feet in depth with occasional large and deep dugouts. At 4 P.M. word was received that the 368th Infantry, on our left, had been withdrawn, and that therefore the left flank was to be guarded. As a matter of fact, the flank had really been exposed since 8.30 A.M., the time that the 2nd Battalion was last in liaison with the patrol of the 368th. Meanwhile patrols from F Company, sent forward to reconnoiter in the heavy undergrowth before dark, suffered casualties from enemy machine guns within 45 yards of our position. During the night the German 77's endeavored to shell the position heavily, but the shells landed fairly well over the mark.

The first day's attack covered about one and a quarter kilometers, reaching the Corps objective, the marshland north of the German third line trenches. Although the order for advance had directed the 2nd Battalion to follow the first, it had been found impossible to keep them from intermingling. After this they co-operated in leading the advance. This was made necessary by the width of the Regimental Sector. The plan of a single battalion attacking with a two company front and maintaining liaison with units far to the right and left had already appeared as obviously unworkable to the Battalion Commanders before they started the advance of the 26th.

Some companies passed the night in the trenches; others dug in. For all it was rainy, cold, and uncomfortable, with little food and no overcoats or blankets. "But we found mineral water in bottles in the German dugouts,"

comments the philosophical Whittlesey, "so it might have been worse." Anyway the objective had been made, and a few prisoners had been taken.

At 1 P.m., next day, the 27th, advance was renewed. The terrain now proved more woody, and the enemy was soon encountered. Stokes Mortars, chauchats, bombs, and rifles were all employed to dislodge the enemy machine gun nests. That the Stokes Mortars proved useful this day was evidenced on the next when "several Stokes shell craters were found, and near them several German helmets covered with blood, and the ground nearby spattered with blood." Moreover, the Stokes fire materially reduced and silenced that of the enemy. About a hundred and fifty yards north of the Karlplatz trench the 1st Battalion met with sharp resistance, and it was then that it proved necessary for the 2nd Battalion to go into the front

line. Losses on both sides were considerable. The action in the afternoon was a severe test on some of the four hundred new men attached to each battalion two days earlier. This action proved the splendid fighting qualities of the Regiment. "When darkness fell the enemy had been pushed back three hundred yards or more. Companies A, C, F, and H, with the Headquarters of both Battalions, had pushed forward to a position in the dense woods south of Moulin de l'Homme Mort. D and G, with a part of E, advanced to a position on the extreme right. B, attempting to follow A, went forward with H. It sounds confused, and it was. Direction and liaison were becoming increasingly difficult, and losses increased proportionately. In A Company, for example, there were on this second day of the advance twelve killed, eighteen wounded, and four missing, so that this company which had made the jump-off with two hundred and five, was now reduced to one officer and one hundred and forty-four men.

Meanwhile, Colonel Prescott had been relieved. At 4 o'clock in the hottest part of the afternoon's action, Major Budd had received word from him to come and take command of the Regiment, but before he could reach the Regimental P. C. in the Karlplatz trench, Lieutenant Colonel Smith had arrived and took command.

Advance on the second day was for about eight hundred meters. At 4.30 P.M., orders were issued to dig in. The two Battalion Headquarters were established close together, the companies digging in in such a way as to refuse possible attacks from the northeast and northwest as well as the north. Memoranda of one Company Commander describe the night passed in an old trench with part of Company A, a wounded man who could not be evacuated until dawn, and a "tall Boche prisoner." " M- and I sat on muddy stairs of an old German dugout, trying to keep warm by smoking cigarettes. A weird night."

According to an order from General Johnson, renewed attack was called for at 5:30 A.M. on the 28th, the third day of advance. In one company at least this order was not received until 7 o'clock. In others, perhaps later. And while some units were advancing and others preparing to do so, the first ration detail since the jump-off, two days earlier, caught up.

"Cold cabbage, beef, and bread," report the chronicles of Company E. "Bacon, butter, bread, and a one pound cannon barrage from the Germans, which wounds Corporal Spahr," records the commanding officer of B. The movement involved in feeding the men had been observed by the enemy, and brought down what those concerned will always remember as the famous "Cruller Barrage." To be shelled on your first opportunity at a square meal after two days of semi-starvation was apparently supposed to have its humorous aspects.

At first, the day's advance brought little resistance, the Germans having largely withdrawn in the night. By 1 p.m. both Battalion Headquarters were established on the narrow gauge railway, at a point where the latter after running north turns to the northeast, about two kilometers north of the Karlplatz trench. In the afternoon, the 1st Battalion again met stiff opposition, this time not only from machine guns and rifle fire, but also from the very unpopular trench mortars, which hurled the very troublesome Minnenwerfers. Here the advancing Battalions were held up until nearly 2 o'clock. The woods of the previous day had been so thick as to prevent the use of the One-Pounders. The yet denser woods of the 28th likewise prevented the use of our Stokes Mortars and even our hand grenades.

Among many casualties, including some of our best N. C. O.'s, were Lieutenant Thaanum, acting Adjutant of the 2nd Battalion, who had joined the Regiment a few days before, and

Lieutenant Whiting, the only officer left in Company A, who was severely wounded and died later. "Clint " Whiting was the sort who can never be forgotten by his associates. I Company A this day lost two killed, eleven wounded, and one missing.

The Battalion Commanders with Lieutenant McKeogh, Whittlesey's Adjutant, were the only battalion officers now left, and there were not sufficient company officers to lead the eight companies. The help of some of the officer material lost in the earlier sectors would have been now of enormous advantage. No praise, however, can be too high for the splendid work of our non-commissioned officers in the Argonne. Their qualities of leadership and personal bravery were outstanding.

Because it was typical of what was happening to many other units at this time and later in the Argonne Forest, may be briefly noted some of the experiences of B Company on this date. The previous day's details of runners and Stokes ammunition carriers have left only two fighting platoons to start with. When the advance begins, the Company receives orders to follow D on the right with E and G behind.

Just at that moment D is out of touch, and so B is ordered to take the lead on the right. While the men are being lined up in-groups with the Corporals in front to steady them, a great sound of machine gun fire starts ahead. Then the advance begins at the time ordered. Within five minutes Sergeant Monohan, acting officer, has been fatally wounded to die a few weeks later in the hospital. Lockwood, of a chauchat team, and Monsees, in charge of a group, are killed; Sergeant

Quay and three Corporals wounded. Major Budd stops the advance to support it with a platoon of fifty men from E Company. Sergeant Bickard, sent out with a gang to get a particularly venomous machine gun on the left, returns with the report that it has disappeared. Again advance begins slowly. Men cross the road where several had been wounded, proceed down a hollow, and then start up the side of a ravine. Machine gun opens on the right. Chauchat team and squad from E start out to silence it. Runner Halligan, taking message back to Major, sees four Germans, is sniped at and slightly wounded. More squads sent out to reconnoiter right flank.

Meanwhile, Lieutenant Stevens, with another platoon of E, gets jammed into B-and just then enemy machine gun fire opens from the rear. A cry is heard in this direction: "We're flanked!" Sergeant Bickard is hit. Kinkle drops mortally wounded. Stevens swings his chauchat around and opens fire on right flank and rear.

Gradual withdrawal is made from exposed position on side of ravine to the one of shelter along the railroad track, left a little earlier, the Commanding Officer doing what he can to cover the movement with his pistol. After order is restored and men are back in funk holes, the Captain reports to Lieutenant Colonel Smith, and learns that communication is cut off with the companies at the front. A rainy night sets in, in which he shares an overcoat borrowed from a Red Cross man with three other individuals, in relays of half an hour each.

At 5:15 P.M. of the day just described, Major Whittlesey had advanced with Companies A,

C, F, and H to a position just north of a little German cemetery and about a kilometer southeast of Binarville. The combined Battalion Headquarters was established on the slope of L'Homme Mort about a hundred yards to the south, and a halt made for the night on account of darkness and rain. Funk holes were dug and the troops placed in the form of a hollow square, Companies C, F, H, and A to the north, east, south, and west respectively. Runner posts had been left behind and a messenger was sent back giving position. This message, which asks for rations and additional chauchat ammunition, states, "We have suffered considerably from lack of drinking water; the men are very tired but in good spirits." The History of E Company tells in this connection how welcome was the downpour: the men "had been without drinking water for four days, and holding their cups under the dripping leaves or steel helmet, they quenched their awful thirst."

The Whittlesey notes say: "All night rain, and pretty cold in the morning, and the next day, the 29th, our runner posts were broken up in the rear so Ken, and I sent back pigeon messages giving the slope."

Major Budd.

Four of these messages were sent back on the 29th. One of them reads in part:

Our line of communication with the rear still cut at 12:30 P.m. by machine guns. We are going to clean out one of these guns now. From a wounded German officer prisoner, we learned that there is a German Company of 70 men operating in our rear, to close the gap we made yesterday. We can of course clean up this country to the rear, by working our companies over the ground we charged. But we understand our mission is to advance, and to maintain our strength here. It is very slow trying to clean up this rear area from here by small details when this trickling back of machine guns can be used by the enemy. Can line of communication not be kept open from the rear? We have been unable to send back detail for rations and ammunition, both of which we need very badly.

The last message-the bird of which was liberated at 4 P.m. and arrived at the loft at 4:26-tells the same story and mentions how a patrol had seen many Germans, and how valuable maps had been obtained from a German officer killed in scouting.

Again to resume the story as told in the notes:

We reconnoitered east, west, and north, and found Boches each way, and also in the rear. Sergeant Anderson of A Company did an especially fine piece of scouting-went two miles to the southwest and still found Germans." Nothing much happened. We were there two days-the 28th and 29th-ate up what food there was. One of the outposts killed a German Lieutenant and his Sergeant who blundered in on our position, and he had a map that showed an important German trench system about two kilos north that did not appear on our maps. Before he died, the German Lieutenant told us that we would meet real opposition there, which later proved to be true.

The rain, fallen in torrents during the previous night, had half filled the funk holes with mud and water by the morning of the 29th. During this day and the following, desperate efforts were made to re-establish communication by both front and rear troops. The "nothing much happened" of the paragraph just quoted must therefore be taken in a comparative rather than a literal sense. Among those who gave their lives in the attempt to carry messages was

Private Quinn of D Company. He was one of a combat patrol under Lieutenant McKeogh sent back a few hundred yards to disperse machine gunners that had cut communications. Arrived at the little cemetery already mentioned, and finding the enemy in unexpected strength, McKeogh sent Quinn north again with a message to Whittlesey that was never delivered. Almost four months later Quinn's body was found in the strange manner described below.

"They didn't give Quinn the D. S. C.," but like many another who fell unnoted in the forest, he well deserved it. Lieutenant McKeogh himself did receive that decoration after making the perilous trip successfully through the German lines to Regimental Headquarters. And so did Private Monson of Company A, and Private Herschkowitz of C. The adventures of these three briefly and inadequately told in their citations make one realize the confused condition of affairs, where units and individuals of the two armies, scattered through the woods, were playing a sort of deadly Prisoners' Base. Another who gave his life at this time furnishes testimony with Quinn that the heroism displayed was confined to neither high nor low rank exclusively.

Lieutenant Colonel Smith was killed on the 29th. It was early in the dreary morning of that day when he appeared, hurrying forward from Regimental Headquarters, to investigate the cut off. He gave the command that all stragglers and detachments lost in the woods should be collected and reorganized, waiting further orders. Colonel Smith was accompanied by Lieutenant Wilhelm and a small detachment, including several runners and men carrying ammunition for the cut off troops. He was proceeding cautiously along a path, which he had been told led straight to Whittlesey's position, and had advanced about fifty yards when he suddenly called out to his men to seek cover. He was immediately wounded in the leg by a machine gun. It became apparent that machine guns placed in the woods some distance from the road, commanded it in both directions. Ordering his men back, this dauntless soldier faced the machine gun alone and returned its fire with his automatic until he fell. He refused first aid treatment, and was again attempting to ascertain the exact location of the nearest nest, when he fell for the last time mortally wounded - a fitting death for one who had so often risked his life for others. A Congressional Medal was posthumously awarded this much loved officer who signally combined high rank with perfect simplicity, and daring courage with kindly consideration for others.

Father Halligan has written of the recovery of Colonel Smith's body:

The enemy knew that they had killed an officer of high rank and as soon as convenient hurried to the body to search it. For better security they carried the body about a hundred yards away, across a corduroy road, but they found nothing. The place was the intersecting point of several roads through the forest. With a dozen or more men we scoured this patch of woods, a triangular strip of small dimensions, during two days without success. In the evening of the second day a sergeant, who was with him when he was killed, scouted the woods in the vicinity and discovered the body less than seven-fifty-five yards away from the spot on which he was shot to death. This incident, better than anything else I know, will give some indication of the difficulty of combat in the thick undergrowth of the forest. The spot in which he was found finally was rendezvous for several machine guns, and probably would have remained undiscovered by us but for the painstaking search for the body of a beloved officer.

To return now to the forward units which had been cut off since the night of the 28th, when the Germans taking advantage of the exposed left flank had filtered in with machine guns and small detachments of infantry. After two days dug in in hollow squares, with almost constant rain, and without food, the men were doubtless able to appreciate Captain McMurtry's suggestion, "How would you like to have a good thick rare steak smothered in onions and some French fried potatoes?" It was not until late on the afternoon of the 30th that Lieutenant Taylor and K Company, guided through the narrow path by Captain Delehanty and Lieutenant Conn, at last got through to the cut off troops. The Germans had, meanwhile, moved out on the morning of the same day. "Starved and no water for three days," Taylor's diary describes the companies, but Whittlesey's notes continue cheerfully:

Lt. Taylor came up with a lot of rations and a big carrying detail. Looked "practically O. K.," as George McMurtry put it. And everybody ate! That night I went back to Rgtl. Advance Hdqrs.-which had been moved forward in the woods. It was the blackest night I've ever seen and I had to be passed on from reserve post to post holding the hand of each successive guide. And I'll never forget going into the Hqrs. dugout and getting warm for the first time, and seeing Frank Weld's genial face. Cocoa, cigars. Then back to the Bn. again, which I found with great difficulty in the darkness. Orders were to advance at daybreak.

So ended the episode of the earlier cut-off of advance troops from September 28th to 30th, which was at first sometimes confused in the public mind with the later cut-off of the so-called Lost Battalion from October 2nd to 7th. Both were due primarily to the same exposed left flank which had resulted from the retirement of the combat liaison unit of the 368th Infantry. Secondly both cut-offs were the results of the same impossibility of attaining objectives and of simultaneously keeping constant communication with the rear and the right flank on so wide a regimental sector. In the last analysis it was simply a case of "Damn the torpedoes and go ahead!" By this, it is not meant to imply that everything possible was not done to keep touch with the rear and flanks by runner posts and patrols; but if no advance had been made except when such liaison was absolutely assured, then there would have been little or no advance. x The best military interests were served by the action adopted.

Although the torpedoes did later explode in the rear, it was best to have damned them and passed over them.

On September 30th, Major Budd left for the General Staff College at Langres where he had been ordered to report on September 24th, and Captain McMurtry I now took command of the 2nd Battalion. Major McNeill, also ordered to the General Staff College, turned over the command of the 3rd Battalion on the 28th to Captain L. M. Scott.

About the 1st of October, French units had taken the place of the 368th Infantry as combat liaison on our left, but they were not up even with our front line. It is said that in order to get ammunition up to the front east of Binarville Captain Roosevelt actually made use of the roads outside the forest in front of the French position.

At 6 A.M. sharp on October 1st, the two forward battalions left their positions at L'Homme Mort to resume their advance through the Argonne Forest. The 1st Battalion, commanded by then Major Charles W. Whittlesey, led with Companies A and C in advance, supported by D and E; the 2nd Battalion, commanded by Captain

George G. McMurtry, followed in support three hundred yards behind.

A reference to the map will show how the broader valley east of L'Homme Mort becomes a comparatively narrow ravine about a kilometer to the north. The troops marched along the heights to the west. About noon they encountered serious opposition from trenches running east and west on the hill, to the west of the ravine. The 2nd Battalion, which had been following in support, immediately closed up and joined with the 1st Battalion. (It was in this ravine that the 3rd Battalion was to encounter such difficulty when it attempted to reach the troops cut off in the Pocket.) Attempt was now made by the Stokes Mortars to dislodge the Germans. But Lieutenant Dobson, who commanded them; was wounded, and the enemy kept their position. Then an attack was made by A Company. Lieutenant Scott, who had taken command that morning, was wounded as well as First Sergeant Bergasse. Later Sergeant Finnegan was killed and Sergeant Anderson took command. At the end of the day this company showed nine killed, twelve wounded and two missing. No officers were left, and only 106 men remained of the 205 with which it had started on September 26th. In consequence of these losses Company A was used as a detachment for the care of the wounded for the next few days, waiting such time as it could be reorganized. All advances attempted in the ravine itself were also checked by the heaviest kind of machine gun fire. As its final result this day showed considerable losses and very little progress.

It was the next day, October 2nd, that Major Whittlesey's troops, the combined 1st and 2nd Battalions, reached the Pocket, situated on the slope, running east and west, just north of the ravine and south of the Binarville-Pre-mont road. The events of October 2nd are fully covered in the chapter on the Lost Battalion which is to follow.

8

The interest which naturally centers about the cut-off troops during the next five days, should not draw attention from the gallant and costly attempts made both by the rear companies of the 308th and by the 307th Infantry to reach their beleaguered comrades. As is constantly the case, the historian must ignore many examples of individual courage. Two, however, may be named, those of Sergeants Norwat and Kaufman.

Now as always the difficulty of maintaining liaison made it very hard for the two regiments and the French on the left all to strike at the same time. On one occasion the troops were led in person by Colonel Cromwell Stacey, and on another by General Evan Johnson, the Brigade Commander. Successive attacks were launched every morning and night of the 5th, 6th, and 7th. That of the last date alone cost the 154th Brigade 78 killed, and 237 wounded. Some of the attacks lost as much as fifty per cent of those engaged.

A field message from Captain James F. Wagner, Regimental Surgeon, dated October 8th, gives the following figures, which may be regarded as at least approximately correct for the casualties from October 1st to October 6th inclusive: sent to hospital, 682; killed in action, approximately 175; sick in hospital, October 1st to 7th inclusive, 146.

Such field messages as are obtainable from those days suggest the bitter struggle going on, but it is too confused an account to furnish an accurate and detailed picture.

"Strong opposition in front and on flanks, we are up to wire . . . advance seems impossible . . . heavy trench mortars in ravine ahead and machine gun firing from slope on right." . . .

"Can advance no further without sacrificing company. My right is held up by wire, two M. G.'s on flank and M. G. in front." . . . "Need ammunition, American and chauchat. Casualties heavy and need stretcher bearers." (The last two quotations are from messages of companies of the 307th.) "Would suggest that more rations be brought up tonight if possible. Also some trombones and V. B.'s. Send some coffee, sugar, and jam or syrup, if you have any. " . . . "We will give them hell from here on the left flank . . . one or two machine guns placed up here could give a great deal of help."

It is significant of the conditions that three or more second lieutenants were killed before actually reaching the commands to which they had been assigned.

Also significant of the conditions of these confused and troublous days is the number of officers who in turn commanded the 308th Infantry between the last days of September and October 10th. Colonel Prescott was followed by Lieutenant Colonel Smith on September 27th. After the latter's death, Colonel Stacey took command, and was in turn succeeded for brief periods by Brigadier General Evan Johnson, Captain Breckinridge from October 5th to 8th, Lieutenant Colonel Gordon Johnston, then Chief of the 7th Corps, October 8th, and finally Colonel R. R. Hannay, who took command on October 10th.

It must be understood, of course, that the, Regiment while under the command of several of these officers, consisted of only those companies which were not cut off, that is to say of the 3rd Battalion and of Company D and a part of E. Captain Breckinridge took the 3rd Battalion on October 4th, relieving Captain Scott. The next day when Captain Breckinridge took the Regiment, the battalion command passed to Lieutenant Burns who was immediately wounded.

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