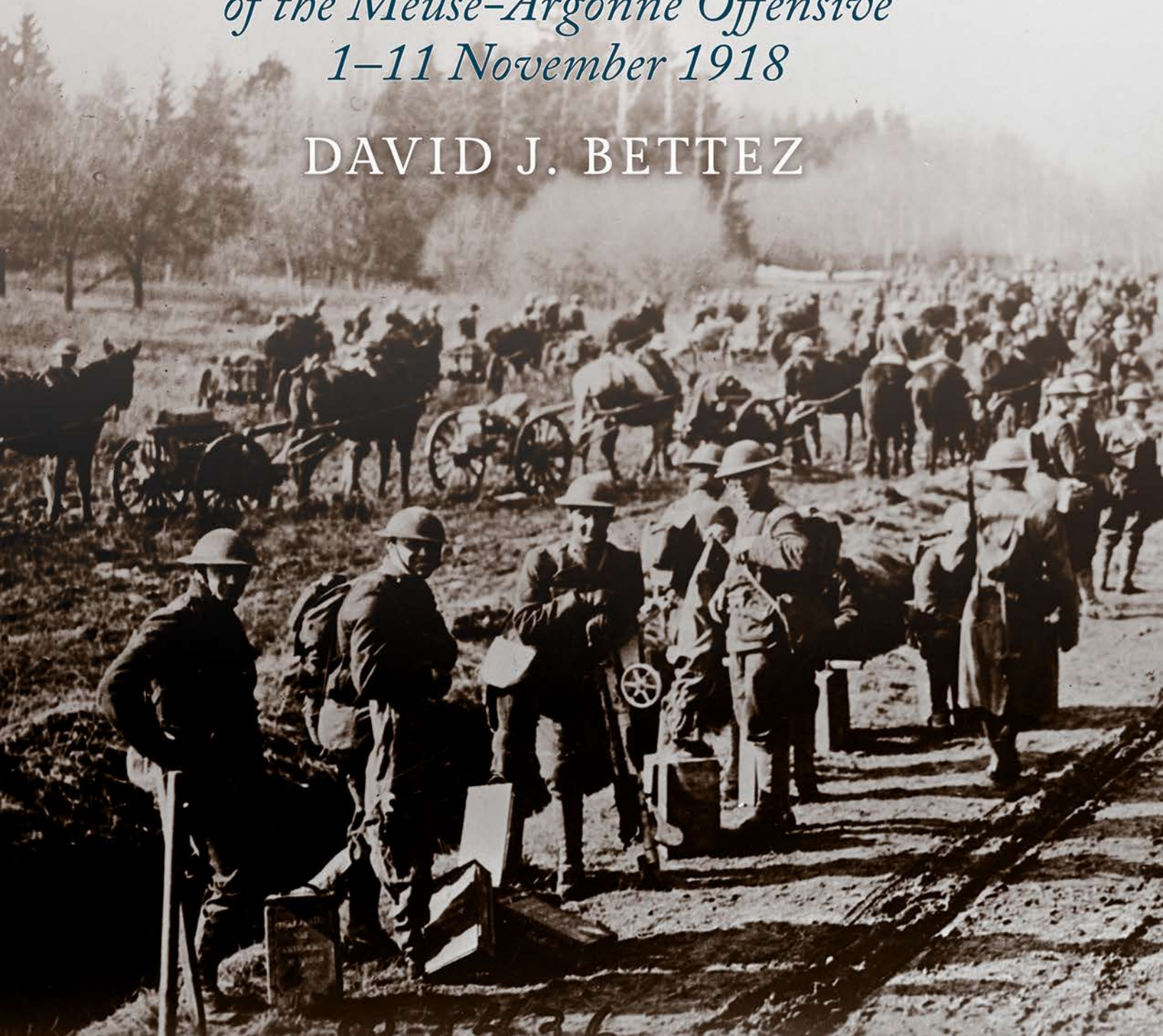


HEROIC DEEDS, HEROIC MEN

*The U.S. Marine Corps and the Final Phase
of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive
1–11 November 1918*

DAVID J. BETTEZ



U.S. Marines in World War I Centennial Commemorative Series

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History Division
an imprint of MCU Press
Quantico, VA 22134

2020

This pamphlet history, one in a series devoted to U.S. Marines in the First World War, is published for the education and training of Marines as a History Division imprint by Marine Corps University Press, Quantico, Virginia, as part of the Marine Corps' observance of the centennial anniversary of that war. Editorial costs have been defrayed in part by contributions from members of the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation.



No. 6 in the U.S. Marines in World War I Centennial Commemorative Series

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The original quote referenced in the title came from the order by Major General John A. Lejeune on 12 November 1918 and read:







On the night of November 10th, heroic deeds were done by heroic men. In the face of a heavy artillery and withering machine gun fire, the 2nd Engineers threw two foot bridges across the MEUSE and the first and second battalions of the 5th Marines crossed resolutely and unflinchingly to the east bank and carried out their mission.

BASIC SYMBOLS

(Red for Enemy Troops)

Army Group XXXXX
Field Army XXXX
Army Corps XXX
Division XX
Brigade X
Regiment III
Battalion II
Company I
Platoon ***
Section ** Squad *
Observation Post (OP)  (Plt or Smaller)

Army Group & Field Army 
Infantry 
Cavalry 
Machine Gun MG 
Tanks 
Artillery 
Engineers E (P = Pioneers)

Deployed Company 
Deployed Battalion 
Assembly Area 
Post of Command (PC)  Type Indicated
Trace of Front Line 
Strong Points, MG Nests, etc. 

ABBREVIATIONS

AEF American Expeditionary Forces
BEF British Expeditionary Force

Arty Artillery	Cdr Unit Commander	Gr Grenadier(s)	Ldw Landwehr	Regt Regiment
Bde Brigade	Co Company	Grp Group (Combat Group)	Mar Marine(s)/USMC	Res Reserve
Bn Battalion	Det Detachment	Inf Infantry	MLR Main Line of Resistance	Stz Shützen(Rifles)
Btry Battery	Div Division	ID Infantry Division	PC Post of Command	USMC U.S. Marine Corps
Cav Cavalry	Egr Engineers	IR Infantry Regiment	Plt Platoon	
CD Cavalry Division	Fus Fusilier(s)	Jag Jaeger (Jager)	Pnr Pioneers	
CR Cavalry Regiment	Gd Guard(s)	Lds Landsturm	R Reserve	

A-H Austria-Hungary	FR French(France)
BE Belgium	GE German(Germany)
BR British(Britain)	LUX Luxembourg
CAN Canada(Canadian)	US United States(American)
























In U.S. Army infantry regiments, the 12 rifle companies were lettered A through M (letter J not used): Cos A, B, C and D in the 1st Bn; Cos E, F, G, H in the 2d Bn, and Cos I, K, L, M in the 3d Bn.

In German infantry regiments, subordinate battalions were identified by Roman numerals and the 12 rifle companies were numbered 1 through 12: the 1st, 2d, 3d, and 4th Cos were in I Bn; the 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th Cos in II Bn; and the 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th in III Bn.

In French infantry regiments rifle companies were numbered as in the German Army, except battalions were assigned Arabic numbers.

U.S. Marine companies were numbered Corps-wide and assigned to battalions and regiments without regard to numerical sequence (i.e., the 1st Bn, 5th Regt had the 17th, 49th, 66th, and 67th Cos). The 2d Bn same regiment included the 18th, 43d, 51st, and 55th Cos; and 3d Bn the 16th, 20th, 45th, and 47th Cos.

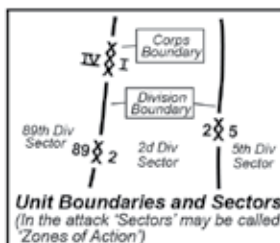
EXAMPLES OF COMBINING SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

 (Pershing) American Expeditionary Forces (Cdr Name)	 (Pershing) US First Army (Cdr Name)	 (Liggett) US I Army Corps (Cdr Name)	 US 2d Division	 US 9th Infantry Regiment	 5th Regiment US Marine Corps	 4th Brigade USMC Post of Command (PC)	 3d Bn, 6th Regt USMC with companies deployed. Is the 84th Co, 3d Bn, 6th Regt USMC
 (Maistre) French Army Group Center (Cdr Name)	 (Gouraud) French Fourth Army (Cdr Name)	 (Naulin) XXI Army Corps (Cdr Name)	 French 21st Infantry Division	 Dismounted French 2d Cavalry Division Dismounted	 French 64th Infantry Regiment	 French 213th Reserve Infantry Regiment	 II Bn, German 461st IR with companies deployed. Is the 5th Co, II Bn, 461st IR.
 (Crown Prince) German Army Group Crown Prince	 (Rothmaier) German Third Army (Cdr Name)	 (Nida) XII Army Corps (Cdr Name)	 German 200th Infantry Division	 German 235th Reserve Infantry Regiment	 German 5th Jaeger Regiment	 German Combat Group with two MG Cos from different Bns	

Battalions may be abbreviated by battalion and regimental numbers separated by a slant (/), such as:

1/5 Mar = 1st Bn, 5th Marine Regt
II/110 Gr = II Bn, 110th Grenadier IR

A combat group is an ad hoc unit formed by combining units from different battalions or regiments. It is temporary and designed to accomplish a specific task.



In Army regiments, company abbreviations have two places: [Co/Regt]. As companies are assigned to battalions sequentially, in 12 company regiments the 1st Co is in the 1st Bn, 5th Co in the 2d Bn, etc. This applies to companies that are assigned letters (i.e. Co A is in 1st Bn, Co H is in the 2d Bn) and so forth.

In U.S. Marine regiments, as companies are not assigned to battalions in sequential order, the battalion number is between the company and regimental number: [Co/Bn/Regt].

In separate battalions, such as MG units and Jaegers, company abbreviations have company/battalion ID: [Co/Bn].

THE SITUATION AND BACKGROUND

On the night of 31 October 1918, the 4th Brigade of United States Marines in France awaited the signal to begin an attack destined to end the Meuse-Argonne campaign and the devastating “war to end all wars”—World War I. Begun five weeks earlier, on 26 September, the campaign involved more than 1 million U.S. troops under the command of Army general John J. Pershing, the leader of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF).¹

The Army’s 2d Division was a hybrid, the only one to combine an Army and a Marine brigade. The 4th Brigade, commanded by Brigadier General Wendell C. Neville, worked alongside the Army’s 3d Brigade and supporting units, all under the Marine Corps’ division leadership of Major General John Archer Lejeune. Even before Lejeune had taken command in July 1918, the division had forged a formidable reputation as one of the AEF’s leading units.²

¹ For more on the Meuse-Argonne campaign, see Edward G. Lengel, *To Conquer Hell: The Meuse-Argonne, 1918—The Epic Battle that Ended the First World War* (New York: Henry Holt, 2008); and Mitchell Yockelson, *Forty-Seven Days: How Pershing’s Warriors Came of Age to Defeat the German Army in World War I* (New York: New American Library, 2016). See also Edward G. Lengel, ed., *A Companion to the Meuse-Argonne Campaign* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2014). Earlier histories include Paul F. Braim, *The Test of Battle: The American Expeditionary Forces in the Meuse-Argonne Campaign* (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Books, 1998); and Robert H. Ferrell, *America’s Deadliest Battle: Meuse-Argonne, 1918* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2007).

² For more on the 2d Division, see Oliver Spaulding and John Wright, *The Second Division American Expeditionary Force in France, 1917–1919* (New York: Hillman Press, 1937).

The 4th Brigade’s Leadership and Experience before September 1918

Soon after the United States entered the war in April 1917, Marine Corps Commandant Major General George Barnett put together the 4th Brigade to fight under Pershing in France. The brigade became an integral part of the 2d Division, which was formed in France under Brigadier General Charles A. Doyen’s temporary command in late 1917. Two regiments formed the 4th Brigade—the 5th and 6th Regiment. Many of its leaders had extensive experience with the Corps around the world before World War I.

After Doyen was sent home in early 1918 due to impaired health, Pershing appointed one of his most trusted officers, U.S. Army brigadier general James G. Harbord, to command the Marine brigade.³ Harbord led it through its World War I baptism by fire in the iconic Battle of Belleau Wood in June 1918, where the brigade reported significant casualties during that month-long fight. On 6 June, the Corps suffered more casualties than it had throughout its history. Nevertheless, by the end of June, the 4th Brigade accomplished its goal—taking Belleau Wood—and established

³ Doyen would continue to serve even after returning stateside, assuming command of Marine Corps Training Camp and Marine Barracks Quantico, VA, until his death in 6 October 1918, when he and many others fell victim to the effects of Spanish influenza.

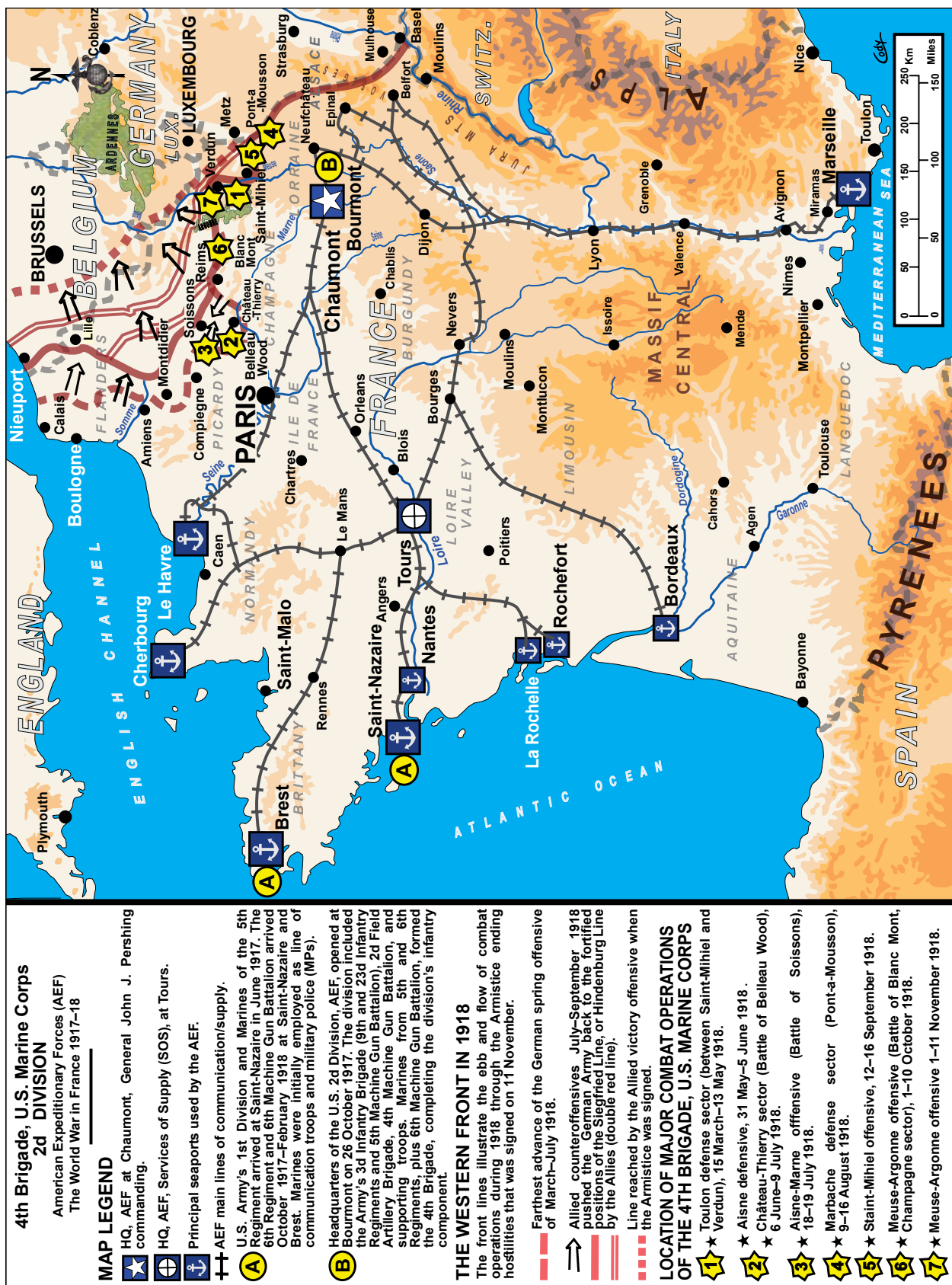
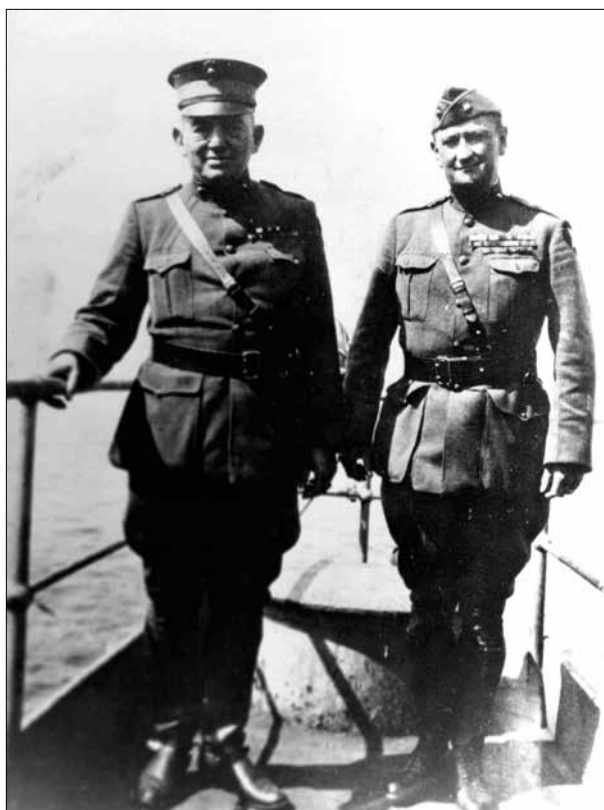


Illustration by LtCol R. L. "Bill" Cody, USMC (Ret)



Two future Commandants, John A. Lejeune and Wendell C. Neville. Lejeune commanded the 2d Division during the last phase of the Meuse-Argonne offensive, while Neville commanded the 4th Brigade.

Official U.S. Marine Corps photo



As second in command of the 5th Regiment during Belleau Wood, Kentuckian Logan Feland received the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions. After the battle, he moved up to command the 5th Regiment during the rest of the war.

Official U.S. Marine Corps photo

a reputation as an impressive fighting force.⁴

In summer and early fall 1918, the 4th Brigade continued fighting as part of the 2d Division. Harbord moved up to command the 2d Division for the Battle of Soissons in July 1918, while then-Colonel Neville took over leadership of the 4th Brigade. Neville had graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis in 1890 and served in Cuba during the Spanish-American War, in China during the Boxer Rebellion, in the Philippines, and in the Caribbean. He received a Medal of Honor for his actions during the invasion of Veracruz, Mexico, in

⁴ For more on the Marine Corps in World War I, see BGen Edwin Howard Simmons and Col Joseph H. Alexander, *Through the Wheat: The U.S. Marines in World War I* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2011); and Edwin McClellan, *The United States Marine Corps in the World War* (Washington, DC: Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1920 and 1968; History Division, Marine Corps University, 2015).

April 1914. On 1 January 1918, he had taken over command of the 5th Regiment and led it through the Battle of Belleau Wood.⁵

When Neville moved up to brigade commander in July 1918, leadership of the 5th Regiment passed to its second-in-command, then-Lieutenant Colonel Logan Feland, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology-educated Kentuckian who had joined the Marine Corps in 1899 after a stint in the Kentucky State Guard. Feland served in Cuba, the Philippines, and the Caribbean. He was one of the first instructors at the Advanced Base School in New London, Connecticut, commander of the Advanced Base Force's mining company, and head of the Philadelphia Military Training Camp (the

⁵ For more on Wendell Neville, see Allan R. Millett and Jack Shulimson, eds., *Commandants of the Marine Corps* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2004), 214–23.

Marine version of the Army's Plattsburgh, New York, training camp movement). He and future General Robert H. Dunlap accompanied General Pershing in the first small AEF contingent to France on the RMS *Baltic* in late May 1917.⁶ During Belleau Wood, Feland had distinguished himself with fearless battleground leadership, earning the friendship of General Harbord for life.

In July 1918, the 6th Regiment was led by then-Lieutenant Colonel Harry Lee, who had served in the Marine Corps during the Spanish-American War, spent several years on ships, and participated in expeditions to Nicaragua, Haiti, and Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. Lee had taken over command of the 6th Regiment on 6 June, during the Battle of Belleau Wood, when regimental commander Colonel Albertus W. Catlin was seriously wounded in the chest by a sniper.⁷

At the brigade level, adjutant Lieutenant Colonel Earl H. Ellis served as General Neville's right-hand man. Ellis would issue many of Neville's orders during the final phase of the Meuse-Argonne campaign. He had joined the Marine Corps as a private in 1900, and by the end of 1901, been commissioned a second lieutenant. He had served as Commandant Barnett's aide-de-camp, and General Lejeune had requested his services when dispatched to France. Ellis would receive a Navy Cross for his work as brigade adjutant:

He has ever shown himself ready for any emergency, even when he had been without sleep or rest for several days and nights at a time. His keen analytical mind, quick grasp of intricate problems, resourcefulness, decision and readiness to take prompt action on important questions arising during the temporary absence of the Brigade Commander within the Brigade, have contributed largely to the success of the Brigade, rendered his ser-



Harry Lee was second in command of the 6th Regiment during Belleau Wood, but took over leadership when the commander, Albertus W. Catlin, was wounded. Lee would continue to lead the regiment through the rest of the war.

Official U.S. Marine Corps photo

*vices invaluable and won for him the high esteem and complete confidence of the Brigade Commander.*⁸

After Soissons, Pershing moved Harbord to command the Services of Supply, and eventually tapped Lejeune to command the 2d Division. An 1888 U.S. Naval Academy graduate, Lejeune had led Marines in Panama, Cuba, the Philippines, and Mexico. He served as George Barnett's Assistant to the Commandant after the war broke out in Europe in 1914. After the United States entered the war in April 1917, he oversaw the new Marine base

⁶ More on Logan Feland can be found in David J. Bettez, *Kentucky Marine: Major General Logan Feland and the Making of the Modern USMC* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014).

⁷ A brief recount of Harry Lee's Marine Corps career can be found in "History of Brigadier General Harry Lee, USMC," *Leatherneck*, 15, no. 6, June 1932, 16; Harry Lee biographical file, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA; and his military file at the National Personnel Records Center, St. Louis, MO.

⁸ For more on Ellis, see Dirk A. Ballendorf and Merrill L. Bartlett, *Pete Ellis: An Amphibious Warfare Prophet, 1880-1923* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1996). Ellis's Navy Cross commendation can be found at "Earl Hancock Ellis," *Valor*. MilitaryTimes.com.

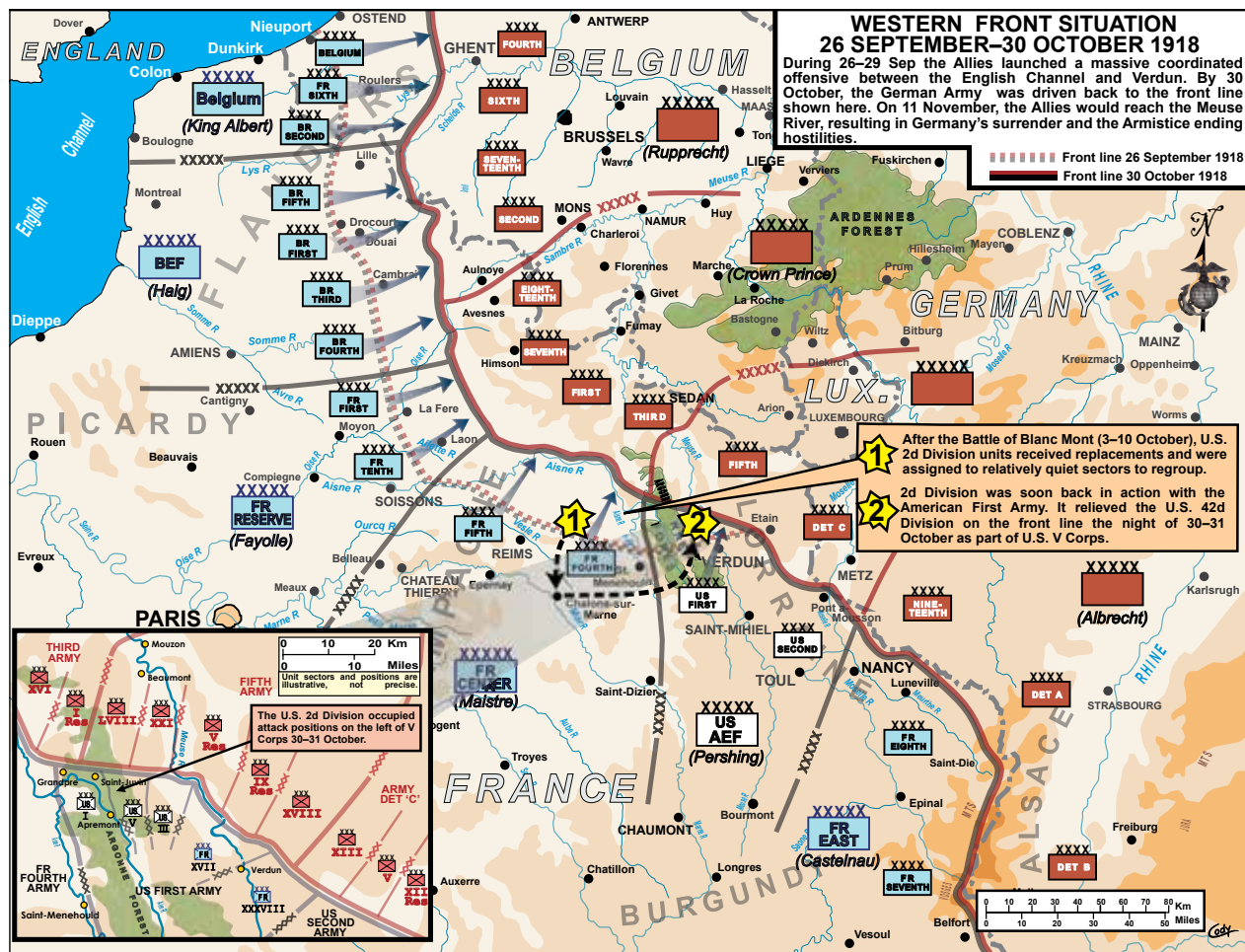


Illustration by LtCol R. L. "Bill" Cody, USMC (Ret)

at Quantico before being posted to France in summer 1918. Lejeune took command of the 2d Division on 28 July and led it through the rest of the war, including the Battle of Saint-Mihiel in mid-September and the Meuse-Argonne offensive.⁹

After the war, Lejeune would serve as Marine Corps Commandant from 1920 to 1929. Neville would become Marine Corps Commandant in 1929, while Harry Lee and Logan Feland would become major generals before retiring in the 1930s. By the time the battle had moved to Soissons, strong leadership from veteran Marines would steer

the division and the 4th Brigade and its regiments through the rest of World War I.¹⁰ The Marine Corps order of battle in the Meuse-Argonne operation for October–November 1918 is shown in appendix A.

The First Stages of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, 26 September–23 October 1918

The first phase of the Meuse-Argonne offensive began on 26 September with optimistic goals: U.S. troops would drive north for 64 kilometers (km) to the town of Sedan, a key railroad junction serving the German Army. Historians Rolfe Hillman Jr. and Peter F. Owen note that "by cutting this railroad, or

⁹ For a biography of John Lejeune, see Merrill L. Bartlett, *Lejeune: A Marine's Life, 1867–1942* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991). See also Lejeune's autobiography, MajGen John A. Lejeune, *The Reminiscences of a Marine* (Philadelphia, PA: Dorrance, 1930).

¹⁰ See also Gerald C. Thomas Jr., "Regimental Command 'Over There': 1917–1918," *Marine Corps Gazette* 81, no. 12 (December 1997): 87, 81.

just by clawing his way close enough to hit it with long-range artillery, Pershing hoped to achieve a colossal interruption in German logistics.”¹¹ In the meantime, British and French troops would attack from the north and west.

The American attack involved going through the Aire valley and skirting the Argonne Forest, an area heavily fortified by the Germans. In conjunction with French troops on their flanks, U.S. Army divisions attacked northward toward Sedan. Unfortunately, many of the American divisions involved in late September actions were untested, and the attack bogged down. By the end of the day on 28 September, “even Pershing could not deny that the Meuse-Argonne offensive looked close to failure.”¹² It was time to pause and regroup an American Army that was battered and exhausted.

For the second phase of the offensive that began on 4 October, Pershing committed some of his more experienced divisions. This attack proceeded at a better pace, but at a tremendous cost in men. For the entire 47 days of the Meuse-Argonne offensive, more than 25,000 Americans died, while nearly 100,000 were wounded. Most of these losses came during the first two phases of the campaign.¹³

During the Battle of Blanc Mont, 3–10 October, the Marines suffered enormous casualties, surpassing the carnage of Belleau Wood. The battle had a devastating effect on the 4th Brigade; at one point, it nearly collapsed under the withering fire of German machine guns on its left flank. The 5th Regiment’s 1st Battalion commander, Major



Earl H. Ellis served as adjutant of the 4th Brigade and was a key contributor to Marine success on the battlefield during the Blanc Mont and Meuse-Argonne offensives.
Official U.S. Marine Corps photo

George W. Hamilton and then-First Lieutenant James A. Nelms, commanding the 5th Regiment’s machine gun company, managed to rally the Marines, but the battle cost the Marines more than 2,400 casualties, including nearly 500 who were killed outright or later died of their wounds.¹⁴

By mid-October, General Pershing recognized that he could no longer lead effectively without adding subordinate commanders, which meant

¹¹ This was the assessment provided by Rolfe Hillman Jr. and Peter F. Owen in their annotation of Carl Andrew Brannen, *Over There: A Marine in the Great War* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1996), 53.

¹² Lengel, *To Conquer Hell*, 160. See also Yockelson, *Forty-Seven Days*, 166, who noted a pause in the offensive was necessary because Pershing’s army was “beat-up and needed rest.”

¹³ See Ferrell, *America’s Deadliest Battle*, 148, which puts the number of dead at 26,277. See also Leonard P. Ayres, *The War with Germany: A Statistical Summary* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1919), 113, 120. Ferrell uses Ayres’s statistics to compute the number of dead in the Meuse-Argonne offensive. The chief of the Statistics Branch of the General Staff, Col Ayres cited a total of 120,000 casualties for the campaign.

¹⁴ Marine casualty figures for the Battle of Blanc Mont, or the Meuse-Argonne (Champagne), are found in McClellan, *The United States Marine Corps in the World War*, 65. For more on the Battle of Blanc Mont, see Edwin McClellan, “The Battle of Blanc Mont Ridge,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 7, no. 1 (March 1922): 1–21, and “The Battle of Blanc Mont Ridge (continued),” *Marine Corps Gazette* 7, no. 2 (June 1922): 206–11; James R. Nilo, “The Battle of Blanc Mont,” *Leatherneck* 76, no. 10, October 1993, 10–15; Allan Bevilacqua, “The Battle of Blanc Mont Ridge,” *Leatherneck* 83, no. 11, November 2000, 26–31; and Edwin Simmons, “With the Marines at Blanc Mont,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 7, no. 11 (November 1993): 34–43.



Gen John J. Pershing (left) served as commander of the American Expeditionary Forces, while MajGen Charles Pelot Summerall (right) commanded V Corps, under which the Marine brigade served during the Meuse-Argonne offensive.
Official U.S. Marine Corps photo

reorganizing the AEF. Instead of commanding it himself, Pershing appointed Major General Hunter Liggett to command the U.S. First Army, and named Major General Robert L. Bullard to head the new U.S. Second Army. He also named Army artilleryman and former 1st Division commander Major General Charles Pelot Summerall to head First Army's V Corps, to which the 2d Division was assigned.

An 1892 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, Summerall had a reputation as a hard-driving, effective leader. At one point in mid-October, he removed a regimental and a brigade commander in the 42d Infantry Division; another brigade commander, Brigadier General

Douglas MacArthur, was also in danger of being relieved.¹⁵ Under Summerall's command, the Army V Corps would play a leading role in the final push.

¹⁵ See Yockelson, *Forty-Seven Days*, 260–65, for the relief of the two commanders—the 83d Brigade's BGen Michael J. Lenihan (USA) and 165th Infantry's Col Harry Mitchell—and for the pressure Summerall put on MacArthur to gain objectives. For more on Summerall, see Charles Pelot Summerall, *The Way of Duty, Honor, Country: The Memoir of Charles Pelot Summerall*, ed. Timothy Nenninger (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010). The 42d Infantry Division was known as the Rainbow Division. The term *rainbow* came from Gen Douglas MacArthur, then colonel and newly appointed chief of staff of the division, because “it spanned the nation like a rainbow.” The division insignia resembles a rainbow in bright, red, gold, and blue colors.

MEUSE-ARGONNE OFFENSIVE

U.S. First Army Area of Operations

30 October–11 November 1918



Illustration by LtCol R. L. "Bill" Cody, USMC (Ret)

Lejeune's 2d Division and the 4th Brigade would play a key role in V Corps.

After Blanc Mont, the 2d Division recuperated briefly, then underwent several forced marches while General Pershing reorganized the AEF. After refitting near Suippes during 10–14 October, the 4th Brigade was temporarily detached from the 2d Division to serve with the French IX Army Corps near Leffincourt. The Marines marched to Leffincourt on 21 October, only to be told they were being reassigned and to march back to their former camp at Châlons.

The Marines grew wet, cold, tired, hungry, and demoralized from their extensive marches. The 6th Regiment's Private Thomas Bryan McQuain later asserted that, at one point, they had hiked "for some 38 hours and seventy-five kilometers."¹⁶ In addition, the ravages of the world-wide Spanish influenza epidemic plagued the Marine brigade. As a result, the brigade took in nearly 1,500 new men to replace Marines lost during the attack on Blanc Mont or lost to influenza, dysentery, and other maladies. Most of the replacements had little training and no war experience. Unit cohesiveness suffered.¹⁷

THE PLAN AND THE KICKOFF, 24–31 OCTOBER 1918

After having been assigned to assist French forces, on 24 October, the 4th Brigade was returned to the 2d Division for the kickoff of the final phase of the Meuse-Argonne offensive. The Americans would complete the drive north toward Sedan, now about 48 km from their jumping-off point.

By 25 October, plans for the third major phase of the offensive had evolved. The First Army's V Corps would be the point of the spear in an American attack north toward Sedan, with III Corps on its right (east) and I Corps on its left (west).

In the V Corps advance, the 2d Division would

pair with the 89th Division, which would attack on the 2d Division's right (eastern) flank. The 80th Division of I Corps would attack on the 2d Division's left (western) flank. The first day's objective was the heights of Barricourt about 40km southeast of Sedan, where the American Army had bogged down earlier in the face of intensive German resistance.¹⁸

In a post-war analysis of the task facing the First Army in this last stage of the Meuse-Argonne campaign, then Army major Andrew D. Bruce, the commander of the 2d Division's 4th Machine Gun Battalion, explained: "The primary object of the First Army was to pierce the line through Landres-et-St. Georges and form a wedge to the vicinity of Fosse. This in order to break the backbone of enemy resistance west of the Meuse, to immediately loosen the flanks of the Army, and force the retreat of the enemy to the east of the Meuse."¹⁹

The Opposition:

The Situation with Germany and Its Allies

The American forces may have been tired from fighting in September and October, but they were slowly succeeding in pushing back the Germans; the Central Powers alliance was collapsing. Bulgaria had dropped out of the war in late September. On 27 October, German Army leader General Erich Ludendorff resigned. Germany's ally Turkey signed an armistice on 30 October. The German Army weakened more every day, retreating but trying to consolidate behind prepared lines to keep up stubborn, deadly resistance.

¹⁶ Thomas Bryan McQuain, *To the Front and Back: A West Virginia Marine Fights World War I* (Westminster, MD: Heritage Books, 2005), 77.

¹⁷ See George B. Clark, *Devil Dogs: Fighting Marines of World War I* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1999), 244, citing an operations report for 10–13 October 1918 that notes the number of replacements.

¹⁸ For the order of battle, see Lengel, *To Conquer Hell*, 386–87. See also *Field Orders No. 49*, 31 October 1918, Headquarters Second Division (Regular), 2d Division Field Orders, in Capt Cylburn O. Mattfeldt, *Records of the Second Division (Regular)*, vol. 1, pt. 4 (Washington, DC: Army War College, 1924–29), noting that the "object of attack west of the MEUSE is to carry the heights of Barricourt." All future references to regimental, brigade, and divisional orders and memorandums are taken from this 10-volume collection. The first eight volumes are available at the Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA.

¹⁹ See p. 6 of Andrew D. Bruce, "Operations of the Second Division (U.S.) during Third Phase of Meuse-Argonne," Company Officers' Course, 1923–1924, Military History Section, Department of General Subjects, Infantry School, Fort Benning, GA, a copy of which is found in the Army Heritage and Education Center (AHEC), Carlisle, PA.

In a post-war analysis published in *Infantry Journal*, the chief of staff of the German *XVI Army Corps*, Major Herman von Giehl, asserted that the Germans knew a major attack was forthcoming, but they simply did not have the resources to thwart it. The Germans had sustained heavy losses early in October and lacked complete, fresh divisions for frontline or reserve action; they were well aware that Austria-Hungary was seeking an armistice. German troops knew that political discussions had occurred with the United States about a possible end of the war. Troops transferred from the Russian front “had been exposed too long to the destroying influence of the Russian revolution and Bolshevik propaganda.”²⁰

Given these weaknesses, the Germans designed a plan to gradually withdraw to lines in the rear that were shorter, easier to defend, and supported by favorable terrain. This strategy also would enable German troops to get better food and shelter and recuperate before the impending American attack.²¹

The Initial Plan and the Kickoff

By 26 October, after more debilitating marching, the 2d Division had gathered near Exermont, about 19km south of Barricourt, to prepare for what would be the final phase of the Meuse-Argonne campaign and the war. Two German defensive lines remained to be breached: the *Kriemhilde Stellung* (eastern section of Hindenburg Line), and then the *Freya Stellung* (new section to the north), which lay along the Barricourt Heights. The plan was for the 2d Division to strike north about 9km, through an east/west line from Saint-Georges to Landres-et-Saint-Georges, then onward to Landreville, Chennery, and Bayonville. Then, it would turn to the northeast to attack the heights of Barricourt.

Division orders stipulated that, in the preattack movement northward, “every effort will be made to ensure secrecy of troop movements.” Troops would march during the day *only* under cover of bad

weather conditions or in wooded terrain; otherwise, the troops would march at night.²² D-day was set for 1 November; the attack would begin at H-hour, or 0530 that morning.

The 2d Division would pass through 42d Division and assume command of the front at noon on 31 October, with the 23d Regiment on the right and 4th Brigade on the left. The 23d Regiment would advance with two battalions in the attack and one in support. The 4th Brigade would attack with regiments side by side. In each regiment, one battalion would follow another. Each battalion would include two lines of two companies each.²³

Divisional instructions ordered that “a vigorous, powerful attack will be made, supported by every available means of delivering fire, including machine guns, 37 m/m guns and [British] Stokes’ [trench] mortars. Dense formations will be avoided.” The attacking infantry would not be alone. Artillery, machine gun detachments, engineers, tanks, gas and flame units, planes, combat liaison with flanking units, and reserve components would support the attacking Army and Marine units. Further instructions covered such issues as stragglers, prisoners of war, and burial details.²⁴

The Kickoff: Visits by General Summerall

General Summerall visited his V Corps regiments and battalions in the two days prior to the expected offensive on 1 November. Marine Gunnery Sergeant Don V. Paradis remembered Summerall’s visit to the 2d Battalion, 6th Regiment, as a positive moment. Summerall laid out the plan of the forthcoming attack, which he was sure would be a success and would help end the war quickly. Paradis

²² *Field Orders No. 47*, 26 October 1918, vol. 1, pt. 4.

²³ *Field Orders No. 48*, 31 October, 1918, vol. 1, pt. 4. For more on the Marine Corps in the Meuse-Argonne, see Edwin Simmons, “Marines in the Meuse-Argonne, Part I: Reaching the Meuse,” *Fortitudine* 23, no. 3, Winter 1993–94, 3–10; and “Marines in the Meuse-Argonne, Part II: Crossing the Meuse,” *Fortitudine* 23, no. 4, Spring 1994, 3–8.

²⁴ See “Tentative Plan of Attack,” 25 October 1918, and *Field Orders No. 48*, 30 October 1918, Headquarters Second Division (Regular), 2d Division Field Orders, vol. 1, pt. 4. These instructions were repeated in *Field Order No. 49* on 31 October 1918. See also *Field Orders No. 32*, undated, Headquarters, 4th Brigade, vol. 2, pt. 1.

²⁰ Herman von Giehl, “Battle of the Meuse-Argonne,” *Infantry Journal* 19, no. 4 (October 1921).

²¹ von Giehl, “Battle of the Meuse-Argonne,” 383–84.

remarked: "It was the only pep talk I had ever heard on any front and the only time we actually knew before we went in what our main purpose was outside of stopping the Heinies [Germans] or pushing them back. It sure had its effect on the morale of the men. It was the first really good news they had heard for months."²⁵

Paradis was fortunate. Appreciating the fact that the gunnery sergeant had never been wounded through all the earlier Marine battles, his captain, Kirt Green, delegated Paradis to the reserve detachment that made up 20 percent of his company.

Private Elton E. Mackin of the 1st Battalion, 5th Regiment, vividly recalled Summerall's visit to his battalion, though with a much different perspective. The Army general arrived on a "beautiful black horse" and lectured the Marines.

*He talked bare-headed, his two-starred helmet hanging from a saddletie [sic], his gloves tucked neatly in his Sam Browne [duty] belt. His riding crop, like his horse, was big and black and strong. He aimed it like a pointer, stressing things he wanted done, or slapped his booted leg to make a point. We gave him our full attention. He did not mince his words. He made us understand.*²⁶

Summerall admonished the veterans and new Marines to take a railhead, capture German artillery, and take three ridges. They were to take no prisoners or stop to aid friends. Mackin and his fellow Marines responded to Summerall's speech with silence, after which the general gave a half-hearted salute and rode away, leaving them to grumble and curse him.²⁷

Private Thomas McQuain recalled that "we of the 2d Division had been selected to attack the hardest part of the line near St. Georges and Landres-et-St. Georges. This would give us an opportunity to further distinguish ourselves. We



Elton E. Mackin served as a 1st Battalion, 5th Regiment, runner. His World War I experiences were captured in the memoir *Suddenly We Didn't Want to Die*. Elton Mackin Collection, Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Library and Museums

thought that this would be nice, but it was further observed by us, that a lot of us would not be there to know anything about it."²⁸

One of the best chroniclers of the Marine experience in the last days of the war, Private John E. Ausland from Captain Charley Dunbeck's 2d Battalion, 5th Regiment, also wrote about Summerall's appearance with General Lejeune.²⁹ In Ausland's war diary, he described how Lejeune stood on a

²⁵ Donald V. Paradis, *The World War I Memoirs of Donald V. Paradis, Gunnery Sergeant, USMC*, ed. Peter F. Owen (self-published, n.d.), 121.

²⁶ Elton E. Mackin, *Suddenly We Didn't Want to Die: Memoirs of a World War I Marine* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1993), 225.

²⁷ Mackin, *Suddenly We Didn't Want to Die*, 225–27.

²⁸ McQuain, *To the Front and Back*, 84.

²⁹ Born in Norway in 1896, Ausland had enlisted in the Marines as John E. Aasland. While serving under this name in the Meuse-Argonne campaign, he received his second Silver Star citation for "rescuing a wounded comrade under fire" on 1 November. After the war, Ausland would assume the name John Ausland, by which he is better known, having published articles under the names John or Jack Ausland.

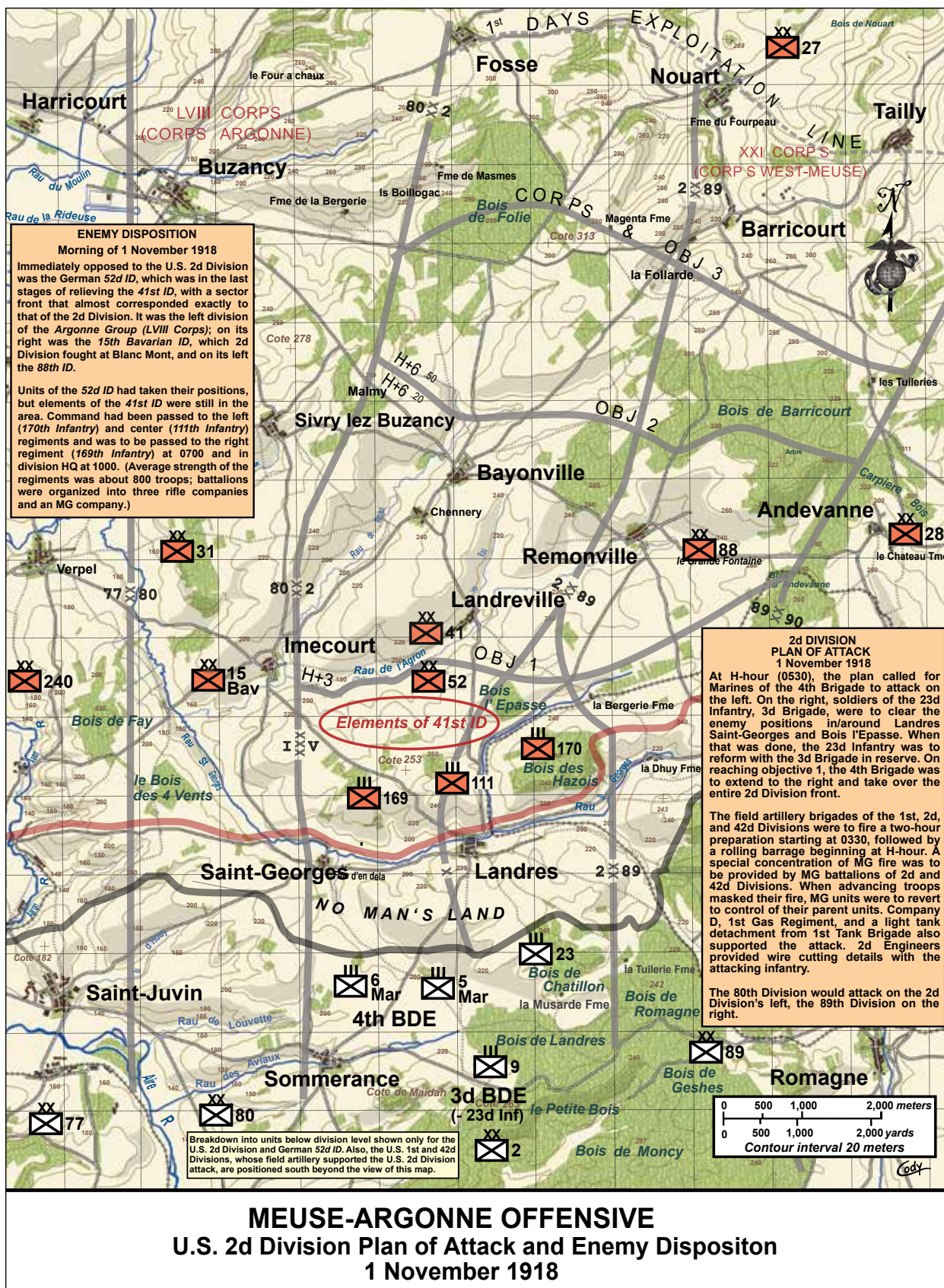


Illustration by LtCol R. L. "Bill" Cody, USMC (Ret)

stump and introduced Summerall, who proceeded to lay out their goal and warn the battalion that “ahead of you is much barbed wire, artillery, and many machine guns. Many Germans will bar your way, and many of you will be killed, but you have the point of honor and I know you will do it.” Ausland wrote that Summerall bowed; the Marines “applauded a little, not understanding all of what he had in mind, then they left for other battalions. Maybe he likes to josh us about getting killed.”³⁰

To carry out the attack Summerall described, the Marines would have to traverse difficult terrain on foot, because few roads existed on which to bring in men and supplies. Army machine gun officer Major Andrew Bruce later described the landscape as “varied and ragged.”³¹ Immediately ahead, the territory south of the objective line, running from Saint-Georges to Landres-et-Saint-Georges, was littered with partially completed trenches, machine-gun emplacements, ravines, and barbed wire.

Forests offered the Germans strong defensive points. In the hillsides above the Americans’ destination, the Germans held good positions from which to fire machine guns and artillery. Bruce pointed out that the Meuse River served to anchor the German left flank, and the hills on the east side of the river “afforded observation points and positions for the enemy to deliver oblique fire on our right.” Conversely, the 2d Division also could fire from heights and woods as it advanced northward, but only after moving uphill from the low ground.³²

As the time of the attack approached, the Marines prepared. They had dinner, which in some cases consisted of steak, creamed potatoes, toast, coffee, and doughnuts. Officers gathered their men to review final tactics. Unfortunately, maps were at a premium with few to be shared.³³

The Detailed Plan

Learning from the Battle of Blanc Mont, Generals Liggett, Summerall, and Lejeune planned a more thorough artillery bombardment prior to the attack. Before the troops moved north toward Saint-Georges, artillery would clear the way with a massive shelling.

Historian Mark Ethan Grotelueschen asserts that “all three commanders shared, in varying degrees, an appreciation of the critical role of firepower in the attack and were not going to be constrained by the limitations of official AEF doctrine.” In other words, they would not simply order their men to charge forward with only rifle and bayonet into withering German artillery and machine gun fire without proper artillery support. To this end, “Summerall created the most powerful and comprehensive American attack plan of the war.”³⁴

The plan recognized four phases of artillery support: “the period before the preliminary bombardment, the preliminary bombardment, the fire accompanying the infantry assault, and the support after the consolidation of the main objective.”³⁵

In the first period, artillery would concentrate on firing “gas and explosive rounds on important targets such as batteries, command posts, and transportation routes.” The second phase would be a two-hour, intensive fire barrage “determined by the amount of ammunition available for the guns while firing at their maximum rate. During this period, the light guns were to hit the enemy front lines and suspected troop concentrations while the heavy howitzers hit towns, woods, strong points, and machine-gun nests. The guns with the longest range targeted enemy batteries to neutralize them before the attack, making extensive use of both persistent and nonpersistent gas.”³⁶

³⁰ Diary entry of John Ausland, “The Last Kilometer, The Meuse-Argonne,” Wednesday, 30 October 1918, Ausland File, Box “2d Division, 5th Regiment,” World War I Veterans Survey Collection, AHEC, Carlisle, PA.

³¹ Bruce, “Operations of the Second Division (U.S.) during Third Phase of the Meuse-Argonne.”

³² Bruce, “Operations of the Second Division (U.S.) during Third Phase of the Meuse-Argonne,” 12–14.

³³ Bruce, “Operations of the Second Division (U.S.) during Third Phase of the Meuse-Argonne,” 25.

³⁴ Mark Ethan Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War: The American Army and Combat in World War I* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 267, 268.

³⁵ Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War*, 269.

³⁶ Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War*, 269–70. *Nonpersistent gases* are those that, when released into the air, disperse quickly, leaving no liquid contamination. *Persistent gases* are liquids that evaporate slowly. They give off vapor or remain dangerous until the liquid has dried both on and below the surface or until they have been rendered ineffective.

Grotelueschen points out that “covering fire during the attack was even more important than the preliminary bombardment.”³⁷ The first two periods were meant to negate counterbattery fire, but in the third period, all artillery would focus on a complex rolling barrage in front of the attacking troops. Lighter guns would fire rounds to land just ahead of the advancing men while heavier weapons fired a few hundred meters farther on.

All this supporting fire was to be perfectly timed at so many meters per minute, depending on the terrain. To move the artillery forward, strict timetables, transportation paths, and new locations were planned. Grotelueschen concludes: “Without a doubt, it was the most centralized and complex fire plan the 2d Division ever executed.”³⁸

To put this ambitious plan into effect, Summerall called on First Army and V Corps’ artillery to augment the 2d Division’s own 2d Field Artillery Brigade. This brigade consisted of three artillery regiments: the 12th and 15th Field Artillery Regiments, 75mm gun units, and the 17th Field Artillery Regiment, a 155mm howitzer unit. Altogether, more than 300 guns of various calibers would support each V Corps division. In addition, Summerall’s plan called for massive machine-gun and mortar fire.³⁹

Two Marine Corps officers served in these 2d Division Army artillery units: Colonel Robert H. Dunlap and Major Edwin H. Brainard. Assigned in April 1914 to consolidate Marine artillery into a battalion during the invasion at Veracruz, Dunlap was known as the “father of Marine Corps artillery.” He became commander of the 17th Field Artillery just as the third phase of the Meuse-Argonne campaign kicked off.⁴⁰ Brainard command-



A fearless warrior, George W. Hamilton commanded the 1st Battalion, 5th Regiment, during the Blanc Mont and Meuse-Argonne offensives, and commanded the Marine attack across the Meuse River on the last night of the war. Unscathed during the war, he died flying a Marine Corps plane during the Gettysburg maneuvers in 1922.

Official U.S. Marine Corps photo

ed the 1st Battalion, 15th Field Artillery Regiment.⁴¹

The 4th Brigade’s commander, General Neville, decided the order of battle. It called for the 5th Regiment under Colonel Feland to advance on the right, while the 6th Regiment under Colonel Lee

³⁷ Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War*, 270.

³⁸ Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War*, 270–71.

³⁹ Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War*, 268–69.

⁴⁰ He would receive the Navy Cross for his distinguished service as regimental commander.

⁴¹ For more on Robert Dunlap, see Gerald C. Thomas Jr., “A Warrior-Scholar in the World War: Robert Henry Dunlap,” *Leatherneck* 82, no. 1, January 1998, 88, 82. For Brainard, see “Major Brainard Resigns for Curtiss Position,” *Leatherneck* 12, no. 6, June 1929, 15. Brainard would receive the Navy Cross for his leadership earlier in the Meuse-Argonne campaign; in the 1920s, he would serve as officer in charge of Marine Corps Aviation.



Commanding the 2d Battalion, 5th Regiment, during the Meuse-Argonne campaign, Charley Dunbeck led his Marines across the Meuse River on the last night of the war.

Official U.S. Marine Corps photo



Henry L. Larsen commanded the 3d Battalion, 5th Regiment, during the Meuse-Argonne offensive and would retire as a lieutenant general after serving in World War II.

Official U.S. Marine Corps photo

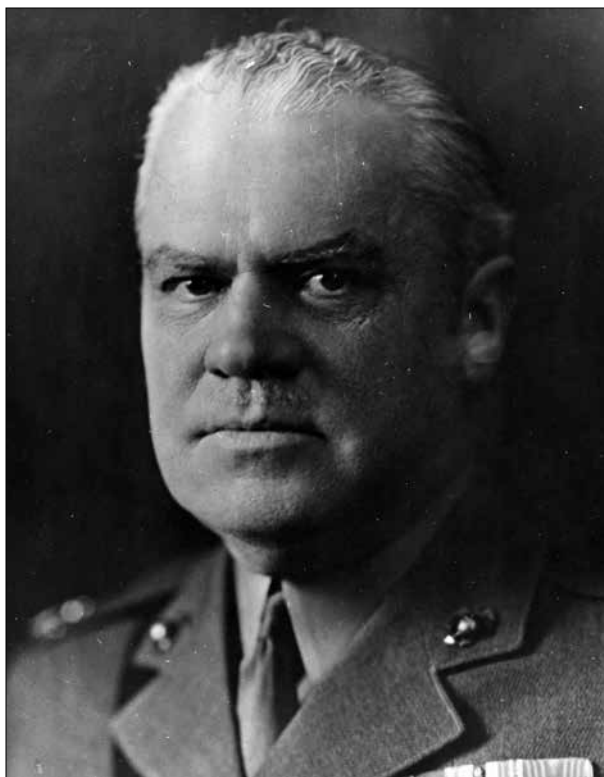
moved forward on the left. In the 5th Regiment, the 1st Battalion would be led by Major Hamilton and supported by the 8th Machine Gun Company. The 2d Battalion, commanded by Captain Charley Dunbeck, would follow, supported by the 23d Machine Gun Company. The 3d Battalion was headed by Major Henry L. Larsen and supported by the 77th Machine Gun Company.

In the 6th Regiment, Major Frederick A. Barker would command the 1st Battalion; the 73d Machine Gun Company would provide support. The 2d Battalion was led by Major Ernest C. Williams and supported by the 15th Machine Gun Company. Major George K. Shuler led the 3d Battalion, supported by the 81st Machine Gun Company. Each battalion had specific goals set out in a timetable,

and they had to be prepared to pass through preceding battalions at the discretion of the regimental commanders.

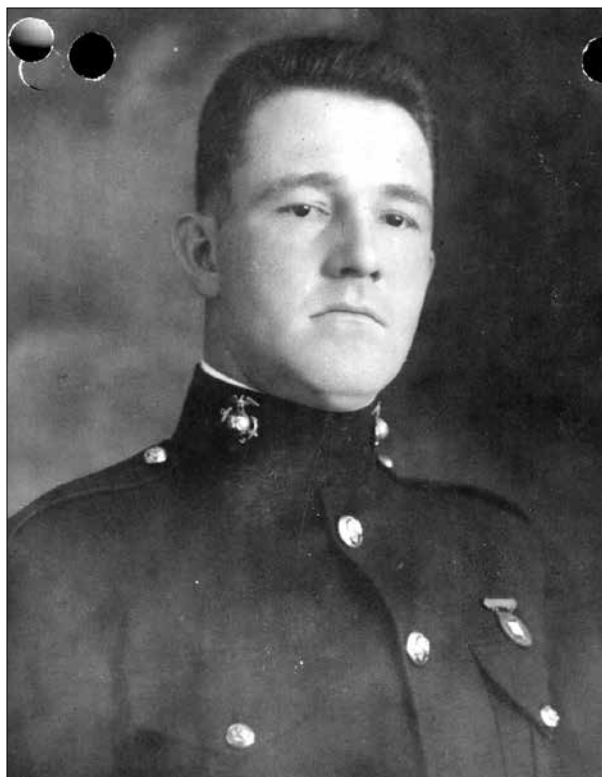
Regimental commanders Feland and Lee could count on excellent, battle-hardened battalion commanders. George Hamilton had proven a brave and resourceful captain in the earliest stages of the Battle of Belleau Wood, when he led an attack on Hill 142 just west of the wood. He also played a crucial role in keeping the Marines from disintegrating at one point during the Battle of Blanc Mont.⁴² With

⁴² For more on George Hamilton, see Mark Mortensen, *George W. Hamilton, USMC: America's Greatest World War I Hero* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011); and Ronald J. Brown, "George Wallis Hamilton: The Forgotten Hero of World War I," *Leath-erneck* 86, no. 11, November 2003, 46–51.



Commander of the 1st Battalion, 6th Regiment, during the Meuse-Argonne offensive, Frederick A. Barker received the Navy Cross for his leadership on 1 November 1918, the first day of the last stage of the offensive.

Official U.S. Marine Corps photo



Ernest C. Williams commanded the 2d Battalion, 6th Regiment, during the last phase of the Meuse-Argonne offensive. He had previously received the Medal of Honor during the Dominican Republic campaign in 1916.

Official U.S. Marine Corps photo

George K. Shuler (shown at right as a captain) led the 3d Battalion, 6th Regiment, during the last stages of the Meuse-Argonne offensive and made a fateful decision not to attack across the Meuse River on the last night of the war. Nevertheless, he served at Headquarters Marine Corps after the war, before leaving to become New York state treasurer.

Official U.S. Marine Corps photo



the Marine left flank in danger of collapsing under heavy German fire, Hamilton had rallied the Marines and stopped what could have become a grave defeat of the attack.

After joining in 1903, Charley Dunbeck had worked his way up the enlisted ranks to be a Marine gunner. After the United States entered the war, he was quickly promoted to captain and then, while commanding the 43d Company, 2d Battalion, 5th Regiment, at Belleau Wood was shot in both legs. At the Battle of Blanc Mont, a head wound took

him off the battle field for a short time. After recuperating, he assumed command of the 2d Battalion on 16 October, just in time for the third phase of the Meuse-Argonne offensive.⁴³

Henry Larsen had joined the Marine Corps in 1913 as a second lieutenant and done expeditionary duty in Santo Domingo in 1916. He led valiantly as a captain during the Battle of Belleau Wood and as a major commanding the 3d Battalion in the Battle of Blanc Mont. Hamilton, Dunbeck, and Larsen all received the Navy Cross and Silver Star Citations for their bravery under fire.⁴⁴

In the 6th Regiment, Frederick Barker had served three years as an Army enlisted man, then joined the Marine Corps in 1904, where he would see extensive service in Haiti and the Dominican Republic. He had already received three Silver Star Citations and would receive a Navy Cross and another Silver Star for his actions on November 1.

Major George K. Shuler had joined the Marine Corps in 1910 and had extensive battle leadership, receiving three Silver Star Citations for his actions at Soissons, Saint-Mihiel, and Blanc Mont. Ernest Williams had received a Medal of Honor for his actions in attacking a fortress in the Dominican Republic in 1916. In 1918, he received a Navy Cross and three Silver Star Citations for his actions at Soissons, Saint-Mihiel, and the Meuse-Argonne.⁴⁵

Assessment of the German Opposition

Before the planned attack, General Summerall summoned his division commanders to his headquarters several times to discuss the coming battle and the German strengths. He alleged that the

German troops aligned against V Corps were the best, that they were extremely brave and “held their ground and, when surrounded, refused to surrender, but attacked their opponents with trench knives, and fought hand to hand until killed.” Summerall believed that earlier American attacks had failed because of heavy German machine gun fire at the beginning of the attack, which prevented the Americans from following behind their artillery barrages. For this reason, the V Corps commander believed in involving more artillery in the upcoming action.⁴⁶

In previous attacks, the Germans had rushed machine guns into the gap in no-man’s-land to mow down the first line of advancing troops. To counter this maneuver, John Lejeune’s chief of staff, Army Colonel James C. Rhea, devised yet another plan: the Marines would pull back 300 hundred yards just before the planned artillery bombardment began. The rolling barrage would then be calibrated to fall into the no-man’s-land, wiping out the enemy machine guns before the Marines advanced.⁴⁷

While the AEF made their plans, the German Army was relieving the forces arrayed against the Marines. The *52d Division* had fought south of the region but had fallen back to Landres-et-Saint-Georges by mid-October. After being withdrawn, rested for two weeks, and supplemented by several replacement troops, the division had been sent back toward Landres-et-Saint-Georges on the night of 31 October to relieve the *41st Division*.

The intelligence section of the U.S. general staff rated the *52d Division* as “one of the best German divisions.” Before the division was in place, however, a battalion of the *169th Regiment* lost 6 officers and 220 enlisted to a massive American gas attack on 30 October. Elements of the *41st Division* would still be in the area after the American attack began on 1 November, but the combination of the *41st* and *52d*

⁴³ For more on Charley Dunbeck, see Maj Allan C. Bevilacqua, “World War I: A Marine Called Charley,” *Leatherneck* 95, no. 11, November 2012, 50–56. See also Gerald C. Thomas Jr., “Battalion Command ‘Over There’: The Fifth Marines, 1917–1918,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 81, no. 9 (September 1997): 112, 106.

⁴⁴ Details on Henry Larsen and Charley Dunbeck are also found in their military files at the National Personnel Records Center [NPRC], St. Louis, MO, while more on Dunbeck and Hamilton can be found in their personnel files contained in Record Group (RG) 125, Records of the Office of the Judge Advocate General (Navy), National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington, DC.

⁴⁵ For more on the 6th Regiment battalion commanders, see Thomas, “Battalion Command ‘Over There,’” 88, 78.

⁴⁶ Chief of staff, 2d Division [J. C. Rhea], to commanding general, 2d Division [John Lejeune], Report of Operations, 2d Division, 1–2 November 1918, dated 2 November 1918, Headquarters 2d Division, vol. 6, pt. 4, AHEC, hereafter Rhea letter.

⁴⁷ Rhea letter. See also Ausland, “The Last Kilometer,” in which Ausland reproduces a handwritten letter (also in the file) from John Lejeune giving credit to Col Rhea for the idea to catch the German machine guns unaware in no-man’s-land.

Divisions, including reserves from other German units, remained weak.⁴⁸

German frontline divisions had suffered great losses in the first stages of the Meuse-Argonne campaign. Their reserves also were insufficient, both in number of units available and in manpower. They never enabled the Germans to launch any effective counterattacks on a large scale. In short, the Germans suffered from disproportionate numbers of troops, much weaker than the American divisions they faced.⁴⁹

To the west of the *52d Division*, the German *15th Bavarian Division* had occupied positions since mid-October. U.S. intelligence forces concluded that “it did not offer a vigorous resistance to the American attacks at first, but in late October and early November it did all in its power to check the American advance.” The intelligence section rated the *15th Bavarian Division* as third class, asserting that “heavy losses in Champagne in September and October, the prevalent sickness, political discontent, and dissatisfaction with Prussia continued to give the division a low morale.”⁵⁰

THE BEGINNING OF THE END, 1 NOVEMBER 1918

Shortly after 2100 on 31 October, 2d Division units received orders affirming that the attack would

⁴⁸ *Histories of Two Hundred and Fifty-One Divisions of the German Army which Participated in the War (1914–1918)* (Chaumont, France: AEF General Headquarters, 1919), 503. See also von Giehl, “Battle of the Meuse-Argonne,” 534.

⁴⁹ von Giehl, “Battle of the Meuse-Argonne,” 540.

⁵⁰ *Histories of Two Hundred and Fifty-One Divisions of the German Army*, 261. Initially, the AEF graded the quality of the German divisions in 1918 using the French-produced evaluations/histories as an initial basis because the French Army had estimated the value of each German division in earlier years. For the Americans, the evaluation was done by the G-2 (intelligence), General Headquarters, AEF. The quality or class was a changing grade or estimate based on known abilities of the unit. As the war wore on, many of the divisions considered first class were downgraded as old men, young boys, and even the infirm were brought into some of the divisions. The G-2 used frontline U.S. reports and interviews to grade a unit according to four classes: first-class division, second-class division, third-class division, and fourth-class division. At the beginning of the war, certain units were rated first class; for example, infantry divisions were the best. Later, it was necessary to track the combat efficiency of the German divisions to gauge the caliber of the opposing force.

begin at 0530 on 1 November. Prior to the opening bombardment, Corporal Vincent B. Grube of the 23d Machine Gun Company, 6th Machine Gun Battalion, moved forward with his machine gun crew. Grube had arrived in France in August with the 1st Separate Machine Gun Replacement Battalion and had joined the 23d Machine Gun Company on 23 October. In pitch dark, he and his crew trudged single file through forests carrying their heavy equipment. After traversing banks and “rough places where wire, mud, limbs, etc., would trip you,” they came to a field, where they dug in to set up their machine gun post. When 0330 came, Grube and his men began firing their gun, expecting that they would use up to 3,000 rounds during the preattack bombardment.⁵¹

When the barrage began, to Grube, *it seemed as though the gates of hell had been opened, and all its fury had launched at the enemy. All through this my gunner showed the greatest coolness and bravery. The Germans tried to neutralize our fire. Shells landed nearer and nearer. The earth shook as though there was an earthquake. Now and then I could hear a wounded man calling for first aid, and could see the Red Cross men hurrying here and there to give first aid to the injured. Litter bearers hurried them to the rear, and all the time the firing continued. I tried to keep cool, and all the time I prayed for God's protection. Thoughts of home came to my mind, and I asked God to have mercy and spare my life. It certainly was hell on earth.*⁵²

When a shell hit 20 feet away, Grube saw “a piece of shrapnel hit my section sergeant right in the forehead, and split his head in half as though an ax had done it.” After Grube went “over the top,” he saw a captain blown to pieces by a shell, and he heard machine guns bullets zip by, “making a funny peeping noise like a sparrow. That’s just what they sounded to me—a sparrow chirping.”⁵³

At 0330 on 1 November, Marines hunkered

⁵¹ Diary of Vincent B. Grube, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA, hereafter Grube diary.

⁵² Grube diary.

⁵³ Grube diary.



Clarence L. Richmond received the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions at Blanc Mont. His World War I diary was reprinted in his local Cleveland, TN, newspaper.
 Courtesy of Robin Richmond (grandson), *The War Diary of Clarence Richmond*



Wounded at Belleau Wood, James M. Sellers returned to action and served bravely during the Blanc Mont offensive. After the war, he spent the rest of his life at Wentworth Military Academy in Lexington, MO, eventually serving as its president.
 Official U.S. Marine Corps photo

down in their holes while the immediate preattack bombardment began. East Tennessee native Private Clarence L. Richmond served as a stretcher-bearer in the 43d Company, 2d Battalion, 5th Regiment. He would later receive a Distinguished Service Cross for service at Blanc Mont because he “unhesitatingly went through the heaviest machine-gun and artillery fire dressing and carrying wounded. Disregarding his own safety, he refused to take rest or food while there were wounded needing attention.”⁵⁴

Richmond’s war diary described events the night of 1 November. He remarked that several

American batteries of 75mm cannon fired nearby, and that the Germans replied with a counterbarrage, but “not near in proportion to ours. The noise was so great that I could only hear a few enemy shells which fell right near us.” Unable to sleep, Richmond “watched the horizon, which was a continuous flash of fire from the hundreds of guns taking part in the barrage.”⁵⁵

Captain James McBrayer Sellers, commanding officer of the 78th Company, 2d Battalion, 6th Regiment, had already been wounded and received the Distinguished Service and the Navy Cross for his

⁵⁴ For more on his Distinguished Service Cross, see “Clarence L. Richmond,” Valor.MilitaryTimes.com.

⁵⁵ See “Recollections of a Buck Private ‘Somewhere in France’: The War Memoir of Clarence L. Richmond,” Robin Richmond, com, 23 January 2014, hereafter Richmond war diary. The diary was first printed in the *Cleveland (TN) Daily Banner* in 1979.

actions on 6 June at Bouresches in the Battle of Belleau Wood as a first lieutenant. As he recalled the bombardment on the night of 31 October/1 November, Sellers noted that “the artillery was brought up very close to us. It was the only time I ever felt nervous. The artillery was just a few yards behind us, firing all night, and I could not sleep very well. I did not relish the situation and really felt uneasy.”⁵⁶

The artillery bombardment also included gas shells: “Summerall was in full agreement with Liggett that the fire plan drench the enemy with various kinds of gas, especially on the enemy’s artillery batteries and most powerful strong points.”⁵⁷ The task of setting up the gas attack fell to the 1st Gas Regiment’s 2d Battalion, which supported V Corps. In the week prior to the final attack, the battalion’s Company D supporting the Marines installed 160 gas projectors 1.5km south of Saint-Georges and 40 gas projectors a similar distance southwest of Landres-et-Saint-Georges.

The gas projectors were tubes eight inches in diameter and closed at one end, resting on a 28-pound steel base plate. They came in three lengths—30, 33, and 48 inches—and weighed 65, 105, and 150 pounds, respectively. They were set up in groups of 20 in a 9.75-m-long trench perpendicular to the line of attack. Covered with dirt so only a small amount of the tube stuck out of the ground, they were easy to camouflage. They fired cylindrical drums weighing 65 pounds and carrying 30 pounds of gas or high explosives for a maximum range of 1,850 yards.⁵⁸

When the attack came, Company D shot 80 canisters of phosgene gas on enemy targets south of Saint-Georges. The 1st Gas Regiment’s chaplain, Army first lieutenant James Thayer Addison, recalled that “since the wind was south and carried through the village and down the ravine northward, enemy casualties were heavy. Prisoners later report-

ed some 300 gas cases, and more than 20 bodies of men killed by gas were found on the position.” One minute before H-hour, “a group of 40 projectors discharged high explosive bombs upon the same targets, and still another launched the same number upon machine-gun nests southeast of Landres-et-Saint-Georges.”⁵⁹

Stokes mortars joined the barrage, firing 50 rounds of thermite bombs.⁶⁰ Stokes mortars were 4 inches in diameter and 48 inches long, firing a 25-pound cylindrical drum holding seven pounds of gas, high explosive, thermite, or phosphorus, for a maximum distance of 1,150 yards. Chaplain Addison concluded that “the weapons described can produce a far more concentrated cloud of gas than it is possible to produce with artillery. Hence the Special Gas Troops have a field which it is impossible for the artillery to fill. The artillery, of course, have a tremendous advantage in range.”⁶¹

H-hour: Over the Top

At H-hour, officers blew their whistles and the Marines moved quickly into a dense fog, behind a rolling barrage designed to fall roughly 100 yards ahead of them. A complement of nearly 100 troops from 2d Engineers also charged forward with the Marines to blaze a path through the barbed wire. In addition, 15 light French tanks manned by Americans went forward; 5 tanks accompanied each of the 5th and 6th Regiments, with the other 5 serving initially to support the Army’s 23d Infantry on the right, before falling back into reserve.⁶²

Private Ralph Williams of the 2d Engineers was happy to be assigned to support the Marines.

⁵⁶ Quote taken from a part of Sellers’s diary reproduced in George B. Clark, ed., *Devil Dogs Chronicle: Voices of the 4th Marine Brigade in World War I* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2013), 323.

⁵⁷ Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War*, 268.

⁵⁸ James Thayer Addison, *The Story of the First Gas Regiment* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1919), 172–73. See appendix D for a description of the equipment used by the regiment.

⁵⁹ Addison, *The Story of the First Gas Regiment*, 175.

⁶⁰ Thermite grenades are one of the most destructive weapons used by the military, rendering a powerful incendiary device that produces intense heat through a chemical reaction and destroys anything it touches. Some thermite grenades have been known to burn at temperatures of nearly 4,000° Fahrenheit.

⁶¹ Addison, *The Story of the First Gas Regiment*, 175, 220.

⁶² For the setting of the time and date, see “Slap” [Feland], to commanding officers, 3d Battalion and 2d Battalion, 31 October 1918, 5th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 1, AHEC. For more on brigade support provided, see “Operations Report, 4th Brigade Marines, covering period 24 Oct.–11 Nov. ’18,” vol. 6, Headquarters 4th Brigade, AHEC. Details about the rolling barrage are found in *5th Regiment Field Order*, 31 October 1918, 5th Marines, Field Orders, vol. 3, AHEC.

He believed that “being in combat with the Marines, cutting wire and going over with them earned our battalion many honors, and they adopted us, which was very unusual for the Marines to do.”⁶³

Williams’s platoon was tasked with cutting lanes through the German barbed wire. He remembered that “it was a miserable night, cold and wet. The fog was so thick that one had to keep in physical touch with the man in front, or get lost.” He recollected that, “when we got to the front line, a Marine asked what outfit we were with, and when we told him the 2d Engineers, he said ‘Great, now we can get through okay, and we know you fellows will go over with us’.”⁶⁴

Williams and his platoon had no trouble cutting a wide path through the German wire, but were caught in an artillery barrage, followed by machine-gun and trench mortar fire, and then grenades. During the attack, Williams saw others wounded, and then “suddenly the lights went out for me. I did not know anything about it until a Marine [Navy] medic and two helpers arrived to bandage the other two [next to me] and called for a stretcher to carry us in.” Although not wounded by shellfire, Williams had been thrown against a tree and suffered four cracked ribs and a serious back injury.⁶⁵ Williams could no longer take part in the Meuse-Argonne offensive, but his actions had paved the way for the Marines to move forward.

The 23d Infantry Regiment of the Army’s 3d Brigade served on the 5th Regiment’s right flank, while the rest of the Army brigade followed the Marines in reserve. The plan was for the 23d Regiment to gain its initial objective, then fall back into reserve with the rest of the Army brigade. Supported by machine guns, a company of Marines from the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, under Captain John R. Foster would maintain liaison with the 23d Regiment. When the soldiers pulled back into reserve, Foster’s command would then serve as liaison to the

89th Division on the 5th Regiment’s right flank.⁶⁶

The attack plan called for the Marines to move out in columns of battalions. In the 5th Regiment, the 1st Battalion would lead to the first objective, then the 2d Battalion would pass through and take the second objective, and finally the 3d Battalion would pass through and take the third goal. In the 6th Regiment, the 1st Battalion would lead, followed by the 3d Battalion, then the 2d Battalion. Each battalion had two companies side-by-side, followed by two additional companies.

In the 5th Regiment’s 1st Battalion under Hamilton, the 49th Company under Captain Francis S. Kieren, and the 66th Company under Captain Robert Blake had the honors of leading their regiment.⁶⁷ Kieren had received a Silver Star Citation for “gallantry in action” during the Battle of Blanc Mont, while Blake would receive the Distinguished Service Cross and Navy Cross for his actions at Belleau Wood.

In Barker’s 1st Battalion, 6th Regiment, the lead-off honors went to the 76th Company under Captain Macon C. Overton and the 74th Company under First Lieutenant Leo D. Hermle.⁶⁸ Overton would receive a Distinguished Service and a Navy Cross for his leadership at Blanc Mont, while Hermle received two Silver Star citations. Both would further distinguish themselves on 1 November.⁶⁹

The Marines moved forward through intense smoke caused by the rolling barrage. In dispatches at 0800 and 0900, Major Hamilton’s 1st Battalion, 5th Regiment, intelligence officer, Second Lieutenant Leonard E. Rea, notified Colonel Feland’s headquarters that the battalion had met its first objective, just south of Landreville. They had suffered five officer and “few” enlisted casualties. The battalion had captured a battery of 77mm cannon, but “few prisoners and no material.”⁷⁰

⁶³ Ralph Williams folder, 2d Division, 2d Engineering Regiment, Company A, Box Divisional Troops, 2d Division, World War I Veterans Survey Collection, AHEC, hereafter Williams collection.

⁶⁴ Williams collection.

⁶⁵ Williams collection.

⁶⁶ *5th Regiment Field Order*.

⁶⁷ Blake would continue to serve, leading Marines as a major general during World War II.

⁶⁸ Hermle would later be promoted to lieutenant general during his service.

⁶⁹ George Clark, *Devil Dogs*, 349.

⁷⁰ See reports from Lt L. E. Rea, 1st Battalion, 5th Regiment, 1 November 1918, 0800 and 0900, 5th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 1, AHEC.

Earlier, at 0810, Hamilton updated Feland with his own dispatch, noting that his men had “met slight machine gun resistance,” and had taken about 500 prisoners. He admitted that because of their start in the dark, all the companies were disorganized, but were regrouping. In the meantime, Dunbeck’s 2d Battalion was passing through Hamilton’s battalion to take up the advance. Heavy enemy machine gun fire was developing along the left front, where there were “large numbers of Germans” but no liaison with units on either flank. Hamilton closed his report by estimating that his battalion had suffered about 5 percent casualties.⁷¹

As it took over the lead, Dunbeck’s 2d Battalion met enemy opposition in the town of Landreville, about 3km north of Landres-et-Saint-Georges. A member of the battalion’s 43d Company, Private Clarence Richmond, observed later that “there was a heavy fog,” and that “walking was actually a difficulty, the ground had been so torn up by the [artillery] barrage.”⁷² Enemy artillery fired point-blank at the Marines, who nevertheless managed to capture several pieces.

The Marines took prisoners and machine guns. Several German soldiers seemed happy to surrender. One of the captured German machine guns had been fired through a window from which a Red Cross flag was flying. The Marines waited briefly for their own artillery barrage to move forward, and Richmond observed that when the Marines drew closer to the supposed Red Cross station, “12 or 15 Germans came running out, with their hands up-lifted, and waving white handkerchiefs.”⁷³

From a hill near Bayonville, 1.6km north, German machine guns raked Dunbeck’s battalion, so the 55th Company attacked from the flank, driving the enemy from the hill. In so doing, the battalion captured approximately 30 machine guns, a battery of 8-inch artillery, and about a dozen 6-inch cannons. Around the guns, the Marines found about 30 German officers and noncommissioned officers ei-

ther killed or wounded. The battalion moved northward, finally arriving in a ravine north of Bayonville, where they rested and waited for the 3d Battalion to pass through, according to plan.⁷⁴

On the 5th Regiment’s right flank, the 18th Company’s commanding officer, Captain John R. Foster, confirmed to Colonel Feland that his liaison company was in contact with the 3d Brigade’s 23d Infantry soldiers: “assault wave going good.” He later added that he was in liaison with the 89th Division as well.⁷⁵

Shortly before noon, Captain Dunbeck reported that his 2d Battalion had reached the second goal north of Bayonville, and Henry Larsen reported that his 3d Battalion had arrived and was getting ready to “go over the top” at 1220. Two hours later, Larsen added that his battalion had reached the 5th Regiment’s third objective south of Barricourt, and that they were “meeting no opposition, except our own artillery falling short. Enemy artillery is very weak.” Casualties were light at approximately 1 percent, and the battalion had captured six artillery pieces and about 100 prisoners.⁷⁶

By midday, George Hamilton acknowledged that his battalion (in support) was digging in and needed food: “Men in good spirits but physically weak on acct of diarrhoea [*sic*]. When can we have some chow?” Colonel Feland promised to send supplies “as soon as possible.”⁷⁷

This communication from Hamilton did not satisfy the Kentuckian; later that evening, Feland chided Hamilton, saying that he had not heard any report from the 1st Battalion commander since 0900. The colonel added that he had sent forward second-in-command Lieutenant Colonel Julius S. Turrill to set up a new command post and ad-

⁷¹ Commanding officer [Hamilton], 1st Battalion, to commanding officer [Feland], 5th Regiment, 1 November 1918, 5th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 1, AHEC.

⁷² Richmond war diary.

⁷³ Episode 18, “Fighting Continues: German Shells Fly Overhead, October 30–November 3, 1918,” Richmond war diary.

⁷⁴ “Records of Marine Units, 1914–49,” RG 127.9, NARA, 20.

⁷⁵ Capt John R. Foster, 18th Company, 5th Marines, to commanding officer [Feland], 5th Regiment, 1 November 1918, 0815 and 0920, 5th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 1, AHEC.

⁷⁶ Slap A 1 [Dunbeck] to Slap 1 [Feland], 1 November 18, 1130, 5th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 1, AHEC; and Slap P 1 [Larsen] to Slap 1 [Feland], 1 November 1918, 1153 and 1430, 5th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 1, AHEC.

⁷⁷ Commanding officer, 1st Battalion [Hamilton], to commanding officer [Feland], 5th Regiment, 1 November 1918, 1520, 5th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 1, AHEC; and Slap to commanding officer [Feland], 1st Battalion, 1 November 1918, 1615, 5th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 1, AHEC.

monished Hamilton to “locate them and send in to them *frequent* reports.”⁷⁸ Despite this apparent criticism, Hamilton would remain Feland’s friend and most trusted commander.

The 5th Regiment had met its first day objectives in a timely fashion. On the night of 1–2 November, division orders called for the 3d Army Brigade to pass through the Marine brigade to lead the next day’s attack. But confusion still existed.

Near midnight, 3d Battalion commander Henry Larsen warned of difficulties establishing liaison with the 89th Division on the right, and admitted he had no idea where the 3d Brigade units might be found. He clarified that it was foggy; runners, battalions, and regiments got lost in the darkness. The Marines were still encountering some light machine gun fire.⁷⁹

The 6th Regiment Advances

On the left side of the Marine brigade, the 6th Regiment also was having a relatively routine operation on 1 November. At 0700, Colonel Lee assured General Neville that “everything [was] going well,” and the regiment was capturing many prisoners.⁸⁰

The attack went ahead as planned, but not without cost. The commander of the 6th Regiment’s 1st Battalion, Major Frederick Barker, announced that he had reached the first objective at 0800, but an officer, 76th Company’s commander Captain Macon C. Overton, had been killed, and 5 officers and 143 men enlisted were wounded.⁸¹

The other leader of the front two companies in



Leo D. Hermle received the Distinguished Service Cross for his leadership on 1 November 1918. He would go on to serve as assistant division commander of the 5th Marine Division during World War II and the Battle of Iwo Jima.
Official U.S. Marine Corps photo

Barker’s battalion, First Lieutenant Leo D. Hermle, received a Distinguished Service Cross for his actions on 1 November. His citation summed up his actions that day:

*When the company on his left was checked by heavy machine gun fire, Lieutenant Hermle led a platoon forward and surrounded a large number of the enemy, capturing one hundred fifty-five prisoners, and seventeen machine guns. Pushing on, he took the town of St. Georges and many machine gun positions. Although he was painfully wounded he refused to be evacuated and remained with his men for two days until he was ordered to the rear.*⁸²

⁷⁸ Commanding officer [Hamilton], 1st Battalion, to commanding officer [Feland], 5th Regiment, 1 November 1918, 1520, 5th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 1, AHEC; and Slap to commanding officer [Hamilton], 1st Battalion, 1 November 1918, 1615, 5th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 1, AHEC. Emphasis in original.

⁷⁹ Slap P 1 [Larsen] to Slap 1 [Feland], 2 November 1918, 1205, 5th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 1, AHEC.

⁸⁰ See Site [Lee], to commanding officer [Neville], 4th Brigade, 1 November 1918, 0700, 0720, and 0905, 5th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 1, AHEC; and commanding officer [Shuler], 3d Battalion, 1 November 1918, 0720, 6th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 3, AHEC.

⁸¹ See commanding officer [Barker], 1st Battalion, to Site [Lee], 1 November 1918, 6th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 3, AHEC.

⁸² “Leo D. Hermle,” *Valor.MilitaryTimes.com*. Hermle would recuperate and go on to serve as a brigadier general in World War II, retiring as a lieutenant general.

CAPTAIN MACON C. OVERTON

Born in Georgia, Overton joined the Marine Corps as a private in November 1913. He spent two years on the USS *New York* (BB 34) before playing on a Marine baseball team in Washington, DC. Commissioned as a second lieutenant in July 1917, he was soon assigned to the 76th Company, 1st Battalion, 6th Regiment, headed for France. At Belleau Wood, he led an attack on a machine gun nest for which he would eventually receive a French Croix de Guerre and a Silver Star. He received a second Croix de Guerre and Silver Star for his actions at Soissons, and would posthumously receive a Distinguished Service and a Navy Cross (for the same action) for bravery under fire at Blanc Mont.

Distinguished Service and Navy Cross Citations:

When his battalion was halted by severe fire, Captain Overton attacked and reduced one strong enemy machine-gun nest, and, moving forward, captured one field-piece that was firing point-blank at his company. He was wounded the next day, but he refused to be evacuated, and continued to lead his command with skill and courage throughout the engagement. On October 8 after occupying St. Etienne without casualties in his company, Captain Overton went through heavy artillery and machine-gun fire to establish liaison with another company, his conspicuous gallantry inspiring his men to repel two strong counterattacks.¹

On 1 November, Overton again displayed courage for “leading his company under heavy artillery fire and silencing five machine-gun nests. He then personally undertook to guide a tank forward against machine-gun positions and while doing so was seriously wounded by a German anti-tank sniper.” For these actions, Overton would posthumously be awarded a second Distinguished Service Cross.²

¹“Macon C. Overton,” Valor.MilitaryTimes.com; and C. Douglas Sterner, ed., *Marine Corps Heroes: Navy Cross, 1915–WWII*, vol. II (Pueblo, CO: CreateSpace, 2006), 71. Other details came from the Macon Overton File, Biographical Files, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA; and Macon Overton File, Box 835, Entry 62, RG 125, NARA.

²“Macon C. Overton.” In July 1919, the U.S. Navy commissioned a destroyer named for him, the USS *Overton* (DD 239), which would serve in convoy duty in World War II, earning eight battle stars. See “Overton (Destroyer No. 239),” Naval History and Heritage Command, 25 February 2016.



The 2d Division's publication The Indian showed this disabled two-man tank, possibly the one that Capt Macon Overton led toward Landres-et-Saint-Georges on 1 November 1918. The caption below the photograph noted that Overton had died in front of the town, and “his loss filled the [76th] company with a desire for revenge that doubled the vigor of their attack.”
The Indian, 20 May 1919

Another member of Overton's 76th Company also posthumously received a Distinguished Service Cross for gallantry on 1 November. Private First Class David T. DePue from Chicago charged through barbed wire at a machine gun nest while spraying it with a French Chauchat light machine gun. When his ammunition ran out, he used his rifle to club the Germans in the nest before being

mortally wounded. His body was found near those of four dead Germans.⁸³

Another company member, Sergeant William H. Faga, received a Distinguished Service and a Navy Cross for his actions that day, but he lived

⁸³“David T. DePue,” Valor.MilitaryTimes.com.

PRIVATE RAYMOND H. STENBACK

Raymond H. Stenback joined the Marine Corps in 1917, expecting to go to France as an infantryman. Instead, he was assigned to be a machine gunner, and was posted to Galveston, Texas, where Marines served as a deterrent to possible war with Mexico. Stenback made it to France in late summer 1918 and was assigned to Gunnery Sergeant Daniel J. Daly's old unit, the 73d Machine Gun Company that supported the 6th Regiment.¹ Very few of the original 73d Machine Gun Company were still around to do so. Their replacements also suffered. In his memoir, Stenback asserted that due to death, wounds, and sickness, only 37 men were left in his machine gun company by the time of the Armistice.

Private Stenback arrived at the 6th Regiment in time for the final phase of the Meuse-Argonne campaign. On his way to the front, Stenback observed:

When moving up to the front lines, we passed over miles of destruction from previous battles. Villages were nothing but ruins and the ground was all torn apart by artillery fire and trenches. Not a blade of grass was left or a green tree—mostly destroyed by shell fire and gas. All kinds of articles of warfare were in evidence and here and there a part of a soldier—it was destruction and death beyond description.²

In his first battle, Stenback admitted that he and his fellow Marines “got a terrible baptism of exploding German shells and machine gun fire” from the counterbarrage brought on by the heavy American artillery fire. Unable to discern the difference between normal shell fire and mustard gas, the newcomers slapped on their gas masks. During this time, Stenback avowed that two lieutenants were wounded and “another went berserk because he just couldn't take it,” and had to be replaced by noncommissioned officers.³

¹ Daly was a two-time Medal of Honor recipient who reportedly uttered a scathing challenge to his Marines at Belleau Wood: “Come on, you sons of bitches, do you want to live forever?” Wounded a second time at the Battle of Blanc Mont, Daly was unable to participate in the final phase of the Meuse-Argonne campaign. For more on Daly, see “Sergeant Major Daniel ‘Dan’ Joseph Daly, USMC (deceased),” Marine Corps History Division, Marine Corps University.

² “The Making of a Marine,” Raymond H. Stenback Personal Papers, 6th Marine Regiment, 2d Division, World War I Veterans Survey Collection, AHEC.

³ “The Making of a Marine.”

to tell the story.⁸⁴ On 1 November, he was severely wounded, but assumed command when his company's leaders were wounded.⁸⁵

The 73d Machine Gun Company's role was to follow closely behind the advancing infantry Marines and move ahead in case of stiff opposition. The German opposition proved weaker than expected, and the Marines “were able to overcome resistance which was beginning to break at that time.” Running from shell hole to shell hole for cover, Private Raymond H. Stenback remained unharmed, al-

though men near him suffered wounds. Later, he would write that they were under constant German artillery fire up to Armistice day, “but it wasn't as heavy as the first day.” Wearing heavy overcoats in the rainy and chilly weather, Stenback and his fellow Marines saw many dead German soldiers and prisoners being led to the rear.⁸⁶

The 6th Marines continued to attack. Colonel Lee's 3d Battalion commander, Major George Shuler, thought his men were moving ahead but slowly. Soon the pace picked up, and by 0814, Shuler revealed that two of his companies were just

⁸⁴ Faga also received a Distinguished Service Cross for his actions during Soissons, where he captured a machine gun and then volunteered to take important messages to his battalion commander under heavy fire.

⁸⁵ “William H. Faga,” Valor.MilitaryTimes.com.

⁸⁶ “The Making of a Marine,” Raymond H. Stenback Personal Papers, 6th Marine Regiment, 2d Division, World War I Veterans Survey Collection, AHEC.



The last drive into Argonne.
Official U.S. Marine Corps photo

south of their first objective. His battalion was passing through Major Barker's 1st Battalion to lead the attack.⁸⁷

At 1100, Shuler informed Colonel Lee that his 3d Battalion continued to take prisoners, about 100 in the latest group, "by using tanks with riflemen." Enemy shelling continued from north of Bayonville. When the 3d Battalion, 6th Regiment, met its second objective line, Major Ernest Williams was ready to lead his 2d Battalion through Shuler's battalion to take the lead. They were held up, however, because U.S. artillery was falling short of its intended German targets, endangering the advancing Marines.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Commanding officer [Shuler], 3d Battalion, to commanding officer [Lee], 6th Regiment, 0814, 1 November 1918, 6th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 3, AHEC.

⁸⁸ Commanding officer [Shuler], 3d Battalion, to commanding officer [Lee], 6th Regiment, 1 November 1918, 1100, 6th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 3, AHEC; and commanding officer [Williams], 2d Battalion, 6th Regiment, to commanding officer [Shuler], 3d Battalion, 1 November 1918, 1224, 6th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 3, AHEC.

Captain Pell W. Foster's Battery B of the 12th Field Artillery fired for six hours to support the 6th Marines in the attack. He remembered that, even though the artillery batteries were situated in plain view, the Germans failed to launch counter-battery attacks. To keep up with the rapid advance of the Marines, his battery moved forward to the Landres and Landres-et-Saint-Georges road to continue their rolling barrage just ahead of the Marines.

On the far left flank, a force under Major George A. Stowell had the challenging task of maintaining liaison with elements of the neighboring 80th Infantry Division, part of I Corps. Stowell's force consisted of 95th Company, 1st Battalion, 6th Regiment, and a company from the 319th Infantry Regiment of the 80th Division. The 80th Division was running into difficulties. Nevertheless, the 319th Regiment proceeded to its destination of Imecourt, about 2.7km southeast of Landreville,

while Stowell's Marines pushed farther north.⁸⁹

Having finally passed through Shuler's 3d Battalion, Major Williams led his men forward, reaching the 6th Regiment's third goal at the edge of the Bois de la Folie by 1515.⁹⁰ He had liaison with Major Stowell on the left and the 5th Regiment on the right. Williams disclosed that casualties among the enlisted men had been light, but 50 percent of the officers had been wounded or killed. Patrols were being sent forward beyond the objective line to an exploitation line.⁹¹

The regimental second in command, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Holcomb, was already moving to the regiment's next command post in the hamlet of Chenery, less than a kilometer southwest of Bayonville. Colonel Lee stayed in Saint-Georges.⁹²

A member of Williams's 2d Battalion, 6th Regiment, Private Carl Andrew Brannen, 80th Company, described what happened when his company attacked. It lost its captain and all its lieutenants, where "the top sergeant was commanding the remnant of the company." Brannen himself was hit, when "the nozzle of a ten inch shell hit me a glancing blow in the chest, but the folds of my overcoat helped, and I had a narrow escape."⁹³

⁸⁹ See American Battle Monuments Commission, *80th Division Summary of Operations in the World War* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1944), 41–42. Orders for Stowell's liaison command are found in *Field Order No. 22*, 31 October 1918, in 6th Regiment Reports, Field Orders, vol. 3, AHEC. See also commanding officer [Stowell], Left Flank Liaison Battalion (I and V Corps), to commanding officer [Barker], 1st Battalion, 6th Regiment, 1 November 1918, 1025, 6th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 3, AHEC.

⁹⁰ Bois de la Folie roughly translates to Wood of the Madness.

⁹¹ Commanding officer [Williams], 2d Battalion, 6th Regiment, to commanding officer [Lee], 6th Regiment, 1 November 1918, 1525, 6th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 3, AHEC. The term *exploitation line* refers to a type of offensive operation that usually follows a successful attack and is designed to disorganize the enemy.

⁹² See commanding officer [Lee], 6th Regiment, to commanding general [Lejeune], 2d Division, 1 November 1918, 1620, 6th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 3, AHEC. Lee's second-in-command, Thomas Holcomb, would eventually become the 17th Commandant of the Marine Corps. For more on Holcomb, see David J. Ulbrich, *Preparing for Victory: Thomas Holcomb and the Making of the Modern Marine Corps, 1936–1943* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2011).

⁹³ Brannen, *Over There*, 54–55.

By the end of the first day, rain was falling and it was cold. Brannen and his fellow Marines suffered: "We were drenched to the skin, and it was freezing. At night we lay in the mud, tired and hungry, and in the morning would take up the advance again." In addition, Brannen observed that many of the men suffered with dysentery, brought about by "scanty unfit food and polluted water."⁹⁴

Brannen's captain was Kirt Green. A veteran of 13 years, Green had been promoted to second lieutenant from the enlisted ranks in April 1917. This last phase of the Meuse-Argonne campaign was his first battle and, unfortunately, his last. When his company faced direct fire from a German field gun, Green called his company officers together to discuss how to deal with the threat. The Germans spied the gathering and fired a shell into the group. Green and First Lieutenant John G. Schneider Jr. died outright and two other officers were rendered *hors de combat* (literally, out of the fight), their war over. One of Green's officers, Second Lieutenant George W. Hopke, survived, and aided by Gunnery Sergeant James Foley Jr., led the ensuing assault that captured the German gun.⁹⁵

When apprised of the 6th Regiment's advance, 4th Brigade commander Colonel Neville cautioned: "We must make every effort to hold the woods to the front and left flank—so that the work will not have to be done again. Send out strong patrols with that end in view. The Boche [Germans] may attempt to filter in today. Good work today."⁹⁶

Despite the seemingly easy advance, Neville knew the Germans remained dangerous. They still had strong artillery and machine gun fire, but the chances of any massed infantry counterattack might be slim. Small German units might infiltrate the rapidly bypassing Marines and still wreak havoc on the brigade.

Lieutenant Colonel Holcomb encouraged Major Williams to push forward a line of exploitation

⁹⁴ Brannen, *Over There*, 55.

⁹⁵ Peter F. Owen, *To the Limit of Endurance: A Battalion of Marines in the Great War* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 182–82, 191–92.

⁹⁶ Sister [Neville] to Site [Lee], 1 November 1918, 1715, 6th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 3, AHEC.

beyond his original goal and set up a position just north of the Bois de la Folie “unless stopped by serious resistance.” This movement forward could keep the Germans out of the woods. Williams, however, informed Lee that holding the northern edge of the wood required manning a line 5km across; his men currently held 2km, but had outposts pushed to the front.⁹⁷

At the end of the day on 1 November, the 4th Brigade had captured its objectives and, in some places, had pressed slightly beyond to a line of exploitation. The brigade then dug in, anticipating that the 3d Brigade’s 23d Infantry Regiment would pass through their lines the next day as planned and lead the 2d Division’s advance north toward the town of Fosse.

The day’s action resulted in 2 officers and 19 enlisted men of the 6th Infantry Regiment killed, another 14 officers and 267 enlisted men wounded, 2 officers and 17 enlisted men sick, and 80 enlisted missing. The sick included 1st Battalion commander Frederick Barker, who would be evacuated to a hospital on 2 November.⁹⁸

Pershing’s war of maneuver was coming to fruition. The weakened German Army continued to retreat, while keeping up staunch artillery and machine-gun fire. For their actions on that first day, Summerall praised the Marine-led 2d Division. The men had taken more than 1,200 prisoners, along with much enemy armament and munitions. The division had achieved or surpassed its objectives, driving 9km into the German lines.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Site 2 [Holcomb] to Williams, 1 November 1918, 1810, 6th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 3, AHEC; and Williams to commanding officer, 6th Regiment, 1 November 1918, 1920, 6th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 3, AHEC.

⁹⁸ For more on Barker’s evacuation, see Report of Sixth Regiment, 2 November 1918, 6th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 3, AHEC; and battalion adjutant, 1st Battalion, to regimental adjutant, 6th Regiment, 2 November 1918, 0940, 6th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 3, AHEC.

⁹⁹ Subfolder Journal of Operations, 20 May–30 November 1918, Folder 2d Division Journal of Operations, Box 24 Hist. Dec. File 33.2, Summary of Operations March–October 1918 to Hist. Dec. File 33.5 Diary 1926, Entry NM-91 1241, RG 120, NARA, College Park, MD.

THE BATTLE CONTINUES, 2–9 NOVEMBER 1918

The Marines had achieved their goals on 1 November, but they still faced problems. In his 0800 dispatch on 2 November, Major Henry Larsen described mixed results. While going around some obstacles, his 3d Battalion, 5th Regiment’s lines had become separated, but he had reorganized his troops and was in fine shape. His men had seen Germans in a ravine digging in along the skyline on a ridge in front. However, Larsen hesitated to call for artillery bombardment, given the uncertainty about whether American units were in the vicinity. The Germans had sent out strong patrols during the night, and one battalion member had been killed. Enemy artillery from the north had been active all night. Larsen was quite willing to have his runners conduct Army 3d Brigade leaders to his command post so that he could apprise them of the situation.¹⁰⁰

Throughout 2 November, the 2d Division sought to consolidate its position. Lejeune ordered the Army’s 3d Brigade to pass through the 4th Brigade lines to resume the attack on 3 November. The day was cold and it rained constantly. Heavy German artillery continued to pound the Marine brigade’s rear. German planes flew overhead, with no sight of American planes; unfortunately, antiaircraft guns were not available to the Marines. Despite these persistent problems, the Marines dug in while Army units slowly moved forward to take up a position at the line of exploitation just in front of Larsen’s line of objective.¹⁰¹

The 3d Brigade passed through the 4th Brigade on the night of 2 November, and the Army units stood ready to resume the attack at 0600 on 3 No-

¹⁰⁰ Slap P 1 [Larsen] to Slap 1 [Feland], 2 November 1918, 0800, 5th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 1, AHEC.

¹⁰¹ See “Secret Memo to commanders of 5th and 6th Regiments and 6th Machine Gun,” 2 November 1918, 1430, from LtCol Earl Ellis, brigade adjutant, to Neville, 6th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 3, AHEC, for postponement of 3d Brigade passing through the 4th Brigade lines. For orders to stand fast, see Slap [Feland] to his three battalion commanders, 2 November 1918, 1830; and for reports of German planes, see 1st Battalion Intelligence Officer [2dLt L. E. Rea] to regimental intelligence officer, 2 November 1918, 5th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 1, AHEC. See also *History of the Second Battalion*, 21, noting cold, rainy weather and enemy bombardment.

MEUSE-ARGONNE OFFENSIVE **The Last Hurrah—Forcing the Meuse** **Night of 10–11 November 1918**

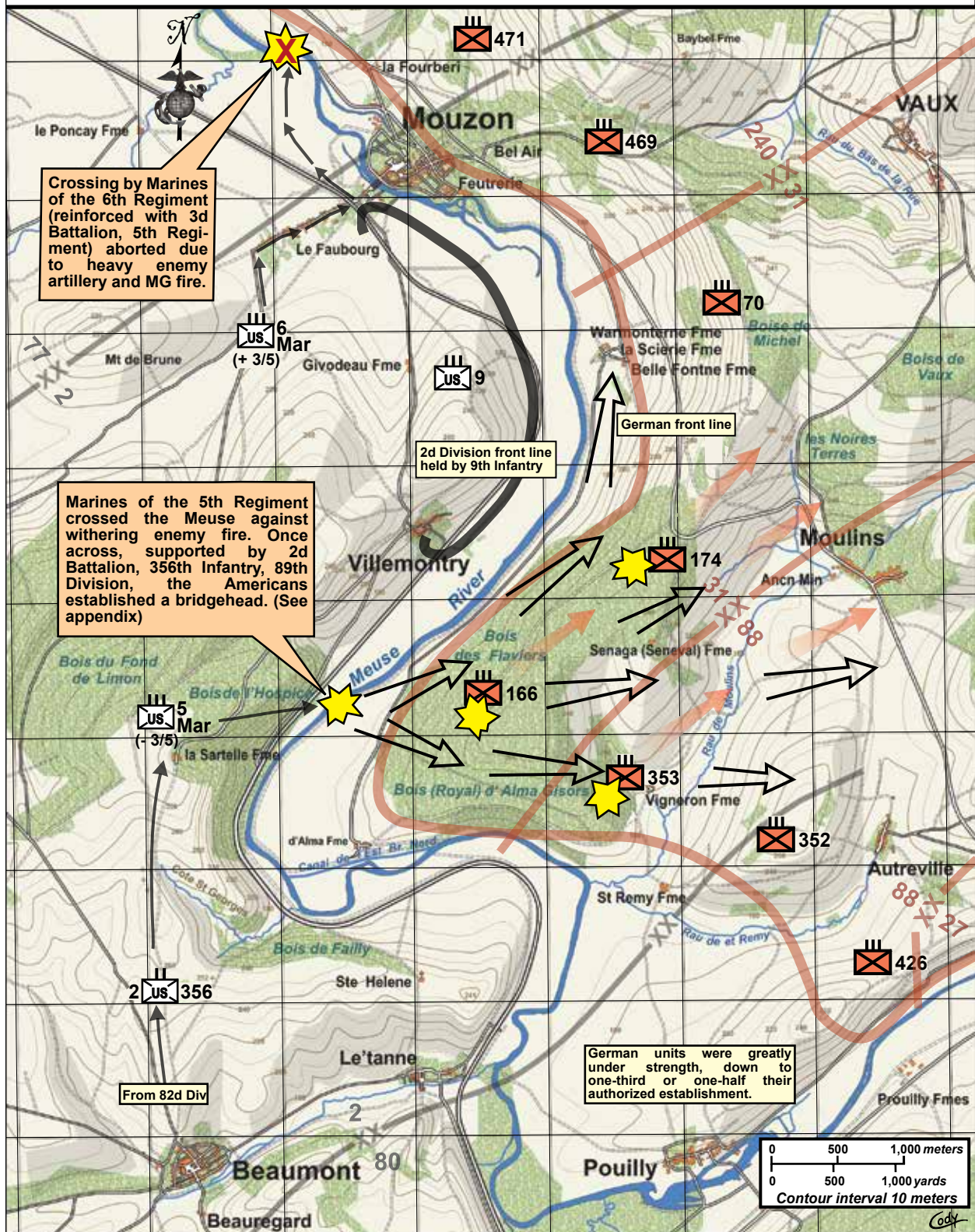


Illustration by LtCol R. L. "Bill" Cody, USMC (Ret)

vember. The plan was for the 4th Brigade to follow about 1,000 yards in support. On the right of the 5th Regiment, the Army's 9th Regiment would follow; on the left, the 6th Regiment would track behind the Army's 23d Regiment. The Marines were ordered to keep in good liaison with the regiments of the 3d Brigade and with Army units on each flank. The 2d Division's objective was a line running east-west through the town of Fosse.¹⁰²

Following behind the 3d Brigade on 3 November, the Marines met only sporadic firing, but it was at times deadly. Arriving just north of Nouart, at the eastern end of the line across Fosse, the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, dug in. Low-flying German planes strafed them from above, as the enemy artillery battery pounded them on the ground. The Marines suffered casualties, but counterbattery fire soon drove off the German artillery and the battalion settled in for the night.

On the night of 3 November, with the 3d Brigade approaching the Beval-Bois-des-Dames, the commander of the 9th Regiment, Army Colonel Robert O. Van Horn, suggested that the Army troops push on through the area at night to avoid another debilitating fight in the woods, such as had occurred at Belleau Wood. The former 2d Division chief of staff and recently appointed 3d Brigade commander, Colonel James C. Rhea, and General Lejeune agreed with Van Horn. They collectively made a crucial decision to stage the night attack. This attack became what Marine John Ausland believed was "probably the most audacious stunt of the war."¹⁰³

In a column of twos, the 3d Brigade made a daring, 8km night march in the rain on a road through the thick woods. The march surprised and further demoralized the Germans. Led by Army Major Ladislav T. Janda's 3d Battalion, 9th Regiment, the Army brigade killed and captured many Germans as they proceeded through the woods to

capture La Forge Farm, then continued northeastward to Tuilerie Farm south of Beaumont.¹⁰⁴

At both farms, the Army brigade captured many Germans who were resting and recuperating to prepare for the attack they believed would come during daylight hours. Ausland acknowledged that "the night march of the 9th and 23d Infantry through the enemy lines in the dead of night was probably the most dashing piece of warfare of the entire war. They [the Army] lost a lot of men though."

Ausland and Captain Charley Dunbeck's 2d Battalion, 5th Regiment, followed in close support of the Army troops, experiencing some casualties from enemy artillery fire. Ausland believed that 15 men in the 5th Regiment had been killed on 4 November, while another 10 died from their wounds.¹⁰⁵ Even if they were not killed or wounded, the Marines still suffered.

Ausland described how his good friend, "Duke," helped a wounded man back to a first aid station, then simply went to the 55th Company's kitchen and stayed there for the rest of the war. Ausland explained that, at Blanc Mont, Duke and two other Marines had overwhelmed a German machine gun.¹⁰⁶ Becoming sick on 1 November and nearly killed by artillery a couple of days later, Duke had simply had enough. Ausland asserted that "up until the time he'd had enough, Duke was the perfect soldier," and commiserated that "Duke tried to do too much and played out before the war ended."¹⁰⁷

On 3 November, Austria-Hungary negotiated an armistice with the Allies. Austrian troops quickly withdrew from the battlefield, and German units had to be plugged in to the remaining gaps. The already thin German lines were being stretched even thinner, so they retreated to their Antwerp-Meuse

¹⁰² See Orders, 3 November 1918, issued by Earl Ellis under Neville's name, 6th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 3, AHEC.

¹⁰³ Ausland, "The Last Kilometer." Monday, Ausland credited the acting 3d Brigade commander, Robert O. Van Horn; on 2 November, Rhea had replaced Van Horn, who went back to commanding the 9th Regiment.

¹⁰⁴ For more on this night march, see the report by L. T. Janda on the night of 3 November 1918, Williamson File, Box 10 (Janda Box), Rolfe Hillman Papers, AHEC, hereafter Janda report. See, also in the same file, S. T. Williamson, "A Night March: An Untold War Story," *New York Times Magazine*, 4 November 1928.

¹⁰⁵ For more on this night march, see Janda report; and Williamson, "A Night March."

¹⁰⁶ These three Marines would later receive both the Distinguished Service Cross and French Croix de Guerre for their heroism.

¹⁰⁷ Ausland, "The Last Kilometer."

position. The German *III* and *V Corps* received orders to move to the east bank of the Meuse River to retain a line running north along the river to Sedan. Their east bank position remained weak, however, due to the lack of time and resources necessary to strengthen it. The Germans could only erect a few obstacles and clear fields of fire.¹⁰⁸

Germans Weakening but Marines Suffering, 4–7 November 1918

The unrelenting cold, rainy weather, compounded by hunger and sickness, continued to take a toll; logistical problems ensued. On 4 November, Colonel Feland's second in command, Lieutenant Colonel Julius Turrill, who was forward with the troops, cautioned: "Advise getting kitchens and rations up *soon*. 1st Bn. [Battalion] has had practically nothing [to eat], since day before yesterday. Rations are being held up on roads. Men very weak."¹⁰⁹

By midafternoon, Major Hamilton, 1st Battalion commander, questioned the need to move forward, wondering if he should wait for rations. He had sent men to retrieve rations held up by heavy traffic. The rations had been cooked, however, and were on their way forward. Captain Dunbeck, 2d Battalion commander, also pointed out that he could not get in touch with his food galleys: "Battalion under heavy bombardment (Gas and artillery) all afternoon. Casualties up to date 20%. Men forced to wear gas masks for four hours."¹¹⁰

As the 2d Division inexorably moved forward to the north-northeast despite periodic heavy machine gun and artillery fire, the ultimate goal of reaching the Meuse River took shape. The Meuse flowed north from southeast to northwest, requiring that the 2d Division turn slightly to its right, northeast toward the town of Pouilly. The 5th Regiment would lead the Marines, with the 6th Regiment following closely in support. The objective

was not only to reach the Meuse but to cross it as soon as possible.¹¹¹

On 5 November, Colonel Logan Feland disclosed to General Neville that Lieutenant Colonel Turrill had gone forward to work with Major Larsen's 3d Battalion to capture a ridge southeast of Pouilly. There, they could scout out a crossing of the Meuse. Neville replied to Feland that the "division directs us to use all haste to send a patrol to the bridge at Pouilly and of course cross it if we can." The 3d Brigade had reported that "the Boche [Germans] have fled and will offer practically no resistance, etc. You know about the value to place on these reports so make haste with reason in carrying out the orders."¹¹²

Shortly thereafter, Neville reiterated the plan to Colonels Lee and Feland for the 5th Regiment, followed by the 6th Regiment, to cross the Meuse at Pouilly and attack the heights on the eastern bank.¹¹³ Turrill remained with the troops on the front lines, reporting that Major Larsen's 3d Battalion had moved toward the heights south of Pouilly in the forest of Jaulny, and that Major George Hamilton's 1st Battalion had moved to the heights initially contemplated for Larsen's battalion. Turrill believed "everything [was] going well."¹¹⁴

As the Marine brigade moved to the northeast, however, the 89th Division to its right continued to move north. As a result, Major Larsen had to inform Colonel Feland that the 89th Division's troops

¹⁰⁸ von Giehl, "Battle of the Meuse-Argonne," 535–36.

¹⁰⁹ Turrill to commanding officer [Feland], 5th Marines, 4 November 1918, 1055, 5th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 2, AHEC.

¹¹⁰ Commanding officer [Hamilton], 1st Battalion, to commanding officer [Feland], 5th Regiment, 4 November 1918, 1420, 5th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 2, AHEC; and Slap A-1 [Dunbeck] to Slap [Feland], 4 November 1918, 2300, 5th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 2, AHEC.

¹¹¹ See Sister [Neville] to Slap [Feland] and Site [Lee], 5 November 1918, 1100, 5th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 3, AHEC, noting that the 6th Regiment would follow in support of the 5th Regiment as it sought to cross the Meuse at Pouilly, then hold the heights on the right bank of the Meuse. Hereafter Neville report to Feland and Lee.

¹¹² See Feland to Ellis, 5 November 1918, 0800, 5th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 2, AHEC; and Sister [Neville] to commanding officer, 5th Regiment, 1012, in 5th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 2.

¹¹³ Neville report to Feland and Lee. See also commanding officer, 6th Marines, to commanding officers, 1st, 2d, 3d Battalions, and commanding officer, Supply Company, 5 November 1918, 6th Marines, Field Orders, vol. 3, AHEC, for Harry Lee informing his battalion commanders that the 5th Regiment would try to cross the Meuse at Pouilly, with the 6th Regiment in support.

¹¹⁴ LtCol Turrill to commanding officer [Feland], 5th Marines, 5 November 1918, 1240, 5th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 2, AHEC.

had taken the position where Larsen's battalion had headed. On 5 November, Larsen acknowledged: "They [89th Division] are in our sector, but if I can get over bridge first I'll send message immediately. There appears to be no Boche [Germans on] this side of river but is shelling weakly." Despite this weak German resistance, Larsen experienced some problems: "Men should have chow—only had 2 cooked meals in 5 days. Their blankets are still at Landreville. Not much pep but [they] are willing to go to Hell if we say so."¹¹⁵

Elements of the Marine brigade and 89th Division continued to advance on Pouilly. A 3d Battalion, 5th Regiment, patrol under command of Second Lieutenant John T. Foster had crossed the canal on a lock near the town. Beyond the canal, an island split the river, and Foster crossed a bridge over the first part of the river. Although it was partly destroyed, Foster believed men could cross that bridge without assistance. Elements of the 89th Division had crossed over to the island, but no one had made it all the way across to the town of Pouilly. He estimated it would take an hour for a platoon to cross the canal lock and both parts of the river. Foster reconnoitered the second bridge, but did not cross it.¹¹⁶

The Marines could see Germans, their lines, outposts, and trenches on the east side of the Meuse River. German machine guns and artillery raked the American troops on the west side of the river, while German planes flew overhead. Furthermore, the Marines suffered from debilitating conditions. A Navy corpsman warned that the "physical condition" of Major Hamilton's 1st Battalion "becomes increasingly worse. Diarrhoea [*sic*], exhaustion and influenza are rampant, numerous cases running a subnormal temperature, showing an exhaustive condition of the men. It has been found absolutely necessary to evacuate 26 men this date with above

complaints."¹¹⁷ On 6 November, the 6th Regiment reported that 2 officers and 101 troops had been evacuated due to sickness, but the next day the number rose to 7 officers and 146 troops.¹¹⁸

The Marines continued northeast toward La Belle Farm, 3km south of Beaumont and approximately 6km directly southwest of Pouilly. On 6 November, the 4th Brigade set up a base northeast of Beaumont, approximately 2km from the Meuse River. There, they waited for two days in rainy, freezing weather, while units continued to probe east toward the river.¹¹⁹

On the afternoon of 7 November, Colonel Feland had notified Lieutenant Colonel Turrill that the 5th Regiment would remain where it was; Turrill could pass along this message to the battalion commanders. Food supplies were finally brought forward. By midafternoon on 8 November, Major Larsen reported: "Kitchens are right here with me and we are feeding well for the present."¹²⁰

Armistice Negotiations Begin and Meuse River Crossings Delayed, 7–9 November 1918

German representatives led by Secretary of State Matthias Erzberger crossed through the lines on 7 November to meet with the Supreme Allied Commander, Marshal Ferdinand Foch, to discuss possible terms of an armistice.

Even before the final phase of the Meuse-Argonne offensive had begun, Pershing had advocated that the Germans be forced to surrender unconditionally. Pershing realized that Allied morale was high, while the German morale was low. He believed that

an armistice would revivify the low spirits of the German Army and enable it to reorganize and resist later on, and would deprive the Al-

¹¹⁵ See reports P-1-[Larsen] to Slap 1 [Feland], 5 November 1918, 1345 and 1445, 5th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 2, AHEC.

¹¹⁶ See 2dLt J. T. Foster to regimental commander, 6 November 1918, 5th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 2, AHEC; and telephone message from Gen Neville to G-3, 6 November 1918, 0900, 5th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 2, AHEC.

¹¹⁷ See 1st Battalion intelligence officer [Lt Rea], to 5th Regiment Headquarters, 6 November 1918, 1945, 5th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 2, AHEC; and battalion surgeon [P. A. McLendon, (USN)], 1st Battalion, to commanding officer, 6 November 1918, 5th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 2, AHEC.

¹¹⁸ See Capt H. P. Mason, operations officer, Reports of 6th Regiment, 6–7 November 1918, 6th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 3, AHEC.

¹¹⁹ *History of the Second Battalion*, 21.

¹²⁰ P-1-[Larsen] to Slap 1 [Feland], 8 November 1918, 1342, 5th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 2, AHEC.

*lies of the full measure of victory by failing to press their present advantage to its complete military end. As the apparent humility of German leaders in talking of peace may be feigned, the Allies should distrust their sincerity and their motives. The appeal for an armistice is undoubtedly to enable the withdrawal from a critical situation to one more advantageous.*¹²¹

Despite Pershing's hard stance, Armistice negotiations began between Foch and the German delegation. In the interim, Allied forces were to keep up the pressure on the German Army. Southeast of the 2d Division, the Americans were driving toward the Meuse River. On 3–4 November, the 5th Division had crossed the Meuse near Briculles-sur-Meuse, about 30.5km from Pouilly. From 7 to 9 November, elements of the 90th Division crossed the Meuse north of where the 5th Division had attacked.¹²²

Initial plans called for the 2d Division to cross the Meuse on the night of 8 November. The attack, however, was postponed.¹²³ All available pontoons had been allotted to the 89th Division on the 2d Division's right flank. Marshal Foch encouraged General Pershing to strike: "The enemy, disorganized by our repeated attacks, is withdrawing along the whole front. It is important to maintain and hasten our action. I appeal to the energy and initiative of the commanders in chief and to their armies to secure decisive results."¹²⁴

¹²¹ "Pershing to Allied Supreme War Council, Paris, 30 October 1918," in *United States Army in the World War, 1917–1919: The Armistice Agreement and Related Documents*, vol. 10, pt. 1 (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1991), 28–30.

¹²² See "Crossing the Meuse," in *The Official History of the Fifth U.S. Division U.S.A. during the Period of its Organization and of Its Operations in the European World War, 1917–1919* (Washington, DC: Society of the Fifth Division, 1919), 199–225; and Maj George Wythe, *A History of the 90th Division* (New York: 90th Division Association, 1920), 114–23.

¹²³ For the announcement that the 4th Brigade would cross the Meuse, see Operations Memorandum No. 36, 8 November 1918, 1300, 4th Brigade Field Orders, vol. 2, pt. 1; for the postponement, see Operations Memorandum No. 37, 1615, 8 November 1918, 4th Brigade Field Orders, vol. 2, pt. 1.

¹²⁴ *War Expenditures: Hearings before Subcommittee No. 3 (Foreign Expenditures) of the Select Committee on Expenditures in the War Department*, vol. 3 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1920), 3,768.

On 9 November, General Summerall called a meeting at V Corps' headquarters with his 2d and 89th Division generals and chiefs of staff. At the meeting, General Lejeune suggested an alternative plan that would not force the 2d Division to cross the Meuse under heavy enemy fire. He suggested that, having already crossed the Meuse farther south, the 90th Division should move north and clear the east bank opposite the 89th Division. The 89th Division would then cross unopposed, move north, and clear the enemy on the east bank opposite the 2d Division. In turn, the 2d Division would drive north along the east bank of the Meuse, clearing the enemy in front of the 77th Division, which was to cross the river between Mouzon and Sedan.

In his reminiscences after the war, Lejeune lamented that his suggested plan was "taken under advisement," but ultimately rejected.¹²⁵ Instead, the 2d and 89th Divisions would attack across the Meuse River in the face of stout German resistance.

By 9 November, Marine machine gunner Corporal Vincent Grube had been lugging a heavy machine gun for days and was "wet and cold and weak from hunger, as were the rest of our company." He had seen friends get killed nearby. His machine gun company was down to 30 men from the original 180. Finally, on 9 November, the Marines received food, including "all the rice we could eat."¹²⁶

On that same day, Lieutenant Colonel Earl Ellis sent orders from General Neville that the 6th Regiment would cross the Meuse near the town of Mouzon, approximately 6.75km directly north of Pouilly, but due to bends in the Meuse River, actually sat about 14.5km in river distance. This assault would form the main Marine brigade's attack across the river. A battalion of the 5th Regiment, with an equal force from the 89th Division, would cross at the town of Letanne, 2.14km (about 3.3 river km) slightly northwest of Pouilly. The regiments were ordered to move to forests just short of the river to prepare for the crossing. Later that day, however, Ellis sent a message that "it looks like there will

¹²⁵ Lejeune, *The Reminiscences of a Marine*, 399.

¹²⁶ Grube diary.



LeRoy P. Hunt received the Distinguished Service Cross for his valor at Blanc Mont, before leading Marines across the Meuse River on the last night of the war. He would eventually serve as a general officer in World War II.
Official U.S. Marine Corps photo

be *no* party tonight.”¹²⁷ The crossing of the Meuse would wait yet another day.

In the meantime, the German delegation that had crossed through Allied lines on 7 November continued discussing possible Armistice terms with Allied commander Foch. Rumors about the German delegation and a possible armistice ran through the troops. Captain LeRoy P. Hunt of the 1st Battalion, 5th Regiment, later summed up the attitude of many Marines who hoped the war

¹²⁷ See *Field Orders No. 38*, Headquarters, 4th Brigade, 9 November 1918, 0830, 4th Brigade Field Orders, vol. 2, pt. 1, 6th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 3, AHEC; and Neville memorandum to commanding officers of 5th and 6th Regiments and 6th Machine Gun Battalion, 9 November 1918, 1050, 6th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 3, AHEC. For postponement, see Sister [Neville] to Feland, 9 November 1918, 1755, 5th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 2, AHEC. Emphasis in original.

would end soon: “By this time the rumors of the armistice were beginning to drift in and we were all hanging desperately to the rabbit’s foot, hoping that the rumors might prove true, as I think most of us had had our fill.”¹²⁸

The Marines also heard about other events marking the collapse of the Triple Alliance.¹²⁹ The men learned that Turkey had signed an armistice on 30 October, and that Austria-Hungary had capitulated on 3 November, the same day that mutinies broke out in the German fleet. Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicated on 9 November, and fled to Holland the following day.

PLANNING TO CROSS THE MEUSE RIVER, 10 NOVEMBER 1918

The end was near. On 10 November, orders came down the line for the Marines to carry out the planned attack across the Meuse.

The Meuse River Crossing Controversy

The necessity of crossing the Meuse on what turned out to be the last night of the war raised questions at the time and after the war. On 9 November, Corporal John Ausland had written in his diary that

*the war is actually over. All objectives have been taken. The enemy is considering the terms and has a time limit on signing. We have a natural barrier, the river, between the 2 armies. If they don't agree to the terms the war, of course, must go on, but if, between this hour and the hour of the armistice we attack again, it will be just plain, damn, deliberate murder.*¹³⁰

Despite the reluctance of many men to sacrifice themselves in a seemingly meaningless attack across a natural boundary, in the face of a weakened but still deadly enemy, the Marines carried out their orders to the best of their ability (see appendix B).

¹²⁸ Capt Le Roy P. Hunt, “The Crossing of the Meuse River,” *Argonaut* 88, no. 2292, 26 February 1921, 131.

¹²⁹ The Triple Alliance refers to a secret agreement between Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy that was formed in May 1882 and renewed periodically until World War I.

¹³⁰ Ausland, “The Last Kilometer.”

Meuse River Crossing Plans

Plans were made to attack across the Meuse River on the night of 10 November. Initial plans called for the 2d Division to cross the Meuse in conjunction with the 89th Division. Summerall left the decision about which units would cross the Meuse to the 2d Division commander, and General Lejeune assigned the task to Neville's 4th Brigade. Neville suggested that they attack in one place across the river during daylight, "since he was convinced of the strength of the German positions on the east bank and because he had 'little artillery with which to support even one crossing'."¹³¹ This plan of action was denied however. A final plan evolved. Elements of the 5th and 6th Regiments, with support of Army units, would cross the Meuse at two points—near Mouzon and Letanne—small towns southeast of the major city of Sedan in northeastern France.

Designated commander of the 2d Division's crossing operations, at 0830 on 10 November, General Neville called a conference of his regimental commanders and their seconds in command at brigade headquarters in Beaumont. Two battalions of the 6th Regiment, supported by the 5th Regiment's 3d Battalion, would cross just north of Mouzon and take the heights northeast of the town. Those three battalions would form the 4th Brigade's main attack.

South of Mouzon, near Letanne, one battalion from each of the 2d and 89th Divisions were to cooperate in a mopping-up action. This group was originally to be commanded by someone from the 89th Division. Two companies of engineers and Company D of the 1st Gas Regiment, as well as artillery and signal corps troops, would provide support. The 3d Brigade would serve as a reserve. The attack was scheduled to begin at 1800 on 10 November.¹³²

Lieutenant Colonel Ellis requested a delay in

H-hour until later in the evening. General Lejeune's chief of staff, Army Colonel Hu B. Myers, denied this postponement. The engineers would move their pontoon bridges to the river as soon as darkness afforded cover, and the Marines were to be ready to cross as soon as the bridges were in place.¹³³

On 10 November, the Marine brigade received similar orders from division headquarters as before, but with one major change. General Neville was ordered to choose the commander of the combined 2d and 89th Divisions mop-up unit crossing at Letanne. In conjunction with 5th Regiment commander, Logan Feland, Neville appointed the 5th Regiment's valued officer, Major George Hamilton, to lead a combat liaison force across the Meuse. The 2d Battalion, 5th Regiment, combined with an 89th Division battalion, would cross the Meuse on two footbridges just north of Letanne, east of the Bois de l'Hospice.

After crossing the river, the combat liaison unit would seize two other woods: the Bois d'Almagis and the Bois des Flaviers. Some of Hamilton's men would then move north to link with Marines from the Mouzon crossing, and other men would move south to link with other units of the 89th Division. The 23d Machine Gun Company and a Stokes mortar platoon would support Hamilton's group.¹³⁴

The stage was set for a two-pronged attack across the Meuse River near Mouzon and Letanne. Both actions were to be heavily supported by machine-gun and artillery fire. The 5th Regiment, less two battalions, would be in reserve for the crossings.¹³⁵

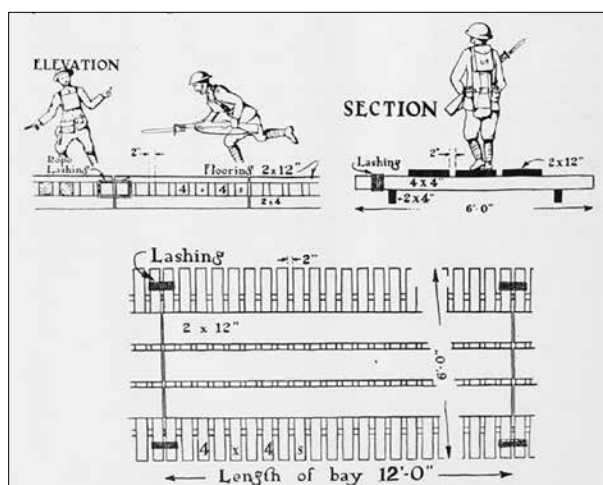
¹³¹ Mark E. Grotelueschen, *Doctrine under Trial: American Artillery Employment in World War I* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 127.

¹³² *Field Orders No. 59/60*, Headquarters 2d Division (Regular), American Expeditionary Forces, 9 November 1918, 1700, Field Orders, vol. 1, pt. 4. See *History of the Sixth Regiment United States Marines* (Tientsin, China: Tientsin Press, 1928), 49, for the brigade conference.

¹³³ Chief of staff [Hu B. Myers] to commanding general [Neville], 4th Brigade, 10 November 1918, Field Orders, vol. 1, pt. 4.

¹³⁴ In *Field Orders 60/61*, Headquarters 2d Division (Regular), American Expeditionary Forces, 10 November 1918, 1400, Field Orders, vol. 1, pt. 4, the choice of commander of the Letanne crossing was left up to Neville. George Hamilton was named as commander of the unit in *Field Orders No. 39*, Headquarters, 4th Brigade, 10 November 1918, 1400, 4th Brigade, Field Orders, vol. 2, pt. 1, which set out the tasks of each unit in effecting the crossing and controlling the east bank of the Meuse.

¹³⁵ See also *Field Orders No. 39*, Headquarters, 4th Brigade, 10 November 1918, 1400, 4th Brigade, Field Orders, vol. 2, pt. 1.



The 2d Division's 2d Engineers had the difficult task of building footbridges to span the Meuse River on the last night of the war. This sketch of the footbridges comes from the 2d Engineers' official history of the war.

W. A. Mitchell, *The Official History of the Second Regiment of Engineers and Second Engineer Train, United States Army, in the World War*

CROSSING THE MEUSE RIVER, 10–11 NOVEMBER 1918

In the 23d Machine Gun Company, Vincent Grube moved forward, believing that the war was nearly over and “hoping for the best.” Resting on a bank by the Meuse River with his machine gun crew, Grube was stunned when a shell landed among them, killing his crew. The concussion lifted up Grube and turned him over. He suffered a calf wound and “something seemed to snap,” as his “nerves went to pieces.”¹³⁶

Grube said, “The last thing I remembered was blood—warm blood—flowing over me like a river.” He regained consciousness in a church and cried when a doctor asked him his name: “I don’t know why I cried, but I couldn’t stop myself.” Grube’s Great War had come to an end and was getting close to doing so for the rest of the Marines.¹³⁷

The 2d Engineers Prepare Bridges for Crossing the Meuse at Letanne and Mouzon

After their retreat to defensive positions on the

east bank of the Meuse River, the Germans had destroyed the bridges crossing the river. It was normally about 45m wide, but the fall rains had swelled the river, making it an even more formidable obstacle. To traverse it, the Americans would have to cross on temporary bridges.

Colonel William A. Mitchell’s 2d Engineers had to construct footbridges for the Meuse River crossing, in addition to maintaining roads to the 2d Division battle front. While the Marines had been moving into place near the Meuse, on 8 November, two engineering companies went to a sawmill at Beaumont to construct the footbridges, using materials from former German barracks in the town and timber from nearby Letanne.

The 2d Engineers built four footbridges. They would place two bridges about 60m apart at the Mouzon crossing point, and two bridges at the crossing point north of Letanne. The Marines’ success getting across the Meuse depended on these footbridges.

The footbridges were described in a 2d Engineers report as a “raft pattern of our own,” which “consisted merely of a series of logs held together by skids, and looks something like a railroad track turned upside-down.” Bridge sections were 12 feet long, and about 6 feet wide.¹³⁸

In writing about the bridges after the war, Captain LeRoy Hunt of the 1st Battalion, 5th Regiment, cautioned:

Before going further, I wish to correct any false impression you may have received by the use of the word “bridge.” The word “bridge” generally creates in one’s mind a picture of a structure of solid foundation with a broad thoroughfare, together with the usual railings, braces, and the like. Blot out any such mental picture, and in its stead see a series of hastily constructed rafts of logs and rough boards, with possibly a couple of small pontoons, just as hastily lashed together with ropes, with no railing or supports of any kind, and you will have a correct picture of those bridges. I should say the “flooring” of the bridges

¹³⁶ Grube diary.

¹³⁷ Grube diary.

¹³⁸ Report is found in Folder “2d Engrs, Compiled History (8 Chapters),” Box 68, 2d Engineers, 2d Division Files, NARA, College Park, MD.



The Last Night of the War by F. C. Yohn, 1921.
Naval History and Heritage Command

*was about three feet wide. It took the Second Engineers just seven minutes to throw them across the river and secure them, so I think it can well be imagined that they were none too stable.*¹³⁹

On the night of the Meuse crossing, the engineers transported the bridge sections four to a wagon to within approximately 45m from the river. Then men skidded the bridge sections across the grass, up a eight-foot-high embankment, across railroad tracks, and down to the river. While they worked, an intense U.S. artillery barrage tried to keep the German machine guns and artillery on the east bank at bay. A dense fog covered the area, making it very difficult for the engineers to find their positions and work efficiently. But, the weather also favored the engineers. As they worked direct-

ly across the river from the German artillery and machine-gun positions, the fog made it more difficult for the Germans to pinpoint the bridges and the engineers at work.

The 6th Regiment Near Mouzon

For the attack north of Mouzon, 6th Regiment commander Colonel Harry Lee chose his senior battalion leader, Major George Shuler, with his 3d Battalion to lead the assault. Shuler's Marines waited for the 2d Engineers to complete and float two footbridges across the Meuse. At midnight, Shuler reported to Lee that the 2d Engineers had suggested that the Marines cross the first bridge while waiting for the second to be floated across. Shuler balked at this idea, insisting that the Marines cross on two bridges at the same time. In the face of strong German shellfire, the engineers placed one bridge across the river. Even with the extra help of 40 Marines, the 2d Engineers could not get the

¹³⁹ Hunt, "The Crossing of the Meuse River," 131.

other bridge across by the goal of 0400 hours.¹⁴⁰

Estimating it would take an hour to get his troops across the river, Shuler had set 0400 as the last possible time that his men could get across the river safely before daybreak. When the hour had passed with only one bridge in place, in consultation with his battalion commanders, Shuler decided that the attack could not proceed. Instead, he ordered his Marines back to the shelter of a nearby forest, the Bois du Fond de Limon.¹⁴¹

The 6th Regiment's attack across the two footbridges north of Mouzon would not occur. The only other place for the Marines to cross would be on the other two footbridges at Letanne.

The 1st Battalion, 5th Regiment, Attacks the Meuse River at Letanne

The 2d Battalion of the 356th Infantry Regiment in the flanking 89th Division had been initially scheduled to take part in the Meuse crossing near Letanne. Under command of Army Major Mark Hanna, the 2d Battalion could not make it to the river on time. Apprised of Hanna's difficulties, Colonel Feland sent his reserve 1st Battalion (led now by Captain LeRoy Hunt) to the crossing, and notified General Neville of his command decision. Neville made Feland the commander of the attack, given that it was now completely a 5th Regiment affair.¹⁴²

Although he was not present for the crossing near Letanne, Captain John Thomason of the 1st Battalion, 5th Regiment, heard multiple accounts from

his fellow Marines. He captured the essence of their experiences as he wrote about the night of 10 November when the Marines moved toward the river:

*The night was incredibly dark and the Meuse Valley was level full of mist, through which the slow rain fell. The only light came from the German shelling, for the German flares were blanketed in the fog. Nervous now and uneasy, the German guns placed fire of interdiction on the highway and on the river slope high-explosive and shrapnel. The column groped for the way with its feet, alternately blinded by shell flashes and plunged in darkness. Progress was terribly slow.*¹⁴³

When portions of the footbridges arrived at the river near Letanne, the engineers lashed them together end to end, then started shoving them across the Meuse. A guy rope held the forward end from drifting downstream. The Meuse River was running high and fast due to the large amount of rain since 1 November. While the engineers worked in groups about 60m apart, they pushed two 168-foot-long bridges across the river. Fortunately, German machine-gun nests across the river fired high over their heads, aiming for a road higher up the bank from the river. When the rope on one bridge broke, engineer Sergeant First Class Willard H. Marshall ran across the bridge and relashed it.

The engineers took only 7 minutes to get one bridge across; the other took 11 minutes. Just as the engineers got the bridges across to the east side, the Marines commanded by Major George Hamilton arrived and moved across the river on the rickety

¹⁴⁰ Commanding officer [Shuler], 3d Battalion, 6th Regiment, to commanding officer [Lee], 6th Regiment, 11 November 1918, 0001, 6th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 3, AHEC.

¹⁴¹ Commanding officer [Shuler], 3d Battalion, 6th Regiment, to commanding officer [Lee], 6th Regiment, 11 November 1918, 0300, 6th Regiment Reports, vol. 5, pt. 3. See also Rolfe L. Hillman, "Crossing the Meuse," *Marine Corps Gazette* 72, no. 11 (November 1988): 68–73.

¹⁴² Feland to secretary, American Battle Monuments Commission, 14 April 1930, File "Correspondence, 5th Marines," Box 194, Correspondence with Former Division Officers 2d Div, Record Group 117, NARA, College Park, MD. For Hanna's role, see George H. English Jr., *History of the 89th Division, U.S.A. from Its Organization in 1917, through Its Operations in the World War, the Occupation of Germany and until Demobilization in 1919* (Denver, CO: Smith-Brooks Printing, 1920), 224.

¹⁴³ John W. Thomason Jr. "November 11, 1918," *Leatherneck* 14, no. 11, November 1931, 10. For more on Thomason, see George B. Clark, "Col John W. Thomason Jr., the 'Kipling of the Corps'," *Leatherneck* 89, no. 8, August 2006, 26–29. Thomason was not actually part of the crossing; he had been recuperating from the flu after the battle of Blanc Mont. Thomason wrote several short stories about Marines that were published in serial magazines and collected in books, including *Fix Bayonets!* (1926) and *Red Pants and Other Stories* (1927).

wooden bridges.¹⁴⁴ The 2d Engineers guided the Marines along a path to the river.

Captain LeRoy Hunt later described the approach to the river:

*At a certain point I was to find guides from the Second Engineers, who were to guide us down a ravine to the river and bridge. We were in single file, each man hanging on to the bayonet, rifle, or coat tail of the man in front of him to prevent the line from breaking or getting lost. The fog that blanketed the ground that night would have made London jealous. You actually could not see three feet ahead were it daylight, let alone it being night time. In fact, the fog continued until about 1 p.m. the next day. In many ways it proved a blessing.*¹⁴⁵

The grave nature of the situation could not be discounted. Thomason wrote:

*The [Marine] files went crouching and sliding as low as they could get, but the engineers, spaced along the muddy slope, stood up so that they could be seen. By the river there was a knot of them, toiling at a flimsy thing [the bridge] that ran out into the water. The column rushed upon it, one man behind another, and it immediately sank, but there was a guide rope and the thing stayed under your feet. Shrapnel spattered and sang around, and great explosions tore the fog, and there was the keening rush of machine gun bullets and an intolerable noise; in effect a foggy hell, seen by nightmare flashes. But the bridge held up and the men filed across in ordered intervals.*¹⁴⁶

Hunt paid special tribute to the efforts and sacrifices made by the 2d Engineers:

Our whole route, from the point of first meet-

*ing the Engineers to the river, was lined with guides who called out to us through the fog and thus directed us by their voices to the bridge. I was told later that most of these guides were killed and that the next day their bodies, still lying at their posts, mutely continued to point out the way to the bridge. Would that some one [sic] could some day [sic] write a fitting tribute to these Second Engineers, who made possible the crossing of the Meuse on this night.*¹⁴⁷

Shortly before midnight on the night of 10 November, the 1st Battalion crossed the river on the southernmost footbridge against strong German machine gun fire. Captain Hunt recalled:

*The bullets were singing regularly and men were being hit at an alarming rate. At the water's edge was a steep bank about four feet high. This made the first section of the bridge slope down at about a 45-degree angle. Each man that crossed the river that night had to crouch down on his haunches and slide down. Some were unfortunate enough not to start in the proper direction and as a consequence slid off into the river.*¹⁴⁸

Going into the river proved to be a problem for many men, including Major Hamilton. Hunt described this mishap: "Major Hamilton in coming across a little later miscalculated a step and walked off the bridge into the river. His Mussette bag, which was over his shoulder, swung around his neck and temporarily pulled him under."¹⁴⁹ He had quite a time getting himself straightened out and back onto the bank."¹⁵⁰

Having taken Captain Hunt's place as acting commander of the 17th Company when he took over temporary command of the 1st Battalion, First Lieutenant Marshall P. Madison led the first contingent across a bridge at Letanne. Although the Marines had encountered heavy shellfire while

¹⁴⁴ See the two versions of the history of the 2d Engineers: Alan Burton, *History of the Second Engineers, 1916-1919* (Cologne, Germany: M. Dumont Schauberg, 1919), 70-74, and W. A. Mitchell, *Official History of the Second Engineers in the World War, 1916-1919* (San Antonio, TX: San Antonio Printing, 1920), 76-79.

¹⁴⁵ Hunt, "The Crossing of the Meuse River."

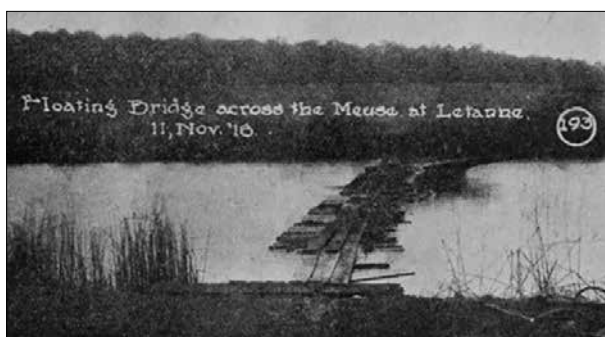
¹⁴⁶ Thomason, "November 11, 1918," 10, 53.

¹⁴⁷ Hunt, "The Crossing of the Meuse River," 131-32.

¹⁴⁸ Hunt, "The Crossing of the Meuse River."

¹⁴⁹ The musette bag was a light alternative to a full backpack and was used to carry small equipment or personal items.

¹⁵⁰ Hunt, "The Crossing of the Meuse," 132.



These U.S. Signal Corps photographs show the bridges the 2d Engineers built and floated across the Meuse River on the last night of the war.

National Archives and Records Administration

moving up to the bridge, Madison recalled that they did not undergo shelling during the actual crossing, but they did move through German machine-gun fire coming from the bottom of a slope just across the river.

When the Marines made it across the bridge despite the heavy machine-gun fire, the Germans retreated up the eastern slope through the woods.

About 100 Marines made it across. Madison concluded later that there was no delay and “the crossing functioned quite smoothly.”¹⁵¹

Captain Hunt recalled the 1st Battalion’s crossing somewhat differently:

*It is difficult to put the crossing itself into words; men were blown off the bridge from the concussion of shells, some were victims of machine-gun bullets and were consequently knocked off, while still others fell off. The weight of the men on the bridge made it sink below water level, at times over a foot or more. This made it necessary for each man to feel his way across with his feet, which added much to our discomfort, for it was bitter cold.*¹⁵²

Arriving on the east bank of the Meuse, 1st Battalion, 5th Regiment, runner Private Elton Mackin remembered: “It was an eerie, ghostly, deadly sort of place, a saucer-shaped hollow hemmed about by brooding wooded hills, a pocket where the shadows hid in fog. Marsh grass was underfoot, bunchy stuff that grew heavy, like roadside lumps of rank timothy [grass]. The withered leafy stems were cushions for the sounds we made.”¹⁵³ Mackin and a hundred of his colleagues moved out, aiming to push back the Germans who still fired toward the bridges.

While all this was happening, 6th Machine Gun Battalion commander Major Matthew H. Kingman sent four Marine machine gun companies to the river. Their goal was to follow the troops across the bridges and set up on the other side of the Meuse and provide secure protection for other crossings. Unfortunately, only one of the battalion’s machine guns made it across, accompanying Captain Dunbeck’s 2d Battalion. Kingman later recounted that “the crews of the 4 guns left on the west side of the river experienced such heavy losses that all 4 guns had to be salvaged.” Kingman acknowledged that the 23d Company casualties

¹⁵¹ Marshall Madison to Capt Howard F. K. Cahill, American Battle Monuments Commission, 13 November 1928, File “Correspondence, 5th Marines,” Box 194, Correspondence with Former Division Officers 2d Div, Record Group 117, NARA, College Park, MD.

¹⁵² Hunt, “The Crossing of the Meuse,” 132.

¹⁵³ Mackin, *Suddenly We Didn’t Want to Die*, 258.

during the crossing had been heavy, “but with this exception evacuations from wounds were light. All companies, however, suffered heavy losses by evacuation on account of sickness.”¹⁵⁴

A decade later, the commander of the 67th Company, 1st Battalion, 5th Regiment, Captain Frank Whitehead, gave the American Battle Monuments Commission a very detailed report on the crossing of the Meuse. After being sent to the rear to recuperate from illness, Whitehead had returned to his battalion on 9 November. The 1st and 2d Battalion and company commanders only had a brief time to look at maps of the east bank of the Meuse before starting the crossing. Whitehead asserted that losses were heavy while crossing the river and that the “weight of the men on the temporary bridges was such that the bridge was submerged until men stood in water waist deep.”¹⁵⁵

After crossing, the battalion and company commanders could not find a road through the woods to their original objective on the east bank because of the dense fog. Whitehead described how the men were formed in a column to “prevent straggling in the dense fog which reduced visibility to a few feet.” Several German soldiers stepped onto the path and “fired signal pistols at shoulder height in an attempt to illuminate the column. At one time the enemy fire was so accurate the column halted and facing to the left fired a volley into the woods.” This caused the Germans to retreat “and from the noise of the bodies crashing through the underbrush it was evident that the woods had been held by a considerable force.”¹⁵⁶

Of the three Marine companies involved in the action on the east bank, only 86 men remained. Apprised of this number, battalion commander Captain Hunt ordered the men back to the crossing bridge, where they dug in. The Marines waited, still expecting reinforcements from Major Hanna’s Army battalion.

¹⁵⁴ See Matthew H. Kingman, “Report of Operations, November 25, 1918,” File “Adjutant and Inspector,” Box 42, Entry 240 (World War I), Record Group 127, NARA, Washington, DC.

¹⁵⁵ Undated letter from Frank Whitehead to the American Battle Monuments Commission, Box 194, Correspondence with Former Division Officers—2d Division, RG 117, NARA, College Park, MD, hereafter Whitehead letter.

¹⁵⁶ Whitehead letter.

Hanna crossed the river, not with his battalion, but with four men. Hunt was stunned. Hanna started back across the river to find the rest of his battalion, but he was killed by a shell burst.¹⁵⁷ For his bravery in the last phase of the Meuse-Argonne campaign, Major Mark Hanna would receive the Distinguished Service Cross posthumously. Suffering heavy casualties, his battalion finally made it to the Meuse River and crossed, helping the Marines solidify their positions on the east bank.¹⁵⁸

The 2d Battalion Crosses the Meuse

A bit farther north, the second footbridge at Letanne was damaged by artillery fire after very few men from Captain Dunbeck’s 2d Battalion had crossed the Meuse. Consequently, Dunbeck led the rest of his battalion to the southern footbridge, crossing after Captain Hunt’s 1st Battalion had dug in on the other side of the river.

In his reminiscences written after the war, General Lejeune wrote about visiting a division field hospital soon after the Armistice. He asked a wounded, legless Marine why he had crossed the river when they fully expected the war to end within a few hours. The Marine replied that battalion commander Dunbeck had gathered his companies in a nearby ravine and simply said: “Men, I am going across that river, and I expect you to go with me.” The Marine, who had been hit by high-explosive shrapnel after crossing the Meuse, replied to Lejeune’s query: “What could we do but go across too? Surely we couldn’t let him go by himself; we love him too much for that.”¹⁵⁹

Private Alfred H. Randall of the 18th Company in Captain Dunbeck’s 2d Battalion recalled the night of the crossing and the intense sniper, machine-gun, and artillery fire.

The darkness alone was our salvation for flares were almost useless, lighting the dense atmosphere for a matter of feet and not enough for them to be of use to the snipers. Amid this confusion the word “Walk in the middle of the planks,” came down our column.

¹⁵⁷ Hunt, “The Crossing of the River Meuse,” 132.

¹⁵⁸ English, *History of the 89th Division*, 223–24.

¹⁵⁹ Lejeune, *The Reminiscences of a Marine*, 406.

*In the darkness I could not see the bridge itself, but followed the splash, splash of the man in front and was mighty glad when my feet struck land although they were both pretty wet.*¹⁶⁰

Private Clarence Richmond of Dunbeck's battalion remembered how long it took to get across due to the fragile state of the bridge. Once Marines reached the center, the bridge would sink under the weight of so many bodies, causing everyone to get wet while at the same time trying to avoid the machine-gun fire, shells from trench mortars, and artillery fire. Richmond reported that

*We had one element in our favor all during the night, and it was indeed a benefactor. A heavy fog hung over the valley, so thick that the enemy's flares could not reveal our presence. Had there been no fog, it is doubtful if enough of us would have gotten across to have told the tale, for those flares would have shown us almost as if it were day. Had our exact position been known, the hundreds of machine guns and trench mortars along on the bluff over looking [sic] the river would have wiped us off the face of the earth, and they did a good job of it as it were, the next day revealed.*¹⁶¹

In the fog and under machine-gun fire, Dunbeck's battalion crossed the river before midnight via the precarious footbridge. Men fell into the river, though not all as a result of being wounded by German shell and machine-gun fire. Dunbeck apparently fished one officer out of the water, noting that at the point where the man was dunked, the river was only waist deep.¹⁶² It was time to move to the other side.

Marines Establish Positions on the East Side of the Meuse River

At the crossing near Letanne under Hamilton's

command, what was left of the 1st and 2d Battalions spread out on the eastern banks of the Meuse River. Their goal was to drive farther eastward into the heights and forests overlooking the river. The 1st Battalion headed toward the Senegal Farm, about 1.6km beyond the river. The 2d Battalion moved toward Moulins, about 3km away.¹⁶³

The senior captain in Dunbeck's 2d Battalion, Captain Samuel C. Cumming, led his 51st Company over the footbridge across the Meuse in sleet and rain. Graduating from the Virginia Military Institute in May 1917, Cumming had been wounded at Belleau Wood. He received promotion to captain in July 1918, and for his bravery, Cumming would receive four Silver Star citations. On the morning of 11 November, he displayed strong leadership in gathering Marines together and continuing to fight the Germans.¹⁶⁴

Arriving on the east bank of the river, Cumming linked up with Marines from four other 5th Regiment companies, including Captain John Foster's 18th Company and Captain Nathaniel H. Massie's 43d Company. Unable to communicate with Dunbeck or Hamilton, Cumming led the gathered Marines downriver north toward where Major Shuler's 6th Regiment was supposed to have crossed. Because of the fighting and communication difficulties, Cumming did not know that Shuler's men had remained on the west bank.

Under heavy shelling and continued machine-gun fire, Cumming's men suffered what he described as "heavy casualties." At a bend in the river, a German machine gun held up the advance and hit several Marines. Determined to silence the gun, Cumming advanced with two men until, oddly enough, he "heard 3 men with beautiful voices

¹⁶³ See *History of the Sixth Regiment*, 49. See also James Nilo, "The Last Night of the War," *Leatherneck* 76, 11 November 1993, 18, 20; and Hillman, "Crossing the Meuse," 73.

¹⁶⁴ For more on Samuel Cumming, see the Cumming File, Biographical Files, Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA, hereafter Cumming file. Cumming would go on to be a brigadier general and assistant division commander of the 4th Marine Division during World War II. He retired as a brigadier general, then received a promotion to major general as a result of his combat citations during World War I.

¹⁶⁰ Undated letter by A. H. Randall, "Our Last Battle," Randall File, Archives Branch, History Division, Quantico, VA.

¹⁶¹ "The Last Battle of the War—Crossing the Meuse in the Fog, November 7–10, 1918," Richmond war diary.

¹⁶² Hillman, "Crossing the Meuse," 72.

THE FIGHTING FIVE

When the United States joined the war, University of Pennsylvania students Second Lieutenant Henry P. Glendinning and now-First Lieutenant Sydney Thayer Jr., also in 43d Company prior to transferring to the 55th Company in November, had joined the Marines as enlisted along with three other Philadelphia-area friends attending the university. This “Fighting Five” came from some of the most prominent families in society. At Belleau Wood, one of them, Sergeant Thomas Roberts Reath, was mortally wounded after volunteering to take a message to the battalion commander. Eventually commissioned a second lieutenant in Dunbeck’s 2d Battalion, Sydney Thayer had taken command of the 55th Company after its skipper, First Lieutenant Charles D. Baylis, was wounded on 6 November.¹

Several years later, First Lieutenant Thayer still had a “clear recollection” of the attack across the river. Thayer remembered that his company “was considerably delayed in crossing due to an accident to the bridge so that the 1st Battalion was actually across the river before my Company got across.”

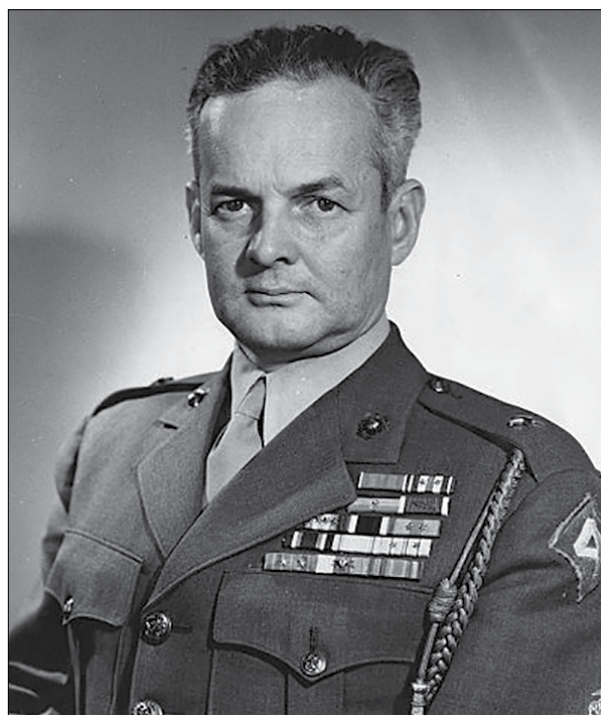
¹ See Charles D. Baylis to Jack Ausland, 13 November 1937, Ausland File, for Baylis noting he had been wounded “in the chest and lower left leg” on 6 November 1918. Baylis also noted that Lt Vincent A. Brady had been “seriously wounded.” Ausland notes in his diary on 6 November that “Lt. Sydney Thayer Jr. was given the company after Captain Baylis and a Lt. Brady were wounded.” For more on Sydney Thayer, see the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 8 November 1918, 129. Ironically, the article notes that Thayer had written home after the fight in the Champagne (Blanc Mont), he was “the luckiest man in the world, I guess. Chateau Thierry, Soissons, St. Mihiel and Champagne, and not a scratch!” The article notes that the University of Pennsylvania students eschewed commissions to join the 5th Regiment and see action more quickly. Thayer, Sydney Gest, and H. Percy Glendinning all became officers and were decorated for bravery. The Fighting Five are mentioned in *Pennsylvania, A Record of the University’s Men in the Great War*, A Supplement to the Alumni Register, October 1920. See also Philadelphia War History Committee, *Philadelphia in the World War, 1914–1919* (New York: Wynkoop Hallenbeck Crawford, 1922), 340, for more on Thomas Roberts Reath. After the war, an all-Marine American Legion post in Philadelphia was named after Reath. The post donated plaques commemorating the 5th and 6th Regiments and the 6th Machine Gun Battalion on a statue, *Crusading for Right*, which stands in front of Butler Hall at Quantico. The statue is often incorrectly named “Iron Mike.” For the genesis of the statue, see Emily Martin, “‘Crusading for Right’: The Story,” *Leatherneck* 95, no. 3, March 2012, 42–46.

Samuel C. Cumming (at right) led Marines across the Meuse River on the last night of the war, and his men were among the last to engage the enemy before finally learning of the Armistice signed earlier that day.

Official U.S. Marine Corps photo

singing ‘Silent Night, Holy Night’ in German.”¹⁶⁵

Working their way around to the rear, the three Marines charged the machine gun nest. Cumming’s men each bayoneted a German lying on either side of the gun, while Cumming shot the gunner in the back of the head with his pistol. After realizing the 6th Regiment was not going to cross the river by daylight, Cumming set up a defensive perimeter with 200 men at the projected crossing point. The Marines manned a tow path along the river, with less than a kilometer field of fire east toward



¹⁶⁵ Cumming file.



Graves near Meuse, ca. 1919.

From the George Barnett Collection (COLL/1635), Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA

a north-south highway, where the Germans were situated behind an embankment.

At 0730, Cumming asked for a volunteer to swim the river to carry a message back to Colonel Feland's headquarters. The volunteer made it about two-thirds of the way across the river when German fire killed him. Another volunteer stepped forward and made it all the way across the river. Although Cumming did not name the successful volunteer, one of his men, Private John V. Bridgford, received a Distinguished Service Cross (and a Navy Cross) for his actions that day. His citation stated: "Private Bridgford delivered an important message from his company to regimental headquarters. In the performance of this mission, exposed to heavy machine-gun and artillery fire, and in full view of enemy machine gunners, he swam the Meuse river. In spite of the great danger, he delivered the message as directed."¹⁶⁶

Second Lieutenant Frank B. Goettge of the 55th Company later reminisced that, after crossing the river, the Marines moved along a road "which was little more than a tow path for river boats." Because the 43d and 55th Companies had been severely depleted, Goettge confirmed that the companies were unable to reach their original objectives east of the river, but instead moved along the river bank. Goettge remarked that "the fog was very

dense, especially in the morning, making it almost impossible to see more than a few yards. The point [man] we had out in many cases ran into German sentinels along the tow path and shot them while the sentries [*sic*] relief slept in a dug out a few yards away."¹⁶⁷ Captain Foster also later commented on how foggy the morning had been, forcing the men to walk in single file and having "difficulty in keeping [in] touch with each other." He also confirmed that his company of the 2d Battalion had been forced to cross over on the southernmost bridge.¹⁶⁸

Eventually, Cumming's group struck out to the northeast, attacking through two farms to reach its destination at Bellefontaine Farm. In the meantime, other elements of the assault drove inland from the river. Dunbeck and patrols from Captain Blake's 66th Company and Second Lieutenant Henry P. Glendinning's 43d Company had reached the town of Moulins.¹⁶⁹

Once across, Thayer led his troops northeast toward Bellefontaine Farm. Two men wielding automatic rifles led on point; the rest of the fighters following in a column of twos. At about 0600, they seized the farm "without much resistance," and

¹⁶⁷ Frank Goettge to American Battle Monuments Commission, 11 December 1928, Box 194. Correspondence with Former Division Officers—2d Division, RG 117, NARA, College Park. Goettge would go on to be a star on the early 1920s Marine Corps football teams championed by Gen Smedley D. Butler. Goettge died in World War II, leading an ill-fated patrol at Guadalcanal.

¹⁶⁸ John R. Foster to American Battle Monuments Commission, Box 194, Correspondence with Former Division Officers—2d Division, RG 117, NARA, College Park, MD.

¹⁶⁹ Capt Samuel Cumming to American Battle Monuments Commission, 24 June 1929, Box 194, Correspondence with Former Division Officers—2d Division, RG 117, NARA, College Park, MD. See also Samuel C. Cumming, "My Last Day in World War I," Cumming Collection, Archives Branch, History Division, Quantico, VA, for more on the crossing of the Meuse and the final day of the war. For the push into Moulin, see Box 194, Correspondence with Former Division Officers—2d Division, RG 117, NARA, College Park, MD, for a handwritten undated note by Charley Dunbeck noting patrols in Moulins. 1stLt James A. Nelms, a hero of Blanc Mont, headed the 8th Machine Gun Company that supported the crossing by the 1st Battalion. He also noted that Capt Blake had reported that his company had been into the town of Moulins. See James Nelms to the American Battle Monuments Commission, 21 August 1926, Box 194, Correspondence with Former Division Officers—2d Division, RG 117, NARA, College Park, MD.

¹⁶⁶ For Bridgford's citation, see "John V. Bridgford," *Valor*. MilitaryTimes.com.

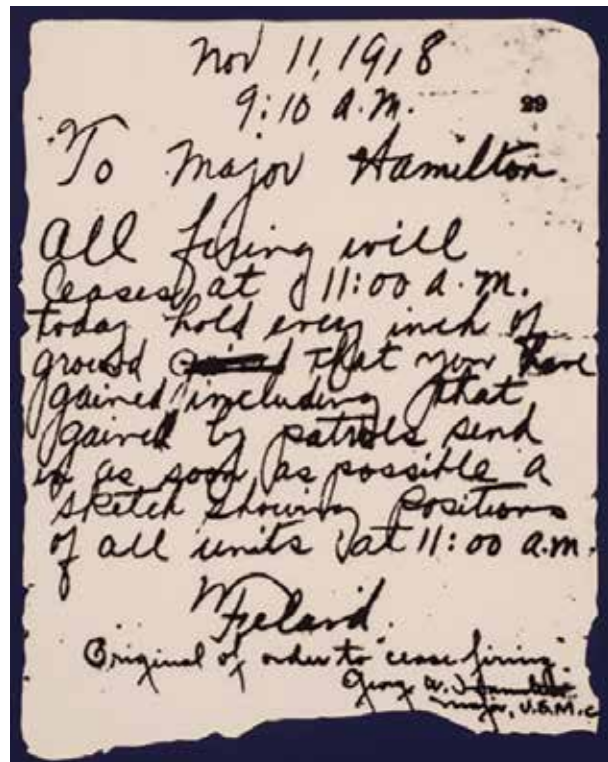
consolidated their position with other units of the 2d Battalion.

Thayer was wounded during the advance on the farm, but remained in command until he heard news of the Armistice. Left with little ammunition and food, Thayer admitted that “the Armistice came at just about the right time for us.” For his actions on 10–11 November, Sydney Thayer’s Distinguished Service Cross and Navy Cross citations stated: “After being wounded, Lieutenant Thayer remained with his company until its objective had been reached, refusing evacuation until rendered unconscious by loss of blood.”¹⁷⁰

From a tactical standpoint, the crossing of the Meuse was a success. The Germans were driven back from the eastern bank, and the Marines had gained a valuable foothold across the river. The casualty total remains indeterminate. Records of the Army Adjutant General’s Corps stated that 22 men of the 2d Division had been killed and 371 “wounded seriously in action.” Army colonel and historian Rolfe L. Hillman later wrote that 31 Marines had been killed and 148 wounded.¹⁷¹

ARMISTICE DAY, 11 NOVEMBER 1918

While the 5th Regiment’s Marines fought their way forward on the east bank of the Meuse River, the war was officially ending. The Germans signed the Armistice terms at 0500 on 11 November 1918. General Foch sent news of the Armistice to General Pershing’s headquarters soon thereafter. Hostilities were to cease at 1100—the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month. In turn, Pershing notified his corps commanders, and the news of the Armistice trickled downward. Lejeune’s headquarters received the news from Summerall’s V Corps



This note from 5th Regiment commander Logan Feland was sent to George Hamilton, announcing the signing of the Armistice. Official U.S. Marine Corps photo

headquarters around 0840 and passed it along in a telephone message to Marine brigade commander General Neville. Neville’s adjutant, Lieutenant Colonel Earl Ellis, wrote Peace Memorandum No. 1 a few minutes later, reproducing Lejeune’s telephone message.¹⁷²

Even as word of the Armistice signing went out from higher command, orders in general were ambiguous about the time between the Armistice signature and the actual 1100 cessation of fighting. It was left up to subordinate commanders to decide how to continue in the interval; they could stop fighting and hold their positions, or they could press the attack up to the last moment.

At General Neville’s command, Ellis sent another memorandum at 0900 to the commanders of the 5th and 6th Regiments and the 6th Machine

¹⁷⁰ Sydney Thayer to Clifton Cates, American Battle Monuments Commission, 15 August 1928, File “Correspondence, 5th Marines,” Box 194, RG 117, NARA, College Park, MD. Thayer’s citation can be read at “Sidney Thayer,” *Valor.MilitaryTimes.com*.

¹⁷¹ See United States, Congress, House of Representatives, Select Committee on Expenditures in the War Department, *War Expenditures: Hearings Before Subcommittee No. 3 (Foreign Expenditures)* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1920), II, 2186, for the Adjutant General’s casualty figures. Hillman’s figures are found in Hillman, “Crossing the Meuse,” 73.

¹⁷² For Ellis’s Peace Memorandum No. 1, see File “4th Brigade Armistice,” Box 17, Entry 240, RG 127, NARA, Washington, DC.

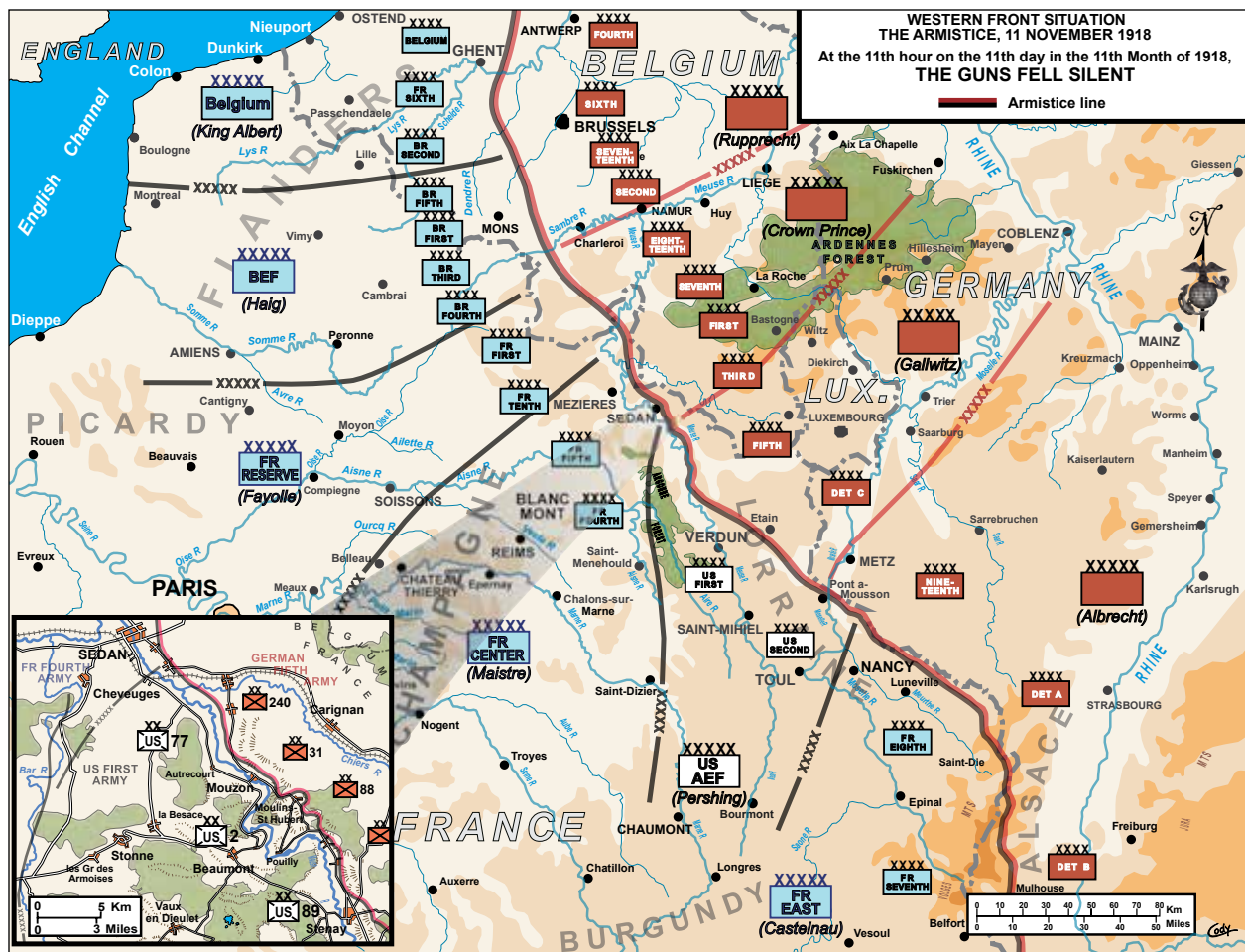


Illustration by LtCol R. L. "Bill" Cody, USMC (Ret)

Gun Battalion. It ordered that "troops will remain in place," "troops will hold no intercourse with the enemy," and "care must be taken to avoid exposure as it may happen that the enemy may not have received the same instructions and so as not to expose the location of our line."¹⁷³

In a follow-up to Peace Memorandum No. 1, Ellis wrote that "troops of the Marine Brigade will advance up to 11:00 A.M. At that hour the troops will dig in and consolidate the positions attained." Ellis cautioned that "the enemy will be watched

very carefully as he may be inclined to break the armistice and begin hostilities at any time," though "organizations will be placed in complete condition for combat as soon as possible."¹⁷⁴

At 0910, Colonel Feland wrote a succinct note to Major Hamilton: "All firing will cease at 11.00 a.m. today [so] hold every inch of ground that you have gained including that gained by patrols send in as soon as possible a sketch showing positions of all units at 11:00 a.m."¹⁷⁵

In response to the 1920 congressional subcommittee query regarding the last day of the war, General Feland stated that his troops were sup-

¹⁷³ Headquarters 4th Brigade Marines, American Expeditionary Forces, to commanding officers, 5th Marines, 6th Marines, 6th Machine Gun Battalion, 11 November 1918, 0900, "4th Brigade Armistice," Box 17, Entry 240, RG 127, NARA, Washington, DC, hereafter Headquarters letter.

¹⁷⁴ Headquarters letter.

¹⁷⁵ Ellis's follow-up memorandum and a copy of Feland's note to Hamilton are also contained in File "4th Brigade Armistice."



This postwar image reveals the flimsiness of the footbridges that were used by the 5th Regiment to cross the Meuse River on the last night of the war.

Official U.S. Marine Corps photo

posed to continue their operations up to the time of the Armistice. This meant pushing ahead to higher ground. Feland said, "This was necessary, in my opinion at least, to establish the command in a more secure position. In other words, we could not stop where we were upon receipt of the notification of the signing of the Armistice." He believed that "the casualties in the three hours preceding the time the Armistice went into effect were not great, [because] by far the greater part of the losses for the entire operation ha[d] been incurred during the crossing on the evening of November 10th."

Feland admitted that the message about the Armistice may have reached some of his patrol commanders after 1100. He reminded the subcommittee of the situation: the distance from his headquarters to some units was more than 8km, and the runners had to make long detours because of enemy firing. He thought all patrols had been notified by

noon, and that no casualties had occurred after the Armistice.¹⁷⁶ Although no casualties may have occurred after the Armistice went into effect, some Marines died shortly beforehand.

In what was described as possibly "the final act of heroism in battle in France during the great war," Private George W. Budde from Major Hamilton's 17th Company, 1st Battalion, died the morning of 11 November. A Cincinnati, Ohio, native of German heritage and a student at Xavier University until he enlisted, Budde had been wounded by shrapnel on 6 June at Belleau Wood. Referring to his actions on the last day of the war, Budde's posthumous Distinguished Ser-

¹⁷⁶ Logan Feland to MajGen Commandant [John Lejeune], "Information requested by Chairman of Select Committee on Expenditures in the War Department," 6 February 1920, File: Wars, WW I—Correspondence, Subject Files, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA.

vice Cross and Navy Cross award citations stated that “upon his own initiative, Private Budde advanced in front of the line to determine whether a certain machine-gun position was hostile or friendly, and was killed by a machine-gun bullet.”¹⁷⁷

Two days after the Armistice, 2d Division commander General Lejeune dispatched his division inspector, Lieutenant Colonel Harry R. Lay, to investigate the last moment of the war. General Neville stated that, when he received orders about the Armistice from 2d Division, he had telephoned the Armistice orders to the commanding officers of the 5th and 6th Regiments and followed up with runners conveying the message.

Colonel Feland asserted that “all the terms of the armistice have been scrupulously observed by the troops under my command.” Many officers and enlisted certified to Lieutenant Colonel Lay that no firing and no advance had been made after 1100. Among others, this included Captain Samuel Cumming, who commanded the 51st Company, 2d Battalion, 5th Regiment.¹⁷⁸

After the war, however, Captain Cumming asserted that both sides continued to exchange fire until around 1415. The Germans then ceased firing and started waving white handkerchiefs on their bayonets. A German captain and another soldier approached and discarded his pistol. Cumming and a German-speaking Marine went out to meet them. Noting that the Marines were surrounded with their backs to the Meuse, the German informed Cumming that the Armistice had taken place at 1100.

Returning to his lines, Cumming ordered his men to cease firing and stand up, after which the German soldiers poured out of their lines and ran toward the Americans. Cumming added: “Whereupon, they supplied German brandy and my men

supplied the cigarettes and one would have thought they were long lost brothers.” A half hour later, a messenger brought news of the Armistice. Cumming believed his men had fired the last shots of the war.¹⁷⁹

For the Marines, the final phase of the Meuse-Argonne campaign had come more quickly than expected. Cumming recognized that his German opponents seemed exhausted, while his men had rested three days before making the final assault across the river.

In any case, the Marines set about to fortify their tenuous position on the east bank of the Meuse. Field orders from General Summerall’s V Corps headquarters noted that “the present line attained will be organized in depth. Troops will be disposed so as to obtain the maximum rest and comfort consistent with necessary arrangements for security, and with preparations for further advance.” The order cautioned against any further communication with the enemy and added that “the present arrangements involving cessation of hostilities is an ARMISTICE only—and not a PEACE—and there must be no relaxation of vigilance.”¹⁸⁰

Official records do not reveal how many Marines were killed in the assault across the Meuse on the last night of the war. Overall, the Marines suffered 8 officers and 189 enlisted killed during the final phase of the Meuse-Argonne campaign. Another officer and 59 enlisted eventually died of their wounds. Seven officers were “wounded severely,” 20 “wounded slightly,” and 6 “wounded, degree undetermined.” Enlisted were listed at 222 “wounded severely,” 467 “wounded slightly,” and another 206 “wounded, degree undetermined.” Three officers and 55 enlisted were gassed.¹⁸¹

As had occurred throughout the war, Marines committed many deeds of bravery, some of them recognized in decorations, others not so. The last phase of the Meuse-Argonne campaign had been

¹⁷⁷ See the *Recruiters’ Bulletin*, 5, no. 4 (May 1919): 20, for the mention of “the final act of heroism.” For more on George Budde, see Felix Winternitz, “The Last Casualty,” *Xavier Magazine*, 2012.

¹⁷⁸ LtCol H. Lay, division inspector, to commanding general [Lejeune], 2d Division, “Report of investigation concerning what happened in each front line unit between our men and the Boche at 11:00 a.m. November 11, 1918 and what has happened on our front since, November 14, 1918,” Headquarters 2d Division, vol. 6, pt. 5.

¹⁷⁹ Samuel C. Cumming, “My Last Day in World War I,” Cumming Collection, Archives Branch, History Division, Quantico, VA.

¹⁸⁰ W. B. Burtt, chief of staff, *Field Orders No. 128*, 11 November 1918, 1700, Headquarters 2d Division, vol. 6, pt. 5.

¹⁸¹ McClellan, *The United States Marine Corps in the World War*, 65.

the capstone of a long war and an arduous mission to help defeat the Germans.

The day after the Armistice, General John Lejeune wrote appreciatively to the men of his 2d Division. He succinctly summed up their actions:

On the night of November 10, heroic deeds were done by heroic men. In the face of a heavy artillery and withering machine gun

*fire, the Second Engineers threw two foot-bridges across the Meuse and the first and second battalions of the Fifth Marines crossed resolutely and unflinchingly to the east bank and carried out their mission. In the last battle of the war, as in all others in which this division has participated, it enforced its will on the enemy.*¹⁸²

¹⁸² McClellan, *The United States Marine Corps in the World War*, 54.

APPENDIX A

MARINE ORDER OF BATTLE 4TH BRIGADE, 2D DIVISION MEUSE-ARGONNE OFFENSIVE, 30 OCTOBER-11 NOVEMBER 1918

Unit	Commander
4th Brigade	BGen Wendell C. Neville
Headquarters Detachment	
5th Regiment	Col Logan Feland
Headquarters Company	Capt Roswell Winans
Supply Company	Capt Edwin P. McCauley
8th Company (Machine Guns)	Capt James A. Nelms
1st Battalion	Maj George W. Hamilton
17th Company (A)	Capt Robert C. Anthony (to 10 November) 1stLt Marshall P. Madison (11 November)
49th Company (B)	Capt Francis S. Kieren
66th Company (C)	Capt Robert Blake
67th Company (D)	Capt Harry K. Cochran (KIA 1 November) 1stLt Elliott D. Cooke, USA (2-5 November) Capt Frank Whitehead (6 November)
2d Battalion	Capt Charley Dunbeck
18th Company (E)	Capt John R. Foster
43d Company (F)	Capt Nathaniel H. Massie
51st Company (G)	Capt Samuel C. Cumming
55th Company (H)	Capt Percy D. Cornell
3d Battalion	Maj Henry L. Larsen
16th Company (I)	Capt Robert Yowell
20th Company (K)	Capt Francis Fisk
45th Company (L)	Capt James F. Rorke (WIA 1 November) Capt Frank W. Wilson (2-9 November) 1stLt Earl F. Johnson (from 10 November)
47th Company (M)	Capt Clarence Ball (to 1 November) 2dLt Louis Cukela (2-7 November) 1stLt William H. Duckham (8 November)

Unit	Commander
6th Regiment	Col Harry Lee
Headquarters Company	Capt Wesley W. Walker
Supply Company	Capt Fred G. Patchen
73d Company (Machine Guns)	1stLt George R. Jackson (to 1 November) Maj Louis E. Fagan Jr. (2 November)
1st Battalion	Maj Frederick A. Barker (to 2 November) Capt Robert H. Shiel (5 November)
74th Company (A)	1stLt Leo D. Hermle
75th Company (B)	Capt Glenn C. Cole
76th Company (C)	Capt Macon C. Overton (KIA 1 November)
95th Company (D)	Capt Clarence N. McClure
2d Battalion	Maj Earnest C. Williams
78th Company (E)	Capt James McB. Sellers
79th Company (F)	Capt Eugene F. C. Collier (WIA 1 November) 1stLt Lloyd H. Houchin (1 November)
80th Company (G)	Capt Peter C. Geyer Jr.
96th Company (H)	1stLt Clifton B. Cates
3d Battalion	Maj George K. Shuler
82d Company (I)	Capt Pink H. Stone
83d Company (K)	Capt Alfred H. Noble
84th Company (L)	Capt Arnold W. Jacobsen
97th Company (M)	Capt Thomas T. McEvoy (WIA 1 November) 1stLt Albert G. Skelton (2–4 November) Capt Lloyd B. Dysart (5 November)
6th Machine Gun Battalion	Maj Littleton W. T. Waller Jr. (to 24 October) Maj Matthew H. Kingman (24 October)
15th Company (A)	Capt James F. Moriarty
23d Company (B)	Capt Louis R. De Roode (to 30 October) 2dLt James P. Schwerin (30 October–6 November) 1stLt Oscar A. Swan (7 November–KIA 10 November) 2dLt James P. Schwerin (10 November)
77th Company (C)	Capt Augustus B. Hale
81st Company (D)	Capt William H. Taylor Jr. (WIA 2 November) 1stLt Cornelius H. Reece (2 November)

Note: During the World War I era, the Marine Corps numbered its companies. They were numbered corps-wide without regard to type or parent unit. The Army required that, while assigned to the AEF, rifle companies of the 5th and 6th Regiments and machine gun companies of the 6th Machine Gun Battalion also be given letters. The letters are indicated in parenthesis. Nevertheless, Marines proudly continued to refer to their companies by number, seldom using the letters, except occasionally in reports to higher headquarters.

Source: George B. Clark, *The Fourth Marine Brigade in World War I: Battalion Histories Based on Official Documents* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2015).

APPENDIX B

CONGRESSIONAL SUBCOMMITTEE NO. 3'S INVESTIGATION ON THE LAST NIGHT OF THE WAR

Doubts about the decision to cross the Meuse on the night of 10–11 November eventually prompted a postwar congressional investigation. In 1919, the so-called “Subcommittee No. 3” of the House Select Committee on Expenditures in the War Department investigated the actions and decisions of the last day of the war.

Some subcommittee members visited General Pershing in France just before his scheduled return home in late summer 1919. Pershing was not happy at the prospect of being second-guessed, and put off the subcommittee members, saying his papers were packed and he would thus not be able to give appropriate answers to their questions. Eventually, he did write an answer to a subcommittee member’s query, stating that “neither the French nor the American were regardless of the wastage of men on November 11 or at any other time.”¹

Subcommittee No. 3 also questioned several other Army leaders, including First Army commander General Hunter Liggett and Brigadier General Fox Conner, who had served as Pershing’s chief of operations. Each denied that senseless slaughter had taken place. Conner admitted that if had he been 2d Division commander, he would have pressed the attack until 1100. The subcommittee issued a preliminary report criticizing the needless slaughter of troops on the final day of the war.

Dissenting committee members prevailed, however, and this unpatriotic conclusion was struck from the final report.²

In his memoirs after the war, General Summerall, V Corps commander, wrote about the Meuse crossing:

*I learned later that the brigade of marines in the Second Division resented the order to cross the Meuse River, as the Armistice came immediately afterward, and blamed me for their losses, which they said were unnecessary. Of course, I knew nothing of an armistice and was obeying the most urgent orders from the high command. The selection of the brigade of marines to lead the crossing of the Second Division was done by the Second Division commander, General Lejeune, a marine, without any reference to me. No doubt, he wanted to gain credit for the marines. There was no complaint from the army brigade in the Second Division. From my experience with the marines, they should never be employed with the army or under army officers. They fight no better than the army, and they complain, seek quick relief, and try to gain publicity.*³

¹ See Gen John J. Pershing to Congressman Alvan T. Fuller, 21 November 1919, in *Hearings before the Select Committee on Expenditures in the War Department: House of Representatives Sixty-Sixth Congress—War Expenditures* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1921). For Subcommittee No. 3’s investigation into the last day of the war, see Joseph E. Persico, “Nov. 11, 1918: Wasted Lives on Armistice Day,” *MHQ: Quarterly Journal of Military History* (Winter 2012).

² See testimony of Col Fox Conner, *Hearings before the Select Committee on Expenditures in the War Department*, 1717.

³ Charles Pelot Summerall, *The Way of Duty, Honor, Country: The Memoir of Charles Pelot Summerall*, ed. Timothy K. Nenninger (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 155. Nenninger in a footnote points out that Summerall believed the losses “excessive,” as cited in Grotelueschen, *Doctrine under Trial*, 127. In turn, Grotelueschen cites Summerall to deputy chief of staff, AEF, 5 January 1919, V Corps Historical File, Entry 1118, RG 120, NARA, 6.

General John Lejeune wrote in his autobiography that

*the night of this last battle of the war was the most trying night I have ever experienced. The knowledge that in all probability the Armistice was about to be signed caused the mental anguish, which I always felt because of the loss of life in battle, to be greatly accentuated, and I longed for the tidings of the cessation of hostilities to arrive before the engagement was initiated; but it was not to be, and many a brave man made the supreme sacrifice for his country in the last hours of the war.*⁴

Lejeune went on to note that Marshal Foch had pressed to continue the attack, to force the Germans to accept Armistice terms at which they initially balked. In the long run, Foch believed the continued attack could save lives by forcing the Germans to accept the proffered Armistice terms and thereby shorten the war.⁵

In a letter to Lejeune after the war, Summerall wrote that Marine officers had complained about military action on the last day. Lejeune replied that there was “a feeling of deep sadness among all on account of the heavy losses just before the cessation of hostilities,” but he assured the Army general that he had not heard complaints from officers.⁶

Lejeune acknowledged that one enlisted had written a letter complaining about the Marine general as well as Summerall. Lejeune exonerated Summerall, noting that “I fully understand that all orders for the operations during the last 24 hours as well as at all other times emanated from the very highest military authority and not from any subordinate officer.”⁷

Despite his wariness of the Marines, Summerall found Lejeune to be an effective leader. In a secret report to General Pershing made a month after the Armistice regarding all V Corps generals,

Summerall wrote that “Lejaune” was qualified for line work, and that “his mentality is such that he would develop into a very efficient administrative staff officer.” Lejeune’s command “exhibited satisfactory evidence of discipline.” The Marine general had a good understanding of supply. He also understood division staff work, which he closely supervised and which was “eminently satisfactory.” Summerall found Lejeune to be “physically strong, mentally active,” and circulating well forward with his troops during combat. He had a “quiet forceful manner, good poise, and expresses himself in a manner that inspires confidence.” He also was “very combative, takes a great pride in his profession, and is a determined, courageous, and aggressive officer.”⁸

In what was probably a reference to Lejeune’s suggestion for different units to cross the Meuse first, Summerall had one problem with Lejeune:

*[his] attitude towards higher authority is lacking in that absolute subordination and eager acceptance of difficult tasks imposed upon his command. He is inclined to insist upon being relieved after a period which he thinks sufficient, and to present objections and difficulties in the execution of missions assigned to him. However, when he commits himself to an undertaking he pursues his objective with admirable vigor, resourcefulness, and self-sacrifice.*⁹

On the subject of Lejeune’s qualification for leadership, Summerall finally concluded that he had “a sound purpose as well as resolute on the part of superiors will obtain the finest results from this officer.” Summerall believed that Lejeune was a “valuable officer as a brigade or division commander, and his command may be relied upon to go fast and to go far in the missions entrusted to it.”¹⁰

In November 1937, the *Saturday Evening Post* published an article based on Corporal John Ausland’s diary. Accompanied by the drawings of

⁴ Lejeune, *The Reminiscences of a Marine*, 400.

⁵ Lejeune, *The Reminiscences of a Marine*.

⁶ Lejeune to Summerall, 18 March 1920, “‘Controversies’—Data on Drive toward Sedan, November 1–11, 1918,” Box 26, Charles P. Summerall Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, hereafter Lejeune letter.

⁷ Lejeune letter.

⁸ Commanding general, V Army Corps, to adjutant general, AEF, “Report on General Officers,” 15 December 1918, “Fifth Army Corps. Report on General Officers of Corps. December 1918–February 1919,” Box 16, Summerall Papers, Library of Congress, hereafter Report on General Officers.

⁹ Report on General Officers.

¹⁰ Report on General Officers.

famed Marine Corps writer and illustrator John W. Thomason, the article “The Last Kilometer” publicly described the Marine’s unhappiness with the task of crossing the Meuse. Ausland served in the 55th Company in Captain Dunbeck’s 2d Battalion, 5th Regiment. The company had been led on the last night by First Lieutenant Sydney Thayer Jr., one of the “Fighting Five” group of friends who were University of Pennsylvania students before entering the Marine Corps in 1917 (see sidebar “The Fighting Five”).¹¹

Ausland based the article on his daily diary entries that questioned and criticized higher command, especially V Corps commander Summerall. Ausland remembered the Army general’s speech to the Marines before the final phase began, noting that afterward “we bowed and we applauded a little, not knowing what else to do. They left for another battalion, where the visiting general could spread some more applesauce and kid the boys about getting killed.”¹²

In his 9 November diary entry, Ausland noted that, during a march to a wood near the river, the Marines met other division members talking about the impending Armistice. He wrote that “everyone was all smiles. Surely there would be no more attacks.” Though, he reckoned that, “with all the enemy across the river and all of us on this side, it seems likely that we will have no more battle casualties. We have probably not lost a man since the fifth [of November].”¹³

When it seemed that the Marines were moving toward the river for a crossing attack, Ausland noted that the river was a natural boundary between the two forces, and that the Armistice was pending.

He disparaged Summerall as “that general,” who had spoken so negatively to the Marines: “To him, our lives are just a matter of arithmetic. So many men, so many square feet of land. So many victories, so many more stars for the general.”¹⁴

Writing to Ausland after he read the *Saturday Evening Post* story, First Lieutenant Thayer acknowledged that it was “one Hell of a night” and “we were fortunate that we did not lose more men than we did but I must say there were several times when I felt like a cold-blooded murderer in having to give the orders I did, particularly when I sent out that patrol which was really to draw out whatever fire there might be so that the whole column wouldn’t catch it in the neck.”¹⁵

In a letter to Corporal Ausland after he read the *Saturday Evening Post* article, a former Army sergeant at 2d Division headquarters, F. A. Connett, congratulated the author on “bringing to light the disgraceful attack of the 2d Division’s costly attack across the Meuse River on the night of November 10th–11th, 1918. I am very pleased that you did not lay the blame for the orders for this attack on the shoulders of General Lejeune.”¹⁶

Connett asserted that “General Lejeune was not at all in sympathy with this useless attack and took the question up with General Summerall at 5th [V] Corps Headquarters and attempted to the best of his ability to have the attack orders countermanded.” Noting that the request was turned down flatly, Connett wrote, “I personally have always placed the blame on Summerall’s shoulders. In my opinion, it was the most useless sacrifice of life to satisfy the vain whims of a General.”¹⁷

¹¹ Ausland, “The Last Kilometer,” 20ff.

¹² Ausland, “The Last Kilometer,” 79.

¹³ Ausland, “The Last Kilometer,” 79.

¹⁴ Ausland, “The Last Kilometer,” 79.

¹⁵ See Sydney Thayer to John Ausland, 22 November 1937, Ausland File, Box “2d Division, 5th Regiment,” World War I Veterans Survey Collection, AHEC.

¹⁶ See F. A. Connett to John Ausland, 11 November 1937, Ausland File, Box “2d Division, 5th Regiment,” World War I Veterans Survey Collection, AHEC, hereafter Connett letter.

¹⁷ Connett letter.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to thank Annette Amerman, Kara Newcomer, and Angela Anderson of the Marine Corps History Division, and mapmaker Lieutenant Colonel R. L. Cody, for their guidance and support for this project. Also, thanks go to J. Michael Miller, retired head of the Marine Corps Archives, for getting the author involved in the U.S. Marines in World War I Centennial Commemorative Series. Staff at the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration and at the Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle, PA, and especially Dr. James Ginter and his colleagues at the Archives Branch, Quantico, VA, also proved very helpful with the research for this project.

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