

EXPERIENCES

Lib

OF THE

GREAT WAR

ARTOIS

ST. MIHEL

MEUSE-ARGONNE

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# EXPERIENCES OF THE GREAT WAR.

## CHAPTER I

### THE DEPARTURE FROM CAMP

It was five o'clock on the afternoon of the seventeenth day of May, 1918, that my command, "E" Company, 320th Infantry, was lined up in front of the "Upper Barrack" at Camp Lee, Virginia, preparatory to leaving for the Great War. The men, in full equipment, and the officers completely togged up for foreign service, had previously taken part in a battalion parade. As we passed out Thirty-first Street and along Avenue B, on the way to the train, soldiers had lined both sides of the way and cheered us as we passed. Some people whom I knew called to me as I marched at the head of my column and bade me Godspeed. The men were, for the most part, silent. They were wondering, no doubt, how many of us who had started out on that great journey would ever return. And I confess, for my own part, that a lump came in my throat as I answered those who called to me, and the tears would not keep back. I remember Mrs. McQuillen, mother of one of my lieutenants, who came to tell him good-bye; she strove hard to keep back the tears as I shook hands with her. Reverend Mr. Nelson was at the train and insisted upon my stepping aside to take a snapshot of me togged up in my foreign service equipment.

We were soon aboard the train, men and packs and everything, including Pete, a black and tan bulldog, the mascot of "E" Company. It shall be my melancholy duty to report later the manner of his taking off. We reached Lambert's Point by ten o'clock that night and got aboard a ship, and by twelve o'clock, exhausted by the fatigue and emotion of the day, were sound asleep in our bunks.

The next morning (May 18th) shortly before noon we slipped out of the harbor so quietly that many of us did not know the ship had left until we chanced to go on deck.

The ship was called the Duke D'Abruzzi. She was an old Italian liner which we understood had been engaged for a number of years in commercial traffic between the Mediterranean Sea and South American ports. She was a dirty old ship of about 400 feet in length, with enough staterooms to accommodate the officers and some of the sergeants, and fitted up below the main deck with tier upon tier of canvas bunks for the men. The men's

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## CHAPTER VII

## THE TRENCH DES ARTISANS

Just at the fall of dusk I led my column up the valley that lay just in front of us toward the west, keeping always off the roads, as the Boche had them all registered, and passed at length across the ridge in the direction of Montfaucon. I crossed the Montfaucon-Cuisy Road and thence by the Fayl Farm where the brigade headquarters were located and then around the east edge of the Bois de Tuilerie and to the Trench des Artisans. I had fortunately sent some of my intelligence men ahead to locate the route, otherwise we would never have found the way over the fields and bogs and along the narrow passages through wire entanglements. Indeed, these narrow openings in the wire, and the difficulties of the way in the darkness, made it necessary for my column to stretch out in single file in many places, and it was with the greatest difficulty that I prevented some of my companies from getting lost. We reached the Trench des Artisans at 9:25 P. M. October 6, and I immediately sent the following message to the Commanding General of the 159th Brigade:

"I have to report that I have taken up support position in Trench des Artisans, behind Hill 299. Company "A," Hickey, has reported to me. Have taken over old Haddie P. C. at M2183 and I am awaiting instructions as to disposition of M. G. Company. I am sending runner to you.

WILLIAMS, Major, commanding Heston."

The Trench des Artisans was, as its name indicates, merely a trench. It extended at right angles from the Montfaucon-Sept-sarges Road for about two hundred meters and then paralleled the road for about the same distance. It was less than a mile from Montfaucon. I had placed my men in this trench and then proceeded to the Haddie Post of Command, which was about two hundred yards distant and located in a little shack beside a trench railroad at the edge of the Bois de Tuilerie. This shack was built of rough timber, about four feet high, ten feet long, and five feet wide, so that one had to crawl in and sit on the floor with his back against the side. Arranged in this order it accommodated, besides myself, my Adjutant, my Orderly, and two Signal men who looked after the telephone. This little place,

notwithstanding its dimensions, would have been very comfortable as life at the front went, if it had not been for the fact that our own heavy artillery was located in the Bois de Tuilerie, a few hundred yards away, and the Boche heavy pieces, which had registered on these guns, were continuously throwing over great, monstrous high explosive shells weighing from eight to twelve hundred pounds. And, due to his error in elevation, some of them were coming immediately over our heads and some falling on either side of us. One of these monstrous shells, I remember, fell within fifty feet of the right of the shack, wounding a wounded man and throwing dirt and shell splinters against our temporary habitation, and another one fell a short distance to the left of our shack. I remember things looked so shaky for a time that we had up the question of moving, but I was a little superstitious and thought that if we moved and got killed there would be no one to blame but ourselves. So we stuck it out and luck was with us.

Of course, nobody slept in the place, sleep was out of the question. In fact, when starting up to the fighting line one should make up his mind to leave sleep behind him. Sometimes it may overtake you, but you should never woo it; you must constantly repel it.

Without sleep, therefore, we remained in that little shack all that night. I did not know, of course, for what purpose my battalion was to be used, but the impression got abroad that we would move back in a day or two or that my men would be used for the purpose of preparing a defensive position above Nantillois, where it was feared the Boche intended to make a strong counter-move. The impression evidently came from an inquiry from Brigade as to how many men I had, and mentioned something about an engineering detail. I remember I replied that I had available 634 men. This was in addition, of course, to the Machine Gun Company that had been assigned to me.

No orders having been received on the night of October 6-7, I determined on the morrow to go forward to Nantillois and reconnoiter the route to the front and the terrain, and visit Colonel Love of the 319th Infantry under whose command I was to act until such time as my regiment should move up in that sector.

## A TRIP TO NANTILLOIS

In the morning, therefore, I started out with my Company Commanders and my Orderly, toward Nantillois. We followed for the most part the little trench railway that wound around the barren ridges until we reached the Nantillois-Sept-sarges Road at a point about five hundred yards from Nantillois.

There were many evidences that a great struggle had taken place over this ground in the battle of a few days before. Equipment and broken wagons and dead horses were everywhere. There were no dead men scattered over the fields, as they had been picked up and laid in a long row on the bank beside the road leading into Nantillois. There were perhaps a hundred of them. It was indeed a pathetic sight. They were Boche and Americans, lying side by side, calm and peaceful and unhating in death waiting for that final act of the crude hands of the living to shove them into the waiting grave, back into the bosom of the mother from which they sprang, to be known and seen no more upon the face of the earth.

As we entered Nantillois we passed through a cut in the road that formed a sharp impression on either side. Here horses and wagons and men were lined in as close as they could get for protection against the Boche shells that were searching the place constantly, as it was the main entrance to the town. Just beyond the cut, after we entered the town proper, the road was cluttered up with dead horses that had been killed by the Boche shells, evidently as soon as they cleared the cut and came into the open. They had been thrust into the gutter along the side of the road to make the passage clear. Indeed there was something almost as pathetic about these dead horses as about the dead men we saw. Not only were they pathetic, but they were horrible to look at. When horses are killed their food ceases to digest and begins to ferment and they swell up out of all proportion. Indeed, we were in no mood to gaze upon these torn, bleeding, swollen creatures and we therefore hurried on into the regimental headquarters, which was situated in what had once been a basement of a church but was now merely a vault, all the upper part of the structure having been blown away by shell fire. It was a very safe place on the inside, however, a heavily re-enforced cement affair upon the top of which heavy shells hit without appreciable damage.

This vault contained two rooms. I found Colonel Love in the back room. We went over the entire situation together, he explaining to me for the first time that my battalion would likely take over a sector in the front line, running through the Bois des Ogons. Colonel Love was frankly not optimistic about the situation at the front and did not hesitate to picture to me the great difficulties I might be expected to encounter. He was undoubtedly impressed with the fact that former attempts to advance beyond the place had been attended with such sanguinary results. He spoke especially of the Boche fire from across the Meuse that constantly swept the approaches to the place. I remember that his remarks were punctuated from time to time by the burst-

ing of shells in the immediate neighborhood of the headquarters, which carried conviction as to the truth of his statements.

I confess, therefore, that between the account that he had given me of the difficult situation I was about to face, perhaps that night, and the more immediate annoyance which the Boche gave us immediately outside of the headquarters, I was in no happy frame of mind as I left Colonel Love's vault, and moved back again to my headquarters in the Trench des Artisans, which latter place we reached about noon.

In the afternoon I set about making such additional preparations and provisions as would be found necessary on receiving orders to move forward. I recall that the rations which the men had on them were running low and I selected a position for my ration limbers to come forward to on the next day and bring rations to be taken up into the front line. I recall also that I made provisions for having the men's rolls dumped in a pile to be left under guard when we should go forward, as men could not go into battle with heavy packs. These things having been arranged for in the afternoon we began at dark what we thought would be another night of "Watchful Waiting." I remember after dark the telephone wires that connected me with Brigade and that ran through the Bois de Tuilerie were blown out by artillery fire and the signal men had to go out in the darkness through the shell-torn woods and repair them. I regret that I cannot recall their names so as to record and preserve a tribute to their splendid courage and devotion to duty. About 9:00 o'clock I received a message from Brigade to hold myself in readiness on an important order that could not be sent over the telephone on account of the ungentlemanly method the Boche had of "listening in" over the 'phone system, but was to come by messenger. The message reached me a half-hour later and was to the effect that I should move my command up to the front line and take over a certain sector in the Bois des Ogons so as to be in position before daylight the next morning. I communicated orders immediately to my commanders directing them to be in readiness. I delayed to move out, however, with my troops until about 12:00 o'clock as I assumed that would give me ample time to get into position before daylight as prescribed in the order. In the meantime Colonel Love had sent me two guides for the move. I remember I raised a great deal of fuss and even went so far in an unguarded moment as to cuss a little—about not having received more guides, as I considered that I should have one guide for each company at least, even one for each platoon as my troops were going in the darkness into an area which neither I nor my officers had reconnoitered in daylight. As I could not talk about this matter over the telephone, I determined to go slightly ahead of my troops, see

Colonel Love and secure, if possible, more guides for my troops, and have them ready at Nantillois by the time my men arrived.

#### THE BOIS DES OGONS

Full directions having been given my Company Commanders as to the route and the time of departure, I started out with my Adjutant, my Doctor, my Orderly and certain Intelligence men and runners attached to battalion headquarters. We followed for the most part the route that we had taken on my trip of the morning, but it was dark, of course, and therefore much more difficult. The trip was not unusual for that time and place. We were grateful for the darkness that gave a sense of security from the whining shells that searched the area, and the noise of many guns with their flashes lighting the sky stimulated and exhilarated the body and mind beyond all powers of description. I remember how fatigued in mind and body we were after the four kilometer hike over the area amid the scenes that I have described and how relieved we were when we finally, about one o'clock of the morning of October 8, reached Colonel Love's headquarters and went inside in a place of safety. I remember when we went through the front room of the vault I had to literally walk over the top of the men who were lying on the floor, so crowded were they, and the atmosphere was so tense that it could have been cut with a knife. The officers in Colonel Love's room were suffering under the strain of some excitement too, due to the fact, no doubt, that the Colonel's Adjutant had been killed outside the door that day and another of his officers had been shell-shocked at the same time. I remember as we got into the Colonel's room, a circumstance that happened that night which, under different environments might have been laughable, but betrayed the state of mind of the men in that room. The vault was closed up tight with heavy iron blinds, and the candles were burning all around the room. My Doctor had rolled a cigarette and he struck a match to light it. Colonel Love turned on him in an instant and said:

"For God's sake, man, put out that light. Do you want us all killed in here?"

I was not successful in getting any more guides out of Colonel Love, except that he furnished me a man to show me the P. C. that had been established for the battalion on the side of the hill up from Nantillois leading toward the Bois des Ogons. He said that the two guides he had furnished me would show the companies the sector and eschelons to be occupied. He kindly assured me, however, that it was "a hell of a place to go into." I had occasion to find out that he was not mistaken in his estimation of the situation.

After a little while I judged that my troops had reached Nantillois and I went out to meet them and started up with them up the hill toward the Bois des Ogons. I stopped off however at the battalion P. C. and saw Captain Egan, whose battalion I was to relieve; and later was shown by him to the position of my headquarters on the crest of the hill above Nantillois. The march of my troops up the hill that night was all Colonel Love told me it would be. It was hell. The night was dark and the way was difficult and the Boche was sweeping the place from across the Meuse with light and heavy shells and with those most dreaded demons of all weapons, the Austrian 88's, or the whiz-bangs, as they are called. He was also putting over gas in great quantities. Indeed, it is hard to understand how any living creature could have passed up that hill that night without injury, and it seems almost incredible that we should have suffered only fourteen casualties. In the clear light of early morning on the 8th of October my men were all in position and my Company Commanders reported to me.

#### THE LITTLE SUNKEN "LOG CABIN"

My P. C. was on a ridge about six hundred meters north of Nantillois, that being the place to which I was directed by the guide. It was not a place to be chosen, but soldiers cannot be choosers at a time like that. It was a little oblong affair, perhaps four feet in the front, about five feet wide and ten feet long, built up about a foot above the surface of the ground and covered with timber and earth. It resembled, indeed, a sunken log cabin, with an entrance that I had great difficulty in creeping into with my pack on my back. I shall never forget that little sunken log cabin, with its dirt walls, and dirt floor, and the shelter-half before the entrance to keep the candlelight from shining out toward the Boche, as he had built the place and the opening was, of course, in his direction. As I said before this little shack was on the ridge above Nantillois, and on a direct line between that town and the Boche guns across the Meuse. We had no occasion to be reminded of this as the Boche was pouring gas shells into Nantillois day and night, some of which fell short, and I remember one of them burst just outside and we had to wear the hated gas mask for a time.

After daylight I received word from Colonel Love that I would be held responsible for the safety of the forward zone. I determined, therefore, to go over the positions of the entire sector and make a thorough inspection and make such changes as might be thought necessary for the safety of the place. Captain Sabiston, my Orderly, and I started out, therefore, on the morning of October 8th on our tour of inspection. By the light of

day we could see what havoc had been wrought on the Americans in the attempts that had been made to advance beyond the Bois des Ogons. Due to the continued heavy fire, details had not been able to police up the battle fields, and dead men were scattered everywhere; some of them were my men who had been lost the night before, but most of them belonged to the battalions that had experienced such sanguinary results in their attempts to take the place. It was indeed a pathetic sight to look at the cold and silent figures, calm and peaceful among so much conflict.

We passed by "D" Company in the third echelon and on to "B" and "C" Companies that were in the trenches newly constructed before the Bois des Ogons in anticipation of a great drive, and thence on to the Bois des Ogons. This wood, which is situated upon a crest, was literally torn to pieces with shells, great trees broken off and torn up by the roots, and the whole place saturated with the nauseating odor of phosgene gas. I remember, when going through these woods I stopped and talked with Captain Hooper of the 319th Infantry, the fighting parson of Culpeper, Virginia, whose regiment occupied a sector on my left. After smoking a few of his cigarettes I went up the road further into the woods and came up to Captain Ted Davant, whose machine gun company had been attached to my command for the operation. I remember Captain Davant talked to me from his little subterranean house. I ascertained from him the location of his guns which had been placed for defensive action and had him make a sketch of their locations. I passed along the wood road leading eastward to "A" Company and to the outpost line of that company along the north and northeast edge of the Bois des Ogons. From the positions of the outpost lines I could see the Bois de Fays and the terrain to the front. I have often wondered why we were not shot to pieces on that occasion as we were in plain view and range of the machine guns we afterwards encountered. Satisfied with the dispositions after some changes which I ordered, I passed along the east edge of the woods and thence back toward my P. C., which latter place I reached about 11:00 o'clock. I immediately had my Adjutant consolidate the sketches of the positions of my troops and sent the consolidated sketches to Colonel Love. With the changes I had made I considered the place well-nigh impregnable against any attack the Boche might put over.

#### ORDERS TO ATTACK

The afternoon of the 8th was devoted to patrols to the front, to going over the maps and information at hand, and making such preparations as could be made in anticipation of orders for fur-

ther action. I had not long to wait, for that night I received from the Regimental Commander a lengthy field order from which I quote the following paragraphs:

"2. On "D" day at "H" hour this regiment will attack side by side with Haddie, following a rolling barrage which will move forward at H plus 15 minutes at the rate of one hundred meters in ten (10) minutes.

3. (a) Heston and Machine Gun Company Hickey, Major Williams, commanding, the assaulting troops.

(b) Hem with Machine Gun Company Henty, Major Emory, commanding, the support, will at H plus 15 minutes keep liaison with and follow Heston in such formation and such support position as will minimize losses from long range artillery fire expected from the northeast.

(c) Heyman, Major Holt, commanding, the reserve, will maintain liaison with and follow Hem in such formation and at such support distance as will minimize casualties."

In other words, we were to go over the top when we should get word as to the day and hour. Indeed, of the day and the hour we knew not, but we knew now it was certain to come and we must be prepared to meet it. In the morning, therefore, I summoned my Company Commanders and Captain Davant for a conference, and for the purpose of giving such orders as might be necessary to have the command in readiness when the hour and the order arrived. I shall never forget that meeting. We crowded into the little sunken log cabin and pored over the maps and the orders, going into every possible phase of the great situation. Indeed, so absorbed were we in the great enterprise in hand that lunch time came before we realized it, and I remember how the 7 of us—Captain Sabiston, Captain Gilmore, Captain Little, Captain Davant, Lieutenant Pownall, Lieutenant Preston, and I—ate the hard bread and canned salmon and drank the black coffee with as much relish as if we had been at a feast. I suppose that no one who was at that meeting will ever forget the great German shell that skimmed the corner of the shack and threw dirt and debris all about it while we ate.

I made Captain Sabiston second in command as he was the ranking Captain in the battalion. When we had completed the conference the Company Commanders went to join their commands, except Captain Davant, who remained with me, as his machine gun company had to be withdrawn from the outpost line in anticipation of the attack we were going to make.

In the meantime the following order had been transmitted to me from Brigade:

"Standing barrage will start at H-15. Barage will commence to roll at H hour. H hour will be notified later."

There remained then nothing to be done until information should come as to when "H" hour would be. I had not long to wait for this. My Company Commanders had not left me for more than thirty minutes when at 2:30 o'clock I received from regimental headquarters the following brief but comprehensive and important message:

"H hour is 3:30 P. M."

In other words, the standing barrage would be laid down on our front at "H"-15, a quarter past three o'clock, and would begin to roll forward at 3:30 o'clock and we were to follow it. I immediately sent the following message to each of my Company Commanders:

"H hour is 3:30 P. M. Send runner back so that I may know that you have received this."

Everything was now in readiness, my troops were to form immediately in pursuance of the order I had sent them, and the disposition had previously been determined upon as follows:

Front line: "B" Company on right; "A" Company on left.  
Support line: "D" Company on right; "C" Company on left.

I directed Captain Davant to remain with me as his company of machine guns was to follow the front line companies so as to be in readiness for service when called upon, particularly for the purpose of consolidation.

#### FOLLOWING THE BARRAGE

We immediately began to get in shape, to collect maps and orders, and to strap on the inevitable pack with belt and pistol and all that. I remember while I was doing this I had my orderly make me a cup of strong coffee, which I thought would never cool enough for me to drink. At length I got it down and it stimulated me wonderfully. I remember I got in shape before some of my headquarters, and Captain Davant, my Adjutant, my Orderly and I went out ahead. It was a beautiful afternoon, and it seemed a pity to spoil it with so much din of war and bloodshed. I remember I passed by the post of "D" Company, over the ridge and through the wire, thence by "C" and "B" Companies. The latter company was just forming the battle line and I remember I went in advance of it, giving certain orders and, I fear, cussing a little because of its tardiness, although I knew it was not at fault. In

the meantime the standing barrage had come down and the shells from our artillery were going over our heads by the thousand. One poetically inclined might say that it sounded like the mysterious music of a great celestial organ. Indeed they were music to my ears, a music that was rudely marred by the discordant sound of the demoralizing whiz-bangs (the Austrian 88's), and the insistent trench mortar shells that the Boche was putting over. Here indeed was an exhilaration of the mind and body that thrilled the soul of man, and a thousand other emotions tearing the heart. As I waited at the edge of the Bois des Ogons for my headquarters to come up and saw my brave boys in battle line coming up the hill to meet whatever fate might have in store for them, calmly, stoically and, indeed, sadly, I looked on them in wonder and admiration and my heart went out to them in pity and in sorrow. In such a time as this one knows indeed that "War is Hell."

In a few minutes the remainder of my headquarters came up and in open formation, so as to minimize losses from artillery firing, we moved by the southern edge of the Bois des Ogons and thence, by short movements from shell hole to shell hole, we proceeded to the southern slope of the ridge running east from the wood. Here I could perceive that my right flank companies had been held up just in front of me and I established my headquarters which, for the time being, included myself and my Adjutant, in a fresh shell hole and waited for further developments. I immediately sent out a messenger to Captain Little, who was in command of "B" Company in the right front, asking him for information of his situation and in a short time received word that he was being held up by enemy machine gun fire in the edge of the Bois de Fays in our right front. I sent him word at once to send a patrol through the woods through the right and take the enemy guns from the flank, as I knew the general situation of the guns from the map and from the reports of the patrols of the day before. Immediately after sending this message I ordered the trench mortars and the one-pounders to come up to take care of the Boche guns if they could not otherwise be reached. I remember Lieutenant Zouck as he came up to me with his trench mortars; he was full of eagerness to do what he was ordered to do, a smile playing always on his youthful face. It was good for him, poor fellow, that he did not know that he had only one more day to live. I sent him and the officer in charge of the one-pounders to the edge of the woods at the crest of the ridge to be ready to give such fire as might be found necessary. In the meantime I waited for action on the right flank; waited in that shell-hole, receiving and sending messages and orders for more than an hour, as it afterwards turned out, but for a time which seemed

to me then almost unlimited in duration, because the afternoon was rapidly passing away and the time for darkness was approaching and I knew that if we were to make progress we must make it while it was yet daylight. The direct losses which I sustained by that hold-up on the right flank were not large; only now and then a man would throw his arms into the air and fall to the ground, but the indirect effects, as I afterwards found out, were intended by the Boche to be very much more serious, if he were to put into operation one of the tricks of defensive warfare at which he was so proficient; that is, by holding us up on our right flank a sufficient length of time to communicate our front lines to his mobile auxilliary artillery weapons and to use these weapons in putting down a counter barrage on our troops.

#### A GERMAN TRICK

In fact, this is what he actually did do. After about thirty minutes hold-up, he opened on the ridge on which my troops and I were located with his trench mortars, those little six-inch monsters that shoot around thirty shots a minute, and with the demoralizing whiz-bangs, traversing from right to left and from left to right along the slope of the hill crest. I shall never forget the experience and sensations of that hour. The trench mortar shells, coming in rapid succession, were digging holes on each side of me the size of the one that I was in, and the merciless whiz-bangs were going over the parabola of the hill. The noise was so intense—noise of bursting shells, of the hideous crying of particles of flying steel, that I had to speak at the top of my voice to make myself heard by Lieutenant Preston, who was in the shell hole with me. It is impossible to describe one's feelings in a situation of that sort or to record the thoughts that passed through a mind so torn with conflicting emotions. And yet it is remarkable what trivial incidents happening under circumstances of that sort will make an impression upon the mind. I remember distinctly a Boche prisoner who was sent to me by Lieutenant Pownall on the supposition that I might get from him some information. He was trembling from head to foot and could hardly speak, and I saw at a glance that I could not get any information that was worth having from a man in his condition. I remember, therefore, that using my limited knowledge of German and speaking at the top of my voice so as to be heard through the din and confusion of battle, I pointed to the rear and said to him:

"Gehen Sie hinter; machen Sie schnell."

The alacrity with which he moved down the hill convinced me that after all I spoke tolerably good German. We never sent fighting men back with prisoners as we could not spare fighting

men for this duty, unless there was a great body of prisoners and it was necessary that they be guided to the rear. There were other men back of the fighting front, less busy than we, whose duty it was to take care of prisoners.

At length, a little after five o'clock (I remember the sun had gone down and the gray dusk was creeping over the earth, as the days were short at that season of the year) the flank movement on the right having overcome the resistance of the machine guns in the edge of the Bois de Fays, "B" and "D" Companies began to move forward again. Owing to the dusk progress was slow and men perforce were compelled to be cautious lest they creep unsuspectingly upon a hidden foe, and after a little while machine guns began to fire on my troops from the edge of the Bois de Malaumont, further on in our sector, and the whiz-bangs were coming over the hill in great rapidity and the trench mortars were still traversing the slope; but we pressed on. I remember as I started to move forward a heavy clod of earth that was thrown up by a trench mortar shell struck my helmet and knocked it askew. Indeed, we were literally "picking our way through a barrage," as the British used to say.

#### PICKING A WAY THROUGH A BARRAGE

One who has never "picked his way through a barrage" can scarcely be expected even to imagine the sensations that throbbled through the heart and mind in such a time as that. One feels in the presence of those powerful and death-dealing instrumentalities how infinitesimally small is man, how life and death are separated by a mere chance. One feels as though he were looking through a film into the great eternity and that at any instant, without a moment's warning, he may come face to face with the great hereafter. Indeed, there is no exaltation, no haughty self-pride at such a time as this. One is all humility. One only hopes and trusts, and maybe prays, and moves steadily forward with a heart full of sorrow and hope. These were my feelings as we passed around the northeast edge of the Bois des Ogons, picking our way through the tangled wire and the gas-soaked ground in the darkness.

I remember how much I deplored the fact that it was growing dark; we had regained the momentum of the attack and by the light of day I felt sure we could have pressed on. In fact "A" Company and "C" Company had made a splendid fight, steadily through the north edge of the Bois des Ogons and out into the open, storming by brilliant attack and taking a system of trenches a hundred meters north of that wood, where a large number of the enemy were killed and "A" Company took 23 prisoners and

three machine guns and "C" Company took 22 prisoners and three machine guns.

We had now passed beyond the Bois des Ogons after having overcome every element of the stubborn and persistent resistance offered by the enemy. As the battalion continued along the open ground to the north of the wood the enemy opened with heavy machine gun fire from the edge of the Bois de Malaumont immediately in our front. It was now well-nigh dark and in this situation I ordered the companies to find such shelter as could be found along the slope to the ravine running south of the Bois de Malaumont, and the Company Commanders to report to me for orders. I remember as soon as I had sent for the Company Commanders I sought some place where I could establish a temporary headquarters and make a light to go over the maps and orders and things of that sort. We inspected, as well as we could in the darkness, the system of trenches beyond the north edge of the Bois des Ogons where the Boche prisoners had been taken. I recall how we went into one shelter after another only to find some dead or dying Boche in it, and as I did not wish to spend any time in their company I selected a simple trench that had a piece of sheet-iron over it and established there my temporary headquarters. I had some shelter-halves hung over the edges of the sheet iron to keep the light from shining out. Fortunately there were plenty of Boche candles in the place. I remember as soon as I got into the place I sent the following message at 6:55 to the Regimental Commander:

"At 5:45 my line was about G0940. My intention is, if the Cunel-Briuelles Road can be reached in the darkness, to consolidate there for the night and to rush a line of outposts well to the front. Final decision will depend upon results and further information as to progress of unit on right flank."

In other words, my plan was to press on during the night without giving the enemy time to consolidate or withdraw, and to clean out the Bois de Fays, the protected positions in the ravine and the Bois de Malaumont during the night. At first blush it seemed an impossible task but time and opportunity are everything in winning battles and we had the time and I knew that my officers and men were capable of performing any task no matter how difficult. At the same time, as will be noted, attention had to be given to the flanks, as progress made without flank protection might prove more dangerous than no progress at all. At length in response to my order Captain Sabiston ("D" Company), Captain Little ("B" Company), and Lieutenant Pownall ("C" Company) reported to me. Captain Gilmore ("A" Company) had been wounded and I sent him back on a stretcher. It developed also at that time that three platoons of "A" Company

had kept in the open in passing beyond the Bois des Ogons and, together with certain units of the 319th Infantry in the sector of my left, had gone on in the direction of Cunel at least a kilometer into the German lines, leaving only one platoon of "A" Company with my command. I sent for Lieutenant Machette, the commander of this platoon, to report to me in the conference to take place there, for further orders.

#### "COMBING" THE WOODS AT NIGHT

I shall not soon forget the little improvised shelter in which I spent several hours that night, stooping over to clear the sheet-iron roof until my back ached. In going over the map and by the use of the compass I could easily see that in the darkness and confusion of battle and what not, my companies had to some extent lost their sense of direction and we were not heading with sufficient accuracy in the right direction for progress in the sector that had been assigned to us, and I determined upon a complete readjustment of positions before attempting further progress. As I said before, I was convinced also that I should not halt in this position for the night and thereby give the Boche an opportunity to further strengthen his machine gun and other positions along the edge of the Bois de Malaumont from which we had already received a heavy volume of fire. Moreover I was convinced that, unprecedented as it was, the peculiar situation here gave a fine opportunity for combing the Bois de Fays and Bois de Malaumont in my sector at night and clearing up my front to the Cunel-Briuelles Road. Some of my Company Commanders were doubtful whether such a mission could be accomplished at night, but I believed it could, fully appreciating the difficulties of keeping contact in the woods at night, especially where men must fight for the most part hand to hand with the enemy. I therefore ordered "B" and "D" Companies to reform in the same order in which the attack was begun and to fall back about three hundred yards to where a little trench railroad ran out of the Bois de Fays and to comb the latter woods to the ravine between the Bois de Fays and the Bois de Malaumont and to report to me when that mission was accomplished. This movement began at 9:30 P. M. "C" Company and one platoon of "A" Company I directed to await further orders. In the meantime I waited for developments, receiving and sending messages and giving orders. I remember, as I sat in the little improvised headquarters about 11:00 o'clock, the shelter-halves lifted and the face of an old classmate of mine at the University of Virginia was thrust into the opening. It was Captain Paul Barringer who was commanding some heavy trench mortars and had been directed to report

to me for orders. He recognized me first as he had grown a mustache, which disfigured him somewhat and concealed his identity. It was a peculiar situation in which to meet an old classmate and I was certainly glad to see him. His mortars were south of the Bois des Ogons, and since they were heavy and had to be carried by his men who, he said, were already nearly exhausted, I told him to have them brought up early in the morning and report to me for such dispositions as might then be thought advantageous.

During the process of combing the Bois de Fays some of my men had captured a German Corporal and they sent him to me. With the assistance of Lieutenant Thompson who was attached to my headquarters, I talked with this Corporal for some length. He said his name was Pat, a strange name for a German. Nevertheless he was a Prussian, and I remember how his blue eyes twinkled in the candlelight as he answered many of my questions. He had been in the War four years and was glad to get out of it. I asked him how many men were in the Bois de Fays and in the Bois de Malaumont. From what I afterwards ascertained it appeared that the information he gave me was correct. I also asked him the strength of the enemy along the ridge north of the Cunel-Brieulles Road, which I knew to be a strongly held enemy position. He said they were a thousand strong and a relief had taken place the night before bringing in fresh troops. This was interesting if not cheerful news, although I could not afford to place too much credence in any statement he might make. At length I sent him happily on his way back toward Nantillois and suppose he reached there safely.

At length, the mission given to "B" and "D" Companies of combing the Bois de Fays to the ravine having been accomplished in due time and many prisoners and guns having been taken, the Company Commanders reported to me and I sent for the Commanding Officers of "A" and "C" Companies and went over the map again with a view of continuing the attack through the Bois de Malaumont to the Cunel-Brieulles Road. This was indeed a difficult and dangerous undertaking; to comb those woods that were held by a determined enemy for a distance of six hundred meters through the darkness. Twenty-four hours before I would have thought such a task impossible to be accomplished by any troops, but I knew that nothing was impossible for the men and officers of my battalion. I was further convinced also that the Boche should not be allowed to withdraw his forces from the Bois de Malaumont to a stronger position further back or to further strengthen his position, which he was certain to do before daylight. At 1:30 A. M. on October 10, therefore, I ordered the battalion, disposed in the same formation in which the attack

had begun, to begin at 2:30 A. M. from a line about the ravine between the Bois de Fays and the Bois de Malaumont and comb the latter woods, clearing the same of the enemy, killing or capturing him if possible, but if not, then by driving him back. At this time the 4th Division, which held the sector on my right, had not yet reached in their sector the ravine from which my attack was to begin and I was compelled to ask from the support battalion "L" Company, commanded by Captain Weikert, to protect my right flank along the wooded road forming the right boundary of my sector through the Bois de Malaumont.

The attack began at 2:30 as ordered. I confess I spent many an anxious moment during that fight, and my anxiety was not lessened by information I received that the 4th Division on my right had previously attempted to advance into these woods in their sector and had been thrown back with heavy losses and, indeed, with some confusion, possibly. The woods were thick and difficult to find the way through even in the daytime, and they were strongly held by an enemy who had made up his mind to hold them to the very death. Only well-disciplined and courageous troops could be expected to maintain direction and order in such a place as that where hand bombs and the bayonet were about the only weapons that could be used.

I remember during the progress of the attack (it was perhaps about four o'clock in the morning) I received a message transmitted to me by regimental headquarters that a barrage would be laid down on the Cunel-Brieulles Road at 7:00 o'clock that morning. As this had been the line at which I had directed the attack to proceed, in order to save my men from the destruction of our own barrage I immediately sent word to each Company Commander that as soon as the Cunel-Brieulles Road was reached he should fall back 150 yards so as not to come under the fire of our barrage, and to await orders. How the runners ever found the Company Commanders that night in those woods I do not know, but they delivered the messages and reported to me that they had done so. I inscribe their names here as a testimonial to their bravery and intelligence in the execution of a high service to their country: Privates, first class, George C. Brown ("A" Company), Raymond E. Pluskey ("B" Company), David Rorison ("C" Company), and Private Charles E. Reams ("D" Company).

I remember there was a lull in the artillery of the enemy from about 9:00 o'clock on the night of the 9th until about 2:00 o'clock on the morning of the 10th. No doubt anxious because of our persistent advance through the woods in spite of darkness, the Boche had moved his light artillery back, and the lull occurred during this retrograde movement. But after two o'clock in the

morning he began again to put high explosive shells and whiz-bangs just over our heads in the north edge of the Bois des Ogons, and a great deal of gas as well, and I was convinced that he would soon lower his elevation and drop them in on us as soon as he learned that his men were out of the trenches that we were in. Shortly after 2:00 o'clock, therefore, one of Captain Davant's men having found a dugout just in the edge of the Bois de Fays near the ravine, I moved my headquarters to that location. It was a splendid place with two entrances leading down into it and fixed up with chicken wire cots, and large enough to accommodate twelve or fifteen men. I established my headquarters and used it also as a First Aid Station as it was a splendid place for the Doctor and his men to work in. I remember there was a little German stove with the pipe running all the way out of the entrance, and there was a picture of Bismarck on the wall. There was also a large mirror that hung at one end of the dugout. My signal detachment soon got their telephones installed and I had my place at a little table at the foot of the north entrance. My Doctor and his men soon got to work and the place was a veritable hospital. To avoid as much as possible the confusion, and to make the aid station as accessible as possible I set aside one entrance for the exclusive use of the wounded. The only disadvantages in the location were that the enemy knew the exact spot and he knew that we were using it for a headquarters and, judging from the insistent shelling of the immediate locality, he had it registered by every gun in range. This made the entrance to it and departure from it extremely dangerous, and as a front line battalion in time of conflict is usually about the busiest place on earth, I had many casualties around the place. I regarded the place itself, however, as fairly safe except from a direct hit with a very heavy shell or from a shell coming down the north entrance. But the concussion of breaking shells was something tremendous; sometimes so great as to blow out the candles that burned always to give us light.

#### OVER THE TOP AGAIN

Messages came and went all that night. It is needless to say there was no time for sleep. I especially kept in close touch with my Company Commanders for information of the progress of the attack. At length at 5:30 o'clock in the morning my front line companies reached the Cunel-Brieulles Road and, in pursuance to orders sent them, fell back 150 yards into the woods to await the barrage at 7:00 o'clock. I cannot think without emotion of the splendid valor and of the inexhaustible energy of the men and officers of my command on that horrible night. To

have formed the battalion twice in the night under the enemy's fire and in the darkness and to have combed those woods in the face of a determined enemy throughout the entire night was a thing which up to that time I should have thought unbelievable. And this was done by men who had been under shell fire continuously for 15 days and under a terrific bombardment with shells and gas and what not for the past forty-eight hours; eating the scant, dry ration of hard bread and a little canned stuff they carried on their backs, with the sleepless nights in the cold, damp shell holes. No man can imagine the anguish and horror of those hours, and no country can ever repay men for deeds of that sort. But notwithstanding the hardships that they had gone through and the results that they had achieved, they were not done yet, and "H" hour was at 7:00 o'clock, only an hour and a half distant. They were to pass again under the barrage and bare their tired breasts to the enemy's fire.

At the appointed hour, therefore, the barrage came down along the Cunel-Brieulles Road and stood for fifteen minutes' time then moved slowly on and my troops, in battle line, emerged from the woods in the wake of it.

I shall never forget that morning as I went from my headquarters to the position of my left front company. Captain Davant and my Orderly and I passed out of the edge of the Bois de Fays and across to the ravine and by a little farmhouse in the hollow called Ville aux Bois. As we passed into this ruin the Boche began to snipe at us with three-inch high explosive shells. He put them down in rapid succession, about twenty of them, and every one came nearer to us as we came into the place, and this kept up until we found shelter behind the little slope that descends westward from the Bois de Malaumont. We jumped out of the frying pan into the fire, as the saying goes, and while we got shelter here from the three-inch gun, a machine gun from a piece of woods south of Cunel to our left front sent bullets whistling above our heads. We dropped into a ditch for a few minutes and, taking advantage of a lull in the firing, moved rapidly up the slope to the edge of the Bois de Malaumont. I remember how almost exhausted I was; with the occasional inhalation of phosgene gas and the loss of sleep and all the rest I had little breath for such exertion. Indeed my companions were in the same condition. I often wondered then why the human body could stand so much. And yet the exhaustion of the body seemed to have its recompense in the horrible aspects of actual conflict, for at such a time as that, with nerves all gone and physical energy ebbing low, there are no tingling nerves to excite you, no workings of the imagination to horrify; all is merely matter of fact; and I have thanked God many a time that no matter how

exhausted the body, no matter how spent the nerves, in spite of the exhaustion and perhaps as a result of it, the mind was clear to see and calm to act.

On reaching the edge of the Bois de Malaumont we passed along it in the direction of "C" Company. I remember a six-inch German shell that came with a rush of the wind and fell within six feet of us, burying itself up to the base in the ground. It was a dud. I remember as the thing hit the ground Captain Davant stepped back and exclaimed: "My God!" It is strange how such small incidents will stick in the mind of a man.

I made my temporary headquarters in the woods just south of the road that morning, expecting later, when the attack progressed, to move my permanent headquarters up.

#### SITUATION ON MORNING OF OCTOBER 10TH

Before detailing the results of this attack I must speak here of the general situation that morning at my front. I had been informed during the night by regimental headquarters that Cunel on my left front had been taken during the night by the 319th Infantry, and from this it was assumed of course that all the enemy's positions in the 319th sector south of Cunel on my left had been taken also, because the 319th necessarily had to pass through them to take Cunel. As a matter of fact Cunel had not been taken, nor had the strip of woods south of that place on my left flank been taken. This erroneous information was based upon the fact that a part of the 319th Infantry, after passing over the Bois des Ogons on the night of the 9th, lost contact with the remainder of the outfit and had struck through the open country along the ravine south of Cunel and passed in the darkness on to Cunel, where some prisoners were taken and, as I am informed, a considerable number of the 319th also were lost to the enemy, and this detachment from the 319th (which, by the way, had taken a part of my "A" Company along with it) had withdrawn during the night back to the Bois des Ogons, leaving Cunel and positions south in full possession of the enemy. Moreover, the 4th Division, on my right, had not advanced out of the Bois de Fays. Therefore, my battalion, during its all-night fight through the woods, had driven a salient of six hundred meters in depth into the German lines in advance of the 319th Infantry on my left and the 4th Division on my right. So that when the barrage was laid down along the Cunel-Brieulles Road neither the 319th Infantry on my left nor the 4th Division on my right could follow it, because the enemy was between them and the barrage in their front and they could not reach the barrage.

I must speak here also of the fact that we were fighting our way through the Kremhilde-Stellung line, which was the third

German main line of defense, which was made up of strongly defended and heavily manned positions which were supplied by a trench railway coming from back of the German lines, and we all knew that the Boche would hold this line to the last ditch, if possible. Much has already been said and written about this great German line of defense. It was upon this line of defense that the Boche endeavored to hold up the advance of the great American Army through the Argonne Forest. A strong line of defense as this was, is a series of mutually supporting positions. We had plowed our way through several of these mutually supporting positions and were now face to face in our immediate front on the ridge east of Cunel with three heavily manned and strongly defended mutually supporting positions. Upon the map (see Page 74) they are designated as follows:

(a) A small triangular piece of woods located about three hundred meters north of the Cunel-Brieulles Road, which triangle was heavily manned with machine guns and with small artillery and flanked by small ridges on either side;

(b) A system of enemy trenches about three hundred meters north of the Cunel-Brieulles Road and about three hundred meters east of (a), which position was strongly held by machine gunners and riflemen, and

(c) A strongly held system of trenches on the ridge and in the edge of the Bois de Foret, about three hundred meters north of (b).

Those three positions, in addition to being strongly defended in themselves, mutually supported each other, and in addition were mutually supported also by a heavy volume of machine gun fire from the piece of woods over the rise to the west of our sector marked (d), by machine guns in the town of Cunel, and by a heavy volume of machine gun fire from the southeast edge of the Bois de la Pultiere. As will be observed by reference to the map the three latter positions which mutually supported the enemy positions in my front were located in the sector of the 319th Infantry on my left. In addition to this flank fire from my left, there was also enemy flank fire from the south edge of the Bois de Foret in the sector of the 4th Division on my right.

On the morning of October 10th, therefore, I was attempting an advance upon information that my left flank was protected, but in reality it was completely exposed to fire from (d), from Cunel and from the Pultiere wood, and with knowledge that my right flank was exposed. The latter situation was taken care of by my own dispositions. When my advance began, therefore, my left flank companies had not gone two hundred yards north of the

Cunel-Brieulles Road before, coming over the edge of the slope, they were exposed to a murderous machine gun fire from the (d) position and from Cunel and from the Pultiere wood, all of which positions were on my left flank in the 319th Infantry sector. Moreover, those flanking enemy positions were able to hold up my left flank companies until the barrage had passed over the triangular position (a) in my front, and permitted the machine guns in that position to open on my troops from the front. It is needless to say that in the face of this murderous cross fire it was suicide to advance further in that flank, and it therefore became necessary for my left flank companies to withdraw into the woods just south of the Cunel-Brieulles Road. I cannot speak too highly of the calmness and courage of my officers and men in the face of this difficult situation. The lines were reformed and Company Commanders directed to await further orders.

In the meantime my right flank, Companies "B" and "D," moving out in the wake of the barrage advanced to the strong position in my right front marked (b) and stormed and took the same.

The situation of my troops at 10:00 o'clock A. M. on the 10th of October, therefore, was as follows: My left front companies were in the woods just south of the Cunel-Brieulles Road with outposts on the road, with strongly held enemy positions in the strip of woods at (d), in Cunel and the Bois de la Pultiere on their left flank, and the position marked (a) in their front; my right front companies were occupying the system of trenches marked (b) taken from the Boche in my right front, and in their position subject to heavy fire from enemy machine guns from position (a) and (c) and from the Bois de Foret in the sector of the 4th Division on my right. The system of trenches occupied by these companies was, therefore, subject to a continuous fusillade of cross-fire.

#### PROTECTING THE FLANKS

Reference to the map on Page 74 will show the positions of my troops and the troops on my right and left flank on the day and hour above mentioned. It was indeed anything but a pleasant situation, to be sticking nearly a thousand meters into the German lines with the people on either side of you unable to advance. But I had orders to advance without regard to my flanks and I understood that the other outfits had the same orders. Such an order no doubt was based upon the expectation that all units would advance simultaneously. Notwithstanding orders it could not be overlooked that there was a limit to displaying one's flanks. Not only were my troops subjected to a continuous cross-

fire from the positions I have mentioned but I realized that the position in which my troops were located would have made it extremely difficult to have defended that position against a counter-attack; and I remember I ordered Captain Davant to dispose his machine gun company along the general line of the Cunel-Brieulles Road to take care of any counter movement on the part of the Boche.

In this situation, however, it was out of the question for me to attempt to make a further advance until the units on my right and left should be able to protect my flanks. The men having without direction dug themselves into rifle pits for protection. I went back to my headquarters to see what could be done toward bringing about a better flank situation.

Upon my return to my headquarters Lieutenant Merriam, who was in command of the platoons of "A" Company that struck out into the open on the night before and had, with certain companies of the 319th Infantry, advanced as far as Cunel in the darkness and returned back of the Bois des Ogons in the night, reported to me with his men. I directed him to have his men take up rations to the men in front and then take their position in the rear of "C" Company.

During the afternoon a barrage was arranged for the 319th Infantry on my left to enable them to clear out the enemy positions south of Cunel, but either the artillery had incorrect information or the barrage was wrongly placed, so that when it came down it fell on a line in advance of the enemy positions, and the 319th Infantry was not able to follow the barrage because they were not able to reach it. The 319th Infantry, therefore, did not advance and the situation on my left flank was not changed during the day, and an advance by me in the left of my sector was out of the question.

It appears, however, that early in the afternoon the 4th Division on my right had secured a barrage to enable it to advance in that sector, and I remember the barrage came down in such fashion as to compel my "B" and "D" Companies that were occupying the enemy positions that I have described above to withdraw to the Cunel-Brieulles Road to protect themselves against the erroneous deflection of our own artillery. This barrage, however, enabled the 4th Division, between three and four o'clock in the afternoon, to advance to a position along the Cunel-Brieulles Road abreast of my front line. I remember shortly after this action took place I received a message transmitted to me from regimental headquarters saying that at a time to be notified later a barrage would be laid down about four hundred meters north of the Cunel-Brieulles Road and that we were to follow that barrage.

We could only wait now for the message as to when "H" hour would be, and in the meantime to get everything in readiness for the attack. I established with the machine guns a temporary line of defense along the line of Cunel-Briculles Road. My companies had been much depleted by casualties, and in order to be ready for the new attack when "H" hour should be notified, I reformed my battalion, putting "A" and "C" Companies into one company and drawing "L" Company from the support battalion, which latter company was placed in support behind "D" Company, so that the dispositions for the attack were as follows: Front line, "B" Company on left; "D" Company on right. In support, "A" Company (with "C" Company) on left; "L" Company on right. I had rations and water taken to the men, and men and officers alike took such shelter as they could find from the high explosive shells that never ceased to fall in our area. I remember late in the afternoon our own artillery was putting shells on my troops, no doubt by a misjudgment of the range and by a lack of observation, and I had to 'phone back and ask to have the firing stopped. During the afternoon a detachment was sent out toward the left front, and by the process of infiltration took a machine gun that was established in a fox-hole along the open ridge called St. Christopher and which had been giving us much trouble.

I remember also during the afternoon Lieutenant Corduan, my Adjutant, who, it will be remembered, was taken to the hospital with influenza from Neuville, returned back to me from the hospital. I am sure I was right glad to see him. On his way up to the front he came by regimental headquarters and they gave him there a cage of pigeons to bring up to the front line, by which we were to send back messages to corps headquarters. And after Lieutenant Corduan got to me with the birds regimental headquarters called me by the 'phone and indulged in a lengthy discussion as to the care and keeping of that particular species of bird and the method of sending messages and the like. Lieutenant Underhill was compelled to perform this duty at the other end of the line. When the conversation was over I said to the Signal Sergeant:

"Take those damned birds, and if the Adjutant wants to write any notes to the corps you can send them."

That was the last I saw of the pigeons, but the Adjutant told me that he sent a couple of messages by them, but if these were ever delivered we never heard. I learned afterwards that some of the outfits were eating their pigeons and I have always regretted that I did not use mine to better advantage than I did.

Presently the afternoon turned into darkness (darkness came very soon in those days) and with the darkness came renewed

activity of the machine guns on the left of my sector in front of the 319th Infantry which, together with the incessant bursting of shells from the Boche artillery, and with the constant lighting of the sky with "Very" lights, made the night a specter and hideous vigil, attended by many casualties, especially among the machine gun men and the troops of the support battalion. I remember, I had Captain Barringer place his heavy mortars in an open space in the ravine between the Bois de Fays and the Bois de Malaumont, which was the only available location (he said) for the weapons with a view to bringing fire on the triangular woods marked (a) on my right front. During the night, therefore, I had him lay his guns on the target and pound his six-inch mortar shells into the place for two hours.

This indeed was another night of harrowing sleeplessness and watchful waiting. And about four o'clock on the morning of the 11th of October I received a message that "H" hour would be at seven o'clock. I immediately rushed word to the Company Commanders giving them the information and directing that all be held in readiness for the new attack at the appointed hour.

#### WAITING FOR THE ATTACK

No men who have not passed through the experience can realize how it feels to wait for the beginning of an attack. There is excitement, of course, but it is suppressed, and there are anxious moments of speculation and anticipation as to what the attack will bring forth; in fact every moment is a moment of that sort. At any rate that three-hour wait was as full of excitement and as full of emotion as any three hours I ever spent. I remember as the time approached for the barrage to go down I sat with my watch in my hand, equipped and togged up in all the habiliments of war, waiting to hear the first great burst of the barrage, and I remember the exhilaration I felt when the great missiles started by the thousand to go over our heads. Whether by accident or whether they had information, I do not know, but almost on the instant that our barrage was laid down the Boche opened a counter-barrage which was the most intense bombardment I have ever heard or experienced. His high explosive shells poured down on us like a monster hail storm, putting the candles out in my headquarters and shaking the place to its very foundation. I shall never forget that memorable morning. As I stood at the foot of the steps I remember the storm of bursting shells was so terrific I waited a few minutes hoping that the storm would break, but there was no let-up. I then moved out into it with my Orderly, and gave directions that my signallers should follow with a wire and a 'phone, and that the remainder

of my headquarters and medical detachment should remain where it was until further orders.

Just outside my place I literally walked over the top of dead men and a hundred feet from the place at the edge of the woods where I turned to the right towards the ravine dead men were lying everywhere. I remember particularly a group of three that had been killed by the concussion of one shell. They were as calm and peaceful as if they had been asleep, but one brief glance gave me the whole ghastly picture. All along the path there were dead and wounded. The Boche artillery had indeed wrought terrible execution upon the American boys. I cannot describe my own feelings as I picked my way through that storm of shells. One has a mixture of anxiety and sorrow in such a situation as that. Hope alone does not forsake one. Those were the emotions that filled me as I passed down to the ravine and up the open ground along the Malaumont wood. I am certain there was not six inches of that ground that had not been freshly dug up by a shell and now, as I look back on it, it is almost unbelievable that any human creature could pass along that place amidst that rain of shells and remain unhurt. Yet Providence was with me—those hideous, whining things, coming with a velocity which it is impossible to describe and bursting with a concussion that one can only feel but cannot imagine, broke in front of me and behind me and on either side of me, and broken steel shrieked in every direction, but none struck me, as God would have it. I remember a few minutes after I reached the place in the Bois de Malaumont just south of the Cunel-Brieulles Road, where I established my temporary headquarters, Lieutenant Preston soon joined me. By this time the storm had broken somewhat; the front elements moved forward and the rear elements followed, so that our barrage, passing on, had either reached the forward elements of the enemy's artillery or the enemy was in doubt as to his front lines and there was a lull in the shell fire. But there was no lull in the machine gun fire of the enemy as my battalion passed on in the wake of the barrage, and I remember distinctly how the bullets whistled over our heads, cutting the leaves and branches of the trees and making a noise like the song of birds. This fire came from the right and the left and the front and I knew what my boys were up against. Indeed, my left flank companies had the same experience as on the day before. The barrage in front of the 319th Infantry on my left was too far ahead of the troops in that sector, and those troops could not follow the barrage because the enemy was between them and the barrage and they could not reach it. So that my left flank companies coming out again in the open and reaching the brow of the ridge north of the Cunel-Brieulles Road were subjected to the same murderous fire which

they had met in the attack of the morning before, and they were compelled by sheer necessity to withdraw slightly to the right under the protection of the knoll of St. Christopher, and this being untenable on account of the direct fire down the little ravine from the triangle of woods in the position (a), they were compelled to fall back to the woods south of the Cunel-Brieulles Road. In the meantime, however, my right flank companies had advanced to the system of trenches in the position marked (b) on my right front, which had been occupied by my troops on the day before, and had stormed and taken the place again and in the operation captured a large number of prisoners, but at the expense of many casualties in my own ranks. Captain Sabiston and Lieutenant Russell of Company "D" were both wounded by machine gun fire, and Lieutenant Schwartz was placed in command of "D" Company. The position was thereafter held under a constant fusillade of machine gun bullets from the position (a) and (c) and from the Bois de Foret in the 4th Division sector on the right.

In other words, I was occupying the same position that I had occupied at ten o'clock on the morning of the 10th, with no advance having been made by the 319th Infantry on my left and with the 4th Division on my right having come up on a line with my right flank companies. I must not omit to say, however, on behalf of the 319th Infantry, that they had hard sledding, because I could see when the barrage of the morning came down our own artillery shells were falling short on some of the troops on their left flank and they were compelled to fall back to get out of it and not without casualties, but the barrage did not touch the strip of woods to the right of their sector marked (d) on the map, which was the position so stubbornly held by the Boche and which had given that organization so much trouble.

#### THE BLOODY TRIANGLE OF WOODS

It was now almost ten o'clock. It was apparent to me that the triangle of woods in my left front marked (a) must be taken, but that it could not be taken by a movement around my left flank as long as the Germans held the position marked (d), Cunel, and the Bois de Pultiere. It was in these circumstances that two separate attacks were launched by my troops against this triangle of woods in my front, the first by a small detachment advancing by leaps and bounds under the protection of our machine guns which were in the front. In this attempt Lieutenant Machette and some of his men actually got into the woods, but he was killed and the detachment overcome and driven back. The next attempt was made by the process of infiltration preceded by the fire from

my three-inch trench mortars and one-pounders. I shall never forget Lieutenant Zouck as he passed me on his way up with his trench mortars. He was sure, he said, that he could blow the place to pieces, and in a short time he was in position and had his mortars playing on the Boche stronghold and he had fired nine shots and was looking over the edge of the embankment when a sniper shot him in the head, killing him instantly. I shall always carry in my mind a pleasing picture of the pleasant, smiling young man. His gun crew suffered heavily and the position of his guns was made untenable and they had to withdraw. My one-pounder detachment was instantly scattered by high explosive shells before they got into action. The second attempt against the triangle of woods was a failure.

### A BEAUTIFUL FLANK MOVEMENT

Shortly after noon, in order to keep in closer touch with the actual process of reducing this formidable position, and to maintain a better view of the terrain and troops toward the front, I moved my temporary headquarters just to the edge of the Cunel-Brieulles Road near the right of my sector. From that position the situation to the front was in plain view. In the situation as it now stood I had one more plan. It was a bold one, but I determined to take those damned Germans if it was possible to do it. By reference to the map and as I have said before there was a system of trenches that extended into the edge of the Bois de Foret, into the 4th Division sector on my right, which position is marked (c) on the map. One of my intelligence men, whom I kept constantly with the front line troops of the 4th Division, and whom I ordered to report to me every hour, reported with a message he had intercepted from one of the front line unit commanders of the 4th Division, which showed me that the front of the 4th had intrenched in the little trench railway that ran near the south edge of the Bois de Foret. As my troops were much depleted I asked Major Emory, who was commanding the support battalion, to lend me a company. He loaned me "M" Company, which was at that time in command of Lieutenant Willis N. Caulkins. When Lieutenant Caulkins reported to me I said to him:

"Lieutenant, I've got a man's job to be done, that's why I've sent for you."

"Very good, sir," he replied.

I thought a little taffy would make him feel better under the circumstances. I said:

"I want you to take "M" Company and pass around to our right along the swail into the 4th Division sector, advising them

of your mission, and proceed through the Bois de Foret and take that system of trenches, and take the enemy from the flank and rear and then await there further orders from me."

"Very good, sir," he said, and moved off and got his company in shape and started on his difficult mission.

It was a hazardous move looked at from any point of view, but the triangle of wood in my left front was practically impregnable as the situation stood, protected as it was by its own defensive weapons and by the mutually supporting positions on its flank, but, if I could take the system of trenches somewhat to the rear and to the right of it, either the enemy would be compelled to withdraw from the triangle of woods because of the threat against his flank or rear or I would then be in a position to attack him from three sides without being subjected to the enemy supporting fire from the positions in the 319th sector in my left. It was indeed a beautiful game, just like a game of checkers. I remember, at the same time that I sent Lieutenant Caulkins out on this mission on the right flank, I sent a message to Captain Little who was occupying the trenches on my right front, advising him of the move that was being made and telling him of the purpose and mission of the move, and that he would receive further orders telling him of the success of the mission.

It was now between three and four o'clock in the afternoon. Having made my new disposition I moved back to my temporary headquarters in the edge of the Malaumont Woods south of the Cunel-Brieulles Road which was near the center of my sector. Here I sat, together with Major Emory, in a little rifle pit, and I remember how we went over the mission together, and I wrote a message to regimental headquarters advising them of the move that I had made. As I said, Major Emory and I were sitting in the little rifle pit which was about three feet deep, two feet wide and five feet long, he in one end and I in the other so, as we were sitting, our knees touched and the tops of our helmets were slightly above the level of the ground. I remember an officer of the 5th Division came up after a little while and sat on the edge of the rifle pit and said that his Division was to relieve us, which relief, he said, was to take place that night. There were a number of other officers and a number of men immediately around the place. I remember Lieutenant France was sitting on the edge of the pit on one side and Lieutenant Preston on the other. Captain Sumner and Lieutenant Vermule were in a little pit about twenty feet away and some wounded machine gunners and other men were seated in rifle pits or lying upon the ground. I remember as we sat in this rifle pit one of the companies from the 319th Infantry sector on our left came in battle formation across the open space that separated our wood from their sector and poured

a great volume of fire into our wood, under the impression, the officer in charge said, that enemy fire was coming from our woods. I remember Lieutenant Ben Temple, who was also close by, rushed out to the edge of the woods, held up his hands and said:

"For God's sake, men, stop shooting us up!"

The bullets did not do us any harm, but the Boche saw the movement of the troops into our woods and communicated this fact to his artillery, and in about twenty minutes the Boche began to pour steel into the woods in the area in which we were, and they were falling fast and furious about us. It was during this bombardment that I had perhaps the narrowest escape of my life. Indeed, as narrow an escape, perhaps, as any man ever had who came out alive. Without the slightest warning of any sort I suddenly found myself under the ground as if by magic, with a ringing in my ears as of many bells. There was a sense of great bewilderment—for the act was quicker than thought, and I remember my first thought was:

"I am not dead, I am thinking."

After a bewildered moment or two I worked my helmet and my head through the surface of the earth and looked around. Major Emory was just then doing the same thing, and I remember the dazed and bewildered look in his eye as he gazed around the place. I think he spoke, because his lips moved, but I was too deaf to hear whether he said anything. I tried to get my arms loose, but could not, so tight had they been packed in by the impact of the shell. Presently two men (I think Captain Wilson was one of them) took hold of me and pulled me out. And I remember as I scrambled out of the dirt I took hold of an unexploded portion of a six-inch high explosive shell that had stopped within a few inches of my face, and it was so hot I had to let it go. This shell had struck about two feet from the edge of the rifle pit in which we were sitting. How Major Emory and I escaped being blown to pieces is almost incredible. The shell had struck and exploded with its full force against the body of the 5th Division Officer who was talking to us, blowing him into a thousand pieces. Lieutenant France, with his head crushed in, was blown across the rifle pit and killed, two machine gunners were killed outright and four others were wounded. Lieutenant Preston was struck in the side and in the neck with pieces of steel but was able, with some assistance, to move to the first aid station. Captain Sumner was shell-shocked.

I remember as I got out of the hole my legs had been cramped with the impact of the earth and were very shaky and my ear drums were ringing so that I could not hear a person speak. In that condition of mind and body I determined to go back to my

headquarters at once where I could collect my scattered thoughts and rest my shattered nerves for a time; so I got my stick (which I never forsook under any circumstances at the front) and started out of the woods in the direction of my headquarters. I remember as I passed along the beaten path a few feet from the edge of the woods, a man's liver was scattered along the path, and twenty feet out in the open I saw a leg and part of a stomach, still warm with the blood of life so recently departed. It was a horrible sight that I shall never forget. I passed along the hollow that leads by the Ville aux Bois, and I remember the shells were bursting in the woods and they sounded in my ears like the ringing of many bells. As I passed along also I recollected that I had left a pair of Boche gloves in the hole where I was buried but I decided that if the Boche wanted them that bad he could have them.

At my headquarters I met Major Emory and pretty soon Lieutenant Preston came into the first aid station. Captain Sumner and Lieutenant Vermule were there and not yet fully recovered from the shock. I remember when I went down into the dugout I sat down at the table at the bottom of the steps, utterly exhausted and worn out by my harrowing experience.

My whole concern at that time was for the company I had sent around the right flank toward the front and for the success of the move that would determine whether or not we could outwit the Boche and take the triangle of woods in my left front. I sent out, therefore, special messengers to get information from Lieutenant Caulkins, but getting a messenger to him and back to me was a dangerous and difficult task and took time. And there was nothing to do but await the due process of time. Dangerous and difficult tasks of this sort cannot be done in a moment and patience is sometimes in battle as important a virtue as aggressive action, so I waited.

I remember while I was waiting, about 7:00 or 8:00 o'clock that night, a code message came to me from regimental headquarters saying that a barrage would be put down about four hundred meters north of the Cunel-Brieulles Road at such time as I would advise that I was ready. Such a thing I considered at once to be impracticable, because first of all, my troops were occupying a position (position b) which was in the line upon which the barrage was intended to be placed, and second, I had sent "M" Company around the right flank far in advance of the line upon which it was proposed to lay down the barrage. I expressed this view to Major Emory who was with me and he concurred entirely with me that such a barrage was out of the question, because it would be absurd to withdraw my men from a position which they had taken at such a great expense, and if

would be impracticable to be ready within a reasonable time, especially in view of the fact that it was the evident intention of some higher commander to lay this barrage down within an hour. In these circumstances I decided to communicate with regimental headquarters but this could not be done over the telephone. Major Emory and I therefore immediately started back with a guide to the regimental post of command. It was an unpleasant walk of one and one-half kilometers, but we made good time, not caring to loiter in an area where shells were making the night hideous. The moment we got there the Colonel said the order had come from Brigade and that he had transmitted it but that the idea had been abandoned. I confess that the information gave me great relief but I should have been much indebted to regimental headquarters if they had communicated this information to me without my going down a kilometer and a half over a shell-torn area to get it. At the same time the Colonel told me of the relief that was to take place that night, and that some of the officers of the relieving division had already moved off in our direction. It did not take us long to get back to my headquarters, but by that time it was past nine o'clock at night, and we found there waiting some of the officers of the relieving troops who had come up in advance to make arrangements about guides and things of that sort. After going into those details I remember we sat there and waited for the coming up of the relieving troops. I remember that I was completely exhausted and found it difficult to hold my eyes open and my ears open long enough to make intelligent response to inquiries.

#### THE PROCESS OF RELIEF BEGINS

At length Lieutenant Colonel McClure, the commanding officer of the 61st Infantry (5th Division), came up, I should say about half-past ten or eleven o'clock. I remember he had with him a map and a blue pencil and I shall not soon forget how he used his blue pencil to show me on his map where he was going to place his battalions notwithstanding the fact that I had gone over the situation with him carefully and given him detailed information as to the strength and position of the enemy in our front. I remember especially that I told him of the difficulty we had encountered in the triangle of woods marked (a) on the map and of the fact that we had counted nine machine guns and several pieces of artillery there and I remember that he said the Corps had told him there were no Germans there. As a matter of fact there were none there, but he did not know it nor did I know it at that time, but it was ascertained on the next day that the "squeeze play" made by "M" Company, which had been sent

around the right flank had been a complete success and that company had captured fifty-seven prisoners and ten machine guns in the position marked (c) on the map, and the enemy in the triangle of woods, not desiring to be caught in an attack from three sides, had withdrawn from the triangle of woods during the night, so that we were turning over to the 5th Division a clean front which extended in our front along the crest of the ridge to the northeast of Cunel, which position of our front line is shown on the map (See Page ??).

On the map it looks a calm and peaceful line to turn over to any division, but, as stated by Colonel Frederick Palmer in an article in Collier's Weekly of March 29, 1919, attempting to describe this battle: "The 80th passed on to its successor a legacy which requires no further comment." It was the very outer edge of the great third German line of defense, every inch of which was held by the Germans with the tenacity of death. Indeed, it was a matter of life and death with the German Army, with his great line of communication back of this place, that this line should hold, and he spared nothing, neither arms nor men in preventing the American Army from breaking through. As a matter of fact every yard of ground that had been gained was gained by a stubborn and bloody fight over some strongly defended position, and when ground had been gained by the process which I have described, our troops had been compelled to hold on like grim death lest they be ousted by the constant pressure of the enemy. Indeed on the night and in the morning when the 5th Division troops relieved mine the German army ahead of us was like a great flood tide being held back by the gates. These facts I endeavored to impress upon the mind of Colonel McClure, but without success as subsequent events showed.

At length the relieving troops began to come up about midnight, and as they came I furnished guides to take them to their respective positions in front. This process continued until all my troops had been relieved, the last passing out, and I with them, at the first break of dawn.