

LIEUTENANT COLONEL PETER F. OWEN, USMC (RET)  
LIEUTENANT COLONEL JOHN SWIFT, USMC (RET)



# A Hideous PRICE

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*The 4th Brigade at Blanc Mont*  
2-10 October 1918

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

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The title for this volume is an adaption of a passage written by Blanc Mont veteran John W. Thomson in his classic book, *Fix Bayonets!*

*And after certain days the division was relieved. The battalion marched out at night. The drumming thunder of the guns fell behind them and no man turned his face to look again on the baleful lights of the front. On the road they passed a regiment of the relieving division—full, strong companies of National Guardsmen. They went up one side of the road; and in ragged column of twos, unsightly even in the dim and fitful light, the Marines plodded down the other side. They were utterly weary, with shuffling feet and hanging heads. The division had just done something that those old masters in the art of war, the French, and the world after them, including [Prussian General Erich] Ludendorff, were to acknowledge remarkable. They had hurled the Boche [Germans] from Blanc Mont and freed the sacred city of Rheims. They had paid a price hideous even for this war. And they were spent. If there was any idea in those hanging heads it was food and rest.*

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## 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)  
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 Schutz(en)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.

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.

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.

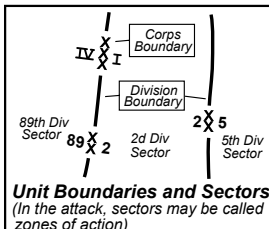
## EXAMPLES OF COMBINING SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

 (Pershing) American Expeditionary Forces (Cdr Name)	 (Pershing) U.S. First Army (Cdr Name)	 (Liggett) U.S. I Army Corps (Cdr Name)	 U.S. 2d Division	 U.S. 9th Infantry Regiment	 5th Regiment U.S. Marine Corps	 4th Brigade USMC Post of Command (PC)	 3d Bn, 6th Regt USMC with companies deployed. (84/3/6 is the 84th Co, 3d Bn, 6th Regt USMC)
 (Maistre) French Army Group Center (Cdr Name)	 (Gouraud) French Fourth Army (Cdr Name)	 (Naulin) XXI French 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. (5/461 is the 5th Co, II Bn, 461st IR.)
 (Crown Prince) German Army Group Crown Prince	 (Rothmaler) German Third Army (Cdr Name)	 (Nida) XII Army Corps (Cdr Name)	 German 200th Infantry Division	 German 235th Reserve Infantry Regiment	 German 5th Jaeger Regiment	 2 Cos 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, etc.).

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].

# INTRODUCTION

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As the summer of 1918 entered its final days, the Great War accelerated toward a violent climax in the fall. Even while the Marines of the 4th Brigade fought at Saint-Mihiel, Allied commanders were completing plans that would launch the Marines once more into a major attack. The 2d Division's hard-won reputation would guarantee it another hard-fought battle. Before the 4th Brigade left the battlefield of Blanc Mont, its Marines would achieve their most spectacular success of the war but endure their most severe day of losses.

## THE OPERATIONAL CONTEXT OF THE BATTLE

U.S. Army general John J. Pershing had established the American First Army in the Saint-Mihiel sector with the intent of continuing operations there in the Lorraine region well into 1919. However, on 30 August 1918—less than two weeks before the First Army commenced its Saint-Mihiel offensive—French marshal Ferdinand Foch visited General Pershing at his headquarters to announce a new strategy.

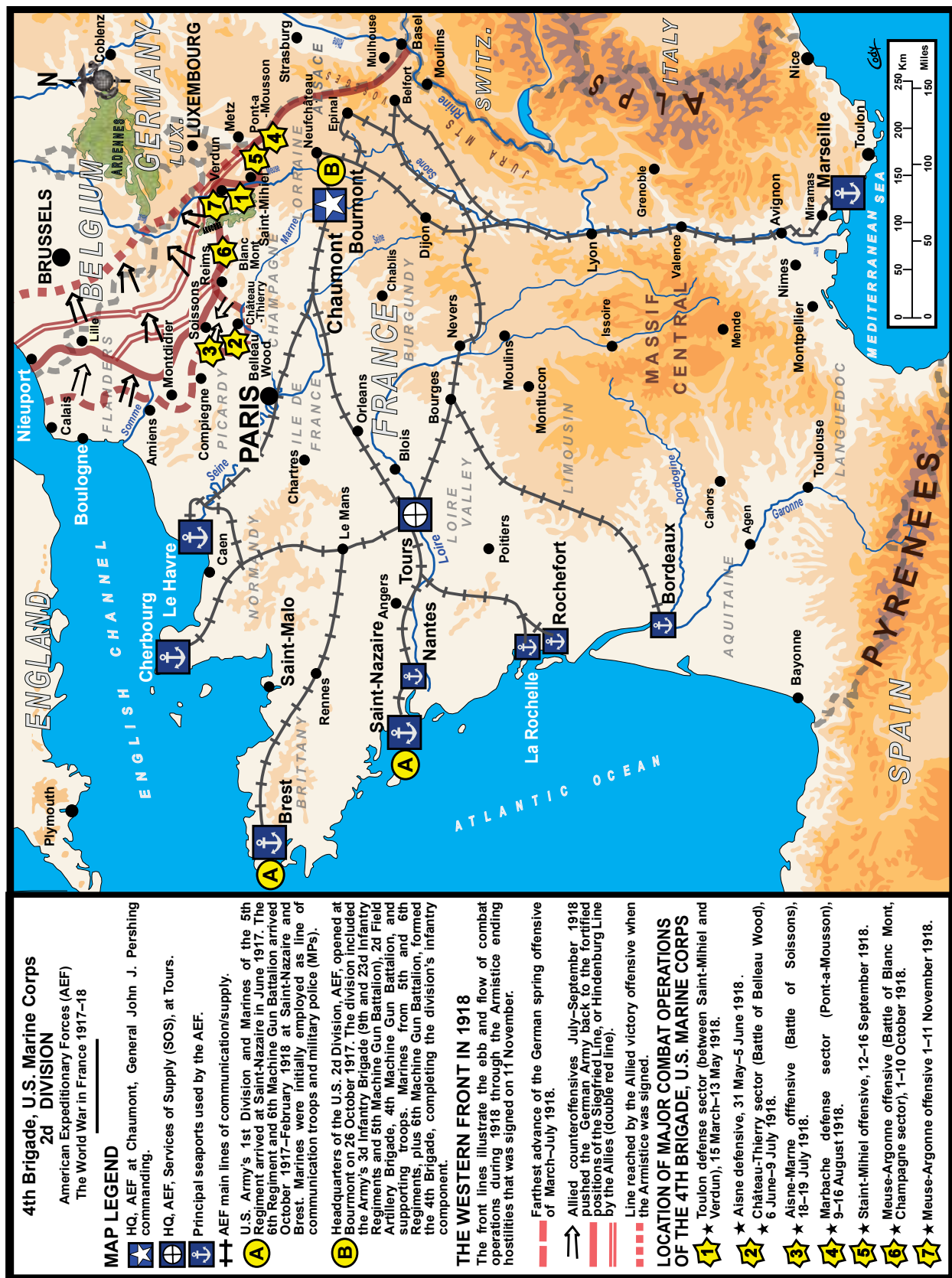
Following the Allies' counterattack in July against the Aisne-Marne salient, which the Marines helped spearhead at Soissons, the British Expeditionary Force achieved a series of stunning victories during August on the Somme. Marshal Foch believed that the momentum on the western front had dramatically shifted. He sensed an opportunity to win the war in 1918. During their meeting, Foch gestured to a map of the western front, where the Germans now occupied an enormous salient. From

Verdun on the Meuse (just west of Saint-Mihiel), the German front line ran due west for 100 kilometers (km) to Reims. From Reims, the lines gently curved northwest to the British sector on the Somme, then due north to the English Channel.

Foch informed Pershing that he now wished to attack both shoulders of this salient. The British would continue the offensive on the Somme as a combined French and American force attacked the southern face of the massive German salient. On the extreme right, the French Second Army, reinforced with American divisions, would attack between the Meuse River and the Argonne Forest. A newly organized American Army would attack to the left of the Second Army. The French Fourth Army—also reinforced with American divisions—would extend the attack even farther west. Set for 15 September, the attacks would commence three days after the beginning of the Saint-Mihiel offensive.

Marshal Foch's plan would have fragmented General Pershing's American Expeditionary Forces among four armies: two French and two American. Pershing demurred and insisted that the Americans fight as an independent national army. Pershing considered this an imperative matter of national pride and policy. Moreover, the logistical challenges involved with redeploying so many American divisions from the First Army sector in Lorraine to a new sector on the Aisne 70km away struck General Pershing as extremely daunting.

After a heated exchange, Marshal Foch left Pershing to review the plan. With two days of cool reflection, the commanders reached a compromise.



Map by LtCol R. L. Cody, USMC (Ret)

The American First Army would fight as a unified national army. The First Army would attack on 25 September between the Meuse and the Argonne Forest, taking over that sector from the French Second Army. The French Fourth Army would attack on the Americans' left. The objective of the two armies was the German east-west rail line running through Sedan, 60km to the north. The Saint-Mihiel attack would proceed on 12 September, but the First Army would limit its advance there once it had reduced the smaller salient.

The new plan preserved the First Army's integrity. It also allowed General Pershing another week to prepare for the Meuse-Argonne offensive. However, the veteran American divisions he had committed to the Saint-Mihiel operation, including the 2d Division and its Marine brigade, would be unable to disengage in time to participate in the initial attack on the Meuse-Argonne on 25 September (later postponed to 26 September). Additionally, the French Fourth Army on General Pershing's left would be attacking along a wider front than Marshal Foch had originally planned.

Recognizing the difficult assignment given to the Fourth Army, General Henri-Philippe Pétain, commander in chief of the French Army, asked General Pershing on 16 September for assistance in the coming offensive. On 24 September, the 2d Division received orders detaching it and the 36th Division from the First Army and moving it by rail to the Fourth Army sector.

## PREPARATION AND MOVEMENT TO THE ATTACK POSITION

In the early morning hours of 16 September 1918, the U.S. 2d Division had been relieved from the front lines and marched south away from the battlefield to establish an assembly area near Royau-meix by 17 September. After three miserable days in a rainy bivouac, the division marched another 12 km farther south on the night of 20 September to a camp on the outskirts of Toul, where it had two days to formally refit with the exchange for new uniforms, field gear, and weapons. Here, Marines from the replacement battalions were hastily integrated into line companies.

The urgency to exploit any advantage the armies gained in the momentum of the assault on the broad front required the 2d Division to continue its movement immediately. The U.S. First Army issued *Special Order 285* on 23 September prescribing this movement of the division to start on 25 September. The order stipulated a rail movement, with the motor transport elements being road marched separately. The division detrained 170 km west of Toul near Châlons-sur-Marne, where the division formally passed to the French Group of the Armies of the Center and prepared for its final movement to the Champagne front.

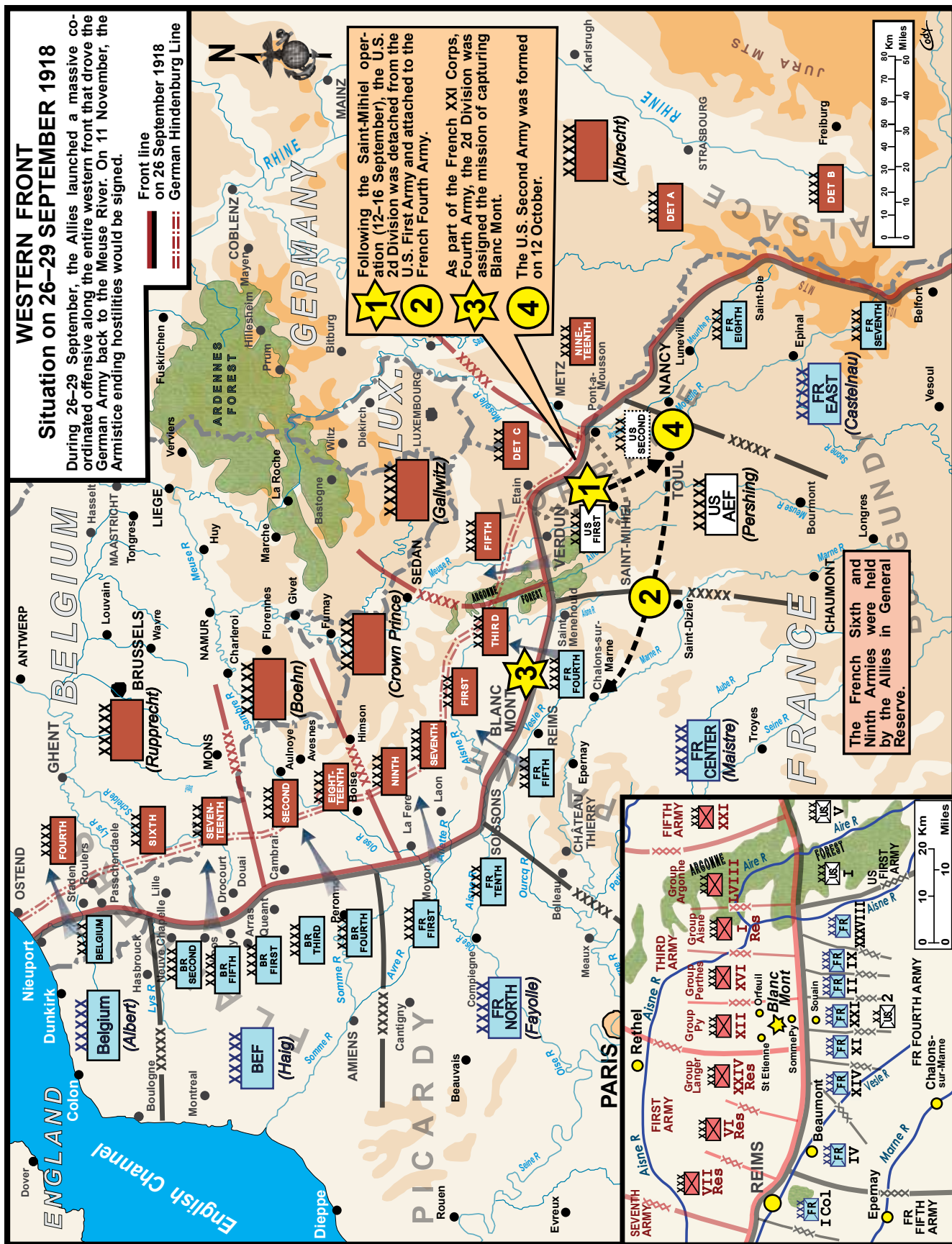
Although the French Group of the Armies of the Center retained the 2d Division as its reserve for the time being, Marine Corps General John A. Lejeune correctly anticipated that his division would soon reinforce the French Fourth Army. Accordingly, Lejeune frequently visited that army's headquarters and its commander, General Henri Joseph Etienne Gouraud.

Gouraud's seven corps had attacked on 26 September, advancing their lines 4km and capturing 7,000 prisoners. However, the Fourth Army's 70km-wide sector between Reims in the west and the American First Army in the east was dominated by an east-west series of hills known as Les Monts. From fortifications on these hills, the German *Third Army* had contained the French offensive.

General Lejeune visited the Fourth Army's headquarters on 27 September, in part to put to rest rumors that the Fourth Army planned to break apart the 2d Division and commit its brigades separately. In Lejeune's recounting of the meeting, General Gouraud neatly summarized his estimate of the situation:

*He then placed his hand on the part of the ridge lying between Medeah Ferme [Farm] and Blanc Mont, and said, "If I could take this position by assault, advance beyond it to the vicinity of Saint-Étienne-à-Arnes, and hold the ground gained against the counterattacks which would be hurled against my troops, the enemy would be compelled to evacuate Notre Dame de Champs and Les Monts, thereby freeing Rheims which he has been strangling for four years, and fall back to the line of the*





Map by LtCol R. L. Cody, USMC (Ret)

*Aisne, a distance of nearly 30 kilometers—as the terrain between the ridges and the Aisne does not lend itself well to defense.” He added, “My divisions, however, are worn out from the long strain of continuous fighting and from the effects of the heavy casualties they have suffered, and it is doubtful if they are now equal to accomplishing this difficult task unless they be heavily reinforced.”*

*I answered with deliberation, “General, if you do not divide the Second Division, but put it in line as a unit on a narrow front, I am confident that it will be able to take Blanc Mont Ridge, advance beyond it, and hold its position there.”*

Gouraud relayed Lejeune’s remarks to General Pétain the following day. That same afternoon, 2d Division received orders to march to Somme-Suippe on the road to Blanc Mont Ridge.

Unbeknownst to General Lejeune’s leather-necks and doughboys, they were marching toward a battle in which German and French plans conjoined to set the 2d Division up for both success and tragedy. General Gouraud’s Fourth Army was fighting for terrain, sending the 2d Division in as its main effort to seize Blanc Mont, compelling German *Army Group Crown Prince* to withdraw to the Aisne, and positioning the U.S. First and French Fourth Armies to capture Sedan. *Army Group Crown Prince* would grudgingly relinquish Blanc Mont, defending each fortified line to preserve its formations and counterattacking to inflict maximum losses to achieve a negotiated settlement to the war. If the U.S. 2d Division captured Blanc Mont while incurring significant casualties, both French and German commanders would have accomplished their objectives for the battle.

Late on 28 September, the 2d Division began its final movement on foot by marching 30km north to Souain-Suippes, just behind the lines of the engaged French Fourth Army. Final elements of the division arrived late on 30 September. Army orders received on 1 October formally placed the division under the XXI Corps, which directed the division

to relieve the French 61st Division that night near Sommepey, 12km farther north.

Under cover of darkness, the 2d Division’s 3d and 4th Brigades began the relief of the *poilus* (French infantry soldiers) where their advance had met determined resistance and stalled. The division’s front was more than 3km in width. The 4th Brigade arrived in position first and manned a 1,600-meter (m) front in the division’s western half of its zone. The 3d Brigade was initially positioned 6.4km to their rear, along the Navarin Farm ridge. The 3d Brigade would receive orders to move into an attack position, occupying the division’s eastern zone, late on 2 October. To the division’s left was the French 21st Division as part of the adjacent XI Corps. The French 170th Division was on the right. Effective coordination with these adjacent divisions during the coming attack was a tactical imperative. Simultaneous attacks by all three divisions would limit the German defenders’ ability to maneuver within their elastic defensive positions and prevent them from concentrating fires and counterattacks against a single attacking division.

Before the final movement forward into the attack positions, General Lejeune issued what he believed to be an order of inspiration to his division for the coming offensive. He felt it had the desired effect of dictating to the division the tactical imperative of falling upon the enemy and gloriously defeating them once again.

At 1330 on 1 October, the 4th Brigade adjutant, Lieutenant Colonel Earl H. Ellis, sent an operational memorandum to Colonel Logan Feland, commanding the 5th Regiment, and Colonel Harry Lee, commanding the 6th Regiment, to expect a commanders’ call at the division headquarters at Suippes. Ellis anticipated that General Lejeune would return from XXI Corps with orders for the 4th Brigade to pass through the French 61st Division that night and conduct a frontal attack on Blanc Mont the morning of 2 October.

But several aspects of the XXI Corps orders troubled General Lejeune. He knew that German outposts still clung to the Essen trench in front of the 61st Division. As the afternoon slipped away, Lejeune surmised that there was not enough time

to organize a proper reconnaissance by all of his infantry and artillery commanders. Most important, his 2d Field Artillery Brigade would not have time to occupy its firing positions in time for the morning attack. General Lejeune recommended that XXI Corps postpone the attack until 3 October. This would give the 2d Division an additional day to prepare and clear the Germans from the Essen trench. French General Stanislas Naulin, commanding the XXI Corps, approved General Lejeune's suggestion, and the 2d Division had its additional day.

The final elements of the 2d Field Artillery Brigade moved into their support positions before dawn on 2 October. The fires of the French 61st Division's artillery reinforced the 2d Division at 0800 on 2 October. At the same time, the division established its headquarters 8km's equal distance between Sommepey and Suippes at a rural crossroads hamlet called Souain.

As 2 October did not bring the anticipated attack, the 4th Brigade commander, Brigadier General Wendell C. Neville, used the day to move his regiments into preliminary attack positions in some semblance of the formations required for the action. Neville placed each regiment in a column of battalions, with the 5th Regiment on the right and the 6th Regiment on the left. The lead battalions, the 1st Battalion, 5th Regiment, and the 2d Battalion, 6th Regiment, occupied the Krefeld trench just north of Sommepey that the French 61st Division had seized in the preceding attack. German outposts still occupied portions of the Pacha, Elbe, and Essen trenches, the northernmost trench lines in the *Third Army's* second main line of resistance. In the 5th Regiment, the 2d Battalion occupied a support position approximately a thousand meters south of the 1st Battalion, and the 3d Battalion was in reserve farther south. In the 6th Regiment, the 1st Battalion supported the 2d Battalion and the 3d Battalion was in reserve.

On the afternoon of 2 October, as the 5th and 6th Regiments prepared to seize the Essen trench, General Naulin summoned General Lejeune and his brigade commanders for a planning conference at his headquarters. The French 170th Division to the right of the 5th Regiment had driven a wedge

into the German *XII Corps* line northeast of Sommepey. However, the French XI Corps to the 6th Regiment's left had hardly gained any ground at all. The German second main line of resistance facing the French XI Corps ran along a commanding ridge known as Notre Dame-des-Champs. The French 21st Division facing this still clung to its positions south of the Py River, several hundred yards short of the German second main line of resistance.

General Naulin noted that the salient driven into the German position on the right by the 170th Division created the opportunity for a flank attack against Blanc Mont Ridge. Naulin suggested that General Lejeune exploit this salient by launching the main attack from there with his 3d Brigade instead of conducting a frontal attack with the 4th Brigade. The Marines could support the 3d Brigade's attack from their current position in the trenches north of Sommepey by advancing partway up the slope, but they could leave the job of seizing Blanc Mont Ridge to the 3d Brigade.

General Lejeune agreed but proposed a converging attack by both brigades. The two brigades would not make physical contact until they reached the summit of Blanc Mont Ridge. The 3d Brigade would attack along a northwest axis from the ground gained by the 170th Division and seize the right half of the division objective line along Blanc Mont Ridge. The 4th Brigade would attack directly north from Sommepey and seize the left half of the objective line, including Blanc Mont. While this scheme of maneuver limited the ability of Lejeune's brigades to support each other during the advance, it enabled him to concentrate the power of each brigade along a narrow front. It also removed the danger that fires of the 4th Brigade would inflict casualties within the 3d Brigade's zone if they were to attack across its front. General Lejeune's plan offered an additional advantage: the brigades would pass on either side of the Bois de la Vipère, which XXI Corps believed the Germans had fortified into a strongpoint.

General Naulin approved General Lejeune's plan. The 2d Division officers returned to the division command post north of Suippes, 8km south of Sommepey. Colonels Feland and Lee met General Lejeune and the brigade commanders when they

returned to the division command post at Suippes and plunged into detailed planning.

## TERRAIN AND THE EFFECTS OF THE WEATHER

The Champagne region is located to the northeast of the Paris basin, where a concentric series of chalk escarpments unfolds into naturally defensible ridgelines. The chalky soil was relatively easy to excavate. When entrenched upon, the ridges morphed into foreboding defensive positions with extended fields of fire. The region cradled intricate trench networks of the opposing armies for four years.

During the preceding year, the *Third Army* had improved a series of rear guard positions that the 2d Division now faced. The Germans had affixed names to identifiable geographical and manmade features. Both German and Allied reports used these names, and they have become part of the historical record as well as this narrative.

The 2d Division's zone of attack crossed three east-west ridges. The German defenses took advantage of these ridges, with the middle ridge being more dominant than the one to the south or north of it. This was Blanc Mont Ridge, the key to the Germans' third main line of resistance. The focus of the 2d Division's zone of attack would be this ridge. At an elevation of 200m, Blanc Mont Ridge commanded its neighboring ridgelines, each no more than 160m in elevation. Blanc Mont Ridge afforded the defenders with seldom-matched observation points and fields of fire to the south. At the crest of Blanc Mont, approximately 1km west of the Sommepy-Saint-Étienne road, a spur jutted south from Blanc Mont Ridge. Within the German defensive plan, this spur contained the Sattelberg position (or Grand Bois de Sommepy), a small rise to the east. This finger of land provided observation south and cross compartment for the other ridgelines, while affording fields of fire to the west, south, and east across the plain that sloped up to Blanc Mont Ridge.<sup>1</sup> Fires from defenders on this

<sup>1</sup> The term *cross compartment* refers to a terrain compartment, the longer axis of which is perpendicular to the direction of movement by a force. This usually puts the attacker at a disadvantage, as the defender can mass fire from positions along high ground and perpendicular to the direction of the attack.

north-south finger could enfilade the Sommepy-Saint-Étienne road and the 4th Brigade's axis of advance.<sup>2</sup>

A lesser relief ran parallel to the Py River, just meters north of the town of Sommepy and approximately 3km south of the crest of Blanc Mont Ridge. This relief contained the Germans' Essen, Elbe, and Pacha trench networks. A kilometer beyond these trenches, the gentle slope was interrupted by a finger whose sides gave way to two depressions. These two depressions offered some cover from observation and direct fire. The Germans had named the southern draw the Stall depression and the northern one the Freiburger depression.<sup>3</sup> From the Freiburger depression, it was a gentle, 2-km climb to the crest of Blanc Mont Ridge.

From Blanc Mont Ridge north, the terrain was generally open to the east of the Sommepy-Saint-Étienne road. West of the road, the hillier terrain formed a draw between Blanc Mont Ridge and a much smaller ridge north of it. The Germans had named the ridge north of Blanc Mont Ludwigs Rücken. The minor depression running northwest between Blanc Mont Ridge and Ludwigs Rücken was boxed by a hillock called Petersberg that protruded north from Blanc Mont. Beyond Ludwigs Rücken lay the town of Saint-Étienne, where the terrain flattened near the Arnes River. Just before the town, and east of the Sommepy-Saint-Étienne road, stood a minor hillock that the Germans named Blodnitz Hill.

For three years, this area had been directly behind the German main line of resistance. The previous year, the Germans had developed deliberate, complex defensive positions. Stretches of the defensive network were accented with revetted

<sup>2</sup> Maps from LtCol Ernst Otto's *The Battle at Blanc Mont* (1930) were used as reference for the German names for terrain features being adopted in deference to the prolonged German occupation and improved positions made by these forces.

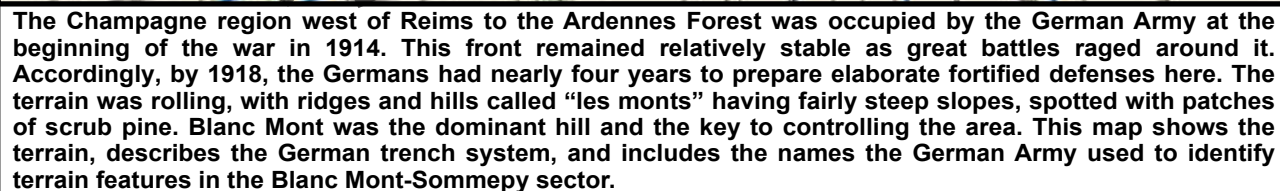
<sup>3</sup> In 1915–16, the German engineers installing the defensive positions renamed the geographical features and trenches. The significance of the names has not passed on in history and appears to be at the whims of the officers' personalities at the time and on the ground. Both sides used similar naming conventions of such features as the norm. In fact, the French intelligence maps of the Champagne region also use the German names for the trenches and geographical features.



Meters 0 500 1,000 1,500

Yards 0 500 1,000 1,500

Contour interval 10 meters



## A HIDEOUS PRICE





*Pvt Charles J. Rheinheimer of the 95th Company took this photo of the ruins of Somme.*

Courtesy of SSgt Steven C. Girard, USA (Ret)



*A German observation tower on Blanc Mont.*

National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Record Group 127 (RG 127)

machine gun positions and shell-proof bunkers. Strongpoints offered readily available indirect fire support from fixed artillery positions to their rear. The Germans constructed redoubts on several of the slight hillocks.<sup>4</sup> Wire obstacles channelized an

<sup>4</sup> The term *redoubt* refers to a temporarily enclosed defensive work that can be as simple as a dirt ditch with a wall built behind it or as complex as fortifications of stone or brick.

attacking force into well designed kill zones. Far-row fields overgrown with wild grass afforded wide open fields of fire. Much of the woods had been cut for construction materials in the previous years, but scrub pine had grown back in large forested pockets on Blanc Mont Ridge and the few knolls north of it. The ridge and its reverse slope were obscured by a young forest of trees about 3m in height.

The Somme-Saint-Étienne road bisected the 2d Division's zone. It was the obvious avenue of approach through the area of operations. A well-used, east-west secondary road ran along the crest of Blanc Mont Ridge, providing access to the Medeah Farm east of Blanc Mont. Paths cut for construction and unused farm roads intersected the Somme-Saint-Étienne road. While these secondary networks aided with navigation, they were not suitable for the movement of large formations or materials. The *Third Army* had constructed minor railroads to supply the divisions in this sector.

The towns of Somme and Saint-Étienne were uninhabited during the battle and lay in ruins. The primary manmade features in the attack zone were the complex trenches, fortifications, underground bunkers, barracks, and observation towers that served as both obstacles and cover or concealment.

The dry summer had begun to transition to fall. The temperatures during the first 10 days of October were in the high 60s, dropping into the 50s during the night. The mornings were accented by fog and a light mist that offered some concealment until it cleared by midmorning. In general, the weather was temperate, with clear observation for most of the 12 hours of daylight. Large troop movements were done before nautical (dawn) twilight at 0544.<sup>5</sup> This was the primary consideration for the 2d Division's time of an attack. Tactical considerations for attacking aside, the terrain and weather strongly favored the defender.

The Blanc Mont massif was easily recognizable as the last natural defensive line south of the Aisne

<sup>5</sup> Twilight (civil, nautical, and astrological) is the time between dusk and dawn when the sun is below the horizon but its rays still light up the sky. Nautical dawn is the moment when the geometric center of the sun is 12 degrees below the horizon in the morning.



*Entrance to one of the fortified bunkers on Blanc Mont.*  
NARA, RG 127

River and the critical point of the German defensive line. The attack to rupture this defensive belt would be weighted as the French Fourth Army's main effort.

## GERMAN DEFENSES

The 2d Division would be attacking the German *XII Corps*, whose front line roughly corresponded to that of the French XXI Corps. The *XII Corps'* commander, General of Cavalry Krug von Nidda, had no illusions about his ability to repel the coming attack. In his estimate of the situation on 1 October 1918, Nidda noted reinforcements and tanks observed opposite in the vicinity of Sommepey and anticipated an attack on 2 October. Nidda flatly stated that his divisions were insufficient to hold the line on Blanc Mont. As previously discussed, the German operational objective for the coming battle was not to repel the French attack but to inflict as many casualties as possible while preserving its combat power in a fighting withdrawal.

Nonetheless, the *XII Corps* had the troops and guns to hurt the 2d Division, and badly. On 2



*Crude German shacks on Blanc Mont's north slope.*  
NARA, RG 127

October, the *XII Corps* had four divisions in line: from west to east, these included the *200th Infantry Division*, the *51st Reserve Division*, the *203d Infantry Division*, and the *3d Guards Infantry Division*. The *200th Infantry Division* defended from



German bunker, Blanc Mont.

Courtesy of LtCol John D. Swift, USMC (Ret)

the corps' right flank to the summit of Blanc Mont inclusive. The *51st Reserve Division* defended Blanc Mont Ridge east to the Medeah Farm inclusive. The 2d Division would initially face the outpost zones of *51st Reserve Division* and a portion of the *203d Infantry Division* to its east. But, as German boundaries ran in a northeasterly direction and the 2d Division would attack to the northwest, the 2d Division would cross into the sector of the *200th Infantry Division* when it reached the summit of Blanc Mont.

By this stage of the war, German formations were mere shells of their former size. Since 26 September, the French XXI Corps attack had ground down the *XII Corps'* numbers and morale. Within the *XII Corps*, regiments were often the size of understrength battalions. Companies were nothing more than large platoons. The commander of the *11th Jaeger Battalion* in the *200th Infantry Division* reported, "I wish to point out that I consider it my duty to point out the condition of the troops. Because of physical and mental exertions the men have become dull and indifferent to such an extent that I can no longer guarantee that the position will be held in case of a surprise attack."<sup>6</sup> German records on fighting strength are incomplete and

strengths vary greatly. A rough estimate of the infantry strength under the control of each division on 2 October was approximately 2,000 men and 120 machine guns.<sup>7</sup> The *XII Corps* also could mass the artillery fire of 200 howitzers, cannons, and heavy mortars against the 2d Division's zone.

The *XII Corps* concept of defense was organized along three fortified lines: the second main line of resistance just north of Sommepey; the third main line of resistance along Blanc Mont Ridge; and the fourth main line of resistance in the vicinity of Saint-Étienne.<sup>8</sup> Each of these lines consisted of several parallel trench lines, underground bunkers, and strongpoints. In its operation order on 1 October 1918, *XII Corps* ordered the *200th Infantry Division* to defend the second main line of resistance in its sector but directed the *51st Reserve Division*, directly facing what would become the U.S. 2d Division's zone of attack, to defend the third main line of resistance (Blanc Mont) and merely outpost the second main line of resistance (Essen trench).

In German defensive doctrine, the purpose of the German outpost zone was to disrupt the attack before it reached the main line of resistance. The outpost zone was typically lightly defended, with machine guns and artillery forward observers concentrating fire on the attacker from concrete bunkers without exposing large numbers of infantry to the attack. By the time the attacker reached the main line of resistance, weakened by casualties, slowed by obstacles, and disoriented by the fog of

<sup>7</sup> The *51st Division's 235th Reserve Infantry Regiment* reported 29 officers and 600 troops present on 2 October. The *236th Reserve Infantry Regiment* reported only 16 officers and 213 troops present. The *234th Reserve Infantry Regiment* had been essentially destroyed during previous fighting. Machine gun strength in units that reported it varies widely, but a ratio of 1 machine gun to 10 men is reasonable. The *200th Infantry Division's* strength was reported on 2 October at 885 men, 55 machine guns, and five trench mortars. The *213th Infantry Division*, which was in much better shape, had reinforced each of these divisions with a regiment of about 1,000–1,200 men. The *2d Battalion, 74th Infantry Regiment*, had a strength of 16 officers and 404 men before the battle, suggesting a regimental strength of approximately 1,200 men. The 3d Brigade would initially face the *203d Division's 410th Infantry Regiment*, which had approximately 1,000 men.

<sup>8</sup> The French Fourth Army had overrun the first main line of resistance in its initial attack.

<sup>6</sup> Based on translated German war diaries from the time, it is clear that the regimental and brigade commanders concurred with this evaluation.

battle, the attacker would be vulnerable to counterattacks launched from the German main battle area.

The *XII Corps* adapted this doctrine to the terrain at Blanc Mont. The *51st Division* deployed its *235th Reserve Infantry Regiment*, remnants of the *234th Reserve Infantry Regiment*, and a pioneer battalion within an outpost zone 4.6km wide and 2.7km deep. The forward-most elements of these units still clung to the Essen trench, the northernmost of four trenches in the second main line of resistance. Three battalions from the *74th Reserve Infantry Regiment* dug in along Blanc Mont Ridge, poised to deliver counterattacks against both flanks of the 4th Brigade. The *XII Corps* could counterattack with at least one division within 24 hours of the American attack, and additional reserve divisions could reinforce the *XII Corps* each day.

## 2D BATTALION, 6TH REGIMENT, ON 2 OCTOBER 1918

In the 6th Regiment's sector north of Somme-py, Major Ernest C. Williams's 2d Battalion had begun relieving the French 61st Division around 0200 on the morning of 2 October. The 2d Battalion had marched 12km up the road from Suippes, weaving around French and American troops and equipment jamming the road. Major Williams's Marines found their trenches reeking with the odor of death. French and German corpses intermingled underfoot as the leathernecks slogged into their positions.

All four companies had taken position by 0500. From right to left, the 79th, 80th, and 78th Companies occupied the former German Krefeld trench just north of the flattened ruins of Somme-py. The 81st Machine Gun Company had joined the 2d Battalion on 2 October, and its 12 French-made Hotchkiss M1914 machine guns bolstered Williams's line.<sup>9</sup> Guarding the battalion's left flank, First Lieutenant Clifton B. Cates's 96th Company occupied a north-south communication trench known as the Boyou de Bromberg. The 96th Company's

Marines found German outposts still occupying the Pacha trench to their left and the Essen and Elbe trenches to their left, front, and right. During the morning, Germans crept down the trenches three separate times to lob grenades, but Lieutenant Cates's Marines drove them off.

Major Williams was more concerned about the German machine guns and artillery emplaced in the Essen Hook overlooking Cates's position.<sup>10</sup> Williams requested artillery preparation to soften the area prior to the upcoming attack. During the afternoon, the 6th Regiment attached a one-pounder and two trench mortars to each of the battalions. Major Williams sent his attachments to the 96th Company to assist Lieutenant Cates against the Essen Hook.

At 1130, General Neville informed Colonel Lee that the 5th Regiment reported trenches to their front had been vacated. Lee forwarded the message to Major Williams at the 2d Battalion, asking for positive evidence that the Germans still occupied the Essen trench to the 2d Battalion's front. To the 96th Company's right, First Lieutenant James McB. Sellers sent a patrol from his 78th Company, commanded by Second Lieutenant Edward C. Fowler, into the Essen and Elbe trenches. Lieutenant Fowler found the trenches deserted, and Lieutenant Sellers ordered a full platoon forward by infiltration to occupy the trenches.<sup>11</sup> At 1305 the same afternoon, Major Williams reported that patrols had confirmed that the trenches east of the 96th Company's position were unoccupied.

In fact, the *7th Infantry Division* had been trying to withdraw from these trenches since the day prior. Successful French attacks on 1 October, particularly by the 170th Division on the right, had broken through the second main line of resistance and made the trenches north of Somme-py untenable. By the time the *51st Infantry Division* had relieved the *7th Infantry Division* on the morning of 2 October, its line of outposts had consolidated about 1 km north of the Essen trench. Only in

<sup>9</sup> Machine gun companies comprised three platoons of four Hotchkiss guns. The company had an additional four guns as spares, but was not manned or organized to employ the additional four guns.

<sup>10</sup> The Essen Hook refers to a section of the Essen trench where it bent around a strongly fortified hill.

<sup>11</sup> Fowler had recently received a commission from the ranks. According to Sellers's memoir, Fowler served as a South Boston police officer before enlisting.

the trenches west and north of the 96th Company, at the eastern boundary of the *200th Infantry Division*, did the Germans still have outposts in the Essen and Elbe trenches.

At 1445, Colonel Lee ordered Major Williams to occupy and hold trenches Pacha, Elbe, and Essen to the 2d Battalion's immediate front so that they might use them as the jumping-off position for the coming attack. The 4th Brigade had advised the 6th Regiment that the French would attack and seize the Essen Hook that afternoon. It was up to Williams to coordinate with the French 137th Infantry Regiment on his left. The 5th Regiment would support Williams by suppressing Germans defending the strongpoint in the Bois de la Vipère to its front. However, as late as 1345, the French regimental commander to Williams's left knew nothing of an impending attack.

At 1615, General Neville advised the 2d Division chief of staff that Colonel Lee believed the strongpoint on the Essen Hook commanded the ground between the 2d Battalion and the Essen and Elbe trenches. Neville authorized the 6th Regiment to occupy the trenches with light patrols until nightfall and then by infiltration with the main body as H-hour approached. However, if the French 21st Division did attack the Essen Hook after all, the 6th Regiment would attack alongside.

At 1620, Williams issued the following order to his four company commanders:

*At 6:30 p.m., you will occupy, by infiltration, the trenches Du Pache, De l'Elbe, and D'Essen. Two platoons will be used initially, followed by the other two as successive trenches are reached. Consolidate and hold with two platoons in front trenches and two in rear.*

Major Williams had chosen the time of attack for just after sunset that evening. His Marines would have some protection from the dusky twilight, but would nonetheless be able to find their way forward. Williams also spelled out sector limits for each company.

At 1830, the 78th, 80th, and 79th Companies seized the trenches without encountering opposition. In the 96th Company's zone, Lieutenant Cates used his attached one-pounder and trench mortars,

two of his rifle platoons, and all eight of his company's automatic rifles to suppress the Germans on the Essen Hook to his left. Lieutenant Cates then led the riflemen of his remaining two platoons in the assault. The 96th Company had to advance 300 meters from its position in the communication trench to the Essen trench to its north. The Marines sprang out of their trench and covered the ground at a dead run. German machine gunners fired bursts at the Marines, but the 96th Company's Marines did not slow their charge. As the Marines neared the Essen trench, the Germans hurled about a dozen grenades and then slipped away into the darkness. The 96th Company suffered a few casualties; the muster roll records show three wounded for 2 October. Cates later wrote that his Marines had captured five prisoners and killed about a dozen Germans. At 2000 that night, Cates reported, "Attack a success. Few losses. Consolidated. Liaison with 78th [Company] on right and French on left. Everything in good shape."

The line of departure for the morning's attack was now secure.

## PLAN OF ATTACK

As the 6th Regiment consolidated its position in the Essen trench, the 2d Division developed its plan for the main attack on 3 October. Although General Lejeune and his staff still had not received the XXI Corps order, they had enough information to develop the essential details. Colonels Feland and Lee returned to their regiments near dusk to brief their battalion commanders. In an operational memorandum issued at 2115 that evening, Lieutenant Colonel Ellis summarized the brigade's assignment.

The 6th Regiment would lead the attack and the 5th Regiment would follow in support. Each regiment would attack in a column of battalions; a battalion in the first line, a second battalion following in support of the lead battalion, and a third battalion following in trace as a regimental reserve. This scheme of maneuver placed all six infantry battalions of the 4th Brigade in a single column, massing its rifle strength on the frontage of a single battalion.

The 2d Battalion, 6th Regiment, would lead the



attack, with all four of its companies on line. The battalion would cover a frontage of approximately 1km. Each company in the 2d Battalion would attack in four waves, with each of its four platoons making up a wave.<sup>12</sup> Twelve Renault FT tanks from the French 2d Tank Battalion would precede the 2d Battalion as it followed the rolling barrage up the slopes of Blanc Mont. The 81st Machine Gun Company would support the 2d Battalion, with a platoon guarding each flank and a third platoon supporting from the rear. The remaining five battalions of the brigade would each advance with two companies in front, two following in support, and the platoons of its supporting machine gun company deploying to the flanks and rear. The 1st Battalion, 6th Regiment, would follow in support of the 2d Battalion, with the 3d Battalion trailing as the regimental reserve. A second company of 12 French tanks would support the 1st Battalion on its flanks and rear. Colonel Lee directed his battalions to leave an interval of approximately 900m between battalions.

The 5th Regiment would follow in a similar column in the order of 2d Battalion, 3d Battalion, and 1st Battalion. The 5th Regiment's battalions would have to shift about 1km to their left after the last battalion of the 6th Regiment moved forward before following in its trace. Colonel Feland directed a shorter interval, approximately 200–550m between battalions.<sup>13</sup> In accordance with a memorandum issued by the division chief of staff at 2045 on 2 October, Colonel Feland tasked his 1st Battalion to act as the brigade combat liaison to maintain contact with the French 21st Division on the left and to be prepared to attack and clear the fortified position

on the Essen Hook. Feland tasked his regiment's one-pounder field guns to support the 1st Battalion. Major George W. Hamilton, commanding the 1st Battalion, gave his 17th Company the task to clear the Essen Hook to protect the brigade's left flank.

The division's artillery, 2d Field Artillery Brigade, was significantly reinforced for this attack and would deliver only five minutes of preparatory fires prior to the infantry attack. A rolling barrage would precede the infantry, advancing up the slope at a rate of 100m every four minutes. With the brigade column stretching more than 4km from the lead waves of the 6th Regiment to the machine gunners trailing the 1st Battalion, 5th Regiment, the rolling barrage would reach the brigade objective before the last companies of the 5th Regiment had cleared the Essen trench.

The idea of a rolling barrage was to provide suppressive fires in support of the infantry in an era in which communications between the infantry were limited to telephone lines, runners, pyrotechnics, and carrier pigeons. As infantry battalion commanders had almost no ability to control artillery fire, the rolling barrage compensated by blasting everything immediately in front of the infantry, shifting forward at a predetermined rate.<sup>14</sup>

Twenty-four 75mm field guns of the 12th Field Artillery would rake the ground in front of the 6th Regiment, with each gun firing 15 shells per minute. Another 12 guns from the French 61st Division would fire high-density white smoke just beyond the barrage line to obscure the advancing Marines. It would take two hours and eight minutes for the barrage to reach the objective line on Blanc Mont. With four minutes allocated to advance the barrage line every 100m, the fire plan allocated an artillery round for every 70 square meters of ground. Just beyond the Medeah Farm road, the barrage would cease rolling, but would continue for 30 minutes to protect the Marines as they consolidated their defense. The barrage would then resume its roll forward another 1.3km to enable the front-line units to push out security outposts. Seven bat-

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<sup>12</sup> This may be misstated; the record shows that each platoon covered a wave the width of the battalion (1,000m), but it is more likely that the four platoons attacked abreast, with each platoon attacking on a 250m front. Otherwise, the platoon commander's ability to control their platoon would be severely compromised. Doctrinally, a company in assault formation of four ranks formed with two platoons abreast and two following in support, with each platoon formed in two waves. A common variation would put the supporting platoons in columns to simplify control, a formation called a "line of combat groups."

<sup>13</sup> The 5th Regiment field message described the original plan for a frontal attack on 2 October 1918. However, there is no indication this interval was amended later.

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<sup>14</sup> The 2d Division also employed wireless radios at the infantry, regiment, and artillery battalion level, but these radios did not accompany assaulting battalions.

talions of French and American long-range 155mm howitzers and 120mm De Bange long guns would suppress enemy batteries. One battalion of 12 additional 75mm guns from the 12th Field Artillery remained hitched to its mules, ready to displace forward and support the advancing infantry.

The 4th Brigade placed all six of its machine gun companies under the command of its six infantry battalion commanders. The machine gun companies habitually supported the same infantry battalion whenever possible.

Recognizing the possibility that the French XI Corps might not keep up on the brigade's left and that Germans in the Bois de la Vipère would be bypassed, the brigade memorandum called for the regiments to "provide unusually strong flank protection." The brigade also directed both regiments to establish combat groups specifically to gain and maintain contact with the 3d Brigade to the right.

The division surgeon had capitalized on the 24-hour reprieve to position a dressing station at Sommepey, directly behind the 4th Brigade's attack position, and four field hospitals 8 km to the south in the vicinity of Suippes. The division surgeon had control of more than 70 ambulances to evacuate casualties from Sommepey to Suippes. Each infantry and machine gun company detailed 12 Marines to carry casualties from battalion aid stations back to the dressing station at Sommepey.

These litter-bearers were drawn from a large cadre of Marines who would not go over the top with their companies. Accustomed now to crippling losses, the 2d Division had instituted a policy of leaving 20 percent of each infantry and machine gun battalion out of action. The purpose of this policy was to maintain a cadre of experienced veterans to rebuild each unit after the fight. While the policy certainly limited the devastation some units would suffer, it also had the immediate effect of removing almost 3,400 riflemen and machine gunners from the 2d Division's ranks.

In raw infantry strength, the 2d Division had massed approximately 13,500 infantrymen against a German foxhole strength of around 5,000. German numbers are very difficult to estimate from available records. The 2d Division would only have been able to make a rough guess of German strength on

the eve of the attack.<sup>15</sup> In artillery, the 2d Division had control of 228 French and U.S. artillery pieces: 144 75mm field guns and 84 120mm heavy guns and 155mm howitzers.<sup>16</sup> The German *XII Corps* deployed about 200 medium and heavy pieces within range of the 2d Division's zone of attack. However, the fire of these German guns would be diffused at times against French divisions attacking on either side of the 2d Division.

During clear days, German artillery observers on the slopes and summit of Blanc Mont enjoyed excellent observation from fortified observation posts from which they could direct these guns via buried telephone wires. American artillery observers accompanying the infantry would be exposed and limited to correcting scheduled fires using tenuous lines strung behind the advance and visual signals. However, several factors offset the German artillery's advantage. German artillery did not have anything approaching the stockpile in ammunition from which the Allies could draw. Allied aviation could at times control the skies over Blanc Mont, affording the French 27th and 252d Aero Squadrons and 45th Balloon Company undisturbed surveillance of the battlefield. The XXI Corps also had attached 48 Renault tanks from the French 2d and 3d Tank Battalions to help the 2d Division spearhead the assault. Nonetheless, the 2d Division enjoyed a mere 4.5:1 advantage in infantry strength and only slightly greater than parity in supporting arms.

General Neville had not waited for a written field order from the 2d Division before having Lieutenant Colonel Ellis issue the operations

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<sup>15</sup> The *2d Division Summary of Operations in the World War* lists 16,855 infantry and machine gunners present for duty on 23 September. The 13,500 accounts for the 20 percent cadre left out of the attack on 3 October. German figures include all battalions within the 2d Division's zone of attack as well as those brought into action from adjacent sectors on 3 October. German war diaries provide on-hand strength for less than half of these *XII Corps* formations. Other units were estimated from reported strengths of similar units. See footnote 7 on p. 11 for a breakdown of these units' strengths.

<sup>16</sup> The 12th and 15th Field Artillery each deployed 36 75mm field guns, as did the French 29th and 35th Field Artillery Regiments of the 67th Division. Other records show that there was a total of seven U.S. and French 120mm and 155mm battalions supporting the 2d Division.

memorandum. Neville and his regimental commanders were aware of most details of the division's plan, since they had attended the planning conference at the division headquarters earlier that afternoon. However, a written order from the division would confirm important details, such as the time of attack and the objective line. Lieutenant Colonel Ellis issued *Operations Memorandum No. 11* at 2115 on 2 October. At that time, as General Lejeune waited in patient agony, his staff was still translating the French XXI Corps order into English and drafting the division order. It was not until 2300 that General Lejeune could approve the three-page division field order. Headquarters orderlies then mimeographed the typed pages before motorcycle dispatchers plunged into the dark night to distribute copies to the brigades.

Lieutenant Colonel Ellis amended the previous operation's memorandum at 0145, confirming the time of attack for 0550 on 3 October, less than four hours away. In the 6th Regiment, Colonel Lee finally received a copy of the division order at 0445 and issued his regimental order by runner 15 minutes later.

It was too late to reach Major Williams and his 2d Battalion, 6th Regiment, at the front line. Artillery liaison officers arrived around midnight and informed Williams of the time of attack. At 0430, with no written orders in hand, Major Williams and his adjutant crawled under a poncho with a flashlight and a field message pad to scribble out a battalion order. Williams based his plan on the aborted plan of attack for 2 October and what details he had learned from the artillery officers. Before battalion messengers could deliver the order to each of his four company commanders, the five-minute preparatory barrage erupted across the battalion's front.

## 2D DIVISION ATTACKS ON 3 OCTOBER 1918

In the eastern half of the 2d Division's zone of attack at around 1800 the evening of 2 October, a German battalion conducted a successful counterattack to regain a previously lost trench in the French 170th Division's sector. This trench was delineated in the forthcoming division order as the jump-off position for the 3d Brigade. While the Germans were retak-

ing these trenches, the 3d Brigade was 7km to the south, marching forward in the fading light. Their French guide missed the hookup, further complicating the 3d Brigade's movement. With the help of their own reconnaissance officers, the brigade managed to deploy into its attack formation at roughly 0300, but they were still nearly 0.5m from the trench delineating their jump-off position.

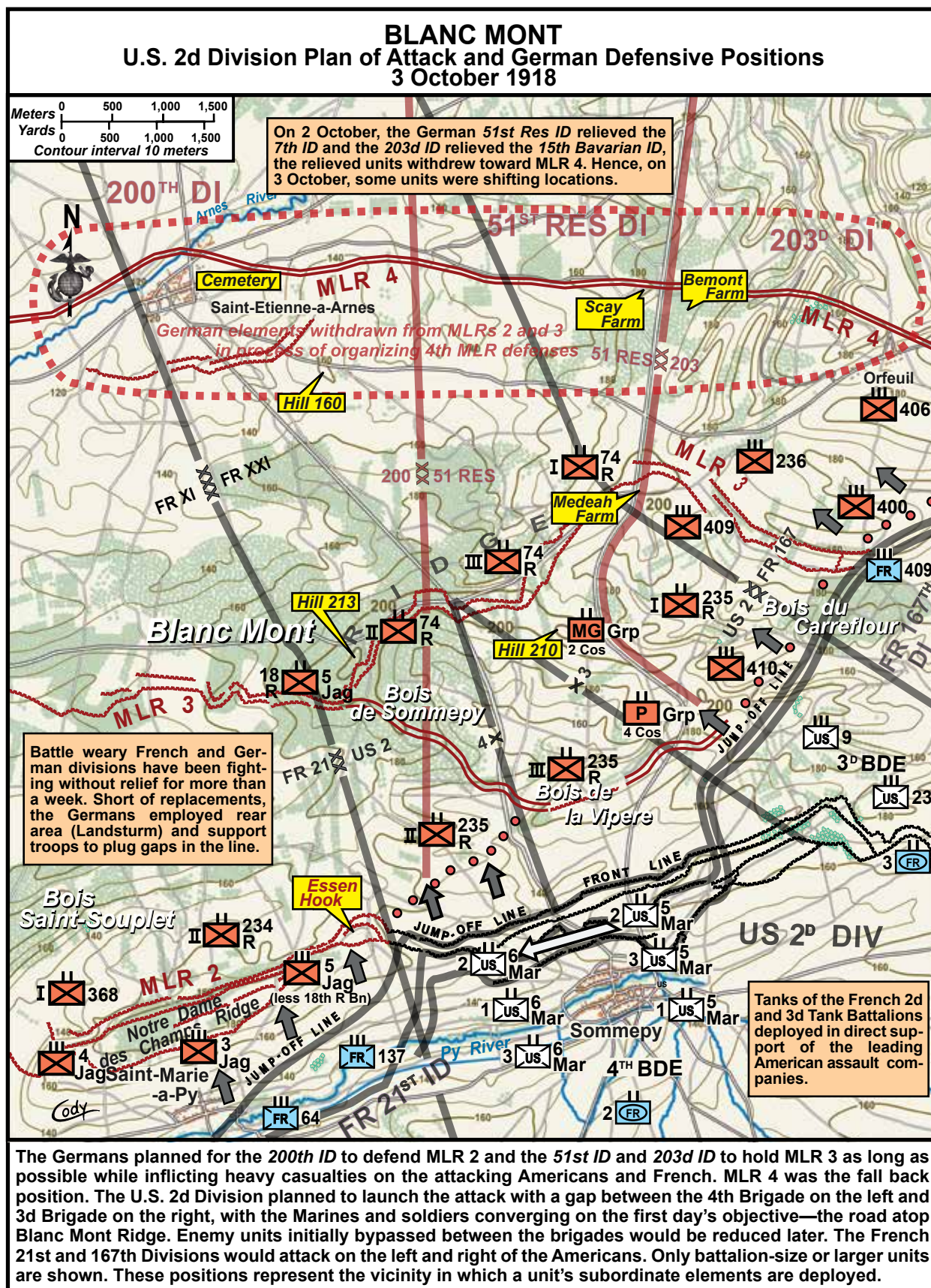
The 3d Brigade formed with its 9th Regiment leading with companies in line, while its three battalions were attacking in regimental column. The 23d Regiment followed in support, prepared to either pass through the 9th Regiment and continue the attack or to provide flank support. The French 67th Division was attacking on the 3d Brigade's east. XXI Corps tasked both divisions to protect each other's flanks with a measured attack and positive liaison.

As H-hour approached, the 9th Regiment's officers, reconnoitering forward, realized that they would first have to assault to gain their prescribed attack position before continuing the attack northwest. This would complicate the regiment's ability to follow on the heels of its rolling barrage. In a development of amazing fortune, the German units holding the trenches delineated as the 9th Regiment's attack position received their own orders to fall back. These German units began withdrawing even as the barrage commenced.

At 0530 on 3 October, the opening salvo for the preparatory bombardment signaled the attack, starting the Battle of Blanc Mont for the U.S. 2d Division. The attack unfolded with the prospect of breaking the Germans' four-year grip on the Champagne sector and initiating the *Third Army's* collapse in the center of the western front. General Lejeune's confidence in his 2d Division would now be tested.

## 6TH REGIMENT ATTACKS ON 3 OCTOBER AT 0550

The barrage caught the company commanders of the 2d Battalion, 6th Regiment, by surprise. A battalion runner delivered a handwritten note to Lieutenant Cates at the 96th Company: "Attack at once—orders will follow." As the 12th Field Artillery's 75mm shells erupted across the battalion's



Map by LtCol R. L. Cody, USMC (Ret)



front, lieutenants and sergeants ordered their Marines out of the trenches and into attack formation.

The thin lines of the *2d Battalion, 235th Reserve Infantry Regiment*, lay 600m to the Marines' front, giving the companies of the 2d Battalion time to assemble into their formations and catch up to the rolling barrage. Only the 80th Company, which was slow getting into position, lagged behind. The French tanks were nowhere in sight. Return artillery fire was very light, inflicting only a few casualties. On the left flank, however, Maxims on the Essen Hook tore into the ranks of the 96th Company.<sup>17</sup>

As the Marines neared the first line of German positions, dense, white smoke fired by the French batteries and a low-lying fog fully obscured the Marines from German observation. Because the shrapnel from the high-explosive shells fired by the 12th Field Artillery Regiment's guns flew on a very flat trajectory, the detonating rounds splattered fragmentation forward, toward the German positions and away from the advancing Marines. This enabled the lead ranks to follow the barrage even more closely. The relentless eruption of 75mm shells across the battalion front served as a simple, obvious control measure, indicating the way forward and pacing the advance. Confidence soared. Precise formations disintegrated as Marines crowded the barrage line. Even one gun repeatedly firing short in the 96th Company's zone did not slow the advance, as Lieutenant Cates's Marines "boxed" around the short rounds and continued up the grassy slope.

Thirty minutes after jumping off, the 2d Battalion, 6th Regiment, reached the position of the *2d Battalion, 235th Reserve Infantry Regiment*. These positions consisted of squads of 8–10 soldiers organized around a machine gun, with an underground bunker for protection from artillery. Despite a reported strength of 463 infantrymen, the German battalion failed to even slow the Marines' advance.

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<sup>17</sup> The first fully automatic machine gun, the Maxim, was developed by engineer and inventor Hiram S. Maxim in 1884. It was manufactured by Vickers and was sometimes known as the Vickers-Maxim and sometimes just Vickers. These guns were used by every major power during the war. The Maxim gun was recoil operated and was cooled by a water jacket surrounding the barrel. The *Maschinengewehr 08*, or MG 08, was the German machine gun based on Maxim's design.

The 79th Company on the right end of the line captured a machine gun position and sent a squad of prisoners to the rear, but not before the company commander, First Lieutenant Amos Shinkle, was wounded. Lieutenant Shinkle passed on the company's objective to his second in command, First Lieutenant John West, who immediately took command and continued the advance.

To the 79th Company's left, Lieutenant Sellers's 78th Company also approached the positions of the *2d Battalion, 235th Reserve Infantry Regiment*. Company runner Private John J. Kelly set out to make good on a boast: he would be the first to capture a German machine gun that morning. Armed only with a .45-caliber automatic pistol and a few grenades, Private Kelly dashed between the exploding shells of the barrage to catch the Germans unaware. According to Kelly's own account, he spied a machine gun position and shot the gunner in the chest a split second before the gunner would have cut him down. Kelly then tossed a grenade to take out the rest of the squad, leaped into the position before the dust had settled from the blast, and captured the stunned survivors.<sup>18</sup>

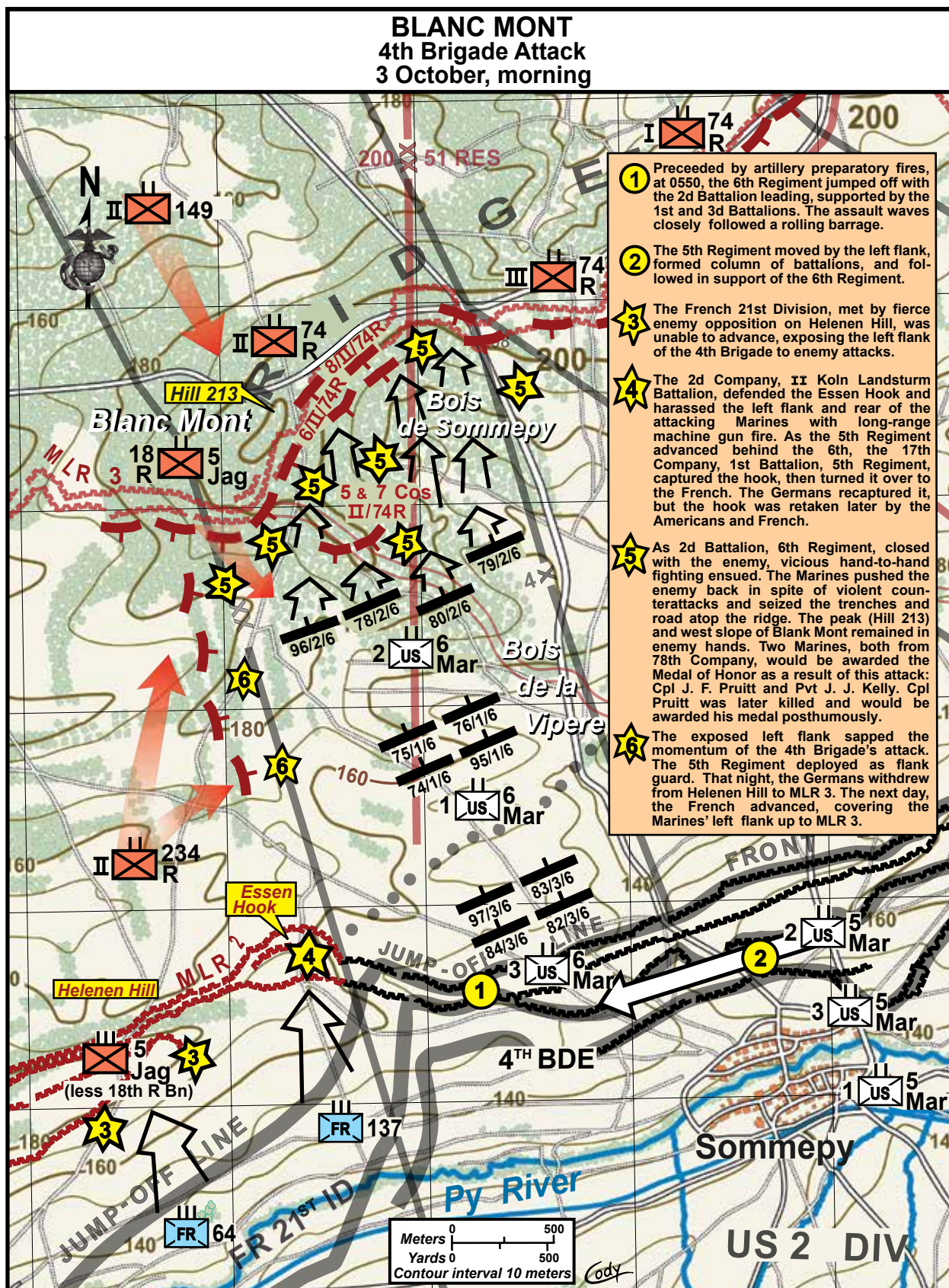
As Major Williams's battalion reached the pine woods on Sattelberg and the slopes of Blanc Mont, the Marines encountered four companies of the *2d Battalion, 74th Reserve Infantry Regiment*. These German troops initially fought more stubbornly. The *5th* and the *7th Companies* ignored Marines waving at them to surrender. Their machine guns fired into what they later reported as "dense masses of Americans." This temporarily halted the Marines' advance, until Hotchkiss gunners raked the parapets of the German positions. Under this covering fire, and taking advantage of the cover offered by the Stall and Freiburger depressions, Marines enveloped the German position.

Other Marines directly attacked the German defenders. The 4th Brigade had practiced an assault technique called *marching fire* in which the Marines advanced, walking upright, firing their bolt action Springfield M1903s from the hip. Automatic riflemen peppered the defenders while their loaders,

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<sup>18</sup> Kelly was awarded both the Army and Navy's Medal of Honor for his actions on 3 October.





Map by LtCol R. L. Cody, USMC (Ret)



*Blanc Mont, as seen from the Essen trench, where the Marines went over the top.*  
NARA, RG 127

walking alongside, supported the heavy Chauchats in the crooks of their right arms. As dubious as this tactic appears, the onslaught was overwhelming. Twenty members of the *5th Company* surrendered. Marines shot down several of their comrades fleeing to the north. Only a dozen members of the *7th Company* escaped.

In this wooded area on Sattelberg, the 78th Company's Marines were fired on from two machine gun positions. Corporal John H. Pruitt led three volunteers forward. Pruitt plunged right into one position, shooting the gunner between the eyes with his Springfield. He killed the gunner of the second weapon with another shot. Corporal Pruitt and his Marines discovered a bunker nearby with a large group of Germans now trapped below ground. More than 40 Germans, including three officers, surrendered to Corporal Pruitt and his team.<sup>19</sup>

As Lieutenant West's 79th Company neared the crest of the ridge, the company encountered the *6th* and *8th Companies* of the *2d Battalion, 74th Infantry*. These companies occupied two trenches just south of the Blanc Mont-Medeah Farm road. The *8th Company* in the rear trench was positioned upslope so that it could fire overhead of the *6th Com-*

*pany* in the forward trench. Though in a formidable position, the Germans had only two functioning machine guns, and the machine gunners of the 6th Machine Gun Battalion's 81st Company covered the assault from the Sattelberg positions just taken from the *5th* and *7th Companies*. The 79th Company surged forward, utilizing marching fire and enveloping both ends of the German trench. Fifty defenders surrendered, a handful fled, and the 2d Battalion was across the Blanc Mont-Medeah Farm road. At 0900, Major Williams had his adjutant send a runner to Colonel Lee with the following message:

*Objective reached at 8:30 A.M. Position now being consolidated. From first information casualties appear to have been light and the bag of prisoners good. Spirits of all very high. Barrage was beautiful.*

The 2d Battalion had indeed seized the central portion of Blanc Mont Ridge. However, the summit of Blanc Mont on Major Williams's left flank, with its deep bunkers and network of communication trenches, still lay beyond the Marines' forward trace.

Between the 78th and 79th Companies, Captain Walter Powers's 80th Company had trailed the rest of the battalion by about 0.5km. This opened a

<sup>19</sup> Pruitt was posthumously awarded the Army and Navy's Medal of Honor for his actions on 3 October.



*Blanc Mont as it looked from the Sattelberg position.*  
NARA, RG 127

250m gap in the battalion front until 0630, when the 79th Company made contact with Lieutenant Sellers's 78th Company to its left.<sup>20</sup>

The 1st Battalion's 76th Company, commanded by Captain Macon C. Overton, had followed in support of the 2d Battalion on the right. About 0.5km from the Blanc Mont–Medeah Farm road, Captain Overton's Marines overtook elements of the 80th Company pinned down by a machine gun position. With the assistance of four French tanks, the 76th Company overran the German position and continued the attack, now leading and guiding on the Sommepey-Saint-Étienne road to its right.

Just short of the Blanc Mont–Medeah Farm road, the 76th Company encountered a second, stronger German position in the vicinity of the crossroads. The Germans were armed with 11 machine guns, a field gun, two antitank rifles, and two trench mortars, all commanding the slopes in the rear of the 2d Battalion. Five French tanks led the attack on the position, with the 76th Company following 10m behind the tanks. The tanks' machine guns suppressed the defenders. With the tanks providing fire superiority, the 76th Company Marines attacked the position. The crew of the field gun was

shot down in the act of firing, and the 76th Company overran the position.

Between heavier resistance on the left and the 80th Company gap on the right, the left-hand 96th and 78th Companies had drifted to the right, inevitably reducing the 2d Battalion's frontage. Major Williams's battalion had reached the Blanc Mont–Medeah Farm road, but the summit of Blanc Mont to its left was still not in American hands.

On the right, Major Frederick A. Barker maneuvered the companies of his 1st Battalion to connect Major Williams's right flank with the 23d Regiment farther to the right. With the exception of Captain Overton's 76th Company, Major Barker's battalion only encountered machine gun fire from the Essen Hook and harassing artillery fire as it followed the 2d Battalion up the ridge. Barker placed his 75th Company to the left of the 76th Company, while the 95th Company dug in behind the 76th, and the 74th took up a position to support the 75th Company. On the extreme left of the 6th Regiment's line on Blanc Mont, Lieutenant Cates refused the line left, now facing his 96th Company to the west.<sup>21</sup> Cates pushed two platoons westward

<sup>20</sup> Capt Powers likely had difficulty controlling his 80th Company and apparently had not occupied the Essen trench in force prior to the attack. This would have placed the 80th Company well to the rear of the other three companies of the 2d Battalion.

<sup>21</sup> The term *refuse the line* indicates that the unit's formation should change its facing (i.e., the direction against where attacks are expected from, and thus, the main axis of defense) by 90 degrees. The command was usually "refuse the line RIGHT" or "refuse the line LEFT" to indicate which way the unit should turn and redeploy to defend against attack.



## THE 78TH COMPANY'S CROWDED HOURS

Marines from the 78th Company were awarded two Medals of Honor and 13 Distinguished Service Crosses for actions on 3 October, primarily for the violent 2 hours and 40 minutes it took the 2d Battalion, 6th Regiment, to advance from the Essen trench to the summit of Blanc Mont Ridge. As the left-center company of the 4th Brigade's lead battalion, the 78th Company attacked directly into the teeth of the German defenses. In addition to the 4 Marines killed, who are listed below, 2 died of wounds, 2 went missing, and 36 were wounded on 3 October. All but one of the Marines below received both the Army and Navy's equivalent medal for valor. Their citations provide insight into the courage and dash it took the 78th Company to win.



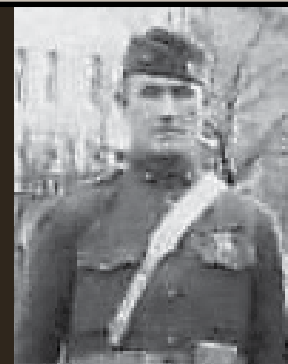
*Pvt John J. Kelly.*  
NARA, RG 127



*Cpl John H. Pruitt.*  
Courtesy of SSgt Steven C. Girard, USA (Ret)



*1stLt James P. Adams.*  
Courtesy of SSgt Steven C. Girard, USA (Ret)



*2dLt Edward C. Fowler.*  
Courtesy of SSgt Steven C. Girard, USA (Ret)

### *Private John J. Kelly*

#### *Army and Navy Medals of Honor*

"Private Kelly ran through our own barrage 100 yards in advance of the front line and attacked an enemy machinegun nest, killing the gunner with a grenade, shooting another member of the crew with his pistol, and returning through the barrage with eight prisoners."

### *Corporal John H. Pruitt*

#### *Army and Navy Medals of Honor (posthumous)*

"Corporal Pruitt single-handed[ly] attacked two machineguns [*sic*], capturing them and killing two of the enemy. He then captured forty prisoners in a dugout nearby. This gallant soldier was killed soon afterward by shellfire while he was sniping at the enemy."

### *First Lieutenant James P. Adams*

#### *Distinguished Service Cross and Navy Cross*

"Voluntarily leading four soldiers through a heavy barrage, Lieutenant Adams attacked and killed a machine-gun crew, which was enfilading his company first line. His willingness, fearlessness, and great courage made possible the cleaning out of many more machine guns, which were holding up the advance of his company."

### *Second Lieutenant Edward C. Fowler*

#### *Distinguished Service Cross and Navy Cross*

"On October 2 Lieutenant Fowler led his men into an advance trench and cleared it of the enemy without a casualty. That night he went out alone and killed the crew of a machine-gun nest with bombs. During the attack on Blanc Mont the following morning, he led his men, capturing about eighty prisoners and fifteen machine guns. After consolidating his position on Blanc Mont he went out alone, and while exposed to artillery fire sniped the crew of a machine-gun nest."



*Pvt Roy H. Beird.*  
Courtesy of Frank Anguiano



*Pvt Richard O. Jordan.*  
Courtesy of Frank Anguiano



*Sgt Henry S. Bogan.*  
Courtesy of SSgt Steven C. Girard, USA (Ret)



*Pvt Samuel Glucksman.*  
Courtesy of SSgt Steven C. Girard, USA (Ret)



*2dLt Hugh P. Kidder.*  
Courtesy of SSgt Steven C. Girard, USA (Ret)



*Pvt Samuel S. Simmons.*  
Courtesy of SSgt Steven C. Girard, USA (Ret)

*Privates Julian W. Alsup (not pictured), Roy H. Beird, Richard O. Jordan, and Bruce H. Mills (not pictured)*  
*Distinguished Service Crosses and Navy Crosses*

“When the advance of their Company was held up by enfilading fire from a hostile machine-gun nest, [the recipient], with three other soldiers, volunteered and made a flank attack on the nest with bombs and rifles, killing three members of the crew and capturing twenty-five others, together with three machine guns.”

*Sergeant Henry S. Bogan*

*Oak leaf in lieu of second Distinguished Service Cross*

“During the attack on Blanc Mont, Sergeant Bogan, without aid, captured three machine-gun nests, and, after being wounded, took thirty prisoners. He himself escorted these prisoners to the rear rather than have the line weakened by taking men for this duty.”

*Private Lambert Bos (not pictured)*

*Distinguished Service Cross and Navy Cross (posthumous)*

“Private Bos, with two other volunteers, flanked a machine-gun nest and, after one of his comrades had been wounded, captured fourteen men and two machine guns. Later, he aided in the capture of forty other prisoners in a dugout.”

*Private Samuel Glucksman*

*Distinguished Service Cross and Navy Cross*

“After capturing a prisoner, Private Glucksman forced his captive to lead him to a dug-out containing twenty of the



enemy, whom he also captured. Later, after being wounded, he returned to the front line, after securing first-aid treatment, and continued in action until his wound forced him to be evacuated.”

*Second Lieutenant Hugh P. Kidder*

*Distinguished Service Cross and Navy Cross (posthumous)*

“On the morning of 2 October Second Lieutenant Kidder led a small patrol into enemy trenches and captured two strong machine-gun positions which were menacing his company. On 3 October with his platoon, Second Lieutenant Kidder attacked and captured four machine-gun nests, and many prisoners, after which he went to the aid of two of his wounded men. While attempting to better his position in the face of heavy machine-gun and artillery fire he was killed.”

*Corporal Henry W. Philblad (not pictured)*

*Distinguished Service Cross and Navy Cross (posthumous)*

“Corporal Philblad advanced alone on two machine-gun nests, which he captured, killing several of the crew with his pistol. Two hours later he again went forward with two other soldiers and, while attacking another machine-gun nest, he was killed by shrapnel.”

*Private Samuel S. Simmons*

*Distinguished Service Cross and Navy Cross*

“With two other soldiers Private Simmons volunteered and attacked a machine-gun nest in advance of his front line, killing the entire crew. Later, with another soldier, he went into an enemy dugout and captured forty prisoners. He also carried three messages through the enemy barrage.”

*Private Joe N. Viera (not pictured)*

*Distinguished Service Cross and Navy Cross*

“After assisting in the capture of three machine-gun nests, Private Viera, with another soldier, went into a dugout when the occupants refused to come out and captured forty of the enemy.”

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Source: G. H. Donaldson and W. Jenkins, *Seventy-Eighth Company, Sixth Marines: Second Division Army of Occupation* (Neuwied, Germany: W. Jenkins, 1919), 10; citations retrieved from Military Times Hall of Valor Project; and casualties from 4th Brigade muster rolls, October 1918.

and captured another 75 prisoners from bunkers near the summit of Blanc Mont. His Marines, however, were exposed to heavy trench mortar and field gun fire. Lieutenant Cates promptly withdrew them back to a trench near his original position. The bunkers and fortifications on the wooded summit of Blanc Mont remained unoccupied.

The 3d Battalion, 6th Regiment, had followed the 1st Battalion as the regimental reserve. At 1010, Captain George K. Shuler ordered three of his companies into a support line 1 km behind the 1st and 2d Battalions. Captain Shuler placed his companies from right to left in the following order: 83d, 97th, and 84th, with his 82d Company as a reserve in the rear center of his line.

Though the 6th Regiment destroyed at least two battalions of infantry, captured hundreds of prisoners, and seized the Blanc Mont-Medeah Farm road, the Battle of Blanc Mont had just begun. German howitzers and field guns could now pummel the 6th Regiment with direct fire from the north, northwest, and west.

The 2d Division achieved a stunning success, but it had created a deep, exposed salient. Until the French divisions advanced along both flanks, the 2d Division would remain vulnerable to counterattacks. Recognizing the serious situation and the opportunity, the German *XII Corps* reinforced the *51st Reserve Division* with the *17th Division*. At 0930, the *51st Reserve Division* issued orders for the *17th*



*Disabled French tank near Sommepey.*  
Courtesy of LtCol John D. Swift, USMC (Ret)

*Division* to counterattack in a southerly direction and retake Blanc Mont Ridge. The combined artillery of the *51st Reserve* and *17th Divisions* would support the counterattack.

Local German commanders on Blanc Mont were focused on containing the disaster. The *200th Division* on the 4th Brigade's left flank scrambled to accomplish three pressing objectives: hold onto the Notre Dame des Champs Ridge on its front to contain the French 21st Division; establish a defensive line with the *18th Reserve Jaeger Battalion* from the Essen Hook north to Blanc Mont; and maneuver the *149th Regiment* from Saint-Étienne around the west flank of Blanc Mont to recover the important positions on the summit, from which it could later launch further counterattacks.

Between 0945 and 1100 on 3 October, Marines of the 96th Company spotted at least 700 German infantry approaching Blanc Mont from the west. These were the companies of the *149th Regiment*, headed to clear Blanc Mont of American infantry. Lieutenant Cates reported the maneuver to Major Williams, who rushed four French tanks over to reinforce the 96th Company and sent a runner to Captain Shuler requesting support from the 3d Battalion. At a range of 0.5km, the tanks, a regimental one-pounder, Hotchkiss guns of the 81st Machine Gun Company, and 96th Company rifles

commenced firing at the German formation. Lieutenant Cates reported that the approaching infantry immediately took cover and disappeared.<sup>22</sup>

The 2d Battalion's left flank was still exposed. In response to Major Williams's request, at 1030, Major Barker shifted the 1st Battalion's 95th Company, two platoons of the 74th Company, and a section of Hotchkiss machine guns over to extend the 96th Company's line southward from Blanc Mont. Upon being relieved by Major Robert E. Messersmith's 2d Battalion, 5th Regiment, these units returned to the 1st Battalion's sector about two hours later.

The situation looked less dire on the German side as well. At one point in the morning action, the commander of the *200th Division's 2d Jaeger Brigade* employed his headquarters' orderlies to defend the command post on Blanc Mont. Shortly after noon, the *18th Reserve Jaeger Battalion* reported it had retaken the Sattelberg position south of Blanc Mont, where the 96th and 78th Companies had overrun the *5th* and *7th Companies* of the *74th Reserve Infantry Regiment*. The large formation engaged by the 96th Company had not been driven off, however. By 1310 that afternoon, the battalion of the *149th Regiment* that had threatened the 2d Battalion's left flank moved into the trenches and bunkers on the wooded crest of Blanc Mont and was preparing for a counterattack. The *2d Jaeger Brigade* reported it had captured American Marines belonging to the 6th Regiment of the 2d Division.

Throughout the afternoon, the 6th Regiment's Marines suffered from small-arms fire enfilading the line from Blanc Mont. Direct artillery fire from the north killed and wounded Marines clinging to the hard crest of Blanc Mont Ridge. One of those lost early to such fire was Corporal Henry Pruitt of the 78th Company, who had killed two German machine gunners and captured more than 40 prisoners from a single bunker. At 1350, Major Williams reported his Marines were under "extremely punishing artillery and M.G. [machine gun] fire from both front and left flank" and requested counterbattery fire. Litter-bearers stayed busy transporting the wounded to an aid station at the base of the

<sup>22</sup> Records show that Cates stated in 1926 that the action took place at 0945 that morning and there were just three tanks.

slope in the Essen trench. At 1530, the situation had not improved, forcing Major Williams to reiterate his request.

## 5TH REGIMENT ATTACKS ON 3 OCTOBER 1918

When the 6th Regiment jumped off at 0550 that morning, the 5th Regiment had initially held fast in the abandoned German trench network in the eastern half of the brigade zone of attack. As the barrage progressed and the 6th Regiment advanced, the 5th Regiment extended its line to the left flank. The 5th Regiment's mission was to follow and support the 6th Regiment and to be prepared to pass through the 6th Regiment and continue the attack beyond Blanc Mont Ridge. The 5th Regiment also was ordered to maintain flank security to the west and ensure liaison on both flanks. The column of battalions had the 2d Battalion in the lead, the 3d Battalion in support, and 1st Battalion as reserve. At 0655, the 2d Battalion followed the 6th Regiment toward Blanc Mont Ridge.

As the Marines watched the ranks of the 6th Regiment move through the smoke and dirt clouds of the barrage, they plainly saw the ravages played upon them by German machine gun emplacements to their front and the western flank. Much of this fire emanated from a western bulge in the German trench that the 4th Brigade occupied as its attack position. The Essen trench's bulge or hook was emplaced on a knoll approximately 20m in elevation that afforded flanking fire into the 4th Brigade. This knoll rested in the French 21st Division's zone and was about 0.5km west of where the Marines had occupied this same trench complex. The French had failed the day prior to seize this trench. At H-hour on 3 October, their attack was still being initiated from a position hundreds of meters southwest of the Essen Hook.

As the 5th Regiment readied its battalions to follow in trace, Colonel Feland ordered the 1st Battalion to clear and secure the Essen Hook. Major Hamilton assigned this task to Captain LeRoy P. Hunt's 17th Company. The 17th Company moved by the left flank at 0700. When the company advanced to within 800m of the hook, German machine gun fire stopped its advance.



*5th Regiment, the third wave attacking Blanc Mont on 3 October 1918.*

Courtesy of LtCol John D. Swift, USMC (Ret)

Captain Hunt brought forward a section of the 8th Machine Gun Company. The machine gunners suppressed the objective while Captain Hunt developed the situation and awaited the support of a gun from the regiment's 37mm gun platoon. The manportable infantry support cannon soon arrived and was quickly emplaced. With the crew's skillful fires, four enemy machine guns were destroyed.

The 17th Company advanced by fire and maneuver to within 300m of the strongpoint and prepared for a final assault. Captain Hunt ordered two platoons to support the attack by enveloping each flank. Once the supporting platoons flanked the position, the other two platoons would conduct a frontal attack. With the aid of an attached machine gun team, the enveloping platoons advanced within 200m of the enemy strongpoint. Captain Hunt was prepared to order the frontal assault when, quite unexpectedly, the German defenders capitulated. Hunt reported the Essen Hook "all cleaned out" at 1030. More than 100 Germans surrendered.

In the three hours required to secure the Essen Hook, the French attack had made gains as well. Captain Hunt turned the position over to the French forces moving in to occupy the trench they had been trying to gain for the past two days. A local German counterattack retook portions of the trench later that afternoon; the 17th Compa-

## SAILORS AT BLANC MONT: IN THE HIGHEST TRADITION OF THE NAVAL SERVICE

The 5th and 6th Regiments found the medical organization they had established at Quantico to be well suited for combat conditions. Each regimental headquarters had a regimental and assistant regimental surgeon, a dental officer, a pharmacist, a chief pharmacist, and eight hospital corpsmen. Each battalion was assigned a surgeon, an assistant surgeon, a chief pharmacist's mate, and 13 corpsmen.

The essential principles for treating and evacuating wounded that these men established under fire remain intact today. The company command post marked the location of the advanced aid station,

where two or three company corpsmen would collect and provide immediate treatment to casualties. As many as 12 litter-bearers who had received rudimentary first aid training would retrieve the wounded where they fell. After the corpsmen provided lifesaving aid, these same litter-bearers would carry the wounded to the battalion aid station. The battalion aid stations were established by the surgeon near the command post in whatever covered position could be found. Here, the small battalion medical team rendered traumatic surgical care and stabilized patients until they could be evacuated to the regimental aid station or directly to the division hospital. The regimental aid station served as the primary medical care and evacuation station within several kilometers of the front line. Casualties could be sustained there until the ambulances transported them to the division hospital. As ambulances often could not reach the forward aid stations during daylight, Marines and prisoners with non-life-threatening wounds were routinely employed to carry the more severely wounded to the rear.

The experience in France presented the Navy medical service with an unprecedented scale of horrendous field conditions and casualties. Such horrors were particularly prevalent at Blanc Mont, and official and personal accounts of the battle are replete with instances of courage and valor by corpsmen, surgeons, and chaplains and of affection and respect for them from the Marines they served alongside. Twenty-one naval servicemen were decorated with the Navy Cross for their actions at Blanc Mont; one hospital corpsman was awarded the Medal of Honor. This represents nearly twice the number of naval personnel recognized at Belleau Wood, which lasted three times longer than actions at Blanc Mont.

Pharmacist's Mate First Class John Henry Balch of the 3d Battalion, 6th Regiment, received a single Medal of Honor that covered his actions at both Soissons and Blanc Mont. His service at Blanc Mont is only briefly summarized in his citation: "Also in the action at Somme-Py on 5 October 1918, he exhibited exceptional bravery in establishing an advanced dressing station under heavy shellfire." Balch also received a Distinguished Service Cross for his valor at Belleau Wood, Soissons, and Saint-Mihiel, and three Silver Star citations for his actions at Belleau Wood and Blanc Mont. He rejoined the Navy during World War II and retired in 1950 as a commander. Fittingly, the medical clinic aboard Marine Corps Base Quantico is named in his honor.

During the war, the valor of four chaplains would be recognized with the Navy Cross. Lieutenant (Junior Grade) Albert N. Park was the only chaplain to serve with the 4th Brigade in all of its actions in the war. He was serving as the 5th Regiment chaplain during its terrible 4 October attack. His citation states, "Chaplain Park, while in charge of the regimental burial detail, voluntarily exposed himself to heavy shell fire to assist two wounded men to a place of safety, and calmly walked around among the men directing them to get under cover while remaining himself exposed." Park later wrote, "I had more [action] in my



*An ambulance park near Somme-Py.*  
Courtesy of the town of Somme-Py museum





PhM1c John Henry Balch.  
Naval History and Heritage Command

burial detail than some companies had in the line.”

Years later, Chief Pharmacist’s Mate Frank Tousic, who received the Distinguished Service Cross for his brave work aiding wounded Marines at Blanc Mont, wrote of the corpsmen with whom he served during those fateful days:

*a book could be written on the noble work of the Navy hospital corpsmen of the Marine Brigade[,] many of whom are sleeping the long sleep, lying in the soil of France, among comrades whom they succored in their dying moments. . . . Many remember Blanc Mont Ridge. . . . Many . . . a man wondered what the man was with a crow on his left arm and a marine ornament on his helmet, who risked his life to dress his wounds and pull him to safety in the midst of such a carnage of destruction and death as few men have witnessed.*

ny would return to provide support in its recapture. Unfortunately, the French advance beyond the Essen trench and abreast of the 4th Brigade would not develop for two more days and the Germans quickly exploited this advantage. The untimely recapture of the Essen Hook and the failure of the French XI Corps to push north enabled the defenders to retain control of the western extremity of Blanc Mont Ridge and Sattelberg.

As the decisive Essen Hook stronghold was reduced and secured, the 5th Regiment continued following in support of the 6th Regiment’s attack. Major Messersmith’s 2d Battalion crossed the Py River as the regiment’s lead battalion. When it reached the trench line from where the 6th Regiment jumped off, the 2d Battalion deployed into its attack formation while advancing, maintaining a 1.5-km interval with the trail element of the 6th Regiment. The 2d Battalion immediately received machine gun fire from the west and northwest, along with intermittent artillery. Private Clarence L. Richmond, a stretcher-bearer in the 43d Company of the 2d Battalion, vividly described the action:

*As soon as the Germans saw what we were attempting to do, they met us with heavy machine gun fire and trench mortars. I think they had every conceivable kind of trench mortar. Some of the shells sounded like they were lopsided as they hit all around us, many of them exploding in the air before hitting the ground. Machine gun fire became murderously heavy as we ascended the slope of the hill.*

*Private [Richard J.] Hamilton of our platoon fell with a machine gun bullet through his chest. Hamilton carried a French automatic rifle. Just before coming to the front he had been given a summary [court-martial] for something he had done. Getting him on a stretcher, we headed for the rear to find a first aid station. We had not gone more than a hundred yards when a trench mortar hit about twenty feet from us and wounded one of the fellows. Stopping a few minutes, I bound up his wound and we proceeded. Hamilton died before we reached the dressing station. Not wishing to leave him on the field, we buried*



*him in a shell hole, putting up a little improvised cross and fastening one of his identification tags to the cross.*<sup>23</sup>

As the 5th Regiment received flanking fire primarily from the west, it echeloned left as it tied into the left of 6th Regiment's cursory defensive positions. The 2d Battalion, 5th Regiment, reoriented west and tied its right flank in with 3d Battalion, 6th Regiment. The 3d Battalion, 5th Regiment, following in support, established a position 300m to its rear and on the southern edge of the Bois de Sommepy. Its companies were deployed in depth and in a position to offer support to the north, west, and east. Here, they were approximately 1.5km south of the 1st and 2d Battalions, 6th Regiment, along Blanc Mont Ridge. Farther to the rear, near the initial attack position, 1st Battalion, 5th Regiment (minus the 17th Company), crossed the line of departure and, within a few hundred meters of advancing, echeloned left and came on line facing west to suppress the German flanking fire. By 1400, Major Hamilton's Marines were trying to tie into the left of Major Messersmith's 2d Battalion, 5th Regiment, and extend the flank of the brigade west.

The attack of the battalions had been oriented north in trace of the 6th Regiment, but the maneuver to the flank caused elements at the squad, platoon, and company levels to lose direction. Company commanders found it difficult to maintain control with verbal orders and hand and arm signals. The terrain was broken with wire obstacles, shell holes, and trenches that, along with the ever-present artillery fire, further disrupted the movement. The battalions consolidated their positions after 1600, but no battalion was in a tactical position or condition to resume the attack.

Just hours before, the order to continue the attack was being disseminated at 4th Brigade headquarters. Having received the report that the 2d Division had seized Blanc Mont Ridge, General

Naulin ordered the 2d Division to continue its advance after 1200. The 2d Division Field Order No. 36, issued around 1600, ordered a two-brigade front to continue the attack north with the objective delineated as the Scay Farm road fork 1 km south of Saint-Étienne.

Sometime that afternoon, Lieutenant Colonel Ellis, brigade adjutant, passed orders to Colonel Feland to advance his regiment and conduct a forward passage of lines and battle handover with 6th Regiment to his front. The 5th Regiment's axis of attack would be the Saint-Étienne-Sommepy road to the German trench line that intersected a fork just south of Saint-Étienne. It took several more hours for the order to be received and then further distributed to the battalions, with most of them maneuvering into positions south of the 6th Regiment around 1830.

Collecting the scattered units, the three battalion commanders executed this order with various degrees of success. None of the battalions made it to the ridge before nightfall, and none arrived with any semblance of strength or cohesion. Captain Henry L. Larsen's 3d Battalion, 5th Regiment, maneuvered behind the 2d Battalion, 6th Regiment, at 2200, but he was still recovering scattered platoons and squads long after. Its position intermingled with the 6th Regiment's hastily assumed positions.

The 2d Battalion, 5th Regiment, began its movement at the same time to a position east of the 2d Battalion, 6th Regiment, along the ridge and across the Sommepy-Saint-Étienne road. When initially moving onto the ridge, Major Messersmith estimated he had at most two companies of Marines intact; the remainder of his Marines were traversing blindly across the now-dark plain below Blanc Mont. Marines were still filtering into his depleted ranks at 0100 on the morning of 4 October.

The 1st Battalion, 5th Regiment, was the most dispersed and farthest southwest. It moved to a position along the Sommepy-Saint-Étienne road near the crest of Blanc Mont, initially with fewer than two companies of Marines. Stragglers began to join their companies in the very early hours of 4 October. No coordinated attack north was feasible. Some combat patrols were sent forward for security

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<sup>23</sup> Pvt Richmond received the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions during 3–5 October 1918. His citation reads, "Private Richmond unhaltingly 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."

but were halted by machine gun fire. The battalions struggled to consolidate their positions and readied themselves for an attack that was certain to be ordered in the morning hours of 4 October. There would be little to no sleep. Although each battalion requested supplies to be brought forward, proper distribution was impossible.

## THE 3D BRIGADE AND FRENCH ATTACK ON 3 OCTOBER 1918

As the 4th Brigade was consolidating its position atop Blanc Mont Ridge, the 3d Brigade was doing the same within the eastern half of the division's sector.

The 3d Brigade began its third day with no rest, after having marched and then fought the night of 2 October to gain its line of departure before commencing the attack upon the ridge at 0550 the morning of 3 October. The 9th Regiment led the attack with its 1st Battalion in the lead, its 2d Battalion in support, and its 3d Battalion in reserve. Fighting through German resistance to reach its jump-off position without French guides, the 1st Battalion started the attack farther west than planned. U.S. Army colonel George W. Stuart, commanding the 9th Regiment, had no report from the 1st Battalion at the commencement of H-hour. Colonel Stuart ordered his 2d Battalion to assume the lead. As the artillery preparation moved forward, Stuart realized he now had two battalions attacking abreast. The regiment had reinforced its battalions with companies from the 5th Machine Gun Battalion and was further supported by the Renaults of the French 3d Light Tank Battalion. The 23d Regiment followed in support with orders to provide flank security and to be prepared to conduct a forward passage of lines and battle handover with the 9th Regiment upon obtaining the objective of the Blanc Mont Ridge along the Medeah Farm road.

The Germans who had occupied the 9th Regiment's jump-off position were members of the *410th Infantry Regiment* of the *203d Division*. After being pushed back, the *203d Division* ordered the *410th Infantry Regiment* to counterattack the morning of 3 October to regain its former position. However, they were decimated as they hurled

themselves against the force of the 3d Brigade's attack erupting before them. By day's end, the *410th Infantry Regiment* reported more than 700 soldiers missing.

Contained within the triangular Bois de Vipère between the 3d and 4th Brigade's zones were elements of the *2d Battalion, 235th Reserve Infantry*, whose six companies were reinforced with a pioneer company and three machine gun companies. The battalion was defending a 3km front with no support to its east. The battalion was awaiting orders that day to withdraw and pass into a reserve position for refit. As the 4th Brigade overran its western sector and the 3d Brigade bypassed it to the east, the unit disintegrated. It offered little resistance to the 3d Brigade beyond uncoordinated, harassing flanking fires. The quick advance of the American brigades on either side made its position untenable, and it retreated in small units straggling over Blanc Mont Ridge.

Having attacked the Blanc Mont Ridge-Medeah Farm road objective in a northwesterly oblique, the 3d Brigade reported its objective secured just before 0900. Of immense tactical importance was that the brigade also reported its flanks secured, with the 4th Brigade to its west and the French 67th Division to the east. The French had met success on the 2d Division's eastern flank. This proved significant for supporting the attacks conducted by the 3d Brigade throughout the day.

The overall success of the 2d Division prompted the XXI French Corps to order the French 3d Cavalry Division forward with the intent to exploit the possibility of a breakthrough beyond the German fourth main line of resistance. A cavalry liaison reported to the 2d Division headquarters to facilitate planning. But, as the day's attacks proceeded, the tactical opportunity never presented itself for a horse-mounted exploitation and pursuit.

As previously noted, the 2d Division issued an order to the 3d and 4th Brigades to continue the attack north on the afternoon of 3 October. With its eastern flank secure and having met only pockets of organized resistance, the 3d Brigade secured the eastern terminus of Blanc Mont Ridge along the Medeah Farm road before noon. The capture of the road and farm was ensured under the auspices of

Marine Major Robert L. Denig, who was entrusted to command the U.S. Army's 3d Battalion, 9th Regiment. He would later receive the Navy Cross for his command of the battalion's determined attack and for his refusal to be evacuated until the objective was secured. The 3d Brigade quickly occupied a defensive position with its battalions intact and was thus able to consolidate quickly. This contrasted with the confused situation in the 4th Brigade, whose attack was defended from three sides and whose 5th Regiment was now arrayed to secure its western flank.

At 1700, the 23d Regiment passed through the 9th Regiment and attacked in a column of battalions with its 1st Battalion leading, its 2d Battalion in support, and its 3d Battalion in reserve. Initially, the attack faced the *31st Bavarian Infantry Regiment, 15th Division*, which had been ordered back into the attack from its reserve position the day prior. The 3d Brigade's zone of attack was generally open with very low undulating ridges that culminated at a German defensive position on Blodnitz Hill, approximately 0.5km south of Saint-Étienne.

The afternoon's division objective of regaining the Scay Farm road fork rested on the western terminus of this position, and it became the focus of the objective for the 3d Brigade's attack as the doughboys penetrated deeper into the zone while veering west. The attack gained nearly 2km before the German defense could orient fires onto its flanks and halt its forward momentum. At 1900, the Germans reported fighting for Blodnitz Hill, and at 1930, reports came of the American's successful attacks on Ludwigs Rücken to the southwest.

On the 3d Brigade's right, the French 167th Division met more determined resistance. As darkness began to interfere with pressing the attack and the German defenders were being reinforced, the 3d Brigade's 23d Regiment maneuvered its battalions into defensive positions. The 1st Battalion refused its front to the north. The 3d Battalion faced east, covering the right flank by tying in with the French at Medeah Farm on Blanc Mont Ridge. The 2d Battalion oriented northwest, tying into elements of the 5th Regiment 100 m north of Blanc Mont Ridge. The 9th Regiment had its battalions aligned in an echelon at the base of this penetration.

The 3d Brigade's success offered the opportunity for a major breakthrough if a corps attack could be coordinated the next day. Marshal Foch, supreme Allied commander, urged immediate action. He noted that, although the Fourth Army had made some progress, he described the battle to break the German final defensive positions as "a battle which was not commanded, not pressed, not held together." General Pétain passed the sentiment to his corps commanders with some reserve, saying, "Marshal Foch orders strong pressure in the directions already assigned; everyone forward, without halt!" Prior to midnight on 3 October, the exhausted 2d Division received written orders to resume the attack north at 0950 on 4 October. The French XXI Corps order was prefaced with:

*Marshal Foch has just learned of the success of the XXI Corps and of the American 2d Division, attached to it. He directs that this success be exploited to the limit. All must press forward at once, without hesitation. The breach is made; the enemy must not be given time to repair it.*

As the Germans assembled reinforcements to counterattack and preserve their third main line of resistance, the 5th Regiment was preparing to continue the attack north and secure the left flank of the 9th Regiment by seizing Ludwigs Rücken and the division objective near the Scay Farm road fork. The German counterattack southeast had as its objective the recapture of the eastern terminus of Blanc Mont Ridge with intermediate objectives being the reinforcement of Blodnitz Hill and Ludwigs Rücken. All this dramatically unfolded in the next six hours.

All forces on the battlefield prepared for additional exertion the next day. That evening, the U.S. 36th Division was released by the Group of Armies of the Center and passed to the reserve of the French Fourth Army. A critical factor for the Marines along the ridge was the fact that the French 21st Division to their southwest was relieved by the French 22d Division, allowing for a renewed attack to come abreast and relieve pressure against the 4th Brigade's left flank. The French XI Corps intended for the 22d Division to accelerate the attack north



*The reverse slope of Blanc Mont. The automobile in the foreground is on the Medeab Farm road. Ludwigs Rücken is the wooded slope in the distant center.*

NARA, RG 127

and maneuver on line with the 2d Division, which had driven a 3km salient ahead of them.

For the 2d Division, the day brought stunning success atop Blanc Mont. However, the position was tenuous. The division's salient was 6km wide at its base but only 3km wide at its apex. The Germans were not defeated; they, too, were consolidating their positions. Many fortified points on the summit of Blanc Mont had not yet been reduced. Although their third main line of resistance had been penetrated, the *Third Army* was reinforcing the fourth main line of resistance at Saint-Étienne and preparing a counterattack with elements of three divisions.

## 5TH REGIMENT ATTACKS ON 4 OCTOBER 1918

The German counterattack erupted before dawn on 4 October. Appreciating the tenuous salient the Marines had forced upon Blanc Mont Ridge, General von Nidda ordered elements of the *51st Reserve Division* reinforced with elements of the *17th Infantry Division* and the *15th Bavarian Infantry Division* to attack and restore the third main line of resistance atop Blanc Mont. Survivors of the *213th Infantry Division* still manning the fortified positions on the summit of Blanc Mont would support by fire as the attack rushed before them.

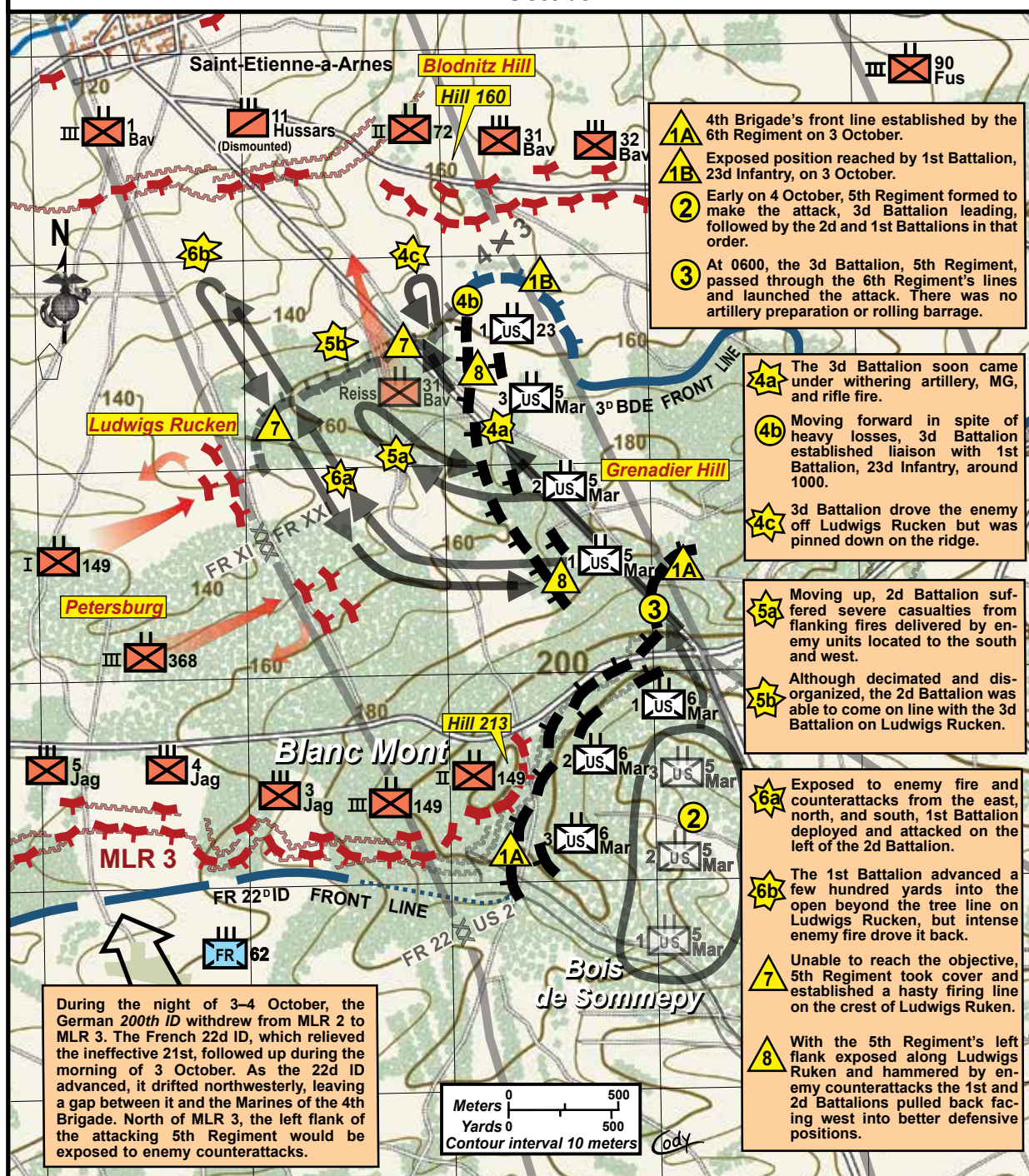
The German attack rolled south at 0415. *Group Reiss* of the *31st Bavarian Infantry Regiment*, *15th Bavarian Infantry Division*, quickly gained Ludwigs Rücken as an interim objective before continuing the attack onto Blanc Mont. The position was quickly consolidated. Requests for both infantry and artillery support were sent in anticipation of resuming a coordinated attack. From the west, two battalions and a battery from the *17th Infantry Division* were approaching to reinforce the attack. Elements of the *149th* and *368th Infantry Regiments* of the *213th Division* were in support positions along Petersberg to the west.

Before the counterattack ensued from Ludwigs Rücken, the Marines had resumed their attack north. After assembling and regaining control of its distributed companies and platoons, the 5th Regiment launched the attack north from its position behind and among the 6th Regiment atop Blanc Mont Ridge. Using the Saint-Étienne-Sommepy road as a guide for its axis of attack, the 5th Regiment attacked in a column of battalions with the 3d Battalion in the lead, the 2d Battalion in support, and the 1st Battalion in reserve.

At 0600, the regiment commenced the attack, with the battalions deploying their units as they uncoiled from their attack positions. For reasons that



## BLANC MONT 5th Regiment Attack 4 October



After the success of the initial attack on the morning of 3 October, 2d Division prepared to continue the attack north. The 3d Brigade and the French on the right pushed forward. The 4th Brigade planned for the 5th Regiment to pass through the 6th Regiment's lines and seize the enemy trenches about 600m south of Saint-Etienne. However, the left flank was still exposed and the Marines' attack was postponed until the following morning (4 October), when it was hoped the French 22d Division could advance. The 3d Brigade's left would be exposed until the Marines could come up; the 1st Battalion, 23d Infantry, 3d Brigade's lead unit, was particularly vulnerable.

Map by LtCol R. L. Cody, USMC (Ret)

remain unclear, the 2d Division did not provide the 5th Regiment with a rolling barrage.<sup>24</sup> The 3d Battalion led the regiment with the 47th and 16th Companies abreast and the 45th and 20th Companies in support. As the companies deployed into their attack formation, German artillery subjected them to harassing fire, making the movement more difficult. Within minutes, German machine gun fire took the range and affected the further disposition of the 3d Battalion.

The attack progressed slowly. As Captain Larsen's 3d Battalion maneuvered down the slope from Blanc Mont and into a draw before the base of Ludwigs Rücken, the terrain offered some relief from direct fire. Having advanced almost 900m, Captain Larsen tempered the pace of his 3d Battalion's assault to reform his attack formation. By 0830, Major Messersmith's 2d Battalion requested flank support from 6th Regiment to his south-southwest, but none was coordinated further.

At approximately 1000, the assault on Ludwigs Rücken unfolded and the German artillery intensified. The German infantry atop Ludwigs Rücken fell back rapidly as their reinforcements from the 1st Battalion, 149th Regiment, and the 3d Battalion, 368th Infantry Regiment, fired from the west into the flank of the 3d Battalion. The artillery and machine gun fire had caused the 3d Battalion's companies to drift apart. Captain Larsen sent orders to consolidate while he effected liaison with 1st Battalion, 23d Regiment, which had maneuvered onto the road and out of its assigned sector. With the slow progress of the attack and the incessant dis-

ruptive fires, the battalions were now only separated by a few hundred meters.

The misery inflicted on the 3d Battalion by the machine guns and artillery to their front and left was compounded by German aircraft that strafed the Marines. While returning fire from the ground, two machine gun teams were destroyed by direct artillery fire from the battalion's western flank. The companies rushed to consolidate in a line just below the crest of Ludwigs Rücken. Behind them, the 2d Battalion emerged from Blanc Mont Ridge on and east of the Saint-Étienne-Sommepey road. As the German fire from the west increased, the 2d Battalion echeloned to the right so that, as it came forward to support the 3d Battalion, it advanced across and east of the road.

Private Richmond provided an eyewitness account of the crossfire that the 5th Regiment advanced under:

*We soon detected that [we] were being fired on from almost the rear on our left, indication that no advance had been made by whoever was on our left flank. There became about as much danger of being shot from the rear as from the front. We were pursuing a course almost parallel with a main highway, and as a consequence were under direct observation. As we cleared the crest of a rise, the machine gun and artillery fire became so fierce we were unable to continue our advance. The October sun was warm and as we would rest a few minutes now and then, I would lie flat on the ground and almost fall asleep due to being sleepy and from the effect of the sun's rays, even though machine gun bullets clipped the ground here and there all around me. Finding we could not safely advance beyond the crest of the hill, we fell back aways [sic] and dug in. Artillery fire was point blank.*

Near 1100, the 3d Battalion continued its attack from the ridgeline to the objective 800m before them. The attack languished under concerted artillery fire that was intermixed with gas shells. Each attempt was shattered by the 15th Bavarian Infantry Division occupying the trench complex that ran south of Saint-Étienne, abreast of Blodnitz

<sup>24</sup> Gen Neville indicated a possible reason for the omission of the barrage on 4 October in a lecture on Blanc Mont that he gave shortly after the war. He stated, "After the advance has been completed for the first day, rolling barrages are to my mind, out of the question for a continuation of the attack unless sufficient time has been taken to clearly define the infantry lines and to bring up the artillery and ammunition sufficient to make a barrage 'dense' enough. In the subsequent war of movement, the artillery, being no longer concentrated, as batteries are moved up separately, is limited in its movements by road space and also as regards the supply of ammunition. This limits the concentration of sufficient artillery to put down a really efficient rolling barrage." Neville's comments seem to refer to the 5th Regiment's disastrous attack on 4 October; but in his very thorough lecture, he incredibly makes no mention of the regiment's attack at all.

Hill, and across the Saint Étienne-Sommepey road. Captain Larsen could clearly see the trench complex on the objective and the German reinforcements moving into them.

It was now well past 1300. The 3d Battalion had withstood withering machine gun fire up to this position and had been subjected to incessant artillery fire for nearly seven hours. Captain Larsen's message sent during this time stated that he could not hold his front any longer and that the other battalions must come and assist or take over. He emphatically added that the situation was "critical." The Germans were preparing to counterattack from the northwest. He reiterated that the enemy's strongly defended trenches were being reinforced and the Germans were remaining on the objective.

The 2d Battalion was in a position to maneuver quickly and stabilize the line while preparing to carry the assault forward. The 2d Battalion had moved forward in support of the 3d Battalion; a concerted attack north was attempted without success. Artillery and machine gun fire cut down the Marines, who presented easy targets to the defenders. The attack gained a few hundred meters past the edge of the woods until the units fell back under the overwhelming fire. These moments were seared into Private John E. Ausland's memory, and his account transcribes the moments of the 55th Company, 2d Battalion's action here:

*We couldn't see through these trees to the right or left, except for the men nearest you, but we could see ahead. And apparently the enemy ahead could see us. . . . All Hell broke loose. "Dig in," shouted Captain [DeWitt] Peck. As we dug, the shells from the German artillery on the ridge ahead rained on us. The machine guns on our left, possibly three hundred yards away, opened up shooting through the evergreens by calculation. . . . Lieutenant [Joseph F.] Maher was killed and Captain Peck was hit in the neck. . . . Seeing we faced annihilation Captain Peck shouted, "Fall Back." "By whose orders?" was the reply. "By order of Captain Peck," was the reply. And so the retirement began. As men saw a chance to make it they left. . . . But I have to give it to Captain Peck. He was wounded and was going to get*

*out of here anyway and could have left us to our fate, or let some other officer give the orders to fall back. He had everything to lose, personally, and nothing to gain but he gave the order anyway, and the Marine Corps doesn't look lightly on falling back, no matter why.*

What remained of the individual companies strained to reform in the scrub forest atop Ludwigs Rücken. For Marines now exposed on the crest of Ludwigs Rücken, the enemy on Petersberg to their left flank continued to inflict casualties. The Germans understood the tactical opportunity offered by this position and organized a counterattack to cut off and destroy the Marines' salient north of Blanc Mont.

Private Richmond vividly described the job of evacuating the wounded prior to the German counterattack:

*Then my work began. All morning I had not seen a single one of the other stretcher bearers. I had been carrying a stretcher alone, and had not yet used it.*

*While the others were digging in, I got some other fellows to help me, and commenced to carry wounded back along the highway. Ambulances came up within a half mile of where the battalion dug in. The road, being under direct observation, was subject to heavy shelling. There were so many wounded that we were not able to evacuate near all of them. There were calls everywhere for stretcher bearers. Some were only slightly wounded, while others were pretty badly shot up. Some bore their pain in grim silence, while others, even though only slightly wounded, acted as though they were nearly killed. One fellow, who seemed to be pretty badly wounded, said: "Never mind the pain, boys, go right on." This was in contrast to those who begged to be carried easier, when we were carrying them as easy as was possible under the circumstances. Continued to carry wounded till darkness called a halt to our work. When night came, I, for one, was pretty tired. One of the ambulances received a direct hit, during the afternoon, and was burned up. Never learned if the driver was killed or not.*

While the 2d and 3d Battalion's attacks expended themselves and a makeshift battle line was assembled back on Ludwigs Rücken, the 1st Battalion, as regimental reserve, had advanced some 1.2km from Blanc Mont. Major Hamilton's 1st Battalion had followed in trace of the 2d Battalion, so his battalion was now east of the Saint-Étienne-Sommepey road. The threat to the 5th Regiment's flank was obvious. Major Hamilton estimated that it was a tactical imperative to secure the regiment's left flank and extend its line in that direction. On his own initiative, Major Hamilton ordered his companies on line facing west to attack across the Saint-Étienne road.

At approximately 1200, the 1st Battalion formed for its assault. German artillery resumed firing into the draw to the south of Ludwigs Rücken and onto the Marines advancing within it. As Major Hamilton's lead companies crossed the road, machine gun positions on Blanc Mont to their left and those within range on Petersberg to their front ripped into their ranks.

After the 1st Battalion crossed the road and emerged deeper into the draw, the trail company held as the battalion echeloned right to pivot its axis of advance from west to north. The *1st Battalion, 149th Regiment*, and the *3d Battalion, 368th Infantry Regiment*, which had begun their counterattack earlier into this draw, were now driven back in a violent meeting engagement.<sup>25</sup> The German infantry recoiled back to Petersberg.

The 1st Battalion's change of front was completed, but its ranks were thinned by German fire from three sides: from the west on Petersberg, the southwest on Blanc Mont, and now the northwest as German forces counterattacked from Saint-Étienne in pursuit of the remnants of the 2d and 3d Battalions. As Major Hamilton's Marines strained to consolidate on top of Ludwigs Rücken amid rifle and machine gun fire, they were further exposed to brutal, direct artillery fire from positions north, beyond Saint-Étienne.

The 3d Battalion's Captain Larsen released a message when his battalion returned to Blanc Mont

Ridge, reporting that three company commanders had been evacuated and casualties were nearing 60 percent. He also stated that, by 1500, all units were intermixed. Some companies could muster only 30 men, and all the officers were wounded. The message smacked of near desperation: "Am having hard time holding men in line where no officers are. Have not obtained objective. . . . We are doing our best to hold ground gained."

The German accounts note that, around 1500, the coordinated attack of the *1st* and *2d Battalions, 368th Infantry Regiment*, resumed. Their objective was Grenadier Hill to the southeast, near Blanc Mont Ridge. The intent was to cut the 5th Regiment's penetration at its base and isolate them.

Major Hamilton noted the expulsion of the decimated and leaderless elements of the 2d Battalion moving to the rear as he attacked onto the crest of Ludwigs Rücken. His 1st Battalion now absorbed the enemy's fires, suffering immeasurably at every step. There was no cover in any direction save forward, beyond the crest. The 1st Battalion continued north, only to receive additional punishment from the German positions southeast of Saint-Étienne. The machine gun and rifle fire grew more intense as the Marines passed beyond the slight cover the stubby trees of Ludwigs Rücken offered. Three hundred meters farther into the open, the battalion's attack expended itself. The momentum of the attack was depleted. Years later, Private Elton E. Mackin recalled his miraculous survival of this attack:

*The men were stunned, lashed down to earth by flailing whips of shrapnel, gas and heavy stuff that came as drumfire, killing them. There was no place in our little world for us to go. The fellows bunched against the fancied shelter of the larger trees in little close-packed knots, like storm-swept sheep, and died that way in groups.*

Coordination of the companies and even platoons was not possible. Too many leaders had become casualties. With the aid of some visual cover offered by a strip of long narrow woods, 30 men under First Lieutenant Francis J. Kelly Jr., 66th Company, made it to within a couple hundred meters

<sup>25</sup> The term *meeting engagement* refers to a combat action that occurs when a moving force, incompletely deployed for battle, engages an enemy at an unexpected time and place.





*2dLt Henry L. Hulbert.*  
Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division

of the German defense outside Saint-Étienne. This was the closest any Marine got to the objective on 4 October. Kelly's platoon found itself isolated and trapped by the artillery fire. The Marines went to ground until darkness offered some relief for movement.

Remnants of the 2d and 3d Battalions had clawed back to where they had jumped off hours before.

The survivors of these battalions organized a hurried defensive position astride the Saint-Étienne-Sommepey road, though the line constricted as casualties mounted. Private Ausland poignantly recalled, "We now had no line. Just groups of men in the patches of woods, and no real connection between the groups. The other companies seem to have fared as we did. . . . The 2nd battalion of the 5th Marines is now a bunch of enlisted men and a few lieutenants." The positions shifted farther east, away from the German flanking fire, nearer and onto the Saint-Étienne-Sommepey road. Again, Captain Larsen relayed his assessment to the 5th Regiment that the front line had advanced to within nearly 400m of the objective; however, after being flanked and incurring severe casualties, they were forced back to the tree line. Here, the Germans conducted another local counterattack. During this action, the intense German artillery forced the 3d Battalion to fall back farther into the woods and eventually onto the reverse slope and into their original position. Elements of the 2d Battalion were already there by the time the 3d Battalion reached this final defensive perimeter.

The 1st Battalion, which was alone now, fought its way back from Ludwigs Rücken. As the fractured elements of the 1st Battalion came back up Blanc Mont Ridge, they too pushed east to find the western flank of the 3d Battalion. The fight by the 1st Battalion to regain a position near the remainder of the regiment would last until 1630, with many squads and individuals fighting much later to regain contact with the battalion. Men who found themselves forward and isolated by the enemy's fire would suffer the night straggling through the scrub forest and looking for their unit's defensive positions.

While trying to assemble his companies near the 3d Battalion, Major Hamilton received a message noting that 1st and 2d Battalions, 6th Regiment, would advance to reinforce the positions north. The order for this advance was never issued, but it initiated a series of messages to the regiment in an attempt to explain how badly the tactical situation had deteriorated. Major Hamilton's response noted the severity of casualties suffered; the urgent need for artillery support, food, and water; that the

left flank was vulnerable; and that a very precarious position was being held.

Consolidating hours later, 1st Battalion's roll call at 1800 provided a maddening testimony to the day's sacrifice. A total of 168 men were present, 12 of whom were officers. The battalion had numbered nearly 800 effectives 12 hours prior. Among the dead on Ludwigs Rücken were two men who had established themselves within Marine lore. Second Lieutenant Henry L. Hulbert and Sergeant Matej Kocak, both recipients of the Medal of Honor for previous actions, had been killed. Recently promoted Second Lieutenant Louis Cukela, who would receive the Medal of Honor for Soissons, was severely wounded.

Colonel Feland dispatched a message to the regiment via Major Hamilton to be prepared to continue the attack in support of the 6th Regiment as they passed through and confirm that the French had pressed the attack on the division's flanks. Major Hamilton replied, noting again his battalion's strength and the impracticality of it being able to cover any frontage or liaison to support the 6th Regiment or its flank to the west. His message grimly stated:

*This battalion will go, or attempt to go, where you order it. You should understand though that your regiment is now much depleted, very disorganized and not in a condition to advance as a front-line [sic] regiment even though the enemy forces in our front are found to be small. It is hard to say "can't," but the Division Commander should thoroughly understand the situation and realize that this regiment can't advance as an attacking force. Such advance would sacrifice the regiment.*

Colonel Feland's response showed an emerging appreciation for the sacrifice already paid; he simply noted the battalions should await further orders before advancing in support of the 6th Regiment. Though the 5th Regiment had been rendered combat ineffective, it would hold its position, offering what combat support it could in the coming day

*2dLt Louis Cukela.*  
Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division



with what rifles were still held by those within its ranks.

In some respects, the events that unfolded for the 5th Regiment were replicated by the experiences of the 3d Brigade to its east. The 9th Regiment had defended its slight penetration, fending off counterattacks from the *15th Bavarian Infantry Division*. A 2d Division order issued at 0600 had directed both brigades to continue the attack north on order. The 5th Regiment had commenced its attack at that time based on the orders issued the previous evening. The 3d Brigade spent the morning of 4 October defending the advanced position it had battled for on 3 October. However, the attack was finally delineated to commence at 1430, whereupon the 23d Regiment would pass through the 9th Regiment and gain the objective.

The 23d Regiment's attack met the determined German defenses before Saint-Étienne. The regiment gained only a narrow salient that was insufficient to enable flank support to the 5th Regiment. The attack of the 1st Battalion, 23d Regiment, was unsupported and attempted under withering fire. After advancing approximately 400m, the battalion commander was killed and the battalion fell back. The regiment's attack was stalled, and it receded south to reoccupy a defensive position near its jump-off point late that afternoon. This movement was noted by the 5th Regiment and caused further concern about their exposed flank. As a result, several messages were released to ensure that the 3d Brigade did not move to reoccupy a defensive position as far south as Blanc Mont Ridge from which no support could be offered.

Ironically, late on the afternoon of 4 October, the *Third Army Headquarters* issued an order for withdrawal that night to the fourth main line of resistance. The German units attacking and supporting the attack upon the 5th Regiment had received this message and were forewarned that its execution would not affect the conduct of the ongoing attacks to stabilize the army's front and to facilitate an orderly and intact withdrawal later. German frontline battalions would effect a battle handover to units that would relieve them starting at midnight. All units would be relieved the following day on 5 October.

### 3D BATTALION, 6TH REGIMENT, ATTACKS ON 5 OCTOBER 1918

At 1000 on 4 October, the French 22d Division attacked west from the rear of the 4th Brigade to the area north of the Notre Dame de Champs and pivoted to the north. The 22d Division succeeded in closing the gap between the French front line and the 4th Brigade's left flank, reaching the trenches of the third main line of resistance southwest of Blanc Mont. When the 22d Division made contact with the 5th Regiment on the north side of Blanc Mont, the *149th Regiment*, which was occupying the summit now, faced Allied infantry in all directions.

Captain George K. Shuler's 3d Battalion, 6th Regiment, and the French 22d Division's 17th Regiment, tried several times to capture Blanc Mont throughout the late afternoon and early evening of 4 October, but they were unable to eject the Germans from their fortified position. At 1635, Captain Shuler advised Colonel Lee that "it is impossible to clean out Blanc Mont without adequate artillery preparation." Shuler's 82d and 97th Companies attacked around 1645. The 97th Company destroyed two machine gun positions and captured 13 prisoners but was unable to exploit its gain. A coordinated attack at 1830 with light artillery support was no more successful.

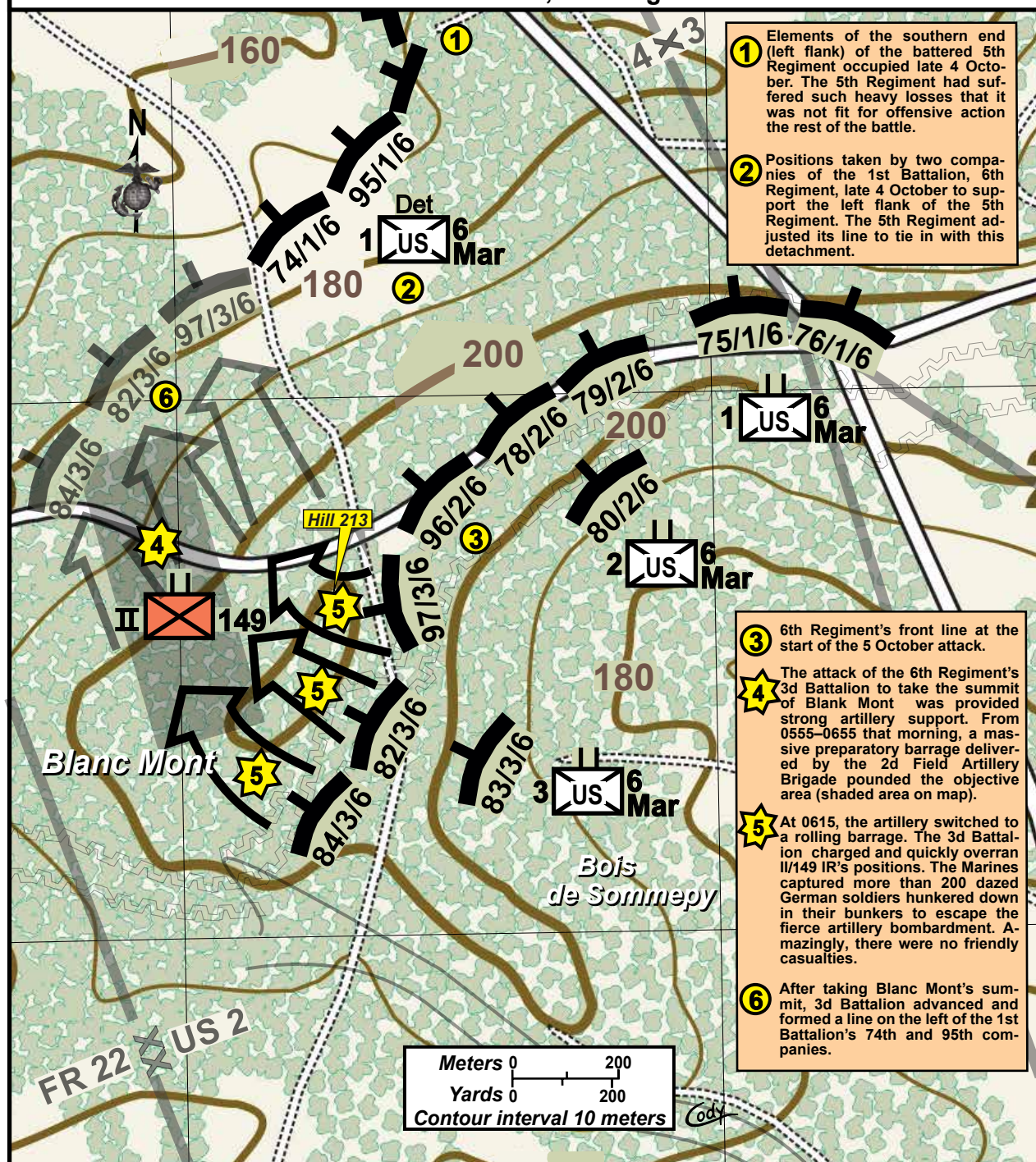
The 5th Regiment endured a long night after an extended day of fighting. Intermingled companies occupied a line oriented toward Saint-Étienne about 2km north of Blanc Mont. Very heavy machine gun and direct artillery fire peppered the line through the evening, and the Marines reported repulsing at least two local counterattacks.

Many of the wounded lay exposed to shells and machine gun fire, forcing U.S. Navy medical personnel to tend them in the open. Litterbearers scurried amid the shelling to load them on the waiting ambulances. Around midnight, a shell struck the 1st Battalion's dressing station, killing two hospital corpsmen and two patients, wounding several corpsmen, and rewounding many patients.

Despite the exposed position, General Neville apprised that the 5th Regiment would suffer even heavier losses if it attempted to withdraw to Blanc Mont, and such a move would expose the left flank



### 3d Battalion, 6th Regiment's Attack 5 October, morning



On 5 October, 2d Division resumed the attack against Saint-Etienne. The Marines of the 5th Regiment, who tried the previous day but were repulsed with heavy losses, were in no shape to do so. It was now the turn of the 6th Regiment. This time, the 3d Battalion, 6th Regiment, began the attack by capturing the summit of Blanc Mont (Hill 213) in the morning. With that piece of key terrain secured, 2d Battalion would advance north in the afternoon. During the night of 4-5 October, the Germans had withdrawn from MLR 3 to MLR 4, leaving II/149th IR to its fate on Blank Mont; the French 22d ID advanced behind them. Finally, the left flank of the 4th Brigade was no longer exposed.

*3d Battalion, 6th Regiment, attacks on 5 October 1918.*

Map by LtCol R. L. Cody, USMC (Ret)



of the 23d Regiment to its right. Neville ordered Colonel Feland to hold his tenuous position.

At 2000 on 4 October, the *200th Division's 2d Jaeger Brigade* ordered the battered regiments clinging to Blanc Mont back to the fourth main line of resistance. The *4th* and *5th Jaeger Regiments*, the *368th Regiment*, and the *1st* and *3d Battalions* of the *149th Regiment* began withdrawing at midnight, leaving behind strong combat patrols to mask their movement. However, the *2d Battalion* of the *149th Regiment* on the summit of Blanc Mont had been surrounded by the 6th Regiment to its east, the 5th Regiment to the northeast, and elements of the French 22d Division to the west and south.

The strongpoint on Blanc Mont commanded the ground between the ridge occupied by the 4th Brigade and Saint-Étienne. The 4th Brigade had to clear the wooded summit of Blanc Mont completely to avoid a repeat of the 5th Regiment's attack on 4 October. At 2127 on the evening of 4 October, Colonel Lee ordered Captain Shuler's 3d Battalion to be in position to attack at 0615 the next morning and "drive the enemy from this position." Colonel Lee directed Captain Shuler to attack as soon as the 2d Field Artillery Brigade shifted its hour-long preparatory bombardment, which would begin at 0515 on 5 October.

At 0350, the 4th Brigade issued a field order that noted the French 22d Division would attack to the brigade's left at 0600. The 4th Brigade ordered all its units to support the attack of the 3d Battalion, 6th Regiment, to annihilate the garrison clinging to Blanc Mont. But the order did not direct an advance for the morning; it stated the brigade would "hold and strengthen its gains preparatory to a further advance."

The 6th Regiment had no illusions about the strength of the German force on Blanc Mont. Several attempts by the 6th Regiment and the French 22d Division on 4 October had failed to drive out the *149th Regiment*. One of the prisoners captured by the 3d Battalion during these actions revealed that the defenders had two dozen heavy machine guns and approximately three dozen light machine guns emplaced behind the infantry, positioned to repel attacks from either flank. The prisoner also claimed that most of the riflemen wanted to surren-

der but the machine gunners did not.<sup>26</sup> The 3d Battalion conducted a thorough reconnaissance of the German position on Blanc Mont, allowing Captain Shuler to pinpoint several machine gun strongpoints and pass the coordinates to the artillery. The 6th Regiment pulled its companies back 500m from the barrage limits. At 0515, the 2d Field Artillery Brigade opened its hour-long barrage. Two battalions of 75mm howitzers and a battalion of 155mm guns fired 800 rounds into a narrow, north-south sheath 700m long and 250m wide. At 0615, the artillery switched to a rolling barrage.

The 3d Battalion attacked with three companies in line: the 97th Company on the right, the 82d in the center, and the 84th on the left. The 83d Company followed in support. The well-planned barrage drove the German defenders deep inside their bunkers. With the superb protection of the rolling barrage, the 3d Battalion maneuvered steadily into the German strongpoint. By the time the barrage had passed, the trapped Germans found Marines approaching their dugout entrances.

At 0645, Captain James H. Johnston reported to Captain Shuler that his 82d Company had reached the objective and was digging in just short of the railroad on the northwest side of Blanc Mont. The three companies consolidated their positions and tied in securely with the French 22d Division on their left. The 3d Battalion had captured four officers and 209 men and an astonishing 75 machine guns. Very few Germans were killed in the attack. Captain Shuler reported, "Not many Boche dead. They were in their dugouts and were captured by our men before coming out."<sup>27</sup>

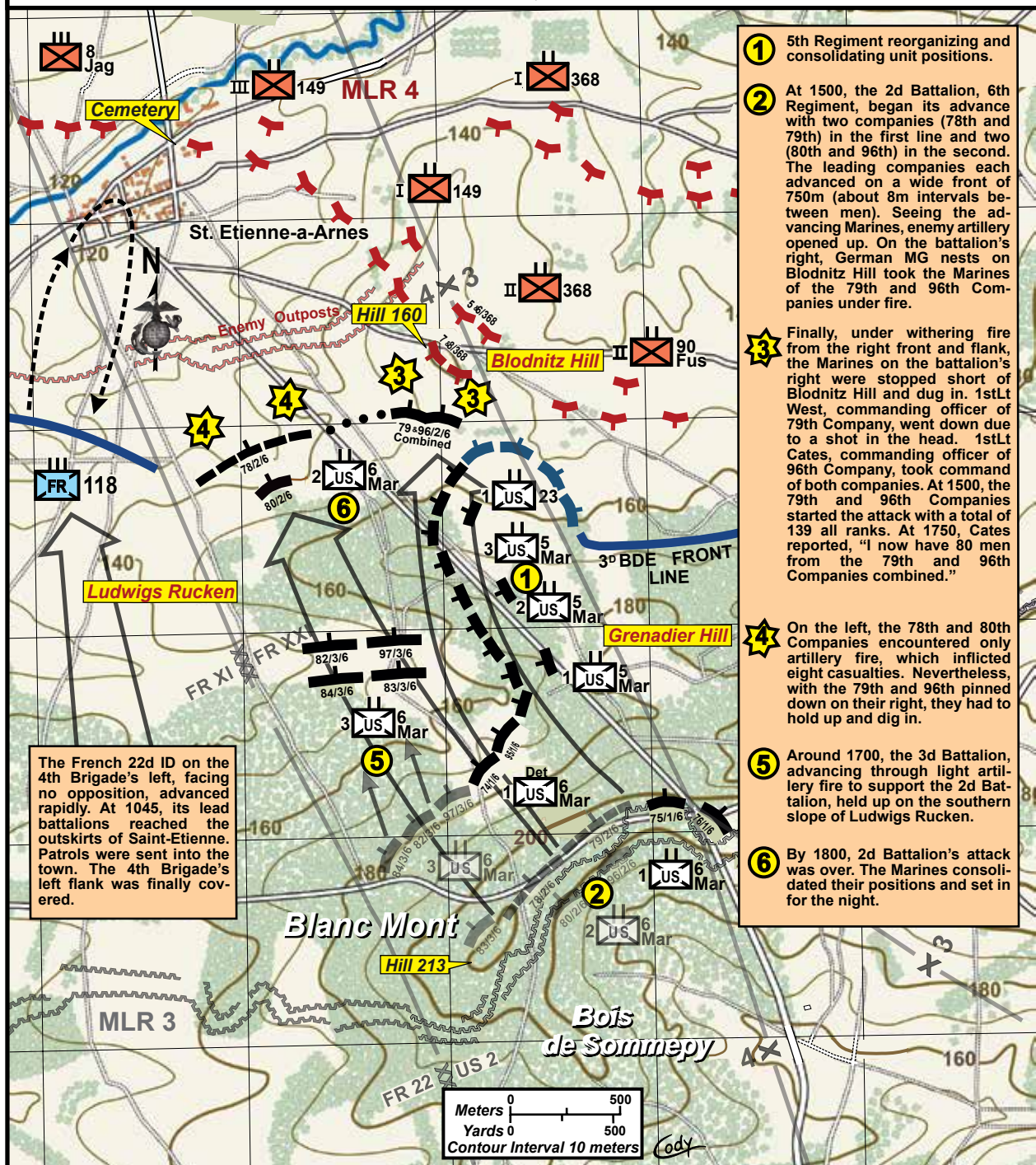
## 6TH REGIMENT ATTACKS ON 5 OCTOBER 1918

Across the front of General Gouraud's Fourth Army, the *Third Army* had withdrawn to its fourth main line of resistance. General Lejeune had issued *Field Order No. 38* at 0400 on 5 October, directing the 3d and 4th Brigades to attack abreast, but the order left the time of attack unstated. General Le-

<sup>26</sup> The message in the *Records of the 2d Division* says the prisoner was from the *129th Regiment*, but it is likely this is an error.

<sup>27</sup> The term *boche* was a derogatory term for German, especially a German soldier.

# **BLANC MONT** **2d Battalion, 6th Regiment's Attack** **5 October, afternoon**



The French 22d ID on the 4th Brigade's left, facing no opposition, advanced rapidly. At 1045, its lead battalions reached the outskirts of Saint-Etienne. Patrols were sent into the town. The 4th Brigade's left flank was finally covered.

- ① 5th Regiment reorganizing and consolidating unit positions.
- ② At 1500, the 2d Battalion, 6th Regiment, began its advance with two companies (78th and 79th) in the first line and two (80th and 96th) in the second. The leading companies each advanced on a wide front of 750m (about 8m intervals between men). Seeing the advancing Marines, enemy artillery opened up. On the battalion's right, German MG nests on Blodnitz Hill took the Marines of the 79th and 96th Companies under fire.
- ③ Finally, under withering fire from the right front and flank, the Marines on the battalion's right were stopped short of Blodnitz Hill and dug in. 1stLt West, commanding officer of 79th Company, went down due to a shot in the head. 1stLt Cates, commanding officer of 96th Company, took command of both companies. At 1500, the 79th and 96th Companies started the attack with a total of 139 all ranks. At 1750, Cates reported, "I now have 80 men from the 79th and 96th Companies combined."
- ④ On the left, the 78th and 80th Companies encountered only artillery fire, which inflicted eight casualties. Nevertheless, with the 79th and 96th pinned down on their right, they had to hold up and dig in.
- ⑤ Around 1700, the 3d Battalion, advancing through light artillery fire to support the 2d Battalion, held up on the southern slope of Ludwigs Rucken.
- ⑥ By 1800, 2d Battalion's attack was over. The Marines consolidated their positions and set in for the night.

After the 3d Battalion's successful morning attack on 5 October, the 6th Regiment made preparations to continue the attack north that afternoon with the 2d Battalion supported by the 3d Battalion and 1st Battalion in reserve. Optimistically, Colonel Lee, commanding officer of 6th Regiment, cautioned the battalion commanders that "the advance will not go beyond St. Etienne without further orders." Unfortunately for the Americans, the enemy was entrenched on a fortified position called Blodnitz Hill (or Hill 160) between them and Saint-Etienne. When the Marines of the 2d Battalion attacked, they would not reach Saint-Etienne; they would not get past Blodnitz Hill.

6th Regiment attacks on 5 October 1918.  
 Map by LtCol R. L. Cody, USMC (Ret)

jeune was adamant that his 2d Division would not advance until and unless the French divisions on either flank advanced beyond his current front line. General Lejeune was determined to coordinate his attack with the French 22d Division on his left and the 73d Division on his right to avoid exposing his two infantry brigades to the flanking fire and attacks they had been subjected to on 3–4 October. He refused to set an H-hour and noted that the 2d Division already “did the trick, they said we forced the retreat of the whole German army east of Reims.”

By clearing the last defenders from the summit of Blanc Mont, the 3d Battalion, 6th Regiment, had cleared a path for the 2d Division and the French 22d Division to its left to advance to Saint-Étienne. At 0800, the 22d Division was already advancing north and meeting almost no resistance.

In accordance with General Lejeune’s attack order, at 0845, General Neville ordered the 6th Regiment to pass through the 5th Regiment and lead the attack toward Saint-Étienne. The 4th Brigade would conform its advance to the French 22d Division on its left and the 3d Brigade on its right. The time of attack had yet to be determined, as the 2d Division was waiting to see how the French attacks fared.

By 1045, the 22d Division’s lead battalions had reached the outskirts of Saint-Étienne and the banks of the Arnes River west of the town. However, on the 2d Division’s right, the French 71st Division did not attack until 1100 and made little progress.<sup>28</sup>

At 1155, the 2d Division directed the 4th Brigade to attack, telling Lieutenant Colonel Ellis,

*The 3d Brigade is waiting on the French on the right to some extent but you had better pass your 6th [Regiment] through now. Get them through there and have that liaison kept and tell them to keep with the 3d Brigade on the right and don’t get away from it.*

The 6th Regiment would be attacking generally

downhill over sparsely wooded terrain, across much of the ground where the 5th Regiment had suffered the day before. The right half of the regiment’s zone was more open and exposed to observation and fire from German positions on Blodnitz Hill and on commanding terrain to the northeast in the 3d Brigade’s zone.

The *213th Division’s 37th Reserve Infantry Brigade* had taken over the sector east of Saint-Étienne. The brigade placed the remnants of the *149th Regiment* in line from the eastern edge of Saint-Étienne to the western slope of Blodnitz Hill. The *149th Regiment* and an attached pioneer company could muster perhaps 500 men to defend a sector more than a kilometer wide, but it still fielded more than 40 machine guns. The *2d Battalion* of the *368th Regiment* defended Blodnitz Hill with about 250 men and 12 machine guns concentrated in a strongpoint on the southern tip of the wooded hill. The remaining two battalions of the *368th Regiment* were echeloned in depth behind Blodnitz Hill, and they could reinforce the line or counterattack with another 325 men and 28 machine guns. The *74th Reserve Infantry Regiment* in division reserve was positioned just to the north of the *37th Reserve Brigade’s* line, with at least 400 men and 20 machine guns on hand. The *2d Battalion* of the *90th Fusilier Regiment* of the *17th Division*, with a strength of 170 men, extended the line from Blodnitz Hill east.

Colonel Lee ordered an attack in a column of battalions, with Major Williams’s 2d Battalion again leading, Major Schuler’s 3d Battalion following in support, and Major Barker’s 1st Battalion in reserve. In his instructions to battalion commanders, Lee stressed the importance of maintaining liaison with units and the imperative of frequent, accurate position reports: “Without this information, artillery fire is impossible for the protection of any one or all of the units, and if used may result in disaster to our own troops.” The 2d Division order had directed the 2d Field Artillery Brigade to support the attack, and the French XXI Corps added the reinforcing fires of an artillery group. But inexplicably, the 2d Division did not provide the 6th Regiment with a rolling barrage.

At 1250, Colonel Lee ordered the 6th Regi-

<sup>28</sup> A report from the 2d Division’s liaison officer to 2d Division at 1245 on 5 October indicated the French 22d Division made some gains and then was driven back.

ment to attack at once, advancing to Saint-Étienne. Before the 2d Battalion stepped off, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Holcomb, second in command of the 6th Regiment, amended the order and directed Major Williams to advance only as far as Ludwigs Rücken. This would position Major Williams's 2d Battalion on line with the 23d Regiment on his right.

The 2d Battalion would jump off from its position along the crest of Blanc Mont Ridge. The 5th Regiment still occupied a line of intermingled companies about 1 km northwest of the Blanc Mont-Medeah Farm road. The Sommepy-Saint-Étienne road served as a boundary between the 5th Regiment's right flank and the 3d Brigade's 23d Regiment. The lead battalion of the 23d Regiment jutted out about 300m farther north than the 5th Regiment. Because the Sommepy-Saint-Étienne road converged toward the 2d Division's left boundary, the 6th Regiment's zone narrowed from 1.5km wide atop Blanc Mont to just 1km at the point parallel with the 23d Regiment's lead battalion.

Two days of fighting had cost the 2d Battalion, 6th Regiment, dearly. On 5 October, Major Williams counted only 17 officers and 325 Marines, less than half the number he had led up the slope of Blanc Mont two days before. Major Williams ordered Lieutenant Sellers to attack with the 78th Company on the left and Lieutenant West to attack with the 79th Company on the right. He ordered Captain Powers's 80th Company to follow and support the 78th Company and Lieutenant Cates's 96th Company to follow and support the 79th Company. To cover the wide 1.5km front, Lieutenants West and Sellers placed their Marines in a single skirmish line. This thin rank had a density of just one Marine every 8m and one officer per 250m of front.

At 1500, the 2d Battalion began its advance down the reverse slope of Blanc Mont. Shortly after stepping off, Major Williams sent a runner to the 79th Company on the right, ordering Lieutenant West to report when he reached the lead battalion of the 23d Regiment. "We will halt and regulate our advance on them," Major Williams wrote. He further ordered Lieutenant West to maintain contact with the 23d Regiment on the right and the 78th

Company on his left, no matter how thinly he had to extend the line.

On the left, Lieutenant Sellers's 78th Company advanced through moderately thick woods, using the Blanc Mont-Saint-Étienne road on its left as a guide. The 78th Company encountered only artillery fire and suffered eight casualties for the day.<sup>29</sup> On the right, Lieutenant West's Marines were more exposed and received heavy machine gun fire as soon as they climbed out of their holes on Blanc Mont.

From the historical record, it is clear that Colonel Lee only intended for the 2d Battalion to advance as far as the forward trace of the 3d Brigade on its right. But it is not clear whether Major Williams's message regarding that ever reached Lieutenant West. Had the 79th Company based its movement on the Sommepy-Saint-Étienne road on its right, its advance would have brought it to a position where it could easily have connected with the 23d Regiment. That was not clearly communicated to Lieutenant West. As the 79th Company advanced, it maintained its 750m front, and soon Marines were crossing the road into the 23d Regiment's sector.

Stubbornly, the 79th Company continued to advance despite the machine gun fire from the *2d Battalion* of the *368th Regiment* on Blodnitz Hill and from the *2d Battalion, 90th Fusilier Regiment*, to the company's right front. After 1.5 km, the 2d Battalion had passed through the lead trace of the 5th Regiment. Another 500m brought the 79th Company into the forward positions of the 23d Regiment. Beyond the 23d Regiment lay 200m of open space. Lieutenant West, mistakenly understanding the wooded slope of Blodnitz Hill beyond the open space to be his objective, led his men on.

This battalion of the 23d Regiment had suffered heavy casualties during its 4 October attack on Blodnitz Hill. The major in command saw the 79th Company heading straight toward the hill and sent a runner to Lieutenant West, ordering him to stop. West sent the runner back with the reply that his orders were to take a position in the woods ahead, and the major could send any future orders

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<sup>29</sup> The 5 October muster roll reports six wounded and two dead from their wounds.





*No Marine officers in the 4th Brigade received the Medal of Honor in the Great War. 2dLt John A. West was recommended for the medal and received the Distinguished Service Cross. His citation states, "Second Lieutenant West voluntarily led a reconnaissance patrol under difficult conditions and secured information necessary to an attack. Three days later, after the command of his company had devolved on him, he continued in action in spite of being severely wounded, leading his men to the objective and refusing to be evacuated until proper disposition had been made."*

Courtesy of Carl West

to him there. West continued his attack toward Blodnitz Hill.

The 79th Company of Marines drove away some German outposts and found themselves in heavy undergrowth. Machine gun fire had taken a heavy toll. By the time the few Marines still on their feet reached the woods, they were spread too thin for Lieutenant West to control. The 79th Company could not locate the well-positioned machine guns and found their advance blocked by strands of barbed wire. While trying to locate his Marines among the heavy growth, Lieutenant West was struck in the head by a rifle bullet.

At 1715, Lieutenant Cates, with his company following in trace of West's 79th Company, sent a runner to Colonel Lee:

*The 79th Company was held up by barb wire and a terrific machine gun fire. Lt. West was killed and losses were heavy. The major from 23d Inf. ordered us to halt here. It will take a good heavy barrage to get the guns out—at least eight in the nest. I now have about 40 men of the 79th Co. and 45 of the 96th Co. here with me. I will hold until further orders, as it is a needless sacrifice of men to try and take this nest. I am digging in and consolidating. I await orders.*

The 79th and 96th Companies also were enfiladed by machine guns to the east of the 23d Regiment. These were the machine guns of the 2d Battalion, 90th Fusilier Regiment. At 1740, Major Williams reported that he had requested artillery fire on these positions. He also reported German reinforcements rapidly filling the trenches southeast of Saint-Étienne, and he was holding his position.

Lieutenant West was alive but seriously wounded, cut off from his company, and in peril of being hit by friendly artillery. At 1800, his friend, Lieutenant Cates, sent this anguished update to Major Williams:

*We have numerous wounded men in the woods where the nest is. A report is that Lieutenant West is still alive but badly wounded and still in the woods. Should we shell the woods under those circumstances? It is impossible to get out the wounded. This same nest cut up the 23d Inf. yesterday and the Major told us that we should not attack but we followed orders. We can hold here, but it will take an extra heavy barrage to get them out and more men [emphasis original].*

At 2030, General Neville telephoned General Lejeune to summarize the 4th Brigade's situation. He estimated the brigade was down to about 1,900 combat effectives. Neville had just spoken to Colonel Lee about the day's attacks, characterizing the 6th Regiment's losses as "enormous" and believing that the regiment needed to be relieved. "The men

are exhausted and though still willing are physically about all in," Colonel Lee stated. As Neville did not consider Lee an alarmist, he felt strongly that General Lejeune needed to know the situation on the line.

After nightfall, Private Arthur G. Marsh and Private William Feaster returned to the woods, found Lieutenant West, and carried him safely to the casualty collection station.<sup>30</sup>

## 6TH REGIMENT ATTACKS ON 6 OCTOBER 1918

The positions held by the 3d Brigade remained unchanged through the evening of 5–6 October, while the 3d Brigade adjusted its position to further anchor its flanks with the 23d Regiment to the east and the French 118th Infantry Regiment to its west. The 118th Infantry of the 22d Division had met little coordinated resistance. Its combat patrols had entered Saint-Étienne on 5 October. Although French and German combat patrols reported that Saint-Étienne had been captured, they were repeatedly proven erroneous. No coordinated occupation or defense was established in the ruins of the village. The town was not incorporated into the Germans' fourth main line of resistance, which was placed on the ridgeline just north and behind the town. The town rested in the combat outpost area before it and offered little tactical value to either side.

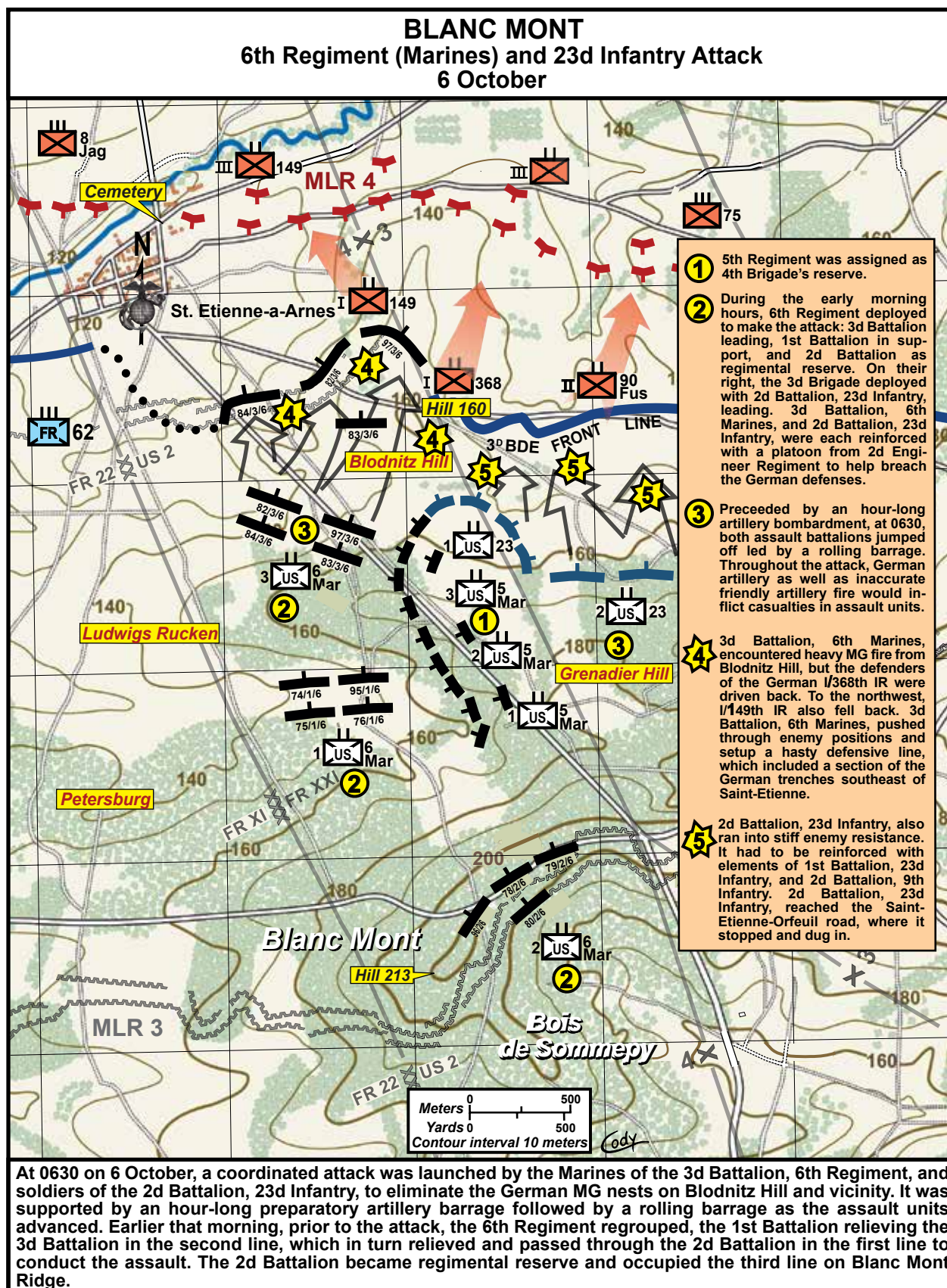
Both sides sought reinforcements and replacements to bolster their withered ranks. The 36th Division was executing its movement north to relieve the 2d Division. On 5 October, its lead brigade, the 71st, was trucked to Suippes and then moved to Sommepey on foot. General Lejeune met with the 71st Brigade's liaison officer and asked them to move up immediately. General Naulin cautioned that the brigade needed a day's rest before being deployed into their first action, but he approved its attachment to General Lejeune's 2d Division at 1835 on 5 October. Lejeune allowed the men a day of rest while commanders finalized plans for a relief of the 4th Brigade under cover of the following night.

Reports for 6 October only reflect local actions by the 2d Division's brigades as they made minor advances to consolidate mutually supporting attack positions on a line with the Saint-Étienne-Orfeuil road, where a relief in place could be effected during the night. These positions would further facilitate a strong, coordinated, northerly attack the following morning with the objective being the town of Machault. Machault was due north of Saint-Étienne and lay behind the German fourth main line of resistance. This attack would be a corps-size thrust north with the intent that the division's flanks would be tied together to enable a successful push beyond the Arnes River, while rupturing the Germans' final defensive belt.

Sometime in the very early hours of 6 October, Colonel Lee met with Colonel Edward R. Stone, commanding officer of the 23d Regiment, to coordinate an early morning attack against the German strongpoint on Blodnitz Hill to their front. This interim objective would provide a consolidated defensive position along the division's front, tracing along the Saint-Étienne-Orfeuil road, and tie in the 2d Division's eastern and western flanks. The plan called for the combined attack of Colonel Lee's 3d Battalion, 6th Regiment, to attack abreast of Colonel Stone's 2d Battalion, 23d Regiment, each reinforced with a platoon of wirecutters from the 2d Engineer Regiment. The 3d Battalion, 6th Regiment, had been ordered forward the previous evening. Lee agreed to launch the attack at daylight on 6 October to facilitate their battle handover and forward passage of lines through the 2d Battalion, 6th Regiment. The attack time was set for 0630, with a one-hour artillery preparation that would then roll forward, preceding the attack waves to a previously established line beyond the objective, where it would suppress for another 30 minutes.

The 6th and 23d Regiments' axis of attack would fall primarily on the *368th Infantry Regiment, 213th Infantry Division*, defending Blodnitz Hill. The *368th Regiment* defended a prepared trench network, with its battalions deployed in depth. Its *1st Battalion* held the forward position while the *3d Battalion* was in a support position behind them. The *2d Battalion* had been destroyed in the attacks during the previous days; its survivors likely filed

<sup>30</sup> Both Feaster and Marsh received Silver Star citations, and the awards were subsequently converted to Silver Star medals, for this action.



6th Regiment attacks on 6 October 1918.  
Map by LtCol R. L. Cody, USMC (Ret)

into the ranks of its sister battalions. West of Blodnitz Hill ran the division boundary between the German *213th Infantry Division* and the *200th Infantry Division*. The town of Saint-Étienne was in the *200th Infantry Division's* defensive sector. Its *149th Regiment* defended the town's cemetery, where it tied into the defenses of Blodnitz Hill. The 6th Regiment would suffer as a result of *149th Regiment's* machine gun positions that could fire to the southeast.

The artillery began firing promptly at 0530. Minutes later, red rocket signals and message traffic alerted the 2d Artillery Brigade that rounds were falling short. The artillery commander responded that "if any Marines were running back from the front line, it was because they didn't withdraw to required five hundred yards' distance from the barrage line."

Coordination of the attack for both movement and fires was immeasurably difficult and further taxed by German resistance. The machine gun fire along and abreast of Blodnitz Hill took a toll. Artillery fire that was likely both German and friendly caused casualties to mount. At 0715, Captain Shuler reported that his battalion had fought beyond the first trench line, but was held up several hundred meters before the second trench line in front of Saint-Étienne. Two of Shuler's company commanders were wounded: Captain James H. Johnston, 82d Company, and First Lieutenant Charles D. Roberts, 83d Company.

Artillery continued to attrite both the defender and the attacker; but at 0735, Captain Shuler reported crossing the second trench line and pressing the attack to destroy the machine gun positions that were engaging his flanks. At 0929, he messaged that his battalion had taken the objective and established liaison with the 23d Regiment to his east. The 23d Regiment had employed companies from all three of its battalions to maintain contact with the Marines to its west and to extend its line east as it pushed north to the objective line. Sometime after 0900, the 3d Brigade employed the 2d Battalion, 9th Regiment, to extend the 23d Regiment's right flank to reestablish contact with the French 173d Infantry Division to the southeast near Me-deah Farm.

As was the case with the 23d Regiment, the 6th Regiment's battalions were so reduced in strength that companies from the support battalion were brought forward to protect and tie in the flanks. Nearly an hour later, as the 3d Battalion consolidated its hasty defensive position, the French 62d Regiment came abreast on its western flank. The French provided a verbal report to Captain Shuler that the Germans were no longer in Saint-Étienne. This report was incorrect; at the time, the French had only managed to maintain a small outpost in the eastern portion of the town.

Before 1100, the German machine gun positions on the forward slope of Blodnitz Hill were reduced. The Germans had reinforced the *1st Battalion* with the *3d Battalion, 368th Infantry Regiment*, but it only had left a small headquarters detachment and several heavy weapons units acting as light infantry. With their ammunition diminished beyond the point that a defense could be held much longer and their eastern flank exposed as the *149th Regiment* was pushed northwest, the remnants of the *368th Infantry Regiment* fell back about 600m to the woods, remaining on the reverse slope of the hill. The 6th and 23d Regiments did not press their attack beyond the Saint-Étienne-Orfeuil road, except for a small stretch of a few hundred meters at the base of Blodnitz Hill.

Captain Shuler reported late that afternoon that the 3d Battalion had effective 15 officers and 290 men in foxholes, with three companies abreast and one company in support. Their frontage was less than 1,000m and their strength only allowed for disparate outposts capable of supporting each other. Colonel Lee requested at 2120 that combat liaison be made on his regiment's left flank and that no gap be left in the line's frontage. Captain Shuler reported at 0030 on 7 October that this was successfully done. He added that the French had informed him their attack at 1800 had captured Saint-Étienne, but that their defense did not extend east of the town and he had filled the gap with a combat patrol. The French report was inaccurate, however; the German machine gun emplacements southeast of the town in the cemetery were still intact.

Saint-Étienne lay in front of the Germans' fourth main line of resistance and within the 2d



Division's sector. The French 118th Infantry Regiment had met little resistance attacking north in its sector and its attack had veered into the western part of the town as German counterattacks were staged from there to attack its flank. This caused the French to ask for the 2d Division to continue its attack and capture the town to prevent the Germans from threatening their eastern flank. The request was not achievable, however, with the eroded combat strength of the 3d and 4th Brigades, who still faced determined German resistance in the center of the sector. General Naulin wished the attack to be pressed on 7 October by his entire corps, but it would be necessary for the divisions to come abreast of each other beforehand. This now made the capture of Saint-Étienne a necessity.

General Lejeune noted the condition of his brigades and asked General Naulin to delay the attack a day so he could employ the newly arrived 71st Brigade instead. He cautioned that, if this new brigade were used for the preliminary capture of Saint-Étienne now, they would not necessarily be prepared for the grand corps-level attack on 8 October. General Lejeune also was concerned that pressing the attack north of Saint-Étienne and rupturing the Germans' final defensive belt would result in counterattacks requiring detailed, division-level coordination and mutually supporting brigades to withstand. General Naulin understood and directed the attack order be drafted for the XXI Corps that night with a time of attack for 0515 on 8 October. He canceled the 7 October attack to take Saint-Étienne.

## 6TH REGIMENT RELIEF BY THE 36TH DIVISION ON 6-7 OCTOBER 1918

The 2d Division *Field Order No. 39*, issued late on 6 October, directed the relief of its frontline units by the 71st Brigade. The 71st Brigade was the advanced element of the U.S. 36th Division, which would relieve the 2d Division as its units deployed onto the battlefield in the coming days. The 36th Division was an untried National Guard division made up of units from Texas and Oklahoma. It had only arrived in France on 30 July 1918. The 2d Division's 3d and 4th Brigades were each instructed

to leave one battalion in its sector to assist with the battle handover, though both brigade commanders initially retained sector command. The 36th Division's rifle companies were equipped with the new Browning M1918 automatic rifles instead of the Chauchats the Marines carried, but the division lacked heavier organic firepower. Accordingly, both brigades also were ordered to leave in place their machine gun battalions, Stokes 3-inch mortar crews, and 37mm gun detachments for 24 hours to bolster the 71st Brigade's firepower.

The 71st Brigade, comprised of the 141st and 142d Regiments, had begun its march from Suippes to Sommepey at 1730 on 6 October. Some units could not locate their 2d Division guides in the dark. Many units spent the night and early morning hours trying to locate their assigned positions and link-up points.

The 141st Regiment relieved the 23d Regiment, which then established a support position to the south on Blanc Mont Ridge. The 9th Regiment remained in line in the 2d Division's eastern sector, placing each of its battalions alongside a battalion from the 141st Regiment. The mutually supporting battalions were arrayed in depth with the 1st Battalion in front, the 2d Battalion in support, and the 3d Battalion in reserve.

At 0115 the morning of 7 October, Colonel Lee sent a message to Captain Shuler that stated the 142d Regiment of the 36th Division would begin their relief that morning. Specifically, the 2d Battalion of the 142d Regiment would colocate with Captain Shuler, who was ordered to assist the new unit with the requisite reconnaissance for the coming attack. Just before 1000, Captain Shuler reported both battalions' positions by noting that the companies of the 2d Battalion, 142d Regiment, were arrayed as Company E on the right with his 97th Company; Company G in the center with his 82d Company; Company H on the left with his 84th Company; and Company F in support with his 83d Company. Before, there had been isolated foxholes with battle-worn Marines; now, the fields staging the attackers southeast of Saint-Étienne teemed with doughboys and leathernecks.

Captain Shuler received reports that the French and Germans were still fighting over Saint-Étienne.

He reported that the Germans before him still held their defensive line 100m outside and to the south-east of town. The 3d Battalion was in a unique position to observe portions of the French attack and the German counterattack through Saint-Étienne. First Lieutenant Alfred H. Noble, commanding the 83d Company, reported at 1440 that about 200 of the enemy were defending the town and reinforcements were moving in from positions beyond the ridgeline northeast of town. He believed the Germans had identified the seam between the French and his company and were trying to orient their attack there to exploit this weak point. Lieutenant Noble recommended the Marines advance and occupy abandoned German trenches on the edge of the town to what was currently their left flank. Lieutenant Noble's reports were forwarded by Captain Shuler, who pressed the tactical imperative to move forward and occupy the trenches before them after conducting the proper reconnaissance.

Colonel Lee could not respond for several hours, but by 1750 posed a plan by inferring that 1st Battalion would conduct a forward passage of lines during the night and occupy the trenches in question. However, no further orders were issued to initiate this action. Subsequent reports may have upended this plan; Captain Shuler reported that a reconnaissance patrol was fired upon and stopped. The patrol gave a clear report affirming the Germans still held the eastern and northern parts of the town, while the French were in the western portion, with strong German defenses between the French and the 3d Battalion.

The German defenders were exacting a price from their integrated defenses. With the strategic objective yet to be won, the French were weighting the main effort.<sup>31</sup> To exploit the advantage the 2d Division had thus far obtained, the French Fourth Army continued preparations to resume the attack on 8 October. The French 7th Division relieved the 22d Division on the 2d Division's left flank. The 7th Division would attack abreast of the 2d Division to take the town of Cauroy. The 2d Division would advance to Machault. The French 73d Division on

the 2d Division's right would attack to seize Belmont Château. This would bring the three divisions abreast on the Machault-Semide road. General Naulin's XXI Corps attack on 8 October was intended as the final effort to collapse the remaining German defensive belt south of the Aisne River.

## SUPPORTING THE 36TH DIVISION, 8-10 OCTOBER

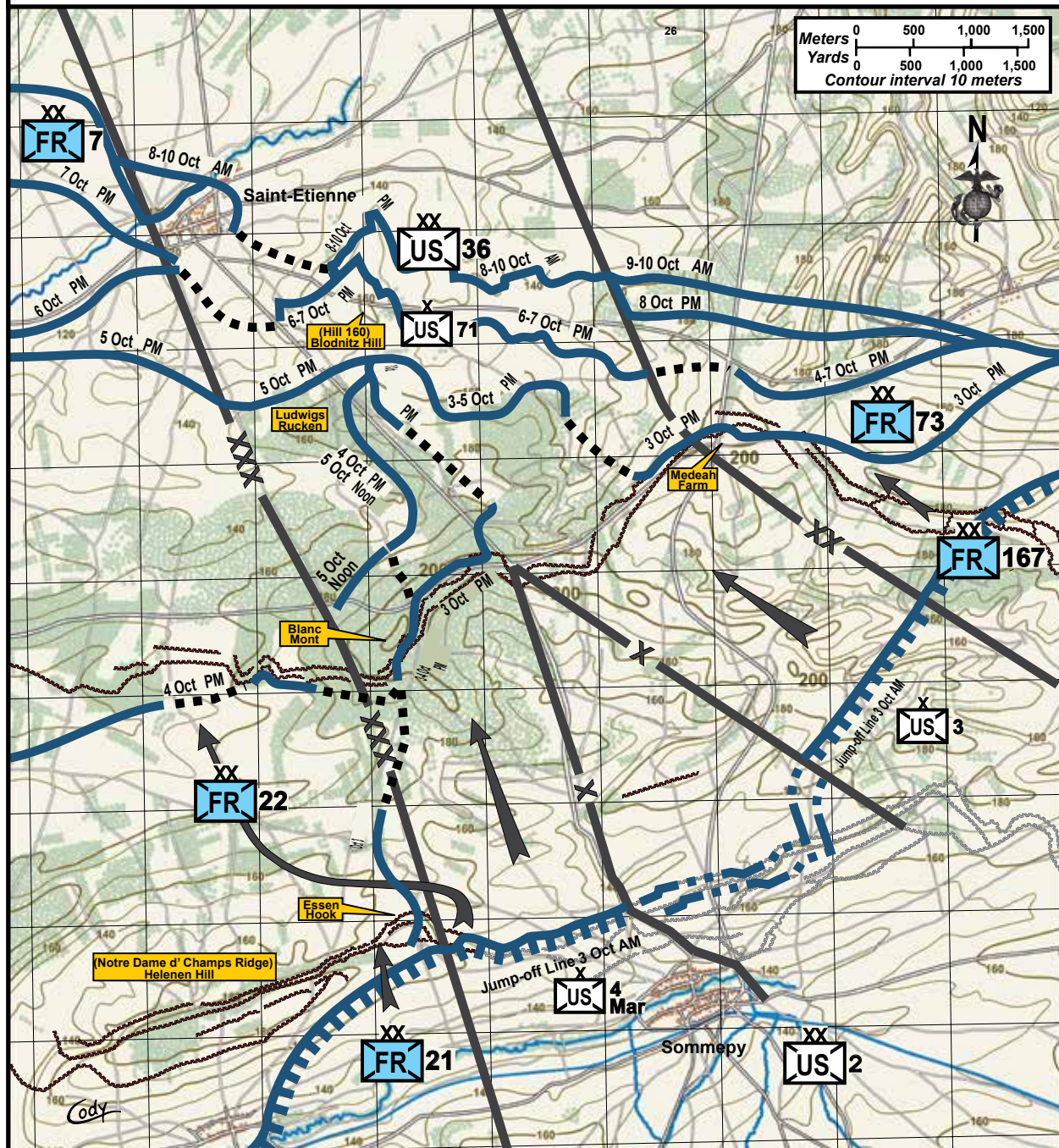
The XXI Corps released its orders for the 8 October attack at 2045 on 7 October. However, the usual disruptions found with combat planning affected their timely dissemination. The 2d Division order had been issued verbally earlier the same day to allow for planning and warning orders. The written order did not follow until sometime after midnight, whereupon the 71st Brigade headquarters finalized and issued its order at 0300 on 8 October. The XXI Corps designated H-hour as 0515, when artillery fires would commence. The lead battalion of the 142d Regiment was still issuing its orders to the company commanders at 0500, and the lead battalion of the 141st Regiment received its order at 0511.

The 2d Division *Field Order No. 40* directed the 71st Brigade to attack across the entire breadth of the division zone. The intermediate objective was the high ground just beyond Saint-Étienne, where German final defenses were anchored. To maintain liaison with the French 7th Division to the 71st Brigade's left flank, Colonel Lee ordered the 1st Battalion, 6th Regiment, to act as division combat liaison with two companies and clear and hold Saint-Étienne with its remaining two companies. The 2d Battalion, 9th Regiment, would maintain contact with the French 73d Division on the right. The 71st Brigade planned for its 141st Regiment to attack on the right and the 142d Regiment to attack on the left. Each regiment deployed in a column of battalions and was reinforced with machine gun companies from the 132d Machine Gun Battalion and a battalion of French light tanks. All other infantry units of the 2d Division remained along the Blanc Mont-Medeah Farm ridge to the south in a supporting role as reserve.

An immense array of artillery would support the 71st Brigade. The 2d Field Artillery Brigade

<sup>31</sup> *Weighting the main effort* describes a force making the main effort preponderantly stronger than the supporting efforts.

# **BLANC MONT A HIDEOUS PRICE . . . 3–10 October 1918**



During four bloody days beginning on 3 October, the Marines and soldiers of the U.S. 2d Division relentlessly attacked and drove the skilled and determined veterans of several German divisions off the strongly fortified position of Blanc Mont. Day by day, casualties mounted until the 2d Division was spent by the end of the day on 6 October. During the night of 6–7 October, the fresh but inexperienced 71st Infantry Brigade, U.S. 36th Division, relieved the worn out 3d and 4th Brigades, which became division reserve. The 2d Division continued in command of operations until 0500 on 10 October, when it was relieved by the 36th Division. The Marines and soldiers of the 2d Division withdrew for a well deserved rest, but the war was not over. After regrouping, filling its decimated ranks with replacements, and a short period of training, the 2d Division rejoined the fight. It took its place as part of the U.S. First Army in the final great battle of the war: the Meuse-Argonne.

*36th Division attacks on 8 October 1918.  
Map by LtCol R. L. Cody, USMC (Ret)*

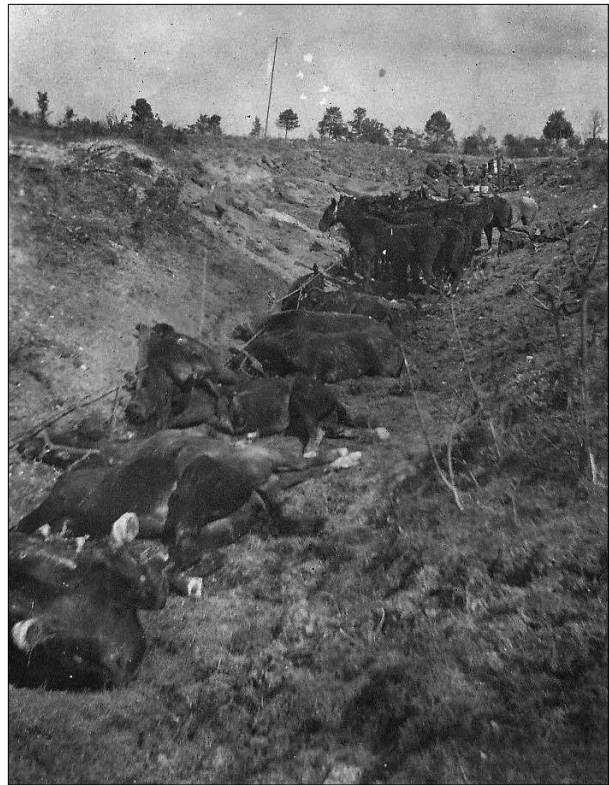


would be in direct support, reinforced with the French 29th Field Artillery Regiment and a battalion each of the French heavy 341st and 452d Artillery Regiments. The operational plan ordered the American light batteries to deliver standing and rolling barrages and the French light batteries to provide standing barrages and smoke screens along phase lines and on designated objectives. The heavy batteries would subject deep targets to destructive fire and neutralization and interdiction fires.<sup>32</sup> The barrages were synchronized with the advance, starting at 0515, with 30-minute destructive fires landing on the intermediate objective after a 50-minute creeping barrage in front of the advancing 71st Brigade and then shifting onto the final objective at 0900, hitting that objective for 30 minutes. In each phase, the fires were coordinated in time and action to taking objectives and to the forward passage of subsequent battalions to lead each phase of the attack. It was a well-coordinated, fully supported plan. However, it relied on the untried brigades of the 36th Division, supported by a few hundred veteran Marines and soldiers of the 2d Division.

The barrage began as scheduled at 0515. The infantrymen immediately recognized that the target line was off, so rounds were not in line with the forward trace of the troops and the attack positions did not directly correspond to the Saint-Étienne-Orfeuill road. The positions were south of the road, except near Blodnitz Hill, where the line crossed the road by 100m. The artillery was oriented just beyond the road; shells were falling nearly 300m beyond the German outpost line. When the doughboys went over the top, the German machine guns were unsuppressed. The assaulting waves staggered under the onslaught. The lead companies lost orientation and became disorganized. Subsequent companies and then the support battalions pressed from the rear and intermingled with the assault companies.

To the east, Major Edwin Gillett Hutchings, the commanding officer of the 1st Battalion, 141st

<sup>32</sup> For our purposes, the term *neutralization* refers to fire delivered to render a target temporarily ineffective or unusable, while *interdiction* fire is intended to divert, disrupt, delay, or destroy the enemy's military surface capability before it can be used effectively against friendly forces or to achieve enemy objectives.



*Pvt Rheinheimer took this photo of live and dead horses belonging to 1st Battalion, 15th Field Artillery Regiment.*

Courtesy of SSgt Steven C. Girard, USA (Ret)

Regiment, had commendably taken advantage of the warning order. He deployed his companies in an attack formation that enabled them to jump off smartly at H-hour. Tragically, Hutchings was killed by machine gun fire early in the attack. His battalion advanced several hundred meters farther before going to ground. Its eastern flank lost the protection of the French 73d Division, which made no gains. This opened a gap that required the employment of the 2d Battalion, 9th Regiment. The doughboys quickly destroyed a German machine gun position and tied in with the French 73d Division to the right. The French light tank battalion started forward late, following the support battalion rather than the lead battalion that had commenced the attack nearly an hour earlier. The tanks' liaison with the infantry was poor to nonexistent; they contributed no effective support to the attack. Hours later, they withdrew.

The 142d Regiment in the 71st Brigade's western zone made progress in the first hour. The regiment passed over Hill 160 and neutralized the



German positions to the hill's northwest in the Saint-Étienne cemetery. The attack on Hill 160 was initially supported by a tank battalion. After one tank was destroyed and the battalion commander was killed, however, the tanks withdrew from the fighting without providing significant value.

Several hundred meters to the west, the 1st Battalion, 6th Regiment, supported the attack on the western flank, which now encompassed Saint-Étienne. Keeping abreast of the 142d Regiment, the thin ranks of the 1st Battalion entered the eastern portion of the village's ruins around 1100. The 1st Battalion advanced a combat patrol farther north before German counterattack fire pushed them back. Shortly thereafter, Captain George A. Stowell, now leading the remnants of two companies, reported there were no officers left in the line and he had with him three noncommissioned officers and 10 enlisted men.<sup>33</sup> As the companies consolidated and forwarded their unit's strength, Colonel Lee released a message noting his regiment's diminished strength, now at 861 Marines. The battalion, regiment, and brigade had lost their momentum and too many men; they had a few more hours left to hold the line until relief.

By 1640, the 142d Regiment's line had stabilized, and the ruins of Saint-Étienne would remain firmly within the American lines. The Germans counterattacked with artillery fire that evening and forced combat outposts to retire into the village's ruins for the night. Private Archibald Hart of Company K, 142d Regiment, recollected in his memoir that, at 2000 "emerging from the wood . . . a small detachment of Marines accompanying us on our left . . . the attack order had read one battalion of Marines will maintain combat liaison on the left and occupy Saint-Étienne. . . . Their number was no where [*sic*] near a battalion."

The 142d Regiment's successful attack had gained several hundred meters, but it left a gap between it and the 141st Regiment on its right. German fires pinned them at the edge of their attack position. As the day went on, a German counter-attack developed with a battle group organized

around recently arrived reinforcements from the German *159th Regiment, 14th Reserve Division*. The attack was oriented against the 142d Regiment and its seam with the 141st Regiment. Strongly supported by artillery from within the fourth main line of resistance, the attack successfully forced back the 142d Regiment's right flank and disrupted the 141st Regiment's cohesion. Shortly after this attack, the 2d Division ordered the 2d Engineer Regiment to deploy a battalion to each flank of the 71st Brigade. As had become the norm within the 2d Division, the combat engineers were being employed as infantry because the line units were too depleted of riflemen. The 1st Battalion, 2d Engineer Regiment, relieved the 2d Battalion, 9th Regiment, on the eastern flank while the 2d Battalion, 2d Engineer Regiment, reinforced the 1st Battalion, 6th Regiment, in Saint-Étienne.

The evening passed as units consolidated in preparation for a resumption of the attack the following day, 9 October. The 71st Brigade's line was not continuous; the 141st Regiment was now disposed in provisional units due to the chaotic effects of the day's attack. Its fractured elements were still stretched along the Saint-Étienne-Orfeuill road, but its line was not tied into the 142d Regiment, whose attack had surged beyond Blodnitz Hill and even a few hundred meters beyond Saint-Étienne near the division's western boundary.

The 36th Division's other elements continued north on foot in preparation for the relief of the entire 2d Division the following night. General Naulin ordered all lines consolidated and flanks tied in, with only local attacks to gain a coordinated jump-off line for 10 October. The objective line would be the German trench line more than 1 km north of Saint-Étienne, the first trench line of the fourth main line of resistance. The French 7th Division had reported reaching this line. General Naulin wanted the 2d Division to push the 71st Brigade north to come abreast of it on 9 October to prepare for the corps attack on 10 October.

Combat patrols from the 142d Regiment entered these trenches on 9 October and gained a foothold, while the 141st Regiment remained in its attack positions farther southeast. As 9 October passed with no coordinated attacks and with

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<sup>33</sup> Stowell would later be commended with a Silver Star for his actions.

only patrols to their front, the Germans were left to withdraw with relatively little interference. With Allied control of aerial observation and strong artillery support on call, the German main body recoiled north, leaving a single depleted regiment in each division sector as a rear guard. The withdrawal would be executed in three phases with the movement completed by the early hours of 12 October.

General Lejeune's final order to the 2d Division before turning his sector over to the 36th Division called for an aggressive patrol to ascertain the German situation. A strong combat patrol of the 1st Battalion, 6th Regiment, entered the abandoned trenches north of Saint-Étienne and confirmed the weakened German frontline strength. Shortly thereafter, a company from the 141st Regiment relieved the 1st Battalion under the cover of darkness. What General Lejeune had suspected was indeed occurring; the Germans had commenced the withdrawal to the Brunhilde position on the Aisne.

The 2d Division *Field Order No. 41* directed the relief by the 36th Division to be complete by 0500 on 10 October. The 2d Division would detach its field artillery and engineers, as well as other supply and sanitary support units, to the 36th Division until further ordered. Its heavy weapons would remain in support positions for another 24 hours to strengthen the defense against the remote possibility of a counterattack. On the night of 9–10 October, the 143d and 144th Regiments relieved the 3d and 4th Brigades.

The 1st Battalion, 144th Regiment, relieved the 6th Regiment just south of Saint-Étienne and along the road to Sommepey. The 76th Company, still being led by Lieutenant Overton, was farthest west in the division's sector outside of Saint-Étienne and was the last unit from the 4th Brigade to be relieved. Overton's resourceful leathernecks, however, would not depart in possession of the additional firepower they had appropriated from the green soldiers of the 142d Regiment. A final message released by Colonel Lee at 1630 directed that "all Browning [automatic rifles] Guns and equipment now in the possession of the men of your command will be turned in."

The 2d and 3d Battalions, 144th Regiment, relieved the 5th Regiment, whose shattered ranks still

occupied a reserve position on Blanc Mont Ridge. Command of the field was transferred at 1000 on 10 October, and it was left to the 36th Division to execute the attack north at 1700. The 36th Division's 72d Brigade conducted a forward passage of lines and battle handover with the blunted 71st Brigade. With its 143d and 144th Regiments abreast, it continued the attack north in the direction of Machault. The 36th Division would press against the withdrawing *Third Army* until it stood behind the Aisne River on 14 October.

## CONCLUSION

Due in large part to the stunning success of the 2d Division at Blanc Mont, General Gouraud's Fourth Army accomplished its objective for the battle. The Germans had been driven from Les Monts and beyond the Aisne River. It was a significant step forward for Marshal Foch, enabling the next phase of his great offensive to end the war.

The French Army recognized the 2d Division's singular achievement in seizing Blanc Mont Ridge in the following report released on 4 October:

*A splendid American division, full of dash and ardor, the 2nd Division, placed at the disposition of the 21st [XXI] Corps on October 3rd, made itself master of the Massif Blanc Mont, which dominates the valley of the Suippes. This conquest rapidly brought about the downfall of Notre Dame des Champs and the Grand Bois de Saint Souplet.*<sup>34</sup>

It may be argued that the German *Third Army* also accomplished its objective. Blanc Mont had cost the 4th Brigade grievous casualties: 448 killed or dead from wounds, 1,902 wounded or gassed, and 310 missing. The total—2,660 men—represented 30 percent of the brigade's strength on 1 October. The failed attack of 4 October crippled the 5th Regiment, which suffered 1,097 casualties on

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<sup>34</sup> There is a statement frequently attributed to Gen Pétain that the 2d Division's capture of Blanc Mont was "the greatest single achievement of the 1918 campaign." The authors were unable to locate an authoritative source for this quotation.

that terrible day.<sup>35</sup> It marked the 4th Brigade's costliest day of the war.<sup>36</sup>

The 4th Brigade's experience at Blanc Mont demonstrated unequivocally what aggressive, experienced U.S. infantry could accomplish with the close, continuous support of artillery—and how disastrous such attacks could be without such support. The tenets of combined arms were still being tempered in October 1918. A fortnight after the battle, Colonel Lee summarized the lesson his regiment learned at such a high price:

*Experience has taught that pure infantry against wonderfully prepared machine gun positions such as we have encountered is too costly in casualties, and that a thorough shaking of the morale of the defenders by harassing fire and heavy bombardment directed on the nest area is the best and cheapest means of their reduction and capture.*

As the 2d Division served under the French

Fourth Army, the Battle for Blanc Mont has been overshadowed by the U.S. First Army's opening of the Meuse-Argonne campaign. Notwithstanding the recognition of the division by the French for its hallowed service, the 2d Division's achievement has been little noted in many Great War histories. However, the battle cast a great pall on the first-person historical record of the U.S. Marine Corps. In one of the most poignant memoirs to come out of the 4th Brigade, Private Elton E. Mackin penned this grim epitaph for his battalion:

*The battalion had come back from Blanc Mont Ridge. No, the battalion was still up there. . . . A hundred and thirty-four of us had come back from Blanc Mont Ridge. We had gone up a full-strength battalion a thousand strong. . . . The men were shocked and dazed and walked about with queer expressions. . . . One saw expectancy, an eagerness of welcome, die on a stricken face. It wasn't him. He wasn't there. He was still up on the ridge.*

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<sup>35</sup> These numbers are slightly higher than the casualty figures reported by the 4th Brigade in its operations report for 1–10 October 1918. Actual losses may have been even higher, as not all companies reported losses of their attached U.S. Navy and Army personnel.

<sup>36</sup> The muster roll lists 1,308 casualties for the 4th Brigade on 4 October 1918. The other contenders for the 4th Brigade's costliest days would be 6 June and 19 July. Historian J. Robert Moskin lists 1,087 Marine casualties for 6 June. The American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) reports 1,481 casualties for 6–8 June, but those numbers include casualties suffered during severe fighting on 7–8 June. For 19 July, most of the casualties would have been suffered by the 6th Marines, and the overwhelming majority of that regiment's Soissons casualties occurred on 19 July. The ABMC reports 1,181 casualties for the 6th Marines during 17–19 July. Historian Allan R. Millett puts the brigade's losses for 4 October at "more than 1,100" and also notes that it was "the worst single day's casualties for the Marines in the war."





## COMMANDERS OF NOTE

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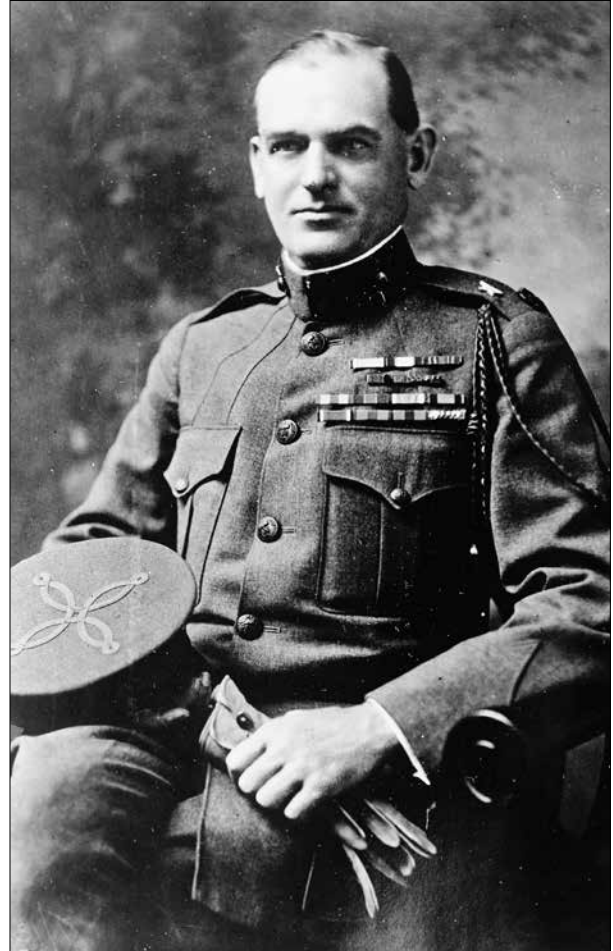


### *2d Division*

*MajGen John A. Lejeune (right) took command of the 2d Division after Soissons and led it through the end of the war. He became the 13th Commandant of the Marine Corps in 1920.*

### *4th Brigade*

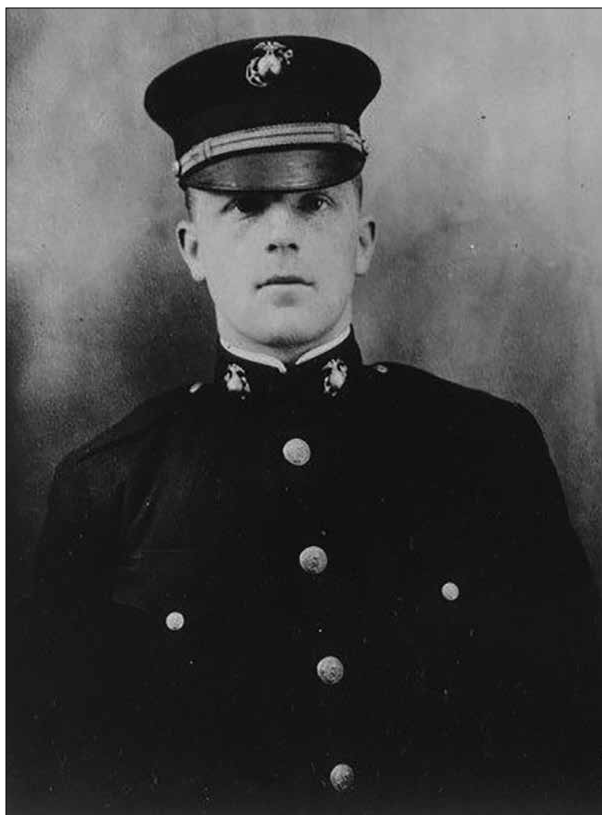
*BGen Wendell C. Neville (left) received the Brevet Medal for his actions at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, and the Medal of Honor at Veracruz, Mexico. He commanded the 5th Regiment at Belleau Wood and the 4th Brigade since July. He succeeded Lejeune as Commandant of the Marine Corps in 1930, but he died a year later. Courtesy of SSgt Steven C. Girard, USA (Ret)*



### *5th Regiment*

*Col Logan F. Feland received the Distinguished Service Cross as the second in command of the 5th Regiment at Belleau Wood. He commanded the 5th Regiment from Soissons through the war's end. He retired as a major general in 1933.*

*Bain News Service Photograph Collection, Library of Congress*



#### *1st Battalion*

*Maj George W. Hamilton received the Distinguished Service Cross leading the 49th Company in the initial assault on Hill 142. Blanc Mont was his first action as a battalion commander. His reports on 4 October illuminate a forgotten, dark day for the regiment. At war's end, he briefly left active duty and then returned to become a naval aviator. Hamilton was killed in 1922 when his aircraft crashed during maneuvers at the Gettysburg Battlefield in Pennsylvania.*

*Courtesy of SSgt Steven C. Girard, USA (Ret)*



#### *2d Battalion*

*Maj Robert E. Messersmith commanded the 78th Company at Belleau Wood, where he was gassed, and again at Soissons, where he was wounded. He commanded the 2d Battalion at Saint-Mihiel and Blanc Mont.*

*Courtesy of SSgt Steven C. Girard, USA (Ret)*



### *3d Battalion*

*Capt Henry L. Larsen served as the battalion's second in command through Belleau Wood and Soissons. He took command just before Blanc Mont and held it through the war. His brave handling of the battalion on 4 October was recognized with the Navy Cross. He would serve through 1946 and receive a second Navy Cross for valor in Nicaragua in 1929.*

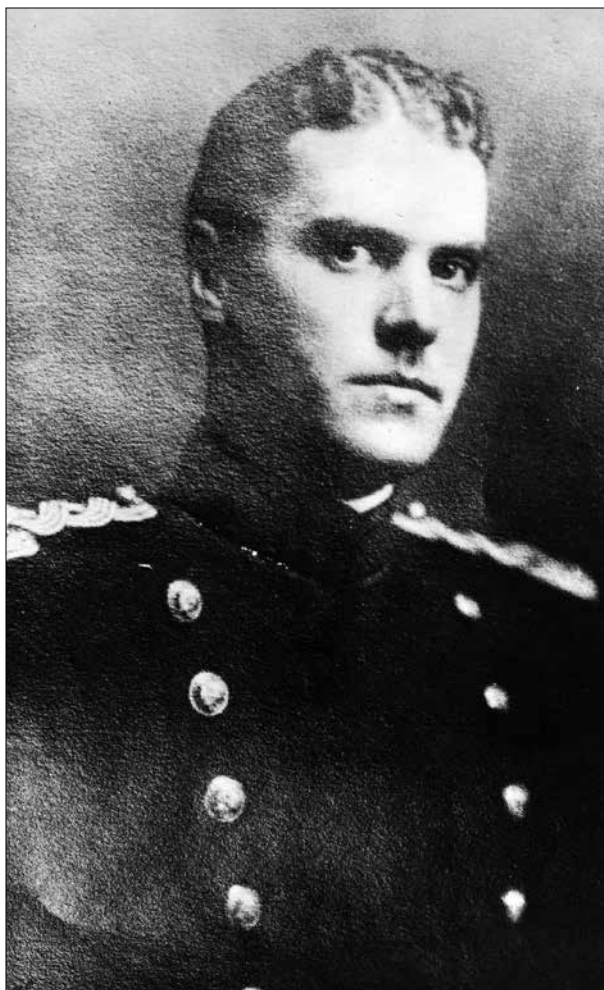
Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division



### *6th Regiment*

*Col Harry Lee took command of the 6th Regiment after the wounding of Col Albertus Catlin at Belleau Wood and retained command throughout the war. His last assignment was as commander, Marine Corps Base Quantico, where he died as a major general in 1935.*

Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division



*1st Battalion*

*Maj Frederick A. Barker had been detached from the 5th Regiment as assistant provost marshal in Paris until just before operations at Saint-Mihiel, when he took command of the 1st Battalion. He retained the battalion through the end of the war, receiving the Navy Cross after the battle at Argonne.*

Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division



*2d Battalion*

*Maj Ernest C. Williams had been awarded the Medal of Honor for his valor in the Dominican Republic in 1916, where as a first lieutenant he had led 12 Marines in the daring capture of a fortified garrison occupied by approximately 200 bandits. He is described in several accounts as a determined fighter, but possibly not an imaginative leader. He took command of the 2d Battalion after Soissons and led it through the Armistice. He would serve until medically retired for an old injury in 1921.*

Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division

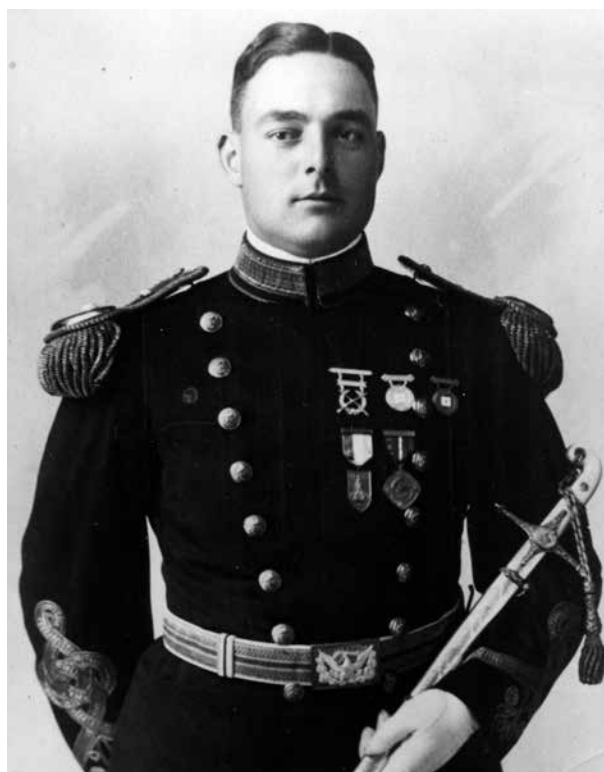




### 3d Battalion

*Capt George K. Shuler served as the adjutant of the 5th Regiment at Belleau Wood and Soissons and had only recently taken command of the 3d Battalion. He received both the Army and Navy Distinguished Service Medals and a Silver Star for his leadership at Blanc Mont. He retained command through the end of the war, including the treacherous crossing of the Meuse River on the night of 10–11 November. After the war, Gen Lejeune hand picked Capt Shuler to evict roughnecks from Teapot Dome, WY, during the oil scandal. Shuler left active duty shortly thereafter and served as the New York state treasurer.*

Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division



### 6th Machine Gun Battalion

*Maj Littleton W. T. Waller Jr. had commanded the 3d Division's 8th Machine Gun Battalion at Châtea-Thierry before taking command of the 6th Machine Gun Battalion during Belleau Wood. He retained it until detached after Blanc Mont as division machine gun officer. Maj Waller received the Navy Cross for his actions in the Great War. He transferred to the Marine Corps Reserve as a lieutenant colonel in 1922 to care for his legendary father but continued to serve his country as an Olympic shooter, captain of the U.S. International Rifle Team, and president of the National Rifle Association. He was the first Marine Reserve officer promoted to brigadier general. During World War II, Gen Waller served as the director of personnel and commanded defenses on Johnston Atoll, Midway, and the Hawaiian Islands in the last year of the Pacific War. Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division*



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# APPENDIX A

## MARINE CASUALTIES AT BLANC MONT, 1-10 OCTOBER 1918

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Unit	Status	Total
5th Regiment	Strength 1 October	3,944
	KIA	140
	DOW	63
	WIA	909
	Gassed	65
	Missing	204
	Casualties	1,381
6th Regiment	Strength 1 October	3,801
	KIA	135
	DOW	73
	WIA	744
	Gassed	31
	Missing	93
	Casualties	1,076
6th Machine Gun Battalion	Strength 1 October	1,037
	KIA	26
	DOW	11
	WIA	146
	Gassed	6
	Missing	13
	Casualties	202
Marines at Blanc Mont	Strength 1 October	8,811
	KIA	301
	DOW	147
	WIA	1,800
	Gassed	102
	Missing	310
	Casualties	2,660

Note: 4th Brigade headquarters had 29 personnel and suffered 1 WIA. KIA = killed in action; DOW = died of wounds; WIA = wounded in action. Casualty figures were compiled from the *Muster Roll of the United States Marine Corps*, October 1918, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division.

# APPENDIX B

## MARINE ORDER OF BATTLE

### 4TH BRIGADE, 2D DIVISION,

### BATTLE OF BLANC MONT, 1-10 OCTOBER 1918

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<b>Unit</b>	<b>Commander</b>
4th Brigade	BGen Wendell C. Neville
Headquarters Detachment	
5th Regiment	Col Logan F. Feland
Headquarters Company	
Supply Company	
8th Company (Machine Guns)	Capt James A. Nelms
1st Battalion	Maj George W. Hamilton
17th Company (A)	Capt LeRoy P. Hunt
49th Company (B)	Capt Francis S. Kieren
66th Company (C)	Capt Raymond F. Dirksen (WIA 4 October)
	1stLt Francis J. Kelly
67th Company (D)	Capt Frank Whitehead (WIA 4 October)
	1stLt Aaron J. Ferch
2d Battalion	Maj Robert E. Messersmith
18th Company (E)	Capt David T. Jackson
43d Company (F)	Capt Charles Dunbeck (WIA 4 October)
	1stLt Sydney Thayer
51st Company (G)	Capt James Keeley (KIA 4 October)
	2dLt Clell G. Johnson to 5 October
	Capt Percy D. Cornell
55th Company (H)	Capt DeWitt Peck (WIA 4 October)
	1stLt Samuel C. Cumming
3d Battalion	Capt Henry L. Larsen
16th Company (I)	Capt Robert Yowell
20th Company (K)	Capt Gilder D. Jackson Jr. (WIA 4 October)
	1stLt Thurston J. Davies
45th Company (L)	Capt Thomas Quigley (WIA 4 October)
	1stLt Floyd W. Bennett
47th Company (M)	Capt Gaines Moseley (WIA 4 October)
	2dLt Nicholas E. Clauson

<b>Unit</b>	<b>Commander</b>
6th Regiment	Col Harry Lee
Headquarters Company	
Supply Company	
73d Company (Machine Guns)	1stLt George R. Jackson
1st Battalion	Maj Frederick A. Barker
74th Company (A)	Capt Robert Shiel (sick 2 October)
	1stLt Leo D. Hermle
75th Company (B)	1stLt Henry E. Chandler (KIA 8 October)
	2dLt Palmer Ketner (WIA 8 October)
	Sgt Aralzaman C. Marsh to 8 October
	Capt George A. Stowell
76th Company (C)	Capt Macon C. Overton
95th Company (D)	1stLt James A. Connor (WIA 7 October)
	2dLt Peter Morgan
2d Battalion	Maj Ernest C. Williams
78th Company (E)	1stLt James McB. Sellers
79th Company (F)	1stLt Amos R. Shinkle (WIA 3 October)
	1stLt John West (WIA 5 October)
	2dLt Lloyd A. Houchin
80th Company (G)	Capt Walter Powers
96th Company (H)	1stLt Clifton B. Cates
3d Battalion	Capt George K. Shuler
82d Company (I)	Capt James H. Johnston (WIA 7 October)
	2dLt Earl F. Lucas
83d Company (J)	1stLt Alfred H. Noble
84th Company (L)	1stLt Cartwright Church (WIA 3 October)
	2dLt Donovan Wilmot
97th Company (M)	Capt Hugh McFarland (WIA 7 October)
	Capt Thomas T. McEvoy
6th Machine Gun Battalion	Maj Littleton W. T. Waller Jr.
Headquarters Detachment	
15th Company (A)	Capt Matthew H. Kingman
23d Company (B)	Capt John P. McCann (gassed 4 October)
	Capt Harold D. Campbell (WIA 4 October)
	Capt William B. Croka
77th Company (C)	Capt Augustus B. Hale
81st Company (D)	Capt Edmund P. Harwood (sick 5 October)
	2dLt Vernon B. Bourdette to 6 October
	Maj Louis E. Fagan Jr.





## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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*Peter F. Owen*

*Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps (Retired)*

Pete Owen enlisted in the Marine Corps from Virginia Beach, Virginia, in 1981. After graduating from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1986, he served as an infantry officer for more than 20 years. His assignments included leading a reconnaissance platoon in northern Iraq in 1991 and serving as the executive officer of the 1st Marine Regiment during Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003. His final assignment was directing amphibious raid, reconnaissance, and water survival training in Coronado, California. Owen has taught as an adjunct faculty member with the Marine Corps College of Distance Education and Training since 2004. He also has organized and led Marines on battlefield walks at Spotsylvania Courthouse, Virginia; Kennesaw Mountain, Georgia; Belleau Wood, France; and Iwo Jima, Japan. He is the author of *To the Limit of Endurance: A Battalion of Marines in the Great War* (2007), coeditor of *Over There: A Marine in the Great War* (1997) by Carl Brannen; and editor of *The World War One Memoirs of Don V. Paradis, Gunnery Sergeant, USMC* (2010).

*John Swift*

*Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps (Retired)*

John Swift was commissioned a lieutenant of Marines upon graduating from Purdue University in Lafayette, Indiana, in 1986. He then served 20 years in the Marine Corps as a tank officer. His last assignment was as the program manager of tank systems aboard Marine Corps Systems Command, Quantico, Virginia. Since retiring in 2006, he has been with BAE Systems, initially as the program manager for mine-resistant ambush protected (MRAP) vehicle design, testing, and fielding and currently serves as director for amphibious combat vehicles.

His interest in military history was fostered by his father and the stories told of his grandfather's service as a rifleman with the U.S. Army's 18th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, in World War I. A student of military history, Swift has studied the Marines of the Great War and, in particular, the Battle of Blanc Mont, for more than 20 years. Swift considers it an honor to have assisted on this project and is grateful for Owen's intimate knowledge of Marine lore. Swift currently lives in Bristow, Virginia, with his wife, Sarah; son, Max; and daughter, Cecilia.