

BATTLE OF BELLEAU WOOD

Colonel Walter S. Grant

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Condition of the 4th Marine Brigade:

The hour of my arrival at 2nd Division Headquarters was identical with that of 41 German prisoners, captured by the Marines in the Bois de Belleau that morning. It struck me that worn-out divisions would not be sending in prisoners.

I found Col. Preston Brown and Col. Arthur L. Conger up. They had had an anxious night as information had been obtained previously that the Germans had brought in a fresh division to attack the 2nd Division front. Almost immediately after my arrival, a telephone report came in that Bouresches was in German hands. Other telephone messages gave the same information. Artillery was given instructions as to its mission and arrangements for counterattack made. Then reports came in that Bouresches was entirely in hand of Marines. The upshot of the whole matter was that the Germans had put down a heavy artillery barrage and had attacked from the northern end of Bois de Belleau to Bouresches, inclusive, but that they had gained no ground.

To give a picture of conditions of Marines, I quote some messages received by Gen. Harbord this morning regarding the flight: At 5:35 AM, Wise, from northern part of Bois de Belleau sent a message containing this sentence: "Morale excellent, but body about all in." Another battalion commander reported. "Conduct magnificent." Another stated: "Germans have not gained an inch of ground."

Brown was of the opinion that the men were tired out, but I gathered that he thought they could hold. I was able to see him only a time of considerable stress after he had been up all night.

A little after 6 AM, I went over to Brig. General James G. Harbord's PC at Fermede la Loge. I saw Col. Manus McCloskey and had a talk with General Harbord. I asked him for a candid expression of his opinion on the situation, informing him that reports received at GHQ had given the impression that the Marines were considered by some to be near the breaking point. He scouted any such idea, stated that their morale was unimpaired, but that physically they were tired out and explained why. Having given the substance of this conversation over my telephone message I will not repeat it. I gathered, however, that he had suggested to General Bundy the necessity for giving the Marine brigade a chance to rest.

From General Harbord's, I went to the PC of Colonel Neville, commanding the 5th Marines at La Voie-du-Chatel. He and his staff were in good spirits and full of fight. They asked, however, when we were going to relieve them, stating the men were tired. When, on my departure, I asked if I could do anything for them, they replied—send a relieving division in. They stated the men's morale was splendid. Also stated that men in front line got only one hot meal a day—at night.

I returned to Bezu-le-Guery and talked with Lt. Col. G.A. Herbst, AC of S., G-3; Captain Pritchard, General Bundy's aid; Bridges; Budd; and had along conversation with General Bundy, the substance of which follows:

General Bundy thinks the situation is grave on account of the extent of front held by his division; the fact that aside from their attacks they have been constantly subjected to shell fire which makes it almost a continuous battle; the fact of their physical fatigue caused by continuous labor and fighting. He thinks that a serious determined attack might shove his line back, but admits that it all depends on the degree of seriousness of attack, which if strong enough, could push back a fresh division. He does not press his request for another brigade though he states he could use it to advantage if conveniently available.

He greatly desires that another American division be brought in his rear to alternate with his division in the line. He desires greatly an opportunity to give his troops physical rest. To accomplish this without the necessity of bringing relief, he applied to General Dugoutte to have the front of his sector shortened, so that by disturbing in depth he could arrange for a system of reliefs and also strengthen his position. This request was not granted. He did not take up the subject of the necessity for relieving his division, with the French, nor have they suggested its necessity.

To ease up on the situation, he has made arrangements for the 9th and 23^d Infantry to extend their fronts, the 23^d to occupy the Bouresches, inclusive, thus relieving three companies of Marines from the front line. He has also caused the Bn. of Marines which was detached as corps reserves to be returned to Gen. Harbord's control. This will enable Gen. Harbord to give his men more rest unless they are used for digging positions in rear when not actually in the front line.

General Bundy states that morale is fine and unimpaired throughout the division. Sufficient replacements are coming in. He gave me a list of daily evacuations of wounded, not including, of course, the dead.

The men I saw all seemed in excellent spirits. General Bundy himself remarked on the high morale of the wounded.

General Estimate Based On Above

That if conditions do not permit the withdrawal of this division to a rest area that local adjustments can be made, such as the exchange of sectors by the 23rd Inf. and 5th Marines, and by the 9th Infantry and 6th Marines, so that the Marines may go into comparatively quiet sectors.

That the withdrawal of the division to a rest area is not essential though it is desirable, provided there are enough divisions available to permit it.

That even under present conditions of physical fatigue, no German attack is liable to make such progress on the 2nd Division front, unless it is in the nature of a drive with greatly superior forces.

That the possession of all our objectives west of the Bouresches-Torcy railroad will for a time stop the necessity for attacking; and that the possession of the strong rock-covered Bois de Belleau will materially strengthen our position, and make it easier to repel German attacks.

That intelligence section of XXI French Corps must be keeping in touch with possibility of German drive on 2nd Division front, and that corps commander will undoubtedly cut down the sector front if he deems it necessary for greater distribution in depth. The XXI Corps has a French division at its disposal in rear of 2nd Division. If 2nd Division finally has to be pulled out for rest and no other American division is available to replace it, this French division might relieve it.