

BATTLE OF BELLEAU WOOD

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Relieved by the 7th US Infantry in the early morning and proceeded to Mery. We were continually fighting for two weeks and during that time, the men did not have even a hot cup of coffee and lived entirely on cold food, and at times water was scarce, and from June 11 were without packs. I have never seen such a spirit as existed in the men in regard to every task that was given them and their losses seem to inspire fresh courage, and at all times were eager for the attack, and such a record may have been equaled during this war, but never surpassed. We had lost rather heavily before the attack on the Bois de Belleau and only had about 700 effectives that morning and attacked on a front and depth of a kilometer. The following points were observed:

- (a) That the maps used were incorrect and orders were not received in sufficient time to make a ground reconnaissance.
- (b) That in wood fighting it is very difficult to determine that you are in the right position and especially so when the underbrush was very heavy.
- (c) The enemy gives no trouble at all after you are at bayonet range, and is only too willing to surrender.
- (d) That it is much cheaper in life to have Germans surrender instead of killing all in sight and that German-speaking men were used very successfully this way.
- (e) That Germans were very helpless when there were no officers or noncommissioned officers around and machine-gun crews were much braver than the infantry.
- (f) That it is a safe method to bayonet all men on the ground as some are not wounded.
- (g) That machine guns were exceedingly well camouflaged, and look out especially for brush heaps and wood piles, also in trees, and that they generally develop one gun at a time and after that is taken, a flanking one will open up.
- (h) All men should have a working knowledge of German machine guns, which are very simple, and when captured, can be used as there is always plenty of ammunition around.
- (i) The majority of Germans captured and well treated were more than willing to tell everything they knew and, in fact, to assist you, as the ones I saw were dead tired of the war.
- (k) When prisoners were taken, the machine guns in their vicinity should be brought out by them, unless you are absolutely certain you are going to consolidate that certain spot. If this cannot be done, a pistol bullet in the breach and water cooler casing will put them out of action and they cannot be used again. In wood fighting, it is very easy for men to conceal themselves and after you have run over them to come back again, so a gun should never be left intact.
- (l) Automatic and rifle fire from the hip was the only kind that could be used in thick cover and it was found very effective.
- (m) In open warfare and when the lines are under 1000 yards, sniping was very successful as they had no idea we could kill at that range.
- (n) In thick cover and when machine-gun nests were run into, if prisoners were available, one in front of a man secured many machine guns, as they would not shoot on their own men.
- (o) All attacks must have good mopping-up parties as the German who is willing to surrender at the time of the attack is a different man several hours afterwards when in hands of an officer. All Germans captured were very much surprised that we did not immediately kill them, as they were told that was our practice.
- (p) The six or seven officers taken were very easily handled.
- (q) Intelligence section should have experts near P.C. so that all information from prisoners can be used at once. A novice gets very little out of a prisoner and during an attack, the small staff of a battalion commander is absolutely necessary for other things under our present organization. It is most important that this data be gotten first hand.
- (r) That staff officers be on hand immediately after an attack to see that all orders have been carried out and that they make a daily inspection of the lines, as a great many officers are casualties and you don't get correct reports from the inexperienced ones left, and a clear mind of that kind from one who knows exactly what the higher command desires would be invaluable and I personally can say that towards the end of our stay in the

sector from excessive work, that I was not at my best in giving clear reports, and I was over my positions at least once a day.

- (s) Rifle and hand grenades were found very useful against machine-gun nests, also a Stokes mortar when the nest is located.
- (t) The enemy used very effectively 37 and 47-mm. guns and 77's point blank against our consolidated positions.
- (u) Machine-gun nests and troops cannot be driven out of woods by artillery when they desire to remain and it takes the personal contact of the bayonet to do it.
- (v) The enemy have a very irritating substance in their high explosives, which a mask won't stop. It is not dangerous, but makes you get out of a small dugout, as the gas causes a sore throat, sneezing, and eye irritation.
- (w) It is not desirable to have replacements take place in the lines as the men never have a chance to get oriented and it has a bad effect on them, as they don't know even their leaders and it is most essential that teamwork must exist to be successful.

In ending this report, I wish it to be clearly understood that I am giving what information I consider might be of value and most of it comes from personal observations, as most of my officers were casualties and I have not the benefit of their views. All of my losses were caused by rifle or shell fire, as we had no gas with the exception of 12 cases and I left Courcelles with 965 effective men and 26 officers in the companies, and lost 615 men and 19 officers. I am convinced that at times we were all over Bois de Belleau, but from lack of men, the stopping of infiltration was impossible. All prisoners and machine guns taken on June 11 and 12 were entirely due to the efforts of this battalion and we occupied part of the sector assigned to 1st Battalion, 6th Marines. Heavy casualties among my best officers was one cause of not obtaining the whole woods, as the youngsters left in my command did not size up the military value of ground promptly. I understand over 450 prisoners including 5 officers were then, and I personally know that over 500 machine guns were taken or destroyed; also 2, each, large and small mortars. I can also state with pride that we may have overrun ground, but not one inch of it that was ever taken up was given after consolidation.