

ON THE WIRE

NEWSLETTER OF THE GREAT WAR ASSOCIATION

Fall 2002



PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Progress. The action of moving toward a goal . . .

The past six months has seen a great deal of progress within the GWA. The GWA has seen improved recruiting yield additional members. New units have applied for membership. Old friends are returning, excited, with what they hear happening. The "weed situation" has never been better. New site developments have been made that will dramatically change some of our tacticals, and many shortcomings have been corrected. Progress is the result of the hard work contributed by you, the membership.

In the past six months, the GWA has added over 40 new members. Many have joined existing units while others have joined the new units—IR 459, IR 124, the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, the 8th Battalion Chasseurs a Pied, the 80th ID AEF, the Border Regiment and others that are sending in their applications. This is the growth we sought. This is the progress we have worked toward. *Outstanding!*

Weeds. For the first summer since the land was first cleared, the site does NOT look like Vietnam . . . Pennsylvania in the summer . . . but not the jungle we have previously experienced. The site has been sprayed three times and the effects are visible in the brown, shriveled growth and the large areas of relatively open space. Grass has been planted to crowd the weeds out and make it easier to maintain the progress we have made. The site is scheduled to be bush hogged in all areas that members have cleared of wire and obstacles by 1 October. Members will still need to address growth in their trenches, but again, the growth is nothing like what we have had in the past.

Site developments have been made and will continue to be made up until the November event. The Allies have seen an extension of their lines, digging out trenches needing improvement and working towards establishing a water point in their center rear. The Central Powers have seen a dramatic change in their right and center. The Allies will have to think of a new name for "death valley." These improvements were made possible by the dues/fees you pay and the special funds we received from your extra contributions and fees collected from guests using our site in the "off season."

Another sign of progress is the response units made to constructive criticism of their positions and bunkers. Not a few members put in long, strenuous hours to correct their areas and showed all who care to look what can be done with team work, determination and unselfish dedication. *Bravo!*

Turning to new things, as I looked at the calendar for next year, I saw Easter (with no disrespect to our Orthodox brethren) falls on the third weekend in April. Oops. The GWA has no bylaw spelling out what weekend we will move the event to. In the past, we have moved the event forwards and backwards. Both choices will surely inconvenience someone. A few weeks ago, I polled the leaders of your units. Some were quite vocal one way, or the other. Some didn't respond. Of those that responded, the opinions were rather evenly divided. Close enough that neither date had a clear majority of support. I have directed the Editor of OTW to add some lines to the registration form where you may "vote" on which weekend you prefer. This will establish GWA policy – not as strong as a bylaw, but a written record of your preferences. The results will be announced to the unit commanders at a meeting on Saturday evening.

Another issue that concerns us is the use of our land. We hold a property that we have invested considerable money and toil in. Every year, since the property was leased and then owned by the GWA, we have rented the site out to guests for movies, tacticals, documentaries, training, living histories and student film projects. The Executive Committee has handled this income producing part of our organization very quietly for years. All guests were required to provide proof of insurance, provide some consideration (usually money) and (increasingly) repair any damages they might cause. For all parties it has mostly been a win-win situation.

This year, a few members voiced concern that others were coming in and using our site when we were not present. They feel that it detracts from their Great War experience, endangers the property or places a financial/labor burden upon individuals units after the guests leave. For the people who ventured such opinions, I am sure these are genuine, heartfelt, concerns. Discussions afterward (mostly on the yahoo email list [groups.yahoo.com/group/great-war-assoc]) showed strong support for the economic benefits our site improvement fund receives from such events. From just one event, the site improvement fund received over \$1,000. That particular group even anted up money to cover claims of damages made by a few units to me.

To establish the policy of the GWA, I have again directed the Editor of OTW to add some lines to the registration form to determine what you, the membership, want. (*See back of registration form—Ed.*) Either no outside guests or continue having the Executive Committee manage the site but insist on an upfront "damage deposit." (Please note that unit bunkers have not been, and will not be, made available to any outside group) Again, the results of this "plebiscite" will be given at the unit commander's meeting on Saturday night.



As President, I certainly could have made these decisions. But given the time we have before either becomes an issue again, it was thought best to establish a long term policy of the GWA based upon the membership's wishes.

The reasonable settling of differences — without petty “politicking,” flame wars on the Internet and unwarranted accusations should be behind us. Let us concentrate on improving our impressions, improving our first person portrayals, improving our site, improving our friendships. Another sign of progress.

As always, for the improvement of our hobby, I welcome constructive comments on these, or any other issues. (410.788.1708 (H) [before 10 PM Eastern] 410.627.1833 (C) or, jnovicki@replications.com) —John

Vice President's Report

Fall is approaching and soon it will be time for another season in the trenches! Just a few requests and other miscellaneous items to pass along. Most of you folks are veterans and know the drill by now anyhow.

Our groundkeeper, Steve Wiser, has been doing a lot of mowing work at the site. Those of you, like myself, who enjoy camping, surely appreciate this effort. Not only is it a bit of added comfort but it has also offered a degree of protection from the rising tick problem this season. Steve has asked that those units who wish to keep having their areas mowed kindly remove campfire stones, bricks, cooking grates, etc. before you leave the site. These things are difficult to see as the foliage grows and Steve has had some expensive equipment damaged. Please store this material near a tree line, wall, or other off-the-beaten-track area. If large holes or firepits are present please mark these with stakes or fill them in before leaving.

Please be reminded that the **SPEED LIMIT** on GWA property is **15 MPH!** There many pedestrians and the roads are tricky, especially at night. As the site is not really that large it is not necessary to go any faster! Please be considerate and DO NOT SPEED! The MP staff has enough to do without setting up radar traps and conducting traffic court.

MPs: We are always in need of volunteers to perform MP duty. A specialized kit is not mandatory! If you happen to have an MP impression this is a perfect opportunity for you to help out. Any individuals or units who are interested in volunteering for a few hours please contact me before the event at: Mineola17@att.net or telephone 860-349-1147. My kind thanks, especially to those folks who have been volunteering repeatedly!

Pyrotechnics: Please note that criteria for the construction and use of pyrotechnic devices have not changed. Please consult the GWA Safety Regulations for details. In particular please be compliant in the weight (8-oz. max.) and the powder charges (30 grs.).

Authenticity characteristics will be enforced! Be forewarned! The policy states that grenades must conform as reasonably as possible, to documented types. If you have been constructing rifle or hand thrown types please use only those which are as authentic as possible. Many complaints have

been received concerning this issue. The Safety Committee will disallow any blatantly bogus shapes or designs! If you cannot comply then DO NOT BRING ANY!

At this time plastic egg types are allowed. Also German stick types, ball (kugel) types, discs, pineapple shapes (French, Mills, etc. fragmentation), paddle types, tubular Batty types, and any other original Great War documented design. There are great many sources available for reference; in fact on-line auctions can easily provide a free tutorial.

Inspection of your pyrotechnics should begin at the unit level! Consult your Unit Comdr. or Unit Safety Officer before making a batch of grenades. If these are Ok'd then please bring a sample for inspection to the registration area. The Chief Safety Officer or designate will examine your product and ignite one for charge testing purposes. PLEASE BE COMPLIANT! Anyone found using unsafe pyrotechnics or pyrotechnics unsafely will be asked to leave the field!

Thanks to you all for keeping the GWA safe, authentic, and enjoyable! —Bill Baldwin

The 107th Infantry/Company A
27th Infantry Division

Mourns the loss of

Pfc. Bryan H. Gosling Sr.

“The Goose”



“Dear Old Pal of Mine”

*Oh, how I want you dear old pal of mine,
Each night and day I pray you're always mine,
Sweetheart may God bless you,
Angel hands caress you,
While sweet dreams rest you, dear old pal of mine.*

(YMCA Victory Songs 1917)



Narrative of Operations

1st Allied Composite Battalion

April 19th to 21st , 1918

On the evening of April 19th, the 1st Composite Battalion relieved the French 66th Regiment in the Neuville-Pronville sector.

Prior to the relief, examination of air photographs by brigade "I" section confirmed that new trench works had been constructed at I. 14. b. d. & I. 15. a. c. Orders were received from Brigade on April, 16th, for a reconnaissance raid to be carried out on the new enemy positions on the evening of the 20th. Intelligence also reported the arrival of IR459 on the Neuville-Pronville sector although, it was not ascertained where this formation was located in the enemy line.

Operations

19/4. Relief of the French was completed by 7:00PM. The dispositions of the companies was as follows: French on the right, AEF in the centre, and BEF on the left of the line.

Although the enemy was initially quiet during the relief, activity increased as the night progressed in a series of raids and patrol engagements in no man's land.

On the left, the BEF carried out a small raid, which resulted in the capture of one prisoner of IR63. While in the centre, the AEF conducted a series of offensive patrols in the vicinity of MUNICH TRENCH and the WUNDERWURK (I. 14. b. d. & I. 15. a. c.). Patrols were also conducted on the right by the French, and a number of small but fierce engagements took place.

At 10:30PM the enemy attempted a raid opposite the BEF, which was repelled with some loss and resulted in the capture of five prisoners.

20/4. At 11:20AM the enemy attempted a daylight raid on the BEF contingent in the same location as that of the previous evening. Although showing great dash and courage, this assault was bloodily repulsed.

During the early part of the afternoon, Pvt. Gonzales of 67th Co. 5th Batt. USMC, captured a German document while on patrol. On examination at HQ, it was discovered to be an operational order for an enemy raid on the right of the battalion line at the junction on the AEF, and French contingents. Preparations were immediately made to strengthen this position and this assault was also repulsed.

At 1:00 PM a small raid was carried out by the AEF contingent opposite the enemy line at I. 14. b. d. & I. 15. a. c. Despite great dash and extreme gallantry, this operation was unfortunately barren of any results, the attackers suffering 70% casualties.

The "Wunderwurk" Reconnaissance Raid*

At 3:50PM the preliminary bombardment of trench mortars, and rifle bombs, commenced on the enemy position at

* See Appendix 1.

I. a. b. 26. 27. Ten minutes later, the AEF contingent (Lt. J. Kidd), crossed no man's land and entered the German line. Although the enemy was caught by surprise, immediate counterattacks were launched, and a savage trench battle ensued with rifle and bomb. Within ten minutes, however, the objective was secured, and no man's land was crossed by the mapping section RE's who proceeded on arrival, to survey the new enemy works. On completion of the survey, a unhindered withdrawal was made back to our line at CAL-ABASH TRENCH.

The results of this operation were, fourteen prisoners from IR63, IR111, and IR459, documents, helmets, rifles, auto-

matics, and miscellaneous equipment. In addition to this, a current survey of the new enemy position has allowed for the update of all sector maps (see Appendix 2, report from Lt. J. Kidd).

During this raid, successful diversionary operations were carried out on the right and left by the French and BEF contingents of the brigade.

Lt. Jensen of 151 RI, Lt. Poplavsky, of Legion Russe, and Lt. Rall 1st RWF, all carried out their tasks with great ability.

The only other event of record occurred at approximately 6:15PM, when the enemy launched a raid on our right. Despite entering the front and support lines, and inflicting some loss on the French and AEF contingents, this incursion was stopped with BEF assistance, and driven from our line with severe loss.

Relief by the 66th regiment was complete by 10:00PM, the battalion reaching billets at Blairmont by 2:00AM.

General Comments

The activity in the Neuville-Pronville sector showed a marked increase during this tour. Casualties were heavy, despite the fact that this sector has been judged as being "mildly active" by the standards of other portions of our front.

Cooperation between the "national companies" continues to improve. The spirit of mutual support and understanding, has been an important element in eradicating the difficulties so often encountered in this coalition war.

The success of daylight raids tend to vary, as much depends on preliminary preparation, bombardment, and timing. Diversions are of great assistance to these operations as the enemy is often misled as to the actual frontage of the assault.

The total number of prisoners captured by the battalion during this tour of the frontline was 42. Sixteen men were reported missing when returns provided by the national company OC's were examined. These men are believed to have been made prisoner.



Photos courtesy of Bob Brown, 5th Batt AIF





In contravention of General Order no. 4, article 8, an unauthorized parley with the enemy took place on April 20th in the BEF sub-sector. This matter is being investigated.

According to captured documents, the enemy opposite the battalion are "Abt. z.b.V. Neuville", under Rtm. Thielmann. The composition of this force is elements of IR63, IR92, IR111, IR121, IR459, 5th Sturm Battalion, with the standard support elements.

IR459 has been identified in occupation of MUNICH TRENCH and the WUNDERWERK at I. 14. b. d. & I.15. a. c.

All ranks of the 1st Composite Battalion are to be commended for their dedication and fortitude in very trying circumstances.

Sgnd. Capt. M. S. Lowe
South Lancashire Regt.
cmmdg. 1st Composite Battalion
24/4/18

APPENDIX 1

ORDERS BY CAPT. M. S. LOWE CMMDG. THE 1st COMPOSITE BATTALION FOR A RECONNAISSANCE RAID ON APRIL 20TH, 1918

- 1) **Intention.** A reconnaissance raid will be carried out by the AEF contingent on April 20th (time to be designated on Z day).
- 2) **Object.** To seize and hold enemy trenches from MUNICH TRENCH to the NEUVILLE-PRONVILLE ROAD exclusive, in order to allow survey to be conducted by RE section (see map attached).
- 3) **Strength and composition.** Main raiding party, (2) platoons from AEF contingent. Covering force, (1) platoon from 107th Infantry AEF attached BEF contingent.
- 4) **Dress.** Fatigue dress, steel helmet, gas helmet in alert position, all documents, maps, and private letters, etc., removed.
- 5) **Equipment & Arms.** Revolvers to designated men, rifles, wirecutters to designated men, automatic rifles, bombs and rifle bombs to designated specialists.
- 6) **Plan of attack.** The main raiding party will assault the enemy line from the right of FUSILIER CRATER at "A" to the ELBOW at "B" with the final objective being the vicinity of the NEUVILLE-PRONVILLE ROAD. The OC raid will need to make certain that bombing posts are established where necessary to prevent enemy counterattacks from developing on the flanks and from beyond the road. The covering force will advance only as far as the enemy parapet, where it will remain unless called upon as reinforcements for the main raiding party. A single red very light will be discharged by the OC raid when the position is secure. Following this, the RE survey section will begin to examine the enemy works. After it has been determined that all possible reconnaissance has been done by the RE survey section, the OC raid will signal the withdrawal by the discharge of (2) red very lights.
- 7) **Rifle grenades & trench mortars.** Arrangements will be made by AEF OC raid to engage the necessary targets.
- 8) **Meteorological conditions.** Sunrise at 5:25AM. Sunset at 6:54PM. The moon will be in the first quarter.
- 9) **Information.** Air photograph examination has discerned new trench works at I.14.b.d. & I.15. a.. c. This raid will allow for the close examination and survey of the new enemy line, dugouts, mine works and MG & TM positions by the RE survey section. It is believed that elements of IR124 & IR459 will be in possession of the area to be raided.
- 10) **General Instructions.** All prisoners and captured documents, etc. will be collected by the AEF OC raid and sent on to HQ. at GUNGA DEN dugout at I. 11. c. 25.26 following the raid. Advanced HQ. of DO raid will be located in OP at I. 8. a. 1. 2. in CALABASH TRENCH.
- 11) **Command Structure.** Directing Officer – Capt. M. S. Lowe



APPENDIX 2

To: Capt M. S. Lowe, South Lancashire Regt.
OC 1st Composite Battalion

Sir,

I wish to report the following actions of the AEF forces under your command on 19-20 April, 1918:

We proceeded into the front lines on the evening of 19 April, relieving elements of the French 370th battalion. We immediately made contact with the units on my right and left, the 107th US Infantry (attached to the BEF) and elements of the Russian Legion (attached to the French 151st Infantry), respectively.

Intelligence reports indicated that the Germans had been doing heavy digging in the area opposite our position in the week prior to our arrival. We undertook aggressive probing of



the suspected area to determine if this digging was for new fortifications, or possibly the digging of a mine. The results of our patrols yielded little information. From prisoners taken there, we learned that the German units in our

front consisted of IR459 and IR92 of the Imperial German Army. Prisoners taken by a Marine detachment attached to my company (67th Co, 5th Marines) indicated that the units opposite my right front included the 20th MG. No mining tunnels were found. The German construction seemed to be incomplete, and his front was not heavily wired. My losses for that evening were 3 men wounded and two missing.

The morning hours of 20 April were quiet. The enemy made several probing attacks off to the left and right of my sector. We sent reserve squads to support the BEF sector when the enemy there gained lodgment, but no serious fighting resulted.

At noon we received orders to assault a large earthen mound directly opposite our center. It appeared to be used as an observation post, and intelligence deemed it was lightly held. A heavy mortar and rifle grenade barrage was to precede our assault, silencing the heavy weapons positions that would threaten our flanks during the advance. Elements of the 107th Infantry would be attached to my company for the assault.

The barrage commenced at 13 hours, hitting the known machine gun position on either side of the valley. We stepped off briskly 10 minute later, formed skirmish lines and moved forward. The effectiveness of the barrage seemed quite complete as we were little troubled by enemy fire for much of the advance. However, within 75 yards of the objective we were met with a ruinous fire from the mound itself, both MG and rifle fire, and well as fire from our flanks. Intelligence reports about the weak defenses there were off the mark and we sustained heavy casualties, nearly 70 percent of the attacking force, killed, wounded or missing. The surviving elements withdrew under heavy fire. The body of one of my officers was returned under a flag of truce.

We consolidated our position with what troops remained, including elements of the following regiments: 28th, 102nd, 109th and 116th Infantry and elements of the 33rd Div, as well as the aforementioned Marines. The sole survivor of 49th Co, USMC was attached to Company HQ. My total strength at that point was two platoons and attached mortar teams.

We soon received orders from Allied HQ that the newly dug areas patrolled the night before needed more exploration and that a raid in support of Royal Engineers mapping parties would



be undertaken at 15 hours. It was felt that the AEF troops had the best knowledge of the approaches to this area and should be used for the assault.

A short mortar bombardment would precede the raid. This bombardment would be made more effective with the knowledge of the defenses learned at such cost hours earlier.

Rifle grenadiers from the 2nd platoon (whose effectiveness provoked serious complaints from German prisoners) added to the weight of this bombardment.

In this action, we impressed upon the units on my right (the Russians and 151st French) to support our flanks by attacking the MG positions on the right should of the valley. My first platoon, led by Sgt Monday of the 33rd ID was to take and hold the mound at the base of the Valley. Troops of the 107th US were again placed under my direction, led by Sgt Torkos. These troops would lead the assault, breaching the enemy line, followed by my 2nd Platoon, led by Sgt Crane of the 102nd. This



platoon, consisting of troops from the 102nd & 109th Regiments would then press into the enemy trenches expand our toehold and allowing the RE's to proceed with mapping.

The operation started without a hitch. The bombardment was effective enough to allow the lead elements to gain a penetration, which was exploited by 2nd platoon. After some close fighting, including the taking of several MG positions and 2 prisoners, 2nd platoon succeeded in consolidating the area and setting the necessary defenses in case of counter attack. The work by the Russians, French and 1st Platoon on the right were likewise effective. German troops were observed massing to counter our assault, and our supply of grenades was at that point limited. Yet the enemy did not press us immediately. The REs had estimated that they would need 45 minutes to 1 hour of mapping time, but needed considerably less, as it turned out. This was not apparent to the holding force, as the retirement signal from the RE's was not at the time or of the type expected. Consequently, the AEF forces held the position for some 20 minutes longer than necessary.

Also at this point, the mortar fire, which had supported our advance, began to fall upon us in the enemy lines. I sent a runner back to cease this fire and ascertain if the REs were in fact done. Upon learning that the mapping was indeed complete, we began our withdrawal, retiring from one defensive position to the next. The Germans were not aggressive in pursuit. Losses in the main

raiding party were light, 8 killed, 16 wounded. We estimated that German losses were 30 men killed, and 2 captured. All the REs returned safely, I believe.

We stood to through the remainder of the afternoon, with little action.

At 17 hours 30 minutes, the 107th US, on my left was withdrawn (reportedly upon orders from Field Marshal Haig), for ceremonial purposes and not replaced. My force at this point consisted only of men of the 109th and 28th regiments, and a few men from the 102nd. Also present were mortarmen of the 116th and my HQ section. This skeletal force was notable, for at approximately 19 hours, a heavy German assault was directed at my position, while another force struck the French sector. The men of the 28th regiment were drawn into the fighting in the French sector, while the 109th US and the remainder of the 102nd were overwhelmed by German infantry five times their number. The survivors fought the Germans trench to trench, containing their advance, when German reinforcements came through the French sector, collapsing their defense. I encountered Lt. Rall, BEF, who brought up reinforcements to contain the attack at the edge of the BEF sector, while French and Russian troops bottled up the Germans on the right. The remainder of the US troops began to hunt down the Hun trapped in our lines. All of the Boche that entered our lines were killed or captured. Notable in this final phase of this assault were the men of the AEF mortar and HQ sections who stood off the raiding Germans with pistol and grenade. Also adding to this last ditch defense was your orderly, Kuntz, I believe his name was.

The remainder of the evening saw little concerted action, though raiding on our part was heavy. We revisited many of the positions taken earlier in the day, causing much damage to the Hun. Few prisoners were taken for my remaining men had little pity left to give quarter.

We were relieved at 22 hours by troops from the 118th US Infantry and proceeded to reserve billets.

I wish to note in my report Sgt Munday who ably led my first platoon after the mysterious disappearance of Lt. Connor; Sgt Crane, whose 2nd Platoon was the hammer of my operations; his section Sgts Werner and Jordan; and Sgt Johnson, whose Marines kept finding prisoners. I also wish to commend my chief runner Pvt. Laplander, who took it upon himself to keep me from getting into trouble. I also wish to

express my pleasure with the new mortar rounds used by the 116th's mortar section, which now have tremendous range.

I wish to thank Lt. Poplavsky, RL & Lt. Jensen, 151st FR; and Sgt Torkos 107th US for the able assistance rendered during my operations.

Respectfully,

Lt. James Kidd, 109th Infantry AEF
Officer Commanding, AEF sub-sector
Neuville-Pronville sector.





I.R. 111 in the Meuse-Argonne Campaign

by Randy Gaulke

Introduction: The regimental history of I.R. 111 provides a highly detailed account of the Baden regiment's experience fighting the American Army in late 1918. It could serve as the basis of a late-war scenario at our reenactment site.

The exact strength of the regiment at the beginning of the American Meuse-Argonne Offensive is unknown. However, the regimental history indicates that the regiment was reorganized into only two Bataillone in early September 1918 due to the lack of leaders and troops. In mid September the regiment was reenforced, adding approximately 100 officers and 400 men, and on 20-21 September the regiment was transported to Kurzel an der Neid, about 12 km. southeast of Metz, where it formed part of the O.H.L. Reserve for Gruppe Metz.

Before describing the action, a brief discussion of the topography of the Meuse-Argonne sector is necessary. "The geography of the Meuse-Argonne sector, about eighteen miles east-west, is ideal for defense, deadly for the attacker. It is apparent that the area is divided by three dominating features: the heights of the Meuse along the east bank of the un-fordable Meuse River, the hills of Montfaucon in the center, with approaches from east and west, and the rising terrain of the heavily wooded Argonne Forest, a plateau in the west of the zone. Moving back east from the Argonne Forest, the valley between the Argonne and Montfaucon is drained by the Aire River, fordable in a few places. The valley is narrow, dominated by the buttes of Vauquois and Montfaucon, and dissected farther north into a maze of ridges and valleys connecting with the Barrois Plateau. The valley east of Montfaucon is intersected by the east-west parallel ridges and ravines running east to the river." (Braim p. 74.)

The Initial Phase

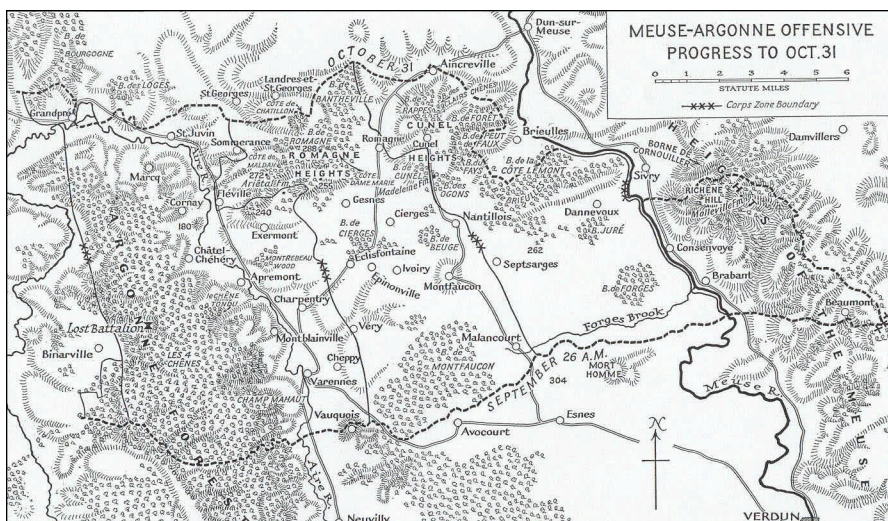
The Americans attacked with 13 divisions (each roughly twice the size of a European division) in the Meuse-Argonne on 26 September. This was followed by an English assault (40 divisions and an American Army Corps) on 27 September in the Cambrai-St. Quentin sector and by Belgian (8 divisions), English 2nd Army (5 divisions) and French (3 divisions and 7 cavalry divisions) units on 28 September in Flanders.

Following the initial American assault, the regiment and other reinforcements were transported from the Metz area via train to St. Juvin, about 5km East of Grandpre. They then marched to the Lichtenauer-Lager (Lichtenauer Camp) located in the hollows north of Fleville, arriving on 28 September. At 1100 hours on 29 September the regiment received orders for an immediate counter attack. The 3. G.R.z.F. (Garde Regiment on Foot), part of 5. G.I.D. (the 5th Guard Infantry Division) had retreated about 1km north, giving up the Gottberg-Mulde (Gottberg Ravine), Exermont and the heights east of Exermont to the 35th Infantry Division, AEF.

Exermont is a tiny village about three kilometers east of the Aire River and situated right in the "maze of ridges and valleys connecting with the Barrois Plateau." The village is flanked on the south and north by two large, wooded hills: Montrebeau, to the South, rises to a height of 220 meters above sea—80 meters above the ravine's floor. Montrafagne, to the north, rises to a height of 225 meters above sea level—85 meters above the ravine's floor. Both hills are capped by woods, appropriately named the Bois de Montrebeau and the Bois de Montrefagne. Other distinguishing features that favored the defender include the steep terraced sides of the ravine as well as the small stream that flows through it.

The regiment counterattacked late that morning with no artillery preparation. The regimental history described the combat as fierce, with considerable hand-to-hand combat using grenades, rifles and spades. By 1500 hours the front line troops had advanced southward to the Bois de Montrebeau. Regimental casualties for 29 September were listed as 78 total; 51 officers and men killed; 13 officers and men wounded, and 14 men missing.

However, Montrebeau was lost during the night, so the regiment was ordered to take it again on 30 September. The



regiment succeeded, but not before experience airplane-directed artillery fire and tank attacks on a neighbor unit. Regimental casualties for 30 September were listed as 101 total; 22 killed, 74 wounded, and 5 missing.

The period from 1-3 October was very quiet. Regimental casualties on 1 October were listed as 11 total; 4 killed and 7 wounded. The troops in the front lines also received their first warm meals on 1 October, and the line was reorganized. The 3. G.R.z.F. (on the left) was replaced, with I.R. 170 and the Regiment Elizabeth (on the right) was replaced with I.R. 169—bringing the 56th Infantry Brigade (I.R. 111, I.R. 169 and I.R. 170) together again. The regiment's commanding officer, Oberstlt. (Lt. Col.) aus'm Weerth, also returned from leave to take command of the regiment. Major Wulff was temporarily placed in command of I.R. 169. The division's sector was shortened on the right flank. Control of



Montrebeau was given to a mixed Bataillon consisting of a bicyclist company, a Landsturmkompanie, and portions of das Regiment Elizabeth. I.R. 111 moved to a new position on Montrebeau southeast of Neuve Forge Ferme.

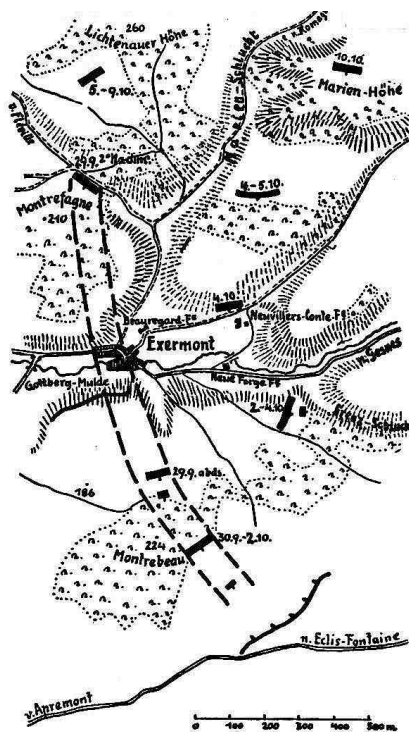
On the other side of the lines, the 35th Infantry Division, AEF was the unfortunate target of the counterattack by 52. I.D. and 5. G.I.D. The division was made up of National Guard units from Kansas and Missouri. Like most of the American divisions participating in the assault, it had only limited experience in the line. Communications and the mix-up of men between the division's various units have been well documented in books on the Meuse-Argonne Campaign, as was the trance-like state of Major General Peter Traub who wandered the battlefield without sleep for four days, going from unit to unorganized unit. From 26 September until its replacement on 1 October—only six days later—the division suffered 6,006 casualties. Given the large size of the average U.S. division—25,000 men—this represented a casualty rate that was disproportional when compared with its neighbor units, the 28th Division (4,131 casualties) and the 91st Division (4,568 casualties) for the same period. On 29 September General Pershing ordered the First Army to go on the defensive temporarily to reorganize and to bring his most experienced divisions from St. Mihiel into the line. Relief of many of the divisions that participated in the initial push of the Meuse-Argonne offensive began on 30 September, and the 1st Infantry Division, AEF relieved the 35th Infantry Division, AEF on 1 October.

But Misfortune Came Quickly

The Americans resumed the offensive at 0500 on 4 October with an artillery barrage that reached as far back as Sommerance. The 1st Infantry Division, AEF was to assist the divisions of V Corps (on its right) in capturing the Romagne Heights. The other two Divisions of I Corps, the 28th Inf. Div. and 77th Inf. Div. were to neutralize the artillery fire coming from the eastern flanks of the Argonne Forest by using smoke and heavy counter-battery fire.

Taking full advantage of the fog, the Americans succeeded in pushing into the right flank of I.R. 170 to the west of Montrebeau. They bypassed the regiment's extended flank, forcing II./111 (the regiment's 2nd battalion) to bend its right flank backwards and hold its position. Two small tanks tried to break through the 5./111 (the regiment's 5th company), but they were forced to turn back.

To the east of the regiment, the Americans broke through the Grenz-Schlucht (Border Ravine) and attacked Exermont. I./111 was thrown into confusion. 2./111 occupied the southern slope of the heights by Neuville-Conte-Ferme and



inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy in the ravine below.

Around 0900 the fog cleared and the 8./F.A.R. 104 (8th Battery of the 104th Field Artillery Regiment) to the right of I./111 now had a direct line of fire. By Neuve Forge Ferme, seven enemy tanks clamored forward. Five were destroyed by the unit, while the other two were forced to turn back by m.g. fire. The battery continued to fire until the Americans came within meters of the guns, destroying their guns before being captured.

As a result of enemy pressure I./111 could no longer hold its position, so it withdrew (fighting) to the heights 500 meters to the north. The Americans soon gave up the advance and dug in by Neuville-Conte-Ferme. However, the Americans succeeded in cutting off II./111. It was later found out that most of II./111 were captured that day.

The enemy also took the northern edge of the Gottberg-Mulde. III./111 was located behind the ravine, its ranks had already been weakened through continuous artillery fire. In spite of strong resistance, the enemy reached the base of Montrefagne by 1200 hours.

A flanking assault that the enemy led from Exermont against the right flank of III./111 was thrown back. However, by the afternoon, the out-flanking of III./111 became so dangerous that it had to withdraw to the Bois de Montrefagne.

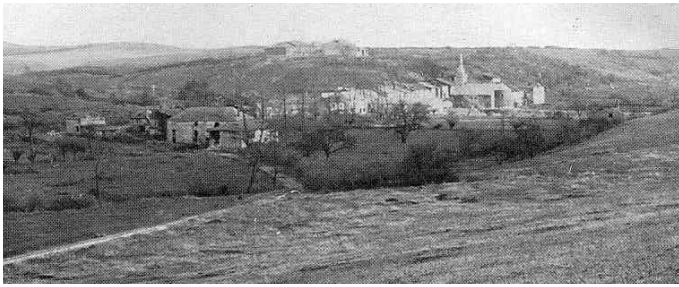
A bataillon of I.R. 150 was placed in line to secure the right flank. Montrefagne was captured by the Americans, but re-captured by I.R. 147 and I.R. 150.

The regiment's casualties for 4 October: Killed, unknown, wounded 126, missing 251.

During the night of 4-5 October, the enemy occupied the northern-most ravine (Marien-Schlucht) out of Exermont, albeit suffering heavy casualties. A minor shift in the division's troops was to be completed that night. I.R. 170 completed the shift, but I.R. 111 did not receive the order. Thus, in the morning of 5 October, there was a gap between the two regiments.

At 0530 on 5 October, an artillery barrage preceded another American assault. The morning fog was heavy, like the day before, and the enemy attacked against the gap in the lines and advanced to the heights behind the front lines. The enemy ran into the remnants of II./111, which was dug in with portions of I./111. In order to avoid encirclement, the Bataillone were ordered to withdraw to the Lichtenauer-Höhe (Lichtenauer Heights on German maps, Cote de Maldah on U.S. maps) and to dig in there. The regimental headquarters was established just 50 meters behind that line. The regiment had no reserve any more, because most of II./111 had been captured the day before.

In the thick fog, the Americans followed with hesitation. By afternoon, they established a line on the northern edge of Montrefagne, but the fog made the exact situation uncertain.



Looking East toward Exermont. Photograph taken from the Western edge of Montrebeau. Beauregard Farm is situated on the hill above Exermont.

In the evening of 5 October, the regiment had a strength of about 180 men. The *Kompanien* took up positions on the narrow (about 30 meters wide) ridge of the Lichtenauer-Höhe. The regimental headquarters was located on the reverse slope, only 30 meters behind. The Americans were only 150-200 meters away, and the neighboring German unit on the right had been pushed back further yet. Regimental losses for 5 October were 136 total; 3 dead, 47 wounded, 86 missing.

On 5-6 October, the regiment's combat strength was increased with the addition of 300 reserves. However, the combat value of the troops was almost zero. The old-timers had been in position or in combat since July with very little rest, while the new replacements had never, or almost never, been under fire.

Since 30 September 52. I.D. and 56 I.Br. moved their headquarters back several times, beyond St. George. Furthermore, enemy artillery made communications between the regiment and higher echelons much more difficult. On 5 October, the regiment's commander moved his command post to the Ludwigs-Höhe, about 3km behind the Lichtenauer-Höhe. While he explained that he was almost captured three times in Flanders, his superiors ordered him to move back to his prior post. The regimental command post was already under heavy artillery fire, and orders could be sent only with considerable danger to the runners. The heavy fire continued for the next few days, forcing the CP to change locations three times because of damage to the dugouts.

On 6 October, the enemy made small limited assaults on the Lichtenauer-Höhe, but these were repulsed. The heights were guarded by a mixed group of troops from I.R. 111, 147, 150, 170 and 169. The command to re-order the units arrived at 0500 on 6 October, but it could not be fulfilled due to day-break, so the units remained mixed.

6 and 7 October were relatively quiet on this portion of the line. 41. I.D. was supposed to lead a counter-attack the next morning (8 Oct.) to relieve the division. Advance troops from I.R. 18 arrived on the evening of 7 October, but the counter attack was pushed back to 9 October initially, and finally cancelled.

On the morning of 9 October, the regiment was supposed to fill a hole between I.R. 170 and I.R. 169. The advanced troops went into position the evening of 8 October. In the early dawn, the regiment relieved Pi. Komp. 103 and 104 between I.R. 170 and I.R. 169. However, the regiment was unable to establish contact with its neighbor on the right. At 0830 the relief was still underway when enemy artillery fire began. At 1030 hours the Americans attacked the western edge of the Lichtenauer-Höhe and in the Marien-Schlucht. A half hour later, the artillery fire reached its crescendo, and every connection of the regimental command post to the rear and to its Bataillone was cut off.

Under the protection of heavy fog, the enemy pushed through the Marien-Schlucht between I.R. 111 and I.R. 170, attacking III./111 from the rear. The machine-guns assigned to protect the ravine barely had any effect because of the fog. The Reservekompanie (number unknown) counter-attacked immediately and managed to bring the enemy to a standstill until the reduced ranks of the forward *Kompanien* could free themselves from encirclement. The front line troops fell back and attached themselves to their left neighbor, I.R. 169. Through all of this, the regimental CP received no reports from the bataillone or from their headquarters. In the meantime, the artillery fire had developed into a heavy barrage directed at the Lichtenauer-Höhe, the connecting ravines, and the streets and paths as far back as one could see.

A Feldwebel-Leutnant from I.R. 150 burst into the regiment's dugout and announced that the Americans broke through between I.R. 150 and I.R. 147. He requested an immediate counter attack, but this was not possible, as the Regimental commander had no men to spare—except for his staff of 16. In consideration of the report and rising danger, he ordered the command post to relocate. However, shells were exploding so close together and so fast outside that the commander and his staff returned to his dugout.

Thus, Oberstl. Aus'm Weerth remained trapped in his dugout with his staff. Out of this hole in the ground, he could observe

the American infantry advance and their machineguns firing on the retreating Germans. He could not be seen because his dugout was hidden in thick growth, and the narrow path through the growth was not easily visible. Oberstlt. Aus'm Weerth hoped that a counter-attack would arrive by the morning of 10 October. However, at 0900 hours that day, American troops marched past the dugout, and he and his staff were discovered. After 4 years of war-time service and 33 years of service as an officer, he was captured. What was left of the regiment continued to fight in the Meuse-Argonne.

Acknowledgments

The description of the Meuse-Argonne is from *The Test of Battle: The American Expeditionary Forces in the Meuse-Argonne Campaign* by Paul Braim. 1998. White Mane Books, Shippensburg, PA.



This well-known photo was taken during the fighting for Exermont.

☐ Check this box if you have changed your address since the last event

Print first letter of your last name in this box

☐ Check this box if you are a unit commander

**GWA Membership Update and Registration Form for the
Fall Living History and Tactical Event
at the
Caesar Krauss Great War Memorial Site, Newville, PA, November 1–3, 2002**

Part I — Member Information — Please Print Legibly

Last Name: _____ First Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Postal Code: _____

Country: _____ Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Unit Commander: _____

Emergency Contact: _____

I certify that I am 18 years of age or older _____
(sign here)

Part II — Unit Affiliation

This box must be filled out, using the units and abbreviations on the back of this form. If you do not belong to one of these units, you are an independent.

Part III — Dues and Event Fees

A. 2002 dues if you have not already paid this year **\$25.00**
(Annual dues are due at the spring event each year)

B. Fall 2002 event fee if pre-registered **\$25.00**

C. Optional site development donation \$

D. Pre-registration subtotal (A+B+C as applicable) \$

E. Gate registration penalty **\$15.00**

F. Gate registration total (D+E) \$

All pre-registrations should be received by the Treasurer on or before October 28, 2002. If your pre-registration is not received by that date, you must pay at the event. Your original pre-registration, if received in the mail, will be returned unopened.

Pre-registration: Members are encouraged to pre-register to save the gate penalty. If you pre-register but are unable to attend the event, your event fee (only) will be returned within two weeks after the event.

Send form and check to: **Randy Gaulke, GWA Treasurer**
584 Valley Road

Gillette, NJ 07933 Phone: (908) 626-1345 E-mail: lavarennnes@rcn.com

Be sure to cast your vote. See the GWA plebiscite ballot on the back of this form.

GWA Plebiscite Ballot

(See President's Letter on Page 1 for an explanation.)

Indicate your preferences in response to the following questions:

Question 1. Shall the Spring 2003 Combat Event be held the week-end before Easter (April 11–13) or the weekend after Easter (April 25–27)?

- ☐ **The weekend before Easter**
☐ **The weekend after Easter**
☐ **No preference**

Question 2. Shall the GWA Executive Committee continue to allow outside guests to use the Newville site?

- ☐ **Yes**
☐ **No**

You may mail this ballot form to the Treasurer even if you are not registering for the fall event, but fill in your name and unit affiliation on the other side to validate your vote.

GWA Unit List (use abbreviations only when filling out registration form)

American Units

1AEF 1st Div., 28th Inf. Co. E., AEF
26AEF 26th Div. (Yankee Div.), AEF
27AEF 27th Div., AEF
L109AEF 28 Div., 109th Inf. Co. L., AEF
M109AEF 28th Div., 109th Inf. Co. M., AEF
BTTYC 28th Div., 107th Field Arty. Btty. C (probationary)
116AEF 29th Div., 116th Inf., Hdqtrs. Co., AEF
30AEF 30th Div., AEF
33AEF 33rd Div. (Prairie Div.), AEF
80AEF 80th ID, AEF (probationary)
372AEF 93rd Div., 372nd Inf, AEF
49CO 5th Marines, 49th Co., AEF
67CO 5th Marines, 67th Co., AEF

British Units

6BWBEF 6th Btn., Black Watch, BEF
7RIR 7th Royal Irish Rifles, BEF
BRBEF The Border Regiment, BEF (probationary)
BUFF 6th Buffs Rgt., BEF
IRISHGD Irish Guards No. 3 Co., 1st Btn.
MGCBEF Machine Gun Corps, BEF
ROYENG Royal Engineers
RWF Royal Welsh Fusiliers (probationary)

Commonwealth Units

5AIF 5th Btn. Australia/New Zealand Army Corps
27CEF 27th Btn., CEF
PPCLI Princess Pat's Canadian Light Infantry

French Units

8BCP 8 Btn. Chasseurs a Pied (probationary)
151RL 151er Regiment d'Infanterie

Russian Units

RL Legion Russe

Austrian Units

63KUK 63rd KuK

German Units

23JR J.R. 23 (2. Oberschlesisches)
63JR J.R. 63 (4. Oberschlesisches)
92JR J.R. 92 (1. Braunschweigisches)
111JR J.R. 111 (3. Badisches)
120JR J.R. 120 (2. Württembergisches)
124JR J.R. 124 (Württembergisches) (probationary)
459JR J.R. 459 (Rhein. Westf.) (probationary)
8KUR 3. Feldesk., Kürassier Regt. Nr 8 (probationary)
1LR Königliche Bayerische Leib Regiment
23/12 12. Minenwerfer Komp. 12 Inf. Div., J.R. 23
20MG 20. MG Scharfschützen Komp.
5SP 5. Sturm-Pionier Battalion (Rohr)

Non-Military

DRK Deutsches Rotes Kreuz
INDP Independent (non-combat only)
SA Salvation Army

Great War Association
584 Valley Road
Gillette, NJ 07933

