

OPERATIONS  
IN THE  
MORT HOMME SECTOR

**SITUATION:**


On the morning of the 10th September, 1918, the 66th Infantry Brigade took over the lines occupied by the 120th (French) Division in the MORT HOMME Sector. Opposite to us the enemy were strongly entrenched, having a swamp, the FORGES Stream, and heavily fortified heights as added protection.

From the 10th to the 25th September, we were engaged in strengthening and preparing our positions for attack, and in patrolling the enemy front line.

The plan of the attack was prepared and submitted by the Brigade Commander to the Division and was approved—as follows:

The 131st Infantry Regiment and the 132nd Infantry Regiment were to attack side by side—each providing its own reserves and supported by two Battalions of Machine Guns.

The 108th Engineers were to provide and construct bridges over the FORGES Stream and enough duck boards and fascines to enable the troops to cross the swamp. The Brigade Commander decided not to make crossings at or near the town of FORGES, but to go farther up stream where the depth of the stream and the intervening marsh land made the crossing more difficult, but where the enemy would least expect an attack. This maneuver turned out to be entirely successful and made it possible to capture FORGES and a large section of the strongest enemy works from the rear, also an added advantage gained by these plans made it possible to take many of the enemy's works on the flank.



Shortly before the attack, the 131st and 132nd Regiments were placed in line. Enough material was brought into the forward trenches to construct four bridges, each 200 yards in length.

On the night before the morning of the attack, the extremely difficult operation of cutting lanes through the barbed wire which in many places exceeded 200 yards in width was accomplished and the lanes taped.

Our troops assembled in position at H minus 2 hours without confusion. The night was very quiet, and, as there was a full moon, we expected to have difficulty in making our final preparations without being observed, but, as the moon rose, a heavy ground mist gathered which gave us excellent cover, and undoubtedly saved us many lives.

**THE ATTACK:** Orders for the attack (Bde. F.O. #16) proved for the forming up North of FORGES Creek, and immediately South of BÉTHINCOURT-FORGES road, extending from a point about 1 Kilometer east of BÉTHINCOURT to a point approximately 2½ kilometers further east. The West boundary of the zone of action for the Brigade was laid slightly west of north from pt. 86.68 to the South edge of JURÉ Woods, N.E.,—then East to the MEUSE river where troops were to dig in and hold the front facing East. The west boundary was along the West bank of the Meuse. The unit on the left was the 80th Division—this unit was not in position when the attack began at H hour, (5:30 A.M.) September 26th, 1918, and no connection with them could be established until some time after our objective was reached.

The failure of this Division to support our left flank necessitated the putting in of the support battalion of the 131st Infantry to clean up a portion of the sector assigned to the 80th Division, also for the protection of the flank which was exposed during the entire movement.

The Artillery barrage which preceded the troops of the 131st Infantry was laid down by the 212th (French) Artillery and was perfect in its plan and execution.

A smoke screen was laid ahead of the jumping off position by a detachment of the First Gas Regiment (U.S.) which was very effective.

The Battalion of the 108th Engineers (U.S.), which preceded the Infantry in order to lay the bridges, remained to hold and repair them while the troops passed over. They performed their work in a most commendable manner. Some of their units accompanied the troops in the attack and fought as Infantry.


The advance to the river and the crossing of same was made very rapidly and with very few casualties, although under heavy Machine Gun Fire. This was owing to the fact that the enemy fire proved too high.

Under the protection of a standing barrage lasting 20 minutes, our lines quickly reformed on the opposite side of the river, using the FORGES-BÉTHINCOURT road as a guide.

The order for the advance was given as the rolling barrage started, and the troops marched forward in an orderly manner. About 200 yards beyond the jumping off line, a vast amount of wire was found, and from that point onward resistance was encountered in many places, such as heavy machine gun fire from the slopes and in the edge of woods.

Many well-organized Machine Gun nests were encountered and subdued—several enemy field pieces which were firing at point blank range were surrounded and captured. Enemy planes flew over our advancing troops firing upon them with Machine Guns and causing casualties. Snipers were in evidence in many places—some operating from positions in trees. These difficulties were successfully overcome and the advance continued according to schedule.

The 131st Regiment advancing in a northerly direction on a front of about 2 kilometers passed and mopped up the following trenches: CERVAUX, BESACE, BILLEMONT, LENIME, and BERNY, and flank trenches nearly a kilometer in extent along the edge of JURÉ woods, also the towns of DRILLANCOURT and GERCOURT, besides innumerable strong points, all covered by wide bands of wire entanglements. They reached their objective—the MEUSE river—exactly on schedule time at 10:10 A.M., having advanced to a depth of about 7 kilometers.



The 132nd Regiment also on a front of about 2 kilometers attacked the enemy positions in front of and in the Bois de FORGES from the South West, and, making a turning movement to the east while in the woods, using the roads in the center of the woods as a guide and a dividing line between Battalions, came out at their objective—the West bank of the MEUSE—exactly as planned in the orders of the Brigade—at 10:00 A.M. This maneuver struck the enemy's works on the flank and rear, took them entirely by surprise and also was responsible for the few casualties inflicted upon the troops. The heavy fog continued throughout the

morning and materially assisted us in gaining the edge of the FORGES wood. The right flank of the 132nd Regiment followed the dirt road  $1\frac{1}{2}$  kilometer West of FORGES, and the left touched the N.W. edge of the woods, the line swinging to the east. Several convenient cross-roads at right angles to the direction of advance enabled the attacking Battalions to reform and keep liaison throughout the whole advance in the woods. It was on the S.W. edge of the FORGES woods that the most concentrated opposition was found in the shape of Machine Gun nests. This machine Gun system was echeloned in depth in 5 lines of nests. This was flanked and bombed into submission. The right company of the first Battalion (on the right) had the special mission upon reaching DIOGENES trench, of swinging to the right, and cleaning up the trenches and the strong points in the direction of the town of FORGES and the town itself. They brushed aside opposition, captured FORGES and reached their objective in time to establish liaison with the balance of their battalion, as it also reached its objective. The distance covered by the 132nd Regiment was 5 kilometers and the work of organizing the line for defense was rapidly accomplished.

The Machine Gun Companies accompanying the Battalions gave splendid assistance while the line was being organized, silencing harrassing fire which came from both banks of the MEUSE.

The 37 mm and Trench Mortar Section took up defensive positions.

As planned in the Brigade order, (see F.O. #16), the Machine Gun barrage was executed by Companies C. and D of the 124th M.G. Bn. from 2nd Company B plus one platoon of Company A of the 122 M.G.Bn. from H hour to H plus one hour and was extremely effective. It was an ideal example of the use of the Machine Guns for firing over the heads of attacking Infantry.

These Machine Guns were located in the Outposts zone of the MORT HOMME Sector, along the ridge (Côte de l'Oie) overlooking FORGES Creek, from the South.

During the entire battle our plans of liaison worked perfectly. At all times there was telephone communication with each Battalion in the attack and the Brigade Commander was kept constantly informed of the progress of the troops.

This entire engagement was particularly interesting because of the fact that it was an action planned and executed by a Brigade as a unit. It was entirely successful, owing, first to the courage and dash of our splendid troops and second because the plans had been carefully worked out and studied by all concerned and during the action these plans were followed with marvellous exactness.

**THE FOLLOWING ENEMY UNITS WERE ENGAGED:**

115th R. I. R.

72nd R. I. R.

Miscellaneous detachments of signalmen, Minnenwerfers and others.

**PRISONERS.** — Approximately 1400 prisoners including officers and men were captured. Many prisoners were turned over to other organizations as stretcher bearers, etc., and many were sent back for whom details failed to take receipts.

**CASUALTIES** — Two officers and 34 o.r. killed.

Two Officers and 203 o.r. wounded.

**CAPTURED GUNS AND MATERIAL:**

- 7 6" Howitzers.
- 2 105 mm guns.
- 18 77 mm guns.
- 5 Anti-tank guns.
- 161 Heavy and light Machine Guns.  
(26 were turned over to the 318th Inf.)
- 10 Trench Mortars.

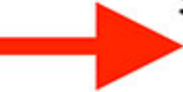
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- 1 Red Cross Ambulance
  - 22 60 cm. R. R. cars.
  - 14 60 cm. 4 wheel flat trucks.
  - 5 60 cm. gravel trucks.
  - 5 60 cm. small box cars.
  - 2 60 cm. large box cars.

Also 2 large Engineer Dumps and several other dumps containing enormous supplies of all kinds.

WOLF  
Brigadier General.

P. C. PLATTE. A.E.F.

September, 1918.

- (b). **ZONE OF ACTION:**  
 Boundaries: (See Map attached).  
 Objectives: (See Map attached).
3. (a) This Brigade will attack with two Regiments, side by side, in the front line. Each Regiment will attack with two Battalions, plus two M.G.Cos. in first line and one Battalion in second line at 500 yards distance. Bns. to take formation as described in Bulletin #160a. "Battalion in Assault". i.e. 2 Cos. in front line and 2 Cos. in Reserve. Distances to be gained during the advance.
- (b) The 131st Regt., on the left, plus Co. B, 124th M.G.Bn. will attack so as to reach quickly the open ground East and North of GERCOURT and DRILLANCOURT, and Trench du Bois JURÉ, so as to assist the 132nd Regiment in the reduction of the Bois de FORGES. Rate of march for the 131st Regt.: 100 meters in 4 minutes.
- MISSION OF 131ST REGT:**  
 Organize West bank of MEUSE for defense, from DANNEVOUX (excl.) to 0993 (Incl)
- (c) The 132nd Regt. on the right, plus Co. A, 124th M.G.Bn. will attack and clean up the Bois de FORGES to the MEUSE River. Rate of march for the 132nd Regt: 100 meters in 5 minutes.
-  **MISSION OF 132ND REGT:**  
 Organize West Bank of MEUSE for defense, from 0993 (excl.) to FORGES (incl.)
- NOTE:** All units will be in position 2 hours before "H" hour.  
 Both regiments will occupy the left bank of the MEUSE with organized strong points of combat groups of not less than one platoon each. Forming up line immediately in front of our own wire.  
 Both regiments will maintain a distance of 300 meters behind the rolling barrage. As the attack progresses, each regiment will promptly clean up its entire zone of action.
- CAUTION:** Especially in the Bois de FORGES, Troops are not to approach closer than 300 meters to the Artillery Barrage.
- (d). The 131st Regt. will maintain Combat Liaison with the 132nd Regt. during the attack.
- (e). **DIVISION RESERVES:** The 65th Inf. Brigade is to assemble at "H" plus 2 hr. within the Brigade area in the present outpost zone and in the "Position of Resistance" in the Brigade Sector and will remain at the disposition of the Division Commander.

FIELD ORDERS }  
No. 16. }

MAP REFERENCE: VERDUN "B". 1:20,000.

1. (a). "Enemy probably holds front line from the MEUSE to MALANCOURT (excl.) with one Division. Enemy's units are weak, discouraged, of poor morale, and afraid of Americans."

(b). On the left of this Bde. is  
the 80th American Div.

On the right, the 66th Regt.  
of the 2nd French Army.

Mission: Will attack in co-  
operation with this Bde.

Mission: Will probably raid  
along the right bank of the  
MEUSE. (Note: Troops must  
be cautioned not to fire in this  
direction unless fired upon).

2. (a). This Brigade will attack at "H" hour in general direction of GERCOURT and will organization [sic] the left bank of the MEUSE from FORGES (incl.) to DANNEVOUX (excl.) protecting the right flank of the general advance.

## THE 33RD DIVISION

- (f). **BRIGADE RESERVES:**  
The Brigade Reserve will be formed as follows:

Division M. G. Bn. (122nd).  
1 Co. in Trenches VAUX-SETIF.  
3 Cos. in HAUTE de la CÔTE de l'OIE.  
2nd Battalion Engineers, less 2 Cos.

## 4. DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS TO UNITS:

- (a). Artillery. (See Artillery Plan).  
(b). Machine Gun Plan. (See Annex # ).  
(c). Air Service. (See Annex # ).  
(d). Tanks. (See Annex # ).  
(e). Engineers.

The Commanding Officer of 108th Engineers will have charge of the laying of the bridges over FORGES stream and of further means of crossing for Artillery and other transport.

One Company of Engineers will accompany each Regiment in the attack under the command of the Regimental C.O.s. The Engineers will bring up to the front line trenches by the night of "D" day, the necessary material for construction of at least two bridges per Regiment across FORGES Creek.

- (f) **Gas:**  
1/2 Co. of Corps Gas Troops will report for duty to each Regimental Commander on afternoon of 23rd September.

**NOTE: for all troops:**

Troops will be equipped as follows:

Battle dress:

2 days reserve rations	per man
220 rounds S.A. Ammunition	" "
2 canteens of water	" "
2 sand bags	" "
2 hand grenades	" "

Picks and shovels in proportion of two shovels to one pick (to be obtained from the Engineers) in addition to portable intrenching tools.

Mess kit and slicker in haversack.

Heavy pack will be left under suitable guard.



5. **EVACUATION and SUPPLY:** (See Annex # ).
- (a) **CIRCULATION and PRISONERS;**  
Prisoners will be sent to Brigade P.C., FLAGEY, with all possible speed under the direction of Battalion Commanders where they will be taken over by a representative of G-2. A detachment of Military Police will be detailed for this work.
- (b) Stragglers Posts at CHATTANCOURT and MARRE under the direction of the Brigade Commander.
- (c) Division Advance Dressing Station, at P.C. ALEXANDRE.
6. **LIAISON:** (For Plan of Liaison see Annex, # ).
- (a) Axis of Liaison for Brigade,  
FLAGEY  
TAZA  
PAULINE  
Point 0769  
DRILLANCOURT  
GERCOURT.
- (b) In the Bois de FORGES, the position of front line of Infantry will be indicated by Airplanes by Very Lights as per Schedule.
- (c) P. Cs. before and during attack:  
Division: La HUTTE  
Brigade: FLAGEY  
131st Regt. RETHEL  
132nd Regt. PAULINE.  
PAUL A. WOLF.  
Brigadier General.

September, 1918.

Addendum to FIELD ORDER #16.

Memorandum:

To all concerned:

- I. (a). Commanding Officers are recommended to go over carefully the Pamphlets #160 and #160 (a), "INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE OFFENSIVE COMBAT OF SMALL UNITS".
- (b). All Officers are instructed to caution Troops not to approach Artillery Barrage closer than 300 meters while proceeding through Woods.
- (c). Attacking units are cautioned to be on the lookout for enemy mines and traps at such places as bridges and cross roads.

**ILLINOIS  
IN THE  
WORLD WAR**

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***VOLUME III***