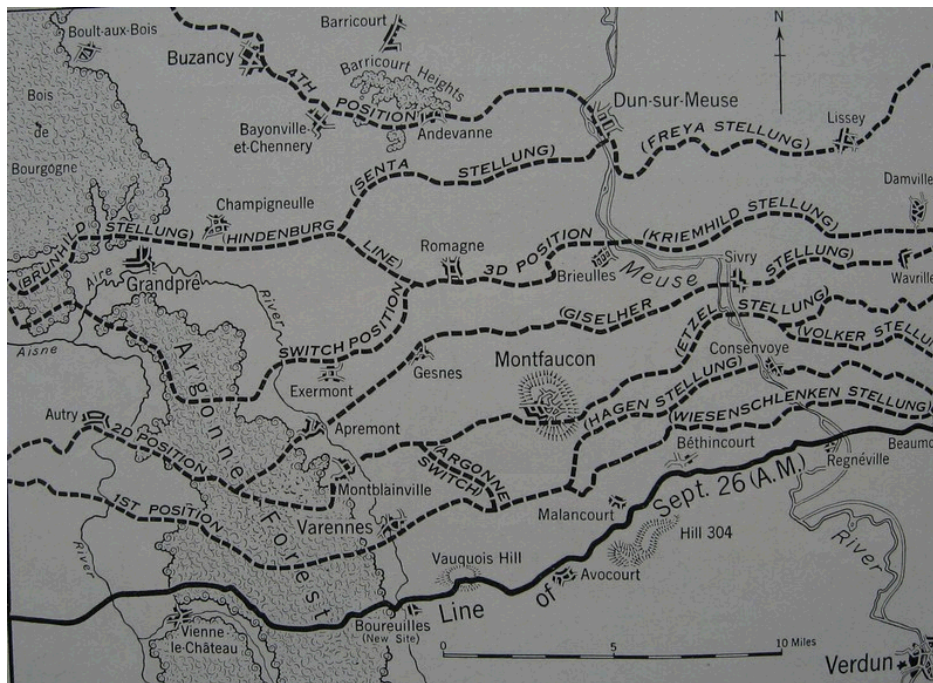


## ***Overview of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive<sup>1</sup>***

***The Meuse-Argonne Offensive was the largest battle ever fought by U.S. troops up to that time in U.S. history. Gen. Pershing chose the area between the Meuse River and the Argonne Forest for this great offensive because of its high strategic value. German communication lines and critical rail lines converged in the vicinity, and Allied commanders believed that a successful offensive in this sector would bring a quick end to the war.***

***The nature of the Meuse-Argonne terrain made it ideal for defense. On the left, the thickly- wooded and tangled Argonne Forest and the Aire River presented natural obstacles. On the right, the Meuse River and the Heights of the Meuse further east formed not only natural barriers but also gave the enemy a vantage point for observation and artillery. In between the Aire and the Meuse Rivers were a series of broken, wooded ridges like rungs on a ladder that provided excellent observation. The first was the dominating hill of Montfaucon. Behind it were the Heights of Romagne and Cunel; beyond them was Barricourt Heights. To protect this vitally important area, the enemy had established almost continuous defensive positions for a depth of 10 to 12 miles to the rear of the front lines (see map below).***



***The movement of American troops and materiel into position for the Meuse-Argonne attack was accomplished over a period of several weeks, entirely under the cover of darkness. On most of the front, French soldiers remained in the front-line***

<sup>1</sup> This introduction to the Meuse-Argonne Offensive is adapted from the American Battle Monuments Commission publication entitled "Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery and Memorial", found at [http://abmc.gov/cemeteries/cemeteries/ma\\_base.php](http://abmc.gov/cemeteries/cemeteries/ma_base.php)

*positions until the very last moment in order to keep the enemy from learning of the large American concentration. Altogether, about 220,000 Allied (mainly French) soldiers were withdrawn from the area and 600,000 American soldiers brought into position without the knowledge of the Germans, a striking tribute to the skill and abilities of logisticians in the U.S. First Army.*

*On 26 September 1918, following a three-hour bombardment with 2,700 artillery pieces, the U.S. First Army jumped off at 5:30 in the morning. On the left, I Corps penetrated the Argonne Forest and advanced along the valley of the Aire River. In the center, V Corps advanced to the west of Montfaucon but was held up temporarily in front of the hill. On the right, III Corps drove forward to the east of Montfaucon and a mile beyond. About noon the following day, Montfaucon was captured as the advance continued. Although complete surprise had been achieved, German commanders were pouring reinforcements into the area. By 30 September, the U.S. front line had been advanced as far as six miles in some places. In early October, in the face of furious German counterattacks, U.S. forces continued the relentless push northward. On 7 October, a strong flanking attack by I Corps on the left in the Aire Valley made capture of the Argonne Forest possible. The next day on the right, U.S. troops crossed the Meuse River, where severe fighting took place for possession of the heights beyond. On 9 October, V Corps began an attack in the center aided by III Corps on its right; both Corps then penetrated the Hindenburg Line. It seemed on 14 October that the Allied assault would develop into another prolonged struggle, as the enemy continued to resist stubbornly. The III and V Corps however, provided relief when they broke through the German main line of defense and seized the Heights of Cunel and Romagne. On the left, I Corps captured St. Juvin and Grandpre, enabling the French Fourth Army, which was positioned to the left of the U.S. First Army, to push forward and further threaten German flanks.*

*The final chapter of the great Meuse-Argonne offensive began at daybreak on 1 November after a two-hour concentrated artillery bombardment. Its progress exceeded all expectations: by early afternoon, the formidable German position on Barricourt Heights had been captured, ensuring success of the whole operation. That night the enemy issued orders to withdraw west of the Meuse. By 4 November, after an additional crossing of the Meuse by the U.S. First Army, the enemy was in full retreat on both sides of the river. Three days later, when the heights overlooking the city of Sedan were taken, the U.S. First Army gained domination over the German railroad communications there, ensuring early termination of the war. So perilous was the enemy position that it was compelled to seek an immediate armistice, which became effective on 11 November 1918.*

The Meuse-Argonne offensive had already been underway for nearly two weeks when, at the end of the first week of October, the 89<sup>th</sup> Division received orders to leave the St. Mihiel area and move to a staging area approximately 50 miles northwest, near the city of Verdun. This move was part of a massive redeployment of 600,000 American soldiers, materiel and artillery over three routes - which were essentially rural back-roads -

planned and directed by Col. George C. Marshall, who later would become much better known for the role he played during and after WWII.

October 8<sup>th</sup>, we pulled out, happy to leave for new fields. Verdun and the Argonne were ahead of us. We spent the night in a cluster of villages about Gironville, then moved on in French truck trains at 4 o'clock the afternoon of the 9<sup>th</sup>, passing through Commercy, Clermont and on north past Verdun, billeting October 10<sup>th</sup> in Brocourt and vicinity. (354<sup>th</sup> War Diary, pg. 230).

After living in trenches and ruined villages for the better part of two months, having engaged in low-intensity combat and a vigorous offensive, constantly under threat from long-range German artillery, Martin and the men of the 354<sup>th</sup> were eagerly anticipating some well-deserved rest and relaxation.

We heard good news; we were to have three weeks rest, Oh Boy! This seems swell. We were housed in what they called Italian Barracks, buildings of the same type as those we had in Leurville. We all figured on a bit of relief, yes we were relieved for the time being. Aside from our regular work we spent every bit of spare time cleaning up our equipment, washing our clothes, writing a letter or so, -- well, this was not bad. The first day passed we were very busy, the second day likewise, then that night we received a number of new (recruits) replacements from the 86<sup>th</sup> Division (from the states – Minnesota, Michigan, Wisconsin) some of these new men had been drafted or called into service since July 4, 1918, now here they were with us, having been in France only a few weeks. (Schoppenhorst, p. 134)

But the soldiers' hopes for a three-week break soon were dashed.

The nice weather we had for a day or two had now turned to a gloomy dreary overcast sky and toward evening it began to rain. While we were at our bunks with candle light reading or writing being glad that we were not out in this stuff tonight in the trenches, in came an orderly with orders: "to prepare to move out at seven o'clock tomorrow morning" ... This was our relief, not three weeks, but we did get three days, most of us were accustomed to such but one felt sorry for those new recruits." (Schoppenhorst, p. 135)

This mobilization order resulted from a reorganization of the AEF in which the 89<sup>th</sup> was transferred from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps to the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps, and the timetable for the 89<sup>th</sup> to return to the front lines was advanced. Many of the combat divisions that had initiated the Meuse-Argonne offensive on 26 September were badly exhausted and some already had been taken out of the line and sent to the rear for rest and refitting. The current front-line Division in the 89<sup>th</sup>'s sector was the 32<sup>nd</sup> "Red Arrow", which comprised National Guard units from Wisconsin and Michigan. The 32<sup>nd</sup> was worn out from weeks of heavy fighting and desperately needed relief: some of its battalions had been reduced to 25% of original strength. Because of poor roads and constant traffic jams, the only way for Martin and his fellow soldiers to get to the front was "by hobnails", i.e., on foot. And so,

on “Oct 13<sup>th</sup>, preceded by a group of Pioneers, the Regiment moved forward across country through mud and rain into our new area; 22 kilometers we hiked, single file through this great section of the Argonne, cutting our way through wire abandoned some days before, bridging deserted trenches, finally reaching the Bois de Very late that night” (354<sup>th</sup> War Diary, pg 231).



***“Struggling on through the Argonne” -- source: Arthur Lloyd Fletcher, History of the 113th Field Artillery 30th Division. Raleigh, N.C.: The History Committee of the 113th F.A., 1920.***

The land over which Martin’s regiment traveled was devastated: “Ere long we came across scenes along the way where fierce fighting had been taking place some time before as roadsides were shell-torn, trees demolished, fields in ruin with shell holes, buildings wrecked and burned etc.” (Schoppenhorst pg. 135). The individual company histories give an idea of the impression that this difficult hike made on the men of the 354<sup>th</sup>: Company A called it the “weary heart-breaking march”, while Company B remembered it as the “heart-breaking forced march”. Company F recalled the “memorably wretched march”, and Company I, possibly exercising some understated sarcasm, described the event as the “never-to-be-forgotten hike”. One unfortunate consequence of moving across such difficult terrain was that the supporting units such as the horse-drawn “rolling kitchens” were unable to accompany the regiment, forcing Martin and his comrades to rely on their scanty reserve rations.

The traffic jam was terrible and our kitchens were held up until the next morning, but the patience of the men endured through this hunger and intense exhaustion. Oct. 14<sup>th</sup> it was “forward again” ... past Mont Sec and up in the woods to the left of Eclis Fontaine we trudged, where we found ourselves billeting in the mud with

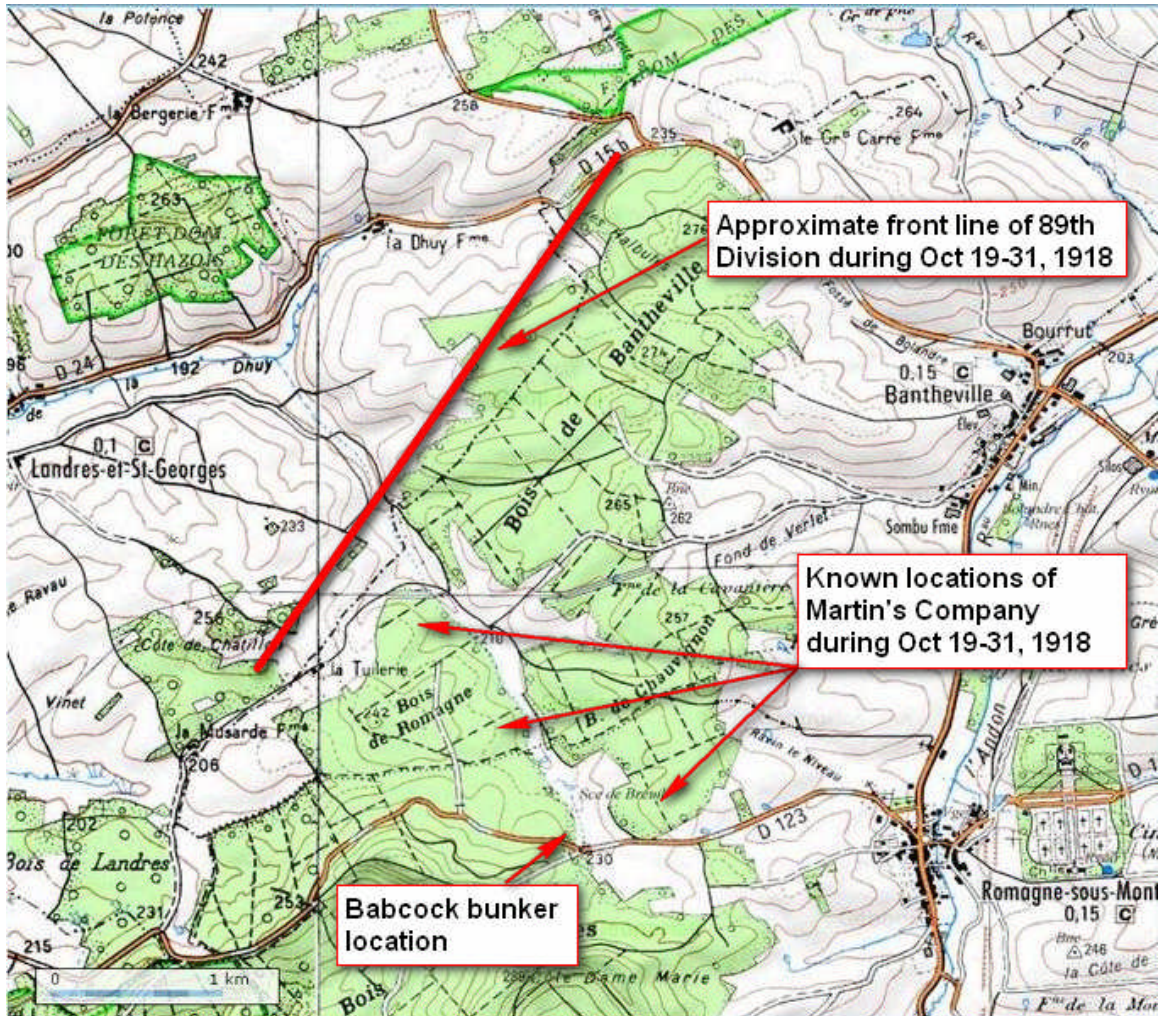
barbed wire for a pillow. On the road sides, we passed walking wounded cases, hobbling to the hospitals in the rear, and they dropped hints to us as to the ferocity of the fighting in the woods ahead. The men pitched their shelter halves in well camouflaged spots, carpeted the mud with branches and tried to ease the discomfort a bit. We were held constantly at the alert, expecting order to advance any hour. Equipment was renewed, daily drills held in the attack formation, and exercises in passing through woods to a given point by compass at night. Now and then a stray shell exploded harmlessly nearby, otherwise there were no untoward incidents. Burying parties interred many horses and German machine gunners killed in the battle a few days previously. (354<sup>th</sup> War Diary, pg. 231)

Much of the next week was cold and rainy, and the brief comfort afforded by the Italian barracks in the Brocourt rest area was now likely just a distant memory. The 354<sup>th</sup> camped in woods in the triangular area formed by the villages of Gesnes, Eclisfontaine and Epinonville, and according to Colonel Babcock, the area “was a miserable bivouac. My P.C. (post of command) consisted of a big canvas paulin spread out on the ground, then doubled over in the middle; one-half serving as an insecure roof propped up at the ends with poles and the whole affair held to the ground with guy ropes. Fix or six of us slept under it, our heads up near the fold. The driest spot was in the center (as the sides were open) and being the senior as well as the oldest, I received that prize. Our kitchen operated under a tent fly and a tree and we “picnicked” that way until the 19<sup>th</sup> – five days of living in the coldest wettest mud I know of. Of course, my P.C was more comfortable than the wet shelter tent camps occupied by the men” (Babcock Memoir pg. 604).



*Soldiers of the 89<sup>th</sup> near Epinonville, October 16, 1918 (source 89<sup>th</sup> History pg. 154)*

On October 19, the 89<sup>th</sup> Division received orders to relieve the 32<sup>nd</sup> Division, commanded by General William Haan, and to take over front-line positions in the Bois de Romagne and the Bois de Bantheville.<sup>2</sup> Martin's company formed part of the second "support" line, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 354<sup>th</sup> took over the front-line position.



Colonel Babcock described the process of the handover and the conditions he discovered at the front:

Immediately following the information as to which regiment of the 32<sup>nd</sup> division the 354<sup>th</sup> was to relieve I walked up to the P.C. of that regiment, commanded by an old acquaintance, Colonel Russell C. Langdon (WP1896) "Dominy" as he was called at West Point, he had his P.C. in a German dugout near the Romagne-Sommerance road about 1<sup>1/2</sup> miles west of Romagne. The 32<sup>nd</sup> Division had had hard fighting and their losses had been severe. As I entered the dugout and was

<sup>2</sup> An interesting detail about the 32<sup>nd</sup> Division is that the 126<sup>th</sup> infantry regiment was commanded by Captain Emil B. Gannser, who was from Grand Rapids Mich. Also, one of the pivotal attacks on the Cote Dame Marie that finally broke the German Hindenburg line was carried out by a group of eight men led by Captain Edward B. Strom, also of Grand Rapids.

cheerfully greeted by Langdon, I noticed that this headquarters had been eating food brought to them in a marmite can (the method by which front-line organizations were fed), that they were unshaved, and as the field telephone began ringing Langdon said ‘After this war I am going some place where it is impossible to hear a telephone bell!’ ... After we took over this area, we found the unburied dead of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Division everywhere; and on our left in the area of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Division, I saw dead Germans lying at the very entrance to the P.C. of some organization occupying a dugout on the Tuilerie farm. It may be unfair to criticize these organizations for failing to bury the dead of both sides, but it is difficult to understand why the American dead well behind the front, and the German dead at the door of a dugout could not have been buried. In the 354<sup>th</sup> Infantry, the Chaplains and the Band performed these sad but necessary duties most efficiently. As soon as the 127<sup>th</sup> withdrew and our front line was established along the west edge of the Bois de Bantheville, south of La Dhuy farm, our burial parties cleared the whole area. (Babcock Memoir, pg. 607-608)



***2010 view of ruins of dugout where Col. Babcock met Col. Langdon (courtesy of the Author).***

Colonel Babcock’s memoir gives the impression of a very self-assured leader with definite ideas about maintaining high military standards, especially in a combat zone.

After my view of conditions at the front, I made up my mind that when my headquarters took over from “Dominy”, we would give him a demonstration of a headquarters polished up as if for inspection. We polished our boots or shoes, were freshly shaved and took great care to keep clean before the hour of departure. Then Barnard, Wolff, McGrath, Sandborn and I and perhaps one or two others, piled into the regimental limousine and drove up to the regimental P.C. of the 127<sup>th</sup> Infantry via Gesnes and Romagne. The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> battalions had to march cross-country via

the Bois de Gesnes and the Bois de Romagne. Our headquarters cooks and stoves were brought up by wagon, the rolling kitchens of the two battalions; those of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion being installed in the southern edge of the Bois de Bantheville, those of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion in the vicinity of that battalion in the same woods. As we entered the 127<sup>th</sup> Infantry dugout, Langdon looked at me, noticed my polished boots and said "How did you get up here?" "By motor", I replied. "Well", said Dominy, "when you have been over here longer you won't do things like that". I didn't tell the efficient but tired regimental commander that I had been in France many months before he arrived, I just said "Dominy, I am a cavalryman. I never walk when I can ride". He and his staff heard our wagons rumbling past on the road, they were aghast at such proceedings; but I had decided here as in the Xammes sector that hot food was half the battle and certainly I had no intention of having my meals carried up to me in a marmite can through the mud and rain every night from some kitchen several miles away. The dug-out was very dirty. We cleaned up the filthy hole before breakfast, and then General Winn ranked us out. (Babcock Memoir, pp. 609-610)

One tangible benefit of Col. Babcock's fastidiousness was that troops under his command enjoyed more frequent hot meals than many other regiments. "There is nothing that is more appreciated in wartime than a good hot meal; and the fact the Headquarters 354<sup>th</sup> Infantry served three hot meals daily was soon known by official visitors to the 89<sup>th</sup> Division sector. Having the company kitchens north of the Romagne-Sommerance road made it possible to feed the front and support battalions much better meals, and the carrier parties had less distance to go than was ordinarily the case in an active sector" (Babcock Memoir p. 612). But even with their commander's efforts to ensure better food, the soldiers wanted more variety, and efforts to broaden their culinary experiences led to near disaster for some of the men in Company "I":

We had to be very careful with fire as smoke soon drew fire from the enemy. Our kitchen was issued charcoal for fuel but we had to be careful so as not to have sparks flying at night. A chow detail would carry the food to the men at the front, this was very dangerous work but we always had fairly good luck getting food to our men, as comparing with other companies who at times lost their entire chow detail, food and Dixie (thermos) cans too, from shell fire. Boys will try things; while here in these woods several boys secured flour from the kitchen, rustled up a nice griddle from somewhere and began to bake "Flap jacks" (Flapjacks and syrup was some rare treat) business was rushing until the enemy spied the smoke, shortly thereafter they put a shell, right on the spot where the baking was done. No one was killed but the business was ruined. (Schoppenhorst pg. 138)

In the Bois de Bantheville and the Bois de Romagne, soldiers of the 89<sup>th</sup> had little shelter against flying shrapnel from exploding shells, and casualties from German artillery were mounting rapidly during the last two weeks of October. "As we expected a forward movement very soon, no effort was made to construct regular trenches. Our front line was a series of fox-holes or funk-holes for one or more men. In rear of the platoons, the platoon commanders had their holes, perhaps covered with brush or a shelter half."



(Babcock Memoir p. 613). As autumn progressed, the formerly thick Argonne forest canopy could no longer be counted on for protection. “The trees had lost most of their leaves and enemy planes had little difficulty locating our lines in the too-densely populated woods and spotting for the artillery; and we had severe casualties almost daily. I endeavored to get authority from the brigade to echelon our forces in much greater depth ... I was authorized to move the support troops south of the Romagne-Sommerance road but the front line battalion (Second) continued to have many casualties. On the night of the 24<sup>th</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> it suffered heavy gas casualties.” (Babcock Memoir, pg 614). The German gas attacks continued almost without pause over the next week, causing nearly 600 casualties in the 177<sup>th</sup> brigade, and making the re-supply of front-line companies and evacuation of the wounded extraordinarily difficult and dangerous. Fortunately Martin’s battalion spent most of this period in reserve, and so was positioned away from the most heavily shelled areas.



*2010 view from 354<sup>th</sup> front lines toward German positions (courtesy of the Author)*

### **Preparation for the Assault of November 1**

Orders had been given for an American advance to begin before dawn on November 1, 1918. The plan of attack for the 89<sup>th</sup> Division was straightforward; after a massive artillery bombardment of German positions, the Division was to drive up and over the heights of Barricourt which lay some 6 kilometers due north, and then continue on to the Army exploitation line, which when captured, would position the 89<sup>th</sup> for a final push to the Meuse river. Col. Babcock described the situation facing the Americans:

By October 24<sup>th</sup>, the conditions in our immediate front were as follows: the Germans were withdrawing their army, holding their rear with hundreds of light and heavy machine guns and relatively small forces of infantry, and about half as much artillery as we had. The country favored rear guard fighting<sup>3</sup>, being densely wooded in many areas and hilly, also very muddy in the ravines. The German soldier knew his army was falling back, knew they had lost the war, knew that he was left behind to hold us; and he was ordered to fight to the last. In many instances he did just that. One could not help admiring the iron discipline that kept the individual German soldier in his fighting place under those conditions. (Babcock Memoir, pg 618)

Babcock also described how the 354<sup>th</sup> was to be configured for the advance:

The assault battalion (1<sup>st</sup>) was scheduled to attack on a front of about 600 yards in the combat group formation, heretofore described. The 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion was to follow it at some 1500 yards, the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion was to act as reserve except one company of that battalion was given the job of maintaining liaison with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division on out left, after the first objective had been captured. In the areas allotted to the assault and support battalions, we worked out avenues for the advance, for the periodic assembly of platoons or sections to check gun or ammunition losses, and for positions to be attained at definite specified times so that the battalion commanders and myself would know where and when we could count on finding a section of machine guns, or 37mm cannon, or a mortar should it be required for any special purpose. (Babcock Memoir, pp. 620-621)

Two days before the planned advance, Martin may have witnessed an episode that resulted in two of his fellow 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion soldiers receiving the Medal of Honor, the highest military decoration awarded by the United States Government. Only 124 American soldiers received the Medal of Honor in WWI, and many received it posthumously.

The afternoon of the 30<sup>th</sup> (of October), the report came that the enemy were withdrawing. To check the accuracy of this and to maintain contact, a patrol was ordered out from the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion. Lt. Millis of "L" Co. and Lt. Rowell from "I" Co. with a small party from both companies, emerged from the shelter of the woods at 2 PM, crossed the high open ground and descended into the depression beyond. While ascending the opposite slopes, two Boche machine gunners ran out on the road from La Dhuy farm and caught the patrol in their fire. Sergeant Keller of L Co. made his way back to the lines for assistance. Two litter bearers sent forward for the wounded returned 30 minutes later with Lt. Rowell and reported that Lt. Millis had been shot in both legs and was in a shell hole about 1000 yards out. In response to a call for volunteers, Privates (Charles) Barger and (Jesse) Funk placed Red Cross brassards on their arms and began their search.

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<sup>3</sup> This type of fighting was used by the Germans to cover the retreat of their main army, and sought to disrupt the advancing American units through sudden artillery bombardments and surprise attacks by machine guns and small arms.

The lieutenant was found and brought into the lines without accident, though the enemy frequently fired at the party. Barger and Funk then returned for another man they had seen wounded. This trip was made under the most harassing fire, and their patient was again wounded on the return. (354<sup>th</sup> War Diary pg 233).

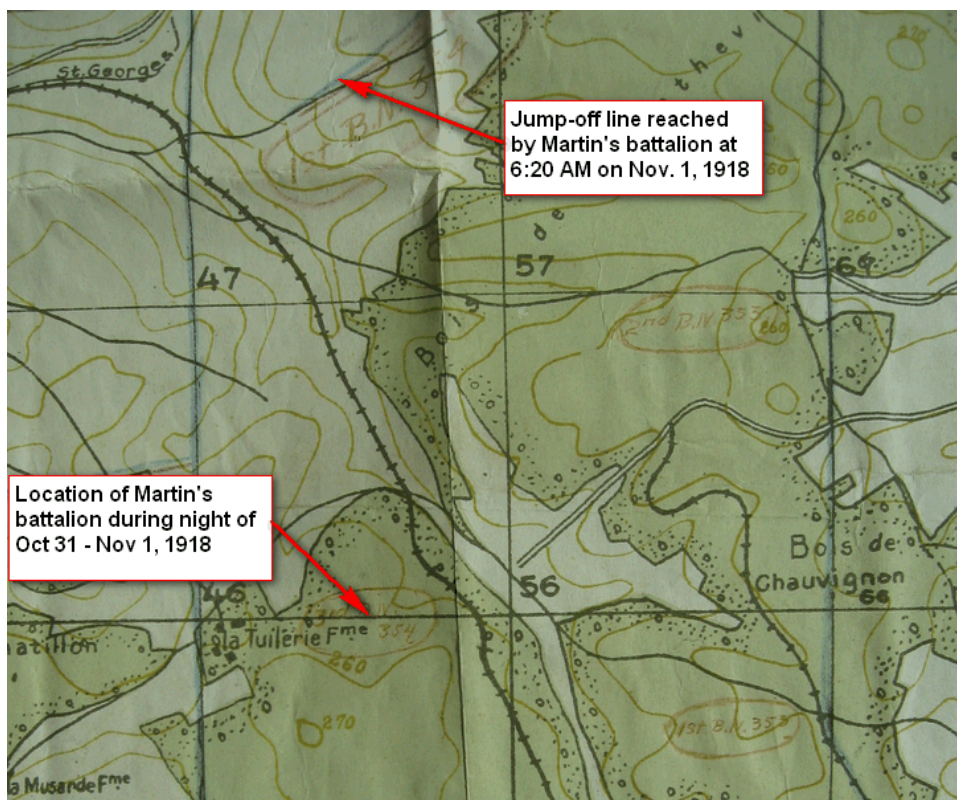
The steady loss of many experienced officers to wounds and disease, combined with frequent officer reassignments to other units within the AEF, resulted in some of the front-line commanders not being “the best and the brightest”. At this critical time, Martin’s battalion had the misfortune of being led (briefly) by an officer whose orders created problems for the soldiers later on in the advance:

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion at this time was commanded by Major Howard B. Stivers, who had been appointed a captain in the Officers Reserve Corps in 1917 after 14 years service as an enlisted man in the Coast Artillery and the US Military Prison Guards. On November 1<sup>st</sup>, when he received the order to prepare his command for battle by removing the heavy packs, and leaving them under a small guard of each company, it was discovered later, and too late to do anything about it, that he had ordered his entire command to leave behind not only their blanket rolls but their mess kits. In spite of strenuous efforts on the part of my staff and myself we were unable to get the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion’s packs up to the men for several days. How the men got along without even forks, as I now remember the report, I do not know; probably living in holes in the ground brought back to them, instinctively, the ancient art of using one’s fingers or a stick. Needless to say, Major Stiver’s exhibition of how to prepare for battle showed how unsuited he was to command infantry. He left the regiment a few days later, ill I believe; if he hadn’t I most certainly would have gotten rid of him.” (Babcock Memoir, pg. 622)

Late in the evening of the 31<sup>st</sup> of October, Martin and the rest of the 354<sup>th</sup> began preparing for the advance. As described by Frank Schoppenhorst, “a midnight supper had been ordered and prepared, and after we had eaten our meal we were advanced to a ravine about ¼ mile from our location in the woods, the entire company deployed in an alert position in a small ravine, while all night a harassing fire was kept up till one AM ...” (Schoppenhorst, pg. 139). Col. Babcock elaborated further on events that occurred during the early morning hours of November 1:

With thousands of infantrymen moving into position all along the American assault line, hundreds of guns of all calibers preparing for the 3:30AM bombardment, it is astonishing that the enemy was not aware of this coming assault. Except for the flares which were thrown up at regular intervals and an occasional big shell bursting somewhere in the woods, the Germans gave no outward sign of knowing what was in store for them. The three-hour wait in the edge of the Bantheville woods was not a rest cure. Anticipating an enemy artillery fire on our assault line and knowing what was going to happen at 5:30 AM, were two far from soothing tonics. Promptly at 3:30 AM the guns opened fire. Some 6000 shells were fired by the light artillery; in addition the heavy (large caliber) artillery plastered the enemy back areas, while the machine gun

companies of the Division poured bullets by the hundreds of thousands over our heads and trees with high angle fire. I have no adjectives to describe this man-made flying death, the appalling noises of the shells as they swept over us in one continuous flight. In some respects the machine gun bullets were, to us, the most terrifying. My recollection is that the machine guns fired from 3:30AM to 6:30 AM, then those assigned to the attacking battalions caught up with their organizations and went forward ... the machine gun barrage was terrific, the bullets, following one another in thousands of files, sounded to me like giant shears cutting a mile-wide sheet of tin. Although these bullets were clearing the trees under which we waited, it really took quite a bit of mental effort to stand up; it was hard to believe those bullets weren't flying right past one's head. (Babcock Memoir pg. 625)



***Initial positions of 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion 354<sup>th</sup> Infantry, November 1, 1918***

Commanders of front-line companies in the assault battalion employed a creative psychological device to bolster the courage of their men and to create uncertainty and fear in the minds of the Germans. "Ten minutes before zero, cigars were given to every man in the assault wave of D Company with the instructions to 'go over puffing on 'er like you liked 'er whether you smoke or not' – and the astonished Hun at Zero hour was met by the spectacle of those 200 men driving toward them, with bayonet in hand and a cigar between their teeth. Ten minutes after zero, the Colonel won the bet he had made an hour before, that within 15 minutes of going over the top we'd have prisoners, and true

enough in filed 10 motley specimens surrendered from the machine guns that had so long harassed us in front of La Dhuy farm” (354<sup>th</sup> War Diary pg. 234).

Martin’s battalion comprised the second “support” wave of infantry, following the assault battalion at a distance of almost a mile. Accordingly, the Company “I” history reported that at 6:20 AM they arrived at the original jumping off place in front of the Bois de Bantheville “under a heavy shell fire” (UVA pg. 4). Frank Schoppenhorst described the attack more vividly:

FIREWORKS! FIREWORKS! Was all one could see everywhere, the sky was illuminated with fire and smoke, explosive machine gun fire, fire grenades, flares, etc. while overhead whirred the shells from our batteries with a constant scream. This scene cannot be described, yet this terrific action will no doubt remain indelibly in our memories. The early dawn looked gloomy, -- scenes along our way showed the evidence of severe action ... Everyone advanced calmly through this fearful noise and danger and fire ... Indescribable events, merciless action, cruel encounters, all tricks of the Hellish game at work. We moved out to the front through a patch of woods which had been cut off with shell fire. Forward! was the command; we formed in combat formation and over the top we went, while the enemy’s shells were flying and dropping along the line of advance. Machine gun bullets popped and whistled past our ears, to make a long story short, it was a hot place ... (Schoppenhorst pp. 139-140)<sup>4</sup>.

The advance continued, and while the leading elements of the assault battalion closed in on the fortified village of Remonville, Martin’s support battalion scaled the steep slope north of La Dhuy farm and entered the flat open land beyond. Col. Babcock was moving among the various units, ensuring that orders were followed and discipline maintained:

For a time, I followed the rear of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, directing the majority of the advanced echelon to follow the Support Battalion. Our men were following the heavy barrage closely, and as the curtain lifted and moved forward they moved right in on the shattered enemy. Enemy shelling was not heavy, but some shells were bursting in most directions. Before the sun was high there was a mist and a low ceiling. Compasses had been issued to all platoon commanders and great stress had been laid on the necessity of carefully following the compass course as prescribed in the attack order. Out in an open field somewhere north of La Dhuy farm, I saw the Support Battalion advancing in perfect order – the combat groups marching in single files with intervals and distances well kept; but to me they seemed to be taking a direction many degrees to the right of the one prescribed. Hastening over to the extreme right flank platoon, I said to the young lieutenant, “It seems to me you are way off your course”. He glanced down at the compass in his hand and replied “Right on the course, sir”, repeating the bearing. “My

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<sup>4</sup> Shortly thereafter Schoppenhorst was wounded in the left knee by fragments from a high explosive shell, and after receiving treatment from the “First Aid boys”, made his way to the ambulance station along with four others who were wounded by the same shell. His part in the Great War was finished, and he returned to his hometown of Marthasville, Missouri where he was married in 1921 and died in 1979.

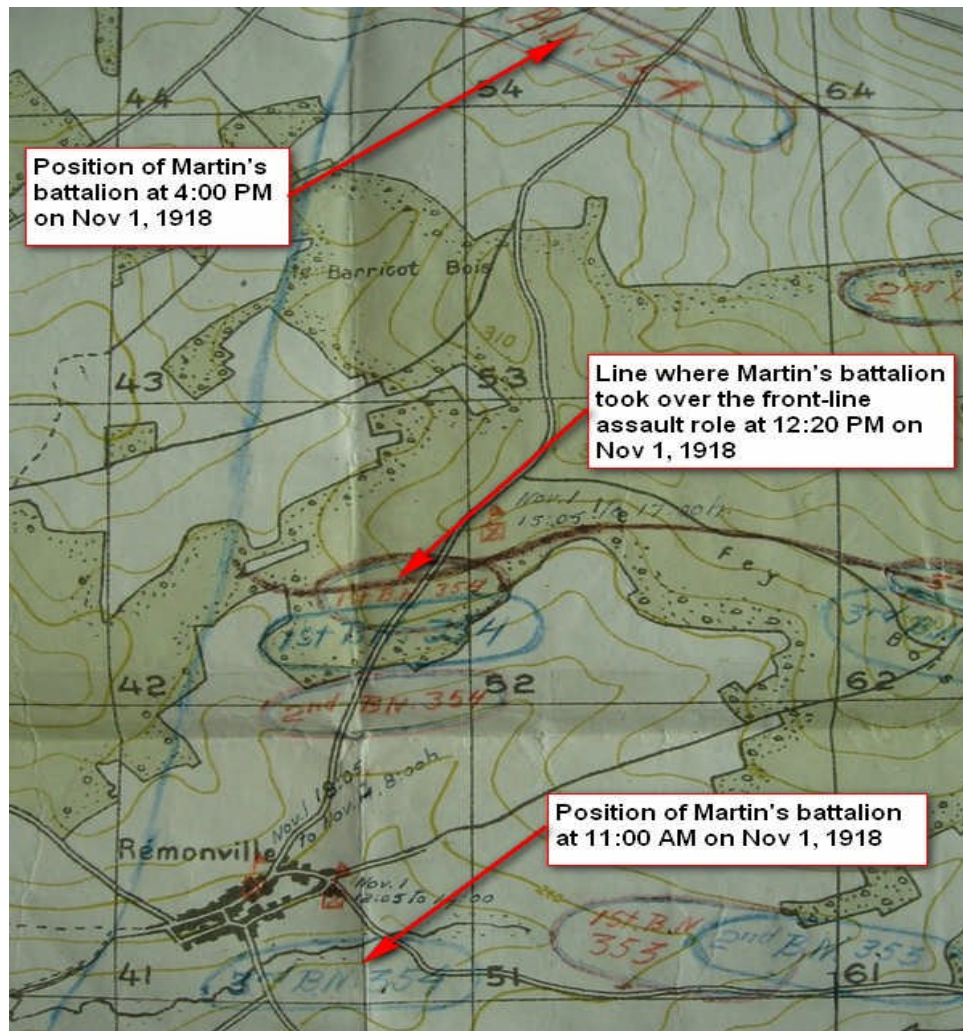
mistake” I said, “You are correct, it is I who am lost”. (Babcock Memoir , pp 626-627)



### **2010 View of Remonville from perspective of attacking 354<sup>th</sup> Infantry**

From his position at the head of the support battalion, Babcock could easily observe the progress of the front-line assault troops as they descended the hill south of Remonville and crossed the river that ran just along the village’s southern edge. These soldiers encountered strong resistance from German artillery and machine-gun emplacements ringing the southern approaches to the village, but Remonville soon fell to the advancing Americans. Col. Babcock cited several examples of heroism, two of which follow: “Sergeant Arthur J. Forrest of Hannibal, Missouri won the Medal of Honor for a very special act of individual valor. The advance of his company was help up by the fire of six machine guns. Sergeant Forrest worked his way to within 50 yards of the nest before being discovered. He then, single-handed, charged the guns; their crews fled but he killed one of them with the butt of his rifle. Forrest belonged to D Company. Private Fred Forbis of Holt’s Summit, Missouri and D Company was a member of the leading combat group of his platoon (the point of the Diamond formation). Southeast of Remonville, they encountered a machine gun nest of six guns. Forbis had an automatic rifle and although only 100 feet from the enemy he fired so rapidly on the machine gun that it enabled the flanking groups to outflank the machine guns. He was severely wounded, but his nerve and coolness was an inspiration to his comrades. Another member of this platoon, who apparently deserves high praise, is the combat group commander. I do not know his name, but his groups functioned perfectly; the Point laid

down a heavy bullet barrage and, under this protection, the flanking groups were able to go forward” (Babcock Memoir, p 630).



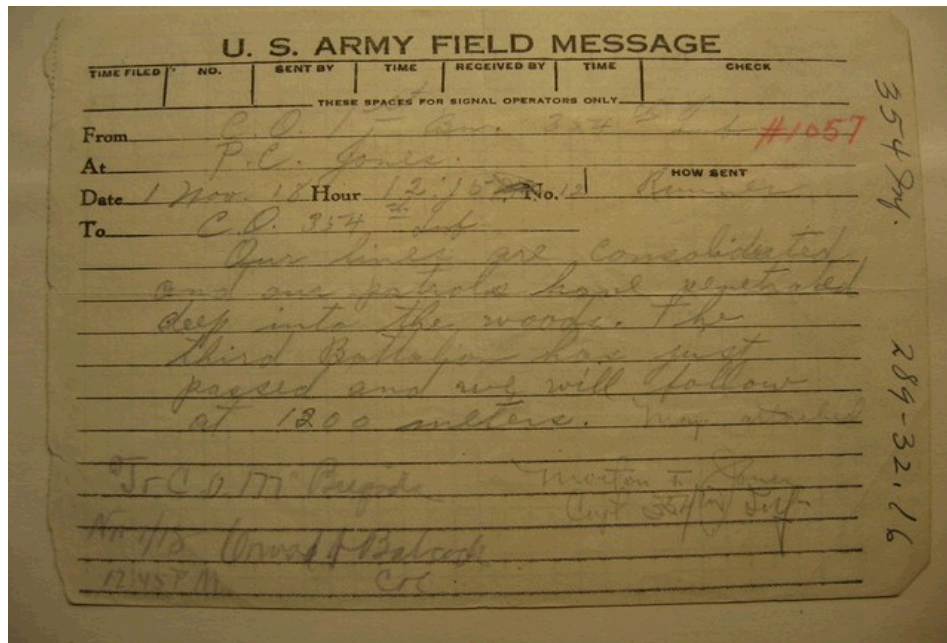
### *Second stage of 354<sup>th</sup> Infantry attack of November 1, 1918*

By mid-morning the assault (1<sup>st</sup>) battalion had swept through Remonville and was ascending the slopes north of the village toward the Barricourt Heights, the final natural obstacle between the 89<sup>th</sup> Division and the Meuse river. This geographical feature was not a rocky hilltop as might be imagined from its name, but rather a thickly-wooded ridge extending perpendicular to the axis of the 354<sup>th</sup>'s advance. Babcock described the southern approach to this ridge as having “no more cover to be found than on a billiard table”. The 1<sup>st</sup> battalion was due to reach the top of the ridge (designated as the “second objective”) at 10:55 AM, at which point the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion was to pass through the lines and at 12:20 PM, take up the advance.

Back in Remonville, one platoon of Company “I” under the command of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. James L. Webster was sent into the village to “mop it up”, taking 65 prisoners in the process (UVA history of Company I, pg. 4). Col. Babcock meanwhile was giving final instructions to

Captain Hugh M. Pinkerton, who had taken command of the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion following Maj. Stivers' problems described earlier. "To suddenly be given command of a big battalion in action was a great responsibility. I realized his difficulties and at 9:10 AM I sent him this message: 'remember your barrage for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Objective starts at 12:20 PM. Be sure to keep great width and great depth. In the woods follow the barrage closely with patrols. Try to gain the north edge of Bois de Barricourt by passing around the west edge of woods with a company. Mop it up later'. In this message, I tried to inject a bit of tactical maneuvers into the unimaginative West Front American barrage following." (Babcock Memoir p. 631).

Just after noon the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion, with "I" and "M" companies in the first line, leapfrogged the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion and forged ahead through the Barricourt Woods, "where the enemy had deep trenches and dugouts, and snipers fought from the trees" (Babcock Memoir p. 631). Fierce fighting ensued. "Though we had reached the Heights the enemy was still to be expelled from them. Due to the density of the woods some of the men became confused in their directions, and also forgot that the barrage was due to halt for 30 minutes on the crest of the hill, and as a result walked into it and mistook it for the enemy's counter barrage ... the Commanding Officer personally assisted in reorganizing them, and just before dusk



**Field Message reporting that Martin's Battalion had taken over as lead assault group. Text reads as follows: "Our lines are consolidated and our patrols have penetrated deep into the woods. The Third Battalion has just passed and we will follow at 1200 Meters - Morton T. Jones, Capt 354<sup>th</sup> Inf" (Source: National Archives)**

we saw them pushing out of the north edge of the woods, having gained 2 kilometers since relieving the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion, and now headed for the town of Barricourt. The delay in the woods had thrown us behind our barrage schedule so that the great advantage gained



by coming upon the enemy immediately after its lifting was lost” (354<sup>th</sup> War Diary, p. 235).

When the leading elements of the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion emerged from the northern edge of Barricourt Woods, deteriorating visibility and the confusion of battle combined to bring about some unfortunate losses among the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion. “It became dark very early and a mantle of mist covered the danger ahead. A murky group on our left flank who we took to be Marines, were Germans and captured the liaison detail sent to them” (354<sup>th</sup> War Diary p. 235). Another platoon from Company “I” ran into problems on the open slopes above the village of Barricourt (see photo below). “One half in command of Lieuts. Bates and Steinhilber and the other half in command of Sgt. Frank J. Radell moved on to their objective. The 20 men with Sgt. Radell were held up by deadly machine gun fire on the hills just south of Barricourt. Due to the lack of liaison the half in command of Lieuts. Bates and Steinhilber advanced into the hills and were surrounded by German machine guns. After a gallant fight in which Lieut. Bates and 10 of the 12 men were wounded, Lieut. Steinhilber took an automatic rifle from a fallen soldier and gallantly defended the dead and wounded until dark, when Sgt. Emil Scheele and 20 men came to their aid.” (UVA history of Company I, pg. 4)



***2010 View of Barricourt Hill, looking toward village of Barricourt, which is situated over the hill on left (source: Author)***

Martin and the rest of Company “I” sought refuge in large shell holes (created by the American artillery barrage of the previous night) and prepared for the long night ahead. Col Babcock described the scene at the end of the day’s fighting:

Our long range guns had blown huge craters in the wet heavy soil of the area, and in these natural defense positions the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion settled down for the night. The left of our line rested near the hill “La Polarde”, just south of Barricourt. Captain Wilder’s Company (B) of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was there. This company had been designated as the liaison group between the right of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division and the left of the 89<sup>th</sup> Division. I went up to the top of this hill to find out what was holding us up in that vicinity and what had become of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. I noticed three of our soldiers kneeling behind one another in file, just over the top of the hill. I asked Wilder why they remained so exposed to enemy fire, and his answer was that they were all dead; all killed in an attempt to take a machine gun nest just beyond the little hill. The instantaneous death of three men, still kneeling close together; by peeking just over the top of the hill, I wasn’t ten feet from them. The men and their positions were so life-like, it was difficult to believe they were not waiting for an opportunity to rise and run forward. (Babcock Memoir, pg. 631)



*Soldiers taking cover in shell holes, location unknown (Source: AABE pg. 198)*

The task of burying the dead would have to wait, but commanders recognized the immediate need to attend to those who had been wounded on the Heights of Barricourt during the advance. A Field Message sent on November 1 at 7:50 PM requested “that motor ambulances be sent up here. Many severely wounded men are waiting for evacuation. They have no blankets. Urge immediate action” (FM 681). Orders were also given to consolidate and organize the front-line positions, bring up artillery and supplies, and to prepare to press the attack early on the following morning.

At 7:40 PM General Winn sent the following message to his Brigade: ‘General Wright wishes to express to the command his hearty congratulations and thanks’. About 8:00 PM, orders went out to Captain Pinkerton that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion would make the assault the next morning. That the barrage would fall 500 meters

beyond the line marked on the map as the 3<sup>rd</sup> objective, at 5:30 AM, remain stationary until 5:40 AM, and then move forward. I was doubtful that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was accurately on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Objective; but it was on the line for all practical purposes. Where the open country, which sloped north, was cut up into little ravines, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was holding the high ground in combat groups occupying shell holes. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had been withdrawn to the vicinity of Remonville and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was in the woods behind the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion. During the night the Commanding Officer of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was ordered to push strong patrols to his front to keep contact with the enemy and get prisoners; this was the Brigade order. (Babcock Memoir, p 632).

Unfortunately for Martin and his fellow front-line troops preparing to attack in the morning, the artillery – upon whom the soldiers depended to lay down a heavy barrage on German positions – had been unable to move into position overnight. A poorly timed order to relieve the artillery commander, combined with difficulty in pulling heavy artillery pieces over muddy roads, resulted in only 22 guns being available on the morning of November 2, as compared with 128 guns that had blasted German lines the previous morning. Consequently, “the morning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> the barrage was put down again before us, but was so weak that it was not even recognized as such by the waiting infantry and of course, was no advantage against the scattered nests on hill 259” (WD pg 236). When Col. Babcock arrived at the northern edge of Barricourt woods after 6:00AM, the feeble barrage had petered out and the commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion told him that since no barrage had been provided, the troops had not advanced. This news also filtered back to 89<sup>th</sup> Divisional HQ, where a message sent at 7:48 AM from Brigadier General Frank Winn<sup>5</sup> to General Wright, stated that “354<sup>th</sup> did not move forward and is still in position at edge of woods. Says it did not have a barrage and could not advance. Am sending orders to advance anyhow” (Field Message 1289, NARA).

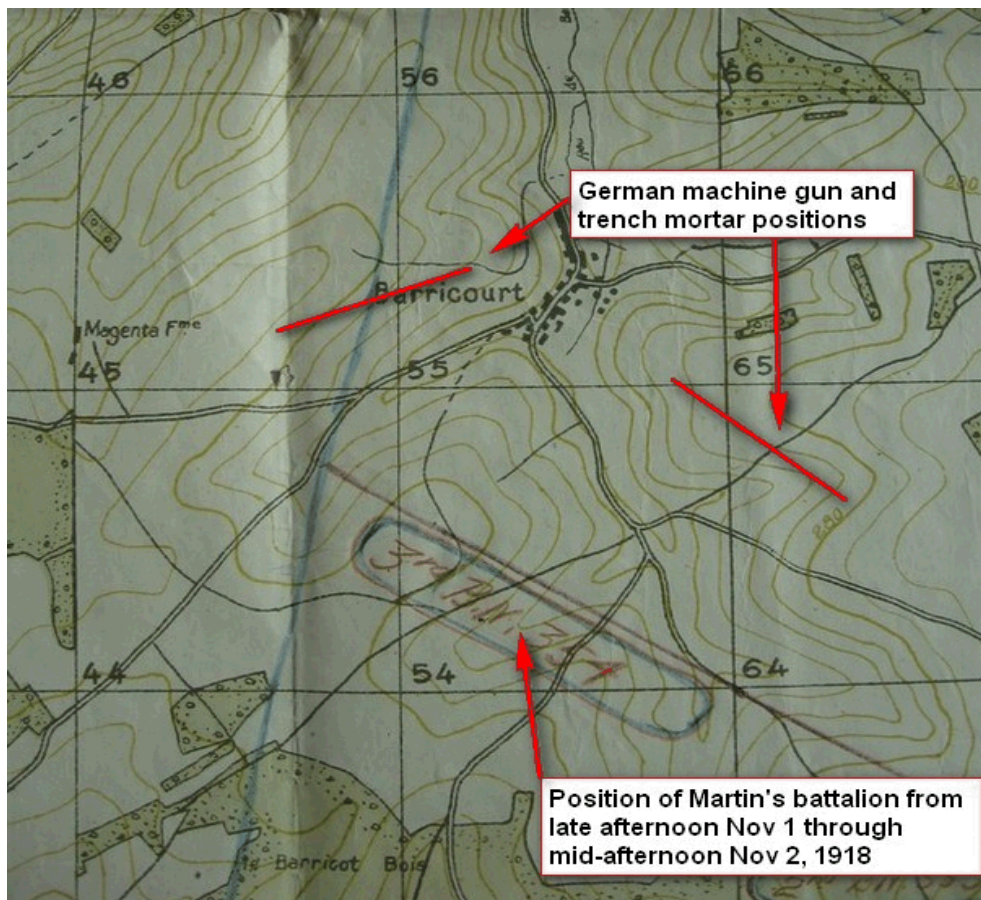
While Martin and his comrades huddled in their shell holes, front-line officers were trying to figure out a strategy to get the 354<sup>th</sup> moving forward. In the mid-morning, Col. Babcock and his subordinates met with General Winn to discuss the situation, and very nearly lost their lives to German artillery fire:

Wolff and I found Captain Pinkerton in a shell hole 400 yards north of the edge of the Barricourt woods and just east of the Remonville-Barricourt road. Captain Root was sent for, and ... as soon as Root had scrambled down into this huge shell hole, I ordered him to prepare to move forward immediately. General Winn with one or two staff officers appeared about this time and he too slid down into the now pretty well-crowded shell hole. After hearing what had happened, he directed that no advance be attempted until he could get artillery support. We talked the situation over, but neither of us knew what was going on to the left (west) of us where the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was supposed to be. In fact the liaison within the 177<sup>th</sup> Brigade and with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division has ceased to function. While we were talking the enemy artillery was throwing shells in our direction. At first this

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<sup>5</sup> General Frank Winn was the commanding officer of the 177<sup>th</sup> Brigade, which included the 353<sup>rd</sup> and 354<sup>th</sup> Regiments. Winn was a very competent and admired officer.

did not appear to be aimed at our huge shell hole, but it wasn't long before the falling shells indicated that the enemy gunners were correcting their range on us by the well-known bracketing system. This shell hole was, in the center, about six feet deep with a diameter of perhaps twelve feet, and had been made, probably, by one of our 8-inch guns or mortars. There must have been at least a dozen officers lining its sloping bank. The burst of a 77mm shell in our midst would have made quite a mess. Finally, when one of the ranging shots hit almost on the lip of the hole, sending a shower of dirt over us, I persuaded General Winn to leave. As soon as he disappeared over the edge, I got up and climbed up the bank and started for the woods south of us. Before I had taken a dozen steps, the enemy fired their battery salvo. The four shells just cleared the big hole, and not one of them missed me by twenty feet. Fortunately, the ground was wet, heavy and free of stones; those four shells burst simultaneously, showered me with dirt, scared me almost to death, but I was unhurt. Before another salvo could arrive, all but Pinkerton and his staff had evacuated his P.C, and the enemy observers, seeing the running figures of men, probably decided the hole was empty; they ceased firing on it. (Babcock Memoir, pg. 635).



**Stalemate Positions on November 2, 1918**

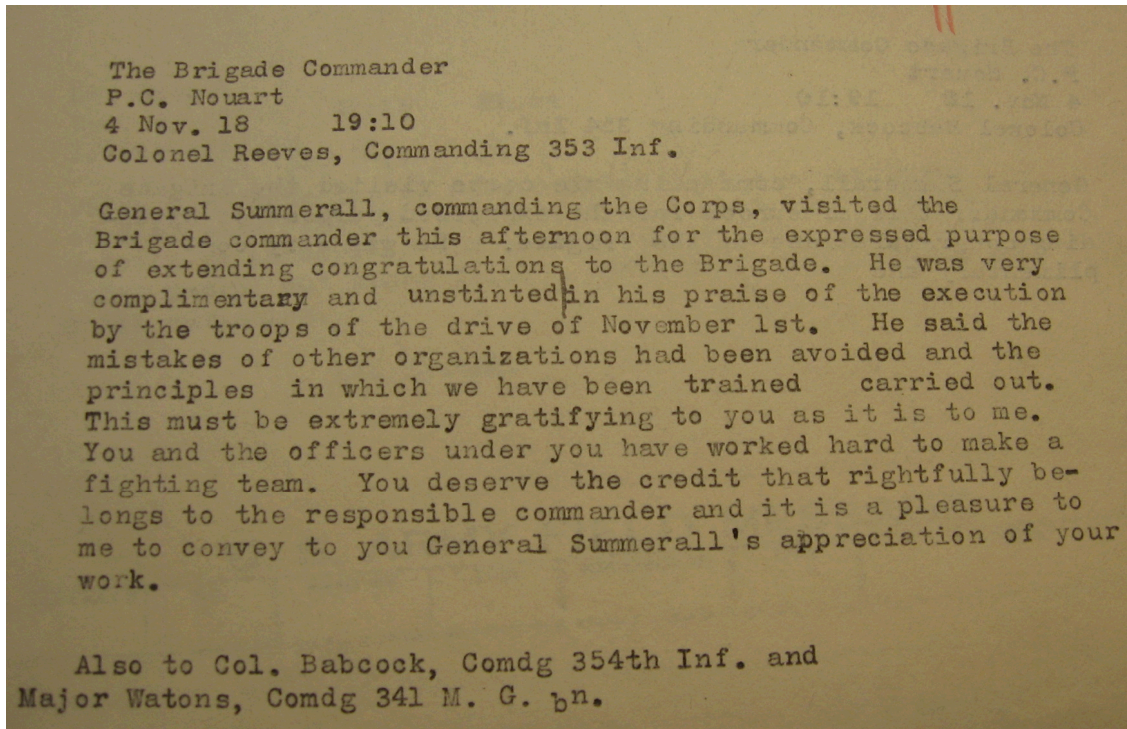
For most of November 2, a stalemate existed between the entrenched German machine gun nests and the artillery-challenged American infantry. As described by Col. Babcock, “it is difficult to recall in much detail or sequence the events of this day. It took ages to get any artillery fire on the many machine guns in our front. Our 37mm guns and Stokes mortars came up and did some effective firing from time to time ... little was accomplished, however; a short advance was made, but tired men unaccustomed to attacking without a heavy artillery barrage were not up to it” (Babcock Memoir, pp. 635-636). The official history of the 354<sup>th</sup> stated that “all through the soggy day the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> battalions schemed and maneuvered to outwit and smash the vicious little works opposed to them, but could not. The artillery could not effectively fire on them, because the mist negated the assembling of accurate firing data” (354<sup>th</sup> War Diary pg. 237). Soldiers who attempted to advance through the rain and mud against the “vicious little works” paid a high price: Companies “G” and “H”, which were sent forward to assist the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion, lost 17 dead and 25 wounded on November 2 alone. Eight hundred yards to the right of the 354<sup>th</sup>, the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion of the 353<sup>rd</sup> infantry was ordered to attack without artillery support, and the 353<sup>rd</sup> regimental history notes that every man who stepped out of the woods in the initial wave was either killed or wounded by machine gun fire. In the late afternoon, German resistance began to crack, and at 3:25 PM a field message sent to Division HQ reported “Mr. Babcock’s regiment a few hundred feet south of Barricourt fighting on SE edge of it; other elements of 354<sup>th</sup> are on hill 289.” (Field Message 1300).

During the night of November 2, German forces accelerated their retreat toward the Meuse river, and American patrols moved forward through Barricourt and occupied the nearby villages of Nouart and Tailly. On November 3, the 178<sup>th</sup> Brigade relieved the 177<sup>th</sup> and renewed the 89<sup>th</sup> Division’s push northward, in hot pursuit of the German army.



*Soldiers repair road to Barricourt a few days after the November 1 offensive (source: 89<sup>th</sup> Division History, p. 195)*

For the final eight days of the war, (Nov 3 – 11, 1918), the 354<sup>th</sup> Regiment served in a reserve role, and daily “war diaries” provide information on positions and condition of the regiment. For example, on November 3 at 8:55 AM (after passage of lines by 356<sup>th</sup> Infantry) four companies of the 354<sup>th</sup> were reported to be on a ridge southeast of Barricourt. This group probably was Martin’s 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion. Later on the same day the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion was reported to be about a kilometer east of Barricourt, just south of the Barricourt – Taily road. The next day, two companies of the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion were reported to have taken up positions in the Bois de Dame, while the other two companies were sent to establish liaison with the 178<sup>th</sup> brigade. Meanwhile, engineer battalions and other troops worked on repairing roads to improve the supply of front-line units. November 4 also brought a letter of commendation from General Wright, describing the favorable impression held by General Summerall (his commanding officer) of the advances made by the 89<sup>th</sup> Division over the previous four days (see below).



The Brigade Commander  
P.C. Nouart  
4 Nov. 18 19:10  
Colonel Reeves, Commanding 353 Inf.

General Summerall, commanding the Corps, visited the Brigade commander this afternoon for the expressed purpose of extending congratulations to the Brigade. He was very complimentary and unstinted in his praise of the execution by the troops of the drive of November 1st. He said the mistakes of other organizations had been avoided and the principles in which we have been trained carried out. This must be extremely gratifying to you as it is to me. You and the officers under you have worked hard to make a fighting team. You deserve the credit that rightfully belongs to the responsible commander and it is a pleasure to me to convey to you General Summerall's appreciation of your work.

Also to Col. Babcock, Comdg 354th Inf. and  
Major Watons, Comdg 341 M. G. bn.

Despite the official words of appreciation, though, logistical problems of supplying Martin and his fellow soldiers continued; Major Stivers’ careless order to leave behind blankets and mess kits, issued before the beginning of the final drive, still had not been corrected. Field Message #1344 conveys some of the frustration, stating that “health of men depends on getting up packs. Tonight will be 5<sup>th</sup> without blankets. The weather is too cold to enable them to sleep and secure needed rest without blankets. Reserve rations for this brigade have not come up”. As the days passed, logistics and hygiene conditions continued to deteriorate in the reserve areas, as described in the message below:

#784

Hdq. 177th Inf Brigade.  
P.C. Beaufort  
9 Nov. 1918 17:05 Phone & Courier  
Chief of Staff.

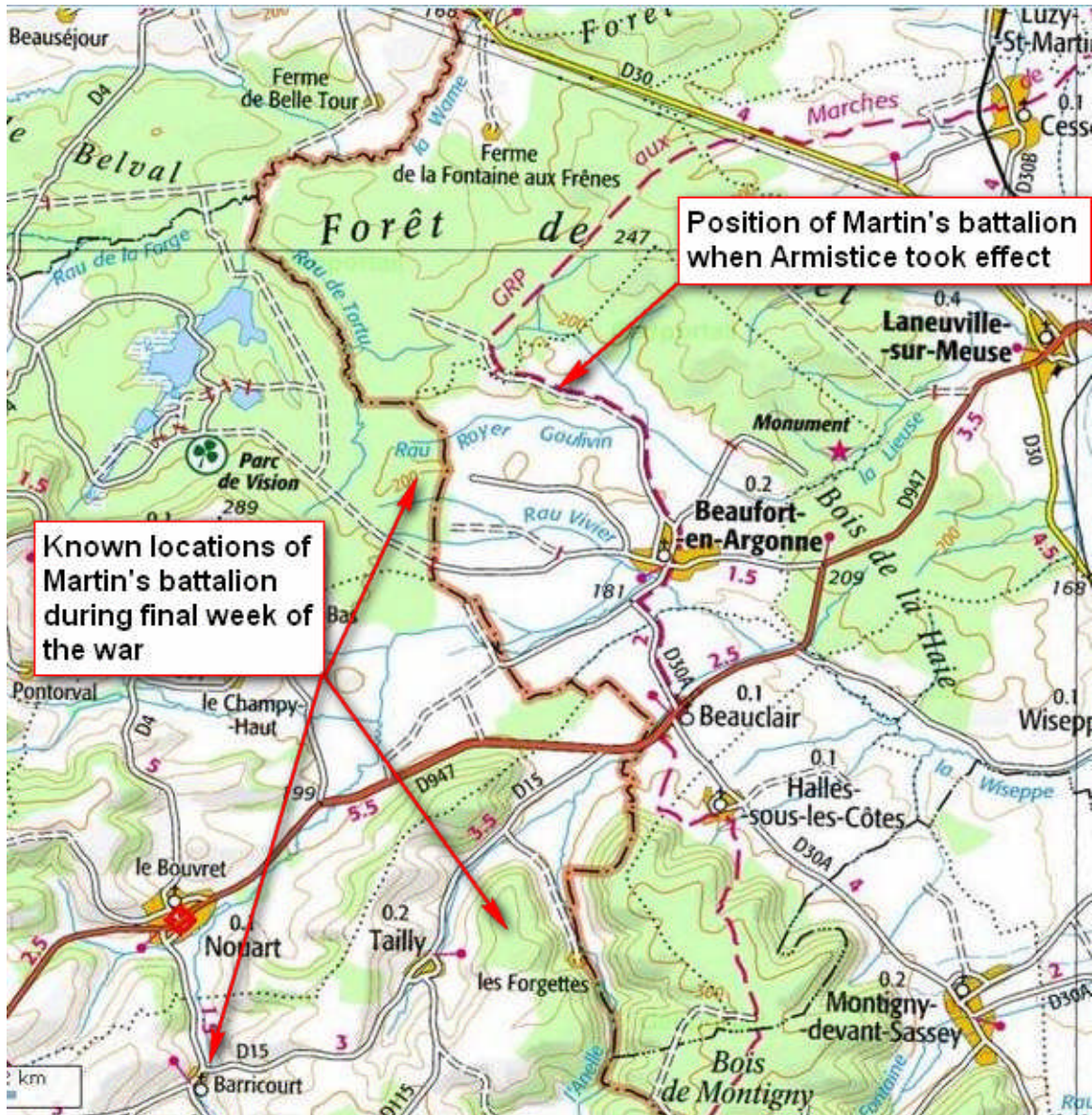
It is desired to bring to the attention of the Division Commander the following matters requiring attention.

- (1) Rations are insufficient in quantity and variety.
- (2) Some organizations, notably 1st Bn 353rd Infy, 2nd Bn - 354th Inf and 3rd Bn. 354 Inf, have had no chance for a bath for six weeks. The men are suffering from Cooties,
- (3) Gun oil is required in quantity
- (4) Oil for the men's feet is badly needed
- (5) Change of underclothing and bathing are badly needed.
- (6) Diarrhoea is on the increase. In the 353d Infy.

it is estimated that 50 to 75% of the men are suffering from colds diarrhoea and other affections, not alarming now, but liable to become so.

Winn  
Maj. General.  
Commanding.

During the last week of the war, the 354<sup>th</sup> remained a few kilometers behind the front line fighting, close enough to re-engage quickly if needed. War diary entries describe a hike on November 5 from a position in the Bois la Dame approximately 2 kilometers west of Beaufort-en-Argonne, to Hill 288 just east of Taily. By November 9, the 354<sup>th</sup> regimental headquarters had been established at Maucourt Farm on the outskirts of Beaufort. As described by Col. Babcock, "The regiment was still in reserve and waiting for something to happen" (Babcock Memoir pg 340), but the Germans were no longer targeting captured villages for heavy shelling, as they had done earlier in the Meuse-Argonne offensive. "Fortunately, they let our farm alone and better still the bivouacs of the regiment, in the woods, were not discovered and consequently not shelled; but we had to look out for enemy airplanes which flew over constantly and could report our positions" (Babcock Memoir, Pg. 640).



On November 10, commanders of the 89<sup>th</sup> were ordered to continue pressuring the retreating Germans, and consequently the 354<sup>th</sup> received orders to send one battalion to relieve the 356<sup>th</sup> Infantry in the vicinity of a sawmill near the town of Pouilly. At 2 AM on the 11<sup>th</sup>, Martin's battalion began a forced march "through water and mud" to reinforce front-line troops crossing the Meuse in several locations, but rumors also were circulating through the regiment that the war was finally about to end. When the Armistice formally took effect at 11AM on the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the eleventh month of 1918, Martin's battalion was near a place called "les Hautes Bruyeres" (which means "high



heather” in French), approximately 2 kilometers northeast of Beaufort.<sup>6</sup> Col. Babcock recalled a poignant interchange with an American soldier just after hostilities had ceased:

Leaving the P.C of the 356<sup>th</sup> Infantry, I walked down the street and met a soldier just as he emerged from the cellar of some house. I stopped and said to him ‘The war is over, it stopped at 11 AM, just a few moments ago’. What reply was expected from this combat infantryman I do not know; but what he said was unexpected. Looking at me a moment, evidently letting the good news spread from his brain to all his nerve centers, he replied ‘Well! Thank God, we can now keep out of the mud’. Those are his exact words. They deeply impressed me at the time, and, unquestionably, they epitomize the suppressed yearning of the combat infantryman, who marched, slept, ate, lived and died in the mud of France. (Babcock Memoir, pg 654).

After the Armistice, Company “I” returned to the village of Barricourt for the next few days. Soldiers reveled in their new freedoms to move about in daylight without danger of artillery and snipers, and especially enjoyed the permission to build fires at night for warmth. The daily war diary states that from November 12 – 13, the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion was employed as a “salvaging battalion”, burying the dead and collecting discarded equipment and ammunition. Two of the four companies were reported to be at the town of Beauclair, one company was at Barricourt and one company was at the nearby town of Nouart. On November 14, the war diary entry specifically mentions company “I” as being at Barricourt.

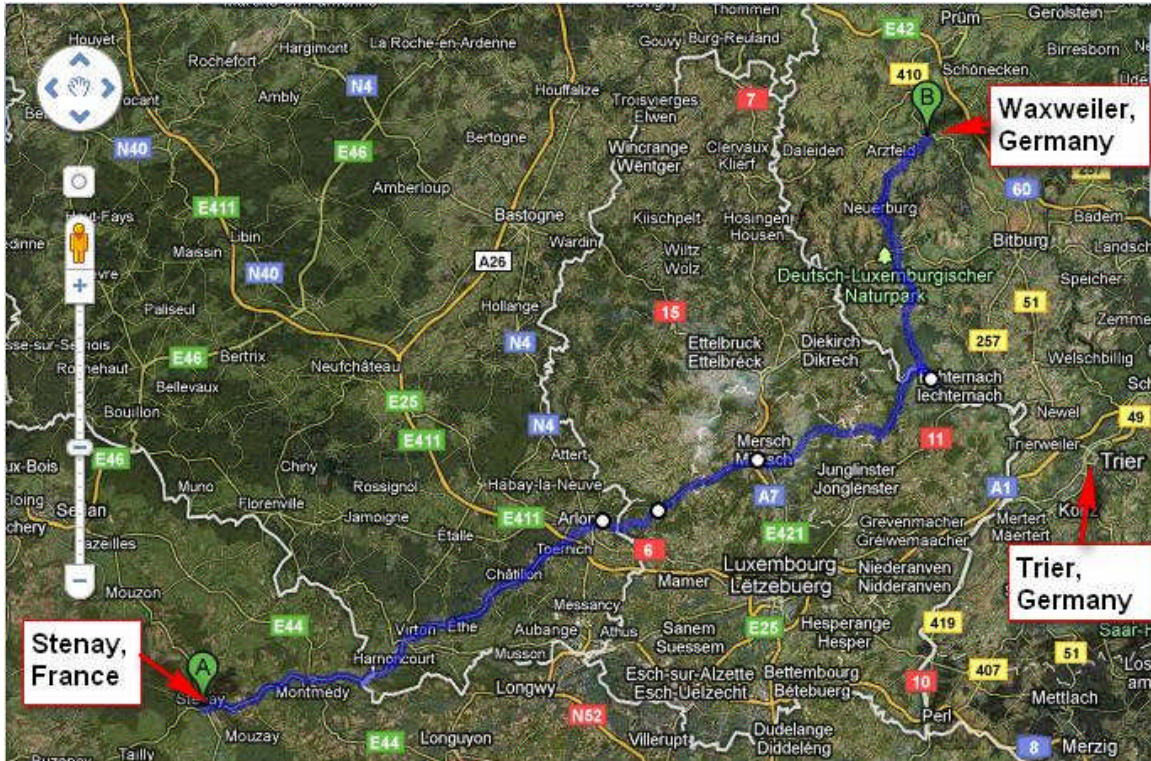
### **March into Germany and Occupation of the Rhineland**

The 89th Division was one of eight divisions selected to comprise the newly-organized Army of Occupation, the leading elements of which marched into Germany literally on the heels of retreating German forces. Although it was a great honor for the 89<sup>th</sup> to be selected to participate in what became known as “the watch on the Rhine”, this honor came at a price: a 120-mile sojourn on foot from the Armistice position near Stenay, across parts of Belgium and Luxembourg, and then into the German state of Rhineland–Palatinate. On November 20, Martin’s 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion left the village of Cesse near Stenay, and followed a route that included the following towns: Cesse, Sapoigne, Bellefontaine, Vance, Tuntange, Heffingen, Burdorf, Dockindorf, Neustrassburg, Biresborn, Hohenfels, Prum, Waxweiler. This journey was not a daily forced march, but rather a series of long hikes interspersed with breaks for rest or stoppages during which soldiers attended to assigned duties. For example, records indicate that the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion spent four days in Bellefontaine Belgium while higher-level commanders worked out logistics of sequencing the movements of eight Divisions over a few rural roads; by December 1, Company “I” was reported to be near Vance, Belgium. After crossing the border into Germany, Company “I” spent 10 days in the small village of Hohenfels performing “railroad guard” duty. Soldiers quickly noticed the stark differences between the

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<sup>6</sup> Col. Babcock resented AEF orders to press attacks even when signing of the Armistice was imminent. The 89<sup>th</sup> suffered several unnecessary last-minute casualties: 80 minutes before the Armistice, a German shell exploded in the midst of a column of soldiers from Company H, killing six and wounding 20 others.

destruction they had witnessed in France, and the pastoral scenes they encountered in Germany: “Should we mention our feelings upon seeing green fields well-kept – roofs and chimneys whole on the houses – fat cattle and well-fed people in unharmed Germany – all after devastated France?” (89<sup>th</sup> History pg. 263)



Approximate route of 354<sup>th</sup> regiment march into Germany



Martin’s battalion crossing Belgium-Luxembourg border (Source: 89<sup>th</sup> Division History, pg. 473)

Eventually in mid-December Martin's battalion arrived in Waxweiler, a small German village (population 800) that was completely lacking in necessary facilities such as mess halls or recreation rooms. Col. Babcock was greatly concerned for his men's morale given the remote location of the village and a lack of diversions. "Drills, inspections and maneuvers were the order of the day. One could have imagined we were training for a war, instead of waiting to go home." (Babcock Memoir p 672) Billeting details found accommodation for American troops in the homes of German families, and in some cases discovered unexpected links between the victors and the vanquished. "As the 89<sup>th</sup> Division moved up into Rhenish Prussia, a company was sent to some little country village, and one member of the company found himself billeted in the house in which he had been born. Quite a unique shuffle in an army of thousands of men" (Babcock Memoir 693). Conditions imposed by the terms of occupation meant that "it was considered incompatible with the prestige of the occupying troops that any German should have more favorable living conditions than those of the Americans in the same dwelling" (89<sup>th</sup> History pg. 286). But many American soldiers did not feel comfortable enforcing this prerogative, and accepted lower quality billets in order not to offend village residents. Aside from more comfortable sleeping arrangements, though, conditions were not much different from those in France, and "after the first novelty of the occupation wore off, the hope and desire of all ranks was to get back home" (89<sup>th</sup> History pg. 267).



Soon the calendar turned over to the 24<sup>th</sup> of December: Christmas Eve had arrived, and Martin's commanding officer improvised a celebration for the homesick men.

In order to celebrate Christmas in our miserable little hamlets, we arranged a program consisting of a band concert, a vaudeville show, a short religious service, then Santa Claus gave each man a pair of warm socks in which were a corn cob pipe, two packages of cigarettes, some chocolate, a can of smoking tobacco, a

little writing paper with envelopes, and a pamphlet of Christmas carols ... There was no candy, but we had pork, geese and apples, and other good things to eat; which, due to the lack of room, the enlisted men had to eat in their village street, near the company kitchens, or return to their miserable billets... The next day, Christmas, we woke to find the trees and ground covered with snow – a Christmas card Christmas in reality. The celebration in Waxweiler was at 9:00A.M. Santa Claus arrived on a machine gun cart with four mules hitched in tandem. The lead mule had twigs to represent antlers, and the team were labeled “Sergeant Reindeer Prancer, Corporal Reindeer Dasher, 1<sup>st</sup> Class Private Reindeer Comet, and Private Reindeer Dixon”. Attached to the outfit was a sign “Mules carried on the payrolls as reindeer will be allowed extra compensation. By order of Santa Claus”. (Babcock Memoir 671-672)



***Christmas Day in Waxweiler – mule-drawn cart visible at left (source: a soldier’s camera)***

And so Christmas Day came and went, and the monotony of village life returned for Martin’s battalion, doubtless made worse by the harsh winter weather. Even Col. Babcock occasionally let his true feelings show for the area in which his regiment was situated. “After two months in Rhenish Prussia, it became evident that the Kaiser had two good reasons for going to war, the first was to see a good-looking woman, the second to get a place in the sun: it never shines in Germany” (Babcock Memoir 676-677). But Babcock and his subordinate officers nevertheless continued to organize small events to raise morale:

As I have mentioned before, the stupid, uncomfortable and uninteresting life of the American soldiers in these villages was a constant cause of worry to me. There was so little that could be done to alleviate the situation; but we tried nevertheless. One day, in Neuerburg, we got up a doughnut party for the men. It was very difficult to get supplies from the sales commissary in Prum, but finally

we got 300 pounds of flour. At Bitburg, enroute to Wittlich, I obtained 100 pounds of sugar and at Wittlich 100 pounds of lard. All this stuff reached Neuerburg at 5:00P.M. when 12 soldiers went to work and made 1600 doughnuts for some 500 men that evening. The men said it was a great party, and with music and a few gifts from the Knights of Columbus they had a good time. Poor, homesick fellows, it didn't take much to please them. (Babcock Memoir p. 677)

On February 1<sup>st</sup>, the 354<sup>th</sup> Infantry received what Col. Babcock described as “an unexpected, a glorious surprise”: General William Haan had selected the 354th to garrison Trier, a medium-sized city situated on the banks of the Mosel river, studded with Roman ruins and surrounded by vineyards covering the hills that rose sharply from the river valley. Trier was one of the oldest continuously inhabited places in Germany, and in 1919 had a population of approximately 50,000. Aside from the additional diversions of city life, Babcock recognized that a posting in Trier also would provide his men with easy access to a multitude of events and activities organized by the Army of Occupation. For example, several divisions fielded intramural athletic teams in football, basketball, indoor baseball, soccer and track and field. Martin's division eventually would win the AEF championship in football, and the final game featured ace pilot Eddie Rickenbacker and his squadron giving an “exhibition of tail spins, nose spins, dives and every sort of air thriller” (89<sup>th</sup> History p. 271)

More importantly, American commanders recognized an opportunity to improve the educational attainment of an energetic (and essentially captive) soldier population. From Post Schools established to address deficiencies in basic reading and writing, to the “AEF University” which was created to serve those interested in higher education, the Army of Occupation sought to make good use of the time in Germany and to improve the “human capital” that would return to the farms and factories in the United States.

They were men of vision and experience who saw in this vast assemblage of the very flower of American youth an unexampled opportunity for doing good, for providing means for increasing the technical skill of a vast body of prospective industrial workers, for instilling and cultivating a taste for higher education among those fitted for it, and finally and most important of all, for taking a great step forwards toward eliminating a humiliating percentage of illiteracy, which, when brought to universal attention by the statistics obtained from enforcement of the Selective Service Act, has proved startling to all lovers of democracy in our great Republic (89<sup>th</sup> History, pg 276).

Babcock immediately assembled his staff and went to Trier to inspect the large German barracks that would house his regiment. “They had electric lights, hot and cold shower baths, good beds, large mess halls, and near-by fine drill grounds. In the city there were movies; and the Y.M.C.A, Red Cross, Knights of Columbus, Salvation Army and Jewish Welfare Board – all were in close competition. It was a wonderful change for my regiment, stationed in the remote little German villages.” (Babcock Memoir, pg. 680). Other amenities included theater performances in the 1700-seat Fest-Halle, performances by traveling vaudeville troupes, frequent orchestra concerts, facilities for playing

billiards, reading and writing rooms, and numerous outposts of the above-mentioned hospitality groups, many of which provided soldiers with ever-welcome free food and drink. Col. Babcock described one of the most popular diversions for enlisted men:

Occasionally there were dances for the enlisted men at the Red Cross Enlisted Men's Club. Captain Wolff and I went one evening and sat in a gallery as observers for an hour. The dance floor was marked off by white chalk lines. Outside and all around this square stood three or four ranks of doughboys, all waiting to dance. Inside the chalk lines were a dozen or more Red Cross and Y.M.C.A. women dancing with the enlisted men. The floor manager and the soldier orchestra were on a stage. When the floor manager blew his whistle, the music stopped and the outsiders were permitted to cut in. Each time this happened, the entire four-sided front rank of waiting men rushed forward and seized hold of the women. Always, two or three men per woman were engaged in this friendly struggle to get a dancing partner. The custom seemed to be to let the female decide who was nearer to the correct position for dancing. (Babcock Memoir pg. 685)



### **Review of 354<sup>th</sup> Infantry in Trier (89<sup>th</sup> Division History)**

Along with the opportunities and diversions that accompanied the 354<sup>th</sup>'s posting in Trier, this honor also increased the visibility of Babcock's regiment and ensured that the AEF's highest command echelon would be paying close attention to Babcock's performance. The Supreme Commander of the AEF was General John Pershing:

About the middle of March, General Pershing inspected Trier, all the diversified activities, including the welfare societies and the 354<sup>th</sup> Infantry... The 354<sup>th</sup> was spic and span: clean, shaved, shoes blacked, steel helmets varnished, bayonets burnished, all machine guns, carts and animals in fine shape. The General walked

down all the ranks, inquired of the men as to where they came from – he is a native of Missouri and most of them were from the same state. I could see he was pleased... In the evening, I dined with the General in his private car. There was quite a large party. Suddenly, during dinner, he tapped his glass to attract attention, turned towards me and said, “Colonel Babcock, I want everyone here to hear this, I want to tell you that you have the finest-looking regiment I have seen in the A.E.F.” He also added that the men were clean fine-looking soldiers and he was much pleased. (Babcock Memoir pp. 691-2)



**Three of Pershing’s “clean fine-looking soldiers” (source: author)**

Not surprisingly, Pershing’s praise for the 354<sup>th</sup> was a highlight of Babcock’s career.

I had and still have a real affection for my fine regiment. I had seen them die, I had seen them tortured by horrible wounds. For weeks they had cheerfully borne the discomforts of rain, mud, cold, gas, contaminated woods – I knew they would do anything for me and the unexpected words of commendation from the

Commander-in-Chief on the magnificent 354<sup>th</sup> Infantry holds a place in my military memories at the very top of the list. The next morning, in the presence of all the offices and non-commissioned officers, I told them what General Pershing had said about them. What a yell they gave! (Babcock Memoir p. 692)

Finally in early May, orders arrived instructing Martin and his fellow soldiers to pack up their belongings and prepare to return to the United States. The trip home unfolded in similar ways to the arrival, just in reverse order. First, the soldiers boarded trains that took them out of Germany and right back through the areas of France where they had fought. Next they boarded ships at the port of Brest that brought them back to New York, from where they traveled by train back to the training cantonments where they had originally been inducted into the Army (in Martin's case this was Camp Grant) .



**Troops of the 354<sup>th</sup> starting their homeward journey (89<sup>th</sup> pg. 480).**



**Troops of the 354<sup>th</sup> onboard the Emperor enroute to the United States (source: <http://freepages.history.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~caulleyfamilyinfo/>)**



By the middle of 1919, many communities across the United States already had welcomed their soldiers home, and now attention turned to the imminent return of the eight Divisions serving with the post-war Army of Occupation. On May 16, 1919 the Fond du Lac newspaper The Daily Commonwealth reported on a huge celebration in honor of Company “E” of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Division. This was “an all Fond-du-Lac parade, with nearly all of the fraternal societies in line, with the patriotic organization of all kinds in best dress, and with a crowd surging up in the rear of the column to avoid missing even part of the march.” Later in May, among reports of births, jury duty, illnesses, out-of-town visitors, deaths of residents and treasured farm animals alike (“Fred Zoellner lost a valuable young horse last Monday”) the newspaper noted this seemingly insignificant event: “Rev. R. Diephuis and Peter Verhage attended Classis at Chicago last week” – could this trip possibly have marked the beginning of a relationship between the Diephuis and Verhage families that brought Martin and Lena together? The June 3 edition brought the following news (immediately following a notice that “C.W. Boom has purchased a Ford”): “Word was received by Mr. and Mrs. Peter Verhage that their son Martin had arrived in New York after being overseas for a year”. And finally, on June 10 came the announcement that “Martin Verhage arrived home from France last week, having received his discharge at Camp Grant. He was overseas almost a year and saw some of the hardest fighting of the war.”

We do not know anything about how Martin was received at the Verhage farm on the day of his return. One can only imagine his state of mind, coming home to his role as an unskilled farm laborer after having lived through the momentous events of the previous year. As one popular song of the era questioned: “How ‘ya gonna keep ‘em down on the farm, after they’ve seen Patee?” Even though his father Peter was not the warmest of souls, I want to believe that Martin was welcomed home by his parents and siblings with open arms and tears of relief. I like to envision a scene similar to the return of Samwise Gamgee at the end of The Return of the King, written by JRR Tolkien, who was a combat veteran of WWI himself, and imbued his most famous work with much imagery from the Great War:

But Sam turned to Bywater, and so he came back up the Hill, as day was ending once more. And he went on, and there was yellow light, and fire within: and the evening meal was ready, and he was expected. And Rose drew him in, and set him in his chair, and put little Elanor upon his lap. He drew a deep breath. “Well, I’m back,” he said.

THE END