In Grandpa Martin's Footsteps

Martin Verhage USA 2814890

In Grandpa Martin's footsteps – how it began

In late October 2006, my wife Ellen and I traveled to Kansas City, Missouri so that Ellen could attend a medical conference. This was my first experience as a "trailing spouse," and I was determined to make the most of it. We rented a car, and while she attended daily conference sessions I was free to explore Kansas City and the surrounding areas. Within a five-minute walk from our hotel were two points of interest: Union Station, the railroad hub through which my father had passed on his way to basic training in San Diego in 1944, and the Liberty Memorial, dedicated to veterans of World War I, situated on a hill overlooking Union Station. One day I decided to stick around the hotel and visit both places.

The Liberty Memorial (www.libertymemorialmuseum.org) was built in the 1920s to honor the men and women who fought in what then was known as "the Great War." Situated atop a large hill overlooking downtown Kansas City, the Liberty Memorial is an imposing granite structure built in the federal monument style (reminiscent of the Lincoln Memorial or Fort Knox). The visitor feels very small in comparison to the massive tableaus of carved stone, the wide staircases, and especially the main plaza, upon which sits a 217-foot tall stone obelisk.

The Memorial complex also includes two exhibition halls occupying opposite ends of the main plaza. In one of these halls, I found a display of the insignia of different military units of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF), along with descriptions of the geographic origin and composition of each military organization represented. I worked my way around the room, stopping to read carefully the exhibit related to the 32nd Division, a unit made up primarily of national guardsmen from Wisconsin and Michigan. I mentioned to the historian on duty that my grandfather had fought in WWI, and that I thought he was living in Wisconsin during the period of the war. He told me that the AEF comprised three different sub-groups: (1) the relatively small standing army of the US; (2) national guard units from several states (including those from Wisconsin and Michigan, which later became the 32nd Division); and (3) the so-called "National Army" made up of soldiers from the military draft instituted by President Wilson in mid-1917. The historian said that although it was most likely that Grandpa Martin had been one of these drafted men, it was impossible to say for sure without more information about his military unit.

As I walked back down the hill toward the hotel, I reviewed my limited inventory of memories about Grandpa Martin. He died in January of 1969, shortly after my family returned from as six-month trip to Nigeria, and so my recollections of him date mainly from before our departure for Africa. As a child I used to go down to the basement workshop at Grandpa Martin's home on Lowell Avenue to "help" him with his building and refinishing projects. On one of the workshop walls he had displayed a black and white photograph of his infantry company from WWI, which probably caught my eye because of its unusual oblong shape. I am sure that I asked him about it, but now I cannot remember his response, or even if he gave a response. This photograph, which still hangs in the Verhage home on Lowell Avenue, contained important scraps of

information that identified Grandpa Martin's Infantry Regiment and Company. These basic data opened the door to a fascinating journey though WWI internet sites, libraries at Duke and Johns Hopkins Universities, facilities of the National Archives and Records Administration at College Park, Maryland and Chicago, Illinois and ultimately a visit to France to walk the battlefields in Grandpa Martin's footsteps, 89 years later.

My main purpose in writing this document was to share results of my research with other interested family members. Grandpa Martin did not talk much about his experiences in Europe, and he left no written record such as a diary, or letters to loved ones. The only tangible evidence of his service was his uniform and a small collection of souvenirs including his dog tags, a German belt buckle, a German trench knife, a gas mask container and some medals. Interviews with family members turned up few reminiscences: Dave Bratt remembered that Grandpa Martin enjoyed watching war movies, and that once while watching a documentary on WWI, Grandpa Martin suddenly became very animated and told Dave that he had been right in that same geographical area (Dave remembers it as Verdun, and Martin's regiment once camped within 10 miles of Verdun). Dave also remembered asking Grandpa if he had ever shot any Germans, and Grandpa replied that he thought so, but wasn't sure because the Germans usually were very far away and difficult to see. Paul DeVries remembered Grandpa telling him about a German shell that hit the foxhole next to Grandpa's, killing the occupant.

As I learned more about the First World War, though, it was clear that Grandpa Martin served in a Division that played an important role in an extraordinary chapter in our country's history. His organization (the 89th "Middle West" Division) participated in the two main offensives led by American forces, and his Regiment, with Martin's company in the front line, captured a strategic ridge in the Argonne Forest during the final push in November 1918, helping to convince German commanders that their cause was lost. Aside from the military accomplishments, I also was intrigued by the thought of how Grandpa Martin would have perceived this adventure: a farm boy from an insular Wisconsin immigrant community, pulled into a World War that took him thousands of miles away from home and confronted him at every step with new, unusual and sometimes terrifying experiences. Many times I have imagined what it would be like to sit with him and hear about his experiences firsthand. Although this is not possible, I was able to locate some diaries and letters of soldiers who served with Martin, in some cases in the same infantry company. Hopefully, the recollections of these men can convey something of the character of Grandpa Martin's experience in the Great War.

Part I: Induction, Training and the Journey to France

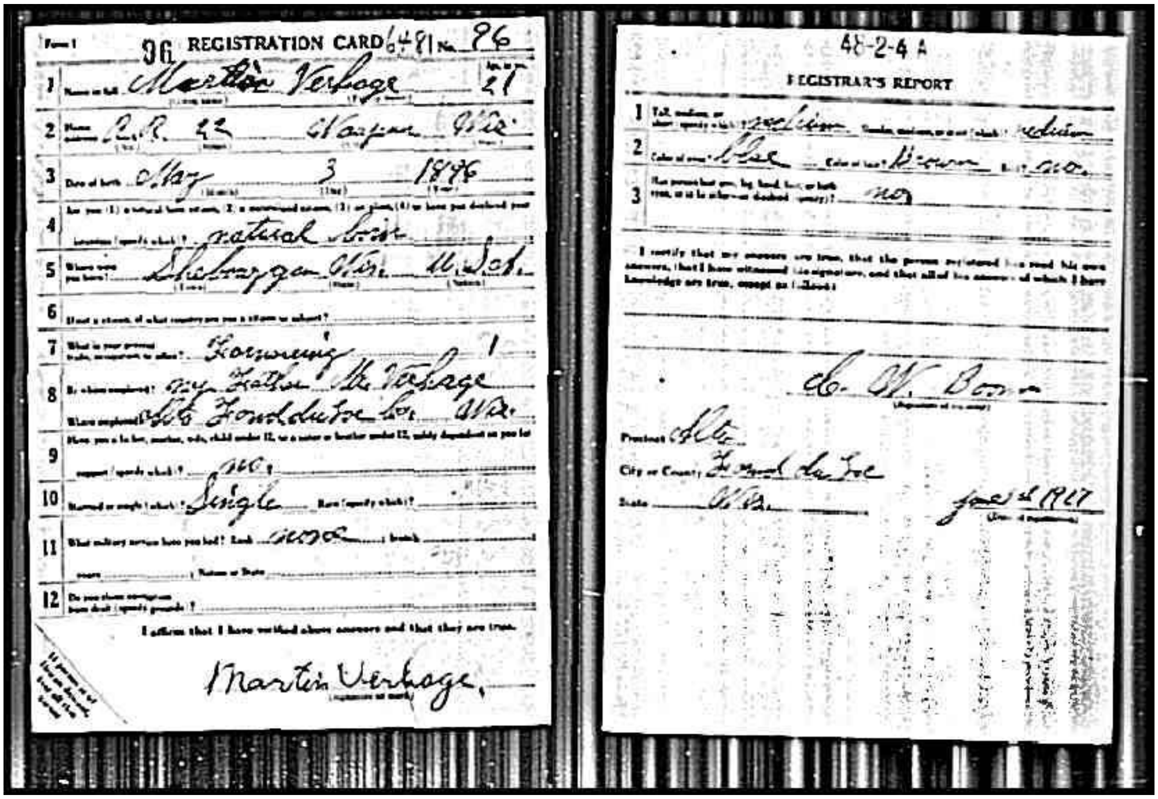
When the United States Congress declared war on Germany in April 1917, the US military was a paper tiger. Troop strength of the standing US Army totaled only 126,000 men, putting the Americans in 17th place worldwide, just behind Portugal. On May 18, 1917, recognizing the need to raise a much larger force, the US Congress passed the Selective Service Act, giving President Woodrow Wilson the authority to call American men to compulsory military service. The first group to register for the draft included men born between June 6, 1886 and June 5, 1896. By the war's end in late 1918, approximately 24 million men had registered with the Selective Service system, representing almost one-half of the total male population of the United States. Eventually, these drafted men made up nearly 80% of US forces sent to France.

This action of Congress had immediate impacts that were felt throughout the country, including in rural Alto Wisconsin, where 21-year-old Martin Verhage worked for his father Peter on the family farm. Peter Verhage had immigrated to the United States from the Netherlands around 1887 as a 16-year-old orphan, and later married Jean Leys, an immigrant from Zeeland, Netherlands. Martin, their oldest child, was born on May 3, 1896 in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, and was named for Jean's father, Marinus Leys. Two years later, Jean gave birth to a daughter Katie, and then in 1901 tragedy struck the Verhage family: shortly after giving birth to a third child, Jean Verhage died of an infection. The infant, who was named John, did not live with Martin's family but was raised by an uncle on the Leys side of the family. Peter Verhage subsequently remarried and had six more children with his second wife, Elizabeth Buteyn.

Martin probably learned of the requirement to register for the draft through newspaper advertisements or printed handbills that were posted in cities and towns. One such notice read as follows:

> *ATTENTION! All males between the ages of 21 and 30 years, both inclusive, must personally appear at the polling place in the Election District in which they reside, on Tuesday, June 5th, 1917 between the hours of 7 A.M. and 9 P.M. to REGISTER in accordance with the President's proclamation.*

Failure to register for the draft carried harsh penalties, including possible imprisonment for a period of up to one year. Although Peter Verhage probably was devastated by the news that his eldest son and main farmhand might be called away from the family farm for an extended period, Martin had little choice but to register. Thus, on June 5, 1917, Martin appeared at the designated place in Fond-du-Lac County, Wisconsin, and provided information to the official in charge of the local draft board. Photographs of draft registration cards for a large number of WWI veterans are available on-line; in fact, Martin's draft registration card was the first piece of official information found in my search (see below). Martin's examiner noted that he was of medium height and build, and that he had blue eyes, brown hair, and was showing no signs of balding.



96 REGISTRATION CARD 6481 No. 86

Martin Verhage — 27

R.R. 22 Waupun Wis.

May 3 1896

natural born

Sheboygan Wis. U.S.A.

Farming

my father M. Verhage

Fond du Lac Co. Wis.

no

Single

none

I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true.

Martin Verhage

48-2-4 A

REGISTRAR'S REPORT

medium — medium

Blue — Brown — no

no

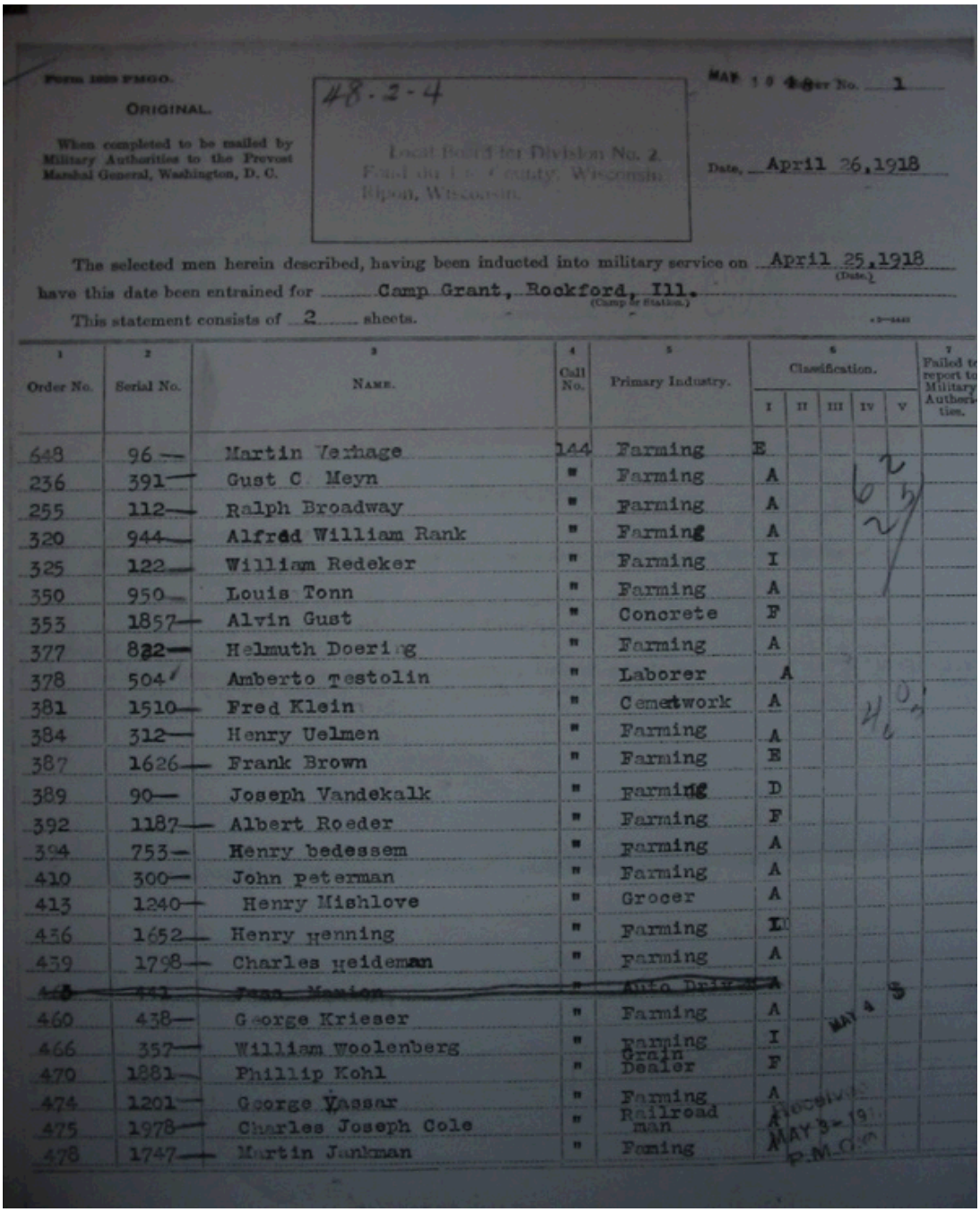
Alto

Fond du Lac

Wis.

June 5 1917

From the information on the photograph in Anna Verhage's house, I knew that Martin eventually was assigned to the 89th Division, based at Camp Funston, Kansas. Initially, though, it was unclear whether he was drafted in an early group and sent to training camp during the second half of 1917, or whether he was part of a later group that was inducted in the spring of 1918. Every county in the United States established at least one draft board to maintain registration records and to send groups of drafted men to training camps as directed by the Selective Service. I learned from a conversation with an Archivist that draft boards recorded information about these men on US Form 1029, also known informally as "lists of men ordered to report". The Chicago branch of the National Archives and Records Administration maintains these records for Mid-western states, and archives personnel eventually located the relevant form 1029. The date of induction was April 25, 1918, and Martin's name is the first one to appear on the list of 38 men sent to Camp Grant, Illinois, one of the "cantonments" that had been hurriedly built in 1917 to serve as training camps for National Army troops. Most of Martin's fellow draftees listed their "primary industry" as farming (the group also included several construction workers, a grain dealer, a grocer and a "railroad man"). Interestingly, nearly all of these men also had German-sounding surnames. Such names might create suspicion among other soldiers, and if there was any doubt about the loyalty of an inductee, military authorities could assign him to a US-based duty station (such as guarding the US-Mexican border), or release him from military service altogether.



Form 1025 PMGO.

ORIGINAL.

When completed to be mailed by Military Authorities to the Provost Marshal General, Washington, D. C.

48-2-4

Local Board for Division No. 2
Fond du Lac County, Wisconsin
Ripon, Wisconsin.

MAY 1 0 19[illegible] Order No. 1

Date, April 26,1918

The selected men herein described, having been inducted into military service on April 25,1918 (Date.)
have this date been entrained for Camp Grant, Rockford, Ill. (Camp or Station.)
This statement consists of 2 sheets.

1 Order No.	2 Serial No.	3 Name.	4 Call No.	5 Primary Industry.	6 Classification. I	II	III	IV	V	7 Failed to report to Military Authorities.
648	96	Martin Verhage	144	Farming	E					
236	391	Gust C Meyn	"	Farming	A			6	2	
255	112	Ralph Broadway	"	Farming	A				5	
320	944	Alfred William Rank	"	Farming	A			2		
325	122	William Redeker	"	Farming	I					
350	950	Louis Tonn	"	Farming	A					
353	1857	Alvin Gust	"	Concrete	F					
377	822	Helmuth Doering	"	Farming	A					
378	504	Amberto Testolin	"	Laborer	A					
381	1510	Fred Klein	"	Cementwork	A			4	0	
384	312	Henry Uelmen	"	Farming	A					
387	1626	Frank Brown	"	Farming	E					
389	90	Joseph Vandekalk	"	Farming	D					
392	1187	Albert Roeder	"	Farming	F					
394	753	Henry bedessem	"	Farming	A					
410	300	John peterman	"	Farming	A					
413	1240	Henry Mishlove	"	Grocer	A					
436	1652	Henry Henning	"	Farming	I					
439	1798	Charles Heideman	"	Farming	A					
~~448~~	~~441~~	~~Fran Mavion~~	"	~~Auto Driv~~	A					
460	438	George Krieser	"	Farming	A			MAY 4	5	
466	357	William Woolenberg	"	Farming	I					
470	1881	Phillip Kohl	"	Grain Dealer	F					
474	1201	George Vassar	"	Farming	A					
475	1978	Charles Joseph Cole	"	Railroad man	A	Received MAY 3-19 P.M.O.G.				
478	1747	Martin Jankman	"	Farming	A					

So from one day to the next, Martin left behind the life of a fieldworker in a sheltered community of Dutch immigrant farmers and entered a very different world populated by personalities he likely never had encountered in Alto, Wisconsin. His first experience as a drafted man was to join other recruits onboard a train to Camp Grant. A similar experience is described by a fellow 89th Division recruit who arrived at training camp at about the same time:

> "The troop train on which I rode to Camp Funston, Kansas, April 29, 1918, was crowded. There were several hundred of us aboard, and no time was lost in formal introductions. While passing through towns along the way, heads and shoulders were thrust out of car windows and loud yells greeted those townspeople, who went to the trouble to go down to see the 'boys pass through'. Inside the coaches 'crap' games were in full blast and drinks were freely passed around. Most of us were asleep when we arrived at Camp Funston near Fort Riley, Kansas at 1 o'clock at night. A sergeant came aboard and ordered us to 'hit the cinders' pronto. Outside we formed a column four abreast and, directed by the sergeant, marched to our barracks where we were assigned cots and then told to hit the hay 'right now'. In 15 minutes the lights were turned out and we were ordered to go to sleep." (Callaway, pp. 11-12)

These were just the first events in a sudden and undoubtedly jarring introduction to military life. According to the official History of the 89th Division, new recruits were quickly parted with any trappings of their old lives as civilians. Their commanding officer was responsible for collecting the clothing they had worn on their journey to the training camp, and personally supervised the fitting of their hobnailed boots. On the first day in camp, all recruits were instructed to take a shower, and then afterward officers carried out careful visual examinations with flashlights (!) to ensure that no communicable diseases were present. "If such signs were found, the recruit was bundled off to the hospital. If not, he dressed himself in new government underclothing and overalls and entered the barrack building" (English, History of the 89th Division, p. 24). Recruits also received their first equipment (two blankets, a mess kit and a bed-sack that was to be filled with straw), underwent another examination performed by a physician, and were given a series of inoculations against smallpox, typhoid and paratyphoid. They were issued military clothing, they became accustomed to army "chow" and began learning the basics of military drill. Their days were so filled with duties that "one recruit expressed his feelings by saying plaintively that Sunday in the Army was just like Monday on the farm" (English, p. 24)

Below is a photo of Martin as a new recruit, with a barracks building in the background on the left, and the detached "bathing building" on the right. He is wearing military-issue clothing (probably made of wool), old-style leather puttees (the later versions were made of wool and were wrapped around the lower leg in a spiral configuration) and is holding a rifle, probably a bolt-action M1917 in .30 caliber. The circumstances of this photo are unknown. First, it is not known whether this photo was taken at Camp Grant or Camp Funston, the cantonment from where he left for France. All training camps were built using similar materials, plans and layouts, and so the buildings in the photo do not provide definitive proof for the site being Camp Grant or Camp Funston. Second, the lack of other soldiers in the photo is odd, because the training camps were very crowded places. It is possible that the Army sent home individual photographs of new recruits in their military garb in order to show the family that their soldier had arrived at the camp and was well. It is interesting that Martin's hair in the photo is still so long (as one family member said, "Lyle Lovett" look); if recruits were given haircuts soon after arriving at training camp, then this photo was likely taken at Camp Grant.

Martin's stay at Camp Grant was brief, likely a few weeks at the most. The History of the 89th Division explains how by the early spring of 1918, the 89th had been "skeletonized" (i.e., broken up) due to transfers of trained soldiers from Camp Funston to other military units that were preparing to leave for France. Replacements in the ranks of the 89th Division were therefore needed, and new recruits from other nearby training camps were sent to Camp Funston to bring the 89th back up to full strength. Martin was one of the men sent from Camp Grant to Camp Funston in late spring of 1918, and one account suggests that some of Martin's fellow travelers were not very happy about their reassignment to the 89th.

> "About the middle of May (1918) we received a number of men from Camp Grant, Illinois, of the 86th Division. This entire Division was broken up and its personnel and members were absorbed by other units. In this way we received a bunch of "busted" – (reduced to the rank of buck private) – non-commissioned

> officers, a bunch of real trained 'soreheads' who did little else besides sulking or griping about this calamity of theirs – this transfer to the 89th Division. One tough-looking ex-top sergeant was repeatedly grumbling over his fate, saying "I always said if they transfer, hope that they would not put me in the ------ 89th Division, now here I am in this *** **** outfit" (Schoppenhorst, p. 28).[1]

It also is clear that Martin had very little time to adjust to Army life before the 89th received its orders to embark for France. "… a large contingent of newly drafted men was received within two weeks of the departure of the Division for overseas, and those weeks were crowded weeks for them. They were equipped, trained in the elements of marching and of manual of arms, given their typhoid prophylaxis and vaccination, all at breakneck speed. But nearly all of their time they spent on the rifle range" (English, p. 38). Another account states that "…it was drill, drill and more drill from morn till night, until they would or would not fall into proper line" (Schoppenhorst, p. 28).

AEF Structure and Hierarchy

A basic understanding of how the US military was structured in 1918 is needed to be able to follow descriptions of battles and troop movements related to Martin's service. General John J. Pershing, the commander of the AEF, created a new divisional structure that he believed would be better suited to penetrate intricate German defenses and fully exploit any breakthroughs into enemy-held territory. Pershing's innovation was the so-called "square" Division, consisting of two infantry brigades of two regiments each (hence the "square" designation), one field artillery brigade (two 75-mm regiments, one 155-mm regiment), an engineer regiment, a machine-gun battalion, a signal battalion, and division supply and sanitary trains. Total divisional strength including all of the support functions was nearly 28,000 men, which was more than twice the size of divisions in major European armies of the time.

In Martin's case, he belonged to the 89th Division, called the "Middle West" Division because the majority of its soldiers came from Midwestern states including Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Minnesota, Illinois and Wisconsin. The 89th Division included two brigades of infantry, the 177th and the 178th, each with approximately 8,500 men. A brigade consisted of two regiments of 3,800 men, and one machine gun battalion. Each regiment was further divided into battalions (3 per regiment) and companies (250 men per company, 4 companies per battalion). Companies were identified by letters ("A", "B" and so on); therefore, companies "A" through "D" comprised the first battalion, "E" through "H" the second battalion, and "I" through "M" the third battalion (there was no company "J", probably because of the possibility of confusion with company "I"). Companies were further subdivided into platoons (50 – 58 men per platoon, 4 – 5 platoons per company), and smaller units within platoons included squads (8 – 12 soldiers) and 3 – 4 man fire teams.

[1] Frank Schoppenhorst was a mechanic from Marthasville, Missouri who was assigned to Martin's company of 250 men. Schoppenhorst was a keen observer of events, and after the war wrote a lengthy memoir about his experiences in the AEF. His account closely parallels Martin's experiences since members of the same company usually occupied the same geographic area.

Command structure was as follows: a General commanded a Division, a Brigadier General commanded a brigade, a Colonel commanded a Regiment, a Major commanded a battalion, a Captain commanded a Company and a Lieutenant commanded a platoon. During combat operations, casualty rates among officers were much higher than among enlisted men, which sometimes resulted in lower-ranking officers such as Corporals or Sergeants being put in command of platoons or even companies.

Martin was a Private in Company "I", 3rd battalion, 354th Infantry Regiment, 177th Brigade, 89th Division. His platoon and squad status are unknown. It is most likely that he was a rifleman, specializing in the use of the Enfield model 1917 .30 caliber rifle, but he also could have received special training as a rifle grenadier or as a member of an automatic rifle squad. We do know, though, that as a Private, Martin occupied the absolute bottom rung of the command ladder in the AEF.

Journey to France

During the second half of May 1918, signs were clear that the 89th was preparing to move to France to join the struggle against Germany. Many of the more experienced soldiers were kept busy packing all of the Division's equipment, while the recent arrivals (probably including Martin) camped out on the rifle range to receive additional marksmanship practice. On the night of May 26, Company "I" soldiers "scrubbed the barracks (and) slept on the bare wire cots for several hours, (with full uniform) ready to leave on a short notice" (Schoppenhorst, pg. 29). At four AM the next morning, Martin and the rest of his regiment began the 4,800-mile journey from Camp Funston, Kansas to the battlefields of France.

> "'Squads Right, March!' was the clear command, quickly and calmly the men responded, everyone seemingly glad to bid "good-bye" to dear old dusty Camp Funston. Some of the officers shed tears, while others were just as hard-boiled as ever. Soon we arrived at Funston Depot where several trains were waiting on the switch. Our train was composed of thirteen cars, ten Pullman, one baggage (in which was located our kitchen) and two freight cars in which was stored our heavy company freight. The trainload consisted of Company "I" and Company "K", or in other words five hundred men to a trainload" (Schoppenhorst, p. 30).

The early portion of the rail journey passed through hometowns of many of these men, providing opportunities for final meetings between loved ones:

> "May 28th at 4:45 AM we arrived in St. Louis, Mo, while many of the boys on this train were drafted from St. Louis, and had somehow sent word ahead to their relatives that we were coming through. Since the entire regiment was on the move, they had made it a point to watch the troop trains as they passed through. Some of these folks had been watching for two days, and other had been there in the yards for the last twelve hours, all anxious to see their folks – perhaps for the last time. An immense crowd had gathered, yet we stopped only three fourths of

an hour. No one was allowed to leave the cars, guards were placed at all the doors, with the instructions not to leave anyone on or off the cars, so the visiting had to be done through the windows. "Oh, what pain it is to part", everywhere one could hear "Good-bye!" for mother, father, wife , sister , brother, sweetheart, and friends. Tears rolled from many a boy's eyes …" (Schoppenhorst p. 31).

Martin's troop train passed through parts of Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York and New Jersey. In many of the small towns, crowds gathered to cheer as the soldiers passed by. Occasionally the train would stop so that the men could engage in physical exercise, principally by taking brisk hikes though small towns on the railway line. One of these stops afforded the men of Company "I" an opportunity to create some mischief at the expense of the officer in command of their train.

"Our commanding officer, Major Styvers, had some relatives in this town and was visiting with them at the depot. We were all in our places, and the train crew was ready to go, then to top the works, someone pulled the cord for the signal to "go". Here we go! Chug, chug, down the line for some distance when all of a sudden we stopped. We wondered what had happened, then here came the Major, struttin' and cursing as he passed along the outside of the cars, in all the rain. He wanted to know who had given the order to pull out, and gave everyone within shouting distance to know that HE WAS IN COMMAND OF THIS TRAIN AND THAT NO ONE ELSE HAD ANYTHING TO SAY ABOUT OUT TIME OF DEPARTURE! It was good that it was raining or else he might have gotten too hot…. We had a good laugh about this prank…" (Schoppenhorst, p.32).

The company's final destination was Camp Mills on Long Island, another of the cantonments built to assist in the task of moving men and material from the US to France.

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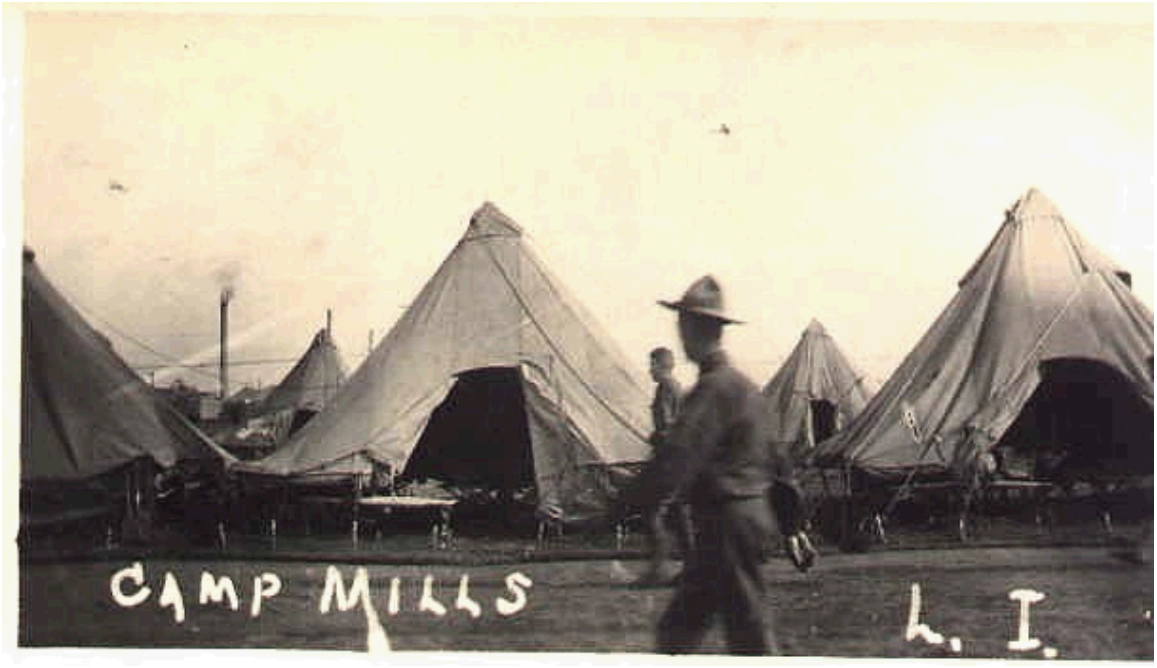

The History of Company "I" entry for May 30, 1918 states the following: "Arrived at Jersey City, New Jersey at 11:00 AM; Crossed East River on ferry to Long Island, where we boarded trains, arriving at Camp Mills, NY at 5:30 PM, making our homes in squad tents until June 3." The 354th used the time at Camp Mills to engage in military drill and to ensure that all supplies and equipment were ready for the ocean voyage.

Late in the evening of June 3, Martin's company left Camp Mills on the Long Island Railroad and headed north. At 8 AM the next morning, the train arrived in Springfield, Massachusetts, where another Company "I" man noted that "ladies of the Red Cross looking like angels board the train and distribute hot coffee and sandwiches, also newspapers with latest news of (German) submarine activities along Atlantic coast. We don't know where we're going, but we're on our way." (Hosmer, pg. 1). During the remainder of June 4, the train continued its northward journey, passing through St. Johnsbury on Lake Memphremagog, and finally crossing the border from Vermont into Canada. At 9 PM, the train arrived at the docks in Montreal, where the troop ship Ascanius (see photo below), formerly a passenger liner of the "Blue Funnel" line, was waiting to carry the entire 354th regiment to France.

> "Across the St. Lawrence and into Montreal, which looks beautiful in the early evening. Detrain at docks and prepare to go aboard ship at one. I am handed a card which reads as follows: 'Your accommodation is a hammock in K Section.' K section turns out to be in the hold, hammocks so close together with every time you turn over you hit the fellow next to you. The ship, by the way, is the S.S. Ascanius, about 8,000 tons burden, a British ship formerly of the Blue Funnel Line, in Australian waters. Has made numerous trips carrying Australians to the Dardanelles. This is her first trip to America" (Hosmer, pg. 1).

The next morning, on the first-year anniversary of draft registration day, Martin's ship left Montreal.

> "June 5, 8 AM: The Ascanius pulls out down the St. Lawrence, loaded to the rails with 3000 doughboys. Chow consisting of mutton stew, boiled potatoes, carrots and bread; this for 16 days with few variations. Sail all day down the St. Lawrence, a beautiful stream. A good many recall that one year ago today they had registered for military service" (Hosmer, pg. 1).

After passing Quebec and Newfoundland, Martin's ship arrived on June 8 in Halifax, Nova Scotia where the rest of the 14-ship fleet that would accompany the Ascanius was assembling. This small armada included several warships and other troop transports, and some of the ships were painted with camouflage patterns to defeat the efforts of German submarines, which had recently begun to attack shipping along the eastern seaboard of Canada and the United States. The next day the Ascanius followed the destroyers out of Halifax harbor, beginning an 11-day crossing that was quiet for the most part. Onboard, some passengers were unimpressed by the accommodations.

> "June 9-16: Uneventful week, zigzagging across smooth seas with considerable fog keeping us in touch with other ships by sounding whistle occasionally. Grub horrible. Sleeping in hammock not too bad, but K section so crowded that you cannot move without elbowing somebody. I understand how they brought slaves over from Africa. The "Middle Passage" had nothing on this" (Hosmer, pg. 2).

On the evening of June 20, the Ascanius arrived in the English Channel, passed the white cliffs of Dover and sailed up the Thames to Gravesend, a suburb of London. The next morning the troops disembarked at Tilbury docks and marched to a nearby railway station, where each soldier was given a small card offering a royal welcome, signed by King George V.

> "After we had our cards we were given a short address of Welcome, by some excited Englishman, what he said we did not hear, for the noise of the English sparrows in the station was almost all one could hear … after he quit talking we all cheered, I guess it was no harm done as this seemed to please him and we gave him plenty of it" (Schoppenhorst, pg. 51).

Then it was time to board another train to a "rest camp" where the regiment would wait until transportation was available to bring them across the English Channel to France. The route took the regiment through heavily populated south London, where they "passed many factory villages and were enthusiastically cheered by crowds of women and children"(Hosmer, pg. 2). By this point in the war, the absence of men would have been easily noticeable, given the large numbers of British soldiers fighting in France and Belgium. English children sough to interact with the American soldiers.

> "We enjoyed watching the passing sights though they were quaint and unusual. We passed through the southern part of London (then the largest city in the world)

> where we received, with much comment, several hundred of school children and smaller children, I judge their age to be five or six years, came alongside our train while we were stopping, they were anxious to chat about this or that, frequently asking for souvenirs, "have you a coin mister?" this was their first and most important question. They had evidently seen many troop trains pass through, from whom they had learned the game" (Schoppenhorst, pp. 51-52).

Martin's rest camp was located just east of Winchester, at a place called Winnall Down. The train arrived at Winchester station late in the evening, and the men marched in the dark with full packs through the center of town to the camp, located a few miles from the train station. The accommodations were not up to the standards of Camp Funston. Barracks were small one-story frame buildings with minimal lighting and heat. Instead of the customary bunk beds, soldiers slept crowded together on "English board beds" which consisted of rough-hewn planks laid on pairs of low trestles. There were not enough bed bags to go around, so many of the men slept right on the boards. The photograph below shows one of the YMCA huts at Winnall Down; Martin may have visited this hut during his stay.

Rations were short at this camp, although the men understood that food was scarce because the British had been at war for nearly four years; "everyone ate his portion and kept still" (Schoppenhorst, pg.57). On the first day at Winnall Down, some of Martin's company reacted to the morning cold by chopping up some of the bed boards and starting a bonfire in the courtyard, an action that drew a quick response from camp authorities. "I suppose that they had smelled the smoke and at once came out to stop that stuff. We had already used some of that forbidden kindling, so what's the difference, we needed warmth and besides, the ashes won't tell, and what's more what Tommy don't know don't make him 'hot'" (Schoppenhorst, pg. 54).

Members of Martin's company made at least two sightseeing visits into the city of Winchester during their brief stay at Winnall Down. Points of interest mentioned included the statue of King Alfred, the West Gate, the ruins of Wolvesy Palace, and especially the ancient Winchester Cathedral. "Before entering the building, Lieutenant P. Boyle, who had charge of our company, knew that if we went through at this time we would be too late for mess, so he let it to a vote, whether or not we wished to miss supper and go through the building, this vote was taken and everyone was in favor of missing supper to see the ancient building" (Schoppenhorst, pg. 56). At the end of their tour, they met the caretaker of the Cathedral. "…he was an old man and very eager to explain and show us things of interest. I remember on one occasion while passing down a certain aisle, he stopped and pointed with pride up to an old box on a high wall (yes, a high dusty wall inside the building) that box, he said, 'contains the hearts of four Saxon Kings.' Then he opened the doors so that we could see the inside of the auditorium, and hear the magnificent pipe organ which at that time was being played" (Schoppenhorst, pg. 57).

On June 25th, the 354th left Winchester for Southampton where they boarded small fast packet boats for the "much dreaded trip" across the English Channel. Throughout the war, German U-boats disrupted shipping throughout the North Atlantic and Mediterranean, sinking hundreds of ships, and the Channel was one of their most active areas. Rumors flew through the regiment of the supposed demise of recent AEF troop transports, and so Martin and his many of his fellow soldiers likely were extremely relieved when they arrived at Le Havre, France early in the morning of June 26. One member of Company "I" summed up the day as follows: "3 A.M. I celebrate my birthday by arriving in France, Le Havre. 8 A.M. we debark and hike through the streets, passing the building that is used as the capital of Belgium. Up some hills thru fields to a sort of stockade which proves to be another rest camp. My tent is minus a floor. We bunk on the ground" (Hosmer, pg. 3).

This camp had even fewer amenities than the one outside of Winchester, and the men were not permitted to do any sightseeing or even to leave the premises. One of the most memorable experiences related to this camp was the system devised for bathing, which was different than anything the troops had seen previously.

> "The building was a small shed-like structure divided into several rooms such as dressing room, hot room, and a cold shower hall. The dressing room was about twelve by fifteen feet and had a concrete floor. Here we had to strip, find a place to hang your clothes on a nail aside the wall, then we were sent to the so-called hot room. I'd call it a sweat room, which was about ten by ten feet closed tight all around having a tight low ceiling. In this room there was a large kettle of boiling soap water. This room was crowded with nude men who were working up a lather on their own bodies with soap furnished us here using no other water for this lather except the perspiration from our own bodies. The atmosphere in this room was very hot and steamy and it soon brought out a profuse sweat. Now when well-lathered up with the sweaty soap suds, we would be taken out of this room and put in a cold shower hall, there they would stand us in a trough while an attendant turned on a stream of cold water, but believe me, if anything takes your

> breath, that does. This finishes the bath, and you go try find your own clothes, and after searching for a while you find them and start dressing. That was some bath, but made up my mind, THAT NEVER AGAIN SUCH STUFF!" (Schoppenhorst, pg. 63).

The final stage of the journey from Camp Funston to the 354th's training area in eastern France again involved rail travel, but this time the conveyance was "little French cigar-box cars." AEF unit histories nearly always mention these boxcars, painted with the words "40 Hommes 8 Chevaux" ("40 men 8 horses") "which notice prompted one doughboy to remark: 'well, I don't mind the 40 men, but I'll be damned if they won't have to take out the 8 horses'" (354th War Diary, pg. 213). These boxcars, and the rails they rode on, made for a memorable (and very unpleasant) experience. Thirty-six men with full equipment crowded into each boxcar, leaving no room to sit or lie down comfortably.

The poor condition of the rails and the lack of any suspension on the boxcars made for a very rough ride. "I guess we traveled at about the rate of one hundred miles per hour; that is, we were going forty miles up, and forty miles down, and about twenty miles in a forward direction" (Schoppenhorst, p. 65). At one rest stop along the route the soldiers were able to replenish their stocks of tobacco, which had run low during the long journey. Immediately after leaving this station "I don't doubt a bit if the cars were seen from a distance it would have appeared as if there was a fire in each one if the box cars, on account of the dense smoke that poured out of every crack, door and window as we went shaking along" (Schoppenhorst, p. 67). As this uncomfortable experience stretched into a

second day, the men were becoming increasingly impatient with this adventure. "First we had to contend with the crowded boat, then in England the cold barracks, then packed like sardines in the ferry boat going across the Channel, then crowded tents, and now it was a crowded boxcar, wonder what's coming next" (Schoppenhorst, p. 66).

Training near Leurville, France

The unforgettable experience with French mass transit ended late in the evening of June 29 in the town of Rimaucourt, and the tired ("fagged out") troops were billeted in houses, barns, and a vacant YMCA hut. The next morning at 7 AM Martin's company began a five-hour march to Leurville, the village where they would undergo five weeks of additional training. "We marched through the town, turning to the right several hundred yards there were several small wooden barracks. These barracks had been built here by American Engineer troops … in a wheat field about two hundred yards to the southeast of the town. Two of these buildings were used for sleeping quarters, and the other was used as a kitchen and dining room. Here was room for 180 or 190 men, thus one platoon had to be billeted in a barn in the town" (Schoppenhorst, p.69).

The small village of Leurville, which hosted troops of Company "I" for the next five weeks, was home to approximately thirty-five farming families who did not live directly on the land they cultivated but rather commuted to their fields each day. Their living arrangements struck the Americans as unusual: "…each large building housed the family, together with all of its livestock, all under one roof … directly in front of each house stood a large manure heap, which was daily added to by throwing the manure from the cow stall or the horse stall located right at the next door …" (Schoppenhorst, p.71). The village also included "a beautiful church, a town hall which also was used as a school house and a post office, a blacksmith shop and a woodwork shop, two cafes in which light wine and beer could be had, a small grocery shop, one public wash house, and one public pond which was free for the use of all" (Schoppenhorst, pp. 71-72).

Although the presence of Martin and his company undoubtedly dominated village life and conversation, the language barrier between the French and the Americans effectively prevented communication between the two groups. Men who had been in the Army for several months would have had opportunity to take a rudimentary French course and learn some basic phrases, but conversing with their hosts was another thing altogether.

> "Here we were now in this strange land, none of us could speak or understand these people except four of our boys in our company. Two of these were Italian, and two were French by birth. These boys had been born and partly educated in their native country, had migrated to America, and then as the draft came they were drafted into military service and were doing their bit the same as we. Outside of these four boys we were at a loss to find out any news of any kind, we could buy no papers, no news or anything, we were out of the reach of everything, so we felt as though we were in a foreign land sure enough. Did I wish that I could speak and understand their language, that would have given a little relief and pastime" (Schoppenhorst, p. 70).

Days in Leurville were spent in rigorous physical training and military drill: "close order, extended order, bayonette drills, maneuvers, nomenclature of the firearms, and not to forget we had plenty of physical exercises to get us in good action … since it was evident that we would soon go to the front line" (Schoppenhorst, p.73). For many of the men in Company "I", Sundays were given as days off to rest, attend worship services and to visit a nearby swimming hole in the afternoons, but for the recently drafted men like Martin, Sunday afternoons were opportunities to spend additional time on the rifle range practicing their marksmanship. All the men in the company now also had access to the "fighting equipment" that would be needed in the coming battles – rolling kitchens, automatic rifles, automatic pistols, gas masks, helmets and live grenade detonators – and so much time was spent familiarizing themselves with all of these new items.

In late July the men received their full pay for the time they had been in France so far, and this caused some commotion, "as we received our pay in French francs. Some of the boys had not been paid since they were in service and a little cash looked mighty good to them. But not so good was that the 'lid was lifted' here in France: that is, soldiers could buy light drinks, such as beer and wine, and on the sly they would buy stronger liquor such as cognac… Here is where I lost the respect of a good many of my buddies; boys that had been real nice to my estimation at Funston, in fact so far they had been unable to obtain any booze, but now after a chance to fill up with this wretched liquor they were an undesirable bunch. Yet there always were remained some that were clean and sober, men who became real buddies and good associates (editorial comment: Grandpa undoubtedly was one of these). Even our Captain Hanson and several Lieutenants Vogel and Jackson were pretty well liquored, especially one Sunday after payday" (Schoppenhorst, p.81).

End of Section One

Coming Soon in Section 2: Trench warfare and "Over the Top"

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In Grandpa Martin's Footsteps, part II: Into the Trenches

By the end of July 1918, the 354th Infantry Regiment was completing its intensive training at Leurville and was preparing to take the next step in the preparation regimen used by the AEF. General Pershing believed in a gradual process of familiarization with the hardships of front-line duty; thus, the next stop for the 354th was a posting in a "quiet sector" where the soldiers would get used to low-intensity conflict (mainly shelling and sniping) prior to being moved into a more active sector. In early August 1918 Martin's regiment received its orders and was sent to an area north of the fortress town of Toul, located near the southern border of an area known as the "St. Mihiel salient." In military terms, a salient is defined as a position that projects into the position of the enemy. The St. Mihiel salient was a result of a 1914 German offensive; by 1918, though, trench lines had largely stabilized, and conflict in this area consisted of artillery duels and occasional raids across no-mans land.

Truck transport (source: 89th Division History)

In the morning of August 7, Martin's regiment boarded trucks and left Leurville. That evening they arrived at a small town situated on a vineyard-covered hillside, which afforded an unobstructed view across 12 miles of open plains directly to the front lines. During the night the soldiers of the 354th saw for the first time the multi-colored signal flares and other illumination shells that the opposing armies used to call for artillery

barrages or to light up "no-man's land" when a trench raid or other action was suspected. Although Martin's company did not know it at the time, soldiers of the 1st battalion of the 354th were up near the front line that night, and suffered nearly 400 casualties in a German artillery assault that employed mustard gas and high explosive shells.

> "As we looked around a bit viewing the town we learned that the name of the town was BRULEY, we were also told that this site marked the place where the Germans were held on their first offensive in 1914. This town was much unlike other towns, narrow winding streets, stone houses, peculiar habits of living etc. However there seemed to be a much more active business here than where we had been the past month. Our rolling kitchen which had been hauled on one of the trucks was here unloaded and put to use, so we had our own company meals again. At 10 AM [the next morning] we were marched into a vacant vineyard on the hillside and given lectures and talks by Lieutenant Bates, Sergeant McKinney and Sgt. Hoffman, their main objective in these lectures was strict obedience to orders from the command. They also told us that we were to leave from this place to go to the front; here again, some of the boys started to drown their troubles by tanking up on liquor." (Schoppenhorst, pg. 83)

Martin's battalion received orders to advance by train that same afternoon to a position much closer to the front lines. While waiting to depart, the soldiers became increasingly aware of the fact that a war was being fought just a few miles to the north.

> "While we waited here we saw our first Boche[1] plane, which was being fired upon by several anti-aircraft guns, these shells exploding high up in the air, but never touching the plane in any way. This was interesting to us and we certainly all craned our necks to watch the show. Here we were aside the old METZ road, a road which leads from the front to TOUL, waiting for our train, there were many ambulances going back and forth, hauling sick, gassed and wounded. Things looked bad. While we were waiting here, Major Stivers, Battalion Commander told us to "Keep on the alert", as the First Battalion of our Regiment had been gassed last night and had suffered severely, you can imagine how blue we felt about this thing, but believe me this little lecture in the meadow aside of the railroad track sobered up a good many boys that had an excess amount of vin rouge[2], quite a few bottles here were jerked out of their packs by them and thrown away." (Schoppenhorst, pg. 84)

At 4 PM, the entire 3rd Battalion (including Companies I, K, L and M) boarded a narrow-gauge train for the trip to the front lines. These little trains were used extensively by both German and Allied armies as a means to transport soldiers, equipment and supplies; engineer troops had developed extensive networks of tracks between front lines and rear supply areas. Fifty soldiers crowded onto each flatcar for the ten-mile ride, and during the trip they soon saw more evidence of the battles between French and German troops that

[1] "Boche" is a French word meaning "stupid" which was widely used among the Allies to refer to the Germans.
[2] "Vin rouge" is French for red wine.

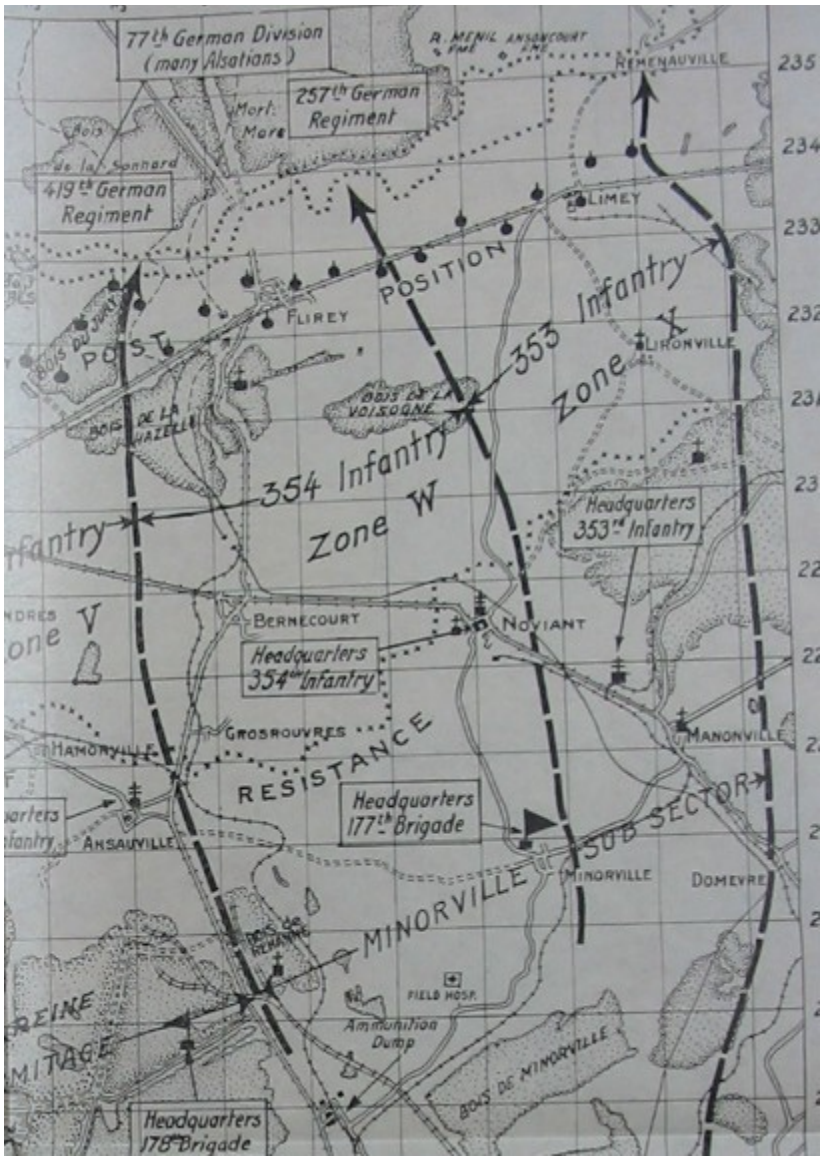
had been fought over this land in 1914 – 1915: old abandoned trenches and barbed wire entanglements, dummy artillery pieces, desolate fields, destroyed buildings and groups of wooden crosses marking gravesites. And then, rounding a curve, the train suddenly brought the soldiers of the 3rd Battalion face to face with the result of the German gas attack of the previous night.

> "… soon we passed a large Red Cross Field Hospital, this sight was one that no one will ever forget; patients everywhere (some on stretchers, others lying on the ground covered with blankets) the large tent was filled, the wide space between the tent and the railroad track was filled with row upon row of stretchers these all being treated for gas effects, further back across the Metz road were woods and there we could also see many waiting there for treatment. Among these patients, Red Cross nurses were busily engaged administering aid to relieve their suffering and pain, while ambulances were steadily coming and going – taking boys to the base hospital at Toul, while others were coming in from the front, bringing boys that needed care and attention. We did not stop here, but we saw what the war had done to our buddies, 'what is going to be our lot?' was the thought that prevailed in our minds" (Schoppenhorst, pg. 85).

Late in the evening, the train finally arrived at Minorville, the largest village in the 354th's sector, located on the third organized line of defenses facing the German front line. This position was known in military parlance as the "line of resistance"; official orders required soldiers to hold this line "at all costs" in the event of a German offensive.

Martin's battalion spent the next five weeks rotating through a series of positions around Minorville, near Noviant (a partially destroyed village on the second defensive line, called "support" line) and in the ruined and largely deserted village of Flirey, located on the front line directly across no man's land from the strong German positions in the Mort Mare forest (see map next page). While in the support positions, the men spent their time digging trenches, fortifying the network of dugouts and shelters, stringing barbed wire and observing the daily dogfights overhead and the nightly artillery exchanges. Howard Hosmer – another member of Martin's company - reported that his life consisted of "quiet, sunny days – nothing to do but lie in the grass and eat plums. Nights not so peaceful. Gas alarms, all false, every hour or so. Otherwise sleeping is pretty good, in house this time, very dirty and full of rats. I have a comfortable sack full of straw" (Hosmer, pg. 4).

The first recorded instance of hostile action directed at the 3rd battalion was a night-time bombing raid by a German airplane while Martin's company was billeted near Noviant. As related by Hosmer, "at 2 AM rudely awakened by the two loudest explosions I have ever heard in my life, shaking stones loose from the roofs. We conclude Boche is shelling us and light out for dugouts. Proves to have been a Dutch [German] aviator dropping a couple of bombs two blocks away, one of which smashed a part of a house" (Hosmer, pg. 4).



354th Infantry Sector in the St. Mihiel Salient

While occupying these positions near Noviant, American soldiers began to notice suspicious behavior on the part of some of the French villagers. "Night after night, the Intelligence Department scouted from place to place about the town, tracing down signal lights, flashes from church towers, etc." (354th War Diary pg. 216) It was thought that French collaborators were trying to alert the German artillery particularly when a movement of American troops to the front line was scheduled, since troops taking over the front lines (as well as those being relieved) were especially vulnerable to shell fire.

> "These people spoke French but they seemed to be pro-German, as numerous arrests were made on account of sending signals from their premises to the Germans …. they would change their clothes on the wash line several times during the day, then again change [plowing] teams about, white and bay horses tandem to

> the plow, (sometimes several times in an afternoon), at night by lantern from house tops or church steeple, using these means of signaling." (Schoppenhorst, p. 88)

Given the suspicion of treachery among the locals, American commanders devised various strategies to attempt to confuse enemy agents. For example, prior to occupying front-line positions around Flirey for the first time, Martin's battalion made several feints on successive nights.

> "We felt that we were going to the front ere long, we had for the last several days marched out toward the front line every evening but had always returned very quietly in the night, this was done to mislead the German spies, for as a general rule the enemy always knew just what evening relief was coming to the front and they were always given a royal welcome by severely shelling them during the time of making the relief. We had fooled the enemy for the last few nights but this day we had stored all our stuff and were now to relieve the second Battalion on the front line. We marched out of town in formation at dusk, going about half a mile then we were halted aside of the road until dark then we were marched out in two single file lines, one on each side of the roadway and five paces interval between men in line, thus we marched to the front line and were assigned our section of the front line and our dugouts." (Schoppenhorst pp. 95 – 96)

The American front-line trenches were located just to the north of the Flirey-Limey road, and the German front-line trenches were on the edge of the Mort Mare forest, a few hundred yards further north. These trench systems were not simple linear defenses, but a tangled and meandering mass of old fortifications from previous German-French battles, as well as new ones dug by American troops. It was possible to cross from the German to the American lines across no-mans-land by following the old trenches, and so one of the tasks of the front-line troops was to guard the entrances to these "communication trenches."

> "From our dugout which housed twelve men, led a series of deep trenches, leading toward almost every direction. Some of these were old and not used much, grown up in weeds and thistles and inhabited only by numerous rats (big fellows) the others were still in use daily by our troops … Shortly before noon I had to go to the company Command post, which was located east of our kitchen on a hillside facing the German lines. I stopped to peep over the top of this support trench a few moments to see the forbidden territory, "No Man's Land", -- what a terrible sight, things all shot to pieces, torn up, battle-scarred, a strip of barbed wire here, another strip there a little further on, trees shot and torn to shreds with shell fire, not a sign of life remained, except that several fresh strips of newly dug dirt appeared as if new trenches had been made or perhaps just lately repaired, this was the only sign of action that could be seen from where I now was." (Schoppenhorst, pp. 96 – 97)
>
> With daylight coming on we could see the battle-scarred, shell-shot, desolated village [Flirey], many buildings were completely demolished, others a wall or two standing, the doorways and windows of which were invariably always all closed up with barbed wire entanglement, here and there was a small faint path which led to

some deep trench … The main street was impassable with deep shell holes, debris and barbed wire as were many of the old german trenches, and the tall weeds took the place of traffic. To the east of us on top of a knoll overlooking the village stood the remains of the Flirey church …. What a beautiful place for a church here apart and above the rest of the buildings in this village, as one could overlook the entire village and surrounding area from here" (Schoppenhorst pp. 116-117).

Trenches in ruins of Flirey, with church in background at left
(source: http://www.greatwar.nl/panorama/pan-flirey.html)

Living conditions on the front lines were difficult. The men were under constant threat of attack, mainly from artillery or snipers. Since the front lines were not well-demarcated, there was a risk of being shot by "friendly fire." Soldiers slept in the trenches or in small dugouts, and had to deal with limited food and water, sleep deprivation and lack of basic hygiene. Fleas (known as "cooties") were the constant companion of the infantryman.

> "While here an order was given that the soldier must not take off his uniform, nor any part of it, thus be ready to go on command at any time, thus our resting or sleeping which was mostly done during the daytime, in our full dress uniform with our gas mask in the alert position and out fighting equipment close at hand. Another order called for every man to "Stand To" every morning at four-thirty AM. We called it the "French Reveille", - after everyone had been working most all the night at least till two or two-thirty AM, this order did not appeal to us very strongly, but this time at dawn was considered a possible time for the enemy to make an attack, thus the order was obeyed as given and no questions asked …We were served two meals a day while here, our food was about the same as usual depending on the amount of supplies received at the railhead (Minorville) and if properly dished out, each man received a good ration. The cooks with the help of several KPs prepared the meals and each platoon sent a chow detail to the kitchen in charge of some Non-Com., these would carry the food in thermo cans to their respective groups, and dish the food to these men. Then when empty they would return these cans to us, while at the same time they would get a supply of water in their canteens. The clank, clink, clank of the canteen was a pleasant sound to hear for the thirsty man, and what was more we missed the water most when we could not

> get as much as we would like to have. We were required to shave daily and with water being scarce it was quite a task at times to make a canteenful last one day." (Schoppenhorst pg. 97 - 98)

Still, some veterans looked back on these experiences with something approaching nostalgia. James Darst, a lieutenant in a machine gun company attached to the 89th Division, who had been a journalist in civilian life, offered this impression of trench life:

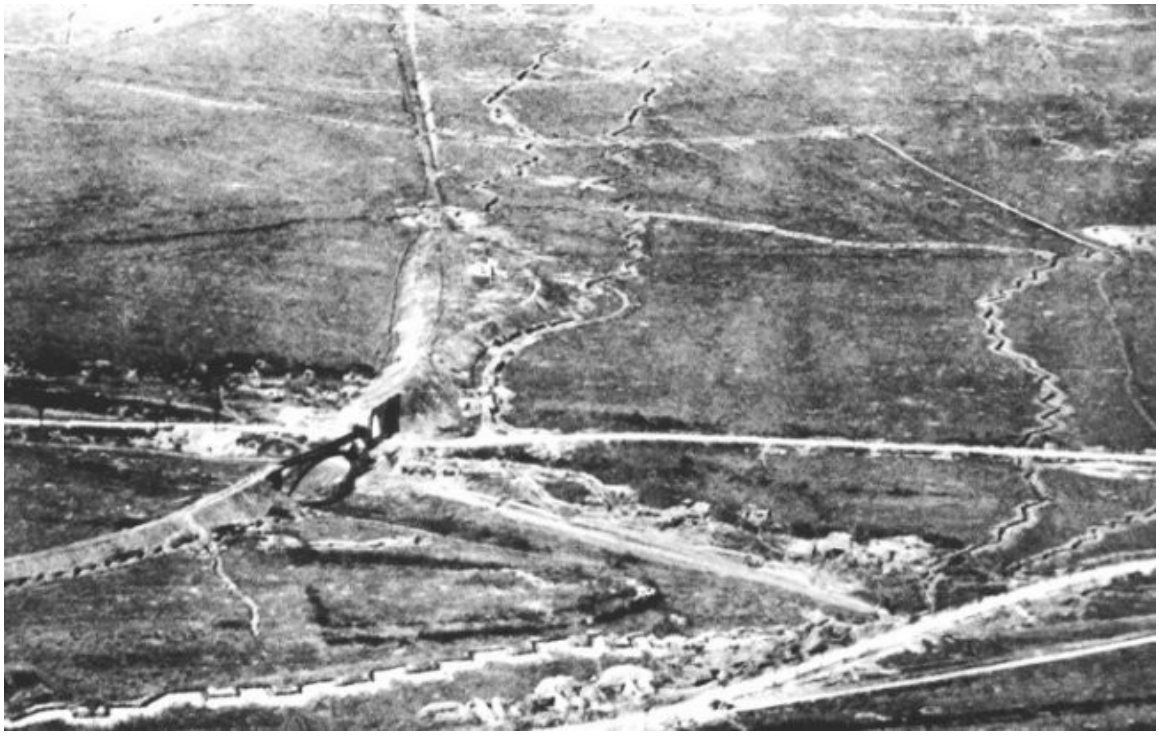
> "The earlier crop of war writers, who specialized in horror, made out the trenches as ghastly places. Perhaps they were bad in Flanders and certainly they were uncomfortable in all sectors during the winter. But trench life during the summer, or at any time, is a picnic compared to the "fox-hole" life in the open warfare of advance. I do not want to seem to underestimate the horrors of war, for they are real, but most soldiers try to forget the ghastly as they would forget a nightmare. I believe I am safe in saying that most of our men – the vast majority – enjoyed the first tour of the trenches. It was a free unhampered sort of life. Of course discipline was strict, orders were numerous and the work never seemed to have an end in sight, but it was healthy, albeit dirty; interesting, although with the spice of danger; comfortable, even in the crude sort of comfort of a hunting party. Dugouts were scarce in our section and the men lived in holes burrowed toward the enemy. Every man took a great pride in his particular "home", usually shared with one of two bunkies. They would scrape the holes clean, enlarge them, line them with "shelter-halves" and then tastefully dispose their packets, blankets, mess kits and shaving apparatus. A man had to insert himself into his 'home' with just the right degree of care; else his foot would lodge in his mess kit."
>
> (Source: James E. Darst, "True Stories of Life as a Doughboy in WWI" http://www.usgennet.org/usa/mo/county/stlouis/darst/darst-4tharticle.htm)

One distinctive feature of life in the trenches was that almost all of the "action" took place at night. Because the front lines were so close together, and observation of enemy lines was constant, any movement of troops during daylight hours was likely to attract artillery and machine gun fire. While in the front line position, Martin's company had to become accustomed to working "third shift".

> "The daylight hours passed quietly, but every night was full of excitement one thing or another, there was guard duty in the trenches, patrol on no man's land, or scouting parties or raiding parties, to get contact with the enemy or even to take prisoners wherever we could. During the daylight everything kept well undercover, not to be seen, but at night everything seemed to be alive with men, besides the abovementioned patrols and parties, there were at times sent out, wire-cutting patrols, cutting the barbed wire entanglements so as to make passage on no man's land easier from one front line to the other. This was dangerous work for no sooner than the clink of a barbed wire was heard by "Fritz", then Up! Went a half dozen dazzling flares, illuminating the entire area roundabout, and beware that object that would move during the time everything was lit up, as plenty of machine guns were

ready to put their hot lead right there on the spot, at that instance." (Schoppenhorst, p. 102)

In late August, German trench raids on the American positions increased in frequency. The purpose of such raids - which usually were preceded by a brief but intense artillery barrage - was to capture prisoners in order to establish which American military units were in the vicinity. One of these raids occurred when Company "I" was holding a section of trench near the old ruined railroad bridge just outside Flirey (see below).



Ruined railroad bridge and American trenches outside of Flirey (source: 89th Division History)

"There is an old saying: That 'there never is a move made in the army except that it has a purpose,' likewise one night orders came from our company commander, for the two platoons to withdraw from the front line and take up the next line of trenches which were about one hundred yards further back, this to be kind of a maneuver. Strange it was that just at this time while orders were received by the platoon commanders to that effect, a German patrol was on top of the parapet, to raid the trenches. Hurriedly orders were given out in great excitement – to fall back to the next line of trenches, the guards on the lookout had reported the coming of the enemy but, additional orders had been given; that "not to shoot as a friendly patrol was out on no-mans land" in this confusion men began running down the communicating trenches, while the enemy patrol on top of the parapet was throwing grenades at them. A very unfortunate situation this was, it was not our patrol – orders not to shoot were hard to obey just now, but a retreat was called for and executed. The next best thing was to try to dodge the "Dutch Potato Mashers"

> as the grenade was called. I was on gas guard with the Medics at this time, as the grenades were fired in this fray, it sounded like a battle royal was just beginning, soon came our boys running for shelter, as they had orders from their officers to retreat. I called in at the dugout door of the Medics, telling them of the late order "to go to the rear" no sooner had I finished giving the order to them, here came all four of these medical men out of the door, fleeing as if the Kaiser was after them, going to the rear at full speed…. By this time Lt. Jackson, Company Commander, was now coming here too, but had very little to say. Inquiry was made whether all the men were out of the area by now or whether some had been taken prisoner. Some one mentioned Mechanic Unland, who was now in charge of an automatic rifle squad of the platoon, he was not yet here, nor any of his men – wonder if he was taken prisoner, or wounded, or killed? This was the whispered discussion of the group. "Listen you can hear someone run over there!" said someone. We could hear someone breathe heavy and groan, one of our group said "who is there"? "Wm. Unland" was the reply.; "I'm shot in the face and leg, I need help". He then came to us and we helped him up the embankment on the road where we were. "Where is one of the Medics?" someone asked; I told them "they all went to the rear at top notch speed quite a while ago." (Schoppenhorst 99-100)

The official history of Company "I" reports that "reinforcements arrived in the form of Cooks, Mechanics and Kitchen Police who were stationed nearby, and Lt. Slaughter commanding the 3rd platoon with exceptional coolness, formed a skirmish line and retook the front line. The Germans retired but reformed and returned at daylight, but were again driven off with heavy losses by rifle fire from the reinforced lines." (History of Co. "I", pg. 3 –UVA library). It is almost certain that Martin participated in this action, since various accounts mention that three of the four platoons of Company "I" were involved, and it is likely that all four platoons took part since platoons were positioned to support one another in case of an attack.

After approximately ten days in the front lines, Martin's battalion was due for relief, at which time the troops were sent to the third defensive line, otherwise known as being "put into reserve." The History of the 89th Division notes that schedules for battalion relief were carefully prepared to minimize the possibility of German artillery inflicting massive casualties on multiple units changing positions at the same time. For example, infantry reliefs were carried out on different nights than machine gun units, and adjacent infantry units never were relieved on the same night (History of 89th Division, p. 76).

> "Of all these events there never was anything that seemed better to us than the news that the platoon Sergeants from the First Battalion arrived tonight, August 30th, to learn the position held by our company in this sector, as this meant relief for us in the near future. So on the evening of the 31st we were relieved and we moved out to the rear, hoping to get a rest. But instead of getting a rest at once we had a very good hike, following the supply wagon all the way to Minorville, thence west into a patch of woods where we remained for the next day." (Schoppenhorst p.104)

The "patch of woods" mentioned by Schoppenhorst was the Bois de Rehanne, which various units of the 89th Division used as a place to relax and refit after a strenuous period of duty in the front lines. These woods were far enough behind the front lines to be reasonably safe, but still were within range of German artillery. Approximately two miles south of the Bois de Rehanne was a small patch of woods that the Americans used as an ammunition dump. Through direct observation or with the help of spies, the Germans became aware of this ammunition dump, leading to what was likely one of the more memorable events of the war for Martin and his fellow soldiers.

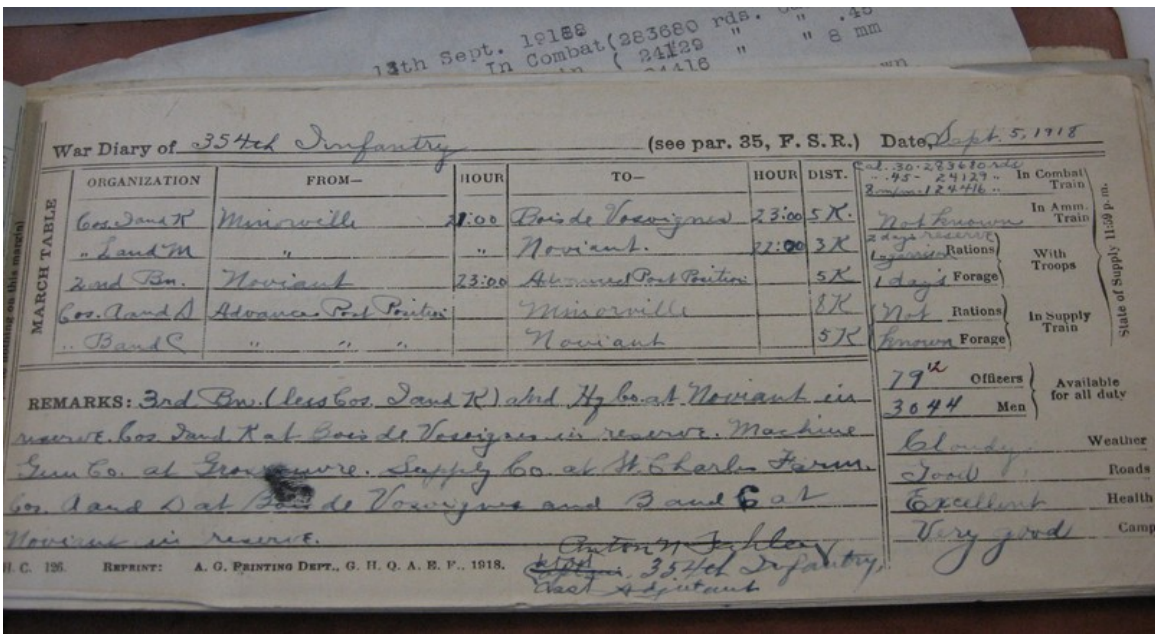
> "There were several batteries of [American] artillery stationed in these woods, and quite a number of splinter-proof dugouts, or rather shelters as they were mostly built on top of the ground, made of native rock. In these were Negro troops, which had just recently come from the States, they were happy to see folks with whom they could speak. But hearing some of the stories of the front, they listened eagerly and sometimes turned pale and speechless with fear … We were through with supper except a detail of these colored men had been working near our kitchen during the day, they were eating at our kitchen too for this day, they had just begun their meal, sitting nearby on the ground or stumps, enjoying the meal, when a shell came overhead making a terrible noise, striking due south of us half a mile away, in a few seconds came another shell just like it, striking very near the spot where the first one struck, only a little to the right, -- these two were range finders, then after these were spotted just right then came the third shell just like the first two, this struck and exploded in a large ammunition storage dump. This exploded and set afire the huge pile of explosives, causing a terrific explosion shaking the very earth underneath our feet. It was all over for us as we had heard such things before, but those negro boys eating their supper fled in every direction, one ran and hid behind our water tank, another ran and looking back fell headlong over a stump, another one fell flat into a shallow ditch, thus the boys had their supper spoiled. The one who fell over the stump remarked, 'I war'nt fered much an' Ise didn' get hoit much either, but it is too bad, I spilled most all my beans!' This was the first report they had ever heard and it was a good one. Another said: "Dat was some houl when dat ting said boom". He still looked pale as he said it… We sat around watching the dump burn, every now and then the blaze would shoot up a hundred feet or more, shortly thereafter we would hear another terrific explosion." (Schoppenhorst, pp 105-106).

Later that evening, while the ammunition dump continued to burn, Martin's battalion received orders to move to Cornieville, a village approximately 12 miles west of the Bois de Rehanne. Although the initial plan had been to move the battalion in trucks, Hosmer tells what happened: "12:30AM trucks fail to arrive, so we hike for four hours with 15 minutes rest. 4:30AM arrive at Cornieville. Everybody all in.[3] Flop in the nearest barn which fortunately has lots of straw" (Hosmer, pg. 5). While in Cornieville, the men received their accrued wages for almost a month's time. "With our pockets full of French money we were now at liberty for the rest of the day. Here again, quite a few boys were not able to control their passion, began to carouse, get soused on French Vin & Bier, of

[3] The phrase "all in" meant "exhausted".

which there was plenty to be obtained here. This town was located behind a hill fairly safe from enemy shells except airplanes, thus the buglers were stationed on lookouts, warning us of their approach, by one blast of the bugle it meant that everyone get and keep under cover until the plane had passed." (Schoppenhorst, p. 108).

At the end of the week of September 7, two very different events took place that directly impacted the troops of Company "I". First, command of the 354th Infantry passed from Col. Americus Mitchell - "who had organized and trained us, acting as a father advisor to his young inexperienced officers and men" (354th War Diary pg. 219) - to Col. Conrad Babcock, a veteran of earlier AEF action on the Marne. Col. Mitchell was transferred to the 35th Division, which at that time was training in the Vosges Mountains for eventual duty in a different area of France. Second, the soldiers learned of the death of Captain Wendell Hay, who formerly had been a lieutenant in Company "I", and who was well-liked by the men. Hay, who had been was promoted to Captain only two days previously, was killed by a grenade during a trench raid in front of Flirey. Hay's was the first battle death among the current or former personnel of Martin's company, and doubtless brought home to the troops the very real risks they were facing.


War Diary of 354th Infantry (see par. 35, F. S. R.) Date Sept. 5, 1918

MARCH TABLE

ORGANIZATION	FROM—	HOUR	TO—	HOUR	DIST.
Cos. I and K	Minorville	21:00	Bois de Vosoignes	23:00	5 K.
" L and M	"	"	Noviant.	22:00	3 K
2nd Bn.	Noviant	23:00	Advanced Post Position		5 K
Cos. A and D	Advance Post Position		Minorville		8 K
" B and C	" " "		Noviant		5 K

State of Supply 11:59 p. m.: In Combat Train: Cal. .30 - 283680 rds, " .45 - 24129 ", 8 m/m - 124416 ". In Amm. Train: Not known. With Troops: Rations 2 days reserve; Forage 1 day's. In Supply Train: Rations Not; Forage known.

Available for all duty: Officers 79; Men 3044

Weather: Cloudy. Roads: Good. Health: Excellent. Camp: Very good.

REMARKS: 3rd Bn. (less Cos. I and K) and Hq Co. at Noviant in reserve. Cos I and K at Bois de Vosoignes in reserve. Machine Gun Co. at Grosrouvre. Supply Co. at St. Charles Farm. Cos. A and D at Bois de Vosoignes and B and C at Noviant in reserve.

Anton N. Schley, 354th Infantry, Asst Adjutant

H. C. 126. REPRINT: A. G. PRINTING DEPT., G. H. Q. A. E. F., 1918.

Entry for War Diary of 354th Infantry for September 5, 1918 (source: U.S. Archives)

The constant rotation of battalions between reserve, support and front lines continued. Company "I" next was sent to a support position in the Bois de la Voisogne (see above), approximately half a mile south of the road connecting Limey and Flirey. Here, Schoppenhorst was pleased to find a deep dugout for protection against artillery, and noticed a pumping station that was serving the water needs of many of the soldiers in the vicinity. It included a gasoline engine that drove a pump jack with a belt, and the water was piped to a tank that was elevated on trestles. "The pumping was done by two Engineer Company men, who were stationed here in this dugout getting their rations from those

infantry companies that came up and were in support. The engineer pumpers had trouble at times getting water enough to supply the demand; they reported "slipping belts" to their organization, requesting a gallon of syrup as a belt dressing. They got the syrup but instead of using it on the belt, they used it on their bread to make it slip better." (Schoppenhorst, p. 112)

One final place that figured prominently in Martin's experiences was a ravine south of Flirey called "Gas Hollow", where many soldiers of the 354th's First Battalion had become victims of the German gas attack four weeks previously. "The thought of that event somehow gave us a creepy feeling, - 'they can get you if you don't look out'. Shelter was our first objective both from shelling and the weather. While those flares were being sent up by the enemy, illuminating the front line area exceptionally well this night, we could see the general outline of this valley, we saw that we were behind a steep hill, giving us good natural protection. (Schoppenhorst, pg. 113)

French Dug-outs near Flirey, on the St. Mihiel sector.

"The entire hill was dugouts,- one dugout aside the other, even several large splinter-proof shelters had been built of heavy rocks and covered with Railroad rails for roof joists on top of which was piled stone about three feet deep, this one shelter would easily accommodate one entire Battalion of troops. (Schoppenhorst, p. 114).

While in this area, Schoppenhorst was beginning to notice changes in the routines that had been in place over the previous five weeks: in his words, "things were getting terribly sensitive and unusually busy" (p. 119). Under cover of night, large caissons full of high-explosive and gas shells were placed in hidden storage areas near the front lines. Platoon commanders met with their men and identified those whose job it would be to carry wounded soldiers to first-aid stations. Artillery pieces in large numbers appeared in Gas Hollow, and more big guns were seen rumbling past on the road toward Flirey. Finally on September 10 came the "shocking order" from the regimental commander that every soldier should dig himself a shelter that would keep him safe from an artillery barrage. On

evening of the 11th, "a French Sergeant from the nearby artillery battery came to our kitchen, he could speak English and wanted to learn to better talk the conversational English. He told us many things which at that time we did not know whether to believe him or not …. He told us that on this very night the Drive [offensive] would begin, we did not know as our superior officers would tell us nothing, however from all indications this Frenchman might be right. We had orders to prepare and serve a meal shortly before 12 midnight." (Schoppenhorst, p. 119)

The St. Mihiel Offensive[4]

In mid-1918, a series of Allied offensives was beginning to turn the tide against the German army. General Pershing chose an area known as the St. Mihiel sector for the first fully American-planned and executed offensive, whose objective was to reduce a salient projecting 16 miles into the Allied line. Roughly shaped like a triangle, the salient ran from Verdun on the north, south-west to St. Mihiel and then east to Pont-a-Mousson on the Meuse River. It was bordered by a line of hills known as the Heights of the Meuse and a succession of marshes and lakes situated across deep ravines and dense forests. In addition to its natural defensive advantages, the salient protected the strategic rail center of Metz and the Briey iron basin so vital to the Germans as a source of raw material for munitions. In addition, the St. Mihiel salient interrupted French rail communications and constituted a constant threat against Verdun and Nancy. Reduction of the salient was necessary before any large Allied offensive could be launched against Briey and Metz or northward between the Meuse River and Argonne Forest.

General Pershing insisted that the attack be a United States Army operation under the separate and independent control of the American Commander- in-Chief. When the decision to reduce the salient was made, there were over 1,200,000 American soldiers in U.S. troop units widely scattered throughout France, either serving with French or British Armies or training in rear areas. In view of the splendid record that so many of the U.S. units had already achieved in combat, the Allies were forced to agree that a separate U.S. Army should be formed, although they requested that U.S. divisions continue to be permitted to fight with their armies. The order creating the United States First Army became effective on 10 August 1918, and on August 30, the U.S. First Army officially took control of the St. Mihiel sector. After a series of conferences, the Allies agreed that the St. Mihiel attack should be limited to a reduction of the salient, following which the U.S. First Army would undertake a larger-scale offensive on the front between the Meuse River and the Argonne Forest. With the attack at St. Mihiel scheduled for 12 September, this would require winning an extraordinarily swift victory there, then concentrating an enormous force to launch a still greater operation 40 miles away, within just two weeks.

[4] This three-paragraph introduction - which provides an overview of the first major action involving Martin's regiment – is adapted from the American Battle Monuments Commission publication entitled "St. Mihiel Cemetery and Memorial", found at http://abmc.gov/cemeteries/cemeteries/sm.php)

Never before on the western front had a single army attempted such a colossal task. At 5 AM on 12 September 1918, following a four-hour bombardment by heavy artillery, the U.S. I and IV Corps composed of nine U.S. divisions, began the main assault against the southern face of the salient, while the French II Colonial Corps made a holding attack to the south and around the tip of the salient. A secondary assault by the U.S. V Corps was made three hours later against the western face of the salient. Reports were soon received that the enemy was retreating. That evening, the order was issued for U.S. troops to press forward with all possible speed. By the dawn of 13 September, units of the U.S. IV and V Corps met in the center of the salient, cutting off the retreating enemy. By 16 September, the entire salient had been eliminated. Throughout these operations, the attacking forces were supported by the largest concentration of Allied aircraft ever assembled. The entire reduction of the salient was completed in just four days, by which time some of the divisions involved had already been withdrawn to prepare for the Meuse-Argonne battle (see map on last page).

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In Gas Hollow, Schoppenhorst and his fellow cooks and mechanics continued talking with the French Sergeant deep into the night. "At 12:30 AM he still sat with us, he seemed to have all kinds of time; then he remarked: 'in thirty minutes everything will go Boom!!! all around us as beaucoup artillery had been placed along this sector'. We took his words for what they were worth, and waited for the time to tell. We had our work out of the way and we were ready to turn in for a rest, the weather was bad, raining hard at times, the trench leading to our dugout was sloppy and at places had water a half-foot deep. It was as dark as black cats and no light dared show up at this time, so we were just groping around in the mud and darkness. The dugout we had for our shelter was so crowded with troops that it was filled to standing room …" (Schoppenhorst, p.119).

The French Sergeant's predictions turned out to be true. "At five to one [AM on September 12] a single warning shell whined across into the enemy's lines. At one sharp, the doors of sound swung open, the hill and valley, burst into cascades of flame and the sky became a highway for a myriad Messengers of Death" (354th War Diary, pg. 220).

> "And there came an explosion that shook the very earth, rocked the giant oaks of the forests for miles around and lit up the heavens so brilliantly that one could have read a newspaper for miles back of the roaring, crashing front. More than two thousand American guns, ranging from the 75-milimetre gun on the fiery edge of battle to the giant naval guns on railway trucks, miles back of the lines, took part in this mighty bombardment, the greatest artillery concentration in the history of the world. During the action designated as the battle of St. Mihiel, these American guns fired a total of 1,000,000 rounds of ammunition in approximately four hours. The magnitude of this battle may be emphasized by comparison with the Battle of Gettysburg, in the War Between the States, in which the Union forces fired 33,000 rounds of ammunition in three days of fighting. Once started, there was no let-up in the firing. Every gun was worked at top speed. The steady flare of the guns furnished enough light for the handling of ammunition and the eager artillerymen

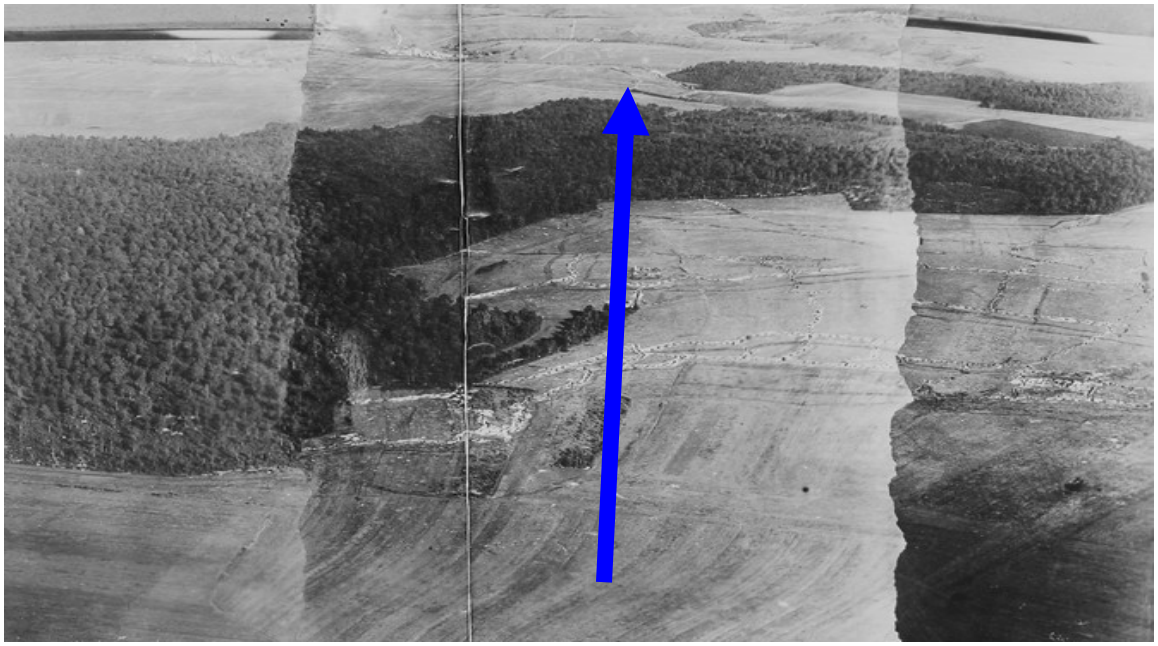
> kept it pouring into their guns in a steady stream …" (Source: Fletcher, "History of the 113th Field Artillery 30th Division", http://docsouth.unc.edu/wwi/fletcher/fletcher.html, pp. 68-69).

The three battalions of the 354th were assigned different roles for the assault on the St. Mihiel salient. The 1st battalion had been sent forward to Limey in support of the 353rd Infantry regiment, which had been given responsibility for attacking on the right-hand side of the 89th Division's sector. Col. Conrad Babcock – the new commanding officer of the 354th - recalled in his memoir that "my advanced headquarters and the remainder of the regiment moved up to a number of dugouts, called "Gas Hollow", about 1000 yds south of Flirey where we spent the night. Beginning at 1:00AM and for the next four hours the noise was terrific." (Babcock memoir, pg. 573) The remaining two battalions (including Martin's company) formed the "Division Reserve", whose mission was to reinforce front-line troops and deal with any remaining strong points in the German lines that were not neutralized by the first wave. During the artillery barrage, they made last-minute preparations for the advance. "In the lines, men gazed across the muddy waste in reverie, or sought a last bit of reviving sleep in a corner where the mud was not so sticky nor the water so deep. The Officers of the Machine Gun Co. with their Sergeants went from gun to gun, verifying their barrage instructions. Line companies got the last warm food they were to have for 36 to 48 hours. Ammunition and pyrotechnics were checked. "Over the Top" packs had been rolled long before and "Surplus Kits" placed in Battalion Dumps where the Supply Officer could later find them. Still it rained." (354th War Diary, pg. 220)

At 10:30 AM on the morning of September 13, Martin's battalion was ordered to advance to the former German positions in front of Limey, following in the path of the 353rd Infantry, who had gone "over the top" at 5 AM. The photograph on the next page shows the ground over which Martin's battalion advanced, with the arrow indicating the approximate route. The forest on the left is called the "Bois de Mort Mare"[5], and was so strongly held by Germans that the American commanders decided not to attack it directly, but rather to flank it and send raiding parties into the woods from the sides. This strategy was very successful, and resulted in mass surrenders by German troops.

> "Boche prisoners were coming back in great companies, with happy, grinning doughboys and military police in charge of them. The Boche looked happy, too. They were glad that the war was over for them and they had already tasted American rations and American tobacco. Very few looked sullen and disgruntled. They were of all shades and sizes, old and young, whiskered and smooth-shaven--a motley crew. They had discarded their heavy helmets and only a few still carried their gas masks. Hairy little "poilus[6]" in their faded blue uniforms, paused to watch these strange processions, to shout "Vive l'Amerique!" and to hurl witticisms and uncomplimentary epithets at the prisoners. They never tired of informing them that the road they were traveling then was, indeed, the road "nach

[5] It may be helpful to refer to the map on page 4. The Bois de Mort Mare is at the very top center of the map, and the photograph on the next page shows the right-hand side of the forest along with the ruins of the Robert Menil Farm and the Ansoncourt Farm, both heavily fortified by the Germans.
[6] "Poilu" is an informal term for a French soldier, and literally means "hairy one".



Mort Mare Forest, Robert Menil and Ansoncourt Farms (Source: U.S. Archives)

> Paris," alluding to the German slogan made famous in the first great drive of the war and in succeeding drives that had promised success. It was a great day for the French as well as for the Americans." (Source: Fletcher, p. 73)

Even though the artillery barrage and initial assault had been largely successful, surviving German machine gunners and retreating artillery managed to exact a toll among the American troops at the head of the advance. German gun emplacements in the woods and around the ruined farms opened up on the advancing infantry, killing and wounding many Americans before they were overrun. Some soldiers were killed by rifle or machine gun fire before they had even fully climbed out of the trenches. In one front-line company of the 353rd Infantry, every officer was either killed or wounded in the first fifteen minutes of the assault.

Several accounts mention enemy snipers in treetop positions; "One of them, in the eastern edge of the woods, was firing upon the lines advancing in the open, and very bravely ignoring the presence of moppers up in the forest beneath him. His nest, well concealed in the tree tops, was finally located and one of our riflemen, long trained in squirrel shooting in our western woods, brought him tumbling headlong from his lofty perch." (History of the 89th Division, USA, p. 100)

By the time Martin's battalion passed over the battlefield around noon, the major fighting had ended but gruesome scenes were everywhere evident. "The dead were about, mostly hit in the head. There were a lot of our men stripping off buttons and other things but they always covered the face of the dead in a nice way" (Col. George Patton[7], quoted in Hallas,

[7] This was the same George Patton who became famous for his exploits in World War II. Other notables who fought within a few miles of Martin included Douglas MacArthur and Harry S. Truman.

Doughboy War, pg. 231). "A large shell had made a direct hit on four boys. All were dead. Limbs were mangled, bodies were torn. It was a sight revolting beyond description. Of one of my comrades I could find only small fragments of his body. None were larger than my hand … (Corporal Chris Emmett, quoted in Hallas, pg. 233). Many American dead were quickly buried in shallow "field graves"; the location of a grave typically was marked with a simple wooden cross, to which was affixed one of the deceased's identity disks (dogtags) so that later re-interment would be possible. The funeral shown in the photo below took place in the same area through which Martin's battalion passed, and it is likely that he saw several such events that day.

BURIAL OF LIEUT. ALLAN W. DOUGLASS

Lieut. Allan W. Douglass, of Battery E, was killed near Limey on the morning of September 12, 1918. He was buried not far from where he fell. Colonel Cox and his orderly were the only members of the regiment present. The German prisoners in the picture dug the grave. A passing Y. M. C. A. man conducted the funeral service.

Martin and his comrades may also have spent some time looking inside the recently abandoned German fortifications in and around the Mort Mare forest. They would have been surprised to have seen how much better the conditions were on the German side of the line.

> "It was interesting to look into the home life of the enemy. His dugouts deep down in the ground were comfortably and orderly arranged. Some of them even had rough sketches on the walls. However, these were only places of safety. His summer houses had all the touches of rustic beauty. During his four-year stay Fritz had given his spare time to making life livable even out here in the zone of action." (History of the 353rd, pp 81-82.)

"There were fine concrete dug-outs for both officers and men. The officers' dug-outs were palatial, compared with those the French lived in on the other side of the old battle line. There was one with a fine piano, many with beautiful furniture, feather beds, bathrooms with hot and cold water, electric lights, a tiled dairy, rabbit warrens, poultry yards, bowling alleys, summer pavilions with rustic tables and seats. It was war deluxe." (Fletcher, pg. 76)

Martin's battalion continued to follow the front-line troops of the 353rd Infantry, and eventually caught up with them near the village of Euvezin, overlooking the valley through which flowed the Rupt de Mad, a tributary of the Moselle river. The 353rd had stopped to "develop the position" against an expected German counterattack. Patrols were sent forward into the town of Bouillonville, seen in the photo below:

View of Bouillonville from across the Rupt de Mad (Source: U.S Archives)

"We were dog-tired and went slowly about the work of digging in. All along the line doughboys and machine gunners of the Eighty-ninth were consolidating, getting ready to hold what they had just taken. Down below us in Bouillonville some of the doughboys had found a German train on a narrow-gauge track, loaded with delicacies for German wounded. Everyone helped themselves to blankets, new underwear, socks, cigarettes and cigars. Dusk came on and we commenced to get word of the entire drive. We learned that thousands of Germans had been captured, that our own casualties were light and that the high command was delighted by the showing of the First American Army in its first major operation.
As the shades of night gathered we made ready to abandon our hurriedly dug fox holes and move forward to lay in wait for a counter attack. You can be sure we were weary, for we had not slept the preceding night and little the night before that.

> We trudged down the slope into the village of Bouillonville and noted where our artillery had smashed it. I recollect a garden that the Germans had set out in cabbages. Four shells had landed in the soft earth and the cabbages were slaw now. We toiled up a road to a plateau that lay on the north of Bouillonville and passed many German dead, mangled by our shell fire. They were twisted in grotesque positions. We noted curiously the ghastly whiteness of their faces." (Source: Darst, http://www.usgennet.org/usa/mo/county/stlouis/darst/darst-6tharticle.htm)

The 354th was now taken from 89th Division Reserve and put back into front-line service. Col. Babcock had spent the first day of the advance with his 2nd battalion, helping to fill in trenches and repair roads to assist in the advance of the artillery and supply trains. Now Babcock was ordered to organize his troops to continue the advance. "Up to that time, I had been riding [on horseback], but in order to set the pace for the dismounted headquarters group as well as the second battalion, I walked. The night was clear and very dark and the horizon to the north and west of us was aflame with the reflection of many fires, and the air trembled with the concussion of the exploding shells as the Germans destroyed their ammunition dumps. It was a really awe-inspiring sight. About 9:00 PM we arrived at Bouillonville and were joined by the 1st and 3rd Battalions. Here we slept on the ground in a cold wind under a broken railroad bridge." (Babcock memoir, pp. 574-575).

Destroyed railroad bridge outside Bouillonville (Source: U.S. Archives)

The next morning, Martin's company received shell fire while they were forming up on the Bouillonville-Thiacourt road. The objectives for the day included the towns of Beney and Xammes, both of which were important German strongholds.

> "The advance was made across a nearly flat open plain towards Beney. Except for the fairly heavy artillery fire, there was no opposition from the enemy. The big shells exploding in the heavy black soil threw great geysers of dirt high in the air; actually they looked worse than they were, due to the nature of the ground upon which they were falling. Had it been rocky, our losses would have been very great.

Approximate view in 2007 of 354th Infantry's Advance (Source: John Bratt)

> We pushed forward for three-quarters of a mile north of Beney to a position selected by General Winn that morning. The 353rd Infantry advanced just beyond Xammes on our right, and the 355th extended the line to our left. At these points the advance was stopped for the day and we began to entrench. It was then about 9:00 A.M. … By 11:00 A.M. of the 13th, the infantry of the 89th Division was holding a line of individual fox-holes from just north of Xammes to a narrow-gauge railroad in the Dampvitoux woods north-west of Xammes. Total length of line about two miles". (Babcock, pp 575-576)

German observation planes flew over the area and reported positions of American troops back to artillery batteries, who shelled the Americans constantly. For six days, logistical problems prevented American artillery from catching up with the front-line troops, which gave German artillerymen free reign to pummel the American infantry units without fear

89th Division soldiers occupying a former German trench near Beney

of counter-battery fire. "Lying helpless on the slopes between Thiaucourt and Beney, witnessing the great wire defenses and deep trenches abandoned without a struggle in this area, we felt convinced that the enemy must have fallen back on exceptionally strong defense" (WD pg. 222).

But the German pullback had a silver lining for American soldiers sent to occupy the towns that formerly had been German strongholds.

> "We had not slept for two nights and had not eaten anything except our canned corned beef and hard tack for two days. To put it mildly, we were ravenous. When we got into Beney we were forced to wait for three hours. Beney was a village of perhaps 1000 souls. German officers had been billeted there and German soldiers had cultivated the gardens. I never saw a finer looking crop of cabbages, turnips and carrots. The Boches were shelling the town constantly, but no one paid much attention to the explosions. A man soon develops the philosophy that if he is destined to get hit he will be hit and there is no use worrying about it. We found refuge, a company of us, in a barn that probably had been used to shelter the horses of German officers. It was half full of clean hay. Soon the men were foraging about the place for food. The first contingent explored the gardens and came back with arms full of carrots and cabbages. Carrots, even when skillfully disguised, have never had a direct appeal to me, but somehow those particular carrots tasted like cake. We remembered the stories of Germans poisoning food when they retreated, but we couldn't think their ingenuity had showed them a way to poison carrots without taking them out of the ground. Pretty soon another contingent of explorers found a kitchen close-by. It contained everything a well-regulated German kitchen

should contain – pots, pans, spices, jams, potatoes, lard, two wood stoves, coffee, black bread. We didn't see any meat but even as we pondered this lack, a muffled squawk came to us out of an adjacent shed and presently a soldier entered the kitchen bearing two speckled German hens, of doubtful lineage but pleasing development of limb and chest. Some buck from the Middle West, who had administered the coup-de-grace to many a fowl on his native farm, effected the execution of this pair and willing hands fell to plucking them of their feathers. Someone else had brought wood for the fire. Another had pulled down a skillet - and was greasing it. There were representatives of three divisions and numerous regiments gathered about, assisting in the preparation of the meal. It was a queer situation. Each party of doughboys rummaged busily among the pots and pans and went about the preparation of his meal quite unconcerned that shells were dropping in the fields near-by and might hit his shelter at any moment." Source: Darst, http://www.usgennet.org/usa/mo/county/ stlouis/darst/darst-6tharticle.htm)

Eventually the 89th Division's position stabilized into a rough rectangle consisting of four sub-sectors, each of which was approximately 1.5 miles wide. The 354th held the "Bois" sub-sector, which was second from the left, mainly located in the Bois de Xammes and the Bois de Dampvitoux. After the excitement of the advance of September 12 – 14, the conflict once again had become a war of position in which enemy troops were mainly unseen and distant artillery inflicted most of the casualties through long range shelling. While in the front lines, Martin and his fellow soldiers were exposed to a variety of life-threatening hazards. "Things become really heart-breaking when the advance is over and men are required to lay in shallow holes, pounded by enemy artillery, the ground swept by machine-gun fire, hostile airplanes sweeping through the sky, dropping bombs and turning their machine guns into the trenches." (Darst, part 7). The men also had to endure long-term exposure to the elements, which in the autumn in northwest France can be very unpleasant.

"As dawn came on a person could make out the figures of soldiers squatting in their holes near by. Usually two men occupied a hole together, and if they were both fortunate they were sleeping in utter exhaustion, huddled together for warmth. We had "borrowed" a number of mattresses from the German stores of supplies in Xammes, and these were placed in the bottom of the holes. When it rained all a person could do was wait resignedly and bail out his home when the downpour had ceased. When it grew lighter most of the men would bestir themselves and take a bored view of the new day. A man then would go about making his toilet[8]. If he were lucky his water supply would consist of a few drops in a canteen. The first process was a vigorous shaking. Rising cautiously, the "buck" would remove his "tin hat" and shake out the accumulation of clods that had lodged in his hair throughout the night. He would then "dust" his hair with his hand and set about seeking a piece of mirror. The mirror would be propped up in a niche and the soldier would cautiously survey himself. If he were a strong man he could survive the initial shock without losing the desire to live. For a man becomes exceedingly unbeautiful when his post office address is a ditch, dirt showing its strong affinity

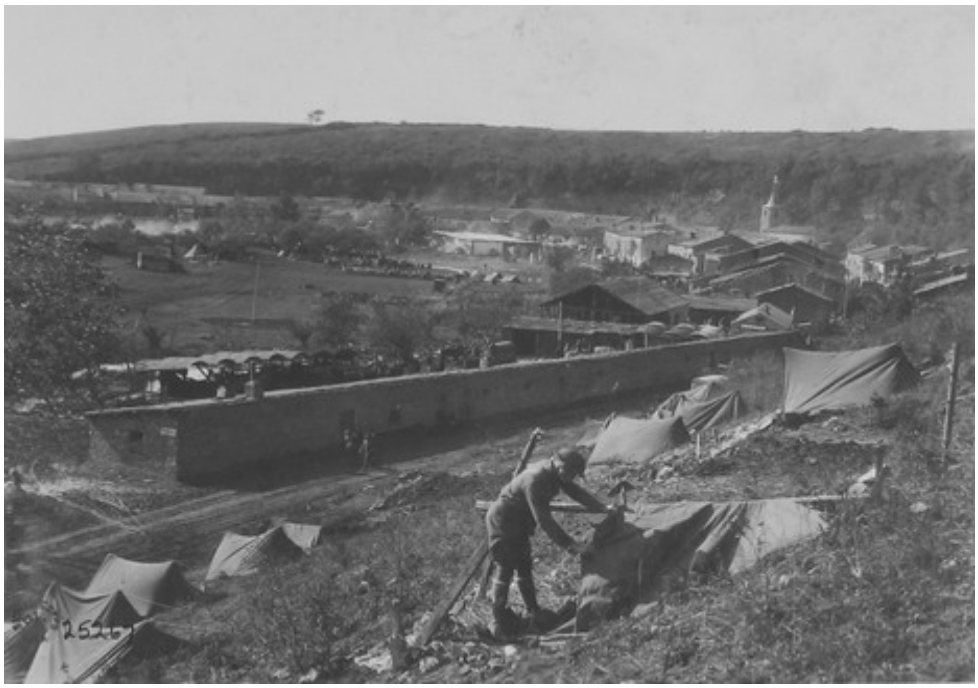
[8] This phrase refers to getting cleaned up.

for the human countenance … Fumbling in his pack, still on his knees, he would bring forth a rag that would make a skillet shudder. Carefully removing the stopper of his canteen, he would transfer a few drops to the rag and go about washing his face as cats and rabbits do, making up for lack of moisture by the vigor of the application. The drying would be done with the other end of the rag. Then he would part his hair with his fingers, readjust the tin hat and be ready for the day… As the day would come on our chief duty would be to keep out of sight and on the alert. Soon the hum of airplane motors would come to our ears and a cautious survey of the sky would show half a dozen planes in battle formation, ranging above our lines. It was exceedingly interesting speculation whether they were our planes or Boche. Glasses would be brought into play, and finally a close scrutiny would reveal the circular markings of an allied plane—or the black Maltese cross of the Germans. If they were Boche every one would remain low and motionless. Whoever was moving at the moment dropped where he was and stayed there. At the same time every one kept a sharp eye on the invaders. Sometimes a plane would sharply disengage itself from the formation and suddenly swoop low over the rows of foxholes. A warning cry would run along the line, and every one would strain his ears for the first crackle of machine-gun fire from the plane. When the burst came every one would huddle in the corner nearest the direction of approach of the plane and draw in his legs and arms to the smallest compass. Conscience would smite a man then—why hadn't he dug that hole deeper when he had the chance? An anxious moment while the plane was zooming above, and then it was past. No one allowed himself the luxury of a breath of relief, however, for they knew how fast the plane could wheel in its tracks and pay a return visit. Usually the plane paid several return engagements, varying its angle of approach and making the men in the foxholes seek different positions. (Darst, part 7).

The main street of Xammes as Martin would have remembered it

Martin's battalion spent three weeks in this sector, dividing time between front line positions northwest of the town of Xammes, support positions near Beney and Pannes, and

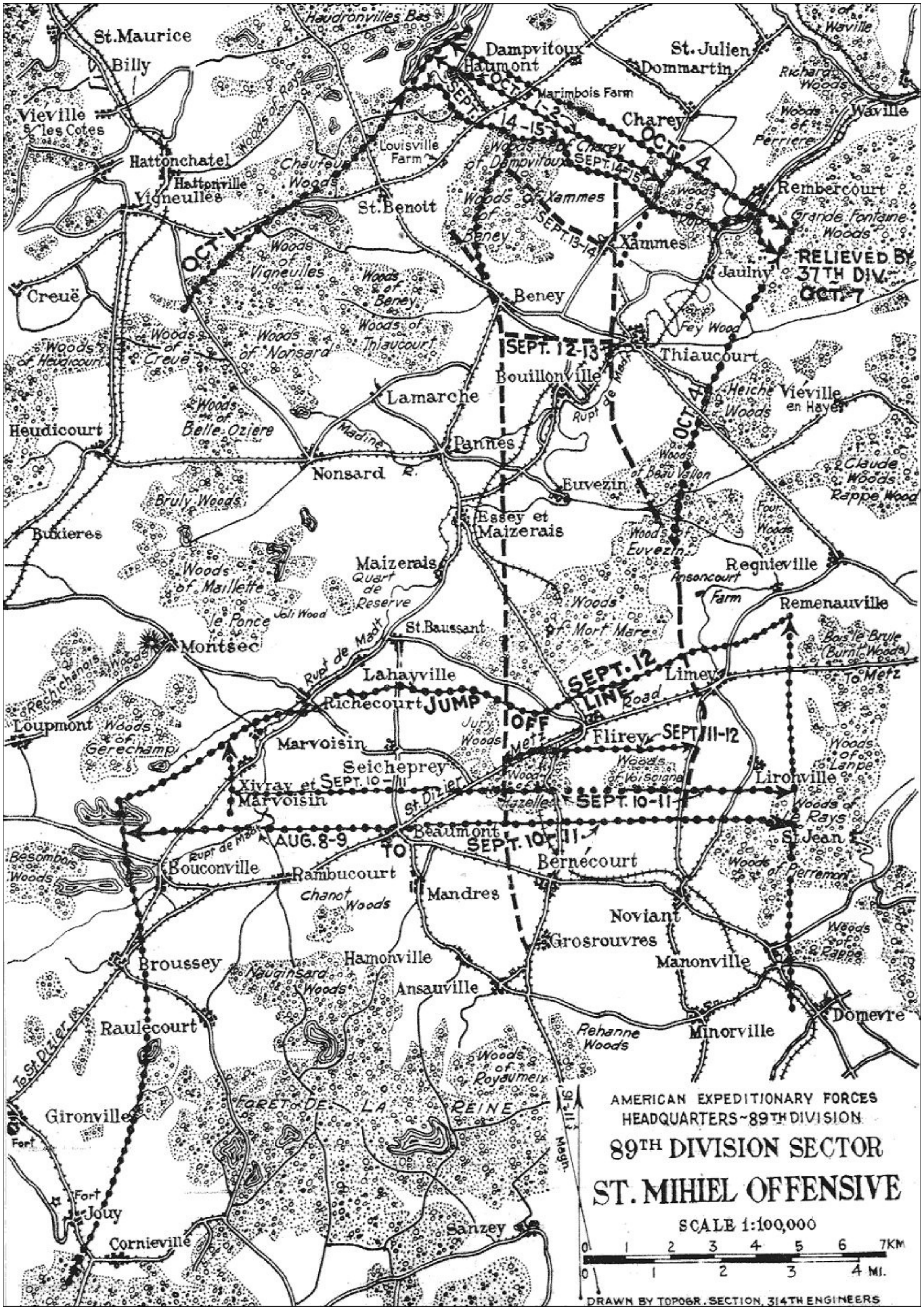
the reserve area around Bouillonville. While in reserve the men received regular hot meals, accessed bathing and delousing facilities, and replaced clothing that they had worn for weeks at a time. Although Bouillonville itself was reasonably safe from shell fire, German aircraft frequently came over on reconnaissance and bombing missions.



In reserve position outside of Bouillonville

Official records make it clear that Martin's battalion was constantly on the move within the sector. The History of Company "I" records nine different moves during an 11-day period from September 23 to October 4, and all of these were made at night to avoid detection by German airmen and artillery. The History of the 89th Division acknowledges that a "most disheartening feature was the apparently useless changes of position, so that it seemed to the tired man that the work he did on one night would be sure to be abandoned on the next night and recommenced only a few yards further forward or back." (pg. 134) But these changes were needed to adjust the American positions to the German Hindenburg Line less than a mile north, and also to accommodate the departure of several divisions which were withdrawn and sent to the Meuse-Argonne area. General Pershing wanted the Germans to believe that the ultimate aim of the St. Mihiel operation was to capture the City of Metz, when actually Pershing had no intention of advancing beyond the ground already captured. Soon it would be the 89th's turn to leave the area around Bouillonville and join hundreds of thousands of other doughboys massing for the final drive of the war.

End of part two


AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCES
HEADQUARTERS~89TH DIVISION
89TH DIVISION SECTOR
ST. MIHIEL OFFENSIVE
SCALE 1:100,000
DRAWN BY TOPOGR. SECTION, 314TH ENGINEERS
RELIEVED BY 37TH DIV. OCT. 7
SEPT. 12 JUMP OFF LINE
St. Maurice
Dampvitoux
St. Julien
Haumont
Dommartin
Charey
Rembercourt
Vigneulles
Hattonchatel
St. Benoit
Xammes
Jaulny
Beney
Thiaucourt
Bouillonville
Lamarche
Pannes
Nonsard
Euvezin
Essey et Maizerais
Maizerais
Regnieville
Remenauville
Montsec
St. Baussant
Lahayville
Richecourt
Limey
Flirey
Marvoisin
Seicheprey
Xivray et Marvoisin
Lironville
Beaumont
Bernecourt
St. Jean
Bouconville
Rambucourt
Mandres
Noviant
Grosrouvres
Broussey
Hamonville
Ansauville
Manonville
Raulecourt
Minorville
Domevre
Gironville
Jouy
Cornieville
Sanzey
Heudicourt
Buxieres
Loupmont
Creuë
Billy
Vieville s/les Cotes