

A REGIMENT LIKE NO OTHER: THE 6TH MARINE REGIMENT
AT BELLEAU WOOD

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fulfillment of the requirements for the
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Military History

by

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ABSTRACT

A REGIMENT LIKE NO OTHER: THE 6TH MARINE REGIMENT AT BELLEAU WOOD, by LCDR J. Wayne Hill, 103 pages.

This thesis addresses the unique composition of the 6th U.S. Marine Regiment and the role they played in the battle of Belleau Wood. It analyzes composition of the 6th Marine Regiment: 60 percent were college men, many of whom were college athletes. With the exception of the Battalion's senior officers and a handful of senior noncommissioned officers, the Regiment was composed of volunteers. Although they were put through rigorous training, these young Marines were not fully prepared for the war that they would face. These young men overcame shortfalls, and became leaders who motivated others to follow. The argument is that these men were able to use their educational and athletic backgrounds to overcome adverse training and combat conditions and proceeded to shape both the outcome of the First World War as well as the Marine Corps for the remainder of the 20th Century.

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This paper is dedicated to two Marines. The first is Captain Robert Secher, KIA 8 October 2006, Hit, Iraq. The best friend, brother, and Marine I have ever known. The second is Private First Class Herbert H. McClelland, KIA 8 December 1950, Chosin Reservoir, Korea. Thank you Uncle Herbert for all you gave up for our country.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE THESIS APPROVAL PAGE	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
ACRONYMS.....	vii
ILLUSTRATIONS	viii
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2 BUILDING THE 6TH MARINE REGIMENT	11
CHAPTER 3 TRAINING.....	27
CHAPTER 4 INTO THE WOODS	52
CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION.....	79
GLOSSARY	91
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	92
INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST	95

ACRONYMS

AEF	American Expeditionary Force
CMC	Commandant of the Marine Corps
Col	Colonel
GySgt	Gunnery Sergeant
Lt Col	Lieutenant Colonel
Lt	Lieutenant
Maj	Major
NCO	Noncommissioned Officer
U.S.	United States
WWI	World War I

ILLUSTRATIONS

	Page
Figure 1. Drawing of Second Division Symbol	1
Figure 2. World War I Marine Recruiting Post.....	9
Figure 3. Photograph of George A. MacGillivray and other members of 80th Company, 6th Marine Regiment in France, ca 1918.....	11
Figure 4. Lt Clifton B. Cates	16
Figure 5. 2d Lt Caldwell Colt Robinson	17
Figure 6. Carl A. Brannen	18
Figure 7. 6th Regiment "Jazz" Football Program, 25 December 1917	22
Figure 8. 84th Company, 6th Marine Regiment, Post-World War I.....	27
Figure 9. Col Albertus Catlin (pictured as BG Catlin).....	31
Figure 10. Lt Col Harry Lee.....	32
Figure 11. GySgt Dan Daly	34
Figure 12. GySgt Fred Stockham.....	35
Figure 13. Survivors of Belleau Wood including Maj Holcomb, 1st Lt Cates, 1st Lt Erskine of 6th Marine Regiment.....	45
Figure 14. Marines in a machine gun nest close to Champagne, France	52
Figure 15. Map of Belleau Wood, 6 June 1918.....	54
Figure 16. Lt Col Sibley, Commanding Officer, 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment	67
Figure 17. Map of Belleau Wood, 10-11 June 1918	69
Figure 18. Painting of "At Belleau Wood"	73
Figure 19. Aisne-Marne American Cemetery and Memorial, France.....	88

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

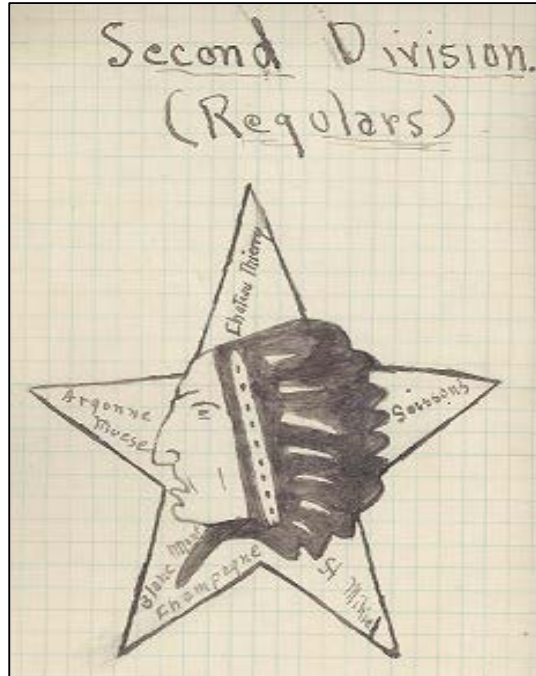


Figure 1. Drawing of Second Division Symbol

Source: Wilbur Talbot, "Diary of Wilbur S. Talbot," *USMC* (Marine Corps Archives, 1918, Marine Corps Base, Quantico, VA).

The United States Marine Corps has long looked to its past to set the tone for its future. The Marines have fought in almost every conflict in American history, from the Revolutionary War to the current War on Terrorism. Names and dates of battles resonate with every U.S. Marine. Tripoli, Tarawa, Iwo Jima, Chosin Reservoir, Hue, and Fallujah are just a few of the places that Marines have fought, bled, and died over the course of American history.

The Marine Corps' first great battle of the 20th Century took place in a small thicket of forest called Belleau Wood located outside of Paris, in June of 1918 during the

First World War. The Germans were on the offensive, and if they could push through to Paris, chances were likely that France would have been forced to sue for peace and withdraw from the war. The Allies would have had no choice but also seek peace with Germany. However, if the German advance could be stopped, then the tide of the war would swing to the Allies and Germany could be defeated.

Recruitment for the Marines was at a high pitch when the war began for America in 1917. Some of the most unlikely members of American society, who would normally not be considered supporters of the Marine Corps, spoke up for them. Former Secretary of the Navy and President, Theodore Roosevelt, who at one time was not a fan of the Marine Corps, was quoted as saying, “There is no finer body of men in the world than the U.S. Marine Corps.”¹ In 1916, the Naval Appropriations Bill was enacted to enable the Corps to add six hundred officers and almost fifteen thousand men to its rosters.² As war drew closer for America, their numbers would increase again, and from this surge of volunteers would emerge the 6th Marine Regiment.

The 6th Marine Regiment not only fought in the First World War, but went on to serve in other wars in U.S. history. During World War II, the 6th participated on Guadalcanal by providing replacements to the 1st Marine Division.³ They later landed on Tarawa as a reinforcing unit and took part in the battle for Saipan and Tinian.⁴ In 1950, the 6th Marine Regiment sent almost all of its troops to aid the 1st Marine Division in the Korean Conflict.⁵ More recently, the 6th Marine Regiment served in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, as well as Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom from 2005 to 2009.⁶

Perhaps no war shaped the world as much as World War I (WWI). The boundaries drawn at the end of this conflict and subsequent restrictions imposed on Germany by the victors set the stage not only for World War II, but also for many conflicts throughout the world today. The First World War established precedents for many forms of modern warfare. From this war emerged the first true use of aviation for combat purposes. Aircraft were used for air-to-air combat, directing artillery support, providing close air support for troops on the ground, and conducting strategic bombing. This war also saw the introduction of tanks on the battlefield. A revolution in communications allowed for the coordination of multiple movements on the battlefield. The world was also introduced to the horrors of chemical warfare on the battlefield on a scale that was unimaginable. Finally, the use of the submarine was adapted as a weapon of stealth that influenced sea lines of communication, and set the stage for its modern day use.

When America entered the war, the U.S. Army was a small force and the U.S. Marines even smaller. However, after war was declared, the draft ensued, and the Army began taking draftees while the Marine Corps relied primarily on volunteers. From these volunteers, the Marine Corps of the First World War were formed. The Marines had always been the smallest of all the American fighting forces, and WWI proved no different. The Marines did not want to rely on the draft to fill its ranks, but they would not allow just anyone to join for the sake of filling those ranks. Those chosen could consider themselves the very best: the best trained, the best marksmen, and the best branch of all the U.S. services heading “over there.”

Fighting on the Western Front, the 6th Marine Regiment was unique among other Marine Regiments and even other U.S. services. What made the 6th Marine Regiment special was its majority of college-educated men and its fusion of new recruits, seasoned officers, and experienced noncommissioned officers (NCOs), making them key to the Allied victory at the Battle of Belleau Wood.⁷ The Commanding Officer of the 6th Marine Regiment, Colonel (Col) Albertus W. Catlin said it best:

If we had the time and opportunity to pick our men individually from the whole of the United States, I doubt we should have done much better. They were as fine a bunch of upstanding American athletes as you would care to meet, and they had brains as well as brawn. Sixty per cent of the entire regiment—mark this—sixty percent of them were college men.⁸

As many were college-educated and played college athletics, the men of the 6th Marine Regiment were possibly more physically and mentally equipped for what the war presented them than most recruits.

Leadership begins from the top down, and the 6th Marine Regiment started with a strong commanding officer in Col Albertus Catlin. Leadership from the “old time” Marine enlisted men also contributed to shaping the 6th Regiment. These were seasoned Marines who would lead the 6th into combat, preparing their men not only to become Marines, but for the brutality of war.

Col Catlin had already seen action in Cuba and Mexico, and was one of the more seasoned officers in the Regiment.⁹ Col Catlin took over the 6th Marine Regiment in Quantico just as newly commissioned officers were training to become leaders and new enlisted were reporting in from Parris Island. Lieutenant Colonel (Lt Col) Harry Lee, Col Catlin’s Executive Officer, had served in the Marines since 1898.¹⁰ Lt Col Lee, too, was a seasoned veteran, having seen action in the Philippines, China, and the Caribbean,

which included Nicaragua, Cuba, Haiti, and Santa Domingo.¹¹ This combination of experienced leadership and trust between these officers was key in the victory at Belleau Wood.

Col Catlin was the perfect fit to lead these men and shaped not only their training, but molded them from a group of recruits into a tight knit, competent, fighting unit of Marines. Col Catlin proved to be tough when it came to training, but what he thought realistic in preparing the 6th Regiment for the Western Front. He quipped, “We taught them to shoot straight and to use the bayonet, we had them mopping up trenches and cutting wire, we hardened them with hikes and we got them to handle machine guns like baby carriages.”¹² True, Col Catlin did train his men for a type of war, but was he training them for the type of war they would face? Were they prepared to fight with artillery in maneuver warfare? Perhaps the Marines were not truly preparing their men for what they would face. Training continued, building on itself from Parris Island to Quantico, and finally to a training camp in France. It was the combination of military training, the officers’ higher education, and the athletic prowess of the 6th Regiment, which would win on the field of battle.

The 6th Marine Regiment benefitted from experience on the enlisted side as well. The 6th only had fewer experienced enlisted than the 5th Regiment, but the 6th brought in numerous sergeants, gunnery sergeants, first sergeants, quartermaster sergeants, and sergeants major from all over the Corps.¹³ These NCOs not only trained new recruits from Parris Island, but even the officers as well.

Some of these “old salts” in the 6th Marine Regiment were comprised of Gunnery Sergeant (GySgt) Dan Daly, GySgt Fred Stockham, Sergeant Major John Quick, and

Sergeant (later General) Gerald Thomas. Also included was a man by the name of George MacGillivray, who enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1910 under the name of Daniel Metzger due to his age, but fought at Belleau Wood under his real name.¹⁴ MacGillivray was not found in the history books, but was one of the many ordinary men who shaped history by serving with the 6th during a battle that determined the outcome of the war.

When the Marines arrived in France, they were placed under command of the U.S. Army's 2nd Infantry Division.¹⁵ The U.S. Marines made up half of the infantry forces of the 2nd Infantry Division, which is why this unit is often referred to as the, "Marine Division."¹⁶ The 4th Marine Brigade was composed of three Marine Regiments: the 5th Marine Regiment, the 6th Machine Gun Battalion, and the 6th Marine Regiment.¹⁷

Major General Omar Bundy was the Commanding General of the 2nd Infantry Division when its Marines were thrown into the cauldron of Belleau Wood.¹⁸ However, not everyone wanted the Marines to be in France as part of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF), such as General John J. Pershing and other Army leaders. Looking to validate their existence, Major General George Barnett, the Commandant of the Marine Corps (CMC) during the First World War, "saw the war as an opportunity to expand the Marines significantly."¹⁹ Indeed, the Marines were too small of a service and were always under the threat of being subsumed into the U.S. Army.

The 4th Brigade was under the command of U.S. Army Brigadier General James Harbord.²⁰ General Harbord was a perfect match not only for the 6th Marine Regiment, but for the 4th Brigade as well. When General Pershing placed him in charge of the 4th

Brigade, he reportedly said he was, “thrilled to find himself in charge of Marines.”²¹

General Harbord and the Marines were eager to prove themselves in the trenches and get in the fight.

To fully understand the relationship between the 6th Marine Regiment, the 4th Brigade, and the 2nd Infantry Division, it is important to look at the relationship between the leadership of the U.S. Army and Marine Corps. Matters of pride, service rivalry, and the importance of the Marines existence as a separate service were key issues. Long before arriving on the battlefield, many battles were first fought in Congress, service headquarters, and even in the public to put the Marines into the battle in France. The road to Belleau Wood was paved by the actions of higher-ranking officers, not only in France, but in the U.S. as well. There were some that felt the U.S. Army alone should garner the laurels of victory. However, the German May 1918 offensive would place the Marines in the fight.

It was during this battle that the unique characteristics of the 6th Marine Regiment, the regiment consisting of “sixty per cent college men,” would pay off.²² Those who survived would shape not only the battlefields of France at the end of this struggle, but the U.S. Marine Corps itself. Looking at the roll call of the 6th Marine Regiment, two future Commandants of the Marines Corps emerge. One sergeant would go on to become a four star general, and one would earn the Medal of Honor from the battle, posthumously (of note, three other members of the 6th would be awarded the Medal of Honor by the war’s end for other battles).²³ More names that filled the officer ranks included Lieutenant (Lt) Clifton Cates, who went on to achieve higher success in the Marine Corps; Lt William B. Moore, who volunteered for a suicidal mission during

the Battle of Belleau Wood; and Lt Johnny Overton, who could have followed his father into the family business, but instead joined the Marines.

There are attributes listed describing a Marine Leader in the *Marine Corps Officer's Guide*.²⁴ Among these attributes is the “contagion of example,” that a Marine officer should not only know a leader’s qualities, but must exhibit them such as command presence; resolution and tenacity, the determination to accomplish what has been tasked; encouragement of subordinates; professional competence; education; physical readiness; the spirit of “can do” and “make do”; adaptability; and grace under fire.²⁵ These are timeless leadership principles and traits. It would be incumbent upon the men of the 6th Marine Regiment to live these principles. These men would set the precedence for not only their time, but the future Marine Corps as well. They had to adapt to changes and challenges presented to them on the battlefield, risking their lives and lives of their men to drive the Germans from the woods and the town of Bouresches. Did these young officers and NCOs exhibit these qualities when their time came to conduct combat operations? How did the senior leadership, both officer and enlisted, help to mold these men of the 6th Marine Regiment? Finally, how did this new Marine Regiment fit within the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) and prove themselves in battle?

As the 4th Brigade and the 6th Marine Regiment were thrown into chaotic battle, questions existed as how its unique college recruits would fare under the German onslaught. Whether their training was sufficient to hold the line to break the German advance was answered by their leadership carried through and emerged victorious. From the smoke, blood, and destruction arose a legend in the U.S. Marine Corps—the “Teufel Hunden” or “Devil Dogs” as they would be forever known. It was the battle of Belleau

Wood where the 6th Marine Regiment found itself thrust onto center stage during the German army's offensive to break through to Paris, ultimately adding the Battle of Belleau Wood to its list of victories. The journey to the woods outside of Paris, France in June through July 1918 began in the United States.

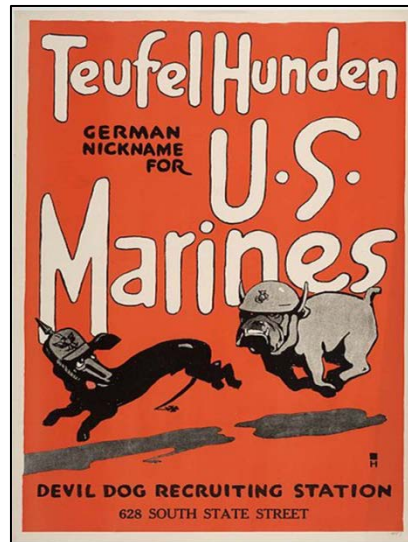


Figure 2. World War I Marine Recruiting Post

Source: Wikimedia.org, “Teufel Hunden U.S. Marines Recruiting Poster,” http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Teufel_Hunden_US_Marines_recruiting_poster.jpg (accessed 30 March 2012).

¹Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons, USMC (Ret) and Colonel Joseph H. Alexander, USMC (Ret), *Through the Wheat, The U.S. Marines in World War I* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 22.

²Ibid., 7.

³6th Marine Regiment-Official U.S. Marine Corps web site, 6th Marine Regiment-History, <http://www.marines.mil/unit/2ndmardiv/6thmarreg/Pages/History/default.aspx> (accessed 28 December 2011).

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Alan Axelrod, *Miracle at Belleau Wood: The Birth of the Modern U.S. Marine Corps* (Guilford, CT: The Lyons Press, 2007), 15.

⁸Brigadier General A.W. Catlin, USMC, *With the Help of God and a Few Marines* (Nashville, TN: Battery Press, 1919 reprint 2004), 18-19.

⁹Simmons and Alexander, *Through The Wheat, The U.S. Marines in World War I*, 27.

¹⁰Ibid., 27.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Catlin, 15.

¹³Simmons and Alexander, 27.

¹⁴George MacGillivray, personal photograph ca 1910 and diary 1918. Marine Corps Archives, Marine Corps Base Quantico, VA.

¹⁵George B. Clark, *The Second Infantry Division in World War I* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc., Publishers, 2007), 1.

¹⁶Ibid., 1.

¹⁷Ibid., 193.

¹⁸Ibid., 5.

¹⁹Axelrod, 9.

²⁰Ibid., 111.

²¹Ibid.

²²Catlin, 18.

²³Owen, 203.

²⁴Kenneth W. Estes, Lt Col., USMC, *The Marine Officer's Guide* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1985), 294.

²⁵Ibid., 294-296.

CHAPTER 2

BUILDING THE 6TH MARINE REGIMENT



Figure 3. Photograph of George A. MacGillivray and other members of 80th Company, 6th Marine Regiment in France, ca 1918

Source: George A. MacGillivray Collection (Marine Corps Archives, Marine Corps Base, Quantico, VA).

The story of the 6th Marine Regiment did not begin with the Battle of Belleau Wood; its story began with the outbreak of the First World War. This was a war which no one had ever seen or experienced anything like it to date. Even before the U.S. military arrived, this conflict was already being referred to as the “Great War,” a war on a global scale that until that time had never been equaled. To put the situation simply, Europe was a piece of firewood simply needing a spark to set it aflame in 1914.

Prince Otto von Bismarck speculated that the cause of the next war would be, “some damned foolish thing in the Balkans.”¹ That “foolish thing” occurred on 28 June 1914, when Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife, the Grand Duchess Sophie, were assassinated by Gavrilo Princip during a visit to the city of Sarajevo.² Princip was a member of a Serbian group known as the Black Hand, which was dedicated to overthrowing the Austria-Hungarian Empire.³ The Austria-Hungarian government held Serbia responsible for the assassination.⁴ What followed next put the wheels in motion for Europe to erupt in conflict and chaos.

On July 5, Germany assured Austria that she could count on Germany’s “faithful support” if whatever punitive action she took against Serbia brought her into conflict with Russia. This was the signal that let loose the irresistible onrush of events. On July 23, Austria delivered an ultimatum to Serbia, on July 26 rejected the Serbian reply (although the Kaiser, now nervous, admitted that it “dissipates every reason for war”), on July 28 declared war on Serbia, and on July 29 bombarded Belgrade. On that day, Russia mobilized along her Austrian frontier and on July 30 both Austria and Russia ordered general mobilization. On 31 July, Germany issued an ultimatum to Russia to demobilize within twelve hours and “make us a distinct declaration to that effect.” War pressed against every frontier.⁵

The First World War began 1 August 1914. Germany put the Schlieffen Plan into action by invading Belgium, which denied Germany the right to pass.⁶ Forces throughout Europe, bound by treaties and obligations, moved quickly to war. Great Britain declared war on Germany over the invasion of Belgium, and France declared war due to its alliance with Russia. Men throughout these nations rushed to the call for arms as never before seen in modern Europe.

From early August 1914 until America began sending troops to Europe, the conflict was nothing short of slaughter. The Schlieffen Plan became mired down by a resistance from Belgium and because the German army outpaced its supplies. The Western Front began as a race to the sea in a series of flanking movements, but settled

into trench warfare. Trenches stretched from the English Channel all the way to the Swiss border, well over 400 miles.

Inside the U.S., its immigrant population watched what was happening with great interest. The Germanic community favored the Germans to win the war, while the Irish community favored whoever was fighting and killing the English.⁷ Most Americans wanted to simply stay out of it and maintain the neutrality that President Woodrow Wilson stated was America's policy.⁸ However, the first real test for U.S. neutrality came on 7 May 1915 when a German U-Boat sank the British flagged, luxury liner, the *Lusitania*, off the coast of Ireland, killing 1,198 passengers, including 124 Americans.⁹ People were outraged at the killing of innocent Americans, and began to talk of going to war with Germany over this action. However, President Wilson did not ask for a declaration of War; instead, he protested through diplomatic channels.¹⁰ In August, the Germans sunk another British liner, the *Arabic*, again with Americans on board, and the American reaction to these losses forced Germany to abandon its unrestricted warfare on the high seas.¹¹

This situation did not last because Germany was suffering from a lack of supplies, and once the ban was in place, the U.S. could again ship supplies to Great Britain and France, which enabled them to continue offensive operations on the Western Front. Eventually Germany gambled, lifted the ban, and began using the U-Boat again for unrestricted warfare at sea in February of 1917.¹² Shortly after this ban was lifted, a U.S. warship, the *Housatonic*, was torpedoed, and President Wilson cut diplomatic ties with Germany.¹³ In January 1917, the British passed along to President Wilson the now infamous "Zimmerman telegram," intercepted between Germany's Foreign Minister,

Alfred Zimmerman, and Germany's ambassador to Mexico.¹⁴ In this note, Zimmerman proposed an alliance between Germany and Mexico. If Mexico declared war on the U.S., Germany would support them militarily, helping them regain their lost possessions of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona.¹⁵ This was the final straw and President Wilson went before Congress and was granted a Declaration of War on 2 April 1917.¹⁶

Once America went to war, it was questionable whether it was truly ready militarily. In addition to building its military forces, America had to expand its existing military forces through recruiting. The U.S. Army built up its forces through both volunteers and draftees; Marine leadership opted to go the way of a volunteer force vice accepting draftees. The Marines chose to increase its numbers by both actively recruiting a specific kind of individual and by appealing to that kind of individual to join. The mindset of those who went to the Marine recruiters could have been *better to volunteer and be selected by the Marines, than be a draftee in the Army.*'

Although the U.S. Congress issued a declaration of war on Germany, in reality, the U.S. military itself was not yet prepared to enter the First World War. The U.S. Army's ground forces were ranked one step below Portugal, which meant it was not even able to take on Portugal, let alone Germany.¹⁷ There were only a few airplanes in its inventory, and the Army had recently been in Mexico attempting to chase down the Mexican bandit, Pancho Villa, with no success.¹⁸ The army in reality was "limited to foot soldiers and some cavalry, with a well-trained but ill-equipped force of artillery."¹⁹ The Navy was in better shape as it had been the recipient of funding and had new bases overseas due to the spoils of victory in the Spanish-American War.²⁰ However, the U.S. Marine Corps saw little of the money that was given to the Navy.²¹ At that time, the

Marine Corps numbered 462 commissioned officers and 13,214 enlisted personnel.²² The Marines needed to recruit to fill their ranks and to fill them fast. With the Selective Service Act of 1917, Marine recruiters found they had a great recruiting pitch: the idea of “voluntary” service.²³

Marine recruiters selected “only literate, healthy, and physically fit young men, self-starters who responded to the Marine Corps ‘First to Fight’ call.”²⁴ This call went out for recruits and the public answered. The nation was at war, and men were volunteering for any service: Army, Navy, or Marines. However, the Army also had the draft to help fill its ranks. The Corps, however, maintained extremely high standards. It has been estimated that out of those who volunteered for the Corps, upwards of 80 percent were rejected for various reasons.²⁵

In order to recruit the top performers, the Marines looked to the campuses of American universities for the men they wanted. Some of the top contributors of early Corps volunteers included universities like Princeton, Texas A&M, Yale, and the University of Minnesota.²⁶ When at the time America declared war, only one in thirty men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four were actually attending college.²⁷

The Commandant of the Marines, General Barnett, wrote a personal letter to the deans of the nation’s best universities and military schools, and what he offered was revolutionary.²⁸ General Barnett’s proposal was to commission around ten seniors on the dean’s recommendation alone.²⁹ This was a major gamble that these graduates’ characters would make up for their lack of military experience.³⁰ The Commandant’s proposal met with much enthusiasm; even the president of Yale encouraged his young students to rally to the Marine Corps.³¹ In doing so, he wrote, “No branch of the service

has a more honorable record than the Marine Corps and none today offers as varied prospects of immediate and active service.”³² By October 1917, 506 lieutenants were commissioned into the Marine Corps in this way.³³ General Barnett was not only gambling that these young men would be able to lead Marines in combat, he was wagering on the very future of the Marine Corps. If his gamble worked, these men would become not only the future leaders of the Marine Corps, but the leaders of society. If he failed, then the Marine Corps could possibly cease to exist once the war was over.

Some of the young men who volunteered to become Marine Corps officers, ultimately serving in the 6th Marine Regiment, included Lt Clifton B. Cates. Cates attended the Missouri Military Academy, going on to graduate from the University of Tennessee in 1916 with a Bachelor of Law degree.³⁴



Figure 4. Lt Clifton B. Cates

Source: Unknown Photographer, U.S. Militaria Forum, <http://www.usmilitariaforum.com/forums/index.php?showtopic=80505> (accessed 30 March 2012).

A fellow Tennessean who joined Cates in the 6th was Lt Johnny Overton, a Yale graduate, whose father was the Alabama Fuel and Iron Company's president.³⁵ One could speculate that given his privileged status as the son of an important man, Overton could have instead arranged for a safer job behind the lines, but Overton chose to become an infantry officer. Another Yale graduate was Lt Caldwell Colt Robinson.³⁶ Robinson was the grandnephew of Samuel Colt, and his father had served as the president of Colt Firearms.³⁷



Figure 5. 2d Lt Caldwell Colt Robinson

Source: Marine Corps Association and Foundation, <http://www.mca-marines.org/blog/beth-crumley/2011/10/03/2d-lt-caldwell-colt-robinson-killed-action-belleau-wood> (accessed 3 January 2012).

Lt William Moore was from Princeton; he, too, joined the 6th Marine Regiment.³⁸ A young lieutenant from Louisiana State University, Graves B. Erskine, became part of the unit shortly after graduating from college.³⁹ However, his accent was reported to have

been so thick that most of his classmates in training claimed they could not understand what he was saying.⁴⁰

More college men joined the enlisted ranks as well. Many young men walked away from college and volunteered to join the ranks instead of waiting for graduation. One of those to leave college was Carl A. Brannen. Brannen's first choice was the aviation corps, but he was afraid he might not make the cut as a pilot.⁴¹ He went with his second choice instead, and left Texas A&M to enlist in the Marine Corps.⁴² In his memoir, *Over There*, Brannen simply states, "The 'First to Fight' recruiting posters were appealing."⁴³



Figure 6. Carl A. Brannen

Source: C. A. Brannen, The Great War Society, <http://www.worldwar1.com/dbc/brannen.htm> (accessed 3 January 2012).

Brennan described the scene repeated on multiple college campuses of a "mass exodus" of fellow Aggies, who went off to enlist and fight in the war.⁴⁴ At the University of Minnesota, a huge, patriotic rally was held after war had been declared.⁴⁵ During the rally, newly commissioned 2nd Lt Carleton S. Wallace, previously captain of the track

team, showed up in his sharp, Marine uniform, and walked among the students.⁴⁶ At the end of the rally, some five hundred undergraduates enlisted en masse with the, “blessing and applause of the university faculty.”⁴⁷ As such, the Marine recruiters did indeed have their choice of college students. These young men volunteered and were selected for their service to be the “First to Fight.” By the time the war ended, the Marines rejected three men for every one that was accepted.⁴⁸

As the war began, the 5th Marine Regiment took most of the Marines already in service across the sea to France.⁴⁹ The 5th were the first Marines to go “over there.” This meant the 6th Marine Regiment had to build a fighting force from scratch. The 6th Marine Regiment became the recipient of the windfall of new recruits. When the 4th Brigade was created by the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) command, the 5th Marine Regiment, already in France, was the only Marine unit available to fill that role.⁵⁰ The 4th Brigade remained incomplete until the 6th finished being formed and trained. Taking into account that the 5th and 6th Marine Regiments were using the same tactical organization and equipment, the key difference was the men that the Marine Corps were hand-selected to become the 6th Marine Regiment. The 5th had the experience, but the 6th would become the future of the Marine Corps.

Col Catlin had specific qualities in mind for his Marines of the future 6th Regiment:

When the final showdown comes, when the last ounce of strength and nerve is called for, when mind and hand must act like lightening together, I will take my chances with an educated man, a free-born American with a trained mind. Unquestionably, the intelligent, educated man makes, in the end, the best soldier. There is no place for the mere brute in modern warfare. It is a contest of brains as well as brawn, and the best brains wins.⁵¹

The caliber of men that Col Catlin wanted could be found in men like Clifton Cates. He was studying for the bar exam when war broke out and immediately enlisted.⁵² Johnny Overton was the son of the Alabama Fuel and Iron Company's president.⁵³ James Sellers's father had served as principal, superintendent, owner, and president of Wentworth Military Academy in Lexington, Missouri.⁵⁴ In general, the new officers of the 6th Marine Regiment were promising young men who, had America not gone to war, would have taken their talents to the business, law, or other professional work.

Many who joined the enlisted ranks had a background similar to the officers. Melvin Krulewitch graduated from Columbia University in 1916, but decided to enlist in the Marines because of the image in his mind of, "khaki-clad figures springing from the bow of a motor sailor, leaping on the beautiful, silvery sand, with the palm trees growing around there in Central America."⁵⁵ Don Paradis was an up-and-comer at the Detroit City Gas Company.⁵⁶ The company had even given him a new Model T Ford to make his rounds, but he wanted to serve in the war.⁵⁷ After trying the Army recruiting office, which he found dirty and full of drunks, he then tried the Navy, which was not much better.⁵⁸ However, when the Marines told him within four months he could be in combat, "That promise, and those clean, snappy uniforms did the trick."⁵⁹ Others who volunteered for the Marines, though not in the 6th Regiment, included Joseph E. Magnus, grandson of Adolphus Busch; Harry A. Pabst, nephew of the Pabst brewer; and Harold E. Kellogg, nephew of the cereal magnate.⁶⁰

The Marines had their pick of those who would fill their ranks as enlisted men. While looking for educated men, the Marines were also looking for another quality in the college men who were joining. The Marines made a special effort to recruit college

athletes.⁶¹ The 6th Marine Regiment would be packed with men who had played sports while in college, and it started from the top. While at the Naval Academy, Col Catlin, himself, had played on the football team.⁶² Col Catlin boasted in his autobiography that it was the athleticism of his men that helped achieve victory on the battlefield.⁶³ These men came from an academic crucible type of setting. They had been through the pressure of academia and, for some, the stress of post-graduation jobs. With athletes, he was getting men who had worked on teams. These men knew what it would take to build a winning organization; it would take more than the individual, it would take a unit to succeed.

Sports have often been compared to the military and these men exemplified this analogy. The second in command, Lt Col Harry Lee was no exception to the other athletes in the 6th. Lt Col Lee had a reputation as being somewhat of a boxer and wrestler.⁶⁴ The demands of boot camp for the enlisted and officer training required these men to be in the best shape; the battlefield would demand it as well. They would compete in sports even while in training. If one were to look at the section on leadership in the *Marine Officer's Guide*, these qualities that the Marines were recruited for in 1917 are expected today from Marine Officers. Indeed, these men of the 6th Marine Regiment were laying the foundation for the modern day Marine Corps Officer.

Of the men of the 6th Regiment, Cates had played both football and baseball. Johnny Overton was the captain for his Yale track team, and set records his senior year in middle and long distance running.⁶⁵ Lt Clarence Dennis, who entered Manlius Military School in New York at the age of 14, played football as a quarterback for the school's team.⁶⁶ John West had played fullback at Michigan, and Carl Wallace, who inspired so many University of Minnesota students to enlist, had been a track star.⁶⁷

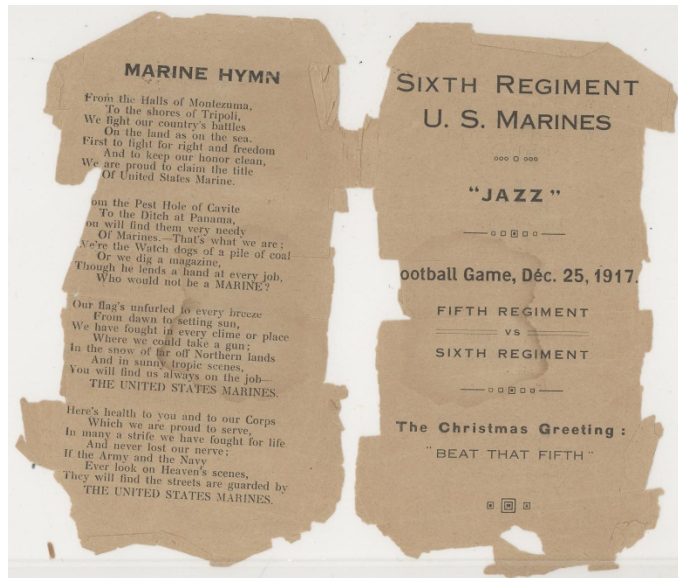


Figure 7. 6th Regiment “Jazz” Football Program, 25 December 1917

Source: Harris J. Andrews III Collection (Marine Corps Archives, Marine Corps Base, Quantico, VA).

James Sellers, while attending the University of Chicago, came down with an illness that sent him back home to Wentworth Academy.⁶⁸ While there during the 1913-14 school years, he coached the school’s rifle squad.⁶⁹ Upon returning to the University of Chicago, Sellers played football in 1914-16, but never on the starting squad.⁷⁰ Indeed, Sellers was glad to know that many of his fellow new officers were “widely known athletes.”⁷¹

Within the enlisted ranks, there were athletes to be found, too. Melvin Krulewitch, for example, rowed, wrestled, and threw shot put while at Columbia University.⁷² Some of the enlisted ranks either grew up in the city slums or on a farm, but they, too, were in good physical shape going into Marine training.⁷³

However, in order to get there, the 6th Marine Regiment needed to mold these men into a fighting force. The men found that it was one thing to be *selected* for the

Marine Corps, but it was another to *become* a Marine. It was the senior leadership, both officer and enlisted, who were responsible for shaping these men into Marines. Col Catlin, Lt Col Lee, and the senior NCOs provided the leadership, both in training and finally on the battlefield, turning these very qualified volunteers into Marines so that they could ultimately become U.S. Marines, and live up to the phrase, “First to Fight.”

¹Barbara W. Tuchman, *The Guns of August* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1962, reprint 2004), 85.

²Axelrod, x.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Tuchman, 85-86.

⁶Axelrod, xiii.

⁷Ibid., xvii.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., xvii-xviii.

¹¹Ibid., xvii.

¹²Ibid., xviii.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Axelrod, xviii.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷George B. Clark, *Devil Dogs, Fighting Marines of World War I* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1999), xix.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

²²Major Edwin N. McClellan, USMC. *The United States Marine Corps in the World War* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, first printed 1920, reprint 1968), 9.

²³Axelrod, 11.

²⁴Peter F. Owen, *To the Limit of Endurance: a Battalion of Marines in the Great War* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 3.

²⁵Clark, 5.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Owens, 2.

²⁸Ibid., 7.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Simmons and Alexander, 23.

³²Ibid.

³³Owen, 7-8.

³⁴Simmons and Alexander, 28.

³⁵Owen, 9.

³⁶Beth Crumley. 2d Lt Caldwell Colt Robinson: Killed in Action at Belleau Wood. (October 3, 2011). <http://www.mca-marines.org/blog/beth-crumley/2011/10/03/2d-lt-caldwell-colt-robinson-killed-action-belleau-wood> (accessed 16 November 2011; 30 December 2011; 3 January 2012).

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Axelrod, 165.

³⁹Simmons and Alexander, 29.

⁴⁰Ibid., 29.

⁴¹Carl A. Brannen, *Over There, A Marine in the Great War* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1996), 5.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 5.

⁴³*Ibid.*

⁴⁴Owen, 3.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 2.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁰Clark, 19.

⁵¹Catlin, 19-20.

⁵²Simmons and Alexander, 28.

⁵³Owen, 9.

⁵⁴*Lt Col James McBrayer Sellers, USMC*, eds. William W. Sellers and George B. Clark, *World War I Memoirs* (Pike, NH: The Brass Hat, 1997), ix.

⁵⁵Owen, 3.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

⁵⁹*Ibid.*

⁶⁰Simmons and Alexander, 22.

⁶¹*Ibid.*

⁶²*Ibid.*, 27.

⁶³Catlin, 19.

⁶⁴Simmons and Alexander, 27.

⁶⁵Owen, 8-9.

⁶⁶“Lieut. Dennis, D.S.C., is killed in action,” *New York Times*, 17 July 1918, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F4081FFC3F5A11738DDDAE0994DF405B888DF1D3> (accessed 8 January 2012).

⁶⁷Owen, 15.

⁶⁸Sellers, xi.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*

⁷⁰*Ibid.*

⁷¹Clark, *Devil Dogs, Fighting Marines of World War I*, 7.

⁷²Owen, 3.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 5.

CHAPTER 3

TRAINING



Figure 8. 84th Company, 6th Marine Regiment, Post-World War I

Source: Photo, Jack Dahlstrum Collection (Marine Corps Archives, Marine Corps Base, Quantico, VA, April 1919).

America was at war and would soon send its sons off to fight on the Western Front “over there.” There was a debate, however, about who would lead the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) into battle against the Germans. On 2 May 1917, General John J. Pershing received a telegram from Major General John L. Scott, Chief of Staff of the Army, informing him plans were underway to send a force of four infantry regiments and one artillery regiment from General Pershing’s Department at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas.¹ On 10 May, General Pershing arrived in Washington, DC, and was informed that he would lead the AEF into France.²

The CMC Major General George Barnett believed that if the Marines were not used in this war, they could possibly cease to exist as an American military force. General Barnett stated in his unpublished memoir that, “unless Marines were to serve with the Army, we could not secure good recruits, and that it would kill the Marine Corps.”³ Because General Pershing did not want the Marines in France, General Barnett had to play a political game in order to send his Marines to France.⁴

General Barnett needed to first get the Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels on his side. General Barnett was able to convince both Daniels and the Chief of Naval Operations William S. Benson to support his plan to send a first contingent of Marines with a second to follow.⁵ With the support of the Secretary of the Navy and the Chief of Naval Operations behind him, General Barnett went next to the Secretary of War, Newton D. Baker, to get the Marines in the fight.⁶ General Barnett outflanked General Pershing, who had not been even involved in discussions about sending Marines to France, by going directly to the Secretary of War and promising him six thousand Marines that could be incorporated in the 1st Division.⁷

On 16 May 1917, the Secretary of War officially requested a regiment of Marines from President Wilson, organized as infantry, to accompany the AEF to France.⁸ Eleven days later, President Wilson granted the request, and the Marines officially became a part of the AEF.⁹ However, there were certain conditions that came with the Marines. The Secretary of War and the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Tasker H. Bliss, had to promise to supply weapons and equipment equivalent to what was being used by the Army.¹⁰ The Navy agreed to provide the vessels needed to transport all troops overseas, and the Marines had to supply not just two regiments, but a pool of replacements, as

well.¹¹ Secretary of War Baker agreed that the Marines would indeed be used in combat.¹²

General Pershing had not been willing to accept any Marines in France up until that time.¹³ Once he learned of the deal, General Pershing promised to give the Marines the same treatment as his Army troops. After the war, General Pershing wrote that the 5th and 6th Marine Regiments became part of the AEF at the suggestion of General Barnett with General Pershing's approval.¹⁴

General Barnett then had to follow up on his promise to allow the Marines to live up to their "First to Fight" slogan. Much of the fighting forces available were not all centrally located, but scattered around the world. Fortunately, a large contingent of Marines had just returned to the States from places like Haiti, Santo Domingo, and Cuba, as well as those serving aboard Navy vessels.¹⁵ This group of returning Marines, plus Reservists called to active duty, formed the 5th Marine Regiment, which was formally established on 7 June 1917.¹⁶ On 14 June 1917, the 5th Marine regiment shipped out for France, arriving on 26 June 1917.¹⁷ Not only did the 5th provide the Marines a footprint with the AEF in France, but the regiment also took along most of the experienced officers and non-commissioned officers.

Back in the U.S., General Barnett began to form a new regiment. In July 1917, Secretary of the Navy Daniels, still wanting a second brigade of Marines in the war, offered Secretary of War Baker the next regiment for France.¹⁸ This offer was accepted, and the 6th Marine Regiment was activated on 26 July 1917 under the command of Col Albertus Catlin and Lt Col Harry Lee as second in command.¹⁹ The regiment's story began in Quantico with Majors Thomas Holcomb, Berton W. Sibley, and John A. Hughes

as battalion commanders.²⁰ These men formed the senior leadership of the battalions, taking their lead from their commanding officer, Col Catlin.

Col Catlin born on 1 December 1868 in Gowanda, New York, was appointed to the U.S. Naval Academy from Minnesota in 1886, and graduated with the Class of 1890.²¹ During his time at the Naval Academy, he played for the football team as a halfback for three years and then as the captain of the team during his final year.²² Col Catlin then completed his requisite two years as a midshipman after graduation.²³ He felt that the Marines gave him the best chance for active duty service and applied for a commission in the Corps. On 1 July 1892, he was made a Second Lieutenant.²⁴ In April 1893, he was promoted to First Lieutenant, and was the Officer of Marines aboard the Battleship *USS Maine* when it exploded in Havana Harbor.²⁵ Col Catlin served on the *USS St. Louis* as the Commander of Marines, and led the first contingent of Marines to land in Cuba in 1906.²⁶ While serving as a major, Col Catlin was in command of a battalion of Marines when he was awarded the Medal of Honor for “courage and skill in leading his men through the action of April 22, 1914, in the invasion and occupation of Vera Cruz, Mexico.”²⁷ In 1916, Lt Col Catlin studied at both Fort Leavenworth and the National War College, where he was promoted to the rank of Colonel and graduated in May 1917, just as America prepared to go to war.²⁸



Figure 9. Col Albertus Catlin (pictured as BG Catlin)

Source: USMC Training and Education Command, http://www.tecom.usmc.mil/HD/Whos_Who/Catlin_AW.htm (accessed 15 January 2012).

Col Catlin had the properties that the Marines needed to form and lead the 6th Marine Regiment. He had previous combat experience and had the drive to prepare his men for combat. He was tough, but fair. He knew the men he would lead in combat differed from what the Army was getting. Training would be the building block for this war, and he was determined that he and his Marines would not fail. While his regiment was also comprised of inexperienced men, he planned to train them for whatever lay ahead.

Col Catlin stated in his memoirs that that the Army experienced problems training its draftees to become efficient troops.²⁹ Even one year after war had been declared, the Army was still in the process making soldiers while he had turned his men from rookies to dyed-in-the-wool Marines.³⁰

The regiment's second-in-command was Lt Col Harry Lee, who was referred to by his troops as "Light Horse Harry" on the incorrect premise that he was the descendent of the Revolutionary War hero, Light Horse Harry Lee.³¹ Lt Col Lee was born in 1872 in the Georgetown area of Washington, DC³² Between 1892 and 1898, Lt Col Lee served in the National Guard from Washington, DC, and was commissioned into the Marine Corps as a Second Lieutenant in August 1898.³³ During the early part of the 20th Century, Lt Col Lee served in the Philippines and Peking, China with the Legation Guard.³⁴ Lt Col Lee, like many of the more senior Marines, served in the Caribbean, "where he had smelled gunpowder at Coyopete, Nicaragua, in 1912," and had seen action in Cuba, Haiti, and Santo Domingo.³⁵ He was deployed on the battleships, *Wisconsin*, *New Hampshire*, and *Louisiana*, as well as the transport ship *Hancock*.³⁶



Figure 10. Lt Col Harry Lee

Source: Genealogy.com, <http://www.familyorigins.com/users/s/a/l/> (accessed 25 January 2012).

In addition to the commander and his deputy, there were also other experienced Marines. Major (Maj) Frank C. Evans, a veteran of the “old Marine Corps,” was made the adjutant for the regiment, Maj John A. Hughes was in charge of the 1st Battalion; Maj Thomas Holcomb the 2nd; and Maj Berton W. Sibley led the 3rd.³⁷

Maj Hughes was often called, “Johnny the Hard,” and was already widely known within the Marine Corps.³⁸ He joined the Marines in 1900 and was commissioned a year later.³⁹ During his time in the Marines, Maj Hughes had fought in the Philippines, Panama, Cuba, and Nicaragua.⁴⁰ He was awarded the Medal of Honor for action in Veracruz in 1914, and was severely wounded in 1916 while in Santo Domingo.⁴¹ Maj Holcomb was a friend of Franklin D. Roosevelt, and had deployed to the Philippines and China.⁴²

Maj Sibley had seen combat in the Spanish-American War as a member of the 1st Vermont Infantry.⁴³ In July 1900, Maj Sibley was commissioned in the Marines and went on to also see action in Cuba, the Philippines, and China.⁴⁴

The 5th Marine Regiment had also taken most of the available senior Marine NCOs with it to France.⁴⁵ The 6th Regiment had to take sergeants, gunnery sergeants, and sergeant majors from wherever they could find them to fill its need for senior enlisted leadership.⁴⁶ However, those that came to the 6th Regiment were exceptional Marines.

Gunnery Sergeant (GySgt) Daniel Daly was one of those senior enlisted Marines that shaped the young regiment.⁴⁷ GySgt Dan Daly joined the Marines in 1899, and was awarded a Medal of Honor for his action in 1900 while serving in China during the Boxer Rebellion.⁴⁸ GySgt Daly managed to hold his position, and killed some two hundred enemy forces, singled-handed.⁴⁹ In 1915, he received his second Medal of Honor for

leading thirty-four Marines against a vicious attack by four hundred Haitian bandits.⁵⁰

GySgt Daly and his Marines fought through the ambush, entered a nearby fort, and defeated the bandits.⁵¹



Figure 11. GySgt Dan Daly

Source: The Great War Society, http://www.worldwar1.com/dbc/ow_4.htm (accessed 28 January 2012).

The 6th Regiment was fortunate to also receive GySgt Fred Stockham, another of its senior enlisted men.⁵² GySgt Stockham joined the Marines in 1903, and served with Maj Holcomb in China.⁵³ GySgt Stockham left the Marines and joined the Fire Department in Newark, New Jersey in 1907, returning to the Marines in 1912 to fight in Nicaragua.⁵⁴ GySgt Stockham had been assigned recruiting duty in Saint Louis, Missouri when war was declared.⁵⁵ GySgt Stockham had a good reputation with his young Marines, both officer and enlisted alike.⁵⁶ A Marine who served with him would

remember that, “When the going was hard, and your tail was dragging, it was Sergeant Stockham who was there with a word of encouragement or a pat on the back that pulled you through.”⁵⁷



Figure 12. GySgt Fred Stockham

Source: USMC Training and Education Command, www.tecom.usmc.mil/HD/Whos_Who/Stockham_FW.htm. (accessed 28 January 2012).

The senior leadership was battle-proven with experience in leading young Marines into hostile situations. However, the trenches of the First World War were a far different environment than what they faced in previous battles. This enemy would not be a group of ill-trained and poorly equipped insurgents, but rather a highly trained and well-equipped modern force, the Imperial German Army. These Marines needed to be strong leaders to build a combat ready team. Before the senior leadership could build their team, these young Marine volunteers had to first go through boot camp or officer training.

The future members of 6th Marine Regiment reported to either Parris Island, South Carolina (SC) for enlisted training or Quantico, Virginia for officer training. There was also a recruit depot at Mare Island in San Francisco Bay, California in 1917 that some recruits went through as well.⁵⁸ Once at Parris Island, it became apparent to the men that things were not as they had expected.

Warren R. Jackson described his rigorous physical examination in his memoir.⁵⁹ The portion that concerned him the most was the eye examination due to the fact he was not very confident in his eyesight for the eye exam, but he did pass.⁶⁰ There was further concern because the enlistment was for a period of four years, but Jackson wanted only to sign up for the duration of the war.⁶¹ However, he and his fellow recruits signed the enlistment papers, indeed, they “were afraid not to sign.”⁶²

Carl Brannen, who had volunteered for enlistment while at Texas A&M, thought his military school background might put him ahead of his fellow recruits during his time at boot camp. “The drill sergeant bore down in order to show us what little we knew of military affairs, and in my case he succeeded admirably. My military training in college helped me over many rough places in one way and was a hindrance in others.”⁶³

The new recruit training at Parris Island was extremely physical and fairly harsh, due to the primitive nature of Parris Island and the summer heat of 1917.⁶⁴ Parris Island did not have enough facilities to handle the large influx of new Marines so the Corps used this manpower as a source of labor and had recruits build the new buildings during 1917.⁶⁵ It was a great way of toughening up the new recruits and getting new facilities built at the same time.⁶⁶

The training cycle at Parris Island was ten weeks long and recruits were subjected to drill, marksmanship, and working parties all in equal amounts.⁶⁷ The Marine Corps training was by far more than what other services were devoting to training their recruits in terms of intensity and time.⁶⁸ The Marine recruits were drilled incessantly, which taught them not only discipline, but some tactics as well.⁶⁹ The recruits trained intensely on how to use their nine-pound rifles, and how to use their bayonets.⁷⁰ The Marines used the Springfield 1903 rifle, which shot a .30 caliber bullet and was considered a very accurate rifle.⁷¹ Warren R. Jackson recalled in his memoir, “We learned to set the sights for the various distances, how to hold the rifle when shooting for the best results, how to place the cartridge clips in the magazine, and so on.”⁷² The recruits trained on their marksmanship for three weeks and at the end of this time, some were able to hit a target at a thousand yards, unlike many of their Army counterparts, who some never fired a rifle until reaching the Front.⁷³ This marksmanship amazed the Allies and Germans alike.⁷⁴

While the U.S. Army had trouble with wartime growth, personnel problems, lack of equipment, with no real guidance, and training that was called, “shallow, inappropriate, and spotty,” the Marine Corps did not lower its standards for training.⁷⁵ The drill sergeants had done their jobs and had turned volunteers into Marines who were ready for war.⁷⁶ Col Catlin described the drill sergeant best when he said, “Much of the recruit’s progress is due to the labours of the drill Sergeant, who is usually a man who bears about him a perpetual frown because he is not at the Front killing Germans.”⁷⁷ However, many men formed a bond with these drill sergeants that at one time were more than likely considered a nemesis. As Carl Brannen wrote, “The sergeant lined us up before our barracks the last time and told us we were well-drilled Marines and would

have spoken further, but stopped and turned his back. We understood and saw him through blurred eyes as we moved off to catch the train.”⁷⁸ Once done with boot camp, these men could now be called Marines and were ready to move on to their next training area in preparation for war.

The officers did their basic training at the new facility in Quantico, Virginia, which was commanded at the time by Col Catlin.⁷⁹ Originally designed to last for twelve months, the officer course was shortened to three months.⁸⁰ The young lieutenants would first complete three weeks of rifle marksmanship at Winthrop, Maryland before moving on to Quantico.⁸¹ The school became known as the “Officers Camp for Instruction” and its first class began on 15 July 1917 with 345 new lieutenants.⁸² In his memoirs, Lt James Sellers described Quantico as looking like a mining town with one single road that made up the original town.⁸³ Lt Sellers described exactly how a young lieutenant’s typical day went at Quantico: “Reveille 5:45, Physical drill 6:00, Breakfast 6:30, Drill 7:30-9:30, Inspection of quarters 11:45, Dinner 12:00, Drill 1:00-2:30, 3:00-4:00, Supper 6:00, Study 7:00-9:00, Taps 10:00. The physical drill before breakfast consisted of running about half a mile in the company streets. As I’ve described the condition of these streets, these runs were regular obstacle courses.”⁸⁴

However, the training that these men received at the time fell “short of expectations.”⁸⁵ Lt Clifton Cates remarked that he spent most of his time, and the presumption could be made for the other officers, learning about semaphore and Morse code.⁸⁶ Other areas covered in training were topography, military engineering, some minor tactics, principles in open warfare, and a course on trench warfare, which was taught by Scottish and Canadian instructors.⁸⁷ There was some effort to teach the new

lieutenants a little about warfare through close order drill and throwing dummy hand grenades, but these officers knew no more than the enlisted men they would soon lead when it came to tactics.⁸⁸ Lt Sellers pointedly recalled, “We did not have any real combat training, map reading, or other obligatory requirements for survival in the field.”⁸⁹

Two months before graduation, approximately 135 officers from Lt Clifton Cates’s class of 345 men were made platoon leaders to be in charge of the group of young Marines that would soon arrive from Parris Island.⁹⁰ “They picked many of us who had come from military schools as well as a few well drilled college graduates to become platoon leaders, and thus the 6th Regiment was born.”⁹¹ These young officers had the disadvantage of having to learn their duties while “on the job,” but they had the advantage of strong leadership in the senior officer ranks to guide them.⁹² These young officers also had the advantage of their time in school as well as team building in sports, which would help mold them into the 6th Marine Regiment.

The next step was to bring the new enlisted Marines together with the new officers to train in Quantico before shipping out to France. This was a period when the Regiment’s enlisted and officers learned from each other. The weather that summer of 1917 was extremely hot.⁹³ One can only imagine what these young men were thinking and feeling at this time. They were in wool uniforms, which could not have been comfortable, in the heat of Parris Island and the muck of Quantico. Now they were about to begin anew on a base that was still being built around them. New buildings were under constant construction, and new Marines arriving by train from basic training moved into them with the smell of fresh pine.⁹⁴ In reality, the Marine Corps was not truly prepared

for the increase in numbers. The new Marines were going to have to adapt not only to a new base, but a training program that was not fully prepared for them either.

Training for the new Regiment concentrated on trench warfare, with great attention paid to using the bayonet.⁹⁵ Marines under the command of Maj Holcomb in the 2nd Battalion found themselves training hour upon hour, doing bayonet drills, and practicing throwing dummy hand grenades.⁹⁶ Lt Col Lee wrote an article for the *Marine Corps Gazette* on how he felt that an attack should be carried out.⁹⁷ In his article, Lt Col Lee postulated that an attack by a company should be like precision drill under complete centralized control.⁹⁸ The basic theory was that the Marines would attack as they had drilled, marching and shooting, blasting away at an enemy who were less marksmen than the Marines, thus winning the day.⁹⁹

However, this idea was already outdated. General Barnett, CMC, had already heard from observers at the Western Front that trench warfare was how the war was being fought and Lt Col Lee's form of warfare would not work in the trenches of France.¹⁰⁰ The idea was that the war would ultimately leave the trenches and become a type of "open warfare."¹⁰¹ Where their training failed was that the men were not trained on artillery, penetrating the lines, envelopment, or gas warfare.¹⁰² The next step was to continue more training upon arrival in France, but first they would need to get there.

The 1st Battalion arrived in St. Nazaire, France on 5 October 1917, and was under the command of Maj Hughes.¹⁰³ Col Catlin and his headquarters arrived in St. Nazaire on 1 November 1917.¹⁰⁴ The 3rd Battalion, under the command of Maj Sibley, arrived on 12 November 1917 in Brest, France.¹⁰⁵ The 2nd Battalion arrived in St. Nazaire on

8 February 1918 under the command of Maj Holcomb.¹⁰⁶ Now that the 6th Marine Regiment was fully in France, their final training could begin.

The 6th Marine Regiment was sent to a training area close to the town of Bourmont, which was located in the Verdun area, fifty miles away from the Front.¹⁰⁷ The weather conditions when the 6th began training were not pleasant, to say the least. “It was winter, cold and often stormy, but the weather made no difference. The training went forward every day, and maneuvers were executed in snowstorms.”¹⁰⁸ The men’s day started at 6:00 a.m., a sixty-pound rucksack followed breakfast with a march off to the training area on a daily basis, twenty miles just moving back and forth from the training area.¹⁰⁹ Their training was taught by the 77th French Infantry battalion with three English-speaking officers attached as advisors.¹¹⁰ The 5th Marine Regiment received training in the same area as well.¹¹¹

Col Catlin describes what the training was like:

A series of trenches was dug near the town where the French troops were billeted, and part of our training included from four to six hours’ work in these trenches several days each week . . . Our men were subject to hurry calls at any time of the night or day. There were forced marches to the trenches, occupation, and relief at night, patrol work, sham raids, gas and raid signals, and all the rest of it. They were drilled constantly in trench organization, signal systems, and all the details of trench warfare as it existed at the Front. All this in addition to the routine drill of the Marines.¹¹²

Within the 2nd Battalion, Maj Holcomb pressed his new junior officers and sergeants hard due to the time constraints and the lack of comprehensive training while at Quantico.¹¹³ At the end of the long day, the NCOs found themselves in class after returning to camp, and the officers were in class at night after dinner.¹¹⁴ Officers of the 2nd Battalion used two manuals translated from the French that provided the tactical

doctrine implemented by the U.S. 2nd Division: *Instructions for the Offensive Combat of Small Units and Manual for Commanders of Infantry Platoons*.¹¹⁵

Interestingly, the manual called for the infantry to attack the enemy in much the same way the German storm troopers were doing.¹¹⁶ A tactic that the Marines developed to counter the size of the battlefield and the burden of command on young lieutenants was to divide the line into “half-platoons,” one of which would be commanded by a lieutenant and the other by a gunnery sergeant.¹¹⁷ The attack by the platoon would be carried out in four skirmish lines or “waves.”¹¹⁸ The attack was meant to be carried out in this manner:

Automatic riflemen and designated hand grenadiers attacked in the first and third waves in order to maximize firepower to the front. Rifle grenadiers formed in the second and fourth waves to fire over the head of the first wave. Platoons advanced by alternating rushes of each half-platoon. Riflemen in the first wave fired one five-round clip between rushes. Upon hitting enemy positions, the half-platoon was to overwhelm the enemy by fire and movement.¹¹⁹

If the Marines were hampered by heavy enemy fire, they were to take cover, return fire, and let another nearby half-platoon maneuver flank to the enemy.¹²⁰ Once the enemy position was breached, then the attack went on to the main line, and the company commander would send patrols to find the enemy while the platoon commander fixed defenses in response to a counterattack.¹²¹ It was small-unit leadership that the manual was teaching.¹²² When the opportunity arose for greater achievement in battle, the manual demanded that NCOs and company grade officers exploit this situation and move forward without waiting for higher headquarter instructions.¹²³

The entire 4th Marine Brigade, including the 6th Marine Regiment, adapted what the French were teaching, melding it with existing Marine doctrine.¹²⁴ There was a problem in that it seemed the men were more concerned with perfecting the procedures

than comprehending their purpose.¹²⁵ Indeed, Maj Holcomb felt the 2nd Battalion did not understand the ideas of flexibility, initiative, and judgment that were needed to exploit and seize opportunities.¹²⁶ To solve this, they practiced more; however, the Marines did not train to the decentralized, initiative taking tactics that the chaos of the battlefield would have in store for them.¹²⁷

The 6th Marine Regiment would go into the fight with U.S. Army rifles and uniforms, first tearing off the buttons and sewing on their own eagle, globe, and anchor buttons, using a combination of French and Marine tactics, and French made machine guns. In terms of training with the rifle, the Marines excelled compared to the Army.¹²⁸ “My company was issued cheaply manufactured French automatic rifles known as chauchats. A man shooting one almost was in as much danger as anyone out in Front being shot at. . . . [W]e were not given the water-cooled Brownings to replace the chauchats until the very end of the war.”¹²⁹

After two months of training in the “quiet sector,” men of the 6th Marine Regiment moved out towards the Front on 12 March 1918.¹³⁰ The training that the men had received was little more than how to conduct war in the trenches, which was exactly how General Pershing did not want the Americans to fight.¹³¹ On the night of 16-17 March 1918, the entire 4th Brigade moved to the Front-line in the Virty-le-Francois area.¹³²

Taking all into account, the 6th Marine Regiment received more training than had their 5th Marine Regiment counterparts. However, their training was not always focused in the right direction for the kind of war they were going to fight. Although they had gone through boot camp, officer training school with integration at Quantico, and two months

more training in France, by modern day standards, they were not fully prepared. The men of the 6th Marine Regiment would have to rely on their academic and athletic backgrounds to adapt to the war. These young officers approached tactics, techniques, and training manuals as they would a new set of problems presented to them in the classroom at Yale or Tennessee or wherever they had gone to college. It was their responsibility to rely upon their own basic knowledge and expand upon it.

The same could be said of the young enlisted men. They were the ones to carry out these new techniques, and many of them had to rely on their own personal backgrounds for the same results. As for teamwork, the officers and men looked upon it as they would a sporting event. The coaches, that is, Col Catlin and Maj Holcomb, would give them the basic play, but it was the junior leaders', NCOs' and Marines' job to execute it and build the team to achieve victory.

The 5th Marine Regiment had the benefit of having been sent to France with the more experienced Marines, but the 6th had to build from scratch. Once all of their training had been completed, there was a difference between the more senior 5th and the junior 6th Regiments. According to General Lejeune's comparison between these two regiments, "[the 6th Regiment's] early training was somewhat more difficult, but it soon found itself, and when the stress of battle came no difference between the two Regiments could be perceived by unprejudiced eyes."¹³³

Shortly after 0000 hours on 27 May 1918, German General Erich Ludendorff began a large offensive to once again try and take Paris, and with the objective to force France out of the war and the rest of the Allies to the peace table.¹³⁴ Although the U.S. 1st Division had successfully repulsed German counterattacks in the village of Cantigny

on 29-30 May, the rest of the Allied Front was not doing as well.¹³⁵ However, General Ludendorff was at a crossroads as well; he was in danger of over extending his supply lines, and his momentum was slowing in both the north and the south areas of operation.¹³⁶ General Ludendorff decided to concentrate on the south towards Paris and by 30 May 1918, he was close to the town of Chateau-Thierry and only thirty-nine miles to the northeast of Paris.¹³⁷ The situation was dire, and Allied headquarters knew it. French reinforcements were too far away, and the small amount available crumbled before the German advance.¹³⁸ French General Henri Petain turned to General Pershing on 30 May 1918, and asked if the Americans could help.¹³⁹ Although he did not want to send in small U.S. units, General Pershing looked at the situation and agreed to send units including the U.S. 2nd Division, 4th Brigade, and 6th Marine Regiment.¹⁴⁰



Figure 13. Survivors of Belleau Wood including Maj Holcomb, 1st Lt Cates, 1st Lt Erskine of 6th Marine Regiment

Source: Naval History and Heritage Command, <http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/pers-us/uspers-c/c-cates.htm> (accessed 4 February 2012).

¹John J. Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War Vol. 1 & 2* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co.), 2.

²*Ibid.*, 15.

³Clark, *Devil Dogs*, 1.

⁴*Ibid.*, 1.

⁵Axelrod, 12-13.

⁶Simmons and Alexander, 9.

⁷Axelrod, 13.

⁸Clark, 2.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰Axelrod, 13.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³Clark, 1.

¹⁴Pershing, 321.

¹⁵Clark, 2.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁸Simmons and Alexander, 27.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹Catlin, xiii

²²Simmons and Alexander, 27.

²³Catlin, xiii. Of note, in discussions with Mr. Wilburn E. Meador, Dept of History, CGSC, there is no record of Col Catlin having attended CGSC during the time mentioned in his memoirs.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., 14.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Catlin, xiii.

²⁹ Ibid., 6.

³⁰ Ibid., 7.

³¹Simmons and Alexander, 27.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Clark, *Devil Dogs*, 20.

³⁸Simmons and Alexander, 33.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid., 29.

⁴³Ibid., 33.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Owen, 2.

- ⁴⁶Simmons and Alexander, 27.
- ⁴⁷Axelrod, 14.
- ⁴⁸Ibid.
- ⁴⁹Ibid.
- ⁵⁰Ibid.
- ⁵¹Ibid.
- ⁵²Owen, 16.
- ⁵³Ibid.
- ⁵⁴Ibid.
- ⁵⁵Ibid.
- ⁵⁶Ibid.
- ⁵⁷Ibid.
- ⁵⁸Ibid., 4.
3. ⁵⁹Warren R. Jackson, *His Time in Hell* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, Inc., 2001),
- ⁶⁰Jackson, 3-4.
- ⁶¹Ibid., 4.
- ⁶²Ibid.
- ⁶³Brannen, 5.
- ⁶⁴Owen, 4.
- ⁶⁵Ibid., 5.
- ⁶⁶Ibid.
- ⁶⁷Ibid.
- ⁶⁸Ibid.
- ⁶⁹Ibid.

- ⁷⁰Ibid., 6.
- ⁷¹Ibid.
- ⁷²Jackson, 10.
- ⁷³Ibid., 6.
- ⁷⁴Ibid.
- ⁷⁵Ibid., 7.
- ⁷⁶Ibid., 6.
- ⁷⁷Catlin, 270.
- ⁷⁸Brannen, 7.
- ⁷⁹Catlin, 15.
- ⁸⁰Simmons and Alexander, 28.
- ⁸¹Owen, 9.
- ⁸²Simmons and Alexander, 28.
- ⁸³Sellers, 24.
- ⁸⁴Ibid., 25.
- ⁸⁵Owen, 9.
- ⁸⁶Simmons and Alexander, 28.
- ⁸⁷Ibid., 28.
- ⁸⁸Owen, 9-10.
- ⁸⁹Sellers, 28.
- ⁹⁰Owen, 10.
- ⁹¹Sellers, 29.
- ⁹²Owen, 10.
- ⁹³Simmons and Alexander, 31.

⁹⁴Owen, 12.

⁹⁵Simmons and Alexander, 30.

⁹⁶Owen, 19.

⁹⁷Ibid., 17.

⁹⁸Ibid.

⁹⁹Ibid., 18.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 19.

¹⁰¹Ibid.

¹⁰²Ibid., 20.

¹⁰³Ibid., 57.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 58.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 58.

¹⁰⁶Owen, 26.

¹⁰⁷Catlin, 23.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 24.

¹⁰⁹Owen, 36.

¹¹⁰Catlin, 23.

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²Ibid., 24.

¹¹³Owen, 38.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

¹¹⁵Ibid.

¹¹⁶Ibid.

¹¹⁷Ibid.

- ¹¹⁸Ibid.
- ¹¹⁹Ibid.
- ¹²⁰Ibid., 39.
- ¹²¹Ibid.
- ¹²²Ibid., 41.
- ¹²³Ibid.
- ¹²⁴Ibid.
- ¹²⁵Ibid.
- ¹²⁶Ibid.
- ¹²⁷Ibid.
- ¹²⁸Clark, *Devil Dogs*, 39.
- ¹²⁹Sellers, 52.
- ¹³⁰Ibid., 59.
- ¹³¹Clark, *Devil Dogs*, 39.
- ¹³²Ibid., 40.
- ¹³³Simmons and Alexander, 27.
- ¹³⁴Axelrod, 36.
- ¹³⁵Ibid., 36-37.
- ¹³⁶Ibid., 37.
- ¹³⁷Ibid.
- ¹³⁸Ibid., 39.
- ¹³⁹Ibid.
- ¹⁴⁰Ibid., 39, 41.

CHAPTER 4
INTO THE WOODS



Figure 14. Marines in a machine gun nest close to Champagne, France

Source: Jack Dahlstrum Collection (Marine Corps Archives, Marine Corps Base, Quantico, VA, 1918).

The German's offensive drive halted on 5 June 1918 after they had penetrated thirty-five miles past the frontlines, north of the Marne, when they ran out of supplies and had to establish a temporary defense.¹ The German offensive had been driving since the end of May, and Col Catlin and his men were aware of the crisis located in Chateau-Thierry.² The Allied High Command was in a panic: French resistance was crumbling, the Germans were making great gains, and once again, Paris was endangered. Perhaps as many as a million people abandoned Paris, and the government made plans to evacuate to

Bordeaux.³ The fate of the battle rested on what happened in those woods surrounding Chateau-Thierry.

Before the war, Belleau Wood was hardly a place where one might think a battle would take place. It was dense with trees and used as a hunting ground, a place where the wealthy could get away and enjoy time in the forest.⁴ The wood had streams, ravines, gullies, and large rock outcroppings, which became natural barriers.⁵ Even during the war, this area was considered a quiet zone, but all of that changed in June 1918.⁶

The U.S. 2nd ID sent in the 4th Marine Brigade, which was comprised of the 5th and 6th Marine Regiments. As early as 2 June, discussions were batted about as to how best employ these men.⁷ General James Harbord, General Pershing's former Chief of Staff and now 4th Brigade Commander, was fighting to get the Marines in the battle.⁸ The Marines had no tanks, shells with gas, or flamethrowers, and they were yet unproven in warfare out of the trenches. However, General Harbord was confident his Marines could take on this task, and asked for the Marines to, "fight in our own way and we'll stop them."⁹ As General Ludendorff's troops rested on 5 June, French General Joseph Degoutte wanted to take the offensive quickly, as in the morning of 6 June 1918.¹⁰ The Marines, both the 5th Marine Regiment and 6th Marine Regiment were committed. The 6th was still the more junior of the two regiments and would be tested in a form of warfare for which they had received little training. This attack included massed artillery preparation, movement to the battlefield, maneuver within the battlefield, and the need for quick decisions to be made; young men would need to quickly step into leadership roles, relying on not only military training, but drawing on their experiences on the athletic field and problem solving in the classroom before ever becoming Marines.

General Degoutte hastily drew up a plan to be executed on the morning of 6 June to take Hill 142, cut off the Torcy-Bussiares Road, and “straighten out the line.”¹¹ General Degoutte wanted the attack to be led by the French 167th Infantry, which was located to the left of the Marines.¹² The 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment (1/5) was to take Hill 142, 3/5 Marines was to move on the left to support the attack, and 2/6 and 3/6 were the reserve, and the entire attack would begin with a thirty-minute artillery bombardment.¹³ That was the plan, however, since the enemy gets a vote in operational matters, the plan did not go as well as it was designed.

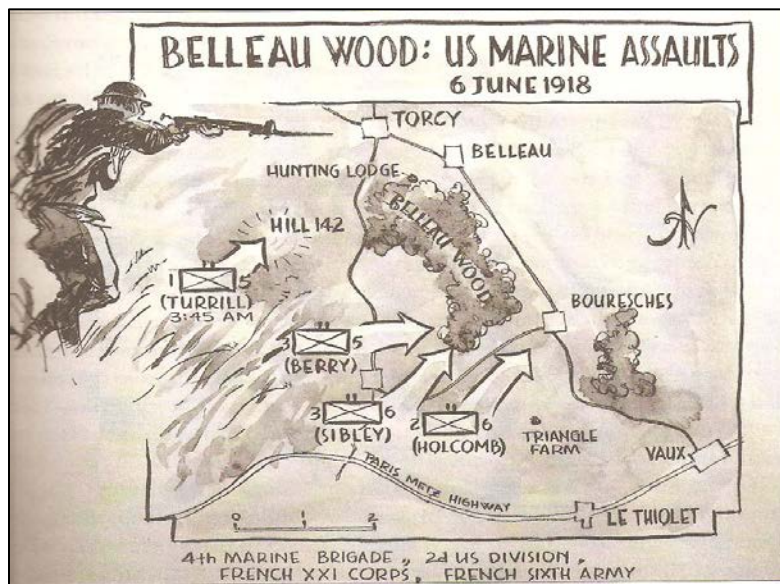


Figure 15. Map of Belleau Wood, 6 June 1918

Source: Simmons and Alexander, *Through the Wheat* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 103.

The complicated plan showed poorly in its execution when 1/5 was easily seen by the Germans, who opened a hellish fire on them, but 1/5 moved forward and was able to

capture Hill 142.¹⁴ However, communications were poor so the real picture was not being relayed to headquarters. General Harbord, new to being in command during battle, was informed of an easy victory, and General Degoutte was happy with the results he was hearing.¹⁵ But the truth was the Marines were in a fight from hell. Wounded and dead covered the battlefield and the battle had only just started. 3/5 continued to press forward with their attack, despite their losses. While Hill 142 was being taken, the Germans still held Belleau Wood and the town of Bouresches on the far side. These two pieces of key terrain still needed to be taken, especially Belleau Wood. As Col Catlin later observed, the woods were too perfect as a fortress to stay in German hands, and waiting to be attacked by the Germans would have been suicidal.¹⁶

However small the gain was in capturing Hill 142, the other part of the plan, the “straightening the line” had not yet occurred. General Degoutte then conceived a second attack, which was even bigger than the first, and even greater in its concept.¹⁷ General Omar Bundy, Commanding Officer, 2ID, felt Belleau Wood and Bouresches needed to be taken to accomplish this plan.¹⁸ This time, the men of the 6th Marines were the ones to charge the German defenses in the woods and Bouresches.

The new plan for attack called for 3/5 Marines, led by Maj Maurice Berry, to fall under Col Catlin’s command for the attack.¹⁹ Col Catlin was given local command over this new attack.²⁰ The other part of the plan called for 3/6 to advance on the right of 3/5, push through the southern end of Belleau Wood, and then move on to Bouresches.²¹ Finally, 2/6 was to be on the right side of 3/6 and conform to the advancements of 3/6.²² Col Catlin was now placed at the forefront of the most important charge in his career. He

would be the one to quickly make the decisions there on the battlefield, which could stop the German offensive and save Paris.

A daunting task even under the best circumstances, this was a huge challenge. One of the first problems of the second attack was the location of 4th Brigade's headquarters, approximately three kilometers away from the front lines, and communications were terrible.²³ The orders were not completed until 1400 hours, and Col Catlin did not receive them until General Harbord's aide arrived on motorcycle and passed them at 1545 hours.²⁴ With only slightly more than an hour to go, the man responsible for undertaking this attack needed to rely on two battalions of junior personnel and trust that they were up to the task at hand.

Col Catlin's confidence in his men was reflected in his statement:

The men knew in a general way what was expected of them and what they were up against, but I think only the officers realized the almost impossible task that lay before them . . . But I had perfect confidence in the men; that never faltered. That they might break never once entered my head. That they might be wiped out, I knew, but they would never break.²⁵

It was this confidence in his boys of the 6th that allowed Col Catlin to operate as the overall on scene commander. If he had doubt in how they would perform, would he have relied on them to operate with only the minimal amount of orders? It can be surmised the orders Col Catlin passed along to his men were not in great detail, given the amount of time until they were to launch the attack. It would be incumbent on these men of academic and athletic backgrounds to solve these problems with a minimum of information, to run a play as when the coach simply says to make a first down. He knew his men and the caliber of Marine they were, and this battle put them to the test.

Prior to moving into action, Col Catlin attempted to contact Maj Berry, who would lead 3/5 into action.²⁶ As Col Catlin stared across what 3/5 and his men from 3/6 and 2/6 had to face, he knew it was daunting. In his memoirs, he states that communications were poor, causing a confused and fragmented attack and resulting in multiple deaths.²⁷

At 1700 hours on 6 June 1918, the second attack began; 3/5 crossed four hundred yards of open wheat field while 3/6 had about two hundred yards of open field before them and the woods were close on their right.²⁸ The first wave consisted of five hundred men from each battalion with the others to follow in successive waves.²⁹ What waited for the Marines in the woods, however, were not tired and broken German forces. They faced twenty-eight officers and 1,141 men from the 461st Regiment, 237th Division under the command of Maj Hans Bischoff, a soldier who had fought in the bushes in Africa.³⁰ He decided that Belleau Wood was a perfect place to defend from instead of counterattack from.³¹ The wood was indeed a strong defensive position and Bischoff used it to his advantage. Another advantage was that his flank would be secure as long as the Germans held the town of Bouresches.

1st Lt David Bellamy, a Yale graduate of 1910, described what he saw as 3/6 entered the woods, “The left companies were held up by machine gun nests on rock fortifications in the woods. The right couldn’t advance beyond the left and lay in the open fields ‘till after dark, being shelled all the while. Our left suffered heavily, vainly trying to clear all the woods.”³²

A legend in Marine Corps lore took place as 3/6 entered the woods. The story recounted is that as a platoon from 3/6 attempted to enter the woods, they were met by

heavy fire and were either pinned down or began to waiver, when a loud voice could be heard over the sounds of fire, “Come on you sons of bitches! Do you want to live forever?”³³ The saying was attributed to GySgt Dan Daly, who was said to have hoisted his bayonet fixed rifle above his head, inspiring his men.³⁴ Col Catlin relayed this story in his memoirs as well although he never mentioned GySgt Dan Daly by name.³⁵ At a time when they needed it most, the young men in the 3rd Battalion, 6th Regiment found inspiration in their senior NCO leadership.

The battlefield was one of mass of confusion and chaos filled with the screams of wounded men, the sight of dying men, blinded by smoke, and deafened by the sound of gunfire amidst the woods and wheat field, and yet the 6th continued their attack. 2nd Lt Louis Timmerman of the 83rd Company in 3/6, along with three of his men, executed a bayonet charge against a larger number of Germans.³⁶ Although wounded, Lt Timmerman pushed the attack, and managed to capture two machine guns and seventeen prisoners.³⁷

This action taken by Lt Timmerman and his men played an important role early in this battle. The assault in the woods took time, and was bleeding the 3/5 and 3/6 Marines. The other part of the objective, the town of Bouresches, still lay on the other side of the woods in German hands. Meanwhile, 3/6 stayed put in the woods and dug in. Regardless of their physical stamina or intellectual capacity, these men experienced something few people who were not there could understand. They were mentally and physically exhausted from the combat they had been through, but they knew that they would have to make do and adapt to the next set of orders that came their way.

However, just as 3/6 began its charge, Col Catlin was shot in the chest by a German sniper. "It felt exactly as though someone had struck me heavily with a sledge . . . I suffered but little pain and I never for a moment lost consciousness . . . I believe it was a chance shot . . . the bullet must have come some 600 yards."³⁸

The situation in command quickly changed as Lt Col Harry Lee stepped up to take command of the 6th Marine Regiment. Not an ideal way to assume command, Lt Col Lee was now thrust into the role of making decisions in a battle he did not plan.³⁹ Lt Col Lee was located at Command Post (Col Catlin is unclear as to which Command Post Lt Col Lee was located, but it can be speculated Lt Col Lee was at 4th Brigade Command Post) and would have to be driven to the town of Lucy to take over command from Col Catlin.⁴⁰ He may have known the attack was coming, but he was out of the loop when it came to troop movements.⁴¹ Now, Lt Col Lee had to adapt to leading a junior regiment into battle, quickly assess the plans, and make snap command decisions, all while trying to figure out the role of command. He would have to become the calm in the storm while headquarters remained in what appeared to be a state of confusion and the 6th remained committed.

General Harbord realized that for part of the second attack to work, someone would need to take Bouresches. He ordered 2/6 to take it; the company chosen was the 96th, which had 2nd Lt Clifton Cates as a platoon leader.⁴² The situation at this time was beyond dire; 3/5 was being torn apart, 3/6 was in a fight for its life, and Captain Donald Duncan, Commanding Officer of 2/6 96th Company was dead.⁴³ What happened next, demonstrated the caliber of junior officers that led the 6th who adapted to a rapidly changing battlefield similar to the way that they would have adapted to a new football

play or tackled an academic problem. Although they had not received good training on open warfare, they were learning to quickly change to the situation on the ground.

The orders received by the 96th Company of 2/6 did not fully explain the current situation or why they were ordered to attack Bouresches.⁴⁴ It is unclear whether Maj Holcomb omitted some part of the order or something else; junior officers of the 96th saw Bouresches and decided, without guidance, to capture the town themselves.⁴⁵ Outnumbered and facing withering fire, men of the 96th moved forward under the command of 1st Lt James Robertson, the Executive Officer of the 96th and now its acting commander.⁴⁶ As they moved closer, the German fire was deadly accurate and men were wounded and dying in droves. There were between three hundred to four hundred defenders holding the town for the Germans.⁴⁷

At this point, those left with the 96th could have easily stayed where they were or worked their way back to the jump-off point, but they did not. Outnumbered, the 96th could have all been easily killed or captured. One can only assume that the same kind of drive that pushed them on the athletic field or academic achievements helped push them on this battlefield. These junior officers had not only a presence of mind to take the initiative, but also a command presence to make their men follow them into a fortified town. These junior officers demonstrated the Marine Officer traits of adaptability, grace under fire, and “can-do” and “make-do” spirit. Their men followed them, not only because of orders, but because these officers led from the front. Eventually the twenty remaining Marines captured the town of Bouresches and began the work of clearing out the remaining German defenders.⁴⁸ Unknown to the men of the 96th, members of 3/6

under command of Lt Timmerman came across Germans setting up two machine guns that would have devastated the attacking 96th.⁴⁹

Of note, during the attack, 2nd Lt Clifton Cates was hit on his helmet and knocked out cold for a short amount of time.⁵⁰ After regaining consciousness, Lt Cates thought about going back to the rear, but changed his mind after he saw three Marines to his right and joined them.⁵¹ Once they reached the town, he noticed Lt Robertson and his team pulling out on the west side of town, to which Lt Cates said they should go on in and take the town; Lt Robertson told Lt Cates to take the town while he (Robertson) went back and got reinforcements.⁵² Lt Cates was an inspiration to the enlisted men of 2/6. Carl Brannen, the young Marine that had dropped out of Texas A&M to enlist, recalled Cates was the “most optimistic man I ever saw . . . His lion courage in the face of any danger was enough to bolster one’s morale.”⁵³

Lt Cates deployed what few men he had into defenses around the town and began to move up street by street.⁵⁴ At one point, a German Maxim machine gun opened fire on Lt Cates and his small squad from the belfry of the church, hitting Lt Cates, again, in the helmet and tearing off his lieutenant rank insignia from his shoulder.⁵⁵ Still, he and his men pressed on through the town. He stopped his advance when another Maxim at the northern end of town wounded several of his remaining men.⁵⁶ Lt Cates felt it was time to halt and wait for reinforcements.⁵⁷

Other members of the junior officer corps of the 6th were not so lucky. Lt James Sellers, also a member of 2/6, recounts that shortly after the charge began, he was working his way from foxhole to foxhole to keep his men calm and check on their status when he was hit by a piece of shrapnel.⁵⁸ “I saw only about two and a half hours out of

the more than three weeks of Allied offensive at Belleau Wood . . . The attack we made was the first chance the Marines have had to show what we really had, and I am mighty glad we got it.”⁵⁹ Although his was a small contribution, in the larger picture, Lt Sellers showed the inner fortitude typical of the young leaders of the 6th as an example to their men.

As 6 June drew to a close, the 96th Company of 2/6 had accomplished a major achievement. The young officers and handful of men had captured the key town of Bouresches. This allowed the 2/6 to observe and fire into the fields that were located east of Belleau Wood. The German 461st Regiment was partially isolated in the woods and 2/6 could fire into the 461st flank, allowing supplies and reinforcements for the 3/6 on the right flank.⁶⁰ This might not have happened if not for the actions of 1st Lt Timmerman and his three men. Taking out a machine gun nest set off a chain of events that impacted a handful of men, unaware of this action, enabled them to capture the town of Bouresches free of a murderous barrage of certain gunfire had that threat not been eliminated.

Maj Holcomb grasped the seriousness of this tenuous hold on Bouresches and acted on his own. Maj Holcomb sent the survivors from the 96th and 79th Companies from 2/6 to reinforce the small numbers in the town.⁶¹ However, the price that day had been high for those companies. On the morning of 6 June, each company had an approximate strength of 250 troops, but ending the day with losses of over fifty-percent.⁶² Those that remained had learned valuable lessons and realized as leaders they would need to adapt to rapidly changing situations. As demonstrated by Lt Cates and Lt Timmerman, the young officers would have to inspire their men whenever the situation looked hopeless.

The Germans had reinforcements north of the town and began to move to retake the town.⁶³ A huge firefight followed, and rumor was that the defenders of Bouresches were running out of ammunition.⁶⁴ Lt William Moore, a Princeton man who had also played sports in college, and SgtMaj John Quick volunteered to drive a truck loaded with ammo through the firefight at night to resupply those men who held that key piece of terrain.⁶⁵ Col Catlin's description of the ride reads like something from a movie,

With a small crew chosen from fifty who wanted to go, they started over a torn road under terrific fire. The whole way was brilliantly lighted by enemy flares and the solitary truck offered a shining mark to the German gunners. It rolled and careened fearfully over the gullies and craters, shells shrieked and whistled over their heads and burst on every hand, and as they neared the town, they drove straight into the fire of the spouting machine guns.⁶⁶

In his memoirs, Col Catlin claimed that this saved the day for the men of 2/6 in the town.⁶⁷ However, the trip was actually useless. There was no shortage of ammunition in the town and what was brought was left right where it was delivered to the edge of town, where it went unused for four days.⁶⁸ Yet, this action again demonstrated the fortitude and caliber of the men of the 6th. A young college athlete and senior enlisted NCO, moving forward when the time called for it.

At 2300 hours on 6 June, headquarters received word that Bouresches was secure and in the hands of the Marines.⁶⁹ At 0230 hours on 7 June, the Germans launched an unsuccessful counter-attack; the Germans continued to try to retake the town through 8 June, but were unable to dislodge the men of the 6th.⁷⁰ While the battle was still far from over, this key piece of land was secured. Looking at the battle in total, this was perhaps the key to victory in Belleau Wood, and it was the men of the 6th Marine Regiment who accomplished it on their own volition.

Within the woods, however, the outcome of not only the first day, but the battle itself was far from over as the fighting continued. 1st Lt David Bellamy tells in his diary how devastating the battle in the woods had been on 6 June. “Because the 5th Regiment on our extreme left failed to make their objective, we stayed at night in the creek bed. There we dug under the banks and got what protection we could . . . It was a hell of a night. It had been impossible for men to overwhelm machines [guns] and our position was uncertain.”⁷¹ Maj Holcomb knew his men were spent and in a tight spot, but he also knew that they had to hold what they had captured. He sent Lt Col Lee a message at 2045 hours stating that he could advance no further due to German artillery and machine guns; he was holding at the far edge of the woods, and awaiting further instructions.⁷² However, Lt Col Lee, much like his junior personnel, had to learn as the battle unfolded. Unfortunately, General Harbord felt that Lt Col Lee was not doing enough to control the situation of not only the 3/6 and 2/6, but also 3/5.⁷³ Much of what General Harbord asked for had already been overcome by events, and he sent messages to Lt Col Lee that appeared to contradict themselves.⁷⁴ In the end, however, Lt Col Lee proved more than capable to the task at hand and beyond.

As 6 June 1918 came to a close, the Marines had their toehold in Belleau Woods with full control of the town of Bouresches. However, it was costly to those involved. On that single day, the Marines had more casualties than on any day in the history of the Corps until they hit the beaches of Tarawa.⁷⁵ The statistics alone are hard to imagine by 2012 standards: 31 officers and 1,056 enlisted personnel were killed, wounded, or missing at the end of the first day, and the battle had another three weeks to go.⁷⁶

On 7 June, very few engagements took place, but all was not well. The Marines had not eaten a hot meal in eight days and many were sleep deprived.⁷⁷ This is where the stamina of so many having been athletes came into play. In their previous civilian life, many of those on the 6th Marines had spent hours on the practice field preparing for games. When in training, they marched, ran, completed rucksack marches, and built up muscle and endurance. The men of the 6th Marine Regiment were specially picked for their athletic abilities as well as their academic backgrounds. These men were physically trained and physically ready for the challenge, perhaps even more so than the more senior 5th Marine Regiment. They were able to push through a day of battle, hold their gains, operate on little sleep, and still be ready to engage in another battle at any time.

Lt Bellamy was sent back to Brigade headquarters on 7 June to inform them of the situation, where he related, “Incidentally, I got the first cup of coffee and even a hot meal in many, many days.”⁷⁸ When he returned, he learned 3/6 was going back into battle again at 0500 hours on 8 June with some artillery support.⁷⁹ It seemed unimaginable to send these men to attack again of whom had already been asked so much, but most of the woods still lay in German hands and threatened Paris.

On 8 June, General Harbord wanted to continue the attack on German positions within the woods and ordered 3/6 to carry out the attack.⁸⁰ The 3/6 was decimated from the previous action on 6 June and needed support. Lt Col Lee decided to have the 80th Company from 2/6 commanded by Captain Bailey Coffenburg fall instead under the command of Maj Sibley’s 3/6.⁸¹ The situation facing the men of the 6th Marine Regiment could only be described as next to impossible. The Germans had the advantage of good ground to defend from, an experienced commander, and the woods themselves.

According to Private Levi Hemrick, Maj Holcomb was upset by the planned attack and realizing the situation ahead of him, Private Hemrick claimed Maj Holcomb stated that Lt Col Lee had “ordered to send his men to hell.”⁸²

As planned, the artillery barrage was executed twenty minutes before the men of 3/6 and 80th Company were to go over the top, but the artillery failed to hit the front-line machine gun emplacement so there was no true damage to the Germans manning the front areas who were waiting for these men.⁸³ At 0630 hours, with bayonets fixed, the men of 3/6 with help from the 80th Company went forward and into the heart of the German defense.⁸⁴ What followed was a form of combat, which was a living nightmare. Lt Bellamy described how the wounded and message runners returned with conflicting information as to how the battle was proceeding.⁸⁵ Maj Sibley ordered Bellamy to reorganize the 82nd Company from 3/6 as their officers, including Lt Caldwell C. Robinson, had all been killed or wounded since 7 June.⁸⁶ Maj Sibley had to change plans in the middle of the battle and his junior officers had to do the same. They could not wait for headquarters to make decisions for them; they did it on their own when the situation demanded it.

Within the 80th Company, George McGillivray described how he and three other men were wounded by an artillery round, which also killed a young lieutenant in the company.⁸⁷ MacGillivray’s wound rendered his right arm useless, and he had to be evacuated from the field.⁸⁸ In the midst of the firefight came the one weapon that soldiers on each side dreaded . . . gas. MacGillivray stated, “Gas was used extensively by the Germans during this engagement, and from the time I was wounded until I reached a first aid station I did not have the protection of a gas mask as I was unable to put mine on.”⁸⁹

The Germans were able to maintain control of the area and the Marines began to fall back.

After five hours of the attack, Maj Sibley reported his men were “too much exhausted for further attack,” the attack was a failure.⁹⁰ Given the strength, emplacement of the German defenses, and the failure of artillery to destroy the gun emplacements, there is little doubt as to why the attack failed. Col Catlin stated in his memoirs, “Companies that had entered the battle 250 strong dwindled to fifty or sixty with a Sergeant or only a Corporal in command . . . The strain was beginning to tell.”⁹¹ The men of 3/6 were pulled out for some much needed rest on 9 June, and 200 artillery pieces unleashed a barrage on the woods.⁹²



Figure 16. Lt Col Sibley, Commanding Officer, 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment

Source: Unit Historian and Reports, History of the Third Battalion, Sixth Regiment, U.S. Marines (Hillsdale, MI: Akers, Mac Ritchie, and Hurlbut, 1919), Introduction page.

1/6 under the command of Maj John “Johnny the Hard” Hughes, who had been held in reserve until then, was brought up to relieve 3/6 and prepared to launch the next attack into the south of Belleau Wood.⁹³ The attack for 1/6 began at 0430 hours on 10 June 1918.⁹⁴ Warren Jackson noted how Maj Hughes appeared on the morning of 10 June when the attack was launched, “Major Hughes . . . [a] tall, imposing figure that he was – led the way, quietly, serenely.”⁹⁵ 1/6 entered the woods with bayonets fixed and some felt that the point they were headed to was filled with German machine guns.⁹⁶

In the initial phase of the attack, things appeared to Maj Hughes to be going his way. He reported back to General Harbord that he had accomplished the day’s goal with a low casualty rate.⁹⁷ He thought that he was at the point where the woods narrowed down, but he was wrong.⁹⁸ Maj Hughes actually was where 3/6 had reached their high-water mark in Belleau Wood three days prior, but his earlier report to headquarters had filled them with false hope.⁹⁹ Col Catlin recalled that 1/6 advanced more than two-thirds of a mile on a front that was six hundred yards wide.¹⁰⁰ Under the command of Maj Frederick Wise, 2/5 was ordered to attack on the morning of 11 June at 0430 hours to join 1/6 in a northern push through the wood.¹⁰¹

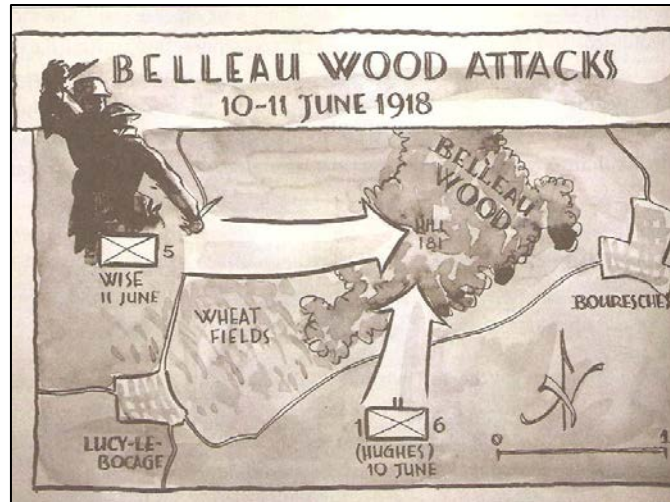


Figure 17. Map of Belleau Wood, 10-11 June 1918

Source: Edwin H. Simmons, Brig. Gen USMC (Ret) and Joseph H. Alexander, Col USMC (Ret), *Through the Wheat* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 112.

Once the two battalions were able to link up, they pushed forward to where Belleau Wood did narrow leaving the Germans in command of the northern part of the wood.¹⁰² 3/5 pushed forward again on 12 June and gained more ground breaking out of the northern portion of Belleau Wood around 2040 hours that evening, but the Germans still held a portion of the wood.¹⁰³ At this point, the men of the 6th Marine Regiment had been fighting hard for over three days with little to eat, carrying twenty pounds or more as they marched off to battle.¹⁰⁴ Their stamina to continue the fight owed much to their physical aptitude from college athletics and the physical nature of their training. Looking at the situation they found themselves on the battlefield, they adapted quickly, using new techniques for which they had not been trained.

Little by little, inch by inch, the Marines and German fought over Belleau Wood. Warren Jackson described 1/6's fight, "And the woods resounded with practically every

sound known to modern warfare . . . Shell after shell dropped about us . . . for one terrible moment the shell seemed to be suspended in the air as though undecided where next to blast a life.”¹⁰⁵ On 13 June, the Germans launched a counter-attack against Bouresches and the northeastern part of Belleau Wood.¹⁰⁶ However, the men of 2/6, hungry and tired, were able to hold the town. The men of the 5th and 6th Marine Regiments almost blended into one inside the woods due to the terrible number of losses suffered.¹⁰⁷

In the attack against Bouresches, the Germans also used gas on the men of 2/6.¹⁰⁸ Lt Clifton Cates barely escaped death by remembering that one of his men had a captured German gas mask and put it on.¹⁰⁹ During the attack, 2/6 saw another example of self-sacrifice from its senior NCOs in the face of adversity. GySgt Fred Stockham saw one of his men bleeding from shrapnel wounds, lying on the ground in the middle of a gas attack on the night of 13 June.¹¹⁰ As GySgt Stockham got to his man, he noticed that that the Marine did not have a gas mask on; GySgt Stockham removed his own gas mask, placed it on the wounded, junior Marine, and carried him back through the gas to safety.¹¹¹ GySgt Stockham reached the aid station in the town of Lucy, dropped off his wounded Marine, and returned to find others needing aid, all the while breathing in the poisonous gas.¹¹² GySgt Stockham died a few painful days later from his exposure, but was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions.¹¹³

The Regiment was given new men and officers as replacements and a few days to catch its breath before heading back to the Front. Over the next week, the Germans did their refitting at the same time as the Marines.¹¹⁴ Starting at 0300 hours on 25 June until 1700 hours that afternoon, an artillery barrage pounded German positions in Belleau Wood.¹¹⁵ The men of 3/5 attacked through the woods and pushed the last of the Germans

out.¹¹⁶ The next morning, 26 June 1918, the message went out from Maj Maurice Shearer, “Woods now U.S. Marine Corps entirely.”¹¹⁷

Men of Maj Holcomb’s 2/6 were sent in to relieve the 3/5 inside Belleau Wood, when the Germans unleashed a huge artillery barrage on them.¹¹⁸ With senior leadership down, Lt Erskine was informed that he was in command of the 79th Company and the men were waiting for his orders.¹¹⁹ As Lt John West ran to locate 3/5, Lt Erskine led his men through the fire to the edge of the woods where West had a one guide move them to 3/5’s position; Lt Erskine, Lt West, and GySgt Bernard Fritz’s quick actions saved the 79th Company from what could have been a disaster.¹²⁰

The Marines shored up their positions over the next several days. The men were mentally and physically exhausted. The nature of combat they had faced was nothing like for what they had been trained. However, they had accomplished a great victory. Col Catlin stated in his memoirs that, “The day before the Marines went in, the Germans had advanced for six miles against the weakening resistance of the French. After that they advanced not a step.”¹²¹ The Germans captured in Bouresches described in their debriefs how the Marines involved in Belleau Wood were “remarkable. They are very healthy men, physically well built . . . who at the present time lack only proper training to make them very serious adversaries.”¹²² The French, however, felt that the Marines had truly saved Paris from the Germans.¹²³ The men of the 6th Marine Regiment were given some well-deserved time away from the Front. Lt Clifton Cates was instructed to pick and lead twenty men from the 96th Company, 2/6 in the 4th of July Parade in Paris, which he did and they the Parisians greeted them with great joy.¹²⁴

On 30 June 1918, Division General Joseph Degoutte released in his orders that from that day forth, “in all official papers, the Bois de Belleau (Belleau Wood) shall be named ‘Bois de la Brigade de Marine.’”¹²⁵ However, despite the praising tone of his memoirs on the war, General Pershing was unhappy about the press and praise that the Marines received.¹²⁶ The U.S. Army command attempted to stop the name change of Belleau Wood. The AEF Headquarters did not invite any of the Marine commanders, not even General Harbord, an Army general when the French Premier visited.¹²⁷ After the armistice was signed, the AEF took one last shot at the Marines. The Battle of Belleau Wood was written in the AEF history as “a local engagement, not a battle, and part of an overall phase defense on the Aisne-Marne sector.”¹²⁸

To the men of the 6th Marine Regiment that fought, died, and bled in the woods and the town of Bouresches, it was a battle. However, the war was not over yet. The Regiment and the men were never the same after those three weeks. Replacements arrived from the U.S., and men were promoted from within to fill the ranks thinned out in combat. Those who received minor wounds returned to the ranks as well. These men had proven themselves. Perhaps, as is fitting with the number of athletes in the 6th, Col Catlin described the battle:

It was like many a football match you have attended, with the game going dead against your side in the second half . . . The game seems lost . . . Suddenly from the sidelines, at the command of coach and captain, a substitute back field jumps in to take the places of the worn-out plungers . . . The advance is checked on the threshold of defeat; the ball is punted out of danger, . . . They were untried, inexperienced, green in the grim business of fighting; . . . they baffled the Hun for downs on their five-yard line.¹²⁹

Then it was back to the Front, and the war continued until 11 November 1918.

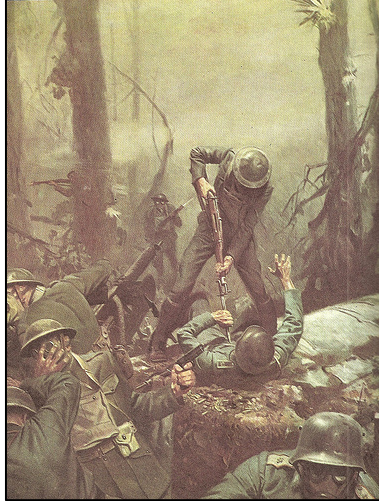


Figure 18. Painting of “At Belleau Wood”

Source: Military Photos.com, <http://www.militaryphotos.net/forums/showthread.php?198479-Bayonet-Course-Brings-Marines-Back-To-Basics/page4> (accessed 24 March 2012).

¹Simmons and Alexander, 101.

²Catlin, 79.

³Pershing, Vol 2, 89.

⁴Axelrod, viii-ix.

⁵Ibid., ix.

⁶Axelrod, ix.

⁷Catlin, 84.

⁸Axelrod, 13; Catlin, 84.

⁹Catlin, 84.

¹⁰Axelrod, 106.

¹¹Simmons and Alexander, 101.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., 102.

¹⁶Catlin, 107, 108.

¹⁷Simmons and Alexander, 102.

¹⁸Ibid., 102-103.

¹⁹Ibid., 103-104.

²⁰Ibid., 103-104.

²¹Ibid., 104.

²²Ibid.

²³Catlin, 109.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid., 110.

²⁶Ibid., 109.

²⁷Ibid., 109, 113.

²⁸Ibid., 112-113.

²⁹Ibid., 112.

³⁰Simmons and Alexander, 104.

³¹Ibid., 104.

³²David Bellamy, personal diary written in 1918, but typed later in 1960s, introduction, 66. Marine Corps Archives, Marine Corps Base Quantico, VA.

³³Axelrod, 144.

³⁴Ibid., 145. Of note, GySgt Daly later told a historian from the Marines that he actually said, "For Christ's sake men-Come on! Do you want to live forever?"

³⁵Catlin, 114.

³⁶Clark, *Devil Dogs*, 120.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Catlin, 118-119.

³⁹Clark, 124.

⁴⁰Catlin, 120.

⁴¹Clark, 124.

⁴²Ibid., 121.

⁴³Owen, 80.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Catlin, 132.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Owen, 80.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid., 81.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Brannen, 21-22.

⁵⁴Owen, 82.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Sellers, 62.

⁵⁹Ibid., 62.

- ⁶⁰Owen, 82.
- ⁶¹Ibid., 82-83.
- ⁶²Ibid., 83.
- ⁶³Axelrod, 165.
- ⁶⁴Ibid., 165.
- ⁶⁵Ibid., 165.
- ⁶⁶Catlin, 133.
- ⁶⁷Ibid.
- ⁶⁸Axelrod, 165.
- ⁶⁹Catlin, 133.
- ⁷⁰Ibid.
- ⁷¹Bellamy, 66.
- ⁷²Clark, 123.
- ⁷³Ibid.
- ⁷⁴Ibid., 124.
- ⁷⁵Sellers, 62.
- ⁷⁶Ibid.
- ⁷⁷Clark, 129.
- ⁷⁸Bellamy, 66.
- ⁷⁹Ibid.
- ⁸⁰Owen, 86.
- ⁸¹Ibid., 87.
- ⁸²Ibid.
- ⁸³Ibid., 86.

⁸⁴Ibid., 87.

⁸⁵Bellamy, 67.

⁸⁶Ibid., 67.

⁸⁷George A. MacGillivray. Letter on his injury at Belleau Wood, page 1, written in 1924 (?) to perhaps Veteran's Affairs office on reasons why he is unable to perform certain jobs that require use of his arm and the effects of being gassed, George A. MacGillivray Collection, Marine Corps Archives, Marine Corps Base Quantico, VA.

⁸⁸Ibid., page 1 of letter.

⁸⁹Ibid., page 1 of letter.

⁹⁰Owen, 87.

⁹¹Catlin, 146.

⁹²Ibid., 147.

⁹³Simmons and Alexander, 112.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Jackson, 101.

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Simmons and Alexander, 112.

⁹⁸Ibid., 112-113.

⁹⁹Ibid., 113.

¹⁰⁰Catlin, 148.

¹⁰¹Simmons and Alexander, 113.

¹⁰²Ibid.

¹⁰³Ibid., 114.

¹⁰⁴Catlin, 111.

¹⁰⁵Jackson, 104.

¹⁰⁶Simmons and Alexander, 114-115.

- ¹⁰⁷Ibid., 115.
- ¹⁰⁸Owen, 94.
- ¹⁰⁹Ibid., 95-96.
- ¹¹⁰Ibid., 96.
- ¹¹¹Ibid.
- ¹¹²Ibid.
- ¹¹³Axelrod, 217.
- ¹¹⁴Simmons and Alexander, 119.
- ¹¹⁵Ibid., 121.
- ¹¹⁶Ibid., 121-122.
- ¹¹⁷Ibid., 122.
- ¹¹⁸Owen, 101.
- ¹¹⁹Ibid., 102.
- ¹²⁰Ibid., 102-103.
- ¹²¹Catlin, 176.
- ¹²²Unit historian, *History of the Third Battalion, Sixth Regiment, U.S. Marines*, (Hillsdale, MI: Akers, Mac Ritchie, & Hurlbut, 1919). Marine Corps Archives, Marine Corps Base Quantico, VA.
- ¹²³Catlin, 176.
- ¹²⁴Simmons and Alexander, 123-124.
- ¹²⁵Catlin, 177.
- ¹²⁶Axelrod, 226.
- ¹²⁷Ibid.
- ¹²⁸Ibid.
- ¹²⁹Catlin, 180-181.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The main argument of this thesis has been to prove that the 6th Marine Regiment, due to its unique composition, was the key to providing the Allies with a victory against the German offensive in the Battle of Belleau Wood. However, it is often difficult to describe the intangibles of leadership. What exactly makes a young man charge headlong into a machinegun nest, knowing he may be dead in a matter of moments? What made this group of young men, arguably the best and brightest, who could have shaped America's financial and industrial landscape, but instead put their promise on hold to join the Marine Corps to fight in Europe? How did this experience go on to shape them as people and the Marine Corps as a whole?

The 60 percent of the 6th Marine Regiment comprised of college men, many of whom were athletes, is only a statistic. What is more significant is what these men accomplished in a short time, beginning with the exclusivity of whom the Marine Corps first accepted into its ranks during WWI. By accepting only volunteers vice draftees, the CMC, Major General George Barnett, gambled the entire existence of the Marines on who would join and what they would achieve in war.

The first step was recruiting the best that America had to offer; to make a work of art, he needed the finest raw material. This material came from college and high school graduates, and young men just entering the workforce. The Marine Corps took these men and shaped them into a fighting force. Therefore, in terms of art, the Marine Corps was the artist, sculpting a bright, patriotic, intelligent, and physically gifted group of men into Marines.

The Attributes of a Marine Leader, as found in *The Marine Officer's Guide*, describes several characteristics discussed throughout this paper. Qualities such as command presence, encouragement of subordinates, professional competence, education, physical readiness, “can-do” and “make-do” spirit, adaptability, and grace under fire have been put to paper and memorized by Marines over the years.¹ However, in 1917, these were not merely words, but the actions of these young Marine Corps volunteers as part of the 6th Marine Regiment. Did their experiences at Parris Island and Quantico teach them these qualities? They may have. The Marine Corps did help to mold and shape these men into Marines through hours of march and drill. However, it was also the inner strength of these men and their experiences in the classroom, moving from the playing field to the battlefield, which shaped their leadership traits as well. The men of the 6th Marine Regiment embodied the quality of adaptability as the battle unfolded. They had to adapt to situations for which they had received little training on. As senior officers and enlisted fell, they had to adapt quickly as leaders to fill the ranks. Finally, they had to adjust to new roles as senior leaders themselves as the war continued. Education and physical readiness were exemplified by those that were hand-chosen to serve in the 6th Marine Regiment. They demonstrated these qualities by the long hours of physical and mental challenges during the Battle of Belleau Wood and beyond. Col Albertus Catlin's recollection concerning the quality training of his Regiment did not always marry up with the truth. Both officer and enlisted received intense physical training, and each man *was* a marksman with his rifle, but were the men really prepared for the type of warfare they would face in France? In looking at how the Battle of Belleau Wood took shape, the answer is no. Of the training young officers received at the Officer School in Quantico,

Lt Clifton Cates said, “Half of it wasn’t worth a hoorah.”² Even the young enlisted found themselves constructing roads and buildings at Parris Island instead of preparing for battle on the Front.

The training did an excellent job of making the men physically fit and expert marksmen. They were drilled repeatedly on how to march, shoot, and use the bayonet. There was evidence of a definite physical readiness, as well as a can-do spirit from manual of Officer Traits that was transposed even onto the enlisted Marines. These men were determined not to fail when their time came to face the enemy, to prove that they were not only worth respect from the AEF Command, but worthy of the title of a Marine. While the senior leadership in the officer and NCO ranks had a command presence, only a handful of junior officers were chosen to become leaders in the new 6th Marine Regiment. They showed a promise of command presence, but only truly demonstrated it as they went into battle. They were selected while training in Quantico with a few months left before going to France.³ What made these men stand out? Why were they so special? They demonstrated abilities at the desired level; these junior officers showed promise that they had the mental and physical advantages for combat.

Training in Quantico and France was static and severely lacking in fundamentals such as artillery coordination and open warfare so leadership was forced to adapt as the situation demanded it. At the Battle of Belleau Wood, the key to victory came when Lt Cates and the handful of men from the 2nd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment took the initiative and captured the town of Bouresches. Not only was it a victory on an otherwise disastrous day, it denied the Germans a foothold to resupply and the ability to recapture

Belleau Wood. A junior regiment, not the more seasoned 5th Marine Regiment, accomplished this action with only minimal direction from its higher headquarters.

How and why were they able to do this? They adapted to the situation and took command. Perhaps these men saw the bigger picture as they might have looked at it as an academic problem, or as a football team seizing the initiative of a game from the opposing side. They risked their lives and perhaps the entire battle to capture Bouresches, and turned the tide of the battle.

True to the manual of Officer Traits, these young officers and men demonstrated resolution and tenacity, described as “an unfaltering determination to achieve the mission assigned.”⁴ They were given only minimal orders to capture Bouresches, and showed the resolution and the tenacity to hold it. The same resolution and tenacity was seen in the fight in Belleau Wood. These young Marines also made-do with what they had. They lost scores of men, they were tired and hungry, and yet they continued to fight. It was these men that filled the ranks of the 6th, who learned leadership qualities under fire that made them the cornerstone of the Marine Corps from the battle onward to this day.

This was a command presence moment for these young officers to demonstrate that they had professional competence at warfare. Was it a moment that the senior officer leadership had encouraged their subordinates? Yes – the handful of men from 2/6 had showed great initiative, which is what the Marines needed in its officers. The extra training that Maj Holcomb had put his men through came to fruition during the battle. Professional competence and encouragement of subordinates was experienced both as the battle continued, through the rest of the war, and ultimately into how Marines would be trained from that point on.

Lt Col Lee had to quickly assume command once Col Catlin went down wounded. He led the 6th Marine Regiment through its baptism of fire and emerged victorious. After the battle, the ranks of men had been depleted and replacements arrived. Some took on greater responsibilities as NCOs, and officers moved up in rank grade.

The 6th was strong in senior leadership, both in the senior officer and NCO roles, strong in new personnel, and strong in physical and mental abilities; but was that enough to have won the Battle of Belleau Wood? The 6th Regiment's hurried and minimalist training might suggest that perhaps they just got lucky. But if luck favors the prepared, perhaps the 6th Marine Regiment *was* lucky. In the case of the 6th Marine Regiment, it appeared that preparation granted them their luck. However, it was not so much the preparation from the training provided by the Marine Corps, although that is also part of it. Instead, it was the preparation that occurred before these men even joined the Marine Corps and formed the 6th Marine Regiment. That preparation was in classrooms across the country and on athletic fields. Their academic background provided the foundation for learning quickly and adapting to changing situations and challenges. These men had to grasp whole concepts with a minimum amount of information, just as if in the classroom. They had to be prepared to execute an action or explain things to their men. In other words, they were students and teachers of foreign concepts all at the same time. In terms of athletics, this was one of the keys in their selection to become Marines in the new regiment. One can reason that this group of young men was in better physical shape than the typical Army draftee. Another key aspect of their athletic background was the sense of teamwork that had been instilled in the men of the 6th Marine Regiment. Athletics had taught them how to be part of a team, to work together to accomplish a

goal. It also taught them to be team leaders and adapt to taking on those responsibilities. When opportunity presented itself, these young men of the 6th Marine Regiment gambled their lives and lives of their men to make the most of that opportunity, and pushed luck to its full advantage even when they had nothing else.

At the end of the Battle of Belleau Wood, the Marines stood victorious. In his memoirs, Col Catlin described how the Marines were only one portion of a division, but fought against three German divisions, an estimated “four times our weight of Germans.”⁵ The price, however, was a heavy one in terms of men wounded and killed. Col Catlin knew and understood the caliber of men that he had under his command. Towards the end of his memoirs, Col Catlin pondered, “Can we read what our college boys did in Belleau Wood without thanking God that the soil trod by Washington and Lincoln, the Pilgrim Fathers and the builders of the great West, can still produce men of such stuff as that?”⁶

These college boys were indeed special. They proved General Barnett’s vision and gamble to be correct and worth the risk. During their recruiting campaign, the Marines specifically looked for men with special qualities to become leaders, both in the officer and enlisted ranks, and groomed them to take that command. The 6th Marine Regiment that entered Belleau Wood with a minimum of training and only an idea of leadership was not the same Regiment that stepped out of the woods after the battle. They lost many friends and men during their battle. The survivors had to train and lead new replacements as they were now the veterans. Many moved up in rank to new leadership roles; they were now the teachers and the team coaches. There were other battles to fight in the Great War they would be called upon to fight. The lessons learned at Belleau

Wood shaped not only their lives, but played a role in shaping the Marine Corps for the rest of the 20th Century.

Maj Thomas Holcomb, Commander of 2/6, stayed in the Marine Corps after WWI. He attended the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College in 1924-25, becoming a Distinguished Graduate.⁷ Eventually, Maj Holcomb rose to the rank of Lieutenant General in 1942, and through an act of Congress, was appointed as CMC.⁸ He was the first person in Marine history to become Commandant at the rank of Lieutenant General.⁹ Looking at the time frame when General Holcomb served as CMC, then one can see how he shaped the Marines for its fight across the Pacific in World War II. It is likely that he drew upon lessons learned early in his career from those junior officers that served under him at Belleau Wood to shape and empower his Marines. As CMC, General Holcomb was a living personification of a “contagion of example.” He had learned much and passed it along to those who need to live it on the battlefield. General Holcomb retired on 1 January 1944, and was promoted to the rank of full General, the first Marine to achieve a four star rank.¹⁰ From March 1944 until June 1948, General Holcomb served as the Minister to the Union of South Africa. He retired after that, and passed away in May 1965.¹¹

Lt Graves Erskine, the young lieutenant whom no one could understand at Quantico due to his thick Cajun accent, went on to a distinguished career in the Marines. Lt Erskine was stationed at Fort Leavenworth for two years beginning in 1929, attending the Officers Staff College.¹² He took command of the 3rd Marine Division in October 1944, and led it in the Battle of Iwo Jima.¹³ General Erskine retired with the rank of General, four stars, in July 1953; he passed away in May 1973.¹⁴ To this day, General

Erskine continues to serve the Marine Corps after death through the Erskine Lecture Series, established February 1984 at the Marine Corps University, Quantico, Virginia.¹⁵ The lecture series invites speakers from the world of politics, journalism, and other fields, which aids in expanding the views of the officers attending Marine Corps University.¹⁶

Carl Brannen survived the war as well. While he did not rise to as great prominence as others, he served a short while as a Marine in World War II until he was processed out for low blood pressure.¹⁷ He passed away at the age of seventy-eight after a career as a schoolteacher, having earned two degrees in history.¹⁸

Lt Clifton Cates, the University of Tennessee athlete and law school graduate, stayed in the Marine Corps as well. After serving in various posts, Cates became Commander of the 1st Marine Regiment, taking part in the battle of Guadalcanal.¹⁹ He was then made Commandant of the Marine Corps Schools until 1944 when Cates was put in command of the 4th Marine Division until the end of World War II.²⁰ From 1948 until 1952, General Cates served as the CMC.

This was not an easy time for America or the Marine Corps. The military budgets were shrinking, and the Marine Corps once again found itself fighting for its existence. However, during his tenure as CMC, the Korean Conflict began, and the nation once again called on the Marine Corps to be sent into action. General Cates, just like General Holcomb, was that embodiment of “contagion example.” His guidance and trust in his subordinates on the battlefield, such as General O. P. Smith at the Chosin Reservoir, allowed the Marines to make quick, timely decisions.

After his time as CMC, General Cates was again made Commandant of the Marine Corps Schools before he retired. This act was truly amazing and selfless at the

same time. General Cates was willing to become subordinate to someone who he had just been in command of in order to ensure that those principles learned so hard in his career, which began in Belleau Wood, were passed along to the next crop of Marine Corps leadership. General Cates was given his fourth star again upon retiring.²¹ He passed away in June 1970.²²

Finally, there was Lt Johnny Overton, the Yale track star whose father was president of Alabama Fuel and Oil Company. Lt Overton was killed in action at the Battle of Soissons, 19 July 1918.²³ It is likely that given his family's status and probable connections, Lt Overton could have been kept out of the front lines. Instead, he went ahead as one of those college boys Col Catlin spoke of, to serve as an infantry officer. Carl Brannen said of Lt Overton, "Johnny was a he-man through and through . . . It did my heart good to follow Overton."²⁴ Johnny Overton was inducted into the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame in 2005.²⁵

Brutal lessons learned in those woods in France forever shaped each man who served there in the 6th Marine Regiment; they forever carried the mental and physical scars of that battle. For those who went on to further serve in the Marines, it shaped their perspective of warfare and how to fight it. They knew the human cost of waging battle.

General Cates addressed the issues of leadership and what it meant while he was Commandant. In discussing leadership, perhaps thinking back to his own beginnings as a combat leader in Belleau Wood, Cates said,

Leadership is intangible, hard to measure, and difficult to describe. Its quality would seem to stem from many factors. But certainly they must include a measure of inherent ability to control and direct, self-confidence based on expert knowledge, initiative, loyalty, pride, and sense of responsibility. Inherent ability cannot be instilled, but that which is latent or dormant can be developed. Other

ingredients can be acquired. They are not easily learned. But leaders can be and are made.²⁶

The Battle of Belleau Wood hinged on the actions, and in the end, it was the 6th Marine Regiment that made the difference. There is a plot of ground in France that is forever the resting place for those brave men who volunteered to become Marines and fought when their nation called.



Figure 19. Aisne-Marne American Cemetery and Memorial, France

Source: American Battle Monuments Commission, <http://www.abmc.gov/cemeteries/cemeteries/am.php> (accessed 28 March 2012).

¹Estes, 295-296.

²Owen, 10.

³Sellers, 29.

⁴Estes, 295.

⁵Catlin, 177-178.

⁶Catlin, 306.

⁷Michael Robert Patterson. Thomas Holcomb, General, United States Marine Corps. (Updated 9 December 2006). Biography courtesy of United States Marine Corps. <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.net/tholcomb.htm> (accessed 3 January 2012; 28 March 2012).

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Michael Robert Patterson. Graves Blanchard Erskine, General, United States Marine Corps (updated 22 October 2006), <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.net/gberskin.htm> (accessed 28 March 2012).

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵United States Marine Corps University web site. No author given. Erskine Lecture Series. <http://www.mcu.usmc.mil/Shared%20Documents/ERSKINE%20LECTURE%20SERIES.pdf> (accessed 7 May 2012).

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Brannen, 107 (written in the Afterword by J. P. Brannen).

¹⁸Brannen, 150, back flap.

¹⁹Michael Robert Patterson. Clifton B. Cates, General, United States Marine Corps (updated 27 January 2006), <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.net/cates.htm> (accessed 28 March 2012).

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³Owen, 118, 120.

²⁴ Brannen, 22.

²⁵ Simmons and Alexander, 271.

²⁶United States Marine Corps, Field Medical Training Battalion, Camp Lejeune, FMSO 1104, Traits and Principles of Marine Corps Leadership, REV July 2008, [http://www.marines.mil/unit/tecom/fmtbn-e/Pages/Student_Materials/FMSO Manual/Block 1/traits.doc](http://www.marines.mil/unit/tecom/fmtbn-e/Pages/Student_Materials/FMSO_Manual/Block_1/traits.doc) (accessed 2 March 2012).

GLOSSARY

American Expeditionary Force. the United States Armed Forces sent to Europe in WWI

Browning machine gun. A heavy machinegun used by the United States armed forces in World War I, manufactured by the Browning Arms Company.

Chauchat. Standard light machine gun used by the French Army during World War I

Maxim machine gun. A self-powered machine gun used by the British armed forces.

Schlieffen Plan. A German operational plan created by General Count Alfred von Schlieffen in December 1905 for a designated attack on France once Russia had started to mobilize its forces near the German border in response to international tensions.

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