GENERAL FOCH AT THE MARNE
AN ACCOUNT OF THE FIGHTING IN AND NEAR THE MARSHES OF SAINT-GOND
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Day broke on a sky still reddened by the angry glow of burning villages. All night long, beneath the moon, the "savage dogs of Pomerania" had howled round their bivouacs in the marshes.

Heavy showers had fallen the previous night, but the moon had cleared away the storm, and though the sky was clouded in the morning, no rain fell till nearly four o'clock in the afternoon, shortly before the German retreat was sounded. But these showers could not be described as that "torrential downpour" which, according to some historians, "quickly filled the marshes, dried up by the intense heat of summer."

There is no doubt that the Marshes of Saint-Gond are no longer so imposing as they used to be; the great lake of quaternary times, the immense emerald set in the silver circle of the low-lying hills of Champagne, has disappeared. But the hidden treasures of the marshes bear witness to the former existence of lake cities, the remains of which one can still discern below the surface. Such as they are, and however dried up they may become, there is no drought capable of drying up that part of the marshes which has not been reclaimed by cultivation. Under the dense growth of reeds, which
Mondemé, left to itself, fell after a mere show of resistance. Finding himself at once master of the castle, which assured him ultimately the key of the marshes, the enemy organised his forces in a masterly way; blocked up all openings with mattresses, placed machine guns on every floor, even in the granaries. At the same time his light batteries hurried forward by the Saint-Gond and Reuves roads, now clear for his troops. And in the beautiful salons, ornamented with charming Louis XV. panels, his staff was installed, a staff said to include an august personage believed to be Prince Eitel.

But Prince Eitel was said to have been seen in many different places during the Battle of the Marne; at Baye, at Coulommiers, at the castle of Mareuil-sur-Ay, at Chaufry and so on. This ubiquity of the modern party appeared with a rush, barely 500 metres away. It took our outposts—tirailleurs wearied with ceaseless watching—by surprise; they scattered and took refuge in the castle and in the village to the north. Gun-limiters were hurled up. In spite of losses among teams and crew caused by the enemy’s fire, I was able to get all the guns away, and left the position accompanying the last wagon, drawn by a sergeant and a trumpeter! We rejoined the rest of the brigade, which still occupied its former positions. I learned at that moment, about eight o’clock, that the colonel had been hit. I went to him at once. He had been looking for new positions on the Broyes-Mondemé road, on horseback, when a shell burst under his horse and broke his thigh. He was lying stretched out in a ditch, black with powder. Major Chaisne, Captain de Bony de Laverne and the surgeon, A. M. Ivey, were with him. He was quite conscious, and did not seem to be in pain. An ambulance was hastily summoned; we laid him in it. Another shell burst quite near, without, however, harming any one. . . . The colonel was taken to Broyes!’

But M. Roland told me that Abbé Payret had seen the cover of a little cardboard box, found on the border of the marshes, addressed to Prince Eitel. “I was told by Captain Bérard, who was told by the Abbé himself,” said M. Roland (see Appendix). It seems proved at all events that a staff was installed at Monde-

Attila seems to throw some doubt on his presence at Mondemé. And Humbert had other cares at that time than researches into identification. He wished to recapture the castle; he could not resign himself to leaving it in the hands of the enemy—who might perhaps have abandoned it of his own accord some hours later. But with what forces was Humbert to recapture it? He had thrown his last reserves into the firing-line. While hoping that Dubois would be able to come to his assistance, he asked the 42nd division to lend him its chasseurs-à-pied, and he flung them, with the remains of his own troops, on the castle. This counter-attack failed. Very well! it must be tried again!

But that was just the time when Foch—his right wing dislocated and obliged to fall back on Corroy, Gourmet (though it might have been only a battalion staff, as it has been ascertained from German prisoners that it was a battalion and its staff which occupied the castle), and that during the few hours which elapsed between the fall of the castle and its recapture by our troops, this staff accounted for very many bottles of wine. A journalist who visited Mondemé some weeks after the battle of the Marne, M. Magne of the Petit Parisien, estimated the number of empty champagne bottles lying strewn on the floor of the entrance hall alone at 300. “Three hundred?” said Felix, the guardian of the castle, who had counted them: “say rather 800”—a proof that even journalists occasionally understate the truth.

According to another inhabitant of the Marne, M. Quinet of Bézanne, whose motor was requisitioned that evening for the transport of wounded, “there were mattresses covered with blood in every room in the castle and on every table were glasses full of champagne. One walked everywhere over the debris of broken bottles.” At Fère and in all the Champagne district, postcards of the Kiosk of Mondemé Castle were sold, bearing this legend: “Kiosk of Mondemé Castle, where the Crown Prince and the German staff were drinking champagne when the first French shell broke in on them. After the flight of the Germans their glasses were found, still half full.”
Foch at the Marne

igançon, Semoine and from there as far as Salon—determined after consultation with Franchet d'Espérey to attempt the most audacious of manoeuvres. Checked at Mondement, his centre wavering and about to lose its strong position on Mont-Août, having no forces he could use except the extremity of his left wing, he decided to make this small body turn as on a pivot, or to use less figurative language, to take the 42nd division from his left and throw it to his right on the flank of von Hausen. This fine manoeuvre has been compared with that of the Prince of Saxe at Saint-Privat; it has been regarded as the decisive action which determined the fate of the battle; it might perhaps be more exact to say that it precipitated that fate, which, from six o'clock in the evening, could no longer be doubted. It also freed the left of the Fourth Army which von Hausen, strongly entrenched to the south of Vitry, could

1 Foch's instructions bore simply that "the 42nd infantry division, as soon as relieved by the Xth army corps, will proceed to form itself by Broyes and Saint-Loup into the reserve army of Linties and Pleurs." That could not have been anything but a measure of protection against German attack. But Foch added: "The point of to-morrow's manoeuvre is to debouch by Fère-Champenoise. For this reason, report on all available forces and all activity in this district." And he fixed the operation to begin at 10.15 the next morning, in slightly modifying his directions: "The 42nd division will arrive on the front Linties-Pleurs. Whatever the situation of the Xth army corps, whether it be far to the rear or not, we count on resuming the offensive with the 42nd infantry division on Kontinent and Corroy, an offensive in which the Xth army corps will take part on the right, Morains-Fère-Champenoise." No doubt was left after these two orders: the flanking manoeuvre was clearly indicated. We may, therefore, hold it as proved, while recognizing as we have done above, that when it commenced the German retreat had already begun.

The 9th of September

not reconcile himself to abandon. But at the time when Foch conceived his manoeuvre, his air-service had not yet been able to inform him (as has been asserted) as to the "existence of a gap" between the two German armies. The manoeuvre was the more audacious on that account. Its only drawback was that it left Mondement uncovered for several hours—Mondement, where the remains of the Morocco companies, nearly all their officers out of action, wandered at random in the woods.

But the movement of the 42nd division had begun at dawn; the castle had not yet fallen, and it was thought that the Montgivroux—Allemant front was sufficiently organised to resist the pressure of the enemy till the arrival of the 151st reserve division of the XIIth corps. Events having belied these conjectures, Humbert had turned back towards Dubois as towards his natural protector. The 77th regiment hurried forward. And if

The struggle at this point (Glannes-Flignicourt-Marolles) lasted till September 11. De Langle did not enter Vitry till the 12th; but from four o'clock on the morning of the 11th, the evacuation of the town had commenced.

September 8, at ten o'clock in the evening.

"Thanks to the aviators, the high command had been aware of the existence of a gap between the armies of Von Bülow and Von Hausen, and it was that knowledge which allowed General Foch to push forward his wedge. This gap was the result of Von Bülow's retreating movement." (Interview of Colonel Carlos Fernandez, Military Attaché of Chili, with Pourriès's agency, reproduced by M. Fabreguettes.) Foch was not, however, aware of this gap till the afternoon of the 9th, but he profited by it at once, having the 42nd division at his disposal, because the intuition of this great leader, his prescience of the imminent retreat of the enemy, had led him to summon the 42nd by an order sent during the night. M. Joseph Reinaud recalls clearly that Foch had stated the principle of this manoeuvre in his lectures at the Ecole de Guerre.
we credit the account of Staff-Officer Asker, the falling back of the 42nd division had been for us "the best of windfalle," for, whilst the infantry of the division executed this "castling" movement, its artillery was not required for two hours, and was able, while passing through Brovies, to concentrate its fire, for these two hours, on Mondement.

Formed up in a semicircle to the north of the village, the six batteries of the division, augmented by three batteries of the Morocco division now again in action, opened an "infernal" fire of extraordinary precision on the park, the woods and the slopes of Mondement. The artillery was commanded, it is true, by Colonel Boichut,¹ who has been called the "virtuoso of the 75's, the Lord of Thunder." According to all accounts, it was "one of the most impressive artillery actions" ever seen. Not only did the barrage it laid down before Mondement prevent the enemy from advancing, but it also gave the 77th regiment time to arrive at its new positions, where without a moment's halt, without even a mouthful of food, it took up its position and deployed towards the castle.²

¹One of our most brilliant generals to-day. This concentric fire was an idea of Humbert's, at whose disposal Foch had put the artillery of the 42nd division, while the infantry of the division was defiling behind the Morocco division. In agreement with Grossetti, Humbert used it between Brovies and the woods, with the objective of preparing a general counter-attack on the castle and front of Mondement.

²Another effect of the artillery fire seems to have been the immediate evacuation of the castle by its staff. The general opinion in the district, supported by various accounts published at the time and afterwards, is that two German generals were killed in the course of the bombardment, and Prince Eitel

The 9th of September

The order to proceed towards Mondement had surprised the 77th regiment near Saint-Loup, between Linthes and Péas, at eight o'clock in the morning. It was no longer raining; the sun had risen, and with it hope had sprung up in the hearts of the men. The company captains had succeeded in procuring some mutton. It was just about to be cut up: great cauldrons of coffee were singing by the fire. . . . Shoulder packs! March!—and that without having eaten the stew, without having tasted the coffee! The greatness of the sacrifice may be measured, when it is remembered that for three days, almost since the beginning of the battle, these men had eaten nothing but raw beetroot. Such was the moral of this regiment, that not one protesting voice was raised.

"The situation is grave, very grave," said the chief, "but it is in no wise hopeless. Hold till midday, till the arrival of the 42nd division at Pleurs, and the battle is won."

wounded. I have not been able to ascertain on what evidence these reports are based. It is certain that no body of a German general was found at Mondement after the recapture of the castle, but it is true that the Germans, when they found it impossible to burn their dead in the course of the battle, carried them away, tied in bundles of four, in motor-lorries or even in common carts, towards the crematoriums of Belgium. During the whole night of the 9th, according to M. Roland, "a long procession of these lorries descended slowly towards the marshes, looking perhaps for the wounded." They passed back again at the same pace, and M. Roland, a native of Lorraine, recognized them by the peculiar sound of their wheels as wagons from Lorraine. But a motor having "two powerful head-lights" which, coming from Mondement, tore up the road towards Cony at full speed, particularly arrested his attention. He believed it contained some "great personage"—perhaps Prince Eitel, who was said to have been wounded, and who would therefore have been left in the rear till nightfall.
Colonel (now General) Lestoquio, commander of the 77th regiment, had orders to send one of his battalions immediately to Allemant, where it was to be at the disposal of Colonel Eon, commander of the 38th brigade. Colonel Lestoquio and the rest of his force were to make for Broyes with all possible speed. The companies set out across the fields to save time. At ten o'clock, Colonel Lestoquio, who had gone on in front, was able to reassure Humbert, to guarantee that his men of the 77th would be at the rendez-vous by 10.30. As a matter of fact, they were already at that moment climbing up the steep ascent to Broyes. Colonel Eon and the 2nd battalion of the 77th arrived about the same time at Allemant. Humbert gave his orders to the two chiefs. The most immediate danger was to be parried; Mondement not being accessible till the approaches to it had been cleared, it sufficed provisionally that Colonel Lestoquio should establish himself strongly with one of his battalions at the northern boundary of the Mondement wood, at the axis of the road which ascends Hill 213; that he should send another of his battalions to the west of the wood, north of the pond called the Petite-Marelle. At the same time, Colonel Eon, who was in command of the 77th, detached from Allemant, took his battalion by way of the Châtaignerie towards the eastern boundary of the wood. The objective of the two leaders for the time being was to act against the enemy's flank, which was attempting to advance by the clearing of Montgivroux. They must not allow him to debouch from the wood.

From 11.50 this objective was attained. The 2nd battalion under Major de Beaufort occupied the southern boundary of the Allemant wood; the 3rd battalion under Major de Courson was stationed near the Petite-Marelle pond, and joined up with the 1st battalion under Major de Merlis. A battery of the Morocco division under Captain de Bornu de Laragne, which had not left the edge of the wood, supported the operation with a machine-gun section of zouaves. In the course of this advance, Colonel Lestoquio, encountering the Enaux battalion of the 208th, ordered it to support the Merlis battalion. Everything was going well. The preliminaries of the operation had evidently succeeded, and Humbert showed himself well satisfied. Suddenly the report went round that there was no need to push the advance further, that Mondement was captured, and that the tirailleurs of the Morocco division were already installed there.

Colonel Lestoquio, who was a little sceptical of this news, wished to satisfy himself regarding it, and set out with Major de Courson to make a reconnaissance; two zouaves, who went forward as scouts, were killed by the explosion of a shell. Not only had the enemy not abandoned the castle, but he had completed the organisation of his defences by making loopholes in the walls of the park and by posting his artillery at its four corners. The village was no less strongly fortified than the castle. Colonel Lestoquio was able to see with his own eyes how our artillery preparations had everywhere ploughed up the approaches to the place, but how the buildings and the walls were practically intact; hence the necessity of immediately resuming the artillery preparation.
In the interval, the order for the attack on Mondement had arrived. The troops were to take possession of the castle, then to push on to the north-west boundary of the Allemand wood, in which it was not known what had become of the zouaves. At 2.30 Colonel Lestoquoy informed Colonel Eon that he was ready, and only awaited the support of the 75 mm. guns. There was not time to receive the reply; the fire had stretched out, and Major de Beaufort with his battalion and two companies of zouaves and tirailleurs collected in the woods, prepared to charge.

But first, writes a soldier who was present, "M. de Beaufort, ardent Catholic as he was, felt the need of commending himself and his men to God. He called a soldier-priest, Corporal Gallard, from the ranks and asked him to give final absolution to such as wished to receive it." These soldiers were Vendéens, lads from Cholet. They all fell on their knees.

Even to-day the few survivors of that moving scene cannot recall it without emotion. The companies were massed about 500 metres from the castle, which they were about to attack by the kitchen garden on the south; the 5th and 7th companies were to follow the Breyes road, which led up to the entrance; the 6th and 8th were to defile by the wood and utilise such cover as it offered. The enemy artillery was searching for this force towards the Ventes de Linthes, where they believed it still to be. The men were "calm and confident"; some were even joking, caressing the points of their bayonets. But one by one "the smell of powder, the game of death, touched them." Major de Beaufort had drawn on his white gloves. He took one last proud look over his battalion. Then he lifted his cane: "Forward! For France! Charge!" And he rushed forward, followed by his men.

"It was a charge of dense serried masses," according to the soldier quoted above. "The men shouted and sang. The bugles quickened their call till it became a veritable gymnastic feat. Bullets whistled past. Soldiers fell. Faster! Faster! The fusillade was infernal. A breach was made in the wall of the kitchen garden by one of our 75 mm. guns. Major de Beaufort rushed towards it. He stopped for a moment at the foot of a tree to decide on his tactics. 'Ah! no sign of them yet, these Boches!' he murmured. A bullet right in the middle of his forehead stretched him dead on the spot. His men wished to remove his body. But the best way to avenge him was to advance. Lieutenant Génois gathered a few soldiers together and led them towards the breach. 'Go through by the breach, my lads! By the breach! we will make a fine shell!' A private called Durand prepared to go through when Lieutenant Parpaillon put his hand on Durand's shoulder: 'Stop. Let me go first.' 'Go on, sir,' replied Durand, 'I follow you.'"

It was magnificent, the fine spirit of emulation between officers and men! Parpaillon was already on the breach, his sword in his hand, shouting the cry which since early morning had been on the lips of every officer; which only died down in one throat to be taken up with greater vigour by another: "Forward! . . ." The
shout died in his throat; the walls of the castle were pierced by loopholes from which the enemy shot us down point-blank. Captain Secondat-Montesquieu, who had also reached the wall, his sword drawn, prepared with Até his orderly to jump into the court: the same bullet levelled the heir to one of the greatest literary names of France and the humble soldier who assisted him. Lieutenant d’Yturbié went forward, and under fire took from the fallen captain his pocket-book and his rosary, precious relics to be sent to the family of the dead hero...

And the heat went on; after de Beaufort, Montesquieu, Parpaillon, Lieutenants Floquet and Rochier; the latter wounded in the hand refused to stop to have his wound dressed, saying simply, “It is nothing. Forward!” Second-Lieutenants Né and Bordin were knocked over; Captain Henrion, Lieutenant Marchand of the tirailleurs were severely wounded. More than a third of the effectives were out of action. But the charge persisted, the bugles continued to sound; the soldiers, who had hoisted each other up on to the wall, forming themselves into a sort of ladder, shot at the grey uniforms over the top. In front of the chief entrance a zouave was seen to take cover behind the gate, and quietly—//as if shooting at the butts//—took aim and picked off his man with every shot.

But it was all no use. At 3.30 in the afternoon, Colonel Eon ordered Captain Villers to fall back with the remnants of the 2nd battalion, caught in the flank by German machine-guns fire. Colonel Lestocquio transmitted the same order to five companies of the 1st and 3rd battalions which had supported de Beaufort. The attack had failed twice more. But our men had not given in; a unit of the 1st battalion, deaf to the bugle call of the retreat, stuck to the crest of the plateau, and continued to fire on the defenders of the farm. Hardly were the companies re-formed when Captain de la Taille, of the 36th brigade, announced that after a new artillery preparation another assault would be delivered. The men had taken that for granted. Towards five o’clock, Colonel Eon called for volunteers to carry forward two guns of the Naud battery,1 which, thanks to the dusk, they were able to get within 350 metres of the castle in the direction of the park.2 Colonel Lestocquio, on his side, succeeded, through the efforts of his intermediary, Staff-Lieutenant Canonge (son of the General), in pushing forward a gun to within 400 metres of

1 Captain Naud had replaced Major Geiger, who was wounded on the 7th while observing the enemy’s positions through his field-glasses.

2 “Finally at four o’clock, a decisive resolve was made. Two guns were taken up so near to the castle that it was even in sight; after a short but violent artillery preparation, the infantry would make a fresh assault. I accompanied Captain Naud in a reconnaissance of emplacements for the guns. We walked along the Broyes-Monument road till the road from the castle was in sight. We were therefore about 300 metres from the southern façade. After consultation with Colonel Eon, and in presence of Lieutenant Canonge of General Humbert’s staff, the two guns were taken up as silently as possible by the infantry. Night began to fall. . . . Captain Naud was in command of the gun on the left; I took the gun on the right. He bombarded the castle and the enclosure to the right; I aimed at the tower and the enclosure to the left. The walls were torn open by our explosives, the offices were set on fire.” (Lieutenant Alons’ Journal.)
the principal entrance. In less than ten minutes thirty-six mlinite shells fired from this one gun fell in a sudden gust on the gates and the offices.

"Come on, my lads! Forward, brave fellows!" cried Colonel Lestoquoi to his men. "One last push and we are there!"

Three of his companies made a rush at the castle; four others threw themselves on the village. Night fell. It was just half-past six. At 6:40 Colonel Lestoquoi received orders to stop the attack, but he tried in vain to arrest the victorious enthusiasm of his troops. "A military order," said Napoleon, "only demands passive obedience except when it is given by a superior, who being on the spot at the moment when he gives the order, has exact knowledge of the situation." At any rate, the colonel went on, leading his last company (the 9th, Captain Chausse), which he rushed right up to the gates of

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1It is perhaps not unimportant to state clearly that Lieutenant Canonne, charged by General Humbert to carry the order for the renewal of the assault, took forward this gun to Colonel Lestoquoi, forestalling the latter's desire, and that this was not, therefore, as has been said, a chance coincidence.

2This statement is contested. "The order was never given," we are told. "On the contrary, Captain Canonne, a staff officer of General Humbert, was sent to carry a message to Colonel Ron and Colonel Lestoquoi, ordering them to resume the assault at nightfall with the support of guns taken right up to within a short distance of the castle. Captain Canonne remained there, to ensure that Humbert's instructions were fully carried out, and did not return to headquarters till the affair was successfully over. The order is to be found duly entered in the records of the division." But would it have been strange if Humbert, advised of the German retreat and knowing that Mondement would have fallen of itself in due course, had decided to countermand the attack? That, at least, is how we interpret the decision which has been attributed to him.

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The 9th of September

the principal entrance. The church, the farm, the park, and the castle were captured. The operation was carried through by main force, and with extraordinary speed and abandon. Colonel Lestoquoi, Major de Courson, and Staff-Captain Bézière-la-Fosse entered the castle, whence the garrison had fled, without a shot being fired. A few houses in the village were still held by German soldiers; our men battered in the doors with their muskets and rushed inside. It was a hand-to-hand conflict, each man for himself. The remnants of de Beaufort's battalion, eager to avenge their fallen leader, rushed, in their turn, on to the plateau. All the enemy troops who had escaped the bayonets of the 77th regiment during the night were to fall under the enfilading fire of the two companies of tirailleurs, posted on the north-western outskirts of the Alençon wood, and of the company of zouaves whose machine-guns swept the Reves road.

At seven o'clock in the evening the last convulsions of the struggle ceased: the silence round Mondement was broken only by the groans of the dying, the cries of the wounded. In the great Louis XV. salon, under the colours of the 77th, Colonel Lestoquoi had gathered his officers together to mourn the losses of the regiment and to acclaim its victory. He summed up the situation with true military brevity in a laconic dispatch he sent to the commander of the Moroccco division:

"I hold the village and castle of Mondement. I remain there overnight."

By a curious coincidence, the 77th infantry regiment,

1Except for a dozen men, who were taken prisoners, and two machine-guns.
which had given further proof on this day of its marvellous qualities of endurance and activity, had in front of it the 77th Prussian infantry, as well as units of the 164th Innoviers. And truly the carnage around the castle was great.¹

The wheeler movement of von Bülow’s front had already commenced: the order to retreat had been received by the various units about five o’clock.² It was only a strong rearguard which had defended the castle.³

¹The steward of the castle reported “that whole battalions were annihilated. In the park alone nearly 3000 German dead were counted; two generals among them.” (P. Fabreguettes, op. cit.) Elie C... says only that “many German dead lay strewn about the walks, the kitchen garden and the park of the castle.” (See Appendix.) M. Gabriel Furine in his noble and pathetic Paysages de Guerre, speaks also of a salon in the castle, “where two officers, killed by the explosion of one of our shells, remained in the positions in which death had surprised them, the one sitting at the piano, the other playing the violin.”

²The incident did occur, but not at Mondement. According to M. Troelot, a merchant of Sézanne, and an eye-witness, it happened at Reclus, in the farm of the old abbey, where the enemy had left twenty of his own wounded and five or six wounded Frenchmen under the charge of a nurse.

³Too soon for the neighbouring units of the Xth corps and the Morocco division. “During the whole day,” wrote Lieutenant Alonis in his Journal, “I saw distinctly through my field-glasses the far-distant roads towards the north-east black with columns of all arms, which moved away ceaselessly into the distance. This splendid objective was unfortunately out of range (eight to ten kilometres). I only succeeded in reaching isolated motor lorries and bodies of cavalry.”

²Peene has at last descended on Mondement. Two springs and two summers have sufficed for the kindly hand of Nature to efface from the countryside the wounds laid open by the war. But the skeleton of the castle remains. It raises its tragic memorials high above the marshes. At night a light gleams forth from it as of old. In the eastern tower, unroofed and three-quarters demolished, the steward still lights the “flame” of Mondement every night—a simple lamp with a steady flame, visible from all points of the horizon. From time immemorial, till September 5, 1914, this lamp was lighted regularly by the goodwill of the lords of the castle, to allow belated travellers to see their way in safety across the winding paths of this treacherous district. But, like the funereal lights which used to shine in the Middle Ages in the “lanterns of the dead,” the “flame” of Mondement now illuminates nothing but graves. In the little village cemetery round the unfortunate church, of which a pious hand has patched the roof pierced by many shells, at great personal risk, the remains of some of the great protagonists of the drama lie in separate graves: Major de Beaufort, Captain Jean de Secondat-Montesquieu, Chief Surgeon Baur, Second-Lieutenant Noël, Lieutenant Parpaillon, Sergeant Atlé, and many others less famous, though doubtless no less worthy of honour. The tirailleurs of Morocco lie under white tombsones on the edge of the plateau, our metropolitan troops, in front of the garden wall, in a meadow beside the Broyes road. Zouaves and foot soldiers fraternise in death, as they frictioned in the struggle and in the victory. There are no names over these graves. A cross, a few flowers, the tricoloured cockade of the Souvenir français, and, on a black ground in letters of gold, these beautiful lines of Henri Regnier:

Mais tandis que montait au ciel avec fureur
La sinistre, larouse et barbare clameur,
Se mêlait, en réponse à cette voix haineuse,
La Chanson d’Aisne-et-Marne au chant de Sambre-et-Meuse...
Foch at the Marne

towards the Petit-Morin at dawn. The moral of these valiant troops had never been so high. They had been annoyed at the news of their transfer to another part of the battlefield. That order had been brought towards five o'clock in the morning by Staff-Captain Canonne.

"They send us away just when we are holding the enemy!" cried the men with tears of rage.

But the truth was that from Soizy to Clos-le-Roi, the most easterly point of the forest of Gault, the German front formed a ring of iron round la Villeneuve-lès-Charleville, a ring which we had not yet succeeded in breaking. Moreover, the fall of Mondevint had straightened out the salient which he had thrust into the enemy's lines to the north of Saint-Gond, and assured him free communication over the marshes. The situation of the Xth corps might have been very critical if Franchet d'Espéréy—whose brilliant and decisive part in the battle has never been sufficiently recognised—advised of the resistance encountered by Defforges, had not ordered his 1st corps, which commanded the plateau of Vaugirard, to proceed towards the south-east, attacking the extremity of the enemy's line towards Baye and Villenevard. Von Bülow, who had already lost Montmirail that morning, saw himself threatened in the rear by this attack, and may already have thought of retiring. It was at this moment, about one o'clock in the afternoon—according to a letter from General Anthoine to the Bishop of Chalon—that Abbé Laplaige, the good Curé of la Villeneuve-lès-Charleville, who had stayed beside his flock during the whole of the battle, "seeing an artillery reconnaissance pass through the village, went up to the lieutenant-colonel\(^1\) and offered to give him information as to the enemy's positions. Abbé Laplaige led the colonel up to the skylight of a granary, and from this height pointed out to him with absolute precision the enemy batteries, as well as an important centre of communications, a point through which the German troops were obliged to pass in their retreat.\(^2\)

The most dangerous of these batteries—six 105 mm. guns, which swept the whole plateau and arrested the progress of our troops—was defiled to the right of the road from Thoul-Troisy to Fromentières, in the district known as la Briqueterie.\(^3\) Caught by the fire of our

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\(^1\) Lieutenant-Colonel de Gensac, of the 50th artillery regiment of Rennes.

\(^2\) From a letter of February 29, 1916. General Anthoine added incidentally, "The lieutenant-colonel of artillery, who put his newly gained information to good use, finished his account of the affair by saying that it seemed to him only just to acknowledge the conduct of the brave Curé, who, after all, raked being shot without question, if a return offensive had put the Germans again in possession of la Villeneuve. The information furnished by the Abbé was of great value to our artillery, and I feel sure that the thanks to which he is undoubtedly entitled would have much higher value for him if conveyed to him by Your Highness."

There is a slight mistake in General Anthoine's letter. Lieutenant Colonel Gensac's observation point was not a granary, but the ladder of a reservoir at the extreme end of the village. 

"In the evening, at nightfall," we are told by one of the principal actors in the affair, "our 75 mm. guns fired to the full extent of their range on the village of Baye, eight kilometres to the north. That stirred up the Germans, who were about to have a meal, and were congregated round their field-kitchens, the officers' tables being near by." The effect of the firing was seen by the French next day in their advance to have been terrible, and this view was confirmed by the inhabitants.

\(^3\) A distinguished correspondent, M. Merlin, Counsellor-General of the Canton of Montmirail, tells us that the batteries were emplaced along the road which crosses from la Mortière to
Foch at the Marne

75's, crashed to pieces with their gunners, the batteries ceased to exist; the road was free for our troops; they carried Corfôix with a rush, and went on towards Talus.

The enemy had staggered under the blow. But he continued to persist on our right, where von Hausen, with great masses of troops, had advanced as far as Gourgouçon, the Guard as far as Connatre. In fact, towards nine o'clock in the morning, the 21st division Bannay. “I can tell you the position exactly,” he writes: “the gunners who served it are buried at the very place where the battery was destroyed.”

“This war is above all a war of positions, that is, of finding out the positions of the enemy: in the case of two batteries, the first very powerful but not knowing the position of the second; it is the second, even though more feeble, which wins the day, if it has discovered the position of the first.” (Charles Nordmann in the Matin of November 18, 1915.)

1They arrived about one o'clock, “forty-four years to the day since the entry they had made in 75,” as Fétart the agent remarked. Our troops had been held up for some time half-way to Fère, notably in the front of the farm of Saint-Georges, where the 23rd company of the 200th had a furious encounter, in the course of which Lieutenant Bouquet was killed. The Saxons arrived about the same time at Gourgonçon, which they had bombarded since ten o'clock. The curé, M. Denisot, was wounded in his cellar by the explosion of a shell. “Most of the fighting took place at Mont-Martin, to the north of the Maurenaie about 1291 metres from here,” said one of the country police. “Most of the dead were found there. The struggle was very sanguinary. One sergeant killed nine Germans at the entrance to the village; his men deserted him, and he took cover alone behind a hedge and fired until he himself was killed.” The Saxon troops who occupied Gourgonçon belonged for the most part to the 102nd, 101st, 106th, 107th, and 133rd infantry regiments, active and reserve, and to the 13th chasseurs: only one or four of the eighty-five Germans buried in the territory of this commune belonged to the Grenadiers of the Guard; at Connatre, on the contrary, the fifty-nine Germans buried there all belonged to the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th regiments of the Guard and to the 1st Grenadiers. The cemetery contains also the graves of three French officers, Lieutenants Gayot of the 3rd Engineers, Riche and Lebée of the 125th infantry regiment.

The 9th of September

had been obliged to relinquish the positions so hardly won the day before, positions which it had defended with extraordinary fury. Thrown back from Œuvy, Radiguet re-formed his forces to the south of Corroy, on Hill 129, and attempted to hold on there, but he had now only the skeleton of a division; the Saxon troops manoeuvred behind a screen of heavy artillery, which cleared the ground in front of them, pulverising all resistance: from Corroy, Radiguet was obliged to descend on Fresnay, then on Faux, and Moussy’s division, drawing back its right little by little to guard the contact of the two forces, found itself constrained to a similar movement. Some of Moussy’s units, like the 135th, had lost two-thirds of their original strength; the 103rd brigade (Colonel Doursol), which extended from Moussy’s division towards Morains, and the 104th brigade of the Battesti division (Lieutenant-Colonel Claudon), which defended the northern slopes of Mont-Aoult, had suffered no less from the terrible high-angle fire which the enemy directed on them from Toulon. A feeble bulwark in truth, this mere handful of effectives, to oppose the tide which flowed towards it from three sides, and threatened to blockade it on its island! The 103rd brigade, the most exposed, was the first to give way.

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Foch at the Marne

a retreat towards the west. Cavalry tearing along at a furious gallop, spurring on their horses; ammunition wagons flying past over the ruts, their drivers crouching low over their teams, urging them on with hurried blows. Grey uniforms came running out of the woods in skirmishing order, and, throwing themselves down, joined their salvos to the volleys of our own men. From the north, from the east, from the south, German guns levelled on the plain, spat forth their shells, covering the plain with heaps of shrapnel, ploughing it up with the ugly black fellows of their heavy shells. A tremendous fusillade caught the trenches of the chasseurs in the rear. . . ."

To escape being totally surrounded, the 104th brigade in its turn broke off the struggle, and retreated in fairly good order towards Saint-Loup. Moussy alone held on to the eastern slopes of Mont-Août. But he had no troops there save his 135th regiment, reduced to 1200 men. And the Prussian guards were upon him!

They carried the slopes and threw the 135th back on Sainte-Sophie, but this gallant regiment only fell back on the left in order to counter-attack on the right. Definitely broken in this heroic charge, in which it lost its commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Graux, Majors Pons and Noblet, and nearly all its officers, the regiment halted, wheeled round, and streamed back towards the south. Moussy, now uncovered on both flanks, could no longer hold the front which Dubois had hastily improvised for him with units of the 52nd division, gathered together along the roads: he therefore drew back the 33rd brigade, but kept his artillery in action on the

The 9th of September

ridge of Mont-Chalmont, threw the 68th regiment into the wood of Hill 144, the 90th into that of Sainte-Sophie, and on this chance position made one last effort.

It was half-past four in the afternoon. The 42nd division was expected every moment—it should have arrived at midday, then at two o'clock, then at four—and it had not yet turned up. What had happened to it? Why had it not arrived? Had it changed its objective en route? Had it gone to the help of Humbert instead of descending on Pleurs? It alone could save the army, which seemed otherwise past all possibility of help, save by divine intervention—which every new effort of the enemy threatened with total annihilation, and which Foch sought to inspirit by optimistic bulletins, appeals to the energy of the race, communications as to the progress—alas! how slow!—of Grossetti. All this great broken force, already at its last gasp, anxiously awaited the arrival of the 42nd division, longed for it, implored that it might yet be in time. Foch sent messenger after messenger; Moussy detached two squadrons of the 7th Hussars to ride out to meet it. A dreadful agony of suspense hung over all. It was comparable to that of Constantine, crushed by Maxentius, lifting his eyes to the

1 This "slowness" is easily explained. The force was not relieved till eleven o'clock in the forenoon, and the 151st was not able to rally its troops till about one o'clock in the afternoon. The 162nd, nearer at hand, had commenced the movement and advanced in the direction Brayes-Pea-Saint-Loup, in shelter of the crest of the Hill of Alleman and of the Signal de Chal-

mont; the 151st followed, the 83rd brigade was in the second line, leaving the 18th battalion of chasseurs to support the Mor-

occo division; the movement was preceded by the 10th regi-

ment of mounted chasseurs.
heavens imploring their aid; to Clovis invoking the God of Clotilda; to Roland sounding his horn; to Napoleon listening eagerly for Grouchy, and hearing instead the approaching steps of Blücher.

The fate of the army seemed decided: two divisions were cut off from the main army, and von Hausen was driving them like dead leaves before him. Already enemy forces had been able to filter through by the Vaure valley: they pushed on towards Pleurs, towards Salon. . . .

A happy, perhaps even a decisive moment for our adversaries, had the other corps of the Second and Third German Armies been able to follow up the movement, had the advance been made all along the line. But von Bülow, after his precarious success at Mondement, refused to move again, as if wedged in by his conquest,¹ and our Fourth Army, which had fallen back on the 8th before Saxon divisions, was fighting actively on the 9th towards Ormet, les Fenus and la Folie. Moreover, de l'Espée's forces remained intact, although he had been obliged to abandon Mailly according to orders, to preserve the alignment, after having held on to that position during the whole of the 8th and the morning of the 9th with hiscyclists and dragoons. The wedge which

¹ "The enemy no longer shows any activity. His heavy artillery seems dead; the attack on Mondement was arrested after the fall of the castle. This arrest, which is still unexplained, after the furious attacks and bombardments of the previous day, was an inexpressible relief to us. Why did the enemy not continue to fire? Why did he not attack? In consequence, they say, of the success obtained by the army on our left. A vague explanation, with which, however, we must be content." (Lieutenant Alous' Journal.)

von Hausen and the Guards drove into the hinge of the French armies, exposed the German forces to dangerous lateral movements: ill-protected towards Humbauville, von Hausen in particular uncovered his right flank completely to our attack, which fell on it like a thunderbolt from the moment when Foch had the 42nd division at his disposal.

At last the 42nd arrived; it swept down the slopes, Grossetti at its head on horseback, a terrible and magnificent figure against the golden background of the setting sun, a very God of Battles.² An enemy aeroplane flew over from the direction of Broyes: at Saint-Loup it darted like a bird towards its own lines. Did it hasten to warn the enemy to fall back instantly, that in retreat alone could he escape disaster? The moment had at last come for the former professor of the École de Guerre to apply his principle: "If by any fortunate chance, any happy inspiration, we catch a glimpse of a fissure in the edifice, or a point of inadequate resistance, and if, by a particular combination of forces, we can add to the regular and methodical action of a flood the sudden blow of a battering-ram, capable of breaking down the edifice at one point—the equilibrium is broken; the mass hurls itself as speedily as possible through the breach, and carries every obstacle before it."²

² Libermann, op. cit.: "The sun, sinking fast, reddened the western sky in one last embrace; its last rays lit on General Grossetti, on horseback in the midst of his staff. Everything was subordinated to that great central figure. Immovable as an equestrian statue, he was the incarnation of triumph, the typification of victory."

² Principes de Guerre, chapter x. p. 289.
The “fissure” was there: in order to break the fragile scaffolding of the German combinations, Foch had only to level against the desired point the blow of the battering-ram, that was in this case the 42nd division: the whole force could then follow through the breach.

The order for a general offensive is given. The call to arms is sounded; some regiments have neither colonel nor superior officer; companies are commanded by sergeants; a magnetic redressing takes place all along the line; nothing remains to be done; the whole division feels itself supported as if by some interior power, carried forward irresistibly as if on some mighty wave. Marvellous buoyancy of the French spirit!

Without losing a minute, Dubois, as soon as he was informed of the arrival of units from the head of Grossoetti’s division (which was to counter-attack in the direction of Connaître (Euvre, seconded by all available units of the IXth and XIIth army corps), changed his own dispositions to fall in with the new order; the 104th brigade held on firmly to the Heights of Chalmont, supported by all the artillery of the 17th division and that of the 52nd “not employed towards the north.” All available units of the 17th division were to attack at the Nozet farm and at Morains-le-Petit; the 103rd brigade was to attack the farm of Sainte-Sophie and Plateau 166, in liaison with the 17th and with Grossoetti’s division. . . .

At six o’clock in the evening, supported by three bri-

gades of artillery, the 42nd division hurled itself in particular formation from the front Linthes-Linthenelles towards the hollow of Éuvre, of which its mounted patrols had previously reconnoitred the approaches.

At eight o’clock, two other brigades under Colonel Boichut concentrated their fire on the further side of Connaître, where the railway line branched off towards Fère-Champenoise and commanded the entrance to that village, relegated to Moussy as his objective. The main body of the 42nd division halted and bivouacked at Pleurs and the neighbouring woods. But Colonel Simon with the 33rd brigade (three battalions of the 90th, two battalions of the 68th and half a squadron of the 7th hussars) continued the pursuit as far as Nozet, Puits and Morains-le-Petit. Such was the activity of this force, that after half-an-hour’s halt at Nozet, to let the men have some food, the Colonel decided to march on right through the night, without taking precautions lest he should lose touch with the 103rd brigade, which only progressed slowly towards the farm of Sainte-Sophie. Moussy, who did not learn till two o’clock in the morning of this tour-de-force of his brigadier (the messenger sent to him by Colonel Simon had lost his way in the night), at once hurried up with his reserves towards Fère-Champenoise, to support the 33rd brigade.

He entered Fère at five o’clock without a shot having been fired. At the same hour the 42nd division entered Connaître, also practically without resistance; and it

1 “I found the 135th crippled: neither colonel nor any superior officer; and I sent it forward nevertheless!” (General Moussy’s Journal of the Campaign.)
They appeared—as at Mondement before the 77th, as at Gourgancourt before Eydog, as at Fère itself before Moussy—that the enemy had only left a curtain of troops, a mere façade of effectives; the alarm given by the aeroplane had been heard.

On the evening of the 8th, according to Abbé Néret, and on the afternoon of the 9th, according to an eyewitness, M. Bonnemain, Fère-Champenoise was transformed into a fair: the reserves of the Guard, who had been in cantonments up till then in the suburbs of Connaître, spread all over the town towards three o'clock. And as practice for their subsequent operations, they pillaged several houses on the way. After that, it was methodical and organised pillage; only the houses and shops without men folk were robbed. Later on, orgies were arranged. Before the Hôtel de Paris, a piano was carried out into the street: music was struck up in front of the church, the audience “seated on benches and ammunition waggons.” Champagne gushed forth in streams. The officers loll’d in basket chairs on the paves—they should come out one by one. “The manœuvre,” said Lieutenant Lemberg, “was effected in good order. At regular intervals the Prussians came out and laid down their rifles. In a neighbouring pathway they were lined up two deep: the chasseurs took them in charge with fixed bayonets. The officer came last: ‘Here is my pistol. You are stronger than we to-day, and we give in. To-morrow, perhaps, you will have to submit to your turn to the supreme humiliation. That is my hope. Oberleutenant Schwartz of the 4th Grenadiers of the Guard.’”

Counting all together, wounded and unwounded, H. Lemberg estimated the number of prisoners taken at Connaître at 500 men of the 1st, 2nd and 4th Grenadiers of the Guard.

The 9th of September

...; their tunics unbuttoned, cigars between their lips, they surveyed the scene complacently through their monocles. This drunken mob had almost the appearance of a Hottentot masquerade, for a neighbouring chapel had been robbed, and the vandals returned with fantastic coverings on their heads. They drank and ate greedily, they danced, they shouted barbarous songs to the glory of the Fatherland. What festival, after all, was being celebrated in this orgy of the flesh-pots? A wounded French soldier was taken past in a handbarrow: the Germans hooted him. Sword-belts unbuckled, haversacks thrown down in heaps, rifles stacked against the walls—everything bore witness to the absolute security in which these scoundrels believed themselves to be.

But suddenly, towards five o'clock, a mounted officer galloped up. He shouted an order in a stentorian voice. It was an order of retreat! The men threw on their kit, snatched their rifles; the officers demanded the way to Sommesous, to Morains, to Écury-le-Répos from the stupefied inhabitants. Everything was done at express speed, in good order, but without fifes. By six o'clock in the evening there was not a single German in the town, save for a few drunkards who snored in the cellars.

1 This incident was reported by M. Larecher, the proprietor of the Hôtel de Paris.
2 But the roads, the fields, the woods round Fère were strewed with German dead, belonging, for the most part, to regiments of the Guard, of the Kaiserin Augusta and the Kaiser Franz. And the wounded swelled the number of the drunkards taken in the cellars. Altogether, about 1500 prisoners were taken, a sufficiently imposing number.
It was not till the next day, at five o'clock in the morning, that the French re-entered Fère. By that time the main part of von Bülow's army had long since recrossed the marshes.

Colonel Simon arrived at three o'clock, but he only touched the hill at the station and pushed straight on to Morains-le-Petit, where other troops joined him later. At five o'clock the rest of the 17th division reached Fère, where Dubois had sent on his main force, and where Foch at midnight set up his headquarters.

The Dawn of Victory

VI

THE DAWN OF VICTORY

There was a current report that Moussy, the future hero of Ypres, had routed the Guard in the Marshes of Saint-Gond, with a division of the IXth corps. Historians have repeated that report. Strictly speaking, he would not have had an impossible task. From Broyes and from Mont-Chalmont, our 75's held the seven roads across the marshes under their fire, roads so straight, so geometrical, that they could be enfiladed right across from one side of the marshes to the other. Over nearly the whole extent of these roads, it was impossible for the Germans to step aside one yard to the right or to the left under pain of being sucked into the marshes. If our artillery had been in action, the Germans would have had to choose between being wiped out by shell-fire or being swallowed up by the marshes. Why did our artillery not intervene? Did it lack shells, as has been supposed, at the last moment? Our aeroplanes, which had been so active in furnishing information during the battle—had they failed in some way towards the end?\footnote{It was the air service, on the contrary, which informed us at 5.30 of the German retreat, though it had been begun sooner by a part of von Bülow's army. The *Memento per asserio* of Vertus informs us that towards two o'clock on the 9th a French aero-}