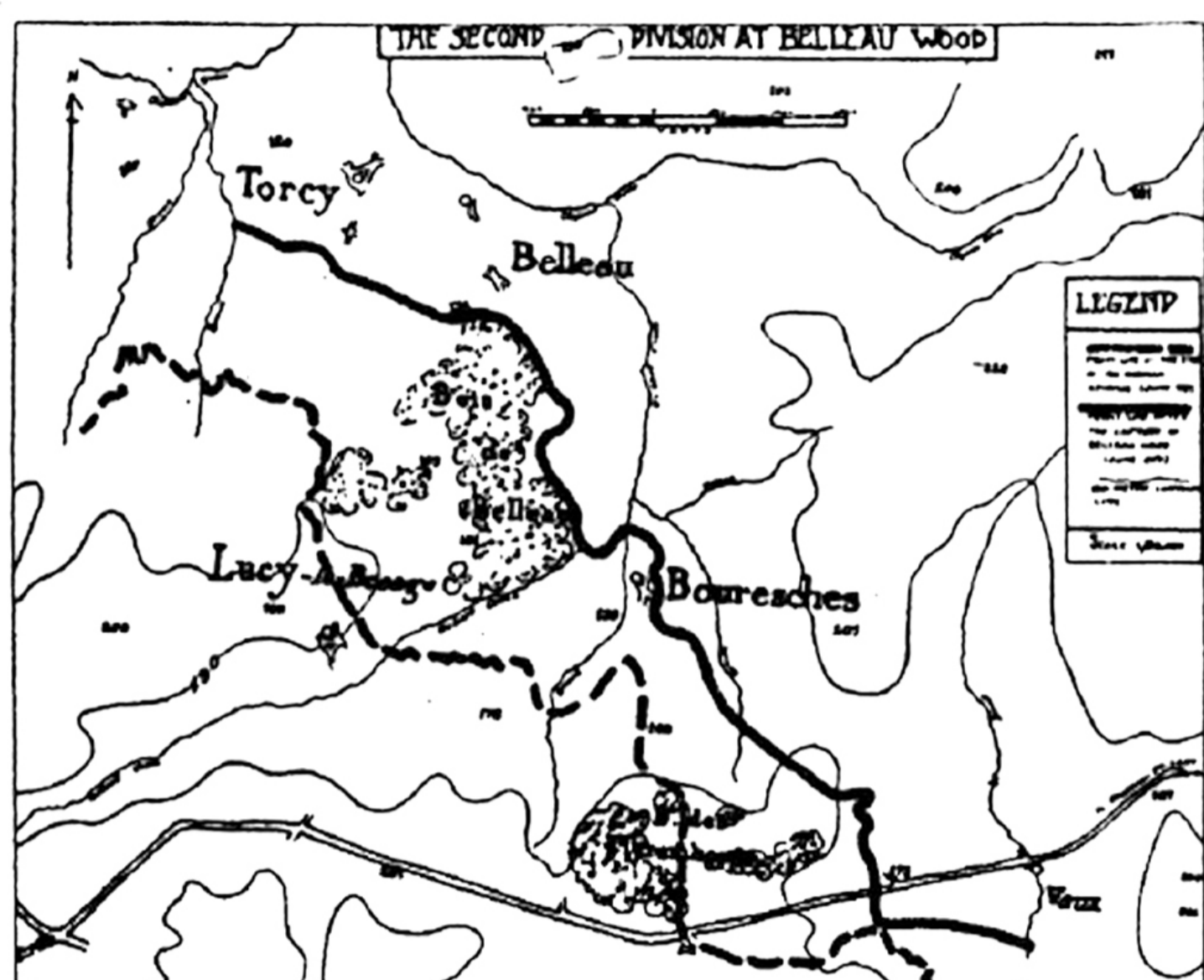


# WAS BELLEAU WOOD "MAGNIFICENT BUT NOT WAR"?



By courtesy of D. Appleton & Company

## WHERE THE SECOND DIVISION WON ITS SPURS

Belleau Wood is shown in the center of the map. The broken line defines the German advance prior to the arrival of the Americans, while the heavy black line indicates the extent to which our troops pushed them back in three weeks of intermittent fighting.

**A** NEEDLESS SACRIFICE, glorious as it was—such, now that it can be told, is the military judgment of Maj.-Gen. Joseph T. Dickman, who commanded the Third Army in France. A veteran of many campaigns and a highly decorated alumnus of the World War, General Dickman has written a book, "The Great Crusade" (Appleton); and as General Pershing has furnished a friendly and approving foreword for it, one may conclude that what the author has to say about Belleau Wood, and other war matters, will be generally interested as an expression of prevailing military opinion in America. It was a French commander in the Crimea who witnessing the British "Charge of the Light Brigade" which was to inspire Tennyson's poem of that title, exclaimed: "*C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre*"; and General Dickman amplifies that phrase as the most fitting comment on the famous capture of Belleau Wood by American troops, at the instance of the French command. This is the way he puts it—and the italicized emphasis is his own:

*"It was magnificent fighting, but not modern war."*

And a little later he declares—again in italics:

*"Belleau Wood was a glorious, but an unnecessary sacrifice."*

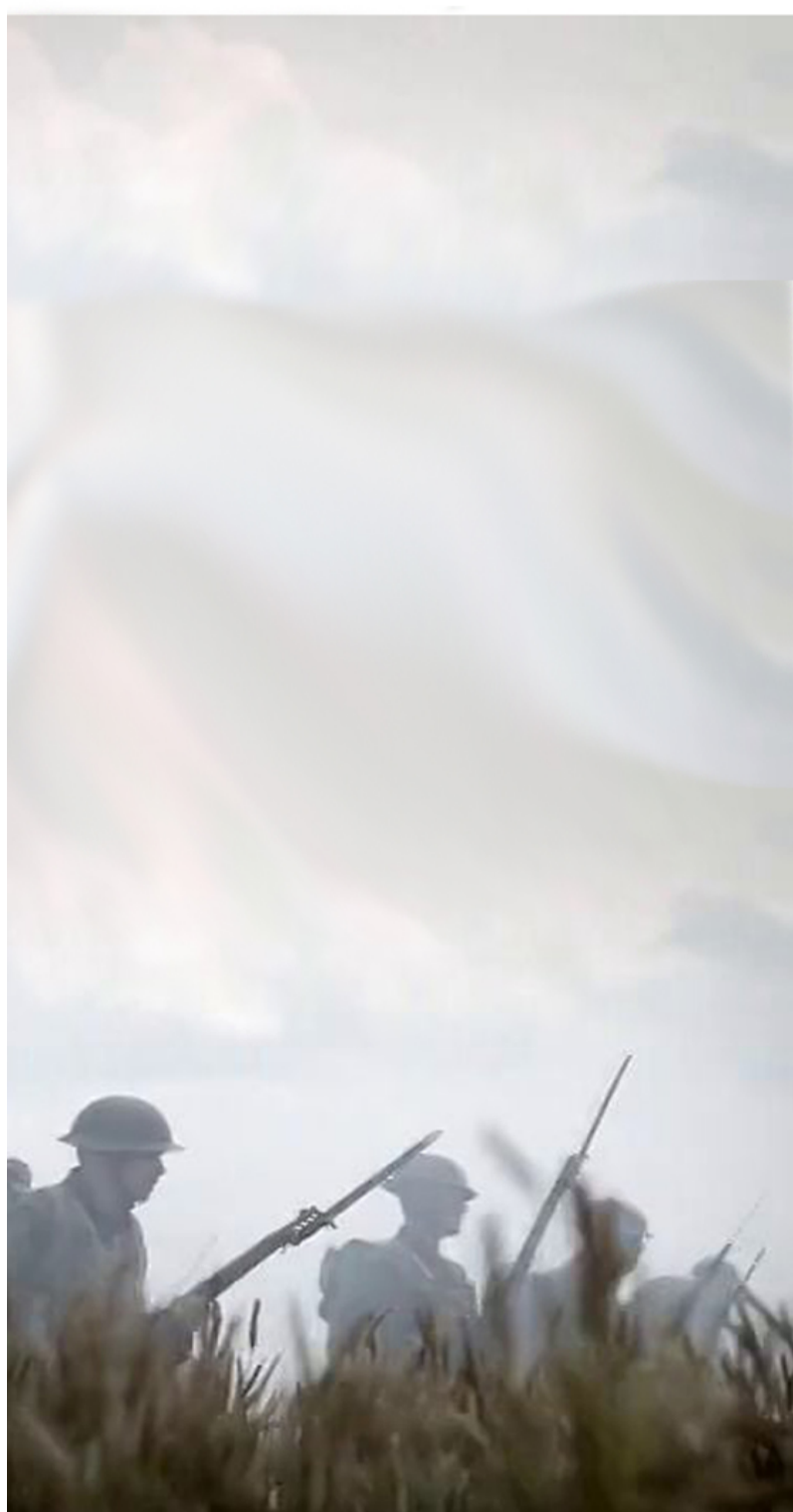
Reviewing the military situation which paved the way for that feat of American arms, General Dickman reminds us that on May 31, 1918, our Second Division, which had been in reserve northwest of Paris, was shifted by two hurried stages to Montreuil-aux-Lions, which it reached on the following day. There, about ten miles west of Château-Thierry, it found itself attached to the 21st Corps of the Sixth French Army; and the General remarks that the arrival of the division was "most opportune," inasmuch as it "stopt the disorganized retreat



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of the French troops." Here General Dickman quotes the Corps Commander as having stated on June 2:

"Thanks to the arrival of the Second Division, U. S., it has been possible to support the entire front of the Corps with a solid line, occupied from now on by American regiments."



Continuing his historical record the author sets it down that, on the evening of the day after the above words were written, the Germans drove forward, taking Belleau Wood and contiguous points; and three days later their line stretched "from Essômes on the Marne, along the . . . southern edge of Belleau Wood, and on over Hill 142, south of Torcy." Extended along that section of the front were the American troops under General Bundy, and "the French troops when forced back passed through the American lines, reorganized, and for a time acted as a reserve."

And here General Dickman explains:

The German drive being pretty well spent, the lines ordinarily would have become stabilized in these positions; but the French Generals, whose troops had just been rescued from a disastrous retreat, were not satisfied with the stopping of the enemy's advance on Paris, but immediately pushed the American troops, who had never been in battle before, into a series of offensive operations in a difficult and unfamiliar country, against a victorious enemy—this in spite of instructions from higher authority to be saving with their infantry forces.

General Michel, whose command, the Forty-third French Division, had been forced out of Belleau Wood on the third of June, had a plan for the immediate recapture of the ground lost; but he was induced to forego this honor, and by orders of the Corps Commander the job was turned over to the Second Division, to be undertaken after preliminary capture of Hill 142 to the west.

Here General Dickman pauses to tell us what Belleau Wood is like, and of what small importance it was in a military sense. He depicts it as hill country, wooded and very rough, not commanding any vital communications, not especially desirable as part of the Allied line; but, on the other hand, strongly defended by the Germans—in fact, "one huge machine-gun nest." Such was the hornets' nest, three square miles in extent and "of no strategical importance whatever," into which the green American troops were now sent—with what sanguinary sacrifice and with what splendid accomplishment, during three weeks of intermittent fighting, history is not backward in acknowledging. The irony of warfare is indicated by General Dickman's argument that, without that sacrifice, Belleau Wood would undoubtedly have been abandoned by the enemy a few weeks later, without a struggle, when the vast Allied counter-offensive at Soissons made it impossible for them to maintain the tip of the Château-Thierry salient. Culminating on June 26, when the Brigade of Marines under Gen. James G. Harbord furnished the finishing stroke to the taking of Belleau Wood, that exploit is credited by the author with having demonstrated certain things which needed no demonstration—to wit, "that American Regulars would obey orders, no matter how



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difficult the undertaking, and that they were sturdy fighters who did not shrink from sacrifices." But such sacrifices as they made for "these minor successes" he brands as "excessive." Thus:

There were 9,412 casualties, of whom 1,862 were killed. The losses of the marines were considerably more than one-half of what they suffered during the rest of the entire war—and they took a prominent part in every major operation. The severity of the fighting may be judged by the fact that one American brigade had to be withdrawn for about a week for recuperation and incorporation of replacements.

After formulating his "magnificent fighting but not modern war" apothem, General Dickman sums up the case in these terms:

To persist in an unnecessary attack simply because it is difficult, and to pile up reserves in repeated assaults, is very erroneous tactics. The French generals, with more than three years of war experience, must have known better; it was, in fact, contrary to the instructions of Generals Foch and Pétain on the use of troops in battle. . . . To quote from Gen. Hunter Liggett, page 37 of his book:

"The attack made by the First American Corps on July 18 was successful, moving in accordance with the general plan, keeping in alinement with the advance made farther north and pivoting on Bouresches. From the very beginning of the fighting all commanders were warned about the futility of making the front lines too heavy, and all were enjoined to attack machine-gun by envelopment, and never directly."



GENERAL DICKMAN IN PRUSSIA

At the time this snapshot was taken near Montabaur, he commanded the Army of Occupation on the Rhine.

The italics are General Dickman's; and it is after this citation that he pronounces Belleau Wood "*a glorious, but an unnecessary sacrifice!*" Of the General's competence as a military critic, one may draw a conclusion from these terse phrases in General Pershing's foreword:

During his forty-five years of active life in the Army, he has participated in every war and campaign. His services both in staff and line, whether in peace or war, have been marked by constant devotion to duty. Always a diligent student, he has occupied the position of instructor in organization, tactics, or military history,

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in several of our schools for officers.

Thus he came into the World War well equipped by study and experience for the responsibilities of high command. . . . His Corps in the battle of St. Mihiel and in the grilling struggle of the Meuse-Argonne performed distinguished service. After the Armistice, under circumstances requiring tact and discretion, he commanded our Army of Occupation on the Rhine for several months with marked efficiency.

General Pershing adds that, while the history of the World War must rest primarily upon official records, the personal narratives of participants who played important parts in the tragedy have a value of their own, and he commends General Dickman's work to the military student as well as to the general reader. In this connection it is perhaps significant that one of the most interesting passages in the book deals with General Pershing's early difficulties in France, when the Allied commands opposed the creation of an independent American Army, planning to use our expeditionary forces as reservoirs of reinforcement for their own depleted armies.



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"MOPPING UP" WITH HAND-GRENADES AS AMERICAN SOLDIERS DROVE THE GERMANS FROM BELLEAU WOOD

One of the episodes of American participation in the war which aroused the most enthusiastic pride, quite unaccompanied by any public inkling that the operation in its military aspect might have been not more than a splendid and costly gesture, as General Dickman now declares.

LITERARY DIGEST

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