Although Alexander ordered his division to begin a new training program on 19 September to improve small-unit tactics, events prevented any significant training. Within days of leaving the front lines, AEF GHQ ordered the 77th to join the First Army to take part in its giant Offensive scheduled to begin on 26 September. On 21 September, the division arrived in its position in the Argonne forest on the far left of the army front, becoming part of Hunter Liggett’s I Corps. Two days later, as the men rested and prepared for another attack, the senior officers met to discuss the plan of attack and the division’s role in it.¹

The Argonne, 26 September–16 October 1918

As previously discussed (see Chapter 3), the First Army plan for the 26 September attack in the Meuse-Argonne was extraordinarily optimistic. The plan called for the three divisions in the center V Corps (i.e., the 91st, 37th, and 79th) to gain the “Corps Objective” by driving a 12-kilometer-deep salient into the German lines within the first few hours (see Map 19). By the end of the second day, the V Corps was to reach the “American Army Objective,” a line some 22 kilometers from the starting position. The goals for the I Corps and III Corps were slightly more reasonable, especially on the far flanks of the attack. The original role given the 77th Division, although certain to be physically grueling due to the terrain, required relatively more modest advances. Although

¹ HQ 77th Division, Memorandum for G-3, 19 September, Folder 50.9, Box 12, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA; Alexander, Memories, 169.
MAP 19: Plan for initial attack in the Meuse-Argonne on 26 September.
the 77th had to spread itself out across nearly 7 kilometers of front in the thick of the Argonne, the unit only had to drive forward 2 to 3 kilometers on the first morning to hit the “Corps Objective” and then another 3 to 5 kilometers more to hit the “American Army Objective” by nightfall.2

Many discussions of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive portray it as an unimaginative frontal attack, but the initial plan envisioned a number of important maneuvers to flank certain enemy positions and gain the objectives. In the center, the difficult seizure of Montfaucon was to be assisted by flanking attacks from divisions on both sides. Likewise, the 77th Division’s mission in the Argonne was to be assisted by the deep advances of the 28th Division on the right and the French Fourth Army on the left. Those attacks were to drive up on both sides of the Argonne, outflank the defenders in the forest, and either capture them or force their withdrawal. The 77th was to push forward and keep enough pressure on the Germans to disrupt their reaction to the outflanking attacks on the edges of the forest. This plan was clearly laid out in the First Army, I Corps, and division plans, but its accomplishment took much longer than expected.3

More than anything else, the terrain of the Argonne promised to obstruct the advance of the 77th Division. Those who fought in it were careful not to leave the impression that the Argonne was just a large forest. Alexander described it as a “wooded mountain . . . extremely rugged with deep, scarped valleys cutting into the central mass, the whole covered by a thick, in some places impenetrable, forest, with dense undergrowth.”4 Its ridges and hills dominated the valleys of two rivers, the Aire to the east and the Aisne to the west. Many of the ravines that cut across the forest

The First Army plan, which called for a deep penetration in the center, allowed for shorter intermediate objectives toward the flanks. Thus, the 35th Division, on the right flank of the I Corps, had to go nearly 10 kilometers in 4 hours just to hit the “Corps Objective,” while the 77th had to go just 2 to 3 kilometers. While the 35th had to advance 15 kilometers to hit the “American Army Objective,” the 77th had to go between just 5 and 8 kilometers. Only at the very end of the first phase of the First Army’s attack, after the Argonne had been cleared, was the 77th supposed to make a rapid advance and catch up with the divisions in the center on the “Combined Army First Objective,” after a total advance of nearly 20 kilometers. See the detailed campaign map in USAWW, 9: 81.

3 HQ I Army Corps, Field Orders No. 57, 22 September 1918, Folder 32.1, Box 23, I Army Corps Historical File, RG 120, NA; and HQ 77th Division, Field Orders No. 43, 24 September 1918, 1930 hours, Folder 32.0, Box 4, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA.

were filled with cold water at that time of year. Furthermore, only one
decent road ran even part of the way north through the forest, complicat-
ing the advance of the artillery, ammunition, and supplies. As expected,
the Germans added immeasurably to the area’s natural strength, turn-
ing it into a veritable fortress of trenches, deep dugouts, barbed wire (in
places 100 meters wide), and *chevaux de frise*, all protected by interlock-
ing machine-gun emplacements and preregistered artillery. Although the
sector was lightly held in manpower, it was still a nightmare for would-be
attackers.⁵

The Argonne must have seemed particularly daunting to the men of the
77th, still exhausted and somewhat demoralized from hard duty along
the Vesle and Aisne. Then, between 22 and 25 September, the division
received four thousand replacement troops. Any hope that these fresh
troops would increase the morale of the division was quickly tempered
by an assessment of replacements’ skills. Due to an unlucky series of events
and a strained training and replacement system, many of the new men had
been drafted only weeks before and quickly shipped to France. They had
received hardly any training at all, and reports from experienced officers
in the division confirmed that a number lacked even the most basic combat
skills. Some apparently did not know how to load and shoot a rifle.⁶

Despite the challenges of terrain, the strength of the German defen-
sive positions, the tiredness and relative inexperience of his own men,
and the absolute incompetence of the replacements, Alexander wanted to
carry out a campaign of maneuver in the Argonne. After failing to locate
even a single “outstanding tactical” feature upon which to formulate an
elaborate divisional scheme of maneuver, he felt forced into ordering
“a straight push forward of the whole line.” But, in ordering such an
attack, Alexander insisted he was merely depending “upon the initiative
of the subordinate commanders, specifically the platoon and company
commanders, for the proper manoeuvre of their units when the necessity
for such manoeuvre became apparent.”⁷

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⁵ Alexander, “Operations of the 77th Division: From the Argonne to Sedan,” 144; *History
of the 77th Division*, 59–60.

⁶ Although officers were encouraged to use the least trained men in less important positions,
such as ammunition carriers, most were soon expected to perform as experienced riflemen.
C.G., 154th Infantry Brigade, to C.G., 77th Division, Subject: “Report of Operations,”
15 November 1918, Folder 33-6, Box 17, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA;
Army, Subject: 77th Division, cutting off of the seven companies and one machine gun
company, October 3, 1918, 8 October 1918, in “Personal File of Major H.A. Drum, Papers
Relating to Lost Battalion, 77th Division,” Box 16, Hugh A. Drum Papers, USAMHI.

Alexander accompanied his emphasis on fighting a battle of movement with statements minimizing the importance of firepower in the forest. Although it was true that the thick woods, steep hills, and deep ravines all worked against the effective employment of artillery, mortars, and machine guns, Alexander greatly exaggerated those difficulties when he later claimed that “practically no assistance whatever could be rendered to the infantry by the artillery against the enemy front line” and that in the end, “the infantry of the 77th Division won their way through the Argonne by sheer fighting ability, by the use of the infantry weapons proper, aided in some cases by hand-grenades and the 37 milimetre gun, but, above all, on account of the inflexible determination to conquer which animated the Division as a whole.”\(^8\) In fact, there is no record of the division commander ever asking for more artillery support from the corps, nor did he show much interest in maximizing the firepower at his disposal. As in previous engagements, this latter task was left to his subordinates, and they regularly attempted to use the limited means at their disposal to maximum effect. As for Alexander, in his emphasis on maneuver and his minimization of the value of firepower, he demonstrated his commitment to the open-warfare ideal, even in the face of a host of surrounding factors that promised to work against his efforts.

Despite the significant problems of using artillery in the Argonne, the initial attack of 26 September relied heavily on a short but intense bombardment from a massive number of guns to ensure success. For the 77th Division, it also was practically the only attack during the three-week fight in which all guns fired according to a centrally organized plan. The 77th also received significant augmentation in guns, giving it a total of nearly 170 pieces, plus as many as 190 French trench mortars. During the 3-hour preparatory bombardment, all of the divisional guns fired short gas concentrations before shifting to destructive and neutralizing fire on enemy strong points, front-line positions, and assembly areas. The trench mortars and big howitzers cut wire, smashed concrete shelters, and knocked out command posts. Then, 25 minutes before H hour, all the 75mm guns fired a standing barrage until H hour, when the barrage rolled forward in 50-meter jumps at the rate of 100 meters every 5 minutes. Although this was not nearly slow enough, it was slower than the rate used by the other divisions in the corps. The 155s took up a standing barrage at the same time as the light guns but fired it a little farther, and they also shot a rolling barrage at the same rate, keeping just ahead of the 75s to create a double barrage. The barrage was to carry the infantry to the end of

\(^8\) Ibid., 149.
The 77th "Liberty" Division

the first phase of the advance – the “Corps Objective” – at which point further orders were to be issued for both the infantry and the gunners. As events showed, this provided adequate protection for the initial attack and it successfully gained the corps line at light cost.9

For their part, the infantry was told to advance behind the barrage but only at a distance of some 500 meters, probably due to a fear of fratricide from tree bursts and short rounds from the unregistered guns. Division orders stressed the need to attack through “lanes of least resistance” and to “turn the front of strong positions by outflanking.” Ravines were to be avoided unless needed “to filter by strong points.”10 Each of the four lead battalions had a dedicated engineer team, a machine-gun company, and two 75mm guns to assist the advance.

It was a good plan for taking and holding a finite amount of enemy terrain, but the AEF leadership had bigger hopes. The plan also included other features that showed its overaggressive, open-warfare foundation – most notably its distant, essentially unlimited ultimate objectives. Also, although the corps and division plans called for the troops to be “prepared to advance beyond the Corps Objective by H plus 4-1/2 hours,” no details whatsoever for that phase of the attack were given to the attack troops at the start of the battle. That part of the attack was to be “covered by later orders.”11 This simple, apparently benign statement was significant because it essentially marked the end of the set-piece portion of the attack and the start of the phase in which AEF leaders probably hoped open-warfare principles would become dominant. Whereas this allowed senior AEF officers maximum flexibility in conducting the attack beyond that line (should they have chosen to exercise it), it also ended the period of organized, well-supported, firepower-based attacks. Although army, corps, and division commanders quickly ordered the troops forward from that line, they rarely provided the detailed information, organizational coordination, and artillery augmentation necessary to make those subsequent advances successful. These deficiencies in staff planning and logistical coordination hindered the offensive.

After the initial attack, the fighting in the Argonne descended into a series of grinding local battles in which senior commanders, from

9 HQ 77th Division, Field Orders No. 43, 24 September 1918, 1930 hours, Folder 32.0, Box 4, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA.
10 Ibid.
11 HQ I Army Corps, Field Orders No. 57, 22 September 1918, Folder 32.1, Box 23, I Army Corps Historical File, RG 120, NA; HQ 77th Division, Field Orders No. 43, 24 September 1918, 1930 hours, Folder 32.0, Box 4, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA.
Alexander on up to Pershing, became practically irrelevant except for one significant and dubious role – ordering the attacks to continue. In this, they approached the dreadful stereotype of unknowledgeable Allied commanders of 1914–1917. Just as Pershing’s decisions contributed to turning the First Army’s offensive into a series of disjointed and ill-supported divisional battles after midday on 26 September, so Alexander’s decisions allowed his division’s operations in the Argonne to become a grueling struggle of individual brigades and sometimes of regiments, battalions, and companies. And, just as some divisions managed to succeed under Pershing’s handling of the battle (e.g., the 1st under Charles Summerall and the 4th under John L. Hines) while others foundered (e.g., the 35th, 37th, and 79th), some units within the 77th Division succeeded at times but failed at others. The key point is that Alexander’s style of command pushed the management of the battle down to his brigades and regiments, and it is at those levels that the struggle to adapt, learn, succeed, and especially to survive was waged most intensely.

Despite the dire predictions of the attached French liaison officer, who warned Alexander that “the line in your front will not move…. I fear you will not be able to make the advance you hope for,” the men of the 77th Division pressed forward on the morning of 26 September and met almost no enemy resistance as they passed through the enemy’s first defensive position.12 The destruction from the preliminary bombardment and rolling barrage was enormous, and it apparently obliterated most of the few unfortunate defenders ordered to offer resistance from the first line. Alexander even thought the artillery might have “over done it” somewhat.13 The terrain, turned into “the most amazing tangle imaginable” by the bombardment, slowed the attackers much more than any enemy resistance.14

The weak initial resistance primarily resulted from most German troops having previously withdrawn to the second defensive position, about 2 kilometers to the rear of the first. The attackers ran into the first significant resistance in late morning when they hit this strong second position, which lay just in front of the “Corps Objective.” Even though they had not yet reached this corps line and were then meeting strong resistance, Alexander told them at 1130 that the standing barrage then being fired 500 yards beyond the corps line would begin rolling forward at

12 Alexander, Memories, 176.
13 Ibid., 181.
14 Ibid., 180.
1300 hours. They needed to catch up and follow it, but none were able to do so. Subsequent attacks that afternoon, apparently made with ad hoc artillery support, only carried the advance closer to the corps line. Sometime after 1500, Alexander passed along a corps order affirming that the division still needed to gain the “American Army” line, more than 3 kilometers ahead, that night. At 1735 hours, though no further advance had been made, Alexander sent another order reminding his brigadiers to take the same line.\(^\text{15}\) There are no records of attacks even being made, much less succeeding, that night.

At 0100 the next morning, the I Corps directed that the advance would continue at 0530. By then, the “American Army Objective,” still more than 3 kilometers away, was identified as merely an “intermediate objective,” and the goal of the second-day’s attack was the “Combined Army First Objective,” a line some 15 kilometers to the front. Alexander passed along the order and called for a 30-minute preliminary bombardment as well as a rolling barrage at the same rate as the first day. Beyond the artillery preparation and the rolling barrage, two other details suggest that Alexander may have sensed the difficulty of the task he was assigning his men. First, he ordered that no troops should “advance beyond the intermediate objective” until given further orders; and, second, his instructions stressed that “full use must be made of all the infantry arms placed at their disposal.”\(^\text{16}\) This might have been, for Alexander, a rare reference to the problem of relying too much on the rifle and not using the auxiliary weapons enough.

In the morning attack, Wittenmyer’s 153rd Brigade gained another half kilometer on the right, while Johnson’s brigade made smaller gains on the left. At this point, apparently having concluded that his centralized attack plans were not working, Alexander decided to turn the light-gun regiments over to his brigadiers to let them run practically individual battles. From that point forward, Alexander continued to order his men forward, but he offered little support, planning, or coordination.\(^\text{17}\)

Alexander’s delegation of the Argonne battle to his subordinates complicated any effort by the division to coordinate attacks and mass firepower. Only he, as the division commander, had the staff and command capability necessary to coordinate the brigade’s attacks and develop

\(^{15}\) ABMC, 77th Division Summary of Operations, 33–4.

\(^{16}\) HQ 77th Division, Field Orders No. 46, 27 September 1918, 0100 hours, Folder 32.0, Box 4, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA.

\(^{17}\) Although Alexander generally retained direct control of the heavy howitzer regiment, even that was delegated directly to the brigade commanders for many of the attacks. ABMC, 77th Division Summary of Operations, 35.
detailed and mutually supporting fire plans. Most likely, the substantial challenges to using artillery in the dense forest and hilly terrain helped convince Alexander that massed barrages were of limited effect and that more valuable support could be arranged on an ad hoc basis at the brigade level. He later admitted that in the rare instances when he did direct a division-wide rolling barrage, he “expected more moral than material result” from the fire.\textsuperscript{18} In any event, the tendency to delegate such responsibility seems to have been part of his style of command.

Despite the challenges of doing so, the brigadiers, regimental commanders, and junior officers labored to support their attacks with firepower. Even after the general failure of the early attack on 27 September, this pattern became apparent. Ordered by Alexander to continue the assault, both brigadiers made additional attacks later that day, utilizing short intense preliminary bombardments and rolling barrages. One such attack by the 154th Brigade pushed the line forward 1 kilometer in the early evening.\textsuperscript{19}

Alexander played a minimal role over the next number of days, issuing no significant field orders or attack plans, even though the brigades fought forward 2 kilometers on the 28th, another 1 on the 29th, and another 1 on the 30th. These attacks were always preceded by preliminary bombardments of 30 or 60 minutes and usually were covered by rolling barrages as well. There is no record that troops in any of these attacks ever attempted to move beyond the covering range of the artillery fire. During some attacks, small units made short advances, halted when enemy resistance developed, and only continued the advance after artillery fire was brought back on the enemy strong point. In fact, this latter style of advance seemed to typify the 77th Division’s fighting throughout the Argonne and even beyond it.\textsuperscript{20}

The brigade and regimental reports on the operations in the Argonne show a repetitive pattern to the fighting. Alexander ordered attacks to be made, often stating simply that “the 152nd F.A. Brigade will furnish such additional artillery support as may be required by Infantry Brigade Commanders.”\textsuperscript{21} The brigade commanders each identified local objectives to be taken, coordinated an artillery preparation and fire-support plan, and ordered the infantry to attack behind a rolling barrage. At times, some commanders even pulled back their most forward troops to more safely deluge the closest enemy positions with fire. Such tactics were used despite

\textsuperscript{18} Alexander, “Operations of the 77th Division: From the Argonne to Sedan,” p. 150.
\textsuperscript{19} ABMC, 77th Division Summary of Operations, 36.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 37–43.
\textsuperscript{21} HQ 77th Division, Field Orders No. 49, 1 October 1918, 2130 hours, Folder 32.0, Box 4, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA.
being officially prohibited by Alexander, who despised the idea of even temporarily giving up ground previously taken. The infantry also made maximum use of their most powerful weapons both before and during attacks, often finding—despite the limitations on the use of all direct-fire weapons in the dense forest—that the 37mm guns, trench mortars, machine guns, and grenades of all types (especially white-phosphorous rifle grenades) produced a greater effect than the Springfield rifle. Nevertheless, many of these attacks led to short gains, at which point they appear to have been quickly stopped, and more fire support was arranged before further attempts were made. Sometimes the advance progressed successfully for 1 or 2 kilometers, usually with the infantry reporting little or “no resistance,” until they hit a new enemy line. At that point, attacks again appear to have been quickly stopped, the lines consolidated, and new brigade and regimental plans prepared for an attack the next day.  

Operations reports suggest that despite the best efforts of the junior officers to find “paths of least resistance” and outflank enemy strong points, in the end, the troops resorted to slowly blasting their way through the German positions. In addition to getting all possible support from

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22 For the brigade reports, see C.G., 153rd Infantry Brigade, to C.G., 77th Division, Subject: Report of Operations 26 September, 1918, to 8th November, 1918, 19 November 1918, Folder 33.6, Box 15, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA; and HQ 154th Infantry Brigade, “Report of Operations of the 154th Inf. Brigade 77th Division in the Argonne Forest from September 26th to October 17th, 1918,” 29 October 1918, Folder 33.6, Box 17, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA. For the regimental reports, see “Operations Report, 305th Infantry, September 26th–November 12/18,” Folder 33.6, Box 21, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA; “Operations Report of the 306th Infantry From September 26 to November 8, 1918,” Folder 33.6, Box 23, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA; “Report of Operations of the 307th Infantry from September 26th, 1918 to November 8th, 1918,” Folder 33.6, Box 26, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA; and HQ 308th Infantry “Report on Operations,” Folder 33.6, Box 9, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA. For the reports of the artillery units, see HQ 152nd Field Artillery Brigade, “Report of Operations of the 152nd Brigade, Field Artillery, September 26th, 1918 to November 11th, 1918,” and HQ 152nd Field Artillery Brigade, Memorandum, 10 November 1918, both in Folder 33.0, Box 29, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA; “Summary of Operations, 304th Regiment Field Artillery, 26 Sept. ’18–8 Nov. ’18,” Folder 33.0, Box 29, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA; HQ 305th F.A. Regiment, Memorandum for the C.G., 152nd F.A. Brigade, 4 February, 1919, Folder 11.2, and HQ 305th F.A. Regiment, “Report on Operations,” 18 November 1918, Folder 33.6, both in Box 30, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA; “Report of Operations of the 306th Field Artillery from September 26, 1918 to November 8th, 1918, inclusive,” Folder 33.6, Box 30, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA.

23 After repeated failed efforts to work around the flanks of machine-gun nests to his front, one exasperated company commander reported that he could not outflank them because “there is no flank to the dam [sic] things.” “Operations Report, 305th Infantry, September 26th–November 12/18,” Folder 33.6, Box 21, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA.
the artillery, they made maximum use of other weapons – especially trench mortars and rifle grenades – neither of which was expected by GHQ officers to be of paramount importance in open warfare. In the 77th, as in other divisions throughout the AEF (as well as in the British, French, and German armies), infantry officers were learning that the so-called auxiliary weapons were indispensable in assaults. As for the standard rifle, one officer in the 305th Infantry claimed that it was “used for anything but firing by our infantry.”

In one typical attack, the commander of the 305th Infantry massed all his Stokes mortars, as well as a number of larger mortars from the 1st Gas Regiment, and concentrated their fire on a 200-meter front during the preattack bombardment to allow for a successful advance through this very narrow zone. The preparation kept all enemy fire down for the first 10 minutes of the attack, during which the troops advanced 150 meters, then dug in when the Germans got their machine guns set up and firing again.

By 2 October, such a system of attacks had brought the two brigades forward 7 kilometers to the German second main defensive position. On this strong line, the defenders determined to make a stand and they successfully resisted numerous attacks during the next five days. The 1-kilometer advance of Major Charles Whittlesey’s battalion (made behind an effective rolling barrage), which was quickly cut off and surrounded on the far left of the line, was the only successful attack during this period. During the course of the next four days, a number of attacks by the rest of the 154th Brigade, often made in conjunction with the French on the left flank, failed to crack the enemy positions and relieve Whittlesey’s command (see Map 20).

The fascinating story of this so-called Lost Battalion became one of the great tales of the American war effort, but it also highlighted two significant aspects of the Liberty Division’s operations in the Argonne. First, the successful resistance of the isolated command against repeated enemy assaults – often hurled at them with much superior firepower – simply confirmed the tremendous tactical advantages held by a determined group of defenders operating in dense woods. The 2nd Division learned this lesson in Belleau Wood, other AEF units learned it elsewhere during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, and Whittlesey’s command simply proved this truth worked for American units as well. Although totally cut off, completely out of food after the second day, without cold-weather clothing, short on

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24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
The 77th “Liberty” Division

MAP 20: The “Lost Battalion” of the 77th Division in the Argonne.

ammunition, and forced to defend itself with only eight machine guns, a few Chauchats, and five hundred service rifles (and ultimately much less), the command beat back no less than seven enemy attacks supported by artillery, trench mortars, and flamethrowers. Although the command suffered tremendous casualties (i.e., 65 percent of those cut off), it survived the ordeal intact and proved in its own way the enormous challenge that
The AEF Way of War

The 77th Division was undertaking by trying to drive a determined enemy out of prepared positions in those same woods. 26

American operations to reconnect with the “Lost Battalion” demonstrated the other important lesson of those events – the increasing amount of firepower the division employed to break the German lines. After repeatedly failing to get Johnson’s brigade to push through to Whittlesey, despite having Johnson personally direct one of the attacks, Alexander finally resorted to the same method that the 2nd Division ultimately used to take Belleau Wood – massive artillery saturation. From midnight until 0600 hours on 7 October, the entire regiment of 155s maintained “special concentrations” on key German positions. The two light-gun regiments also carried out an intense 3-hour bombardment that morning to weaken German resistance. Finally, five days into the effort to relieve the isolated command, the fire from all the divisional guns was coordinated in an effort to break the German lines (see Map 21). Although the Germans surrounding Whittlesey’s command withdrew primarily because Liggett was finally able to order a long-overdue flank attack into the woods by the 28th and 82nd Divisions, investigation of the saturation bombardment by corps and division inspectors determined the fire caused “such losses to the enemy in men and material” that it contributed to the enemy withdrawal that day. 27 In fact, this massing of firepower was really just a division-level form of what the brigades and regiments had been trying to do on a smaller scale since the afternoon of the first day.

The fighting of the men in the Argonne was marked by one other characteristic, and it went hand in hand with an increasing reliance on

26 The exact number of men in Whittlesey’s command is disputed, but he probably started out with between seven hundred and eight hundred men and lost about a hundred during his advance. An account by Whittlesey claimed 554 men were trapped the first night. He also insisted 194 men were unscathed when relieved on the afternoon of 7 October, while 107 were killed and 159 were wounded. The balance were killed or captured while serving as runners. See L. Wardlaw Miles, History of the 308th Infantry, 1917–1919 (New York, n.p., 1927), 170. Another excellent source is Capt. Nelson M. Holderman, “Operations of the force known as the ‘Lost Battalion’, from October 2nd to October 7th, 1918, Northeast of Binarville, in the Forest of Argonne, France,” Company Officer’s Class 1924–1925, The Infantry School, Fourth Section, Committee “H,” Fort Benning Ga. (student monograph) in Folder 18.2, Box 3, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA. Holderman commanded an infantry company in the surrounded force and was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his actions.

27 HQ 152nd Field Artillery Brigade, “Report of Operations of the 152nd Brigade, Field Artillery, September 26th, 1918 to November 11th, 1918,” and HQ 152nd Field Artillery Brigade, Memorandum, 10 November 1918, both in Folder 33.0, Box 29, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA.
On 7 October, the 77th Division made its first significant advance since the initial attack in September, thanks to a flank attack by the 28th and 82nd Divisions.

firepower – caution. Although many contemporaries – German, French, British, and even American – as well as numerous historians have correctly asserted that inexperienced American troops regularly displayed a level of individual recklessness that matched their bravery, the records of the 77th’s experience in the Argonne lead to the inescapable conclusion that the men of that division had learned better than to impetuously run headlong into machine-gun fire. Despite Alexander’s callous orders that
objectives were “to be gained without regard to losses,” the men and junior officers demonstrated a willingness to regulate the intensity and persistence of their attacks. In the most dangerous sense, at least militarily, this resulted in a relatively high rate of “straggling” in the division, and commanders from Alexander on down seemed incapable of stopping it.28

However, in a more general sense, many commanders reported that even those officers and troops who courageously fought in the front lines throughout the weeks in the woods typically demonstrated more discretion than aggressiveness in their attacks. In some cases, orders to attack were not followed up by any effort to advance at all but, more often, the attacks were attempted and pressed forward until the troops’ tolerance for enemy fire was exceeded.29 They then stopped and dug in. Alexander knew well that his men did not share his level of aggressiveness in attack, and he bemoaned this fact to Liggett during the battle. Liggett’s aide recorded that Alexander claimed to be about at the end of his rope. He had tried coaxing and kicking and every expedient to make his men move. He had sustained losses, but not heavy, and he had many stragglers and men drawn from the city, who knew nothing about the woods and fighting of this character, but he thought they were all in, and was greatly distressed that he could report no better progress.30

He tried firing commanders, from lieutenants to colonels, when he heard that attacks were not pushed to his satisfaction, further repeating the stereotypical pattern of earlier Allied commanders. On 27 September, he ordered that a company commander in the 307th Infantry be relieved and sent “to the rear echelon under arrest with charges against him for

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28 On 4 October, the I Corps chief of staff, Malin Craig, reported to Hugh A. Drum at First Army HQ that the 77th had “a great many stragglers . . . Gen. Alexander says he knows it and has had two straggler lines and in addition to that the Corps has one; but in the woods they get away.” Field Messages, Folder 32.16, Box 19, I Army Corps Historical File, RG 120, NA.

29 The historian, William Langer, who was briefly attached to the 77th Division as a member of the 1st Gas Regiment, described more than one instance of the infantry not attempting to attack after his unit had fired a preparation of thermite, smoke, and high-explosive mortar rounds. He also described attacks that were carried out. In many cases, infantry failed to attack on time simply because they had not yet received the order to do so. William L. Langer, Gas and Flame in World War I (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), 63–4.

30 Entry for 5 October, Stackpole Diary, p. 250. Apparently only on this late date, well into the second week of the battle, did senior commanders realize it was a serious mistake to send a division of men drafted almost exclusively from New York City to fight in the thickest woods in France, when units filled with men from Michigan and Wisconsin had been available.
disgraceful conduct in the face of the enemy” after the officer supposedly “permitted his entire company to be held up by the fire of a few snipers.”

Apparently this did not successfully motivate the other officers and men, because the caution did not disappear or even decrease. Even senior officers admitted the necessity of prudence in the attack, though only when more enemy firepower was present. One regimental colonel openly reported “the impossibility of advancing in the face of a continuous line of machine-guns which had a good field of fire.”

The indirect evidence of the division’s casualty and prisoner of war (POW) statistics confirm that the unit was not overly aggressive in most of its attacks. Recalling that AEF divisions had an authorized strength of twenty-eight thousand officers and men, it is instructive to compare the 77th and other divisions. Between 26 September and 19 October, when it received an eleven-day break from the front lines, the division suffered 4,115 casualties – about 15 percent of its authorized strength. Although these were by no means insignificant losses, when the difficulty of the mission and the number of days in line are considered, they prove to be relatively moderate. During the first week of the attack, the division suffered an average of 206 casualties a day. It lost 177 a day during the second week and 144 a day in the final week. In contrast, during this same period, the 1st Division fought for about twelve days in the Meuse-Argonne and suffered 7,772 losses (i.e., 28 percent of division strength) – an average of 648 a day. The 2nd Division fought for about nine days near Blanc Mont, losing 6,327 men (i.e., 23 percent) – about 703 a day. The 77th Division itself averaged 202 losses a day during its first week along the Vesle, when it made no major attacks whatsoever. Regarding prisoners, the Liberty Division captured just 631 enemy troops during its three weeks in the Argonne sector. Although not insignificant, that figure compares unfavorably to the fourteen hundred taken by the 1st Division during its much shorter fight in the Meuse-Argonne.

31 Operations Messages, 27 September 1918, Folder 32.11, Box 6, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA.
32 “Operations Report, 305th Infantry, September 26th–November 12/18,” Folder 33.6, Box 21, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA.
33 One source lists the division’s actual strength on 26 September as 25,709 officers and men. If that is correct, the division’s losses were 16 percent. History of the 77th Division, 137.
34 These rates pale in comparison to the losses suffered by the 1st and 2nd Divisions at Soissons, where each lost an average of about fourteen hundred men a day. Also, more than half of all the prisoners taken by the 77th during the Argonne fighting were taken on 14 October, when it seized the town of St. Juvin. ABMC, 77th Division Summary of Operations, 21; ABMC, American Armies and Battlefields, 327, 369.
The operations report from the 306th Infantry, which included the number of casualties suffered in each minor attack in the Argonne, highlights what these general statistics meant on the small-unit level. On 28 September, after a substantial preliminary bombardment and behind a rolling barrage, the regiment drove through a German defensive line and advanced nearly 3 kilometers. Yet, the capture of just one enemy prisoner and the loss of just ten casualties (and none killed) suggest that the Germans probably did more withdrawing than shooting. More telling are the reports of failed attacks. The regimental attack on 2 October broke down after a minor advance, but the unit reported only three killed and ten wounded. Four days later, the regiment failed to take the same objective, and although it reported “entire day spent attacking machine gun nests,” it lost only two men killed and five wounded. Although each casualty was individually tragic, losses of this scale during failed attacks by a regiment with more than two thousand soldiers at its disposal suggest that the attackers, far from being overly aggressive, were erring on the side of caution.

Despite the foregoing analysis, it would be wrong to conclude that the officers and men of the 77th Division were shirkers and that no attacks were pressed with vigor. The men of the 77th engaged in much difficult fighting in the Argonne. They worked hard to outflank and envelop enemy strong points. Occasionally, they advanced in the face of withering machine-gun fire, and some assaults ended in fierce hand-to-hand fighting. But, on balance, the system of attack, the rate of advance, and the numbers of casualties suffered and prisoners taken suggest that the men of the 77th attacked with more caution and maybe with less skill than the best AEF divisions. They tended to make successful advances of any depth only after massing enough firepower and pounding the enemy lines long enough to convince the defenders to withdraw. However, it is only fair to note that considering the original plan to have the 77th make slow but steady holding attacks through the woods while other American and French divisions outflanked the defenders, the men and junior officers of the 77th did a better job of sticking with the original scheme of attack than Pershing, Liggett, or Alexander.

Shortly after the 77th Division emerged from the Argonne, the I Corps, by then commanded by Joseph Dickman, ordered it to attack the outpost

35 “Operations Report of the 306th Infantry from September 26 to November 8, 1918,” Folder 33.6, Box 23, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA.
36 By 8 October, even the thoughtful and self-possessed Liggett exclaimed that he was “out of patience with the apparent supineness and lack of initiative of the 77th.” Stackpole Diary, p. 255.
positions of the _Kriemhilde Stellung_, just north of the Aire River. Corps orders directed the 77th to drive forward just slightly, primarily to protect the left flank of the 82nd Division on the right. The division ultimately made two partially successful attacks, one on 14 October that took the town of St. Juvin on the right and then another attack on the 15th that led to the partial occupation of Grandpré on the left (see Map 22). In both attacks, Alexander continued to stress maneuver over firepower, while the brigades again showed a tendency to maximize firepower and make cautious advances.

Alexander’s plan to take St. Juvin called for his eastern brigade, the 153rd, to make a demonstration to the immediate front with some troops while swinging another battalion through the rear area of the 82nd Division to the right so it could hit St. Juvin from the eastern flank (see Map 23). The 154th, on the left, was apparently to take Grandpré by direct attack. For fire support, the division orders directed a 2-hour bombardment and a massed machine-gun barrage and specified that the light-gun regiments were “subject to the call” of the infantry brigadiers. McCloskey’s artillery plan laid out a detailed schedule of fire support that attempted to incorporate both a slow rolling barrage (i.e., 100 meters every 6 minutes) and a series of shifting fires on successive areas. However, the coordination of this fire plan, complicated by the wide flanking maneuver directed by Alexander, required better liaison than the division could maintain in the attack to keep the artillery shifts coordinated with the infantry advances. Despite these problems and some confusion on the part of the troops carrying out the attack, the flanking troops ultimately took St. Juvin and Hill 182 beyond it, capturing three hundred German soldiers while suffering just seventy-eight casualties. For its part, the 154th failed to cross the Aire in its attack.37

That evening, Dickman ordered his corps to continue attacking the next morning and to drive forward about 4 kilometers, which would have taken it through the _Kriemhilde Stellung_. Alexander directed both brigades to attack at 0730 hours and allowed a 1-hour artillery

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37 The details of the St. Juvin battle are sketchy, due as much to a lack of records as to conflicting evidence in those that are available. Although Alexander later wrote that he decided against simultaneous attacks on St. Juvin and Grandpré because his “artillery was not sufficient for both tasks at the same time,” his field orders seem to direct both brigades to attack on 14 October; other sources confirm that they did. Nor do reports agree on the specific nature of the artillery support. Alexander, Memories, 244; ABMC, _77th Division Summary of Operations_, 69–70; HQ 306th Infantry Regiment, “Report of the Capture of St. Juvin & Hill 182 by 306th Infantry,” 19 October 1918, Folder 33.6, Box 23, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA.
MAP 22: The First Army’s 14 October attack.
On 14 October, the 77th Division took the city of St. Juvin but little else.

preparation, which focused on Grandpré and Champigneulle, the two large towns in the attack sector. The 155s were to continue pounding those towns until the attacking infantry came within 800 meters of them and then shift to other targets. Alexander's penchant for delegation continued, and he allowed his infantry brigadiers to "employ the regiments of 75s at their disposal in such a manner as they deem expedient from H minus one hour on." In fact, McCloskey gave each infantry brigade the dedicated support of a battalion of 155s as well, retaining direct control

38 HQ 77th Division, Field Orders No. 56, 14 October 1918, 2200 hours, Folder 32.0, Box 4, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA; HQ I Army Corps, Field Orders No. 73, 14 October 1918, Folder 32.1, Box 23, I Army Corps Historical File, RG 120, NA.
of only one battalion of howitzers. With all the guns delegated to the infantry commanders, the artillery fire plan included little more than a list of targets and a rare warning that “due to difficulties of ammunition supply all fire should be observed. Where this is impracticable, there will be a minimum expenditure of ammunition.”

The infantry commanders added the fire of their 37mm guns, accompanying 75s, and machine guns to the preliminary fire as well as the attack.

Just like the day before, this attack did not go as planned and was only partially successful. The 153rd Brigade spent the entire day repelling a strong enemy counterattack and made no advance. The troops of the 154th advanced well to the Aire before being held up for hours trying to cross that unfordable river (see Map 24). Eventually, after dark, a few companies crossed the Aire and successfully entered Grandpré.

Operations reports claimed losses were light thanks to the excellent use of infiltration tactics by the infantry and the fire of the artillery, which was – despite the fear of a lack of shells – described as “splendid throughout.”

In fact, Johnson wrote a special letter to McCloskey declaring that “had it not been for the effective and efficient support which was given to me by both the heavy and the light arty… the taking of Grand Pre by the troops of my command… would have been an impossibility… the success of the operation was due in large measure to the effective Artillery support.”

That very day, 16 October, the division was relieved by the 78th Division, and it marched back into the Argonne forest for a two-week period of rest, refitting, reconstituting, and training before taking part in the final

39 HQ 152nd F.A. Brigade, Field Orders No. 11, 2120 hours, 14 October 1918, Folder 32.1, Box 29, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA.
40 The question of which division captured Grandpré was a controversy during and after the war. Although many officers in the 77th Division, including Alexander, claimed units of the 77th completely occupied Grandpré, they appear to have only maintained firm control of the southwest portion on the town. The 78th Division, which relieved the 77th on 16 October, engaged in bitter fighting throughout most of the town for many days. See the transcript of the discussion between Liggett and Alexander in Maj. Gen. Alexander, “Operations of the Divisions, 26th of September to the 11th of November” (lecture delivered on 3 February 1919), Folder 50.9, Box 11, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA.
41 C.O., 307th Infantry, to C.G., 154th Brigade, Subject: Attack on Grand Pre, October 15/16th 1918, 18 October 1918, Folder 33.6, Box 26, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA.
42 C.G., 154th Infantry Brigade, to C.G., 152nd F.A. Brigade, Subject: Use of Artillery during recent operations, 18 October 1918, Folder 11.4, Box 2, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA.
On 15 October, troops from the 77th Division entered Grandpré before the division was replaced by the 78th Division and finally given an opportunity to rest and refit. They had been attacking almost continuously since 26 September.
First Army attack of the war on 1 November. The Liberty Division had been in the front lines continuously since 21 September and was thoroughly exhausted. In grinding its way through the Argonne forest, it had successfully if slowly completed one of the more trying missions of the war by any AEF division. Despite the restrictions and limitations on the offensive use of firepower, from both internal and external factors, the men of the 77th struggled to maximize all the weaponry at their disposal to blast their way forward. Far from demonstrating the reckless aggressiveness that led to heavy losses in the Vesle-Aisne operations, the infantrymen showed a level of caution in their advances that troubled senior commanders but also kept casualty rates below those of units in other major offensives. The division continued to demonstrate those tendencies in the minor operations at St. Juvin and Grandpré and did so even more clearly in its final operation in November.

To the Meuse, 1–11 November 1918

During its brief period out of the front lines, the depleted 77th received its second large contingent of replacement troops. Many were almost as unprepared for combat as those that had arrived in September. For this reason especially, the division officers felt that the days between attacks had to be dedicated to training rather than rest. Alexander ordered that after three days of rest, “intensive training” would begin throughout the division. He stressed the training of “leaders of small groups” in maneuver, as well as “the use of the rifle” and its combined use with “the auxiliary arms.” The men were to correct weaknesses identified during the Argonne fighting: lack of skill in outflanking machine guns, too much “useless grouping of men,” and too little use of cover. Alexander then admitted that “even of more importance is the necessity for securing fire superiority. Men must be taught the necessity of immediate fire whenever a target presents itself so as to secure at once the overwhelming benefit which immediately results from fire superiority of all kinds.”\(^{43}\)

These words may have been merely an extension of the prewar ideas of gaining fire superiority by having more riflemen fire at the enemy, or they might be a sign that Alexander had developed a greater appreciation for the amount and kinds of firepower necessary to secure superiority on the

\(^{43}\) HQ 77th Division, G-3 Memorandum, No. 2 (Training), 17 October 1918, Folder 50.9, Box 12, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA.
modern battlefield; the former seems more likely. Elsewhere, Alexander insisted that his experience in the Argonne merely “confirmed” existing opinions. During the training period, he reissued the official “Combat Instructions” memorandum that George Marshall wrote in August, which was based on the fighting in the Aisne-Marne Offensive. He also passed along Pershing’s latest version of “Combat Instructions,” issued on 12 October, that complained of forward units hesitating “where there has been little opposition” and officers not grasping “the extreme importance of constant aggressiveness.”

In the materials he disseminated throughout his division, as well as in his own writings, Alexander proved himself a firm adherent of the official AEF doctrine developed in 1917. He seems to have never lost faith in the almighty power of the rifle, and his postwar references to the more firepower-intensive infantry weapons, including machine guns, automatic rifles, 37mm guns, mortars, and grenades, as “merely adjuncts” suggests he learned little. He criticized his men for “a disinclination to utilize to its full potential power the infantry rifle” and a “dependence . . . upon machine guns, grenades and other auxiliaries.” The latter weapons, he dismissively wrote, may have been “useful in their way” but the “intelligent use of the infantry rifle wins battles when no other instrumentality will suffice.” Alexander may have remained a greater devotee of the standard service rifle than Pershing himself.

But, considering Alexander’s style of command, lesson learning by subordinate commanders may have been more important to the remaining operations of his division. The development of the infantry brigadiers, Johnson and Wittenmyer, became a moot point during this period because both moved to other assignments and the division received two new brigade commanders. Colonel William R. Smedberg, an experienced regimental commander, left the 305th Infantry to command the 153rd Brigade and Brigadier General Harrison J. Price arrived from the 82nd Division to lead the 154th Brigade. The regimental commanders were all men who

44 Alexander, Memories, 265.
45 A First Army document entitled “Combat Instructions,” 12 October 1918, was included in HQ 77th Division, G-3 Memorandum, 18 October 1918, Folder 50-9, Box 12, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA. See also HQ 77th Division, G-3 Memorandum, 20 October 1918, Folder 50-9, Box 12, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA.
46 Alexander, Memories, 17.
48 Wittenmyer was promoted and given command of the new 7th Division. For unknown reasons, Johnson asked to be reassigned from the 77th and took command of a brigade in the 79th Division.
had experienced the Argonne as part of the division. They carried out Alexander’s orders to improve the skills of the officers and men by completing a regimen of drill, tactical talks, and lots of firing practice into the hills of the Argonne. They found it especially important to ensure that the new troops knew how to use not only their rifles but also rifle and hand grenades, a sign of their appreciation of those weapons in the previous fighting.\(^{49}\) Finally, some members of Alexander’s own staff issued documents to the division that expressed a greater understanding of the role of firepower. The 77th Division’s operations chief (G-3) issued a memorandum on 26 October that stressed the importance of artillery liaison officers as well as the use of rifle grenades and Stokes mortars. He also made this surprising admission: “Remember that the men cannot do anything against material. Against wire entanglements artillery preparation is necessary to open the road to the infantry, otherwise the infantry will be needlessly sacrificed.”\(^{50}\)

By the last week of October, planning for the final attack of 1 November was in full swing. The division was reassigned to Dickman’s I Corps and was to advance about 5 kilometers to protect the left flank of Summerall’s V Corps, which was expected to make the primary effort and the deepest penetration (see Map 25).\(^{51}\) Although the 77th Division was only attacking in a supporting role, its orders called for a breaching of the main enemy line of defense along the *Kriemhilde Stellung*, certain to be a difficult task.

As with previous attacks, Alexander turned to maneuver to secure his advance. He later wrote that “Under no imaginable circumstances would a direct attack upon so strong a position . . . be advisable unless there was no other alternative.” Convinced there was “a promising opportunity for maneuver” by going into the territory of the neighboring 80th Division on the right, he ordered that his leading battalions advance from that direction and envelop the main enemy line, which lay 2 kilometers to the front, from the east.\(^{52}\) Alexander stacked all his regiments so that only the

\(^{49}\) C.G., 154th Brigade, to C.G., 77th Division, Report on Training, 31 October, 1918, Folder 50.9, Box 12, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA; “Dickman-Smedberg Interview,” 9 November 1918, in HQ American First Army, Memorandum for Chief of Staff, Subject: Investigation of Action of 77th Division on November 1, 1918, 12 November 1918, Folder 66.0, Box 14, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA.

\(^{50}\) HQ 77th Division, G-3 Memorandum Order No. 122, 26 October 1918, Folder 32.13, Box 5, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA.

\(^{51}\) HQ I Army Corps, Field Orders No. 85, 28 October 1918, Folder 32.1, Box 15, I Army Corps Historical File, RG 120, NA.

\(^{52}\) Alexander, *Memories*, 268–9. However, there is some doubt regarding some senior leaders’ assessments of the strength of the German positions to the front. I Corps orders
After the slow start on 1 November, the 77th Division fought its way to the Meuse River by November 6. But even this advance was characterized more by caution and a reliance on firepower than by the official AEF doctrine on open warfare.

305th Infantry would make the initial assault. The attack was to occur in three phases: one that led to the capture of the main enemy line and the
The AEF Way of War

town of Champigneulle with the flanking attack from the east, the second in which the infantry drove north to an identified line, and the third that covered the final push to the corps objective.\textsuperscript{53}

The fire-support plan included 30 minutes of preliminary fire by the divisional guns (though the corps preparation began at H minus 2 hours) and a rolling barrage advancing 100 meters every 6 minutes – a fairly slow rate. During the preparation, the 305th Field Artillery fired a thousand gas rounds into an enemy strong point, while corps guns flooded suspected enemy artillery positions with gas. Throughout the preparation and the attack, the 304th Field Artillery was placed “under orders” of the infantry brigade commander, but it was to take part in the prepared fire plan unless it received specific missions directly from the infantry. McCloskey retained command of the other two regiments as well as the twenty-four additional 75s given to the division for the attack. The firing schedule was completely prearranged for the first phase of the attack, which was expected to last 1 hour. But, after the infantry took Champigneulle, it was to signal the artillery that the fire for the next phase was to start. As for the infantry weapons, Alexander directed his officers to “insure full use” of 37mm guns and Stokes mortars during the attack, and a machine-gun barrage was incorporated into the fire plan.\textsuperscript{54}

Although not as comprehensive and powerful as the plan formulated by Summerall for the attack of his divisions in the V Corps, this plan represented some improvement over previous division plans. However, its effort to employ a wide lateral flanking maneuver in the initial phases was complicated, necessitating excellent coordination with its neighboring division on the right and close liaison between the infantry and the artillery between phases. As it happened, mistakes in the former area prevented the division from ever completing the first phase of the attack. Apparently, no senior officer assured that the advance of the division’s

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\textsuperscript{53} Although Alexander claimed he secured approval from the commander of the 80th Division, neither he nor his staff ensured that the two advances were suitably coordinated at the small-unit level. Whereas Alexander wrote that he developed this plan of maneuver and that Dickman merely approved it, Dickman later claimed that the plan of attack “was given” to the division commander. It might be the only time in recorded history when two commanders claimed credit for the same failed attack. HQ 77th Division, Field Orders No. 59, 25 October 1918, Folder 32.1, Box 5, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA; HQ American First Army, Memorandum for Chief of Staff, Subject: Investigation of Action of 77th Division on November 1, 1918, 12 November 1918, Folder 66.0, Box 14, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA.

\textsuperscript{54} HQ 77th Division, Field Orders No. 59, 25 October 1918, Folder 32.1, Box 5, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA.
right flank was coordinated with that of the left of the 80th Division – a terrible failure in an attack in which the right flank was to maneuver through the area of the neighboring division. Just before the attack, the respective platoon and company commanders discovered a time differential of 12 minutes between the advances of the two divisions’ adjacent units. Even this small time difference was sufficient to cause the troops on the right flank of the 77th to miss their barrage. When they attacked, they met a wall of machine guns and the attack broke down. Throughout the day, these troops eventually worked their way forward about 500 meters, but they never made their all-important flank attack from the east. The advance of the rest of the division, dependent on this maneuver, never progressed sufficiently either.55

As in the Argonne, the caution of the junior officers and men in pressing their attacks also contributed to the lackluster advance of the 77th Division. On the afternoon of 1 November, even Marshall, far away in the First Army HQ, noted that reports from the I Corps front brought word of “no further advance, little firing, and few casualties.”56 Other reports confirmed his insinuation. The 80th Division, stopped by the same German positions that held up the 77th, managed to regroup and reattack later in the day, effectively reducing the enemy strong points holding up the advance. While the officers and men of the Liberty Division actually did a fair job of fighting that day, arranging for special fire from machine guns, 37mm guns, Stokes mortars, and the field artillery, they simply did little advancing. No records show how many enemy were killed or wounded by the fire of the division that day, but the 77th Division suffered fewer than 250 casualties during the entire day’s effort.57

After Alexander fired Smedberg for supposedly not ensuring that the attack was carried out as ordered, he directed that the offensive be continued the next morning. The artillery support was similar to that of the first attack, with the important addition of a heavy bombardment of the enemy positions throughout the night.58 Because the 80th Division was actually ahead of the 77th, the attacking infantry had a much easier time

55 HQ, American First Army, Memorandum for Chief of Staff, Subject: Investigation of Action of 77th Division on November 1, 1918, 12 November 1918, Folder 66.0, Box 14, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA.
56 Marshall, Memoirs, 184.
57 The ABMC summary accounts for just 291 total casualties for the division’s operations on both 1 and 2 November. Probably most but not all of these were suffered during the first attack. “Operations Report, 305th Infantry, September 26th–November 12/18,” Folder 33.6, Box 21, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA.
58 HQ 77th Division, Field Orders No. 61, 1 November 1918, 2200 hours, Folder 32.1, Box 5, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA.
using the former’s sector as a maneuver ground to take the enemy position from the east. This attack was a walkover, and the infantry claimed that the only thing that kept them out of Champigneulle until 0800 was the fire of the American artillery still pounding the village. By 1015, the division had driven forward 4 kilometers and taken Verpel. By the end of the day, the infantry had established a new line 9 kilometers away from the jump-off.

Alexander claimed this success vindicated his original maneuver-based plan to outflank the German lines from the east:

...the maneuver, identical in principle with that ordered for the 1st, had proven brilliantly successful. The enemy’s line was broken and his troops driven in rout before us. It is not unreasonable to believe that the same result would have followed on the 1st and with equal promptness had the orders for that day been carried out with like intelligence and vigor.59

Actually, the success of the 77th on 2 November was a result of the excellent flanking position gained by the 80th Division on the 1st, which in turn was a direct result of the brilliant success achieved by Summerall’s V Corps. That corps had driven such a salient into the enemy lines on the first day that the Germans in front of the 77th Division withdrew all but a thin rear guard that night.

Alexander was only slightly more correct when he claimed that, from 2 November on, “the pursuit of the fleeing enemy was consequently as rapid as human endurance could compass…whatever the difficulties, fortified positions or none, the immediate and pressing demand upon us was for vigorous pursuit, unrelenting and remorseless.”60 Although the division did make a relatively rapid advance to the Meuse River over the next few days, the junior officers and men in the vanguard of the advance did not carry out a campaign consistent with GHQ’s idealistic view of open warfare – a recklessly aggressive drive of a self-reliant infantry.

According to both the unit histories and the operations reports, the 77th Division’s officers below Alexander had learned to meet every instance of any enemy resistance by halting the advance and employing sufficient firepower to blast out the defenders. As with the fighting in the Argonne, the statistics confirm this assessment. The fact that the division suffered fewer than six hundred total casualties over the next ten days

59 Alexander, Memories, 276.
60 Ibid., 277.
while capturing just eighty-nine prisoners (most of whom were stragglers and wounded) suggests that the 77th Division’s pursuit was almost as cautious and reliant on firepower as it could have been.\(^{61}\)

An attack of the 306th Infantry on the morning of 3 November demonstrated the extent of the adaptation and innovation that characterized this final operation. After an advance of just 4 kilometers, the 306th Infantry stopped in front of a hastily organized enemy line near the village of St. Pierremont. The regiment had netted just sixteen prisoners that day and suffered only three casualties, yet the leading troops made no effort to close with and destroy the enemy rear guard until suitable firepower had caught up. Later that day, a number of light guns moved into position and, while sections of machine-gunners fired their own barrages, the artillerymen sent nearly a thousand rounds into the enemy positions near St. Pierremont, forcing the rear guards to fall back.\(^{62}\)

The fact that these guns were able to provide such support within a reasonable period was itself a result of important changes made in the artillery brigade. The preceding day, McCloskey had reorganized the entire artillery brigade to ensure that the infantry had at least some fire support during the pursuit phase. Because each of his artillery regiments was so short of horses, McCloskey ordered each regiment to form one fully mobile “provisional battalion” – with all the horses and men necessary to keep a battalion of guns and sufficient ammunition within range of the infantry. By 3 November, this ingenious gamble had paid off, and the infantry received the support they needed to make cautious firepower-based advances even in a more fluid open-warfare environment.\(^{63}\)

\(^{61}\) The 77th Division suffered fewer than nine hundred casualties from 1 to 11 November, with the majority of them slightly wounded, and it captured just eighty-nine German soldiers and thirty-six guns. For comparison, the 80th Division, on its immediate right, suffered more than twelve hundred casualties, even though it was relieved on 5 November. The two divisions in the V Corps, the 2nd and 89th, suffered 3,282 and 3,864 casualties, respectively, during their drives to the Meuse. The 2nd Division also captured 1,700 Germans troops and 105 guns.

\(^{62}\) C.G., 153rd Infantry Brigade, to C.G., 77th Division, Subject: Report of Operations 26 September, 1918, to 8th November, 1918, 19 November 1918, Folder 33.6, Box 15, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA; “Report of Operations of the 152nd Brigade, Field Artillery, September 26th, 1918, to November 11th, 1918,” and HQ 152nd F.A. Brigade, Memorandum, 10 November 1918, both in Folder 33.0, Box 29, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA.

\(^{63}\) “Report of Operations of the 152nd Brigade, Field Artillery, September 26th, 1918, to November 11th, 1918,” and HQ 152nd Field Artillery Brigade, Memorandum, 10 November 1918, both in Folder 33.0, Box 29, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA.
That night, the 307th Infantry of the 154th Brigade took over the front line. Attacking at daylight, the troops quickly stopped after gains of just 1 or 2 kilometers when they discovered new enemy positions near the village of Ouches. Again, the artillery was massed and more than a thousand rounds were fired during the day. On the evening of 4 November, the division staff actually drew up a detailed plan of attack for early the next morning to ensure that the enemy rear guard to their front would be overwhelmed. At this point, Alexander put a regiment of the 153rd Brigade back in line and even ordered that all the divisional artillery be massed on its front from H minus 30 minutes until 1 hour after the attack. At that time, half the guns reverted to the control of the 154th Brigade, which could call on them as needed. The 155th also were ordered to pound an enemy strong point near a farm for a full hour during the attack. For Alexander, this represented a different approach.

After starting on time, the 153rd Brigade’s advance continued without difficulty on the right for 6 kilometers before it ran into enemy fire near the town of La Besace. Quickly the advance was stopped and machine guns were set up to neutralize the enemy fire with a barrage. On the left, the advance drove forward a few kilometers before meeting enemy fire. The commander of the 154th Brigade ordered the infantry to stop while the artillery pounded the enemy strong points for 15 minutes, drove them off, and allowed the infantry to continue. The operations report of the 307th Infantry succinctly described this action, “Our artillery ceased. The Regiment pressed forward.” It was a fitting description for the entire drive after 1 November.

On the morning of 6 November, the advance continued without difficulty, and the 153rd Brigade drove almost unhindered to the Meuse River. On the left, the 154th Brigade ran into enemy fire on two occasions that day, first near Malmaison Farm and later near Raucort. In both cases, the advances were stopped, artillery and machine guns were brought up, and the enemy was blasted out. General Price's operations report makes it clear that in both of these cases, the decision to halt and wait for greater fire support was a conscious one, even though it took

64 HQ 77th Division, Field Orders No. 63, 4 November 1918, Folder 32.1, Box 5, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA.
65 C.G., 153rd Infantry Brigade, to C.G., 77th Division, Subject: Report of Operations 26 September, 1918, to 8th November, 1918, 19 November 1918, Folder 33.6, Box 15, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA; “Report of Operations of the 307th Infantry from September 26th 1918 to November 8th 1918,” Folder 33.6, Box 26, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA.
“considerable time” to arrange the artillery fire. Both the regimental and brigade commanders agreed that the enemy positions, hastily organized as they were, would only be taken “immediately following artillery fire.”

By the end of the day, units from both brigades had driven the German rear guards across the Meuse, and the division’s fighting was practically over. Although Alexander ordered that bridges be put up across the river that “will be crossed and a foot-hold gained on the north bank,” no such attack was ever pressed forward.

As in the Argonne and in the recent drive toward the river, the junior officers and men apparently assessed the strength of the German positions opposing them and decided to wait for sufficient fire support.

Conclusions

The experiences of the 77th Division present a detailed picture of an important characteristic of the AEF as a whole. The beliefs and attitudes of the senior leaders, especially regarding combat doctrine, were not necessarily as important as the style of warmaking developed by the more junior officers and men. Although the AEF leadership could not have stressed more the importance of training for open warfare, the 77th Division trained almost exclusively for trench fighting. Although official AEF doctrine was based supposedly on the power of the rifle, assisted where absolutely necessary by “the auxiliaries” (e.g., artillery, machine guns, mortars), the officers and men of the 77th based their attacks on the auxiliary weapons and apparently resorted to the rifle only when necessary.

Finally, despite the bellicose words of the 77th’s senior leaders and their repetitive emphasis on the importance of aggressiveness in the attack, the men of the 77th rather quickly learned to discard this rhetoric and fight with a level of caution that suited their assessments of the resistance ahead of them and of the resources available to them.

During the brutal days along the Vesle and Aisne Rivers, whatever recklessness and aggressiveness this division had appears to have been

66 C.G., 154th Infantry Brigade, to C.G., 77th Division, Subject: “Report of Operations,” 15 November 1918, Folder 33.6, Box 17, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA; History of the 77th Division, 100.
67 HQ 77th Division, Field Orders No. 65, 6 November, 2200 hours, Folder 32.1, Box 5, 77th Division Historical File, RG 120, NA.
68 Apparently, Liggett agreed with the troops and he directed Alexander to countermand any order sending small groups of men, unsupported, across the river. Alexander, Memories, 293.
shot out of them. The men may have learned the hard way, but they did learn. Despite Alexander’s impractical pronouncements and disruptive command philosophy, from then on, both in the Argonne and beyond it, the officers and men of the 77th Division tried to maximize firepower and make cautious advances. Perhaps it became too cautious in the eyes of some AEF leaders. Yet, it might be more fair to say that this most modern and metropolitan of all American divisions, which nonetheless suffered 25 percent more casualties than any other National Army division, made the kind of adjustments to its style of fighting that many military officers might expect a unit to make during and after the next world war. Although Alexander proudly claimed to have learned very little, the officers and men seem to have learned a great deal. And, in the end, it was the combat doctrine that they demonstrated, more than the one the leaders promulgated, that had the greater impact on the American way of war during the United States’ first great crusade abroad.