

# SEICHEPREY

## CHAPTER 17 – STURM to the High Water Mark

### The Assault Commences to the First Line

**Offizierstellvertreter** [Warrant Officer] Kientz's took charge of **Freiwilligenkompagnien 7./258** at the front line. **7./258** comprised volunteers that served **Leutnant Keun's α-Kompagnie (258./Keun)** with the mission to proceed to through **Alfa-Waldchen** and **Beta-Waldchen** to finally attack the trench networks around **Pfaumen Waldchen**, the oldest battleground in the Seicheprey sector where the *128<sup>e</sup> brigade d'infanterie* of the *64<sup>e</sup> division d'infanterie* dug the first trenches of *Secteur Lahayville* in October 1914. Kientz rose and proceeded through the wire entanglement. Everyone was fully aware of the large **MW** firing at the close by American lines. The changing air pressure from the nearby explosions caused his fellow **stosstruppen** to fall to the ground—a moment of stark terror to be hurtled to the ground by the shock wave. **Vizefeldwebel** Ettighoffer recalled his chest experiencing a crushing sensation. Then **7./258** saw a **rot-grün Doppelrakete** (red-green double rocket) fired into the dense mist. It was time for **Sturm**.<sup>1</sup>

**KTK Major** Brunns envisioned a four pronged assault. Four nests were set in place with four Battalions given specific objectives and a route to cover. Like **Einladung**, the **Kirschblüte** assault was designed to be quick—reaching objectives, destroying trenches, dugouts, pill boxes and annihilating any other resistance before the Americans could figure what had transpired. To the west, **Battalion Tolle** comprising both **Res. I. R. 258 Freiwilligenkompagnien** and **Res. I. R. 259. Res. I. R. stosstruppen** were to head directly south and diverge within the trench networks around **Pfaumen Waldchen** to the west and American positions south of Seicheprey. The center thrust was **Battalion Grumbrecht**, going right down the north-south Seicheprey-St. Baussant road directly into the southwest entrance into the village. **Battalion Hellmuth** to the left of **Battalion Grumbrecht** was to strike the eastern flank of Seicheprey and the western side of *Bois de Remieres* and occupy Sibille Trench, the main American defensive position within Position 1. Finally, **Battalion Seebohm**, under the command of the former **Einladung KTK Hauptmann** Seebohm, was to strike *Bois de Remieres*. This time Seebohm's **stosstruppen** were to attack the eastern side of the forest and defend against American reinforcements coming from Beaumont ridge or French forces nearby in the eastern *Bois du Jury*.

It was perfect conditions for an assault. The night frost proved perfect for traversing No Man's Land and continuing the attack route. The fog, which prevailed at daybreak and became constantly denser and denser, paralyzed all observation potential for the Americans on the front line, particularly the outposts. The conditions complicated an already chaotic situation from the bombardment that hammered the Americans since 0300. The German's reported that it was impossible to see even anything at 100 paces from the village—effectively screening the attack

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<sup>1</sup> Ettighoffer, 228; v.Bornstedt, 179-180; Petitjean, *31<sup>e</sup> corps d'armée Ordre*.

as well as obscuring vital liaison via rocket signals.<sup>2</sup> General Edwards reported three weeks later to Chaumont, “The dense mist was our serious handicap; airplanes could not observe. The enemy reached Seicheprey under their own barrage. Officers tell me that the outlines of a man were indistinct fifty feet away.”<sup>3</sup> The dense fog covered the whole area and persisted until about 0800.<sup>4</sup>

As destructive fire shaped the battle as **sturmmtruppen** and **stosstruppen** moved into their jump off positions within their assigned nests. Then the barrage shifted. Commencing at 0430 specially detailed batteries began firing and continued until the beginning of the **stosstruppen** attack. Ten minutes later artillery and **MW** commenced a heavy systematic fire of destruction directed at the point of the American line which was to be pierced. Duration of fire by **MW** at the point of penetration was three minutes with each layer to be annihilated. **Reserve. Pionier Kompagnie. 80** crossed the enemy front line and proceeded to cut the paths through additional wire entanglements that protected the second and third lines. Two **Pioniere Zug** carried charges to blow up wire entanglements and concentrated charges to destroy the American dugouts and defense works opposite Seicheprey. A third **Pioniere Zug** was attached to the battalion attacking *Bois de Remieres*.<sup>5</sup> **Generalleutnant** Hoffmann observed that some passages in the enemy wire entanglements damaged by the annihilating artillery and **MW** fire did require infantry blow up, cut, or cross with the aid of portable bridges. It was his contention that wire entanglements were not to be bombarded for the half hour required to open up the passages since the element of surprise would have been forfeited. **Generalleutnant** Hoffmann was pleased and his comments to **Generalleutnant** Fuchs at **Gruppe Gorz** reflected successful application of artillery and **MW** to the operation blocking the point of penetration on both flanks and diverted the enemy’s attention to **abschnitt G III**.<sup>6</sup>

**Freiwilligenkompagnien 7./258** proceeded to their assault point as the artillery fire diminished. **Vizefeldwebel** Ettighoffer noticed the moon covered with clouds while to the east in a former battleground north of Pont-à-Mousson known as **Priesterwald** a red glow hung on the horizon. Montsec’s outline was clearly visible to the west while a fog commenced settling in various parts of No Man’s Land. Heavy artillery fire continued from *Bois de Gargantua* to the north and **7./258** could see the devastation in the American front lines that they were to strike. Volleys of flares were shot and observed by both adversaries. **7./258** commenced the **Sturm**—ready to commence their attack and started to climb on the embankment to the guide lines through the wire entanglements that was set earlier. Shell craters now had temporary fill through a layer of white lug boards. The guidepath was a carefully constructed lane of white ribbon and straw bundles showing the way. Ettighoffer wondered how the **Pioniere** could accomplish this risky task so efficiently. The time was now 0430. Artillery rounds screamed overhead.<sup>7</sup>

In preparation of the assault 20 minutes of **MW** hammered northern Seicheprey and the graveyard twenty yards north of the church. **MW** fired into the center of Seicheprey for 40 straight minutes.

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<sup>2</sup> 78. R.D. War Files, 15; *History of the 102<sup>nd</sup>, United States Infantry, 26<sup>th</sup> Division*, 12-13; Taylor, 124; Sibley, 144.

<sup>3</sup> Major General Clarence Edwards memorandum in Box 25, 26<sup>th</sup> Division, RG 120, NARA.

<sup>4</sup> *History of the 102<sup>nd</sup>, United States Infantry*, 12.

<sup>5</sup> 78. R.D. War Files 7.

<sup>6</sup> Artillery Commander No. 78, “Report on our Operation,” 36.

<sup>7</sup> Ettighoffer, 226-228.

Likewise a similar duration battered 1-Bis trenches and the west of Seicheprey.<sup>8</sup> Lieutenant Ingersoll remembered eating in his Seicheprey dugout early that morning when the barrage fire struck *Bois du Jury*. About a half hour later shells fell on Seicheprey. Ingersoll's gas sentry was getting nervous.<sup>9</sup> As shells struck Seicheprey, Rau's soldiers ran into their *abris*. A counter barrage was necessary and Rau took action to alert artillery in Position 2. Rau's 38<sup>e</sup> *Régiment d'infanterie liaison*, *lieutenant* Toulouse, rushed out to the Seicheprey designated rocket station and attempted to send out a signal rocket calling for barrage. The incoming artillery and **MW** rounds were so heavy that Toulouse couldn't safely get there. Rau handed Toulouse a rocket and quickly set up an improvised rocket launcher made from a sand bag outside his PC. It didn't work. Toulouse lit the rocket but it fell over, burning him on the hand. Rau then took another rocket and rushed to the rocket station. As he ran an artillery round burst 15 feet away and knocked him down with fragments and debris hitting his helmet and wounding his hand. Rau stopped in a daze. His officers came out of the PC to help. He got up and made it to the rocket station and fired off three in rapid succession that successfully alerted the American artillery to commence with a barrage. The German's barrage continued covering the American's southern Woëvre front area. Rau now had turned to getting his forces ready for an enemy assault to include posting sentinels near the PC. Lieutenant Ingersoll awakened his sergeant and orderly in the dugout and went outside noticing a barrage rocket being fired. Ingersoll immediately ran down the street waking his men in nearby dugouts before heading into Major Rau's PC.<sup>10</sup>

Major Rau reported "Boche attack at 0500 at Seicheprey. Am holding there."<sup>11</sup> Lieutenant Harry E. Rice, 102<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery, was Rau's artillery liaison. Rice ran to centrally located remains of a building known as the Seicheprey Observatory Tower and proceeded to fire off a rocket. He noted that the attack started at 0500 [a half hour off the 0530 jump off] and observed *Boches* in Seicheprey at 0530. Since his telephone lines were cut, Rice called for a barrage at that moment using fireworks that signaled 'attack underway.' From his position in the tower Rice proceeded to see the entire battle unfold.<sup>12</sup>

Major Bowditch reported to his superiors at Chaumont later that afternoon what he could ascertain from what he could determine a heavy machine gun barrage was underway to the right near Bois de Remieres. When 0500 arrived, Bowditch recalled the German's barrage was right down the support line of Position 1-Bis and Position 2. At that moment the **stosstruppen** assault commenced. Bowditch's final observation of that time hit a nerve for how the battle was conducted. "No messages from the front line were received for a considerable length of time."<sup>13</sup>

## Sturm

**Kirschblüte's** assault commenced at 0430 with a simultaneous **MW** and artillery barrage combined with **stosstruppen** and **sturmtruppen** penetrating the entire battle line. **MW** fired a short three minute destructive barrage at the closest targets using bombs armed with delayed

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<sup>8</sup> Major Rau was awarded the Silver Star citation for bravery and leadership in the battle. Rau, "Report of Action Morning of April 20<sup>th</sup> 1918."

<sup>9</sup> Lt Ingersoll Report.

<sup>10</sup> Rau, "Report of Action Morning of April 20<sup>th</sup> 1918."

<sup>11</sup> "Colonel Parker Memo to Brigadier General Traub memorandum."

<sup>12</sup> "Telephone Log," Box 42, 26<sup>th</sup> Division, RG 120, NARA; Rice message, Box 19, 26<sup>th</sup> Division, RG 120, NARA.

<sup>13</sup> "Bowditch letter to Colonel Craig."

action fuses to reduce splintering. **MW** bombs deluged the American front lines between **Alfa-Waldchen** and **Pflaumen-Waldchen** in the west as the *Bois de Remieres* in a fourteen minute barrage to deter any immediate Allied reinforcement. Barrage fire commenced once signals were received from **stosstruppen**. Another **MW** group diverted fire in front of **abschnitt G III** for 40 minutes.<sup>14</sup>

**Generalleutnant** Hoffmann's close-range artillery conducted the initial barrage and switched to the rolling barrage advancing ahead of the **stosstruppen**. Keeping reinforcements at bay from Position 1-Bis and Position 2 south of Seicheprey and at *Bois du Jury* was accomplished by destructive fire of varying strength from **Generalleutnant** Hoffmann's artillery inventory, particularly from his long-range group. Annihilating artillery fire now covered the entire American sector up to Position 2. Simultaneously with the sudden opening of **MW** and artillery fire, the infantry approached the points of penetration at 0430 on the whole west line. The enemy front lines were crossed a few minutes later without any resistance. The sparsely manned front line had soldiers spread apart who set off fireworks and retreated. No American obstacles slowed down the **stosstruppen** advance in this part of the battlefield.<sup>15</sup>

Lieutenant Cunningham at 51<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery headquarters reported at 0447 a quiet in the area as artillery fire shifted from CPO to counterbattery created a much more quiet environment. A minute later Cunningham telephoned 51<sup>st</sup> Brigade headquarters that the front line trenches at Seicheprey, *Bois de Remieres* and *Bois-Brûlé* were under heavy bombardment. This was the first notice to General Traub's headquarters that an attack was in progress on trenches around Seicheprey and *Bois de Remieres*.<sup>16</sup>

Initial contact was extremely light. Directly north of Seicheprey only four Americans were observed at the first stronghold and to the west at **Alfa-Waldchen** three soldiers were spotted firing off flares and retreating to the south. No trench obstacles along the front line caused any noticeable delays.<sup>17</sup> One team of four linemen under the command of Corporal Viberts worked north of Seicheprey in an outpost called "Philip-P" had been on duty for three weeks, operating the switchboard and repairing the lines. Just prior the the attack they were ordered to remove the switchboard and salvage the wire. It was too late. The outpost was overrun by **stosstruppen**. One lineman, Private Herbert E. Liming, had to fight his way back through Seicheprey. The others were killed or declared missing.<sup>18</sup>

At the western nest just south of Lahayville, **c-Kompagnie (5./259 Pohl)** advanced unhindered to the American second trench line, just 100 meters of the launch nest. They met their first resistance from the Americans at this point. The second wave's **Freiwilligenkompagnien b-Kompagnie Obermüller Regt. 258** arrived behind **c-Kompagnie (5./259 Pohl)** and engaged the Americans in a 25 minute battle, freeing up Pohl's **stosstruppen** to continue south towards their southwest Seicheprey objectives. Machine gun fire from both sides made the advance difficult.

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<sup>14</sup> 78. R.D. War Files.

<sup>15</sup> 78. R.D. War Files.

<sup>16</sup> Telephone message, RG 120, 102nd Infantry Files, Box 19; Telephone Message, RG 120, Box 19; G-3, GHQ, AEF: 26<sup>th</sup> Div.: Operation Reports, 26<sup>th</sup> Division, A.E.F., Boucq, Meurthe-et Moselle, April 23, 1918. *Report of Enemy Raid on Troops of the 26<sup>th</sup> Division at Seicheprey, April 20/21, 1918* in U.S. Army History, 3, 613.

<sup>17</sup> 78. R.D. War Files, 15.

<sup>18</sup> Private Liming received the *Croix de Guerre*. Corporal Blanchard quoted in Hills, 15.

**Leutnant** Obermüller's men advanced on the American dugout and adjacent "pill-box complex under the command of Lieutenant Benjamin C. "Bennie" Byrd. The pill-box comprised 2 large *abris* and 3 shelters of corrugated iron—from which Americans fought with every weapon at their disposal. **Hauptmann** Tolle personally became involved using a telephone line connection that had been laid by the signalmen in the attack wave. His **b-Kompagnie Obermüller Regt. 258** fought a tenacious adversary. One American *abris* let the **stosstruppen** advance to a certain point. As the Germans approached the entrance of the *abris* they were suddenly overwhelmed by a fusillade of fire from coming from within the *abris* entrance. **Stosstruppen** above one *abris* entrance threw **handgranaten** inside that caused a few Americans to surrender. The Germans quickly became introduced to American skills in throwing baseballs because their aim with grenades proved deadly. It drove **Leutnant** Obermüller's **stosstruppen** back. They now resorted to blocking off the trench, surrounding the *abris* entrance and proceeded to throw a barrage of **handgranaten**. It proved overwhelming for Lieutenant Byrd and his remaining 22 men. They came out with hands outstretched and surrendered. **Leutnant** Obermüller had his men disperse along Sibille Trench and prepare for counterattack. Upon close examination of the area Obermüller's **stosstruppen** discovered a cache of 60 rifles and destroyed them.<sup>19</sup> Despite the momentary exaltation over the victory, **Hauptmann Tolle** soon learned that his son, **Musketier** Engke, became a casualty, shot and killed in the first moments of the assault.<sup>20</sup>

As **c-Kompagnie (5./259 Pohl)** left Obermüller to contend with Lieutenant Byrd's *GC*, **Leutnant** Pohl's **stosstruppen** continued south they met with heavy machine gun fire along the Lahayville-Seicheprey road. In a struggle that lasted 25 minutes they conducted an enveloping movement around the machine gun nest that resulted in casualties on both sides, to include Pohl. **Offizierstellvertreter** Siebrecht, **Sergeant** Philipp and **Unteroffizier** Neumann took immediate action leading the attack. Breaching the pill-box required a **granatenwerfer** to lob **granaten** downrange to avoid being hit by the American's accurate fire. A few Americans raised their hands. As the Germans got closer one suddenly threw hand grenades and shot his pistol, wounding **Sergeant** Philipp, **Unteroffizier** Neumann, and two other **stosstruppen**. **Offizierstellvertreter** Siebrecht and his remaining **stosstruppen** then stormed the defense. One of the four American machine guns captured that day was from this close combat.<sup>21</sup> The remaining **c-Kompagnie (5./259 Pohl)** proceeded south and regrouped southwest of Seicheprey with **Battalion Grumbrecht's d-Kompagnie (7./259 Hillemann)** **stosstruppen**. The plan was proceeding as **Major** Bruns envisioned.

To the far west of the assault, **Battalion Tolle's a-Kompagnie (258./Keun)** reached **Alfa-Waldchen** without meeting resistance. **7./258** advanced forward through two small wooded areas and crossed into American lines with **MW** bombs impacting just 50 meters ahead their advance. The first American dugout they overran was empty. At the next objective known as **Beta-Waldchen**, they also found it unoccupied. As Keun's **a-Kompagnie** advanced further to the south the **stosstruppen** were discovered by an American machine gun nest and took heavy fire from the trench east of **Beta-Waldchen**. Ettighoffer recalled that the trenches suddenly came alive. They were now confronting a strongly defended position and every traverse had to be fought for. Ettighoffer's **führer**, **Offizierstellvertreter** [Warrant Officer] Kientz's plan was to

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<sup>19</sup> v.Bornstedt, 180; 78. R.D. War Files, 16.

<sup>20</sup> v.Bornstedt, 179.

<sup>21</sup> 78. R.D. War Files, 17.

divide into three groups and penetrate forward. Just as they proceeded to execute the plan, Kientz's counterpart, **Offizierstellvertreter** Roos, was shot in the head and died instantly. It now became close combat between **7./258** and the Americans. They enveloped the American stronghold at this point of the attack and managed to capture six men. Ettighoffer remembered the Americans wore flat steel helmets on their angular beardless faces. He was struck by the quality of the uniforms the Americans were wearing—a luxury not seen in trenches were beautiful long rubber waders—the best apparel for the mud and sludge of Seicheprey. **7./258** then advanced through knee deep mud they discovered a large bounty of booty—cans of food, blankets, and other accessories. As much as he wanted to stop, Ettighofer realized they had to continue the advance to their objective.<sup>22</sup>

Suddenly Ettighoffer and his fellow **stosstruppen** heard two machine guns firing. **Offizierstellvertreter** Kientz leaped into the closest nest shouting “Hands up, you bloody fools!” Kientz managed to grab the officer in charge, Lieutenant Robert B. McDowell, 102<sup>nd</sup> Machine Gun Battalion, and simultaneously pulled out his **Doch** [bayonet] and put it to McDowell's throat. The remaining American's in the nest hesitated and started to raise their hands in surrender. When another machine gun started to fire in the German's direction Kientz immediately responded by throwing a **handgranaten** that killed the crew. Then the air became a barrage of American grenades and German **handgranaten** exploding around the combatants creating geysers of mud and sludge—making both enemies unrecognizable. Ettighoffer took a quick body count—ten American corpses most likely were killed during the **MW** barrage. **7./258** casualties so far in the **Erstürmung** was one dead and four slightly wounded.<sup>23</sup>

A few **7./258 stosstruppen** took charge of Lieutenant McDowell and his remaining men and proceeded back to the German lines. The rest of **7./258** moved on until they came to another large shelter. A **stosstruppen** rushed the shelter and shoved two **handgranaten** into the riser creating a muffled explosion. **Offizierstellvertreter** Kientz went towards the *abris* entrance and ordered the Americans to come out. They responded with pistol shots. Kientz's men proceeded to throw **handgranaten** into the *abris*. One American near the top of the stairs caught the **handgranaten** and threw them back. A **stosstruppen** shot back and killed him. The rest of the *abris* surrendered and came out. Ettighoffer noticed that some of the Americans wore pistols loosely on their belt like a cowboy. Others came out with their hands in the pockets—giving Ettighoffer the impression of small school boys about ready to be punished. **Offizierstellvertreter** Kientz then shouted at the assembled prisoners to put their hands up high. The Americans respond hesitatingly. Suddenly an American burst out of the shelter and ran south to the nearest American line. The startled Germans raise their weapons to fire. The remaining captive Americans started angrily shouting at the Germans—then became exuberant cheering on their counterpart in the run of his life. “Run Bill!” Bill made it to the next trench and dove in. The Americans erupted into applause—“Hurrah for Bill!” **Offizierstellvertreter** Kientz's **stosstruppen** witnessed what they thought was the American's take on this horrific experience—war is a sport. The veteran Germans on the other hand saw themselves as aging soldiers long spent with war and time at the front. The newly arriving Americans expressed youthful vigour,

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<sup>22</sup> 78. R.D. War Files, 18; Ettighoffer, 229-230.

<sup>23</sup> Ettighoffer, 229-230.

wanting to continue on in this “game.” **7./258** now prepared for defense against a possible counterattack.<sup>24</sup>

Lieutenant Lockhart’s platoon strength was down to eight soldiers. The early morning **MW** barrage on Sub-center H-1 had completely obliterated the trenches, *abris*, and company **PC** killing five men wounding sixteen. Communication in Lockhart’s area required runners as the telephone wires to the south and east were broken.<sup>25</sup> At 0500 Lockhart’s *boyau* Nantais location started receiving rounds from both German and American artillery. Despite the double jeopardy, Lockhart held *boyau* Nantais using his Chauchat automatic riflemen to fire intermittently towards the German wire. The **stosstruppen** held back and did not advance.<sup>26</sup>

**Hauptman Tolle’s** deep attack **kompagnie** was **d-Kompagnie (7./259 Hillemann)**. **Leutnant Hillemann’s stosstruppen** advanced in orderly fashion despite the foggy conditions and skirmishes underway on the Lahayville-Seicheprey road. Hillemann’s lead for the drive was **Unteroffizier Müller** and his **stosstruppen**. Armed with a number of light machine guns, Müller’s **stosstruppen** forced their way into a trench full of Americans next to an observation post southwest of Seicheprey and proceeded to initiate close combat. Just as the fight commenced, the remaining **stosstruppen** from **c-Kompagnie (5./259 Pohl)** arrived and the two conducted operations against the Americans, to include repulsing a minor counterattack from nearby trenches. It was not an easy engagement for **Unteroffizier Müller’s stosstruppen** encountered violent resistance by the Americans. One squad of eight American soldiers fought to the last man. **Stosstruppen** proceeded to maneuver through the traverses and captured eleven Americans in the area supporting the observation post. The initial attack phase had been completed. Now Tolle’s **stosstruppen** were in place to link up with the newly arriving **Battalion Hellmuth’s a-Kompagnie (6./259 Knop)** coming from the northeast. **Leutnant Knop** was a veteran in attacking the Americans, having led one of the assaults on *Bois de Remieres* during the **Einladung**. Close combat now commenced in earnest.<sup>27</sup>

### The Fight in Sibille Trench

**Battalion Hellmuth’s a-Kompagnie (6./259 Knop)** advanced along the direct north-south road of St. Baussant—Seicheprey. **6./259 Knop** encountered American *abris* north of Sibille Trench but being the first wave, by-passed them, leaving the third wave to contend with any resistance. Lieutenant Edward A. Kenney, 102<sup>nd</sup> Machine Gun Battalion, commanded a *GC* that maintained the Hotchkiss machine guns defending the western sector where *boyau* Seicheprey intersected with Sibille Trench. When the massive **MW** bombardment commenced Kenney ordered his eight men into the *abris*. When the **stosstruppen** arrived behind the artillery barrage they encountered Kenney and his *GC* totally surprised. At that moment the third wave arrived carrying **flammenwerfer**, making a convincing argument for surrender. After the battle, Major John D. Murphy, Company B, 102<sup>nd</sup> M.G. Battalion, wrote on the incident that Lieutenant Kenney was

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<sup>24</sup> Ettighoffer, 230-231; 78. R.D. War Files.

<sup>25</sup> Corporal Emil Gogun, Private James Clark, Mechanic Friend Rosene, Private First Class Julius Lorynec, Private Arthur Bjornber, Private First Class Andrew McIlvarey, Private William Pushnick, and Private John D. Curry. Capt Harry Bissell, Report of Battalion Commander of Center H, on the Day of April 20<sup>th</sup>, April 27, 1918, Box 53, 26<sup>th</sup> Division, RG 120, NARA.

<sup>26</sup> *History of the 102<sup>nd</sup>, United States Infantry*, 13.

<sup>27</sup> v.Bornstedt, 180; 78. R.D. War Files.

“the best officer we had almost.” As it happened, the absence of Kenney’s unit defending Company D’s flank may well have helped out the Germans more than at first appeared for the **stosstruppen** advanced more quickly around Seicheprey.<sup>28</sup>

To the right of Lieutenant Kenney’s unit was Captain Freeland, Company D commander and Major Rau’s lead for defending Sibille Trench. After **Leutnant Knop’s a-Kompagnie (6./259 Knop) stosstruppen** had captured Kenney, they proceeded east through and above the Sibille Trench network in the fog and proceeded to cordon off the defenses around Freeland’s *GC*. It proved to be a very bloody battle for both sides. **Leutnant Knop’s stosstruppen** were grateful when **Battalion Hellmuth’s b-Kompagnie (1./259 Tänzer)** showed up in the assault’s second wave. Additional help came as **Battalion Hellmuth’s c-Kompagnie (2./259)** serving as reserve for the three waves arrived. It proved a deadly struggle for both sides. Freeland’s *GC* fought until every man was killed, wounded or actually overpowered. Captain Freeland was also wounded from **handgranaten** blasts but fought until his wounds proved overwhelming and was captured.<sup>29</sup> All the **stosstruppen** suddenly realized that they were fighting a determined enemy with tremendous fighting potential when they saw their **kompagnie** commander, **Leutnant Knop**, killed by a rifle bullet.<sup>30</sup> Private Alvin C. Lugg—surrounded yet undaunted—broke through the **stosstruppen** using hand grenades and his bayonet.<sup>31</sup> Sergeant George Nelson fired away with his revolver at a large group of **stosstruppen** rushing him and was overwhelmed. Corporal James Moody and his Chauchat team shot many Germans as they came forward. “We sure piled them up proper, believe me.” Prior to succumbing to a head wound he saw four **stosstruppen** “turning somersaults.” Sergeant William Thompson “scared clear through” shot three Germans and ran for the nearest *abris* avoiding “sure death.” Thompson and two other soldiers heard German voices advancing, raising the distinct possibility that “we had but a few minutes to live.” They planned to blast away anyone who came to the *abris* door. Instead the **Pioniere** exploded a charge that collapsed the *abris*, knocking Thompson senseless. When he regained consciousness, he discovered his knee and leg were severely wounded. Additionally, Thompson was choking on his own blood. He commenced digging himself out and over the space of nine hours was able to successfully the dugout wreckage and retrieve his comrades as well.<sup>32</sup> Private Charles E. Brundett was surrounded by **stosstruppen** as they rushed forward. He nearly exhausted all ammunition at his disposal and proceeded to fight with his rifle and bayonet. He worked his way back to the support platoon and kept up the fight against the **stosstruppen**.<sup>33</sup>

Major Rau was kept in the dark on what was underway at Sibille Trench. TPS messages were sent sent out by Rau’s available signalmen but were not acknowledged. He attempted to use a projector (electric flare) to maintain communication with Colonel Parker’s PC but the mist and poor visibility contributed to the failure.<sup>34</sup> The lack of communication became critical. At Beaumont ridge, Colonel Parker reported to Brigadier General Traub that reports from OP 14,

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<sup>28</sup> Telephone Log, 21 April 1918, Box 19, 26<sup>th</sup> Division, RG 120, NARA.

<sup>29</sup> Strickland states Captain Freeland died of wounds. He was the highest ranking officer captured that day. Subsequent newspaper accounts still listed him as alive. *History of the 102<sup>nd</sup>, United States Infantry*, 13.

<sup>30</sup> v.Bornstedt, 179-180; 78. R.D. War Files.

<sup>31</sup> In addition to the *Croix de Guerre*, Private Lugg was awarded the Silver Star citation. His recognition was overlooked over the decades. On 24 April 1966, Private Lugg was recognized in New Haven, CT. Strickland, 136.

<sup>32</sup> Coan, 49-50.

<sup>33</sup> Private Brundett was awarded for his heroic action with the Distinguished Service Cross. Stringer, 76.

<sup>34</sup> Grant, “Report on 26<sup>th</sup> Division affair of April 20th.”

engineers, and runners sent out in all directions indicated that the barrage on their front was exceedingly heavy up to 0500.<sup>35</sup> Chaumont observers commented that the only means of communication between company commanders and their battalion headquarters was runners and fullerphones. Unfortunately for the soldiers occupying Seicheprey, fullerphones quickly went out of commission.<sup>36</sup> At this moment Major Rau totally depended on his runners. Rau's telephone lines to the regimental PC at Beaumont were out of commission.<sup>37</sup> Private Arnon Horton finally got Major Rau's message through and miraculously returned. Runners from the 102<sup>nd</sup> PC had not arrived.<sup>38</sup> Private C. Peckham was recommended for the Distinguished Service Cross for bravery running messages throughout the day for Major Rau to the 102<sup>nd</sup> Infantry PC at Beaumont, despite the heavy barrages impacting his route. He only stopped after succumbing to exhaustion from the rigor of the battle.<sup>39</sup> Signal Corps personnel assigned accomplished herculean tasks trying to reestablish communications. At the end of the day, Colonel Parker made it clear that the detachment of Signal Corps people under Lieutenant Hannah, to include Sergeant First Class Louis L. Morse, Private Liming [from the first wave] and Private Ernest G. Grey deserved special praise. "There were no cold feet, there were no yellow streaks in this outfit. Their conduct was simply magnificent."<sup>40</sup>

### Kirschblüte am Seicheprey

Major Brun's assigned **Battalion Grumbrecht** the honor of directly assaulting Seicheprey without stopping and taking possession of the village. The combined **Sturm Battalion.14** and **Res. I. R. Kompagnie** force was to avoid the outlying trenches and annihilate the resistance from within. Aiding **Battalion Grumbrecht's** assault was **Leutnant** von Ponickau's **Pioniere**. As **Reserve. Pionier Kompagnie. 80** crossed over the third line of trenches they took fire from American snipers. **Unteroffizier** Hober and **Sergeant** Friedel immediately turned their squads to the left and attacked the American's flank. They took 4 prisoners, killed 3 American soldiers and captured one Chauchat automatic rifle. **Reserve. Pionier Kompagnie. 80** then opened up two passages in the wire entanglement and continued their advance. At 0500, ten minutes after commencing the attack, **Leutnant** von Ponickau's **Zug** linked up with **Leutnant** Groote's **Zug** of **Battalion Grumbrecht's a-Kompagnie (4./259 Pfeiffer)**.<sup>41</sup> **Leutnant** Pfeiffer's **stosstruppen** ran east of the machine guns that proved deadly for **Leutnant** Pohl. **Pfeiffer's stosstruppen** continued on, diverting to the west working with **Leutnant** von Ponickau's **Pioniere** and made it to the north side of Seicheprey. As they proceed south they were briefly joined by the elite **sturmtruppen** of **b-kompagnie (Sturm Battalion.14)** who went directly south towards Seicheprey and ran into fierce resistance at the northern cemetery. **4./259 Pfeiffer** edged Seicheprey on the west until they came to the Richecourt road and proceeded into the streets of the southern end of the village at 0530. **Leutnant** von Ponickau ordered his non-commissioned

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<sup>35</sup> "Colonel Parker Memo to Brigadier General Traub memorandum."

<sup>36</sup> The fullerphone was a portable direct current line Morse telegraph, devised as a non-over hearable signaling set for positional warfare. Grant, "Report on 26<sup>th</sup> Division affair of April 20th."

<sup>37</sup> Grant, "Report on 26<sup>th</sup> Division affair of April 20th."

<sup>38</sup> Strickland, 143.

<sup>39</sup> Strickland, 134.

<sup>40</sup> The three were awarded Silver Star Citations for heroism. "Colonel Parker Memo to Brigadier General Traub memorandum."

<sup>41</sup> Von Ponickau Platoon. Report of Engineer Platoon on Cherry Blossom Operation, 30; v.Bornstedt, 181-182.

officers to attack the dugouts.<sup>42</sup> **Sturm Battalion.14's b-Kompagnie** advanced toward the church at the north end. Aiding their advance were two light guns that provided additional firepower against the American entrenched positions. The **b-Kompagnie Sturmtruppen** proceeded to rush into Seicheprey on both sides of the church.<sup>43</sup> Thanks to **Leutnant Knop's Kompagnie** confronting the Americans at Sibille Trench, **Sturm Battalion.14's c-Kompagnie** proceeded to rush unencumbered toward the northeast area of Seicheprey near the road to St. Baussant. On the eastern side of Seicheprey **c-Kompagnie** acknowledged **Battalion Grumbrecht's d-Kompagnie (3./259 Maus, Hans)** as they continued south towards their rendezvous point just east of the village. Together with **Leutnant Thomas, Reserve. Pionier Kompagnie. 80, Landwehr II, Leutnant Maus and Leutnant Hans' 3./259** ran towards the American machine gun nest located right in *boyau* Seicheprey, the lifeline to the village. **Leutnant Thomas, Reserve. Pionier Kompagnie. 80, Landwehr II, and 3./259** reached the machine gun next at 0500, fifteen minutes after the assault commenced. **Leutnant Thomas' Pioniere** crept up and encircled the machine gun nest and attacked it in a violent struggle. Soon the air resounded with the German's shouting "Hurrah!" Their maneuver resulted in capturing five wounded Americans as well as one model 07 machine gun.<sup>44</sup> To the German planners, **3./259** were now at the high water mark of the assault, the point of bifurcation at 295 where the American machine gun nest was in position. **Pioniere** throwing *handgranaten* took out the nest.<sup>45</sup> As *stosstruppen* and *sturmtruppen* advanced to the south, Sergeant James Walsh, Company A, prepped his men for defense against the advancing German attack. Soon they were surrounded. The ensuing close combat wounded Walsh, but his men successfully fought off the attack. Walsh stayed with his unit for several hours until finally relieved.<sup>46</sup>

**Kirshblüte's** die was cast. The time was now 0540. **Sturm Battalion.14's b-Kompagnie** was at the Seicheprey church. **Sturm Battalion.14's c-Kompagnie** was now at the northeast area of Seicheprey near the road to St. Baussant. **Battalion Grumbrecht's d-Kompagnie (3./259 Maus, Hans)** and **Leutnant Thomas, Reserve. Pionier Kompagnie. 80, Landwehr II,** were at 295 and heading north. **Battalion Grumbrecht's a-Kompagnie (4./259 Pfeiffer)** and **Leutnant von Ponickau's Reserve. Pionier Kompagnie. 80 Zug** was on the Richecourt-Seicheprey road and running west. Each *kompagnie* had their own mission and the independence to execute any plan to overcome the Americans.<sup>47</sup> For the next one and a half hours the Germans and Americans engaged in a desperate struggle among the village ruins. The *kompagnies* were independent yet without central command and control. The result was the descriptions of the fighting was left to the imagination and not recorded in the post-battle reports.<sup>48</sup> **Sturm Battalion.14** reinforced the *stosstruppen* advance by providing fire support at the two critical points to both prevent the Americans fleeing out of Seicheprey towards Beaumont as well as reinforcing against a counterattack. As envisioned by **Major Bruns,** Major Rau's forces were to become stuck in place, surrounded by *sturmtruppen* and *stosstruppen* methodically annihilating any opposition as they proceeded from *abris* to *abris*. Bruns' assault force also served as a lethal obstacle to any

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<sup>42</sup> 78. R.D. War Files, 19-20; v.Bornstedt, 183-184; Report of Engineer Platoon on Cherry Blossom Operation, 30

<sup>43</sup> 78. R.D. War Files.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Platoon. Report of Engineer Platoon on Cherry Blossom Operation. 32.

<sup>45</sup> 78. R.D. War Files.

<sup>46</sup> Sergeant Walsh was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions that day. Stringer, 404.

<sup>47</sup> Kauffman assessment. Outline of Mil. Intell. Org. of Deputy General Staff in Berlin III B. In Dennis Nolan papers, MHI

<sup>48</sup> 78. R.D. War Files, 21.

Americans fleeing out of Seicheprey towards Beaumont as well as establishing deterring against any Allied counterattack.<sup>49</sup> After the first wave, the entire fight at Seicheprey became hand to hand between each individual **Zug** and *GC*.<sup>50</sup>

**Leutnant** von Ponickau's **Reserve. Pionier Kompagnie. 80 Zug** reached Seicheprey's northwestern edge while the area was still under barrage causing them to take cover with **Leutnant** Pfeiffer's **4./259 stosstruppen** engaged in the attack. The two units penetrated Seicheprey streets from the west Richecourt-Seicheprey road shortly after 0430 receiving fire from all directions. *Lieutenant* Toulouse ventured out into the village. As the first **Battalion Grumbrecht's a-Kompagnie (4./259 Pfeiffer) stosstruppen** entered Seicheprey and approached Major Rau's PC, they were astonished to see *lieutenant* Toulouse throwing a grenade at them.<sup>51</sup>

Lieutenant Moore ran up the road shouting that the *Boche* were in the town. Three **Sturmabteilung.14's b-Kompagnie sturmtruppen** were following him and throwing **handgranaten** at him. Moore fired back at the three **sturmtruppen** with his pistols causing them to turn around.<sup>52</sup> Color Sergeant Church reported from Major Rau's PC that the **sturmtruppen** were following very close after their own barrage, some of them being seen almost at once, less than one hundred yards down the street.<sup>53</sup> Private William B. Bolton ran into the PC after seeing the advancing **sturmtruppen**. Rau's staff handed Bolton as many papers, maps, and documents that he could safely carry. He left the PC under a barrage and managed to successfully reach Colonel Parker's PC at Beaumont.<sup>54</sup>

**Leutnant** von Ponickau issued orders to his **Pioniere** to attack the dug-outs. Americans in one dugout offered stubborn resistance and refused to come out. **Handgranaten** were thrown followed by **Pioniere** Rettig's attempt to coax the Americans to surrender. They refused and in the process wounded Rettig with gunfire and hand grenades. **Leutnant** von Ponickau ordered the dugouts be destroyed using two charges of 30 pounds each. The entire *abris* was destroyed. **Reserve. Pionier Kompagnie. 80 Zug** moved on blowing up an ammunition dump that was filled with hand-grenades and rifle cartridges. Soon cartridges, trench mortar shells, rockets and other combustibles were exploding in every direction. **Leutnant** von Ponickau's **Res. Pionier Komp. 80** then proceeded to their final objective—attacking Rau's PC Machine-gun fire came from a nearby house ruin diverting the **Pioniere** attack for a few minutes.<sup>55</sup>

Lieutenant Strickland remembered the screams and screeches that made the blood run cold coming from the throats of “half drunken Germans as they hurled their **handgranaten** at every American that appeared.” The fighting was incredibly fierce surprising the battle veteran **stosstruppen**—rifles used as clubs, pickaxes, trench tools, knives—everything came into play.. One kitchen was afire where the **stosstruppen** had shot **flammenwerfer** streams of liquid fire. The patrol came up just as Carl Jacobs, Company D's mess sergeant and his kitchen police,

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<sup>49</sup> Artillery Commander No. 78, “Report on our Operation,” 36-40.

<sup>50</sup> *History of the 102<sup>nd</sup>, United States Infantry*, 12-13; Taylor, 124; Sibley, 144.

<sup>51</sup> du Boisrouvray, 353; Von Ponickau Platoon. Report of Engineer Platoon on Cherry Blossom Operation, 30-31.

<sup>52</sup> Rau, “Report of Action Morning of April 20<sup>th</sup> 1918.”; Conn. Vets Remember Seicheprey, James S. Jackson, *Hartford Courant*, Apr 17, 1927.

<sup>53</sup> Church, 25 April 1918.

<sup>54</sup> Strickland, 137,

<sup>55</sup> Von Ponickau Platoon. Report of Engineer Platoon on Cherry Blossom Operation, 30-31.

fought off **flammenwerfer** operators with cleavers and butcher knives. Company D's kitchen force, surrounded and called on to surrender, fought until all were killed or wounded. One German was split through the head to the shoulders by a cleaver blow—testifying to the intensity of the struggle. About twenty 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry disciplinary prisoners still clad in blue overalls fought hand to hand with the remaining **stosstruppen** within the broken houses and against the crumbled stone walls. The prisoners hurled chunks of stone and mortar as well as grabbed picks and shovels swinging them as lethal weapons. At the same time everyone heard screams and groans of agony as **flammenwerfer** operators poured a stream of liquid fire into a nearby “pill box” of 102<sup>nd</sup> machine gunners.<sup>56</sup> Strickland also remembered at that moment looking up and through the first light of daybreak and the dissipation of the fog that covered everything a black German combat aeroplane [**LVG C.V**]droned overhead almost touching the Seicheprey house-tops, signaling with absolute precision to German artillery the location of each little group of American defenders left in Seicheprey.<sup>57</sup>

Later Lieutenant Ingersoll relayed that someone came into Rau's PC reporting that soldiers were retreating. He went outside the PC and saw soldiers coming from all points within the village that were able to escape the **stosstruppen** attack. Now Rau had a contingent of cooks, signal men, runners and others to set up his defensive perimeter.<sup>58</sup> Color Sergeant Church helped Major Rau take the men and quickly set up a line of defense behind sand bags around the battalion PC and within the *boyau* that led towards Beaumont. Church helped arm the stragglers with available ammunition and grenades were issued from the ammunition dump. At the same time Ingersoll took charge of a few men to the east of Rau's PC and posted them behind some *gabion*. Shooting from down the street was heard followed by a man running back saying the *Boche* were near. Then Rau and his defensive unit saw more men came running up the street followed by about 20 **stosstruppen**. Rau shouted to the men to jump into the trench running along the Seicheprey *boyau* while the men behind the sand bag pile fired away at the enemy. The PC defense stayed in place for about an hour and a half, then filed down to the first cross street, established a line and started forward. Rau proceeded to conduct his own personal reconnaissance within the village. In turn, Lieutenant Ingersoll and Color Sergeant Church proceeded to take a handful of soldiers and advanced back into the Seicheprey ruins. Everyone kept up as heavy rifle fire as possible and **stosstruppen** withdrew toward the northern edge of the town.<sup>59</sup> **Stosstruppen** were seen as they moved forward. Rau's men reached the northern edge of the town and retired to the trench line.<sup>60</sup> As they moved out they discovered a dead German officer about 75 yards to the front of the American defenders. Two or three wounded Germans

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<sup>56</sup> Strickland, 136; du Boisrouvray, 353; 102nd History; Edwards, , 5-6; Henry Berry, “For Some Old Soldiers, France was Yesterday,” *New York Times*, 30 April 30, 1978, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851-2001), CN19; Fred Tyrrell Papers, 102d Regiment files, MHI; Stallings, 53

<sup>57</sup> Strickland, 136.

<sup>58</sup> Lt Ingersoll Report.

<sup>59</sup> Rau, “Report of Action Morning of April 20<sup>th</sup> 1918.”

<sup>60</sup> Grant, “Report on 26<sup>th</sup> Division affair of April 20<sup>th</sup>.”; Lt Ingersoll; Rau, “Report of Action Morning of April 20<sup>th</sup> 1918.”

were crawling around on top of the ground. The Americans buried the German officer in a shell hole near the spot where he lay the following night.<sup>61</sup>

Rau recalled the time in a letter home that was published after the war illustrating what went through his mind as the **stosstruppen** and **sturmruppen** advanced. “I had only two companies on the line, attacked by Prussian storm troops and two battalions of reserve infantry. Every man stuck to his post. Our mission was to hold the ground....We held. They came clear through the town, blew up my first aid station, burned all my kitchen. They captured my doctor and sanitary men the first thing.”<sup>62</sup> The American’s first aid station was in a large building near the center of the village and about 50 yards north of the battalion PC and within the vicinity where *boyau* Nantais entered the northwestern part of Seicheprey.<sup>63</sup> It marked the line where **stosstruppen** entered the town from both sides. Lieutenant Burke, medical officer, and all but one of the enlisted personnel in the station were captured. They were busy inside the building tending to casualties when the **stosstruppen** entered.<sup>64</sup> The Americans figured that the Germans mistook the aid station as Rau’s battalion command post. The two were the largest remaining structures in the village and were within close proximity on the same street.<sup>65</sup> At the northern end of Seicheprey, Major Rau set up an Chauchat automatic rifle to the left of *boyau* Mayennaise behind the wall of the building where the *gabion* [military fortification] were in place, and continued to fire with it on the cemetery. **Stosstruppen** thinking the Americans now occupied a position in rear of a broken-down wall of the church, started to shoot at it with a machine gun.<sup>66</sup> The Germans also claimed that an American soldier was firing from the tower. The close combat that occurred resulted in the American killed and three prisoners taken.<sup>67</sup>

Corporal Charles T. Blanchard occupied an *abris* with nine Company D men during the bombardment. When the bombardment stopped Blanchard saw the **stosstruppen** coming towards them from two or three different directions. The Americans were cornered. They saw at once that it was to be a fight for their lives. The soldiers loaded, cocked and made everything ready to stand off the **stosstruppen**. It wasn’t long to wait, for they they were spotted. Twenty **stosstruppen** moved in. Blanchard and his fellow soldiers rushed them and fired a volley into their midst, dropping several. The **stosstruppen** returned fire with a machine gun. The Americans scrambled for cover. With the machine gun providing cover two **stosstruppen** with **flammenwerfer** rushed into the room and fired. Corporal Blanchard’s mess sergeant colleague was burned by the flame. In turn the building caught fire. More **stosstruppen** arrived, making the odds three to one in favor of the Germans. Blanchard and his fellow soldiers fixed bayonets to their rifles and proceeded to charge into the **stosstruppen** mass. Their audacity worked—the **stosstruppen** scattered.<sup>68</sup> Private Arthur F. Socia was surrounded by advancing **stosstruppen**.

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<sup>61</sup> Reports of dead German officers did not match the casualties that 259.Res.I.R. forwarded to Gruppe Gorz. Leutenant Schmidt (Sturmtruppen.14) and Leutant Tabke bodies were recovered and buried by the Germans the next day. Rau, “Report of Action Morning of April 20<sup>th</sup> 1918.”

<sup>62</sup> Conn. Vets Remember Seicheprey, James S. Jackson, *Hartford Courant*, Apr 17, 1927.

<sup>63</sup> Grant, “Report on 26<sup>th</sup> Division affair of April 20th.”

<sup>64</sup> *History of the 102<sup>nd</sup>, United States Infantry*, 12-13; Taylor, 124; Sibley, 144.

<sup>65</sup> Grant, “Report on 26<sup>th</sup> Division affair of April 20th.”

<sup>66</sup> Rau, “Report of Action Morning of April 20<sup>th</sup> 1918.”

<sup>67</sup> v. Bornstedt, 188.

<sup>68</sup> Corporal Charles T. Blanchard quoted in Hills, 14-15; *Hartford Courant*, August 18, 1918 in Michael E.Shay, *The Yankee Division in the First World War, In the Highest Tradition* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 81-82; Coan, 50.

Socia and several soldiers rushed a machine gun nest set up on the advance. The machine gun was silenced but Socia was the only survivor. He managed to return into Seicheprey crawling from shell hole to shell hole.<sup>69</sup> Corporal Blanchard saw Private Viberts, an infantry signal man, fight with incredible intensity killing several Germans. Viberts went through the entire struggle without a scratch, suffering only a tear to his uniform from a bullet. At one moment in the hand to hand combat Viberts implored one of his Company D friends not to bayonet a wounded **stosstruppen**. Unfortunately, the **stosstruppen** didn't appreciate Vibert's gesture for he attempted to throw a **handgranat**. Viberts' colleague didn't hold back this time and killed him with his bayonet.<sup>70</sup>

Lieutenant A.P. Thorpe's Battery B, 103<sup>rd</sup> Field Artillery was positioned directly north of Seicheprey—one of three anti-tank gun units. When the attack commenced, the battery became infantry with each man fighting with the remnants of Company D, using pistols, hand grenades, machine guns and such rifles salvaged from the dead. Thorpe's anti-tankers that survived the onslaught became artillerymen once more and were ordered back to their batteries.<sup>71</sup>

Captain Stanchfield's machine guns posted around Seicheprey took a serious beating. The initial barrage that led the **stosstruppen** advance cut off all of Company B and part of Company A's positions. Three of the guns manned by Company B were captured along with all of their crews. Four of the Company A guns were blown up and destroyed by the barrage. The remaining two guns of Company B were mounted by Stanchfield in pill boxes in Seicheprey.<sup>72</sup> One gun had been destroyed so the replacement gun unit set up outside the rubble without benefit of shelter. He discovered the guns and crews that occupied right side of the village and in the trench left of Seicheprey had been captured. One gun emplacement in the orchard to the north side of the village had been hit by a shell knocking the gun out the emplacement, killing one man and wounding another, the balance of the crew had escaped. The crew managed to immediately remove their gun and set up a new field of fire from an intact Pill Box. Captain Stanchfield observed many signs of a hard struggle at all the machine gun positions that occupied the right and left of Seicheprey.<sup>73</sup>

At dawn's first light Major Rau set out to determine the extent of German occupation outside of Seicheprey. It was important to determine what strength and where the Germans were after the bugle sounded. Two combat groups were hastily formed from runners, orderlies, cooks, telephone men defending the wall around Rau's PC. They were sent forward to discover if the Sibille Trench was occupied by the enemy and gain an appreciation how far the **stosstruppen** had fallen back. Major Rau asked his 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion counterpart, Captain Clarence Thompson, to organize his fourteen man patrol and proceed to the west of Seicheprey. Rau also ordered his acting battalion adjutant, Lieutenant Strickland, to lead a ten man patrol down *boyau* Mayennaise. Thompson divided the patrol into two sections. Color Sergeant Church, acting as Battalion Sergeant Major, and Sergeant Smith of Headquarters Company, in charge of signal detachment, both took the extreme left of Captain Thompson's party with several of the battalion

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<sup>69</sup> Private Socia was a recipient of a Silver Star citation. Strickland, 136.

<sup>70</sup> Corporal Charles T. Blanchard quoted in Hills, 15.

<sup>71</sup> *History of Battery B*, 56; Kernan and Samson, *103rd Field Artillery*, 39.

<sup>72</sup> Major Murphy, April 27, 1918, Box 55, 102<sup>nd</sup> Infantry, RG 120, NARA.

<sup>73</sup> Capt Stanchfield, Report of Operations of April 20-21, April 26<sup>th</sup> 1918, Box 55, 26<sup>th</sup> Division, RG 120, NARA.

liaison men. All through the town and up to within twenty paces of battalion headquarters they saw remains of both Germans and Americans. Artillery shells were still falling on the ragged and littered street of the town as the two patrols worked down toward the front lines to gain information as to what was taking place.<sup>74</sup>

Major Rau ordered Lieutenant Moore to take the men which had been pushed out to the left flank. Lieutenant Strickland took his patrol to the right flank to reconnoiter that sector. His patrol also went north and found survivors and casualties from Company D that had engaged in hand-to-hand combat. Strickland recalled, “The men of Connecticut had held the line until annihilated! There they were, dead—in windrows almost, out in front of the fire trenches which by reason of the mud made poor places from which to fight.”<sup>75</sup> Strickland, at great risk to himself attempted to rescue two men lying nearby with his soldiers providing cover. Unfortunately, they were dead—killed by artillery fire.<sup>76</sup> Captain Clarence Thompson ordered Color Sergeant Church’s platoon to proceed to the west and hold *boyau* Nantais [northwest of Seicheprey] with the men he still had. Thompson returned to see Major Rau at 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion PC. Church organized a patrol and proceeded for the northern edge of Seicheprey. Throughout this time his bravery and leadership in combat was cited as inspirational to everyone. As soon as that was reached and Church confirmed his area was cleared of **stosstruppen**, the patrol established a line of defense using *boyau* Nantais and walls and buildings along the edge of Seicheprey as shelter. Acting under orders from Lieutenant Strickland, Church then reported to Major Rau that his squad was holding the lower edge of Seicheprey, but had seen nothing of Company C or the remaining soldiers from Company D.<sup>77</sup> Rau started out through the center of the town, and upon arriving near the northern edge saw 15 or 18 of the enemy under an open shed. He commenced fire with his pistol and the **stosstruppen** left. In the meantime the line in the rear, without any command from Rau followed him through the streets and debris. Rau’s personal leadership quality came through. He looked back and found his newly stood up unit covering his back.<sup>78</sup> The American moved forward to the north side of Seicheprey where they found **stosstruppen** occupying American trenches. A few well directed pistol shots from members of the patrols brought some of the “free lancing” German raiders to the ground.<sup>79</sup>

### Prisoners of War

Private Walter Wolf recalled seeing Seicheprey full of **sturmtruppen** [from **Sturmbattalion.14’s b-Kompagnie**]. Five of his colleagues left towards Rau’s PC to join the remaining Americans in the struggle. Wolf stayed behind to fill his pockets with hand grenades. It proved to be a costly decision for at the exact moment Wolf took to acquire the weapons **sturmtruppen** suddenly appeared next to him. Wolf rushed into a dugout and hid behind a wooden partition hoping **sturmtruppen** would pass him by in the confusion of the moment. Unfortunately, he had lit a candle at the entrance of the dugout which alerted **sturmtruppen** that “they knew damn well that some bird was hiding there. Quite nonchalantly a few potato mashers came floating in, while I was busy bandaging my wrist. The thin partition saved me. All was quiet again. I peeked out,

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<sup>74</sup> Rau, “Report of Action Morning of April 20<sup>th</sup> 1918.”; Church, 25 April 1918.; Strickland, 134-135.

<sup>75</sup> Strickland, 135; Coffman, *The War to End All Wars*, 149.

<sup>76</sup> Strickland, 135.

<sup>77</sup> Color Sergeant Church received a Silver Star citation for this operation. Church, 25 April 1918.

<sup>78</sup> Rau, “Report of Action Morning of April 20<sup>th</sup> 1918.”

<sup>79</sup> Strickland, 135-136.

only to find the nozzle of a liquid fire gun pointed directly at me. Choosing between Scylla and Charybdis, I trotted right out among the boys. This gave them great pleasure. One big fellow going through my pocket with one hand, clapped me on the back with the other, saying 'Don't be afraid.' One thing they did not get, however, my watch, which previous to coming out I had dropped down the neck of my shirt, and it now rested in my trouser leg. This watch I still have. The search completed, I was marched to the rear."<sup>80</sup>

Battery C, 103 Field Artillery, under the command of Sergeant Harold "Pa" Tucker manned the front-line anti-tank gun. In their northeast Seicheprey dugout to the right of the ruined church Sergeant Tucker and his "C" battery-men Corporal Lee, Privates Sefton, Sutcliffe, Cardell, Collins, Petochelli, and Goldman were waiting for the barrage to lift. At the moment that they thought the barrage had stopped Tucker's team rushed outside the dugout right into a horde of **Sturmabteilung.14's b-Kompagnie** surging through the narrow street next to the church. A star shell alerted them that something was amiss. The uniforms weren't American or French. A momentary glare from star shells revealed strange uniforms surrounding them and making them prisoners of war. Battery C's anti-tankers found themselves surrounded and were forced to surrender.<sup>81</sup>

At the 102<sup>nd</sup> Machine Gun dugout on the northeast side of the village Lieutenant Walter Tenney and his medic Private Enoch Doble directly experienced how **Sturmabteilung.14's c-Kompagnie** assaulted a large dugout. In the dim foggy light at the opening above the back exit of the dugout located on the northeast side of the village south of Seine Cemetery, Tenney and Doble could see silhouetted **sturmmtruppen** figures with the unmistakable German helmets approaching fast. A foggy dawn was beginning to break when suddenly the firing stopped and Private Doble could hear his corporal yelling. "It's French soldiers." Lieutenant Tenney recognized the mistake and responded, "I'll run to the gun positions." However, he came out into the smothering fire from the **stosstruppen's** indirect machine gun fire and quickly returned. Bullets and flying debris drove the dugout crew away from the entrance down the steps for safety. Unfortunately the dugout was no longer a sanctuary. A **handgranaten** exploded close to where they stood. In a rush the soldiers moved all the way down the dugout steps to the bottom. Two more **handgranaten** exploded halfway down the stairs. It was a sad dilemma for the newly arrived crew of gunners and medics—they were not familiar with the route to the back exit. A quick orientation followed and they discovered the back exit at the other end of the dugout. The Germans attempted to enter the dugout but Lieutenant Tenney fired a round from his weapon and they retreated. Both exits were now covered by **Sturmabteilung.14's c-Kompagnie sturmmtruppen**. A **handgranaten** slid onto the floor beside Tenney and Doble from the back exit. Quickly, Tenney picked it up and threw it back up the stairs. It exploded right in his hand and knocking everyone to the ground. Doble picked himself up in the smoke in a state of shock amazed to see Lieutenant Tenney still alive and coherent. He looked around and saw a sergeant slowly standing up. "Are you all right?" Doble called. "I think so," the sergeant answered. Doble picked up Lieutenant Tenney suffering from the fresh wounds, "I'm done, don't bother with me. Make a run for it to stand at the gun positions with the boys". Doble wiped off the blood from Tenney's face, grateful to have something to do when it was certain the next

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<sup>80</sup> Wolf cited in *History of Battery B*, 113; *History of Battery B*, 56.

<sup>81</sup> Henry T. Samson and George C. Hull, *The War Story of C Battery, One Hundred and Third U.S. Field Artillery* (Providence, RI: The Plimpton Press, 1920), 64; Kernan and Samson, *103rd Field Artillery*, 41.

**handgranaten** could kill them all. Then they heard a familiar voice at the main exit of the dugout. “It’s all right, it’s all right, don’t fire.” It was the last living member of the gun position—the rest had been killed in the assault. The **stosstruppen** had cut across the narrow passage to the town. To reinforce the precarious situation that they found themselves within the *abris*, one of the captured soldiers remarked, “They [Germans] are miles in back of us.” The **sturmtruppen** had told him to tell the crew in the dugout to come out or they would blow them out. After a short conference, the remaining Americans came out the front stairway toward the opening there, with their hands above the heads. The *abris* emptied to several **sturmtruppen** pointing long-muzzled automatics. One of the **sturmtruppen** without warning fired his automatic straight at Tenney and Doble as they exited the dugout. The bullet added another wound to Tenney—this time in the left calf—and tore through Doble’s uniform.<sup>82</sup>

Two **sturmtruppen** freed the Americans of their sidearms. They began to go through pockets, taking booty they might find to their liking—a preference was the valuable rubber boots the men wore. Doble for some reason was overlooked. A young German **sergeant**, tall and blonde, pretended to go through Tenney and Doble’s pockets. Doble had \$100.00 in American Express checks, pictures of his parents and his home in Quincy, Massachusetts. He took nothing at all. Then the **sergeant** said in very good English, “Will you please take care of the lieutenant’s wounds, and let me know when you are ready to move?” Doble rebandaged Tenney’s shattered hand and again cleaned the blood from his face and eyes, thinking Tenney had lost his vision. Doble signaled that they were ready. The **sergeant** repeated, “Will you please take care of your lieutenant.” Doble put his arm around Lieutenant Tenney’s waist and the two struggled across No Man’s Land.<sup>83</sup>

Top Sergeant Erving “Pete” A. Dresser and Private Ed Clark were assigned to 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Headquarters in the center of Seicheprey. As the barrage opened up, Clark and fourteen companions were asleep in a small *abris*. They had become adjusted to the “big shells,” and realized the barrage was impacting their location. After two hours of barrage Clark noticed a moment of quiet. Suddenly outside the dugout “all hell had broken loose.” Three **handgranaten** were thrown inside the *abris*. One landed square on Clark’s bed with the other two landing adjacent to the bed frame. When they exploded Clark remembered “they took me along with them and I had my left thumb nearly blown off, my hands filled with shrapnel, also my face and eyes, and a small wound in my right arm and my ears stunned so that I couldn’t hear.” Clark picked himself up and found that he “was a long ways from dead.” **Battalion Grumbrecht’s d-Kompagnie (3./259 Maus, Hans) and Leutnant Thomas, Reserve. Pionier Kompagnie. 80, Landwehr II**, engaged in crossfire with Clark and his comrades. After a few minutes another moment of quiet ensued. Then fifteen **handgranaten** flew into the dugout. The resulting explosions killed several soldiers and badly wounded the rest. Clark escaped death but received another wound—this time to his leg. Top Sergeant Dresser and the rest surrendered and came out of the *abris*.<sup>84</sup>

## Medical Aid

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<sup>82</sup> Doble, 23-24.

<sup>83</sup> Doble, 24.

<sup>84</sup> Bomb Landed in His Bed but Lad Escaped Death, *Hartford Courant*, Aug 18, 1918

In his postbattle writings Colonel Parker paid glowing tribute to the Sanitary Detachment and recommended for Distinguish Service Cross the regimental surgeon Dr. Charles W. Comfort slipped through the barrage fire and with a detail from the Medical Detachment. Medical Aid arrived at locations outside of Seicheprey about 0800 and the dressing of wounded began. Evacuation of the seriously wounded began and they were evacuated over the top of the trenches. Dr. Comfort worked among the wounded in the shelter of the remains of a wall of Seicheprey masonry. He administered first-aid for 36 hours without rest or relief to numerous wounded in the open, almost constantly under heavy artillery fire, and assisted in their evacuation thereby setting an example of heroic performance of his duties under the most trying circumstances. Private John R. Cannon was the only surviving member of the medical platoon—the rest were either killed or captured. Cannon, emerging from the aid station saw a street full of **stosstruppen** running in his direction. Cannon quickly rolled into a ditch and kept quiet. The **stosstruppen** rushed past him and captured Lieutenant Joseph P. Burke and the rest of the medics in the aid station. Later after working on the wounded all day, Private Cannon was struck by a piece of shrapnel, which necessitated the amputation of his leg. There were incidents where German machine guns were sniping at the party digging out the buried men even though the Red Cross flag was in plain sight. Colonel Parker was effusive in his praise of the Sanitary Detachment working in the open despite the serious risk without regard to their own safety.<sup>85</sup>

There were incidents of humane treatment from both sides. Major Rau found two wounded Americans north of Seicheprey, each with a hot canteen of coffee and a food container placed beside him, and both of them neatly bandaged up by the German enemy. Sergeant Fred A. Tyrrell, Company F, recalled that some wounded American prisoners were found in the field with their wounds bound up.<sup>86</sup> Later in the week after the battle a burial party sent out to bury a dead German soldier between the lines was fired on from the German line. The American party held up a wooded cross to be used to mark the grave. The firing stopped and the burial party was allowed to complete its work without molestation.<sup>87</sup>

As **Battalion Grumbrecht's d-Kompagnie (3./259 Maus, Hans)** and **Leutnant Thomas, Reserve. Pionier Kompagnie. 80, Landwehr II** converged on the southern limits of Seicheprey, Corporal Robert Conroy's pet Stubby climbed out of the Beaumont trenches close by the 102<sup>nd</sup> Regiment PC and was injured by artillery shrapnel that struck his left foreleg and causing an ugly wound. Everyone around Stubby learned he was hit when he howled and yelped with pain. He limped back to the shelter in the trench where the headquarters company medic dressed and bound the wound. After the battle and for the remainder of his time at Beaumont, Stubby recuperated in the safety of Conroy's *abris*.

### **Rau Determines German Intentions**

At 0700 a wounded **stosstruppen** was reported captured by Major Rau's men fighting at the northern edge of Seicheprey.<sup>88</sup> The first information as to the magnitude of the "raid" came from

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<sup>85</sup> Later in the war, Dr Comfort was awarded a bronze oak leaf for his Distinguished Service Cross for administering first-aid to the wounded under violent artillery and machine gun fire on the front line. Parker, "Raid April 20-21st on Beaumont Zone."; Strickland, 142-143; Sibley, 143.

<sup>86</sup> Fred Tyrrell, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, MHI.

<sup>87</sup> Parker, "Raid April 20-21st on Beaumont Zone."

<sup>88</sup> Telephone Log, Box 42, 102<sup>nd</sup> Regiment, RG 120, NARA.

Major Rau, a native of Alsace and fluent in German, interrogating the **stosstruppen**, who later was evacuated to the hospital. The prisoner told Rau that the attack was made by 1200 storm troops and two battalions of reserve infantry; one battalion of which was to attack on the French front. Rau learned that the center of attack was Seicheprey. One thousand or more line troops of the enemy were in reserve in front and to the flanks of each sub-sector. A raid with the purpose of possessing Seicheprey, to be followed by the seizure of the heights of Beaumont ridge, had been the enemy's plan—to effect a lodgment on the Metz-St. Dizier Road. Then the **stosstruppen** were to counter-attack fiercely with the hopes that they would break through the French-American counter-attack and attain the 1-Bis line which had been weakened then attack a second time with all German forces, sweeping through to gain *Bois du Jury* and the St Dizier-Metz Road—holding the ground captured. The enemy was to fall back somewhat before this counter-attack.<sup>89</sup> Major Bowditch in his report to Chaumont stated that “No verification of this story was ever secured.”<sup>90</sup>

Rau's prisoner was subsequently interrogated by *2<sup>e</sup> Bureau, 32<sup>e</sup> corps d'armée*. What they learned went beyond **Generalmajor** von Stolzmann's plan: To make prisoners and maintain in sector troops which the allies might intend to send to the Somme battlefield; possibly to oblige the Allies to bring reinforcements into this southern Woëvre front area; in any case to cause Allies to use up as much ammunition as possible. The raid's objectives showed Seicheprey village was to be occupied and held until the Allies launched a counter-attack. The details reflected what was the true force. The estimate of the strength of the German assault was close to the truth, showing 100 men from **Sturm Battalion.14**, the entire **Res. I. R. 259**, and two or three companies from **Res. I. R. 258** which has a mission to protect the west flank of the attack. **Sturm Battalion.14** was equipped with five or six small model **MW**. Each **Res. I. R. 259** **kompagnie** was likewise equipped with one **flammenwerfer**. The prisoner heard that the artillery was to be considerably reinforced during the attack—the report labeled this comment as ‘No details.’<sup>91</sup> The interrogatory had to be interrupted because of the condition of the wounded man. The report concluded, “It will be continued later.”<sup>92</sup> The prisoner's condition was critical at capture. Whatever information *2<sup>e</sup> Bureau* gleaned from the prisoner ceased when he died two days later from the wounds received at Seicheprey.

At this stage of the battle the only successful communication between headquarters and battalion was through runners. That morning at Seicheprey, runners became casualties almost as soon as they started with their messages. Some of them were found later, dead or wounded in shell holes or along the road. Some were never found.<sup>93</sup> Runners set out at 0410 from Seicheprey and eventually arrived at Colonel Parker's PC at 0633. It was then that Parker learned from Rau, “*Boche* are attacking in force. We are holding yet. Send a barrage Normal. We will hold.”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> The historical record showed the prisoner had fabricated most of the battle plan in almost all aspect. It was a theme covered by many after the war, to include Frank Sibley. Rau, “Report of Action Morning of April 20<sup>th</sup> 1918.”; Collins, “Raid on Seicheprey.”; “Bowditch letter to Colonel Craig”; Strickland, 135.

<sup>90</sup> “Bowditch letter to Colonel Craig.”

<sup>91</sup> Headquarters 26<sup>th</sup> Division, G-2, (translation of 32<sup>nd</sup> Army Corps, 2<sup>nd</sup> Bureau, “Report of the Interrogatory of a Wounded Prisoner of the 259<sup>th</sup> Reserve.” Box 12, 26<sup>th</sup> Division, RG 120, NARA; “Telephone Log,” Box 42, RG 120, NARA.

<sup>92</sup> Report of the Interrogatory of a Wounded Prisoner of the 259<sup>th</sup> Reserve.”

<sup>93</sup> Taylor, 123; LaBranche, 114.

<sup>94</sup> “Colonel Parker Memo to Brigadier General Traub memorandum.”

Shortly after two more messages came from Rau giving details of the fight. “1200 *Boches* attack are still in our front line send barrage quick. Put barrage on our front line trenches they are working toward us. RAU.” More information dribbled in from Rau providing Colonel Parker with his first understanding of what was actually the situation in Seicheprey. “The enemy put down a very heavy barrage, set kitchen on fire most all dugouts knocked down. 1<sup>st</sup> Aid station down flat. No doctor. Boche followed barrage by big raid, drove men as far as Battalion P.C. Drove them back here beyond our front line. Am holding large number wounded, some captured have not exact figures, send ambulance or stretcher bearers and doctor. Have taken position farther edge of town still holding still shelling. Started at 0315 attack at about 0430. RAU”<sup>95</sup> Parker repeated Rau’s message to Brigadier General Traub highlighting the fact that Germans penetrated Seicheprey with a 1200 man assault force and had been driven back to the edge of the town where Rau was holding. He added that Major Rau quickly wanted a barrage on his front line; had experienced a large number of wounded and needed ambulances, stretcher bearers and a doctor. Finally, Parker added that artillery fire was coming from St. Baussant and *Bois de Remieres*.<sup>96</sup>

Rau’s intelligence officer, Lieutenant Frederick Oberlin, arrived at Seicheprey around 0800 and continued the interrogation of the three German prisoner’s and confirmed Rau’s suspicions. It suggested to Rau and those in command that the German attack was intended to remain in place, hence the requirement to bring additional essentials and ammunition. This complicated analysis of German intentions—analysis which governed commander’s decisions for the next twenty-four hours.<sup>97</sup>

### Indelible Memories

Colonel Parker, Lieutenant Colonel Dowell, and Lieutenant Leavenworth left the 102<sup>nd</sup> Infantry PC around 0600 and proceeded to the front lines down the hill from Beaumont to see for themselves the extent of combat underway. Parker’s sudden departure from his PC left some wondering where he was. The artillery barrage blasted away at his sector. The three officers rushed out and proceeded to traverse the main *boyau* rallying troops and strengthening their resolve to defend the ridge with whatever means possible. Throughout this time, Colonel Parker repeatedly climbed upon the firing step of the trench, being of large physical stature, he presented a very visible target to both Americans in the *boyau* and Germans down the hill. Colonel Parker stood with his back to the barrage despite shell splinters falling about him, and commenced calmly talking to his men get ready for the oncoming battle. Private Julius T. Fedel, Sanitary Detachment, 101<sup>st</sup> Engineers, recalled later in life that Parker called out, “Say fellows, there is nothing happening, you are just as safe here as you would be at home.” Fedel said his calm demeanor put a damper on their fear—“if he could do it then so could we.”<sup>98</sup> His decisive and courageous manner greatly buttressed their resolve in a rapidly deteriorating situation. The

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<sup>95</sup> Field Messages, 20 April 1918. Box 19, 102<sup>nd</sup> Regiment, RG 120, NARA.

<sup>96</sup> “Colonel Parker Memo to Brigadier General Traub memorandum.”

<sup>97</sup> “Colonel Parker Memo to Brigadier General Traub memorandum.”

<sup>98</sup> Private Julius T. Fedel, quoted in 26<sup>th</sup> Division videotape.

men proceeded to do their duty under fire. It was the first of four Distinguished Service Crosses that Colonel Parker earned in battles that he fought the next five months of the war.<sup>99</sup>

Legend revolved around Colonel Parker from this battle—suggesting he went into the trenches to encourage his men and found a machine gun that had been silenced because its crew had been killed. Two dead Americans lay beside the gun. Parker was then quoted as saying “If these brave boys can stick to their post like that I can do a little.” He operated the machine gun until relieved.<sup>100</sup>

Lieutenant Colonel Dowell proceeded further down the trench line to ascertain whether the heavy barrage in progress was designed to destroy the barbed wire entanglements to allow the Germans to push their attack through that designated point. The troops in place were at the verge of breakdown from the barrage. Dowell spent the time working with the soldiers and calming their nerves with words of encouragement to ready them for an attack.<sup>101</sup>

During Colonel Parker’s temporary absence four horsemen from the east galloped under fire and arrived at the 102<sup>nd</sup> Infantry PC. Sibley related that *Colonel Jules-Alexandre Bertrand* and his senior staff from *162<sup>e</sup> Régiment d’infanterie* wanted to congratulate Parker on the defense they had demonstrated. As he road towards Beaumont, German observers reported a cavalry attack in progress and directed artillery at Bertrand. Fortunately, they arrived safely at the PC.<sup>102</sup> The French quickly exchanged information with the 102<sup>nd</sup> Infantry staff on the evolving battle.<sup>103</sup> When Parker returned he discussed with Bertrand on what they both perceived were the German’s assault objectives as it concerned Position 1-Bis and the Beaumont ridge. German conquest of Beaumont meant a substantial gain for commanding the area, providing additional high ground in addition to Montsec to better engage the entire *32<sup>e</sup> corps d’armee* southern Woëvre front area. Standing orders from both *armée* and *corps* required every man to defend Position 1-Bis at all costs.<sup>104</sup>

At this time Colonel Parker’s French liaison advisor, *commandant* du Boisrouvray also took action to better understand German intentions for the attack and proceeded to head into the battle zone during the height of the barrage, fearlessly disregarding danger to himself to secure information for tactical dispositions and artillery support. His efforts were successful for his understanding of the situation combined with the information passed to infantry and artillery command assisted the headquarter’s awareness of what was transpiring. For this heroic act *commandant* du Boisrouvray was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.<sup>105</sup> In his postwar work *With the Yankee Division in France*, Frank Sibley paid *commandant* du Boisrouvray the highest complement. “Major de Boisrouvray was a French officer who represented the best type, the very beau ideal of a French officer. His record is written on his breast, where the batterie de cuisine, (kitchenware) as the French call their rows of decorations, is formidable and suggestive

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<sup>99</sup> Military Times Hall of Valor.

<sup>100</sup> Hinman, 57.

<sup>101</sup> Dowell received the Silver Star citation for this brave act. “Recommendation for the Award of the D.S.C.” [draft], Box 15, Edwards Papers, MHS,

<sup>102</sup> Sibley, 148.

<sup>103</sup> du Boisrouvray, 353.

<sup>104</sup> Collins, “Raid on Seicheprey.”

<sup>105</sup> Stringer, 62.

of dare-devil fighting. Though a major, he had commanded a regiment, and he was known and adored throughout the French armies.”<sup>106</sup> *Commandant* du Boisrouvray had earned the second highest award for bravery in the U.S. Army.

Major John Gallant was awakened along with the rest of the 102<sup>nd</sup> Infantry by the early morning artillery barrage while at Beaumont. He proceeded to the 102<sup>nd</sup> Infantry headquarters to assist. Reports were not coming in so Gallant volunteered to go forward and fix the problem. At 0800 Parker sent Gallant to the 1-Bis position just to the north of the 102<sup>nd</sup> Infantry PC known as the cave to organize the service and relay the reports. When Colonel Parker ordered reinforcement of Seicheprey, Gallant organized the Company B into *GC's* and developed new observation posts from remaining elements.<sup>107</sup> Somehow in the confusion of the morning Colonel Parker credited Major Gallant for retaking Seicheprey. The absence of communication between Seicheprey and Beaumont was the culprit. Parker wrongly assumed in his initial report to the 51<sup>st</sup> Brigade that sending Gallant forward with Company B made the difference. An amended credit for the recapture of Seicheprey went to Major Rau and Captain Thompson in Parker's subsequent report to 51<sup>st</sup> Brigade.<sup>108</sup>

Battery F, the most exposed of all the American batteries near Dead Man's Curve fired for ten hours straight and spent all their HE rounds in the morning barrage. They also lost communication with the outside as the battle commenced. The last report they received from their battalion was alarming. “Germans enter Seicheprey—still coming.” Battery F men removed their shoes and put on rubber boots. At the same time they distributed more revolver ammunition. Lieutenant Thompson, battery commander, ordered shrapnel to be cut for 50 meters and the 75mm gun tubes leveled at the Beaumont Ridge. Battery F men didn't know if the next man coming over the ridge was the enemy. One of the team got out his box of cigars from home passed them around. He didn't want the Germans to get the cigars and he wanted his mates to have a “real one” for a last smoke. Later after the firing had quieted down all Battery F had a good laugh when their magnanimous counterpart regretted his kindness for he escaped being captured or killed after all.<sup>109</sup> At Corporal Ernest LaBranche's Battery E, the possibility of Germans coming over Beaumont ridge was equally frightening. Their battery received orders to prepare to retreat. The men were quickly briefed that as the first waves of retreating infantry passed they were to man certain defenses near the battery and await word to move south. The 75mm pieces were to be rendered useless by a welding shell—only to be used in extreme emergency. Both men and the disabling shell were placed at the ready.<sup>110</sup>

Private Enoch Doble's brother Kendall, watched the battle from his position in a trench overlooking Seicheprey from Beaumont ridge. He told Enoch after the war that the worst and most intense German barrage the 26<sup>th</sup> Division experienced in the entire war was at Seicheprey that morning. Kendall was in every battle that the 26<sup>th</sup> Division fought that year.<sup>111</sup> Private Earl

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<sup>106</sup> Sibley, 91.

<sup>107</sup> John Gallant, Appendix A in Sibley, 357-358.

<sup>108</sup> Chaumont staff were initially informed that Major Gallant was officer responsible for retaking Seicheprey. “Message for Chief of Staff, 1<sup>st</sup> Corps, and G-3, G.H.Q. April 20, 1918,” Box 19, 102<sup>nd</sup> Regiment, RG 120, NARA; “Field Message 2 26-32.16,”

<sup>109</sup> Mozley, 27.

<sup>110</sup> LaBranche, 113-114.

<sup>111</sup> Doble, 24.

Yeomans' company held the line down the hill from Beaumont. His unit was able to look down into Seicheprey and see the actual hand-to-hand fighting from a distance—being so far away they were powerless to assist. Their mission was to hold the 1-Bis sector.<sup>112</sup>

As Sergeant Fred Tyrrell's patrol reoccupied ground north of Seicheprey one of his soldier's gave him a note found on a sand bag. It read "Did we make you run Yanks? More are coming."<sup>113</sup>

Major Bruns' reserve companies followed in the third wave with heavy machine-guns, light **MW**, **granatenwerfer**, medical personnel, stretcher-bearer parties and carrying parties with ammunition and equipment. The necessary distribution in depth was made immediately after the first wave reached their first objective. Two groups of four light **MW** on flat trajectory gun carriages were assigned to accompany the third wave, taking up positions that supported the **stosstruppen** by combatting isolated posts of resistance with direct fire. **Hauptmann Tolle's e-Kompagnie (Reserve-Kompagnie, 8./259 Wegener)** served the third wave force, employing heavy machine-guns and fell in line behind **Kompagnie C** and **Kompagnie D. 8./259 Wegener** searched the occupied trenches and then prepared for defense setting up the heavy machine-guns. Despite the delayed role, **Leutnant Wegener's kompagnie** suffered loss of an officer and 22 soldiers from the Seicheprey attack.<sup>114</sup> When the **stosstruppen** returned from Seicheprey the **MW** assumed positions that produced a protective barrage before the newly gained front line. Heavy machine-guns were used at *Bois de Remieres* and at those points where a particularly favorable fire effect justified their use in the front line. Heavy machine-guns were in place to support the first waves as well as ward off whatever counter-attack was experienced. Flank support to **Kirschblüte** was provided by **Model 08 machine guns** fired through gaps in the German's own line or by firing over it and two **Sturm Battalion.14** guns from the infantry gun battery. Southwest of Lahayville lay the primary west flank for **Kirschblüte**. North of *Bois du Jury* on the east flank saw identical alignment of enfilading fire. **MW** fired on both flanks of the attack for the entire 90 minutes that the attack required.<sup>115</sup>

What alarmed the Germans reflecting on the battle a week later was Americans fought while sitting on walls of houses and remains of the church, inflicting losses on **sturmtruppen** and **stosstruppen** before being discovered—disappearing in the rubble to fight again. A tribute by German combatants to their enemy at Seicheprey came from three members of the elite **Sturm Battalion.14. Unteroffizier Hummel, Grenadier Karasiewicz, and Grenadier Baier** assess "American resistance in front of the main line of resistance, in the main line of resistance and in the supporting positions in front of the village of Seicheprey, was stubborn. Every man had to be overpowered individually. The light machine guns of the Americans fired up to the last moment. Since the troops occupying the village did not want to come out of their dugouts, but defended the entrances, individual combats, man against man, took place."<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Unknown author, Earl Yeomans papers, 102<sup>nd</sup> Infantry, USAMHI.

<sup>113</sup> Fred Tyrrell Papers, 102d Regiment files, MHI.

<sup>114</sup> v.Bornstedt, 179-180; 78. R.D. War Files.

<sup>115</sup> 78. R.D. War Files.

<sup>116</sup> Outline of Military Intelligence Organization of Deputy General Staff in Berlin III. Dennis E. Nolan Papers, USAMHI.

