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### Title

The Battle of St. Quentin Canal and the American Experience in World War I

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Sydney Leigh Martin  
Library Research Award Reflective Essay

As a freshman, I discovered the amazing resources of UCSB's Special Collections when working as a Research Assistant in the library. Early in 2016, while exploring documents from Special Research Collections for Professor John Lee's historical exhibition, *Helmets of the First World War: Battle, Technology, and Culture* (displayed at the UCSB Library, 2016-2017), I became excited when I touched pictures, maps, and letters from over 100 years ago. This excitement led me to switch my major from Economics to History and eventually inspired my independent research for this Library Research Award Project, *The Battle of St. Quentin Canal and the American Experience in World War One*. The UCSB Library is where my passion for research started three years ago and now, as a senior, I am happy to say that my undergraduate research journey ended in the same spot on the third floor of UCSB library.

While this research stemmed from my work on the *Helmets* exhibit, it manifested itself through my interest in interpreting primary documents. The map folder in Bernath Mss. 3 was not used in the exhibit because we were not focused on the American journey throughout the war, but I knew the moment that I saw the maps that there was a story to tell. Simply the title of the folder, **American 2nd Corps: 4th Army B.E.F.**, sparked my interest, as I previously knew that the United States entered World War I very late. Still, I saved the folder for a later day and was able to revisit it with more attention.

In order to finish this research paper, I used UCSB Special Collections, Interlibrary Loan, library books, online resources, and worked with Prof. Lee and the Special Collections team to get some of my photos reproduced. After finding that Special Collections has no records of how Bernath Mss. 3 came to be donated to the library, I had to interpret why certain maps were included within the folder. After recording all of the maps, I did a lot of preliminary research on WWI battle mapping, which inspired the first section of my research paper. I realized that

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without understanding the background of something so complex as battle maps, the story of St. Quentin Canal could not be told effectively.

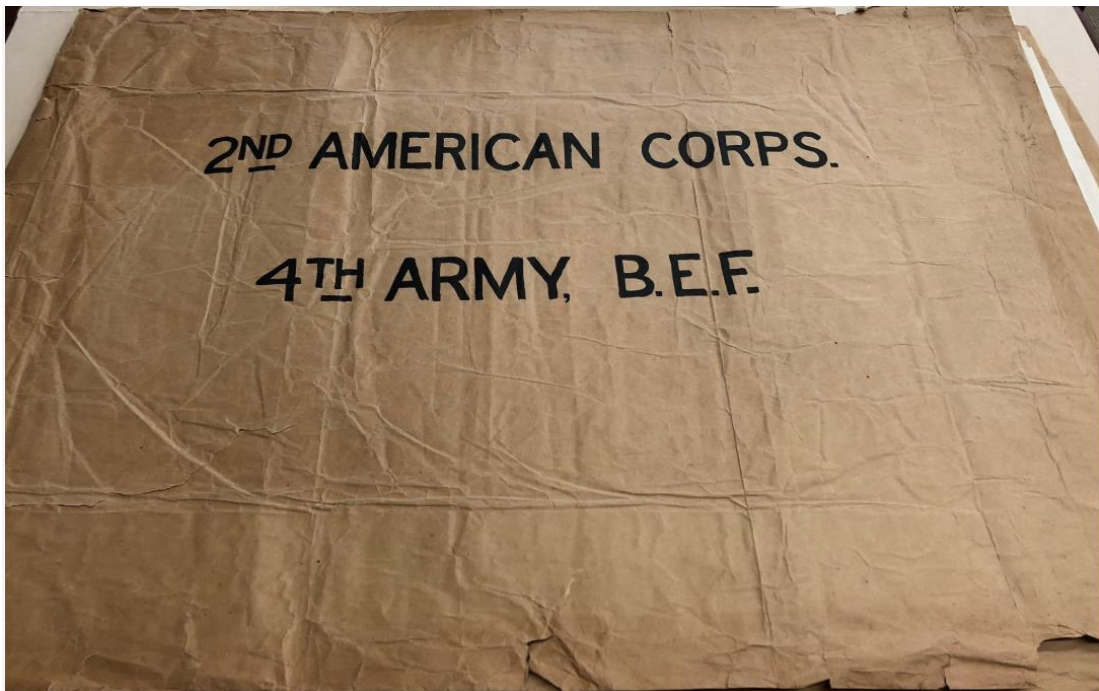
Once I confirmed that the battle maps were for the Battle of St. Quentin Canal, I was able to use Interlibrary Loan to obtain *British Military Operations: France and Belgium*, the British government's official history of the war. After mistakenly requesting the full set of about a dozen books, I carried all of them around with me for a few weeks until I found the information I needed—definitely a learning experience! I used UCSB's online resources such as ArchiveGrid and JSTOR to find photographs, personal letters, and unit histories for my paper. These sources allowed me to make an accurate and detailed analysis of this battle that has been forgotten in the teachings of World War I. However, the most important sources of all were the maps from Special Collections. They allowed me to discover the importance of Americans within the preliminary bombardment and, later, in the full attack. They also allowed me to discover how racism was laced throughout the war, even in something as simple as the names given to battlefield terrain. These small things led to a larger analysis of international racism before, during, and after the war. Finally, I worked with my research advisor, Professor Lee, to fill in the missing pieces of my project. From word choices surrounding military technology to the physical format of my research paper, Prof. Lee helped me learn how to organize and present my research.

I immersed myself in this set of maps over the past years, and, as time went on, I realized how important this project became to my development as an undergraduate student. I know now that telling the stories of the forgotten is my passion. This passion, that I discovered in my very first visit to Special Collections early in 2016, will outlast my time at UCSB and benefit me for years to come.

**“The Battle of St. Quentin Canal and the American Experience in World War I”**

**Library Research Award Submission**

**By: Sydney Leigh Martin**



## Introduction

After discovering the American A.E.F. Folder of the Bernath Mss. 3 in UCSB Special Collections in Spring 2016, I knew that there was a larger story to tell. Now, in 2019, I will use this folder to explain the narrative of the forgotten, yet important, World War I battle of St. Quentin Canal that commenced on September 27, 1918 in France. This battle, an important offensive of the attack on the German Hindenburg Line, was fought by British, Australian, and American forces. In this paper, I will examine the journey of the American Expeditionary Force's (AEF) 27<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> Divisions from being drafted in America to the aftermath of the Battle of St. Quentin. By using the battle maps discovered in Bernath Mss. 3, I will give a history of battle mapping, explain the battle, and recount the journey of the AEF's 27<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> Divisions. Next, I will utilize first-hand accounts from soldiers and leadership to derive a conclusion about the journey of the American soldier leading up to battles like this specific one.

The archives of UCSB's Special Collections and Bernath Mss. 3 made this research topic and historical investigation possible. Bernath Mss. 3 includes a large, brown paper folder with the bold, black letters spelling: **2<sup>ND</sup> AMERICAN CORPS. 4<sup>TH</sup> ARMY B.E.F.** that contains 19 battle and land survey maps. This collection of maps, over 100 years old, are a reminder of the innovative, complex system of information technology adopted by the Allied army during World War I. The construction of this system allowed soldiers to receive constantly-updated information in the midst of increasingly complex warfare. Each map within the folder surveys the various territories of France, from the small town of Bellicourt to complete Maps of France. Each map has detailed names of the surveyed areas written in red, and most of the maps this research examines revolves around the area surrounding the French towns of Bellicourt, Nauroy, and Le Catelet. Most notably, they include "Secret Copies" of battle plans, most of which have handwritten notes and extra information.

The one thing that all of the maps have in common are their dates, around September 1918. The dates of the maps and their titles reveal that this set of maps revolved around the Battle of St. Quentin Canal. The most notable maps are the ones labeled "Secret Copy," clearly revealing the Allied plan of attack on the preliminary bombardment day, September 27, 1918, and the plan for the official battle on September 29, 1918. The maps contained in Bernath Mss. 3 in conjunction with UCSB's inter-library loan, online archives and library books allowed me to detail the battle and the unwritten implications of the maps.

## **A Brief History of WWI Mapping, Communication, and Technology:**

Each World War I battle map found within this collection is typical of the types of maps utilized towards the end of the war. At the start of the Great War in 1914, military commanders relied on colorful maps located in popular French books and maps created during the Napoleon Wars. Over the course of four years, complex systems of trenches were created, new technology of aircraft emerged, and highly detailed maps of the terrain became essential to the commanders of the various armies. It was in 1916 that detailed mapping became an integral part of the war effort, commanders used 1:10,000 scaled maps for infantry movement, 1:20,000 for artillery, and 1:40,000 for battle planning.<sup>11</sup> A majority of the maps in this folder are scaled 1:20,000, indicating that these maps belonged to and were intended for the artillery units within the American Expeditionary Force.

Over time, the integration of mapping and technology were the reasons why the battle maps in this folder are so complex. These maps were created based on information acquired by examining aerial photographs—a new technology introduced by the war. War planes and kite balloons were used to survey and take photographs of the area surrounding the battlefield to accurately prepare for battle. In Image 1, we see an example of one of these photographs. The photograph was labeled to assist the army in figuring out the location of the tunnel commandeered by the Allied powers on September 29, 1918. Images like these allow us to understand why and how the maps in the 2<sup>nd</sup> American Corps folder are as detailed and informative as they were in September 1918.

At the end of the war, mapping technology grew at an immense speed for both the Allies and the Axis powers. For example, by 1918, the British Expeditionary Force (B.E.F.) controlled a cartography survey organization that consisted of over 5,000 people.<sup>2</sup> In fact, maps were integrated into the everyday lives of the B.E.F. and the soldiers who fought with them by serving as communication forms as well. Bernath Mss. 3 contains a map entitled *Message Form* which has a small scale 1:20,000 map of the battleground. Because American forces entered the war late, many of the British tactics were borrowed by Americans. This can be the explanation for the presence of Map 1 within the folder. The map also includes an empty message form on the back, shown in the image of Map 1.

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<sup>1</sup> For those confused about the numbers on these maps, they indicate that, for every one-inch on the map, there are 40,000 inches in real terrain.

Map 1 is not discussed in many publications, but its presence in the folder exemplifies the unique tactics used by the Allies during the war to effectively communicate with each other. It was an instillation of the British Army to send these maps out with their troops and, since they were included in this American folder, it can be assumed that these maps were carried by American soldiers fighting with the British Expeditionary Force during the Battle of St. Quentin Canal.<sup>2</sup> The intersection of technology and the increased reliance on mapping towards the end of the war is shown in this two-in-one map that allows soldiers to navigate their way around the battlefield and communicate by simply filling out the form and sending a messenger with it to the nearest Headquarters. This folder is essential in understanding the journey of mapping and the importance it contained throughout the Great War. By the end of the war, accurate and consistently updated maps were the key to winning a battle and staying alive.

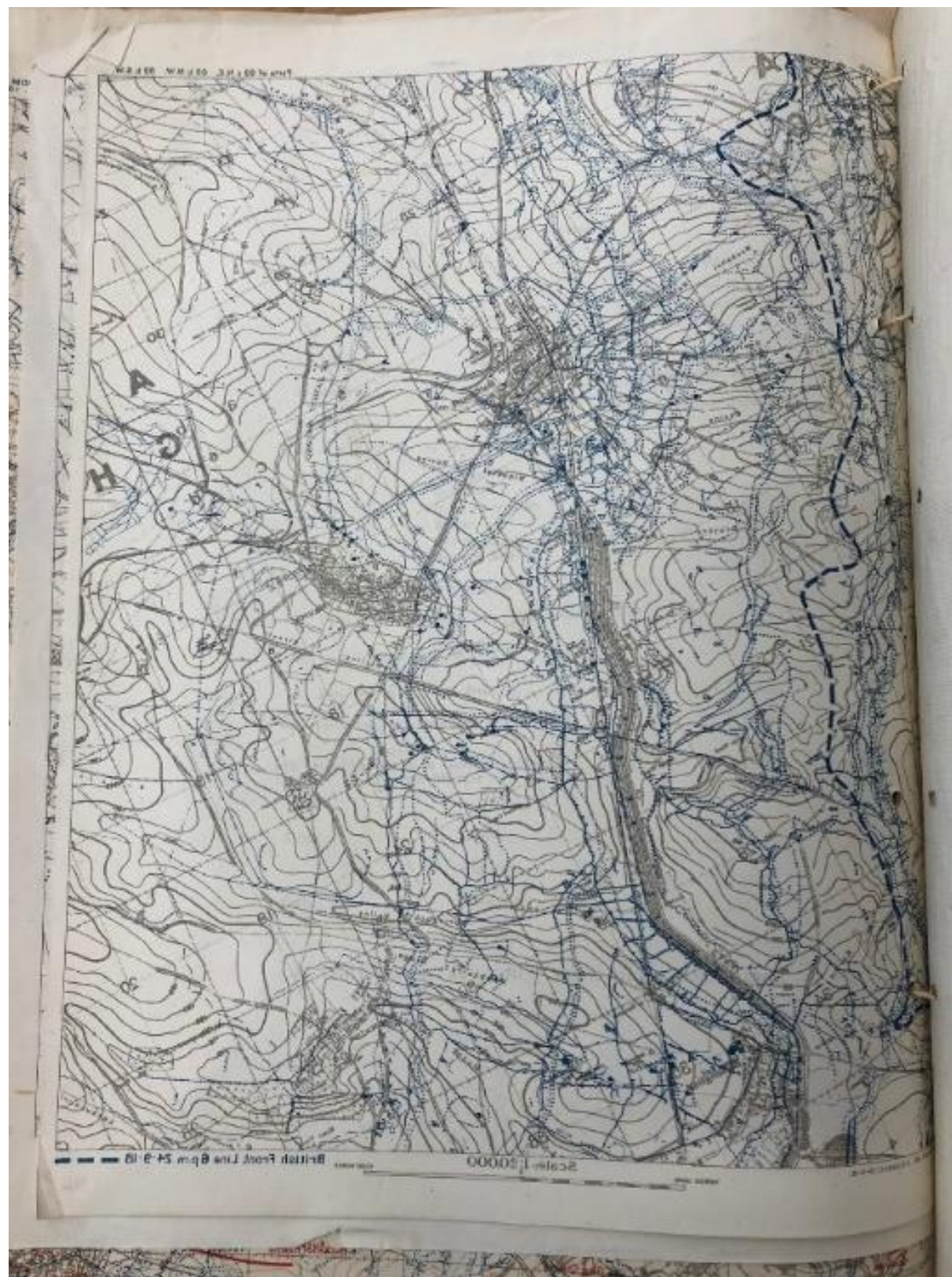
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<sup>2</sup> The first known message forms were used by British soldiers in 1917.





**Image 1: Aerial photograph of territory surrounding St. Quentin Canal, probably used to assist cartographers in creating battle maps found in Bernath Mss. 3.<sup>3</sup>**





**MESSAGE FORM.**

Division \_\_\_\_\_

Map Reference or Mark  
on Map at Back \_\_\_\_\_

1. I am at \_\_\_\_\_ and am consolidating.

2. I am at \_\_\_\_\_ and have consolidated.

3. I am at \_\_\_\_\_

4. Am held up by M.G. at \_\_\_\_\_

5. I need:

- Ammunition
- Bombs
- Rifle Grenades
- Water
- Verrey Lights
- Stokes Shells

6. Counter-attack forming up at \_\_\_\_\_

7. I am in touch with \_\_\_\_\_ on <sup>Right</sup> <sub>Left</sub> at \_\_\_\_\_

8. I am not in touch on <sup>Right</sup> <sub>Left</sub>.

9. Am being shelled from \_\_\_\_\_

10. I estimate my present strength at \_\_\_\_\_ rifles.

11. Hostile 

Battery	}	active at _____
Machine Gun		
Trench Mortar		

Time \_\_\_\_\_ m. Name \_\_\_\_\_

Platoon \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Company \_\_\_\_\_

Battalion \_\_\_\_\_

IF CAPTURED STATE ONLY YOUR NAME AND RANK.

Map 1: Map of Area surrounding St. Quentin Canal & Message Form located on Reverse.<sup>4</sup>

## **Battle of St. Quentin Canal**

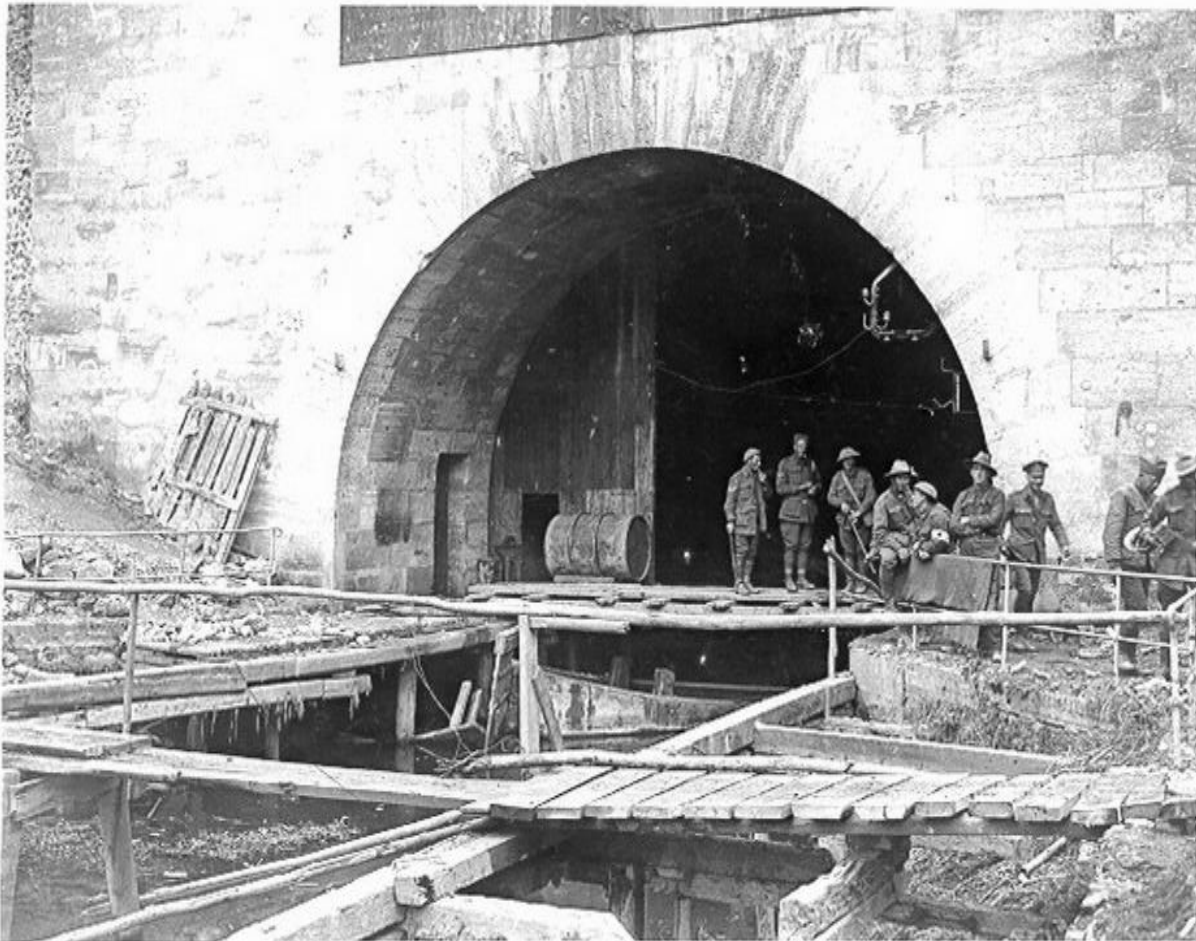
The battle maps enable us to take an unparalleled look at the important, yet forgotten, Battle of St. Quentin Canal. In September 1918, the Allies of World War I were in the midst of attacking the Hindenburg Line, a defensive position created by the German army on the Western Front. The battle of St. Quentin Canal was one of the last attempts by the Allied forces to push through this defensive position and became the first successful break of the Hindenburg line. Germans used the St. Quentin Canal as a primary point on the Hindenburg Line and the canal tunnels between Bellicourt and Bony as a safe haven because it was deep enough below ground to be safe from any heavy bombardment.

Map 2, *Waincourt*, shows the extremely detailed intelligence contained by the British Army. The areas utilized by Germans were labeled as “Centres of Activity” and shaded in with purple pen. We can gain a clear picture of the Allies’ knowledge 10 days prior to the big event, which is the reason why this map was chosen to introduce the Battle. The complex system of trenches (printed in blue) is everything known to the B.E.F. up until that point. The cartographer’s preciseness is also exemplified in the naming of simple copses (small clumps of trees) and even sugar factories. Most notably, however, is the labeling of locations of enemy headquarters (HQ) and machine guns (M.G.), and the specific locations of the Hindenburg Line and tunnel entrances. From this map, it can be concluded that the army officials were planning on attacking the locations in the tunnels that included airshafts. Clearly, by examining this one section of a larger map, we can look into the minds of military officers 100 years ago. It is also important to note that there are five different maps surveying the same area, *Waincourt*, and while the battle itself occurred 10 days after the information from Map 2 was collected and printed, we know that there were updated versions of this same map right before the battle.

At this point during the war, the German army was very weak. The Hindenburg Line was their last main defensive area and they were ready to fight hard to keep their position. They knew that the British Fourth Army was going to attack during that September but did not know when exactly it would happen.<sup>5</sup> Image 2 shows one of the German army’s captured bunkers at the entrance of one of the St. Quentin Canal tunnels. Germans dug into the tunnel walls to create kitchens, offices, dressing stations, stables and living quarters.<sup>6</sup> Due to access to information like this obtained by the BEF, it is easy to understand why the Hindenburg Line and this particular

section of it required so much planning and mapping by the B.E.F. right before the attack. They wanted to make sure they rid the Germans of their not-so-comfortable living quarters.

A task this heavy needed extra strength. Both the American 27<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> Divisions were moved to assist the 4<sup>th</sup> Army British Expeditionary Force (B.E.F.) by the American General, John Pershing, on September 20, 1918 and arrived on September 24, 1918. The American divisions were under the direct command of the Australian Corps for this battle and the combination of the two countries was known as the Australian-American Corps.



**Image 2: Entrance to St. Quentin Canal, picture shows Allied soldiers after the capture of German soldiers.<sup>7</sup>**





Map 2: Waincourt. 1:20,000. 19 September 1918. Handrawn circles indicating “Centres of Activity” and handwritten tracking of tunnels.<sup>8</sup>

### **Preliminary Bombardment and Official Attack**

The preliminary bombardment of the Battle of St. Quentin Canal started on September 27, 1918 near the French cities of Bellicourt, Nauroy, Le Catelet, and Gouy. Bernath Mss. 3 contains “*F.A. [Field Artillery] – Barrage Map: Secret Copy no. 285*” (Map 3) and gives a visual representation of the intended planned attack of the preliminary bombardment. Within Map 2, the planned pre-attack of the Battle of St. Quentin is detailed. On September 27<sup>th</sup>, the Australian-American Corps was tasked with breaking through the first objectives (Guillemont Farm, Quennemont Farm, and the Knoll) in the hopes of obtaining the main objective—Nauroy-Gouy.<sup>9</sup> In Map 4, a later version of the *Waincourt* terrain, we can see that the preliminary bombardment was intended to start before both sections reached the two main towns of attack, as shown on Map 2, Bellicourt (American 30<sup>th</sup> Division) and Le Catelet (American 27<sup>th</sup> Division).<sup>3</sup>

As newly secured divisions of the B.E.F., the Americans and Australians were asked to acquire these first objectives through various offensive tactics: Gas (B.B. Bombardment), vigorous counterbattery work, intense harassing fire, and the bombardment of selected strong points and localities (such as the tunnel at the canal that the Germans were occupying as shelter).<sup>10</sup> However, the Germans were aware that an attack was to occur, and the American execution of these bombardment tactics were met with an impressive German defense.

Although initially successful in the advancement, the members of the American 27<sup>th</sup> Division were unable to keep off the German forces from their newly acquired objectives and were pushed back to Guillemont and Quennemont Farms. Due to this unachieved objective, the Americans were forced to execute this same bombardment one hour before Zero Hour on the first official day of the Allied attack: September 29, 1918.<sup>11</sup> Having Map 3 in Special Collections is essential in understanding that there was, in fact, a planned preliminary bombardment that ideally would have made the September 29<sup>th</sup> attack much easier. Map 3, in conjunction with Map 2, further reveals that the American 30<sup>th</sup> Division, were fighting a main “Centre of Activity” in Bellicourt, and were still able to achieve their objectives. The lack of success of the 27<sup>th</sup> Division insinuates that the “Centres of Activity Map” could have lacked information surrounding the

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<sup>3</sup> For those unfamiliar with the intricacies of battle maps, the series of lines shown are included to indicate the locations of the troops at “zero hour” (starting time) and the ideal location of the troops at every 3 minute interval following Zero Hour (5:30AM on September 27, 1918).

area of Le Catelet, underestimating the amount of German soldiers waiting for the attack and placing the 27<sup>th</sup> Division in a well-equipped German stronghold.

The official battle commenced on September 29, 1918. In addition to guns used during the attack, the Allies used B.B. gas and Tanks in order to win this battle. The use of B.B. gas, much like mustard gas, was shot out of artillery guns throughout the battle. The use of this gas is interesting because Germans are usually credited with the use and abuse of mustard gas within battle. In fact, there are first-hand accounts of American soldiers describing their experience of harsh gas-trainings conducted by the British Army.<sup>12</sup> Mark V tanks were also used within the battle and were carefully assigned to different units depending on which division needed the most support.

The Major Allied Forces of this battle included the British V & IX Corps: 18<sup>th</sup>, 32<sup>nd</sup>, and 46<sup>th</sup> Divisions, the American II Corps: 27<sup>th</sup> & 30<sup>th</sup> Divisions, and the Australian 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Divisions. They rehearsed the crossing of St. Quentin Canal on September 28<sup>th</sup> on the Somme in order to be amply prepared for the actual event. While the American and Australian Corps were recruited to assist the British Army, the maps in Special Collections reveal that the commanding officers kept the divisions separate, during battle. The “Scheme of Attack” map (Map 4) contains the plan for both the British Corps and the Australian-American Corps for the official battle. However, the “Heavy Artillery Bombardment Map” (Map 5) only includes the intended actions of the British Royal Garrison Artillery (R.G.A). Map 5, dated after the preliminary bombardment, reveals that the British understood the 27<sup>th</sup> Division’s blunder and aimed to correct it by reinforcing with the British R.G.A. Here, the maps tells us not only the strategy used to defeat the Germans but also the strategy used by the B.E.F. to remedy the initial American defeat.

At 5:30am on September 29<sup>th</sup>, Zero Hour was launched and all forces were deployed to take St. Quentin canal. According to the *British Military Operations: France and Belgium (1918)*, the specific battle plan was separated into three sections signifying the three major corps: Combined Australian-American Corps, British IX Corps, and British III Corps. The American divisions were to capture the first objective they failed to secure two days prior and then the Australian divisions would leap-frog and capture the second objective. The British IX Corps were supposed to attack simultaneously with the Australian-American Corps to capture both objectives and then move south to assist the French First Army. Lastly, the British III Corps was



tasked with holding a defensive front between the Australian-American Corps and the third army until the Aus-Am Corps reached the first objective, then “mop up the ground west of the canal.”<sup>134</sup>

The morning of September 29<sup>th</sup> was particularly foggy, and the added amount of smoke from shell-fire prevented Allied assistance from the air. The American Tank Corps was mobilized, but heavy fog prevent them from seeing clearly, which resulted in tank-ditching in trenches and sunken roads that otherwise would have been avoided in clear weather.<sup>14</sup> At the end of the first day, only two tanks of the initial forty, reached the Hindenburg line.

The poor visibility also caused a bit of confusion throughout the Allied leadership. In fact, the 27<sup>th</sup> division was unable to be located for a couple of hours during the first day of battle. Despite this obstacle, the Allies were able to capture over 800 prisoners of war and completely control the Bellenglise tunnel by 8:00a.m. This is partially due to maps like Map 6, which laid out the specific locations that the army intended for their soldiers to capture. The key of the “Target Map” emphasizes the vast amount of knowledge contained by the Allies, from the broad “Centres of Activity” as seen in Map 2, to the simple locations of “Light Railways that are probably used.” Map 6 demonstrates that all of the information gathered from aerial photographs, captured German soldiers, Allied soldiers and further land surveys constantly caused the need to update battle maps. Moreover, Map 6 also allows us to assess the importance of understanding the enemy’s movement of weapons such as tanks and kite balloons.

By the end of the day on September 29<sup>th</sup>, the American 30<sup>th</sup> Division had crossed both the main Hindenburg Line and the Hindenburg Support Line and were able to reach Nauroy. The major achievements of this day, however, include the taking of Bellicourt and the southern entrance of the canal as well as the capture of over 5,100 prisoners and 90 guns. The official Battle of St. Quentin Canal ended on October 2, 1918 with a German retreat and Allied control over the Canal and that section of the Hindenburg Line. At the close of the battle, the 4<sup>th</sup> Army B.E.F. and its American and Australian allies captured around 36,500 prisoners and 380 German guns.

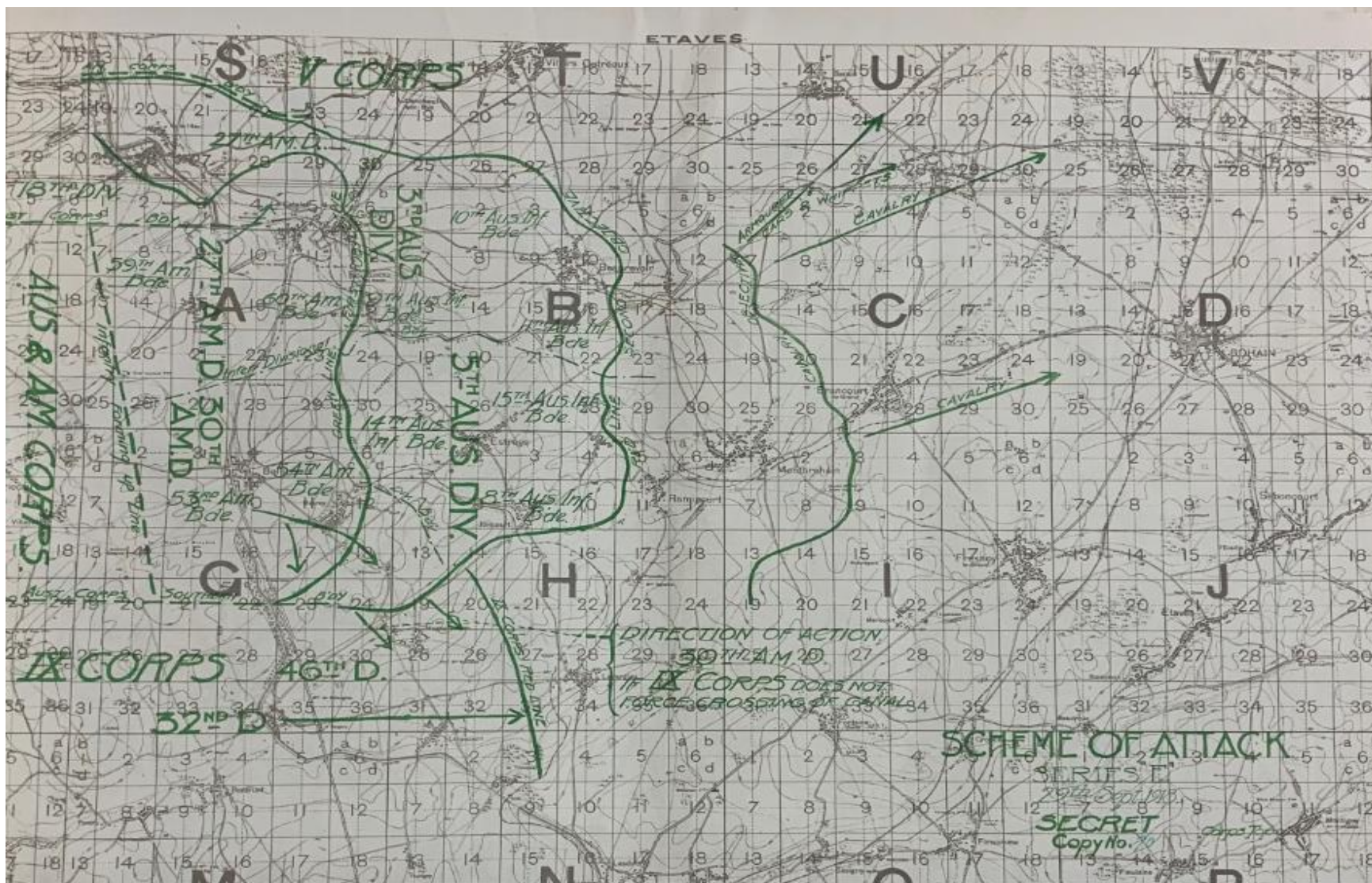
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<sup>4</sup> “mop up the ground west of the canal” simply put, means to keep fighting until they acquire everything west of St. Quentin Canal.



Map 3: Waincourt – F.A. Barrage Map Issued Under Australian Corps. 27 September 1918. This is Secret Copy no. 285.<sup>15</sup>





Map 4: Etaves – Scheme of Attack, Series E. 19 September 1918. This is labeled Secret Copy No. 70.<sup>16</sup>

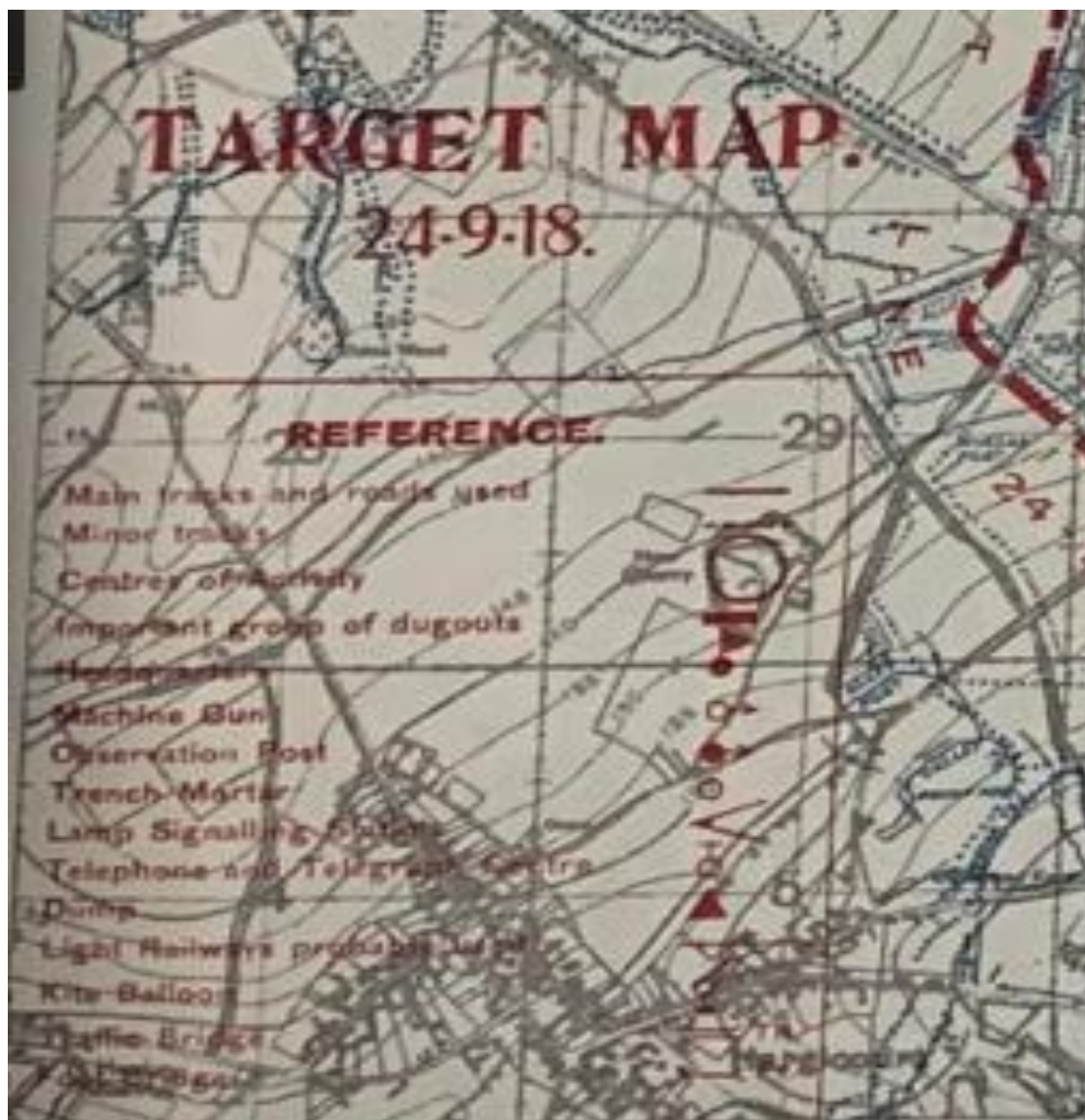




Map 5: Waincourt. Heavy Artillery Bombardment Map: Showing Bombarded Areas & Times of Lifts to Accompany Aust. Corps. 28 September 1918. This is labeled Secret Copy no. 317.<sup>17</sup>







Map 6: Early Target Map & zoomed in Target Map Reference Guide<sup>18</sup>



## The American Divisions & Racism Abroad

The Battle of St. Quentin Canal holds significance because it is one of the few battles that relied on American forces towards the end of the war. By looking into the histories of the 27<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> divisions, we can get a broad idea of the journey of the American soldier throughout the war. American soldiers were sent to Europe in July 1918 without much training or experience. They were sent under the orders of A.E.F. General John Pershing to the B.E.F. for the Battle of St. Quentin Canal.<sup>19</sup> The 30<sup>th</sup> “Old Hickory” Division consisted of the National Guards of Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee.<sup>20</sup> Nicknamed “Old Hickory” after Andrew Jackson’s influence on their home states, the 30<sup>th</sup> Division prided itself on “more than 95% of its personnel [having] American born parents.”<sup>21</sup>

The American 27<sup>th</sup> Division was the direct extension of the New York National Guard. Their creation exemplifies American segregation at the time because the Division did not include the colored men of the 369<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment (aka the Harlem Hellfighters), who were also a direct extension of the New York National Guard. During the war, the men of the 27<sup>th</sup> Division were forced to train while moving toward the front, shifting between British Armies before they were sent to fight with the British 4<sup>th</sup> Army at St. Quentin Canal.

The maps do more than just emphasize the battle, they also emphasize the perspectives of the soldiers fighting. Within the primary documents found written by white soldiers, race was still heavily influential. Specifically, perceptions of race were expressed in the maps with the names of the different Copses (or a group of trees) the armies named.

As you can see in Map 7 and 8, the circled red names of the copses explicitly reveal the varied perceptions of white soldiers. In the middle right of the picture, it is noted that one of the copses is named as a popular racial slur within the United States. If it were named by the 30<sup>th</sup> Division, made up of men from the U.S. South, it would be far from surprising, given the history of racism accredited to the south. However, if named by the 27<sup>th</sup> Division, heavily constructed of white members of the New York National Guard, the naming would also be far from surprising and serve as a reminder that segregation and racial terminology was not restricted to the U.S. South. The historical relationship between blacks in New York and the white soldiers of the National Guard was laced with racism and indifference. It has been reported that white soldiers of the National Guard in New York supported race riots, and commanders of the National Guard intended to stop them “took no disciplinary action.”<sup>22</sup> However, the British did mass produce

these maps and the slur on Map 8 is a British slur term towards Africans in Africa, meaning that either way British forces normalized racial terminology within their battle mapping process. Either way, racism towards blacks manifested itself as an integral part of white American and British lives. So much so, that they had no problem writing racial slurs in official military documents such as the battle maps found in Special Collections.

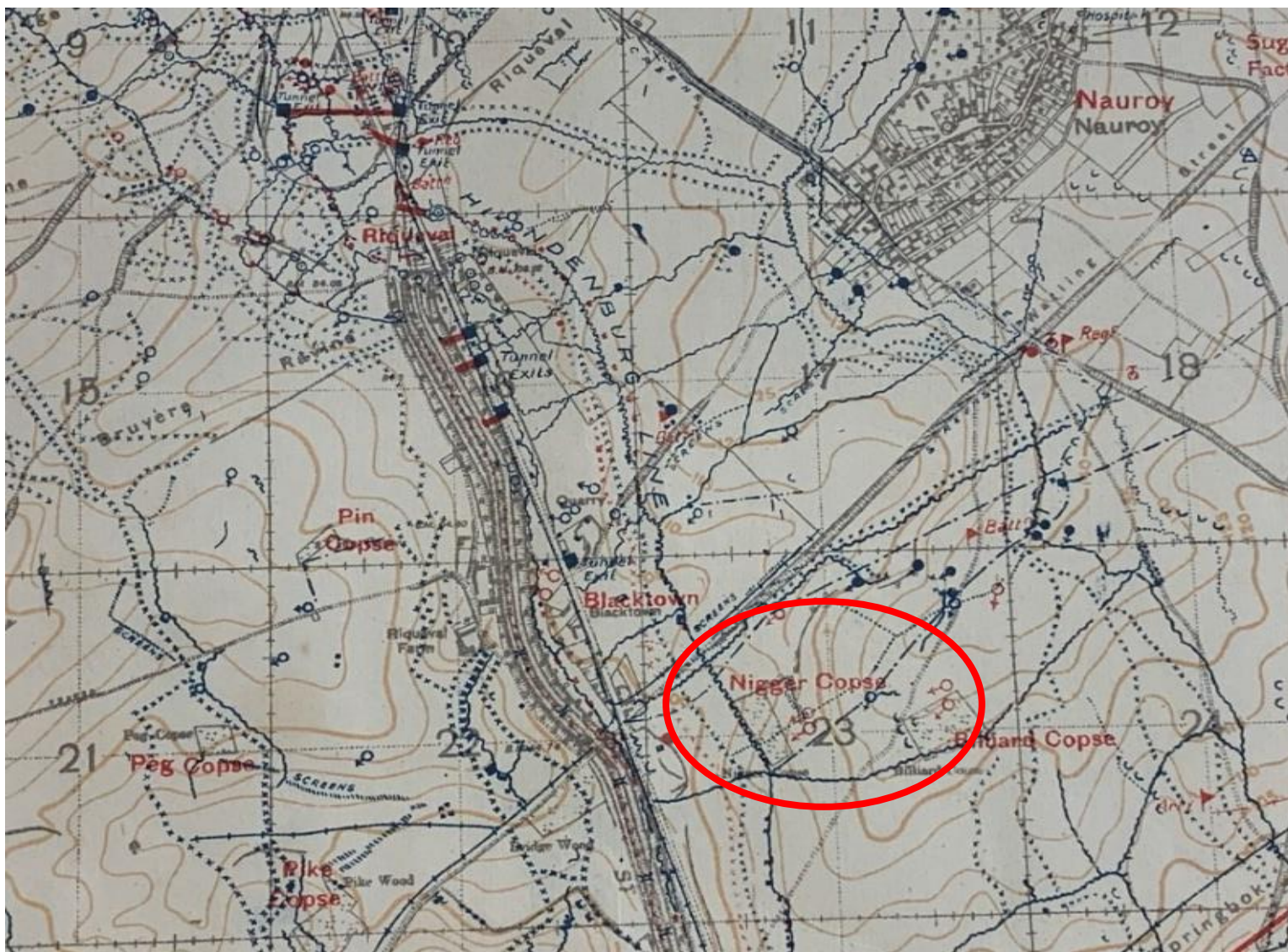
Interestingly, the 27<sup>th</sup> Division, constructed of white members of the New York National Guard, were fighting in France at the same time as the famous 369<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment (also known as the Harlem Hellfighters) which descended from the black troops of the 15<sup>th</sup> N.Y. National Guard Regiment. Map 7 influences the mention of the Harlem Hellfighters and the explicit ways their experience differed from that of white American soldiers. The 369<sup>th</sup> Regiment was assembled separately from the 27<sup>th</sup> Division, again highlighting U.S. segregation in the trying times of war. According to *From Harlem to the Rhine*, while their white counterparts were fighting in the Battle of St. Quentin Canal, the Harlem Hellfighters were 115 miles away in Sechault, France relieving a French battalion.<sup>23</sup> Black members of the New York National Guard were integrated into the French National Army, but were separated from their white peers—sending United States segregation and racism overseas.<sup>24</sup>

United States racism at its finest, neither the 27<sup>th</sup> Division nor the 369<sup>th</sup> Regiment interacted with each other while in Europe for the duration of the war. It is integral that Map 7 and African American soldiers are recognized in the analysis of the maps in Bernath Mss. 3 because, while African American troops like the Harlem Hellfighters were busy fighting hard enough to be the most productive Americans fighting in Europe, their white counterparts transported racism abroad by using and accepting racial slurs to as the language to describe French terrain. The names in this maps also remind us of the legacy of African American soldiers that was ignored after the war. While white soldiers enjoyed the luxury of praise, black soldiers were treated with the same respect they were given when these names were chosen. In fact, black soldiers faced a discreditation of their efforts, with movies made that depicted whites in blackface to portray the black man's journey throughout the war.<sup>25</sup>

Even if these specific names were not written specifically by the American divisions, racism continued to reveal itself in their writing. Within official histories written by white soldiers, they used racial terms to describe the faces of the Americans they saw while leaving the port to go to France: “the march led us through the Negro district of the Newport News, and the

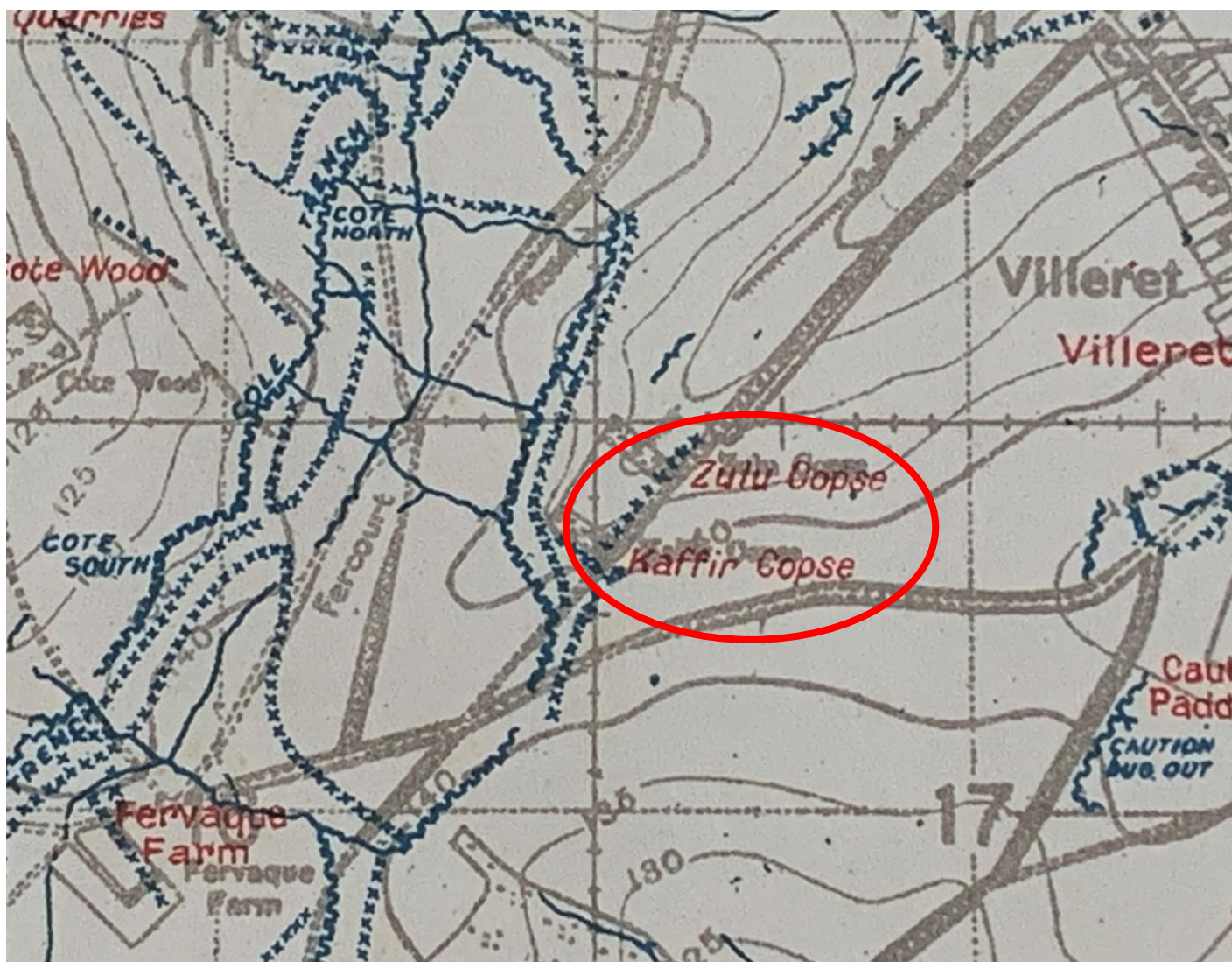


darkies that grinned to us from doors and winders were the last American civilians we were destined to see for ten months.”<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the naming of simple places such as groups of trees as racial slurs within these maps cannot be extraordinary. These maps in Special Collections, while important in helping us understand a specific battle, are also important in revealing the racial (and official) language used by the white British and American soldiers of the Allied nations.



Map 7: Another Waincourt map, shows the explicit racism publicized in battle maps.<sup>27</sup>





Map 8: Further example of Allied racism, this time using words that British colonists used against Africans.<sup>28</sup>

## Understanding the Battle of St. Quentin Canal from the Perspective of the Soldier

We can turn to official accounts published soon after the war in order to assess the Battle of St. Quentin Canal through the perspective of the soldier. *Company L. 107th Infantry, 54th Infantry Brigade. 27<sup>th</sup> Division.* is a collaborative autobiography that gives a detailed look at the war from the perspective of infantrymen. This document allows us to directly glimpse into the journey of American soldiers leading up to and experiencing this battle. The shift of the attitude of the soldiers aligns with their point of time in the journey. When hearing about finally being summoned to go abroad, "...the boys were giddy with excitement...Eagerly they counted the hours, like so many small children checking off the days before Christmas. It seemed too good to be true...Everybody was happy."<sup>29</sup> Here, we can see that the brutalities of war had yet to reach the Brigade while they were still in New York. Their knowledge of what awaited them abroad was not imaginable in the early stage of recruitment and training. It was not until they stepped foot in France that they realized their perspectives of the war would be drastically different from what they assumed before leaving the United States.

Their accounts of the actual Battle of St. Quentin Canal reflect the brutalities of war on the common American soldier. Company L gives us a glimpse into the night of the battle, which they call the "Battle of the Hindenburg Line" rather than the more specific title used throughout this paper:

"It was a miserable night for most of us. Knowing beforehand that we were to go over the top, we had left behind in compliance with orders our overcoats--and everything else, in fact, that would only be extra weight and a burden to men mixed up in a death struggle...We didn't even have a blanket to wrap up in. The only bit of apparel we had besides that on our backs was the slicker, or rain coat, each man carried. Nearly every chap in the company had this out of his pack and was wearing it."<sup>30</sup>

Their experience shows that one of the most significant American battles during the war was not easy for the soldiers and should not be a forgotten tale. Although they were freezing in the cold French weather, they continued on with the rest of the 27<sup>th</sup> Division to successfully capture their objectives. While successful, Company L suffered great losses. Only 22 of Company L's 140

men that went into battle left unharmed, the rest either dead or greatly injured. They lost many leaders that day, including their Captain, Fancher Nicholl.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout this gruesome period of American fighting towards the end of the war, American soldiers communicated with their families back home to describe their battles. The Battle of St. Quentin Canal is one of these battles that was recounted from officials and soldiers to their families. Our first example is from Cordie Lee Majors, an American educator turned 30<sup>th</sup> Division soldier. He was officially given the title of Company Clerk, but still went into battle a few times. Most notable of these times was the explosive Battle of St. Quentin Canal. Entries exemplify nationalistic perceptions of the American soldier, ones that believed that the Americans were on the “right” side of the war. On September 27, 1918, Majors tells his family of his Division’s status at the end of the preliminary attack, they were “on the ground now that was occupied [sic] by the Germans less than one month ago and facing the noted Hindenburg Line, but don’t worry, we’re doing and sacrificing something that is worthwhile.”<sup>31</sup> From this account we also see that anti-German propaganda was, in part, spread in the United States by letters written by soldiers in Europe to their families in the United States. Majors, a man from Tennessee who served as a principal of his former high school contributed to this propaganda in his small town of McNair county through these letters.<sup>32</sup> In his second letter written after the St. Quentin battle on October 10<sup>th</sup>, he furthers this propaganda stating that he “has a harder job than picking cotton. And that is fighting these dirty Germans. Don’t you wish that we soon get them whipped?”<sup>33</sup> His words explain how many American soldiers felt about Germans while fighting in France and the distribution of this type of rhetoric from soldiers to their common-folk families contributed to an early American distrust and dislike of Germans. This is interesting, as 18% or around 500,000 Americans were immigrants to the United States at the turn of the century and many of those immigrants participated in the U.S. War effort.

Many World War I officials kept personal journals documenting their experiences in the war. While this form of communication was not shared with anyone at the time, it is a great example of the emotional impact of total warfare on American militiamen. In his diary, Colonel

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<sup>5</sup> Only 16% of this particular brigade were able to capture German soldiers.

Joseph Hyde Pratt of the 30<sup>th</sup> Division describes the aftermath of the initial attack of the Battle of St. Quentin Canal:

"It was a hard experience to see our men lying dead on the field, and while it was to be expected, it did not ease the pain it caused me. There were also many dead Germans. Dead horses were scattered around and several guns were seen that had been knocked out of commission...I do not like it and it still keeps my nerves taut. I am still, however, able to control my legs and make them go where I want them to, regardless of how I feel inside."<sup>34</sup>

In addition to the exposure of these men to a new country and lack of training, the massive death and destruction experienced by a generation of men not exposed to the brutalities of the American Civil War, was emotionally impactful. Here, Colonel Pratt provides an example of a man in leadership clearly affected by the site of a battlefield after war, but understanding that he needs to be strong for his men.



**Figure #2: Shows allied soldiers crossing the Riqueval Bridge. The crossing of this bridge is significant because it represents the first major break of the Hindenburg Line—a break that relied on the assistance of the American 27<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> Divisions.<sup>35</sup>**





**Figure #3: Depicts 30<sup>th</sup> Division soldiers with captured German prisoners. In the background, Mark V tanks with attached “cribs” that could be dropped into trenches to aid tanks is crossing.** <sup>36</sup>



### American Impact and Legacy<sup>37</sup>

Right after finding out the American contribution to this victorious battle, popular news outlets highlighted the brave efforts of the 27<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> Divisions. *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* did not wait long to write about the Americans breaking through the Hindenburg Line on October 1, 1918. It makes sense that this newspaper would mention the battle, considering the 27<sup>th</sup> Division hailed from New York.

However, the most interesting about this particular document is the inclusion of a simplified map of the acquired objectives (Map 9). The location of this map in an U.S. based newspaper further proves the impact that mapping technology had on not only the military but the world. Maps were now being used to show American victories and were the closest things Americans had to their soldiers abroad.

The contribution of the 27<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> American Divisions were also not ignored by their national counterparts. They lost a significant amount of men due to the failed breakthrough of the first objective on September 27<sup>th</sup>. In fact, so many American soldiers died in the Battle of the St. Quentin Canal that a temporary cemetery was created for the men about ½ mile southwest of the ruined city of Bony, France. Over 150 soldiers who died on September 27, 1918 and over 440 American soldiers who died on September 29<sup>th</sup> are buried at the Somme American Cemetery. Many of these soldiers are from New York, indicating the tremendous loss of lives for New York citizens from one battle.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, as a direct result of this battle, America also erected the Bellicourt American Monument above the St. Quentin Canal Tunnel in 1928 in honor of the 27<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> Divisions.<sup>39</sup>

As for American impact in the states, a significant amount of American soldiers received honorable mentions by the United States government for their acts in this battle. Congressional Medals of Honor were awarded to First Lieutenant William B. Turner and Sergeant Reidar Waaler of the 27<sup>th</sup> Division for pushing through all objectives without proper gear and rescuing trapped and captured men. Sergeant Joseph B. Adkison and Sergeant Milo Lemert were also awarded Medals of Honor for capturing the first round of German prisoners on September 29<sup>th</sup>. As for the treatment of African American soldiers, their experience directly paralleled the information found on the *Waincourt* and *Sequehart* maps. In fact, continued racial prejudice did not allow African Americans to hold onto their honorable status of fighting for the cause.<sup>40</sup> Although the Harlem Hellfighters were honored after the war, many other black soldiers and

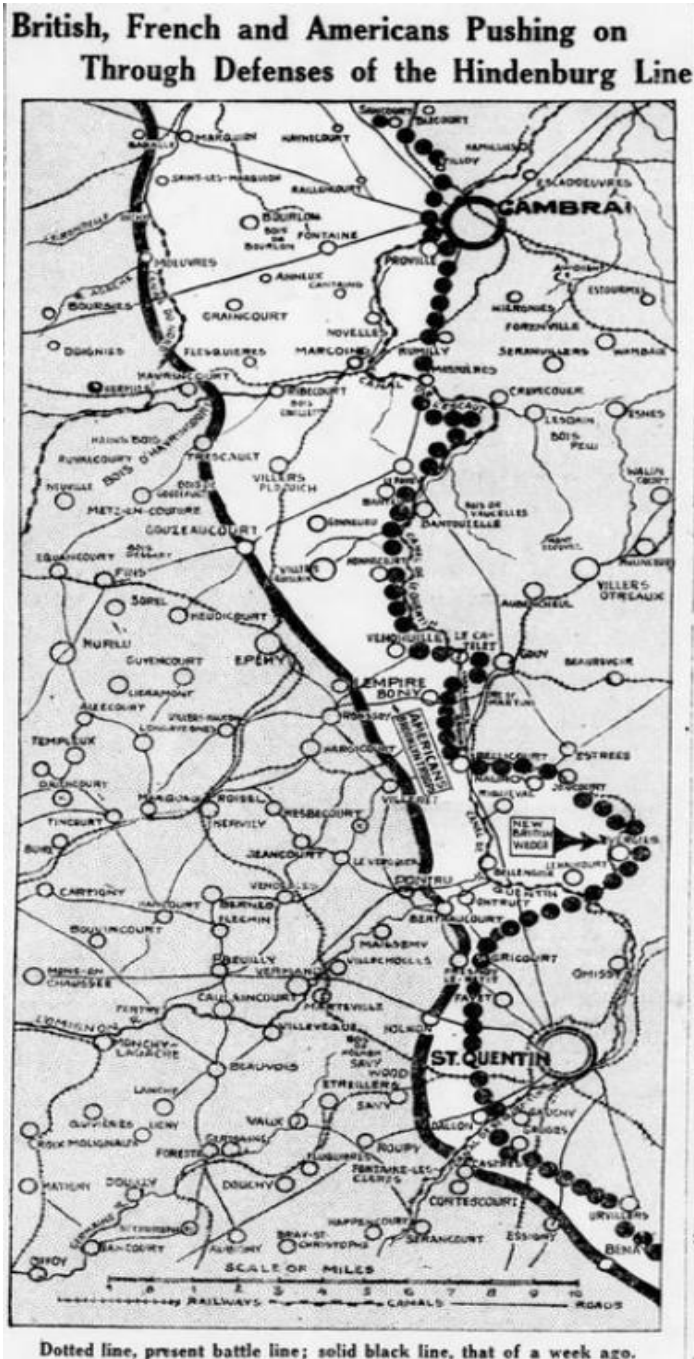
their service was forgotten. So, while the aftermath of this specific battle proves that the United States paid attention to achievements of white Americans in battle (even if they significantly blundered a part of the battle) but ignored the equally important achievements of black Americans in battle.

Although the Battle of St. Quentin Canal may have not made it into national headlines as a significant victory for the Allies, it was a major battle for the American Expeditionary Forces. The Battle of St. Quentin Canal saw the loss of many American soldiers, but it was significant because the Americans were essential in the crossing and capture of this side of the Hindenburg Line. Fortunately, this story is able to be told through the exclusive resources of UCSB's Special Collections.

### **Conclusion**

Although 100 years has passed since the Great War, historical sources such as this Bernath Mss. 3 folder can reemphasize the importance of battles like St. Quentin Canal. The existence of a collection such as this one tells the journey of battle mapping and how it intersected with the technologies that emerged during the war by serving as a new technology itself (dual map and communication form) and documenting the locations of major weapons unique to World War I. By examining just a few of the maps in the folder, I was able to narrate the story of St. Quentin Canal and the commanders' tactics 10 days before the battle, during the Preliminary Bombardment, after the American 27<sup>th</sup> Division's blunder, and on day of official attack.

However, these maps also remind us to look past the surface and search for the true answers. They bring to light the forgotten story of the American 27<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> Divisions and how their individual stories can reveal the true journey of the American soldier from leaving the homeland to participating in battles as complex as this one. The tiny details of the maps reveal the largely-ignored story of blatant racism against African-Americans and Africans held by the commanders of the Allied powers, although they were fighting valiantly for the same cause. Bernath Mss. 3 in UCSB's Special Research Collections has allowed the forgotten individual histories of the war to be resurfaced and examined. Most importantly, it has revealed that a single map can tell a thousand stories.



Map 8: A map clipping from the October 1, 1918 edition of *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*<sup>41</sup>

- <sup>1</sup> Moore, Ryan J. "Maps of the First World War: An Illustrated Essay and List of Select Maps in the Library of Congress." *The Occasional Papers*, 7th ser. (Summer 2014). <https://www.loc.gov/rr/geogmap/pdf/plp/occasional/OccPaper7.pdf>. 7.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid. 6.
- <sup>3</sup> *Guoy – Le Catelet*, Image acquired from: State Library of Western Australia. August 1918.
- <sup>4</sup> *Message Form Map*, World War I Maps, Bernath Mss. 3.. Department of Special Collections, UC Santa Barbara Library, University of California, Santa Barbara.
- <sup>5</sup> Stofft, William. *United States Army in the World War 1917-1919: Military Operations of the American Expeditionary Forces*. Vol. 7. 17 vols. Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1988, 210.
- <sup>6</sup> Pershing, John J. *American Armies and Battlefields in Europe: A History, Guide, and Reference Book*. Washington, D.C.: American Battle Monuments Commission, 1938, 373.
- <sup>7</sup> Image Acquired from: Wikipedia.
- <sup>8</sup> *Waincourt*, World War I Maps, Bernath Mss. 3.. Department of Special Collections, UC Santa Barbara Library, University of California, Santa Barbara. 19 September 1918.
- <sup>9</sup> Pershing, John J. *27th Division Summary of Operations in the World War*. Washington, D.C.: American Battle Monuments Commission, 1944, 14.
- <sup>10</sup> Stofft, William. *United States Army in the World War 1917-1919: Military Operations of the American Expeditionary Forces*. Vol. 7. 17 vols. Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1988. 62. & Target Attack Map
- <sup>11</sup> Edmonds, James E. *British Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1918*. London: Macmillan and Co., 1935, 98-99.
- <sup>12</sup> Mitchell, Harry Thompson. *Company L, 107th Infantry: 54th Infantry Brigade, 27th Division American Expeditionary Force 1917-1919*. 1919.
- <sup>13</sup> Edmonds, James E. *British Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1918*. Vol V. London: Macmillan and Co., 1935, 98-99.
- <sup>14</sup> Kaplan, Lawrence M., ed. "Official Tank Corps Personal-Experience Reports." In *Pershing's Tankers: Personal Accounts of the AEF Tank Corps in World War I*, 31-179. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky, 2018, 139-140.
- <sup>15</sup> *F.A. Barrage Map*, World War I Maps, Bernath Mss. 3.. Department of Special Collections, UC Santa Barbara Library, University of California, Santa Barbara. 27 September 1918.
- <sup>16</sup> *Etaves – Scheme of Attack Map*, Ibid. 19 September 1918.
- <sup>17</sup> *Waincourt - Heavy Artillery Bombardment Map*, Ibid. 28 September 1918.
- <sup>18</sup> *Target Map*, Ibid. 24 September 1918.
- <sup>19</sup> Yockelson, Mitchell. "Borrowed Soldiers: The American 27th and 30th Divisions and the British Army on the Ypres Front, August-September 1918." National Museum of the United States Army. July 20, 2016. Accessed February 01, 2019. <https://armyhistory.org/borrowed-soldiers-the-american-27th-and-30th-divisions-and-the-british-army-on-the-ypres-front-august-september-1918/>.
- <sup>20</sup> "American Expeditionary Forces and Activities in World War I", <https://dmna.ny.gov/historic/reghist/wwi/>
- <sup>21</sup> *Operations. Thirtieth Division. Old Hickory*. pg. 4
- <sup>22</sup> Barbeau, Arthur E., and Florette Henri. *The Unknown Soldiers: African-American Troops in World War I*. Philadelphia, PA: Da Capo Press, 1974, 25.
- <sup>23</sup> Little, Arthur West. *From Harlem to the Rhine: The Story of New York's Colored Volunteers*. New York: Haskell House, 1974, 280.
- <sup>24</sup> Barbeau, Arthur E., and Florette Henri. *The Unknown Soldiers: African-American Troops in World War I*. Philadelphia, PA: Da Capo Press, 1974, 33.

- <sup>25</sup> Keene, Jennifer D. "The Memory of the Great War in the African American Community." In *Unknown Soldiers: The American Expeditionary Forces in Memory and Remembrance*, 60-79. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2008.
- <sup>26</sup> Mitchell, Harry Thompson. *Company L, 107th Infantry: 54th Infantry Brigade, 27th Division American Expeditionary Force 1917-1919*. 1919, 6.
- <sup>27</sup> *Waincourt*, World War I Maps, Bernath Mss. 3.. Department of Special Collections, UC Santa Barbara Library, University of California, Santa Barbara. 19 September 1918.
- <sup>28</sup> *Sequehart*, *Ibid*. 6 September 1918.
- <sup>29</sup> Mitchell, Harry Thompson. *Company L, 107th Infantry: 54th Infantry Brigade, 27th Division American Expeditionary Force 1917-1919*. 1919, 6.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 29.
- <sup>31</sup> Majors, William R., ed. "Letters from the AEF." *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 367-82. Accessed October 8, 2018. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42623840>, 378.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 367.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 378.
- <sup>34</sup> Pratt, Joseph Hyde. "DIARY OF COLONEL JOSEPH HYDE PRATT, COMMANDING 105TH ENGINEERS, A.E.F." *The North Carolina Historical Review* 2, no. 1 (January 1925): 117-44. Accessed October 08, 2018. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23514418>, 119
- <sup>35</sup> "Battle of the St. Quentin Canal," by Unknown. The Imperial War Museum via *First World War Poetry Digital Archive*, accessed April 2, 2019, <http://ww1lit.nsms.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/collections/item/3684>..
- <sup>36</sup> McClellan, David. *The Hundred Days Offensive, August – November*. Image acquired from the Imperial War Museum. 29 September 1918.
- <sup>37</sup> Pershing, John J. *American Armies and Battlefields in Europe: A History, Guide, and Reference Book*. Washington, D.C.: American Battle Monuments Commission, 1938.
- <sup>38</sup> American Battle Monuments Commission. *Bellicourt American Monument*. American Battle Monuments Commission. Accessed February 01, 2019. [https://www.abmc.gov/database-search-results?search\\_api\\_aggregation\\_1=&search\\_api\\_aggregation\\_3=&field\\_serial\\_number=&field\\_service\\_number=&field\\_abmc\\_burial\\_unit=All&field\\_place\\_of\\_entry=All&field\\_cemetery=4645&field\\_cemetery\\_2=4645&field\\_branch\\_of\\_service=All&search\\_api\\_views\\_fulltext=&field\\_war%5B%5D=1844&field\\_dod\\_day=27&field\\_dod\\_month=9&field\\_dod\\_year=1918&missing-status-dummy=All&field\\_memorialized\\_text=All&sort\\_bef\\_combine=field\\_last\\_name+ASC&items\\_per\\_page=10](https://www.abmc.gov/database-search-results?search_api_aggregation_1=&search_api_aggregation_3=&field_serial_number=&field_service_number=&field_abmc_burial_unit=All&field_place_of_entry=All&field_cemetery=4645&field_cemetery_2=4645&field_branch_of_service=All&search_api_views_fulltext=&field_war%5B%5D=1844&field_dod_day=27&field_dod_month=9&field_dod_year=1918&missing-status-dummy=All&field_memorialized_text=All&sort_bef_combine=field_last_name+ASC&items_per_page=10)
- <sup>39</sup> American Battle Monuments Commission. *Bellicourt American Monument*. American Battle Monuments Commission. Accessed February 01, 2019. <https://www.abmc.gov/cemeteries-memorials/europe/bellicourt-american-monument>.
- <sup>40</sup> Keene, Jennifer D. "W.E.B. DuBois and the Wounded World: Seeking Meaning in the First World War." *Peace & Change* 26, no. 2 (April 2001): 141.
- <sup>41</sup> "British, French, and Americans Pushing on Through Defenses of the Hindenburg Line." *The Brooklyn Daily Eage*(New York City), October 1, 1918, Vol. 78, No. 272.

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