THE U.S. ARMY
CAMPAIGNS OF WORLD WAR I



THE MARNE

15 JULY–6 AUGUST 1918

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Cover: The Rock of the Marne, *by Mal Thompson*
(The U.S. Army in Action series)

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THE MARNE
15 JULY–6 AUGUST 1918

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Mason W. Watson



Center of Military History
United States Army
Washington, D.C., 2018

INTRODUCTION

A century ago, the great powers of Europe became engulfed in what was then called the Great War. It signaled a new age in armed conflict in which mass armies supported by industrial mass production brought an unprecedented level of killing power to the battlefield. By the time the United States entered the war in 1917, the combatants were waging war on a scale never before seen in history. The experience defined a generation and cast a long shadow across the twentieth century. In addition to a tremendous loss of life, the war shattered Europe, bringing revolution, the collapse of long-standing empires, and economic turmoil, as well as the birth of new nation-states and the rise of totalitarian movements.

The modern U.S. Army, capable of conducting industrialized warfare on a global scale, can trace its roots to the World War. Although the war's outbreak in August 1914 shocked most Americans, they preferred to keep the conflict at arm's length. The United States declared its neutrality and invested in coastal defenses and the Navy to guard its shores. The U.S. Army, meanwhile, remained small, with a regiment as its largest standing formation. Primarily a constabulary force, it focused on policing America's new territorial possessions in the Caribbean and Pacific as it continued to adapt to Secretary of War Elihu Root's reforms in the years following the War with Spain. It was not until June 1916 that Congress authorized an expansion of the Army, dual state-federal status for the National Guard, and the creation of a reserve officer training corps.

In early 1917, relations between the United States and Germany rapidly deteriorated. The kaiser's policy of unrestricted submarine warfare threatened American lives and commerce, and German meddling in Mexican affairs convinced most Americans that Berlin posed a danger to the nation. In April 1917, the president, out of diplomatic options, asked Congress to declare war on Germany. But the U.S. Army, numbering only 133,000 men, was far from ready. The president ordered nearly 400,000 National Guardsmen into federal service, and more than twenty-four million men eventually registered for the Selective Service, America's first

conscription since the Civil War. By the end of 1918, the Army had grown to four million men and had trained 200,000 new officers to lead them. As it expanded to address wartime needs, the Army developed a new combined-arms formation—the square division. Divisions fell under corps, and corps made up field armies. The Army also created supporting elements such as the Air Service, the Tank Corps, and the Chemical Warfare Service. The war signaled the potential of the United States as not only a global economic power, but also a military one.

In June 1917, the 1st Division deployed to France, arriving in time to parade through Paris on the Fourth of July. The first National Guard division, the 26th Division from New England, deployed in September. By war's end, the American Expeditionary Forces, as the nation's forces in Europe were called, had grown to two million soldiers and more than forty divisions. During 1918, these American "doughboys" learned to fight in battles of steadily increasing scale: Cantigny, the Marne, Aisne-Marne, St. Mihiel, and Meuse-Argonne, adding thirteen campaign streamers to the Army flag. Overall, in roughly six months of combat, the American Expeditionary Forces suffered more than 255,000 casualties, including 52,997 battle deaths (as well as more than 50,000 nonbattle deaths, most due to the influenza pandemic). The war that the United States entered to "make the world safe for democracy" ended with an armistice on 11 November 1918, followed by a controversial peace. American soldiers served in the Occupation of the Rhineland until 1923, before withdrawing from Europe altogether.

The United States will never forget the American soldiers who fought and died in the World War. America's first unknown soldier was laid to rest on 11 November 1921 in the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery, where soldiers still stand guard. The United States created permanent American military cemeteries in France, Belgium, and Britain to bury the fallen. To this day, memorials to their sacrifice can be found across America, and the date of the armistice has become a national holiday honoring all those who serve in defense of the nation. The last surviving U.S. Army veteran of the war died in 2011. It is to all the doughboys, those who returned and those who did not, that the U.S. Army Center of Military History dedicates these commemorative pamphlets.

JON T. HOFFMAN
Chief Historian

THE MARNE
15 JULY–6 AUGUST 1918

The Second Battle of the Marne was the turning point of the First World War on the Western Front. Between March and July 1918, the Germans launched four devastating offensives that resulted in an advance unlike anything that had been seen in four years of trench warfare. The German assault on the Chemin des Dames at the end of May brought the German Army back to the Marne River, where the Allies had halted its drive on Paris in September 1914. For the second time in four years, the Germans appeared to be on the cusp of victory. Between 15 and 17 July, however, American divisions along the Marne and in Champagne played a decisive role in halting the last German drive. The Allies then went on the offensive. On 18 July, the French Army, which included multiple American divisions, initiated a series of offensives that eventually pushed the Germans back from the Marne to the Vesle River. The German Army would remain on the defensive for the remainder of the war as the Allies continued offensive operations from August until the Armistice on 11 November 1918.

This commemorative pamphlet discusses the role of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) in the fighting near the Marne. The Second Battle of the Marne can be divided into two phases. The first consists of the Franco-American defense of 15–17 July against German attacks aimed at capturing Reims. The second covers the Allied counteroffensives between 18 July and 6 August 1918. Both phases included critical contributions by American troops, most notably in the initial Allied offensive at Soissons. In total, Americans accounted for more than 40 percent of the Allied casualties sustained in the Second Battle of the Marne. In addition, the battle saw AEF divisions fighting side by side for the first time, as well as the eventual arrival of American corps as operational units. The experience gained in the fighting near the Marne would prove invaluable as the AEF began independent operations in September.

By the spring of 1918, the German Empire's window of opportunity for victory in the war had nearly closed. Despite some battlefield successes, Germany had failed in two major attempts to defeat France—the initial invasion of France and Belgium in 1914, and the attritional assault on the fortress-city of Verdun in 1916. Rather than undertaking yet another offensive in the west in 1917, the new heads of the German Army High Command (Oberste Heeresleitung; OHL), Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg and General Erich Ludendorff, opted for a strategy focused on supporting Austria-Hungary and defeating the faltering Russian Empire. In the meantime, Germany attempted to force Britain from the war through a renewed submarine offensive. On land, Germany's "eastern strategy" was a success. By the end of 1917, Russia had agreed to enter armistice negotiations with the Central Powers. An Austro-German offensive against Italy in late 1917, the Battle of Caporetto, also had impressive results—the Italian Army suffered a stinging defeat, nearly resulting in the fall of Venice. At sea, however, Germany's U-boat campaign against Britain failed disastrously. Instead of reducing the number of hostile powers arrayed against Germany, the employment of "unrestricted submarine warfare"—the sinking of civilian vessels without warning—led to the United States entering the war as an "Associated Power" alongside France and Britain. The first American troops arrived in France in June, and more Americans continued to arrive in ever-increasing numbers throughout the year. Germany's strategic outlook at the beginning of 1918 was therefore ambiguous. Although Russia's defeat opened new strategic possibilities, America's entry into the war gave the Allies an overwhelming advantage, at least in the long term. Moreover, the German home front suffered from the Allied blockade, now approaching its fifth year. The hungry, overworked, and impoverished German populace was quickly losing its appetite for "total war."

Refusing to contemplate a negotiated peace, General Ludendorff called for a resumption of offensive operations on the Western Front in March 1918. Transferring roughly fifty divisions from the closed Eastern Front, the Germans enjoyed a temporary numerical superiority in the west of approximately 1.25 to 1. The German Empire would never again have better odds. Utilizing elite formations trained in infiltration tactics, Ludendorff intended to crush the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) and drive it from

the continent before turning on the French Army. Lacking British support, the French would then be forced to surrender, thereby ending the war in the west well before significant American forces arrived. Even though roughly 200,000 American soldiers were already in France in March 1918, Ludendorff and the OHL doubted that the novice American divisions could stand against battle-hardened German troops.

The first German offensive, code-named *Michael*, seemed to vindicate Ludendorff's ambitious strategy. Launched on 21 March 1918, the offensive crashed through the thinly held defensive lines of General Sir Hubert Gough's British Fifth Army, which lay at the juncture of the British and French armies, and seized over 3,000 square kilometers of French countryside. Yet the Germans' tactical successes belied *Michael*'s strategic failure. The British defenders fell back, but the BEF did not break. Within two weeks, the deployment of French and British reserves arrested the German advance. Logistical difficulties also stalled the German Army's progress; German troops had advanced to a point over fifty kilometers from their closest railheads, which limited their access to crucial supplies, especially artillery ammunition. Moreover, the crisis compelled the Allies, at long last, to establish a unified command. On 26 March, the Allies appointed French General Ferdinand Foch to the position of "generalissimo," with the official title of General in Chief of the Allied Armies. Henceforth, he would coordinate the various Allied armies on the Western Front, guiding but not directly commanding the Allied military effort.

On 9 April 1918, a new German offensive, *Operation Georgette*, targeted the British in Flanders. The attack gained about sixteen kilometers but failed to replicate the dramatic advances made in March. The following month passed in relative quiet until the opening of *Operation Blücher-Yorck* on 27 May. Directed primarily against the French Sixth Army along the Chemin des Dames, the offensive initially offered the prospect of a decisive German victory. Taken by surprise and forced into a headlong retreat, the French gave up about sixty kilometers and 50,000 prisoners before the front once again stabilized. At the city of Château-Thierry, on the Marne River, the American 3d Division's 7th Machine Gun Battalion helped hold up the German advance on 31 May, denying them a secure foothold south of the Marne.

When *Operation Blücher* finally ended on 5 June, it had produced a nearly 2,300-square-kilometer salient in the Allied front lines, stretching from Soissons in the west and Château-Thierry



Château-Thierry, after having changed hands three times in two months (National Archives)

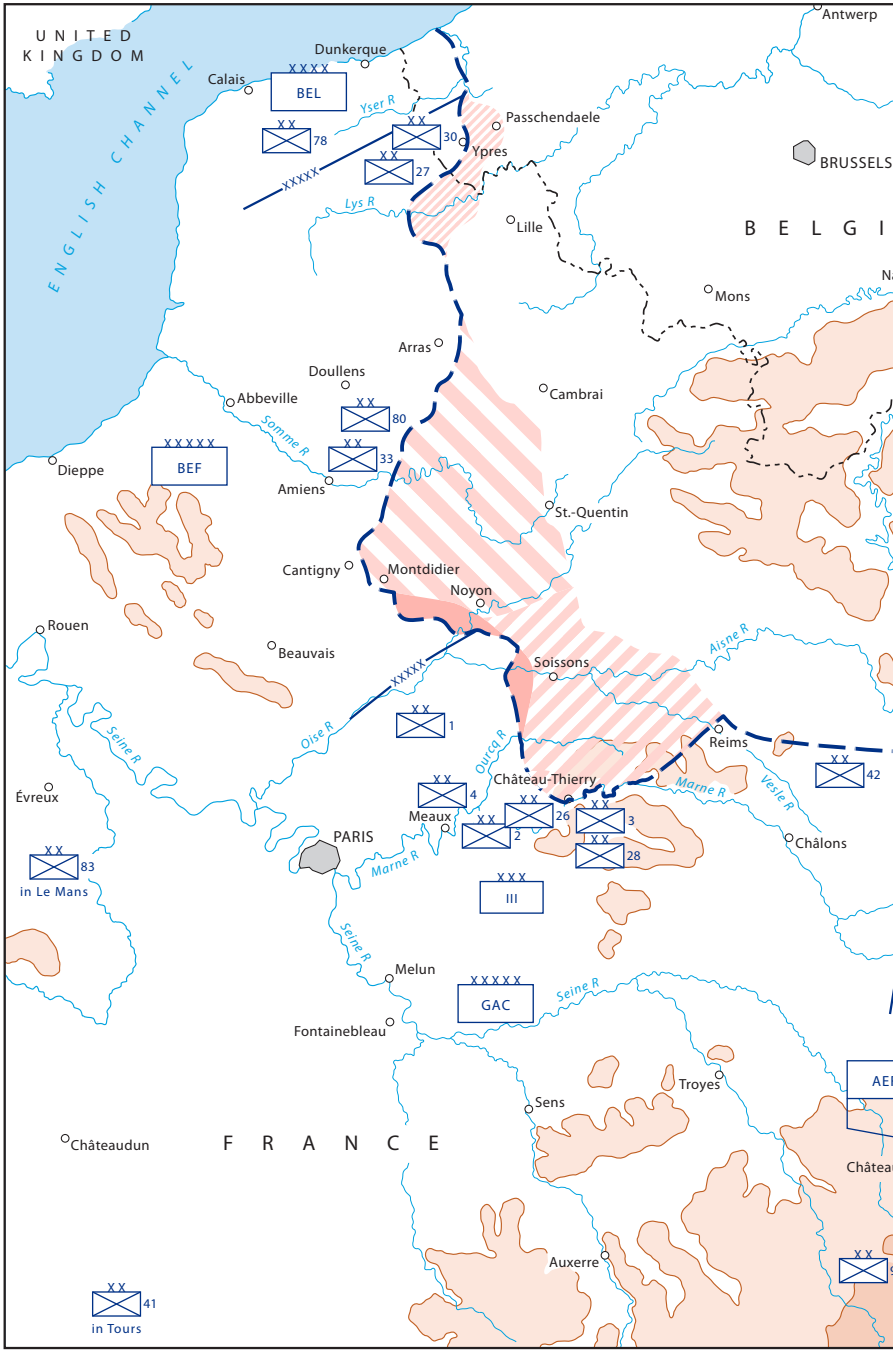
in the south to the vicinity of Reims in the east. German soldiers were just over sixty kilometers from Paris—as close as they had been in September 1914. The French government was in a state of crisis. French prime minister Georges Clemenceau declared, in terms that Winston Churchill would echo two decades later, that "the Germans may take Paris but that would not stop me from fighting. We will fight on the Loire, then on the Garonne, if we must, then even on the Pyrenees. If at last we are chased from the Pyrenees, we will continue the war on the sea; but as to making peace, never!" As it happened, solidifying Allied resistance precluded a further German drive on the French capital. In June, the Germans followed up *Blücher* with a pair of more modest operations, code-named *Gneisenau* and *Hammerschlag*, designed to improve the position of the German armies in the Marne salient. Neither achieved significant results. (*See Map 1.*)

As of early July, the record of the German spring offensives was decidedly mixed. *Michael* and *Blücher* had inflicted undeniable tactical defeats on the Allies, but both fell short of their larger operational objectives. Indeed, the salients created by the two offensives left the German Army vulnerable to counterattack. This was especially true in the Marne salient, which lacked sufficient north-south lines of communication, creating severe logistical

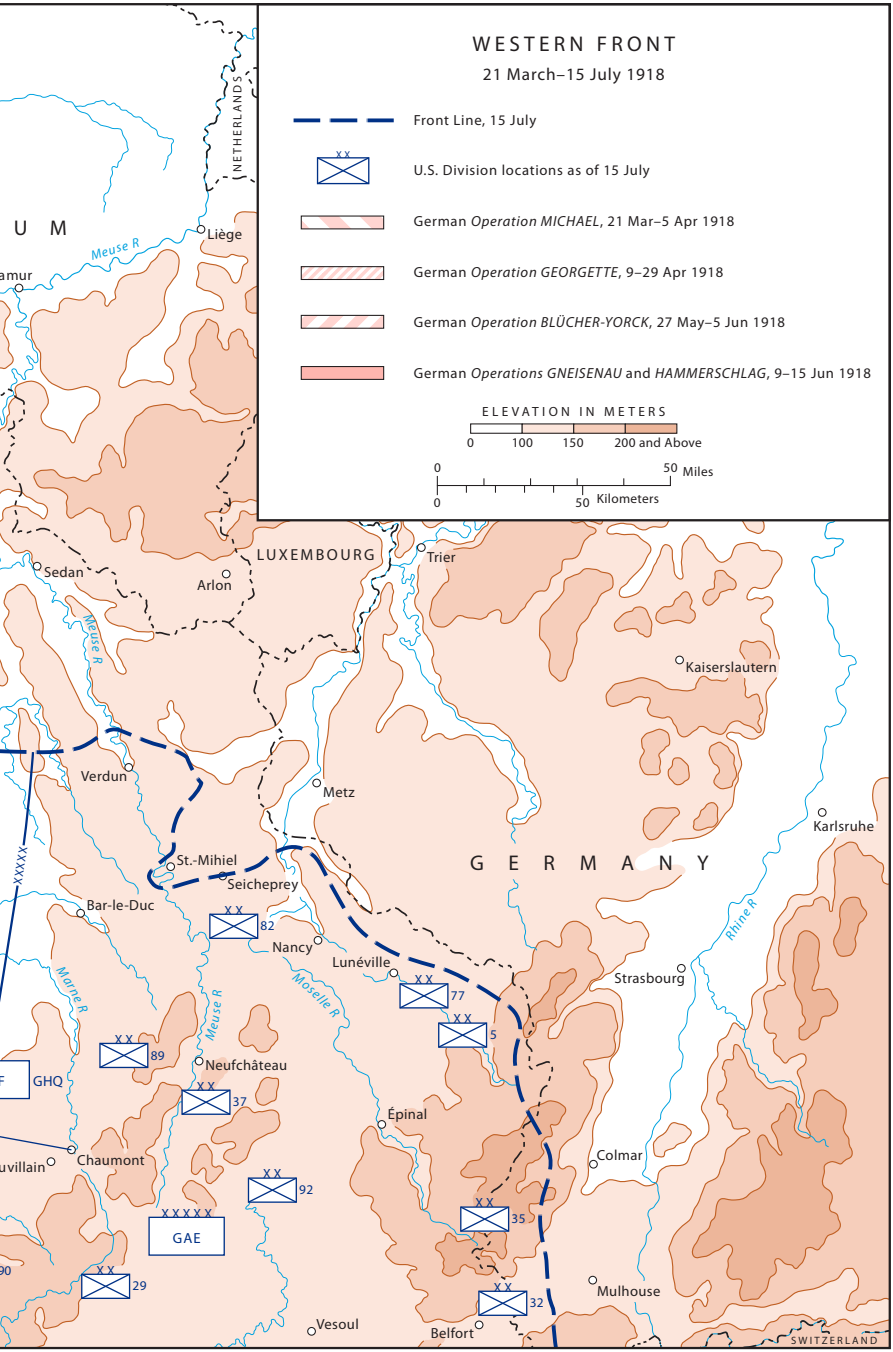
difficulties for the Germans. In addition to holding a more vulnerable position overall, the German Army was greatly reduced in numbers. Even though the Germans generally inflicted heavier casualties than they suffered in the 1918 offensives, March and April 1918 were their bloodiest months of the entire war. Unlike the Allies, who could count on American manpower to make up their losses, the Germans had no deep well of replacements from which to draw.

Despite these challenges, Ludendorff continued to hold out hope for a final victory. This would be achieved through an operation code-named *Hagen*, which would involve an attack on the British Second Army just south of Ypres. The defeat of *Georgette* in April, however, indicated that the Allies had sufficient reserves in the north to halt a major offensive. The Germans would have to draw the British and French reserves away from the north to a new sector. Ludendorff suggested that an offensive aimed at capturing Reims, an important rail hub, would both ease German supply difficulties in the salient and entangle the British and French reserves in a new campaign. This goal became the genesis of the last major German offensive of the war, *Marneschutz-Reims* (Marne Defense–Reims).

Planning for this operation began on 5 June, immediately after the end of the *Blücher* offensive. The underlying concept was simple. Rather than attacking Reims directly, German armies on either side of the city, in Champagne to the east and along the Marne to the west, would break through to a depth of about thirty kilometers. The two jaws of the German advance would meet near Épernay, about twenty-four kilometers south of Reims, enveloping the city and its defenders. The destruction of substantial forces at Reims would compel the Allies to deploy their reserves, weakening their position in the north and clearing the way for *Hagen*, which OHL tentatively scheduled for 1 August. OHL assigned *Marneschutz-Reims*, set for 15 July, to the *Army Group German Crown Prince*, headed by the Kaiser's eldest son, Crown Prince Wilhelm. The army group included the German *First*, *Third*, and *Seventh Armies*, a total of forty-eight divisions organized in eleven corps, or approximately 650,000 men. Artillery assets amounted to 6,353 guns, twice as many as were available to the defenders. General Max von Böhn's *Seventh Army*, which would execute an opposed river crossing over the Marne, received nearly half of these guns. The attack would take place along a 119-kilometer front stretching from Château-Thierry in the west almost to the Argonne Forest in the east.


UNITED KINGDOM
ENGLISH CHANNEL
Dunkerque
Calais
BEL
Yser R
78
30
27
Passchendaele
Ypres
Lys R
Lille
Antwerp
BRUSSELS
B E L G I
Mons
Arras
Doullens
Abbeville
Somme R
80
33
Cambrai
Dieppe
BEF
Amiens
St.-Quentin
Cantigny
Montdidier
Noyon
Rouen
Beauvais
Soissons
Aisne R
Oise R
1
Ourcq R
Reims
42
Seine R
Évreux
Château-Thierry
Marne R
Vesle R
4
26
3
Meaux
2
28
Châlons
PARIS
83
in Le Mans
III
Melun
GAC
Fontainebleau
Troyes
Sens
Châteaudun
F R A N C E
Auxerre
41
in Tours

Map 1


WESTERN FRONT
21 March–15 July 1918
Front Line, 15 July
U.S. Division locations as of 15 July
German Operation MICHAEL, 21 Mar–5 Apr 1918
German Operation GEORGETTE, 9–29 Apr 1918
German Operation BLÜCHER-YORCK, 27 May–5 Jun 1918
German Operations GNEISENAU and HAMMERSCHLAG, 9–15 Jun 1918
ELEVATION IN METERS
0
100
150
200 and Above
0
50 Miles
0
50 Kilometers
NETHERLANDS
Liège
Meuse R
Sedan
Arlon
LUXEMBOURG
Trier
Meuse R
Kaiserslautern
Verdun
Metz
Karlsruhe
St.-Mihiel
Seicheprey
GERMANY
Bar-le-Duc
82
Nancy
Lunéville
Rhine R
Strasbourg
Marne R
Meuse R
Moselle R
77
5
89
Neufchâteau
GHQ
37
Épinal
Chaumont
Colmar
92
35
GAE
29
32
Mulhouse
Vesoul
Belfort
SWITZERLAND

Although the German divisions massed for the attack represented a formidable concentration of force, few were fresh and none were at anything approaching full strength. Limited rations—roughly 2,500 calories per day, down from 3,100 calories earlier in the war—left the German soldiers undernourished and vulnerable to disease. The first wave of the influenza epidemic in the summer of 1918 sent as many as 2,000 men per division to the hospital. Even after receiving replacements before the offensive, German divisions were severely understrength. In the German *10th* and *36th Divisions* of General Hugo von Kathen's *XXIII Reserve Corps* (part of the *Seventh Army*), companies contained an average strength of about sixty men. The divisions themselves could muster only about 5,000 effectives each. In contrast, American infantry companies consisted of 250 men at full strength, and American divisions—over twice the size of full-strength French or German divisions—amounted to no less than 28,000 men.

The Germans would base their attack on the doctrine of infiltration tactics. A decentralized system of command and control that relied on the initiative and good sense of noncommissioned officers and individual infantrymen, infiltration tactics routinely produced dramatic advances on the battlefield against strong defensive positions. Most important was the close cooperation of infantry and artillery. Fired "off the map," without lengthy registration, a hurricane artillery bombardment would suppress Allied defensive positions, allowing specially trained *Stosstruppen* (storm troops) to advance. Organized in flexible ten- to twelve-man squads and equipped with grenades, flamethrowers, and light machine guns, storm troops would overwhelm lightly defended enemy positions, bypassing strong points, while advancing as far and as fast as possible, supported all the while by a *Feuerwalze* (rolling barrage). These methods had been key to the tactical successes the Germans achieved during *Michael* and *Blücher*, and it remained to be seen whether the Allies could develop an effective counter.

Between the end of May and the beginning of July, minor Allied counteroffensives regained a few square kilometers of the ground lost earlier in the year. American battlefield successes in support of these operations were heartening but small. At the end of May, the 1st Division assaulted and successfully held the village of Cantigny against determined German counterattacks. The 2d Division likewise captured Belleau Wood and the villages of Bouresches and Vaux after a grueling struggle that continued through most of June. In these engagements, the Americans demonstrated their

ability to advance and hold ground against determined German resistance while absorbing punishing losses, including nearly 10,000 casualties in the fighting around Belleau Wood alone. And thousands more Americans reached France every day. After the battles of Belleau Wood and Cantigny, a German assessment of the American forces noted that, "considering its small experience of war and defective training the combat value of the American division can in general be described as good. In defense even the most recently arrived troops represent an opponent worthy of respect. The American soldier shows himself to be brave, strong, and skillful. Losses are not avoided. However their leadership is not yet all that good." This eager—if undertrained and inexperienced—force would face its first major test in the Second Battle of the Marne, beginning with the final great German offensive in mid-July.

The repulse of the German *Gneisenau* and *Hammerschlag* offensives in mid-June inaugurated what Foch termed the "period of waiting." He and the rest of the Allied command anticipated a renewed German drive, although no consensus existed at first as to where it would fall. French intelligence accurately estimated that the Germans still had substantial reserves, amounting to at least seventy-five divisions—fifty-five of them fresh—as of 30 June. Intelligence estimates also correctly predicted that limitations on transport capacity, as well as the overall state of the German reserves, precluded any major German offensive on the Western Front before 15 July. The Allies therefore had ample time to prepare a counterattack. On 14 June, Foch instructed the commander-in-chief of the French Army, General Henri Philippe Pétain, to begin planning for an offensive in the area of the northwestern shoulder of the Marne salient. Foch and Pétain conceived this attack explicitly as a riposte to the coming German offensive. The Allied counterattack would fall immediately after the Germans committed substantial forces to a new push. Success in this attack depended to a large extent on timing: the shorter the delay between the German offensive and the Allied counteroffensive, the better the chances for an Allied victory. The primary objective was to bring Allied field artillery and heavy guns within range of the German-held rail hub at Soissons. As Foch noted, interdiction of German supply through Soissons would ensure that "any German offensive in the direction of Château-Thierry [and hence along the road to Paris] would be deprived of its life blood."

The Soissons offensive fell to the French Tenth Army, under the command of General Charles Mangin—an experienced officer

known throughout the French Army as "*le boucher*," or "the butcher," for his aggressive tactics. Also assigned to the offensive were General Jean-Marie Degoutte's French Sixth Army, which would attack from the west, and General Antoine de Mitry's French Ninth Army, which would advance from the south. General Mangin completed his plan of operations for the offensive on 20 June, carrying out a minor preparatory attack on 28 June that advanced the front several kilometers and revealed the German Army's lack of defensive preparations. Heartened by this success, Mangin proposed expanding the offensive to encompass an attack on Soissons itself. Mangin's impending operation built on plans for a more limited offensive against the eastern flank of the Marne salient by General Henri M. Berthelot's French Fifth Army, which had been in development since 7 June. Both operations had relatively modest objectives but had the potential to achieve strategically significant results. If the offensive drives by the French Fifth Army from the east and the Tenth Army from the west met in the middle, they could attempt to envelop and destroy the German forces left within the salient. Yet neither side had ever succeeded in a battle of annihilation on such a scale, even after multiple attempts over nearly four years of fighting on the Western Front.

The AEF allocated substantial forces to operations around the Marne salient. Even though General John J. Pershing objected to American units serving as part of Allied armies, the crisis provoked by the German 1918 spring offensives led him to release American divisions for service in French and British commands. Pershing's flexibility on this matter paid off on 10 July 1918, when Foch announced plans to establish an independent U.S. army of thirteen divisions, scheduled to be created by the end of July. In the meantime, six American divisions remained in position around the Marne salient. The blooded American 1st and 2d Divisions occupied rear areas near Foissy and roughly ten kilometers south of Château-Thierry respectively. The 26th (Yankee) Division, composed of National Guard units from the six New England states, held the 2d Division's old lines along the edges of Belleau Wood, operating with the French 167th Division as part of the American I Army Corps. The 3d Division, part of the French Sixth Army's XXXVIII Corps under General Jean de Mondésir, occupied a position along the Marne just east of Château-Thierry. The infantry brigades of the 28th (Keystone) Division were stationed both to the east and west of the 3d Division, with the 55th and 56th Brigades attached to the French 125th and 39th Divisions. About



Soldiers from the Rainbow Division advancing (National Archives)

30 kilometers east of Reims, the 42d Division held a second-line position behind the French 13th and 170th Divisions as part of General Henri Gouraud's French Fourth Army.

Defensive preparations in these sectors varied substantially depending on the commander. In general, all the forces under the control of the French high command (GQG) were to adhere to the principles of elastic defense-in-depth, which Pétain had laid out in his Directive No. 4 in December 1917. This document prescribed a lightly held front line, with the main "combat zone" located several kilometers to the rear. Such a deployment kept the bulk of the defenders out of the range of enemy artillery, preserving their strength for the main defensive battle. The attackers, who would be disorganized after having fought through the thinly held "sacrifice" line of defense manned by isolated groups of soldiers who were expected to hold out at all costs, would lose momentum by the time they reached the second defensive line. This approach to defensive operations was the cutting edge of doctrine in 1918. The Germans employed these tactics with considerable success in 1917 during the Nivelle Offensive and the Third Battle of Ypres, and the Allies considered their example worthy of imitation.

Pétain, however, did not require his subordinates to implement these instructions to the letter. He permitted them to use their own judgment regarding the proper forms of deployment within their defensive sectors. This meant that while General Gouraud's Fourth Army embraced the doctrine of defense-in-depth, General Degoutte's Sixth Army, holding the defensive line along the Marne, did not. Degoutte instead directed his men to defend the Marne "with one foot in the water," prescribing a rigid, linear defense. The American commanders serving under Degoutte's command generally followed his direction, despite their reservations, but not all of his French subordinates did the same. The inconsistent defensive preparations within the Sixth Army caused considerable confusion for the Allies when the German offensive finally opened on 15 July.

By the middle of July, it was clear that Foch's "period of waiting" was at an end. Intelligence pieced together from various sources gave the Allies a remarkably accurate and detailed understanding of the scale, objectives, and even the precise timing of the next German offensive. In spite of the massive concentration of German pursuit aircraft in the region—no less than forty-six of the seventy-eight German fighter squadrons on the Western Front were operating near the Marne as of early July—aerial reconnaissance nevertheless detected that the Germans were moving large quantities of munitions into the salient. An informant attached to the German crown prince's staff also passed along useful information about German preparations to his French handlers. Deserters and prisoners captured during the lead-up to the attack revealed additional significant details. In one notable case, a German officer who had swum across the Marne near Dormans to reconnoiter potential crossing points on 30 June was captured with several maps in his possession. In response to these signs, Pétain ordered the transfer of five divisions into the area east of Château-Thierry between 7 and 9 July. Additional troop movements into Champagne followed after 12 July. The final and most important piece of intelligence, however, came mere hours before the German offensive began. At 2000 on 14 July, a trench raid by the French IV Corps (part of the Fourth Army) returned with twenty-seven German prisoners. After a brief interrogation, the prisoners disclosed that the German offensive would open between 0300 and 0500 the next day, following a preparatory bombardment scheduled for shortly after midnight. Between 2330 and 2345, only about thirty minutes before the German preparatory bombardment was to begin, Allied artillery in Champagne and along the Marne

opened fire on suspected German assembly areas. These were the first shots of the Second Battle of the Marne.

Operations

Defending Champagne

When the German attack began in the early morning hours of 15 July, the American forces attached to the French Fourth Army in Champagne were deployed as follows. From west to east, the 84th and 83d Infantry Brigades of Maj. Gen. Charles T. Menoher's 42d Division held second-line positions in the sectors of the French 13th and 170th Divisions, with both falling under the overall command of General Stanislas Naulin's French XXI Corps. The 42d, composed of National Guard units from twenty-six states, became known as the "Rainbow Division" because of the variety of hues in the colors of its component regiments. Although it was only the fourth American division to reach France, the 42d had seen limited fighting thus far, and many in the division were eager to prove that Guardsmen could fight just as well as U.S. Army regulars. Some twenty-five kilometers to the east of the 42d Division's position was Col. William Hayward's 369th Infantry, a segregated African American New York National Guard unit known to its members as "Harlem's Rattlers," later termed the "Harlem Hellfighters" by the Germans. On the morning of 15 July, the 369th Infantry held a second-line position in support of the French 16th Division.

In general, the American units in Champagne enjoyed a strong working relationship with their French comrades. The Fourth Army's battle-scarred commander, General Gouraud, was held in particularly high esteem; Brig. Gen. Douglas MacArthur, the 42d Division's chief of staff, later characterized Gouraud as "without weakness," describing him as "almost . . . the reincarnation of that legendary figure of battle and romance, Henry of Navarre." The Americans trusted Gouraud and took their place within the French defense-in-depth for the coming battle. While the French units held the "sacrificial" trenches, the inexperienced 42d Division held the crucial "intermediate" position, three kilometers to the rear, where the main battle would be fought. Writing in his diary on 14 July, one soldier recorded that their orders were "to fight to the last man, and in no case, to let the Bosche through [sic]."

Of the twenty-two German divisions allocated to the offensive east of Reims, elements of at least six divisions—all assigned to General Karl von Einem's German *Third Army*—attacked within the sector partly held by the 42d Division. Although the preemptive Allied artillery barrage indicated that the offensive had lost the element of surprise—an essential component of earlier German successes—the attack could not be called off on such short notice, and the German gunners opened their preparatory bombardment on schedule at 0010 on 15 July. The intensity of the German fire left a lasting impression on the men of the 42d Division, who observed the destruction of the first-line trenches from the comparative safety of their positions in the second line. The sound of the German guns could be heard as far away as Paris. As the first German infantrymen went forward at 0350, the small groups of Allied soldiers left in the forward trenches set off flares, indicating the general direction and strength of the German assault, before opening fire. The Germans were surprised to find the forward trenches so lightly held. Instructed to maintain a rapid pace—some of the German assault formations had orders to go as far as twenty kilometers in the first day—the Germans rapidly mopped up the first defensive line and continued the advance.



Brig. Gen. Douglas MacArthur, days after winning his fourth Silver Star
(National Archives)

Struggling forward across the wide expanse separating the first and second Allied lines while under heavy artillery fire, the Germans found the main defensive line intact and fully manned, and the 42d Division's machine gun and rifle fire caught them in the open. Veteran French soldiers advised the Americans to hold their fire until they could clearly see their targets' uniforms—in the early morning haze, it was easy to mistake French horizon

blue for German field grey. Desperate to break through the second line, the German infantry launched seven attacks in close order against the American defenses, suffering appalling casualties. One doughboy recorded that the German waves were so tightly packed that the dead "couldn't find room to fall down." Small teams of storm troops did manage to reach the Allied lines, where they engaged in fierce hand-to-hand combat with the American defenders, but these isolated efforts quickly met defeat. The Allies launched several counterattacks beginning at 1500, and by the end of the day the 42d Division had recaptured the first-line trenches.

To the east, the 369th Infantry took several casualties, including five fatalities, in the initial German bombardment, but the German infantry failed to appear when the barrage lifted around 0430. When it became clear that no attack was forthcoming, the 369th received orders to move almost five kilometers to the west to support General Georges Lebouc's French 161st Division. "Harlem's Rattlers" arrived in time to aid the 161st Division's defense, with one machine gun team—commanded by the 369th's regimental machine gun officer, 1st Lt. Lewis E. Shaw—helping to repulse a German assault while under heavy artillery fire. Shaw received the Croix de Guerre, as well as a promotion to captain, for his role in this action. On 18 July, the 369th participated in a counterattack that drove the Germans back to their original lines.

The experiences of the 42d Division and the 369th Infantry were indicative of the situation along almost all of the French Fourth Army's front. General Gouraud's elastic defense-in-depth had held.

"The Rock of the Marne"

The situation was different in the Sixth Army's sector. There, the principal American units within the zone of the German offensive were Maj. Gen. Joseph T. Dickman's 3d Division and Maj. Gen. Charles H. Muir's 28th Division. The 3d Division, attached to de Mondésir's XXXVIII Corps, held a twelve-kilometer front along the Marne River, from the outskirts of Château-Thierry in the west to the slopes overlooking the Surmelin River valley in the east. The division's 4th, 7th, 30th, and 38th Infantry regiments were all in line from west to east. Just to the right of the 3d Division was General Antoine Diebold's 125th Division—part of General Léonce Lebrun's III Corps—with the 28th Division's 55th Infantry Brigade attached. While the majority of the brigade held a six-kilometer

front in the 125th Division's second line, about three-and-a-half kilometers to the rear, four companies from the 109th and 110th Infantry regiments held forward positions along the southern bank of the Marne.

Defensive arrangements varied from unit to unit. General de Mondésir interpreted his commander's intent to defend the Marne "with one foot in the water" literally. He instructed General Dickman to prepare a rigid frontline defense, rather than a defense-in-depth, explaining that "it is on the Marne itself that it is easiest for us to halt the enemy because he can cross it only by small fractions in boats, or by columns on the foot bridges, and because he approaches or reaches the [sic] River, necessarily disorganized." Dickman objected, later writing that he found these instructions to be "a violation of fundamental principles and utterly erroneous." He gave his subordinates the freedom to prepare their defenses as they saw fit.

The wooded, rolling slopes and overgrown fields on the southern banks of the Marne were ideal defensive terrain, offering the Americans both concealment and cover. Along the entire 3d Division front, the forward portion of the "outpost zone," on the river banks, consisted of widely spaced rifle pits and machine gun nests. Behind this was the main line of the "outpost zone," with entrenchments along railroad tracks running parallel to the Marne. The second defensive position, based around an aqueduct built along the slopes overlooking the river, was more elaborate; it included shallow trenches as well as dugouts used as command posts or dressing stations. The third defensive position, known as the "woods line," bisected the Bois d'Aigremont to the south. This would be the last line of resistance.

Col. Edmund L. Butts, commanding the 30th Infantry, distributed his battalions among the widely spaced first-, second-, and third-line positions—effectively preparing a defense-in-depth. However, Col. Ulysses G. McAlexander ordered his 38th Infantry to reinforce the front line, positioning four companies—about 1,000 men—in the "outpost zone" to prevent the Germans from crossing the river. The remainder of the regiment divided between two lines located roughly 2,700 and 5,400 meters from the Marne. The 9th Machine Gun Battalion, together with the 6th Engineers, held positions along the 3d Division's front in support of the infantry. McAlexander—suspecting both that the French to his right would retreat, and that the Germans would attempt to use the cover of the Surmelin valley to infiltrate his sector—also took the precaution



Entrance to a dugout near Suippes, Champagne
(National Archives)

of constructing additional trenches throughout the 38th Infantry's position, facing east.

The Americans serving with the 125th Division found the defensive preparations in their sector to be even more confused. Distributed by platoons, Companies L and M, 109th Infantry, and Companies B and C, 110th Infantry, held partially complete trenches along the railroad and near the northern edges of the Bois de Condé, a few hundred meters at most from the Marne. Despite receiving no orders to fall back in the event of a German attack, one soldier in the 28th Division observed that the French officers had burned their maps and records and packed up their personal belongings, a clear sign that they planned to withdraw. Without other orders, however, the four American companies stationed along the river intended to stand and fight.

On the opposite side of the Marne, General von Kathen's *XXIII Reserve Corps*—the westernmost formation in the *Seventh Army*—made its final preparations for the offensive. The units assigned to the attack, while understrength, were among the best in the German Army, and morale was generally high. The *10th Division*, rated by Allied intelligence as a "first-class" unit, stood on the far left flank of the entire *Marneschutz-Reims* offensive; its *398th Infantry* and *6th Grenadier* regiments had orders to

cross the Marne and advance through the area held by Butts' 30th Infantry. Immediately to the east was the *36th Division*, considered an "excellent fighting unit" in 1917 but recently assessed as "second class." This division's *5th Grenadier* and *128th Infantry* regiments were to attack along the front held by the French 125th Division and Colonel McAlexander's 38th Infantry. The role of the *XXIII Reserve Corps* in the offensive was to advance about seven kilometers on a six-kilometer front, with the first day's advance limited to just two kilometers. Once in position, its orders were to dig in and await the fall of Reims. Whether the corps would make any further attacks would be determined later.

When the Allied artillery bombardment began at 2340 on 14 July, the leading elements of the *10th* and *36th Divisions* were already in their assembly areas, about 500 meters north of the Marne. Before the shells began to burst, some Germans speculated that their artillery preparation had started ahead of schedule. The initial Allied bombardment caught one battalion of the *398th Infantry Regiment* in the open, causing over half its strength to disperse before the crossing could begin. Other units were more fortunate—the *6th Grenadier Regiment* managed to avoid the barrage entirely—but doubts nevertheless spread through the German lines. The Allies knew that an attack was coming, but just as in Champagne it was impossible to call off an offensive at the last moment. At ten minutes after midnight, the German gunners duly opened fire. Yet the confusion caused by the Allied bombardment forced the German engineers, who had made painstaking preparations for the river crossing, to improvise. They relocated ferries and bridging materials, and directed the assault troops to new assembly areas. At 0210 on 15 July, the first German infantrymen set foot on the south bank of the Marne.

The preemptive Allied bombardment disrupted the Germans from the start. The lead battalions of the *10th* and *36th Divisions* were supposed to reach a line of departure south of the Marne by 0350. At that time, the German preparatory bombardment would shift to a rolling barrage that would accompany the main infantry attack. As it happened, few formations reached their jump-off points in time. Even so, the *6th Grenadier Regiment* continued to enjoy relatively good fortune, crossing the Marne by 0240 and seizing most of the town of Mézy. To the east, the *175th Infantry Regiment* likewise crossed the river on schedule, reaching its starting line between Varennes and Reuilly in good order well before 0350. Other units faced much greater opposition.

One battalion of the *5th Grenadiers*, having suffered heavy casualties in the Allied bombardment, failed to cross the river altogether. Its replacement, the regimental reserve, succeeded in bringing only scattered elements to the southern bank of the Marne by daybreak. The *3d Battalion*, *5th Grenadiers*, crossed on schedule but encountered an American trench shortly after disembarking, whereupon soldiers from the 38th Infantry engaged the attackers in hand-to-hand combat. On the far west of the German advance, the *398th Infantry Regiment* crossed on ferries and bridges, arriving on the southern bank of the Marne well before 0350. Unable to establish contact with the neighboring *6th Grenadiers*, and having lost contact with its own *1st Battalion*, the regiment paused to regroup before continuing the advance. The German artillerymen, having heard nothing from the infantry south of the Marne, assumed that the advance was proceeding on schedule. However, as the rolling barrage began at 0350, only one out of four German regiments in the first wave, the *175th*, was prepared to attack.

The advance of the *175th* met with initial success. By dawn, the American companies along the river bank in the 125th Division's sector had endured nearly four hours of German artillery fire while in the dubious shelter of their unfinished entrenchments. One veteran of the 28th Division recorded that the intensity of the bombardment "in more than one instance upset completely the mental poise of our soldiers, so that they had to be restrained forcibly by their comrades from rushing out into the open in their temporary madness." Throughout the barrage, the American and French defenders kept up a steady fire on the Germans, who crossed the river in twenty-man boats. When the main German infantry advance began, however, the French fell back at once, leaving the Americans to face the Germans in isolated, platoon-sized groups. Outnumbered and attacked on all sides, the four 28th Division companies fought desperately throughout the early morning. Around 0800, the remnants of these units attempted to fight their way to the safety of the 55th Brigade's lines, about three-and-a-half kilometers to the south. Small groups made their way back during the afternoon and evening of 15 July, but the majority became prisoners or casualties. Company C, 110th Infantry, suffered severe casualties, with twenty-four men killed, forty-eight wounded, and sixty-five taken prisoner. The other companies took similarly heavy losses, and casualties from the entire detachment amounted to several hundred men. By 0900,

elements of the *175th Infantry Regiment* had advanced at least three kilometers, bypassing or destroying the Americans and reaching the southern edge of the Bois de Condé, within sight of the Allied second defensive line. (*See Map 2.*)

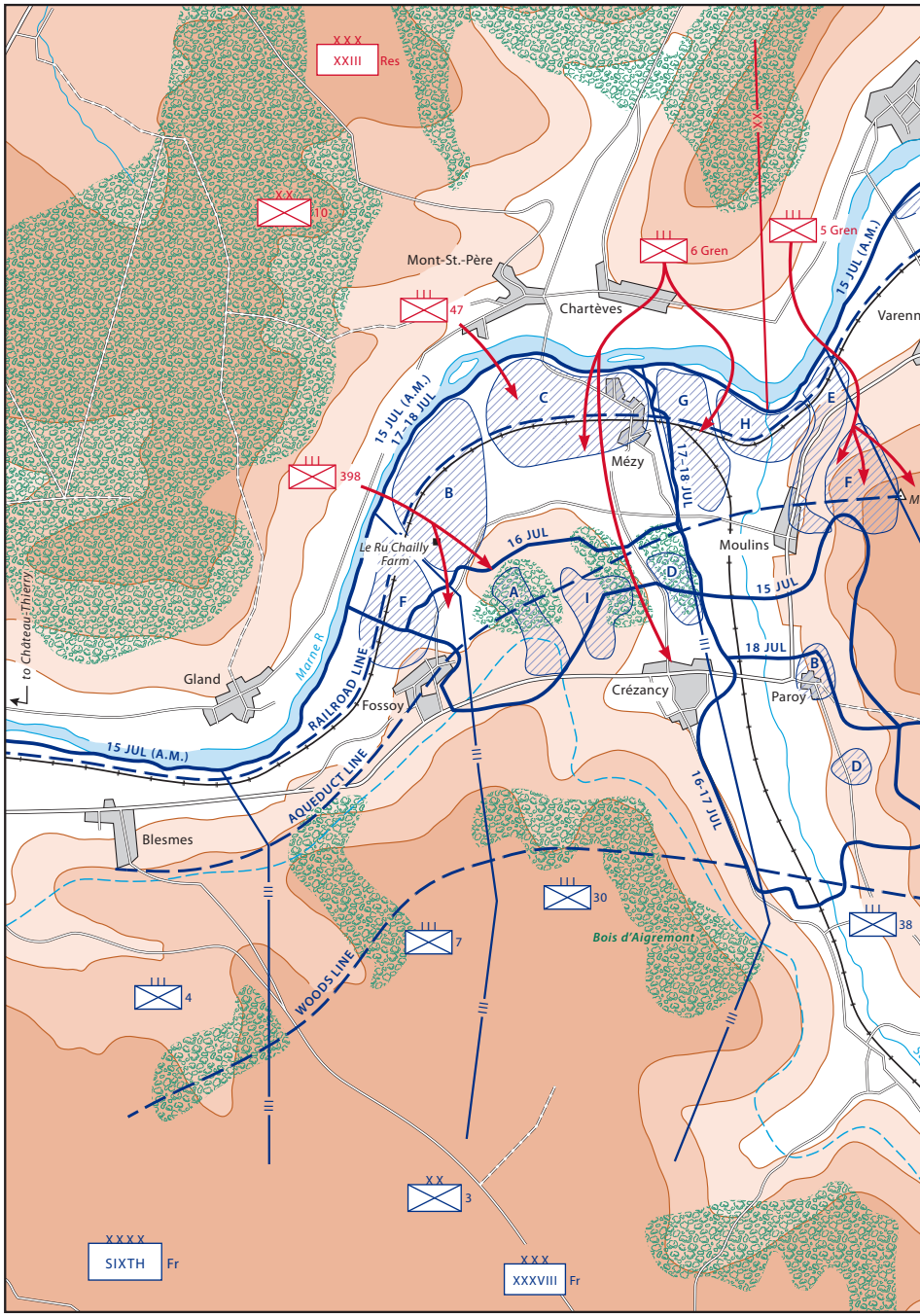
The *5th Grenadier Regiment*, crossing just east of the Surmelin ravine, achieved similarly impressive results early on. By 0400, elements of the *5th Grenadiers* had infiltrated behind the 38th Infantry's forward positions on the Marne riverbank, occupying the hillside east of Moulins. Some German forces made it even farther, reaching the woods northeast of Paroy—almost two kilometers south of the Marne—where they engaged in a firefight with parts of two companies of the 38th Infantry. Several American commanders staged local counterattacks as the threat to the 38th Infantry's right flank became apparent. Occupying eastern-facing trenches on the outskirts of Moulins, Capt. Thomas C. Reid's Company F, 2d Battalion, 38th Infantry, opened fire on the Germans streaming southward past Varennes. Two of Reid's platoons, commanded by Lt. Ralph Eberlin and, after Eberlin was wounded, by Lt. Carl C. Cramer, launched a bayonet charge, disrupting German efforts to set up machine gun nests overlooking the 38th Infantry's main position. A larger counterattack came at 0900, as the 1st Battalion's Companies B and D, under the overall command of Maj. Harry J. Keely, assaulted the *175th Infantry Regiment*'s position on Moulin Ruiné Signal, northeast of Paroy. Hitting the advancing German forces in their right flank, the attacking companies inflicted heavy casualties and captured around 400 prisoners. Afterward, the companies set up a new defensive line on the Moulins ridge, temporarily securing the 38th Infantry's right flank.

The situation on the 38th Infantry's left was less critical, but also worrisome. After crossing the Marne, the *398th Infantry Regiment* paused briefly, losing the rolling barrage, before pressing toward the railroad line, overrunning forward positions held by the 30th Infantry. At 0500, the regiment launched simultaneous attacks toward the south and southeast. The southern thrust encountered heavy resistance; after destroying a machine gun nest manned by the 7th Infantry southwest of Le Ru Chailly Farm, and capturing about twenty-five prisoners, the attack foundered. The regiment had advanced only about 100 meters to the south by 0900, as Companies I and F, 3d Battalion, 7th Infantry, stubbornly defended the northern edge of Fossoy and the nearby woods. Refusing to withdraw, two platoons from these companies fought to the

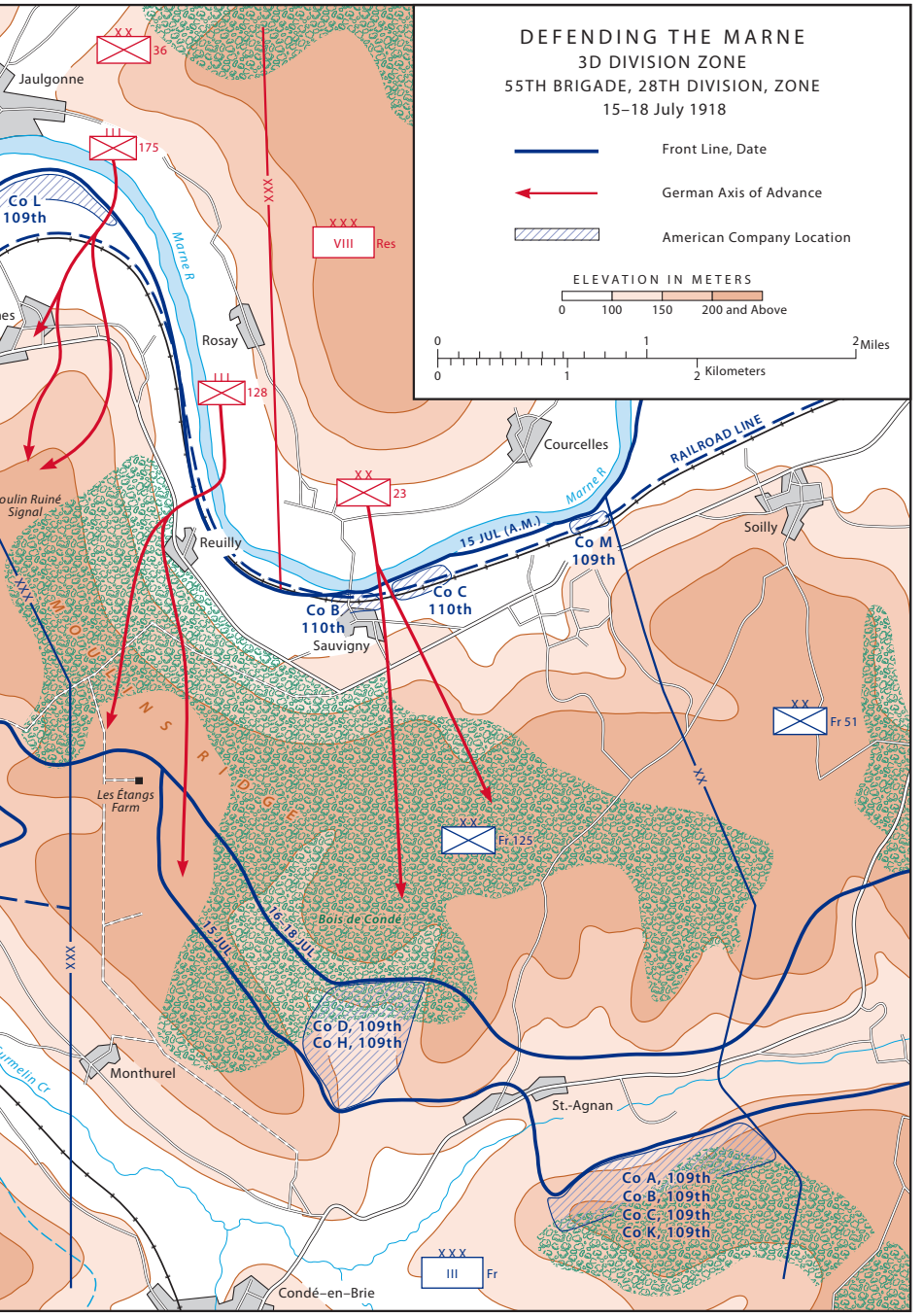
last man, inflicting heavy casualties before being destroyed. The *398th*'s push to the southeast fared somewhat better despite fierce opposition from the 30th Infantry, with several patrols penetrating the "aqueduct line" and infiltrating into the woods east of Fossoy and north of Crézancy. Exhausted and understrength, the *398th* ceased all offensive operations in its sector by 0900, shifting to the defensive to await reinforcements.

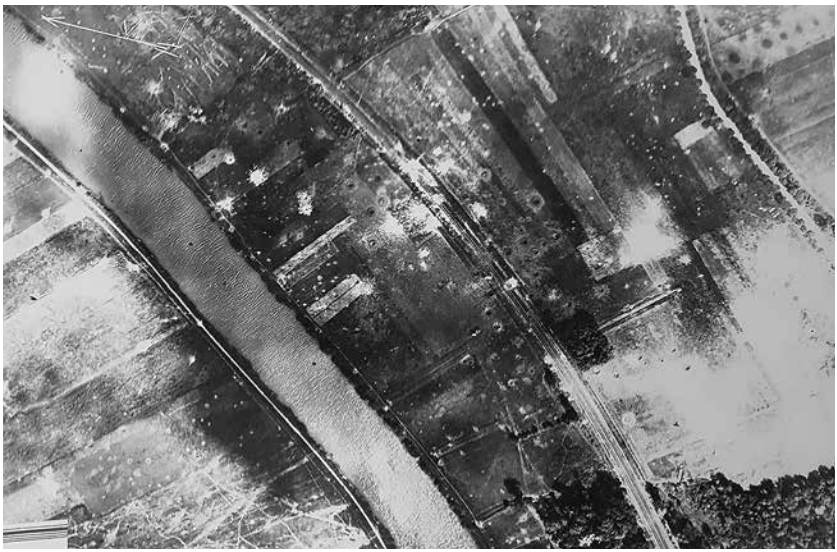
After several crossing attempts early in the morning, the German *47th Infantry Regiment* secured a foothold opposite Mont-Saint-Père around 0845, advancing to the east and west to make contact with neighboring units. In response to this new German advance, one hundred men from the 30th Infantry—still holding their posts near the river bank—fought their way back to Allied lines under the command of 1st Lt. James H. Gay, surprising several German detachments and capturing around 150 prisoners, including a German major, along the way. Gay later received the Distinguished Service Cross for his leadership during this action. Pressing on toward Mézy, the *47th Infantry Regiment* became bogged down under fire from American positions in and around the southern outskirts of the town. The Germans made several attempts to break through during the afternoon before halting around 1630. With this single exception, the *10th Division* had shifted over to the defensive by noon, having secured few of its first-day objectives.

Meanwhile, other German crossings in the vicinity of Mézy had been uniformly unsuccessful. Although the *6th Grenadiers* crossed the river on either side of Mézy, capturing most of the town before dawn, it was unable to hold on to this position against determined American opposition. Companies G and H, 2d Battalion, 38th Infantry, counterattacked the German landing site east of Mézy at 0415, driving the Germans in this area back across the river by 0500. The Germans held on somewhat longer west of the town, advancing up to and beyond the railroad line shortly after 0500. One German company of about forty men pushed even farther, infiltrating beyond the American defenders and reaching Crézancy, over two kilometers south of the Marne. The remainder of the regiment was pinned down near the railroad tracks only a short distance from the river bank, exposed to machine gun fire from the 3d Division's 9th Machine Gun Battalion, sections of which occupied concealed positions along the railroad embankment. Capt. Jesse W. Wooldridge's Company G, 38th Infantry, which remained in the vicinity of Mézy throughout the morning, staged


XXX
XXIII Res
XXX
10
Mont-St.-Père
III
47
Chartèves
III
6 Gren
XXX
5 Gren
15 JUL (A.M.)
Varenn
15 JUL (A.M.)
17-18 JUL
C
G
E
H
III
398
B
Mézy
17-18 JUL
F
16 JUL
Le Ru Chailly Farm
Moulins
D
15 JUL
A
I
F
18 JUL
B
Gland
Marne R
RAILROAD LINE
Fossoy
Crézancy
Paroy
to Château-Thierry
15 JUL (A.M.)
AQUEDUCT LINE
16-17 JUL
D
Blesmes
III
30
III
38
III
7
Bois d'Aigremont
WOODS LINE
III
4
XX
3
XXXX
SIXTH
Fr
XXX
XXXVIII
Fr

Map 2


DEFENDING THE MARNE
3D DIVISION ZONE
55TH BRIGADE, 28TH DIVISION, ZONE
15–18 July 1918
Front Line, Date
German Axis of Advance
American Company Location
ELEVATION IN METERS
0
100
150
200 and Above
0
1
2 Miles
0
1
2 Kilometers
Jaulgonne
XX
36
III
175
XXX
VIII
Res
Co L
109th
Marne R
Rosay
III
128
XX
23
Courcelles
RAILROAD LINE
Marne R
15 JUL (A.M.)
Reuilly
Soilly
Co M
109th
Co C
110th
Co B
110th
Sauvigny
MOUNTAINS RIDGE
XX
Fr 51
Les Étangs
Farm
XXX
Fr.125
Bois de Condé
15 JUL
16–18 JUL
Co D, 109th
Co H, 109th
Monthurel
St.-Agnan
Co A, 109th
Co B, 109th
Co C, 109th
Co K, 109th
XXX
III
Fr
Condé-en-Brie



Aerial view of the 3d Division's sector on the Marne
(National Archives)

a series of counterattacks beginning at 1030 against this German lodgment. These assaults—directed against a force roughly five times the size of Wooldridge's company—captured several hundred German prisoners, effectively destroyed the *6th Grenadiers* as a fighting force, and earned Wooldridge the Distinguished Service Cross. Wooldridge's unit suffered 50 percent casualties.

Because of German advances throughout the morning, the 38th Infantry now found itself in an exposed position, with enemy forces active to the front and on both flanks. The situation was particularly critical shortly before 1100, when Maj. Fred L. Walker—believing that his platoons along the river bank had been destroyed—ordered the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry, to retreat back to the Bois d'Aigremont, leaving the "aqueduct line" unmanned in the 30th Infantry's sector. Walker's withdrawal created a gap in the American defenses on the 38th Infantry's left flank. During the late morning and early afternoon, however, a series of American counterattacks helped to stabilize the front line and eliminate the risk of a breakthrough. At 1100, American forces near Mézy and Fossoy assaulted the *398th Infantry Regiment,* forcing it to give up its modest gains and withdraw

back to the railroad line. Around noon, two companies of the 4th Infantry attacked the small German detachment in Crézancy, which at that time was the farthest German penetration within the 3d Division's sector. After holding out for an hour, the Germans withdrew a short distance to the north, leaving the southern part of Crézancy in American hands. The German force remained near that position until the evening, when it retreated in good order back to the Marne. Later in the afternoon, the 1st Battalion, 7th Infantry, together with elements of the 30th Infantry, launched an additional counterattack to retake the 7th Infantry's original outpost line along the Marne. Moving across ground already targeted by German artillery, the attackers came under an intense and accurate bombardment while exiting the Bois d'Aigremont, suffering heavy casualties. The counterattack faltered and dispersed. Patrols later discovered that the Germans had abandoned their positions in this area.

Fighting east of the Surmelin continued into the afternoon, with German efforts achieving mixed results. Despite having made excellent progress early on, the *36th Division* paused to regroup in front of the Allied second-line positions around 0930, exchanging fire with elements of the 28th Division's 55th Brigade, located near St. Agnan. The Germans later resumed the offensive during the afternoon, assaulting the 38th Infantry's positions east of the Surmelin ravine. In response to this renewed threat to his right flank, Colonel McAlexander ordered the 1st and 2d Battalions, 38th Infantry, accompanied by the 30th Infantry detachment remaining in Mézy, to fall back toward the "aqueduct line," thereby reducing the regiment's overextended front line. The battalions took up new positions facing to the north and east. At 1245, General de Mondésir took additional steps to shore up the XXXVIII Corps' position, ordering the French 73d Division to advance into the gap that had opened between the American and French units east of the Surmelin. The attack opened at 1930, and resulted in the capture of Les Étangs Farm, a little under two kilometers east of the Surmelin. The Germans made no further attacks in this area on 15 July. In the evening, General von Kathen ordered the elements of the *XXIII Reserve Corps* south of the Marne to make preparations to withdraw.

To a large extent, the confused fighting on 15 July had been a company and platoon commander's battle, with officers at the regimental level and above exercising little control after the shooting started. Soldiers on the spot carried out the local attacks

that contained the German advance on their own initiative. More organized efforts undertaken on the basis of inaccurate or out-of-date information, such as the 7th Infantry's ill-fated counterattack during the afternoon, were much less successful. General Dickman, commanding the 3d Division, received almost no information from the front line, and therefore had few opportunities to shape the course of the battle. In his memoirs, Dickman affirmed that "after relaying the information of the coming attack and ordering the fire of counter preparation, the conduct of the fighting passed into the hands of the subordinate commanders, each one to employ the means at his disposal, including artillery and reserves, in accordance with his judgment and the developments of combat." By contrast, the lack of communication between the front line and support units, particularly the artillery batteries, hindered the Germans. Having lost the rolling barrage shortly before 0400, the German infantry lacked effective fire support throughout the battle, and consequently they had only limited ability to advance against determined opposition.

On the morning of 16 July, the Germans still held a small lodgment on the south bank of the Marne within the 3d Division's sector. The German armies north of the Marne had achieved more impressive results. Against General Berthelot's French Fifth Army, the Germans had driven forward over five kilometers, nearly destroying the Italian II Army Corps. The advance across the Marne within the 125th Division's sector was also notable, and elements of six German divisions were now on the river's southern bank, occupying a depth of up to six kilometers along a fourteen-kilometer front. Despite these gains, the German *Seventh Army* had failed to secure the offensive's ambitious first-day objectives, and Reims remained securely in Allied hands. It was unclear whether further efforts could salvage the offensive.

Having pinned such high hopes on the operation's success, the German high command ordered the *Seventh Army* to continue its drive on 16 July. These attacks made limited progress north of the Marne. Meanwhile, von Kathen's *XXIII Reserve Corps* near Château-Thierry carried out its planned withdrawal. American patrols quickly discovered that the Germans in the 3d Division's sector had left, and by 1000 General Dickman could report, with some exaggeration, that "on the front of the 3d Division there are no Germans south of the Marne, except the dead." In the 125th Division's sector, the Germans repulsed a joint Franco-American counterattack involving elements of the 28th Division's 109th

Infantry. A minor attack on the French 73d Division, launched in the morning of 17 July, represented the last German offensive effort south of the Marne. After this operation, which briefly routed two companies of the 28th Division, the French and Americans returned to the offensive, forcing the Germans back across the Marne by the end of the day. By that time, the German high command had already decided to terminate *Marneschutz-Reims*. Ludendorff immediately approved a new plan for *Army Group German Crown Prince* to continue limited attacks north of the Marne toward the city of Reims, transferring the *Seventh Army*'s reinforced artillery to the east to support this operation. Ludendorff's attention, however, was already focused on the long-awaited campaign against the British in Flanders. On the afternoon of 17 July, he departed from the Marne salient, heading to the headquarters of *Army Group Rupprecht of Bavaria* to plan that next offensive. Yet as Ludendorff continued to fantasize about future victories, Crown Prince Wilhelm formed a more realistic assessment of the battle's consequences, later writing in his memoirs that when the attack on Reims failed "I no longer entertained any doubt that matters at the front as well as affairs at home were drifting towards the final catastrophe—a catastrophe which was inevitable unless, at this eleventh hour, great decisions were formed and energetically carried out."

Although the battle was decided on the ground, aerial operations also played an important role in the Allied victory. The Germans committed more than half of all their pursuit squadrons on the Western Front to the offensive. Among these was the famous "Flying Circus" of the Red Baron, Capt. Manfred von Richthofen—though as the Red Baron himself had been killed earlier in the year, from 8 July the unit was under the command of 1st Lt. Hermann Goering. Opposing this German force was a range of Allied squadrons, including two inexperienced and underequipped units belonging to the AEF's Air Service, the 1st Pursuit Group and the I Corps Observation Group, both part of Col. William L. "Billy" Mitchell's 1st Air Brigade. On 29 June the 1st Pursuit Group deployed to Touquin, about forty kilometers from Château-Thierry. A few days later, a group of eight Nieuports from the 27th Aero Squadron under Lt. Donald Hudson encountered nine German Fokker D-7s. Thirty-five minutes later, both squadrons returned to their respective bases with two fewer machines. Other skirmishes in the first weeks of July were similarly bloody. Among the pilots of the 1st Pursuit Squadron who lost their lives in the



Constructing a memorial to 1st Lt. Quentin Roosevelt
(National Archives)

fighting over the Marne salient was 1st Lt. Quentin Roosevelt, the youngest son of former president Theodore Roosevelt. Quentin Roosevelt earned his first aerial victory in a dogfight on 10 July. He died four days later, on the eve of the German offensive, when he became separated from his squadron near Chamery and was overwhelmed by seven German fighters.

While the 1st Pursuit Group contested German air superiority, the I Corps Observation Group conducted a series of reconnaissance flights over the German front lines and rear areas, taking relatively light casualties in the course of their missions. Their photographs helped to reveal German troop movements and supply dumps, adding to the evidence pointing to the impending German offensive. When the German attack began, both the I Corps Observation Group and the 1st Pursuit Group went into action, flying constant missions throughout 15 July. Colonel Mitchell personally identified several German pontoon bridges near Dormans in a solo reconnaissance flight during the morning. Although American fighters engaged in dogfights during the rest of

the day, they suffered no casualties and earned no confirmed kills. American aircraft flew numerous missions during the following days, and the 1st Pursuit Group claimed to have destroyed a total of eight German aircraft between 15 and 18 July.

Casualties during the fighting on the ground were much more severe. From 15 through 17 July, the 3d Division lost a total of 3,151 men (606 dead), with the heaviest losses falling on the 7th Infantry (730 casualties) and the 38th Infantry (632 casualties). Although only one of the 28th Division's two infantry brigades—the 55th—was heavily engaged, it also suffered severely, with the 109th and 110th Infantry regiments losing a total of 670 men (including 223 dead) between 15 and 18 July. German casualties are more difficult to estimate, although it is clear that the *10th* and *36th Divisions* both lost heavily, with prisoners taken from these units alone amounting to well over 1,000 men. One German veteran estimated that 60 percent of the men who attacked against the Americans on the Marne had become casualties.

The 3d Division's success on the Marne earned it justified fame. Whereas other Allied divisions along the Marne yielded up to eight kilometers in some places to the advancing Germans, the Americans—and, in particular, McAlexander's 38th Infantry—held their ground. In his final report on the AEF, Pershing wrote that during the fighting near Château-Thierry on 15 July:

> a single regiment of the 3d Division wrote one of the most brilliant pages in our military annals. It prevented the [German] crossing at certain points on its front, while on either flank the Germans who had gained a footing pressed forward. Our men, firing in three directions, met the German attacks with counterattacks at critical points and succeeded in throwing two German divisions into complete confusion, capturing 600 prisoners.

Pershing later clarified that the regiment in question was the 38th Infantry. In a letter written shortly after the battle, the 3d Division's then–chief of staff, Col. Robert H. C. Kelton, discussed McAlexander's leadership on 15 July in glowing terms, describing the 38th Infantry's commanding officer as "like the rock of the Surmelin Valley as George H. Thomas was of Chickamauga." The sobriquet, originally applied just to McAlexander, was altered slightly and eventually extended to encompass the 38th Infantry as a whole: "The Rock of the Marne." The 3d Division likewise became known as the "Marne Division."

The Battle of Soissons

The defeat of the German offensives in Champagne and on the Marne presented the perfect opportunity for Foch's long-awaited counteroffensive. The German forces in the Marne salient were disorganized, depleted, and exhausted after nearly four months of continuous fighting. On top of this, they were disheartened by the obvious failure of their most recent major offensive. Moreover, the German concentration in the eastern part of the salient left only a handful of the salient's forty divisions—under the command of General Johannes von Eben's *Ninth Army*—to guard against an Allied attack in the west. Although German planners recognized that this deployment left their right flank vulnerable, they assumed that any Allied reserves allocated to an offensive against the western side of the Marne salient would be drawn into the fight around Reims. In other words, they believed that their own offensive would remove any threat to their position in the Marne salient. On this point, they nearly were proven correct. At 1000 on 15 July, shortly after the opening of *Marneschutz-Reims*, Pétain issued orders for General Émile Fayolle's Reserve Army Group to cease preparations for the offensive near Soissons and to transfer reserves to the east for a counterattack against the Germans on the Marne. If carried out, these orders would have indefinitely postponed the offensive assigned to Mangin's Tenth Army, giving the Germans in the salient an opportunity to redeploy their forces and to reinforce the defenses on their right flank. Foch moved quickly to countermand Pétain's orders, instructing Fayolle's army group to continue preparations for the attack and limiting the transfer of reserves away from the Tenth Army. Instead, reserves were released from Gouraud's Fourth Army, which had checked the German assault in Champagne. Arrangements for the attack near Soissons therefore proceeded according to schedule, with the offensive opening as planned on 18 July. (*See Map 3.*)

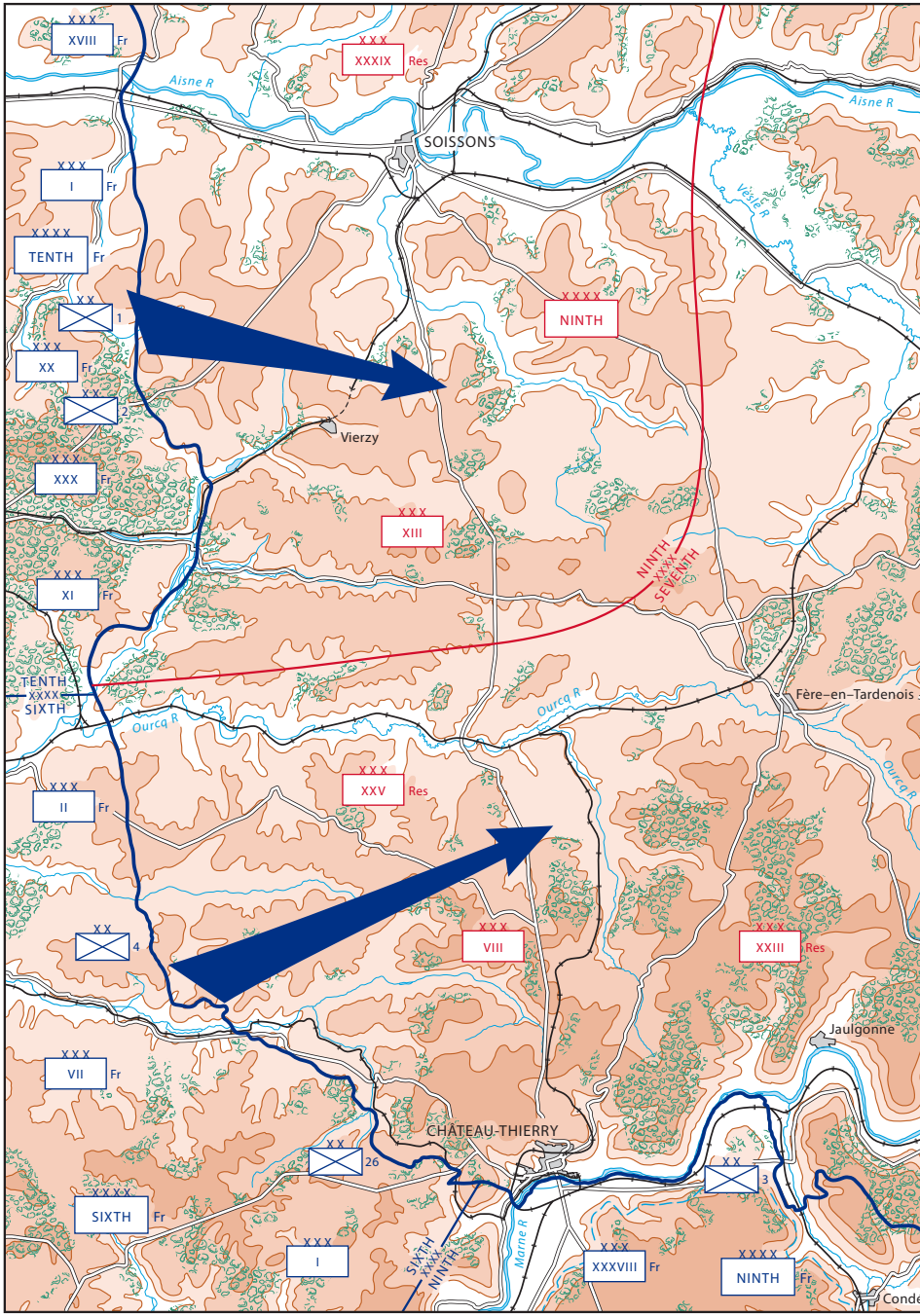
Mangin's Tenth Army consisted of twenty-two infantry and three cavalry divisions, most of which had been concentrated in and around the forest of Villers-Cotterêts since late June. Although not present with the main body of the army, the American 1st and 2d Divisions were slated to play a leading role in the coming offensive. Maj. Gen. Charles P. Summerall's 1st Division was located near Froissy, a little over twenty kilometers from the battlefield at Cantigny, when it received orders on 11 July to report to the French Tenth Army. The division made

the 120-kilometer journey to Mortefontaine by truck over the following week, with the artillery arriving just in time for the offensive during the night of 17–18 July. The 2d Division had even less time to redeploy, receiving orders to move out on 14 July. Lacking transportation, the infantry could not embark until 16 July, and consequently did not reach their destination until the evening of 17 July. Arriving at Taillefontaine with little time to spare—still about seven kilometers from the jump-off point—many units had to march in double-time up to two kilometers before immediately going into action.

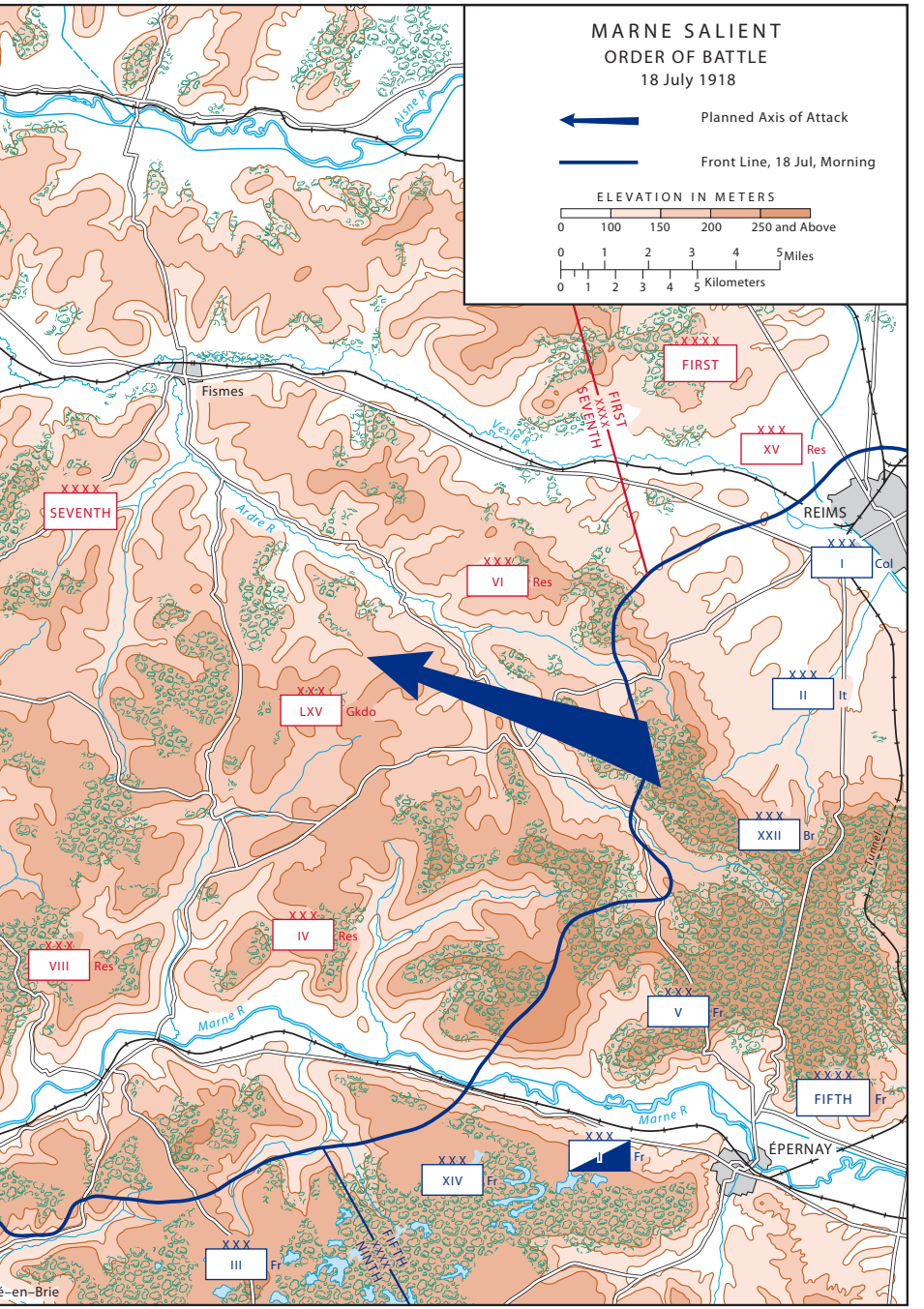
On top of the chaos caused by its last-minute redeployment, the 2d Division had just undergone a change in overall command. While on leave in Paris on 14 July, Maj. Gen. James G. Harbord, who had led the 4th Brigade through the fighting in Belleau Wood, received orders to take command of the 2d Division after Pershing relieved Maj. Gen. Omar Bundy. Harbord left Paris the next day, assuming command of the division around 0900 on 15 July. He had almost no time to familiarize himself with his new duties before the beginning of the offensive, which he only learned about on the evening of 15 July. Harbord recorded his irritation at these last-minute developments, writing that:

> A division of twenty-eight thousand men, the size of a European army corps, had been completely removed from the control of its responsible commander, and deflected by marching and by truck, through France to destination unknown to any of the authorities responsible either for its supply, its safety, or its efficiency in the coming attack. The French Corps Commander and his staff were unable to state the points at which the division would be debussed or where orders could reach which would move it promptly to its attack position. This within thirty hours of a decisive battle.

Opposite the Tenth Army were eight divisions, backed by an additional six in reserve, belonging to the German *Ninth Army*'s *XXXIX Reserve Corps* and *XIII Corps*. These units had made limited defensive preparations and suffered from low morale as well as supply shortages. The Germans based their strongest points of resistance around the ravines that cut across the countryside southwest of Soissons. Other strong points were the small French villages, whose stone-walled buildings provided useful shelter and cover for the German defenders. In


XVIII Fr
XXXIX Res
Aisne R
SOISSONS
Vesle R
I Fr
TENTH Fr
NINTH
1
XX Fr
2
Vierzy
XXX Fr
XIII
NINTH
XXX
SEVENTH
XI Fr
TENTH
XXX
SIXTH
Ourcq R
Fère-en-Tardenois
II Fr
XXV Res
4
VIII
XXIII Res
Jaulgonne
VII Fr
CHÂTEAU-THIERRY
26
3
SIXTH Fr
I
SIXTH
XXX
NINTH
Marne R
XXXVIII Fr
NINTH Fr
Conde

Map 3


MARNE SALIENT
ORDER OF BATTLE
18 July 1918
Planned Axis of Attack
Front Line, 18 Jul, Morning
ELEVATION IN METERS
0
100
150
200
250 and Above
Miles
Kilometers
Aisne R
Fismes
Vesle R
Ardre R
Marne R
REIMS
ÉPERNAY
FIRST
SEVENTH
XXXX
SEVENTH
XXX
VI
Res
XXX
XV
Res
XXX
I
Col
XXX
II
It
XXX
XXII
Br
XXX
V
Fr
XXXX
FIFTH
Fr
XXX
I
Fr
XXX
XIV
Fr
XXX
III
Fr
XXX
IV
Res
XXX
VIII
Res
XXX
LXV
Gkdo
é-en-Brie



Battery of 5th Field Artillery, 1st Division, near Ploisy
(National Archives)

general, the Germans in the Marne salient, not expecting to fight a defensive battle, had not constructed elaborate trench networks resembling those found in more established positions elsewhere on the Western Front.

Both the 1st and 2d Divisions came under the control of the French XX Corps, commanded by General Pierre E. Berdoulat. Known within the French Army as the "Iron Corps," the XX Corps had fought in Champagne and at Verdun before deploying to Soissons. Foch himself had led the corps during the defense of Nancy in 1914. At Soissons, Berdoulat's command consisted largely of Americans, who accounted for no less than 80 percent of the corps' strength. The 1st and 2d Divisions were among the most experienced and battle-tested units in the AEF. The 2d Division, however, was not entirely fresh as a result of the casualties it sustained in the fierce fighting in Belleau Wood, which had ended only a few weeks prior.

Also assigned to the XX Corps was one of the French Army's most elite units—and one of its few remaining twelve-battalion divisions—the 1st Moroccan Division, commanded by General Albert Daugan. Consisting of a mix of French Foreign Legion, Senegalese, and North African units, the outfit impressed the Americans as particularly fearsome. One doughboy recalled that a "big, fierce-looking" French battalion commander, visiting with 1st Division troops before the battle, commented that "he hoped it would be sunny on the morrow, as it was much better weather

for killing Germans, and that he was looking forward to it." The American added that the officer "looked as if he meant it, too."

The three divisions in XX Corps formed the spearhead of the Allied attack, aimed at securing high ground south of Soissons. Other American units were also slated to participate in subsidiary operations around the Marne salient. Farther to the south, elements of the 4th Division were assigned to divisions in the French Sixth Army's VII and II Corps. The 39th, 58th, and 59th Infantry of the 4th Division were thus attached to the French 164th and 33d Divisions in two separate attacks directed eastward into the salient, both of which would begin on 18 July. From the southernmost tip of the salient, the 3d, 26th, 28th, and 42d Divisions were to push northeast, crossing the Marne and proceeding north through the center of the salient, with attacks beginning at the same time as—or shortly after—the initial operation near Soissons. Although the offensive against the Marne salient was technically a French operation under French overall command, it was really a coalition effort, with substantial AEF and BEF contributions. (*See Map 4.*)

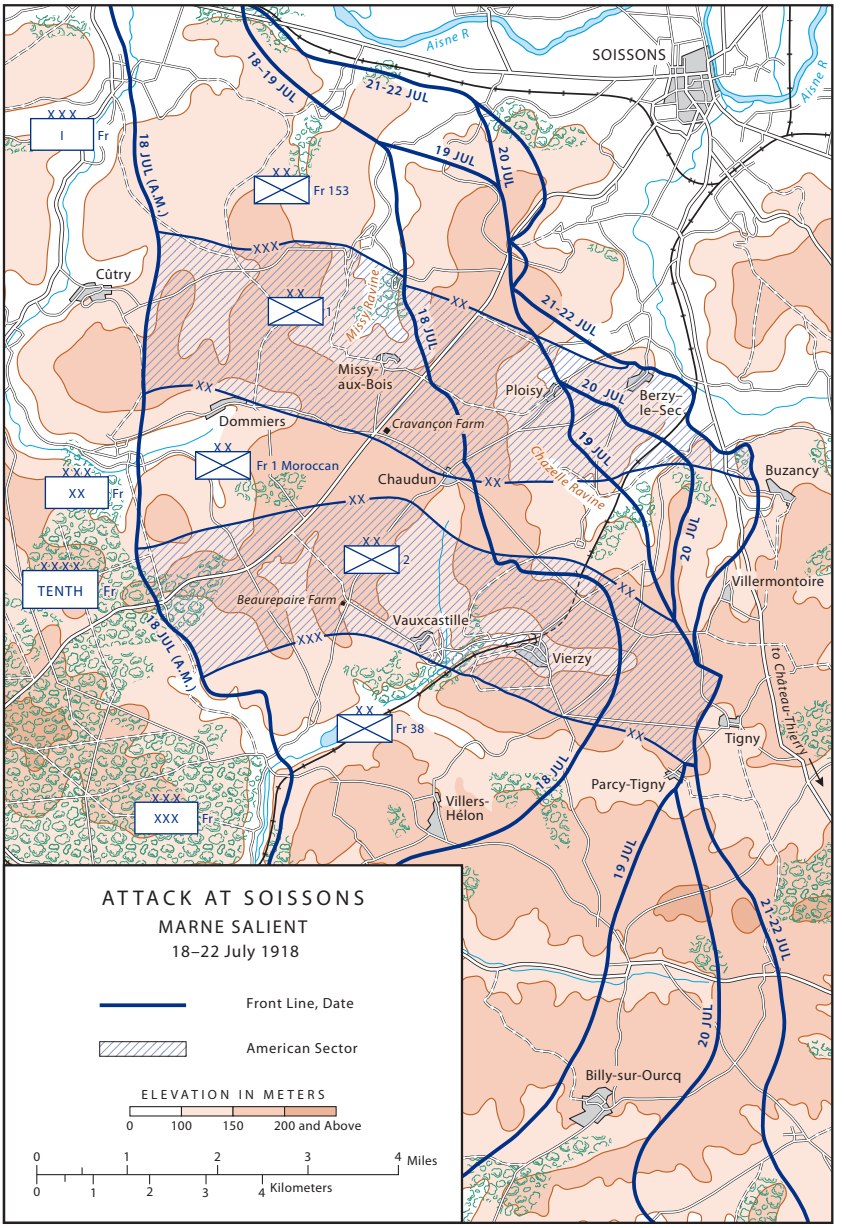
Assigned to fight alongside the infantrymen of the French Tenth Army was a contingent of 324 tanks belonging to Col. Charles-Joseph Chedeville's French 2d Tank Brigade. Consisting of either heavy tanks—the 13.6-ton Schneider CA-1 or the 23-ton Saint-Chamond, both mounting 75-mm. guns—or light 6.7-ton Renault FT tanks, mounting 7.9-mm. or 37-mm. guns, the battalions of the brigade supported different divisions in the attack. A total of fifty-seven tanks, mainly Saint-Chamonds, went into battle in support of the 2d Division, while twenty-seven Schneiders accompanied the 1st Division. Owing to technical problems—common to tank operations throughout the First World War—only 225 tanks of the 2d Tank Brigade made it to the battlefield on 18 July, although others joined the fight on subsequent days. The Sixth Army had another 154 tanks. The total of 478 made Soissons the French Army's largest tank battle of the war. One American soldier remarked that there were more tanks at Soissons "than we knew were in the world."

The XX Corps issued attack orders on 17 July, with H–Hour set for 0435 the next day. Unfortunately, these orders did not reach the 1st and 2d Divisions until late in the evening. Both divisions had difficulties moving into assault positions and to the starting line, compounded by violent thunderstorms during the night of 17–18 July. The road conditions were so bad that machine gun companies and 37-mm. gun sections could not keep up and did not rejoin their

regiments until 19 July. Many of the accompanying French tanks also arrived late to the fight.

In the 1st Division's sector, the Allies experienced a security breach—similar to that suffered by the Germans before their offensive in Champagne—when two French deserters crossed over to enemy lines around 0400 on 18 July, revealing that the Allied attack would begin in less than an hour. The Germans responded with a protective artillery barrage at 0430, which fell while the 1st Division's first wave was assembled on the starting line. The Allied artillery plan called for a rolling barrage, beginning at H–Hour without any prior artillery preparation. The absence of a sustained preparatory bombardment had the intended effect of preserving the element of surprise, in spite of the above-mentioned security breach, and the rolling barrage—together with French tank support—enabled a rapid advance across two kilometers of open farmland with only light casualties. The fighting intensified around the town of Missy-aux-Bois and the nearby Missy ravine, a kilometer-wide gulch where the Germans had stationed large numbers of machine guns and field artillery pieces. Maj. Clarence R. Huebner's 2d Battalion, 28th Infantry, took 50 percent casualties in two unsuccessful attacks on the ravine. The German position faced an additional attack by the 2d Battalion, 26th Infantry, which stormed the ravine at about 0715. Fighting through the elaborate German defensive works, the 28th Infantry, supported by elements of the French 153d Division, mopped up the German strongpoint by 0900, as the town of Missy-aux-Bois fell to the 16th Infantry at about the same time. One German battalion, which had taken refuge in a cave, was captured almost intact, complete with 604 officers and enlisted men.

As the regiments of the 2d Infantry Brigade to the north became bogged down in the fighting around the Missy ravine, the 1st Brigade's 16th and 18th Infantry made one of the day's most dramatic advances, reaching their objectives by 0830 and pushing forward about a kilometer farther than neighboring units. Elements of the 18th Infantry went even farther than that, assaulting Chaudun—located within the 1st Moroccan Division's sector—and engaging in hand-to-hand combat with the German defenders. The 1st Brigade's rapid advance left both its regiments in an exposed position, and they suffered heavy casualties as a result. The official history of the 1st Division records that the 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry, taking fire from three sides, lost all of its officers and "was almost annihilated."


ATTACK AT SOISSONS
MARNE SALIENT
18–22 July 1918
Front Line, Date
American Sector
ELEVATION IN METERS
0 100 150 200 and Above
0 1 2 3 4 Miles
0 1 2 3 4 Kilometers
SOISSONS
Aisne R
Aisne R
Câtry
Dommiers
Missy-aux-Bois
Missy Ravine
Cravançon Farm
Ploisy
Berzy-le-Sec
Chaudun
Chazelle Ravine
Buzancy
Villermontoire
Beaurepaire Farm
Vauxcastille
Vierzy
Tigny
Parcy-Tigny
Villers-Hélon
Billy-sur-Ourcq
to Château-Thierry
Fr 153
Fr 1 Moroccan
Fr 38
TENTH
18–19 JUL
18 JUL (A.M.)
19 JUL
20 JUL
21-22 JUL
18 JUL

Map 4

At 1100, the XX Corps headquarters announced that the 1st Division's intermediate objective, Cravançon Farm, had been taken. Although the division's orders were to take the line running from Buzancy to Berzy-le-Sec, the disorganization and heavy casualties incurred in the morning's fighting limited its ability to make a further advance. German resistance also started to stiffen in the afternoon, owing in part to the timely arrival of the *28th Division*, which had been in reserve. Unable to progress toward its new objective, the 1st Division shifted over to the defensive, staging no major attacks in the afternoon of 18 July. The division had made a six-kilometer advance in the space of only a few hours—shattering the *11th Bavarian Division*, which was left with only 2,500 men out of a prebattle total of 6,500. In the words of the 16th Infantry's regimental chaplain, "it was a most spectacular battle to watch, but terrible beyond description to experience."

To the south, the doughboys in the 2d Division began their assault as they arrived at their jump-off points around 0435 on 18 July. In this sector, the objectives were Beaurepaire Farm, the château southeast of Vauxcastille, and the eastern edge of the village of Vierzy. Advancing behind a rolling barrage, the infantry made rapid progress at first, although confusion set in immediately as troops became intermingled—in part because of their precipitate arrival at the starting line. Although the terrain in the 2d Division sector did not include the troublesome ravines that obstructed the 1st Division's advance—with the exception of the Vauxcastille ravine near Vierzy—many 2d Division units rapidly strayed outside their boundaries or veered away from the designated axis of attack. Some 2d Division troops crossed into the 1st Moroccan Division's sector, fighting alongside French troops in that area. One company of the 2d Battalion, 5th Regiment (U.S. Marines), went even farther astray, traveling over five-and-a-half kilometers to the northeast—across the front of the 1st Moroccan Division—almost reaching the zone of operations of the 1st Division. Around 0930, a mixed force composed of elements of the 5th Marine Regiment and the 28th Infantry infiltrated to the east as far as the edge of the third objective, the town of Vierzy. After briefly entering the town, however, the detachment withdrew to avoid the effects of German gas shelling.

Although the 2d Division's third-line objectives remained unoccupied on 18 July, it nevertheless had successfully taken all

of its second objectives by the early afternoon. In response to the division's rapid progress during the morning, the XX Corps announced a new objective for 2d Division, beyond the Château-Thierry–Soissons highway. The regimental commanders did not receive orders for this operation in time for the division to begin the assault at 1800, and the attack was therefore postponed. The 2d Division's assault kicked off shortly after 1900. The division reached a line east of Vierzy, which fell to elements of the 23d Infantry and 5th Regiment—attacking from three directions—after 2000. By the evening of 18–19 July, the 2d Division's front line was fairly straight except on its left flank, where the 1st Moroccan Division's comparatively slow rate of advance had left a one-kilometer gap. The 2d Division repulsed several German counterattacks during the night.

The Allied advance of roughly seven kilometers on a twenty-kilometer front in a single day of fighting dislocated the entire German position in the Marne salient and wrecked Ludendorff's hopes for a renewed offensive in Flanders. The German high command redeployed divisions earmarked for that offensive during the afternoon on 18 July, diverting troops and support services to the south, and effectively ending preparations for *Hagen*. One German officer wrote in his diary the next day: "I know that we are finished. My thoughts oppress me. How are we to recover ourselves?" German losses had indeed been severe. Across the entire front of the Marne salient, around 20,000 German soldiers had been taken prisoner, including 10,000 captured by the Tenth Army. Although the Allied forces had fallen somewhat short of their ambitious objectives for the first day, failing to break through the German lines, by the evening of 18 July it was clear that the German Army had suffered a major defeat.

At 0400 on 19 July, the 1st Division resumed attacking with the same objective, the line Buzancy–Berzy-le-Sec. This attack began with a rolling barrage and tank support, but no preparatory artillery fire. Heavy German artillery and machine gun fire stopped elements of both the 1st Division and the 1st Moroccan Division short of the Chazelle and Ploisy ravines, stalling the advance. Resuming the assault once again at 1730, this time with heavy artillery preparation, 1st Division elements captured Ploisy, advancing to the east of the town and into the Chazelle ravine.

In the 2d Division's sector, Harbord ordered Lt. Col. Harry Lee's 6th Regiment (U.S. Marines) to continue the attack on 19 July. The division's other three regiments were too exhausted and depleted



"Peace Talk": American artillery piece near Dommiers
(National Archives)

to make further attacks. When the 6th Regiment's assault began at 0900, accompanying French tanks drew a tremendous volume of German artillery fire, resulting in about a third of the armored force being disabled. By midday, the 2d Division had advanced to a line from Parcy-Tigny to La Râperie. Losses during the advance were extremely heavy, and at 1145 Colonel Lee estimated that his regiment had already suffered roughly 30 percent casualties. At 1800, the German *20th Division* counterattacked on the 2d Division's left flank, seeking to regain ground lost during the day. The 1st Moroccan Division and 6th Regiment repulsed the attack west of Villemontoire. The French 58th Division ultimately relieved the 2d Division during the evening of 19–20 July, completely taking over the 2d Division's front by the next afternoon. After this, the 2d Division withdrew to Pierrefonds and Taillefontaine, in Tenth Army reserve, having advanced some eight kilometers in only two days of fighting.

The attack of the 6th Regiment on 19 July had been especially costly. The unit suffered the highest number of casualties of any unit in 2d Division engaged in the offensive, in large part because

of accurate German artillery fire, which caught the 6th Regiment during their two-kilometer advance across open ground to the starting line. The division sustained 4,135 casualties between 18 and 20 July, including over 700 dead. Harbord was convinced that their push had made an extremely important contribution to the Allied victory in spite of its heavy cost, writing in his memoirs that the 2d Division's achievements at Soissons would have been worthwhile "even if every member of the Division from the Commanding General to the last joined replacement had died."

As the 2d Division withdrew from the line, the 1st Division remained in place with orders to continue the advance the next day. The XX Corps adjusted divisional boundaries at 0230 on 20 July, setting La Folie Farm, east of Buzancy, as the 1st Division's new objective. Beginning at 1400, after two hours of artillery preparation, attacks made some progress before stalling in front of Berzy-le-Sec. The XX Corps ordered a renewed attack on 21 July, but by this time 1st Division units were badly commingled and organization was largely improvised. When the 28th Infantry's senior surviving officer in the vicinity of Berzy-le-Sec, 1st Lt. Soren C. Sorenson, was hit by a shell fragment, 2d Lt. John R. D. Cleland assumed command of the first wave of the assault on the town. Despite being wounded both before and during the advance, Cleland led his men into Berzy-le-Sec through German artillery and machine gun fire, receiving the Distinguished Service Cross for this action. The 28th Infantry had control of the town by 1015. Throughout the day, the entire 1st Division faced heavy artillery and machine gun fire, as well as at least one fully organized German counterattack, which it repulsed. By the evening of 21 July, the division had secured a firm position on the outskirts of Buzancy, astride the Soissons–Château-Thierry highway.

The XX Corps ordered the British Army's 15th (Scottish) Division to relieve the 1st Division on the night of 22–23 July, and the 1st Division's infantry regiments withdrew from the line with little German interference the next day. In only five days of combat, the 1st Division had forced an advance of eleven kilometers, sustaining a total of 6,870 casualties, including over 1,500 dead. Losses among commissioned officers were particularly heavy, amounting to as much as 60 percent killed or wounded. The 16th and 18th Infantry regiments lost all of their field-grade officers, except their respective colonels; for their part, the 28th Infantry lost two and the 26th Infantry all of its

field-grade officers. The division would not be fit for service on an active front again until September.

On 22 July, in response to the Allied advance, Ludendorff authorized the evacuation of German forces from the southern portion of the Marne salient. Further withdrawals took place by stages over the following weeks. Field Marshal Hindenburg later wrote that the retreat from the Marne was:

> a grievous decision, not from the purely military standpoint but from that of professional pride. How the enemy would rejoice if the word "Marne" were to mean a revolution in the military situation for a second time! Paris, and indeed all France, would breathe again. What would be the effect of this news on the whole world? We realised how many eyes and hearts would follow us with envy, hatred—and hope.

The Germans in the salient would ultimately pull back to a defensive line on the Vesle River, over thirty-two kilometers north of Château-Thierry.

The performance of the 1st and 2d Divisions at Soissons offered further proof that American troops were willing and able to fight fiercely at close quarters with the enemy. It also again demonstrated that reckless frontal assaults and headlong advances were costly and often ineffective. At the same time, American troops benefited from fighting alongside the veteran 1st Moroccan Division, which—like many other French Army units—had refined small unit tactics to such an extent that they could reliably reduce heavily defended strongpoints while suffering minimal casualties. The only drawback to the French tactical system was that it entailed a slower rate of advance, something that many American officers were unwilling to accept or even understand. Additionally, both American divisions had difficulty maintaining direction and observing unit boundaries while attacking, although this might have been attributable in part to their late receipt of orders and late arrival on the battlefield, which gave them no time to reconnoiter or even study maps of this unfamiliar front. The divisions also found maintaining forward and lateral communications in the attack to be a constant challenge, and command posts at all levels consistently failed to keep each other informed of their locations as they moved. In the 1st Division, the 2d Brigade's commander, Brig. Gen. Beaumont B. Buck, exacerbated this confusion by deciding to spend his time



Horses of the 7th Field Artillery near Missy-aux-Bois
(National Archives)

throughout much of the offensive "touring" the battlefield and visiting neighboring units rather than commanding his own men.

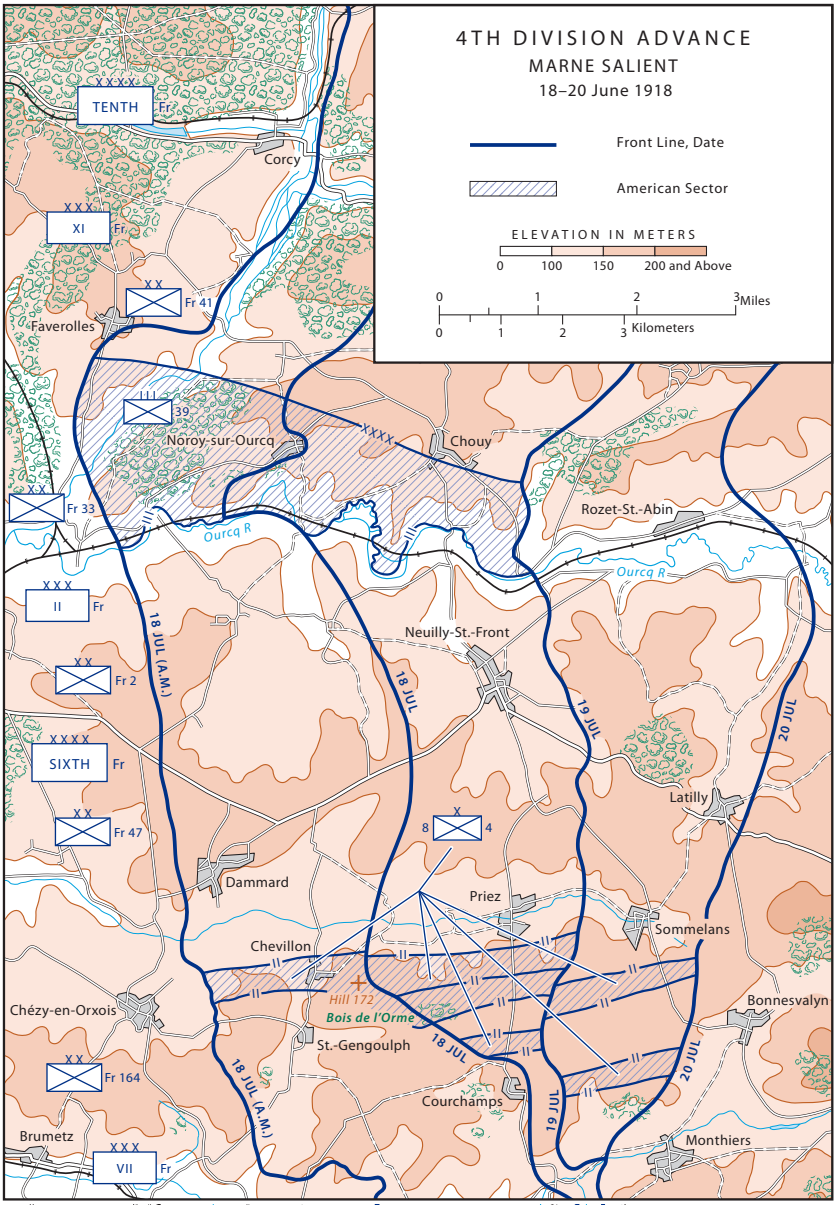
General Summerall had assumed command of the 1st Division only three days before the attack, replacing Maj. Gen. Robert L. Bullard, who had been promoted to command the III Corps. An artilleryman who had commanded the 1st Division's field artillery brigade at Cantigny, Summerall cemented his reputation as a "pusher" almost immediately. He may have threatened to relieve Buck, spurring the latter into action on 21 July, and impugned the personal courage of the 26th Infantry's commanding officer, Col. Hamilton A. Smith, by suggesting that his command post was located too far to the rear. Smith was killed shortly afterward while leading his men in an assault on a German machine gun position. Summerall later also relieved the 28th Infantry's commander, Col. Conrad S. Babcock. Beyond his tendency to replace subordinates on a whim, Summerall's fondness for overblown rhetoric added to his image as an aggressive, demanding commander. His reply, when asked in the evening of 18 July whether his division could attack the next day, was characteristic: "Sir, when the 1st Division has only two men left they will be echeloned in depth and attacking toward Berlin." Summerall's bombastic personality, however, belied a judicious appreciation for the power of artillery on the modern battlefield.

Since his arrival in France, he had insisted that American divisions needed more artillery than that contained in two regiments of 75-mm. guns and a single regiment of 155-mm. howitzers, but his recommendations had fallen on deaf ears. At Soissons, however, he discovered a method for maximizing the artillery firepower available to the division by concentrating fire on a narrow front, even if this might leave the division's flanks unsupported. This technique proved to be effective.

The 4th Division's Advance

In the south, other American divisions participated in the general Allied offensive as part of the French Sixth Army. The objectives there were more limited, intended mainly to support the Tenth Army's decisive effort near Soissons. The French II Corps, the northernmost unit in General Degoutte's Sixth Army, had orders to advance roughly five kilometers to the line running from a hill north of Breuil to the village of Neuilly-Saint-Front alongside the Tenth Army. At the same time, the French VII Corps and the American I Army Corps would make a modest advance in the southern part of the Sixth Army's sector. Elements of Maj. Gen. George H. Cameron's 4th Division, which had only arrived in France in May 1918, were assigned piecemeal to French units in the Sixth Army. Opposing the 4th Division were the German *40th Division* and *10th Bavarian Division*, which Allied intelligence rated as third- and second-class units, respectively (*Map 5*).

Commanded by Col. Frank C. Bolles, a veteran of the Philippine Insurrection and recipient of the Distinguished Service Cross in 1899, the 4th Division's 39th Infantry attacked along with the French II Corps' 33d Division between 18 and 20 July. Despite suffering from a breakdown in communications which led to the regiment taking friendly fire from French artillery on the morning on 19 July, the 39th Infantry managed to advance more than seven kilometers in two days of fighting, reaching a point two kilometers east of Chouy while suffering only 255 casualties. Meanwhile, the 4th Division's 58th and 59th Infantry of the 8th Infantry Brigade saw action farther to the south while attached to General Léon M. Gaucher's French 164th Division, part of the VII Corps. While the 59th Infantry remained in reserve, the 58th Infantry jumped off at 0435 on 18 July with no artillery preparation. Early in the morning, the 1st and 2d Battalions, 58th Infantry, assisted French units in successful attacks on Chevillon and Courchamps. Maj. Gilbert R.


4TH DIVISION ADVANCE
MARNE SALIENT
18–20 June 1918
Front Line, Date
American Sector
ELEVATION IN METERS
0 100 150 200 and Above
0 1 2 3 Miles
0 1 2 3 Kilometers
TENTH Fr
Corcy
XI Fr
Fr 41
Faverolles
39
Noroy-sur-Ourcq
Chouy
Fr 33
Ourcq R
Rozet-St.-Abin
II Fr
Fr 2
18 JUL (A.M.)
Neuilly-St.-Front
18 JUL
19 JUL
20 JUL
SIXTH Fr
Fr 47
Latilly
8 4
Dammard
Priez
Sommelans
Chevillon
Hill 172
Bois de l'Orme
Chézy-en-Orxois
St.-Gengoulph
Bonnesvalyn
Fr 164
Courchamps
Brumetz
VII Fr
Monthiers

Map 5

Cook's 2d Battalion then made an independent advance around 1000, storming trenches located on Hill 172 and coming under heavy fire from well-defended German positions near the Bois de l'Orme. Unable to advance, and having taken almost 50 percent casualties, the battalion was forced to fall back from the wood, with the bulk of the unit taking up positions near Hill 172. The French released the 59th Infantry from reserve in the early afternoon, although neither American regiment made further attacks on 18 July.

Resuming the offensive at 0435 the next day, the 59th Infantry took heavy casualties in repeated attempts to cross the Courchamps–Priez road. Despite being supported by French tanks in attacks during the afternoon, the regiment made no progress against German artillery and machine gun fire. The 1st Battalion, 58th Infantry, also attacked on 19 July, accompanying a battalion of the French 113d Infantry Regiment in an advance eastward from Courchamps. The battalion progressed less than a kilometer before being halted by heavy German fire. The attack continued at 0435 on 20 July. The 3d Battalion, 59th Infantry, was the only 4th Division unit to attack on this day, as other American battalions acted in support of French units. On the early morning of 21 July, the 164th Division ordered the withdrawal of all 8th Brigade battalions. The 8th Brigade sustained some 1,660 casualties during its three days in the offensive, helping French units to gain about eight kilometers of ground against determined German resistance. Total casualties for the 4th Division in the offensive against the Marne salient amounted to 2,098 men.

The Advance from the South

The 26th Division was the third American division to arrive in France. By the end of the war, it had accumulated more days in active engagement with the enemy than any other AEF unit, with the exception of the 1st Division. In addition to its lengthy service in the line, the 26th Division was distinguished by the controversies that surrounded both the unit and its commander during and after the war. Last in his class at West Point, Maj. Gen. Clarence R. Edwards served as an administrator in the Philippines and headed the War Department's Northeastern Department before taking command of the 26th Division in 1917. His easygoing personality and paternalistic command style left an indelible mark on the Yankee Division's personnel, who idolized their commander, giving him the nickname "Daddy." The 26th received less training than other early-arriving

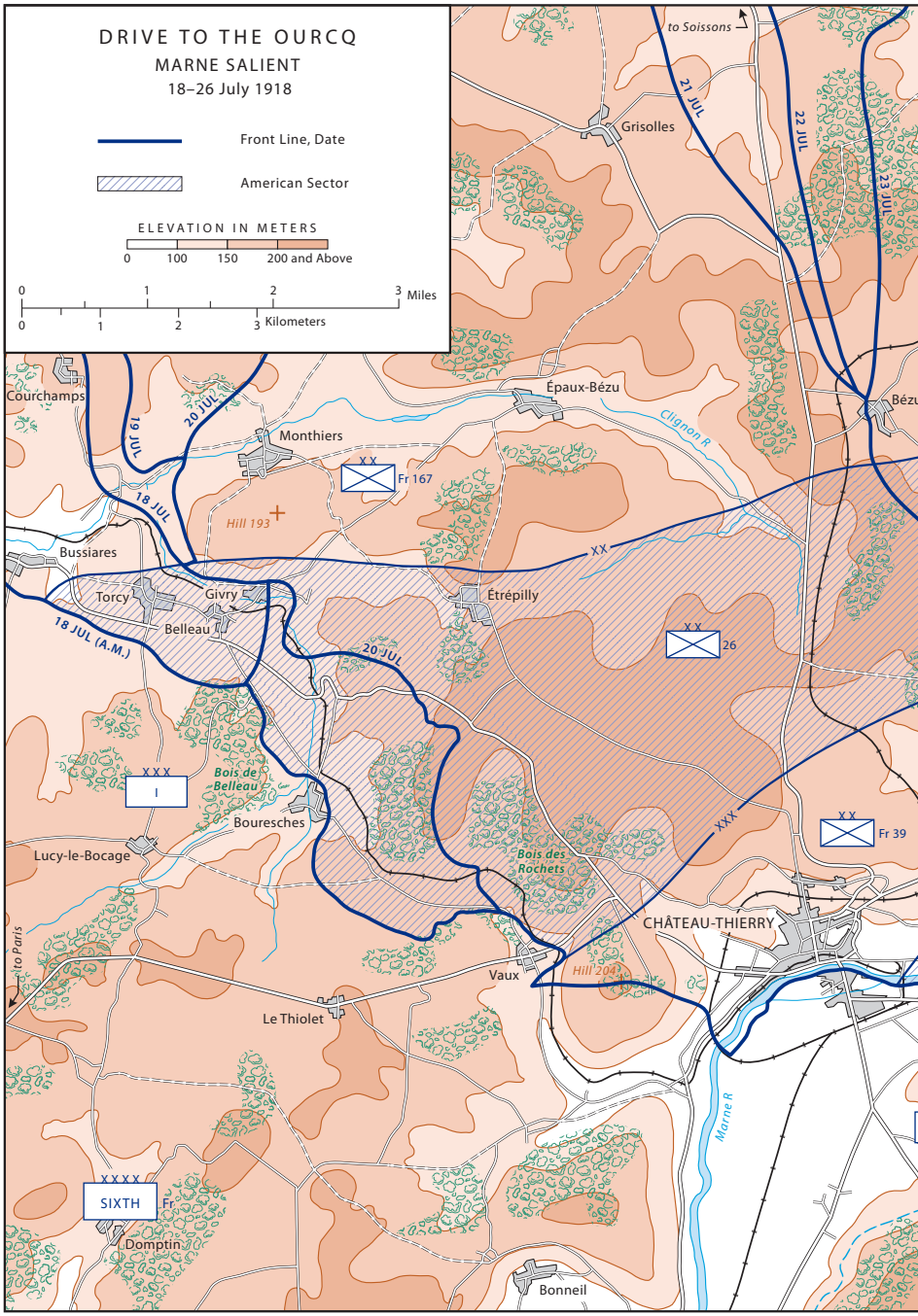
divisions and performed indifferently during its first tour of duty in a quiet sector of the line. Inspectors frequently criticized the unit, citing instances of loose discipline and disorganization.

But the 26th was not necessarily a substandard division. To some extent, General Pershing's bias against the National Guard, something that he shared with many other Regular Army officers, influenced assessments of the division's performance. When the 26th Division repelled a major German raid while holding the line at Seicheprey on 21–22 April, the response from AEF General Headquarters (GHQ) was overwhelmingly negative. Pershing considered the raid a defeat, noting that the division had suffered 650 casualties, of which 180 were taken prisoner, and he held the Yankee Division and its commander responsible.

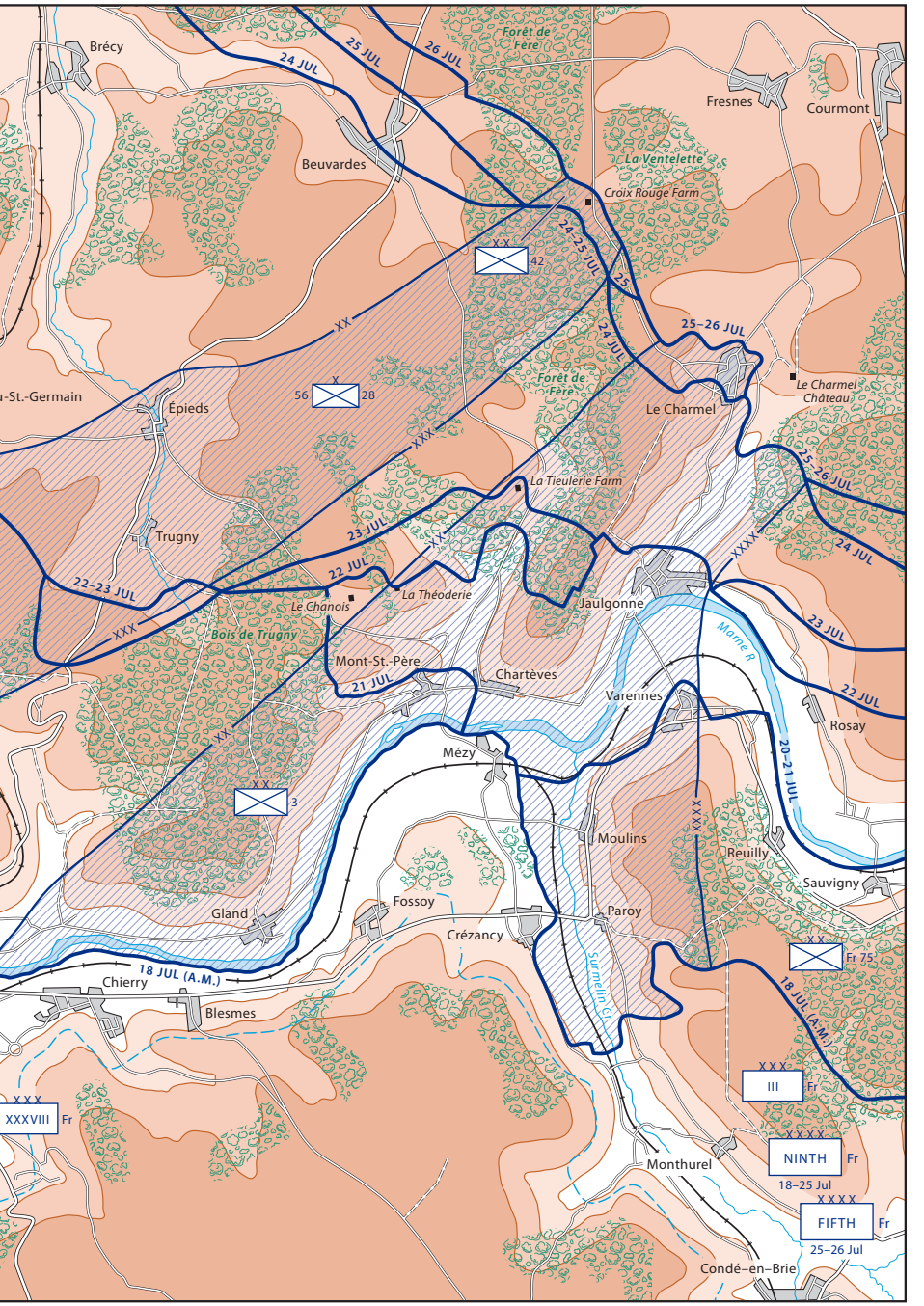
The reality, however, was more complicated. The commander of the French XXXII Corps, General Fénelon F. G. Passaga, held that the division had done well against a "carefully planned and well executed" German attack. In the assessment of historian Mark E. Grotelueschen, the division's record showed that it had "done fairly well in a long, hard, inglorious tour in an increasingly active sector." However far from perfect, the 26th Division was not as dysfunctional as Pershing and GHQ believed.

In early July, after recovering from the raid at Seicheprey, the 26th Division moved toward Château-Thierry, occupying a ten-kilometer front in the *Pas Fini* (or "unfinished") sector as part of Lt. Gen. Hunter Liggett's newly established I Army Corps, part of the French Sixth Army. In the German offensive of 15–18 July, the entire line of the 26th was subjected to heavy artillery bombardment, and its 101st Infantry repelled two minor German attacks around Vaux on 15 July. Little further enemy action occurred in the division's sector, but the incomplete defensive works offered minimal shelter against German artillery fire and raids, and the 26th Division suffered more than 1,000 casualties between 10 and 17 July.

Following the defeat of the German offensive, Liggett directed the 26th Division to attack in support of the general Allied operation on 18 July, ordering the Yankee Division to advance two kilometers while maintaining close contact with the neighboring French 167th Division (*Map 6*). As was the case elsewhere along the Marne salient on 18 July, the assault was scheduled to begin at 0435 without a preparatory bombardment. Confusion set in almost immediately, as entire companies and ammunition columns lost their way while advancing through Belleau Wood in the predawn


DRIVE TO THE OURCQ
MARNE SALIENT
18–26 July 1918
Front Line, Date
American Sector
ELEVATION IN METERS
0 100 150 200 and Above
0 1 2 3 Miles
0 1 2 3 Kilometers
to Soissons
Grisolles
21 JUL
22 JUL
23 JUL
Courchamps
19 JUL
20 JUL
Monthiers
Épaux-Bézu
Bézu
Clignon R.
Fr 167
18 JUL
Hill 193
Bussiares
XX
Torcy
Givry
Belleau
Étrépilly
18 JUL (A.M.)
20 JUL
26
XXX
I
Bois de Belleau
Bouresches
Lucy-le-Bocage
Bois des Rochets
Fr 39
CHÂTEAU-THIERRY
to Paris
Vaux
Hill 204
Le Thiolet
Marne R.
XXXX
SIXTH
Fr
Domptin
Bonneil

Map 6


Brécy
Beuvardes
Forêt de Fère
Fresnes
Courmont
La Ventelette
Croix Rouge Farm
42
Épieds
56
28
Forêt de Fère
Le Charmel
Le Charmel Château
La Tieulerie Farm
Trugny
Le Chanois
La Théoderie
Jaulgonne
Bois de Trugny
Mont-St.-Père
Chartèves
Varennes
Rosay
Marne R.
Mézy
3
Moulins
Reuilly
Sauvigny
Fossoy
Paroy
Gland
Crézancy
Surmelin R.
Fr 75
Chierry
Blesmes
III
Fr
XXXVIII
Fr
NINTH
Fr
18–25 Jul
Monthurel
FIFTH
Fr
25–26 Jul
Condé-en-Brie
25 JUL
26 JUL
24 JUL
24–25 JUL
25–26 JUL
23 JUL
22 JUL
22–23 JUL
21 JUL
20–21 JUL
18 JUL (A.M.)
XX
XXX
XXXX

hours. Only one of the division's three assault battalions—the 3d Battalion, 103d Infantry—reached its jump-off point in time to catch the rolling barrage, and yet that battalion, advancing alongside the French division to its left, took its assigned objectives, including the town of Torcy, within the hour. The remaining two battalions reached their jump-off points and attacked around three hours later. Having captured the town of Belleau by 0830, the 3d Battalion, 104th Infantry, resumed its advance in the afternoon, pushing through Givry and partway up the slope of Hill 193. The battalion then withdrew to positions on the northern edges of Givry and Belleau. Meanwhile, the 2d Battalion, 103d Infantry, made a limited advance during the morning, overrunning a German machine gun position located in the Bouresches railway station by 0930. Remaining in its new position throughout the day—taking enfilading fire from machine gun positions on Hill 193—the battalion repulsed a German counterattack before withdrawing back to Belleau Wood after dark.

The following two days saw relatively little progress. Despite orders to continue the attack, the 26th Division held its position on 19 July and waited for the 167th Division to capture Hill 193. The French division made several attempts to take the hill, supported by small-arms fire from nearby 26th Division units, but it did not succeed. By 20 July, the Germans had begun to withdraw from their forward positions in the salient. Liggett ordered the I Corps to resume its advance with a major attack in the afternoon on 20 July, instructing the 26th Division to push about five kilometers to the north and east. After a short preparatory bombardment, the assault began at 1500 under the cover of a rolling barrage. Although elements of the 26th Division succeeded in reaching their first objectives, about two kilometers from their starting line, the division's performance was generally poor. The failure of the neighboring French 39th and 167th Divisions to advance exposed the Yankee Division's flanks as it moved forward. The German forces on Hill 193 remained a particularly serious obstacle, as the machine gun positions located there enfiladed the advancing 51st Brigade. The 52d Brigade, on the right, likewise took fire from German positions on Hill 204, which the French 39th Division assaulted unsuccessfully on 20 July. Machine gun fire from German strongpoints in Les Petits Bois and the Bois de Rochets, in the center and on the right of the 26th Division's sector respectively, further reduced the Yankee Division's rate of advance. In the evening, the 167th Division reported that it was no



Camouflaged pontoon bridge over the Marne (National Archives)

longer in contact with German forces, a sign that the Germans had evacuated their defensive positions in the I Corps' sector. Liggett accordingly ordered the 26th Division to continue attacking on 21 July, hoping to turn the orderly German retreat into a rout.

As the 26th Division struggled to move forward between 18 and 20 July, the French XXXVIII Corps, east of Château-Thierry, mopped up the remaining German troops south of the Marne. The 3d Division undertook limited operations on 18–19 July, patrolling actively without attempting a major advance. On the morning of 20 July, French troops attacking east of the Surmelin ravine discovered that the Germans in that area had withdrawn. The 38th Infantry then advanced in conjunction with the French 73d Division, reoccupying the town of Varennes, which the Germans had captured on 15 July. On 21 July, the 3d Division established a foothold on the northern bank of the Marne, crossing on pontoon bridges and boats near Chierry and Fossoy. German machine gun and artillery fire prevented an additional crossing by the 6th Engineers near Mézy. By the end of the day, elements of the 4th and 7th Infantry regiments occupied positions north of the Marne. Meanwhile, the French 39th Division captured Château-Thierry itself around 0800 on 21 July, as part of a general ten-kilometer advance.

Operations in the 3d Division's sector continued the next day as the Germans withdrew farther into the salient. The 38th Infantry

began crossing near Mézy at 0400 on 22 July, occupying Jaulgonne before noon and driving north toward Le Charmel. Although the 1st Battalion, 38th Infantry, reached Le Charmel at about 1315, it was unable to hold the position without support and fell back toward Jaulgonne later in the afternoon. The 4th and 7th Infantry regiments also advanced against light opposition, and by the end of the day the 3d Division had secured a line running roughly from Le Chanois and La Théoderie in the west to Jaulgonne in the east.

The 26th Division's advances on 21–22 July were equally dramatic. Attacking at 0400 on 21 July, the Yankee Division drove forward six kilometers against minimal opposition, reaching the Soissons–Château-Thierry highway by noon and taking about 175 prisoners. After a brief rest, the advance resumed in the afternoon. Progress slowed as the infantry approached fortified German positions near the towns of Épieds and Trugny. Ordered to continue advancing against what the I Corps headquarters believed to be lightly defended rearguard positions, General Edwards launched a series of unsuccessful attacks without artillery support on Trugny and Épieds in the evening of 21 July. Elements of the 26th Division briefly entered both towns before stiff German resistance forced them to withdraw. Fighting continued on 22 July as the 26th Division made repeated attempts to push through the German defensive line. The 102d Infantry gained a foothold in Épieds by 0630, but German machine gun fire, as well as a counterattack by the German *201st Division*, caused the regiment to fall back and prevented further advances during the morning. In the afternoon, the 102d staged an additional, unsuccessful attack on Épieds after a preparatory bombardment.

German resistance throughout the fighting on 21–22 July, with the exception of the defense of Épieds, Trugny, and Le Charmel, was generally on a small scale. The German rearguard elements consisted of scattered squad-sized groups of riflemen and machine gunners. These men had orders to hold out as long as possible in order to ensure that the bulk of the German forces could withdraw to new defensive positions. One historian of the 3d Division described (with slight exaggeration) how hidden German machine gunners ambushed the advancing American forces, "[opening] fire from bushes, from concealed slit trenches, and from positions in trees. It was Indian warfare with modern weapons." Lt. Col. Emerson G. Taylor, who served as the 26th Division's last chief of staff during the war, praised the tenacity of these "little groups," which helped to hold up the Allied advance, writing that "all of them defended



Directing the fire of a 37-mm. gun near Roncheres
(National Archives)

their positions to the last." Even small teams fighting in this way could cause heavy casualties. The rearguard's efforts bought time for the Germans to reinforce and occupy a series of defensive lines that ran across the interior of the Marne salient. Each line was intended to impede the Allied advance to the Vesle River, where the German high command hoped the front would stabilize. The main point of resistance, short of the Vesle, was the line along the Ourcq River in the vicinity of Fère-en-Tardenois. Although the Ourcq itself was a small waterway, fordable in many places—one soldier in the 42d Division wrote that it was "a stream hardly worthy of the name creek, but dignified by the French as a river"—the wooded terrain in the Tardenois region, as well as the high ground north of the river, made the Ourcq an ideal position from which to fight a holding action.

As the I Corps slogged through one German defensive line after another, the 1st Air Brigade carried out numerous supporting missions. The I Corps Observation Group shifted to the north immediately following the defeat of the German offensive on the Marne, and a series of reconnaissance flights supported the

advance of the 1st and 2d Divisions near Soissons. The observation group then returned to the I Corps' sector as the Americans began to advance to the Ourcq. Aerial observation during the push saw mixed results. Pilots had great difficulty communicating with ground troops who had little or no experience cooperating with air support. Because infantry contact patrols frequently failed to indicate their positions with flares or panel displays, observers had to fly at extremely low altitudes in an attempt to distinguish between American and German uniforms with the naked eye. Enemy opposition remained stubborn, and the Air Service took increasingly heavy casualties as the offensive dragged on. The 1st Air Brigade lost a total of fifteen pilots during the fighting from 18 July to 6 August, while achieving sixteen confirmed kills.

Meanwhile, the Germans prepared to hold their ground for one final day before falling back to their next defensive line, near the Ourcq. The 3d Division's 4th and 7th Infantry regiments launched renewed assaults on 23 July, pushing northeast as far as La Tieulerie Farm. The 26th Division also attacked that morning, and elements of the 101st Infantry reached the Épieds–Le Chanois road before withdrawing in the face of heavy German resistance. The rest of the day was relatively quiet within the 26th Division's sector. During the night of 23–24 July, the 28th Division's 56th Brigade entered the line, relieving the exhausted 52d Brigade—which, Liggett maintained, had "[lost] direction and failed to hold together as an organization" after the events of 21–22 July. At 0405 on 24 July, the 56th Brigade—now attached to the 26th Division—attacked the German positions near Épieds and the Bois de Trugny. The attacking 111th and 112th Infantry regiments found that the Germans had withdrawn during the night, and both regiments immediately advanced, encountering almost no opposition before reaching the Forêt de Fère—nearly nine kilometers away—in the afternoon.

Liggett issued orders in the evening instructing the 26th Division to make a "supreme effort" to reach the Sergy plateau before daybreak. This entailed a further ten-kilometer advance. Passing these orders on to the 26th Division, General Edwards noted that this drive, if successful, would permit the French I Cavalry Corps "to pass through and effectively break up a retreating and hard-pressed enemy. A complete victory is at hand." German defenses in the Forêt de Fère, including a heavily fortified position built around Croix Rouge Farm—a complex of stone buildings within a large clearing—forestalled this new push. Rather than attacking such formidable defenses, the 26th Division

and its attached troops dug in to await relief by the 42d Division's 84th Brigade, which was then advancing by truck from La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, roughly thirty-five kilometers to the southwest. The 84th Brigade entered the line on 25 July, taking control of the 26th Division's sector by 1900, while the 83d Brigade simultaneously took over the sector previously held by the French 167th Division's 170th Infantry Regiment. The 42d Division now held the entire I Corps front. The Yankee Division accordingly passed into the Sixth Army's reserve, ending its participation in the Second Battle of the Marne.

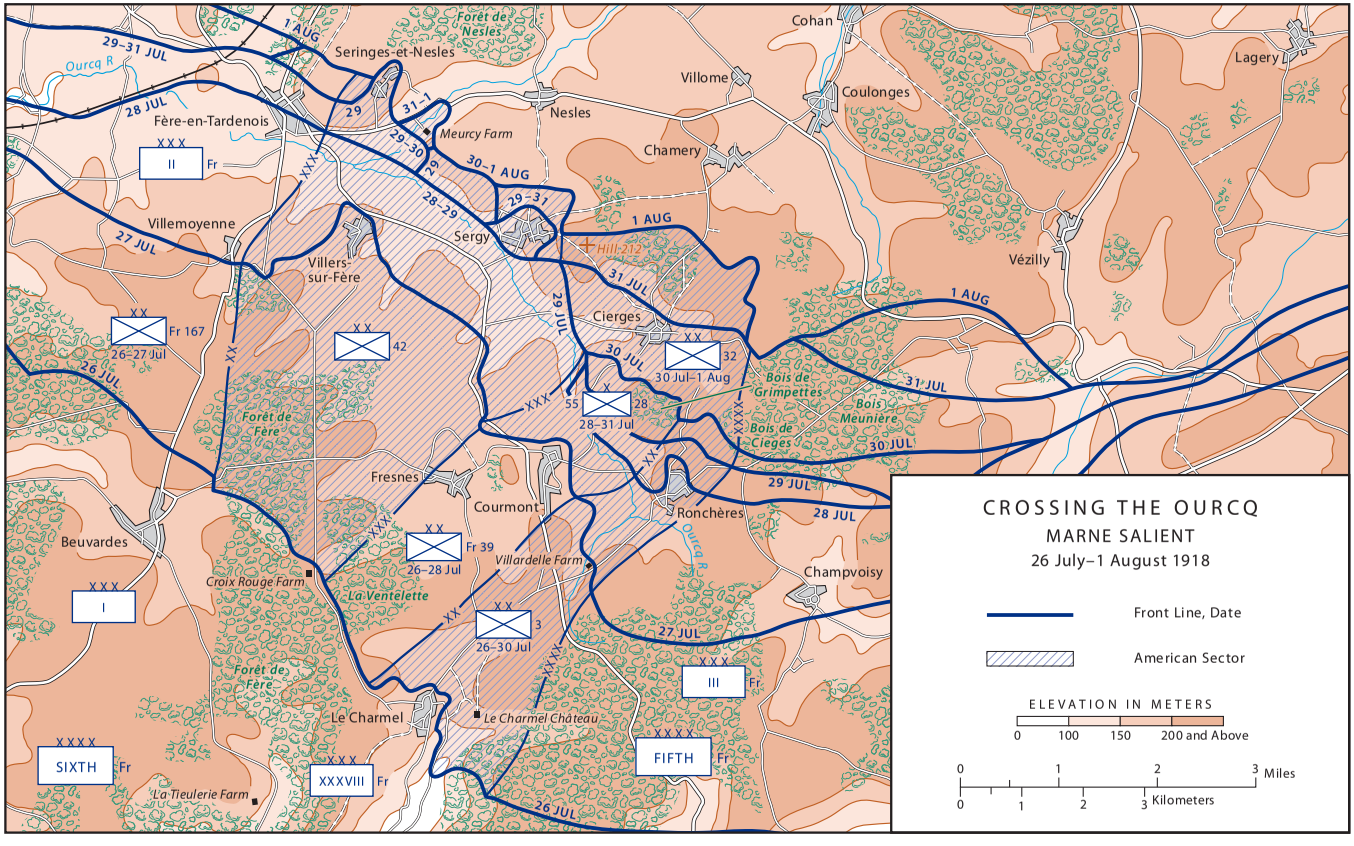
In the ten days that had elapsed since the beginning of the German Marne offensive, the 26th Division suffered 4,644 casualties. Casualties from 18 to 23 July, including losses incurred by attached units, amounted to 3,613. These losses came in the course of an eighteen-kilometer advance, which netted about 250 prisoners as well as several field artillery pieces. Although frequently critical of Edwards's leadership, Liggett held the 26th Division's personnel in high regard, stating that the "quality of the men was splendid, and equal to any in the Army." Although the division's inexperience and curtailed training limited its effectiveness in the Marne campaign, Liggett held that the Yankee Division "nevertheless . . . as a whole performed very well in its first essay in open warfare, and it did so under peculiarly difficult conditions."

The German withdrawal on the night of 23–24 July also opened up a path for the 3d Division to advance. The next day, leading elements of the 4th, 7th, and 30th Infantry regiments (the latter having relieved the 38th Infantry) approached the outskirts of Le Charmel, but failed to capture the village itself. The division attacked again on 25 July, and elements of the 4th Infantry finally succeeded in occupying the village that afternoon. The position there remained dangerous, as fire from a German machine gun nest located in Le Charmel Château, a little over a half-kilometer from Le Charmel proper, prevented American troops from moving openly in the village streets. By the evening, the capture of Le Charmel, as well as the entry of the 42d Division into the line, had prepared the ground for further advances by the I Corps and French XXXVIII Corps on 26 July.

Croix Rouge Farm

The 42d Division received orders for the first attack it would make in support of Foch's Marne counteroffensive at 1540 on

Map 7


CROSSING THE OURCQ
MARNE SALIENT
26 July–1 August 1918
Front Line, Date
American Sector
ELEVATION IN METERS
0
100
150
200 and Above
0
1
2
3 Miles
0
1
2
3 Kilometers
Ourcq R.
Seringes-et-Nesles
Forêt de Nesles
Fère-en-Tardenois
Meurcy Farm
Nesles
Villome
Cohan
Coulonges
Lagery
Chamery
Villemoyenne
Sergy
Hill 212
Villers-sur-Fère
Vézilly
Cierges
Fresnes
Courmont
Ronchères
Champvoisy
Beuvardes
Croix Rouge Farm
La Ventelette
Villardelle Farm
Forêt de Fère
Le Charmel
Le Charmel Château
La Tieulerie Farm
Bois de Grimpettes
Bois Meunière
Bois de Cieges
II Fr
I
Fr 167
42
32
28
55
Fr 39
3
III Fr
FIFTH Fr
SIXTH Fr
XXXVIII Fr
1 AUG
29–31 JUL
28 JUL
29
31–1
29–30
30–1 AUG
28–29
29–31
27 JUL
31 JUL
29 JUL
30 JUL
26 JUL
26–27 Jul
30 Jul–1 Aug
28–31 Jul
26–28 Jul
26–30 Jul

26 July (*Map 7*). The 167th and 168th Infantry regiments learned that they were to attack the Croix Rouge Farm position in a little over an hour, with orders to advance almost two kilometers beyond the farm to the edges of La Ventelette wood. The Germans had gone to great lengths to reinforce the defenses at Croix Rouge Farm, setting up several camouflaged machine gun positions with overlapping fields of fire. The defending troops, which consisted of elements of the German *23d Infantry Division* and the *10th Landwehr Division*, had taken the precaution of clearing the underbrush from the surrounding woods and painting waist-high white or red lines on the trees as visual aids for the machine gunners. The defenders also had access to a sizeable ammunition cache, located about a mile from the complex, which the Germans had stockpiled earlier in the month in preparation for the 15 July offensive. Altogether, Croix Rouge Farm was among the more formidable positions established inside the Marne salient. To one Rainbow Division soldier, it seemed as if:

> enemy machine gunners were almost everywhere—in trees, behind fallen ones, and in hurriedly made "nests" on the farm to the front . . . and all the Hun gunners had to do was sit there, pull the triggers, and keep on loading. It was a devilish deathtrap, a wicked device of a hellish brain!

Responsibility for assaulting this position fell to the 1st and 3d Battalions, 167th Infantry, and the 2d Battalion, 168th Infantry, together with elements of the 151st Machine Gun Battalion. An understrength French infantry battalion, with only about thirty men per company, also supported the left flank of the attack. The men from the 167th and 168th were tired and hungry, as many had not eaten or slept in over a day and a half. Furthermore, ammunition was slow in reaching the infantrymen on the front lines, and the attacking battalions lacked both detailed maps and accurate information about the enemy. They also had been subjected to inaccurate but nonetheless deadly harassing artillery fire throughout the better part of the day, while the Allied artillery preparation—which had been scheduled to begin two hours before the attack—failed to materialize. The attack therefore went forward shortly before 1700 in less-than-ideal circumstances.

Springing up from cover and dashing toward the German positions, across several hundred meters of farmland, the assaulting battalions immediately came under heavy machine gun fire.



Croix Rouge Farm (National Archives)

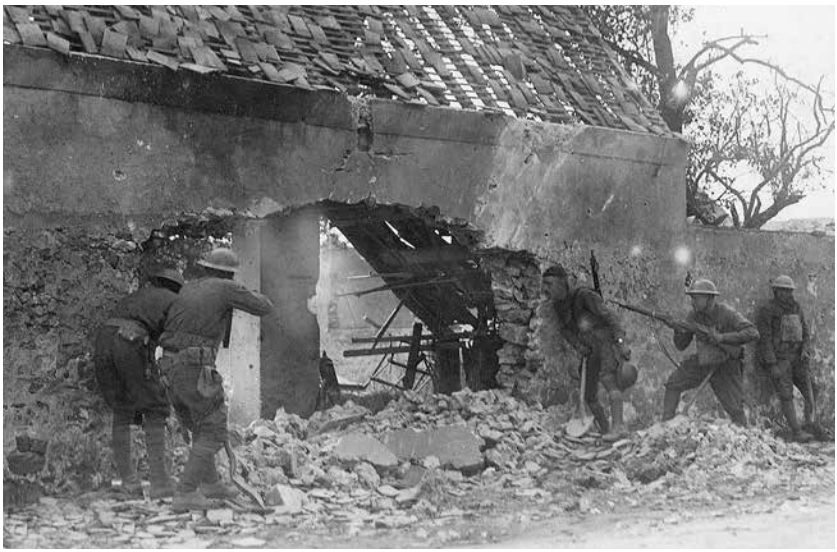
The 167th Infantry's 1st Battalion sustained the attack for less than fifteen minutes. Pinned down in the open ground surrounding the farmhouse, it remained in place under German fire for an hour before resuming the advance. At about 1800, ad hoc units composed of elements of several platoons commanded by 1st Lt. Ernest E. Bell and 1st Lt. Robert Espy, both from the 167th's 1st Battalion, staged simultaneous bayonet charges with a total of about 110 men. The groups swept into the north and west sides of the farm complex, capturing twenty-seven machine guns but suffering more than 60 percent casualties. The force then mopped up the Germans in the farm buildings, repulsing a hasty counterattack. Groups of men from the 168th Infantry also managed to reach the farmhouse from the south, helping to clear out the remaining defenders. German counterattacks ceased around 2000. By nightfall, Croix Rouge Farm was securely in American hands—at the cost of over 1,000 casualties. The Germans destroyed their remaining ammunition before withdrawing behind the Ourcq to the northeast. In his memoirs, Douglas MacArthur praised the tenacity of the men of his division who had "[crawled] forward in twos and threes against each stubborn nest of enemy guns . . . [closing] in with the bayonet and the hand grenade," adding that "there was no quarter asked or given." He remarked elsewhere that the attack on Croix Rouge Farm was carried out "in a manner which for its gallantry I do not believe has been surpassed in military history."

After staging an unsuccessful attack on 26 July—launched at the same time as the assault on Croix Rouge Farm—the 3d Division resumed its advance the next day. The Germans in the 3d Division's sector had withdrawn during the night, leaving rearguards to hold their former defensive line. Led by the 4th Infantry, the 3d Division pushed forward almost two kilometers to Villardelle Farm. The 42d Division also moved forward in the afternoon, encountering little enemy resistance south of the Ourcq River and occupying the town of Villers-sur-Fère. Machine gun fire from strong defensive positions to the north of the river, however, prevented the Rainbow Division from crossing. During the night of 27–28 July, the 28th Division's 55th Brigade, previously held in the XXXVIII Corps' reserve, relieved the French 39th Division, taking over a two-and-a-half-kilometer front between the 42d and the 3d Divisions.

Elements of three American divisions, operating as part of two corps in the French Sixth Army, now occupied a continuous line along the Ourcq River from the outskirts of Villemoyenne in the west to the vicinity of Ronchères in the east. American units held the entire frontage of both the I Corps and the French XXXVIII Corps. The fighting along the Ourcq was, as one doughboy later expressed it, "a straight issue between Americans and Germans." In subsequent days, American divisions played a decisive role in forcing a crossing over the Ourcq, and thus in destroying the last tenable German position in the Marne salient south of the Vesle.

Crossing the Ourcq

The Allied assault on the Ourcq began in earnest in the early morning of 28 July. Elements of the 42d Division soon gained a foothold across the river, with the 166th, 165th, 167th, and 168th Infantry regiments—in order from left to right—attacking in line. The 168th Infantry launched a costly assault with limited artillery support on Hill 212, a "dome-like eminence" located on the north bank of the Ourcq a little over a half-kilometer to the southeast of Sergy. Although heavily defended, the German position on the west face of the hill had largely collapsed by 0800. The 167th Infantry also gained a foothold a little to the west of the 168th. The 167th and 168th contested control of Sergy throughout the day—at least two platoons belonging to the 1st Battalion, 167th Infantry, entered the village—but could not secure it before nightfall.



Picking off German snipers (National Archives)

On the 42d Division's left, the 165th and 166th Infantry regiments stormed across the river, halting in front of German defenses located around Seringes-et-Nesles and Meurcy Farm. The entrenched German position at Seringes-et-Nesles, which MacArthur described as "like a small Gibraltar," put up especially stubborn resistance. Heavy artillery fire from the Forêt de Nesles limited progress in this sector, and by the end of the day both regiments of the 83d Brigade had withdrawn back across the Ourcq.

For the 28th Division, to the 42d Division's right, German resistance was equally resolute. Attacking in the morning, two battalions of the 55th Brigade's 110th Infantry reached the Ourcq by noon, although machine gun fire from the Bois des Grimpettes prevented a further advance. To the right of the 55th Brigade, the 3d Division (supported by the neighboring French 4th Division) captured Ronchères around 1500. At 1630, the 3d Division's 5th Brigade, together with the 55th Brigade, launched a renewed attack. Although the 3d Division troops pushed only a few hundred meters beyond Ronchères, elements of the 55th Brigade succeeded in crossing the Ourcq and advancing some distance toward the Bois de Grimpettes before heavy fire compelled them to pull back to the river.

Attacks against the German positions on the Ourcq continued on 29 July. The 4th Division, which had entered into the I Corps' reserve after participating in the initial offensive between 18 and 20 July, took part in attacks along the Ourcq during this day. General Liggett attached elements of the 47th Infantry and the 11th Machine Gun Battalion to the 42d Division on 28 July, and the 47th Infantry accordingly supported the 168th Infantry's attacks near Sergy, which began shortly before 0900. The 47th Infantry's Companies L and I (both part of 3d Battalion) entered Sergy from the west and east, under the overall command of Lt. Col. Gulielmus V. Heidt. Company L fought its way through the majority of the village, taking severe casualties, while Company I also pushed in from the east. Both companies withdrew around 1700 when Sergy came under heavy fire from German artillery. The savage fighting in the village took a heavy toll on the command structure of the 47th Infantry, as the 3d Battalion lost a series of commanding officers in quick succession. Heidt was hit before the 3d Battalion entered the woods near the Ourcq, and his successor, Maj. James P. Cole, was wounded just after the battalion entered Sergy. Capt. Louis T. Roberts then briefly assumed command before being wounded by shellfire. His replacement, Capt. Ross Snyder of Company M, was killed later in the day.

Meanwhile, the two regiments of the 42d Division's 83d Brigade overcame three more German strongpoints in fighting that continued through the late afternoon. The 165th Infantry assaulted and captured Meurcy Farm and the nearby Bois Colas. The town of Seringes-et-Nesles also fell to the 2d Battalion, 166th Infantry, around 1800 after "desperate resistance" by the German defenders. The Germans refused to surrender, and the Americans were disinclined to take prisoners. MacArthur described the scene in his memoirs:

> I formed our infantry on the south bank of the stream and rushed the town. Their artillery concentrated, their machine guns east and west of the town raked us fore and aft, but nothing could stop the impetus of that mad charge. We forded the river. We ascended the slopes. We seized Hill 184. We killed the garrison in the town to a man. At dusk on July 29th we were in sole possession.

With this, General Menoher announced—somewhat prematurely—that "the backbone of the enemy's resistance on the heights north of the OURCQ [had been] broken."



Soldiers of the 167th Infantry in combat near Seringes-et-Nesles
(National Archives)

In the 28th Division's sector, attacks resumed on 29 July at about 0445 after a brief preparatory artillery bombardment. The division's orders envisioned an initial advance of at least six kilometers to a position north of Villome and Coulonges. General de Mondésir, however, had more ambitious plans for the day. Imagining that the Germans were in full retreat, he instructed the leading elements of XXXVIII Corps to establish outposts as far north as Mont-Notre-Dame and Mont-Saint-Martin—almost fifteen kilometers from the Ourcq. German resistance, however, was much stronger than anticipated, and the 110th Infantry had barely advanced as far as the Bois des Grimpettes by 0915 before retiring in the face of heavy fire. A second assault, beginning at 1700, made minimal progress at the cost of heavy casualties. The 3d Division's 4th Infantry regiment also made an attack around 0650 but was repulsed, and the 32d Division moved forward to relieve the 3d Division during the night of 29–30 July. A German report summarizing the events of the day simply stated that the attacks to the east of Sergy on 29 July "collapsed before our front lines."

The 32d Division, commanded by Maj. Gen. William G. Haan, formally took command of the 3d Division's sector in the morning of 30 July. A late arrival to France, the 32d Division originally had been assigned to the I Corps to receive further training and serve

as a pool of replacements for frontline units. Redesignated as a combat division on 10 April, the 32d held quiet sectors on the front lines for some time during May and June before moving to support the French Sixth Army's offensive against the Marne salient in late July. At 1000, the 2d Battalion, 127th Infantry, launched an assault on the Bois de Cierges and the Bois des Grimpettes in support of the 28th Division, which had attacked with artillery support earlier in the morning. Although the 28th Division's 110th Infantry had managed to enter the Bois des Grimpettes before 0600, parts of the wood remained in German hands and the 127th Infantry's supporting attack made little progress. At 1430, the 28th and 32d Divisions made simultaneous assaults following a twenty-minute artillery bombardment. Advancing behind a rolling barrage, the infantry pushed through the Bois des Grimpettes toward the village of Cierges. The 110th Infantry finally secured the wood, mopping up the Germans remaining in the area. Elements of the 127th Infantry also occupied the southwestern portion of the Bois de Cierges. The 55th Brigade withdrew from the line during the night of 30–31 July, relinquishing its sector to the 32d Division's 63d Infantry Brigade. In three days of fighting near the Ourcq River, the 55th Brigade had suffered more than 1,400 casualties. With the 28th Division's withdrawal, the 32d Division occupied the entire XXXVIII Corps' front.

The 42d Division made little progress on 30 July. A ninety-minute artillery bombardment preceded an unsuccessful attack at 0900 by two battalions of the 47th Infantry, with support from the 168th and 167th Infantry. To the west, the 165th Infantry made a small advance before repelling a German counterattack directed toward Meurcy Farm.

Further assaults undertaken during the afternoon of the next day achieved equally little. The 1st Gas Regiment (formerly the 30th Engineers) brought about the largest advance in the 42d Division's sector on 31 July, forcing the Germans to retreat from their position just to the north of Meurcy Farm, in the Bois Brulé. The 32d Division fared somewhat better, assaulting Cierges after a thirty-minute artillery bombardment. The town fell to the 1st Battalion, 127th Infantry, around 1630. Further attacks beyond that point, however, were unsuccessful. By the end of the day, the 32d Division held a line running from Hill 212 in the west to a point about a kilometer east of Cierges.

Both the 42d and 32d Divisions launched further attacks on 1 August, but the German defenses continued to hold. The two



Relief of the 7th Infantry west of Moulins (National Archives)

American outfits succeeded in pushing the Allied line forward about a kilometer at most. German counterattacks continued to hinder progress, especially within the 42d Division's sector.

Allied efforts elsewhere in the Marne salient were more successful. Mangin's French Tenth Army returned to the offensive on the morning of 1 August, capturing several villages near the heights of Grand-Rozoy, about six kilometers to the west of the 42d Division's sector. French and British divisions then held the position against repeated German counterattacks. During the night of 1–2 August, the Germans withdrew the bulk of their forces to a new defensive line along the Vesle, an unfordable but shallow river about thirty-five feet wide. The last German troops withdrew from Soissons on 2 August. By that time, the decisive phase of the Second Battle of the Marne had come to an end. The Marne salient, which at the beginning of July had appeared to threaten Paris, was now reduced to a sliver of territory between the Chemin des Dames and the Vesle River. Meanwhile, the British were preparing for their own offensive near Amiens, scheduled to begin on 8 August. The Germans were on the defensive, and the Allies did not intend to give their opponents any opportunity to regain the initiative.

The Pursuit to the Vesle

The American divisions along the Ourcq discovered the German withdrawal early in the morning on 2 August and immediately began a pursuit. Caught in the middle of being relieved by the 4th Division, and exhausted after more than a week of unremitting combat, however, the Rainbow Division made only a limited advance. The 165th Infantry's regimental chaplain, Francis P. Duffy, recalled that General MacArthur "wanted a last effort made by his Division. He called on one regiment, then on another, for a further advance. Their commanders said truthfully that the men were utterly fatigued and unable to go forward another step." At the same time, the 32d Division drove forward about six kilometers, occupying the villages of Chamery, Coulonges, Cohan, and Dravegny. German resistance throughout the day was generally light, although the small groups serving as rearguard detachments did their best to impede Allied progress. During the evening, the 4th Division completed the relief of the Rainbow Division, which accordingly passed into the I Corps' reserve. The 42d Division was severely depleted, having suffered more than a thousand dead and 5,476 total casualties since joining the battle along the Ourcq.

General Liggett later praised the Rainbow Division for its conduct during the fighting in the Marne salient, writing in his memoirs that "no Division in the Army could have acquitted itself better than did the 42nd Division in the crucial fighting on the North bank of the Ourcq River. It proved itself a first class Division in every sense; swift in attack, and tenacious in both attack and defense." Father Duffy described the battle's impact on his regiment, referring to the 165th by its original National Guard designation, the 69th Infantry, in somewhat more personal terms:

> In this one battle nearly half our strength is gone. We have lost fifty-nine officers and thirteen hundred men and of these thirteen officers and about two hundred men have been killed outright. Many of our wounded have been badly hurt. . . . But in spite of losses and sorrow and sickness I find the men surprisingly cheerful and willing to carry on. They have what soldiers most wish for, Victory. And they know now that the men who opposed their path and had to give way to their persistence were the famous Prussian Guards, of the very flower of the German Military Machine. The old 69th had again lived up to its

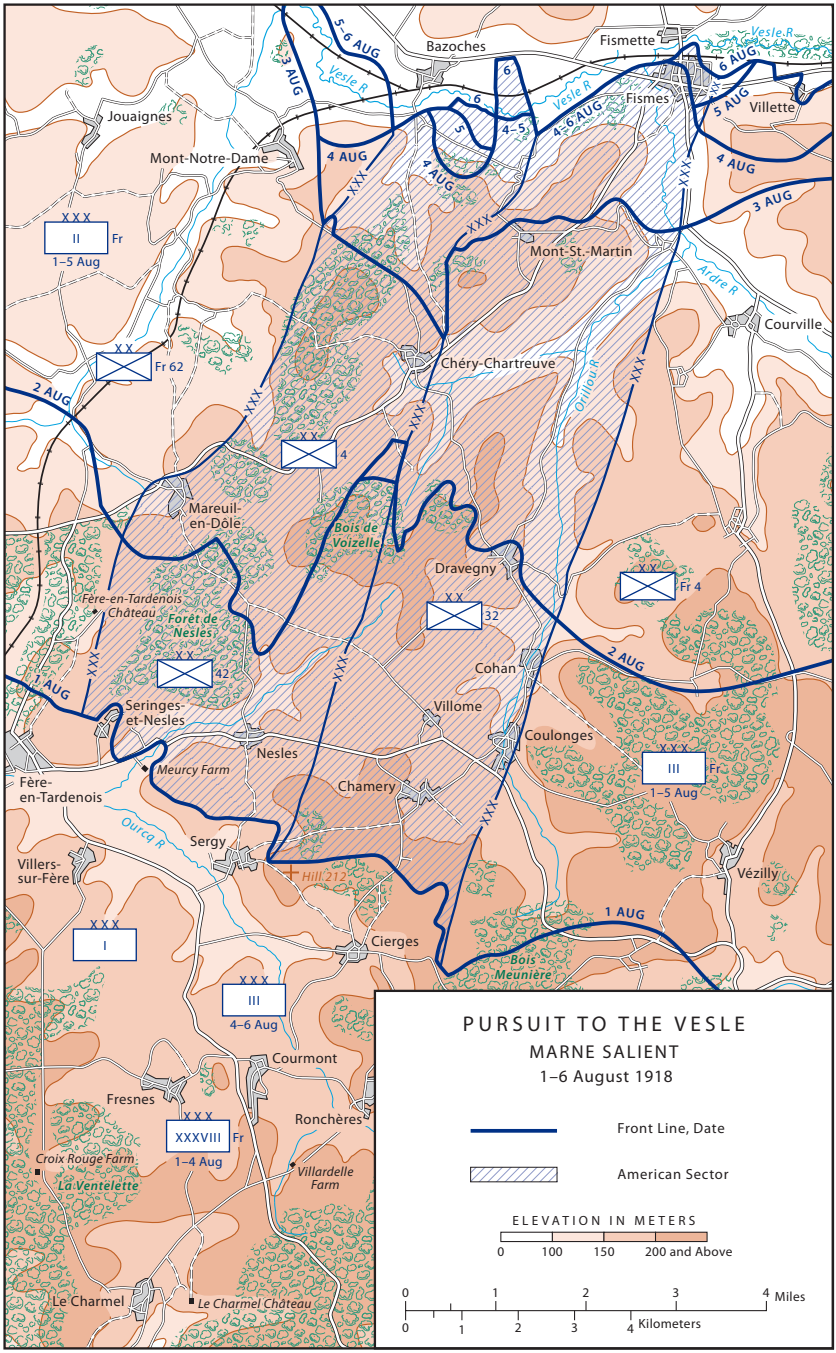
reputation of the past; there were no German troops; no troops in the world that could withstand its stubborn bravery.

Taking the Rainbow Division's place in the line, the 4th Division—now operating for the first time as a complete unit under General Cameron's overall command—prepared to continue the Allied advance to the Vesle (*Map 8*).

The pursuit resumed on 3 August, as the 4th Division pushed forward between three and eight kilometers. German machine gun nests located north of Chéry-Chartreuve and in the Bois de Bazoches caused some delays, but the Germans abandoned both positions during the afternoon. The 32d Division also advanced, reaching a point less than two kilometers from the Vesle. General Degoutte ordered the Allied divisions to establish bridgeheads on the north bank of the Vesle during the night of 3–4 August, but neither American division attempted to cross the river at that time. The small riverside town of Fismes, located in the 32d Division's sector on the south side of the Vesle—opposite its smaller twin, Fismette—also remained in German hands. During the night, the French XXXVIII Corps yielded control of its sector to General Bullard's III Army Corps. General de Mondésir and the rest of the XXXVIII Corps headquarters staff passed into the Sixth Army's reserve. This was the first time in the war that two American army corps operated in tandem on the same front.

The battle continued early on 4 August as both the 4th and 32d Divisions attempted to cross the Vesle. The 4th Division reached the river but was unable to cross, although the French 62d Division, to the left of the 4th Division, did secure a foothold across the river in its sector. The 32d Division attacked in the afternoon, and the 3d Battalion, 127th Infantry, occupied part of Fismes late in the evening, fighting street-by-street against the German defenders. Although the Germans retreated from their positions between the Ourcq and the Vesle without putting up much of a fight, they had transformed Fismes and Fismette into veritable fortresses. One 32d Division veteran later recalled that the Germans "had spared no effort in making this city and surrounding country as impregnable as science could make it. Huge stores of ammunition and engines of destruction were located here and preparations made to withstand the most formidable attack." The two towns would become the site of fierce fighting over the following weeks.

The next two days saw relatively little combat, as heavy rainfall and solidifying German resistance prevented the 32d and


PURSUIT TO THE VESLE
MARNE SALIENT
1–6 August 1918
Front Line, Date
American Sector
ELEVATION IN METERS
0
100
150
200 and Above
Miles
Kilometers
Bazoches
Fismette
Fismes
Villette
Jouaignes
Mont-Notre-Dame
Mont-St.-Martin
Courville
Chéry-Chartreuve
Mareuil-en-Dôle
Bois de Voizelle
Dravegny
Fère-en-Tardenois
Château
Forêt de Nesles
Cohan
Villome
Coulonges
Seringes-et-Nesles
Nesles
Meurcy Farm
Chamery
Fère-en-Tardenois
Ourcq R.
Sergy
Villers-sur-Fère
Hill 212
Vézilly
Cierges
Bois Meunière
Courmont
Fresnes
Ronchères
Croix Rouge Farm
La Ventelette
Villardelle Farm
Le Charmel
Le Charmel Château
Vesle R.
Ardre R.
Ormiou R.
II
Fr
1–5 Aug
Fr 62
4
42
32
Fr 4
III
Fr
1–5 Aug
I
III
4–6 Aug
XXXVIII
Fr
1–4 Aug
1 AUG
2 AUG
3 AUG
4 AUG
4–5
4–6 AUG
5 AUG
5–6 AUG
6 AUG
6

Map 8



German machine gun team firing on infantry from the 28th Division (National Archives)

4th Divisions from making significant progress. The 32d Division sent a few patrols across the Vesle on 5 August, while the 127th Infantry improved its position in Fismes, largely evicting the Germans from the town. The 4th Division, meanwhile, defeated a limited German counterattack early in the morning on 5 August, and elements of the 39th and 58th Infantry regiments established several footholds across the river but abandoned all of them by nightfall. The 32d Division made no attack on 6 August, while the 4th Division undertook a small-scale advance. Small groups belonging to the 39th Infantry succeeded in crossing the Vesle, but withdrew to the southern bank by the end of the day. The German defensive line on the Vesle River remained largely intact.

The desultory fighting on 6 August marked the end of the Second Battle of the Marne. The 28th Division returned to the line—refreshed after a brief period in reserve—relieving the 32d Division on 7 August, while the 4th Division remained in position until relieved by the 77th Division on the night of 11–12 August. Casualties during the final phase of the fighting had been relatively light compared to the shocking losses earlier in the offensive. The 4th Division lost 1,625 men between 3 and 6 August, while the 32d Division—which

had been in the line between 30 July and 6 August—suffered 3,662 casualties. The battle around Fismes and Fismette dragged on until late August, as American divisions sought to wrest the area from German control, but from a strategic perspective this was a subsidiary operation. Foch, who had been promoted to Marshal of France on 5 August, recognized that further large-scale efforts against the Vesle would only bring diminishing returns. Instead of battering at the German defensive positions there, Foch placed his hopes in the long-awaited offensive by the British Fourth Army near Amiens, scheduled for 8 August. The next major Allied blow would inaugurate the period known as the "Hundred Days": three months of unremitting Allied offensives that pushed the Germans back more than a hundred kilometers and culminated, in November 1918, with the collapse of Imperial Germany.

Analysis

In his memoirs, Erich Ludendorff claimed that 8 August 1918, the first day of the British offensive at Amiens, was the "black day of the German Army in the history of this war." The attack launched on that day was a true coalition effort. British tanks, supported primarily by Australian and Canadian infantry with help from elements of the American 33d Division, inflicted a terrible defeat on the German Army, capturing some 18,500 prisoners and 374 guns and advancing nearly thirteen kilometers. Subsequent days would bring further disasters for the Germans; from August onward, the German Army was in almost continuous retreat.

The Battle of Amiens undoubtedly was a significant Allied victory, but it is doubtful whether it would have had the impact it did if not for the Allied counteroffensive on the Marne. The Second Battle of the Marne created the necessary conditions for the Allied victory at Amiens. In a real sense, therefore, the "Hundred Days" offensive began on 18 July, not 8 August. Ludendorff may have downplayed the significance of the defeat on the Marne, but other German leaders recognized the importance of what had occurred. German chancellor Georg von Hertling, for example, described his response to the defeat of *Marneschutz-Reims* and the beginning of the Allied offensive at Soissons:

> At the beginning of July, 1918 I was convinced, I confess it, that before the first of September our adversaries would send us peace proposals. . . . We expected grave events in Paris for the

> end of July. That was on the 15th. On the 18th even the most optimistic among us knew that all was lost. The history of the world was played out in three days.

On the other side, Foch was especially proud of the victory the Allied armies had achieved, tallying the "30,000 prisoners, more than 600 guns, 200 mine throwers, and 3,000 machine guns captured," and noting that the collapse of the Marne salient both eliminated the threat to Paris and shortened the Allied front by about forty-five kilometers. Even more importantly, however, "a victorious counter offensive had once more placed in our hands the initiative of operations and the power to direct the progress of events in this long, vast war."

The reality of this achievement was not lost on the soldiers of the AEF, who were well aware of the leading role that American troops had played in the fighting in the Marne salient. In his memoirs, Pershing was far from modest about the decisive importance of the American participation in the Second Battle of the Marne:

> While our forces had played important rôles in halting earlier German offensives, there were available here for the first time sufficient American divisions to join with those of the Allies in striking a decisive blow. The power of American arms brought to bear in the Marne salient made it possible to crush the last enemy offensive and commit him entirely to the defensive. . . . The preponderance of Americans at the critical points of this offensive, coupled with their successes in the vital areas of the battle, brought about this victory.

This victory nevertheless came at a heavy cost. About 39,672 out of the roughly 270,000 Americans who fought in the Second Battle of the Marne became casualties. Total Allied losses in the battle amounted to 95,165 men. Several factors explain the high casualty toll suffered by the American divisions on the Marne. Foremost among these is the relative inexperience of the American soldiers. General Liggett commented in his history of the war that Americans "endlessly took chances that no French soldier in his right mind would have chanced; nor would our men had they been fighting since 1914." The eagerness and impetuosity of American soldiers was both a product of, and to some extent a substitute for, their lack of experience. "The courage of our young Army was not

always wise," Liggett wrote, "yet it served to end the war of 1918. Courage sometimes is the only substitute for the skill that comes of experience." He recalled how the commander of the 1st Moroccan Division, observing the American attack at Soissons, professed to "weep for the families and sweethearts of these Americans. See how they went into battle as we did in 1914! My division, the flower of the French Army, no longer can keep up with them."

American dash and élan account for the dramatic advances that American troops routinely made as well as the appallingly heavy casualties they suffered in these advances. The spirited attacks of the 6th Regiment at Soissons on 19 July and the 167th and 168th Infantry regiments at Croix Rouge Farm on 26 July exemplify the American willingness to fight and advance with almost no regard for losses. Nevertheless, fighting in this manner wore out units rapidly, making them less effective in subsequent actions. Impetuous attacks likewise led to American units frequently outpacing neighboring French formations during the advance. As a consequence, entire American divisions sometimes found themselves exposed to enfilading fire as well as counterattacks directed toward their flanks. These advances undoubtedly were dramatic, but American units might have profited from slowing their progress to stay in step with their Allied counterparts.

Similarly, even though relations with individual French soldiers were generally good and many French generals praised the American soldiers who fought under their command, French and American units often failed to apprise each other of their dispositions, leading to considerable confusion on the battlefield. The most egregious example of this was the retreat of the French 125th Division on 15 July, which the French executed without informing the four attached companies of the 28th Division. It remains unclear why the French did not warn the four companies about the retreat. Likewise, American officers were sometimes less than forthcoming in their communications with their French counterparts and superiors.

Although these problems reduced Allied effectiveness, they cannot detract from the significance of what the AEF achieved. Despite the limitations imposed by inexperience and sometimes rocky relations with their French allies, American divisions played a pivotal role in the battle that decided the course of the First World War on the Western Front. They would carry the experience gained on the Marne to their subsequent engagements in September through November 1918.



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