



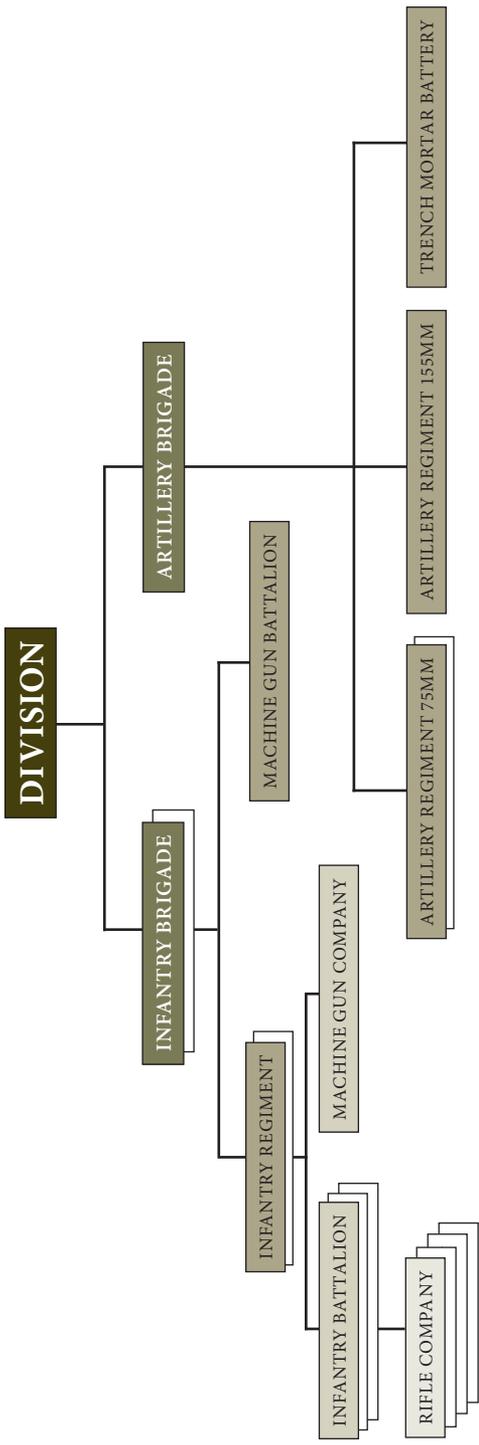
THE U.S. ARMY IN WORLD WAR I



PARTICIPANTS' GUIDEBOOK
BATTLE OF THE OURCQ
AISNE HISTORICAL MARCH



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



SIZE:

- Infantry Company - 250
- Division without Trains - 24,816
- Division with Trains - 28,059

INFANTRY:

- Rifles - 17,666
- Pistols - 11,913
- Automatic Rifles - 768
- Machine Guns - 224

ARTILLERY:

- 12 batteries-75-mm. field guns (48 tubes)
- 6 Batteries-155-mm. howitzers (24 tubes)
- 3 Batteries-6" Trench Mortars (12tubes)



TO AISNE HISTORICAL MARCH PARTICIPANTS:

Welcome to this special event, part of the U.S. Army’s program of commemoration of the World War I Centennial. Today you will have an opportunity to take part in a guided walk on ground fought over and captured by the American Expeditionary Forces in late July one hundred years ago.

The purpose of today’s march is to bring you as close as possible to the wartime experiences of Army Soldiers in World War I by letting you follow quite literally in their footsteps. The terrain of these battlefields has changed little, if at all, in the century since the Second Battle of the Marne, making it possible to visualize what took place here. This guide has several resources to assist you with that visualization, including:

- A map describing the route of march with historical unit sectors of American and German divisions in 1918.
- Firsthand accounts by participants in the battles.
- Wartime photographs of the terrain.
- Brief summaries of the engagements themselves.
- Background information on the forces and leaders involved.

The march begins at Croix Rouge Farm, site of the 26 July 1918 assault of the 167th and 168th Infantry Regiments, 42d Division, on German positions in and around the farm. After spending a few minutes learning about the fighting here and receiving logistical and administrative information, participants will be grouped into twenty-person detachments and released onto the route in five-minute increments. Members of the event C2 Cell will be positioned at turning points.

There are a total of eight stops along the march route, each indicated with numbered signs. At each stop it is recommended that you pause and read the corresponding selection in this guide. Historians, wearing blue polo shirts, will circulate through the route to answer questions.

While the march occurs in woods, fields, and over dirt roads and paths, Stop Two involves the crossing of a main road. At this stop, medical personnel will be available, security personnel will ensure that the road crossing is conducted safely, and buses will be available for those who are unable to continue. Please ensure that you carry water with you on the march, and food as you desire. Restroom facilities will be available at Stop Five in the village of Sergy.

At Stop Seven, Meurcy Farm, the march groups will gathered into a mass formation to complete the walk to the final stop at Oise-Aisne American Cemetery. There will be C2 Cell personnel at the farm to guide this process.

I hope you enjoy this unique chance to experience Army history from the perspective of those who made it!

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of the initials 'CR' followed by a stylized 'B' and a trailing flourish.

Charles R. Bowery, Jr., SES
Chief of Military History

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 2** **AEF DIVISION ORGANIZATION AND EQUIPMENT**
- 6** **STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL CONTEXT
JULY 1918—THE SECOND BATTLE OF THE MARNE**
- 8** **STARTING AREA: CROIX ROUGE FARM**
- 11** **STOP 1: FRESNES OVERLOOK**
- 12** **STOP 2: D6 CROSSING**
- 14** **STOP 3: THE OURCQ**
- 15** **STOP 4: HILL 212**
- 16** **MAP WITH UNIT SECTORS, MARCH ROUTE, AND STOPS**
- 18** **STOP 5: SERGY**
- 21** **STOP 6: PVT. SIDNEY MANNING**
- 23** **STOP 7: MEURCY FARM**
- 26** **STOP 8: OISE-AISNE AMERICAN CEMETERY**
- 28** **ROUGE BOQUET**
- 30** **CONCLUSION**
- 31** **FURTHER READINGS**

STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL CONTEXT, JULY 1918

THE SECOND BATTLE OF THE MARNE

In the spring of 1918 the Germans launched a series of massive offensives intended to bring a swift end to the war on the Western Front. After wearing down the British Army in a series of bloody battles that lasted throughout March and April, the Germans launched a surprise attack against the French in May that resulted in the occupation of a 2,300-square-kilometer salient near the Marne River. German troops, in what became known as the “Marne salient,” were just over sixty kilometers from Paris—as close as they had been in September 1914. The Germans hoped to use their newly gained territory as a springboard for yet another offensive. Spearheads on either side of the city of Reims—along the Marne River in the west and in Champagne in the east—would converge near the town of Epernay, enveloping Reims and its defenders. By threatening the substantial Allied forces near the Marne salient with destruction, the German High Command hoped to draw French and British divisions away from the strategically important but extremely well-defended British sector in northern France, leaving the British Army vulnerable to defeat in detail.

In the meantime, the Allies looked for a way to regain the strategic initiative after months of bitter defensive fighting. Anticipating a renewed German offensive, the Allied Generalissimo Ferdinand Foch moved powerful reserves—including several American divisions—into positions near the Marne. Once the Germans had clearly committed their forces to a new offensive, the Allies would launch their own counteroffensive against the northwestern shoulder of the Marne salient toward the German-held rail hub of Soissons. The American 3d, 26th, 28th, and 42d Divisions would help to repulse the German drive, while the American 1st, 2d, and 4th Divisions—later rejoined by the 3d, 26th, 28th, and 42d—would deliver the decisive counterblow. With this substantial American support, Foch hoped to drive the Germans back from the Marne, securing a base for further operations that would continue throughout the summer and into the fall.

The Second Battle of the Marne began early in the morning on 15 July, as German artillery fired a preparatory bombardment at Allied positions along the Marne and in Champagne. The German infantry assault began a few hours later. Although the Germans made substantial advances in some areas, strong Allied resistance ensured that the offensive fell far short of the German High Command's expectations. Having repulsed the German attack, the Allies launched their counterattack against the Marne salient, beginning on 18 July with an eastward thrust near Soissons spearheaded by the American 1st and 2d Divisions. The first stage of the Allied offensive achieved its objectives and closed down by 22 July. The axis of the Allied advance then shifted, as drives by the French Sixth and Ninth Armies, concentrated along the southwestern and southern faces of the Marne salient, followed up the initial attack.



Croix Rouge Farm, looking northeast from the attack position of the 167th Regiment

STARTING AREA:

CROIX ROUGE FARM

You are standing on the site of Croix Rouge Farm, or Red Cross Farm. The terrain here is identical to its appearance at the time of the battle. The centerpiece of the farm complex, as remembered by 1st Lt. Edmund Hackett of the 167th, was a “farmhouse, a huge walled-in affair of stone and mortar, medieval in style and fortress like effect.” The wall standing nearby is the sole remnant of the farmhouse. A Soldier in the 168th Regiment described the farm as well: “Imagine a hill crowned by a group of farm buildings, not the more or less perishable edifices common to this country but solid constructions that have withstood the test of time—hundreds of years as reckoned by the French.” The house occupied “the apex of a V” of trenches with machine gun pits. The two arms of the V stretched several hundred yards to the southwest and northwest, in the direction of the woodline behind the Rainbow Division Memorial. There were other machine gun positions along the road and within the farm complex itself. The German units holding the farm painted white stripes on the trees at the edge of the wheat field to serve as range stakes for the machine gun crews.

The 167th took up positions in the woods as night approached. This was done without guides because the French and the U.S. 26th Division had already taken quite a beating and had

withdrawn. The Alabama regiment was fired on all night in totally unfamiliar terrain. The regimental command post was a short distance to the southwest in the Forêt-de-Fère.

The 1st Battalion under Maj. John W. Carroll of Ozark, Alabama, and the 3d Battalion, under Maj. Dallas B. Smith of Opelika, Alabama, were in the woods east of the Croix Rouge Farm. The 2d Battalion, under Capt. Everette H. Jackson of Montgomery, Alabama, was to the south in support.

The plan called for the 167th and 168th Regiments to conduct a simultaneous assault on the farm complex, but the 168th had difficulty moving into position, leaving the Alabamans to make the attack themselves. The 51st Field Artillery Regiment, part of the 26th Division, had been detailed to the support of the 85th Brigade, but in the Yankee Division's withdrawal from the front, coordination between the artillerymen and the Rainbow Division broke down. As a result, the assault went in unsupported.

The first assault went in at 1650 and immediately bogged down in the fields under heavy machine gun and artillery fire. For over an hour,

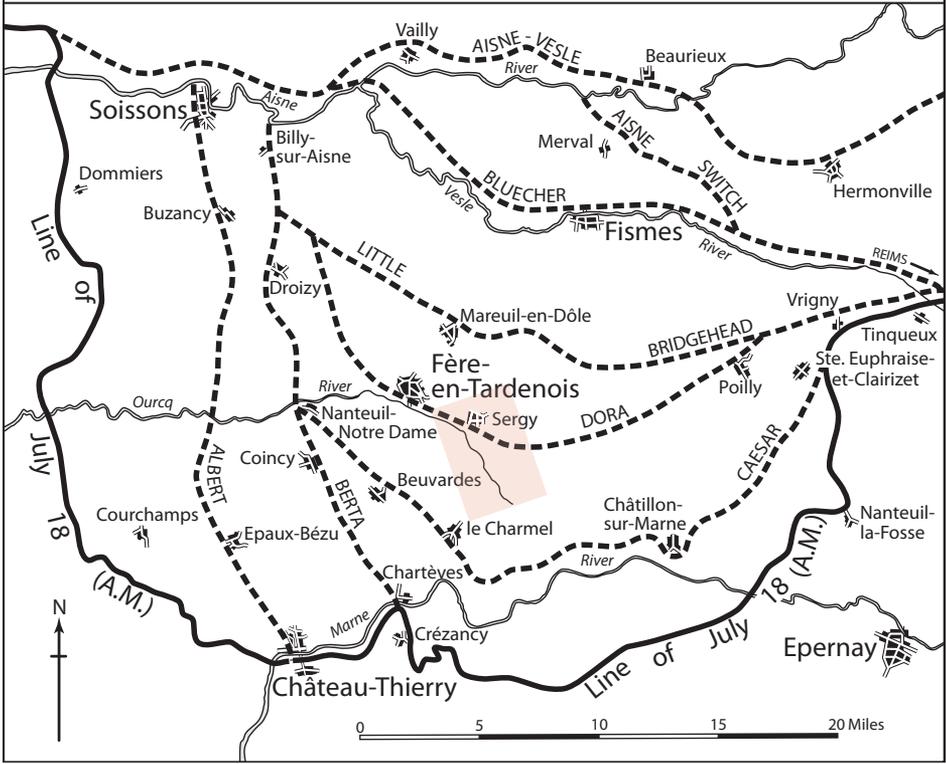
the troops traded fire across the field, and American casualties mounted. First Lt. Robert Espy of Company B, from Abbeville, Alabama, and 1st Lt. Ernest Bell of Company D, from Bessemer, Alabama, gathered platoons of about fifty-five men, ordered them to fix bayonets, and led a final assault that captured the farm at nightfall. After a German counterattack—repelled again in hand-to-hand fighting with bayonets and clubbed rifles—failed to dislodge the 167th, the Germans began to withdraw to the Ourcq River position that night. The attack was successful, but at a heavy cost. The 167th sustained over 65 percent casualties. The regimental surgeon reported that he treated over 1,100 casualties after the battle, and both attacking battalions lost more than half of their officers.

Walk down the road to the north, cross into the forest at the indicated signs; please watch for traffic.



Croix Rouge Farm as it appeared shortly after the battle

German Withdrawal Positions, Aisne–Marne Salient



STOP ONE:

FRESNES OVERLOOK

Face in the direction you were walking. You have just crossed through the Forêt-de-Fère and have the village of Fresnes-en-Tardenois in front of you. Beyond Fresnes, out of sight, is the village of Courmont. Approximately two miles away in this direction is a large wooded area, the Bois des Grimpettes. Running through the low ground on the far side of Fresnes, from right to left, is the Ourcq River. The ridgeline running across your front on the far side of the river was the German “Dora” defensive line, one of a series of German defensive positions in the Marne salient.

On 28 July 1918, following the assault on Croix Rouge Farm, the start point of this march, the U.S. I Corps front line trace ran roughly north-south on the far side of Fresnes, facing the Dora position.

After Brig. Gen. Robert A. Brown’s 84th Brigade, 42d Division, captured Croix Rouge Farm on 26 July, the German *4th Guards Division* withdrew to the Dora Line, and the next phase of the Marne counteroffensive began. The I Corps attack was part of the larger offensive by the French Sixth and Tenth Armies, from the south and west, respectively, intended to reduce the Marne salient by capturing the road and railroad lines of communications from Soissons to Château-Thierry. The ultimate Allied objectives were the Vesle River and the Aisne River to its north.

On 27 July, the American 28th Division, formed from the Pennsylvania National Guard, came alongside the 3d Division, which had suffered more than 6,000 casualties in two weeks of fighting north from the Marne

River. The 3d Division would soon be removed from the line for a period of rest. The 42d and 28th Divisions, augmented by a third National Guard division, the 32d from Wisconsin and Michigan, would attack the Ourcq/Dora Line.

On 28 July, the 42d Division, with the 166th (Iowa) and 167th (Alabama) Regiments on line, advanced from this vicinity to the Ourcq, about six kilometers, over the ground to your left front, but could not force a crossing of the Ourcq itself. The 28th Division began a series of assaults on the Bois des Grimpettes. On the night of 29 July, the 32d Division arrived to relieve the 3d, and together the Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Michigan men captured the wood in hand-to-hand fighting. After the 30 July assault, the 28th Division also left the line, and the 32d Division took over the frontage of both units.

Continue downhill into Fresnes, turn left at the indicated signs, and pass by La Cense Farm.

STOP TWO:

D6 CROSSING

Look across the paved road in front of you—the D6. Directly to your front are La Motte Farm and Caranda Mill, both wartime farm complexes. Behind the mill, the Ourcq River crosses the valley in front of the Dora Line. From this position, you can see the commanding nature of the German defensive position. Col. Conrad Lanza, the First Army’s artillery chief, called it “one of the finest positions for the defense that could have been selected.” These ridges were honeycombed with machine gun positions and interlocking fields of fire over the wheat fields. The hilltops offered perfect positions for artillery observers to adjust fire.

Your current position is the boundary between the 42d Division, stretching away to your left, northwest, and the 28th Division, with its frontage to your right, southeast. The 84th Brigade of the Rainbow Division, now commanded by Brig. Gen. Douglas MacArthur, attacked toward Sergy, while the 55th Brigade of the Keystone Division attacked Hill 212 to your front. On the first day, uncoordinated battalion-size attacks barely got beyond the Ourcq River. Pvt. Martin Hogan of the 165th (New York) Regiment, described the fighting:

... the enemy had a machine gun behind every tree, and he was working these frantically. One felt a queer uneasy sensation in the pit of the stomach as one ran to think of the myriads of steel needles streaming through the air around him, and one felt from minute to minute that the end could only be a matter of the next step or so. The air was alive with death and the mocking rat-a-tat and crackle of death. . . .

Men plunged to earth to the right and left of me. Almost at every stride some comrade fell, stumbling forward lifeless . . . Others just slipped down and lay low and still, too badly wounded and spent to go on with the advance, but most of them to be saved by the rapidly working mercy service of the American army. I saw these incidents, little nightmare incidents, flashed upon the screen of my vision in jumbled, jerky fashion. . . . stopping to aim and fire as some chance gray uniform showed, and then blindly running on.

MacArthur noted that the fighting returned to a very primal form: “We reverted to tactics I had seen so often in the Indian wars of my frontier days. Crawling forward in twos and threes against each stubborn nest of enemy machine guns, we closed in with the bayonet and the hand grenade. It was savage and there was no quarter asked or given.”

Taking care to observe traffic, move out to the D6, turn right, and walk



General MacArthur in 1918

down the road along the shoulder for approximately 200 yards and take the dirt road to your left. This dirt road will take you around La Motte Farm, and toward Caranda Mill.

At the mill, turn left and follow the Ourcq to a bridge, which crosses the river. Turning right along the bank, walk for approximately 400 yards to Stop Three.

STOP THREE:

THE OURCQ

Face uphill. You have just crossed the Ourcq River, which by itself was not a significant obstacle, but was made more difficult to cross because of the German defenses on the high ground north of the river. To your right rear is Courmont and the Bois des Grimpettes. On 29–30 July, the 28th Division captured the wood in hand-to-hand fighting and was relieved by the 32d Division, the Red Arrows. The Red Arrows were organized in 1917 from the National Guard in Wisconsin and Michigan, and brought up to full strength with draftees before the division's deployment overseas in January–March, 1918. The division was initially slated to provide individual replacements to other units; however, in May it was designated for combat duty. Maj. Gen. William Haan, an Indiana native and 1889 graduate of West Point, was the division commander. He was popular with the division; his men gave him the affectionate nickname of “Bunker,” which recalled his cadet days.

On 30 July, 127th Regiment, 32d Division, made disjointed attacks against the Dora Line, but they were able to assist the 110th Regiment, 28th Division, in fighting off a German counterattack. That night, Sgt. Lyle S. Cole of Company I, 125th Regiment, attempted to dig a foxhole near Cierges to get some rest:

Too many roots. Try a new spot, more roots. After the third try I found a place that was easier digging, got down about a foot and found more roots. I reached down to pull the roots out and the bark came off in my hand. It was so dark I could not see what I had in my hand, but from the odor I knew . . . what I had in my hand was the skin off the fingers [of a dead German soldier]. He was just getting ripe. I said ‘To hell with it,’ curled up in my blanket on the ground and went to sleep.

At 1200 on 31 July, as the Germans began to withdraw, General Haan ordered a division attack on the Dora Line, and the 32d stepped off at 1400. Sergeant Cole attacked Hill 212 near where you are standing: “Sergeant Wojezechowski, over on my left, called to me, ‘Let’s give them hell Cole.’ I shouted back, ‘I’m with you, we will show them.’ The next time I looked back Wojezechowski threw up his hands, dropped his rifle, whirled around, and fell to the ground. He was a good friend of mine. . . . It made me so mad all I could think about was getting to the top. . . . It was a sight I have dreamed of many, many times.”

Using the path in front of you, climb to the top of Hill 212.

STOP FOUR:

HILL 212

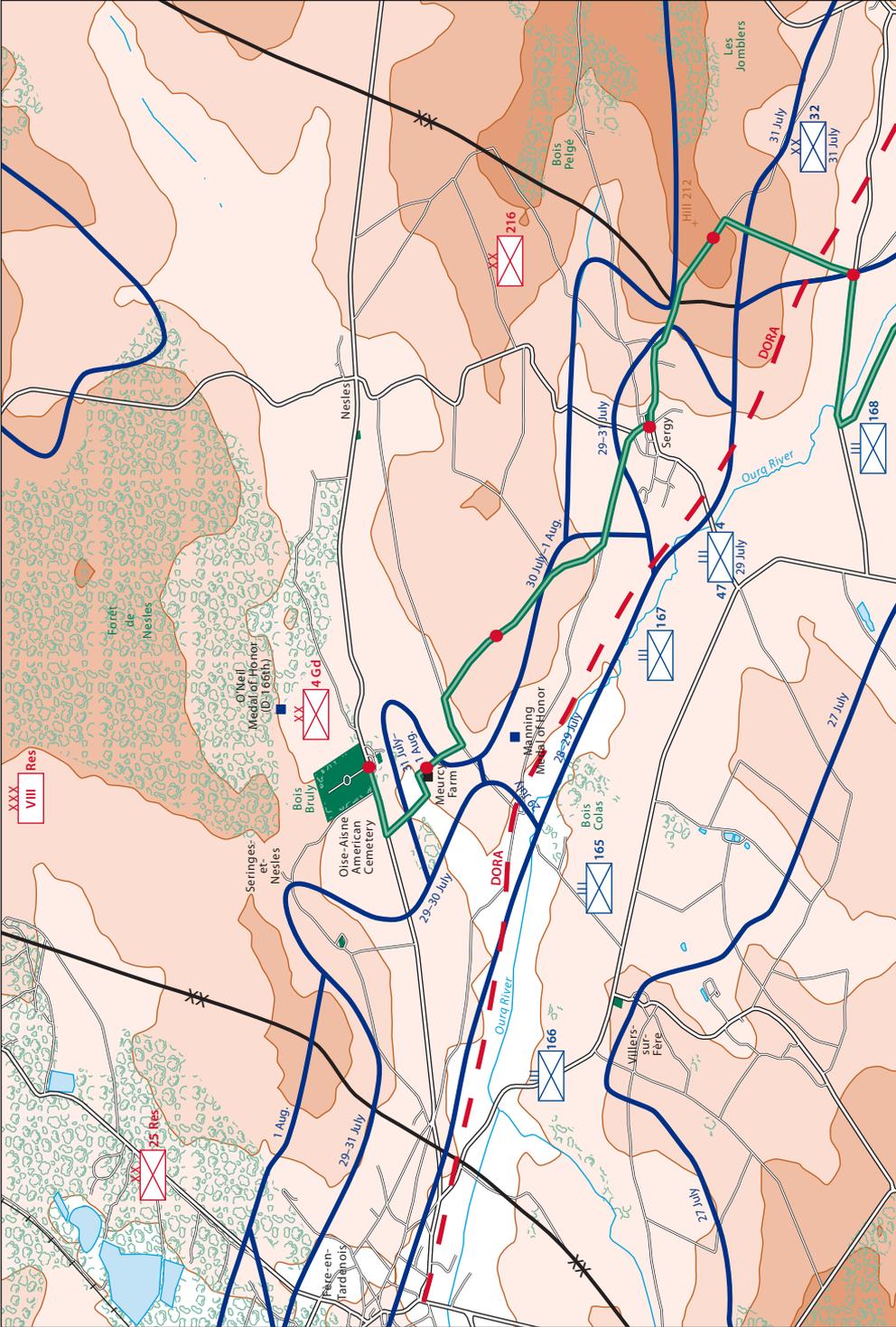
As you reach the top of the hill, you will encounter a small road running left to right. Stop at this road, and look to your right (east). The wooded area to your left front, as you are facing east, is Les Jomblets; the village of Cierges is approximately a half-mile to your front.

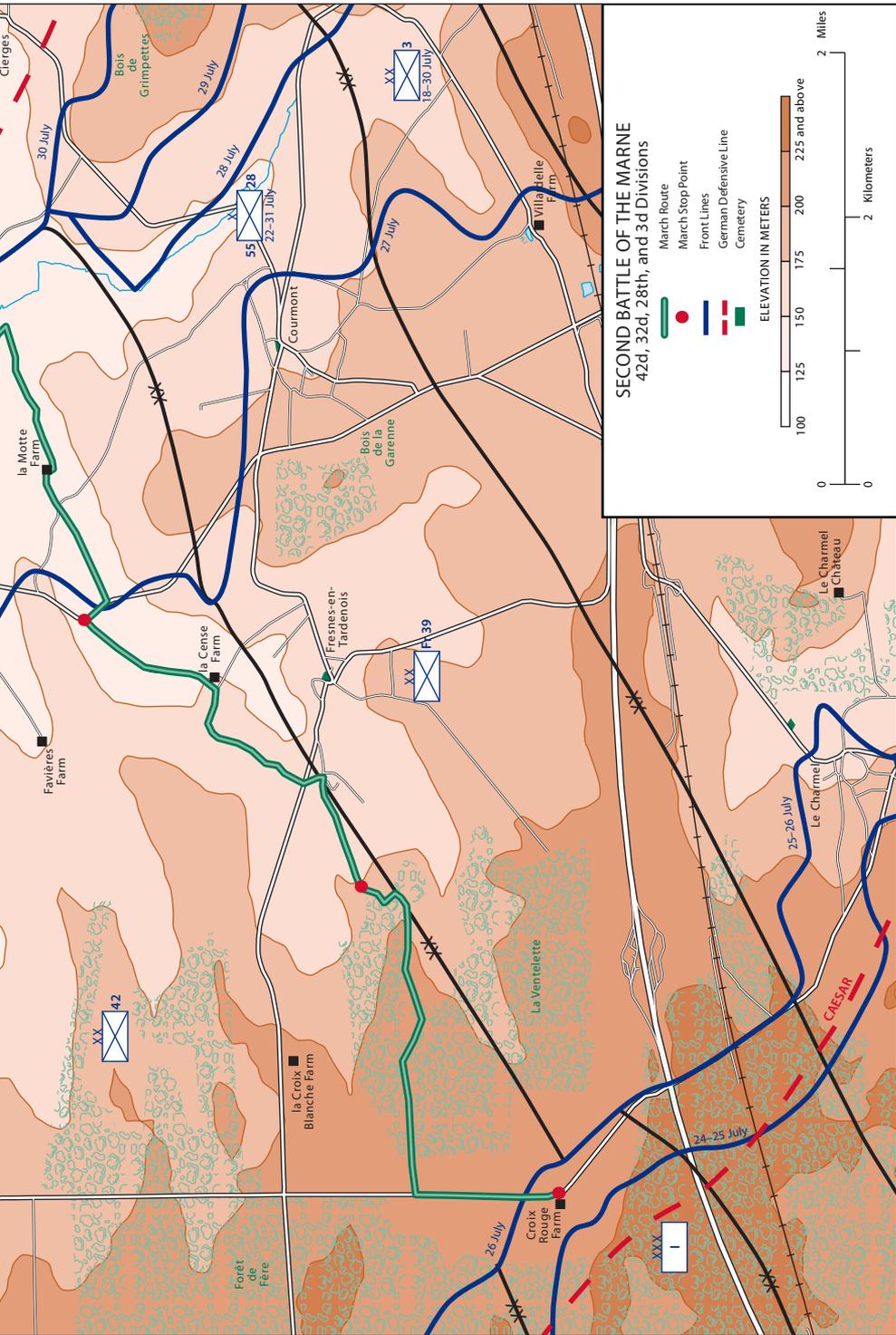
Sergeant Cole and a few others of the 125th Regiment made it to the top of Hill 212 on the afternoon of 31 July; Cole was wounded in the foot and evacuated. The 32d pushed on to capture Cierges very briefly, but fell back after the Germans saturated the village with poison gas. The Americans held on to Les Jomblets through the night of 31 July, but were pushed back out to here by a German counterattack on the morning of 1 August. In two separate regimental attacks later that day, the 125th Regiment took and held Les Jomblets, and the German retreat to the Vesle River continued.

Turn around and follow the road downhill into Sergy.



A German Aid station in the church of the village of Cierges





STOP FIVE:

SERGY

Stop in front of the village church in Sergy to view photographs of the local area during the war.

Beginning on the morning of 28 July, Lt. Gen. Hunter Liggett, commander of the U.S. First Army, ordered Maj. Gen. Charles Menoher, the commander of the 42d Division, to attack the Dora Line with both of his brigades abreast. The 83d Brigade, with the 165th (New York) and 166th (Ohio) Regiments, aimed north toward Fèren-Tardenois and Seringes-et-Nesles, while the 84th Brigade's Iowans and Alabamians attacked Sergy and the high ground on either side of it.

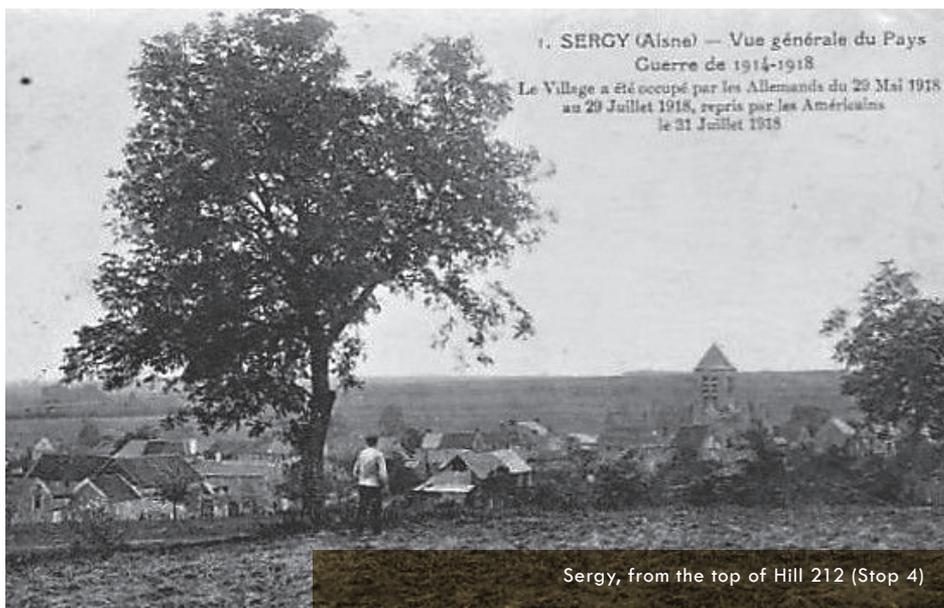
The German *4th Guards Division* had turned Sergy into a massive strongpoint with machine gun positions in virtually every building, and the entire village covered by massed artillery fire. A Rainbow Division officer described the area: "The enemy was in a natural fortress with the village of Sergy in the valley flanked by bare hills. On the east the Germans had a flank position protected by woods, on the west a small creek called the Rue du Pont Brule. Meurcy Farm lay in the valley of this creek near its junction with the Ourcq, and farther up the creek was the village of Nesles. Farther to the west the village of Seringes gave a commanding position over Meurcy Farm."

Fighting swirled around for two days, with the village changing

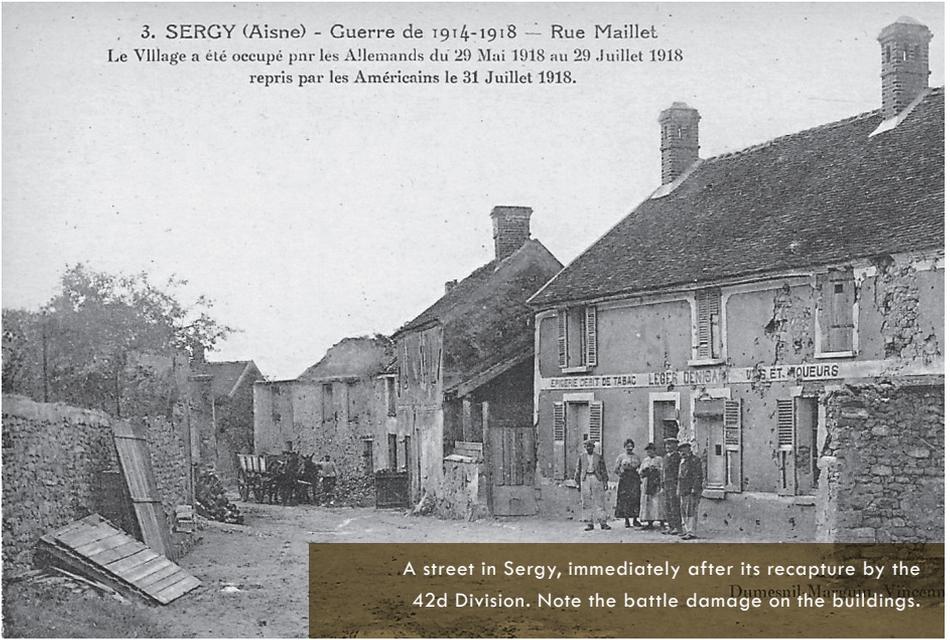
hands at least four times in attack and counterattack. The initial attack by the 84th Brigade was by the 2d Battalion of the 167th Regiment, which had been held out of the Croix Rouge Farm fight, and the 168th Regiment, which attacked across the wheat fields to the west of town. A company commander in the 167th noted that for the first time, German airplanes were causing significant casualties by dropping bombs. Soon, MacArthur called the bloodied 1st and 3d Battalions to assist the 2d, and two 1st Battalion platoons captured Sergy for the first time, with the assistance of the Iowa 168th. German artillery quickly drove them out. Another 168th patrol took the town again, but they too were driven back.

The Germans made liberal use of gas in Sergy. An Alabamian wrote after the war that the gas "formed curious greenish-yellow clouds that moved before light winds, becoming a bluish-white mist, such as is seen over water on a frosty night. Each kind of gas was marked by a distinctive odor. Chlorine smelled like pineapple, phosgene had the stench of putrid fish, and mustard gas had a sweet, almost soapy smell."

In order to reinforce the 167th in front of Sergy, Liggett assigned two



3. SERGY (Aisne) - Guerre de 1914-1918 — Rue Maillet
Le Village a été occupé par les Allemands du 29 Mai 1918 au 29 Juillet 1918
repris par les Américains le 31 Juillet 1918.



A street in Sergy, immediately after its recapture by the 42d Division. Note the battle damage on the buildings.

battalions of the 4th Division's 47th Regiment to support the Alabamians. The 1st Battalion of the 47th was entering its first battle of the war, and relieved 2-167th on the night of 29 July. That battalion, along with 1st and 3d of the 167th, attacked Sergy in strength on the morning of 30 July, but 1-47 was stopped with heavy

losses and relieved on 1 August. The 167th and 168th Regiments had firm possession of Sergy later on 1 August.

Continue through Sergy as indicated by the signs. You will enter wheat fields northwest of the village. Stop when you reach the group that is assembling on the hillside overlooking the Oise-Aisne American Cemetery.

STOP SIX:

PVT. SIDNEY MANNING

Look to the north; the Oise-Aisne American Cemetery is in the distance. Just to your left of the cemetery is the village of Seringes-et-Nesles, and to its left is Fère-en-Tardenois. On this side of the cemetery, in your line of march, is Meurcy Farm. You are surveying the left flank of the sector of the 42d Division's 167th Regiment, which attacked across this ground on 29 July 1918. To your left front is a small grove of trees. In the vicinity of this grove, Cpl. Sidney Manning of Company G, a native of Butler County, Alabama, took part in the assault on the German lines here; he received the Medal of Honor for his actions.

When his platoon commander and platoon sergeant had both become casualties soon after the beginning of an assault on strongly fortified

heights overlooking the Ourcq River, Corporal Manning took command of his platoon, which was near the center of the attacking line.



Rainbow Division Soldiers advance on a German position in Villers-sur-Fère, France July 1918.

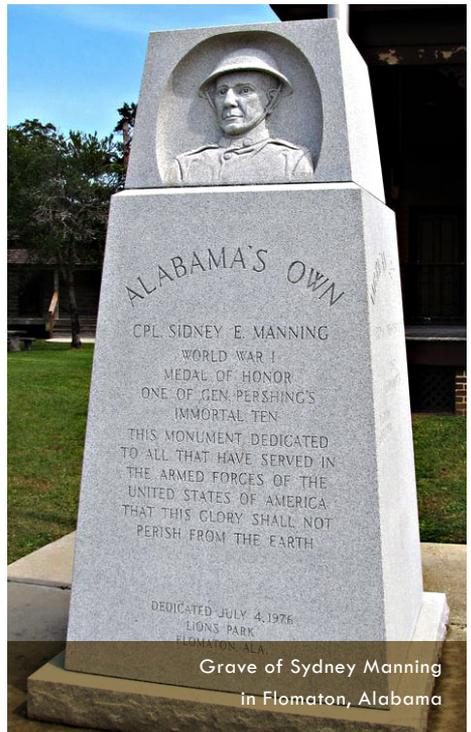
Though himself severely wounded, he led forward the thirty-five men remaining in the platoon and succeeded in gaining a foothold on the enemy's position. During the action he received more wounds and all but seven of his men had fallen. Directing the consolidation of the position, Manning held off a large body of the enemy only fifty yards away by fire from his automatic rifle. He declined to take cover until his line had been entirely consolidated with the line of the platoon on the front. Then he dragged himself to shelter, suffering from nine wounds in all parts of the body. Manning survived the war, and passed away in 1960.

Late in the day, elements of the 166th Infantry came into the line and occupied Seringes-et-Nesles. At approximately the same time, the 83d Brigade captured Fère-en-Tardenois, and the Rainbow Division headquarters moved into the village.

Continue walking straight ahead to Meurcy Farm.



Manning after the war



Grave of Sydney Manning
in Flomaton, Alabama

STOP SEVEN:
MEURCY FARM



assaulted the Bois Brulee, the wooded area at the near side of the Oise-Aisne American Cemetery to your right front. On 29 July, Donovan moved through this area toward the small creek in front of you to lead the attack in person after another officer was wounded. Ames was following him to the creek when a German sniper, hiding behind a dead horse, shot him dead. He was buried temporarily near this spot and later moved to the Oise-Aisne American Cemetery. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for the action.

During the same attack in which Lieutenant Ames was killed, Sgt. Richard W. O'Neill was later awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions nearby.

Sergeant O'Neill, the son of Irish immigrants, was born in New York, New York, in 1897. He enlisted in the 69th Infantry Regiment, New York National Guard, and served on the Mexican border during the 1916 Punitive Expedition. He went to France with his regiment, now redesignated the 165th Infantry, and rose to the rank of sergeant. On 29 July, he led a detachment of men in a reconnaissance against the German lines. Every member of the detachment except him was killed, and O'Neill was repeatedly wounded. However, O'Neill would not leave the field until he had passed his information to his battalion

Move to the small stone marker near the farm buildings.

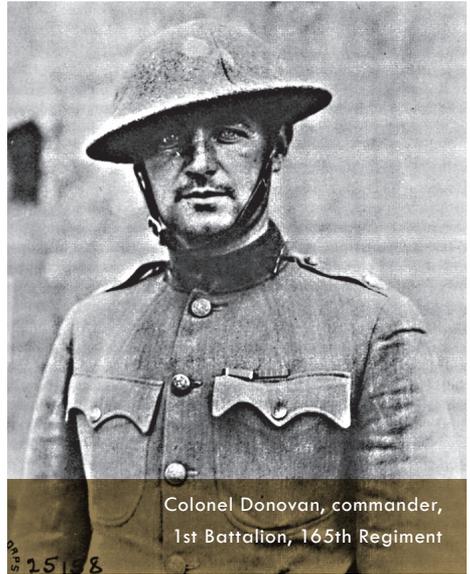
This stone memorializes 1st Lt. Oliver Ames Jr. of Boston, Massachusetts. Just as at Croix Rouge Farm, the retreating German *4th Guards Division* turned these buildings into a strongpoint. The 165th Infantry Regiment, 83d Brigade, 42d Division, captured the farm in an infantry assault on 29 July 1918. As part of that action, the regiment's First Battalion, commanded by Lt. Col. William J. Donovan,

commander, Colonel Donovan. He would go on to sustain another wound and be evacuated to the United States. Marshal Ferdinand Foch awarded O'Neill the Medal of Honor in 1921, while O'Neill was still recuperating from his wounds at Fordham University Hospital. The Medal of Honor citation recounted his action:

In advance of an assaulting line, he attacked a detachment of about 25 of the enemy. In the ensuing hand-to-hand encounter he sustained pistol wounds, but heroically continued in the advance, during which he received additional wounds: but, with great physical effort, he remained in active command of his detachment. Being again wounded, he was forced by weakness and loss of blood to be evacuated, but insisted upon being taken first to the battalion commander in order to transmit to him valuable information relative to enemy positions and the disposition of our men.

During World War II, O'Neill served for Donovan once again, this time in the Office of Strategic Services. O'Neill died in 1982.

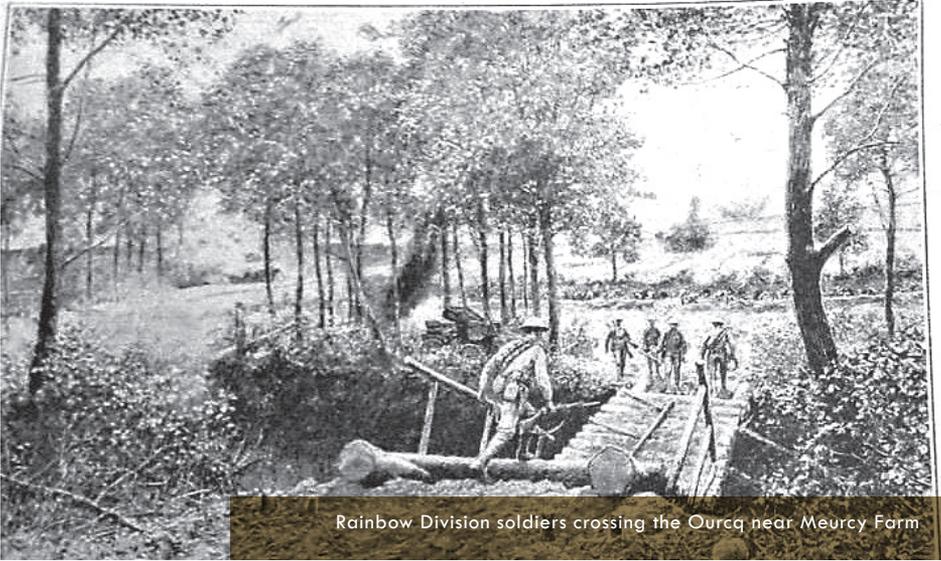
On 30 July, elements of the 83d Brigade held Meurcy Farm in the face of strong counterattacks by retreating German forces. One of the American casualties of these counterattacks was a member of the 165th Regiment's intelligence section, Sgt. Joyce Kilmer. Kilmer was a native of Brunswick, New Jersey, and at the time of his deployment to France, was considered



the leading American Catholic poet of his generation. He attended Columbia University, married poet Aline Murray, and fathered five children. On the day of his death, Kilmer volunteered to accompany Donovan's battalion in its attack on Meurcy Farm and the Bois Brulee. He was leading a small team in a reconnaissance of German machine gun positions when he was killed by a sniper near the Ourcq River, 500 yards behind you.

Continue walking north along the dirt road in front of you, and turn to the east (right) when you cross the small creek, the Point Brulee. Walk to the right of the cemetery's property wall, as directed by signs and the march leaders. As you round the back of the cemetery maintenance buildings, you will encounter a small cemetery enclosure surrounded by hedges and trees. This is Plot E of the Oise-Aisne American Cemetery.

Chapel and Farm Re-won on Ourcq and Marne



Rainbow Division soldiers crossing the Ourcq near Meurcy Farm

Plot E is the final resting place for American Soldiers from World War II who were tried, convicted, and executed for crimes committed while serving in the European Theater of Operations. Out of the 16 million members of the Allied Expeditionary Forces who served in World War II, approximately 30 were executed in the Pacific Theater and 100 in the European Theater. The members of our

armed forces were held to a high standard of conduct and held accountable when they did not meet that standard. Those buried in Plot E were sentenced to death for crimes they committed. The American Battle Monuments Commission ensures that these Soldiers rest in discrete but well maintained graves, reflecting our Nation's commitment to all our war dead.

STOP EIGHT:

OISE-AISNE AMERICAN CEMETERY

Stand in front of the Visitor Center with a view of the cemetery. The ground on which the cemetery stands was the wartime Bois Brulé, and the much larger Foret de Nesles stretches for several miles to the north. After sweeping across this ground on 28–30 July, the 42d Division handed the battle to the 4th Division in the Foret de Nesles, continuing the offensive to the Vesle River and the next German defensive line.

Gerald Howell, a 4th Division Soldier, described the relief in place:

Back through the woods and roads to . . . Chateau-Thierry, there was now an incessant troop movement. Men struggled under heavy packs. Troops were coming out of the lines, others going in. We of the 39th [Regiment, 4th Division] were here at Fere-en-Tardenois to relieve the 42d Division who would go to the rear for a rest. It is night and the roads are full of moving troops. Walking infantry is mixed with guns, limbers, and all sorts of transport. French camions, U.S. motor trucks and water carts are bobbing as they slowly edge their way through the congested road . . . Hard-bitten mule skinnners loudly curse their mules, the war and the U.S. Army. Men stumble and fall flat in the mud, only to rise wearily and continue on, cursing and crabbing about everything as they go. Ahead, through the woods, at the crossroads, there is the ominous boom of a high caliber German gun whose shell bursts are making the spot unhealthy for moving troops.

Father Francis Duffy, the chaplain of the 165th Regiment, watched the shattered remnants of the Rainbow Division walk out of the line after capturing the smoking remnants of Fère-en-Tardenois and Seringes-et-Nesles:

Back came our decimated battalions along the way they had already traveled. They marched in wearied silence until they came to the slopes around Meurcy Farm. Then from end to end of the line came the sound of dry, suppressed sobs. They were marching among the bodies of their unburied dead. In the stress of battle there had been but little time to think of them—all minds had been turned on victory. But the men who lay there were dearer to them than kindred, dearer than life; and these strong warriors paid their bashful involuntary tribute to the ties of love and long regret that bind brave men to the memory of their departed comrades.

Oise-Aisne is the third-largest American military cemetery in Eu-



Sergeant Kilmer

rope, and the second-largest World War I cemetery. It contains 6,012 graves, most of whom were killed in the fighting here in 1918. The cemetery was designed by Paul Cret, the Consulting Architect for the ABMC. Cret was born in France, and was offered a professorship at the University of Pennsylvania, but elected to return to France and enlist in the Army. Famous poet, Sergeant Kilmer is buried

in Plot B, Row 9, which is to the right of the central path, close to the main road. Before the war Kilmer wrote the well-known poem “Trees,” and during the Rainbow Division’s training period in eastern France he wrote “Rouge Bouquet,” which was about his experience enduring an artillery barrage that killed nineteen men of his company.

ROUGE BOUQUET

BY SGT. JOYCE KILMER

*In a wood they call the Rouge Bouquet
There is a new-made grave to-day,
Built by never a spade nor pick
Yet covered with earth ten metres thick.
There lie many fighting men,
Dead in their youthful prime,
Never to laugh nor love again
Nor taste the Summertime.
For Death came flying through the air
And stopped his flight at the dugout stair,
Touched his prey and left them there,
Clay to clay.
He hid their bodies stealthily
In the soil of the land they fought to free
And fled away.
Now over the grave abrupt and clear
Three volleys ring;
And perhaps their brave young spirits hear
The bugle sing:
“Go to sleep!
Go to sleep!
Slumber well where the shell screamed and fell.
Let your rifles rest on the muddy floor,
You will not need them any more.
Danger’s past;
Now at last,
Go to sleep!”
There is on earth no worthier grave
To hold the bodies of the brave*

*Than this place of pain and pride
Where they nobly fought and nobly died.
Never fear but in the skies
Saints and angels stand
Smiling with their holy eyes
On this new-come band.
St. Michael's sword darts through the air
And touches the aureole on his hair
As he sees them stand saluting there,
His stalwart sons;
And Patrick, Brigid, Columkill
Rejoice that in veins of warriors still
The Gael's blood runs.
And up to Heaven's doorway floats,
From the wood called Rouge Bouquet
A delicate cloud of bugle notes
That softly say:
"Farewell!
Farewell!
Comrades true, born anew, peace to you!
Your souls shall be where the heroes are
And your memory shine like the morning-star.
Brave and dear,
Shield us here.
Farewell!"*

Walk to the colonnade at the top of the cemetery. Here you will find, etched in stone around the central platform, the shoulder patches of the AEF divisions that fought in this region in 1918.

CONCLUSION

By 6 August 1918, the Allies had pushed the Germans back from the Marne to the Vesle River, reducing the Marne salient and eliminating the German threat to Paris. The American divisions that participated in the Second Battle of the Marne paid a heavy price for this victory, suffering over 12,000 casualties in six weeks of fighting, from Château-Thierry and Soissons to the Vesle. From this point in the war, the Allies were continuously on the offensive until the Armistice on 11 November. On 8 August, as French and American forces continued their drive from here to the northeast, a combined force of British, Canadians, Australians, French, and Americans initiated an offensive east of Amiens in northern France. This day became known as the “Black Day of the German Army” as the massive combined Allied offensive pushed the Germans back to the Hindenburg Line, the last fortified line before the Rhine River and the German frontier. The Great War had turned in a decisive direction.

FURTHER READINGS

American Battle Monuments Commission. *American Armies and Battlefields in Europe*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1995.

Amerine, William H. *Alabama's Own in France*. New York: Eaton and Gettinger, 1919.

Frazer, Nimrod T. *Send the Alabamians: World War I Fighters in the Rainbow Division*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2014.

Howell, Gerald A. *Yesterday There Was Glory: With the 4th Division, A.E.F., in World War I*. Ed. Jeffrey L. Patrick, Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2017.

Lengel, Edward G. *Thunder and Flames: American in the Crucible of Combat, 1917–1918*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2015.



Center of Military History

United States Army | Washington, D.C.