

“The Battle of the Ourcq River”

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Table of Contents:

Introduction: *Dramatis Personae*, 2

Chapter One: The Battle Begins: 28-29 July, 13

Chapter Two: On It Rages: 30 July-2 August, 33

Chapter Three: Denouement: 3-6 August, 64

Conclusion: The Ourcq Weighed in the Balance: 76

Bibliography: 82

Introduction: *Dramatis Personae*

The Battle of the Ourcq River was an engagement fought by American and German forces during late July and early August 1918 as part of the Second Battle of the Marne. The Battle of the Marne was a decisive point in the First World War. Because it was fought toward the “tail end” of the enormous Second Battle of the Marne and because the Meuse-Argonne has captured so much of the attention of the American historical community, the Battle of the Ourcq tends to be glossed over, treated as a stepping stone between the important battles – the Marne and the Meuse-Argonne.¹ The St. Mihiel offensive has been studied in detail, as have Belleau Wood, Chateau-Thierry, and Cantigny.² Belleau Wood in particular has received extremely careful examination, particularly when compared directly to the skeletal accounts on the Ourcq.³ For example, in *Thunder and Flames*, historian Edward Lengel devotes six chapters to Belleau Wood.⁴ The Battle of the Ourcq gets all of twenty-one pages, approximately two-thirds of chapter fifteen.⁵ Another study of the Great War, Martin Marix Evans’s *Over the Top*, devotes only two pages to the Ourcq.⁶

Edward M. Coffman’s *The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I* was first published in 1968. Fifty-one years later, it is still probably the best

¹Technically speaking, the engagement fought along the Ourcq River from 28 July to 6 August 1918 was the second Battle of the Ourcq. It should not be confused with the engagement between German and French forces along the Ourcq River, 5-9 September 1914 as part of the First Battle of the Marne. See Robert P. Asprey, *The German High Command at War: Hindenburg and Ludendorff Conduct World War I* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991), 102-106; and Holger H. Herwig, *The First World War: Germany and Austria-Hungary, 1914-1918* (London: Arnold, 1997), 96-106.

²David Bonk, *Chateau Thierry and Belleau Wood 1918: American’s Baptism of Fire on the Marne* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2012); and Matthew J. Davenport, *First Over There: The Attack on Cantigny, America’s First Battle of World War I* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2015); and James H. Hallas, *Squandered Victory: The American First Army at St. Mihiel* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995).

³Alan Axelrod, *Miracle at Belleau Wood: The Birth of the Modern U.S. Marine Corps* (Guilford, CT: The Lyons Press, 2018); and Richard D. Camp, *The Devil Dogs at Belleau Wood: U.S. Marines in World War I* (Minneapolis, MN: Zenith Press, 2008); and Albertus W. Catlin, “*With the Help of God and A Few Marines*” *The Battles of Chateau Thierry and Belleau Wood* (Yardley, PA: Westholme Publishing, 2013).

⁴Edward Lengel, *Thunder and Flames: Americans in the Crucible of Combat, 1917-1918* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2015), 98-206.

⁵Ibid., 302-337.

⁶Martin Marix Evans, *Over the Top: Great Battles of the First World War* (London: Arcturus Publishing, 2002), 205-208.

overview of America's military involvement in "the Great War." The Ourcq is given a brief treatment before being overshadowed by St. Mihiel and the Meuse-Argonne.⁷ In a work possessing the size and scope of Coffman's, that briefness is understandable, and what is there is of the very best. James J. Cooke's *The Rainbow Division in the Great War* provides a complete history of one of the AEF's most famous infantry divisions, from its formation to its disbanding.⁸ Cooke examines the Division's organization, training, and combat record, seeking to explain the causes behind its cohesion and excellent performance in battle. Cooke covers the personal relationships of the officers and personnel, logistics, intelligence, air support, artillery support, gas warfare, tactics, and the operations of divisional headquarters. Because the 42nd played an important role at the Ourcq, Cooke studies the Division's involvement in detail, using roughly the same amount of space he devotes to the Rainbow's participation in the battle at St. Mihiel and the Meuse-Argonne offensive.⁹

There are a significant number of unit histories which touch on the Ourcq, including primary sources such as Raymond M. Cheseldine's history of the 166th Infantry Regiment, and secondary sources such as Nimrod T. Frazier's study of the 167th Infantry Regiment.¹⁰ There are also personal accounts which mention the Ourcq, like Father Francis P. Duffy's history of his experiences as chaplain to the 165th Infantry, or Charles MacArthur's *War Bugs*.¹¹ A couple of biographies also examine the Ourcq, such as Stephen L. Harris's *Duffy's War*.¹² George Browne's letters, edited and collected into a soldier's-eye-view of the war by David L. Snead, covers the Ourcq as it relates to Browne's involvement.¹³

⁷Edward M. Coffman, *The War to End All Wars* (Reprint. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 253-257, 260-261.

⁸James J. Cooke, *The Rainbow Division in the Great War, 1917-1919* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1994).

⁹*Ibid.*, 117-138, 139-162, 163-189.

¹⁰Raymond M. Cheseldine, *Ohio in the Rainbow; Official Story of the 166th Infantry, 42nd Division, in the World War* (Columbus, OH: F.J. Heer, 1924); and Nimrod Thompson Frazier, *Send the Alabamians: World War I Fighters in the Rainbow Division* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2014).

¹¹Francis P. Duffy, *Father Duffy's Story: A Tale of Humor and Heroism, of Life and Death, with the Fighting 69th* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1919); and Charles MacArthur, *War Bugs* (London: Hutchinson, 1929).

¹²Stephen L. Harris, *Duffy's War: Fr. Francis Duffy, Wild Bill Donovan, and the Irish Fighting 69th in World War I* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2008).

¹³George Browne, *An American Soldier in World War I*, ed. David L. Snead (Lincoln & London, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

All of these sources are of excellent quality and of great use to the historian, but they do not make up for the lack of a comprehensive account of the Battle of the Ourcq River. In order to properly understand and study the Ourcq, one must first become familiar with its participants. Five infantry divisions of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) entered combat at the Ourcq: the 3rd, 4th, 28th, 32nd, and 42nd.¹⁴ To oppose these units, the German army called on several divisions, including, among others, the 4th and 84th Guard Divisions, the 6th Bavarian Division, and the 201st Infantry Division.¹⁵

As they marched on paper, AEF divisions consisted of two infantry brigades, a field artillery brigade broken into three regiments, one machine gun battalion, a signal battalion, a regiment of engineers, the division headquarters staff, the headquarters troop, military police company, train headquarters, supply, sanitary, engineer, and ammunition trains, the mobile ordnance repair shops, railhead unit, mobile veterinary section, division salvage squad, mobile field laboratory, clothing and bathing unit, machine shop truck units, a bakery company, sales commissary, and a laundry company, totaling between 27,000 and 28,000 men.¹⁶ Divisions were commanded by major generals. Artillery brigades consisted of two light regiments armed with 75mm guns and a heavy regiment equipped with 6-inch howitzers. Infantry brigades, commanded by a brigadier general and his staff, had 8,500 men divided into two regiments and a machine gun battalion. Regiments were commanded by colonels and consisted of three infantry battalions and a machine gun company; regiments mustered 3,800 soldiers. Battalions were made up of 1,000 men broken into four companies, and were commanded by a major. Companies numbered 250 strong and were commanded by captains.¹⁷

Of course, paper strength and actual strength were rarely, if ever, the same thing. Of the five divisions which fought at the Ourcq, three, the 3rd, 28th, and 42nd, had been recently engaged in combat at the Battle of Soissons and suffered severe casualties. The 4th and 32nd were

¹⁴Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 321, 328-329, 332-337.

¹⁵Frazier, *Send the Alabamians*, 127.

¹⁶Douglas V. Johnson and Rolfe L. Hillman, *Soissons, 1918* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1999), 163; and Frederic Vinton Hemenway, *History of the 3rd Division United States Army in the World War, For the Period December 1, 1917 to January 1, 1919* (Andernach-on-the-Rhine, Cologne: M. Dumont Schauberg, 1919), xix.

¹⁷Ibid.

fresh with the Ourcq being their baptism of blood.¹⁸

The 3rd Division was formed at Camp Greene in Charlotte, North Carolina on 23 November 1917. It consisted of the 5th Brigade (4th and 7th Infantry Regiments and the 8th Machine Gun Battalion), the 6th Brigade (30th and 38th Infantry and the 9th M.G.B.), the Third Artillery Brigade (10th, 76th, and 18th Field Artillery regiments), and the necessary support services. Major General Joseph T. Dickman served as the division's commander from December of 1917 to 18 August 1918.¹⁹ Its brigadiers were Fred W. Sladen (5th) and Charles Crawford (6th).²⁰ The division arrived in France on 4 April 1918. The 3rd's first combat came in late May and early June at the Battle of Chateau-Thierry.²¹ On 14 and 15 July, the 3rd had earned its soubriquet: "The Rock of the Marne," when it helped hold back assaults from overwhelming German forces, besting some of the Kaiser's elite troops in the process, with Colonel Ulysses Grant McAlexander's 38th Infantry winning special praise from John J. Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Forces, in the army reports.²²

Like the 3rd, the 4th Division was organized in December 1917 at Camp Greene. Initially it consisted of regular army units from the West Coast before having its ranks filled up to paper strength by volunteers and draftees in February and March of 1918. The 4th Division's constituent units were the 7th Brigade (39th and 47th Infantry and 11th M.G.B.) and 8th Brigade (58th and 59th Infantry and 12th M.G.B.), along with its artillery, support, and staff units. Elements of the 39th, 58th, and 59th had been engaged during the initial French assaults on the Aisne-Marne Salient, but the Battle of the Ourcq would be the 4th Division's first experience fighting as a single combat unit. At the Ourcq, the 4th was commanded by Major General George H. Cameron and its brigadiers were Benjamin Andrew Poore (7th) and the newly arrived Ewing E. Booth (8th).²³

¹⁸Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 332; and Coffman, *The War to End All Wars*, 255.

¹⁹Hemenway, *History of the 3rd Division*, Frontispiece, 1-2.

²⁰Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 215.

²¹Ibid., 2-4; and Michael S. Neiberg, *The Second Battle of the Marne* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 113.

²²Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 207-241; and Coffman, *War to End All Wars*, 225-227.

²³"Memorandum for Colonel Bolles, HQ 7th Infantry Brigade, AEF, France August 6th, 1918," National Archives and Records Administration [cited hereafter as NARA], Records of the American Expeditionary Forces (World War I), Record Group [hereafter RG] 120, Box 24, 4th Division, Folder 32; Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*,

The 28th “Keystone” Division was formed at Camp Hancock, Georgia, in August 1917. Its early organization was partly the result of its participation in the expedition against Pancho Villa. The 28th was not a new organization but rather a reorganization based on the building blocks of the old 7th Division.²⁴ The 28th consisted of units from the Pennsylvania National Guard, though its ranks were filled in by draftees from across the United States. Its brigades were the 55th (109th and 110th Infantry and the 108th M.G.B.) and 56th (111th and 112th Infantry and 109th M.G.B.). The Keystone’s commander was Major General Charles H. Muir and its brigadiers were Thomas Darrah (55th) and William Weigel (56th).²⁵ The 28th had helped halt the German attack across the Marne on July 15, holding so staunchly that it was given the soubriquet of “Iron Division.”²⁶

Major General William G. Haan’s 32nd Division was formed at Camp MacArthur in Waco, Texas, in July 1917 and consisted of National Guard troops from Wisconsin and Michigan. Its brigades were the 63rd (125th and 126th Infantry) and 64th (127th and 128th Infantry). The 57th Field Artillery Brigade was also attached to the Division.²⁷ The 32nd arrived in France in February 1918. In mid-May, it gained the distinction of being the first American unit to enter German territory when several of its combat patrols made forays into Alsace, though the division as a whole remained in position in the trenches.²⁸ Brigadier General Robert Alexander commanded the 63rd Brigade at the Ourcq, while 64th Brigade was led by Brigadier General Edwin B. Winans.²⁹ Eventually the French dubbed the 32nd Division “Les Terribles” because of its fierceness.³⁰ “Red Arrow” was the division’s other nickname, because it “shot through every

302-303; and Christian A. Bach and Henry Noble Hall, *The Fourth Division: Its Services and Achievements in the World War* (Issued by the Division, 1920), 93.

²⁴28th Infantry Division Association, *28th Infantry “Keystone” Division (Mechanized): 125 Years of Service* (Nashville, TN: Turner Publishing, 2005), 26-29.

²⁵Ibid; and Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 217

²⁶28th Inf. Div. Association, *125 Years of Service*, 29.

²⁷ Joint War History Commissions of Michigan and Wisconsin, *The 32nd Division in the World War, 1917-1919*. (Reprint. Forgotten Books, 2016), 27-40.

²⁸Ibid., 41-48.

²⁹“Report on the Operations of the 63rd Infantry Brigade, (July 27-August 7, 1918, Inclusive),” NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3316, 32nd Division, Folder 1, 34-37; and Comments on the Operations of the 64th Infantry Brigade, (July 27-August 7, 1918, inclusive),” NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3316, 32nd Division, Folder 1, 37-38.

³⁰Henry Berry, *Make the Kaiser Dance: Living Memories of a Forgotten War: The American Experience in World War I* (New York: Doubleday, 1978), 281.

line the Germans put in front of us.”³¹

The 42nd “Rainbow” Division was officially formed at Camp Mills, New York in August 1917. It included units from twenty-six U.S. States and the District of Columbia, leading to the nickname “Rainbow Division.” The Division contained the 83rd (165th and 166th Infantry and 150th M.G.B.) and 84th (167th and 168th Infantry and 151st M.G.B.) Brigades. The “Rainbow” reached the Western Front in November of 1917, being one of the first American units to do so.³²

At the Ourcq the 42nd was commanded by Major General Charles T. Menoher.³³ Brigadier General Michael Lenihan commanded the 83rd Brigade.³⁴ The 84th Brigade began the battle with Brigadier General Robert A. Brown.³⁵ The 42nd Division had helped repulse the German attack on 15 July, inflicting a large number of casualties in the process. One machine gunner was credited with killing an entire enemy company. The Division had also been engaged at Croix Rouge Farm from 25 to 27 July, where it had lost several hundred men.³⁶

The Second Battle of the Marne lasted from 15 July to 6 August 1918. The German Attack, which began on 15 July and was sent reeling backward on the 18th, would be the last-ditch attempt by the Kaiser’s high command to win a favourable peace before the arrival of American troops in Europe turned the odds irrevocably against the weary German army. Not only did the Imperial offensive fail to achieve its goal, it also lengthened the odds against Germany by spilling enormous amounts of blood which the Kaiser’s outnumbered forces could ill afford to lose. By August 2nd, German losses amounted to 110,000 killed, wounded, or missing, along with the loss of thousands of machine guns and nearly 800 artillery pieces.³⁷

The German attack was to begin with an artillery bombardment at 12:10 A.M. on 15 July,

³¹Ibid., 282.

³²United States Department of the Army, Center of Military History, *Order of Battle of the United States Land Forces in the World War, Volume 2* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1931-49. Reprint. Center of Military History, 1988), 275-277.

³³Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 320.

³⁴Harris, *Duffy’s War*, 249.

³⁵Frazier, *Send the Alabamians*, 136.

³⁶Ibid., 105-125, 139.

³⁷Asprey, *Hindenburg and Ludendorff*, 434-443; and Herwig, *Germany and Austria-Hungary, 1914-1918*, 392-432.

to be followed between 3:00 and 5:00 A.M. by an assault on Reims by the German First and Third Armies. Unfortunately for the Germans, the commander of the French Fourth Army, Henri Gouraud, had learned the approximate time of the planned attack from a prisoner. Based on this information, Gouraud's artillery opened fire on the German front lines and assembly areas at 11:30 P.M. on 14 July, inflicting heavy casualties on the tightly-packed assault formations waiting for the word to advance.³⁸ Once the German artillery responded, nearly 4,000 guns shook the earth and lit up the night sky. A poetically inclined member of the Rainbow Division later wrote: "Through that ghostly, ghastly silence came the midnight hour... Silence gave way to the cannon's angry roars... and thunder shattered Purgatory's doors... Shrieking o'erhead missiles to maim and kill... Thus early hells raved on and many warriors died, Until [*sic*] night had passed and came the morning tide."³⁹ Once the attack began on the 15th, it continued throughout the day, with the Germans launching seven separate assaults against the Allied positions.⁴⁰

German fighters and bombers proved a constant menace to the Allied defenders because the majority of the Allied air forces were occupied attacking strategic targets behind the German lines, granting "Les Boches" air superiority over the battlefield itself.⁴¹ This misallocation of air power by the Allies did not continue throughout the Second Battle of the Marne, with Allied Supreme Commander, Ferdinand Foch concentrating as much air power as possible for his counterattack.⁴² Nevertheless, American accounts will demonstrate in the succeeding chapters that the Allies lacked air superiority at the Battle of the Ourcq. Regardless of their advantage in the air, the German attack had failed badly, and the assault ceased on 16 July. The troops on the south bank of the Marne had gained a small and untenable bridgehead, and Crown Prince Wilhelm, the German commander, decided on 17 July to withdraw to the northern bank of the Marne. The failure of the offensive had left the German army exposed to a counteroffensive and the Foch was determined to make the most of the opportunity.⁴³

The Allied counterattack which began on 18 July sent the Germans "reeling along the

³⁸Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 221-223.

³⁹Quoted in Snead, *An American Soldier*, 96.

⁴⁰Herwig, *Germany and Austria-Hungary, 1914-1918*, 392-432. and Asprey, *Hindenburg and Ludendorff*, 434-443.

⁴¹Neiberg, *Second Battle of the Marne*, 103.

⁴²Ibid., 123

⁴³Neiberg, *Second Battle of the Marne*, 98-117; and Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 207-241.

ropes like a punch-drunk boxer.”⁴⁴ Four French field armies, including American divisions and corps, were assigned to the offensive, the largest and paramount of these armies being Charles Mangin’s Tenth Army. The Tenth Army contained five corps, including two of France’s best, the XX and XXX. XXX Corps included two U.S. divisions, the 1st and 2nd. As Mangin’s Tenth Army attacked to the southeast, the Sixth Army, under Jean Degoutte, was ordered to advance to the northeast. Degoutte’s Sixth Army originally included the American 4th and 26th divisions. Between the Tenth and Sixth Armies, Henri de Mitry’s Ninth Army was given the task of holding the nose of the Marne Salient and preventing the Germans from making an unhindered retreat. The Ninth Army included the U.S. 3rd and 28th Divisions. Fifth Army was also assigned to the counterattack, but included no American units.⁴⁵

Allied preparations for the offensive included the largest concentration of tanks in the war up to that point, and the army commanders took great pains to prevent the enemy from discovering the armor’s presence. Mangin’s Tenth Army initiated the counterattack at 4:35 A.M. on 18 July, 1918. Beginning with an artillery bombardment by over 2,100 pieces, the attack caught the Germans completely by surprise. Allied artillery fire was so heavy that it could be heard in Paris, nearly a hundred miles away. The nine divisions of the initial assault wave swept forward over a front of over twenty-eight miles. Allied tanks proved to be highly effective psychological weapons as well as useful offensive tools. German refusal to entrench ground they had gained in recent days made things easier on the attacking forces, if only at first.⁴⁶ Included in the first day’s attack wave were three U.S. divisions: 1st, 2nd, and 4th. They performed well, but suffered heavy casualties in the process. Despite the losses, the offensive proved hugely successful. U.S. 2nd Division actually pushed so far that it outran its line of supply.⁴⁷ On the 18th alone, the Allies captured 20,000 prisoners, 518 artillery pieces, 300 *minenwerfer* (trench mortars), and 3,000 machine guns.⁴⁸ The German lines were in such disarray that one American regiment captured 3,000 prisoners from five different divisions.⁴⁹

⁴⁴Herwig, *Germany and Austria-Hungary, 1914-1918*, 420.

⁴⁵Neiberg, *Second Battle of the Marne*, 118-139; and Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 242-301.

⁴⁶Neiberg, *Second Battle of the Marne*, 122-125, 127-128.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 131.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 130.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

Unfortunately for the Allies, the advance had taken its toll. The strategic plan could not be adjusted to changing events, making cooperation difficult. German resistance stiffened. Losses among field officers were heavy. For example, some units in the U.S. 1st Division had lost sixty percent of their officers.⁵⁰ Many units had advanced farther than others, leaving their flanks exposed. To make matters worse, German planes had regained air supremacy.⁵¹ Historian Michael S. Neiberg argues: “Thus the Allies could thus [*sic*] force the Germans out of their positions, but with their forces ‘horribly depleted,’ they lacked the strength to turn victory into a rout.”⁵² The 1st and 2nd U.S. Divisions proved indispensable to the success of the advance, though the fighting of the 19th, 20th, and 21st of July cost them an enormous number of casualties.⁵³ The 1st Division lost 7,317 officers and men, including 75% of its field officers.⁵⁴ The 2nd Division sustained 4,180 casualties and its 9th Regiment could muster only 334 men.⁵⁵

By 22 July, the German high command realized that the Marne line was untenable and decided to draw a new defensive line along the Ourcq River. Among other things, this necessitated the rebasing of their airplanes, temporarily relieving some of the pressure on Allied pilots. Unfortunately for the advancing Allies, the rebasing did not prevent German planes from bombing supply trains, further exacerbating the already enormous supply problems.⁵⁶ In spite of the difficulties, Foch was determined to maintain the initiative and avoid giving the Germans a respite. Many of the French units were worn out, and there were few British divisions available in the Marne sector; therefore, the bulk of the fighting would be done by American divisions. The advance was not an easy one. The Germans had become crafty in their use of camouflage, and their cunning ability to hide machine gun emplacements cost many doughboys their lives.⁵⁷

From 22 to 26 July, the 3rd and 26th Divisions were charged with advancing up the center of the Marne salient. On 26 July, the 26th Division was ordered to redeploy to the St. Mihiel salient, and the 28th and 42nd Divisions arrived to join in the attack.⁵⁸ The 26th (and elements of

⁵⁰Ibid., 131-134.

⁵¹Ibid., 134-135.

⁵²Ibid., 135.

⁵³Johnson and Hillman, *Soissons, 1918*, 88-142; and Lengel, 242-301.

⁵⁴Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 297.

⁵⁵Ibid., 288.

⁵⁶Neiberg, *Second Battle of the Marne*, 140-142, 144, 148.

⁵⁷Ibid., 145, 148.

⁵⁸Ibid., 152.

the 28th operating under 26th's control) had taken ten miles in a week. It had paid for its success with 4,108 casualties.⁵⁹ Meanwhile, the 3rd Division had succeeded in securing the eastern approaches to Chateau-Thierry before bloodying itself badly in a failed attempt to seize Le Charnel from the Germans on 26 July. When the “Rock of the Marne” tried to advance again on the morning of the 27th, it found the Germans gone; “the Hun” had retreated across the Ourcq during the night.⁶⁰ 26 July had seen the 28th Division redeploying to try and make sure there were no gaps between the 3rd and newly arrived 42nd Divisions. To the north of the “Keystone” Division the 84th Brigade of the “Rainbow” Division, which had just taken over the front from the American and French forces, managed to force the Germans out of their position at the Croix Rouge (Red Cross) Farm at the cost of over 1,000 casualties.⁶¹ On July 27th, all three of these divisions pursued the Germans until they reached the southern bank of the Ourcq River.⁶²

By nightfall on the 27th, the American line south of the Ourcq ran as follows from left to right: 42nd Division (Charles T. Menoher, Hunter Liggett’s I U.S. Corps, Degoutte’s Sixth French Army), 28th Division (Charles H. Muir, Jean de Montdesir’s XXXVIII French Corps, Sixth Army), 3rd Division (Joseph T. Dickman, XXXVIII Corps, Sixth Army).⁶³ The stage was set and the curtain ready to rise. Two American divisions were in reserve: the 4th Division, which was coming up behind the 42nd, and the 32nd Division, to the rear of the 3rd and 28th. The Battle of the Ourcq was about to begin.⁶⁴

The ten days of battle which began on 28 July 1918 were terribly bloody. Eagerness to pursue the enemy, poor tactics, a lack of cooperation between units, and the skillful efforts of the German forces cost thousands of American soldiers their lives. When the *Charleston News and Courier* declared in its 30 July headline, “River Ourcq Runs Red with Blood Where Americans Triumph Over Prussian Guard,” it was not engaging in hyperbole.⁶⁵ That same day, 30 July, George Browne of the 117th Engineers, 42nd Division, wrote to his sweetheart: “This is not going

⁵⁹Ibid., 152-154; and Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 316.

⁶⁰Neiberg, *Second Battle of the Marne*, 154; and Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 318-320.

⁶¹Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 318; and Frazier, *Send the Alabamians*, 137-138.

⁶²Ibid., 320-321.

⁶³Neiberg, *Second Battle of the Marne*, 162; and Lengel, 69, 303, 319, 321; and John Kennedy Ohl, “The Keystone Division in the Great War,” *Prologue* 10, no. 2 (Summer 1978): 93-95.

⁶⁴Neiberg, *Second Battle of the Marne*, 140-166; and Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 302-320.

⁶⁵Quoted in Snead, *An American Soldier*, 107.

to be very lengthy as I'm not exactly in the mood for writing. I'm going to wait till later, perhaps after the war, to tell you all of the experiences we've had just now."⁶⁶ On 8 August, Browne wrote to the same loving recipient: "The army is nothing nice in a place like this front has been. It makes a guy feel the uselessness of war when he sees men shot up and killed. It's no use trying to describe it and I wouldn't want to."⁶⁷ While Browne had no desire to share what he had seen, the doughboys who were killed and maimed at the Ourcq deserve to be remembered. Their courage and the carnage they endured must not be forgotten.

⁶⁶Ibid., 99-100.

⁶⁷Ibid., 100.

Chapter One: The Battle Begins: 28-29 July

The 42nd Division began the Battle of the Ourcq on the morning of 28 July when it attacked across the river, pressing toward the town of Sergy and seeking to establish a line with its left flank at the Meurcy Farm and its right flank on Hill 212.¹ Unfortunately for the Rainbow Division, “Les Boches,” as Allied troops often called their foes, had chosen their defensive position well. The Germans were entrenched in a natural fortress in the village of Sergy in a valley flanked by bare hills. To the east, the Germans had a flank position guarded by woods, while their western flank was protected by a small creek called the Ru du Pont Brûle. The Meurcy Farm lay in the valley of this creek near its junction with the Ourcq River. Farther up this creek was the village of Nesles. To the west, the village of Seringes gave a commanding position over the Meurcy Farm.² The Ourcq itself was not a great obstacle, being merely a “shallow tributary” of the River Marne, but it would slow the Americans down, and the steep hills on the north bank of the Ourcq would prove to be a formidable impediment to the attacking infantry.³ The German artillery had excellent fields of fire, and of all the branches of the bruised and battered German army, the “Long Arm” of the artillery was the least atrophied. It would demonstrate this with terrible clarity in the coming days.

To make matters worse, the infantry would have to advance without artillery support, relying on the bayonet in place of the guns.⁴ Indeed, high command had explicitly forbidden the troops to fire during the initial assault because they wanted the attack to be “in the nature of a

¹“General Orders No. 51, Headquarters, 42nd Division, A.E.F., July 27th 1918, 9:30 A.M.,” NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3327, 42nd Division, Folder 14, 6.

²Cheseldine, *Ohio in the Rainbow*, 195.

³Harris, *Duffy’s War*, 242; and Neiberg, *Second Battle of the Marne*, 171-172.

⁴Duffy, *Father Duffy’s Story*, 163; and Cheseldine, *Ohio in the Rainbow*, 196.

surprise.”⁵ Evidently this decision was not made by Menoher or Liggett, but by Degoutte himself.⁶ Apparently Degoutte thought the Germans were fought out and would turn and run if sufficiently pressed. What exactly gave the general this impression is unclear. Father Francis Duffy (chaplain of the 165th Infantry), Colonel McCoy (commander of the 165th), and General Lenihan (83rd Brigade) all of whom were considerably nearer the front than Degoutte, were of a different opinion: “The assumption of a retreating enemy against whom infantry bayonets and charging cavalry could be effective was not justified by what the front line could detect. It was a case for artillery preparation and careful advance.”⁷ How the advancing doughboys were supposed to surprise the Germans while wading a river and climbing uphill in broad daylight is also unclear.⁸

Orders called for the 42nd Division’s 83rd and 84th Brigades to advance abreast and force the Ourcq in unison.⁹ The attack was scheduled to begin at 3:45 A.M.¹⁰ Things did not go according to plan. No sooner had H-hour arrived than Brig. Gen. Lenihan (83rd Brig.) found he could not locate Col. Benson W. Hough of the 166th Infantry (83rd Brig.). The fact that his telephone lines had been cut exacerbated the situation further.¹¹ Then, at 3:20 A.M., a courier arrived from Gen. Brown to inform Lenihan that the 84th Brigade could not advance without artillery preparation because the men had fought all night. That was not strictly accurate. The 167th Regiment of the 84th had managed to snatch some sleep the night before; it had been their first such opportunity in three days.¹² Brown promised to advance at 4:00 A.M., “if possible,”

⁵“General Orders No. 51, Headquarters, 42nd Division, A.E.F., July 27th 1918, 9:30 A.M.”; and “Field Orders No. 27, Headquarters 1st Army Corps, American E.F., 27th July, 1918,” NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3327, 42nd Division, Folder 14, 6, 11-12.

⁶ Harris, *Duffy’s War*, 247; and Duffy, *Duffy’s Story*, 163-164. Charles T. Menoher commanded the 42nd Division, which made up Hunter Liggett’s I U.S. Corps, and was assigned to Jean Degoutte’s Sixth French Army.

⁷Duffy, *Duffy’s Story*, 163.

⁸Neiberg, *Second Battle of the Marne*, 171-172.

⁹Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 320.

¹⁰“Orders from 83rd Brig. HQ to the C.O.’s of the 165th and 166th Infantry Reg’ts.,” NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3327, 42nd Division, Folder 14, 12-13.

¹¹Harris, *Duffy’s War*, 249.

¹²Frazier, *Send the Alabamians*, 128.

but he doubted he could do so unless the enemy withdrew.¹³ Attempts by Lenihan to contact Colonel William P. Screws of the 167th were unsuccessful.¹⁴ In spite of all these setbacks, Colonel McCoy ordered the 165th Regiment of the 83rd Brigade over the Ourcq at 3:45, under a terrible bombardment from German artillery. Major James A. McKenna's Third "Shamrock" Battalion led the way, followed by First and Second in due course.¹⁵ When Captain Merle-Smith of L Company, 165th, noticed there were no troops on his unit's flanks, he returned to the regimental post of command, where he learned his doughboys would be advancing alone. He was less than pleased: "The Major and the Colonel looked white, but orders were orders, so we literally repeated the charge of the Light Brigade."¹⁶ Though they did not know it then, the 165th was marching into a crucible.

The Shamrock Battalion pressed forward shrieking like banshees, and determined to give the Germans "a bellyful of Uncle Sam's cold steel."¹⁷ The fact that the battalion continued to advance successfully was nothing short of miraculous. The Germans pelted the advancing doughboys with a hail of bullets. Officers and NCOs were slain at an alarming rate. Captain J. P. Hurley, commanding K Company, was wounded while crossing the river. Lieutenant Patrick Dowling took command and led them onward, only to be shot through the heart moments later. Dowling had been "well in advance of the men and shouting words of encouragement," when he fell.¹⁸ Lieutenant H.W. Arnold assumed control and led the unit onward, successfully seizing the crest of the hill. Arnold dispatched messages immediately, explaining the situation and requesting reinforcements. None of the messages got through. Arnold suspected that was so and

¹³"Message from Brown to Lenihan," NARA, *Records of the AEF*, RG 120, Box 3327, 42nd Division, Folder 14, 13.

¹⁴Harris, *Duffy's War*, 249.

¹⁵Martin J. Hogan, ed. James J. Cooke, *The Shamrock Battalion in the Great War* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 56, 84-85.

¹⁶Harris, *Duffy's War*, 252.

¹⁷Hogan, *Shamrock Battalion*, 81.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 81-82.

resolved to relay the information personally. He turned command of the company over to Sergeant Herbert F. McKenna and began making his way rearward. Captain Hurley had managed to drag himself forward to a shell hole partway up the hill, despite exhaustion and blood loss. No sooner had Arnold reached Hurley than the lieutenant dropped dead. A machine gun bullet had pierced his heart.¹⁹

Merle-Smith's L Company had successfully seized the Meurcy Farm, despite the Germans' best attempts to dislodge them. A bayonet charge by "Les Boche" was repulsed with cold steel.²⁰ L Company was taking fire from all sides, but it held on gallantly.²¹ To Merle-Smith's left, Captain Richard Ryan was leading I Company forward with the cry of: "Guts and bayonets!"²² I Company pressed forward fiercely through the wheat fields to their front. Well ahead of his troops, Captain Ryan took a bullet to the arm, then another bullet knocked him down. When one of the company officers tried to get him to retreat, Ryan refused, shouting that he would shoot any man who tried to take him rearward. Soon after a shell landed nearby, flinging him up to fifty feet into the air and throwing him down the hillside. He had been pierced by twenty-three pieces of shrapnel.²³

At 5:15 A.M., Lenihan ordered McCoy to suspend the advance. The brigadier did so because he did not know whether or not the 84th was advancing to his right, and he thought it too hazardous to advance with his right flank exposed. Colonel Benson W. Hough's 166th Infantry, which was to the rear of the 165th, was also ordered to halt.²⁴ At 6:05 A.M., Lenihan learned, to his horror, that the 165th had not ceased its advance. Five companies were across the Ourcq and pressing towards the Meurcy Farm. The general leapt into action. Regardless of the 84th's

¹⁹Hogan, *Shamrock Battalion*, 82-83; and Harris, *Duffy's War*, 254-257.

²⁰Harris, *Duffy's War*, 257.

²¹*Ibid.*, 259-260.

²²*Ibid.*, 260-261.

²³*Ibid.*, 261-263.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 253.

movements, he could not leave the 165th to its fate. Hough was ordered to send a battalion across the Ourcq and cover the New York regiment's flank. Lenihan also informed Menoher's HQ of the state of events. He thought the 84th had not yet advanced, but the 167th had already begun moving into position on the 165th's right flank.²⁵ At 11:20 A.M., McCoy informed Lenihan that 3rd Battalion had taken the crest of the hill between the Meurcy Farm and Sergy. Because the Third had suffered so severely, Lenihan ordered that it be rotated to rear and replaced by Major "Wild Bill" Donovan's First Battalion.²⁶ This rotation, combined with German counterattacks, resulted in the loss of the Meurcy Farm as the lines swayed back and forth. By nightfall, the 165th was on the edge of the Farm, but the Germans still held it.²⁷

The 165th's regimental headquarters had been established in the village of Villers-sur-Fère. The chateau there had been converted into a field hospital and the cellar and first floor were overwhelmed by the time Lenihan received McCoy's report. Unfortunately, the chateau and surrounding area were under enemy observation. German artillery lobbed gas and high explosive shells into the town, while German planes strafed the streets, chasing people and machine-gunning ambulances. The fact that the hospital was clearly marked, being "covered with flags" did nothing to deter the Germans from targeting it. Because the chateau was overwhelmed, large numbers of the wounded were strewn across the hillside. Defenseless wounded men were shot, shelled, bombed, or blown apart where they lay.²⁸ Enraged by "the Hun's" barbarity, Sergeant Frank Gardella of the regimental machine gun company decided to set a trap for the German airmen.²⁹ He hid near the river until two planes approached, one above the other. Then he, "stepped out into the open and aimed his machine gun at the top plane. He riddled it badly

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., 263-264.

²⁷Ibid., 267-276.

²⁸Ibid., 264-265.

²⁹"Hun" was a derogatory term for the Germans, comparing them to the infamous Attila and his barbarian tribe. The Allies employed the term liberally.

enough that burst into flames. Plummeting to earth, it collided atop the other plane. Both planes crashed and burned.”³⁰

The fury the 165th's “fighting Irish” harbored for enemy pilots was not unfounded. German air attacks were severe enough to draw attention in the Rainbow’s official operations report: “The fact that the enemy had practically complete control of the air not only prevented our troops from receiving adequate information, but [also] enabled the enemy to adopt a very aggressive attitude in the way of firing on our troops with machine guns and bombs.”³¹ Allied fighters were proving entirely insufficient to the task of keeping the skies friendly.³² Nor had the infantry (or the wounded) been a lone target for German planes. Though the “Long Arm” arrived late to the front thanks to the abysmal condition of the over-crowded roads, it received its fair share of attention from the unfriendly skies.³³ Charles MacArthur of Battery F, 149th Field Artillery, 42nd Division, later described the enormous amount of munitions showered upon his unit by the Germans: “They were laying bombs like linoleum. Four days of this nonsense. It wasn’t even funny....and suddenly eight German planes discovered our little hideaway. They circled over us at 200 feet, machine gun bullets falling like hail.”³⁴ MacArthur and a companion managed to bring one of the aviators down with a machine gun, successfully convincing the others to make a hasty retreat.

Another eye-witness chronicler, Vernon E. Knipdash, radio operator with the Headquarters Company of the 150th Field Artillery, 42nd Division, actually enjoyed his experience responding to German air attacks: “Bosche (*sic*) avions come over every so often...dropping bombs and shooting their machine guns. They flew so low that the Iron Cross

³⁰Ibid., 265.

³¹“OPERATIONS REPORT, July 25th-August 3rd, 1918,” NARA, Records of the American Expeditionary Forces, RG120, Box 3327, 42nd Division, Folder 9, 2.

³²Neiberg, *Second Battle of the Marne*, 164; and Henry J. Reilly, *Americans All: The Rainbow at War; Official History of the 42nd Rainbow Division in the World War* (Columbus, OH: F.J. Heer Print Co., 1936), 82.

³³Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 324. The artillery did not come into action until 29 July.

³⁴MacArthur, *War Bugs*, 106-107.

on the bottom of the wings looked as big as a ten acre field. The boys all confiscated German rifles and we formed an anti-aircraft battery. We had a picnic answering the fire of those Bosch avions.”³⁵

By nightfall, the 165th had come just short of securing the Meurcy Farm. The cost had been horrific.³⁶ 145 of the gallant New Yorkers lay dead on the field.³⁷ Captain Charles Baker would die three months later from an infected wound. The nurse who cared for him, Alice Maxwell Appo, praised Baker in a letter to his father, noting that his first question after being given was ice cream was whether or not the others had any. Charles MacArthur later described the ground over which the 165th attacked:

Up forward New York was crossing the Ourcq, which they insisted on calling the O'Rourke, the better to fit Irish orientations. They had been having a desperate time getting knocked off like flies...At last they broke through. We hitched and followed, through the ghastliest scenes of the war. The roads were strewn with our doughboys, gray faces in the mud, blue hands frozen to their guns...More bundles of what had once held life sprawled on the river's edge. German, American, and French – all gone, and nobody gave a damn. In the poppy fields the living lay with the dead; it was hard to tell which was which.³⁸

3rd Battalion in particular had lost an enormous number of men, NCO's, and officers, including its commanding officer, Major McKenna. The slaughter was so fearful that sources differ about the time of McKenna's death. Martin J. Hogan, of 3rd Battalion's K Company, and author of *The Shamrock Battalion in the Great War*, says McKenna was cut down, “at the very start of the battle.”³⁹ Captain H.K. Cassidy, 3rd Battalion's adjutant, says the Major was slain about noon while attempting to report to Colonel McCoy.⁴⁰ Hogan was gassed at about 4:30

³⁵Vernon E. Kniptash, *On the Western Front with the Rainbow Division: A World War I Diary*, ed. Bruce Geelhoed (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 75.

³⁶Harris, *Duffy's War* 274-275.

³⁷Ibid., 275.

³⁸MacArthur, *War Bugs*, 107-108.

³⁹Hogan, *Shamrock Battalion*, 85.

⁴⁰Harris, *Duffy's War*, 264-265.

P.M. on the 28th while delivering a message. By his own admission, Hogan did not hear of McKenna's death until after the battle, meaning he must have heard the news second or third-hand, while Cassidy witnessed the major's death with his own eyes. The captain's report is, therefore, the more reliable of the two accounts, but the existence of the discrepancy helps to illustrate the sheer carnage and confusion the Shamrock Battalion had endured.⁴¹

To the left of the 165th, marking the left flank of the Rainbow Division, was Colonel Benson W. Hough's 166th Infantry. The 166th had spent the night of the 27th-28th in a state of "decided discomfort."⁴² Their discomfort was due in large part to the lack of information concerning the enemy. Generalities of the German position were known, along with the obviously apparent fact that "the Huns" were retreating from the Marne salient and were determined to make a spirited rearguard action. Few maps were available. Torrential rain and German shelling had added to the Ohioans' discomfort.⁴³ One Doughboy, Johnny Houck, was knocked out by a shell which landed in the middle of his platoon of B Company. When he recovered consciousness, he discovered he was totally unharmed. Twenty-one of his comrades lay dead around him. The 166th lost 104 more casualties over the course of that hellish night.⁴⁴

The regiment's 1st Battalion began moving forward at approximately 1:30 A.M., but for reasons previously stated, did not cross the Ourcq until noon.⁴⁵ The troops were less than impressed by the "river" Ourcq, which, at their point of crossing, seemed more like a creek; "river" was an altogether grandiose term. Unawed by the Ourcq, the 166th's Doughboys were certainly impressed by German artillery fire, which caused many casualties. Thanks to the lack of Allied artillery support, the German guns possessed a "momentary supremacy" of which they took full advantage. Many machine gun nests that might have been cleared away by an Allied

⁴¹Hogan, *Shamrock Battalion*, 85; and Harris, *Duffy's War*, 264-265.

⁴²Cheseldine, *Ohio in the Rainbow*, 193.

⁴³Ibid., 193-194.

⁴⁴Ibid., 194.

⁴⁵Ibid., 197.

barrage were able to set their sights on the advancing regiment.⁴⁶ German air superiority further impeded the 166th's forward drive.⁴⁷ Shell-holes and accurate enemy artillery fire meant that traversing the roads to the 42nd's rear in daylight was impossible, severely straining the army's ability to supply the frontline troops. Combat-weary doughboys would suffer from shortages of food and water in the days ahead. So far as rations were concerned, the 166th probably fared best out of the 42nd's infantry regiments.⁴⁸

Due to the heavy casualties they had suffered in the previous fortnight's fighting, Colonel Screws had been forced to combine the 1st and 3rd battalions of the 167th the previous day, and they would operate as a consolidated unit for the rest of the battle. For all intents and purposes, then, the old 4th Alabama was going in at least one-third understrength. In all probability, the regiment was nearer to one-half strength than it was to two-thirds.⁴⁹ The vast majority of the gaps in the ranks had been created the previous day when the 167th drove the Germans out of Croix Rouge (Red Cross) Farm: "It took all their undoubted courage to sweep over the machine gun nests, and they succeeded in doing it at the price of a battalion."⁵⁰

The 167th Infantry's 2nd Battalion, under Captain Everette Jackson, crossed the Ourcq at 9:00 A.M.⁵¹ Though the Ourcq was called a river by the French, Jackson's Doughboys considered it too unimpressive to merit that designation, since it was "a still water about 30 feet wide," and too shallow to allow swimming.⁵² 2nd Battalion crossed the Ourcq safely, but soon came under fire from Germany artillery whose aim was guided by airplanes and from the observation posts which dotted the nearby hills. The German machine guns were well dug-in and had excellent overlapping fields of fire sweeping the open wheat fields across which the

⁴⁶Ibid., 196-199.

⁴⁷Ibid., 198-199.

⁴⁸Ibid., 199

⁴⁹Frazier, *Send the Alabamians*, 126-128, 137, 139.

⁵⁰Duffy, *Duffy's Story*, 156.

⁵¹Frazier, *Send the Alabamians*, 128.

⁵²Reilly, *Americans All: The Rainbow at War*, 386.

Rainbow had to advance.⁵³ One American officer later described the German defensive lines along the Ourcq as, “naturally strong and skillfully arranged so as to command every approach, at the same time affording themselves almost perfect concealment.”⁵⁴ When F Company was initially repulsed, Private Julius Grogan was left lying on the hillside with eight bullet wounds. Once he realized he was being left behind by his fellows, Grogan “jumped up and away down the hill he ran, crying out before he started: ‘all right – damn it! I’ll take myself!’”⁵⁵

Having seized the hills of the Ourcq, the 2nd Battalion of the 167th held on grimly, repelling several German counterattacks. The remnants of 1st Battalion moved up to plug a gap between the 2nd Battalion and the 168th on the right flank. The First cleared its immediate front of German snipers and machine guns. Two of its platoons even managed to reach Sergy and hold the town for a few hours before being forced to retreat by enemy artillery fire. Exhausted Doughboys clung to the ground they had won at the cost of so much blood and ate what food was available, though German fire killed the animals pulling many of the supply wagons. German gas plagued the area, lingering especially over the low, swampy area along the Ourcq River. The doughboys became so familiar with the different types of gases that they could identify which gas was which merely by the smell.⁵⁶

The 167th's slow advance held up Colonel Ernest R. Bennett's 168th Infantry of the 84th Brigade, which was struggling desperately to gain the high ground in its sector as it advanced on the 167th's right flank, which was also the right flank of the Rainbow Division.⁵⁷ The regiment had also been engaged at Croix Rouge Farm, though it had suffered less heavily than the 167th.⁵⁸ The 168th's objective was the “dome-like eminence” dubbed Hill 212. The 2nd Battalion, under

⁵³William H. Amerine, *Alabama's Own in France* (New York: Eaton and Gettinger, 1919), 158-159.

⁵⁴John H. Taber, *Story of the 168th Infantry*, vol. 1 (Iowa City, IA: State Historical Society, 1925), 352.

⁵⁵Amerine, *Alabama's Own*, 159.

⁵⁶Frazier, *Send the Alabamians*, 132-133.

⁵⁷Ibid., 130; and Harris, *Duffy's War*, 246.

⁵⁸Taber, *Story of the 168th* vol. 1, 321-341.

Major Guy S. Brewer, led the advance over the Ourcq and at about 5:00 A.M., with the intention of pushing 500 yards up the hillside.⁵⁹ Brewer's Doughboys were disappointed by the lack of Allied artillery support, going so far as to chastise the absent gunners in the official regimental history: "The artillery was giving no support whatsoever. The Huns on top of 212 could have slept until noon if they had waited for our guns to disturb them."⁶⁰ Brewer planned to use the morning mist to his advantage and attempted an envelopment of the German position. The infantry had no tanks, no artillery support, no air support, nothing but the rifles and Chauchats they carried with them, but still they advanced steadily. Through the wheat fields, up the hill, through a hail of bullets, the Iowans swept forward, capturing thirteen artillery pieces and numerous POWs. At the point of the bayonet, the 168th pushed forward and sent the 4th Prussian Guards, pride of the Kaiser's army, reeling backward. Once they reached the crest, they could go no further. Heavy shelling and an enfilade fire on their right flank forced them to halt.⁶¹

The Iowans of the 168th dug in along a sunken road only to be strafed by machine gun fire from the German planes; this fire took a heavy toll, killing, "a great many of our men who were lying flat on the ground."⁶² The 168th also suffered terribly from a well-prepared and accurate artillery barrage. According to the regiment's surgeon, Major John W. Watts: "On three different occasions in this area, the Aid Stations were so severely shelled that it was necessary to scatter the Medical Department men and wounded so that they could take advantage of the little protection offered by the terrain."⁶³ One of the 168th's patrols held Sergy briefly before being driven out by German shelling, which included an enormous number of gas shells.⁶⁴ After taking count of the men that evening, Colonel Bennett's regiment could muster 1,527 effectives, less

⁵⁹Ibid., 353-354.

⁶⁰Ibid., 354.

⁶¹Ibid., 354-362.

⁶²Reilly, *Americans All*, 372.

⁶³John W. Watts, *Memoir of Work with the Rainbow Division*, 1920, as quoted in Frazier, *Send the Alabamians*, 130.

⁶⁴Frazier, *Send the Alabamians*, 132; Taber, *Story of the 168th, Volume I*, 368-373.

than half its paper strength. There was some discussion among the officers about consolidating battalions in order to try to maintain combat effectiveness.⁶⁵ To put it another way, by dusk on the 28th the 168th was roughly the same size the 167th had been at dawn on the 28th. The Rainbow Division was being bled white.

Away to the 42nd Division's right was Major General Charles H. Muir's 28th "Keystone" Division. Thomas Darrah's 55th Brigade, 109th and 110th Infantry, was given the task of pressing the assault and capturing Hill 220 on 28 July. To say that the attack was severely mishandled would be an understatement. "Bungled" is not too strong a word. Darrah chose the 110th to be carry out the attack. Then, on the morning of the 28th, Darrah decided to relieve the regiment's commander, Colonel George E. Kemp, for "general inefficiency."⁶⁶ When the 110th advanced, its 2nd and 3rd Battalions moved forward at dawn, but thanks to heavy German fire, they did not reach the Ourcq until noon. They managed to force their way across the river and push the enemy back, before being made to retreat to the river themselves. Like the 42nd Division, the attacking battalions had not received artillery support. It is also worth noting that while a single regiment was expected to attack across a front two kilometers (about 1.2 miles) wide, a front which was much too large for a single regiment to cover effectively, an entire brigade, the 56th, sat idle. For this misallocation of forces, the 28th's commander, Charles H. Muir, deserves criticism. Muir also blamed the men in the ranks for the failure of the attack. It should be noted that the general had not reconnoitered the position which his troops were ordered to attack.⁶⁷

Under orders from Degoutte himself, the 110th attacked again at 4:30 P.M., this time focusing their assault on the enemy positions near Bois des Grimpettes in an attempt to aid the advancing elements of the 3rd Division's assault on the Bois des Grimpettes. The orders were

⁶⁵Taber, *Story of the 168th, Volume I*, 379-380.

⁶⁶Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 322. Darrah would later be relieved of command on the same grounds.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 322, 421 notes 29 and 32.

received too late for proper cooperation between Darrah's HQ and the "Rock of the Marne," resulting in a bloody repulse for the Pennsylvanians, who were again forced to take shelter in the river bottom. Throughout all of this, the 109th had been ordered to "support" the 110th – that much and no more. Why the 109th was not more actively employed by Darrah is unclear.⁶⁸ The strange inability of General Muir to properly employ three-quarters of his available infantry merited far more attention than it received at the time. The one true piece of good news was that the regiment had finally managed to make contact with the unit to its left, the First Battalion of the 168th, though that regiment was a little farther ahead than the 110th.

The 3rd Division was positioned to the right of the 28th Division. Fred W. Sladen's 5th Brigade had been pursuing the Germans for the past few days, pushing as hard as possible in order to maintain pressure on the foe. Of his two regiments, the 7th was the most worn out; the 4th would be shouldering the Brigade's burdens in the coming days. On 28 July, the its Third Battalion crossed the Ourcq, attacked the town of Roncheres, and drove the Germans out of it around noon, capturing a trench mortar, four machine guns, and one prisoner in the process. Third Division found the Ourcq to be so slight an obstacle in its front that it referred to that watercourse as a "stream" in its official history. The 4th Infantry Regiment's Second Battalion reached Roncheres about 4:30, from whence it advanced to attack the heavily entrenched German lines around the Bois des Grimpettes. Lacking artillery support, the advancing units managed to drive forward a few hundred yards before being hurled back to their starting positions.

To the rear of the raging battle, Major General William G. Haan's 32nd Division remained where it had been on the night of the 27th, camped in the Forêt de Fère. Battalion and regimental commanders reconnoitered the front as best they could. Orders arrived after midnight on the 28th that the 32nd Division was to move forward and relieve the 3rd Division on the night of July

⁶⁸Ohl, "Keystone Division in the Great War," 93-95.

29th-30th, and 32nd's HQ staff began making preparations to that effect. Command of the 3rd Division's front would pass to Haan at 11:00 A.M. on 30 July. The 32nd was not officially scheduled to relieve the 28th Division until 9:00 A.M. on 31 July.

Major General George H. Cameron's 4th Division spent 28 July peacefully. Division HQ was established at the Artois Farm around noon. At 6:00 P.M., orders arrived from Liggett's (I Corps) headquarters, directing the 4th Division to furnish two battalions of infantry to be loaned to the 42nd Division, starting at 8:00 P.M. on the 28th. Cameron ordered the 47th Infantry of the 7th Brigade to furnish the required battalions.

The early morning hours of July 29th found the 42nd Division still fighting for Sergy. For the seventh time in twenty-four hours, the 4th Prussian Guards drove them out of the town. Bloodied and breathing hard, the 42nd decided it was time for a change in tactics: "It was not a rush this time; it was a painfully slow crawl." Fortunately for the doughboys, the artillery had come up and began making its presence known. Furthermore, something like proper cooperation between units was achieved: the "Rainbow" went forward in coordinated fashion as a division, not scattered regiments making isolated attacks which occasionally happened to help each other when luck favored them. At least, that was what Menoher and Division Chief of Staff Douglas MacArthur envisioned. Reality fell somewhat short of the plan. On the division's left, the 166th seized Hill 184, enabling them to command the town of Seringes et Nesles. This "beautifully executed maneuver" allowed the regiment to drive the Germans out from a distance, then occupy the town with relatively few casualties.

To the right of the 166th, the 165th pressed the advance, with Donovan's First Battalion in the lead. The attack had been scheduled for 8:00 A.M., but did not begin until some time between 9:00 and 9:30 A.M.⁶⁹ The plan called for the 165th to drive the enemy out of the Meurcy Farm and seize to small hills to its rear, the Bois Colas and Bois Brûle. Problems were

⁶⁹Frazier, *Send the Alabamians*, 134; and Harris, *Duffy's War*, 277.

encountered as soon as the advance started. To the right of the 165th, the 167th failed to advance. This forced Major Alexander E. Anderson's 2nd Battalion to deploy to Donovan's right in order to protect his flank. Thus, overextended and with only the depleted Shamrock Battalion as a reserve, the 165th moved forward through fields of wheat and grain and clover.

The 165th advanced methodically against the Meurcy Farm, resorting to "Indian fighting" tactics, making the best use possible of whatever cover was available. As he moved forward, Corporal Charlie Carman of Headquarters Company found himself trapped in a shell hole by German machine guns: "One of the boys put his helmet on the end of his gun and raised it just a bit over the edge of the top. A couple [bullets] hit the helmet and put a hole in it." In the same letter to his wife, Carman made the blithe understatement: "I must say the most unpleasant thing in the world is the music of a lot of machine gun bullets whizzing past your ears." Major Donovan was nearly killed, being grazed by three different pieces of shrapnel. He remained at the head of his battalion, and later remarked to his wife that the incident convinced him he was "born to be hanged." Major Anderson's battalion kept pace with Donovan's and helped seize the Meurcy Farm once and for all through a sharp but brief hand-to-hand fight. Even though the Third "Shamrock" Battalion had been held in reserve, it also suffered casualties from German artillery and planes, the latter of which continued to target medical facilities. Overall, however, the 165th had lost fewer killed on the 29th than it had on the 28th; sixty-six as compared to 145.

On the 165th's right, the 167th "held position east of the Ourcq until evening of the 29th." Holding position was not advancing; the Alabamians had failed to keep pace with the Irish to their left and advance toward Sergy. In fairness to the 167th, it had been fighting for three days straight and had lost at least one-third of its men at Croix Rouge Farm, Chateau Thierry, and the Marne River defense. The 165th had not.

42nd Division Headquarters had entrusted the task of securing Sergy to its right-most

regiment, the 168th. Its Second Battalion would lead the assault, supported by First, with Third in reserve.⁷⁰ The original plan called for an assault at 7:00 A.M., but new orders from 84th Brigade HQ (Brown), arrived calling for the pursuit of a retreating enemy. It was plainly evident to the men on the ground that the Germans were not retreating. They were firmly dug in and waiting for the next blow to fall. They were pleasantly surprised, then, when they advanced into the town only to be greeted by overjoyed French civilians. The soldiers in the vanguard managed, in their broken French, to glean from the local populace the intelligence they needed: the German main body had fallen back, leaving behind only a small rearguard to obstruct and hinder the American advance. As soon as the Germans noticed the American presence in Sergy they began shelling the town, utterly disregarding the civilians who scurried back to their cellars as quickly as they could. Attempts by the 168th to press beyond the outskirts of Sergy proved unsuccessful as the enemy fire was simply too heavy. Indeed, the 168th soon found the town itself too hot to occupy, and had to make do by circling it with outposts instead. Then tragedy struck.

The Third Battalion, 47th Infantry, one of the two “on loan” to the Rainbow from the 4th Division, had been assigned to the severely understrength 168th. The Iowans were glad of the reinforcements and ordered the battalion to take cover in a depression in a wheat field where it would be safe from German artillery fire. Unfortunately, this unexperienced battalion and its equally inexperienced officers decided to advance straight toward the Ourcq over the most open ground they could find. Their commanding officer was wounded, along with many other casualties incurred, before an officer from the 168th ordered them back to a safe position. About an hour after its first farcical attempt at an attack, and to the shock and horror of the onlooking Iowans, the 47th's Third Battalion advanced toward Sergy, straight into the teeth of German artillery. The battalion suffered immense casualties before retreating in disorder. Colonel Bennett immediately issued written orders to the senior officer of the battalion, ordering him to regroup,

⁷⁰Taber, *Story of the 168th, Volume I*, 381.

entrench, and stay put. The third time being the charm, the green members of the 3rd Battalion, 47th finally did as they were told.

Because the 28th Division's attacks to their right flank had been forced back, the 168th could not continue advancing for fear of being enfiladed. The Iowans had not eaten since before their advance across the Ourcq. Lieutenant John H. Taber of the 3rd Battalion wrote in his diary: "It's July 29th and we've had no food since leaving the Forêt de Fère, reserve rations gave out some time ago, and most of us are getting weak. The men looked haggard and sunken eyed, just when we are most in need of dependable men." The weary, understrength regiment entrenched, endured constant German artillery bombardment, and waited for a new opportunity to present itself. The Iowans would remain where they were until the next morning.

Twenty-nine July was a frustrating day for the 28th Division. The 110th Pennsylvania advanced at 4:45 A.M., under orders from Degoutte to launch another attack on the Bois de Grimettes before dawn. Because the order had been given at short notice, Darrah once again lacked the amount of time necessary to properly coordinate the maneuver with the 3rd Division or with his French artillery support. The 110th had learned from the its experience the previous day and changed its formation when advancing, thereby reducing the number of casualties incurred from German machine gun fire. Despite the lack of artillery support, two battalions of the 110th managed to reach the edge of Bois de Grimettes, while also seizing the crest of Hill 188, just to the west of Bois. Eventually, under a hail of machine gun fire from Bois de Grimettes and the nearby town of Cierges, the 110th was forced to fall back, taking cover on one side of Hill 188. Darrah was ordered to make another attack at 3:00 P.M., but could not start forward until 5:00 P.M. because the orders were delivered late. The artillery did little to help the advance, and the exhausted 3rd Division did nothing at all to help Pennsylvanians in their attack. The assault failed.

The 3rd Division's performance on 29 July left much to be desired. The Second Battalion,

4th Infantry began its attack on the Bois de Grimpettes at 6:50 A.M., a full two hours after the 110th regiment had gone forward. The Division historian notes that 2nd Battalion managed to get “within 200 yards” of the Bois de Grimpettes before being forced to retreat because its flanks were exposed: “The French on our right, however, again failed to advance, and the 110th Infantry on our left withdrew its line slightly.” The lack of coordination, and therefore of a simultaneous attack by elements of the 28th and 3rd Divisions, was not the fault of Dickman or his subordinates. The blame for that properly rested upon the shoulders of Degoutte, whose unrealistic expectations concerning the necessary time in which to plan operations was the cause of many an ill-prepared attack by forces under his command. The 3rd Division can be criticized, however, for attempting to foist the responsibility for the defeat onto the 110th Infantry and some unspecified French units on their flank. Such casting of blame ill-suited the Rock of the Marne, whose cap had plenty of feathers without false plumage, and whom no one could reasonably censure for failing given the circumstances, especially considering that the Division had been engaged every day since the 15th of July.⁷¹ From 14 July to 1 August, the “Rock of the Marne” suffered the loss of 7,705 officers and men.⁷²

Bravado notwithstanding, the 3rd Division was worn out and had more than earned a rest. It was officially relieved at midnight on 29-30 July, with the 127th Infantry of the 64th Brigade moving into the positions evacuated by the 4th Infantry.⁷³ 32nd Division had spent the 29th preparing to move forward to 3rd Division’s relief. General Haan visited 3rd Division’s command post and personally made the necessary arrangements with General Dickman.⁷⁴ Edwin Winans’s 64th Brigade began moving forward in the evening of the 29th, while Robert Alexander’s 63rd

⁷¹Ibid., 63; and “General Summary,” NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3316, 32nd Division, Folder 1, 6.

⁷²“Report of Operations, 3rd Division, U.S., July 14 to August 1, 1918,” NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3304, 3rd Division, Folder 6, 3.

⁷³Hemenway, *History of the Third Division*, 64; and “General Summary,” NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3316, 32nd Division, Folder 1, 6.

⁷⁴Dickman, *The Great Crusade*, 125.

Brigade remained in bivouac at the Forêt de Fère.⁷⁵ The 32nd Division appeared to possess in full measure the energy, eagerness, and *élan* which were essential in successful offensive operations. Whether or not it also possessed the necessary tactical acumen remained to be seen.⁷⁶

The 4th Division, minus its two detached battalions, spent 29 July moving toward the front. Complying with orders from Liggett (I Corps), the 4th concentrated in the area of the Bois du Chatelet. The balance of the 7th Brigade, just returned to the Division from the VII French Corps, bivouacked for the night at the Bois de Beuwardelle, west of the Artois Farm.⁷⁷

In two days of extremely bloody fighting the 3rd, 28th, and 42nd divisions had proven their courage. The experience had also demonstrated a lack of proper coordination between units at higher levels and the apparent inability of the high command to comprehend matters on the ground. Degoutte had sent the Americans forward expecting a quick clash, a rout, and a dashing pursuit. Instead, three divisions and elements of a fourth had been thrown headlong into a bayonet charge against entrenched enemy positions. German artillery fire and air superiority took an enormous toll, and the lack of Allied artillery support on the first day had forced the infantry to clear out German machine gun posts at great cost in blood. The 28th and 3rd Divisions had been unable to properly coordinate their attacks. Muir, commanding the 28th, had left three-fourths of his infantry idle. Thanks to the cutting of their phone lines, brigadiers Lenihan and Brown of the 42nd Division had had difficulty coordinating their attack. For all of these mistakes the men in the ranks had paid with their blood. When the AEF's magazine, *Stars and Stripes*, compared the wheat fields of the Ourcq to the corn fields of Antietam it was not engaging in hyperbole.⁷⁸ The comparison was an apt one. Men had been mowed down like wheat before the

⁷⁵Joint War History Commissions, *32nd Division*, 54-55; and "General Summary," NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3316, 32nd Division, Folder 1, 6.

⁷⁶Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 332.

⁷⁷Bach and Hall, *The Fourth Division*, 93-94.

⁷⁸"Yankees Humble Germany's Best In Ourcq Battle," *The Stars and Stripes*, 2 August 1918, 1-2.

scythe. By the morning of 30 July, the 42nd Division alone had suffered approximately 2,400 casualties.⁷⁹ Saddest of all, little had been achieved by the carnage. For the surviving doughboys, worse was yet to come. The Germans were still entrenched and still had to be driven back. They would exact a heavy price on the Americans doing the driving.

⁷⁹Pierpont L. Stackpole, *In the Company of Generals: The World War I Diary of Pierpont L. Stackpole*, ed. Robert H. Ferrell (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2009), 116.

Chapter Two: On It Rages: 30 July-2 August

Thirty July to 2 August was an eventful period for the doughboys fighting along the Ourcq. On the left, the 42nd Division was expected to consolidate its hold on Seringes-et-Nesles and the Meurcy Farm, secure the whole of the town of Sergy, and continue the drive northward into the Forêt de Nesles and the town of Nesles.¹ The 28th Division wanted to capture the Bois de Grimpettes and Hill 188 before being pulled off the line.² The 32nd Division was expected to connect its flank with the 42nd's right, to help secure Sergy and Hill 212, help capture the Bois de Grimpettes, clear the Germans out of Bois Pelger and Bois de la Planchette, and continue the northward push through the town of Cierges, Hill 230, the Bellevue Farm, the Reddy Farm, and the hamlet of Cohan.³ The 4th Division was ordered to aid the 42nd in its efforts and eventually to relieve the Rainbow when that division was pulled out the line.⁴ Although some elements of the divisions had been in combat, these summer days marked the first time the 4th and 32nd Divisions were deployed as a whole and both were anxious for the chance to prove their courage and ability as fighting forces.⁵

Thirty July was a frustrating day for the 42nd Division. On the left, Lenihan's 83rd Brigade, 166th and 165th Infantry, tried to consolidate the ground it held and drive the Germans farther backward.⁶ On the extreme left, Colonel Hough's 166th held its position, securing its hold on Seringes-et-Nesles, driving back a German counterattack with the help of the 149th Field Artillery, which was more than willing to give "Les Boches" a taste of his own medicine.⁷ To

¹Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 319, 324, 328.

²Ibid., 319, 324; and Ohl, "Keystone Division in the Great War," 95.

³Coffman, *War to End All Wars*, 255; and Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 319, 325-327.

⁴Bach and Hall, *The Fourth Division*, 95-106; and Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 319, 328-331.

⁵Bach and Hall, *The Fourth Division*, 95-96; and Coffman, *War to End All Wars*, 255; and Joint War History Commissions, *32nd Division*, 57-58.

⁶"July 30th," NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3327, 42nd Division, Folder 14, 23-24.

⁷Cheseldine, *Ohio in the Rainbow*, 202-205.

the right of the 166th, the 165th had been assigned the task of pushing the line forward from Meurcy Farm to Bois Brule, ensuring the key position at Meurcy was secure. The Irishmen started forward at 9:00 A.M. into woods full of German machine gun nests.⁸ Major “Wild Bill” Donovan’s First Battalion led the way. Thanks to the number of officers lost over the previous two days, twenty-year-old Sergeant Richard O’Neill had been temporarily promoted to command of D Company, and Donovan had given O’Neill’s men the task of locating several of the machine gun emplacements nestled in the woods so the artillery could zero in and destroy them.⁹ O’Neill was struck by the jarring distinction of the loveliness of the French countryside on a clear morning versus the daunting task with which he had been entrusted: “What a contrast between the scenic beauty and the shelling! I said to myself, ‘Dick, it’s a hell of a morning to pick to get killed!’ My pessimism was due to the job Donovan had given us. We knew there were machine guns up ahead, but not how many or where.”¹⁰

O’Neill charged on up the hillside and through the woods, running so quickly that he outstripped the thirty-two men of his company. A German bullet knocked his rifle out of his hands, and on the ridge, O’Neill “almost fell into a large gravel pit. Then I got the shock of my life. The hole was filled with twenty-five Germans and several machine guns.”¹¹ Fortunately for O’Neill, the “Huns” were as surprised as he was. The young sergeant drew his pistol and began firing. He also threw one or two grenades. The Germans fired back, hitting O’Neill six or seven times, but only inflicting flesh wounds.¹² O’Neill managed to kill two of the Germans’ non-commissioned officers. Panicked, the remaining Germans surrendered.¹³ O’Neill then proceeded to try and march his score of prisoners back down the hillside, only to be hit in the legs by two

⁸Harris, *Duffy’s War*, 281-284.

⁹Ibid., 281-285; and Berry, *Make the Kaiser Dance*, 335-336.

¹⁰Berry, *Make the Kaiser Dance*, 335.

¹¹Ibid., 336.

¹²Harris, *Duffy’s War*, 286-287.

¹³Berry, *Make the Kaiser Dance*, 336

more bullets fired from another nearby machine gun nest. Since he could no longer walk or crawl he rolled himself down the hillside and back into the cover of the woods, where the rest of his company finally caught up to him. O'Neill was determined to tell Donovan where the German machine guns were and refused to be carried to a dressing station until he had spoken to the major. The sergeant delivered his report to Donovan and promptly passed out.¹⁴ O'Neill was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his heroic feat.¹⁵

Before Donovan could move the rest of the battalion forward, the Germans launched a fierce counterattack, hoping that fog blanketing the Ourcq would cover their advance.¹⁶ By 10:50 A.M., "Les Boches" had been driven backward with the aid of Anderson's Second Battalion.¹⁷ When Donovan went forward to reconnoiter, his acting adjutant, the poet Sergeant Joyce Kilmer was slain by a bullet to his brain, "God rest his dear and gallant soul."¹⁸ Kilmer was Donovan's second battalion adjutant to be killed in as many days.¹⁹ Donovan had called for artillery support, but it was late in arriving. In the meantime, men of the Headquarters Company had begun trying their luck with Stokes mortars which had been dragged across the Ourcq on 29 July. One of these amateur mortar-men, Charles Holt, described the fighting: "The battle was stretched out before us like some Civil War paintings I have seen, though the line of barrage fire made it far more terrible and two towns nearby were in flames."²⁰ While trying to drive the Germans out of the Meurcy farmhouse itself, Holt was struck by a shell which "felt like a ton of bricks. I didn't know the skin had been broken until I put my hand to my back and found it bloody. The man next to me said that a piece [of shrapnel] was about two inches long, whereupon I decided to go

¹⁴Ibid., 336-337.

¹⁵Harris, *Duffy's War*, 282-283. After the war, Father Duffy had the pleasure of marrying O'Neal and his sweetheart, Estelle Johnson.

¹⁶Robert DeC. Ward, "Weather Controls over the Fighting during the Summer of 1918," *The Scientific Monthly* 7, no 4 (Oct., 1918), 291.

¹⁷Harris, *Duffy's War*, 285-288; and Duffy, *Duffy's Story*, 195.

¹⁸Duffy, *Duffy's Story*, 192-193.

¹⁹Ibid., 187-188, 192-193.

²⁰Harris, *Duffy's War*, 288.

the rear.”²¹

Once the American artillery finally began firing, the Germans retreated back up the hill. “The Huns” gunners quickly returned fire. Elmer W. Sherwood of the 150th Field Artillery reported in his diary: “Upon returning to the gun position we made a dive for cover in the small ditches we had dug for protection, because the Hun planes had located us and directed artillery fire to us. HE’s [high explosive shells] were bursting all about us.”²² When the German artillery retaliated not all of the gunners found the American “Long Arm.” Instead some errant shells struck the forward field hospitals, blowing up ambulances and men. Captain William Hudson, doctor in charge of one of the temporary dressing stations, was struck through the heart and killed by a shell fragment.²³

By 11:46 A.M., Colonel McCoy, commander of the 165th, was pleased by Donovan’s progress, but concerned that the Germans might make a counterattack to the right of the Meurcy Farm. He called for another artillery barrage along the southern edge of the Bois Brûle. To his horror, many of the shells fell short of their target, hitting Donovan’s troops in the Bois Colas.²⁴ Donovan, determined and indomitable, rallied his men and prepared to push forward. By late afternoon, another German counterattack had been repulsed. The 165th continued advancing into the evening. To the rear, gas shells and artillery fire continued to rip the field hospitals and dressings stations apart. Many of the wounded were doctors, including the 165th’s chief medical officer, Major George Lawrence.²⁵ Ambulance drivers of the 117th Sanitary Train worked for seventy-two hours without food or sleep until: “Reaching the limit of their human endurance, many of these men finally fell into a stupor at their steering wheels, and had to be removed and

²¹Ibid.

²²Elmer W. Sherwood, *A Soldier in World War I: The Diary of Elmer W. Sherwood*, ed. Robert H. Ferrell (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society Press, 2004), 64.

²³Harris, *Duffy’s War*, 289.

²⁴Ibid., 289-290.

²⁵Ibid., 291-293.

replaced by some less experienced driver, who was, in every case, a litter bearer nearly as tired as the man he relieved.”²⁶ To the 165th's right, the 84th Brigade was floundering as it tried desperately to advance.

The 84th Brigade was in a state of confusion, exhaustion, and frustration. Brigade Headquarters, located at La Croix Branch Farm, was graced by the presence of three distinguished visitors on the morning of 30 July: Major General Charles T. Menoher, commander of the Rainbow Division, Brigadier General Douglas MacArthur, Menoher's chief-of-staff, and Lieutenant Colonel Pierpont L. Stackpole, aide-de-camp to Major General Hunter Liggett, commander of U.S. I Corps.²⁷ The cause of this illustrious visit was Brigadier General Brown's supposed unfitness for continued command of the 84th. Stackpole considered Brown “very much changed and despondent about the condition of his brigade – lost his nerve and all in.”²⁸ Brown was officially relieved on 31 July, and MacArthur approved as his temporary replacement. This was most fortuitous for MacArthur, who had been slated to return to the United States to train a new brigade. Now, thanks to Brown's “exhaustion,” MacArthur, the youngest general officer in the AEF, was in command of one of the most highly regarded combat brigades in France.²⁹ Menoher, with whom MacArthur was close, recommended Brown's relief to Liggett, who recommended it to AEF Headquarters.

Brown was not the only officer of the 84th Brigade to be relieved. On the morning of 30 July, word reached the 168th that Colonel Bennett had been relieved of duty, to be succeeded for the time being by Major Guy S. Brewer. General Brown also transferred Major Emory C. Worthington, commander of the 168th's First Battalion, to the division military police.³⁰ All of these removals from command were the result of the 168th's lackluster performance at Croix

²⁶Ibid., 293.

²⁷Stackpole, *In the Company of Generals*, 116.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid; and Frazier, *Send the Alabamians*, 136-137.

³⁰Both of these removals were ordered by Brown, under pressure from Division HQ.

Rouge Farm and Brown's supposed mishandling of the Iowa regiment along the Ourcq. The inspector-general's fifty-nine-page dossier on Brown's relief and demotion to the rank of colonel cited MacArthur as ruling Brown unfit for combat command.³¹

Regardless of the wrangling among the higher-ups, the doughboys and field officers focused on the task in front of them: pursuing "Les Boches." By Liggett's order, the First and Third Battalions of the 47th Infantry of the 4th Division had been loaned temporarily to the 42nd Division. First Battalion relieved the 167th and had taken position in the front line about 11:00 P.M. on 29 July. First Battalion attacked on 30 July with the 167th in support. Despite repeated assaults, little ground was gained.³² In the morning, the combined units managed to capture a machine gun nest manned by troops from the German 93rd Reserve Regiment.³³ By late morning or early afternoon, 47th's First Battalion had pushed to the top of Hill 212, with the 167th's combined First and Third Battalions just behind, but could advance no further because the 168th had stalled to their right.³⁴ The First Battalion, 47th dug in where it was and repulsed a German counterattack without giving ground. German artillery targeted the 47th's position and shelled it heavily while enemy planes made nuisances of themselves. The 4th Division's official history remarks: "The Germans had control of the air and their planes were very active."³⁵

At 6:00 P.M. on the 29th, Major Brewer, operations officer of the 168th, received orders from Brown's (84th Brig.) HQ to attack at 9:00 A.M. on 30 July. Brewer made his way to the general's headquarters and protested the orders. He argued there were no troops to the 168th's right, and the enemy position was too strongly held for an assault to succeed. Brown agreed, but the order was from Liggett's headquarters, and there was nothing Brown could do.³⁶ Thus with

³¹Frazier, *Send the Alabamians*, 136-137.

³²Ibid., 134; and Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 324.

³³John H. Taber, *Story of the 168th Infantry*, vol. 2, 8.

³⁴Ibid., 11.

³⁵Bach and Hall, *The Fourth Division*, 99.

³⁶Ibid., 1-3.

an attitude of “mine not to reason why,” Brewer made the best preparations he could.

In addition to his own troops, Brewer had at his disposal the Third Battalion of the 47th Infantry, and every effort was made to secure artillery support for the assault.³⁷ To the major’s consternation, the Third Battalion, 47th could not be located until 5:00 A.M. on the 30th. Once located, Brewer discovered it to be severely disorganized and wholly incapable of offensive action thanks to the large number of casualties it had suffered on the 29th. That being so, Colonel Bennett ordered Brewer to make the attack with what was left of the 168th’s First Battalion.³⁸ Fortunately for the Iowans, the 47th made a better showing than Bennett had expected. At 8:30 A.M., Third Battalion’s commanding officer reported to Brewer with about 300 men.³⁹ The combined battalions began their assault at 9:00 A.M. The promised artillery support did not materialize. A few guns made a short desultory fire before the infantry went forward. It was a far cry from the hour-and-a-half long bombardment promised by Brigade Headquarters.⁴⁰ “Press on as quickly as you can – it is your only hope,” said Brewer to the officer commanding the 47th’s doughboys.⁴¹

They charged up the slopes of Hill 212, enfiladed by a withering German machine gun fire. Without artillery to clear the machine gun nests or infantry to guard their right flank, there was nothing to shield the combined battalions as they advanced. Yet again the doughboys were being hurled into the teeth of prepared German positions with the bayonet again being called upon to do the work of the artillery.⁴² German artillery rained down a merciless fire on the doughboys: “Here a man went hurtling into the air to fall to earth a shapeless, quivering mass; there another was swirled completely around by the impact of a bullet full in the body...It

³⁷Ibid., 3.

³⁸Ibid., 3-4.

³⁹Ibid., 5.

⁴⁰“July 30th, 6:30 A.M. Advices, HQ 84th Brigade to Lenihan,” NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3327, 42nd Division, Folder 14, 23.

⁴¹Taber, *Story of the 168th Infantry*, vol. 2, 6.

⁴²Ibid.

seemed to be but a question of time until they were annihilated.”⁴³ At least one of the Iowans went “stark, staring mad” and shot himself in despair.⁴⁴ At the edge of village of Sergy, Major Worthington set up his post of command in a stone cellar, and wounded men streamed back to the P.C. seeking help. One such fellow had been shot in the face and was “so cruelly wounded that it took courage to face him... Unable to talk, for a bullet had clipped off part of his tongue, with an ear hanging by a shred, cheek laid open, blood dripping over his shirt and dyeing his hands crimson, he yet listened intently as he was given directions to the dressing station.” This poor, mangled lad was led to the dressing station by one of the “walking cases” who had been slightly wounded – the guide had “only” had his finger blown off.⁴⁵ Just as with the 165th, the aid stations were overcrowded and choked, and German shells wreaked havoc among the crowds of injured men.

Major Brewer realized what he already knew; there could be no further advance without artillery support. He ordered a retreat. 47th's Third Battalion had sent 300 officers and men forward, and forty-four fell back.⁴⁶ The Battalion had begun the assault under the command of a Major, but a Lieutenant commanded it in the retreat.⁴⁷ The 168th's First Battalion was smaller than a company ought to have been.⁴⁸ As they fell back down the hillside, German artillery continued to fire mercilessly at the staggering doughboys. Volunteers from 168th's Second Battalion rushed forward to try and collect the wounded from Sergy and the surrounding fields. Unfortunately, the German artillery, guided by their airplanes, continued to shell anything that moved.⁴⁹

Brewer reported to Brown's HQ as soon as he could. By some bizarre arrangement,

⁴³Ibid., 9.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid., 12-13.

⁴⁶Ibid., 14.

⁴⁷Bach and Hall, *Fourth Division*, 102.

⁴⁸Taber, *Story of the 168th Infantry*, vol. 2, 14.

⁴⁹Ibid., 15-16; and Bach and Hall, *Fourth Division*, 102.

Colonel Bennett had been bypassed entirely, because Brown had ordered Brewer to report directly to him. What little information Bennett had consisted of German artillery fire and air raids against the 168th's Third Battalion and supply lines.⁵⁰ When Bennett requested information concerning the regiment's effective strength, the reported total, including the 47th's personnel, was 954 men and thirty-six officers.⁵¹ The 168th Regiment was weaker than a battalion ought to have been.

Lack of adequate artillery support had doomed the attack from the beginning. This lack of support resulted from a miscommunication. "The Brigade Commander," presumably Brown, was wrongly informed by an outpost of the 167th that the German troops opposite to the 168th were part of the 168th.⁵² Thus misinformed, "the Brigade Commander" ordered the artillery to cease fire, over the protests of the artillery commander. Once he realized his mistake, the "Brigade Commander" ordered the guns to resume firing, but by then it was far too late.⁵³

To the 42nd's right, the 28th Division had begun 30 July with an early morning assault. By Degoutte's (Sixth French Army) order, the 110th Infantry launched another attack on the Bois de Grimpettes at 3:45 A.M. Like its previous four assaults, this one also failed, and for much the same reasons.⁵⁴ Artillery support was insufficient and despite Darrah's best attempts, proper coordination could not be arranged with the newly arrived the 32nd Division units to the 110th's left.⁵⁵ Two battalions of the 110th made another attack at 5:45 A.M. They reached the crest of Hill 188, and briefly gained a foothold on the western edge of the Bois de Grimpettes, but were forced to retreat by enfilade fire from Grimpettes and Cierges.⁵⁶ Degoutte's apparent inability to

⁵⁰Ibid., 16.

⁵¹Ibid., 17.

⁵²Ibid., 19-20. Taber's account does not name "the Brigade Commander." MacArthur's statement to Stackpole that he had been *de facto* commander of the Brigade since 28 July, combined with Taber's repeated use of this strangely impersonal phrase is cause for confusion.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 324.

⁵⁵Ibid., and; Ohl, "Keystone Division in the Great War," 95.

⁵⁶Ohl, "Keystone Division in the Great War," 95.

realize the amount of time necessary to coordinate an attack by elements of two different divisions is strange. Perhaps French divisions could liaise more quickly. Whatever the reason, for this lack of cooperation the 110th had paid repeatedly and dearly in blood. By Darrah's order, the 109th remained in reserve for most of 30 July.⁵⁷

At 2:30 P.M., for the last time at the Ourcq, the 110th assaulted the German line. Thankfully for the doughboys, "Les Boches" had withdrawn some of his machine guns from that part of the line. An attempted counterattack was halted by the 32nd Division's 127th Regiment, which had advanced on the 110th's right flank.⁵⁸ Aided by some units of the 109th, the 110th pushed forward, capturing the western and southern sections of the Bois de Grimettes and the town of Cierges.⁵⁹ Unfortunately, the seizure of Cierges was short-lived, as the Germans had flooded it with gas, and the Keystoneers had to withdraw to the high ground located between the town and the Bois de Grimettes.⁶⁰ Thirty July had proven a successful day for the Pennsylvanians, who must have been glad to have gained some ground before they were pulled off the line. That night, the exhausted men of the 28th were relieved by elements of the 32nd Division.⁶¹

Unfortunately, the 28th's rest was not an uninterrupted one. It continued to suffer casualties from German bombing on 1 and 2 August.⁶² The three days of combat had cost the 28th Division dearly. By the end of the war, the division's total casualties numbered 451 officers and 13,966 enlisted men.⁶³ Between 1,100 and 1,400 of these losses were incurred during the

⁵⁷"Hq. 55th Inf. Brigade, France, July 30, 1918., 2:45 A.M., Field Orders No. 8," NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3313, Folder 1.

⁵⁸Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 324.

⁵⁹Ohl, "Keystone Division in the Great War," 95.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, and; "General Summary" NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3316, 32nd Division, Folder 1, 5.

⁶¹Ohl, "Keystone Division in the Great War," 95.

⁶²"Special Report of Operations of the 28th (Keystone) Division, American Expeditionary Forces, Fismes Sector, August 1st to September 8, 1918, Inclusive, Chronological Record of Events," NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3313, Folder 2, 1.

⁶³"Appendix F," NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3313, Folder 12.

Battle of the Ourcq.⁶⁴ It is likely that the vast majority of these casualties were in the 110th Infantry because it had done the majority of the fighting along the 28th's front at the Ourcq.

The 32nd Division's 63rd Brigade (125th and 126th Infantry), under Brig. Gen. Robert Alexander, spent 30 July in preparation, moving into place in the 28th's rear. At sunset, the 63rd moved forward and took possession of the line.⁶⁵ For the doughboys of the 63rd, the night of the 30th-31st would be their first time trying to sleep on the front line. It was not a pleasant experience. Sergeant Lyle S. Cole of the 125th attempted to dig a foxhole: "Too many 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...from the odor I knew I had run into a Dutchman and what I had in my hand was the skin off his fingers. He was just getting ripe. I...curled up in my blanket on the ground and went to sleep."⁶⁶

The 32nd's 64th Brigade (127th and 128th Infantry), under Brig. Gen. Edwin B. Winans, was in line to the right of the 28th Division, with the 127th positioned to the right of the 110th Pennsylvania. Major General Haan, commanding the 32nd, made every possible effort to ensure proper artillery support for the advancing infantry. The 32nd's artillery was ordered to shell the German positions prior to the 127th's assault. Once this was done, Haan made his way to Muir's (28th Division) headquarters to ensure proper coordination between the two divisions and to request artillery support from the 28th's batteries.⁶⁷ Haan's request for artillery was granted, and the personal attention he paid to securing cooperation between units paid off. A twenty-minute bombardment began at 2:10 P.M. The 127th began its attack at 2:30 P.M. To the 127th's left, the 110th advanced in the manner already described. Synchronization and cooperation between

⁶⁴28th Inf. Div. Association, *125 Years of Service*, 30; and Ohl, "Keystone Division in the Great War," 95.

⁶⁵"VI Armee, 38th Corps d'Armee, General Operations Order No. 171," NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3316, 32nd Division, Folder 2, 51.

⁶⁶Martin Marix Evans, *American Voices of World War I: Primary Source Documents, 1917-1920* (London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2001), 113.

⁶⁷"General Summary," NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3316, 32nd Division, Folder 1, 5.

divisions had finally been achieved.⁶⁸

The 127th pushed forward into the Bois de Grimpettes. Almost immediately its right flank came under fire from German machine guns in the Bois de Cierges. Two companies were detached to protect the flank, and the remainder of the regiment pushed ahead and secured the woods, repelling a German counterattack from the east. Once Grimpettes was secure, the 127th pushed on to the edge of the Bois de Cierges.⁶⁹ The Germans counterattacked again around 10:00

P.M., hitting the doughboys in their left flank. The Americans responded with the bayonet, and the hand-to-hand fighting was fierce. After half an hour, the attack was “routed completely.”⁷⁰ Haan believed German losses had been high: “Many dead bodies were found in that (*sic*) woods several days afterwards.”⁷¹

On the morning of 30 July, the entire 7th Brigade of the 4th Division had been temporarily placed under Menoher’s command “for emergency use.”⁷² Menoher ordered the 39th Infantry, the 4th Engineers, and the 11th Machine Gun Battalion to construct defensive lines along the northern and eastern edges of the Forêt de Fère, the position from which the 42nd had advanced on 28 July.⁷³ Based on that action, and the fact that half of another infantry division had been loaned to him for “emergency use,” it is not unreasonable to conclude that Menoher may have anticipated a successful German counterattack. Considering the thinness of the Rainbow’s ranks, that fear was justified. Fortunately, the Germans were not interested in driving the Americans back. Securing their own army’s retreat satisfied them.⁷⁴

Throughout the night and early morning of 30-31 July, the Rainbow Division remained

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Bach and Hall, *The Fourth Division*, 94. Menoher commanded the 42nd Division.

⁷³Ibid.; and Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 319.

⁷⁴Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 320, 327.

engaged. On the far left, the 166th maintained an extremely tenuous hold on its position in Seringes-et-Nesles: “the enemy kept up a steady artillery fire which increased to such an intensity after midnight of the 30th and 31st that it seemed advisable to withdraw to the open field south of the village. The village was garrisoned with the least possible number of men, and no attempt was made to clear out the entire town past the crest of the ridge.”⁷⁵ While a German counterattack was repulsed about 3:00 A.M., no forward progress was made.⁷⁶ The French units to the left of the 166th had been unable to advance as far as the Ohioans had.⁷⁷ Likewise, to the 166th's right, the 165th was not up far enough to guard the regiment's flank: “Ohio stuck out in front of the sector like a sore thumb. Concentrated enemy fire raked the position from three sides. Something had to be done.”⁷⁸

Something was done. Major Donovan pushed the 165th's First Battalion forward far enough to cover the 166th's right. Then the exhausted New Yorkers took whatever cover they could find or construct as German artillery began a concentrated fire on them.⁷⁹ When dawn broke, the fire slackened until around noon, when the “Hun” resumed his bombardment. To the front of the 165th, the Germans had emplaced machine gun positions in the southern edge of the Forest of Nesles. Elements of the 151st Machine Gun Battalion had advanced with the 165th, and now began firing on the enemy. By day's end, the machine gunners had fired over 8,400 rounds of ammunition in their attempts to cover the 165th and silence their German counterparts.⁸⁰

To the right of the 165th, the 1st Battalion of the 47th Infantry of the 4th Division held on to the position they had taken the previous day. The combined 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 167th remained in position supporting the “borrowed” battalion. Captain Gardner Greene, temporary

⁷⁵Cheseldine, *Ohio in the Rainbow*, 202-203.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 209.

⁷⁷The French were attempting to capture the shell-pocked remnants of the village of Fère-et-Tardenois. Their engagement is considered separate from the Battle of the Ourcq.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 203.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 203-204; and Harris, *Duffy's War*, 294.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*

commander of the combined battalions, reported to Colonel Screws: “the men had been gassed for two days, that we were in a ravine...and that it was impossible for us to evacuate and get to higher ground...the men were completely out and jaded and I felt that making an advance might prove futile to our side.”⁸¹ The enemy’s “Long Arm” pounded the 167th, which “suffered most from artillery fire.”⁸² Screws did his utmost to determine where the German guns were and forwarded the information to American batteries and his superiors, hoping they would “have the heavy artillery do counter battery work” to silence the German artillery.⁸³ The American artillery failed to counteract the German, which continued to rain fire down on the 167th for the remainder of 31 July.⁸⁴ Despite the state of the 167th, its First and Third Battalions relieved the 47th’s First Battalion during the night of 31 July-1 August.⁸⁵ The Alabamians were less than pleased at having to relieve their own relief force.⁸⁶

Lieutenant Isaac G. Walker’s section of the 151st Machine Gun Battalion had accompanied the 167th in its advance. He recalled: “This [German] plane circled our position and flew in a straight line and disappeared over a crest to the north. Very shortly we were shelled by larger caliber artillery fire with excellent direction and range. These shells looked like large earthen jars tumbling in the air towards us. Sixteen were fired.”⁸⁷ Walker was injured by a fragment from the last shell. At nightfall, he turned over command of his platoon to a sergeant and went to the rear for medical attention. He eventually found “an old stone building on a main highway. He [Walker referred to himself as ‘the writer’ or ‘he’ in his account] passed wounded men dying begging for water. Some were blue in the face but still breathing.”⁸⁸

⁸¹Frazier, *Send the Alabamians*, 135.

⁸²Reilly, *Americans All*, 370.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Frazier, *Send the Alabamians*, 135.

⁸⁵Ibid., 134-135; and Bach and Hall, *The Fourth Division*, 100.

⁸⁶Frazier, *Send the Alabamians*, 134-135.

⁸⁷Evans, *American Voices*, 111-112.

⁸⁸Ibid., 112.

On the right of the Rainbow Division, the 168th managed to snatch a few hours' rest: "Aside from a half hour's bombardment that commenced at ten o'clock and a nocturnal visit from their bombing planes, the Boches granted us a night of comparative quiet."⁸⁹ Food was another matter. Thanks to German shells and the distance between the kitchens and the front lines, many of the doughboys went hungry on the night of the 30th-31st: "The [kitchen] details often started with food which the men in the line never saw. On several occasions the marmites (containers) with an entire company's supply of slum (food) were destroyed before they reached their destination, and that meant that the hungry men must do without food for another day."⁹⁰

Lieutenant Colonel Matthew A. Tilney had been given command of the 168th on the afternoon of 30 July.⁹¹ He made no changes to the regiment's dispositions on the 31st. The outskirts of Sergy were held by outposts, with the majority of the regiment held under cover at the base of the hill.⁹² High explosive shells served to keep the doughboys of the 168th on edge. Field Orders No. 13 arrived from 84th Brigade Headquarters, calling for the 168th to advance at 3:00 P.M., once the 63rd Brigade of the 32nd Division had crossed over its front and passed its left flank. Then, the 168th was to straighten out the line and the entire Rainbow would advance in cooperation with the 32nd on its right.⁹³ Things did not go according to plan.

The 63rd Brigade did not sweep the Germans off the top of Hill 212 and the Iowa regiment did not succeed in its planned advance. Major Stanley attempted to take his battalion forward in accordance with orders from General Brown himself. The attack achieved nothing other than costing more doughboys their lives.⁹⁴ By nightfall on the 31st, Tilney reported to the 84th's headquarters that the 168th had suffered 69% casualties. The regiment was, in his opinion,

⁸⁹Taber, *Story of the 168th Infantry*, vol. 2, 22.

⁹⁰Ibid., 21.

⁹¹Ibid., 20-21.

⁹²Ibid., 21

⁹³Ibid., 23.

⁹⁴Ibid., 24-25.

not fit for combat: “My opinion is that the regiment could not effect (*sic*) an attack, even against an inferior foe, and could offer but little resistance to a counter-attack. This opinion is shared by all three Battalion Commanders.”⁹⁵ About 6:00 P.M, the 47th's Third Battalion threw back a German counterattack and maintained its hold on the village with support from the 168th. The Iowa regiment's K Company relieved the Third Battalion, 47th, around midnight on 31 July-1 August.⁹⁶

Due to German artillery fire, the 32nd Division had redrawn its line during the night of the 30th-31st, but was prepared to attack when the hour arrived. Haan's orders called for the division to capture Cierges and Hill 212, then to press onward and seize Hill 230 and the Bellevue Farm on the right.⁹⁷ The 32nd's advance began between 2:00 and 3:00 P.M.⁹⁸ By evening on the 31st, the 64th Brigade (127th and 128th Infantry) had captured Cierges and its right flank and reached Hill 230. Due to enfilade fire tearing into its right flank, the Brigade gave a little ground and eventually spent the night on the slope of the hill between Cierges and the Bellevue Farm.⁹⁹ The Brigade's success had not been without cost. Earl Goldsmith of the 128th remembered: “And what those shells could do to someone's body – God, just turn it to nothing! Then there were times just one little piece of shrapnel could do the job...A big shell came over and landed in front of us...I'll be damned if one piece didn't hit Chatfield in the side of the head. It must have driven clean through to his brain, because the poor guy was dead; he looked just like he'd gone to sleep.”¹⁰⁰

The 63rd Brigade (125th and 126th Infantry) had an even more difficult time than the 64th. Sergeant Lyle S. Cole of the 125th wrote in his journal: “Sergeant Wojezechowski, over on my

⁹⁵Ibid., 27.

⁹⁶Bach and Hall, *The Fourth Division*, 103.

⁹⁷“General Summary,” NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3316, 32nd Division, Folder 1, 5.

⁹⁸Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 326; and Evans, *American Voices*, 113; and Taber, *Rainbow Lieutenant*, 95.

⁹⁹“General Summary,” NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3316, 32nd Division, Folder 1, 5-6.

¹⁰⁰Berry, *Make the Kaiser Dance*, 281.

left...threw up his hands, dropped his rifle, whirled around, and fell to the ground...Smailly and I were all that was left out of the eight men [in Cole's unit] that started out. I asked about the others and was told they were either wounded or killed. I later learned that Dombrowski had a bullet through the groin and it came out his rectum."¹⁰¹ Cole ended up alone on the hilltop for almost two hours. A shell fragment struck him in the foot. Wounded and wondering where everyone else was, Cole retreated back down the hillside.¹⁰² Once it was safe enough, he took off his boot and examined his foot: "The bullet had gone through the eye of my shoe, my foot, and out the sole."¹⁰³

The 32nd Division's official account contains the following sentence: "The troops on the left reached their objective (Hill 212)."¹⁰⁴ That statement was not strictly accurate. The Iowans of the 168th had watched in horror as the 63rd Brigade advanced as if on parade. German artillery fire was less severe than it had been over the past three days, and the doughboys of the 63rd quickly scattered into more open formations once the first few shells began tearing holes into their advancing ranks.¹⁰⁵ The advancing troops reached the tree-line, only to be met by a withering hail of machine gun and rifle fire. The line recoiled, wounded men streaming back down the hillside, thrown into utter confusion as the German artillery began lobbing shrapnel and gas shells into their midst.¹⁰⁶ Thanks to another mix-up on the part of 84th Brigade HQ, German machine gun positions had been mistaken for advancing Americans, and artillery which should have been supporting the attack of the 63rd Brigade was silenced. By the time the mistake was realized, it was too late. The Third Battalion of the 125th had been "decimated."¹⁰⁷ M

¹⁰¹Evans, *American Voices*, 113.

¹⁰²Ibid., 113-114.

¹⁰³Ibid., 114.

¹⁰⁴"General Summary," NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3316, 32nd Division, Folder 1, 5.

¹⁰⁵Taber, *Story of the 168th Infantry*, vol. 2, 24.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 25-26.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 26.

Company of the 126th was “virtually wiped out.”¹⁰⁸ Despite all that gallantry could do, stout hearts were not enough to dislodge the Germans. The 63rd fell back far enough to mend its lines and rest for the night.¹⁰⁹ General Montdesir, commanding the French XXXVIII Corps, had the temerity to order a night attack, but this was not undertaken due to the exhaustion of the troops.¹¹⁰ In a demonstration of their continued domination of the skies, German airplanes bombed the American lines throughout the night of the 31st, but caused no casualties.¹¹¹

German control of the air had continued to be a persistent problem on the last day of July. Elmer Sherwood of the 150th Artillery recalled in his diary: “Five Boches came over us today and dropped bombs. We could see the bombs falling and exploding, but the planes were unmolested while doing their dirty work, our planes seem sadly outnumbered...However when they get bold and swoop down on us we have our fun.”¹¹² Sherwood and his compatriots responded to the Germans with small arms fire and managed to down a plane which contained a captain and a private, both wounded by the crash, who were sent off to the rear as prisoners.¹¹³

Dawn on 1 August found the Rainbow back in possession of its front line. The units “on loan” from the 4th Division had effectively been returned to their rightful owner, Major General Cameron. On the left, the 166th held its position without attempting to advance. The Ohioans came under heavy artillery bombardment around 11:00 P.M.¹¹⁴ The 165th also held its ground. The New Yorkers were puzzled by the slackening of German pressure on their front.¹¹⁵ Father Duffy recalled that “enemy aeroplanes constantly harassed” the regiment’s Stokes mortar Platoon, which busied itself by targeting enemy machine gun nests.¹¹⁶ The 167th tried to advance

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

¹¹⁰Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 326. The 32nd Division was assigned to XXXVIII Corps, which was part of Degoutte’s French Sixth Army.

¹¹¹Taber, *Story of the 168th Infantry*, vol. 2, 27-28; and Taber, *Rainbow Lieutenant*, 96.

¹¹²Sherwood, *Diary of Elmer W. Sherwood*, 65-66.

¹¹³Ibid., 66.

¹¹⁴Cheseldine, *Ohio in the Rainbow*, 209.

¹¹⁵Harris, *Duffy’s War*, 295.

¹¹⁶Duffy, *Duffy’s Story*, 200.

but gained no ground. The 168th supported two attempted advances by the 63rd Brigade, but both assaults were forced back by the Germans.¹¹⁷ This time, communication between the infantry and artillery was accurate; when the doughboys were driven back, the American guns blazed: “When the artillery was notified of the withdrawal of the infantry, it smothered the woods with fire. No one could complain of the support of the guns now.”¹¹⁸

The 168th held its position, enduring more shelling from enemy artillery and machine gun fire from enemy planes until dusk, when the Germans “drenched the valley with gas,” which was fortunately ineffective.¹¹⁹ During the night a messenger arrived for Colonel Bennett, bringing the news that the 117th Regiment of Engineers had been ordered to act as infantry and relieve the 84th Brigade. The Iowans were glad of this news, despite the fact that the 168th had been ordered to remain where it was for the time being.¹²⁰ The 42nd Division’s official report sums the day up in a single sentence: “On August 1st, the 84th Infantry Brigade again attacked but was again unable to advance due to exposing its right flank.”¹²¹ Even for an official summary possessing all the usual soldierly reticence, that is a laconic understatement.

To the Rainbow’s right, the 32nd Division had pushed forward again. The 63rd Brigade began its assault at 3:30 A.M. Sometime after 5:45 A.M., they reached the German machine gun nests and captured a number of prisoners. Then, they pushed on through the Bois de la Planchette toward the Bois Pelger.¹²² A surprise counterattack by the Germans drove the 63rd backward “precipitately.”¹²³ About 3:00 P.M., the 63rd tried again only to be forced to retreat by another counterattack.¹²⁴ By nightfall, the 64th Brigade had finally secured Hill 230 and Bellevue

¹¹⁷Taber, *Story of the 168th Infantry*, vol. 2, 29-31.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, 31.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, 31-32.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, 32.

¹²¹“Headquarters, 42nd Division, American Expeditionary Forces, Operations Report, 42nd Division, American E.F., July 25th-August 3rd, 1918,” NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3327, 42nd Division, Folder 9, 2.

¹²²Taber, *Story of the 168th Infantry*, vol. 2, 29-30.

¹²³*Ibid.*, 30.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, 31.

Farm.¹²⁵ The 64th's casualties had been extremely high. One company of the 128th had advanced up-hill, head-on into a German machine gun. It disintegrated after fifteen minutes of exposure to direct fire from the gun. The company had numbered 200 men when it advanced. When it was finally reassembled four days later, it mustered 65 men. Another company attempting to capture the same machine gun succeeded at a cost of 50% of its personnel.¹²⁶ Haan noted that the front was too narrow for two brigades, but orders from XXXVIII Corps headquarters would not let him redeploy.¹²⁷ He also reported that several German planes, one of them sporting Allied colors, had been harassing the 64th Brigade with their machine guns.¹²⁸

The 4th Division spent the 1st of August in relative quiet in the Forêt de Fère, where the 39th Infantry was placed "in support of the 42nd Division."¹²⁹ At 8:00 P.M. a German bomber flew directly over the 39th's First Battalion: "Flying almost on a line with the column the aviator dropped a string of bombs so rapidly that the separate explosions could hardly be distinguished. The result was a scene of death and horror worse than battle. Every company in the battalion was hit, the total casualties being twenty-seven killed and ninety-four wounded."¹³⁰ The bomber continued for an hour, striking the 2nd Battalion of the 58th Infantry and costing it four casualties.¹³¹

For Elmer Sherwood of the 150th Field Artillery, 1 August was an extremely memorable day. Seven German planes flew over his battery, dropping bombs and marking the position for the German guns. Suddenly, a French airplane appeared and engaged one of the Germans in a dogfight. The two planes flipped and dived and maneuvered as they fired at one another. The

¹²⁵"General Summary," NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3316, 32nd Division, Folder 1, 6, 10-13.

¹²⁶Glenn Garlock, *Tales of the Thirty-Second* (West Salem, WI: Badger Publishing Company, 1927), 108-111.

¹²⁷"General Summary," NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3316, 32nd Division, Folder 1, 6, 10-13.

¹²⁸*Ibid.*, 12.

¹²⁹Bach and Hall, *The Fourth Division*, 104.

¹³⁰*Ibid.*

¹³¹*Ibid.*, 114-115.

Frenchman forced the German pilot low enough that he came within range of the Americans on the ground, who immediately opened fire with their machine guns. The German crashed, and Sherwood was one of the first to reach the downed plane: “The lone pilot wounded in head and arm was taken into a nearby house and given first aid...he was scared stiff and begged for his life. We hate them bad enough but couldn’t be so dirty as killing a wounded man. I tore off part of the black cross from the wing of the plane and am going to send it home.”¹³²

On 2 August, the Allies discovered that the Germans had abandoned the line of the Ourcq and begun retreating toward a new defense line north of the river Vesle. The 42nd was supposed to have been relieved, but Brig. Gen. MacArthur issued orders for the Rainbow to “advance with audacity.”¹³³ The members of 117th Engineers needed no such encouragement: “the 117th Engineers, who for the preceding days of the battle were disgusted that there was no use for them as an infantry reserve, were off to the attack like a shot. They were anxious to show the rest of the Division...that engineers were also good infantry soldiers.”¹³⁴ The weary 168th was less enthusiastic: “This dismaying news, coming like a blow beneath the belt, was greeted in partial silence, and then from the depths of the gloom: ‘My God, are we the *only* division on the Western Front?’”¹³⁵

MacArthur was determined to press the Germans with all possible speed, but, with the exception of the eager Engineers, a swift pursuit was beyond the strength of the thoroughly exhausted 42nd Division.¹³⁶ Although German artillery fire slowed the advance, the troops were glad to find the ground to their front unoccupied by “Boches” machine gunners. By nightfall, they had taken the unoccupied Forêt de Nesles.¹³⁷ On the left flank, the 166th had come under fire

¹³²Sherwood, *Diary of Elmer W. Sherwood*, 66.

¹³³Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 328; and Frazier, *Send the Alabamians*, 138-139.

¹³⁴Reilly, *Americans All*, 343.

¹³⁵Taber, *Story of the 168th Infantry*, vol. 2, 33.

¹³⁶Cooke, *Rainbow in the Great War*, 131-132.

¹³⁷*Ibid.*

from gas shells and drawn its line back to the reverse slope of Hill 184.¹³⁸ The Shamrock Battalion led the 165th's forward drive.¹³⁹ To the right of the 165th, the 167th tramped on through the rain and marched unopposed into the village of Nesles.¹⁴⁰ On the division's right flank, the 117th had advanced farther than any other unit in the Rainbow.¹⁴¹

Elements of the 4th Division began arriving in the evening to relieve the 42nd, but the process of rotating one division out for the other would last through the night and into the next morning.¹⁴² It was 4:00 A.M. on the 3rd before the last elements of the 168th were pulled out of the front line and sent rearward to recuperate.¹⁴³

To the right of the 117th, the 32nd Division began its advance about 5:45 A.M on 2 August and had rougher going than the engineers.¹⁴⁴ "Les Terribles" encountered German machine gunners who had remained in position in order to delay the American advance. Corporal Samuel M. Kent of the 128th recorded in his journal: "As we reached our first objective and were getting aligned, suddenly, without warning a Hun machine gun nest opened fire on us from a church tower to our left-front."¹⁴⁵ Kent threw himself flat on the ground and remained there for several minutes. He then crawled forward with the rest of his unit. Then: "Just a little bit ahead of me and to the right, Sergeant Ponti, seeing a man posing himself to fire, raised up just a trifle to tell the man to keep low upon the ground; just as he gave the order, a machine-gun opened fire and one of the bullets shot him in the mouth, killing him instantly."¹⁴⁶ The Sergeant was the first man in Kent's company to be killed in action. The 128th's men secured the Reddy Farm by 1:00 P.M. and pushed forward into the town of Cohan, where they quickly came under

¹³⁸Cheseldine, *Ohio in the Rainbow*, 210.

¹³⁹Harris, *Duffy's War*, 303-305.

¹⁴⁰Frazier, *Send the Alabamians*, 139.

¹⁴¹"From the History of the 42nd Division 242-27 In Historical Branch Files, It Pushes Forward to the South of the Vesle," NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 26, 4th Division, Folder 204-11.5.

¹⁴²Bach and Hall, *The Fourth Division*, 106.

¹⁴³Taber, *Story of the 168th Infantry*, vol. 2, 38.

¹⁴⁴"General Summary," NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3316, 32nd Division, Folder 1, 15.

¹⁴⁵Evans, *American Voices*, 115.

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*

heavy fire from German batteries.¹⁴⁷

Smoke billowed and fires blazed as the Germans destroyed their ammo dumps and wrecked bridges to cover their retreat. While moving to the front from the Forêt de Fère, James W. Block of the 59th Infantry, 8th Brigade, 4th Division, stumbled across an enormous German ammunition depot while searching for the field kitchens: “There were acres and acres of shells of all kinds. The big 210s and ‘GI’ cans were piled up like cord wood in ranks four feet high...It looked like a huge wood pile, only the wood was shells. Lordy, what a disturbance Jerry could kick up with all these.”¹⁴⁸ Sprinkled hither and thither throughout the depot and its vast supply of untouched ammunition were a large number of destroyed ammo dumps. Either the Germans had destroyed what they could as they fell back, or American ordnance had set them off. Many of these smelled of mustard and phosgene gas.¹⁴⁹

At 9:15, General Haan received word that the bridge at Cierges had been destroyed. The 32nd's engineers were ordered to begin repairs at once.¹⁵⁰ By nightfall, the 64th Brigade was roughly two kilometers south of the village of Fismes, while the 63rd Brigade was about one kilometer south of the Vesle.¹⁵¹ They could not advance further due to the heaviness of the German artillery and machine gun fire.¹⁵² The 32nd had covered approximately 3.7 miles over the course of the day.¹⁵³

Away to the 32nd's left, the past six days had worn the Rainbow Division threadbare. The “loaning” of battalions from the 4th Division was proof of that in itself. Unfortunately for the 42nd Division, they were veterans, while the 4th had never gone into battle as a unit. Even if their quality had been the same, the 4th had been strung out on the road. It needed time to be

¹⁴⁷Ibid.

¹⁴⁸Evans, *American Voices*, 12.

¹⁴⁹Ibid.

¹⁵⁰“General Summary,” NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3316, 32nd Division, Folder 1, 15.

¹⁵¹Ibid., 14.

¹⁵²Ibid.

¹⁵³Ibid., 15; and Joint War History Commissions, *32nd Division*, 63.

concentrated after having its constituent units loaned out to various and sundry French organizations.¹⁵⁴ The ad hoc arrangement of loaned battalions was probably the best that could be managed under the circumstances. When the 42nd Division was finally relieved by the 4th Division during the night of 2-3 August, it was a shadow of its former self. The ragged and weary survivors dragged themselves back to their rest area in the Forêt de Fère, which stank of decomposing corpses, both human and animal, and of dysentery. Mustard and chlorine gas still tainted the air. Father Duffy described it in no uncertain terms: “This is a dirty, dank, unwholesome spot and the daily rains make it daily more intolerable...Sixty per cent of our men are sick with diarrhoea (*sic*) and everybody is crawling with cooties. The men are sleeping in shelter tents or in holes in the ground in the woods and they are a sorry looking lot.”¹⁵⁵ Raymond Cheseldine’s assessment was essentially the same: “It was a terrible place in which to bivouac but men cared for nothing but the chance to rest. Flies and mosquitoes abounded, dirty pools of stagnant water gave forth terrible odors, and the stench from dead bodies...would have been unbearable under other circumstances.”¹⁵⁶

There are a range of different figures given for the 42nd’s total casualties in the battle, but by any standard the butcher’s bill was high. The highest number given is “6,459 dead, wounded, and missing.”¹⁵⁷ Approximately 5,500 is the middle number.¹⁵⁸ The lowest is 4,372, which is certainly too low a figure.¹⁵⁹ According to Cheseldine, the 166th had lost 1,055 officers and men.¹⁶⁰ Father Duffy said the 165th had lost 1,571, killed, wounded, or missing.¹⁶¹ The 167th

¹⁵⁴Bach and Hall, *Fourth Division*, 91-95.

¹⁵⁵Duffy, *Duffy’s Story*, 207.

¹⁵⁶Cheseldine, *Ohio in the Rainbow*, 211.

¹⁵⁷Snead, *An American Soldier*, 107.

¹⁵⁸Coffman, *War to End All Wars*, 255; and Duffy, *Duffy’s Story*, 206; and Frazier, *Send the Alabamians*, 139.

¹⁵⁹Harris, *Duffy’s War*, 301.

¹⁶⁰Cheseldine, *Ohio in the Rainbow*, 216.

¹⁶¹Duffy, *Duffy’s Story*, 208.

had lost 1,785 men, including those slain at Croix Rouge Farm. Excluding the ill, 55% of the regiment's personnel had been rendered *hors de combat*.¹⁶² Taber gave the 168th's losses as the "sad total of 1,539," not including the sick. The Iowa regiment could have mustered perhaps 30% of its strength if called upon.¹⁶³ Through the courage of the living and the sacrifice of the fallen, the Rainbow had earned itself a reputation as first-class fighting unit.¹⁶⁴ Assuming that Frazier, Cheseldine, Duffy, and Taber are correct in their assertions, the infantry alone had lost 5,950 men. Since the 42nd's artillery and support units must have suffered some casualties, the division's total losses were at least 6,000 men.

One of the greatest tragedies of the Battle of the Ourcq was the repeated attacks ordered by French high command which did not allow the advancing units an adequate amount of time to prepare and coordinate before launching their assaults. Before it was relieved, the 28th Division had been called on to make seven different attacks on the same position. The last one succeeded because it was launched after the division had been given enough time to properly prepare.¹⁶⁵ After the armistice, Major General Haan of the 32nd Division said: "I did not want to see another of those wonderful lads jeopardized needlessly."¹⁶⁶ That sentiment was evident in the conscientious care Haan displayed in coordinating the advance with Darrah (55th Brigade, 28th Div.) on the 30th, and in the 32nd's subsequent advances. As for Darrah, he had probably been wrong to hold the 109th in reserve for the majority of the fighting, and for advancing over a front that was too wide for the troops he had designated for the task. It would be unfair to criticize him for the lack of coordination between units of his brigade of and other divisions. That was the fault of Degoutte and Montdesir, who failed to allow proper time for preparation and

¹⁶²Frazier, *Send the Alabamians*, 139.

¹⁶³Taber, *Story of the 168th Infantry*, vol. 2, 39.

¹⁶⁴Coffman, *War to End All Wars*, 255; and Snead, *An American Soldier*, 107.

¹⁶⁵Ohl, "Keystone Division in the Great War," 93-95.

¹⁶⁶Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 325.

organization before hurling American troops at entrenched German positions.¹⁶⁷ The success of the combined advance by the 28th and 32nd Divisions (or, more precisely, of the 110th and 127th regiments) at 2:30 on the 30th proved that, given adequate time to liaise and prepare, American field commanders could coordinate their movements well.¹⁶⁸ Another factor in the success of the assault was the presence of the 32nd's artillery regiments. The 28th's artillery had been on detached duty throughout the Battle of the Ourcq and the French batteries had failed to properly support the previous assaults by the 110th, although the lack of time to ensure proper coordination between the infantry and artillery was also a factor in that failure. Poor French staff work and communication problems resulting from linguistic differences doubtless added to the difficulties.¹⁶⁹ Regardless of the cause, the 28th had been required to repeatedly assault an entrenched enemy position without proper artillery support, and its casualties had been enormous as a result.

The 32nd's advances on the 1 and 2 August had demonstrated a lack of tactical knowledge on the part of the field officers. Edward Lengel argues persuasively that these problems haunted the entirety of the AEF. According to Lengel, while units such as the 32nd and 42nd divisions had performed admirably, their performances also “pointed to problems in the AEF that could only be regarded as endemic.”¹⁷⁰ Units had gotten tangled up together while attacking because of their “sloppy” formations. Men were not providing cover fire for one another as they advanced. Many of the doughboys were discarding their Chauchat automatic rifles in favor of picking up rifles from the wounded and dead.¹⁷¹ The French liaison officer to the 3rd Division, Colonel De Poumeyrac, noted that the American troops did not make proper use of cover. Certain units were delaying their advance to wait for units on their flanks to catch up with them, exposing

¹⁶⁷Jean Degoutte commanded Sixth Army, and Jean de Montdesir commanded the French XXXVIII Corps.

¹⁶⁸Ohl, “Keystone Division in the Great War,” 95.

¹⁶⁹Ibid., 96.

¹⁷⁰Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 327.

¹⁷¹Ibid.

themselves to artillery fire all the while: “Too much importance has been attached to the maintenance of ‘a line.’”¹⁷² This was made worse by the soldiers standing too close together when advancing, thereby increasing the “yield” of every German artillery shell.¹⁷³ Stories told by captured Germans only confirmed De Pomeyrac’s complaint. One machine gunner claimed his company had mowed down three advancing American companies without losing a single man.¹⁷⁴ Many American officers, meanwhile, were of the opinion that the French simply lacked the dash and vigor necessary to succeed on the offensive.¹⁷⁵

There had also been a lack of cooperation between American units and poor command control on the part of many of the AEF’s officers.¹⁷⁶ Green and inexperienced as many of the doughboys were, their newness to battle was exacerbated by the lack of training given to junior officers. Needless losses had been suffered due to a lack of tactical skill on the part of many of the field commanders.¹⁷⁷ Lack of proper training was a major contributing factor to these tactical mistakes.¹⁷⁸ The 4th Division had spent almost none of the previous winter in training because of the severe weather in the United States. The 4th had been in Europe six weeks when the Battle of the Marne began on 15 July. Even if the entirety of that period had been spent in training alongside the French and British, it would not have been enough to instill proper discipline, tactics, and command control.¹⁷⁹ Inadequate training cost thousands of doughboys their lives. Moreover, the school of combat, which was the only school many of the officers were given time to attend, was not a forgiving one.¹⁸⁰ Casualties among the officer corps also must have

¹⁷²Ibid., 333.

¹⁷³Ibid.

¹⁷⁴Ibid., 334.

¹⁷⁵Ibid., 335.

¹⁷⁶Ibid., 332-333

¹⁷⁷Ibid., 324-327.

¹⁷⁸Richard S. Faulkner, *Pershing’s Crusaders: The American Soldier in World War I* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2017), 82-99; and David F. Trask, *The AEF & Coalition Warmaking, 1917-1918* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 1-42, 167-177.

¹⁷⁹Coffman, *War to End All Wars*, 255-256.

¹⁸⁰Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 327.

negatively affected unit cohesion. Eighty-eight out of every 1,000 infantry officers were killed in action or died of their wounds.¹⁸¹ This was probably due to a desire to prove their courage to the men they led. As doughboys of all ranks learned during the bloody summer and autumn of 1918, raw courage was no substitute for proper training.

One of the worst mistakes of the battle was the repeated mismanagement of the Allied artillery. To quote Major Lloyd D. Ross of the 168th: “Had artillery been turned loose on those positions on our first day our [troops] would have just walked over Hill 212 and the Germans would never have been able to organize along their next line.”¹⁸² The headlong charges of the 28th might be excused because the enemy was believed to be retreating. On the 29th, the straining horses were still dragging the guns to the front over mudholes that had once been roads. On the 30th and 31st, however, there was no excuse. The guns were up.¹⁸³ That they were ordered to cease fire on two separate occasions after the infantry had been contacted and confirmed they were not in the target areas is a black mark on the otherwise excellent record of the 84th Brigade.¹⁸⁴ Which brigadier ordered the cease fires is not clear. According to Lieutenant Colonel Stackpole: “MacArthur told me that the brigade itself is alright and he himself has been fighting it for the last two days, as Brown is done up.”¹⁸⁵ Brown was officially relieved on 31 July, and MacArthur approved as temporary commander “while the brigade was in action,” but what exact time of day this took place is uncertain.¹⁸⁶ MacArthur was named the brigade’s permanent commander on 4 August.¹⁸⁷ John H. Taber’s use of the phrase “the Brigade Commander” in his history of the 168th also contributes to the confusion.¹⁸⁸ MacArthur was

¹⁸¹Faulkner, *Pershing’s Crusaders*, 496. Surprisingly, the enlisted infantrymen died at a lower rate: fifty-two out of every 1,000.

¹⁸²Reilly, *Americans All*, 516-518.

¹⁸³MacArthur, *War Bugs*, 97-109.

¹⁸⁴Taber, *Story of the 168th Infantry*, vol. 2, 23-27.

¹⁸⁵Stackpole, *In the Company of Generals*, 116.

¹⁸⁶Frazier, *Send the Alabamians*, 137.

¹⁸⁷Taber, *Story of the 168th Infantry*, vol. 2, 44.

¹⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 19-20.

probably too fine a soldier to make such a mistake, especially twice in a row. If Brown was the culprit, his removal would have been justified by that alone, but because MacArthur insisted that he had been in actual command, and Taber fails to describe which “Brigade Commander” issued the orders for the artillery to cease fire, it would be unfair to definitely place the blame on Brown’s shoulders.

There is also a cloud surrounding the circumstances of Brown’s removal. First is Stackpole’s claim that MacArthur said he had been in *de facto* command of the 84th from the start of the battle. Considering the state of the 167th and 168th, it is not unreasonable to ask how MacArthur could possibly have considered the 84th to be in fit condition for an advance, especially if he had personally been “fighting it” on 28 and 29 July.¹⁸⁹ MacArthur insisted that the 84th was lagging unduly in the fight along the Ourcq because the 83rd and 84th had endured “practically the same hardships, practically the same amount of fighting...They [the personnel of the two brigades] had been subjected to exactly the same conditions as the rest of the Division.”¹⁹⁰ Official division reports, gave an account essentially in line with MacArthur’s claims: “During the night [of 26 July] the enemy withdrew. On July 27th, the entire Division took up the pursuit and gained contact along the line of the Ourcq.”¹⁹¹

Henry J. Reilly, official historian of the Rainbow Division, gave a slightly different account: As the 83rd Brigade was not in action during this time [25-27 July] its casualties were fairly light as only due to shells landing in the woods which they occupied.”¹⁹² A report by the French military mission assigned to the 42nd Division says the following: “On the evening of the 25th, the 83rd Brigade is brought up in camions and bivouacs in the woods north of BEZU...On

¹⁸⁹Stackpole, *In the Company of Generals*, 116.

¹⁹⁰Frazier, *Send the Alabamians*, 137.

¹⁹¹“Operations Report, 42nd Division, American E.F., July 25th – August 3rd, 1918,” NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3327, 42nd Division, Folder 9, 1. One might well ask who authored the official report.

¹⁹²Reilly, *Americans All*, 493.

the 26th, the 83rd Brigade is in line opposite the Ferme de la CRIOX (*sic*) ROUGE.”¹⁹³ Father Duffy placed the 165th (83rd Brig.) at “Courpoil” on the night of the 27th.¹⁹⁴ According to the reports, General Lenihan’s command post was located at Courpoil on 27 July, and did not advance from Courpoil until 9:00 P.M.¹⁹⁵

When one examines this tangled web, it is difficult to avoid the impression that someone has bent the truth. Since three independent sources contradict MacArthur, it is reasonable to conclude that he was wrong in insisting that the 83rd had been engaged as heavily as the 84th. The two brigades plainly had not borne “practically the same amount of fighting.” As division chief-of-staff, MacArthur ought to have known that. By claiming that the 83rd was as heavily engaged as the 84th in the days leading up to the Battle of the Ourcq, MacArthur created the impression that the reason for the 84th’s lack of success on 28 and 29 July must have been due to mismanagement by Brown. He then profited from that impression’s existence. There is at least one other point in favor of General Brown. Colonel Screws and three other officers of the 167th, and three officers from the 168th, all testified in Brown’s behalf before the inspector general. Screws insisted emphatically that all of men in the 84th Brigade had been beyond exhaustion at Croix Rouge and the Ourcq, including General Brown.¹⁹⁶ In the end it did not matter. Brown took the blame, and MacArthur took over the 84th.

Regardless of who exactly bore the blame for the lack of artillery support, the result was the same: more dead doughboys lying in the wheat fields, on the hillsides, and in the woods, more wounded men writhing in agony as they were transported rearward by overwhelmed ambulance services, and an unbroken line of German soldiers guarding their army’s safe and

¹⁹³“Summary of the Operations of the 42nd U.S. Division in the Region of the Ourcq, July 25 to August 3, 1918,” NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3327, 42nd Division, Folder 11, 1.

¹⁹⁴Duffy, *Duffy’s Story*, 156.

¹⁹⁵“Following is the Brigade Message Center Record of 27 July, at P.C. Courpoil,” NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3327, 42nd Division, Folder 9, 9; and “Ibid., P.M. 6:20,” NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3327, 42nd Division, Folder 9, 11.

¹⁹⁶Frazier, *Send the Alabamians*, 138.

successful retreat from the Marne salient. Despite the best efforts of the Americans, the German retreat was proceeding on schedule; it was not the hoped-for rout.¹⁹⁷ Regardless, the initiative had to be maintained. Whatever the cost, “Les Boches” could not be allowed to retire unmolested. The determined doughboys of the 4th and 32nd Divisions would ensure that they did not.

¹⁹⁷ Ohl, “Keystone Division in the Great War,” 95; Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 329; and Asprey, *Hindenburg and Ludendorff*, 442-443.

Chapter Three: Denouement: 3-6 August

After six days of fighting, the Germans had retreated from the Ourcq River line. Three U.S. Divisions, the 3rd, 28th, and 42nd, had exhausted themselves in their assaults on the enemy. The 3rd had been relieved first, around midnight on 29-30 July. The 28th had been pulled off the line at sunset on 30 July. As of 3 August, the 28th was in reserve to the rear of the 32nd, with the 3rd taking its rest behind the 28th.¹ The 42nd had been relieved during the night and early morning of 3 August, and spent a large part of the day dragging itself back to its rest area. For the 3rd, 28th, and 42nd Divisions, the Battle of the Ourcq was over. Starting on the morning of 3 August, it was up to the 4th and 32nd Divisions to carry out the pursuit and ensure that “Les Boches” did not escape unscathed.

The last four days of the Battle of the Ourcq consisted of pursuit, attacks against entrenched positions, and more heavy casualties. The Germans had created another defensive line to the north of the Vesle River valley and were determined to make its crossing as costly as that of the Ourcq.² On the left of the American line, the 4th Division continued to push northward, toward the Vesle, targeting ground to the north and west of the commune of Fismes, which straddled the Vesle and was connected by bridge to the hamlet of Fismette.³ This advance was also the 4th's first engagement operating as a complete unit, and it doubtless wanted to demonstrate its effectiveness in combat.⁴ To the right, Major General Haan's 32nd Division advanced toward the Vesle and attempted to capture the commune of Fismes.⁵

On the morning of 3 August, the 4th Division occupied “a general southeast and northwest line from the southern point of the Bois de la Pisotte along the Les Bons Hommes

¹“General Summary,” NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3316, 32nd Division, Folder 1, 14-20.

²Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 327-328.

³Coffman, 254; and Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 330, 342, and 345-356.

⁴Bach and Hall, *The Fourth Division*, 90-93, and 126.

⁵Ibid.

Farm—Mareuil-en-Dole road to the northeastern tip of the Bois de la Porte d'Arcy.”⁶ Now it was the Rainbow’s turn to lend Major General George H. Cameron’s 4th Division a helping hand. The 4th’s doughboys would advance under covering fire from the 42nd Division’s 51st and 67th Artillery Brigades, which were temporarily attached to Cameron’s HQ.⁷ Vernon E. Kniptash of the 150th Field Artillery, 67th Art. Brig., recalled the difficulty with which the guns were lugged forward: “Since the last writing...it’s been days of fighting and nights of hiking. We just can’t keep up with the Bosche (*sic*); he’s retreating so fast...the roads are jammed with traffic and when the column does move it’s a snail-like affair. A kilometer an hour is good time.”⁸

The 4th Division deployed on a two-brigade front. Benjamin A. Poore’s 7th Brigade (39th and 47th Infantry) was on the left, with Ewing E. Booth’s 8th Brigade (58th and 59th Infantry) on the right.⁹ The division’s orders were to cross the Vesle and establish a bridgehead running from Vauzeere to Blancy-les-Fismes. By 1:00 P.M., the 4th Division had reached Chery-Chartreuve, and by about 4:30, its patrols reached the south bank of the Vesle.¹⁰ The 7th Brigade’s 39th Infantry occupied Chery-Chatreuve.¹¹ The 8th Brigade’s orders called for it to cross the river and establish a line halfway between Blancy-les-Fismes and Vauzeere, about 1.8 miles west of Blancy-les-Fismes and 1.8 miles north of Fismes itself.¹²

To the left of the 4th, the 32nd Division, under orders from General Montdesir, initiated its

⁶Bach and Hall, *The Fourth Division*, 106.

⁷Ibid.; and U.S. Dept. of the Army, Center of Military History, *Order of Battle of the United States Land Forces in the World War, American Expeditionary Forces: Divisions, Volume 2* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1931-1949), 273, 281. The 51st Artillery Brigade had been “borrowed” from the 26th Division when the 42nd took over the front on 27 July.

⁸Kniptash, *On the Western Front with the Rainbow Division*, 75.

⁹Bach and Hall, *The Fourth Division*, 106.

¹⁰“Chronological Record of the Divisions of US Army, 4th Division, August 3rd, 1918,” NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 26, 4th Division, Folder 204-11.5.

¹¹“Record of Events, 39th Infantry, (To be attached to Monthly Return, 39th Infantry, August, 1918),” NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 29, 4th Division, Folder 204-11.5.

¹²“Headquarters 8th Infantry Brigade, American Expeditionary Forces, August 3rd, 1918, Field Orders No. 5,” NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 26, 4th Division, Folder 204-11.5.

advance at 4:00 A.M. on 3 August.¹³ The 32nd was to advance on Fismes without stopping, regardless of enemy machine gun fire. According to Haan's summary of operations: "The main body of the Division was given as successive objectives the line Party Farm-Cohan, north of the stream of Chartreuve, crest of the hills south of the Vesle."¹⁴ By 4:15 P.M., the division's left, the 63rd Brigade (125th and 126th Infantry), had advanced to its immediate objective north of the Chery-Chartreuve valley. For the first time that day, the 63rd was under German artillery fire, and expected it to increase because they had reached the "bluffs of the north side of the Vesle River."¹⁵ "The Huns" continued to enjoy virtually uncontested control of the air. The 63rd reported: "Enemy avions active. Ours not very evident."¹⁶ Haan's own report confirmed the second sentence. He had twice requested a scout plane be sent over the German lines to reconnoiter. His requests were ignored.¹⁷

The 64th Brigady started forward at 4:00 A.M. and by 8:00 A.M. it had begun a vicious struggle for the town of St. Gilles or St. Giles, which the Germans had occupied in force.¹⁸ The fighting in streets was brutal and the air shrieked with German shells. Sergeant Earl Goldsmith of the 128th later recalled: "See St. Giles? [Goldsmith was pointing to a map] That's where I almost got it [killed] when we were having that nasty house-to-house business – that was nasty as hell. I'd just jumped into this caved-in house trying to get some cover when a shell came and knocked over what was left of the walls. I was almost buried, but I jumped out just in time."¹⁹ Despite the ugly fight at St. Giles, where the infantry once again lacked artillery support, the 64th initially made quicker progress than the 63rd, reaching the south bank of the Vesles by 12:15 P.M. The

¹³Jean de Montdesir commanded the French XXXVIII Corps, which was assigned to Jean Degoutte's Sixth French Army.

¹⁴"General Summary," NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3316, 32nd Division, Folder 1, 16.

¹⁵Ibid., 17.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid., 16.

¹⁹Berry, *Make the Kaiser Dance*, 282.

Germans had occupied the north bank in force and were ready to dispute any attempt at crossing.

First Battalion of the 128th took up a position just south of Fismes, but avoided entering the town itself: “The town of Fismes is located in the valley and undoubtedly will be heavily shelled as soon as occupied by our troops. The river at this point is very deep and swift and about 15 meters [49.2 feet] wide. The bridges are undoubtedly all destroyed and therefore, the crossing of the river is impossible except under the support of intense artillery fire which we have not now.”²⁰ Already under heavy artillery fire, German control of the air added considerably to the 64th's troubles: “German observation balloons on the heights north of the Vesle watched their [the 127th and 128th] movements and the German field guns showered them with direct shell fire. German planes flew over the area without opposition...planes traced our lines...dove and turned their streams of tracer bullets upon troops on the ground. Losses were serious.”²¹

Both brigades reported to division headquarters that the Germans had destroyed the bridges along their line of advance, slowing or inhibiting the supply trains. Consequently, lack of food had also hindered their advance, in spite of the engineers' best efforts to swiftly repair the bridges.²² Heavy rain and a paucity of roads had exacerbated the supply problems.²³ Despite the difficulties, by day's end, the 32nd had advanced about four-and-a-half miles, which was certainly a “rapid” advance considering the amount of ground gained in the six previous days.²⁴

Under orders from Montdesir, both divisions attempted to cross the Vesle and establish a bridgehead on the night of 3-4 August.²⁵ The 39th Infantry, 7th Brigade, 4th Division, began to advance about 10:00 P.M., but German artillery fire was so heavy that it had to fall back and

²⁰“General Summary,” NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3316, 32nd Division, Folder 1, 17; and Garlock, *Tales of the Thirty-Second*, 141.

²¹Garlock, *Tales of the Thirty-Second*, 141.

²²*Ibid.*, 16-17.

²³*Ibid.*, 17.

²⁴*Ibid.*; and Joint War History Commissions, *32nd Division*, 64.

²⁵Bach and Hall, *The Fourth Division*, 107-108; and “General Summary” NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3316, 32nd Division, Folder 1, 17-18.

bivouac for the night. The horrid weather added to the doughboys' troubles: "The inky darkness of the night and the torrential rain made reconnaissance impossible."²⁶ At 10:30 P.M. a night attack was attempted by the 59th Infantry, 8th Brigade, 4th Division, but due to "delay in receipt of orders and darkness it was impossible to carry out the orders."²⁷ The division's official history confirms that assessment.²⁸ Around midnight, the 128th Infantry, 64th Brigade, 32nd Division had attempted to take Fismes, but was driven back by heavy machine gun, artillery, and gas fire. Its casualties were so heavy that it had to be rotated out of the front line, with the 127th taking its place.²⁹

Just after dawn on 4 August, the 4th Division resumed its advance, moving across country to avoid the German shells which continued to scar the dirt roads leading north. About 8:00 A.M., the 39th Infantry's advance guard entered the town of St. Thibaut, on the south bank of the Vesle, but ran into a gauntlet of German artillery and machine gun fire. The Germans had fortified the north side of the river, so that any movement within the town brought down a hail of iron, steel, and lead.³⁰ The river was not wide in that area, but there were marshes on both banks, and on the northern side were heights which led to the gorge of the Aisne. At 8:35, several patrols were sent across the river to reconnoiter, and they discovered that this already strong natural position had been fortified by "Les Boches," whose industry and skill had: "staked down...lines of barbed wire in the stream and on the north bank."³¹ There were also machine gun nests littered throughout the valley of the Vesle River, and the town of Bazoches had been turned into a strong point from which the Germans could pour machine gun fire into the ranks of any

²⁶Bach and Hall, *The Fourth Division*, 108.

²⁷"Vesle River Operations, Aug. 2nd-12th (incl.), of the 8th Inf. Brigade, 4th Div. (Regular), August 3rd, 59th Infantry," NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 28, 4th Division, Folder 204.33.1, 8-9.

²⁸Bach and Hall, *The Fourth Division*, 108.

²⁹"General Summary," NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3316, 32nd Division, Folder 1, 18.

³⁰Bach and Hall, *The Fourth Division*, 108-109.

³¹*Ibid.*, 109.

advancing foe. Observation posts on the heights gave their artillery an excellent field of fire, and as soon as the patrols moved out of St. Thibaut, “the Huns” began lobbing shells, including gas, into the town.³²

The 58th Infantry, 8th Brigade, had marched all night and reached St. Thibaut about 9:00 A.M. The 58th's Third Battalion moved through a draw, attempting to determine if the country between St. Thibaut and Villasavoie was clear of Germans. The remaining two battalions retraced their steps toward Chery-Chartreuve, then moved across country to take up a position to the 39th's right, intending to press toward Villasavoie via Mont St. Martin, and reached the main road about 1:00 P.M..³³ Major General Haan of the 32nd Division met these battalions in the road and advised them that German shell fire would inhibit any advance up the road. On his advice, the battalions halted and took cover in the nearby Bois de Cochelet, establishing the regimental headquarters at the nearby Les Près Farm.³⁴

Brigadier General Booth, commander of the 8th Brigade, made a personal reconnaissance of the front line, moving from the 39th's rear elements along the Chery-Chartreuve-St. Thibaut road, then cutting across country on foot, moving into the Bois de Cochelet, where he found the 58th's First and Second Battalions.³⁵ Booth immediately ordered them to resume their advance. They soon discovered Third Battalion in the Bois de St. Martin. The 58th began moving forward again at 3:00 P.M., with Second Battalion leading the charge toward the river. German fire was extremely heavy and losses were high, but by 8:00 P.M., three companies had managed to dig in along the south bank, and were returning fire at the Germans with their Stokes mortars.³⁶

Third Battalion advanced to the west of St. Martin, moving due north toward the Vesle

³²Ibid., 109-110.

³³Ibid., 110.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid., 110-111.

³⁶Ibid., 111.

over “perfectly open ground.”³⁷ The Germans targeted the battalion with a tremendous artillery barrage as it advanced “in columns of squads over open terrain.”³⁸ For once, the school of combat was kind. This severe tactical error should have resulted in the decimation of the Third Battalion. Instead, by some miracle, the shells landed between the advancing columns: “Shortly after it left the shelter of the Bois de St. Martin it ran into a German barrage which, providentially, was so placed as to fall almost entirely between combat lines...although the fire was heavy, the battalion suffered few casualties.”³⁹ The Third Battalion, like the Second, reached the edge of the river and held position for the night.⁴⁰ In accordance with orders from Liggett and Montdesir, respectively, the 4th Division’s engineers had spent the 4th bringing forward the materials necessary to bridge the Vesle. The afternoon and night were spent in scouting suitable positions at which to place the bridges.⁴¹

To the right, the 32nd Division was heavily engaged throughout the afternoon and evening of 4 August.⁴² Around nightfall, the 127th Infantry of the 64th Brigade forced its way into the outskirts of Fismes, pushed through the heart of the town, and dug in along the southern bank of the Vesle. The Germans responded by pouring a withering fire of high explosive and gas shells into the commune. Machine gun fire also took a heavy toll. The 127th’s casualties had been so high that its commander was forced to temporarily combine its three battalions into a single unit.⁴³ To the 127th’s left, the 126th Infantry of the 63rd Brigade stalled in its advance “between the northern and northeastern stretch of the Moulin Neuf.”⁴⁴ The Germans continued to control

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Coffman, *War to End All Wars*, 255.

³⁹Bach and Hall, *The Fourth Division*, 111.

⁴⁰Ibid., 112.

⁴¹Ibid.; and “General Summary,” NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3316, 32nd Division, Folder 1, 18-19.

⁴²“General Summary,” NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3316, 32nd Division, Folder 1, 18-19.

⁴³Ibid., 19; and Joint War History Commissions, *32nd Division*, 65-67; and Garlock, *Tales of the Thirty-Second*, 147-153.

⁴⁴“General Summary,” NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3316, 32nd Division, Folder 1, 20.

the skies, and their airmen harassed the 32nd's doughboys throughout 4 August.⁴⁵ At 8:00 P.M. on the 4th, Major General Robert Lee Bullard's newly formed U.S. III Corps took over command of the 32nd Division front from Montdesir's French XXXVIII Corps. For the first time in the war, two American Corps were operating side by side.⁴⁶

The 4th Division spent the night of 4-5 August trying to force a crossing of the Vesle. American artillery bombarded the enemy positions from midnight to 5:00 A.M., but the barrage did little damage because the gunners were unable to locate the exact position of their targets. German planes prevented Allied reconnaissance, much to the frustration of the "Long Arm."⁴⁷ At

4:30 A.M., the 58th Infantry's First Battalion pushed toward the river, suffering enormous casualties in the process: "In this advance the battalion suffered severe losses from artillery, minenwerfer [trench mortars], and machine gun fire directed on the open ground between the bottom of the bluff and the river. Patrols were at once sent forward to cross the river, only to be killed almost to a man."⁴⁸ After several attempts, four patrols managed to cross the Vesle and gain a foothold to which they clung for the rest of the day.⁴⁹

To the right of the 58th Regiment, the 39th Infantry advanced about 5:00 A.M. The town of Bazoches lay to the front and taking it was a difficult task. The Germans had scattered machine gun nests throughout the town and the numerous vantage points gave them a clear field of fire over the whole of that section of the Vesle. The Kaiser's artillery also made its presence felt: "Minenwerfers added their nerve-racking fire to that of the machine guns. The German artillery fire was controlled as easily as a man would handle a hose."⁵⁰ Four companies

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid., 19; and Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 330. Liggett's I U.S. Corps consisted of the 4th and 42nd Divisions.

⁴⁷Bach and Hall, *The Fourth Division*, 112.

⁴⁸Ibid., 113.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid.

of the 39th advanced, but of the approximately 400 men, only thirty-eight managed to cross the river. Losses were so severe that at 5:10 P.M., Major General Cameron ordered the withdrawal of all troops north of the Vesle so that an artillery bombardment could be prepared for the following day, 6 August. The infantry would advance under cover of artillery fire once the bombardment had been completed. Until then, the weary doughboys of the 4th Division would be allowed to rest and lick their wounds.⁵¹

The only other point of interest on the 4th Division's front on 5 August was an attempted German counterattack which was repulsed by the artillery. Vernon Kniptash of the 150th Artillery Regiment recalled in his diary: "Still fighting like Hell and no relief in sight. The boys are dead tired...The battle has come to a Deadlock at the Vesle River. They [the Germans] tried a counter-attack last night but it was repulsed. We got too many guns on this side for them to pull off anything. Our Brigade alone fired over 23,000 shells last night."⁵²

The 32nd had relatively little success on 5 August. Heavy artillery and machine gun fire prevented the 63rd Brigade from crossing the Vesle, and it spent the night on the south bank of the river.⁵³ The 64th Brigade achieved a little more. The remnants of the 127th which had taken Fismes the day before did their best to "mop up" any Germans who were still hiding in the commune, particularly snipers.⁵⁴ During the night, the Third Battalion of the 128th, "the only strong battalion left in the 64th Brigade," advanced into Fismes and reinforced the 127th, whose effective strength had been reduced to 400 men.⁵⁵

6 August found the 4th Division glad to be whole; its artillery, the 4th Artillery Brigade, finally reached the front on the night of 5-6 August, just in time to participate in the

⁵¹Ibid., 114-116.

⁵²Kniptash, *On the Western Front with the Rainbow Division*, 77. The 150th was assigned to the 67th Field Artillery Brigade.

⁵³"General Summary," NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3316, 32nd Division, Folder 1, 20.

⁵⁴Joint War History Commissions, *32nd Division*, 67.

⁵⁵"General Summary," NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3316, 32nd Division, Folder 1, 21.

bombardment of Bazoches and Haute Maison.⁵⁶ The American bombardment began at dawn and lasted until 4:30 P.M.⁵⁷ “Les Boches” responded in kind and the roaring of the guns shook the valley: “German artillery stepped up its efforts to obliterate Fismes from the face of the earth.”⁵⁸ At 4:30 P.M., the infantry advanced under cover of smoke and a rolling barrage from the artillery. On the right division’s right, the 58th Infantry’s First Battalion pushed forward hard, driving as far as the Rouen-Rheims road only to find both of its flanks exposed and under German machine gun fire. The First Battalion of the 39th Infantry was supposed to have advanced on the 58th’s left, but the battalion commander misjudged the amount of time necessary to cross the river and launched his attack an hour behind schedule. The result was predictable and tragic: “When the battalion attempted to cross the river...it was met with a fire so severe, from rifles, machine guns, minenwerfer, as well as artillery, as to make impossible the crossing of a force of any size.”⁵⁹ Despite having both its flanks exposed, the 58th’s First Battalion held its position along the Rouen-Rheims road. Eventually reinforced by part of the Second Battalion, the doughboys of the 58th repulsed three German counterattacks and maintained their line until 3:45 A.M. on 7 August, when they were relieved by the 59th Infantry.⁶⁰

6 August was another day of frustration for the 32nd Division. On the left, the 63rd Brigade could not advance because the Germans had strung barbed wire through the marshes on both banks of the Vesle and on the river bottom.⁶¹ To the right, the remaining battalions of the 128th marched into Fismes and relieved the exhausted and severely understrength 127th. The 128th spent the remainder of the 6th attempting to clear German snipers out of the eastern section of the town.⁶² As if to punctuate the consistent tactical errors which had plagued the green

⁵⁶Bach and Hall, *The Fourth Division*, 115-116.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 116.

⁵⁸Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 330.

⁵⁹Bach and Hall, *The Fourth Division*, 117-118.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 118.

⁶¹“General Summary,” NARA, Records of the AEF, RG 120, Box 3316, 32nd Division, Folder 1, 22.

⁶²Joint War History Commissions, *32nd Division*, 67.

regiments throughout the battle, Corporal Samuel M. Kent of the 128th recorded in his diary: “As we advanced in squad-columns, yesterday, towards the town of Fismes, in broad daylight, with sun brightly beaming, Mr. Boche (*sic*)...gave us a beautiful barrage.”⁶³

The 28th Division relieved the 32nd on the night of 6-7 August.⁶⁴ By that time, the 32nd had suffered between 4,100 and 4,700 casualties.⁶⁵ The 4th Division remained engaged at and around Bazoches until 12 August. From 18 July to 17 August, the division sustained 6,923 casualties.⁶⁶ Their indomitable spirit was summed up in the words of a lieutenant whose right arm had been torn off by an artillery shell: “The Boches haven’t got me – I write with my left hand.”⁶⁷ 3-6 August had repeated many of the lessons of the previous six days. Troops had marched forward over open ground under artillery fire, then struggled over the shattered remnants of towns. The street-to-street fighting in Fismes echoed the conflict in Sergy: “From some invisible (*sic*) position a German machine gunner was directing bursts of glancing fire against the flat stones of the house across the square. The ricocheting bullets were fanning the street intersection and covering it in two directions.”⁶⁸

The doughboys of the 4th and 32nd had demonstrated their bravery but had conclusively proven that raw courage was no substitute for proper tactics. Assaults on entrenched positions needed time to be properly prepared and coordinated, especially when the artillery could hardly drag itself forward through the mudholes which had once been roads. German control of the air had provided them with valuable intelligence while denying it to the Americans, and the harassment of the planes had added considerably to the doughboys’ woes. Glenn Garlock of the 32nd Division recalled: “One morning a supply sergeant...drove up with his chow wagon, parked

⁶³Evans, *American Voices*, 115.

⁶⁴Joint War History Commissions, *32nd Division*, 67; and Garlock, *Tales of the Thirty-Second*, 171-174.

⁶⁵Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 331; and Garlock, *Tales of the Thirty-Second*, 173.

⁶⁶Bach and Hall, *The Fourth Division*, 126. Separate numbers for the Ourcq are not provided.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 125.

⁶⁸Garlock, *Tales of the Thirty-Second*, 167.

it near a barn across the road from the battery position and prepared to feed his troops. The sergeant had not lived...under the menace of shells guided by the all seeing eye of a trained balloon observer...In less than 15 minutes four or five shells dropped onto his location killing or wounding almost every man in the group.”⁶⁹

The Battle of the Ourcq ended in an anticlimax. The Germans successfully escaped the Marne Salient before the jaws of the Allied trap could snap shut. Instead of the crescendo of a successful breakthrough and pursuit of a routed foe, the 4th and 32nd Divisions had worn themselves out fighting a line of German defenders along the Vesle as stubborn and ruthless as the rearguard along the Ourcq had been. It would take nearly a month for the Allies to dislodge the Germans from Fismes and Fismette, and the 28th Division would pay an exceedingly heavy price to achieve that feat.⁷⁰ As the surviving members of the 3rd, 4th, 28th, 32nd, and 42nd Divisions looked back on the Battle of the Ourcq, they could console themselves with the knowledge that they had done their full duty and earned a reputation for excellence in combat.⁷¹ That reputation was dearly bought. Recounting the story of the Ourcq the following year, Raymond S. Tompkins of the 42nd division wrote that the “Hills and Fields [were] Crimson With Blood.”⁷² One doughboy recalled in his diary: “I have seen more dead Americans in this little time than I ever did before in all my life.”⁷³

⁶⁹Ibid. 179.

⁷⁰Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 337-367.

⁷¹Ibid., 330-337.

⁷²Raymond S. Tompkins, “Rainbow Breaks Hun Defenses on Ourcq and Starts Retreat,” *The Baltimore Sun*, May 7, 1919, 6.

⁷³Elmer Frank Straub, quoted in Snead, *An American Soldier*, 107.

Conclusion: The Ourcq Weighed in the Balance

The Second Battle of the Marne lasted from 15 July to 6 August, 1918. It was the last major German offensive of World War I and the Allied counterattack on 18 July marked the beginning of what came to be known as the Hundred Days Offensive, which culminated in the Allied Armistice with Germany on 11 November 1918. The Second Battle of the Marne is notable for many reasons. The Allied counterattack was arguably the first decisive offensive operation on the Western Front and it was certainly the first successful offensive since 1914. The German attack which began on 15 July and was sent reeling backward on the 18th would be the final attempt by Erich Ludendorff to win a favorable peace before the arrival of additional American troops in Europe turned the odds irrevocably against the weary German army. Not only did the Imperial offensive fail to achieve its goal, it also lengthened the odds against Germany by spilling enormous amounts of blood which the Kaiser's outnumbered forces could ill afford to lose.¹ From 15 July to 6 August, German losses amounted to approximately 110,000 killed, wounded, or missing, and 29,000 taken prisoner, along with the loss of over 3,000 machine guns and nearly 800 artillery pieces.² The brutal arithmetic of attritional warfare was in the Allies' favor.³

The Battle of the Ourcq was an important part of the Marne battle because it helped keep pressure on the withdrawing German army, gave American divisions an opportunity to gain combat experience, and allowed the AEF to demonstrate that it was ready to fulfill Pershing's dream of creating an independent American army.⁴ The Battle of the Ourcq was also tragic because it resulted in only limited tangible gain. There was no breakthrough in the German line and no rout of the forces in the Marne salient. Whether the German retreat from the Ourcq River

¹Herwig, *Germany and Austria-Hungary, 1914-1918*, 96-132.

²*Ibid.*, 392-432; and Asprey, *Hindenburg and Ludendorff*, 434-450; and Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 207-337, 338.

³Asprey, *Hindenburg and Ludendorff*, 435-488; and Herwig, *Germany and Austria-Hungary*, 351-452.

⁴Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 327; and Trask, *Coalition Warmaking*, 86-114.

line was hastened by American assaults is unclear.⁵ The retreat from the whole of the Marne salient was a foregone conclusion, decided at Soissons, the Marne River defense, and the Allied counterattack which began on 18 July.⁶ Of the three, Soissons had truly been the critical turning point.⁷ Apart from achieving Foch's goal of maintaining the initiative and preventing the Germans from launching diversionary offensives elsewhere, the Battle of the Ourcq gained nothing which time would not have won.⁸ Strategically, it was a victory. Tactically, it was a disappointment.

The Ourcq illustrated some "endemic" problems within the 3rd, 4th, 28th, 32nd, and 42nd Divisions, and the AEF as a whole.⁹ Poor tactics had cost thousands of doughboys their lives. Time and again, they learned that naked valor was no match for the Maxim machine gun. Throughout the course of the battle, American units advanced in columns of squads, forming lines of battle reminiscent of the War Between the States. This tendency to charge straight at machine gun nests was so prevalent that in late July and early August, Major General Hunter Liggett, commanding U.S. I Corps, was forced to issue a special manual of instructions explaining how to properly attack entrenched machine gun positions.¹⁰

Many of the doughboys' tactical missteps were the result of improper training which was due to the time constraints under which the Americans were forced to operate. Raising an army of four million men and shipping two million of them to France by the Autumn of 1918 was no mean feat, but that success came with a cost. The doughboys being shipped over were progressively less and less well trained.¹¹ The death rate for junior officers was appallingly high,

⁵Asprey, *Hindenburg and Ludendorff*, 438-443; and Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 327-329.

⁶Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 242-301, 331; and John S.D. Eisenhower, *Yanks: The Epic Story of the American Army in World War I* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 162-175.

⁷Eisenhower, *Yanks*, 162.

⁸Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 326-328; and Trask, *Coalition Warmaking*, 93-96.

⁹Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 327.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 332-333.

¹¹Faulkner, *Pershing's Crusaders*, 82-99; and Byron Farwell, *Over There: The United States in the Great War, 1917-1918* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 49-68, 122-134; and Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 368-375.

lowering both morale and unit cohesion.¹² Regardless of the cause, the infantry advanced in formations which were too dense, made little to no use of fire and maneuver tactics, and often failed to properly cooperate with other branches of the service, especially the artillery and the air forces, although this last criticism cannot be fairly leveled only at the infantry.¹³

The repeated failure of the Allied high command to allow proper time for the preparation of assaults was also responsible for many of the losses sustained by the assaulting divisions. The best illustration of this is the experience of the 28th Division, which launched seven successive assaults on the German positions in the Bois de Grimpettes.¹⁴ The first six failed because the commander of the division, Major General Charles Muir, did not have enough time between the receipt of his orders and the scheduled hour of attack. The seventh assault succeeded because Muir and Major General William G. Haan of the 32nd were finally allowed enough time to properly coordinate the advance of their divisions, and to ensure the support of the artillery.¹⁵ Had the 28th been allowed enough time to properly coordinate the first assault, it might have been able to drive a lot farther north than the Bois de Grimpettes.

General Jean Degoutte's haste in pursuit of the retreating enemy was understandable on the 28th when he ordered bayonet charges by the American infantry.¹⁶ That he genuinely believed

“Les Boches” was on the run is evident from his positioning of the French cavalry, which had been ordered to join the U.S. infantry in pursuing the foe.¹⁷ Beyond that date his continued insistence on flinging the doughboys into the teeth of prepared defensive positions without proper support or preparation is inexcusable. Coordination between infantry divisions and

¹²Faulkner, *Pershing's Crusaders*, 496.

¹³Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 332-337; and Timothy K. Nenninger, “Tactical Dysfunction in the AEF, 1917-1918,” *Military Affairs* 51 No. 4 (Oct., 1987), 177-181.

¹⁴Ohl, “Keystone Division in the Great War,” 94-95.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶General Degoutte commanded the French Sixth Army.

¹⁷Harris, *Duffy's War*, 240-253.

between the infantry and the artillery was often impossible because they were not given enough time to prepare. Gallantry made a poor and costly substitute for artillery support. For all the legitimate criticisms that can be made of the Americans' tactics, the majority of the dysfunction between the infantry and artillery was due to assaults being hurled forward by Degoutte before they had been allowed to adequately prepare for the attack. General Montdesir was also responsible for ill-prepared, prematurely launched advances. When U.S. III Corps took over Montdesir's sector, Bullard intended to continue assaulting the German positions across the River Vesle. At first Bullard was convinced that the Germans would not attempt to hold the line of the Vesle.¹⁸ Even after it became apparent that "the Hun" would be fighting another stout rearguard action, Bullard believed the III Corps could force its way across.¹⁹ The 32nd had paid heavily for that conviction and the 28th would pay heavily for it throughout the month of August.²⁰ The 32nd Division's Glenn Garlock later remarked: "The front line was convinced the Germans were making a stand at the river line but it took more than a week before that belief was shared by their superiors in rear."²¹

As has been shown in previous chapters, German control of the air had been a major problem for the doughboys. Scout planes and balloons had enabled the German artillery to zero in on American targets which would otherwise have been much more difficult to hit. Bombers and fighters wreaked havoc on front and rear lines alike, targeting infantry, artillery, support, and medical personnel without distinction. Field hospitals and aid stations, overwhelmed as they were, made prime targets for German pilots, who took full advantage of the opportunity. Trying to determine precise numbers is well-nigh impossible, but it is not inaccurate to say that hundreds of doughboys were killed and wounded because Allied air power was not employed to

¹⁸Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 330.

¹⁹Garlock, *Tales of the Thirty-Second*, 173.

²⁰Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 338-367.

²¹Garlock, *Tales of the Thirty-Second*, 164.

intercept German aviators. Historian Byron Farwell insists that pilots preferred to strike targets far behind enemy lines rather than provide close support to the infantry because they found it too difficult to distinguish friend from foe.²² While there was certainly some merit in this objection, the result of the absence of Allied fighters over the field of battle speaks for itself.

The Battle of the Ourcq also served as a kind of foreshadowing, albeit an incomplete one, of the AEF's achievements at St. Mihiel, where the American First Army first functioned as an independent unit.²³ The parallel is not a complete one, but it is there. Three of the divisions fighting at the Ourcq were under French Corps command until Major General Robert Lee Bullard's III U.S. Corps assumed command of the 32nd Division's section of the line from General Jean de Montdesir's XXXVIII French Corps, and both army corps reported to Degoutte's Sixth Army. Nevertheless, they were American divisions, fighting next to and relying on one another. They did not cooperate as well at the Ourcq as they would at St. Mihiel and the Meuse-Argonne, but that was largely due to decisions made by the French high command under which they served.

The AEF was beginning to come of age. The Battle of the Ourcq was an essential part of that development. The 3rd, 28th, and 42nd Divisions had added luster to their already formidable reputations. They would attain even greater fame in the weeks and months ahead.²⁴ After two weeks' continuous fighting, the 3rd had exhausted what little strength it had left in hastily organized assaults on the Bois de Grimettes before being relieved during the night of 29-30 July. The similarly exhausted 28th had seized the Bois de Grimettes and then rotated out of the line on 31 July. The 42nd had tasted both success and failure, gaining ground in the first three days of the battle, then largely stalling for the next two. On 2 August the Rainbow had pursued

²²Farwell, *Over There*, 200-203.

²³Eisenhower, *Yanks*, 179-198; and Farwell, *Over There*, 206-217.

²⁴Eisenhower, *Yanks*, 179-283; and Farwell, *Over There*, 206-284; and Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 338-376; and Trask, *Coalition Warmaking*, 96-178.

the enemy as enthusiastically as their weary limbs allowed before it was relieved by the 4th Division on the night of the 2nd-3rd.

The 4th and 32nd Divisions had been given the chance to prove they could fight well as combat units, and they made the most of their opportunity. Elements of the 4th had shared in the 42nd's trials and travails before taking control of its front on 3 August. The doughboys of the 4th had pursued the foe with alacrity and assaulted "Les Boches" vigorously once they caught him. Elements of the 32nd had engaged the enemy on 30 July and the whole division had fought bravely from 31 July to 6 August. The swiftness of its pursuit and the determination of its attacks earned the division one of its nicknames, "Les Terribles," during the Battle of the Ourcq.²⁵ It would live up to that soubriquet in the blood-soaked Autumn.²⁶

As with virtually every battle, some things had gone according to plan and some had not. Tactically, the Ourcq was not the success it might have been. If the doughboys had employed proper fire-and-maneuver tactics and taken cover as they advanced, they would certainly have suffered fewer casualties. Had their ranks been less thin, they might have succeeded in breaking the German line. Fate and circumstance denied them the tactical training that would have enabled such a victory. Strategically, the Battle of the Ourcq achieved the goals Foch had set out and helped to prove that Foch had not erred by allowing Pershing to form the First American army.²⁷ A partial victory, then, had been won by the sacrifice of thousands of doughboys along the Ourcq and the Vesle. They did not die in vain.

²⁵Berry, *Make the Kaiser Dance*, 281; and Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 331.

²⁶Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 327.

²⁷Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 326-328; and Trask, *Coalition Warmaking*, 86-114.

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