U. S. ARMY CHEMICAL CORPS HISTORICAL STUDIES

GAS WARFARE IN WORLD WAR I

THE 32nd DIVISION ADVANCES TO FISMES

August 1918

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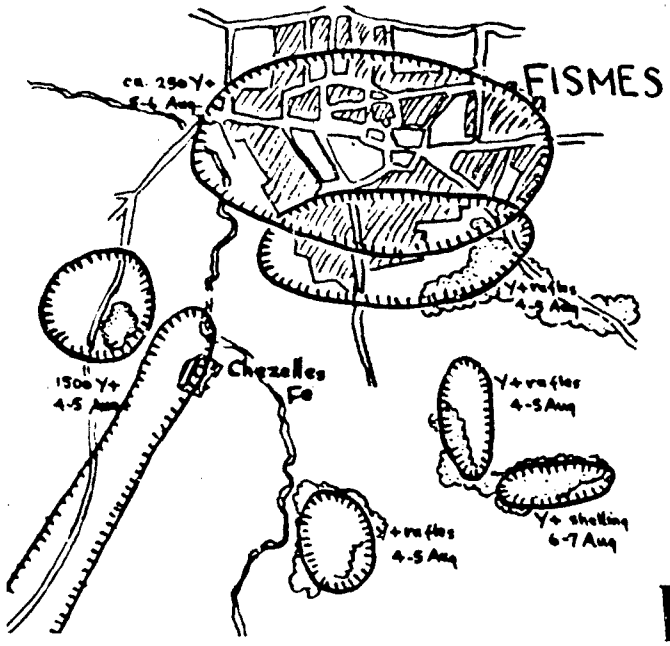

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The 32nd Division Advances to Fismes

August 1918

by

Rexmond C. Cochrane

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GAS WARFARE IN WORLD WAR I

Study Number 12

U.S. ARMY CHEMICAL CORPS
HISTORICAL STUDIES

U.S. Army Chemical Corps Historical Office
Office of the Chief Chemical Officer
Army Chemical Center, Maryland

1960

The 32nd Division Advances to Fismes
August 1918

Prepared by

Rexmond C. Cochrane, Ph.D.

Under Contract DA-18-108-CML-6214

with

U.S. Army Chemical Corps

This is an accepted draft study on gas warfare in World War I

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Colonel, CmlC
Acting Asst CCmlO for Planning & Doctrine

Foreword

This is a tentative study of the gas experience of the 32nd Division during World War I. This study is not presented as a definitive and official history, but is reproduced for current reference use within the Military Establishment pending the publication of an approved history.

The author was assisted in his research by Mrs. Charlotte M. Bolin and Mr. Guy F. Goodfellow.

Note to Reader: Comments and suggestions relative to accuracy and adequacy of treatment are invited, and may be transmitted to the Chief, U.S. Army Chemical Corps Historical Office, Army Chemical Center, Maryland.

THE 32nd DIVISION ADVANCES TO FISMES

August 1918

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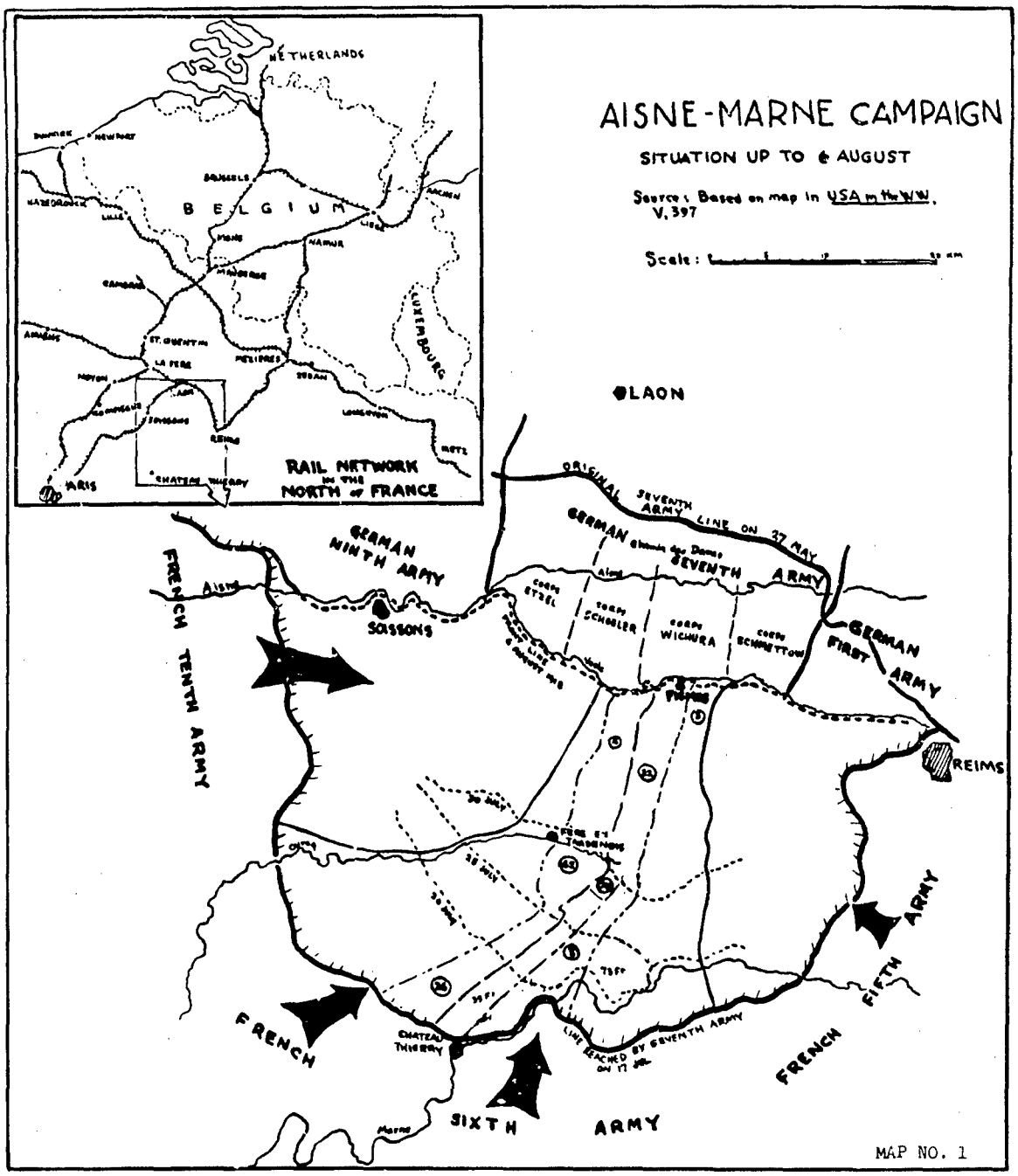
THE 32nd DIVISION ADVANCES TO FISMES

August 1918

The armistice with Russia in late 1917 set free large numbers of German reserves for the Western Front. For the first time since 1914 the German armies in France had the forces necessary to break out of the defensive battle of the trenches and take the offensive. The plan of campaign was to cut through the British front in the north and roll it up to the Channel, then push back the French armies onto Paris. A series of great military victories, Hindenburg thought, might not end the war on Germany's terms but would at least ensure a favorable negotiated peace.

When the first two offensives against the British in March and April 1918 tore great rents in the line but failed to break the anchorhold on the Channel, the Germans launched their armies against the French. The third German offensive, on 27 May 1918, penetrated 45 miles, from the Chemin des Dames, through Soissons and Fismes, down to the Marne, creating a huge salient that could be supplied only by rail communications through Soissons. The fourth German offensive, on 9 June, was an effort to take Compiègne, in order to protect Soissons and open up the main trunk line, Compiègne-Liege, for better supply (Map No. 1).

The German failure to seize Compiègne in that drive set the stage for Foch's counteroffensive, first projected on 14 June, to retake the plateaus dominating Soissons on the west and southwest and thereby deny the enemy


AISNE-MARNE CAMPAIGN
SITUATION UP TO 6 AUGUST
Source: Based on map in USA in the WW, V, 397
Scale:
NETHERLANDS
BELGIUM
LUXEMBOURG
PARIS
RAIL NETWORK IN THE NORTH of FRANCE
LAON
ORIGINAL SEVENTH ARMY LINE ON 27 MAY
GERMAN SEVENTH ARMY
GERMAN NINTH ARMY
FRENCH TENTH ARMY
SOISSONS
CORPS ETZEL
CORPS SCHOELER
CORPS WICHURA
CORPS SCHMETTOW
GERMAN FIRST ARMY
REIMS
FRENCH FIFTH ARMY
FRENCH SIXTH ARMY
CHATEAU THIERRY
LINE REACHED BY SEVENTH ARMY ON 17 JUL
Marne
Aisne

MAP NO. 1

use of this great rail center.[1] Meanwhile, balked at Compiegne, the German High Command planned still another offensive against the French, with Reims as the objective. Its capture would solve the supply problem in the Marne salient and at the same time constitute, if successful, a decisive blow against the French armies between Paris and Verdun.[2] Thus a German offensive and a French counteroffensive were planned for almost simultaneous delivery, sometime in mid-July.

On 5 July, as Mangin's Tenth French Army prepared for the Soissons operation, its commander suggested that with additional forces success in that operation might well be exploited in an effort to reduce the whole of the Chateau Thierry salient. Petain, commanding the Armies of the North and Northwest, at once approved the operation as being "the most effective parry to the impending German offensive." A week later the plan was enlarged as Petain ordered a concerted offensive by the Tenth, Sixth, and Fifth French Armies, in two great lateral drives towards the plateaus north of Fere-en-Tardenois.[3] The result was the Aisne-Marne Campaign, called by the French the Second Battle of the Marne.

As in its previous offensives that spring, the German attack launched on 15 July with the Seventh, First and Third Armies was preceded by a short

---

1 Ltr, Foch, C-in-C Allied Armies to Petain, C-in-C Armies of the North and Northwest, 14 Jun (U.S. Army in the World War, V, Champagne-Marne, Washington D.C., 1948, pp. 223, 227, 229).

2 Howland, A Military History of the World War (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 1923), pp. 288 - 89.

3 USA in the WW, V, 232 - 37. and map, p. 231.

but violent bombardment with almost 250,000 blue and green cross gas shells on French battery positions and rear areas, while minenwerfer battered the front lines with high explosives. As in the Compiègne offensive the month before, the French again effectively countered the German preparation by echeloning their troops in great depth along the entire front. This time, learning on the evening of 14 July that the bombardment would begin at midnight, the French opened fire shortly before that hour with a massive gas and HE counteroffensive preparation.[4]

Though badly hurt, the German armies drove forward, advancing across the Marne and southwest of Reims against the lightly held front of the Sixth and Fifth French Armies. On 16 and 17 July, at the main line of resistance, the initial impetus was gone and it was clear that there would be no breakthrough. The next day, the 18th, the French armies attacked. Tenth Army, supported by Sixth Army, advanced in the Soissons region, while the Ninth and Fifth Armies on the south and east walls of the salient continued to oppose the spearhead of the German advance, preparatory to forcing it back across the Marne.[5]

Surprised by the French counteroffensive and fully aware that its own attack had failed, on 20 July the German High Command ordered the withdrawal of all forces from the Marne salient. The north banks of the Vesle

---

4 Lt Col Xenephon H. Price, The Montdidier-Noyon Defense, n.d. (AEF GHQ G - 3 Rpts Box 3158, fol 1136); Howland, p. 295.

5 USA in the WW, V, 231, 250, 252, 276, 347 - 49.

and Aisne from Soissons as far as Reims were to be prepared for defense, while intermediate positions, outposts, and rearguard detachments established in the intervening terrain delayed the pursuit.[6]

The Allies sought desperately to advance in the direction of Fere-en-Tardenois and establish themselves on the line of the Vesle and Aisne in order to cut off the retreat, but von Boehn's Seventh Army in the pocket, by skillful use of machine guns, artillery, and gas, methodically withdrew in bounds to one hastily constructed defensive position after another. On the night of 20 - 21 July Seventh Army recrossed the Marne. Further withdrawals to the "Berta" position on the night of 23-24 July, to the "Caesar" position on 24 - 25 July, and the "Dora" position on 26 - 27 July put the army on the line of the Ourcq.

On 28 July, with his forces on the Ourcq, von Boehm reported: "The hostile assault lasting from July 18 to 26 has been defeated." As the salient narrowed, the 40 German divisions that had been on the Marne contracted to 17. In the plan for the next withdrawal, from the Ourcq to the Vesle, Corps Wichura was to take over the sector occupied by Corps Conta. Corps Endres and Corps Kathen, then completing the organization of the line of the Vesle, would also be phased out, leaving Corps Etzel, Schoeler, Wichura, and Schmettow to hold the river line and complete the task of

---

6 Opns Rpt 106, German Supreme Hq, 14 Aug (USA in the WW, V, 672 ff.); Rpt, Army Group German Crown Prince to Supreme Hq, 24 Jul (ibid., pp. 684 - 85); Msg, Ludendorff to Army Group German Crown Prince, 25 Jul (German Files Box 43, fol 26). Note: German Files Box will hereafter be abbreviated to GFB.

evacuating above the Aisne "the wounded, supernumerary rations, German ammunition, damaged guns, and the most valuable stores captured."[7] In an annex to the same order, von Boehm added:

Yellow cross gas ammunition will be employed during the fighting and movement...whenever the supply permits. But the rules governing gas fire must be strictly observed, otherwise there will be no effect. Yellow cross grenades should be exploded in bomb-proof cellars and dugouts opposite the Vesle front.... The success of the movement depends just as much on the successful crossing of the Vesle, the Tafelberg [?], the Aisne and the Chemin des Dames, as it does on fighting.[8]

On 29 July, eleven days after the French counteroffensive began, hope for any further exploitation beyond Soissons by Tenth Army was given up, and Degoutte's Sixth Army took charge of what had become the principal and immediate operation, the drive north to the Vesle.[9]

Study No. 4, "The 26th Division in the Aisne-Marne Campaign," described the advance of that division, which with the 167th French Division comprised I Corps (American), on the right flank of Sixth Army. On 25 July, after eight days of alternate pursuit and attack, the 26th Division was relieved by the 42nd Division in the Forêt de Fère, almost 18 kilometers from its jump-off line. The next day the 42nd also relieved the 167th French Division, taking over the entire corps sector. On its right were the

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7 AOK 7 (Seventh Army Hq) Order Ia 1168 (II Ang), 28 Jul (GFB 43, fol 27).

8 AOK 7 Order Ia 1168 (III Ang), par 9, 30 Jul.

9 Order No. 38770, French Armies of the North and Northeast, 29 Jul (USA in the WW, V, 265).

39th French and 3rd American Divisions of XXXVIII French Corps.[10] Before the week was out, the 39th French was also relieved and the 42nd and 3rd Divisions, on corps fronts, supported by a brigade each of the 4th and 28th Divisions, respectively, continued the attack to the line of the Ourcq (Map No. 2).

On 30 July the 32nd Division relieved the 3rd Division and its 28th Division support, while a day later the 4th Division began the relief of the 42nd Division, completing it on 3 August. The 4th and 32nd Divisions were to make the drive from the Ourcq to the Vesle.

"Officially the Aisne-Marne Offensive ended on August 6th," the day the 32nd Division was relieved at the Vesle, although "very severe fighting in continuation of the...operation continued for several days longer in the general effort to cross the Vesle."[11]

The present study concerns the gas experience of the 32nd Division during its advance from the Ourcq to the Vesle. A later study will describe the gas experience of the 77th and 28th Divisions after they took over the front occupied by the 32nd. Not "for several days," but for a solid month these two divisions fought futilely at the Vesle, immobilized largely by the skilful use of gas by the German forces opposite them.

But the Germans had used gas no less skilfully against the 32nd Division. The focus of the present study therefore will be on the use of gas by retreating forces to retard pursuit, and the effect of gas on pursuing troops.

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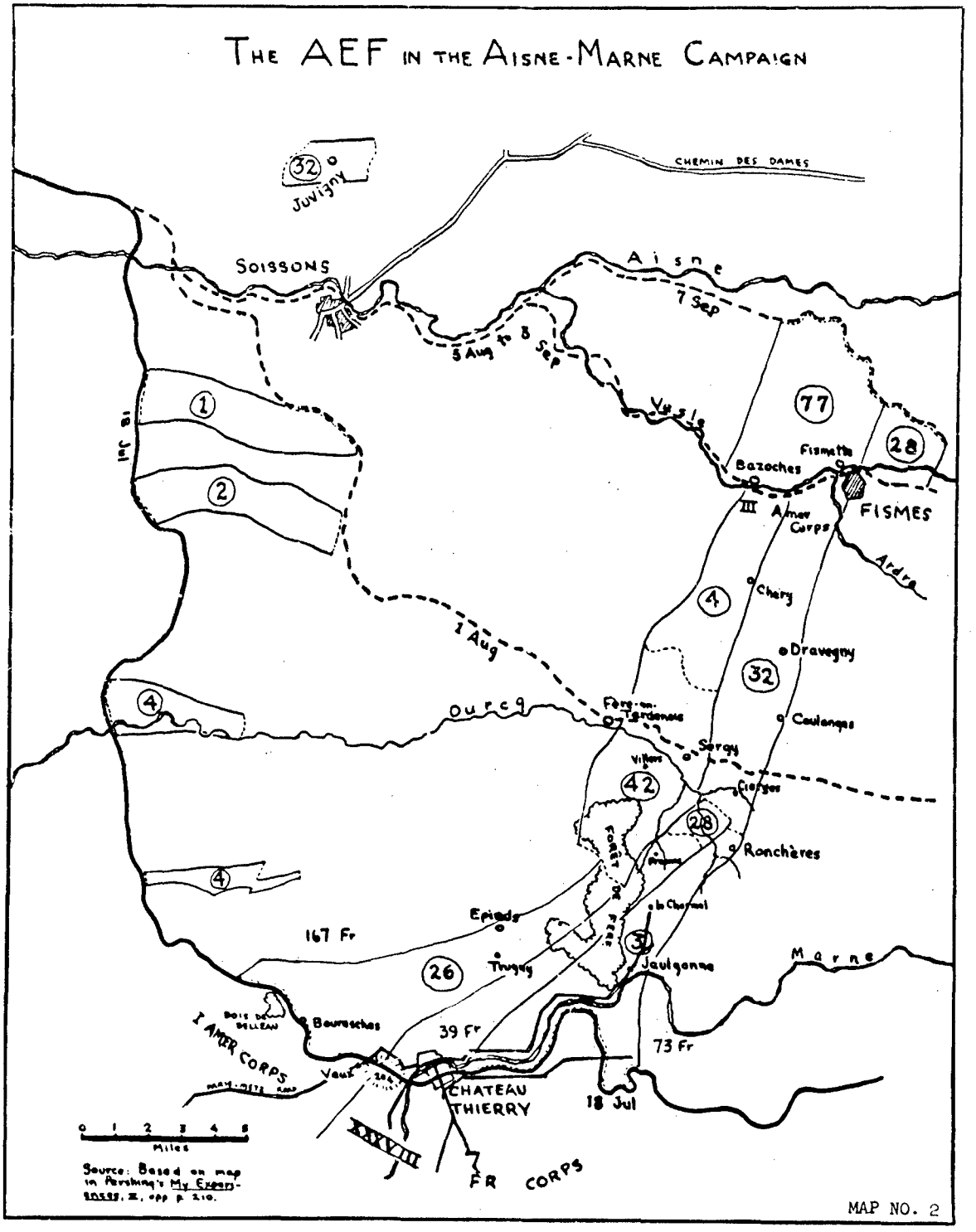
10 USA in the WW, V, 254, 354.

11 Jennings C. Wise, The Turn of the Tide (New York, 1920), p. 236. Cf. Pershing, My Experiences in the World War (New York, 1931), II, 310 - 11; USA in the WW, V, 218.


THE AEF IN THE AISNE-MARNE CAMPAIGN
CHEMIN DES DAMES
Juvigny
SOISSONS
Aisne
7 Sep
5 Aug to 8 Sep
Vesle
Bazoches
Fismette
FISMES
III Amer Corps
Ardre
Chery
Dravegny
1 Aug
Ourcq
Ferté-sur-Ourcq
Coulonges
Sergy
Villers
Cierges
Ronchères
Forêt de Fère
Epieds
167 Fr
Trugny
Jaulgonne
Marne
Bois de Meleau
Bourasches
I AMER CORPS
39 Fr
73 Fr
Vaux
CHATEAU THIERRY
18 Jul
XXXVIII
FR CORPS
Miles
Source: Based on map in Pershing's My Experiences, II, opp p. 210.

MAP NO. 2

Replacement Division

The 32nd Division, which "didn't complain or get investigated....[and] had the more or less unique distinction of having never claimed to be the best division in the American Army," was organized on 18 July 1917 from National Guard units of Wisconsin and Michigan.[12] As reorganized in September under the command of Brig. Gen. William G. Haan, it comprised the 125th and 126th Infantry, 63rd Brigade, under Brig. Gen. W. D. Conner (relieved by Brig. Gen. Robert Alexander on 5 August); the 127th and 128th Infantry, 64th Brigade, commanded by Brig. Gen. Edwin B. Winans; the 119th, 120th and 121st Field Artillery, 57th FA Brigade, under Brig. Gen. G. LeRoy Irwin; and machine gun, engineer, MP, signal, and medical components.

After three months of training at Camp MacArthur, Waco, Texas, the division sailed for France, its last troops arriving early in March 1918. It was the sixth division to land, being preceded by the 1st, 2nd, 26th, 41st, and 42nd Divisions. In France the division was notified that like the 41st Division it was to be a replacement division. Three regiments were at once detached as temporary labor troops, to unload supplies at the docks and build barracks for the divisions then on the high seas, while almost the whole of the 128th Infantry except its cadre was used to fill out the ranks of the 1st Division, on its way into the line at

---

12 The 32nd Division in the World War, 1917-1919 (Joint War Hist Comm of Mich and Wisc, Madison, 1920), p. 189. No MS histories of the division have been found. This published account will hereafter be cited as History.

Cantigny.[13]

Following the March offensive on the Western Front, which put a sudden premium on trained American divisions, the 32nd, although now 9,000 men short, was hastily reconstituted as a "temporary combat division." Early in April the 41st Division provided the needed fillers for the 32nd, a four-week training course was prescribed to ready the division for combat duty, and a month later, on 14 May, the division was on its way to Alsace, in the Belfort region, for front line training with the XL French Corps, Seventh French Army.

The 32nd Division seems to have received its first gas defense training in late March when 1st Lt. W. A. Wylde was appointed Division Gas Officer. By early April a gas organization had been set up, masks and respirators were issued, and in accordance with training memos, two hours per week were allotted to gas defense instruction.[14] As in other AEF divisions beginning their training in gas protection in France, there were misunderstandings about the purpose and procedures of gas defense. Visiting a company in school, a G - 3 inspector reported that the officer in charge had called "Gas alert!" and the men had taken a full minute to get their masks to the alert position. Although not certain, the inspector

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13 History, pp. 34 - 35.

14 See Ltr, DGO to BGOs, n.d., sub: Anti-Gas Training, and Lecture, General Facts about Poison Gas, n.d. (32nd Div Box 14, 54.3); Tng Memo 3, 1 Apr; Tng Memo 5, 10 Apr; Tng Memo 9, 23 Apr; Ltr, DGO to CG 32nd Div, 26 Apr, sub: Gas Schools for Officers and NCOs; Tng Memo 13, 21 May; Tng Memo 14, 31 May (all in 32nd Div Boxes 13 and 14, 50.4).

"thought the men should be wearing their masks at the alert," since masks were supposed to be at that position anywhere within five miles of the front, and that the drill should consist of putting on the mask rather than merely getting it to the alert.[15]

At Belfort, where Wylde was replaced by Capt. C. L. Joly as Division Gas Officer, the latter was to complain of the "very apparent lack of cooperation of the company commanders" in impressing the vital necessity of gas discipline on their men. He found that "every new unit (and some of the old ones) which goes into the line has to be coached and whipped into line by the gas officers themselves." On at least one occasion the DGO and the 127th Infantry RGO found a number of officers and men in the trenches without their masks or wearing them in the wrong position.[16] On another occasion a III Corps inspector during a tour of the front found over 200 gas mask infractions, many of the men not carrying their masks at all and large numbers with their masks in the slung position. Yet XL French Corps and Seventh French Army gas officers, also present, considered this number of infractions evidence of "superb discipline" in a command of 18,000 men.[17] As it happened, there had been only 12 gas casualties up to that time and

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15 Memo, G - 3 Inspect, 18 Apr, no other data (32nd Div Box 11, 37).

16 Daily Rpt, 127th Inf RGO, 9 Jun (32nd Div Box 21, 63.33).

17 At full strength, an American division in World War I had 979 officers and 27,082 men. The rifle strength of a division was 17,666, and that may be the reference, since the division was then at approximate full strength.

this may have reassured the French visitors, though it did not impress the III Corps inspector.[18]

With less than three weeks remaining in this phase of the training cycle, III Corps was also to express dissatisfaction with the unit training of the division in open warfare tactics, then being conducted back of the line. Particularly lacking, said Corps, were exercises in infantry tactics under gas conditions, as well as exercises in the use of artillery to fire "swift concentrations of...gas on targets pointed out by the infantry."[19] No evidence has been found that these omissions were repaired in the time remaining. The first was a lesson learned only by hard experience; the second seems never to have been learned.

To the Line of the Ourcq

On 19 July, after almost two months on the Alsace front, the division was relieved by French units and entrained for the Soissons area. A week later it was ordered to Mondesir's XXXVIII Corps, Sixth French Army, near Chateau Thierry. Foch's Aisne-Marne counteroffensive was under way, the enemy on the west and south faces of the salient was in retreat, and above Chateau Thierry as the troops detrained the red flashes and rumbles of

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18 Memo, DGO for G - 3 32nd Div, 5 Jun, sub: Violation of G. O. 38 (32nd Div Box 16, 63.3); Memo, DGO for G - 3 32nd Div, 10 Jun, n.s.; Memo, DGO for CG 32nd Div, 25 Jun, n.s. (32nd Div Box 14, 54.3); G. O. 61, 32nd Div, 3 Jul (32nd Div Box 16, 64.2). Spencer, "History of Gas Attacks upon the AEF" (GAF), II, 307 - 19, reports 56 gas casualties in 12 gas attacks between 29 May - 3 Jul.

19 Ltr, Wright, CG III Corps to CG 32nd Div, 29 Jun, sub: Training (32nd Div Box 14, 50.4).

distant heavy artillery marked the site of the battle up ahead. Just before dark on 27 July the regiments lined up on the Paris-Metz road and started forward. At daybreak they entered the Forêt de Fère, near le Charmel, in the rear of the 28th and 3rd Divisions (Map No. 3).[20]

The night of 28 - 29 July, said the 107th Engineers, "was made hideous by frequent gas alarms, all of which proved to be unfounded, but the men as a consequence got very little rest."[21] At least eight alarms were sounded that night, but not all were false. G - 3 reported "many gas shells from La Fosse farm forward [and] especially on Courmont." Some also fell near le Charmel, for ten gas casualties were reported in the 63rd Brigade, and the next morning it withdrew from the gassed area to the south edge of the Forêt de Fère.[22]

On the night of 29 - 30 July, while the 63rd Brigade remained near le Charmel, the 64th Brigade moved out of the forest and, "harassed by false gas alarms" all the way, advanced to the relief of the 3rd Division on the

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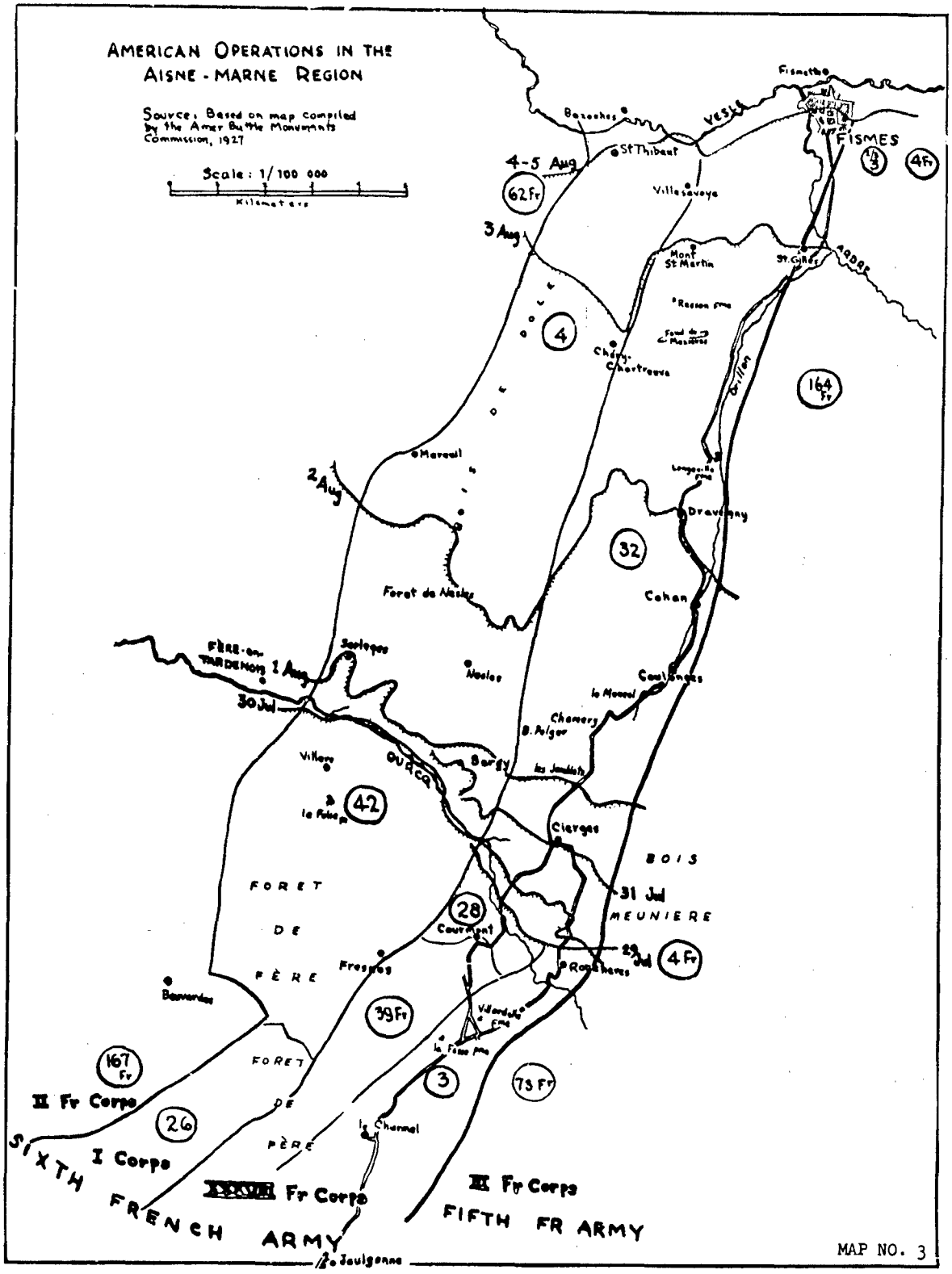
20 FO 19, 32nd Div. 0010, 27 Jul; FO 20, 1130, 28 Jul; FO 22, 0445, 29 Jul (32nd Div Box 3, 32.1).

21 MS. Hist of 107th Eng, n.d. (32nd Div Box 25, 11.4); Diary, Co. A, 107th Eng, 28 Jul (32nd Div Box 26, 11.5).

22 DOR, 32nd Div, 29 Jul (32nd Div Box 10, 33.1); Annex 7, Rpt on Opns of 32nd Div, 29 Jul - 7 Aug, 24 Aug (32nd Div Box 11, 33.6).


AMERICAN OPERATIONS IN THE
AISNE - MARNE REGION
Source: Based on map compiled by the Amer Battle Monuments Commission, 1927
Scale: 1/100 000
Kilometers
4-5 Aug
3 Aug
2 Aug
1 Aug
30 Jul
31 Jul
29 Jul
FISMES
St Thibaut
Villesavoye
Mont St Martin
St Gilles
Chery-Chartreuve
Marcuil
Dravegny
Cohan
Forêt de Nesles
Coulonges
Chamery
Villers
Courmont
Fresnes
Rosnay
Clergy
BOIS
MEUNIERE
FORET
DE
PÈRE
Bouvardes
Le Chornet
62 Fr
4
32
42
28
39 Fr
3
73 Fr
164 Fr
167 Fr
26
4 Fr
II Fr Corps
I Corps
SIXTH
FRENCH ARMY
III Fr Corps
FIFTH FR ARMY
Jouigonne

MAP NO. 3

slopes above the Ourcq.[23] To the left of the brigade were the 28th and 42nd Divisions, to its right the 4th French Division. Before the brigade were the 4th Guard and 216th Divisions of Corps Wichura, holding the "Dora" position from Seringes to a point north of Roncheres. East of Roncheres was the 200th Division of Corps Conta (Map No. 4).[24]

The Dora Stellung at the Ourcq, the third line of defense constructed above the Marne, had been organized just the week before, but with complete control in the choice of battleground, the enemy had quickly put together a pattern of machine guns and light artillery that made the line of the Ourcq a formidable position. Behind it Seventh Army continued to withdraw its mountains of material and to organize further lines of defense above the Vesle and Aisne.

The 3rd Division, which for six days had fought its way up from Chateau Thierry, had arrived in front of the Dora position on 27 July,

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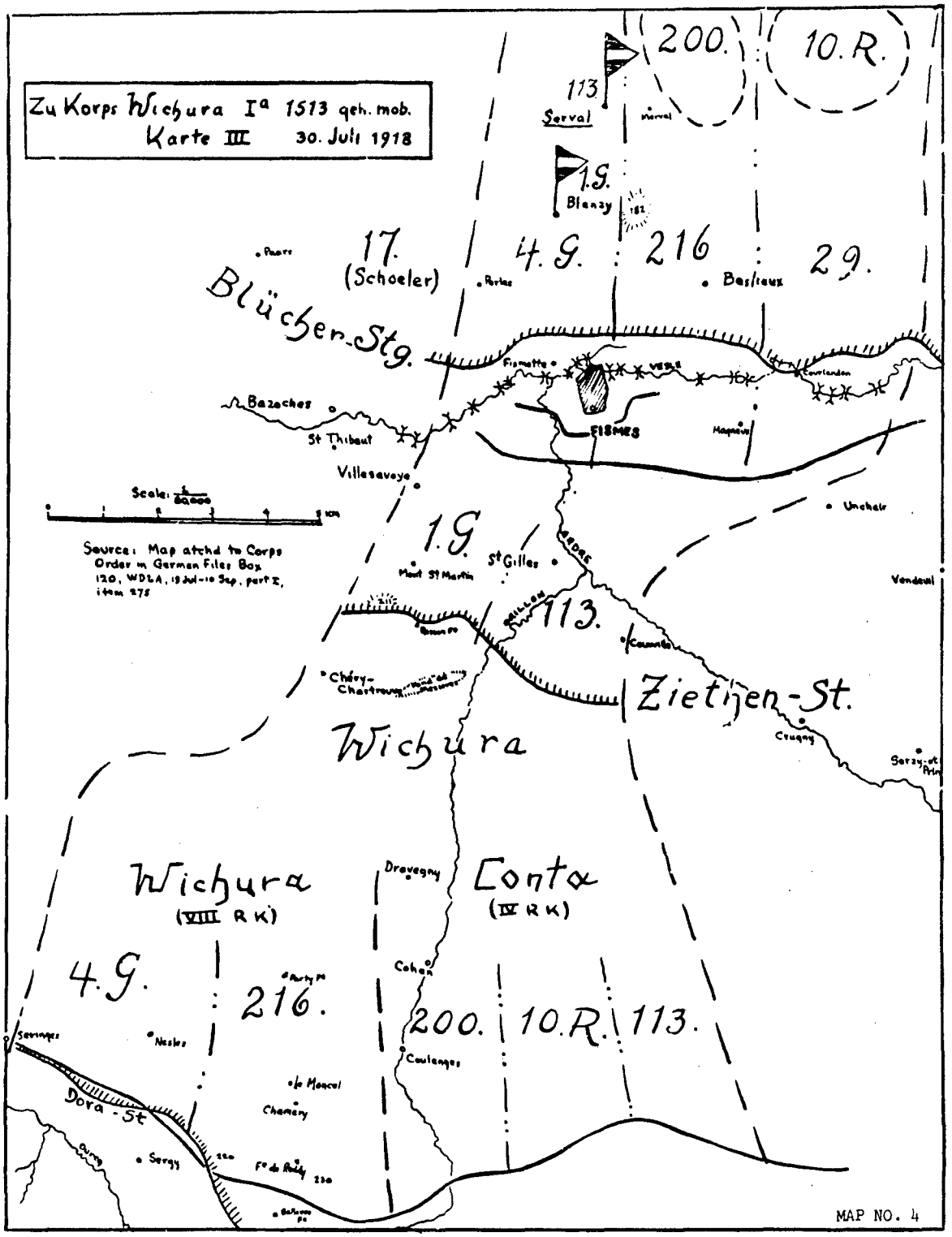
23 History, p. 57. Jnl of Opns, XXXVIII Corps, 30 Jul (USA in the WW, V, 571), said: "During the night and at daybreak [of 29 - 30 July] violent shelling, mostly poison gas, by enemy artillery on the line of the OURCQ, and the villages of RONCHERES and le CHARMEL....At the end of the day the enemy shelled the village of CIERGES violently with poison gas." There is no mention of this shelling in 32nd Div records unless the previous incident is misdated 28 - 29 Jul. Cf. 4th Gd Div Order Ia 12764, 9 p.m., 29 Jul (GFB 147, fol I, p. 68), which ordered the use of gas in harassing and annihilation fire at 2210 and 0415 that night.

NOTE: The Ourcq in the Courmont-Cierges sector was only 3 - 6 feet wide, 3 - 8 inches deep, but its banks were 3 - 7 feet high (Jnl of Opns, 28th Div, 30 Jul, in 28th Div Box 6, 33.3).

24 Estimates of these and, later, the 29th Div are in Annex IV to SOI 10, III Corps, 12 - 13 Aug, and Annex III to SOI 22, 24 - 25 Aug (III Corps Box 7, 20.1).


Zu Korps Wichura Ia 1513 geh. mob.
Karte III 30. Juli 1918
200.
10.R.
113
Serval
1.G.
Blanzy
17.
(Schoeler)
4.G.
216
29.
Bassieux
Blücher-Stg.
Bazoches
St Thibaut
Villesavoye
FISMES
Scale:
Source: Map atchd to Corps Order in German Files Box 120, WDGA, 19 Jul-10 Sep, part I, item 275
1.G.
St Gilles
Mont St Martin
113.
Chéry-Chartreuve
Zietjen-St.
Wichura
Wichura
(VIII R K)
Conta
(IV R K)
4.G.
216.
200.
10.R.
113.
Dora-St
Chamery
Sergy
Couloanges
Cohan
Dravegny
Vendeuil
Unchair
Cuisy
Serzy-et-Prin

MAP NO. 4

had crossed the Ourcq and advanced above Roncheres before coming to a halt. To its front was the Bois des Grimpettes, a well-organized strongpoint that resisted repeated artillery bombardments and by the flanking fire of its defenders had succeeded in stopping both the 3rd Division and the 28th Division on the left.[25] A degree of the exhausted condition of both these divisions was the result of the repeated gassings they had suffered and the contaminated terrain they had had to cross in the advance above the Marne.[26] The other considerable hindrance to their advance, and soon to plague the 32nd, had been "a continuous line of machine guns, especially light ones," placed so near the front that they escaped artillery fire. Sixth French Army urged the divisions to retire slightly on their fronts before each attack in order to bring these machine guns under fire. They were also advised that there was "every advantage in compelling the enemy to wear gas masks by executing fire with gas shells during several minutes before H Hour."[27] But the American divisions under Degoutte continued to

---

25 History, pp. 57 - 58.

26 See Study No. 14, "The 3rd Division at Chateau Thierry." For enemy gassing at the Ourcq, see Rpt 9732, Arko 4 to Wichura, 4 Aug (GFB 147, fol I, p. 178).

The 28th Div was to say that on 29 Jul it took the greatest number of casualties of any single day in the war. These casualty figures are not available, but for comparison its "second most disastrous day" was 7 Sep, above the Vesle, when it suffered 588 wounded, 390 gassed, and 54 other casualties, a total of 1,032 (Jnl of Opns, 28th Div, 4 - 7 Sep, in 28th Div Box 6, 33.3).

27 3rd Bur, Sixth Army, Note for the Army Corps, 1615, 30 Jul; ibid., Note on...Neutralizing Enemy Machine Guns, 1615, 30 Jul (32nd Div Box 9, 32.7).

rely on their weight of numbers, attacking with meager artillery preparation, and, so far as can be learned, without the help of gas.

Completing the relief of the 3rd Division just before noon on 30 July, and with the artillery of the 3rd and 28th Divisions secured for the assult, the 64th Brigade, 32nd Division, was ordered to take the Bois des Grimpettes and with the 28th Division advance in the direction of Hill 230 (Map No. 5). Division warned that

> Reports from VI Army Centre of Information state that the enemy during the night heavily shelled the low ground along the Ourcq, and in many places the cavalry patrols have encountered pools of gas. Therefore in the advance over low ground, gas masks will be worn.[28]

At 1430, following a twenty-minute bombardment of the wood, the 127th Infantry with the 128th in support advanced from Roncheres behind a creeping barrage and entered Grimpettes. Taking high casualties from the machine guns left in the wake of the barrage on the wood and from the nests on the edge of the Bois Meuniere on the right, the troops reached the top of the Bois des Grimpettes at 1630 and halted to reorganize for the next advance. At dark the 127th Infantry reportedly extended its forces to the edge of the Bois de Cierges and dug in there, planning to clear it at dawn. But during the night, his Grimpettes position penetrated, the enemy withdrew from the

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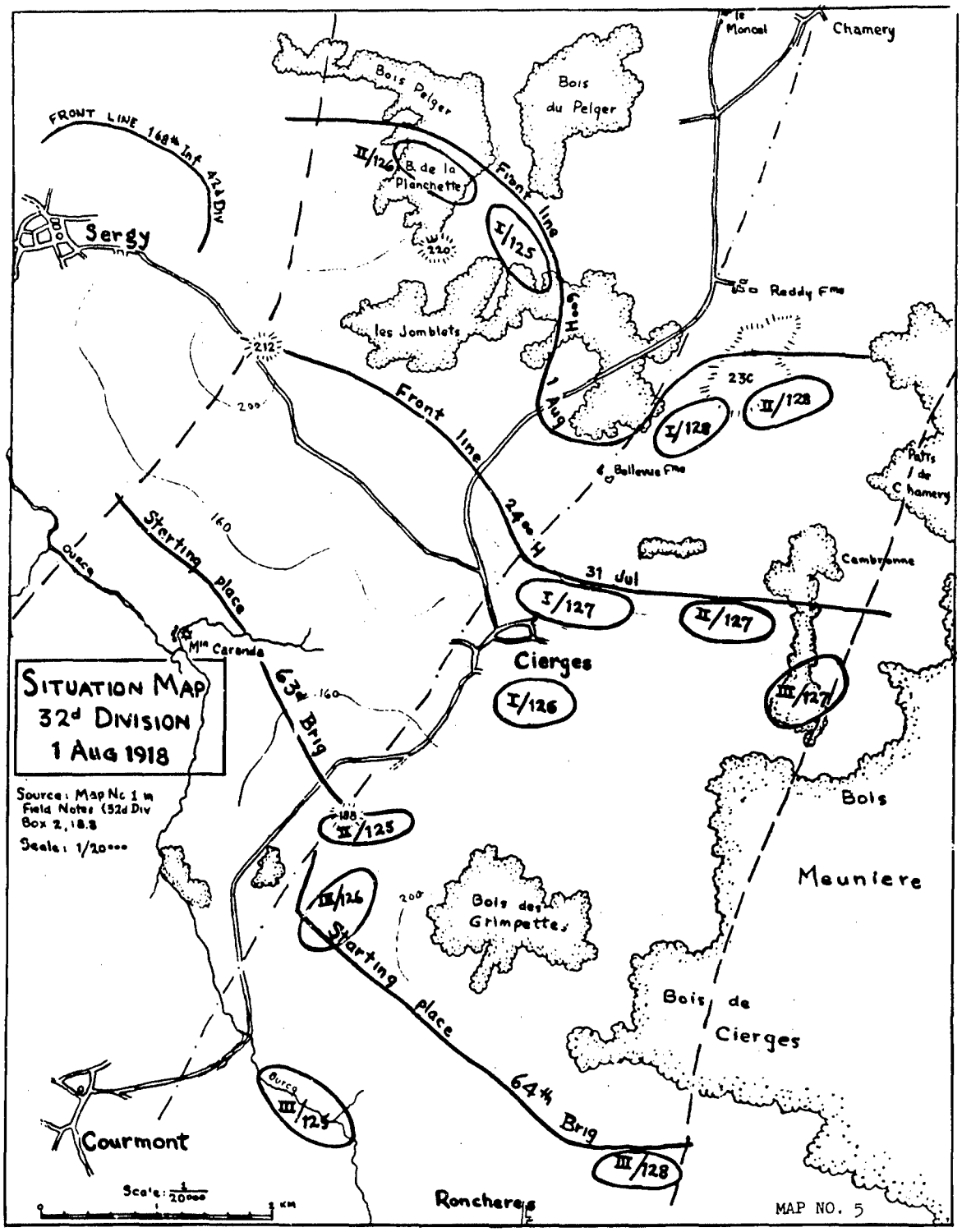
28 FO 23, 32nd Div, 1745, 29 Jul; Gen Opns O 172, XXXVIII Corps, 2230, 29 Jul (32nd Div Box 9, 32.7). Quotation from FO 26, 1100, 30 Jul, par 3 (C) 2. Cf. Opns records of 32nd Div in USA in the WW, V, 636 - 59.

Msg, Col. Lemaitre, PC Leon, Corps Cav to G - 3 32nd Div, 0910, 30 Jul (32nd Div Box 5, 32.16): "Information coming from Villardelle Farm. The bombardment of the whole valley of the OURCQ by gas shells is being violently maintained. French cavalry patrols are constantly crossing large areas of gas."


SITUATION MAP
32d DIVISION
1 Aug 1918
Source: Map No. 1 in Field Notes (32d Div Box 2, 18.3
Scale: 1/20000
FRONT LINE 168th Inf 42d Div
Sergy
Bois Pelger
Bois du Pelger
B. de la Planchette
Front line
6th H
1 Aug
Le Monoel
Chamery
Ferme Reddy
les Jomblets
Front line
24th H
31 Jul
Ferme Bellevue
Parts de Chamery
Cambronne
Starting place
Ourcq
Mlin Caronda
63d Brig
Cierges
Bois
Meuniere
Bois des Grimpettes
Starting place
64th Brig
Bois de Cierges
Courmont
Ronchères
Scale: 1/20000
MAP NO. 5

Bois de Cierges and abandoned the ground from Cierges to the southwest corner of the Bois Meuniere.[29]

A counterattack by enemy forces from the Bois Meuniere that night was repulsed after savage fighting, and through the rest of the night the enemy artillery pounded the troops in the woods. Towards morning the 127th Infantry withdrew slightly from both Grimpettes and Meuniere woods to avoid further losses. Exclusive of the heavy casualties in one company whose count could not be obtained, G - 3 reported "only 8 officers and 165 men killed and wounded" in the opening action.[30]

During the same night of 30 - 31 July, the 125th and 126th Infantry, 63rd Brigade, moved up above Courmont to relieve the 28th Division, which had advanced slightly with the fall of the Bois des Grimpettes. A series of messages reported that the 28th Division had taken Cierges the night before, but "afraid of being attacked by gas" in the hollow where the town lay, its troops had left the town and taken positions on the high ground to the west. Coming up to relieve the 28th Division elements at Cierges, the battalion commander of the 125th Infantry was told that if he found the place filled with gas, he was to "push on through the town and establish [himself] on the heights to the north." But Cierges was not

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29 Evening rpt 12774, 4th Gd to VIII Res Corps, 1915, 30 Jul (item 73, GFB 147).

30 History, p. 58; Diary of Action of 127th Inf (32nd Div Box 21, 33.6); DOR, 32nd Div, 30 Jul - 1 Aug (32nd Div Box 10, 33.1).

gassed either night because elements of the 216th Division were still there, and the 125th Infantry actually relieved the 28th Division forces half a kilometer south of Cierges.[31]

The Line is Turned

At dawn on 31 July the two brigades of the 32nd Division were approximately in line, occupying the entire front of XXXVIII Corps from Caranda Farm, where the 63rd Brigade connected with the 42nd Division, across the sector through the Bois des Grimpettes. Directly in front of the brigades was the open slope of the Ourcq valley rising to the long ridge marked by Hill 212, Hill 220, and Hill 230. Through these hills ran the last line of resistance south of the Vesle. The complex of machine guns in Les Jomblets wood, below Hill 220, not only menaced the 63rd Brigade but together with machine guns in the Bois Pelger, further back, flanked the open ground before the division on the left and made its advance impossible. Corps ordered the 32nd Division to take Hills 220 and 230 and the village of Cierges between them.[32]

After a half-hour artillery preparation on the morning of 31 July, the entire 63rd Brigade, in columns of battalions, moved out. Elements on

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31 Msg, CG 64th Brig to CofS 32nd Div, 2230, 30 Jul; Msg, CG 63rd Brig, to CO 1st Bn 125th Inf, 2330, 30 Jul (32nd Div Box 5, 32.16); SOI 2, 32nd Div, 31 Jul - 1 Aug; Jnl of Opns, 28th Div, 30 Jul (28th Div Box 6, 33.3 and USA in the WW, V, 628 - 629).

32 History, pp. 58-59; Field Notes by Maj S.E. Rinehart, Hist Sec AEF, Apr 1919 (32nd Div Box 2, 18.8); GO 173, XXXVIII Corps, 10 p.m., 30 Jul (USA in the WW, V, 570 - 71); FO 27, 32nd Div, 0230, 31 Jul.

the right entered Cierges as the main body advanced to the Sergy-Cierges road where it was stopped by strong machine gun fire from Les Jomblets. About 1430 hours the exchange of intense machine gun and rifle fire let up and enemy forces were seen withdrawing towards the Bois de la Planchette. At once enemy artillery opened up on Cierges and the area to the south and for almost four hours filled it with HE and gas. G-2 reported that "about 150 shells containing sneezing gas were fired on positions occupied by the 2nd Battalion, 125th. Much of this gas was thrown into Cierges while occupied by our troops....The enemy is using mustard and sneezing gas from which some of our men have suffered skin burns and slight lung trouble. Woods and ravines have been particularly subjected to gas shelling." [33]

Clarifying rather than contradicting this account of the action around Cierges that day, the French liaison officer with the division said:

Sometimes the fighting was more in the manner of cavalry than of infantry. I mean the troops advance with dash, then fall back. For instance, the 63rd Brigade had taken Cierges. The village being then drenched with gas, the brigade evacuated it; but instead of advancing beyond the village, which is in a hollow, it withdrew to the rear, far more exposed to the view of the enemy and his fire. Next day the enemy had reoccupied Cierges.[34]

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33 Opns Rpt, 125th Inf, 31 Jul (32nd Div Box 18, 33.1); SOI 2, 32nd Div, 31 Jul - 1 Aug; Ltr msg, CG 63rd Brig [to Div Hq], 31 Jul (32nd Div Box 5, 32.16); Brig Gen Alexander, Consol Opns Rpt, 63rd Brig, 14 Aug (32nd Div Box 17, 33.6); History, pp. 59-60.

34 Leçons à tirer des opérations offensives du 29 juillet au 6 août 1918 entre la Marne et la Vesle (unsigned,undated report in 32nd Div Box 13,50.1). NOTE: It is questioned whether the enemy reoccupied Cierges.

On the right, the 127th Infantry (64th Brigade) emerged from Grimpettes wood, skirted Cierges and advanced until halted by machine gun fire from Bellevue Farm. The regiment dug in and waited until dark, when elements on the right flank filtered through to Hill 230. Without support from the French division on the right which had been held up in the Bois Meuniere, those who reached Hill 230 at once came under flanking fire from both Reddy Farm and Bellevue Farm. There was nothing to do but withdraw to the reverse slope between Cierges and Bellevue Farm.[35]

The artillery commander of the 4th Guard Division said that on 31 July

> the enemy in apparent strength pressed forward in the 4th Guard Division sector over the Ourcq bottom [i.e., the area in the triangle Seringy-Fresnes-Roncheres]. In this area and in the draw between Villers and la Folie Farm known support positions were shelled from early morning on with bursts of yellow cross according to [the manual], "Use of Gas by the Artillery." Approximately 2500 rounds of [77-mm.] yellow cross and 200 rounds of [105-mm.] yellow cross were fired.
>
> Although the enemy carried out a heavy attack against the neighboring divisions, the 4th Guard Division was not attacked on this day. These facts lead to the conclusion that the enemy, presumably under losses from the yellow cross gassing, could not seize the opportunity to employ great strength in an attack against this position.[36]

That night the forward elements of the 32nd Division reportedly held a general line from the south slope of Hill 220 - southwest half of

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35 History, p. 60

36 Rpt Ia 9732, Arko 4 to Wichura, 3 Aug (GFB 147, fol I, p. 178). The gassing began at noon, according to 3rd Bn 5th Regt, 4th Gd Div WD, 31 Jul (ibid., fol II, p. 96). Enemy movements and assemblies, villages and traffic points were included in the HE and yellow cross fire on Corps Conta's front, said its WD, 31 Jul (GFB 113, fol I, p. 20).

Les Jomblets - southeast to a point between Cierges and Bellevue Farm - east to Cambronne woods. It was not a secure line for behind it on hill 212 and east of Sergy was a regiment of the 216th Division, with the remainder of that division reported holding Reddy Farm and entrenched on Hill 230 east to the Patis de Chamery.[37]

Although more that 200 killed and wounded were counted on 31 July, the total casualties were so heavy that it was "impossible to report them." [38] G - 3 said nothing about gas casualties, but Captain Joly, the Division Gas Officer, reported 86 cases, all but four in the 127th Infantry, as the result of approximately 100 77-mm. mustard gas and phosgene shells fired into the Sergy-Cierges area. Ten of the casualties occurred when 127th Infantry patrols entered Cierges.[39] The remaining gas casualties were said to have resulted from advancing over previously gassed ground.[40]

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[37] Draft Sum of Opns from noon 30 Jul to noon 4 Aug, 32nd Div, 4 Aug (32nd Div Box 10,33.2); SOI 3, 32nd Div, 1-2 Aug. Cf. Maps No. 4 and 5.

[38] DOR, 32nd Div, 31 Jul-1 Aug. The 63rd Brig alone reported 134 killed, 461 wounded, 71 missing that day, and a provisional battalion had to be made of the 2nd and 3rd Bns, 125th Inf (Consol Opns Rpt,63rd Brig, 14 Aug, 32nd Div Box 17, 33.6).

[39] "Send 2 Cos. to reinforce line as we have been gassed. Do not come into town as it is full of gas" (Msg, Capt O'Connell [CO 2nd Bn 127th Inf] to Capt Smith, Co.B.art. [sic],1745 [31 July], 32nd Div Box 5, 32.16).

[40] Four Rpts on Gas Attack,all dated 16 Aug (GAF 32nd Div). There are no gas attack reports in the archive records of the 32nd Div; all are in GAF at ICC, and all are bare accounts prepared a week or more after the event. There appear to be inaccuracies of memory in most of the reports,e.g., the date of the gas bombardment here is given as the night of 1 Aug but other evidence indicates that the casualties occurred on the night of 31 Jul. Sixty-seven of the 127th Inf cases are reported as seen at Sergy,in the zone of the 42nd Div, but see narrative.

Although there is evidence that German Seventh Army gassed its entire front on 31 July in preparation for its next withdrawal, no record has been found of any gas casualties among the massed battalions of the 125th and 126th Infantry that day. The Analysis will show that from 31 July on communications and control in the division were badly disrupted, and casualty records and gas attack data became matters of guesswork.

Lt. Col. Glenn W. Garlock, 1st Battalion commander, 128th Infantry, was making a reconnaissance in anticipation of the relief of the 127th Infantry on the night of 31 July when he ran into gas and HE in the Bois de Cierges. The shells, he estimated, were falling at the rate of one every five seconds. In masks and unable to see, he and his guide quickly became lost. Taking a chance on the gas, they took off their masks, preferring "a slow and lingering death" to the quick death likely if they stopped there much longer. In spite of the discomfort in breathing, they beat their way through the woods safely to the 127th Infantry field post and found two battalions of the regiment there, on the outskirts of Cierges. They were in poor shape, he said, with "Gas, hunger, lack of sleep, shells and bullets...wearing down their morale." [41]

On the morning of 1 August, Major J.P. Smith, 32nd Division Ordnance Officer, went to Roncheres "to see the two companies [of the 127th Infantry] reported to have been gassed to ascertain their casualties." How many he found there he did not say, but Colonel Langdon, the 127th Infantry commander, told him that "they were probably gassed by walking

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41 Garlock, Tales of the Thirty-Second (West Salem, Wisc.,1927), p. 18.

in ravines which had been gassed." They were only slight cases, and though many were very weak none had been sent to the rear on account of the heavy artillery fire. Colonel Langdon also said that the two battalions in the forward line, some 400 yards above Cierges, were now badly intermixed, and all their companies had "suffered heavily in losses and many [were] now very weak from loss of sleep, lack of water and food, and constant strain. [It was] only with considerable effort that many of the men could move forward yesterday." [42] So ended the third day of the campaign.

The order for the attack on the morning of 1 August directed the 63rd Brigade to take the Bois de la Planchette, while the 64th Brigade advanced to Hill 230 to turn the strong point at Bellevue Farm. Planchette was to be directly assaulted, but Bellevue Farm and Hill 230 were to be taken by converging attacks of the 127th Infantry from Cierges and the 128th Infantry coming through the western edge of the Bois Meuniere and Patis de Chamery in the French sector.[43]

For the attack on Planchette, the 126th Infantry replaced the 125th in the lead during the night. Through an error the 1st Battalion, 126th Infantry, advanced a full hour the next morning before the 2nd Battalion on its left, and "machine guns in Planchette shot the battalion to pieces [and threw it back] to the sunken road from which it started." The 2nd

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42 Rpt, PC 32nd Div, 1 Aug (32nd Div Box 2, 16.1).

43 History, p. 62. Note: The front line at 0600, 1 Aug, shown in Map No. 5, does not agree with the records.

Battalion advanced by way of Sergy to Hill 212, and the 3rd Battalion, coming up in support, went on to the Bois du Pelger. Late that afternoon counterattack forces threw them all back to Hill 212 and Les Jomblets.[44]

The initial attack of the 64th Brigade was no more successful. Forced back by machine gun fire that morning, in the early afternoon the 127th Infantry by sheer weight of numbers reached the road to Reddy Farm as the 128th cleared Bellevue Farm. A company of the 128th Infantry "moved straight up the hill against a German machine gun. In...15 minutes of fighting the company melted away and for four days was lost as a unit of the regiment. It started 200 strong and when it was reorganized a few days later only 65 men remained." The replacement company was warned "not to rush into German machine guns out there with the whole company," but to flank them by platoons. It lost "only 50 percent of its strength" before finally taking out the machine gun. "In the three hours of fighting that afternoon," said Colonel Garlock in his account of the attack, "I estimated 100 killed 500 wounded." [45]

After dark the 128th Infantry got into the Patis de Chamery, east of Hill 230, and was joined there by the French division on the left. Hill 230 and the high ground to the left was thus completely enveloped. Since from these positions there was excellent observation as far as

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44 Garlock, Tales of the Thirty-Second, pp. 129 - 30. Casualties in the 63rd Brig were 71 killed, 339 wounded, 61 missing (Consol Opns Rpt, 14 Aug, above).

45 Tales of the Thirty-Second, pp. 108 - 09, 111.

the hills at Dravegny, 12 kilometers distant, the enemy had no choice but to withdraw.[46]

As of 1500, 1 August, Lt. Col. Gilbert E. Seaman, the Division Surgeon, estimated that total wounded since the start of the operation numbered at least 750, and the wounded were still coming in. Unaware of the gas casualties seen at Roncheres and elsewhere, Colonel Seaman said that so far there had been comparatively few gas cases, about 14, as well as 58 shell shock cases.[47] There were soon to be many more, but with division liaison in shaky condition their numbers were not to be reckoned until long after the action.

G - 2 reported that during the night of 1 - 2 August "the enemy fired a large number of mustard gas shells. Very few casualties, however." Among them, at least, may have been the three men of the 126th Infantry, digging in a shell hole, who failed to detect the odor of mustard and got the oil on their hands and then their cigarettes. All three were evacuated with throat burns.[48]

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46 History, p. 62; Haan, Rpt on Opns of 32nd Div, 29 Jul - 7 Aug, 24 Aug, p. 4 (32nd Div Box 11, 33.6).

47 DOR, 32nd Div, 1 - 2 Aug. By comparison, the 216th Div reported that "the battle in the Cierges area has cost the division...about 48 officers and 1,498 men" (216th Div WD, 2 Aug, GFB 220, fol I). Strength rpt, 216th Div (p. 39), shows 90 officers and 2,121 men lost in the same period, 29 Jul - 1 Aug.

48 SOI 3, 32nd Div, 1 - 2 Aug; Rpt of Gas Attack, dated 11 Aug.

The Division Gas Officer did not report the attack or indicate any casualties but these three, although hospital admission lists show almost 200 gas casualties for that period. Even Colonel Pollock, who had a low opinion of gas as a weapon of war, found it more troublesome than usual that night.

Toward sundown the Germans began to send in gas shells and kept it up for half an hour....An hour before dark the Germans gave us another gas shell deluge [in the woods east of Bellevue]....Every second several shells burst until the valley was filled with a cloud of smoke that looked like a fog in a hollow. Some men put their masks on early. I was smoking my pipe and was still alive after having quite a flurry of gas shells burst around me the night before. I moved up the bank....to higher ground above the gas and continued to smoke. [Told by a captain to put his mask on, he did, but took it off a few minutes later to answer the phone. After the call] I got back into the mask because it was a bit stuffy outside. I might say now that I was slightly gassed and felt its effects for three weeks.[49]

The Advance to the Vesle - 2 August

On the night of 1 August, with the 42nd and 32nd American and 4th French Divisions joined again above the Dora position, the Sixth French Army commander ordered a general attack at dawn, to capture the Chamery-le Moncel area. The guns of the 57th FA Brigade, which had been coming in since the night of 30 July, and with French auxiliaries comprised 20 batteries of 75's and 6 batteries of 155's, were all in position for the preparatory bombardment. But on the morning of 2 August it was discovered

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49 Tales of the Thirty-Second, pp. 113-14.

that the Germans had gone, and while the guns were limbered up again, the troops set out in pursuit.[50]

The formation for the general advance, with the 126th, 125th, 128th Infantry in line and the 127th following the 128th, was maintained as the chase began. Behind the 32nd came the 28th Division. Reddy Farm was passed about 0700 and by mid-morning the line had reached Chamery, the day's objective. Packs, blankets and other equipment marked the passage of the division and the places where it encountered sacrifice machine gun crews. Urged on that afternoon, the pursuit continued until dark, with French cavalry patrols out front probing as far as Party Farm and Dravegny, almost six kilometers from the jump-off.[51]

Stubborn opposition had been met that day from isolated machine gun nests along the edges of la Pissotte and Bois du Faux, west of Dravegny, costing the 63rd Brigade 30 killed, 151 wounded, and 20 missing. As G - 3 said, "The Germans appeared to be precipitately retreating but their opposition was serious enough to cause considerable casualties in our ranks." The Division Surgeon's report at 2000, 2 August, gave only the total

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GO 175, XXXVIII Corps, 8:30 p.m., 1 Aug (USA in the WW, V, 574-75). Details of the German withdrawal to the Ziethen and Blucher positions beginning 2400, 1 Aug, appear in 4th Gd Div Order 2, Opns Sec 12803, 2300, 31 Jul, and 4th Gd Div Order 1, Opns Sec 12810, 1400, 1 Aug (items 17 - 18, 257-59, GFB 147). See Warning Order, Gp of Armies German Crown Prince, 11 p.m., 27 Jul (USA in the WW, V, 686-688).

51

SOI 3, 1-2 Aug; FO 30, 32nd Div, 2 Aug; FO 31, 1400, 2 Aug; Garlock, Tales of the Thirty-Second, p. 131; History, p. 63.

casualties received by the four field hospital triages since 29 July: 1,501 wounded, including approximately 100 shell shock and 150 gas cases.[52]

Nothing in the unit records of the 32nd Division indicates any special gas hazard in the advance from the line of the Ourcq to the Vesle. Yet the "large number of mustard gas shells" fired on the night of 1 - 2 August appears to have been the beginning of a large-scale interdiction operation that established a barrier in the division sector, the Division Gas Officer later said, 1½ kilometers wide and 12 kilometers deep. Captain Joly may have exaggerated the extent of the barrier, but Seventh Army almost certainly fired large quantities of yellow cross across its rear as it withdrew to the line of the Vesle, just as it had following each withdrawal above the Marne.[53]

Both Captain Joly and 1st Lt. W.E. Otis, Regimental Gas Officer of the 128th Infantry, said that the gas shelling began, not on the night of 1 - 2 August but about 1600 on 2 August, and did not cease until 0800, 4 August. Lieutenant Otis estimated that during that period a total of

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52 Draft, Sum of Opns from 30 Jul to 4 Aug (32nd Div Box 10, 33.2); DOR, 32nd Div, 2 - 3 Aug.

53 The division and corps records of Seventh Army (AOK 7) examined for this study have considerable data on the gas defense of the Vesle, little or nothing on the gas defense above the Ourcq. It is assumed that there was a Seventh Army order corresponding to Ninth Army (von Eben) Order Ia 1249, 2 Aug, sub: Defense between the Oise and Aisne (quoted in G - 2 Memo, 28th Div, 3 Sep, 28th Div Box 3, 20.8): "Every opportunity to injure the enemy by the use of gas will be employed. Points past which traffic must pass will be constantly bombarded with yellow cross shell."

20,000 blue, green, and yellow cross gas shells[54] were fired into the area between Cierges and St. Gilles, with the heaviest concentrations on woods, ravines, and hillsides. Captain Joly made no estimate of the number of gas shells but agreed with Otis that the troops, after wearing their masks for from twenty minutes to an hour during each of the repeated bombardments, removed them as they could not see to advance in the dark. (Operation reports do not mention any night advances.) Both gas officers also agreed that "The gas area was evacuated by advancing" -- an unconvincing statement, since the gassed area was said to be 12 kilometers in depth.

Among the first reported casualties were 14 men in the 127th Infantry who were caught by two bursts of approximately 90 green cross shells on the night of 2 - 3 August. Almost 200 yellow and blue cross shells fell among elements of two battalions of the same regiment near Reddy Farm, resulting in 26 casualties. "As soon as the troops had advanced far enough to allow [these] units [in the rear] to evacuate forward, this precaution against further casualties was taken."[55]

The greatest number of casualties that night was in the 128th Infantry, spearheading the pursuit in the right sector. Almost 3,000 men, representing

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54 Diphenylchloroarsine, phosgene, and mustard gas, respectively, in 77-mm. and 105-mm. shells.

55 Rpt on Gas Attack dated 16 Aug; Rpt on Gas Attack dated 8 Aug. The hour and date of the latter attack, 2200-2300, 3 Aug, does not seem to fit the known sequence of events. Spencer, II, 324-25, 327 shows two attacks on the 127th Inf, each resulting in 14 casualties, and in the attack near Reddy Farm he reports 36, not 26 casualties.

all three battalions, were exposed to repeated bursts of gas shells while advancing towards St. Gilles. By the morning of 4 August a total of 349 officers and men were reported as gas casualties.[56] No reports of gas attack or of gas casualties in the 125th or 126th Infantry during this stage of the advance have been found.

The Advance to the Vesle, 3 August

With the 32nd Division approaching Dravegny, the 1st Guard and 113th Divisions in the "Ziethen" position evacuated it on schedule at 0100, 3 August, as the 4th Guard and 216th Divisions occupied the "Blücher" line, above the Vesle (See Map No. 4). Under corps orders issued four days earlier, all cellars in farms and villages below the Vesle were demolished and where this was not possible they were contaminated with yellow cross. Above the Vesle, the artillery of Corps Wichura waited, its principal mission "the destruction of enemy artillery ....Large scale yellow cross shoots are to be prepared [Gelbkreuzschiessen mit viel Munition sind vorzubereiten]."[57]

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56 Two Rpts of Gas Attack dated 16 Aug, another dated 17 Aug. See also Rpt of Gas Attack on 128th Inf for 30 Jul - 6 Aug, dated 9 Aug, which said that during the advance almost 40 per cent of all shells falling on the regiment were gas. Note: The total of 349 is not supported by hospital records but may nevertheless be reasonably accurate since hospital figures are believed incomplete. See Analysis, pp. 61 - 63.

57 4th Gd Div Order 1, Opns Sec 12816, 0945, 2 Aug (item 219 - 19, GFB 147); Corps Wichura Order Ia 1523, 31 Jul (in 216th Div WD2A, 26 Jul - 7 Aug, GFB 2.0, fol I, p. 28); Corps Wichura Arty Order 1540, 31 Jul (in 4th Gd Div In to WD, GFB 147, fol I, p. 99).

Resuming the pursuit on the morning of 3 August, the 32nd Division had covered seven kilometers when the main body of troops passed St. Gilles and the advance guard came to a halt before the high ground overlooking the valley of the Vesle, about one kilometer south of the river on the left and two kilometers south of Fismes on the right. Contact with the divisions on either side had been lost, and waiting for the 32nd on the hills was the German rear guard, protecting the withdrawal of the "Ziethen" defenders over the river.

Late that afternoon advanced troops of the 64th Brigade attempted to force a passage through to the Vesle but withered before the fire of the rear guards and the fierce machine gun fire and gas and HE put down on them from the enemy positions on the heights above the Vesle. The whole line was hastily withdrawn below Villesavoye-Champ Gaillard-Fontenoy des Roches to avoid further losses, but not before the commanders of the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, 128th Infantry, among others, had been severely gassed.[58] The line of the Vesle had been reached (Map No. 6).

Division G - 2 was to report that the 4th Guard Division, with orders to hold Fismes, had concentrated machine guns in the woods south of the town and still greater numbers above the Vesle, "planted so as to cover all approaches to the river and to enfilade the streets of the town of Fismes." The enemy's main line of resistance was organized on the plateau three kilometers north of the Vesle. Back of the plateau were ravines that

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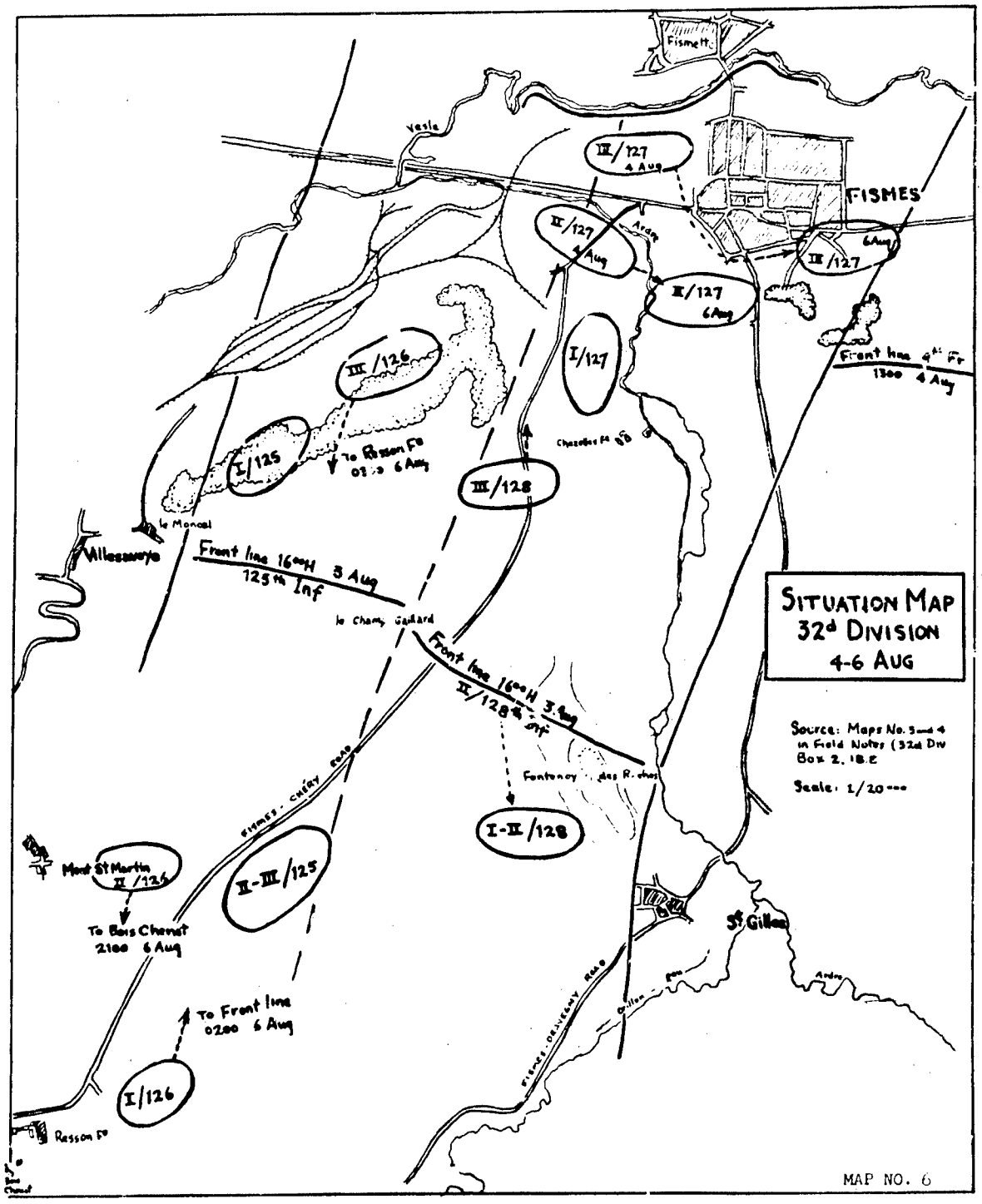
58 SOI 4 and 5, 2 - 4 Aug; DOR, 3 - 4 Aug; Garlock, Tales of the Thirty-Second, p. 142. Arko 4 WD, 3 Aug (GFB 147, fol II, p. 174, source j): "At 11 a.m....bursts [of HE] and yellow cross on Chery and Fismes - Chery road. For the night massive harassing fire with yellow cross is ordered."


SITUATION MAP
32d DIVISION
4-6 AUG
Source: Maps No. 3 and 4 in Field Notes (32d Div Box 2, 18.E
Scale: 1/20---
FISMES
Vesle
Ardre
Fismette
IV/127
4 Aug
II/127
6 Aug
I/127
III/126
I/125
To Resson Fe
0230 6 Aug
III/128
le Monoel
Allesanrye
Front line 16th H 3 Aug
125th Inf
le Chamy Gaillard
Front line 16th H 3 Aug
II/128th Inf
Fontenoy
Fismes - Chery Road
I-II/128
Mont St Martin
II/126
To Bois Chenet
2100 6 Aug
II-III/125
To Front line
0200 6 Aug
I/126
Resson Fe
St Gilles
Fismes - Dormeny Road
Front line 4th Fr
1300 4 Aug

MAP NO. 6

abounded in great caves providing concealment and shelter against artillery fire for support and counterattack forces. Despite this organization, said G - 2, it was probably not the intention of the enemy to hold his present line permanently. The Aisne, his jump-off line in the 27 May offensive, was probably his eventual destination.

At Fismes the river was about 35 feet wide and 6 feet deep. It had been filled with tangled barbed wire, and all but a few temporary foot bridges had been destroyed. For some distance on either side of the Vesle the ground was marshy and lightly wooded, and completely under enemy observation.[59] It was an almost invincible barrier before which the 32nd Division, and Sixth French Army, stood on the night of 3 August.

Sometime on 3 August Corps Wichura issued its artillery plans for the defense of its portion of the barrier (see Map No. 4):

The enemy artillery concentration and advance against the Blücher Stellung is expected to take place in the Ardre valley and the draw [northeast of Crugny]. To disrupt this artillery concentration and also to paralyze already recognized enemy batteries, a yellow cross shoot by all batteries of the corps is in preparation. The artillery commander of the 29th Division is charged with the preparation and execution of this shoot... in liaison with the artillery commanders of the 4th Guard and 216th Divisions....

The shoot is to be laid out in such a manner that the Ardre valley from St. Gilles to Crugny and the...draws up to Serzy et Prin-Vandeuil road can be kept under gas. If it is not possible with the batteries and yellow cross ammunition now on hand to cover all the mentioned areas

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59 SOI 5 and 6, 3 - 5 Aug; G - 2 Rpt, 0230, 6 Aug, sub: Information About the Enemy on the Front of this Corps (32nd Div Box 2, 22.21). On 7 Aug, the 28th Div Jnl of Opns (28th Div Box 6, 32.3), said that as a result of the rains the river was then almost 50 feet wide. Cf. G - 2, III Corps study, Data Regarding River Vesle Between...Bazoches...and Magneux, 24 Aug (III Corps Box 28, 33.1).

with the necessary concentration of gas; concentrated fire in addition to the shoot is requested on known enemy batteries, approach routes and probable enemy positions...north exits of St. Gilles and Courville and both bridges north of the village, both crossroads on the north edge of Crugny and... probable battery areas in the draw and wood [north of Courville and northeast of Crugny].[60]

The missions of 4th Guard Division artillery for the night of 3 - 4 August included concentrated gas bursts on four areas in the Ardre valley between Fismes and Courville from 2330 to 0315 hours. Eight batteries of field artillery were to fire 130 yellow cross rounds each in two bursts, while six batteries of the light field howitzers fired 50 yellow cross rounds each in two concentrations -- a total of 2,680 rounds.[61]

On the morning of 4 August, the 4th Guard Division reported that it had made contact the previous day with enemy forces near Chezelles Farm and Villesavoye. For that reason, in addition to its howitzer fire with yellow cross on the Ardre valley as ordered, between 2150 and 0400 hours it had put bursts of yellow cross on the woods southeast of Villesavoye, the woods west of St. Gilles, St. Gilles itself, and Mont St. Martin.[62] Its scheduled field artillery missions were apparently carried out by the 216th Division which reported firing yellow cross bursts between

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60 Corps Wichura Arty Order 171, 3 Aug (in 4th Gd Div Annexes to WD, GFB 147, fol I, p. 163).

61 Arko 4 Arty Order 2, 3 Aug (ibid., p. 165).

62 Morning rpt, 4th Gd to Wichura, 4 Aug (Corps Wichura WD&A, GFB 120, fol I, pt 1, p. 163).

St. Gilles and Courville, south of Bonne Maison Farm, above Courville, the ravine northeast of St. Gilles, and the wood running south into the Ardre bottom (Map No. 7).[63] The total number of yellow cross shells actually fired by the two units was not given but was probably in excess of the 2,680 scheduled for the 4th Guard artillery.

Of the yellow cross fire that night, there is not a word in 32nd Division or Division Gas Officer records, unless reports of gas fire during the day of 4 August refer to enemy HE fire on areas contaminated during the previous night, so that the effect was that of mixed HE and gas fire. German records show all gas missions to have been fired between dark and dawn, and it was unquestionably this fire that was responsible for the admission to 32nd Division field hospitals of more than 300 gas casualties on 4 and 5 August.[64]

The Taking of Fismes

On the night of 3 August, corps ordered the 32nd Division to push forward the next day to the Vesle and organize means for crossing the stream. If there were no bridges or boats available, nearby buildings were to be demolished to provide crossing material. Advance guards were to get over the Vesle during the night of 4 August and establish bridgeheads to cover

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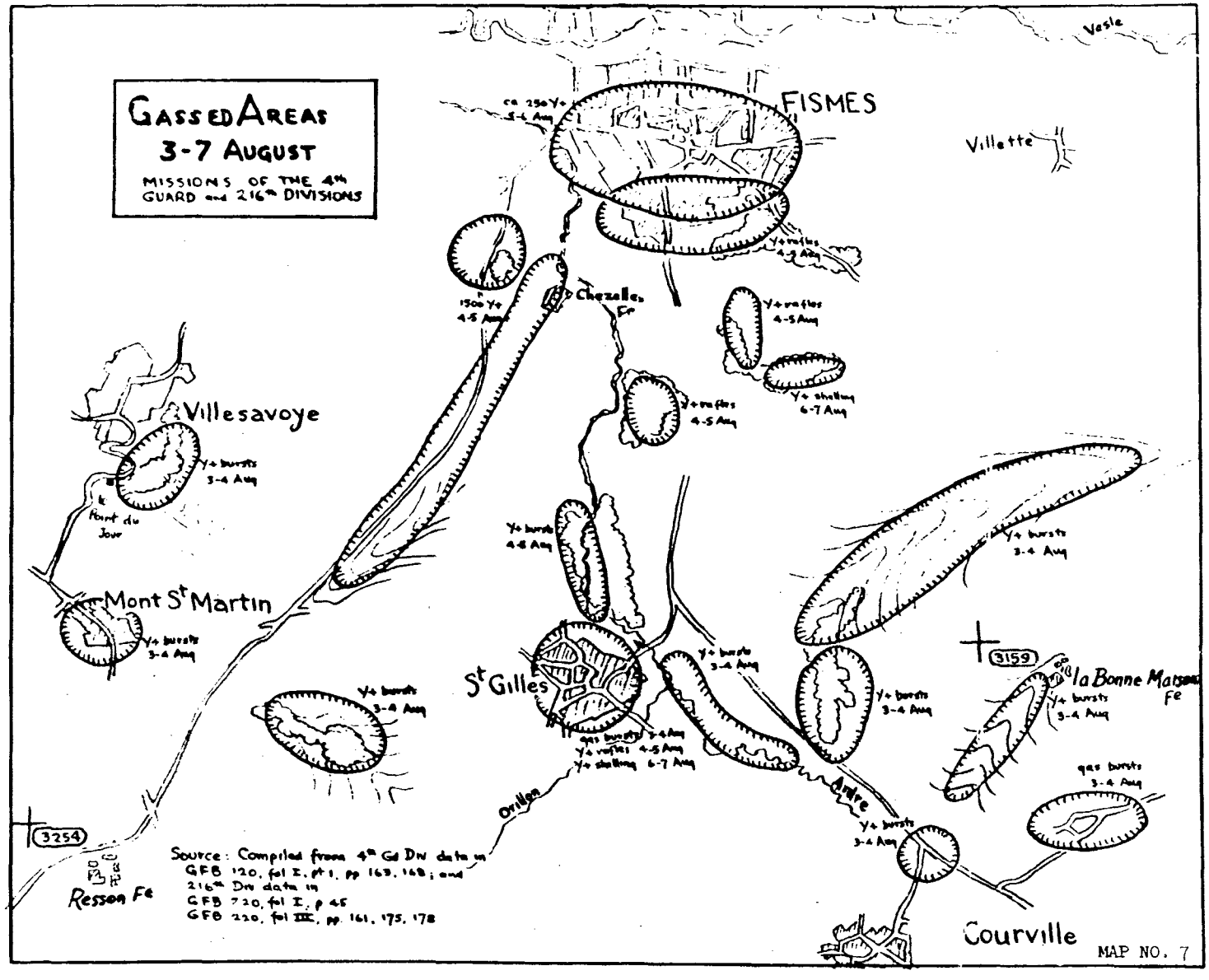
63 54th FA Regt WD, 4 Aug (216th Div WD&A GFB 220,fol III,p.175); Arko 216 WD, 4 Aug (ibid., p.161).

NOTE: Map No. 7 is a composite of gas missions reported by the German units in the Fismes sector.

64 Analysis, p. 63.


GASSED AREAS
3-7 AUGUST
MISSIONS OF THE 4th GUARD and 216th DIVISIONS
FISMES
Vesle
Villette
Chezelles Fe
Villesavoye
Mont St Martin
St Gilles
la Bonne Maison Fe
Courville
Resson Fe
Ardre
Orillon
3254
3159
Source: Compiled from 4th Gd Div data in
GFB 120, fol I, pt 1, pp 163, 168; and
216th Div data in
GFB 720, fol I, p 45
GFB 220, fol III, pp 161, 175, 178
MAP NO. 7

the crossing of the main body. The 28th Division, in corps reserve, was to be ready to pass through the 32nd as soon as a bridgehead was secured, and then advance to a line through Hill 182, on the Fismes-Merval road.[65]

The morning of 4 August was spent resting and reorganizing the troops after their two days of pursuit and waiting for the artillery to come into position in Fond de Mezieres, the valley south of Resson Farm (see Maps No. 3 and 4).[66] Following a personal reconnaissance above Mont St. Martin, General Haan looked with optimism on the coming operation. "It is my opinion that we can throw bridges across the river tonight and cross a force over without much difficulty." [67]

By afternoon the reserves were up, the lines had been formed again, and the machine guns had been "split up among the attacking companies, a mistake, but what superior from top to bottom would listen to a machine gunner in those days. The sections of machine guns went off to their various positions and thereafter were mainly on their own." [68]

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65 Gen Order of Ops 180, XXXVIII Corps, 2040, 3 Aug (32nd Div Box 9, 32.7); FO 32, 32nd Div, 0345, 4 Aug; G - 3 Memo, 32nd Div, 1825, 3 Aug (32nd Div Box 4, 32.15).

66 In the 114-page "History of the 57th FA Brig," p. 35 (32nd Div Box 24, 11.4), the brigade reports that between 1 - 7 Aug it fired 39,525 75-mm. and 3,619 155-mm. rounds, none of it gas shell.

67 Memo for CofS, 4 Aug (32nd Div Box 7, 32.4, and USA in the WW, V, 655).

68 Garlock, Tales of the Thirty-Second, pp. 149, 215.

At 1500 the two regiments of the 63rd Brigade advanced against the railroad yards south of the river. On the right, Colonel Langdon's 127th Infantry moved out of St. Gilles, relieved the 128th Infantry above the town, and continued on to Fismes. "Shells, gas and bullets thinned the advancing lines" as they approached the stone wall at Chezelles Farm and the nearby mill, both "blazing with machine guns." [69]

The 63rd Brigade cleared the German rear guard elements from the rail yards west of Fismes and got several patrols across the river during the night but could not maintain them there. "The river valley [occupied by the 126th Infantry] was an ideal place to retain gas and the day was favorable to the use of mustard gas. The position was deluged with high explosives and gas shells." After two hours, when the fire abated, the most exposed company was withdrawn as the remaining units dug in along the embankment.[70]

On the right, the 127th Infantry advancing on Fismes "was badly cut up, [but] late in the day Colonel Langdon organized a provisional battalion out of what was left of his regiment and sent this force forward to storm the town." Parts of several companies finally succeeded about nightfall in passing through the town and established a position on the south bank of the river. There the 3rd Battalion commander "numbered his troops and found 89 men and two officers." The 2nd Battalion "had a few more but the eight companies could not muster 250 men." According to Colonel Langdon,

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69 Garlock, p. 151.

70 Garlock, pp. 154 - 55.

there were less than 500 effectives left in the whole regiment. There was no thought of forcing a crossing. As General Haan said, "Machine gun fire and gas shells caused casualties to such an extent that the attempt [to cross] was abandoned."[71]

Haan had heard from his Division Surgeon that the 125th, 127th and 128th Infantry had taken almost 800 casualties in the past 24 hours and were close to exhaustion. "They will not stand much more." [72] Though the Division Surgeon did not say so, probably a third of these casualties were gas cases.

The 4th Guard Division order reporting the loss of Fismes said the town would not be retaken, but beginning at 0300, 5 August, the southern part of Fismes would be shelled by waves of HE and yellow cross fire.[73] This mission was revised when Corps Wichura, perhaps apprised of the condition of the 32nd, ordered Fismes retaken. A day later plans for the counterattack were abandoned when the pioneers reported the river so

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71 History, p. 67; Garlock, pp. 168, 171; Rpt, Sum of Opns, 30 Jul to 4 Aug, 4 Aug (32nd Div Box 10, 33.2). Diary of Action of 127th Inf (32nd Div Box 21,33.6) said that at 1700, 4 Aug, two battalions encircled the town, the third battalion was in support SW of Fismes.

72 Memo, Div Surg [for CG, 32nd Div], 1800, 4 Aug, sub: Casualties (32nd Div Box 1, 12.3).

73 4th Gd Div Order 2, Ia 12854, 11:15 PM, 4 Aug (GFB 147, fol I, p. 181).

swollen by recent rains as to make the undertaking hazardous.[74]

The 4th Guard artillery order for the night of 4 - 5 August allotted its close support group 1,500 rounds of yellow cross and 1,000 HE and its long-range group of 10-cm. cannons 100 rounds of yellow cross and 900 HE, to be put on woods, [illegible]s, crossroads, ridges and road forks across its front. New corps orders that same night directed that additional "yellow cross shoots be prepared [to cover] the valleys from the southern part of Fismes as far as Chezelles." The actual targets gassed, 4th Guard reported the next morning, were the roads leading south of Fismes, the woods and draws south and southwest of Fismes, and the village of St. Gilles.[75]

So far as the 32nd was concerned, enemy batteries began pounding the valleys of the Vesle and Ardre with gas and HE on the late afternoon of the 4th and did not cease until the division withdrew from the sector on the

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See 4th Gd Div orders and rpts, 4, 5, and 6 August, in GFB, fol I, items 162, 139, 100 - 101. (German records are often in reverse chronological order.) See USA in the WW, VI, 206, for possibility that the Germans also dammed the stream to make it impassable.

On 23 Aug, the 29th Div received orders to begin the systematic destruction of Fismes by HE (29th Div WD, 23 Aug, GFB 182, fol I).

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Arko 4 Order, 2330, 4 Aug (GFB 147, fol I, p. 176); Corps Order Ia 190 to 4th Gd, 216th and 29th Divs, 2350, 4 Aug (ibid., p. 185); Morning rpt, 4th Gd to Wichura, (Corps Wichura WD&A, GFB 120, fol I, pt 1, p. 168).

morning of 7 August. According to available Division Gas Officer reports there were no specific attacks; the mixed fire simply continued on and on.

The 2nd Battalion, 126th Infantry, claimed that it was "shelled for seven days, July 29 - August 5, a number of gas shells falling each day but no casualties until the night of August 4 - 5." The battalion was above Mont St. Martin that night when a concentration of 40 yellow cross shells mixed with HE fell in its midst. No wounded were reported but 30 men were evacuated with burns. Three men of the 120th MG Battalion nearby were also evacuated. The 3rd Battalion, 126th Infantry, northeast of Villesavoye, reported an intense bombardment of HE, mustard gas, and phosgene, in the proportion of twenty HE to one gas shell, so that the gas was not readily detectable. Masks were put on only when gas was smelled and worn for ten or fifteen minutes at a time. The next morning 26 men were evacuated, all slightly affected by gas.[76]

Hardest hit was the 127th Infantry in and around Fismes. An estimated 250 mustard gas and phosgene shells mixed with HE fell on troops below the village and resulted in 59 gas casualties. Elsewhere in the

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76 Two Rpts on Gas Attack dated 11 Aug, another dated 9 Aug.

Fismes area a concentration of almost 300 150-mm. gas shells were said to have landed in the vicinity of 600 men of the 127th, resulting in 18 casualties, most of them receiving skin burns. Another 48 men of the same regiment, reportedly at the regimental PC at Villardelle Farm, were gassed during an HE bombardment that included approximately 400 blue and green cross-2 shells,[77] and 23 men between Reddy Farm and Cohan were evacuated after almost 300 mustard and phosgene shells fell in that area.[78] Altogether, 148 officers and men in the 127th Infantry and 59 in other units were reported gassed during the night of 4 - 5 August.

There is little doubt that the frequent gas alarms and the almost constant gassing of the division from the Ourcq to the Vesle had necessitated frequent and sometimes prolonged wearing of the gas mask. Those who came in contact with mustard gas or found their masks intolerable sooner or later had to be evacuated. Gas mask fatigue and combat fatigue steadily sapped the strength of those who remained.

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77 Green cross -2 shells contained phosgene, diphosgene, and diphenylchloroarsine. Blue cross shells contained diphenylchloroarsine.

78 Four Rpts of Gas Attack dated 9, 11, and 16 August. Details in some of these reports are questionable. German data indicate no gassing below Cohan, though residual mustard gas may still have been present. As for 600 men in the 127th Inf, see Msg, CO 127th Inf to CG 64th Brig, 1450, 5 Aug (32nd Div Box 5, 32.16), reporting effective strength of the regiment "about 360 men."

III Corps Takes Over

On 4 and 5 August the recently activated III American Corps, under Maj. Gen. Robert L. Bullard, relieved the XXXVIII French Corps and then the III French Corps in the narrowing sector. Bullard's troops included the 32nd Division, its main body then said to be in the vicinity of Fond de Mezieres; the 28th Division, in reserve east and west of Dravegny; the 6th Brigade, 3rd Division, near Petite Chezelles Farm, with the 4th French Division (soon to be relieved by the 164th French) in support of the 3rd Division, east and west of Courville. The 5th Brigade, 3rd Division, was south of the Marne, resting in reserve.[79]

On the left of III Corps was Liggett's I Corps, which relieved the II French Corps that day, 5 August. Its 4th Division, with the 42nd Division in reserve, occupied the entire corps front, like III Corps, almost two miles wide.[80]

Assured by Army and III Corps on the night of 4 August that the enemy did not intend "to offer serious resistance between the Vesle and Aisne," the 32nd Division again ordered advanced guards of its two brigades to cross and seize the plateau north of the river, and then keep close contact with the enemy and continue on to the Aisne, nine kilometers above Fismes.[81]

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79 GO 3675, Sixth Fr Army, 2 Aug (USA in the WW, V, 389); FO 2 and 3, III Corps, 3, 4 Aug (III Corps Box 19, 32.1); Lt Col F.W. Clark's G - 3 Jnl, III Corps, 4 - 6 Aug (III Corps Box 28, 33.0).

80 GO 3687, Sixth Fr Army, 20 h., 3 Aug (USA in the WW, V, 329, 473); cf. Rpt of Opns, I Corps, 4 Jul - 14 Aug, n.d. (ibid., 479-487).

81 FO 4, III Corps, 2245, 4 Aug; FO 33, 32nd Div, 0200, 5 Aug.

On 5 August the 127th Infantry reportedly mopped up the west half of Fismes as the 164th French Division, on the right, occupied the villages of Villette and Magneux.[82] The 127th found, as did the other regiments along the river, that it was impossible because of the hostile fire to bring up bridge-building material. Attempts to cross "on poles and boards" also failed. Almost continuous gas and HE fire fell on the troops along the Vesle and in the valley west of Fismes, while farther back "mustard gas shells were also thrown into [the woods west of Resson Farm], causing a few casualties," and towns as distant as Dravegny, Cohan, and Coulanges were kept under bombardment by long-range 15-cm. guns.[83]

The efforts to cross the Vesle that day cost the division 758 officers and men, the Division Surgeon reported, not counting a "considerable number... being passed through dressing stations of other organizations....Considerable number of gas cases [are reported], mustard gas [being] much more common during the past few days [than] during previous days of the engagement."[84]

The use of mustard gas increased as the German corps carried out new orders of Seventh Army issued on 5 August for the defense of the line of the Vesle:

The groups [i.e., the corps]...will prepare yellow cross contamination shoots against villages, dugouts, woods and defiles occupied by the enemy on their sector fronts....Ammunition will be brought forward in the next few days.

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82 SOI 2, III Corps, 4 - 5 Aug (III Corps Box 7, 20.1).

83 SOI 7, 32nd Div, 5 - 6 Aug; DOR, 4 - 5 and 5 - 6 Aug.

84 Memo, Div Surg for CG 32nd Div, 1800, 5 Aug (32nd Div Box 1, 12.3).

Groups will report their requirements as soon as possible. A certain shortage of yellow cross for the field guns must be figured on.

The contamination shoots against...known occupied targets can, in deviation from...IIb of directive, "Use of Gas by the Artillery," 1.12.17, be carried out by exchanging the gas concentration burst in the firing method for the cloud shoot. For purposes of screening [i.e.,concealing the use of yellow cross],[such shoots] should be initiated with blue cross and HE,or if necessary, HE fire; it is also recommended that yellow cross shoots follow immediately after cloud shoots with Buntkreuz [blue and green cross mixtures].

In order to prevent a withdrawal of the enemy [from contaminated areas] when the large yellow cross gasshoots take place, village exits, roads and traffic points windward and especially in the rear or the gassed areas will be ringed with concentrated fire. The contamination shoots will, whenever possible, be repeated at irregular intervals on the succeeding days.

In regard to the weather, it should be noted that strong gusts of wind quickly dissipate the ever-present slight cloud gas effect of yellow cross and that heavy rain makes the contaminating part of the chemical harmless and [washes it away].

The yellow cross-HE ammunition [die Gelbkreuz-Brisanz-Munition] now available to the groups can be drawn on if necessary for the screening of contamination shoots, although it is better suited for use on infantry targets (trenches, assembly areas, reserves,etc.) where wind direction and distance from our own outposts permits its use.[85]

The only German record of gas fire on the night of 5 - 6 August is the 216th Division report that it supported the fire missions of 4th Guard from 2200 to 0100 "by the delivery of one round of yellow cross per battery every twenty minutes on Fismes.[86]

That same night of 5 - 6 August, 500 replacements arrived to fill gaps in both brigades of the 32nd Division, and the 3rd Battalion, 128th Infantry,

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85 AOK 7 Order Ia 5905/18 to Etzel, Schoeler, Wichura, 5 Aug, sub: Contamination Shoots (in Corps Schoeler Annexes, GFB 119, fol III, p.17).

86 54th FA Regt (216th Div) WD, 6 Aug (GFB 220, fol III, p. 178).

"the only strong battalion left in the 64th Brigade," was ordered up to reenforce the 127th in Fismes. Not support but relief was necessary the next morning as the battalion entered Fismes. The 3rd Battalion spent all day clearing snipers out of the town, and not until nightfall "could anything like control of the city" be claimed.[87] The control was only temporary.

The regimental aid station at Longville Farm reported handling 529 gassed and wounded on 5 and 6 August, many of them from regiments other than the 127th, "since it was near the main road and the wounded drifted into it." The Division Gas Officer was to report only 33 gas cases those two days and another 23 on the morning of 7 August, although hospital records show 308 wounded and 358 gassed in the 32nd Division alone on 5 - 6 August, and 39 additional gas cases received on 7 August.[88]

By now, said Colonel Garlock, "the front line was convinced the Germans were making a stand at the river line but it took more than a week before the belief was shared by their superiors in the rear."[89] Sixth Army, through

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87 History, p. 67; Diary of Action of 127th Inf.

DOR, 32nd Div, 5 - 6 Aug, reported the arrival of the replacements; Msg, CG 63rd Brig to CG 32nd Div, 1430, 8 Aug (32nd Div Box 17, 12.3), said that many of them arrived without gas masks and all of them without ammunition in their belts.

88 Ltr, Surg 127th Inf to Ch Surg 32nd Div, 14 Aug, sub: Rpt of action and casualties (Med Dept Box 3682, fol 14); Spencer, II, 334-36; Analysis, p. 63.

89 Garlock, p. 164. Cf. ACK 7 Order, recd 5:25 p.m., 7 Aug (USA in the WW, VI, 211 - 12).

corps, ordered the attack continued, but on the night of 6 August General Haan had to report that his division was used up. Almost immobilized since the morning of 3 August, the division had taken "heavy casualties without accomplishing anything." Upon inquiry, Haan told Bullard that his troops were now "too exhausted and too depleted for any further attempt across the river."

Our men are tired and we estimate that our losses for the last 24 hours amount to 1,000. A good many of these were incurred in our attempts to cross the river. The proportion of dead and mortally wounded is not high. We are proud that here we have not had one death from gas nor even one very serious case, although the enemy has been using mustard gas on us constantly. The lines are now so close, with the Germans in Fismette and our men in Fismes, that...we are almost under conditions of trench warfare -- in range of grenades.[90]

Bullard ordered the division relieved.

That same night Petain's headquarters signalled the end of the Aisne-Marne operation: "Until further orders no final action will be undertaken north of the Vesle." The bridgeheads north of the Vesle, said Petain, were to be "preserved, widened, and reinforced," simultaneously with the "intensive study and preparation for a decisive blow" to drive the enemy above the Aisne.[91] Through corps, Sixth Army ordered the 28th Division to relieve the

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90 DOR, 32nd Div, 6 - 7 Aug; Msg, Haan to CG III Corps, 1000, 6 Aug (32nd Div Box 4, 32.15); Record of Events, 32nd Div, 6 Aug (32nd Div Box 1, 11.5); Haan, Rpt on Opns of 32nd Div, Jul 29 - 7 Aug (32nd Div Box 10, 33.0).

91 USA in the WW, V, 274; VI, 5 - 6.

32nd on the morning of 7 August and at once prepare to cross the Vesle and establish additional bridgeheads.[92] This it did, but they were not to be widened or preserved.

During the night of the relief, the 216th Division had orders to contaminate St. Gilles and the woods southeast of Fismes, while the 29th Division put mixed HE and yellow cross bursts on trenches and dugouts, field kitchens, trains, and column routes across the river.[93] In no condition to report on the gas fire that night, the 32nd Division, as it withdrew its troops from Fismes, could only say that the town was still filled with enem patrols and would probably continue to be "fair game for both sides for several weeks."[94]

"Pitiful," said the division history, "were some of the handfuls which company commanders mustered" as the 32nd made its way down to the bivouac area below Dravegny. Counting the cost of the 19-kilometer advance that week, the Division Surgeon reported that his dressing stations and field hospitals had handled and evacuated a total of 3,007 men, mostly wound, gas

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92 FO 10, III Corps, 6 Aug. Cf. USA in the WW, V, 395 and Instructions 3723, Sixth Fr Army, 7 Aug (ibid., V, 398). See also VI, 62 - 63, 72.

93 216th Div Order Ia 1682, 1545, 6 Aug (GFB 220, fol I, p. 45); 9th FA Regt (29th Div) WD, 7 Aug (GFB 182). Though 4th Gd Div directed the nightly gas missions of the corps, no record of its own fire that night has been found.

94 FO 8, III Corps, 6 Aug; SOI 8. 32nd Div, 6 - 7 Aug; History, p. 67.

and severe shell shock cases. This number did not include those "handled by other organizations on the right and left of us...[those] evacuated by other means than by ambulance and through the hospitals...[or those] who have straggled and gotten...to hospitals further back." Altogether, he estimated no less than 4,000 casualties, with at least 500 killed, during the operation.[95]

Corps was to report between 40 and 50 casualties a day in the 32nd Division during the several weeks it rested in corps reserve. Most were long-range HE casualties, with gas casualties confined to the artillery in the Fond de Mezières. At night, says Colonel Garlock of that period after the 32nd was relieved on the Vesle, the big guns rumbled and enemy planes came over dropping bombs and flares. "When sleep was sweetest, some crazy gas guard up around St. Gilles would smell something and yell 'Gas!' and shoot off his rifle. Overtrained gas guards at Dravegny, Cohan, Coulanges, Chamery, le Moncel, Reddy Farm and all the string of towns from Fismes to Chateau Thierry would repeat the yell of 'Gas!' and emphasize it with a rifle shot... Of course there was no gas and never would be under such conditions." [96]

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95 History, p. 71; Memo, Div Surg, noon, 7 Aug (32nd Div Box 1, 12.3). The 127th Inf reportedly lost 55 officers and 1,390 men in the campaign (Ltr, CO 127th Inf to CG 64th Brig, 7 Aug, sub: Rpt of Casualties since 28 Jul, in 32nd Div Box 20, 12.3). Cf. Msg, Ch Observer 125th Inf to CG 32nd Div, 0815, 6 Aug, which reported the CO 127th Inf as saying he had but 300 effectives left in his regiment, none of whom had had a meal since 3 Aug. Rpt, CG 63rd Brig to CG 32nd Div, 1300, 6 Aug (32nd Div Box 7, 32.4), said the bn strength of the 125th was about 325, that of the 126th about 450.

96 Garlock, pp. 192 - 93.

It is true that little gas was fired below Fond de Mezieres. But it is questionable whether the gas guards were overtrained. That they and the rest of the troops of the 32nd were overly gasconscious is more certain.

ANALYSIS

A Problem in Control

Exhausted, its units mixed up, and its troops scattered from Cierges to Fismes, the 32nd Division on the morning of 7 August headed back the way it had come, collecting stragglers and discarded equipment as it went. The problem of control in the huge, unwieldy American divisions was aggravated in the case of the 32nd by the fact that this had been its first campaign and its first experience in open warfare. Furthermore, as General Haan said corps had insisted on both brigades in the line, and the sector was too narrow to permit any maneuvering.[97] As a result, men and material were strewn the length of the sector.

A salvage problem was to be expected after an advance in two days of more than twelve kilometers. Salvage details were organized as the withdrawal began and ordered to range across the sector and clear the battlefield of "abandoned packs and other articles of equipment." "From the amount of salvage left on the field, it appears that the men threw away

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97 Haan, Rpt on Opns of 32nd Div, 29 Jul - 7 Aug, Second Battle of the Marne, 24 Aug (32nd Div Box 11, 33.1). Cf. Garlock, p. 116, on the lack of coordination in battle.

a great deal of equipment, also food. This was undoubtedly due to the rapid advance of the troops and to the excitement incident to battle."[98] In a sense, the same reasons accounted for the excessive straggling.

G - 1 reported that after 31 July the system of straggler posts broke down completely and from then on "a great many stragglers were left behind." The Provost Marshal said there were "manyhundreds" of them, but it is likely that they ran into the thousands.[99] The problem was great enough to necessitate a direction in the division order for the relief that "Immediate steps will be taken to collect all men now with rear echelons and who belong to organizations in the forward lines." [100]

Control of casualties and casualty reporting, as the next section will show, seems to have failed as completely as other forms of liaison. Repeatedly during the campaign the Division Surgeon had to qualify his count of casualties with bare guesses at the numbers of wounded and gassed being

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Annex 11, Rpt of ACofS G - 1, Haan rpt, above.

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The messages of the 127th Inf commander, that on 5 and 6 Aug his regimental effectives amounted to no more than 300-350, while his final report showed a total of 1,445 casualties in the campaign (narrative, footnotes on pp.45, 52) would indicate either a breakdown in liaison or a high percentage of stragglers.

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G - 1 Order 17, 32nd Div, 6 Aug (32nd Div Box 1, 10.3); FO 34, 32nd Div, 1900, 6 Aug; Ltr, Asst PM 32nd Div to CG 32nd Div, 8 Aug, sub: Rpt & Recommendations (32nd Div Box 2, 15.1). See also Conver, CG III Corps with CG 28th Div, CG 55th Brig, CG 56th Brig, 6 Aug (28th Div Box 4, 32.13), that 32nd Div stragglers were not to be fed but arrested, and NCOs were to collect them and use them for carrying parties.

cared for by other organizations. In the preparation of data for this report, 32nd Division casualties were found in every American field hospital in the sector -- seventeen in all -- and it is evident from final reports of casualties that almost as many more, of which no record is available, must have found their way into French hospitals in the area and back at Chateau Thierry.

It seems more than likely that the advance of a novice division over more than twelve kilometers of gas-contaminated terrain, as the Division Gas Officer described it, must have occasioned instances of gas panic or at least gas mask fatigue. As frightening, certainly, as the seemingly endless nests of enemy machine guns during that advance, must have been the constant encounter with mustard gas. It is even more probable that at the Vesle, where the troops were pinned by machine gun fire under constant gas shelling, there were occasions for panic. The 28th Division was later to admit to considerable gas hysteria, but not the 32nd.

Some proportion of the stragglers unquestionably sought escape from the gas as well as the machine gun fire, although no evidence of either has been found to support the conjecture. Nor is it possible to say how many gas masks were found in the great amount of salvage collected from the battlefield. Gas officer records and correspondence for the period are conspicuously missing from the archive records of the division.

There is evidence that the division was not aware of the extent of its gas experience and, as will be shown, may never have learned even the approximate numbers of its gas casualties. The 24 after-action gas attack reports of the DGO that are available are so fragmentary and garbled as to be largely suspect. In a postwar report to the Chief of the Chemical Warfare Service

of artillery gas attacks against the division in the Aisne-Marne campaign, the then Acting DGO listed 61 separate attacks between 30 July and 13 August, involving a total of 4,034 gas shells, approximately half of them yellow cross. No casualties were given. His sources for the attacks, he said were the daily Summaries of Intelligence and the reports of the regimental and battalion gas officers, and since these were incomplete his data were "probably not accurate."[101]

Gas and Gunshot Casualties in the 32nd Division

Anything like precise data on the gas and wound casualties of the 32nd Division are difficult to determine, partly because sometime prior to the operation the Statistical Section notified division units that they were to classify "all cases of shell shock and gas as SLIGHTLY WOUNDED or SERIOUSLY WOUNDED." [102] More importantly, at the end of the operation the Division Surgeon had to confess that only about 40 percent of the division casualties had been treated at the division field hospitals. The remaining 60 percent had "passed through direct to hospital trains or evacuation hospitals or

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101 Ltr, Capt J.R. Finn to CGO Third Army, 18 Feb 1919, sub: Rpt of Arty Gas Attacks, and Rpt, n.d., sub: Gas Training, 32nd Div (both in GAF - 32nd Div).

102 Memo, Stat Sec, 32nd Div, n.d., sub: In Reporting Casualties (32nd Div Box 1, 10.1).

were handled by field hospitals of other divisions."[103] The records indicate a still higher percentage.

It would appear that the collapse of the straggler post system in the division sector was only exceeded by the breakdown of the casualty collecting and recording system, and weeks were required to arrive at a total of probable casualties.[104] Late on 2 August, for example, the Division Surgeon estimated a total of 1,501 casualties handled since the beginning of the campaign, including approximately 150 gas cases. Available hospital lists indicate a minimum of 284 gas casualties through 2 August.[105]

As the division withdrew from the river front on 7 August, the Division Surgeon reported a total of 3,007 gas wound, and shell shock cases since the beginning of the operation. The next day this total was corrected to 3,270, and on 9 August total casualties were estimated at 4,463, as

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103 Hist of Med Dept, 32nd Div, p. 4 (Med Dept Box 3682, fol 1). No tabulation of casualties appears in this history, but in an appended Med Hist of the 32nd Div is a table showing 1,923 casualties (including 618 gas cases) which is crossed out and another table written in showing 3,493 casualties (gas cases not distinguished).

104 Numerous copies of a 32nd Division chart, "Method of Reporting Casualties in the Soissons Battle" (RG 120, 32nd Div, Cartographic Div, NA), suggest an effort to remedy this failure.

105 DOR, 32nd Div, 2 - 3 Aug; Tables, p. 58, 63.

follows:[106]

TABLE NO. 1

DIVISION SURGEON SUMMARY OF CASUALTIES

	Officers		Men		
	Killed	W and M	Killed	W and M	
125th Infantry	13	30	193	896	
126th Infantry	7	6	83	776	
120th MG Bn	3	2	9	83	
127th Infantry	8	46	150	1232	
128th Infantry	4	21	54	677	
121st MG Bn	0	1	0	84	
57th FA Brigade	0	0	5	35	
Other	0	5	0	40	
	35	111	494	3823	= 4,463

On 16 August, corps reported that "certified casualties of the 32nd Division" between 30 July and 15 August totaled 4,615:

572 officers and men killed
74 died of wounds
851 seriously wounded
2,032 slightly wounded
779 with undetermined wounds
307 missing

Corps operations reports were to show that the 32nd suffered between 40 and 50 casualties daily while in corps reserve, 7 - 23 August. For the period 15 - 23 August there were 349 casualties, which added to the earlier "certified" total made a final total of 4,964 casualties.[107]

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106 DOR, 32nd Div, 6 - 7, 7 - 8, 8 - 9 Aug.

107 DOR 9, III Corps, 15 - 16 Aug (III Corps Box 28, 33.1). Also DOR 10 - 16, III Corps, 15 - 23 Aug.

On 24 August in a reduction of the "certified" total, General Haan's final report on the campaign showed a total of 4,701 battle casualties:[108]

26 officers,	559 men	killed
1[illegible] officers,	72 men	died of wounds
46 officers,	974 men	severely wounded
65 officers,	2,536 men	slightly wounded
16 officers,	188 men	with undetermined wounds
2 officers,	206 men	missing

Whether the 349 casualties between 15 - 23 August are included in these figures is not indicated.

These corps and division final totals are further diminished in the Battle Monuments Commission study of the 32nd Division which reports more or less officially that 636 officers and men were killed in the Aisne-Marne operation, 173 died of wounds and 2,989 were wounded -- a total of 3,798 battle casualties exclusive of the missing or captured.[109] Thus final totals of casualties fluctuate between 3,798 and 4,964 with the median 4,381.

Final estimates in Medical Department records of the gas casualties suffered during the campaign range between 369 and 618.[110] The Monthly Gas Casualty Reports of the DGO show 38 gas cases during the last three days of July and 263 in the first eight days of August, or a total of 301 gas

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108 Rpt on opns, 24 Aug, p.14 (32nd Div Box 11, 33.6). The 32nd Division in the World War, pp. 125, 296, 71, has totals (killed, wounded, missing) of 3,527, 4,138, and 4,187. Shipley Thomas, The History of the A.E.F. (New York, 1920), p. 182, reports 3,547 casualties.

109 32nd Div Sum of Opns (Washington, 1943), p. 22

110 The total of 369 appears in a chart of casualties for the period 29 Jul - 22 Aug (Med Dept Box 3682, fol 9). A postwar Med Dept rpt to G - 3, 32nd Div, n.d. (Med Dept Box 3686 - Casus), shows 19 officers, 570 men gassed from 29 Jul - 7 Aug and 2 officers, 27 men from 8 - 24 Aug, or 618.

casualties.[111] This is at variance with a compilation of the casualties from the narrative, based on the gas attack reports made by the DGO for the period 1 - 7 August (no gas attacks are reported before 1 August) which reveals a total of 741 gas casualties.

Both medical and gas officer figures come under suspicion when compared with the total of gas (and wound) casualties found in the field hospital admission lists. And here it may be said that it is doubtful whether any division during a single operation of such short duration had its casualties so scattered as did the 32nd. They were found in the records of seventeen field hospitals of five divisions, including all four field hospitals of the 32nd.[112]

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111 In GAF - 32nd Div. Monthly Rpt of Gas Casualties, III Corps, Aug 1918 (War Dept Box 297, 12.3), shows 462 in the 32nd Div.

112 Totals below include both gas and HE cases:

111	in FH 125	(32nd Div)	(Med Dept Box 3694)
393	FH 126		(Med Dept Box 3696)
195	FH 127		(Med Dept Box 3688)
104	FH 128		(Med Dept Box 3701)
59	FH 109	(28th Div)	(Med Dept Box 3636)
85	FH 110		(Med Dept Box 3638)
89	FH 111		(Med Dept Box 3639)
1294	FH 112		(Med Dept Box 3640)
44	FH 27	(3rd Div)	(Med Dept Box 3450)
1	FH 7		(Med Dept Box 3447)
7	FH 5		(Med Dept Box 3443)
64	FH 165	(42nd Div)	(Med Dept Box 3811)
3	FH 166		(Med Dept Box 3815)
39	FH 167		(Med Dept Box 3815)
39	FH 168		(Med Dept Box 3818)
59	FH 19	(4th Div)	(Med Dept Box 3462)
18	FH 33		(Med Dept Box 3471)
2604			

Cf. Memos, Div Surg 28th Div for Div Surg 32nd Div, 29 Jul - 10 Aug, n.s. (28th Div Box 7, 43.1) for 32nd Div casualties handled by 28th Div.

Because of this dispersion, great care was taken in counting both gas and wound admissions to prevent duplication. The breakdown by unit of 32nd Division gas and HE casualties found in the lists is shown in Table 2.

Of the 825 gas casualties recorded in the lists, 208 were admitted as mustard gas cases, 12 attributed to phosgene, 8 to "chlorine," 268 to "gas inhalation," and 329 simply as "gassed."

In spite of a thorough search, the total of gas and HE casualties (825 and 1,635, or 2,460), in the lists is far from the official totals of "wounded" (i.e., gassed and wounded) reported elsewhere in this section (3,906 according to Haan, 4,086 in corps records, 3,162 in the Battle Monuments Commission study). This would suggest that more than one-third of the division's gassed and wounded may have been received by adjacent French hospital units. It would also indicate that on a proportional basis with gas casualties approximately half those wounded by shot and shell, that total gas casualties in the 32nd Division may have been nearer 1,300 than 825. [113]

The narrative and Table No. 2 appear to coincide so far as the proportion of daily casualties is concerned, though the totals in the Table are unquestionably much too low. Thus, the 225 HE casualties on 31 July doubtless represent the fairly high cost of the attack on les Jomblets and Bellevue Farm that day (narrative, p. 21 - 23), as the 423 HE casualties

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113 Compare the hospital data of 42 gassed, 15 wounded in the 57th FA Brig between 28 Jul - 18 Aug with the report in the MS History of the 57th FA Brig, p. 31 (32nd Div Box 24, 11.4), that when the brigade withdrew on 25 Aug it had "suffered the heaviest casualties of the war," -- 40 killed and 350 gassed and wounded.

on 1 August (the highest in hospital records on any one day) reflect the assault on the machine guns in Planchette and Bellevue Farm (narrative, pp. 26 - 27.

Similarly, the 103 and 141 gas casualties admitted on 1 and 2 August probably represent casualties of the German gas interdiction for the retreat (narrative, pp. 28, 30 - 31). All subsequent hospital gas totals are suspiciously low, considering the events related in the narrative.

The argument for questioning the hospital records in Table No. 2 is summed up in the Division Surgeon's report of 758 casualties on 5 August ("not counting considerable numbers" passing through adjacent organizations [narrative, p. 47]), and General Haan's report of 1,000 on 6 August (narrative, p. 50). The hospital record of a bare 666 on those two days may not only be an accurate gauge of the disparity between actual and recorded casualties, but also reflect to some degree the problem of straggling.

One other point. The narrative, like the histories and after-action reports prepared by the division, suggests from first to last that it was German machine guns and gas, not German high explosives, that felled the division. In the absence of any divisional or medical data to the contrary, it has been assumed in this report that artillery HE was a negligible factor in producing 32nd Division casualties.

It does not seem possible with available DGO, G - 3, or even German data to do more than guess at the number of gas shells that were fired to produce the 825 (or 1,300) gas casualties. If the estimate in the postwar report of the Acting DGO (p. 56, above) of 4,034 gas shells in 61

TABLE NO. 2

FIELD HOSPITAL ADMISSIONS OF 32nd DIVISION CASUALTIES

	125th Inf		126th Inf		127th Inf		128th Inf		MG Bns		Field Arty		Other		Totals		
	Gas	HE	Gas	HE	Gas	HE	Gas	HE	Gas	HE	Gas	HE	Gas	HE	Gas	HE	Shell Shock
28 Jul		1			1										1	1	
29 Jul		10	4	5											4	15	
30 Jul		2		3	13	69		3						3	13	80	2
31 Jul	3	91		14	18	112	1			8					22	225	8
1 Aug	22	139	8	121	54	97	7	61	12	5					103	423	6
2 Aug	32	67	8	58	58	47	21	67	21	11	1			2	141	252	37
3 Aug	12	11	4	12	17	2	5	18	8	2		1			46	46	25
4 Aug	3	25	15	47	11	45	43	65	3	5				4	75	191	23
5 Aug	14	39	38	52	50	148	129	43	10	5		2	3	5	244	294	37
6 Aug	2	19	24	8	16	26	15	1	4	3		5	3	2	64	64	4
7 Aug	4	14	8	5	7	6	10	4		1	1	6		3	30	39	2
8-18 Aug	8		5		6	2	11	1	5	1	42	1	5		82	5	
	100	418	114	325	251	554	242	263	63	41	44	15	11	19	825	1635	144

Total Casualties = 2,604

attacks seems absurdly low, that of 22,048 gas shells, estimated by the DGO in his 24 reports (see Spencer, II, 320 - 43) -- with 20,000 of them the guess of the 128th Infantry RGO -- may be as much too high. German and gas map data suggest a total of 10,000 gas shells as a more probable maximum fired on 32nd Division forces, including its artillery, over the period 29 July - 20 August. On this assumption, between 7 and 12 gas shells were required for each casualty. Considering the physical condition of the men and the tactical circumstances at the Vesle, as well as the known attitude of 32nd Division troops towards strict gas discipline, it would seem that their gas casualties might have been caused by far fewer gas shells than 10,000.

The Cost of Fismes

To the 32nd Division the Aisne -Marne campaign meant the taking of Fismes, as the subsequent Oise-Aisne campaign meant the capture of Juvigny. To Degoutte, Fismes was the key to the advance from the Vesle to the Aisne, and as Bullard said, Degoutte expected to make that his springboard for the next advance. On no account was it to be relinquished.

Interestingly enough, Haan's remark on the night of 6 August that the division had fought since the morning of the 3rd "without accomplishing anything" (narrative, p. 50), covered the entry of the 127th Infantry into Fismes, on the night of 4 August. In the light of his casualties, he may not at the time have been impressed with his tenuous hold on Fismes, however valorous it was to seem in retrospect. The hospital lists indicate that almost half the total casualties of the campaign were incurred in the

struggle to take and keep Fismes and to cross the river there.

In his story of AEF operations between April and August 1918, Jennings C. Wise said only of the 32nd's 2,000 killed and wounded on 4 - 6 August, that it was "indicative of the nature of the resistance encountered by the American troops on the Vesle." Pershing, understandably concerned with plan to form the First American Army with I and III Corps on that front in early August, later explained why Fismes ceased to be important:

> The favorable turn of the situation [i.e., the German withdrawal from the Marne salient], resulting in slowing down of activity along the Vesle River by August 6th and the discontinuance for the time being of further extensive offensive operations in that direction, made it inexpedient for the First Army to assume command on that front.[114]

Colonel Garlock, battalion commander in the 128th Infantry and later Division Inspector, whose candid Tales of the Thirty-Second deals almost entirely with the advance and stand at Fismes, had no illusions about the river town. "As a military objective Fismes was hardly worth what it cost." He was thinking of Fismes in terms of the needless casualties that fell then the futile efforts to cross the stream without adequate preparation, the final breakdown of communications and morale. Yet neither he nor anyone else acknowledged in the slightest the effect that gas had had on the operation. Other divisions then and later were to admit that the ability or inability to retaliate with gas, when gas made severe inroads on the fighting strength of a unit, had a very real impact on morale.

Division Surgeon records, which show 618 gas casualties during this campaign (where hospital records reveal 825, and probable gas casualties wer

[114] The Turn of the Tide, pp. 237-38; Pershing, My Experiences, II, 211.

[115] Garlock, p. 164

nearer 1,300), also indicate that the division suffered at least 574 gas casualties later in the Juvigny operation, and another 532 while near Damvillers, east of the Meuse, in late October.[116] But to the end of the war, Colonel Garlock (then Division Inspector) was to insist that gas might be a nuisance in battle but could have no appreciable effect on its outcome if troops could be trained to stand up to it. In a G - 3 memo of 3 October, Garlock was quoted as saying:

> I am of the opinion that a considerable number of men take advantage of orders regarding treatment of gas casualties to escape from the battlefield...I have been under three stiff gas shell bombardments myself and did not find it very difficult to escape the effects of the gas without wearing the mask for a very long period. I believe that where any considerable number of men are gassed in an organization there should be an investigation and disciplinary action.[117]

He ignored the fact that he had been free to move to higher ground or even out of an area under gas bombardment, and had forgot the painful three weeks he spent after being "slightly gassed" near Bellevue Farm (narrative, p.29).

Of greater importance, Garlock overlooked the cumulative effect of constant harassing fire with gas, particularly mustard gas. General Haan may have been right about there being no serious gas cases during the campaign, but 61 separate gas attacks in two weeks, even if that number is exaggerated, suggests a fairly constant hazard to troops, particularly when virtually the whole division was in the line and confined to a narrow sector, without room

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116 Rpt of Gas Casualties, Div Surg for G - 3, n.d. (Med Dept Box 3686 - Casualties).

117 G - 3 Memo, 32nd Div, 3 Oct (32nd Div Box 4, 32.15).

to maneuver, as Haan said.

With more comfortable masks and a greater appreciation of gas, the troops might have been trained to endure the continual gas atmosphere. But the mask was physically exhausting to wear for any length of time and ceased to be effective after some 40 hours in a gas atmosphere. Unquestionably, large numbers of men in the division either succumbed to gas mask fatigue, deliberately took off their masks in order to become slight gas casualties, sought relief by claiming to be gas casualties, or simply straggled to the rear to escape the gas. Whether they were malingerers or stragglers they were still "battle casualties" and out of the fight. There is no clearer case of attrition by gas, both direct and indirect, than the plight of the 32nd Division on 7 August

Lessons Learned

The 32nd Division lasted just seven days in battle, two of those days out of contact with the enemy while pursuing him to the Vesle. Liaison, communications, and control of the division seem to have been lost from the second day (31 July) on. It was not a division but a pitiful handful of companies that was relieved at the Vesle on the night of 6 - 7 August.

Aside from the difficulties of operating a big American division under French control -- and these could be insuperable and at times almost disastrous -- what happened to the 32nd Division was to happen to other American divisions when confronted with the German's skilful use of machine guns and gas.

The division had been warned that its artillery must learn to use gas at the direction of the infantry (narrative, p. 12). And the Sixth French

Army had specifically instructed its divisions to withdraw slightly before each attack in order to bring artillery fire, including gas, on near enemy machine gun positions (narrative, p. 17). The instructions presuppose that the 32nd Division had a supply, or access to a supply, of gas shells, although neither confirmation nor denial has been found in the records. In any event, the division used no gas at the Ourcq or at the Vesle.

With assisting enfilade fire from the Bois de Cierges on the right, the German machine gunners in the Bois des Grimpettes, a small isolated wood, had stopped the 3rd and 28th Division attacks, and were finally overrun by the 32nd Division only at high cost (narrative, pp.15 - 20). A ten-minute burst of gas on Grimpettes and on the edge of the Bois de Cierges would probably have neutralized them temporarily, long enough to take out those nests.

The machine guns in Les Jomblets and Planchette woods could have been reached by the 155's, if not the 75's,as could such open targets as Bellevue Farm and Reddy Farm (action described on pp.21,26-27; cf., Map No. 5). All these targets invited gas concentrations prior to attack. Instead, infantry companies made repeated and costly frontal attacks on the machine gun positions until they were overrun.

The division commander, General Haan, regretted that the principles of attacking hostile machine guns had been taught only "during a very brief period in the Belfort sector."[118] Combat instructions issued by First

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118 Rpt of Action on 30-31 Jul, 7 Aug (32nd Div Box 11, 33.6); Tactical Note 3, 18 Aug (32nd Div Box 13, 50.1); Haan, Rpt of Opns, 24 Aug (32nd Div Box 10, 33.0 and Box 11, 33.6).

American Army and subsequently by the 32nd Division describing tactics and available weapons for fighting machine guns were not until late September to include the use of gas, smoke, and thermite as "most effective in reducing strong points in woods and villages."[119]

The handling of the 32nd Division in the narrow sector allotted to it could hardly have been worse. General Haan said that his inability to maneuver his troops was the fault of his orders from the French. But that was no excuse for failing to relieve and rest his forward troops frequently. They ought not to have been, on the second day of the campaign, "very weak from loss of sleep, lack of water and food, and constant strain" (narrative, p. 26).

Division liaison and control, lost at the Ourcq, were never to be recovered. When on the morning of 2 August it was learned that the Germans had vanished on the front, time should have been taken to reorganize the units before beginning the pursuit. Instead, by 0700 the whole division was moving forward -- just as, earlier, whole brigades advanced to the attack (narrative, p. 30). And during the long march the 32nd was closely followed by the 28th Division, unquestionably making a shambles of both divisional organizations in the rear. The policing of stragglers became impossible.

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119 Tng Memo 27, 32nd Div, 2 Sep; Tng Memo 31, 24 Sep; Tact Note 6, 18 Sep; Tact Note 7, 24 Sep; Tact Note 8, 2 Oct, sub: Use of Gas and Flame Orgn (32nd Div Box 13, 50.1 and Box 3, 3.28); Memo, Hq First Army for Corps and Div Commanders for distribution to Platoon Commanders, 16 Oct, sub: Reduction of Hostile MG Nests (90th Div Box 6, 32.14).

How far General Haan was out of touch with the condition of his command is evident in his optimism over the ability of his troops to cross the Vesle on the night of 4 August (narrative, p. 40). He had made the reconnaissance himself, while behind him lay a dozen kilometers of chaos. But in nothing was General Haan so much in the dark as concerning the effect that gas had had on his men. Gas intelligence had broken down along with all other lines of communication.

There is no evidence that any element of the division, in the march from the Ourcq to the Vesle, advanced during the night, yet the Division Gas Officer attributed many of the gas casualties to the necessity of removing gas masks in order to "see to advance in the dark" (narrative, p. 32). More remarkable was the precaution taken to avoid further mustard gas casualties: troops up front were hurried along to allow those following to evacuate badly gassed areas (narrative, p. 32). It suggests that the units were crowded closely together, and that everyone got a chance to wade through the gassed areas.

The fact that all the gas attack reports of the Division Gas Officer, Captain Joly, were prepared after the division was relieved and that so many of the statements in them are beyond resolution, suggests that Captain Joly had little or no idea of gas conditions or of the gas casualties in the division. None of his reports indicates that he visited any gassed area to observe for himself. And that he and the Division Surgeon shared their lack of first-hand knowledge seems evident from General Haan's frequently repeated statement in reports and letters (but not in the published history of the division) that he was proud that there had been no

gas deaths and no serious gas cases during the campaign, although mustard gas had been used constantly.[120]

Apparently General Haan did not know that mustard gas poisoning rarely resulted in death, and that such deaths were almost impossible when control of troops was so far gone that the men straggled at will. Furthermore, since the Division Surgeon could account for no more than 40 percent of the division casualties -- and that much was only a wild guess -- the condition of the other 60 percent or more, whether gassed or wounded, was totally unknown. Haan's statement on 6 August that there was not "even one very serious [gas] case" was therefore simply wishful thinking. But no records have survived to dispute it.

The division had been warned, while in training, that the troops must learn to operate under gas conditions (narrative p. 12). They were still green troops that came up to Chateau Thierry on the night of 27 July, with little experience of gas as a result of their training in Alsace. Whether they had even had any theoretical training in tactics under gas conditions is questionable. The comment of the French liaison officer that the troops withdrew from Cierges to more exposed positions, rather than advanced beyond the village when it was gassed (narrative, p. 22), would tend to deny such instruction. Before another opportunity came, German machine

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120 Narrative, p. 49 - 50, and ltr, Capt H. C. Bell, LO with 28th Div to Col Conger, 28th Div, 6 Aug, n.s. (32nd Div Box 11, 33.61). The remark was underscored in pencil in this letter.

guns, failure to rest the troops, and loss of control made the question of good gas discipline academic.

That the fragments of companies and provisional battalions formed below the Vesle were able to reach the river front at all and take any part of the town of Fismes was a tribute to the fighting qualties inherent in the division. The advance of the division was, its French liaison officer said encouragingly, a "très bien succes," and with experience the 32nd would become a fine combat division -- "une Division de choc de 1° ordre." [121]

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121 Lecons à tirer des opérations...entre la Marne et la Vesle, n.d.