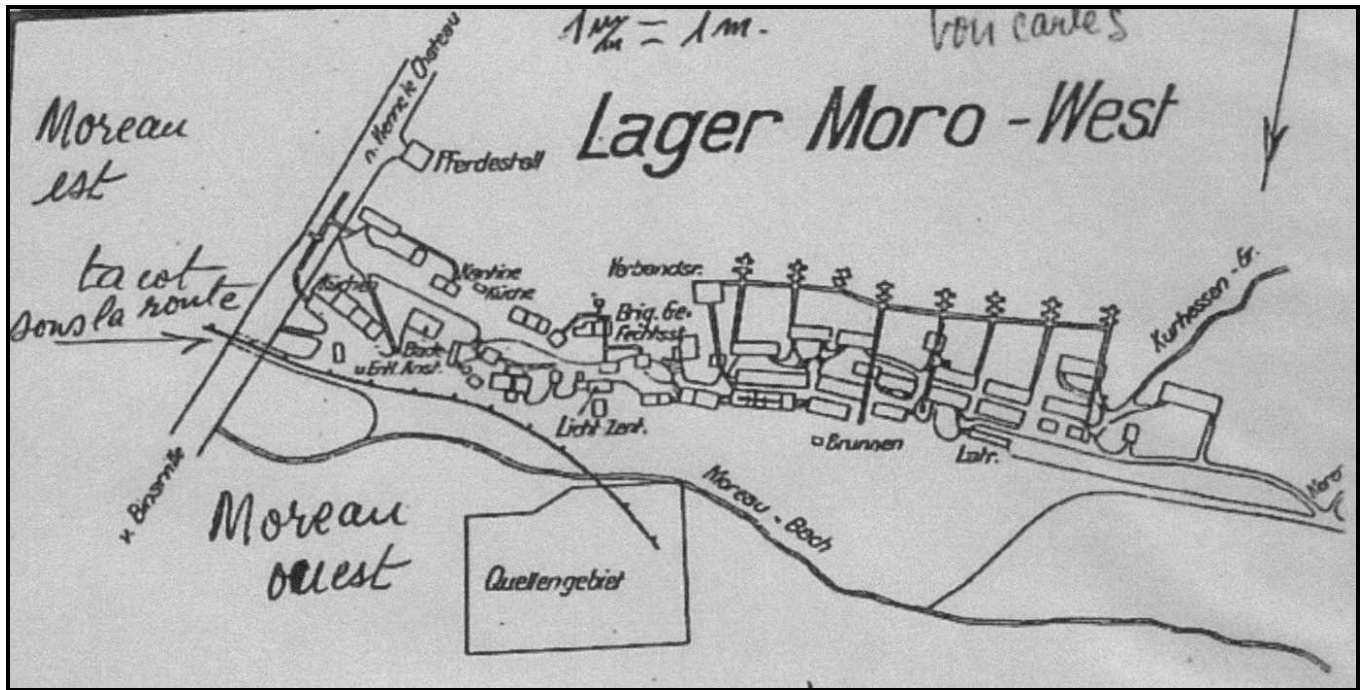


I Corps

77th and 28th Divisions Jump-Off Point, Ossuaire de la Haute Chevauchée

To the French, the Ossuaire and the preserved craters around it are symbols of the bloody fighting and mining war in the Argonne Forest, especially in 1915. To the Americans, this area marks the jump-off point of the 77th and 28th Divisions on 26 September, 1918. The road which brought us here is the demarcation line: The 77th was West of the road, the 28th was East of the road.

Morolager West (German Camp), Binarville



(Photo Courtesy of Adolf Buchner)

Situated just south of Binarville, the Morolager West is technically outside of the boundaries of the American First Army. However, it is a very well restored camp, typical of those found by the doughboys throughout the Argonne Forest.

The camp was constructed and occupied almost exclusively by Landwehr Inf. Regt. Nr. 83 from February 1915 until September 1918. Situated approximately 1.5km (1 mile) behind the front line, the camp included a narrow-gauge railroad line, water source (Quellengebiet), the Brigade HQ (Brig. Gefechtsst.), an electric generator (Licht Zent.), kitchens (Küche) and a bathing / de-lousing facility (Bade- u. Entl. Anst.). A stables (Pferdestall) was located just south of the main camp.

Renovation of the camp began in 1998 by Le comité franco-allemand, and it is ongoing today.

Note: The author needs to verify that it was built and occupied by Landwehr Inf. Regt. Nr. 83. According to one map, which covers most of 1915, that regiment was further behind the lines, between Charlevaux Mill and le Chêne Tendu.

Lost Battalion Site, Binarville

There are two ways to study the Lost Battalion: superficially or extremely in-depth. Given tour time constraints, the author has chosen the former. For those interested in an in-depth study, the following new book is recommended: Finding the Lost Battalion: Beyond the rumors, myths and legends of America's famous WW1 epic. (See bibliography.)

Here is the abridged version: “The attack continued on October 2. During the afternoon a composite group of infantry and machine-gun units broke through the German defenses east of the ravine south of Moulin de Charlevaux. This group advance to the Apremont-Moulin de Charlevaux road and took up an isolated defensive position. From October 3 to 6 the remainder of the division was unsuccessful in numerous efforts to move up abreast of the surrounded force, which succeeded in beating off frequent attempts of the Germans to destroy it. On October 7 the Argonne Forest was enveloped on the east by other American divisions and the Germans began to withdraw. This enabled the 77th Division to begin a general advance about noon that reached the isolated force about 7 p.m.” (77th Division, p. 25.) The “Battalion’s” effective strength was reduced from 600, at the outbreak, to 194 severely-weakened men, when rescued.

One thing leads (in part) to another: The flank assault on 7 October by the 82nd and 28th Divisions sought to accomplish two objectives: 1) Allow the I Corps to advance by eliminating German fire from the Argonne Forest and 2) Relieve the Lost Battalion.

Another interesting fact: Two of the four American aviators to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor after WW1 were 1st Lt. Harold Goettler, pilot, and 2nd Lt. Erwin Bleckley, observer, members of the 50th Aero Squadron, who were shot down and killed when attempting to re-supply the Lost Battalion. A portion of the citation reads: “Having been subjected on the first trip to violent fire from the enemy, they attempted on the second trip to come still lower in order to get the packages even more precisely on the designated spot. In the course of his mission the plane was brought down by enemy rifle and machinegun fire from the ground.” 1st Lt. Goettler is buried in Chicago, Illinois. 2nd Lt. Bleckley is buried in the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery in Romagne.

Le Chêne Tondou, Apremont

American Armies and Battlefields in Europe describes this geography as “a projecting ridge of the Argonne Forest plateau...The strong German second position had been organized along that ridge and across the Argonne...Le Chêne Tondou was the scene of prolonged and intense fighting by the 28th Division for ten days from September 28, the date the division first obtained a foothold on the ridge, until its capture was finally completed in an attack on the morning of October 7. (ABMC pp. 223-4.)

A slightly different version of the 28th Division’s activities in the early part of the offensive reads as follows: “...The right of the division advanced 5 kilometers; the left, in the eastern edge of the Argonne Forest, gained 2 kilometers. The attack continued on September 27. The right brigade captured Montblainville and established its line to the north of the town. The left brigade was unable to advance. On September 28 the right brigade reached Apremont and established a line of resistance to the east, north and west of the town. The left brigade gained a foothold on Le Chene Tondou. The attack continued on September 29, but the line was not materially advance during the day...On October 1 the crest of Le Chene Tondou was gained. No attacks in force were made on October 2. Patrols were pushed toward Châtel-Chéhéry and Cote 180. There were local actions on October 3 but the line was unchanged. On October 4 the right brigade established its line east of the Aire River south of Fléville. The left brigade made small gains. On October 5 the right brigade occupied LaForge and held the line of the Aire from just south of Fléville to near Apremont. No attack was made on October 6 but perepartitions were made for a general attack to be launched on the following day...” (28th Div., p. 40)

Deutscher Soldatenfriedhof, Apremont (Situating atop Le Chêne Tondou)

Begun in November 1915, this is the only cemetery for fallen Germans in the Argonne Forest that survives in its almost original condition. The Germans continued to use the cemetery until being pushed back in October 1918. After the war, the French authorities consolidated about 230 provisional German graves here. Today, 1,111 German soldiers currently rest in the cemetery.

Salvation Army Canteen and Hospital, Neuville

Salvation Army workers, both male and female, were generally attached to support the troops of a specific division. In this case, the workers were attached to the 1st Division, which moved up from the St. Mihiel salient in late September and replaced the 35th Division in the line on 1 October.

The Salvationists stayed in Neuville for a period to help out at the hospital (situated in the church) and to establish a canteen for the troops. "The house that had been selected for a Salvation Army canteen was nearly all gone. One end was comparatively intact, with the floor still remaining, and this was to be for the canteen. The rest of the building was a series of shell holes surrounding a cellar from which the floor had been shot away...Across the road from the most ruined end of the canteen building stood an old church...It had been used all day for an evacuation hospital...The boys had built a small bonfire on the stone floor against a piece of one wall that was still standing, and now they sent a deputation to know if the girls would bring their guitars over and have a little music...They sang at first the popular songs that everybody knew...By and by someone called for a hymn, and then other hymns followed...They sang for at least an hour and a half, and then they did not want to stop." (War Romance, pp. 245-7.) As the advance continued, the Salvationists moved up to Varennes and to the field hospital at Cheppy.



THE WRECKED HOUSE IN NEUVILLY WHERE THE LASSIES WENT TO SLEEP IN THE CELLAR AND WOKE UP TO FIND THE SOLDIERS WATCHING THEM

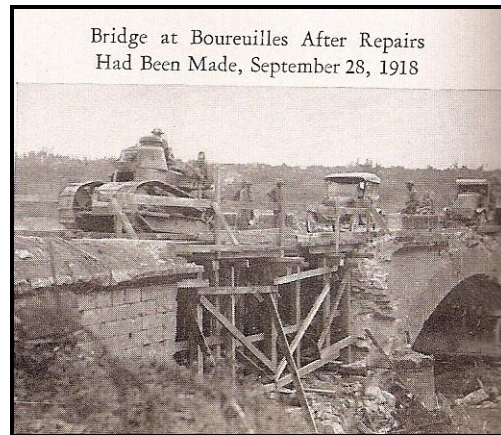
(Source: War Romance of the Salvation Army)



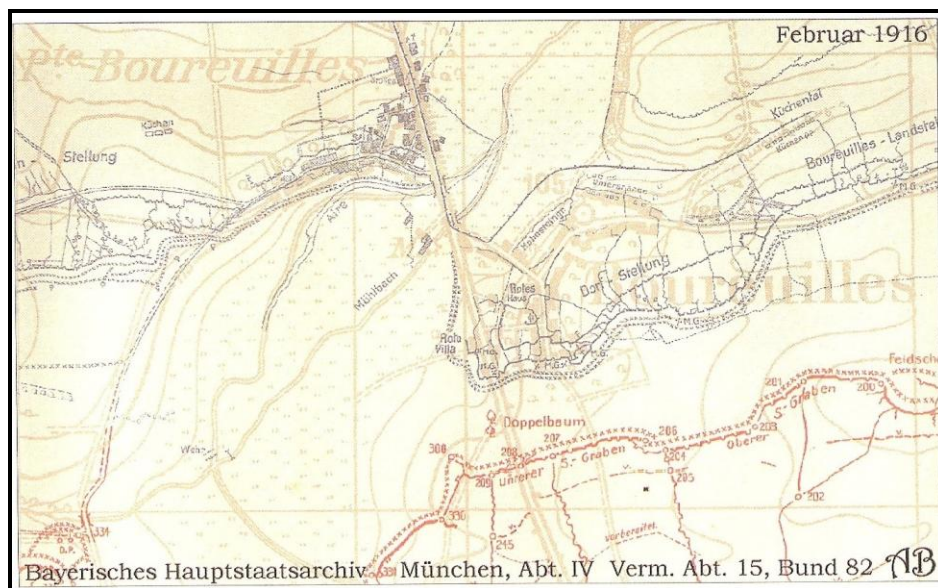
American Wounded in a Wrecked Church, Neuville, September 26, 1918

(ABMC p. 188)

Wrecked Bridge, Boureuilles



(ABMC p. 222)

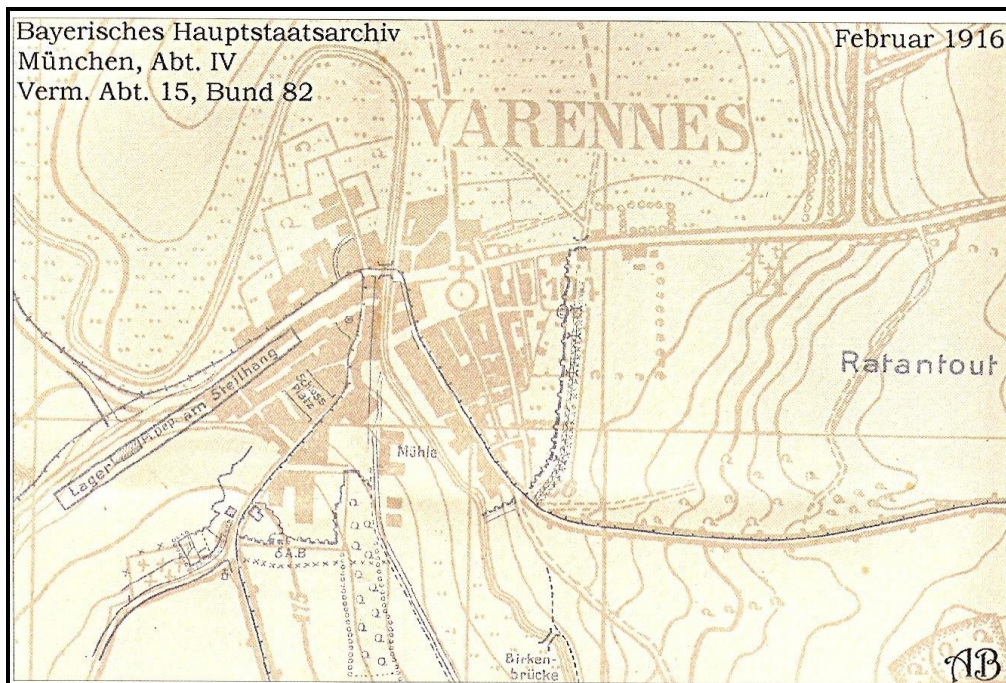


(Vaquois p. 152)

Pennsylvania Memorial, Varennes

To the French, Varennes is best known as the town in which Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette were captured fleeing to Belgium during the French Revolution. To the Germans, Varennes is perhaps best known as an important logistical town, situated about 3.5kms (2.1 miles) behind the nearest front lines, and just a bit further to Vauquois Hill. To the Americans, Varennes is best remembered as a town captured by the 28th and 35th Divisions on the first day of fighting.

Varennes is also one of the towns most visited by American pilgrims to the battlefields because of the Pennsylvania Memorial, which is on the site of an old Chateau. It is hoped that the series of pictures below will allow pilgrims a chance to “see” the town during German occupation, which lasted most of the war.

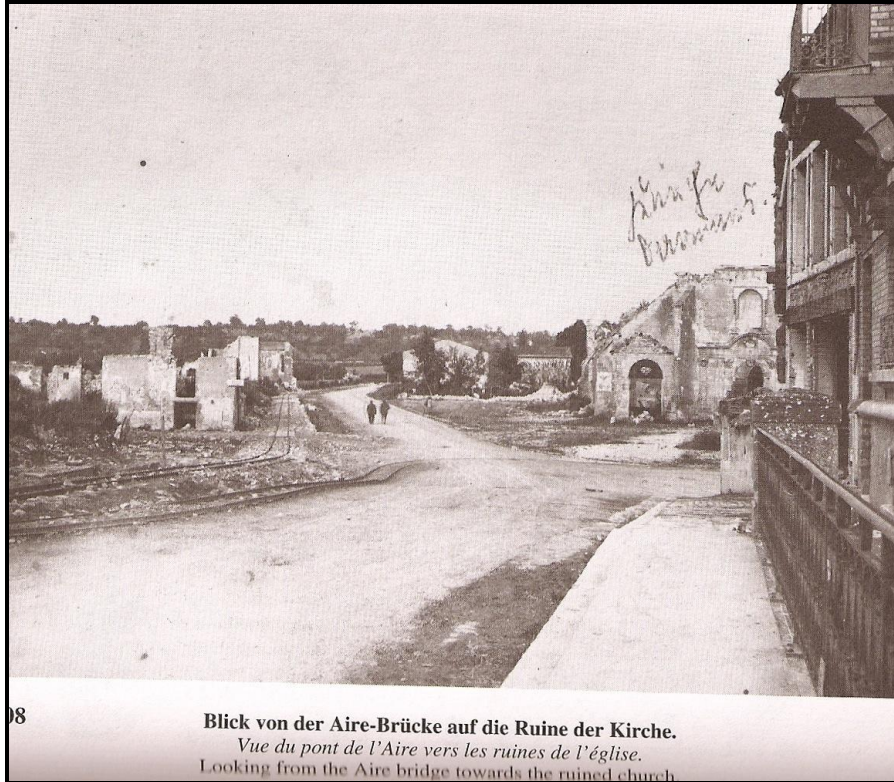


Map showing narrow gauge tracks running through town and pioneer camp,
That is situated on the escarpment beneath the palace. (Vauquois, photo 120)



Blick auf das Hotel „Grand Monarque“.
Vue sur l'hôtel « Grand Monarque ».
Looking towards the hotel "Grand Monarque".

(Vauquois photo 106)



(Vauquois photo 108)



(Vauquois, photo 102)



(Vauquois, photo 126)

80th Division Assault / Sergeant York Site, Cornay

As mentioned in the Lost Battalion section, the flank assault that commenced on 7 October by the 82nd and 28th Divisions sought to accomplish two objectives: 1) Allow the I Corps to advance by eliminating German fire from the Argonne Forest and 2) Relieve the Lost Battalion.

The condensed version of the assault, from the 82nd Division's viewpoint was: "Prior to the entry of the 82nd Division into line in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, elements were used from September 29 to October 3 to support the 28th Division, and on September 30, to stiffen the lines of the 35th Division near Baulny. On October 7 the 82nd Division, less one infantry brigade, and in conjunction with the 28th Division to the left, attacked the east flank of the Argonne Forest in the vicinity of Châtel-Chéhéry. By nightfall an advance of about 1 kilometer had been made. The attack continued on October 8. On October 9 the remaining infantry brigade of the 82nd Division passed through the 28th Division, and executed a turning movement to the north, while the brigade on the right attacked north." (82nd Division, p. 17)

Space and time do not permit an in-depth summary of Sgt. York's actions on that day. A copy of his Medal of Honor Citation is printed below. Also, using a variety of English- and German-language sources and battlefield archeology, a team under the leadership of Doug Mastriano claims to have found the specific locations in which Sgt. York's activities on 8 October occurred. Readers should visit the expedition's website: www.sgt.yorkdiscovery.com.

Sgt. York's Medal of Honor Citation

YORK, ALVIN C.

Rank and organization: Corporal, U.S. Army, Company G, 328th Infantry, 82d Division.

Place and date: Near Chatel-Chehery, France, 8 October 1918

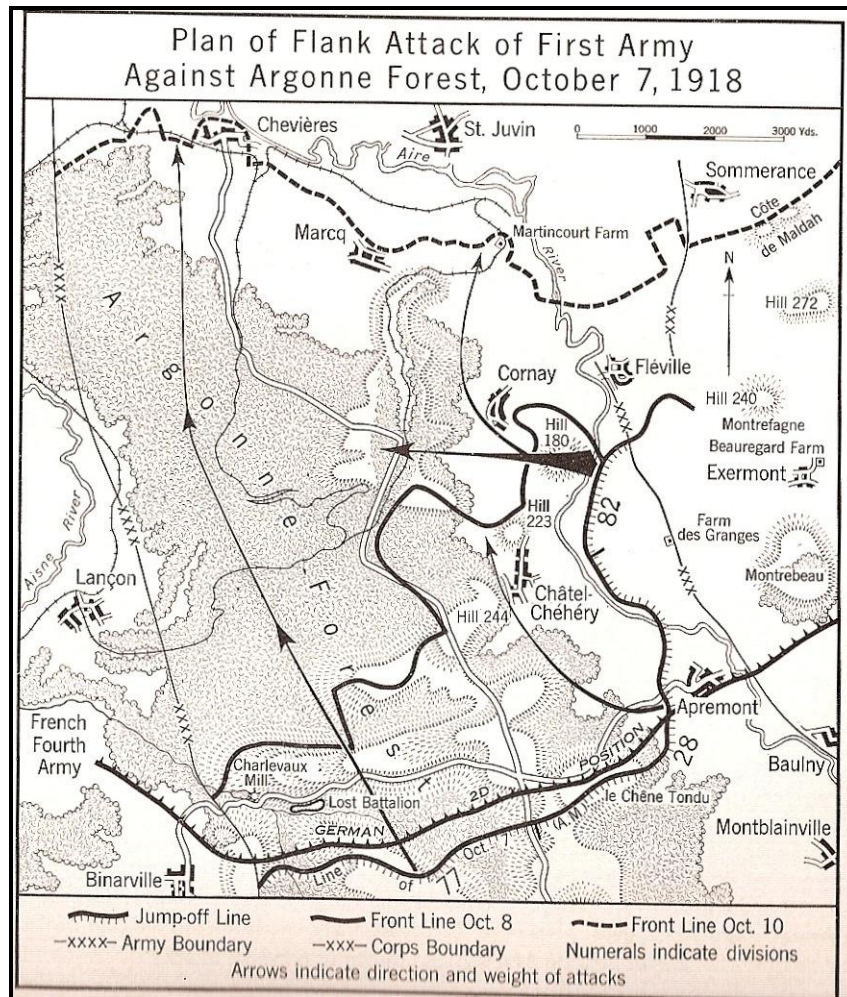
Entered service at: Pall Mall, Tenn.

Born: 13 December 1887, Fentress County, Tenn.

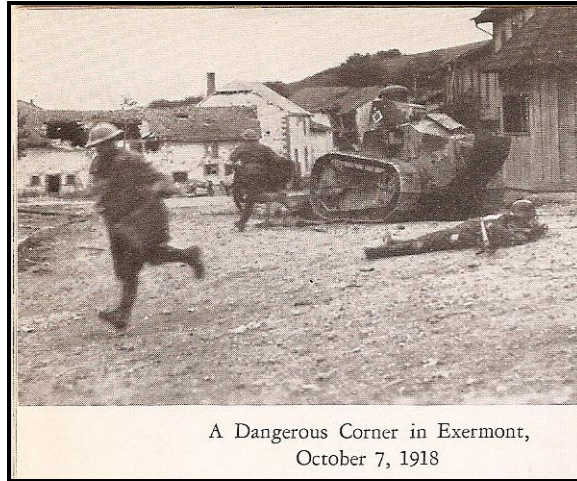
G.O. No.: 59, W.D., 1919.

Citation: After his platoon had suffered heavy casualties and 3 other noncommissioned officers had become casualties, Cpl. York assumed command. Fearlessly leading 7 men, he charged with great daring a

machinegun nest which was pouring deadly and incessant fire upon his platoon. In this heroic feat the machinegun nest was taken, together with 4 officers and 128 men and several guns.



35th and 1st Division Assaults, Exermont



A Dangerous Corner in Exermont,
October 7, 1918

(ABMC p. 320)

The story of the Village of Exermont and its two hills—Montrebeau to the south and Montrefagne to the north—is one of capture, loss, and re-capture.

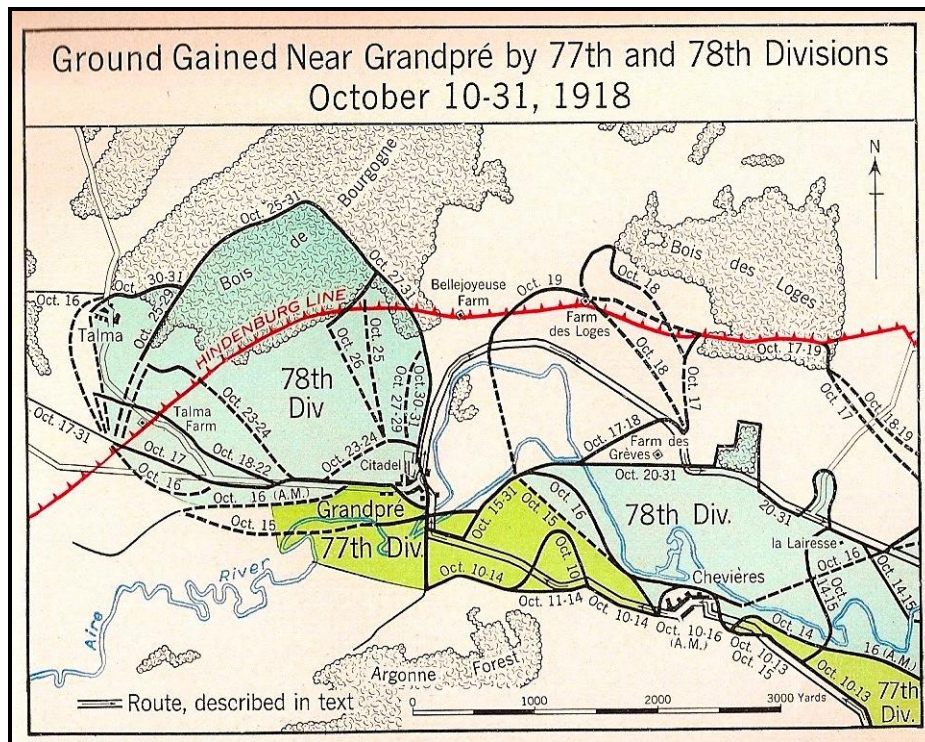
The town was originally captured and held briefly by elements of the 35th Division, which was a National Guard division comprised of units from the states of Missouri and Kansas. Like so many of the American divisions that participated in the initial assault, the Division had only minimal front line experience. By the end of Sept. 26 the division captured Varennes, jointly with the 28th Division, and had advanced beyond Cheppy. The Division continued to advance: It captured Montrebeau, the southern hill, on 28 September, where it dug in on the north edge of the Bois de Montrebeau (Montrebeau Wood.) On 29 September the Division captured, and briefly held, Exermont, Beauregard Farm (situated on Montrefagne, north of Exermont) and the southern slope of Montrefagne.

Thereafter, the Division's fortune began to change. Fresh German divisions arrived and the Division's area appears to have been one of their priorities. They launched a series of aggressive counterattacks characterized by intensive close combat and hand-to-hand fighting. The numerous assaults pushed the doughboys back to the south on 29 and 30 September. The Division's units became hopelessly intermingled, and its commander, Maj. General Peter Traub, wandered the battlefield trying to locate the headquarters of the Division's various units. During the six days it was in the line, the 35th Division suffered 6,006 casualties, or almost 25% of its entire combat strength. Before it was rotated out, the front line was situated just a few hundred yards north of Baulny, about two miles south of Exermont.

Interesting notes: Maj. General Traub, who was a West Point graduate, was also a Brigadier General with the Yankee Division, during the deadly assault by Seicheprey in early 1918. The 35th Division was slated to fight again with Bullard's Second Army beginning 14 November, but the war ended first.

As the initial assaults bogged down, Pershing replaced the 35th with the 1st Division on 1 October, and resumed the offensive on 4 October. At 0500 that morning the 1st Division's artillery began its barrage, and at 0700 the infantry assault began. By the evening of 4 October, Exermont, Beauregard Farm and the southern slope of Montrefagne were re-taken. Slow progress was made over the next several days. Most of Montrefagne was captured by 8 October. The Côte de Maldah (part of the Romagne Heights) was captured by the division on 10 October. From 1-12 October the 1st Division suffered 7,772 casualties.

Grandpré and the Hindenburg Line



(ABMC p. 237)

From the 77th Division's Summary of Operations: "Attempts to cross the Aire and capture St. Juvin and Grand-Pré on October 11 were unsuccessful. On October 14 troops crossed behind the 82nd Division to the east, and captured St. Juvin. The southwestern part of Grand-Pré was taken on October 16. The relief of the 77th Division by the 78th Division began during the night of October 15-16 and was completed about noon October 16." (77th Div. pp25-26)

From the 78th Division's Summary of Operations: "On October 10 the 78th Division moved into the Argonne Forest west of Montblainville in reserve of the I Corps. On October 16 the division relieved the 77th Division in a sector along the Aire River from St. Juvin to Grand-Pré. The division gained some ground during the day northwest of St. Juvin and crossed the Aire River west of Grand-Pré. The hostile defenses in the Bois des Loges were attacked on October 17 and a foothold gained in the southern portion of the wood. The line was also advanced north and west of Ferme des Grèves. Small gains were made east and west of Grand-Pré on October 18. Additional ground was taken east of the town on the 19th, but on October 20 the line in this part of the zone of action was withdrawn to a line, La Lairesse – Ferme des Grèves – Grand-Pré. This position was held virtually without change until the general offensive on November 1. West of Grand-Pré efforts were continued to breach the hostile defenses of the Bois de Bourgogne and force the enemy to evacuate the ridge north of town. On the left, slight advances were made on October 23, and the Citadel in Grand-Pré taken. On October 25 the left of the line was advanced into Bois de Bourgogne, northeast of Talma. By midnight, October 31, the ridge north of Grand-Pré had been taken and Talma occupied." (78th Div., p. 19)

Note: The 78th Division's Summary of Operations describes the "German position known as the Citadel, on the steep spur in the northern portion of the town." (78th Div., p. 24.)

Boult-aux-Bois

After advancing beyond Grand-Pré and clearing the Bois de Bourgogne and the woods further northward the 78th Division made contact with the French Fourth Army on 3 November in the little town of Boult-aux-Bois.

The 78th Division was relieved by the 42nd Division on 5 November. (Remember this when Noyers-Pont-Maugis is visited.)

Buzancy, Then and Now

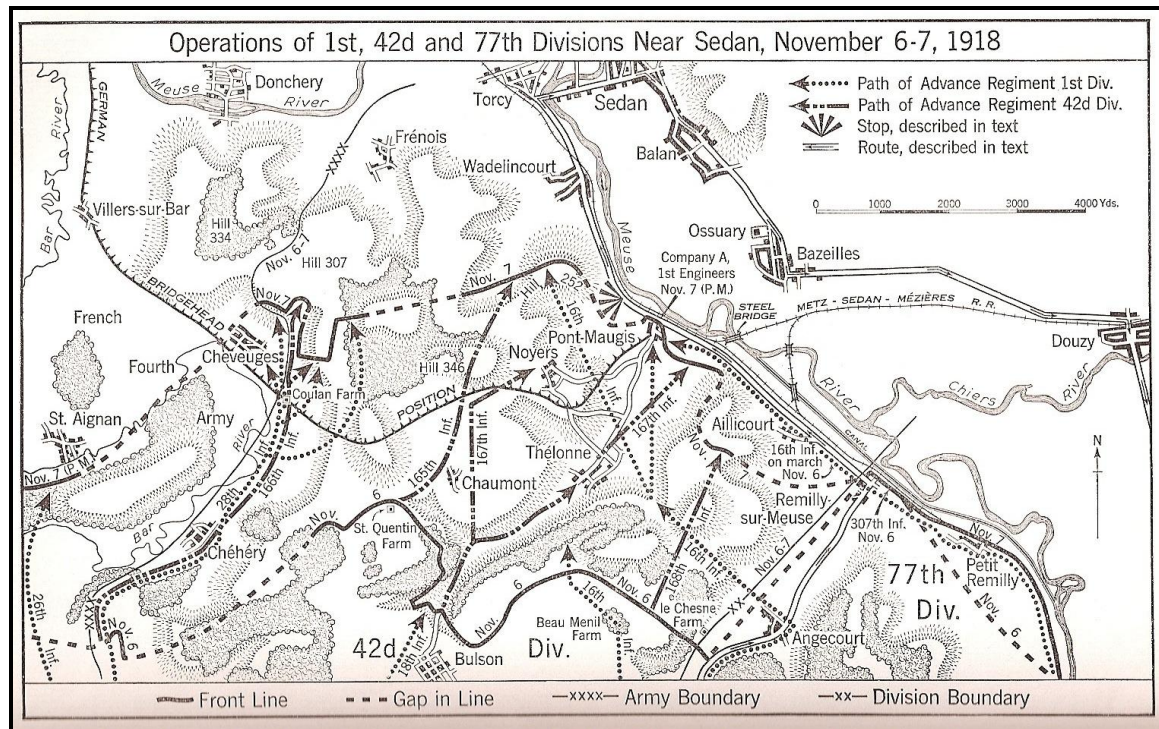
Buzancy was situated close to the 4th German defensive line. On the night of 1-2 November, the Germans withdrew their main forces to the heights north of the town. It was captured by the 80th Division early in the afternoon of 2 November after brisk fighting. Thereafter, it came under heavy enemy machine-gun and artillery fire. The Germans continued to shell the crossroads for several days in order to disrupt the advance of the 80th and 77th Divisions.



Note: (ABMC p. 286)

For participants who enjoy interesting then and now pictures, the above photograph clearly shows the use of Buzancy's village hall (Mairie) during German occupation. From the posted signs, it can be seen that the building served as a both a soldier's club (Soldatenheim) and post office (Deutsche Feldpost.)

Conflicting Boundaries / German Cemetery, Noyers-Pont-Maugis



(ABMC, p. 296)

Deutscher Soldatenfriedhof, Noyers-Pont-Maugis

This is one of the largest German cemeteries on French soil, containing the graves of 26,843 German soldiers; 14,055 from World War One and 12,788 from World War Two. This includes a communal grave from 1914/18 containing the bodies of 4,900 soldiers; 4,600 of which remain unknown. The cemetery was established in 1922 by the French Authorities to consolidate the Graves of German soldiers around Sedan.

In the post-Vietnam and post-Watergate era, the events that happened during the advance on Sedan would have been a major scandal. While Paul Braim covers it somewhat fleetingly, Edward Coffman spends more time analyzing the advance on Sedan. The town was significant to the French due to their loss to the Germans there in 1871. Nevertheless, General Pershing wanted the First Army to take the town. An order from the Commander-in-Chief stated the following:

1. General Pershing desires that the honor of entering Sedan should fall to the 1st American Army. He has every confidence that the troops of the I Corps, assisted on their right by the 5th Corps, will enable him to realize this desire.
2. In transmitting the foregoing message, your attention is invited to the favorable opportunity now existing for pressing our advance throughout the night. Boundaries will not be considered binding.

Actually, the entire process of the writing of the message involved numerous steps and modifications. According to Coffman, General Pershing sent his G-3, Fox Conner, to First Army HQ in Souilly to give the army the specific mission. First Army General Liggett and his Chief of Staff, Drum, were not present when Conner arrived at First Army HQ. Conner proceeded to dictate the memo to Marshall, G-3 of the First Army. After Conner's departure, Marshall showed the memo to Drum. They added to the memo, and telephoned the message to the two corps headquarters. (Coffman, pp.348-49)

General Dickman (of I Corps) had the 42nd Division move straight ahead against Sedan, with the 77th Division, on the right, continuing to advance toward the Meuse. General Summerall (of V Corps)

“assumed because of the statement—“Boundaries will not be considered binding”—that Pershing was calling for a race to Sedan, not just between the French and the Americans but between his corps and Dickman’s.” (Coffman, pp. 349-50) What happened is that units of the 1st Division, ignoring boundaries, rushed to Sedan, as shown on the above map. During 7 November the 16th and 28th Infantry Regiments (both of the 1st Division) fought the Germans, with the 16th driving the Germans off Hill 252. However, doughboys with the “Fighting 69th” (the 165th Inf. Regt., 42nd Division) also claimed that they took the hill.

“At any rate, Americans were in a commanding position in the environs of Sedan, but repercussions of the First Division’s remarkable maneuver were piling up.” (Coffman, p. 351.) Of course, the French were understandably furious. Dickman (of I Corps) was also furious and basically ordered his subordinates to Find Brig. Gen. Frank Parker, C.O. of the 1st Division, and tell him to get his men out of the area. Liggett, C.O. of the First Army, likewise lost his cool, when he learned of the boundary crossings. “When Pershing visited Liggett and talked about the incident on November 9, he seemed to be amused by the rivalry between the 1st and 42nd Divisions, and he gave the impression he did not consider the matter to be serious. In his memoir, he blamed the affair on Summerall’s misconception of the order and praised the 1st Division for its “fine spirit.” What happened on the road to Sedan was that personal feelings and relationships took precedence over professional training and common sense.” (Coffman, pp. 352-3.)

Note1: Conspiracy theorists could also question why the 78th and 80th Divisions were relieved and replaced by the 42nd and 1st Divisions, respectively. It is interesting to note that the four divisions on the left of the First Army’s line were, in order: The 42nd, 77th, 1st, and 2nd Divisions.

Note 2: Of course, the French got the honor of taking Sedan as, in this author’s opinion, it should have been.