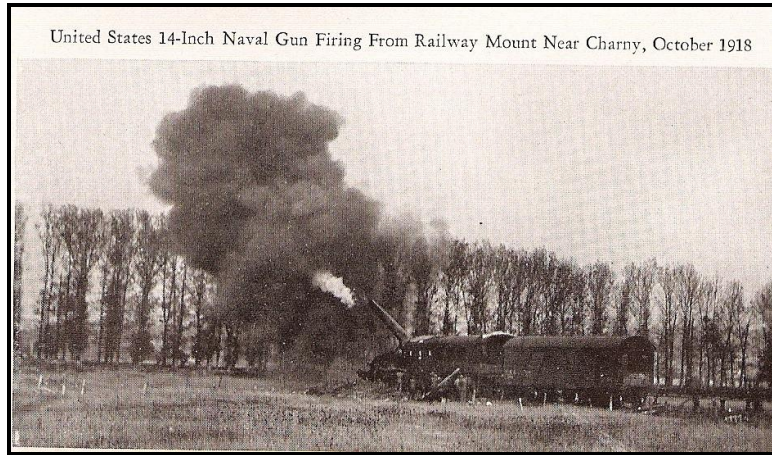


## III Corps and East of the Meuse

### U.S. Naval Gun Pits, Charny and Thierville



(ABMC p. 194)

From late October until the Armistice four of the U.S. Navy's five 14-inch railway batteries fired more than 500 rounds from gun pits located near the villages of Charny and Thierville, just north and west of Verdun. Their targets were military and transportation centers behind the German lines. For example, Montmédy, one of the most important targets, was the headquarters of the German Seventh Army. The city also contained a large rail yard, numerous barracks and an airfield.

"Fundamentally each battery consisted of a 14-inch 50-caliber naval rifle carried on a special railway mount, together with ammunition and auxiliary cars. The gun...had a maximum range of 42,000 yards (approx. 24 miles). Firing could be effected between angles of zero to 43 degrees elevation...For firing at any angle with the range of 15 to 43 degrees elevation, it was necessary to place the gun car over a suitable pit foundation to allow clearance for the 44-inch recoil of the gun." (Naval Batteries, pp. 23-24.)

While the exact location of the gun pits and their sidings is unknown to this author, a brief description of location and daily life can be found in the following unpublished manuscript:

*"At Charny, things got rather warm. Our train was parked near the Meuse River and was protected by some close-by hills but our gun was around the bend, about seventy-five yards from the main Highway. Soon, Number Four Gun pulled in and was emplaced south of the Highway where they fired over our heads.*

*Part of the day and all of the night, the Highway was bumper to bumper with traffic of all kinds, dough-foots, supplies and horse artillery. At this spot we were attached to the Yank Twenty-sixth Division known as "The Yankee Division."*

*The Germans were very methodical. Every day at two o'clock they shelled this cross-road for thirty minutes. This had been going on for weeks as I heard the story. After the shelling, The Sixteenth Railway Engineers, who had their camp on the hill, would repair the tracks and the cross-road so traffic could move." (Plunkett)*

Two interesting facts: 1) Battery No. 4 fired its last shot at 10:57.30 on 11 November, allowing it to land just seconds before the Armistice took effect. 2) Laurence Stallings states that: "The guns had difficulty hitting a small target twenty miles away, but this was overcome when someone ferreted out an infantry captain who was a wizard in mathematics of curved space and time. This Doughboy, as Dr. Edwin P. Hubble, later won a Nobel Prize..." (Doughboys, p. 343.)

### 33<sup>rd</sup> Division Advance, Forges, Bois de Forges and Vicinity

Often cited as the most successful Divisional-level achievement in the initial offensive, the 33<sup>rd</sup> Division reached its objectives and established a line along the Meuse River by noon on 26 September. This involved crossing the Forges Brook and the surrounding marshy areas, clearing the Bois de Forges and wheeling 90 degrees to take up a position on the banks of the Meuse. In the process, the division captured around 1,500 prisoners, narrow gauge railways, artillery and other supplies; while suffering less than 50 killed and 250 wounded. Lawrence Stallings states, "No other outfit ever catalogued one day's fighting with such thoroughness. No other ever had time." (Doughboys, p. 231)

Three of the division's infantrymen received Congressional Medals of Honor for their role in the capture of the Bois de Forges. These were: Capt. George H. Mallon, First Sgt. Sydney G. Gumpertz, and Sergeant Willie Sandlin.

#### MALLON, GEORGE H.

Rank and organization: Captain, U.S. Army, 132d Infantry, 33d Division.

Place and date: In the Bois-de-Forges, France, 26 September 1918.

Entered service at: Minneapolis, Minn.

Born: 15 June 1877 Ogden, Kans. G.O. No.: 16, W.D., 1919.

Citation: Becoming separated from the balance of his company because of a fog, Capt. Mallon, with 9 soldiers, pushed forward and attacked 9 active hostile machineguns, capturing all of them without the loss of a man. Continuing on through the woods, he led his men in attacking a battery of four 155-millimeter howitzers, which were in action, rushing the position and capturing the battery and its crew. In this encounter Capt. Mallon personally attacked 1 of the enemy with his fists. Later, when the party came upon 2 more machineguns, this officer sent men to the flanks while he rushed forward directly in the face of the fire and silenced the guns, being the first one of the party to reach the nest. The exceptional gallantry and determination displayed by Capt. Mallon resulted in the capture of 100 prisoners, 11 machineguns, four 155-millimeter howitzers and 1 antiaircraft gun.

#### GUMPERTZ, SYDNEY G.

Rank and organization: First Sergeant, U.S. Army, Company E, 132d Infantry, 33d Division.

Place and date: In the Bois-de-Forges, France, 29 September 1918.

Entered service at: Chicago, Ill.

Born: 24 October 1879, San Raphael, Calif. G.O. No.: 16, W.D., 1919.

Citation: When the advancing line was held up by machinegun fire, 1st Sgt. Gumpertz left the platoon of which he was in command and started with 2 other soldiers through a heavy barrage toward the machinegun nest. His 2 companions soon became casualties from bursting shells, but 1st Sgt. Gumpertz continued on alone in the face of direct fire from the machinegun, jumped into the nest and silenced the gun, capturing 9 of the crew.

**SANDLIN, WILLIE**

Rank and organization: Sergeant, U.S. Army, Company A, 132d Infantry, 33d Division.

Place and date: At Bois-de-Forges, France, 26 September 1918.

Entered service at: Hyden, Ky.

Birth: Jackson, Ky. G.O. No.: 16, W.D., 1919.

Citation: He showed conspicuous gallantry in action by advancing alone directly on a machinegun nest which was holding up the line with its fire. He killed the crew with a grenade and enabled the line to advance. Later in the day he attacked alone and put out of action 2 other machinegun nests, setting a splendid example of bravery and coolness to his men.

Unfortunately, the easiness of the first day would not last long, as the Germans began to shell the doughboys of III Corps from the heights east of the Meuse. In fact, "The 33<sup>rd</sup> had the awful distinction of having more men gassed than any other American division (more than 2,000)." (Coffman, p. 326)

On October 7, the tactical control of the division passed from III Corps to the French XVII Corps, which was charged with the mission of dislodging the Germans on the heights east of the Meuse. The unit participated in the offensive on 8 October and continued to fight across the Meuse until it was relieved by the French 15<sup>th</sup> Colonial Infantry Division on 21 October. (See maps in subsequent sections.)

It is not the author's intention to give significant space to the exploits of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Division's doughboys at the expense of other units, but the actions of Cpl. Ralyn M. Hill also exhibit a bravery found in few doughboys.

**HILL, RALYN M.**

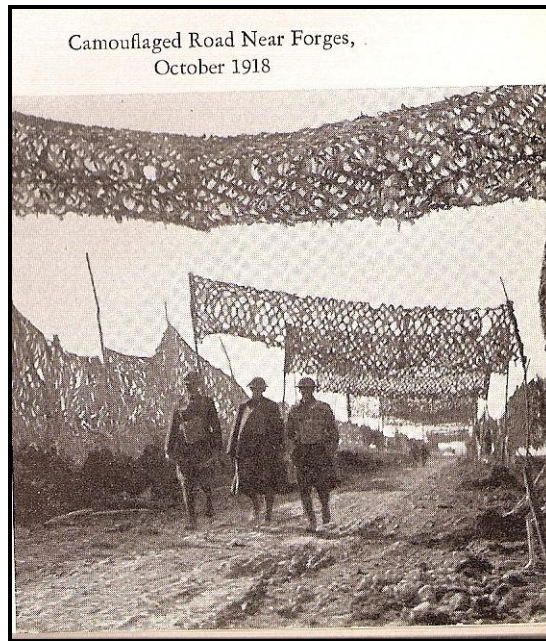
Rank and organization: Corporal, U.S. Army, Company H, 129th Infantry, 33d Division.

Place and date: Near Donnevoux, France, 7 October 1918.

Entered service at: Oregon, Ill.

Born: 6 May 1899, Lindenwood, Ill. G.O. No.: 34, W.D., 1919.

Citation: Seeing a French airplane fall out of control on the enemy side of the Meuse River with its pilot injured, Cpl. Hill voluntarily dashed across the footbridge to the side of the wounded man and, taking him on his back, started back to his lines. During the entire exploit he was subjected to murderous fire of enemy machineguns and artillery, but he successfully accomplished his mission and brought his man to a place of safety, a distance of several hundred yards.



(ABMC, p. 197)

### **Brioules-sur-Meuse**

The capture of Brioules was difficult at the beginning, but it ended surprisingly quietly. The Germans in the town, and stragglers from retreating units were determined to hold the town and bridges across the Meuse during the initial phases of the offensive.

After good initial advances on 26 September, the advances of both the 4<sup>th</sup> and 80<sup>th</sup> Divisions became bogged down around the Bois de Brioules and Bois de Dannevoux.

Stallings states: "By nightfall, German gunners pouring in by rail were eager to turn their marshes into carpets of blood and khaki, but Bullard would have none of it. He halted his advance to exploit a better line, and the riflemen of the 80<sup>th</sup> were three days facing Brioules marshes before Bullard diverted them, every squad sniped at, not by riflemen, but by heavy guns across their flanks and the sizzling 77s facing them." (Doughboys, p. 233) On 31 October, the 80<sup>th</sup> Division was shifted further to the left, and the 33<sup>rd</sup> Division took over that portion of the line.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Division continued to press the advance, but made little progress. From the 4<sup>th</sup> Division's Summary of Operations: "Part of Bois de Brioules was captured on the 28<sup>th</sup> and the remainder on the 29<sup>th</sup>. No attacks were made during the period, September 30 – Oct. 3. From October 4 on, the principal attacks were made on the left. On October 4, the leading troops reached the Brioules-sur-Meuse—Cunel road, but fell back to the northern edge of the Bois de Fayes for the night. From October 5 to 8 the division held its position in Bois de Fayes against counter attacks. No gain was made in an attack on October 9..." (4<sup>th</sup> Division, p. 48) From 26 September through 19 October, the division suffered 5,820 casualties.

For the rest of the month, Brioules lay in German hands.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Division entered the line mid-month, but most of its actions were further west. When the offensive resumed on 1 November the Summary of Operations recorded: "On the right of the division, detachments from the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry were sent into Brioules-sur-Meuse. Strong patrols were sent along the river bank to determine a method of crossing. These patrols reported that there were no enemy troops west of the river. However, owing to activity of the enemy outposts, no crossings were made. The front line was advanced to the west bank of the Meuse." (80<sup>th</sup> Div., p. 43.) Thus, it appears that the town itself fell silently, even though the 5<sup>th</sup> Division was faced with a more daunting task of crossing the Meuse.

### **Deutscher Soldatenfriedhof, Brioules-sur-Meuse**

The origins of this cemetery also date back to late 1914/early 1915. Originally, the cemetery was established by and for members of Infantry Regiment Nr. 13 (Münster/Westphalia). By the end of October 1918 the cemetery had grown to 604 graves. After the end of the war, French authorities continued to

consolidate German graves at the cemetery. Expansion/improvements started in 1932, following a 1926 agreement between the French and German authorities. Today, 11,281 German graves rest at the cemetery; 5,956 in individual graves (25 unknown), and 5,325 in three communal graves (563 unknown.) Also, 2,572 French, Russian, and other soldiers who fell in World War Two are buried at the cemetery's west exit.

With regard to the Frank Luke crash site in Murvaux, it is interesting to note that three members of Ballonzug 35 are buried at the cemetery. These include:

Sgt. Max Unger	19 Oct.	Block 4 Grave 406
Gefr. Hans Galle	18 Oct.	Block 5 Grave 157
Wilhelm Kan	18 Oct.	Block 5 Grave 158

### **Richene Hille, Borne de Cornouiller, Memorial 316<sup>th</sup> I.R., 79<sup>th</sup> Division**

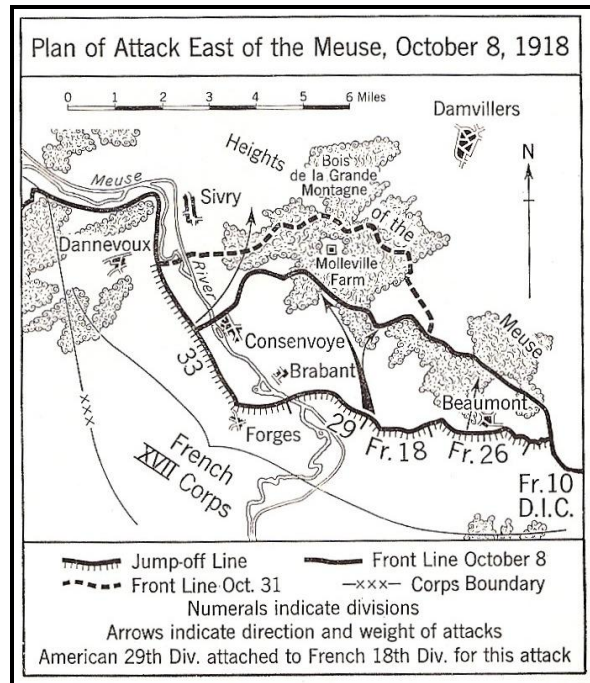
The serious student of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive cannot understand the actions of the three American Army Corps involved in the offensive west of the Meuse, without looking at the German position's east of the Meuse. The high ground, especially as seen from the Bourne de Cornouiller, offered a commanding view to Montfaucon, approximately 10 miles (16km) away. In addition, the very rough terrain around the hills offered an ideal defensive position. This explains, in part, why the Germans were able to hold onto the positions until endangered by encirclement as a result of the numerous Meuse river crossings that occurred in early November.

*Note: As a point of reference, the German 7.7cm field gun had a maximum range between 7km (4.2 miles) and 10.3km (about 6.5 miles), depending on the charge and type of shell. The German 10.5cm light howitzer had a maximum range between 5km (3.0 miles) and 7km (4.2 miles), depending on the charge and type of shell. The author does not have the ranges for larger guns.*

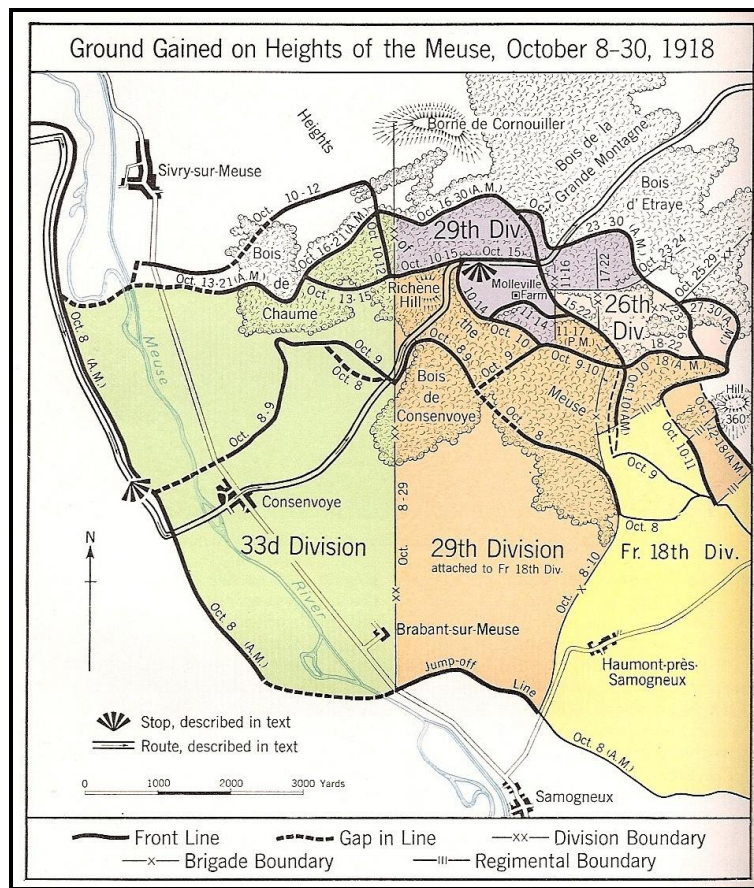
The bus drive that the trip will follow takes the reader to Richene Hill and Molleville Farm, captured by the 29<sup>th</sup> Division in mid October, and, ultimately, to the Borne de Cornouiller, captured by the 316<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 79<sup>th</sup> Division, on 7 November.

The ever-so-colorful Laurence Stallings describes the fight as follows: "And so the Germans on the Borne, beginning the night of November 3, saw the pinwheel flare into brilliant artillery display. Ely's 5<sup>th</sup> Division Regulars lit the first fuse. At the same time the 79<sup>th</sup> Division began its attacks to reach the crown of Corned Willy Hill from the east, the French Colonials began their climb from the banks of the Meuse, and the New Englanders of the 26<sup>th</sup> Division held on the south and rested for a few days... The Blue and the Grays of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division met the Colonials atop the hill November 7 after four days of furious fighting, when the New Enganders, rested three days, then took up the pursuit. The Borne de Cornouiller had cost the Americans fifteen thousand casualties, a pittance to what blundering Joffre had lost there over the tragic years." (Doughboys, p. 359.)

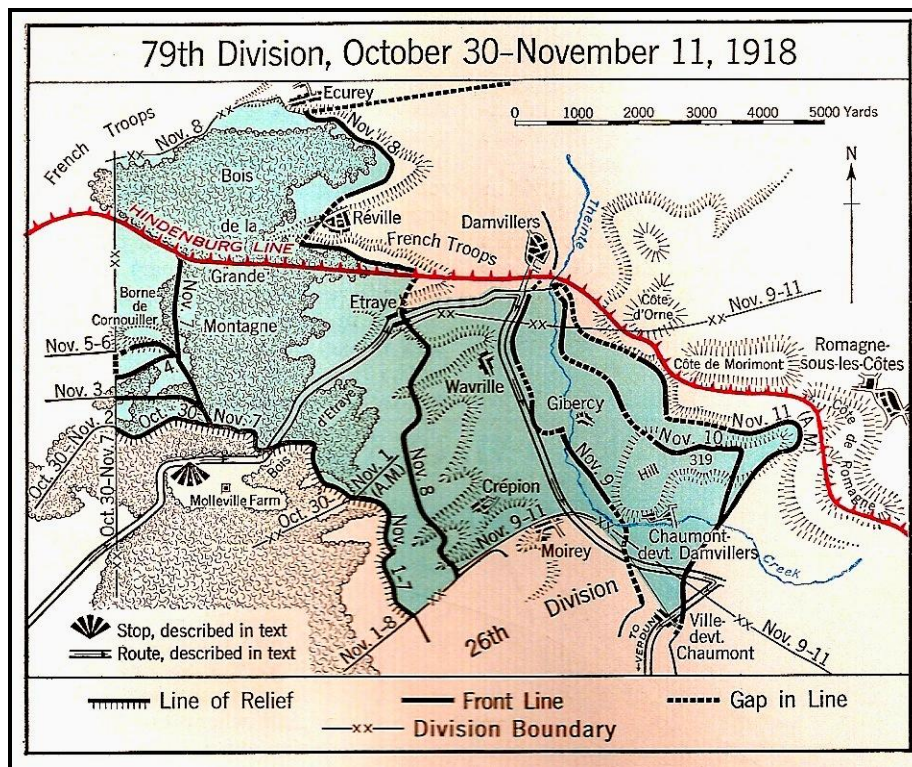




(ABMC, p. 179)



(ABMC, p. 264)



### Sivry-sur-Meuse, Then and Now

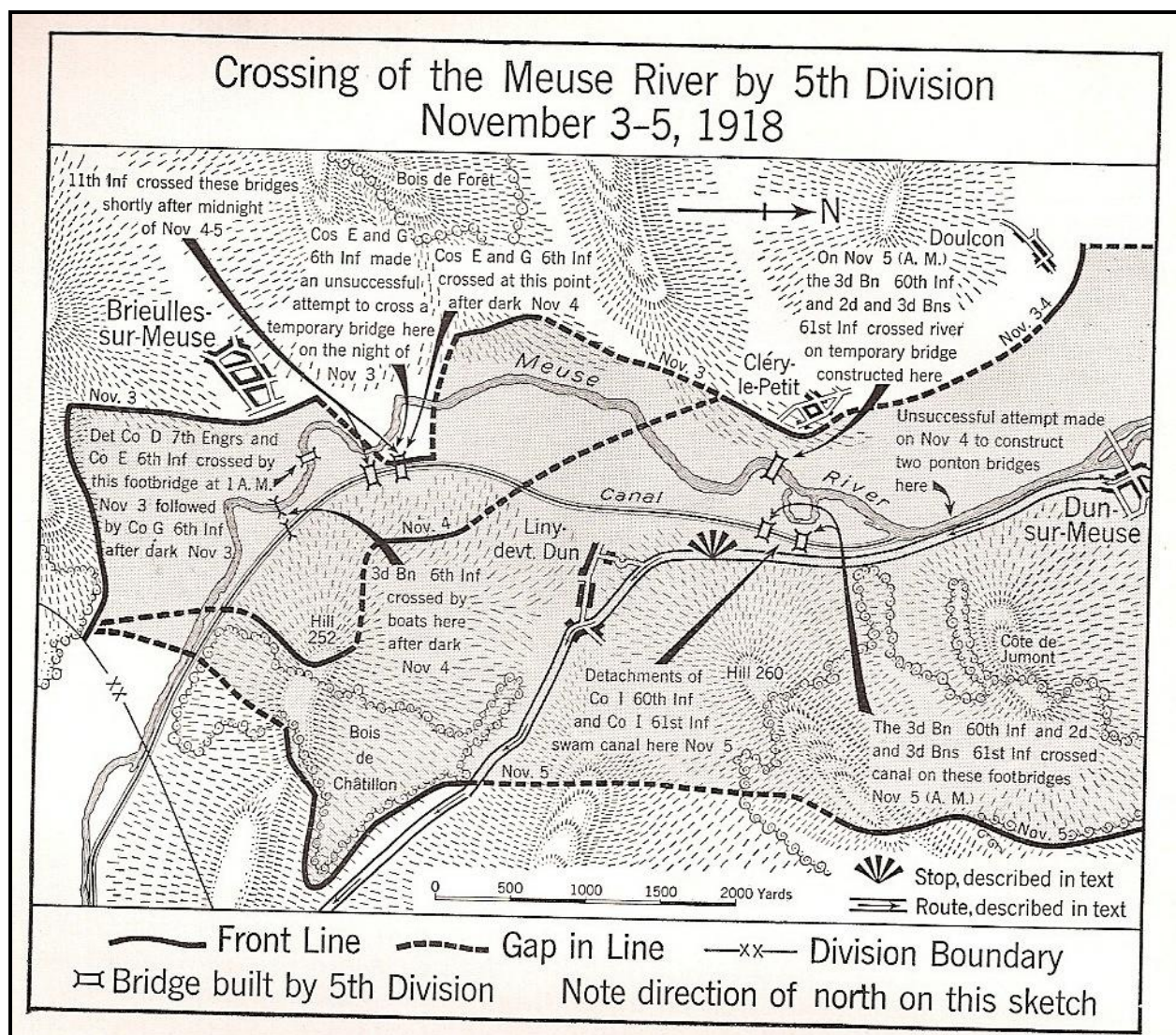


Unfortunately, time and technical difficulties did not allow the inclusion of the original postcard. It showed the main street above, with German hospital patients milling about the area where the care is situated. The caption on the postcard read: Kaiser-Wilhelmstr. Mit Feld-Lazarette—Sivry a.d.Maas. Translated: Kaiser-Wilhelm Street with Field Hospital—Sivry on the Meuse.



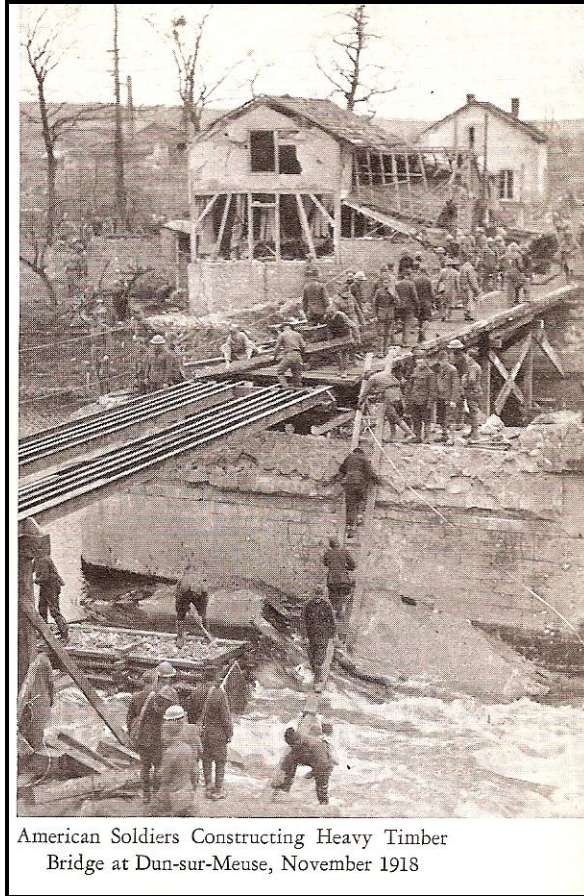
## Dun-sur-Meuse

By virtue of the division's front line positions, the 5<sup>th</sup> Division was tasked with crossing the Meuse River once the offensive resumed on 1 November. The highly detailed map and photograph below can describe the actions of the 5<sup>th</sup> Division more eloquently than this author can.



(ABMC, p. 310)





(ABMC, p. 323)

## Murvaux, Under German Occupation, and Frank Luke Crash Site

2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Frank Luke, one of the four aviators to win the Congressional Medal of Honor during WW1. His citation for the Congressional Medal of Honor reads as follows:

LUKE, FRANK, JR. (Air Mission)

Rank and organization: Second Lieutenant, U.S. Army Air Corps, 27th Aero Squadron, 1st Pursuit Group, Air Service.

Place and date: Near Murvaux, France, 29 September 1918.

Entered service at: Phoenix, Ariz.

Born: 19 May 1897, Phoenix, Ariz. G.O. No.: 59, W.D., 1919.

Citation: After having previously destroyed a number of enemy aircraft within 17 days he voluntarily started on a patrol after German observation balloons. Though pursued by 8 German planes which were protecting the enemy balloon line, he unhesitatingly attacked and shot down in flames 3 German balloons, being himself under heavy fire from ground batteries and the hostile planes. Severely wounded, he descended to within 50 meters of the ground, and flying at this low altitude near the town of Murvaux

opened fire upon enemy troops, killing 6 and wounding as many more. Forced to make a landing and surrounded on all sides by the enemy, who called upon him to surrender, he drew his automatic pistol and defended himself gallantly until he fell dead from a wound in the chest.

Murvaux was a significant hub of German operations. Two ammunition dumps were situated just outside of town; one on the north side of the modern D102 about a quarter of a mile east of the village, another in the field north of the D102 very near the Le Bradon creek west of town across the road from the homestead known as La Polygarne. About half a mile east of the village was a major communications post with a complete telephone system that was abandoned intact with the German retreat on the last day of the war (US forces were outside of Murvaux near Dun on November 10th). Lines and radio posts lined the east end of the top of the 1000 foot Cote St. Germain.

A full artillery battery of 77's was located 3/4 of a mile west of Murvaux halfway up the Cote St. Germain (the big ridge north of town). Two "flaming onion" M-216 flak batteries were on the south ridge a bit higher than the church's level and directly behind it.

Balloonzug 35 was nearly a mile west of town at the west end of the Cote St. Germain. This was Luke's final victory. Six anti-aircraft guns were huddled in a 100 meter circle underneath the balloon ascension point. Frank did not crash, he landed in the field north of the D102 and about 70 yards north of Bradon creek, his SPAD facing west and slightly north when it stopped.

The church was turned into a hospital, as was the schoolhouse adjacent to it. German barracks were built north of town in what are today farm fields. More barracks and medical facilities were located behind the church. All the trees you see today along the Cote and the south ridge were cut down during the war to provide for German building projects.

As you enter town from the west on the D102 - right at the exact edge of town - in the field to your left was a small defensive trench protecting the entry to the village. The trench zig zagged northward for about 50 yards.

Source: from the upcoming book THE STAND: The Final Flight of Lt. Frank Luke, Jr., available in summer 2008 from Schiffer Books, and written by Stephen Skinner.