

V Corps

Montfaucon (Destroyed Village)

The key to a quick victory in the Meuse-Argonne Campaign lay with V Corps in the center of the salient: “The plan was to overwhelm the Germans and make two deep penetrations through the German lines on each side of the commanding high ground of Montfaucon. Upon the completion of these turning movements, there would be a single powerful thrust through the Kriemhilde Stellung in the vicinity of Romagne and Cunel. The terrain limited the tactical options as did the boundaries. Drum later stated: “There was no elbow room, we had to drive straight through.” And they had to do it quickly. The order specified that the assault troops should reach their objective in the afternoon of the first day, and Drum hoped they would penetrate the Kriemhilde Stellung by the morning of the next day at the latest. This meant an advance of ten miles in one day, double the distance required of the foremost attack divisions on the first day of the St. Mihiel operation.” (Coffman, pp. 300-301)

Unfortunately, events did not play out as planned. “The 91st had advanced eight kilometers and the 37th had done as well as one could expect. But the 79th had not lived up to expectations, and their failure to achieve a spectacular gain in their debut at the front held the other division’s back. (Coffman, p. 311)

The 79th Division’s summary of operations gives only a cursory explanation: “The division attacked on September 26, and advanced about 3 kilometers. On the 27th Montfaucon was taken. On the 28th the division occupied Nantillois, and cleared that portion of the Bois de Beuge within its zone of action. The attack on the following day encountered severe enemy resistance, which caused a withdrawal to the ridge northwest of Nantillois and the northern edge of the Bois de Beuge.” (79th Div., p. 8.)

The real weakness lay in the delays on the initial day. The Division’s 313th and 314th Infantry regiments participated in the initial assault. However, they lost pace with the rolling barrage early, and, in a clearing called the Golfe de Malancourt, were pinned down by the Germans on the high ground. A frontal assault was made by the 313th Inf. Regt. in the Golfe de Malancourt with the help of French tanks and a flank attack by the 314th Inf. Regt. The regiment was able to push into the Bois de Cuisy and the Germans were falling back to Montfaucon, but the 313th was too disorganized to take advantage of their retreat. At dusk a battalion was ordered to assault the village again, aided by 7 or 8 tanks. However, after 45 minutes in the valley in front of the town, the French tank commander refused to continue, and the assault was stopped. At the end of the day, the Germans held the town—even though they would give it up on the following day.

More could be written about this episode, about lost opportunities by other units, failures of command, etc. but it would require more than a few paragraphs. With the benefit of hindsight, it is doubtful that even the most experienced units could have breached numerous German defensive lines, given the terrain and the tenacity of the German defenders. But the use of three relatively inexperienced divisions in V Corps. in the most important portion of the line also raises questions. The headquarter units of all three of these National Guard and National Army Divisions arrived in France only in June and July 1918, and they had no real combat experience prior to the offensive.

The 37th Division, in the middle, was relieved by the 32nd Division on 30 September / 1 October. The 91st Division, on the right, was relieved by the 32nd Division on 4 October. Both Divisions were sent to Belgium to participate in the Ypres-Lys Offensive as part of the French Sixth Army in late October.

The 79th Division was relieved by the 3rd Division on 30 September. Despite its failure on the flank of Montfaucon, the 79th Division would fight again—but largely as part of various French Army Corps. Most noted is its service with the French XVII Corps, northeast of Consenvoye, including an assault on the Borne de Cornouiller, which will be visited later in the trip.

37th Division Memorial (State of Ohio), Montfaucon (in Re-constructed Village)

This Alms House, constructed by the State of Ohio as a memorial to the 37th Division, is now part of the town’s senior citizens’ center.

Madeleine Farm, Nantillois, and Road from Nantillois to Cunel



Madeleine Farm, Captured by the 3d Division on October 9, 1918
Note character of wooded areas in 1918

(ABMC, p. 256)

The land between Montfaucon and Cunel is described as follows in American Armies and Battlefields in Europe: “The difficult character of the ground over which the American Army forced its way forward is illustrated by the country between here (Cunel) and the next village, Nantillois; and the bitter nature of the fighting is indicated by the comparatively small yet numerous American gains made along this road. In the next 2.5 miles there are six pronounced ridges which run almost at right angles to this road. It took the First Army 14 days of nearly continuous fighting to capture them. Each time the Germans lost a ridge they had one equally good for defensive purposes just behind it.” (ABMC, p 255. Also, see map below.)

Deutscher Soldatenfriedhof, Nantillois (Adjacent to Madeleine Farm)

This German cemetery was begun in March 1916 as the German assaults on Verdun were extended to the West Bank of the Meuse River. At the beginning of the Verdun battle several hospitals were established at Madeleine Farm, and the fallen were buried at the edge of the forest. The cemetery includes the graves of 918 German soldiers from seven individual regiments, including 179 from Inf. Regt. Nr. 15 and 325 from Res. Inf. Regt. Nr. 109. 888 Germans are buried in individual graves; 30 in a communal grave.

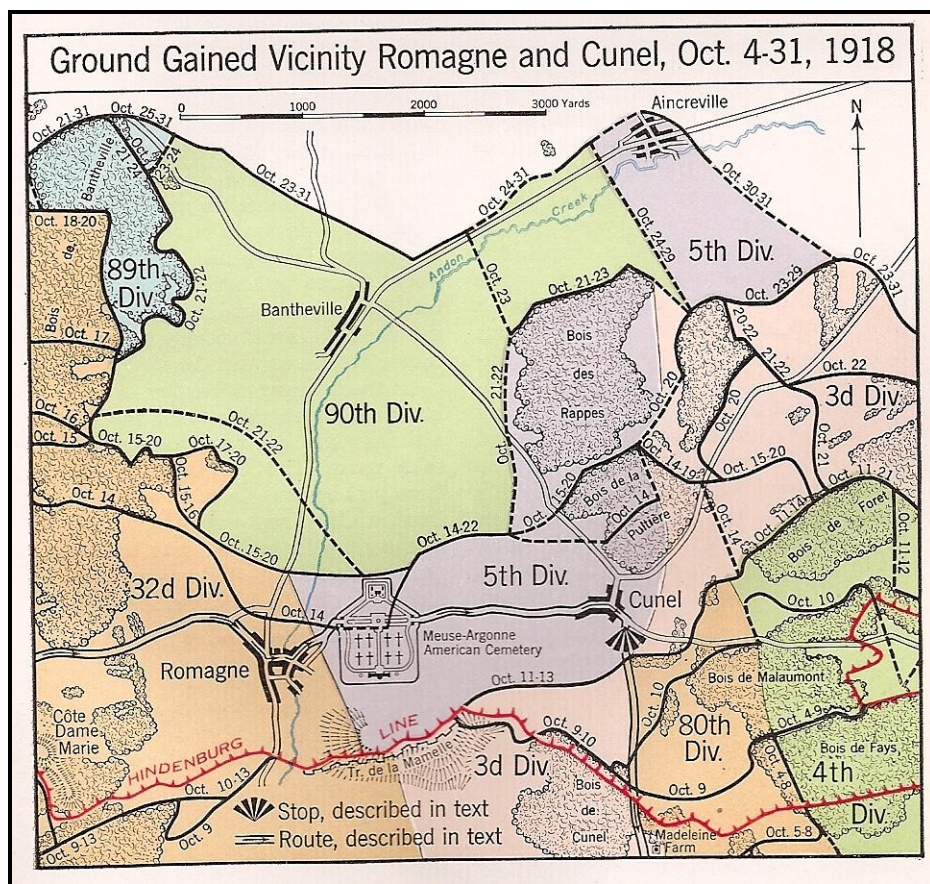
Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery, Romagne

The cemetery, which encompasses 130 acres, was established on 14 October by the American Graves Registration Service. According to the guidebook published by the American Battle Monuments Commission, it was built on terrain captured by the 32nd Division. However, the photograph below suggests that it was captured by the 5th Division. Readers should keep in mind that war-time boundaries are never as exact as suggested. It should also be noted that the cemetery lies just about 1 kilometer north of the Kriemhilde Stellung (aka Hindenburg Line.)

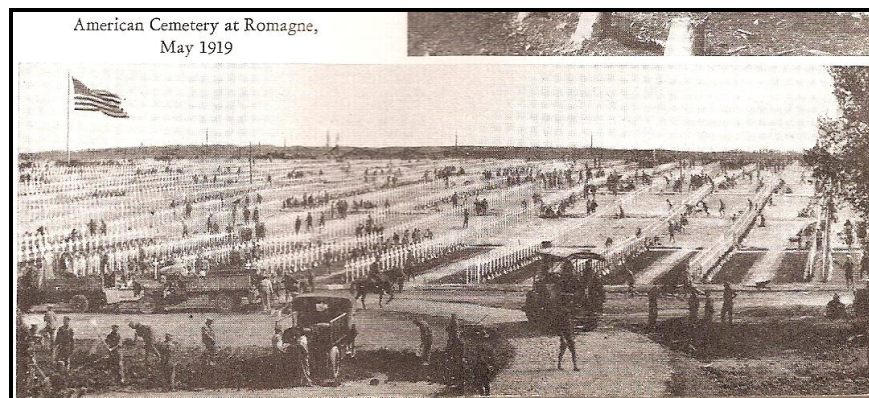
The cemetery is the largest WW1 American cemetery, containing the graves of 14,246 American soldiers, 486 of whom are unknown.

A total of 9 Congressional Medal of Honor Winners are buried at the cemetery. The locations of their graves are as follows:

Frank Luke Jr.	A-26-13
Fred E. Smith	A-07-18
Harold W. Roberts	B-45-36
Marcellus H. Chiles	C-31-23
William Sawelson	C-09-33
Matej Kocak	D-41-32
Erwin R. Bleckley	F-25-33
Oscar Millar	F-10-36
Freddie Stowers	F-36-40



(ABMC, p. 249)



(ABMC, p. 245)

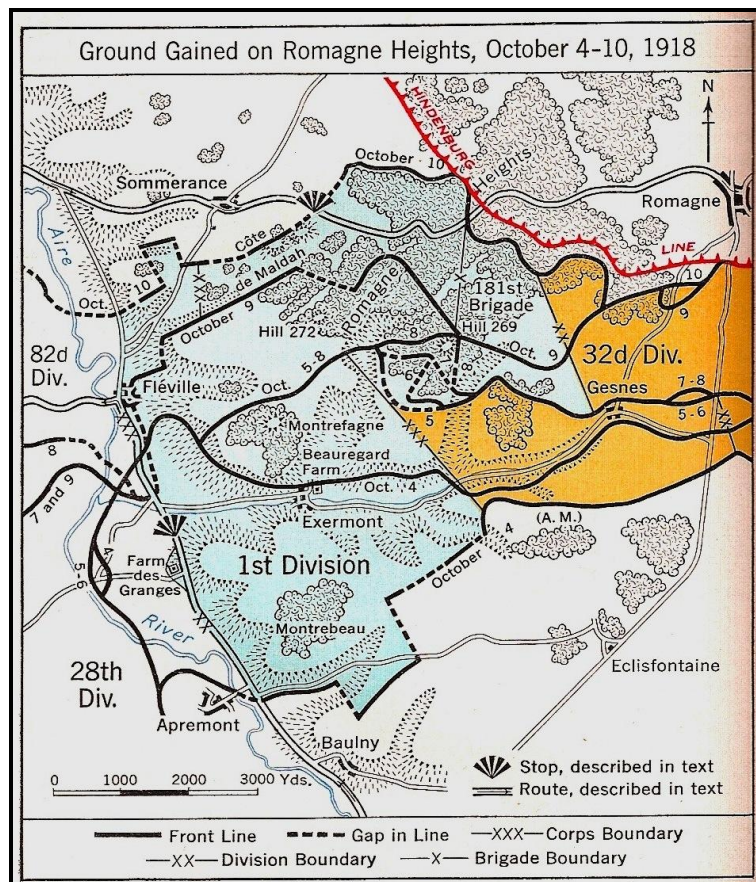
Deutscher Soldatenfriedhof, Romagne-sous-Montfaucon

The origins of the cemetery date back to the Meuse-River crossings between Stenay and Sivry in late 1914. At that time, several hospitals were established in Romagne, and the casualties were buried next to the town cemetery. However, tree planting and numerous other improvements did not begin until 1932, following a 1926 agreement between the French and German authorities. Today, 1,412 German and 4 French soldiers rest in the cemetery. All of the Germans rest in individual graves, but 65 remain unknown.

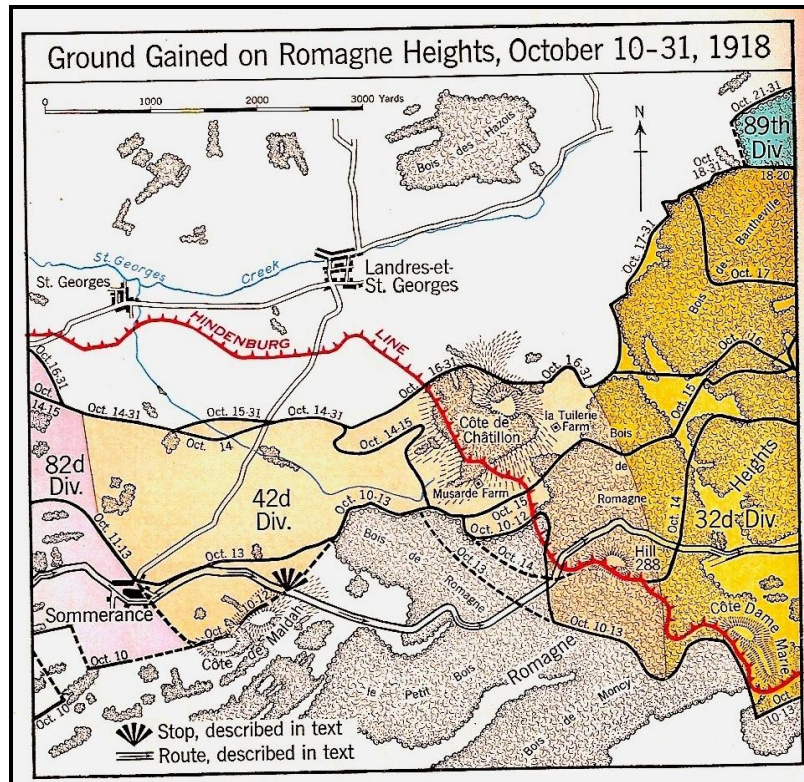
Musee, Romagne 14-18, Private Collection

Jean Paul de Vries, a Dutch national, owns this museum which has over 20,000 World War 1 relics, found near the village of Romagne sous Montfaucon. He will tell the rest of the story when the tour group visits the museum.

Romagne Heights



(ABMC, p. 226)



From the 32nd Division's Summary of Operations: "During the early morning of October 12 the division extended to the left and took over the zone formerly held by the 181st Infantry Brigade, 91st Division, which was attached to the 1st Division. On this day the 3rd Division passed to control of the III Corps, the 32nd Division thus becoming the right division of the V Corps. The 42nd Division relieved the 1st Division to the left of the 32nd.

No attack was made on October 13. On the 14th the division captured Romagne and gained a line through the Bois de Chauvignon. The left flank was refused to the southeastern slopes of Hill 288.

The attack was resumed on October 15 and an advance made to the northern edge of Bois de Chauvignon. The left flank was advanced in Bois de Romagne to the southeast of La Tuilerie Ferme.

No general advance was made on October 16. On the 17th the L-shaped wood east of Bois de Chauvignon and the southern and western portions of Bois de Bantheville were taken. On the 18th the line was advanced in Bois de Bantheville. This line was held until the 89th Division relieved the division at 8 a.m., October 20." (32nd Div., pp. 36-7.)

From the 42nd Division's Summary of Operations: "On October 12 the division relieved troops of the 82nd Division in the vicinity of Sommerance. On the same day the right boundary of the 42nd Division was moved to the right about 1,500 meters to include about 1 kilometer of the Bois de Gesnes. Troops of the 84th Infantry Brigade, the right brigade of the 42nd Division, relieved troops of the 32nd Division as far as the new right boundary on October 13. The left center of the division moved forward from Côte de Maldah to Ravin du Gras Faux on this date.

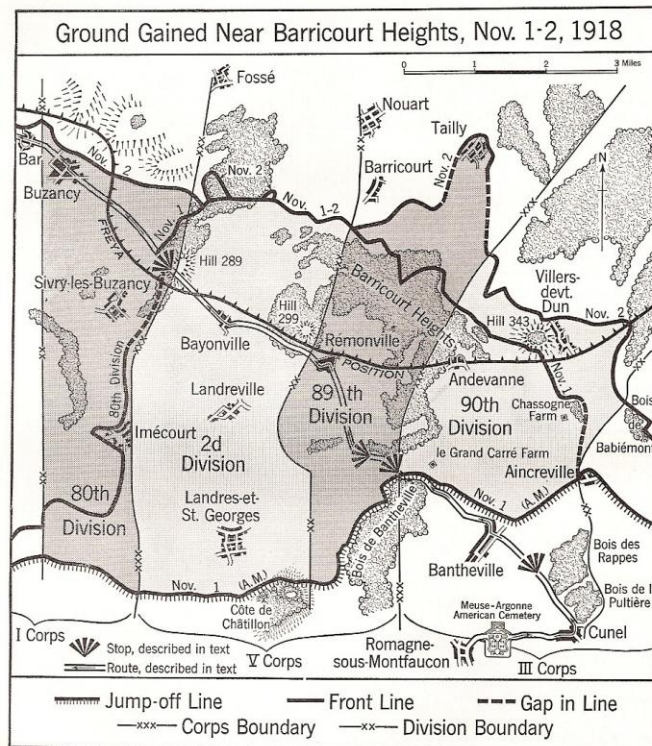
The division attacked on October 14, reaching the crest of Hill 288 and the lower slopes of Côte de Châtillon. There was a gain of about 1 kilometer on the left.

The attack was continued on October 15. During the day the right brigade reached positions just south of La Tuilerie Ferme and La Musarde Ferme. The left brigade reached the enemy wire south and east of St. Georges, but the positions gained could not be held, and except for slight adjustments in the center, the front line was the same as that occupied during the night of October 14-15.

On October 16, the right brigade attacked Côte de Châtillon, and in a combined attack of both regiments reached and held the crest of that hill.

During the period October 17-31, the ground was organized for defense. No advances were made.” (42nd Div., pp. 53-4.)

Advance of 2nd and 89th Divisions toward the Meuse and Stenay



(ABMC, p. 276)

Stenay at the Armistice, Then and Now

