

User's Guide:
U.S. Army Tracings of German Situation Maps--German 5th Army and Army Detachment C

From the 1920s and 1930s the Army War College had representatives at the German Reichsarchiv in Potsdam who were making exact copies of Imperial German military documents so that they could be studied and analyzed by the U.S. military. One subset of documents is the tracings of daily situation maps (singular, Lagenkarte) created by the individual German Armies. These situation maps are an important resource for examining the German side of the St. Mihiel and Meuse-Argonne Offensives.

Created at the individual Army-level, the original Lagenkarten (plural) show the disposition of German Army Groups and divisions within the stated German Army; adding to a better understanding of the German forces on the ground and the command structure. To varying degrees, the maps include major defensive lines, aviation units (balloon and aircraft), unit headquarters, units in reserve, major training areas and some railroad lines. They also provide a glimpse of the enemy units that the German Army believed it was fighting. (Note: The latter is not always accurate.)

These maps were generally updated and produced daily at the Army level; making it possible for researchers to analyze the changes in units on an almost-daily basis. Unfortunately, NARA's collection has a few gaps. **A complete listing of maps included is provided in a separate document.**

The collection also includes 3rd Army maps from 25 – 30 September, as "Group Argonne" was part of the 3rd Army until 5 October 1918. Unfortunately, NARA's collection does NOT include 3rd Army maps from 1-5 October; leaving a gap in coverage during crucial days in the Argonne in early October.

The original 5th Army maps were produced in 1:100,000 scale and the Army Detachment C maps were produced in 1:300,000 scale. Because of this scale, the focus is largely on divisions and higher echelon units; although they do show individual regiments in the case that only 1 or 2 of a division's 3 infantry regiments are in the line. Example: 1/3 52. would indicate that one regiment of the 52nd Infantry Division is in the line.

The U.S. Army tracings (of the originals) were produced on a transparent sheet that is similar to wax paper. Many of the original "wax paper" overlays can still be viewed at the National Archives in College Park, MD. However, most are in very fragile condition. Therefore, at some point, the National Archives created duplicates of these on white or light blue plastic sheets. The maps in this collection are large-scale scans from those duplicates.

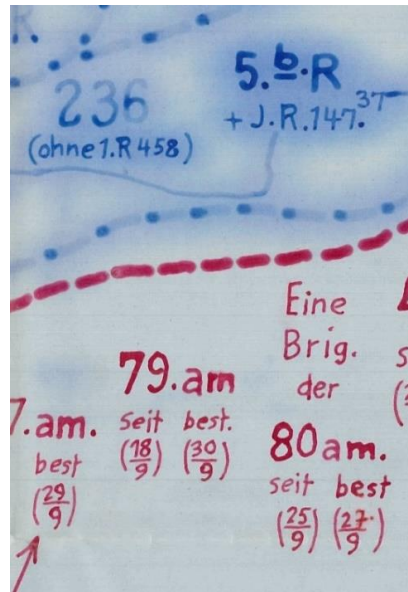
Each map included in this collection has been scanned at 200dpi and each map is provided in two file formats: .jpg and .tiff. As a result, this collection is about 5GB in size!

For the technologically impaired, the .jpps should suffice. Those who are stronger with computers might figure out ways to overlay the .tiff files onto other maps. Great, but one must remember that the overlays will be inexact because of: 1) the large scale used, 2) the folds in the original transparencies and 3) the fact that these are one generation removed from the original transparencies.

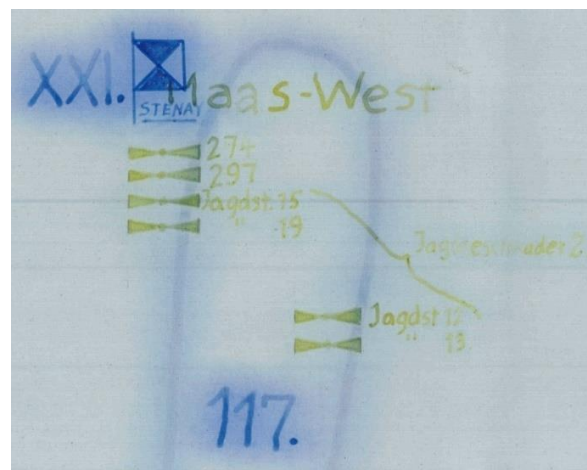
Some working knowledge of the German Army structure in WW1 is essential to fully understand these maps. (Said another way: Randy's tolerance for further information and interpretation of maps will be limited.) Historian Marc Romanych offers high quality NARA scans of various U.S. and German

documents through his business: www.digitalhistoryarchive.com. For example: His brochure “Taktische Zeichen (Tactical Symbols for Maps) 1917” is a great resource for interpreting map symbols. In addition, the “Research Tools” section of Randy’s <https://meuse-argonne.com> website contains bibliographies focused on the Imperial German Army in WW1.

As an example, the snippet below, dated 1 October, shows two German units: The 236th Inf. Division, less Inf. Regt. Nr. 458th and the 5th Bavarian Reserve Division, plus Inf. Regt. Nr. 147 from the 37th Infantry Division. It also shows that intelligence indicated they were fighting against the 79th Division, AEF and one brigade of the 80th Division, AEF. The 79th Division has been in place since 18 Sept. and the 80th since 25 Sept. Randy believes that “best” is the German abbreviation for “Bestaetigung” or “Confirmed.” If correct, the unit’s identity was confirmed on that date.



In the second snippet below, one can see that Stenay was the HQ for the XXI Army Corps of Group Meuse West. One can also see the general area where the 117th Inf. Div. bivouacked and the disposition of various aviation units, including the four Jastas of Jagdgeschwader 2.



Ultimately, many readers will seek unit histories for the German units that opposed a particular U.S. unit. Readers must bear in mind that most German unit histories were written at the regimental level, NOT at the divisional level. Once the German division is known, readers can find information on the regiments that comprise the division in two reference books:

“The German Forces in The Field: November 1918,” (Published jointly in 1995 by The Imperial War Museum, London and The Battery Press, Inc.)

“Histories of Two Hundred and Fifty-One Divisions of the German Army Which Participated in the War 1914-1918” (Published by the London Stamp Exchange Ltd. In 1989.)

Armed with that information, they can then seek further details on-line or elsewhere. Patrick Schallert’s website, <https://www.military-books.lima-city.de/>, is a great source of digital versions of German unit histories. (Note: These are German documents, NOT English translations.) They can also make plans to do research at the National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, MD. Specifically, they should look in Record Group 165: AEF Historical Division Special Staff—German Records (Reichsarchiv.) Finding Aid NM84, Entry 320 will outline the contents of the 205 boxes of German documents that make up RG165, including the map tracings in this collection.

One final note: As with the Griffin Group Photo Archive this map project required multiple trips to the National Archives in College Park, Maryland. The reason: Researchers are limited to a maximum of ten large-scale scans per day. The math is simple; given that the Meuse-Argonne Offensive lasted 47 days and that 3rd Army and Army Detachment C maps have also been included.

A second final note: Most of the original documents in the German Reichsarchiv were destroyed in the April 1, 1945 RAF air raid. In that sense, one should be grateful for the NARA holdings in RG165!!!

As researchers know, the fun is found in the details. These maps are a treasure trove of information on the Meuse-Argonne and St. Mihiel Offensives—from the German point of view.

Hals und Beinbruch! (Good Luck!)

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