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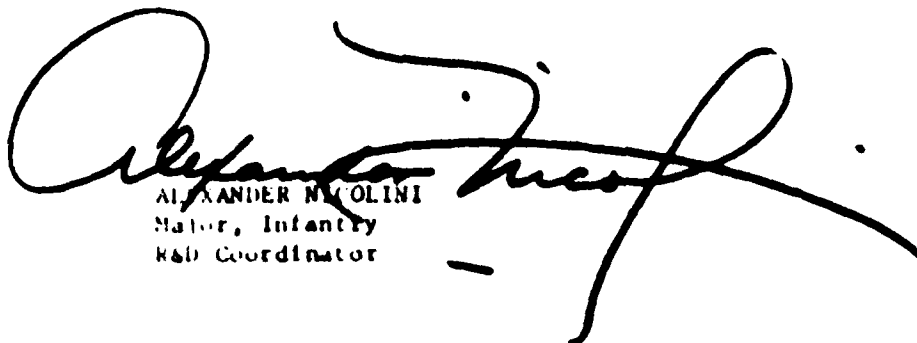
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The 79th Division at Montfaucon,

Remond C. Cochrane, Ph.D. Edgewood Arsenal

with

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

Study 11

Major E. Fellenz
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New

411 439

The 79th Division at Montfaucon
October 1918

by

Rexmond C. Cochrane

GAS WARFARE IN WORLD WAR I

Study Number 19

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Foreword

↙ This is a tentative study of the gas experience of the 79th Division at Montfaucon 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. George Dangler.

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.

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THE 79TH DIVISION AT MONTFAUCON

October 1918

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THE 79th DIVISION AT MONTFAUCON

October 1918

The 79th Division, one of the greenest outfits ever to be thrust into a major engagement, earned enduring reproach for its failure to take Montfaucun on the morning of 26 September, thereby wrecking First Army's schedule at the start of the Meuse-Argonne drive.

Why Pershing put his rawest division in front of the greatest obstacle in the sector will probably never be known. With untrained troops and untrained staff, operating over impossible terrain, the 79th never had a chance.

The division met no serious gas that first day, little the second, and not much more the next two days, but it was enough to complete the total disorganization of the division. After four days of combat, the 79th was withdrawn from the line and sent across the Meuse to the inactive Trezen sector. It took two weeks to put the division back together again.

The 79th was still in the process of being reorganized when on the night of 9 - 10 October it was hit by a major gas bombardment. Two things alone seem to have saved the division. Owing in part to the sorting - out process, less than 1,000 men were exposed to the bombardment. And the Germans used Lorraine yellow cross, a mustard gas shell with a heavy high explosive content. Even so, over 25 percent of those exposed became casualties.

The present study tells the story of the Montfaucon operation and the gas attack that came as its anticlimax.

A Quiet Sector above Verdun

The 79th Division was organized in the fields of what was to become Camp Meade, at Admiral, Maryland, on 25 August 1917. Maj. Gen. Joseph E. Kuhn, military attaché in Berlin in 1915 - 16 and briefly Director of the Army War College, was given the command. The 79th began its career as the Liberty Division with a liberty bell its symbol, but for some unexplained reason ended it with a silver Lorraine cross in place of the bell.

The division as assembled for the first time in mid-October comprised the 157th Brigade under Brig. Gen. William J. Nicholson, made up of the 313th ("Baltimore's Own") and 314th Infantry; the 158th Brigade under Brig. Gen. Robert H. Novle, with the 315th ("Philadelphia's Own") and 316th Infantry; Brig. Gen. Andrew Hero's 154th FA Brigade (not to join the division again until after the Armistice), and machine gun, engineer, signal, and medical units and ammunition and supply trains.

In November, basic training completed, French and British officers arrived at Camp Meade to conduct special courses in the bayonet and machine gun, in artillery fire, gas defense, intelligence, and engineering. During the spring months "stress was laid upon the subject of gas training and gas discipline." Regimental officers and NCO's, completing the course at the division gas school, began explaining to the troops "the dread effects of German gas," and drilled them in donning their gas masks in less than five

seconds.¹

With the departure of the French and British contingents, gas training continued under Maj. Edgar S. Linthicum, Division Gas Officer (replaced in April by 1st Lt. Edwin L. Frederick and by Capt. Arthur B. Clark when the division left for France). Gas exercises during so-called field maneuvers were devoted entirely to trench discipline under simulated cloud gas attacks, with the emphasis on gas mask drill and clearing the trenches of gas. Mention was made of gas shell bombardments, but no word of mustard gas reached the men, as is evident from their instruction material and the standing order that "if no infantry attack develops [after a gas attack], get the men out of their respirators as quickly as possible."²

The training, such as it was, went for naught. In July 1918 when the division moved overseas, almost 65 percent of the troops it had trained were taken for cadres and fillers elsewhere, and the 15,000 recruits it received in the final six weeks "secured overseas clothing, accoutrements and rifles

1

J. Frank Barber (Lt Col, CO 304th Eng), ed., History of the 79th Division (Steinman, Lancaster, Pa. [1927], 510 pp.), p. 36. Note: Nowhere in this volume, hereafter cited as History, does the title or name of the Division Gas Officer appear. The name of the Division Medical Gas Officer, Lt Col Andrew W. Smith, is listed but no reports of his have been found.

2

79th Div Gas Def Serv Memos, Camp Meade, 1, 14, 18 Mar (79th Div Box 3, 32.11); Ltr, DGO 79th Div to C of Eng, 30 Apr, sub: Monthly Rpt for Apr (79th Div Box 11, 63.56).

along with the rest of the division, learned the elements of movement by columns, had a brief lesson or two in the use of the gas mask and that was all."³

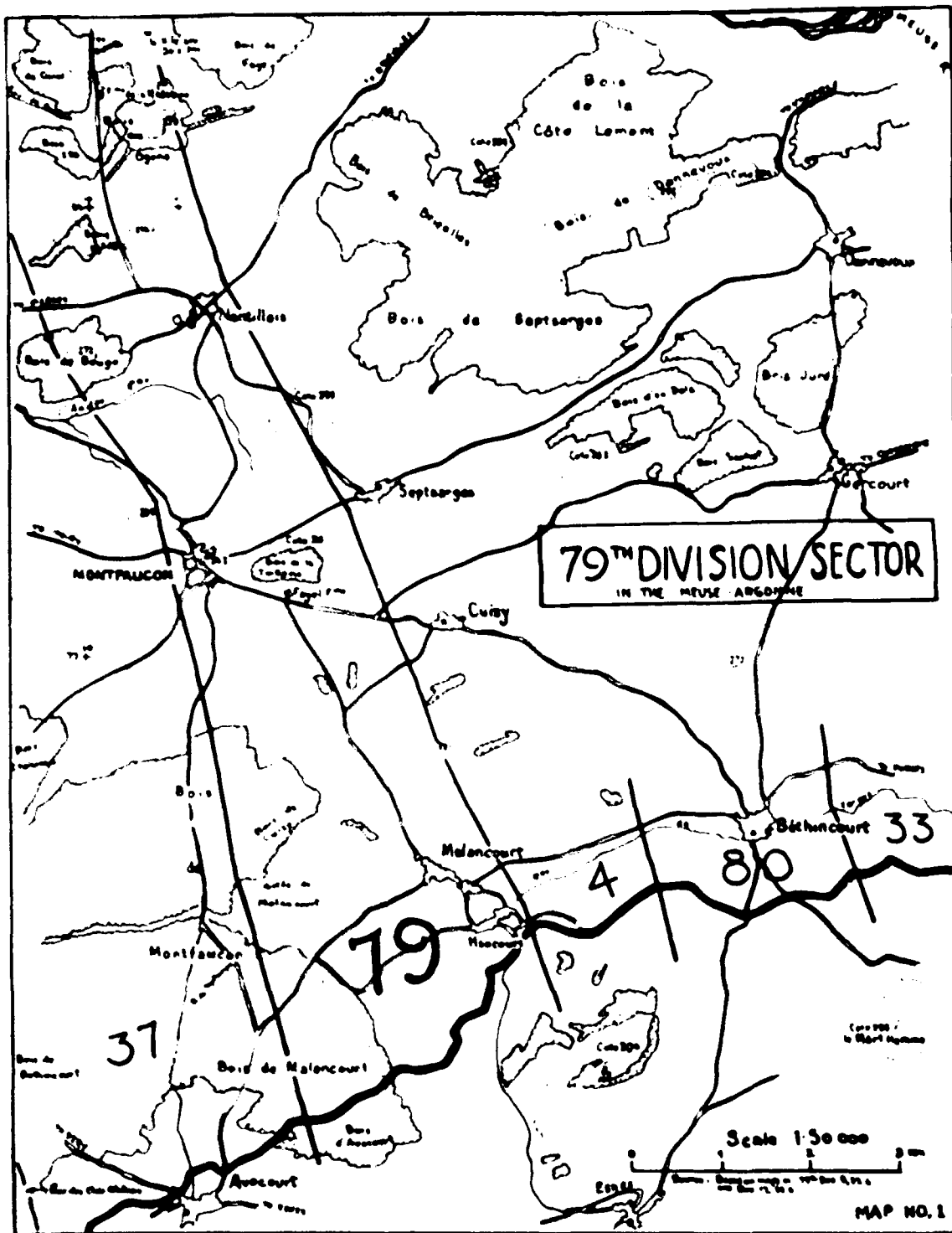
Its training exercises ended in the Tenth Training Area in the Haute-Marne on 7 September, and with the issue of steel helmets and gas masks, the 79th Division was ordered to the Second French Army area in the relatively quiet Meuse-Argonne region. Ten days later the 313th and 315th Infantry relieved the 157th French Division in Sector 304, between the razed villages of Avocourt and Haucourt, "Baltimore's Own" relieving the 371st Infantry, 93rd American Division, then brigaded with the French division (Map No. 1).⁴

Sector 304 was a part of the battlefield of Verdun, fought over by the armies of France and Germany for four years. In 1916 the French had lost over 300,000 there before surrendering Hills 304 and le Mort Homme to the enemy. The heights were finally retaken in August 1917, and the 79th Division came into trenches that had been organized to protect these watch towers of Verdun.

To the north of Avocourt steep series of hills and ravines covered with small clumps of trees, underbrush, and barbed wire entanglements rose and fell as far as the eye could see. On the horizon stood the height of Mont-

³ History, pp. 15, 37; Rpt, Insp of 79th Div, 19 - 27 Jun (79th Div Box 11, 66.1). Ltrs, DGO 79th Div to C CWS Def Div, 18, 24, 31 Aug, sub: Weekly Rpt (79th Div Box 202, 319.1), rptd that on arriving in France all troops went through the gas chamber test and wore their masks for a single four-hour period; 15 officers and 30 NCO's completed gas courses at the AEF gas schools.

⁴ See 2nd Fr Army, corps, and div orders in 79th Div Box 6, 32.7; FO 2, 79th Div, 1200, 12 Sep (79th Div Box 3, 32.1); History, pp. 54 - 7.



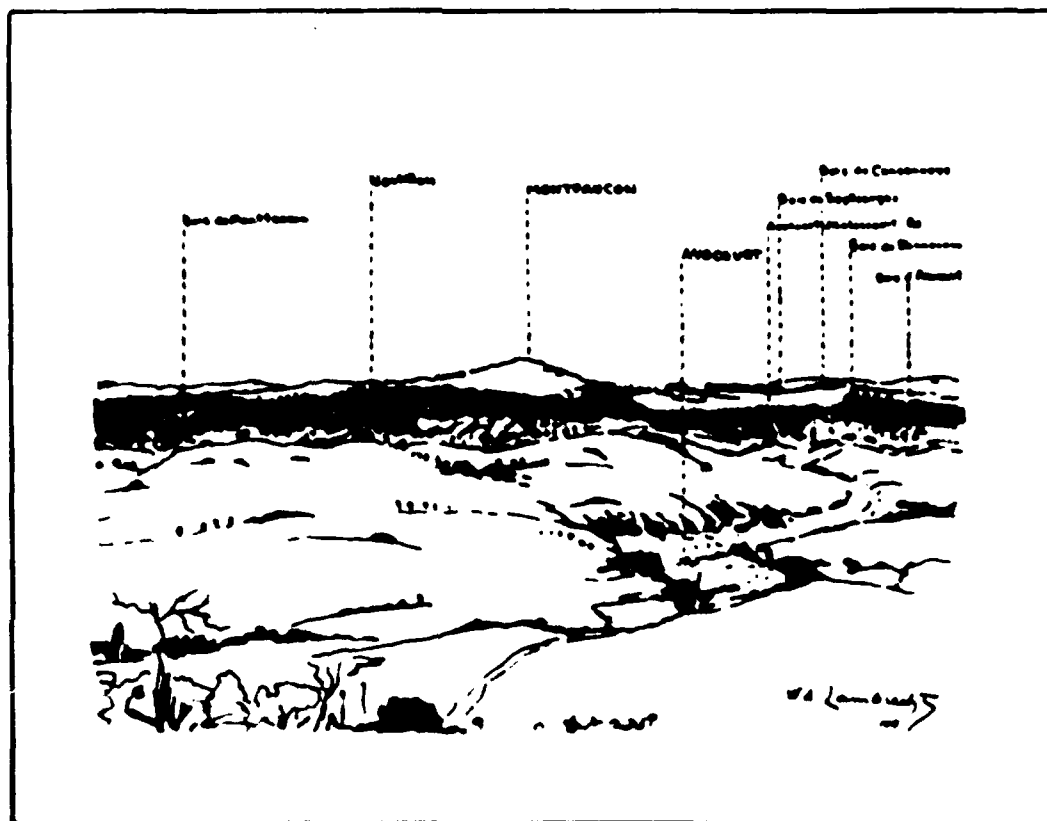
faucon, the white ruins of a village capping its crest (see Sketch). Back of the German outpost zone, three kilometers deep in front of the 79th, was the enemy's Hagen Stellung, and three kilometers beyond that the Etzel Stellung, another fortified battle zone, dominated by Montfaucon. The enemy on Montfaucon commanded the terrain from the heights of Verdun to Clermont, on the edge of the Argonne Forest, and from there the German Crown Prince had looked down on the battle for Verdun in 1916. Seven kilometers beyond Montfaucon was the Kriemhilde Stellung, the last great defense system of the German Armies on the Meuse-Argonne front.

The outpost positions turned over to the 313th and 315th Infantry on the night of 15 - 16 September were occupied by groups of 20 men at quarter-mile intervals. Isolated two thousand yards in front of the main trench positions, their sole mission in the event of an enemy attack, they were told, was "to die as loudly as possible." Meanwhile, they were to do everything possible to prevent the enemy from learning that American troops had come into the sector.⁵

After a day or two the first apprehensions of the green troops subsided. The enemy made no raids and his shelling -- 78 HE rounds recorded on 15 September and 47 the next day -- was far from severe. "Gas shells," said the division history, "were more feared than the occasional high explosives. The troops were not used to being gassed as yet, and several

⁵

History, p. 61; Secret Order 4, 79th Div, 15 Sept (79th Div Box 3, 32.13).



MONTFAUCON IN SECTOR 304

Source: Thoreau
Map of 1850-1851
p. 24

bad cases occurred, despite...klaxon warnings."⁶

Captain Clark, the Division Gas Officer, confirmed a spate of false gas alarms, but reported just three small gas attacks, on the mornings of 21 and 22 September. Six to eight green cross-1 (diphosgene and chlorpicrin) shells landed in a trench, causing one slight casualty. The next morning approximately 25 yellow cross (mustard gas) shells fell near a company of engineers. A French soldier with them was struck by a shell fragment and carried into a nearby dugout until evacuated a short time later. The two medics attending him and four men who slept in the dugout that night noticed a faint peculiar smell but didn't recognize it as gas. All were casualties the next morning. Elsewhere in the sector that morning 50 green cross - 2 (phosgene, diphosgene, and diphenylchloroarsine) shells fell in a battalion area of the 315th Infantry but the wind quickly dispersed the gas and no casualties resulted.⁷

G - 2 reports covering the first ten days in the sector indicate that the enemy fired a total of some 1,800 HE shells. No gas shells were reported, but G - 2 said alarms were sounded when a heavy shell that landed

6

History, p. 64. Gas memos issued included Bul, 79th Div, 21 Sep, and Standing Orders for Defense Against Gas, 79th Div, 23 Sept (79th Div Box 11, 63.32).

7

Ltr, DGO to C CWS, 21 Sept, sub: Weekly Rpt (79th Div Box 11, 63.3); Ltr, *ibid.*, 22 Sept, sub: Gas Rpt (79th Div Box 202, 319.1); Spencer, "History of Gas Attacks upon the AEF" (15 Feb 1928), III, 493 - 95.

near the trenches on the night of the 20th emitted a heavy white smoke "which covered our trenches looking like gas." On 21 September an observer reported a new emplacement under construction on the edge of the woods north of Avocourt and thought it might "possibly be mine-thrower for a gas attack." Nothing apparently was done about it nor was the emplacement later confirmed. G - 3 reported a total of 4 killed and 6 wounded in the period, all the result of a raid on an outpost on the morning of 22 September.⁸

Any hopes the division had of remaining unnoticed and unidentified by the enemy were dispelled when a series of raids were made on the outposts a week after arriving on the front. Several men were captured on the 21st and again on the 22nd. In turn, fallen raiders revealed the presence across no man's land of the German 1st Guard and 117th Divisions (Map No. 2).⁹

The Golfe de Malancourt

Until 21 September, when orders transferred the 79th from French control to the American V Corps, the division thought it was simply getting its trench warfare seasoning before going to a more active front. Rumors that it might attack at Avocourt were considered just rumors and lightly discounted. But

⁸ SOI 3 - 12, 79th Div, 15 - 25 Sep (79th Div Box 2, 20.1); unnumbered DORs, 79th Div, 14 - 24 Sep (79th Div Box 6, 33.1). Memo, 79th Div, 17 Sep, rptd that a German projector company was said to be working eastward from the Argonne, and Bul, 79th Div, 21 Sep (both in 79th Div Box 212, 470.6), warned of the necessity for strict gas discipline.

⁹ SOI 8 and 9, 79th Div, 20 - 22 Sep. These two German divs spanned the front from the edge of the Argonne east to Malancourt, a distance of about 12 kms.

no doubt remained when the left sector was turned over to the incoming 37th Division, and on the night of 24 - 25 September a battalion each of the 316th and 315th Infantry with their machine gun companies came up to relieve the two regiments in the line. On their right they found the 4th Division of III Corps.¹⁰

The order for the attack on the morning of 26 September said that the 79th, in close liaison with its adjacent divisions, was to advance rapidly to the Corps Objective, a line above Nantillois (Map No. 3). It would take Malancourt, Montfaucon, and Nantillois in its drive up the center of First Army line. This was a distance of nine kilometers, but the deep objective was considered possible since only one regiment of enemy troops was believed to be in front of the 79th. "In view of the extent of the projected advance for the First Day, brigade commanders will provide, by echelonment in depth, the necessary driving power."¹¹

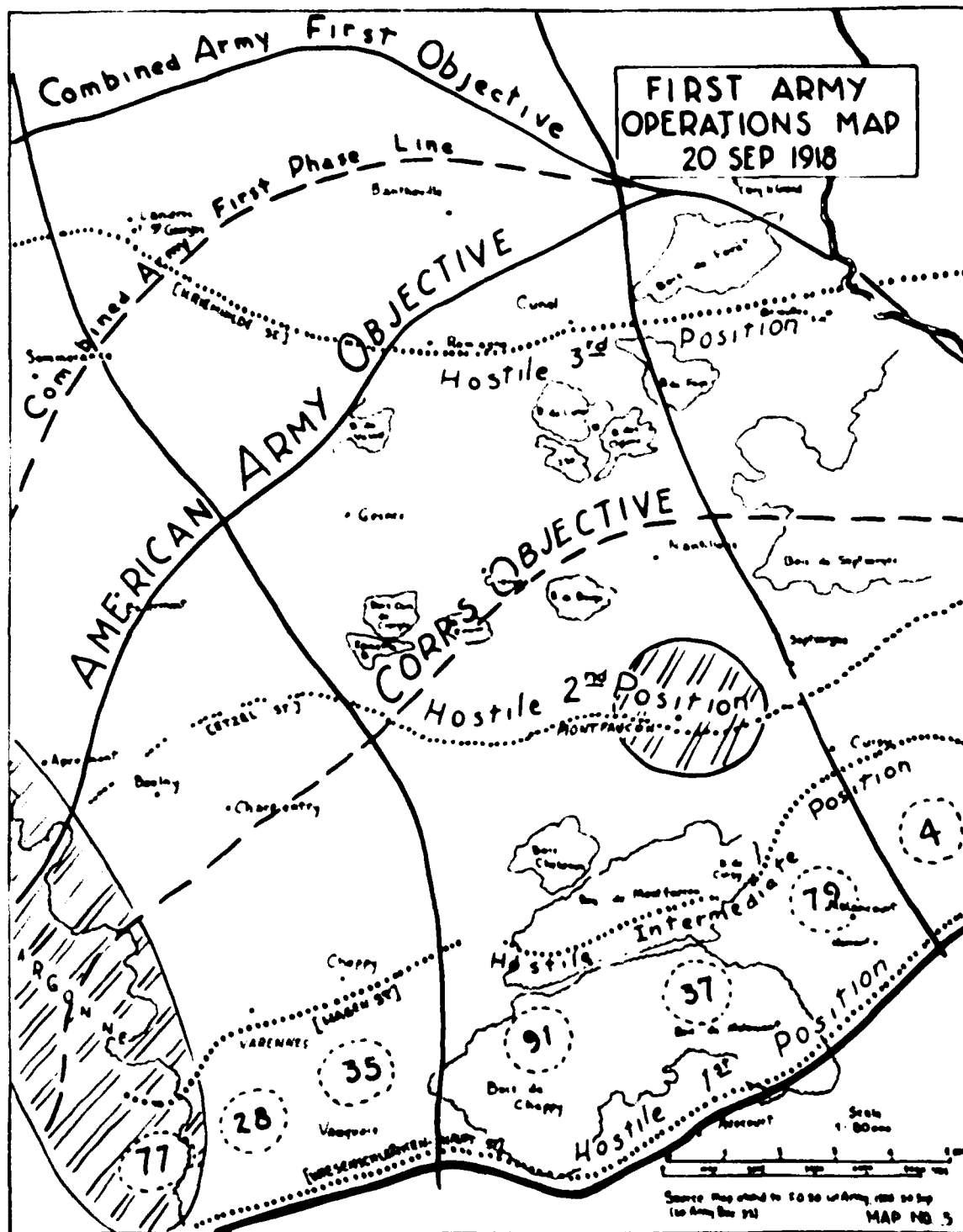
To deceive the enemy, a battalion from the 33rd Division, from the right wing of III Corps, had taken over the outposts on the night of 22 - 23 September, and to complicate the organization of the attack still further, on the afternoon of the 24th word was received designating the 157th Brigade to make the actual attack, two battalions each of the 313th and 314th Infantry abreast, their companies echeloned in depth, to pass through the 316th

¹⁰

FO 30, V Corps, 0600, 21 Sep; FO 31, V Corps, 0800, 21 Sep; FO 34, V Corps, 1530, 21 Sep (V Corps Box 14, 32-1); FO 5, 79th Div, 1600, 21 Sep; History, pp. 68 - 70.

¹¹

FO 6, 79th Div, 1330, 25 Sep, par 2(C); History, p. 73.



and 315th Infantry in the front line trenches at H hour. The regiments of the 158th Brigade would then follow in support 1,000 meters to the rear. Heavy machine gun companies, three tank battalions, and Company D of the 1st Gas Regiment were to support the attack regiments.¹²

The artillery preparation and support of the advance was under Brig. Gen. G. LeRoy Irwin, 57th FA Brigade (32nd Division), who had 23 batteries of 75's, 10 batteries of 155's, 2 batteries of 9.2's, and 12 trench mortars under his command.

The mortars of the 1st Gas Regiment were to confine themselves to firing smoke prior to the advance and thermite, as directed by the infantry, during the advance. "During the preparation fire," said the division order for the attack, "there will be certain halts prescribed by the Corps Chief of Artillery....these halts [to be] followed by the use of gas shells to surprise the hostile personnel and to compel the wearing of gas masks."¹³ This was the final sop to Army's indecisive plans for the use of gas on the Montfaucon front, and even this was never carried out.

With the weight of the attack in the center, driving for Buzancy and Stonne, the Army field order of 20 September had said that nonpersistent gases (French #4 hydrogen cyanide or #5 phosgene) would be used to

¹²

FO 5, Amendment, 79th Div, 1815, 21 Sep; Secret Memo, Col Tenney Rose Cofs 79th Div for CG 157th Brig, 23 Sep (79th Div Box 6, 32.8); FO 39, V Corps, 1030, 25 Sep; FO 6, 1330, 25 Sep, 79th Div; Ltr, CG 157th Brig to CG 79th Div, 3 Oct, sub: Rpt of Opns of Brig (79th Div Box 13, 33.6).

¹³

Annex A, FO 6, 79th Div, 24 Sep.

neutralize enemy forces in the Bois de Montfaucon, Bois de Chehemin, and Bois Septsarges. The edge of the Argonne would also be gassed with non-persistent agents to neutralize that flank temporarily, and persistent mustard gas east of the Meuse would neutralize the right flank of the attack.¹⁴ But the principal map accompanying the order (see Map No. 3) showed a single gas target in the center of the Army line, covering the heights of Montfaucon.

Whatever First Army's gas intentions may have been, they were apparently nullified by the Army artillery annex which left the decision to use gas to the individual corps commanders. Thus the initial V Corps attack order on 21 September said nothing about gas. Two days later a supplement said that nonpersistent gases would be used on the Bois de Montfaucon and Bois de Chehemin.¹⁵ The heights of Montfaucon were to be destroyed with HE by corps and divisional artillery to prevent hostile observation.

At the last minute, V Corps "asked that no gas be used in any of its area of advance...." "The event proved," said the Army Chief of Artillery later, "that gas used against the Boisumont, Bois de Beuge and Bois des Epinettes, all small woods foreseen to be probable centers of resistance

¹⁴

FO 20, 1st Army, 1500, 20 Sep, par 3 H (6)(a) (1st Army Box 32, 32.1).

¹⁵

Annex 1, Employment of Army Arty, FO 20, 1st Army, 19 Sep, par V (3)a; FO 31, V Corps, Parts I and II, 21 and 23 Sep.

of serious consequence, might have saved much delay."¹⁶

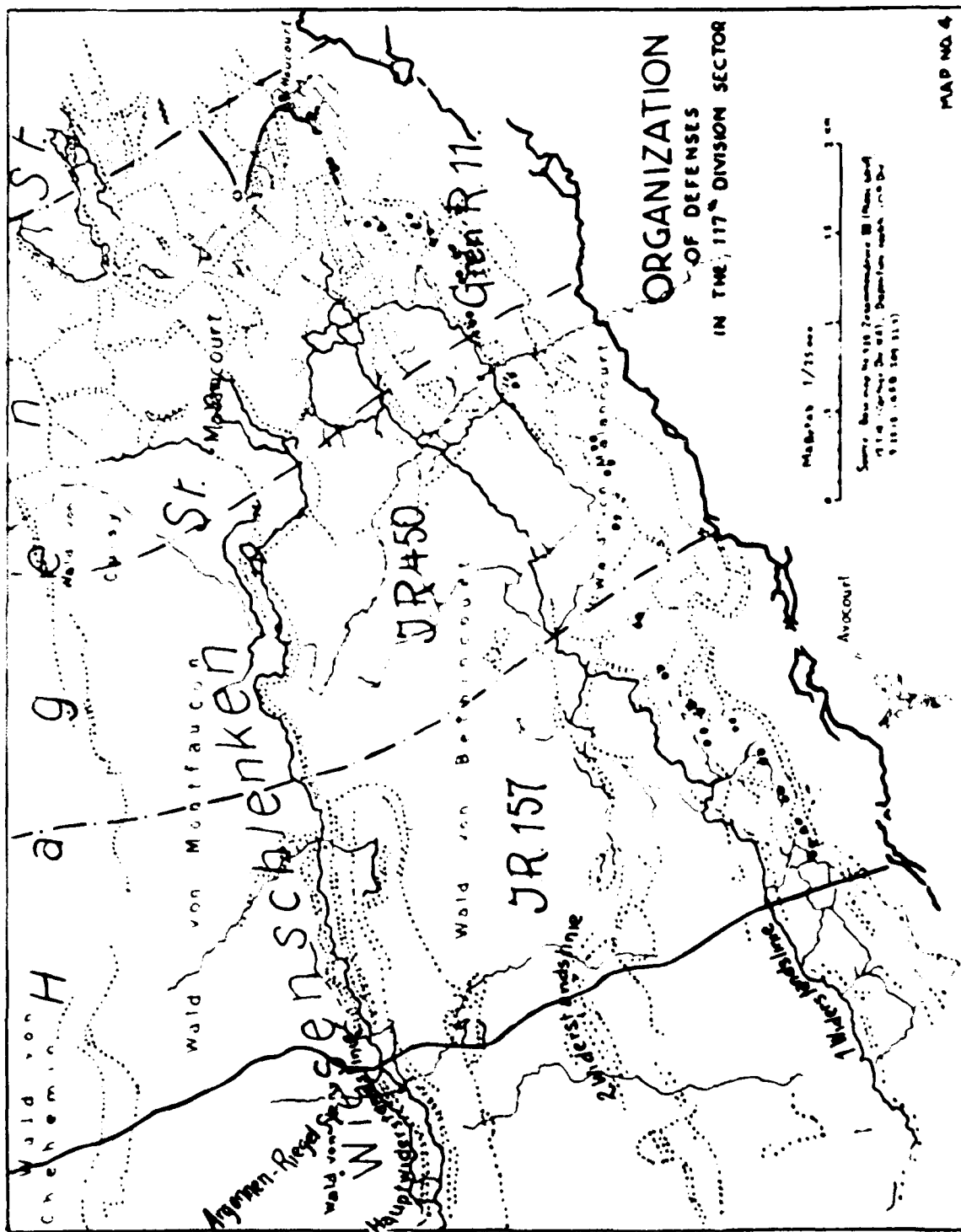
At 2330 hours, 25 September, the 2,700 guns of First Army began the five-hour preparation for the assault. Irwin's batteries alone fired almost 40,000 75-mm. and 6,000 155-mm. shells in the preparation and barrage for the 79th Division.¹⁷ Twenty seconds before H-hour, the mortars of the 1st Gas Regiment filled no man's land with a fog of white phosphorus smoke. Then the attack companies of the 313th and 314th Infantry, with fixed bayonets, jumped off, following their rolling barrage.

The barrage gradually drew away from the troops as they stumbled and struggled across the cratered, wired terrain before them and made their way through the dense underbrush of the Bois de Malancourt and the rubble of Haucourt and Malancourt (Map. No. 4). By 0900 hours, their artillery fire falling far up ahead, the troops finally penetrated the enemy outpost zone as the 313th Infantry emerged from the Bois de Malancourt into the mile-square sloped clearing known as the Golfe de Malancourt. Here the regiment was held up for five crucial hours by entrenched machine guns firing point blank from positions half way up the slope and by overhead fire from nests along the edge of the Bois de Cuisy.

The division history was to say that "a German map, showing the disposition of their machine guns..., indicates that in this particular

¹⁶ Memo, Cof Arty 1st Army for CofS 1st Army, 1 Oct, sub: Some conclusions from recent ops (1st Army Box 87, 60-3); 1st Army Arty G - 2 WD, 1015, 26 Sep (1st Army Box 90, 60-32); Study No. 10, "The Use of Gas in the Meuse - Argonne Campaign," pp. 12 - 13.

¹⁷ The next day the arty brigade fired just 1,500 rounds. Hist of the 57th FA Brig (32nd Div Box 24, 11.4).



sector there were 113 and it is fair to assume that in addition to these fixed guns there were at least half as many more movable or portable machine guns in action against our advancing infantry." The German map has not been found. General Kuhn later reported that approximately 12 machine guns stopped the advance.¹⁸

With no time to organize an elaborate flanking operation against these nests if they were to catch up with the barrage, successive companies of the regiment made repeated frontal attacks that resulted only in slaughter. The confusion was redoubled when one battalion commander was killed almost immediately and another severely wounded soon after.¹⁹

Behind the 313th Infantry came the 316th, its progress of interest only for an episode related by Captain Glock, its Regimental Adjutant. The slight gas fire that day went unreported except by Glock who said that within an hour or two of going over the top "we ran into gas and had to don our masks. Perspiration and moisture condensed on the eye-pieces, and I could see only a dancing of green flashes as I pushed on and on up the duck - board walk [of an enemy communication trench]. We heard frantic cries behind us, and it was the Colonel [Oscar J. Charles, regimental commander]. He had secured a particularly elaborate mask [probably a French Tisset] and didn't know how to wear it. He forgot to pull out one cork under his chemical canister and couldn't draw air. We

¹⁸ History, p. 86; Ltr, CG 79th Div to CG V Corps, 2 Oct, sub: Rpt of Opns (79th Div Box 6, 33.6).

¹⁹ Ltr, Col C. B. Swezey CO 313th Inf to CG 79th Div, 2 Oct, sub: Rpt of Opns of Regt (79th Div Box 17, 33.6).

get him fixed up and pushed on....Our own barrage was on ahead. At last we came out into the German front line trench."²⁰

On the right, the 314th Infantry advanced over the shell-pocked terrain of the Malancourt valley. In the dense fog and smoke its units became intermingled, and they left behind them numerous concealed enemy machine guns, particularly around Haucourt. As the fog lifted, about 1000 hours, the foremost troops were near the ruins of Malancourt when enemy machine guns opened up on them "from practically every point of the compass.... more or less demoralizing the command."²¹

Both the 313th and 314th Infantry were by that time without machine gun support, for the heavy machine gun companies assigned to them had long since been left far to the rear. Their efforts to man-handle the heavy Brownings over the tangled and torn terrain failed and the companies were finally ordered back to the trenches to await further orders. Hours later some of the machine gun units with the support battalions worked their way to the front.²²

"The 79th is holding up the whole army"

The extrication of the 313th from the Gelle de Malancourt on the afternoon of the 26th was largely owing to the advance of the 37th and

²⁰ Pers ltr home, dated 10 Oct (79th Div Box 21, 33.6).

²¹ Col Oury, Draft Rpt of Opns for 314th Inf and 158th Brig for period 25 - 30 Sept., n.d. (79th Div Box 18, 33.6).

²² Opns Rpt, 311th MG Bn, 25 Sep - 1 Oct (79th Div Box 22, 33.6), said the bn fired just once "on a real machine gun target" during the whole operation. See also History, pp. 91 - 2.

4th Divisions on either side, with some assistance from the 314th Infantry. As the Germans pulled back to concentrate at Montfaucon, the 313th moved into the Bois de Cuisy. At 1600 hours, troops arriving at the top of these woods found themselves again checked by hostile machine gun fire.

The 313th was now dispersed in widely scattered little groups and its impetus gone. It was trying to survive, not attack. To the right, "the zeal of several elements of the [supporting] 315th Infantry had carried their attack forward so strongly that they found themselves fighting side by side with the front line units of the 314th Infantry."²³ The brigades were coming apart. Any hope of an attack that day against Montfaucon would soon be out of the question.

In the rear the supply trains of the division with their ambulances and ammunition and ration trucks milled around as the attack began and then came to a stop in a hopeless snarl. The few north and south roads in the sector were under intense shell fire from distant enemy guns and in many places soon disappeared completely. To make matters worse, the lone road through Avecourt was shared by the 91st, 37th, and 79th Divisions, and that between Malancourt and Cuisy by the 79th and 4th Divisions. At 1115 hours the 304th Engineers reported to 79th Division headquarters:

Axial road into Avecourt will be OK within one hour. From there N. 3 - 4 km. can be repaired in a few hours. From that point on all roads seem to be lost. All forward areas a mass of craters. Must have unlimited help

23

E. Lester Muller, The 313th of the 79th in the World War (Meyer & Thalheimer, Baltimore, 1919), p. 108, said "the divisional reserve got out of hand, and advancing too rapidly, mingled with the assault troops." See also History, pp. 93 - 5.

to construct both roads. Advise what I can expect.²⁴

Little could be expected since the other divisions, as well as corps and Army with their mobile units were in approximately the same fix. Ground plowed by some ten million shells during the previous four years could not be repaired in hours or days. The month of rain that began on 28 September made that certain.

Since early morning the wire between General Cameron at V Corps and Kuhn at his advance post on the Malancourt - Esnes road had been out, and liaison between Kuhn and General Nicholson's 157th Brigade was lost when Nicholson moved his command post forward without notice. A corps message sent sometime before noon saying that Cameron "desires the attack pushed" did not reach General Kuhn until 1450 or the 313th Infantry until 1735. "You must get by Montfaucon tonight," corps signalled at 1807 hours, and this message, warning that the 79th was "holding up the advance of the whole army," was sent on to both brigades. But it is doubtful whether they received it that night.²⁵

At 1800, moving a relatively intact support battalion of the 313th to the front, and with a handful of French whippet tanks that had come up, Colonel Swezey, regimental commander, led his force down into the valley

²⁴

Quoted in History, pp. 98, 109. See road sketches in V Corps Box 3, 15.1 and 15.2.

²⁵

Mag, Kuhn to CG 157th Brig, n.h., 26 Sep; Mag, V Corps to CofS 79th Div, 1807, 26 Sep (79th Div Box 4, 32.15); Ltr, CG 79th Div to C-in-C AEF, 24 Oct, sub: Rpt of Opns (79th Div Box 6, 33.6); Div Sig Off, Rpt on Liaison of 79th Div, 25 - 30 Sep. n. d. (79th Div Box 28, 33.6).

between the Bois de Cuisy and Montfaucon. At dark the tanks withdrew and Swezey with his men returned to the wood. The 314th on the left, now thoroughly intermingled with the 315th, advanced about a kilometer north of Malancourt before dark.

At one time there had been "a little evidence of panic" in the two regiments that afternoon, but it had subsided. Reports from company commanders that night revealed that a number of "detachments had straggled away entirely in the fog that morning." At least it was assumed that was when they had left.²⁶

The division history estimated that 130 men were killed in the two lead regiments that day but made no effort to hazard the number of wounded. Medical records indicate that at least 206 were killed and 222 wounded on the 26th. The division ambulances brought in just 73 wounded. A few other wounded may have reached adjacent unit hospitals, but the rest were left in the field where they fell. The road block that developed that day continued for 80 hours before any kind of break in it could be made and ambulances or anything else could get through.²⁷

At midnight, while Kuhn still tried to locate the 313th and 314th Infantry and order the night attack demanded by corps, corps finally got

²⁶

Cel Cury, Draft Rpt of Opns....(79th Div Box 18, 33.6).

²⁷

History, pp. 102 - 06; Med Dept statistics for 26 Sep, in Analysis, p. 84; Lt Col James M. Troutt, 304th San Tr, Periodical Opns Rpt for 25 Sep to 1 Oct, 18 Oct (Med Dept Box 3867, fol 3).

through another imperative message it had received from Pershing: "The C-in-C expects the 79th Division to advance tonight to a position abreast of the 4th Division in the vicinity of Nantillois." Another message from Pershing a half hour later concluded:

The enemy is in retreat or holding lightly in places...and there should be no delay or hesitation in going forward....Corps and division commanders will not hesitate to relieve on the spot any officer of whatever rank who fails to show in this emergency...qualities of leadership.²⁸

When General Kuhn had not reached Nicholson or the 157th Brigade command post two hours later, he ordered General Noble, the 158th Brigade commander, to take the 315th Infantry and advance immediately. If when he arrived above Malancourt and found that attack instructions to the 314th had not been received or obeyed, he was to take over that regiment also and move ahead as far and as fast as possible, keeping Kuhn informed of his progress by runners.²⁹ Noble spent the night trying to locate and reorganize his regiments and conferring with his officers. Kuhn subsequently learned, instead of attacking as ordered.³⁰

28

Quoted in History, p. 106; Pers ltr, Col Tenney Ross, CofS 79th Div to Maj Colby, 29 May 1939 (79th Div Box 5, 32.6).

29

Mag, CofS 79th Div to CG 158th Brig, 0115, 27 Sep (79th Div Box 4, 32.16); History, p. 107.

30

Ltr, V Corps Insp to IG AEF, 2 Oct, sub: Prelim rpt on 79th Div (V Corps Box 63, fol 91); Ltr, CG 79th Div to CG V Corps, 2 Oct, sub: Rpt of Ops (79th Div Box 6, 33.6).

At 0515 on the morning of the 27th, Kuha at last reached Michelson, told him to locate the 313th and 316th Infantry and push on with them at once to the Combined Army First Phase Line (see Map No. 3). By that time G - 2 had learned that on the previous day the division had met not one but the better part of two regiments of the German 117th Division. It did not yet know that during the night the 37th Division had come up behind the 117th.³¹

On 25 September, von Oven's Group Mass West, opposite the 37th, 79th, 4th, 80th, and 33rd Divisions of First Army, consisted of two divisions, the 117th and 7th Reserve (see Map No. 2). The 117th, resting in the sector after fighting at the Somme all through August, had not yet had its losses replaced. In addition to its three regiments, with a battle strength of approximately 6,400 officers and men, the 117th Division had two attached pioneer companies (3 officers and 112 men) and two Landsturm battalions, one with 12 heavy machine guns, the other with 3 officers and 68 riflemen. Altogether, the 117th may have had about 6,650 effectives, approximately half of them on the 79th Division front.³²

At 1050 hours on the 26th, the 117th Division reported that the enemy had broken through at its junction with the 7th Reserve. Two hours

31

History, p. 108; FO 44a, V Corps, 0145, 27 Sep; SOI 14, 79th Div, 27 - 28 Sep. There was no SOI for 26 - 27 Sep. Cf. V Corps Chronological Statement of Events, 1500, 27 Sep, and 0900, 29 Sep (V Corps Box 2, 11.4), for rpt and ident of enemy reinforcements.

32

223rd Brig (117th Div) WD, 25 Sep (German Files Box 210, fol 11); Msg, 117th Div to Gp Mass West, 3 Oct, sub: Battle worth of the div (GFB 209, fol 1, p. 12).

later, while its center continued to hold the American 79th, its left regiment reported that it had had to withdraw to the top of the Bois de Montfaucen. On the right, Hill 301, north of Cuisy, had been occupied by the Americans and they were in Septsarges. The retreating troops were ordered into the Bois de Beuge and Montfaucen. Late that night the 37th and 5th Bavarian Reserve Divisions, summoned the day before from east of the Meuse, arrived to support the battered 117th and 7th Reserve.³³

The 117th Division on the 26th lost almost half its forces and half its artillery, damaged by American fire or spiked to prevent capture. But one battery at least fired 551 rounds of green cross (phosgene) before its crew retreated, most of it against the advancing waves of the American 37th and 4th Divisions.³⁴ Troops in the 79th Division may never have been exposed to more than drifting gas.

Montfaucen and Montillois

At first light on 27 September, the two regiments on the left and the intermingled two on the right, all on emergency rations now and low on ammunition, advanced across the sloping plain towards Montfaucen and the Bois de la Tuilerie east of the heights. Fully exposed to the enemy, their

³³ 223rd Brig WD, 26 Sep; Arke 117 WD, 26 Sep (GFB 210, fol III); Mass West Order Ia 499, 0245, 26 Sep (GFB 209, fol I, p. 4); 117th Div Order Ia 4822, 0315, 27 Sep (GFB 209, fol I, p. 6).

³⁴ I/88 Fusaa Bn (117th Div) WD, 26 Sep (GFB 210, fol IV). I Bn FAR 233 (117th Div) WD, 26 Sep (GFB 210, fol III), said that after exhausting its supply it received 1,050 blue and green cross shells that day. A single battery survived the day, spiking its guns when its ammo was gone. No record of captured gas ammo has been found.

only covering fire was a battalion of 75's and a company of heavy machine guns. They were no match for the storm of fire that came from the top of the Bois de Cusel, from the Argonne hills ten kilometers to the west, from la Berne de Cerneuiller (Hill 378), ten kilometers east, beyond the Meuse, and from the woods around Clerges and Remagne.³⁵

313th Infantrymen in the lead pressed on through the rain of fire to the foot of Montfaucen before nests of concealed machine guns dropped them in their tracks. One nest was stormed and a captured gunner insisted there were 33 more guns on the slopes before them. German records reveal 10 heavy machine guns in five nests there.³⁶

Several hours later units of all three battalions of the 313th had taken out the nests, climbed the heights and were at the edge of the town on the crest. Two hundred Germans, 30 machine guns and 11 field pieces were reported captured on the northwest slope of Montfaucen.³⁷

Since the 4th Division, on the right, was then north of Septarges, a German message at 1103 hours said Montfaucen was to be evacuated at once, the troops moving back to the south edges of the Bois de Bouge and

35

History, pp. 110 - 11.

36

Teleph order, 233rd Brig, 26 Sep (GFB 210, fol II, p. 4).

37

Ltr, Swezey CO 313th Inf to TAG, 17 Jul 1919, sub: Rpt of Opns (79th Div Box 16, 33.6).

Montfaucon (Map No. 5).³⁸ At noon, as the last of the enemy snipers on Montfaucon were cleared out, the 313th sent word to division headquarters:

Take town of Montfaucon 11h55....Am moving on to corps objective and hope to reach it by 16h. Request artillery fire on Bois de Beuge beginning 2:30 PM and lifted at 4:00 PM.³⁹

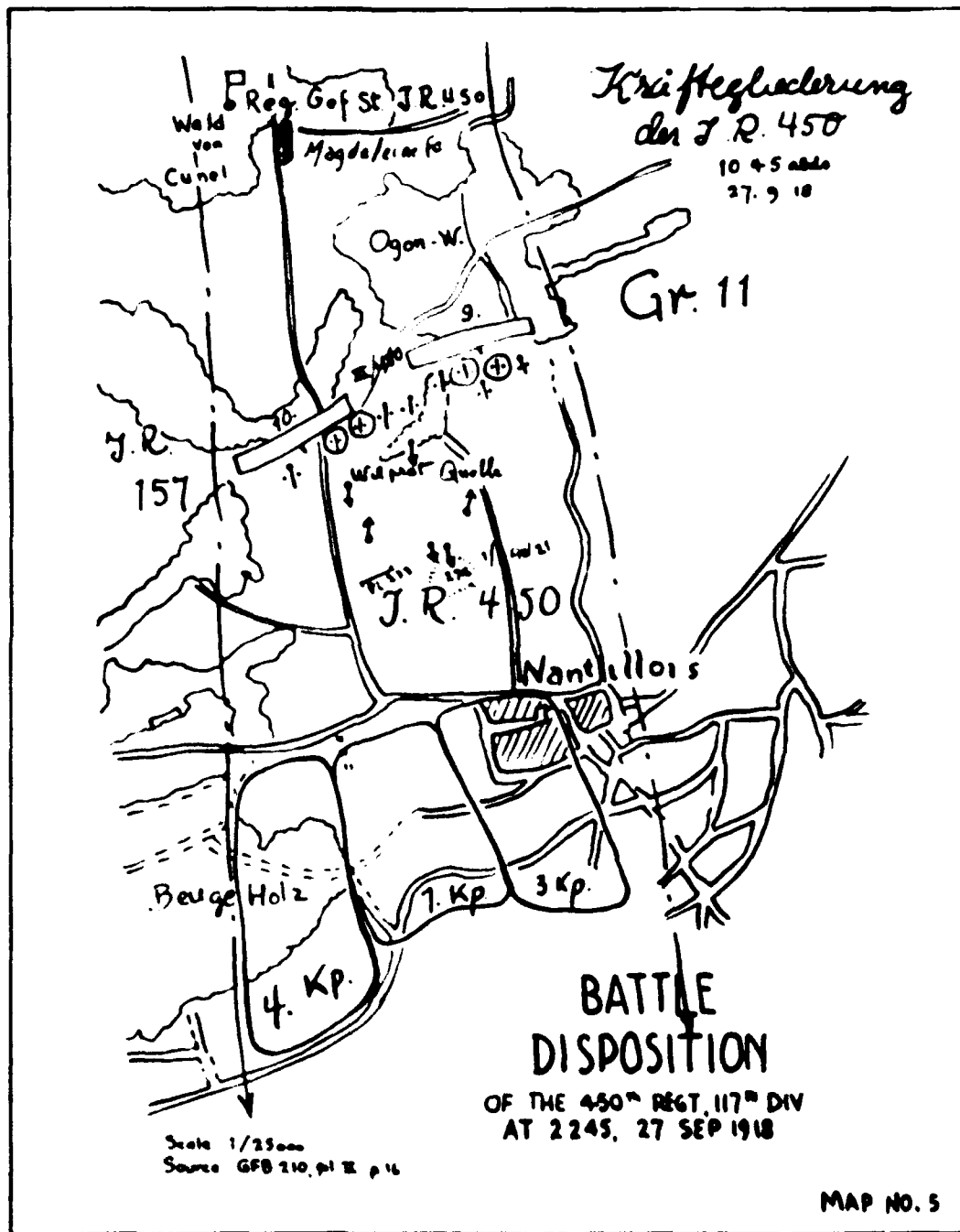
About the same time, leading elements of the 314th Infantry reached the Bois de la Tuilerie. There Col. William H. Oury of the 314th learned that General Noble had been relieved by Kuhn for failing to attack the night before as ordered, and Oury was to command the 158th Provisional Brigade, made up of the 314th and 315th Infantry. General Nicholson would take over the 313th and 316th Infantry, forming the 157th Provisional Brigade.⁴⁰ The assault and support brigades of the previous morning were now brigades in column.

Attempts to reorganize the regiments within the new brigades were hampered by the enemy fire and occasional bursts of gas shell that swept the area and by the fact that the men of all four regiments, without re-

³⁸ Arke 117 WD, 27 Sep (GFB 210, fol III).

³⁹ Mag, CO 313th Inf to CG 79th Div, 1305, 27 Sep (79th Div Box 4, 32.16); History, p. 112. 1st Army Arty G - 2 WD, 1200, 1435, and 1450, 27 Sep (1st Army Box 90, 60.32), rptd that Mouse and Aire Groupings of Army Arty had 22 guns laid on Montfaucon that afternoon, in the belief that the enemy still held it. Only at 1450 was Montfaucon rptd by air as "surrounded by our infantry."

⁴⁰ History, p. 115.



supply or rest since the morning before, "were in a state bordering on exhaustion."⁴¹

Swezey's message calling for fire on the Bois de Bouge resulted in a half hour of scattered shells, largely because, as Army Artillery said, it was "impossible to locate Kuhn's division accurately."⁴² When the French tanks with the 313th and 316th Infantry were knocked out within minutes of the advance, the troops went to ground in the open fields just beyond Montfaucon. On the right, the effort to advance on Nantillois that afternoon made no more progress. The heavy fire that pinned them down included at least 300 green cross (phosgene) shells.⁴³

At nightfall the troops were ordered to dig in where they were, a half kilometer above Montfaucon and in the Bois de la Tuilerie. The troops back on the slopes and in the village of Montfaucon suffered "as the town and hill especially were heavily shelled and gassed most of the night."⁴⁴ Preparation by Army's Aire Grouping, apparently at Kuhn's

41

Mag, McKenney 2nd Bn 314th Inf to CO 314th Inf, 1245, 27 Sep (79th Div Box 4, 32.16); History, p. 117.

42

Army Arty G - 2 WD, 1756, 27 Sep.

43

1/88 Fuoss Bn (117th Div) WD, 27 Sep (GFB 210, fol IV).

44

Henry C. Thorn, Jr., History of the 313th Infantry - "Baltimore's Own" (W. H. Crawford, New York, 1920), p. 32. Cf. Mag, Phelps Asst DGO at Montfaucon to CofS 79th Div, 1240, 28 Sep (79th Div Box 4, 32.16): "Gas shells blue and yellow cross in small numbers were thrown into [Bois de la Tuilerie] during night Sept. 27 - 28. No casualties."

request, to put gas on the Bois de Beuge throughout the night were cancelled by V Corps.⁴⁵

Casualties that day in the four infantry regiments were 54 killed, said the division history, but again no one could estimate the wounded, and medical records show only 142 men brought into the hospitals, four tagged as gas cases.⁴⁶ The division was still two long kilometers from the Corps Objective, the top of the Bois de Beuge - Nantillois. And coming from east of the Meuse into the area were two more German divisions, the 115th and 236th. The 79th Division was to meet the latter, the 236th, only briefly.⁴⁷

The field order issued about midnight on 27 September said the 316th and 315th Infantry were to resume the attack at 0700 the next morning. After sorting out during the night, the 313th and 314th would be withdrawn to support positions 1000 yards back of the attack regiments.⁴⁸ Though the division history declared "the relief was carried out successfully," disentangling the regiments that night proved impossible.⁴⁹

45

Army Arty G - 2 WD, 1940 and 2057, 27 Sep.

46

History, pp. 117 - 27; Hospital admissions, Analysis, p. 84.

47

117th Div Order Ia 4834, 1915, 27 Sep (GFB 209, fol 1, p. 7).

48

FO 8, 79th Div, 2330, 27 Sep, actually said: "...arrangements of the relief [will be] made under direction of brigade commanders after conference between regimental commanders concerned."

49

A pencilled note in the Enoch Pratt Library copy of the history, p. 132, by "a veteran of Co. M. 313th Inf," says "The 316th did not relieve the 313th but were in such disorder that Col Charles was later removed." Lt Col Rebt. L. Meader replaced Lt Col Oscar J. Charles on 30 Sep. C. E. Gleck [RIO & Regtl Adj], History of the 316th Regiment of Infantry (Biddle - Deemer, Phila., 1920). p. 45, says it was 5 Oct.

The troops waited for the preparatory fire the next morning (28 September) until 0730, and when the efforts of the four batteries of 75's could not be recognized, the attack began. At 0830 a 316th Infantry battalion commander in front of the Bois de Beuge called regiment for help: "Being fired at point blank by field pieces. For God's sake get artillery or we'll be annihilated."⁵⁰ But liaison with the artillery was lost.

An hour later General Kuhn said he was sending a company of big tanks to the 316th, but before they arrived the enemy withdrew from the Bois de Beuge and company - size elements of the 316th were on their way to Bois 268, a kilometer beyond. At 1700 hours Capt. Harry A. Rapelye of division headquarters reported from the Bois de Beuge:

Have located 313th, 314th and 316th together with part of B and A companies 311th MG and [the] 312 MG Bn. in woods west of Nantillois. They are held up by own artillery fire, patrols report. Request orders.⁵¹

On the right, the 315th Infantry advanced against raking fire coming out of the Bois de Briouilles and Bois de Septsarges and about noon, as the enemy withdrew from Nantillois, entered the town, each of the foremost companies having lost about a third of their men that morning. By 1300, troops were in front of Hill 274, and a halt was called to reorganize the battalions.⁵² A German war diary said Nantillois was shell-

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Quoted in History, p. 134.

⁵¹

Mag, Kuhn to Charles, 1105, 28 Sep; Mag, Rapelye to G - 3 79th Div, 1700, 28 Sep (79th Div Box 4, 32.16); History, pp. 134 - 39.

⁵²

History, p. 133.

ed with yellow cross shortly after it was evacuated, but no confirmation has been found in 79th Division records.⁵³

About 1400, troops from all three battalions of the 315th, with six French tanks and covered by 75's and machine guns, advanced again, their objective Madeleine Farm, in the center of the Bois des Ogons. Hostile heavies from east of the Meuse, field guns at Madeleine Farm, and machine guns at the edge of the wood knocked out or drove off the tanks and withered the advancing ranks. Without more artillery support those reaching the edge of the woods could not hold on.

The regiment was ordered back to the reverse slope of Hill 274 where the 1st and 3rd Battalions "reorganized their shattered ranks, preparatory to another thrust in the Bois des Ogons," while the 2nd Battalion collected behind them. At 1640 Colonel Knowles told division headquarters: "The men of the 315th Inf. must have food. Too weak for further advance without food." But the supply and ration trains were still below Mont-faucon and could not get up.⁵⁴

Still without artillery support, at 1800 the regiment again moved out against the Bois des Ogons, 100 meters away, got inside and then withdrew, just as "a terrific bombardment...almost leveled the woods." The

⁵³

233rd Brig (117th Div) WD, 28 Sep (GFB 210, fol II, p. 18).

⁵⁴

History, p. 141. Msg. Knowles to Div Comdr, 1640, 28 Sept (79th Div Box 4, 32.16).

regiment had lost 34 killed that day; Colonel Knowles estimated total casualties in the 315th as 15 officers and 250 men.⁵⁵

On the 28th a convoy of food reached the regimental supply companies parked along the Malancourt - Montfaucon road, but the latter could not get through or around Montfaucon to the advance lines and the assault battalions got little or none of the food or water. Thirteen truckloads of caliber .30 and 37-mm. ammunition, as well as grenades and pyrotechnics, were somewhere between Esnes and Malancourt. A horse section with 900,000 rounds of caliber .30 managed to reach a point just above Malancourt that afternoon. Nearly 2,000 wounded, gassed and sick had passed through advanced dressing stations by then, but round trips for ambulances between Montfaucon and the triage at Clair Chêne, a distance of a little more than 10 kilometers by road, were taking as much as 42 hours. Horse-drawn vehicles with wounded made little better time "by driving out through mud, bushes, and shell holes."⁵⁶

At 1800 hours on 28 September, General Kuhn received word that the 4th Division on his right was still about a kilometer ahead of his troops, the 37th on the left about the same. Corps orders received near midnight said the attack was to be resumed "not later than 7:00 o'clock" the next morning, all three divisions to advance "independently of each other, push-

⁵⁵

History, pp. 142 - 43; Mag, Knowles to G - 2, 79th Div, 1915, 28 Sep. Note: G - 3 issued no DORs for the three days 24 - 27 Sep and that for 27 - 38 Sep, on a mag form, said only that the 3rd Bn 316th Inf had rptd heavy casus.

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History, pp. 146 - 48; Mag, Maj Miller, Div Ord Off to CofS, 1400, 28 Sep (79th Div Box 4, 32.16).

ing the attack with the utmost vigor and regardless of cost."⁵⁷ They were to reach Bois de Gesnes, Bois de Moncy, and le Petit Bois without fail, said the division history. Nothing was said about the Bois de Cumel, in the path of the 79th (Map No. 6).

"Gas should be used"

"The night of September 28 - 29, on the front lines, was one of horror." The steady cold rain that day had turned the ground into mire, the shell holes into great muddy pools. Hostile machine guns in the Bois des Ogons and the Bois de Cumel swept over the men crouched in Bois 268 and in the lee of Hill 274. Gnawing hunger gripped them. Shells seemed to fall in avalanches around them, and everywhere they could hear the moans of the wounded, "many of whom had not been and could not be evacuated." Runners carrying the orders that night for the attack were unable to find any of the command posts but that of 3rd Battalion, 315th Infantry.⁵⁸

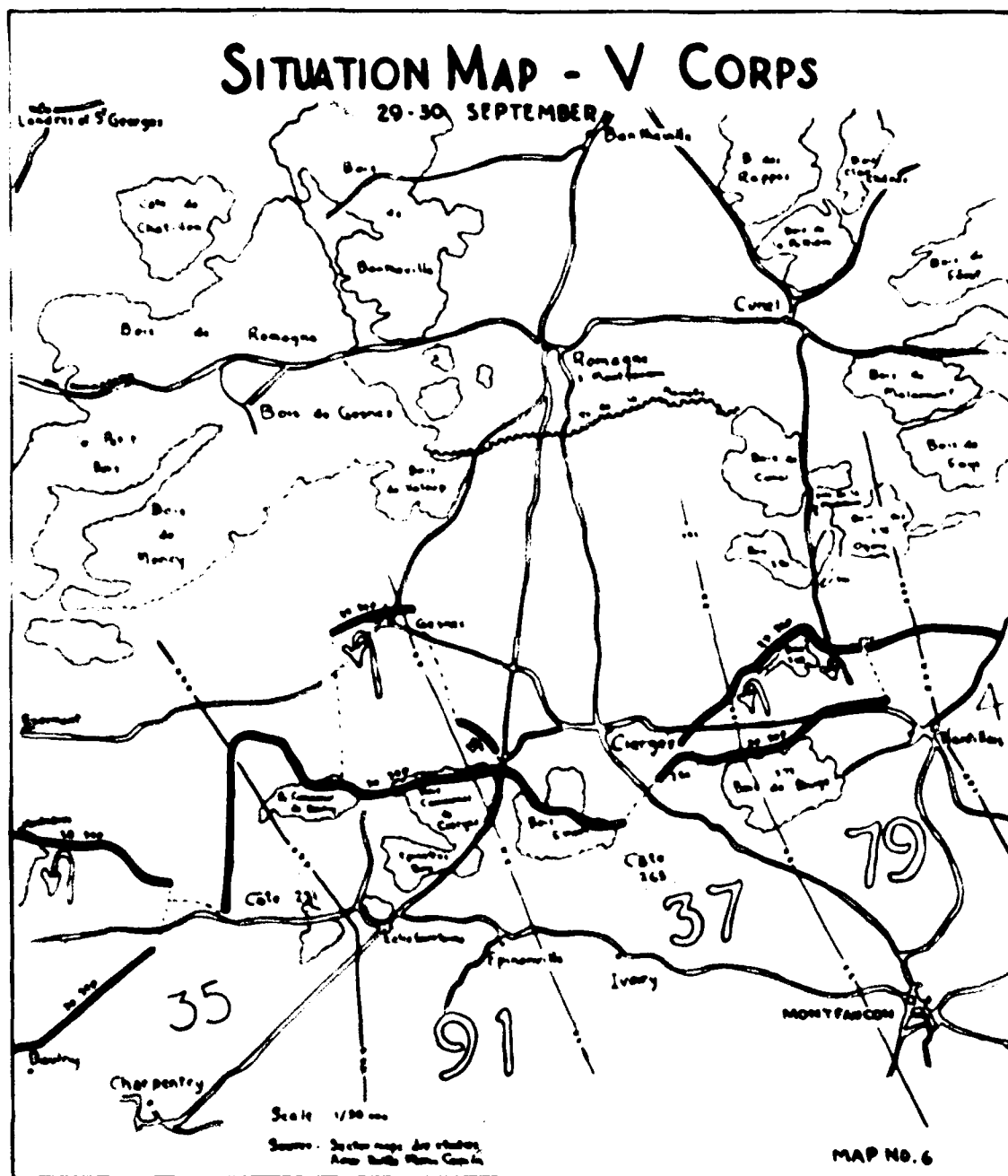
In a fine gesture, division ordered everything thrown into the line. The 157th Provisional, with the 316th and 313th Infantry, 31st MG Battalion, a battalion of tanks and another of field guns was to advance on the left, the 158th Provisional with the 315th and 314th, 310th MG Battalion and similar battalions of tanks and field guns on the right. A thousand meters behind this proposed array was to be division reserve, a battalion each from

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FO 46, V Corps, 2300, 28 Sep; History, p. 149.

⁵⁸

History, p. 150.



the 313th and 314th Infantry and the 310th MG Battalion. Back of them, presumably, the Engineers and the trains were to continue the battle of transportation.

To keep them all going, "brigade, regimental and battalion commanders [were to] use every means regardless of cost to prevent the advance from being delayed."⁵⁹ It was a paper plan. The last semblance of organization in the division would not survive the day.

The same was happening in the other divisions of V Corps. The losses in the corps to hostile shell fire on 28 September were reported as over 5,000, and Army was only too aware that artillery assistance was imperative if the divisions were to survive.⁶⁰

At 0500 on the 29th, with balloon observers up, enemy batteries near Cunel, in the Bois de Cunel, and around Madeleine Farm opened up with HE, shrapnel, and "some phosgene and mustard gas," said G - 2, while flanking fire from east of the Meuse at times seemed even more devastating than the frontal fire. The historian of the 313th Infantry said the gas shelling was almost constant that day.⁶¹

⁵⁹ FO 9, 79th Div, 2330, 28 Sep.

⁶⁰ Army Arty G - 2 MD, 0130, 29 Sep.

⁶¹ SOI 15, 79th Div, 28 - 29 Sep (SOIs for 29 Sep - 7 Oct have not been found); Thorne, History of the 313th Inf, p. 35.

Mag, LO with 37th Div, 29 Sep (79th Div Box 4, 32.16), described conditions in the right brigade of the 37th Div as similar to those in the 79th: continual enemy gas fire, no food, and the troops badly in need of relief.

The preparatory fire for the attack at 0600 "was a fiasco," and no advance could be made against the machine guns in Bois 250 and the Bois des Ognons. Ourry at 0845 reported "all lines under heavy H.E., shrapnel and gas," and General Kuha called on 4th Division for help: "My division on approximate line 10.0 - 81.4 to 11.0 - 82.1 [i.e., half a kilometer short of Bois 250 and Ognons] cannot advance because of enfilade artillery fire from the right. Cannot advance unless your left brigade also advances at the same time." But an artillery liaison officer reported at 0920:

The 4th Division on our right is well advanced into the Bois des Ognons On Hill 274 I found companies of the 314th Inf held back by one machine gun located in the Bois des Ognons which had not been mopped by the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Bns of the 315th Inf who are completely over Hill 274 and into the woods... Found wounded men who had lain on the ground since 1:00 o'clock yesterday without attention....⁶²

About 1100 hours the 73rd Brigade (37th Division) on the left was seen falling back from the position it had reached. Then the 316th in front began to withdraw, back through the 313th, to the east edge of the Bois de Beuge, mingling with the 313th and 314th.⁶³ General Nicholson stopped them all, reformed the lines, and ordered them to advance, the 313th in front this time, though it was now just a crowd of some

62

Mag, CO 157th Brig to CG 79th Div, 1010, 29 Sep; Mag, Lt C.A. Webb at 157th Brig FC to CO 121st FA (32nd Div), 0920, 29 Sep (79th Div Box 4, 32.16); History, pp. 154 - 56.

63

Thorn, History of the 313th Inf, p. 35; Muller, The 313th of the 79th, pp. 121 - 22.

500 men. About the same number were available in the 316th Infantry -- "stragglers, litter bearers and casualties are the cause, mostly stragglers."⁶⁴

Nicholson reported "that the men were dying on their feet," the 313th extremely depleted, some companies reduced to 15 men. Another report, "that the troops of the 313th, 314th and 315th were badly disorganized," and only the 2nd Battalion, 314th Infantry, had retired under orders, indicated almost complete chaos.⁶⁵

First Army G - 3, learning of the heavy fire on the 37th and 79th, phoned instructions to Cameron at V Corps:

Your two right divisions apparently held up by hostile artillery located in Bois de Cunel, Bois de Valoup, and along Romagne - Cunel road. Gas should be used to neutralize batteries in these positions while our troops advance. The Army Commander desires this means of overcoming opposition and delay utilized. If your artillery hasn't the necessary ammunition within reach, call on....Aire Grouping....for help, indicating exact targets ...Use of No. 5 shell [phosgene] is suggested....No. 20 [mustard gas] shells should be used, especially for obstinate points....not [to] be occupied afterwards....Hostile infantry concentrations sufficiently in advance of ⁶⁶ our troops should be bombarded with short intensive bursts of No. 5 shell.

But Cameron, as on the night before, apparently had no intention of

⁶⁴ Mag, 157th Brig Hq to CG 79th Div, 1307, 29 Sep.

⁶⁵ Mag memo, Nicholson to Kuha, ca. 1115, 29 Sep; Mag memo, Lt Landrey, 314th Inf, ca. 1225, 29 Sep (79th Div Box 4, 32.16).

⁶⁶ Tele instru, Col McCleave to CG V Corps, sub: Use of Gas, with copies to III Corps, C Army Arty, Aire Gpg (AEF GHQ 1st Army Rpts Box 3382, 113.0); also in USA in the NW (Washington, 1948), IX, 155.

using gas. Actually, any kind of useful artillery fire on that front was now almost out of the question, and Nicholson's call for all the artillery support possible, in an attempt to get the advance going again, went unanswered. Supply was at a standstill and artillery and infantry liaison had broken down.

Moving out of Bois 268, the 313th Infantry encountered heavy machine gun fire at once, and "upon reaching the woods [Bois 250?] they were found to be heavily gassed."⁶⁷

At 1245, hearing of the retirement of the 316th, General Kuhn ordered it collected in the Bois de Beuge, there to be consolidated as one battalion. Some hours later Colonel Meador, taking over the regiment from Colonel Charles, replied:

Orders to reorganize [in] Beuge received 1525, but 313th Inf has relieved us for assault [on General Nicholson's orders] and is held up with ruinous losses on north edge of Wood 268, falling in scattered groups. This regiment [has] effective about 450, 313th also fast melting away.⁶⁸

Before he heard from Meador, General Kuhn had already notified corps:

Line advanced this morning as ordered to south edge Bois des Ognons...Line enfiladed by artillery fire from right and left...and forced to fall back because of this fire, machine gun fire, and total exhaustion of troops. I consider them incapable of further driving power....Troops on my right reported falling back...I am of the opinion that if the advance is to be maintained fresh troops must be supplied and hostile artillery kept down.⁶⁹

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Thorn, History of the 313th Inf, p. 36.

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Glock, History of 316th Regt, pp. 42 - 43; History, p. 159.

⁶⁹

Msg, Kuhn to CG V Corps, 1245, 29 Sep, and repeat msg, 1300 (79th Div Box 4, 32.16).

On the left, elements of the 315th for the third time that morning fell back to Hill 274. At 1500, Colonel Knowles reported:

Regiment...south of line 10.5 - 81.6 [below Hill 274]...with orders to organize, collect stragglers (most of whom are after food and water), dig in or get shelter and await orders...316, 314, 313 men mixed with us - trying to weed them out and report [to] their organizations. Effectives this regiment approx 50 percent...Men are of good morale, but badly exhausted because of lack of food, water, sleep. Officers getting scarce. Med officers left [are] all in...Many wounded, who could be saved are dying because of lack of attention and exposure...⁷⁰

The G - 3 operations report at noon that day consisted of three pages of field messages received at headquarters. It also included the information that "gas [was] being used" by the enemy, and said division plans were "to reorganize the disorganized commands preparatory to resuming the advance."⁷¹

At 1625 and again at 1732 hours, Colonel Oury, who two days before had taken over the 158th Provisional Brigade (314th and 315th Infantry), asked permission to withdraw his men. HE and gas fire had been continuous for some time and he had been gassed out of his command post. All the troops were now very tired and if ordered to advance again, said Oury, there was "danger of disorganized retirement" that might "develop the pos-

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Msg, Knowles, CO 315th Inf, 1500, 29 Sep; History, p. 162.

⁷¹

DOR, 79th Div, 28 - 29 Sep. The DOR for 29 - 30 Sep, dated 2 Oct, consisted only of five pages of messages.

sibility of a stampede somewhere along the line."⁷² Colonel Meador reported that his 316th Infantry numbered 150 men with three machine guns on a one - kilometer front, with no food, little water, and just 7,000 rounds of ammunition.⁷³

General Kuha's refusal to withdraw an hour later concluded: "Rumors have been prevalent that the 79th Division is to be relieved. This rumor has no foundation in fact, and must be suppressed." Colonel Oury was to relieve the 315th with the 314th Infantry and prepare to advance above Nantillois. By that time, 2047 hours, Colonel Oury was reporting "the 315th Inf retreating from its position" and "a retrograde movement by the regiment on my right [in 4th Division?]." The regimental commanders had been found and ordered to proceed back to the front but the troops were "making no attempt to move forward."⁷⁴

Not certain his previous message had got through, at 1930 General Kuha again reported to V Corps that he had ordered all troops to withdraw and prepare positions along the north edge of Bois de Beuge and in front of Nantillois. "Due to casualties and straggling, the effective force now

⁷² Mag, Oury at Nantillois to Kuha, 1625, 1732, 2020, 29 Sep; Mag, Oury to G - 3 79th Div, 1630, 29 Sep (79th Div Boxes 4, 14, 32-16). There were in reply to Mag, Kuha to 157th Brig, 158th Brig, 1500, 29 Sep: "What is situation now?...Dig in....Report frequently. No cause for alarm. Restore confidence of troops."

⁷³ Mag, CO 316th Inf to Kuha, 1900, 29 Sep.

⁷⁴ Mag, Oury to Kuha, 2047, 29 Sep (79th Div Box 14, 32-16); History, pp. 162 - 63.

available is less than 50 percent of the original strength of the command. All...are completely exhausted and incapable of effective action...[and] have been under a terrific shell fire, mixed with gas, for more than 24 hours...The command has been on very short rations and [without] water [for] the last 36 hours because of the artillery fire. I am informed that a somewhat similar situation exists on my right and left..."⁷⁵

An enemy counterattack against the 37th and 79th Divisions that day might have been disastrous. Instead, said V Corps, the enemy struck further to the left, and "both the 91st Division of 5th Corps and the 35th Division of 1st Corps had been forced to retire from the extensive gains that they had made, because of the enemy's superiority of fire and of inability to receive support from the remainder of the line." The corps line of resistance that night was along Cote 231 - center of Bois Clerges - north edge of Bois de Beuge - one kilometer north of Nantillois. The 37th and 79th Divisions would have to be relieved at once, and part of the 91st before long. There would be no attack on the 30th.⁷⁶

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Mag, Kuhn to CG V Corps, 1930, 29 Sep; History, p. 168.

⁷⁶

Comments by Corps Comdr [Summerall] upon Opns of Fifth Army Corps, n.d. (V Corps Box 2, 11); Chron Stat of Events, V Corps, 29 and 30 Sep; FO 49, V Corps, 2300, 29 Sep.

Note: At 2215 hours, V Corps, with no attack planned, asked Army's Meuse Gpg to gas enemy batteries at Cunel and the adjacent hill through the night. No confirmation has been found. Army Arty G - 2 WD, 2215, 29 Sep.

Word came at last that the infantry of the 3rd Division was coming under forced march to the relief of the 79th that night. At 2220 hours, when the relieving forces failed to appear, Kuhn asked Oury to hold on as best he could. "It would be a pity should the men fail to maintain discipline now."⁷⁷ The 3rd Division column did not reach Montfaucon until 1045 on 30 September and it was 1300 when the daylight relief began. On the left, the 37th Division was relieved by the 32nd.

All day on the 30th the scattered infantry of the 79th came back over the battlefield to the rear of no man's land below the Avocourt - Malancourt trenches, the Engineer regiment falling back with them until orders arrived sending it back to 3rd Division to continue road building.⁷⁸ "Utter confusion prevailed" around Malancourt for the next two days as the men sat around huddled in their blankets and their officers, as weary as they, tried to make sense out of the chaos.⁷⁹

For five days First Army remained in place, relieving used up divisions and clearing as far as possible the roads in the sector, while the enemy poured in fresh divisions and guns. Where there had been four

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Mag, Kuhn to Oury, 2200, 29 Sep.

⁷⁸

Tel order, CofS 1st Army to Burtt CofS V Corps, 1516, 29 Sep (AEF GHQ 1st Army Rpts Box 3382, 113.0); FO 47, V Corps, 1700, 29 Sep; FO 10, 79th Div, 0630, 30 Sep; History, pp. 171 - 72.

⁷⁹

Col Oury, Opas Rpt, 314th Inf, 16 Nov (79th Div Box 18, 33.6).

German divisions on the front on 25 September, a week later there were nine, with more coming in. When the advance was resumed on 4 October, 3rd Division with 244 guns in support and four battalions of tanks leading the way found the ground above Nantillois as savagely opposed as had the 79th, its lines of communications repeatedly shelled with quantities of gas.

In seven days 3rd Division advanced approximately four kilometers, to within half a mile of Cunel. Elements of the division, transferred to III Corps, continued the attack in the direction of Clery le Grand, and after ten days cleared the Bois de Foret (see Map No. 3). On 27 October it was relieved a mile below Clery le Grand, having lost more than 1,150 killed, 4,200 wounded, and 1,500 gassed.⁸⁰

The Cost of 10 Kilometers

For a division with "more than half its strength...made up of draftees of not more than four months' service and considerably less of actual training," said General Kuhn at Malancourt, it had done well to advance almost ten kilometers and take 905 prisoners.⁸¹

General Hoefer, commander of the 117th Division, also thought his troops had done well, particularly those veterans of the Somme, the 450th

80

3rd Division Sum of Ops in the World War (Amer Battle Monu Comm, Washington, D.C., 1944), pp. 57 - 58; Med Dept Statistics; Col Brooke Payne, Notes upon the support of the 3rd Div by its Divisional Arty, 30 Sep - 20 Oct (V Corps Box 4, 18.2).

81

Ltr, CG 79th Div to CG V Corps, 2 Oct, sub: Rpt of Ops (79th Div Box 6, 33.6).

and 11th Grenadier Regiments, who had "held their positions in a deep wedge south of Montfaucon and retired only upon order." The 117th Division had lost over 40 percent of its forces including attached troops in the four - day battle: 8 officers and 76 men killed, 23 officers and 411 men wounded, and 39 officers and 2,135 men captured or missing, for a total of 2,692 casualties. The 79th Division, meeting most of the two regiments from the Somme, accounted for at least half the total casualties of the German division.

On 3 October, in billets above Dun-sur-Meuse, General Hoefer had just 3,941 officers and men left. Nine hundred recruits were assigned to him, but 115 of these were being held at the replacement center to face court - martial proceedings for mutiny.⁸² The 117th Division was to do no more fighting. It came into the line again on 2 November only to take part in the final retreat across the Meuse.⁸³

As computed after the relief on 30 September, casualties in the 79th Division were reported as 149 officers and 4,966 men killed, wounded, or missing. It was almost a pure guess. Later division counts put the killed and wounded at numbers ranging between 2,527 and 3,380, and gas casualties between 147 and 594. Official Medical Department statistics were to show 597 killed, 2,375 wounded, and 473 gassed, for a total of 3,435

⁸²

117th Div Order Ia 4866, 1 Oct; Rpt of Losses 21 - 30 Sep, 117th Div, 2 Oct (GFB 209, fol I, pp. 18, 79); Rpt Ia 4909, 117th Div to Go Meuse West, 3 Oct, sub: Battle worth of the division (GFB 209, fol I, p. 12).

⁸³

History of 251 Divisions of the German Army (GPO, 1920), p. 611.

battle casualties in those five days. General Kuhn's estimate on 30 September that his remaining effective strength was no more than 50 percent of his original forces apparently took into account some three or four thousand stragglers and unnumbered wounded who, more fortunate than others, made their way to adjacent aid stations or field hospitals. On the night of the 30th, the 304th Sanitary Train reported its hospitals clogged with patients from three or more divisions, every truck in use, and the influx continuing without letup.⁸⁴

In his report for the week ending 29 September, Captain Clark, Division Gas Officer, said that owing to the withdrawal of enemy guns from their advanced positions just prior to the attack, no gas had been encountered until about 1400 on 27 September when intermittent gas shelling began, most of it on the far slope of Montfaucon and on the wood east of the town. Up to noon on the 28th, about 500 shells had fallen in this area, no more than 50 of them gas shells. They were mostly blue cross shells (diphenylchloroarsine), with a few green (phosgene) and yellow cross (mustard gas) mixed in. Forty-five gas cases were accounted for, almost a casualty per shell, but three-quarters of the casualties, he said, were doubtful cases.⁸⁵

84

Ltr, CG 79th Div to CG V Corps, 2 Oct, sub: Rpt of Opns; Ltr, CG 79th Div to C-in-C AEF, 24 Oct, sub: Rpt of Opns (both in 79th Div Box 6, 33.6); Med Dep^t statistics in Analysis, p. 81. History, pp. 174, 427; Periodical Rpt, CO 304th San Tr, 29 - 30 Sep, 18 Oct (Med Dept Box 3867, fol 3).

Glock, p. 45, said the strength of the 316th Inf on 4 Oct was down to 1,858; Thorn, p. 36, that the 313th Inf had lost 1,245 officers and men.

85

Ltr, DGO 79th Div to C CNS Def Div, 29 Sep, sub: Weekly Summary (79th Div Box 220, 319.1).

He as yet knew nothing of the other 400 or more cases then coming in to the gas hospitals in the sector.

First Army was aware that though the enemy had fired relatively little gas in the four-day period, the numbers of men everywhere reporting themselves gassed had been alarmingly high. On 30 September, after an investigation of some of the alleged gas cases by the Inspector General of the AEF, First Army ordered that no more patients were to be evacuated as gassed unless certified by a Division Medical Gas Officer.⁸⁶

In his monthly report a week later, Captain Clark added nothing to his original count of gas casualties. He may have had nothing to add, partly because his regimental and battalion gas officers during the advance had been almost wholly occupied with other than gas duties. "As a rule cooperation of the commanding officers in gas defense has been good....There are some exceptions." However, in the short period the troops had been at the front and in action there had been no real test of gas training, or as Captain Clark said, "Gas training and discipline....cannot be adequately determined, as only subjection to gas of some severity and for some time can develop just what has been accomplished in this respect."⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Ltr, CofS 1st Army to CG V Corps, 30 Sep, sub: Gassed men (79th Div Box 214, 704).

⁸⁷ Ltr, DGO to C CMS, 8 Oct, sub: Monthly Rpt for Sep.

Enemy use of gas, in all likelihood, was only the final hazard contributing to the disorganization of the 79th, as it was in the 37th Division on its left, where gas accounted for a third again as many gas cases as in the 79th.⁸⁸ The Corps Inspector, visiting these two divisions on 2 October, gave few details about the shape of the 79th but said that "at first inspection the 37th Division [appeared] in better condition." Straggling in the 37th had reduced its combat force only to about 80 percent, its infantry showed little sign of strain, had discarded no packs and little equipment, and would probably be fit again in a week's time.⁸⁹

Lorraine Yellow Cross

On 3 October, after strenuous but not altogether successful efforts "to gather in all stragglers and to effect reorganization," the division received orders to take up the march that night to the zone of Blondlat's II Colonial Corps, across the Meuse. Without time to complete sorting out its units, the division set out in columns of provisional brigades, slogging south until after midnight.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Ltr, Div Surg 37th Div to Ch Surg V Corps, 24 Dec, sub: Casualties (Med Dept Box 3742, fol 2), said casualties 26 Sep - 4 Oct were 424 killed, 1,708 wounded, and 729 gassed. Field hosp lists however record 520 gassed and 1,332 wounded in the 37th Div between 26 Sep and 3 Oct, with 360 of the gassed in the 79th Div hospitals. 37th Div hospitals listed 131 exhaustion or exhaustion - gas cases on 30 Sep, and 9 from the 79th Div (Med Dept Box 3748). 79th Div hospitals recorded no exhaustion cases.

⁸⁹ Ltr, V Corps Insp to IG AEF, 2 Oct, sub: Prelim rpt on 37th Div (V Corps Box 63, fol 91).

⁹⁰ Secret Order, 79th Div, 2 Oct (79th Div Box 3, 32.13); FO 11, 79th Div, 3 Oct.

While on the march the division was directed to relieve the 26th Division, with the French colonial corps in the Troyon sector, about 13 kilometers north of St. Mihiel. Kuhn wrote to Blondlat that he did not think his troops could complete the march or that they were in condition for duty "even in a quiet sector" until they had had at least three days of absolute rest. Urged on, the troops reached the end of their 31 - kilometer march three days later.⁹¹

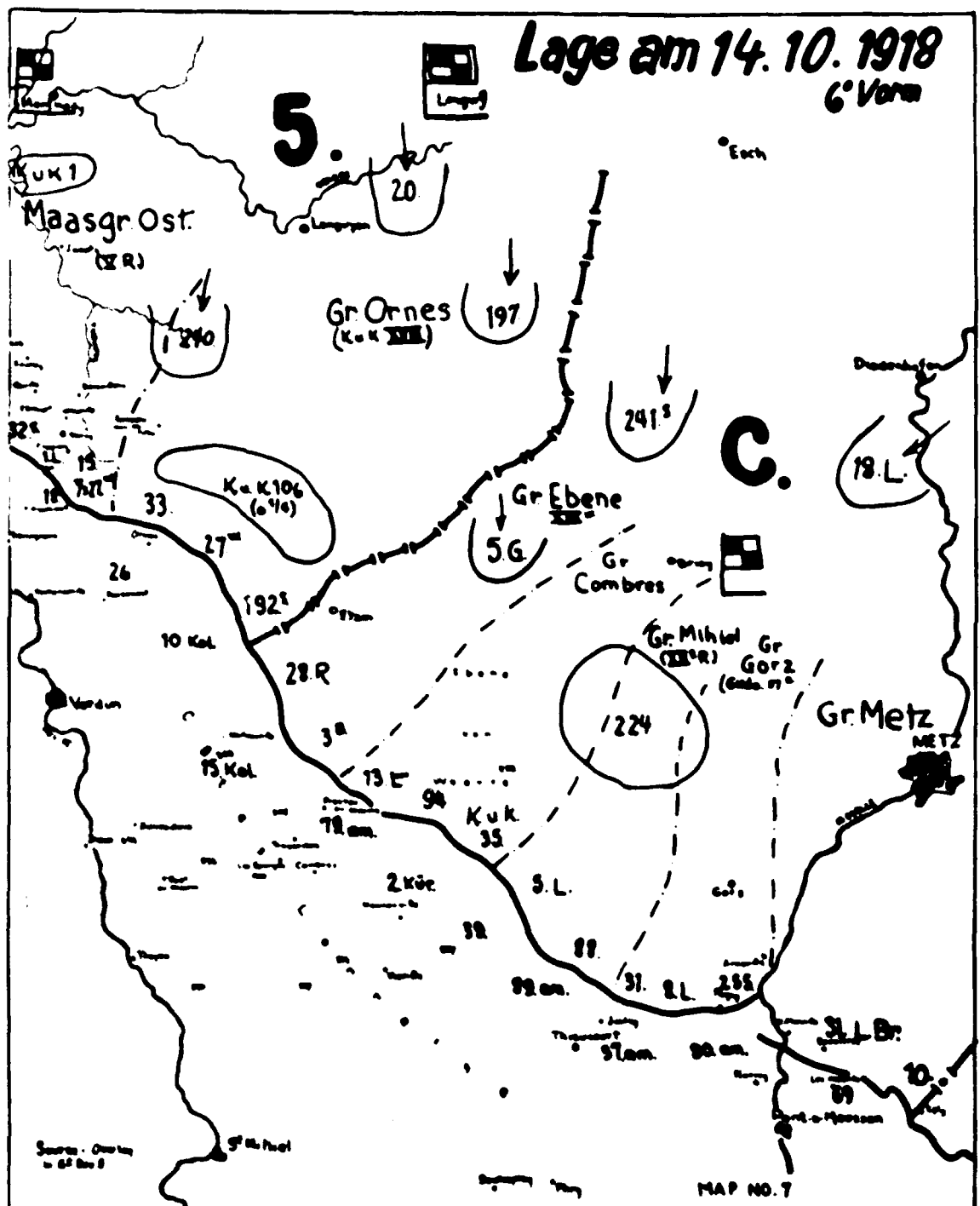
The Troyon sector was a rest area where the "opposing enemy line was held by a second or third rate German division [the 13th Landwehr], which had been uniformly unsuccessful in raiding. [However,] the German artillery was active, especially on the towns in the Zone of Observation," in the Meuse plain below the heights of the Meuse.⁹²

The relief of the 26th Division was made in the cold rain on the night of 7 - 8 October, two battalions each of the 313th and 316th Infantry taking over a nine - kilometer front running northwest to southeast along the heights of the Cotes de Meuse, looking out on the Meuse plain (Map No. 7). The other two regiments of the 79th remained in reserve west of the Meuse, to complete reorganization and begin greatly needed training.⁹³

⁹¹ Ltr, CG 79th Div to CG II Col Corps, 5 Oct, sub: 79th Div (79th Div Box 204, 322.03); Memo, Col F. P. Lahm, G - 3 staff, 1st Army for G - 3 1st Army, 12 Oct, sub: Rpt on 79th Div (79th Div Box 7, 33.6).

⁹² Ordre General 321, II Col Corps, 3 Oct (Fr Files Box 115, 30.1); SO 811, II Col Corps, 5 Oct (79th Div Box 6, 32.7); Quote from FO 12, 79th Div, 5 Oct.

⁹³ FO 14, 79th Div, 8 Oct.



The single major gas attack on the 79th during the war occurred on the night of 9 - 10 October as the division relieved the French battalions still holding outpost positions in the Zone of Observation. The division had arrived on the front of Group Combres, in Armee Abteilung C (Army Detachment C), just as that corps received orders to begin an Army - wide contamination of the allied lines. Groups Ebang and Gorz were to carry out their yellow cross shoots two nights later, on 12 October, and Groups Mihiel and Matz the following night.

Yellow cross shell was the principal defensive weapon remaining to the German forces west of the Moselle. The transfer of its best attack divisions to the Argonne front had left Army Detachment C with broken, sick, and worn-out units incapable of withstanding a major attack, yet it had the task of stopping any advance on the Longuyon - Briey - Diedenhofen industrial complex in its rear. Its only hope of breaking up expected allied preparations for this attack was to keep the batteries and troops opposite under yellow cross contamination. With companies averaging 85 men each, it planned to convert its infantry almost entirely into machine gun units. Battalions with four companies were to establish at least six machine gun nests per company, two guns per nest, using their remaining effectives as protection for the gunners. Battalions with three companies were to maintain at least eight machine gun nests per company.⁹⁴ And as soon as the corps had carried out the initial contamination shoots, each was to be resupplied with 12,000 additional yellow cross shells, to be kept in readiness if the expected attack became imminent.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ AAC Order Ia 3343, 3 Oct; AAC Order Ia 3548, 11 Oct (GFB 107, fol I, pp. 70, 118).

⁹⁵ AAC Order Ia 3713, 17 Oct (ibid., p. 138).

On 10 October, Army Detachment C reported that during the night Group Combres had "carried out a large yellow cross shoot on foremost battery positions under particularly favorable weather conditions." The contamination shoot HERBSTTAU ("Autumn Dew") with 11,000 rounds, said Group Combres, had been put on troops billets in Tresauvaux, Combres, Harbeville, and Hannonville, as well as on enemy battery positions.⁹⁶

79th Division G - 2 reported that "at 22h30, 9 October, a heavy bombardment was opened on the village of Hannonville with some fire directed on Saulx [Map No. 8]. Seventy-five percent of these shells were Yellow Cross....Hannonville was set on fire and burned for [three hours]." Elsewhere in the same report G - 2 estimated the enemy fire for 9 - 10 October at 614 shells, including 50 gas and HE rounds on Hannonville. Appended was a recent item of intelligence:

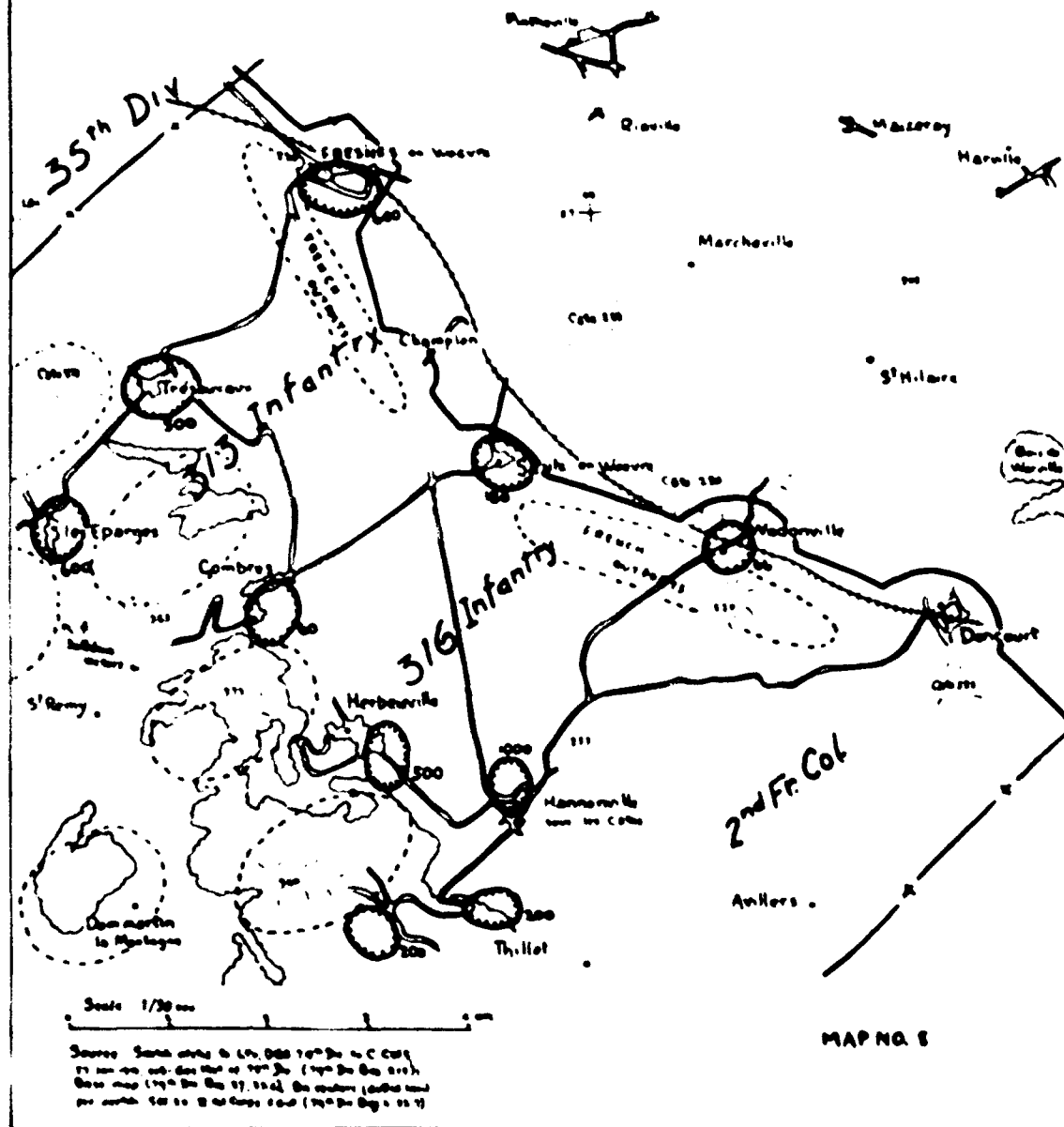
Attention is drawn to the fact that the enemy is now employing an increasing number of gas shells containing considerable quantities of high explosive. It seems probable that it is his intention to employ this type of gas shell almost exclusively in the future....Until recently the only combined gas and high explosive shells used in large numbers on the British Front have been Blue Cross...In a recent Yellow Cross shell bombardment, however,...all the shells burst like high explosive...[and the gas was] said to have been masked by the fumes of the high explosive.⁹⁷

The note was timely, for the Division Gas Officer was to report that the Germans had used the new yellow cross - HE shell, recently designated

⁹⁶ AAC Order La 3545, 10 Oct; Daily Rpt of Army Mag Center, 10 Oct (GFB 107, fol I, pp. 98, 103). Note: Morning Rpt, AAC, 13 Oct (ibid., p. 124), said GP Ebans fired 10,000 yellow cross shells, GP Gorz, 14,000 on their fronts. Shoots by Gps Mihiel and Matz were also confirmed (ibid., p. 125), but no rounds given.

⁹⁷ SOI 3, 79th Div, 9 - 10 Oct.

TROYON SECTOR showing Gassed Areas Oct 8 to 26



Lorraine yellow cross by the British and French. Only the odor of the atomized mustard gas distinguished its burst from HE.

Captain Clark estimated that approximately 9,500 mustard gas, dipho- gene, and diphenylchloroarsine shells, all calibers and mixed with consider- able HE, were fired in the attack. (The only HE was probably that in the yellow cross shells, and green and blue cross gas was expected, whether or not proof was found, in every large - scale bombardment.) Neither Clark nor anyone else confirmed the burning of Hannonville.⁹⁸

The greatest weight of shells, almost 1,000 Lorraine cross, said Clark, fell on the 316th Infantry units in and around Hannonville. Three platoons on their way to relieve French troops in the outposts above the village were caught in the bombardment and withdrew to shelters in the town when the shelling was over. All removed their masks after four hours on the advice of a company gas NCO who had not yet been to gas school. Some 20 men were evacuated that evening, the remaining 74 in the platoons and 12 others in the village continuing in the area until the afternoon of the 11th, when the town was ordered evacuated. All were casualties by then.⁹⁹

Between 500 and 600 mustard gas shells were said to have fallen in the area occupied by two companies of the 313th Infantry in front of Fresnes,

⁹⁸

Rpt on Gas Atk, 11 Oct (GAF - 79th Div); Ltr, DGO to C CMS Def Div, 13 Oct, sub: Weekly Rpt (79th Div Box 202, 319.1).

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Ltr, DGO, 13 Oct, above.

where "the tactical situation did not permit of evacuation." By evening of the 11th, after 61 casualties had been taken out, Captain Clark convinced the command that the area could be held with fewer troops and frequent reliefs. The battalion headquarters of the 313th, as well as that of the 316th in Hannonville, were thoroughly gassed and had to be abandoned.¹⁰⁰

With the 79th and the French in the sector was the light artillery of the 26th Division, waiting to be relieved that night by the 55th FA Brigade (30th Division). Major Thomas H. Cutler, 26th Division Gas Officer, estimated that nearly 7,500 shells, most of them mustard gas, fell on their battery positions in or near the villages of Combres, Herbeville, Hannonville, and Tresauvaux.

While the gas attack might have been incidental to the arrival of the 79th Division in the sector, Cutler thought it more likely that it was in retaliation for the 1,000 rounds of French yperite the two light artillery regiments had fired on the morning of 5 October, against 35th Austro - Hungarian troops holding the Bois d'Harville and a company of the 13th Landwehr known to be in Pintheville. The "retaliation" was severe, making casualties of more than 25 percent of the gunners.

On 13 October, Cutler reported 111 casualties in the artillery regiments, 76 of them through premature removal of masks, on orders from their

100

DOR, 79th Div, 10 - 11 Oct. Thorn, p. 38, thought the susceptibility of the troops to mustard gas was the result of their having "taken sick after exposure during the battle at Montfaucon."

battery commanders. They were victims of false confidence, "having been [previously] subjected to many light attacks on the Toul front without casualties." Others wore only the mouthpiece and noseclip of the mask after the bombardment, keeping them on from four to eight hours at most. None of the guns in the heavily gassed areas were moved to alternate positions until 0700, almost four hours after the attack, when a Regimental Gas Officer making the rounds, urged that they move out.¹⁰¹

Clark, the 79th Division Gas Officer, said the artillery casualties came to 50 percent, not 25 percent. Of a total of 382 gas casualties on 10 and 11 October, 192 of them, out of 750 men exposed, were in the 79th Division. The remaining 190 casualties, out of 390 exposed, were from the 101st and 102nd Field Artillery.¹⁰² Casualties of the HE content of the gas shells may be inferred from the G - 3 report of 3 wounded among the infantry and 1 killed and 2 wounded in the artillery in the period.¹⁰³

Although final Medical Department statistics tend to agree with the Division Gas Officer figures, the daily admission lists of the 79th Division hospitals show 495 infantry and artillery officers and men

¹⁰¹

Ltr, DGO 26th Div to C CWS, 13 Oct, sub: Gas attack; Ltr, *ibid.*, 21 Nov, sub: Rpt of Offensive Opns (26th Div Box 248).

¹⁰²

Ltrs, DGO 79th Div, above. Cf. Spencer, "History of Gas Attacks upon the AEF," III, 496 - 503.

¹⁰³

DOR, 79th Div, 9 - 10 Oct (79th Div Box 6, 33.1).

brought in as gassed on 10 and 11 October, along with 10 wounded. No other corroboration for this total has been found in medical records, nor any clue that the diagnosis of many of these cases may later have been changed.¹⁰⁴ In view of the physical and mental condition of the division at the time, and above all the chaos of its liaison and reporting functions, the figure of 495 rather than 382 seems not unlikely.

Of the 79th Division gas cases, almost 90 percent had eye or skin burns and 40 percent developed lung complications as a result of premature removal of masks, failure to evacuate gassed terrain, becoming contaminated while moving through gassed areas later, and above all, since the experience with mustard gas was their first, through failure to recognize its presence because of the masking effect, Clark said, of "chlorpicrin" in the shells.

The 11,000 shell attack of Group Combres was not a "retaliation" mission directed solely on the 79th Division sector. II Colonial Corps records indicate that its 2nd Dismounted Cavalry Division, on the right of the 79th, took even more gas casualties than the 79th and 26th Divisions. On 11 October corps reported 421 gas cases in the 2nd Dismounted, just 60 in the 79th, and none in the 26th Division. For the six - day period 10 - 15 October, French gas casualties were reported as 551, along with 3 wounded; 79th Division gas casualties shown as 147, and 15 wounded. The 39th French Division, on the right of the 2nd Dismounted, suffered just one

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See Analysis, pp. 84 - 7.

gas casualty in the bombardment, 46 in the next five days.¹⁰⁵ French liaison, so far as counting casualties was concerned, seems to have been little better than American.

Total gas casualties in the French divisions may have been even higher than those reported by their G - 3. In any event, the 2nd Dis-mounted could not sustain such casualties and remain in the line. On 16 October it was relieved as the big 79th Division extended its front to cover the gap. The gas attack by Group Combres had cost the French and Americans 1,200 or more officers and men.

"An active interest [in gas] is manifested"

Some additional gas casualties on 11 and 12 October, said Captain Clark, were attributed to the fact that "we were still getting from 1,000 to 1,200 shells a day along the front, some of which are gas, and with the present [damp, cool] weather conditions we will continue to get a few casualties." Although G - 2 reported an average of no more than 400 - 450 shells daily that week, a division memo pointed to the real hazard: "The area we occupy has been saturated with mustard gas. Therefore the carrying of gas masks...will be insisted on [and] animals will not be grazed in shelled areas."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵

Comptes Rendus, II Col Corps, 10 - 15 Oct (French Files Box 115, 30.3).

¹⁰⁶

Ltr, DGO 79th Div to CG 79th Div, 12 Oct, sub: Rpt on gas bombardment, and atchd Memo, CofS to CGs 157th and 158th Brigs, 12 Oct (79th Div Box 11, 63.3); Memo, 79th Div, 12 Oct (79th Div Box 11, 64.4).

The immediate result of the attack of 9 - 10 October was a division order relieving gas personnel from all other duties, and another repairing the "serious disorganization and losses...sustained in gas personnel" during the Montfaucon campaign.¹⁰⁷ But gas training was secondary to restoring the physical and mental condition of the men. Between the privation and fighting at Montfaucon, the rising incidence of influenza and diarrhea as the men came into the Troyon sector, and the gas attack, morale had fallen badly. In the 313th and 316th Infantry, according to the Division Surgeon, the physical efficiency of the troops was no more than 40 percent.¹⁰⁸ It was probably little better in the reserve brigade across the Meuse.

"Night after night," said the division history, "the towns along the hills and in the plains were drenched with gas and raked with shrapnel and high explosive...The most serious incident of gas shelling...took place on the night of October 14, when...Ambulance Company 315 [at Les Eparges was] subjected to a severe gas bombardment." The entire company "was caught unawares and had a narrow escape, but the 316th Infantry, moving into Hannonville, had 85 men put out of action"¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ GO 13, 79th Div, 12 Oct; GO 5, 313th Inf, 13 Oct (79th Div Box 212, 470.6); Ltr, DGO, 13 Oct, above, and 1st Ind, CG 79th Div to C CWS, 14 Oct.

¹⁰⁸ Memo, Lahn, G - 3 staff, 1st Army for G - 3 1st Army, 12 Oct, sub: Rpt on 79th Div (79th Div Box 7, 33.6).

¹⁰⁹ History, pp. 188, 190. Glock, History of the 316th Regt, p. 47, said these 85 casualties occurred 9 - 10 Oct.

Captain Clark said that between 500 and 600 mustard gas shells were put into the ravine near Les Eparges that night, and although the ambulance company withdrew at once, six casualties resulted from contaminated clothing. (The ambulance train commander said one medic was killed and 17 gassed.) Clark said nothing about the 316th Infantry, but a battery of the 114th FA (29th Division) nearby was not withdrawn until twelve hours later. Three of the men were killed by gas shell fragments and six others were badly burned by close bursts. The remaining 16 casualties developed later "due to irregular wearing of masks."¹¹⁰

G - 2 did not confirm the nightly drenching with gas. Furthermore, the troops did not seem convinced they were in a dangerous sector. During a series of inspections made between 10 and 14 October -- that is, after the great gas attack -- the Division Gas Officer found three-quarters of the 310th Machine Gun Battalion in mess lines with their masks in the "carry" position, and some 70 or 80 of them without masks at all. Less than 30 percent of the 311th Machine Gun Battalion in a mess line had their masks with them, and concern for gas was little better in the 313th, 314th, and 316th Infantry. Among the infantrymen, Captain Clark reported large numbers of masks, when worn at all, in the "carry" position, gas officers and NCOs assigned to other duties, and lack of interest and poor cooperation generally from their commanding officers.

¹¹⁰

Rpt on Gas Atk, 16 Oct (GAF - 79th Div); Ltr, DGO to C CNS, 20 Oct, sub: Weekly Rpt (GAF - 79th Div); Lt Col James M. Troutt, CO 304th San Tr, Periodical Rpt for 4 Oct to 11 Nov, 16 Nov (Med Dept Box 3867 fol 3).

Captain Clark was hopeful that when sufficient gas officers became available again the recent attack would "add interest to gas training, and a knowledge of its effects. Commanding officers are realizing its importance."¹¹¹ The division staff had been shocked by the attack but the troops had not responded. It indicated much about the morale of the men at that time.

For the whole period 8 - 25 October, G - 2 observers counted over 10,800 shells. In the same period they reported only some 1,500 gas shells in the sector, including the gas bombardment on the night of 9 - 10. This count was never corrected, though a correction may be implied in the G - 2 report on the 18th that

atmospheric conditions have been such that during the past few days concentration from gas shells have been absorbed by the moisture in the earth. For this reason it is very important that an alert for gas be maintained in these gassed areas the first clear day that the process of evaporation can take place.

It seemed fairly obvious, G - 2 added, that the enemy contemplated no offensive in the sector, but was "determined to keep us at a distance, as is evidenced by his harassing artillery fire and gas attacks as well as avoidance of patrol encounters."¹¹²

¹¹¹

Ltr, DGO 79th Div to CG 79th Div, 15 Oct, sub: Rpt of...State of Gas Disc; Ltr, Div Insp 79th Div to CG 79th Div, 14 Oct, sub: Gas disc (79th Div Box 198, fol 250); Ltr, Hq 79th Div to all commands, 16 Oct, sub: State of Gas Disc (79th Div Box 212, 470.6).

¹¹²

SOI 11, 79th Div, 17 - 18 Oct; SOI 2 - 18, 8 - 25 Oct. In approx the same period G - 3 rptd that the supporting arty had fired 3,840 shells, including 124 gas rounds, with no fire on four days owing to contamination of the guns.

As their spirits revived, gas discipline improved. Two wooded areas hit with almost 400 Lorraine mustard gas shells on the night of 21 - 22 October were immediately evacuated when the shelling ceased. Of two companies in the woods, there was just one casualty. He picked up a yellow cross shell fragment and put it in his hip pocket as a souvenir. On the morning of the 24th, approximately 1,800 150-mm. blue cross (diphenylchloroarsine) shells crashed into the marshy ground in front of the trenches east of Fresnes. None there were injured or gassed, but three men in the outposts were evacuated the next day.

Altogether, said Captain Clark, records of the Division Surgeon showed 265 men -- 211 infantrymen and 54 attached artillerymen of the 55th FA Brigade (30th Division) -- evacuated as gas casualties between 10 and 27 October. By that time he could say that "cooperation with Staff Departments is very good, indeed. An active interest is manifested in gas work, necessary orders are published, and support is given in every way...to assist the Division Gas Officer in maintaining gas discipline and protective measures."¹¹³

For further discussion of the probable total casualties in the Troyon sector in October, see Analysis, p. 84.

La Borne de Cornouiller

Reconstitution of the brigades was finally completed in the second

¹¹³

Ltrs, DGO to C CWS Def Div, 20 and 27 Oct, sub: Weekly Rpt; Ltr, Lt Owen Winston DGO 79th Div to C CWS, 4 Nov, sub: Monthly Rpt for Oct (79th Div Box 202, 319.1).

week of October, the division this time following the AEF pattern of brigades in column, with the 316th and 315th Infantry echeloned on the left, the 313th and 314th on the right. On 12 October the division passed from French control to the newly organized Second American Army under Bullard, the 79th Division, anchored on Fresnes - en - Meuvre, the northernmost unit in the Army sector.¹¹⁴

On 22 October the 79th was relieved by the 33rd Division in the Troyon sector, acquired, 2,200 replacements, and put at the disposal of First Army. Orders on the 26th sent it to Claudel's XVII French Corps in the Grande Montagne sector, to relieve the 29th Division.¹¹⁵

Two nights later guides of the 29th Division met the forward elements of the 316th Infantry at Consenvoye and led them up into the Bois de Consenvoye, just as the woods came under one of its nightly shellings with gas. "Already blinded with sweat, the men cursed their gas - masks...and stumbled on through the darkness." G - 2 reported that almost 1,200 rounds of HE and gas fell in the Ravin de la Vaux Michieux between 1630 and 1930 hours that night. The Germans said that in addition the ravine west of Belleu Bois, on the edge of the 315th

114

FO 17, 79th Div, 10 Oct.

115

FO 26, 79th Div, 1200, 23 Oct; Ordre General 842, XVII Fr Corps, 26 Oct (Fr Files Box 91, 30.1). History, p. 15, said the replacements were from the July draft and came in with very little military training and no knowledge of their rifles.

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Infantry sector, was contaminated with 800 yellow cross shells (Map No. 9)

The 79th Division coming into position that night learned it was facing the 228th and 192nd Divisions, defending the German Giselher Stellung running through Hill 378.¹¹⁷ The heights dominated by Hill 378 were known to the Germans as Hoher Eichenberg, to the French as La Borne de Cornouiller, and to the Americans as "Corn Willy." They were about three kilometers east of the Meuse and 19 kilometers north of Verdun. Hill 378, the principal direction center for the enemy's oblique fire on First Army west of the Meuse, was firmly believed by the 79th to have been the source of most of its woes in the advance on Montfaucon and Nantillois. A German sketch of the artillery in the sector seems to confirm that belief (Map No. 10).

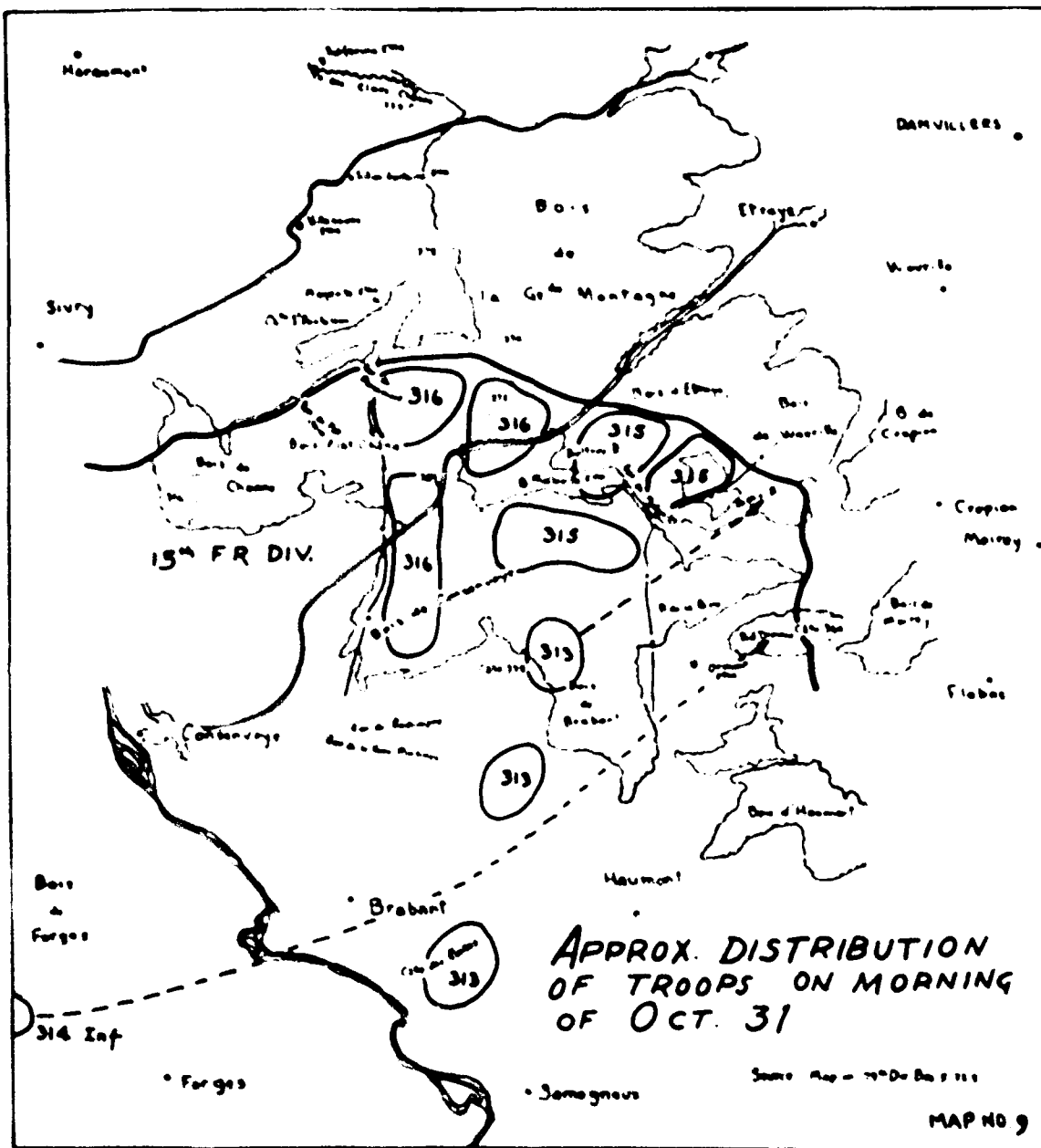
La Borne de Cornouiller, as the 79th Division rightly claimed, was also the pin in the vast hinge - like movement of the German armies on the Western Front, then swinging back slowly onto the Antwerp - Meuse line

116

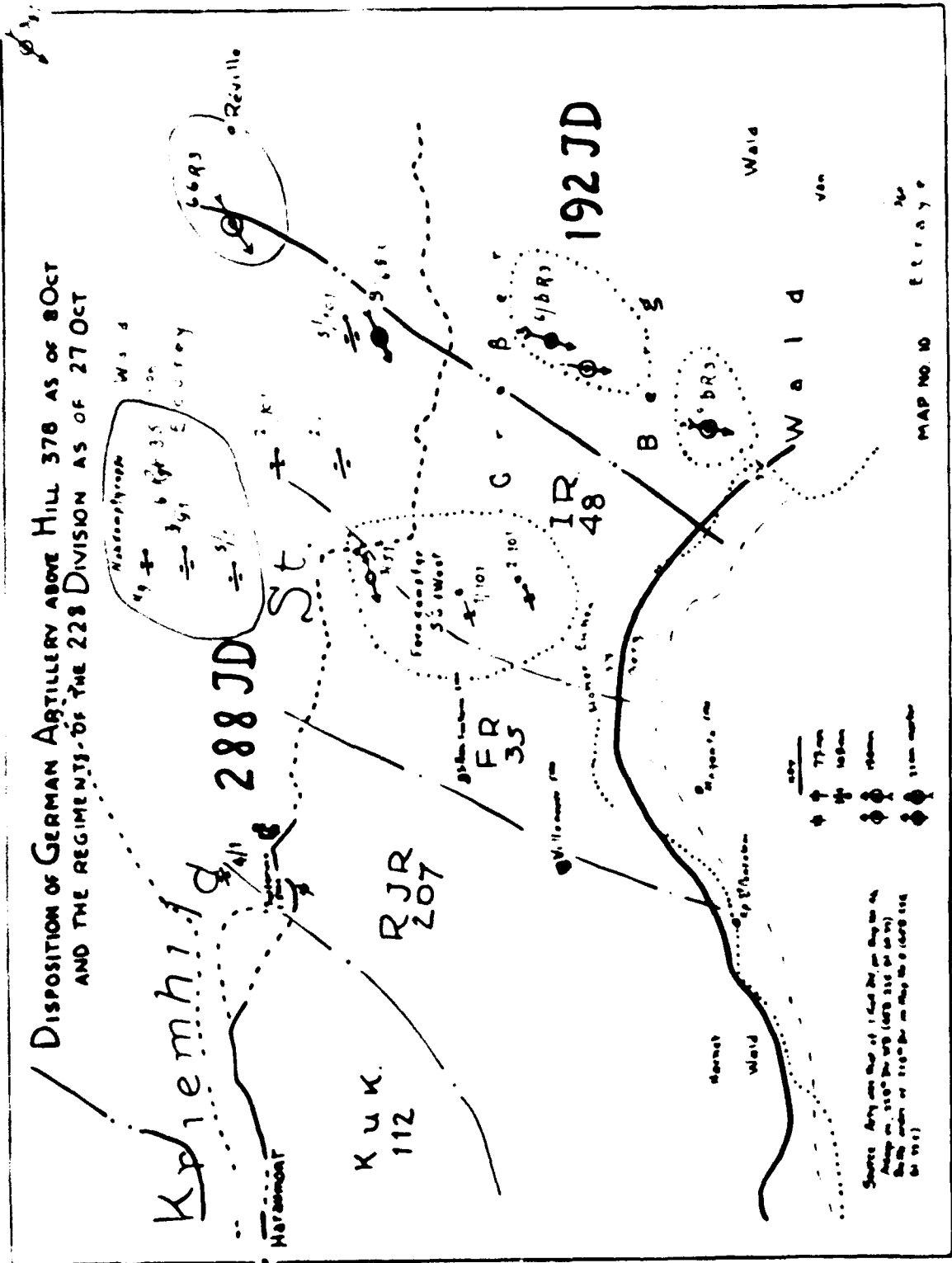
Glock, History of the 316th Regt, p. 57; SOI 1, 79th Div, 29 - 30 Oct. Go Meuse Oct WD, 29 Oct (GFB 115, fol 1), rptd the incoming 79th. III/Felda R 192 (192nd Div) WD, 29 Oct (GFB 214, fol III, p. 68), said the roads in the B de Consenvoys and the ravines at the north and south edges of the wood were harassed with gas and HE that night. Felda R 192 WD, 29 Oct (ibid., pp. 18 - 20), rptd the contamination.

117

48th Inf. 228th Div, prisoners taken the next day said the regt was down to 9 companies averaging 30 men per company. Three companies had been dissolved two weeks earlier after heavy losses near Romagne (SOI 1, 79th Div, 29 - 30 Oct.).



DISPOSITION OF GERMAN ARTILLERY ABOVE HILL 378 AS OF 8 OCT
AND THE REGIMENTS OF THE 228 DIVISION AS OF 27 OCT



before the British, French, and American attacks that autumn.¹¹⁸

The enfilading artillery around Hill 378 had been a primary objective of the attack launched east of the Meuse by XVII French Corps on 8 October. The 33rd and 29th Divisions, with two French units on their right, tried to silence the enemy guns to the north that were harrowing the attack west of the river. On 10 October efforts to capture Sivry - sur - Meuse and storm la Borne de Cornouiller came within a mile of these objectives before being stopped.

The 33rd Division was held there until relieved by the 15th French Division on 21 October, while the 29th Division in local operations on 15 and 16 October took Molleville Farm and got into the edge of Bois de la Grande Montagne. Another attack on 24 October, with the 26th Division brought in on its right, put the 29th Division on Etraye ridge.¹¹⁹

At that point, on the nights of 28 and 29 October, the 79th Division relieved the 29th, as the 316th and 315th Infantry under Brig. Gen. Evan M. Johnson took over the front in the Bois de la Grande Montagne and Bois d'Etraye. Two nights later, on 31 October, the 314th and 313th Infantry, 157th Brigade, crossed the river and relieved a part of the 26th Division in Belleu Bois and Bois d'Ormont (see Map No. 9). Supporting the

¹¹⁸

FO 28, 79th Div, 1600, 27 Oct.

¹¹⁹

History, pp. 204 - 05.

division was the 52nd FA Brigade (27th Division), under Brig. Gen. George A. Wingate.¹²⁰

That same night of 31 October the enemy carried out a yellow cross contamination shoot on Bois Plat - Chêne and harassed roads and ravines in the sector with blue cross gas and HE. Plat - Chêne was contaminated again the next night, along with the Molleville Farm ravine. On 2 November, Bois Plat - Chêne was the target of a third contamination shoot, while blue cross gas fell on ravines, roads, and traffic points across the front.¹²¹ Field hospital records of the 79th Division reveal a total of 159 wounded and 80 gassed in those first six days in the sector.¹²²

The impression in the 79th that the enemy gassed them day and night was more or less supported by a war diary entry of the 192nd Division artillery: "When weather permits, missions will be carried out only with gas ammunition, because ammunition is in short supply and we can figure two days of fire in the gun positions by counting in the gas ammunition."¹²³

To the 79th it seemed that "the Germans had every point registered, and...high explosives and shrapnel wrought havoc with ration details,

¹²⁰

FO 29, 79th Div, 28 Oct; FO 30, 30 Oct; History, pp. 210, 214.

¹²¹

Go Mass Out WD, 31 Oct, 1 and 2 Nov (GFB 115, fol I); III/Felda R 192 WD, 31 Oct (GFB 214, fol III, p. 68); Arko 192 WD, 2 Nov (GFB 214, fol III).

¹²²

Analysis, p. 84.

¹²³

Felda Regt 192 WD, 31 Oct (GFB 214, fol III, p. 28).

working parties and liaison groups, while the constant use of gas shells made it necessary for the men to be masked most of the time."¹²⁴ The historian of the 316th Infantry wrote:

The woods were soaked all the time with a light concentration and everyone was breathing it. It was only when a gas shell burst near at hand, spreading heavy concentrations, that gas masks were used, however, for one cannot work all the time in a gas mask. It was the gas at night that was the most wicked -- being wakened out of a deep sleep, or even a half doze, by a muffled cry of "Gas!" from one's comrade who was already struggling into his mask...In spite of casualties from gas and high explosive, the routine work of the sector went on, the consolidation of the front, and the arduous task of bringing up ammunition, supplies, water and food. The carrying parties that brought up the heavy and bulky boxes of caliber .30 and the great marmite cans of coffee or slum from the kitchens to the front lines, falling into shell holes in the darkness, stumbling over logs and slipping the mud of the narrow paths in the woods, performed heroic labors.¹²⁵

The 79th waited.

Clearing the Côtes de Meuse

As it resumed the attack between the Argonne and Meuse on 1 November, First Army planned to swing its three corps in an arc, throwing the enemy onto the line of the river. The plan of Claudel's XVII French Corps east of the Meuse was to strike across the plains of the Woivre and advance into Germany. But before doing that, it must first take la Borne de Cornouiller, which not only continued to menace the advance west of the Meuse, but guarded the valley roads eastward to the Woivre plain and the great

¹²⁴

History, pp. 220 - 21. SOI, 311th MG Bn, 1 - 8 Nov (79th Div Box 22, 20.1), rptd almost daily gas fire down in the Bois de Brabant.

¹²⁵

Glock, History of the 316th Regt, pp. 62 - 3.

German supply camps and railheads at Etraye, Réville, and Ecurey.¹²⁶

In front of the 316th Infantry as it took over the line on the north edge of the Bois Plat - Chene and south edge of Bois de la Grande Montagne was a series of ridges culminating in Hill 370. Beyond that were the bald heights of Borne de Cornouiller, further protected by the dominating Har-aumont ridge, three kilometers to the north (see Map No. 9).

On 2 November, at the direction of corps, the 316th Infantry was ordered to test the enemy strength on Hill 378, the French unit on its left to probe enemy defenses between Ste. Pantaleon and Magenta Farm. Following a brief artillery preparation, three patrols of two platoons each with heavy machine guns advanced from their positions at 0600 the next morning.¹²⁷

One of the patrols, moving into position, was caught in a box barrage of HE and what was described as phosgene [actually it was mustard gas] and lost 2 wounded and 30 gassed. Another patrol, advancing towards its objective, Hill 370, "found themselves with a ravine saturated with chlorine gas between them and [a machine gun nest]....Because to advance was impossible with gas masks....Corporal Deysher chose [to remove them] and advanced with his squad, captured the nest and voluntarily paid the penalty with all his squad by being severely gassed."¹²⁸

¹²⁶ History, pp. 217 - 18.

¹²⁷ Ordre Particulier 19, XVII Fr Corps, 2 Nov (Fr Files Box 93, 30.1); G - 3 Order 7, 79th Div, 1730, 2 Nov (79th Div Box 3, 32.13).

¹²⁸ Glock, p. 65; History, pp. 223 - 24.

Five hours later the patrols returned, having taken, they reported, eleven machine guns. They had left a platoon dug in at the foot of Hill 378, and it was reenforced by a company that evening. The reconnaissance that day had cost 17 killed, said the division history. Nothing was said of the wounded nor of the 50 gassed.¹²⁹

Following this success, corps ordered another "action" against Cornouiller for the morning of 3 November, again in conjunction with the French on the left. A battalion of the 316th was to make the principal thrust, while another battalion advanced against Hill 370 and the east flank of Hill 378. A battalion of the 315th was to provide diversionary action in the Bois de la Grande Montagne. Anticipating the attack at 0625 enemy guns began filling the area with gas and HE. "Before jumping off, 70 men had been gassed, 3 wounded and 1 killed."¹³⁰

After a short fight the center battalion occupied Hill 370 but "within a half hour...the enemy turned the advance [of the left battalion] into a shambles....The story of the 1st Battalion [led by Major Parkin, the regimental commander, up the bare slope of Hill 378] that foggy morning is one of the many tragic ones of the war."¹³¹

¹²⁹

Glock, p. 68; History, pp. 227 - 28.

¹³⁰

History, pp. 230 - 31; Mag, 158th Brig RC to G - 3 79th Div, 0630, 3 Nov (79th Div Box 14, 32.16).

¹³¹

History, pp. 231, 233 - 34.

About 0800, after heavy losses, two companies of Parkin's battalion succeeded in reaching the summit. With only 25 men left, one of the companies fell back to the edge of la Grande Montagne. When the fog lifted, enemy counterattack forces rushed the remaining troops on the hill, capturing the survivors, 3 officers and 21 men. Successive companies sent up to rescue them were swept off by hails of fire.

In one attempt, the Regimental Adjutant Captain Glock with 60 men followed the route of the 1st Battalion through the Ravin de Moyemont and reached the trenches on the hill that had been occupied that morning. He found a number of dead, "but there was not a living soul, not one man of the battalion that had swept up the hill in the morning."¹³² At nightfall a provisional battalion of parts of three companies remained dug in at the foot of the south crest of Hill 378. The enemy continued to hold the height.¹³³

Killed that day in the attack on Hill 378 were 33 in the 316th Infantry, 23 in the 315th. Hospital records omitting the captured, show 46 wounded and 19 gas cases admitted, while later Medical Department statistics indicate a total of 31 killed, 131 wounded, and 35 gassed on 3 November.¹³⁴

¹³²

Glock, pp. 72 - 3.

¹³³

History, pp. 235 - 36. GP Mass Out WD, 3 Nov (GFB 115, fol 1), said that in repulsing the heavy atks that day the 48th Inf on H  her Eichenberg (Hill 378) had lost heavily.

¹³⁴

History, p. 238, Analysis, pp. 85, 87.

All during 3 November the enemy put intermittent gas fire on Vacherauville, where division headquarters and the trains were located, and at dusk fired 100 mustard gas shells into the town in a two - hour period. Even with good gas discipline, 35 officers and men became casualties. An unspecified number of men, as well as the commander of the 130th MG Battalion, in reserve near Brabant, were also evacuated, "suffering two doses of gas.. in the course of twelve hours."¹³⁵ In his weekly report on 3 November, the Division Gas Officer said that the enemy was "using gas extensively and consistently in this sector." Though he suggested that the continual gas-sing was exhausting, he counted only 48 gas casualties that week.¹³⁶

On 4 November the crest of Hill 378 was assaulted and taken twice and twice lost to counterattacks. Attempts to run a 75 forward to assist the battalion on the hill proved futile. "For four hours an endeavor was made to drag this gun through the mud, six horses being used, and late in the afternoon they had not been able to get it forward."¹³⁷

During the night of 4 - 5 November word came that III Corps would cross the Meuse near Dun the next day, continuing the First Army drive

¹³⁵

SOI 6, 79th Div, 3 - 4 Nov; History, pp. 237 - 38.

¹³⁶

Ltr, DGO to C CWS, 3 Nov, sub: Weekly Rpt (GAF - 79th Div). Note: Neither G - 2 nor DGO gas casualty counts are confirmed in hospital data. See Analysis, p. 84.

¹³⁷

228th Div WD, 4 Nov (GFB 225, fol IV); Memo, Brig Gen E. M. Johnson, CG 158th Brig for Gen Kuhn, 14 Nov, n.s. (79th Div Box 14, 32.15).

to the northeast. In conjunction with this attack the 79th Division, with the French on its left, was to make an all - out assault on Hill 378 and continue to its final objective, three kilometers beyond. The 158th Brigade would jump off at 0900.¹³⁸

The artillery preparation for the 79th Division attack was said to have begun that night with gas concentrations on Hill 378. German records do not confirm it. The only "considerable gas" that night was German gas, put on the Ravin de Rechimpre, Ravin de la Vaux Michieux, and Vacherauville in what appears to have been routine enemy missions.¹³⁹

With the provisional battalion dug in at the foot of Hill 378 and the 1st Battalion almost wiped out, all that was left of the 316th Infantry were Companies A, L, and M, which, with a company of the 315th, were formed into a second provisional battalion. Two of these companies, A and M, failed to materialize at the hour of attack and the other two advanced without them. The 315th Infantry, with one battalion used up the

¹³⁸

Ordre Particulier 21 and map, XVII Fr Corps, 4 Nov (Fr Files Box 93, 30.1); FO 31, 79th Div, 2230, 4 Nov.

¹³⁹

SOI 7, 79th Div, 4 - 5 Nov; DOR, 79th Div, 4 - 5 Nov. Ltr, Capt W. L. Bull DGO 79th Div to C CWS, 30 Jan 1919, sub: Gas Hist of 79th Div (79th Div Box 212), said the only gas fired by its atchd arty in the period was No. 5 phosgene on Crepion, Moirey, and Reville on 4 and 5 Nov (see DGO map, here as Map No. 11). Ltr, CG 52nd FA Brig to CG 79th Div, 15 Nov, sub: Rpt of Opns (27th Div Box 11, 33.6), said gas and HE were fired on five unspecified targets on 4 Nov. Opns O 12, 52nd FA Brig, 5 Nov, ordered 240 No. 5 shells put on 3 targets on 6 Nov.

No confirmation of gas on Hill 378 appears in these arty records. On the other hand, Crepion, Moirey, and Reville seem unlikely targets at this time.

1950-1951. 1. 50,000

October 26 To Albany Mass 11. 1918

1950-1951. 1. 50,000



previous day, attacked with its remaining two.¹⁴⁰

Three regiments of 75's and two batteries of 240-mm. howitzers from corps fired almost 8,000 shells preparing the way on the morning of 5 November, and by noon the south slope of Hill 378 was cleared. At night-fall troops of the two attack regiments were still there. No record of losses that day has been found, but the 316th was said to have had no more than 600 effectives left that night. Apart from a battalion of the 315th Infantry that was sent to the rear "in a shattered condition," every company of the brigade was now in line.¹⁴¹

On 6 November the 2nd Battalion, 313th Infantry, brought up from the Côte des Roches to replace the 316th, and a battalion of the 315th in support, were ordered to continue the attack across Hill 378. But enemy batteries at Solferino Farm and on Haraumont ridge so saturated the north edge of the Bois de Consenvoye with HE, shrapnel, and gas that the battalion of the 313th and to some extent the support battalion became completely disorganized and lost the barrage. No attack was possible.¹⁴² G - 2 reported that "In spite of unfavorable wind for gas,

¹⁴⁰

History, pp. 239 - 40.

¹⁴¹

History, pp. 244 - 46; Ltr, Johnson CG 158th Brig to CG 79th Div, 1610, 5 Nov, sub: Condition of Brig (79th Div Box 15, 33.6).

¹⁴²

FO 32, 79th Div, 2130, 5 Nov; Thorn, History of the 313th Inf, p. 46; History, p. 248. A single bn of the 314th Inf constituted div reserve at this time.

the enemy threw gas shells on the left front...and slight gas concentrations [were established] in Ravin du Plat - Chêne and Bois Plat - Chêne.¹⁴³

On the left the French advanced and took Villores that day, establishing contact with III Corps, then driving towards Brandeville (see Map No. 12). With the loss of Villores, the enemy's Sivry - Hill 378 front was outflanked, and that night Group Maas Ost ordered its units to begin withdrawing to the Riegel position. Roughly parallel to the Meuse, the Riegel Stellung was anchored at Mouzay and joined the Kriemhilde Stellung at Haraumont. An order on the night of the 7th continued the withdrawal to the line Mouzay - Bois de Remolville - Vittarville.¹⁴⁴ The great German retreat was on.

On the morning of 7 November, again ordered to advance to the Sivry - Reville road, the 313th Infantry covered the final kilometer almost without opposition. The enemy had withdrawn his heavy guns from Haraumont ridge and the fire from the few batteries of 77's left behind proved negligible. By 1100 the troops were across the road and before nightfall both the 313th and 315th had advanced almost two more kilometers, over Hill 329 to les Clairs Chênes trench.¹⁴⁵ That day the French on the left occupied Haraumont ridge as First Army's flanking attack above Dun made

143

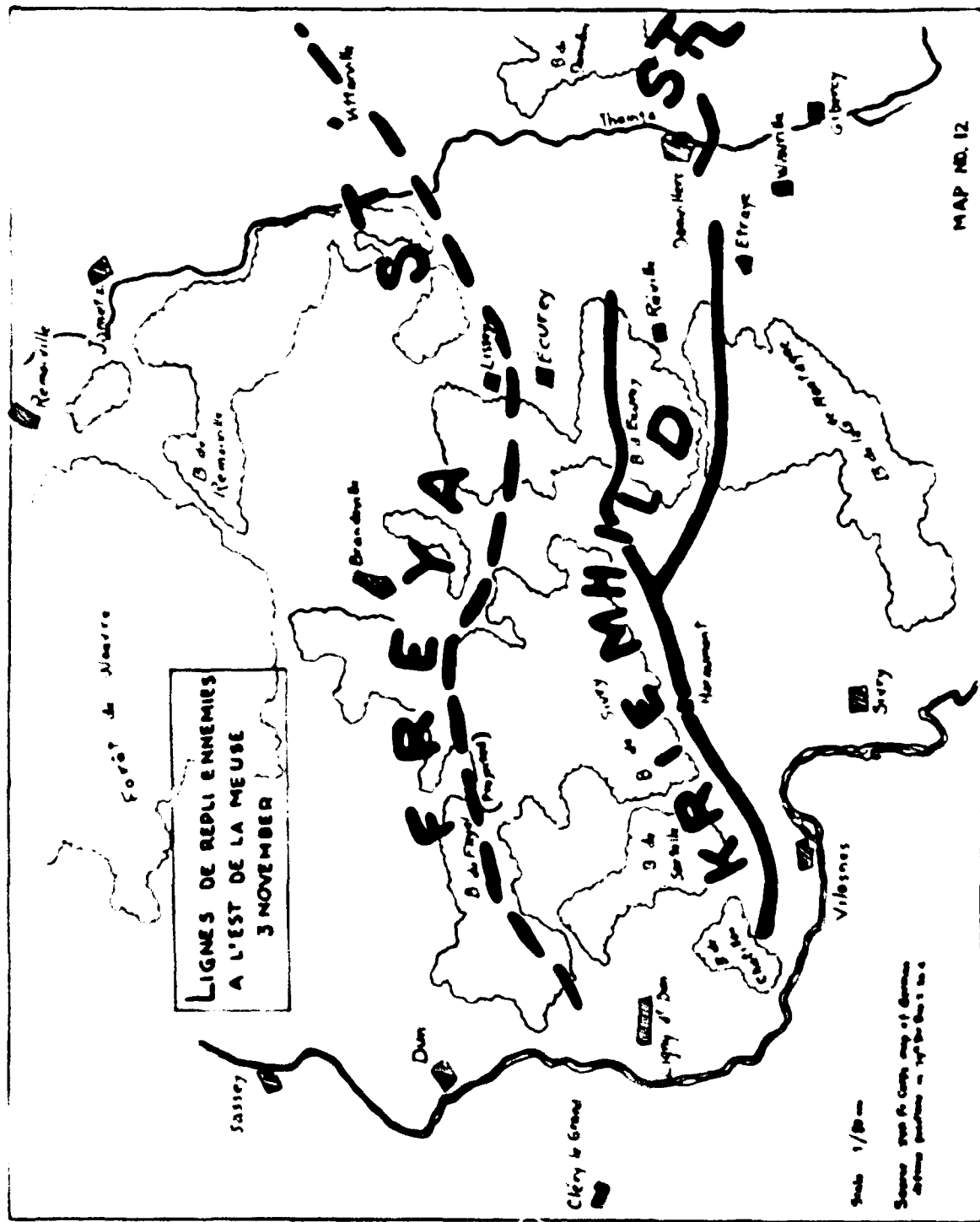
SOI 8, 79th Div, 5 - 6 Nov. 228th Div WD, 6 Nov (GFB 225, fol IV), rptd the success of its arty fire but did not say gas had been used.

144

GP Maas Ost WD, 6 Nov (GFB 115, fol I); 228th Div WD, 7 Nov (GFB 225, fol IV).

145

FO 33, 79th Div, 2115, 6 Nov; History, pp. 257 - 58.



the heights untenable. The Côtés de Meuse, under attack since 8 October, had at last been cleared.

With the French and III Corps forces above them, the 79th halted. The division was more than ready for relief, but learned instead that it was only to change the direction of its attack. The troops, said the Division Surgeon, were "now in very poor physical condition, due to long continued loss of sleep, and lack of sufficient nourishment combined with a high degree of mental strain."¹⁴⁶

G - 2 made no estimate of the amount of gas fire encountered in the eleven days in the Montagne sector (29 October - 8 November), reporting only "some gas" on three days and "considerable gas" on three other days. Enemy HE fire in the period, as reported by observers, came to no more than 7,860 shells. By contrast, 79th Division fire was said to have totaled 59,700 rounds.¹⁴⁷

In the same period, G - 3 reported 72 killed, 428 wounded, and 5 gassed. The division field hospitals records 988 wounded and 588 gassed, while postwar Medical Department analyses show 338 killed, 1,183 wounded, and 396 gassed in the Grande Montagne sector.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ 1st Ind, Div Surg to CG 79th Div, 8 Nov, on Memo, Div Orthopedist to Div Surg, 6 Nov, n.s. (79th Div Box 214, 704).

¹⁴⁷ SOI 1 - 10, 79th Div, 29 Oct 0 8 Nov. No SOI's have been found after 8 Nov.

¹⁴⁸ DOR, 79th Div, 29 Oct - 9 Nov; Analysis, pp. 84.

"The proper movement of the division"

On the night of 7 - 8 November, with orders to attack in the direction of Réville and Etraye, two provisional regiments, each made up of mixed battalions of the 313th and 315th Infantry, were formed and faced due east between the Sivry - Réville and Cpmsevoie - Etraye roads, a span of three kilometers. The lone battalion of the 316th Infantry, then in the Bois de la Grande Montagne, was to fall back through them and become divisional reserve as the improvised line advanced.¹⁴⁹

The advance was ordered for 0600 on 8 November, but it was noon before the two lead battalions of the 313th Infantry came into place. A possible reason for the delay may have been the heavy concentration of HE by enemy long range guns on the Bois d'Ormont, and "between 18 hours and 20 hours 30 the considerable gas put into the Ravin d'Hauumont, Ravin de Rechimpre and Ravin de la Vaux Michieux."¹⁵⁰

As the troops moved through the Bois d'Ecurey and Bois de la Grande Montagne they found the enemy gone. By 1600, in driving rain, the advancing forces spanned the area between the Haraumont - Ecurey road south to the Bois d'Ormont, a distance of 7½ kilometers, and still had encountered nothing but occasional long - range shells. Just before dark patrols entered the town of Ecurey and Réville. On their left flank the provisional 314th Infantry marched into Etraye. The enemy

¹⁴⁹

FO 34, 79th Div, 2300, 7 Nov; History, p. 277.

¹⁵⁰

SOI 10, 79th Div, 7 - 8 Nov.

had withdrawn everywhere and casualties that day were light.¹⁵¹

A French corps order arrived directing the 79th Division to sideslip that night out of the Ecurey - Etraye sector and continue its advance in the morning between Etraye and Moirey, to permit the 15th French to advance above them and take Damvilliers. The move would bring the two provisional regiments of the 158th Brigade more than four kilometers south, to the sector then occupied by the 314th Infantry.

On the morning of 9 November the two battalions of the 314th (157th Brigade) spanning the new division front were to begin the advance, with the 313th, 315th, and 316th echeloned to the rear. As they advanced, the 315th was to take over the left flank of the line, the 314th to concentrate to the right, the 316th and 313th taking positions behind them. Then the machine gun battalions, artillery, and engineers would fall into place, putting all in order "for the proper movement of the division."¹⁵²

Two battalions of the 313th, said the division history, sideslipping that day in a southeasterly direction towards Navrille, to take positions back of the 314th, went through a woods saturated with mustard gas. Why the gas was not detected at once and the woods bypassed, the history did not say. Hospital records show 40 gas cases from the 313th Infantry ad-

¹⁵¹

History, pp. 278, 281, 285.

¹⁵²

SO 826, II Fr Corps, 8 Nov; FO 35, 79th Div, 0100, 9 Nov; History, pp. 286 - 90.

mitted on 8 November and 11 the next day, indicating that the event probably occurred but that either the history or hospital records confused the date.¹⁵³

By nightfall of 9 November, as the leading elements of the division crossed the shallows of the Theinte river, the alignment of the division on "a two brigade front, each sector of battalion width" had been completed. There the division came to a halt as enemy artillery and then machine guns opened up from their positions on Hill 328 (Côte de Morimont) and Hill 361 (Côte d'Orne).¹⁵⁴

On the 10th, with the German 84th and 1st Landwehr Divisions found solidly installed on Côte d'Orne, Côte de Morimont, and Côte de Romagne, the 79th maneuvered on the plain in front of those heights but could make no progress. The division was still inching forward at 1100 hours the next morning.¹⁵⁵

In a review of the fighting from 29 October to 11 November, General Kuhn reported 2,697 casualties -- 463 killed, 1,483 wounded, 288 gassed, and 463 missing. In this campaign, he said, "the energies of the combat units were husbanded and not dissipated so rapidly as [at Montfaucon]."

¹⁵³ History, p. 293; Analysis, p. 84.

¹⁵⁴ History, pp. 294 - 95.

¹⁵⁵ History, pp. 299 - 311.

Straggling was kept at a gratifying low limit," and the brigades though somewhat depleted were still capable of further effort when the Armistice brought them to a halt.¹⁵⁶

The report of the Division Gas Officer for the month of November was to show 452 gas cases. The Division Medical Gas Officer, Capt. Edgar P. Sandrock, said the gas hospital had treated 526 cases in the period, 465 in the 79th Division and 61 from other units, though hospital records show a total of 660 in the 79th alone.¹⁵⁷

On the afternoon and evening of 11 November, burial parties were sent out to take care of "the great number of bodies - German, French Colonials, and Americans of the 29th, 33rd, 26th, and 79th Divisions" throughout the sector east of the Meuse.¹⁵⁸ That evening the German soldiers on the hills set off their remaining stores of rockets and lights in a blaze of colored fire that lasted for hours. With the end of pyrotechnics the range of hills glowed with the lights of a thousand camp fires. The next morning the Engineers of the 79th set up the posts and wires that marked the

¹⁵⁶

Ltr, CG 79th Div to G - 3 GHQ AEF, 15 Dec, sub: Rpt (79th Div Box 6, 33.6).

¹⁵⁷

Ltr, Lt Owen Winston DGO 79th Div to C CNS Def Div, 1 Dec, sub: Monthly Rpt for Nov, and atchd Monthly Rpt of Gas Casualties (79th Div Box 202, 319.1); Ltr, DMGO to Med Dir CNS, 16 Nov, sub: Rpt (GAF - 79th Div); Analysis, p. 84.

¹⁵⁸

History, p. 330.

limit of the American advance.¹⁵⁹

Sometime about noon on 12 November almost 200 German soldiers approached the wire of the 79th, desiring "to talk, give cigarettes and mingle with our men." They were driven off, in some instances at rifle point. The feelings of the 79th were reported as not at all friendly, and the enemy made no further attempt to fraternize.¹⁶⁰

On the day after Christmas 1918 the columns of the 79th Division began the long march west, staging homeward. On 10 January its 154th FA Brigade joined the division near Chaumont. The artillerymen complained bitterly that without transportation they had never got into action. In their four months overseas they had "shot up the chocolate line" and that was all.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹

Salvage operations of the 315th Inf alone that week brought in 481 U S rifles, 108 German rifles, 102 U S gas masks, and 30 German gas masks (Salvage list, 315th Inf, in 79th Div Box 19, 33.6).

¹⁶⁰

Ltr, Asst Inap Gen 1st Army to Inap Gen 1st Army, 16 Nov, sub: Fraternizing with the Enemy (79th Div Box 11, 66.3).

¹⁶¹

History, p. 345.

ANALYSIS

79th Division Casualties

The division history recorded four sets of figures, ranging between 6,126 and 8,884, representing total casualties of the 79th in World War I, one of which is shown in Table No. 1 since it distinguished gas casualties.¹⁶²

Table No. 1

TOTAL CASUALTIES BASED ON 79TH DIVISION RECORDS

Sector & Date	313th Inf			314th Inf			315th Inf			316th Inf		
	K	W	G	K	W	G	K	W	G	K	W	G
Montfaucon (26 - 30 Sep)	171	779	114	104	472	108	140	608	143	170	703	155
Troyon (8 - 25 Oct)	6	39	106	4	30	22	7	42	17	14	62	90
Grande Montagne (29 Oct - 11 Nov)	40	233	63	100	315	93	121	327	76	151	441	170
No date	5	82	0	5	38	0	4	0	0	11	0	0
Total	222	1,133	283	213	855	223	272	977	236	346	1,206	415

	MG Bns			304th Eng			TOTAL		
	K	W	G	K	W	G	K	W	G
Montfaucon	23	91	27	1	21	47	609	2,674	594
Troyon	0	34	6	0	2	8	31	209	249
Grande Montagne	21	45	14	2	13	0	435	1,374	416
No date	2	72	0	0	0	2	27	192	2
Total	46	242	47	3	36	57	1,102	4,449	1,261 = 6,812

To this total of 6,812 battle casualties should be added approximately 1,600, the number reported in other casualty lists as captured or missing, for a final total of 8,412.

¹⁶² History, pp. 424 - 27; the Table above is on p. 427. Shipley Thomas, A History of the A.E.F. (New York, 1920, p. 471, records 1,396 battle deaths, 80 captured, and 6,114 wounded, for a total of 7,590 casualties.

These divisions totals of 1,102 killed, 4,449 wounded, and 1,261 gassed compare fairly well with final Medical Department statistics on the 79th Division, which show 1,074 killed, 4,257 wounded, and 1,260 gassed, represented below, according to campaigns, in Table No. 2.¹⁶³

Table No. 2

MEDICAL DEPARTMENT STATISTICS

Date	Killed	Wounded	Gassed
26 Sep	212	228	5
27 Sep	56	236	16
28 Sep	118	481	68
29 Sep	138	543	132
30 Sep	52	306	75
1 Oct	18	334	65
2 Oct	2	109	29
3 Oct	0	74	41
4 Oct	1	64	42
	<u>597</u>	<u>2,375</u>	<u>473</u>
8 - 25 Oct	<u>41</u>	<u>460</u>	<u>359</u>
26 Oct	0	7	4
27 Oct	2	6	4
28 Oct	0	8	4
29 Oct	11	30	5
30 Oct	4	32	9
31 Oct	5	48	7
1 Nov	46	126	21
2 Nov	10	57	16
3 Nov	31	131	35
4 Nov	61	219	67
5 Nov	89	209	71
6 Nov	18	133	37
7 Nov	39	102	55
8 Nov	23	75	34
9 Nov	30	50	17
10 Nov	41	103	24
11 Nov	26	86	18
	<u>436</u>	<u>1,422</u>	<u>428</u>
GRAND TOTAL	1,074	4,257	1,260 = 6,591

.... Note: These Oct figures obviously represent delayed counts.

¹⁶³

Medical Dept of the U S Army in the World War, XV, Statistics, Part II, Medical and Casualty Statistics (Washington, D C, 1925, pp. 1030 ff.

The Battle Monuments Commission study of the 79th Division, which includes gas cases with the wounded, omits casualties incurred while the division was in the Troyon sector. With this omission, total casualties (killed and wounded) are reported as 6,418. Casualties in the artillery units attached to the division from 26 September to 11 November total another 154.¹⁶⁴

There appears to be little correlation between these more or less official casualty figures and the admission lists of the field hospitals, where the wounded come to not much more than half these other compilations, and gas casualties are over 600 more than in official counts (Table No. 3). A comparison of gas casualty figures during the three phases of 79th Division operations makes the difference clear:¹⁶⁵

	<u>79th Div Records</u>	<u>Med Dept Stats.</u>	<u>HoSP Admissions</u>
Montfaucon	594	473	466
Troyon	249	359	799
Grande Montagne	418	428	660
	<u>1,261</u>	<u>1,260</u>	<u>1,905</u>

The discrepancies in the figures for the Troyon and Grand Montagne campaigns are only partially explained by the inclusion of 374 men from the 26th Division artillery in the hospital admission total of 799. No evidence of wholesale changes of diagnosis, to account for final medical statistics, has been found.

¹⁶⁴ 79th Div Sum of Opns in the World War (Washington, D C, 1944), p. 34.

¹⁶⁵ Ltr, Capt W. L. Bull, DGO 79th Div to C CMS, 29 Jan 1919, sub: Gas Hls of 79th Div (79th Div Box 212), found evidence in DGO records for only 717 gas cases out of 7,552 battle casualties including captured and missing. Of these 717, 181 occurred at Montfaucon, 248 at Troyon, and 288 in the Grande Montagne.

Table No. 3

CASUALTIES ACCORDING TO HOSPITAL ADMISSION LISTS¹⁶⁶

Date	313 Inf		314 Inf		315 Inf		316 Inf		Army Brig		MC Bns		Others		TOTAL	
	G	W	G	W	G	W	G	W	G	W	G	W	G	W	G	W
26 Sep	0	46	0	27	0	13	0	4	0	5	0	1	0	2	0	98
27 Sep	2	77	0	31	2	19	0	8	0	0	0	2	0	1	4	138
28 Sep	11	91	16	56	8	63	18	40	0	1	1	14	0	2	54	267
29 Sep	8	81	2	28	9	49	5	94	0	0	5	3	0	2	29	257
30 Sep	19	49	10	27	26	70	13	71	2	0	9	12	2	3	81	232
1 Oct	42	178	48	98	76	126	61	221	3	8	14	24	7	8	251	663
2 Oct	4	24	2	9	2	14	6	23	0	0	1	2	0	4	15	76
3 Oct	0	0	8	1	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	2	1	12	4
	86	546	86	277	123	354	105	463	5	14	30	58	11	23	446	1,735
10 Oct	23	3	0	0	0	0	33	0	83	2	0	0	0	0	139	5
11 Oct	87	0	9	0	1	0	105	1	150	4	1	0	3	0	356	5
12 Oct	16	0	0	0	0	0	16	0	48	0	2	0	0	0	82	0
13 Oct	55	1	0	0	0	0	4	2	7	0	0	0	4	0	70	3
14 Oct	21	4	1	0	0	0	2	0	32	0	0	0	0	1	56	5
15 Oct	5	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	9	1	0	0	5	0	20	3
16 Oct	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	13	0	0	0	12	0	27	1
17 Oct	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	10	0	15	0
18 Oct	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	22	0	0	0	1	0	25	0
19-25 Oct	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	7	5	0	0	0	0	0	9	7
	213	9	10	1	1	0	163	11	374	7	3	0	35	1	799	20
29 Oct	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	3	3	0	0	2	0	0	7	
30 Oct	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	6	0
31 Oct	2	2	0	0	8	19	14	15	0	0	0	2	1	0	25	38
1 Nov	0	6	3	8	1	21	6	4	1	2	0	2	0	0	11	43
2 Nov	1	2	1	10	5	8	3	6	2	0	0	0	0	1	12	27
3 Nov	6	4	9	13	0	3	4	17	0	4	0	5	0	0	19	46
4 Nov	2	9	13	21	6	26	87	79	2	3	3	12	1	11	114	161
5 Nov	0	8	10	18	26	62	54	84	2	4	4	5	11	0	107	181
6 Nov	10	30	8	15	19	56	50	77	0	2	5	26	13	6	105	212
7 Nov	10	46	48	7	27	35	21	40	2	3	2	31	5	1	115	163
8 Nov	40	56	8	14	1	27	10	11	0	0	3	3	5	1	67	112
9 Nov	11	8	6	14	0	9	4	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	22	33
10 Nov	6	7	12	52	1	18	6	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	25	93
11 Nov	0	13	12	58	1	17	6	14	0	2	0	0	0	6	25	110
	88	191	130	230	96	301	271	367	15	20	17	88	43	27	660	1,224
GRAND TOTAL															1,905	2,984

¹⁶⁶

79th Div FH 313 (Med Dept Box 3872), FH 314 (Box 3874), FH 315 (Box 3875), FH 316 (Box 3876); 37th Div FH 145 (Box 3746), FH 147 (Box 3747), FH 148 (Box 3749), 4th Div FH 19 (Box 3463), FH 21 (Box 3464), FH 28 (Box 3467).

Effectiveness of Gas

The almost complete lack of fire data in either American or German records in the opening days of the Meuse-Argonne campaign makes any kind of computation of artillery or small arms effectiveness impossible. The same must be said for the final days of that campaign, east of the Meuse, when as earlier the maintenance of detailed records seems to have been beyond the intelligence forces of the division. While 79th Division records are little better in the Troyon sector, they are just sufficient to hazard a few calculations.

The Division Gas Officer accounted for 455 gas casualties (including 190 artillerymen of the 26th Division and 54 in the 30th Division) in the period 8 - 27 October. Medical Department statistics show 41 killed, an unlikely total of 460 wounded, and 359 gassed in the division alone in the same period. And hospital lists record 29 wounded and 799 gassed (including 374 gas cases in attached artillery).

The narrative account of the period in the division history makes the total of 799 gassed appear more probably than the DGO count of 455. From mid-September to the end of the war the Troyon sector was kept almost constantly under yellow cross gas. Hospital admission lists indicate that almost all cases were brought in as mustard gas cases, or suffering from mustard gas and chlorpicrin, the latter possibly to explain the incidence of respiratory distress from prolonged exposure to residual mustard gas.

There is nothing in the division history to justify the Medical Department total of 460 wounded. Division records showing 31 killed and 209

wounded, while high, are more reasonable. Thus for purposes of calculation, casualties in the Troyon sector will be assumed as 31 killed, 209 wounded, and 799 gassed.

G - 2 counted 10,800 HE and 1,500 gas shells at Troyon (narrative, p. 60), making no attempt to guess at the number of gas shells fired on the night of 9 - 10 October. At least half the 11,000 Lorraine yellow cross shells fired by Group Combres that night fell in the 79th Division sector. (French casualties readily account for the balance of the shells.) Thus the probable total of gas shells in the 79th Division sector that month must have been almost 7,000.

Accepting these figures, a gas casualty in the 79th Division sector was incurred for every 8.8 gas shells, an HE casualty for every 45 shells. And in this instance it is likely that almost all killed and wounded were the result of artillery rather than small arms fire, since the enemy conspicuously kept his distance throughout the period (narrative, p. 56).

Lessons Learned:

Problems of Judgement and Experience

The 79th Division, perhaps the greenest division to jump off in a major operation of the AEF, was given Montfaucon, the most formidable obstacle on the First Army front, to assault. Its raw troops were to take Montfaucon, six kilometers distant, in as many hours and continue for another three kilometers to the day's final objective.

"The troops were tired when they went into the fight," said Colonel Oury, commander of the 314th Infantry, "[after] a week or more in the woods with wet clothes and wet feet; they made a long march the night before going in, without any sleep, and went over the top after [an intense] bombardment. For green troops it was quite an ordeal." They met heavy artillery fire heavily mixed with gas for the first time just after the capture of Montfaucon on the 27th. It was this, after the struggle through the enemy defenses and the subsequent isolation from their supplies, that finally destroyed the morale of the units. "Troops with three months' service will stand the ordeal but a short time."¹⁶⁷

In the spring of 1919, Col. Brooke Payne, surveying the battlefield on behalf of the Historical Section, AEF, said of the prospect:

I stood on the jumping-off trench near Avocourt and imagined myself equipped with a....gun, a bag of ammunition and other impediments aggregating 50 or 60 pounds...added to the conditions of rain, fog, mud, pools of water, dense underbrush, fallen trees, the need to move straight ahead without choosing a detour, and the lurking presence behind every unknown cover of a stubborn enemy armed with a machine gun...[and felt] astonishment and admiration that the infantry succeeded in getting forward even as fast and as far as it did.

The planning for the attack, said Payne, was poor. The barrage moved inexorably, without regard for the progress of the infantry, for six hours, until 1105 hours, at which time it ceased, having reached its limit, one kilometer above Montfaucon. The 75's which were to have begun displacing

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Oury, Draft Rpt of Opns for 314th Inf and 158th Brig for period 25 - 30 Sep, n.d. (79th Div Box 18, 33.6).

forward at the three-kilometer line, could not be moved out. "The six-hour artillery preparation had converted the so-called roads [in the V Corps sector]...into an effective obstacle...impassable for wheeled transportation."

In the 79th Division sector, "13 classes of mobile persons and things converged on one possible road of advance." Within hours nothing moved, and it was the morning of 28 September before the guns left their positions or the first supply train got through^u the regimental trains.

By 29 September, said Payne, the 37th and 91st Divisions, like the 79th, had also become "quite worn out from marching, fighting, lack of warm food, weakened by gas, and shaken by bombardment."¹⁶⁸

Considering the terrain, Army had set an impossible task for V Corps and its three big divisions. And with green troops and little or no divisional training in control or liaison, the organization of the 79th Division came apart as soon as it hit resistance. Within hours neither General Kuhn nor his Chief of Staff, Col. Tenney Ross, had any idea where the forward troops were.

Another artilleryman with the AEF Historical Section, Col. C. F. Crain, looking over the 79th Division records and the Montfaucon battlefield, summed up the operation briefly: "The infantry of the 79th Division attempted to capture the German position with their bare hands."

¹⁶⁸

Payne, Observations on Arty Support during the First Day of Attack - 79th Div, 37th Div, 91st Div, 25 May 1919 (V Corps Box 4, 18.2).

The artillery preparation on the first enemy positions had been excellent, but had been "not nearly so intensive" on the Etzel Stellung, at Montfaucon. Had the 313th and 314th Infantry got through the Hagen position (above the Golfe de Malancourt) sooner, and had the 316th and 315th Infantry been utilized, said Crain, even without artillery Montfaucon might have been taken some twelve hours earlier, and the Germans would have been routed rather than withdrawing in an orderly manner as they did.

The artillery fire support was inadequate the whole four days, said Crain, and did little or nothing about the south edges of the Bois de Beuge, Bois 268, Bois 250, Bois de Cunel, and Bois des Ogons, all of which "possessed almost perfect fields of fire on troops advancing from the south." The 79th hadn't a chance. It was "specifically relieved for its failure to take Montfaucon on the 26th" and because it couldn't get beyond Bois 268.¹⁶⁹

Brig. Gen. Evan M. Johnson, who took over the 158th Brigade on 28 October, relieving Colonel Oury (314th Infantry), its commander since 27 September, implied in two of his reports that Oury, not Kuhn, had been the real division commander of the 79th. "During the last two days of the [Montfaucon] attack," said Johnson, "operations of the division were under direct control of Col. Oury." In the Troyen sector,

¹⁶⁹

Crain, Field Notes, "Capture of Montfaucon," 15 - 16 May 1919 (79th Div Box 2, 18.8).

from 4 to 24 October, he said, "brigade headquarters [under Oury] was re-organized on the basis of a small divisional staff, and began to function properly at the close of the period."¹⁷⁰

Further veiled criticism of General Kuhn appears in Colonel Swezey's report that in the Troyen sector there was "too much wear and tear upon the personnel [of the 313th Infantry]...due to holding the outpost line with an entire battalion."¹⁷¹ And General Johnson had one final word, again critical of the command. In the Grande Montagne sector in early November, he said, "All formations for the attack on Hill 378 formed up in woods subjected to [intense HE fire] and heavy concentrations of gas, which strained the morale and discipline of our troops to the highest degree."¹⁷²

In both the Troyen and Grande Montagne sectors, General Kuhn was under French control. He seems to have accepted his lot and French directives without question.

General Kuhn's training and long experience as an Army engineer, and his tours of duty as military attaché and military observer, do not seem

¹⁷⁰

Ltr, Johnson to CG 79th Div, 17 Nov, sub: Rpt of Opns, 158th Brig, 26 Sept - 3 Oct; Rpt of Opns, 158th Brig, 4 - 24 Oct, n.d. (both in 79th Div Box 15, 33.6).

¹⁷¹

Ltr, CO 313th Inf to CG 79th Div, 18 Nov, sub: Rpt of Opns of 313th Inf (79th Div Box 16, 33.6).

¹⁷²

Rpt of Opns, 158th Brig, 25 Oct - 8 Nov, n.d. (79th Div Box 15, 33.6).

to have qualified him particularly for troop command. Nothing has been found in the records to indicate that he ever wrote or spoke directly to his men. The fault was not entirely his. He never really had time.

Pershing's obsession with prolonged training, particularly for divisions that came over in 1917 and early 1918, certainly did not extend to the 79th. By August 1918 Pershing was committing his forces almost as soon as they arrived. A month later his Army was formed, he had two fronts to man, and July civilians found themselves September soldiers crossing no man's land.

The 79th apparently never trained as a division and therefore never fought like one. The survivors of the Montfaucon battle were poor teachers of the replacements the division received, and Troyen was no place for training. The troops that took over the Grande Montagne sector a month after the Argonne battle knew little more of liaison, communications, enemy tactics, machine gun defense, or gas than they had earlier. They fought bravely but in the dark.