

Oise-Aisne Offensive

OISE-AISNE OFFENSIVE, AUGUST 18—SEPTEMBER 6

THE AISNE-MARNE OFFENSIVE closed on August 6, by which time the Germans had been driven north of the Vesle and Aisne Rivers. French General Headquarters directed that, for the time being, the French Fifth, Sixth and Tenth Armies would take no action in force north of the Vesle River. They were, however, to continue operations to establish bridgeheads north of the Vesle, for the purpose of securing a line of departure for a new offensive, and to engage the enemy on this front while the British launched the Somme Offensive to the northwest. [4, 5]

The Somme Offensive began on August 8, when the British Fourth Army and the French First Army, under British command, attacked south of the Somme River. As a result of the success of this attack, the front of the Somme Offensive was extended south to the Oise River by the French Third Army, also under British command. [5]

The Oise-Aisne Offensive opened on August 18, when the French Tenth Army attacked in the vicinity of Noyon with a view to forcing the Germans to abandon their defensive lines along the Vesle and Aisne Rivers. By August 28 the French Tenth Army had completed the first phase of its operation by driving the enemy north of the Oise and Ailette Rivers. In the second phase of its operation, which was to begin on August 29, the French Tenth Army was to penetrate the hostile front between the Aisne River and Forêt de St. Gobain, northeast of Juvigny, capture the Laffaux plateau and advance northeast through Terny-Sorny and Laon. This maneuver would turn, in succession, the German lines behind the Aisne and Vesle Rivers. In this phase of the Oise-Aisne Offensive, the 32d Division was to take part. [5, 140, 141, 142]

The following paragraphs, in *italic*, are a synopsis of the service of the 32d Division in the Oise-Aisne Offensive. This synopsis is designed to make the principal facts concerning this service available to the reader in compact form.

When the Oise-Aisne Offensive began on August 18, the 32d Division was in reserve of the American III Corps, French Sixth Army. The division was transferred to the French XXX Corps, French Tenth Army and, on August 28, relieved the French 127th Division west of Juvigny. On the same day it executed a local attack to improve its position.

On August 29 the division took part in the general attack of the French Tenth Army between the Aisne and Oise Rivers. Juvigny was captured on August 30 in a local operation. The general attack was resumed on August 31, the 32d Division advancing to Bois d'Alsace and the Terny-Sorny—Béthancourt road.

The division was relieved by the French 1st Moroccan Division at 4 a. m., September 2.

Aug.
18-27

Following its relief on the Vesle River on August 7, the 32d Division, less artillery, remained in reserve of the American III Corps, French Sixth Army, until August 23, when it was transferred to the French Tenth Army. The 57th Field Artillery Brigade, which, after the relief of the division, served successively with the 28th and 77th Divisions and in III Corps reserve, rejoined on August 24. The 147th Field Artillery, 41st Division, was attached to the brigade. The division was assigned to the French XXX Corps on August 25 for the purpose of relieving the French 127th Division. The French XXX Corps ordered the relief to take place during the night of August 27-28. [1, 140, 143, 144]

The French 127th Division faced generally east about 2 kilometers west of Juvigny. The zone of action was as follows:

Right boundary: roadfork about 800 meters south of Valpriez Ferme (excl.)—ridge 131, about 1,700 meters southwest of Juvigny (excl.)—Beaumont Ferme (incl.)—Terny-Sorny (incl.).

Left boundary: Bagneux (excl.)—crossroads 151.2, 1,500 meters northeast of Juvigny (excl.).

The French 59th Division, French I Corps, was to the right, and the French 64th Division, French XXX Corps, to the left. [145, 146]

The 32d Division ordered the 63d Infantry Brigade to make the relief with regiments abreast, each regiment with two battalions in line. The 64th Infantry Brigade was to take station in the region between Vesponin and Nouvroun-Vingré, about 7 kilometers west of Juvigny, in reserve. [146, 147]

The 126th Infantry took over the right half of the zone about 2 a. m., August 28, with the 3d and 2d Battalions in line from right to left. The 125th Infantry planned to occupy the left half of the zone, with the 2d and 3d Battalions in line from right to left. The 2d Battalion was in position by 2:30 a. m., but the 3d Battalion was delayed by shellfire and did not complete the relief until after nightfall. The 32d Division took command of the zone at 7 a. m. as ordered. [30, 148, 149]

Aug. 28

Prior to the entry into line of the 32d Division, the French Tenth Army had endeavored to improve its position by eliminating the small salient in the line west of Juvigny. This operation was begun on August 27 by the French 127th Division and was not yet completed when the 32d Division assumed command. Pursuant to instructions from the XXX Corps, the 32d Division at 10:40 p. m., August 27, ordered the 63d Infantry Brigade to continue the operation on August 28 and capture the high ground to its front. [150, 151, 159]

The French 59th Division planned to attack at 7 a. m. The 63d Infantry Brigade issued orders at 1:15 a. m. directing the 126th Infantry to advance with the French to the railroad 1 kilometer to the east. The 125th Infantry was to support the advance. [152]

The 126th Infantry attacked at 7 a. m. and pushed the enemy back to the railroad. The 3d Battalion was in liaison with the French, while the 2d Battalion was in contact with the 125th Infantry to the left. During the advance the assault battalions of the 126th Infantry veered to the south and north, thus creating a gap in the center. [30, 148, 153, 154, 155]

The enemy launched a counterattack at 11 a. m. from Bois du Couronne which struck south of the junction of the 32d and French 59th Divisions and forced the French back from the railroad. The 126th Infantry refused its right flank to conform to the new French line. [155, 157]

At 11:30 a. m. the 1st Battalion, 125th Infantry, was attached to the 126th Infantry. It entered the line in the center of the 126th Infantry, thus filling the gap in the line. It was relieved after dark by troops of the 3d Battalion, 126th Infantry. The line held by the 126th Infantry was about 300 meters west of the railroad. [30, 157, 158]

In the morning the 2d Battalion, 125th Infantry, reconnoitered the railroad and readjusted its line in order to face the track. The 3d Battalion completed the relief of the French southeast of Montécouvé at 9:45 p. m. [159]

In the plan for the general attack of the French Tenth Army the French XXX Corps was to capture the plateau north of Terny-Sorny and then advance northeast about 10 kilometers to the heights around Anizy-le-Château, about 12 kilometers northeast of Juvigny, on the first day. The first-line divisions were to advance at the rate of 3 kilometers per hour during the first two hours and 2 kilometers per hour thereafter. The advance was to be continuous, only short delays being permitted. There was to be a 15-minute pause along the Terny-Sorny—le Mont de Leuilly road. Second-line divisions were to be ready to pass through the leading divisions along the line, Brancourt—Anizy, about 6 kilometers east of Juvigny. In case the right of the French XXX Corps advanced more rapidly than the French I Corps to the right, the French XXX Corps was to capture the high ground north of Neuville-sur-Margival, notwithstanding that it was in the adjoining zone of action. [140, 160, 161]

Harassing and interdicting artillery fire had been ordered to commence on August 27. There was to be concentration fire for 25 minutes prior to the infantry attack, which was to begin at 5:25 a. m., August 29. The advance was to be assisted by one battalion of French light tanks and by a rolling barrage,

which was to move forward at the rate of 100 meters in two minutes. [140, 142, 160, 161, 162]

Complying with these instructions, the 32d Division at 9 a. m., August 28, ordered the 63d Infantry Brigade to make the attack with regiments abreast, each with two battalions in line and one in support. Each front-line battalion was to have two companies in assault and two in support. Thirty tanks were attached to the assaulting regiments to lead the attack. The successive objectives were that part of the plateau north of Terny-Sorny within the divisional boundaries, and Arbre de Montbavin, about 15 kilometers northeast of Terny-Sorny. The 64th Infantry Brigade was to follow the 63d Infantry Brigade at 1 kilometer and was to be prepared to pass through it without holding up the advance. The rolling barrage was to be laid down at the beginning of the attack on a line 300 meters east of the railroad. [163, 164]

The attack commenced at 5:25 a. m., August 29. The tanks broke through the enemy line in many places, but were quickly put out of action before the infantry could take advantage of their fire. [165, 166]

Aug. 29

The attack of the 2d and 3d Battalions, 126th Infantry, was smothered under artillery and machine-gun fire and met with no success. In several attempts to advance, isolated groups crossed the railroad track but the line finally held was that of the previous day. Contact was maintained with the French 59th Division to the right. [30, 166, 167, 168]

In the 125th Infantry, the 2d Battalion on the right was able to advance only a few yards until late in the afternoon when it moved up to the railroad track due west of Juvigny. On the left the 3d Battalion captured the railroad track in the first rush and organized a line 100 meters to the east. Owing to lack of cover and heavy machine-gun fire, the troops moved back to the railroad, which was held throughout the day in close contact with the French 64th Division to the left. The 1st Battalion, 125th Infantry, reinforced the line. [30, 166, 169, 170]

The attack of the French Tenth Army met with only slight success. It directed that August 30 would be spent in making

the necessary preparations for a renewal of the attack on the following day. [171, 172]

The enemy ordered a withdrawal during the night of August 29-30 opposite the French I Corps and the right of the 32d Division, to the general line, north of Crouy, 6 kilometers south-east of Juvigny—ridge south of Juvigny (incl.)—Juvigny (incl.). [173]

Aug. 30

In the French XXX Corps, during the night of August 29-30, the French 66th Division relieved the French 64th Division, to the left of the 32d Division. In the 32d Division, the 64th Infantry Brigade relieved the 63d Infantry Brigade at 4:30 a. m. The front line was held with the 2d and 3d Battalions, 127th Infantry, on the right and the 1st and 3d Battalions, 128th Infantry, on the left. [174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179]

The enemy withdrawal opposite the French I Corps was discovered during the morning. At 12:10 p. m. the 64th Infantry Brigade ordered all front-line battalions to reconnoiter the hostile positions to their front. This was done. At 12:30 p. m. the French XXX Corps authorized the 32d Division to advance if the situation permitted, and at 1 p. m. ordered the division to advance in liaison with the French 59th Division. At 1:24 p. m. the 32d Division ordered the 64th Infantry Brigade to advance its right at once, pivoting on any convenient part of the line if a general advance was impracticable. The Terny-Sorny—Béthancourt road was the objective. [180, 181, 182]

The movement started at 3:45 p. m. On the right, the 2d and 3d Battalions, 127th Infantry, passed through Bois du Couronne and successfully attacked the ridge south of Juvigny. Companies A and B, 127th Infantry, partially cleaned up Juvigny after dark and reinforced the line along the road east of the town. Contact was established with the French 59th Division in Bois du Promontoire. [30, 183, 184]

In the 128th Infantry, part of the 1st Battalion crossed the open ground west of Juvigny, passed north of the town, and gained contact with the 127th Infantry at the crossroads east of the town. The other elements of the battalion remained on the railroad track. The 3d Battalion advanced several hundred

yards, but under heavy fire returned to its original position. [30]

The enemy made unsuccessful counterattacks against the 128th Infantry shortly after 6 p. m. and the right of the 127th Infantry about 8 p. m. [30, 185]

After midnight, August 30, the 2d Battalion, 128th Infantry, was moved from support to the railroad in the vicinity of the Juvigny station to assist in closing the gap between the troops at Juvigny and those in the left of the zone of action. Elements of the 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry, were placed along the road west of Juvigny, facing north. The 3d Battalion, 125th Infantry, had been attached to the 128th Infantry at 10:30 p. m., August 30, and relieved the 3d Battalion, 128th Infantry, after midnight. It was in turn relieved by the 3d Battalion, 128th Infantry. There was close contact with the French 66th Division to the left. [30, 186, 187, 188]

Aug. 31

The French Tenth Army ordered a general attack at 4 p. m., August 31, without change in missions. The French XXX Corps extended the left boundary of the 32d Division to a point 500 meters southeast of Fontaine St. Rémy and assigned as a first objective the plateau north of Terny-Sorny. That part of the 32d Division on the road east of Juvigny was not to advance until 4:50 p. m. This delay was to enable the remainder of the corps to come abreast of Juvigny, from which point the advance was to be general on the corps front. There was to be a 4-hour artillery preparation and a rolling barrage. Tanks were to assist the infantry. [189, 190, 191]

The attack took place as planned. Preceded by tanks, the 128th Infantry attacked at 4 p. m. with three battalions in line, and advanced to the Juvigny—Crécy-au-Mont road. At 4:50 p. m. the advance from the Juvigny line commenced. [30, 192]

The 127th Infantry attacked with the 2d and 3d Battalions in assault and the 1st Battalion in support. The troops crossed Bois d'Alsace ravine southeast of Juvigny, but were held up on the ridge north of Beaumont Ferme by fire from Bois de Beaumont and Sapin. The three battalions were consolidated and organized in two lines along the east edge of Bois d'Alsace ravine. Con-

tact was established with the French 59th Division to the right. [30, 193]

The 128th Infantry advanced to the Terny-Sorny—Béthan-court road where it was stopped by machine-gun fire from the east and southeast. The three battalions were consolidated, and a line organized along the road. The 3d Battalion, 125th Infantry, reached Raperie, northwest of Terny-Sorny, where it took up a position with its right refused to Puits to partially cover the interval between the two assault regiments. Patrols crossed the main road and entered Tranchée de Castille. Contact was established with the French at the divisional boundary. The interval between the two regiments was protected by machine guns and by the 1st Battalion, 125th Infantry, which was moved forward in close support of the right of the 128th Infantry. [30, 194]

The French XXX Corps ordered the division to consolidate and organize the ground gained and maintain close contact with the enemy by aggressive patrolling during the night. [195]

Sept. 1 About daybreak, September 1, the 1st Battalion, 125th Infantry, strengthened the right of the 128th Infantry near Raperie and placed Company A in line in the interval between the 127th and 128th Infantry Regiments. [30]

The 64th Infantry Brigade ordered its troops to reorganize and push on to the objective previously set, the plateau north of Terny-Sorny. Before this could be accomplished, the 32d Division ordered Tranchée de Castille occupied as a front line and indicated that no further advance was contemplated. [178]

The 127th Infantry attacked about noon and advanced several hundred meters against machine-gun fire from Bois de Beaumont and Sapin. Contact was established with the French in the vicinity of Beaumont Ferme. [30, 196, 197]

Attempts of the 128th Infantry to advance were stopped by machine-gun and artillery fire. Tranchée de Castille was patrolled but was not occupied. Contact with the French was maintained at the divisional boundary. [30, 198]

Sept. Pursuant to orders of the French XXX Corps, the 32d
2-6 Division was relieved during the night of September 1-2 by the French 1st Moroccan Division. Command passed at 4 a. m.,

September 2. The relief was completed by 5 a. m. and the division moved back to the second line, west of Valpriez Ferme. It remained here until September 6, when it was transferred to reserve of the French Tenth Army, and moved to the vicinity of Hautefontaine, preparatory to moving to the Meuse-Argonne region as part of the concentration for the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. [1, 150, 199, 200, 201]

CASUALTIES, OISE-AISNE OFFENSIVE

		Aug. 18-27	Aug. 28- Sept. 2	Sept. 3-6	Total
<i>32d Division</i>					
125th Inf.....	{ W.....	8	415	4	427
	{ DW.....		24		24
	{ K.....	1	73	2	76
126th Inf.....	{ W.....	13	295	4	312
	{ DW.....	1	31		32
	{ K.....	3	86	1	90
127th Inf.....	{ W.....	6	443	5	454
	{ DW.....		25		25
	{ K.....		84	9	93
128th Inf.....	{ W.....	8	683	8	699
	{ DW.....		53		53
	{ K.....		110	1	111
119th FA..... (DS Aug. 18-24)	{ W.....		21	8	29
	{ DW.....		5		5
	{ K.....		2		2
120th FA..... (DS Aug. 18-24)	{ W.....	7	15	6	28
	{ DW.....		2		2
	{ K.....		4		4
121st FA..... (DS Aug. 18-24)	{ W.....		25	3	28
	{ DW.....			1	1
	{ K.....		1		1
119th MG Bn.....	{ W.....		61		61
	{ DW.....		1		1
	{ K.....		3		3
120th MG Bn.....	{ W.....	8	68	5	81
	{ DW.....		2		2
	{ K.....		12		12
121st MG Bn.....	{ W.....		51	1	52
	{ DW.....		4		4
	{ K.....		2		2
107th Engrs.....	{ W.....	5	4	6	15
	{ DW.....			1	1
	{ K.....				
Others.....	{ W.....	1	19	4	24
	{ DW.....		3		3
	{ K.....		6		6
Total.....		61	2, 633	69	2, 763
<i>Attached Units</i>					
147th FA (41st Div)..... (Aug. 26-Sept. 6)	{ W.....		10	5	15
	{ DW.....				
	{ K.....		3		3
Total.....			13	5	18
Aggregate total.....		61	2, 646	74	2, 781

W=wounds not mortal; DW=died of wounds; K=killed in action; DS=detached service.