

The 33rd Division Along the Meuse,
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by

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GAS WARFARE IN WORLD WAR I

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The three battalions under Col. Abel Davis were in no condition to continue the attack. In two days they had advanced five kilometers through the Hagen and Volker Stellungen and were at the Giselher Stellung when they were stopped. "They...had been heavily pounded with shells and machine-gun fire, and flooded with gas," and had lost 1 officer and 37 men killed, 11 officers and 315 men wounded.⁷⁷

The Division Gas Officer was to say there were no special gas attacks on 8 and 9 October, but that large numbers of gas shells mixed with HE fell over the entire division area, on both sides of the Meuse. "The large losses reported this date [i.e., 257 gas cases in the 129th Infantry, 181 gas cases among the forces east of the Meuse] were misleading." The

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Msg (Conversation), Capt Bader [LO Fr Mission] at 66th Brig Hq to G - 3 33rd Div, n.h., 9 Oct (33rd Div Box 6, 32.16); DOR, 33rd Div, 9 - 10 Oct; History, I, 112 - 15; ltr, CO 132nd Inf to CG 33rd Div, 15 Nov, sub: Conf Memo 36 (33rd Div Box 20, 33.6).

Maas Ost WD, 9 Oct, implied that the principal object of the counter-attack that day was Kronprinzhohe [Hill 316 in the Bois de Chaume], but the arty comdr of the 32nd Div said its 102nd and 177th Inf were ordered to retake the HWL [i.e., MLR] or Volker Stellung (32nd Div-Sub Units WD&A, 8 - 20 Oct, German Files Box 184, fol III, p. 112).

A prisoner that day described the fortified mg nests, 10 meter-deep dugouts, and trench network in the Bois de Chaume and Bois de Consenvoye and said these woods would be held and that 3 to 4 divisions were in reserve back of the woods for that purpose (Msg, Capt Lauer Asst G - 2 33rd Div, to G - 2 33rd Div, 12:05 p.m., 9 Oct).

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History, I, 115. Ltr, CO 132nd Inf, 15 Nov, above, said the casualties as of the 9th were 2 officers and 34 men killed, 7 officers, and 191 men wounded.

Notes: The History (I, 115, 362) reports the same casualty totals for the bn of the 132nd Inf on the west bank as for the two bns on the east bank. See p. 57 below. Ltr, 15 Nov, is probably correct.

operation under Colonel Davis had slowed down, said Lieutenant Vawter, and on the 9th all those men who were thought to have been gassed were sent to the aid station for examination. The Medical Department kept no record of the number of those who were evacuated but estimated that it was at least 50 percent of those examined.⁷⁸

Reenforcements to the East Bank

Brigadier General Wolf, commander of the 66th Brigade, was now placed in charge of troops across the river, and on the night of 9 October reenforcements began pouring over the bridges. All three battalions of the much-gassed 129th Infantry, the 3rd Battalion of the 130th, and the two remaining battalions of the 131st, with four machine gun companies, were moved across during the night.⁷⁹ Except for the battalion of the 132nd Infantry with the 4th Division in the Bois du Fays, two battalions of the 130th Infantry in front of Brioules, and a single machine gun company in the Bois de Forges, all combat units of the 33rd Division were now on the east bank of the Meuse.⁸⁰

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Ltr, DGO to C CWS, 22 Feb, sub: Gas Atks (GAF-33rd Div). Hospital admission lists show 251 gas casualties and 115 wounded evacuated on 9 Oct (see Analysis).

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Six gas casualties were reported in one of the MG companies when it traversed a contaminated area in the Bois Jure that night (Ltr, DGO to CGO III C, 13 Oct, sub: Gas Rpts).

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History, I, 116 - 17. Actually, the 3rd Bn, 129th Inf, crossed on the night of the 9th, the other two the next day (Chron Rec of Events of 65th Brig, 10 Oct, 33rd Div Box 13, 11.5).

The only other element of the 33rd Division on that side of the river was the 3rd Battalion, 132nd Infantry, and its machine gun company, with the 4th Division in the Bois du Fays. On the 10th it participated in the attack against the Bois de Foret, advancing to the northern edge of the wood, and holding its position until relieved by the 3rd Division on the 13th. In its week with the 4th Division, the battalion lost 1 officer and 37 men killed, 11 officers and 315 men wounded and gassed. The machine gun company commander was to say that "due to the enemy alternating high velocity shells with gas," 105 of his 130 combat men had become casualties during that week.⁹³

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History, I, 125.

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History, I, 125, 130, 362. Ltr, CO MG Co 132nd Inf to CO 132nd Inf, 30 Jan 19, sub: Rpt on Action...in Bois du Fays, 6 - 12 Oct (33rd Div Box 20, 33.6).

Cf Msg, Maj Bullington CO 3rd Bn 132nd Inf to G - 3 33rd Div, 5:10 p.m., 10 Oct (33rd Div Box 6, 32.16); "I have had 9 officers and about 160 men casualties. Located in Bois de Fays. My doctor and first aid people were all gassed and have gone to the hospital."