

THE SECOND BATTLE OF THE MARNE

June, September 1918

At the Mont Sinai Observatory in July 1918: General Gouraud attends the German defeat

The 45th ID presence **in the Saint Thierry Massif** and the 21st English WD presence

MAY 27, 28 and 29 : a disaster for the 45th division

We knew that the German attack on the “Chemin des Dames” was to be launched on May 27. General Duchêne’s 6th army was ready for it.

At 1:00 am and for 2 hours and 40 minutes more than one thousand gun batteries are going to shoot massive amounts of gas shells at the 90 km long battle front and as far as 12 km behind the lines.

The French and English gun batteries are neutralized. At 3:40 am Von Boehm’s 7th army and Von Bulow’s first army launched the attack. At 12:00 am they crossed the river Aisne. In the evening, they went over the Laon road at Loivre-level, Bouvancourt is occupied.

On the 28th, on the opposite side, the 45th Infantry Division is trying to resist on the line: Prouilly’s hill, Trigny-Marzilly’s pass, Toussicourt Heights, Villers-Franqueux, Chauffour’s wood, Courcy, in liaison on the right with the 134th ID on the “Cavaliers de Courcy”. But the Germans keep going forward. At 9:00 pm the Germans take hold of Thil. St Thierry’s fort is taken at 6:30 pm. German pressure is strong between Trigny’s pass (on the Hermonville road) and Prouilly’s hill.

On the 29th, it is ordered to leave the right bank of the river Vesles. The engineering has all the bridges blown up, but Branscourt is taken hold of. The Germans reach the Montazin farm then the Ardre valley by surrounding the “Montagne de Reims”

In spite of the efforts of the units of the 45th ID, at 11:00 pm, the enemy infiltrates. The situation is critical. The Courcelles-Sapicourt – Rosnay front gives in. The Germans reach Germigny and Janvry.

Yet, the French resistance is exemplary. The violent combats west of Reims, in Mâco, in the Moulin Compensé, in La Garenne de Gueux, Mont Saint Pierre, Thillois, Geux, Ormes, all delay the German progression. Reims won’t be captured, the “Côte 240” will remain an inaccessible stronghold.

The long-range cannons remained inefficient in front of the German lead of May 1918

The front line on May 27 and the German lead on May 28,29,30 and June 1

The infantry troops of the 45th ID on May 27 led by General Naulin---General headquarters in Chenay

1st regiment de Marche of Algerian infantrymen (3 Btns)

The Africa group of Battalions (3 Btns)

6th regiment de Marche of Algerian infantrymen (3 Btns)

3rd regiment bis of Zouaves

3rd battalion of the 17th RIT (infrantry reserves)

177th BIT (3 Btns)

The 3rd bis of Zouaves: “Great regiment full of ardour and speed” ws nominated several times for the Order of the Army.

The Allied forces: key elements of victory

Vrigny: a bruised village under the Côte 240

The Americans going down the trenches

French, Italian and English officers looking at their maps during the battle of the “Bois de Reims” in the Tardenois region.

From debacle to victory

The year 1918 started calmly. On the Allies side, one expects the massive arrival of the Americans and on the German side, Commander in Chief Ludendorff is secretly preparing a big spring offensive which he hopes will be definitive.

On March 21st 1918 the Germans launch an attack from Arras to Fère sur Oise. The English are in the firing line. General Foch, coordinator for the Allied forces manages to stop them but with great difficulty as they are about to enter Amiens. A second German offensive north of Béthune, attempts a break in the direction of Calais and Boulogne to stop the English food supplies. This one is held back as well.

On May 27th, Ludendorff knocks down the front line at the Chemin des Dames and directs his attack southward, to the river Marne and the Paris road. After a few days the German troops reach the river Marne.

Then the front line stabilizes. From July 14th the Germans don't progress anymore. Their supply lines are too stretched out.

Yet, on July 15th, they try to break through the front line by launching an offensive south-west of Reims and another one to the south-east thus surrounding the 'Montagne de Reims'. The Allied forces, tenacious and resolute, defeat this last attempt. The Italians in particular, who protect the Ardre valley, will see thousands of them die in the battle. But, the Germans reach and cross the river Marne on each side of Dormans.

On July 18th, Mangin's and Degoutte's counter-attack (10th and 6th army) turns out to be blistering. The attack begins in the direction of Fère-en-Tardenois. 2000 pieces of artillery open fire. 13 French and 5 American divisions as well as 500 tanks take part in the battle together with all the available planes. Totally taken by surprise by this offensive, Ludendorff is compelled to retreat towards Fère-en-Tardenois and the Aisne valley while maintaining his positions on the heights of St Thierry on the right bank of the river Vesle till September 30th.

From this date to October 4th 1918, a fourth great battle took place in our region called battle of the St Thierry Massif. It compelled the Germans to give up all their positions west, north and east of Reims. One month later, the armistice was signed. Our villages were freed on September 30th and October 1st 1918. The German army will keep on retreating till the end of the hostilities.

The battle of the St Thierry Massif or Battle of the Vesle

Since August 8th, the Germans occupy the north banks of the river Vesle, from Courlandon to Muizon and the villages on the hillside: Chenay, Merfy, Saint Thierry, Thil...

During the night of the 29th to the 30th of September, the engineering places footbridges over the river Vesle. The infantry troops are put in place at midnight. It rains, it is windy, it is cold and the Germans don't realize what is going on.

On September 30th, there is no artillery preparation. At 5:30 am the infantry launches the attack in the north-west direction behind a heavy fire.

All day long, violent combats take place. Cuissat's windmill resists. In the evening, Montigny is taken hold of.

In the morning of the 1st of October, Prouilly is freed, then Trigny, Pévy And things speed up. The whole Massif is occupied by the Allied forces. Later that night, Marzilly and Toussicourt are freed.

The day after, October 2nd, the Germans leave Chenay, Hermonville then Cormicy.

Down south, near Reims and along the canal, the opposition was stronger. They had to wait till October 3rd before entering Cormicy and October 5th to free the canal and the nearby villages: Courcy, Loivre.

The attack was then launched on the river Suipe and the north of the 'Monts de Champagne' which were finally recaptured.