

CHAPTER XII
SERVICE WITH THE THIRD BRITISH ARMY



PON the arrival of the division in the new area, units took stations mentioned in Field Orders No. 6 and in the march table attached thereto, which appear in the Appendix as Exhibit 15. The new area covered an attractive stretch of country west of Arras shown on the accompanying map, which also shows graphically the location of divisional units.

Arras, a destroyed city of some importance, was still held by the British. In preparation for defense against further enemy pressure in that sector several systems of trenches had been indicated in the rear of the line held by the 3d British Army. These positions were in various stages of development. Some had been not much more than outlined. A great deal of work had been done by large forces of coolie laborers in digging the trenches to a depth of about two and a half feet, leaving them to be completed by troops designated to occupy them.

When the division arrived in this area of the 3d British Army, the Division Commander, accompanied by Colonel Stanley H. Ford, Chief of Staff, visited General Sir Julian Byng, commanding that army, and received from him personally an outline of the situation and the possibilities of the German attempt to drive through in that vicinity.

While with the 3d British Army, Division Headquarters was located in the town of Beauval. The locations of other units of the division are shown on the accompanying map.

On June 24th the Division Commander received from the VI Corps of the 3d British Army a secret memorandum, of which the following is a copy:

SECRET

VI CORPS G. S. 26/102

27TH DIVISION, U. S. A.

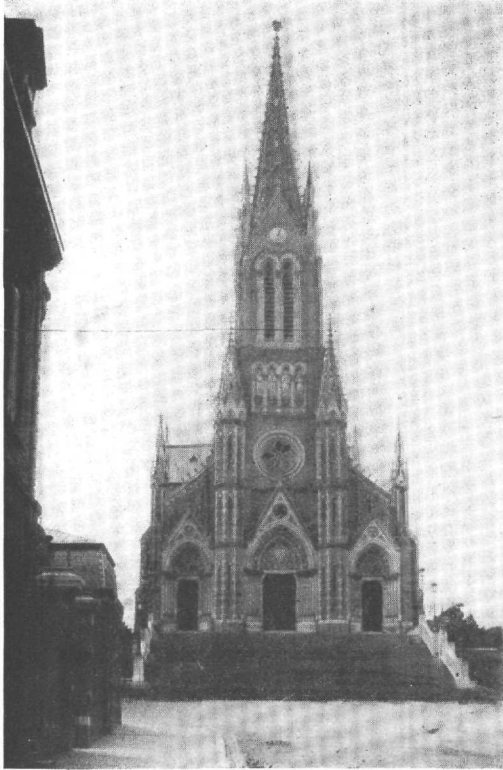
1. In the event of the enemy penetrating the first and second defensive systems on the VI Corps front the 54th Brigade, U. S. A., will be prepared, on receipt of orders from VI Corps, to occupy the fourth (Beauquesne-Pasbarly, or General Headquarters) system in the VI Corps area, in order to give time for reinforcing troops to arrive and for troops withdrawing from the forward area to reform; also to collect all stragglers and small parties withdrawing from the forward area and reorganize them for the defense of the line.

2. The fourth system will be held by the 54th Brigade, U. S. A., with a line of outposts. All six battalions will be in the line. The front (observation) line will be the line which will be fought for.

3. Four copies of a map showing the third and fourth systems, with the latter system divided into suggested subsectors, and showing the location of headquarters, are forwarded for issue as follows:

27th Divisional Headquarters, U. S. A.—1 (issued personally on 23d June)

54th Brigade Headquarters, U. S. A.—1 (issued personally on 23d June)



View of Church at Beauval. In the foreground to the left will be seen a portion of the building used as the Headquarters of the Division Commander and General Staff Sections of the Twenty-seventh Division, during the service of the division with the Third British Army.



View of Town Hall at Beauval, used as offices by portion of 27th Division Headquarters, during the service of the division with the Third British Army in the Doullens Area.

107th Regimental Headquarters—1

108th Regimental Headquarters—1

These maps will not be in the possession of a lower formation than a regimental headquarters. In addition, six maps showing the third and fourth systems are forwarded for issue to battalion headquarters. Only sufficient detail should be entered on these to enable each battalion to know the extent and headquarters of its own subsection and the subsection on either flank.

4. In the event of the first and second systems being penetrated, the third (red) system in the VI Corps area has been organized to be held by four divisions with headquarters at Grenas, Couturelle, Warluzel and Barly. In addition, the Gouy Switch (shown in blue on the attached maps) will be held by the 4th Guards Brigade from Laherliere to Gouy (both inclusive). Headquarters of the 4th Guards Brigade will be at P. 20. b 2.0 (Barly Wood).

5. The following dumps will be available for the supply of S. A. A., etc., for both the third and fourth systems:

Sus St. Leger.....0.26.a

Barlyon Barly-Saulty road, P. 21a and c.

La Bellevue.....U. 22.b (Doullens-Arras road).

L'EsperanceDoullens-Arras road, half a mile west of l'Esperance Farm.

6. In order to be able to occupy the fourth system at short notice, the 54th Brigade, U. S. A., will carry out the necessary reconnaissances of the line and the approaches thereto as soon as possible. On completion of the reconnaissance of the fourth system, the 54th Brigade, U. S. A., will carry out a reconnaissance of the third (red) system in the VI Corps area, and of the approaches to it, to enable them to reinforce this system should the necessity arise.

On application to the VI Corps, two buses are available for conveying reconnaissance parties to and from their billets daily.

7. As soon as the necessary reconnaissances are completed a map showing proposed dispositions will be forwarded to VI Corps.

Should the 54th Infantry Brigade wish to practise entrenching, arrangements can be made through the VI Corps for this to be done in the General Headquarters system.

A. W. STERICKS,

Major.

For B. G. G. S.

VI CORPS

24th June, 1918

Copies to:

66th Division
199th Infantry Brigade (with map)
3d Army
IV Corps
XVII Corps
VI Corps R. A.
VI Corps Heavy Artillery
VI Corps "Q"

Guards Division
2d Division
32d Division
2d Canadian Division
4th Guards Brigade
54th Infantry Brigade, U. S. A.
4th Tank Brigade

It may be interesting for the reader to follow the execution of a mission of the above character. This can best be done by reading the division order (Field Order No. 6) and the accompanying march table, which appear in the Appendix. This should be done in connection with the accompanying map of the Doullens area. The division order was followed by an appropriate order of the 54th Infantry Brigade to the 107th and 108th Infantry Regiments and the 106th Machine Gun Battalion. The

regimental order of the 108th Infantry and the battalion orders and defense scheme of the 2d Battalions of the 107th and 108th Infantry Regiments are given herewith as samples of the manner in which the mission was directed to be carried out by the infantry battalions:

HEADQUARTERS, 108TH INFANTRY

27TH AMERICAN DIVISION

June 27, 1918, 9:00 P. M.

FIELD ORDERS

No. 5

MAP REFERENCE, SPECIAL MAP, 1/20000

1. In the event of an attack by the enemy our brigade has been assigned to defend the General Headquarters line on the whole front of the VI Corps, B. E. F. The General Headquarters line is the fourth line of defense on the front of the 3d Army, B. E. F. In case the enemy breaks through the forward systems, the brigade is charged with the collection of stragglers from the front, their reorganization for the defense of the line and with the holding of the enemy until certain designated reinforcing divisions arrive. The 53d Brigade will be on our right and the 107th Infantry on our left.

2. This regiment (less machine gun company) will, on June 28, 1918, march to the General Headquarters line and occupy it for purposes of instruction.

3. (a) Each battalion will assemble at 7:30 A. M. at its alarm post, and will immediately proceed to occupy the sector assigned as follows:

1st Battalion will occupy from a point V 15 e 3, 5-6.5 on observation trench to point V-2-6-8-3.

2d Battalion will occupy from a point V-2-6-8-3 to P 27-a 4.5-6.

3d Battalion will occupy from a point P 27 a 4.5-6 to P 15-5 7-5.

(b) Commanding officers will assign their respective units to battle positions, station their troops therein, advance posts will be located and occupied. Line of communication by means of visual signaling, runners, motorcycles and any other means available will be established between units on right and left and regimental headquarters.

4. First line transports will accompany units and rations for the day will be carried; field kitchens will be taken to a point to be designated by battalion commanders and troops will be withdrawn from trenches for meals. Troops will withdraw from trenches and march to billets at 6:00 P. M.

5. Regimental headquarters will be established at 0-28-B-7.5.

E. S. JENNINGS,
Colonel.

Copies to:

1st Battalion
2d Battalion
3d Battalion
Headquarters Company

Supply Company
Medical Department
War Diary
File

HEADQUARTERS 2D BATTALION, 107TH INFANTRY

June 27, 1918.

DEFENSE SCHEME

REF.: MAP 51C 1/20000

1. The 107th Infantry will occupy the trenches of the General Headquarters line, which is the fourth line of defense of the 3d Army front on the VI Corps front. The sector assigned is C.18.B.7, inclusive, to V.15.D.1.3., inclusive.

2. This battalion will occupy the sector V.26.D.3.3., inclusive, to V.15.D.1.3, inclusive. The sector on its right will be occupied by the 3d Battalion, 107th Infantry, and the sector on its left by a battalion of the 108th Infantry.

3. The enemy has made preparation for an attack on this front, with probable objective Arras and the Vimy Ridge, by a turning movement in northwestern direction on the south of Arras. Two switches have been constructed on the VI Corps area.

4. The ground includes in this sector important tactical features of the hill to the southeast of Warliecourt-Labazeque-Saulty.

5. The line is organized as follows:

(a) POSTS IN ADVANCE OF FORWARD LINE—Have been constructed or sited with accommodations for about one section with Lewis gun.

(b) OUTPOST LINE—First line constructed on forward slope of hill, and therefore as a line of observation. It has been ordered that this line is to be held as a line of resistance.

(c) SUPPORT LINE—Constructed in many places on reverse slope of hill, and therefore screened from ground observation.

(d) RESERVE LINE.

(e) COMMUNICATION TRENCHES—At points tactically important are arranged in more than three lines and for all-around defense.

(f) MACHINE GUN POSITIONS—Have been sited and will, where suitable, be used for Lewis guns.

(g) WIRE—Along most of front one or two apron fences have been erected in front of advanced posts, first line and second line.

6. The line will be held as follows: Three companies in the line, each occupying same with three platoons and one platoon in support. Each company commander is responsible for the holding of all probable approaches and tactical features as strongly as possible.

The following sectors are assigned:

(a) COMPANY E—V.26.D.3.3., inclusive, to edge of wood V.26.B.7.6., inclusive.

COMPANY G—Edge of woods V.26.B.7.6., exclusive, to angle of trench at Labezeque V.21.D.6.3., inclusive.

COMPANY H—Angle of trench at Labazeque V.21.D.6.3., exclusive, to V.15.D.1.3., inclusive.

(b) COMPANY F—Will be in reserve, right resting at V.20.B.4.2.

(c) BATTALION HEADQUARTERS—At dugout V.19.D.2.0.

(d) BATTALION AID STATION—At Battalion Headquarters.

(e) REGIMENTAL HEADQUARTERS—At U.21 B.2.4.

There will be no brigade or regimental reserve.

7. During the occupation of these trenches reconnaissance of the line of trenches in advance will be made with a view to their possible occupation.

8. WORK—Brush and undergrowth in advance of all fire positions will be sufficiently cut away to furnish field of fire.

Communicating and fire trenches to be deepened and fire steps and parapets completed.

Wiring to be reconnoitered and strengthened.

9. FIRST LINE TRANSPORT—Will be placed along road at edge of woods V.20.C.4.0. to V.20.B.5.0. and there remain for further orders.

10. At command "Man Battle Stations," the battalion will assemble at Alarm Post and will be marched to its position by Le Souich-Lucheux-Hombecourt-Couturelle-La Bezeque Farm.

BY DIRECTION OF CAPTAIN NESBITT,

Commanding 2d Battalion.

Copies to:

Companies E, F, G, H
Supply Officer
Transport Officer

Medical Officer
C. O., 107th Infantry.
Battalion File

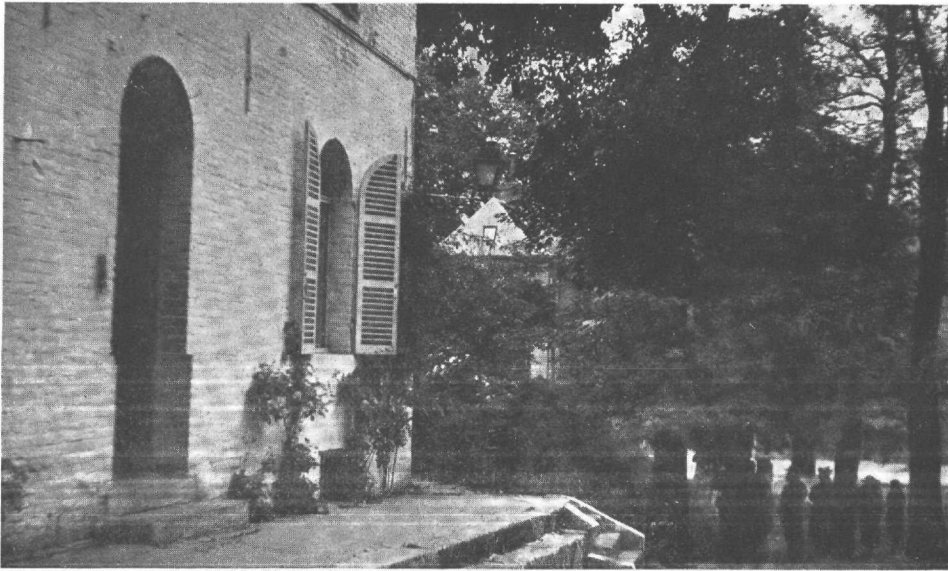
On June 28th the 54th Infantry Brigade marched to the General Headquarters line and actually occupied it. The day was spent in supervising the manner in which the occupation was made. The approach marches were checked up by numerous staff officers. Plans for delivering the necessary tools for deepening the trenches and constructing the necessary shelters were also checked, and all concerned made acquainted with their particular functions in relation to the mission of the division should the contingency arise for its occupation of the General Headquarters line.

During the time the division was in this area it was subjected to constant bombing at night by enemy planes. One bomb was dropped back of the Division Commander's billet among animals of the 105th Infantry. The bomb was fragmented laterally with great violence, cutting off the legs of a number of horses and mules. This explosion resulted in the death of about a dozen animals. One soldier of the 105th Infantry was sleeping in an escort wagon at the time and, although the wheels of the wagon were badly damaged, the soldier was not injured. No other soldiers were injured at this time.

Two bombs were dropped close to the chateau occupied by Colonel James M. Andrews, commanding the 105th Infantry, without injuring any of the occupants of the building.

It was while the division was in this area and on July 2d that General Pershing paid us a visit of inspection. He lunched with the Division Commander at the latter's billet in Beauval. After lunch, accompanied by the Division Commander, he motored about and inspected various units of the division, some in their billeting areas and some on the march. More detailed reference to this visit is made in another part of the book.

While in this area, also, the Division Commander, accompanied by Colonel Ford, was invited to witness an attack by two battalions of the 12th British Division on a 1,200-yard front against the German position near Bouzincourt in the vicinity of Albert. At that time of the year and in that latitude it is not dusk until about 10 o'clock at night. The attack was directed to be made at 10:00 P. M. on the evening of Sunday, June 30th. The Division Commander and Chief of Staff of the 27th Division joined General Higginson, commanding the 12th British Division, early in the evening of June 30th and proceeded to a point well forward from which a clear view of the front could be had. For an hour preceding the time set for the attack there was very little fire. At exactly 10 o'clock the earth shook with the roar of hundreds of guns and almost immediately the bursting shells could be seen falling on the enemy trenches and on positions in rear, throwing great columns of mud and earth into the air. Simultaneously with this were seen rockets of many types thrown into the air from the German line. Soon the foreground was clouded with the approaching darkness, through which could be seen the innumerable flashes of bursting shells and the path of tracer bullets fired from the British side to make clear to the attacking infantry the direction of their advance. The attack was a success.



Building used as Battalion and Regimental Headquarters, 105th Infantry, within the citadel at Doullens

The opportunity to observe and informally to participate in British operations of this character, prior to the actual participation of our own division in similar engagements, was of the greatest value in furnishing experience in the preparation for battle and conduct of operations. The British afforded us many opportunities for such experience during the period preceding the time when the 27th Division first took over a divisional sector.



27th Division Headquarters at Beauval, France, June, 1918

The division had engaged in much reconnaissance of the defensive sector which it was to take over in the event of enemy attack and had practised the actual occupation of the line. Orders were received to the effect that the division would shortly be relieved and sent for service with the 2d British Army, at that time holding an important part of the line in Flanders. The movement to Flanders began on July 3d. The first divisional orders were in the form of a warning order sent out on June 30th. These orders, Field Orders No. 10, may be found in the Appendix as Exhibit 16. The following day Field Orders No. 11, also to be found in the Appendix as Exhibit 17, were issued prescribing the details of the movement which was largely to be made by rail.

The circumstances governing the movement of a body of troops as large as a division are complicated, and it may be of interest to the reader to learn something of the details to be provided for in orders when a movement of this character is to be undertaken. In the case of the movement of the division from the Doullens area to Flanders, such details appear substantially in Orders Nos. 22 and 26 and these orders, together with Field Orders No. 13, will be found in the Appendix as Exhibit 18.

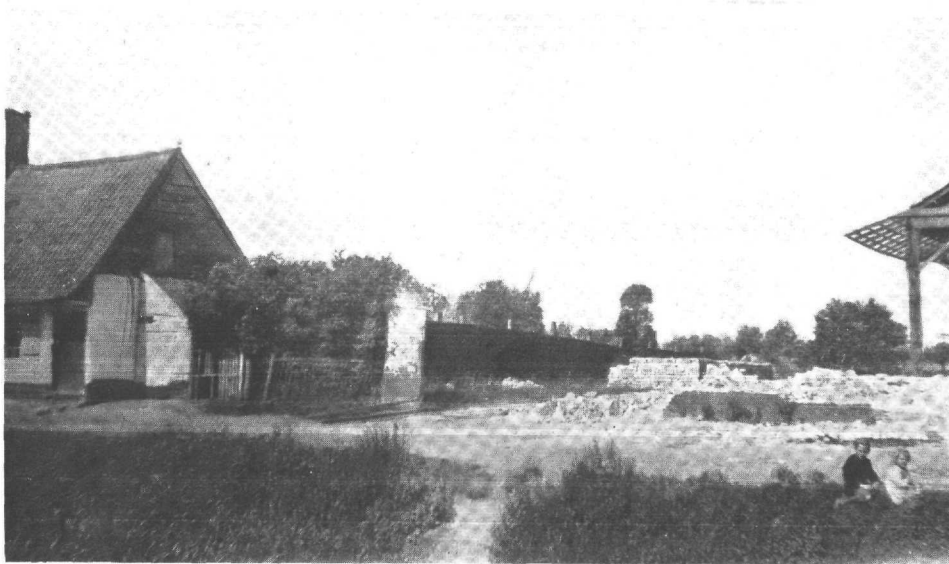
The reader will note that in paragraph 7 of Orders No. 22 directions were given that the 27th Division would carry their overcoats. This was believed by the Division Commander to be a very desirable modification of the prescribed field equipment which eliminated overcoats and provided for two blankets per man. The weather in northern France, particularly in the Flanders areas, except for a few short spells during the summer, was ordinarily cold and raw. It was believed that by substituting the overcoat for one blanket the men would be kept in better health and maintain a higher resistance to disease than would otherwise be possible. In moves of the character referred to, the overcoats were baled by squads and tagged. They were then left in the area under guard and transported to the new area as lorries became available. This system worked most satisfactorily throughout the entire period of active operations, with the result that when in the trenches the men of the 27th Division always had the additional protection and warmth of the overcoat.

Pursuant to the orders mentioned above, the division, without any incident, left Doullens area for Flanders. Division Headquarters moved in part by rail and in part by lorry. En route the Division Headquarters stopped for two nights at the little village of Nieurlet, a most attractive, almost medieval hamlet, located near St. Omer, a town about midway between Calais and Ypres. Nieurlet was connected with St. Omer by a canal and travel between these places was largely by this waterway, the people poling their boats up and down the canal in the transport of all kinds of farm produce. While at Nieurlet enemy bombing was very active, particularly against St. Omer, Calais and Boulogne. At times less important places were also bombed. Night was made attractive or hideous, dependent upon the state of mind of the observer, by the panorama of hundreds of searchlights scanning the skies with their accusing beams for the elusive enemy bombers, whose ominous engine throbs could plainly



View of the hamlet of Nieurlet showing the little canal on the right

be heard from above. Frequently one of the beams would disclose an enemy plane. When this happened other beams were immediately turned on the aerial target, while from the ground about the "archies," as the anti-aircraft cannon were called, belched their shrapnel into the air in an effort to destroy this most dreaded of all nocturnal disturbers. The



Remains of the building where the bomb dropped on the billet of 106th Machine Gun Battalion at Nieurlet. Photograph taken during summer of 1920 when the débris of the building had been largely removed

roar of the guns, the dropping of shrapnel and shell fragments on the tiled roofs of the houses, the swinging searchlight beams, the occasional view of the enemy planes, the blinding flashes and severe detonations when the bombs were dropped, constituted a scene and an experience that nothing short of another such war will ever produce.

It was here in this little village of Nieurlet a night or two after Division Headquarters left that one of the companies of the 106th Machine Gun Battalion while billeted in a barn on the one village street suffered its first losses. An enemy plane made a direct hit on the building, which was crowded with sleeping soldiers. The result was one man killed and about twenty wounded. It seems miraculous that more men were not killed. The building was badly shattered.

By the 4th of July the main body of the division had arrived in the new area. There were, however, no formal celebrations of the day, as many of the units were on the march, while others were in process of establishing themselves in their new billets. In a number of regiments, however, games were held in order that the anniversary of American independence might not pass unnoticed.

On Sunday, July 7th, Division Headquarters moved forward to the Flemish town of Oudezeele, east of Cassel.