

CHAPTER XIV

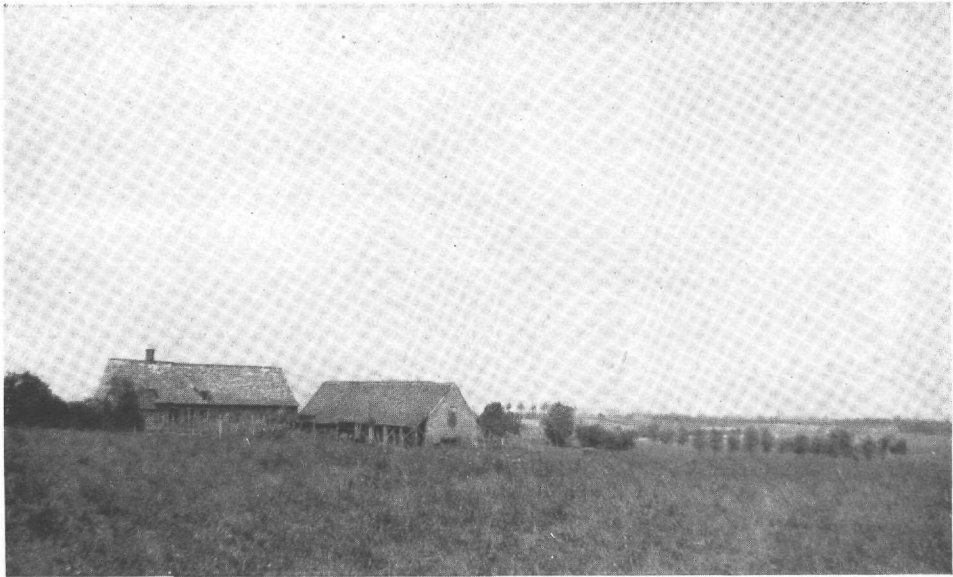
BATTLE OF VIERSTRAAT RIDGE



ON the 30th of August information was received that south of us the enemy were giving up the Lys salient and that British patrols had been enabled to advance for a considerable distance and had captured Bailleul. Accordingly the 27th Division was directed to push out patrols on the following day to determine evidences of retirement on our own front. About the same time the 41st British Division on our right discovered that the enemy had given up Mt. Kemmel, and accordingly this important position was occupied by their advance elements. Field Orders No. 36, of the 27th Division, which appears in the Appendix as Exhibit 31, were issued on August 31st, directing the advance of the 53d Infantry Brigade on Vierstraat Ridge. This advance was begun at 11:30 A. M. on the same day by patrols of the 2d Battalion, 105th Infantry, advancing through the 3d Battalion of that regiment commanded by Captain Stanley Bulkley. Thus began the engagement known as the battle of Vierstraat Ridge. In this attack the 53d Infantry Brigade advanced with the 106th Infantry on the right and the 105th on the left.

The same day, Field Orders No. 38 were issued, covering the continuance of the operations on the following day. These orders are included in the Appendix as Exhibit 32.

By reference to the attached map it will be noted that at the commencement of this action the front line occupied by the 27th Division faced in a southeasterly direction. It was the object of the Army Commander in making the advance to swing the line so that it would face almost due east. The 30th American Division on our left was called upon to make a short advance for the purpose of taking the village of Voormezelle. This division in a sense therefore acted as a pivot while the 27th Division moved forward. Correspondingly the advance of the 105th Infantry was to extend from this pivot and conform to the greater advance to be made by the 106th Infantry on its right. The boundary between the two regimental sectors was the road running from Hallebast southeasterly through Vierstraat to Wytshaete. On the afternoon of August 31st the 105th Infantry advanced successfully, taking Captain's Post and Major's Post, which appear on the accompanying map, and consolidated their position in the trenches running along the easterly side of the York Road, advancing its left beyond Middle Farm. In similar manner south of the highway above referred to, the 106th Infantry advanced in their sector across the Cheapside Road, and crossing the York Road, occupied and consolidated the enemy trenches known as Vierstraat Switch, running along the easterly side of York Road. The attack of the 106th Infantry covered a greater depth than that of the



Douglas Camp, taken during the summer of 1920. It was here that Headquarters of the 27th Division was located during the Battle of Vierstraat Ridge

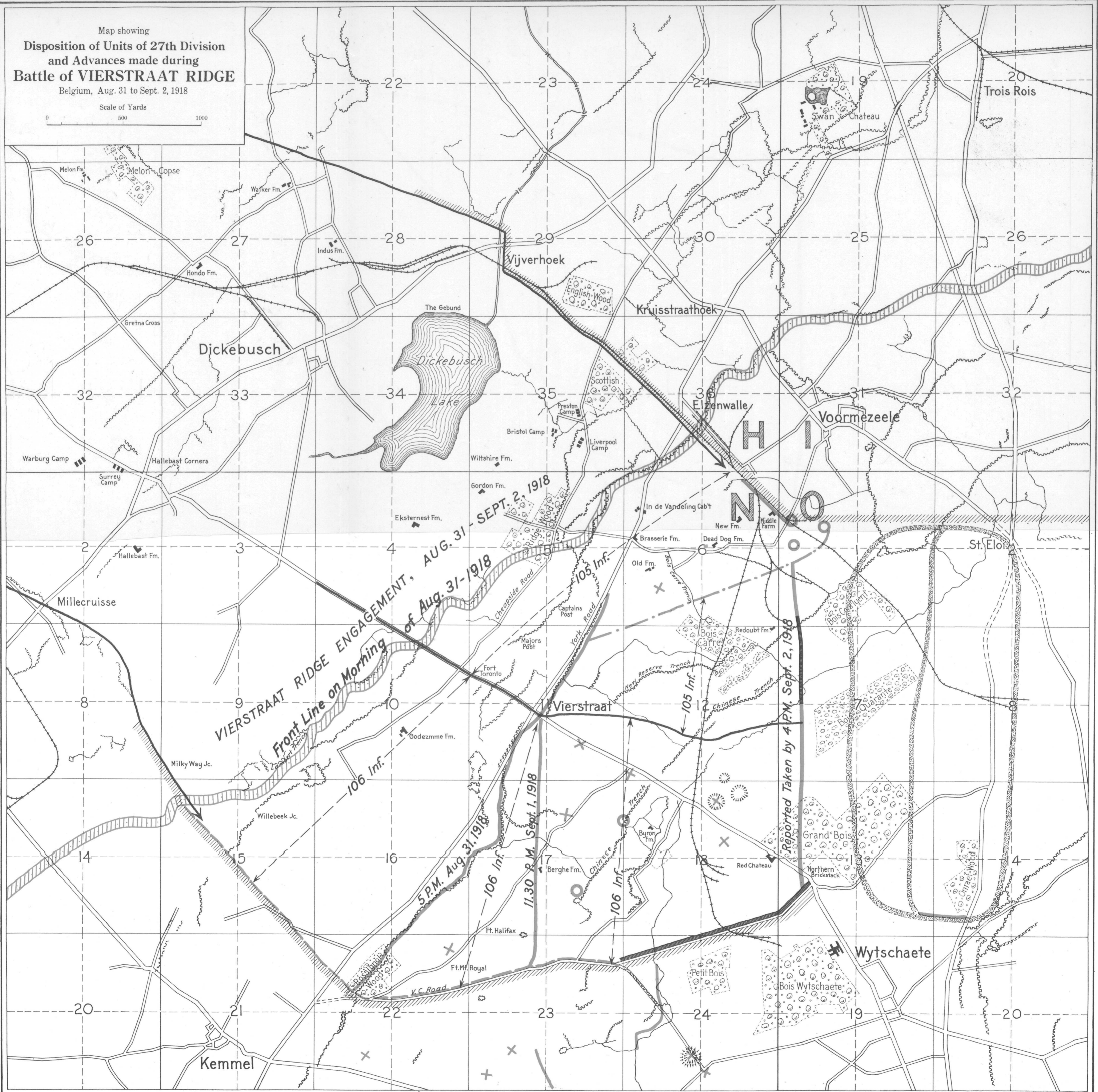
105th, as will be seen from an inspection of the map, the southern boundary line of their advance extending from the Milky Way to the V. C. Road east of Rossignol Camp. By 5:00 P. M., both regiments were engaged in consolidating the new line, which included what was left of the village of Vierstraat. Both regiments had taken a number of prisoners and had captured considerable booty in the way of machine guns, anti-tank rifles, grenades, ammunition and other supplies.



Hallebast Corners

Map showing
Disposition of Units of 27th Division
and Advances made during
Battle of VIERSTRAAT RIDGE
 Belgium, Aug. 31 to Sept. 2, 1918

Scale of Yards
 0 500 1000



The following day the 105th Infantry were to hold their position, while the 106th Infantry, with their left as a pivot, connecting with the 105th at the village of Vierstraat, were to advance on the right from Ft. Halifax until their line ran due north and south. This movement was successfully made by the 106th Infantry, which had completed its task by 11:30 on the morning of September 1st. The enemy's defense from this time on was considerably strengthened. The 105th Infantry, having extended its left beyond Middle Farm, now attacked Redoubt Farm and the trenches in Carre Farm, and later the railway and that part of the Chinese Trench within its sector. At the same time the 106th, with its front extending north and south, attacked and took Chinese Trench on both sides of the Vierstraat-Wytchaete road, within its sector. Captain Harry F. Sullivan's company, M of the 106th Infantry, with other detachments from the same regiment, got into the Chinese Trench but were subjected to a severe enemy artillery bombardment, preliminary to a counter-attack. The casualties were such that Captain Sullivan withdrew the troops under his immediate command for a short distance and the enemy counter-attacking troops regained Chinese Trench. Orders having been issued for the retaking of Chinese Trench, an attack was made after artillery preparation and the trench was regained and held by parts of the 106th Infantry. By hard fighting the 106th Infantry on the same day advanced to the line of the railway near the foot of Wytchaete Ridge.

On the following day, the divisional line was advanced to Northern Brickstack on the south and thence due north along the ridge from Northern Brickstack to Middle Farm. This line was secured late in the afternoon of September 2d.

For the reader who is interested in knowing something of the information that came to the division during this period from the Intelligence Sections of the British army, there is included in the Appendix as Exhibit 33 extracts from various intelligence reports received during this period.

By reference to the accompanying graphic diagram showing the order of battle of the 53d Infantry Brigade, one can observe the order in which units down to companies entered the battle. Company H of the 105th Infantry was detailed to the 3d Battalion of the 106th Infantry, under command of Major Harry S. Hildreth, for this operation.

The diagram also gives the names of all officers of the 105th and 106th Infantry Regiments commanding units of the attacking force. It may be stated in relation to this first major operation of the division that the attitude of officers and men was one of confidence and eagerness, perhaps too much so. Orders from the XIX Corps prohibited the use of a barrage and directed that the advance be made with the front covered by patrols pushed well out.

Pursuant to these directions, when the patrols advanced across the Cheapside Road on the afternoon of August 31st, they did not go far before they came under the fire of snipers and light machine gunners who had been left in position for the purpose of inflicting casualties.



Hague Farm

Right here some comment should be made of the manner in which the German soldiers on this and other occasions, who were called upon to perform such duty, carried out their missions. Except toward the very end, such detachments stuck to their jobs with the greatest courage and spirit of self-sacrifice. Indeed, some of them refused to surrender even when our men were upon them, and were killed at their posts. It has been stated that the conduct of our troops in this battle was marked by con-



A close-up view of one of the buildings at Hague Farm. Photo taken summer of 1920

105th Infantry				
K Capt. Robert S. Hall. 2d Lt. Walter W. Slayton.	I 1st Lt. Alexander Granat (w). 2d Lt. Ramon L. Hall. 2d Lt. Harold J. Hobbs.	D 1st Lt. Leo F. Giblyn. 2d Lt. Frank J. Baumert. 2d Lt. John T. Clissett, Jr.		
M 1st Lt. William B. Turner. 2d Lt. John J. Rudin.	L 1st Lt. Thomas G. Carlin. 1st Lt. Harold F. Smith (w). 2d Lt. Henry J. Cammann.	B 1st Lt. Kevney O'Connor. 2d Lt. Clement A. G. Feldt.	A 1st Lt. John J. Callahan. 2d Lt. Stephen B. Elkins.	C 1st Lt. Harry Merz. 2d Lt. Charles J. Doyle.
3d Battalion Capt. Stanley Bulkley, 1st Lt. Carl G. R. Ross, Adj. 1st Lt. Cary Walradt, Int. Off. 2d Lt. John C. Cipperly, Gas Off.		1st Battalion Capt. Henry Maslin. 1st Lt. Ogdan J. Ross, Adj. 2d Lt. Harold O. Blakeley, Gas Off. 2d Lt. Christopher B. Degenaar, Int. Off.		
E Capt. James S. Slosson.		F Capt. Frank R. Potter (w). 1st Lt. Eben P. Armstrong. 2d Lt. Lawrence P. Clarke (w). 2d Lt. Edward Van Holland (w).		
G 1st Lt. Earl W. Maxom. 1st Lt. Edward Warschauer.		H Capt. Raymond F. Hodgdon. 1st Lt. James T. Bergen. 2d Lt. Arthur H. Cunningham. 2d Lt. Harold B. Morris.		
2d Battalion Capt. Charles A. McArthur. 1st Lt. Harry L. Conway, Adj. (k).				
2d Lt. Llewellyn H. Davis, Int. Off. 2d Lt. Frank P. Buck, Gas Off.		Capt. Elmer H. Ormsby, M. C. 1st Lt. Charles G. Dodd, Trans. Off. 1st Lt. George F. Ramsay, Attd.		
Colonel James M. Andrews. Major Charles W. Berry, Attached Capt. John W. Frost, Oper. & Int. Off. Capt. Lewis H. Gibbes, Adj. Capt. Stephen H. Fifield, Pers. Adj. 1st Lt. Benjamin Buckley, Gas Off. Capt. George W. Papen, Jr., M. C. 1st Lt. James C. Donovan, M. C.		Capt. Jacob S. Clinton, Hq. Co. 1st Lt. Edwin B. Gore, T. M. Off. 1st Lt. William Innes, Int. Off. 1st Lt. H. E. Burke, One Pounders 1st Lt. Paul A. Florian, Sig. Off. Capt. Roscoe B. Trumble, Sup. Off. 1st Lt. John F. Mahoney, Sup. Co.		
M. G. 1st Lt. Howard Bird. 1st Lt. Lester C. Higbee. 2nd Lt. Glenn C. Wasson. 2nd Lt. George F. Evans.				

106th Infantry				
K 1st Lt. Edward A. Gray (k). 1st Lt. Willard M. Webster.	L 1st Lt. H. C. Stevens, Jr. 1st Lt. Ira A. Hodes (w).	M Capt. Harry F. Sullivan. 2d Lt. Horace B. Scanlon (w). 2d Lt. Edward L. Bonney (w).	C Capt. John T. Sheehan. 1st Lt. John A. Nelson. 2d Lt. James A. Malloy.	G 1st Lt. Albert G. Reinert. 2d Lt. Frank A. Knowles (k).
I 1st Lt. Louis Peterson. 2d Lt. John R. Clark (w).			D 1st Lt. Matthew J. A. Wilson. 1st Lt. Edward L. Ryan. 2d Lt. Frederick W. Rozeck.	B 1st Lt. Charles Ostberg. 2d Lt. George W. Turner (w).
3d Battalion Major Henry S. Hildreth. 1st Lt. Chester P. Jones, Adj.			6 T. M. 3 37mm.	1st Battalion (Less A, Plus G) Major Ransom H. Gillet. 1st Lt. Ames T. Brown.
H 1st Lt. Lennox C. Brennan. 2d Lt. Frank P. Ulrich (w).		A 1st Lt. Gilbert P. Rudkin. 1st Lt. James B. Post, 3d.		E 1st Lt. Thomas F. Ward, Jr.
F Capt. Foster G. Hetzel. 1st Lt. York W. Brennan.				
2d Battalion (Less G, Plus A) Major Sidney G. de Kay. 1st Lt. Frederic K. Long, Adj.				
Colonel William A. Taylor. Capt. Joseph A. S. Mundy, Adj. Capt. Arthur V. McDermott, Op. Off. Capt. William E. Blaisdell, Sup. Off. 1st Lt. William A. Hunter, Int. Off.		Major Lucius A. Salisbury, M. C. (w). Capt. Nils A. Larsen, M. C. 1st Lt. Joseph L. Gilman, Gas Off. Capt. G. W. B. Witten, 6 Div. R. F. A.		M. G. Co. at Busseboom (Not in this operation) Capt. George E. Bryant. 1st Lt. Leaman S. Broughton. 1st Lt. Ivan L. Smith. 2d Lt. William E. Brill. 2d Lt. William B. Behrens. 2d Lt. James F. Curtis.

NOTE:—After the commencement of the action Company D was moved to the right of of Company G. Later Company B went in on the left of Company C.

105th Machine Gun Battalion			
A (Support B) Capt. Lucius H. Biglow, Jr. 1st Lt. Joseph F. Cook. 1st Lt. William C. Barthman. 2d Lt. Harry B. Jennings. 2d Lt. Harold L. Downey.	B Capt. Nathaniel H. Egleston. 2d Lt. George Matthews, Jr. 2d Lt. Robert D. McCaskey. 2d Lt. Richard G. Lyon.	D Capt. Stanton Whitney. 1st Lt. Alwyn Ball, 3d. 2d Lt. Bert R. Anderson (w). 2d Lt. Hugh de Y. Stillman (w).	C (Support D) Capt. Robert R. Molyneux. 1st Lt. Edward S. Flash, Jr. 2d Lt. Ward H. Farnham.
Major Kenneth Gardner. 1st Lt. Theodore Crane, Adj.	1st Lt. Knowlton Durham, Int. Off. 1st Lt. Raymond A. McLeer, Sup. Off.	2d Lt. Frederick Snare, Jr., Trans. Off. Chaplain Archer B. Bass.	Capt. Charles D. Kayser, M. C. 1st Lt. Joseph Mulcahy, D. C.

Order of Battle
OPERATION AT
VIERSTRAAT RIDGE
AUGUST 31st to SEPTEMBER 2d, 1918

K—Killed or died of wounds.
W—Wounded.

fidence and determination. Perhaps to this should be added that some of them displayed impatience in getting forward. This is illustrated by the fact that when enemy machine gun nests were located there was a tendency with some of the attacking groups to abandon the deliberate methods for attacking such points, which they knew so well, and to resort to the quicker but much more dangerous method of rushing such points of opposition. Accordingly losses were voluntarily incurred by some of our groups which it is believed were avoidable.

The terrain lying between Cheapside Road and the top of Wytschaete Ridge is an open stretch of valley which afforded excellent observation to the enemy from their position on the forward slopes of Wytschaete Ridge, and accordingly it was in most cases impossible for the attacking groups to conceal themselves from observation. It is true that the ground was pitted with shell holes and scarred by numerous trenches, which, when occupied during the advance, temporarily screened the attacking groups from the immediate observation of any enemy groups in the valley, but left them subject to the fire of enemy guns controlled by the artillery observers on Wytschaete Ridge, whenever such fire could with safety to enemy groups be turned upon our men. The effect of this hostile fire was to a considerable extent minimized so far as our leading elements were concerned, because of their aggressiveness in pushing hard upon the outlying groups of the enemy forces.

Were this chapter a professional critique, covering the operations of August 31st-September 2d, there might be much to comment upon that would be of value from the professional point of view. In the conferences following the battle it was most satisfactory to observe that none were more eager to point out such matter than the actual participants. All the officers displayed a marked modesty in relation to their own activities, were generous in commending the gallantry of others, and seemed most interested to be of service to their brother officers by frank discussion of their experiences. All the officers were keen in their appreciation of the continued aggressiveness of the men, while from personal contact with the men, the Division Commander learned that they felt inspired by the dashing leadership of their officers.

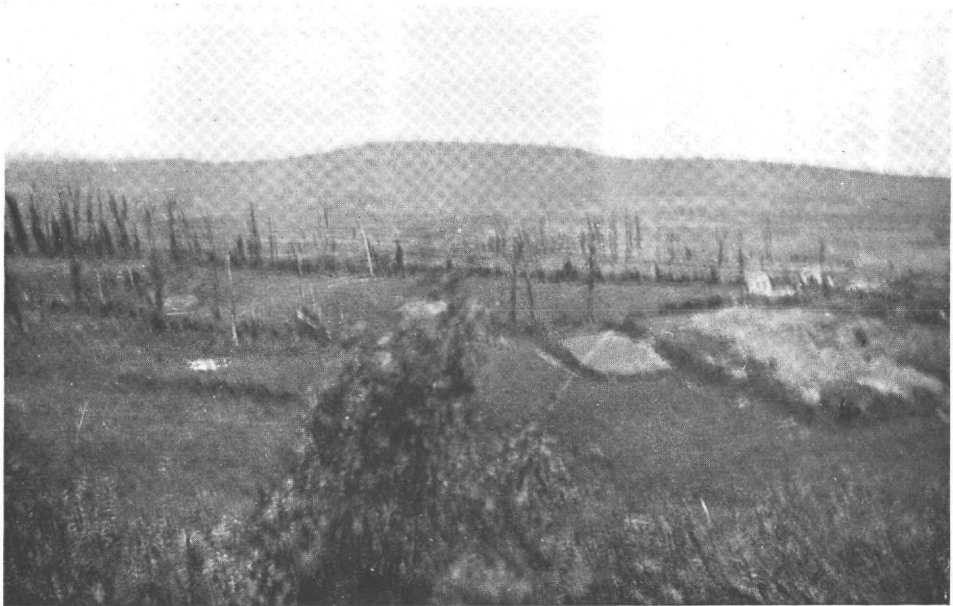
It is a most difficult thing in a work of this character to undertake to apportion praise for exceptional gallantry or accomplishment. In fact, it cannot be done and will not be attempted. Every participant in battle is naturally impressed by the things he personally sees or which have come to his knowledge first hand under the stress of extraordinary conditions, and the tendency is to accord greater importance to them than to incidents and occasions which may merit equal or greater commendation, but of which he has had no personal or intimate knowledge. None will better appreciate and understand this than the officers and soldiers who read it, and accordingly, when mention is made of particular officers and soldiers, commending them, it is with the knowledge that there are many others in the division who during active operations acted with equal or greater gallantry, but whose fine conduct, under the complex circumstances involved



View of Dickebusch Lake from The Bund

in the command of an organization as large as a division, did not come to the personal attention of the Division Commander.

On the morning of August 31st, the day of the opening of the attack on Vierstraat Ridge, the Division Commander and Chief of Staff went to



View of Mt. Kemmel from Scherpenberg

the forward area of the 105th Infantry to a place known as The Bund, bordering Dickebusch Lake. They were there primarily for the purpose of checking a special shoot of the divisional artillery, and accordingly the earlier movements of the leading elements of the 105th Infantry came under their observation. The 53d Infantry Brigade on this day was under the aggressive leadership of Colonel James M. Andrews, of the 105th Infantry, who was succeeded the next day by Brigadier General Albert H. Blanding, who reported as Brigade Commander. This temporary command of the brigade by Colonel Andrews placed the 105th Infantry under the command of Major Charles W. Berry, the senior battalion commander, it being remembered that shortly before, the Lieutenant Colonel, Morris N. Liebmann, had been killed.

The 105th Infantry was eager to come to grips with the enemy on their front. The patrols of the regiment from the 2d Battalion were there ready for their advance through the 3d Battalion, commanded by Captain Stanley Bulkley. Captain Bulkley's instructions to his men given in the presence of the Division Commander were confident and to the point. The first prisoners taken and the first machine guns captured in this battle were secured by a patrol from Company I of the 105th Infantry two days before. Throughout the three days of fighting the battalions of the 105th Infantry were at all times well in hand and their successive missions were skilfully and satisfactorily executed.

The 106th Infantry was commanded by Colonel William A. Taylor, in whose leadership the officers and men of the 106th Infantry had the greatest confidence. Colonel Taylor's conduct of this operation was marked by coolness under fire and a profound sense of responsibility. His men seemed to understand that the loss of any of them was to Colonel Taylor a matter of sincere personal grief.

The regimental operations officer was Captain Arthur V. McDermott, who seemed during the action to bear a charmed life, for he probably covered more ground in the battle area than any other officer in the brigade. His reports were accurate and comprehensive.

On the first day of the Vierstraat Ridge Battle, Major Ransom H. Gillet reported at Division Headquarters at Douglas Camp, having come by way of Paris from one of the army schools, this being the customary though not prescribed route for officers returning to their divisions from detached service. This aggressive officer seemed to feel as though he had been imposed upon because the battle had been started during his absence from his regiment. Accordingly he was assigned to command the 1st Battalion of the 106th Infantry. He left at once for the front and reported during the night, having walked most of the way there in the darkness. During the battle he maintained his record for fearless aggressiveness.

Shortly before the battle of Vierstraat Ridge, Major Sidney G. DeKay, who had been convalescing from an attack of pneumonia, reported for duty and had been assigned to the 106th Infantry. When his battalion went forward in the attack, Major DeKay advanced his headquarters and took over three enemy dugouts, one of which he used as post of command.



102d Engineer Train constructing dugout for telephone and telegraph for the 105th Infantry Headquarters during the Battle of Vierstraat Ridge



102d Engineers finishing "Nissen" huts at St. Laurent, for use of Headquarters 27th Division. Due to changes in orders, however, Division Headquarters did not occupy these huts

Having occasion to supervise a part of his line, he left his dugout but had not proceeded far when he heard a muffled roar. Looking about he saw one of the dugouts had been blown up, evidently by a mine left there for that purpose. The dugouts had been inspected and passed "clear" by the personnel of one of the British tunneling companies, operating with the 106th Infantry. The clerical personnel of Company K's headquarters had moved into the dugout and been there but a few minutes when the explosion occurred. As a consequence of this enemy trap, we lost the following named men, all of Company K, 106th Infantry, who made up the detachment:

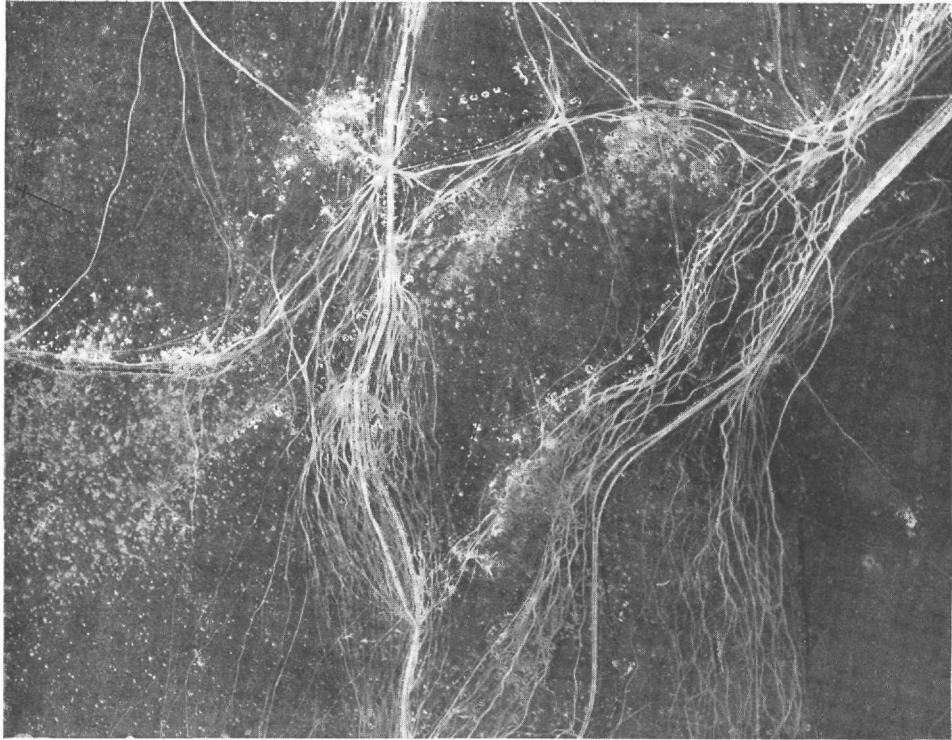
First Sergeant William J. Doherty,
Corporal James A. Harrington,
Corporal John A. Tyack,
Private First Class John J. Michaels.

Reports from the 105th Infantry seemed to agree that among the numerous officers who distinguished themselves were First Lieutenant William B. Turner, who was later killed in the attack on the outworks of the Hindenburg Line, September 27th, and posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor; First Lieutenants Alexander Granat, who was wounded in this engagement; James T. Bergen, later killed on October 17th; Leo F. Giblyn, later wounded, October 18th; Harry Merz, later wounded, September 29th; E. W. Maxon, later killed on September 29th; and the Medical Officers, Lieutenants Lisa, Donovan and Campbell.

Among those in the 106th Infantry who especially distinguished themselves were First Lieutenant Lennox C. Brennan and his brother, Second Lieutenant York W. Brennan, and Second Lieutenant Edward A. Gray. Captain Sullivan, whose company had very hard fighting in and about Chinese Trench, spoke most highly of First Lieutenant Willard M. Webster, who was later killed in the battle of the Hindenburg Line.

The activities of the one-pounder guns may be illustrated by reference to the work of the one-pounder detachment of the 106th Infantry, under command of 1st Lieutenant Erdmann Brandt. The following is an extract from his report: "When the regiment first went into the line as a complete unit, the 37 m/m platoon moved to Busseboom a battered collection of sheds and Nissen huts that had once been a workshop of the Royal Engineers. It was about two miles back from Ouderdom, on the Ouderdom-Watrach Road. There we stayed for two days without getting any closer to the line, as our preceptors, the British, did not use the 37 m/m in their army, and considered them the handiwork of the devil and an invitation to the enemy for retaliation, to the distress of the infantry. As it turned out, we were never able to prove or disprove their theory, as we only got into action when the actual advance began, and not in trench occupation.

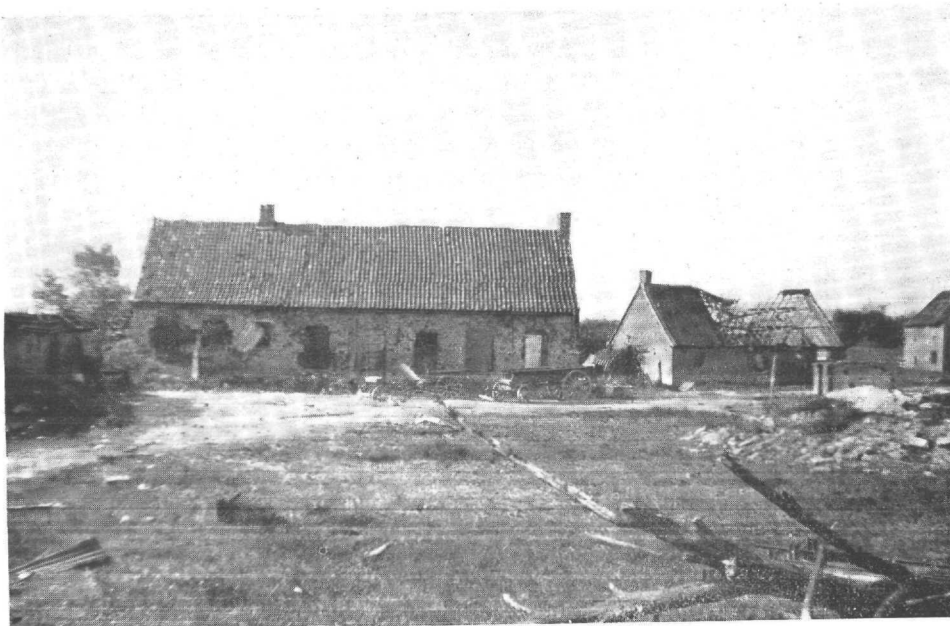
"About August 26th, Colonel William A. Taylor and Captain Murray Taylor visited us, bringing with them Captain Witten, R. F. A., British Artillery Liaison Officer, attached to Regimental H. Q. After inspecting the personnel and equipment, a demonstration was given, which included



Aerial photograph showing trails made by carrying parties at night behind the front line trenches. (Note shell craters resulting from night bombardments directed at these trails)

the dismounting, carrying and setting up of guns, carrying of ammunition, etc. That night Colonel Taylor, Captain Witten and the Platoon Commander made a complete tour of the front lines to determine how the guns could be used to the best advantage. After this reconnaissance Colonel Taylor ordered us up into the line.

“The next night we took two guns up to the lines and placed them back of 1st Bn. H. Q., and thereafter each night one gun team was brought up from Busseboom, a gun carried down to the front lines and an opportunity sought to use it. Unfortunately, none presented itself until the opening of the Battle of Vierstraat Ridge. The evening of the first advance we were ordered by Captain Sheehan, commanding the 1st Battalion, to get into position, covering a gap between our right wing and the British left, as they had lost contact. This we did, though nothing developed. At dawn I received word to move to the left Battalion and report to the Major commanding. Two guns and gun teams were moved forthwith to Iodine Crossing (B. H. Q.) and personal reconnaissance made. The Battalion Commander having given orders for us to use our own judgment as to going into action, one gun was left in reserve at Iodine Crossing, the other was moved forward of Cheapside, and the gun put in position about 100 yards back of Vierstraat crossroads and 50 yards to the left of Vierstraat-Hallebast Road. While forward with Sergeant Perley and



Micmac Farm (photo taken summer of 1920)

Private Moeller, on personal reconnaissance, I met Lieutenant Jones, Battalion Adjutant, who reported need for reinforcement of troops in York trench. Lieutenant C. Brennan appeared as his company was moving forward to effect the reinforcement. His company, at that time, was just back of the ridge, and to advance in the open without supporting fire



A close-up view of Micmac Farm (photo taken summer of 1920)

would subject him to severe machine-gun fire. I asked him to wait ten minutes and give my guns a chance to silence hostile machine guns. Lieutenant Jones was able to give enemy locations—in fact, the enemy could be seen without glasses. The gun was immediately put into action, firing over open sights as speed was essential and the slope was so steep that using the ridge as a mask would have met with doubtful success. The 37 m/m gun silenced the two major machine-gun nests before they had a chance to change their targets and sweep our gun position. We had the satisfaction of knowing Lieutenant Brennan's company reached York Trench without a casualty.

“During the next two days we were able to silence several more machine-gun nests, once under the observation of Captain McDermott, Regimental Operation Officer. Enemy artillery constantly endeavored to wipe out our gun position and machine-gun fire and snipers made it difficult at times to function. It was the only position, however, that offered opportunities and it was decided to keep on using it. Enemy artillery knocked one gun out of action, but we suffered no casualties. The third gun had been brought from Busseboom and was at Iodine Crossing at the service of Battalion Commander, as the second gun had replaced the first which was out of action.

“During the time before the advance, different gun teams had been brought up each night, so that all three were accustomed to being under fire and each gun team had an opportunity to get into action and acquitted themselves like veterans. The gun team sergeants, Perley, Liddell and Hagner, did exceptionally well. We rationed ourselves, transporting rations from regimental ration dump by our own mules and caissons.”

One interesting incident that happened in this battle occurred when two seriously wounded men of Captain Sullivan's company of the 106th Infantry were necessarily left in Chinese Trench when the company withdrew. When the counter-attacking German forces entered the trench they found the two wounded soldiers of the 106th Infantry lying there. The latter apparently expected to be killed. Promptly their first aid packets were confiscated, but their wounds were dressed with German paper bandages and the men made as comfortable as could be under the circumstances. A German officer, who spoke English, notified the men that his command were Saxon troops, who always treated their enemies in chivalrous manner. He added that the Americans were apparently preparing to retake the trench; that the Americans did not seem to care whether they were killed or not, and that the trench was not worth holding anyway. He added that his force would anticipate the counter-attack by retiring and that soon they would again be in the hands of their friends. Thereupon he and his men withdrew. Shortly thereafter, supported by artillery fire, through which the two wounded men happened to survive, the detachment of the 106th Infantry, as already narrated, retook the trench and heard from the wounded men the foregoing account of their experience.

On the third day of the battle, the Division Commander having occasion to pass through the Advance Dressing Station at Longbarn, which



Buildings at Trappiste Farm, where the battalions usually went first after leaving the line

place will be remembered by the wounded who received initial treatment there, noted the spirit of the wounded of the 105th and 106th Infantry, which typified the attitude of the personnel of these regiments. Shells were dropping about, but the wounded seemed oblivious, at least so far as their own safety was concerned. One group of about a dozen wounded men were seated with their backs to a building waiting their turn to have their wounds dressed. On the ground about were a score of others lying on



Vierstraat Ridge

litters, some of them unconscious. The sitting wounded, in answer to questions, assured the Division Commander that their comrades had given good accounts of themselves in terms of damage to the enemy. One of them, asked who was the bravest man in his company, responded, "General, the bravest man in our company was that little Wop behind you." Turning about, the Division Commander saw lying on a cot immediately behind him an Italian American, who seemed to be nearing death. A blanket covered all but his head. His eyes were closed and his face wore a blue-white pallor. Asked how he felt, he slightly opened his eyes and with evident difficulty, forced his face into a smile, and said: "I feel-a fine." This was the spirit of the men on this and later occasions of battle. They not only were calm in battle, but their effort was to make light of their hardships and wounds.

The division was relieved on the night of September 2d-3d by the 41st British Division. In this first major operation, the division had acquitted itself most satisfactorily. They had been aggressive and resourceful in the fight and had profited much by their experience.

The casualties in the 53d Brigade in this battle were:

Killed and died of wounds.....	40
Shell wounds.....	126
Gunshot wounds.....	150
Gassed.....	33
<hr/>	
Total.....	349

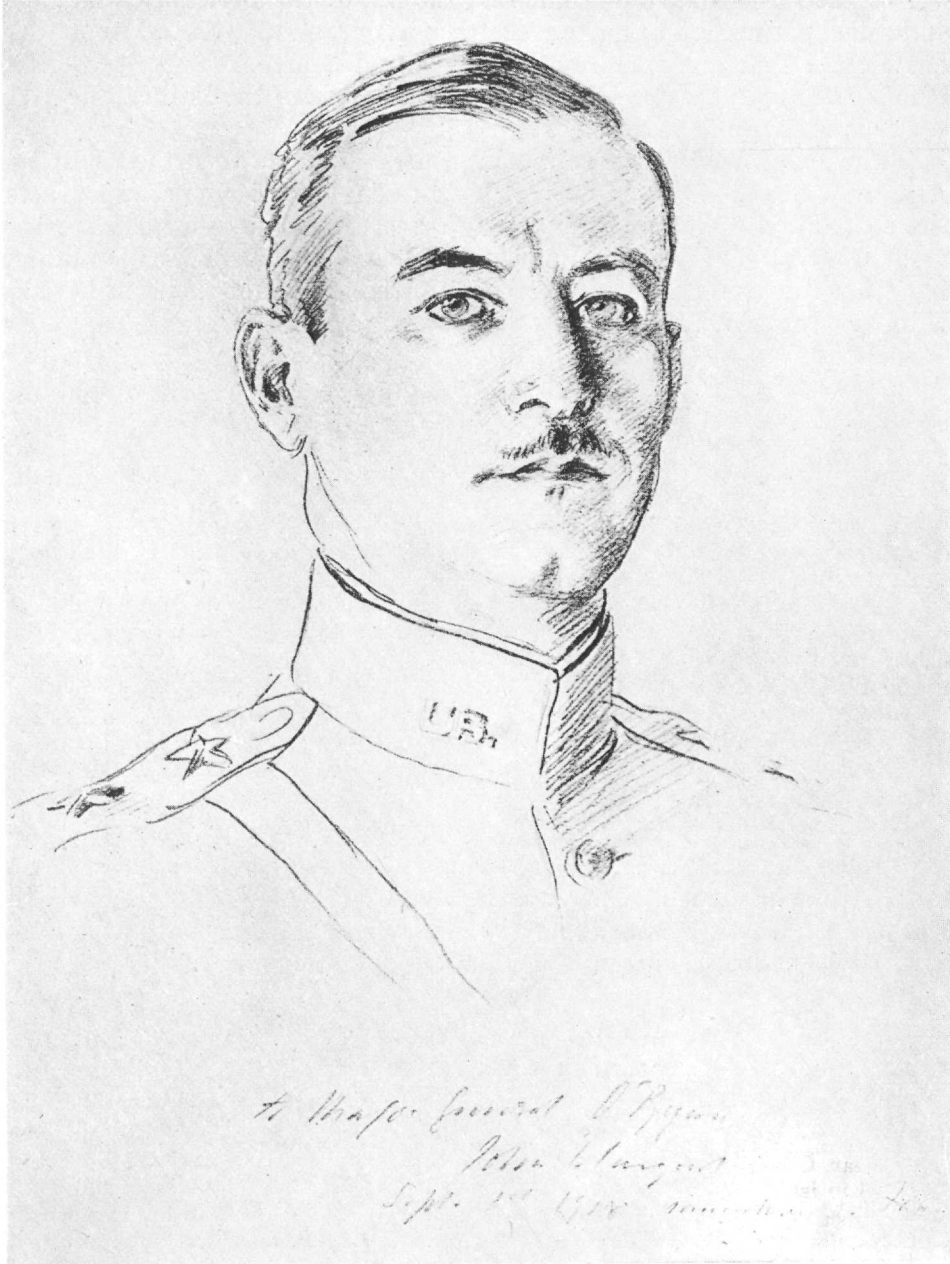
Forty-seven German soldiers were taken prisoner in this battle.

During the battle of Vierstraat Ridge the following material was captured:

63 Machine Guns
 11 Minnenwerfers
 1 Field piece (artillery)

Much more material than enumerated above was captured but the division upon conclusion of the battle, immediately left the sector for the Beauquesne area and before all captured property could be collected, tagged and reported.

Shortly before the battle of Vierstraat Ridge and while the Division Headquarters was at Douglas Camp, the XIX British Corps sent word informally that John S. Sargent, noted as being the world's greatest living portrait painter, was with the British army in the field for the purpose of doing some military art work for the British Government and had expressed a desire to see something of the 27th American Division. Accordingly the Division Commander invited him to spend a few days at the Division Headquarters. Mr. Sargent arrived promptly and became a member of "A" Mess. It soon developed that his idea of seeing something of the American troops involved a search for appropriate subjects amid the scenes of front line activities. With difficulty the Division Commander dissuaded him during the first few days of his visit from going farther forward than



A Major General O. Ryan
John L. Largent
Sept. 11, 1918

the Division Headquarters. Later it was learned, however, that he had succeeded in persuading one of the Staff to take him along to the front and that he had visited trenches, smelt gas and been under a bombardment while in the remains of the city of Ypres. During the second day of the Vierstraat Ridge Battle he came into the hut of the Division Commander and asked permission to make a sketch portrait, stating that it would take but a short time and would not involve any distraction from the work in hand. His request was acceded to and this sample of the skill of this great artist is shown on the accompanying page.

The relief marked the termination of the service with the 2d British Army. When the division was about to sail for home from France, after the completion of its services abroad, the Division Commander received from General Sir Herbert Plumer, commanding the 2d British Army, the following communication referring to the service of the 27th Division with that army in Flanders:

HEADQUARTERS, SECOND ARMY

COLOGNE

February 9, 1919.

Dear General:—

I should like, before the division returns to the United States, to convey to you and to your officers and men my appreciation of the service rendered by the division while they were with the 2d Army.

The wonderful spirit which animated all ranks and the gallantry displayed in the minor engagements they took part in with us foreshadowed the successes they would achieve later.

Our regret was that the period of their service with the 2d Army was so brief. Believe me,

Yours sincerely,

HERBERT PLUMER.

To G. O. C.,
27th American Division.

About the same time, the following letter, addressed to the Editor of the Division news magazine, was received from Lieutenant General Sir Herbert E. Watts, commanding the XIX British Corps, with which the 27th Division served during the Flanders operations:

HEADQUARTERS, XIX CORPS

BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY FORCES

February 9, 1919.

Dear Sir:—

I hear that on the return of the 27th American Division to New York it is proposed to issue another number of your leading organ, *The Gas Attack*, and as the first British Corps Commander who had the honor of having the 27th in his command, I should like your permission to set down my great appreciation of the splendid soldierly qualities of the officers and men of your division and my very happy reminiscences of the time we spent together—from the days around Oudezele with their military training and social meetings—culminating with the memorable dinner at the Hotel Sauvage at Cassel on the occasion of General O’Ryan’s birthday—to the more serious work and fighting around Kemmel.

We British were all very eager to see some of the American army—and I remember on returning to my headquarters after my first visit to your division being asked: "What are they like?" and my reply, "Oh, you needn't worry; they look like business and mean it." Apart from the fine military bearing and physique, I was struck by the tremendous keenness of all ranks to learn as much as possible, as quickly as possible and to waste no time before getting to real business—and they didn't—and what the 27th achieved when they did get there is now well known, and are not their praises writ large in the congratulations and appreciations received from Commander in Chief downwards?

May the best of luck attend all members of your division and may they have as kindly and friendly remembrances for their old comrades of the XIX Corps as the latter have for them.

Faithfully yours,

HERBERT E. WATTS,
Lieutenant General, Commanding,
XIX Corps, B. E. F.

The Editor,
The Gas Attack.

After the return of the division to New York, Lieutenant Philip Barbier of the Belgian army, on duty with the Belgian Military Mission, came to New York with a letter from the Belgian Legation, addressed to the writer, relating to the service of the 27th Division in Belgium. The letter transmitted a cablegram, addressed to the Division Commander and sent by His Majesty Albert, King of the Belgians. The letter and cablegram follow:

I have the honor to communicate to you under this cover the copy of a cablegram addressed to you by His Majesty, the King of the Belgians, and which this Legation has been directed to transmit to you.

I have instructed Lieutenant Barbier, Acting Military Attaché, to go and hand over to you the enclosed copy.

Accept, sir, the assurances of my high consideration.

Telegram sent on behalf of King Albert of the Belgians to the Belgian Legation at Washington, for General O'Ryan, Commander of the 27th Division:

Chargé d'Affaires Belgique, Washington,
For General O'Ryan, New York, N. Y.

Having been informed of the triumphal return of the 27th Division of the American army, I address to you and to your valiant and victorious men who fought so bravely in Flanders the grateful greetings of the whole Belgian nation.

ALBERT.

Since the war, the writer has had some correspondence with Lieutenant General von Hamann, who commanded the 8th Prussian Division, and this officer and his Chief of Staff, Major von Kolaczek, have furnished information concerning these operations as they appeared from their side of the line.

Referring to the period following August 21st, the date when the 27th Division went into the line in that sector, Major Kolaczek writes:

"During these days our numerous night patrols always encountered strong and extremely alert garrisons in the opposing trenches. They did not succeed in bringing in any prisoners."

Referring to the battle of Vierstraat Ridge, Lieutenant General von Hamann writes:

"Reports reaching me from all sources, particularly from our artillery observation posts, were that your infantry was unusually energetic in their attack."

The relief and movement of the units of the division were covered by Field Orders Nos. 39, 40, 41 and 42 and by Orders Nos. 79 and 80, copies of which appear in the Appendix as Exhibit 34.

The rail movement carried the division to a new area, known as Beauquesne area. Its mission there will be taken up later in the next chapter.