

Chapter VII

AMERICAN OPERATIONS ON THE VOSGES FRONT

THE Western Front, extending for more than 400 miles from Switzerland to the North Sea, was so long that neither the Allies nor the Germans could obtain sufficient men to undertake operations on a large scale throughout its entire length. Consequently each massed

of Belfort, no great amount of fighting had taken place since 1914 and although the terrain was appropriate for military operations the narrowness of the pass between the mountains and the Swiss border, called the Belfort Gap, made the region not suitable for large-scale operations.



42d Division Troops in Front-Line Trench Near Baccarat, June 3, 1918
Scene is typical of the trenches and terrain in the Vosges region

its troops most heavily near those places where there existed a strong likelihood that the other might attack or where the terrain or other strategic factors were such that an offensive would have good chances to bring about decisive results.

The rugged terrain in the Vosges Mountains, north of the Swiss border, was a serious obstacle to major operations in that region because of the difficulty of maneuvering and supplying any considerable number of troops during an advance.

South of these mountains near the town

The battle line between the Vosges Mountains and the Moselle River followed roughly the former frontier between France and Germany. The French had prepared before the World War to meet a German attack on that particular front and one of the main reasons Germany violated the neutrality of Belgium was to avoid a major offensive there. Severe fighting, however, occurred in the region early in the war when the Germans attempted to take Nancy, but after 1914 it became inactive as both sides



An American Division on the March, Winter of 1917-1918

realized that offensive operations on other parts of the battle line which were not as strong offered more possibility of success.

When the American troops arrived in France the entire stretch southeastward from the Moselle River to the Swiss border was a quiet or inactive front held by comparatively few troops. This front, commonly known to the Americans as the "Vosges Front", was used by many American divisions for training purposes. It was admirably suited for the purpose as it was conveniently located with respect to the St. Mihiel salient, which was early selected as the scene of the first offensive operation by the American Army, and with respect to the American line of communications, which was being developed to supply troops on the St. Mihiel front.

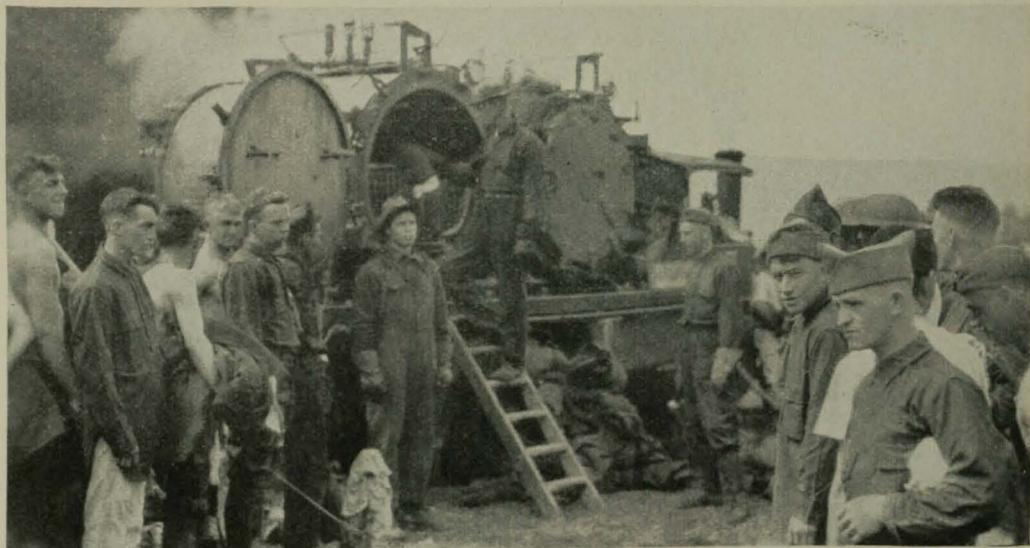
The normal program of training pre-

scribed for an American division after its arrival in France was first to carry out intensive training in an area in rear of the front lines, then to serve in quiet sectors for a time with French or British troops and finally to complete its training for battle in a sector of its own. This routine procedure was broken in emergencies and some American divisions, such as the 3d, 4th, 36th, 78th and 91st, went directly from training areas into battle without sector service, while the 79th, 89th and 90th Divisions took command of sectors without any period of affiliation with troops of the Allied Armies.

The 1st, 5th, 6th, 29th, 32d, 35th, 37th, 42d, 77th, 81st, 88th and 92d Divisions of the American Army had their first sector service at the front in the Vosges region.

Elsewhere on the Western Front the

Delousing Machine in Operation at Saacy, August 10, 1918





American Patrol Starting on a Raid Near Badonviller, March 17, 1918

2d, 26th, 28th, 82d and 93d Divisions had their first front-line training with the French; the 27th, 30th, 33d and 80th with the British, and the 7th Division mainly with the American Second Army.

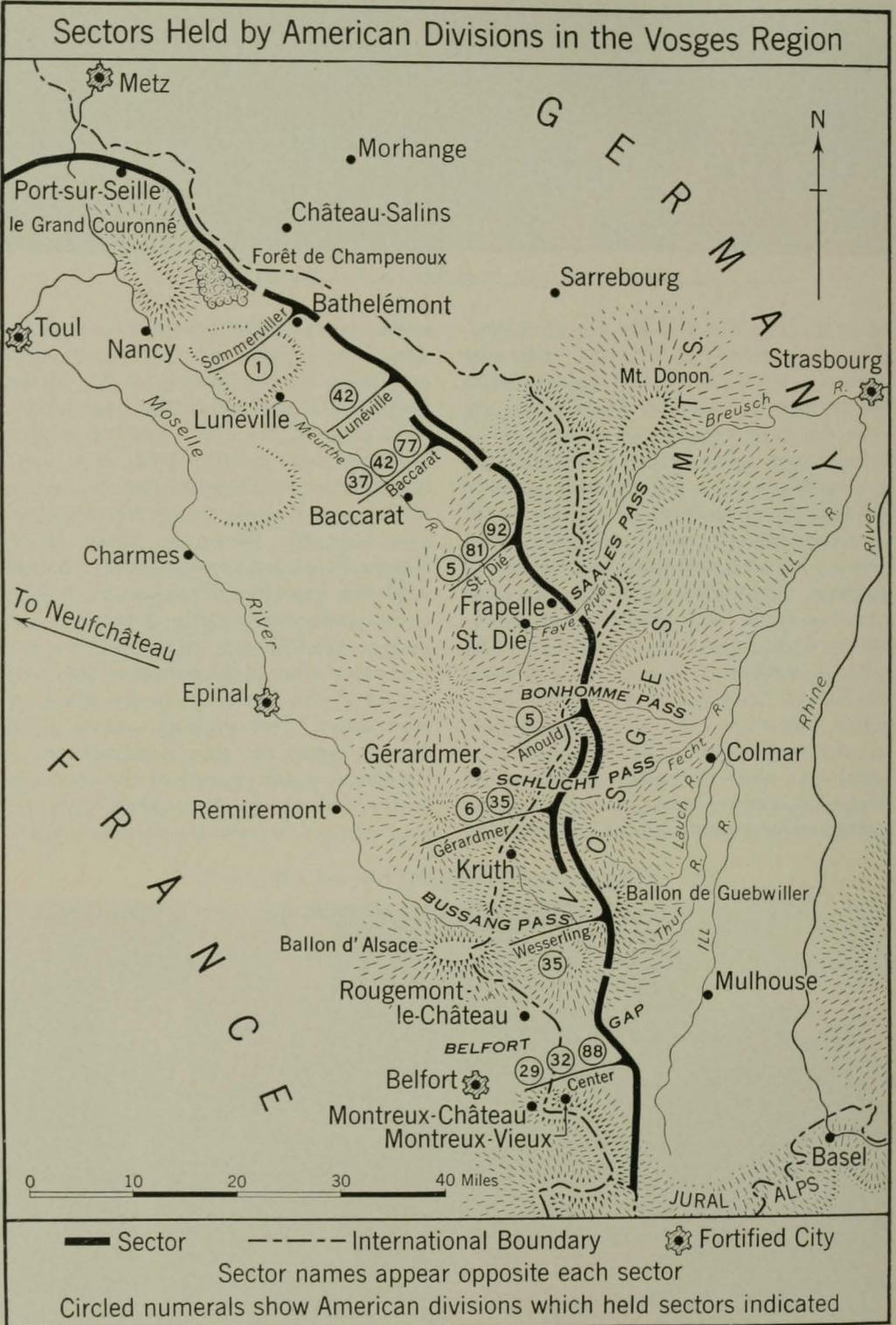
Service in quiet sectors varied widely in character. For considerable periods the daily life of the front-line troops would be comparatively uneventful, disturbed only by routine patrolling and desultory shelling. At intervals, however, this comparative quiet was shattered by hard-fought local operations and raids. The natural enthusiasm of the American troops and their inherent desire to start active operations as quickly as possible usually produced a marked increase in the fighting in these normally quiet sectors. While this had no immediate effect on the general military situation it did result in

giving valuable combat experience to the American soldiers who later served so creditably on the Marne, at St. Mihiel, along the Meuse and in the Argonne.

Sections of the front line assigned to divisions were called "division sectors". A particular sector was often changed in both size and name as the military situation changed. However, those of the Vosges Front were not radically changed while the American divisions served in the region and, consequently, it has been possible on the following pages to give a general description of the sectors as they were known to the American troops who occupied them. The division sectors of the Vosges region are graphically shown on the sketch which appears on the next page. In the text which follows the sketch they are discussed in order from south to north.

Mail Call at Rolampont, February 1918





The Center Sector lay wholly in German territory. It extended north from the Swiss border and controlled the important Belfort Gap. The American 32d, 29th and 88th Divisions served in that order at different times in this sector.

The Wesserling Sector, also on German soil, secured for the Allies the Bussang Pass and the greater part of the mountain mass called the Ballon de Guebwiller. The 35th Division trained in this sector and the 369th Infantry of the 93d Division served here just prior to the Armistice, as part of a French division.

The Gérardmer Sector covered the Schlucht Pass and lay entirely in German territory. It was held by the 35th and 6th Divisions at different times.

The Anould Sector was astride the principal range of the Vosges Mountains, its southern portion being on German soil. It covered the Bonhomme Pass. The 5th Division gained front-line experience here and the 371st and 372d Infantry Regiments of the 93d Division served in this same sector as part of a French division just before the Armistice.

The St. Dié Sector, north of St. Dié, controlled the southern exit of the Saales Pass. It was held at various times by the 5th, 92d and 81st Divisions.

A corps front extended from the western slopes of the Vosges Mountains toward the northwest. It was known to the 42d Division, which trained on it, as the Lunéville Sector. The corps front was divided into three divisional sectors, the one nearest the Vosges being called the Baccarat Sector. This last-named division sector was held at different times by the 42d, 77th and 37th Divisions.

Farther to the northwest was the Sommerviller Sector. Units of the 1st Division entered the front lines in this sector for training with the French on October 23, 1917. This marked the first time that elements of an American division held a section of the front-line trenches.

The following incidents in the history of the American divisions which served in the Vosges region will give an idea of the more active part of the American occu-

pation of the so-called quiet sectors there.

While the 1st Division was in the Sommerviller Sector training with the French it took the first German prisoner captured by the A.E.F. The first Americans to be captured were taken by the Germans in a raid at Bathelémont on November 3, 1917, and in the same raid the first American soldiers were killed in action, three men losing their lives. These three men are now commemorated by a monument which the French erected in 1918 over their graves near Bathelémont.

When the 5th Division took command of the St. Dié Sector, the German position near Frapelle formed a salient projecting into the American lines. The division decided to seize this salient and on August 17 captured it in a small but well-executed attack. Consolidation of the new position was begun in spite of a violent hostile artillery bombardment which continued almost without interruption for three days. The division, however, clung grimly to its gains, repulsing a German counterattack on August 18. By the 20th the new position was completely organized and securely in American hands. The 5th Division lost approximately 400 men in this fighting.

On October 4 about 60 men of the 6th Division near Sondernach, east of Gérardmer, were attacked by a party of 300 Germans, equipped with machine guns and flame throwers. Although cut off by a barrage and greatly outnumbered, the Americans repulsed the attack and captured five prisoners.

While occupying the Center Sector, elements of the 29th Division raided the German lines on August 31 and on September 7, inflicting many casualties.

The front lines of the 32d Division were raided on July 19, while the division was in the Center Sector. The raiding party in this operation was repulsed, leaving two prisoners in American hands.

While training with a French division in the Wesserling Sector, troops of the 35th Division raided a German position on July 6, inflicting losses upon the enemy troops and capturing seven prisoners.



Outpost in the Forest of Parroy, Northeast of Lunéville, March 5, 1918

Position destroyed by shellfire soon after picture was taken

On September 11, while in the Baccarat Sector, a party of the 37th Division penetrated the German lines and captured two prisoners without any losses.

While with the French in the Lunéville Sector, units of the 42d Division participated in three raids on March 9.

The Germans raided the 77th Division in the Baccarat Sector on June 24. They were repulsed after a sharp fight.

A post of the 81st Division in the St. Dié Sector was attacked by German troops on October 9. The enemy was promptly driven back, leaving a number of dead and one prisoner in American hands.

During October the 88th Division holding the Center Sector encountered strong resistance when it attempted to

Firing a Trench Mortar During Sector Occupation Near Baccarat, June 3, 1918



improve the position of its front line.

On September 4 the Germans raided the lines of the 92d Division, at that time serving in the St. Dié Sector. The raid was repulsed after a brisk fight.

While the American First Army was preparing for the St. Mihiel offensive, an American corps commander and a group of staff officers were sent to Belfort on August 28 with orders to prepare plans for a major offensive in the direction of Mulhouse and the heights southeast of that place. No American divisions were moved, nor did General Pershing actually contemplate such an attack, but the Germans instantly became aware of the increased activity in the vicinity and were led to bring more divisions to the Vosges region, thus decreasing their availability for use on the St. Mihiel front where the attack was actually made. This successful maneuver which deceived the enemy has become known as the Belfort ruse.

If the war had continued beyond November 11 that part of this region northwest of the Vosges Mountains would have seen greater activity as the Allied Commander-in-Chief had decided to launch an offensive east of the Moselle River. This attack was to be participated in by six American divisions of the American Second Army, which was to advance in a northeasterly direction from the vicinity of Port-sur-Seille, and by a French army group adjoining it on the east. The date for this offensive was fixed as November 14, and the movement of the divisions and other troops which were to take part in the attack had already begun when the Armistice was signed. (See map page 114.)

The Vosges region holds vivid memories for many American soldiers as it was there that so many of them, after arduous months of training in the rear areas, had their first experience with trench life and their first contact with the enemy. One division, the 6th, had its only front-line experience in the Vosges Mountains. Deeds of individual bravery were numerous and the Distinguished Service Cross was awarded to 85 members of the A.E.F. for their heroism on this front.

ADDITIONAL PLACES OF INTEREST IN THE VOSGES REGION

Baccarat. Location of 42d Div. Hdqrs., Mar. 30–June 21; 77th Div. Hdqrs., June 19–Aug. 4; and 37th Div. Hdqrs., July 23–Sept. 17.

Ballon d'Alsace. Southernmost mountain mass of the Vosges. It rises to a height of over 4,000 feet and dominates the northern side of the Belfort Gap.

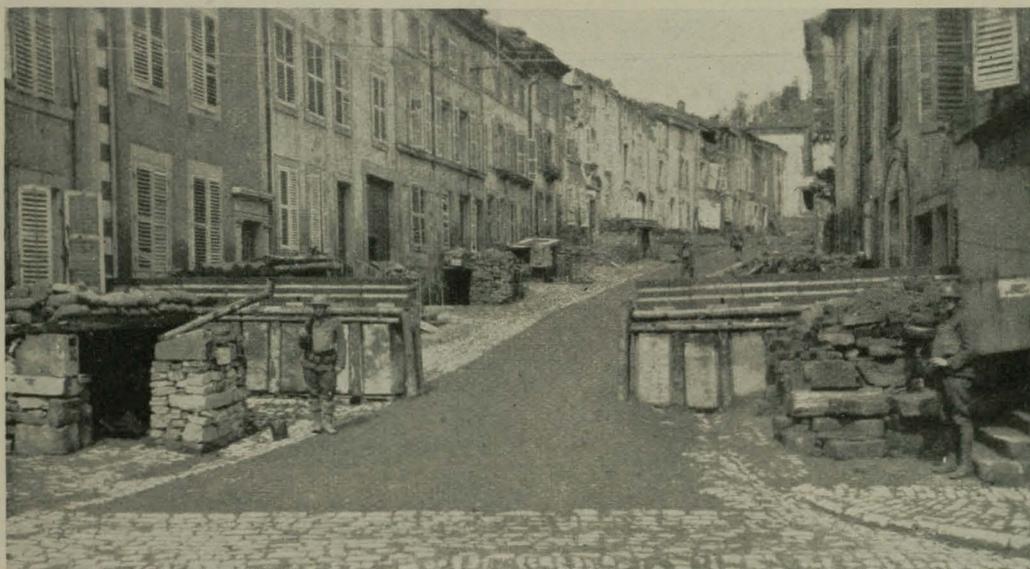
Ballon de Guebwiller. Southeastern shoulder of the Vosges. Lying between the Thur and Lauch Rivers, this rugged area reaches a height in excess of 4,600

feet and dominates the eastern exit of the Belfort Gap.

Belfort Gap. A rolling valley about 15 miles wide between the Vosges Mountains and the Jural Alps. It is of strategic importance and on the French side is controlled by the fortress of Belfort.

Bonhomme Pass. A pass through the Vosges northeast of Gérardmer.

Bussang Pass. An important pass in the eastern part of the Vosges Mountains which gives access to the valley of the Thur River and that of the upper Rhine.



Street in Badonviller on April 29, 1918
Note entrances to dugouts and cellars

feet. It dominates the eastern exit of the Belfort Gap and the valley of the Rhine River to the north of Mulhouse.

Belfort. An important fortified town forming the southern element of the French frontier defenses in 1914. The town was fortified late in the 17th Century by the famous military engineer, Vauban. It successfully withstood siege by the Prussians in the War of 1870. This successful defense is commemorated by the great Lion of Belfort, a memorial

Charmes Gap. Between the fortifications of Epinal and Toul lies the relatively open Lorraine plain, in the center of which stands the town of Charmes. Before August 1914 this area had been left without permanent fortifications so that in the event of war the stream of German invasion would be canalized to this definite course. It became known as Charmes Gap and it was through this gap that the Germans attempted during 1914 to turn the French position near Nancy.

Epinal. An important fortified town situated at a strategic point on the Moselle River about 38 miles south of Nancy. In 1914, at the beginning of the war, it was one of the principal elements of the French frontier defenses.

Gérardmer. Location of 5th Div. Hdqrs., June 7–July 15; 35th Div. Hdqrs., Aug. 14–Sept. 2; 6th Div. Hdqrs., Sept. 3–23 and Sept. 25–Oct. 26.

This village, situated on a beautiful lake, is a summer resort in a setting of forests and mountains.

Krüth. The 35th Div. Hdqrs. was located here July 27–Aug. 14.

Le Grand Couronné. The name given by the French to the bastionlike heights north and east of Nancy. It was from these heights that the French forces hurled back many powerful assaults by the German Army in the Battle of Nancy during August and September, 1914.

Mont Donon. The most northern mountain mass of the Vosges. It dominates the valley of the Breusch River to the north of the Saales Pass.

Montreux-Château. Location of 29th Div. Hdqrs., Sept. 14–22, and 88th Div. Hdqrs., Oct. 7–Nov. 4.

Montreux-Vieux. Location of 29th Div. Hdqrs., Aug. 9–Sept. 14.

Neufchâteau. I Corps Hdqrs., Jan. 20–June 18; IV Corps Hdqrs., June 20–Aug. 13; and VI Corps Hdqrs., Aug. 1–12. These corps headquarters while at Neufchâteau exercised administrative but not tactical control over the American divisions assigned to them.

Remiremont. III Corps Hdqrs., June 10–July 12; V Corps Hdqrs., July 10–Aug. 18; and VII Corps Hdqrs., Aug. 20–Nov. 8. While at Remiremont, these headquarters exercised administrative but not tactical control over the American divisions assigned to them.

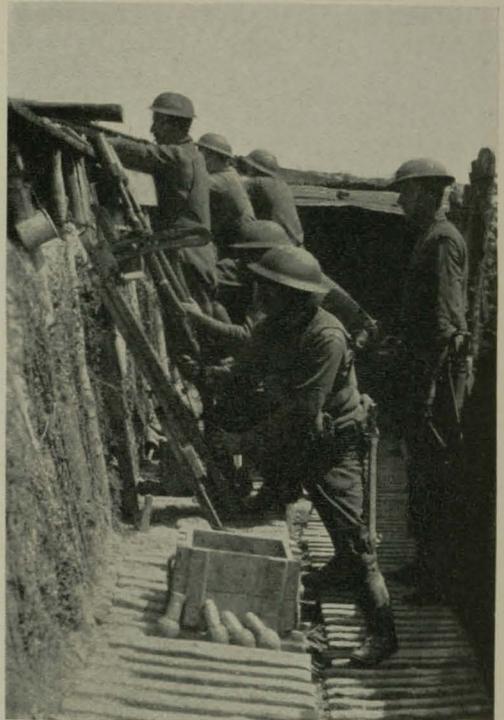
Rougemont-le-Château. Location of 32d Div. Hdqrs., June 9–July 20.

Saales Pass. This pass, in the northern Vosges, is second in importance to Belfort Gap. It gives access to the upper part of the Breusch River valley and thence to the Rhine River valley near Strasbourg.

St. Dié. Location of 5th Div. Hdqrs., July 15–Aug. 23; 92d Div. Hdqrs., Aug. 24–Sept. 20; and 81st Div. Hdqrs., during the period Sept. 21–Oct. 20.

This ancient town grew up about a monastery established in the 7th Century. One of the earliest printing presses was located at this place in the 15th Century.

Schlucht Pass. An important opening in the eastern Vosges which gives access to the valley of the Fecht River and the



Front-Line Trench of the 32d Division, Alsace,
June 14, 1918

upper Rhine. This pass was taken by the French in August 1914 during their invasion of upper Alsace and was held by them throughout the war.

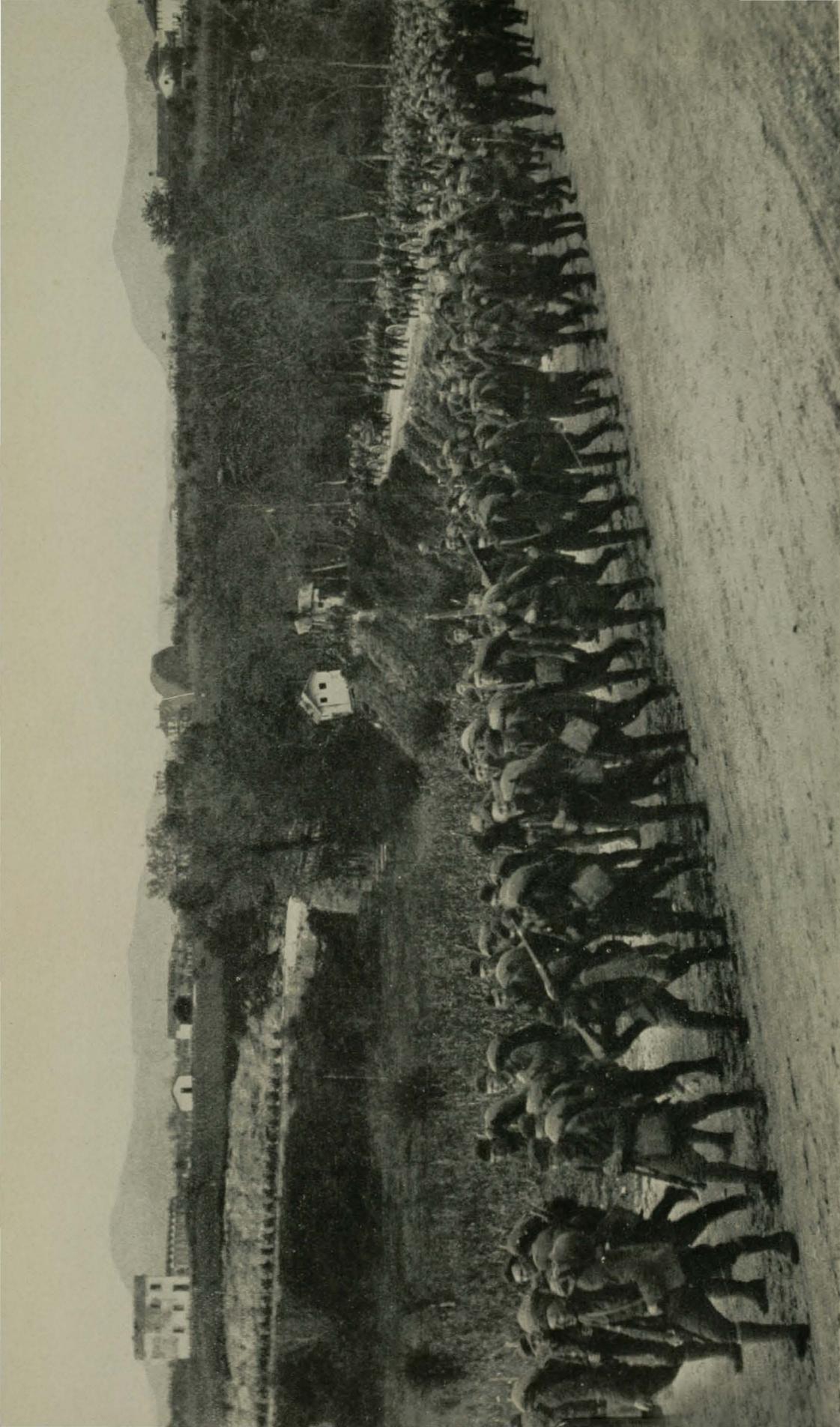
Strasbourg. Location of an old Celtic city which was captured by the Romans. It is situated at the junction of the Ill and Breusch Rivers, 2 miles west of the Rhine, and has long been a point of great strategic importance. It was ceded to Germany in 1871 but returned to France at the conclusion of the World War. The city contains many interesting features.

SUMMARY OF COMBAT SERVICE OF AMERICAN DIVISIONS
ON THE VOSGES FRONT

<i>Name of Div.</i>	<i>Period of Service 1918 Unless Otherwise Indicated</i>	<i>Character of Service</i>	<i>Location of Service General Vicinity of—</i>	<i>Army to Which Attached ¹</i>	<i>Corps to Which Attached ¹</i>	<i>Casualties ²</i>
1	Oct. 23–Nov. 20, 1917.	Training in Line.	Bathelémont.....	Eighth.....	IX.....	45
5	June 14–July 16.	Training in Line.	Northeast of Gérardmer.	Seventh.....	XXXIII.....	149
	July 19–Aug. 23.	Sector.....	North of St. Dié.....	Seventh.....	XXXIII.....	580
6	Aug. 31–Oct. 12.	Training in Line and Sector.	Southeast of Gérardmer.	Seventh.....	XXXIII until Oct. 4, then I.	311
29	July 27–Sept. 23.	Training in Line and Sector.	East of Belfort.....	Seventh.....	XL.....	744
32	May 20–July 19.	Training in Line and Sector.	East of Belfort.....	Seventh.....	XL.....	365 (2)
35	June 20–Sept. 2.	Training in Line and Sector.	Southeast of Krüth and southeast of Gérardmer.	Seventh.....	XXXIII.....	360
37	July 28–Sept. 16.	Training in Line and Sector.	Northeast of Baccarat..	Eighth.....	VI.....	174
42	Feb. 21–Mar. 23.	Training in Line.	East of Lunéville and northeast of Baccarat.	Eighth.....	VII.....	893
	Mar. 31–June 21.	Sector.....	Northeast of Baccarat..	Eighth.....	VII until May 12, then VI.	1,104
77	June 21–Aug. 4.	Training in Line and Sector.	Northeast of Baccarat..	Eighth.....	VI.....	375
81	Sept. 18–Oct. 19.	Training in Line and Sector.	North of St. Dié.....	Seventh.....	XXXIII until Oct. 1 then X.	116
88	Sept. 23–Nov. 4	Training in Line and Sector.	East of Belfort.....	Seventh.....	XL.....	72
92	Aug. 23–Sept. 20.	Training in Line and Sector.	North of St. Dié.....	Seventh.....	XXXIII.....	355
93 (369th Inf. only)	Oct. 17–Nov. 11.	Sector.....	Southeast of Krüth.....	Seventh.....	I.....	23
93 (371st Inf. only)	Oct. 16–Nov. 11.	Sector.....	Northeast of Gérardmer.	Seventh.....	X.....	9
93 (372d Inf. only)	Oct. 14–Nov. 11.	Sector.....	Northeast of Gérardmer.	Seventh.....	X.....	33

¹ All armies and corps are French.

² Casualties are for period in line only. Figures in parentheses give casualties for units temporarily attached. Add figure in parentheses to the one above in order to obtain the total casualties during the entire operation.



The 332d Infantry Marching Into Austria, Northwest of Cormons