

Soldier of Company K, 110th Infantry Regiment, receives first aid from comrade for wound suffered in the fighting at Varennes.



The Keystone Division in the Great War

JOHN KENNEDY OHL

During World War I, the controversy over the best method of sending into battle the American troops who were being sent to France severely strained relations between Gen. John J. Pershing, commander-in-chief of the American Expeditionary Forces, and the Allied leaders.¹ The controversy erupted shortly after the United States entered the war in April 1917 and did not abate until the Allied and American offensives to push the Germans out of France began late in the summer of 1918.

Allied leaders argued that the quickest and safest method of putting American troops into battle was to amalgamate them with the Allied armies as replacements. Their case was not

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¹ To examine the amalgamation controversy, see David F. Trask, *The United States in the Supreme War Council: American War Aims and Inter-Allied Strategy, 1917-1918* (Middletown, Conn., 1961), pp. 70-99; Daniel R. Beaver, *Newton D. Baker and the American War Effort, 1917-1919* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1966), pp. 110-150; and Harvey A. DeWeerd, *President Wilson Fights His War: World War I and the American Intervention* (New York, 1968), pp. 300-311.

without merit; amalgamating the units meant expanding the existing military system rather than accepting the delays incident to establishing a completely new one. After three years in the field the British and French armies had built up a substantial officer cadre skilled in handling large units of men and at great expense had acquired supply, maintenance, and billeting capabilities. Heavy losses, however, had caused a shortage of infantrymen and the Allies faced the prospect of being defeated in 1918 by a German army that was then being reinforced by seasoned troops freed by the collapse of Russia. The United States Army, meanwhile, had a large reservoir of manpower from which to draw troops but had no leaders or staff experienced in managing large field forces, and it lacked the artillery, aviation, and other kinds of support so badly needed.

Since it would take the United States military establishment at least two years to move from a state of unpreparedness to one where it could place a fully equipped and properly staffed army in France, what better way to have American troops learn the art of war, save lives, and possibly hasten the end of the conflict than to amalgamate them into the depleted British and French armies.

Despite intense pressure from Allied leaders, Pershing vehemently opposed this plan and insisted that American troops must fight in an independent American army. Considerations of great-power diplomacy were paramount in Pershing's resistance to amalgamation. By failing to place an independent army in the field in France, the American war effort would appear half-hearted and would thereby weaken President Woodrow Wilson's bargaining position at the peace table. Other considerations also played a role. Pershing feared that differences in language, training, and morale were bound to lower the efficiency of the American troops. He also deeply resented the implication that the United States Army officer corps could not master the complexities of modern war, and he was determined to vindicate its professional reputation by having American officers command their own countrymen on the Western Front.

Pershing eventually prevailed on the question of an independent American army. However, lest the devastating German offensives of spring 1918 crush the Allies before such an

army could be created, he granted Gen. Ferdinand Foch, commander-in-chief of the Allied armies, temporary "use of American troops wherever and in any way they were needed."² American divisions became integral parts of the British and French armies, and were distributed to all parts of France; American headquarters retained no tactical control over them.³ By August 1918 the crisis had passed, and an independent American army became a reality, but not before inserting the troops into Allied armies had proved a costly and exasperating experience for many of the American units. No more was this apparent than with the American Twenty-eighth Division, which was a victim of mishandling by the French in three operations during the summer of 1918.

The first occurred during the Champagne-Marne phase of the second battle of the Marne. The American Twenty-eighth Division, which was organized around the Pennsylvania National Guard, popularly known as the Keystone Division, had arrived in France in mid-May 1918 and had trained for a month with the British forces in Picardy. While the Keystoneers were in training, the Germans mounted a devastating offensive against the French forces on the heights of Chemin des Dames and drove a sharp salient into the Allied line, bounded roughly by Rheims, Chateau-Thierry, and Soissons. Losses in the fighting at Chemin des Dames had seriously depleted French reserves, and at Foch's request Pershing moved the Keystone Division and four other American divisions from the British to the French front, "primarily as a precaution against another German movement toward Paris, but ultimately for possible use on the offensive."⁴ On June 22 the Keystone Division was attached to France's Sixth Army, and a week later the division, minus its artillery brigade, then still in training, went into the Chateau-Thierry sector of the line on the south face of the Marne salient.⁵

² Russell F. Weigley, *History of the United States Army* (New York, 1967), p. 383.

³ Shipley Thomas, *The History of the A.E.F.* (New York, 1920), pp. 79-80.

⁴ John J. Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, 2 vols. (New York, 1931), 2:95.

⁵ U. S., Department of the Army, *Order of Battle of the United States Land Forces in the World War: American Expeditionary Forces, Divisions* (Washington, 1931), p. 143; Ameri-



Marshal Ferdinand Foch, who was instrumental in stopping the enemy advance at the first battle of the Marne, later assumed unified command of the British, French, and American armies.

Thanks to careless German security and talkative prisoners, the French high command gleaned detailed information about an assault, code-named *Friedenssturm*, or peace offensive, that the Germans intended to launch in mid-July in the Chateau-Thierry and Rheims sectors with the intent of enlarging the Marne salient. Armed with this information, Gen. Philippe Pétain, commander-in-chief of the French army, instructed his army commanders in the threatened areas to strengthen their front line positions to keep the Germans from breaking through to the second defensive position.⁶ The

can Battle Monuments Commission, *28th Division: Summary of Operations in the World War* (Washington, 1944), p. 8.

⁶ U.S. Department of the Army, GHQ Special Instruction 5358, July 5, 1918, in *United States Army in the World War, 1917-1919*, 17 vols. (Washington, 1948), vol. 5, *Military Operations of the American Expeditionary Forces* (cited hereinafter as *USA/WW*). pp. 3-4.

commander of the French Sixth Army, Gen. Jean Degoutte, a heavy, mustachioed burgher, who held his command more as a result of his reputation as an aggressive fighter and his closeness to Foch than his ability as a military tactician, was particularly concerned about the French 125th Division. The division, which held the south bank of the Mame River about seven miles east of Chateau-Thierry, had been badly mauled in the struggle for Chemins des Dames and needed replacements. There were already reserve French divisions in the Chateau-Thierry sector from which replacements could have been drawn. Instead, the headquarters of the French Thirty-eighth Corps ordered Maj. Gen. Charles H. Muir, the portly commander of the Keystone Division, to send replacements from the Fifty-fifth Infantry Brigade, which was holding the second position in support of the French 125th Division. Muir preferred to send a regiment from the brigade and have it take over a section of the front line. But since the brigade had had no fighting experience, the French felt that its green regimental staff could not be entrusted with re-

Maj. Gen. Charles H. Muir, commander of the Keystone Division, was ordered to put his Infantry companies at the disposal of French military commanders.





German machinegun being fired at the 28th Division in Fismettes, second battle of the Marne.

sponsibility for defending a sector of the front at this critical juncture in the war and directed Muir to send infantry companies to the commander of the 125th Division to use as he saw fit.⁷

Responding to Muir's instructions, Brig. Gen. Thomas W. Darrah, commander of the Fifty-fifth Brigade, sent two companies each from the 109th and 110th U. S. *Infantry Regiments*. On the nights of July 9 and July 11, French staff officers sandwiched the four companies into the front line to fill the interstices of the 125th Division's undermanned battalions. Company L of the 109th Regiment was attached to the French 131st Infantry Regiment and took its place in the line north of Varennes. Companies B and C of the 110th Regiment were attached to the French 113th Infantry Regiment,

⁷ Col. Edwin L. King, chief of staff, Twenty-eighth Division, to commanding general, Fifty-fifth Brigade, July 8, 1918, Records of the American Expeditionary Forces, Record Group 120, National Archives (cited hereinafter as RG 120, NA).

stationed in the vicinity of Sauvigny, directly in the great bend of the river. And Company M of the 109th Regiment was attached to the French 113th Regiment northeast of Courthiézy. Each company was assigned responsibility for protecting approximately six hundred yards of the front and had a rifle platoon in pits along the outpost line on the river bank and had stationed the remaining three rifle platoons and the headquarters unit at the edge of the woods on high ground overlooking the river.⁸

Communication between these units and the French units to their right and left and the French and American units to their rear was maintained not by telephone, the lines of which were continually being severed, but by a system of runners carrying messages from platoons to company commanders and then to French battalion commanders.⁹ In addition, Darrah assigned a liaison officer to each French regimental headquarters with instructions to inspect the Keystoneers daily to insure that they knew and understood the orders issued by the

⁸ Col. Conrad H. Lanza, "The 109th Infantry in the Second Battle of the Marne from July 15th, 1918, to July 18th, 1918," *ibid.*

⁹ Darrah to commanding general, Twenty-eighth Division, July 21, 1918, *ibid.*

French commanders.¹⁰ The original orders issued by the commander of the French 125th Division instructed the units to withdraw from the outpost line to the high ground overlooking the river if the German attack was too strong. After the four companies of Keystoneers took their places in the line, however, he issued new orders directing the troops to hold all positions to the last man.¹¹

Throwing the Keystoneers piecemeal into the front line of the French Division was the real binger of disaster for the American infantrymen. Trained primarily for "open warfare" they had never been exposed to "trench warfare" and French defensive tactics.¹² Moreover, they were still new to the war and had yet to learn that French officers often failed to relay changes in orders, or that when the war-weary French poilu said, "Nous resterons là," he was uttering so much mannerly malarkey.¹³ More important, liaison was poor because the company commanders, none of whom understood French,

had to depend upon French battalion commanders for orders.¹⁴ Concerned about the language barrier, Maj. Edward M. Martin, the first liaison officer assigned to the French 113th Regiment, suggested that he be permitted to carry out direct liaison with the three companies of Keystoneers attached to that regiment. But the French regimental commander declined this offer as unnecessary.¹⁵ As a result, on the eve of *Friedenssturm* more than nine hundred utterly green Keystoneers found themselves scattered along the French front line, with no inkling of how the French planned to repulse the imminent assault and no effective liaison with them.

Friedenssturm began at 12:10 the morning of July 15 with a massive artillery bombardment.

¹⁰ p. 99; Lawrence Stallings, *The Doughboys: The Story of the AEF, 1917-1918* (New York, 1963), p. 124.

¹¹ Col. Edward M. Martin, *The Twenty-Eighth Division: Pennsylvania's Guard in the World War*, 5 vols. (Pittsburgh, 1923-24), 5:135.

¹² Statement of Maj. Edward M. Martin, 110th Infantry, n.d., RG 120, NA.

¹⁰ Darrach to Lanza, n.d., *ibid.*

¹¹ Brig. Gen. Wilds P. Richardson, "Fifty-fifth Brigade—Report of Operations While Serving as a Unit of a French Corps," *ibid.*; General Headquarters, G-3 reports, *ibid.*

¹² Diary of Pvt. Charles G. Pflugfelder, 109th Infantry, Papers of Karl Bretzfelder, U.S. Army Military History Research Collection, Carlisle Barracks, Pa.

¹³ H. Essame, *The Battle for Europe, 1918* (New York, 1972),

French ambulance ferrying the wounded from the front at Chateau-Thierry, July 1918.



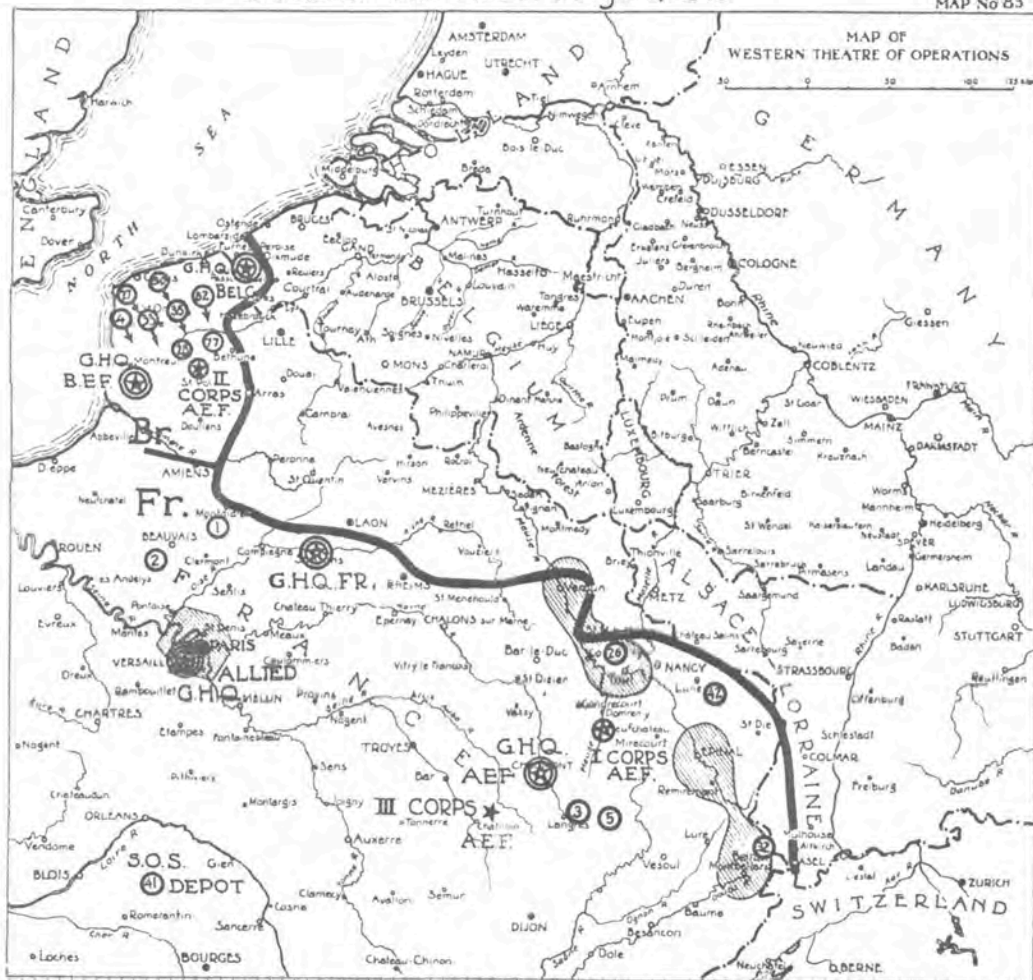
In the Chateau-Thierry sector, particularly in that section of the front held by the French 125th Division, the hurricane of shells was devastating. Within ten minutes all telephone liaison between the front line and the second defensive position was severed, and within an hour the "frightful blanket of fire" had inflicted heavy casualties on the stunned defenders and had torn gaping holes in the forward line along the riverbank. At 3:30 A.M. the Germans dropped smokebombs on the south bank of the Marne, and behind a rolling barrage, assault troops stormed across the smoke-and-fog-wreathed river, using rafts and pontoon bridges. French and American riflemen and machine gunners,

firing almost point-blank, killed hundreds of the attackers, while German machineguns on the north bank maintained a steady din, keeping many of the gassed and shell-shocked defenders down in their holes. In minutes the shell-and-bullet-churned Marne was choked with hundreds of German corpses. But the murderous German bombardment had left the defenders so disorganized that they were unable to prevent the Germans from sweeping

Position of Allied and American forces as the Germans attempted to cut the British off and begin an all-out drive to end the war before the Americans arrived in overwhelming numbers.

BUILDING THE A.E.F. May 27, 1918.

MAP No 83



Reprinted of the General Service School, Fort Leavenworth, Mo. 1923

History of the War in France, C. G. Rowland

with the exception of shooting them to prevent them from retiring, but was unable to stop them. There was no attempt made to notify anyone.¹⁷

At least one platoon commander of the French regiment did send word to a neighboring Keystone platoon that he was retiring.¹⁸ If any of the other French officers sent word to nearby platoons that they were retiring, the runners conveying it were killed before they could deliver the message or its import was lost in translation.

With the 113th Regiment routed, the Germans were now able to outflank the French 131st Regiment. The 131st, following the custom the French had employed earlier when superior numbers and the intensity of the attack made it necessary, "dropped back at the coming of the shock troops to take up stronger positions, and to harass with artillery and machinegun fire the crest of the advancing wave."¹⁹ The "yielding defense" of the 131st Regiment caught the Keystoners of Company L off guard. They had not been trained in this method of defense and did not receive word from the French that they were dropping back. They realized that the French had withdrawn only when they saw German soldiers suddenly appear on their flanks.²⁰

The retreat of the French had left the four companies of Keystoners to flounder in a sea of attacking Germans. Following the path of least resistance, the Germans poured through the yawning gaps created by the retreating French, surged up out of the river bottom, and pressed on southward into Bois de Condé, leaving behind holding forces to mop up the outnumbered and exposed Keystoners, who were milling about in small groups at intervals of several thousand feet. In each of the four companies, the platoons stationed along the river bank were virtually annihilated. The supporting platoons on the slopes were also engulfed by the German onrush, and throughout the day they alternately fought and fell back

toward the second position of resistance held by the Fifty-fifth Brigade.

In Company L of the 109th Regiment, the platoon along the riverbank was wiped out shortly after dawn. The three platoons on the slopes above the river held out until eight o'clock in the morning and then, in a flurry of hand-to-hand fighting, were overwhelmed by the onrushing Germans. Capt. James A. Cousart, acting company commander, and a handful of men were quickly severed from the main body of troops and taken prisoner. However, Cousart's second-in-command, Lt. James B. Schock, rounded up forty men, organized them into a rough circle, and began edging back the three miles to the second position, occupied by the 109th Regiment in Bois de Rougis. Picking up men along the way, firing from behind trees, using bayonets and grenades, Schock's group made it back to the regimental headquarters at eight o'clock that evening. During the night other members of Company L drifted in, but only seventy-seven were left of the more than two hundred members of Company L who had moved up to the Marne four days before. The rest were killed or captured; many of those who were captured had been wounded.²¹

In Company B of the 110th Regiment, the Third Platoon had just arrived at the outpost line to relieve the Fourth platoon when the first German shells fell. The two platoons immediately took refuge in rifle pits and for three hours endured a shattering avalanche of high explosives and poison gas shells with almost no protection overhead. As the German bombardment relented to permit the river to be crossed, those lucky enough to be alive emerged from their holes, set up *Chauchat* automatic rifles, and repeatedly repelled determined German attempts to cross the Marne on their front. Germans crossing at points left vacant by the retreating French, however, rapidly outflanked them, and, during a momentary lull in the fighting, survivors of the two platoons withdrew to a railroad embankment about one hundred fifty yards to the rear. There they established a new defensive line, but were again outflanked by

¹⁷ Statement of Thompson, 110th Infantry, n.d., RG 120, NA.

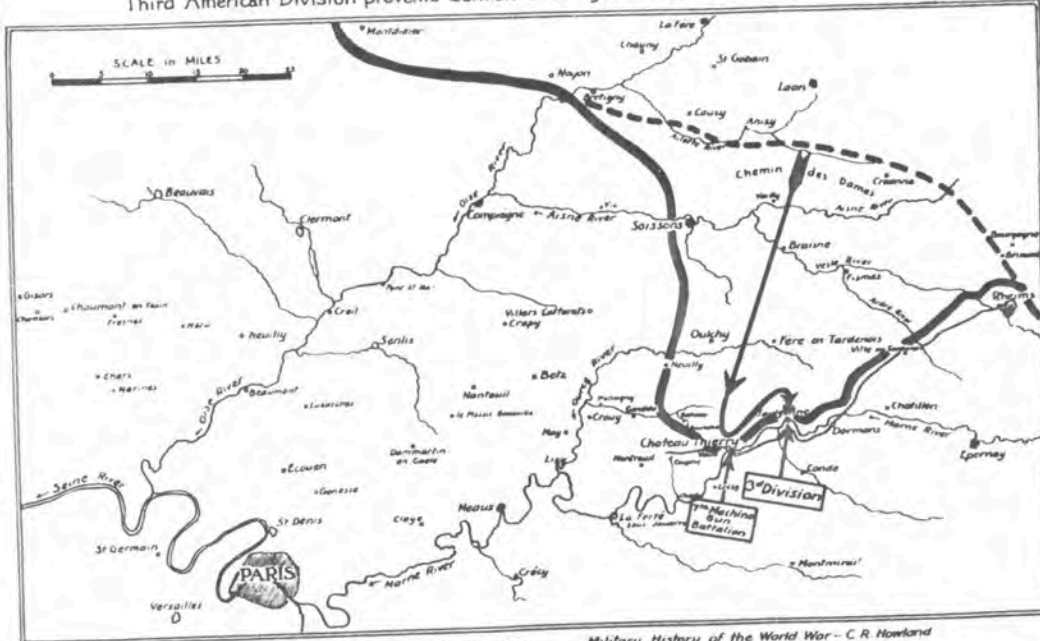
¹⁸ Statement of Lt. Gilmore F. Haymen, Company B, 110th Infantry, n.d., *ibid.*

¹⁹ Martin, *The Twenty-Eighth Division*, 5:134.

²⁰ Statement of Lt. Col. Wallace W. Fetzer, 110th Infantry, liaison officer assigned to the 131st Regiment, n.d.; Darrah to commanding general, Twenty-eighth Division, July 21, 1918, RG 120, NA.

²¹ Lieutenant Schock, Company L, 109th Infantry, to commanding officer, 109th Infantry, July 19, 1918, *ibid.*; "Fifty-fifth Brigade—Narrative of Events, July 17, 1918," *ibid.*; H. G. Proctor, *The Iron Division: The National Guard of Pennsylvania in the World War* (Philadelphia, 1919), pp. 63-65.

Third American Division prevents German Crossing of the Marne (May-June 1918) MAP No. 93



After a long forced march to reach the battlefield, the Third Division, assisting the French, stopped the Germans at Chateau-Thierry and forced them back across the Marne at Jaulgonne.

the Germans. They then split into small groups and, covered by teams with automatic rifles, crawled through a wheatfield to Bois de Condé, where they found a weak point in the circle of attacking Germans and broke through. Alternately firing and falling back, they reached the lines of the Fifty-fifth Brigade that night, leaving behind many prisoners and many dead.²²

The support platoons of Company B were situated approximately a thousand yards to the rear of the outpost line. The Second Platoon observed the Germans advancing on their front at about 4:30 A.M. As related by Lt. Claude W. Smith, platoon commander:

My position was reinforced with two [French] machine guns . . . and . . . we stopped the front line and there was a slight pause in the fighting until they came up in waves and we had considerable action with them until the French retired on my left flank

²² Statement of Lt. Alben E. Jones, Company B, 110th Infantry, n.d., RG 120, NA; Association of the 110th Infantry, *The History of the 110th Infantry (10th Pennsylvania) of the 28th Division, U.S.A., 1917-1919* (Pittsburgh, 1920), p. 53.

after an hour and a half of fighting. . . . I sent word . . . [the First Platoon] that I was going to retire as we were being fired on from both flanks and the rear as well as from the front. We moved out in squad column with automatic rifles right and left for about 75 yards, when we stopped and fired toward my right flank and then continued and took up position on the first road leading to French Battalion Headquarters, where we made a slight stand and then retired to the crossroads, and took up position there in connection with the French. . . . We held this position until the action stopped.²³

The First Platoon was separated in the dense woods as it began to withdraw after receiving word to fall back from Capt. William Fish, the company commander. One group, under the command of Lt. Gilmore F. Haymen, made it to safety. The others suffered a different fate. Harassed by German machinegun and light artillery fire, they moved northeasterly toward the Marne in hope of circling a large force of Germans who had outflanked them. But they ran into another German force and, after two running skirmishes, were taken prisoner at 3:30 in the afternoon.²⁴

²³ Statement of Lieutenant Smith, Company B, 110th Infantry, n.d., RG 120, NA.

²⁴ Statement of Lieutenant Haymen, Company B, 110th In-

Captain Fish was at company headquarters a short distance to the rear of the support platoons when the barrage started. As related by Darrah:

Captain Fish went to his dugouts when the barrage started, and when the barrage lifted, worked from his Company Headquarters. . . . The first intimation he had that he was being flanked was when a crowd of French soldiers came running down the road past his headquarters from the direction of the headquarters of the French battalion which they were with. They said the Boche were coming down the road. He sent a man to find out if it was true, and this man just got a little way from his headquarters when he found the Germans were coming. He was fired at 6 times and ran back and told Captain Fish the Germans were coming. Captain Fish then sent word to Lts. Hamen [sic] and Smith to withdraw their platoons . . . and with the men left with him moved over the crossroad down which the first and 2nd platoons would have to come in withdrawing. When he got to this road, the French had placed two automatic rifles there and were firing directly towards the first and second platoons, or the direction in which they would have to come back. He stopped the fire and the French then withdrew to the next cross-road. He followed them back. These were the first French troops he saw endeavoring to make a stand. Lt. Smith came along with his platoon and they withdrew to the position where the French were at the next cross-road. Captain Fish had attempted to obtain information from Battalion and regimental headquarters as to what the French proposed doing and found no one at either place. They waited at the cross-roads for some time and were again attacked by the Germans, resisting there until one man was killed and four wounded, and they were again glanked [sic], withdrawing and taking up another position where they continued resisting. The French, to the extent of about forty men took part in these stands. . . . Captain Fish says very soon after the barrage lifted the French troops began coming to the rear and except for the forty mentioned above, he saw no French attempt to make a stand.²⁵

Company B was more fortunate; it suffered the fewest casualties of the four Pennsylvania companies attached to the French 125th Division. Of more than two hundred men on duty with the company, one hundred-fifty-two eventually reached the safety of the second position.²⁶

In Company C of the 110th Regiment, the pla-

toon stationed along the river repelled all German attempts to cross, using rifle grenades to sink several rafts loaded with Germans. After daybreak, however, the platoon was rushed from the rear by Germans who had crossed the river at points left vacant by the French. With their backs to the Mame, the heavily outnumbered Keystoneers mowed down many of the onrushing Germans, but were unable to stem the inexorable tide and following fierce hand-to-hand fighting, all of them were killed or captured. Shortly afterward the three platoons of Company C in the woods to the rear also felt the brunt of the German onrush. Like the doomed platoon along the river, they held the Germans ahead of them at bay but were overtaken from the rear. At this point, Lt. Wilbur Schell and Capt. Charles L. McLain, an observer on temporary duty with Company C, gathered together the survivors of the company and retreated to a wheatfield. As soon as they started across the field, hidden enemy machineguns open up and "cut them to ribbons." Only twenty-five men fought their way free of this grim trap. Company C suffered the heaviest casualties of the four companies. Of two hundred men present at the opening of the battle, forty-eight were killed or died of wounds; one hundred twenty-six were taken prisoner.²⁷

Company M of the 109th Regiment was cut off by the Germans crossing the Mame on the sector held by the French Fifty-first Division. In a desperate tangle of fighting, the company was divided into three groups. Capt. Edward P. Mackey, the company commander, and a dozen men were quickly separated and escaped through the German-infested woods. Lt. Thomas B. Fales assumed command of the main body and, with thirty-five men and six German prisoners, slowly fell back to the new position taken up by the French 113th Regiment, reaching it at 12:10 in the afternoon.²⁸ The third segment was the platoon led by Lt. Martin L. Wheeler. Though badly wounded in the hand, Wheeler scouted an escape route through the woods and held off the Germans while the surviving members of his platoon regrouped and

antry, n.d., *ibid.*; Assn. of the 110th Infantry, *The History of the 110th Infantry*, pp. 53-54.

²⁵ Statement of Captain Fish, Company B, 110th Infantry, as related by Darrah, n.d., RG 120, NA.

²⁶ "Fifty-fifth Brigade - Narrative of Events, July 17, 1918," *ibid.*

²⁷ Assn. of the 110th Infantry, *History of the 110th Infantry*, pp. 55-57.

²⁸ Lt. Thomas B. Fales, Company M, 109th Infantry, to commanding officer, 109th Infantry, July 19, 1918, RG 120, NA.



Pontoon bridge in use at Chateau-Thierry.

started a fighting retreat.²⁹ Altogether, eighty-three of the 239 men on duty with the company reached safety.

Even as remnants of the four companies were fighting their way back to the safety of the second position, the German offensive was grinding to a halt all along the front. At no point were the Germans able to breach the second position, and on July 18 the French launched counter-offensives in the Soissons and Chateau-Thierry sectors that forced the reluctant Germans to admit defeat and to begin evacuating the Mame salient. In the meantime, survivors of the four companies were temporarily reformed into two companies and reassigned to their respective regiments. On July 21, the Fifty-fifth Brigade was pulled out of the line and sent to a rest area several miles to the rear. There the four companies were refilled with replacements to make up for the approximately five hundred fifty casualties they had suffered in the fighting at the Mame.

The second episode occurred during the Aisne-Mame phase of the second battle of the

Mame. On July 21, 1918, leading columns of the French Sixth Army crossed the Mame River and pursued the retreating Germans down the spine of the Mame salient, reaching the heights south of the Ourcq River July 27. At this point two conflicting purposes clashed. The Germans, recognizing the need to delay the French advance so that they might remove the immense quantities of war material brought into the salient for the *Friedenssturm*, decided to hold the Ourcq line five days longer. The line was ideal for the Germans' purpose, although the river itself, only six feet wide and a foot deep, was an insignificant stream. From the slopes north of the river, however, the Germans commanded the entire ground south of the river over which the French Sixth Army would advance. Along these slopes they stationed fresh troops and set up hundreds of carefully camouflaged machineguns with interlocking fields of fire, amply supported by artillery. General Degoutte, thinking that the Germans would not make a serious stand at the Ourcq, intended to cross the river quickly to hasten the German retreat to the Vesle River. His thrust was to be carried out from left to right by the American Forty-second Division, the Fifty-fifth Brigade of the Keystone Division, and the American Third Division.³⁰

From the outset, things went badly for the Fifty-fifth Brigade. Recuperating at a rest area

²⁹ Col. Millard D. Brown, commanding officer, 109th Infantry, to commanding general, Twenty-eighth Division, July 22, 1918, *ibid.*; Proctor, *The Iron Division*, pp. 65-67.

³⁰ Van Every, *The A.E.F. in Battle*, pp. 155-156.

south of the Mame, the brigade received orders at two o'clock on the morning of July 27 to participate in the advance, scheduled to begin that evening. Most of the day was spent marching north to the front, a march made difficult by the Germans' intermittent shelling and by drenching sheets of rain that turned the roads into bogs of deep mud. By the time the brigade relieved the French Thirty-ninth Division at the front line in the vicinity of Courmont, it was early morning of July 28, the jump-off time for the brigade's advance having been postponed because of bad weather, and the men were utterly fatigued. In one respect the brigade was fortunate that it had been delayed in reaching the Thirty-ninth Division. The original orders from the headquarters of the French Sixth Army called for the brigade to push forward during the night of July 27-28 "with cold steel only," an absurd decision, since there was virtually no chance that the maneuver would catch the Germans by surprise.³¹ Other factors, though, worked against the brigade. It had arrived at the front too late to reconnoiter the ground over which it was to advance. And, since the Keystone Division's artillery brigade was in training elsewhere, it was compelled to depend upon the French Thirty-ninth Division for artillery support.

The French Sixth Army's assault began at daybreak July 28. The Fifty-fifth Brigade was not ready to move because the change in position of the day before had prevented General Darrah from reestablishing effective liaison with the artillery commander of the Thirty-ninth Division. General Muir, however, under pressure from the French Sixth Army and the French Thirty-eighth Corps headquarters insisted that an attack be undertaken as soon as possible.³² At 4:30 A.M. the Fifty-fifth Brigade, with the 110th Regiment in the lead and the 109th Regiment supporting, pushed forward down the exposed slopes leading to the Ourcq but with no preliminary softening up by the artillery. Almost immediately the Keystoneers ran into deadly accurate fire from innumerable machineguns and from artillery. The bullets seemed "as thick as flies," and Keystoneers

went down in large numbers, hit by vicious fire from the chattering guns, particularly those firing from flanking positions near Bois des Grimpettes, the sector defended by the American Third Division.³³ Braving the enemy fire and leaving behind a trail of dead and wounded, the leading battalions of the 110th Regiment managed to cross the Ourcq before they were forced to fall back and take refuge in the river bottom. The French, who now knew that the Germans would make a determined stand to defend the Ourcq, thereupon ordered the Fifty-fifth Brigade to join the American Third Division in an assault on Bois des Grimpettes that afternoon. The orders were received too late for Darrah to coordinate his attack with that of the Third Division, and most of the meager ten-minute artillery barrage provided by the Thirty-ninth Division fell uselessly on the slopes leading from the Ourcq to Bois des Grimpettes, where there were no Germans. As a result, when the Keystoneers again attacked at 4:30 P.M., deadly enfilade fire prevented them from making significant headway and forced them to fall back to the river bottom.³⁴

Everywhere along the front, the advance of the French Sixth Army was blunted July 28. Degoutte, however, felt that the failure to advance was more the result of lack of will on the part of the Americans than that the Germans were strongly entrenched. Undeterred, he ordered another attack to be carried out in the pre-dawn hours of the next morning. Acting on army and corps instructions, Muir at 2:50 A.M., gave orders for Darrah to launch a third attack within the hour in conjunction with the American Third Division.³⁵ Owing to the delay in receiving the orders, the Fifty-fifth Brigade did not begin its advance until 4:45 A.M. As with the second attack on July 28, there was little time to coordinate the maneuver with that of the American Third Division and artillery support received from the French Thirty-ninth Division. German machinegun fire, as withering as that on the first day of battle, took a heavy toll but losses were not as serious. Earlier,

³¹ Thirty-eighth French Army Corps, Order no. 164, July 26, 1918, *USA/WW*, 5:559; Lanza, "The Passage of the Ourcq By the 28th Division," RG 120, NA.

³² Darrah to Lanza, n.d., *ibid.*

³³ Diary of Pvt. Owen M. Serene, 110th Infantry, Bretzfelder Papers.

³⁴ American Battle Monuments Commission, *The 28th Division: Summary of Operations*; Lanza, "Passage of the Ourcq," RG 120, NA.

³⁵ Twenty-eighth Division, Field Order no. 7, July 29, 1918, *USA/WW*, 5:626.

the Keystoneers had plunged ahead shoulder to shoulder, in regular skirmish lines, but they had now learned to deploy themselves widely, to rush forward in short sallies, and to slither through open territory one man at a time.³⁶ In this way German machinegunners could hit only a single man with a burst of fire rather than a dozen or so.

Slowly but steadily pushing forward, two battalions from the 110th Regiment reached the edge of Bois des Grimpettes and the crest of Hill 188, immediately to the west of the woods. There they came under machinegun fire from Cierges as well as from Bois des Grimpettes, and, after holding their position for a short time, they dispersed and retired to the lower slopes of Hill 188. Darrah was ordered to make a fourth attack at three o'clock that afternoon, again in conjunction with the American Third Division. This attack, which was not carried out until five o'clock because of delay in receiving orders, likewise failed. Artillery support was ineffective, and the American Third Division, expecting to be relieved by the American Thirty-second Division that night, did not join in the attack at all. The day ended with the Keystoneers only slightly in advance of where they had been the day before.³⁷

The Fifty-fifth Brigade's inability to make significant gains July 29 was matched by that of the American Forty-second and Third divisions. Nevertheless, Degoutte was more than ready to press ahead, and at 2:35 A.M. the next morning Muir, on French instructions, ordered the Fifty-fifth Brigade to make a fifth attack, beginning at 3:45. This attack was to be carried out jointly with the American Thirty-second Division.³⁸ Again there was almost no time to coordinate the attacking units, although there was better, albeit still inadequate, artillery support than was provided for the earlier attacks. Two battalions from the 110th Regiment gained the crest of Hill 188 by 5:45 A.M. and penetrated the western portion of Bois des Grimpettes. But deadly enfilade fire from Bois des Grimpettes and Cierges prevented further advance up Hill 188 and forced the men to retire. The remainder

of the morning was spent preparing for a new attack to begin at 2:30 that afternoon. In this instance, given a modicum of time to prepare properly for the attack, Darrah and Maj. Edward M. Martin, acting commander of the 110th Regiment, were finally able to coordinate their assault with that of the American Thirty-second Division and, by having the French artillery commander brought to brigade headquarters, provided for effective artillery support.³⁹ This time the attack was successful. Advancing behind a rolling barrage, the 110th Regiment, with the assistance of several companies from the 109th Regiment, captured the western and southern edges of Bois des Grimpettes and moved into Cierges. Unable to hold Cierges, the Keystoneers pulled back to the northern edge of Bois des Grimpettes, where, at dusk, they repelled a desperate German counterattack.⁴⁰ That night the thoroughly exhausted Fifty-fifth Brigade was relieved and sent to a rest area.

The capture of Bois des Grimpettes by the Fifty-fifth Brigade and the American Thirty-second Division provided the French with their first tactical success on the Ourcq line and opened the way for thrusts that forced the Germans to evacuate their positions along the line during the night of August 1-2. In many respects, however, the battle at the Ourcq was a hollow victory for Degoutte. The German high command had planned to delay the French pursuit at the Ourcq for five days and in this they had succeeded.⁴¹ For the Fifty-fifth Brigade, crossing the Ourcq had been costly. It suffered nearly fourteen hundred casualties, three hundred of whom were killed outright or later died of their wounds.⁴²

Questions may be raised about the conduct of a number of high-ranking officers of the Fifty-fifth Brigade during the fighting at the Ourcq. Darrah erred in permitting the 110th Regiment to carry the burden of the fighting and in having attacked on so wide a front with only a few troops.⁴³ There were further difficulties involving Col. George E. Kemp, commander of the 110th Regiment, and Col. Millard D. Brown,

³⁶ Darrah to Lanza, n.d., RG 120, NA.

³⁷ American Battle Monuments Commn., *The 28th Division: Summary of Operations*, pp. 20-21.

³⁸ Twenty-eighth Division, Field Order no. 8, July 30, 1918, USA/WW, 5:627.

³⁹ Darrah to Lanza, n.d., RG 120, NA; Assn. of the 110th Infantry, *The History of the 110th Infantry*, pp. 62-65.

⁴⁰ Proctor, *The Iron Division*, pp. 142-156.

⁴¹ Van Every, *The A.E.F. in Battle*, p. 178.

⁴² American Battle Monuments Commn., *The 28th Division: Summary of Operations*, pp. 35-36.

⁴³ Lanza, "Passage of the Ourcq," RG 120, NA.

commander of the 109th Regiment, that led Darrah to relieve them at the height of the battle.⁴⁴ But these events in the brigade's struggle to cross the Ourcq were secondary to the problems stemming from its attachment to the French army. During the fighting at the river, the headquarters of the French Sixth Army and the French Thirty-eighth Corps consistently failed to give the brigade sufficient advance notice so that it could organize and prepare for the scheduled attacks. As Darrah stated:

It is understood that orders were issued at Division Hq as soon as instructions were received from Corps, but it may be pointed out that nightly instructions, e.g. a telephone message at 2:00 A.M. to attack at 3:40 A.M., do not give opportunity for reconnaissance, for the preparation of a well considered plan, nor for the preparation and distribution of the necessary orders. The uncoordinated efforts of single division did not obtain any decisive results.⁴⁵

In this respect the Keystoneers were learning a lesson that the English had already learned at a dear price; namely, that French command and staff methods were at best disorganized.⁴⁶ Moreover, the brigade had lacked adequate artillery support in all but the most recent attack. As Col. Edward L. King, chief of staff of the Keystone Division, later pointed out, this was attributable in great degree "to French confusion, for want of a better word, partly due to difficulties of language with all that it implies, [and] partly to lack of good communications."⁴⁷ Consequently, Keystoneers were forced to assault a strong position with minimal artillery preparation and suffered excessive casualties.

The third episode occurred during the Oise-Aisne operation. After cracking the Ourcq line,



Brig. Gen. Edward L. King, 65th Brigade, 33rd Division, at the brigade post command, Willeroncourt, Meuse, France, making an observation.

the French Sixth Army renewed its pursuit of the retreating Germans. The pursuit came to an end August 6 when it reached the city of Fismes on the south bank of the Vesle River. Probing attacks across the river, in which the Keystoneers established bridgeheads in the vicinity of Chateau du Diable, about a mile west of Fismes,

⁴⁴ The replacing of colonels Kemp and Brown is shrouded in controversy. Darrah, a regular army officer, asserts that they were relieved "for inefficiency known to the Division Commander" and "demonstrated . . . throughout this action." Darrah to Lanza, n.d., *ibid.* Edward M. Martin, Pennsylvania's most prominent guardsman, however, states that colonels Kemp and Brown were "two fine and conscientious officers" who were victims of Darrah's prejudice against National Guard officers. Martin, *The Twenty-eighth Division*, 5:161-162.

⁴⁵ Darrah to Lanza, n.d., RG 120, NA.

⁴⁶ Essame, *The Battle for Europe*, p. 99.

⁴⁷ Brig. Gen. Wild P. Richardson, "Fifty-fifth Brigade—Report of Operations While Serving as a Unit of a French Corps," RG 120, NA; General Headquarters, G-3 reports, *ibid.*; memorandum, Col. E. L. King to Lanza, ca. Oct. 10, 1920, *ibid.*

and in the southern and eastern corners of Fismette, a small suburb of Fismes, indicated that the Germans intended to hold the Vesle line and that a full-scale assault against the German position on the heights north of the river would be too costly. Accordingly, the French high command decided to await the results of offensives elsewhere before pushing on to the Aisne River. On August 8 General Degoutte ordered his corps commanders to "establish themselves on their positions south of the river" and to take no action in force north of the river. They were, however, to hold the small bridgeheads already established so as "to give the enemy the impression that they were making preparations for a vigorous attack."⁴⁸ The bridgeheads were to be held with a minimum of troops, and patrols of not greater than company strength were to be sent out to maintain contact with the enemy.⁴⁹

Both Maj. Gen. Robert L. Bullard, commander of the American Third Corps, the tactical unit to which the Keystone Division was now attached, and General Muir considered the bridgehead strategy unsound. German artillery commanded the river crossings, and "it did not make sense to the American generals to hazard men's lives" to hold on to obviously vulnerable bridgeheads.⁵⁰ But Degoutte insisted that they be held. In part, his insistence was based on French military doctrine. The French, as related by Brig. Gen. Alfred W. Bjornstad, chief of staff of the American Third Corps, considered rivers as obstacles and felt they could not speedily resume the offensive in the Fismes sector unless the bridgeheads were held. Bullard's counter-argument that the Vesle itself was not a serious obstacle and "that it was better to keep on our side of the river" and cross only when the Germans evacuated the heights was rejected out of hand.⁵¹ Personal factors also

played a role in Degoutte's thinking. Rumors abounded that the French high command planned to break up the Sixth Army to replace losses in other armies, and Degoutte feared that he would be reduced to a corps commander in this consolidation if he deviated from the high command's directive.⁵²

On August 10 and 11 the Keystoners carried out local attacks to secure the Fismette bridgehead. But each time they emerged from their hideouts in the cellars of the ruined buildings along the east-west street closest to the river, they were turned back by murderous German machinegun and sniper fire from the steep slopes surrounding the village.⁵³ For the next ten days the Keystoners clung to a corner of Fismette at a heavy cost in casualties. The Germans occupied the northwest corner of the village, and at night German patrols roamed the streets, lobbing "potato mashers" into the buildings and setting up sniper posts. Two companies of Keystoners were normally stationed in Fismette, and except for a few lookouts they spent their days crouching in cellar hideouts, listening to their artillery shell the German positions and suffering the return German barrages. To make matters worse, on more than one occasion the Keystoners had to endure "unders" (short-falling rounds) from their own artillery, the result of "the worn riflings of the 75's" the French had palmed off on the division's artillery brigade.⁵⁴ Machinegun and sniper fire swept the broken stone bridge connecting Fismes and Fismette, and incoming and outgoing reliefs could dart across the rubble of the bridge only at intervals, one man at a time. In the blistering August heat, the unburied dead provided a feast for flies and yellowjackets, and clouds of poison gas mingled with the stench of charred buildings and high explosives, but worst of all was the awful odor of putrefying flesh that hung over the village. Those who were in Fismes and on the slopes south of the river were not much better off, since every building, crossroads, and well for a

⁴⁸ Ferdinand Foch, *The Memoirs of Marshal Foch* (Garden City, 1931), p. 368.

⁴⁹ Brig. Gen. A. W. Bjornstad, chief of staff, American Third Corps, to commanding general, Twenty-eighth Division, Aug. 10, 1918, USA/WW, 6:118-119.

⁵⁰ Edward M. Collman, *The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I* (New York, 1968), p. 258.

⁵¹ U. S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Military Affairs, *Nomination of Col. Alfred W. Bjornstad, U. S. Army, for Promotion to Be a Brigadier General*, Hearings, 68 Cong., 2 sess., pp. 263-264.

⁵² Robert Lee Bullard, *Personalities and Reminiscences of the War* (Garden City, 1925), p. 229.

⁵³ Thomas J. Gallagher to Hervey Allen, Aug. 20, 1934, and J. Earle Sheffer to Allen, Sept. 14, 1934, Hervey Allen Papers, University of Pittsburgh Libraries; Hervey Allen, *Toward the Flame: A War Diary*, 2d ed. (New York, 1934), pp. 232-277.

⁵⁴ Fred W. Blewitt to Allen, Aug. 2, 1934, Allen Papers.

distance of ten miles behind the line had been registered and was a target of German artillery.⁵⁵

On August 22 Keystoneers from the 112th U. S. Infantry Regiment of the Fifty-sixth Infantry Brigade ousted the Germans from the north-west corner of Fismette. For the first time, the village was entirely in American hands. However, German artillery and machineguns still made life in the village miserable, and it was evident to the regimental commander, Col. George C. Rickards, that the Germans might easily swoop down from the surrounding slopes and overwhelm the defenders before help could arrive from Fismes. In the afternoon of August 26 Bullard and Muir visited Rickards's advance headquarters in Fismes. Both agreed with his assessment that the Germans could recapture Fismette at will, and, before leaving Fismes, Bullard approved Muir's order that the "uselessly small bridgehead" be evacuated that night. But upon returning to his own headquarters Bullard learned that Degoutte had visited his staff in his absence and that Bjornstad had informed Degoutte that the Fismette garrison was to be evacuated. Degoutte immediately countermanded Muir's order and later phoned Bullard to censure him for approving the evacuation. The orders to the Keystoneers remained the same: Hold Fismette.⁵⁶

A German attempt to recapture Fismette was not long in coming. At four o'clock in the morning of August 27, just after Companies G and H of the 112th Regiment had relieved two of their sister companies in Fismette, the Germans began a punishing barrage on the village. Twenty minutes later the shelling shifted to Fismes effectively sealing off Fismette with a wall of shrapnel and gas. Suddenly, more than a thousand crack German assault troops swarmed down into Fismette. By the time the dazed Keystoneers stumbled out of their cellar hideouts and set up their *Chauchats*, the Germans were storming the outlying houses, using flamethrowers and "potato mashers" to rout the defenders from their strongpoints. In minutes the engagement became a tangle of vicious house-

to-house fighting in which smoke and fog make it exceedingly difficult to distinguish friend from foe.

The Germans quickly set up a machinegun on the street leading to "Bridge Street," down which the Keystoneers entered the village in crossing the Vesle from Fismes. From this position they blocked the escape route of Company G, which held most of Fismette west of "Bridge Street," and proceeded to surround and kill or capture one group of the company after another. Only a handful or so of men from Company G managed to escape, swimming the Vesle.⁵⁷ Company H, which was situated astride "Bridge Street," held on until 5:30 A.M., killing many Germans with hand grenades and automatic rifle fire. Then someone in an American uniform (undoubtedly a German in the opinion of Muir, since the Keystoneers had encountered Germans masquerading as Americans before) ran down the street shouting that further resistance was useless and that the company's officers had ordered everyone to surrender.⁵⁸ Most members of Company H ignored this order. But a few, already confused by the strange melee, hesitated, enabling the Germans to penetrate the company's perimeter. With Germans inside its perimeter, Company H finally gave way, although one group of eight Keystoneers, led by Lt. Benjamin B. Turner, held out in the house closest to the Vesle long enough to permit thirty or so of their comrades to escape across the river to Fismes. When the Germans started shelling the house, Turner's group also escaped, crossing the Vesle at a makeshift dam below Fismette.⁵⁹ Of 236 Keystoneers in Fismette, approximately seventy-five were killed and 127 were taken prisoner.⁶⁰

After the Germans recaptured Fismette, rela-

⁵⁵ John F. Joline, Jr., to Allen, Aug. 27, 1926, Allen Papers.

⁵⁶ Muir to commanding general, American Third Corps, Aug. 30, 1918, RG 120, NA.

⁵⁷ Statements of Lt. George Riggs, Cpl. Frank Moteley, and Lt. Benjamin E. Turner, members of Company H, 112th Infantry, Aug. 27, 1918, and Maj. Gen. William Weigel, commanding general, Fifty-sixth Brigade, to commanding general, Twenty-eighth Division, Aug. 29, 1918, *ibid.*; James A. Murrin, *With the 112th in France: A Doughboy's Story of the War* (Philadelphia, 1919), pp. 193-210.

⁵⁸ *Pennsylvania in the World War: An Illustrated History of the Twenty-Eighth Division* (prepared under direction of division commanding officers), 2 vols. (Pittsburgh, 1921), 2: 583; Martin, *The Twenty-eighth Division*, 3:119.

⁵⁵ Diary of Pvt. George F. Hooker, 109th Infantry, Bretzfelder Papers.

⁵⁶ Allan R. Millett, *The General: Robert L. Bullard and Officership in the United States Army, 1881-1925* (Westport, Conn., 1975), pp. 386 and 388; Martin, 5:203-204.

tive calm settled over the Fismes sector until September 3 when the Germans, their flank turned by a French attack elsewhere, began retreating to the Aisne River. In the meantime, Degoutte attempted to make amends for his part in the loss of the Keystoneers at Fismette by citing the division for breaking up a German counteroffensive, a fanciful interpretation of what everyone knew was merely a raid. But Bullard, who considered the affair the one accident of his long military career, was not mollified. And in reporting the affair to Pershing, he complained bitterly that Degoutte had unnecessarily sacrificed his men.⁶¹

The affairs at the Marne crossings, the Ourcq, and at Fismette were bitter for Pershing to swallow. From the outset of the amalgamation controversy, Allied leaders had argued that inserting Americans into Allied units would make the best use of the American forces. Their arguments were often accompanied by derogatory remarks about American staffs and higher commanders, and there were patronizing suggestions that American soldiers would be better served if they were led by battle-wise Allied commanders. The experiences of the Keystone Division gave the lie to that specious argument and crystallized Pershing's opposition to amalgamation.⁶² □

Headquarters Company, 110th Infantry, 28th Division, prepares for homecoming parade in Philadelphia, May 15, 1919.

⁶¹ Bullard, *Personalities and Reminiscences of the War*, pp. 237-238.

⁶² Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, 2:166, 245.

