



American Battle Monuments Commission – World War One Sites

Routes of Interest – Cantigny American Monument, the 1st Infantry Division attacks Cantigny

Historical Note: German offensives in the spring of 1918 strained Allied forces and required emergency participation of American units at the front. The First Infantry Division had been in defensive operations and was well trained. They were placed into the line opposite Cantigny under the French.

The attack of the First Infantry Division at Cantigny was the first American divisional attack in World War One. Planning and written orders were meticulous, and troops rehearsed the attack on similar ground in rear areas. The 28th U.S. Infantry Regiment was chosen to lead the attack. The French Army reinforced the attack with 12 Schneider tanks and four Battalions of Heavy artillery. Neighboring French Infantry divisions protected the American's flanks with harassing fire. First Infantry Division also had its own machinegun battalion and seventy two artillery pieces of the 1st Artillery Brigade in support.

1. Starting from the Cantigny American Monument at the park in Cantigny.
 - Looking down from the park to the west you can see how the site dominates terrain and blocks observation of the land behind the town to the east.
2. Drive southeast on the D26 toward Fontaine-sous Montdidier.
3. Bear right downhill at the fork.
4. Ahead on the left is the American First Division Stelae.
5. Park if you can here.
 - This monument bears the names of 1138 members of the Division lost in this area.
 - The nearest point of the Allied line here was in the forested hill down the road and “A” Company of the 28th Regiment faced this way from the Eastern end of the wood in a covering position. American troops advanced closely behind a rolling artillery barrage. The south flank of the barrage marched up this field from west to east.
6. Continue on the D26 and when you come to open fields look out for a tall chimney off to the left.
 - The chimney was for brickworks built to help rebuild local towns after the war.
7. At the next opportunity make a hard right turn through the line of trees.
8. Continue through Mensil-Saint-Georges past the small monument.
9. Turn right at the crossroad just past the water tower on the right toward Breteuil on D930.
10. You will go through a low area and then rise again and the road bears right.
 - If it is clear you can see Cantigny off to the right a town of white and brick buildings to the left of the of the wind turbines.
11. Turn right toward Villers-Tournelle on D188 through Belle Assise.
 - Belle Assise was the right rear of the First Division's lane of advance.
12. If it is safe pull off in the lot by the grain elevator for a moment to see the lie of the land.
 - On the night before the attack, Company “C” of the 18th Infantry Regiment moved into the forest across the field to the north as a reserve for the attack of the 28th Regiment and a German raid was turned back from there the night before the attack.

13. At the intersection in Villiers-Tournelle bear right.
 - Villiers-Tournelle was under constant observation and frequent bombardment by the Germans. It was a field telephone communications center, connecting the regiments facing Cantigny with artillery and command. During the attack Ambulance Company No. 13 was stationed here. Shortly after it became the main ambulance control and evacuation center.
14. Stay to the right by the church.
15. Bare right at the fork past the church.
 - Half way over the road between Villiers-Tournelle and Le Plessier is the left rear of the 1st Division's zone of advance.
 - The night before the attack Company "F" of the 18th Infantry Regiment moved into the middle of the three woods to your right (Bois des Glands de Villiers) as reserves for the attack. "C" Company did the same in the Bois de Cantigny on the right flank.
16. At the stop sign turn right toward Montdidier on D109.
17. The road turns right and Cantigny is visible ahead.
 - You will pass a wood on your right, the lane between this and the next wood, Bois St. Eloi, is the left flank of the 1st Division.
 - The Germans attempted a predawn trench raid on Bois St. Eloi on the morning of the attack but were repulsed by the 28th Regiment troops in the wood's edge.
 - In the attack the 3rd Battalion of the 28th advanced from the woods and adjoining trenches across the road toward the Rue Saint-Aignan ahead while some faced left digging to face the north flank about 400 yards north of the Cantigny town square.
18. Continue back into the center of Cantigny and park.
19. Walking down the hill you may get a better view to the west toward Villiers-Tournelle.
 - The American jump off line was about 300 yards in front of the town. From the 3rd Battalions wood on the right to the Bois de Cantigny on your far left. The attack started at 6:45 a.m. with companies in two lines hugging a very heavy moving artillery barrage. Four Companies of the 2nd Battalion attacked in the Center with the French tanks from the Bois de St. Eloi into the west side of Cantigny. Two companies of the 1st Battalion attacked the south end of Cantigny through the wood in front of the town while a third company established flank contact with the Bois de Cantigny.
 - The 28th Regiment advanced quickly. The defenders were taken by surprise. The attack went through to the east of Cantigny in a half hour taking 250 German prisoners.
 - The 1st Engineers and other support troops moved up to consolidate the defense line and establish forward observation posts with telephone communication to artillery support. The light Fords of Ambulance Company No. 13 could now reach Cantigny from Villers-Tournelle.
 - Over the next two days the 28th Regiment and two Battalions of the 18th endured multiple daily counter attacks, frequent shelling, and attacks from the air.
 - The First Division remained on this line until July 8th running patrols and raids and improving defenses.
 - The significance of Cantigny was that it showed the exceptional competence that the A.E.F could achieve. It gained respect from the Germans, the confidence from the Allies, and self-confidence or the premier division of the AEF.