

1-30

THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
FOURTH SECTION
COMMITTEE "H"
FORT BENNING, GEORGIA

ADVANCED OFFICERS' COURSE
1925-26

OPERATIONS
OF
THE SECOND BATTALION, TWENTY-THIRD INFANTRY ✓
SECOND DIVISION, U. S. A.,
IN
THE SOISSONS OFFENSIVE.

MAJOR d'ALARY FECHET, INFANTRY

1

I N D E X

| | PAGE |
|--|---------------|
| Index | I |
| Bibliography | II & III & IV |
| Introduction | 1 |
| General Setting for the Soissons Offensive | 2 |
| To the Forest of Villers-Cotteret | 3 |
| Orders and Preparations for the Attack | 5 |
| The March to the Jump-off | 6 |
| The Terrain in front | 7 |
| The Attack | 7 |
| Analysis and Criticism | 12 |
| Lessons | 13 |

MAPS

| | |
|--|----|
| Marne Salient July 1918 | 15 |
| Attack of 2nd Bn 23d Infantry, July 1918 | 16 |
| Photographs | 17 |

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ayres, Leonard "The War with Germany", Government Printing Office, Washington, 1919.
- Bond, P.S. and Sherrill, C.O. "America in the World War," George Banta Publishing Co., Menasha, Wis. 1921.
- Browne, C.Waldo and Pillsburg, R.W. "American Army in the World War", Overseas Book Co., Manchester, N.H., 1921
- Buchan, John "History of the Great War", Houghton, Mifflin & Co., Boston, 1922.
- Cooke, Elliot D. "Report on Recent Fighting", dated July 18, 1918
- Chambrun, Alcebert de "American Army in the World Conflict", Macmillan Co., New York, 1919
- Fletcher "Major Operations of the A.E.F. 1917-1918"
- Halsey, F.W. "The Literary Digest History of the World War", Funk and Wagnalls, New York, 1920
- Harbord, James G. "Leaves from a War Diary", (articles Clipped from Saturday Evening Post)
- "Harper's Pictorial History of the World War", Harper, and Bros., New York & London, 1920.
- Hindenburg, Paul von "Out of my Life", Casselland Co., Ltd. New York and London, 1920
- Horne, F.C. and Austin, W.F. "Great Events of the Great War", J.J. Little and Ives Co., New York, 1920.
- Howland, C.R. "A Military History of the World War", General Service Schools Press, Fort Leavenworth, Kan., 1923.
- Information concerning Battle casualties of the First, Second, and Third Divisions, A.E.F. Office of Chief of Infantry, W. D., Feb 6, 1922.
- King, W.C. Editor "King's Complete History of the World War", History Associates, Springfield, Mass., 1922.
- Larned, J. N. "The New Larned History for Ready Reference", C.A.Nichols Publishing Co., Springfield, Mass, 1924.
- Liggett, Hunter "Commanding an American Army", Houghton, Mifflin and Co., New York, 1925.
- Ludendorff, Eric von "Ludendorff's Own Story", Harper and Bros., London and New York, 1914.
- Mattfeldt, C.O. "Records of The Second Division", Fort Sam Houston, Texas, 1924-25
- Michelin et Cie "Soissons before and during the War", Clermont - Ferrand, 1919.
- Monograph "Soissons"

Moss, J. A. and
Howland, H.S. "America in Battle", George Banta Publishing Co.,
Menasha, Wisc., 1920.

Page, A.W. "Our 110 Day's Fighting", Doubleday, Page and Co.,
Garden City, N.Y. 1920.

Pershing, John J. "Final Report of General John J. Pershing, Commander
in chief, A.E.F.", Government Printing Office,
Washington, 1920.

Pugh, I.E. and
Thayer, W.F. "Forgotten Fights of the A.E.F.", Roxburgh
Publishing Co., Boston, 1921

A.E.F. Newspaper "Stars and Stripes"(official Newspaper of the A.E.F.)

Thomas, Shipley "History of the A.E.F.", George H. Doran Co.,
New York, 1920.

U. S. General Staff. A.E.F. "American Battle fields, A.E.F", Headquarters A.E.F.,
1914.

Press Review. Summary of Information.
Summary of Intelligence.

Wise, Jennings C. "Turn of the Tide" Henry Holt and Co., New York,
1920

MARGINAL ABBREVIATIONS USED.

B. Buchan, John "A History of the Great War"

B.C. "Information concerning Battle Casualties
of First, Second and Third Divisions, A.E.F."

H. Howland, C.R. "Military History of the World War".

G.S. General Staff A.E.F. "American Battle Fields"

K. King, W.C. Editor "King's Complete History of World War"

M. Moss, J. A. & Howland H. "America in Battle"
S.

O.A. Mattfeldt, CoO. "F.O.47, 23d Infantry July 6, 1918."
"Records of Second Division".

O.B. Mattfeldt, CoO. "F.O. 48, 23d Infantry July 16, 1918"
"Records of Second Division".

O.C. Mattfeldt, CoO. "F.O. 49, 23d Infantry, July 17, 1918."
"Records of Second Division"

O.D. Mattfeldt, CoO. "F.O. 15 2d Division, July 17, 1918"
"Records of Second Division."

O.E. Mattfeldt, CoO. "F.O. 26, 3d Brigade, July 18, 1918"
"Records of Second Division"

O.F. Mattfeldt CoO. "F.O. 17, 2d Division July 20, 1918"
"Records of Second Division".

| | | |
|----------|--------------------------------|---|
| O.G. | Mattfeldt, C.O. | "F.O. 23d Infantry July 24, 1918 "Records of Second Division". |
| P. | Page, A.W. | "Our 110 Day's Fighting" |
| Pershing | Pershing, John J. | "Final Report of General John J. Pershing, Commander-in-chief, A.E.F." |
| P & T | Pugh, I.E. and Thayer, W.F. | "Forgotten Fights of the A.E.F." |
| T. | Thomas, Shipley | "History of the A.E.F." |
| W. | Wise, Jennings C. | "Turn of the Tide". |

OPERATIONS OF THE SECOND BATTALION, TWENTY-THIRD INFANTRY,
SECOND DIVISION, U.S.A., IN THE SOISSONS IN OFFENSIVE.

INTRODUCTION

(1)
O.B. At four in the afternoon of July sixteenth, 1918, the Twenty-third Infantry, one of the regiments of the Second Division, was embussing for points unknown. (1) This monograph will relate where this journey led, and what befell the Regiment, and more especially its Second Battalion, at the journey's end. The author had the honor of commanding this battalion during the ensuing operations.

(2)
P.34 The Second Division had entered the lines northwest of Chateau-Thierry on June first (2) and for some thirty-nine days had been engaged in its first serious battle. During this time the Marine Brigade had deservedly won everlasting fame at the Bois de Belleau, and the Third Brigade, composed of the Ninth Infantry and the Twenty-third Infantry, had acquitted themselves well in the equally brilliant capture of Vaux. (3) But the Second Battalion of the Twenty-third Infantry had not participated in either of these engagements and though subjected to continued losses from German shell and gas, it had not come into actual contact with the enemy. Thus the battalion was in a sullen rage against the Germans, aching to avenge its dead comrades, and determined to show that it was the equal of the victors of Vaux and of Belleau Woods.

(4)
O.A. Withdrawn from the front on the ninth of July, (4) an easy march put the Twenty-third Infantry in comfortable billets at Saint Aulde, in the smiling and beautiful valley of the Marne. Here a week of sunny weather was spent in work on secondary lines of defense, (5) in training, receiving replacements, and in drawing equipment. Food was good and plentiful, and long arrears in sleep were made up. The sixteenth of July found the Second Battalion in top-notch morale for a battle.

(5)
W. 147 Before dawn on the sixteenth, the Field and Staff of the Regiment was ordered to report to the Colonel, who gave orders for all transportation including rolling kitchens, to leave St. Aulde after the noon meal, prepared for an overland journey, while the remainder of the regiment was to embuss

(6)
O.B.

at four in the afternoon (6). The move was by battalion, and the Second Battalion started off with no idea where it was going, nor why. There was a generally believed rumor to the effect that the Second Division was to join the First, and with it form a Shock Corps.

GENERAL SETTING FOR THE SOISSONS OFFENSIVE.

(7)
H.275
(8)
B.256
(9)
H.277

On May Twenty-seventh, the Crown Prince, with an army of nineteen divisions, (7) had attacked the Chemin des Dames front and had made a startling advance of thirty miles in seventy-two hours (8) and had crossed the Marne at Jaulgonne. (9) However, the Germans had created a dangerously deep salient, and desperate attempts to widen it east of Rheims and on the western flank, met with but slight success. (10)

(10)
H.289

The Germans were faced with the choice of continuing the battle, or losing all their recent gains. Paris was alluringly near and the enemy decided to push on. (11) At dawn on the fifteenth of July, the Crown Prince's Army launched a violent attack east of Rheims and in the vicinity of Chateau-Thierry. (12) The Allies put up a splendid fight, and in this engagement the Thirty-eight Infantry of the Third Division made a brilliant defense (13) and rolled back the German tide.

(11)
H. 291

(12)
H.298

(13)
Pershing
35

The news of the stand of the Third Division reached the Second Division, and added to the already high morale of those troops. Though the enemy secured a foothold over the Marne between Chateau-Thierry and Dormans, (14), his advance was stopped in forty-eight hours. (15)

(14)
B.277

(15)
H.302

The situation was grave. The advance of the Crown Prince's Army had put the enemy precariously near Paris, the heart of France as is no other capital the center of its country. The Allies had lost heavily in men and supplies. The Germans were now resting, but should they push on towards Paris, at worst the war might be lost, and perhaps an indecisive defensive would result.

Marshall Foch, the Allied Commander in Chief, had long waited an opportunity to resume the offensive. Now was the hour. Forty German Divisions (16) were involved in the dangerously deep Marne salient,

(16)
H.302

(17)
H. 333

a tremendous German offensive had just spent itself, (17) and the time was ripe to strike. A blow at the gates of the salient would cause the Crown Prince to break off the battle and retreat, or else risk the capture of his entire army. The railroad from Soissons to the junction of the Soissons-Fismes railroad, with the Chateau-Thierry - Soissons Highway formed the line of communications for the German troops in the salient. (18) At this time it was learned that the Germans held the line from the Aisne to Chateau-Thierry with but eleven divisions. (19) So the western side of the Salient was judged the more sensitive and here Foch decided to attack. Only sufficient Allies to hold a possible attack were left south of the Marne, (20) and all available forces were quietly concentrated between Soissons and Chateau-Thierry. (21) General Mangin in command of the Tenth Army holding from the Ourcq to the Aisne (22) made his Twentieth Corps composed of the First and Second Divisions of the American Army and French First Moroccan Division, the spear-head of his attack. (23)

(18)
H.330
(19)
G.S.3

(20)
G.S. 3
(21)
G.S. 3
(22)
H.335

(23)
B.280

(24)
H. 339

The eighteenth of July was set for the advance. All was subordinated to surprise, and even Corps Commanders knew of the impending attack only a few days in advance. (24) A turning point of the World War had arrived, and the fate of nations depended on the issue of the battle soon to crash forth.

TO THE FOREST OF VILLERS-COTTIERET

Now that the stage is set for the Soissons offensive, let us return to the Second Battalion of the Twenty-third Infantry, which we last saw rolling away from St. Aulde in motor camions on the afternoon of July sixteenth.

Night fell and still the journey continued. The Annamese chauffeurs spoke nothing but native gibberish, so from them no information as to the destination or of the duration of the trip could be obtained. The ride was most uncomfortable - sleep was impossible in the crowded trunks, the white dust was choking thick, and the lack of supper added nothing to the

(25)
W.148

gaiety of the occasion. When breakfast time passed, and no chow was forthcoming, and when artillery fire was heard in the distance, some doubts as to the formation of an elite Shock Corps in a quiet training area were entertained, but when at last the Battalion, stiff, sleepy, and hungry, debussed at Taillefontaine (25) about eight in the morning of the seventeenth, and saw units of the First Division bivouacked in the forest, the rumor was believed after all.

At this time the Battalion Commander received a written message from his Colonel to proceed by marching and without delay to Carrefour de Nemours, so with full field equipment and with no food since noon the preceding day, the battalion started out. This weary march continued all day - doubtful water from streams was drunk, because the day was hot and the roads were dusty - but no food was had. The march was through a forest, offering protection from airplane observation, but not a single German plane was seen.

At about four o'clock, the Colonel of the Ninth Infantry went past in his car - and stopped to tell the Battalion Commander that an immense attack was on for the next morning, with more artillery and more tanks than had ever been used before. As the necessity for secrecy had now ceased, this word was passed to the tired troops, and it heartened them up immensely.

At about six o'clock, after an all-day march, the Carrefour de Nemours was reached - there was nothing here but some shacks used as Division Headquarters, and water could be obtained. The men were told to wash their feet, change their socks, eat their reserve rations, and then go to sleep at once. As fires were out of the question, the raw bacon and raw coffee beans made a poor meal. Here the Battalion Commander received from the Colonel of the Regiment the Division attack order and the Regimental attack order, and was told to accompany the Colonel at once on a reconnaissance of the front line from which the jump-off would be made the next morning at four thirty-five.

ORDERS AND PREPARATIONS FOR THE ATTACK

The trip to the French front lines was hurriedly made in the Colonel's car but as the traffic on the roads caused an unexpectedly slow journey, it was found impossible to spare the time necessary for a personal reconnaissance on foot to the advanced trenches.

During the trip, the Colonel went over the Division attack order and his own Regimental order for the next day, explaining both carefully to the Battalion Commander.

At nine o'clock, the Battalion Commander was back at his battalion and gave orders to prepare for the march up - only belts were worn, the remainder of the field equipment being left in a large pile. Most of the men were asleep, dead asleep, but those who were awake crowded around to ask if the Battalion went first the next day, and when told it was true, said they sure were glad. While the men were being shaken awake and while equipment was being put on, the officers of the Battalion were assembled, and by waning light the attack order was hurriedly gone over. The sector of the regiment was shown on the one map issued to the Battalion. This was the only chance for any orientation before the battle.

The attack was to be in column of battalions, the Second leading. Consistent with Marshall Foch's plan of secrecy, there was to be no artillery preparation, only a rolling barrage to be followed at two hundred meters. (26) The first objective was a north and south line through Beaurepaire Farm, the second objective was a north and south line through Vauxcastile and the 3d objective was a line just east of Vierzy (26). Fifty-four tanks (27) were assigned to precede the division, with some twenty-seven (28) tanks of the light St. Chaumont type (27) in the front of the Third Brigade. As the Second Battalion had never seen a tank in action, and as they were a much-discussed and greatly feared weapon, great stress was laid on this unusual concentration of "devil-wagons".

The battalion front was 500 yards, and two companies, (E and F) advancing abreast were to form the assault echelon, while G and H companies were to form the support echelon.

(26)
O.C.

(27)
H.340
(28)
O.D.

THE MARCH TO THE JUMP-OFF

At nine-twenty, when it was almost dark, the final march was taken up.

Now followed a night to try men's souls.

The narrow roads through the forest were completely blocked by a traffic jam. For miles there was an unbroken and inextricable mass of general's limousines, artillery vehicles, water carts and what-not, solidly filling the roads, the ditch and parts of the impassable forest. All lights were, of course, forbidden. A drenching rain accompanied by flashes of blinding lightning added to the silent and sinister confusion of the scene.

Due to wire entanglements, it was out of the question to leave the road and cut across country, so it was necessary to march the thousand-odd men of the battalion in single file with one hand up and one hand back - even then breaks in the march frequently occurred and the line was lost in the woods. Frequently, in the inky darkness the men had to climb over a wagon or a horse. Time was passing at a perilously swift rate.

At about midnight, a forest cross-roads where grenades were to be drawn was reached, but here word was received that there were no grenades of any kind, and also that the Machine Gun Company told off to support the battalion could not possibly join it for the attack. (29)

(29)
W. 159

At about three in the morning, another road junction, where rifle ammunition was to be issued was reached, but it took so long to open the Ordnance boxes in the darkness, that only the assault companies could be issued extra bandoliers of ammunition, and the remainder of the battalion had during the battle only the two hundred rounds carried habitually on the person. As no one dreamed of a battle on leaving St. Aulde, not a few men were minus much of their allowance.

From now on, the roads were empty, and the battalion hurried along as fast as it could. The expected French guides did not appear.

By four o'clock, the gray light of dawn gave warning that zero hour was dangerously near. The map showed that there was still an alarming

(30) distance to cover - so the weary battalion took up the double time. (30)

H. 339

until four-thirty, when the jump-off trench was reached.

During the march up, the attack was explained as thoroughly as possible to all ranks.

Had the traffic jam been a few hundred yards longer, had a wrong road been followed in the darkness, had a minute's rest been taken through the nerve-wracking night, the Twenty-third would have been late in its attack. It is within the bounds of reason that adjacent units, enfiladed, would have been unable to advance - with the resultant failure of the Soissons Offensive. (31)

(31)
T.145

Every man in the Battalion knew this, and on the way, not a whimper nor a complaint was heard, nor did a single man fall out.

THE TERRAIN IN FRONT.

On leaving the Villers-Cotterett Forest, the country is open and rolling, cut by deep ravines perpendicular to the axis of attack. Dotting the landscape are substantial farm houses of stone, which were, in general, intact enough to serve the Germans as centers of resistance.

Lime-stone caverns are plentiful, many of size sufficient to shelter a regiment. These the Germans used as dugouts, storehouses, and in many cases they proved death-traps to their users. Vierzy is a considerable town, with a stone chateau, many streets of stone houses, and innumerable caves.

The enemy had considerable barbed-wire entanglements in good condition; his trench system was excellent, and well kept up.

On the eighteenth of July, the wheat was ripe for cutting. The Germans were harvesting the grain, and some were surprised by the Allied tanks at this bucolic occupation. Throughout the extensive wheat fields, machine guns were planted. (32)

(32)
H. 338

THE ATTACK

By the grace of God, the jump-off trenches were in a sight-defiladed hollow, and the breathless and staggering battalion was hurriedly rushed into attack formation and went over the top without a falter at 4:35 A.M. using

(33) rifles only as weapons. (33)
P.&T. 83

The battle was on.

At four thirty-five, a terrific bombardment from our guns opened up - it was a devastating sound, making it almost impossible to think, but it cheered all immensely to realize what splendid artillery support would help them over No Man's Land and into the German Trenches.

At the jump-off trenches, a French officer of tanks reported to the Battalion Commander that all the tanks told off to support the attack of the Twenty-third Infantry were stuck in a ravine some five kilometers to the rear and that they would probably never enter the battle. This was a blow, for with the failure to obtain grenades, machine guns, and an adequate amount of rifle ammunition, great reliance had been placed on the tanks, and they had been talked up to the men at a great rate.

(34) A minute or so after the Allied barrage opened, the German artillery
T.149 replied (34) with a rain of shells on our jump-off trenches and all over No Man's Land. It seemed impossible that a path could be picked over the ground to the enemy trenches, so close were the shell bursts to one another.

The Battalion suffered severe losses here - some five officers, among whom was the company commander of one of the assault companies, and two battalion staff officers were killed or wounded, one quarter of the enlisted personnel of Battalion Headquarters was dead or wounded, and at least two sections of the support companies, kneeling in close section column ready to advance, were wiped out completely.

No Man's Land was crossed at last, and the German front-line trenches were taken with but little trouble. The surprise was complete, and the prisoners taken were completely demoralized by the unexpectedness of the attack and the intensity of our artillery fire. Many seemed dazed, and many had not even put on their equipment. Here the German artillery fire slackened as we were in German territory, and was a steadily lessening factor for the Battalion until that night. German light machine guns were almost touching each other across the front, but not a shot was fired from them.

(35) Until Beurepaire farm was taken, at 4:50 A.M. (35) (36) it was only

(36)
M. & H. 88

a matter of following the rolling barrage and bayoneting the survivors who did not choose to surrender.

Beaurepaire Farm was a staunch old French farmhouse of stone, converted by the Germans into a strong point and full of machine guns. Due to our barrage it fell with little or no resistance, and at least one hundred prisoners were taken in or near the farmhouse.

After taking Beaurepaire farm our barrage was lost and the resistance stiffened. From there on to Vauxcastile Ravine, the fight became a series of reductions of enemy strong points, of outflanking machine gun nests, and of pushing through where the pushing was good.

Between Beaurepaire and Vauxcastile, a German battery of field artillery opened up with point blank shrapnel on the Battalion. It was charged and the defenders, who fired until the last moment, were bayoneted. The troops who charged had no ammunition, so cold steel was used.

(37)
W. 161

At Vauxcastile Ravine, serious resistance was encountered. (37) The trees were full of snipers and machine guns, there was a strong enemy line at the near edge of the ravine and a stronger one on the far side. Several attempts to take the ravine failed, and one section of the right assault company was caught alone in the bottom of the ravine when an attack fell back. There were no communications whatever in operation, and twice runners were sent to ask for artillery fire on the ravine but both were sniped dead while still in sight of the Battalion Commander. At this moment, two tanks appeared most opportunely, and were directed into the ravine. Their fire and the attack by one of the support companies which followed gave us possession of that ravine at 6:45 A.M. (38) (39) and the enemy fled in great confusion. Here was captured, operating at the moment of seizure, an artillery telephone switchboard with eight operators. To everyone's surprise no artillery fire followed information as to our location which must have been given. We followed into Viersy, the near houses of which were occupied by a platoon at about ten A.M. (40)

(38)
MAH 89
(39)
BC. 34

(40)
BC. 34

It appeared that the French troops on the right were not up with

(41)
W.161

the battalion, (41) and a murderous enfilade fire was coming from the high ground south of Vierzy. The platoon was ordered to hold on, and the Battalion Commander, who by this time had no staff at all, went back for reinforcements. In the ravine, there was great confusion, troops of the Twenty-third, the Ninth, and of the Fifth Marines were milling around, and all unit organization had been lost, due to the death of so many officers, and to the confusion resulting from the attack on Vauxcastile Ravine.

It was thought necessary to sort out the different organizations and send outside men to their regiments, and when the advance on Vierzy could be resumed so heavy a fire was met that advance was impossible. A heavy concentration of low, leg-wounding machine gun fire came from the buildings in Vierzy and from a ruined tower called 'la tour isole'. Much of this machine gun fire was indirect. Artillery fire on the machine gun positions and on Vierzy was asked for, but as all means of communications were out, it was not forthcoming, and a third attempt to take Vierzy having failed, the advance was temporarily abandoned. Measures for safety were taken, and the almost exhausted men were allowed to rest as best they could.

At this time, about five-thirty in the afternoon, written orders from the Colonel for a general attack on Vierzy were received. The First Battalion of the Twenty-third had been fighting valiantly on the right of the 2nd. This attack took place at 7:15 P.M. (42) with the 9th Infantry and the Twenty-third in line (43) and with the French troops to the south of Vierzy also advancing.

(42)
W.163
(43)
O.E.

After many losses due to the accurate German machine gun fire, Vierzy was reached, and stubborn house-to-house fighting occurred. The enemy used light machine-guns from doorways and windows, and then ran out the rear exits. In the main square, some two hundred Germans were captured in one group, and in the cave-dugouts hundreds of others were taken - among whom was a German Colonel of artillery.

(44)
H.340
(45)
W.161

After Vierzy fell to the Third Brigade, (44) high ground to the east of the town was occupied, with heavy losses. (45)

(46)
MAH 91

At dawn, the Colonel personally led the battalion to an advanced position halfway between Vierzy and Tigny (46) through a hail of machine-gun bullets which took further toll from the depleted battalion.

(47)
W.165

Orders were received to hold the ground already gained, (47) and the morning of the 19th was spent in consolidating the position. As there were only about three hundred and fifty men left available in the battalion, this was an easy matter.

During the afternoon, some food was brought up, but the Germans by this time had found out where we were, and artillery and machine gun fire made much movement impossible. A ravine where ration carts were assembled soon became a veritable shambles. Vierzy was severely shelled.

(48)
T.160

During the eighteenth, the Allied planes had entire control of the air, but they apparently disappeared on the nineteenth and the bright-red planes of Baron von Richthofen's Circus (48) flew low and raked our lines with machine guns, but miraculously there were no casualties.

(49)
W.173

During the night of 19-20 July, orders were received to stand relieved when the French Fifty-eighth Division should have passed through our lines, (49) and by dawn after a hard march over the ground over which the attack had been made, the shelter of the Forest de Retz was gained. A short distance into the forest, and our rolling kitchens with a hot meal ready, were found. Here the first proper meal since noon on the sixteenth was eaten, and as it was then five o'clock on the morning of the twentieth, it was welcome to the half-starved battalion.

(50)
O.F.

A leisurely march was made to Carrefour de Memours, and the whole regiment made bivouac for the night in this vicinity. A rain started at about seven, but everyone was soon sound asleep. At nine o'clock, orders were received to get up and march again, (50) and it took all night to reach St. Etienne, where the regiment went into billets for a few days.

The Soissons Offensive was over for the Second Battalion of the

Twenty-third.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In this attack, all was subordinated to surprise, and the Germans were beaten before they could re-organize and stem the tide of the Allied advance. Consequently all arrangements were hurriedly made. But even considering this lack of time, there was serious deficiency in staff work. The lack of machine guns, tanks and ammunition, and the traffic jam might well have lost the day for the Allies.

The machine gun units of the Third Brigade were dumped off their trucks miles in rear of the front on the morning of the seventeenth. They marched all during the seventeenth, and all during the following night of storm. At dawn on the eighteenth, they heard the Artillery open up, and knew they were late for the attack, and knew their powerful support was lost to their people. Loaded down with the man-killing weight of the Hotchkiss machine gun, and carrying ammunition by hand, they continued their march and Company D of the 5th Machine Gun Battalion joined the Second Battalion of the Twenty-third at dusk on the nineteenth, too late to be of any assistance. Someone had seriously blundered in naming their debussing point so far to the rear.

All communications broke down on the eighteenth. Except for what he saw, the Battalion Commander was for hours out of touch with the situation. It was impossible to obtain supporting artillery fire or any help from the Thirty-sevens or from the trench mortars.

It is to be noted that the enemy failed to counter-attack at any time during the advance. A counter-attack on our worn-out troops might well have succeeded.

After the taking of Vauxcastille Ravine, had the attack been pushed on at once by the Battalion Commander, Vierzy would probably have fallen that morning, thus saving much subsequent fighting.

It must be again repeated that in this attack, surprise was the vital element. There was undoubtedly much confusion within divisional units,

but this was of no importance, considering the gigantic game Marshall Foch was playing. Had all details been worked out, had the troops been fed and rested near their jump-off positions, and had ample medical units been concentrated near the forward positions, undoubtedly the enemy would have gotten wind of the impending attack. Instead of a surprised and demoralized enemy, the attack would have met forewarned troops, backed up by fresh reserves hurriedly rushed to the threatened front.

(51) The Allied losses were heavy. The Twenty-third Infantry entered
P.49 the engagement with 99 officers and 3,400 men (51) (52) and of this number
(52) lost 62 officers and 1922 men (51) (52).
M&H 92

The attack had been immensely successful. An advance of eight
(53) miles in two days had been made, (53) great numbers of prisoners and munitions
G.S.10 of war were captured, among which may be mentioned a dump containing 15,000
(54) rounds of seventy-seven millimeter shells (54).
G.S.10

The Twenty-third Infantry alone captured 2175 prisoners, 75 officers
(55) (55) 6 batteries F.A., an anti-aircraft battery and a vast quantity of
P. 49 machine guns, ammunition, and stores. (56)
(56) O.G.

But more important than the advance made, and more important than any number of prisoners and any amount of spoil, was an intangible gain. As the news of the victory travelled, Allied morale went up, and the Germans knew that their much-vaunted and grandiose "Friedensturm" had failed.

By crumpling in its western flank, Marshall Foch had narrowed the
(57) Marne Salient, destroyed the enemy's communications (57) and most important
B.281 of all, he had wrested the initiative from the enemy. (58) The decisive
(58) H.343 blow had been struck at last, and the Germans were retreating, (59) never to
(59) T.171 attack again.

LESSONS

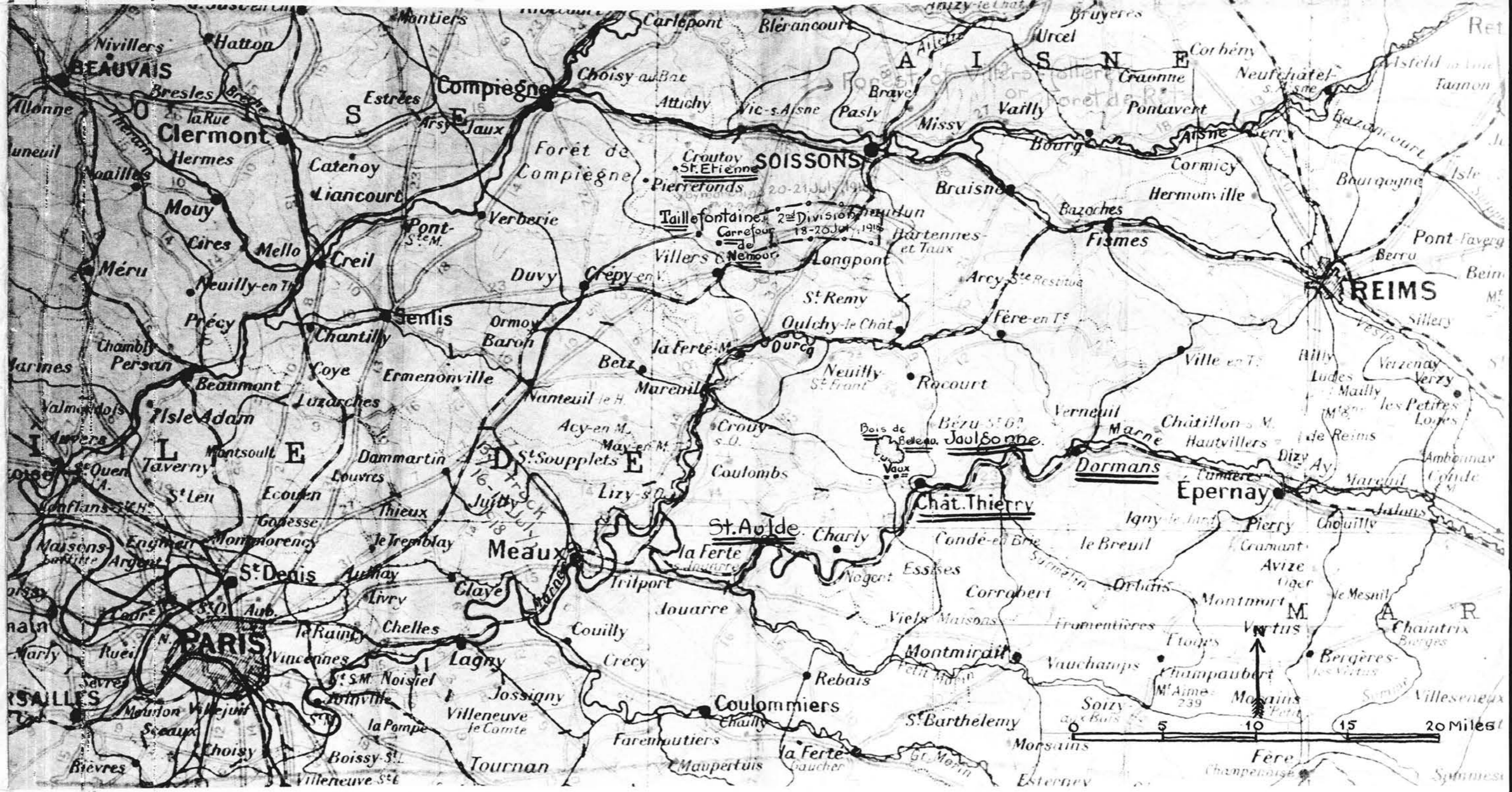
1. A successful attack should be pushed to the utmost, allowing the enemy no time in which to coordinate his defense.
2. Tanks are a factor of great importance in modern warfare.
3. Attention to communications is always necessary.
4. Careful and efficient staff work is vitally necessary in military

operations.

5. Morale wins battles in the face of all obstacles.

6. To surprise the enemy is to defeat him.

7. There is no limit to human endurance.



SOISSONS

REIMS

PARIS

Epernay

Meaux

Chât. Thierry

Coulommiers

Dormans

St. Aulde

Jaulgonne

Taillefontaine

Villers

la Ferte-Mac

Mareuil

Coulombs

la Ferte-Mac

Tritport

Jouarre

Rebais

la Ferte-Mac

Braisne

Longpont

St. Remy

Oulchy-le Chat

Neuilly

Rocourt

Chât. Thierry

Essises

Corrobert

Viels Maisons

Montmirail

St. Barthelemy

Fismes

Arcey

Fere-en-T

Verneuil

Châtillon

Chât. Thierry

le Breuil

Orbais

Fromentieres

Vauchamps

Morsains

Epernay

Ignny-le-Jard

Pierry

Crémant

Avize

le Mesnil

Chantreaux

Dormans

le Breuil

Orbais

Fromentieres

Vauchamps

Morsains

Fere

20 Miles

20-21 July 1918

18-20 July 1918

2nd Division

St. Aulde

la Ferte-Mac

Mareuil

Coulombs

la Ferte-Mac

Tritport

Jouarre

Rebais

la Ferte-Mac

Braisne

Longpont

St. Remy

Oulchy-le Chat

Neuilly

Rocourt

Chât. Thierry

Essises

Corrobert

Viels Maisons

Montmirail

St. Barthelemy

Fismes

Arcey

Fere-en-T

Verneuil

Châtillon

Chât. Thierry

le Breuil

Orbais

Fromentieres

Vauchamps

Morsains

Epernay

Ignny-le-Jard

Pierry

Crémant

Avize

le Mesnil

Chantreaux

Dormans

le Breuil

Orbais

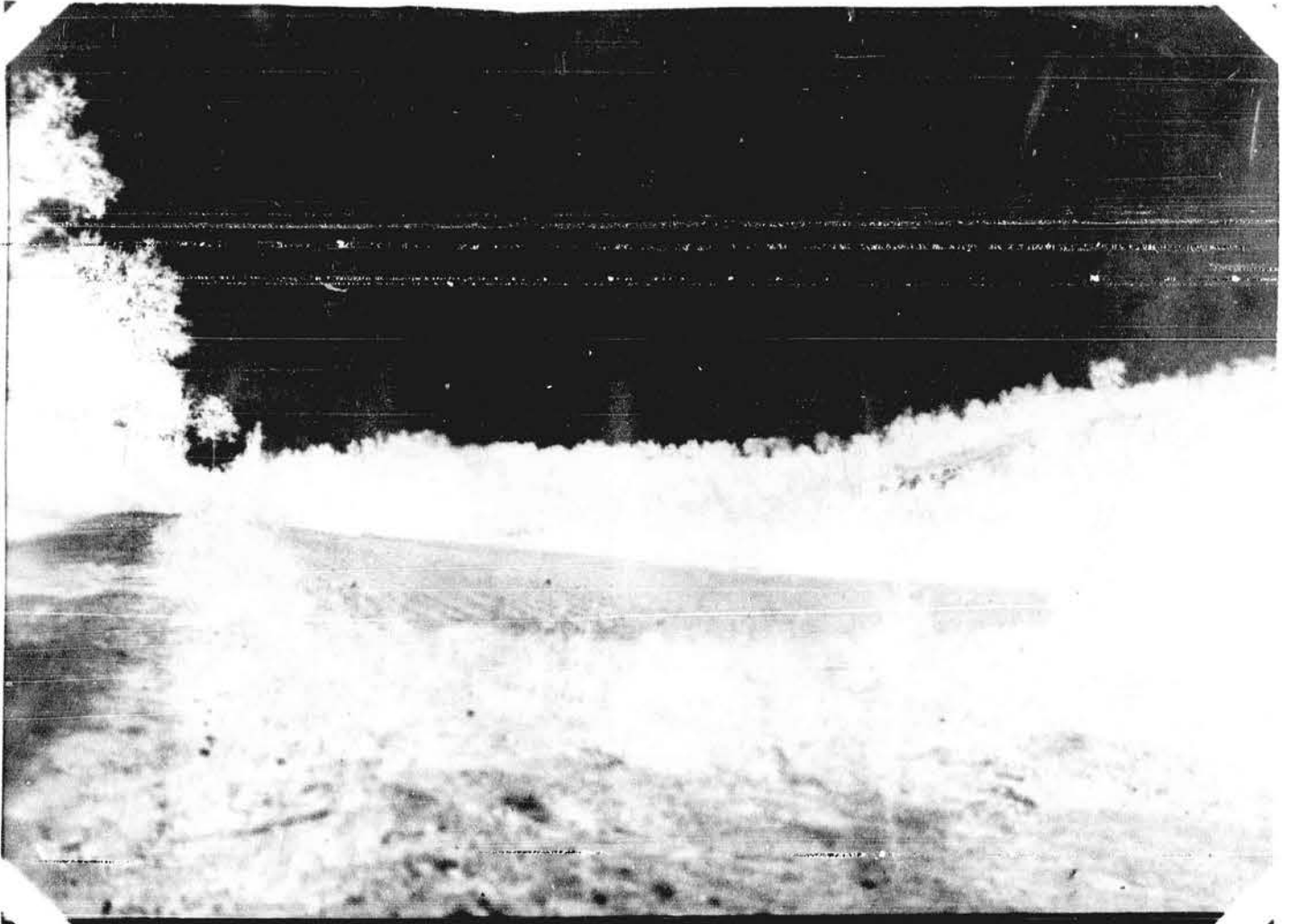
Fromentieres

Vauchamps

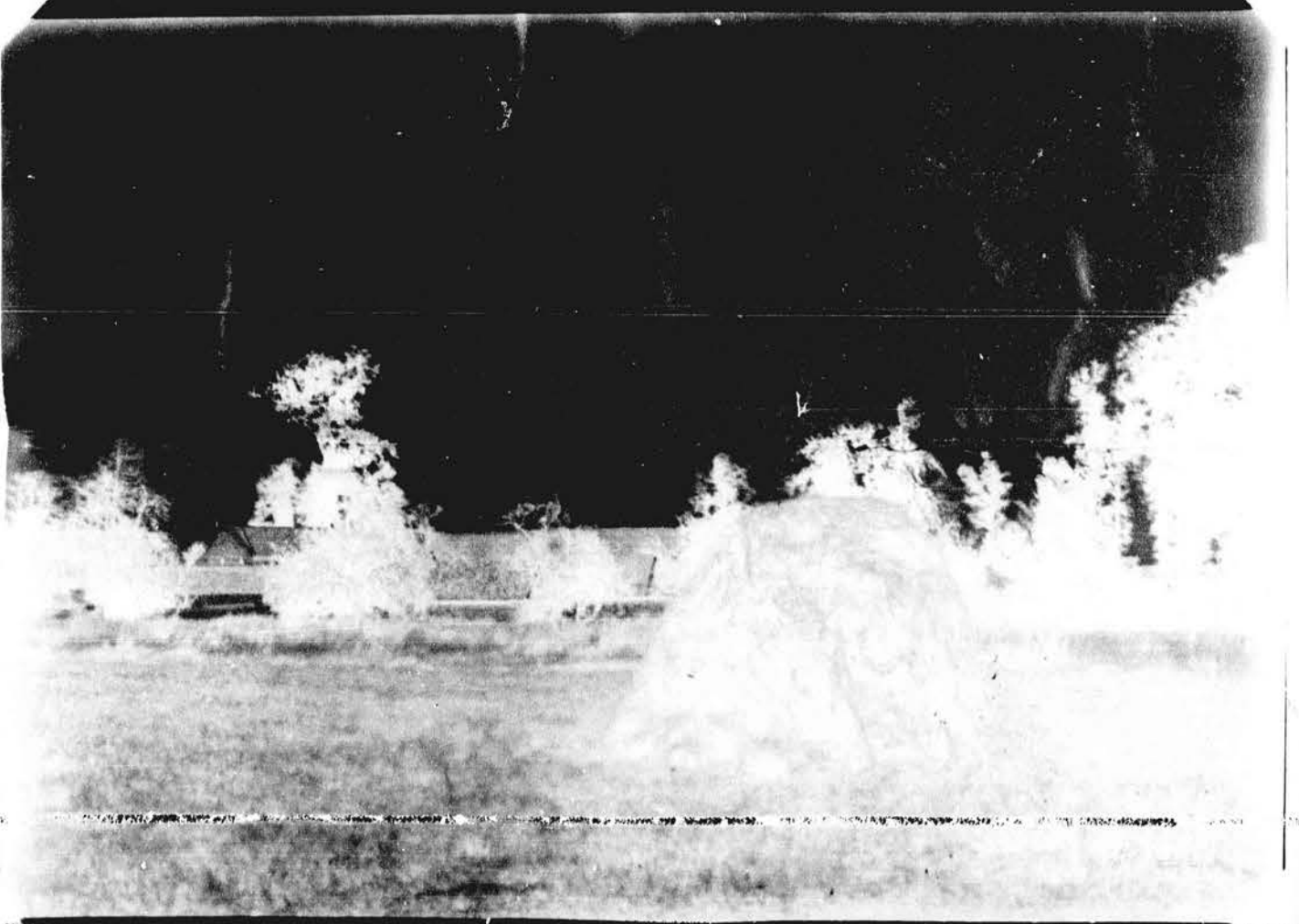
Morsains

Fere


20 Miles



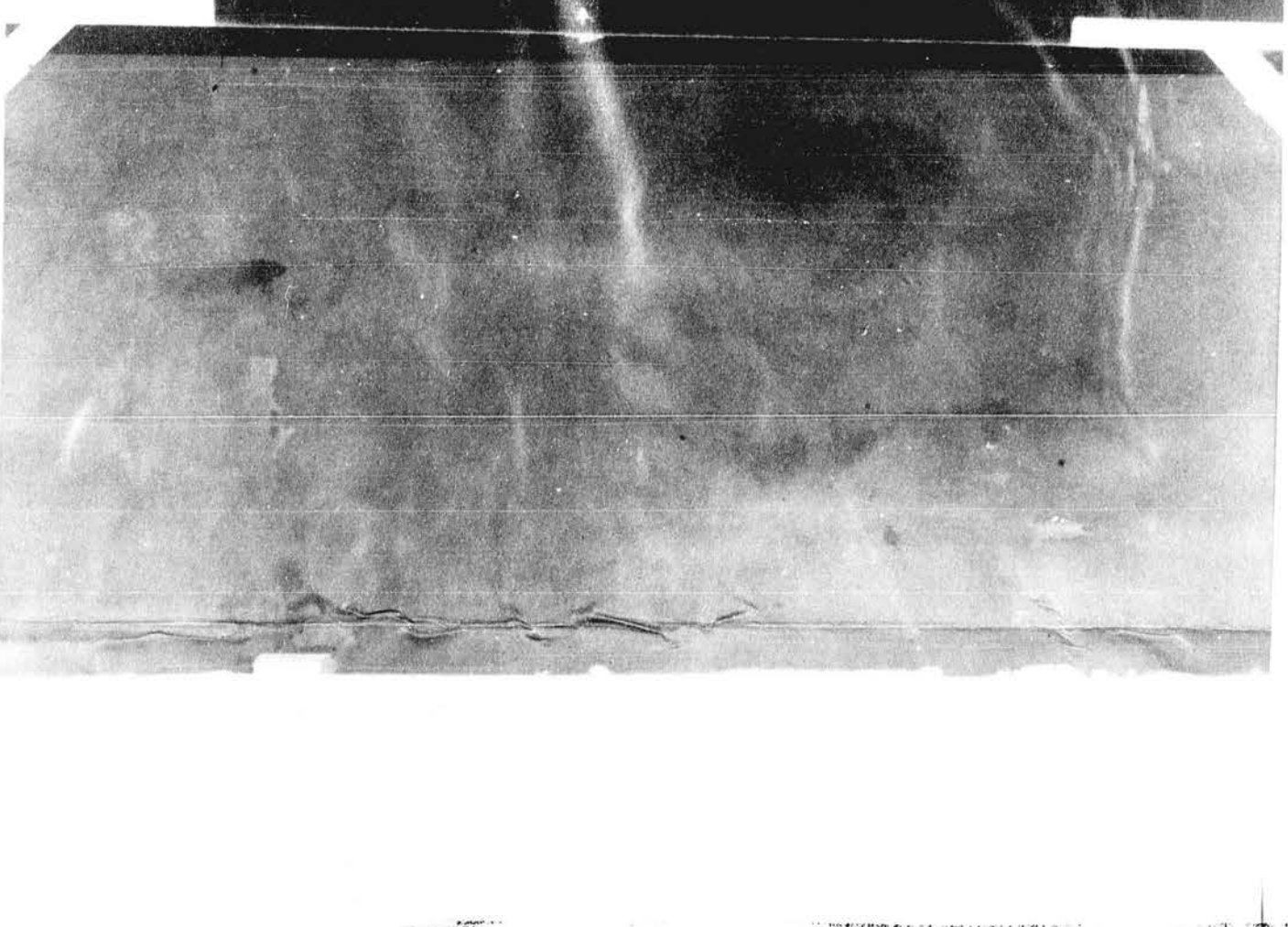
Vauxcastile Ravine • 1922 •



Beaurebaire Farm • 1922 •



The Jump-Off. 1922.



No Man's Land. 1922.

PLAN OF ADVANCE 2ND DIV. A.E.F.

