

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
Cover page	(Unpaged)
Table of contents	i
Bibliography	ii
Marginal abbreviations used	iii
INTRODUCTION	1
TOPOGRAPHY	1
3D DIVISION SITUATION-JULY 21	2
3D DIVISION CROSSES MARNE	3
7TH INFANTRY ADVANCES NORTH	3
3D BATTALION TAKES UP ASSAULT-JULY 23	3
ADVANCE THROUGH THE FORET DE PERE	4
ADVANCE ON LE CHARMEL CHATEAU - JULY 25	6
ATTACK ON LE CHARMEL CHATEAU - JULY 26	7
COMMENT	8
LESSONS	9
CONCLUSION	10

MAPS

Map No 1--Terrain north of Mont St. Pere	11
Map No 2--Marne river from Chierry to Mont St. Pere ...	12
Map No 3--Route of advance July 23-27	13

THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
FORT BENNING, GEORGIA


ADVANCED COURSE
1932-1933

MILITARY HISTORY

COMPANY "I" SEVENTH U.S. INFANTRY
IN THE AISNE-MARNE OFFENSIVE

(Personal Experiences of a 1st Sergeant)

FREDERICK L. KNUDSEN, JR
First Lieutenant, Infantry



BIBLIOGRAPHY

History of the
Third Division

"History of the Third Division
United States Army in the World
War", December 1, 1917-January
1, 1919.

It is an account of the operations of each unit of the division and has been compiled from official reports and records of the division and from data furnished by individuals participating. It supplies a source of complete and accurate information.

Dickman, J. T. .

"The Great Crusade"

This is a narrative written by Major General Joseph T. Dickman, who commanded the 3d Division during the 2d Battle of the Marne. Although the information contained in this work is quite accurate it is very general in character.

MARGINAL ABBREVIATIONS USED

3d Div.

"History of the Third Division United States
Army in the World War" December 1, 1917-
January 1, 1919.

INTRODUCTION

By July 21st, 1918, the last big German offensive directed toward Paris had been definitely and completely crushed and all enemy elements had been withdrawn to the north of the Marne River. To the northwest a determined attack toward Soissons by the 20th French Corps had by July 21st penetrated to a depth of eleven kilometers and had seriously menaced the entire supply system of the Marne salient which had as its base the railroad line connecting Chateau Thierry with Soissons. The situation of the German forces in this area was rapidly becoming precarious and a general withdrawal with a view to straightening their battle lines on the western front became imperative. Thus we find at hand the opportunity for which the allied high command had waited and prepared - that of passing from the defensive to the offensive. Immediately the plans for launching a vigorous and general offensive along the entire western front were put into operation and the advance beyond the Marne began.

TOPOGRAPHY

The Marne River is over fifty yards in width and unfordable. All bridges across the river had been destroyed in the face of the German advance. The river runs through a deep valley the sides of which, in places, rise to a height of about five hundred feet, the north side being higher and the slope more abrupt. Two main avenues control the outlet from the valley to the north, the Surmelin Valley and the Jaulgonne Gorge. Separating

the two is a long ridge which extends northward from Charteves to the town of Le Charmel. The country generally is broken and heavily wooded with two large forests extending from the Marne Valley a long distance toward the north. Numerous small villages and farms afforded good prepared cover for machine gun positions and for small bodies of protecting infantry. In the road net north of the river there are two main roads leading north; one which traverses the Surmelin Valley and the other, the Jaulgonne-Le Charmel road, follows the Jaulgonne Gorge. A network of unimproved roads and trails connect these two main arteries and branch out in all directions. In general the terrain is particularly well suited to the type of defensive action peculiar to a rear guard action.

3D DIVISION SITUATION - JULY 21

On July 21 the 3d Division again occupied all positions held by them at the start of the German attack on July 15. The entire division had suffered heavily in casualties and the transportation had been greatly depleted. A general reorganization had taken place within units and regiments were being collected in assembly areas preparatory to crossing the river.

The 1st Battalion of the 7th Infantry was in the woods just to the north of Fossoy and the 2d and 3d Battalions were assembled in the woods in the vicinity of the chateau at Fossoy. Company "I" had suffered heavily in the attack having been reduced in strength from over two hundred and forty to a bare hundred and thirty odd men who were fit and ready to take up the advance.

Map No 2

Map No 3

Pere through the Surmelin Valley. Heavy shelling was taking place along the road particularly on that portion passing between the Bois de Mont L'Eveque and the Foret de Fere. The battalion reached its position about midnight, relieved the 1st Battalion and dug in on the west of the road in the vicinity of Le Tieulerie Farm.

ADVANCE THROUGH THE FORET DE FERRE

Map No 3

On the morning of July 24 the advance toward Le Charmel was resumed. Without regard for the concealment offered by the western edge of the Foret de Fere the initial part of the movement was made over open ground with no concealment for a distance of some seven hundred yards. The leading companies of the battalion penetrated the forest at a point about seven hundred yards north of Le Tieulerie Farm and traversed the forest toward the northeast. As the rear of the battalion reached the cover of the woods the battalion commander called a halt and directed me to conduct a patrol through the forest to determine the location of the assault companies.

The patrol located the assault companies under cover along the eastern edge of the forest and then proceeded south to determine the location of the right flank of the line. About 100 yards beyond this flank troops were discerned preparing to debouch from the forest and move north to the cover of the Bois de Charmel. Having identified the unit as the 3d Battalion of the 4th Infantry, I placed the patrol under cover in a ditch about twenty yards to their left flank from which an unobstructed view was offered along their entire front. The occurrences

3D DIVISION CROSSES MARNE

In the early morning of July 21, the 3d Division began its crossing, the 4th Infantry being the first regiment to cross at Chierry. (1)

(1) 3d Div.
p 59

Late the same afternoon and during the night of July 21-22 the 1st Battalion of the 7th Infantry crossed by boat and footbridge in the vicinity of Fossoy. Early on July 22 the 2d and 3d Battalions crossed over a footbridge at Fossoy. (2) Considerable shelling of the bridge and its approaches was experienced during the crossing and a number of casualties resulted.

(2) 3d Div.
p 97

7TH INFANTRY ADVANCES NORTH

On July 22 the 7th Infantry began its advance north in the direction of Le Charmel in accordance with orders received the previous day. (3) The 1st Battalion advanced through Mont St. Pere and up the ~~Sune~~^{Sune} Valley toward Le Tuilerie Farm and the 2d Battalion moved on La Theodorie Farm. (4) The 3d Battalion went into position as regimental reserve on the heights above Mont St. Pere. Considerable sniping was still in progress by the enemy from well concealed positions on the north slope of the valley and several isolated machine guns were captured after they had caused a number of casualties in the reserve units. The fire of the enemy artillery on the bridges and their approaches was continuous and had become more effective.

(3) 3d Div.
p 59

(4) 3d Div.
p 97

Map No 3

3D BATTALION TAKES UP ASSAULT - JULY 23

On July 23 the 3d Battalion received orders to relieve the 1st Battalion at Le Tuilerie Farm and that night moved out along the road from Mont St.

observed during the next few minutes were both interesting and instructive.

The initial debauchment was made in the customary stereotyped wave formation. The leading wave had gained a scant twenty-five yards into the clear when the German artillery went into action. From an observation balloon in the vicinity of Le Charmel the movement was under direct observation from its inception and a concentrated shrapnel barrage was perfectly placed along the entire front. Casualties resulted and the wave was forced to the ground. A minute later all men had been withdrawn from the open to the cover of the woods. After a reorganization of the leading wave had been accomplished a second attempt was made to effect a crossing. The same formation was used and, as could have been expected, the second effort met with no more success than had the first. With an apparent determination to force a crossing without delay and gain the Bois de Charmel regardless of obstacles, the commander of the unit employed the same methods in a third and still a fourth attempt to penetrate the barrage line. Each fresh appearance of troops from under cover of the forest was met by the German artillery with an increased volume of fire. After the fourth sortie had failed of its purpose, the unit commander was finally convinced that the means employed were not consistent with the requirements of the situation.

Map No 3

An interesting feature of this episode was the lack of appreciable artillery fire directed against the woods at the point from which the

battalion was attempting to debouch. It was not until the troops had been driven back to cover for the fourth time that any real attempt was made to concentrate on the assembly positions in the woods. The patrol, having a definite mission to perform, was unable to remain and see what course of action was next adopted by the unit commander.

ADVANCE ON LE CHARMEL CHATEAU-JULY 25

Orders were received on the morning of July 25 directing the advance to proceed along a new line. The new route was laid along a line which ran east from the Foret de Fere to the Jaulgonne-Le Charmel road and thence north through Le Charmel Chateau. The 3d Battalion 7th Infantry, with Company "I" in reserve, left the Foret de Fere during the morning of the 25th and began its advance on Le Charmel Chateau. As had been the case in their movement the previous day proper regard was not given to the cover offered by the woods, with the net result that the Germans observed the troops as they crossed the Jaulgonne road and the entire column was heavily shelled.

Map No 3

The advance was maintained until the leading elements had gained a point about three hundred meters north of Argentol where they became subjected to a very heavy concentration of machine-gun and artillery fire. The volume of fire was so intense that further progress was impossible and the battalion took cover in a ravine south of Le Charmel Chateau.

Reconnaissance of the ground in the direction of the chateau and of the enemy positions in its vicinity indicated that if the advance were to continue

the 4th Infantry on the left, the French on the right and the 1st Battalion of the 7th Infantry in the center, an attack was launched against the Le Charmel Le Charmel Chateau line which forced the Germans to abandon their positions and retire toward the north.

On July 27 the 3d Battalion was withdrawn to a position in support of the 4th Infantry and thus ended the participation of this battalion as an assault unit in the Aisne-Marne offensive.

COMMENTS

During the first five days of this offensive no actual contact existed with other units of the division. This fact obviated any possibility of ~~expecting immediate support from any source outside~~ the regiment. Consequently the advance resolved itself into a series of individual actions in the several zones of advance rather than a concerted effort along the entire division front.

On two separate occasions a battalion was moved across open ground in the face of the enemy without taking proper advantage of the cover and concealment offered. As a result, in one of these instances, the battalion was forced to pay for this neglect by suffering numerous casualties.

About the only solution which might logically explain repeated attempts by a unit commander to force a barrage line with his troops in a formation which does not permit of the maximum use of cover, would be the necessity of conducting his entire force to a given point in the shortest possible space of time. However, one can conceive of few instances where the time element is of such vital importance as

Map No 3

without suffering heavily in casualties support from flank units would be necessary to reduce the positions around the chateau. Effort was then directed toward establishing contact with adjacent units with a view to obtaining the support required. Up to this time no contact whatever had existed between the battalion and other units outside the regiment. Information as to the locations of these units was very indefinite, and little was known as to the situations which confronted them. As an example of this deficiency in information, the instructions issued to me in the assignment of a mission for my patrol might well be used. In substance these instructions were as follows:

~~"The 4th Infantry is somewhere on our left. You will establish contact between that regiment and this battalion."~~

A considerable gap existed between the 3d Battalion and the 4th Infantry so to facilitate the contacting of the leading elements of the two regiments the 1st Battalion of the 7th Infantry was brought up into position in the woods south of Le Charmel.

ATTACK ON THE CHARMEL CHATEAU-JULY 26

The 1st Battalion arrived in its position in the woods on July 26 and suffered heavily while forming for attack. The French, by this time, had advanced to a line generally in prolongation of our right flank and contact with them was established. Here we find, for the first time since the advance north of the Marne was begun, a concerted effort by adjacent regiments against a common objective. With

would warrant the deliberate sacrifice of many men to satisfy its requirements.

The retreating Germans employed artillery and automatic weapons to the utmost limits of their capabilities in fighting the delaying action against the allied advance. The results obtained present an illuminating study and a valuable lesson concerning the important part these weapons are capable of playing in the conduct of a rear guard action.

LESSONS

Following is a summation of the lessons an attempt has been made to bring out:

1. By the judicious employment of artillery and automatic weapons in conducting a rear guard action, it becomes possible for a relatively small force to effectively delay a force of much greater size for considerable periods of time and to inflict heavy casualties.

2. In combating a rear guard action close mutual support by adjacent units is of paramount importance if the maximum advantage is to be gained from the enemy's retirement. Uncoordinated effort results in piecemeal advance, duplication of effort, with its attendant unnecessary sacrifice of personnel and permits the enemy to regulate largely according to his own plans and aims the progress of the advance.

3. The formations which are adopted when advancing in the face of the enemy must be consistent with the requirements of the situation. To attempt to advance through a heavy blanket of fire except through the medium of some method of infiltration,

whereby full advantage may be taken of cover and of breaks in the zone of fire, is suicidal and disastrous to the fighting efficiency of an organization.

4. Failure to utilize to the fullest extent every available source of cover results in needless loss of life and indicates a lack of appreciation of one of the most important contributing factors in the consummation of a successful operation.

CONCLUSION

All units of the 3d Division that participated in the Aisne-Marne Offensive acquitted themselves in an excellent manner and accomplished the missions assigned them most creditably. However, from personal observation and from a study of the operations of other units which were closely associated with my organization, it is difficult to refrain from entertaining the belief that, had closer cohesion existed between units the same results would have been accomplished in a much shorter space of time, at a much less cost in man-power and with a correspondingly increased effect on the morale of the enemy.

1st Lt. Frederick W. Knudson Jr.

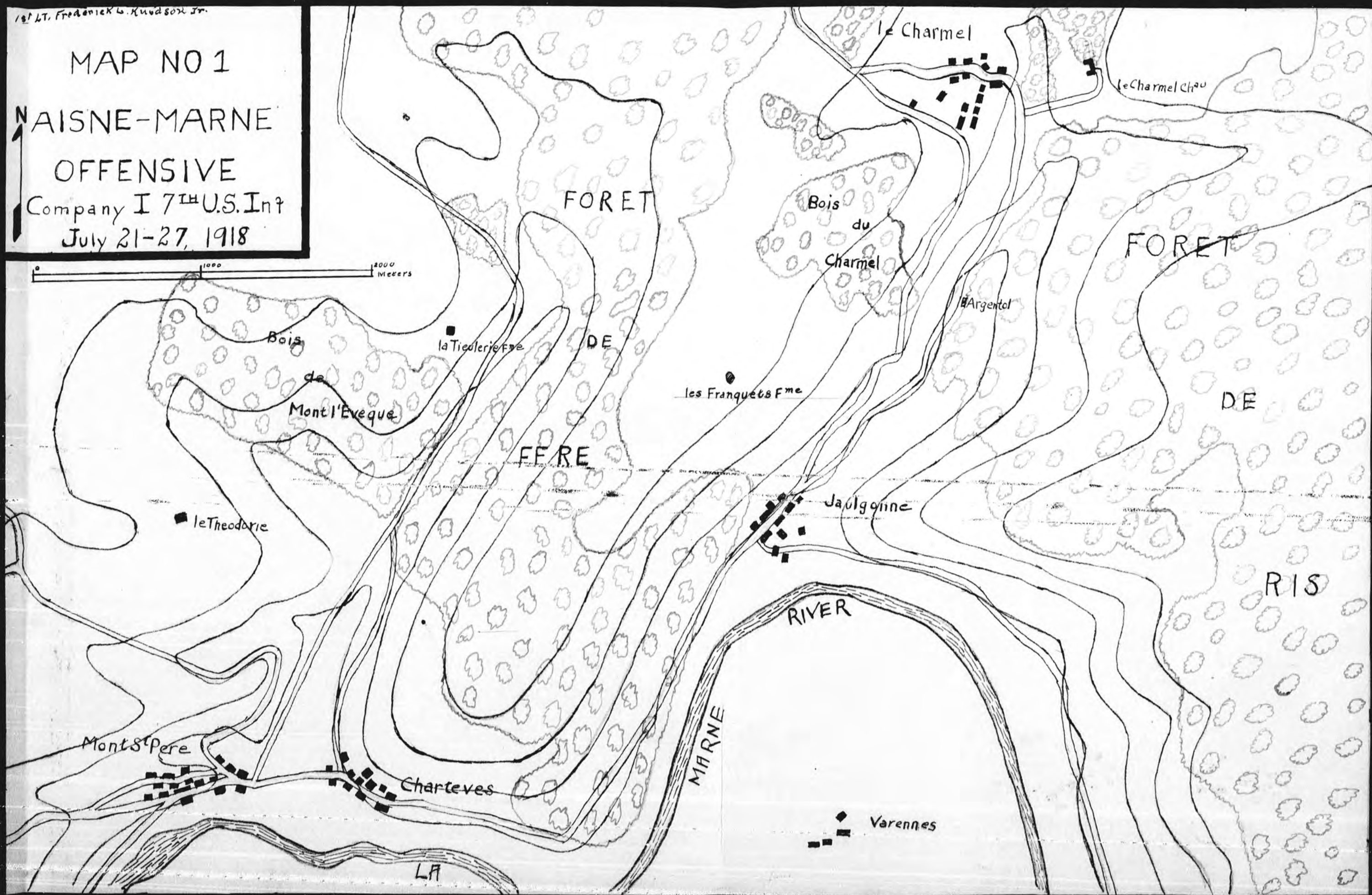
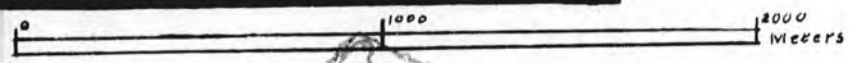
MAP NO 1

NAISNE-MARNE

OFFENSIVE

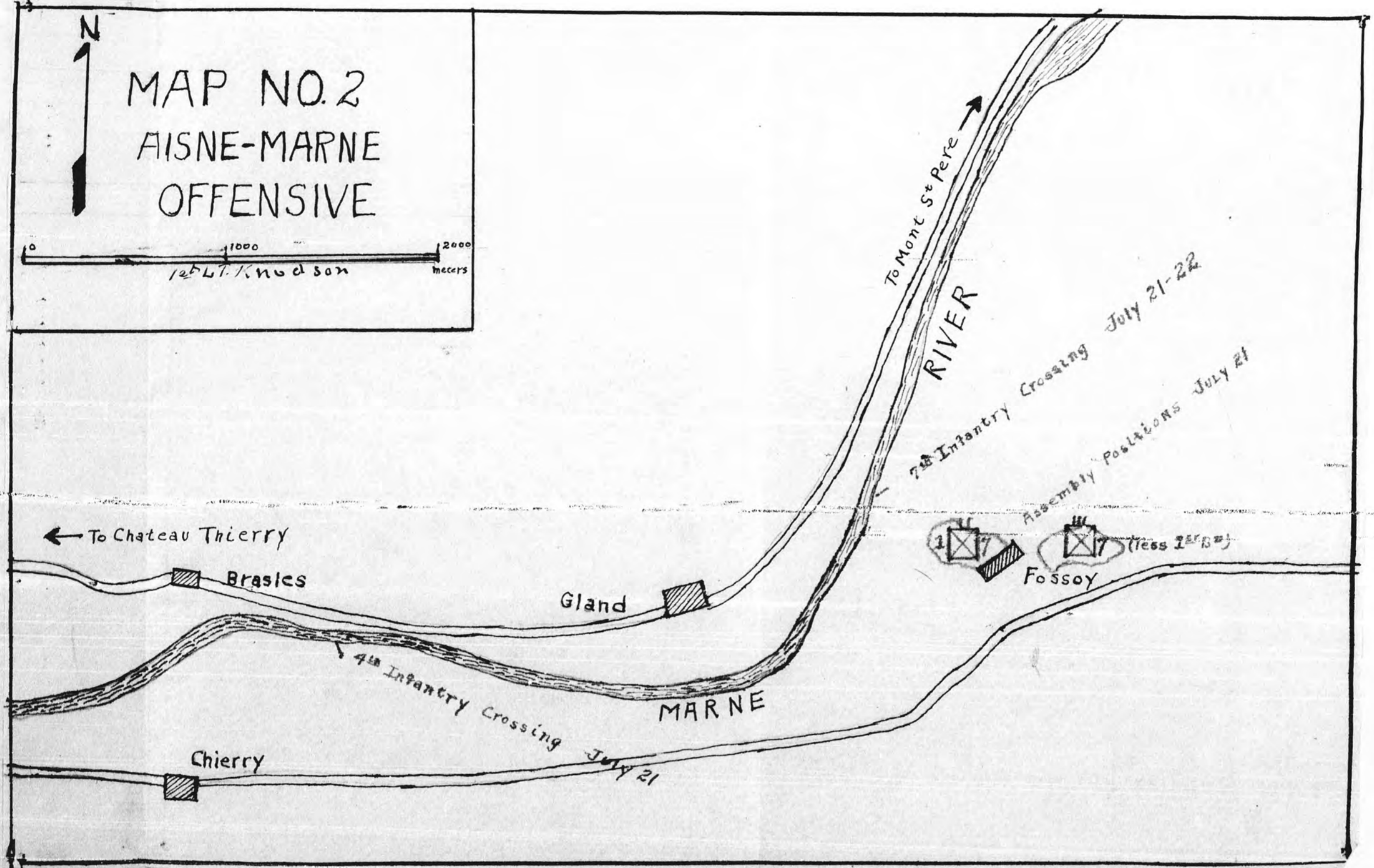
Company I 7th U.S. Inf

July 21-27, 1918



MAP NO. 2
AISNE-MARNE
OFFENSIVE

0 1000 2000
125 LT. Knudson meters



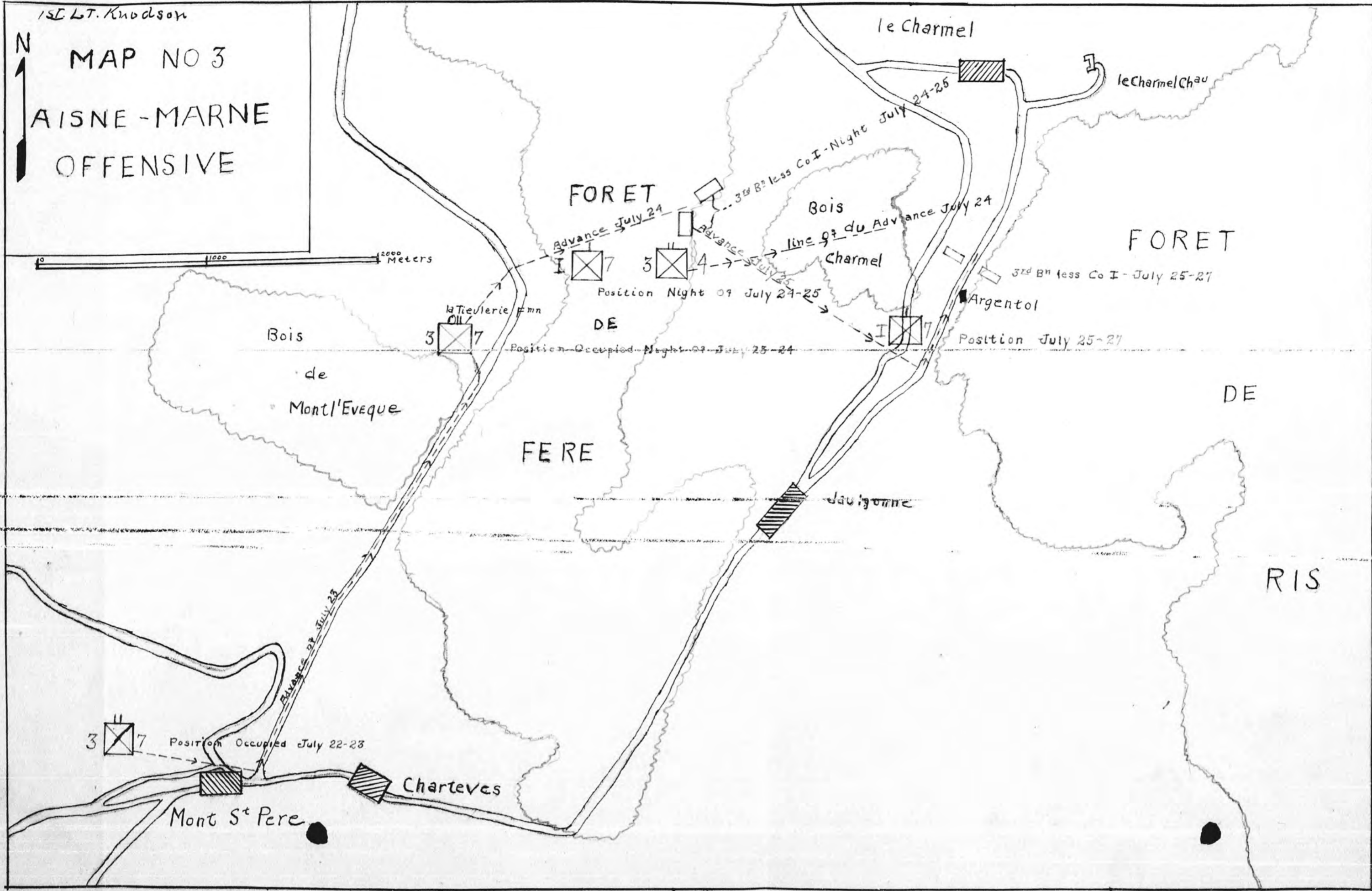
1st Lt. Knudson

MAP NO 3

AISNE-MARNE OFFENSIVE



0 1000 2000 Meters



3 7 Position Occupied July 22-23

Mont S^t Pere

Charteves

Jauignone

Position July 25-27

3rd Bn less Co I - July 25-27

Argentol

Position Night of July 24-25

line of Advance July 24

Advance July 24

Advance July 25

le Charmel

le Charmel Chau

FORET

DE

RIS

Bois de Montl'Eveque

Bois de Charmel

FORET DE FERE