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THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
FORT BENNING, GEORGIA

ADVANCED COURSE
1933-1934

MILITARY HISTORY

OPERATIONS OF THE FOURTH PLATOON,
COMPANY "C", 31ST INFANTRY

Kazanka, Siberia

JULY 3, 1919.

(Personal Experience of a Platoon Commander)

WILLIAM J. KUNZMANN CAPTAIN, INF

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MARGINAL ABBREVIATIONS USED

Bugbee	"The A.E.F. in Siberia," by Colonel F.W. Bugbee.
Graves	"America's Siberian Adventure," by Major General W. ^S . Graves.
R.E.	"Record of Events," Allied Mine Guard, Suchan, Siberia. Official Document.
Rhoads	"A Study of the Operations and Supply of the American Forces in the Suchan Mine Area," by Captain O.R. Rhoads.

INTRODUCTION

This study was made in an attempt to describe some of the problems that may confront the leaders of a small unit in an engagement. It is written after a lapse of more than fourteen years and the writer has no diary or any other document available from which to refresh his memory.

The incidents described are those recalled; perhaps some occurrences of much greater importance have been entirely forgotten.

The time available for the preparation of this paper does not permit the writer to obtain verification for some of the statements made.

During the months of August and September 1918, an American Expeditionary Force, consisting of the 27th and 31st Regular Infantry Regiments, and certain special troops, landed at Vladivostok, Siberia.

This expedition had, as part of its mission, the duty of guarding railroads and supplies of all kinds and, in furtherance of its mission, detachments were placed on guard over supplies and sources of supply in and around Vladivostok and along the Trans-Siberian Railroad as far West as Verkhne Udinsk.(1)

(1) Bugbee, ✓
p 632

Map #1
One of these detachments was stationed in the Suchan Valley which is about 150 miles northeast of Vladivostok by railroad. In the Suchan Valley are ten large coal mines which are the main source of coal supply for Eastern Siberia and the harbor of Vladivostok. Each of the Russian political factions tried at one time or another to gain control

of these mines. Consequently the duty of guarding them was by no means an easy one. Most of the engagements in which Americans took part occurred in or near the Suchan Valley. (2)

(2) Graves, p 94

The mine guard, on June 20, 1919 consisted of Companies "H" and "M", 31st Infantry and two companies of Japanese Infantry. (3)

(3) R.E.

During the Fall and Winter 1918-1919 there was little enemy activity. The American troops were occupied with guard duty and training and they became quite friendly with the Russian people around their stations.

At the end of winter 1918-1919, Bolsheviki forces became active. Propaganda, spread by the Germans prior to the Armistice together with the extreme measures taken by the monarchists and certain of our allies to suppress Bolshevism had finally taken effect. Numerous armed bands appeared through-

(4) Bugbee, p 638

out the country. (4) These bands were composed of ex-soldiers of the Russian Army, peasants and bandits. They called themselves Partisans, Social Democrats, Bolsheviki, and various other names but for our purpose they may all be designated as Bolsheviki.

During May and June these bands committed many depredations, destroying railroad bridges and supplies and firing on trains. In Suchan Valley they had destroyed power stations and had made several attacks on the Allied Mine Guard. On June 22, they had captured one Mexican Officer, Lieutenant

(5) R.E.

Friby, and four enlisted men and an attempt, made by Company "M" to rescue these prisoners had failed.

(5) One Mexican Lieutenant and four enlisted

men were killed and several were wounded in the engagement.

On June 24, a provisional battalion commanded by Major W.H. Joiner, consisting of Company "C" (less one platoon); Company "D"; one platoon Machine Gun Company and one 37 M.M. Gun Squad, Headquarters Company, was sent from ~~Schotovo~~^K into the Suchan Valley to reinforce the Allied Mine Guard. (6)

(6) Bugbee,
p 638

It may be well at this time to note the strength and organization of the American and Japanese Companies and to state what little was known of the opposing forces.

Our Forces

(7) Personal
Knowledge

Each American company consisted of six officers and two hundred and fifty enlisted men, organized into a company headquarters and four platoons. Each platoon contained seven squads, two automatic rifle squads and five rifle squads. The automatic rifle squad was armed with two automatic rifles and five rifles.

Enlisted men

The 31st Infantry was a Regular Army Regiment and about fifty per cent of its enlisted personnel were old Regular Army soldiers. The remainder were mostly volunteers who had had more than a year of service. All were highly trained except in the use of the automatic rifle. This weapon was received after the expedition reached Siberia and its proper employment was not generally understood. It was invariably used on automatic fire.

Officers

The first officers of the Regiment were recent graduates of the Military Academy and the

various training camps; a few were former enlisted men with some years service. The battalion commander, the leader of the first platoon of Company "D" and the writer were in the latter class and during the march one of these officers was usually in command of the advance guard while the other commanded the rear guard. (7)

Company "C", 31st Infantry

The enlisted personnel of Company "C" compared favorably with that of the other companies of the regiment. The non-commissioned officers were mostly men with several years experience in the service. They thoroughly understood their duties, were loyal, intelligent and had initiative. Their leadership was as cool and efficient during combat as on the drill field.

On July 3, three officers and the first platoon were absent on other details and as that left only two lieutenants with the company the personnel of the second platoon was divided between the third and fourth platoons making their strength ten and eleven squads respectively.

The fourth platoon was further divided into two sub-platoons of two sections each; each sub-platoon commanded by a sergeant.

During the operations in the Suchan Valley the deployment was generally made in one line with from one to three paces interval between skirmishers. A support was never held out by the platoon and seldom by the company.

The 4th platoon habitually deployed with ~~two squads on each flank and it was~~ the duty of the corporals of these squads to maintain

contact with the organization on their flank or to protect the flank if it was exposed.

The men carried full field equipment with rations, one extra blanket and two extra bandoliers of ammunition. They had all been in several engagements and they had recently defeated numerically superior forces of the enemy. Morale was high. (8)

(8) Personal Knowledge

Japanese Forces

The Japanese companies were about the same strength as the American. Their men were seasoned soldiers, well equipped and in excellent physical condition, ~~however~~. During the fall of 1918 their operations against Bolsheviki, particularly in Suchan Valley, had not met with marked success except when they had numerical superiority.

(9) Personal Knowledge

(9) The average enlisted man seemed to be lacking in intelligence and he had no initiative. Relations between the Japanese and Americans were not cordial.

(10) Rhoads, p 13

(10)

Enemy Forces

Composition

The strength and organization of the enemy troops cannot be definitely given as a different type of organization existed in each separate locality. They were generally organized into so-called battalions the strength of which varied from seventy-five to four hundred. When several battalions were concentrated they usually had attacked at least one battalion of Chinese. These Chinese battalions were about seventy-five strong and their principal duty was to torture and execute prisoners.

Arms

About fifty per cent of the Bolshevik troops were armed with modern Japanese and Russian army rifles. Of the remainder, some were armed with the old Russian Army rifle, the Berdanka, and the others with an assortment of weapons ranging from modern sporting rifles to ancient flint locks.

About fifty percent had seen service in the Russian Army. Some had been members of outlaw bands and the remainder were peasants with no previous military experience of any kind. Training, discipline and marksmanship were poor, artillery and automatic weapons were almost entirely lacking and when present were operated most ineffectively. (11)

(11) Personal
Knowledge

From June 24 until July 2, detachments of the Mine Guard had numerous skirmishes with the

(12) R.E.

enemy. (12)

Situation - Allied Mine Guard

On July 2, the reinforced mine guard, less detachments left at the mines to guard supplies, made an attack on Novitskaya with the object of disarming enemy troops at that place. At the close of this engagement the Mine Guard Commander, Lieutenant Colonel G.H. Williams, gave orders for an attack on Kazanka on the following day.

Map #1

Kazanka was the political and military headquarters for all enemy forces in the Suchan Valley. The object of the attack was to break up their organization and disarm their troops.

Map #2

Plan of Attack

Companies "H" and "M" and the 3rd companies were to march north on the main highway and attack the enemy forces in Kazanka, at daybreak, from the south.

trees or bushes. The grass on it was about 12 inches high.

Beyond the plain is another mountain range which is parallel to the river.

Kazanka has no railroad. The principal line of communications is the highway which runs through the center of the town parallel to the river. A secondary road from the north-east passes through the town, crosses the river at a ford and enters a pass in the mountains to the southwest.

OPERATIONS

At 10:45 PM the Provisional battalion at Suchan began to form for march. There was no confusion or unnecessary noise, although no lights were used. Promptly at 11:00 PM the march started.

Order of March: Advance Guard, 1st Platoon
Company D.

Main Body: Company D (less one platoon)
Company C (less two and one-half platoons)
One Squad, machine gun company
One 37 M.M. gun squad, Headquarters Company
Rear Guard: Fourth platoon, Company C
(The writer was in command of the rear guard)

The Machine gun and 37 M.M. gun were carried on pack mules. There was no other transportation. The night was dark but clear. About two miles from Suchan Mines the main road was left and from there on the march was over an unimproved mountain road.

Shortly after leaving the main road, the column halted for a moment. This indicated that, as usual, our movement was known to the enemy.

Personal
Knowledge

Companies "C" and "D" (less detachments) and detachments Headquarters and Machine Gun Companies to evacuate the wounded and prisoners from Novitskaya to Suchan Mines then to make a night march from there northeast through the mountains and attack Kazanka from the west. It was contemplated that this attack would start soon after the attack from the South had been launched. (13)

(13) Personal Knowledge

Situation - Enemy

Nothing very definite regarding the enemy forces is known. Kazanka has a normal population of about 2,000 and it was the enemy headquarters for the Suchan Valley. It has been estimated that there were between ten and twenty thousand Bolsheviks in the valley. However, many of them were not armed.

Terrain

The terrain around Kazanka affords excellent defensive positions particularly against an attack from the south or west. It lies on the southwest slope of a mountain range which runs generally northwest and southeast. Beyond the town, to the southwest, about 800 yards is the Suchan River which at this point is parallel to the mountains. Between the town and river are wheat fields. The wheat at this time was about 15 inches high. Opposite the center of the town and about 100 yards from the river was one small building surrounded by large spreading trees.

Map #2

The river is about 40 feet wide and 5 feet deep. Its banks are steep and average four feet in height. On each side of the river is a screen of trees and bushes. South of the river is a marshy plain about 100 yards wide and almost devoid of

Many of the natives were in sympathy with the enemy and we had no way of detecting them. Consequently information regarding our movements was sometimes given to the enemy before the move started.

Beginning of Engagement

The march continued, in good order and with the usual hourly halts, until about 4:00 AM, just before daylight, when firing was heard to the front. The firing continued but the rear guard kept moving forward slowly. At about 5:00 AM the firing increased and a signal to halt was received from the main body.

After about ten minutes a verbal message was received, from the battalion commander, directing the rear guard to move forward.

Situation

We passed the main body, sitting by the road side, and as we approached the mouth of the pass, we were met by the Major who halted us and explained the situation as follows: As the advance guard debouched from the pass, it had come under heavy fire and had been stopped. It was now deployed on the left of the road and engaged with an enemy along the river. Nothing had been heard of the attack of our other column. (See Plan)

We were ordered to extend the line of the advance guard, to the right, and assist in driving the enemy to the north. All of the men had heard the Major's orders so we moved forward at once.

Fourth Platoon Enters Engagement

As we reached the mouth of the pass, the command, "As skirmishers, guide left", was given and

Map #2

we had almost completed the deployment when the enemy opened fire on us. We could see no one but smoke, caused by the black powder used by many of the enemy, suddenly appeared along the river's edge. Every one was watching that point because we knew that the enemy was there and I believe every man in the platoon was prone before their bullets had time to reach us. Their fire was wild and was not answered.

After a few minutes observation the signal to advance by section rushes from the left was given. The platoon continued to advance by this method until we were abreast of the advance guard and about 850 yards from the enemy position. We now commenced firing with service rifles using range 1000 yards. After a few shots had been fired, the platoon sergeant said, "Lieutenant, they're shooting clear over those mountains," so the signal down 100 was given. The enemy fire soon began to slacken and we decided that we had the correct range.

After a few minutes firing the corporal of the left automatic rifle squad began to signal and point to his left and it was seen that the advance guard had moved forward about 100 yards beyond our line. The automatic rifles were ordered to commence firing and the signal for squad rushes, starting with the left squad, was given.

The advance started at once and I went forward with the Sixth squad. After observing our fire for a short time it was discovered that the right half of the platoon had not yet started its advance and was still firing from the old position.

Some of their shots were coming uncomfortably close to us.

I signalled the section leader to cease firing and advance. He appeared to be looking at me but he made no move; the signal was repeated several times without result. Finally one of the platoon runners was sent back. He soon returned and reported that he had ordered the section leader to advance and had even jumped on his back and shaken him but couldn't get him to obey.

The section guide of the first section was then placed in command of the right half of the platoon and he brought it up on line. The other sergeant was put in the firing line with the sixth squad where his actions could be observed. Later when this man was questioned, he stated that he had seen and understood the signals and that he had received the message but couldn't force himself to move. As a member of the squad he conducted himself properly and later during the engagement he volunteered to go on an apparently dangerous mission. He had been under fire several times before and was in several later engagements but that was the only time he ever failed to properly perform his duty even for a short time.

Overhead Fire

Shortly after this, a voice from the rear was heard shouting, "Range sixteen hundred; Corporal Doan kick that man up in line or I'll kick you; fire at will." I looked back and saw that our 3rd platoon was deployed on the hill in our rear and was firing over us. Almost at once several shots struck around us, all coming from the rear. Several

Map #2

~~of the non-commissioned officers called my attention~~
to this. I signalled to the 3rd platoon leader to

shift his fire to the right which he did. We continued to advance, by squad rushes of about 40 yards each, until we reached a position 700 yards from the enemy. Here two corporals, from the right section, reported that they had men wounded.

Flank Attack

The enemy fire from the front had continued to slacken and it had at no time seemed particularly dangerous but now shots were striking close. Men had been hit and snipers seemed to have located the platoon headquarters group. The platoon sergeant hit the ground for the first time that day and shouted, "You had better get down, Lieutenant, they're coming pretty close."

Near my position there was one lone bush, about three feet high, and it looked like a good place from which to observe so I started for it at a run but on reaching a point about thirty feet from it, I suddenly remembered that we had passed no other trees or bushes for some time so I got down and watched it for a few seconds; twigs and small limbs were dropping from it, as if by magic. I immediately placed some distance between myself and that bush and I don't believe that I would ever again select the one outstanding landmark on a piece of ground as an observation post.

The platoon sergeant now called my attention to the mark left by a bullet, which had struck near his head. It showed plainly that the shot had been fired from directly to our right and we soon located an enemy force on the small hill on our right flank.

Map #2

Support by Third Platoon

Before any action was taken, two runners reported with a verbal message from the commander of our third platoon, which was still on the hill near the mouth of the pass. The message stated that the company commander could not be located and that the 3rd platoon wasn't doing anything and wanted some orders.

We didn't know where the company commander was and the Major could be seen, mounted, far to the left. I remember that it flashed through my mind that the advance guard must be worse off than we were or the Major would not have been on that flank. I sent orders to the third platoon leader to drive the enemy off the hill on our right and then to follow in rear of our right flank.

One runner started off to the left to take advantage of the cover offered by a few bushes on that side. The other started straight for his platoon across the open field. He reached his platoon commander without being hit and arrived, of course, much sooner than the other runner. This man, Private John C. Martens, Company C, 31st Infantry, was later decorated because of his actions during this engagement. (14)

(14) Decorations,
U.S. Army,
1862-1926
p 440.

The 3rd platoon moved forward and launched its attack without delay and we were soon able to resume the advance.

Enemy Withdrawal

We continued to advance by squad rushes until we were within 500 yards of the enemy. ~~By this time, their fire had practically ceased and our men were beginning to expose themselves in an~~

effort to locate a target. Then it was discovered that the enemy was withdrawing. The platoon rushed forward about 200 yards, halted and opened fire. The enemy was then withdrawing through the wheat field across the river and later many dead and wounded were found there. It is believed that at least ninety per cent of the enemy casualties, caused by our platoon, occurred during this withdrawal.

When the enemy disappeared into the town we ceased firing and advanced to the river at a walk; in one line.

Supporting Weapons

While looking for a place to cross the river, the 37 M.M. gun and the machine gun, originally at the tail of the main body of the march, were seen going into action near our left flank and a short time later their firing was heard. It is not known whether they had been employed earlier in the day; however, they had been offered few favorable targets.

River Crossing

A ford was finally located by one of the corporals and two squads were sent across; their crossing covered by the remainder of the platoon. After reconnoitering the east bank, they covered the crossing of the platoon which deployed on the river bank and opened fire on the town.

From our new firing position a wagon train and some troops could be seen on the mountain road beyond the town and our 37 M.M. gun was firing on them. The range was too great for this weapon, however, and fire was soon shifted onto the town.

Map #2

At this point, a sergeant with three squads from Company "D" reported that they had lost contact with their organization. I had known this sergeant for some time and knew that he was an excellent non-commissioned officer and I didn't believe that he had lost contact. I told him this and he said, "Lieutenant, you'll do us a big favor, if you let us fight this war right here." I didn't know where his platoon was and it was apparent that for some reason he was reluctant to return to it so he was assigned to the right sub-platoon as a third section.

The platoon now contained fourteen squads, four of which were automatic rifle squads.

Attack Halted

The impetus of the attack seemed temporarily at least to have spent itself when the river was crossed. We had been fighting about five hours, we had had little sleep the night before. We were all tired and hungry and we were in a good safe place so we continued firing but did not advance.

This continued for some time. Then, perhaps more to excuse our failure to advance than for any other reason, an inspection of our line was made. Near our right, the sub-platoon leader was found standing with his hand on his breast and swaying as if he were about to fall. When we started to examine him, he said, "It's no use. I am hit bad." His shirt front was covered with blood but no hole could be seen in the shirt. We then examined his back and could find no hole or blood either. I then opened his shirt and found his undershirt perfectly clean.

He had been lying in the spot where some enemy had been wounded. When the platoon was ordered to advance,

his chagrin was pitiful.

Attack Resumed

Map #2

After about twenty minutes the battalion commander appeared and inquired as to our casualties and ammunition supply. He was informed that three men had been wounded; that there was no shortage of ammunition; he then ordered us to resume the advance. We started to advance by squad rushes from the left but as the first squad emerged from the bushes along the river bank, it came under heavy fire from the right, and was forced to return to the river. No enemy could be seen to the right but a sergeant reported that he had seen a movement in one of the trees, which were about 300 yards from our right flank, and asked permission to investigate.

He was given one automatic rifleman and helper. With them, he moved to the right under cover of the river bank. In a short time, the hostile firing from the flank ceased and the platoon moved forward. The sergeant later reported that he had gained a position about 75 yards from the trees and had opened fire into the tree tops; that about 15 of the enemy had dropped from the branches. Several of them were killed or wounded and the rest disappeared into the wheat field.

Occupation of the Town

On arriving at the edge of the town, the platoon halted and two squads were detailed to advance up each street. They were instructed to advance through the town rapidly and not waste much

~~time as surprise was one of our platoons could be seen~~
~~behind us and the enemy could be seen~~
moving up the ridge beyond the town.

Little fighting took place in the town
itself but there was some sniping mostly from the rear.

Our platoon headquarters advanced up the street ~~advance up the street~~ on which the enemy headquarters building was located; this building was entered and hurriedly searched but nothing of importance was discovered.

Effect of Machine Gun Fire

About two blocks beyond this place, some fifteen enemy were found dead. They were all members of the Chinese Battalion and had apparently attempted to cross this street after our machine gun had taken its position near the river.

Leaving the Town

On reaching the eastern edge of the town, the platoon came under fire from the enemy on the ridge. When the headquarters group arrived several squads had already deployed and were firing and by the time the last squad had cleared the town, the enemy fire had been silenced.

The platoon then advanced to the top of the ridge, the men walking and halting to fire when a target appeared.

End of Engagement

At this time, the Major again appeared and ordered us to halt. He explained the situation which was as follows: The advance guard was on our left; our third platoon was in the town in our right rear; one platoon of Company "D" was near the right of our third platoon; another platoon of Company "D" was approaching the town from the south and the remaining platoon of Company "D" was engaged with an enemy south of the pass.

Map #2

time it was discovered that many buildings in the

back to investigate.

We had been in constant contact with the advance guard. This was verified and one squad was sent forward to reconnoitre. This squad returned about thirty minutes later and reported that they could see no signs of the enemy. A few minutes later, a verbal message was received, from the Major, directing us to withdraw to the eastern edge of town and establish an outpost.

One squad was left on the ridge and we withdrew to the town. During our withdrawal several prisoners were captured.

Two more squads were detailed on outpost duty each one furnishing two cossack posts and the men were directed to eat their canned ration.

It was now about 2:00 P.M. and I went to the battalion command post, near the southern edge of the town, to report to the Major and to visit my wounded men.

The fires had been extinguished, I later learned, by our troops.

From the battalion command post Japanese soldiers could be seen in the southeastern part of the town.

Prisoners

On returning to the platoon command post, some of the prisoners were questioned and while the information gained was of little value; because the Russian Peasant is, above all things, a finished liar; some of the comment was of interest.

According to these prisoners, there were between 1500 and 4000 Japanese in the town at the time of our attack. Of this force, about 500 were

ex-soldiers, 75 were Chinese and the remainder were peasants.

One prisoner stated that when they had first fired on us they thought we had all been killed or wounded as we all fell down and did not fire. They were much surprised when we started to advance.

Several inquired as to our method of carrying and firing machine guns. They said that they had never before seen one man carry and operate a machine gun and that they would not have withdrawn from the river if further defense against our overwhelming machine gun fire, had not seemed hopeless.

Our automatic rifles had been used on automatic fire throughout the engagement and this had given the impression that we were using machine guns.

They also asked why our men had worked so hard to extinguish the fires in an enemy town and they expressed surprise that we were not engaged in looting, murder and rape. They said that it had been rumored that American Soldiers conducted themselves in a different manner from other soldiers but that until now little credence had been given these rumors.

At about 4:00 PM the combined Allied force started its return march to the Suchan Mines, twelve miles away, arriving there at about 8:30 PM. From midnight, July 1-2 to 8:30 PM, July 3, this platoon marched 52 miles. It took part in two engagements which consumed about eleven hours and they had had one cooked meal.

LESSONS AND CONCLUSIONS

During this engagement, five orders were

issued. They were all verbal and very brief. This

is the greatest number of orders ever received, by the writer, in one engagement.

During the late war the writer never even saw a written field order. This seems to be about equal to the experiences of other junior officers in past wars and will probably be as much as may be expected in future wars.

It is not believed that overhead fire can be safely delivered with shoulder weapons. Regardless of the training and experience of troops and their excellence in marksmanship, during the excitement of combat much will be forgotten and the firing will at times be extremely erratic.

It is well to be familiar with the weapons used by the enemy. In this engagement had the enemy known that we were using automatic rifles instead of machine guns and had he known the characteristics of this weapon, he probably would have held his position at the river. It is doubted that our force could have dislodged him had he decided to remain.

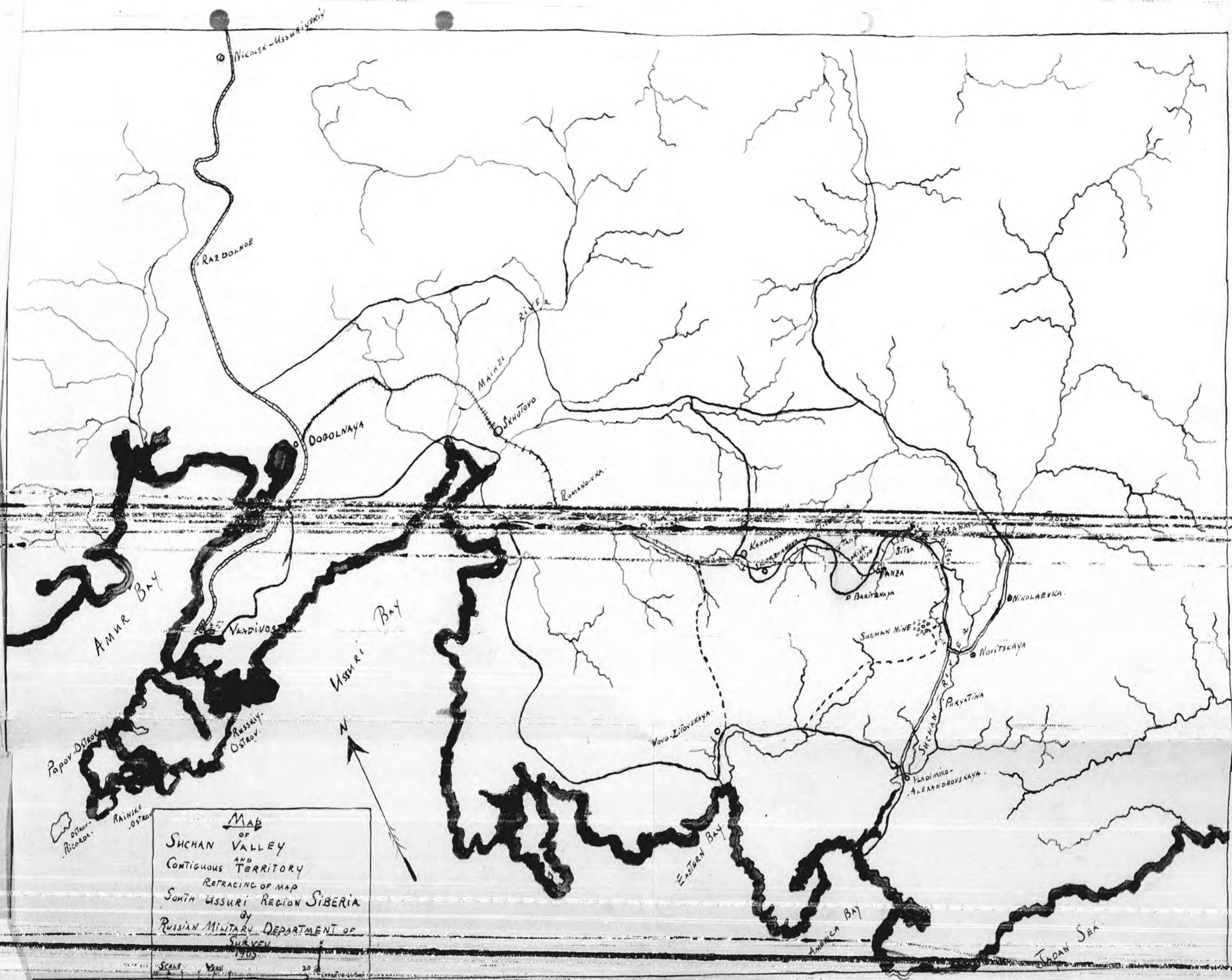
The withdrawal of the enemy, from the river, was not well planned and was very costly to them. It is well to give considerable attention to lines of communication in a defensive position as well as in an attack.

Troops are easily kept in motion as long as they are in exposed positions. When good cover and concealment are secured, most men have no desire to leave them. Here the commander must exert himself to keep the attack moving or it will fail.

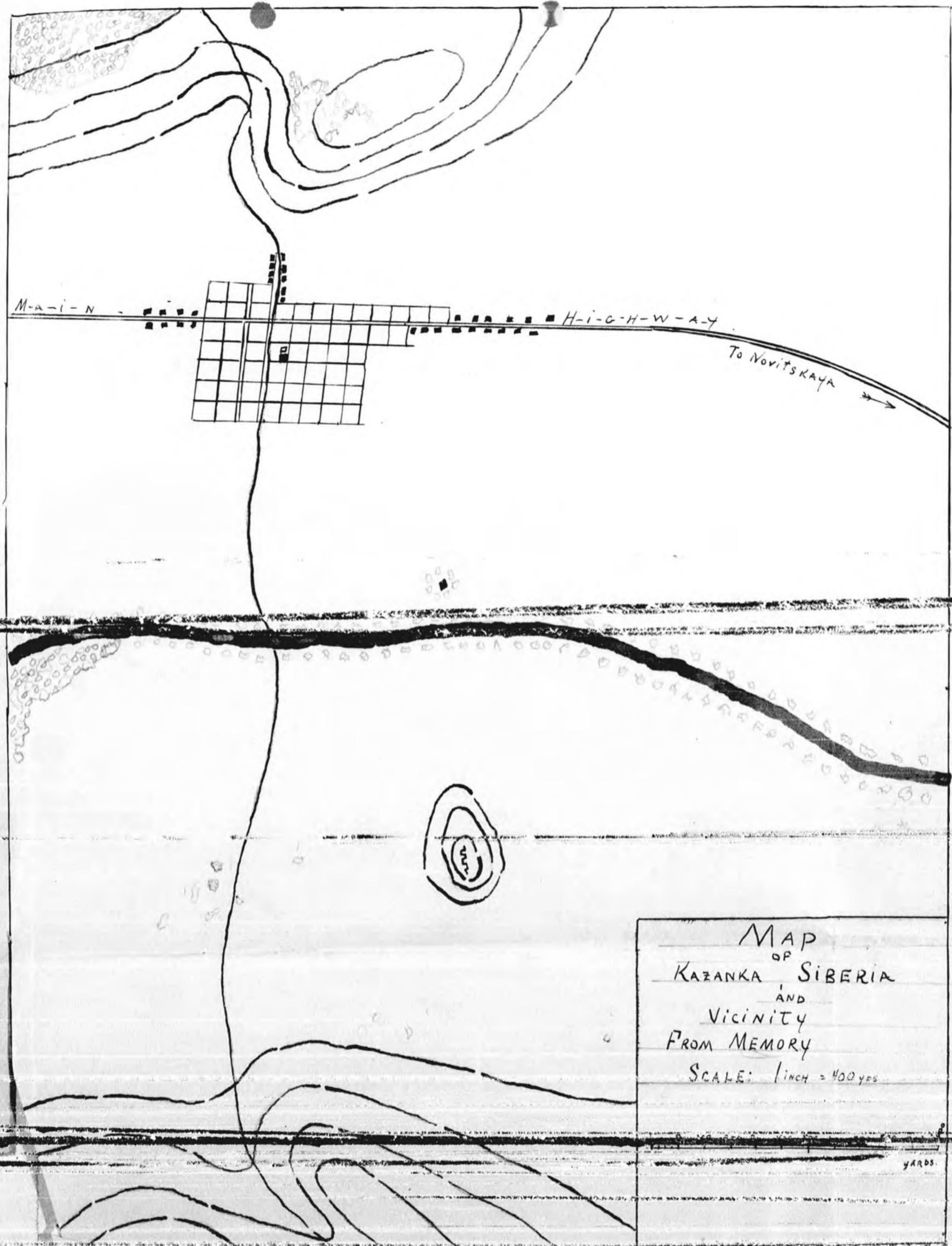
Well trained and reliable non-commissioned officers are the greatest asset a platoon leader can have.

Many of the details of movement, employment of fire, reconnaissance and communications are forgotten because those details were handled by non-commissioned officers.

A platoon of this size could not have been properly controlled by one person and the fact that it was divided into smaller units which were commanded by reliable non-commissioned officers accounts for its success in this engagement.



MAP
 OF
 SUCHAN VALLEY
 AND
 CONTIGUOUS TERRITORY
 RE-TRACING OF MAP
 SOUTH USSURI REGION SIBERIA
 BY
 RUSSIAN MILITARY DEPARTMENT OF
 SURVEY
 1905
 SCALE 1:20,000



MAP
OF
KAZANKA SIBERIA
AND
VICINITY
FROM MEMORY
SCALE: 1 inch = 400 yds
YARDS