

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

2-9

ADVANCED COURSE  
1929-1930

OPERATIONS OF THE 7th MACHINE GUN BATTALION,  
(THIRD DIVISION) IN THE VICINITY OF CHATEAU THIERRY,  
FRANCE, MAY 31 - JUNE 4, 1918. (PERSONAL EXPERIENCE)

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MARGINAL ABBREVIATIONS USED

Bissell	Personal letter
Cobbey	Personal letter
Dickman	"The Great Crusade"
Frothingham	"The American Reinforcement in the World War"
Houghton	Personal letter and lecture
Howland	"Military History of the World War"
Kelton	"The Miracle of Chateau Thierry"
Mondesir	"The American 3d Division in Second Marne Battle"
Pershing	"Final Report, Commander in Chief, A.E.F."
B.M.C.	Battle Monuments Commission
U.S.War Coll.	"The Aisne and Montdidier-Noyon Operations"

## INTRODUCTION

Since their inception during the World War, the study of motorized forces has been growing steadily among military students. Unquestionably, motors will hold an important place in all future wars of any magnitude and a careful analysis of their powers and limitations is of vital importance to every nation. Unfortunately, however, few historical examples of their use are available and it is believed that, if for no other reason, the action of the 7th Machine Gun Battalion (motorized) of the 3d Division at Chateau Thierry in June 1918 is well worth examining.

## ORIENTATION

*not true*

The collapse of the Russian and Roumanian armies late in 1917 gave the Central Powers a great preponderance of troops for the spring of 1918 on the Western front. They realized that the opportunity existed to defeat England and France on that front and bring the war to a successful conclusion, provided that they could act before the United States Armies became effective. In a carefully analyzed plan, Von Hindenburg to whom the Kaiser had delegated all strategic authority (1) hoped to crush the British by a double envelopment toward Amiens and Hazebruck, after which concentrating all his forces against France he could cut the Paris-Metz railroad, capture Paris and paralyze that nation. (2)

(1) Howland, ✓  
p. 242

*Emergency  
fact*

(2) Howland,  
p. 248

*not true*

Von Hindenburg's first blow fell on March 21, 1918 (Map 1). Superior to the Allies in strength, morale, training and experience in mobile warfare, with the added

- (3) Pershing, p. 30 advantage of unity of command (3) the Germans swept away all resistance and by March 31st had penetrated to Noyon and Moreuil, creating a broad salient, 37 miles deep on a base of 65 miles (4), capturing 90,000 prisoners and 1300 guns. (5)
- (4) Howland, p. 255
- (5) Frothingham, p. 243

Desperately the Allies had subordinated their differences, agreeing on unity of command in the person of Marshal Foch and it was only through his efforts in drawing reserves from all fronts that the Germans were finally stopped. (6)

- (6) Howland, p. 253

Continuing the plan of enveloping the British, Von Hindenburg struck his second blow on April 9th toward

- (7) Howland, p. 263

Hazebruck. (7) (Map 1.) Though not as successful as the first, he penetrated 20 kilometers on a 50-kilometer front and secured Mt. Kemmel giving him observation of

- (8) Howland, p. 265

the entire British salient at Ypres. (8)

Somewhat disappointed in failing to isolate the British he still believed that this could be accomplished in one more powerful blow. However, time would be required for its preparation and he could not afford to surrender the initiative. The Crown Prince had earlier prepared plans for a drive toward Paris to gain control of the Amiens--Rheims--Metz railroad and now contended that the situation favored it. The Allies reserves had been drawn north of Paris and the French line of the Chemin des Dames though naturally strong was weakly

- (9) Howland, p. 274

garrisoned. (9) So Hindenburg authorized this attack and the 7th and 1st Armies, totalling 41 divisions, were secretly assembled by night marches over a period of

- (10) U.S. War Coll.p. 8

twenty days. (10)

At 2:40 AM, May 27th, the blow fell as a com-

- (11) U.S. War Coll, p. 10      plete surprise on a 25-mile front. (11) By 8:00 AM <sup>the Chemin des Dames</sup> was captured. By noon he reached the Aisne and that evening was on the Vesle. Foch, hurriedly gathering reserves, placed them at Rheims and Soissons against the flanks of this fast forming salient but was unable to stop the German march. On May 28th Paris was bombarded. Soissons fell on the 29th and on the 30th the armies of the Crown Prince reached Jaulgonne and Chateau Thierry. (12) The complete satisfaction of the High Command could have been no more clearly shown than in the pompous announcement of that day's communique, "We stand along the Marne." (13)
- (12) Howland, p. 276
- (13) Kelton, p. 1

SITUATION, 7th MARCH. GUN BATTALION, MAY 30, 1918.

The 7th Mach. Gun Battalion, 3d Division, was a Regular Army unit, organized in 1917 from trained men from the 4th and 7th Infantry regiments and consisted of two companies and a Headquarters detachment, total strength about 20 officers and 375 men. Having received its basic training at Camp Green, N. C., it arrived at La Ferte-sur-Aube, France, in the Chaumont training area on April 17, 1918. Certain officers were promptly sent to a Corps School for additional training and on May 1st Hotchkiss machine guns were drawn, 16 per company making three four-gun platoons with four reserve guns without crews as replacements. Intensive instruction was started and by May 30th a reasonable degree of efficiency had been reached. Unfortunately, however, this could not be said for the transportation. Motor equipment was first issued on May 24th. (14) It consisted of 52 covered vans of 1000 lbs. capacity, such as are used for delivering groceries, 6 Ford touring cars and 24 motorcycles, solos

- (14) Houghton, p. 2



and some with side cars. A canvass of the companies produced very few experienced chauffeurs and during the few days after their receipt the machines suffered many minor accidents at the hands of these novices. Perhaps the greatest difficulty lay in the solo motorcycles for it is no easy matter to control these on short acquaintance. However, by dint of perseverance, by May 30th the train could be formed, started, and stopped with only occasional collisions.

In summing up we may say that this battalion's training, with the exception of the motors, was excellent; discipline and morale superior, and equipment fair, for the guns were not new and the motors as will be shown later were inadequate to carry the loads required.

The 3d Division was scheduled to occupy a quiet sector north of Toul about June 14th for training purposes. Major General Dickman, commanding, was en route to inspect this when recalled by telephone May 28 and advised that instead he would go to the Vosges, May 31st, to release a seasoned French Division for active fighting. However, on May 30th this was again changed and the 3d Division was assigned to the 38th French Corps operating in the vicinity of Chateau Thierry. (15)

(15) Dickman,  
p. 46

Based on this, Division Field Order No. 1, dated May 30th, directed the 7th M.G. Bn. to proceed at once, using its own transportation, via Arcis and Sezanne to Conde-en-Brie to report to a French Headquarters.

(See Appendix 1 and Map 1.)

#### MOVEMENT BY MOTORS

This order reached the battalion headquarters at 10:00 AM, May 30th. It came as a complete surprise

for although rumors were circulating that the French were hard pressed, this newly arrived unit hardly hoped to be called upon. A battalion warning order was issued at once directing companies to load and report when ready to move. (See Appendix 2.) Troops were recalled from drill and transportation was loaded on a basis of two vans per squad with Officers and Headquarters personnel in touring cars. The motorcycles were used for couriers and key N.C.O.'s. Three heavy trucks were secured by the Battalion Supply Officer from the 3d Ammunition Train for emergency use.

(16) Bissell

(16) Later five more from the Div. Q. M. Train joined the Battalion for the heavy baggage.

(17) B.M.C.,  
p. 1

At 2:30 PM (17) the column cleared La Ferte in the order Hqtrs, A, B, Trains. A rate of twenty miles per hour soon extended the column badly and finally twelve was settled upon as the most economical rate. Trucks built for loads of 1000 lbs. carried 1500, making springs rest on axles. On steep hills men had to dismount and walk, in some cases push, to reach the top. These cars were secured from the British, were right hand drive and the tires proved to be old stock resulting in many punctures. Delays were frequent and motorcycles proved invaluable in guiding and carrying spare parts to broken down trucks. Before starting each truck was furnished with a reserve can of 5 gallons of gasoline and each driver had an itinerary of the route.

A short halt was made about 9:00 PM near Sezanne to rest the men, refuel, and overhaul the cars. Thereafter no lights were used which added to the difficulties of the drivers. At daybreak the column encountered refugees and it grew increasingly difficult to keep the train intact until finally there were seldom as many as

10 cars in any group. Starting with a few carts the refugees increased rapidly to what appeared to be a never ending stream. Families had abandoned their homes and were fleeing from the invaders with their most treasured possessions, women and children sharing large hay wagons with feather beds, chests of drawers, bird cages and chicken coops, the men leading cattle and spare horses. Their faces were haggard with weariness but all could smile and wave encouragement to "les Americains", their cars the only ones moving north against this current of fear and depression.

Nearer the front detachments of infantry, heavy siege guns and supply wagons, both French and British, appeared in the intervals between the refugees, all retreating, the wreck of the defeated army.

North of Montmirail there was less confusion. Here artillery was still in firing positions and Cavalry of La Tour's 5th Cavalry Division (18) was standing to horse in formation near the road, looking rather medieval with their bannered lances.

(18) Mondesir,  
p. 1

At 12:30 PM, May 31st, the head of the battalion halted at Conde-en-Brie, having come 110 miles over roads jammed with traffic in 22 hours. Reporting to General Renouard, French Army, the Battalion Commander received orders to continue to Chateau Thierry. (19) En route, looking back at the town of Conde, shells could be seen striking the buildings in the square the Battalion had recently vacated. The war was rapidly becoming a reality.

(19) Dickman,  
p. 49

Nesles-la-Montagne (see Map 2), the last cover before entering Chateau Thierry was reached at 3:30 PM. Two French batteries were firing from south of this town on the heights north of Chateau Thierry and it was not

(20) Houghton

considered safe to move the cars further forward without reconnaissance. (20) A base was established and pursuant to the orders received (see Appendix 3), the Company Commanders were sent to report to Lieut. Colonel Benezech, commanding the 33d Colonial Infantry at Les Chesneaux, just north of Chateau Thierry to reconnoitre gun positions.

(21) Mondesir,  
p. 1

At arriving at the stone bridge over the Marne in the center of the city, the Captain of Co "A" who was accompanied by the Battalion liaison officer (French) observing some confusion parked his car in a side street and approached the bridge where, observing a French General with some officers, he stated his mission. This General proved to be Marchand, of Fashoda fame, (21) commanding the 53d Colonial Division, who said that Colonel Benezech had been either killed or captured, that he was taking personal command, and he directed that the 7th Battalion bring up its guns immediately and occupy positions on the south bank of the Marne to cover the approaches to the bridges and to protect the withdrawal of the French to the south shore, after which, these bridges, now being mined, would be destroyed. He further stated that the Battalion was to remain in position until it was relieved. These orders were transmitted to the Battalion Commander in Nesles and later confirmed in writing. (22)

(22) Houghton,  
p. 4

#### DESCRIPTION OF TERRAIN, CHATEAU THIERRY

The city of Chateau Thierry straddles the Marne River, the major portion being on the north side where it surrounds the base of a prominent bluff. A fortified chateau stands on this bluff and from its walls can be seen not only the entire city but the level plain between

its southern limits and the wooded hills of Nesles. This plain, some 1500 yards deep affords very limited cover. The Marne and a canal form an island within the city. Rue Carnot, the principal north-south street extends almost straight south from the bluff, crossing a large stone bridge over the Marne, hereafter referred to as the west bridge, across the island, a smaller stone bridge over the canal, through a square named Place Carnot, across a third bridge under which the railroad passes and on over the plain toward Nesles. A main highway follows the north bank of the Marne, opening as a long quay-like plaza opposite the west bridge, then continuing eastward to the town of Brasles. Another east-west road passes thru Place Carnot on the south bank, running east to Cezancy and known as the Cezancy Road. The southern part of the city is taken up with rather extensive railroad yards with one track crossing a combination wagon and railroad bridge just beyond the island on the eastern edge of the city, hereafter referred to as the east bridge. These two bridges were the only means of crossing the Marne for five miles in either direction. Except for a short period in 1914 the Marne valley had not been in the war zone. The city had not been damaged by shell fire and the surrounding country was in a high state of cultivation, wheat being the principal crop. Both north and south slopes of the valley are steep, forming natural defensive lines to the east and west.

ORGANIZATION OF THE DEFENSE  
(See Special Map No 3)

On receiving General Marchand's order the Battalion Commander directed both companies to send gun squads to the Place Carnot (o) as fast as they arrived in Nesles.

(23) Houghton,  
p. 5

In the absence of the Supply Officer still with the slow heavy trucks he directed the Captain of A Company to organize the base, arrange for rationing and loading strips of ammunition. (23)

By 4:30 PM several squads of each company had arrived in Place Carnot, their equipment piled on the curb while the cars returned to Nesles for protection. After some delay, "B" Company was ordered to cover the east Bridge and protect the east flank. Five guns were moved out at once and placed, two at the stone steps (A) just south of and enfilading the east bridge and three in the corner of a field (B) firing to the northeast across the river.

(24) Houghton,  
p. 5

Meanwhile further orders were received by the Battalion Commander and pursuant to them one section (two guns) of Company "A" was sent under an officer across the Marne to the northeast exits of the city (C), to cover the withdrawal of the French via the west bridge returning when this withdrawal was completed after which the bridge would be blown up. (24) Moving out at 5:00 PM, they were followed by a French rifle platoon.

In crossing the bridge they received scattered fire but suffered no casualties. Advancing to a tower (C) one gun was mounted to fire north and east, the other being held in reserve while the officer reconnoitred. German snipers occupied two Adrian barracks in a park a gateway at (M) and some houses at (N) near the river. By 6:00 PM, however, the French had established a line along the stone wall some 150 yards east of the tower with a machine gun at (P) covering their flank. The other "A" Company gun was therefore mounted near the first. Though

(25) Bissell

subject to occasional machine gun fire during the night these positions remained unchanged. (25)

The balance of the Battalion was held in the Place Carnot until after dark and about 11:00 PM a reconnaissance was made by the Battalion Commander, accompanied by the Company Commanders to locate gun positions. This failure to take advantage of the daylight hours is difficult to explain, unless there was some uncertainty still existing as to the ultimate use of the Battalion. It was a very dark night and the reconnaissance was not completed until after 2:00 AM. Platoon Commanders then received their orders and by dawn the defense was organized as follows:

"B" Company:

3 guns on wooded peninsula (F) 300 yds east of town  
2 guns in a sugar refinery (D) on river bank  
2 guns in sunken garden (E) covering bridge.

"A" Company:

2 guns north of Marne (C)  
6 guns in three sections on north shore of island  
all east of the west bridge.

Each of the above groups was commanded by an officer.

The remaining guns were still in Company and Battalion reserve. Orders were issued to remain concealed and fire only on the orders of an officer. In "A" Company the destruction of the west bridge was given as the signal for all guns to open fire on suitable targets. (26)

(26) Houghton,  
p. 5

### GERMANS SURPRISED ON EAST FLANK

On June 1st the sun rose at 3:44 AM and as the mists rose from the river a German column estimated as a battalion was observed marching west from Brasles on the river road. At ranges of 500 and 800 yards respectively the five guns of "B" Company opened simultaneous fire. (See Appendix 4) As the fire was rapidly adjusted the German ranks broke, the men scattering into the fields of wheat between the road and the river. They were screened from view but not from fire. Moving by short bounds in small groups they gradually approached the river bank and east bridge. (27) This brought their line close to the peninsula and enabled them to definitely locate the guns there. Under heavy German machine gun fire and later artillery they were finally forced to withdraw at 7:00 AM their losses, five men wounded. The refinery guns protected within a building remained in position. Protected by rifle and machine gun fire the Germans massed several times near the east bridge and attempted to rush it but this brought them into the open and the refinery guns drove them back each time with heavy losses. At this point the river is barely fifty yards wide and at times the men used pistols against the encroaching Germans at the waters edge.

About noon a German machine gun was located in the window of a large house opposite the refinery and a duel ensued. At times German bullets glanced off the barrel of the air cooled Hotchkiss. Finally the German gun was silenced and it is not illogical to assume that one fire being equal to the other, the Maxim water jacket was pierced thus disabling the gun and illustrating an

(27) Cobby



(28) Cobbey advantage of the air cooled type. (28)

During the morning frequent requests had been made by the Captain of "B" Company for artillery support. At 3:30 PM it was secured, a heavy barrage falling on the north shore east of the east bridge and rolling back from the river. Those Germans in its path rose and fled precipitately and again the refinery guns did effective work, now increased to four.

Meanwhile, across the river, the French Colonials occupying the chateau were using machine gun fire against the Germans in the orchard, the wheat fields east of the farm and the brush and by noon small detachments assisted by the "A" Company section one gun of which had been moved to the gate (M), had captured the houses at (H) but otherwise were unable to advance their line. The German rifle fire had meanwhile increased and by 2:00 PM artillery and mortars were firing in the northern parts of the city still held by the French. (29)

(29) Bissell

During the day there was some sniping against "A" Company and the Battalion CP was moved across the Place Carnot to a cellar, it having been badly damaged by shell fire. In reconnoitering for this move a large supply of machine gun ammunition, already loaded in strips, was found which when distributed to the guns solved for the remainder of the fight what was threatening to become a serious problem. (30) Also during the morning an officer of "B" Company, at the time in charge of the depot at Nesles, was killed while delivering supplies.

(30) Houghton,  
p 7

All day detachments of French troops, mostly of the 10th and 53d Colonial Divisions, drifted back over the west bridge. During the afternoon a message was received that the Germans were concentrating in the

(31) Houghton

Bois de Barbillon northeast of the city (Map 2) and that a determined attack might be expected soon after dark, the time depending on the readiness of artillery which was taking up positions to the north and east. It was also learned that the Germans had crossed the river at Jaulgonne, some five miles to the east and that from prisoners captured there it was known that the two left Divisions of the VII Army had orders to cross the Marne at Chateau Thierry to gain a foothold on the high ground to the south. (31)

Anticipating now a possible attack from the east "B" Company was ordered to watch this flank closely and to be prepared to cover the remainder of the Battalion from positions south of Etampes in case of a withdrawal. Based on these orders second line positions were selected by the 1st and 3d Platoon Commanders during the afternoon.

A provisional platoon of four guns, three from "A" and one from "B" Companies was also organized at Battalion Headquarters and placed on the west end of the island under the executive officer of "B" Company to cover that flank. Spare guns, two from each company but without crews were brought from Nesles and held as a battalion reserve at the CP.

By the evening of June 1st the guns of the Battalion were distributed as follows from right to left.  
(See Special Map No 3, Appendices 5 and 6)

"B" Company

4 guns east of railroad, 3d platoon, covering right flank of Battalion

4 guns in buildings of sugar refinery covering river and northern approaches to east bridge, these constituting the 2d Platoon

4 guns along Crezancy road and in railroad yard, 1st Platoon, covering southern exit and enfilading east bridge.

"A" Company

2 guns near east end of island crossing fire with "B" Company

2 guns in yard at center of Company sector enfilading opposite street and square north of west bridge

2 guns in warehouse enfilading river and square

2 guns north of river.

Provisional Platoon

4 guns in park at west end of island covering west flank.

Company reserves

3 guns (two from A Co) without crews at Co B's CP.

1 gun at Company A's CP.

Battalion reserves

4 guns without crews, two from each company at Bn CP

GERMAN MAIN ATTACK

At dusk the German artillery increased its fire including for the first time some guns of heavy calibre. Counter-battery fire from a few exhausted French batteries of 75's south of Etampes offered slight encouragement.

(32) Houghton, At 8:40 PM (32) the French Machine Gun Company designated p 7 to occupy the gap on the island between "A" Company and the Provisional Platoon having been put out of action Company "A" was ordered to occupy this sector with half its guns.

Assembling one gun from each section on the island and the gun in company reserve, the Captain and a lieutenant reconnoitred the buildings west of Rue Carnot and the adjacent park, selecting two gun positions near

the south end of the west bridge firing from a cellar window and two others in the park. During this time machine gun fire from the bluff and shell fire were constantly increasing. In guiding the squads to their positions a corporal and a gunner accompanying the Captain were killed. An officer was placed with each pair of guns.

A hot engagement had now developed north of the river on the entire front from the foot of the bluff to the eastern outskirts of the city. The French, aided by the A Company section were contesting desperately and were being forced back. Just before 10:00 PM the battle line reached the square north of the west bridge. French soldiers withdrew over this bridge fighting hand to hand with the Germans and the artillery lifted to the south shore making it practically untenable. Then, with a deafening explosion the bridge flew into the air carrying both French and Germans with it. (33)

(33) Dickman,  
p 50 ✓

So far the guns of Company "A" had not fired. With the explosion as their signal, they now opened on the Germans who were massed in the square waiting to rush the bridge but who instead melted into the dark leaving many mute witnesses to American marksmanship. (34)

(34) Houghton,  
p 9

Twice again the Germans massed in the square, their higher commanders either not realizing that the bridge was gone or believing that it could still be crossed on the wreckage. Each time by the light of burning buildings they were dispersed with great losses. (See Appendix 6)

#### FRENCH WITHDRAWAL TO SOUTH OF MARNE

Let us turn again to the situation north of the river. Late in the afternoon the Germans captured the chateau. (35) This gave them machine gun command of the

(35) Bissell

(36) Bissell

entire city. The French Major commanding north of the Marne at this time reported his situation as hopeless and twice requested authority to withdraw. Receiving no replies to his requests, at 7:30 PM he ordered a withdrawal on his own initiative. The A Company section, both guns now at the tower, was to cover the withdrawal outposted by some twenty Senegalese. At 9:00 PM the withdrawal started. (36) There was no pressure against the outpost but heavy machine gun fire passed over their heads from the chateau. Keeping under cover the section withdrew each gun separately, the officer going with the last.

On coming in sight of the west bridge he noticed great confusion at the square. Rifle fire broke out. He found his other squad under cover on the river bank. Then a machine gun enfiladed the street striking many of the French and to cap the climax, the bridge blew up. Hugging the walls both French and Americans worked their way to the east bridge. A French officer asked him to warn the Americans south of the river not to fire. With a few men he went out on the bridge and called but was greeted by a fresh burst of fire. This continued for over twenty minutes. A German gun to the right rear also fired and several French and Americans were wounded. He examined the stream with a view to swimming but the current was too swift and would have swept them west to the fighting they had just left.

When the firing ceased he again called and now received a reply from the lieutenant commanding the 2d platoon of B Company who then crossed the bridge with some men and assisted in getting those who remained of

(37) Bissell

the A Company section safely back. Its casualties were one killed and seven wounded. (37)

Meanwhile in B Company artillery fire had been as intense as on A Company's front and the 2d Platoon had joined in the fire following the destruction of the bridge, anticipating an attack on the east bridge. In a lull he heard the call "Cease firing" in English from across the Marne but realizing that many Germans spoke English and unfamiliar with A Company's plight, he believed this to be a ruse and to be safe he opened fire. Again hearing the call he crept close to the water and now recognized his name. Convinced now that something was wrong, he suspended fire with his guns and led a patrol across the bridge, where he found the A Company group. (39)

(39) Cobbe

The Germans pursuing closely also crossed and though the 2d Platoon Commander was able to again bring the bridge under fire they penetrated to the Crezancy road. To the Captain of Company B the situation appeared desperate. Runners sent to Battalion CP failed to return. His own reconnaissance and the report of the A Company Lieutenant of his experiences convinced him that without rifle support B Company could not avoid capture and was ineffective in its present positions. Moreover failure to gain contact with the Battalion CP implied that they had moved, probably to the rear and his orders had been to cover such a withdrawal. He therefore sent verbal messages by runner to his platoons, directing the 1st and 3d to withdraw to the second line position and the 2d, still, he hoped, commanding the bridge, to cover the withdrawal. With the men at the company CP he then followed the Crezancy road to the Battalion CP in Place Carnot in an effort to gain contact with the rest of the battalion.

### RIGHT FLANK POSITIONS REGAINED

Though under heavy fire the battalion CP had not moved and Company B was directed to regain its former positions. The Captain with the battalion reserve of four guns manned by his headquarters personnel and such men as were available in Battalion Headquarters returned eastward on the Crezancy road hugging the walls of the buildings. On approaching the east bridge, firing was heard and one of his men was wounded. A gun was mounted and fired down the road to the east (k) and the remainder of the platoon turned south toward the railroad, following the tracks to a point opposite the bridge. The gun on the Crezancy road now barred the platoon's further advance. Germans, recognized by their helmets, could be seen between the road and the river. A few French were in the railroad yards. Uncertain whether the 2d Platoon had as yet withdrawn, a gun was mounted to cover the bridge carefully avoiding the refinery. This drove the Germans under cover behind some railroad fills. After stopping the fire of the gun on the Crezancy road, the Captain of B Company with a small patrol moved to the refinery only to find the 2d Platoon gone. Returning he mounted another gun north of the road near the railroad crossing and the combined fire of these guns drove the remaining Germans across the bridge. The guns were then moved to the refinery and sunken garden from where they held the south bank until daylight when the remainder of the company was reestablished in its former positions. Later investigation showed that the runners, becoming confused, had delivered the Company Commander's order as "Withdraw at once" to all platoons. The interval between the 2d Platoon's withdrawal and the Captain's return was

hardly more than twenty minutes. Fortunately no great harm was done but the value of telephone communication and the unreliability of verbal messages is clearly shown.

#### OPERATIONS JUNE 2d and 3d

With one bridge destroyed and both forces somewhat demoralized by the night's fighting, the day of June 2d passed quietly. Occasional shells fell but did no material damage. At dark, however, an observer was placed near the east bridge to prevent surprise and at 10:30 PM he signalled movement near its north approaches. Fire was opened by all guns covering the area in question and for the balance of the night no efforts were made to cross.

On June 3d a marked increase of activity was observed among the Germans in the eastern fringes of the city. Newly placed machine guns enfiladed streets and open areas and forced B Company to shift the positions of its guns in several instances. However, these changes were made to cover the same sectors, generally moving from one building to another. An attempt at long range fire at some trenches about 2000 yards away failed to justify the expenditure of ammunition due to the instability of the Hotchkiss mounts.

During this day a platoon of Senagalese troops gave a striking example of sniping. These men scarcely removed from their savage state on the west coast of Africa have remarkable eyesight. With faces scarred in fantastic patterns and polished ivory ornaments in their ears and noses, they took keen delight in exhibiting strings of shrivelled brown human ears cut from their German victims and worn on a string around their necks.

Standing behind trees they fired on Germans at



distances up to 800 yards. At the longer ranges they selected a point on a road where men frequently passed. Seeing a man vanish behind some brush and knowing that he would appear on the other side, they aimed at the point of his reappearance and fired as he emerged. By using this method their scores were quite remarkable.

During the afternoon of June 3d orders for relief were received. Firing by the Germans opposite B Company increased and the French made plans to mine the east bridge. At 8:00 PM under the protection of B Company's guns, French engineers placed charges against the abutments at the water edge. These charges were to be fired only in case of an attack.

German fire and American retaliation against targets located during the day increased during the night. At 11:00 PM the guns of the 2d Platoon were too hot to fire and were replaced by cool ones in company reserve. The relief was slow in arriving and was barely completed by dawn. Finally, carried in 3-ton trucks instead of Fords, the Battalion drew out of the vicinity of Place Carnot, made a dash down the enfiladed Rue Carnot, fortunately unobserved by the enemy, and as the column reached cover in the woods near Nesles they heard the explosion which announced the destruction of the east bridge and the barring of the Marne. (39)

(39) Dicksman,  
p. 51. ✓

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The 7th Machine Gun Battalion was organized in November, 1917, but did not draw the equipment with which it was to fight until May 1918, six months later and only one month in the case of its guns and six days in the case of its motors before it went into action. The

machine guns were French, old guns in poor condition and inferior in accuracy to the German, British and later American Brownings. The motors were Fords manufactured in England. They were of unsuitable design, cheaply constructed, furnished with tires from old stock in which the rubber had lost its flexibility and inadequate in tonnage for the required loads. Fortunately the Battalion accomplished its mission but it was through no foresight on the part of the American Government. A well planned supply system with balanced reserves and facilities for rapid augmentation in case of war would have avoided this situation.

The route from the training area, La Ferte, to Chateau Thierry was over much of its length blocked with refugees and the equipment of a retreating army. It was poorly marked, especially in the towns. Speed was important and it was impossible to prevent the column separating into small groups, even to individual cars. The responsibility for arrival at their destination lay with the drivers and noncommissioned officers, seeing the route for the first time, unable to speak French and equipped only with an itinerary of the towns along the route. The fact that all reached their destination despite motor troubles in a reasonable time is directly traceable to the discipline of regular troops inculcated through years of service.

The difficulty of cooperation between foreign troops, even when combined in the same command is evident in several instances. Company B requested artillery support at 9:00 AM, June 1st. It was not received until 3:30 PM. The Battalion was held in the Place Carnot from 4:30 PM until dark before the Commanding Officer made his

dispositions for defense. Most of this delay was caused by his uncertainty as to locations and plans of French troops to which he was attached. Again, in withdrawing from the north side of the Marne contact was lost by the French commander with his American machine guns resulting in the destruction of the bridge before their return.

Surprise, twice secured on the morning and evening of June 1st, was traceable to strict fire orders rigidly enforced. In both these cases the Germans aided materially in the effect of this fire through lack of reconnaissance. In the first case they failed to determine whether or not the south bank of the Marne was occupied, and in the second they failed to examine the condition of the west bridge after the explosion.

The Captain of Company B, in ordering the occupation of the second line positions used verbal orders. The situation at the time of issuing these was critical. To the runners it undoubtedly presented a scene of utter confusion so that their failure to deliver the messages as given can be easily understood. A telephone line to Battalion CP would have made these messages unnecessary. In any case the value of good communications and the unreliability of verbal messages of importance is clearly illustrated.

Finally, there was an excessive amount of fire by the Americans, much of it to little advantage. Had it not been for the timely discovery of surplus ammunition in the search for a Battalion CP, they might easily have been placed in a serious situation. Though it may have had some moral value in disguising the strength of the defense, much of it was of questionable value. This firing, it is believed can always be expected from

inexperienced troops under a great nervous strain.

### LESSONS

There are three outstanding lessons to be learned from this engagement.

FIRST. It is of vital importance to a nation to have ample war reserves of equipment and a well established industrial mobilization plan for augmenting these supplies at once, thus never being dependent on foreign supply after war is declared.

SECOND. There is great value in surprise to any small force, but particularly machine guns, in successfully opposing a superior force.

THIRD. Discipline is necessary to carry men through difficult situations, generally unforeseen, when they are separated from their leaders and under a severe strain. This quality can be developed only over a considerable period of time, but without it no troops can be depended upon to carry out difficult missions.

### CONCLUSION

This Battalion, only partially trained, with no combat experience, was rushed overnight across 110 miles of foreign territory, forced through the disorder of a retreating army and thrown into a defile against an experienced foe of overwhelming strength, drunk with the success of a deep penetration with Paris almost on the horizon. Through the tenacity and courage of its members it stopped this foe, enabling the remainder of the 3d Division to establish itself on the Marne.

Organized as a weapon of opportunity, its use

at this time was a striking example of the emergency for which it was intended; and had it engaged in no further combats during the war, its existence would be justified.

QUESTIONS ON THE OPERATIONS OF THE 7TH M.G. BATTALION  
IN THE VICINITY OF CHATEAU THIERRY, FRANCE,  
MAY 31st TO JUNE 4th, 1918.

1. The 7th M.G. Bn. at Chateau Thierry supported units of:
- (1) The American 3d Division
  - (2) The American 2d Division
  - (3) The French 38th Corps.
- Answer   3
2. The movement to Chateau Thierry was made by:
- (1) Railroad
  - (2) Motors
  - (3) Foot.
- Answer   2
3. The American defensive lines were located:
- (1) North of the city
  - (2) South of the city
  - (3) Within the city.
- Answer   3
4. The defense of Chateau Thierry terminated the:
- (1) Amiens offensive
  - (2) Lys offensive
  - (3) Chemin des Dames offensive.
- Answer   3
5. The occupation of Chateau Thierry was important because:
- (1) It contained the only bridges in a stretch  
of 10 miles
  - (2) It was a railroad center
  - (3) It was a supply base.
- Answer   1
6. The action of this battalion is an example of:
- (1) Use of machine guns in attack
  - (2) Use of machine gun indirect fire
  - (3) A weapon of opportunity used for the  
purpose for which it was intended.
- Answer   3

7. The outstanding principle of war illustrated was:
- (1) Mass
  - (2) Surprise
  - (3) Security
  - (4) Economy of force.
- Answer 2 or 3
8. Effectiveness of German machine gun fire was reduced by:
- (1) Plunging effect
  - (2) Inaccuracy
  - (3) Lack of targets.
- Answer 1
9. German losses were due largely to:
- (1) Accuracy of American fire
  - (2) Artillery
  - (3) Lack of reconnaissance.
- Answer 3
10. The ultimate arrival of the entire battalion was primarily due to:
- (1) Training in handling motors
  - (2) Discipline
  - (3) March organization.
- Answer 2

APPENDIX 1

Third Division,  
France, May 30, 1918.

SECRET

Field Orders

No. 1.

Maps: 1/80,000  
Chaumont 83  
Wassy 68  
Arcis 67  
Chalons 50  
Meaux 49

1. Seventh Machine Gun Battalion will proceed at once by road to COMDE-EN-BRIE and report on arrival to Representative of Staff of group of French Armies.
2. Route: BAR-SUR-AUBE, BRIENNE-LE-CHATEAU, ARCIS-SUR-AUBE, MERY-SUR-SEINE, ANGLURE, SEZANNE, MONTMORT, ORBAYS, CONDE-EN-BRIE.
3. It is expected that organization will be met at CONDE-EN-BRIE by Captain Royer, French Army, who will furnish further orders.
4. Equipment- Individual Mobile.
5. Trains will accompany organization.
6. Report will be made to Division Headquarters of exact time of departure and arrival at destination.

J. T. Dickman,  
Major General.

Distribution:  
Chief of Staff  
G-1-2-3  
7th M.G.Bn.



APPENDIX 2.

Headquarters, 7th Machine Gun Battalion  
American Expeditionary Forces

France, 30 May 1918, 10:00 A.M.

General Orders.

No. 13

1. In compliance with telephonic communication with the Chief of Staff, Third Division (Regular), this A.M., this battalion will be prepared at once to move from its present station on its own transportation.

2. Company Commanders will take steps to fulfil the above paragraph.

3. This office will be notified by Company Commanders the moment the companies are ready to move. Loading will start at once.

By order of Major Taylor:

Copies to:

All companies  
Supply Officer  
Sanitary Detachment.

E. J. Hoover,  
1st Lieut., N.A., 7th M.G. Bn.  
Adjutant.

APPENDIX 3.

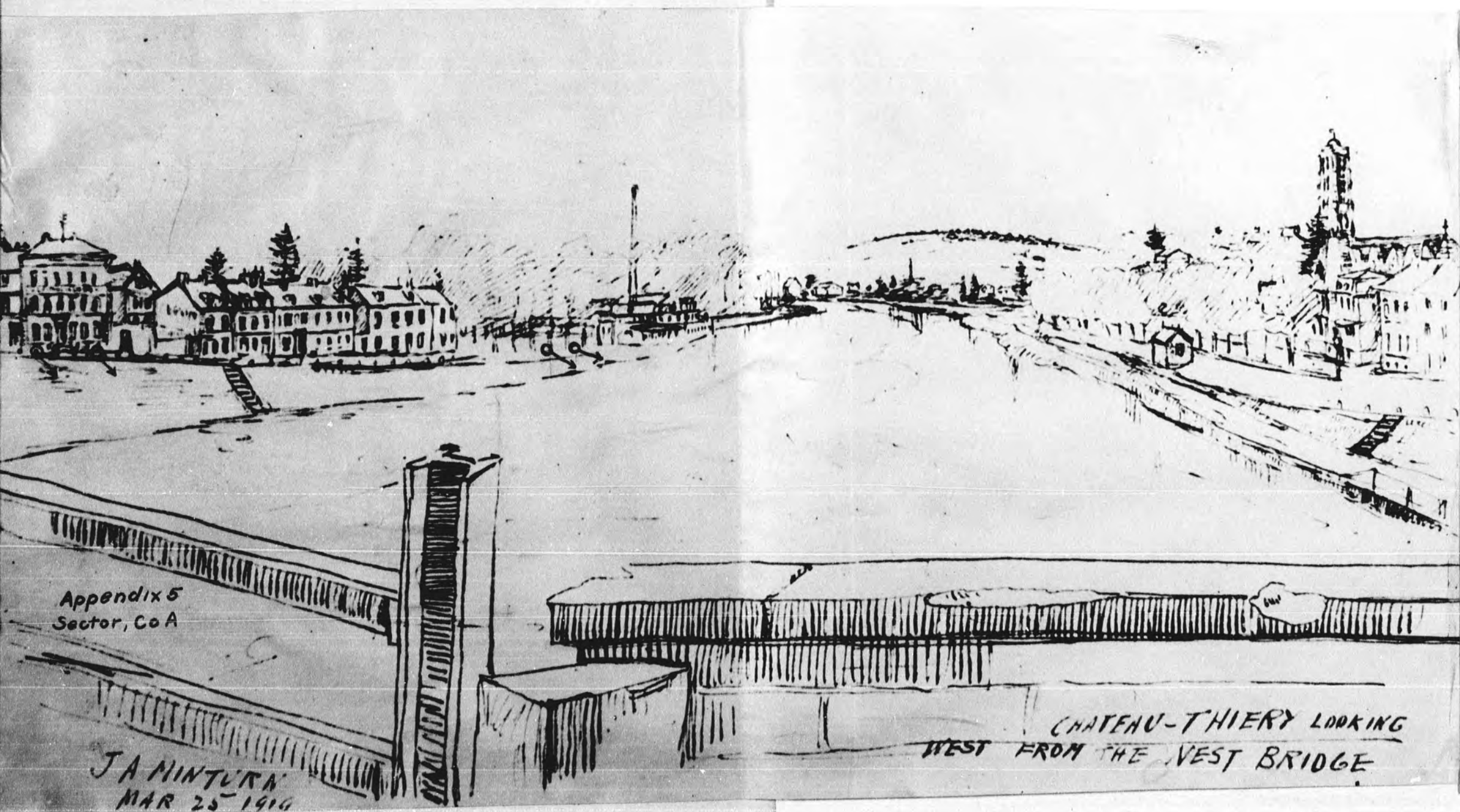
Order of 10th Colonial Division received by C.O. 7th M.G. Bn. ordering it to Chateau Thierry. (Translation by Capt. J.T. Bissell)

Instructions for the American M.G. Bn.

1. To proceed to Nesles-le-Montagne by the direct route Conde-Courboin-Nesles. (A battalion of the 53d Colonial, is billeted in Nesles. To coordinate with the C.O. of this battalion with reference to billeting in Nesles and elsewhere.)
2. To send officers as soon as possible to reconnoitre Chateau Thierry and the adjacent terrain with reference to possible machine gun emplacements.
3. To establish liaison with Lieut. Colonel Benezech, C.O. 33d Colonials, whose C. P. is to the north of Chateau Thierry (near Les Chesneaux). To ascertain from the Lieut. Colonel what would be the most urgent measures to take by the American machine guns to support him in case of a violent attack.

10 Div Coloniale  
Le General Commandante  
(seal)

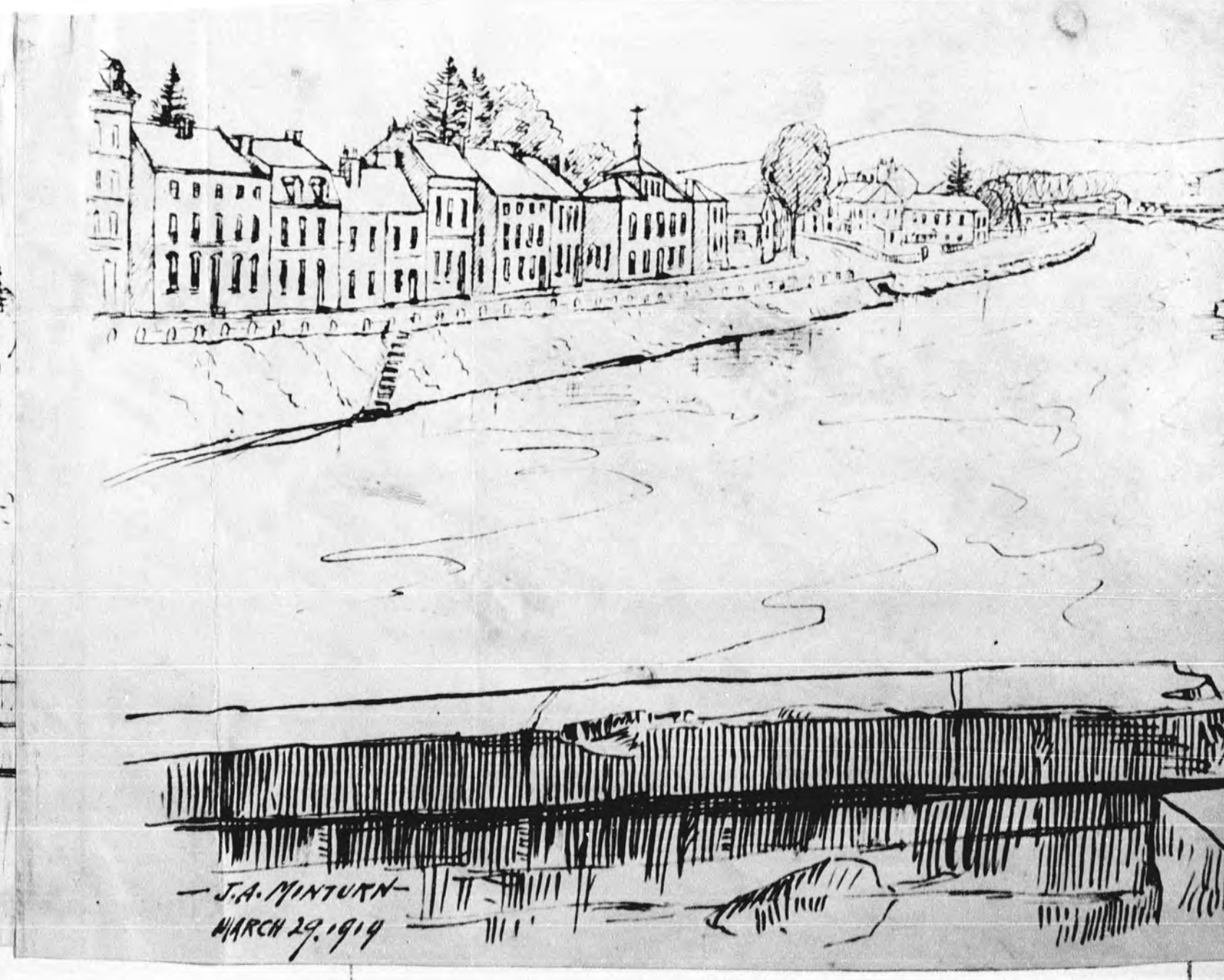
31 May 1918.  
By order- The Chief of Staff  
Nicolet (?)



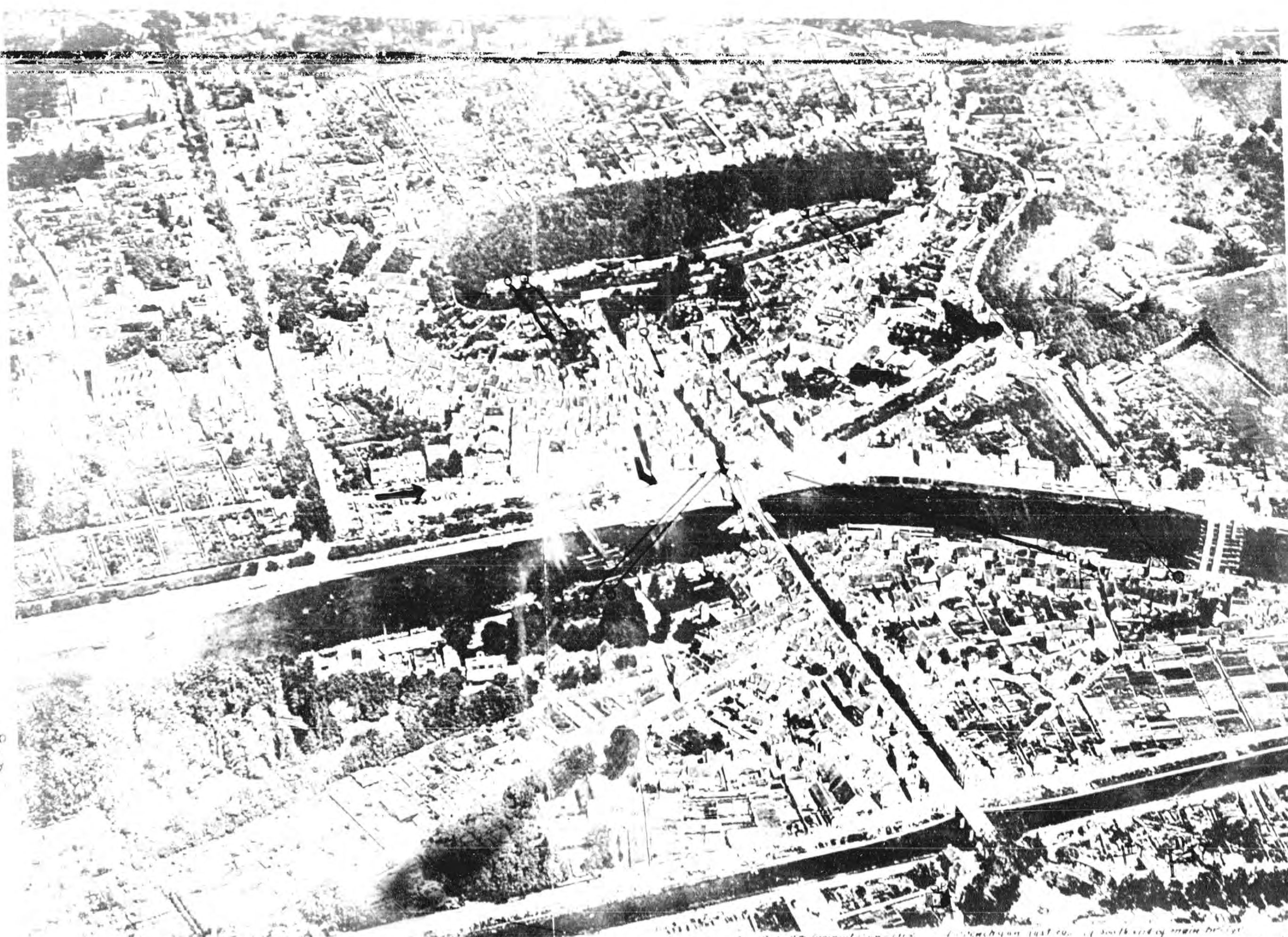
Appendix 5  
Sector, Co A

J.A. MINTURN  
MAR 25 1914

CHATEAU-THIERY LOOKING  
WEST FROM THE WEST BRIDGE



J.A. MINTURN  
MARCH 29 1914



This picture is an enlargement of an aerial photo taken about July 2, 1918. In June 18 the ponton bridges were not present and the main bridge was intact until 1907. The eastern bridge and C. B. position. 10.5 mm.

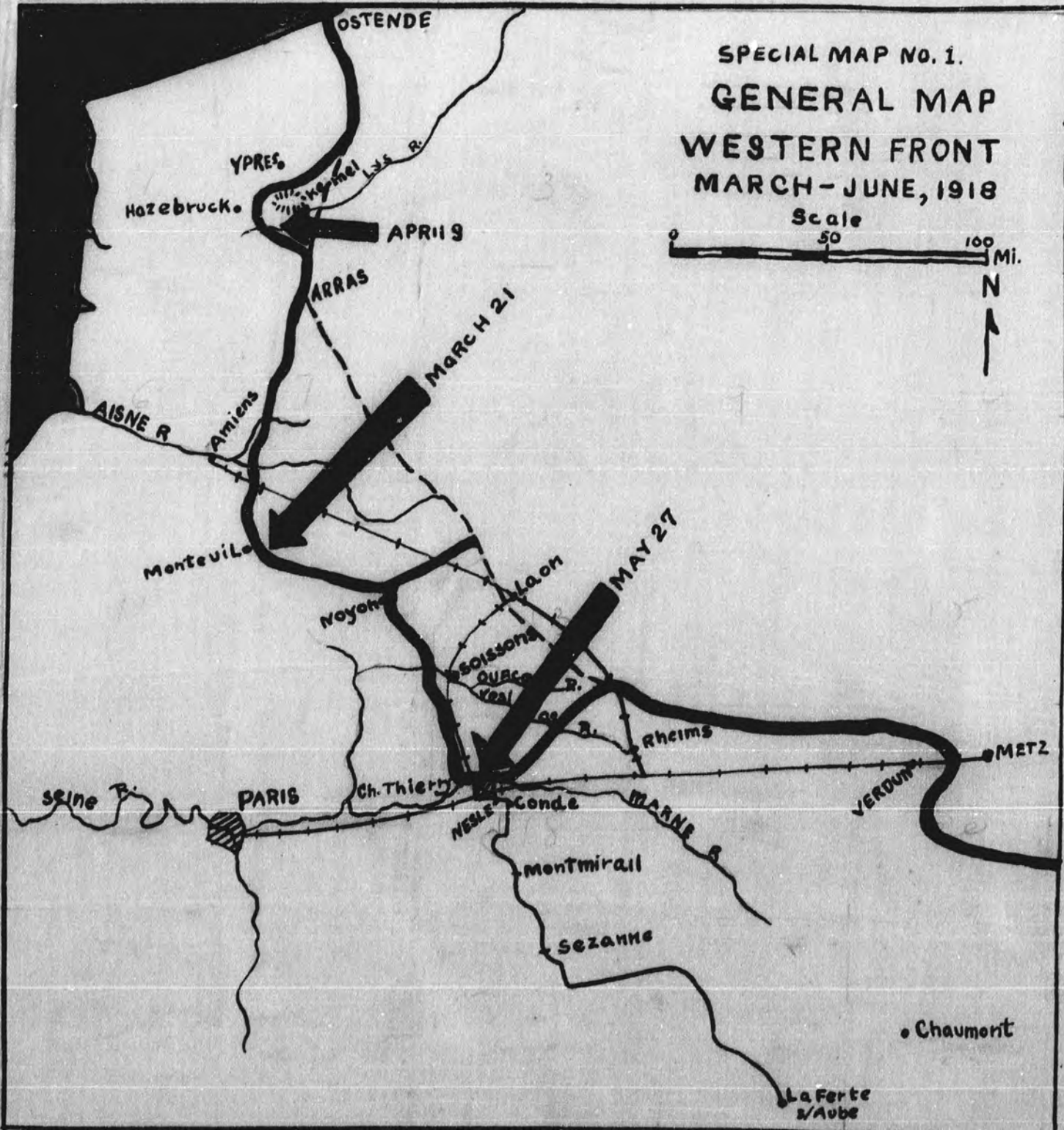
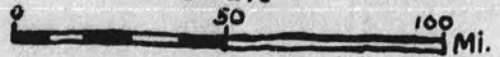
- positions of Co's guns in the 2.00' m (wire) from the
- 3 guns with Cook
  - 2 " Bissell
  - 7 " on river front
  - 3 " with G. B. (no personnel)
  - 2 " of 24 Hq.

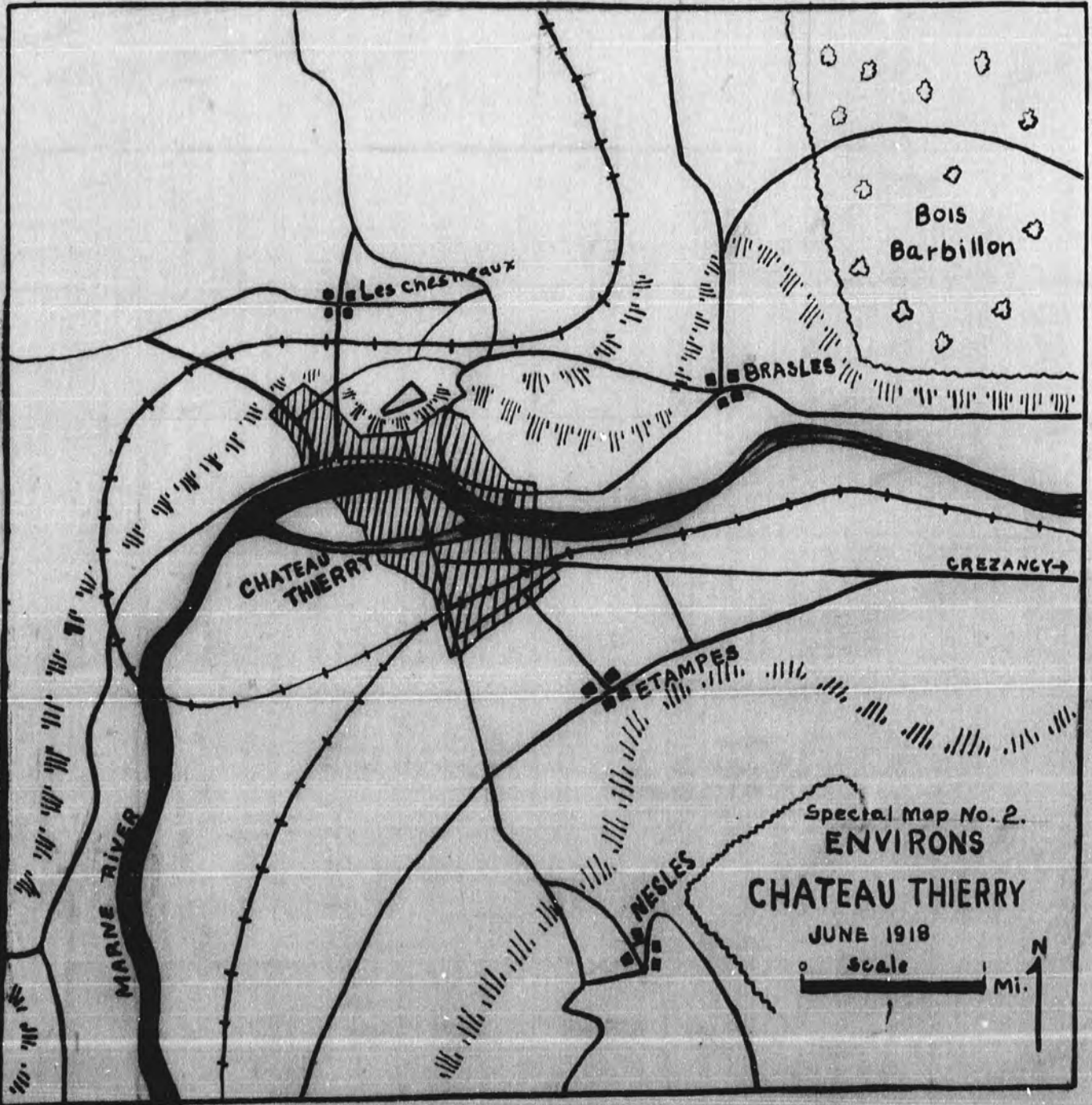
Location just east of south end of main bridge. Cook's platoon was on west end of island and could not shoot toward north end of main bridge. Lines of communication were destroyed.

Finch section on main bridge was demolished

SPECIAL MAP NO. 1.  
GENERAL MAP  
WESTERN FRONT  
MARCH-JUNE, 1918

Scale





Les chateaux

Bois Barbillon

BRASLES

CHATEAU THIERRY

CREZANCY →

ETAMPES

NESLES

MARNE RIVER

Special Map No. 2.  
ENVIRONS

CHATEAU THIERRY

JUNE 1918

Scale

Mi.



