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THE ATTACK OF THE 39th INFANTRY (U.S.) AS PART  
OF THE 33rd FRENCH DIVISION SOUTH OF  
FAVEROLLES, JULY 18-19, 1918.

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B I B L I O G R A P H Y .

- The American Army in the European Conflict. - De Chambrun.
- History of 39th U. S. Infantry.
- History of the Great War. - Buchan.
- Pershing's Report.
- Ludendorff's Own Story.
- The Turn of the Tide. - Wise.
- Map - Issued from Hqs. II French Corps.
- Map - Issued from French 33rd Div. Hqs.
- Map - French 1:80,000 Soissons sheet.
- F. O. # 1. Hqs. 39th U. S. Inf., July 17, 1918.
- F. O. # 2. Hqs. 39th U. S. Inf., July 18, 1918.
- F. O. # 3. Hqs. 39th U. S. Inf., July 18, 1918.
- F. O. # 4. Hqs. 39th U. S. Inf., July 19, 1918.
- The Principles of War. - Foch.
- Foch The Winner of the War. - Recouly.
- Map - G-2. French G.H.Q.
- The German Offensive of July 15, 1918.- General Service Schools,  
Fort Leavenworth.
- Documents Nos. 1067-1079. G.H.Q., A.E.F.
- History Fourth Division. - Bach.
- My own personal experience as Commander of the 1st Bn., 39th Inf.,  
in this operation.

this day, little is known throughout the service about the part played by the 7th and 8th Brigades in this operation. This monograph will take up the operations of the 39th Infantry (7th Brigade) in this attack, and in order to follow the operation, let us make a hasty survey of the situation around the Marne Salient at this time.

On the morning of July 15, 1918, the Germans began their last great offensive action of the war. This offensive had been spoken of and referred to by the Germans for sometime as "the friedenstag", meaning the attack which would bring about peace. (4) Elaborate preparations had been made for this great operation, tho the secrecy usually displayed by the Germans in such movements was lacking, and the Allies were fully aware not only of the time, but the sector in which the movement was to start. (5)

The offensive extended from the little village of Fossay on the Marne just above Chateau Thierry to Vrigny toward Rheims, a distance of about twenty-seven miles, and east of Rheims beginning near Primay and extending east about twenty-six miles to the Main-de-Massignes. This offensive was carried out by the 7th German Army west of Rheims and the 1st and 3rd Armies on the east. Ludendorff took a liberal objective for the first day and expected to reach the Marne between

(4) Buchan. p. 275.  
(5) Pershing. p. 34.

On the first day of the attack the Germans made some progress west of Rheims, but had not widened the salient. Chateau Thierry

(6) Buchan.IV. Epernay and Chalons. (6) p. 276.  
(7) Buchan.IV. and Rheims were still in Allied hands. (7) It might be stated in p. 277.

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The 4th Division was one of the twelve American Divisions which

- (1) De Cham- were scheduled for service with the British in the Spring of 1918. (1)  
brun.p.169. The Division had been hurriedly filled to full strength in March, and  
embarked for France during April and May. After serving a short  
while with the British the plans were changed, due to the German of-  
fensive on the Aisne, and the Division along with several other Am-  
erican Divisions was moved to the Chateau Thierry Sector. Division  
Headquarters was established at La Ferte-sous-Jouarre and later moved  
to Lizy-sur-Ourcq. Hqs. Seventh Infantry Brigade was at Acy-en-Multien  
and the Eighth Brigade at Ventryoul north of Jouarre. The Divisional  
Artillery was still in its training area in the South. (2) The 39th  
Infantry, 7th Brigade was at Acy-en-Multien. The Brigade was attached  
to the 4th Division (French) for training, - this Division being one  
of the reserve Divisions of the II Corps (French) with which the bri-  
gade was to operate. (3) An intensive course of training was imme-  
diately taken up, which was interrupted from time to time by the so-  
called "alerts", that is, movements to our battle positions in the  
vicinity of Mareuil-sur-Ourcq. These positions were assigned to the  
regiment for organization and defense in case the expected German at-  
tack should develop along the west side of the Marne Salient. These  
two Brigades in addition to our 1st and 2nd Divisions took an active  
part in the great French counter-attack on July 18th. Due to the  
prominence given to the excellent work of our 1st and 2nd Divisions on



under shell fire. This is especially true of the main highway from Soissons to Chateau Thierry which was of vital importance to the Germans. Buchan states that "it is inconceivable that the German Staff should not have been alive to such risk, and the only explanation is that they believed Foch had no reserves available for a counter-at-

(13) Bucha.IV.  
p. 279.

tack". (13) There is no question but what Foch had long planned to take the offensive when a favorable opportunity arose. His whole theory of war is based on the necessity for offensive action. In one of his lectures delivered several years before the war he states this clearly when he says, speaking of the "decisive battle", -

"the offensive form, whether it be immediate or as succeeding the defensive, can alone give results. It must consequently be always

(14) Foch.  
p. 312.

adopted at some stage or other". (14) The time had now come, thanks to the rapidly increased strength of the American Army, when Foch had sufficient reserves available to take the offensive.

On July 14th, the day before the German offensive, the Allied order of battle along the western and southern face of the Marne salient was as follows: - The X Army (Mangin) extended from the Aisne to the little village of Faverolles, just north of the Ourcq. Mangin had in line at this time from north to south the XVIII, I, XX, XXX and XI Corps. South of Mangin the VI Army (Degoutte) extended from Faverolles south to St. Agnan on the Marne, just inside the limits of the German offensive. Degoutte had in line from north to south: the II, VII French Corps and the I Corps (U.S.) and the XXXVIII

(15) Map. G-2  
French  
GHQ.

French. (15) The VII German Army at this time had in line opposite this front from north to south the XIII, XXV, and VIII Corps.

passing that it was on this section of the front that the American 3rd Division and parts of the 28th Division were heavily engaged, and took a very prominent part in breaking up the German attack. East of Rheims on this same day the French IV Army, under Gouraud, had stopped the attack with little trouble. It has been stated that

(8) Buchan.IV. only 3,000 men passed thru Gouraud's casualty stations on this day, (8) p. 278.

which shows conclusively that the attack here must have fallen down miserably. On the second day some ground was gained west of Rheims, but the French Artillery still held the Marne River under fire which made it extremely difficult for the Germans to maintain their troops

(9) Buchan.IV. south of the River. (9) East of Rheims the Germans made no progress p. 278.

and by evening it was evident that the attack was destined to fail. The offensive of the 1st and 3rd German Armies was called off at

(10) Ludendorff. noon on July 16th by orders from G. H. Q. (10) Some further attacks II.p.310.

were made west of Rheims on the 17th, but by evening of this date the Allies had taken most of the initiative away from the Germans by

(11) Buchan.IV. successfully counter-attacking at several points along the line. (11) p.278-279.

The situation at this time was ideal for a counter-stroke on the part of the Allies. It was just such a situation that one would expect a "Foch" to seize and exploit. The German 7th Army was in a dangerous position; their attack was made south, across the Marne, which exposed their lines of communication to a disruption from the west. All rail communication to the salient depended upon the junction

(12) Buchan.IV. at Soissons. (12) A small advance by the Allies from the west would p. 279;

bring most of the roads extending South in the salient to the Marne

By the morning of the 18th, Degoutte's right flank had been withdrawn to Vaux, just west of Chateau Thierry, and the IX Army (De Mitry) had come into line between Degoutte and Bertholot to

(16) Buchan.IV. the east. (16) Foch's plan was to strike with a surprise attack p. 280.

(17) Buchan.IV. on the German's weak flank between Soissons and Chateau Thierry. (17) p. 279.

Mangin's Army had been in its present position since May 30th, and ever since June 16th had been preparing ground for an assault, by

(18) Buchan.IV. getting advantageous "jump off" positions thru local attacks. (18) p. 280.

This army was to conduct the main attack on the first day, while Degoutte's Army was to fight a holding action with the right and center, and the left was to advance in prolongation of the line of

(19) Turn of the X Army. (19) The element of surprise can be shown in this operation when we consider that on July 17th the X Army had only

three Divisions in line of the ten that were to take part in the

(20) Turn of attack. (20) By "zero hour" on the 18th the order of battle from Tide.p.133.

north to south of these two armies included the following American

troops: - with the Mangin's XX Corps was the 1st and 2nd U. S.

Division in front line, with the famous Moroccan Division between

them, - with Degoutte's II Corps we find the 7th Inf. Brigade, 4th

Division, with the 39th Infantry in the front line, and the 47th

Infantry in reserve, - with VII Corps we find the 8th Inf. Brigade,

4th Division, and on the right of this Corps we find the I Corps (U.S.)

with the 26th Division (U.S.) and the 167th Division (French) in

(21) Turn of front line. (21) The II French Corps with which this paper is concerned was the left Corps of the VI Army and was in liaison with XI

Corps X Army in the vicinity of Faverolles, and extended south to



(22) Turn of Damnard, a front of about nine kilometers. (22) (See Map # 1.)  
Tide.p.179.

On the night of July 15-16 the 39th Infantry was moved to a position in the French second line in the vicinity of Thury-en-

(23) Hist.39th Valois. (23) The great German attack which we had been waiting for  
Inf.p.25.

had started that morning and of course the troops were "keyed up" to a high pitch, yet there was an air of confidence throughout the

(24) Personal regiment due to the encouraging reports received from the front. (24)  
Knowledge.

The following day July 16th, the regimental commander and Battalion Commanders went up to Authiel-en-Valois, where we found the headquarters, 33rd French Division. This Division with the French 2nd Division, was at that time in the front line of the II Corps (French). At Authiel the battalion commanders were turned over to French guides for the purpose of making a reconnaissance of the front lines, pre-

(25) 39th Inf. paratory to a contemplated relief of the French. (25) At this time  
p. 25.

<sup>had</sup>  
(July 16th) we ~~have~~ no intimation whatever that an attack was to take place and were under the impression, as were the French officers in the 33rd Division, that the relief was being made in order to release the French Division for service in the battle which was waging to the south.

This shows with what secrecy the plans for the great counter-stroke were brought forth. Before taking up the relief of the French, let us look over the sector held by the French 33rd Division at this time.

This sector was known as the Troesnes sector, and extended from a position about one kilometer south of Faverolles to a point about

(26) Map.Hqs. halfway between Marizy-St-Mard, and Passy-en-Valois, (26) (See Map #2)  
33 Div.



where liaison was established with the 2nd Division, same Corps. The front line followed along the highway between Faverolles and Troesne, thence around the village of Troesne, which made a sharp salient in the line, thence due south to where it entered the sector of the 2nd

(27) Map II French Division. The front held was approximately 5,000 meters. (27)  
Fr. Corps.

This Division included three infantry regiments, the 9th, 11th and 20th. At this time the 11th Regiment was in front line with the 9th

(28) Personal in support and the 20th in reserve. (28) The ground included in this  
Knowledge.

sector had been the scene of hard fighting in the last days of May, when von Boehn was trying desperately to widen the Marne salient by

(29) Buchan.IV.a thrust westward below Soissons. (29)  
p. 257.

The Germans were stopped along the Savières, a small stream in front of this position. In rear of the position and extending north almost to St. Pierre-Aigle, a distance of about 16 kilometers, we find the great Forêt Domaniale de Retz. This is a dense forest intersected by numerous excellent highways running in every direction.

Such a screen offered a wonderful opportunity for offensive preparations, and no doubt was of great assistance in keeping the offensive

(30) Fr. Map plans a secret. (30) These woods of course, were a great help in  
1:80,000

the sector, in facilitating movement, and the relief here could have <sup>almost</sup> always been made in the daylight without risk. The little Savières, just between the French and German lines at this point ran thru a

(31) Fr. Map deep wooded gorge and was very swampy on both sides of the stream. (31)  
1:20,000

This stream was an excellent obstacle from a defense point of view, but afforded some trouble when the advance was made, as you will see.

After ascending the east bank of this stream into the German lines you would come out into what was known as the Buisson de Cresne, a dense thicket on the nose of a low plateau running out from the village of Ancienville. This thicket was approximately two kilometers wide, and on coming out you found yourself in an open rolling country covered with wheat fields, which extended on east to where the Rau-de-Puderal entered the Ourcq from the north, a distance of about six kilometers from the eastern edge of the thicket. The sector was an excellent one from a defensive standpoint, but that portion of the ~~sector~~ <sup>sector</sup> from Troesnes extending north toward Faverolles offered a very poor line of departure for an attack, and, as you will see later, the French did not plan to make an initial forward movement from this portion of the line. (See Map #2) As the position had only been held by the French since May 30th, it was poorly organized, no trench system was included, only a few dugouts and shelter for command posts, etc. (32) Personal Knowledge.

We found later that the German position was even less organized than the French. No effort apparently had been made to provide shelter for the troops other than that constructed by each individual soldier. (33) Personal Knowledge.

The order for the relief of the French 11th Regiment was issued on July 17th. At this time the battalion commanders and staffs were still in the front line and the regiment was brought up by the Regimental Commander. We were to take over that portion of the front held by the French 11th Regiment from Troesnes inclusive, north along the Troesnes-Faverolles Road for about 2500 kilometers where liaison was established with the 4th Division, XI Corps, X Army. All three bat-

talions were to be placed in the front line, the 1st Bn. on the left, the 3rd Bn. in the center and the second battalion on the right. The sector to be occupied by the 2nd Bn. included the strong point in

(34) F.O. #1. the line which formed a salient around the village of Troesnes. (34)  
Hqs. 39th Inf.

Company "C" 11th Machine Gun Bn. was attached to 1st Bn., and Co. "A" to 3rd Battalion. The Regimental Machine Gun Company was to operate with the 2nd Bn. This relief was to take place early in the evening of the 17th. Before the relief was made however, we received our first word in the line as to the attack to take place on the 18th. About 7 P.M. the French front line battalions received orders for the attack the next day. They were as much surprised as we were, tho I have a distinct recollection that there was no confusion a-

(35) Personal Knowledge. bout the command posts as might be expected under the circumstances. (35)

Under the orders received the 11th French Regiment, upon relief by the 39th U. S. was to close over to the right, reducing their front held by approximately one-half, and be in position to attack in the morning.

The relief was made without incident, thanks to the excellent work of the French guides in placing our units in line. A thunder storm accompanied by a blinding rainstorm, kept up most of the night which made movement difficult, but at the same time prevented the Germans from detecting anything unusual going on in our lines.

Immediately upon the relief the French moved off to the right, and left us in complete control of the sector, but in ignorance of what was going on, other than the fact that an attack was to take place in the morning. Whether we were to take part in this operation was



(36) Personal not known at this time. (36) Upon completion of the relief the Experience.

1st and 2nd Battalions had two companies in the front line and two in support, while the 3rd Battalion had three companies in the front line and one in support. The Machine Gun Companies took over the gun positions located by the French.

Along about eleven P.M. messages were received by the Battalion Commanders to report at the Regimental Command Post. Previous to this of course, liaison had been established with the regimental P. C. by an exchange of runners. Telephone communication had been removed when the French left the sector and our wires were not ~~in~~ <sup>as installed.</sup> yet. The runner who brought us the message guided us back to the Regimental P. C. about a mile thru the rain and mud where we found every one assembled except the Battalion Commander 3rd Battalion. Here we received our first intimation of the part

(37) Personal we were to play in the operation on the 18th. (37) Experience.

F. O. #2 was being written at this time and, upon completion a conference was held and every point gone over carefully as to the part each battalion was to play. This order was very complete and covered every detail of the attack. The order is reproduced here in full (See Appendix A) to assist in following the operation, and to show that a complete order can be issued from Regimental Headquarters, even in a surprise attack, and that the order can be dispatched to the battalions in ample time for the operation.

No doubt a critical study of this order will show some defects in the light of what is prescribed today in a written field order.



But the point I want to bring out is that the order is clear and complete, and that there was no room for doubt as to the mission assigned to each battalion in the operation. A map from French Division Headquarters showed us the following order of battle on the Division front the morning of the 18th. In the front line from left to right was found the 1st, 3rd and 2nd Battalions, 39th Infantry (U.S.), one battalion, 20th French Regiment and two battalions 11th French regiment. In support was one or two battalions of the 20th French Regiment and one battalion of the 11th French Regiments. The 9th French Regiment was held in reserve. (38)

(38) Map.Hqs.  
Fr.33 Div.

It cannot be stated as a fact, but it is believed that when the attack started one battalion of the 20th French Regiment went forward north of the Buisson de Cresnes, with its objective the village of Neroy-sur-Ourcq. We know that the plan of the French

(39) Hist.39th.  
p. 26.

was to encircle the Buisson de Cresne and close in on Neroy, (39) and it is unlikely that they would plan such a movement with one part allotted to a battalion in another army, the X (23 Inf. on our left, see par I, F.O. #2 Appendix). It is believed that Par. I. F.O. #2 was written to show the situation as it would exist when we moved forward and contemplated that this battalion of the 20th Regiment would have reached at least the far edge of the woods by the time we started forward.

My reason for this belief is first, that the French official map of this operation shows the town of Neroy-sur-Ourcq as an objective of a battalion of the 20th French Regiment coming in from the northwest, and second, the warning contained in Par. 4, F.O.

(40) Fr. Map  
of Oper.

#2 (See Appendix A), and third, the fact that later, on reaching the far edge of the Buisson de Cresne we came into contact with elements of the 20th French Regiment on our left. The French map of this operation is badly blurred and not legible in some places. (40)

(41) Fr. Map.

The French plan was very conservative; the first objective of the 11th Regiment on our right at its deepest point was two kilometers from its line of departure, and the second objective was only four kilometers. The town of Neroy-sur-Ourcq was only four kilometers from our line of departure and as you will see later, the French failed in their plan to occupy this town on the morning of the 18th. (41)

(42) Personal  
Experience.

After a lengthy conference at the regimental P. C. the Battalion Commanders, 1st and 2nd Battalions, started back for their command posts. The orders for the 3rd Battalion were sent forward by an officer. This officer however, was caught in the German counter-barrage, and severely wounded, and as he was acting alone, the order never reached the battalion. The C. O. 3rd Battalion came over to the P. C. 1st Battalion where he saw a copy of the order and conducted his operations accordingly. (42) So all three battalions had their orders in ample time for the attack. The Battalion Commanders got back to their command posts just at the time when the French preparation started, 4:30 A.M.

We will now take up the operations of the three battalions on July 18th. You will note that in Par. 10, F. O. #2, we were not expected to attack until we received further orders from the Regimental Commander. This was in line with the cautious policy of the French,

to hold strong forces in the sector pending the outcome of the attack. This portion of the line was the "key" defense position of the western face of the salient and they were taking no chances on a German counter-attack forcing them to withdraw. In holding the 39th Infantry in the sector they were following out a principle laid down at this time and stressed in several of their documents, namely that, "troops with-drawing before an enemy are not able to occupy a defensive position if the latter is not already occupied by available troops", and again, "a garrison should be assigned to each retirement position". (43) Of course the French had learned to be cautious thru bitter experience and when we consider that this was their first offensive operation since the disastrous Nivelle Offensive in April 1917, why we can hardly blame them. The 1st Battalion was finally ordered to attack at 8:00 A.M.

(43) Doc. Nos.  
1067-1079,  
GHQ.

Prior to this time the Company Commanders had been assembled at the P. C. and the order gone over carefully, so the battalion got off without much confusion. Difficulties were encountered however, very quickly. The Savières River in our front proved to be much more of an obstacle than one would have judged from the map. The French had not taken us into their confidence relative to this obstacle and we felt as if we were pulling their chestnuts out of the fire for them.

On reaching the bottom of this stream bed the men found themselves in an immense bog, where it was almost impossible to move without sinking in to your waist. Fortunately the Germans had not



in a tree after the leading elements of the battalion had passed beyond it. Fortunately the discovery was made before he decided to open fire from our rear. A halt was made on the intermediate objective for the purpose of reorganization, as the battalion had become badly disorganized in the woods. After some delay the advance was resumed and the battalion reached its objective early in the afternoon and began to dig in. The battalion had suffered only slight casualties, and had taken about 100 prisoners and a large number of trench mortars and machine guns. (46)

(46) Personal Experience.

The 3rd Battalion did not advance until 2 P.M. although "K" Company had crossed the Savières about 9 A.M. and taken up a position on the east bank. The Battalion moved forward and encountered some opposition from the German in position along southern edge of woods. This resistance was finally broken up and resulted in about nine machine guns falling into their hands. They finally reached their objective on the eastern edge of the woods late in the afternoon where liaison was established with the 1st

(47) Hist. 39th Battalion and the position consolidated. (47)  
Inf.p.29.

It was not until 3:45 P. M. that the 2nd Battalion began their advance. All this time the battalion had been subjected to a heavy

(48) Hist. 39th shelling and some machine gun fire directed at the Troesne salient. (48)  
p. 29.

The advance of this battalion was partly over open ground to the south of the woods. The woods however, were pretty well cleared by the time the French allowed this battalion to advance, so they met with little opposition. The battalion moved forward along the north bank of the Ourcq and finally reached its objective along the north



discovered our advance as yet, and a few stray shells were the only fire we received. Some men did get straight across by wading in up to their necks, others crossed on several logs which had been thrown across by the Germans, evidently for use by their night patrols in getting out. (44) One company, however, crowded on to a little foot bridge off to the left, and before they could be stopped half the company was on this bridge. Just at this time the first German Machine Gun opened up, and it looked for a minute as if the company was caught in a very bad position. Fortunately the gun was firing wild, evidently in the general direction of the noise they heard in the river bottom. No one was hit, but the bridge was cleared of men very quickly.

Luckily for us the German main line of resistance was along the southern edge of the woods and they had left this portion of the front uncovered. Later in the day prisoners told us that they did not expect anyone would be reckless enough to attack across the swampy Savières, so they had not seriously occupied this part of the sector. (45)

On ascending the hill east of the river some machine guns were encountered, but at such close quarters that they were quickly silenced, - in most cases surrendering after firing a few bursts. The organized resistance along the southern edge of the woods was not broken up however, by the advance of the 1st Battalion, as the 3rd Battalion had some trouble when they advanced later thru that portion of the woods. The 1st Battalion pushed on thru the woods without meeting much resistance. One machine gun was discovered

*South*

northeast corner of the Buisson de Cresne. When this battalion reached its objective the regiment had completed the mission as-

(49) Hist.39th signed to it in F. O. #2. (49)  
p. 29.

The encircling "movement" in the original French plan was not a success. No French troops had approached Noroy from the south

(50) Hist.39th and the village was still in German hands in the late afternoon. (50)  
p. 29.

It was evident that the Germans had recovered from their surprise and their resistance was stiffening. The French apparently had been too cautious and had not exploited their surprise attack to

(51) Hist.4th. the fullest extent. (51) About this time the French asked the  
Div.p. 72. commanding officers, 39th Infantry for assistance in taking the village of Noroy. They seemed to be in great fear of a counter-

(52) Hist.4th attack in force by the Germans. (52) The commanding officer, 39th  
Div. p.72. Infantry replied to this request by issuing F. O. #3, which directed the regiment to advance as follows:- (see map #2) -

The 2nd Battalion to advance and occupy a position with its right resting on the Ourcq and extending north for about 500 yds., just east of road running south from Noroy;- the 1st Battalion to advance and extend the line to the left, with its left resting on the highway between Noroy and Chouy. The 3rd was to constitute the reserve and take up a position about 800 yards in rear of the center of the line. All battalions were directed to consolidate their positions and prepare them for defense against an expected counter-

(53) F. O. #3. attack. (53)  
Hq.39thInf.

This order was dated July 18th, 3:40 P.M., but did not reach all the troops until late in the evening. In the meantime the 3rd

Battalion had pushed forward patrols to the outskirts of Noroy and at the request of the French were preparing to occupy the town. When F. O. #3 was received by the 3rd Battalion the Battalion Commander came over to the P.C. of the 1st Battalion and stated that his battalion was in a better position to move forward thru Noroy than the 1st Battalion, and that he was going to occupy the position assigned the 1st Battalion in F. O. #3, and directed the 1st Battalion to remain in reserve in the woods.

The change in the disposition as prescribed in F. O. #3 was made on the initiative of the commanding officer, 3rd Battalion, and as the situation existed at that time he was without doubt

(53) Personal Experience.

justified in assuming responsibility for the change. (53) The 3rd Battalion advanced into the town of Noroy, overcoming all resistance and took up a position east of the town. The 2nd Battalion could now advance with little difficulty along the Ourcq, which they did, and took up a position south of the town extending

(54) Hist.4th. Div.p. 73.

the line of the 3rd Battalion south to the river. (54) Two companies of the 3rd Battalion remained in the woods during the night in support, while the 1st Battalion as regimental reserve remained on its objective reached early in the afternoon. This completed the operations on the 18th and the troops remained in these positions during the night of July 18-19th. (see map #2.)

About one A.M. on July 19th the Regimental Commander received

(55) Hist.39th p. 30.

instructions from the French command to resume the attack at 4 A.M. (55) For this operation one battalion of the French 20th Regiment was to come under orders of the Commanding Officer, 39th Infantry, and



operate on our left. It is believed that this is the same battalion of the 20th Regiment which probably attacked ahead of us on our left on the morning of the 18th.

In accordance with the French plan of action for the 19th, F.O. #4, Hqs. 39th Infantry, was issued at 2 A.M. on the 19th. The Regimental P.C. had by this time been moved and was established at Troesne. (See Appendix B) This order was complete and clear and while some difficulty occurred in getting the order out to the troops, they nevertheless received the order in time to attack at the hour designated. (56) This order gave us the information that the enemy was still retreating and that our Division would continue the pursuit in the morning. Battalions of the 20th French Regiment were on our right and left. The mission of the Regiment as stated in the order was, "to attack this morning in continuation of the pursuit".

(56) Personal  
Knowledge.

The 2nd and 3rd Battalions from right to left were to constitute the assault echelon, while the 1st Battalion was to follow in reserve. The front assigned each assault battalion was only 550 yards. The zone of action widened some after the advance progressed. The assault echelon was assigned three objectives. (See Map #2.) These objectives were comparatively short and shows again the very conservative plans of the French. It was planned to hold the final objective when reached with only one battalion in front line, one in support and one in reserve. (57)

(57) F.O.#4.  
Hqs.39th  
Inf.

Par. 3 (g) of this order prohibited any further advance on



reaching the final objective unless orders were received from Regimental Headquarters, - again the French caution. The Regimental command post was to move to Noroy after the first objective was reached. Under this order the 2nd and 3rd Battalions were to leave the position at 4 A.M. and move forward behind a barrage fire to be delivered by the French. Let us now see what took place in each battalion.

The 3rd Battalion, which occupied the position in front of  
(58) Hist.39th. Noroy, advanced at 4 A.M. as ordered. (58) At this time the Ger-  
p. 31. man artillery was very active and the French heavy artillery was  
(59) Personal firing on our front. (59) It is doubtful if this battalion real-  
Knowledge. ized that the barrage fire supposed to open at 4 A.M. had not  
materialized. Having never seen a barrage fire at close quarters  
they probably did not realize its absence in the confusion. Any-  
way, the battalion moved forward rapidly, overran a German battery  
in the fog east of the town, and was shortly stopped by machine  
(60) Hist.39th. gun resistance. (60) About this time word was received at the  
p. 31. Regimental P.C. that the French had delayed the attack one hour  
and that the barrage fire would be held up accordingly.

It was impossible to get word to the 3rd Battalion to withdraw  
out of danger at this time, and for some reason the barrage could  
not be called off, so at 5 A.M. it came down. It passed just over  
the heads of the 1st Battalion, which at that time was on the north-  
(61) Personal east edge of Noroy, (61) caught the 3rd Battalion in line east of  
Experience. Noroy and gave them quite a shaking up. This was a very trying  
experience for green troops to pass thru, but they recovered prompt-

ly from the shock and after the barrage passed they continued their advance. This battalion encountered quite a lot of machine gun resistance in the wheat fields thru which they advanced. This resistance was broken up as a rule by the simple method of overrunning them. Such a method was costly, but quick and sure!

A short halt was made on the road leading south from Chouy for the purpose of reorganization, and the battalion then pushed on to the final objective which was reached early in the forenoon. On reaching its objective this battalion had advanced eight kilometers into the hostile position since the morning of the 16th, had cleaned up part of the Buisson de Cresne, taken the town of Noroy from the Germans in a hand to hand fight, advanced across several miles of wheatfields covered with machine gun nests, and finally reached its objective on time. This was a very creditable operation for a green battalion which had never been in action before.

The Second Battalion on the right was fortunate in being echeloned to the rear of the Third when the attack started, and having very difficult ground to advance over, the low swampy Ourcq valley. Consequently it did not make rapid progress at the start. They encountered enemy machine gun resistance and considerable artillery fire which held them up. This allowed them to escape to some extent the fate of the 3rd Battalion in being caught in the French barrage. (62) After moving out of the swamp this battalion continued the advance against considerable enemy machine gun resistance and finally came up in rear of the 3rd Battalion, where they dug in and organizing<sup>ed</sup> their position.

The 1st Battalion in reserve, after waiting north of Noroy for the artillery barrage to pass, moved east toward Chouy. Some trouble was experienced with machine guns in position north of the Noroy-Chouy road. These guns were in the sector of the French battalion on our left which had not as yet advanced beyond the Aucienville-Noroy Road. In trying to overcome this resistance the battalion moved farther north and finally came out just south of Chouy, where a position was taken up in a long cut on a hill south of the town. In coming down the long bare faced hill from the ridge east of Noroy toward Chouy, the two supporting companies of the battalion were caught in a heavy concentration of German artillery and cut up badly. The Germans evidently had direct observation on them, as the fire followed them straight down the hill into Chouy a distance of about one kilometer.

All the afternoon of the 19th this battalion was subjected to a heavy concentration of German artillery fire directed at Chouy and the troops in position along the road leading south. Fortunately the battalion was well covered and very few casualties resulted

(63) Personal Experience. from this fire. (63) This completed the forward movement of the 39th Infantry in this phase of the great offensive. The battalions held the positions they now occupied until the early morning of the 20th when they were relieved by units of the French 9th Regiment and marched back to a reserve position in the woods north of Troesne.

#### SUMMARY OF OPERATIONS.

Beginning at 8 A.M. on July 18th, the regiment advanced into the hostile lines and by noon on the 19th had penetrated about eight kilometers, had taken the Buisson de Cresne, the villages of



Noroy and Chouy, had captured an enemy battery, a number of trench mortars and machine guns and taken over one hundred prisoners. While there are a great many things that could be criticized in this operation it is believed that it can be called a successful attack without fear of contradiction. The Regiment was cited in orders from French G.H.Q. and from Headquarters French II Corps for their part in the attack.

In criticizing this operation it must be borne in mind that the regiment was composed of men who had not more than six months service, and that the regiment as such had really functioned only since March. And since that time more than six weeks had been spent in transporting the regiment from its camp in the United States to the training area in France. This operation affords a good field for discussion as to the action of partially trained troops in battle. Of course the greatest of all training schools is the battlefield, but it would be the height of folly to wait until we reach there to commence our training.

History affords us many examples of where the issue of war was decided in one action. Our training regulations state that the object of all training is to insure success on the battlefield; then it certainly behooves us to see wherein we can have this state of training approach as a limit, that near perfection of technique which is only acquired by veteran organizations of many campaigns. Of course some of the defects and criticisms to be mentioned were corrected immediately after the operation, and I might say that this regiment was quite a different organization when it went into

the Argonne, for example, than what it was on July 18th. This improvement however, was gained thru bitter experience. The criticisms and defects to be mentioned were common to all organizations at this time, so naturally most of them have been considered and worked out here at this School. In consequence of this, if we had to send infantry regiments into war six months from today, they would be quite different from those that went in 1918. With these thoughts in mind the criticisms following are substantially those which occurred to us immediately after our first battle.

#### CRITICISMS AND OBSERVATIONS.

##### 1. Preparations for the Attack.

It is believed that this regiment was about the only American unit taking part in this operation which was in line in sufficient time before the hour of attack to get off without confusion. This statement is not made in order to place the regiment in a more favorable light than other American units, but simply to show that the French Command on this front had the situation better in hand than elsewhere. Our relief operations on the night of July 17-18th were conducted so smoothly that it <sup>served</sup> ~~seemed~~ as a model for us in future work of this character.

##### 2. The French General Plan.

The whole French plan of action for this operation can be criticized as being too conservative. The I Army was given a limited objective and were under strict orders not to advance beyond this objective, until further instruction pending the outcome of the battle. Only the

#### 4. Leadership and Discipline.

The discipline in itself throughout the regiment was good during the operation, but the most apparent defect was the lack of leadership among the commanders of all units. This was due in a great measure to inexperience, yet it is believed that this important phase of training while talked about a great deal, is quite frequently slighted. Corporals could not and did not even understand that they were supposed to command their squads. Sergeants looked to Platoon leaders to command their sections, and platoon leaders to company commanders to command their platoons. One company commander on reaching the intermediate objective, instead of reorganizing his company at once, went off looking for souvenirs and proudly exhibited them to the battalion commander. The battalions were lacking in team work due to the fact that they had never functioned as battalions in any tactical exercises. This defect was due to the fact that our training programme was cut short by the necessity for duty in the line.

#### 5. Formations.

At this time we were still using the drill regulations of 1911, modified as to combat formations by a pamphlet from G.H.Q. on the offensive action of small units. The new formations for the attack were understood to some extent by the officers, but the men had had no training in this work whatever. So in going forward on the 18th the formation resembled more or less a "mob", tho we endeavored to advance in two lines of squad columns with two platoons in the assault



the French had learned their lesson thru disastrous reverses, but it is interesting to conjecture on what might have happened had this attack been pushed to its utmost on the first day.

### 3. Plan of Action French 33rd Division.

The plan of action adopted here was of course in line with the conservative plans of the whole operation. The objectives were too short but at that were not attained on time by the French, which to one familiar with the operation has always been a mystery. The plan was well conceived but poorly carried out. In their "encircling" maneuver around the swampy Savières and the obstacle of the Buisson de Cresne they took the utmost advantage of the terrain, and in order to take no chances they assigned the 39th Infantry to hold the original sector, pending the success or failure of the attack. In other words, ~~even~~ had the attack failed it is believed that the strong position west of the Savières could have been easily held even against strong counter-attacks. They allowed one battalion, the 1st, to advance at 8 A.M. in order to drive out the resistance still in the Buisson de Cresne, which undoubtedly must have been giving them some trouble both to the north and south. The holding up of the advance of our 2nd and 3rd Battalions until mid-afternoon over the violent protests of our Regimental Commander, was in line with their extremely conservative plans.

On reaching our final objective on the 19th, we were only six kilometers from the Soissons-Chateau Thierry highway. An advance of even three kilometers more would have brought this important highway under fire from our light artillery.

and two in the support echelon. We endeavored to maintain this formation with close d intervals in passing thru the woods, but after encountering resistance the battalions became badly disorganized due to the inability of the leaders of small units to command. Fortunately only slight resistance was met here, which was quickly overrun by simply pushing forward, which generally resulted in the surrender or hasty retreat of the enemy. These woods were traversed in several directions by roads, and while the troops had been warned about halting on roads and other open spaces, we found it invariably done. The only thing that saved us getting losses in this respect was the failure of the Germans to man their machine guns, which in several instances we found placed so as to enfilade the roads.

In the open we endeavored to use two formations; - the assault platoon were deployed as a skirmish line at five pace intervals, sometimes both waves, and sometimes second wave would be in squad columns. Support platoons and companies were invariably in squad columns. Reserve battalions were in squad columns when advancing in open as they always receive more shelling than any other units on the battlefield. It was found that a skirmish line was much more difficult to control than a squad column formation. "Bunching" is always more apparent in a skirmish line. Green troops seem to feel instinctively that safety lies in keeping together, which of course we know is the most dangerous thing to do on the battlefield. In a squad column the corporal can control this tendency much better.

It was found that the squads become depleted too rapidly due first to authorized absences at the time of going into line, second, straggling and casualties, and third, details away from the platoon for such duties as ammunition carriers for machine guns, stretcher bearers, liaison agents at battalion and regimental headquarters, etc. Some of these sources of absentees are eliminated under our present organization, but you will never be able to get away from the nuisance of constant battlefield reorganization of your platoon so long as your squads or, as they might be called, combat groups, are only composed of eight men. Why not organize your section to start with into two combat groups of twelve men each. Such an organization would have sufficient strength to sustain a fifty per cent loss in battle and still retain its entity as a fighting unit.

This may seem radical to some of us because we are "married" to the squad idea and cannot get away from it. Was the size of the squad determined from a tactical standpoint? I don't believe that it was. I think it came from close order drill. I can't see any direct connection between close order drill and combat formations. The only close order formation necessary in the advanced zone is the column of squads on the road. Once you leave this formation you need never go back to it again. If you want a closed formation after being once deployed all that is necessary is to close your four combat groups in, without interval, and you have the same formation we call column of squads. This organization for the advance zone would give you a formation whereby infantry can bivouac, sleep, eat, march, and fight without changing from close order to extended order and back again.



This is especially desirable today where all movements in the forward zone are invariably at night. This idea is not a theory. A modified form of this organization was used in this regiment during the war, as a result of experience gained in this operation. The French platoon while in the forward zone is organized and handled in a similar manner.

6. Use of Rifle Fire.

Rifle fire was used very little. This may have been due in part to a lack of training in the principles of musketry. The following observations may be of interest in connection with rifle fire:-

Infantry will invariably rush from cover to cover, and it is practically impossible to stop them in the open when fired upon by the enemy for the purpose of returning the fire.

Infantry will fire only at what they can see.

Hostile targets are invariably small groups of resistance and very difficult to locate. The first great surprise one has in the attack is the utter absence of the enemy. He makes his presence known by his fire only.

You advance sometimes hundreds of yards without firing a shot. You wait behind cover until the hostile fire ceases or is shifted to another target. You then advance quickly, hoping you can get to the next cover before he catches you again.

It is very difficult to get men to crawl forward to a ridge line under machine gun fire, and open fire at something they cannot see.

Men will go thru small arms fire on the run, but they wont stand still under fire or lie down in an exposed position.

When hostile centers of resistance are located, it is best to overcome them by "encircling" thru movements to their flanks by carefully selected avenues of approach which afford cover.

7. Use of Machine Guns and Auxiliary Weapons.

Machine guns were not used to advantage. Each battalion had one company of machine guns attached, but there was a lack of co-operation due to the fact that the machine guns had never worked with the rifle battalions in any tactical exercises. The guns were always brought forward and placed in position when halts were made for any length of time. The morale of infantry on the firing line is increased by the presence of machine guns located in their position. They recognize their power both physical and moral over the enemy.

The one pounder and Howitzer never came into action. It is very difficult for these weapons to keep up with advancing infantry and be close enough to be useful when needed. The method of utilizing the full power of these weapons in the offensive is yet to be developed.

8. Orders.

The regiment issued four complete field orders between July 17th and 3 A.M. July 19th. These orders were complete and clear and with one exception, where the order was sent forward to a battalion by an

officer acting alone, the orders reached organizations in ample time for the battalions to make necessary preparations for their execution. In the one exception the officer carrying the order became a casualty.

9. Scouting and Patrolling.

Lack of training in this important work was apparent at all times. Too much time cannot be devoted to this subject in training programmes.

10. Liaison and Communication.

This phase of operations had never been seriously studied in our service before the war. Consequently in the early operations we fell down miserably in this respect. We had the means at hand but were very crude in making use of them. The principal means of communication was the runner and the telephone. It is remarkable how quickly one learns by experience. It is believed that liaison was a hundred per cent better on the second day than the first, tho of course, it was far from being what was desired. On the first day no telephones were used; on the second day all battalions were connected with the Regimental P. C. by phone shortly after the final objective was reached.

11. Maps.

Issue of maps was insufficient. No officers below company commanders had maps. Maps should be issued to include at least platoon leaders. This, I believe is very important.



12. Night Work.

Night movements were very confusing. More training should be given in this work before going to the front. Troops should be impressed with the idea that night work is the rule in war rather than the exception.

13. Organization of Positions.

In some cases troops on reaching objectives were required to remain in exposed positions under shell fire. This is unnecessary in most cases and can be eliminated to a large extent by a proper organization of your position.

14. Aerial Observation.

Men were very prone to come out in the open and gaze at hostile aircraft. This practice is very difficult to overcome in inexperienced troops. It is sometimes thought that the only cure for it is a good "bombing" or "shelling" as a result of aerial observation. Such a lesson will usually be remembered.

15. Straggling.

Straggling was excessive as always on the battlefield. One prevalent type of straggling you will encounter is men going to the rear with wounded. This always happens with inexperienced troops. A man once gone as far as the dressing station rarely comes back, at least on that day.

16. Evacuation of Wounded.

Evacuation was as good as could be expected. While some men undoubtedly died who could have been saved thru early medical attention, it was unavoidable. This is one of the things about war

4. Officers and non-commissioned officers must be thoroughly conversant with maps, to such an extent that ground in the dark can be recognized from memory of ground forms pictured from the map. This is very important! Maps should be issued down to at least platoon leaders.
5. Much more training must be given in night work. Ability to advance at night without confusion would enable troops to advance over short stretches of open ground over which a daylight advance might be very dangerous.
6. A most severe penalty should be imposed against straggling.
7. It is very difficult to get men to observe a target and fire when hostile bullets are striking on or near their position.
8. Hostile small arms fire, including machine gun fire, at long and mid ranges will invariably come from your flank and not from your front.
9. Inexperienced troops will always "bunch" when under fire. Stringent measures will have to be taken to prevent this.
10. Small columns are a better formation than skirmish line except when you expect to deliver rifle fire.
11. The squad as a combat organization is too small. Casualties quickly reduce it below the minimum number of men required for a fighting unit. This necessitates frequent reorganization <sup>in</sup> to the platoon on the battlefield.
12. Inexperienced troops do not appreciate the power of observation in the hands of the enemy, especially aerial observation. The necessity for concealment from observation must be impressed upon men before they

that we cannot avoid. Someone always gets hurt. If we expected to get every man hit, to the rear immediately, it would take as many stretcher bearers as infantrymen on the front line.

17. Effect of Enemy Fire.

Troops were very nervous and fearful of hostile shell fire, especially when exposed to it for long periods. It is an odd fact that shell fire appeared to be more dreaded than machine gun or small arms fire. It is believed that the converse of this is true after more experience. Once troops see the terrible effect of machine gun fire it is the most dreaded weapon on the battlefield.

18. Grenades.

Hand and rifle grenades were not used to any extent. This was due more to ignorance of the powers and limitations of these weapons than to anything else. During the training period we had spent some time on the technique of these weapons, but practically no training was given in the methods of employment, or tactical use.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM THE OPERATION.

1. Men must be given more instruction in what to expect on the battlefield.
2. Important orders should not be entrusted to a single messenger going forward.
3. When advancing thru woods men must be impressed with the idea never to stop in an open space such as a road, trail or clearing. It is good idea to have certain men in each section instructed to observe carefully all trees for possible snipers.

go in the line.

13. Machine guns must be retained as an integral part of the rifle battalion. Without this organization you will never get the teamwork necessary for offensive action. The machine gun should always be considered as <sup>an</sup> infantry weapon.

14. It was found that until you reach close range, the power of maneuver is of equal, if not greater assistance in advancing on the enemy than the fire power of the rifle.

15. In closing we might add that it was found that leadership, discipline and team work were still the great factors that insure success in battle.



APPENDIX "A".

Field Orders  
No. 2.  
Map 129.

Hq. 39th Inf.,  
Regt. P.C.,  
18 - July - 18.  
12:30 A.M.

1. The enemy hold the woods to our east with about one small Bn. with machine guns. The 23rd French Regt. will attack on our left, Major Bienamia Comd'g right Bn. The French 20th Inf. attack on our right. Our infantry and artillery support attack.

2. This regiment will attack, capture and consolidate woods to our east.

3. (a) The 2nd Bn., M.G. Co., 39th Inf., Major Mitchell comd'g., will take the objective from the point 168.6 - 276.7 inclusive to the point 168.5 - 276.4 and envelop hostile left.

(b) The 3rd Bn., Co. A, 11th M.G. Bn., detachment 1 lb. guns and Stokes mortars, Lieut.-Col. Peck comd'g., will take the objective from the point 168.6 - 276.7 (exclusive) to the point 168.3 - 277.4 inclusive.

(c) The 1st Bn., Co. C. 11th M.G. Bn., Major Terrell comd'g., will take the objective from the point 168.3 - 277.4 exclusive to the point 168.4 - 278.

(d) The remainder of the Regt. will constitute the Regt. Reserve and remain at Regt. P.C.

4. All objectives will include all woods in immediate front to vicinity of 170. Upon capture of objectives the outpost line will be established on east edge of woods line of resistance 500 yards west. Both lines will be consolidated. Care must be exercised that French troops who are operating east of us and in our front are not fired into. Liaison with French troops on our right and left must be established and maintained.

5. Prisoners will be sent to Regt. P. C.

6. Reserve rations and ammunition and light packs will be worn. Canteens will be worn filled with water. All blankets and other equipment will be left at present company position under guard of one man who cannot march.

7. All grenade sections will be fully armed.

X - 3rd Bn. will be the Base Battalion.

8. Trains will remain in present location.

9. The Zero hour of the French - 4:35 A.M.

10. Direction of attack line east. Our attack will begin upon notice from Regt. P. C.

11. Axis of liaison through center of position.

12. Regt. P. C/ and Regt. Dressing station at present position until further notice.

By order of Colonel Bolles:

(C. A. Bayler, Jr.,)  
Capt. and Adj. 39th Inf.

Copies to  
Each Bn. Commander.

APPENDIX "B".

Field Order  
No. 4.  
Map Soissons No. 1/80,000

Hqs. 39th Infantry,  
19th July 1918.  
2 A.M.

1. The enemy are still retreating, this Division continues the pursuit tomorrow. The enemy occupies the position about 1 Kil. east of us. On our right is the 20th French Regt., on our left 3rd Bn. 20th French Regt.

2. This regiment will attack this morning in continuation of pursuit.

3. (a) 2nd Bn., M. G. Co., 39th Inf., Major Mitchell comd'g, will attack on a front of 550 yds. with their right following the river.

(b) 3rd Bn., Co. A., 11th M. G. Bn., det 1 pounders, Lieut. Col. Peck comd'g. will attack along a front of 550 yds. from left of 2nd Bn.

(c) These Bn.<sup>s</sup> will have 3 objectives in the attack: 1st objective  $1\frac{1}{2}$  Kil. from line of departure, along a line about  $10^{\circ}$  east of north; 2nd objective along road CHOUY-LA SUCRY; 3rd objective ridge 1 Kil. S.E. of CHOUY-LASURCRY road, covering a front of  $1\frac{1}{4}$  kil.

(d) In the capture of the 3rd objective only one Bn. will be used on first line, the other two Bn. of the arrange in depth.

(e) 1st Bn. & Co. C., 11th M. G. Bn. and Det. Stokes Mortar, Major Terrell comd'g., will constitute the reserve, and march 600 yds. in rear of center of first line.

(f) The Headquarters Co. less det. will remain and march with Regt. Hqs. Co.

(g) Upon the capture of the 3rd objective no advance beyond

this ridge will be made, except upon order of Regtl. Co. at which time the Regt. will be in 3 lines, one Bn. in each line.

(h) The 2nd Bn. will be the base Bn., the rate of march will be 110 yds. in 3 minutes, and must be absolutely maintained on account of barrage fire.

(i) The direction of march will be 45 S of E which must be accurately maintained by each unit.

(k) The axis of liaison will be along the road, TROESNES-NORDY. Liaison with units on the right and left must be maintained.

4. All trains will remain in position here until further order.

5. Regt. P. C. 1st at TROESNES, before 1st objective thereafter at NORDY.

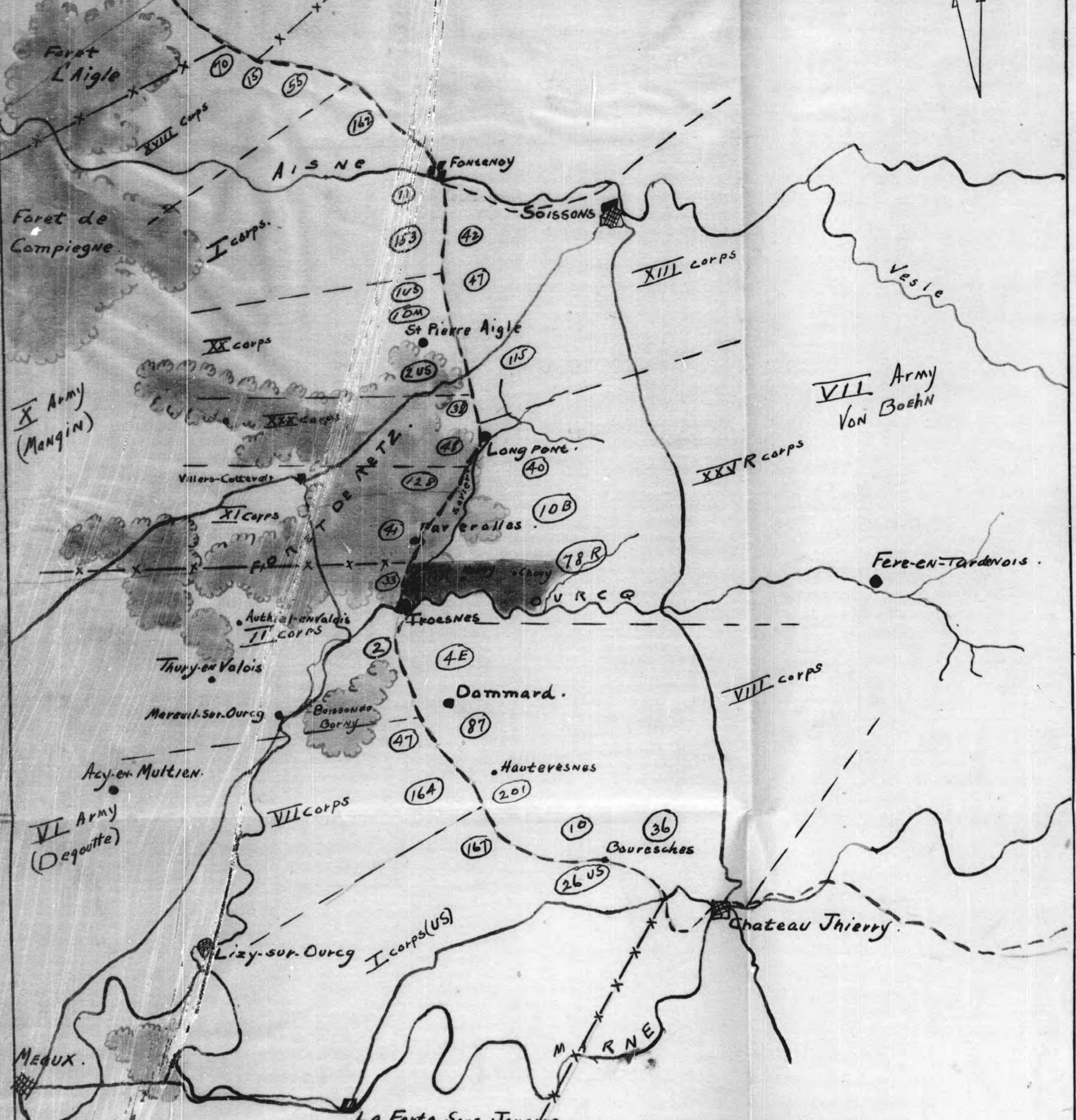
6. Prisoners to Regt. P. C.

7. Zero hour 4 A.M., at which time march must promptly be taken up.

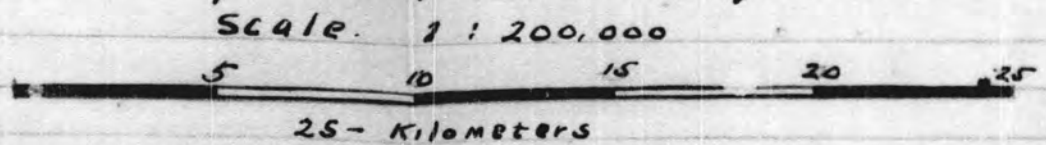
By order of Colonel Bolles:

(C. A. Bayler, Jr.,)  
Capt. and Adj. 39th Inf.





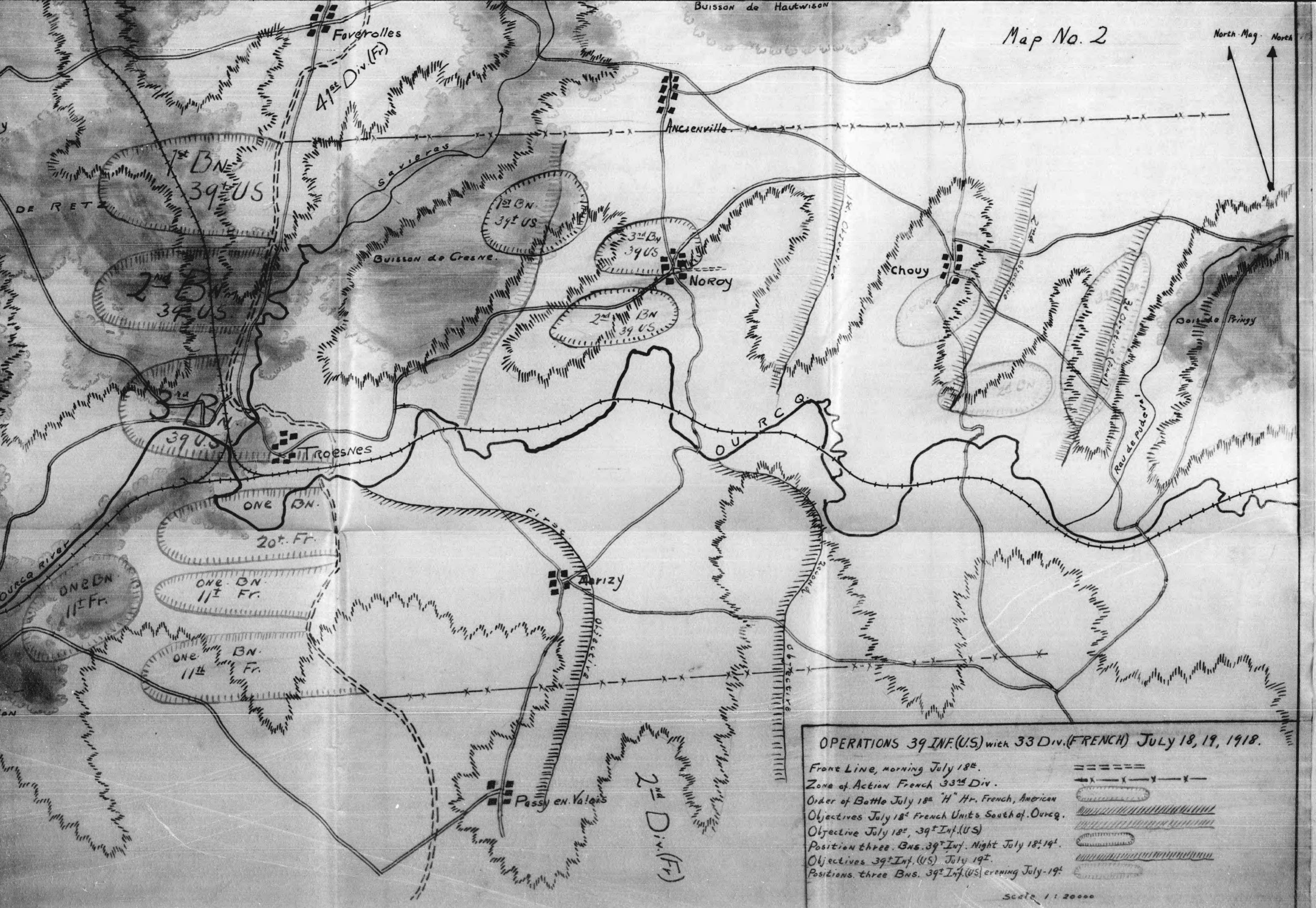
Map No. 1.  
 THE West Side Marne-Aisne Salient  
 Showing Order of Battle July 18, 1918.



- Army Boundary — x — x — x —
- Corps Boundary — — — — —
- Divisions in line. (4)

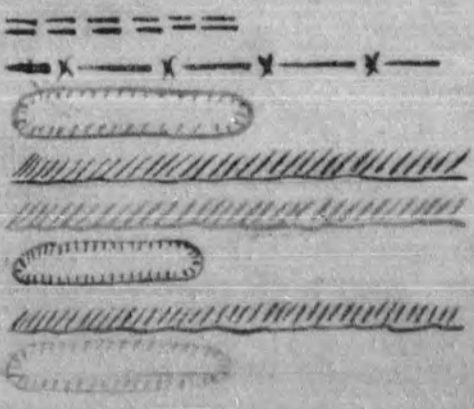
Note: 7 Brig (US) with II Corps French, 8<sup>th</sup> Brig (US) with VII Corps.  
 Area of Operations 39<sup>th</sup> Inf. (US) July 18, 1918.





OPERATIONS 39 INF.(US) with 33 Div.(FRENCH) July 18, 19, 1918.

- Front Line, morning July 18<sup>th</sup>.
- Zone of Action French 33<sup>rd</sup> Div.
- Order of Battle July 18<sup>th</sup> "H" Hr. French, American
- Objectives July 18<sup>th</sup> French Units South of Ourcq.
- Objective July 18<sup>th</sup>, 39<sup>th</sup> Inf.(US)
- Position three Bns. 39<sup>th</sup> Inf. Night July 18<sup>th</sup> 19<sup>th</sup>.
- Objectives 39<sup>th</sup> Inf.(US) July 19<sup>th</sup>.
- Positions. three Bns. 39<sup>th</sup> Inf.(US) evening July 19<sup>th</sup>.



Scale 1:20000

3 Kilometers