



A Description of the Battle of Chateau-Thierry

[Excerpted from Edwin L. James, "The Americans in the Second Battle of the Marne," in *New York Times Current History* (September. 5 1918), pp. 399-402]

July 18, 1918.

[...]

Last night tales of heroism of these men were being told. I believe that of all of them the story of Sergeant J. F. Brown was most notable. Brown commanded a detachment of eleven men when the German onslaught came. They had shelter, which saved them under the heavy German bombardment, and when the advancing boche came along they let him pass, and then got ready to turn their machine gun loose. But just then a hundred or more Germans came along. Brown ordered his men to scatter quickly. He ducked into the woods, and saw the Huns put his beloved machine gun out of the war. The Germans passed on. Brown looked around and seemed to be alone. He started toward the Marne, away from his own lines, and met his Captain, also alone.

These two Americans, out there in the woods in the dark, the Captain with an automatic pistol and Brown with an automatic rifle saw that the boche barrage kept them from getting to their own lines, and so decided to kill all the Germans they could before they themselves were killed. They lay in the thicket while the Germans passed by in large numbers. According to Brown's report, they heard two machine guns going back of them, and decided to go and get them. The two crept close and charged one of the machine guns, which killed the American Captain. Brown got the lone German gunner with his rifle. Then up came an American Corporal, also

left alone in the woods, and Brown and the Corporal started after the second German machine gun, behind a clump of bushes.

They got close, and Brown with his automatic rifle killed three Germans, the crew of the gun. Then attracted by the shooting close at hand, up came the eleven men Brown had commanded, each looking for Germans. Brown resumed command, and led the party to where they could see more Germans in a sector of trench taken from the Americans.

These thirteen Americans performed a feat never to be forgotten. The Germans evidently were left in the trenches with machine guns to meet a counter-attack should the Americans make one. Brown posted his twelve men about the Hun position in twelve directions. He took a position where he could rake the trench with his automatic rifle. At a signal the twelve Americans opened up with their rifles from twelve points, and Brown started working his automatic rifle. Brown said he didn't know how many Germans he killed, but fired his rifle until it got so hot he couldn't hold it, and had to rest it across a stump. The Germans then, thinking they were attacked by a large party, decided to surrender. A German Major stepped out of the trench with his hands high, yelling "Kamerad!" Brown laid down his heated rifle, and while three of the hidden Americans guarded him, advanced toward the Major. Then all thirteen Americans moved in and disarmed the Germans. Brown said he didn't know how many there were, but it was more than 100.

Then, with Brown and the Corporal at the head, and the other eleven Americans in the rear, the procession started through the woods guided by a doughboy's compass, toward the American lines. It wasn't plain sailing. They were behind the German advance, and had to pass it and a space between the fighting Germans and the Americans. On the way through the woods several parties of Germans saw the advancing column, with Brown and the Corporal at its head, and hurriedly surrendered.

Beating through the thicket, Brown led his party to a place where the German advance line was broken. Just as he started over the American lines the Germans laid down a barrage. This got four of the Germans, but didn't touch an American. Brown and his twelve comrades got back with 155 prisoners. The four killed made a total for the thirteen Americans of 159.

American officers were almost dumbfounded at the strange tale Brown brought back, but doubt vanished when, soon after he reached regimental

headquarters, a military policeman showed up with a large Bundle of maps and plans Brown had taken from dead German officers killed by his automatic rifle, and, handing them to Brown, said: " Gimme my receipt."

70 Brown, who is 23 years old, and last year was a shipping clerk, had met this man on the way back, and, turning over the maps, which made a heavy bundle, had stopped while he scribbled out the receipt he demanded. Meanwhile barrage shells were falling all around. This receipt is part of the records of the American army. . . .

75 July 21 . - What a week this has been in the world's history ! A week ago, while the French were celebrating Bastille Day, the Germans, strong in hope because of two preceding drives, were making ready for another great effort. On the 1st they launched an attack from Chateau-Thierry to north of Chalons on a 100-kilometer front. They crossed the Marne and moved a short distance toward their objectives. Then, out of a clear sky, 80 July 18, came Foch's blow from Soissons to Chateau-Thierry. On Thursday and Friday French and Americans fought ahead, and then today they hit Ludendorff a body blow south of the Marne. The week started with a formidable German offensive. The week ends with a great allied offensive.

85 Americans, French, English-all the Allies-now face the fury of the German high command, with its great military machine. That machine is big and powerful, but it is not the machine it used to be. The morale of the German Army is weakening from day to day. The size of the German Army is growing surely less day by day.

90 The morale of the allied armies is getting better every day, and because of America the size of the allied armies is growing day by day. The defeat of Germany is but a matter of time. How much time no one can say. America should rejoice, but America should not be overconfident. But for what France has to be thankful for America has a Just right to be thankful for, 95 too.

South of Soissons, where the bitterest fighting of the week took place, it was the Americans who had the good fortune to push the line furthest ahead. Northwest of Chateau-Thierry, the closest point to Pans, it fell to the Americans to push the Germans back. East of Chateau-Thierry the 100 Americans drove the enemy back the same day he crossed the Marne. South of Dormans the Americans held the German advance and helped

drive the foe back. North of Chalons, the grand objective of the Crown Prince, the Americans stood on the plains and the boche could not pass.

It was the lot of American soldiers to be at vital points, and they made 105 good. It is not to be supposed that Americans were at those points through accident. Perhaps Foch felt that the ultimate, complete victory depended on what the American fighting man could do and perhaps he thought it best to know now. It seems but fair for America to know and believe that after all the greatest allied gain of this glorious week is the assurance that 110 the American fighting man has no superior. What tens of thousands of them have done in the last week hundreds of thousands will do. The week has changed the nature of the war from an allied defensive to an allied offensive. For the first time in more than a year the Germans are on the defensive.

115

From: A Description of the Battle of Chateau-Thierry
http://www.shsu.edu/~his_ncp/Thierry.html