

## LIFE IN THE TRENCHES

MEN who thought they had roughed it found new items to add to their list of discomforts after making the acquaintance of the trenches. It was no more pleasant to wade through and stand in half frozen mud than it had been, back in Rimaucourt, to hike and drill on snow-covered ground in dilapidated light-weight shoes. A windy billet might be preferable to an air-tight dugout that dripped water onto the wretched bunks and thence to the flooded floor. It was not cheering to stand on post through the long watches of the night, rendered more miserable by the necessity of wearing shoes and clothing continuously wet, gas masks, and side arms. There were no rubber boots, no changes of shoes or socks, and the trenches were in many places knee-deep in mud and water. Long exposure to these conditions confirmed the belief that Hell is not a place of fire and brimstone, but of mud and water.

Each platoon maintained in its G. C. five or six posts, each held by four men, with two on duty at a time through the night. Each post boasted of a small shelter dug into the bank and covered with corrugated iron or strips of canvas and dirt, where its members slept and kept the equipment not in use. The rest of the garrison served as gas guards, runners, and reserves in case of attack, and slept in the dugouts to which all could repair during bombardment. In the daytime two or three guards served for the entire G. C.

The daily routine commenced with stand-to, beginning an hour before dawn and lasting until broad daylight. As this ominous hour approached, sergeants went about the posts waking up the men. The murky dugouts and shelters then disgorged their sleepy-eyed occupants, who slowly found their way to the alert stations where they waited in groups of four to find out whether or not the Boche had chosen that particular morning to attack.

Upon dismissal from stand-to, all thoughts turned to food. The mess detail never seemed speedy enough to suit the voracious appetites of the front line. After a seemingly interminable wait, someone would spy the perspiring detail winding up the communication trench, and at the magic word "Chow" all else was subordinated to the business of producing mess kits and fighting for an advantageous position at the point of distribution. Rare was the occasion when the innocent detail was not accused of everything from drinking up the coffee and "mooching" the sugar, to jettisoning the slum to ease the load.

The food was carried from the company kitchens in Badonviller to the line in large containers constructed on the principle of fireless cookers, called by the French *marmites*. With a stout pole passed through the handles, it took two men to negotiate one of them. Once in a while they managed to keep the meal lukewarm until it reached the consumer. Bread was brought up, uncut, in burlap sacks; butter in pails; and other articles in whatever receptacle was handiest. The menu was simple and invariable, the quality first-rate, and the quantity sufficient. It consisted of slum, that haphazard mélange of meat, vegetables, and whatnot; coffee with sugar and condensed milk; white bread, good butter, boiled rice,

molasses or jam; and once in a while, pudding of some sort.

Twice a day the details made the pilgrimage to the front line; often they were shelled, and at all times they had to contend with the slippery duckboards. If a shell happened to light too close, it was quite possible that the post for which that particular meal was destined might have to do without its coffee, and then there would be a barrage of malediction to face. For more reasons than one the mess detail was an unenvied and unsought-for job.

The supply of water was naturally limited, as it, too, had to be carried by hand from the rear; an infinitesimal amount had to serve the purposes of both drinking and ablution. By rare economy one learned to quench his thirst, bathe, shave, and still have a surplus on an amount that ordinarily would not suffice for a bird.

As soon as the meal was over, the details for the never-ending toil of repairing the damage caused by shell fire and the elements gathered up their picks, shovels, and pumps and set to work. There was work for every one, and a certain number of hours every day were devoted to the upkeep and improvement of the trenches. Between times all equipment was inspected and cleaned: Chau-chats were dismounted and oiled; rifles worked over until the barrels shone like sunlight; grenades inspected for faulty caps and rust. There were daily inspections, too, of feet, gas masks, and ammunition by sergeants and the officer on the post. The rest of the day was spent catching up on sleep; reading, if there were papers available; writing letters, if one could scrape up the materials; airing the feet; and attempting to dry the shoes and socks. The men were not long in the trenches

before the great majority realized that they "had 'em". No one was immune; even the most fastidious were victims, and the business of shirt reading soon became one of the most popular and steadily pursued pastimes. Aside from these duties and diversions, there was little to do but keep out of sight and dodge the shells.

There was no time or occasion in the trenches for the observance of the formalities of military life behind the line: implicit and strict obedience to orders was all that was necessary. The officer in command of the post lived the same life, sharing the same food, the same bed, the same emotions, and the same dangers as his men. This intimate association brought out the true feeling of comradeship between subordinate and superior, and developed, instead of familiarity, an increased respect one for the other.

With the coming of night, life in each G. C. took on a sudden activity. Approaching dusk was the signal for evening stand-to, and again every man went to his emergency post, remaining there, ready for anything that might arise from the deepening shadow, until the danger of attack was past. Guards on post were now doubled, the men having four hours on and four off throughout the night; and the wire gates at the extremities of the posts were shut to prevent the ingress of intruders. Each was provided with a bell or some other device to warn the sentry in case they were touched.

The method of challenging in the dark, when it was impossible to distinguish friend from foe, was somewhat unorthodox. But if one were wise, he stopped short at a sudden low hiss, and gave the password; if it were the sergeant or the officer making one of the frequent rounds

during the night, it was enough to make himself known by name, so long as it were quickly done.

As soon as it was dark enough to escape detection from the enemy lines, the nightly wiring parties, protected by covering details, climbed out over the parapet and set to work. Combat and reconnoitering patrols, faces blacked, and armed to the teeth, filed out through the chicanes in the wire, and disappeared into the mysterious night.

At the entrance to the P. C. a guard is stationed to sound the alarm in the case of gas, and to prevent the entry of unauthorized persons. Below in the gloomy depths, faintly illuminated by a flickering candle, the officer is busy making out his reports, while the heavy breathing of the sleeping relief beats a steady cadence in the ear. From time to time a dark form descends to make a report or to deliver a message; sometimes it is a white, frightened face to warn of danger lurking beyond the wire, or it may be the leader of the hourly liaison patrol that keeps in touch with the adjoining posts, to say that all is well.

For the sentries on post the nights seemed ages long, and they were marked by inevitable scares and false alarms. A German patrol within a radius of five hundred yards never had occasion to feel neglected, and gas alarms averaged at least one a night for the first few weeks.

If the gas guard saw a green rocket rise from some distant point on the line where the danger was purely local, he did not take time to find out whether or not there were any poisonous vapors in his vicinity, but loosed upon the night air the blood-curdling screeches of his Klaxon. In no time at all green rockets would be

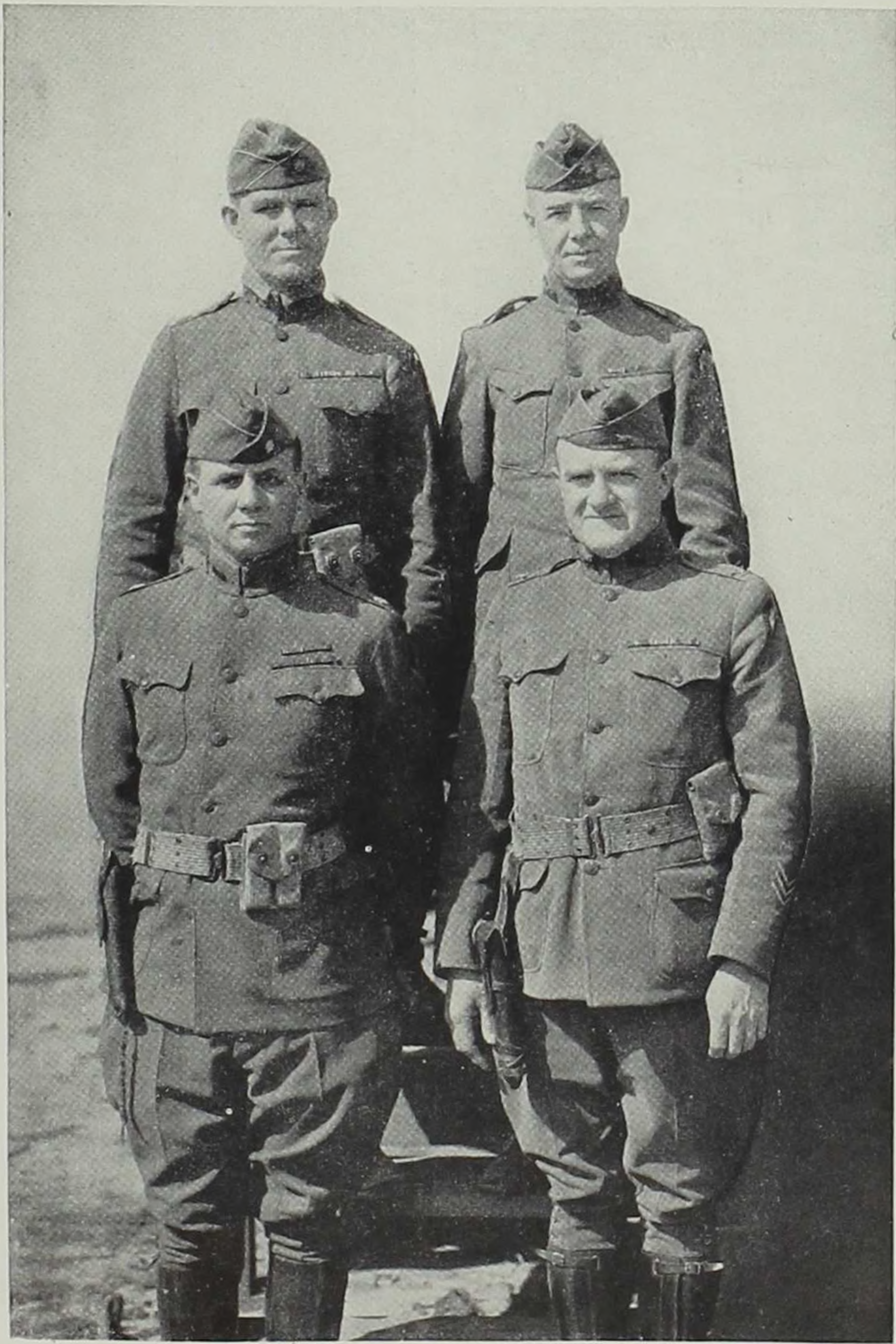
streaming up into the darkness, while off in the diminishing distance echoed the successively repeated warnings of the horn. The shouts of "Gas! Gas!" brought a thousand men to their feet, fingers fumbling for their respirators. Sudden terror, then doubt, then disgust at finding that there was no gas — this was the common sequence of sensations until the men picked up and could imitate that air of superior disdain with which a French soldier could exclaim "*pas de gaz*". As a matter of safety it was, of course, far better to suffer the discomfort of a thousand false alarms than to run the risk of being caught unprepared by one real attack. Although at first the cry was "Wolf — wolf", there finally came a night when the wolf appeared and sank his fangs deep in the body of the regiment.

Between the G. C.'s there were stretches of unprotected trench, 300 yards or more in length, which could be only occasionally patrolled, and there was always the possibility of Boche patrols working in behind our lines. The officers and men were learning lessons which experience alone could teach. A sentry on post at first spent most of his watch fighting down his fear, and as the night wore on the tension began to tell, his eyes and ears to play him false. Gazing out into a blackness so intense that it seemed to have physical body, he created for himself a thousand imaginary dangers — posts seemed suddenly to transform themselves into crouching Germans waiting to rush upon him and chop him into mincemeat. At times even the horizon seemed to buckle and bend, and then he would let fly a grenade or a burst from his Chauchat.

There is nothing so contagious as rifle fire at dark, unless it be gas alarms, and in a second a miniature

battle would be precipitated against harmless shadows. Then the Boches would wake up with gleaming flares and a healthy response from their vigilant machine guns. A prowling cat could tighten the nerves of an entire platoon a whole night through; and although the men affected in the light of day an amused attitude toward the fears of the night, a creaking limb was a stern reality until it was proved a creaking limb. It was only after many hours of suspense, suspicion, and sudden unnecessary fear that the sounds of the night were divided into the natural and the unnatural — that the suspected German signal was found to be the call of an innocent bird, that the sound of the enemy preparing to rush was only the sighing of the wind, and that the vague and wandering figures of the middle distance were but stumps or the posts that supported protecting bands of wire.

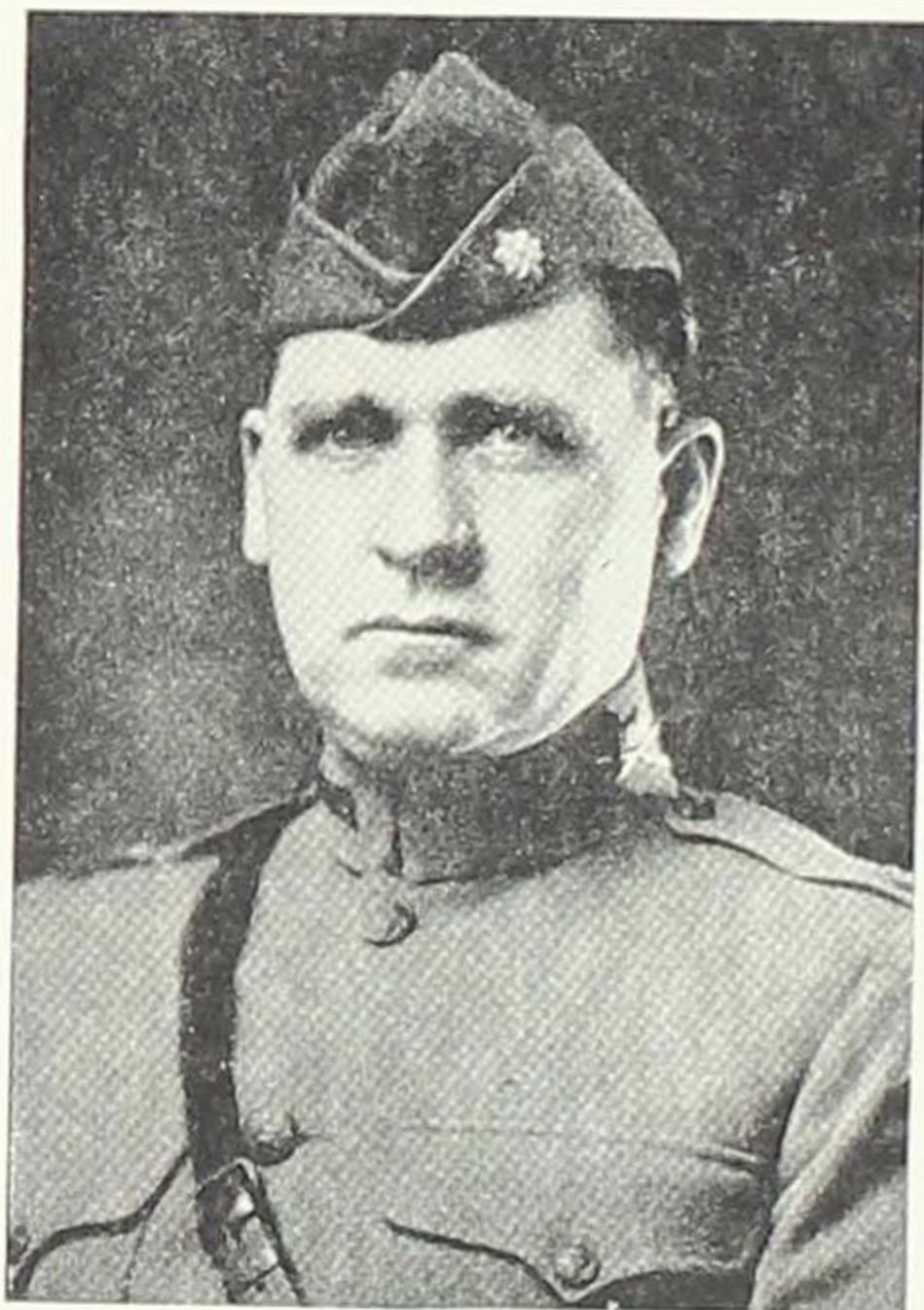
Patrolling by night commenced within the first twenty-four hours in the trenches, when a detail consisting of one officer, two non-coms, and three men from each company then in the line accompanied the regular patrols of the French. From then on, a patrol from the line or support companies went stumbling out through the wire every night on a mission which sounded most important on the order, but in reality was little more than a reconnaissance of our own wire. The real object was to gradually accustom the men to finding their way through the maze of wire, brush, and abandoned trenches without losing their sense of direction or their presence of mind. These first patrols could be followed throughout the greater part of their course by their low-muttered curses, and telltale betrayals of snapping twigs and scraping wire; but by degrees they picked up the tricks of the art, first from the French and then from their own experience,



MAJOR LLOYD D. ROSS  
LT. COL. GUY S. BREWER

MAJOR GLENN C. HAYNES  
COLONEL MATHEW A. TINLEY

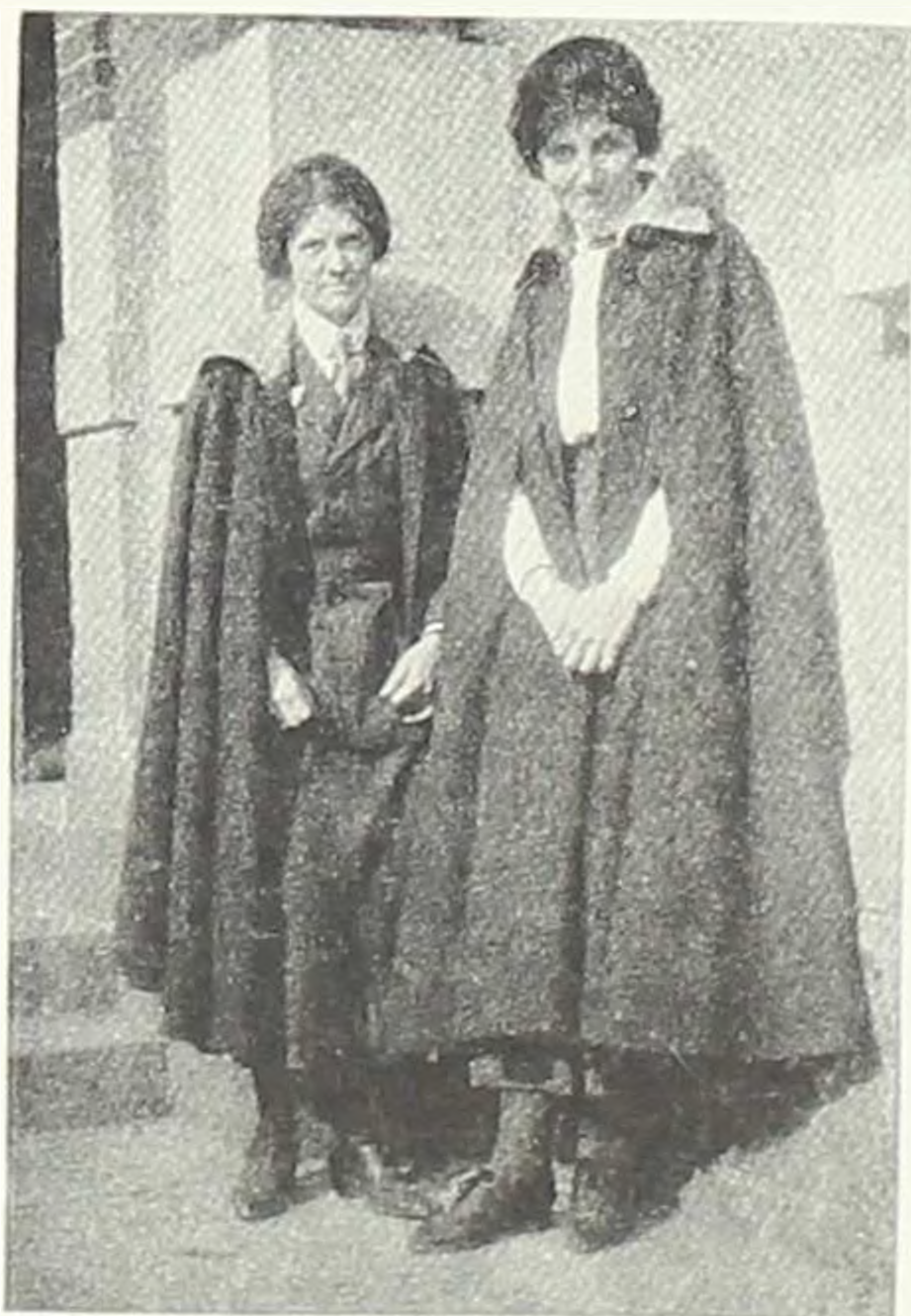




LT. COL. CLAUDE M. STANLEY



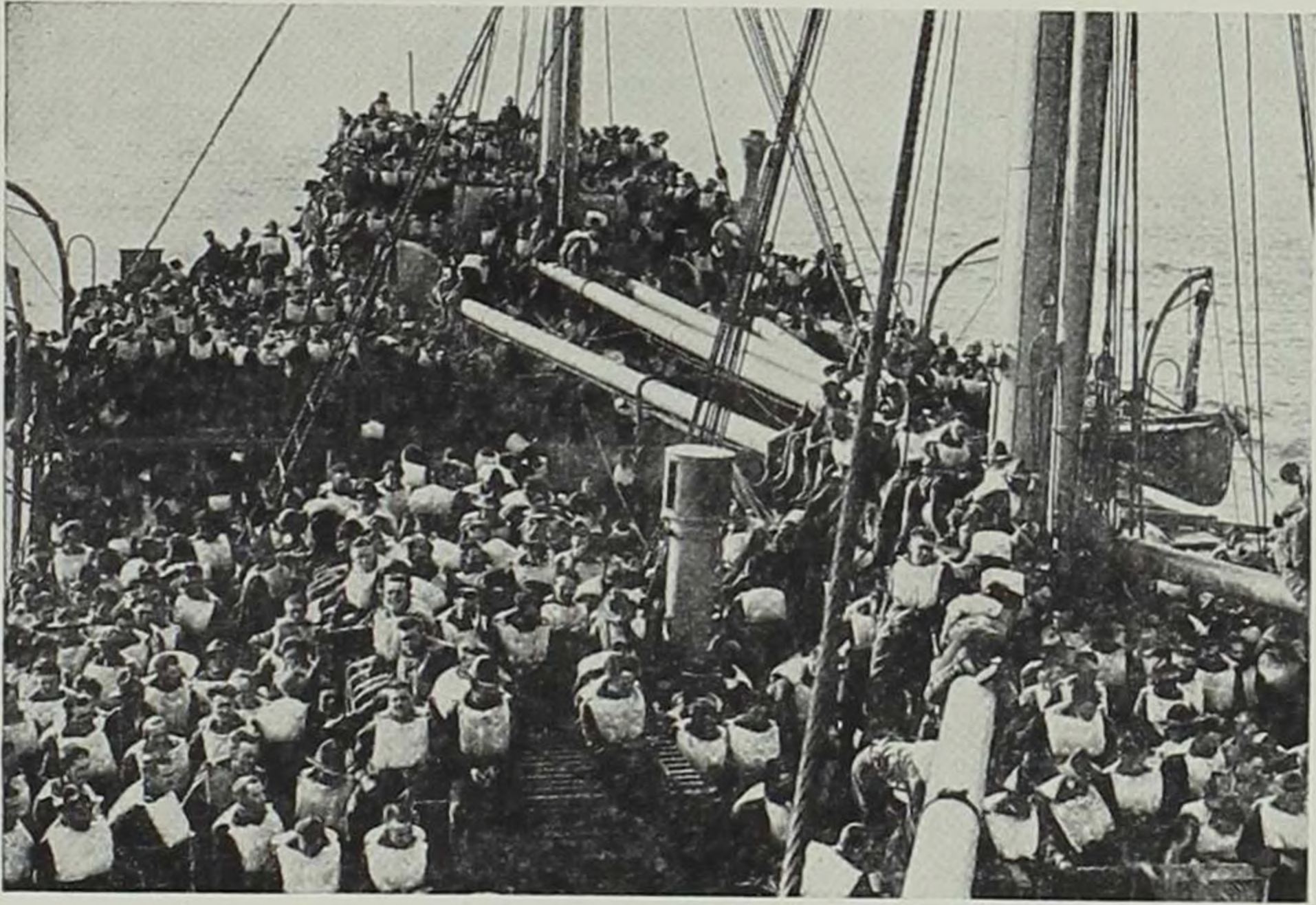
CHAPLAIN WINFRED E. ROBB



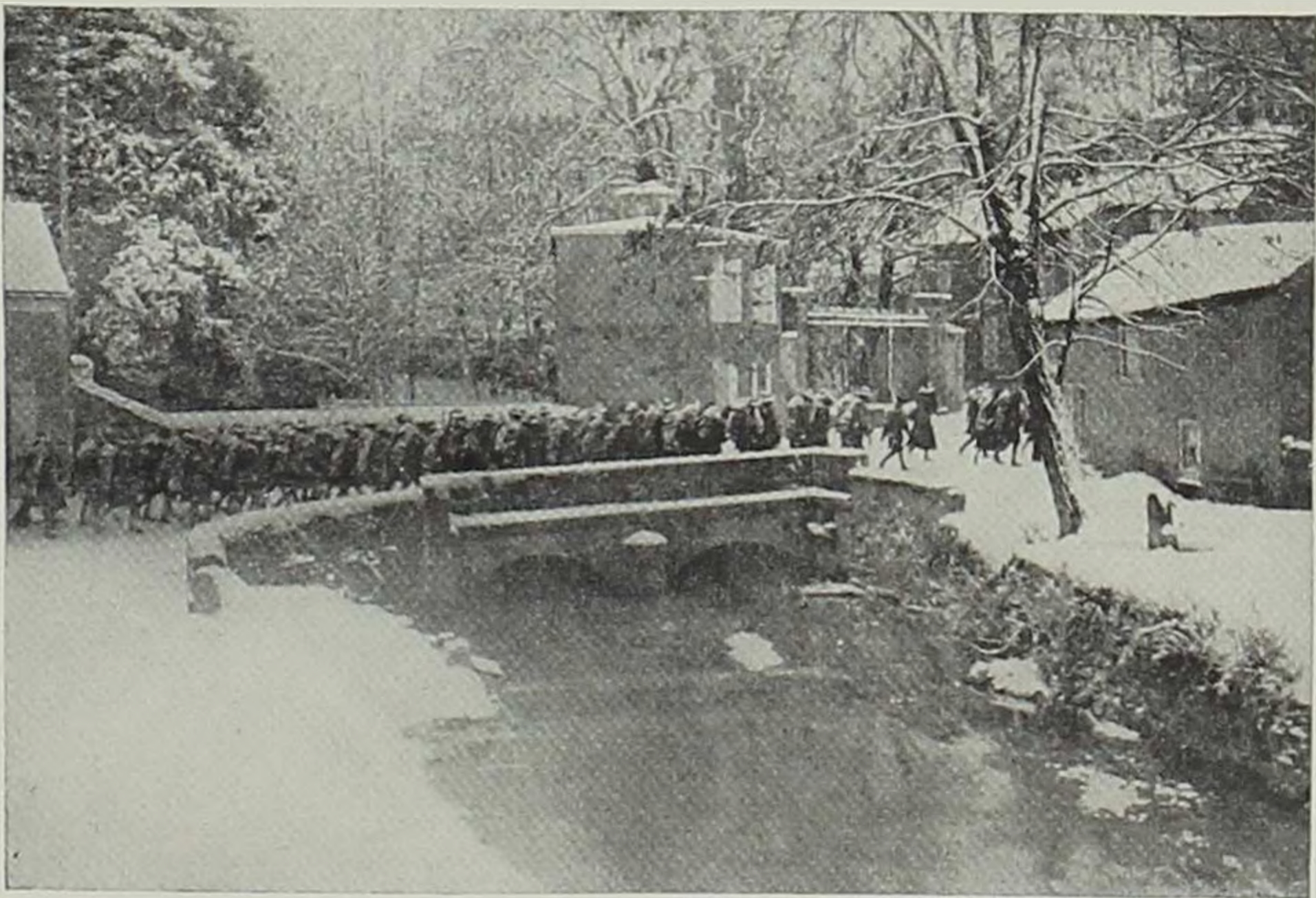
MISS ELIZABETH POTTS, MISS  
CHRISTINE JOHNSTON. Y Work-  
ers with the 168th



MRS. EDITH W. KNOWLES, First  
Woman Y Worker Assigned to  
the 168th



Abandon Ship Drill on the Grant



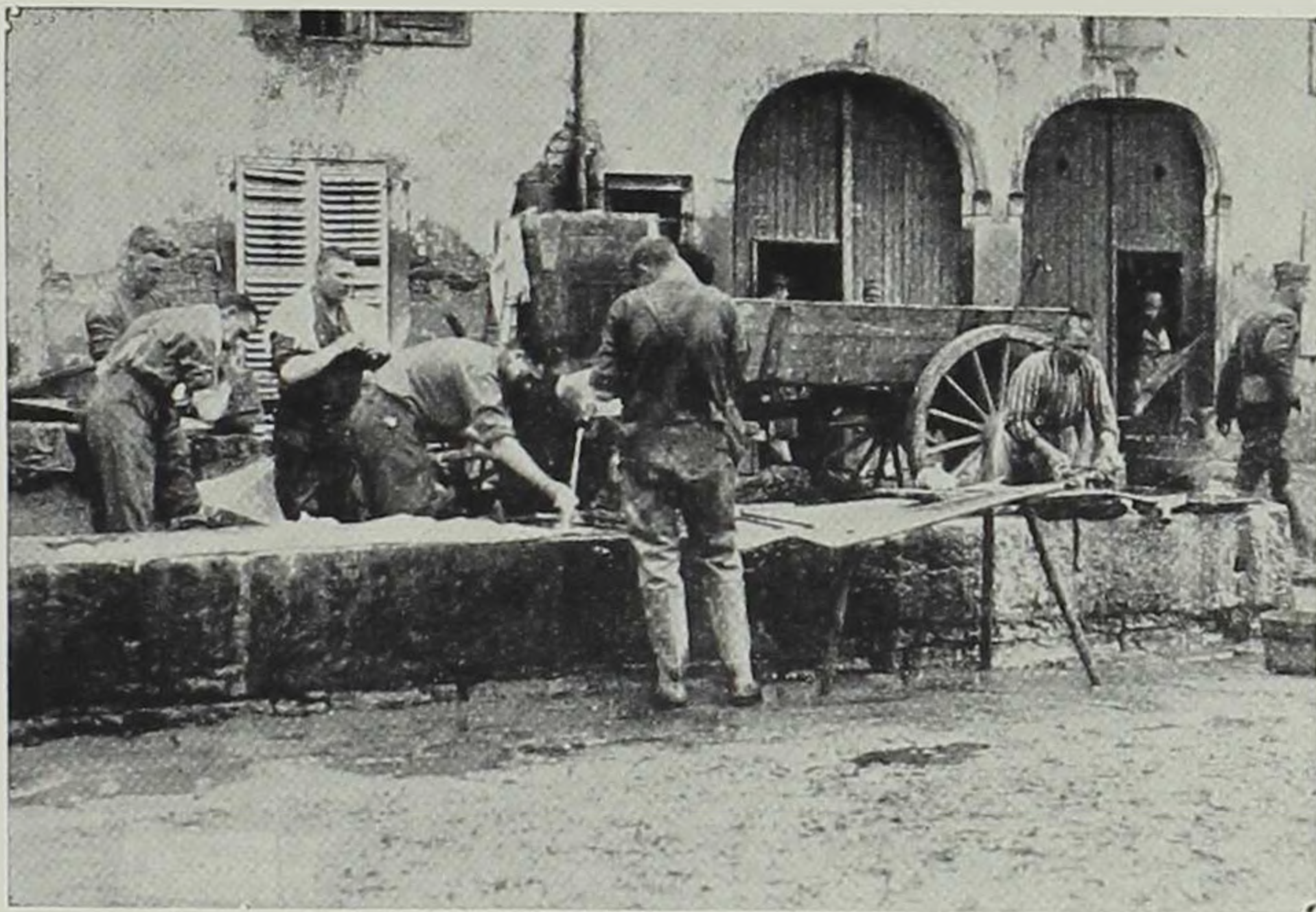
Rainbow Troops Marching through Rimaucourt, December, 1917



The 168th Arrives in Rolampont February 1, 1918



Neufmaisons — always over-crowded, somewhat dirty, undeniably friendly, with its shifting population, crooked streets, primitive homes; but where roofs fended off the rains, and tiny stores now and then offered for sale nuts, oranges, and eggs.



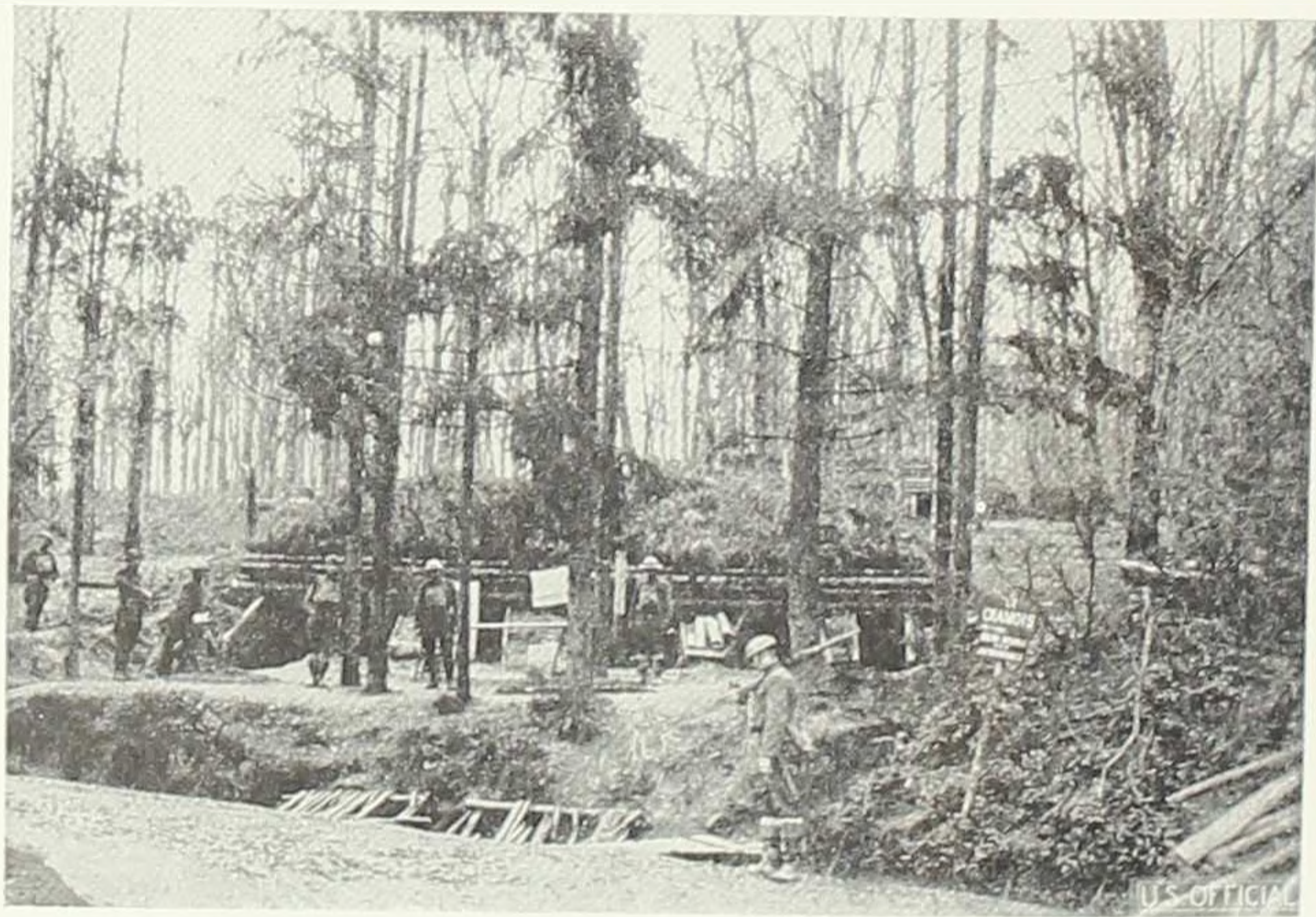
Modern Improvements Were Plentiful in Neufmaisons



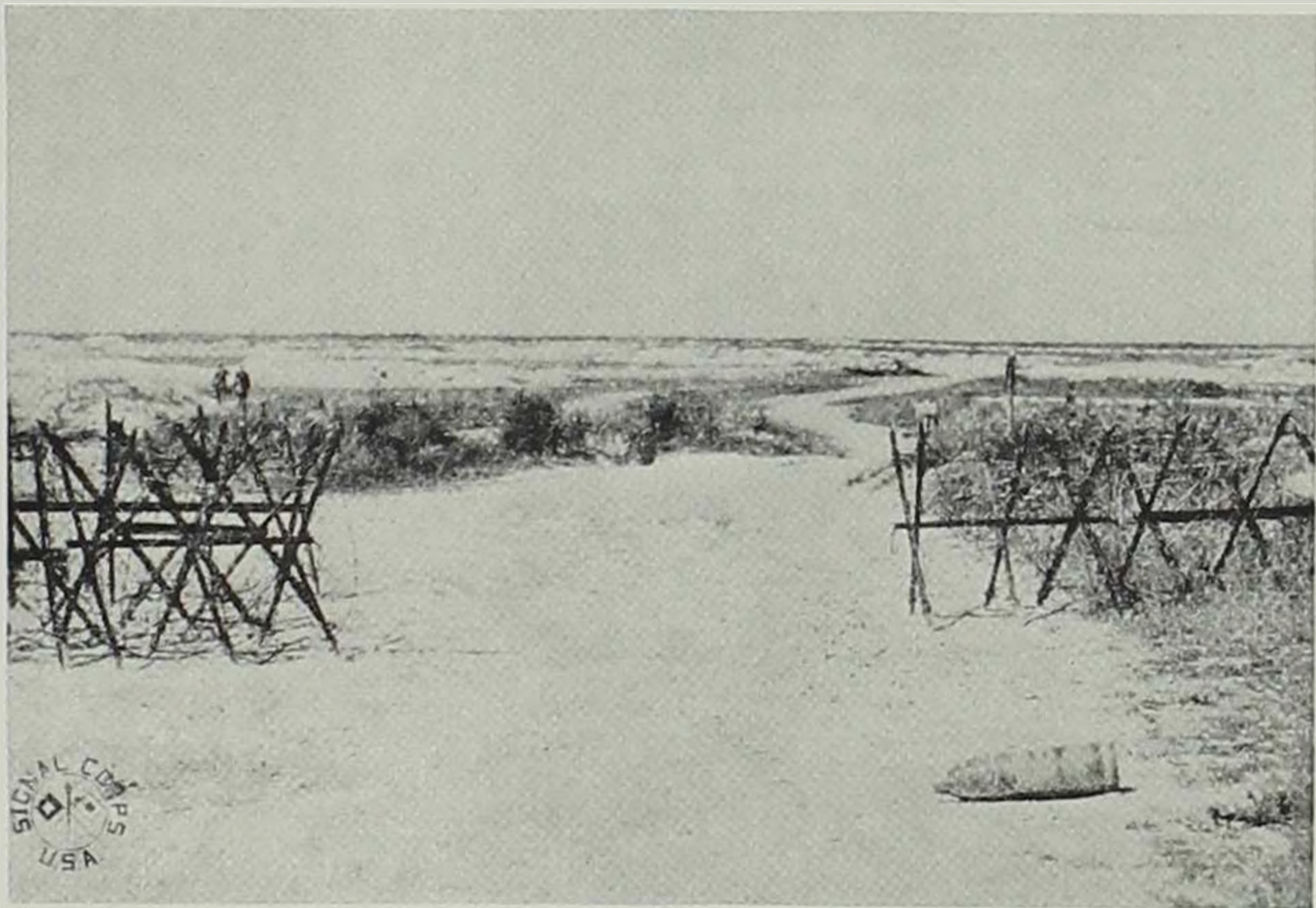
Men of Company M Resting in Neufmaisons After Raid of March 9th



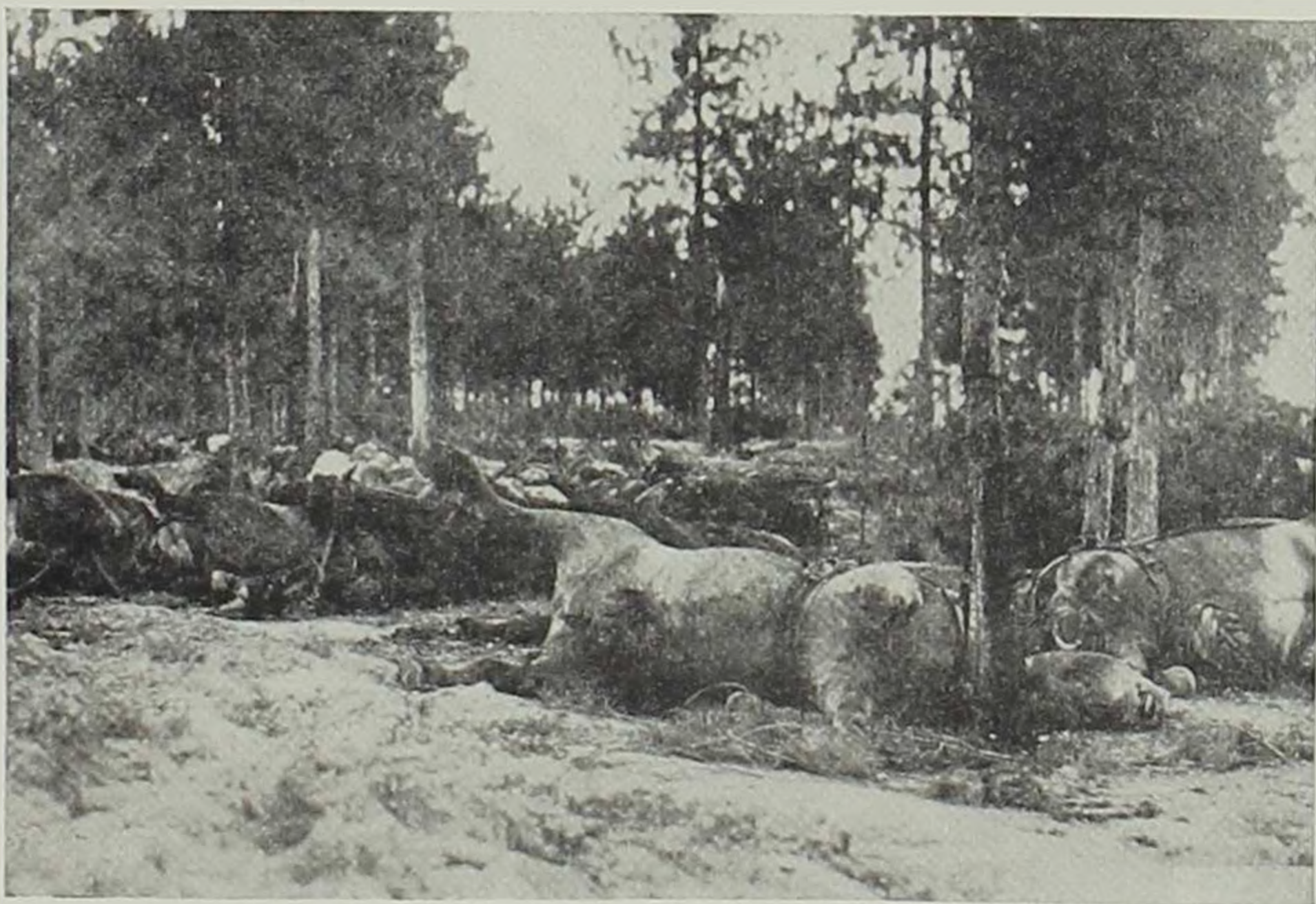
Advanced Post in Front of G. C. 9, March 15, 1918



Reserve Position at Village Negre, April 29, 1918



Typical Champagne Country



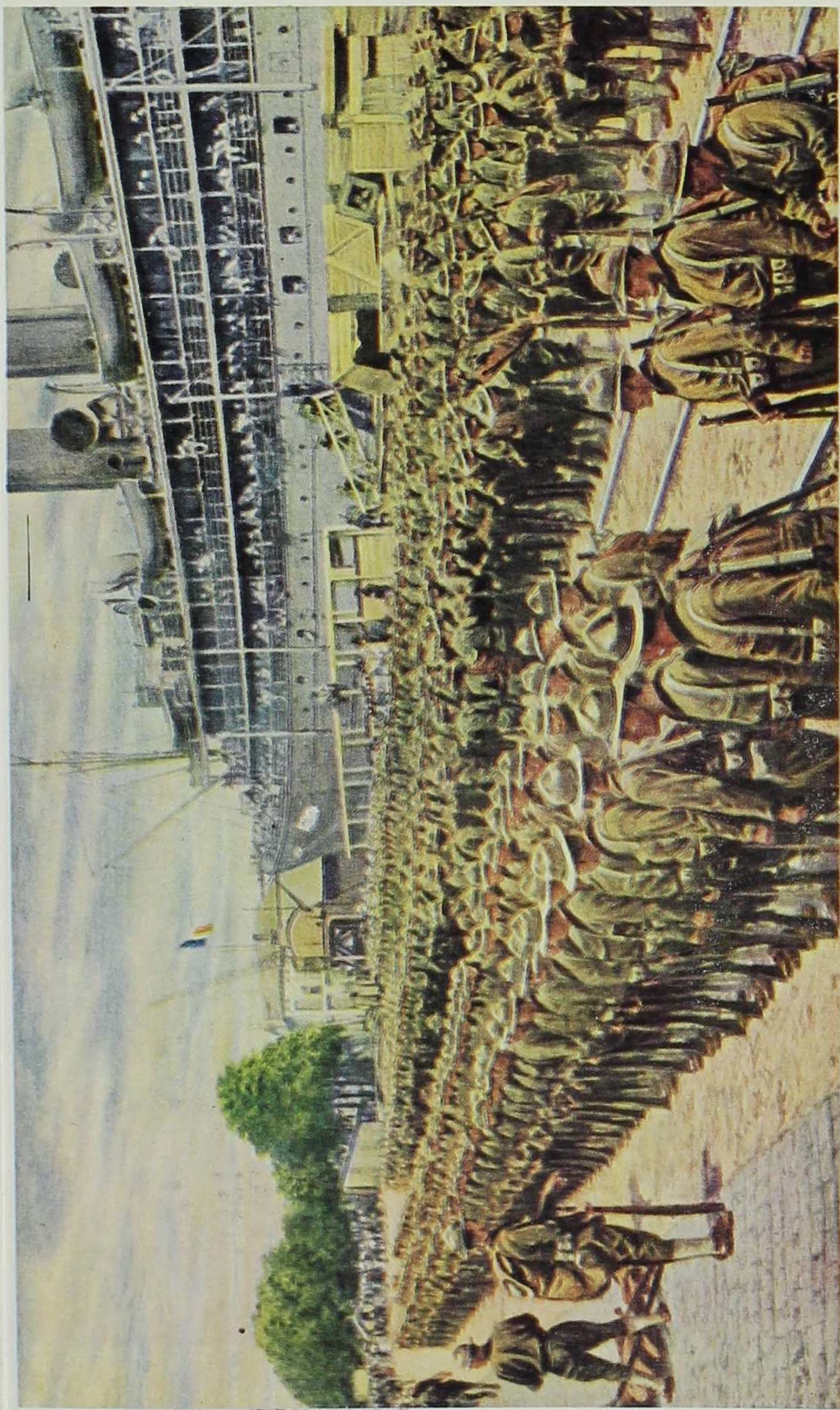
Slaughter of Horses by German Bombardment in the Sector  
of the 168th, July 15, 1918



Boche Plane Brought Down Near Camp De La Noblette July 19, 1918



German Dead on the Battle Field of the Ourcq After the Rainbow Passed Over



The first American troops land in France





Khaki clad Americans lead French home for Christmas

Frank Schaefer  
9-16



Old and young of St. Mihiel greet American liberators



After the battle — the power of music weaves magic spell



Victory won — peace on earth good will toward men



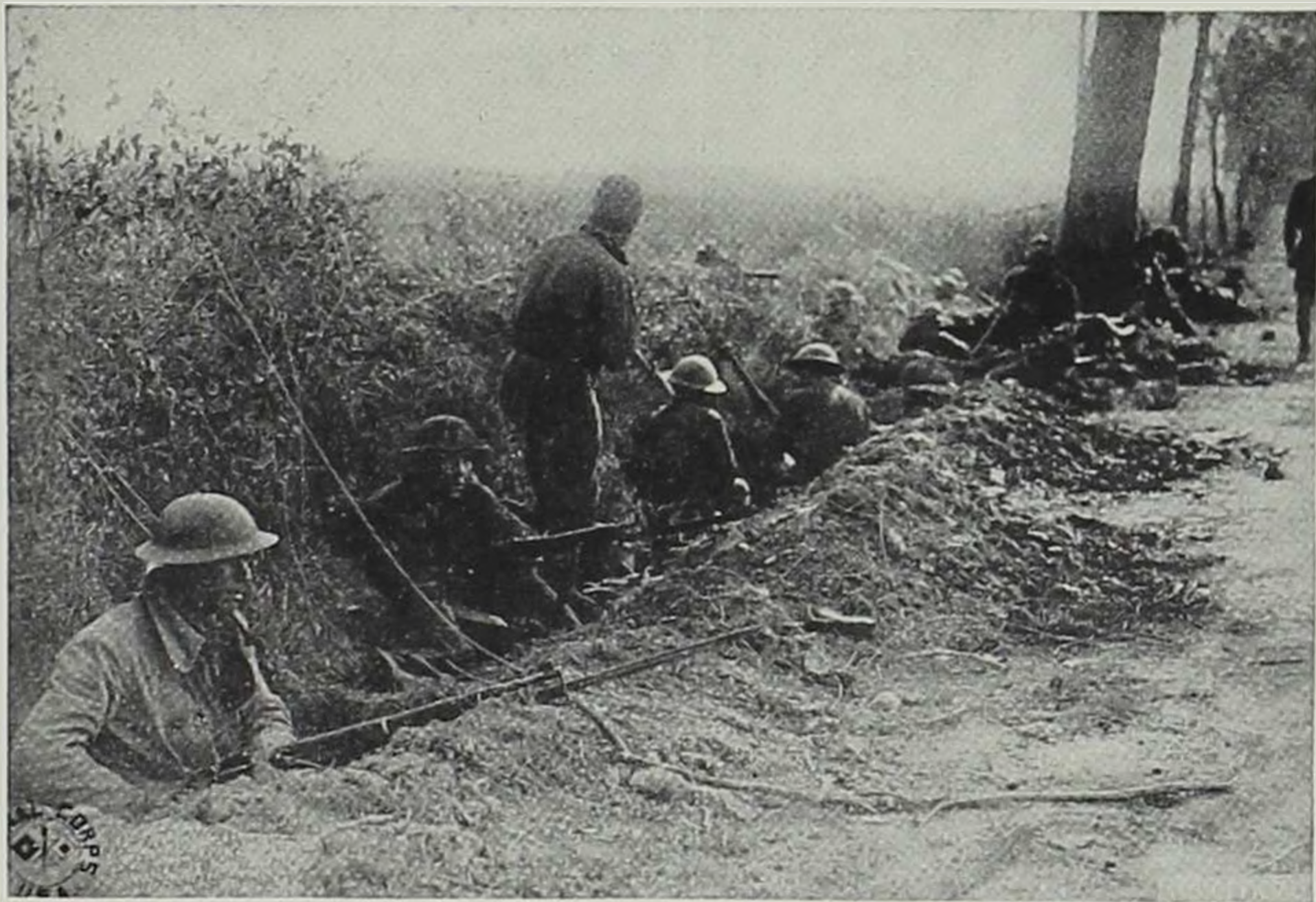
German plenipotentiaries receive armistice terms from Marshal Foch



After the armistice doughboys were first to cross the Moselle into Germany



Back home to God's country — reunion with loved ones

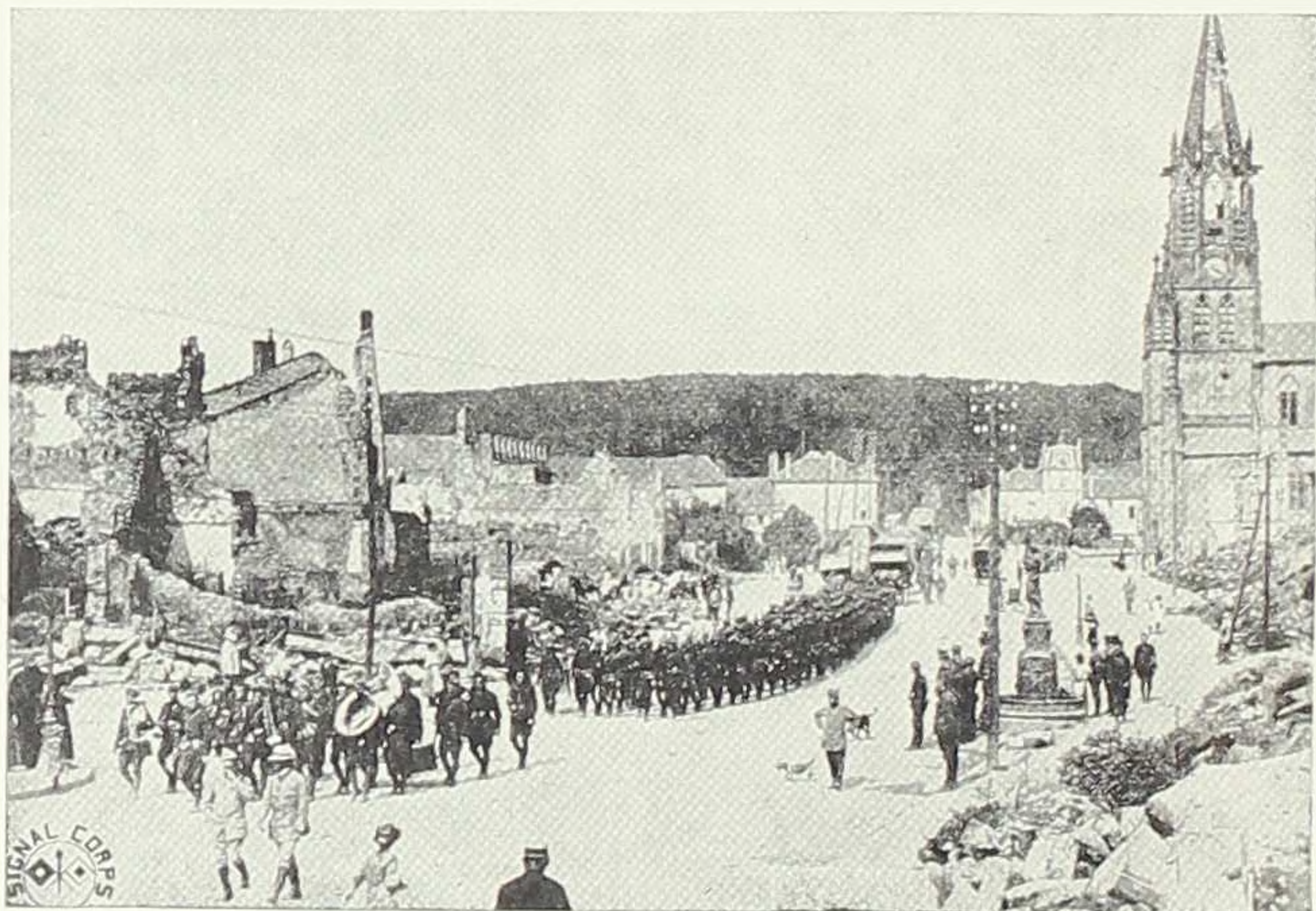


Men of E Company Waiting to go Over the Top on the Evening of  
September 16, 1918



First Aid Treatment for Wounded Officer. Prisoners Waiting to Carry  
Him Back to Dressing Station. Near Pannes

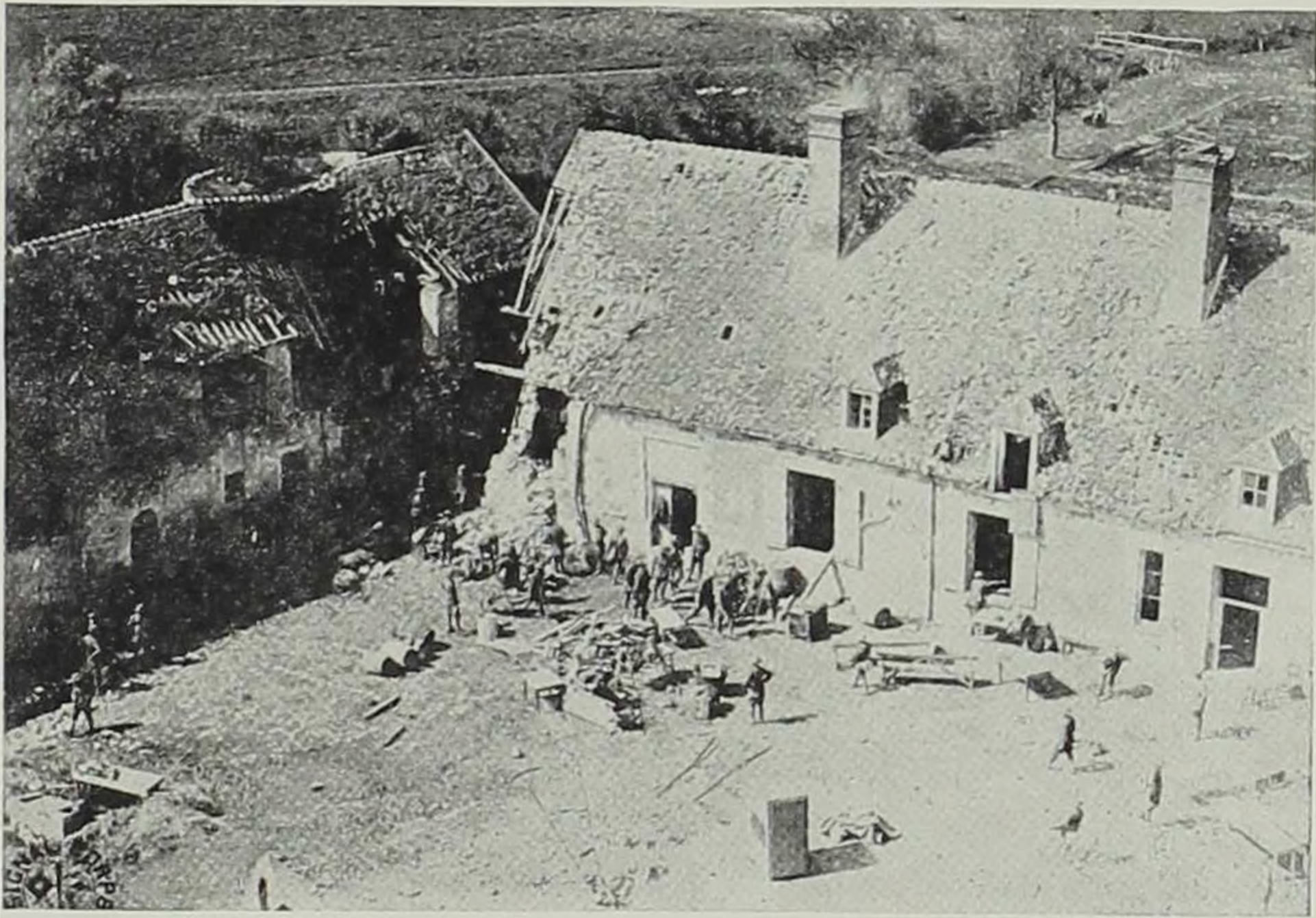




The Funeral Procession of Captain Fleur and Others Killed in the  
Gas Attack of May 27th — Baccarat



French Children Decorating Rainbow Graves in Military Cemetery  
at Baccarat, Memorial Day, 1918



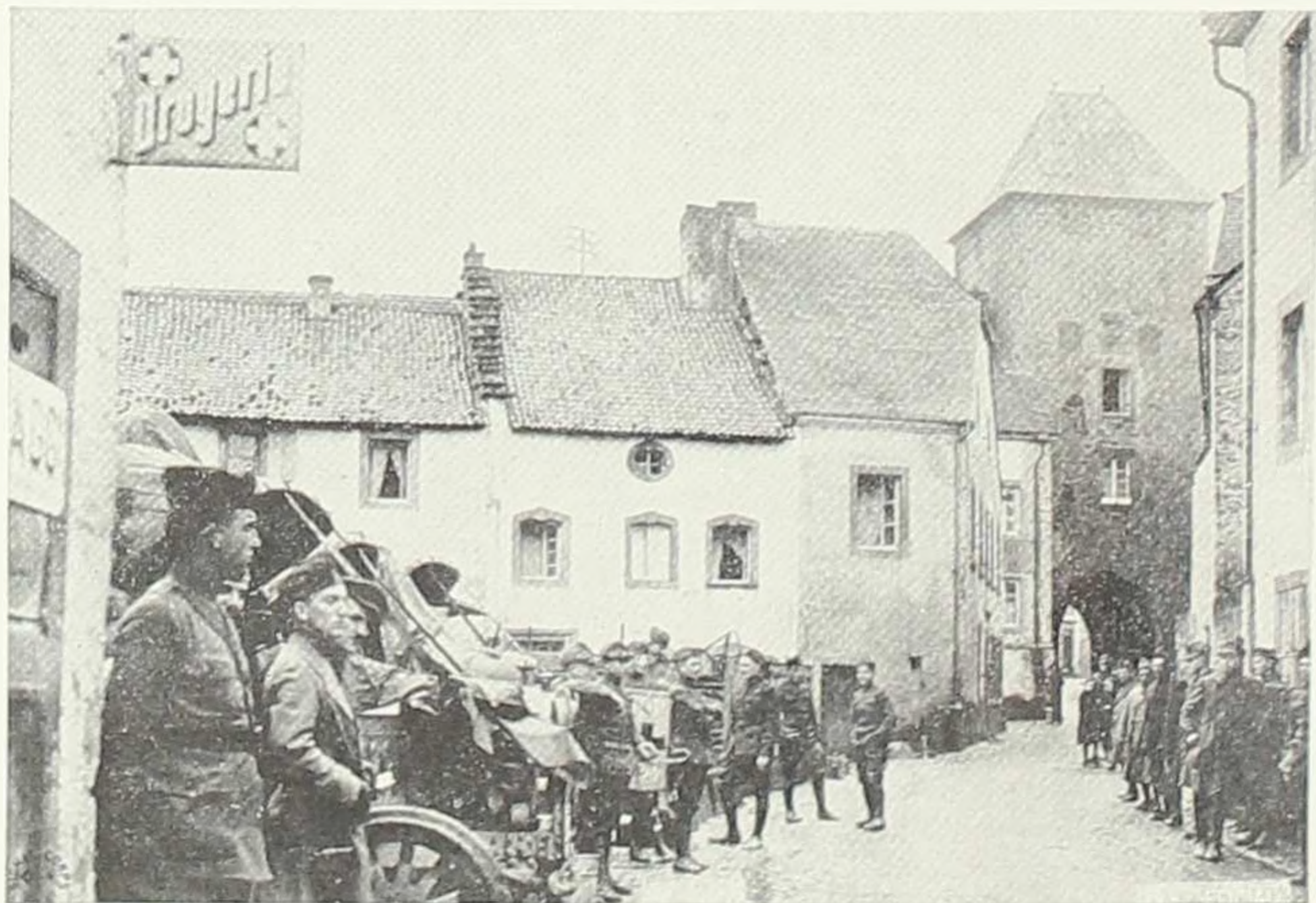
The Chateau De Nesles Captured by the 168th



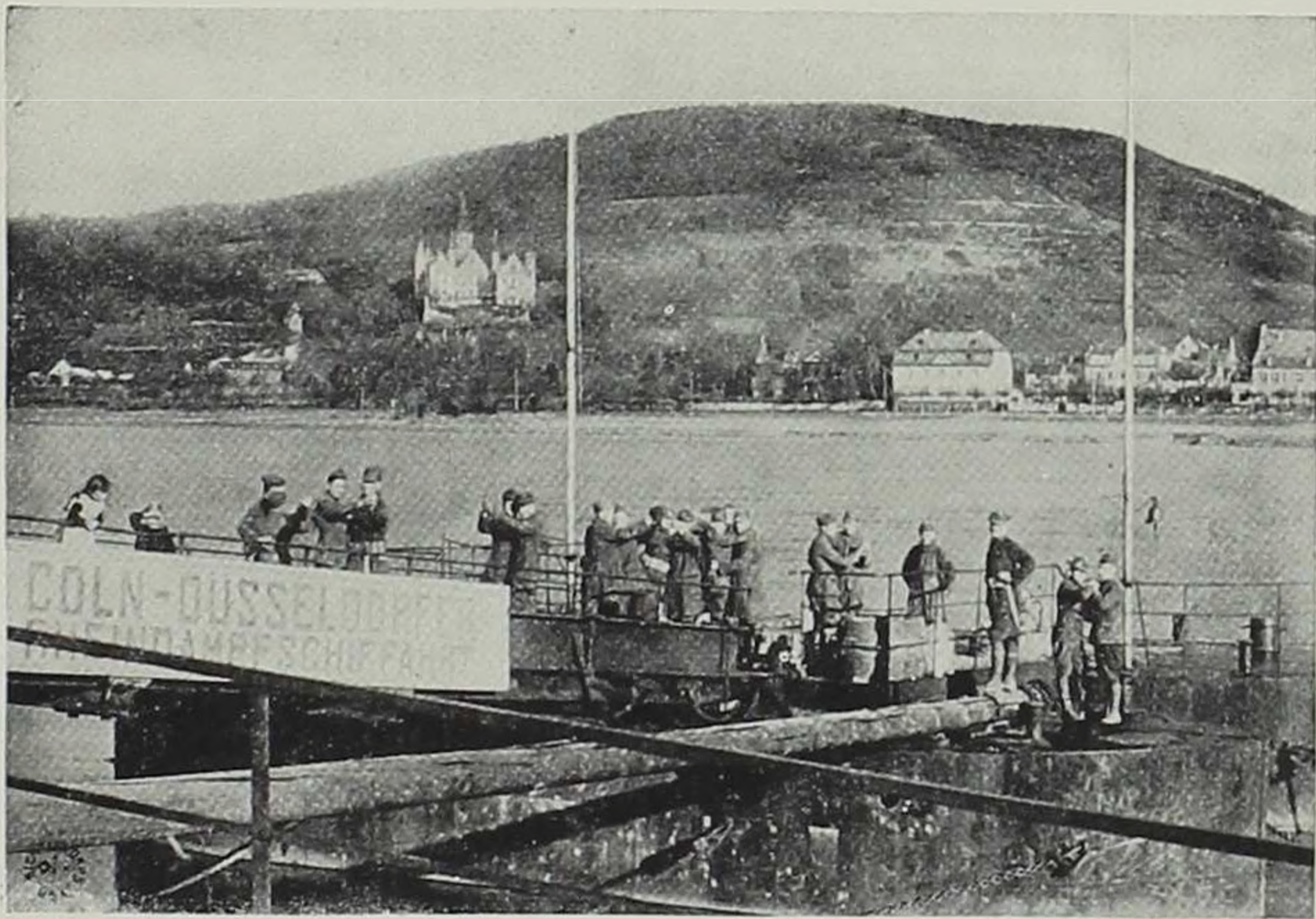
Pannes After Its Capture by the 168th on the 13th of September, 1918



Typical of Triumphal Arches Erected in Honor of the American Troops  
Marching Through Belgium and Luxembourg



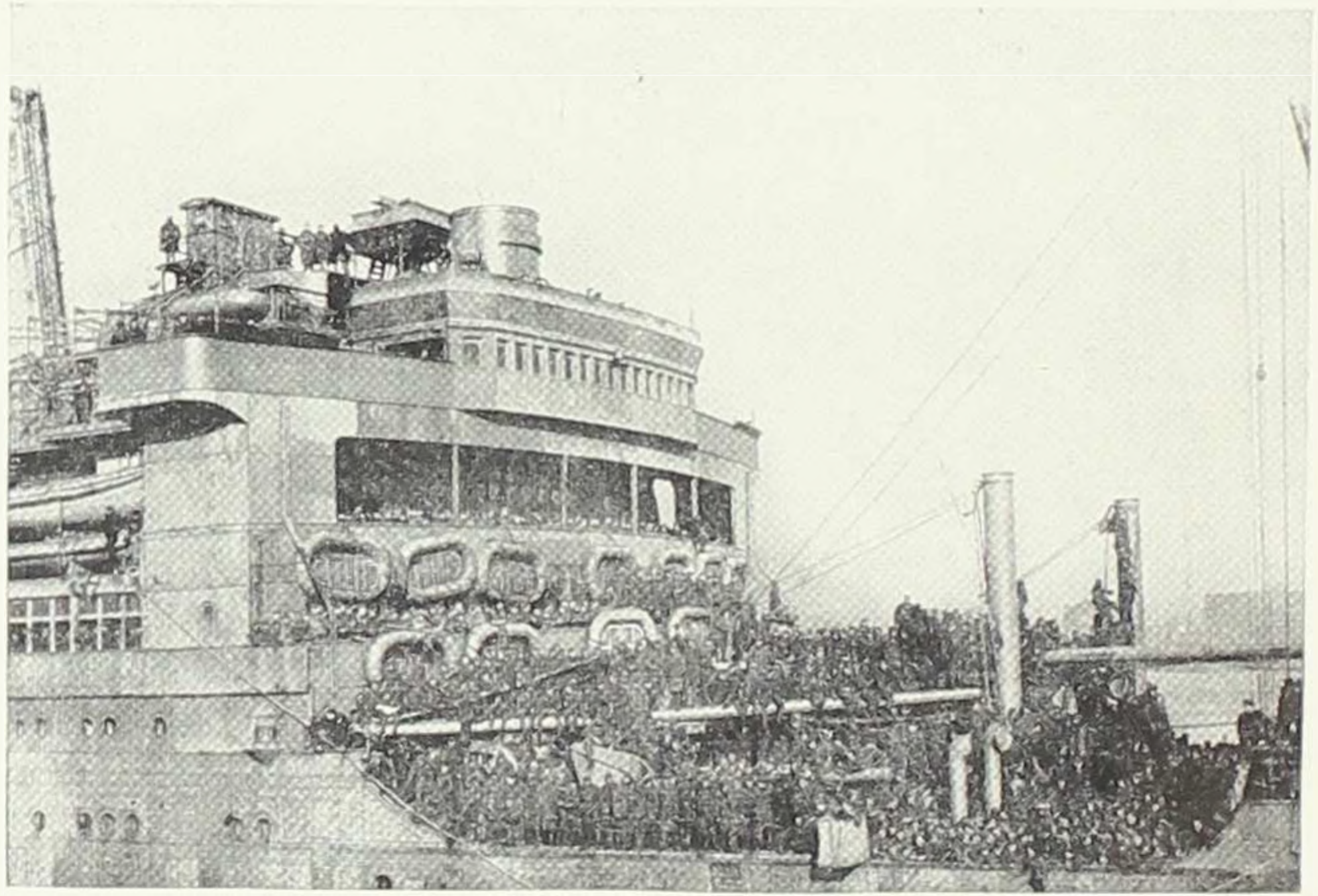
Street in Dudeldorf, Germany, December 5, 1918. Captain Bunch of the  
Sanitary Detachment and Lieutenant Chapman of Regimental Headquarters  
Standing at Attention at the Left.



Men of the 168th Amusing Themselves at the Niederbreisig Landing.  
Across the River the Schloss Arenfels



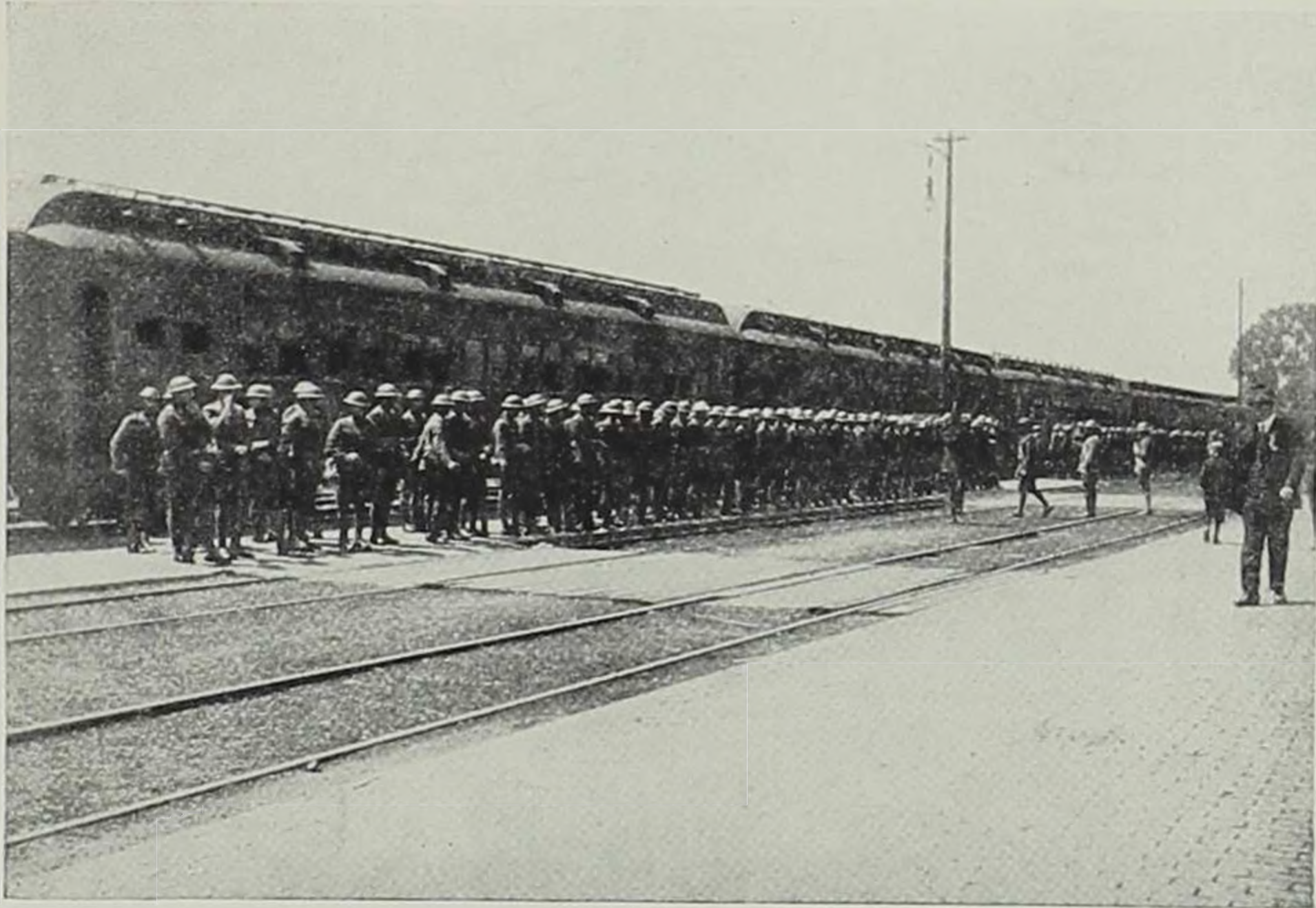
The Watch on the Rhine. 168th Troops Patrolling  
the Water Front at Rheineck



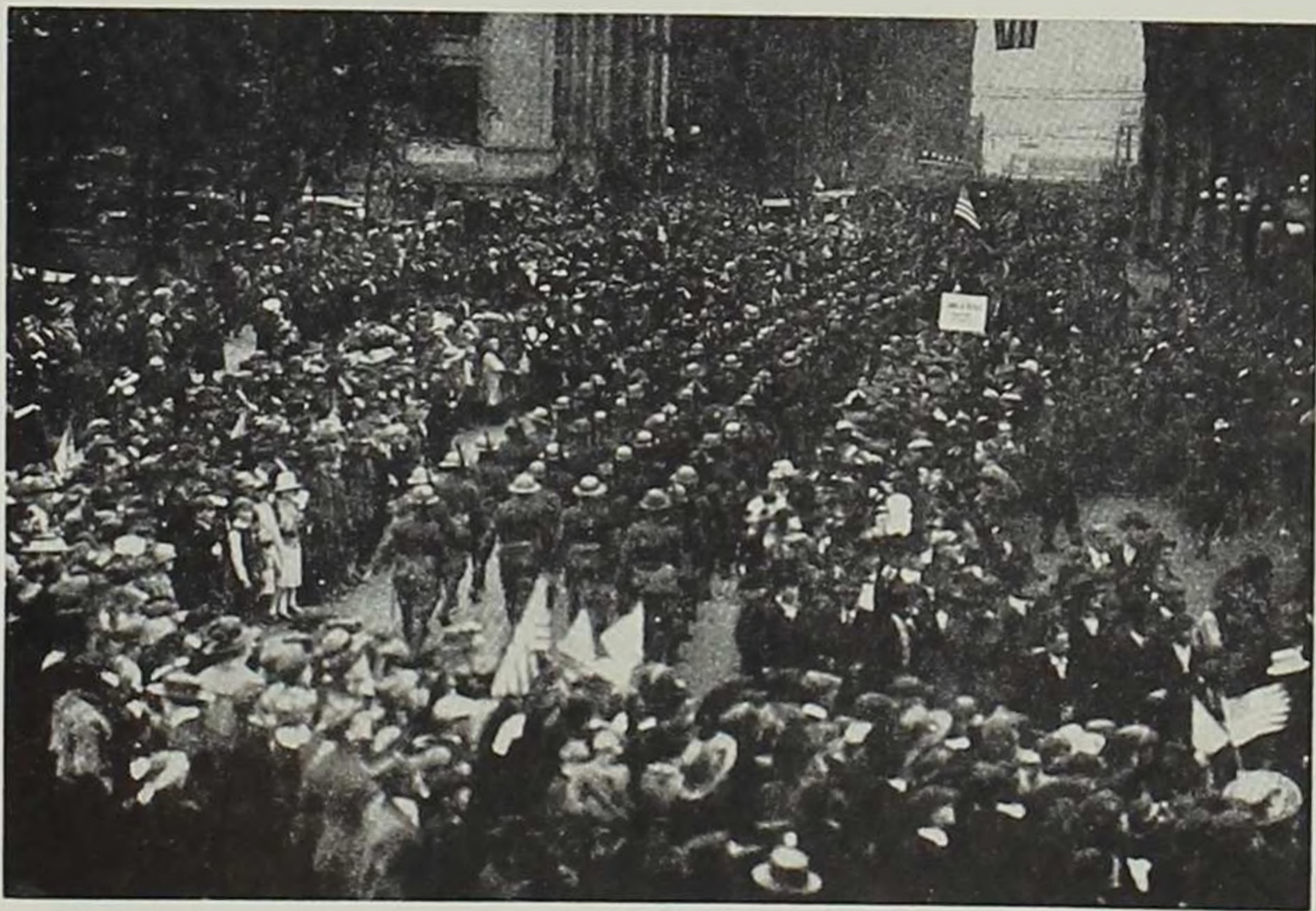
The Leviathan Docking at Hoboken



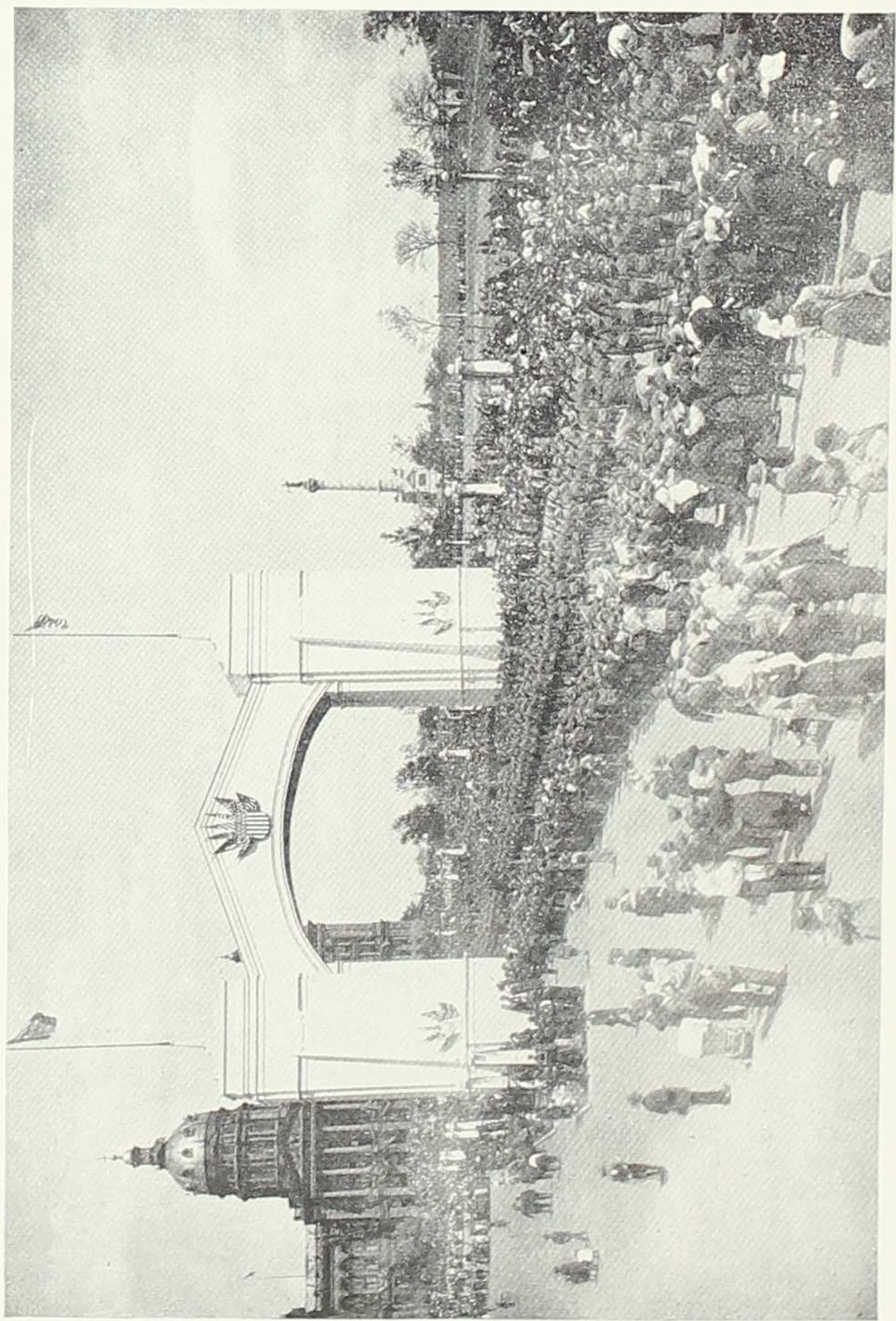
The Band of the 168th on the Leviathan



Section of Train Carrying the 168th Back to Iowa Arrives at Keokuk



Third Battalion Parading at Davenport



The Final Parade at Des Moines

until they were ready to venture beyond their own territory and, eventually, into the very mouth of the lion — the German trenches.

While the First Battalion was experiencing the initial thrills of contact with the enemy, the others were back in the suburbs of Baccarat, awaiting their turn; the Second Battalion still in billets at Deneuvre, and the Third, minus K Company, which, however, rejoined it on the last day of February, at Badménil.

On Washington's birthday, red-lettered by a general issue of turkey, these two battalions were reviewed in a drenching rain at Baccarat by the higher French and American officers of the area. But aside from that, there was no ceremony to detract from the last important preparations for service at the front. On the evening of the 28th of February the Second Battalion moved up to Neufmaisons in anticipation of their relief of the First Battalion.

On the night of March 2nd the ration cart brought in as passengers de luxe Lieutenant Charles Smith, Sergeant Gurnow, and Corporals Clements and Porter, who, with twenty-nine men of the Supply and Headquarters Companies, had been sent on October 1, 1917, on special detail to Newport News to accompany the animals of the Division to France and to valet for the mules.

Their story had a thrill in it, even when told in the trenches. On the 26th of January they sailed aboard an ex-German boat, the *Hercules*, with a cargo of approximately two thousand animals. On the second day out the steering gear collapsed and they were abandoned by the rest of the convoy to make it alone as best they could. Nine days later they were hit by a terrific storm, during which the wireless apparatus was put out of commission,



the life-boats washed away or smashed to splinters, and one propeller broken off and lost. Then the water tanks burst, flooding Hatch No. 4, and one hundred and fifteen animals were drowned; the battering of the waves sprang a leak; then a fire broke out mysteriously in Hatch No. 1; and to cap the climax the crew mutinied. But the soldiers, most of whom had never before even seen the sea, took matters into their own hands. An "alert" was ordered, the mutiny crushed, and the ship kept afloat by ceaseless pumping.

In all, two hundred and forty-five animals were killed. These unfortunate creatures, many of them mangled and torn to pieces, had to be cut in parts in order to be thrown overboard. For four solid days and nights, without a wink of sleep, the doughboys worked to keep the helplessly floundering ship afloat, disposed of all the carcasses, and maintained a vigilant watch for the renewal of any disorder among the crew. Small wonder that they had no time to think about submarines. The ship limped into Queenstown after seventeen of the most diverting days any one of them could recollect; and after temporary repairs, it proceeded to St. Nazaire where it dropped anchor on the 15th. When the surviving animals were unloaded, not one of them was found fit for service.

The detail from the 168th reported at once to their organizations, and were assigned to duty in the trenches. From manning pumps in a leaking hold to manning pumps in a leaky dugout wasn't such a far cry, especially when a few shells hit close enough to rock the dugout and complete the illusion.

While Sergeant Holden, who had just reported back for duty, was waiting for instructions at the Pink Château an excited Frenchman ran up and gave him to

understand that something was very much the matter. It had to do with "*Mulets*". *Mulets* meant nothing to the sergeant, but he followed the gesticulating *poilu* to a shelter where a squad of active Machine Gun Company mules had been billeted within kicking radius of several thousand boxed grenades with detonators attached. At the moment a number of the mules were making an obvious effort to get transferred to the Self Inflicted Wounds ward of the veterinary hospital. Four boxes had already been demolished, and some two hundred grenades, which had been carefully packed in sawdust to avoid shock and jar, had been kicked promiscuously about the floor. Sergeant Holden, in his ignorance of the vagaries of the grenade, did not appreciate his danger as he separated mules from grenades, and only afterward learned why the Frenchman kept his distance during the operation.

Before the 1st of March the German forces opposite had discovered that there were American troops in the Chamois sector, and immediately there was a marked change in their activities. The daily shower of shells increased noticeably, and their patrols grew more numerous and bolder. During a heavy bombardment on the 2nd of March, Private Charles Gerdon of D Company had the distinction of being the first man in the regiment wounded and, as a consequence, the first to be decorated. The injury was slight — not nearly so annoying as the results of the injection of anti-tetanus serum — and he insisted on returning to his post as soon as it was dressed. He considered the subsequent bestowal of the Croix de Guerre more of a reward for the treatment than for the actual wound.

It was evident that our lines were being closely

observed. If a working party showed a head above the parapet, a half dozen 77's were at once directed at the spot. A sniper concealed in a clump of evergreens in front of G. C. 12 became obnoxiously active, and at night sounds of activity floated from the direction of the Boche lines. During the 3rd there was heavy shelling on both sides, with an especially violent bombardment of our front at four in the afternoon. The enemy was trying out the nerves of the Iowans — attempting to weaken the morale of the green Yankees who had come to ruffle up their quiet sector.

To the left of the C. R. Chamois was the C. R. Neuviller held by a French battalion, and beyond that the sub-sector Ancerviller occupied by French and Americans, represented by a battalion of the 167th Infantry which was likewise making its *début* in the trenches. On the night of March 3-4 the enemy attempted to raid this sector, but instead of taking prisoners left two of their own behind them.

Warning of this raid had come to us through the admirable French Intelligence Service, but as the exact point of attack was undetermined, the word was passed along the entire front line. This meant an all-night alert for the Chamois front, and the entire garrison was forced to remain at its combat posts until daylight.

The companies in the line were to have been relieved on the 4th, but in the face of the threatened enemy activity it was decided to make no change until the situation cleared. Beginning at ten in the morning of the 4th, the Boche kept up an intermittent artillery fire on parts of our front. At one in the afternoon, Colonel Tinley received word from the French that they had intercepted a German telephone message giving infor-

mation of an intended bombardment of the line. Runners were immediately sent to the front to warn our men there, and everybody was under cover when the strafing commenced. From three to half past three there was a violent bombardment of the right of the sector, and for fifteen minutes, beginning at 3:50, the Boche unlatched everything he had in the way of artillery, distributed generally over the whole front. At intervals from then until after dark there were sporadic outbursts of varying intensity.

During the early part of the night disquieting sounds issued from certain points in front of our lines, and requests for artillery fire upon the suspected area were sent back to Headquarters. Shortly after midnight the presence of a patrol, or patrols, in rear of our positions was detected.

By this time the men, fatigued from the prolonged alert of the previous night, with nerves on edge from the continued shelling, and apprehensive at the indications of enemy aggression, had reached the point where it would have been a relief to have anything happen — anything to clear the air and end the suspense. Something was going to happen. Every man felt sure of that, and dreaded it — yet at the same time was impatient for the storm to break.      ★ ★ ★

It would be impossible to follow the 168th through the many rugged days of trench warfare that followed their arrival in the Chamois sector. The Germans, learning of the presence of American troops in the trenches, began a violent bombardment of the 168th Infantry's position on March 5 but the Iowans held fast. In his official French report, Colonel G. Allie testified to the energetic resistance of the 168th: "Therefore it can be certified that the valor of these troops is highly reliable." This was the first test of the National Guard on the Western Front. The Iowa volunteers, who made up these units, had not been found wanting. [The Editor].