

# Virtual battlefield tour across the central sector of the Meuse-Argonne.

Answer the questions based on the pictures/videos/diary entries as you tour north and west across the battlefield from Esnes to Gesnes, following places “fighting chaplain” Ben Lacy moved with his field artillery unit attached to the 79<sup>th</sup> division.

Location One: Esnes.

Esnes was the furthest south the Germans advanced in their fall 1914 initial offensive as part of the Schlieffen Plan. The French held north of Verdun and 1915 stalemate ensued where both sides dug in. To the west of here at Vauquois Hill each dug mines under the enemy positions on the strategic hill. Feb-Dec 1916 saw the Germans launch attacks from here attempting to take the Verdun salient. At great cost the French held Verdun and 1917 saw the Germans fortify the area as part of the forward defenses of the Hindenburg Line. It was from Esnes that the AEF began to push north at the start of the Meuse-Argonne campaign.



- 1) Above is the remains of a German bunker built probably in 1917 facing to the left. Speculate as to what the terrain might be in front of it then. What might you as a tour guide want to tell visitors about this position?
- 2) Just after this picture was taken a fellow teacher found a “chauchat” round inside the bunker. Research who produced these and why it might be inside the bunker.



- 3) What type of weapon fired this round? How can you tell it was never used? Given the size of it (150mm) – research the size of the impact crater were this to explode.



- 4) Given that these shells are of different dimensions why do you think they are piled here like this? What would the likely procedure be to deal with these shells 100 years later? Research what can happen to locals/farmers stumbling upon WWI ordnance.



- 5) This is a narrow entrance to an elaborate and extensive German bunker system. What were some of the purposes of underground bunkers (as opposed to machine-gun positions)?



- 6) Look carefully and count how many grenades you see in this picture? One of my fellow teachers accidentally stood on one while I was next to him. How might you react in that situation?



7) Here's a close-up of one of these grenades with my finger to scale. Speculate as to how it might be used.



- 8) This is a different type of grenade just left sitting on top of a wall near a bunker complex (close-up below). Imagine a long wooden handle attached to it – what very famous type of German grenade is this?



Next, using Ben Lacy's diary and the map in the pdf. attachment, trace on the map his daily movements from Esnes until he reaches Ivory/Montfaucon. For each day below note his location that day but also notable events of the day:

Sept 23<sup>rd</sup>:

Sept 26<sup>th</sup>:

Sept 27<sup>th</sup>:

Sept 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>:

Location two: Montfaucon

“Falcon mountain” was a very important geographic location during the Meuse-Argonne battle. Research why the Germans wanted to hold on to it. Use elements of this digital remapping video in order to understand why:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQsskd99Uk4&noredirect=1>

Then answer why the American government following WWI wanted to build a monument there: <http://www.abmc.gov/cemeteries-memorials/europe/montfaucon-american-monument>

Go back to Ben Lacy’s diary and the map in the pdf. attachment, tracing this time on the map his daily movements from Montfaucon until he Gesnes. Again for each day below note his location that day but also notable events of the day:

Sept 30<sup>th</sup>:

Oct 1<sup>st</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>: speculate as to why his location barely moved during this time

Oct 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>:

Location three: Gesnes

Just before his unit was withdrawn from the front line Lacy reached Gesnes. The ravine between it and Exermont to the west had been recently fought over by the 79<sup>th</sup> and 37<sup>th</sup> division’s neighbor to the west – the 81<sup>st</sup> division. Oct 1<sup>st</sup> saw it relieved by the 1<sup>st</sup> division. The period Sept 29<sup>th</sup> to Oct 4<sup>th</sup> saw a fluid period of attack and counter-attack by American and German units around and just to the west of Gesnes. As Ben Lacy was approaching Gesnes a rather remarkable pistol duel was being fought between a German major and an American sergeant at Tronsol farm, just to the south-west of Gesnes. Find the general location on the map, then proceed to chapter 11 to find a more specific location, read about that duel, watch a video re-enactment of it, complete a lesson assignment on the duel, and conclude your virtual tour of the central area of the Meuse-Argonne battlefield.

