Brief reflection on maps

Albert Szent-Gyorgi, who knew a thing or two about maps, by which life moves somewhere or other, used to tell this story from the war, through which history moves somewhere or other:

From a small Hungarian unit in the Alps a young lieutenant sent out a scouting party into the icy wastes. At once it began to snow, it snowed for two days and the party did not return. The lieutenant was in distress: he had sent his men to their deaths.

On the third day, however, the scouting party was back. Where had they been? How had they managed to find their way? Yes, the men explained, we certainly thought we were lost and awaited our end. When suddenly one of our lot found a map in his pocket. We felt reassured. We made a bivouac, waited for the snow to stop, and then with the map found the right direction. And here we are.

The lieutenant asked to see that remarkable map in order to study it. It wasn’t a map of the Alps but the Pyrenees.

Goodbye.