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ENTITLED

# THE EXPERIENCES OF THE GERMAN 1st ARMY IN THE SOMME BATTLE.

## I.—INFANTRY AND MACHINE GUNS.

**General.**—"The duty of every infantry commander is, firstly, to train and educate the infantry soldier for hand-to-hand fighting (which should not be a privilege reserved for assault units, but should be a universal one); next, and more difficult, to keep him physically and mentally fit to fight both before and during an engagement; and, lastly, the most difficult of all, to get the men out of their shelters and dug-outs in time and launch them against the enemy.

"In this war, which is apparently dominated by science and numbers, individual will-power is, nevertheless, the ultimate deciding factor.

"The defence of a position depends more than it ever did before on the unshakeable determination of the subordinate commander and of each individual man to hold his position."

**Training.**—The importance of the following is emphasized:—

- (a) Individual training.
- (b) Every man being thoroughly expert with all hand grenades, both his own and ours.
- (c) Every infantry officer being able to fire a machine gun and keep it in action. The standard set is 30 seconds to come into action from the bottom of a dug-out.
- (d) Patrol work.
- (e) Immediate counter-attack over the top, as well as along the trenches.
- (f) The quick organization of a methodical counter-attack.
- (g) Constant practice in passing through or round hostile artillery barrages.
- (h) Co-operation of infantry with artillery and aeroplanes.
- (i) The rapid organization of a position in shell-holes.
- (j) Regimental exercises.
- (k) The communication troops taking part in the above training, and the use of all means of communication, including light and sound signals, being practised.

"It is a sound principle to keep troops, intended for use on a certain battle front, behind this front for about 14 days, to enable them to complete their training. In this manner, immediate advantage can be taken of the lessons of the most recent fighting, while at the same time commanders can familiarize themselves with the ground on which they are to be employed and with the special features of operations in that locality."

**Construction of positions.**—"The front infantry trenches are well placed if they are situated on a reverse slope out of sight of the ground observation of the enemy's artillery, and are overlooked directly by their own artillery observers from a position at least 550 yards in rear.

"The deeper the dug-outs the more important are a good wide entanglement, continuous observation of the foreground, and reliable alarms. Dug-outs without these precautions are mere man traps."

**Conduct of the defence.**—Much stress is laid on front lines not being thickly held and troops being distributed in depth on a narrow front. In front lines, one man for every 4 to 6 yards, on a frontage of 880 yards for a brigade, is reckoned sufficient.

Distribution in depth is arranged with a view to immediate counter-attacks; the necessity for these on the part of subordinate commanders is continually insisted on. In spite of the defended areas in rear, fighting must be for the possession of the foremost line. Should the immediate counter-attack not be successful, a methodical counter-attack must be organized as soon as possible.

From 8 to 10 hours should be allowed for orders to reach the front from divisional headquarters.

"The necessary preliminary for the repulse of a hostile attack is that our own infantry, distributed in depth, shall be kept fit for fighting in spite of effective and intense bombardment for days by the enemy's artillery. Continual work on the positions, and a good organization of the supply of rations and ammunition, are the most important points in maintaining their fighting strength."

**Counter-attacks.**—In methodical counter-attacks 1,000 yards of front is regarded as a fair allotment to a brigade in the attack.

Counter-attacks should not be arranged to take place shortly before or after day-break, on account of the difficulties of artillery registration.



Commanders of certain machine gun sections are detailed to go forward with infantry assaulting lines in order to reconnoitre positions for their guns in the captured position. Small infantry escorts are told off to machine guns, to act as covering, working and carrying parties.

In every attack, rearward positions, strong points and flanking positions must be held by emergency garrisons as a precaution against possible failure.

For the infantry, 150 rounds S.A.A. per man is considered an adequate allowance.

**Reliefs.**—Staff Officers of Corps or Divisions about to carry out a relief in the front line should go ahead some days in advance, in order to make themselves acquainted with full details of the line they are about to take over.

Advanced parties of incoming troops should go into the line a considerable time before their main bodies. Rear parties of outgoing troops should remain 24 hours after their main bodies have left.

Troops should not be left too long in the line. Worn-out troops take many months to recuperate. The normal tour of duty for a brigade in a defensive battle is reckoned as 14 days.

After a successful assault or counter-attack, troops should not be immediately relieved. Successful troops consolidate and hold on to what they have gained better than fresh troops who are not so well acquainted with the situation.

"Fresh troops will be led by the most reliable guides of the outgoing garrison. Delays, crossings and blocks occasion unnecessary losses and have a depressing influence on the troops.

"The nerves and endurance even of the best troops have their limits, so that timely reliefs are absolutely essential. The utter exhaustion of troops in action usually culminates in the loss of the position. Worn-out troops are incapable of strenuous effort for months afterwards.

"The experience of the Somme Battle teaches that an infantry regiment, which has one battalion in front line, one in support and one in reserve, can hold a front of about 880 yards for some 14 days in a defensive battle. After this period, relief is generally necessary."

**Equipment.**—"Orderlies, runners and carrying parties are best armed with pistols, as rifles get in the mens' way as they dash from one shell hole to another."

**Rations.**—"The widely spread idea that troops in the foremost line do not care for hot food and prefer cold rations which they take up with them is erroneous. It is true that the troops do not care for cooked food when it reaches them as a cold and greasy mess. On the other hand, it is absolutely essential for the maintenance of the health and spirits of the troops, especially in wet and cold weather, to do everything possible to bring up something hot to eat and drink to the men in the front trenches at least once a day."

## II.—ARTILLERY.

"A systematic engagement of the enemy's artillery, of the enemy's points of departure and of the enemy's troops waiting for the assault, could not in most cases take place. Continual barrage fire, and nothing else, was regarded by the troops as the only salvation when on the defensive.

"At the beginning of the battle, the troops had not been made to see that barrage is simply a protective measure, to hinder the enemy entering a certain strip of country in front of our own line, but that it does not do the enemy any damage if he does not run into this strip or is not surprised there. Thus, by continual barrage fire, with its huge expenditure of ammunition, material and human energy, no real damage to the enemy is ensured.

"Owing to the noticeable lack of long-range flat-trajectory guns, there was, from the outset, no possibility of a well thought out and systematic interference with the enemy's organizations behind his front of attack."

Attention is called to the following points as the most important in the organization of the artillery, which came to light during the battle:—

Equipment of field and heavy artillery with good maps and reliable battery boards.

Most careful supervision of the handling by the troops of material and ammunition.

The most comprehensive engagement of the enemy's artillery and continual attacks on the enemy's rearward communications and billets.

"The results of these measures were soon shown by the fact that the troops recognized that barrage fire diminishes in importance if the enemy can be systematically engaged with artillery; that is, if proper attention is given to the engagement of the enemy's artillery and to destructive and annihilating fire.

"It has been proved advisable, for purposes of command during the battle, to concentrate the command posts of the divisional commander, the artillery commander and the commander of the heavy artillery at the same place.

"If it is in any way possible, the fighting sectors of the field artillery groups should coincide with those of the infantry regiments.

"The closest co-operation with the infantry will be obtained if the command posts are as close together as possible; this gives an opportunity for the two commanders (artillery group commander and infantry regimental commander) to confer together.

"Heavy artillery, especially when armed with flat-trajectory guns, must not be led away by its greater range into choosing battery positions farther in rear. The object in providing long range guns is not to enable such batteries to avoid the enemy's fire more easily, but to make their effect felt far behind the enemy's line.



"It does not, therefore, seem justifiable to use long-range guns for shooting from the map, when their short length of life and their expensive ammunition are taken into consideration.

"It is worthy of remark that our enemy's guns apparently have a much smaller zone of dispersion than our own. He also appears to have better and more accurate data for shooting from the map than we have. This seems to be proved by the fact that, in weather that excludes all possibility of observation, and under conditions very different from those prevailing during previous shoots, he obtains hits on small targets with great accuracy."

### III.—AIRCRAFT.

**Allotment.**—The following proportion of aircraft was found sufficient on the Somme:—

One artillery flight with protective flights for each division.

One infantry flight for each Corps.

Two or three reconnaissance flights, including one for photographic reconnaissance, for every Group of 3 or 4 divisions.

**Employment.**—"The main object of fighting in the air is to enable artillery registration and photographic reconnaissance to be carried out, and at the same time prevent that of the enemy.

"All other tasks, such as bombing raids, machine gun attacks on troops, and even distant reconnaissance in trench warfare, must be secondary to this main object. So long as the execution of the main task is not ensured, all available forces must be employed for this purpose. All subsidiary tasks must be abandoned, even when the enemy's attacks in the air are causing us considerable annoyance."

### IV.—SURVEY.

"The Survey Detachment, owing the wide extent of the battle, is no longer in the position to sift all the information sufficiently quickly and disseminate it to the troops in the form of a map. It is essential that each Corps Headquarters should establish a topographical section, which will undertake the sifting of the information received and print maps for a particular sector both in front of and behind the Corps front."

### V.—"MORAL."

**"Moral."**—It is claimed that the German infantry is superior to the British (!)

The value of assault platoons is discounted. It is considered that every man must be able to assault.

Much stress is laid on *moral* and on the initiative of subordinate commanders.

Von Below says:

"The fighting value of troops depends on the standard of training attained by the men and on the military efficiency of the subordinate commanders."

GENERAL STAFF,

GENERAL HEADQUARTERS.

15th May, 1917.