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(Translation of a German Document.)

Chief of the General Staff
of the Field Army.
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BIBLIOTECA DO EXERCITO

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GENERAL HEADQUARTERS,

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Not to be taken into the trench

Livro N.º Pag.

EXPERIENCE OF THE RECENT FIGHTING AT VERDUN.

The serious and regrettable reverses sustained at Verdun during October and December have led me to issue the following orders :—

1.—CONSTRUCTION OF DEFENCES.

The principles laid down in the text-book "Construction of Defences" (*Stellungsbau*) have proved sound. Single lines of trenches do not suffice. A fortified zone must be constructed, organized in depth, allowing of a stubborn defence of an area even after the capture of fragments of its lines of defence.

The rearward portion of this zone will, therefore, consist of a system of strong points, machine gun nests, etc., merging towards the front into an increasingly closer meshed network of trenches. The individual trenches, machine gun nests, etc., must afford each other mutual flanking support.

Deep mined dug-outs in the front line trench will be absolutely prohibited. They simply form man traps and will, therefore, be blown up wherever they exist. The place for the majority of the dug-outs (which should be of concrete and be well distributed and masked) is in the rearward lines and in the intermediate zone. Vast subterranean accommodation is only admissible for reserves far in rear.

Of greater importance than a wide obstacle covering the front line trench, which will, in any case, always be destroyed in a serious attack, is the construction of a number of obstacles within the fortified zone, namely along the communication and switch trenches, and farther in rear, forming a part of the strong points. These obstacles form the meshes in which an enemy who has broken through is caught, and which prevent him from surrounding the portion of the garrison which has held out in the front line.

Difficulties will be added to the enemy's reconnaissance and artillery work, by the construction of the greatest possible number of targets, and by making them difficult of recognition (also of dummy defences).

At Verdun, where there were too many dug-outs in the front line trench, a proportion of the infantry did not get out of them quickly enough. A close-meshed network of trenches was lacking, as were also obstacles running perpendicular to the front.

2.—OBSERVATION.

Observation both for artillery and infantry must be assured even under the heaviest fire. This is not the case when, as at Verdun, observation is mainly carried out from the front line trench. It is preferable to construct a network of observation posts located at points in rear. The view from one post must supplement that from another.

In addition, constant observation of the enemy's activity, from balloons and by artillery and infantry aeroplanes (contact patrols), must, of course, be absolutely guaranteed.

Finally, one must insist that infantry quartered in deep dug-outs and shelters protect themselves effectually against surprise attacks by posting look-out men and by frequent visiting rounds. The large number of unwounded prisoners shows that this was not properly done.

3.—METHOD OF HOLDING THE POSITION, AND THE INFANTRY BATTLE.

As pointed out in the "Defensive Battle" (*Abwehrschlacht*)* (see more particularly paras 6, 13 and 15), a stubborn defence alone will not lead to the desired result.

The front line trench cannot be too thinly held. Distribution in depth is essential, even for a company. Each strong point must have its definite garrison which will be responsible for holding it.

Only isolated machine guns will be taken into the front line trench; they will usually be kept in carefully selected positions behind the front line, concealed and posted chequer-wise, frequently in hollows, which are difficult to detect from the air and cannot be reached by the artillery; their main task is to open a surprise, flanking fire on an enemy who has broken through. The operation of bringing machine guns into position, and relieving them, will be specially supervised.

Reserves must also know their way about the sectors of the Divisions on their flanks. When fighting conditions permit, a certain tactical situation will be assumed, schemes will be set and manœuvres carried out over the actual ground. Tactical work in the front line position

* Not yet captured.