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BIBLIOTECA DO EXERCITO
 (Antiga Biblioteca do E. M. E.)
 N.º 888 Estado Maior do Exercito
 Aumentado em 17-9-1918
 Livro N.º _____ Pag. _____



[S.S. 753.]

Ia/55622.

CHANGE IN THE DISCIPLINE AND MORAL OF THE GERMAN ARMY.

JANUARY—SEPTEMBER, 1918.

January—April.—During the first three months of 1918 the *moral* of the German Army was very good. Owing to the large number of divisions set free from Russia, the divisions which had been heavily engaged at the end of 1917 were enabled to be withdrawn to rest, and Armies arranged training schemes lasting over periods varying between 3 weeks and 3 months for these resting divisions.

During this period, all ranks hoped that the peace in the East would shortly be followed by peace in the West. The intensive training for the attack and open warfare, which was carried out, ensured good discipline and filled the troops with ideas of a speedy victory, and the *moral* of the German Army was at its height.

During the attacks in March and April on the Somme and Lys fronts, the fighting qualities displayed by those divisions which had not a reputation as assault divisions, when fighting alongside the picked divisions of the German Army, testified to the good effect which the winter training had had on all troops.

Evidence now shows that, when these attacks were brought to a standstill by the Allied reserves, almost all the enemy attacking divisions immediately available in reserve had had to be engaged, owing to the enormous casualties incurred.

May.—The following extract from an order issued by the Eighteenth German Army on the 18th May, shows that there was an extraordinary want of discipline prevailing in the back areas near Ham on that date.

“Recently, supply trains on normal and narrow gauge lines have again been attacked by armed soldiers and pillaged. Threatened by arms, those in charge of the trains, being unarmed and in small numbers, have been unable to offer resistance to these excesses.”

It is remarkable to find this change in the discipline in the Eighteenth Army, commanded by v. Hutier, who directed the successful German attack on Riga in September, 1917, and who commanded this Army in the attack on the St. Quentin front less than 2 months before.

The German Higher Command has been particularly troubled this year by the large number of Alsace-Lorrainers in the ranks, as, previously, special precautions were taken to keep these men on the Russian front. A mutiny on a large scale at Beverloo in May was only just detected in time; there were about 10,000 Alsace-Lorrainers and Poles in the Camp this time.

June.—The failure of junior officers to prevent their men from looting food depôts during the German advance on the Aisne is clearly shown by the following extracts from an order issued on the 14th June by v. Boehn, commanding the Seventh German Army, which took the chief part in the fighting:—

“The hopes of utilizing captured food as rations and of distributing a fixed portion of the provisions to the fighting troops have proved to be fallacious, owing to the fact that the troops have taken these provisions themselves and eaten them without treating them as part of the authorized scale of rations.

“The people at home are so short of all provisions necessary to life that enough can never be done to diminish the amount which they have to supply to the Army in the field.”

Also, *Gen. der Kav.* v. der Marwitz, who commanded the Second German Army in the counter-attack near Cambrai on the 30th November, 1917, and during the advance to the Ancre in March, 1918, considered it necessary to issue the following order on the 7th June:—

“Discipline, which is the keystone of our Army, is seriously shaken.”

Five days later, this was followed by a further order containing the following significant paragraph:—

“Cases of soldiers openly refusing to obey orders are increasing to an alarming extent.”

July.—In previous years, the rapid construction by the enemy of defensive lines on our fronts of attack and the substantial nature of his defences have been a noticeable feature.

On the 20th July, the G.O.C. 41st Div. drew attention to the slackness in the construction of field works prevalent in his division, and stated that the recent loss of ground (just south of the Somme) was attributable to the lack of obstacles and communication trenches which he had ordered to be dug. (In this connection, it is interesting to note that Ludendorff considered that one of the three reasons for the defeat of the Second German Army on this front on the 8th August was that scarcely any positions or obstacles existed, either in the forward battle zone or in villages farther back.)

There seems little doubt that the confidence in success of the German divisions just before the German offensive on the 15th July was not what it had been before their earlier attacks this year. One of the reasons for this was that the casualties caused by the previous attacks had not been made good and that the company strengths were further lowered by the temporary absence of men suffering with Spanish fever.

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