



[S.S. 485.]

Ia/20964.

(Translation of a German Document.)

1st ARMY H.Q.,
Ia. No. 489. Secret.

ARMY HEADQUARTERS,
23rd August, 1916.

**ARMY ORDER REGARDING THE EXECUTION
OF COUNTER-ATTACKS.**

1. On the battle front of the 1st Army, our positions consist for the most part of hurriedly constructed trenches without dug-outs. Our line, the exact position of which must invariably be known to the artillery to enable it to carry out the extremely important task of maintaining an accurate barrage fire, can for the most part, therefore, only be lightly held. The absolute necessity of holding the front line in spite of the annihilating effect of the enemy's artillery fire, can in many cases be complied with only by means of *counter-attacks carried out by reserves which have been withheld.*
2. The experience of the Battle of the Somme fully confirms *previous experience* that counter-attacks are, as a rule, successful only when they:—
 - (a) Originate in the bold resolve of subordinate commanders in the front line, and are carried out so rapidly that the enemy has no time to consolidate himself in the newly captured ground, especially as regards his machine guns;
 - (b) Are carried out after a methodical preparation.
3. As regards the leading in the recent fighting, I have formed the impression that these principles have frequently been neglected. I therefore lay special stress on the following:—

**A.—IMMEDIATE COUNTER-ATTACKS ORIGINATING IN THE RESOLVE OF
SUBORDINATE COMMANDERS.**

4. **For an immediate counter-attack** it is necessary for reserves to be at hand in good time. They must, therefore, in spite of the enemy's fire, be brought further forward than usual. This must be effected, as soon as an approaching hostile attack is recognised, by the commanders anticipating events and moving up the rearmost reserves first, thus enabling those further forward to be closed up towards the front. That is to say, the depth in which the reserves are deployed must be reduced. The higher commanders must accurately gauge the proper moment for the reserves to be moved forward: if they are moved forward unnecessarily, the troops are deprived of their requisite amount of rest. Reserves which are moved forward too tardily arrive too late for a timely counter-attack. There must be continual observation of the direction of the enemy's fire on ordinary and special days during the battle, in order to gain such a knowledge of it that the casualties of the reserves when moving forward may be minimized. It will often be advisable to move up the reserves along the lateral limits of the zones covered by the enemy's intense bombardment; this will also effectively prepare the way for launching the counter-attack so as to take the enemy in flank.

5. **Our infantry** is thoroughly convinced of its *superiority* over the French and English in close fighting. A numerically inferior German force has, therefore, every prospect of success if it advances boldly.

Every subordinate commander, relying on the efficiency of his troops, must therefore endeavour, by means of an immediate counter-attack, to recapture any portions of the position which may be lost.

In this connection, it is especially important, by means of a continuous barrage behind the objective of the counter-attack, to prevent the enemy's reserves from coming up and taking part in the close fighting.

B.—METHODICAL COUNTER-ATTACKS.

6. **When the enemy has established himself** in a newly gained position, it is important first of all to obtain a clear idea of the position of our own and the enemy's troops, so that our barrage fire and fire for effect against the enemy's trenches may be properly directed. Sketches prepared by the infantry in front line, showing the position of the enemy, must be rapidly placed at the disposal of the artillery. It is the duty of every commander to consolidate the new line and to maintain absolute touch with neighbouring troops.

7. **On this basis**, and in accordance with the reports and proposals of subordinate commanders, the **higher commanders** must consider and **decide** whether a **methodical attack** should be carried out in order to regain the ground lost. When making this decision, the commander must look ahead and consider whether the objective to be gained by the attack will repay the expenditure of force necessary to ensure its success.

It frequently happens that parts of positions which have been tenaciously defended against many assaults are finally lost owing to their being situated on the forward slope or forming a salient, being thus unduly exposed to the force of the enemy's fire before the assault takes place. If such points are retaken by a methodical counter-attack, the troops are deliberately placed once more in what has already been recognised as an unfavourable position, and there is once more a risk of suffering heavy casualties and a danger, which should not be under-estimated, of again losing the position which has just been recaptured. When this is judged to be the case, the higher commander must, after coolly weighing the consequences, forbid a methodical counter-attack in spite of the importance of acquiescing in and supporting every effort on the part of the troops to regain lost ground.

8. The battle which is now in progress consumes, in the defence alone, so many troops that I am forced to issue orders that methodical counter-attacks, beyond minor ones of a purely local nature, are not to be carried out except by my orders. The Army Groups will furnish me with the necessary data on which to base my decision. These should include:—

(a) A clear statement of our own and the enemy's **situation**, based on reports from infantry, artillery, aviators, specially detailed liaison officers sent out from the higher commands, captive balloons, etc.

(b) An exact determination of the **objective**, which must be selected so that the line gained by the attack can be permanently defended without incurring heavy losses.

(c) An estimate of the **infantry force** necessary to carry out the counter-attack, inclusive of the reliefs which are generally required for the infantry after the first hostile counter-attacks against the line gained by us.

(d) A statement of the infantry which can be furnished by the fighting troops themselves, and of the **infantry reinforcements** which must be provided by Army Headquarters.

(e) The number of **batteries** which are available for the preparation of the attack, and the extent to which artillery reinforcements from neighbouring Army Groups, or from the Army Reserve, are considered necessary. In this connection, separate statements will be given of the number of batteries for counter-battery work, for firing on the trenches which form the objective and for creating a diversion against the enemy's trenches on either side of the objective.

The co-operation of the Artillery General at Army Headquarters can be obtained at all times for the purpose of working out the artillery details.

(f) The number of Flammenwerfer, Minenwerfer and pioneer companies.

(g) An estimate of the **quantity of ammunition** required for the attack, *inclusive* of the anticipated expenditure in warding off counter-attacks. In this connection, the number of rounds for individual batteries corresponding to their employment throughout the whole of the operation will be calculated, and a demand submitted to Army Headquarters for the quantity of ammunition required *in addition* to that already available.

(Signed) v. BELOW, GENERAL,

Commanding-in-Chief.

GENERAL STAFF (INTELLIGENCE),

GENERAL HEADQUARTERS.

10th October, 1916.