

## EXTRACTS FROM GERMAN DOCUMENTS DEALING WITH "LESSONS DRAWN FROM THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME."

### 1. German Opinion of British Troops.

Previous to the attack the enemy's infantry patrols showed increased activity. The foremost trenches were probably lightly held during the intense artillery fire. The troops for the assault were apparently assembled in the trenches in rear.

The attack on the 1st July was well prepared, and the infantry was splendidly equipped with all kinds of weapons for the close combat. It was provided with a large number of Lewis guns, which were brought into action very quickly and skilfully in newly-captured positions. It is very desirable that our infantry should be equipped with a large number of light machine guns of this description in order to increase the intensity of its fire.

The individual English soldier is well trained and shows personal bravery. Some of the officers, however, are not sufficiently thoroughly trained. They are lacking in ability to exploit a success and to follow it up quickly.

The English infantry has undoubtedly learnt much since the autumn offensive. It shows great dash in the attack, a factor to which immense confidence in its overwhelming artillery probably greatly contributes. The Englishman also has his physique and training in his favour. Commanders, however, in difficult situations showed that they were not yet equal to their tasks. The men lost their heads and surrendered if they thought they were cut off.

Telephone connections were established very rapidly.

The enemy's trench mortars were skilfully served and produced effective results.

The enemy's artillery registered skilfully and inconspicuously. The guns proved accurate; the effect of the shells was good, but the percentage of blinds was high.

### 2. Description of German Position.

**The 1st Line Position** will be held if the enemy attacks. It consists of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Trenches, and should have, if possible, two rows of wire in front of each. There should be at least two communication trenches in each company sector from the 3rd to the 1st Trench, but the points at which they enter and leave the 2nd Trench should not be opposite one another. The number of dug-outs should be increased until there are sufficient to accommodate the infantry garrison necessary for the repulse of a prepared attack.

**The Intermediate and 2nd Line Positions** consist of at least two trenches, each provided with two rows of wire on pickets, and the same number of communication trenches as in the 1st Line Position. Each of the present regimental sectors must be provided with sufficient accommodation for at least one battalion.

**Trenches.**—Narrow trenches with steep sides again proved very disadvantageous and caused considerably more casualties (men being buried) than shallower trenches with a wide sole. One regiment is of opinion that the garrison is better protected if the men lie down or crouch at the bottom of the trench without any further cover, than it is if the so-called "rabbit holes" are used.

A cover trench roughly parallel to the front fire trench is not sound. Such trenches are destroyed by the enemy's fire at the same time as the actual fire trenches. To obviate this, trenches sited in accordance with the ground, and consequently with a certain irregularity of trace, are recommended.

**Obstacles.** There should be two or three rows of wire, each from 3 to 5½ yards deep, with an interval of from 5½ to 11 yards between each, this interval being provided with trip wires. The outer edge of the furthest wire should be about 55 yards from the trench. It should not always run parallel with the trench, but should follow the lie of the ground.

**Dug-outs.** The thickness of earth overhead should be from 23 to 26 feet, and more in the case of command posts and the dug-outs for the medical services, telephones and kitchens. The dug-outs for the men should be sufficient for 16 men, with two entrances separated by a traverse. Several dug-outs should be connected up to form corridor dug-outs with accommodation for a platoon. The dug-out recesses should be on the same side as the entrances—not facing them. Entrances should be 4 feet by 5½ feet, and should be well stayed and braced. Inclined galleries offer more resistance than frames built in on steps one below the other.

**Machine guns.** It is advisable to employ the bulk of the machine guns not in, but behind, the 1st Trench. When fixing their siting, the possibility of delivering both frontal and flanking fire must not be forgotten. Used as an emergency garrison for the Intermediate or 2nd Line Position, they may prevent a break through if the enemy succeeds in overrunning the 1st Line Position.

Machine guns must, as a rule, be kept in the dug-outs of their crews until the enemy assaults, and must then be placed rapidly in position at suitable points on the parapet.



Machine gun units are particularly suitable for employment as a commander's mobile reserve.

**Retired positions.** The preparation of villages and other strong points afforded by the ground behind the front line, for subsequent defence, cannot be begun too soon.

The first necessities for retired positions and the extremely important diagonal switch lines, are *entanglements*, *dug-outs* and *communication trenches*. The number of these positions should be increased by continual work, and by making the fullest possible use of all available forces.

### 3. Distribution of the German Infantry.

**Method of holding the position.** One of the most important lessons drawn from the Battle of the Somme is that, under heavy methodical artillery fire, the front line should be only thinly held, but by reliable men and a few machine guns, even when there is always a possibility of a hostile attack. When this was not done, the casualties were so great before the enemy's attack was launched, that the possibility of the front line repulsing the attack by its own unaided efforts was very doubtful. The danger of the front line being rushed when so lightly held must be overcome by placing supports (infantry and machine guns), distributed in groups according to the ground, as close as possible behind the foremost fighting line. Their task is to rush forward to reinforce the front line at the moment the enemy attacks, without waiting for orders.

The essential conditions for success are, therefore, that the various formations should be organized in depth but that their units should be employed side by side.

The garrison of the 1st Trench of the 1st Line Position should be strong enough to repulse the enemy's attack, assuming that the men reach the parapet in time, but no stronger. It is, as a rule, sufficient to have one man to every 2-3 yards as an emergency garrison in the 1st Trench.

The 2nd Trench of the 1st Line Position is garrisoned by the Supports, one portion of which is specially detailed to defend the entrances to the communication trenches, while the other portion consists of strong specially formed bombing parties, which are held in readiness to rush forward at once to the support of the foremost trench.

**Reserves.** Even the Company Commander must, in no circumstances, neglect to provide himself with a reserve consisting of a few groups and, if possible, of machine guns as well. The Sub-sector Commanders must also have at all times sufficient troops at their disposal to be able at once to drive the enemy out, by means of a counter-attack, should he succeed in penetrating into the position.

The fighting strength of both the front trenches would soon be exhausted if the Sector Reserves were not put in. These must therefore be brought close up in good time, either into the 3rd Trench or into special reserve trenches. In case of an attack they should be moved forward into the 2nd (or 3rd) Trench to replace the reinforcements which have already gone forward (the Supports) and continue the task allotted to the latter.

In critical situations it is not sound to quarter reserves in villages immediately behind the front. It has nearly always proved impossible to assemble the troops quickly when they were scattered in numerous cellars, etc., in a village which was being heavily shelled. In such cases the reserves should be in the trenches.

In the 5th Division, a 4th platoon was formed in the infantry companies. At first, these reinforcements for replacing casualties were kept back with the 1st line transport (field kitchens). They were sent forward only when the losses of the three other platoons made reinforcements necessary. When they went forward, the 4th platoons took with them all that had been found necessary in the particular fighting (hand grenades, entrenching tools, rations, etc.). This arrangement proved very successful.

### 4. German Tactics.

**Approach march.** Before bringing up troops into the zone of the enemy's artillery fire, the commander must obtain a clear idea, by means of clever scouts and by his own observation, how the enemy's fire is distributed over the ground to be crossed. When selecting the route, areas which are hardly or not under fire will be taken into consideration rather than the nature of the ground and the cultivation. Depressions and sunken roads which are invisible to the enemy are, as a rule, under such heavy barrage fire that it is not advisable to make use of them. *Villages which lie in the enemy's zone of fire are to be avoided on principle.*

**Action when heavily shelled.** It has been found to be a good plan, during the continuous heavy bombardment of incomplete front line positions, for the garrison to advance 100-200 metres and to lie down in the open without any cover.

Over ground which cannot be observed, and at night, the unaimed but horizontal **barrage fire of infantry and machine guns**, during and immediately after critical periods, affords rest and protection to troops who are probably shaken for the moment, and not only scares the enemy but inflicts losses on him.

The excellent results obtained from selected **snipers** posted at good view points in trees, etc., are particularly emphasized by one Regiment.

The detailing of **assaulting parties** in an attack has proved very useful. Their chief advantage lay in the freshness of the specially selected personnel who had not been engaged in previous fighting. The careful training beforehand of the assaulting parties resulted in these troops proving themselves quite equal to all tasks which fell to their lot in village or wood fighting. They felt that they were a body of élite troops, which indeed they proved themselves to be.



**When attacking in a wood,** it is preferable, instead of the usual skirmish lines, following one after the other, to employ small assaulting columns following a single line of assault.

**Relief of infantry and engineers.** When troops are relieved, it is of the utmost importance that the out-going troops are careful in handing over. Whenever the tactical conditions permit, this should take place on the spot, the various commanders meeting together for the purpose. At any rate, it is absolutely essential that the in-coming troops should be thoroughly informed as to the tactical situation, by means of personal conferences between the commanders, with the assistance of maps and sketches which will be taken over by the former. A perfectly clear picture must be given of the state of the positions, etc., particularly of their weak points, and also of any work which it had been intended to carry out, the degree of importance attached to it being specified.

If it is impossible to give the in-coming troops an idea of the ground beforehand, then detachments of the out-going troops must be left behind in the trenches. It is very important that the junction points with other troops should be absolutely clearly indicated, as these are so easily forgotten when reliefs are carried out under heavy fire.

Losses on the march up to the trenches can be minimized if the stretches of ground which are under fire are crossed in as small parties as possible. One Infantry Brigade recommends that the relief be carried out by platoons, at short intervals of time, and considers that the troops should move up in file. No hard and fast rules can be laid down. The choice of the formation in which the troops are to move will always depend on the nature of the ground.

When troops which are advancing are to be relieved, as much engineer and constructional material as possible must be taken with the relieving troops. In all cases the men must carry as many large entrenching tools as they can.

## 5. German Communications.

**Runners.** When all others fail, the runner still remains as the last means of communication. Numerous runners must be trained to know the ground. Dug-outs should be constructed at intervals along the routes used. Runners should never be sent out singly.

Runners, and the establishment of relays of runners, have proved very useful everywhere. The casualties were comparatively slight. All important information and orders should always be sent in duplicate. One Infantry Brigade recommends 100 yards as the normal distance between the relay stations in the fire zone.

**Telephones.** The usual practice of changing telephone apparatus, when reliefs were carried out, proved to be a source of very marked interruption. It must not take place when the fighting is so severe. The out-going units should hand over their apparatus to the in-coming troops.

**Light-pistols.** The communication between the front line and the artillery for the direction of barrage fire was entirely confined to light-pistol signals.

## 6. German Rations.

**The quantity of "iron rations"** in the position was increased to 5 days' rations. Ample supplies of mineral water, cigars, chocolate and solidified alcohol for warming up food were provided.

The provision of kitchens and store rooms in mined dug-outs and of spare kitchens is necessary.

It is necessary that fresh troops going into the line, when the precise state of the battle is uncertain, should be supplied with the 3rd iron ration.

**The formation of carrying parties** with baskets, etc., was of great use in bringing up rations and also in supplying troops with ammunition and stores. Wherever infantry pioneer companies were not used for this purpose, these carrying parties were formed within companies; this has the advantage of the feeling of camaraderie which prevails between such carrying parties and their fighting troops.

## 7. Miscellaneous.

**The infantry pioneer companies** of each infantry regiment of the Corps proved of great value. Full use, however, was not made of their special training, as the fighting provided them with more urgent work. These companies, which consisted of men of experience and accustomed to work together, proved most valuable in the many difficult and unexpected problems which continually faced the regiments:—for instance, in the provision of the front line trenches with the matériel necessary for carrying on the fight.

**The hand grenade** was a most important infantry weapon both in attack and defence. It is universally suggested that the supply of hand grenades should be increased.

**Entrenching tools.** Repeated requests from all arms for an increased supply of entrenching tools must be met by the provision of entrenching tools from the reserve depots behind the battle sector.

**Dressing stations.** In rear of every Battalion Sector it is advisable to have one bomb-proof medical dug-out with accommodation for 30 wounded, or 2 dug-outs each for 20 wounded



## 8. German Training.

The instructions based on our previous experience in defence and attack all took for granted a carefully constructed trench system. The troops on the Somme found practically no trenches at all.

The front line, and the ground for a considerable distance behind the fighting front, was kept under fire by the enemy's artillery; this fire was almost continuous and of a volume never before experienced. Several lessons for the training of the troops were learnt as the result of this bombardment; the following are the most important:—

Every individual must be trained to the highest possible degree of self-reliance, so that he may know how to act during the critical periods of his own or the enemy's attacks, when he must generally be left to his own resources, and is beyond the control of his superiors.

Crossing ground which is being heavily shelled.

Training of the infantry in establishing relays of runners.

Increase in the personnel trained in the use of our own and captured machine guns (officers and men).

Training in the use of all kinds of German hand grenades.

Training as many men as possible in the use of the enemy's hand grenades.

Attacks by sectors, according to time table, following close up to our barrage. Formations organized in as great depth as possible to be able to cope with surprises. The absolute necessity of this has again been proved in attacking in wooded country with a restricted range of vision.

Rapid execution of counter-attacks over open ground under different conditions. Bombers in front, skirmishers about 10 metres behind them, a number of small bodies in support slightly further in rear. In wooded country these move in file, otherwise in extended order.

Training in the rapid preparation of shell holes for defence, and in digging trenches by small parties in captured ground. Marching in file to form up on the tracing tape.

The employment of improvised materials in constructing defences if prepared materials are not available.

GENERAL STAFF (INTELLIGENCE),  
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