

WORLD WAR I

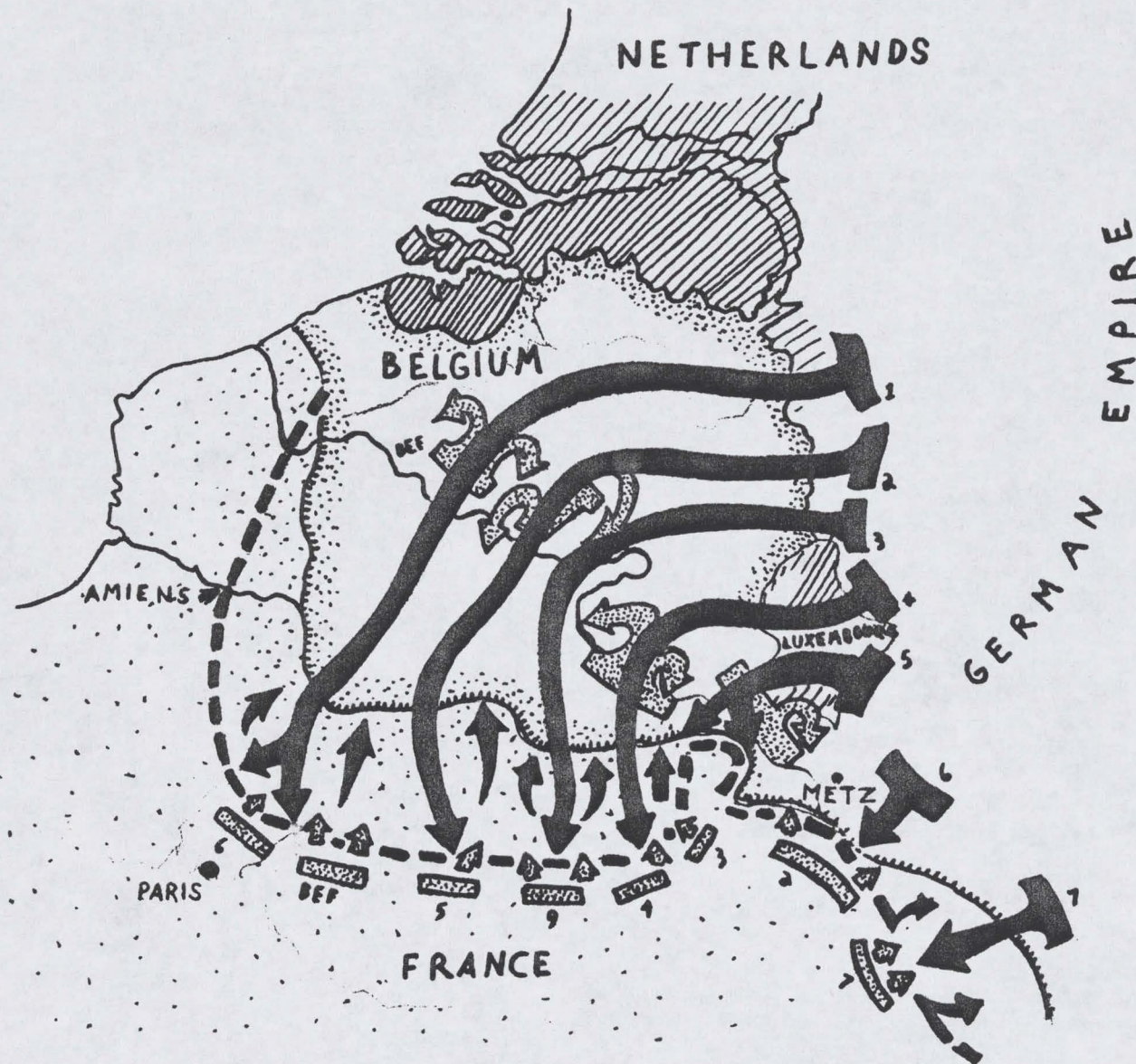
- PLANS AND EXECUTION
- STAGNATION
- FINALE

"Even in 1914 when, during the first battles, it became obvious that the machine-gun was the dominating factor in the field, a suggestion that their number should be increased was actively resisted by the High Command in France. Kitchener himself was lukewarm and Sir Douglas Haig explicitly said that it was a weapon apt to be overrated, and that the existing establishment of two per battalion was sufficient for all purposes. One wonders on what basis these brains were working. None of the official theorists managed to conceive the idea of combining trenches, wire, flanking and cross-fire into a coherent system--the idea of infantry tactics based not on rifles but on machineguns. Nobody had the right prophetic vision of the battlefield . . ." (Miksche, Atomic Weapons & Armies, pp. 45-46.)

". . .in the battle of Third Artois - Loos, the French and British respectively lost 48,2000 and 48,267 men, and in the Second Battle of Champagne the French losses were 143,567. In both, no more than the German front line system of trenches, in places some 3,000 yards deep, was captured.

". . . in all the initial assaults of this year (1915), mass artillery bombardments enabled the infantry to occupy parts of or all of the enemy's front line entrenchments. This went far to prove that, had a sufficiency of artillery existed during the mobile period of the war, it would have been possible to penetrate the unentrenched, or slightly entrenched, fronts of those days. This was one of the lessons Napoleon had taught his age, and he had said: 'It is only with artillery that one makes war.' Now, when the opportunity had passed, and the entrenched fronts were daily growing deeper and deeper, the French General Staff fondly imagined that they had discovered the secret of victory in the aphorism 'Artillery conquers, infantry occupies.' Tactics were reduced to a matter of push of pikes - actually push of shells - drill took the place of manoeuvre, method of surprise, and bombardments replaced leadership. Tactics, in fact, reverted to their level under the Spartans in the 5th century B.C., with one marked difference - the generals never went into battle." (Fuller, The Conduct of War, 1789-1961, p. 166.)

SCHLIEFFEN STRATEGIC MANEUVER (1914)



WORLD WAR I

Action

- Offensives conducted on wide fronts
- Evenness of advance maintained to protect flanks and provide artillery support as advance makes headway
- Reserves thrown in whenever attack held up--against regions or points of strong resistance

Reaction

- Defense organized into depth of successive belts of fortified terrain
- Massed artillery and machinegun fire designed to arrest and pin down attacker
- Counter-attack to win back lost ground

Result

- Stagnation and enormous attrition since advances made generally as expected along paths of hardened resistance because of dependence upon railroads and choice of tactics of trying to reduce strong points by massed firepower and infantry.

BATTLE OF THE SOMME (1 July - 14 November 1916)--the archetype of attrition warfare. This British/French offensive was considered a success by Sir Douglas Haig, who wrote that it "placed beyond doubt the ability of the Allies' to achieve their aim" (Fuller, The Conduct of War, p. 168). And indeed, the Allies did advance to a maximum depth of 7 miles over a 30-mile front by the offensive's end. But the price was 419,654 British, 194,451 French, and about 600,000 German casualties! Montross points out that despite a week's artillery bombardment, the Germans, having had two years to dig in, were able to quickly man their machine guns when the infantry attack came and, by the evening of the first day, the British suffered nearly 60,000 casualties (about 40% of the British troops engaged)--War Through the Ages, pp. 721-22.

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A WAY OUT

Idea

- Infiltration Tactics
- Guerrilla Tactics

Authors

- Capt Laffargue
- Gen Von Hutier?
- Gen Ludendorff
- T.E. Lawrence
- Paul Von Lettow-Vorbeck

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