

THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
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ADVANCED COURSE
1930-1931

THE 14th GERMAN DIVISION WITH THE SECOND ARMY
(VON BUELOW) IN THE FIRST BATTLE OF THE MARNE,
1914.

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A. von Schell,
Captain in the German Fuehrer-Stab.

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INTRODUCTION

After an unexampled ^{rapid} ~~fast~~ advance through Belgium and North France the German armies in the beginning of September 1914 were stretched out in a long circle between Paris and Verdun. The last days had ^{been} ~~seen~~ ^{much} very hard in marching. ^{we} They were marching daily from ^{dawn} daylight until ~~the~~ night; the packs were heavy and the boots hurt. But we in the front had the feeling that the great battle of decision had still to come. We all know very well the old principle of the German army: " Battles will be won by legs."

The commander-in-chief, however, believed that it was not possible to pass Paris without security against that gigantic fortress. Therefore he ordered the First and Second Army on September 5 to turn to the right against Paris in order to secure the rest of the armies. That order ^{found} ~~met~~ both armies in the situation shown on Sketch I. In consequence of the movements ^{directed} ~~according~~ ^{by} to this order, and in consequence of the decision of the French to stop ^{it} the ^rretreat and to attack the German right flank, the battle of the Marne began.

In the following, I wish to ^{set forth} ~~show~~ ^{at} first, the events as seen by the soldiers in the front, Then ~~I will give~~ the reasons ^{my thanks to} ~~of~~ these events, and at last, ^{an analysis} ~~we will consider~~ them. (Sketch 2)

The 14th Division, which was marching on the right wing of the Second Army, made during ~~that~~ September 5, a long march, passing east of Montmirail. We crossed the Petit Morin River and spent the night in a small village ~~in the~~ south of that river. At daylight September 6 we

were alarmed. There was a loud booming of cannons in the south, but we marched to the north, the same ^{direction} way as yesterday. We were not at our ease, because we could not find out why we had to march to the rear; we never had done ~~so~~ before. We all were only one month in war and did not know its ups and downs. Finally about noon, it was said that our division was to be a reserve of the army. A little later we halted on both sides of the main road from Chateau Thierry to Fontenelle. ^{Cor} The good spirits soon came back. We were ^{contented} glad to stay there for all the afternoon, because we knew war well enough to know that ^{when the reserves were allowed to rest} the battle must be going very well, ~~as the reserves had not to make any movements.~~ Finally when it became dark, the ^{sound of artillery fire} booming of cannons died down.

In the early morning of September 7, we had a very short march into a wood near Artonges. Here we saw something which was not agreeable to see. ~~We saw~~ many supply wagons ^{returning hastily and} in bad condition, ~~which returned hastily.~~ The drivers told us about a retreat of our troops, about heavy casualties, about a defeat, etc. We were anxious about the battle, which we only could hear, but not see. ^{Q / To /} About 8 o'clock AM, we marched to Vиллемoyenne and began digging in there, our front to the west. We could not understand this situation, ^{because} ^{Now} to date we ~~always~~ ^{been} had ^{ing} driven the French to the south. ^{Then} ~~Then~~ we had to march to the north. ^{and} ~~Then~~ it was rumored that our troops had to retreat, ~~and now~~ we ^{caps} were digging in, ^{our} the front to the west; that ^{is,} ~~means~~ to the outside flank. Where could the First Army be? ^{It} ~~That~~ all looked as if the French would attack our right flank. We could feel a certain anxiety ^{among} in our troops. However, we had not a long time to think about it. About ¹¹ o'clock ⁴

AM we finished digging and started a forced march to the east. We got the order to reach Fromentieres, located behind the middle of our army. The march was difficult as it was very warm and dusty, and as we had to cross several long columns of ammunition wagons and wagons with supply going to the front ~~or~~ coming back. About 1 o'clock PM we halted, though we had not yet reached Fromentieres. Then we turned back to the ^{vicinity} ~~surroundings~~ of Artonges. These numerous changes made an unfavorable impression upon the troops. The high commanders seemed not to know what to do. ^{since} ~~However~~, we had hardly any experience in war, ~~these seemingly confused and vacillating orders made a~~ ^{and} ~~and therefore~~ ^{injurious} all momentous impressions had an ~~prejudicial~~ effect upon ^{the morale of} the troops.

About 5 o'clock PM we reached again the neighborhood of Artonges. We were still talking about the events of the day and about the different meanings of the battle, when we were alarmed suddenly. It was 8 o'clock PM. Our battalion commander told us the French had made a penetration through the left wing of our army, ^{and that} ~~Therefore~~, ^{we were} ~~we had still~~ during the night ^{to} march there to help. ~~We had to march~~ without any rest and without any regard for march casualties. ~~And besides~~ ^{it} was very dark when we started this forced night march, sometimes crosscountry. Now we had the direction to the east again. We ran in ^{double time} ~~quick step~~ for 5 minutes each 30 minutes. We had the impression that the battle must be going very badly, otherwise we would not have to make such a march.

Finally on September 8 about 1 o'clock AM, we had reached our goal near Champaubert. The march casualties had not been very heavy. I lost in my company only

about 10 men from 130. ~~But~~ ^{It} is a war experience that march casualties never are heavy in night marches and in a retreat. The reason may be that nobody likes to leave his unit, when he does not know where he is ~~situated~~ or when he ~~can~~ ^{may} be captured.

At Champaubert we dropped to the ground and fell asleep at once. We believed that we would attack at day-break. But after three short hours of rest we were aroused. However, we did not engage in battle but marched again to the east. Nobody knew wherefore ~~and~~ ^{Nor} why.

Now we ~~will~~ ^{shall} briefly consider the reasons for these movements:

As shown on Sketch I, the left wing of the First Army was situated farther south than the Second Army. Therefore, if the turning movement, ordered by the commander-in-chief, was to be made, the VII Corps with its 13th and 14th Divisions was superfluous at the front at the present time. Therefore it had to remain as the reserve of the army north of Montmirail, in order to clear the pivot of the army, while the other corps had to wheel to the right in a large circle.

On September 6, however, all corps marching to the south were engaged in heavy fighting (Sketch 3) so that the 13th Division had to help the hard fighting IX Corps. Now only the 14th Division remained in army reserve. On the same day, however, it was seen that the IV Reserve Corps alone could not secure the flank of the army on the Ourcq River. Therefore the First Army was forced to order one corps after another from the south to the Ourcq River, finally even the III and the IX Corps. Thus the rumor started in our 14th Division of a retreat.

The ^{gap} ~~hole~~, resulting from these events, was secured only by some cavalry divisions. It was obvious that now the right wing of the Second Army would have to fall back. Only the left wing was able to continue the attack, in order to get the decision. (Sketch 4) In this plan, the 14th Division, situated behind the right wing, naturally had the task of securing the right flank of the army. Therefore we saw it digging in, its front to the west. In the meanwhile there had begun a bloody struggle on ^{the whole} ~~all~~ the front of the army, but without any definite decision. It is to be understood, that in this situation the army commander desired to have his reserve behind the center of his front, in order to engage it wherever he would need it. At this time the ^{messages} ~~messages~~ from the ^{gap} ~~hole~~ between the First and the Second Army ^{did not indicate that the situation there was critical} ~~were not bad~~. Therefore, he ordered his reserve behind the center of his army and thus our march to Fromentieres. In the meantime, however, new messages had reached the army, which forced it to take care of the right flank, and consequently the 14th Division received an order to march back behind the right wing of the army. About the evening of September 7 new information arrived at the headquarters of the army, that the French had made a penetration between the X and the Garde Corps. The only available reserve, ~~just~~ the 14th Division, had to make that difficult night march. Later on, it became clear that there was no danger in this particular ^{part} ~~place~~ of the front.

^{at this time (evening September 7)}
~~Now~~ The situation was as follows: The right wing of the Second Army had retreated, but the French and the English followed very slowly. On the left wing, however,

there seemed to be a weak place in the enemy front. Probably it would ^{was} have been possible to penetrate there through the French lines, ^{ic} But if it ^{were} was to be tried, it had to be done promptly, as the situation on the right wing could change very quickly. Therefore even the last reserve - the 14th Division - was aroused in the early morning of September 8 to help to win the battle.

Let us stop here for a moment, to learn the experiences and the difficulties encountered by the 14th Division.

1. We saw, that on September 5, the German leaders believed that they were confronted by an enemy who was continually retreating, and ~~therefore~~ they accordingly based their decisions on this assumption. The Germans therefore were on September 6, very much surprised to see the French even making counterattacks. This ^{surprise} was not the consequence of a poor reconnaissance. ~~However,~~ ^{intentions and actions may always be expected} ~~this~~ lack of knowledge of the enemy ~~is always true~~ in open warfare. In open warfare we will never know exactly where the enemy is, how strong he is, and what he intends to do. War is not as easy as a map problem. All leaders ^{must} have nearly always ^{issue} to orders without exact information. They ^{surmise} ~~only can~~ think about the future. The only thing, which is clear, or which should be clear at least, is one's own mission and one's own will. Therefore we must not wait for better information when it is time to give an order. ~~Otherwise,~~ it often happens that your information is false or, ^{at least distorted} ~~overdrawn~~; ^u A real leader must know the art of recognizing what is true and what is false.

^{to} We saw that the Second Army received the order on September 5 to secure against Paris. This order had

^{immediately} to be given as it was time to do so, although they had ^{general headquarters} very poor information. ^{This decision was correct.} ~~That was correct.~~ We saw also the 14th Division on September 7 make a difficult night march from the right wing to the left wing; ^{or is} in that case the decision of the army was based on false information, ^{and was incorrect}. It is an experience of war, that ~~each~~ information is often misleading, ^{therefore}, we must be careful in sending off as well as in accepting ^{it} information.

insert reservation
7. ~~2. The lack of knowledge of the enemy demands, also, that a leader ^{keep out} have reserves. Reserves, ^{simply for the sake of having a reserve,} in themselves would not be necessary, as in a battle only the fighting soldiers bring an advantage, ^{are essential} But ~~you must have reserves,~~ because you (never will) (exactly know) what will happen.~~

As the information of the enemy changes, it is the tendency of a leader to move his reserves according to his momentary conception of the situation.

We notice the lack of clearness in the decision of the army leader by the different movements of the 14th Division. The leader always should have regard for the fact that useless marches affect the morale of the troops. The troops are always thinking about these things. Therefore, it is important in peace-time ^{to which they will be subjected} to teach the soldiers about the different impressions, ^{to which they will be subjected} in warfare ~~to and~~ which they ~~must not react.~~ ^{should accept with calmness and fortitude.}

We may learn two things from these events:

1. All leaders must give their orders without having complete information. Only ones own will is stated. In spite of the fact that the information of the enemy is incomplete, you must make a decision.

The strength and morale of

conserved

3. Reserves must be ~~spared their strengths~~ ^{conserved} and morale in order ~~to be engaged in battle with~~ ^{that their full benefit of their positions may be gained} ~~all their might.~~ ^{when, finally, they are engaged in battle,}

The 14th Division had a difficult task in this attack, which was to decide the outcome of the battle. It had to force the crossing of the broad swamp of the Petit Morin River south of the village of Joches.

The terrain was as ~~disadvantageous~~ ^{unfavorable} as possible. The swamp was impassable even to foot troops. There was only one bridge across the swamp. The French could fire with artillery and machine guns upon the only road and the village of Joches. There was beyond the swamp on the left side of the road a long row of high trees, which prevented the German artillery from observing hill 154.

Take out

On the hot September 8, the sun glittered on the blue sky and dazzled the Germans.

Company

At that time I was in command of the 2d ~~Corps~~ ^{Company} 57th Infantry Regiment. My company was attached to the 53d Infantry Regiment because two companies of that regiment were left behind in Belgium. My soldiers were all well trained and of high morale.

The day was extremely hot and a blazing sun glittered in the blue sky and dazzled our eyes.

Coming from the north ^{September 8th} About 8 o'clock ~~AM~~ we reached, ~~coming from the north~~, the north edge of the village of Coizard and prepared for action in the gardens of that village. I went forward to the south edge of the village of Coizard in order to reconnoiter the terrain before us. From here I saw the village of Joches, I saw the broad swamp, saw beyond it hill 154 with lone trees and many hedges. The grain was standing in sheaves on the ground. I could

recognize some Frenchmen upon hill 154, as their red leggings were easily seen. There was no firing to be heard. Behind me I saw some German batteries, just reaching their positions, and I heard my soldiers singing a song from home.

About 9 o'clock AM our first scouts left the village of Joches and hastened forward to cross the swamp. The French opened fire at once with artillery, machine guns, and rifles upon the road and the village. I saw our soldiers jump into the eastern ditch of the road and hurried on quickly. Then I was called back to my company. Our battalion commander gave the order:

"The 2d Bn 16th Inf Rgt starts the crossing of the Petit Morin River. 53d Inf Rgt will follow, the 2d Company 57th Inf Rgt at the head. The goal of the attack is the village of Broussy le Petit."

That was all.

We did not know where the enemy was and what his strength was; we did not know if, and how much, artillery would support us; we did not know who was to our right or left. We only knew that we had to attack and that we would meet the French beyond the swamp. ^{v was my experience} It always ~~saw~~ in open warfare on the Western Front as well as on the Eastern Front, in Rumania, ^{and} ~~as well as~~ in the ^{C C} ~~Kaukasus~~, that we had only poor information of the enemy when we started an attack.

Before we started I told my company to fire ^{calmly} ~~quietly~~ and with the correct elevation, as I had seen in earlier fighting, that many soldiers, when excited, forget

to take the ^{proper sight setting} ~~correct elevation~~. Then we started forward and reached the village of Joches.

The French artillery began firing upon that village. We passed through it on the run without any casualties. After having reached the south edge, I saw that the last elements of the 2d Battalion 16th Infantry Regiment had not crossed the swamp. Therefore, I left the road with my company and took cover behind a building. From here we could see how the last squads of the 2d Battalion ran forward in the ditch beside the road and that some soldiers were hit while crossing the bridge. The French artillery shot like the devil upon the road and the village of Joches, which soon began to burn. The shells whizzed constantly. My company was bunched and lying behind me. Nobody was talking. They all looked at me. Suddenly a terrible crash and a shell hit in the middle of my company. Ten soldiers were killed or wounded. All men sprang up; there was a big tumult; suddenly there was our Brigadier, General Schwarte, riding on horseback in the middle of the company. He was calmly smoking a cigar as if nothing had happened. He commanded: "2d Company, fall in. I hope not to see such a picture again, or I shall shut in some of you, when we return into our garrison." Such extraordinary coolness had a marvelous effect on the troops. The company was lined up at once, formed into platoons, moved forward as quickly as possible in the ditch beside the road and crossed the swamp and the bridge with only three other casualties.

This happened about 10 o'clock AM.

On the other side of the swamp I assembled my company, each platoon separate; the events in the village

of Joches had taught me a lesson. There were some killed and many wounded in the row of the trees. We did not know where the enemy was and where our own troops were. We could only hear firing beyond the trees. The shells, machine-guns and rifle bullets whizzed over constantly. I advanced with two platoons, while the third platoon took cover among the trees. As soon as we left these trees, we received a heavy fire. I saw our soldiers firing about 100 m^{eters} before me. We rushed about 50 m^{eters} beyond their lines. Then we opened fire. The advance stopped, as we had heavy casualties and as some French machine guns shot from the "la Verrerie Ferme" into our left flank. I therefore sent a runner to my third platoon with an order to take possession of this ~~ferme~~. After half an hour this disagreeable flank fire stopped. As I realized the following day, my third platoon took the ~~ferme~~ with only a few casualties. In the meanwhile we were in a fire fight. We saw only a little smoke from the French lines, coming out of the hedges and out of the grain sheaves. I myself was situated among my soldiers. The two platoons were mixed with soldiers of the 16th Infantry Regiment of different companies. *9/* Now arrived from the rear some companies of the 53d Infantry Regiment, so that my soldiers were mixed with companies of two other regiments. We all were lying in one line. The row of trees, now behind us, seemed to be the assembling point for all troops, ~~having~~ ^{who} crossed the swamp. So it happened that after a half of an hour all units were mixed. There was no leading, as we officers all were in the front line and could only see some meters to the right and to the left. We were

sufficiently experienced to know that all developments must ~~have~~ ^{take} their time and that the place of the commanders of companies and higher units is not the first line.

In the meantime there were engaged in battle ^{CAI} in a front of 700 m; ^{CAI} one battalion 16th Infantry Regiment and two battalions 53d Infantry Regiment, and all were mixed. We tried to advance constantly, but we won only some hundred meters. The support of our artillery was bad, as they had poor observation. About 1 o'clock PM the last battalion 53d Infantry Regiment advanced right of the road, but soon it was also stopped by the French artillery and rifle fire.

My men were firing very calmly but I could feel a certain nervousness among them, as we could not continue the advance. It was about 2:30 o'clock PM that I looked back and saw through a hole in the row of trees, the bridge. Suddenly a battery of light field howitzers rushed galloping out of the burning village of Joches, approaching the bridge. The French artillery fired like hell, but the battery passed the bridge, went in position 300 m ^{CAI} behind us and opened fire soon with good result. At the same time some companies of the 56th Infantry Regiment arrived at our lines, advancing forward, I had the feeling that this was the time for the decision. I shouted to my bugler, lying beside me: "Blow the call for the attack." He calmly stood up and blew the signal, well known to the soldiers, with all his force and the other buglers repeated this signal. There was a movement in our lines at once. We sprang up, fixed bayonets, shouted "Hurrah" and rushed forward. The French, however,

were brave men. Their fire became still heavier. But our critical period was over. Now we were attacking, we were filled with enthusiasm and we were not willing to stop the advance again. So the attack was successful. Some French escaped before we reached their lines, the rest were killed, fairly fighting, or taken prisoner.

Now we had won the top of hill 154 and saw down to the village of Broussy le Petit, which the French, running away, tried to reach. We all thought; we have won, the battle is over, we start now the pursuit, in order not to allow the French to stop their retreat. We did not stop, but rushed downhill, to capture the village of Broussy le Petit.

Suddenly we received ~~quite~~ terrible machine-gun fire, coming from the valley before us. At the same time the French artillery opened fire upon us with all their force. In a few minutes we had enormous casualties. We were stopped at once and forced to ^{lie} lay down. We tried to take cover, ~~but~~ there was no possibility of doing so, as we were situated on the hillside sloping down to the enemy. It was like a hail-storm. Our artillery was unable to help, as it had no observation into the valley before us. I remember that I soon was situated among

the killed ^{men around me} ~~They all~~ were of different companies of the 16th, 53d and 56th Infantry Regiments, nobody was of my own company. ^{At} ~~in~~ this critical ^{MOMENT} point, there whizzed from from the rear suddenly heavy shells of our own medium artillery and burst among us. That was too much. ^{At} ~~First~~ only a few soldiers, but soon more and more went back to

the other side of the hill in order to take cover. I sprang up to ~~hinder~~ ^{keep} ~~my~~ ^{the} men ~~in~~ ^{from} going back and I saw that some other officers and noncommissioned officers did like ^{well} ~~me~~.
It was a difficult moment,

le / The reason for these events is to be found in psychology. ~~The forced night march, the heavy struggle during all the morning, all the strong impressions.~~

"/ After the successful attack we thought, "the battle is over, we have only to pursue, our work has been done, and now *"/* this terrible fire, these heavy casualties. This all together was too much for the soldiers, still young in warfare. *It was a difficult hour.*

More and more soldiers went back, until suddenly 6 guns, horse-drawn, rushed forward over the ridge from behind us into our lines and opened a terrible fire upon the French, who were situated 400 m ^{from} before us. This gave us new courage. At the same time, fresh companies under the command of the adjutant of the brigade advanced. The calls for the attack were blown. That was the right moment. We sprang up and ran towards the enemy. After *- /* some short hand-to-hand fighting the French ran away across the swampy ground to the village of Broussy le Petit.

In the meantime it became dark so that we could not capture the village. We spent the night in the lines, we finally had reached, but we had only a ~~small~~ ^{short} rest. We arranged and assembled our units, the field kitchens brought warm meals and the wounded were brought back.

On September 9, about 4 o'clock ^{AM} - it was still dark - a message from my scouts arrived; that there were no French in the village of Broussy le Petit. I aroused my company at once, sent the message back to the battalion

commander and started forward to that village. And truly there was no enemy. I advanced up the hills beyond the village of Broussy le Petit, but even from the top of the hills, I could not see any enemy. I received there an order from my battalion commander to stop the advance and to wait for further orders. ~~It became necessary~~ ?

About 1 o'clock I received an order to go back behind the swamps. We could not understand this order, but we felt that we yesterday had won the battle and therefore, this order did not impress us ~~very much~~.

We went back, without receiving fire from the enemy, crossed the swamps and dug in beyond them. ^{ON} ~~IN~~ the following night we started the retreat. The battle of the Marne was over. *ANALYSIS*

Spice It is not my task to discuss the reasons, but before we start the consideration of these events, I would like to invite your attention to the situation of the German and the French, as shown on Sketch 6.

The casualties on September 8 had been very heavy. I lost 62 men of my company. You remember that I had 120 men, when we started the attack. So the casualties were more than 50%. You see in this struggle all the typical factors, which are to be seen in the first months of a war:

1. You remember that we received a very poor order for the attack. I wish to emphasize that this was the only order I received during all the day. But our leaders were well trained and long in service. What may be the reason for that poor order? All field exercises and war games in peace time were made with pretty good

information of the enemy. But here there was no information. Therefore the leaders did not know what to do, ^{and} ~~as~~ they probably thought that there was no strong enemy, because there was no information of him. The conclusion is: Make your exercises, your map problems and your map games in peace time with as little information of the enemy as possible. Then you will handle the problem in peace time as it will probably be in warfare.

2. You remember, that in the beginning of the attack after a short time all units were mixed. What was the reason? All units, having crossed the swamp near the village of Joches, hastened forward, without waiting for the other troops. The result was that the front became too narrow, ^{with resultant mixing of} ~~that the units were mixed~~. Therefore it happened, that one company after another, one battalion after another was engaged in battle and was stopped. The conclusion is: Prepare your attack well. The time which you need in doing so is not lost. That means ⁱⁿ our case: The several units ^{should have} ~~had to~~ cross the only bridge one after another and ~~to~~ take cover, until the advance could be made in mass and on a broad front.

3. You remember that all impressions were extremely strong for soldiers, still green in warfare, though our men were well trained and of a high morale. The reason may be, that they never had heard of the impressions ^{which they would have to undergo} in warfare. The conclusion is: Teach your men in peace time about the impressions in warfare, tell them that there will be very often critical periods. I know that it is very difficult to teach experiences of the war. The only way which I can see, is to study military history and to teach it to your soldiers.

4. You remember that, during September 8, twice a battery, commanded by officers, was the reason for the success, and there were always officers who gave the example for advancing. We learn that it is not necessary that all leaders are in the front line, as you cannot lead, when you can only see some meters to the right and to the left. ~~We~~ we may also learn that the troops are like their leaders. An officer has to give an example to his men, even in dying.

Let us sum up:

a. Make your decision, when it is time to do so, and do not wait for good information.

b. Be careful in using your reserves and save their forces for the hour of decision.

c. Prepare your fighting well. A modern attack needs plenty of time.

d. Prepare yourself and your soldiers in peace time for warfare by studying and teaching military history. Make your field exercises, your map problems and your war games with as poor information as possible. If the real war gives you better information, you will have a good time.

See rewritten page.