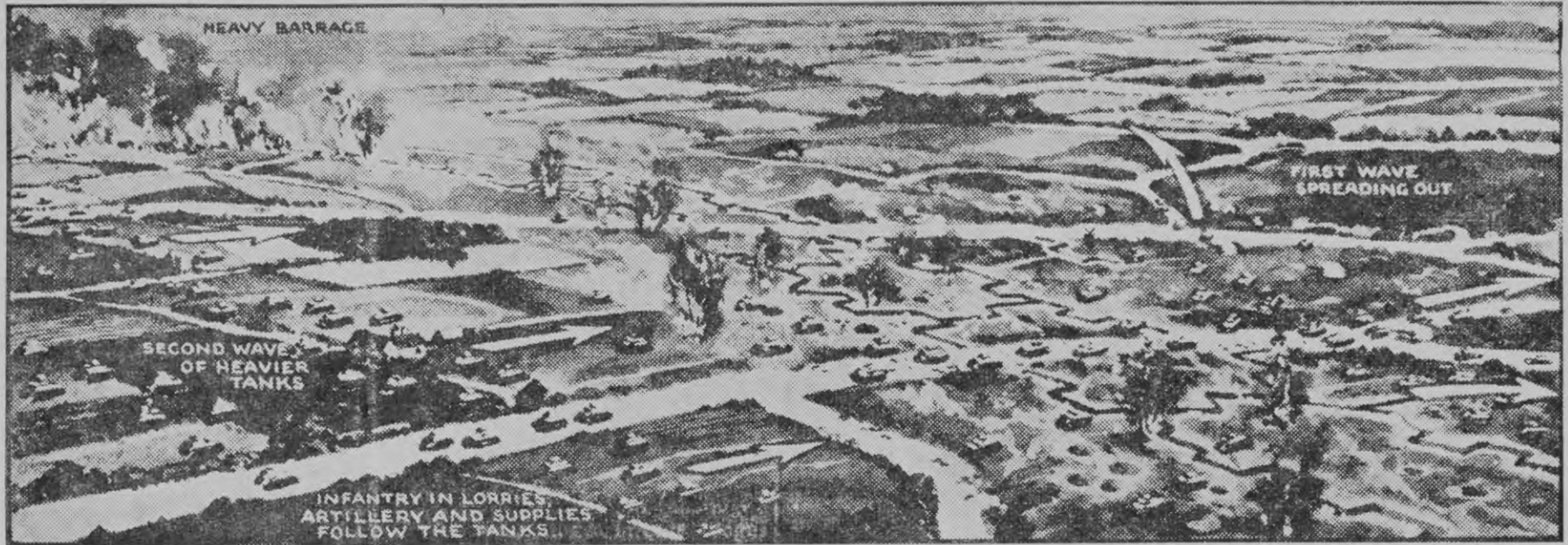


# DEFENCE IN DEPTH

HOME GUARD PROVIDES VITAL ANSWER TO NEW METHODS OF GERMAN ATTACK TRIED IN FRANCE



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This sketch shows that the fixed front line is no stronger than its weakest part where a mechanised army can break through. This modern tactic of infiltration caused the downfall of France. If there is no system of "defence in depth," there is nothing to stop a strong and well-organised attack breaking through successfully.

Tactics, that is the movement of any number of soldiers in the presence of the enemy, is of immediate concern to every volunteer in the Home Guard.

Strategy or generalship is quite a different matter and is the business of our leaders, for strategy is the science of combining and employing military resources in the operation of war.

The art of war is subject to rapid change, a fact that will have been impressed on all those who fought in the war of 1914-18, for the methods used in 1940 were certainly not recognized by the commanders of 1914.

The changes that have taken place in the last few hundred years are due solely to the improvement in weapons and increased facilities for transport.

There is no doubt that at all times in the past when troops were led into battle by their kings and commanders, that almost every engagement was won by those with superior tactical ability. This accounts for the Norman success at Hastings, and the English victories at Crecy and Agincourt, to name just three of the innumerable battles of the past.

Frederick the Great, however, was definitely the first general to realize that war was a science. In his days the rival armies would march and manoeuvre for a whole summer without one side being fortunate enough to obtain a position in the field that would give them superiority.

After months of marching the armies would go into winter quarters without having met. A point that should be remembered, however, is that Frederick and other commanders of his period were solely responsible for the movements of their armies. That is to say, in the year 1750 an army of perhaps 50,000 men had only one officer who was allowed to make tactical decisions.

Compare this with the end of the 1914-18 war where non-commissioned officers on both sides had the same power over the men in their charge. In the year 1941 even private soldiers are expected to act on their own initiative, which gives them, under certain conditions, exactly the same power.

The soldier of to-day is an intelligent man whose training fits him to fight the enemy, advance, retreat or stay put as he thinks best in the absence of a superior.

As every one knows, during the trench warfare of 1914-1917, neither side found it possible to advance with any large degree of success. Increased fire power had made the frontal at-

tack suicidal expensive in lives and money. A flank attack was absolutely impossible, as the opposing armies stretched from the Swiss Frontier to the sea.

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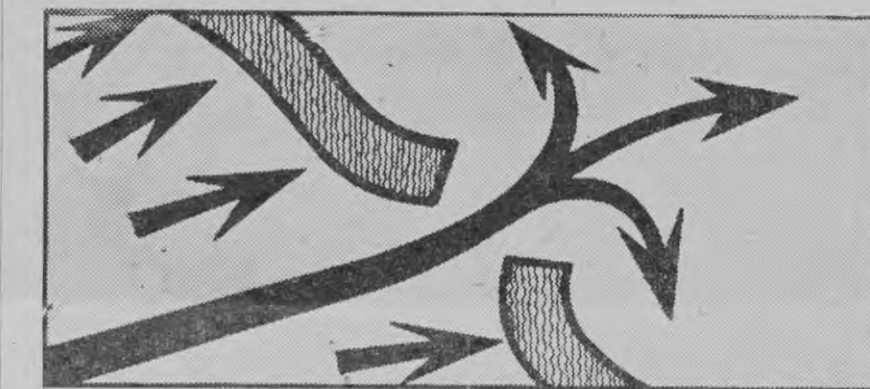


Diagram shows how a bulge in the line is widened and mechanized troops break through. Only defence in depth will hold the rapidly advancing troops.

For most of the time the German armies were on the defensive, and huge numbers of French and British troops were flung against them time and again in an attempt to drive them back. Incredible losses and small gains for a long time failed to convince our leaders that "it was magni-

ficient but it was not war." The end of the war of 1914-18 still seemed very far away when the Germans broke through in March, 1918, and almost won the war! They were able to do this because a new tactic had been discovered, not by a German but by a Frenchman!

This method was to attack the weakest parts of the defence, ignore entirely the stronger parts of the line and penetrate rapidly the weak, al-

most undefended rear. In fact, in was "infiltration." These new German doctrines were not unknown to the Allies, and early in 1918 the British Army adopted a system of "defence in depth," the only answer to infiltration.

Unfortunately, though many strong points and pillboxes were built behind the lines, no provision was made for counter-attack. After the break through, British soldiers in isolated groups fought and died where they stood, but the enemy found a way round.

It is known now that a retiring defence would have saved these brave men for the counter-attack that would have stopped the advance much sooner.

With these new theories in mind, the French and German Governments built the Maginot and Siegfried Lines. Strictly speaking, these were not lines but fortifications in depth, and if the Maginot Line had been built along the Belgian Frontier it is almost certain that the Germans would not have defeated the French Army.

In fact, it is likely that both frontiers would still be intact and that the war would have been confined to the air or have developed on other fronts. The undefended end of the line was cut by the German forces with their mechanized troops, who penetrated to the comparatively undefended back areas and swept on sometimes at the rate of forty miles a day.

The town of Abbeville was captured by a couple of dozen motor cyclists! A small, half-trained and partly equipped Home Guard section could have held this town until relieved by regular troops. A successful German Army following these small motorized detachments swept into France, ignoring the expensive fortifications,

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