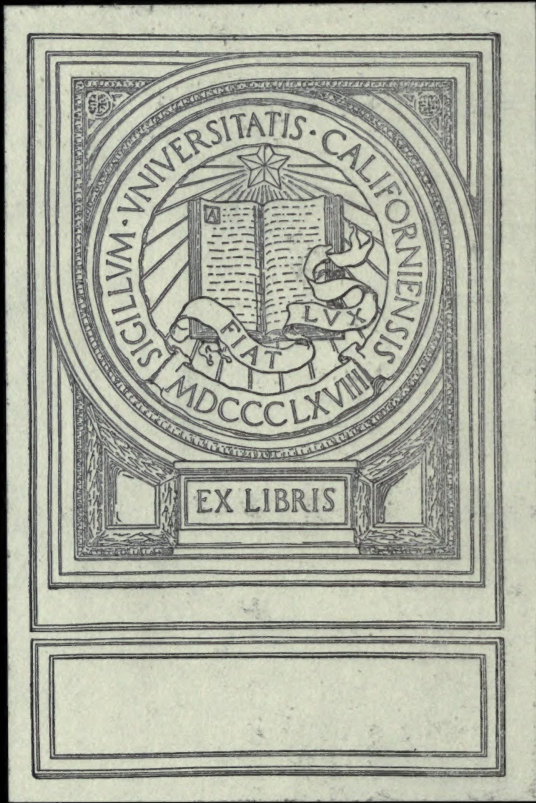




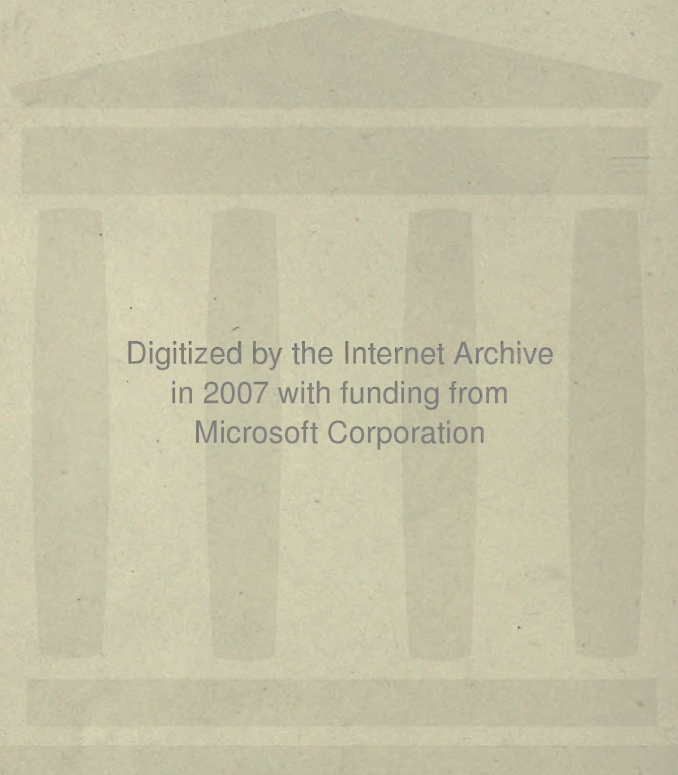
THE CONDUCT OF WAR

Lieut.-Gen. von der Goltz

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THE CONDUCT OF WAR

WAR does not belong either to the Arts or Sciences, but is rather a part of social life. It is a conflict between interests which can only be solved in blood, and is thereby distinguished from all other disputes.

It might better be compared with commerce, which is also a conflict between human interests, than with any art ; still better, with national policy, which in its way may be regarded as a kind of commerce on a great scale. For the national policy is the womb in which war is developed ; in it its main features may distinctly be traced, as the characteristics of living beings may be found in their germs.—CLAUSEWITZ, "On War," Book II., Chapter III.

THE CONDUCT OF WAR

*A SHORT TREATISE ON ITS MOST IMPORTANT
BRANCHES AND GUIDING RULES*

BY

COLMAR FREIHERR VON DER GOLTZ

*Lieutenant-General in the Prussian Army, Field-Marshal in the Ottoman
Army, and Aide-de-Camp to His Imperial Majesty The Sultan*

AUTHOR OF "THE NATION IN ARMS," ETC.

TRANSLATED BY

MAJOR G. F. LEVERSON, P.S.C., ROY. ENG.

FORMING THE FOURTH VOLUME

OF

The Wolseley Series

EDITED BY

CAPT. WALTER H. JAMES

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Gibraltar, April 19th, 1897.

DEAR CAPTAIN JAMES,

I HAVE read with interest the list you have sent me of the military works to be published as "The Wolseley Series."

The subjects are wisely chosen, and the authors will be generally accepted as soldiers who are competent to express valuable opinions upon them.

I am much flattered by having my name associated with an undertaking that is designed to improve the professional knowledge of our officers, and I rejoice to feel that under your able editorship its success is assured. In some instances I see you are not only editor but also translator, for which duty, if you will allow me to say so, your intimate knowledge of the German idiom eminently qualifies you.

I hope the officers of her Majesty's army may never degenerate into bookworms. There is happily at present no tendency in that direction, for I am glad to say that this generation is as fond of danger, adventure, and all manly out-of-door sports as its forefathers were. At the same time, all now recognize that the officer who has not studied war as an applied science, and who is ignorant of modern military history, is of little use beyond the rank of Captain. The principle of selection, pure and simple, is gradually being applied to the promotion of all officers, especially in the higher grades. As years go on this system will be more and more rigidly enforced.

It is gratifying to know that a large proportion of our young officers are ambitious, and without doubt there is now many a subaltern who hopes to be a Field-Marshal

or to be shot in the attempt. Experience enables me to warn all these determined men of how small their chance is of ever reaching any great position in the army unless they devote many of their spare hours every week to a close study of tactics and strategy as dealt with in the best books upon recent wars.

In this series of military works from the pens of first-class writers, the military student will find ample material to assist him in fitting himself for high command, and in the interest of the Empire and of the army I earnestly hope he will avail himself of it.

I know how truly this work is undertaken as a labour of love by you as editor and by all who are helping you. But I also know that you and they will feel amply repaid if it assists the young officer to learn the science of his profession and, in doing this, to improve the fighting value of the service, to the true interests of which we are one and all sincerely devoted.

Believe me to be,

Very truly yours,

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

THIS work of Lieut.-Gen. von der Goltz requires no introduction: he is already well known to the military public by his book entitled "The Nation in Arms." The following pages contain, in a brief form, his views as to the conduct of the principal strategical and tactical operations of war, and will be found to be a short and convenient introduction to a deeper study of the rules which should underlie the direction of the ever-varying incidents of modern fighting.

WALTER H. JAMES.

5, LEXHAM GARDENS.

January 1st, 1899.

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INTRODUCTION

THE circumstances under which military operations are conducted are so diverse that it is hardly ever possible to discover two precisely similar situations. Even if we did, the personal equations of those who are concerned in carrying them out must be taken into consideration; and the results would, therefore, never be mathematically identical.

It follows from this that, although there are certain rules of the conduct of war of unquestionable authority, their application can never, in practice, be relied upon, like that of mathematical formulæ, to produce constant results. It is all very well to say that all we have to do, in order to ensure success, is to apply these rules with judgment to the particular circumstances of each individual case. It is, however, in practice, no easy matter to do so.

A mere theoretical acquaintance, therefore, with the rules of the conduct of war is, for this reason,

likely to be of dubious advantage. Such theoretical knowledge may even conduce to fatal mistakes, unless due attention be paid to the innumerable postulates on which success depends. Book learning is apt to lead us into the error of over-estimating both the value of cast-iron rules of generalship and the extent of our own knowledge.

It is a remarkable fact, although quite capable of explanation, that the number of men who fancy their true vocation to be that of a great commander, and that the exercise of this calling is very simple, is particularly great in those armies in which the leaders have the fewest opportunities of testing themselves in a practical way.

In cases where it is possible to supplement theory by practice—that invaluable school—such illusions are soon dissipated through the experience of failure, difficulties, and misfortune. Then the barometer of self-conceit falls to a low level, as does the mercury before an approaching storm.

In some of the great military schools they have now quite given up making the higher theory of the conduct of war the subject of special instruction. Each individual student is left to work out the principles of the art from the study of military

history, from careful observation at extended field manœuvres, and from his own personal reflections.

However, the need for a précis of the conduct of war still exists. The young soldier who desires to fit himself for the position of a commander has not always the means of attaining the desired end by himself, in the way indicated. It is not everywhere that constant association with experienced brothers-in-arms exists, affording the possibility of an interchange of ideas, which, by extending over all the operations of war, imparts instruction without constraint or formality.

The novice, then, who wishes to learn the rules of his profession out of books, without other trusty guide, is confronted with the necessity of finding out what are the chief rules for the conduct of war which he must observe. These rules can be determined by a comparative study of older works, such as those of Bülow, Jomini, Clausewitz, Willisen, &c. Work of this kind, however, requires time, labour, and presupposes a certain amount of previous training in the student. The more recent treatises on the conduct of war on a large scale are principally taken up with the mobilization and strategical concentration of armies, a department of strategy which only

began to play an important part in modern times. It is the result of the construction of a dense network of railway lines in the West of Europe, which has rendered it possible to mass large bodies of troops in a surprisingly brief time. Each power tries to outdo its neighbours in this respect. Since this is an occasion when the transport of very great masses of troops has to be undertaken, the whole affair assumes the form of a military work of art which gives an opportunity to the strategical specialist to show off his brilliant qualities. Consequently it is now frequently supposed that the whole conduct of war is comprised in this one section of it.

In this connection, however, the fact is lost sight of that wars are also carried on in countries in which railways do not yet play so great a part as in Western Europe, regions in which the strategical concentration of armies has to be effected in a slower and simpler manner. At the same time the point is overlooked that, even in the West of Europe, the importance of railroads for the use of troops during an action is inconsiderable.

It is to this very subject, however, i.e. the action — of masses of troops *after* they have been deployed,

that we shall have to devote our principal attention, because it is nowadays so often treated in such a meagre fashion. This is, and always will be, the most important branch of the conduct of war. The preparation and maintenance of the troops form suitable subjects for special treatises, for which they offer a wide field. Here they will be touched upon to such an extent only as may be required for the elucidation of the general subject.

To avoid adding yet another to the many bulky volumes already in existence on the subject of strategy, I shall abstain from treating my subject at any length. This, I admit, leaves us little more than a table of contents for the study of the conduct of war; but it is in conformity with the object aimed at in the following pages, namely, to introduce the beginner, in an easy manner, to a more thorough study of the art. Further, it is only within such limits that the present book can be adapted to the purpose for which it is intended, of being a handbook with which the entire subject may be run over as completely as possible in the decidedly few hours which can be devoted to it during the year.

It is true that the reader is thus expected to

accept in good faith, in the first instance, many statements, the absolute truth of which may seem to him open to question. However, since my object is only to put him on the right line for his own independent investigations, there is no need to apprehend any disadvantage from this procedure. Subsequent independent research will help him to grasp further particulars, by which the value of the statements made by me is upheld, either altogether, or only in a modified sense.

To the advanced student this book will serve as an *aide-mémoire*. Clausewitz justly remarks that the whole difficulty consists in keeping true, in the embarrassing environment of war, to the principles which we have devised for ourselves. To accomplish this, it is above all necessary to remember these principles at the right moment; and this further requires that we recall them to our memory from time to time. To such an end, however, a short study of the conduct of war as a whole is better than a voluminous military-philosophical treatise.

Some subjects which used formerly to be comprised in works like the present, for instance, the system of intelligence, the publication and transmission of orders, &c., have been excluded from the

present work. My intention has been simply to collate the various ways of manipulating troops which can be made use of in war. All details are reserved for a subsequent work, which will embrace everything connected with the relations between a general and his army. This separation has the advantage that it avoids the apparent discrepancies between theory and practice. It is quite possible, for instance, in a general study of the conduct of war to strongly advocate the offensive, and yet, in the case of a special army and special circumstances, to choose the defensive as the only proper course. Were we to try to combine general statements with detailed procedure it would be necessary to add the exceptions immediately after every sentence. This would produce an impression of vagueness and uncertainty. It is, therefore, better to give the necessary hints for the application of the contents of the conduct of war in a separate work dealing specially with the leading of troops in the field.

Certain deviations from the above course have, however, been found to be unavoidable. Thus, the plan of operations, although belonging rather to the province of troop-leading in the field, has been treated here, because it is intimately connected with the

strategical concentration of armies, just as this itself is connected with the base, and the lines of operations and communications. The separation between the two above-mentioned provinces (general theory and special details) was hardly practicable in this instance.

THE CONDUCT OF WAR

CHAPTER I.

THE RELATION IN WHICH WAR STANDS TO SOCIETY.

THE governments of all civilized states keep up special ministries and permanent diplomatic missions to regulate their political relations with one another. A large proportion of the duties of such officials consists in the adjustment, by peaceful methods, of any differences which may arise.

But it will never be possible to entirely prevent the occurrence of cases in which each contending party thinks it cannot possibly give in to the other without dealing itself a deadly blow. Such cases have arisen in our generation, especially from the struggle of nationalities to form united and independent states, which could not be created without a violation of existing arrangements. Moreover, questions of power and influence, or national jealousy and

rivalry, may attain such significance that political wisdom and diplomatic skill vainly seek for a peaceful settlement. The violent solution by means of war then becomes inevitable.

War is thus an outgrowth of politics, but the means employed for gaining the desired end now take a different form. The idea of making war impossible by means of arbitration has not led to any practical result, because no power exists which could ensure absolute and universal obedience to the awards of arbitrators. The best safeguards for preserving peace are sound military organizations, for the strong is less easily attacked than the weak.

The evil which the collision of armed forces brings about, increases in proportion to their size and strength; the responsibility for deciding on war, therefore, becomes graver, and is, consequently, the more reluctantly incurred.

States which are weak from a military point of view, and which are surrounded by stronger neighbours, invite war, and if they neglect their military organizations from false motives, they court this danger by their own supineness.

The same applies to states with a weak government incapable of curbing the popular passions; for

the excited masses are more prone to clamour for war than Cabinets.

The best military organization is that which renders available all the intellectual and material resources of the country in the event of war. A state is not justified in trying to defend itself with only a portion of its strength, when the existence of the whole is at stake.

The forms of military organization depend very much on the internal condition of the country and on international jealousy. They vary as the social life of a nation changes. The form adopted in most of the military organizations of our days is that of the so-called "armies of *cadres*." A portion of the male population capable of bearing arms is kept embodied in permanent units, which serve both as a training school for the entire male population fit for war, and also as the mould into which the stream of trained men flows in time of war. Only a few states have gone on beyond this to a "militia" organization, in which there is a total absence of permanent "*cadres*," with the exception of insignificant establishments of instructional troops.

Such an organization may be justifiable when the natural position ensures against the possibility of an

attack by an army ready to fight, or where the small extent and scanty population of a state allows of this expedient being adopted in order to raise a mass of combatants, at all events numerically imposing. The voluntary system is now quite the exception and is dying out.¹

¹ The word in the text, "Werbe system," literally means a system by which men are obtained by bounties. This was the old Prussian plan ; it obtained in England up to recent times, but is no longer employed here or elsewhere.—ED.

CHAPTER II.

THE SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF WAR AT THE PRESENT TIME.

WAR nowadays generally appears in its natural form, i.e. as a bloody encounter of nations, in which each contending side seeks the complete defeat, or, if possible, the destruction of the enemy.

Success will no longer be achieved by simply attempting to strike terror into the enemy by manœuvres, by occupying threatening positions in such a manner as to make him submit to our will, or, as an eminent military writer at the beginning of this century put it, "to gain victory without fighting solely by dint of manœuvring."

The experience of the Napoleonic wars has taught us that such action ceases to have effect the moment one of the parties resolves on decisive action and to fight in earnest.

Just as we cannot think of armed conflicts without decisive engagements, so is it nowadays no

longer possible to imagine wars, in which states which have entered into a quarrel, do not go forth with their full strength, and do not contemplate the overthrow of the enemy; but merely engage a portion of their force to gain certain points in which alone their interest lies.¹

Such action can only be rationally conceived when the subject of the quarrel is a very trivial one. But in these days matters will not generally culminate in war for trivial causes. If, however, as an exceptional case, this ever should happen, owing to the perversity of the contending governments, then the inflamed national feeling of the people will at once interpose and not allow those in authority to make the fate of the whole

¹ Here we must exclude special exceptions, such as when a weak state has violated the rights of a stronger neighbour and out of blind rage or for other reasons has turned a deaf ear to his remonstrances, so that the latter is at last compelled to have recourse to the force of arms in order to enforce a settlement of the questions. Such wars partake rather of the character of military executions, and do not form the subject of our present review. In the same way we except colonial wars, which will in every case introduce quite peculiar conditions, depending on the nature of the country and of the enemy. We can exclude both these cases all the more for the reason that under such circumstances it is generally of little importance to adhere to the rules which obtain in the conduct of great wars.

war dependent on any misfortune sustained by a small portion of its fighting resources. Public opinion will insist upon their reinforcement; the enemy will do likewise, and thus, little by little, contrary to all original intentions, the whole strength of both the combatants will become engaged. Now that states and nationalities are in most cases almost identical, they resemble persons who would rather lose their lives than their honour.

From this it follows also that it is a misconception of the nature of modern war to imagine a system of warfare, which, while holding the whole fighting strength of a nation in readiness, would, however, make no open use of it for the decisive appeal to arms, but would resort to a system of manœuvres and isolated blows, dealt with portions of this strength. None but a thoroughly incompetent and inactive enemy would allow himself to be stopped by this. To wage war from a mere love of fighting, or from a passion for plunder and conquest, is now vetoed by advancing civilization, since the state of civilization of the nations has become such that it suffers by every war. The victor therefore strives to compel his enemy to accept the desired terms of peace as rapidly as possible. But as this is only

possible when one of the parties has lost all prospect of success, here again is an argument for the necessity of defeat or destruction.

So long as the principle of nationality remains the keystone of the political edifice, these conditions will not vary, and war will preserve its absolute form.

“Defeat,” however, and “destruction” must not be taken to mean actually killing off or putting entirely *hors de combat* all the enemy’s fighting men. The loss of a portion will, as a rule, suffice to make such an impression on the whole mass, that it will drop all hope of victory and give up the struggle. Thus moral effect adds its destroying force to the power of arms; in fact,—human nature being what it is—moral influences will ever outweigh material.

When, therefore, we speak of the “defeat” of the enemy, we mean that, by the annihilation of a portion of his fighting power, we make him despair altogether of any subsequent favourable turn in the hostilities;—and by “destruction” we imply that we reduce him to such a physical and moral state that he feels himself incapable of continuing the struggle.

CHAPTER III.

THE MAIN FEATURES OF THE MODERN CONDUCT OF WAR.

THE enemy, whom we must suppose to be actuated by motives similar to our own, will mass his troops into an army, so as to strike as decisive blows as possible with his combined force.

When, owing to the great numbers of the total land forces of a state, it becomes necessary to form them in different groups, because the united mass would be too unwieldy, several of these groups will, nevertheless, be employed for joint action. Thus a portion of the fighting force will always be considered as intended for the decisive combat, and this we may define as the enemy's "Main Army." This, at the same time, constitutes the enemy's power of resistance. It is evident that, if the main army is beaten first, then the remaining weaker groups will be still less able to count on victory. They will perhaps even cease to resist, so that we may possibly

bring the whole business to a successful conclusion with the one great success. Hence it follows that the primary objective, against which we must direct all our efforts, is *the enemy's main army*.

This, the first principle of the modern conduct of war, is unaffected by the fact that a series of minor operations sometimes precedes the great encounter. Frontier fortifications, which bar the roads, may perhaps hinder the simultaneous movement of large bodies of troops. Such fortifications must, therefore, be attacked and carried before the main operations begin. It is open to either of the contending sides to endeavour to disturb the concentration of its opponent's forces by the aid of bodies of troops, more especially cavalry masses, rapidly pushed forward, and some introductory combats may take place in consequence.

But no independent object, however, is gained by these isolated operations; they are immediately connected with the main operation, as well by the idea on which they are based as by their result. They belong to it, in the same way as lightning is associated with the approaching thunderstorm.

The surest way to conquer the enemy's main army is to concentrate a numerically superior fighting

mass, for no one can assume beforehand that he will have the better general at the head of his army, or that the latter will be braver than that of the enemy. Such factors for calculating on victory may certainly be taken into account when the tasks set us in the field are being practically carried out, and there they will often carry more weight than any others in enabling us to arrive at a decision. In the absence, however, of any marked superiority in one side over the other expert opinion will always suppose troops of equal quality on both sides. And then, next to the suitability of the measures adopted by the leaders, numbers are more decisive than anything else.

From this first principle of the modern art of war follows the second, which is, if possible to unite *all the available forces for the decisive moment*—a single battalion may turn the scale in a battle.

It would appear, according to the above rule, that every detachment from the main force is a blunder. Since the great successes would include the small ones, we might apparently neglect all minor dangers and even put up with a few defeats, so long as we preserve intact the fighting power of our main army. This, however, cannot be carried out to the full.

We shall rarely be in a position to exactly foretell the hour at which the great decision may be expected, and cannot put off all enterprises of secondary importance to an indefinite time. Moreover, there will always be some points which certainly lie outside the direct road to the main objective; but which could not be abandoned to the enemy without affecting our main fighting force, and hindering it in its action at the most important movement. We must therefore cover it by means of special detached parties. Detachments, then, are unavoidable, and the only point is to arrange them so that either it is possible to recall them for the battle or that they will indirectly contribute to its successful issue. The best way of carrying out the latter plan is for the detachments to hold stronger hostile forces in check at points remote from the battle-field. But those detachments which have no connection whatever with the decision of the main action are invariably faulty.

The collection of very large masses of men at one place naturally involves considerable discomfort to the troops. This discomfort may grow into a serious danger if unfortunate contingencies, such as epidemic diseases, follow in its wake. It becomes impossible

to quarter all the troops in inhabited places, and difficult to feed them.

The mobility, moreover, of troops is diminished if they are collected at one place instead of being separated in groups; for, in marching off from two or more places, a greater number of roads can, naturally, be made use of than when the start is made from one point only. The difficulty recurs during the march, at every halt for the night's rest, and again at every resumption of the march. It has, in addition, to be borne in mind that not more than 30,000 to 40,000 men can be allowed to move by the same road if we wish to bring the whole mass into action on the same day. The rear of the column would not otherwise arrive on the battle-field before nightfall. Thus this consideration also makes the sub-division of large masses of troops a *sine quâ non*, and the rule as to concentrating one's forces is not to be interpreted as meaning that they must constantly march and camp together, but merely that it must be possible to concentrate them at the decisive moment, or, at any rate, to bring them into action simultaneously.

The modern art of war, therefore, involves alternately separating and uniting bodies of troops.

It is the duty of the general to maintain as a rule the state of separation, as being the condition which makes things more pleasant for the troops, but at the same time to reserve the power of uniting them at the right time. "It is not possible to give any rules of universal application on this subject, as the problem is an ever-varying one."¹

To be able to concentrate all the available fighting forces on the day of the decisive action without their having long previously suffered from being closely crowded together, would represent the triumph of the art of separating and uniting.

Owing to the sensitive nature of the highly-developed commercial system of modern times, the mere continuance of a state of war exercises a disorganizing and ruinous influence on a nation which, under some circumstances, can exert an actual decisive effect.

It follows from the above that the "art of war"

¹ Field-Marshal Moltke says in the *Militärwochenblatt* of the 18th November, 1867.—Napoleon has given us a hint, worth taking to heart, for the solution of this problem:—The general should say to himself several times every day, that the enemy has appeared on the front, or on one or other of the flanks of his army, and he should then ask himself, what ought to be done. Should he feel in any doubt, then this would point to some fault in his disposition, which would have to be corrected at once.

of the present day brings in its train an uninterrupted flow of events. A cessation may occur as an exception, e.g. when one of the contending parties has repulsed the attack of the other, but is not at the time strong enough for a counter-attack. This happened in the last Russo-Turkish war after the second battle of Plevna, where the interruption lasted more than four months until the fall of the place. But in this case the relative conditions of strength were unnatural from the first. Turkey, too weak to set about the counter-stroke after successfully beating off the attacker, ought never to have committed itself to a real appeal to arms without certain help from allies. Thus, an initial mistake in deciding on war was the cause of the exception here; and it only proves the rule. It is a thing of the past to have those long pauses without any apparent urgent reason, such as were customary in older wars, and which were due to some disinclination to go on, from an absence of clear ideas as to what was to be done next, or from habit, such as that of resting through the winter. The expense of the upkeep of the armies put into the field in the present day is so great that governments have to insist on their generals keeping the troops at work uninterruptedly

in order that they may get rid of this crushing burden. The side which is in a position to support the strain of war the longest enjoys a great advantage. Theoretically, it is quite conceivable that a state may destroy the organized military power of another nation and overrun a great part of its territory, and yet not be able to bear for long the sacrifices which the occupation imposes on it, and in the end be compelled to grant a comparatively favourable peace to the defeated state. This is frequently lost sight of, and the destruction of the enemy's main army is taken as being synonymous with the complete attainment of the object of the war.

Countries of great expanse, like the Russian Empire, with a population closely united by the bond of a common nationality, whose inhabitants do not live too much crowded up and whose conditions of life are still simple, are little dependent on the undisturbed maintenance of international trade, and naturally suffer far less from the continuance of a state of war than highly civilized states with contracted frontiers and dense populations, composed of different nationalities. This weakness is frequently still further intensified by the fact that such states are not able to feed their population on the products

of their own country, but are compelled to draw supplies from abroad, such supplies being liable to be interrupted or entirely cut off by war.

Social and political conditions also play an important part in this connection. If it be only a rural population, living scattered over the country, which is affected by the war, the government has an almost perfectly free hand for its decisions, as the people are not in a position, as a rule, to give authoritative expression to their ardent desire for peace. It is different where there is a commercial citizen class, settled in large towns, which stands to lose everything by the disturbance of the usual order of things. After a few defeats such classes will be the first to be in favour of peace; while at the same time they, as a rule, possess the means of procuring attention to their wishes through their control of the press, and other means of influence. It is only when the two opposing states are somewhat similar in national characteristics that the ultimate object, namely, the enforcement of the desired peace, can at once be attained by the defeat of the enemy's main army. A most striking example of this was afforded during the Campaign between Prussia and Austria, in 1866, when the battle of Königgrätz decided

the war. But, even under such conditions, things may turn out differently, as actually did happen in the Franco-German War of 1870-71. After the almost complete destruction of the organized French fighting power, during the first three months of the war, three more months were still required to make the French nation recognize the necessity for making peace.

When, on the other hand, the inner nature of the belligerent states is different, the defeat of the enemy's fighting forces and the enforcement of peace will but seldom coincide.

Napoleon failed in 1812, not because he was unable to beat the Russian armies, but because, as a matter of fact, the defeat of these armies and even the loss of the capital, Moscow, did not compel Russia, with its enormous extent of territory, and stubborn population so hard to affect, to make peace. In the Great American War the Secessionists were victorious almost up to the end, and yet they succumbed at last, because they had at no time been in a position to bring such pressure to bear on the country and people of the Union as to compel them to submit to peace.

Thus, after breaking up the enemy's main army,

we have in many cases to be further prepared for the special and, under certain circumstances, more difficult task of enforcing peace. Indeed, the possibility of having to perform this further task must be reckoned with at the time when war is decided upon.

It is, above all things, necessary to satisfy ourselves as to whether our own military power is sufficient, after victory on the battle-field, to cause the enemy's country to feel the burden of war severely enough to desire a return to peace. In this respect Napoleon failed. The organization of his fighting forces was not complete enough to allow of his great army, which had gone forward to defeat and destroy the Russian armies, being followed up by fresh bodies of troops, which, occupying the enemy's territory, in sufficient strength, would have rendered its reconquest impossible. If the Emperor had been able to do this, he would have secured the peace he wished for. 75

The means to be employed in order to exert the pressure necessary to create a strong desire for peace on the part of the enemy, will depend on the nature of the country and people. To capture, or perhaps, as in the last Russo-Turkish War, and

also in that of 1828 and 1829, merely to threaten the capital may be enough. But it may also become necessary to seize the harbours, arsenals, important trade routes, fortresses, and factories for supplying warlike stores, that is to say, all important possessions essential to the people and army for their existence, in fact, to seize a considerable portion or the whole of the enemy's territory. Sometimes, when there are difficulties about the food supply of the population, it may suffice to shut the country off from the outer world, as the Union did the Southern States with great success in the American War.

As the first object of the victor is to obtain peace, a new character is imparted to the art of war. More attention than ever has now to be paid to arrangements for keeping up the strength of our own forces. From the moment of victory onwards it is more a question of the duration than of the intensity of the struggle. The Franco-German War shows us clearly the separate nature of the two periods. It began with an energetic advance of the assailant from one decisive battle to another up to the complete reduction of the enemy, and then closed with a defence of the country occupied against the efforts at reconquest

made by those hitherto vanquished. Peace was looked for, not as the result of further victories in the open field, but of the capture of the capital, which was meanwhile besieged.

If we now sum up the distinctive characteristics of the modern method of conducting war, we shall find them to be as follows :—

(1) Calling up the military resources of the country to such an extent that, victory being gained, we may proceed to enforce a favourable peace with the least possible delay.

(2) Placing all our forces in readiness at the very commencement of the war.

(3) A ceaseless and untiring prosecution of the campaign until the organized resistance of the enemy is broken in decisive battles ; after which, until the conclusion of peace, a less strenuous action and one more sparing of the “instrument of war.”¹

It is in the nature of things, that, in this latter period of the campaign, politics, which gave birth to the war, should once more occupy a prominent position, and finally, at the conclusion of the treaty of peace, take the foremost place.

¹ i.e. the army.—ED.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TWO CHIEF METHODS OF CONDUCTING WAR.

IT is usual to classify the main forms of conducting war under the two heads of attack and defence, and of two combatants to designate that one, the assailant, who decides to advance, to seek out his opponent—defeat him—and force him to capitulate, whereas the object of the defender is to ward off the operations directed against him.

A general, however, who aims at nothing more than to ward off such assaults, merely averts his own defeat; this result, if attained, is a negative one, and merely frustrates the intentions of the opponent. The defence is, therefore, strictly speaking, not a complete form of the art of war with which we can reach the object of the war, namely, the overthrow of the enemy. Consequently all adherents of the defensive advocate the counter-attack to finish up with. They all admit that it must after all be abandoned at the last moment if any advantage is to be gained. Thus the defence figures chiefly as an episode in the relations between

the belligerents, and it will only be quite as an exception that it will be adhered to from the beginning to the end of the struggle. It will only be adopted by a general who is conscious of weakness and is satisfied if he is able to avoid the ruin planned for him.

It is therefore by no means necessary always to suppose a defender opposed to an assailant. On the contrary, when they are approximately equal and are both conscious of strength, the combatants will advance simultaneously to the attack. There will, therefore, in such a case be two assailants, until one of them finds his strength shaken, and his hopes so crushed by the result of the first encounters, that he begins to confine himself to a defensive attitude. It will frequently happen that the possession of greater ability to place everything in readiness, or the unexpected appearance of an enemy superior in numbers, will compel one side to become the defender. This was the case with the French in 1870. However, owing to the care with which we nowadays commonly calculate the military resources of probable opponents, and the time within which such military resources can be rendered available, such surprises will be of rare occurrence.

The assailant may, it is true, as a temporary

measure, resort to a defensive attitude when he is preparing for some increased effort, or when he wishes to economize his forces at one place so as to be proportionately stronger at another.

All this shows that the defensive holds a lower position than the offensive, and that virtually it is not an independent form of the conduct of war. It is, however, convenient to accept existing classification, and to let attack and defence be considered on an equal footing as main forms of the art of war. The general position of a belligerent is denoted by either of these expressions, and we can at once form a clearer idea of his prospects and of the conditions under which he is acting, than if we simply define him as a "belligerent."

It must be borne in mind, however, that by "assailant" is meant that side whose action is by choice an attacking one, and by "defender," that side whose action is principally directed to warding off the enemy's attacks. It must not be imagined that the one does nothing but attack, or that the action of the other is invariably limited to warding off assaults.

The whole field of the study of the operations of war

is further divided into *Strategy* and *Tactics*. The former deals, speaking generally, with the broad measures which have for their object to enable the troops to enter on the decisive struggle under the most favourable conditions. Tactics, on the other hand, include all dispositions for the decisive struggle itself. Strategy is also called "the art of manœuvring armies," and tactics "the art of leading troops in action."

Numerous illustrations have been given of both ideas; none of them, however, are definite enough, because the line of demarcation between strategy and tactics cannot be absolutely fixed. Clausewitz defines tactics as the study of the employment of military forces in the combat, and strategy as the study of the employment of combats for the purposes of the war.¹ This agrees pretty nearly with what has been stated above, and will enable us to form a generally true idea of both divisions of the operations of war.

This distinction between strategy and tactics is also convenient as denoting in one word what kind of military operation is meant; it facilitates a general survey of the conduct of war, and it is advisable to adhere to it, although strategy and tactics frequently

¹ Clausewitz.—"On War," i. p. 89 (4th edition).

merge into one another. We speak therefore of the strategical attack and the tactical attack, of strategical and tactical defence, and these expressions again give rise to various comparisons which require consideration.

Thus, in the first place, strategical and tactical attack may be synonymous terms. This is due to the fact that an army which advances offensively on the disputed theatre of war¹ will, if it finds the enemy before it, in some cases, go on to the attack on the battle-field. And yet, on the other hand, we may cause tactical defence to follow strategical attack, by leaving it to the enemy, after we have advanced up to him, to become the assailant on the actual battle-field.

In such a case the enemy would be considered as being in a position, strategically defensive, and tactically offensive. He would allow our movements to

¹ It is, however, to be noted that any army which advances for a few marches is not on that account alone to be considered as "offensive." The object of the movement may be quite a negative one; it may be, for instance, that the defender, who has decided to await the enemy's onset, merely wishes not to do so on unfavourable ground, and seeks a better position, or that he dare not take up his position in too close proximity to some object which he is anxious to protect both strategically and tactically. The general situation will at all times decide which term is applicable.

go on, and would wait for us, and set about an offensive stroke as soon as we stood in front of him.

When the strategical and tactical defensive are combined, we adopt a thoroughly passive attitude ; for we await not only the movements of the enemy's army, but also the attack on the battle-field, and are satisfied with inflicting a repulse on him.

In his "Higher Theory of War," Willisen has arranged, in tabular form, the various results possible in practice, from which may be gathered what is to be expected from the several combinations of strategical and tactical offensive and defensive, in the case of a battle which is gained or lost :—

Situation	A Strategical Defensive combined with Tactical Defensive.	B Strategical Defensive combined with Tactical Offensive.	C Strategical Offensive combined with Tactical Defensive.	D Strategical Offensive combined with Tactical Offensive.
Victory.	No decisive result.	Victory on the battle-field, but no effect on the campaign or war as a whole.	Favourable general situation. Victory, however, fruitless, because the enemy's fighting power remains unimpaired.	Annihilation of the enemy. Conquest of his country.
Defeat.	Annihilation, and loss of one's own country.	Retreat for the purpose of resuming the tactical offensive.	Disaster averted by our favourable strategical position.	Temporary abandonment of the project in hand.

Such mathematical forecasts are treacherous in the province of the study of war ; they are apt to produce false expectations and a deceptive confidence. War abounds in thousands of uncertainties and

accidental circumstances which exert determining influences on the results, and increase or decrease their importance in such a way that even the most careful previous calculation is upset. In war all is doubt and uncertainty.

When Frederick the Great marched to the battle of Kolin to cover the siege of Prague, he was in a state of strategical defence, but assumed the tactical offensive on the battle-field. In this case, had he lost the battle, he ought, according to Willisen, only to have expected a "retreat for the purpose of assuming the tactical offensive." But the losses in men, and the disorganization, especially of his infantry, were so great on the field of battle, that he was committed to a strategical retreat, and the entire situation underwent a complete change.

Willisen's table, however, makes it clear that the highest results—the destruction of the enemy, and the conquest of his country—can only be attained by the combination of the strategical and tactical offensive, whereas the result, brought about by the strategical and tactical defence, even in the most favourable case, is wholly indecisive.

Text-books which discuss the advantages and disadvantages of attack and defence, frequently produce

the erroneous impression that a general has a free hand as to which he will select. This, however, will practically never be the case; on the contrary, his action will always be regulated by higher considerations, which dictate the course to be followed by him.

It must not be forgotten that war is an offshoot from and a continuation of politics, and, therefore, that it is the political situation in the first instance which influences the assumption of the strategical offensive or defensive. The political situation is again, in its turn, affected by the stage of development of the national life.

We see this very clearly in ancient times in the case of the Persians and Greeks, in whose wars a most complete change appeared in the strategical attitude simultaneously with a historical change. A people which, in its historical course of development, has reached a state of rest, or is even beginning to decline, will not be politically offensive, and will therefore only go to war by compulsion. The natural consequence of this is that, as a general rule, it will wait for the attack, i.e. will confine itself to a strategical defensive, followed by a similar tactical attitude.

On the other hand, energetic aspiring nations and states have no lack of positive objects, in the pursuit of which they will take the political offensive ; it may be to acquire frontier provinces in dispute, or for the sake of uniting with those of their own race who have remained under foreign rule ; or it may be to enforce the opening of outlets for trade and commerce which are barred by a neighbouring state. Such objects, however, can only be effected by means of strategical attack ; for the enemy will not afford us the opportunities if we remain passive. The aggressor, in a strategical sense, will also, in nine cases out of ten, adopt the tactical offensive ; for if he pulls up the moment he comes upon his enemy, his blows will be wanting in vigour.

Exceptional cases are, of course, conceivable. The strategical attack may lead an army on to points, the occupation of which robs the enemy of the necessaries of life, so that he is forced to attack, and a temporary reversal of rôles takes place, in which tactical defensive succeeds strategical offensive and *vice versâ*. But such cases are rare.

A combination of the strategical defensive with tactical offensive is still more difficult to imagine ; for no one is ever strategically defensive from pure

good nature, but always from a sense of weakness or on account of the incompetence of his armies. Such conditions, however, are not favourable for the sudden assumption of the tactical offensive.¹

We are, however, seeking, not the exceptions, but the rule, which is: that the tactical usually follows the strategical attack, and that, similarly, strategical and tactical defence go together.

Military organization also plays an important part in this connection. The side which first succeeds in placing his military forces in readiness will generally want to use this advantage for a rapid advance. The general, however, who recognizes that he must complete his strategical concentration later than the enemy, will be compelled, in the first instance at any rate, to prepare himself for resistance, and will not be able to think of an advance.

Each of the belligerent parties will therefore determine and have to accept its *rôle* in this respect as something fixed by circumstances. This shows

¹ Nevertheless, in the case of Great Britain this would be the part our armies would play if the country were threatened with invasion. Strategically, we should be acting on the defensive, while tactically we should seek to crush the enemy as he landed.—Ed.

how superfluous it is to argue which of the two forms of the art of war is the more advantageous. It is more practically useful to examine the characteristics of both.

CHAPTER V.

THE OFFENSIVE.¹

1. *The Strategical Offensive.*

THE strategical offensive originates, as we have already seen, in the political aspiration after some positive object, from the consciousness of power to attain this object, and from a sense of decided superiority over the enemy.

The natural instinct of a General will be to make

¹ We retain the expression "offensive" although strictly speaking it is a foreign word, to which usage has lent a more extended meaning than it originally possessed; for in "offensive" is embraced not only a single act of attack, but the collective action terminating in the destruction of the enemy's fighting power, whilst the term "defensive" similarly signifies the acts of displaying the power of resistance in general, not merely a single act of defence. In French the separation of the two ideas is easier by means of the different expressions: *offensive* and *défensive* for the action taken in a collective sense, and *attaque* and *défense* for the single act.

[N.B.—This note applies to the original more than to the translation. At one time many technical military terms used in Germany were French; but of late years a purer German has been employed. Thus "Beitreibungen" is used instead of "Requisitionen," &c.—ED.]

full use of such favourable conditions, before time perhaps effects a change in them.

Rapidity of movement and surprise are thus the life and soul of the strategical offensive.

We already know its first objective, the enemy's main army. Our first step will be to invade the theatre of war occupied by this army, seek it out, and to force it to a battle under the most favourable conditions possible.

He who leads off with a feeling that a forward movement is the necessary and natural thing, has far more to stir him on to mental activity, bold decisions, and prompt action, than he who waits. The assailant will, consequently, generally be the more active of the two sides.

Even at peace manœuvres we can see the influence of the offensive on the bearing of the leaders and the behaviour of the troops.¹ There is no doubt that its assumption fortifies the mind; and that this is an advantage not by any means to be lightly estimated.²

¹ This further explains why, when the umpire is not very skilful and careful, he almost invariably decides in favour of the assailant at peace manœuvres.

² We frequently hear it asserted that psychological considerations should be excluded from the study of the art of war, because mental powers and emotions can neither be gauged nor computed. However, they are of such extreme importance that it

The assailant's object is to seek out and beat the enemy. To have a clear object in view assists the judgment, renders it easier to make proper dispositions, and prevents one committing many faults and blunders, because we are well aware of our objective, and can only go wrong in the choice of the way to it.

The mobility which is a characteristic of a properly conducted strategical offensive, facilitates the concentration of the advancing masses of troops. Every march in a forward direction can at the same time be utilized to bring them nearer to one another. This is rendered easier by the fact that the common objective is obvious to all the subordinate leaders. Their combined action assumes a simpler form than in the expectant defensive, where all is uncertain until the enemy appears in front of the position.

The more importance attaches to this facilitation of combined action by reason of the very nature of the offensive, in that the aim and object of all strategy is to come up at the right place in the greatest strength possible.

would be a great mistake not to mention them. The knowledge of human nature is probably the most difficult, but at the same time the most important part of the general knowledge of war, which a Commander has to master in order to fit himself for his high calling.

Further, the offensive has generally gained its object when it is successful at one point; for the positions held by the defender will, as a rule, form an organic whole, which loses its internal support and cohesion the moment it is disorganized in one section.

This brings under our notice the fact that as a rule the assailant has the power of effecting a surprise, inasmuch as he selects the point for the decisive stroke. Even granting that the defender, by carefully weighing all the circumstances, may frequently foretell what point will be attacked, yet very rarely will this be done without some mistakes as to the details. The assailant thus has a certain natural right to hope he will find the defender unprepared at the decisive point. Even if the duration of wider strategical operations allows the defender to repair to some extent the errors which he has made, yet greater distances will in this case have to be dealt with, and the errors will be but imperfectly corrected. Mistakes in the original concentration of his military forces will be hard to rectify in the case of the defender, for it is not possible to move bodies of troops like chess-men.

It is an important fact that the strategical offensive is always leading the army into fresh country. In

times of stress mere change is a benefit. Change of locality when we are acting on the offensive usually has a morally and materially refreshing effect on the troops. This apparently trivial circumstance may become a very important element for the resuscitation of a dispirited army. We have but to imagine the effect on the *moral* of such an army, which has stood for a long time before a hostile fortress, when it marches off again to resume active operations in the open field. This happened to the Germans when they were set free from before Metz.

Thus far we have only spoken of the advantages of the strategical offensive. But it must not be forgotten that it tries the troops severely. By its very nature, by its forced marches, &c., the strategical offensive consumes the troops even more than the attacks to which it leads. More men are lost on the march in war than in the combat.

Since the strategical offensive has to be sustained in continually progressive action, if possible without interruption, right up to the attainment of the objective, it does not leave any intervals of rest for recuperation of strength, for bringing up stragglers, or for collecting reinforcements. In spite of its admirable discipline the Prussian Guard Corps lost

5000 to 6000 men in the marches between the attack on St. Privat and the battle of Sedan.¹

The inhabitants of the country, through which the assailant marches, must, as a rule, be considered to be hostile. Precautions must therefore be taken, and the advancing army must drop detachments, which will not be able to co-operate in the subsequent engagements.²

Special protection is, in addition, required for the lines of communications of the army, by which all the necessaries of life are brought up to it.

At the same time the army is constantly moving away from home and its main sources of supply. Even if this circumstance loses much of its importance in civilized countries, owing to modern means of communication, such as railways, still it exercises a far from inconsiderable effect in weakening the power of the offensive; for, in the first place, in a hostile country we cannot reckon even on railways which we may have made available for ourselves, in

¹ Hohenlohe.—“*Letters on Strategy*,” vol. i. p. 64. English edition.

² It is quite possible to imagine a case, in a hostile country—when the inhabitants are of an allied race—in which the attacker will be assisted by them. Such a condition is, however, an exceptional and merely accidental one, which, as a rule, does not affect the nature of the attack.

the same manner as we can on our own; and, secondly, it is impracticable to call in all the detachments left in rear of an attacking army, whereas a retreating army re-absorbs them in falling back.

Sieges and the investments of fortresses, which have to be watched, reduce the strength of an invading army. Again, it is but human nature that we do not put forth such strenuous efforts when fortune is favourable, and when the urgency of exertion is not so clearly brought home to us as when we are confronted by dangers and difficulties.

Finally, the progress of an invader may provoke the jealousy or apprehension of other Powers, and thus bring about a political situation unfavourable to the assailant. Commencing as a weakening factor, such feelings may even develop into armed intervention.¹ The assailant is, besides, often in danger of losing allies, who are willing to assist him up to a certain point, but have no wish to see him grow strong at their expense.

It is characteristic of the strategical offensive that the foremost body of troops of an army, the portion

¹ The attitude of Austria in the Crimean War, and that of England in the last Russo-Turkish War, are instances of how effective the intervention of a third Power, even without armed interference, may become.

which fights the battles, amounts to only a comparatively small fraction, frequently only a quarter, or even one-eighth, of the total fighting strength employed, whilst the fate of the whole army depends throughout on the success or failure of this fraction. Attacking armies melt away like snow in the spring.

Napoleon crossed the Niemen in 1812 with 442,000 men, but reached Moscow barely three months later with only 95,000. The destruction of this force, though it was only the fifth part of his fighting strength during the retreat, decided the fate of the whole campaign, and was the turning point in his career. Still more striking is the example of the campaign of 1810 in Spain. In the spring of that year 400,000 French crossed the Pyrenees; they continued in an uninterrupted advance and gained a number of successes, but still Marshal Masséna in the end only brought 45,000 men up to the lines of Torres Vedras, near Lisbon, where the decision lay. This force was too weak to deliver the last deciding stroke and to attain the immediate objective. The result, as a matter of course, was a fatal retreat, which put an end to the successes of the French in the Iberian Peninsula.

Again, Field-Marshal Diebitsch had barely 20,000

men left at Adrianople out of the 160,000 which Russia had put into the field for the decision of the campaign in the Balkan Peninsula in the spring of 1829. If he had had to continue his march he would, according to Moltke's calculations, have arrived before Constantinople with, at the outside, 10,000 men. A skilfully concluded peace saved him before his weakness became apparent or a reaction set in.

The case was similar in 1878, when the Russians, out of the great army of 460,000 men which they had led across the Danube, brought barely 100,000 up to the gates of Constantinople. In this figure are included the sick, whose numbers are said to have reached one-half of the total.¹ Even the Germans, in whose case the proportion works out unusually favourably, brought only 171,000 men to Paris, after a six weeks' campaign, out of the 372,000 with whom they crossed the frontier in 1870, and yet a defeat of this portion of their force would infallibly have given a new turn to the whole campaign.

We are therefore right in describing the ever-diminishing power of the strategical offensive as an

¹ The actual fighting strength of the Russians before Constantinople was about 43,000 men.—ED.

unavoidable drawback, which has to be taken into account, and which invariably becomes more pronounced the longer the line becomes over which the attack advances. The existence of this drawback requires that measures should be adopted in the way of organization and strategy to continually reinforce the fighting head of the army with reserves. As Clausewitz says, the main roads in rear of an advancing army should never be allowed to become empty.

The best assurance for the strategical offensive being properly carried out lies in a true appreciation on the part of the General of these truths. The boldest and best plan will lead to ultimate failure, if the available resources do not hold out until we have successfully gained the final objective, the attainment of which ensures peace. This is most clearly shown in the case of great commanders like Hannibal, Charles XII. and Napoleon I., who all failed in this one point and came to grief over it. These great Generals resemble smart speculators, whose means do not quite suffice to carry their speculations right through, and who, through some final piece of bad luck, often in itself trivial, see all their brilliant winnings suddenly swept away.

If we trace the course of the strategical offensive, we shall in each case find, in contrast to the defensive, that there is a culminating point, at which the original superiority of the offensive is, by natural weakening processes, brought to such a condition that, although the progress of the attack has hitherto been sufficient for victory, it does not guarantee success in the future. An able General will at once recognize when this culminating point has been attained, and will either conclude peace, as Diebitsch did, or assume a defensive *rôle*, holding all that has been previously gained, until the enemy submits to peace. Should the culminating point be reached too soon, i.e. before the desired peace is assured, a reaction will ensue, generally more disastrous than to be defeated while standing on the defensive.

But the offensive requires not only sufficient troops and a constant inflow of reinforcements, but also special qualities in the army.

Since movement is the very soul of the strategical offensive, the troops must possess a high degree of mobility, and this can only be relied upon if their training has been thorough. The various units may frequently have to operate independently; a sufficient number of trained and experienced leaders must,

therefore, be available. The disorganizing influences which assert themselves in the course of the offensive, can be resisted only by highly-trained and disciplined troops who have become habituated, by a sufficiently long peace service, to orderly movements.

With young and comparatively untrained soldiers, a strategical offensive can be successfully carried out only in the event of the enemy being of even inferior quality. Militia are quite unfit for it, and even the mere forward movement will frequently disorganize them. The possession therefore of numerous and good troops is an essential condition for assuming the strategical offensive.

2. *The Tactical Offensive.*

The tactical offensive differs from the strategical in so far that considerations relative to the number and quality of the troops here have to be viewed in a different light. The importance of good qualities is even more definitely pronounced here, inasmuch as in the tactical offensive there are tasks, such as the capture of trenches, defiles, bridges, fortified positions, &c., which cannot be carried out at all with troops of moderate or inferior quality.

A single good battalion, which is not dismayed by

the effect of the enemy's fire, may be sufficient to storm a small bridge defended by the enemy, when ten bad ones would stand helplessly before it, or would make ten feeble attacks one after the other without result. The battles on the Lisaine afford illustrations of this. General v. Werder's extended line of battle would probably have been broken through by 40,000 good troops, whereas 120,000 indifferent ones were unable to do so.¹

As a rule the tactical offensive also requires a numerical superiority. Although this superiority may not always be absolutely necessary as regards the total strength present on the battle-field, yet it must exist at that point where decisive results are sought.

¹ It is not intended by the above to blame General v. Werder's dispositions. They were, on the contrary, thoroughly suited to the existing conditions, although not in accordance with the rules applicable to ordinary cases, for to place 43,000 men along a line nineteen miles in length is to extend the line unduly. But General v. Werder knew his enemies very well, and was aware that, if he deprived them of the opportunity of making enveloping manœuvres, they would not be able to derive any advantage from their great numerical superiority. As a comparatively weak resistance at each separate point was sufficient to hold the incompetent enemy in check, this action was completely justified. Prince Frederick Charles acted similarly against the French army of the Loire before the battle of Orleans. Both examples show how very necessary it is to take the nature of the enemy into account when practically applying the rules of the art of war.

Here, as in the case of the strategical offensive, it has to be remembered that the act of assembling the forces naturally facilitates concentration on the point selected for decisive action.

The tactical offensive forces leaders to use their brains and to act on their own initiative. It awakens their powers of resource by presenting varying opportunities, and excites ambition and keenness. It helps the rank and file to overcome the fear of danger, and strengthens them with a sense of superiority, for all know that it is only because a superiority exists that the General has decided on the attack.

The tactical offensive makes the common objective even more evident than does the strategical offensive. In the latter it is inferred from the dispositions adopted, here it is actually seen. This circumstance lessens the danger of individual units of the force going astray in the fight.

The element of surprise favours the tactical even more than the strategical offensive, because the tactical offensive leaves the enemy less time to remedy mistakes due to his want of foresight. The special power of attacking from several sides, of enveloping on one or both wings, and of making a

simultaneous advance against a flank and the line of retreat of the defender can here also be utilized.

Further, the concentration of fire attainable by our own movement, and by the visibility of the objective, is not to be underrated. The great range of modern firearms, especially of artillery, makes it possible for troops which in no way belong to the units actually attacking, to contribute all the same to the decision by means of their fire.

And finally, the tactical offensive has the advantage that it can select the point for decisive assault, and that, even more than in the strategical offensive, victory is assured if a decisive advantage is gained at this one point. In the tactical dispositions of the defender, even more than in the case of his strategical measures, his position constitutes a whole, the stability of which receives a shock if one part is disorganized or thrown out of gear. The overthrow of a wing or the forcing of a flank by the enemy generally decides the fate of the battle. We even see the defender give way after getting the worst of it along only a fourth part of his line of defence, whilst the attacker, after having been driven back along three-fourths of his front, still gains the day because he has been victorious on the remaining

fourth. This was the case at St. Privat and Gravelotte on the 18th August, 1870. The obvious way to the point of assault on the enemy's line is visible to all the forces of the attacker, and their concentration and co-operation is brought about in a practical manner by the course of events. The moral effect of success increases the natural weight of the blow.

There are, however, disadvantages inherent in the tactical offensive. The first is due to the movement of the attacking troops. Physical exhaustion robs the assailant of a portion of his force before he reaches the enemy's line. It may have enormous effect if, after a long march to the battle-field, there still are serious natural obstacles to be surmounted, as was the case with the attack of the Prussian half-division of Schwarzkoppen on the 16th August, 1870. Numbers of men there sank from exhaustion and fell helpless into the enemy's hands.

Another disadvantage of great import is that movement almost completely interrupts fire, and so the assailant has for a time to bear the effect of the enemy's fire without being able to reply to it. This circumstance, coupled with the fact that during the advance the assailant has to do without protect-

ing cover, makes his losses up to the moment of the assault, far heavier than those of the defender. It is only after carrying the position, as a rule, that he is able to retaliate, for the defender has now to move, and suffers doubly from the disadvantages of motion, because it is in a retrograde direction.

The tactical attack is further embarrassed by the fact that it is tied to time. It must as a rule complete its work on one day. When the sun goes down, an undecided battle often resolves itself into a success for the defender. Had the battle of Gravelotte and St. Privat been fought on a winter's day, the French would in all probability have scored a victory. Night would have put a stop to the attack after the capture of Ste. Marie aux Chênes, and would have given Marshal Bazaine time to strengthen his menaced right wing with the whole Guard Corps.

It is frequently advanced as a weak point of the attack that, as it is compelled to take the initiative it is more likely to make mistakes at an earlier period than the expectant defender, who is able to avail himself of such blunders. This disadvantage is, however, compensated for by the fact that the assailant can turn to good account the defects in the

defender's original arrangements, and even base his own plan on them.

It is no easy matter for a General not only to at once detect, but also to take advantage of the enemy's mistakes. To be able to do so, he must have previously perfected his own arrangements, especially as regards a proper distribution of his troops.

As already pointed out, no disadvantage for the attack, although a condition of considerable difficulty, lies in the great task required of the troops.

Troops acting on the offensive must be mobile and at the same time proof against the moral influence of danger. They must be led by a large number of superior and subordinate leaders of great experience. All this necessitates a very sound and sufficiently long preparation in time of peace. With untrained armies, even when there is numerical superiority, the tactical attack is even less feasible than the strategical.

These conditions must be fully realized before the attack is decided upon. If we cannot ensure at least the greater part of them being fulfilled, it will scarcely be possible to gain any success.

Another consideration which presents itself, is

that the successful delivery of the attack requires the maintenance of a far firmer control on the part of the General over his troops than does the defence.

The latter may be considered as an obvious duty imposed by the necessity of self-preservation; the attack, however, calls for higher qualities in the troops, and greater exertions, which none but a strong hand can exact.

The decision to attack also carries with it heavy responsibility for the losses, generally very considerable, which occur when it is delivered; and most men shrink from such responsibility.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DEFENSIVE.

1. *The Strategical Defensive.*

WE must not picture the Defensive to ourselves as a simple passive state, or suppose that an army quietly waits in a position taken up once and for all until the enemy comes up and attacks it. Such procedure can but seldom occur, and will scarcely ever lead to success. The strategical defensive must not altogether exclude movement, and must not on any account remain in absolute inactivity.

Such movement may take the form of adopting a formation which will admit of going out to meet the enemy wherever he may come, with a portion of the force, thus holding him until our remaining troops have concentrated in that direction and are able to co-operate.

In military history, we usually find the strategical defensive assumed by the weaker side. It is true that there are no special advantages appertaining to it, but it allows the final decision, which is so difficult

in such a situation, to be deferred, and affords more hope for favourable chances.

Another form of the strategical defensive is when an army retires before the enemy into the interior of the country, so as to gain time, during which those factors which constantly tend to weaken the offensive have time to operate.

Often while this is going on an accession of strength may reach the defender, who is meanwhile approaching his sources of supply, and uniting with troops, which were not available at the outset, not being in the first line. It is self-evident that such a course is only advisable in cases where there is sufficient space to give the necessary time for the action of weakening influences on the attack. Naturally, too, important portions of the territory to be guarded must not be given up by an initial withdrawal; for the mere loss of them would play a decisive part in the campaign.

The third method of turning to account the element of movement in the defensive is, to wait quietly during the preliminary operations of the assailant, discover his mistakes or weak points, and then making use of them, attack him with concentrated forces. This method of conducting the

strategical defensive is, as a rule, the most effective, the true ideal of the defensive.¹ Here, however, as has already been stated, the fact is overlooked that the defensive in this case is abandoned, and is not the real guiding principle, but subordinates itself to the eventual attack, and becomes merely an accessory to it. Here the case is more one of an offensive, waiting for the right moment, than of the defensive, and we have, strictly speaking, no right so to describe this class of operation.

The fundamental idea which guides the strategical defensive is to remedy an unfavourable situation by husbanding our own forces whilst those of the enemy are more rapidly consumed in the attack.

In endeavouring to attain this object we are favoured above all by the fact that the element of movement, which, as we have already emphasized, is of itself a disorganizing force, plays a smaller part in the defensive than in the offensive. We may, therefore, much more readily venture to commit ourselves, with inferior troops, to a strategical defence than to a strategical attack.

¹ Blume (*Strategie*, 1st Edition, p. 199) has styled these three ways of conducting the defensive as the Defensive—of position, of retreat, of aggression. The last case is in English called the offensive-defensive.

But there are yet other circumstances which further strengthen and facilitate the strategical defence.

Among others, we must remember before everything that the direct defensive aims only at a negative result, which is much easier to attain than a positive one. The attainment of the latter calls for action which is more likely to bring about unfavourable chances than standing still. If the assailant makes mistakes in his dispositions, and his operations consequently fail, the defender may score success without having done much. The enemy has himself precipitated his own defeat, the very thing that the defence aimed at. Clausewitz says of the defender, that "he reaps what he has not sown."

Even sins of omission and fruitless waste of time on the part of the assailant, benefit the defender, who may, under certain conditions, derive positive advantages from the mere fact that he has not yet been decisively beaten. This will occur when, as for example in the case of Turkey at the commencement of the Crimean War, a sweeping change is to be hoped for from the accession of powerful allies. Time is, as a rule, the ally of the defender; for the attack, even if it is not of itself too weak, is often

crippled simply because the final success has been too long delayed.¹ For the defender it is a question of holding out, for the assailant of winning; and the former is generally easier in war.

The strategical defender has again no need to quit the theatre of war, which is familiar to him, chosen by himself, and perhaps specially prepared, or betake himself to unfamiliar country. He is more secure than the attacker against mishaps, which may be occasioned by the unexpected appearance of obstacles. Since it must be assumed that the defender has a fuller knowledge of the district in which the war is carried on, than is possessed by the assailant, and that he is already in position when his adversary arrives, it follows that his operations will be less subject to hindrance than those of his opponent. The railways of the seat of war will render much more effective service to the defender than to his opponent; as the latter has at his disposal, for the most part, only lines of railway which are held by

¹ It is only when the material resources at the disposal of the combatants are totally different, as in the American War of Secession, that this rule is reversed. To be able to keep up the war long enough is one of the fundamental conditions of a successful strategical defence. The defender can place great reliance on this element of strength—if he possess it.

armed strength, deprived of their own staff, and frequently damaged and disorganized. Finally, the defender is able to avail himself of the natural and artificial means of adding to his strength which are afforded by the country, such as streams, mountain ranges, woods, marshes and deserts, which the enemy has to surmount in his advance. Fortresses and entrenchments also delay the assailant or compel him to divide his forces.

Further, we may reasonably consider the defender to be operating in his own country, and the assailant in a foreign one. The former, also, can count upon the help of the inhabitants, which will at times be of value in obtaining information and for feeding the troops. The defender generally has at his command the normal administrative machinery of the country which is the seat of war. This enables him to do a great deal for the maintenance and sheltering of his army, for repairing its losses, and for arranging means of transport on a large scale for his troops.

In a broad sense the defender receives the assistance of a whole nation, whilst the assailant is moving away from similar help. This does not mean that we are at once to think of an armed rising, but

only of the support which a patriotic people is able to lend in many ways to the defence of the country, whilst it can make movement, sheltering, and feeding more difficult for the enemy.¹ The obvious danger which threatens their native country incites the people to increased efforts, and may develop passions which enhance their fighting powers to a previously unsuspected degree. This happened in Spain in 1808-13 and in Germany in 1813 ; and also in France in 1870 after the downfall of Sedan. The assailant's fighting powers, on the contrary, receive no such stimulus. His own people fondly suppose that he is continuing unchecked his victorious march into the enemy's country, for they do not witness the dangers

¹ Of course, it is assumed here that in the defender's country public spirit is in a healthy state, that the people take a self-sacrificing interest in all that concerns the state, and that they are accustomed to contributing to the support of the army. If this be not the case it may come to pass that, the enemy's army, which has no occasion to spare the resources of the country, will live better than the defender on his native soil. In the campaign of 1806 the Prusso-Saxon troops nearly perished from hunger in a rich country, because they did not dare to touch its supplies, whilst the enemy helped himself to them freely. In the winter campaign of 1870-71 the French troops bivouacked in the streets of the towns in the bitter cold, as it was not considered advisable to quarter them in the houses of rich citizens, whereas the Germans, who came after them, made themselves quite comfortable with these people's board and lodging.

and difficulties with which he is battling. It will be difficult to make apparent to the public mind the indications, almost imperceptible but still evident to the trained eye, of an impending reaction in the fate of the campaign. The assailant, thus, when almost within sight of his goal, is frequently denied the urgently needed support for successfully terminating the campaign, as happened to Hannibal in Italy.

The greater freedom of action which is afforded the defender by all these circumstances, enables him to at times even prepare surprises for the enemy. Seeing that he is able to exist pretty well where he likes in the country, he has the power to suddenly change his position with regard to the enemy and take up flanking positions. This compels the assailant to change his plans, deviate from the direction in which he was previously moving, and alter his arrangements for the subsistence of his army. This of itself is no easy matter. Further, since the defender possesses that knowledge of the country which his opponent lacks, this sudden change of plans may be accompanied by mistakes and mishaps which add to the difficulties of the latter.

On account of the forward movement of his army, the assailant has greater trouble than the defender

in providing for the subsistence of his troops. He will, therefore, frequently have to divide his forces so as to advance on a broader front and draw more supplies from the country. This gives the defender an opportunity of attacking with his combined forces one of the fractions into which the enemy's army is divided, before the others are able to come to its support. If this manœuvre succeed, it enables the defender to march with the same troops, who have just routed one hostile column, against a second or even a third one with like success. Napoleon gave a brilliant example of such action in his attacks on the Silesian army from the 10th to the 14th February, 1814. Frederick conducted his defence in the Seven Years' War in the same way on a large scale.

So long as the defender can avoid a decisive defeat, he exerts a natural attractive force on the assailant, like a magnet on iron. The assailant naturally seeks him out so as to defeat him, and relieve himself of the pressure which the vicinity of a hostile force exercises on all his operations. Thus it may be generally assumed that he will advance to the place where the defender has taken up his position. This considerably simplifies matters for the latter.

If the assailant were to attempt to pass by a posi-

tion held by the defender, which commanded the theatre of war, the defender need as a rule only show signs of activity in order to attract the enemy. Even the irresolute movements of the Turkish army of the Danube on the left flank of the Russian army, combined with Osman Pasha's advance on its right flank in the summer of 1877, sufficed to put a stop to the operations initiated by the Russians across the Balkans. Should the assailant attempt to pass by and ignore the defender, the latter can always effectually reply by a forward movement against the former's flank. Scharnhorst recommended this course for the Prussian army, though without success, in October, 1806, and with success, for the Allied Army at Lützen in May, 1813. General v. Werder was also successful, against General Bourbaki at Villersexel on the 9th January, 1871.

The strategical defender may utilize to the full, and without any apprehension, especially in his own country, the greater freedom of movement inherent in the defensive.

We have seen that one of the most important conditions to be fulfilled in the case of the strategical offensive, is to have the military forces in readiness

at an earlier period than the enemy. Ability to fulfil this condition depends, however, on the constitution of the army, on previous systematic preparation for mobilization, on the possession of ample equipment and abundant transport material, and on the geographical form and nature of the country. It also requires a considerable expenditure of money, and it is difficult to fulfil all these conditions. Emulation in this respect with neighbouring states who are more fortunately situated, may bring a country to the verge of ruin, even during peace.

A General who confines himself to the strategical defensive keeps clear of these difficulties. He can generally, without injury to himself, allow the enemy to get a slight start, provided the lines or positions selected for defence are not reached by the invaders before his own troops can occupy them.

When discussing the offensive we said that the defender has, as a rule, more prospect of support from other powers than the assailant. At the present moment there is a state of equilibrium in Europe, and all powers have a certain interest in keeping it up. The great powers would, therefore, be averse to its disturbance by the destruction of any one power, they would oppose it, and would put a

check on a conqueror who tried to make too much out of his successes. The fact that the powers, not directly interested, intervened in favour of vanquished Austria in 1866 only in the form of a very feeble diplomatic action on the part of Napoleon III., and that in 1871 they did not interfere at all on behalf of France, was due to the wise moderation displayed by the victor in utilizing the success which he had gained.

The modern tendency to keep up the international *status quo*, arises from the great age of all European states. This sentiment naturally fits in with the spirit of the strategical defensive, the principle of which is likewise that of keeping up the *status quo*. In the Seven Years' War, youthful Prussia found the danger of disturbing the existing order of things. It was only the rare genius of a great Prince which saved it from ruin.

Side by side, however, with the above-mentioned advantages, there are decided disadvantages in the strategical defensive. It is wholly impossible to divorce this form of conducting war from a general sense of weakness. This feeling has, we know, before now inspired the decision to limit all efforts to the defensive.

Again, it must be borne in mind that no decisive result can be attained by the defensive pure and simple. The utmost that can possibly be attained by the strategical defensive is a peace which the enemy grants because he is worn out. Frederick the Great gained such a peace, but he was assisted in obtaining it by a revolution in the political situation ; —the system of warfare prevalent in his time also favoured him to an extraordinary extent.

The attempt of the Southern States to tire out their numerically superior enemy in the American War of Secession failed in spite of supreme patriotic exertions, better armies, and abler generals. Similarly in the Russo-Turkish War the strategical defensive terminated in disaster, in spite of early successes. An army which is unable to exchange the defensive for the offensive towards the end of the campaign may in general be given up for lost. Its defeat is only a question of time.

The strategical defensive will in most cases have at the outset to abandon territory and at the same time its sources of supply ; for it will scarcely ever be possible to carry out a defence exactly on the frontier. The defender will be fortunate if, after successfully conducting the defence, he manages to

win back what he had originally relinquished to the enemy. The very nature of the defensive, however, militates against the prospects of success in such an undertaking.

An important moral effect is exercised by the consciousness of weakness always inherent in the defence, and by the enforced inaction while waiting to see what the enemy is going to do. Just as movement develops new intellectual and moral powers in the assailant, so does hanging on in uncertainty put those engaged in the strategical defence to a severe test. We have said, it is true, that the defender may be able to prepare surprises for the assailant, by observing his movements and attacking him the moment he discovers a mistake ; but this is by no means easy, for the situation is never very clear. The assailant will come into contact with the defender not merely at one single point, but at several points simultaneously. As a rule those directly affected imagine the principal danger to be where they are. Clausewitz says, "At that time there generally is trouble in all directions." The state of uncertainty gives rise to false alarms and unprofitable labours, which have a twofold depressing effect when they are realized by the troops to be useless. Only a very

true and practised eye is able to see at once in which direction to turn. Furthermore, it is only possible to make full use of the mistakes of the enemy by rapid successes, and these require great tactical superiority. The advantages of the strategical defensive are thus qualified and limited.

Moreover, there is always the drawback that the enemy, who is in movement, is able to threaten the defender's communications with the rear, however numerous they may be. The defender will often have to abandon advantageous positions merely for the purpose of securing his lines of communication.

Finally, it remains to be noticed that the strategical defensive very frequently deprives the troops for a long while of the salutary change of locality. The danger of ravaging diseases is thus increased, and a depressing influence as a rule exerted on the spirits of the men.

Yet all these circumstances are not so very serious as the one fundamental defect, namely, that by the use of the strategical defensive—as may be said of the defensive generally—all that is possible is to avoid defeat; victory is unattainable.

2. *The Tactical Defensive.*

Most of the peculiarities and conditions which influence the strategical defensive are also found in the tactical. Some, however, operate differently.

The main advantage of the tactical defensive, and which most frequently leads to its adoption when the General has a free hand, is, that it avoids the danger of the troops being worn out in abortive assaults on hostile positions. Stubborn assailants readily yield to the temptation, especially in local fights, of making great efforts to gain some objective, the attainment of which is not worth the sacrifice. The attack may thus cause a waste of troops. Even success will often be so dearly bought, particularly against the terrible firearms of modern times, that the general situation is thereby made worse rather than better. Pyrrhic victories are the bane of the modern tactical offensive. Frequently, the wish to make the most of fire action induces us to choose the defensive, especially after bitter experience of losses in offensive actions. The defender certainly has the advantage of bringing to bear uninterrupted fire action while the assailant's fire is interrupted by his movement. This advantage is limited only by the divergent nature of the de-

fender's fire, whereas that of the attack is as naturally convergent. Then, too, the advantage afforded by the ground is even more effective in the tactical than in the strategical defensive. The defender selects the obstacles which he means to make the enemy cross under his fire, and can often add to their strength by artificial means. Further, the defender enjoys the special advantage of being able to keep his troops under cover and his dispositions concealed, whilst the assailant has to advance in the open and exposed to view, in fact, on the main roads for the most part.

As a result of all this the defender should be able to effect surprises even more frequently than is recorded in military history. It is, however, very difficult to move troops, once distributed along a position, as quickly as would be required to make the most of any mistakes that may have been made by the enemy. The theory of a defender lying in wait in his position until he has detected some error of the enemy's, certainly is an attractive one, but is seldom realized in practice. An army is not able to rush upon its prey with the rapidity of a tiger. It needs time for the General's eye to detect the opportunity, for the decision to mature in his mind, for the order to reach the troops, and for them to

form up for the advance and move off. All this means time, which generally enables the assailant, who is moving rapidly, to get safely over the critical moment.

Part of the difficulty of moving troops already distributed for defence, especially in any other direction than towards their front, arises also from the weakness of the flanks of every position. Otherwise the defender, who has less distance to go, would always be sure of completing his change of front before the assailant could finish his enveloping movement.

The principal danger to which the tactical defensive is exposed, is to be simultaneously attacked from several directions, engaged in the front and enveloped on one or both flanks, or even to be deprived of its line of retreat. It is more difficult to reply with counter-strokes in this case than in the strategical defensive, because the space is generally too cramped and the time too short to make it possible to fully prepare and develop them. Even an advance with the same body of troops, first against one and then against another portion of the enemy's army, in other words a tactical operation on interior lines, will hardly ever be possible, because the distance between the separate hostile groups is too small, and

it is a case of being not only between two opponents, but also between two fires.

Tactical counter-strokes on the battle-field, except in the simplest form, that is by an advance straight to the front after an attack has been repulsed, require very great skill in handling troops, such as was peculiar to Napoleon. At Austerlitz he gave the most consummate example of a counter-stroke, but such examples are rare.

The defender may more readily prepare surprises for the enemy by appearing unexpectedly in another direction at the last moment before the decisive assault, and when the enemy has already definitely decided his dispositions. The assailant will, moreover, in such event, often be compelled to make a change of front at the last moment—a manœuvre most productive of confusion and errors.

If the lack of mobility of troops in the defence constitutes a certain weakness, on the other hand, the defence carries with it the specific advantage that there is no need for so high a standard in the training and steadiness of the troops, or in the education of their leaders, as in the case of the attack. With troops who from their nature would be unable to deliver an even fairly energetic attack,

it is still perfectly possible to conduct quite a tolerable, even a successful, defence. Between the two *rôles* there is a great difference, and, if there be free choice, the defensive is often a haven of refuge when the quality of the troops is poor.

CHAPTER VII.

CHANGING FROM THE OFFENSIVE TO THE DEFENSIVE AND THE REVERSE.

It is difficult to give definite rules when to change from one form to the other. The nature of both must be carefully considered, and at the time we must choose that which is more advantageous for our own army, and more likely to lead to the attainment of our object. It is a matter of good judgment to perceive the right moment for changing from one *rôle* to the other. The General must, so to speak, feel the pulse of his army, so as to know what he may expect of it.

In the case of strategy a change will be made from the offensive to the defensive as soon as the wasting effect, which, as we have seen,¹ is exerted on the army by the former, has attained to such proportions that the superiority over the enemy which was the reason why the offensive was chosen, shows signs of approaching vanishing point. It would be a

¹ See page 37.

mistake in striving to make the most of that original superiority, to continue the advance until the force of circumstances absolutely compels a change to the defensive. Such a result would be the more disastrous because the violent reaction would be accompanied by loss of moral and physical power. The assailant would no longer be able to remain at the point of vantage previously reached by him, but would be forcibly driven away from it. On the contrary, the General should himself choose the time for changing over to the defensive, and possess the power of deciding when to voluntarily abandon the continuance of the offensive. This is indispensable if he wishes to hold that which he has already gained. In weighing the situation, however, he must make allowance for the fact that the losses which he actually sees in his own army, must needs make a greater impression on him than those which his imagination pictures in that of the enemy. Otherwise he will be liable to suspend his advance too soon, and not follow up his advantages to their utmost extent. Not to change to the defence until this last moment, and then to do so on his own initiative, is the highest flight of generalship.

The same conditions hold good tactically. An

attack which has been carried too far, generally brings about a fatal recoil, for here events move more rapidly than in the domain of strategy, and it becomes twice as difficult to make a stand once we have begun to fall back. The impressions of the moment have greater power in this case. However, it is easier to tell the right time for the change in the field of tactics than in that of strategy. The failing in strength is more clearly apparent. The General not only has the army under his eyes, but is also able to survey the whole stage on which the action must take place. He perceives more clearly the limit up to which it is possible and imperative to advance, in order to be able to exchange *rôles* and hold what he has gained without prejudicing himself. Generally speaking, his limit is formed by the enemy's line of defence; in special cases it is marked by localities, such as villages, farms put in a state of defence, woods, and heights. The rules of tactics teach us not to advance beyond such localities immediately after taking them; but first of all to establish ourselves in them, restore order in the ranks, and generally secure their possession, in fact, to change over to the defensive for a time.

Here again, however, the change should be no

involuntary one ; but originate in the judgment and deliberate decision of the leader.

Changing to the defensive, because the distances to be traversed and the exertions required of the troops are too great, points to faulty plans and preparations. Previous calculation, however, is difficult, and requires a very strong control of ideas, which are prone to adapt themselves to our innermost wishes and produce illusions. Napoleon has been blamed for not stopping in 1812, after the Battle of Smolensk, and for changing over to the defensive, as his arrangements for the maintenance of his army, able as they were, yet proved inadequate for a continuation. Now, if this great genius was guilty of such a blunder, how much more is it likely to be the fate of others ?

The object aimed at will seldom be gained by making the change to the defensive simply for the reason that we wish to take advantage of favourable ground, and to utilize a position strong either strategically or tactically. The circumstances which previously enabled the assailant to attack, but compelled the defender to confine himself to defence, are still in force at the time when the transition would be made. It is not likely that the defender,

who but recently felt too weak to hold his ground, will suddenly fall in with our intentions and all at once change over to the attack—and that, too, when he sees a strong and good position before him.

Attacks involving heavy losses, which are brought about by the strategical offensive, may render a change necessary. The defensive gives time to bring up reinforcements, or opportunity for subjecting the enemy for a period, to the greater sacrifices resulting from the attacks which he is compelled to make under some circumstances, so that the losses are equalized and the original relation between the two forces thus restored. This will be the case if we succeed in so confining and shutting in the enemy's army that it must obtain more space at any price, or if we sever a line of communication, without which it cannot exist. Such fortunate situations are, however, rare. Theoretical investigation cannot exclude them; but in practice it will not as a general rule be safe to rely on them.

The reciprocity between offensive and defensive may also be such that we may make use of both at the same time. Those units, which are not themselves intended to deal the decisive blow, may be reduced in strength and ordered to confine themselves only to

keeping the enemy busy, retiring before him if he presses with superior force, and advancing again as soon as he shows signs of relaxing his efforts, whilst the units selected for decisive action are made correspondingly stronger at the expense of the others. The Allies applied this combination of offensive and defensive very successfully in the autumn campaign of 1813, when they decided that, whenever Napoleon appeared with his main army, they would retire before him until he gave up the pursuit, and, on the other hand, that they would attack his Marshals with their full force, whenever they confronted them at the head of flanking detachments. The sole violation of this principle by the Bohemian Army on the 26th and 27th August, was punished by the loss of the Battle of Dresden. On the other hand, the observation of this principle gave to the Armies of the North and of Silesia the victories of Gross-Beeren, Dennewitz, and the Katzbach. Such action, however, requires a very practised eye and quick decision of purpose. Blücher showed himself a master of it by twice succeeding in drawing the Emperor after him towards Silesia, without giving him the eagerly desired opportunity of a battle. On both occasions the Emperor had to cease his advance,

because the advance of the main army of the Allies from Bohemia called him back. In the end he effected nothing, beyond exhausting his troops to no purpose.

The difficulty in settling on the right time for passing from the defensive to the offensive, lies in the fact that the right moment has to be decided upon from the condition of the enemy, and that there are only uncertain signs to judge it by. The situation will rarely be so simple that a great increase of strength on our side, or a very evident decrease on that of the enemy, will impel us to make the change to the offensive.

The nature of the defence is to hold on to what it has, that of the attack to gain more, and, in doing so, to consume its forces. Like a good man of business, the General must not expend his means uselessly where success is not remunerative ; but at the same time he must not be stingy where there is a prospect of profit. It is on the happy combination of these principles that the proper distribution of forces in relation to time and space depends, and on it depends success. It is a sign of incapable generalship to be equally strong and to make the same exertions everywhere. Only he who knows

how to economize his forces at points, where even a reverse cannot have decisive results, will be able to act vigorously at some other point, and gain the upper hand; a consummation ever to be wished.

CHAPTER VIII.

OF OPERATIONS.

1. *General Remarks.*

As a war proceeds, certain incidents, more closely connected with each other than with the preceding and succeeding occurrences, will always group themselves together. During the course of such events the military action aims specially at some one particular object, neglecting or subordinating all others, until that one purpose is attained. This accomplished, it is possible to admit a little relaxation, possibly a short breathing-space for recovery, until more rapid progress is again resumed and, as it were, a fresh idea, a second objective presents itself. Every such group of incidents will consist of marches, the occupation of positions and battles, which we call "operations." Thus, in the account of the Franco-German War, we speak of "The operations on the Saar," or "on the Moselle," "The operations round Metz," &c. It is self-evident, that the several groups of events are

linked together by the bond of a common guiding idea, and should never be arbitrarily or casually connected with one another.

Again, a closer relationship will generally exist between a certain number of operations from the fact that they are conducted under similar conditions, at the same season, and against the same hostile army, and that they are distinguished from the other operations by conditions of time and space, by change of adversary, or by some alteration in the manner of conducting the war. Such a group of operations may conveniently be called a "campaign," which forms a distinct period of the war. Originally, this definition applied merely to the seasons of the year, and it was customary to speak of winter and summer campaigns. With the growth of armies and the expansion of theatres of war there has been added the element of space. Thus in 1870-71, for instance, we distinguish between the Campaign on the Loire, the Campaigns in the North and in the East of France, &c. This distinction has, of course, no practical bearing on the conduct of the war; yet it facilitates a general review of what has taken place, as well as the formation of plans for the future. It is possible, as an exception, for a war to be finished by a single

campaign, and for the terms "war" and "campaign" to be synonymous, as was proved by the year 1866 in Bohemia.

We have said that the manner of conducting war at the present day requires an uninterrupted flow of events; this must not, however, be taken literally of a whole war or even campaign. No troops can march and fight without intermission; periods for rest are interposed. As regards a single set of operations it must, however, be taken more strictly; for the enemy will soon guess its immediate aim and can take advantage of any cessation. Even one single day of rest inopportunately allowed can do great harm, especially in the offensive. Bazaine would probably have escaped from Metz if the I. and II. — German armies had been disposed to rest on the 15th August, 1870. Again, it was his ruin that he took but little advantage of that same day for marching off. On the defensive, interruptions in the chain of events will, certainly, often occur spontaneously, being due to the necessity of waiting to see what the enemy is about. This, however, does not signify a suspension of activity as regards the object aimed at, which, indeed, very frequently consists solely in delay and gaining time.

If, however, the action within one and the same phase has to be carried on as far as possible without intermission, then everything required by the troops must be well provided for beforehand. Their commissariat and the reserve of ammunition must be most carefully organized for the whole period in advance. The distances to be traversed should not be greater than can be covered at a stride, so to speak. In military history we seldom come across operations which involve more than five or six successive marches in the same direction without any change of objective. To halt in the middle simply because the exhaustion of the men renders it necessary, is fatal to success. The enemy readily perceives that we have undertaken more than we are capable of performing, and this increases his confidence and strength. If the distances are excessive, it will be better to sub-divide the operations or endeavour, before its actual commencement, to imperceptibly push the troops on nearer to the enemy, so as to arrive at a part of the country from which it is possible to reach the objective in one uninterrupted series of marches. Provisions and ammunition are then brought up to this point, *matériel* prepared for crossing natural obstacles

which may be encountered on the way,¹ and the advance must immediately follow the completion of the last essential preparations.

Communication must be kept up, during the movement, with the district in which these preparations have been made, since it is from this quarter that supplies have to be drawn. That district forms the base on which to build up the operation.

This brings us to the idea of the base as usually met with in the study of the conduct of war.

2. *The Base of Operations.*

The term "base of operations" used to imply a geographically hard and fast line, the possession of which was secured by special precaution, such as the construction of fortifications, bridge-heads, entrenched camps, &c. The operations of a whole campaign often aimed only at gaining a base for the next. During such a preliminary campaign a general would be satisfied with the capture of some

¹ Marshal Sout, in his campaign in Portugal in 1809, was compelled to make a détour of 140 miles, merely for the purpose of finding a passage across the Lower Minho. This was the penalty of the want of forethought, shown in the preparation of his expedition. He had omitted to take a bridging equipment in the delusive expectation that he would find the population peaceable and the bridges intact.

fortresses, from which he intended, perhaps not till the following year, to advance into the enemy's country. Naturally, there had to be good communications between the chief points in the base, and a practicable network of roads from these points to the front and rear. Hence, in this former sense of the term, a navigable river, with a row of fortresses commanding both banks at the points of passage, formed the best base of operations. Lines of fortresses, connected by a great high road, also constituted an admirable base.

Along the base, and protected by the fortresses, magazines of food used to be established, supplies of clothing and boots were accumulated, and ammunition collected for the whole campaign. Workshops for the repair of damaged and the renewal of lost war material were set up, artillery collected, bridging and transport parks, and often even recruiting depôts were formed, so as to make good the losses in men. In a word, the interior economy of the army was organized in such a way as to be capable of prompt restoration after sustaining losses.

If the army advanced further, precautions were taken for the base to follow it, and to establish a new

line, an emergency or immediate base, closer to the sphere of operations. Although the organization of this intermediate base was not so complete as that of the principal base, still it had for the space of some days to provide all that was necessary.

However much their military expeditions may have been characterized by audacity, yet all great commanders have attached the highest value to the possession of a good base. Greatly tempted as Alexander was, after his first victories over the Persians, to follow on the heels of the defeated armies so as to derive full advantage from the successes already gained, yet, both after the battle of the Granicus and that of Issus, we see him first turn towards the maritime countries on the Mediterranean, and even undertake wearisome sieges in order to obtain possession of the harbours situated there and a communication with his own country, as well as depôts for his army. He even considered the conquest of Egypt essential before his march into the interior, so that he might procure naval forces which he needed for the extension of his conquests. Starting from the small and far-off country of Macedonia, he changed his base after his invasion of

Asia, and converted the whole coast-line of the Eastern Mediterranean into one.

Napoleon I. was no less particular always to gain a sure footing for his operations. His dispositions for the campaign of 1813 in Germany, are particularly instructive in this respect. After the Weichsel and Oder lines had been lost in the preceding winter, he selected the Elbe as his base of operations. At first, his idea was to attempt a grandly planned offensive from the lower course of this river, so as to regain communication with the strong garrisons which he had left behind in the fortresses of the Prusso-Polish theatre of war. He laid the greatest stress on securing the northern course of the Elbe by means of Magdeburg and Hamburg, in order to use the river line as a base, and solely for this purpose he ordered Eugène to take up a threatening position in advance of the former place, on the Berlin road, with the remains of the army returning from Russia.

In the second period of the same campaign the Emperor chose the middle Elbe as a base for the defensive, on which he had determined, quite against his own inclinations, in consideration of the general situation at that time. It is instructive to follow out

with what care he established himself there. He already possessed three fortresses on the banks of the river, Magdeburg, Wittenberg and Torgau ; but this was still not enough for him. Hamburg and Dresden were also fortified, the former strongly, so as to be able to resist the enemy unaided for a considerable time, the latter so that its garrison could hold it for a week without external assistance. The Emperor did not anticipate that he would under any circumstances, remain with his army more than a week at any distance from this town. He had even further thoughts of forming two new places of arms in the course of the campaign, one at the junction of the Plauen Canal with the Elbe, the other at the confluence of the Havel and Elbe ; there was, however, no opportunity of carrying this out. In this way Napoleon intended to relieve himself of all anxiety for the safety of his base while he went forth to deal rapid, powerful strokes against the Allies, who held him invested along the wide arc stretching from Mecklenburg through Silesia as far as Bohemia.

The Emperor accumulated all war material necessary for his army, and large supplies of provisions in the Elbe fortresses, so that he could look

forward with confidence to a long and decisive campaign.¹

It must not be forgotten that the previous armistice had given him plenty of time to properly equip his base. Events in war will not, however, always give the necessary time for this purpose; and a rich district with good communications, from which it is also possible to quickly draw everything necessary during the operations, is on that account of very great assistance.

In a wider sense we also speak of this entire district as the base, and say that the army is based on this or that province.

In Western Europe the dense network of railways allows of reinforcements and supplies being brought up in a few days from the most remote parts of a country. It even obviates the necessity of restricting the base to one district, the whole area of the state becoming the base. But, since we can also make use of the railways in a hostile country, where the enemy has not carried out too systematic demolitions, even the frontier no longer constitutes an obstacle.

¹ It is impossible to agree with the author on this point. The Elbe was far too advanced to form a proper base for Napoleon's operations. The consequence was that when he lost it he was compelled to retreat beyond the Rhine. See also p. 97.—ED.

The conduct of war of our time, therefore, has to deal with a movable base, and this is an advantage which enables us to act with the utmost energy.

It is self-evident that an army is favourably placed which possesses such a movable base. The assailant should, therefore, lose no time in making careful preparations for the restoration of the lines of railway beyond the terminal stations which he has in his hands at the start, as well as for taking over the management which has been disorganized by the enemy. The defender will otherwise soon enjoy an advantage. The latter, too, has to take care that the lines of rails, which he is forced to abandon, are rendered useless to the enemy either by means of fortresses or forts blocking them, or by thorough demolitions.

Another thing required in a base is that it should be of sufficient size. If it consists of only one short line or perhaps a single point, the army which is resting on it, is liable to be driven off it. In any case it must bear a just proportion to the size of the army. An army reckoning its hundreds of thousands cannot base itself adequately on one or two small fortresses. The supply arrangements alone for so many men demand space; to enable them to live, the masses require a greater area. All the movements of the army

are hampered if the district to which it must retire in case of need is too small. The fundamental difficulty connected with all operations beyond the seas is that they are generally restricted for a base to one point, namely, that of disembarkation.

When a network of railways constitutes the base, a large army cannot do with a single line of communication. There must be several such lines leading in the direction of the operations if there is to be any freedom in the movements of the army.

The straight line is not an advantageous form for the base. It should if possible enclose the theatre of war on two sides, especially if the sides meet in an angle which is almost a right angle. The operator within the angle then receives help and support in two quite different directions. In this case we speak of a double base. Napoleon I. tried to secure one in 1806 when he first of all prepared the line of the Main, from which he started, and subsequently the Rhine which was on his left.

To have one or more lines of railway in rear of us, and to be sure that as we advance we shall soon come upon another leading from one side across the theatre of war, is a highly favourable condition; the theatre of war must, however, have a very fortunate configuration for the attainment of such a condition.

To change the base in the middle of military operations is most difficult, even in cases where it is possible to make use of other lines in the home railway system. The transfer elsewhere of supplies already accumulated takes up more time, at any rate, than suits the impatience of the General or the wants of the troops, considering the state of confusion which generally exists in rear of the large armies of modern times, and the mass and variety of claims which are at the same time imposed on the officials on duty there.

It is a simpler matter to merely forward stores after an army which has gone on ahead; the lines of communication in such case are only prolonged and the railways, which have been seized by the advancing troops, are utilized, so that it is only a matter of forwarding the various supplies in bulk to the new terminal stations.

A fleet and a land army can afford one another immense support in pushing forward a base if the theatre of war is bounded by the sea on one side. The Japanese in their advance on China have just given us a splendid example of this. They first of all occupied the object at issue, Corea. Then, after a victory, they crossed the frontier river of China,

the Yalu. By this time the distance between their army and the Corean harbours, where they had disembarked, had stretched out of all proportion. The fleet, therefore, made its appearance with a second army before Port Arthur, a fortified port situated further up the coast in a westerly direction, and took it; later on it seized Wei-Hai-Wei, on the opposite coast of Shan Tung. In the subsequent advance these points afforded support to the land army. From their position they both command the great basin of the Gulf of Pecheli. Provisions, ammunition, and reserves of all kinds can be conveyed to any place on the coast. Had the land army appeared in front of the ports before the arrival of the fleet, it would have been exposed to the attack of hostile relieving forces. Had it appeared later than it did the object aimed at would not have been attained. We see the same thing carried out in olden times on a large scale by Alexander, who made the fleet of Nearchus accompany his land army in its march to and from India.¹

¹ The transfer of Wellington's base during the Peninsular War from Lisbon up the Portuguese and Spanish coasts, until Bordeaux was finally reached, is a good example. Similarly in 1882 the change of base from Alexandria to Ismailia was rendered possible by the command of the sea. — ED.

The permanent maintenance of favourable relations between the operations and a well-appointed and secure base has at all times been carefully considered by great commanders. Twice do we see Napoleon in 1813 desist from his pursuit of Blücher and return to Saxony, because the Elbe, and the chief *point d'appui* on it, was threatened by the Allies' main army advancing from Bohemia.

Circumstances may, however, at times demand that the base should be entirely disregarded, and that we should, as it were, look only to the front and not to the rear. We then aim at an objective, which, when it is attained, affords us a fresh support for further enterprises in the place of the one given up. General Sherman's march from Atalanta to Savannah, and thence through South and North Carolina to Goldsboro' and Raleigh, has given us an instance of such an operation, which was attended with the greatest success. But it must be observed that this operation led through a country almost denuded of hostile troops, and that it was possible to replace supplies on the spot. General Sherman also had the certain prospect before him of gaining another base on the sea coast.

Careful preparations, great determination on the

part of the General, who refuses to be stopped, and an unquestioned superiority over the enemy, are here requisite.¹ All the same, a complete abandonment of the base is always a leap in the dark.

The strength of the army plays an important part in this connection. It must not be out of proportion to the resources of the country. Sherman had 65,000 men under his command on his march. This is a large number in a thinly-populated district like Georgia and South Carolina. With the armies of our time and their millions of men we shall hardly dare to cut ourselves altogether adrift from our connection with the base; if ever we do so it will probably be immediately before a great engagement in order to get a favourable direction for the attack, as the Germans ran the risk on the 18th August, 1870, at Gravelotte—St. Privat. Victory on the battle-field restores to us full freedom and reopens the communications previously abandoned. A practised eye will note in each particular case when and to what extent the abandonment of the base may take place without risking the safety of the

¹ Sherman, when he marched off from Atalanta, took with him, on his waggons, provisions for thirty days.—John Bigelow. "The Principles of Strategy, p. 100." Philadelphia, 1894.

troops. To turn back in such a situation is generally disastrous, as is shown by the destruction of the "Grand Army of La Vendée" in its march North of the Loire in December, 1793.¹ And yet a General, who fears to cut adrift from his base more than he loves victory, will rarely achieve anything really great. Those commanders who think more about establishing their base and making it secure, by so doing usually miss the favourable moment for action.

If it be a weighty matter to effect a voluntary separation from a base, it must become serious when it happens unexpectedly through the action of the enemy. The severance, however, must not be taken in its purely geometrical sense. The mere fact of a hostile force moving on the lines which connect us with our base need not alarm us. It is only when at the same time the arrangements, without which we cannot well continue to exist, are affected that a serious danger arises.

If the army can afford to sever its connection with the base for a time, either because it has provided itself with new points of support further to the front,

¹ Boguslawski. "Der Krieg der Vendée gegen die Französische Republik." Berlin, 1894, p. 199.

or because it is operating in a district which supplies its wants, it need not allow itself to be stopped by the intelligence that a hostile force has occupied its former lines of communication.

Besides, a force which is trying to cut another off must itself be of respectable strength.

Napoleon I. did not for one moment think of turning back because the Duke of Weimar advanced in October, 1806, with a division of the Prussian Army through the Thuringian Forest on to the very roads which connected him with his base on the Main and on the Rhine. This advance on the part of the Duke was conceived quite in the spirit of the old ideas of war, when more importance was attached to geometrical relations than to the relative strength of the combatants. When Napoleon had established himself on the Elbe in August, 1813, he was no longer in the least disturbed by the thought that the Austrians could push forward from Bohemia by Bayreuth into the heart of Germany.

“What I am anxious about,” he wrote to St. Cyr on the 16th August, “is that I may not be cut off from Dresden and the Elbe; it matters little to me if they separate me from France.” In the event of the Austrians undertaking a march in that direction, he

had already made up his mind "to wish them a pleasant journey and let them go on." They could then only have captured or destroyed a small amount of reserve transport in Franconia, Thuringia, and Hesse, but would not have attained any object, the loss of which would have so seriously endangered the Emperor's position, as the loss of his fortified main depôt, Dresden, would have done.

3. *Lines of Operation, Lines of Communication, the Objective and Lines of Retreat.*

Discussion of the base brings us to that of *Lines of Operation* and of *Communication*.

Lines of Operation are those routes by which the army moves from the base on its objective, but Lines of Communication are the land and water-ways or railways, by means of which it is kept fed and supplied. Anyone who has entirely cut himself off from his base is at the same time free from trouble about his lines of communication.

When Ferdinand Cortez burnt his ships, after setting foot on Mexican soil, he probably felt convinced that with his small force, he would anyhow not be able to keep up his communication with the

coast in a populous foreign country. He thus rid himself of two impediments at one stroke.

On the other hand, the best equipped base is naturally of no use if the roads leading from it are insecure. The larger an army is, the heavier will the traffic be in its rear, and the better and more numerous must its lines of communication be. With the modern growth in the size of armies, so much importance attaches to lines of communication that strategy has come to be considered by some as exclusively a study of lines of communication—a definition which is of course far too limited.¹

The safest lines of communication are land roads, which the enemy may, it is true, interrupt, in fact, destroy in places; but which he can, only in extremely rare cases block entirely. If one road is closed to us another remains open, and we can reach the main road again by *détours*. The employment of roads also gives rise to the fewest difficulties in the event of a change being made in the direction already taken, and in the existing system of communications. But the rate of progress of wagons and pack animals is slow. Comparatively small loads can be carried. Rain and snow exercise the

¹ Willisen, "Theorie des grossen Kneiges," p. 33—35.

greatest influence over the march, even the best constructed high-road will at last be cut up by the incessant trains of wagons. Winter sometimes completely closes mountain roads. In order to make such primitive lines of traffic more useful, we may nowadays employ special means, such as the high wagons with teams of strong horses, which are used in Eastern Europe, horse tramways with rapidly-laid rails, baggage wagons drawn by traction engines, &c.—still, these expedients are only possible on great main roads, not on bye-roads and mountain paths, and they can never quite take the place of the more rapid means of transport which regulate commercial traffic. An army of respectable strength, which is exclusively confined to roads, will be hampered in its movements and clumsy according to our present day notions. All campaigns in the East, in the Balkan Peninsula, and in Anatolia, have, to our minds, this stamp. They can only be properly criticized if the circumstance is taken into account that, in most cases, food supplies and ammunition are forwarded to the army on the backs of mules, horses, and camels. The ox wagons of the country can only be employed in the flat districts.

Navigable canals and streams make admirable

lines of communications. Ship transport is the cheapest, and admits of the simultaneous transport of very great loads. Nowadays, when, as on the Elbe, big lighters are towed in strings by steam power, water lines of communication render much more service than in the time when people had to depend on a favourable wind, rudder and sails. And yet the mere possession of the middle Elbe, which traversed his whole theatre of war, was one of the elements of Frederick the Great's superiority over his enemies in all his campaigns in Saxony and Bohemia.

But the value of water lines is restricted by the fact that they may be closed by the frost during a hard winter, and that their direction cannot be altered. If a change suddenly takes place in the operations, they may thus lose their importance.

As a means of communication between the army and the sources of its strength, the sea is free from both of the just mentioned restrictions, as it does not freeze, except in the extreme north, and it does not limit vessels to a fixed line. But it will not do to base ourselves on a single harbour or on a very few, especially while the enemy still possesses any means whatever of being dangerous to us on the

sea. In such case he would lie in wait for our transports at their port of destination, and destroy them. Besides, it must be borne in mind that harbours in our latitudes become obstructed by ice-floes in the winter, and that storms and rough weather temporarily interrupt sea communications.¹ We, therefore, give the preference to railways, which are the quickest means of communication, and independent both of wind and weather, heat and cold. Railways certainly are inferior to ships in power of simultaneously transporting heavy loads, and they have, in the same way as canals and rivers, the drawback that they cannot be shifted at the will of the general. Yet in Western Europe there are more railroads than navigable water-ways, and when the army suddenly strikes a new direction, a branch or cross line will generally be found available. Deliberate demolitions can, however, be more easily effected by the enemy in the case of railways than in the case of other lines of communications, and can hardly be entirely prevented, at least, when the length of line is great. Railways are delicate lines of communications. Of course, they, for that reason, also have the advantage that we can utilize them ourselves and yet deprive

¹ Ice obstruction does not of course affect England.—ED.

the enemy of their use.¹ To render a river unnavigable is impossible, to block a landroad is difficult, but railways can quickly be made unserviceable. When they start from the sea and are only accessible to the enemy from the sea-coast, all that is necessary is to withdraw the rolling stock into the interior of the country in order to make them temporarily useless to the enemy, for to convey locomotives and trucks by ship at a time when all means of transport are taxed to the utmost for the troops, is not easy. At all events, a rolling stock depôt provided in this way would hardly prove large enough to be of much service. The demolition of a few bridges, tunnels, &c., will render other lines useless for months to come.

The mention of railways shows us that *lines of communications* and of *operations* are not the same thing, as is often tacitly assumed. Railroads can scarcely be lines of operations ;² for it is not possible

¹ One of the most untenable of all the objections which have from time to time been raised, and that by military men, against the commencement and extension of the network of railways—in the Ottoman Empire for instance—is that a road into the country would thereby be opened to the enemy.

² Apart from the exceptions, such as the turning manœuvre of the French against the Austrians through Vercelli from the 28th to the 31st May, 1859.

to advance into a hostile country by rail, and river lines can act as such only very rarely, in countries without roads, where the fighting force is transported by boat! The two most efficient kinds of lines of communication are therefore not at all, or only quite exceptionally, available, as lines of operations.

Under certain circumstances the latter differ considerably from the former in their direction. When the Second German army advanced to the Loire in the late autumn of 1870, it chose its main line of operations by Joinville, Troyes, Sens, Nemours, and Pithiviers. It would not have been feasible to use this road permanently on account of the great distance to be traversed by wagon. Hence the railway line by Joinville, Chaumont, Châtillon-sur-Seine, Tonnerre, Joigny, Moret, Montargis, and Juvissey to Orleans, was chosen as the line of communication. At times the railway to Lagny served as a similar line to the troops before Paris. Lines of communication and of operation were thus very different in each case. It may, in certain circumstances, be immaterial whether the enemy crosses the lines of operations in rear of the army. Once the troops have advanced these lose their importance, unless they have at the same time to do duty as lines of communication. As a rule,

however, the terms are synonymous, or, at any rate, lines of communication and operation are contiguous so that they share the same fate if the enemy seize one or the other.

The lines of communication should be made secure before everything. The longer they are, the more difficult they are to guard, and the more vulnerable do they become. It is easier for the enemy to intercept them, and more difficult also for us to forward supplies to our army by them. Advances along very extended lines of operations, which render similar lines of communications necessary, are therefore always productive of trouble. Often the failure of a whole expedition has been caused by the excessive extension of lines of operation and communication; as in the case of Massena's march on Lisbon and Napoleon's expedition to Moscow, or Frederick's advance into Bohemia in 1744. A line of communication exceeding five or six good days' marches may be considered a long one, and it will be as well, at any rate, for the supply of food and ammunition, to establish a fresh base, as the Second German army tried to do on reaching the Loire in December, 1870.

The shorter the base, the greater the danger of losing one's communications. The angle, in which

the lines of operations meet at the objective, then becomes correspondingly acute. Such a triangle naturally includes but little interior space and is more easily enveloped. The lines are closer to one another, and can be more readily cut, and the theory of war formally required, in the interest of the security of the army, fixed spaces between the lines of operations. This purely geometrical view is, however, very theoretical. The only point of importance is that the traffic behind the army should remain open. A broad navigable river, commanded by our war-vessels, might form a very long, and yet very good line of communications. Much depends on the density of the population, on its disposition towards the advancing army, and on its more or less warlike character. Finally, the number of the troops plays a great part. Everything depends upon its bearing a suitable proportion to the size of the area occupied. Count Yorck gives an interesting comparison in his excellent work on Napoleon I.¹ Three and a half months after the commencement of the war against Russia, the Emperor was in Moscow having behind him a line of communications 570 miles in length,

¹ "Napoleon as a General," vol. ii. chapter v.—The advance on Moscow.

extending as far as the Niemen. Altogether the area traversed and occupied by him amounted to 70,000 square miles ; the strength of his army was 213,000. The Germans encamped before Paris with their main forces, three and a half months after the commencement of the war, at a distance of only 190 miles from the Prussian frontier. Their troops covered all in all an area of 20,000 square miles and numbered 425,000 men. It is evident how much better their theatre of war was secured than was Napoleon's. Their communications with their own country were infinitely better protected, and disasters could never have brought about such a sudden reverse as that experienced by the French army in 1812. On the sure hold of the theatre of war thus depends the safety of the communications in rear of the army, and on this again depends the efficiency of the troops for action. The question is not so much one of the favourable length and position of the various lines of communication, or of geometrical measurement of the angles formed by them, as of a just proportion between the strength of the troops and the area occupied by them, and of the hold exercised over it by them.

Anyone who calculates how many wagon columns,

each belonging to a separate body of troops, come and go in rear of an army, will readily understand what tremendous effect every shifting of the base or change of the front of operations must have on the lines of communication. Difficulties enough are produced by the intersection of the lines of advance of the several units at the front. The trains cross one another and complications are inevitable. As it is almost impossible to keep up uninterrupted telegraphic or written communications between these and the combatant troops, the former will have difficulty in finding their way if the line of communication no longer leads them directly to their destination. It is a common thing to see baggage trains wandering about behind an army in search of their respective units. Hence, when changes of front and displacements of the army corps take place, it is usual to keep the lines of communications approximately in the same direction, merely bending them out, even if this entails longer distances being traversed. The first protracted halt in the operations is then devoted to rectifying the arrangements.

The best plan when making alterations is simultaneously to give up the old and establish the new lines of communications, so that for a time both

are in operation together. This, however, assumes that a new base is found close to the first, though to set it up requires time. It is only when a double base was originally possessed, or when the district, serving as a base, includes the army in a semi-circle, that a change in the lines of communication is easy. The advantage of having such a base very quickly makes itself felt by the way in which it facilitates forming new lines of communication in various directions. But the superiority of the movable base stands out even more clearly here. If we are able to promptly restore demolished lines of railway,¹ we can begin to form our base and transfer the whole machinery for keeping up the army to another district, simultaneously with the decision to change the direction of our operations. Nothing can possibly fortify more the power of resource of the commander than the freedom of movement thus conferred on him, and the military art of the future will doubtless be able to show us even greater achievements than have hitherto been seen in history.

¹ Military forces—railway troops—will never do this so well as great railway contractors, who should be brought up for this purpose even during war. If this had been done in 1870 it would even have been possible to restore the bridge of Montereau, which would have opened up a capital line of communication for the Second army by Troyes, Nogent-sur-Seine.

The more lines of communications an army has, the better circumstanced it naturally is. The most favourable proportion would be for each unit, which is independent in its administration, supply and reinforcement, to have its own line of communication. At present, in most large armies, such units are *army corps*. In 1870 and 1871 the Germans nearly always managed to assign to each army corps a separate road for its exclusive use.

The object against which a movement is specially aimed is called the *Objective* of the Operations. Since all important undertakings in war demand a co-operation of the fighting forces, the lines of march directed on that object will, naturally, be concentric. However, the objective must not be considered as stationary, but as movable. It is not sufficient, therefore, to have the power to effect a junction at the one point originally fixed upon. The lines of operation must, on the contrary, be so flexible that they can be closed together as soon as the appearance of the enemy renders it necessary, or opened out and made to meet at a point beyond the objective originally intended.

It is a serious error to have in simultaneous use several lines of operations, between which there are impassable obstacles. It exposes the army to the

danger of being defeated in detail, should the enemy advance more rapidly than was expected, and offer opposition on one line of operations with superior forces.

Lines of operations leading towards the rear and used by an army falling back before a superior enemy, are called *lines of retreat*. In their selection, points have to be considered which are to a certain extent quite different from those affecting lines directed forward.

The defeated army, which for the time being is no longer able to think of resistance and only seeks to get away from the enemy, will convert its lines of communications into lines of retreat, so as to secure its commissariat arrangements, and at the same time cover its base.¹

However, we are not concerned with an army such

¹ The more unwieldy an army, and the more defective the arrangements for its supply service, the more closely is it committed to them. Large, newly raised armies, like those of the Third Republic in France in the winter of 1870-71, cannot move far from railways. The feeding of the Turkish army in the last Balkan war was only rendered feasible by the extreme frugality of the soldiers, of which we in Europe have scarcely any conception. Nevertheless, the difficulty which the generals had with regard to commissariat tied their hands greatly and hindered all free and rapid movement. This was especially the case with the main army on the Lom.

as this, but with one which is not yet exhausted, and which will probably continue the struggle with vigour in spite of its retreat.

Such an army only suffers from a temporary inferiority to the enemy. Hence, the main question for it is, not to escape and save itself, but to restore the balance by an increase of force. From this it follows that those lines must be used for the retreat which connect the army with its reinforcements, no matter whether they come up by the same or other lines of operations. By courageously dismissing nervous anxiety about its communications and its base, a retreating army has before now often succeeded in effecting an unexpected change. We have but to look at the case of Blücher and Gneisenau after the battle lost at Ligny, when they did not choose the line of retreat, where their natural communications lay, by Sombreffe on Liège and Maestricht, but that on Wavre and Tilly, where there was the possibility of a junction with the English, for whom they had waited in vain at Ligny.¹ Thus they succeeded in coming up to Waterloo at the decisive moment,

¹ This is quite wrong. Blücher meant to fight at Ligny irrespective of Wellington's assistance.—ED.

thereby winning the battle, giving an unexpected turn to the campaign, and putting a sudden end to Napoleon's power.

Of course the separation of the line of retreat from the line of communications must not last so long that the army is ruined by it or unduly weakened by want. The arrival of reinforcements would in that case be powerless to effect the desired restoration of equilibrium.

Under some circumstances this latter aim may be sought by means of strong positions, taken up by the retreating army. The effect of a divergence of the lines of retreat from those of communication, however, becomes more dangerous in this case. If there are friendly troops, on which we can make our retreat, we thereby can recruit our own forces. By taking up a position, on the other hand, we receive no accession of strength, unless it is quickly brought into communication with a new base. If such a base is situated not in rear of the retreating army, but towards a flank, then, if the access of strength either by troops or position is of itself great enough to make an impression on the enemy, this fact is rather an advantage than a disadvantage. The enemy is compelled then not only to renew his

attack, but also to unexpectedly change his direction of operations. "Lateral bases," says Jomini, "are often decisive for preventing the enemy from making any further advance into the heart of the country."¹

Lines of retreat which lead to such a base, and which leave the straight road to the objective open to the enemy, are as a rule called divergent.

A movable base, like a network of railways, when it is commanded for a sufficient length, naturally admits of connection with divergent lines of retreat much more freely than a simple lateral base does; for the railroads, which restore the power of feeding and maintaining the army after the separation of the lines of retreat from those originally used for communication, at the same time allow of the rapid bringing up of reinforcements. This advantage is especially the case in defending one's own country.

If the access of strength for the retreating army is to be gained either by means of defensive positions or by the approach of reinforcements, it will be a matter of good judgment to select lines of retreat in the direction in which the greatest prospect of success is offered. Fixed rules cannot be given for this, but further on, when discussing defensive

¹ Jomini, "Précis of the Art of War," p. 8.

operations, we will endeavour to draw up some points to be considered in making the choice.

4. *Placing the Army in Readiness.*

Preparation for War, Mobilization, Strategical Deployment.

No army can take the field straight away from a peace footing. This is part of the nature of the military organizations of the present day, which in peace only keep together a nucleus for the troops to be formed in war. Indeed, even this much does not exist in the case of many nations, whose military forces have to be organized *de novo*. Officers and men on the reserve list have to be re-called to the colours, the establishment of horses, vehicles, and means of transport has to be largely increased, an infinity of war material has to be procured. Thus a certain time is required for carrying out the *preparation for war*.

This can never be entirely concealed. The enemy will receive intelligence about it and will learn from it what awaits him. The rivalry between the Great Powers has brought about the preparation for war in peace time, even when a war is not in prospect. In pursuance of this plan it is

customary to keep in store every requisite which cannot be provided at the time when the army has to be placed on a war footing, or can only be procured so slowly that it would cause delay in placing the whole in readiness. Similarly, all administrative work, down to the smallest detail, is laid down on paper beforehand. The ideal to be reached in these days is for the army to be ready to march off the very hour the last soldier called up is able to join.

This transition from peace to war footing, which is previously worked out down to the minutest detail, is called the *mobilization* of the army.

The advantage is obvious of preparing the mobilization as the first step towards preparation for war. It makes surprise possible, and only discloses the object which we are pursuing when it is too late for the enemy to make up the start we have gained. The fact that we have decided on war does not become evident until the outbreak is imminent.

Mobilization prepares the army for war, though it does not place it in position. The time gained might be again lost if the concentration were to take place too slowly. This, therefore, must be previously worked out in every particular. It may

be objected that it is not possible to foresee where it should take place; but the following words will show that this is a mistake. *It is part of the plan of operations to fix where our forces can be most suitably deployed against each of the neighbouring powers.* + By means of careful work it is possible to make out a combination of marches and railway and ship transport, in accordance with which all the troops can arrive at the chosen place without loss of time.

The limit of what can be done is generally fixed by the working capacity of the railways. If we employ all the lines leading to the sphere of operations, and every day bring to each line the number of troops that can be despatched by it, then, and then only, is the concentration well arranged.

One of the chief things affecting preparation for war is a permanent stationing of the troops—a peace distribution—which will in the highest degree favour entraining and despatching them to the frontier. All lines of railway should also be adequately provided with rolling stock, so that the greatest number of trains which the nature of the lines will allow can be run. The railway network should also be completed in accordance with military requirements. These considerations will not exempt two or more lines from

being put to the full test of their working capacities, simply because they converge and run on a single track for some distance. The same applies to bridges over streams. The rivalry between neighbouring states has had the effect of causing perfectly new lines to be constructed solely for military reasons. — Strategical railways constitute a special feature of our time.¹

In the concentration of armies we reckon almost by hours. But it must also be borne in mind that, if France were in a position to effect her *strategical deployment* three days sooner than Germany, she would invest Metz and Thionville, cut — Strassburg from its communications, and cross the Saar with her cavalry masses before Germany was ready. The German armies would, in such case, be compelled to transfer their concentration back almost to where it took place in 1870. The moral gain, the growth in confidence amongst the troops, would be far more important even than the material advantage of getting such a start. A single day even would mean a great deal, and, of course, no power,

¹ Their number is proportionately highest in Russia, where the private traffic of the sparse population does not require so many lines as are rendered desirable by considerations for the concentration of the army.

which understands its interests, will allow itself to be forestalled if this can possibly be avoided.

3. *The Plan of Operations.*

Although it is generally agreed nowadays that a complete plan of the operations for the field is not possible because we have to reckon with the will of the enemy, which is independent of ours, nevertheless, we shall not be disposed to abstain altogether from previously determining what should be done. It is, in fact, of the highest importance that we should do so in a thoroughly definite manner, for vagueness as to our intentions produces irresolution in our decisions and uncertainty in the orders. Such uncertainty again would be attended by incomplete or feeble execution on the part of the troops. An absence of clear knowledge of the object aimed at engenders a weak method of conducting war, and contains the germ of future defeat.

The chief point, in getting out a scheme of operations, is to decide how far we can go with it, and especially, how deeply we can enter into details. We must also be careful not to allow arbitrary assumptions to creep in as the basis for arriving at conclusions which are dependent on them. It is hazardous to assume the

success of our first steps simply because, so far as they are concerned, they are well conceived; for we have already pointed out that even the best plans may miscarry in war through chance circumstances.¹ Our material superiority will rarely be so great that we are certain to crush the enemy in spite of mishaps and errors. If it were so, it would be very easy to sketch a plan and no ingenuity would be required.

In thinking out the probable course of a coming campaign it is not possible to make sure of selecting from amongst the various courses which appear open to us, that which gives most promise of success. Here, in particular, there comes into play a gift of divination, which we call the master eye, and which is difficult to describe. This faculty can, no doubt, be sharpened by means of study and experience, but cannot be created where the natural talent does not exist.

It is well known that Napoleon I. boasted that he never had a plan. Yet we see that all his operations were directed from the outset on some great and perfectly definite objective, which can be readily recognized, whether it be cutting the enemy's army from its communications, as in 1805, or threatening

¹ See the Introduction, pp. i. and ii.

his capital, for the protection of which the army must at all costs interpose and accept battle, as in 1806.

Jomini discovered, it is said, before the commencement of that campaign to the great surprise of the Emperor, not only the objective, which the latter had set before himself, but even the route he intended at first to follow. Both were thus within reach of the intellect of the attentive observer.

The surprising changes in the plan of operations—which could not be foreseen even by such an adept as Napoleon—took place during the execution of the original plan, and were due to the dispositions of the enemy, and especially to the mistakes made by him.

Now this shows what Napoleon meant by the saying attributed to him. The plan of operations must define what we wish to do and hope to achieve with our available resources. It cannot forecast the individual movements or operations by which this will be effected. The first important engagement with the enemy above all things exercises a distinctly decisive influence on them. We have but to look at Wörth and Spicheren in 1870. The material and moral results of every battle will

determine what has to be done afterwards. Since, however, in modern times active operations commence from the completion of the strategical concentration, it is not long before the first combats take place. It follows therefore that the purview of the original scheme cannot in general extend further than the strategical deployment. Beyond this the only thing left as a guiding star to the commander is the broad general object aimed at.

To successfully grasp this, what is required more than anything is a correct appreciation of the general military and political situation, and an exact knowledge of the capabilities of one's own army. The fundamental error committed on the French side in 1870 was that they thought they would be able to assume a strategical offensive, which would affect surprise, with an army, the larger units of which were only to be formed at the time of assembly, the reserves of which were to join only on the ground on which the concentration took place, and the administration of which was centralized to the highest degree, so that the machine was bound to work slowly. This they expected, moreover, against an enemy who had most carefully prepared the mobilization of his forces and their

strategical concentration, whose well elaborated decentralization made the most rapid execution possible, and whose larger units already existed in peace prepared to come forward for war.

It was quite right that the Turkish army, which had just before acted on the offensive in the Servian and Montenegrin War, should confine itself to the defensive in the subsequent Russian War, because its entire organization made a forward movement to a great distance impracticable, and the enemy was superior in numbers and mobility. The limit, however, which they imposed on themselves should not have extended so far as to make them entirely renounce an active defence and isolate offensive operations, such as the seizure and blowing up of the bridge of Barboshi, and similar enterprises which would have had the effect of disturbing the enemy's strategical concentration. It is like building a house without foundations, to plan a strategical offensive, which requires rapidity and energy with an unwieldy levy, the leaders of which have not had the opportunity of acquiring the necessary training even in peace manœuvres in moving large bodies of troops. Such an edifice must fall unless some special good luck comes to the rescue.

On the other hand, it is like burying a treasure, to limit a well-disciplined army with expert leaders and perfect organization, to the defensive against an inferior enemy, without being forced to do so by great numerical disparity.

Now, of course, no one will readily make such a mistake with his eyes open. We have only to take the word of those responsible for the efficiency of any army, even the most thoroughly neglected one, and we shall generally find that they consider it ready to go anywhere and do anything. Either from want of experience or from conceit they give it credit for the possession of every high quality, and for solid plans they substitute elaborate arguments. Such defects can only be compensated for by natural gifts or by special ideal powers, such as heroic bravery, enthusiasm, religious fanaticism, or something of the sort.¹ Hence, a thorough knowledge of our own capacity is of the very first importance in deciding on the military objective for a scheme of operations. Often it is even necessary to reject a plan which is good in itself,

¹ The importance of such motives can, of course, not be altogether denied, but it is even a greater mistake to try to hide under them all the weak points of the army, which are exposed by mature judgment.

because the man who would, under the existing circumstances, have the carrying of it out is not equal to it. If the commander makes out the plan himself, he should ask himself honestly and without trying to deceive himself, if he really thinks himself capable of performing the great things which he proposes.¹

In this way the first important point of the plan of operations is to be decided, namely, the general lines on which the war is to be conducted, whether we can advance against the enemy, or whether we must wait on the defensive for an improvement in our own position.

If we have to deal with several adversaries at the same time, we must further consider against which of them our main forces must be directed, and which, on the contrary, may be treated as of minor importance. We should then ask ourselves what the enemy is likely to do. Although the experience of war does not exactly forbid us to calculate upon mistakes on his part, when we consider any special reasons which make it allowable to count upon them, yet it will be wise to suppose his dispositions to be generally correct,

¹ An excellent example of this is seen in Napoleon's suggestion to Moreau in 1800, which the latter would not carry out.—ED.

i.e. to be those which would tell most heavily against us.

If we can form a pretty good idea as to what the enemy will do, it will be possible to make a forecast of the strategical deployment of his troops, which will be regulated by the same fundamental conditions as our own. The object, which we ascribe to him, enables us to decide the locality in which the assembly of his armies must take place, and which will therefore form his base of operations.¹ The peace distribution of his troops, of which we should not be ignorant, as well as the position and limit of his military administrative districts in peace time, gives us the points of departure from which his troops will set out. The railways, roads or water-ways, which lead thence to the base, enable us to determine the lines by which they will come up. By taking all the factors into consideration we can form an idea of the general concentration of the enemy's military forces. If our work has been carefully done it cannot prove altogether wrong. We can by the same means

¹ This question of the base of operations is somewhat obscured by this sentence. The *real* base of operations is the *whole country*. The *immediate* base is that part of the latter, where supplies are accumulated for the operations. It is the latter which is meant in this case.—ED.

learn the natural grouping of the enemy's fighting strength into different armies.

Our own plan of strategical concentration must take into consideration that of the enemy. If it is to be followed by the offensive it must above all things be favourable for combined action in a forward direction. If it is intended to be defensive, then the chief consideration is the union of our forces for resistance in the direction of the enemy's probable main line of advance. In this case it is advantageous to assemble our forces as near to the enemy as the safety of the process of concentration will allow. Concentrating further back means abandoning country and resources and loss of time.

A plan for the offensive may next go into considerable detail about the directions which the different columns have to take, and may indicate the more limited district where concentration prior to battle is to be effected, and the special objective of attack, as, for example, a wing, a flank, or the centre of the enemy's army.

Further than this only general ideas can be drawn up for future action. As a rule, they will direct attention to separating the enemy from his most important communications, without which the further

existence of his forces is imperilled. This is the easiest method of destroying the enemy in the sense in which we use the term in military language.¹ That this object is more difficult of attainment than formerly follows from a just conception of the movable base, on which the defender in particular is able to rest. In the great American War, only thirty years ago, it was still possible for the fate of an army to be decided by its being severed from the only line of railway that existed. At the present time such a thing is no longer possible in a theatre of war in Western Europe, where it would be a question of severing it from whole districts, on the resources of which the subsistence of the army is chiefly based. A decisive blow cannot be struck unless an investment takes place, and the enemy is driven back on to a neutral frontier or a sea-coast of which he has not command. Finally, a reference to the way in which the enemy should be forced to conclude peace forms the necessary completion of the scheme.

A plan for the defensive will specify somewhat definitely the first strategical position in which resistance is to be offered in the first place; or, if resistance is only to be temporary, where decision will

¹ See p. 8.

take place. The point selected for this will, if the scheme is logically prepared, be that where a favourable change in the general situation is likely to assert itself. It must also be pointed out whence the force, which induces the change, will proceed. It is evident how important it is that, so long as he retires, the defender should select his direction in such a way that it leads him towards his reinforcements, while it, if possible, diverts the enemy away from *his* objective. The more embarrassed the enemy's communications and the better ours become in the course of the operations, so much sooner will the desired reaction take place. With an explanation as to where and when this reaction is expected to take place the defensive plan comes to an end. Thus it does not, like that for the offensive, take us to the very end; but can only deal with the operations up to the second period of the war, when a plan of attack is required.

The way to make a valuable plan of operations consists, beyond everything, in keeping within wise limits. If we go too far into questions of time and space, or enter too deeply into details, which are entirely dependent on chance, the course of events will soon prove us wrong.

More than this, however, is required in such a plan. It must prescribe general lines of action for the armies stationed in neighbouring theatres of war. It will be the aim of these to prevent the events which occur there from influencing the conduct of the main army in any way until after the decisive battle.

If fortresses have to be besieged during the operations, it must be decided beforehand how they are to be dealt with, because they react on the strategical concentration. A modern siege-park can, with difficulty, be transferred from a direction already taken to another. It must, therefore, be settled at the outset what hostile fortress it is intended to take by siege. Similarly, the scheme of operations must also settle at what point it is intended to break through the frontier defences which bar the way to the enemy's main army ; for the troops proceeding thither require a special equipment.

Finally, we have to consider the relations between operations by sea and those by land when a fleet supports the army. Thus the scheme of operations will form a literary essay, which, commencing with a general consideration of the joint political and military situations, draws a comparison between the opposed

military forces, and from this deduces the general line of action to be taken.

It should then set forth what the enemy can do and where he will effect the strategical concentration of his forces, so as later on to fix where our own troops must concentrate and how they must be grouped.

Next follows the choice of direction for the first movements, the aim of which is to fight the decisive battle against the enemy's main force under the most favourable conditions.

From this point onwards it depends whether the plan of operation is offensive or defensive. The former points out the further objectives to be pursued, in a general way, right up to the enforcement of peace ; the latter only takes us up to the moment of the expected turn in the tide of affairs, and deals chiefly with the prospects of the subsequent offensive campaign. Finally, they both give opinions about such points of secondary importance as may influence success.

CHAPTER IX.

STRATEGICAL OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS.

1. *Aim—Conditions—Auxiliary Means.*

WE already know that the aim of all strategical offensive operations is to bring about the tactical decision under conditions as favourable as possible for ourselves. We shall accomplish this if we fall upon the enemy's weakest point with superior force. If, before the decision by combat, we succeed in bringing together all the troops which can possibly be brought up, and lead them in the direction in which their presence will be most felt by the enemy, then we shall have done everything strategically possible for the offensive. After all, the whole art of war resolves itself into being the stronger at the decisive point.

The conditions for success are, apart from the fact that the means of every sort at our disposal must be sufficient, in the first place, concealment of purpose

in such a way that the enemy can only discover the direction of our blow when it has become too late for him to retaliate with a concentration of all his forces before the battle. Therefore, when the movement has reached such a stage that the enemy can no longer be deceived as to its aim, the most distant portions of our army must be nearer to the point, at which collision will ensue, than those of the enemy. If good information has been obtained before the commencement of the operations, the above condition is quite capable of fulfilment. The rapidity of the advance must naturally be such that the enemy is unable to outdo it. Our action must be prompt and energetic.

These conditions sound so extraordinarily simple that it might be thought quite impossible to fail in fulfilling them. What makes them difficult is that, in practice, the situation, which appeared so clear when our resolution was first made, very soon becomes complicated.

The contact between the two contending armies takes place not at one but many points. And all these points are so many influences to divert us from the course previously chosen. The offensive is not in quite such a bad way in this respect as the defensive,

where there is very soon trouble all round ; still it is similarly affected, so that it seems everywhere as if the forces were inadequate, and reinforcements were required. In spite of this, however, and with perfect unconcern, it is necessary to withdraw troops here and there, in order to march them off in the decisive direction. This gives rise to doubts as to whether this direction has been correctly chosen. Then the effect produced by the enemy joins in and causes the situation to appear other than it was supposed to be. Actual dangers which have not been foreseen, threaten the further advance. Instead of the one object of operations, which was all we pictured to ourselves when sketching our plan, we see several when we come to carrying it out.

In this crisis everything depends on whether we can quickly recognize with unhesitating glance the most important, or at least an important objective, and can persuade ourselves to neglect the others, at any rate, for the moment. The important thing is ever to remember that the offensive has generally gained its whole object the moment it is victorious at one point, no matter how it fares at others. It is in making able use of this characteristic of the offensive that the secret of its successful execution lies.

2. *The Choice of the Point of Concentration.*

Even when an objective has been selected and the troops have been directed towards it, a great deal still depends on the choice of the point of concentration. If the troops are not able to co-operate at the moment when we reach the objective we have been seeking, the operation will fail, for the necessary numerical superiority will not exist.

Now, in order to avoid this evil, it would be well to keep all the fighting forces united from the very beginning and to advance in a state of concentration. This, however, is possible only in very rare cases. In the first place we have to deal with the original situation over which we had no control, and which may, for example, for geographical reasons alone, prevent a concentration before we enter upon the offensive operation, as happened to the Prussian army in 1866. If we always tried to concentrate all the troops before setting them in motion, the loss of time would be so great that the whole military situation might possibly have changed meanwhile, and the assumptions, on which our plans had been based, might have become falsified.

We know also that whenever an army is collected into a small space great discomfort is brought on it.¹ It may still be possible to feed it if it has a very close network of railways behind it; but the water supply often presents more difficulties. In any case, it is desirable that the army spread itself out while making the forward movement. The necessity of looking out for a sufficient number of made roads even compels it to do so.²

This, however, again makes it indispensable to fix beforehand on a point of concentration.

Two great principles stand in opposition to one another in the selection of this point.

Napoleon I., it is well known, is the chief exponent of concentration before coming on the battle-field. He used to form his army into a united serried mass, and then deal the enemy an irresistible blow. To avail himself at the same time of the element of surprise, he always took care to conceal the concentration by means of some natural feature in the country, such as a chain of mountains, the course of a river, &c. He called his system: "attacking in mass."

In this way he assembled his army in 1805,

¹ See page 12.

² See page 13.

between Donauwörth and Ingolstadt, behind the right wing of the Austrians, before he crossed the Danube, and attacked them in rear at Ulm. In the same way he collected his army at the commencement of October, 1806, on the Upper Main at Bayreuth, Bamberg and Schweinfurth, in order to lead it forward in a compact body. Similarly in April, 1813, he marched with his masses, coming up from France first, to the Lower Saale at Merseburg and Weissenfels, where the Viceroy Eugene was stationed with the army which had remained in Germany. True to his principle he wanted first to form one mass of his entire fighting forces, so that he might then advance in the direction of Leipsic and outflank the Allies on their right, their main force being to the south of that town. This performance was repeated in the same campaign towards the end of August, when the Emperor was returning from Silesia to the Elbe for the battle of Dresden. He took care to give his troops first of all a general rendezvous at Stolpen, in front of the Elbe and Dresden, in order to continue the movement thence in mass. Again, his last campaign of 1815 began with a rapid concentration of all his troops, stationed on the northern frontier, in the direction of Charleroi

for an assault in mass on the cantonments of the Prussian army opposite.

We see King Frederick at the commencement of the campaign of 1757, and the Prussian army in 1866, before Sadowa, act in exactly the opposite way. Detached columns march against the enemy and select their point of concentration within the space which he is occupying. The same procedure was repeated in 1870 and 1871 at Wörth, Orleans and Le Mans, by the Prussian army. Field-Marshal Moltke stands out as the representative of this principle—which is opposed to that of Napoleon—of uniting detached columns on the battle-field.

Both of these principles, Napoleon's and Moltke's, have led to great results. They both aim at the same thing, namely, to bring superior forces into combined operation in the battle. In spite of the opinion of one of our greatest military writers, who, even after 1870, pronounced Moltke's principle to be inferior,¹ we must acknowledge both to be equally good. Each responds to a distinct preceding state of affairs and is not of arbitrary application.

Austria had gained a start of Prussia in arming

¹ Graf Yorck. "Précis Militaire de la Campagne de 1813 en Allemagne." Leipsic, 1881, p. 34.

for war in 1866. But the Prussians succeeded in making up for this by rapidly preparing and concentrating their forces, which came from the east and west of the kingdom. Had General von Moltke tried to unite them first of all at one place in their own country, further loss of time would have been involved. The natural point of junction which could be most rapidly reached from all parts, lay to the front, in Bohemia, in the neighbourhood of the Upper Elbe. It is true that it was possible for the enemy to arrive there first, but not with his *whole* army, individual corps of which were still at Landenburg in Southern Moravia, whilst the most distant Prussian detachments came from Dresden and Neisse, and so at all events could arrive first. Thus the joint advance in the direction of Gitschin¹ was decided upon, not as a chance which could only succeed with good luck, but as the well-considered and proper means of remedying the unfavourable geographical form of the Prussian kingdom.

The point of concentration may therefore lie even within the area already in possession of the enemy, provided he cannot post himself there with superior forces in less time.

¹ Spelt Jicin on Austrian maps.—ED.

Napoleon's principle of concentrating before invasion has the advantage that in case of surprise, when the conditions turn out different to what was expected, all the troops are well in hand and there is therefore not much to fear. It happened thus to Napoleon I. when in October, 1806, he found the Prussians not in his front on the high-road through Leipsic to Berlin, but, contrary to his expectations, on his left flank behind the Saale. But the crowded advance increases the trouble and the losses. Napoleon's army was ruined in 1813 by marching and counter-marching in a state of close concentration. The Austrians suffered greatly from the same cause in 1859, and likewise in 1866. If the enemy is able to evade the blow, as Blücher did with success on two occasions, in August and at the beginning of September, 1813, the concentrated mass soon finds itself obliged either to give up the contest or scatter under the eyes of the enemy. Either alternative is unpleasant.

Finally, to concentrate before reaching the objective requires a good deal of space. If the enemy be posted close before our front, concentration can be effected only by drawing our forces together without advancing. This involves flank marches,

which, although they are not by any means so hazardous as the lessons of war would often make us believe, yet, when carried out in too close proximity to the enemy, readily lead to surprises, confusion, and unintended isolated combats. If we can picture armies of hundreds of thousands of men at the outbreak of a war, strategically concentrated on the frontier, and closely fronting one another, as would be the case in Western Europe, it is easy to see that the space must be wanting here for closer tactical concentration before the assault on the enemy's positions, and that it must take place during engagements with the enemy.

When the concentration is effected within the space in the enemy's possession it naturally enables the army to remain separated up to the last moment. Moreover, if the enemy withdraw it is possible to push the point of concentration further forward. This facilitates the feeding and movement of large bodies of men; there is this fundamental danger about it, however, that the columns may be beaten in detail by an enemy who makes his appearance between them, before the others can render assistance. Frequently accident or unskilful and irresolute action on the part of a single column

necessitates the retreat of all, and then the advantage of the offensive, that it is generally victorious if successful at one point, is converted into the disadvantage of having failed because a disaster has happened to it at a single place.

The more the army is distributed over a wide area, the less, naturally, does the influence of the commander-in-chief become, and the greater the independence of his subordinate generals. Their manner of acting has, in such case, great weight on the combined success. The concentration will not be successful unless at least the majority of the generals act with energy and prudence, and thoroughly in harmony with the will of the supreme commander. The latter may easily come to grief through the faults of his subordinates. The Second Prussian army at its entry into Bohemia, did not permit itself to be delayed in consequence of the incompetence of one of the corps commanders. But a check might possibly have ensued if a second corps commander had also failed in his duty; if, for instance, General Steinmetz had acted at Nachod in the same way that Bonin did at Trautenau. We must therefore know our men and be able to rely implicitly on them in every respect. The troops,

too, must not be so feebly organized that accidents easily cause separate units to be disorganized, as happened with Oudinot's army on the 23rd August, 1813.¹ Bad troops gain in cohesive power by being kept concentrated. The advance in mass thus affords great security against disaster, and anyone who is not certain what to do should choose it. The divided advance, on the other hand, as a general rule, promises greater success; for the surprise of the enemy is facilitated, because, when attacked at the same time at different places, he has greater difficulty in recognizing which is the important point, and does not come to a clear decision and definite action so quickly, and because the danger, threatening him at several points, readily introduces confusion and mistakes into his dispositions. Finally, this method of concentration, if ably carried out, naturally results in the envelopment of the enemy on the battle-field, which, coupled with the effect of modern firearms, is the best form for the tactical attack.

Whether the point of concentration for the units

¹ Battle of Gross-Beeren, where the dispersal of Reynier's troops brought about the retreat of the whole army, then advancing in three columns.

of the army should be selected according to the one principle or the other, must be left for the practised eye to discern from the situation, which is different on every occasion. It must, however, always be borne in mind that the object aimed at is not to seek the point of concentration according to the one method or the other, by any hard and fast rules, but to bring all the troops on to the battle-field so as to ensure their combined action.

3. *Parallel, Convergent and Divergent Lines of Advance—Night Marches and Flank Marches.*

An advance straight to the front on parallel roads has the advantage of always preserving the same interval between the several columns during the movement. This facilitates obtaining shelter and food. Each column possesses its own line of operations, and generally, also, its own line of communications. This obviates confusion amongst the troops as well as amongst the baggage trains following them. Undoubtedly, such an arrangement is the most convenient for the movement of great masses. But it cannot conduce to a junction on the battle-field, unless the lines of march run quite close to one another; in which case there is no advantage. An

advance cannot therefore, as a rule, be conducted on parallel lines to the battle-field, but only when, after a decisive action has taken place, we have to traverse the interval from one area of country gained to another, without anticipating a collision with the enemy. This happened, for example, with the German armies between the Saar and Moselle in August, 1870. But even in that instance changes became necessary when the French unexpectedly halted behind the Nied.

When approaching the enemy convergent lines of advance are required ;—yet we must not abandon the parallel lines too early, or we shall reveal our object prematurely, and charge ourselves too soon with the inconveniences attendant on reducing the intervals between the columns. The point of concentration is not a fixed one, but varies within a certain area, because the enemy's army, on which its choice depends, is in movement, and the convergent direction of the columns will therefore, as was the case with the Prussians in 1866, not really be aimed at one point, but will more generally be directed on a tract of country, until it is clearly seen where the tactical decision is to be expected.

We must also not understand the term concentra-

tion in a too literal sense, as implying that all parts of the army are to stand shoulder to shoulder on the same field. An army is concentrated when even its most distant corps are able to arrive on the battle-field on the same day at the required time. The most favourable position the several units of an army can occupy is when they are disposed in a semicircle round the battle-field, as before the battle of Königgrätz, in such case we can the more readily abstain from completely effecting the junction of the columns, as was then done. A state of separation facilitates the advance and the deployment.

The divergent advance is the epilogue to a victory, —the concentration which the combat had required, being again relaxed for the benefit of the troops, the only further object being to occupy country after the victory. It is hazardous to open out to a divergent advance in the presence of the enemy; it must never occur when a fresh fight of importance is expected, or even considered possible.

The campaign of 1814 shows us on two occasions the strange spectacle of the Allies opening out for the sole purpose of again enveloping the enemy and driving him into a corner. In that case, however, there were other motives of a secret nature at work,

especially the endeavours of one commander-in-chief to secure greater independence and freedom of action, than was possible in close combination with the main army. The Servo-Turkish War of 1876 began on the Servian side entirely with a divergent offensive movement in four army groups towards the three points of the compass, in which hostile territory was situated. Political motives were in that case pre-eminent, and caused the rapid and lamentable wreck of the undertaking. However, these are exceptional cases which can scarcely recur.

The direction of our march will not always lead direct on to the enemy's front, but will often run obliquely to it, or temporarily even run parallel with it, so that the troops while marching expose their flank to the enemy and thus execute a flank march. We therefore introduce here at this early stage a few words on flank marches, although they might equally well come into the province of the defensive when it is a question of anticipating the enemy at some point on a flank.

A flank march only becomes dangerous when it is not fully understood that one is being executed, and when an attack by the enemy from the outer flank would therefore take us by surprise. A column on

the march, however, deploys more rapidly to a flank than to the front, for the distances are shorter. Still, it will not do to march too close to the enemy, as sufficient space for deployment must be preserved. Covering the flank march by a special body has its risks. Either it is weak, in which case it invites the enemy to make an attack at the very time which is most inconvenient to us, or it is strong when it delays the lateral movement of the whole force by its slower rate of march. The precautions required when making a flank march are to reconnoitre carefully, to make an alteration in the order of march so that there shall be some cavalry available in the centre of very long columns, and to keep the subordinate leaders well informed, so that they are alert and prepared to deploy to the flank. It is true that an attack during the flank march always causes confusion; for the march is directed on an objective already clearly defined, which it is desired to reach as quickly as possible; and every fight, even if it ends successfully, causes delay. Should the enemy be stationary at the time, the flank march derives a certain amount of protection from the fact that it takes time for troops, which are deployed and distributed over a position, to be set in motion. The

situation becomes more difficult if the enemy is himself on the march and we want to get safely past the heads of his columns. Frequently the only course left is to attack them with separate bodies and to bring them to a standstill by surprise, whilst the rest of the force continues the march. Yet there is great danger of such partial fights drawing us into a general engagement at a place where we did not wish it.¹

Flank marches are unavoidable. Every occasion on which masses, previously separated, have to be concentrated within striking distance of the enemy will necessitate semi- or complete flank marches. They must be carried out with caution, with full knowledge of the situation and object aimed at, and yet without apprehension.

Similarly, we must dismiss the dread of night marches, a dread which has increased in recent times as the result of anxiety to spare the troops. It is as impossible to do without them altogether in strategical operations as it is to exclude flank

¹ One of the best examples of such a situation, i.e. both sides marching and each endeavouring to outstrip the other, is seen in the movement side by side of Marmont and Wellington in the retreat on Portugal which terminated in the Battle of Salamanca.—ED.

marches. Many instances from the campaigns of Frederick and Napoleon prove that well planned night marches do not prejudicially affect the condition of the troops. In the open plains of Southern Europe they are the rule in the hot season. Osman Pasha made three night marches between Widdin and Plevna in July, 1877. And yet the subsequent actions proved that his troops had not lost their fighting powers.

Night marches will be of great use immediately before a battle, in order to bring densely-crowded masses close up to the enemy's position before the commencement of the attack. With the growth of armies they will be indispensable in the future, since, otherwise, it is scarcely possible for two army corps in succession to make use of the same road to the scene of action.

The only thing to be feared is the usual disturbance of the night's rest, which can be quite well avoided by issuing the orders for the following morning sufficiently early.¹

¹ The author is here somewhat sarcastic. He evidently means that the troops should rest after completing the march, and not be disturbed by the issue of orders which can be given out before.—
ED.

4. SPECIAL FORMS OF THE STRATEGICAL OFFENSIVE.

It is clear that a great number of different forms, all of which cannot be treated in detail, may be discussed in connection with the position of the base of operations, choice of the object of operations, direction of the lines of operations or of retreat, the nature and method of the advance, and the determination of the point of junction and of attack. It is sufficient to quote the simplest forms which always recur under one shape or another in the conduct of war.

The Strategical Frontal Attack.

This is the most straightforward expression of superior strength, and as such is thoroughly warranted. Anyone who is sure that he is able to overthrow the enemy under all conditions, goes straight at him so as to attack him wherever he can find him.

It is true that this means sacrificing all artificial expedients for intensifying the success, aimed at by superior strength. The full advantage, however, of such success must be sought in energy of action, especially in pursuit after initial victories. The strategical frontal attack does not threaten the enemy's lines

of communication and operation. All chance of effecting a surprise by the direction of the attack is excluded, it can only be attained by rapidity of advance. But to desire any adjunct to the simple frontal attack is neither an advantage in itself nor a source of strength, and since to do so requires us to detach troops, it involves in the first place even a weakening effect. It is only later, if it thus deceives the enemy, surprises him or induces him to make mistakes, that any such adjunct may bear fruit. When, therefore, no special reasons exist in the nature of the country or road system, or in the position occupied by the enemy or our own forces, to invite us to combine the frontal strategical attack with other operations, we must not hesitate to dispense with the latter and look upon the simple form as a thing complete in itself. The object aimed at is to bring on the battle, and this is attained in the quickest and shortest way by a direct advance.

Strategy, moreover, affords fewer chances of making enveloping and turning movements than tactics does. It is quite conceivable, particularly with the size of modern armies, that in their strategical deployment they may obtain secure

support on both flanks from sea-coasts, neutral frontiers, systems of fortification, &c. Tactically this is rarely the case. The simpler forms facilitate command and diminish the danger of confusion, misunderstandings, and errors.

Moreover, the manner in which the tactical decision is to be fought out, is not entirely determined beforehand by the original strategical plan. It is quite possible to change from a frontal strategical attack to a tactically out-flanking and enveloping one.

The simplest kind of advance on parallel lines of march, by which the enemy is similarly affected along all parts of his front, naturally also promises the least decisive result. It may be employed when the enemy is so weak that all there is to do is to rush him, and then occupy the territory defended by him without further delay, or, when backed up by almost inexhaustible resources, our plan is to ruin him by losses, which he can no longer make good—as was done by General Grant at the end of the War of Secession. The distribution of forces on the several parallel lines of march will not, as a rule, be uniform; but that wing will be stronger, which is intended to destroy the hostile wing opposed to it

by means of superior strength, and after all even the strategical frontal attack generally comprises convergent lines of march, which are directed on to one point of the enemy's position, and thus produce a special form.

Strategical Penetration.

This, which forces the enemy's line and separates the several parts of the army attacked, so as afterwards to defeat them one after the other, must, if it succeeds, be exceedingly effective and attended with great results. In addition to this, the groups driven apart, as a rule, lose at the same time their natural lines of communications, since they are compelled to withdraw in the direction of the flanks. But penetration is invested with the specific danger that if the motive power be not great enough, the wedge remains embedded. It also frequently leads to tactical frontal attacks, which in these days of highly-developed fire effect are attended with the utmost difficulty. This will happen more especially when the enemy is already united or is able to concentrate at the same time as we attempt to penetrate, so that all the portions of his army come into simultaneous action. Then we have enemies in front of us and

on both flanks, like a force, which is invested in a fortress. The time for strategical penetration is therefore *before* the concentration of the enemy's forces.

It was in this way that King Frederick invaded Bohemia in 1757,¹ when he knew the Austrians to be still scattered in billets between Königgrätz and Eger, and occupied with their preparations for the coming campaign. He had reason to hope that he would separate them, split up their army, and defeat the groups singly. His success was nevertheless only a partial one. It is true that the Austrians were unable to collect their whole army for the principal battle at Prague; but to ensure a complete triumph it would have been necessary for him to have succeeded later on in keeping off Daun's relieving effort, and, by this means, in forcing the army of Prince Charles of Lorraine, which was shut up in Prague after the loss of the battle, to lay down its arms. Before entering the country Frederick himself stood with his troops distributed over too wide an area, and kept them divided by the Elbe. This caused waste of time, and lessened the weight of the blow.

¹ The general direction of his advance being on Leitmeritz.

If the various parts of the army to be attacked are differently situated as regards their communications with the rear, this favours penetrating between them and promotes their separation. Buonaparte reckoned on this in 1796, when in his independent first campaign he gave one of the most brilliant examples of strategical penetration.

At the commencement of the month of April of that year he was in the Riviera, in the neighbourhood of Savona, with 36,000 men, being opposed on his right by 30,000 Austrians, between Sassello and Volti, with their lines of communications to the north-east, along the Bormida towards Alessandria and Milan, and on his left by 22,000 Piedmontese around Ceva, with all their lines of communication running to the north-west, in the direction of Turin. He at once resolved to advance with his concentrated army from Savona to the point where the two armies opposed to him joined hands. Matters were further made easy for him by the fact that the Austrian right wing advanced to meet him, and he was able to defeat it at Millesimo, and to drive it back on Dego on the 11th and 12th April. He also took the latter place on the 11th April, and the Austrians concentrated at Acqui, whilst the Pied-

montese remained at Ceva, so that Buonaparte was now between the two. The Allies were thus separated—with divergent lines of retreat, which each had chosen for himself in his own interests. Their re-union was impossible. Buonaparte then turned against the Piedmontese, defeated them, and forced them to conclude peace, and subsequently followed up his advantage by attacking the Austrians separately.

Chance had it that his last campaign opened in a very similar manner, though the result was quite different. On the 15th June, 1815, he pushed forward through Charleroi on to the Sombref cross-roads, so as to separate the opposing Prussians and English at this point, where they joined hands. The former had their communications in a north-easterly direction to the Rhine, the latter in a north-westerly direction to the sea. On the 16th June the Emperor defeated the Prussian army at Ligny; but we already know from our consideration of lines of retreat that the leaders of this army quickly saw through the intention of separating them from their Allies, and frustrated it by a bold counter-move.¹ They re-effected a junction with the English on the 18th June, to Napoleon's ruin. The presence of

¹ Page 112.

mind and strength of character of his adversaries caused his originally soundly-planned operation to completely fail. It is true that on the morning of the 17th June, after winning the battle of Ligny, Napoleon was to blame for delaying in a manner which favoured the success of his enemies. It is evident that the assailant must act with the utmost rapidity immediately after effecting penetration, so as to derive full advantage from the enemy's first confusion, for, if the latter is given time to recover himself, he will generally find ways and means of restoring the lost connection.

It is quite possible that future wars in Western Europe may furnish fresh instances of strategical penetration. This simple and effective manœuvre asserts itself in a natural way when an attacking army, consisting of hundreds of thousands of men, is confined within a narrow space close to and facing the enemy, for from purely mechanical reasons it can hardly be moved in any direction than straight to the front. We have seen that¹ in the mobilization of the army, and placing it in readiness on the frontier, the difference between the great military powers is in these days almost reduced to one of

¹ Page 118.

hours. It will, therefore, scarcely be any longer possible to effect penetration at what is naturally the most favourable moment, i.e. before the enemy can concentrate. He will be found already united, and a rapid decision as in 1796 is not to be thought of. It will be more a matter of laboriously boring through than of breaking through his front. With the increasing employment of frontier defences the tendency will be to combine field and fortress warfare in the future.

An attack on the point of concentration of separate armies, possessing conflicting interests, as in 1796 and 1815, can, it is presumed, seldom be made in the future. Where allies are concerned nowadays, efforts are made to establish thorough unity of action between them. It is, however, possible to approximately guess the point, at which two particular groups of the hostile forces must meet, from an examination of their strategical concentration; and later, during the operations, by displaying the necessary acuteness, to fix this point more definitely. The attacker then enjoys the advantage of single-handed leading as against a divided command, in which two commanders have to arrange their joint action by means of the telegraph or in

writing. This becomes more difficult the more the situation takes the form of a surprise or becomes critical, i.e. the more rapidly and energetically the other side acts. The point at which contact is established between two independent armies in the course of their strategical concentration, will, therefore, be in future the objective for strategical penetration.

The Strategical Attack on a Wing.

The dangers of strategical penetration decrease with the breadth of the gap which we succeed in making in the hostile position. It disappears altogether if we entirely destroy one of the enemy's wings, for then we have our outer flank clear, and need not have any fear of being enveloped. A further advantage follows naturally from such a success, which arises from our wheeling in towards the remaining portions of the enemy's army and compelling it to form a new front, and, as a rule, to place itself at the same time in a position which is unfavourable to its communications with the rear. At the commencement of the war of 1870 a similar course was proposed by the Germans. First of all, the French right wing in Lower Alsace was to be destroyed, and then the main group of the army in

Lorraine was to be enveloped from the south so as to force it northwards away from its communications on Paris. The battle of Spicheren, which caused the French to retreat on Metz, temporarily interrupted this plan, though subsequently on the far side of the Moselle, it was realized in an altered form.

The strategical attack on a wing will perhaps be the most usual form in future wars; it is simple and can be suitably employed with large forces. The conditions required are, that the deciding wing must be strong enough to go on after the destruction of the wing opposed to it, and at once roll up the enemy, that in so doing it should not lose its communications with the rear, and that finally the wing, which is refused, should either be able to hold the enemy in check or that the general situation should admit of its falling back without any undue disadvantage arising in consequence.

The Strategical Envelopment.

By the above term we understand the attack upon a theatre of war, occupied by the enemy simultaneously in the front and on one or both flanks. The point of concentration of the assailants' columns in this case naturally lies within the space occupied

by the enemy, and all those considerations apply which we have already mentioned in connection with the choice of such a point. All the dangers of the advance on separate lines of operations, between which the enemy is placed, come into force here. If the enemy has completed his preparations he will retort with a counter-stroke, and we should then require to be so strong that each separate column of ours could at least hold its own against this counter-stroke for some time. This assumes a considerable superiority in our total strength.

If the enemy is not ready to receive us, our advance, which makes itself felt in various directions during the strategical envelopment, will confuse him, occasion changes in his dispositions, bring about a dispersion of his troops available for defence, and thus facilitate our success.

King Frederick obtained an advantage of this description by making an enveloping entry upon the theatre of war in 1757 with four columns. A whole Austrian Corps, that of Serbelloni, was absent and idle on the decisive day of Prague.¹

¹ In 1757, Frederick combined envelopment and penetration by entering the theatre of war with his four columns from different directions, giving them later, however, a common direction on the centre of the area occupied by the enemy.

The campaign of 1866, which was decided on the same ground, demonstrates the very great success of the enveloping strategical attack on the part of the Prussians. It led to their holding the enemy in their grasp and overthrowing his main army on the battle-field of Königgrätz. The utmost effect was thus relentlessly extracted from this manœuvre. It is a distinctive feature of the strategical envelopment that, when successful, it generally yields at one blow all the results which can be hoped from it. Strategical penetration is, as it were, only an introduction to victory, which in the full meaning of the term, can only be achieved by rapidly moving backwards and forwards between the separated hostile groups and incessantly pressing them. But the semi- or wholly enveloping attack which follows from strategical envelopment, can hardly be other than instantly annihilating in its result. It yields its fruit on the battle-field itself; there will, as a rule, not be any pursuit, for troops advancing on convergent lines will naturally cross at the moment of victory in such a way that order must first be re-established amongst them. They cannot at once undertake new operations. This circumstance partly explains why there was no pursuit after the battle of Königgrätz.

To ensure success, the enveloping movement should not be cramped for space, although the danger of being thrown into disorder increases with the distance apart of the wings.

If the envelopment be carried out in a half-hearted way, a defender who knows his business will extricate himself from our grasp at the last moment by a short retrograde movement, and we shall find ourselves before him in an embarrassing situation. Every envelopment must therefore be boldly conducted.

One of the most daring attacks of this kind in recent times was undoubtedly that of Prince Frederick Charles against General Chanzy at Le Mans, in January, 1871. An army numerically weaker here attacked a stronger one, enveloping it on both wings, and carried the operation through successfully, although its own columns, separated by wide intervals, were very loosely connected with one another and could only support each other indirectly by their advance. The result was the breaking up of the enemy's army, which left a number of guns and numerous prisoners in the hands of the victors. But here also it is easy to see the risk which the latter incurred.

If, instead of accepting battle on the 11th January in a wide semi-circle in advance of Le Mans, General Chanzy had at the right moment withdrawn over the Sarthe, which lay in his rear, and taken up a position on the far side, the Prussian troops following close on his heels would have poured into the scattered town situated in front of his centre. To lead these troops further forward to a frontal attack would have been the more difficult from the fact, that the large and rich town which had once already proved fatal to Larochejacquelin's army, would, in a natural way, have exerted a strong attractive force on the soldiery already suffering from frost and hunger.

Widely extended and carried out with energy, the strategical enveloping movement certainly is the best way of arresting an enemy, whom we credit with the intention of trying to avoid a decisive action. If we succeed in surprising and attacking his flanks, his centre also will have to halt. In this way it was General von Moltke's intention to powerfully envelop both flanks of the Danish army in the famous Danewerk position at Schleswig, so as to make its escape—by which the war would have been protracted—impossible from the very first moment.

His scheme, which was committed to paper in 1862, was not actually carried out; but still it is a very instructive example.

A General who possesses a double base, which envelops the theatre of war on two sides, has every reason to adopt the strategical envelopment. Strategical concentration of military forces at one place is in this case generally impossible, or involves great loss of time, as would have been the case for the Prussian army in 1866.

The troops will converge by the mere act of advancing from the two sides of such a base, there is nothing to be done then but to concentrate them to the front. Envelopment is the natural result.

In such a case the attacking army must, as a rule, be supposed to be the numerically stronger one, and as a fact there is no means which could make such superiority felt by the enemy more rapidly than the strategical enveloping movement. Perhaps it will for this very reason be also repeated in the future and frequently play an important part.

Two other conditions have to be fulfilled for successfully carrying out a strategical envelopment, viz. tactical superiority of the troops and uniformly good commanders. These two conditions are even

more important than superiority of numbers. Nothing has a more demoralizing effect during such an attack than the sudden and unexpected defeat of separate units. Rumours, as a rule, exaggerate the news of such a defeat, and the bad moral effect is the stronger, since the danger attending the execution of the operation is only too apparent.

The reiterated, but unsuccessful, attack of the Republicans on La Vendée in 1793, furnish proof that the advantage of numbers alone by no means guarantees victory in the case of a convergent and enveloping advance. The troops must be good enough to be able in themselves to withstand superior force, should the enemy throw himself on one column with his whole strength; and the qualities of the leaders must ensure that no part of the whole force will fail altogether in attaining its object.

The Strategical Turning Movement.

When we not only envelop the enemy in the attack, but begin so far off with the movement that we at the same time threaten his communications and place him in such a position that he would be sure to lose them, if he were beaten, then the enveloping has become a turning movement.

If we have already carried out our strategical concentration against the enemy on a line more or less parallel to his front, it is extremely difficult to carry out a strategical turning movement. By means of a movement towards a flank and the destruction of one of the enemy's wings we could possibly carry out the enveloping movement; but the enemy will not quietly look on while we disappear from his front and move in a wide arc towards his flank or perhaps his rear. He will follow us while we are doing so, and will bar our way or attack us, so that we shall have to fight a series of engagements before we can carry out the turning movement. The latter must therefore be combined with the strategical deployment, and must be effected entirely on or behind the enemy's flank.

This was the case in the most brilliant strategical turning movements executed by Napoleon I.

In April, 1800, the Austrians had expelled the French from Italy, and stood triumphant on the Var and before Genoa. The country behind them was only weakly occupied. All apparently was secure in that quarter, and the Alps were considered sufficient protection for the roads leading through Upper Italy to their own country. But the First

Consul, Buonaparte, had long ago pushed forward the so-called Reserve Army, nominally stationed at Dijon, into Switzerland, and assembled it at the northern foot of the mountains. From that point he crossed the St. Bernard in May, and debouched from the mountains directly on the rear of the enemy's army. From the very commencement of the operation he stood on the Austrian lines of communications.

The same thing happened in 1805, when Mack, with the Austrian army on the Iller, awaited Napoleon opposite the eastern exit of the Black Forest passes, facing westward, while the Emperor, bringing his army from the North of France and the State of Hanover, assembled it with the utmost despatch between Lauterburg and Mannheim on the Rhine, and also at Würzburg, in order to move by Ludwigsburg, Hall, Ingelfingen and Anspach, to the Danube, where he made his appearance with his closely concentrated army, between Donauwörth and Ingolstadt, behind the right wing of the Austrian army. A single corps had meanwhile demonstrated directly against it from Strassburg.

Napoleon acted very similarly in 1806, when with his united army from Bayreuth, Bamberg, and Schweinfurth on the Upper Maine, he marched on

Leipzig, moving between the Austrian frontier and the Prussian army, which was then assembling behind the Upper Saale, thus placing himself, even before the decisive battle, nearer to Berlin than the Prussians.¹

It is only natural that the strategical turning movement in most cases terminates in a battle with reversed front. Even the army making the turning movement and which has deprived the enemy of his communications, has, in doing so, given up its own.² The decisive battle can therefore only result in the total defeat of one of the two sides. Napoleon always aimed at this.

A variety of circumstances will in future make strategical turning movements, like those of Napoleon, of very rare occurrence, even if they do not preclude them altogether.³ The strategical

¹ At the opening of this campaign Napoleon's immediate base was Strassburg, so that he was not really forced to a flank when fighting Jena. After that battle he transferred his communications to the north of the Thuringer Wald, back through Fulda.—ED.

² Jomini, it is true, lays down that the attacker should deprive the enemy of his communications without abandoning his own; but only under very favourable conditions will it be possible to fulfil this condition.

³ The example of the French, who went round the right wing of the Austrians from Alexandria to Vercelli by rail (v. note p. 103), is too isolated a case to be conclusive.

concentration of either side must take place at certain definite parts of its frontier, and the opponent can make a very good guess at which.¹ The unwieldiness of the great masses of armies dictates simplicity as regards the form and manner of movement; and finally the cavalry reconnoitring service, which is far more developed than formerly, adds greatly to the difficulty of concealing the turning movement, the very element of which is surprise.

It must be remembered that the telegraph, newspaper correspondents, and the public curiosity for which they cater, no longer allow important facts to remain long secret. Even unimportant occurrences are nowadays known by the whole civilized world within twenty-four hours. How much sooner then are we likely to receive news of the entry of an army into our theatre of war?²

We can hardly see such a sight nowadays as was afforded in the above-mentioned campaign of 1800, where Buonaparte did not know what had become of Massena in Italy, and Melas was unaware that Buonaparte was already in Switzerland.

¹ Page 126.

² Thus in 1870 German spies in Lyons telegraphed Bourbaki's movements to Switzerland, whence they were forwarded to the Germans.—Ed.

The strategical turning movement will thus generally commence with a series of introductory combats, in which the defender, in falling back, gradually loses his communications, and the victorious assailant similarly gains possession of them. An example of such an operation is given in the days before Metz in 1870. On the 14th August the French army still stood to the east of this place opposite the First German army, while the Second had marched further south to the Moselle, and was on the point of crossing the river.

To evade this turning movement Bazaine decided on retreat, which, however, was stopped by the unexpected attack of the German advanced guard, which held him, and the result was the battle of Colombey-Nouilly on the 15th August. In this battle the fronts and lines of communications were still quite normal and in accordance with geographical conditions. In the meantime, the Second army commenced the passage of the Moselle, and the French commander-in-chief found himself under the necessity of resuming the retrograde movement. But the Germans had forestalled him to the west. After his passage through Metz, Bazaine was attacked from the south and stopped. Then ensued the

battle of Vionville, in which the front of the contending armies had a general east and west direction, and stood at about right angles with that of the 14th August. In spite of his superior force Bazaine did not succeed in shaking off the enemy. He was equally unprepared to continue his march westward by circuitous routes. He therefore wheeled backwards with his army towards Metz and took up a position on the plateau between Roncourt and Point du Jour, with his front facing west, towards France. In the battle of Gravelotte and St. Privat la Montagne on the 18th August, the fronts were therefore completely reversed. Both armies had described three-quarters of a circle and, relatively to their communications, their positions were exactly opposite to what they were on the 14th August. The French had lost their communications with France, the Germans had of their own accord relinquished theirs with the Rhine. That the destruction of the vanquished did not take place at once, but only through the capitulation of the 27th October, was due to the shelter which they found for a time under the guns of the fortress. The catastrophe had become inevitable as the result of the 18th August.

Strategical turning movements will afford similar spectacles in the future. They retain their value, and will still be able to bring about the same results ; but as a rule they will no longer take place at the beginning of the war, but only in the course of operations which have a decisive effect.

The strategical turning movement when executed in a slow and dilatory manner never had any prospect of success, even of old. If the army to be turned is allowed the necessary time to reply with a counter-stroke, then the one seeking to turn it is itself soon forced away from its communications, although it set out with the intention of cutting off those of the enemy.

At Austerlitz the Allies found to their cost that the idea of carrying out a turning movement does not of itself guarantee success. Their movement was boldly conceived. From their camp at Olschau they intended turning the enemy, who had taken up a position facing them at Brünn, by moving to the south against the refused flank of the French. If Napoleon had been defeated he would have been thrown back on the Prussian frontiers, where a strong army was just then assembling against him. But there was a want of foresight and precaution in the

way the Allies attempted to put their plan into execution. Fully three days before the battle Napoleon saw through the intention of his enemies, for, after first marching westwards, they suddenly wheeled towards the south in open country. And again, on the day of battle itself, they neglected to screen the movement sufficiently from the Emperor. He, in order to draw them into the trap, purposely refused his right wing, which would have received their stroke, and then, as they passed along his front with their main forces, suddenly attacked them, inflicting on them a complete defeat. Rarely has an attack, such as that of the Allies, been commenced with such bright prospects of victory and ended so miserably as this one.

They forgot that even the best strategical conception is useless unless it leads to a successful tactical decision on the battle-field. The strategical turning movement, moreover, is only intended to bring the troops up to the enemy in a direction which is especially favourable for a tactical decision, and in which he does not expect attack, or in which attack is certain to be more dangerous to him than in any other. The movement is not the end itself, but only a means to the end.

Strategical Attacks against the Rear and Flank.

In these days we can no longer count upon fully carrying through an attack against the enemy's rear, as the ultimate result of a successful strategical turning movement. But it may still perhaps find a place in the altered form of the final decisive advance against an enemy, who has been deprived of his communications as the result of previous defeats. Its nature requires very marked decision and a degree of energy in carrying it out, which will not be stopped by anything, while the General must at the same time assume that the enemy is in movement and not stationary. We do not always have a Mack to deal with.

It is different with the flank attack, which may easily develop during an advance against very strong positions, especially in combats about fortified frontier lines. To break through these in front, where the enemy's army is posted between the works, is only possible when there is great material and moral superiority. Generally, the attacker will try to deceive the enemy as to the real point of breaking through, and induce him to concentrate his masses for defence at the wrong place, whilst he himself

endeavours to capture by surprise one or more obstructing forts further off towards a flank, and not protected by field troops. If this succeeds, the assailant naturally comes upon the enemy's flank on the other side of the frontier line which has been penetrated. But as the telegraph, telephone, cyclists, and cavalry scouts nowadays report everything unusual very rapidly, we must be prepared soon to come upon the heads of bodies of hostile troops, rapidly hurrying up. Thus, in the most favourable case the first battle will be fought against a wing which has been hastily formed and thrown back. Skill in rapidly bringing up and deploying masses out of their march formation—a test of the efficiency of the staff—will decide the victory.

It must, of course, also be assumed that the enemy, either owing to the nature of his front or our numerical superiority, has meanwhile been prevented from replying to our operation with a counter-stroke delivered from his position, for such action on his part would necessarily interrupt our movement, and prevent our moving towards his flank.

CHAPTER X.

OFFENSIVE TACTICAL OPERATIONS.

1. *Aim, Conditions, Means of carrying them out.*

SEEING that the value of all strategical offensive operations is wholly due to the tactical decision following upon them, we may appropriately consider in this place what there is to be said about it. In order to avoid unnecessary repetition, those points only will be here dwelt upon in which there exists a radical difference as compared to strategical offensive operations. In other respects the principles already detailed will apply equally well to tactical offensive operations.

The aim of all tactical offensive operations is the attack on the battle-field. As this will be easier when the enemy is caught in the middle of his movement than when he has already formed up for defence,¹

¹ How important the distinction is, is shown by a comparison of the two battles of Vionville and St. Privat, which took place on the 16th and 18th August, 1870. In the former action, two and a

it follows that the assailant must constantly seek to force the enemy to the decisive combat while the latter is still on the march.¹

A primary condition for success is tactical superiority. A deliberate, although it may be bold, attack differs from a blind rush in that the resolve to make it is founded on a deliberate conviction of the existence of this superiority. Anyone, who can foresee that he will be stronger to-morrow and yet attacks to-day commits an error, unless he has reasonable grounds for suspecting that the enemy may give him the slip during the night. On the other hand, it will not do to go to extremes in waiting for circumstances

half Prussian army corps succeeded in holding Bazaine's whole army. In the latter, eight army corps had difficulty in forcing the same army from its position.

¹ Although the remark is one belonging more to the province of Grand Tactics, i.e. the command and direction of armies in the field, yet it will not do to leave unnoticed here the fact, that the great independence of the subordinate leaders, which was manifested in the German armies in 1870-71, and which the tendency in these days is to restrict, receives its justification from this one principle alone. If every General, who finds himself in chief command in the first line in proximity to the enemy, were first to inquire from headquarters whether he might undertake the attack, which circumstances appear to recommend to him, the enemy would always gain time enough to take up a position for resisting the attack, which he would thus forestall.

to favour us. The ideal would certainly be to concentrate our entire forces for the battle; but this is seldom possible.

If, however, we were to postpone the inception of all serious work until tactical superiority was assured, any favourable element that may exist in the general situation would meanwhile vanish. In war, as in everyday life, favourable opportunities, once lost, never return. The main thing is to allow the strategical situation to mature sufficiently before crowning it with the tactical attack.¹ This can only be effected by the possession of that military *coup d'œil*, which combines together genius, knowledge and experience.

As in the strategical, so too in the tactical offensive, rapidity and energy of action, as well as surprise will be the principal requirements for a successful beginning. During the operation superiority of fire

¹ The Allies failed in this respect before the battle of Austerlitz. Prussia was on the point of declaring for them, and intended completing its preparations by the middle of December. By skilful dispositions the Archduke Charles was able to bring up between 40,000 and 50,000 men to Moravia. Three weeks later the Allies would have been in a position to take the field in much greater strength than at the end of November. The general state of affairs invited a delay. In spite of this the Allies advanced precipitately to the attack.

action which nowadays decides the fate of battles, must be added to the above. To ensure combined action on the part of the columns streaming towards the battle-field and co-operation between the different arms, is *the secret* of the art of generalship. The first requisite is to obtain the upper hand in the artillery fight. The infantry attack will but seldom succeed without this prelude. There always remains a second indispensable condition, namely, to establish a superiority of rifle fire at the decisive point. Whoever is in these days best able to direct and control the mighty stream of infantry fire has the greatest prospect of success.

It is further necessary to actually advance against the enemy and assault his position. He who trusts to driving the enemy from his position solely by fire action is liable to be rudely undeceived.

If the defender sees that he has succeeded in stopping the enemy in his movement, he will naturally be imbued with a feeling of success. The assailant is, in fact, compelled to press on continuously through a storm of bullets. To be victorious means to gain ground. The fight will very seldom proceed as far as an actual collision in hand to hand fight, for the defender will have already become convinced of

the inefficacy of his chief means of defence, and will not wait for the fact to be practically demonstrated to him by the enemy with bayonets and clubbed rifles.

2. *Placing the Troops in Readiness.*

Opening the Attack.

The joint action of the troops, and the direction of their fire on a certain objective, will only be effected if they are kept well in hand up to the moment when they enter the zone swept by the enemy's projectiles, and if they have been brought up to a favourable point for commencing the decisive attack. If they have previously become engaged with the enemy here and there on their own account it will be very difficult to get them into the proper direction again.

The fierce fire which sweeps a modern battle-field soon dissolves ordinary tactical formations, and places the actual leading in the hands of numerous inferior subordinate leaders. The ably handled masses of the Napoleonic era have become an impossibility. So much only of the ideas of the commander-in-chief will find expression as have found their way into the minds of the subordinate leaders by means of his

preliminary measures. These last acquire the greatest importance from this fact. The judicious opening of decisive attacks is the parent of success.

Success is naturally materially facilitated if the intention of seeking a decisive engagement originally existed, and the battle is a premeditated one. In such case we freely are able to dispose of our forces, and it is possible to settle which portions of them are to be collected opposite the decisive point for the great blow.

Things are much more difficult in a chance encounter, where the resolution to attack only originates whilst we are gradually becoming involved with the enemy. Portions of the army, which might best be able to deal the decisive blow, have perhaps already become deeply engaged. They have to be left where they are, and the force, with which the scale has to be turned, formed by other troops, which are with difficulty concentrated for this purpose. The great art, is then, to put a stop to the aimless expenditure of fighting forces, to hold the enemy in check by means of the troops already engaged, to keep all the remainder away from the dangerous experiment of joining in independently, and form a mass with them. The masterly skill of

Napoleon I. consisted in this, as is shown by his conduct of battles.

The plan of attack too, as expressed in an order, cannot do much more than give directions for opening the attack, and state the objective and the approaches to it.

Details as to the subsequent course of the attack depend too much on the steps taken by the enemy—which are only found out during its progress—for it to be possible to make definite arrangements with regard to them beforehand. The course to be adopted will have to be guided by circumstances, and, so far as circumstances admit, by the general principles for the employment of troops in action.

3. *Parallel, convergent and divergent Advance.*¹

It is in the nature of things that an advance of the different fractions of an army in parallel directions against the enemy's position can only take place when a decisive result is not intended. A frontal rush which overwhelms the enemy by the weight of

¹ There is nothing special to say here about night and flank marches. The same considerations apply as in the corresponding section of the chapter on the strategical offensive, with the exception that the principles there expressed carry even greater weight when we are in the immediate neighbourhood of the enemy.

advancing masses is precluded by the effect of modern firearms. The gaps, which are formed under the fire of the enemy by death, by wounds and by men falling behind, must be constantly filled up. If we wish to arrive before the enemy's front in comparatively speaking the same strength as we were when we started, we must at the commencement of the advance have about twice as long a front as at the end, for the number of the combatants will be reduced in the same proportion. Hence, convergent directions towards the point of assault are the rule in the attack.

It is difficult to go more into details on this subject or to formulate how these directions must be fixed.

The troops are at the outset confined to the existing roads, later to the cover afforded by the ground, which gives a certain amount of protection against the enemy's hail of projectiles. The commander's keen eye and practical experience must make a proper choice. When the operations are on a fairly large scale a good knowledge of map reading is important.¹ Then, again, we have to remember that our objective is always moving. Even when the enemy awaits us,

¹ This branch of military knowledge is frequently neglected, especially by older soldiers.

his position has a certain depth, and we are very liable to mistake the fighting line of his advanced troops for the main position. We must be careful not to hurry the columns of attack too soon one after the other in the advance.

It is obvious that all dissemination and dispersal of troops is also a source of weakness.¹ Divergent directions in tactical attacks are therefore hardly conceivable. They can only be employed in a case in which we want to hold portions of the hostile army at distant points of the battle-field. Here the effect of combined action is indirectly produced, in that we weaken the enemy at the important point by depriving him of the help which he expects. To successfully perform this manœuvre, however, we must be able, with a smaller force pushed forward on a divergent line, to debar a larger force of the enemy from participation in the main action.

4. *Special Forms of the Tactical Offensive.*

Owing to the greater flexibility of the chain of tactical events, the more powerful effect of moral impressions, and the more rapid development of the action, in which cause and effect are im-

¹ See pages 11 and 12.

mediately connected with one another, the number of possible combinations is even greater in the tactical than in the strategical offensive. Nevertheless, with the exception of trifling variations, they resolve themselves again into the same familiar main forms.

The Tactical Frontal Attack and Penetration.

All that there is to be said about the former of these really follows from what has already been stated about the tactical advance on parallel lines. The frontal attack cannot boast of any natural advantage over the defence. On the contrary, with the exception of the moral impetus, which every forward movement gives to the troops, all the disadvantages appear to be ranged on its side, since there is a total absence of that convergent action which forms the strength of the tactical attack.

“To establish a superiority of fire individually as well as collectively is the first tactical principle of modern times, and will be so in the future.”¹ If the defender has occupied his front in sufficient strength, and if the attacker is only able to oppose him with an equal force, we fail to see how this fire superiority

¹ Liebert. *The Employment of Reserves in Battle.*—First supplement to the *Militär-Wochenblatt*, 1895.

is to be gained, troops and weapons being equal. There is therefore only one way of attaining it, viz. by numerical superiority, such that the attacker is always able to make good the losses occurring in the firing line, whereas the defender is finally unable to do so. But, as the latter enjoys the advantage of better cover, he suffers fewer losses. Thus the attacker's superiority in numbers must be very considerable for it to turn the scale.

Victory in the frontal attack therefore depends on the greater efficiency and better training of the troops, as well as on the energy, experience, and intelligence of the leader, i.e. on forces, the consideration of which is properly speaking left out of a theoretical consideration of the conduct of war.

But we must not on that account, even from a purely theoretical standpoint, entirely reject the frontal attack as something in itself wrong. There are cases when it is necessary to carry it out, when we must rely on the *moral* and the numbers of the troops, and skilfully make full use of both. To perform this task with success is a more critical and difficult feat than to make a successful enveloping attack, and it is worth while to go fully into the subject.

One circumstance naturally favours the assailant in such a case. From having to face a difficult task, even a man of moderate attainments will often gain moral strength and accomplish things of which we had not thought him capable. Qualities then appear which required a very strong stimulus to awaken them from their slumber. Exactly the same thing happens with the soldiery. The consciousness of having to carry out something difficult inspires the leaders in the first place with an enthusiasm, which shows itself in an energetic manifestation of all their abilities, and this process is communicated to the men from their leaders. The feeling of security, which makes him inactive, often becomes dangerous to the defender, and the moral reaction which follows, when this security is seen to be a delusion, is particularly disastrous.

Frontal attacks will have to be made in the future, and may still lead to grand results. Whether they will ever develop into regular tactical penetration is another question. There is no doubt that the improved arms of infantry and artillery have very greatly strengthened the capabilities of even inferior troops on the defensive quite as much as has the modern battle training in making deliberate use of

every advantage of the ground. The infantry weapon of to-day is terrible in its effect and simple in its manipulation. A defender, provided with this arm, who has once settled himself in a position and is not altogether devoid of courage, will be hard to dislodge. Even if pressed back he has learnt to establish himself again wherever a rise in the ground, a ditch, or the edge of a wood offers the opportunity of doing so. The dangerous zones of fire have become much deeper than formerly and fights progress slowly. Even a defeated enemy does not disappear from the arena, but clings to the victor. He knows well that it is more dangerous to keep on falling back under the latter's fire than to continue the defence. The line of battle is no longer like a rod, which can be broken, as in the time of linear tactics, but is a strong though elastic band, which settles round our flanks if we press it back in the centre.

All these circumstances add to the difficulty of really penetrating a defensive line. The defender's fire action can indirectly defend quite considerable gaps. A space of several thousand yards, which would formerly have been a sufficiently broad passage for an army, is in these days thoroughly

defended from the flanks. The sorties of the armies invested in Metz, Paris, and later in Plevna, naturally led to attempts at penetration; but the assailant finally failed in them all.

The only occasion on which we are likely to witness penetration occur will be in the battle between moving armies, when one of them, proceeding on lines of march which are close alongside one another, advances in concentrated order and comes up with the heads of the enemy's columns which are distributed over a somewhat wide area, before they can deploy. Even a surprise of this kind has no longer the same effect as formerly. There can no longer be any question of rushing the enemy and deciding a fight in the space of a few minutes, as at Rossbach. The only thing that can be done is to gradually force him back, and meanwhile the neighbouring hostile columns have time to come up and bring help to those being pressed. The self-contained power of resistance of the larger units in these days allows of a division coping without hesitation with a strong hostile army-corps on the morning of the fight, provided that it is sure of being supported by another division at midday. Even if it is gradually defeated, still this takes so long

that help must arrive in the meantime.¹ Tactical penetration may perhaps still be successfully executed if it be possible in a chance encounter to drive one part of the enemy's army back behind an obstacle, such as a stream, and to keep him there while we move against the other and defeat it.

The battle of Orleans on the 3rd and 4th December, 1870, might be characterized as a penetration battle. But the great extension of the French army, cut up into three parts by the attack, and the nature of the battle, which resolved itself into a series of partial combats, partake more of the character of a strategical than of a tactical operation.

The Tactical Envelopment.

The strength of the attack lies in its convergent nature, consequently envelopment is naturally the most advantageous form of attack. Most of the battles of recent wars have been decided by it, and

¹ The Imperial manoeuvres of 1894 in East Prussia gave an instance of this in a manner closely resembling the real thing. On two successive days the two divisions of the I. Army Corps were a day's march apart, and still the latter succeeded in maintaining the fight against the concentrated advance of the XVII. Army Corps with one division until the next day when the other came up, and, after averting a defeat on the first day, even gained an advantage on the second.

we see it repeated on all European manœuvre grounds. Against an enemy already concentrated we shall always have recourse to the envelopment, whenever circumstances admit, owing to the difficulties which attend the frontal attack. The great range of modern firearms, which thoroughly sweep the whole area comprised within the enveloping movement, even if it be thousands of yards wide, invests them with a terrible power.

The difficulty of executing an envelopment lies in the commencement. Experience shows that, of a hundred attacks planned as enveloping, only eighty find their way to the enemy's front. The reason for this is that the great ranges require that the movement be commenced at a comparatively considerable distance. Thus the initial line of deployment will be of great length, if we think of it as part of an area of a circle, of which the enemy is the centre. An assailant who happens to be concentrated or advancing from only one direction will often, therefore, have again to spread out so as to bring enveloping action to bear on the objective. But this separation in presence of the enemy has the appearance of being hazardous—hence we frequently see tactical enveloping movements commenced too close to the enemy.

It ought to be thoroughly realized, however, that a defender cannot commit himself to a forward movement at a moment's notice. The difficulty of making counter-strokes from an occupied position has already been demonstrated.¹ The danger of being thrown into disorder by an enterprising defender during a tactical enveloping movement is therefore rather an imaginary than a real one. In this respect tactical envelopment has a decided advantage over the strategical.

The unavoidable lack of joint action between the frontal attack and the enveloping movement is a more real danger. It is obvious that both must be carried out at the same time, for otherwise the defender could form a strong thrown back flank on the threatened wing, or roll up the enveloping troops with his reserves. Now it is just as easy for the frontal attack to reach the enemy too soon, and fall to pieces, as it is for the enveloping troops to arrive too late, and for one portion to be defeated after the other in isolated struggles. The great extension of battle-fields makes concerted action especially difficult, as is proved by the events at St. Privat on the 18th August, 1870.

¹ See page 55.

The frontal attack should develop in earnest at the moment when the enveloping movement is on the point of making itself felt by the enemy, and the enveloping attack must for its part enter the decisive phase quickly enough to prevent any check to the troops menacing the enemy's front. It is impossible to entirely do away with the disadvantage that these troops in the front must hold their ground for a considerable time very close to the enemy, thereby suffering heavy losses.

The enveloping troops have to face the danger which threatens their outer flank, on which the defender will direct his counter-stroke. They must on that account be followed by strong reserves.

A double envelopment of both flanks of the enemy facilitates the attack very much. The danger of a penetration of its own centre is thus almost eliminated; for if the front be not too much extended, it receives protection from the fire of the wings of the enveloping troops. This, however, can be attempted only when the attack possesses great numerical superiority, such as the Germans possessed at the battle of Wörth, the most memorable example of double envelopment in military history.¹

¹ In a surrounding battle, like Sedan, the brunt of the work

The Tactical Turning Movement.

At peace manœuvres tactical turning movements are generally strongly condemned. In war they will nevertheless be absolutely necessary—especially nowadays, when fire effect supplies the means of holding a defile by a position in front of it with almost perfect security. It would often be quite impossible to capture mountain passes except by means of a turning movement, as is proved by numerous examples in military history from the defeat of Leonidas at Thermopylæ down to the combat of Blumenau before Pressburg and Gourko's advance through the Boghas Wood.

The gap between the troops executing a turning movement and those forming the rest of the attacking force becomes so great that it cannot be indirectly closed by fire, and there is great danger of the troops becoming unduly dispersed. Wide turning movements challenge the enemy to make a counter-stroke; the great point is, therefore, that special circumstances should render such counter-stroke improbable. This may

lie decidedly within the province of strategy. We therefore do not allude to it, although, considered in the abstract, it is the most perfect example of the double enveloping movement.

happen as the result of the incapacity of the enemy's troops, or it may even be due to the nature of the country. If we find a stream in the possession of the enemy and try to open up a passage across it for ourselves by detaching a turning force, the enemy would have to advance across the obstacle before he could drive such turning force away and break the connection between it and the rest of our forces. In mountains there is frequently no lateral communication between the different passes. The defender can therefore only act from the rear against a turning column, which may have found a defile open, and thus there is no fear of the turning force being repulsed. Turning movements may thus be very successful and afford the only means of overcoming an obstacle defended by the enemy. Mountain warfare is the special field for making use of them. The turning movement must not, however, any more than the enveloping movement, be looked upon as useful or meritorious in itself. Absolute necessity must always justify its employment.

Tactical Rear and Flank Attacks.

Tactical rear attacks may develop out of successful turning movements, and will then be all the more

decisive, as they take the enemy by surprise and deprive him at once of his retreat and communications. But an efficiently conducted reconnoitring service will limit them to very rare occasions.¹ As applied to individual units they may occur in very involved battles and engagements as the result of confusion and error. Thus, before Le Mans, French detachments, which had been forced apart and wished to fight their way through to their own people, attacked the extreme right wing of the Germans during the night. But here it was rather a case of a sudden incursion than of an orderly combat. As far as large units are concerned such attacks will be almost out of the question. The flank attack, too, which develops as a surprise to the enemy and without the prelude of an enveloping movement, can only take place under exceptional conditions, and when great lack of vigilance is displayed by the enemy. If very sodden ground or deep snow hinders the action of cavalry, we may see a repetition of what happened at Parigné l'Evêque on the 10th January, 1871, where a French brigade marched along the front of the 5th Prussian Division, but being dis-

¹ It would have come to one at Blumenau on the 22nd July, 1866, if the armistice had not interrupted the fight.

covered, was attacked and defeated. As a rule, however, we have to deal, tactically even more than strategically, solely with the form of flank attack, which follows naturally from the enveloping movement.

CHAPTER XI.

STRATEGICAL DEFENSIVE OPERATIONS.

1. *Object, Conditions, Means of Carrying Them Out.*

STRATEGICAL defensive operations aim chiefly at avoiding decision at the commencement of the operations, so as to seek it under more favourable circumstances, such as the exhaustion of the enemy, the occupation of some especially advantageous position, or the arrival of reinforcements which were not available at the outset. The most instructive campaign for the study of such operations is that, repeatedly mentioned, of Napoleon in 1813, after the armistice.

Strategical defensive operations may also aim at simply waiting until the enemy arrives at a line, which is especially full of promise for the defence. This, however, is hardly a case of active operations.

To merely aim at gaining time is much the same as avoiding decision, with the special limitation,

however, that much territory should not be abandoned for this sole purpose.

A condition on which success depends is that the increase of strength which may be expected during the strategical defence, or the decrease on the enemy's side, shall exceed the material and moral losses which will invariably be associated with a retiring, waiting, or procrastinating policy. If, at the end of a defensive operation, we are no stronger in comparison with the enemy than at the beginning, nothing has been gained, and it would have been better to have risked the tactical decision at the very first; for loss of confidence will always have sprung up in the meantime amongst the troops. Shirking a decision and courting delay merely for fear of an unfavourable decision cannot be called operating, for there is an absence of that set purpose which must always enter into the operations of war. Such a line of action can only prove useful when plenty of time and space are available for seeking in the course of events advantages and resources which have not been thought of before. It happened thus in 1812 with the Russian armies, which at first withdrew into the interior of the country, for the sole reason that they were separated and did not feel strong

enough for resistance. This procedure was subsequently systematically adopted by the Russian generals, when they realized the destructive power which the continuance of the operations exerted on the assailant. Time, space, or obstacles which the country puts in the way of advancing forces, as well as artificial defensive arrangements, such as fortresses, are the principal expedients resorted to in every defensive operation.

The most effective means for making things take the course we wish them to, is the attractive force which a retreating army exerts on the enemy.¹ Clausewitz has drawn attention to this in the strongest manner. He remarks that the Russian army in 1812, after its first retreat into the interior of the vast empire, might have effected a second retreat from the interior towards the frontier, so as to arrive on it at the same time as the enfeebled hostile army, which would have been compelled to follow it.²

It is due to a sense of weakness that the defender very often does not become fully aware of the extent of this attractive force. His retreat then assumes the character of a flight, even if it progresses slowly,

¹ See page 60.

² Clausewitz. Posthumous Works, vol. i. p. 121.

for it is guided entirely by the enemy's movements. A spirited and able defender, on the other hand, often finds in this attractive force, inherent in his army, a further means of controlling the operations in spite of the general unfavourable state of affairs.

The attractive force exerted by the defender, naturally increases as the superiority of the assailant becomes less. A defender who is only slightly weaker would always be bound to succeed in drawing the assailant after him, in whatever direction he wants, if the theatre of war only give him a certain amount of freedom of movement.

The necessity of keeping up this attractive force often compels the defender to avoid fighting for a time. This is fully proved when a force has the task of keeping back a superior enemy from a definite objective by means of its manœuvres, until other troops can come up; for a defeat would weaken the attractive force, and a total reverse entirely destroy it for the time being.

2. *Selection of the Turning-point.*

In discussing the plan of operations it has already been stated that every systematic defence must

forecast a turning-point, at which it assumes that the reaction will set in in its favour.¹

If we anticipate a favourable turn, solely from the exhaustion of the enemy, the limit is then naturally to be found more or less in the interior of the country, according to the strength of the attack. In such case it can only be approximately fixed, because it is not possible to calculate in advance with any certainty where the culminating point of the offensive will be. It will depend on the losses sustained by the enemy during the operations owing to battles, smaller engagements, marches, privations and disease. Nevertheless the turning-point must not be placed so far back that our own army thereby loses the power of further existence. This procedure—the “Retreating Defensive”—in its absolute form is only admissible when the theatre of war is very extensive. It would not be possible in any one of the civilized states of Western Europe; the loss of resources, which is entailed, would be much greater than the damage sustained by the enemy. The Turkish military authorities were at fault when they tried to depopulate the country as far as the capital after the loss of the Balkan line. The enemy’s lines

¹ See page 129.

of operation were not sufficiently long and the country was not poor enough to arrest his advance ; and the stream of fugitives towards the capital contributed in a great measure to forcing the government to submit to an unfavourable peace. It would have been different if the Russian main attack had selected the road through Anatolia, while the Turkish fleet commanded the Black Sea.

The tables are turned if the "Retreating Defensive" finds, at the end of a rather long line of operations, a place of refuge, the capture of which is no longer within the power of the enemy, who has meanwhile become weakened. Under such conditions the retreating defensive may possibly be effective on other theatres of war than the Russian. Let us suppose that MacMahon's army had not been annihilated at Sedan in 1870, but that it had only been weakened in a series of continuous engagements, and had finally been driven back on the fortified capital. The losses of the Third and Meuse Armies would then probably have been considerably heavier during their march on that city, than they actually were through the operations round Sedan. It is therefore extremely doubtful whether they would still have been strong enough to effectively invest

Paris with its increased garrison. As a result, the German armies, in spite of their original superiority, would probably have been too weak for an attack on such a large, rich, and populous country. This supposition is near enough to reality to merit earnest consideration.

Even more to the point is the case of Wellington at Torres Vedras. In the spring of 1810, matters seemed hopeless for the Spanish cause in the war against France. The Iberian Peninsula had been conquered with the exception of Portugal. Napoleon, arrived at the zenith of his fame, had just overthrown Austria, and was now able to turn his thoughts to finishing off things in Spain. Under Massena's command he formed a main army of 123,000 men, which seemed more than sufficient to drive into their ships the 30,000 English who then still held out in the Peninsula. But the shrewd Duke of Wellington retired slowly, offering resistance, as far as the extreme neck of land in front of Lisbon, where he took up a position resting on the friendly element, the sea, which was commanded by the English fleets. There he was protected on the right, left, and in rear by the water, and in front he had established a strong position,

which made all the greater impression on the enemy when he came up to it, as its existence was quite unsuspected. As the result of leaving covering parties behind, of losses, and of detachments on a long line of operations, the enemy found himself, when close in front of his objective, too weak to quite attain it. From that time forward a reaction set in in the Peninsula, and indeed in Napoleon's fortunes.

Much the same would have happened if the Turks had, after the loss of Plevna and the line of the Balkans, retired on the position of Tchataldeza before Constantinople, which stretched from sea to sea, and had remained strongly posted there. The weakened Russian army would neither have been able to take, envelop or turn the entrenched lines, especially if England had resolved to support the Porte not only with diplomatic notes, but also with troops. Hostile fleets would have harassed the assailants on both flanks, and the advance of an allied army which could easily have been assembled in the fortified quadrilateral still held by the Turks on the Danube, would have obliged the victorious Russians to retreat.

Never in recent military history has such a favourable opportunity been neglected. Originally to all

appearance hopeless, yet on closer investigation it offered all the means for a brilliant deliverance.¹

If the reaction is expected to ensue from our having gained a position, everything depends on arriving there with an army which is not yet seriously shaken or beaten. Simple as this sounds, it has been forgotten ere now.² If there is no prospect of accomplishing this, it is better to seek protection and increase of strength from other troops, without which even the strongest defensive position would be worthless.

The fundamental danger of the defensive is that it may become inopportunistically involved by the enemy in decisive engagements. Strategically this is even more difficult to avoid than tactically, because the Commander-in-Chief has not the army under his eyes, and mistakes on the part of the subordinate generals

¹ The study of war is often accused of dealing in platitudes, but such a fact as this affords a justification for inculcating afresh simple things, such as have been discoursed upon here.

² Mazzenbach, at the commencement of the century, anticipated complete success for the Prussians in the war against Napoleon provided they retired on the position on the Ettesberg at Weimar. His luckless eccentricity even after the battle of Jena had been lost advised the leaderless fleeing ruins of the army to hasten thither, as if the mountains alone could compel Napoleon to stop.

may bring on the undesired complication. On the other hand, retreat without resistance easily degenerates into flight, and greatly impairs the *morale* of the troops. Hence we have to steer a middle course between the desire to fight and the need to escape, and that requires as sharp an eye and as strong a will as were displayed by Blücher in Silesia in 1813, and on many occasions by Robert Lee in his campaign in Northern Virginia.

Matters are otherwise if a favourable change in the situation is anticipated from a junction with approaching reinforcements, e.g. with an allied army which was not ready when hostilities broke out. Here again it is desirable that at the time of their junction neither of the two groups should have suffered severely. But there is one exception.

If the reinforcement is still so far off,¹ or still so unprepared that the force first deployed against the enemy would in any case be committed to lengthy operations, this force may prefer brave resistance to simple retreat. To secure strong positions, the capture of which will cause the enemy great loss and waste of time, will then be more important than the rapid approach of the expected reinforcements. The

¹ It is assumed that it cannot be brought up by railway.

assailant, however, labours under the special disadvantage that the power of any army to endure the hardships of war is not unlimited, but becomes exhausted even when things go well with it. Even the conqueror will become weary of the war after a certain time. The more highly civilized a nation is the more strongly does this weakness manifest itself. It is very difficult to overcome the disinclination which prevails amongst officers and men to begin all over again, with a craving for home already in their hearts, when a first campaign is just concluded and they then encounter a new enemy. Napoleon's winter campaign of 1807 clearly shows this. When, after an unprecedentedly victorious expedition against the Prussian army, he came upon the weaker but fresh Russian army in Poland, his operations came to a standstill. The experience of the Germans was similar in 1870 when, after their victory over the armies of the Empire, they still had to engage in a serious struggle against those of the Republic.

The leading idea for a strategical defensive may thus very well be founded on this theory. The original intention of the Prussian Generals to delay Napoleon I. in the late autumn of 1806 by a harass-

ing campaign, in order that they might take decisive action against him in the early part of 1807, having by that time the Russians with fresh forces on their side, was not in itself so faulty, though the execution should, of course, have been of a less sorry character.

3. *The Previously Prepared Position, Direct Retirement, Convergent and Divergent Retreat.*

The position of the turning-point may be almost identical with that of the starting-point of the whole strategical defensive operation. We may even select a turning-point quite in the foremost line and await the approach of the assailant. This will always happen when we wish for a battle, but do not feel strong enough to make an attack, which really requires numerical superiority. It was so with Napoleon I. before the battle of Austerlitz. For that reason he purposely spread reports about the bad state of his army and gained his object. The allies advanced and incautiously attacked him.¹

An army in a fortified position on a frontier, like the French army facing Germany, can act similarly.

¹ See page 174 and note, page 180.

It is quite conceivable that such an army would gladly see itself attacked between and behind the frontier forts, for the attack is here undoubtedly far more difficult than in the open field. A defensive attitude is further entailed by the fact that years of labour and millions of money have been previously spent for the purpose of preparing the defence. It is almost a moral necessity to make use of the artificially created battle-field. But we are only justified in occupying such a position prepared beforehand, when there is something making it compulsory for the enemy to attack. We cannot always reckon on such an obliging enemy as Napoleon found at Austerlitz.

The best course to adopt when occupying such a strategical position prepared beforehand, is to rapidly close in the forces in the direction of the place selected by the enemy for assault. Good lateral communications behind the front, and a judicious distribution of the forces in conformity with the network of roads, are the main requisites. Railways can here be utilized for transporting the infantry of the defender, even during the operations.

A direct retirement from the first strategical front of concentration to a line in rear points as a rule to

some previously committed error,¹ when no weighty political reasons have influenced the strategy ; for we only retire in this way when, on the approach of the enemy, we do not consider the position in which we are posted sufficiently strong for successful resistance. But we ought to have known this before. It should not have needed the battles of Wörth and Spicheren to convince the French of the weakness of their line of concentration on the German frontier. They could have learnt this equally well from a careful and practical comparison of the respective armed forces, and might have commenced their retreat to the stronger line of the Moselle without even fighting. If their main forces had remained to prepare the defence on the line of the Moselle while the advanced guards hastened to the frontier, they would have fared better.

The convergent retreat aims at the concentration of the forces in a previously selected and favourable position, which lies across the enemy's lines of operations. It might be said with apparent justice that it would perhaps be wiser to collect the forces

¹ It may be that it forms part of a systematic procedure, a defensive at many points, which is intended to weary the enemy.

there from the first. Weighty reasons may, however, render this impossible. Considerations connected with feeding the troops may not permit us to remain long in that position with a large army. We may very likely be unwilling to at once surrender all the country in front, and the army may be deployed on the frontier, only to retire on the enemy making his appearance. There may also be the fear that advanced guards pushed forward would not alone exert sufficient force of attraction to draw the enemy on. It becomes necessary to select a retired position for concentrating in, when we are in doubt as to whether we shall have completed the deployment of our army before the enemy, or whether he may not commence operations sooner than we can. At the time of the strategical concentration of the II. Army, Prince Frederick Charles had chosen such a position at Göllheim in the Pfalz.

The convergent retreat into a position in rear is also the natural expedient in the case of being surprised. The central situation facilitates the joining of forces. Thus when King Frederick attacked the Austrians in 1757, the general place of assembly at Prague came quite naturally to them. Finally, preliminary combats may prove the impossi-

bility of a previously planned offensive procedure. The act of falling back into a central position, as the Austrians did behind the Bistritz in 1866, then constitutes the change to the defensive.

The convergent retreat is the first and readiest operation for one who perceives his own weakness. "Concentrating to the rear" is for that very reason, too, held in bad repute in conducting war. It is nearly akin to those central positions, of which men boast that it is possible to advance from them equally well in all directions, but which are mostly chosen by them because they do not know which way to turn.

The divergent retreat to a position situated towards a flank will, as a rule, be no longer possible to an army taken by surprise, unless the position in question is specially favourable owing to its natural conformation, and well known beforehand. At such times one generally does what is most natural and simple; and that certainly is not a retirement towards a flank, which would require the army to be previously almost concentrated and well in hand.

Marshal Bazaine's retreat into the position on the French Nied on the 6th August can be called a

divergent one; for he transferred his army to the right flank of the German armies, which were pushing on to the Moselle.

All the advantages of the divergent retreat, namely, that it prepares a surprise for the enemy, that it compels him to alter his dispositions and order of march, and that it in any case causes him loss of time, would have been apparent here if the Marshal had given them time to take effect.¹

The double divergent retreat, which designedly separates the forces, temporarily robs the army of the ability to fight; this kind of retreat has for that reason been rejected on principle. But there are many situations in war, where for a time we have the greatest interest in avoiding all contact with the enemy. After a battle has been lost, the divergent retreat often offers the best means of evading pursuit. The mere fact of utilizing a greater number of roads facilitates escape, and the divergent retreat misleads the victor as to the direction which the main body of the retreating army has taken. The example of the French after the battle of Orleans on the 4th December, 1870, is instructive in this respect. The victorious army of Prince Frederick Charles, when it

¹ See page 59.

had taken the town which was in the centre of the hostile position, confronted the retreating enemy, who had their right wing on the west, their left wing on the east, and their centre to the south. Owing to the confusion produced by the battle, men of all the different French units were found mixed up in all three directions, and for a time there arose a doubt as to the whereabouts of the enemy's main body.

The double divergent retreat thus has its advantages in certain circumstances and deserves serious consideration.

A formidable obstacle in our rear, which has to be crossed in presence of the enemy, may call for the double divergent retreat. For instance, in the case of a great river we must gain possession of certain points of passage some distance apart from one another.

A similar result may follow from the circumstance that we have lost a battle, but expect assistance from an army coming up in our rear, and intend, as a primary measure, to obviate the immediate consequences of defeat. The separation must, naturally, be understood to be only a temporary one, and the reunion must, in this case, have been definitely considered beforehand.

It is of course necessary to have a supporting

point for this reunion. It may consist of a position strong by nature, of fortifications or of reinforcements of troops.

It is precisely because the divergent retreat deprives the enemy of any distinct objective that it will cause the pursuit to cease earlier and thus enable our troops to again unite. Railways can do good service at this time. The French at any rate, after the battle of Orleans, managed by such means to transfer a whole army to another theatre of war, without the fact becoming known for some time to the Germans. So also we can carry out a central closing movement on a railroad in good working order, provided the operation is well planned and prepared.

4. *Special Forms of the Strategical Defensive.*

From among these we select three as the most interesting:—

The System of Flanking Positions.

We already know what is to be said in a general war about flanking positions.¹ It is only their pre-meditated employment that requires explanation in this place.

¹ See pages 59, 112, 113, 215.

Anyone who feels strong enough to move straight against the enemy and bar his road, will choose this the simplest of all forms of the strategical defensive. It is the most sure, minimizes the chances of error, and does not allow the enemy to get past us. Lines of communication and of retreat are retained, and if the resistance does not succeed on the first line, it can be renewed on one further back. But, of course, we generally draw the enemy on after us in the direction in which he himself desires to advance, and we must therefore be certain of being able to detain him at some place in advance of his objective.

Where such certainty does not exist we can resort to strategical flank positions as an artificially strengthening expedient. The main advantage thereby gained is that we divert the enemy from the direct path to his objective, which is thus indirectly secured, though we did not think ourselves strong enough to directly protect it. Such change of direction besides adds considerably to the difficulty of the enemy's task.¹

It must be admitted, however, that in most cases we certainly add to the difficulties of our own situation as well. We lead all our lines of communica-

¹ See page 59.

tion and of retreat towards the one flank, and may easily lose them, whilst we offer the other flank to the enemy and lay it open to being enveloped. If we are beaten, all opportunity is lost for once more checking the enemy in a second position before the objective. The artificial character, which must always underlie the system of flank positions, is more apt to bring on a disaster; it makes higher claims on the skill of the leaders.

In any case special embarrassing conditions arise. In the first place the defending army must be strong enough to exert the requisite force of attraction on the enemy's main body. If the numerical superiority of the assailant is very great, he opposes a minor fraction of his forces to the defender, who has retreated in a lateral direction, and with his main body makes use of the direct road left open to him. Every strategical flank position must, therefore, likewise be a good line of departure for the offensive. Anyone who posts himself behind a broad and deep river, and breaks up the bridges, can, it is true, hold out in a flank position, but he forfeits all its advantages. He shuts against himself the door to the theatre of operations.

The flank position must, further, not be liable to

be discovered by the enemy too early, otherwise he will incline towards it in good time and it will do no more than slightly delay him.

It should always be possible to retreat from a flank position, and such retreat should be favoured by the nature of the surrounding country, at any rate by way of indirect roads, otherwise the troops will be shut up in the position and rendered harmless.¹ If it is possible to retreat in different directions, we are in possession of the valuable power of first turning the enemy aside to the flank position and then, by a slow retirement, of diverting him in pursuit of us still further away from his original direction.

From this again it follows that this manœuvre requires plenty of space and a good network of roads. Movement must be free. A strategical flank position must have a "hinterland," and the best of such positions are to be found where they cover a still intact theatre of war, on which the army can rest and from which it can draw reinforcements. Jomini's high opinion of such a base is well known.² That it will as a rule only be found by the defender in his own country is evident.

¹ As the Turks at Plevna.—ED.

² See page 114.

A few examples will make the real nature of the operation still clearer.

Clausewitz says, in discussing the campaign of 1812 : “When it is considered that at Borodino there were only 130,000 French opposed to 120,000 Russians, no one can doubt but that a different direction of the campaign, e.g. on Kaluga, would have put an advance on Moscow quite out of the question. At Kaluga the Russian army would still have had sufficient country behind it to enable it to live, in fact, with time, even to be able to add to its strength, and the French would for their own safety have been obliged to follow it, whilst at the same time lacking the necessary numerical superiority to occupy Moscow as well.”¹ That as a matter of fact this line of action was not followed, Clausewitz considers quite explicable, because nobody could possibly have foreseen the rapid melting away of the French forces, and because the preparations for the march of the army in a flank direction in a comparatively deserted country, had been omitted. In discussing the defence of France against the Allies in 1814, he suggests Napoleon’s taking up a position to the south-east of Paris ;—still, this capital would have had to be guarded

Clausewitz, *Posthumous Works*, 2nd edition, vol. vii. p. 119.

against a simple *coup de main*, for the mere occupation of it would, for political reasons, have been sufficient to decide the fate of the Empire.

This brings us to the last condition for successfully conducting this style of defence, namely, that the object to be guarded, if of predominant importance, must have a garrison for its protection.

Moltke, as was made known not long ago,¹ proposed in 1860 a defence of Berlin by a flank position in the event of an Austro-Prussian war. He considered, in view of the then existing relative strength of the two nations, a direct defence against the hostile army, assumed to be advancing from Bohemia, to be disadvantageous. An unsuccessful battle had to be taken into consideration as a possibility. But by such a battle we should have lost Berlin and, if an energetic pursuit had been made by the enemy, been driven back on Stettin. Were the Prussian army, on the other hand—he goes on to say—to post itself on the Elbe between Torgau and Wittenberg, then the best effect might be anticipated from any offensive initiated from this flank position. It would compel the enemy to form

¹ Field Marshal Count Moltke's "Views on Flank Positions." First Supplement to the "Militär-Wochenblatt," 1895, p. 5.

front to it there, and to give up his communications on Bohemia, and, if successful, would throw him back on Silesia, while in case of a failure it would afford the army protection behind the river and, through the possession of the fortresses, the opportunity of soon resuming the offensive. Berlin would, of course, have had at the same time to be independently protected for a few days against a direct attack.

In a memoir dated 1868, in which the possibility of a war against France and Austria was considered, a similar line of action is advocated against the latter power. Here it was further shown that an army occupying the flank position on the Elbe could have preserved good communication with the Prussian army on the French frontier, and could, in case of need, draw up reinforcements from there. This would have made the situation of the Austrians still more insecure if they marched on Berlin with the flank position behind them.

The offensive element in the system of strategical flank positions was even more strongly emphasized by von Moltke than by Clausewitz. Such positions, in fact, form the best foundation for the offensive-defensive, the effect of which may be

enhanced by means of advantageous direction and surprise.

It is not only a retreating army that takes up a flank position. Such a position may equally well be developed from an offensive operation against the assailant's flank, as is shown by the example of Osman Pasha at Plevna. The effect of his appearance on the Russian operations against the Balkans was the more powerful because unexpected.¹

If the flank positions of the strategical defence offer incontestable advantages, yet it would be wrong to resort to such positions under all circumstances. Even this short discussion has shown how many conditions must be fulfilled in order to make them useful. It is further necessary to take into consideration the personal reputation of the commander, the estimation in which his army

¹ His critics have directed two reproaches against him, both unjustly, namely, that he did not continue his offensive, particularly after the first successes gained on the defensive, and that he remained in his position so long that he was at last unable to leave it. For the first he lacked the requisite number of troops, and his army was wanting in the necessary tactical mobility. As regards the second point, he acted as he did, contrary to his own wish and to his own views, and in obedience to distinct orders from superior authority, which a Turkish general is far less able to disregard than a German, a French, or even a Russian.

is held by the enemy, and many other things. General de Curten was on the 6th January, 1871, with his division in what appeared geographically a highly effective position on the left flank of the army of Prince Frederick Charles—which was operating against the line of the Loire at Vendôme, but no one thought of allowing that circumstance to stop the advance. For neither from the hostile General, who was unknown, nor from his troops was anything serious to be feared.

Operations on Interior Lines.

These form a much debated part of the theory of war, because they have repeatedly led to brilliant successes, which have surprised the world. When the defender rests on a point, which the enemy, moving on separated lines of advance, attacks from several parts of an arc of a circle surrounding it, the former is said to act on interior lines. The same thing happens when he occupies a position on which the enemy makes a direct attack with one portion of his forces, while he tries to turn it with the other. The term has further been generalized to describe the situation of any army

which happens to be between several hostile groups and is able to unite its troops within the space enclosed by the enemy before the latter is in a position to attack them in superior force.

The real nature of these operations is best illustrated by the dispositions of Napoleon I. from the 10th to the 14th February, 1814. Retiring on Paris before the allied armies, the Emperor found himself with the main body of his forces at Sezanne on the 9th February. To the north, separated from him by the Petit Morin and its marshy valley, the Silesian Army under Blücher was then moving on against the capital. It was not concentrated, but was distributed on two roads, namely, along the Marne and also on the shorter route through Champaubert. In addition to this the army corps were following one another on both roads at considerable distances. These circumstances of course favoured a surprise attack, especially when they were offered to a Napoleon. He in the first place took possession of the crossing over the Petit Morin. Next, making use of this means of passage, he hurried across to the southern road occupied by Blücher's army and dispersed the leading Russian Corps of Olsuvief at Champaubert. On the 11th he hastened after Sacken's Corps, which

had already formed up at that place, and defeated it at Montmirail. The troops of the Prussian Corps of York, which had hastened from the northern road on the Marne to Sacken's assistance, were driven back across that river at Château-Thierry on the 12th. Hereupon the Emperor turned back towards the southern road, along which Blücher was coming up from the rear with the Prussian Corps of Kleist and the Russian one of Kaptchevitch. On the 14th February Blücher also suffered a complete defeat at Etoges and was forced to collect his army again by retreating to Châlons before he could attempt anything further.

In itself the situation on interior lines is by no means always favourable. As a rule it is only adopted when the enemy is numerically stronger. But the fact that he is between the enemy's lines of operation may be the saving of the defender. This lies in the power which he has of repeatedly using the same force against different hostile groups. With 30,000 men it is possible to defeat three bodies each of 20,000, one after the other, while a fight against the combined 60,000 would be hopeless.

The conditions that have to be fulfilled when

operating in such a way are, in the first place, very great determination on the part of the General, who should not lose a single hour, for the enemy is seeking to concentrate, and his concentration would reverse the situation. Next, the troops must be very efficient, for the repeated employment must naturally wear them out more than a single operation. Marching and countermarching is fatiguing and makes subsistence difficult.¹ Finally the distances must be just right. If they are too small the defender is exposed to the danger that, during the fight with one column of the enemy, the others may come up and envelop or surround him. If they are too great, then, while busy with one opponent, the defender may lose sight of the others for a long time, and they are able to act without being molested. Thus, what are required are moderate distances, not too long or too short, and these can only exist for a brief period in the case of a convergent advance of the assailant. It is difficult to strike this mean successfully in the uncertainty which always prevails in war.

Finally, for the success of such operations we must

¹ For this reason successful operations on interior lines are generally only available to the defender in his own country.

further assume that an imperfect concert exists between the columns of the assailant. If they act as the Allies did in 1814, when Napoleon was foiled in spite of his grandly planned operation on interior lines from Dresden,¹ operations on interior lines are doomed to failure.

At the commencement of a war nowadays the enormous size of the armies still further stands in the way of the success of operations on interior lines. Masses, such as are called out in our time, cannot be tossed to and fro on interior lines, as Napoleon did with his corps in those famous February days. Surprise, too, which in those days contributed much to success, ceases when the telegraph publishes innumerable reports as to the actual position of the defender, who is moving in the interior space.

We shall probably only see successful operations on interior lines in future wars after long protracted fights have caused the troops to melt away, and when, in addition to this, exhaustion has reduced the

¹ Page 77. In order to deceive the enemy and to disturb his unity of action, the force operating on interior lines must generally leave some troops, however few, to observe those hostile columns, against which the main body is not acting for the moment. Thus Napoleon, when he betook himself to Montmirail and Château-Thierry, left Marmont behind to keep a watch on Blücher.

exertions and vigilance of one of the belligerent parties.

In the case of operations on a very large scale, where the strategical situation merges into the political, successful operations on interior lines may be conceivable. Germany would be on interior lines in a simultaneous war on her eastern and western frontiers, and might find in them a means of strengthening her power of resistance. Should she succeed in bringing the enemy's operations on one frontier to a standstill, her very perfect railway system would then enable her to rapidly convey considerable masses of troops to the other frontier, so as to gain the preponderance there. But very quick resolution and an equally rapid execution would be necessary ; for our doings would not long remain secret. The action of Frederick the Great against Austria, France, and Russia during the Seven Years' War was of this nature. Armies moved slowly in those days, but so did the news of their movements, and far more slowly still was an understanding come to between the Allied Courts as to their common action.

Combined Offensive and Defensive Operations.

By the above term we mean the procedure of the

defender when he combines offensive and defensive movements. He retires with his forces, where he can do so without serious disadvantage, but advances where he sees a prospect of an advantage, with a view to gradually amalgamating a number of partial successes into one whole with crushing effect. Such was the system of the Allies in the campaign of 1813 after the armistice.

All that can be said about this has already been given a place in the chapter on the reciprocity of the offensive and the defensive. A roomy theatre of war is required, and one which is physically favourable to the defender, at any rate in some part of it. Blücher's successful action against the French in the above-mentioned campaign (1813) was very much favoured by the nature of Silesia, with its water-courses flowing in deep and precipitous valleys. Fortresses and fortified positions may render similar assistance; they enable us, under certain circumstances, to make one strategical wing temporarily very weak, and in this way to transfer most of its fighting strength to the other wing for a powerful counter-stroke.

CHAPTER XII.

TACTICAL DEFENSIVE OPERATIONS.

1. *Objects and Means of Carrying Them Out.*

THE details of the above are to be found in any manual of tactics. Here we need only discuss the general relations in which tactical defensive operations stand.

These, in contrast to tactical offensive operations, may have a two-fold aim, namely, warding off the enemy on the field of battle or gaining time. It is by no means always necessary that we should have resolved on a serious resistance when we oppose the enemy. The real nature of the defensive has shown us that time is its ally, and that the defender can often count it as a success, if he can contrive to escape defeat up to a certain time.¹

When, after losing a battle, an army is hard pressed by the enemy and leaves its rear-guard to

¹ See page 55.

make a stand, so as to obtain the necessary start for getting into a fresh position, the rear-guard will generally have fully accomplished its task if it can hold its ground for a few hours only. If the halt was made towards evening, it is sufficient if its resistance last until darkness sets in. The cover of darkness is then utilized for the attainment of the object.

To gain time may thus be as good as to gain an advantage in fighting ; whereas in the offensive the latter must be had at any price.

It is naturally indispensable that the actual object of the tactical defensive should not be purchased with too great losses. It is, for example, no use effecting a delay in the course of the operations, or holding some important position, if we are thereby crippled, and unable to continue the war. The sum total of all the means which the defender can utilize, namely, fire action, utilization of ground, artificial works of defence or exhaustion of the enemy, must in any case be great enough to warrant a prospect of doing away with the previous superiority of the enemy.

It is necessary to explain how the exhaustion of the enemy may be considered as of use to the defender. The effect of fire action, ground, and

artificial adjuncts of strength is intelligible without further explanation.

We know that the success of an attack depends very considerably upon its skilful preparation and the judicious deployment of the troops. If the defender, after retreating a short distance, makes another stand, the assailant cannot rush blindly on, but must first deploy from columns of march. If the defender's position is of any length, and if he has made use of the advantages of the ground, it must first be reconnoitred. The lines of approach to the position have next to be found out, and the troops led forward on them, and, at the same time, extended in order of battle. This must take place beyond effective artillery range, which is nowadays reckoned up to 2700 yards. The line on which the assailant deploys will thus be considerably longer than the hostile position, and the movements up to it are executed across country. This consumes the physical powers of the troops. The larger the unit the longer will the deployment take and the greater the fatigue entailed on the men. If the ground happens to be wet, or if the fields are covered with deep snow, the difficulty of the advance is enormously increased. Moreover, under such cir-

cumstances, the manner of fighting must be changed, for the efficiency of cavalry almost ceases, that of artillery becomes very much reduced, and the burden falls almost entirely on the infantry. If we further reckon the shortness of the winter days, which is generally combined with such conditions as the above, it is easy to see why under such circumstances actions are seldom carried through to the end, but interrupted by darkness before complete decision is gained. We need but refer to the days of Le Mans.

When the troops thread their way back again on to the roads the same spectacle repeats itself as when they are deploying. From a simple consideration of the lengths of columns on the march, it follows that an army corps cannot be deployed for battle more than once in a day. By dint of supreme efforts a division might be able to deploy once, get on the move again, and once more to form up in order of battle. But the second deployment would be wasted labour, because there would be no time left for fighting before the approach of darkness. All these circumstances favour the tactical defensive. If it succeeds in deceiving a large hostile unit and in making it deploy for battle, and then withdraws without any great loss, it has gained a day. The

fact is often overlooked, that merely threatening to fight is a valuable means of attaining the object aimed at.

The successful application of this expedient requires ability on the part of the leader, and good battle discipline on that of the troops. In the attempt to gain time it is easy to become involved, and forced into an unpremeditated and decisive engagement. An effective employment at the outset of artillery at extreme ranges is necessary, in order to guard against this danger. The distance certainly detracts from the effect of the artillery fire, but our object is not so much to inflict losses as to deceive. Dispersion of the batteries, so as to make the enemy at first believe in the presence of a greater number than is actually present, is a thoroughly justifiable ruse, and has before now fulfilled its object, even at peace manœuvres, where it is much easier to see through it. Other profitable expedients are to take up fronts which are far more extended than the strength of the troops would justify, and deployment of a very strong first line, with reserves insufficient for a serious resistance.

The most difficult thing is to know the moment at which we may consider our object attained. If we

allow this moment to slip by, the penalty follows instantly. As a rule it may be said that, if the infantry is once seriously engaged with the enemy, the combat must be fought out to decision, because it is no longer possible to extricate infantry, without its suffering the very heaviest losses. The disengagement must therefore take place before matters have got so far as this. This is not easy, for the enemy will notice our intention and soon begin to press heavily.

2. *Application of the various Systems of Tactical Defensive.*

When is it advisable to gain time? when to tire the enemy out? and when to engage in a decisive action?

The last mentioned course will mark the end of the whole defensive operation and introduce the reaction. The *decisive fight* should not therefore be accepted until we believe that we have at our disposal the utmost available power of resistance. Our power of resistance consists in the number of our troops, their condition, and the strength of the position as regards ground and moral potentialities. It is not an absolute factor, but must be estimated in comparison

with that of the enemy. If we are expecting an access of numerical strength, which will probably more than counterbalance the losses likely to occur pending its arrival, it is important to avoid a decision meanwhile, and the first consideration is to *gain time*:

To tire the enemy out is, under certain circumstances, the best resource of the defender, and one which may reduce the assailant to a state of absolute prostration. It is the sole aim of the defensive so long as it is impossible to foretell how long this attitude may last. This distinction sounds in itself very simple and clear. But it is not easy to carry it into practice; for the picture, which we have before us in the field, fails in exactness. Even if we are able to assume with some certainty when and where we ourselves shall receive reinforcements, still we are generally unable to judge as to whether the same thing will not occur with the enemy, and again neutralize our advantage. Still less possible is it to reckon with certainty the losses we may incur. In forming an estimate of the enemy's condition, considerable errors are possible. We know how greatly the Allies were deceived on this point before the battle of Austerlitz.¹ The wasting process, which

¹ See page 211.

was going on in the French army in Russia in 1812, did not become apparent to the enemy till very late. Kutusow had not fully realized it even in his position at Kaluga. The assailant is better off in this respect than the defender. His path takes him over battle-fields and past camping grounds of the enemy, and for the most part follows the roads, which the latter has traversed before him. Traces of dissolution will scarcely fail to be noticed, and he has more opportunity for making prisoners. Such means are not open to the defender as he retires, and, should he happen to be on hostile soil, no news worth knowing will find its way to him from the inhabitants.

The vigour which the assailant displays in fighting may form a standard for forming an opinion of his physical and moral strength, yet it must not be forgotten that such vigour may perhaps be merely the expression of the energy of his intentions.

It may be possible to theoretically determine the bases on which our opinion of the enemy should rest; nevertheless we shall often *grope about* in uncertainty. The diagnosis must be made according to the circumstances taken collectively. War experience and knowledge of human nature are the qualities required to form a right judgment.

3. *Defensive Dispositions.*

For every kind of fight the defender must decide on some disposition of his forces, which will constitute an organic whole. If he allows himself to be caught on the move and only defends himself just as circumstances allow, at the places where his troops happen to be, then he resigns the initiative. Such cases are, as a rule, of no value for scientific consideration and the framing of rules.

If we intend offering a serious decisive resistance at the turning point of the operation, the chief point for consideration in the selection of a position is that it should be favourable for fire effect, for this, not the difficulty of getting over the ground, is the greatest obstacle to the enemy. If the defender wishes to fight in the position which he has taken up, it is anything but an advantage to have too formidable an obstacle in front; for this may possibly force the enemy to make movements which will deprive the position of its importance, so that it may have to be quitted. An apparent weakness, as on Napoleon's right wing at Austerlitz, may be advantageous, because it tempts the enemy into an advance in a direction easily recognized by us. It is certainly con-

venient if a portion of the front is strong by nature ; for, taking everything into consideration, that the defender must be supposed to be the weaker of the two combatants, and, if he wish to make sure of keeping the upper hand on one part of the battle-field, he must be able to risk fewer troops at others.¹

A further condition is a screened interior space, which cannot be easily overlooked by the enemy. Formerly projecting rises of ground sufficed ; to-day, when men can look down from captive balloons over very considerable intervening heights, a country veiled by cultivation, wood, farm buildings and gardens is more advantageous. Such country enables us to conceal the distribution of our forces from the enemy.

Co-existent with the above conditions, however, must be freedom of movement within the position ; though it is no easy matter to combine all these in one. Close ground is found more especially in highly cultivated districts, and these abound in obstacles to movement. Even if there be an absence of impassable watercourses, steep ravines, marshy tracts and so on, there may be garden walls, wire

¹ It is desirable that the assistance given by field entrenchments should be supplemented by the nature of the ground

fences, ditches, deep ploughed fields and similar adjuncts of an advanced state of agriculture. Numerous roads, or at least practicable approaches, to the foremost fighting line and towards the flanks are requisite. We must always bear in mind that a change of front may become necessary.

If it be feasible to choose the position in such a way that, before approaching it, the enemy has to cross an obstacle which can only be surmounted at a few points, such as a river, at which he is limited to the bridges, the defender has the advantage of knowing beforehand in which directions he must concentrate his fire. The assailant's movements are also tied down in such a case, and the defender can form an idea of what he has to expect.

We know what little prospect of success there is in a frontal attack as a rule.¹ The defender must therefore first of all attend to the flanks. It is more difficult to find protection for them from the ground than in the case of strategical defensive positions.² However, natural protection should be sought, for at least *one* flank, especially for that which, because it is stronger by nature,

¹ See pages 87 and 88.

² See pages 51 and 52.

is on that account manned by fewer troops. The troops are closed in to the weaker flank, being utilized as a living flank defence.

The way in which this living flank defence should be disposed will be determined by the nature of the field of battle.

A very simple method is that of prolonging the line after the assailant has already commenced his enveloping movement, so that he will end by arriving before the front. For this purpose reserves behind the wing are necessary. But a widely extended wing usually becomes weak, and may be destroyed or driven in, like that of the French at Roncourt on the 18th August, 1870, and its defeat will have almost as disastrous an effect on the army as would an envelopment. A flank which is thrown back is generally stronger, especially if the assailant is unable to discover it until he has reached the wing of the position. His line of advance to the fighting line is then longer than that which our reserves have to traverse, and the only advantage left to him is the convergent form of his attack.

The best way of defending a flank is to have troops echeloned in rear of it. As a rule the main reserve should be stationed there, for the front

has no need of it, and the flank which rests on the obstacle can be made secure with fewer troops. This force, held back at first, can advance against the enveloping movement and take it by surprise. The assailant, who, when engaged in this movement, often thinks he is already at his objective, will always be powerfully affected by such a counter attack. If it is considered that the main reserve will be wanted elsewhere, then an independent force must be detached to defend the flank and manœuvre against the enveloping movement. Even if it cannot defeat this, still it will be able to delay it at the decisive moment and neutralize its influence on the decision. The weak detachment of General von Keller succeeded in doing this on the Lisaine at Frahier on the 17th January, 1871, against the divisions of Cremer and Penhoat, which had set out on an enveloping movement.

Moreover, reserves in rear of a flank, even if not actually required for the defensive, will be very suitably placed for an offensive counter-stroke.

If both flanks are "en l'air," more protection must be given to that which is most exposed to attack. This, in the majority of cases, is that flank which if

defeated would have the most serious strategical consequences, from our lines of communication or of retreat leading from it, or it may be that we are expecting a reinforcement from this direction, which it is to the enemy's interest to keep away.

Wholly different are the considerations which apply when the position has been taken up for the purpose of gaining time. This indeed follows from what has been already said about the real nature of this operation of the tactical defensive.¹ An inaccessible front then becomes of great advantage, for if it deters the enemy from the attack and forces him to turning movements, our object has been gained in a cheaper way. A flank support is not an absolute necessity, for the enveloping movement itself costs the enemy time, and is a source of profit to the defender. Rivers difficult to cross, deep valleys with steep sides and heights falling precipitously to the plain, and difficult to scale, are by no means suitable for the decisive defensive battle, although they no doubt are for a fight, carried on for the purpose of gaining time.

It is different when the object is to tire the

¹ See pages 233 and 234.

enemy out. Then it will be necessary to do more than merely delay him, by offering a semblance of opposition. Serious actions are brought on, in which, however, no absolute decision is reached. In this form of the defence we seek for a combination of favourable conditions of the ground, time of year, armament and qualities of the troops to insure success. What is generally called a "step by step defence." Tenacity becomes the cardinal virtue just as in the attack it is energy. Ground which is difficult to see over, covered with thick growth and much intersected, is of great assistance. It makes it difficult for the attack to utilize superior numbers or deploy large masses, restricts fire action, and allows the defeated side to escape destruction, and resume its resistance after a short retrograde movement. Regions like the Elbe Duchies, Brittany and Vendée are of this class. The admirable resistance of the Vendéans, and the Chouans against the First Republic in France is partially accounted for by the nature of the country.

We thus see that a very great variety of considerations influences the selection of a position for tactical defence ; and that a critical examination of these considerations leads to totally different results.

The method of defending and situation of every defensive position must be in harmony with the idea pervading the operation and with the actual object aimed at by it. It is not every position which is good simply because it is strong by nature, and not every disposition which is correct just because it conforms to the form of the ground.

4. *Special Forms of the Tactical Defensive.*

The Ambuscade Defensive.

We might give the first place here to a species of defensive, which is very much recommended nowadays. The advocates of the tactical offensive cannot deny the all-conquering power of fire action, nor can those of the defensive deny the moral stimulus, imparted by a forward movement with clear objective. Hence the idea has arisen of utilizing the former while not renouncing the latter. This would be possible if we were to let the enemy first suffer heavy losses by knocking his head against a good position, and then, when he is exhausted, issue from our position and fall upon him. Blume's offensive-defensive transferred to the sphere of tactics, would partake somewhat of this character. It will never be possible to make the attack with the

same troops as undertook the original defence. The difficulties which this would entail are well known.¹ Hence for this purpose others must be kept concealed in reserve, and in fact they must be the greater portion of the whole force, since the offensive stroke plays the decisive part. Thus a trap is, as it were, laid for the enemy, and the whole proceeding can therefore be called "the ambuscade defensive."

Austerlitz affords an example, so far unsurpassed, of such; but it must not be forgotten that Napoleon I. was an unsurpassed master in the art. If the "ambuscade defensive" were easy to conduct, no other kind of defence would ever be adopted in future. But it is natural that the troops told off for repelling the enemy, who must of course be considered to be in a considerable minority as compared with the assailant, will soon find themselves in difficulties. Since the whole manœuvre cannot succeed if the enemy prematurely defeats this portion of the defending force, support must be afforded to it, and a portion of the troops told off for the counter-stroke must be taken away from their appointed duty. The troops for the counter-stroke may then very likely become too weak. If the counter-stroke

¹ See pages 68 and 69.

is to pass through the front of the position, there is in addition great danger of its not advancing far enough, and at the most carrying the front a little further forward ; thus missing its real aim ; for the fight attracts to itself those who come up, and stops their forward movement. The reserve kept for this purpose would be better posted behind the wings ; where it would have before it a clear field for its action. There, however, the enemy discovers it more easily, draws it into the fight, and the defender's intended offensive resolves itself into a prolongation of front or a deployment into a defensive flank. This class of defence is best carried out when the forces detailed for the offensive stroke only arrive on the battle-field at the decisive moment, like Blücher's army at Waterloo, or the Second Prussian Army under the Crown Prince Frederick William at Königgrätz. In this form the "ambuscade defensive" may take place in the future, where armies are advancing on separate lines and at a short distance from one another. Then, if the already concentrated enemy attacks one of them with superior forces, its duty is to delay him and weaken him by skilful resistance until the others approach and are able to proceed to the counter-attack.

An army may adopt the "ambuscade defensive" on a small scale, with a small body of troops, provided the ground be favourable. If the front be strong, but too extended for the troops occupying it, it may be used for a temporary resistance, which will compel the enemy to decide on the main direction of his attack, and, therefore, to show his strength. An attack is then made on him, where it offers most promise of success, with the main body, hitherto concealed behind this covering line. If the line of front be so formed that if the enemy takes it he has to pass through defiles, then, besides having good information from the preliminary fights, the defender has the advantage of encountering, with troops already deployed, the heads of deep columns as they emerge from the defiles.

*Tactical Flanking Positions.*¹

These come under the same rules as similar

¹ We here quote the masterly explanation which Field Marshal Moltke has given of this kind of position in the solution of his sixty-third tactical problem: "A flanking position is a position which is taken up close to and parallel to the enemy's direction of operations—a position past which the enemy cannot go without giving up his communications—a position at which the victorious combat and the pursuit turn away from the original objective. At the same time we must consider that by taking up a flanking

strategical positions, allowance being made for the more limited space available. The danger of their being discovered is greater, and it is equally probable that the assailant will capture that flank of such a position which is turned towards him.

This flank must therefore above all things have a secure support to rest upon ; the wing affected must, moreover, be refused to the enemy by reason of its situation, and the one turned away from the enemy must be somewhat pushed forward. Should the enemy be deceived by the trap thus set for him, it will not do to leave the direct road to the objective quite open to him. A rear-guard should retire in that direction in order to draw him after it. Again, the position must be within artillery-range of the enemy's line of advance, for otherwise he has too much latitude for changing direction, deploying and opening the fight. It must also be easy for the defender himself to assume the offensive from the position we give up our own line of retreat as well. A flanking position, therefore, can as a rule only be taken in the interior of a country, where there is a friendly "hinterland" on which we can subsist. In a hostile country it will be much more difficult. In this case we are turning one wing towards the enemy ; it is therefore a requisite condition that this wing should receive strong support from the ground—otherwise the enemy will advance diagonally and roll up our position.

flanking position, so that he may be able to fall upon the enemy and defeat him in the event of his attempting to get past and follow up his object without taking any notice of the flanking position. Finally, when we leave the main road and take up the flank position, we must not deprive ourselves of a line of retreat, but must always retain some road open. Thus we see that to perform this manœuvre we must be able to count on several conditions, most of which will disappear if we directly oppose the enemy on his road to the objective.

Tactical flanking positions will be particularly effective when they make the enemy uncertain as to whether they are held by the troops retreating before him or by the vanguard of new arrivals. Should there be behind the flanking position any sort of important defile, from which troops belonging to the defender may be expected, or a railway station at which they can arrive, then the uncertainty of the situation becomes still greater for the assailant, especially if the ground between the flanking position and such defile or railway is not open to view. If such a favourable situation occurs, the defender may obtain the greatest advantage from it even with quite small forces.

The best example of this has been furnished by Field Marshal Moltke, not, it is true, in the practical field of war, but by means of a tactical problem. A weak force is at Gravelotte, to the west of Metz, and a hostile army is advancing to the siege of this town. The head of the enemy's column has already arrived at Vionville and the detachment of Gravelotte must delay it at least a day in order to enable the garrison of Metz to be made up to war strength.

In any position which directly bars the way to the enemy the above task would be quite impossible,—the enemy's superiority would be far too great. Therefore this detachment must take up its position to the south of and just off the high road from Vionville to Metz, on the edge of the Bois des Ognons. So placed, its strength cannot be gauged; a thick wood lies in rear, and behind the wood the small town of Ars with two bridges over the Moselle and a large railway station, whence reinforcements might be expected at any moment. The assailant would of necessity be in doubt as to whether he had to deal with an advanced detachment of the garrison of the fortress, or with the vanguard of an approaching column. Until this doubt was cleared up by fighting he would not be able to attempt anything

further. Even the capture of the edge of the wood, which by itself would require considerable time, would not remove the uncertainty; for no one could know what there might be in the wood behind. The situation would not be cleared up until after he had succeeded in driving the defenders back on Ars, without any increase of their forces having been observed. By then, however, the necessary time would have been gained by the detachment and its task accomplished.

If the resistance in a flank position is crowned with success, the defence further reaps the advantage that the assailant has to set about his retreat under difficult conditions, because it is only by wheeling that he can get back into his original direction. An assault made from the flanking position could then force him off it altogether.

A tactical flanking position is most effective when the enemy has to deal with it immediately after the passage of a defile, e.g. when he has just passed a bridge over a large river. In such case his retreat, in the event of defeat, becomes most difficult, because he has to retire through a narrow passage, situated on his flank.

CHAPTER XIII.

OPERATIONS UNDER SPECIAL CONDITIONS.

ALL operations may receive a certain amount of restriction or modification from the shape and nature of the theatre of war.

Formerly quite a decisive importance was attributed to such modifying agencies, and names were accordingly invented for special variations in the manner of conducting war. Thus, for example, mountain warfare was looked upon as something quite by itself. Special principles were laid down for it.

Similarly, there was a special theory for the attack and defence of rivers, &c.

There is no necessity for this distinction, at any rate so far as the principles of the conduct of war are concerned. These follow general rules, and they have only to be adapted to the ground on which they are applied.

Trackless regions, mountain ranges, watercourses,

&c., are, above all things, obstacles to movement; they therefore are favourable to the defence.

Let us suppose the defender to be in possession of a mountain range; in such case he enjoys the advantage of having a front, which is, generally speaking, only vulnerable at definite points, namely, where roads lead through the mountains. These points can be defended with comparatively small forces, and, according to our idea, are connected by an impassable obstacle, so that the range resembles a closed front. Thus it is reduced by these conditions to a simple case of frontal defence. We are inclined to consider the position as very strong. But it must be borne in mind that in Western Europe all mountain systems have already been made very accessible by civilization, and have been pierced by good roads.¹ They form hardly any obstacle at all now. Then we must not confound a country poorly provided with roads with one which is quite impracticable, as was done by the Turkish Headquarters in 1829, 1877, and 1878, in the case of the Balkans.² Finally, mountain

¹ Our main roads in mountains are mostly of the best quality, for they are on a solid foundation and suitable material for construction is everywhere close at hand.

Infantry to-day is able to get over the very greatest obstacles,

ranges of short length, with impassable flanks, as when they rest at both ends on sea coasts, are extremely rare. Mountain positions are either very extended, and in consequence comparatively weak at all points, or they will be open on their flanks. This danger is doubly serious because the several detachments posted in the front have little connection with one another, and are unable to afford each other mutual support.

The counter-action by the defence at a threatened point can as a rule only take place from the rear, and the troops advancing thence undergo the same difficulties as the assailant penetrating into the mountains.

The assailant, well aware of these facts, who finds an occupied mountain line before him, will merely keep the defender busily engaged in front, while trying to turn him on one or both flanks. If the defender extends more and more so as to oppose him, all the time occupying a greater number of passes situated more towards the flanks, he gives his opponent the opportunity of bringing up proofs of which are already given in peace by the Italian and French Alpine troops. Mules will follow pedestrians on extraordinarily difficult roads. Mountain artillery, too, can therefore accomplish wonders in the way of climbing.

reserves and forcing the line with them. In this way the assailant will overcome one post, while he holds the adjacent ones in their places by means of weaker attacks. A precipitate retreat of the latter, when the news of the successful irruption reaches them, is the ultimate result.¹

The defender will, on his part, naturally anticipate such a course of events and, unless special circumstances tie him to offering the decisive resistance in the mountains themselves, will prefer to only lightly occupy the chain with its passes, so as to ascertain the enemy's direction and strength, while keeping the bulk of his forces concealed behind the mountains with the object of falling upon the enemy when his marching columns wind laboriously out of the mountain defiles. We have here simply to deal with a case of ambuscade defensive.²

Hence the question before us is not one of framing new principles for the conduct of war, but of the suitable application of those which we already know to the various conditions.

Much the same takes place in the attack and

¹ The unfortunate defence of the Balkan line by the Turks in the winter of 1877-8 is the latest warning example of overrating the value of mountain chains as defensive positions.

² See page 248.

defence of river lines, which nearly always suffer from the disadvantage of over extension, and cannot even be observed throughout their whole length. Here, too, the defender will generally prefer only to defend the course of the river so far as obtaining information about the enemy makes it necessary, and to concentrate his main force to the rear, so as to attack when the enemy crosses and is compelled to accept battle with his forces not yet fully deployed and with an obstacle in rear.

Neither do artificial works of defence radically transform the rules for the conduct of war. They only call for special dispositions in putting the rules into practice.

Artificial works of defence consist of: *fortified positions, entrenched camps, and fortresses.*

The first of these must give us a front, which is strong and protected on its flanks, and in which decisive resistance can be made with a weak army, against a superior enemy, unless our object is only to strengthen one portion of the front so as to be able to economize troops there and mass them at other points.

In the former case we require a very decided

support from the ground, for the position will play a strategical part. To this category belong the lines of Torres Vedras as well as the Danewerk position—for the protection of North Schleswig and Jutland—which stretched from sea to sea. At the present moment examples of such works of defence are given by the Tchataldtchha and the strong French frontier line facing Germany, which reaches from one neutral country to another.¹ The second class of entrenched positions is pre-eminently of a tactical nature. The secure support of both wings is nearly always wanting, and the entrenched line only forms a piece of the front, just where we purpose to have a weak garrison. The enveloping movement is anticipated here, and a battle-field close to the position is selected from the outset, on which the idea is to utilize with success the stock of troops economized in the actual defence.

The *entrenched camp* forms a closed figure and faces in all directions, yet it resembles the fortified position in that it requires an army to give it its importance.

¹ The American Civil War also presents many examples of this kind.

Once it is forsaken by the army it becomes worthless, like the camp of Conlie at Le Mans in 1871. An entrenched camp should act as a support or a place of refuge to the army when it resolves to give up its communications and line of retreat for a time. However, we only withdraw into such a camp when we no longer feel that we have the power to resist the enemy in the open field.

Hence it follows logically, that we have just as little power to again quit the place of refuge in the presence of the enemy, i.e. to set ourselves free, if we are invested in it. Therefore we must only retire into an entrenched camp when we can reckon with perfect certainty on an approaching reinforcement. The army then enjoys the advantage of not being weakened by further retreat, and, as a rule, also of bringing the operations to a standstill for a time.

An entrenched camp can also perhaps be used as a pivot, on which, for example, to rest one wing while the other is manœuvring, or in order not to be forced away from an important place, such as a great passage over a river, during a short absence of the main body. Then, however, the camp assumes the

character of a provisional or auxiliary fortress, which, however, is not so strongly finished off as a real one. Dresden played such a part as this in 1813, and was again marked out for the same purpose by the Prussians in 1866.¹

The *fortress* is more independent than the camp. It is more strongly constructed, cannot be taken with the appliances of field warfare, possesses all arrangements for the supply and maintenance of its garrison, and should have an importance of its own even without the presence of an army.

Hence it follows that fortresses are, properly speaking, only really wanted where we wish to retain our hold on some district removed from the theatre of war, without keeping up an army for the purpose. When provinces are situated far away from the rest of the country, without good communication with it, or, at least, are so placed that the assembly of an army in them would lead to a disadvantageous division of the available fighting strength, then it is permissible to fortify an important town there, which may be defended

The Author uses the words *verschanzte Lager* to signify a point surrounded by provisional fortifications, such as Dresden in 1866 or Florisdorf in the same year.—ED.

by a weak garrison, the capture of which, however, by regular siege would require considerable time. Then, even if the open country round about is overrun by the enemy, when peace is concluded the right of ownership can be urged and no danger is run of losing the remote province. The Turkish Empire has two such threatened districts, Epirus on the Greek and the Albanian basin on the Montenegrin frontier. If foreign fleets command the sea, troops can only be sent there with the utmost difficulty by the land route, and once there they are tied down and would not be able to contribute even in the smallest degree to the general defence of the empire. Here, then, there is every reason for fortifying the two capitals of these districts, Janina and Scutari, so that they can be held by the forces always available on the spot. Königsberg in East Prussia might, under certain circumstances, be able to play a very similar part in a stubborn, long-protracted struggle, occupying Germany's military forces on several theatres of war. It is easy to see, however, that in such an arrangement of fortresses political considerations outweigh the military ones. We only wish to keep in our possession a security for our claims at the conclusion of peace. Therefore such a purely passive

resistance, which can never lead to anything in ordinary cases, is here sufficient.

The addition of smaller fortified points may become useful in this case, because a whole district thereby remains in our power, and this materially supports the assertion of our right of ownership. Only in that case a small field force must be available in the open country to keep up communications, even if it be not large enough to play a part as an independent field army.

In all other cases the fortified position or provisional fortification of the point should suffice. For as the army is either there, or at least in the neighbourhood, it indirectly protects the points to be secured, and thus the power of complete independence and self-defence does not appear absolutely necessary. The fear of having to go away for too long with the field army from some important place also leads to the establishment of a fortress there, which is designed as a pivot for the operations. Thus in 1813 Napoleon I. intended making Hamburg into a real fortress, in order not to lose the Lower Elbe. On the Middle Elbe, where his army stood, he was content, as already mentioned, to convert Dresden into an entrenched camp.

The defender may assume that he will in the first place have to abandon some important place close to the frontier, while he will, however, again make use of it so soon as he has drawn up all his troops from the interior. Kars played a part such as this at the beginning of the Russo-Turkish war, 1877, in Asia.

The idea of the association of fortresses and field troops has led to the former being now always provided with advanced works, which protect the space for an army by their guns.¹

In such a case a fortress will undertake the following part in conjunction with the field army:—

The latter, retiring before a stronger enemy, can leave it like a pier, which projects beyond a bridge and is designed to break the first force of the ice

¹ These works were at the same time designed to secure the body of the place against the long range artillery of the assailant. As this latter became more and more perfect they were pushed out further to the front, but in that way became more isolated and exposed. It has therefore lately been the custom to construct the *enceinte* round the central point more strongly, and we thus end by boxing one fortress in another, a thing which was never intended originally. The garrisons naturally grow in proportion, and at last become so large that they would suffice to gain the object aimed at as armies, even without any fortress. Unquestionably a wrong direction has thus been taken, and it is desirable to leave it in the interests of national prosperity and the economy of forces.

floes crowding against it. The enemy will invest the place or have to post a fairly strong body of observation before it. In his further advance he thus comes with reduced strength before those positions which the defender afterwards takes up for offering resistance. His prospects of success disappear. In this way Ahmed Mukthar Pasha succeeded in repulsing the first Russian offensive at Zewin on the 25th June, 1877, after it had been weakened by the investment of Kars. When, as in this case, the field army of the defender has been in the fortress up to a short time previously, success will be all the more certain, for the enemy cannot know how many troops may possibly have been left behind in the place. The assailant is then all the less justified in leaving it unobserved.

It certainly is a necessary condition that the fortress should be large and the garrison strong enough to have some chance against the attacking army. Furthermore, the defender's position in which he intends to fight must not be too close to the fortress, otherwise the assailant will employ the force which is investing the fortress and send it back again to resume the investment after the fight.

The fortress again can be utilized as a flank

support, and here the consideration comes in that, with its outworks and long range guns, it often commands an area several days' march in breadth. It thus at the same time forms a solid length of front. It is then not even necessary that the army should be in direct contact with the place. Without any harm to itself it can leave a gap between its position and the place, and the stronger the army is the greater can this gap be. Even in 1870 the shots of the fort on Mont St. Quentin reached as far as Ars-sur-Moselle, five and half miles from Metz. Had the French Army of the Rhine in falling back taken up a position behind the Moselle, between Pont-à-Mousson and Novéant, the fortress would still have secured its left wing. The narrow strip between Ars and Novéant, not commanded by the guns of the forts, would not have sufficed for the advance of the German armies, or even permitted the development of a strong enveloping movement. The situation of Metz would have been doubly advantageous, because the place projected in front of the line of defence and threatened the assailants on their right flank. Parts of the field army, which were not used in the front, would have been able to advance through the fortress during the combat

and to assume a powerful offensive against that flank.

This makes it at once evident that a place gains in importance if it stands on a river and if it affords the opportunity of changing from one bank to the other in safety.

It acquires increased importance if it commands the confluence of several important streams. Küstrin is a fortress of this description, and Napoleon I. blamed Eugène most severely for not having derived any advantage from its possession in the retreat of February, 1813. Twenty days, wrote Napoleon, could have been gained there, for securing Berlin. As a matter of fact Eugène could in the first place have taken up a position in advance of Küstrin, somewhere about Drossen, and so have prevented the enemy from crossing the Oder. Then, when the latter had turned against him with superior forces, it would have been possible for him to have crossed from one of the sections between the rivers to the other.

Suppose still a third and a fourth river, or brook, in a swampy valley flowing towards a common centre, then the same thing can be successfully repeated even more frequently, and the army, using

the fortress as a pivot, can box the compass in wheeling round it.

The only danger involved is that of being thrown back into the place and being shut up in it. The outer wing must therefore be the stronger; a simple rule, the importance of which everyone easily understands, and which was yet overlooked by so experienced a commander as Marshal Bazaine on the 16th and 18th August, 1870. Unnecessary anxiety lest he should be forced away from the fortress made him place his reserves behind his inner wing.

An army once invested in a fortress, if it wants to get free again, must resort to the tactical penetration of a hostile position specially prepared for defence.¹ We already know the difficulty attending this, and it is in this case augmented by the fact that the hostile reinforcements can advance naturally from the line of investment extending from right to left, that is to say, in the most effective direction, against the defender's flanks. Military history presents very few examples of the self-deliverance of an army once invested.

It is in the nature of things that the proximity of the protecting fortress must exert a great force of

¹ See pages 190-91.

attraction on an army in a difficult situation, and that it is very much easier to lead an army back under its walls and guns than to lead it forward again away from this safe refuge.¹ The employment, therefore, of centres of gravity and of motion, i.e. of supporting and wheeling points, hides numerous rocks, on which a General may come to grief. This has induced a modern writer to say, with great justice, that a fortress resembles a sphinx, which brings ruin on those who do not solve its riddle.

In the foregoing remarks we have anticipated all there is to say about the final way of employing fortresses, which is proposed for our great modern "fortress camps," namely, to serve as a place of refuge to the armies, which have been beaten or hard pressed in the field; a place where they will rest, recruit their strength, and provide themselves with everything necessary, so as afterwards to resume the operations in the open

¹ Each individual soldier is impressed with the feeling that the army is no longer a match for the enemy in the open field and that it stands in need of artificial protection. This feeling, however, is by no means calculated to raise the *morale* of the troops, or restore confidence. In addition the army lacks the power to make good the losses arising from battle and disease, and it is generally badly sheltered. Thus even the material advantages of the situation vanish on closer examination.

field. The whole idea is too theoretical for it to hold good in the practice of war. Metz is the best example of the truth of this proposition.

Fortified districts, General Brialmont's "Régions Fortifiées," are preferable for this purpose, because they do not admit of investment, and yet sufficiently protect the interior space in which the army is to be accommodated.

We have still to consider the proposal that has been made to protect the capital of a country by means of fortification. The objection may be made to this that an assailant, who is strong enough to drive the armies right back on to the capital, will possess the strength to overpower the latter as well, and that the question is therefore at most one of a gain of time. Nevertheless it must not be forgotten that such a gain may be valuable in connection with help from allies.

Moreover, exceptions do occur. Capitals, which play a commanding part in their country for domestic reasons, but from their position are very exposed to an attack, must be fortified. Constantinople, Copenhagen, and even Lisbon belong to this category. An enemy who commands the sea, might gain possession of them by a *coup de main*, and thereby

paralyze the development of the power of the whole state. Political reasons here come to the fore. A fortified capital may likewise be the centre of a systematically prepared defence of the country. Nevertheless it is impossible to do away with the objection that such a great fortress exerts a strong force of attraction on the military forces destined for the war in the field, and that it not only supports them, but at the same time also fetters them and in a direct way employs a considerable portion of them for its garrison. There is also great danger here of the premature investment and surrender of the army. These objections gain weight, the more important the place becomes in comparison with the strength of the field army. Bukharest is more likely to be fatal to Roumania than Paris to France.

If all places which are important for the defence of a country have to be provided with a modern fortress, their number would be great. And yet we may learn by experience when it is too late, that if operations in the field take an unexpected turn, fortress camps are missing just at the very places where they are required. France did not by any means lack fortified places in 1870, and yet the want of them was felt at two places, where they would

have been most valuable during the whole of the second period of the war, viz. at Orleans and Amiens.

For the fortress to be of use to a fairly large army its extent must be considerable. As it increases in size, its power of passive resistance decreases and an increase of the garrison becomes necessary. The expenditure of money and troops that has to be made for fortifying the country thus increases two-fold.

Some means will have to be found of making the fortress mobile and of establishing it in such a way that quite a small garrison will suffice for simple security against forcible capture. The use of iron and steel as a means of protection, used in immediate connection with the gun¹ so that the latter and its protecting armour form one whole capable of transference from place to place, indicates the way towards the attainment of this end. We should thus be able to secure important localities by means of a few contrivances served by only a handful of men with a view to provide a framework for future fortified positions or camps. These would only be established where their utility appeared probable

¹ The term "Armoured Carriages" is most inexpressive.

from the course of the operations. Thus it would be possible for a nation to avoid permanently keeping up ten or twelve large fortresses with whole armies as garrisons in order that one or two of them may be of use in war, while probably none exists at the very place where it will be most needed.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE INFLUENCE OF OPERATIONS BY SEA ON THE CONDUCT OF WAR.

A FLEET can lend the greatest assistance in the strategical concentration of armies by taking charge of large convoys of transports. The Turkish Empire would never have been able to get its armies together in 1877 without such help. During this war the revival of the summer campaign in the Balkan Peninsula was due to the fleet, which brought Suleiman Pasha's army across from the Albanian to the Thracian coast. How useful the co-operation of sea forces can be in advancing a base and forming new communications when the land operations happen to be in proximity to the coast, we have seen from the example of the war between China and Japan. The command of the sea, which enables the land army to rest on the coast at any point where there is a good harbour, is no less valuable for the defender than for

the assailant. A glance at the map is enough to show how important it is for Germany to have sure command of the Baltic Sea in the event of a war in the East and West.

As to the Polish theatre of war, the German armies would have far greater freedom of action if they had the option of retiring in case of need on Königsberg or Dantzic, instead of only in a westerly direction towards the Oder.

The command of the sea often obviates the necessity for costly and extensive systems of fortifications. So long as the Ottoman naval force held the Black Sea and at the same time was strong enough to block the Dardanelles to all others, the fortification of Constantinople could be looked upon as a luxury. London could not possibly remain unfortified if England did not rule the sea.

Of two belligerent powers the one stronger by sea retains under all circumstances his rear free and his communication with the outer world open, and is thus able to bring up means of resistance from all quarters. It is able to utilize the manufactories of other nations for the armament and equipment of its military forces. If hostile fleets had blockaded its coasts, France would never have been able to accom-

plish such prodigies in 1871 after the overthrow of the Empire, in setting up armies which, though newly formed, were well provided with everything necessary.

The example of the American War of Secession shows that by blocking its communications with the sea it is possible to absolutely starve out a large country which does not produce sufficient to feed its population, and to render all its successes on land finally useless.

The opposing forces being approximately equal, victory will in the end rest with the one which remains master of the seas. It will exhaust the financial power of the other by the destruction of its commerce and the stoppage of all maritime traffic, and thus also undermine its military power.

But apart from this indirect support which comes within the province of the higher strategical conduct of war, a direct support of the land operations through the action of the fleet is further possible, when the configuration of the theatre of war is favourable to it.

An army moving along a coast line can render one of its flanks absolutely secure by means of accompanying warships, and has only to guard the other. The

naval forces can help the march by hastening on ahead and seizing coast towns. The attack on fortified positions or towns lying on the sea has little prospect of success without the participation of a fleet. If the defender keeps up communication with the sea he cannot be deprived of the power of replacing men, food, guns and ammunition, and he can prolong his defence indefinitely.

It is seldom that great water-ways will make it possible for a fleet to directly support the entry of the army into a theatre of war. Yet the great American Civil War gives an instance of it. One of the most important reasons for the defeat of the Southern States was that the fleets of the Union, advancing simultaneously from the sea and from the upper course of the Mississippi, gradually gained complete possession of that river. This enabled them to cut the Southern States in half and keep the two parts permanently separated.

Naval forces can directly support a defender by securing fortified places on the coast, by attacking blockading squadrons, by maintaining sea communications between distant provinces or parts of the army, and also by securing the flanks and rear of the land armies.

This support, under specially favourable circumstances, may have a decisive effect. It makes it possible for the defender to fix the turning point for his strategical defensive far back in some neck of land, at which point his own strength then attains its maximum, and the attacker is weakened by the length of his own line of operations. The reaction then becomes doubly fatal. Without the protection of the rear by means of the fleet the defence of the lines of Torres Vedras would never have been attempted, and that of the lines of Tchatalditcha would have been impracticable.¹

Finally we have still to briefly consider the nature and importance of landings. The peculiarity of these expeditions is that, although they are based on a point which is selected as near as possible to the objective,² they are independent of connection with the other parts of the army. They are able to pass by hostile country which is occupied by troops, and to appear unexpectedly in districts which are still quite unaffected by the war. They are especially suitable for threatening the enemy's flanks and rear.

In our sketch, therefore, of a defence of the lines

¹ See pages 206 and 207.

of Tchatalditcha at the end of the Russo-Turkish War, we had in view an expedition of this nature. It would have been rendered peculiarly effective by the possession of the Bulgarian Quadrilateral and the presence of no inconsiderable force of Turkish troops in it.

If landings are in general a greater benefit to the assailant than to the defender, it is because the latter is more rarely in the position of having the necessary surplus forces. Otherwise such expeditions would give to a defender, who is weaker on land, the opportunity of making raids on the assailant, whose rear and communications he threatens by landings. The weakness of all landing expeditions consists in the fact that owing to the difficulty of transporting troops by sea, their number will always be limited, and the proportion of cavalry, artillery, and waggons in particular will be small. This makes bodies of troops which have been landed ill-adapted for a rapid and distant advance from the coast, a thing which, on the other hand, is just what is necessary for the purpose of gaining elbow room and extending the base.

In highly civilized and thickly populated countries, therefore, landings never have any prospect of great

success. The military organization of such states and the network of means of communication are in these days so developed that it will always be possible to assemble a vastly superior force against the corps landed, the strength of which at first can scarcely ever exceed 40,000 to 50,000 men. The only exception to this is if the landed troops at once receive reinforcements owing to a popular rising, or the forces of an allied power, which has only waited for this incentive to commence hostilities. A French landing in a war with Germany could only attain any importance through an alliance with Denmark. The time for such expeditions is at the very commencement of hostilities, when all field troops are on their way to the frontier and their distracting effect is most felt, or else quite at the end, against a defender already worn out and weary of the war.

Exceptions occur when an important object of operations lies on the coast itself or close to it, so that even a temporary occupation would of necessity have considerable influence on the course of the war. Political considerations may materially enhance the importance of a landing expedition under such circumstances, especially when the capital is on the sea. By rapidly seizing it we may force a vacilla-

ting government to join us or to declare for neutrality in accordance with our wishes. Such an aim justifies the risk which is always associated with maritime expeditions.

At Sebastopol the Allies' object during the Crimean War was to destroy the cradle of the Russian naval power in the Black Sea, and this particular reason gave to the otherwise not very important place an importance which justified the Allies in making a great landing expedition.

Colonial wars and conflicts with states situated in distant parts of the world and possessing little military strength are in general the fields for landing expeditions. In these cases a numerically weak, but well equipped and trained European force tells decisively in the settlement of political disputes. With the increasing opening up of these countries for international trade and European civilization, however, the sphere of action for such expeditions is again becoming more limited. Thus the recent war between Japan and China should put an end to the old times when a few thousand French or English troops escorted by a fleet were able to compel the governments of large and populous countries in Eastern Asia to comply with their will.

CONCLUSION.

WE cannot close this series of ideas taken from the study of the conduct of war, without once more pointing out that it is not by any means supposed to exhaust the whole subject.

All the principles explained and forms described here are simple, and capable of being understood without difficulty. To be thoroughly acquainted with them is by no means a great scientific accomplishment, which could guarantee success in the bustling turmoil of war. Every well-informed soldier knows them, but he is not necessarily on that account an able general, while a very small percentage of able generals develop into really eminent leaders of armies.

In carrying into practice the theoretical principles which we have worked out for ourselves, so many secret mainsprings of human action enter into the question, that success only attends the keen eye which penetrates them with the rapidity of thought

and is able to note their effect without any long and laborious process of thinking.

Political, social, and material circumstances and other conditions of every description have to be considered.

The actual execution, moreover, requires a strong will and a firm character, for only such a man remains true to himself and to his convictions in the stormy press of the incidents of war.

Power of influencing his fellow men, which is denied to many a distinguished man, is a further requisite. It is also indispensable to clearly recognize one's object, and to possess that talent, so difficult to define, of instinctively grasping all favourable circumstances, which we in ordinary life call "luck."

Owing to these conditions it is as difficult to put into practice the art of leading armies as it is easy to acquire a theoretical knowledge of the art of conducting war.

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