
THE DELAYED OFFENSIVE.

It has been learned, as a result of recent British and French exploratory operations along the Western front, that a considerable proportion of the German troops now holding the line consists of men who have recently returned from the Russian front and are as yet unaccustomed to the conditions of warfare in France. This may account in some measure for the fact that the Germans encountered during these exploratory raids and local advances of the Allies surrender readily.

Why are inefficient soldiers of poor morale kept in the line? Not because Germany is unable to place first-rate fighting men there. The battles of the spring and early summer proved that there are still storm troops of the highest quality in the ranks of the enemy who can be relied upon to attack again and again over ground swept by shell and rifle fire. The obvious conclusion is that second-class men are holding the German positions while the first-class men are rehearsing another great offensive. The loss of a few thousands of the stop-gap troops will not count if the offensive has the results hoped for and expected.

Comments of the military writers in Allied countries indicate that the problem of meeting the German shock troops with the best the Allies can muster is engaging a good deal of attention. General Maurice states that Britain for several months has been shipping boys of eighteen and a half across the Channel. Referring to the fact that hundreds of American soldiers under the age of twenty-one are being picked out and sent back from France, he says: "This is significant of the type of manhood in the American ranks. . . . The effect of the intervention of a fresh army composed of the picked manhood of a nation which is not suffering from the staleness of four years of effort must be decisive."

The leaders of the German army have already learned of the quality of the Americans. They know that over a million are in France and that another million are getting ready for transportation to the scene of war. Every day's delay increases this formidable new fighting force. Why, then, do the Germans continue to delay? Conjecture covers a wide range, but whether the halt is attributed to the Spanish influenza, or the phase of the moon which does not at present give sufficient light for night marching, or the threatening situation in the Balkans, or the need for the accumulation by the enemy of a great supply of projectiles, not one of the correspondents suggests that the Germans have adopted again the defensive. They have pursued so long and so successfully on the Western front, and are waiting for the Allies to attack. All believe that Germany will make one more tremendous effort to achieve peace by conquest. Yet, as the season passes, the delay becomes more mysterious and more difficult to reconcile with the basic conditions of the situation. Germany may again decide that the Allies can be tired out, even though they cannot be conquered.
