

STUDIES OF GERMAN DEFENCES NEAR LILLE

15

§ II.

AUBERS RIDGE.

77 MM. BATTERY POSITION NEAR BAS BLANDRE.

Plates 11A, 11B, 11C. Photograph 8.

General Description.—This position was selected as a representative example of work done by German field gunners on their positions. It was not the best that could be found, but was chosen because it shows the lines on cover which were in the German mind during 1915-16-17, and how they changed as shell-drops increased.

Judging from zero lines given by the siting of the pits the nominal target of the battery was the British line between La Bourloméie and Condrozere Farm.

The distance of the position from the front line was 1,000 yds. and it was constructed for a 77 mm. Field-gun battery. The battery probably formed part of the divisional artillery commanded from the Hd. Qrs. at Seneffe Farm.

Ammunition and concrete were brought from the dumps at Fournes by light railway right up to the battery.

The description of the positions is divided for the sake of clearness under the following headings:—

1. (a) General Siting for concealment of the battery.
(b) Subsequent concealment preparations.
2. Gun pits, detachment and ammunition shelters.
3. Other accommodation for battery staff.
4. Command and communications.
5. Defensive arrangements against tank and infantry assault.

2. (a) *General Siting for Concealment.*—Natural cover was very well chosen; the position is on a road and no tracks need therefore be made which would be observed on an air photograph.

A thick hedge and numerous trees served to hide the guns, and a small farm just behind No. 4 pit formed a natural site for the battery headquarters. The guns were grouped round a ditch and hedge, which were preserved intact.

(b) *Subsequent Concealment Preparations.*—The pits themselves were built into the hedge as much as possible and the trees were left standing where they existed already. Hence, in the case of Nos. 1 and 2 gun pits five trees project through the cover, and their trunks were used as stakes for rails. All earthwork was sodded or covered with brushwood.

2. *Gun Pits.*—In all the pits the trail bed was more permanently constructed than in the British positions. A heavy timber frame was sunk in the ground. A cushion to prevent the trail space jarring was provided by means of a fascine bent round the arc of the trail bed.

Each pit was provided with a small concrete magazine to hold about 400 rounds, and a place where at least two "S.O.S." men could sleep near the guns.

Concrete shelters near the guns were provided for the detachments which had up to 4 ft. of cover.

Nos. 2 and 3 pits were the earliest construction and consisted of rails and pit-prop frames with earth covering.

No. 1 pit was the next to be tackled and had a roof of 2 in. of concrete supported on 12 in. \times 4 in. "salved" channel irons.

3. *Other Accommodation for Battery Staff.*—The concrete dug-out in the farm (see Plate) provided accommodation for the officers, and that in the outbuildings for the men. These were not used permanently, however, but only in case of shelling. In normal times both officers and men lived in the rooms in the farm. During quiet times these had been well filled up. The officers' mess walls were decorated with coloured drawings, not, perhaps, in the best taste. In the adjoining field the battery had a garden laid out in plots for three gun detachments.

4. *Command and Communications.*—The fire of the battery was controlled from the command post shown on the Plate. This consisted of a steel observation cupola of standard type set in concrete. It was connected to all four gun pits by speaking tubes made of salved 4-in. piping.

The light signal post signalled to Bondu Farm which, it is thought, was the battery O.P. A buried cable ran from the farm to the position. The telephone post in the battery was in the officers' dug-out in the farm, which was connected by a speaking-tube to the light signal station.

5. *Defensive Arrangements and Anti-tank Position.*—For immediate defence the battery was surrounded by wire from 20 ft. to 40 ft. wide. Its left flank was protected by the infantry Hd. Qrs. 250 yds. away, also enclosed with wire. The ground in front and to the right flank is open and there is a view for about 2,000 yds. This ground could be swept by three guns for anti-tank defence. Nos. 2 and 3 guns were to be taken out of their emplacements and fought from raised positions (shown on Plate), which gave the necessary command for fire. No. 1 gun could be pulled out and man-handled up the banks to a similar position (right flank), which provided a good lead for direct fire eastwards.

Descriptif de la batterie

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