

## CHAPTER 4

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# The impact of WW I on the tactical development of the Imperial Japanese Army

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### Introduction

World War I, fought in Europe where massive industrialization and great improvements in technology were achieved, taught contemporary people lessons requiring comprehensive and complex whole of nation approach like the conception of total war. Likewise on the tactical level, emergence of new weapons and significant increase in firepower on the field taught lessons to armies in many countries, which forced them to solve those problems to prepare for the next war. After WW I, discussions on the future of the army in Europe were centered upon mechanization, for both the victors and the defeated, based on the lessons from the long static war of attrition. On the other side of the hemisphere in the far east, being segregated from the war in Europe and therefore with limited information on the war, the Japanese Army struggled to understand and to adapt itself to the new norm of warfare which materialized in WW I, instead of to *the next war* suggested by the lessons of it. By the beginning of WW II, the Japanese Army only had been able to catch up with *the new norm* in a Japanese way.

In this paper I would like to make clear the process of the tactical development of the Imperial Japanese Army to adapt to WW I-type warfighting in terms of infantry tactics.

### 1. Craving for information

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 1914 Japan declared war against Germany and occupied Ching Tao, German territory in the South Pacific, by November. But Japan limited army operations to the Asia-Pacific area, and continuously refused to send ground troops to Europe regardless of the repeated requests from allies. A year after the outbreak of WW I on the 27<sup>th</sup> of December 1915 the Imperial Japanese Army established the Special Military Investigation Committee in the Ministry of Army to prepare itself for the future based on the lessons of WW I. About 25 officers

and some civilians of the committee from all major institutes of the army were organized into 8 sections, each of which had its own field of interest.<sup>1</sup> This effort was so comprehensive that its subjects encompassed military organizations, mobilization, education, strategy, tactics, fortification, materiel, and logistics. The information collected were published monthly and distributed among the whole Army. The focus of the reports was trench warfare on the Western Front.

Along with this effort the Army General Staff, the Infantry School, and even some infantry divisions began studies on trench warfare. The whole army was craving for information on WW I.

## 2. The first series of efforts

### 2.1 Trench Warfare Exercise of 1918

In autumn 1918, just before the surrender of Germany, the Japanese Army conducted the first experimental maneuvers, named “Jinchi Kobo Enshu” or Trench Warfare Exercise to study the ramifications of WW I. Directed by General Hyoe Ichinohe, the head of the Inspectorate General of Military Training, they reenacted a battle of the Western Front of WW I in the maneuver area. The objectives were threefold: firstly to understand new ways of both defensive and offensive tactics adopted in the war; secondly to study the effects and employment techniques of the new equipment and munitions; and thirdly to establish guidelines for planning and executing training of this kind for field units.

Because the troops only knew what they had been trained, i.e., basically the way the Japanese Army fought the Russo-Japanese war, the Army wrote special manuals to prepare for this maneuver,<sup>2</sup> which were based on French infantry manuals of 1917.<sup>3</sup> The Army distributed them among participants about a few months in advance and trained them according to it. The main features of the

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<sup>1</sup> Atsushi Koketsu, “Gunji Chosa Iinkai no Gyomu Naiyo (What was done in the Special Military Investigation Committee)”, *Seiji keizai shi gaku* (The journal of historical studies: politico-economic history), vol. 174 (1980): 56.

<sup>2</sup> Kobo enshu keikaku iinkai (The planning committee for trench warfare), *Jinchi sen ni okeru hohei no koudou* (Infantry actions in trench warfare), August 1918 (material in the possession of Military Archives, Center for Military History [CMH], National Institute for Defense Studies [NIDS], Ministry of Defense [MoD]).

<sup>3</sup> The contents of those manuals are identical to the French manuals of 1917.

experimental manuals were as follows.

Infantry battalions, which had only rifles at the time, got an additional 4 heavy machine guns, 2 infantry guns, and 64 grenade launchers for this experiment. And 4 light mortars were added to regiments. For the Japanese, which were in their second year of a 10 year-process of acquiring only 6 heavy machineguns for each regiment, this volume of firepower was revolutionary.

Infantry formation became more dispersed and added more depth. For attack, assaulting battalions were to employ waves of assaulting lines of companies. The interval between men was 5 or 6 paces instead of 2 of the doctrine of those days. Fire and movement was to be conducted at platoon level instead of company. Form of maneuver shifted from a stiff linear one to a fluid one in order to infiltrate into enemy defensive positions. For defense, instead of one line of defense, a division was to establish 2 or 3 defensive belts, each of which consisted of 3 defensive lines, and to hold them in conjunction with spoiling attacks and counterattacks by individual units on their own initiative. With the above changes, they introduced a new way of command and control because they required independent actions by small units at the level of platoon, squad, or below amid the confusion of battles. Such actions were exceptional for the Japanese Army back then.

For the maneuver the Army temporarily organized 3 regiments with 2 normal brigade HQs, 1 heavy regiment, 2 heavy artillery battalions, and 2 engineer battalions. During the 3-week experiment, the first 10 days were assigned for field fortification work. The maneuver started with a speech by General Ichinohe to observing officers: "I regret to say that even the basic concepts for both offensive and defensive fighting are undecided and showing what should be done is beyond my capacity ... I request you to frankly exchange opinions regarding benefits and shortfalls of the fighting methods in detail in search for essence requisite for the future army training."<sup>4</sup> Along with the maneuver, live fire tests of various new weapons were conducted to understand the effects of bombardment on field fortification.

Due to excessive requirements and poor exercise control by inexperienced

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<sup>4</sup> *Taisho 7 nen jinchi kobo enshu kiji dai 1 kan* (1918 Trench Warfare Exercise, vol. 1), 1918 (material in the possession of Military Archives, CMH, NIDS, MoD).

officers, achievements of the maneuver were insufficient. The exercise issues identified were inadequate understanding of infiltration maneuver, counterattack and spoiling attack, poor cooperation with adjacent units, and so on.<sup>5</sup> Among them the initiative of lower command echelon and infantry-artillery cooperation were focuses of the problems to be settled.

As for the initiative of the lower command echelon, the Army decided that requisite tactical skills for noncommissioned officers and proper actions by individual soldiers should be attained to cope in the confusion of battle. However, attending troops voiced suspicion. "Is it suitable for Japanese culture? Considering the educational standard of current noncommissioned officers, it is doubtful that they can achieve it." "If it is the best way, we must conduct far more intense training." "With the noncommissioned officers who are inept in this kind of skills ... it is impossible to achieve victory."<sup>6</sup> They suggested the transformation of leadership training for noncommissioned officers.

As for infantry-artillery cooperation, General Ichinohe mentioned that "it was far below expectation, and there was a large room for fixes."<sup>7</sup> He saw infantry troops and artillery batteries conduct 2 separate battles where each branch did its own. The officers from both branches did not even understand the need for exchanging their battle concepts and requisite information, on top of the lack of means for communication. The same was pointed out for the cooperation between heavy infantry support weapons and rifle units. The main challenge was receiving support synchronized to the infantry maneuver when it deviated from the predetermined scheme for attack.

Though the achievements of the experiment were limited, it was a groundbreaking effort that galvanized the entire Japanese Army. It was observed by a total of 238 officers, who were in commanding positions above regiment and divisional staff from every division in addition to those from central army institutions. The experiment became a catalyst to promulgate the new way of fighting, even if it offered just a glimpse of it.

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<sup>5</sup> *Taisho 7 nen jinchi kobo enshu kiji dai 4 kan* (1918 Trench Warfare Exercise, vol. 4), 1918 (material in the possession of Military Archives, CMH, NIDS, MoD).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-24.

## 2.2 1920 revision of the Infantry Manual

At this moment the Army was uncertain what would be key to breaking through the defensive belt of WW I. The most promising solution the Army could think of was the way the German army conducted the Ludendorff Offensive in 1918, information of which was too scant to understand what happened.<sup>8</sup>

In 1919 the Infantry School started the work of revising the Infantry Manual of 1909 based on the studies of WW I. The guidance given from Lieutenant General Masahiko Kawamura, the Commandant of the Infantry School, demanded that the infantry manual should be a Japanese one, instead of just importing the Europeans', taking into account the Japanese culture, the capacity of Japanese soldiers, and the organization and the equipment that the Japanese Army could afford. In addition it directed that the focus of the manual should be *open warfare* instead of *trench warfare*, which he thought was much easier than the former in terms of time available for decision making, and that the scope should be limited to fundamental skills applicable to any combat situation on the premise of the short service term of the draftees.<sup>9</sup>

At this moment there were two schools of thoughts on how the manual should be revised. One was represented by the Infantry School, which was responsible for drafting the new manual; the other was by the Special Military Investigation Committee, which was the center of research for the war and organized the recommendation for the manual. They differed on 2 points. The first point was about the amount of new weapons and ammunitions that would be the condition for drafting the manual. The Infantry School assumed that the weapons and ammunitions could be insufficient because of the weak industrial capacity of Japan. On the other hand the committee assumed that the same level of armaments and supplies as the Europeans during the war should be considered. The second point was about the understanding of two different forms of warfare:

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<sup>8</sup> Rikugun hohei gakko (The Army Infantry School), "Susen jinchi no kobo ni kansuru Kaneko chusa no iken (Lieutenant Colonel Kaneko's opinion concerning trench warfare)", *Kenkyu geppo* (Monthly Research Report), vol. 9 (1918): 41-42.

<sup>9</sup> Rikugun hohei gakko (The Army Infantry School), "Hohei soten kaisei ni kansuru Kawamura koucho no danpen (The excerpt of speech of commandant Kawamura concerning revision of the Infantry Manual)", *Kenkyu geppo* (Monthly Research Report), vol. 16 (1919): 25-36, vol. 17 (1919): 25-30, vol. 18 (1919): 37-41.

*open warfare* and *trench warfare*. The school viewed *trench warfare* as a peculiar kind of warfare requiring different fighting skills from *open warfare*. It decided there was no lesson from WW I to be adopted to the *open warfare* doctrine, which was the core of the Infantry Manual, even though there were other thoughts in the army which regarded the two forms of warfare as inseparable, with *open warfare* following breakthrough of the defensive belt.<sup>10</sup>

After the discussions in fall of 1919 they revised and created a tentative version of the Infantry Manual in September 1920. The Infantry School's thought was adopted. And the strategic imperative for short decisive war required the Japanese Army to reject *trench warfare* as unfavorable and exceptional. The lessons adopted from WW I were only minimal. It was almost identical to the latest manual published after the Russo-Japanese War except for consideration of both dispersion and decentralization of command.

### 3. Road to the drastic change in tactics

#### 3.1 Trench Warfare Exercise of 1922

By the end of 1921 the Japanese Army had access to the latest infantry manuals published after the war by former belligerents of WW I: Britain, France, Germany, and the U.S. The Army understood that the European countries had reached a conclusion on the lessons of the war.<sup>11</sup> At the end of 1921 Lieutenant General Soichiro Kojima, the chief of headquarters, Inspectorate General of Military Training, organized the Committee of Infantry Tactics with the aim of revising the Infantry Manual with the latest knowledge from Europe. As the aim shows, the scope of the study was only limited to *open warfare*.

The committee studied various ways including war games, experimental exercises, and live fire tests. The studies mostly relied on French documents, and the opposing force of the war games was the French Army. The culminating event associated with the effort of this committee was the exhibition maneuver in April of 1921 in the presence of more than 120 officers including all division

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<sup>10</sup> Captain Miura, *Hohei soten kaisei ni kansuru iken* (Opinions on the revision of the Infantry Manual), (material in the possession of Military Archives, CMH, NIDS, MoD).

<sup>11</sup> Infantry Major Mitome, "Kaisei hohei soten souan ni kansuru kenkyu (Research on the revised tentative Infantry Manual)", *Kenkyu geppo* (Monthly Research Report), vol. 56 (1923): 4-5.

commanders and reserve generals. After 4 months of study the committee submitted the final report.

Contrary to former arguments, the committee admitted that the two forms of warfare, *open warfare* and *trench warfare*, were inseparable. Along with this fundamental change in framework, it reached a conclusion on the following associated changes: delegation of command and control downward, shorter combat range of infantry fire, and machinegun centric employment of infantry.

The delegation of command and control downward was described in terms of necessity of dispersion required by dense lethal fire of machineguns. The committee concluded that under the fire of the modern battlefield, even the platoons would be large enough to be immobile as a group. Only sections or individual soldiers could maneuver under enemy fire. Troops that reached deeper into enemy position should enable the following troops to advance. As a result, tactical unit of fire and movement was changed from the platoon to the section along with the abolition of the tightly closed formation.

The combat range of infantry fire had been stipulated as mid-range of 600m in the manual. But the study showed that infantry fire should be shortened to 300m to avoid casualties by enemy artillery bombardment and to adapt to the new norm of battlefield of wide dispersion and camouflage where soldiers hardly spotted distant targets without an optical device. To supplement the weaker firepower of the Japanese Army compared to that of European armies, both in terms of infantry fire and artillery fire, the introduction of sufficient number of grenade dischargers was stressed.

The Japanese Army acknowledged the value of machinegun centric employment, replacing the firepower of rifles with light machineguns for the infantry sections. However, because Japan could not afford to equip each infantry section with a light machinegun, the gap had to be filled by rifle sections without dispersing, and therefore, accepting the possibility of greater casualties.

Soon after the formation of the Committee of Infantry Tactics, the Army decided to conduct another experimental maneuver, Trench Warfare Exercise of 1922, cancelling the scheduled Special Engineer Exercise of 1922. The purpose was to select adequate lessons of the trench warfare from WW I for the Japanese Army, by examining the ways to conduct trench warfare, which was formed in

close relationship with the study of *open warfare* by the Committee of Infantry Tactics.<sup>12</sup> The maneuver was conducted with temporally organized troops; one and a half infantry battalions for defense, and two and a half infantry battalions for attack, both of which were reinforced by infantry and artillery guns, engineer units, and balloon units with the exception of the support by tanks and airplanes that were attached only to the attacking unit. The offensive phase of the exercise was about a week long after 2 months of fortification work.

The focus areas of the exercises were twofold: how to organize all the combat elements through meticulous planning and to execute it for both offense and defense, and finding a new way of fighting centered on the infantry section.<sup>13</sup> Through the exercise the Army admitted that planning for trench warfare improved marginally, and the execution, especially the preparation work, was poor. The new section centric fighting, which participating troops were trying to materialize, was nothing more than what the Army had been doing. The issues raised for further development were: relation between plan and order, command and control of the small units, cooperation between the infantry and the artillery, and the way to employ defending force for defense in depth.

Planning by the company commander and below was the worst, though the Army required more detailed planning for the lower echelon. For execution, the plan should have been adaptable to changing situations by updating the plan or improvising the actions of individual leaders without adherence to the plan. The balance between the preplanned action and the improvised action was regarded as a key to trench warfare. To strike a balance between them, the Army concluded that the development of the initiative of individual soldiers was necessary.

For the command and control of the small unit, the Army regarded *the command facilitating the initiative of the subordinate* as necessary. But what the troops actually performed was *uncontrolled command*, by which commanders gave just nominal orders to subordinates and left them on their own without any control. It was too novel for the troops to understand the new way of command

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<sup>12</sup> Kyoiku soka bu (The Inspectorate General of Military Training), *Taisho 11 nen jinchi kobo enshu kiji dai 1 kan* (Report on the Trench Warfare Exercise of 1922, vol. 1), March 1923, 4 (material in the possession of Military Archives, CMH, NIDS, MoD).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.



and control. Poor tactical skills and judgment of both the platoon leaders and the section leaders emerged as new problems.

Cooperation between infantry and artillery was evaluated as poor, especially when the advance of the infantry attack was delayed and adjustments of the artillery fire were difficult due to lack of means to communicate swiftly between them. In regard to keeping the overall harmony between infantry and artillery, the Army admitted that local failure of the infantry attack was not good enough to change the artillery fire plan. This notion led to the negation of the creeping barrage and promoted the further study of the cooperation.

The issues associated with the way to employ the defending force in depth were withdrawal and counterattack. In the exercise, the defending troops fought and retrograded to the next defensive line one by one as the enemy attack progressed. Such an approach was criticized as the successive defense which should be avoided. It was emphasized that defensive positions should be held tight. In the counterattacks, firing troops in the position just vacated all positions and launched an attack even when effect of fire was insufficient or attacked the enemy head on with poor synchronization of fire and movement.

Those are all signs of old habits of linear tactics before WW I. The central problem regarding the new way of fighting was command and control of the lower tactical echelons. Whereas linear tactics had allowed communication by natural voice, the new ones did not because of the dispersion and lack of proper communication equipment. It was hard to communicate with the troops beyond reach of natural voice. Officers who attended the exercise were right on the mark about the difficulty. "By having insights into how situations will develop and with spontaneous initiative we must establish spiritual radio communication." "Now it is required that the training will cultivate closer mental communications with each commanders."<sup>14</sup> Those were a requirement for Telepathy, or Mission Command in current military parlance, and it should be achieved through proper training.

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<sup>14</sup> *Taisho 11 nen jinchi kobo enshu kiji dai 2 kan (ge)* (1922 trench warfare exercise, vol. 2 part 2), 1922 (material in the possession of Military Archives, CMH, NIDS, MoD), 185-188.

### 3.2 1923 revision of the Infantry Manual

After the conclusion of the study by the Committee of Infantry Tactics, based on the outcome of the study and the maneuver, the Infantry Manual of 1923 was published, again as a tentative version, in January 1923. It was “the drastic change from the former”.<sup>15</sup>

For the offensive actions the Japanese Army basically accepted the idea of the Europeans. However, the Army understood that Japan lacked both the industrial capacity to equip enough fire arms and the intellectual capacity of the noncommissioned officers.<sup>16</sup> The Army decided not to go so far as the Europeans did.

The main features of the changes were emphasis on the local encirclement by the units of lower echelon, more dispersion, and the delegation of command to the lower.

The local encirclement by the units of the lower echelon had been stipulated in the former manual, but this time it was emphasized more aggressively. The commanders of all echelons were required to break into weak points of the enemy position, to locally encircle him, and to exploit it to the breakthrough of the enemy defensive belt.

Further dispersion and the delegation of command to the lower were materialized based on the outcome of the committee, though under sparse enemy fire it still stuck to the use of packed formation as a favorable form. The section leader was required to exercise command authority for the first time. And the responsibilities associated with fire control were transferred from the company commander to the platoon leader with detailed directions to be given by the section leader instead of the platoon leader. The authority for initiating assault was delegated from the battalion commander to the company commander.

For the defensive action the Japanese Army only partially accepted the WW I lessons of Europeans. The primary principle the Army stressed was “breaking

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<sup>15</sup> The comment of Lieutenant General Kazushige Ugaki, *Hohei soten souan kaitei riyu sho* (Explanation on the revision of the tentative Infantry Manual), January 1923 (material in the possession of Military Archives, CMH, NIDS, MoD).

<sup>16</sup> Infantry Major Mitome, “Kaisei hohei soten souan ni kansuru kenkyu (Research on the revised tentative Infantry Manual)”, *Kenkyu geppo* (see note 9 above), 13-14.

enemy attack in front of the forward edge of the battle area by holding the only one defensive belt". There was no difference in principle from the Russo-Japanese War except for expression of "defensive belt" instead of "defensive line". The word "belt" symbolized the lessons from WW I accepted by the Japanese in the case of open warfare. Even in the case of trench warfare the second defensive belt and ones further in depth should be utilized just in case. The counterattack which had been conducted by the battalion and above was to be done by the platoon and above. The place of counter attack was only limited to the point where the enemy broke in or just in front of the defensive position. The infantry school clearly negated counterattack against the enemy having already penetrated the first defensive belt.<sup>17</sup>

### ***3.3 1928 revision of the Infantry Manual***

The next manual of 1928, which was not labelled "tentative" after almost a 10-year effort of assimilating the lessons of WW I, was basically the same as the 1923 tentative version. It was just edited so that soldiers could more easily understand.

## **4. Institutional reform for improving the capacity of noncommissioned officers**

To make the Infantry Manual practical the Japanese Army had to take another step beyond just changing the doctrine. As discussed along the course of tactical development, the fundamental lack of capacity of the noncommissioned officer could be the critical cause of deadlock for the implementation of the new doctrine. Understanding the necessity of intellectual enhancement and cultural transformation of the noncommissioned officer, the Army revised the Army Maneuver Regulation, the Army Training Regulation, and the Army Service Regulation in conjunction with the publication of the infantry manual and established 3 Army Noncommissioned Officer Schools by 1927.

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<sup>17</sup> Rikugun hohei gakko (The Army Infantry School), "Kaisei hohei soten souan ni kansuru kenkyu (zoku) (Research on the revised tentative Infantry Manual [continued])", *Kenkyu geppo* (Monthly Research Report), vol. 59 (1923): 52.

The new Army Maneuver Regulation of 1924 designated leaders of small units including noncommissioned officers to be inspected periodically along with giving emphasis to the importance of leader development for small units and combined arms training. And it included the provision of establishing the permanent framework for experimental study of trench warfare, while maneuvers of this kind had been temporal.

The Army Education Regulation was revised 3 times in conjunction with the revisions of the Infantry Manual. The regulation of 1920 emphasized education by self-awareness, which responded to the fear of mutiny plagued among the war-weary European countries. On the other hand, the Army Service Regulation of 1921, whose tentative version was published in 1919, described the necessity of spontaneous initiative of junior officers and noncommissioned officers to wage future war in addition to attention to the mutiny. The Army Education Regulation of 1922 directly mirrored the changes in the infantry doctrine. It stipulated that the infantry section was the focus of the training, and that the achievements of conscripts in the first year of the training should be inspected. In the explanation on the change, General Kazushige Ugaki, the head of the Inspectorate General of Military Training, elaborated the importance of the tactical judgement and leadership capacity of noncommissioned officers, and demanded that preparation for the education of candidates of noncommissioned officers be conducted with care. The regulation of 1927 promoted the idea further by stipulating the *how* in detail. The urgency of the improvement of the noncommissioned officer education was continuously promulgated by the Inspectorate General of Military Training.

## **5. Changes through Japan's own warfighting experience**

The theoretical studies of the WW I and the associated transformation of the infantry tactics based mostly on information from France were concluded with the publication of the Infantry Manual of 1928. But proofing tests were needed to finalize the transformation. Two tests were prepared by the Germans, then conducted by their apprentice, namely the Chinese National Army; one started from 1932 and the other from 1937. The experience of 1932, or the 1<sup>st</sup> Shanghai Incident, was reflected in the 1937 Tentative Infantry Manual, and that of the earlier stage of the Sino-Japanese War was reflected in the 1940 Infantry Manual.

The focus of the revision of the 1937 manual was tactics of the infantry rifle platoon, along with the change in organization. The rifle platoon employed in the incident consisted of 2 through 4 rifle sections and 2 sections of light machinegun. The experience of the combat taught that: the platoon was unwieldy for having too many sections subordinated to it, grenade dischargers which were temporally assigned for the expedition were very useful and should be added to infantry troops, and the cooperation between rifle sections and light machinegun sections should be improved.<sup>18</sup> Then the Army decided to reorganize it to the new rifle platoon consisting of 3 rifle sections, each of which had 1 light machinegun, and 1 grenade discharger section with 4 pieces. Tactics corresponding to the organizational change was introduced to the manual. This change made the offensive tactics of the Japanese Army almost identical to the Europeans of WW I. On the other hand the defensive tactics did not change. On the contrary the basic principle of “breaking enemy attack in front of battle position” was further emphasized.

The campaign around Shanghai of the Sino-Japanese war stood out from all battles between Japan and China in terms of preparedness and intensity of fighting. Unlike the first Shanghai incident of 1932 which the Chinese did not expect, the campaign was well prepared by the Chinese with the help of German military advisers. The crash was like WW I with more than 2 months of deadlock, in which attacks launched by each side bogged down and both poured reinforcement in piecemeal fashion. The eventual force size amounted to 7 Japanese divisions and 7 Chinese divisions with heavy casualties for both sides, more than 40,000 for the Japanese and approximately more than 200,000 for the Chinese. Through this experience the Japanese Army understood the firepower of the modern warfare, though it was limited in scale and intensity compared to the European experience.

The lessons of the campaign were introduced into the 1940 Infantry Manual. Most of the changes were minuscule except for the idea of defense. Before this revision the primary focus of defense had been to make conditions for the

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<sup>18</sup> Rikugun hohei gakko (The Army Infantry School), *Gakko an jun hi hohei soten kaisei an (riyu sho tomo) daitai kyouren ika no bu* (Manuscript of the school, Secret Equivalent, the revision manuscript of the Infantry Manual [with reasons], training of the battalion and below) (1936), 41 (material in the possession of Military Archives, CMH, NIDS, MoD).

offensive in a short decisive war. This meant defense with a lower force ratio rather than defense against overwhelming enemy attack.<sup>19</sup> In this manual the Army changed the focus to wider frontage against a superior enemy. Even though the basic concept of “breaking enemy attack in the front of defensive position” was still held, utilization of the depth of the defensive positions was admitted as normal. This made the defensive position for open warfare slightly deeper, as deep as the defensive position of infantry battalion, which still negated to use multiple defensive belts in depth. For trench warfare utilization of the defensive belts in depth, which had been only applicable under exceptional conditions, became normal.

This new focus led to several changes. Counterattack against the enemy in front of the defensive position was abandoned because of the heavy loss. Independency of battalion battle position was enhanced. And the normal range of the infantry fire weapons was shortened by prohibiting mid-range of 600m to avoid casualties from enemy fire.

Thus in 1940 the Japanese Army at last accepted the idea of elastic defense adopted by the Europeans, though with reservation. The defense of the Japanese Army was categorized into defense for open warfare and defense for trench warfare. Only for the latter did it allow battles in the defensive belts placed in depth. Where the line was drawn between the two determined the way to fight a defensive battle. But the line was vague. There was no objective criterion for the line. This question was raised by line officers when the Infantry School requested inputs for the revision of the 1928 Infantry Manual.<sup>20</sup>

No solution was discussed or suggested by anyone as far as the documents show. The indistinctness and the doctrine of rapid decisive war with defense averse thinking adopted by the Japanese biased the focus of training and mind of soldiers toward offensive open warfare. When it comes to defense in practice, it only allowed a shallow defensive belt with the depth of infantry battalion coupled

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<sup>19</sup> Colonel Miyazaki, *Sakusen youmu rei hensan ni atari toku ni kyouchou jushi sare taru youkou* (Particular points of emphasis and importance on editing the Field Service Regulations, Operations), (1940) (material in the possession of Military Archives, CMH, NIDS, MoD).

<sup>20</sup> Rikugun hohei gakko (The Army Infantry School), *Hohei soten hensan keika tuzuri (19)* (Files of the process for editing the Infantry Manual, vol. 19) (1928) (material in the possession of Military Archives, CMH, NIDS, MoD).

with aggressive counterattacks in open warfare.

## **6. In conclusion**

Looking at the process of the tactical development of the infantry after WW I, the Japanese did make an earnest effort to collect information and study it to understand what WW I would mean to the Army. But in the process, Japan's lack of experience with modern warfare imposed a limitation to understanding. Prejudice tinted by the old ways of doing, coupled with the imperative imposed by the strategic environment, both domestic and the international, prevailed the reality experienced by others. Even after Japan's own experience, they accepted it reluctantly. Eventually the Imperial Japanese Army managed to materialize its efforts to assimilate the lessons of WW I in time for the outbreak of the war against the UK and USA. These efforts contributed to the success of the initial phase of the Japanese offensive in Southeast Asia.