



Verdun

Why did the French army win?

Colonel (r) Claude FRANC

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Methodically, throughout the book, Claude Franc attempts to literally "dissect" the plans (attack plans for the Germans, defense plans for the French) of the belligerents around Verdun, and the methods of their implementation. Point by point, he examines the organisation of the command, the friction between the different hierarchical levels, the conceptions of some and the decisions of others.

Chronologically, it presents us in 11 chapters, from the situation in the winter of 1915-1916 to the strategic and tactical assessment of the battle after the success of the Nivelle counter-offensives in December, all the facets of the fighting, as seen by the staffs.

As an immediate response to an expected criticism: the Hairy War at Verdun, in all its horror, is well known and perfectly documented; but who can today explain how the opposition between von Falkenhayn at the OHL and von Knobelsdorf at the 5th Army developed? Who knows the details and springs of the tensions between Joffre and Pétain? Who still knows how the staff of the 2nd Army functioned? So many questions, among many others, addressed throughout the pages.

The reader may be surprised to learn how the artillery battle was conducted, or why the German attack on the left bank in March failed. Or why the responsibilities of the French local command in the poor preparation of the defensive organization of the terrain before February 1916 are major. What were the respective roles of Pétain, Castelnau and Nivelle? Everything is said, based on known sources (many references to the AFGG's supporting documents), but rarely used because staff work required real special skills. One cannot forget here that the author, for several years, prepared (often successfully) generations of officers for the War School competition: he knows what he is talking about.

The result is a book that stands out in the current general historiographical production and which absolutely deserves to be included in any library on the Great War.

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