



The Volunteer Review

AND MILITARY AND NAVAL GAZETTE.

A Journal Devoted to the Interests of the Military and Naval Forces of the Dominion of Canada

VOL. IV. OTTAWA, CANADA, MONDAY, JULY 25, 1870. No. 30.

"THE OPERATIONS OF WAR EXPLAINED AND ILLUSTRATED."

(CONTINUED.)

The next step is to consider the army, not as, in general, collected on the main road, but as distributed in parts on several roads.

When hostilities begin between nations, one of them at the outset almost always finds reason for standing on the defensive, and allows the other to make the attack. Declaring war against Napoleon in 1815, the Allies were reduced of necessity to await the attack, because their forces, greatly superior in numbers, were scattered over an immense space. Only Wellington's and Blucher's armies were ready to meet the first onset. They were in Belgium, and three great roads cross the frontier leading from French fortresses upon Brussels, by either of which Napoleon might advance, after concentrating his army behind the screen of the fortresses. Blucher were forced to guard all these avenues to Brussels by placing on them portions of their forces. But these portions were liable, each or any, to be attacked by the whole French army—in fact, only one Prussian corps was assembled at the point where Napoleon's whole force broke in. Under such circumstances, all which that corps, or any of these fractions of the Allied armies, could do, was to take advantage of the fact that the heads only of the great French columns as they advanced on the roads were available for immediate attack, and to dispute the advance till the French front should so grow in extent, by accessions from the rear, as to be irresistible, and then to withdraw with as good a face as can be maintained. In this way time would be gained for the concentration of the remainder of the Allies upon the threatened line. Whereas, had any line been entirely neglected, the enemy, being unopposed there, might be in Brussels before any adequate force could have time to interpose. It is very easy to understand, therefore, why an army on the defensive is spread over a large front, on lines which radiate from the point they seek to cover, like the spokes of a wheel from the nave.

It is not at first so manifest why an invading army operates by many roads; but a brief calculation will suffice to show the reason.

In round numbers, 30,000 infantry on the march extend over about 5 miles of road; 60 guns with their attendant carriages occupy 2½ miles; 6,000 cavalry, in sections of threes, allowing 11 to 12 feet of space longitudinally to each horse, fully 4 miles.

If Napoleon's army had entered Belgium by one road instead of three, it would have extended as follows:—

90,000 Infantry.....	15 miles.
20,000 cavalry.....	14 "
300 guns, etc.....	14 "
Total.....	43 miles,

irrespective of intervals between the columns, of losses of distance, of stores of any description. Therefore, on a single road the head of the column must have been marching two days before the rear could have quitted the place of rendezvous. An army moving thus would naturally lay itself open to defeat by a very inferior force, which, by enveloping the head of the column, might inflict a succession of crushing blows before the rear could arrive on the point of action. And, in fact, though Napoleon's columns moved by three roads, the divisions in rear, moving from the same bivouacs as those in front, failed to deploy on the field of Ligny till the afternoon of the following day.

When General McClellan moved from Washington to attack the Confederates, who, having defeated Pope, had invaded Maryland, he thus replied to some comments on his method of advancing, addressed to him by the Commander-in-Chief: "If," he says, "I had marched the entire army (about 100,000 men) in one column along the banks of the river instead of upon five different parallel roads, the column, with its trains, would have extended about fifty miles, and the enemy might have defeated the advance before the rear could have reached the scene of action."

Now, we will suppose, on the other hand, the extreme case that an army, on quitting its bivouacs, could find separate roads for every brigade, all converging on the point where an engagement might be expected, and all sufficiently near each other for constant communication and concert. The whole army would then be assembled simultaneously on the space to be occupied by the line of battle. In no case, of course (except in limited marches on great plains), are such facilities to be expected, but the illustration will serve to show why an army always marches by as many roads leading toward its destination as are sufficiently near to each other to admit of mutual support.

As the different portions of an army on the defensive must unite as quickly as possible on the line by which the enemy advances, it is, of course, indispensable that there should be good intercommunications, or lateral roads, by which they can readily approach each other. And these should not be coincident with the front of the army, but in rear of it—otherwise, if a division or corps were pushed back by the rapid advance of

the enemy, the line of intercommunication would be broken.

Also, if an army were advancing toward the enemy, and using, for the sake of facility, several adjacent roads, these, however near, should not be separated by any impassable obstacle, such as a great swamp, a mountain ridge, or a river without fords or bridges; otherwise, one portion of the army might be merely spectators of an attack upon the rest, as happened at Rivoli, where an Austrian column, moving on the left of the Adige, witnessed the defeat of the army on the other bank; and as occurred more notably in 1796, when the Austrians, advancing into Italy on both sides of Lake Garda, were beaten in succession by the same French army.

Thus the line by which an army moves is not necessarily, nor frequently, a single road, but several roads tending in the same direction and united by a sufficient number of cross-roads. For instance, the French army moved to Solferino thus:—

- First Corps, from Esenta toward Solferino.
- Imperial Guard, from Castiglione toward Solferino.
- Second Corps, from Castiglione toward Guidizzolo.
- Fourth Corps, from Carpenedolo toward Medole.
- Third Corps, from Mezzana toward Castel Goffredo.
- Sardinians from Lonato } by Madonna } on Poz-
- and Desenzano. } della Scoperta } zolen-
- } and Rivoltella } go.

And the Austrians reached the same field from the Mincio thus:—

- Eighth Corps crossed Mincio at Sallone on Pozzolengo.
- Fifth Corps crossed Mincio at Valeggio on Solferino.
- First Corps crossed Mincio at Valeggio on Cavriana.
- Seventh Corps crossed Mincio at Ferri on Foresto.
- Third Corps crossed Mincio at Ferri on Guidizzolo.
- Ninth Corps crossed Mincio at Golto on Ceresole.
- Eleventh Corps crossed Mincio at Golto on Castel Grimaldo.
- Second Corps from Mantua to Marcaria on the Oglio to turn the French right.

The two armies, each of which was advancing in ignorance of the movement of the other, thus occupying on the march the space from flank to flank which was necessary for the formation of the line of battle.

When armies approaching each other are still many marches distant, as may happen at the outset of a campaign, it is not, of course, necessary that the various columns, as they quit their own frontier, should be within supporting distance. It is when an engagement may be imminent that the lines of intercommunication become of such special importance. Moreover, it then becomes necessary to shorten as much as possible the distance between the head and the rear of each column by widening its front. A