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PRUSSIAN TACTICS.

[CONTINUED.]

The more the different parts of the army have a disposition to fight separately, the greater will be the strength of hand required to hold them together, and arrange matters so that all their unchained power, instead of following their own ideas eccentrically and without plan, shall finally work towards a point fixed upon by the eye of the commander. A mere mechanical leading will produce no result, because the leader would then not understand how to use his precious instrument; a faulty leading is still worse, for it would ruin it.

This loose individual mode of combatting requires a counterpoise which must be twofold. The first and most important is the commander-in-chief, who remains on horse-back out of the range of fire; he watches over, and has by him a strong reserve to reinforce the front line when necessary. The other counterpoise is the officer commanding the front line, whose essential duty is to execute all the necessary movements in the same.

We will speak now of this latter point. The greatest danger to this line is, that the enemy, by an attacking force concentrated at one point and suddenly applied, may break it, and drive back these small individual divisions which are fighting without any plan. Trautenberg and Langensalza afford proof of this.

The fighting line cannot always receive benefit from a reserve which stands intact in the rear; the blow comes so suddenly that the reserve, hurrying up to its support, only comes partially into the fight, and is wholly enveloped in the mass of retiring line. This being so, the fighting line should seek a resource in itself to resist such an attack effectually.

For this purpose it is necessary that the superior officer in the front line should form into close columns all who are not actually required as skirmishers, and place them in such positions as may appear good to him according to the nature of the ground and where they will be most useful, without any regard as to whether they happen to be before or behind the line of fire. But in these formations all idea of the original ones, whether of companies or battalions, should be laid aside.

If the superior officer, who commands the first line, wishes to fulfil his duty properly in his sphere of action, he must direct the whole chaos of the surrounding fight. But in this chaos, parts of the troops originally under his command become mixed up in

the most varied manner with others. If he should only command his own part, the force of the rest would not be utilized. No officer would willingly encroach on the rights of another leader, but it is most especially necessary that every leader should have the right, unconditionally, to dispose of all the troops that happen to be in his vicinity. The senior officer commands, and posts the companies or battalions together, according to his judgment. He assembles together, in strong masses, all that are within his reach at the spot where he foresees an attack, after which the columns can be deployed and again resume the offensive.

Thus a strong resource is always to be found in the front line, weak as it may appear to be, if there should be a leader at the decisive point who knows how to command, and thinks of nothing but the tactical emergency.

But it may be objected that such tactics would make it very difficult, after the battle, to re-assemble the troops thus mingled together, in their proper corps and divisions. To this we may reply, consider the case of the battle of Charbusitz, where three different armies had mutually to pick out their own men.

And, again, it may be remarked—first gain your battle, that is the chief point, then it will be far easier to disentangle and collect your men in their proper places, than after it is lost. If, therefore, the victory can be gained by this free disposal of men of different corps and divisions, it can not only be justified, but should be enjoined.

A most striking phenomenon is to be observed throughout all the battles of 1866. They were essentially begun, continued, and ended by the infantry. The other arms played a mere secondary part, and not unfrequently their influence was unfelt. It is very easy to give reasons in each individual case, and to explain why, under the circumstances, it was found impossible to bring the other branches of the service into action, the common and principal reason being—“We did not understand how, or consider it necessary, to make use of them, and therefore made no effort to bring them into action.” This is scarcely a reproach. The army of 1866 was a “peace-time” army, as excellent as long and careful peace training could ever form. Its teachers were infantry soldiers, who only know well their particular army, and trusted implicitly to it. Thus, in the pressure to advance, so long as it seemed to succeed, there was a strong tendency to rely wholly on this convenient and ready instrument. The superiority of the infantry arm over that of the enemy, had

the effect of rendering the inadequacy of the other branches of the service imperceptible except in very rare cases. There was necessarily an absence of that calm coolness which war experience alone can give, and which instinctively informs the leader when the one branch of the troops should be aided by the others, and enables him to employ all at the proper moment. So the infantry rushed on, and when its advance was checked, in its impatience it extended to the right and left, till the whole again moved on. This manœuvre generally succeeded. The superiority of the arm justified the greater license.

But the triumph of one particular branch of the army is only possible at the expense of the others. In the sequel we will examine the duties of each branch in its turn, and will here, merely in order more clearly to understand their mutual relations, refer to a few facts.

It is a very remarkable circumstance that out of 113 guns taken on the field at Koniggratz, 103 fell into the hands of the infantry, while the cavalry only took five. Under the conditions of the contest, it was to have been expected that the cavalry would have made the capture; these conditions were—splendid cavalry ground, uncommon extension of the enemy's front, badly supported wings, and much demoralization and disunited tactics; and on our own side a more numerous cavalry. Certainly there will be no want of reasons to show us the causes of this failure of the cavalry. But all these reasons put together prove nothing more than that it was not understood, or not considered necessary, that they should act on the occasion. A similar example is afforded by the artillery at Koniggratz, the First Army, from eight till two o'clock, carried on essentially an artillery action. But did their artillery attain its object? That could only be to make a breach in the enemy's formation, when the infantry could attack, and thus prepare their defeat. But they never once succeeded in making any impression on the imposing Austrian artillery formation; they barely succeeded in holding their own (*ihrer haut zu wehren*). Had not the Prussian infantry appeared in the rear of the Austrian artillery, they would have had no occasion to surrender their position. Thus, in this battle, the artillery was not capable of fulfilling its task. If it be objected that, on this occasion, the object of the artillery was not to decide matters, but merely to hold the enemy in check till the Second Army, or the Elbe Army should come into action, and that these remarks are made rashly, without due regard to the circumstances; we reply, that it was not only pos-