

Modern Tactics.

(By Capt. H. R. Gall—From Illustrated Naval and Military Magazine.)

(Continued from Page 325.)

THE effect on the health of the men is thus described by Lieutenant Greene in another paragraph:—

“Gourko lost about 2,000 men *hors de combat*, from freezing, during the storm of December 18th-23rd, before his movement began. During the movement Dandeville's column lost about 1,000 more. At Shipka the 24th Division lost over 6,000 men (80 per cent. of its strength) during the same storm, and was, for the moment completely disorganized and useless. After the march fairly began there were several hundreds more or less who gave way under the cold or were frozen, but the number was not very great—not so much greater than the sunstroke and diarrhoea cases in the terrible heat of summer, as to be particularly noticeable.

“In this march (as in most campaigns) bad food and the lack of change of clothing laid the seeds of typhus and typhoid fevers, which broke out at San Stefano in the following month of May, with such malignity that at one time 50,000 men—45 per cent. of the whole force stationed thereabout—were in the hospitals.”

The Order of March on Each Road

depends on whether the enemy is near or distant. If near, troops must march prepared for action; in which case every column will have its advance-guard, and a good rough rule for the order of march of the main body is—

- (1.) One-third of the infantry leading.
- (2.) Artillery.
- (3.) Remainder of infantry.
- (4.) Cavalry.

One-third of infantry leading, in order to protect the guns from ambuscade in the event of the advanced-guard missing their way in a mountainous country in the dark, or in any country during a snowstorm. Next the guns, because, under ordinary circumstances, either in attack or defence, they are the first to come into action. The remainder of the infantry and the cavalry last, as they are useless on a road, and can be quickly transferred to any part of the field they are wanted.

If the enemy be distant, the convenience of the troops need only be consulted. If possible a separate road should be told off to each arm; the shortest to the infantry, the hardest to the artillery, and the softest to the cavalry; each column preceded by its own advanced-guard, and so timed that all arrive about the same time at the new halting-ground.

If only one road is available, the cavalry and artillery should march first, as their work commences when they reach camp, and the infantry should follow at a convenient distance.

Rules as to Halts.

The first halt should take place about half an hour after starting, and should be for a quarter of an hour, to enable the men to re-arrange their belts, valises, etc., often put on hastily after striking the camp and packing the baggage. If the march is under 14 miles, halt for half an hour half way; if over 14 miles, halt for half an hour every two hours. This is the German rule. Never halt in villages or short defiles, and, when halted, invariably throw out videttes and sentries, and if the halt is of any duration, and the men break off and are allowed to take off their accoutrements, outposts should be posted if there is even a remote possibility of surprise.

Avoid old camping-grounds if possible. If the men are very tired and have to be up at daybreak, provide cover for the perishable baggage, and let the troops bivouack.

Use of Several Parallel Roads.

Marching on parallel roads opens out a wider area of country, and consequently facilitates supplies, reduces the length of the columns, and is conducive to increased speed with lessened fatigue, enables the heads of columns to be more easily reached, facilitates deployments.

Free communication must, however, exist between the different columns marching on parallel roads, or they are liable to become isolated and to be beaten in detail.

Night-Marches,

as a rule, should be avoided; they render men unfit to fight the next day, and are liable to panic, and many unavoidable delays and annoyances. They are admissible in hot climates, or as preliminary to a daybreak attack upon an enemy who will probably not wait to be attacked if he gets warning.

Precautions.—Reconnoitre and mark the cross-roads, and paths if possible, procure reliable guides, keep the men unloaded and in the ranks at all costs, with strong advanced guards. No detached parties. Halts to be named for certain hours not places.

In all calculations of time required, allow an ample margin for unforeseen delays.

Flank Marches.

A flank march is one in which a flank is exposed to the enemy. It is, therefore, very dangerous when within striking distance, say half a day's march.

Precautions.—Reconnoitre the country in front and on the exposed flank. Keep natural obstacles, rivers, defiles, etc., between the nearest column and the enemy, and a flank-guard, composed of infantry, in the formation of outposts moving to a flank about two miles from the most exposed column between it and the enemy.

Order of March.

Columns in echelon, advancing from the flank farthest from the enemy, with artillery at the head and tail of each column, advanced and rear-guards, composed

entirely of infantry. As secrecy is essential, the cavalry, baggage, trains, etc., should be kept on the flank farthest from the enemy, on a separate road if possible.

CHAPTER IX.—RIVERS.

Are very formidable obstacles; nevertheless, it is generally recognized that a river line of defence is not a desirable one.

A long line of defence, such as a mountain range or a river, cannot be defended by posting isolated bodies of troops at different places along it. Such a position necessitates dissemination, while the act of opposing the enemy wherever he attempts to cross obliges concentration. Unless, therefore, the line to be defended is limited in extent in proportion to the numbers available for defending it, a river line is an extremely vulnerable barrier.

Even the Danube, of which the main stream from Widdin to Silistria, a distance of 250 miles, averages about 1,000 yards in width, with its numerous fortresses, and command of the southern or Bulgarian over the northern bank throughout the entire distance, failed to stop the Russian invasion in 1877.

The Turkish resistance was not energetic; still opinions are divided as to whether a more prolonged passive resistance would have materially aided them in repelling the invasion.

Some of the great rivers of the world—for instance the Indus or the Jumna—for six months in every year are impassable, except by means of boats. The magnificent bridges across these mighty rivers, rank amongst the greatest engineering triumphs of the age. They take years to build, and are quite beyond the scope of all operations of war.

To attempt to convey an army over a raging torrent from three to four miles broad, in open boats, or even river steamers, would be an operation, apart from its difficulty, that would be bound to attract so much attention as to enable the most apathetic defenders to oppose the crossing in force, wherever it was attempted. During the melting of the snows the Indian rivers may be said to be impassable barriers to an army hampered with the requirements of modern war. As the time of year would be very unsuitable for campaigning, these rivers need only be contemplated in a military sense (so far as invaders are concerned) when confined to their natural beds, and not when over-flowing their banks for miles on either side.

They constitute our chief natural safeguard against any successful invasion of India from the north and north-west.

The rivers we have principally to consider are those of Europe, and of these the Danube, notably one of the most formidable, has never yet stopped an invasion.

There are two methods of opposing an invader's crossing. First, by offering an active; secondly, a passive resistance.

The former is when the defenders hold one or more bridges, and occupy various positions along their own bank, with the power of concentrating at intermediate points.

This method, in addition to opposing the invaders more or less vigorously along the line, gives to the defenders the power of issuing over the river on the assailants' side, and delivering counter attacks. It entails even more dissemination than passive resistance, as troops pushed over on the enemy's side, if they act with boldness are liable to be beaten in detail, and to be forced to surrender or retreat over their own bridge, possibly in contact with the invaders, who may thus gain their object without the trouble of constructing a bridge for themselves.

Its success will chiefly depend on the handling and posting of the different detachments, and their power of speedy concentration, which must, again, depend on the extent of front to be guarded.

The passive defence of a river is when the defenders keep their own side, with the exception of scouts pushed over, and watch the easy crossing-places generally, while they still retain enough troops between these points to be marched wherever the enemy attempts to land a covering party. Both methods are more or less unsatisfactory, and, except where the river is broad and limited in lateral extent, rarely succeed in their object.

The enemy is certain to conceal his real intentions, and whenever he attempts to cross will do so at several points simultaneously, with concentrated forces. Once the enemy has gained a footing for his infantry forming his covering party, the passage is more than half lost; the defenders will probably be engaged at two or more other places simultaneously, and will naturally be alive to their extreme vulnerability, should the assailants succeed in effecting even one out of three or more attempted crossings and break into their isolated detachments, and attack them in detail.

There is another way in which a river line can be utilized by the defenders, often with the greatest probability of success, and the same applies to a chain of mountains. It is to watch the various points of passage throughout with scouts, and keep the main army of the defence at some central point in rear of the river between the assailants and their objective.

If the scouts report that the enemy are about to cross at a certain point within reach, *i.e.* if his real intentions are made clear, the defenders from their central position may be able to bear down upon him and strike a sudden and decisive blow, before all his troops have crossed the river, or the mountains. This is in effect to take advantage of the vulnerability of the assailants, and strike a blow at an opportune moment; failing this, the position selected by the defenders should be naturally a strong one, and, with time and means available, artificially improved, and so chosen that the enemy, supposing him to have surprised the passage, will not dare to pass it, and expose his flank and communications.

(To be continued.)