

Modern Tactics.

[By Capt. H. R. Gall—From Illustrated Naval and Military Magazine.]

(Continued from Page 245.)

PIQUETS, as a general rule, should not provide sentries for more than 800 yards of front, on account of the fatigue entailed in visiting them.

The distance intervening between sentries must entirely depend upon the nature of the country; but no more sentries should be posted than are required to command a clear view of all approaches.

The sentries posted, the piquets, supports, and reserves take up their respective positions.

Visiting Patrols.—With young or untried troops, and also in bad weather, sentries are visited hourly, and in their rounds the visiting patrols include the right sentry post of the piquet next on the left, thus constantly establishing lateral communication throughout the entire chain of observation. If a piquet has a front of 800 yards, this duty entails about 25 miles walking, which gives about 12 miles walking to each relief.

Reconnoitring Patrols.—In addition to sentries who are stationary, experience directs that reconnoitring patrols are a necessary precaution, and small parties are sent beyond the sentry line for a distance not exceeding three-quarters of a mile to inspect dangerous places such as woods, ravines, farms, &c., which from their vicinity might afford rallying-points for an enemy to collect on, prior to a sudden rush on a portion of the outpost line.

Piquets should not, as a rule, be farther than a quarter of a mile from their sentries, and should be near enough to afford mutual support to each other (*i. e.* when extended they should be able to retire on their supports under cover of each other's rifle-fire).

It sometimes, in fact frequently, happens, that owing to the accidents of ground, the piquet line is the best line of the defence. In this case supports reinforce their piquets when seriously attacked; but under ordinary circumstances piquets, having covered the retirement of their sentries and reconnoitring patrols, retire fighting on their supports, the latter in the meantime having extended.

Piquets must be careful in retiring to clear the flanks of their supports extended, and then the combined piquets and supports extended in one general line retire on the reserves or position, taking care not to expose a flank or close in towards the centre.

They should retire straight back until they cloud the fire from the position, or receive orders to clear the front, when they should make for the flanks with all possible dispatch.

Supports are posted about a mile in the rear of their piquets; their mission is to support them either actively or passively according to instructions received, and the general line of resistance indicated by the commander of the outposts.

Reserves, if deemed necessary at all, usually consist of about one-third of the force employed on outpost duty.

Their mission is (1) to reinforce the supports and piquets if hard pressed, and unable to offer the required amount of resistance; (2) as compact bodies of fresh troops well in hand, to afford rallying-points for those in front, and at all times connect them with the position they are covering. In exceptional circumstances—if, for instance, a flank is exposed, and a portion of the piquets and supports are in imminent danger of being cut off—a portion of the reserves may make a counter attack. Reserves are usually posted in a central position, but may often be divided with advantage.

Guns often find a place in the outpost line, and are posted to command approaches such as bridges and main roads; care must be taken to provide them with ample means and protection from surprise, especially at night.

Some positions, from their nature, do not require outposts at all in their generally accepted form. Such, for instance, was Plevna, a town surrounded on three sides by heights, and on the fourth side by a river. The defenders at Plevna occupied these heights with their fighting line, and thus did away with any necessity for outposts, although they pushed forward their defences down the slopes towards the enemy; these entrenchments were manned by troops composing the main army, and were under the direct control of the commander-in-chief.

In an open country by day, cavalry furnish the outposts; but if liable to be attacked, infantry should be ready to turn out and occupy an inner line on the shortest notice.

If a river line has to be watched by outposts, the piquets should be posted in rear of the bridges with just enough sentries pushed across to give ample warning of the enemy's approach (on the principle that all defiles should be defended in rear unless liable to be turned).

Three kinds of Woods that may come into the Sentry-line.

I. The small wood whose "outer" edge is within from two to three hundred yards of the general line of sentries.

In this case the sentries are either advanced or withdrawn to occupy its outer edge, and their piquets are brought into the wood and posted near them.

So favourable an opportunity as that offered by defending the outside edge of a wood for a certain time, against an enemy advancing over the open, should never be lost, provided the general retirement of the whole of the outpost line is not thrown out by a too prolonged resistance.

II. The wood partly in and partly beyond the general sentry-line.

In this case advantage should be taken of any natural clearing, such as a stream, ravine or path running through it more or less in conformity with the general sentry-line of the outposts; the sentries posted along the near side of it; but they must not be advanced beyond two or three hundred yards to seek such a position, or they become isolated and liable to be out-flanked.

If no natural defensive line exists, a clearing of some sort must be made to conform with the general line of sentries. The sentries posted along the near side, and their piquets, as in No 1, brought close up to them, and the portion of wood stretching beyond constantly searched by reconnoitring patrols.

If the enemy is active, reconnoitring patrol should be sent into the wood from the supports as well as the piquets.

III. The wood whose "inner" edge is more than four hundred yards from the general sentry-line.

Such a wood must either be held by a strong detached party (at all times a dangerous expedient) or the sentry-line advanced and posted about 300 yards from the near side. In this case sentries and piquets are posted together and entrenched, and the near side or inner edge of the wood entangled by cutting down the trees in order to delay the enemy issuing from it under the fire of the piquets entrenched outside it. This kind of wood is very dangerous, and frequent patrols must be sent with it from the piquets and the supports, the former penetrating a considerable distance.

Method of Instructing a Battalion in Outposts.

"MY DEAR GALL.—The regimental training in outpost duty, which I mentioned to you, was carried out somewhat as follows:—

"A scheme were drawn up and a defensive position for a considerable force chosen outside the cantonment. The whereabouts and extent of this position was denoted by flags. The regiment was required to cover its front and flanks with a chain of outposts.

"The ground was reconnoitred a day or two before, and a general line of front which would give the best *line of observation* for the purpose was chosen.

"There were also chosen, one, two, or three successive *lines of resistance*; as continuous as was possible, having due regard to the capabilities for defence afforded by the ground.

"Four companies were detailed to occupy the front line, and four companies were kept in reserve. The defence was divided into sections, and officers commanding companies were made thoroughly acquainted with the general arrangement of the whole scheme: of the extent of front to be watched and defended; of that portion of it especially allotted to them; of the most convenient routes for them to reach their positions; of the nature and whereabouts of the successive *lines of resistance* chosen; and of the position of the reserve.

"The *reserve* was, as a rule, kept in two bodies, rather to the flanks of the general line of defence, and near the roads leading to them sheltered itself; but on ground whence the commander of each double company could watch the action of the outpost line in his front.

"Generally speaking, it was intended that each double company should be the reserve of the two companies in its front.

"*Lines of retreat* up nullahs and deep re-entrants were carefully chosen, so that when resistance on the part of the outposts was no longer required, the front of the main position might be rapidly cleared.

"The detail of placing sentries, piquets, and supports in the front line was left to officers commanding companies.

"The country being generally open, and the *line of observation* a commanding one, but few sentries were, as a rule, required, and the general arrangement was, as far as I remember, that companies were pretty evenly divided—one-half company furnishing the sentries and the piquets, the other half company in support occupying the *first line of resistance* chosen.

"All the arrangements were, of course under the supervision of the officer commanding the outposts, viz. the C. O. of the Regiment, and the way in which this was exercised, and the whole thing tested, was as follows:—

"The four companies for the front line paraded and marched independently to their respective positions, under their own officers. The half battalion, in reserve, parading somewhat later, and being marched to its position in one body. On arrival on the ground, it was sometimes kept together and sometimes as I have before mentioned—divided into double companies, and placed somewhat to the flanks.

"Shortly after daybreak, when the sentries, piquets, &c., had been posted, the C. O. inspected their position, criticising, and ordering any alterations he thought advisable.

"At a fixed time the fight commenced. The enemy was represented by about half a dozen N. C. officers or men previously trained for the work, with white flags, as in working with a marked enemy at Aldershot.

"They were directed by an officer specially selected, who was virtually an umpire, for it was left to him to decide as to the time during which his advance would be checked by the resistance offered. This would, of course, vary, with the falling back of the sentries on the piquets, and these on the supports, &c., with the natural strength, &c., of the successive *lines of resistance*. It was usually from five to ten minutes, but the rule was that, while the flags halted, the outposts held their ground; the advance of the flags was the signal for them to retire.

(To be continued.)