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The Sham Fight at Toronto.

Thanksgiving Day furnished an opportunity for a grand military parade at Toronto, participated in by the Field Battery, "C" Company of the Infantry School Corps, the Queen's Own Rifles and Grenadiers of that city; the Thirteenth Battalion of Infantry from Hamilton; and the Dufferin Rifles from Brantford, each corps justly the pride of the people of its headquarters. The affair consisted of a sham fight and subsequently a formal inspection and march past, all fully described by the local press. As a holiday pageant the affair was a great success, and all concerned are deserving of praise for the spirit of enterprise prompting them to take part, and the good feeling prevailing throughout. The occasions are rare upon which our militia can mimic the conditions of actual warfare, and when they do find such an opportunity it must be remembered that their chief desire is to ascertain from the practice the points upon which they are chiefly in need of instruction; and they do not expect the public to see in their field movements a display of the high standard of proficiency to which the militia have attained in mere barrack square drill. In the hope that it may serve a useful purpose, and be accepted in the friendly spirit in which it is made, we purpose to offer some candid criticism on certain phases and details of the fight; and in doing so we would have it borne in mind that the troops were disgracefully hampered by the crowds of holiday seekers, who seemed to think that the whole affair was merely for their entertainment, and deliberately mixed themselves up with the troops in every stage of the fight. It would have been better, had such been feasible, if the umpires had stopped the operations until the onlookers had retired to such places as would have enabled the troops to act with freedom.

The site chosen for the fight was very favourable for the purpose. Almost every variety of ground was to be met with—hill and plain, wooded and open country, ravines and projecting spurs. But we might suggest that another time the troops should not be informed of the ground until they are paraded to march off. The chief umpire or some one disconnected with the operations should choose the place, and the troops should be ordered to parade at a given place and time, and only then receive their orders. What happened in the present case was that the ground was visited frequently by both parties before the day of battle, and things went more smoothly than they would otherwise have done, whereas it is best to train men fully to the confusion that always arises in fighting in wooded country.

From the very outset it was plain that there was too great a hurry exhibited on both sides, and the result was a hasty pushing forward and a great want of contact between the company units, leading to an entire

want of unity of action between them. Each company pushed forward on its own account and decided on its own objective. Consequently large gaps at once occurred in the firing line, in which the supports were pushed at the very outset of the fight. Thus from the commencement whole companies were extended, leading to an early mixture of units. An entire want of fire preparation (so essential in modern fighting) was conspicuous on the centre and left of the attack.

On the right of the attack the fight was conducted in a much more orderly way, but the country was open and clear, whereas the centre and left of the attack were working in deep wooded ravines and spurs.

On the left of the attack one serious mistake was made. The leader of the left column allowed himself to be drawn into the fight at too early a period. If he had pushed on boldly he would have passed right round the right flank of the defence and taken it in rear.

From both sides rushing into the fight too strong a fire was developed at the outset, the opposing sides even coming to within twenty yards of each other in the most reckless way, the umpires not seeming to mind.

The fire discipline was bad; the section commanders named no ranges, nor any objects for the fire to be concentrated on; the men did not aim, and no one looked to see that they did so at the named object. This want of control over the men caused them to get out of hand from the first in the wooded parts of the ground, and they rushed to such points as they pleased, often leaving large gaps in the firing line. Only one whistle was heard during the day, though it is only by the use of whistles that it is possible to attract the attention of men while heavy firing is going on. Further, the men often laid down when ordered, and fired in positions where they could not see ten yards, instead of moving a few yards nearer to get a good field of fire. Another noticeable point was that the mounted officers remained mounted under close fire.

The first part of the fighting took place on different spurs and hill sides. Looking from the centre of the fight it was seen that the troops on the left of the defence made little or no use of cover, and remained perfectly exposed on the sides of the steep hill sides. Such a position is all very well if you have time to entrench, but such time was not available. Further, the attacking troops in the centre were raking the whole of the left of the defence by a heavy enfilade fire at a short range of 400 yards; but no one seemed to mind. This was the only real, regular attempt during the fight at employing a flanking fire to assist the progress of other parts of the line.

The effect of the advance through the wooded ground was best seen when the troops reached the open country. The more enclosed and difficult the country the more necessary is it to keep the supports in closed formations, but instead of this they were unnecessarily extended (from a too close adherence to the words of command in the drill book), and the result was considerable confusion and mixing of units and a premature using up of the supports—the battle for a considerable period before the finish devolving into what is known as a "soldiers' battle."

One result of the troops knowing the ground beforehand was that a rush was made by both sides to gain the crest of the wooded slopes.