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ABC TO THE GUNS

Facts About Weapons Employed in War
—From The Manchester Guardian.

It is a truism that modern armies are complex organizations and this applies with equal force to the artillery with which a modern army is equipped. The types of guns to be found with a modern field army are machine guns, horse artillery guns, field artillery guns, field artillery howitzers, heavy guns and mountain guns; and doubtless in this present war all types will bear their share in the fighting which is taking place on such varied terrain. Let us glance at each type in turn.

Machine Guns

Machine guns are automatic guns of rifle calibre, capable of delivering a heavy rapid fire; they are attached (in our service) by pairs to infantry battalions, as well as to cavalry regiments; and in the infantry they render the closest possible cooperation with their own unit commander's hand to use by surprise as the crisis approaches, so as to ensure that fire supremacy is gained, and that the bayonet can be brought into play. Given suitable targets (of considerable depths) and close ranges, these weapons are capable of great results, but they are unsuited to a long drawn-out frontal fire-fight against a shallow target.

Horse Artillery

Horse artillery guns are the most mobile of all guns in the field; they are intended to cooperate with cavalry. Naturally what these guns gain in mobility they lose in power, and in the latter they are distinctly inferior to our powerful field artillery guns, which are intended for cooperation with the infantry. By controlling the hostile artillery fire, their field-guns enable the infantry to advance across the helpless zone, when the infantry could be fired at by hostile guns without having the power to respond. In addition, the field-guns prepare a position for assault by battering down the enemy's final resistance, shaking his aim, and destroying his reserves as they show themselves. Thus all through the action the field artillery guns act as the good comrades of their infantry, and the greater the difficulties of their infantry the closer is the support accorded by their own quick-firing field-guns.

Field Artillery

The field artillery howitzers are short, light pieces of mobile artillery capable of throwing a comparatively heavy shell at high angles of elevation. Their role is to search the reverse slopes of hills, deal with redoubts, trenches, shielded field-guns, villages, and houses, and support an assault until the last moment.

Heavy field howitzers—firing a five hundred pound high explosive shell, such as the Japanese used at Port Arthur—do not accompany an army in the field but are sent to the front when necessity for their employment arises. The material effect produced by one of their shells exploding in any confined space, room, casemate, etc., is prodigious, and cover to keep out their fire is rarely worth the labor of construction, except in the case of magazines.

Their Use

Such weapons have not proved so successful; as the targets are less favorable, and the slight modern field en-

trenchments are notoriously difficult to injure.

Heavy artillery are the most powerful and the least mobile of all forms of artillery accompanying our field army. Their use is to destroy defended buildings, knock out shielded field-guns by direct hits, to deliver and enfilade fire against part of the enemy's position that the less powerful field-guns can only reach with frontal fire, and to mete out destruction to the enemy's reserve before they can be engaged.

Mountain artillery consist of very light and less powerful weapons; lightness is essential in their case, as they have to be carried on mules, or in some cases even on porters' heads; but though the guns are light they fire a comparatively heavy shell. Mountain artillery can move wherever an infantryman is not forced to climb; and in the rough mountainous country which forms part of the present theatre of war doubtless these guns will play a useful part.

Use Shrapnel

All the guns mentioned—except the machine guns, which naturally fire rifle ammunition—use shrapnel shell, the man-killer; while our howitzers and heavy guns also fire high-explosive shell, the defence-destroyer. Shrapnel is fired with the idea of killing or disabling the troops themselves the material damage it does to a parapet is infinitesimal, while even a direct hit by a shrapnel shell of a gun may inflict little damage.

On the other hand a shrapnel hitting a wall will usually penetrate before bursting, and if it is then inside a room the releasing of its two hundred bullets may have a disastrous effect on the garrison. But it is shrapnel



which kills, and it is used primarily as a man-killer, and not as a defence-destroyer.

Deadly Effect.

Its bullet-cone has great depth, covering two hundred yards when burst properly in the air by a time-fuse at effective ranges; and thus for enfilading a fire trench, flanking a position, raking a bridge or stretch of stretch of road, the effect produced by shrapnel on a line of troops or a marching column is excellent and its moral effect is deadly.

High-explosive shell is an aerial mine projected by a heavy gun or howitzer, to burst either in the air or on impact. The effect of a direct hit by one of these shells on the shield of a gun is disastrous both for the gun and for the detachment; it is much the same also when one pitches in a house the wreckage is considerable, and the number of splinters in such a confined space has great effect.

Shell Fire.

Prominent houses can be rendered quite untenable by high-explosive shell fire in a very short time. But against the modern low-command fire trench parapets the effect is very light; in fact the material obstacle presented by a modern parapet is usually so small that it is not worth destroying or breaching, and this energy is concentrated on disabling the defenders, and as man-killer the high explosive is not a great success in the open, its radius of activity is too small—only twenty-five yards around the centre of impact.

But although it is said that artillery frightens more than it hits, it must be remembered that accurate statistics are very difficult to get, and men hit by shrapnel bullets and splinters of shell are more often killed outright than wounded, and after an action the dead are buried hurriedly, no note being taken of how the casualty occurred, whereas accurate records are always made of patients who undergo hospital treatment.

Don't Get Full Credit.

This it is probable that the artillery are not given full credit for the actual havoc they have wrought, although everyone agrees as to the nerves of the combatants.

But there can be little doubt that the destructive effect of modern Q.F. field artillery is very great and this is proved by the ever-increasing desire to render troops and entrenchments as invisible as possible. This fact alone speaks volumes as to the efficacy and deadliness of modern field artillery.

Even as the backbone of the artillery of an army is its field artillery, and the other types are adjuncts; so the artillery arm itself is but an accessory to its infantry, the real queen of the modern battlefield, and the duty of the guns is to ensure that at any cost their infantry shall triumph.

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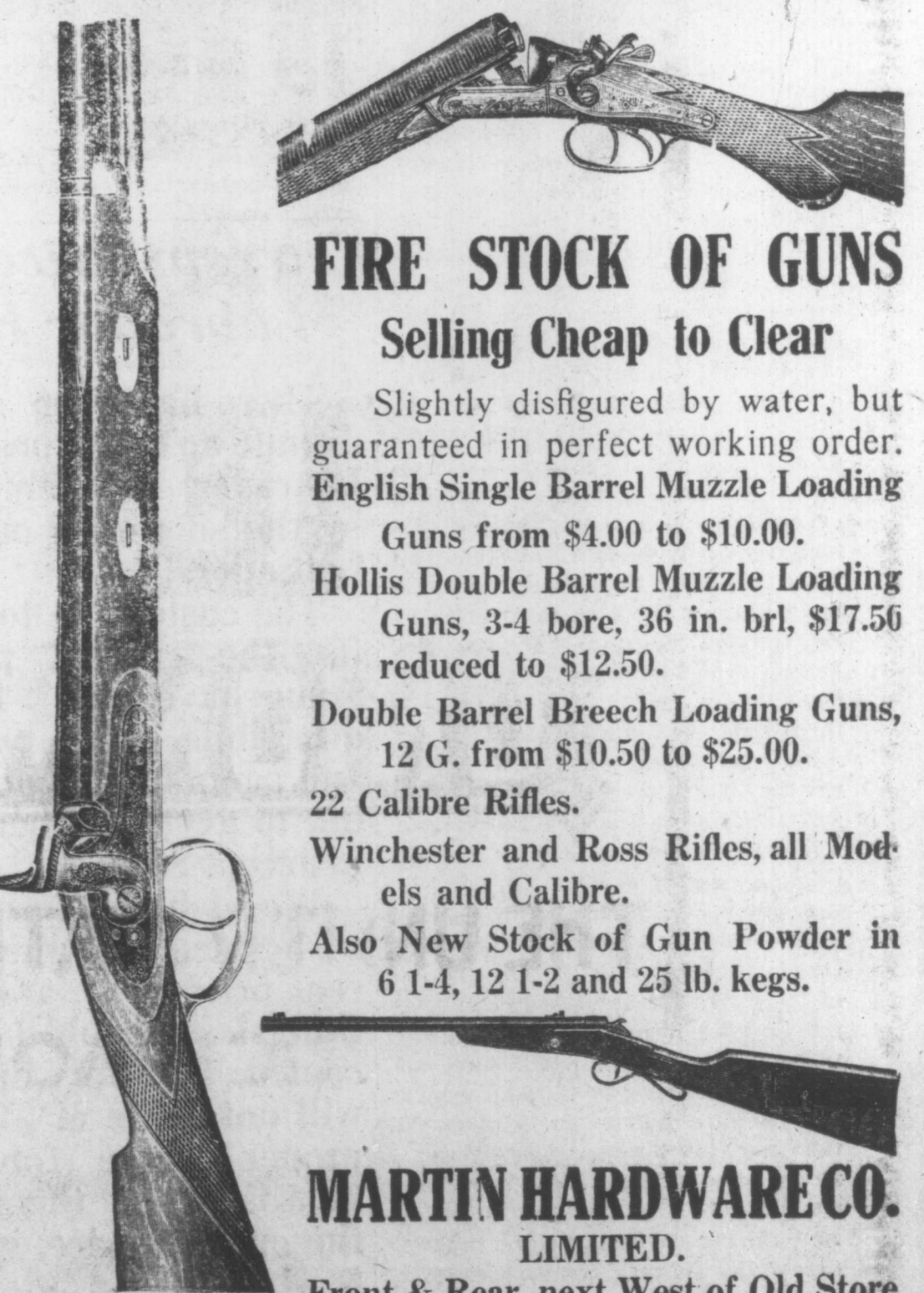
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