

Drill and Training of Volunteer Infantry.

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Major-General Philip Smith, C.B., commanding the Home District, took the chair at a well attended meeting yesterday of the Royal United Service Institution, on the occasion of the reading of a paper on this subject by Captain W. Adye, Royal Irish Rifles, Adjutant 15th Middlesex Rifle Volunteers.

The lecturer in the first place indicated the conditions of efficiency which a rifle volunteer has to comply with in order to be returned an "efficient," described the general system of annual training prevailing throughout the force in order to meet these requirements, and then pointed out some of what he considered the many shortcomings attached to the present efficiency qualifications.

1. An entire absence of any progressive course of instruction either for officers or men. The description of drill performed at one parade must necessarily be more or less the same as that carried out at the preceding one, so long as fresh men are present on each occasion.

2. With the exception of a few corps, and those with numerous outlying companies, officers and non-commissioned officers do not drill with and train their own men. Our "Infantry Drill" lays special stress on the method of company training. The Army Order of January 1, 1889, says: "The careful training of the soldier in ordinary times by those whose duty it will be to direct his fire and lead him in action has become of paramount importance."

3. Volunteer parades are almost entirely confined to practice and instruction in drill and close order movements. Practice in extended order, outposts, skirmishing, the attack, and other field manoeuvres, is carried out to a very limited extent.

4. The number of drills or rather attendances laid down for the efficiency of a trained volunteer are too small. They not only require to be increased but made more comprehensive.

5. The extension of the large number of drills now held in corps distributed over such a lengthened period of time. The reason of this is by no means obvious, and the consequences arising from such an arrangement are unfortunately very detrimental to true efficiency.

6. The system of inspection. The annual inspection should not count as a drill towards efficiency, or if it is included it should be understood that every man attending it must have performed some of his efficiency requirements before it takes place. Numbers of men are often present who have done little or no previous training in the year.

7. Musketry. The conditions laid down for efficiency cannot be termed severe. There is a popular notion that the volunteers constitute an army of marksmen or good shots; but volunteer officers will generally admit that, with the exception of a small percentage of men who go in for fine range shooting, the vast majority of the men of any corps shoot very indifferently, even at range practice, and that military shooting, like field training, is almost unknown.

8. As regards the enrolment of recruits, there is much reason to fear that sufficient care is not always taken in their acceptance as volunteers.

9. Distinct regulations should be laid down regarding signalling, ambulance, cycling, and other extra subjects. They should not form any part of the efficiency conditions. Some rules are also urgently required regarding the practice of the bayonet exercise and physical drill. It is needless to say that these latter are very essential for the development and training of all bodies of men. These practices are continually performed by regulars, but they should on no account enter into the instruction of a volunteer during his efficiency drill.

All the drill that volunteers get now, if properly carried out on some system, is or ought to be amply sufficient as the preliminary training for war purposes, more especially when we consider that time is limited with them. Therefore, what do they require further? The lecturer offered the following suggestions:—First, the issue of an official text-book, as short and simple as possible, containing orders for drill movements, a system of training for the recruit and trained volunteer, and some plain rules for tactical manoeuvres with complete examples, extracts from the authorized books of instruction on encampments, dress, and equipment of volunteers, instructions for special parades, such as inspections, field days, etc., a syllabus of the annual training of corps, musketry, and the company school. Second, a Field Service Manual for mobilisation, giving complete directions as to selection of trained and medically fit men, clothing, stores, ammunition, transport, etc.

Captain Adye then turned to the official conditions of efficiency, and made the following propositions:—

1. Not less than twelve company drills, and six battalion drills, exclusive of inspection, or any public functions such as guards of honour, march pasts, etc. Not less than one hundred rank and file and twenty officers and sergeants to be present at a battalion drill, and not less than

twenty-five rank and file, with five officers and sergeants, at a company drill.

2. All company drills to be completed before battalion drills are attended or commenced.

3. Every officer and man must drill with his own company and no other at parades other than battalion.

4. Corps to hold so many drills counting towards efficiency, and no more. The whole series of drills to be compressed into the smallest possible period compatible with local circumstances, the period in no case to extend over six months of the year, if possible shorter. Corps to be at liberty to hold any number of non-efficiency drills.

5. Detail of company training. Captains to select as far as possible their own dates and places for holding their parades. Not more than fourteen or fifteen per company to be held annually, thereby allowing a narrow margin for unavoidable absences, and ensuring a progressive course of construction, made up as follows:—Eight to be held in the drillshed or ground, which should include not less than three musketry exercises, the other five to embrace a detailed course of company instruction to be laid down in an official text-book, containing also a short series of lectures. The remaining six company drills to be carried out in the field, or some open tract of ground if necessary, in combination with one or two other companies. These should all be in uniform and in light marching order, and invariably include skirmishing and field manoeuvres with blank ammunition, and always based on some minor tactical scheme.

6. Not more than nine battalion parades for efficiency should be held. They might be made up as follows:—Five close order parades, the remainder manoeuvre parades in the country, which should include a brigade drill; all in light marching order.

7. No men should attend a camp until they have completed at least nine company drills. If a corps as a complete body goes into camp, the week's instruction should include nothing but practice in field manoeuvres, camp work, and if possible musketry. From what one hears, it is to be feared that some regimental camps are anything but conducive to the best results. Here, again, a syllabus of training at camps should be authorised.

8. Recruits' training. No recruit should be passed into the battalion until he has completed twenty recruit drills. In order to ensure a progressive and good sound individual course of instruction, the lecturer advocated the following recruits' programme of drills. Thirty drills to be performed during the first year's service. (a) Not more than thirty or thirty-five recruit drills to be held during the season, as after a man's twentieth attendance he can make up his efficiency drills with his company. (b) These drills to include fifteen squad and company close order parades, ten musketry, and five skirmishing, etc. The regulations to direct that two officers or non-commissioned officers must be present at each parade. (c) The enrolment of recruits by all corps should be confined to certain months of the year—say from November 1 to January 31, or end of February, after which date the recruits course of training commences, and not before. The contract of service to be made with the Government, and not with the corps.

9. Musketry. A certain number of days, say four or five, should be set apart for each company, for class firing, during which the members of a company must attend.

For trained volunteers the following musketry course is suggested. Five rounds individual firing at 200, 300, 400 and 500 yards respectively. Classification—45 points to become second class shot (obligatory for earning the grant); 65 points to become first class shot; 75 points to become a marksman. All members who become second class shots to fire not less than twenty rounds in section or group volleys or skirmishing or attack practice. In fact, after all trained volunteers have once become second class shots they should annually fire not less than forty or sixty rounds in nothing but some description of field practices. All badges for individual firing should be abolished, and badges substituted to be worn by the men of a company which has made the best percentage of hits in the field practices, and another badge for the best section (and sergeant) in a company in this respect. A great deal can be done to improve the military shooting of corps provided the system of giving prizes is based on some sound practical foundation. A good two-thirds of the prize fund should be devoted to "field practice," entries to be as far as possible by squads and half companies under their own officers and sergeants; the prizes for individual firing should be based on the results of the annual course of class firing.

10. It should be laid down that all company officers, sergeants and corporals should, in addition to the other requirements for efficiency, be required to attend not less than six parades, to include firing exercises, judging distance, guard duties, reconnaissances and outposts. The whole to be specially examined annually for proficiency certificates. To excite emulation and bring forward the best men in a corps, Captain Adye advocated an addition to the Regulations regarding sergeants' proficiency.