

WE reprint from a service paper a description of some excellent results obtained by the use of Major Richards' system of rifle practice, and would strongly advocate the use of the same system for the Canadian militia. Everyone acknowledges now that ability as a marksman is the one essential of the soldier; but while acknowledging it, the authorities permit us to go on in the same old groove that experience has proved practically useless. We meet for our twelve days every second year, and we are made to fire hurriedly twenty rounds of ball ammunition with practically no previous instruction, and then we are supposed to be qualified to meet an enemy if occasion should arise. The absurdity of the idea is too apparent to need any comment.

LESSONS by qualified instructors would help to mend matters, but plenty of practice alone will make good shots, and this, with ammunition at 2 cents a round, the bulk of our militiamen cannot afford. If by adopting Major Richards' system the cost could be reduced to one tenth what it is at present, and every man could have a range at his own door, it is altogether probable that rifle practice would become a popular amusement, and that the bulk of our militia would become good shots. Perhaps we may have more to say on this subject at a future time.

Common Sense on Parade, or Drill Without Stays.

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MIXING up is elevated to a principle instead of its being acknowledged, as it ought to be, that "all mixing up is, and must continue to be a makeshift" (*Militar Wochenblatt*), and that this mixing "is one of the greatest evils of the extended order of fighting."—(*Outline of Attack Formation. Intelligence Branch, Q.-M.-G's. Department.*) "We sacrifice the great moral power of accustomed comradeship, and mix different, perhaps rival companies. I venture to think this is a serious matter, and very like organising disorder."—(*Col. C. B. Brackenbury.*) Accordingly, this question of reconciling the order with intervals of the advance with the return to a closed order without confusion "is exercising the minds of officers of all armies" (*Gen. Macdougall*), and the result may be expressed in the almost despairing cry of one of the most thoughtful soldiers: "how are we to seek and where are we to find a new system which will allow us to move in loose order, and at the same time rally at the decisive moment?"—(*Col. H. Brackenbury.*) Here the "loose" order of men extended out of formation—the scattering and dispersion from the space they normally cover to an extended line—is the only idea from which to start; and the entreaty is for some "new" system to overcome the evils resulting from such scattering or dispersion, as regards the recovery of tactical form. The use of such a skirmishing extension, obtained by lateral spreading, is stated as if it were inevitable. May it not be that the remedy lies in discarding the "loose" order, the lateral spreading of extension, "the dispersed order of fighting" (*Major-Gen. Newdigate*), and that if this is done it may be found that no "new" system is necessary, but only a development of the old to meet new conditions. In former days, the solid line moved straight on the foe. May it not be possible that those who compose it should in portions move in succession straight to the attack, with intervals automatically obtained, as formerly it moved all at once and solid? May not the advantages of an order with intervals be gained, without these intervals being made by a scattering and disintegrating process? May not intervals in the first line of attack be obtained by a judicious thinning forward in a direct line, rather than by that interference with tactical form which must result from altering the extent of front covered by any unit? In other words, the intention being to form a final line by reinforcement for the decisive stage of the action, can the line principle be maintained throughout? Can the mode of working be rather the direct thinning forward of the line at the commencement of the attack, and the direct thickening up of the line as the engagement proceeds? A final line being the thing aimed at, can the dominating principle be the line? And if the principle cannot, owing to modern conditions, absolutely prescribe the detail, cannot the detail in some reasonable degree follow the principle? Can the excellent maxim be

adhered to, that "a system of movements should be consistent in all its parts, and therefore its general character should prevail throughout, and its distinctive feature be discernable in every evolution that belongs to it."—(*Capt. Suasso.*)

And if it be the line which is the distinctive feature, if, however much necessity compels the development of a skirmishing style in the early stages, yet still "skirmishers at the last must form some kind of line" (*Gen. Sir William Codrington*), if "the object to be aimed at is to place the attacking force within charging distance of the enemy's position as nearly as can be in a two-deep line."—(*Lieut.-Gen. Lord Chelmsford.*) If the problem is "how, starting from the basis of a deployed line, can you get these (the fighting) units through the fire swept space, so that they may have at the last moment a more or less resemblance to a coherent line such as is necessary at the last moment for shock (*Capt. James*), then, if possible, let the line principle be throughout discernible. If possible, let the start be made from the line, with intention to maintain the principle of the line. Let the mode of movement be only a thinning forward of the line and not a lateral disruption and destruction of the line. Let reinforcement be a thickening forward again into the same line as near as may be, and not a spurious imitation of it, in which units and commands shall be indiscriminately and unnecessarily jumbled up.

The aim, then, should be to advance from the line in an order with intervals, not obtaining these intervals by lateral extensions, but if possible by a straight movement to the front. If this can be done in a practical manner, all difficulties of closing in under fire, and all disadvantages of doubling up reinforcements and fighting line would be eliminated. There would be no *made* confusion on the one hand, and no hazardous or impossible expedients to avoid it on the other. It would fulfil absolutely the desideratum, that from first to last the movement of attack should be straight to the front, and would maintain naturally the organic arrangement of the troops down to the smallest unit. The separation caused by a part being sent forward and a part held back would not be a disarranging and disintegrating operation. It would be one of space in depth only. Just as the companies following one another in a column are separate in the sense of there being spaces in depth between them, but are an orderly and harmoniously acting unity; so a line, sent straight forward in the way supposed, would retain its unity, although spaces, from front to rear, intervened between its parts. Thus the desideratum that "the formation originally adopted shall be as little altered as possible during the action" (*Major-Gen. the Hon. W. H. A. Fielding*), and "the necessity of maintaining very strictly the bonds of tactics" (*Italian Official Precis*), would both be given effect to.

The question therefore is this: Can no third alternative be found, avoiding the evils caused by indiscriminate doubling up or lateral closings in the reinforcement of the fighting line? Is there no simple way of advancing *straight out* from the first in an order with intervals, and of reconsolidating straight forward on reinforcement? Is there no way by which troops can go *in principle* straight to the front, the parts deviating not to obtain extension, but only for the temporary purpose of cover, passing obstructions, gaining a view for fire, or the like? Can men not be advanced into the combat, in a formation with intervals, exactly *as if they were extended*, while they still cover only their own front in line, advance exactly—though not necessarily with external exactitude—over the grounds they would advance over in line, and can be reinforced on a straight-form-the-rear principle in every case, so as to give effect to the following, so far as the unavoidable difficulties of actual combat make this possible? "What we want to avoid is mixing them, if it can possibly be helped, in the long advance before the charge, so that we may bring at last into close contact with the enemy a force that shall be homogeneous, which shall be under the hand of the officers."—(*Col. C. B. Brackenbury.*)

What is required is a mode of movement which shall tend to maintain the position of every man relatively to the line, except in so far as temporary deviation and abandonment of exact drill order is needful, in consequence of the nature of ground, obstacles to be passed, or the disciplined use of cover under orders, etc.

To accomplish this as well as it can be accomplished, the problem is, to discover some principle out of which two desiderata shall be obtainable. 1. That troops shall have the best attainable means of avoiding final loss of form. 2. That the principle shall be universally applicable to all movements of troops.

If the first of these desiderata could be obtained, the great difficulty of the modern "attack," as distinguished from ordinary drill, would be removed. But if the second could also be obtained, it would have the invaluable result of making all drill have a real relation to business, instead of being as it so often is, a thing apart, useful only for developing steadiness and inculcating discipline, but in no way directly applicable to the combat, which results in its often being "stiff, con-