

FIELD ARTILLERY FIRE.

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It is quite clear then from this example, that it must be particularly impressed upon gun-layers that they have nothing further to do with projectiles which have left their guns, and must implicitly obey all orders they may receive and lay in the manner in which they have been taught. In a later chapter, on the examination of range reports, it will be demonstrated that a perfect check may be kept on the gunlayers without delaying the practice of the battery by verifying the laying of each gun before firing.

In the new competitive practice (1891) the moving of the gun-layers a few paces to a flank to observe the effect of their rounds has been a fruitful source of loss of marks for fire discipline. Not that, in itself, there is any objection to these men knowing the result, but the practice is sure, sooner or later, to lead to their altering the elevation or laying to suit their own observation and thus practically taking the direction of fire out of the hands of the battery commander.

In the selection of gun-layers great care should be taken that they all lay not only accurately but uniformly, and all in the regulation manner, that is to say with full sight, in order that the Battery Commander may not have to complicate the mental process which he has to go through, by having to make allowances for the varying performances of the pieces arising from the personal peculiarities of the several layers.

In the selection of layers something more than good eye-sight must be sought for, namely intelligence sufficient to at once pick out a target verbally indicated on occasions when a detailed pointing out is impossible, and also ability to set sights correctly. It is by no means uncommon to find sights wrongly set, and it is manifest that, however good the laying may be, it is useless if the proper elevation has not been given. Indeed, in using telescopic sights, where the personal error is eliminated, intelligence rather than good eye-sight is required. The instructions for selection of layers, as laid down in the pamphlet on the competition for skill-at-arms, give plenty of scope for the elimination of unintelligent layers by allowing no marks for rounds in which the sight has been wrongly set or the gun laid on the wrong objective. Abroad, where the *chef de pièce* or gun captain is other than the *pointeur* or gun-layer, the verification of the settling rests with him, and it is again, in many cases, inspected by the Sectional Commander, a process which must involve unnecessary delay if intelligent gun-layers are selected in the first instance.

CHAPTER II.

BRINGING BATTERIES INTO ACTION.

The battery being in an efficient state as to its drill, and the gun-layers carefully trained to carry out correctly orders given to them, the first step towards a good fire effect will be to bring the battery into such a position that it may be able to administer its fire advantageously, and to point out to the gun-layers what is required of them.

Let us assume that the battery with which we have to deal is one of a brigade division of three batteries, forming part of an independent division, which is on the line of march. The proper place for the Lieut.-Colonel commanding the brigade division is with the Divisional General, who will generally ride at the head of the main body of the division. On news being received from the front that the advanced-guard has been checked or has come across the enemy in position, the General, with his Artillery Commander, will ride forward to reconnoitre the enemy and determine what steps are to be taken to oust him from his position. During this state of the proceedings all the instructions that the Lieut.-Colonel is likely to receive are given to him in the shape of a tactical sketch, the details of which, as regards his special arm, are

left him to fill in, in accordance with the general plan of operations. To enable him to do this correctly he must be a careful and constant student of the tactics of the arms to whom he is auxiliary, for by this only can be avoided the perpetual sending of orders, which tend to fetter the genius of subordinate commanders and render the combat slow and wearisome.

Having been made acquainted with the wishes of the General, the Lieut.-Colonel will select a position for his batteries from which they can best forward the object that the principal arm, the infantry, has in view. To do this without attracting the attention of the enemy he should dismount before actually approaching the firing position, and all orderlies, etc., should be left out of sight in rear. He will also select a preparatory position, as close as possible to the firing position and hidden from the view of the enemy. The selection of a position for the second line of waggons is treated of under the heading of "Ammunition Supply."

In the later stages of the fight it will seldom be possible to select a preparatory position, nor would time permit of its being occupied, and the batteries will have to advance straight into the firing position selected and reconnoitred for them by the Lieut.-Colonel, but, at the long ranges at which the earlier stages of the fight takes place, the lie of the ground will generally offer suitable preparatory positions within easy reach of the firing position.

The Lieut.-Colonel then sends off his Adjutant to guide the batteries into the preparatory position, himself remaining on the firing position in observation of the enemy. When the batteries have arrived in the preparatory position he calls up the battery commanders, who dismount before reaching him and kneel as much as possible under cover. When they have come up to him he

1. Points out the full extent of the target and apportions it among them.
2. Communicates sufficient of the General's tactical sketch to enable them to readily follow the proposed operation and thus, by knowing beforehand what is required of them, to be able on receipt of an order from him, to turn their fire upon the proper portions of the target in succession according to the sequence of the fight.
3. Gives instructions if any special nature of fire is required of them, otherwise the choice of projectile is usually left to battery commanders.
4. Tells them what rate of fire is desired, *i.e.*, if a delaying action, slow, deliberate fire to economise ammunition, if a decisive action, ordinary, or in some cases, rapid fire to force a solution as quickly as possible.
5. Indicates to them the general alignment upon which he proposes that their batteries should take up position.

While the above instructions are being given to the battery commanders, the batteries in the preparatory position are being got ready, guns loaded and prepared, carefully inspected as to their fitness for immediate action, and depressed so that their muzzles may be in the correct position, or at least horizontal when unlimbered (a saving of time with slow motion elevating gear, such as that of the Mark II, 12-pr. carriage), portable magazines and tube pockets filled, two of the case shot brought from the waggon and placed upon the gun, etc.

The battery commanders having received their instructions as to target, position, etc. (to be dealt with more in detail hereafter), they will proceed to the place that they propose to occupy in action, and thus mark for one flank of their batteries, they will at once communicate to their range-takers the portion of the target to which they desire the range to be found, and the latter will proceed with the operation. A signal is then made by each commander to his battery, at which the sectional officers and gun-layers fall out to him, dismount, and approach him on foot, keeping under cover all the time, the last named bringing with them their telescopic sights.

To these, battery commanders now communicate the following information, in which they will be greatly assisted by the use of a pointer, which defines objects much more graphically than any verbal description.