

MODERN WAR.—REMARKS OF ABLE OFFICERS.

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(Concluded from Page. 160.)

The German front attack was usually combined with an attack in flank made by a turning movement. It has yet to be seen whether such tactics any more than strategy of the same kind, will succeed against a well trained enemy who makes a vigorous counter attack; but they were very successful when encountered only by troops standing passively on the defensive. The turning movement for the flank attack makes the attacking line exceedingly weak, and gives the enemy a favourable chance to meet it: in fact, a great superiority of force, which on most occasions the Germans had, is the true justification of this system.

It is self evident that when one army so completely surrounds another the attacking line must be very thin in many places. According to old rules the best way of meeting such a move would be by a vigorous attack with a concentrated mass upon some point of the necessarily thin and extended line of the enemy.

The French Infantry generally received the German attack behind field entrenchments; and though they destroyed the enemy in thousands, they frequently allowed themselves to be turned, made no resolute counter attacks, and ended by abandoning the ground.

In spite of the drawbacks (caused by the fire of modern small arms) the French might have tried the effect of an attack upon a point of the line which was surrounding them. But their tactics were entirely deficient in the offensive element on a large scale, by which, with inferior numbers even, you may gain great advantages if you are in a position to make rapid concentrations and advances on decisive points. Partial counter attacks on isolated positions of a battle field such as the French made frequently, and with great bravery at Sedan, can only have a momentary effect.

The German Infantry, when on the defensive, did not open fire till the enemy was within 3 or at the outside 400 paces.

An attempt to break through investing lines with anything like a large army is a matter of extraordinary difficulty; the case is quite different from that of a garrison escaping from a fortress; and the proverb "*villæ investit est vilis perdit*," is more than ever applicable in modern war.

It is a very difficult matter to sally forth from a fortress even against unfortified positions, for the investing force has this great advantage, that the besieged can never take it in flank, being themselves surrounded by the position of the besiegers. They must, therefore, attack the latter in front, to which the breach loader opposes great difficulties, besides which, to deploy considerable masses of troops among the works of a place, and to make them debouch from its gates requires much time and a great power of manœuvring.

A plan which is destined to envelop and overthrow the enemy both in front and on both flanks can be only undertaken with a numerically superior force, and even then can only be carried out by leaders who can rely on the punctual execution by all parties of their share in the complicated dispositions.

Plans of this sort have frequently been proposed in former wars, but have never

been executed as they were in the late campaign; they never can succeed except with perfectly formed and disciplined troops under efficient and distinguished leaders, a fact which has been clearly proved by history.

The frequent failures of concentric commands formerly led to the opinion that such operations were altogether inadvisable. The danger to the aggressor is certainly very great. Even if only one part of the army machine should fail to perform its share in the general plan. The lines on which the several divisions of the force march are all converging, and only intersect each other in a point the possession of which they must strive for; the danger lies in the possibility of the separate parts of the attacking force being fallen upon and defeated in detail.

It is very apparent that when the march takes place against an enemy, the several divisions of the column cannot move in immediate sequence one close behind the other, as in that case any mishap to the head of the column would throw the whole into disorder. An advanced guard then should be selected, which in the larger divisions should consist of different arms, and possess sufficient intrinsic solidity and independence to hold its own if attacked by the enemy, until time is afforded for the rest of the column to draw up.

In order that the whole body should not have to form up on account of every small body of the enemy, but should be permitted to pursue its march undisturbed, it is so arranged that the main body shall follow the advanced guard at a certain distance. A wide distance, therefore, between the advanced guard and the rest of the troops, should always be maintained.

The question now is, whether there should be a considerable distance between other portions of the troops—such as between the main body and the reserve, which once was the rule.

That a leader in battle requires a reserve up to the moment when he will be obliged to employ it, is self evident; all troops engaged, are at the best only conditionally in the hands of the superior command, and generally not at all, and a leader has only so far a pervading influence, as he has closely formed bodies of troops at his disposition, or understands how to form such bodies to meet the several crises of the fight. No action should be entered into, without a reserve. But why a reserve should be detached on a line of march is not easily to be seen. A march reserve is not quite requisite, and a battle reserve only when the fight commences.

Military nomenclature has here gone a step too far. Let us only for a moment consider what the idea of a reserve comprehends. *All troops, so long as they are not engaged in the fight, are the reserves of the Chief Command.*

Up to this time it has been the custom to lay down as a rule, for a line of march, one-quarter of the force advanced guard; one-half main body; one quarter reserve. When a battle commences, no one possibly can know whether the advanced guard will suffice to carry it through, or whether the last man will be required.

The advanced Guard opens the fight, the rest of the troops are its reserves, from which as many men are supplied as are required. Why then should there be any other distribution?

Or, is a considerable separation with greater distances necessary within the masses of troops themselves? It would certainly not be advantageous in action if a part of the whole were to arrive half an hour later than is necessary.

This condition is shown when, for example, on a line of a march of a *corps d'armee* as reserve is separated and is permitted to follow the tail of the column at a mile distance.

For the line of march, of course, intervals must exist, in order that the whole may not be affected by temporary impediments, but never of such extent as 1,000 or 2,500 paces: it is quite sufficient to fix as a rule, short distances between the several bodies of troops in close order. Undoubtedly we must picture to ourselves that these distances are there, in order to be lost under circumstances, and when these occur it requires time to take them up again correctly.

Thus separating a reserve from the main body on the march appears to be wholly useless; that which is useless is also dangerous, and such a danger undeniably lies in the distribution formerly in use.

Every effort should be used to maintain the original homogeneity of the troops, as formed during peace, that is, their order of battle as long as it is practicable. The order of march commonly practised, operates however, most decidedly towards destroying this most necessary principle.

Add to this, that the value of a strong reserve is greatly increased by the comparatively heavy loss within a short time, in action of breach-loader against breach-loader. Now, by the distribution of the force into an advanced guard, main body, and reserve, and following the principle of bringing into action these divisions as united as possible, a leader might be seduced into allowing his main body to be engaged too soon, and in that case he would have only about one fourth of his force—the strength of his reserve—left at his disposition.

It appears advisable to prevent any artificial separation of the unity of a brigade, especially at the moment of the fight. This may be done if the rule is laid down, that the Regiments which brigades with the advanced guard shall always be placed at the head of the main body. (An analogous formation may also be employed either with small or large divisions of troops.)

We have then this advantage, that the first support of the engaged advanced guard is afforded by the nearest organized division belonging to the same, and the Brigadier is enabled to dispose of his whole united brigade in the battle, and the General of the division has a so much stronger body in close order as a reserve.

Further, a formation of this kind has this advantage—that if called on suddenly to form a new advanced guard for example, or if obliged hurriedly to change direction, the second brigade is not broken up.

The verbal command of a superior officer, given direct to the person concerned, is the surest method of imparting orders.

Also the verbal transmission of orders through Adjutants, orderly officers, &c., is sometimes a advisable, but only when the order is short and positive, e. g. the Brigade will take up its march through X to Y; if anything further is to be explained with regard to general purposes, or other columns, &c., a written order is always preferable.

The subordinate leader should be made perfectly well acquainted with all that the officer in command knows concerning the enemy so far as it relates to the object in view.

The purport of an order, i. e. what the object of it is, should also be explained.

But care should be taken not to go too far. Certainly it is very interesting for the troops to know how their better informed leader looks on the whole state of affairs, but this leader has to digest and ponder over all