

THE MILITARY LESSONS OF THE WAR.

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(Concluding Chapter of an Unpublished Memoir of Events of the War.)

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The only block house that was actually captured on the main line was the one described near Alatoona. Our trains from Nashville forward were operated under military rules and ran about 10 miles an hour in gangs of four trains of ten cars each. Four such groups of trains daily made 160 cars of 10 tons each, making 1,600 tons, which exceeded the absolute necessity of the Army and allowed for the accidents that were common and inevitable. But, as I have recorded, that single stem of railroad, 473 miles long, supplied an Army of 100,000 men and 35,000 animals for the period of 196 days, viz., from May 1 to November 12, 1864. To have delivered regularly that amount of food and forage by ordinary wagons would have required 35,800 wagons of 6 mules each, allowing each wagon to have hauled two tons, twenty miles each day, a simple impossibility in roads such as then existed in that region of country. Therefore I reiterate that the Atlanta campaign was an impossibility without these railroads; and only then, because we had the means to maintain and defend the road, in addition to what was necessary to overcome the enemy. Habitually a passenger car will carry fifty men with their necessary baggage. Box cars and even platform cars answer the purpose well enough, but they should always have rough board seats. For sick and wounded men, box cars filled with straw or bushes were usually employed. Personally I saw but little of the practical working of the railroads, for I only turned back once as far as Resaca; but I had daily reports from the engineer in charge, and officers who came from the rear often explained to me the whole thing, with a description of the wrecked trains all the way from Nashville to Atlanta. I am convinced that the risk to life to the engineers and men on that railroad, fully equalled that on the skirmish line, called for as high an order of courage and fully equalled it in importance. Still I doubt if there be any necessity to organize corps specially to work the military railroads in time of war, because in peace these same men gain all the necessary experience, possess all the daring and courage of soldiers, and only need the occasional protection and assistance of the necessary train guard, which may be composed of the furloughed men coming and going, or of details made from the local garrisons to the rear.

For the transfer of large armies by rail, from one theatre of action to another by the rear—the cases of the transfer of the Eleventh and Twelfth Corps—General Hooker, 23,000 men—from the East to Chattanooga, 1,194 miles in seven days, in the fall of 1863, and that of the Army of the Ohio—General Schofield, 15,000 men—from the valley of the Tennessee to Washington, 1,400 miles in eleven days, en route to North Carolina in January, 1865, are the best examples of which I have any knowledge, and reference to these is made in the Report of the Secretary of War, Mr. Stanton, dated Nov. 22nd, 1865.

Engineer troops attached to an army are habitually employed in supervising the construction of forts or field works, of a nature more permanent than the lines used by the troops in motion; in repairing roads and in making bridges. I had several regi-

ments of this kind that were most useful, but as a rule we used the infantry or employed parties of freedmen, who worked on the trenches at night whilst the soldiers slept, and these in turn rested by day. Habitually the repair of the railroad and its bridges was committed to hired labourers, like the English navvies, under the supervision of Colonel W. W. Wright, a railroad engineer, who was in the military service at the time, and his successful labors were frequently referred to in the official reports of time. For the passage of rivers, each army corps had a pontoon train with a detachment of engineers, and on reaching a river the leading division was charged with the labour of putting it down. Generally the single pontoon train could provide for 900 feet of bridge, which sufficed; but when the rivers were very wide two such trains would be brought together, or the single train was supplemented with a trestle bridge, or bridges made on crib work, and out of timber found near the place. The pontoons in general use were skeleton frames, made with a hinge, so as to fold back and constitute a wagon body. In this same wagon was carried the cotton canvas cover, the anchor and chains and a due proportion of the bulks, chessex and lashings. All the troops became very familiar with their mechanism and use, and we were rarely delayed by reason of a river however broad. I saw, recently, in Aldershot, England, a very complete pontoon train, but the boats were sheathed with wood and felt, made very light, but I think these were more liable to chafing and damage in rough handling than were our less expensive and rougher boats. On the whole I would prefer the skeleton frame and canvas cover to any style of pontoon that I have seen.

In relation to guards, pickets and videttes, I doubt if any discoveries or improvements were made during the war, or in any of the modern wars in Europe. These precautions vary with the nature of the country, and the situation of each army. When advancing or retreating in line of battle the usual skirmish line constitutes the picket line, and may have "reserves," but usually the main line of battle constitutes the reserve; and in this connection I will state that the recent innovation introduced into the new infantry tactics by General Upton is admirable, for by it each regiment, brigade and division deployed, sends forward as "skirmishers" the one man of each set of fours, to cover its own front, and these can be recalled or reinforced at pleasure by the bugle signal.

For flank guards and rear guards, one or more companies should be detached under their own officers, instead of making up the guard by detailing men from the several companies.

For regimental or camp guards, the details should be made according to existing Army regulations; and all the guards should be posted early in the evening so as to afford each sentinel or vidette a chance to study his ground before it is too dark.

In like manner as to the staff. The more intimately it comes into contact with the troops, the more useful and valuable it becomes. The almost entire separation of the staff from the line, as now practiced by us, and hitherto by the French, has proven mischievous, and the great retinues of staff officers with which some of our earlier generals began the war were simply ridiculous. I don't believe in a chief of staff at all, and any general commanding an army, corps, or division, that has a staff officer who professes to know more than his chief, is to be

pitied. Each regiment should have a competent adjutant, quartermaster and commissary, with two or three medical officers. Each brigade commander should have the same staff with the addition of a couple of young aides-de-camp, habitually selected from the subalterns of the brigade, who should be good riders, and intelligent enough to give and explain the orders of their general.

The same staff will answer for a division. The general in command of a separate Army and of a corps d'armée, should have the same professional assistance, with two or more good engineers, and his adjutant-general should exercise all the functions usually ascribed to a chief of staff, viz., he should possess the ability to comprehend the scope of operations and to make verbally and in writing all the orders and details necessary to carry into effect the views of his general, as well as to keep the returns and records of events for the information of the next higher authority, and for history. A bulky staff implies a division of responsibility, slowness of action, and indecision, whereas a small staff implies activity and concentration of purpose. The smallness of General Grant's staff throughout the Civil War forms the best model for future imitation. So of tents, officer's furniture, etc., etc. In real war things should all be discarded, and an army is efficient for action and motion exactly in the inverse ratio of its impedimenta. Tents should be omitted altogether, save one to a regiment for an office and a few for the division hospital. Officers should be content with a tent fly, improvising poles and shelter out of bushes. The tent d'abri, or shelter tent, carried by the soldier himself, is all sufficient. Officers should never seek for houses, but share the condition of their men.

A recent message, July 18, 1874, made to the French Assembly by Marshal McMahon, President of the French Republic, submits a projet d'loi with a report prepared by a board of French generals on "army administration," which is full of information, and is as applicable to us as to the French. I quote from its very beginning: "The misfortunes of the campaign of 1870 have demonstrated the inferiority of our system." "Two separate organizations existed with parallel functions, the 'general' more occupied in giving direction to his troops than in providing for their material wants, which he regarded as the special province of the staff, and the 'intendant' (staff) often working at random, taking on his shoulders a crushing burden of functions and duties, exhausting himself with useless efforts, and aiming to accomplish an insufficient service, to the disappointment of everybody. This separation of the administration and command, this co-existence of two wills, each independent of the other, which paralysed both and annulled the dualism was condemned. It was decided by the board that this error should be 'proscribed' in the new military system." The report then goes on at great length discussing the provisions of the "new law," which is described to be a radical change from the old one on the same subject. Whilst conceding to the Minister of War in Paris, the general control and supervision of the entire military establishment—primarily—especially of the estimates or budget, and the great depots of supply, it distributes to the commanders of the corps d'armée in time of peace, and to all army commanders generally in time of war, the absolute command of the money, provisions and stores, with the necessary staff officers to receive, issue, and account for