

How the British Soldier Is Taught to Shoot.

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(By a Military Correspondent of the "Times.")

The advance was conducted with great steadiness, the firing being by half-company volleys, the commander giving the elevation and also the object or part of the line to be aimed at. The men having been purposely served out with ammunition in unequal quantities—half having twenty rounds, one-quarter fifteen rounds, one-eighth ten rounds and one-eighth five rounds per man—every man was ordered when he had fired away all his cartridges to lie down and remain on the spot. Thus the gradually increasing number of killed and wounded were represented, and gaps, as on active service, were created, which gaps were filled by reinforcing from the rear. Towards the end of the advance fresh ammunition was served out to the firing line by men carrying packets of cartridges in haversacks. The fire discipline was admirable, and the fire was directed, now on one part, now on another, of the enemy's line, according to the judgment of the commanders, as readily as if they individually held the rifles. Great importance is to be attached to giving a suitable direction to the fire of companies, half companies, and sections, for in action soldiers are not apt to fire straight to their front, whereas by firing in an oblique direction they might do more execution. It is equally desirable sometimes to concentrate the fire of a large portion of your own front on a small portion of the enemy's front, for the moral effect produced by killing in two minutes—say twenty men along a front of thirty yards—is much greater than that of killing, say, fifty men in five minutes along a front of 100 yards. Men with range-finders followed in rear, and from time to time took the distances, but I do not believe that in an advance after getting within 1,000 yards much practical good will in action result from range-finding. After the Hythe force had advanced some distance a counter attack on its left flank was made by the enemy. This counter attack was represented by sixteen dummies, representing men showing only their heads and shoulders above a shelter trench for five seconds, and then disappearing for eight seconds by alternate fours. About sixteen or twenty men were told off to deal with this counter attack, and advancing by a series of short rushes from about 300 yards distance fired some five or six rounds each. Eight survivors were supposed to retire to a butt behind which they took shelter, but two or three more rounds and a bayonet charge disposed of them. On counting the hits there were found to be 34, which was astonishingly good shooting. Another episode occurred soon after on the extreme right of the attacking force. All of a sudden nine dummies representing Cavalry advanced by means of a tramway at about six or seven miles an hour—had not the wind been against them they would have accomplished nine miles an hour—and were fired at by about twenty men, who opened fire at about 300 yards, and kept it up till the range had been reduced to 100 yards. The horsemen were not fully visible the whole time, as there were some intervening swells of the ground. Every now and again a horse was seen to fall till at last only one dragoon remained alive. An innocent spectator might have thought that the horsemen were knocked over by the bullets, but as a matter of fact they were prostrated by ingenious trips which threw them down at stated intervals. What injury would have been inflicted on real dragoons, even had they been charging at the rate of sixteen miles an hour, can be imagined when I mention that the number of hits was 101; in fact nearly every shot told.

When the Hythe force had reached to 300 yards of the enemy's position the last reinforcements were brought up into the firing line, and a series of heavy volleys were fired. Then "cease firing" was sounded and the enemy's firing line was removed from the shelter trench which it occupied to one about 100 yards to the rear. This change having been accomplished, the Hythe force advanced to within 120 yards of the new position by rushes of half battalions, one half battalion rushing forward the instant the other half battalion fired. At 120 yards a succession of rapid volleys were delivered and bayonets were fixed by half battalions. As soon as the bayonets were fixed a round or two was fired and then, officers in front, the whole line charged. The enemy on this were supposed to betake themselves to their boats, represented by two rafts with head and shoulder dummies moored about 100 yards from the edge of the water, which was 150 yards from the captured position. The Hythe men halting here, poured a rapid independent fire on the boats for a couple of minutes, and would certainly have riddled them and slain all their occupants, provided they had not themselves been unsteadied by fire from the enemy's gunboats. Indeed, under any circumstances, few of the enemy could have escaped. This concluded the first portion of the day's performance. As to the effects of the firing the total number of rounds fired was 4,126, producing a percentage of hits of 20.21. In these hits are not included the hits on the boats. It is interesting to note that the fire from the marksmen on the hill and the party attacking in flank inflicted twenty-eight hits on a section of head and shoulders dummies, twelve on the two guns, and fourteen on the

gunners working the latter. The most noteworthy circumstance in the whole performance was the fire discipline, as an instance of which I may observe that I on several occasions saw a section, after receiving the word "present," obey the order to "unload." This seems to me the very crowning excellence of fire discipline. It is true that there were no bullets being rained into them, no shells bursting among them, that the troops consisted for the most part of officers and sergeants, and that all had gone through an eight-weeks' special training. Still, I was shown that good British soldiers could be brought to a high state of fire discipline—not to be surpassed, I am sure, in the best of foreign armies—under disturbing conditions, if sufficient care were taken in their training and more practice in field firing than is now afforded given. If it be remembered that one hundred such men as I saw are equal in destructive power to many times their number of equally brave but less skilled, less trained, and worse disciplined troops, it surely will be admitted that neither money nor pains should be spared to increase the practical value of our numerically small army.

The second portion of the day's performance consisted in executing certain portions of the field practice. Among these were the following: Individual practice at moving target. In this two butts are separated by a 4-foot wide screen, so as to give two runs of twenty-five feet in length each. Passing along a rail are two figures of men—one to each interval—which stop at the end of each run for a second or two and then return. The distance was 150 yards, and though the figures represented very small men the practice by a section of sergeants was very good. The pace at which the men moved seemed to me to be that of a very quick walk. Then there was the vanishing target which I have described above. Another exercise was an extremely practical one, consisting of a section formed up at 600 yards distance opposite to targets with figures of men painted on them—hits off the figures not to count. The party, not exceeding ten in number—on this occasion there were nine—was formed up at the "order" at 600 yards from the targets. They were then brought to the "ready," and on the word "commence" two rounds were fired. The men then ran up to 500 yards and fired two rounds, ran up to 400 yards and fired two rounds, then ran back to 500 yards and fired four more rounds, making ten in all. The time allowed is five minutes, but on this occasion the performance only took 4.1 minutes, the number of hits being 38. There was also "independent rapid firing," there being eight men firing each ten rounds at 6ft. targets with figures of men marked on them at 200 yards distance. The number of targets was ten but two were not fired at and were not struck. The numbers of hits were 10, 5, 8, 9, 2, 7, 5, 5. These results it must be remembered, were obtained by men who had been running and firing the whole afternoon.

I will now proceed to give a brief abstract of what soldiers do at their regiments. The Cavalry, Infantry, and Engineer recruit having become sufficiently advanced in his drill is put through six days of preliminary drill and practice, including lessons on the care of arms and ammunition, fourteen lessons on the principles of musketry, aiming drill, firing 20 rounds with miniature cartridges and Morris's tubes at miniature targets on a miniature range, and 20 rounds with blank cartridges. Then follows ten days' target and judging-distance practice. During the first three days they fire ten rounds each at 100, 150, and 200 yards each, the target being 6 ft. by 4 ft., with a bull's-eye 12 inches in diameter and a centre 3 feet in diameter. On the fourth day the same—third class—target, but without bull's-eye, is fired at with two rounds at 100, 150, 200, 250, and 300 yards. On the fifth day, on a 6 ft. by 4 ft. target with a head-and-shoulder figure marked on it. At this target four rounds are fired at 150 yards and two rounds at 200, 250, and 265 yards respectively. On the sixth day a second-class target is used, and the distance is increased to 300 yards. The target is 6 ft. square with a bull's-eye 2 ft., and a centre 4 ft. in diameter. Ten rounds are fired. On the seventh day the range is increased to 500 yards, but the target and the number of rounds are the same. On the eighth day ten rounds are fired at a distance of 500 yards at a first class target, which is 6 ft. by 8 ft., with figures, bull's-eyes, and centres. Hitherto each man has fired individually. He now fires as one of a squad. On the ninth day he fires in independent firing five rounds at 300 yards at a 6 ft. by 12 ft. target, and five rounds in volleys at the same distance. On the tenth day he fires at 400 yards five rounds in volleys at the same target lying down in extended order and five rounds at 500 yards in the same position at a 6 ft. by 16 ft. target. During this time also, judging-distance practice has been going on. Thus 100 rounds are fired before the soldier is allowed to quit the recruit class. In addition to this recruit training, every soldier goes through an annual course with his troop or company. This may be divided into judging distance, range practice, and field practice. The range practice is for first class shots up to 800 yards at targets at the rate of ten rounds a day, or at the discretion of the commanding officers, as many as 20 rounds a day. Fifty rounds are expended annually in individual and sectional field practice, which includes firing at figures, either full length or head and shoulders, marked