

### COLONEL MIDDLETON ON OUTPOST DUTY.

By the kindness of Colonel Middleton, the Superintendent of Garrison Instruction, we are enabled to give the full text of the very interesting lecture on outpost duty delivered by him to Volunteer officers, at the Royal United Service Institution, on the 22nd February:—

Mr. President and Gentlemen.—The subject of my lecture is "Outpost Duty." Now to any of you who have at all studied this subject, as doubtless lately many of you have, it must be evident that to condense all connected with this important part of tactics into one night's lecture would be a feat in homoeopathy which I for one am certainly not going to attempt. I propose therefore to treat the subject more with the view of drawing your attention to its great importance and general principles. Outpost duty may justly be termed "high art" as regards the duties required of a soldier in the field. For its due and proper performance, perfect discipline, great intelligence, thoughtfulness, activity both of mind and body, presence of mind, self-reliance, unceasing watchfulness, and I need hardly add courage, are required added to which certain physical qualities are almost indispensable, such as good eyesight, acute hearing and bodily strength; and I may almost say that all these qualities, to a greater or lesser extent, should be found not only in every officer, but in every non-commissioned officer and soldier engaged in this duty, for to them one and all, the protection and safety of the whole army is entrusted—nay, perhaps of their country. As Colonel (now General) MacDougall writes in his book, "The Theory of War," an officer in command of an outpost should invariably act as if the safety of the whole army depended on his individual vigilance, and he should impress the same feeling of responsibility on the minds of every one of his sentries. Moreover, this is actually the case, for if one link of the chain is broken the great object with which it is stretched may be lost. Now we are accused of neglecting this important part of our profession, and there is, I am afraid, some truth, or rather has been hitherto, as regards time of peace, though many officers have been aware of its necessity, and have done their best to make others think so—notably the late Lord Fitzclarence, whose little book on "Outposts" is well worthy of perusal. In the wars we have been engaged in from time to time in our colonies, they having been either against savages, who rarely move at night, or against badly disciplined Asiatic troops, we have not been forced to carry out such strict outpost duty as is necessary when acting against an enterprising European enemy, so that our colonial wars have not done us much good in that way. In peace-time we have, until lately had no opportunity of practising outpost duty. The fact has been that after every European war the good people of England have begun to think it must be the last, or that if there should be another, we were sure to have nothing to do with it. Their interest in the Army died out and reduction became the order of the day. The Army itself could not help being influenced by all this. Then the jealousy with which the civil law watches and over-rides every act of the military law tends to make our peace soldiering more like playing soldiers than is the case with foreign armies; hence we have always required the stern realities of war to awaken us. Nothing is so likely to remedy this state of things as the newly introduced and

long wished for system of autumn manoeuvres, when the want of a stimulus in the shape of the enemy's fire, is made up by the sharp, but generally just, pen of the newspaper correspondent. That in time of war we can soon make good outpost soldiers, is easily proved by referring to the records of the Peninsular war. Decker, a Prussian staff officer, and a writer of some note, in 1822, in a work entitled "La Petite Guerre" writes as follows.—"The English to this very day carry out the duty of outposts with great pedantry; in general, they have only a very superficial idea of the use of light troops. Thus, in the wars in the Peninsula they employed exclusively their German troops for this duty." He also says that in making your disposition of outposts, the character of your adversary is a consideration of some influence. For instance, he remarks, in that respect—viz., outpost duty—it is said, "The Frenchman is brave, the Austrian troublesome, the Russian dangerous (on account of his numerous Cossacks) the Spaniard lazy, and the English dull; whilst the German is docile, full of zeal and good will, and learns everything." That there was some little truth, however, in what Decker said is shown by the fact, generally admitted, that General Crawford, who commanded the incomparable light division in Spain, formed his system of outposts principally from that of the 1st Hussars of the German Legion (who were I believe, Hanoverians, and who formed part of his division but that we exclusively employed our German auxiliaries for outpost duty during the Peninsular war is contradicted by the fact that most of Crawford's division, which eventually performed nearly all the outpost duty of our army, consisted principally of British troops; and that they were neither pedantic or dull in their performance of these duties, let the answer be the operations in the tract of country between the Poa and Agueda in 1810, where the light division, consisting of never more than 3,500 infantry 800 cavalry, and six light guns, held a tract of country, with at first a front of forty miles, for four months, in face of two entire corps of the French Army under Massena.

When we went to the Crimea I am afraid we had forgotten most of our Peninsular outpost knowledge. The Russians say that their spies could always penetrate the English lines easier than the French, and at Inkerman we were nearly surprised owing to our outposts failing in their duty. Towards the end of the Crimean War, as usual, we were nearly perfect. Altogether, then, it may be concluded that we have never experienced any difficulty in making good soldiers of any description so long as we had time on active service to do so. But shall we have that time? No, we shall not; and this is a fact which should be brought home to every Englishman be he soldier or be he civilian. Colonel Chesney, in his admirable lecture on the "Study of Military Decision in time of Peace," delivered at this Institution May 5, 1871 says on this point, as describing the process by which Wellington formed the Peninsular Army—viz., by the pressure of actual experience in the field—"Such was the manner in which the Army of the Peninsula was formed, but its formation in that way, I take leave to say, has been in one sense a real national misfortune to our country," because, he goes on to say "you are constantly met with the objections" to Army reform, "Why do you require army reform when we had so perfect an army in the Peninsula?" He adds that it cannot be too often or too clearly declared that no English general will ever again have the time to form an army in that

Wellington had. In the old days, when wars lasted for years, we were able to expend a year or so in learning our work, and the results generally crowned us with victory, but at a heavy cost, as Sir William Napier forcibly and eloquently puts it in his "History of the Peninsular War": "In the beginning of each war England has to seek in blood the knowledge necessary to insure success, and like the Fiend's progress towards Eden, his conquering course is through chaos, followed by death." In these days, however, owing to the greatly increased attention which is paid to the science of war, the vast improvements in the precision and range of all arms, the rapidity of movements caused by the use of steam and the electric telegraph, wars no longer drag on their weary length year after year. We have seen of late four European wars, the longest of which was of scarcely a year's duration, and which prostrated two of the great Powers of Europe. Hence, it is evident that in future campaigns, every man, officer or soldier, must take the field learned in the art of war so far as it can be taught in time of peace, and to what perfection that teaching can be carried we have in the late exploits of the Prussian Army a most convincing proof. That we in this country have resolved that in future England shall not have to seek in blood, the knowledge necessary to insure success in war, is apparent from the efforts of Government, backed by the general opinion of the country, especially of late; and it only remains for all of us who constitute the military forces of Great Britain to second these efforts with that hearty zeal and determination which is so characteristic of our nation when engaged in what we know and feel to be right and necessary. If we only do this, I for one, certainly fear not the result of our meeting the armies of any power in existence, whilst we have right on our side, and without that, I think there is little fear of Great Britain ever entering into a war with King or Kaiser, and I might add, in these Republican days, with President either. Now, I have already given you to understand that of all duties, outpost duty is the most important and difficult, owing to so much being demanded from those who undertake it, and as requiring, I think more practice: and it seems likely that in future wars these duties more than ever will be entrusted to picked troops specially selected, and when I say picked troops, I do not mean picked out for height or smartness of appearance, or because belonging to this or that regiment, but because they possess those qualities which I have already enumerated as necessary to make a good outpost soldier. Some of these qualities, I will allow, can only be ascertained in actual warfare—the others can be as well ascertained in peace time, much more than with regard to other operations; and for this reason: When bodies of men are moving against each other in peace time the true test of good performance, owing to the absence of real fighting, is wanting; whereas, in the case of outpost duty, actual fighting is a small part of the test; quickness and correctness of eye in seizing advantageous cover and ground, ability in disposition, and obtaining information of the enemy's movements, being the most important part of the duty, a knowledge of which can only be obtained by constant practice, and their performance can almost be as well estimated in peace time as in war time. For this reason I should like to see in our autumn manoeuvres some practical attempts made to test the outpost duty knowledge of both officers and men, by moving one force against another without any previous warning.