

MOBILITY IN MODERN ARMIES.

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The aim of Napoleon was always to destroy his enemy. This was his first object. Afterwards he manoeuvred at his ease, in the presence of a beaten army.

With inimitable art he disposed his corps in such a manner as to be able to mass them in the shortest possible time on any point of the theatre of war; and then, with consummate genius and cunning, he enticed and induced the enemy to march and disclose his projects.

If he succeeded in his plan, he fell upon his adversary like an eagle upon its prey. Hence, his veterans of the Guard used to boast that the leader won all his victories with their legs and not at the cost of their lives. Endowing his army with great mobility, he secured great strategical and tactical advantages at a small cost of bloodshed.

The secrets of success in all conquering armies have ever been the same, and assuredly, the most important is—Mobility. Among the moderns, Frederick the Great was the first to discover its advantages, and by securing it in his armies he not only carried all before him, but also established his highest claim to martial glory. Marshal Saxe was of opinion that marches contributed more than battles to the success of a campaign, and he laid down the celebrated maxim that "success in war depends upon the legs of the soldiers;" and no improvement in the appliances of war will ever enable an army to dispense with that essential guarantee of victory—the utmost rapidity of motion—disciplined mobility.

The great merit of Frederick consists in having foreseen all the advantages that might be taken against heavy masses so difficult to set in motion, of troops capable of manoeuvring, accustomed to march over extensive ground in good order, capable of passing in the shortest time from the order of march to the order of battle, and *vice versa*—in a word, troops sufficiently trained to be able to manoeuvre in the presence of the enemy—to threaten one of his wings, to outflank him, &c.

All Frederick's efforts tended to this grand development, and it must be admitted that the means he employed were Herculean. Prussia became one vast camp. His regiments were drilled every day, according to a new regulation, which was the most perfect in Europe. His army was divided into manageable fractions, and placed under the orders of permanent generals; the *cadres* of the companies were augmented; they had fourteen non-commissioned officers (corporals and sergeants), whilst those of Austria had only six.

Frederick revolutionized infantry tactics by introducing the formation and deployment of close columns by divisions. In the hands of his generals, his columns executed numerous tactical combinations before unknown—changes of front, echellons, passages of lines, &c.

The thin order was his invariable order of battle and order of manoeuvring in the presence of the enemy, and so his soldiers were exercised in moving in deployed lines; the country round about Berlin often beheld twenty battalions extending over a space of some four thousand yards, executing a march of twelve hundred paces in order of battle with admirable regularity and precision.

In such a system any amount of confusion would be fatal; and so this was rendered next to impossible by a severity of discipline totally inconceivable at the present day; but

certainly it was the effective means of keeping the Prussian soldier in rank and file. He had no will of his own; personal initiative or effort was out of the question; they made a machine, of him, the better to dispose of him. The punishments awarded by the Prussian military code were excessive, almost barbarous. Whilst slaps in the face and blows with a cudgel were inflicted on the private for the slightest offences, the non-commissioned officers were castigated with the flat of the sword.

But, to the Prussian mind, there was a compensation for these indignities. The army was the first body in the State. The citizen bowed before the uniform of the soldier, and the simple ensign ranked on an equality with the highest civil functionary.

It must be remembered that the ancient Romans were subjected to an equal degree of inexorable and pitiless discipline. It can scarcely be denied that they owed to it their world-renowned superiority, which elicited the fervid and characteristic encomium even of Paul, the Apostle; but it is certain that outrageous treatment did not degrade the Prussian soldier in his own estimation; on the contrary, pride and discipline made the Prussian lines veritable bars of steel; whilst their mobility made them irresistible in the onslaught, by enabling them to be massed with the greatest rapidity, and in the greatest numbers on the critical point to make the crisis of battle at their own pleasure—thus being ever confident of victory.

This explains and accounts for all the success achieved by Frederick the Great, in spite of the enormous faults he committed, as it were at pleasure, against the most elementary rules of the art of war—his concentrations operated in the sight of the enemy—his flank-marches within cannon range of his antagonist. This also explains his bold marches across a country menaced by three formidable armies—his successful retreats after lost battles—his voluntary abandonment of the lines of operation, which he knew right well he could regain when he pleased. In one word, the Prussian army was more mobile than its rivals.

And the Emperor William—perhaps the most fortunate conquerer ever vouchsafed to earth—owes to the revived and enhanced mobility of his troops the largest part of his undoubted claim to martial admiration. Austria was crushed, as of old, by means of Prussian mobility; and then came the turn of France, in one short month almost annihilated by some twenty reversed Jena's—blows dealt with such rapidity that Kaiser Wilhelm might well be excused for considering them somewhat supernatural and "Providential," as would appear, by his persistent thanksgivings to the Almighty.

It was at the very commencement of the campaign, namely at Wiessenburg, that the Crown Prince's sudden movement exhibited German rapidity and decision in contrast with French vacillation and delay; betokening on the part of the Germans a purpose and a plan and giving them the grand prestige of a victory on the territory of the Power which had challenged them to war. It was the same at Worth, at Gravelotte, at Le Mans; but nowhere so striking and so glorious in results was superior mobility exemplified as in the entrapping of the entire French army at Sedan. Of course, it was the eye of Count Moltke that at once took in all the possibilities of the situation; but, without the perfect and disciplined mobility of the German troops—their rapid marches—Count Moltke's calculations would have failed, and Kaiser Wilhelm would not have won his glory and enormous war-indemnity.

And yet it appears that the Prussian offi-

cers are not satisfied with the excellence in this respect which they have hitherto attained. They believe that still more can be done, and without loss of time, so important do they consider this guarantee of victory, they are earnestly seeking for improvement.

No wonder, then, that our late manoeuvres did not "show" very favourably to our enlightened and preoccupied German critics in this essential attribute of armies. It was quite evident that the British Army has not yet secured the celerity of motion possessed by the Germans, even when they crossed the French frontier at the commencement of the last war. This, however, is not the fault of the material, but of those who shape and fashion it. Our military leaders do not appear sufficiently impressed with the necessity of progress in this direction; but, like "everybody" in England, rather inclined to sacrifice to the traditional and boasted *steadiness* of the British infantry that rapidity of movement which, to be effective in the field, must be practised on the drill-ground as much as any other "preparation" for a campaign and a field of battle.

Steadiness in the army is essential, but mobility, or celerity of movement, is indispensable. The possession of the former is the very soul of the latter; and the Prussians both of the former and recent date have acted on this principle. We have alluded to the severe drill-practice enforced by Frederick to secure the steadiness of his men, and it is certain that the utmost severity of discipline prevails at the present day in the armies of Germany, especially of Prussia. Therefore, our soldiers cannot be too steady, but they are taught to acquire that celerity of motion of which steady drill should be merely the groundwork.

The military value of mobility is absolute—that is to say, its superiority will be manifest in all conditions of warfare; but it has become immeasurably more indispensable under the new conditions of warfare introduced by breech loading arms of precision. The extended range and accurate aim of modern fire-arms render it necessary that troops should be able to rush with great rapidity from one place of cover to another. Serried columns, or unwavering lines, moving in rigid formation across open ground, within many hundred yards of a hostile position, are now things of the past—abolished by necessity. The late war must be considered the type of all future European wars, and it taught us nothing more forcibly and conclusively than that the *Tirailleur*, or skirmishing, method of fighting will be ever in requisition. Now, it is obvious that efficiency in that form of warfare depends upon the power of rapid advance and rapid retreat.

It must be admitted, however, that the acquisition of mobility and its application in war must be preceded by important military reforms—reforms in organization. It is now agreed upon by all military authorities that no army in which the battalion is constituted the smallest tactical unit can manoeuvre with much rapidity in action.

And why? Because of the altered conditions of warfare. In time of war, a battalion must consist of about one thousand men, if it is to be effective and repay the cost of the staff and general direction. This might answer in former times when, in battle, battalions could be kept in massive columns, or when deployed, were ranged in closed lines, on the "shoulder to shoulder" principle—enabling the commanding officer to observe the conduct of every individual, and to direct the general action of the whole body by word of mouth.