

## Modern Tactics:

[By Capt. H. R. Gall—From Illustrated Naval and Military Magazine.]

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### Chapter I.—Part II, Continued.

WHEN a reconnaissance in force is composed of cavalry and artillery only, greater latitude may be given to its commander. A good instance was afforded during the American War, and is mentioned in Colonel Denison's work entitled *Modern Cavalry*: "General Stuart of the confederate army made a magnificent armed reconnaissance in front of Richmond in 1862, by which he gained information as to the position of the enemies' lines, which enabled General Stonewall Jackson a few days afterwards to fall upon the flank and rear of General McClellan's army with confidence and effect." In this reconnaissance, which, after obtaining its first object, *yiz.* information, assumed the form of a raid, General Stuart with his cavalry and artillery made a complete circuit round the Federal army, going round their left flank along their rear, and returning by their right flank, cutting in all directions the enemies' communications, burning and destroying a large amount of property, and capturing a number of horses. Thus showing that a bold cavalry leader may get right round an enemy's position, while a less daring commander might be haggling for information, and engaging his light troops in front, and on the flanks, and possibly gaining none.

The second class of armed reconnaissances are what are called reconnoitring parties, or patrols. Reconnoitring patrols are sent out when armies are within striking distance of each other. Cavalry or infantry, or a small force of both arms combined, may furnish a reconnoitring party.

The normal distance that a cavalry patrol would be sent is about ten miles, and an infantry patrol about four miles from the outposts.

The principles which guide their action, making allowance for the different tactics of the arms, are similar.

The general instructions given to the commander of a reconnoitring party, whether composed of cavalry or infantry, would be: Reconnoitre the country along such and such a road, or between such and such roads, note carefully the general features of the country, question the inhabitants, and correct your map and obtain all the information you can about the enemy's movements and force. Special instructions for a cavalry patrol: Avoid all engagements, as far as possible, unless with inferior bodies of the enemy's cavalry. Special instructions for an infantry patrol: Avoid, as much as possible, engagements with the enemy's infantry, but push back any parties of his cavalry you meet with.

A reconnoitring patrol may consist of from ten men up to a squadron or a company, or of a squadron and company combined, the infantry holding defiles, bridges, or the entrance to a village in rear of the cavalry, in order to protect their retreat, and enable them to act with greater boldness in a difficult country.

The formation of a patrol, either cavalry or infantry, is the same; the distances alone being altered to suit the different arms. As a general rule, cavalry distances may be taken to be treble those of infantry.

A patrol should always consist of a point and flankers, main body, rear-guard. If strong enough add a head, and if of full strength, as in the case of a squadron or company, add a support. The principle being to push forward small bodies towards the enemy with ever increasing stronger bodies in the rear, and is based entirely on that of an ordinary advanced guard preceding a battalion.

Although the information brought back by a single patrol may be little, it must be borne in mind that a general would probably send out a dozen patrols in different directions, and the information thus obtained may be very complete.

After a victory, especially in bad weather, cavalry patrols should be sent along all the roads to discover what line of retreat the enemy has taken.

General Hamley points out that a reconnaissance made on every road after the battle of Ligny would have saved Napoleon at Waterloo, which battle he fought under the impression that the Prussians were routed and closely pursued by Grouchy. Grouchy, pursuing with 20,000 troops, mistook the road, and Blucher appeared on the field at Waterloo with 60,000 fresh troops, on the right flank of the French.

Again, General Hamley points out how Wellington, pursuing a wrong road line under a false impression, failed to gather the proper fruits of the victory of Salamanka. The Prussians, after the battle of Worth, in which they had completely routed the French, failing to send out reconnoitring patrols, lost touch with their defeated opponents, and did not know, next day, in what direction the French had retreated.

No officer should ever start on a reconnaissance of any sort without the best map procurable, or a rough sketch of one, for the want of a better; and as he goes along he should compare it with the country, and note errors, making any additions he thinks likely to be useful.

Colonel Denison relates how, on the map used by General Lee before Richmond, there was an inaccuracy which, in spite of the careful reconnaissances he had made, was not corrected. There were two roads, one called the Quaker Road, and the other had no name; on General Lee's map the latter was wrongly marked as the Quaker Road. General Lee, making his plans by this map, ordered General Magruder to march by the Quaker road to a certain position. General Magruder was conducted at night by his guide by the real Quaker Road, and found out his mistake too late to take part in one of the most critical junctures of that memorable series of battles.

Secret or individual reconnaissances are conducted by stealth, and are of three kinds:

1. To discover the enemy's whereabouts, numbers and movements.
2. To report upon a position occupied by an enemy.

3. To make a military survey of the country an army is operating in.

It requires experience, study, and thought, and presence of mind to perform these duties satisfactorily.

As an instance of the presence of mind required Colonel Denison relates the following anecdote. Before the battle of Koniggratz, a Prussian officer reconnoitring, left his escort, consisting of two troopers, hidden in a safe place as near to the Austrian outposts as he deemed it advisable to approach on horseback, and thence proceeded alone on foot, and, not being challenged, passed through the Austrian outposts, actually entering the fortress before his uniform attracted attention. Made prisoner, and taken before the Austrian commandant, he said he had come to summon the garrison to surrender, as the Prussians would shortly be in a position to bombard the town. The offer was refused, and the Prussian officer, who had obtained a great deal of important information, was conducted back through the Austrian outposts.

Another good instance of the importance of secret reconnaissance in connection with the enemy's whereabouts and movements was furnished when the Duke of Wellington, during the siege of Badajos, heard that Marshal Marmont was approaching Ciudad Rodrigo, which fortified place Wellington had recently captured from the French.

Wellington sent an officer secretly to observe Marmont's movements. A few days afterwards, on entering a town which the French had just quitted, this officer discovered that they had left their scaling ladders behind.

As their siege train had been captured at Rodrigo, Wellington, who might otherwise have been drawn away to reinforce Rodrigo, had no fears for the safety of that place, and remained before Badajos.

A fatal instance of neglecting to obtain information of the enemy's movements was furnished during the campaign of 1866 between the Austrians and Prussians. Before the battle of Koniggratz any qualified officer lying hidden in a fir-wood there was close to the position, could have counted every Prussian battalion and squadron that the Crown Prince of Prussia moved towards Miletin on the Austrian right flank, and, if properly trained, could have estimated their strength.

Marshal Benedek's ignorance of the Prussian movements showed a total absence of reconnoitring.

In making a reconnaissance to find out and report upon an enemy's movements and numbers, a knowledge of the rate of marching and the space occupied by the different arms is indispensable. An enemy encamped or bivouacked in rear of a position he intends to fight on will cover that position by his outposts, and all the approaches will be carefully guarded; but by creeping along in the dark, and avoiding direct roads, an officer employed on secret reconnaissance can usually get much closer than would appear possible. One reason is that the sentries are stationary, and only the patrols moving in front of them will have to be avoided. Having concealed himself under cover of darkness, an officer can wait for daybreak and gather a deal of information about the outposts and what is going on in his immediate front.

It must be borne in mind that half-a-dozen or more other officers will probably be sent out on similar expeditions, and the sum total of information they bring in about the enemy's positions and disposition of his troops may often be very considerable.

Napoleon always made use of the information he obtained by secret reconnaissances. No hard and fast rules can be laid down for the guidance of those employed on these duties. A thorough knowledge of the principles of tactics is absolutely essential. Sportsmen generally are men of resource, and acquire a quick eye for country. An officer should endeavour to select his escort from men of this class, and take them completely into his confidence. In case of accident, the safety of the report must be carefully provided for. The report should be framed as clearly and concisely as circumstances permit. Places marked on the map or sketch should be mentioned in the report, and the data on which calculations are based must always be given, due allowance being made for the appearance of roads, fords, &c., in fine and wet weather.

The third class of individual reconnaissance is a military survey of the seat of war, or the country immediately surrounding an army in the field. So important a duty would usually be entrusted to a specially selected staff or engineer officer; but it may devolve on any officer or non-commissioned officer to perform, or at any rate to materially help to perform.

A military survey or sketch is a map or plan of country made expressly with a view to give the information required for military purposes. Ordinary maps do not supply the information required by the commander of a force in order to take advantage of the accidents of ground and the amount of cover procurable. Owing to the increased accuracy of modern firearms, cover even for a few companies is often of the utmost importance.

In a military survey the following are some of the principal points to be specially noted:—

- I. Surface of the country, close or open, situation of suitable camping grounds, and ground for artillery positions. Mountainous, hilly or wooded.
- II. Roads, state of repair, width, appearance in wet or dry weather. Lateral roads, where they branch off and lead to.
- III. Towns and villages, construction of houses and situation of principal buildings.
- IV. Rivers and streams, depth, breadth, current, command of banks, approaches, fords, bottom, boats procurable, tributary streams, bridges, wood procurable. Easy and difficult crossing places, islands.
- V. Railways, rolling stock, staff of employees, &c.
- VI. Probable amount of supplies procurable on requisition.

(To be Continued.)