

Modern Tactics.

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

(Continued from Page 304.)

THE Russians in 1877 often reached the Turkish entrenchments, only to perish in them, or only captured them after desperate hand-to-hand fighting.

The construction of the Turkish and Russian field fortifications, and their defence, furnish a study well worth the careful consideration of every thoughtful soldier. They belong more properly to field fortification than tactics, and the student is recommended to read a most interesting and valuable book entitled *The Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey, 1877-78*, by F. V. Greene, U. S. Army. The book is published by Messrs. W. H. Allen & Co., 13 Waterloo Place, S.W., together with an excellent atlas, and sets of drawings representing very clearly the types of field-works used by the Turks and Russians respectively.

Lieutenant Greene remarks in his concluding chapter: "The campaign, 1877-78, like every campaign which was ever fought, furnishes its military lessons for the future, mistakes to be avoided, successful manœuvres to be repeated under similar opportunities. But there is one feature, a question of tactics, in which this war finds no parallel in past history, and which is of the highest importance for the conduct of future wars. I refer to the great use which was made of hasty fortifications in connection with modern fire arms.

Infantry bear the brunt of every battle, and their assaults are now delivered in the formation known as "The Attack Formation."

The British system is fully described in the Field Exercise. Its main characteristic is that it endeavours to eliminate the mixing up of companies.

Several other attacks (including one by the author), have been advocated, all based on the wrong assumption that it is possible to prevent companies being mixed up. Until this restriction is removed no practical solution of the all important tactical question is likely to be arrived at.

With an organization giving eight weak companies to a battalion, and in the face of recent military history, the tenacity with which the authorities hold on to their thoroughly impracticable restriction about not mixing up companies is inexplicable.

In the opinion of a high German authority, "It destroys at the very outset of the action the captain's control over his company, and entirely ignores the losses inseparable from a general assault on a position, and that to carry a front of 800 yards it is necessary to put in a whole division. Battalions must be intermixed before even a distance of 500 yards from the enemy has been reached, and by the time the zone of decision (about 300 yards) has been attained, whole regiments will be required.

"This danger can only be guarded against by accustoming the men in peace to act under the orders of the officers nearest to them, and on the part of the officers by redividing amongst themselves the commands as each fresh reinforcement comes into line. This is the universal practice in Germany at present. The British advance is altogether too slow.

"In the German attack, from the moment the signal for the advance is given, all troops in rear of the fighting line move off in quick time and never halt; if the fighting line is checked, they close on it and carry it on with them.

"The usual distance between successive lines is about 400 paces."

Fourth Stage.

At the moment of closing on the defenders' position, all three arms must be well up to co-operate. The same German authority above quoted remarks that, "the different arms of the service in the English army are not sufficiently closely united; they fail to perceive that each only exists for the other, and that the efficiency of an army is measured by the product, not the sum, of the efficiency of each arm."

The guns must be prepared to move forward (not necessarily on the flank) as their infantry advances, and take up fresh positions, and, if necessary to re-establish confidence, come right up alongside of it, to within 900 yards of the enemy, i.e. within the deadly zone of the defenders' rifle-fire. The fatal fallacies which the breech-loader brought in its train must be swept away before cavalry or artillery resume their proper role on the field of battle.

The cavalry must be ready, not simply willing, to sacrifice itself in the event of a repulse, to give time for its beaten infantry to be rallied, or to retreat to a safe distance and extemporize a rear-guard, in the event of a retirement being deemed expedient.

In the event of success it is equally imperative for the sister arms to be well up with their infantry; the artillery to make good the captured positions against counter

attack, and to shell the retreating enemy; and the cavalry to pursue and reap the full fruits of the victory.

The efficiency of artillery depends to such a large extent on accurate shooting, and this again on the nature of the ground and the state of the weather, that any calculations not made on the spot are worthless.

The principle that artillery should not fire over infantry is entirely a wrong one, and practically deprives the infantry of the co-operation of its guns.

In pointing out this tendency of British gunners not to fire over their infantry, the same German officer before quoted, explains, "That, even in a fight of one corps against another, it would be impossible for the artillery to prepare the attack from a position on its flank, because, taking 2,000 yards as the distance between the two fronts, the outer battery of the line would be some 4,000 yards distant from the point of attack; and where several corps are fighting alongside each other, the idea is perfectly impracticable."

Artillery-fire Tactics in Attack.

1st. Fire on hostile artillery, if it be visible; if not shell his infantry.

2nd. Change position as seldom as possible during an action, as guns are vulnerable and silenced when moving; and if the target be visible, 200 or 300 yards, more or less, makes little difference with modern artillery.

When artillery moves forward it should move boldly and as far as necessary to co-operate with its advancing infantry.

3rd. Batteries should be massed as much as the ground admits of for the sake of unity of command. Experience shows it to be difficult to concentrate the fire of dispersed batteries.

Musketry-fire Tactics in Attack, as laid down in the Field Exercises,

"depend on a knowledge of the range, the skill" of the firer, and the formation of the ground; and in the field, the moral condition of the troops, and the quantity of ammunition at the disposal of the assailants.

According to the Field Exercise "distances are classified as follows: up to 400 yards 'Short Distances,' from 400 to 900 yards 'Medium Distances,' from 900 to 1,700 yards 'Long Distances,' and from 1,700 to 3,100 yards (the extreme range of the rifle) 'Extreme Distances.'

"The preparation of the attack at 'long' distances belongs to the artillery; it is only in exceptional cases that the infantry can take part in it.

"A premature opening of fire by the fighting line may lengthen the action, and lead to a deficiency of ammunition at the final stage, and thus weaken the moral energy of the assailants.

"In open ground the troops in the fighting line should only begin firing at 'medium' distances, provided the enemy is visible; if he is not seen the time is better spent in getting over the ground than in halting to fire at an inadequate target.

"In broken and covered ground the fighting line may advance to quite 'short' distances without firing.

"In the attack volley-firing should be employed, in the early stages when at the longer distances. It cannot be used by troops during the advance in the final stage, where any halt would delay the vigorous offensive required at the moment. Volleys should also be used by troops specially detailed for the purpose from the reserve, and placed on commanding positions on either flank to cover the general advance.

"When a position has been carried, volley-firing is the best fire to be used in the pursuit, and when getting the men in hand again.

"A dropping fire can produce no useful effect, and has the drawback of slackening the advance.

"The fighting line should be reinforced as the fire can be made to tell; it is essential to bring from the commencement an effective concentration of fire on the enemy's position.

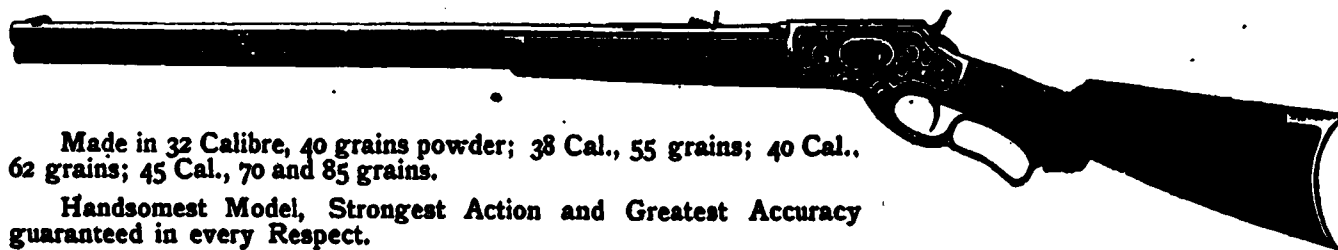
"The useful effect of musketry-fire depends on its precision, combined with rapidity, but it is better to seek such effect from accuracy, and from a sufficient number of rifles brought up into the line (without over-crowding) than from undue rapidity from a smaller number."

These regulations are thus quoted with the object of impressing them upon the student (a considerable experience having convinced the writer that they are too often ignored altogether or slurred over).

Fire-discipline, especially when the attack commences, should be the most important part of an infantry soldier's training.

(To be continued.)

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