

THE DEFENCE OF HOUSES.

[BY THE EDITOR.]

It is often convenient during the progress of military operations to hold a small fortified position against the enemy, such as a church, or large house. Though these buildings were never erected with an intention of converting them into fortresses, yet we know by experience that they are capable of making a successful defence upon occasion. Numbers of gentlemen's houses were turned into strongholds during the great civil war in England, and in the gallant hands of the cavaliers made a stout resistance to the Parliamentary levies. Hundreds of instances might be mentioned; we will cite here only three remarkable ones. In 1703, the chevalier Folard held a strong stone farm-house near Liescia, with four Companies of Grenadiers, against a far stronger force of the best troops of the great Prince Eugene, commanded by the Prince of Wirtemberg, so successfully, that although the attacking party employed cannon, and once penetrated into the courtyard, they were ultimately compelled to retire.

During the same year, in the course of the campaign in Poland, a Swedish lieutenant, with but twenty-four men, was detached from Petrichoff to levy contributions; his party was discovered and pursued by the celebrated partisan, Smelegski, with eight hundred men. The Swede threw his little party into a house at the entrance of a village, which he defended with so much skill and courage that Smelegski was obliged to abandon the attack, with the loss of some hundred or so of his men killed, and more wounded. Smelegski repeatedly offered honorable terms of surrender to the Swedish officer, but was disdainfully repulsed.

M. De Saxe, afterwards the great Field Marshal, with eighteen men, being pursued by a large force of hostile cavalry, shut himself up in an inn at Crachnitz, a Polish village, and defended it for several hours against 600 horse, and 200 dragoons—and when night came, though he himself was wounded, charged out of the court, on horseback, broke through the cordon of the enemy, and escaped to Sandomir, through a thick wood close to the Inn.

Officers who command companies, particularly of Riflemen, should always recollect, that it is ever within the probabilities of their profession, that they may be called on at a moment's notice to discharge such a duty as the defence of a house. We have heard men say, "Oh, field fortifications, the attack and defence of posts, and things of that sort, are no business of ours!" To which we have always retorted, "Then you can have very little of the true soldier spirit, for it is the business of a soldier to make himself acquainted with all the details of his profession, so far as his abilities and opportunities will let him." Some men will tell you that it is the duty of the Engineers to look after these matters;—but we say that it is just in a case like this where there is the least chance of an Engineer being on the spot, and that it is also just the kind of case in which an intelligent and enterprising young officer will make his mark. We would rather take our chance of obtaining the sole credit of some dashing, though comparatively unimportant exploit in war, in the independent command of 20 men, than share in the general glory of a great engagement.

To take our own Volunteer companies; if officers

for a moment suppose that when they themselves have learned the mere company drill, and are told by the Inspecting Field Officer that the performance of their Companies is very respectable, there is nothing more to learn, they vastly deceive themselves. The Company drill, allowing it to be done to perfection, is to the soldier, just what the very first lessons are to the musician; the mere alphabet of his art.

To exemplify our meaning we take this very subject, the defence of a building.

It may happen that the force of circumstances, the emergency, may compel an officer with a detached party, as it happened to the Swedish officer, and to M. De Saxe, to act on his own responsibility in occupying and defending a building. He may do so if surprised and pressed by a superior force, in the hope of speedy assistance from his own people. Under no circumstances whatever, that we can imagine, can an officer do wrong, who resists the enemy to the last moment. War is after all a chapter of accidents, and it is impossible to say what effect the resolute defence of an isolated post may not have on the result of some much larger operation.

If ordered to defend a post, that is quite another matter:—the officer acts under definite instructions, and has no responsibility, beyond that of carrying out his orders to the letter.

But how is an officer to execute these orders, or even act on his own responsibility, without knowing how? He cannot have a military library in his pocket, nor should we give much for the probable efficiency of measures taken by a man who has to carry them out with a book in his hand. Years have elapsed since we ever read a line of the subject, but there are lessons, particularly where the simple first principles are concerned, that can never be forgotten.

Suppose then, that either acting on his own responsibility, or in accordance with orders, an officer is ordered to defend a building, what is needed? Decision—Time—Material.

Decision. As Schiller says in his great play, "Wallenstein's camp," of the soldier—

"His sharpness makes him, the dash, the tact,
The cunning to plan, the courage to act,"—

We mean then by "Decision" that almost indescribable quality of mind, which intuitively as it were, leads an officer, almost in an instant, to comprehend the position in which he is placed, the state of things about him, the necessary steps to be taken, and the tact of communicating in the fewest and simplest words his will to others, and enforcing obedience by the power of his own energy and example. Indecision is fatal—it spreads like the virus of an epidemic disease. How can the men do ought but waver and hesitate when they find their officer's brains go wool-gathering? Knowledge, the thorough understanding of what is to be done, and the way to do it, is the parent of decision. What a fearful thing would it be were the Surgeon whose knife is within a hair's breadth of the issues of life, suddenly to become undecided? But on the decision of an officer scores of brave men's lives may hang. Without the necessary knowledge there can, as we insist, be no decision.

Time. The more time for preparation the better, but this cannot always be attained; the best must be done that circumstances will admit, and it must always be recollected, that if the party is thrown into a house in ever so great a hurry, a portion of it must instantly be set to

strengthen the defences, while the other does its best to beat off the assailants.

Material. Almost everything, wood, stone, iron, furniture, that can be collected, should be so as quickly as possible, together with working tools, and a supply of water—but on these points we shall enlarge when we speak of the preparations to be made within the building.

Of the nature of the building to be defended. Except it is a regularly built blockhouse, of heavy logs, and if possible of hard and green timber, we should have but little hope of holding out a house constructed of timber; none whatever, if cannon, or rockets could be brought against it. The incendiary projectiles would soon burn it over our heads. With a strong stone building the matter is altogether different. A Stone building properly prepared in the manner to be hereafter indicated will resist light Artillery, six and nine pounders, for a long time.

(To be Continued.)

OTTAWA RIFLES.—We have great pleasure in inserting the following communication addressed by the Adjutant General to Captain Patterson, commanding the First Company of Volunteer Rifles in this City; a letter of similar tenor has been addressed to Captain Turgeon, commanding the second Company.

ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE,
TORONTO, March 7, 1857.

SIR,—I am directed by His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief, to acquaint you that His Excellency has received with much satisfaction the favorable report made of the appearance and progress at drill of the Company under your command, by Lieutenant Colonel McDougall, Inspecting Field Officer for Upper Canada, at his recent inspection. The number present on parade is very creditable to both officers and men.

I have the honor to be,

SIR,
Your most obedient servant,
DE ROTTEBURG,
Adjutant-General.

CAPTAIN PATTERSON,
Com. 1st Volunteer Militia
Rifle Co., Ottawa, Canada.

ADMIRAL NAPIER AND THE QUEEN.—Admiral Sir Charles Napier, in his "History of the Baltic Campaign of 1854," publishes the following letter to Prince Albert, declining the honor proposed to be conferred on him, of being invested with the insignia of a Knight of the Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath:—

"I have received your royal highness's commands to attend her Majesty on the 7th of July, to be invested with the insignia of a Knight of the Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath. I beg your royal highness will convey to her Majesty my humble duty and sincere thanks for the honor her Majesty contemplated conferring on me, and I beg most respectfully your royal highness will convey to her Majesty my regret that I do not think I can, consistent with my own honor, accept it. I beg to assure your royal highness that I mean no disrespect to her Majesty; she has not a more devoted subject than myself, and I am ready to lay down my life in her service. I have served her Majesty's family with honor and credit for 33 years, and at the end of my career I have been grossly insulted, and false interpretations put upon my despatches, by the Admiralty, and been degraded and dismissed because I resented, as became a man of honor, injuries wounding to my character. Her Ma-