

NEW DRILL AND TACTICS.

(Concluded from Page 63.)

The *Times* commences a critique of the new drill and tactics by referring to the infantry:—In the first place, says our contemporary the battalion used to be the unit, and there has been an almost universal consent among tacticians that it is too large to be held in hand by one man, since the tendency has increased to cover wider spaces with the same number of men. This tendency comes directly from the power of the breech-loader, which covers more ground with its fire than the old weapon. The Prussians divided their battalions into four companies, placed a mounted officer in command of each company, and gave him and his 250 men more responsibility and power of initiative. The plan was found to work admirably, combined as it was with much tactical practice for all the junior officers. Each company was formed into two divisions, so that there were eight divisions in a battalion. In the English battalions there are for the future to be eight companies, and four of them, or a half-battalion, are to be placed under the command of one of the majors, who is of course mounted. As English battalions are weaker than Prussian, and as there is no such scheme for the perpetual supply during war of men trained previously in the battalion, there can be no doubt that the half-battalion will practically become not much stronger than the Prussian company. The English officers being also more numerous in proportion to their men than the Prussians it will be possible for the major to control a larger force than the Prussian company. But a further step has been taken, and one of almost inestimable value. According to the old Drill-book, officers were warned that, Her Majesty having approved the regulations, no deviation from them was to be permitted. No encouragement was held out in the English service to those who were ready to take responsibility, while exactly the contrary feeling was impressed on Prussian officers. They were allowed every latitude, and held responsible that no Regulations should be permitted to hinder their taking the initiative. In the new order given by the Duke of Cambridge, majors are told that much will depend on their adapting their movements to the exigencies of the moment, and they are to understand that it is their duty to profit by any openings which may occur, without waiting for orders. This may be accepted as one of the most important orders ever given to the English Army, and the fact is so inspiring that we hardly like to express the wish that it had been couched in the same terms as the one following it, whereby officers commanding divisions or brigades are told to understand clearly that the formations for attack and changes of front laid down are not intended to be adhered to "unless the features of the ground and the numbers and dispositions of the enemy suit." "In every case they must exercise their own judgment in adopting the formation best suited to the actual circumstances."

Proceeding to details, our contemporary thinks it rather a weak point that two of the small English companies are to be put together and called a double company, as it appears that one-half of the double company will frequently be skirmishing supported by the other half, and as all experience of modern war teaches that the supports will inevitably press forward into the line of skirmishers, breaking up into skirmishing order themselves, there will certainly be a mixture

of men known only partially to the senior captain, who will of course, in such a case take the command. To obviate this difficulty, each double company is recommended to work constantly at drills as a compound body, so that both captains may be acquainted with the men of both single companies.

Heretofore, no authorised formation for attack other than the advance of a whole brigade in line has existed, but the new order will cause a battalion acting alone to send either a definite half-battalion or half of each half-battalion to the front as skirmishers and supports. The remainder will follow in column of double companies or in line, according to circumstances, the skirmishers being 500 yards in front of the main body and the supports 200 yards. The *Times* observes on this: "None of the advocates of progress in tactics, so far as we are aware wished to abolish the line altogether, and substitute heavy columns of attack for it. What they wished to see abolished was that long stiff, theoretical line of battalions, bound fast to each other, so slow in formation so crippled in advance, borrowed from German Frederick, and long ago cast off as an incumbrance by modern German tacticians. They wished to substitute for it some such formation as the new one promulgated by authority—a number of small bodies each working independently, except in so far as it must not lose the others or fail to support them in emergencies, capable of changing from line to column, or into a mixed formation of skirmishers, line and small columns, acting always 'according to circumstances.' There is not a military nation in Europe which does not use the line when occasion serves, and no nation uses heavier columns than were constantly exposed to fire on Salisbury Plain. The old controversy of line versus heavy columns of attack, was settled long ago, and has really nothing to do with the questions which have so lately agitated the minds of soldiers, and are now settled for the present by the new order. For the present we say, because no man can predict when some new development in weapons or increase in mobility may render further modification of forms necessary. We are far, however, from anticipating such further changes, at any rate for a long time, because the new order of attack is adaptable to many unforeseen circumstances, and officers are not only permitted, but enjoined to think for themselves, and act according to these circumstances."

"The formation for a battalion acting alone as an attacking force will be—half of it in front skirmishing (either one of the half battalions, or half of each half battalion) the remainder being held back as a main body, either in double company columns or in line, according to circumstances. The supports of the skirmishers (two companies) are to be in open file, that is to say, they will not form stiff lines, but flexible ones, the individual soldiers being, therefore, more or less independent. They are to be 200 yards behind the skirmishing line. Doubtless this will come to be 'according to circumstances' too—for no officers would be justified in neglecting the cover of a house or a dip in the ground to give shelter to his men. If we look back to the old English practice, as exemplified by the Light Brigade in the Peninsula, and related by one of the actors themselves, Colonel G. Gawler in his *Essentials of Good Skirmishing* (a book well worth republication), we find it laid down that while no man, standing up in his rank, touching a comrade right and left of him in a line, may be permitted to shrink one inch from shot or shell because in that case he

would derange the formation, exactly the opposite course is proper for skirmishers. He 'who in a skirmish neglects to make the most of every foot of cover, has no right to the title of a wise soldier.' For these and other reasons the place of the supports will doubtless be 'according to circumstances,' the distance being only laid down as a guide. The main body is always to deploy when under fire. Doubtless in war it will often reinforce the skirmishers, for we are entirely sceptical as to the possibility of a line of half battalions in formation making their way where a line of half battalions in skirmishing order has failed.

"A brigade is to send to the front one of its battalions (which of them is to depend on circumstances), four of its companies in skirmishing order and four in support. 'When circumstances of ground render advisable the skirmishers may advance by ranks the front rank 100 yards or so in advance of the rear rank.' Supports, with open files, 200 or 300 in rear of the skirmishers, remaining battalions 'in line of half battalions double columns, at deploying distance 100 or 400 yards in rear of the supports.' If the brigade happen to have four battalions, one of them 'will be placed as a reserve, 400 or 500 yards in rear of the centre, if possible, under cover, and either in battalion or half battalion double columns.'

(To be Continued.)

The German Government is now considering the claims of the various German States to share in the captures made from the French during the late war. Bavaria, Saxony, and Wurtemberg have already been put in possession of the trophies which were won by their armies in the field, but the booty given up at capitulations has not yet been distributed. At Sedan the French destroyed all their military insignia except an eagle, which was afterwards found in a ditch, so that the booty to be divided consists only of guns and the arms and ammunition of the French troops. As the Bavarian army and the Saxon *corps d'armée* took part in this battle, they claim a share in the spoil. The only corps which could put forward a claim to divide the spoil of Metz with Prussia is the Hessian division, which has since been amalgamated with the Prussian Army. The same is the case with the Baden corps which fought at Strasburg. The Mecklenburgers, who were engaged at Toul, might claim the eagle of the Mobiles and the flag of a dragoon regiment which were given up at the capitulation of that town; but they too, have since been incorporated with the Prussian Army. At the capitulation of Paris 1912 guns, but no flags, were given up to the German troops, and a portion of these are claimed by the Bavarians, Saxons, and Wurtembergers.

Several of the St. Petersburg journals are again calling attention to the necessity of establishing a complete system of defence along the western frontier, strengthening their appeal by the *in terrore* argument of the vast preparations set on foot in the same quarters by Prussia. "The Government of Berlin," says a Russian critic, in a recent article on national defences, "has commenced a gigantic reform in its system of fortification—a reform to which we cannot but pay attention, since it is palpably directed against ourselves. Glogau, Thorn, Posen, Churlowitz, are all marked in the list of fortresses to be remodelled upon the newest principles, and transformed into first class arsenals; and to oppose to all this we have palpably nothing."