

Musketry Training and Judging Distance.

The one object in view on which all attention must be concentrated in the musketry training of the Forces is preparation for the demands of war. It should be clearly recognised that the rifle-shooting, upon which the country is expected to spend large sums of money, must be part of the military preparation for the whole Force, and not merely a sport and accomplishment for a few experts.

There is no doubt that our musketry training has been (in common with the rest of the Empire), and still is, carried out as if the sport and accomplishment of the expert was still of more importance than military preparation in its true meaning. Only in the British Empire and in China is the bull's-eye target or the fixed target, purposely made conspicuous by a large artificial background, used for anything but the most elementary training.

This subject is receiving great and earnest attention at Hythe, and no doubt we shall soon obtain the results of the tests carried out and experience gained there, and should then be in a position to remodel our musketry regulations so as to insure that musketry training is carried out as far as is possible to insure good shooting under war conditions.

I have found that the practice of judging distance is almost entirely neglected. There is nothing of greater value in the field, and the successful result of rifle-shooting in war often depends upon it.

I cannot too strongly emphasize the necessity for insisting on this training. All men should be carefully instructed and practised in judging distance under varied conditions, but there are some men who have a natural aptitude and are interested in it, and many who can never be very successful. I would suggest that a few specially selected men of the former class in each unit should be encouraged to make themselves as perfect as possible in this work, in order that they may become really expert and reliable judges of distance of all sorts of objects under any conditions, and that it be made worth their while to do so by such rewards as are now given for special efficiency in other branches.

TACTICAL EXERCISES AND MANŒUVRES.

As I have explained already in various portions of this report, my inspections this past year have, wherever possible, taken the form of tactical exercises or manœuvres in the field.

I may here be permitted to quote the definitions of the above, as defined in a Memorandum on Training recently issued by the War Office, London:—

“‘Tactical exercises’ are defined as operations against a skeleton Force, the initiative of the Commander of which is limited, so as to allow the exercise to be carried out in accordance with the wishes of the officer directing the operations.”

“‘Manœuvres’ are defined as operations between opposing Forces or against a skeleton Force, in which the Commanders are allowed freedom of action within the limits of the scheme.”

In several cases the knowledge and ability of the Commanders and staffs to understand what was required, and to handle their troops in a proper manner to attain the desired object (considering their limited opportunities for learning and practising this art), in others the ability to learn and aptitude for the work if given a proper opportunity to learn, and in all cases the keenness, enthusiasm, and desire to do their best of such as did attend of all ranks and all arms, have been exceedingly gratifying, and are the clearest possible proof of what splendid results we could get if only sufficient numbers could be induced by any means to train for a sufficient time.

The officers and men who come out are the enthusiasts, who willingly give their service to their country, and no praise can be too high for them in return for their unselfish sacrifice, especially when the only return they get in many cases is the jeer of their fellows who do nothing.

In spite of this it is my duty to record my absolute conviction, which is that, owing entirely to want of opportunity to learn their work in the field from various causes, neither the Field Force as a whole in any district, nor any unit of which it is composed, can be honestly called efficient all round to deal with the varied situations with which it might be reasonably expected to cope in war.

In peace, work in the field without criticism is worse than useless as a rule, because faults and mistakes are not recognised, and are repeated next time. In war, bullets to a great extent take the place of umpires, and the mistakes are generally made apparent by the result.

When criticizing field-work I have always tried to point out (as well as showing the mistakes) how, in my opinion, improved methods could have been adopted, and I have always found that my remarks were taken entirely in the spirit in which they were intended, which is for the good and improvement of the Force as a whole. I am satisfied that all ranks have recognised that I have nothing but praise to give to the men who try to learn their work, and I thoroughly understand their difficulties. My criticisms are in the direction of showing the absolute impossibility of attaining efficiency in the field without training and practice for all; and I take it that is an important part of the Inspector-General's duty, contained in the direction to “Watch over the military system, and bring to light its defects.” Briefly, the faults which have been, on the whole, most apparent in the conduct of the exercises and manœuvres have been,—

- (1.) In very many cases there has been little knowledge of the use and effects of fire, field-gun, machine-gun, and rifle.
- (2.) The knowledge possessed of the “service of protection” is not sufficient, and this work has not been practised.
- (3.) Signalling in the field practically does not exist, except in the specially trained corps at District Headquarters, and even in some cases there is backward.
- (4.) The orders issued and the reports received in the field are often practically worthless.

With regard to the former they should be as short and clear as possible, and should make plain to the subordinate as much as is necessary for him to know