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SOME NOTES ON MODERN TACTICS.

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IN a boxing contest, when the men are of approximately equal strength and skill, both alternately attack and defend; when ill matched, one is mainly on the defensive, though at times attacking.

In these respects battles may be said to resemble glove fights, but as no two boxing matches can be alike in details, so no two battles can be similar, and, in the battlefield, the difference is accentuated by the factors of topography, climate, supply, etc.

Battles may be divided into two categories: the first when both sides possess approximately equal force; the second, when one is preponderantly stronger.

In the first case both may be expected to attack, and though, in the course of the action, a greater or less proportion of the troops on either side will, according to the fortunes of the field, be thrown on the defensive, still, the main object of each combatant will be attack.

In the second class, the weaker will, by skilful use of ground, by field fortification, by mobility, endeavour to economise force in one portion of the battle ground, in order that, in another, he may possess, if not preponderance, at least equality.

The action of the weaker will, therefore, take the form of offensive-defensive as opposed to the unqualified offensive of the stronger. But the latter, even if not finally defeated, may, in certain localities, be temporarily thrown on the defensive.

A great battle between two armies is the natural culmination of the strategical deployment, and of the direction in which the troops are afterwards launched.

A large army will occupy so considerable a frontage if its formation is linear, or depth and frontage if moving in *échelon* or lozenge shape, that the exigencies of time and space will preclude any sweeping changes of formation once the forward movement is commenced.

Hence, the order of deployment will, in a marked degree, remain the order of battle, with the modification that the troops will, in the latter, occupy a more restricted frontage.

Since a reserve is only advantageous if so situated that it can be used whenever required, the employment of a central reserve to a formation in other respects linear or *échelon* is precluded, for such body cannot, as a rule, come into action until after a march of many miles, and during this interval the situation may have so radically altered that it may not only be too late, but its presence may be required in quite another locality.

When an army is marching in line or *échelon* of masses, it is better, therefore, to place all troops from the beginning of the fight, where they will be finally employed, trusting to the effect of vigorous pressure to oblige the enemy to conform to our movements. This arrangement, moreover, is in accord with the general principle of linear action, which seeks to attain victory by simultaneous and convergent pressure, and is also suitable to *échelon*.

Even if the army is arranged in lozenge shape, which implies that a fraction is held back behind the remainder, and that success is to be sought from successive but continuous development of force, it is clear that the direction in which this fraction is to be deployed must, if the greatest advantage is to be gained from its presence, be decided soon after close contact is established with the enemy, or the stroke may fall too late.

In other words, whether advancing in linear, *échelon*, or lozenge formation a large army must march in close approximation to its battle order, and the grand tactics of the attacker in modern war will more nearly resemble strategy than the conception of a general engagement, followed by a decisive stroke by the reserve in whichever locality the course of the battle has shown to be most favourable.

For similar reasons, when the offensive-defensive is adopted, the direction of the counterstroke must be pre-arranged, and the troops disposed accordingly.

In minor tactics, however, considerations of time and space will usually permit the retention of a reserve, to be employed, after the enemy has been forced to show his hand, as circumstances may demand.

In grand tactics, then, there will be little distinction between the local operations of one or other division or corps, for all will exercise, on the enemy, the greatest possible pressure, so as to mar his plans, though the troops on the flanks will endeavour to envelop rather than to break the enemy's line.

But, in minor tactics, the units first committed to action will fight in order to force the enemy to expose his dispositions and absorb his local reserves, when an opportunity will be offered for the employment of their own reserves.

When two modern armies advance to meet one another, as did the French and Austrians at Marengo and Eckmühl, and the French and Allies at Lützen, each will be preceded by a force of cavalry sent ahead to discover the position and direction of march of the enemy's main body, and the forward movement of each will be screened and protected by another group of horsemen, so as to allow to the strategical cavalry a free hand to manœuvre.

It is in the nature of things that, sooner or later, the two strategical cavalries will meet and fight for mastery, and that, until one or other has gained complete victory, a state of mutual attraction and neutralisation will supervene. In such circumstances it would seem that the protective cavalry will tend to be drawn into the area of the operations of the strategical cavalry,

for both sides will call up every possible reinforcement, and the protection of the main armies will therefore fall to the advanced guards.

If the cavalry of one side succeed in gaining some important success, the rôle of the defeated will, with the assistance of the other arms, be still to so far menace and contain the victors, as to prevent them, at the risk of defeat in detail, from initiating other operations.

Complete success in the cavalry fight will leave the victor free to commence whatever undertakings seem best calculated to further the general plan of campaign, and these, after requisite information of the movements of the enemy's infantry has been obtained, and arrangements have been made to watch them closely, may include attack of the hostile columns with the object of delaying them, or an enterprise against the enemy's line of supply. But, as a general principle, cavalry should undertake nothing calculated to prejudice its mobility, and power to strike hard and quickly in any given direction, nor should its efforts be directed so far from the probable field of battle that their effect will not immediately be felt.

No matter what may be the position of the strategical and protective cavalry, and of the special reconnoitring and other detachments sent out by these troops, both armies will, in addition, be preceded by advanced guards.

Since neither the mass of cavalry, owing to the opposition of the hostile horsemen, nor the reconnoitring detachments, by reason of their weakness or of the enemy's vigilance, may be able to procure adequate intelligence of his dispositions, this duty may become one of the principal functions of the advanced guard or guards, according as the formation of the army is linear, *échelon*, or *lozenge*.

In the latter cases the leading group will form a general advanced guard to the remainder; but in the linear form, a wider frontage will be under close observation, and there will, perhaps, be less risk of defeat in detail.

Since advanced guards are required to gain information, and will certainly have to fight for it, they must consist of the three arms and be of sufficient strength to hold their own until reinforced, should they find themselves involved with superior forces.

In a modern battle the Commander-in-Chief will remain in some convenient position, sufficiently removed from the temptation to see events with his own eyes but near enough to the field to quickly receive news of the fight. He will, therefore, watch the fight through the medium of the reports of his staff and commanders, content to supervise by indicating when and where special pressure is to be brought to bear, rather than to direct.

The divisional and corps leaders, on the other hand, will ride forward to some locality whence they can observe and draw conclusions from the action of their advanced troops.

These generals may be followed by their artillery, which will halt in covered positions, whilst the brigade commanders take stock of the situation and topography, order necessary reconnaissance of routes and localities to be made, and, if necessary and desirable, the construction of artificial cover in possible fire positions.

As the action develops, the divisional or corps leader will be able to judge the areas where his artillery can be most favourably disposed, and the guns will be moved in these directions by covered lines.

Probably, at first, guns will fire from concealed positions, or from earth cover previously thrown up, but in the later stages of the fight it may be necessary and possible to serve the guns in the open.

The corps or divisional commander may retain a portion of his artillery in hand as a reserve of fire or to meet casualties, but the desire for concentration of effort, and the long range of modern guns, which enables them to bring, from a wide frontage, fire to bear on any given locality will usually tend to their early employment.

Once in position and subject to the general instructions of the corps or divisional commander and to specific orders to move towards or concentrate fire on any given locality, the guns must be fought by the artillery officers, whose aim will be to co-operate, to the greatest advantage, in the infantry attack. Whether fire is directed on the enemy's artillery, on his infantry, or on both, will depend on the local situation. Since the enemy's artillery will rarely be completely silenced, the guns will, as a rule, shell both hostile artillery and infantry, directing fire mainly on the latter, subject to the condition that the artillery fire against our guns must not be permitted to become overwhelming.

The artillery having been disposed of, the infantry of the main bodies, as it arrives, will be pushed forward into the fight, and in greatest strength towards localities more easy of approach or tactically more important; but as small a force as is consistent with the attainment of the immediate purpose will be engaged.

Such infantry units as are not, for the moment, required in front, may, with the technical troops, be usefully employed in putting into a state of defence the ground where they are halted.

The divisional or corps cavalry will, when the action has joined, have fallen back, and the portions not utilised for maintenance of communication, for security of flanks, for reconnaissance, etc., can either be retained in reserve, or placed in a position or positions of expectation, in localities well adapted to mounted action.

Owing to the extended frontage on which the battle will take place, pressure in one locality will usually be best and most quickly relieved, not by direct assistance, but by counter-pressure on some other place, more especially if of importance

to the enemy, and on this principle both Commander-in-Chief, and local leaders, who will mutually be in close inter-communication, will direct their operations.

In addition to watching and supervising movements, the Commander-in-Chief and other generals will give careful thought to administration, and a portion of the staffs will be fully occupied in organising supply of ammunition, removal of wounded, distribution of rations and water, as from the perfection of these arrangements much will depend.

And so the battle will continue, both combatants gradually expending their force, until one side or other becomes exhausted, until a disaster in some locality necessitates the retirement of the remainder, or until the whole or a portion of one army is enveloped by the other.

A battle may, however, take another form, in circumstances when one side intrenches and awaits the other, and in such case both preliminaries and details may vary somewhat from the example already considered.

The employment of the strategical, and even of the protective cavalry will not probably be very different, but the course of the action in the other introductory phases will depend on whether the defender covers his position with advanced guards, and so takes up false fronts, or whether he merely throws forward a weak screen or line of outposts.

The advantages claimed for the former method are that the enemy may be exhausted and forced to deploy prematurely; the drawback is that the defender will commence the battle with the moral disadvantage of retirement by part of his force, which may be followed by the attacker right into the prepared position.

If the first method is adopted, the earlier stages of the battle may take the form already discussed, except that, since the defender will be stationary, or even prone to give way early, it should not be so difficult for the attacker to form a correct opinion of the situation.

In the second case, the advanced guard commander or commanders, may be forced to engage their troops with more circumspection, in order to avoid the risk of defeat in detail.

Since, too, such of the artillery and infantry of the defender as are in position will be under cover, natural or artificial, and will possess knowledge of ranges, troops attacking these localities will be obliged, at first, to act with vigour, tempered by caution.

But the units, on the one side, undertaking enveloping movements or turning operations, and those on the other, delivering the great counter-attack, may adopt the procedure outlined in the case when both sides advance to meet one another.

In regard to the occupation of a position, it is a truism that portions too inaccessible, either owing to natural features, or to the art of the engineer, will defeat their own purpose, for if the attacker cannot approach, neither can the defender issue from them, and the former will therefore be able to contain the

occupants with a few troops, diverting those thus economised to other parts of the field.

Whether local counter-attacks should be made from the intrenched position is, perhaps, doubtful.

Often an attacker, by following troops who have delivered a local counter-attack, has succeeded in obtaining a footing in localities previously found impregnable.

On the other hand, a too passive resistance is harmful to the *morale* of the defender, and permits the assailant's errors to go unpunished.

The question is, therefore, one for decision according to the exigencies of the moment; but it would seem that the attacker should not be allowed to mass troops, undisturbed, within assaulting distance of any locality, nor, without an effort to evict him, to establish himself on ground gained by assault.

Whether all available troops should deliver a local counter-attack, or whether it should be made only by supports and reserves, without direct assistance from the firing line, is again a moot point.

If the first method is adopted, and the attack fails, no troops remain to meet the enemy's pursuit; but under the second system, failure may result from want of force, and the firing line may be swept away in the subsequent rout.

It would appear, then, that the former plan possesses fewest drawbacks.

The attitude of commanders of all grades will not differ, in this type of battle, from that in an action when both advance. But the defender will possess this advantage, that his arrangements for ammunition and food supply, for removal of wounded, etc., and even as to possible retreat, can be made before the battle is joined.

No battle can be really decisive unless a large portion of the enemy's army is captured, or so effectually dispersed, that, for some time, it will be of no value.

These ends can be attained either by enveloping the whole or part of the enemy's army, or by effective pursuit.

When successful, envelopment is decisive without further operations, but a victory of this nature demands considerable superiority of force. When partially successful, a considerable victory is gained, but troops, owing to the position of the wings, will not be well placed for pursuit, and the flanks will be lent to the enemy, who will, however, probably be incapable of availing himself of the opportunity.

If envelopment is abortive, the attacker will lend one or both flanks to his opponent, and will be without fresh troops to meet a counter-offensive.

Pursuit is seldom effective unless undertaken by the three arms, for cavalry and horse artillery, however well handled, will hardly be a match for large bodies of infantry with guns, unless the foot soldiers are demoralised.

But, in a well-fought action, all available infantry will usually be employed, and troops who have fought hard are rarely in condition to undertake new efforts, and to face fresh dangers; hence, effective pursuit will, as a rule, only be practicable when the victor has possessed unusual preponderance of force.

Even when pursuit is possible, and the enemy can be forced off his line of supply, the fruits of victory are not so immediately and certainly reaped as when the opponent is surrounded; consequently, in spite of its disadvantages, envelopment will be the probable aim of the stronger combatant.

Indirect pursuit, which attempts to head off the enemy, should be combined with direct pursuit, and the former will fall to the lot of the cavalry of the victor, always provided that the horsemen of the defeated army can be shaken off.