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Major F. C. Ormsby-Johnson R.M.L.I

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## RECONNAISSANCE AS A FINE ART UNDER THE PRESENT CONDITIONS OF WAR.<sup>1</sup>

*By Major F. C. ORMSBY-JOHNSON, R.M.L.I.*

PERHAPS, as an introduction to the subject of Reconnaissance, I may be allowed to quote a short passage from the fascinating pages of "Linesman," in the volume known as "Words by an Eye-witness," before I proceed to make some attempt to cope with the problem of "how to reconnoitre" on a large or small scale. And first let me add my conviction, that the key to reconnaissance, like that of the bilateral cypher, is "inspiration." Can it be evolved?

Before I make my quotation, may I anticipate a charge of irrelevancy by boldly stating my opinion, that I should hardly wish to reduce this vast abstraction, called Military Reconnaissance, to an academic study bounded and delimited by narrow concrete rules, which *must* fetter the practical student; though in order to grip this complex problem, an attempt must be made to outline the principles on which our troops may be instructed. And so to my quotations from the volume which, to my mind, more than any other dealing with the South African war, has brought home to the civilian and the soldier the very *atmosphere* of modern warfare:—

"Boers have two of the most valuable of martial qualities—an eye for country and self-reliance. Had they the third—the instinct of self-sacrifice—at command, they would be the most formidable fighting men on earth; even without it they are nearly so.

"The British soldier has the third—the only unteachable one—without the other two qualities, and he has it so abundantly that this deficiency has been sometimes nullified. Teach them to him, and you have a soldier who will conquer the world in arms, not as now with the full expectation of attending the funeral of one in every twenty of his friends."

Then again in another place the same author writes as follows:—

"The net result is what I have stated, that in *small* cunning the Boer is unequalled, and consequently holds in *small* affairs a great advantage over braver but less guileful opponents."

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was originally read before the officers of the garrison at Devonport, 7th January, 1902.

In these few words I maintain that we have almost the full measure of that enemy who, if some pessimists had been believed at the crisis of the South African campaign, was the perfect epitome of all the strategists who ever lived from Hannibal to Napoleon or the great Duke of Wellington.

But in sober logical English such nations as the twin Republics, now colonies of Great Britain, might have been *expected* to excel in those minor arts of espionage and tactical surprises much wanting in continuity which in nearly every case have been due to a long and careful, if possibly unconscious, study of the country and a decentralisation<sup>1</sup> of commandoes as well as instinctive training for guerilla war, induced by long years of struggle with nature and the native, which indeed were valuable assets, but which, if a campaign is only sufficiently prolonged, must inevitably be overshadowed by the modern army, which enjoys resources in the shape of a body of officers and men trained to treat war, and more particularly that branch of it which comes under the head of reconnaissance, as a *continuous* and by no means a spasmodic and occasional episode, the detached and illogical want of continuity of Boer actions being a marked feature of the campaign. So if an attempt is made both in peace manoeuvres and in actual warfare, to locate every unit of the enemy by means of reconnaissance, the cases of surprise will be fewer, because the habit of reconnaissance will be too strong to be disregarded and an absence of reports of a reliable nature will most certainly result in such modifications of the plans of all set in high authority, as to render it quite certain that no combined movement in force will be made without the basis of actual knowledge or deductions formed from reasonable hypotheses. For it must be borne in mind that for many reasons the British troops were impelled to hasten their movements in advance, and even to fight at the beginning of the campaign without any pause for detailed reconnaissance. Then, as the end drew near, *trained* intelligence checkmated the nature-trained Boer at his own game.

The next point which occurs to me as introductory to the subject is the measure of disguise and dissimulation which is lawful under the accepted "conventions of war," for this is a most material factor in discussing warlike reconnaissance, and more particularly that form of it which appeals to us so strongly, while our Army in South Africa is still engaged in a series of more or less detached operations, which, when the full history of the campaign is written, will claim, perhaps, as much attention from the military student as the pitched battles of this unique campaign.

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<sup>1</sup> There is internal evidence in the secret history of the Transvaal that the country *was* mapped out.

“Quoting from the ‘Aide-Mémoire’ of the French staff officer, I find this definition of the conduct which should characterise civilised troops in the matter of permissible and forbidden espionage :—

“The essential character of ‘espionage’<sup>1</sup> pure and simple is the concealment or dissimulation of the intention to observe an enemy’s dispositions in the garb and character of a non-combatant. Thus a soldier disguised as a civilian, or a civilian *affecting* the rôle of a disinterested or friendly party, and found in the act of taking notes, asking questions more or less material to the dispositions of the army, or found in possession of plans, sketches, or even *data* relating to the defences or locale of troop-units, is liable to be tried by a military court, though if such a person escapes and is caught on a subsequent occasion, when *not* engaged in espionage, he cannot be tried for his original offence.”

It, therefore, appears that the garb of the soldier, even when engaged in military espionage or reconnaissance, must be sufficiently indicative of his rôle as combatant to enable an enemy to recognise him as such when brought face to face with him in close combat, though I can find no clause or law, international or otherwise, which forbids the blackening of buttons, and the like, if such obsolete fashions as brass ornaments were ever again allowed to be worn in warlike operations.

The same rules, one must note, govern the use of the “white flag,” which is the sacred emblem of a desire to treat, and can never be fired on, unless the bearer or his party, on the refusal of the enemy to discuss matters, should commit some overt act of warfare, when he may be treated as a belligerent and shot.

Having thus touched cursorily on some of the rules of the great game of war, I approach the subject of reconnaissance more directly and divide it into the headings under which it naturally falls :—

Strategic Reconnaissance, Reconnaissance in Force, Special Patrols, Ordinary Patrols.

To begin with, the first and most obvious reconnaissance undertaken by the military representatives of the nation which is about to commit its cause to the arbitrament of war is that which, for want of a better term, I will call “Strategic Reconnaissance,” which is, of course, partly based upon the existing maps in the Intelligence Branch of the Army, and partly contained in special and consular and other reports, which inevitably find their way home when the war clouds are looming on the political horizon. The late Captain Gill, R.E., for instance, travelled much at his own expense, and brought back invaluable scientific information. Majors Younghusband and Yate did the same. Now I am prepared for

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<sup>1</sup> We do not recognise the term. The French *use* it, but denounce it as penal.

the objection that this can have very little to do with the *bulk* of the officers and men of the land forces, who are not likely to be employed in a rôle necessarily limited to a small percentage only. So that here I will ask you to bear with me in another slight digression, which may tend to elucidate my meaning.

It was just before the expeditionary force left these shores for the Egyptian war in 1882 that I met an officer in the smoking-room of a club closely studying one of Murray's guide-books. In reply to a question I put to him, he told me that as he could find no purely military hand-book on Egypt it had occurred to him that he might acquire some useful information from the volumes beloved of Cook's tourists. Now, whether or not the officer in question gained much from his perusal of Murray, it has often struck me that if some of the voluminous information collated at Head Quarters, could be distributed in "hand-books of war," as I may term them, with as much information with regard to the armament, habits, etc., of the enemy or potential enemy as possible, with lucid essays by the best authorities on the difficulties to be met with, and the alternative tactics most likely to bear fruit, with perhaps a chapter or two for the advanced student on strategy adaptable to the *terrain* to be occupied, the result would be that a large percentage of the officers and men would start with sound notions of the kind of enemy they were to be pitted against, and some knowledge of the climatic and other difficulties to be overcome. This in fine would be a kind of strategic reconnaissance which would place an army in the field, if all officers and men were encouraged to study the special hand-books in question as a habit of life, in a position in which they would not for long be at a loss in any clime or in any conflict. For instance, different war-study might be set for each season. Add to this the careful study of frontiers, wherever troops are stationed, with special reference to a mimic campaign and by a realistic war-game, in which the pieces are first placed on the map of the country, and the troops then moved over the identical ground in nature, and one arrives at some such tactical reconnaissance as should precede the proclamation of war, and form an adjunct to the strategic survey dealt with above.

And here, perhaps, before I proceed to touch lightly, for time is limited, on reconnaissance in force (a feat of consummate generalship if successful, but formerly *alleged* to be most dangerous as to the morale of an army if not judiciously worked out), on special reconnaissance and on the ordinary conduct of strong and weak patrols, I may say a word on the rationale of scouting in general, and on the methods of teaching officers and men how to make it a habit of life and not an occasional incident of a summer field-day.

But on proceeding to discuss details of the *tactical* reconnaissance of an enemy in position or on the march, it may be objected that no mention has been made of that reconnaissance of *country*, which enables a commander to appreciate the difficulties or the advantages of his advance or flank march or other movement in a specific direction. But I think this branch of the art is covered by what I have said above on the necessity of keeping officers and men up to date in the knowledge of their immediate environment both in war and peace. while the *data* for such reconnaissance are to be found in the text-books. To this end tactical marches would be carried out in time of peace at home with the view of locating an unseen enemy, and with a view to collective reports from commanders of dispersed units on the tactical features of the *terrain*, thus improving on the old system of detailing officers *without* troops to reconnoitre some days beforehand the country which is to be traversed by manœuvring units at a later date. Of course, one might recapitulate text-book aphorisms *ad nauseam* dealing with the headings of a detailed reconnaissance of country, which are all *sound* but by no means the object of this essay, which I now want to divert to that other channel, *i.e.*, reconnaissance in actual touch with the enemy.

And now passing on to the uses of a "reconnaissance in force," which in spite of its infrequency, I believe still to hold a place in military nomenclature, two great authorities must here be quoted, who are, or were, undeniably opposed to the practice, save as an exception and for a very special object. Thus both Field-Marshal Lord Wolseley and the late Lieut.-General Sir Edward Hamley have laid stress in "The Soldier's Pocket-Book" and "The Operations of War" respectively on the loss of morale consequent on an advance made with the obviously necessary consequence of retreat, while, of course, none but the supreme commander-in-chief and his staff can possibly judge whether the game is worth the candle, though the mass of officers and men soon become aware of the fact that the movement to the rear is planned as such, unless in the exceptional case of a proposed counter-attack of the enemy and the retreat becoming a rout.

But let me examine this question from the point of view of troops experienced in the use of the magazine rifle, the Q.F. mobile gun and with a strong and skilful hand on the reins, well adapted to handle light troops including mounted infantry. Of course, one's thoughts fly instinctively to certain actions in the South African campaign, which perhaps in the dry keen light of history we shall learn to regard as mere reconnaissances in force and not as pitched battles on selected ground, if indeed the latter term is appropriate to one engagement in twenty of the war, the circumstances so often tending to the splitting up of

intended battles into dispersed actions, in which what has been well called "the low cunning of the Boers" had full scope, with corresponding disadvantage to British troops trained to fight on more chivalrous a plan.

Now I want to deal with the question what is this subtle mood pervading an army, which is called "morale," for the definition is important and very relevant to the subject of a "reconnaissance in force." And again, has loss of morale—if the term means, as I prefer to translate it, the optimist or pessimist temper of a large body of men—been peculiarly noticeable during the present war? Turn again to the "Words of an Eye-witness" and we find that so far as the great mass of troops was concerned, the term had no particular meaning to an army which went to war with an absolutely certain conviction that it was bound to come out on top in the end. In this sense even Spion Kop was to the bulk of the army merely an *incident* of war, though "Linesman" very properly objects to the cynical use of the term when applied by florid and irresponsible scribes to the gallant deeds of men who placed that "incident" on the page of history in letters of blood.

Now without a single word of criticism, for this is not the time or place for it, let me picture for you some such impregnable position as those rugged ramparts of Natal, and assume that some kind of feint must be made to draw the fire and disclose the strength of an enemy in position. So the first question that arises is, how to gauge the force with which so tremendous a task is to be undertaken; and my impression is that, given the factors of smokeless powder, magazine rifles, machine and Q.F. guns, etc., the display of force required for the operation must be based upon two questions, *i.e.*:—1. Has the enemy a general knowledge of the average strength of the force opposed to him, such as, for instance, the Boers had while their lines or *sources* of communications were still open to them? 2. Can the fraction of the army, whether army corps, division, or lesser unit detailed for the reconnaissance, so disguise its strength by accidents of ground, stealthy approach, mobility, etc., as to keep the enemy in ignorance of the reality or falsity of the attack until too late to move reserves to the post or section threatened with exposure?

To this add a rider in the shape of the dogma, that the modifications in tactics forced upon us by the introduction of improved arms of precision will in most cases compel a prudent commander to hold his main body in readiness to force home the reconnaissances as an *immediate* sequel to the acquisition of a *pied à terre* in the hostile zone of operations.

*Immediate, i.e.*, in the sense that the operations are continuous, allowing only for brief pauses—the one operation being the complement of the other.

Then let me point out that this reading of a "reconnaissance in force" is a very different thing to that described and allowed by Lord Wolseley and Sir Edward Hamley under special circumstances. For what both were picturing and describing were mere isolated movements in advance by a force of all arms such as was conducted by Lord Raglan at Bulgarnac with 2 divisions, 2 cavalry regiments, and 9-pounder batteries (12, I think,) to extricate 4 squadrons of cavalry, or that by the Prussian General Stolberg against the French in the Forest of Marchenoir, which last was a leap in the dark, as the position, strength, and morale of the French forces were absolutely unknown factors.

Now a few paragraphs back I touched on the normal procedure in these days of pushing the attack hard close on the reconnaissance in force, and with reason; for what the Boers could do in the shape of prolonging lines of defence, changing front, or throwing back crochets, because they were both mobile and resourceful as to *every* unit of their extraordinary organisation, a modern Army possessing large bodies of mounted rifles and cavalry *should* and *would* do equally well, which manœuvres obviously would completely alter the conditions of the attack if an interval, even of hours, *only* should intervene between reconnaissance and the advance within striking distance of the main body.

But here, perhaps, an interpolation is necessary in order to refute the argument that no enemy worthy of the name would *allow* a force of all arms to remain on the tactical offensive for a period of time sufficient for the army in rear to deploy and form for attack, and to this I reply, that such a force of all arms as I have tried to picture would not only be sufficient to pose and manœuvre for some hours as a real attack, but that the main body would be already deployed and formed in its bivouac for an immediate advance, while the advanced reconnoitring units would be provided with mounted sappers and working parties of mobile infantry for the purpose of secret construction of defensible observation posts, which would be linked together by connecting posts and horsemen with special regard to lines of retreat, if so hard pressed and forced to give way, before the real attack should be in position to deliver the *coup de main*. And here I should like to point out that what I would call the "fighting bivouac" should be echeloned in advance or in rear of the more permanent camping ground, both in order to deceive the enemy and to ensure mobility.

Now, summing up briefly the *raison d'être* of a "reconnaissance in force" before I pass on to a more detailed commentary on the mode of instructing troops in the art of reconnaissance in small bodies, such as patrols from outpost lines, special and strong patrols, I arrive at the conclusion that this method of reconnaissance, in face of the improve-

ments in armaments and the increased advantages of the defence, would probably be applicable to the following cases, among others:—

1. An army which is in a position to attack before the enemy has time to alter the details of his defence, more particularly in the matter of moving bodies of men to points threatened by the reconnaissance in force. This pre-supposes that the advanced units of observation have fixed some objectives of the assault, and have so far succeeded in their mission as to hold some point of vantage until the main cadres of attack can move into tactical connection with them.
2. A force which is tracking a mobile force of the enemy which cannot be held fast or properly reconnoitred by mere "advanced" and "contact squadrons" or ordinary patrols.
3. A force which is watching and holding a coast line, the main body being required for operations of great importance, and therefore unable to fritter away its units in widely extended formations.

I purposely exclude fortress investments and the *chance* battle of mobile field armies.

Other cases might be enumerated, such as that of an army of occupation in such a country as South Africa, when the perpetual movement of strong mixed brigades of mounted troops would undoubtedly tend to pacify a conquered territory with much less labour than the constant moving of infantry from garrison to garrison.

*De Bloch on Reconnaissance in Force.*—Now it is but fair to quote de Bloch's theory that reconnaissances in force, as projected by no less a person than von Moltke, are absurd, because the effect of rifle fire is so great that Lord Roberts increased intervals of infantry in the attack to twenty paces, and because Lord Methuen stated that it was impossible to sit on horseback at less than 2,000 yards from the enemy.

Now we can hardly accept such deductions based on isolated dicta *not connected* with reconnaissance; at least you will accept my reading of history that in the first place von Moltke was dealing with the case of the single loader, and that I have said nothing about sitting on a horse within the forbidden zone; while in another part of his lecture M. de Bloch insisted upon *actual* detailed reconnaissance *on foot*, which I have already advocated both here and in former papers. Keynote of reconnaissance, like that of the bi-literal cypher, is "Inspiration."

Then, one last word on the subject of morale before I proceed to take a cursory glance at the procedure of small bodies engaged in the work of strong patrols and the routine work of lines of observation and

covering detachments, thrown out to form "the eyes, ears, and curtain of the army."

Thus, if we reconsider the time-worn legend, "the psychological moment," in the days of battles of half or, *at most*, of *one day's* duration, it must dawn upon us that when the combatants could and *did* approach to very close ranges long before the energy or *vis viva* of the attackers was exhausted, that psychological moment was forced upon all, or *nearly* all, of the troops engaged, and this nerve tension was the more marked, because the practice obtaining of bringing up supports and reserves in more or less close order let nearly the whole force into the secret of how the action was going and created a kind of public opinion, which very few generals could afford to neglect or disregard. But now in these days, when a brigade of infantry may well be disposed at intervals and depths treble or quadruple that of an old-fashioned division, it is obvious that the morale of an army fighting on a wide front will not be so liable to those waves of feeling which were wont to pass along the ranks with much the same force and consequence as the strange premonitions which in some inexplicable manner have at great crises appeared to photograph on the minds of Orientals the events which were as yet hidden in the unknown future. Apply this theory to the case of a reconnaissance in force, and we arrive at the conclusion that the movement will be so vast and abstract to the individual unit, whether man or company or squadron, that the happenings in one part of the line and even the retirement of the mass will hardly affect the general and pervading spirit of a force well handled and in the high condition which is almost a necessity of this special form of war, which is perhaps the most scientific and delicate of any accepted manœuvre. And I maintain this thesis in face of the fact that in the case of the Army of Natal—as "Linesman" tells us—the troops at times suffered *locally* from loss of morale. But these, if you remember, were as a rule in very close order, which accounts for a *great deal*, and *indirectly* supports my contention.

I here should like to add a note suggested by a review I have recently read on a somewhat remarkable book by a retired French officer on "Individual and Collective Military Psychology." From this volume let me quote two sentences, which, if axiomatic and more or less truisms, are perhaps truths overlooked on *account* of their obviousness. They read thus:—

"Every collectivity, when threatened in its moral or material well-being, *may* become a mob"; and "Violence from without is answered by violence from within."

Now I said just now that "Linesman," whom one may assume to be cognisant of at least *local* feeling in his own and neighbouring units, admits *temporary* loss of morale, where men were in comparatively *close*

order, but indignantly repels the idea of any general or wide-spread feeling of depression in the mass of the army of Natal. In other portions indeed of the theatre of war our officers and men were actually criticised for treating the campaign as a sort of picnic, which at least tends to confirm my impression that the new conditions of warfare must tend to raise *our* Army above the standard of the home-abiding soldier of the Continent, who lives in the constant shadow of a fight for national existence, along a difficult and apparently impassable frontier, while our troops are reared in the conviction that *always* and *by all means* the war is to be carried into somebody *else's* country. So that in spite of M. de Bloch's vaticinations, we may still hope that both in the abstract and in detail by a close study of psychology we may evolve a manœuvre discipline, which by the aid of the long-ranging arm and magazine attachment and quick-firing ordnance will enable our officers to deal with problems involving long odds against us (numerically) by opposing to them a reconnoitring power, which I hope to show is the key-note of success in war. But it will never be safe to neglect that dangerous collectivity, which cannot, of course, as a rule dwell in columns, because the *presumption* is that they are protected against surprise, but may infect any line of skirmishers if the intervals in action are reduced beyond a certain figure, which ought to be determined by the ability of the soldier to watch as well as guard a much wider frontier than ever before. In this sense the soldier must ever be ready for reconnoissance duty, which culminates at times in actual battle, because light divisions are obsolete in face of much wider areas now required to be surveyed or reconnoitred by forces of all arms.

Consequently the object to be kept in view in all extended formations, and more particularly in the case of reconnoissance, where troops are launched *en l'air*, as it were, must be to obviate the dangers of collectivity and loss of morale by strengthening the moral sense while attenuating the cordon, which in these days may have to fight as well as observe.

Assume, therefore, the necessity for defensible observation posts and a gradual advance of a left flanking column, keeping pace with the advance of the main columns, and the retention of reserves in rear of flanks of a thin line for the false attack.

#### SPECIAL RECONNAISSANCE.

And now a few words on military nomenclature, before I proceed to sketch out some form of instruction in reconnoissance to meet the needs of the period and the exigences of Imperial warfare. Our textbooks, so I have read in works<sup>1</sup> by *foreign* experts, are very deficient in

<sup>1</sup> Some of our own people have caught the infection, and are crying out for more verbiage.

their technical vocabularies and as relevant to the subject now under discussion, let me take the case of reconnaissance, which boasts in *our* Service perhaps not more than some half-dozen terms descriptive of mobile units of observation, such as reconnaissance in force, strong patrol, reconnoitring patrol, and the more or less conventional one of *special* patrol. (Visiting patrol is a police term.)

Now, this accusation, to my mind, savours of pedantry, and is the very hall-mark of "things made in Germany," where exactitude in alignment and precision of movement are carried to an extreme which must be put to the test of modern war before the claims of German tacticians to be right can be proved or disproved. Therefore, I would say, be content with the terms we already possess, so long as each conveys a distinct meaning, and is susceptible of those modifications which *can* be, and *ought* to be expressed in speech and in written instructions limiting and controlling definite operations of war.

For to multiply terms is very often to darken knowledge, and the simpler our vocabulary the easier to impress the laws and customs of war on the soldiery.

Now in the past, as I have already hinted, officers and men have been taught the art of reconnaissance in a very academic manner, because it was hardly to be supposed that the practice would with the old single-loader ever become a matter of days and even weeks before full knowledge of where to attack could be acquired. But now, if I have gauged the situation aright, battles may last for days, and the reconnoitring phase may be greatly prolonged, and will at times be almost indistinguishable, to the onlooker, from the *real* thing.

By this I mean to suggest that, though *not all*, reconnaissance will be (technically) *in force*, yet we must accustom ourselves to mixed patrols of cavalry and mounted rifles (infantry), and even of artillery, for reasons which shall now be adduced.

Thus we have seen that the long-ranging arms of modern Armies, have put the closure on the grouping of large masses of troops in formation for attack, who cannot now dispense with a close and accurate reconnaissance of the objective selected by the general in command, while the case of cavalry patrols securing valuable information from mere saddle work in the matter of a knowledge of what is going on behind even provisional earthworks must be very rare. In consequence, we are driven to elaborate a training of our officers and men which shall aim at the evolution by artificial means of that instinctive discipline which helped the Boers to withstand a trained Army—and it must be borne in mind that the details of actual close reconnaissance will be obtained *on foot* for a long period—flushed though it was with a proud sense of certain eventual success.

Now, I said elsewhere that the practice of reconnaissance must become a habit of life ; and this might be compassed by :—

1. The firm and deeply-rooted conviction that modern war is bound up in this art which now pervades the every movement of a general in command in the field.
2. By the constant association of troops of *all* arms in tactical operations.
3. By the drastic regulation that no unit shall move from its barracks or camp or rendezvous (except, of course, for ceremonial drill) without all and every precaution taken and ordained by regulation in time of war.
4. By the arrangement of tactical marches in winter and summer with a system of surprise tactics and the provision of an umpire staff.

To enter more into details, you will perhaps bear with me if I advance my own ideas on the execution of these marches, which should teach more than the practice even of outposts (necessary as that is), because troops in movement are constantly changing their point of view, and fresh problems continually claim solution at the hands of the leaders. Therefore I say, send the unit, battalion, or company, or mixed brigade with tactical "ideas" set by an officer *not* concerned in the leadership ; and in the case of trained troops, *i.e.*, those who have passed all the necessary tests of the several courses, graft on to the pre-arranged problem others based upon "surprise tactics" in order to evolve the invaluable quality of initiative, without which neither the officer nor soldier can be reckoned up-to-date.

Of course, I am well aware that such critics as His Excellency Jean de Bloch, who recently lectured on the war at the Royal United Service Institution, has elsewhere advanced views, which, if adopted, would give the *coup de grace* to an Army recruited by means of a voluntary system on professional lines<sup>1</sup>; but it is our business to make the best of the conditions of our system, which has withstood the buffets of time, and to produce 'hose qualities by education, which some critics tell us are born with men and never created.

Well, at least we can teach boys of fifteen, by means of a system of cadet corps, the elements of tactical reconnaissance ; and as it is believed that some federation of Boys' Brigades, Church Lads' Brigades, cadet corps, etc., may be arrived at, there is still some hope that a large percentage of men may join the Army in future with a very fair amount of rudimentary knowledge of the soldierly quality of tactical observation, which will be carried on when the recruit has blossomed into the fully trained parade soldier.

<sup>1</sup> The lecturer prefers a national army to a small professional one with auxiliaries.

And so with the makings of the tactically-trained soldier we start on the route march, which from beginning to end is to be a test of all ranks in the art of "what to observe and how to report it," every halt being utilised to deliver a short peripatetic lecture on the part of the officers, with some minor flanking or other reconnaissance thrown in, whereby every man shall take a share in the project set by superior authority.

It may be noted that the cavalry eye or tactical eye is *not* the eye of the hunting man, which is the orb of the egotist, whose sagacity is exercised in merely making short cuts, and not in *close* observation of terrain.

Naturally the main object must be to get the unit into an open order of battle as soon as possible, and to accustom groups of men to march for miles, under the command of subordinates, with very little *personal* supervision from their superiors. By this means only can initiative be developed and instinctive discipline taught. Of course, if mixed troops are available, as in many stations will be the case when the decentralised system of commands has had time to take effect, the combined reconnaissance of small bodies of two or more arms will supersede the isolated marches of battalions, regiments, and batteries.

But the mention of batteries requires an explanation of the term I am about to use, *i.e.*, "the reconnoitring action of artillery." If the expression meant nothing before, it would seem that in face of what we have read and what many officers and men have experienced in the concealment of guns, the use of smokeless powder, has introduced a means of utilising artillery in the responsible work of searching out an enemy in conjunction with, of course, a proportion of the other arms as tactical escort, though the use of the term "escort" is to be sparingly used, the best form of escort being the troops with which the artillery are tactically connected, who would obviously have other duties besides the mere guarding of the guns. The idea then would be that artillery should accompany certain "special patrols" for the purpose of testing the defensive power of an enemy in position, for there must be cases in war when nothing less than artillery could tempt an enemy in a strong position to return the fire of a patrol or a series of mixed patrols converging from different points by concerted action on various objectives.

Of course, this sort of action of artillery is not absolutely novel; but it is very apparent that the specialised training of both cavalry and artillery has often *apparently* precluded the *constant* practice of small detachments of both arms, or of all three arms working together from small garrisons as a mutual or column base. And small garrisons, for several reasons, cannot be entirely done away with, though it may be hoped that in future they will be reduced to the smallest number

compatible with the military duties of detachments so quartered for ceremonial purposes, or safe-guarding of public works, etc.

*Artillery.*—In the course of a discussion at the R.U.S.I., Colonel Downing, R.A., disputes de Bloch's theory that the rôle of artillery has lost its importance. Here we have the opinion of an expert who has served at the front, and contends that, "properly handled," the cardinal maxims governing the use of artillery are still practical truths. He goes further, for he gives the cheering information that field guns can yet keep down the fire of infantry. More than this, he quotes the case of Pieters Hill, when 90 guns in battery dominated the Boer riflemen; and another case, Rietfontein, where the 18 guns of a brigade (3 batteries) division very soon knocked out the 4 guns worked by the Boers,<sup>1</sup> hitherto with great effect. To this M. de Bloch replies, that 4 guns *versus* 18 is so great a disproportion as to virtually prove *nothing*; but *I* ask you to bear in mind, that the lecturer probably omitted to investigate the question as to whether or not the Boer guns were long-ranging *guns of position*, which entirely alters the problem; and if we could have heard from Colonel Downing his definition of the expression "shortly silenced the Boer guns," we should probably learn that even field guns, strained to the utmost in point of extreme range, can, if well handled, and skillfully covered or sheltered, cope with much heavier and more immobile ordnance. For instance, a field gun was concealed on Portsdown Hills in the winter of 1901-2 and by its action entirely baffled a strong infantry battalion sent out purely to *locate* it.

Perhaps this proves in a certain measure my contention that *even* the massing of guns, and still more the dispersion in reconnoitring order, with a certain amount of latitude in the matter of disguising the strength by means of constant moving of batteries—if such heterodoxy may be admissible in this particular case of reconnoissance—might well bewilder and confuse an enemy in position, and serve to so far perplex him, that on the deployment of the real attack and the unmasking of the assailant's actual objectives, he might be held so fast by the false attack of the reconnoissance, as to be unable to transfer his reserves, already, perhaps, moved to the expected but wrongly-judged objective of his assailant, in time to meet the overwhelming current of the real attack. Again, in a sortie from Ladysmith, 2 field guns served to extricate a squadron in difficulties from the fire of concealed riflemen.

Also artillery officers must be encouraged to conduct patrols *with* guns, or the tendency in practising reconnoissance will be to neglect the needs of artillery as to ground, etc.

For though one must strongly oppose the argument brought forward by some, that the modern rifle has levelled up the civilian rifleman to

<sup>1</sup> Two 15-pounder batteries, and one 7-pounder battery; range, 2,400 yards.

such an extent that a large professional Army is therefore not required, it is open to question whether cavalry and artillery should not find time for more and closer association with the other arms and Auxiliary forces, not only at annual manœuvres, but as the rule of life, as the new rôle of Auxiliaries—as a first line on emergency, *must* necessarily lead to close association with the R.A., the more so as Auxiliaries are now to have these guns.

Apply this proposal to the case of all local tactical associations, and encourage the troops quartered in the command to lend *personnel* and *matériel* to the work of all such military or semi-military societies.<sup>1</sup>

And though there may not be anything very novel in the idea it is most undoubtedly true, that even in the case of tactical training, particular arms of the Service *may* develop a conservatism which tends to specialise them to an extreme, which, in the case of active service, would impair the effect of joint or combined tactics of the different arms, and never more so than in the execution of a reconnaissance of mixed troops.

For if a case is assumed of an attempt on the old scale of a cavalry reconnaissance of any well-chosen position, what would a mere cavalry reconnaissance from the saddle produce in the form of reliable intelligence? Assuming, if you like, that a general officer already possessed what I may call a fair amount of general *data*, culled from a strategic survey, or from the Intelligence Department at home of numbers in the field, etc., armament, maps, permanent defences, etc.

Launched on the war-path, the mounted patrols, unsupported by mobile rifles, might or might not be allowed to approach within from two to four thousand yards—of what? The position prepared by hasty or improvised field works (for I am not dealing with fortresses which must be sapped up to)? No. But just within field-glass range of the out-posts, which I am quite sure would be manned by artillery, for experience has taught us that a few rifles well posted can immensely strengthen the position of isolated guns, and at the same time lend immense confidence to the battery commanders,<sup>2</sup> if these officers are allowed to deal with so-called escorts in accordance with the “genius of the ballistic arm.”

And here, if you will bear with me, I want to place you in the two-fold position of the enemy with his out-post artillery in close tactical association with the other arms designed not only to protect the batteries, but to emphasise the power of the defence; but also in the rôle of the officer in command of the mixed patrols on the other side, which have

<sup>1</sup> Include rifle clubs, cadet corps, if possible in all local tactical schemes, etc.

<sup>2</sup> The dispersion of *mobile* guns cannot yet be accepted as axiomatic on occasion until the point has been settled by the Commander-in-Chief.

been ordered out, perhaps a day or two before they first catch sight of the hostile position, with instructions to reconnoitre and report on the position, whether defended on a regular plan or merely improvised to meet the case of a pivot<sup>1</sup> for counter-attack; to hold a strategic or tactical point, or as a link in a chain of a big system of defensive works.

Now if the patrol has ridden obliquely in the direction of a flank, it *may* be possible to recognise the fact that the line of defences, if they are visible from the distant fringe of the outposts, is broken, crenellated, and provided with out-works, etc., or the reverse. Before the battle of Tel-el-Kebir, it will be remembered that the cavalry reconnoissance conducted frontally at 5 miles distance did not notice or report upon a small out-work in the form of a lunette or redan or blunted redan (the exact shape I did not hear), which might have been a very important factor, had a more wide-awake enemy opposed the march and deployment of the columns of attack. Possibly the patrols will first become aware of the proximity of the enemy by stumbling up against some hostile reconnoitring unit, and of course if prisoners are taken much valuable information may be obtained, after careful sifting of evidence; but failing this lucky chance, the patrols dispersed on a wide front, possibly chiefly to both flanks with temporary observation posts between, if such can be found, are charged with the task of determining the flanks of the position, and of selecting one or more lines of advance for the flank, or real attacks, and for the frontal feint. But an enemy who has learnt to hold his fire is hardly likely to respond to the waspish false attack of mere carbineers, and will content himself with throwing out patrols from his reserves, or even from the outposts to prolong the line or emphasise its defence. Therefore, failing guns and mobile rifles in numbers sufficient to present an imposing *show* of attack or the intention of attack, the commander of a mere horse-patrol would then be reduced to armed espionage of the position, by bivouacking out of sight, establishing observation and connecting-posts, and detaching very loose, "creeping," or special patrols towards the enemy's lines. But here note the disadvantage of neutralising the intelligence of a body of officers, who obviously cannot be spread very thick along the line of detached patrols, and the constant need of pauses, every one of them a source of delay, while new information is passed to the officer in command, after collation from the juniors and fresh modifications introduced.<sup>2</sup>

But it may appear that I am now depreciating the value of a secret patrol, or series of patrols, engaged in close reconnoissance of a *field*

<sup>1</sup> A space for counter-attack left between obstacles.

<sup>2</sup> Ideal cavalry officers are expensive and comparatively few; as directors of reconnoissance they are excellent; as *merged* in the line of observation, wastage, this work being the duty of subordinates, and *specialty* of mounted rifle scouts.

position; but this is not the case. What I want to bring home to you is, that *of* itself and *by* itself, conducted by cavalry only, it is not reliable when great issues, such as night attacks, are in the wind, unless these secret patrols can be *maintained* in position until the formed units of attack or the advanced guard in the shape of a "reconnaissance in force" is in a position to force the hand of the enemy before he has had time to change front, prolong his line, or erect detached flanking works, or establish positions for enfilade, etc.

*Cavalry.*—In reply to M. de Bloch, Colonel Graves, a cavalry officer, sounds a note of warning against ringing the death-knell of orthodox cavalry. For he sees in the light of the Boer war, with all its apparent tacit condemnation of nearly all shock action, no reason whatever for a *radical* alteration in the training of the knightly arm, though at the same time he is ready to adopt the applied tactics of a cavalry leader (Captain Moore, 60th Yeomanry Company) in the present war, who found his salvation, and at the same time the discomfiture of 300 Boers attacking a convoy, in the opening out of his cavalry unit to twenty paces from knee to knee, preparatory to a charge on what I presume must have been more or less broken and disordered riflemen, with no backbone of orthodoxy and self-sacrificing discipline capable of overcoming the inborn hatred of the Dutchman of the veldt for shock tactics of any sort. But still more instructive, I think, is his remark that mobility runs a good second to invisibility, and I think that one might even improve on that truth by adding to it the axiom that in many cases invisibility and mobility are synonymous terms. In Captain Moore's case, it is observed that he charged troops in position—more or less.

And so, for the purposes of my argument, I have been able to quote the dicta of officers of both cavalry and artillery, who indirectly support the view that the two arms of which we have heard of late in some quarters the most disparagement in the sense of being most in need of re-organisation, are after all at least as susceptible to changes in the conditions of war as their comrades of the infantry, while it is yet to be proved that the bulk of the cavalry under the command of General French have not learnt the art of combining the *elan* and dash of the horse soldier of romance with the more scientific training forced upon the cavalry by the association with that novel unit, mounted rifles, who, if my idea is a correct one, will be called upon in nine cases out of ten to form what I may term the contact and creeping patrols of any mixed force, charged with the close reconnaissance of an enemy in position or on the march, the cavalry reserving to themselves the major part of the tactical or strategic problem of manœuvring the riflemen into position for actual contact.

And so I put it to you, that without a pivot of operations in an advanced position your cavalry patrols, in face of the intrinsic force, both moral and physical, possessed by the defenders, will never penetrate even a well-planned outpost line, and that even minor patrols must be supported by infantry, trained as such, but with the mobility inherent in the units now so well known as mounted infantry, and in many cases by artillery trained to manœuvre with these mobile riflemen, who will be taught that their rule of life is to reconnoitre *on foot*, but to manœuvre, when out of range, in the saddle. But to come to closer quarters with this conundrum of how to manœuvre artillery in connection with a special patrol, I must first advance the old axiom that the guns demand from the other arms that same close support and protection when on the march which no teachings of this or any other war have modified; though I am prepared to show that by a wide dispersion of the patrols it may well be possible to ambuscade the battery or batteries in positions where they may be in close tactical connection with the reconnaissance and available for immediate use when the observation posts are threatened, or the approach of the main body renders concealment no longer a matter of the first importance. To make a hypothetical case clearer, let us assume a low range of hill country occupied by a field force of the enemy with outposts, with advanced artillery positions on the lower spurs and a rude natural glacis, which is obviously forbidden ground to our own artillery, while perhaps the enemy's flanks are thrown back by the natural contour of the terrain. Now one must conclude that even the scouts of the advanced cavalry patrols will hardly venture on the plain or glacis, but will conceal themselves on the reverse slope of the high ground, if such exists, where at least a kind of chain of posts may be arranged to watch the front; but the riflemen (mounted), and of course part of the cavalry, will move off to the flanks, if indeed their lines of march have not already been directed on divergent roads, relatively, I mean, to the frontal reconnaissance. Meanwhile the riflemen, with their flanks watched and guarded by cavalry, are stealing round the flanks by a long detour, dropping here and there observation and connecting posts, until perhaps the time comes when their cordon is becoming dangerously attenuated and they must either wait for reinforcements or retire. For it is all very well to adjust the balance on paper between the means required and the object to be attained, but this is exactly what the realism of war teaches us that it is impossible to do in half the cases that actually occur of armed reconnaissance. Now in face of this probability, I venture to assume that far away in rear of the patrols several small columns—"potential reserves"—would be slowly advancing with flanks yet more extravagantly expanded than the first columns and prepared to bivouac in close support of the advanced units.

These troops, provided with a proportion of artillery, will be in a position to extend the arc of reconnaissance to the flanks, and will be charged with the police duty of preventing inhabitants or others of passing round the flanks in the direction of the enemy.

But during the dismounted reconnaissance or scouting of the mounted rifles the temporarily immobile units have improvised local and tactical defences, and if by nightfall nothing material has been ascertained of the preparedness or otherwise of the enemy for defence, the cordon of observation secure under the veil of night and behind their entrenchments are ready to bivouac and await instructions for the next day, care being taken to fix the bivouac on the main body of the screen out of the line of the improvised defences. Now if anything has been ascertained by the creeping patrols of the dispositions of the enemy, he will hardly succeed in materially altering his dispositions unnoticed or unheard, so long as the advanced riflemen maintain their position during the night, while if battle is to be given on the morrow, the selected artillery positions will necessarily tend to give an immense advantage to the attack, in contradistinction to the vagueness inherent in any plans based upon information which, if touch has been lost by the return of the screen, can hardly be up-to-date.

Of course it may be urged that I am drawing a fancy picture, in that I am leaving out of account the possibility of my whole system of patrols being routed in detail by a well-concerted counter-attack; but I reply to this, that if the defence has gained enormously by the invention of the magazine rifle and the quick-firer, and smokeless powder, the defenders lose much more in these days than ever they did before by leaving their entrenchments, breastworks or provisional works and deliberately forcing the rôle of defender on their concealed opponents, who being mobile and in small columns, and holding their lines of retreat intact, can move, other things being equal, much more rapidly and knowingly than the counter-attackers; while the skilful use on the part of the commander of the reconnaissance of rear-guard tactics may even irritate the enemy into forcing home his counter-attack and rendering it very difficult to extricate his troops without recourse to reserves, and with losses much in excess of the patrols, who will necessarily know every inch of the ground and where to make a stand to the best advantage.

Now the gist of all I have tried to say is that reconnaissance must now be reckoned as pervading nearly everything that the soldier takes up as a study, and that in order to implant in the individual the germ of the power of observation he must be led to note not only the usual and stereotyped movements and signs of troops on the march, in bivouac, behind entrenchments, etc., but must learn to note the flight of birds, the movements of animals disturbed by the approach of human beings, the

features of country *as he marches*, while the route march will be made a series of continuous and practical exercises in how to manœuvre in small parties, such as stealthy patrols, and how to word his reports or verbal or written messages, all of which, if mere truisms to the ear, are worthy of much labour on the part of the instructor; for in order to get the best out of every man it is necessary to fathom his methods of thought, his measure of intellect, his logical faculty, his power of judging distance, his marksmanship, and generally his idiosyncrasies, which if apparently too much for the grasp of one officer in command of one hundred men, such as a company or squadron, can be attained by means of a system which renders subordinates capable of appreciating the various temperaments and abilities of the maniple under their charge and acting as under-studies of their captain.

And so, in conclusion, I would add just a short scheme of instruction of the trained soldier in the rudiments of practical reconnaissance.

In the first place, impress upon all subordinates that, unlike the service of mere security, advanced guards, etc., reconnaissance must demand devious ways, while the patrols of an advanced guard are bound to go ever forward, as time may be an element in the march.

Further, that reconnoiters should usually move obliquely to their true line of advance as regards the enemy's front; that tactical connection with other patrols must be kept up by every ingenious resource, including secret signals, connecting files specially trained, and the like.

Patrols must be accustomed to lie dark for hours together, and must bear in mind that time is of less importance than accurate information. But before men are allowed to undertake actual practice against a skeleton enemy they should be sent out on minor tactical marches, with special instructions as to *data* required, but not to be interfered with by the N.C.O. in charge in the matter of collecting these *data*, for the first thing, after a soldier or officer has joined a unit as trained, is to ascertain his mode of thought, his originality, and the like:

For instance, four patrols sent out on identical errands, and with precise instructions, if guarded against inter-communication, will probably, even if each man has his separately defined work to carry out, return with very different reports, if the work is new to them and the business of the N.C.O. in charge is therefore to sift the information and learn how to elicit the real facts by cross-examination, and so assist his officer in estimating the relative values of individuals in the art of observation. For in these days the fact cannot be made too much of that every step of a soldier in advance is a species of reconnaissance, while the means of teaching it are to send out patrols—first alone, to report on inanimate objects, and then as units of a combined movement of all arms, to observe from all points of view troops in dispersed order,

behind entrenchments, and in all formations and attitudes. Next to analyse and report upon simple movements of hostile troops in some tactical formation and manœuvring with some tactical object.

Again, let the element of surprise enter into the orders given to units who have arrived at some measure of perfection by, for instance, suddenly when on the march detaching a special flanking patrol, supported or to form its own support, to make a report on a village or eminence, say, some mile or so on a certain bearing, the N.C.O. or officer as far as possible leaving the collation of intelligence to the men, while carefully watching their movements and directing only in a general way, and guarding them against losing their way, etc.

For I cannot say too much, perhaps, as to leaving men to work out problems for themselves, and the instructor preserving silence until the operations have come to an end, when a careful and skilled umpire's verdict should be invaluable in correcting mistakes, discovering latent talent, and teaching that instinctive drill and discipline of individuals and small units, which enables them to work out schemes based upon silent drill and secret signals and the like, which are and must be our best means of coping with potential enemies, who have learnt perhaps by the study of nature what we have to teach by artificial means.

And last of all, teach men and officers to argue from the *unknown*, and don't accustom them to start on their man hunt with too many established facts, or the result will be that in war they will be at a loss if launched *en l'air*, as it were, to argue out the spoor of the scouts or patrol, about which little can be told them that is reliable.

Remembering always that at times, I might almost say at *most* times, verbal messages of very material import must be given and carried, and even the knack of carrying a message correctly, as I have often proved at manœuvres, is to some people a lost art.

To this end dispatch a reconnoitring unit in the *first* stages of its higher education to some distance with alternately written and verbal instructions, say to extend at a certain spot, or at a certain distance from the starting-point, then to change direction east or west, and then to extend again or close to form an entrenching party, further to estimate the thickness of certain walls, the general slope of an eminence in their front and finally demand an exact account of the approach of the patrol towards their objective, collated from the men, checked by the sergeant, and eventually commented upon by the officer.

Expand some system as this, with its infinite scope for original talent, to the battalion, the mixed brigade, the detachment of perhaps one battery and one squadron, and again at the annual manœuvres to the division and the army corps, and one begins to see that, like the Boer war at the present stage, it may *seem* to have no ending, for as the course

of instruction proceeds, still as one problem succeeds another, others spring into view, but always, I think, possessing this great advantage over much of our routine work, that the study need never become monotonous, because as the scene changes so does the problem, while the ingenuity of the other side provides the stimulus of competition and rivalry.

And if there is one word to add to this very short and discursive notice of a subject, which is, to my mind, the main cog-wheel of military education, it is this, that manœuvre drill must be taught in the most *realistic* form possible, with every variety and element of surprise, while those who teach should in every possible way encourage individuals to work up to their objective in their *own* way, thus putting their inventive genius to the test and arriving at a fair estimate at the end of a season of the relative value of the unit and the individual in the art of military espionage and reconnaissance, always recognising the fact that the art must be made to embrace nearly all that we sum up in our drill and text-books, as Applied Tactics, which more than ever before are now becoming the substitute for close order drill, which is merely a means to an *intermediate* end, *i.e.*, the manœuvre drill of troops of all arms, and the prologue of that realistic form of tactical exercises, which are destined to prepare officers and men for the confused order of, and "the fog of war."