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Friday, April 27, 1888.

COLONEL C. B. BRACKENBURY, R.A., Director, Artillery College,
Woolwich, in the Chair.

THE MECHANISM OF THE COUNTER-ATTACK.

By Major WALTER W. M. SMITH, R.A. (D.A.A.G. for Instruction,
Home District).

WORDS need not in all probability now be wasted to demonstrate that some form or other of counter-attack is looked upon as an *essential* element in the defensive battle. To justify the adoption of a passively defensive attitude by any commander, it is felt that the circumstances of his situation must be such as are not usually met with, before we can acquit him of an unwarrantable departure from the accepted theory of decisive strategy. A very marked inferiority in numbers, in armament or *moral*, the necessity of carefully husbanding every man and horse for a greater crisis yet to come, the exigencies of a wide investment line, and a few other conditions may at times restrict an army to the task of receiving and warding blows on its own ground; but it is recognized that decisive results can in no case be looked for from such a class of dispositions alone. The "offensive-defensive" battle, as it is often termed, is one fraught with a peculiar historical interest to Englishmen, since some of the most conspicuous triumphs of our campaigns during the revolutionary era were won by some admirable applications of its system. The substratum of theory and fact on which its employment rests is an indisputably sound one; and its basal principle may be stated as follows: A force which compels an adversary to attack it in a chosen position, while it relinquishes certain special advantages peculiar to the offensive, obtains compensations in other directions, which are admitted by all to tell heavily in its favour. The greater frequency, accuracy, and coolness of fire delivered by a stationary infantry, superior advantages of cover, the more exact knowledge of ranges, the more matured presage of eventualities and assignment of ground to the several arms,—these, with other causes, have invariably served to inflict the heavier loss and disorganization on the assailant up to the moment of the final arbitrament by the bayonet and sabre. Hence, if the latter can be himself vehemently assailed either at or about the stressful moment of the supreme crisis, the chances of war must beyond question incline heavily in favour of the force which now for the first time seizes the offensive. Many and masterly were the

exemplifications of this method in former days, which are now embodied in the annals of our national history; but the reasoning and the practice alike have remained relevant, and more than relevant, down to the present day. The revolutionary changes in the arms, and consequently in the tactics of the warfare, of our own generation have served but to give a deeply enhanced cogency to the system on which the offensive-defensive battle is based.

In the earlier battles of the Franco-German War, circumstances (with which we are not here concerned) combined to deal the initiative into the hands of the German leaders, and compelled the French Generals to accept battle in a strictly defensive attitude. The training, the traditions, and the national idiosyncrasy, however, especially adapt the French soldier for a vigorous offensive.

Hence, as might be expected, every battle presents us with numerous instances of vehement and (for the moment) successful counter-strokes. In the latter phase of the war, when the conditions of the case were somewhat inverted, we find the Germans delivering counter-attacks with equal boldness, and more durable success, because more fully matured in design, and supported in execution. The experience of the war, as a whole, confirms the view, not only that the method under consideration has not ceased to be applicable to modern conditions, but that the general use of the breech-loader and of far-ranging artillery has given it a deeper and wider significance than previously pertained to its use. It is no doubt also true, that we fail to find in the annals of that campaign any satisfactory application of its use on a decisive and momentous scale. It must be conceded that the practice was from various causes exceedingly defective. All the historians and critics comment on and censure the omission in numerous instances which it fell to their lot to chronicle. Enough, however, was done to suggest to the thoughtful student the presage of a great development of the principle in future campaigns; and, as a matter of fact, the challenge to tacticians of a constructive turn has been well taken up by those who have set themselves the task of deducing the needful lessons from the teaching of that great struggle.

The reasoning is that with which we are all familiar. The power of the local defensive (speaking of small areas only) has enormously increased relatively to the power of the attack. The losses of the troops detailed for the assault are far heavier; the confusion and escape from superior control enhanced fourfold; while, on the other hand, a relatively larger number of troops are necessarily held well in hand within the position, and available for any offensive action which the ever-shifting situation may render desirable. If, therefore, the counter-attack was likely to be deadly and decisive before, its aptitude for the same purpose has become doubly accentuated now.

It may be well, however, in the first instance to concern ourselves with a possible misuse or exaggeration of the "counter-attack" theory, which purports to base itself on what we may term the "*pivot-and-interval*" system of battle-fields. It will be at once conceded that certain definite areas may be adequately defended by a far more

attenuated body of troops than was possible thirty years since. Where formerly from ten to twelve men, or even more, were required for every yard linear of ground, it may now be held by from two to five with comparative ease. The instances of extraordinary tenacity exhibited by a brigade of Ducrot's Division at the Battle of Wörth, or of Frossard's Corps on the left flank of the Gravelotte position, are fresh in the memory of everybody. On the other hand, nearly all the great contests of history teem with instances in which the deadliest stress of battle has raged over certain decisive centres, which the conditions of the arena have indicated as of culminating importance. This historical fact, coupled with the analogy of modern fortification, which, from its original fringe of well-marked "salients," has successively developed "outworks," "advanced works," and, lastly, "detached forts," has led present scientists to recognize that nearly every suitable position for defence must present an alternation of "strong points" or "pivots," and of more feebly occupied "intervals." It might, moreover, be pointed out that this conclusion is as much the outcome of an inevitable relation between the existing features of actual ground on nearly every battle-field, as it is of theoretical considerations. So much, indeed, is generally accepted. The only question is as to the relative numerical strength to be assigned severally to the weaker "intervals" and the "strong points" in the formation of the lines of battle. What may be termed the extreme school of writers on this topic have urged that to occupy the interval with anything beyond a mere "screen" or outpost-line of infantry, is a waste of strength, which can be better applied elsewhere; that no better fortune can be looked for than that the enemy should intrude large forces into the spaces between the pivots, in order that they may be shattered by the cross-fire of the strong points themselves, and, finally, swept from the field by the counter-attack. This view of the battle-line of the future has high authority to support it; if we only instance the German writers, Clausewitz and Von Scherff. We may well hesitate, however, before we accept their conclusions; for they are probably based on a misconception of the element, wherein lies the true source of definite strength. That element is undoubtedly the extent of the fire-swept glacis in front of the position, and the intensity of the hail of iron and lead that can be poured over its surface. The enemy *must* at all hazards be compelled to cross that zone, and to suffer the utmost penalty in doing so; and for this purpose the frontal fire of infantry must be a maximum in volume and continuous in lateral extent. It is doubtless true, that when in spite of all that has been done, he does pierce the line at any point, he must be exposed when possible to a murderous cross-fire, and, finally, expelled by a counterstroke; but it would not, in ordinary circumstances, be either prudent or otherwise justifiable to lure a numerous and resolute adversary into a position whence he could attack the strong points themselves with so much comparative advantage. The latter are most exposed to danger, when assailed by an enveloping attack; arrangements may easily have been concerted by the enemy to meet a counter-attack on nearly equal terms by the

arrival of fresh troops; while much reliance cannot be placed upon the flanking fire of the works themselves, when (as would probably be the case) every gun and rifle is tasked to the utmost to repel the simultaneous attack along the front.¹

We may assume, then, that to design a system of defence on the principle of observing with a mere screen of troops certain sections of the alignment, in order to entice the enemy on to ground on which it is hoped to deliver a counterstroke with more overwhelming effect, is in reality a departure from the fundamental ideas on which the offensive-defensive battle is based, in so far as it fails to turn to account the intrinsic advantage of the defensive attitude.

The next point, then, demanding consideration is the inquiry into the different circumstances under which counterstrokes may fairly be delivered. These are admirably tabulated and discussed in General Schaw's treatise on the "Defence and Attack of Positions" (1882). With the object, however, of collecting, as concisely as may be under one view, the more essential data of the problem before us, the follow-

¹ It may be remarked in passing, that the true reason why the old manœuvre of *piercing the centre* of a line of battle appears in late campaigns to have fallen into disuse, has probably escaped attention. Undoubtedly the "pivot-and-interval" system of defence renders it more difficult; but this system obtained in its entirety in the wars of Napoleon, and he was probably the greatest exponent of the modern method of breaking the line. The practice of Epaminondas showed that it was not in his days unreasonable to hope to break the phalanx with a steel-tipped wedge of fighting men, and the phalanx itself might without extreme dislocation be adapted for the purpose. The steel tip itself, though the post of honour, incurred no very overwhelming danger relative to the salient faces of the great wedge, because the effective range of the spearmen and bowmen was short. The natural tendency of the introduction of all improved projectile weapons was to broaden out the apex, until the pointed shape was dispensed with altogether. In Napoleon's days the actual perforation was doubtless usually made by the head of a battalion column; the gap thus made was systematically broadened out by the successive arrival of the steps of a double *échelon*, which eventually deployed to right and left and rolled up the two halves of the enemy's lines, which thus became not only outflanked, but severed more and more widely from each other with every moment. When, however, the head of his column was smitten through and through by a cross-fire, both without and within the position, it was apt to crumble away before it reached the intended point of attack. On the other hand, could he but succeed in effecting a breach of *sufficient breadth*, this fire could only affect to any considerable extent the flank companies or sections of the leading rank. Hence it results that the old manœuvre of *piercing the centre* can only be attempted, with tolerable hope of success, when the actual head of attack bears some superior relation to the range of modern firearms. If the effective rifle-fire of the present day may be taken for this purpose at 800 yards, and of the field shrapnel at 2,400, it is probable that the assailant must aim at pushing back by the application of direct force a section of the enemy's line of say from 1,200 to 3,000 yards in extent; some deduction being rightly made on account of occasional cover in the alignment, and of the diversion of the enemy's flanking fire to other parts of the field. It is for reasons precisely analogous that fortificationists prescribe the capture of *at least* two contiguous detached forts, before the cuneate is assailed. There is, however, this difference of principle between the designs which fix the minimum size of the intervals in the two cases. On the extemporized battle-field the strong points are themselves more or less vulnerable at the first onslaught. On the front of fortification the detached forts are absolutely unassailable prior to the execution of formal siege operations; and hence what happens in the intervals during any earlier stage is of meagre importance.

ing summary is substituted for his more exhaustive treatment of the subject:—

1st. After all that can be done in the preparation of the line of battle, a vigorous enemy will in all probability succeed in establishing himself for the moment at certain points in the defensive cordon. When this is the case, he must undoubtedly be attacked with all the numbers and vigour available, and expelled from the ground he has won, and the sooner in point of time that this is effected the better.

2nd. A counter-attack of a more local and immediate character (delivered probably by the battalion or local reserves) may disperse the enemy's troops, almost at the instant that he would otherwise come to close quarters with the first (or firing) line of the defence.

3rd. The enemy may never be allowed to reach the position at all; and he may be attacked at the moment of temporary hesitation which usually precedes the final charge. This counter-attack (as General Schaw has pointed out) should, to be productive of good results, be effected by fresh troops,—a conclusion which he aptly supports by the instance of the ultimate defeat of the Navarre Carlists, who were repulsed with heavy loss after a momentarily successful sortie of this character from their own lines. He considers it doubtful whether, except under unusual circumstances, this class of counterstroke should be resorted to at all.

4th. It is probable that the most determined assaults may as a rule be expected on the outer wing of the position, where they would tend ultimately to assume an enveloping character, resulting in an attack on front and flank at once. The method of providing for the defeat of offensive movements of this nature by the delivery of well-timed counterstrokes based on the strong points designed as supports for the flanks, has now almost reached its stereotyped phase; and, if the relative position of the strong points themselves is good, and their intrinsic strength sufficient, probably no other system will give an equivalent security in this direction. Its application, however, postulates the possession of well-placed and numerous reserves of good troops, who are especially detailed for this very purpose.

5th. This last application of the "counter-attack" theory is capable (if we are to follow in the wake of German opinion) of a far wider extension than we have so far indicated. Being one, however, comparatively new to the arena of professional controversy, it probably calls for more particular notice than was demanded by the foregoing instances. As long ago as at the opening of the 1870 campaign, when the German leaders deemed it possible that their concentration on the frontier might be anticipated by a French irruption into the Palatinate, it was designed to take up a position near Mannheim with seven *corps d'armée*. For it was calculated would hold the front on the defensive, one was to manœuvre on each wing to protect the flanks, and one was held in reserve. Were a similar scheme to be drawn up in the present year to meet a similar emergency, it is probable, according to the ideas now prevalent, that a much larger proportion of the whole force available would be assigned to the manœuvring sections for the defence of the wings. It is well known

that Von Scherff and others propose to hold from one-half to two-thirds of the disposable troops in hand for offensive action, while the front of attack is contained by the remaining moiety or smaller fraction. It is not difficult to picture to the mind the species of dispositions by which the decisive counter-attack may be expected to be most effectively delivered. The position is held fast by such attenuated lines as modern conditions of fighting render distinctly feasible, but the resistance offered is to be as stubborn and tenacious as Teutonic troops have always made it. The struggle may possibly protract itself over days rather than over hours, but the inevitable anticlimax of physical and nervous exhaustion cannot be postponed beyond a certain point. The large force destined for the counter-attack may consist of several Divisions, or be an army in itself. The troops are kept fresh and eager, from a few miles to a day's march distance from the position, awaiting the announcement of the initial symptoms of whole or partial collapse of the enemy's attack, which must surely come. A rapid march, the details of which have been previously planned with something of the same microscopic nicety that is now deemed indispensable for a night attack, or for the preparation of the defensive works themselves, places the force deployed in hostile array across the enemy's flank, and compels him in his turn to receive attack on unprepared ground, taken up at hazard in a flank position, and with a shattered and disorganized army. Undoubtedly we must conclude, that if so much of the situation can be truly predicted, the *dénouement* is a foregone conclusion. It is, however, equally certain that only the most punctilious and minute prearrangements, the most perfect organization, coupled with the highest generalship, and such good fortune in details as always favours the resolute, could put such a scheme into timely and effective operation. Questions of new and untried methods, however promising and suggestive, do for the most part but resolve themselves once more into the old problems of a balance of the elements of force, of a better planned concentration, of a more economical disposal of reserves, of a more incisive adaptation of means to ends, as in times of yore. The grand counter-attack delivered from ten or twelve miles distance may be met and contained for so many hours by a force numerically its inferior. The defence of the main position once overcome, and its garrison routed even for a few hours, would render the arrival of the detached moiety as useless on the morrow, as the fresh reserves whom Napoleon used to describe as appearing the day after the decisive battle, only in time to witness and swell the flood-tide of disaster. If, on the other hand, as is equally likely, it arrives prematurely on the scene of conflict, it will fail to realize to itself the special advantages that were intended; or else, its action may be superfluous. The limiting conditions of time, within which the margin of safety is to be realized for the counter-attacking force, are in fact by no means so wide as could be wished for the sake of our theorists. It is necessary to place its difficulties in a "fierce" light, just because there is much danger in attempting to base new strategic or tactical combinations on any other foundation than on the exercise of the old faculties of a

laborious adaptation of means to the conditions and methods of success. For this reason we have felt it necessary thus cursorily to indicate the great obstacles to the execution of so ambitious an enterprise. To depreciate it further than this would involve a still greater error. That which is hopeless in the hands of an incapable or hesitating commander becomes a machinery replete in promise and resource to the self-reliant and ably served leader of an efficient and resolute army.

6th. Clausewitz has in addition furnished us with another suggestion for employing the method of the counter-attack on the largest scale attainable, in order to achieve equally significant results. It differs from the last example merely in the fact that the blow is launched from near the centre of the position, so as to strike the centre of the assailant's army. If in the first instance successful, its further action has the faculty of "throwing back the fractions of the beaten forces on to divergent lines of retreat," and hence to promise effects especially decisive. The method undoubtedly presents certain advantages and difficulties peculiarly its own, which it is unnecessary now to examine. Some further discussion on the subject will be found in General Schaw's admirable treatise, from which I have borrowed the quotation. If we compare it for the moment with the previous instance, it is sufficient to point out that while concealment of the design should be more easy, and the exact timing of its execution is held more completely subject to the personal inception of the commander, the initial difficulties of the attack promise to be somewhat greater. It would, however, be most imprudent to assume that the same painstaking and minute provision for its conduct in all its details is not to the full as imperative a duty as in the preceding case.

But it is not only in warding blows delivered against a formally occupied position that what may be termed "counter-attack" conditions are met with. If we were to take some military writers and critics at their word, one would imagine that whenever two hostile bodies of infantry meet, and under whatever circumstances, it is part of the unchangeable nature of things that the one force should seize what we recognize as the proper "defensive," the other the "offensive" attitude. When for instance one detachment meets another wandering in a thick wood, at some turn of a rough mountain road, or among minor folds of the ground, the one is bound by all the rules of modern fighting to throw itself on its face, to send supports and a reserve post-haste to the rear. The other is equally compelled by inexorable laws to dissolve into the attack formation, to advance by alternate rushes, and so forth, until it nears the enemy. The suggestion has at this point, I think, already reached what students of Euclid would call the "absurd" stage; and yet such appears to be the only fair inference to be drawn from what we are often told to regard as the binding rule of our modern tactics. "The old deployed line is dead, is impossible. It can never have any more relevance to any conceivable conditions of existing warfare. The extended line backed by supports and main body is everything."¹ If

¹ Language of this kind, though sufficiently common, is of course far too sweeping.

indeed it be true that no third alternative is to be found in the tactics of our schools, these undoubtedly *are* the horns of the dilemma in which we still stand; and it cannot be denied that the sooner we seek for some *via media*, or new departure, to supplement our recognized formations, the better for the future of our fighting machinery.

This last consideration has thus conducted us to that which we submit is *the* crucial question, which it should be the design of this paper to bring into something more of prominence than it at present occupies in the circles of professional thought. If it be generally admitted that where an army is not afflicted with an inferiority so incurable as to bind it to the *passive* defence, counter-attacks in *some* form or other must be delivered, it surely becomes a question of much moment what the accepted rules for conducting them are. Such is the enquiry which to my mind should be assigned a definite answer. It is one, however, which will I believe be in vain sought for, whether in our tactical treatises, in our drill-books, or in any accepted standard of professional opinion. Where answers have been given, they are not I believe such as should convey either conviction or satisfaction to the mind. In the "Field Exercises" the topic is certainly conspicuous by its absence; and, if it has received some cursory treatment elsewhere, some impulse is still needed to take it out of its present phase of speculative immaturity; and to give those of us, who may one of these days be called upon to assist in offensive-defensive operations on the field of battle some more definite guide for our dispositions than we now possess. It must be recollected that the opportunities for the application of the counterstroke are to a certain extent like those which present themselves for the offensive action of cavalry,—few, rapid, and evanescent. It is indeed possible that gifted men of highly trained minds, or of unusually rapid intuitions, may at such moment blunder upon apposite formations and methods of their own; though the chances are that they would improvise highly defective ones. Even a Napoleon is none the worse for being possessed at crises like these of a reliable mechanism to which he has but to give the initiatory impulse. It is probable, moreover, as we trust the sequel will show, that something more even than a sound and flexible mechanism is desiderated. Few will now be found to deny, that the real want of both attack and counter-attack alike is rather a higher ideal of discipline and disciplined method than we readily find scope for inculcating, in our present routine of drills and exercises.

Leaving, however, for the moment the question of how best to attain that higher ideal of intelligent and tempered discipline, which, the best authorities tell us, is so indispensable to the tactics of the

To take a single instance, solid formations of some kind or another are now recognized as essential for the conduct of night attacks, combined with the almost exclusive use of the bayonet. Other instances will occur to the reader, and they all serve somewhat to emphasize the contention that another departure is required in our fighting formations before our drill-book is considered duly adequate to our most pressing tactical requirements.

future, we may pause to ask what the characteristics of the advance to the counter-attack should be. The peculiarity of the situation lies, as we have already remarked, in the fugitive nature of the opportunities that it gives rise to. If some point in the position has been seized by the assailant, it can scarcely be doubted but that the successful troops will be closely followed by a detachment of engineers, who should a few minutes later be busily engaged in entrenching the captured locality;¹ while fresh troops will arrive simultaneously from the rear, charged with no other duty than to repel the expected counterstroke. When, on the other hand, the latter is directed at the attacking infantry in the critical zone a few hundred yards from the position, the time for effective action is still more fleeting, while the same remarks apply with equal force to the action of the special reserves disposed for offensive action for the protection of the flanks. It was, no doubt, considerations like these, combined with his experience of the battle-fields of 1870, which led Von Scherff to lay down as a binding condition of effective counter-attacks, that they should be "quick, concentrated, energetic."² The conditions which in other cases necessitate the previous preparation by a prolonged infantry fire, are here entirely wanting. The very essence of the situation lies in the fact that all the needful preparation has been already given by the fire-line of the troops occupying the position. The sooner that the struggle is put to the arbitrament of an actual collision, and if need be with the bayonet, the better for those conducting the counter-attack.

¹ It is to be hoped that the next edition of the Field Exercises, in the instructions for the attack of a Division, will contain an express stipulation to this effect.

² General Schaw, after giving a full and fair exposition of Von Scherff's views on the point, expresses his own partial dissent, and supports it by reasoning which may be briefly adverted to. He quotes the French "sorties" at Wörth and Spicheren as instances of attacks "in masses," impetuous and energetic no doubt, but which ended in failure. It may be answered, however, that in many of the instances in question the sorties were eminently successful in the first instance in regaining ground that had been lost, and ultimately failed for the best of reasons: because, viz., they were left unsupported, with exposed flanks, in the presence of fresh German troops, who were continually arriving upon the scene. In hardly any instance, moreover, were they so directed as to fall on the flank of the German troops. The General, however, continues: "It is probably the difficulty, which evidently exists, of quickly bringing large bodies of troops from cover and concealment in extended order, that has impressed itself on Von Scherff. When large masses are to be moved, such as the offensive reserves proposed by him, it is evident that their attack cannot, in these days of extended order, be either quick or concentrated," &c. Granted, most fully; and the argument serves to strengthen our plea for the adoption of some systematized formations, which shall restore to us the means of "quick and concentrated" attack. He then proceeds to admit that these terms may be applicable to the counterstrokes of small reserves, who rely on energetic local action for their success, and supports it by valuable instances from the Lorraine. I am not sure whether I rightly apprehend the drift of General Schaw's reasoning, especially when he says that, granting all Von Scherff's contention, "the necessity for extended order still remains;" but I imagine his difficulties to be the same as mine; namely, that neither the solid nor the attack formations of our own and the Continental drill-books supply the machinery required for our purpose; but he is probably less sanguine than we need be in his anticipations of a more suitable mechanism being discovered.

When, however, large masses of from one to three Divisions, or a whole *corps d'armée*, are launched from a distance against the flank of an attacking foe, it may readily be granted that the conditions will differ materially from the foregoing. A simultaneous surprise, extending over the whole depth of the enemy's formations, is in this case hardly to be hoped for. The actual impact, no matter what the form of the counter-attack may be, must be distributed over a long front. The character, therefore, of the collision will vary greatly from point to point. While in certain regions the previous assailant may have found time and means to assume (locally) a formal defensive attitude, possibly even to entrench hurriedly, it is equally clear that at others he must pay the penalty of being surprised and out-flanked. His troops have been disposed for the attack, presenting probably a succession of long and wavy lines, attenuated by casualties, and fronting with hopeless obliquity, in relation to the direction of the new peril; the flank companies hastily thrown back on the ground they happen to occupy at the moment; the 2nd lines and reserves being too much preoccupied with the exigencies of their own situation to give the intended protection to the flanks of the troops they had been placed to support. It avails nothing to say that the distance of the ground, from which the advance to the counter-attack was previously made, must have given the necessary security from surprise. Even the massive formation and unquestioned ascendancy of the breech-loader did not enable certain French battalions at Vionville to withstand the onset of Von Bredow's horse, when the charge of the latter was skilfully masked by a masterly utilization of the undulations of the ground on their immediate flanks; and, if such was the case, there is no avoiding the inference that the attack of infantry could have been delivered with a far greater certainty and ease. But it is enough for our purpose, if it be admitted, that along the assailed flank situations may occur, where the laboured progress of the attack formation will be utterly wanting in the elements of vigour and decisiveness which the conditions so imperiously demand. Such then we believe to be a fair representation of the probable condition of things which will obtain in the debatable zone at the moment of incipient collision. At certain points, may be, the impending blow is discovered in tolerable time, and the assailant finds leisure to formally occupy the ground. Here, consequently, the "attack" formation, with which we are familiar, becomes apposite or compulsory; here, too, the counter-attack may expect to be temporarily arrested, while to right and left, where no such laborious provision is necessary, it surges onward, eventually enveloping and isolating such headlands, like rocks in a rising tide. Nor is it probable that points thus tenaciously held with all the advantages of the defensive would be numerous. The whole hypothesis presumes that the available reserves have been pretty well used up, and the troops already engaged much shattered numerically and morally, if not, as is more probable, already organically dislocated. The stereotyped deployment for attack was designed to overcome a much more strenuous resistance than such bodies could afford; and it would be

impossible to offer any adequate justification for the loss of invaluable time which must result from expending so powerful an agency on an opposition so unworthy of its steel.

If we trace back, indeed, the history of our own mental progress since the dawn of the new tactical era at Sadowa, twenty-one years since, the justice of the present contention will become more apparent. The great revelation of that year was the enormous "retaining" power imparted locally to the defensive by the adoption of the breech-loading rifle. Then followed a recognition, perhaps an over-estimate, of what appeared to be the insuperable difficulties of the frontal attack, pure and simple. Further experience, and notably that of the giant struggles of the Franco-German War, showed that, if certain binding conditions were observed, the attack was not only still feasible, but retained many of its inalienable advantages. This lesson became further emphasized as tactical formations based on the new condition of things became crystallized into drill, and the subject-matter of methodical instruction. But still the power of the *local* defensive remains the dominant factor of the situation. Here, however, we come to a new point of departure. General Schaw and others argue from the historical data that they have collected that *all* collisions between opposing infantries must henceforth receive the local impress of these new conditions. One must perforce adopt the attitude of the pure defensive, the other at the same moment that of the recognized attack. The decision, moreover, will be a question of bullets and not of the bayonet. Both lines submit to the arbitrament of rifle-fire delivered lying down, the only distinction being that one remains *in statu quo* in the shelter-trench, the other advances by alternate rushes until brought to a standstill, half the volume of fire being continuous throughout. It is at this point that I submit the opposite inference ought rather to be drawn. It is precisely because the defensive attitude has such a fearful subsisting power, that we will so dispose matters as to assail our adversary not only when he is morally and physically shattered by the losses incidental to the attack, but when it is *impossible* for him to assume a defensive attitude with all the advantages that pertain to it. To insure this result there is no escaping Von Scherff's well-reasoned conclusion that the counter-attack, to be pertinent at all, must be "quick, concentrated, energetic," and if so, it would be an error of some magnitude to attempt to adapt the attack formation, which was designed to fulfil a wholly different purpose, and whose method is essentially the reverse of "rapid, concentrated, and energetic." Its habitual rate of advance is too slow, its movements too sinuous and intermittent, its fibre too deficient in coherence and tenacity. We may also admit on the other hand that escape is as little to be sought for in the direction of the abandoned linear tactics of Frederick the Great. The old deployed line is too rigid, too conspicuous, too much wanting in the faculties of plasticity and suppleness. The battalion column of Napoleon has become all but an impossibility under fire, and the German company column of 1867 and 1870 only less so, in proportion as it is smaller and more easily screened. It does not, however, follow that no new formations

can be adopted, which, without sacrifice of flexibility and celerity, possess that coherence and amenability to superior impulse which the extended line lacks. It may also be conceded, so far as this argument is concerned, that it is the bullet and not the bayonet which in four cases out of five must effect the final decision. The fact, however, remains that the ultimate proof of superiority in this particular will be the continually dwindling distance between our organized formations and the enemy's;¹ the bayonet being only the last word after the controversy is practically ended. With regard again to mere local counterstrokes, the same line of reasoning acquires still greater cogency. The arrangements which provide for the greater combat include the less, and in an enhanced degree; for the time allowed to the enemy's attack formations to assume an effective defensive attitude is less.

The subject is, however, too novel a one, and our practical knowledge of what takes place nowadays in the deadly zone of the last 250 yards too scanty to admit of more than a purely tentative scheme for supplying the hiatus. The time is, however, in many respects a suitable one for advocating a new departure. *Pari passu* with the rising demand for a tactical machinery more congenial to the exigencies of the modern arena, the claims of a higher *fire* and *marching discipline* are forcing themselves more and more obtrusively on the attention. The British soldier at present appears to recognize two distinct degrees (if not species) of discipline, as far asunder as those he is wont to associate respectively with his orderly-room and the canteen-bar. He forms line and column and marches past with a gravity worthy of the grenadiers of the great drill-master of Berlin. He is then deployed into what he must regard as the altogether secondary and more fanciful function of the attack; and all his more stringent ideas of subordination fly, if we are to believe some of our German critics, to the four winds. He obtains licence; but neither he nor his Officers gain anything of salutary initiative. It must be admitted that this is the exact reverse of what we have aimed at, and that the critics in question may have somewhat overstated their charge; but the *tendency* of our practice is not at any rate so inconspicuous as to have escaped the attention of many a careful observer in our own Service. Some link apparently is wanting. Rigid and extended formations are both still essential; but they do not represent two opposite poles of discipline. The latter, indeed, postulate the granting of a wider initiative; but unfortunately it is not sufficiently understood that the claims of an intelligent (though less mechanical) discipline become more paramount, exactly in proportion to the relaxation of detailed control over the freedom of individual volition. If some gradation, intermediate in character between the two species, involving less rigidity than the one, and less liberty of independent movement than the other, were to become matter of everyday practice, it is probable that the pervading nexus of a dominant discipline would

¹ I believe the original authority for this, or for some closely kindred remark, is to be found in the recent writings of Von der Goltz.

be more universally recognized as *the* one indispensable factor in all drill formations alike.

It is difficult, indeed, to conceive of any method better calculated to impress indelibly on the average soldier that, however other conditions may vary, the claims of the most absolute and unhesitating subordination to authority remain supreme, than the constant passage, even in the course of the same exercise, from one fighting formation to the other, each with its own gradation of freedom or of subserviency of individual movement. It is, moreover, exactly transitions of this character which may be expected to recur with greater frequency than we generally recognize in our advance to the attack. Instead of the stereotyped deployment at some 800 to 1,000 yards from the position, it is more likely that the conditions of fire and cover will compel the first extension of battalions at 2,000 or even 3,000 yards. As, however, no glacié of that extent is to be found in front of ordinary positions, ridges, woods, folds in the ground will certainly occur, where some class of close formation may and should be resumed for the moment; followed, indeed, by a subsequent redeployment, whole or partial, when the other ceases to be relevant. It is impossible, I think, to invent any better school for the inculcation of the new discipline, than to practise our companies and battalions in the advance over varied ground; the frequent alternation at a moment's notice from quarter-column into attack formation, thence into deployed line, thence to the counter-attack, back again to the attack, and when the intermingling process of the latter had proceeded to a sufficiently illustrative point, to suddenly reconstitute the battalion in any simple formation.

It is probable, however, that a deep-seated principle of the utmost moment lies at the basis of the whole question. In proportion as the minor units become spread over a larger extent of ground, and the rigidity of drill becomes proportionately relaxed, so must coherence and due subordination be provided for by a wider *devolution of responsibility and initiative to the leaders of the minor fractions of the line*. In the rigid drills of former days it seldom became necessary to recognize any lower sub-unit than the company of from 200 to 50 strong.

In the present extended formations the Continental Powers who stand foremost in the path of progress find it necessary to allow very considerable latitude to fractions as small as one-sixth of a company. [A Belgian section equals one-half a "peloton," equals one-sixth of the company, 200 strong.] In my opinion it is in the solidarity of purpose, but independence of method of these sections, that the germ of our future organization for attack and counter-attack alike is to be found. In the Belgian Service it has already germinated into a very promising system of attack. Each section forms a small aggregate of from twenty to thirty men, which alike in the daily incidents of life in camp or quarters, or amid the crises of the battle-field, looks to its own corporal as the source or channel of all authority and well-being. Such we believe to be the basal idea of the tactics of the future; but the scope of this article does not permit of our tracing it upwards into

its more obvious developments.¹ Enough has been said to show cause for one prominent feature at least in the suggestions that follow.²

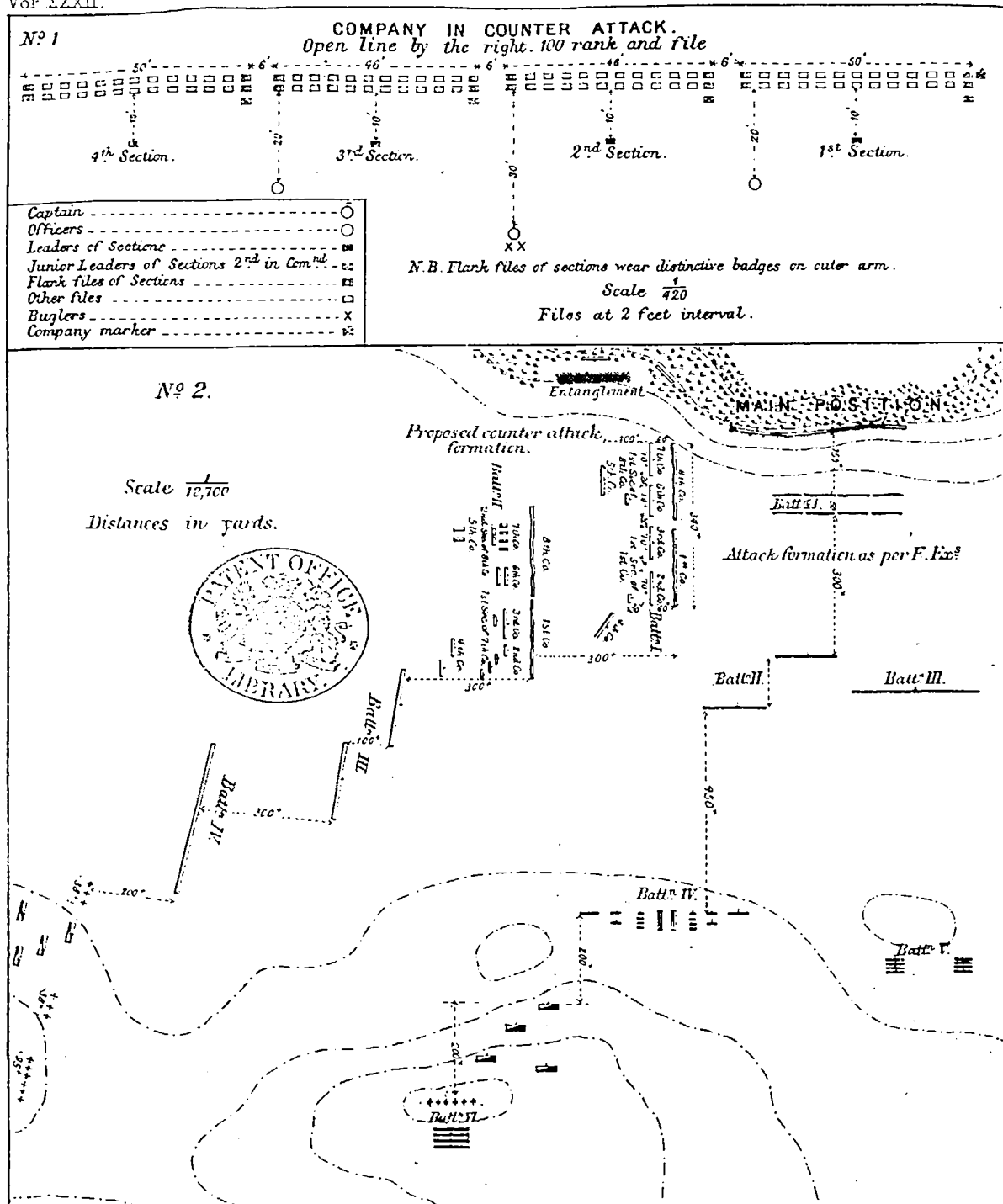
The diagram before us (Fig. 2) is a rough attempt to present in one view the general aspect which the outer section of a modern battle-field might conceivably offer to the eye, at the moment that the offensive counterstroke is being delivered against the assailant's flank. Certain assumptions favourable to both sides must be made. The position is doubtless so selected that a series of undulations and other features serve as a partial veil to the advance of the intended counter-attack; and arrangements have been made to deepen the obscurity which hangs over this quarter by the action of a screen of resolute cavalry, backed by infantry outposts. On the other hand,³ the attack has been pushed nearly home, the main body of the leading battalion is on the point of reinforcing its shooting line preparatory to the final rush. Suitable arrangements are made to support the first line, and to protect the exposed flanks by a well-disposed *échelon* thrown out to the left by a second and third line of infantry; while prolonging the *échelon* still further to the rear we have both cavalry and guns. The position from which the attack has been delivered is probably a strong one. It is obvious that the counter-attack to be effective must arrange to engage each step of this *échelon* simultaneously as it progresses, or it will find itself outflanked. In this case the initiative should be all its own, and there should be no difficulty by refusing its right in a corresponding *échelon* of battalions, squadrons, and batteries, not only to protect its own advance, but to fully occupy and finally roll up the rearmost "steps" of the enemy's left.

It will probably be of some advantage to take the leading battalion in this *échelon* as illustrative of the counter-attack formations that we advocate. The plate is drawn to scale, assuming 8 companies of 50 files each to form the battalion. The wavy line in front represents an extended line, which is trained however to bear a closer resemblance in its methods to the skirmishers of Crimean days than to our present shooting line. Its function is partly to provide a certain volume of fire, and to scout the advance; but still more essentially to form an impervious screen to the progress of the more solid detachments behind. It may here be recollected that when the French delivered their vigorous counter-attacks in the earlier battles of the 1870 cam-

¹ It is, however, hoped that the exactness of the analogy the proposed organization presents to the unrivalled constitution of our existing batteries of artillery will not escape notice.

² In my discussion of this part of my subject I find it difficult to trace exactly how far my conclusions are the outcome of my own study and experience, extended over several years, and what share, on the other hand, I owe to an admirable description of the Belgian system, recently given in this theatre by Colonel Lonsdale Hale, and to his invaluable comments thereon. In any case, the indebtedness in which many of us stand to his writings and lectures for the growth of our military perceptions on this and many kindred points is probably greater than we often remember to confess.

³ This is for illustrative purposes only. It is not meant to assume that the counter-attack could frequently be timed with such exact nicety as might perhaps be inferred from the representation in the diagram.



paign, even the cool and practised eye of a Hohenlohe failed to detect any considerable group behind the leading line of skirmishers, although the latter was usually closely followed by whole or half battalion columns. The skirmishing line then would be even more sinuous, independent, and mobile than the extended line of the attack. At the moment depicted it would have nearly accomplished its purpose of preparing and screening the advance, and would be awaiting the signal to rush behind the companies in its rear, to clear the way for the decisive action of the latter, and to re-form behind them. The battalion has, in fact, extended as follows: The flank companies throw out each from two to three sections to cover the front in rank entire at from 2 to 3 yards interval, the remaining sections form supports in rear of the battalion, for relief, feeding, and rallying purposes only. The two centre companies drop to the rear, and move either towards the exposed flank, or to deepen any weak point in the line. The remaining four companies "expand" from "deployed" or "close" line into "counter-attack" or "open" line,—a formation which demands a somewhat more detailed consideration. The battalion in question occupies in deployed line a front of 275 yards; and the usual attack formation (if two companies are thrown out in rank entire at two paces interval) covers exactly the same frontage. It would be possible, by placing the four companies at intervals of 14 yards apart in "counter-attack" formation, to fill once again the same ground, which would realize for our proposal the advantages of uniformity and simplicity of method.¹ It is probable, however, that a higher efficiency would result from our assigning the same battalion an additional frontage of one quarter, or 314 yards in all, for purposes of the counter-attack—a trifling extension, which the essential conditions of the case do more than justify. Each company, therefore, obliques outwards until a lateral interval of 20 yards (roughly, one-third of its own front) is attained. The files also open out till separated from each other by intervals sufficient to admit, if needful, the rear rank man; viz., with 2 feet between each.² The main distinction of training and

¹ A prolonged experience in laying out points on parade for brigading and other purposes has taught me that the 24 inches per file is a fiction (though a convenient one) even for our most stalwart regiments. The old space of 21 inches answers exactly. Hence the "counter-attack" companies could be disposed with intervals of 21 inches between files, which would at any moment enable rank entire to be formed. I prefer, however, to give the 48 inches to each file, so as to minimize jostling and increase the effective front still further.

² The justification for an "open" in preference to what we may term a "close" line is a simple, though possibly not a novel one. Columns of attack are better suited than any line formations to take advantage of cover, but have the unavoidable defect of attracting a specially aimed and converging fire. In proportion as the columns become smaller and more numerous this defect diminishes. When finally each small column dissolves into a line of individuals, all convergency of the enemy's fire ceases and his specially aimed fire is replaced by one that is general and indiscriminating. Even this is no doubt sufficiently serious; but the gaps, if the line be an "open" one, will absorb a large proportion of those bullets (about two-thirds namely) which must inevitably cause casualties in the old "deployed" or "close" line. In both cases the two-deep formation evinces some slight superiority over the rank entire at half the strength, in proportion as the rear rank man gains some

practice lies in the drill of these companies. If the effect of shock is (as may occasionally happen) resorted to, it may quickly, if desired, at the word of the Captain become "serried" to 24 or 21 inches on the centre files. The 48-inch elbow room is, however, the usual space, and this allows of freedom in doubling, halting, lying down, firing even in rank entire, or of volleys from two ranks, and yet at no time (under the arrangements we propose) of an unmanageable length of front. If, however, beyond the power of the voice, it may be worked by half companies or sections, whether aligned or in open column. The skirmishers being in front, the advance never intermits in ordinary cases, but proceeds continuously. Finally, as the latter run outwards round the flanks, the way is cleared for the companies to charge. The arrangement is, however, also susceptible of advance by alternate rushes, or of alternate volleys, and, if need be, of rapid conversion into the attack formation; but the conditions under which counter-attack is conducted would seldom render it necessary.¹ It may, perhaps, be objected that the 2-foot interval between files, and the further intervals between sections, presently to be described, take this at once out of the category of solid formations. Certainly the dressing and spacing is no longer assisted by actual contact at the elbow; but our knowledge of the Macedonian phalanx shows us that a high degree of symmetry and coherence may be retained consistently with the preservation of certain small intervals between files. Three feet is generally understood to have been the usual assignment of front to each hoplite or heavily-armed foot-soldier. A glance at the proposed company formation in Fig. 1 will show, moreover, that the preservation of the proper intervals and spaces generally is peculiarly in the hands of the Officers, and of the leaders of sections and their assistants.²

meagre protection from the comrade in his front. Probably no better mean between the extended line in rank entire and the old deployed two-deep line can be found than that suggested in these pages. It appears to realize in a large degree the merits of both without the corresponding defects.

¹ The original battalion words of command would be pretty much as follows: "The battalion will extend for counter-attack. Flank companies will extend three sections for skirmishing, forming their own supports. Two (or three) centre companies will form battalion reserve. Remainder—outwards turn. Intervals, 20 yards. By the right."

² The above lines were penned early in the month of March. Some time after they were written, it became the writer's privilege to witness the manœuvres of some German companies. It became, therefore, a matter of considerable interest to observe that in this—the most practical and soldier-like nation of modern Europe—whether from design, or as the result of trained habit, the contact of adjacent files at the elbow appears to have already passed into the limbo of other time-honoured anachronisms. Such indeed appeared to be the case equally in the march-past, in the "parade-drill," and in the simple fighting and marching formations, to which, however, the word "rigid" is still applicable. The reason, moreover, assigned for this action is, if possible, still more worthy of notice than the fact itself. The German organizer, in all details of drill and training, from the march of the Division down to the "goose-step," keeps first and foremost before his mind's eye the paramount urgency of habituating the soldier to the exigencies peculiar to modern fighting. Those exigencies demand perfect coherence and discipline of the masses, combined with freedom of individual movement. Hence, even in the rigid forma-

The most important and distinctive feature of all, however, yet remains to be described. It is an endeavour to engraft, at least to some humble extent, on our accepted formations, that carefully subordinated but confident delegation of initiative into the hands of the leaders of minor fractions, in which, as already urged upon your attention, we believe to lie the germ of all future progress in drill and tactics. It will appear from an inspection of the dimensions shown on the diagram (Fig. 2) that a spare frontage of 16 yards is still available for the battalion alignment. The gain, may be, does not appear at first sight worthy of especial notice; but it may probably be turned to valuable account if we simply utilize it to retain an extra interval of 4 feet between sections, thus more clearly demarcating one from the other. In lieu of the present somewhat objectless division of space by the supernumerary rank, the leader of each section would march directly behind it, supervise, and be held responsible for its intervals and its every movement. It would of course be open to the Captain to reserve all independent issue of orders to his sections to himself; or, on the other hand, to delegate just that freedom of action which at each successive juncture he deems relevant. In the event of either verbal omissions, or of any sudden collapse of superior authority, the sectional commander (or in the event of casualty his assistant) would issue every necessary command; his guiding principle being unswervingly to conform the action of his section to the general idea. During the earlier stages of the advance, when concealment, facility of marching, and cover were the most important considerations, he would probably be allowed full latitude. Thus we might perhaps see a company advancing, the right section say in "open line," the second in column of files or fours, the left half company in column of sections, &c.; but the unison of method might be resumed at any moment. It is, however, essential to our purpose to premise that, if this sectional independence is only to be such as obtains in our present companies, a mere name and nothing more, it would be preferable even to exclude them expressly from the Field Exercises, as a needless complication of drill. If they are to be a reality, to be put into habitual use, the more their individuality is marked off in the daily life of field and quarters, the better. For this reason I would be inclined to lay much stress on the apparently trivial innovation of placing distinctive badges on the arms of the flank men, partly with the view of creating an honoured and somewhat privileged status for the men themselves, which could not but react on their efficiency as sectional guides—but still more to render their positions conspicuous in the ranks, which would be of especial value, whenever occasion arose for rallying or re-forming out of the confusion incidental to the attack. Even the habitual march of companies in fours is to be deprecated wherever the width of roadway admits of a larger front. The quartering in rooms, the daily roster

tions of the battalion, the soldier must be trained to move, not with the mechanical assistance of bodily contact, but guided by the measured cadence of his step, by his eye and intelligence alone. A sword-blade should always be capable of passing between himself and his comrade in the ranks, without touching either.

of reliefs and duties, the formation of outposts, and of instructional squads, should all be designed so as to bring into relief the autonomous and patriarchal life of the section and its leader. Our proposal on this head is at once conservative and revolutionary; the former because it is an attempt to invest with life a partition of responsibility which already obtains in name and theory; and the latter, because it seeks by a development of the same embryo to create a new principle, potentially rich in the agency which is, we hope, to educe something more of order and method out of the chaotic din and confusion of the final fire-conflict or of the *mêlée*. To enlarge upon the administrative value of such a system, and its reflex action in forming the character of our non-commissioned officers, lies unfortunately beyond the scope of the present discussion, except in so far perhaps as it reacts on its tactical efficacy.¹ An ungrudging and intelligent correlation of this double agency may, however, be the means of infusing a new source of strength and vigour into the muscular tissue of the Army. The Corps of Officers must of course always remain the backbone, to which the whole of the outer framework is minutely articulated. But the hope is, by means of a further differentiation of function, to enable it happily to exercise a more pervading and manifold influence than is at present possible on the outer sensoria of the system.

If to the foregoing be now added a few words as to the support it is proposed to afford to the head of the counter-attack, the account will, in all probability, be sufficiently clear and exhaustive for our purpose. The whole supposition on which the probability of a successful counterstroke is based presumes that the resistance to be overcome and the power of inflicting loss are alike relatively small. Hence the dealing of the *coup de grâce* is, in the first instance, assigned as the special function of the four companies which follow immediately behind the skirmishers. They are, however, powerfully supported,—at first by the two reserve companies, which will arrive comparatively fresh upon the scene;—and subsequently by two others, parts of which had been extended, but which have now rallied on their respective nuclei, and which should have suffered but little. A second line may or may not be necessary. If it is, some modification of the counter-attack formation would in all likelihood be more germane to its situation than the rigid two-deep line. It is probable that a distance of less than 300 yards would suffice. The attack to be successful (it is now recognized) should be successively supported by wave upon wave of fresh infantry, until as many as from six to ten men to the pace are accumulated. The decision, it is held, will ultimately depend less on the increase of the volume of fire, than on the ever-rising pressure, moral and physical, which makes itself felt in a series of impulses propelled forwards from the rear. In the counter-attack the necessity of such provision is, of course, consider-

¹ Officers of field artillery could say a great deal as to the results of their experience on this head, so far at least as regards the effect of an exactly similar training on those invaluable non-commissioned officers known as the "Numbers 1 of subdivisions."

ably less, as a question of *degree*; but the *principle* is probably the same. We, therefore, reduce the size and number of our supporting échelons, as compared with the attack; but bring them closer together.

Such, in fine, is the disposition which is now submitted to the judgment of the profession, as not altogether unsuited to its purpose. It cannot, however, be contended that it is the best, nor indeed nearly the best, solution of the problem enunciated in these pages. Its crudities and defects, or rather perhaps its difficulties, lie very much upon its surface; and it bears, no doubt only too palpably, the stamp of the novel and tentative character of its own proposals. It will, however, have served its purpose, if it does but act as a momentary stimulus to professional thought and controversy on an important subject that has been too long overlooked. Certain merits, too, may modestly be claimed for it. The formation we have formulated appears to stand midway in its gains and defects between the old linear tactics of thirty years since, and the modern attack of our text-books. It is undeniable that the last method, for the sake of greater gain in other directions, has lost somewhat in cohesiveness and subordination. The problem of the counter-attack, while it postulates an even enhanced stringency in these latter conditions, demands a flexibility nearly equal, a rate of advance on the enemy less protracted and intermittent, and finally a higher faculty for (at any rate) the moral effect of shock tactics at the climax. Some improvement in these directions we claim to have realized in our suggestions, and to those we have endeavoured to add a few of those inestimable advantages, which all drill formations whatever may be expected to reap from the devolution of responsibility and freedom of initiative to the smaller fractions of the line. The old bond of union in the Potsdam school of rigid tactics was to a great extent a mechanical one. This has perforce become relaxed under modern conditions, and we seek to replace it by the higher tie of a moral and intellectual union, based on an unfailing co-operation of purpose, but working through an intelligent individualization of method. In this principle we claim to see the "promise and potency" of at once a higher tactics and a more well-founded discipline.

It should not, however, be overlooked that while our aim has been in the main restricted to the supply of a more powerful and suitable mechanism for the use of the offensive element in the active defence of lines of battle, we have incidentally provided a means prolific in promise of many distinct applications in modern warfare. The action of a force pursuing beaten troops, whose retreat is covered in the ordinary way by a rear guard charged to fight a series of "delay" actions, can hardly fail to present occasions, when the repeated extension into the dilatory attack formations would entail the waste of much invaluable time. An elaborate preparation by musketry fire is here entirely out of place; an assault of a brusquer and less uncertain character than the attack proper affords is clearly required by the situation. Again, in our frequent wars against a savage or semi-civilized enemy the old rigid drill has unquestionably often stood

us in good stead. Other cases must, however, not unseldom have occurred when the commander must have wished in vain that he had ready to hand some appliance more rapid than either the deployed line or the modern attack, and yet more flexible than the one, and more rigid and coherent than the other. Even the attack itself, when conducted over ground similar to that of the Le Mans campaign, might at times do well to borrow the method we have prescribed for the counter-attack. The close and intersected country of that region gave rise to continual isolated combats, which were fought out in extended order; and Boguslawski tells us how for this reason the superiority of the well-trained German soldiers over the raw and ill-disciplined levies of General Chanzy evinced itself far more conspicuously than elsewhere; and he proceeds to describe the theatre of war in terms which would exactly answer for by far the greater part of our own country. Had the French soldier been trained to the drill we have advocated for the counter-attack, the result might evidently have been widely different. Such are some among probably numerous instances which might be quoted in support of our plea for introducing some new drill-formations into our present practice, which shall stand midway between the two somewhat divergent systems which at present occupy the ground. To Englishmen the appeal should carry especial weight, not only on account of the probable exigencies of our semi-barbarous wars, but because of the peculiar character of those large districts in our own country which may, for all we know, become the stage of future war.¹

¹ Let us assume for illustrative purposes a simple case, such as might any day arise in ordinary warfare. A British battalion is advancing through a wood, not suspecting the presence of an enemy, and in a highly unsuitable formation—say, a battalion quarter-column. Suddenly it emerges in view of a clearing, 100 to 150 yards wide, and on the opposite side French troops are seen in position. The battalion commander passes through the inevitable stage of momentary hesitation, but he has an apt machinery ready to hand, a fact which cannot but react on the slowest mental constitution. "Battalion will extend for counter-attack. 1 and 2 companies will extend for skirmishing, furnishing their own supports." So much requires but little mental effort, and is equally suitable to various afterthoughts. The orders are immediately executed, and two or three minutes' respite for consideration is gained, during which a preparatory fire begins in earnest, and an opaque veil is drawn over the battalion front, which to the adversary may mean either impetuous attack with the bayonet, or a precipitous retreat, or any intermediate function between the two. But the commander has leisure to think for two minutes, and issue his orders in the third. "3, 4, and 5 companies deploy outwards, open line, at 20 yards' interval. By the centre." Another pause to consider, and then, "Remaining companies (6, 7, and 8) will support." A moment more, and he adds, "Direct échelon from the centre, to protect both flanks, No. 7 leading, at 100 yards' distance from companies in first line." All this might be accomplished in five minutes or less. Such an incident might have occurred twenty times over in the Gifert or Stiring Wälder during the battle of Spicheren, and yet we have an exact instance of what may be termed "counter-attack conditions." Nothing is perhaps better calculated to carry conviction to those who, while they advocate progress, are still sceptical as to the adequacy of motive for such extensive additions to our faculties of manœuvre as we have designed, than the simple illustration we have taken, if it does but induce them to consider for a single moment how they would themselves propose to meet the same emergency, and what formations they would borrow for the purpose from our own, or indeed from any, drill-book with

It may be objected that a larger training and more varied exercises will be required to adapt our infantry to such requirements. To this it might perhaps be enough to answer that the claims of the higher discipline and individual training, which all now recognize as so indispensable to the new conditions, will in any case make more serious demands on the time we are used to assign to drills and exercises; and that if so it matters little, so far as economy of time is concerned, what the nature of the more elaborate education that we impart is. Or again, it might be demonstrated that to add one-sixth or one-quarter to the number of our present exercises by no means involves an equivalent increase of the hours devoted to drill. But it is, we think, better (without entering on other theses, which we feel sure we could establish, but which we can put aside as after all unessential to our main contentions) simply to point out that the objection itself is based on a prevalent, but none the less harmful misconception.

The British soldier, like the Teutonic brotherhood from which he springs, is at times somewhat of a grumbler; but this is mainly due to the intensely utilitarian side of his character. He has nothing of the visionary and too little of the imaginative about him in matters of drill and work. The story of Don Quixote's night vigil as a preparation for a life of knight-errantry could not have been predicated of any countryman of ours. The labour of the treadmill is deterrently

which they are acquainted. It may well be doubted if any satisfactory solution is to be found except in the general direction we have indicated.

Both French and German text-books discuss the chance "*combats de rencontre*," in which two hostile bodies unexpectedly find themselves at a moment's notice in each other's immediate presence. They argue that to each of the rival commanders a question demanding prompt decision will be simultaneously presented—whether, namely, to assume an offensive or defensive attitude as the better means of repelling the enemy. Unquestionably it will; but to conclude further that the force which succeeds by superior initiative or other cause in imprinting the defensive on the dispositions of the enemy is, therefore, tied down to the formations which constitute our present cumbersome system of attack, involves the most obvious *non sequitur*. Hitherto it is true the latter has furnished the only suitable weapon that our armoury could provide. Surely the system advocated in this paper, as more suitable for counter-attack operations in general, is also far better adapted than the other for effecting a rapid decision in an improvised attack, arising out of a chance encounter of this nature.

In this instance, again, the experience of the writer, subsequently to the time when this note was first penned, has stood him in good stead. It became a matter of especial interest to witness the German companies practising, on the parade-ground of Metz, the way to receive the attack by sudden surprise, while on the line of march. The lightning-like rapidity with which the offensive surprise-formation was developed was quite remarkable. The column of march dissolved as by magic into two groups, the central nucleus, which pushed forward at once with accelerated step to beat of drum, and the skirmishing groups on either flank, which at open files screened and covered the advance by a certain volume of fire. Here we find the exact analogue to the formation advocated for either the counter-stroke or the informal attack in these pages. In both cases the assault is delivered by the central nucleus, which advances rapidly and continuously towards its objective, while its progress is masked and covered by the fire of skirmishers in front or flank.

repulsive even to our coarsest natures; but chiefly for the reason that it is so absolutely unproductive. There have been in our records perhaps instances of an undue repetition of barrack square manœuvres, the tedium of which has become so insupportable as to produce a state of feeling bordering on insubordination. Such cases are, it is to be hoped, exceedingly rare; and when they do occur are probably the outcome of an instinctive feeling, that the gain to military efficiency bears no fair proportion to the toil exacted. All, however, who can speak from their own experience in the field and quarters as to the working idiosyncrasies of our soldiers will agree, that no men in the world will more cheerfully bear toil, privation, and discomfort whenever the object is one worthy of the means. The acquiring of knowledge, no matter how laborious and distasteful in itself, which is admitted by common consent to be essential to soldierlike training, is never begrudged nor resented, but is cheerfully acquiesced in by all. The experience of our artillerymen and engineers, of our blue-jackets and marines, teaches us that a multiplicity of drills does *not* in itself impair either discipline, handiness, or efficiency, whenever any practical end is kept in view; rather we may say it is an admirable machinery for producing and fostering it.

If indeed it be admitted that the extensiveness of the modern battle-field, the ever-increasing depth of the fire-swept zone, the multiplicity of armaments and equipments demand ever so little, some responsive development in tactical adaptations, then all objections which are founded solely on the increasing elaboration of the soldier's training fall absolutely to the ground. True it certainly is that toil of brain and nerve and muscle is more than ever *the* one indispensable condition of all success in war and civilization. Probably never in the history of warfare has revolution followed revolution so rapidly as in the last momentous quarter of a century; and it is more especially within the domain of fire-tactics that the stone of Sisyphus is kept ever rolling. The recorded results of the great struggle of 1871 present us with a monument more durable than hardened brass of what can be achieved by more than half a century of plodding toil, high-mettled zeal, and unwearied patience. All the energies, the aspirations, the patriotism, the industry of a mighty race concentrated on the task of rearing the potent fabric of those vast armed formations, which could alone form an effective guarantee for the preservation of the national existence. The data of the problem to us Englishmen are happily somewhat diverse; but they equally demand the attaining of an ideal perfection in those small but fearfully costly armaments which are confided by the nation to our charge; and the conditions of success are identical. If an assiduous industry, a lavish expenditure of painstaking energy, and a resolute looking in the face of emergencies certain to come are to be begrudged here more than they were by our elder brethren of the great Teutonic race, let us at least recognize the price to be paid. It is nothing less than to relinquish for ever the honourable rivalry in military excellence, with all the prizes of intrinsic strength, which have over discriminated between rising and falling peoples. The failing *motif* for

manly exertion is even more baneful in its effects on the character of our race, than in its negative results on our machinery of war. No surer portent can be forthcoming to foreshadow the approaching advent of a wholesale national decay.

Colonel SLADE, late Rifle Brigade: Colonel Brackenbury and gentlemen, I confess that I have listened with the utmost astonishment to this lecture. The impression left on my mind is that the lecture must have been written thirty years ago, and that the lecturer, when he was attached to an infantry battalion, after passing through the Staff College, cannot have looked very closely into the interior economy of the battalion, or the manner in which it carried out its field manoeuvres. I have lately given up the command of a battalion myself, and I can assure the lecturer that ever since I was in that battalion the companies were organized in sections as a matter of course, not only in quarters but also in the field. I perfectly remember thirty years ago seeing the 52nd Light Infantry and the 68th Light Infantry organized in precisely the same manner in sections. In every well-instructed and well-regulated battalion in our Service now-a-days, the sectional system is adopted. With regard to the German infantry, I had the privilege last September of closely following for a month the exercises of about thirty battalions of the German Guard, the infantry of the Guard, and also the tactical battalion of instruction, and I have no hesitation in saying that although as regards the parade movements their rigidity was more than equal to the rigidity of our close formations, yet carrying out the attack formation, as I saw them do day after day, and on one occasion a battalion at war strength firing ball cartridge at a village prepared as a position which they were to attack, we have nothing to learn from the German infantry in carrying out an attack. More than that, if our infantry did not get over the ground quicker than I saw the German infantry do it, I should be very much surprised. That is the case with every well-drilled battalion, as you may see any day at Aldershot. They get over the ground more quickly than any German battalions that I saw. But I doubt whether it is a very great advantage to try and rush too quickly over the ground. You must remember that the soldier is weighed down, and he has to go over perhaps a ploughed field or rough ground with his coat, his ammunition, water-bottle, and his haversack for rations, and what would be the result? Why, at a critical moment you would find the men blown, exhausted, and unable to push the attack home. But, as I have said, I cannot admit that our infantry is not organized in the way it should be. I do not think the lecturer can have read the last new attack formation which will probably be practised this year at Aldershot.

General DUNNE: I am sorry to say that I was unfortunately late in arriving here, and, therefore, I cannot venture to offer any criticisms as to the commencement of the lecture; but as Colonel Slade's old Brigadier at Aldershot, where for two years I commanded a brigade, and also from what I have seen of the German troops, I can thoroughly and completely bear out almost every word that Colonel Slade has spoken. His own battalion, and other battalions under me in Aldershot some years ago, were precisely as Colonel Slade has stated, and I agree with what he has said on that subject.

Major-General MONCRIEFF: Colonel Brackenbury, ladies, and gentlemen, I do not quite see that that this proposed counter-attack system of the lecturer's of a battalion in quarter-column formation suddenly coming upon an enemy in a wood is any quicker than the present attack formation. In the attack formation you have simply to send out so many companies in advance in extended order, with more in support, and the remainder as the main body. I do not see that there is any material gain in time in what the lecturer has proposed. Unfortunately that part of his lecture is in a foot-note, which has not been read, so that you may not know exactly what it is. There is a certain difficulty, although the lecturer may not think so, in having two ways of forming for an attack, one the ordinary way in the drill-book, and the other for this particular occasion, which he calls the counter-attack. The two attacks to my mind are identical. If there is some way, which I do not see in the paper, in which a superior and quicker attack

formation can be devised, then, no doubt, it might be a useful thing. But the merit of having two systems of attack formation in the drill-book I cannot see.

Major SMITH: It only remains for me to say one word in reply to the observations that have been made. Colonel Slade accuses me of not being aware that the sectional system is that which has existed as the basis of administration in the service battalions for many (perhaps thirty) years past. Well, I do not doubt that nearly everywhere where it is possible sections are put on a separate roster, in separate rooms, and so on, but I do not think at this moment, in spite of the disclaimer we have heard, that the sectional system in any *valid* sense of the term does obtain. There is all the difference in the world between its being carried out in a very theoretical or visionary way, and its being made the *bona fide* pivot of the whole regimental system which I advocate. What I urge upon your attention is that the section should be always kept under its own Commander whether in the field or in quarters, forming an administrative and tactical autonomy of its own. It should not have its men split up during the process of "sizing" into different parts of their company. It is a great point that the non-commissioned officer in charge of a section (the sergeant in our case) should be the *one* channel of authority, whether in the daily routine, the discipline of quarters, or as the channel of orders in the field. Of course I readily accept what Colonel Slade has said,—that sections have been carried out as far as possible within his own sphere of knowledge, and I am glad to hear it; but I am bound to say that the information I have received privately by asking a very large number of infantry Officers points in an exactly opposite direction. Many recognize the value of it, but they find that the administrative difficulties in the Service are such that it is almost impossible to carry it out. I heard only last night from a field Officer of infantry that that was the case in his own battalion, although he has long realized the great value of the system. If I had had time to indicate rather more fully and thoroughly how far sections might be kept distinct in the everyday life in camp or quarters, and how its inevitable tendency would be to make its leader a man of far greater weight and significance in the daily routine, I think it would have gone far to convince you that advantages which it is hardly possible to over-estimate will result from giving these sections an independence which they do not now possess. And I think that would react very powerfully in those moments of supreme importance when the battalions are withered more or less under fire, and it becomes necessary to collect and rally them round their leaders as soon as possible. I think if each section had a very much more marked autonomous life than it has now, and was habituated by frequent practice to rally round its own leader, great advantage would result; and the reflex action on the character of the non-commissioned officer in charge of the section would be of enormous value. Artillerymen have long been conversant with the extraordinary effect that it has on the mind of an average non-commissioned officer when he is placed in the position of a "number one" in quarters and in the field alike; he then has an independent position of responsibility which I do not think any other non-commissioned officer of his rank in the Service possesses in an equal degree, and that has an influence in forming the man's character which is something quite extraordinary. I believe that our non-commissioned officers in charge of subdivisions, or "numbers one" (as we call them in the Royal Artillery), will bear comparison with those of any arm of the Service; and this not because there is anything superior in the class from which the men are originally selected, but that their training has been of such unquestionable value in bringing out their powers of mind and character. Of course I accept with great pleasure General Dunne's statement that in his brigade the sectional system did obtain; but perhaps if he had told us a little more (and I wish he had done so), he would have pointed out that it was not as thoroughly carried out as he could have wished, on account of the administrative difficulties which we all admit—those of us, that is, who are accustomed to work the daily routine of regimental administration—and more especially that very great difficulty of the numberless employments by which men are taken out of our hands altogether. In reference to General Moncrieff's observation as to that particular emergency which I imagined—an English battalion meeting a French one in a thick wood—that, namely, the ordinary attack formation would have answered as well as the one which I propose, un-

doubtedly it would not in the first instance be so very unsuitable to form your men exactly as you would do in the attack formation provided you had regularly trained them to it; but I think that if only some 200 or 300 yards still separated the opposing bodies, the attack formation would compare most unfavourably with mine. In the former the men are not habituated to making a rush, and moreover you expect that the decisive *coup de grâce* is to be given by the extended fire line in front. In my formation the extended line in front is a mere screen of skirmishers, and the final blow is given by the companies in the rear; that makes all the difference. The advance of those companies in the rear should, in my opinion, be continuous, whether done at the double or by an extra quick step, as it is by the Germans. I believe that my view on this head is entirely borne out both by the German theory and habitual practice. When a sudden attack has to be made, or when you suddenly decide to rush the enemy's position from a short distance off, that long dilatory preparation by firing becomes inapposite. You want, on the contrary, a very quick concentrated advance screened by skirmishing fire, for the purposes of which the attack formation furnishes no machinery whatever. The latter, moreover, would entirely fail to bring up its "supporting" or "main body" companies in any suitable formation for dealing the decisive stroke in a position like that I have imagined.

The CHAIRMAN (Colonel Brackenbury): We have to thank Major Smith very much for his interesting lecture. I may perhaps, as usual, be permitted to say a few words, both on what he has said, and on the discussion. In the first place I confess that this seems to me to be a day of surprises. Never have I been more astonished in my life than to hear what Colonel Slade and General Dunne have said. It is, I believe, at this moment about as certain as anything can possibly be, that the attack formation is unpopular in the Army, and quite distrusted. From the highest to the lowest, from the Adjutant-General to the youngest subaltern, I believe there is no confidence in it. With regard to the question of sections and groups under non-commissioned officers, I tried very hard indeed at one time to get the principle introduced, but quite without success. If Colonel Slade had been then at the War Office, he would have understood what the principle was, and also how difficult to get recognized. I have lately come from a district where I saw a great deal of drill. I have also often been to Aldershot, both lately and formerly, and I have never seen in any British regiment, at any period, work in sections and groups like that which is done by the Germans, and also by the French and Belgians. The French have their system of sections and groups. The group is a small body of men which would be about equivalent to our section in peace, and is commanded by a corporal. The training of the regiment begins, not by the Lieutenant-Colonel or the Adjutant, but by the corporal being sent out with his men, and made to perform every tactical duty in the face of an enemy, with his group equivalent to our section, just as any Officer commanding a company might be. Major Smith evidently refers to the same principle. In that way, and in that way alone, do I believe that it is possible for a thorough tactical knowledge to be made to penetrate throughout the whole of a regiment or an army.

General DUNNE: Neither Colonel Slade nor myself said a word about groups.

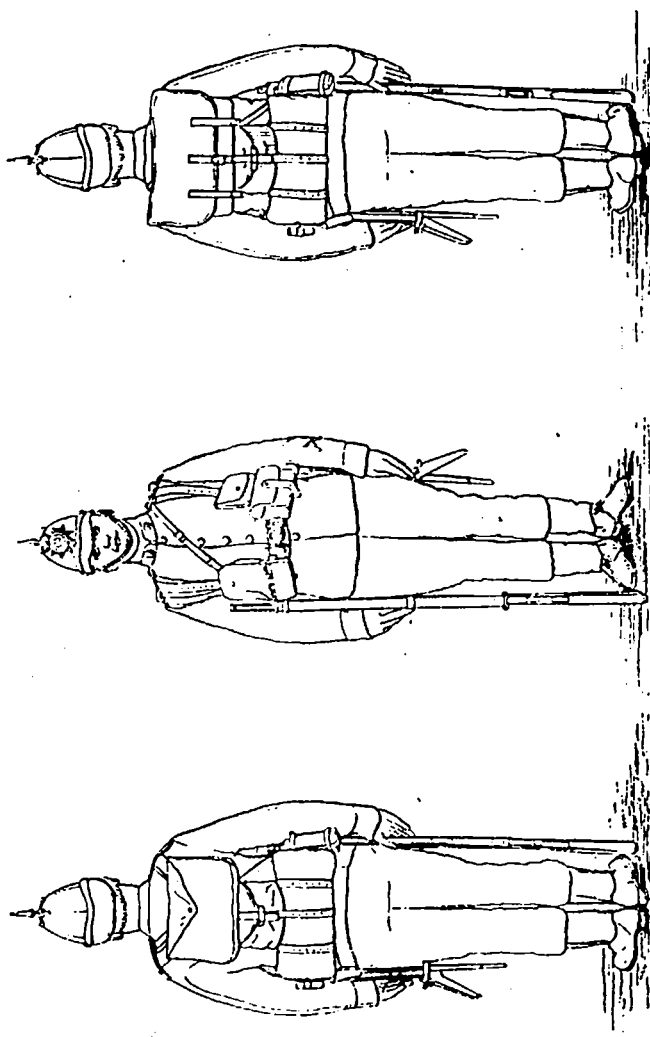
The CHAIRMAN: It is the same question, one of principle.

General DUNNE: Sections are different from groups.

The CHAIRMAN: The lecturer, as has been remarked, has, I think, been rather wily, in that while he has been talking about counter-attack, he has been really introducing to a large extent a new system of attack. It is difficult to see why there should be any great difference between the mechanism of a counter-attack and of an attack, only that the former should bear always, if possible, the nature of suddenness, if not surprise. In the early part of his lecture, Major Smith seemed to speak rather in favour of acting on the defensive, at least on a small scale. That again, I cannot help thinking, is a question on which we English are a little opposed to general tactical opinions. We insist upon this wretched defensive idea, though there is not another army in the world that believes in it in the least, except that of the Turks, and they have suffered enough by it. All the great Generals, English or otherwise, from all time, with the exception of certain occasions on which the Duke of Wellington used the defensive for peculiar purposes, have been in favour of the

offensive. It has advantages which are greatly superior to any belonging to the defensive. There is a power in the offensive to concentrate the fire upon, and then attack, any point selected. The defenders cannot do this, because they do not know where the enemy is coming, and may be facing another way. We are now arriving at a point of artillery progress when shells will have high explosives in them, and be able to destroy earthworks, levelling them to the ground; and thus will be restored the power of the artillery to dig out, as it were, infantry which has sheltered itself behind earthworks. One of the great features of the modern defensive will then lose its efficacy. Troops on the offensive leave behind them all the demoralizing sights and sounds, the dead and the wounded; they do not know how their ranks are thinning, because they are constantly being filled up. All such mental impression is against troops on the defensive, who have around them the horrible sights and sounds, and know the evil which is happening to them. Then there is the moral effect on the men of the mere fact that they are taking the offensive. They believe in themselves; they believe in their power and in their superiority. They think they are going to be successful, and that makes them successful. And further is another very strong point. If a defender is beaten at any one point he is beaten altogether, whereas if the attacker wins in any one spot he wins altogether. The only answer to this is what Major Smith has been trying to develop to-day, the counter-attack. What does it mean? It means that you can never gain a great success until you become the attacking party. Well, gentlemen, we may have all sorts of new formulae, and it is very much the habit now to be designing new formulae for doing this or that, and to say that it is the bullet that wins the day, and not the bayonet. Most men who have seen a great deal of war have come to the conclusion that it is not the bullets nor the bayonets either, but the men, and the hearts that are in the men. You do not sweep away the enemy with your bullets or your bayonets; you do not with your bullets kill all those who are opposed to you, and then walk over their bodies; you do not with your bayonets thrust your antagonist through, for the bayonets rarely meet; but what happens is this: one side, showing a firm front, courage, determination, and discipline, whatever be the conditions, produces on the other side a sinking of heart which causes the weaker-hearted to run away. I do not care whether you call it the bullet or the bayonet which is the means to this end, but the real fact is that the side which has the greatest moral force wins. Therefore, though forms may be interesting as matters of drill, they are deadly if you put confidence in them. Have we not, perhaps in England, a little too much tendency now-a-days to look perpetually at forms? The Officer who makes up his mind that he wants to win in war with his battalion need not trouble his mind so much as to the exact formation which, while staying at home in the study, he thinks he will use the first time he has an opportunity before the enemy. The real thing will be so different that he will never use his formula. What he should do is, as far as possible to imbibe the spirit of fighting tactics, but, above all, to conquer the love and confidence of his men. Then, and not till then, everything that he does will have life in it, and he, and those whom he commands, will be perfectly certain of beating the enemy which is opposed to them. In your name I now beg to thank Major Smith for the valuable paper which he has given us.

Note.—As it appears that the opening paragraphs of this paper have been understood by more than one of its readers to imply a design on the part of the writer to exalt the "defensive" above the "offensive" attitude, it may be well to seize the opportunity of the final reprint to emphasize the fact that this was the very last conclusion that they were intended to convey. The advantages which pertain exclusively to the offensive are, in the opinion of the writer, "inalienable," and remain substantially untouched by recent developments of tactics. On the other hand, the remarks of the Chairman (adding their own weight indeed to a previously formed conviction) have forcibly drawn his attention to the dangers which may result to British arms from the prevalent, but too undiscerning, admiration of the method which, for want of a better name, we may term "Wellingtonian." At its best the counter-attack is but an attempt to borrow for the defensive attitude certain faculties



COMPLETE MARCHING ORDER

COMPLETE MARCHING ORDER -
FRONT VIEW.

LIGHT SERVICE ORDER.

for decisive action, which are nevertheless the peculiar birthright of offensive tactics; and that will prove in the long run a sinister influence, which habituates British Officers to look in any other direction for success, than to the constant readiness to assume a vigilant and resolute initiative. It would therefore be matter for regret if the opinions expressed in this article, such as they are, were to add any stimulus, however slight, to a tendency of thought, which various peculiarities of our position have contributed to form, but which may perhaps be considered as already likely to exercise a too-pronounced influence on our conduct of field operations.—W. W. S.

SLADE-WALLACE EQUIPMENT.¹

THIS equipment (see Plate), the invention of Colonel Slade, h.-p., Rifle Brigade, and Lieutenant-Colonel Wallace, late King's Royal Rifle Corps, has been expressly designed as an infantry equipment suitable for service in any climate, and it is claimed for it by the inventors, that not only is it superior in every respect to the 1882 pattern, as a service equipment whilst equally suitable for home service, but also possesses the following distinct advantages over the last-named equipment:—

1. It is lighter; 2. Has fewer straps, and is more easily put together; 3. It is more comfortable and less likely to gall or rub the wearer; 4. When ammunition is carried the weight is more easily distributed; 5. The arms are perfectly free; 6. The pouches sit better on the waist-belt, the cartridges are not so liable to fall out, and when a full supply of ammunition is carried, the sides and lower part of the body are not liable to be rubbed or galled; 7. The valise is smaller and lighter than the present one; 8. The valise can be put on or taken off in a few seconds without in any way interfering with the rest of the equipment; 9. When the valise is not worn, the haversack, waterproof sheet, or blanket, can be carried in its place. The cost of the equipment is about the same as that of the present pattern. There is no difficulty in converting the 1882 pattern to the Slade-Wallace, and the cost of doing so is about one-third that of a new set. This equipment is based on a sound principle, viz., that the valise should be entirely separate from the rest of the equipment and capable of being put on and taken off easily and quickly. The 1882 pattern is precisely the reverse of this, and is dependent on the somewhat large and cumbersome valise for its proper fitting.

The details of the Slade-Wallace equipment are as follows:—The front ends of the braces are passed through D's on the belt and pouches, and buckled; the back ends, after being buckled to the waist-belt behind, go round and support the great coat rolled 15 inches long, and the waterproof sheet if one is carried. The mess-tin rides on the coat, and is kept from shifting by the strap being passed through D on mess-tin cover, and runner on braces, and then round

¹ Exhibited by Colonel Slade at the meeting on 27th April, 1888.