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Editor and General Manager
EUT. COL. EDWARD T. MILLER, Chief
Quartermaster Ohio Division, Columbus.

Associate Editors—Colonel Edwin B. Baker of Mississippi; Major A. L. Hitchens of Kansas; Brigadier General W. E. Finzer of Oregon; General C. H. Englesby of South Dakota; Major R. A. Richards of Wisconsin; Captain C. M. Dillon of Delaware; Major Edward D. Ellis of Michigan.

mail Arms Department—Major M. J. Phillips, Editor. Home address, Owosso, Mich.
Washington Correspondent—William Wolff Smith, Southern Bldg., Washington, D. C.

ew England Bureau—No. 6 Dearborn St., Salem, Mass. General P. Frank Packard, Manager.
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THE NATIONAL GUARD MAGAZINE

Volume X.

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Number 3

Increasing Importance of Individual Training of the Soldier*

By COLONEL A. C. SHARPE, U. S. Army, A. M., LL.D.

THE military poverty of our country, not only in its lack of prepared materiel, such as Field Artillery, but especially in its lack of trained men, is a source of great anxiety to military students, and should be of deep concern to every property holder, and, indeed, to every father and mother in the land; for it is upon the property holder and the parent that the effects of war most heavily fall. The great mass of our people, however, seem to be quite sound asleep or wholly indifferent to the conditions in which we are heedlessly drifting. As General Wood, Chief of Staff of the Army, recently said in an article in the N. Y. Independent: "We are confronted with a condition of ignorance which is simply appalling." Worse even than this few people have the patience to listen if one tries to inform them. War, or the possibility of war, is a disagreeable subject and they don't want to hear about it. Thus there is little hope of reaching the people through technical publications or even military lectures. Scientific and technical facts and figures do not, as a rule, appeal to the popular fancy. It is only when men turn their attention earnestly and seriously to a subject that we can hope to secure their thoughtful consideration. Fortunately for the country we have an organized body of citizen-soldiers to whom we can turn in this hour of anxiety. The National Guard, supplemented by our College Cadets, seems to offer the only hope, the only avenue of approach through which the people may be aroused from this fatal lethargy. It is composed of men who are not only patriotic, but who appreciate the importance of preparation and who are willing to spend the time and energy necessary to make themselves available for service in case of need. I am, therefore, coming to you tonight with such a subject and such a lecture, knowing that your interest in the matter will assure me a patient and intelligent hearing. What I shall say to you will not relate to the dramatic or spectacular in war, but aim to be simply an array of dry facts and conclusions established by mathematics, physiology, psychology and the teachings of social and political history, with some reference to the development of art and literature in relation to war. According to the letter of our U. S. Constitution, the power to declare war is vested in the Congress, but, as a matter of fact, war is determined upon by the people, who rise spontaneously and clamor for war, and no power on earth can restrain them. Such was the case when Ft. Sumpter was fired on in 1861, and again when the Maine was blown up in the harbor of Havana in 1898. Recognizing this, we also see the wisdom of being ready; for modern war is a cold-blooded, scientific proposition, which cannot be learned in a day. There is no invention, no scientific discovery or appliance, no telephone, aeroplane, submarine, high explosive or other device brought out by the cunning of man which is not immediately seized upon and tested as to its availability for war. Even physical endurance, patriotism and bravery are problems in physiology and psychology which are assiduously studied with reference to their use and effect in the great game of war. I am, therefore,

going to ask your attention to a consideration of some of these elementary principles as they relate to the Importance of the Individual Training of the Soldier, and especially of the Infantry soldier. * * * * *

The great development of Fire Action within the last few years, necessitating constant changes in Drill Regulations, emphasizes, in a precise way, and in a degree which, I think, is not sufficiently appreciated, the increasing importance of the individual training of the soldier. The old weapons and the old drill books, which have now passed into memories or become interesting curiosities in museums, required much attention to exactness and precision in a multiplicity of movements. This was so, not only in the mechanism of loading and firing, but also in foot movements and in preserving accurate distances, intervals, angles and alignments. These requirements secured incidentally great attention to detail, and this, in turn, resulted naturally and, indeed, inevitably in the habit so indispensable to the soldier, which we call discipline. In the modern drill many of these requirements have disappeared; the long sweep of the rapid-loading rifle has dissipated these nice formations, and, in fact, literally "fired them off the field." Seeking to keep pace with the wonderful progress of firearms by reducing formations and eliminating movements as they become obsolete or unnecessary, and by enlarging upon the practical application of tactical principles, the modern drill book devotes less and less space to detail, less attention to the beauty of ceremonies and forms, and recognizes an increasing latitude and responsibility in the hands of the squad leader and individual soldier. And, while there thus seems to be considerable relaxation along these lines, there is no relaxation in the demand for the highest attainable discipline. Indeed, modern war seems to require a higher nerve-endurance than ever before. This results from various causes, among them being the greatly increased influence of Field Artillery, the terrifying effect of high explosive shells, the difficulty of supplying ammunition in battle to keep pace with our rapid-loading guns, the sudden and demoralizing losses, even at long ranges, and the sense of isolation when deployed into thin lines. All these and other modern developments are demanding a higher and higher individual training, and yet giving the company commander a simpler and less effective drill system with which to accomplish it. Great emphasis is now laid in our new Drill Book and in the S. A. F. Regs. on the importance of Fire Discipline and Fire Control (248, 250, 254, I. D. R.), and yet it must be obvious to even the most casual military observer that without this preliminary individual training there can be little fire discipline in the ranks and practically no control or direction on the part of the leader. The tendency, however, seems to be to underestimate its importance, possibly because the Drill Book has become so simplified and the rifle so easy to operate. Some officers seem to think that because of the diminished space given in the book to the elementary training it is to be considered of diminishing value, and because of the larger space devoted to combat tactics, marches, camps, patrols and other field exercises, these are of increasing importance; and so they hasten on to the study of maneuvers and the evolutions of battle lines, forgetful of the fact that without this elementary education

of the individual man and squad there can be no satisfactory work in maneuvers, and certainly none when advancing the attack (453-458, I. D. R.) under fire on the modern field of battle. Now it may be instructive to look for a moment at some of these changes in our drill which have been brought about, as I have indicated, by the necessity of keeping abreast of the development of firearms. During the Civil War, for instance, to go no farther back, our infantry rifle carried with little accuracy only five or six hundred yards. Its trajectory at long ranges lifted the bullet over 80 feet in the air. Infantry advancing to the attack against such a weapon could be held together in mass or close order until the enemy were actually before their eyes; and cavalry, having the endurance of horses' legs and wind and the rider's skill about the same as now, could draw close enough to make a charge in full view of the entire field. The old rifle in use at that time required 12 counts (or "times" as they called it,) and 20 motions to load, and it took over a minute to do it. The trajectory being so high, the continuous zone, or "zone of effective fire," was small, and slight errors in elevation or in estimating distance would throw the firer entirely off his target. (Col. Sharpe here read extracts from an old Drill book illustrating the loadings and firings.) With such a cumbersome weapon it is doubtful if even the best drilled man could load and fire in less than a minute; more likely it would require the average soldier a minute and a half; and a recruit probably over two minutes. So that a body of cavalry, coming on at a charge, in which the pace is 440 yards per minute, could cover a half mile, that is, 880 yards, before the defenders could reload. The rate of a horse depends largely upon the conditions under which he is called upon to make the charge. If the ground is favorable, smooth and not obstructed by ditches, entanglements, abatis, or other obstacles; and if the horses are not leg-weary nor underfed, but in prime condition, the pace might be slightly increased; in any event he could generally reach the infantryman before he could have time to reload his piece. In the artillery, also, the old muzzle-loading guns were so slow and the fire of the infantry support so ineffective that it was no uncommon thing for cannoneers to be actually sabered at their guns. You will thus see that troops advancing into action under such conditions being safely out of infantry range at 1000 or even 800 yards, while the artillery shells could not beat their own whiz, (i. e. they travelled so slow that you could hear them coming before they reached you,) could be held together or in hand in close order up to the last moment; and thus, also, the resulting cohesion and mutual support which come from close personal

Note 1—Prior to the Civil War the most up-to-date rifle had an initial velocity of 963 feet. The Minie rifle, which our soldiers used at the opening of the war, was of such limited range that if held horizontal and fired from the standing position, the bullet struck the ground at 177 yards distance. It was considered rapid fire to deliver 60 rounds in 30 minutes! As late as 1869 the best advance our gunmakers had made was still throwing bullets high in the air. Following are the ordinates for a horizontal range of 1050 yards:

Horizontal dis.	300 Y.	500 Y.	700 Y.	900 Y.	1050 Y.
Height of trajectory above ft. in.	ft. in.	ft. in.	ft. in.	ft. in.	ft. in.
Line of sight.	56 10	74 3	87 0	63 0	0

* (Extracts from a lecture delivered by Colonel Sharpe before the officers of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 8th Infantry and Corps of Engineers, Ohio National Guard, and Corps of Cadets of the Ohio Wesleyan University.)