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THE NATIONAL GUARD MAGAZINE

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The Underlying Principles

By LIEUT. BASIL MIDDLETON, Assistant Instructor Military Science and Tactics, Culver Military Academy.

WAR is an art which has been handed down to us by our ancestors, from generation to generation, from the beginning of time. Our histories are filled with accounts of long wars, and great battles; and even today, with our so-called civilization, we are witnessing a gigantic conflict between an allied power and a tottering nation struggling to maintain its territorial boundaries.

The military profession and the art of war are the grandest, most noble, interesting and absorbing of all studies. In them is to be found most virtues as well as practical unlimited intellectual and physical scope for study, knowledge, recreation and attractions of every description. Most people have very little knowledge concerning them, and the people of this country are as a whole the people who take the least trouble and interest and who are generally the most ignorant regarding them.

The moral factor is one of the most important issues with which a military man has to deal. It is absolutely necessary that the troops have confidence in themselves, and in the character and ability of the commander in whose hands they are placed. But important as is the cultivation of morale in the troops themselves, it must not be forgotten how much of this morale can be derived from the nation itself.

European nations differ from the United States in that there seems to be a strong bond of sympathy between the army and the nation. The nation takes a pride in the development and welfare of the army, and in the knowledge the people possess of things military. With us the army is a small affair compared to the size of the nation, a large part of it is always on foreign service and practical military things might be said to be wholly unknown to the bulk of the people, and for this very reason the army and National Guard cannot derive the full measure of moral support from the nation which a wider knowledge of military affairs would create.

If we are to gain the full measure of benefit to be derived from our association with the military, we must get away from some of the old methods and ideas regarding the service; we must take it seriously. In other words, consider it from a professional standpoint.

Professional conversation is one of the chief ways in which knowledge is acquired. If we are deprived of this most pleasant means of carrying on our education, we are faced by the necessity of hard, dry study of books, which in the Indiana National Guard (so I am told) requires considerable "encouragement" from senior authority.

To illustrate the point, let us take the rifle shooting as conducted in the United States. Have you ever noticed that in discussing rifle shooting all grades seem to be enthused and are to a certain degree acquainted with some of the fine points of the game? Each man has some pet ideas or theories and is never loath to discuss them. The result is that the United States produces the finest rifle shots in the world. Why wouldn't the same thing work in the other branches of military science?

Fortunately there seems to be an increasing amount of interest being displayed by the National Guard and the ventilation of theories and arguments is gradually on the increase.

Comparatively speaking it is but recently that nations can be said to be enjoying peace. It has been but a few centuries since the absolute and crudely organized monarchies of the far East were intolerant of the very existence of other nations, and lived in a state of constant warfare with them. Of distant nations they knew nothing, and cared less—there were no communications or intercourses of a diplomatic nature between them whatsoever.

At this time Europe and Asia were divided into a large number of small states, each controlled by a ruler who was absolute and each was in a constant state of hostility with his neighbor. Intercourse by land was always difficult and at times impossible; internal commerce could not exist and the growth of towns as centers of trade and manufacturing industries was hampered and restricted. War was the rule, and peace the exception. The rules of war were cruel and harsh in the extreme, quarter was rarely given; the garrisons of besieged towns were put to the sword; prisoners of war were reduced to slavery, and so great was the mutual distrust of sovereigns that they maintained no intercourse with each other and obtained such information as they desired through agents or spies.

The force of custom and usage in the regulation of conduct is as potent in the handling of armies as it is in the affairs of individuals. When the acts of a great leader are criticised, the attempt is invariably made to justify them by a reference to approved precedents; so, too, when the correct line of action is not quite clear the attempt is made to support the proposed course by a similar reference to precedent. For this reason, usages which by long continued observance have developed into approved courses of action for handling armies in the theater of operations, are known as "tactical principles."

Law in its most general acceptance is a rule or principle which underlies or controls a sequence of events; it may also be said that the tactical principle is the rule which underlies or regulates the dispositions as made by a tactician on the field of battle.

Some people are of the opinion regarding military affairs that military scientists are continually discovering or working out new rules or principles which control tactical disposition. Is that the case? Or are they just applying up-to-date methods to the old principles?

The evolution of the ways of applying certain fundamental tactical principles and the causes leading up to and which have resulted in the most up-to-date methods is a very fascinating study and one in which you are all no doubt interested.

The military men of Europe are forced to keep the sharpest lookout on the development of thought and the evolution taking place around them, so as not to fall behind.

If we go on a false principle that our requirements are so different from those of other nations, we are in danger of military egotism and narrow-mindedness; of a general disregard of the evolution and thought going on around us, because we imagine it does not apply to our case.

The laws of social evolution, punctuated in each period of the world's history by strides in science and in the industrial arts, have exercised their influence on all things and imposed certain characteristics on their contemporary methods of warfare.

War being a certain phase of social existence has necessarily reflected in the application of certain well known tactical principles the modifications which the industrial arts have been continually undergoing.

Everything points toward new methods of applying the axioms and general principles, and it is their consideration which dominates the thinking part of the military world; hence, the gradual but steady evolution which has been taking place in modern battle formations. A feverish movement toward new studies, for greater progress and for the application of more scientific methods has convulsed the whole world. The perfecting of scientific discoveries; the progressive alteration in all war material, the continual reduction in the caliber of small arms, the introduction of quick firing guns, and the most important invention of smokeless powder, bringing about greater precision as well as longer ranges and flatter trajectories, working strongly upon the minds of enlightened experts in the military world, have turned their attention in a new direction regarding the study of tactical questions. The great penetration of projectiles, increasing the vulnerability of troops in masses, has naturally caused tacticians to adopt more open formations; hence the innumerable theories recently propounded for substituting deep formations by others more appropriate and less vulnerable.

In tactical consideration it must be taken into account that battle is the final object of all armies, and that man is the first instrument gree of certainty be laid down regarding tactical affairs without first a study of the essential of battle; therefore nothing can with any de-instrument, MAN, and his moral temper in the hour of battle. No matter how great the skill of the supreme commander, victory will surely escape him if his soldiers have not the courage to carry out his dispositions and if each be not possessed of the determination to do or die. The records of histories show us that not only in ancient times, but likewise in the present period, the moral factor exercises what we might call a decisive influence in all great battles. So it stands to reason that in this one consideration of tactical problems time has made no change.

In speaking of infantry attack, our field service regulation states that the "assailants have the confidence in the numerical and moral superiority. When the die is cast and the attack is on, they look forward and not backward. The defenders, shaken by the superiority of fire and seeing the steady advance of the enemy, foresee the effect of impending contact and of the resulting enfilade of reverse fire and seldom wait for the final onslaught."

From what it says one would naturally infer that without confidence in their own ability assailants would fail in their purpose; for they would lack that aggressiveness which is so necessary in a successful attack. The effect of an army of troops upon other troops is both material and moral. The material effect is your ability to damage the other fellow; the moral effect is the result you produce on him by his estimate of your power. So you will find in whatever period of the world's history battles have been fought, the principle factors which have affected the tactical theories have been the weapon and the man. Tactical science therefore has always possessed two indispen-