

NIGHT OPERATIONS FOR INFANTRY.

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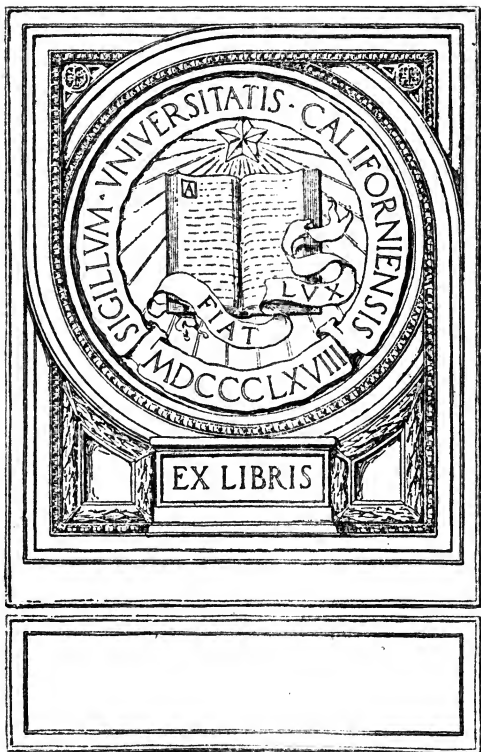
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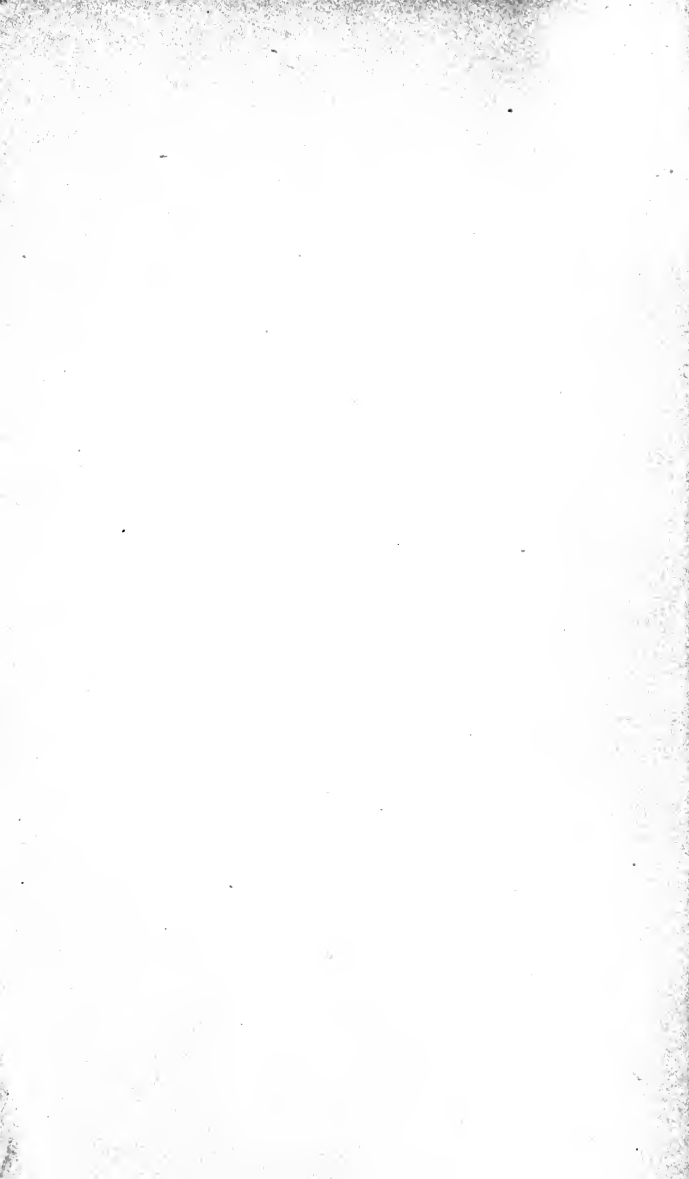
Brig.-General C. T. DAWKINS,
C.B., C.M.G.

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LONDON, ALDERSTOT,
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NIGHT OPERATIONS
FOR INFANTRY. .

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Night Operations For Infantry

COMPILED FOR THE USE
OF COMPANY OFFICERS

BY

Brig.-General C. T. DAWKINS,
C.B., C.M.G.



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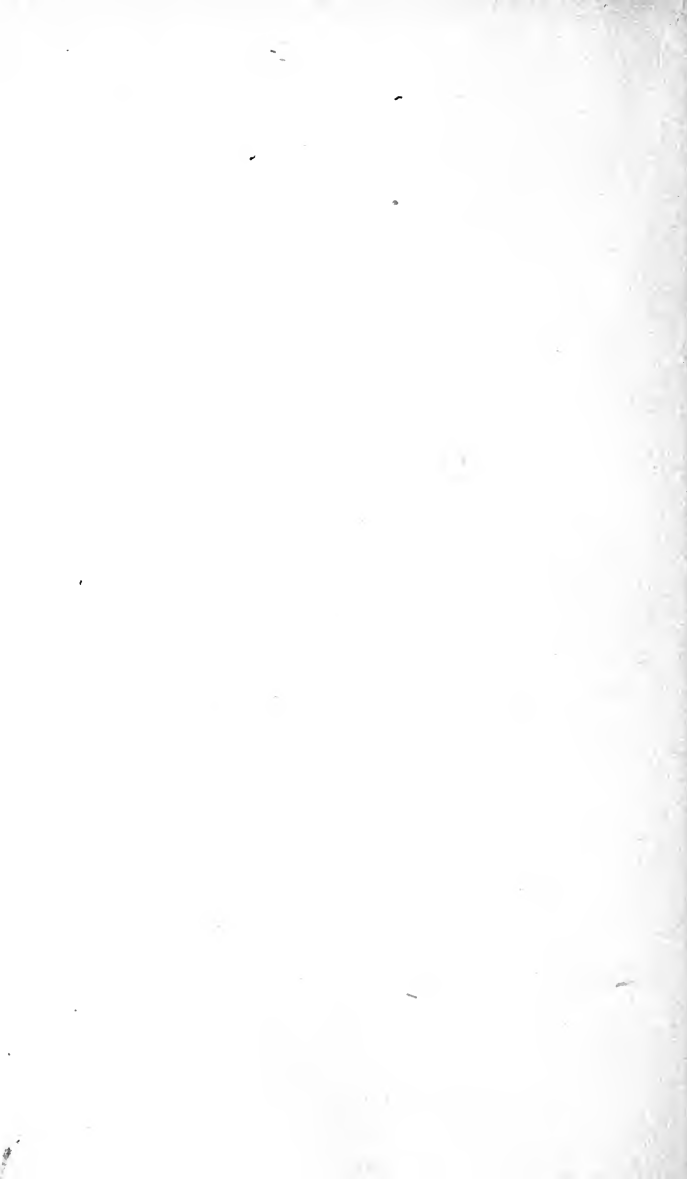
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NIGHT OPERATIONS FOR INFANTRY.

CHAPTER I.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CAREFUL TRAINING IN NIGHT OPERATIONS.

Although in recent years there has been a marked increase in the practice of night operations, yet I doubt if the majority of officers have realized that the changing conditions of war tend to make night fighting a much more common occurrence in the future than it has been in the past. A brief study of the accounts of the Russo-Japanese War shows that, as time went on, both combatants evinced a growing tendency to resort to night attacks, and to employ in their execution forces of considerable strength; it is, therefore, reasonable to assume that in future wars similar circumstances will compel the

adoption of similar methods. Moreover, if we consider the results which are likely to follow from the facilities for the acquisition and the rapid transmission of information offered by airships and wireless telegraphy respectively, and from the increased efficiency of fire-arms, we are compelled to realize that in all future wars operations carried out under cover of darkness, not only for the purpose of massing troops in a favourable position for further action, but also for the actual assault of particular localities, will become a matter of constant occurrence. Indeed, as a French officer, from whose book* I have gathered many hints on night training, points out, night fighting can no longer be regarded as something abnormal and exceptional, but as the power of fire-arms increases, so will combats in the dark become more frequent and necessary.

For this reason it seems to me to be most important that we should establish

*" Guide pour le Chef d'une petite unité d'infanterie opérant la nuit, par Le Commandant Breveté Niessel."

a systematic method of training our men. It is an axiom that in order to master any subject properly the student must first be instructed in its elementary details, and it is in this respect that at present our system fails. During the annual course of training a few night operations are carried out by companies, by battalions, and by brigades, but during the rest of the year little attention is paid to night work, and, in many units, at any rate, no attempt is made during the winter to give the soldier that elementary instruction which is indispensable to fit him to take an intelligent part in operations in the dark.

It must be remembered that many of our men up to the time of their enlistment have passed their lives entirely in large towns, and have rarely been beyond the range of street lamps. Such men, when first taken out in the dark, are helpless; they start at every shadow, stumble even on level ground, make a terrible amount of noise, and are generally in such a state of nervous excitement that they are hardly

responsible for their actions. Yet these same men, by a short course of careful, individual instruction, can be trained to work together with confidence on the darkest night, and when once they have gained confidence their further instruction is comparatively easy.

If in daylight the moral is to the physical, as three is to one, there can be no question that at night the proportion is many times greater. Indeed, I doubt if the true ratio can be estimated at all. History furnishes many instances of night fighting, in which the success achieved has been out of all proportion to the number of the victors, but it also teaches us that, in most cases, at any rate, the defeat of the beaten side was due to disorganization through panic. Now it is unquestionable that the best troops, if suddenly called on to face conditions to which they are not accustomed, are liable to panic, and it is to make sure that night fighting shall not be a strange occurrence in our Army that

I advocate closer attention to training in it.

I am aware that some officers maintain that it is a mistake to risk the chances of a night attack, because, even if the attack is successful, the want of light will prevent it being followed up. This may be a sound argument against making a night attack, but it is obviously no argument against training men for night fighting. Whether we attack by night ourselves or not, it is quite certain that our enemies will sometimes attack us, and, unless we are prepared to be taken at an enormous disadvantage, we must train our men to meet them in the dark. Besides, even the opponents of night-fighting do not dispute the value of an attack delivered with the first appearance of daylight, and an attack at dawn necessitates an advance during what are often the darkest hours of the night, with the possibility of its interruption by a counter-attack at any moment. To carry out such an operation with any prospect of success, even in the

most open country, it is essential that both officers and men should have the highest possible training.

In our Army, with men enlisted for a term of seven years with the Colours, we have far greater opportunities of accustoming our troops to night-fighting than most nations have, and, if we choose to do so, we can bring our training to a high state of efficiency. It seems to me to be folly to ignore our situation, and not to take every pains to train our men to carry out operations by night, since, in view of our comparatively weak numbers, efficiency in night-fighting may be of the utmost value to us in any future war.

It is with the object of inducing officers to pay closer attention to this branch of their men's training, that I put forward a few hints on a progressive method of instruction, which I have personally proved to produce useful results. In order that it may be made clear that training for night operations is a normal and

necessary part of the soldier's education, a training which is to be carried on continuously throughout his whole service, and not confined to the short periods of company and battalion training, I advocate the commencement of the elementary instruction while the recruit is still at the depôt.

CHAPTER II.

ELEMENTARY INSTRUCTION.

The first thing to be done is to accustom the soldier to darkness, to teach him to overcome the nervousness which is natural to him, and to train his powers of vision and hearing to suit conditions which are strange to him.

Training of Vision.

Two or three men, under an instructor, should be taken out to ground with which they are perfectly familiar. The instructor will direct them to notice the different appearance which objects present at night, when viewed in different degrees of light and shade; the comparative visibility of men under different conditions of dress, i.e., in khaki, in a tunic, in shirt-sleeves, etc., when viewed against different backgrounds; the ease with which bright

objects are seen, especially if in movement. If there is rising ground in the vicinity the difference in the visibility of men standing on the sky-line or on the sides of the slope should be noted. Experiments in the distance at which a match struck in the open and also under cover of some object, or a man smoking, can be seen should also be made. Blank cartridges should be fired, and recruits taught to judge the direction in which the rifle was pointing and its approximate distance from them.

Training of Hearing.

To train their powers of hearing, men, placed a few yards apart, should be made to guess what a noise heard is caused by, and the approximate position of it. The rattle of a mess tin, the working of the bolt of a rifle, the movement of a patrol, the throwing down of accoutrements, low talking, or any noise likely to be heard on outposts may be utilised. Special pains must be taken to impress upon the men

the penetrating power of the human voice. The distance at which men talking, even in a low voice, can be heard on a still night is astonishing, and as it is a sound which cannot be mistaken for anything else, and which disturbs birds and animals more than any other, it is most important that the recruit should be shown the absolute necessity of keeping perfect silence.

At this stage it is a good practice to post the men in pairs at intervals along an alignment which the instructors endeavour to cross unnoticed. The instructors should cross from both sides, so as to compel the recruits to watch in every direction.

Finding Bearings.

When the recruit has become accustomed to the dark, and entirely overcome his nervousness, he should be taught to find his bearings by the pole star, to check the direction of his advance by means of stars, landmarks, or even the wind, and

conversely by the same means to find his way back to the point from which he started. He should also be taught to recognise the phases of the moon, and to judge whether it is rising or setting.

To test a man's ability to keep a given direction when moving at night, the following plan is useful. Having chosen a spot from which no prominent landmarks are visible, the instructor, accompanied by the recruit, will advance towards it from a distance of not less than 200 paces. While advancing the recruit must take his bearings. On arriving at the spot chosen the instructor will turn the recruit rapidly round two or three times, and then order him to continue his advance on the same line as before.

Moving in the Dark.

For this exercise three or four recruits, with the instructor on the directing flank, will be placed in line at about one pace interval. Some clearly visible mark, such

as a lamp, should be placed as a point for the directing file to march on. The instructor will impress upon the men the importance of lifting the feet up high and putting them down firmly and quietly, also of keeping in touch with their neighbour on the directing flank, and of conforming to his movements without sound or signal. The pace must be very slow, and frequent halts made to test the quickness of the men in working together. As the instruction progresses, each man in turn will take the instructor's place on the directing flank, and the light on which they are marching should be obscured at intervals, in order to test their ability to maintain the original direction.

When the recruits have thoroughly mastered the foregoing principles they should be taken to more difficult ground, and gradually advanced to work together in larger numbers. They must be taught to turn into single file for the purpose of passing obstacles, and to form up rapidly in single rank again without noise or con-

fusion. It must always be remembered that the rougher the ground, the darker the night and the longer the line, the slower must be the pace and the more frequent the halts. After passing any obstacle, such as a ditch, hollow road, etc., which does not necessitate turning into file, it is always advisable to halt and make sure that the alignment is correct. After passing an obstacle men instinctively line up parallel to it; consequently, if the obstacle does not lie exactly at right angles to the line of advance, the direction is lost. I remember seeing a brigade thrown into complete disorder by the neglect of this precaution, after successfully advancing for about 1,000 yards on a very dark night. In this case one flank of the line crossed a hollow road, lying at an angle to the direction of the advance, and forming up parallel to it advanced across the front of the rest, and altogether broke up their formation.

General.

During the earlier exercises the men may be taken out without arms, but, as the instruction progresses, they must be trained to work in full marching order. Each man must be taught to note carefully those portions of his equipment which are likely to cause a noise under special circumstances, such as lying down, rising up, crossing an obstacle, etc., and to take precautions accordingly. Bayonets should always be fixed, but to avoid accidents the scabbards should be on them. Special attention must be paid to seeing that the rifles are carried at the proper angle to prevent the bayonets clashing.

From the commencement of the training the instructor will not fail to continually impress upon the men that it is absolutely criminal to fire during a night attack, and that the bayonet is the only weapon the assailants can use with advantage to themselves and safety to their comrades.

Except during a brief period in the middle of summer, it is generally possible to carry out these elementary exercises before 10 p.m., and in the short winter evenings they can take place immediately after the men's tea. It is always advisable that the men should have had a meal shortly before starting to work in the dark, and if the weather is cold, or they are kept out late, they should be given soup or cocoa on their return.

CHAPTER III.

GENERAL REMARKS ON NIGHT OPERATIONS.

Definitions.

In the Field Service Regulations, night operations are divided into three classes—night marches, night advances, and night attacks—which may be briefly defined as follows:—

A night march is a movement along roads, or well defined tracks, in normal march formations, undertaken for the purpose of transferring troops under cover of darkness to some desired point.

A night advance is stated in the Field Service Regulations to be a forward movement of which the object "is to gain ground from which further progress will be made in daylight, and not to deliver a decisive assault during darkness." During

the advance the troops will either be deployed or at any rate will move in formations which admit of rapid deployment.

Night attacks are delivered for the purpose of gaining possession of some point or locality which is held by the enemy or of surprising "an ill-trained, ill-disciplined, or semi-civilised enemy." (Field Service Regulations.)

A night march may be a necessary prelude to either a night advance or a night attack, but in that case the march is considered to have ended on the arrival of the force at the position of assembly.

Importance of Careful Preparation.

Whatever may be the nature of the operation, the most careful preparation is essential. The success of all operations in the dark, up to the moment of collision with the enemy at any rate, depends on the care and thoroughness with which the preparatory arrangements have been

made, and these arrangements are just as necessary in the case of a night march, carried out at some distance from the enemy, as in that of a night attack. It is impossible to lay too much stress on the importance of this preparation, no detail is too trifling to be considered, every eventuality, whether probable or improbable, should be thought out and provided for, and nothing must be left to chance.

The first and most important step in the preparation of any night operation consists in obtaining accurate information concerning the ground to be traversed and the position of the enemy. This necessitates as close a reconnaissance as is possible, and the reconnaissance should be made by night as well as by day. Ground presents such a different appearance at night that it is often difficult to identify a spot which has only been seen previously in daylight, moreover, small accidents of the surface which may not attract attention in daytime are sometimes sufficient to

throw troops into disorder, if they come upon them unexpectedly in the dark.

The chief points on which information is required being set forth in the Field Service Regulations, it is unnecessary to recapitulate them here, but the following details should be attended to as well:—

- (1) The spots selected both for the position of assembly and position of deployment must not only be places which can be easily identified at night, but must also afford sufficient space for the troops to form up.
- (2) Both the position of obstacles, and the direction in which they lie, must be accurately reported, and it must be noted if their direction is constant throughout.
- (3) In reporting on the enemy's position every effort must be made to discover the extent to which patrols are used, and the distance beyond the line of the

advanced posts to which they penetrate.

Plan of Operations.

The plan of operations will be based on the information gained during the reconnaissance, and in preparing it the following maxims should be borne in mind:—

1. It is the quality and not the number of the troops that counts.
2. The larger the force the greater the difficulty.
3. Every detachment increases the risk of failure.

Though No. 3 is undoubtedly true, yet it will often be necessary to move in more than one column. In that case each column must be given a separate objective; each objective must be distinct from, and situated some distance away from, any other, and every possible precaution must be taken to prevent an accidental collision between any two columns, either before or after reaching their objectives.

The Field Service Regulations direct that lateral communication is to be maintained between columns, so that the assaults may be delivered simultaneously, and recommend the use of telephones for the purpose. The maintenance of lateral communication is very important, but each column commander should understand that if his column is discovered he must press on to the assault without waiting for the others.

*The Framing of Orders for Night
Operations.*

The rules for framing orders are clearly laid down in the Regulations, but, as the orders will only be communicated beforehand to those officers who are required to make the preliminary arrangements, it is necessary that extracts, containing those portions which are to be read to the troops at the position of assembly, should also be prepared. These extracts will probably have to be read in a very feeble light, and it is, therefore, important that they should

be very clearly and legibly typewritten. Nothing is more trying than to have to try to grasp the meaning of a blurred hektograph copy of orders by the aid of an indifferent lamp, which probably has to be held under a coat.

In all operations which commence with a night march the selection of a suitable starting point is important. This point should be so situated that it is possible for the whole force to be drawn up in its order of march before the movement begins, and a staff officer must be detailed to ascertain that every unit is present, and in its proper place before the column moves off. This is an obvious precaution; but, as I have seen it neglected in South Africa, with serious results, I think it well to lay stress on it.

Protection During Operations.

The general principles governing the protection of forces during operations are the same by night as by day, except that at night both the strength of the protecting

bodies and their distance from the troops they cover will be much reduced.

In night marches small advanced and rear-guards will be employed, but in night advances and night attacks these will be replaced by lines of scouts at a distance varying from 50 to 100 yards, according to the light.

To protect the flanks during a night march in close country the Regulations advise the use of flanking piquets, posted by the advanced guard, and withdrawn by the rear-guard. I have never seen this system tried at night, but I doubt its success; even if the advanced guard commander is able to identify quickly the points at which the piquets are to be left, there will be a certain amount of delay while they are quitting the column, and the rear-guard will be constantly delayed by waiting for them to withdraw. Thus the rear-guard will gradually fall further and further behind, and, unless the column is frequently halted to allow the rear-

guard to close up, the rear companies will melt away into a long string of connecting files.

If flanking piquets are used, and it seems to be the safest plan, they should be found by a special unit, and, having taken up their positions before the march commences, should not be withdrawn till it is over.

In open country at all times, and in close country in the case of night advances and night attacks, the only *moving* protection which can safely be given to the flanks is that afforded by scouts, who must keep quite close to the column.

Maintenance of Connection.

The maintenance of connection between the various portions of a force when engaged in night operations is a matter of supreme importance. The facility with which units go astray when connection is lost is extraordinary, and when once they have gone astray it is often very difficult

to find them. I have myself seen a whole brigade of infantry disappear and be lost for nearly two hours in an area which hardly exceeded a square mile.

Rifle Fire in Night Attacks.

It cannot be too strongly impressed upon all ranks that to fire during a night attack is not only useless, but to use the words of General Dragomirov, is absolutely criminal. The Regulations lay down that rifles are not to be loaded, but the magazines are to be charged and the cut-offs closed, and this order must be rigidly adhered to. Personally, I am against having the magazines charged; the proper weapon for the infantry soldier to use at night is the bayonet, and he should be taught to rely on that alone.

Caution Necessary in Planning Night Operations, but Resolution Essential in their Execution.

Although it is necessary to act with caution, and to weigh well the chances of

success and failure before deciding on an offensive night operation, yet, when once the undertaking has been commenced, it must be carried through with the utmost resolution. It is exceedingly unlikely that the enemy will be completely surprised, but every second of delay between the discovery of the attacking force and the delivery of the assault is of priceless value to the defence; it must, therefore, be impressed upon all ranks that when the enemy opens fire the only course open to them is to press on to the assault, and decide the issue with the bayonet.

DEFENCE AGAINST NIGHT ATTACKS.

Passive Defence Useless.

Unless the defenders are protected by an impenetrable obstacle, a passive defence is suicidal. Artillery and machine guns may be laid so as to sweep a particular area at night, but no reliance can be placed on the effect of rifle fire unless the rifles have been mechanically fixed.

I do not overlook the fact that instances are on record of huge losses inflicted by rifle fire at night, but I maintain that the effect obtained is merely a matter of chance, and any officer who puts his trust in chance is likely to have to pay dearly for his mistake.

Every infantryman must be imbued with the idea that at night the bayonet is the only weapon which he can trust, and that the more promptly he uses it the better his chance of success will be. In the dark every advantage lies with the side that takes the initiative; numbers are of little account, for a resolute bayonet charge, delivered by even a single piquet may, if it comes unexpectedly, demoralise and throw into disorder a strong attacking column.

In short, when the attacking column reaches the outposts it must be received with vigorous local counter-attacks delivered with the bayonet by the nearest bodies of the defenders. If a counter-

attack comes as a surprise, the chances of success are all in its favour, but any success gained must not be followed up, the outposts should be withdrawn to their original positions, and patrols sent out to keep touch with the retiring enemy. It is most important that all ranks should realise that to wait to receive a charge is fatal; the only course open is to advance boldly with the bayonet; even if the counter-attack is not successful, the outposts will still have fulfilled their duty and have gained a few minutes' time for the supports and reserves to form up.

CHAPTER IV.

TRAINING A COMPANY FOR OFFENSIVE ACTION.

Instruction in Reconnaissance.

The instruction of officers and selected non-commissioned officers and men in the art of reconnaissance for night operations must be carefully carried out, and the following method has proved to be useful.

The Captain takes his class to the ground chosen, and, after explaining the tactical scheme, and pointing out the kind of information which is required, allows them a certain time to go over the ground and make their notes. At first the class should be allowed to move freely over the ground; but, as the instruction progresses, flags may be put out to mark the position of hostile posts and the class forbidden to approach them. When the notes are

finished they should always be criticised on the actual ground.

When the class thoroughly understand what to observe and how to report it, they should be ordered to reconnoitre by night ground which they have already reported on by day. The two reports should be compared, and any differences noted, and then the Captain should go over the ground with them *by night*, so as to actually check on the spot the accuracy and sufficiency of their observations.

To make a reconnaissance suitable for the execution of night operations requires a great deal of practice, and it is only by constantly testing *in the dark* the value of the reports sent in that one learns what are the points which it is essential to observe with accuracy.

Night Marches.

In carrying out night marches, the company should be practised as an advanced guard to a column, and as a company acting alone.

In close country an advanced guard will consist of scouts, the point, and the main guard. The provision of a vanguard at night is undesirable—it lengthens the column without giving any practical advantage.

The scouts should be started two or three minutes ahead of the point, and should keep in the shadow on the side of the road. They will march at a quick pace, halting at cross-roads and suspicious places to listen, and will move on again when they hear the advanced guard approaching. They must be trained to use their ears as much, if not more than their eyes. If they discover the enemy, one of them will return to warn the advanced guard; the others will conceal themselves and watch. It must be impressed upon them that they are on no account to fire unless for the purpose of warning the column, and then only if there are no other means of doing so. It is useless to attempt to keep connection between the scouts and the point, as the distance between them will constantly vary.

The point may consist of one section, and will march on one or both sides of the road, covering itself in front by a file at about 30 paces distance.

The main guard will follow the point at a distance of from 50 to 100 paces, according to the light; it also should march on the sides of the road. If there is a main body it will follow the main guard at about double the distance which is kept between the latter and the point. Communication between the point and the main guard, and between the main guard and the main body, will be kept by means of connecting files, within clear view of each other.

A company marching alone on a road should move in the same formation as when forming an advanced guard, but will also cover its rear with a few scouts.

Night Advances and Night Attacks.

The formations adopted in night advances and night attacks will vary with

the ground, the nature of the operation, and the activity of the enemy; it is, therefore, necessary to train the company to move at night in all possible formations, both in double and single rank. The men should be constantly practised in forming company, platoon, and sections in single rank to either flank, when moving in file or single file. In a close country like England it is constantly necessary to move in fours or file, and it is essential that the company should be able to form up with rapidity and precision. When moving in line in double rank it is advisable that a distance of about five paces should be kept between ranks, otherwise if a front rank man stumbles his rear rank man will fall over him.

When a company is acting alone, even in open country, it is best to keep it fairly well concentrated until the position of deployment is reached, and in a close country, where fences have to be passed at intervals, it is generally necessary to move in fours or file.

The following formation has proved to be handy, and, if the men have been well trained, they will have no difficulty in forming up rapidly on the darkest night. Two platoons, each in single file, advance side by side, followed at about 20 paces distance by the other two platoons in the same formation. In the event of alarm, the platoons form up on the right and left respectively, and the company then stands in column of half companies in single rank at about 60 paces distance.

Whatever formation is used, the front, flanks and rear must be covered by scouts, whose distance away will vary with the light. Protection in rear is very important, yet is often neglected. I have on more than one occasion seen a night operation completely disorganised by a bold attack delivered against the rear of the column by a party of the enemy, who, in the absence of scouts, had approached unnoticed.

The Field Service Regulations direct that before the position of assembly is

quitted the orders are to be clearly explained to all ranks, so that everyone may know :

1. The object in view and the direction of the objective.
2. The formation to be adopted at the position of deployment.
3. The part he has to play.
4. His action in case the enemy is not surprised ; also that the warnings against firing, talking, striking matches, smoking, etc., are to be repeated two or three times.

In training a company the prohibitions here alluded to will, of course, be most rigidly enforced at all times. It must always be remembered that as men are trained in peace so will they act in war, and the officer who, from carelessness or good nature, allows his men to disregard these obvious precautions may inculcate habits of slackness calculated to have most serious results on service.

The situation of the position of deployment will depend on the strength of the attacking force, and the alertness of the enemy; the smaller the force the nearer to the enemy's position will this point be fixed. A company can usually get within 300 yards of the enemy's posts without difficulty.

The Regulations advocate that when the position of deployment is reached the force should be formed in three lines, but with a company it is rarely advisable to have more than two. The company may be formed with two platoons in each line, or with three in the front line and one in the second, according to the extent of the position to be attacked; the front line, at any rate, should be in single rank. When deciding on the formation officers should remember that no more men should be put into the front line than are necessary for the object in view, and that the maintenance of a reserve to meet eventualities is of paramount importance.

Guiding Troops Across Country at Night.

Instructions governing the guidance of troops at night in open country are to be found in the Field Service Regulations, and in the Manual of Map Reading and Field Sketching.

On a very dark night a modification of the system described in section 71 of the latter book may be employed with advantage. Half a dozen assistants, with luminous discs, both on their chests and backs, are provided, and, when the guide has determined on the line, these assistants are placed on it facing towards the guide and covering each other. As the force advances each assistant in turn moves to the far end of the line and covers again on the others. With well-trained assistants a rate of advance of about half to three-quarters of a mile per hour may be counted on.

In enclosed country if the fences run parallel to the line of advance they are a great help to the guide, otherwise they

increase his difficulties. Fences, as a rule, must be passed at gateways or gaps, and this necessitates moving in a zig-zag direction. On a starlight night the following method has been used with success. A star to march on having been chosen, the company is halted, and an officer, with a couple of scouts, each provided with a pocket electric lamp, are sent on to find the best point of passage in the fence; when this point is found an electric light is shown, and the company marches on it. In broken ground it may sometimes be necessary to post one of the scouts with a light as an intermediate point. If the lamps are carefully handled there is but little risk of their being observed from the front. Provided that a suitable star is visible, the direction can be maintained without difficulty.

If there are no stars, and the fences do not run parallel, the only means of guiding a column is as follows:—

The company is halted while the guide moves on to the next fence by the method

previously described for open country. On reaching the fence one assistant is posted to mark the spot, while the guide and the others search for the best point of passage. The company is then brought up to the selected spot, passed through the fence, and again halted. The guide then returns to the point at which the assistant was left, and from it lays out his line to the next fence. This is, of course, a very slow method, but it gives accurate results. Special care must be taken to see that the company is protected by scouts during the whole operation.

The Assault.

If, after the position of deployment has been reached, the enemy opens fire, the company must continue its advance until near enough to charge; under no circumstances must the fire be replied to.

When the actual assault takes place the second line—and the third line, if there is one—will be halted to await developments; should their assistance be required

they will act in prolongation of the first line, and strive to envelop the enemy.

If a force is formed in two lines only the commander must beware of allowing the second line to be drawn into the fight, unless it is absolutely necessary. The retention of some portion of the force intact and ready for instant action is quite as important at night as in the daytime. The commander himself must remain with his reserve.

Should the assault succeed, no attempt to pursue is to be permitted; the reserve must be at once disposed to meet the counter-attack, and the remainder reformed under its protection.

Whether the attackers should cheer at the moment of the assault or not is a moot question. The arguments in favour of it are:—

1. It encourages your own men.
2. It discourages the enemy.
3. It notifies the assault to neighbouring columns.

Against it :—

1. It gives warning to the enemy.
2. It gives an indication of the strength of the attacking force.

Personally, I am in favour of training men to deliver the assault at night in silence, for the following reason: Sudden outbursts of fire without any due cause occasionally occur in all armies, when the outposts are near those of the enemy, and it is quite possible that the enemy's supports and reserves will not move until they have obtained information of what is happening. If, however, the assault is delivered with cheers they can be in no doubt as to what has occurred, and will, therefore, act at once.

TRAINING FOR DEFENSIVE ACTION.

Outposts.

The first brunt of a night attack necessarily falls on the outposts, and unless they receive timely warning they will undoubtedly be overwhelmed; it is, therefore, a

matter of supreme importance that the training in outpost duty should be thoroughly carried out.

In our Army outpost duty was for many years almost entirely neglected, and even now it is not treated with sufficient seriousness. At manœuvres, and at field operations lasting more than one day, an armistice is often declared at night, and it is but rarely that the infantry are practised in outpost duty under service conditions. It is true that this duty, if strictly performed is extremely harassing, but in view of its importance it is, I think, unwise to allow any opportunity of gaining experience to pass.

In carrying out the training of a company in outpost duty the strictest discipline should always be maintained, no irregularity, however trifling, should ever be passed over, and all duties carried out with great care and thoroughness.

With the weak companies which we often have it is sometimes difficult to find

sufficient men for the complete service of outposts, and when this is so the position of piquets, and even of groups, may be marked with flags. The one service which should never be dispensed with is that of the reconnoitring patrols. It should be impressed upon all that the protection afforded by groups and piquets, unless supplemented by a regular system of reconnoitring patrols, is altogether inadequate, and every commander should invariably satisfy himself that the proportion of men told off for patrol duty is sufficient to carry out the work properly.

Position of Piquets at Night.

Unless a piquet is protected by obstacles, its best means of defence at night lies in a resolute counter-attack, and to carry out this a clear space is necessary. The Regulations lay down that the first duty of outposts is to strengthen their position as much as possible, and in open country the usual course followed is to entrench the groups and piquets.

Now a shelter trench affords fair protection in the day time and may be useful at night if the ground immediately in front of it is illuminated by searchlights, but in the dark it loses a great deal of its value, and it is obviously a very bad place to receive a bayonet charge in. For this reason it is better at night to withdraw the piquets about 30 yards behind the trench ; this latter will then form an obstacle likely to break the ranks of an assaulting enemy, and the defenders will have room for the counter-charge.

Readiness for Action.

It cannot be too strongly insisted on that piquets must always be ready for action. The men should sleep with their rifles beside them, in the positions they will occupy in the ranks, and must not be allowed to cover their ears when lying down. Either the commander, or the next in command, together with a proportion of the piquet, must always remain awake, and when the commander lies down he

should do so close to the sentry over the piquet.

This readiness for action is often neglected; it is, of course, necessary that officers and men on outpost duty should sleep, but arrangements must be made to ensure that some of the piquet are always alert.

At manœuvres I have often seen an entire piquet peacefully asleep, trusting to the protection afforded by one or two groups 200 or 300 yards away, and the single sentry over the piquet. Any one who has had experience of the heavy sleep which overtakes tired men will know the difficulty there would be in quickly rousing a piquet under these circumstances. I remember on one occasion witnessing a night attack on a piquet by a company of the enemy, which charged, with loud cheers, yet some minutes after the assault had been delivered, two or three members of the piquet were found to be still fast asleep, with their heads enveloped in their blankets.

Cover for Groups.

When groups are posted in front of a piquet in open country, they should always have cover in rear to protect them from the fire of their comrades. Groups will remain out with much greater confidence if they feel that they are safe from the fire of their own side.

Marking of Route to and from Piquets.

The route from the support to its piquets, and from the piquets to their groups, should always be clearly marked; scraps of paper, or even green sticks, with the bark peeled off, may be used.

Sentries Challenging.

The Regulations provide that sentries shall challenge at night, but it is desirable to avoid any noise likely to disclose their position. It is easy to arrange a system of signals by which patrols, etc., can be recognised. The signal should be made by the sentry first and replied to by the patrol, but it must be an invariable rule

that after the signal has been made one man, and one only, of the patrol shall advance up to the sentry to be recognised. If the signal is not replied to, the sentry will challenge, but in no louder tone than is absolutely necessary.

Sentries Firing.

Sentries must be taught always to allow persons to approach fairly near to them before challenging, and never to fire, except when it is absolutely necessary to give an alarm, unless they can clearly distinguish the object they fire at and can be fairly certain of hitting it. Every officer who has been on service knows well that at the commencement of a campaign sentries are continually firing at nothing, but as they gain experience shots at night become rare; it is really a question of training, and the training should be given during peace.

In the French Army serving in Algeria there is a rule that any sentry who fires at night must produce a corpse, or, at any rate, be able to show by blood marks that

he has hit the person he fired at, failing this the sentry is dealt with for giving a false alarm. This is an excellent rule, for unnecessary firing causes a great deal of fatigue and annoyance to the troops on outpost duty.

Action of Outposts in a Night Attack.

If due warning of the enemy's advance is received and searchlights are not available, the groups should be withdrawn, and the enemy allowed to approach without any indication that the defenders are aware of his movement being given. When he gets within 30 yards, or on dark nights even less, he should be received with one round from every rifle, followed immediately by a bayonet charge.

The round should be fired by word of command, like the old volley, and great pains must be taken to impress upon the men the necessity of aiming low. In the dark the natural tendency is to fire high, and the men must be trained to overcome it. Firing from the hip has been suggested

as being likely to bring down the line of fire, but I have never seen it tried at night, and experiments conducted in daylight have not proved it to have any effect in that direction.

If adjoining bodies of the outposts are able to deliver an attack simultaneously against both the front and flanks of the enemy, it will probably be successful, as troops are quite as sensitive to flank attacks at night as in the day.

In defence, as in attack, it is imperative that a portion of the force should be held in reserve as long as possible.

CHAPTER V.

MISCELLANEOUS.

Training and Employment of Scouts.

The selection and training of Scouts for work in the dark cannot be too seriously undertaken, since the success or failure of a night operation depends in a great measure on their efficiency. They must be men of good constitution, active, able to bear great fatigue, and to sleep at any hour of the day or night; they must also have acute powers of vision and hearing, be able to make a rough map, to find their way by the compass and the stars, and be absolutely without "nerves." They should be thoroughly well acquainted with the appearance of the moon in all its phases, and have a knowledge of the rate of its movement, so that they can at any time form an estimate of the time the moonlight will last. They must be capable of

moving across country in line with considerable intervals between them, and of consistently maintaining the direction of their line of advance. Each scout should carry a luminous compass and a piece of card, covered with luminous paint, for use under a tracing of the map. If possible, they should be supplied with rubber soles to their boots or, at any rate, the heel pads, which are to be found in most shops.

No scout can be considered efficient if he cannot pass through any ordinary outpost line at night whenever he pleases; if he is really well trained, nothing short of a continuous chain of sentries can keep him out.

This power of traversing the lines at will affords great opportunities not only of obtaining information, but also of harassing the enemy's outposts. Two or three small parties of well-trained men can keep a whole section of an outpost line in such a state of nervous tension that sleep will be impossible, and the resulting fatigue will greatly diminish the efficiency

of the troops composing it during the next day.

In night attacks selected men should be employed to surprise and disable the sentry groups on the line of advance. They should attack the groups from the rear, and the best weapon for them to use is an ordinary life preserver, well weighted and covered with rubber, or a small leather bag filled with sand and securely fastened to the end of a short stick. A blow on the side of the head from either of these makes very little noise, and, as the injury caused by them is not necessarily fatal, they can be used with less compunction against an unsuspecting man than more lethal weapons.

In addition to disposing of the groups, scouts should be detailed to creep close up to the enemy's piquets and supports, and to remain there ready to throw hand grenades among them when the attack develops.

Suitable men soon become keenly interested in their work, for the sporting

chances offered by night operations have an undoubted fascination for adventurous spirits.

Searchlights in Attack and in Defence.

Even in open ground it is rarely possible to arrange searchlights so as to illuminate the whole of the area covered by their beams since small irregularities in the surface of the ground produce patches of shadow. When fixed lights are exposed the attackers must endeavour to utilise these dark patches when crossing the zone of light; if travelling beams are used they must lie down before the light reaches them and remain perfectly still till it has passed. Unless their clothing affords a marked contrast to the colour of the ground it is difficult to detect troops if only they remain motionless.

Should the enemy's artillery open fire on the area covered by the light, the attacking column must continue to advance, and if necessary assume more open formations. The guns will probably have been laid by

daylight, and it is not easy to make accurate alterations in the dark, consequently the quicker the attackers advance the less loss they are likely to suffer.

In the defence, if searchlights are provided, the officers on outpost duty must endeavour to ascertain what portions of the ground in their front the beams do not light up, and take special measures to watch them.

Flares, etc.

When piquets are protected by obstacles an arrangement of flares for lighting the ground in their immediate front is often useful. Empty barrels, with both ends knocked out, are stuffed with straw, rags, or even paper, which has been saturated with paraffin or covered with tar; they should be placed about 50 yards in front of, and a little to the side of, the piquet, and if a bold man is available to wait till the enemy is close up before lighting them, they will prove of great assistance.

I have seen short sticks, with rags dipped in paraffin, tied round one end, used with effect; when set on fire they can be thrown 25 or 30 yards, and are hard to extinguish, but there is always a risk of the enemy throwing them back again.

Hand Grenades.

These ancient weapons, having been improved, are likely to be largely used in future, and would be specially suitable to issue to scouts. A well-trained scout would have no difficulty in getting close up to hostile piquets, and the sudden explosion of a hand grenade could not fail to have considerable moral effect even if it did little material damage. Against columns advancing to make a night attack they would also be very useful weapons.

The confusion which is caused among troops at night manœuvres by the explosion in their ranks of a few ordinary crackers is strong evidence of the advantage to be gained from the use of hand grenades at a critical moment.

Luminous Discs.

Luminous discs are required to mark the directing flank of companies; they should be made of thin board, coated on both sides with luminous paint, and mounted on a pole about 5 feet long. In shape they may be either round or square, but it is useful to have one of a special pattern to mark the directing guide. They may be from 12 inches to 15 inches in diameter.

Pocket Electric Lamps.

The pocket lamps used by many officers for reading maps at night answer well as points to march on. They should be provided with a cardboard hood extending about three inches beyond the bulb, to check the lateral spread of the rays.

Connecting Ropes.

If ropes or tapes (entrenching tapes do well) are used for keeping connection, they must be held up by men placed at intervals of three or four yards. Unless this is

done the rope is sure to catch in bushes or stones, and will probably break.

Passing Fences.

When possible a gateway will be used for the passage of the troops, and if the gate cannot be taken off its hinges a man should be detailed to hold it open till the column has passed; if no gateway exists a gap must be made.

To make a gap in a hedge, choose a weak place, and cut away the wood with saws or knives; axes and billhooks should not be used, as the sound made by them can be heard a long way. Walls, if built of loose stones, must be carefully pulled down and the stones piled up at the sides of the gap; if the stones are laid in mortar the wall must be climbed. Wire fences should have a length of wire between two posts cut right out and removed; the cuts should be made about two feet from the posts, and the ends of the wires twisted back round the posts. Before cutting a taut wire see that it is firmly grasped on

both sides of the point where the cut is made, otherwise the wire when cut will spring back with a loud, ringing noise. As sound travels a long way up a wire fence, great care must be taken to avoid jarring the wires.

Entrenching by Night.

If trenches which have been dug at night are examined in daylight, it will often be found that owing to the faulty shape of the parapet a good deal of ground close in front of the trench is dead. To obviate this it is advisable to place white objects or electric lamps about 30 yards in front of the trenches, in order that the men, when finishing off the parapet, may so shape it that when firing over it the line of sight will cut the ground at that point. It must also be remembered that in the dark men instinctively fire straight to the front, *i.e.*, at right angles to the parapet, consequently if it is desired to bring fire to bear in an oblique direction some means of marking the required direction are necessary.

Wire Entanglements.

In making wire entanglements for the defence of posts any attempt at neatness or regularity is to be avoided; the stakes should be unevenly spaced, and the wire left rather slack with occasional loose loops in it. An entanglement made in this way is harder to pass and to cut than one of the regulation pattern.

Halts at Night.

Unless a halt is to last at least an hour, its duration should not exceed five minutes, otherwise some men will certainly fall asleep, and the operation of waking them causes noise and delay. If a march is to last all night, a halt for a couple of hours, to allow the troops to sleep, is of great benefit, and will diminish but little the total distance covered.

Recognition of Friends at Night.

In repelling a night attack the defenders are always embarrassed by the difficulty of distinguishing between friend and foe,

and a previously arranged code of signals is essential if collision between bodies of our own troops are to be prevented. The Russians for this purpose adopted the practice of chanting their National Anthem, and, although the tune of "God save the King" may perhaps be too well known to be safely used, it would be easy to select some simple English song which could not be sung by our enemies.

Knowledge of the Moon and Stars.

An elementary knowledge of the names and positions of the principal constellations and stars is very useful in night work, as without such knowledge there will often be difficulty in pointing out the particular star chosen for the column to march on, and any mistake may have serious consequences. The Manual of Map Reading and Field Sketching states that the lateral movement of a star will not exceed 5° in 20 minutes, and that it is safe to march for about a quarter of an hour on the same star.

If neither the tables given in Appendix III. of the Field Service Pocket Book, nor an Almanac are available, it will be impossible for the ordinary man to calculate accurately the times of the rising and setting of the moon, but a rough knowledge of its phases enables us to estimate approximately the duration of moonlight. When the new moon is first seen it rises in the morning and sets soon after sunset, but as its hours of rising and setting become later each day, by the time it reaches its first quarter the moonlight lasts from sunset to about midnight, and at full moon all night. When the moon begins to wane, and its hour of rising becomes later than the hour of sunset, there is a daily increasing period of darkness between sunset and moon-rise. Consequently, when the moon is growing, moonlight may be expected in the early hours of the night, but after the last quarter not till after midnight.

The number of well educated persons who cannot distinguish between the moon when in the first and last quarter is

astonishing, but I have found the old plan of taking a biscuit to represent the moon, and biting pieces out of it to show the different phases, a simple means of explaining the matter to recruits. They soon realise that if, as you look at the biscuit or the moon, a piece is wanting on the left side, the moon is growing; if on the right side, it is waning.

*Constant Practice the only Means of
Acquiring Knowledge.*

The old proverb, that an ounce of practice is worth a ton of theory, is specially true of night operations; neither intuition nor books can ever replace actual experience. The accidents that may, and do, happen are so numerous, and the consequences of trivial mistakes so far-reaching, that unless they have been seen they cannot be realised. The only means of gaining knowledge is to constantly practise Night Operations on all sorts of ground, and in all sorts of weather. My

own experience of night work, both on service and in peace, is probably above the average, but I do not believe that I have ever returned from any night operation without feeling that I had acquired some fresh item of knowledge.

Conclusion.

In conclusion, I wish again to lay stress on the fact that although in planning any night operation it is necessary to proceed with the greatest caution, yet, when once the undertaking has been commenced, it must be carried through with the sternest resolution. In the dark the boldest course is generally the best, and every moment of hesitation diminishes the chances of success. To the junior ranks of the Army night fighting affords chances of gaining distinction which cannot occur in daylight, but these chances are fleeting ones, and must be seized the moment they occur. The secret of success lies in acting boldly and in acting promptly, and young officers,

when engaged in night operations, will do well to adopt the motto attributed to the great leader of the French Revolution, Danton:—

De l'audace, encore de l'audace, toujours de l'audace.

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