

**NAVAL PROFESSIONAL
PAPERS, NO. 18: TRAINING
OF ENLISTED MEN**

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Naval Professional Papers, No. 18: Training of Enlisted Men by Various

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VARIOUS

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NOTE.

The within papers are republished from the "Journal of the Royal United Service Institution," to call attention to the necessity for the more elaborate training of enlisted men in the Navy, and to the several systems advocated and carried out in foreign armies.

The general principles of such training are as applicable to navies as to armies.

BUREAU OF NAVIGATION, NAVY DEPARTMENT, *August*, 1885.

SOME GERMAN VIEWS UPON THE TRAINING OF INFANTRY IN PEACE AND ITS ACTION IN WAR.

"*Militärische Briefe II. Ueber Infanterie.*" Von Kraft Prinz zu Hohenlohe-Ingelfingen, General der Infanterie à la suite der Armee, General-Adjutant seiner Majestät des Kaisers und Königs. (Berlin, 1884.)

"*Beiheft zum Militär-Wochenblatt, 1884.*" Heft 6. Herausgegeben von V. Löbell, Oberst. z. D. Die Heranbildung v. Unterführern auf dem Exercirplatz. (The training of leaders of the lower grades on the field of exercise.)

Twice during her short history as a kingdom has Prussia established her superiority in war—the first time under Frederick the Great, the second time under Frederick William and v. Moltke. On each occasion her army has become the pattern for all European armies, and her annual fields of maneuver the meeting ground for students of the art of war. Her first period of military supremacy was but of short duration, principally owing to political causes, but also to a falling off from the high standard of warlike efficiency which had been attained, a decline which had commenced even before the death of the great warrior statesman whose genius had raised his little kingdom to one of the foremost places among nations, a decline so rapid that within twenty years of Frederick's death the army which he had made a model one, imitated, and sometimes only too blindly, by other nations, entirely broke up and collapsed under the blows of a younger and more vigorous organization. As far as the military question goes, the reasons for this rapid decay of Prussia's fighting power are not far to seek. They are to be found mainly in the torpor which is too often with nations, as with individuals, the natural consequence of great success, in the idea that the system which has succeeded so well must be perfect and must always succeed, that in fact it is only necessary "to let well alone," as the saying is. You may slumber in peace. Unfortunately for the slumberers the world does not stand still, and while they are taking their rest changes unnoticed or unappreciated by them are constantly being made, till all of a sudden they are rudely awakened to the consciousness of a new order of things for which they, with their old-world notions, are utterly unprepared; and so they and those who have been guided by them give way

before men and nations who have kept awake. Situated as Prussia is geographically and politically, military decline must inevitably in a very short time produce a national catastrophe. Such was the case in 1806. The lesson was not lost upon the nation or its rulers. The painful reawakening of Jena led eventually, through some years of suffering and humiliation, to renewed life, and the warlike spirit, thoroughly aroused by the struggle for independence, has never since ceased to animate more or less the Prussian people notwithstanding a long period of peace, though had it not been for the fine example set by the present sovereign and his family, for the genius, energy, and persistency displayed by the statesmen and soldiers at the head of the Government and of the armies, this spirit could not have produced the mighty results which we in these latter days have witnessed. Again, for the second time in her history, has Prussia overcome every army which has met hers in the field, and again has her army, and this time, through its teaching, that of united Germany, become the best sample of warlike efficiency which the world can produce. During this second period of preponderance her success has been far more rapid, complete, and continuous, also on a much greater scale than during the former period. There would consequently appear to be more justification for allowing a course of placid repose to follow upon one of tremendous exertion; but no such feeling has arisen, or if there be some few among the older officers for whom age and weariness make a quiet life the one thing to be desired, their number and influence are not great enough to affect the general result; so that, instead of the torpor succeeding Frederick's successes, we find after v. Moltke's much greater victories constant, unremitting exertion and a never-ending struggle for improvement throughout the ranks of the army. Not a shot has been fired by it on an enemy since the spring of 1871; consequently a period of peace has elapsed about equal to that which intervened between Frederick's last war in 1779 and the invasion of France by the Duke of Brunswick in 1792; but whereas after Frederick's wars military knowledge remained at a standstill, while military spirit and efficiency degenerated, during the present peace, on the contrary, military spirit remains as strong as ever, while military knowledge and efficiency have largely increased. As far as can be seen, there is every prospect of a continuation of this reign of progress, for it has become the prevailing fashion of the army not to accept any part of its institutions as perfect, and to be constantly aiming at improvement. The saying "nothing is so successful as success" does not apply to the estimate formed by the German army of itself. It was successful in three successive wars within a period of only seven years, in the latter two of which wars success was on a scale hitherto unprecedented; yet after each of these wars, particularly after the last and greatest, there has been a general inquiry, "How can we do better next time?" Hundreds of busy heads are continually occupied in originating or carrying out improvements in administration, in armament, in

equipment, in organization, in tactics, in short in everything which conduces to efficiency in war. No invention of these inventive days which can in any manner be useful in warfare passes unheeded, even such a matter as the rearing and training of carrier pigeons being carefully studied. An enormous amount of new military literature appears annually, officers of all ranks contributing to it, and being thought the better of by those in authority for doing so. Many of these writers enjoy a world-wide reputation, their works being known and appreciated everywhere. Amongst the latest who has come into the lists as an author is one of the highest-placed officers in the German army, one who has held important commands on service during the late wars, and also during the subsequent time of peace. He is thus amongst those best qualified both by war and peace experience to give his opinion on military subjects. I speak of Kraft Prinz zu Hohenlohe-Ingelfingen, who has within the last twelvemonth published a series of letters on the three arms, cavalry, infantry, and artillery, a little volume devoted to each having appeared in the order above given. The author, so well known as an artillery officer, commanded the "reserve" artillery of the Guard Corps during the campaign of 1866, being wounded at the battle of Königgrätz, and the whole artillery of the same army corps in 1870-71, playing an important part both in the battle of the 18th August at St. Privat and in that of the 1st September at Sedan. Though not in command of either infantry or cavalry on service, he had ample opportunities of watching the action of those arms in battle, particularly of the former, and after the peace commanded for seven years an "infantry division," which contains in the German service, as we know, detachments of the other arms also. Prince Hohenlohe's experience during his thirty-five years' service has been thus of a sufficiently varied character to qualify him as an authority on the subjects of which he treats, and I think that all those who read the letters will be struck by the breadth of view and earnestness which he displays. It is evident from his writings that he is a man of judgment and of observation, moreover of an ingenious and inventive turn of mind, and endowed with the true spirit of a soldier, whilst his record of service proves him to have been a cool-headed and able commander. The description of the scenes in which he took part or of which he was an eye witness is graphic and picturesque, bearing at the same time the impress of reality and accuracy.

In the introduction to the first volume of the series he gives his reasons for publishing his opinions and experiences in the form of letters. He states that having been often asked to give the army the benefit of his views upon professional matters, he was doubtful as to the form which the publication should assume, at first thinking of bringing out a book of memoirs, but rejected this idea because memoirs, or, in other words, the account of what a man sees and hears, differ very much in moments of excitement from what actually occurs, each man's views

being colored by his own immediate environment; consequently personal memoirs are sure to promote controversy and disagreement, things which it is well to avoid. Then the idea of a scientific work on the tactics of the three arms occurred to him, but this also was rejected, for, as he says, "there are so many and such excellent works of this nature. I could only repeat what has long been known and has been repeated over and over again." He ended by presenting his ideas to his comrades in the form of letters written in a familiar, gossiping style, and I do not think that his decision is to be regretted. It will be found, as may naturally be expected, when we consider the intimate connection between the different arms in war, that the action of all the arms is frequently referred to in each volume, for as all must work in combination it would be impossible to treat the subject in a fitting manner if attention were exclusively given to the one arm at the moment under consideration. My own remarks will be confined to the second volume of Prince Hohenlohe's letters, from which I shall give as copious selections as my space will allow, concluding with an extract from the "Militär Wochenblatt," the views advocated in which in a very clear and practical manner are, as will be seen, in complete accordance with certain opinions held by the prince. The passages which I have selected from his letters on "Infantry" appear to me such as specially require our attention, but I recommend a careful study of the three volumes, of which a complete translation would be desirable.

The first letter begins with the following striking passage: "After reviewing the performances of German infantry in the war of 1870-71, one comes to the conclusion that it is not only the most perfect force of that arm which has ever existed, but that no more perfect infantry can be imagined. It is true that the Emperor Napoleon remarked, after the catastrophe of Sedan, that German victories were due to the Prussian Uhlans and to the Prussian artillery. Bazaine makes a similar statement in his 'Episodes.' It was doubtless owing to our cavalry that our adversary was blindfold, and that our armies had complete freedom of action; doubtless, also, German artillery had often to take a very active part in the work which properly belonged to infantry when the range was too long for the needle-gun to reply to the chasseur; but after all it was always the infantry which had to do the main part of the work.

"Nothing would have been more natural than that our infantry should have believed itself to have attained the acme of perfection, and that it should hold fast to every detail of its institutions. But no; we have been surprised, on the contrary, to remark that a general desire for improvement prevailed throughout its ranks."

This desire has been maintained ever since, and is still maintained, not only in the infantry but throughout the army, as before remarked. With regard to the principal arm, it is well to bear in mind that great tactical changes were contemplated before the French war, and that a

new edition of the Field Exercise was actually published in the first half of 1870. Its adoption was, however, wisely deferred, and after the war so much consideration was required, owing to the experience gained during its progress, that the result was only made known to the army in 1876, when the edition now in force was issued. The tactical changes introduced are discussed here and there throughout the letters now before us, and are generally approved of, the great merit and salient point of the present regulations being that while extreme steadiness and precision of movement, complete adherence to established forms, are insisted upon at drill and when maneuvering in close order, very great discretion is allowed in the so-called "battle exercises" and in their counterpart, actual battle. The author's criticisms are chiefly confined to the manner in which the spirit of the regulations is understood and acted upon, and here he has a great deal to say. The first few letters are devoted to the individual drills and instruction of the soldier, which, as the writer points out, cannot be too careful in these days, when such a variety of knowledge is required, and when so much depends upon individual proficiency. I have made no extracts from the letters in question, because, though full of good hints, the system described in them appears not to differ materially from that in operation at home. It is, however, and this is an important point, worked out in a more steadily progressive and systematic manner than with us. Then we come to company drill, looked upon with justice by the Germans as a matter of paramount importance, not only for training but also for discipline.

It is within the limits of the company that, as Prince Hohenlohe phrases it, the soldier learns the "how," that is to say, the details of execution of the "what" afterwards practiced at battalion exercises, and later on applied to the requirements of the battle-field. It is in the company principally that he learns the duty of obedience, and that he gains that confidence in and respect for those in authority over him without which true discipline cannot exist. The chapter upon the company officer is excellent and instructive. We now arrive at battalion training and inspections. The manner in which these matters are conducted by commanding officers and inspecting generals is severely criticised, and it is somewhat surprising to find how much "unrealities" are in vogue even under the very practical military system of Germany.

Prince Hohenlohe does well in drawing attention to the fact that the prevailing style of inspection virtually regulates the manner in which troops are trained, for given good material you can work it into any shape required. It is for the heads of the army to choose the right shape. The importance of developing individual initiative in subordinates is strongly insisted upon, and this can be accomplished to a great extent by a judicious system of training; but if officers are not accustomed to think and act for themselves upon occasion in peace time, they must learn to do so on service, and often do not acquire the habit

soon enough for themselves and for their country. It may be considered superfluous nowadays to preach the necessity of fighting in extended order, using the term in a large sense, not only as applied to the individuals composing a tactical unit, but also to those units in relation to one another; yet such exhortations are evidently required even in Germany, where the principle of extended order has long been firmly established. How much more so with us, seeing that the form of tactics supposed to be the most suitable to modern requirements, and practiced accordingly by our soldiers in peace time, has to be so often departed from in the wars which one part or other of our army is almost always waging under conditions which render it necessary to return in greater or less degree to tactics considered obsolete in civilized warfare. Consequently, I think that no occasion should be lost of reminding ourselves that, necessary as formations in close order may often be when encountering foes such as Zulus, Afghans, or Soudanese, to meet a civilized army in such a manner would be to court disaster. The author's remarks upon this subject are well illustrated by battle pictures drawn from his own experience. In the same manner he adds force to his views upon flank and frontal attacks, upon the action of infantry against and combined with cavalry, and upon the supply of ammunition to troops in action, one of the most difficult problems to solve, and one which v. Moltke is reported to have pronounced insoluble, meaning probably when engaged at close quarters. The author's suggestions to infantry upon this point are practical, and will be found further on. The eleventh letter treats of the attack of a position by infantry supported by artillery across perfectly open ground, the most difficult operation which infantry can in these days be fairly called upon to perform, and one for which a great many recipes have been invented in all countries since the breech-loader was introduced. The author gives a very good picture of such an attack, which, if conducted properly, is, however difficult, far from impossible, as we know from the history of the last European wars. The chapter on fire discipline is well worthy of study by officers of all armies, not excepting our own, which is far from being as superior to all other armies in that material point as it used to be in the days of the smooth-bore musket. The reason of this is, I think, not far to seek. I do not believe it to arise from any deterioration in the physical and moral qualities which contribute to "steadiness" in the soldier, but from the want, till quite of late years, of the most practical part of training in the use of the rifle, what we call "field firing" and the Germans call "battle shooting." They and other foreign nations have carried it on systematically for some years. We have only taken to it recently, and I believe that even now we do not put the men through a preparatory course of *individual field firing*, as do our continental friends. The next letters, portions of which are included in the following extracts, treat of the training of the regiment and of the brigade. The concluding letter, that on the "*Geist der Infanterie*"—