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ADVICE FROM FLANDERS FOR NATIONAL GUARD

A Canadian Officer Gives Some Lessons of Trench Fighting—Field Service the Real Work for Making Soldiers.

I have received the inclosed letter from a friend who is an officer in the Canadian Overseas contingent now fighting in Flanders. It was written as a result of a letter I wrote for THE NEW YORK TIMES several months ago concerning the National Guard of New York. The Canadian officer writes with the object of showing the National Guardsmen the necessity of careful training and keen observation of minute details in all matters pertaining to field service.

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[Inclosure.]

My Dear Captain Rich:

I read your article in THE NEW YORK TIMES with a great deal of interest, and am sending the following personal notes of my personal experiences with the Canadian contingent in Europe:

Very few readers of newspapers, or even National Guardsmen, have the real angle on certain matters pertaining to this war.

TAKING COVER.—The smallest implement in the British Army that in proportion to its size accomplishes the most good to the soldier is the intrenching tool that hangs at his back. In open work it is indispensable in making cover for the infantryman, and even where there are trenches partially or entirely constructed that same little intrenching tool is a great friend, especially if the bombardment is on or a trench mortar has blown down a section of a trench. At Ypres I found myself in a partially constructed French trench that had been occupied by an Algerian regiment, which when we arrived was a terrible sight—dilapidated and filled with dead men overcome by the gas attack. After we arrived there was only about an hour before the Germans opened a severe bombardment of high explosive shells as well as shrapnel, but every man had not only dug a hole for himself down and into the trench as protection against shrapnel, but had also found cover for the

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man has been taken from the Allies' trenches seriously wounded, but furious lest the wounded back might suggest trepidation and flight. I know one man who had led a really rough career and feared neither God, man, nor devil, who had six shrapnel wounds from his neck to his heels. Oh, how that fellow cursed his "rotten" luck, but stuck like the rare game old rooster that he was, right to the last, until he finally keeled over from exhaustion. While I am on the subject of intrenching I must add that regiments in the British Army that have done the greatest service to the country have not only been fighters, but workers as well. A man who piles in and helps to build the best trench is not only making cover for himself and his own intimate pals, but for the regiments that will follow. Do not forget for an instant that a good example in respect of keeping your fellow-man in mind brings back threefold and more. Perhaps my experiences have made me particularly partial to soldiering, but I do not know of any remark so touching as to hear a cockney say to some lazy chap next to him, "Come on, matey. Lor' love me, the other feller will need cover as well as you. Why, blime me, he is makin' cover for you down around Armentières, Estaires, and Givenchy. Aye, all along the line, and 'ere you are sittin' back like a toff." A real man is the cockney, and make no mistake.

Where the ground is high, a trench after the Turkish system is the best. It gives perfect cover, and the shooting can even be a graze fire, while the sheer deep trench reduces to a minimum the chances of being hit, as the men are down so deep. In cutting the trench a ledge is always left in order to permit men to reach the top, and frequently they cut another at the bottom where they may sit while a bombardment is in progress.

The land in Flanders is so low that they must build up by means of sandbags. The character and instincts of a battalion or regiment are invariably shown by the condition of the trench that they have previously occupied. Thus "the good that men do lives after them."

During the extreme cold weather a soldier should have a cap resembling a skating cap, pulled down over the ears, and a pair of felt-lined leather mittens

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attached by a long cord hung around the neck. The mittens will keep the hands warm and preserve perfect circulation, besides being more easily removed for rapid fire. A waterproof sheet is a very valuable adjunct to the top or great coat. Last, but by no means least, save old rubber sheets or torn sandbags to bind about leggings and feet. They will keep out the cold, keep your feet dry, and save the leggings from becoming caked and heavy with clay.

A soldier should never forget that his firearms are his best friend. Keep them clean and sufficiently oiled, see to it that the bayonet fits easily, and keep your ammunition cleaned and oiled.

Much has been written about periscopes for the rank and file, but for me the most practical periscope that I have yet seen is a pocket affair about three inches long and one and one-half inches wide when folded. A metal top opens on a hinge away from the metal-backed mirror, and can be attached to a stick, cane, or bayonet by a small clasp back of the mirror portion, and then placed at the rear of a trench.

The question of considering others, although of little importance to some, is of the utmost importance to men in active service. A good shot or a zealous marksman is very apt to forget his mates. Why draw the enemy's fire when it isn't imperative, and when your own brother or chum may be on a working party back of where you are firing? Many times in the spirit of zeal and patriotism a man is led to make moves that are detrimental to those around him. Save your ammunition. You might hit your target, though a very difficult one, on your second shot, but your first shot would tell your range and draw fire from several rifles of the enemy, causing unnecessary casualties among those working in the rear of your line.

USE OF THE BAYONET.—Men enthuse over descriptions of bayonet charges. They are no idle pastimes, so it behooves all soldiers not only to become absolutely perfect in bayonet exercises, but to practice getting under way, keeping abreast with your mates and having a firm hold on your rifle. The soldier may say, "Oh, that bayonet exercise isn't practical in a charge." No? Very well, that may appear right to some, but I should advise every one knowing every parry,

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thrust and counter so thoroughly that after they become second nature you can then do whatever your intuition at the moment directs.

Wire cutters are very good for reconnoissance at night and scouts, but wire cutters never cleared entanglements for a charge. If a Government cannot furnish high explosives to clear the way, (an army should wait until they do,) it is a thousand-to-one shot that even six charmed lives out of a regiment will reach the enemy's line.

In a bayonet charge never stop to look after a mate, because the taking of a position and securing it is far more important than anything else. The charge once over, your mate will be cared for well by troops assigned for that duty, unless, of course, you can be spared to attend to your mates. In this case first aid training comes in especially handy and the past instructions that men have received will become apparent. In the instructions received by us before we left Canada, and afterward England, for the front the following was firmly impressed on every man by the surgeons: When the charge is over and you have time to attend to the wounded apply the wounded man's first aid bandage. If the man is bleeding profusely apply a tourniquet to the nearest blood vessel in order to save him from losing too much blood, then use the medicated first aid bandage, but never try to wash a wound with water. The thought is very kind, but the application of water in a great percentage of cases is likely to send the impurities of the earth or your handkerchief into the wound. The application of iodine to a wound carries wonderful results. A tiny glass of iodine forms a part of the French soldiers' first aid kit.

EXTENDED ORDER FIGHTING.—The matter of changing direction, so many intervals extending from right, left, or centre are parts of the extended order work that depends upon instructors and company commanders and officers, but the individual soldier must practice by himself the trick of dropping to the ground and rising in the quickest manner. In dropping, pass the rifle smartly over to the left hand, throw your feet out back of you, keeping the rifle in the left hand, holding it forward and a little to the left so that you can more easily fall into a comfortable position. This is different from the United States Drill Regulations, and

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I do not consider it as good. When firing ceases and the soldier is about to advance, shove the bolt in full and turn the safety catch, else on the next fall you will be apt to have an accident that would injure yourself or one of your mates. In rising keep the rifle in the right hand, bringing your left hand under your left side on a line with the lower ribs and simultaneously with this move bring the right knee in line with the waist, placing the toes firmly in the earth. You will find the matter of rising will not only be more swift, but you will have a good crouching start, very similar to a sprinter. In advancing think of your mates on either side and keep the ordered interval. If wounded and the line advances, keep your head, don't try to shoot through the line or over them.

OBSERVATION. — To develop your power of observation is as essential to the soldier's welfare as anything else. A man's ability to shoot depends largely on his observation and judgment of distance. If the sight becomes damaged or out of order do not be afraid of a surly armorer, step right up, have the matter attended to if you cannot manage it alone, because with a poor sight your opportunity to keep your cause in that engagement would be almost nil and valuable ammunition would be wasted. So go into an engagement as perfectly prepared as you possibly can and be ready for any emergency that may arise.

The German Mauser rifle carries five rounds in the magazine, the British ten rounds, while the Canadian Ross rifle, which is really an excellent arm for fine target shooting, is not a practical rifle in the field. It is too fine. The British rifle is a truly terrible weapon, especially in rapid fire. The mechanism of the magazine is very simple, while the sights are so stable that they are not easily thrown out of gear. In the battle of Armentières the British rifles became so clogged that they were of no further use, so the order to charge was given and an apparent defeat was turned into victory, but thereafter waterproof covers were issued. These covers, while a good idea, were quite a nuisance and were generally supplanted by a simple, good, cold common-sense device. This was nothing but an old sock cleaned and oiled that the men would slide down over the barrel in order to cover the bolt, sight, and other mechanism. This

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cover they found was more readily removed for action. The muzzle of the rifle should never be covered or stuffed with an oily rag, as it will cause a sweating of the barrel. Russian petroleum is used very extensively in the British Army and is very excellent. After coming out of the trenches, especially if the four days in the trenches had been very rainy and wet, I always cleaned my rifle before another thing was done, then rubbed the bolt and breach with vaseline. While this is a good move, some men are not careful enough to keep these parts from collecting dust. If a man wants to go to that trouble, he should always be sure to rub all of the vaseline off with a clean cloth before applying the gun oil. Too much oil used indiscriminately is very detrimental, so a clean, well-oiled piece of flannel is the best way to oil a rifle. In cleaning the barrel try to avoid the overuse of wire gauze usually attached to "pull-throughs," for if it fails to loosen any slight rust spot it is bound to scratch the fine bore of the rifle and thereby reduce the efficiency of the gun. Use plenty of oil on the piece of "pull-through" rag and finish your work with a dry piece of flannel. The rifle is a soldier's best friend, and the "pull-through," oil bottle and strip of flannel are important members of the rifle family. All the men in the trenches are supplied before they arrive there with a 12-inch strip of flannel marked off in 2 by 4 inch sections by means of red strips. Each man receives a portion consisting of nine 2 by 4 inch pieces. By experience the size of these pieces has been determined as suitable to carefully clean the rifle.

I firmly agree with you that the Field Service in time of peace is the real work in training men to become soldiers. It is the individual aptitude that is developed and broadened by field work, and this, in conjunction with the close order work in the armories, will develop the man into a soldier.

X. X. X.

Fifth Battalion, Second Brigade, First Canadian Contingent.

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