Table Annexed to Article: Hints to Young Generals by John Armstrong Jr. in MR Text

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HINTS TO YOUNG GENERALS

SECTION I.

GENERALs have been divided into three classes; theorists, who by study and reflection, have made themselves acquainted with all the rules, or maxims, of the art they profess; Martinets, who have confined their attention merely to the mechanical part of the trade; and practical men, who have no other, or better guide than their own experience, in either branch of it. This last description is, in all services excepting our own, the most numerous; but with us, gives place to a fourth, viz. men, destitute alike of theory and of experience.

Self-respect, is one thing; and presumption, another. Without the former, no man ever became a good officer; under the influence of the latter, Generals have committed great faults. The former, is the necessary result of knowledge; the latter, of ignorance. A man acquainted with his duty, can rarely be placed in circumstances new, surprizing or embarrassing; a man ignorant of his duty, will always find himself constrained to guess, and {6} not knowing how to be right by system, will often be wrong by chance.

These remarks are neither made, nor offered, as apllying exclusively to the science of war. They apply to all other sciences; but in these, errors are comparatively harmless. A naturalist, may amuse himself and the public with false and fanciful theories of the earth; and a metaphysician may reason very badly on the relations and laws of matter and spirit, without any ill effect but to make themselves ridiculous. Their blunders but make us
merry; they neither pick pockets, nor break legs, nor destroy lives, while those of a general bring after them evils the most compounded and mischievous; the slaughter of an army, the devastation of a state, the ruin of an empire!

In proportion as ignorance may be calamitous, the reasons for requiring instruction are multiplied and strengthened. Are you an honest man? You will spare neither labor nor sacrifice to gain a competent knowledge of your duty. Are you a man of honor? You will be careful to avoid self-reproach. Does your bosom glow with the holy fervor of patriotism? You will so accomplish yourself as to avoid bringing down upon your country either insult or injury. {7}

Nor are the more selfish impulses without a similar tendency. Has hunger made you a soldier? Will you not take care of your daily bread? Is vanity your principle of action? Will you not guard those mighty blessings, your epaulets and feathers? Are you impelled by a love of glory or a love of power? And can you forget that these coy mistresses are only to be won by intelligence and good conduct?

“But the means of instruction—where are they to be found? Our standing army is but a bad and ill-organized militia; and our militia, not better than a mob. Nor have the defects in these been supplied by Lycees, Prytanees and Polytechnic schools. The morbid patriotism of some, and the false economy of others, have nearly obliterated every thing like military knowledge among us.”

This, reader, is but one motive the more for reinstating it. Thanks to the noble art of printing, you still have books, which if studied, will teach the war of war.

“Books! and what are they but the dreams of pedants? They may make a Mack, but have they ever made a Xenophon, a Caesar, a Frederick or {8} a Bonaparte? Who would not laugh to hear the cobler of Athens lecturing Hannibal on the art of war?”

True: but as you are not Hannibal, listen to the cobler. Xenophon, Caesar, Saxe and Frederick, have all thought well of books, and have even composed them. Nor is this extraordinary, since they are but the depositaries of maxims, which genius has suggested, and experience confirmed; since they both enlighten and shorten the road of the traveller, and render the labor and genius of past ages, tributary to our own. These teach most emphatically that the secret of successful war, is not to be found in mere legs and arms, but in the head, that shall direct them. If this be either ungifted by nature, or uninstructed by study and reflexion, the best plans of manoeuvre and campaign, avail nothing. The two last centuries
have presented many revolutions in military character, all of which have turned on this principle. It would be useless to enumerate these. We shall quote only the greatest and the last.—The troops of Frederick!—how illustrious under him? How contemptible under his successors? Yet his system was there; his double lines of march by platoons at \{9\} entire distances; his oblique orders of battle; his simple lines of manoeuvre in the presence of an enemy; his flying artillery; his wise conformation of an Etat-Major;—all, in short, that distinguished his practice from that of ordinary men, survived himself:—but the head, that truly comprehended and knew how to apply these, died with Frederick. What an admonition does this fact present, for self-instruction,—for unwearied diligence,—for study and reflection? Nor should the force of this be lessened by the consideration, that after all, unless nature should have done her part of the work, unless to a soul, not to be shaken by any changes of fortune;—cool, collected and strenuous, she adds a head,—fertile in expedients—prompt in its decisions, and sound in its judgments, no man can ever merit the title of a General.

It is under this view of the subject, that the following pages have been written.—They are the result of much reading, of more reflexion, and of some practical knowledge; and are offered as the mite of one, who laments, that he has nothing better to offer on the altars of his country. {10}

SECTION II.

It is of great importance to simplify science, by reducing it to first principles. That of the art of war rests but on two—concentration of force and celerity of movement. The officer who knows best how to combine and give effect to these, is the most scientific general, and must, celeries paribus, always succeed. “I know no thing in the art,” said Bonaparte, “more sublime, than to assemble an army, march twelve leagues a day, fight a battle and sleep in safety.”

Didactic writers must however specify as well as generalise; they must divide, and sub-divide, and illustrate. Hence it is, that the latest, and perhaps the best, on this subject, treat it under the following heads:

1st. The art of choosing the most advantageous line of operations, and that of carrying to any given part of this line, the largest possible mass of your forces in the shortest possible time: and,

2d. The art of directing this mass, when brought together, most efficiently, against some given point of your enemy’s line of operations or line of battle.
The first is called the *plan of campaign*, and that part of it which relates to the {11} union of your own troops, has received the name of *stratagie*. The last has been called *tactics*, but would be more properly denominated *the art of combat*.

Conforming to this division of the subject, I shall assemble the *definitions* and *maxims*, which govern under these two heads, and shall add some incidental remarks and illustrations.

**Of Lines of Operation, &c.**

This branch, as already noticed, has been called the *plan of campaign*, but with little propriety—as it is quite impossible, that you can hypothecate with any exactness in your closet, the movements either of yourself or of your enemy, in the field: not those of yourself, because your conduct must necessarily be governed by events;—nor those of your enemy, because you are not in the secret of his intentions, nor of the means he may employ to execute them. This part of the art, therefore, resolves itself into the mere *choice of positions*, which, whether your object be offensive or defensive, will best promote that general object. Tho’ thus narrowed in its meaning and application, and though perhaps not the most sublime branch of the science, still it is one of {12} very high moment; without which, victories, if gained, will be barren—and defeats, if suffered, fatal.

In technical language, lines of operations, are either simple or double; excentric or concentric; interior or exterior; profound, secondary or accidental; deriving their names from relations of place, or from some quality inherent in themselves.

*Simple* lines are those formed by an army acting in *masse*.

*Double* lines are those formed by an army acting on the same frontier, and with the same object, but in *separate* bodies.

*Excentric* lines are those formed by an army marching from the same point on diverging lines.

*Concentric* lines are those formed by an army marching from different bases to unite at a point in front, or in rear, of these bases.

*Interior* lines are those which you oppose to an enemy, and to which is given an *interior* direction.

*Exterior* lines are formed on the extremities of one or more of the lines of the enemy.

*Deep* lines are those which are remote from your object. {13}

*Secondary* lines are those formed by two corps acting on the same developement.
Accidental lines (as the name sufficiently indicates) are those growing out of any change in the primitive line of operations, and which gives to these a new direction. These last are rare, and when the result of a good coup d’œil, very important.—It is honorable to the Untied States, that the history of their war of the revolution, furnishes one of the finest examples of them. I mean the accidental line of operations taken by Gen. Washington in N. Jersey, after the action at Princeton. In mere relation to military principles, this was not inferior to that taken by the King of Prussia after the battle of Hohenkirchen.

It remains to present to the reader the maxims, which, on this head, result from the history of all modern wars.

1. Simple and interior lines are the most advantageous, because from the unity of mass in the former, and the shorter movements which result from the latter, you can always bring to the attack or defence of any given point your whole force.—These were often employed by Frederick, and always by Napoleon. The following figure will illustrate this maxim. {14}

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{A} \\
\text{C} \\
\text{B}
\end{array}
\]

C is a simple and interior line, formed to oppose A B, which is a double and exterior one. It is evident that C can carry its attack (en masse) on either of the divisions A B, in less time, than either of these can be brought to the succor of the other.

2d. Interior lines, whether simple or double, are most advantageous when employed on two frontiers. This we illustrate by the following figure.

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{A} \\
\text{B} \\
\text{C}
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{A} \\
\text{B} \\
\text{C}
\end{array}
\]
The dotted line C represents the section of a state, or province, assailed on two frontiers by the army A, whose lines of operation are double and exterior; and defended by the army B, whose lines are also double, but interior. It is evident, that the divisions B can (by uniting their forces) overthrow either of the divisions of the army A, before they can be supported by each other.

3. Double, exterior, and all multiplied lines have been unsuccessful, when opposed by those of simple and interior form and direction;—because they can but oppose to an attack (en masse) weak and separate divisions. This maxim has been proved, as well by our own history, as by that of Germany and France. Burgoyne’s line of operations (in 1777) was double and exterior. Operating as he did on the arc, and the American army on the corde, his wings fell in succession, and but announced the surrender of the main army.

4. The most advantageous direction for a simple, manœuvering line, is that which may be given to it on the wing or on the rear of an enemy, because in that case you engage only a part of his forces, and because (finding a flank menaced) his primitive position will not be maintained.—The French army of the Danube, after manœuvering on the left wing of General Kray, marched rapidly through Switzerland, and put itself on the right extremity of the Austrian line of defence, and, by this movement alone, conquered all the country between the Rhine and the Danube, without pulling a trigger. A similar movement of the army of reserve, carried it on the rear of Melas, and produced results still more important.

5. The shape or figure of a frontier, having, like the northern side of Bohemia, or eastern of Switzerland, a central and salient angle, is highly favorable to lines of operations; because, besides that your manœuvres are here necessarily interior, you are so far advanced upon the position of your enemy, as to be able to gain his flank or rear.

6. The want of these central and salient positions may be supplied by the direction given to your manœuvres, as may be seen by the following figure.
B manoeuvring on the right flank of A, and D manoeuvring on the left flank of C, will form two interior lines E E, upon an extremity of each of the lines A C, which they may beat in succession.—This combination offers the results of the manoeuvres of the French army in 1800, and of the very best of Frederick’s.

7. Two *interior lines* (such as those mentioned in article 6,) must avoid being compressed into a space, too narrow to permit their display, as well as the opposite faults of spreading themselves too widely, or pushing too far any separate attacks. The reasons for both rules are obvious.

It will be perceived, that I have, thus far, spoken only of *manoeuvring lines*, and have left unnoticed, those traced out by *art*, or indicated by *nature*. My reasons {18} for this omission, will not be mistaken.— Of the former, none exist in this country, and the uses of the latter are not rejected by the maxims I have laid down. He must be more than a novice in the art, who does not know that mountains, ridges, defiles, rivers, lakes, swamps and forests, form good points of support in a line of operations; and we may say of a general, who either knows not, or neglects, to profit by these, what Frederick humorously said of Prince Ferdinand’s mule, “twenty years service will not make him a tactician.”

It remains to offer a few maxims on the *strategic* part of this head.

1. Marches on your own line, if *in the face of an enemy*, should be *masked*; because not being made without an object, and being preliminary to offensive or defensive measures, their success will often depend upon the secrecy with which they are executed. This is best secured by *night* movements, or if any reason forbids these, by availing yourself of some *local* circumstance (such as the cover of a wood or of a ravine) and by *demonstrations*, which will fix the attention of your enemy on a point, different from that which is your real object. Your order of march {19} should be in *two columns*, by *flanks*, with *platoons* at *entire distances*, and ready to take an order of battle by a *simple conversion*.

2. Marches made *out of the presence, or stroke, of an enemy*, and upon your own line, are best executed by dividing your army into four or more columns, moved by different routes. The advantages of this order of march are—greater celerity of movement, greater facility of subsistence,
and the influence of the doubts and disquietudes with which your enemy may be inspired, by the uncertainty thrown over your real point of attack or defence.

**SECTION III.**

**Of the Act of Combat.**

This, according to a definition already given, is that of carrying the most efficient attack upon any given point of your enemy’s line of operations or line of battle; whence it follows, that the best dispositions will be those, which put in motion, at the same instant, and on a given point, your whole force, excepting that destined for reserve. Your order of march therefore should be on two contiguous lines, in columns, by platoons at entire distances. {20} Frederick’s army generally marched in two columns by the flanks, taking its order of battle by a simple conversion of platoons without openings. By this order, an army may execute all its movements, remain united, and run no risk of having its right, or its left, borne down by an attack of its enemy. When it reaches the field of battle, it can be formed in a few minutes; and having no other distances to observe, than that which separates the columns (which will also be necessary between the lines when formed) and those between the platoons, we may give to this manoeuvre equal precision and celerity. Should the face of the ground render a multiplication of columns necessary, the number may be doubled. Four columns being formed, and having reached the ground on which they are to act, the second will halt until the first shall have entirely passed it. The head of the second column will then find itself near the last platoon of the first, and by the simple conversion we have already mentioned, will form a continuous line. The same process will bring the other two columns into the same relation to each other, and form a second line behind the first.

Next to keeping your troops in a state {21} to act simultaneously, it is important in this art to select with judgment the point against which you are to carry your attack. This may be the centre, or an extremity, or the rear of your enemy’s line. An attack on the centre is only justifiable when your enemy has committed a fault. If he has extended his line too far, and thus weakened his centre; or if he has committed the maintenance of it to divisions isolated by ravines, &c. &c. you may strike these, and with decisive effect, as by this measure you break down altogether his order of battle, and compel his wings to fly, or to take the hazard of fighting without concert, and falling in succession. An attack on the rear, has in itself some inherent
advantages and disadvantages.—When successful, it carries with it entire
discomfiture to your enemy,—but as it presupposes the turning of a flank,
so it occupies more time than that manoeuvre; it involves more labor and
calculation; it puts more to hazard, and lastly, it makes necessary a division
of your forces—because in executing it, you must be careful to leave a stron
body in the extremity you pass, which will answer the several
purposes of keeping open a communication with your primitive line of operations, while it severs that of your enemy; of assailing him in front
while you attack him in rear, and of preventing him from escaping from a
bad position, by a concealed movement. These remarks sufficiently indicate
the preference which the attack of a wing has over that of either of the
other points. This does not, like the last, make a division of your force
necessary; nor does it, like the first, bring you against a point which may receive assistance from both wings;—but against one, which can but be maintained by its own skill and intrepidity, or by reinforcements, slowly
and successively coming to its aid. If, then, the most advantageous attacks
are those made but on one extremity of your enemy’s line; and if it be an
acknowledged maxim, that he ought to oppose to such attacks, counter-
movements of the same kind,—it cannot be denied, that the mode of attack
which shall deprive him of this faculty, will be the best. Now a hidden
movement is the only one against which a skillful enemy cannot oppose a
counter-manoeuvre. In all other cases, he will be able to follow the march
of your columns, present to them his whole front, and take them in flank; [1]
whence it follows, that your approaches must be so masked, as to enable you to gain your champ de bataille unperceived. This concealment
may be effected in one of three ways: by a night movement; by the form of
the ground; or by a false attack on your enemy’s front. Night movements,
are however less certain or safe than those of the day; nor will the ground
always favor you; but when it does, the advantage is not to be slighted, and
when combined with that of a false attack, rarely fails.

It yet remains to speak of the order of attack, because if this be not
judicious, all the advantages resulting from your first steps, however wisely
taken, will amount to nothing. [2] Do you employ the parallel order, considerably reinforced at the head of your line? Though not the worst,
this is far from being the best, you might have taken. You cannot but perceive that the weak part of the line, being nearly approached to the
enemy, may be engaged against its will, and that thus the advantages gained at the principle point of attack, may be balanced, or even outweighed, at some other point. The reinforced wing may beat that opposed to it, but can it follow up its blows without separating from the
other part of the line, should that also be engaged? If on the other hand, the enemy has been civil enough to leave this part undisturbed, and it should attempt to follow the movements of the reinforced wing, can it do so without a *detour*, which would give to the {25} enemy an opportunity of resuming the offensive at the principal point, because first able to carry thither the whole of his forces? Are *perpendicular* and *oblique* orders of attack, liable to the same objections, or to others equally solid? We believe not. They have the sanction of the greatest generals;—they were adopted by both Frederick and Napoleon: but they have still higher authorities on their side—the conclusions of reason and the demonstrations of science.

If all the combinations of the art of combat can be reduced to a single principle, (as we believe they can) and if this principle be, *the putting in action at the most important point of a line of operations, or line of battle, a greater force than the enemy*—it follows, that the oblique or perpendicular orders must be the best, because they are those which are most conformed to this principle. I will illustrate my meaning by the following figure, which represents the relative positions of the King of Prussia and the allied army at the battle of Rosbac. {26}

A.

B

A. represents the Prussian army, and B. that of the allies. We perceive that B. is attacked *perpendicularly*, and is uncovered on one of his flanks. The advantage of this state of things to A is, that he presents his *whole front* to *one extremity of his enemy’s line*; and that B cannot bring his battalions into action against him but in *succession*, and of course *exposed* to be separately overthrown.

The same advantages to the assailant, and the same disadvantage to the assailed, would be the result of an *oblique order of attack*. But of this, there are many modifications, which are either better or worse, as the refused wing may be either less or more exposed to be separately engaged. A line, for instance, nearly parallel with that of your enemy, and, strongly reinforced on one of its wings, may be *oblique*, but so little so, as to have
nearly all the defects of the parallel\{27\} order already mentioned. The position laid down in the beginning of this paragraph, must therefore be considered as applying to the open oblique order, the power of which is much increased by a crotchet, or potence, at the reinforced extremity. The brilliant results of this combination cannot be too frequently submitted to the meditation of military men, and it is for this reason, that, though somewhat inconsistent with the brevity meant to be given to this work, we shall add another figure, and some remarks in illustration of it.

The left wing of the army A B C will receive the fire of the 2d brigade of the \{28\} army D D, while the 1st brigade, formed in column by platoons, will uncover it. The 2d brigade, following the oblique prolongation of the 1st, will be sustained by the 3d, which, after pouring in its fire upon the attacked wing, will pass onward. The 4\textsuperscript{th}, taking the place of the 3d, will operate in the same way, &c. &c. while the head of the attack having
reached the dotted lines E E, will give to its efforts the direction of those lines. This order presents the following advantages—

1st. The weak or refused part of your line, runs no risk of being engaged with a superior force of your enemy:

2d. Its parts are brought in succession, to support the main attack:

3d. Your enemy’s wing is uncovered and taken in flank, and he is left without the power of opposing to this attack any prolongation of his line, or any other efficient manoeuvre: and,

4th. It opposes your whole force to a third or a half of your enemy’s.

We have said nothing of the simple parallel order, because it is a proof of absolute incapacity in the general who employs it; it is a mere contest between legs and arms, without any admixture of mind; it belongs to the Attilas and Tamerlanes of the art. \{29\}

We shall now proceed, as in the last section, to offer the few maxims which govern on this subject.

1st. Double attacks are to be avoided, because they necessarily divide your forces:

2d. Central attacks are dangerous (excepting when your enemy has committed a fault), because they expose you to his united attacks; his wings being easily brought to the support of his centre:

3d. Extended attacks are bad, because they necessarily present weak points:

4th. Simple parallel orders of battle, are barbarous, and shew only ignorance or folly. They ought in no case to be employed, excepting when your superiority of force is most decided, and when, (if I may be allowed the observation) you may be prodigal of life, without the hazard of losing any thing else: and,

5th. Attacks on an extremity of your enemy’s line, or on his rear, and en masse, to which are given an oblique, or perpendicular direction; or orders, having a reinforced wing, though neither oblique nor perpendicular, are advantageous, because by these, your force is most concentrated and least exposed.

As the best generals may sometimes {30} receive attacks against their will, and as those of the American army have no right to expect an exemption from this species of trial, our hints might be considered very imperfect, did they not indicate what in this case will be their duty.

Does your enemy attack your centre? Call in your wings promptly to its support, and break down the head of his column. Does he make upon you double attacks? Seize upon his weak, or disordered points and punish his temerity. \[3\]
Does your enemy manoeuvre on your flanks, and is his attack inevitable? Anticipate the blow, and attack him promptly and vigorously. One of two consequences follows—either he calls in his manoeuvering columns, or neglecting to do this, he uncovers his own flanks, and exposes his main body to be beaten. Does he after all, establish himself on one of your extremities? This presents a critical, but not a desperate case. Form a crotchet instantaneously, at the head of the assailed wing;—this will receive the attack, while you prolong yourself upon his extremity, and thus turn against him his own manoeuvre. He has then but one mode left of escaping defeat: to change his front; and to do this, he must retire, which is both difficult and dangerous, in the presence of a crotchet already formed, and of a line, prepared to present itself by a simple conversion of its platoons. This manoeuvre will be made more intelligible by the following figure.
A. has gained the left flank of B. who establishes the crotchet C. which receives the attack, while B. prolongs himself in the direction of his primitive line to E.—He will then occupy the place indicated by the dotted lines D. and present to the flank of A. an entire front—thus turning against him his own manoeuvre.

In a word, as there is no situation, however guarded and strengthened, which will prevent an able tactician from attacking you, so there is no species of attack, which may not be resisted by talents of the same kind.

I shall close this section with some additional maxims of the highest importance.

1st. *General battles* are not to be fought, but under the occurrence of one or more of the following circumstances: {33}

When you are, from any cause, decidedly superior to your enemy:

When he is on the point of receiving reinforcements, which will materially affect your relative strength:

When if not beaten, or checked, he will deprive you of supplies, or reinforcements, necessary to the continuance, or success, of your general operations; and *generally*, when the advantage of winning the battle, will be greater, than the disadvantage of losing it:

2d. Whatever may be your reason for risking a general battle, you ought to regard as indispensable preliminaries,—a thorough knowledge of the ground on which you are to act;—an ample supply of ammunition;—the most perfect order in your fire arms;—hospital depots regularly established with surgeons, nurses, dressings, &c. sufficient for the accommodation of
the wounded:—points of rendezvous established and known to the commanders of corps; and an entire possession of the passes in your own rear:

3d. The battle being fought and won,—the victory must be followed up with as much alacrity and vigor, as though nothing had been gained:—a maxim, which by the way, is very difficult of observance, (from the momentary disobedience which pervades all troops flushed with conquest) but with which an able general will never dispense. No one knows better the uses of this maxim than Bonaparte, and no one is a more strict and habitual observer of it. By neglecting it, the Archduke Charles, lost all the advantages of his splendid battle of Esling.—Had he crossed the Danube any moment within forty-eight hours after fighting that battle, Napoleon, if not a prisoner, would have been driven out of Germany. The truth is, that the Prince was not prepared for the contingency of good fortune, and did not know how to avail himself of a circumstance purely accidental. Never did his genius sink below Napoleon’s so strikingly as on this occasion. [4] Like Daun, in the presence of the great Frederick, he doubted his own victory, and lost by doing so, all the advantages of it: And

4th. The battle being fought and lost, it is your first duty to do away the moral effect of defeat;—the loss of that self-respect and self-confidence, which are its immediate followers, and which, so long as they last, are the most powerful auxiliaries of your enemy. I need scarcely remark, that to effect this object;—to re-inspire a beaten army with hope, and to re-assure it of victory, we must not turn our backs on an enemy, without sometimes presenting to him our front also; we must not confide our safety to mere flight, but adopt such measures as shall convince him, that though wounded and overpowered, we are neither disabled nor dismayed—and that we still possess enough both of strength and of spirit to punish his faults should he commit any. Do you operate in a covered or mountainous country? avail yourself of its ridges and woods....for by doing so you will best evade the pressure of his cavalry. Have you defiles or villages to pass? Seize the heads of these....defend them obstinately, and make a shew of fighting another battle. In a word....let no error of your enemy; nor any favorable incident of the ground, escape your notice or your use. It is by these means that your enemy is checked, and your own troops inspired; and it was by these that Frederick balanced his surprise at Hohenkinchen, and the defeat of his plans before Olmultz. The movement of our own Washington, after losing the battle of Brandywine, was of this character. He hastily re-crossed the Schuylkill with the professed intention of seeking the enemy and renewing the combat, which
was *apparently* but prevented by a heavy and incessant fall of rain. A rumor was now raised that the enemy, while refusing his left wing, was rapidly advancing upon his right, to intercept our passage of the river, and thus gain possession of Philadelphia. This report justified a retreat, which drew from the General repeated assurances, that in quitting his present position, and giving to his march a retrograde direction, it was not his object to avoid, but to follow and to fight the enemy. This movement, though no battle ensued, had the effect of restoring the confidence as well of the people as of the army. [5]

[The following paragraph, being on a loose piece of paper, was inadvertently omitted in its place, which is, as here, between the 3d and 4th sections.]

In the preceding sections we have treated, in our brief way, of the principles which govern in choosing a line of operations—in moving our forces on this line, and in fighting general battles. The following sections will treat of subjects closely connected with these, and which come also within the scope of what is called *Grand Tactics.* {37}

**SECTION IV.**

**Of Camps.**

These are of so much importance, and ought to bear so intimate a relation to your present or future views, that every general will, if possible, choose them for himself. In ordinary cases, and when not in the presence of an enemy, it is enough that they combine healthiness of situation, wood, water, ground admitting a ready communication between your several corps, and roads, sufficiently numerous, well directed and practicable.

If on the other hand your camp is chosen with some particular view; to attack, for instance, a neighboring fortress—to defend a defile—to obstruct your enemy’s supplies—or to draw him into an assault—the choice of it requires more circumspection, and in addition to the circumstances already mentioned, it will be desirable to find swamps, lakes, rivers or hills, as *points d'appui;* and where these are not to be found, we must resort to *entrenchments.* The Romans always entrenched their camps, and the constancy of the practice would appear to demonstrate its usefulness. Their motives to it were,—greater security—keeping up the {38} habits of labor, and preventing desertion among their troops. On the other hand, they
never entrenched a field of battle. On the other hand, they never entrenched a field of battle. Modern usage, in a great degree, reverses this practice: Our fields of battle are strengthened, and our camps generally left open—excepting in the cases already stated, and sometimes [6] when we are desirous of covering a fortress.

A general and highly important rule in choosing a camp, in the neighborhood of an enemy, is, that it be so placed that by a small movement on your part, you may compel him to make a great one.

A second general rule is, to encamp in the order of battle best adapted to the ground—so that whether you make, or {39} receive an attack, there may be as little transposition of corps as possible.

SECTION V.

Of Entrenched Fields of Battle.

These are close, open or irregular. The first are only employed when you are greatly superior to your enemy, either in the number or quality of your troops; or when, from causes not to be controlled, you have a large and exposed front to defend. They may be strengthened as in the case of intrenched camps (from which they differ but little) by redans, bastions, redoubts or forts.

Generals of great name have held this species of fortification in much disrespect, and the objection they make to it is, no doubt, a solid one. “An army,” they say, “behind such works, cannot avail itself of the errors committed by the enemy—because it cannot march against him in order of battle, having only a few narrow avenues through which it can defile. He may therefore blunder with impunity, and retire without annoyance.”

The second or open entrenchment, is not liable to this objection. This consists of a line of redans, of bastions, or of {40} redoubts, which, separately, are not formidable, but which, if well supported by each other and by an army behind them, will make an enemy weep over even a victory. Whether redans, redoubts or bastions be employed, one of these with an epaulement behind it, should be thrown up before each battalion of the front line, and the intervals should be defended by artillery, &c. but as these will be your weak points, you must be careful to shorten your front as much as possible, and thus avoid their multiplication.

The last of these forms is the irregular, which rejecting a more systematic work, seizes only particular and favorable points. Are there villages on your line of battle? These must be separately entrenched and
well filled with me. Is your line intersected by ravines? These favor an assailant, and must be commanded by one or more redoubts. Have you a wood in your front, or on your flanks? This must be cut down and formed into an abbatis; and in the intervals between these, you must throw up redans or bastions.

That open, and even simple lines, may be defended with great effect, is abundantly established by history in general; nor is our own wanting in evidence of the same kind. The affair of Bunker’s-hill was a noble effort of undisciplined valor on the one side, and of a total absence of military judgment on both sides. Had Gen. Howe have landed on the isthmus, he would have taken the American lines in flank, and precluded our militia from the possibility of retreat. Their position was a perfect cul de sac, from which they escaped but by the ignorance or presumption of the British general.

As the principles of military tactics and those of fortification are the same, and as no officer can be accomplished without a competent knowledge of the latter, I may be permitted to subjoin to this section the maxims which govern on the subject of field fortification. These are—

1st. To give to your works the least possible extent that may consist with the accommodation of the troops destined to occupy them:

2d. To choose that form of work, which has the least circumference:

3d. To dispose your lines in such way as shall give to your fire the greatest possible number of directions without crossing itself:

4th. To locate your work on ground which shall not be commanded by any neighboring height:

5th. To clear your front and flanks of every thing that shall obstruct your view of the enemy’s movements, or lessen the effect of your fire upon him:

6th. To give to your parapets that elevation, thickness and form which shall completely cover the entrenched ground; and,

7th. So to place your exterior defences (palisades, wells, &c.) as shall most retard the approach of the enemy—keep him longest under you fire, and render any oblique movement, whether to the right or to the left, not less difficult, than a direct one.

SECTION VI.

Of the Character and Rules of Defensive War.
In a defensive war, your first duty is to exclude the enemy from the participation of those articles, the loss of which would be injurious to you, and the acquisition of which might be useful or necessary to him. If therefore the line of your frontier be weak or indefensible, retire until you find one sufficiently adapted to your purpose. There collect the spoils of the district you abandon, and remember, that of these spoils, what you cannot gather and secure, you must destroy. This last measure, which, if unqualified by an exigency of state, would be both barbarous and unjust, becomes under this exigence matter of public duty, and as such ought to be executed with fidelity, and suffered with cheerfulness. Its direct effect is to strengthen you, while it weakens your enemy; to leave you in abundance, while it surrounds him with want; to compel him to movements unseasonable, disorderly, or precipitate, or to delays more ruinous than these. In a word, it is by this measure we make a friend and ally of famine itself, and literally beat our enemy, by starving him into errors, or into debility.

As however your enemy may break through your first barrier, you will have anticipated the necessity of a second and even of a third line, and have made your arrangements accordingly—that is, you will have magazines formed on several points of these newly projected positions, and supplied from that tract of country, which (on the supposition of retreat) your enemy will first occupy. It is by this mode of proceeding alone that you can render justice to the first principle of defensive war. [8]

The reader will have seen, that to the party carrying it on, a defensive war is a war of retreats, and of course, of the kind most difficult of management. He who conducts it well, must besides courage, science, activity and decision, possess also patience, foresight and fortitude. To fly from post to post, and yield in succession the finest positions and provinces to an enemy, is not difficult. This which sycophants have dared to dignify with the name of the Fabian war, is within the reach of ignorance, stupidity and cowardice; but such is not the war of which we speak. Instead of finding security only in flight;—instead of habitually refusing to look the enemy in the face; instead of leaving his march undisturbed by enterprises of courage or of labor; instead of abandoning without contest, points made strong by nature or by art; instead, I repeat, of all this, the true war of defence seeks every occasion to meet the enemy, and loses none by which it can annoy or defeat him; it is always awake; it is constantly in motion; and never unprepared for either attack or defence.—When not employed in efforts of courage or address, it incessantly yields itself to those of labor and science. In its front, it breaks up roads or breaks down bridges; while it
creates or repairs those in its rear: It forms abbatis, raises batteries, fortifies
passes, or entrenches encampments; and to the system of deprivation
already detailed, adds all the activity, stratagem and boldness of the petite
guerre. Dividing itself into detachments, it \{46\} multiplies its own attacks
and the alarms of the enemy. Collecting itself at a single point, it obliterates
his progress for days, and sometimes for weeks together. Does it even
abandon the avenues it is destined to defend? It is but for the purpose of
shielding them more securely—by the attack of the hospitals, magazines,
convoy, or reinforcements. In a word, adopting the maxim, that the enemy
must be made to pay for whatever he gains, it disputes with him every inch
of ground, and if at last it yields to him a victory, it is assuredly of that kind,
which calls forth only his sighs.

SECTION VII.

Of the Character and Rules of Offensive War.

The first rule of this species of war, is to keep your forces in as
undivided a state as possible. By observing this rule, you not only prevent
misfortune, but secure victory—since by its necessary operation you possess
the power of throwing your whole weight upon any given point of your
enemy's position.

Like other general rules, however, this has its exceptions. These are—
\{47\}

1st. When the food and forage of the neighborhood in which you act
has been exhausted and destroyed, and your magazines are, from any
cause, unable to supply the deficiency—one of two things must be done,—
either you must go to places where these articles abound, or you must draw
from them your supplies by detachments. The former is rarely compatible
with your plan, and necessarily retards its execution, and hence the
preference which is generally given to the latter:

2d. When reinforcements are about to join you, and this can only be
effected by a march through a country actually occupied by hostile corps, or
liable to be so occupied, you must again waive the general rule, and risk one
party for the security of the other, or (which may be better) make such
movements with your main body, as shall accomplish your object:

3d. When you have complete evidence of the actual or probable
insurrection in your favor of a town or province of your enemy, or of a
division of his army, you must support this inclination by strong
detachments, or by movements of your main body; and
4th. When by dispensing with the rule {48} you may intercept a convoy or reinforcement coming to the aid of your enemy.

Other circumstances may multiply exceptions—but those already stated sufficiently indicate the character of the cases which will justify them. Turenne was not more famous for a knowledge of rules, than for a departure from them, when (after a trial of his antagonist) he discovered that he might take liberties with impunity. At the battle of Colmar, he presented his first line to the Elector’s front, while he detached the whole of his second; which however passing a defile without been noticed, took his enemy in flank and beat him. I do not however quote this part of Turenne’s character or conduct as worthy of imitation. Cato was respectable even in the act of suicide,—but how ridiculous was the same conduct in his imitator?

If, as we have seen, it be the first great rule of an army acting on the offensive principle, to keep its forces concentrated, it is no doubt the second to keep them fully employed. Is it your intention to seize a particular province of your enemy? to penetrate to his capital? or to cut him off from his supplies? Whatever measure be necessary to open your route to these objects must be promptly taken, and if you mean to subsist yourself at his expence (which I take for granted) your movements must be more rapid than his. Give him time to breathe—and above all, give him time to rest, and your project is blasted; his forages will be completed, and his magazines filled and secured—The roads of approach will be obstructed, bridges destroyed, and strong points every where taken and defended: You will, in fact, like Burgoyne, in 1777, have reduced yourself to the necessity of bleeding at every step, without equivalent or use. Such cannot be the fate of the commander, who, knowing all the value of acting on the offensive, will, by the vigor and address of his first movements, have shaken the moral, as well as the physical, force of his enemy—who electing his own times, and places and modes of attack, shall have confounded his antagonist by enterprises equally hardy and unexpected—and who shall at last leave to him only the alternative of resisting without hope, or of flying without resistance. Are there strong posts on your route occupied by hostile detachments? Let not these disturb a moment the main action of your campaign. Either entirely disregard {50} them, or leave a corps in the neighborhood to hold them in check, or at least to watch their movements and apprize you of them. It was by not observing this rule, or by misunderstanding another, viz. to leave no post unsubdued in your rear, [9] that the American army lost a victory at Germantown, which (had it
been gained) would probably have terminated in 1777 a war that lasted till 1783.

These two general rules shew how wretchedly ignorant the British army was of even the leading maxims of the art, during the war of which we speak. Instead of condensing their forces, and exterminating our army by repeated blows, they dissipated them by division, and thus weakened themselves on all the points of attack, while on the other hand, by this very policy, they enabled us to call out the whole of our fighting force. [10]

SECTION VIII.

Maxims which relate to Sieges.

1st. A siege may be undertaken with propriety, when a fortress is so situated, on passages leading to your enemy’s country, as to prevent you from reaching him or it unless by previously making yourself master of the fortress:

When the country in which you operate does not furnish the necessary subsistence, and when the fortress obstructs your communication with another which is more fruitful:

When the possession of it is necessary to cover the magazines which you have been able to form in the country itself:

When it contains supplies indispensable to your enemy:

When the taking of it gives you possession of a large tract of territory necessary to your farther views; and

When its reduction would, in effect, terminate the war.

2d. An army which covers a siege, ought never to suffer itself ot be attacked from without. If the succoring army is not an over-match for it in the field, the attack must be prevented by making on on its adversary; and on the contrary supposition, the siege must be abandoned, and the covering army withdrawn.

3d. In protecting a siege, your position ought not to be too nearly approached to the fortress, the capture of which is your object—because the greater the distance the succoring army has to march, the more difficult will the discharge of its duty become.

By not observing the rules (2 and 3) Frederick lost before Olmutz, all the advantages he had gained in the beginning of the campaign of 1758; and by observing them, Napoleon beat Wurmsder, reduced Mantua, and menaced Vienna.
P. S. I have purposely confined myself in this section to what strictly belongs to the duty of the commander in chief.... The other maxims relating to this subject, belong to the engineer's department.

SECTION IX.

Maxims which relate to the employment of Cavalry.

1st. If you are strong in horse, and the country in which you act be an open one, whatever be your order of battle, you will begin your attack with your cavalry. Their career must commence four hundred paces from the enemy's lines, upon which they will precipitate themselves with the utmost fury:

2d. If on the other hand the field of battle be mountainous, or woody, or broken by ravines, or if you are weak in cavalry, you will reserve them to give the last touches to your victory. Outstripping the enemy, they will seize the passes through which he is flying, and render his retreat more bloody and ruinous, than the antecedent battle:

3d. Cavalry formed in two lines, is regular and conformable to the principles of the art; three line orders are bad, and contrary to these principles:

4th. If the first line be put into disorder, the best way of repairing it is to advance the second line, while the first executes a conversion to the right and left, forms en potence on the extremities of the second, and thus prevents it from being taken in flank. The following figure will explain this manoeuvre.

```
D

C

E

F

A
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A, B. are two lines of cavalry charging the enemy C, D. A. advancing occupies the dotted line. E. is there repulsed and broken—and takes the new position F.F. covering the flanks of the second line B. and supporting its attack by an order *en potence*.

5th. In a charge of cavalry in two lines, a reserve bent in columns by squadrons, may in the moment of it be made to overlap the enemy—take its distances in advancing, and by a simple conversion to the right, or to the left, of each squadron, form its order of battle, and thus attack the rear of the enemy:

6th. If you make an important charge of cavalry on the side of a wood, or other {55} covered ground, it ought to be preceded by a movement of infantry, which should clear this wood or covered ground of the enemy, and if you have in frantry to spare, it will be well to occupy it, and so to plant a few pieces of cannon as shall second the charge of your horse. It also follows, that if we place our cavalry on the skirt of a wood, it is indispensable to fill it with infantry, for the purpose of preventing the enemy from executing this manoeuvre upon us.

**SECTION X.**

Of Retreats, and the Rules which should govern them.

Military writers are much divided on this question—which is no bad proof of the difficulties attending it.

Loyd and Bulow recommend *excentric* lines, and the latter pretends, that a good retreat cannot be made but by their employment. The reasons he assigns are, that they cover a greater extent of frontier, and by the position of their wings, menace the flanks of the adversary. The following figure will do justice to this writers ideas. It represents an army of forty thousand men, divided into four {56} corps of ten thousand men each, marching by diverging lines from the same base.
Prince Charles (of Lorraine) adopted a system of acting by heavy and separate corps, instead of employing his army *en masse*—and extended the rule as well to *retreats* as to attacks. In the former, as in the latter, he divided his army into as many heavy corps as the country would admit, completely isolated these, and gave to the march of each, a different and sometimes an opposite direction. The difference between this and the system of Loyd and Bulow, is too obvious to require the illustration of a figure. The latter professes a dependence on the great principle of *concentration*, though every step taken, makes this more difficult, and a few marches render it quite impracticable. The former, on the other hand, abandons this principle altogether, and seeks safety by the opposite one of *division*. The advantages of this system are stated to be—

1st. The greater facility with which subsistence can be procured:
2d. That if your enemy divide his strength, for the purpose of pursuit, he cannot act vigorously on any point, and exposes one or more of his divisions to disaster; and
3d. That if he move *en masse*, he can do so against but one of your divisions, while the others retire without annoyance. Even the division assailed, being the smaller body, can move with so much more celerity than a large army, that it has little to fear, if conducted by a vigilant and skilful commander, and protected by a strong rear guard.

Before I go on to state the third and more orthodox creed on this subject, it may not be amiss to remark on the *excentric order*, that the *diverging* direction of its lines exposes the divisions which occupy them to be beaten in detail, and that for this, the remedy provided by its authors is *concentration*—which directly contradicts their own reasoning, and necessarily overthrows the whole system.

Nor will it be unnoticed by a military reader, that the other (the isolated order of Prince Charles) is one which aims only at *escape*, and is contented with mere {58} safety, or even with the sacrifice of one of its divisions:—and it must be admitted, that where this becomes a duty, the mode is a sure one, and may be practised with effect. But such were not the retreats which have signalised their authors;—which will always command admiration, or bestow fame; which denotes that real greatness which subdues difficulties, triumphs over fortune itself, and leaves you scarcely
less formidable after a defeat, than after a victory; such, in a word, were not
the retreats of Xenophon, of Frederick and of Moreau.

It is a maxim in military science, that small armies should always act
en masse, [11] because by dividing their forces, they deprive themselves of
the faculty of seizing any favorable moment, or circumstance, which may
occur. Now a retreating army must be presumed to be inferior to its
adversary, and hence it comes within the meaning and injunctions of the
rule.—History abounds in instances where the observance of this rule has
not merely {59} secured the first object (a retreat) but where it has
produced an entire change in the fortune of the campaign, by giving to the
inferior army an eventual superiority.—Nor is there any want of proof of the
fatal consequences which a neglect of it has produced.

It is important to remark, that a retiring army is not necessarily
obliged to retrace its steps—and regain its own frontiers. It may, by a march
parallel to its line of defence, change the theatre of the war, without either
the loss or disgrace of actual retreat. Such was the King of Prussia’s
movement when obliged to raise the siege of Olmutz, and such that of Gen.
Washington from Trenton to Morristown, in 1777, already noticed. These
movements are models, and full of instruction for military men. Marshal
Daun and Lord Cornwallis committed, in these cases, the same faults, and
with a similar result.

If hard pressed by your enemy, you will march slowly and in echelons.
You cannot make more than nine (or at most twelve) miles a day. More
expedition would destroy your distances, and disqualify you from taking an
order of battle, and less, would not accomplish your {60} object. Your
cavalry and light troops must be occupied in breaking down bridges, and
obstructing roads in your rear, &c. &c. and if you have defiles to pass, you
will plant some artillery at their heads—occupy the surrounding heights
and woods with your rear guard, (which should not consist of less than one
fifth of your effective force) and thus induce your enemy to believe, that you
are willing to accept a new combat, while you are in fact doing all you can to
avoid it.

If villages be found on your route, you will turn these to the same
account, and your enemy (if either incapable or uninstructed) will probably
break his head very uselessly against them. If on the other hand, he knows
and performs his duty, he will set fire to them with mortars, and take
another point of attack.—Such was Marlborough’s conduct at Hockstadt—an
example always to be followed.

If your retreat be perpendicular (to your enemy) your park, baggage,
&c. will follow the van guard;—if parallel, you will place them on the right
or left (as the case may require) of the column, most remote from the enemy. If both your flanks be menaced, or annoyed, their {61} situation should be central and between your columns.

If your march be through a valley—you will be careful to occupy the hills, which form one or both of its sides. The neglect of this rule lost to the King of Prussia the battle of Hohenkirchen.

But the incident in a retreat requiring the greatest vigor and address, is the passage of a river in the presence of an enemy. One of the finest examples of this, in modern history, was the passage of the Elbe at Kolen, by the King of Prussia, in the campaign of 1744. Two bridges were thrown over this river;—the heads of these were embraced by a common entrenchment, and within this by two smaller and separate works. A detachment with a large portion of artillery was now passed over, and posted on the opposite bank and on heights which commanded the bridges. The infantry of the army followed, and after them the cavalry en echequier. The corps lining the entrenchment, was next withdrawn, when the bridges were destroyed, and the detachments occupying the têtes des ponts, brought over in boats, covered by the batteries on the opposite side. The following figure will explain this manoeuvre.
EXPLANATION.

A A are the exterior lines, B B the interior, C C the bridges, and D D the batteries raised to command these and the opposite bank.

If your enemy be rash enough to press you by isolated divisions....you will take care to punish his temerity. Prince {63} William Henry of Prussia, in the campaign of 1759, has given us two fine examples, at Hoherswerda and Dommitsch, which ought not to escape our notice. By beating in detail, Generals Welia and Gemmingen, he re-established an equilibrium of physical force, while he added to the confidence of his own troops, and nearly extinguished that of the enemy. It is by strokes of this kind, in which mind triumphs over matter, that we see the real dignity of the art.

If by practising this manoeuvre, or by the arrival of reinforcements, you are able to re-commence offensive operations, you will not fail to attack
your enemy while he is *in march*—because an army attacked on the heads of its columns, is in the same local relation to its enemy, as if attacked on one of its wings. Hence it was that the King of Prussia generally attacked his enemy while in march, and hence also it was, that Marshal Daun sought to avoid these contests by long detours and the choice of strong posts.

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SECTION XI.

Maxims which relate to the Passage and Defence of large Rivers.

Like long protracted lines of entrenchment, large rivers are not easily defended, and for the same reason—because your enemy, choosing both the time and the place of his attack, you must be equally guarded at all points, which is impossible. The King of Prussia asserts, that a front of more than eight German miles, is indefensible; and to render one of that extent secure, he stipulates “for one or more redoubts on the bank, and that the river shall no where be fordable.”

The following remarks will indicate the duty of the assailant and the assailed. Is it your object to pass a river? Conceal from your enemy the point at which you mean to pass. This is done by taking a position which shall equally menace several other points; and by making your preparations as if to be used at these.—When ready—make your movement in the night, and be punctual to the moment of rendezvous; plant some artillery on the bank from which you depart; embark your van in boats; avail yourself of any islands which may lay in your course; {65} when you gain the opposite bank, seize a position which shall command the passage, and fortify the head of your bridge. If your enemy has been deceived by your feints—he will have left the field open to you, if on the other hand, he has spread out his defence, he is no where strong enough to repel an attack skillfully and courageously made. On the other hand, if it become your duty to prevent your enemy from passing a river—you will begin by collecting all the boas, or materials for making these or bridges, and withdraw them from his reach; you will with the same intention make an exact survey of the river, noting the places most favorable to his designs; you will throw up redoubts at these places so as to command them; you will open communications along the bank, so that your movements may every where be made with expedition and ease; you will take a central position for your army—and detach from it, under the most vigilant officers, a corps of dragoons, which shall constantly watch the movements of the enemy, and keep you regularly
apprized of them. As many feints may be practised, you will be careful to
distinguish these from the real attack—when this is made, which may be
{66} known by the actual construction of the bridge, and by the preliminary
descent on the bank you defend, you will be advised of it, and shall put
yourself in march to repel the attack. This movement must be rapidly made,
and your assault given without balancing. If the river you defend be
fordable, and if the bank, in possession of the enemy, be higher than that
occupied by you, resistance will be useless.

SECTION XII.

Of Magazines.

The wars of the French revolution abounded in events both
unexpected and unaccountable, and have given rise to theories, which are
at least very dangerous. One of these is, that magazines have no real
influence on the operations of war, and that plans of invasion, on a grand
scale, may be executed without them.

Armies compelled to canton themselves for subsistence, even in a
country abounding in food, must unavoidably occupy a vast extent of
ground; their lines must of course be considerably lengthened and exposed.
If on the other hand they operate on a theatre exhausted of its {67}
products, or naturally unfruitful, or at a season of the year when all
countries are comparatively so, their line must necessarily be still more
protracted and weak.—These considerations, founded on the nature of
things, are not to be overruled by the accidents of a war, which has no
parallel either in its motives, principles or fortunes. When the same
enthusiasm shall have been produced by similar or by different causes, and
when this shall have pervaded all classes of our own citizens, and spread
like an epidemic among those of our enemy, it will then be time, and not
before, to depart from rules suggested by prudence, and confirmed by
experience. These rules are—

1st. To form your depots in the rear of your line of operations, and in
places made strong by art, or by nature, and of course, defensible by a
comparatively small force:

2d. To place them on navigable rivers, or on roads (practicable to
waggons) communicating with your own line:

3d. To multiply them in proportion to the length of your line and the
character you mean to give to your operations. If your line be long, and
your campaign offensive, two or three depots in your rear {68} may be
sufficient; if defensive, you must double or treble their number in the
direction you mean to give to your retreat, should that measure become
necessary:

4th. Your communication with your magazines should be such, as
allows you to have always on hand, at least nine days provision in your
camp; because a smaller quantity will not enable you to make those
movements in advance, which may sometimes become proper or necessary:

5th. On occupying a new line of operations, it becomes the first duty
of the commanding general to possess himself of the most minute
knowledge of the productions of the country, both with regard to quality
and quantity, and to hasten the collection of the articles necessary for his
supply, at such places as will be covered by his position; and

6th. He will give to the commissariat, the utmost punctuality and
activity. The smallest faults in this department should therefore be severely
punished, because upon its capacity and fidelity, the whole success of your
operations will depend.

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SECTION XIII.

OF THE COUP D’OEIL

This is the faculty of seeing things as they are, at a single glance. It is
therefore but another name for the combined effect of a prompt and correct
judgment on the various incidents which occur in the course of a campaign,
and without which, you are not likely to profit as you ought, either by local
incidents or by the faults of your enemy; while, on the other hand, you are
continually exposed to the commission of blunders, the most ridiculous and
ruinous. As this is a faculty partly natural, and partly artificial, it would be
well that our young generals should exercise themselves habitually in
estimating distances by the eye;—in judging of the shape of grounds;—of
the relative bulk of bodies and of the number of corps, whether in a state of
motion, or of rest. It must however be admitted, that these school exercises
will not always lead to just conclusions, because the powers of men are very
different, in the security of mere parade, and under the presence and
pressure of actual danger.—How often do we meet with men, whose
faculties, exercised in a place of personal {70} safety, are quick, vigorous
and decisive—who in the presence of an enemy, sink into mere lifeless and
ordinary machines; while others, who, on common occasions, “hold the
noiseless tenor of their way” without exhibiting much of either the intrepid or the strenuous, require only the stimulus of combat—to rise not merely into heroes, but into sages. Both descriptions require the extraordinary circumstance of a battle, to develope their true character. On the one, its effect is sedative—on the other, tonic: the former, it deprives of all the powers bestowed by nature, or acquired by art,—the latter, it quickens into a vigor and activity, both physical and mental, which no smaller or less interesting event, could either excite or maintain. It is in this last character, that we find the true military stamina and the full exercise of the coup d’oeil—the faculty of seeing and of seizing, as if by intuition, all advantages, whether of ground or of manœuvre—of correcting our own errors, and of punishing those of our enemy;—in a word, it is here, that we witness those more than mortal fires, which raise the soldier far above the men of all other professions—and which, in the universal sense of mankind, have even ranked him with the gods. To reach this eminence, should be your constant aim—for this is the virtuous ambition of noble minds—an ambition to excell and totally different from the miserable aspirations after power and office, which swell the bosoms of little men,—which a Cataline may feel as well as a Caesar,—and which, unfortunately, go far to characterize the times and the country in which we live.

FOOTNOTES
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[1] It was by this manoeuvre that the King of Prussia beat the combined army at Resbac.

[2] It does not come within the view of this work to say any thing of the merely mechanical part of the art; because it must be taken for granted, that every man who accepts the command of an army, knows at least the alphabet of his trade. If he does not (unless his enemy be as ignorant as himself) defeat and infamy await him. Without understanding perfectly what are called the evolutions, how is it possible that a general can give to his own army that order of battle which shall be most provident and skilful in each particular case in which he may be placed? How know, which of these evolutions the enemy employs against him? and of course, how decide on a counter-movement, which may be necessary to secure victory, or avoid defeat? The man who shall take the command of an army without perfectly understanding this elementary branch, is not less presumptuous, than he who should pretend to teach Greek without knowing even his letters. If we
have such generals, let them for their own sake, if not for their country’s, put themselves immediately to school. Besides other useful effects—the humiliation of this act will be some atonement for the impudence of having accepted a great public trust, the elementary duties of which, though as strictly mechanical as weaving, or shoe making, they do not comprehend.

[3] Such should have been our conduct in 1777, at Chad’s ford. The main body of the enemy was carried up the Brandywine and maneuvered on our right, while a German corps occupied the camp on the S. side of the creek and beyond sustaining distance from the main body. The American lines being interior, our whole force might have been readily brought against this insulated division, and must have overwhelmed it. It is true the road to Philadelphia, would then have been open to Gen. Howe—But would he have dared to have made a single march in that direction, while an active, vigilant and able enemy hung upon his rear, or on his flanks? No: He must have measured back his steps, and put himself between us and the seaboard, or have run the risk of being cut off from his supplies, and perishing, as Burgoyne did, by inches. That Gen. Washington did not proceed upon this suggestion, was owing to his uncertainty, whether the corps advancing upon his right was, or was not, the main body—an uncertainty that could not have existed, had the army been supplied with a well organized etat major.

[4] The moment you become sensible of the ascendancy in point of talent and information, of your adversary—seek some early occasion to withdraw yourself from the competition. This will be both duty to your country and to yourself, and a proof as well of your wisdom, as your honesty.

[5] Some of the biographers of Washington, more anxious to illustrate the prowess, than the wisdom of their hero, would make us believe, that the General really meant to give battle to the British army on the 21st of September, 1777. Had these biographers been on the spot, the ostentatious pains, so very different from the ordinary habits of the commander in chief would have convinced them, as they did the writer of these hints, that such was not his intention.

[6] I have expressed myself in this qualified way, because since the days of Conde and Tarenne, armies of observation have been generally substituted for these camps; and because cases may be found, in which
exceptions may be justly taken to the general rule: In all such, the fortress will form one side of your position, and the rest of your circumference will be defended by simple lines strengthened by redans, at the distance of 120 fathoms from each other. The doors are made in the centres of the curtains, and the troops encamp in a line parallel to the entrenchment, and at such distance from it as gives room for their manoeuvres.

[7] See chapter 6 of the King of Prussia’s instructions to his general officers, on the coup d’œil.

[8] Is it not extraordinary that the principle we inculcate, was either not known or not acted upon during the war of the revolution? What though a whole neighborhood be removed by its necessary operation? Is it not better that we should lose something by our friends, than every thing by our enemy? Is the reflexion that we have served, perhaps saved, our country, nothing? Is property the best of all possible things, and the loss of it the greatest of all possible calamities? Was it that the people combating for their firesides, could bear no intrusion upon them? or that the fears of the administration had rendered it faithless in the general interests committed to their custody? Whatever was the cause, the effect was lamentable; and a war, waged by a nation three thousand miles distant, and maintained by an army never exceeding forty thousand men, was permitted to last eight campaigns! Men of the United States, listen without offence to the voice of a brother and a friend—Your reputation for arms, is yet to be established.

[9] It never was the meaning of this rule, that the main body of your army should either break its head against a ___one house, or permit half a regiment that took shelter in it, to draw off your attention from the leading object of your attack. A single regiment left to watch it, would have kept it penned up, and of course harmless; or had it come out, would have sufficiently chastised its presumption.

[10] Had the war been confined to the South, we should have lost the glory and service of Bunker’s Hill and Saratoga; and had it been restricted to the North, the brave spirits, who combated at King’s Mountain would have lived and died unknown to history, and comparatively, useless to their country. The British generals, by multiplying their attack on points so remote, doubled our powers of resistance, while they lessened their own means of invasion, and of course, pursued exactly the policy we ourselves
would have prescribed for them. These facts are full of instruction, to those who meditate an offensive war.

[11] Where an army is too weak to make any opposition with effect, as was the case with the American army during their retreat through Jersey in 1776, they can but be regarded as a detachment, and the rules of the petite guerre must govern.