

VON SPOHN *König*

ART OF COMMAND.

Translated from Jahrbücher für die
Deutsche Armee und Marine, Oct., 1907.

London: Gt. Brit. General Staff, 1907.

By Colonel VON SPOHN.

Translated by the General Staff, War Office, from the
Jahrbücher für die deutsche Armee und Marine, October, 1907

By permission of the Publisher, Herr A. Bath, Berlin.

Communicated by The General Staff,

"Is command an art?" will perhaps be asked by some who feel that nothing can be easier than to give orders. Anyone, however, who thinks so, ignores the fact that the only man capable of command is the man who has learnt to obey, and that an order is only justified if, under the actual circumstances of the case, it was absolutely necessary. Even then, it can only be approved if it be unobjectionable both in matter and manner.

Every order places the subordinate to whom it is given in a position of constraint, to which he willingly submits without any question if he recognizes the necessity for it; in such a case obedience is not a servile submission, but the free gift of a free man; but he complies with an order unwillingly if it is dictated merely by the pleasure of giving orders, or by the desire to magnify one's own importance.

Fondness for domineering leads to tyranny and incites insubordination; it does no good but compromises discipline. We can see this in thousands of cases in the army, where there are superior officers who compel the willing obedience even of insubordinate men, while there are others to be found who make even the best behaved men refractory.

Only the man who himself knows how to obey, who has learnt from personal experience how grievous an inopportune or superfluous order can be, and how inexpressibly hard it is, in such a case, to resist the impulse to revolt, only such a man will avoid blunders when he is himself in a position of command.

We soldiers should always keep this fact before our eyes; we want in the army a cheery and willing, not a slavish servile obedience. It is the first alone which conduces to happiness in the service, ensures a firm unshaken discipline, and inspires men to heroic deeds in action when bullets are whistling around them. It is the first kind of obedience alone, which acts educationally and forms the character. The second kind only drives men, reduced to slavery (even if, from fear of punishment, they crush their feeling of defiance during the time of their service with the colours), to join the ranks of the Social Democrats, who are ever ready to receive them with open arms.

For this reason superiors who do not know how to command are a grave danger to the army and, ultimately, even to the State.

But this is not all. Another serious drawback involved in a mania for giving orders (whether it arises from a spirit of domineering, or is only a result of that anxious care which conceives that nothing goes on without an order), is that all independence, all initiative, and all love of responsibility on the part of subordinates are killed. And yet-as para.2 of the introduction to our German training manuals clearly says-modern fighting requires thoughtful leaders trained to be independent, and self-restrained men, capable, from devotion to their officers and to their country, of proving their firm will to conquer even when their leaders have fallen. 379117

Such leaders and such men are not produced by orders, superfluous in themselves, and beside the mark; but we undoubtedly do get them if we give no more orders than are absolutely essential, and if we praise every independent action even if it be not altogether apt or appropriate. In such a case what is wrong must be reproved, but not severely, not sharply, not in the form of censure, but only in the way of kindly instruction.

No man likes to be severely found fault with, but everybody is willing to accept instructions, and does better another time. The man who has cause to fear fault finding, forswears initiative, and says to himself: "If I am going to be blamed I had better keep in the background; very likely I shall not be noticed then."

With regard to the form of an order, it should be borne in mind that this is only a definite distinct order, as short as possible, in which not a needless word is said, and which cannot be misunderstood. Every superior who finds that he has been misunderstood would first look for the fault in himself; if, after careful consideration, he finds that it was not his own fault, then, and not till then, he may take his subordinates to task.

It would be a great blessing if all orders in action had to be given in writing as, apart from the fact that such orders would be evidence on record, the superior issuing the order would be kept from blunders due to haste, while the recipient of an order can understand more clearly what he sees in black and white before him, than he can an order given verbally to him by an *side-de-camp* or orderly, often enough in a great hurry. I remember an instance at an inspection years ago, when I was a subaltern, which illustrates what I have just said. At a brigade inspection an officer of considerable seniority had just given his first order for action, in the presence of the general officer commanding, and what happened? The general officer commanding said to him: "It is a pity, Herr . . . that you did not give that order in writing. If I were to repeat it to you now, word for word, you would think I was joking, and you would never admit that you had given the order in the style you did."

It is very human and natural; the superior knows well enough what he wishes to order, but what he actually has ordered in the excitement of an engagement, is beyond his power to judge. In his mind there remains only what he wished done at that given moment, not the actual wording of the order, though the whole question depends upon the latter only.

Let us leave the battle-field for a moment, and glance at our ordinary everyday life. How many stupid stories are not told by every one of us about our servants, and how many mistakes and misunderstandings can we not remember? So much so that the officer's servant has become a typical figure on the stage. But are our men so stupid that they really make a muddle of every order given to them?

No, most certainly not; and if we went to the bottom of the misunderstandings and mistakes, and their origin, we should find often enough that ~~it~~ was our own fault.

When, for instance, a subaltern tells his newly-appointed soldier-servant to "get these gloves cleaned" (I have done it myself), why should he be astonished if the man sends the gloves to the washerwoman? Or again whose fault is it if the man, being ordered to "bring me a glass of beer," brings the wrong brand of beer, or gets it from A. instead of from B.?

Examples of this kind constantly occur every day, and the unlucky servant gets all the blame, because he went off on a false scent. Sometimes mistakes occur in social matters, and why? The unlucky servant, who has grown up amidst the most homely surroundings, and has never in his life spoken otherwise than according to his lights, has suddenly to execute commissions and deliver messages which are quite beyond his comprehension, with the inevitable result of mistakes and blunders of all kinds.

This brief digression is only intended to point out how difficult it is, even in everyday life, to give orders in such a way as to make it impossible to misunderstand them, so as to place the difficulties of orders in the field in the right light. In the one case orders are given quietly at one's ease, when there is nothing to distract one's attention, while in the field we have to deal with the excitement of the moment, which may, all too easily, lead to crude, ill-considered, and hasty orders.

If we clearly picture to ourselves the possible and sometimes very lamentable results of such orders in active service, we cannot fail to recognize the fact that the giving of orders is an art which can be learnt and practised, and the only man who will succeed in learning is one who is really in earnest about it, who observes and trains himself by strict and relentless hard work, and sets himself a high standard.

In the field, in the course of actual duty (which constantly demands special attention, and must be carried on in accordance with its own special character), there is no time to practice giving orders. Therefore, no one should neglect to set himself problems on a map at home, and to set down in writing the orders or arrangements which would be required on actual service. It is interesting to see how many corrections have to be made at the moment, and how many have to be added later, if the problem and the orders have been laid aside for any length of time.

Another and better method of learning the art of command is found in war-games, tactical exercises, and staff rides, if the directing staff strictly insists that commanders of all grades shall give all their tactical orders, without exception, in the proper form and wording, and therefore not in the form of: "I should not move up X Battalion on the left flank," but, "Major O., deploy your battalion on the left of N Battalion; the regiment will attack." If time permits, all orders should be given in writing.

Now how must an order be worded, so as to be clear and understandable to subordinates, and incapable of being misunderstood? The German regulations give indications enough, and it is, therefore, for us to make them our own.

According to the German "Field Service Regulations", paras.46-51, it is laid down (with regard to the issue of orders) that an order should contain all that the subordinate must know in order to be able to act on his own responsibility for the attainment of the object in view, and no more. Consequently the order must be brief, clear, and definite, and it must also be suited to the recipient's range of view. Orders, during the transmission of which the situation may become changed, or those which may have to be carried out under circumstances which cannot be foreseen, must abstain especially from details. "Instructions," then, take the place of "Orders". These must indicate the object in view, but must leave the method of attaining that object alone.

Anticipatory orders dealing with a time a long way ahead, and those which go into minute detail, can seldom be carried out in their entirety.

In conformity with these directions, we read in the German Infantry Training Regulations, para.274: "as no fixed pattern or normal form of action can be given, orders for action must abstain from any set form. As a rule, it comes to the troops being first moved quickly in the required direction by word of mouth; more detailed directions follow later."

And again (para.275): "The higher commanders should give only such orders as are unavoidable. They must abstain from any interference in matters of detail, and must leave the choice of means to their subordinates."

These are wise regulations, but are they taken to heart by all commanders and on all occasions? Does not a lack of faith in the capabilities of a subordinate, or a wish to see the order carried out exactly in the way conceived by himself, end in many a commander transgressing against this very definite and outspoken regulation?

Would that every one would lay his hand on his heart, and examine his conscience.

This much is certain, that we can only bring up and train subordinate leaders to have independence, initiative, and fondness of responsibility, if we do not crib, cabin, and confine them, but rather give them freedom of action, within their allotted sphere. Such freedom of action, if properly directed, will never degenerate into the licence which is condemned further on in para. 276 of the German Infantry Training Regulations. But to deprive the subordinate commander of the independence to which he is entitled, means robbing him of the pleasure of service and the pleasure of action, and, at the very least diminishing his interest in his work, and with it the germ of all active endeavour.

We can see from all this that command is, in fact, an art it implies, with regard to the contents of an order, the necessity for recognising and not overstepping the proper limitations; but, within those limits, the wording must be so precise and formal that the meaning shall be free from all doubt, and shall stand out so clearly and sharply defined, as to make any misunderstanding impossible.

Such demands can only be satisfied by a commander who has been accustomed in his youth to give correct and appropriate orders, and who has never ceased to practice himself in doing so. We must again not lose sight of the fact that the proper co-operation of companies in a battalion, or a battalions in a regiment, etc., will be absolutely impossible unless the orders issued have been thoroughly thought out from beginning to end.

In peace time, it is just conceivable that an order issued may be altered or cancelled five minutes later, though even here the phrase "Order, -Counter-order, -Disorder," is too often justified; but in war it must be definitely accepted as a fact, that such supplementary orders are impossible.

The orders issued to subordinate commanders at the opening of an action must, therefore, be worded in such a way that they shall still be applicable- at all events, in their general sense- as the action progresses.

A few examples may perhaps explain and illustrate what I mean,-----

SITUATION I

A regiment advancing comes in touch with the enemy. What orders will the commander of the regiment give to the commander of the advanced guard?

The German Infantry Training Regulations say (para.356-7): "It is the duty of the advanced guard to secure for the main body time and space to deploy for action; the regimental commander issues the necessary orders with that view to the commander of the advanced guard. Above all, the position to be taken up by the artillery must be covered. Important tactical points especially commanding heights, to the front and flank, must be rapidly occupied, if necessary, by force.

The advanced guard should not hesitate to take up a wider front than its strength would justify for a serious action. The artillery coming up will soon lighten its task.

It is obvious from these regulations that the regimental commander, even if he wished to do so, is not in a position to give an order which includes all possible eventualities without thereby raising misunderstandings. He can only express his intention, and therefore issues the following order:-

"The advanced guard will fight a delaying action." He leaves the methods of doing so to the commander of the advanced guard, who will find them enumerated in the regulations (paras. 417-420 in addition to those already referred to).

This order contains everything that has to be ordered, or that can be ordered, and makes the commander's intention quite clear. The enemy must be engaged in order to occupy his attention, but should not, under any circumstances, be induced to deliver an attack, as the commander of the forces still desires to have a free hand. The advance guard therefore pushes forward near enough to the enemy to be able to open fire and to make the enemy think that he is threatened with an attack; but not, under any circumstances, so near that its commander loses his freedom of action or even runs the risk of being driven back by the enemy, if the latter is daring enough.

The order given in the form indicated above cannot be misunderstood, and leaves to the commander of the advanced guard full power of initiative, by indicating only the general lines of his action.

If the wording of the order had been: "The advanced guard will occupy height X and will from there engage the enemy." the commander of the force would have acted contrary to regulation, and what is the advanced guard commander to do, if "height X" which from the position of the commander of the force seemed to be at most some 1,000 yards distant from the enemy, turns out to be actually some 1,600 yards away, or, perhaps, within close range?

In the first alternative, the advanced guard would be unable to open fire without a culpable waste of ammunition, and, therefore, the order cannot be carried out; in the second alternative it would not be able to hold its ground under such close hostile fire for any length of time, and would either have to fall back or else push forward to the attack, in other words, to certain destruction.

If the "height X" is too far off, this makes a delaying action impossible, and if it is too close to the hostile position, this deprives the commander of the force of all freedom of action; he will have to conform to the enemy's initiative.

So the advanced guard commander will be compelled to disobey, as he ought not, under any circumstances, to carry out the order in the form given to it.

SITUATION II

The battery with the regiment is moving to a hill marked by a windmill, and the battalion at the head of the main body has received an order to furnish the escort to the artillery. What orders are given by the commander of the battalion?

"The 10th Company will form the escort to the battery that has moved on to the hill marked by the windmill."

An artillery escort should, as a rule, take post to the front and to the flank, usually to the outer flank, but it would be wrong for the battalion commander to fix its position, even if the character of the ground made it possible for him to do so. The company commander will find the right place, i.e. one which will enable him to carry out the duty allotted to him.

Assuming that there is a plantation some 400 yards to the right and 300 yards to the front, which the battalion commander considers to be the right place for the escort, he might give the order thus:-

"The 10th Company will advance to the plantation lying to the right front of the windmill hill, and will act as escort to the battery."

But he would have overshot the mark, because in the first place the choice as to how to do it is the company commander's affair; and, moreover, what if the plantation is too thick for the company to set foot in it? And what if the artillery has not taken up the position indicated at all, but, for good and sufficient reasons, has gone further to the front, to the right, or to the left?

SITUATION III

The commander of the regiment decides to attack, deploys the 2nd Battalion, but orders the 3rd Battalion to hold two companies in rear of the left flank at his own disposal. What order should the battalion give?

"The 11th and 12th Companies will remain in rear of the left flank at the disposal of the colonel commanding the regiment."

Any other order, such as, for instance, defining the place of prescribing any particular formation or interval between the companies, would be fundamentally wrong, because the hands of the company commander would be tied thereby.

What if the company suddenly came under artillery fire at the place named and has to suffer heavy loss? Though such loss might probably be avoided by a change of formation, or by moving a short way forward, or back, or to a flank, the company leader is tied by his orders and must disobey if he diverges from them.

Now it is obvious that in such circumstances no competent company commander will adhere to the letter of an order which brings death and destruction upon his company, and no superior

will blame such disobedience. On the contrary, in such a case it would only be the man who obeyed his orders who would be called to account. But why place the company commander in such a position? On active service, where bullets alone are enough to decide as to right and wrong, there can be no doubt in deciding a question of this kind, but how does it stand in peace manoeuvres? If the company commander disobeys a definite order, let us say because he finds himself exposed to fire, or because some other considerations forced him to do so, and if his commanding officer does not recognize the necessity, or very possibly never even asks the reason, but is annoyed, what then?

SITUATION IV.

The attack is to be pressed, but the regiment has not yet succeeded in establishing its superiority of fire. The battalion commander therefore decides to deploy another company. What order will be given?

"The 11th Company will deploy to the left of the 10th Company."

It would be wrong to prescribe the sort and method of deployment, or the strength to be deployed. The captain of the company will know that. It would also be wrong to order the company to place itself immediately on the existing flank. Very possibly there may be a suitable fire-position, not too far off, which the captain has noticed. Should it be left unutilized? What a mistake it would be, for instance, if the regiment could work its way forward under the cover of fire from such a position, and that position was not made use of!

The captain of the company knows that the regiment is trying to establish its superiority of fire; he will, therefore, be in no sort of doubt as to how many rifles to put into the firing line, or what position is best for the purpose.

Or again, the regiment is about to attack, but, before that, another company is required to be deployed. In this case the order must be supplemented by:-

"The regiment is about to attack."

If the addition to the order were worded otherwise, e.g., "push the firing line forward", not only would it be trenching upon the company commander's province, but it would be an order which, under certain circumstances, it would be impossible to carry out."

For if, at the moment when the order was given it was possible to carry it out, then the captain of the company would certainly do so on his own account. On the other hand, any such advance can no longer be thought of, if the enemy heavily reinforces his firing line while the advance and deployment is being carried out. In that case the company can do nothing but lie down and wait until the desired superiority of fire has been regained.

SITUATION V.

The commander of the regiment finds that he is engaged with superior forces, and that his attack cannot succeed; he therefore decides to fall back to another position and there await the attack of the enemy. In order to prevent the enemy from pressing his retirement too closely, the 12th Company of the regiment (still available) is to be made use of. What form would the order to the captain of that company take?

"The regiment is moving its left flank to X; you will cover the regiment's retirement."

Any addition, any detailed directions, would be an infringement of the company commander's rights. He must not be told "deploy your company on the ridge," or "occupy (such and such) a line or edge of a wood, etc.," as his freedom of action would thus be hampered, and he must comply with his orders, or pain of being disobedient, even though he must, from where he is, reach a very much more suitable position. But even assuming that the occupation of the line (or edge of wood, etc.) mentioned fits in with the view of the company commander, such an order cannot be justified, because, entirely apart from the fact that the choice of means must be left to the subordinate, the constantly changing conditions of an engagement soon make measures wrong which shortly before were correct enough.

SITUATION VI.

A regiment, in the course of its advance, has to pass a defile. The enemy is also advancing. The regiment, therefore, pushes the advanced guard battalion forward to cover the passage of the defile. What orders would be necessary?

"The advanced guard will cover the regiment's passage of the defile."

The commander of the advanced guard will, as a matter of course, select a suitable position far enough to the front and flanks of the defile to prevent the enemy from bringing fire to bear upon it. The order leaves him an entirely free hand, and allows him to turn in any direction he may deem expedient.

If, on the other hand, he was told how far he was to advance, or if he was ordered to occupy a definite piece of ground, or even to adopt a certain formation or course of action, the regimental commander would have been wrong three times over: first, because such an order would prescribe the means by which the object in view was to be carried out; secondly, because the regimental commander (even if he were at the moment in a position to issue such an order) cannot foresee the subsequent course of events; and thirdly, because the battalion would be tied down to one prescribed position.

Assuming that a thoroughly suitable copse or plantation lies in front of the defile, it will be, without question, the first immediate objective of the commander of the advanced guard; and it might therefore seem that there would be no harm by the regimental commander in pointing it out at once in his order. But it is not so. For instance, if the enemy comes up on a flank and opens fire upon the regiment as it debouches, the advanced guard will ipso facto be compelled to deploy against the hostile force in that direction, and we shall have another case of disobedience of orders being made compulsory owing to those orders encroaching upon the subordinate province.

The order, as drafted above, lays no constraint upon the commander of the advanced guard, but demands circumspect, intelligent, and correct action on his part, according to the circumstances of the case.

SITUATION VII

Red is beaten, and in his retreat has once more deployed on the line of the plantation opposite the defile, apparently to delay the pursuing enemy (Blue). The possession of the plantation is of great importance to Blue for the passage of the defile. What order will the Blue regimental commander give to his leading battalion?

The order should on no account fake the form of "You will attack the plantation."

Such an order would compel the battalion commander to attack, even if he sees that the enemy is on the point of retiring, and that the wood is only held in very small strength. The attack would compel Red to offer renewed resistance, and instead of merely occupying the wood after it has been evacuated, the battalion would have to take it at the expense of casualties. Under some circumstances it would lead to the enemy's reserves being deployed, and to an obstinate resistance being offered.

The essential point here is not to engage the enemy, but merely to occupy the wood, under cover of which the main body will be able to pass the defile. The order therefore should run:

"You will occupy the plantation."

In this case it is left open to the officer commanding the battalion to await the enemy's retirement and the evacuation of the wood, and then to follow immediately and without delay; or to take up a position threatening the enemy's line of retreat, so that he will be compelled to continue his retirement. At all events, the wording of the order leaves the choice of means to the battalion commander, and it is for him to choose the most suitable means, which may, but not necessarily must, be to attack.

SITUATION VIII.

A battalion comes upon an hostile position, prepared for defence, but cannot ascertain its extent and strength, nor the numbers and description of the force holding it. It is therefore necessary to reconnoitre at once, so as to clear up the situation. What order should be given?

"The 10th Company will reconnoitre towards the enemy's position near Z."

The company commander advances with his company to some point which gives him the widest possible view, but still far enough away to prevent the enemy being able to interfere with him. The actual reconnaissance will be made by officers' patrols, or groups, or even by half-sections (according to circumstances), to which the company forms the necessary support. The reconnaissance itself will naturally embrace all important points, viz., the description of the fortifications, position of obstacles, strength of fortifications, weak points, distribution of the enemy's troops, position of his reserves, etc.

It would be wrong for the battalion commander to attempt to lay down in his orders how far the company is to advance, for he cannot know whether the point he prescribes (which may seem from his own position, to be correct and suitable) will actually enable the company to carry out the task assigned to it; nor can he tell whether the company will not have to fight to reach that point—a possibility which is to be avoided, at any rate, in the first instance.

SITUATION IX

The regiment, with two battalions in front line and the third battalion still in rear, finds itself threatened on its left flank in the course of its attack. Order:--

"The 3rd Battalion will cover the regiment's left flank."

Any addition would be a mistake. For instance, if the regimental commander gave the order: "The 3rd Battalion will occupy Cherry Hill, and cover the regiment's left flank", it might very possibly be right enough for the moment, and might coincide with the views of the battalion commander.

But how will it be a little later on when, for instance, the regiment advances? There is no longer any object in occupying the height mentioned, as it no longer covers the flank. So a fresh order will have to be given. Whereas with the order in the form first suggested, the battalion would conform to the movements of the regiment without any further orders. It will be still worse if it is impossible to cover the left flank from Cherry Hill, for then we shall have two orders, impossible to reconcile, and cancelling each other. If the battalion commander remains on Cherry Hill he cannot carry out the second part of the order; and if he covers the flank he cannot occupy the hill, and cannot therefore carry out the first part of the order. And yet there is hardly an officer of any seniority who has not received such orders! We should be specially on our guard against making such mistakes.

SITUATION X.

The battalion is engaged on the defensive; the enemy's attack is being pressed, and the commanding officer finds himself obliged to employ the 10th Company till now held in reserve. How is his order worded?

"The 10th Company will endeavour to check the enemy's attack!"

Here it is left to the company commander to deploy his company in such manner and place as he may deem to be the best for achieving his purpose. It is quite immaterial whether he prolongs the firing line, or whether he moves to a position from which he can bring a flanking fire to bear, as any position will be correct which enables him to carry out the order. The duty assigned to him might be achieved by a counter-attack if, for example the ground should admit of an advance against the enemy's flank without too lengthy a turning movement, and if it appeared to be advisable. The captain of the company will only have to consider that attack is more costly than defence, and that he can only hope for success if the enemy has no reserves available, or if the counter-attack can be made so suddenly that the enemy will have no time to deploy what reserves he may have.

If the company commander remains on the defensive he must select his fire position not too far from the enemy, or else the latter, by a suitable employment of his reserve could (and would) continue his advance unchecked. But, on the other hand, the captain of the company must not push too far forward, because his own advance would give the enemy time for carrying out counter measures, and the company, isolated from the rest of the battalion would be liable to be overwhelmed.

SITUATION XI.

The same situation as above, except that the enemy is threatening the left flank of the battalion with an enveloping movement.
Order:--

"The 10th Company will prevent the enemy from delivering a flank attack."

Here the captain of the company is given a free hand. If the character of the ground calls for a counter-attack, he decides upon a preliminary surprise opening of fire. If he considers it to be more correct to remain on the defensive, he will select a position lying in rear and to a flank of the battalion's position, so as to compel the enemy either to make a wider turning movement, or to abandon his manoeuver altogether.

SITUATION XII

The regiment is engaged with a hostile force, the superiority of which has only been ascertained in the course of the action, and wishes to shake off the enemy by the assistance of its battalion in reserve. What order does the regimental commander give?

"The 1st Battalion will cover the retirement of the regiment."

The battalion can now deliver a counter-attack, or threaten the enemy in flank, or adopt any other measure which appears right and suitable for attaining the object in view. It is given an entirely free hand.

If, however, the order had been worded: "You will attack the enemy on the right flank," the battalion would have to continue the attack, even if its commanding officer was convinced that the enemy was abandoning his own offensive movement, because the order, in its present form, does not show that the regimental commander's intention is to disengage himself from the enemy.

It is obvious that to continue an attack under such circumstances would be a mistake, as it would then become impossible to break off the action, while the commander of the regiment has lost his hold upon one of his battalions, and has thus split up his force.

These examples will suffice, I hope, to show what I wished to point out.

Even if we may confidently assume, as I have already said in one of the examples, that no competent officer will adhere to the letter of an order in action, but will pursue the object in view with a proper willingness to accept responsibility—still this fact does not absolve superiors from the duty of never ordering more than it is necessary or possible to order.

We have, thank God, no model, no normal form of action, and therefore no superior officer ought to fall into the mistake of wishing to direct the course of an engagement upon lines of his own choosing.

Troops once engaged are beyond the control of the higher commander, and interference on his part is therefore impossible on active service. But what applies to active service also holds good for peace time, unless we abandon the principle that nothing must be learnt on the parade ground that has to be unlearnt again on service.

We learn most from mistakes and misunderstandings, and it is therefore well to let them run their course. Untimely interference, repeated orders, and such like, produce, instead of the trustworthiness, independence, and initiative which should be our aim, a feeling of insecurity and uncertainty which destroys all willingness to accept responsibility.

This much is certain, that superior officers who give their subordinates-in action and everywhere else where it is possible to do so-the independence which is their due, and even demand such power of initiative from them, will never be left in the lurch. They will find their troops, down to the smallest detachment, always in the right place throughout the battle and after its conclusion.