

An t-ÓSÍÁC

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A CRITICAL TIME.

It is quite evident to everybody in Ireland that we are going through one of the most critical periods in the history of the country. The fate of the Irish Nation is trembling in the balance. The toilsome and dangerous work of past years has borne fruit, and the Republic, established by the Irish Volunteers in 1916, now possesses a properly constituted National Government, the *de jure* Government of Ireland, whose authority is recognised by the Irish people as a whole. But the foreign usurper still maintains his army of occupation in our midst, Ireland is still garrisoned by the hirelings of the foreigner, in huge numbers and provided with every implement and equipment of modern warfare. The Irish Army is still confined to the trenches, its offensive activities being confined to raids and sniping.

It remains for us to convert the *de jure* Republican Government of Ireland into a *de facto* Government. At the present time those engaged in the struggle with the English usurpation need to throw every scrap of energy into the work, to leave no stone unturned, no device unresorted to, which can be effectively used against the enemy. We must keep ourselves at a high pitch of enthusiasm and efficiency. In particular is it the solemn duty of every Irish Volunteer to keep himself at the top of his endeavour, to maintain the highest possible standard of zeal and energy in his Volunteer work. For on the Army of Ireland, properly speaking, everything depends. It was they created the Irish Republic; they are the force at the back of the Irish Government, the main instrument and security of its executive power. On their loyalty and courage the future of the newly born Irish Republic depends. It is certain that their loyalty and courage will be put to the test in many important ways in the course of the next few months. The enemy is growing desperate, and at the same time panicky and vindictive, in the face of our organised and disciplined resistance. Our raids and snippings have had a demoralising effect upon his forces. The police and soldiers of the enemy are being made to understand that they cannot carry on their black-guardism with impunity; and higher-placed agents of the enemy will be taught the same lesson. The

enemy's garrison in this country is in a panic, and correspondingly cruel and vindictive when the opportunity arises. It seeks to revenge itself on helpless prisoners. It is endeavouring to reduce the Irish prisoners of war in Belfast to the status of criminals, and for weeks these brave men *have been continually in irons*. In Mountjoy and Cork similar situations exist. If the enemy's atrocities are continued, reprisals on those responsible—on all engaged in ordering or carrying out the operations against us—must inevitably become the order of the day. Whatever form our military activities may take, the officers and men of the Irish Volunteers may be trusted to play their part with the same courage and efficiency that have always distinguished them.

The President of the Irish Volunteers and head of the Irish Republic has been freed by our means from the custody of the enemy. He is at large and well-informed, able to take a leading part in the councils of the Irish Volunteer authorities and the councils of the Irish Republican Government. It will be a source of encouragement to Irish Volunteers in this critical time that the wisdom and courage of Commandant De Valera are at our disposal.

The Irish Republic has many national departments to set up. One department, the most essential national service of the moment, is already in existence, well organised and working efficiently—the National Army. The Volunteers are the right arm of the Irish Republic, the men who can be trusted to carry out the will of the Irish Government with the readiness and effectiveness of disciplined men. A state of war has been declared to exist between Ireland and England, and in war time the military side of things must receive a preponderating share of attention. The fate of Ireland will be determined, for good or evil, within a very short time from now. What the result will be depends largely upon the fidelity, courage and discipline of the Irish people. Let not the Volunteers, the right arm of the nation, be found wanting in this critical time. Let every officer and every soldier act as though the credit and effectiveness of the Army of Ireland depended on him alone. We may not be always "in the trenches." We may not be there for long.



NOTES FROM HEADQUARTERS.

ORGANIZATION NOTES.—Before dealing in detail with the duties and functions of Brigade Officers the Director of Organisation wishes to say that complaints have been received from many Battalions on the following:—

- (a) That copies of the "Oghlach" have not reached them;
- (b) That Brigade (and sometimes Battalion) Council meetings have been held very irregularly.

With regard to the "Oghlach" it has already been announced that copies must be distributed from the Brigade H.Q. immediately they are received. It is an easy matter for a Brigade Commandant to appoint a special Volunteer to take charge of this activity and to ensure that the copies are distributed in due proportion to each Battalion and through them to the Companies. To be more explicit, let us take a typical Brigade of say five Battalions or twenty Companies. For such, G.H.Q. allots 120 copies which should be apportioned by the Brigade Commandant as follows:—

For Brigade H.Q. say 10 copies.

For Battalion H.Q. (five in all) 30 copies.

For Companies (four copies each) 80 copies.

The Volunteer in charge of the distribution at Brigade H.Q. will simply have to reserve the requisite number for the Brigade Commandant, passing on a parcel, as set out above, to each Battalion. Note specially that it is to be done IMMEDIATELY. There is no necessity to wait until a Brigade Council meeting is being held nor to wait until a Battalion Officer turns up accidentally at Brigade H.Q. It is to be hoped that this matter need not be referred to again. It is necessary to state here also that payment for the "Oghlach" is very much behind in a large number of Brigades. This carelessness on the part of Brigade Commandants has the effect of assisting the enemy and increasing our own difficulties.

(b) Brigade Council meetings must be held not less frequently than once a fortnight. This matter will be dealt with fully in the Brigade Notes to appear in forthcoming issues. Details will be given of a system of reports to G.H.Q. Arrangements are now made for a series of visits by members of the Head Quarter's Staff to all Brigades throughout the country, and Brigade Commandants are to send in at once time and place of the next meeting of the Brigade Council in order that these visits may be carried out systematically.

NOTES ON TRAINING.

Hedge-Fighting for Small Units.—It will sometimes be possible for a solitary cyclist sniper well posted on a road to enfilade transverse hedges from the road. This would help to frustrate turning movements by small parties in the immediate neighbourhood of the road. A good cyclist should be able to spring on his machine instantly and sprint off at top speed from such a position when once it became untenable.

Cycles in cases of necessity are not absolutely confined to roads; they can wheel their machines along paths and thus escape across country if cut off. If the cyclists are laying an ambush their safest way of retreat may be across country for some distance and then by cycle on a different road. In that case the best place for their machines to begin with would be the second road.

Left-Handed Shots Needed.—In the case of delaying actions on roads the men will commonly have to fire round corners, gate pillars, etc. Clearly in such a case it will be necessary to have men able to shoot from the left shoulder—otherwise the men will be able to get cover on one side of the road only, whereas it may happen that the best cover and positions are on the other side. With this end in view it should be the aim to put all the left-shoulder men of a company into one section or squad so as to have them to hand when wanted. If none of the men fire naturally from the left shoulder a squad should be trained to do so.

Roads Leading into a Position.—There is one other matter of great importance in connection with Roads, which forms a special case. This is the case of roads leading from the direction of the enemy into a fortified position. If these were suitable and the enemy were prepared to face the losses entailed, it might be possible to drive forward strong columns along them into the heart of the position. This would need to be specially guarded against.

For this purpose the position should be so traced that the stretches of such roads leading to it would be long and straight, so that the advancing columns would be under fire for a long time. Picked shots in well-protected positions would be told off to command the approaches. Barriers of thorn bushes and barbed wire should be placed in front to hold up the attacking troops. No other barricades should be used, as they would simply mask the fire of the defenders.

Another useful defence is thus described in an account of Turkish defences in Mesopotamia,

These were "trous de loup" or pits with spikes at the bottom. "These looked just like honeycomb, only the tops of the holes were circular. They were four to five feet across, from seven to eight feet deep, with sharpened stakes in the bottom, and were shaped like an inverted cone. At the top the edges were about nine inches apart. Over one lot I saw there was a barbed wire entanglement." These would hold up a column under fire, and in all probability cause the assault to fail.

Materials.—When treating of defensive positions it will be suitable to preface the subject by detailing certain materials that although rough and ready, are nevertheless capable of being speedily put to good use for making or improving cover. When time serves quantities of the following should be accumulated. Plenty of opportunities for collecting them will arise, and should never be neglected:—

Wire.—Barbed if possible, for making entanglements and stiffening hedges. Even short lengths are useful. A supply of staples for fastening it should be provided.

Timber.—For rivetting banks and flooring. Nails of all kinds.

Stones.—All large stones of a couple of stone weight should be used. Brushwood for filling gaps in hedges, corduroying roads, etc. **Bushes**—Strong thorn bushes for barriers and abattis. **Sods**—For rivetments and for facing rough walls to prevent splinters flying. Sacks are very important, being better than sandbags. They can be filled with earth, gravel, road metal, and are splendid material. They should be about half filled only. It is not necessary to choke or tie a sack if the mouth is carefully folded under it when being placed in position.

Importance of the Defensive.—The recent European War emphasised to an enormous degree the advantages of the prepared defensive as a tactical system. Whether we are strategically attacking or not makes no difference. In that case judicious use of localities held on the defensive is the best means of strengthening to the fullest the force available for the counter-attack. Now, there is no country in the world in which a defensive position can be more easily prepared than in Ireland. In most other countries elaborate measures must be taken; the trenches much be traced and dug; supporting points must be properly provided; localities must be prepared for defence, and, in general, technical skill involved. In great part of Ireland, however, good defensive positions will be found ready-made, and much time and labour will be saved.

The Field of Fire Required.—In one vital point the present war has modified former theories of defence in favour of the ordinary Irish terrain: field of fire is no longer the first requirement sought for. It is better to have a field of fire of 100 yards and to be invisible than to have one of 600 yards and to be an easy target for artillery. Cover from view has become more important than field of fire. Fire direction and control thus become simple matters, and all the officers and N.C.O.'s have to do is to steady their men and make them keep their rifles flat.

Now, in Ireland the wide fields of fire formerly sought after would have been practically impossible to find. The country is so broken and cut up by fences, hedges, and walls that no extended field of fire would be obtainable. The proper use of firearms in Ireland consists of steady, careful aimed fire at short ranges. In short, a force well hidden behind a hedge with a level field of ordinary size in front is formidably posted. These conditions would constantly present themselves in Ireland without any special preparation at all.

Level Ground the Best.—A perfectly level terrain is the one best calculated to get the fullest results from the peculiar defensive capabilities of enclosed country. In level country the hedges obstruct view completely beyond the first hedge in each direction. On the other hand, a man posted on a hill can see into the fields in the plain, or a man in a plain can see the surface of the fields on a hillside—like butts to a target. A bank position behind the crest of a hill is the best in such a country. This compels the enemy to expose his infantry to your musketry and gives his artillery very little opportunity for observation.

Preparing Hedges.—When posting a firing line behind a hedge the appearance of the hedge on the enemy's side should not be changed at all. The hedge should be trimmed from behind at the bottom to enable the men to crawl right in under the bushes. They will then be able to fire from the front edge and will have a good view, while they will be quite hidden.

Practising Map-Reading.—There are large numbers of Volunteer officers and N.C.O.'s who are unable to read a map, strange as this may seem. The following hints will be found very useful by them. The best map of Ireland is the 1-inch Ordnance Map, which gives practically all natural features and land-marks:—

- Having procured the best map of the district you can get hold of, go up on some fairly commanding height from which you can survey a good area of the country around.

- Take out your watch and lay it flat on the palm of the hand, with the hour-hand of the watch pointing to the sun. Halfway from the 12 o'clock



figure to the hour hand is the true south—counting forward from twelve in the afternoon and back in the morning. Knowing the south, you can easily find the other cardinal points.

3. The top of the map is the North, the bottom is the South, the left-hand side the West, and the right-hand side the East. Spread the map flat so that its top corresponds to the North as you have ascertained it by the watch. This is called orienting the map.

4. Once you know how the map corresponds to the ground you can easily identify the places on it. At first you may find it takes time, but constant short spells of practice will speedily make you proficient. Half-an-hour spent each day in this way for a week will repay you well.

GENERAL NOTES.

On Saturday last the Irish Volunteers received at Kingstown the remains of Pierce McCan, T.D., who was slowly murdered in an English prison; his remains were conveyed through Dublin, the semi-suppressed anger of the populace threatened to burst forth into open denunciation of the murderers.

Pierce McCan is dead. He has followed Ashe and Coleman. They have truly died for Ireland. Over McCan's remains Ireland mourns in silence. Though he is dead his spirit lives. It will animate the Volunteers of his native Tipperary with a still greater desire for freedom. His death adds further weight to the already heavy debt our alien enemy has to pay when the reckoning begins. Irish Volunteers remember.

We referred in our last issue to the rescue of President De Valera from Lincoln Prison as a brilliant example of Volunteer courage, skill and efficiency. It should hardly be necessary to inform Volunteers that the absurd story of a "secret meeting of Irishmen in London" and a message from De Valera dated "between sky and land," which appeared in a London newspaper and was reproduced in some Irish newspapers, is simply "fake." When the story of our President's escape comes to be made public, it will form one of the most creditable of the many splendid episodes in the history of the Army of Ireland. The rescue of MacNellis from Cork Jail will also rank as an achievement of which Irish Volunteers may well be proud.

The capture of two policemen by a body of Volunteers, who deprived the two men of their revolvers, belts, and batons, was an admirable achievement whose efficiency has greatly irritated the enemy. Unable to discover the men who had taken part in the capture, the enemy determined that they would at least secure some victims, and men who had not been present at all on the occasion

were brought up before a British court-martial, solemnly "identified" by the two policemen, and "convicted," in face of the testimony of a huge number of respectable witnesses that they were elsewhere at the time the policemen were arrested. The "sentence" of the British court-martial has not yet been promulgated, but it is likely to be heavy. This example of English "justice" should help to convince every Irish Republican (should any remain in doubt upon the subject) that even from the point of view of expediency they have nothing to lose by adopting the Volunteer attitude and refusing to recognise the courts of the enemy.

A book purporting to be "A History of the Irish Volunteers" has recently appeared. It is entirely unauthorised and contains in its few pages a great number of untruths, inaccuracies, deliberate suppressions, and misleading statements. It is written by a man who is discredited in the eyes of all decent Volunteers, and even from the literary point of view is a worthless production. Volunteers should discourage its circulation by every means in their power. When the time comes the full and true history of the Irish Volunteers will be issued by those in a position to speak on the subject.

Ba cheart dosna ceannailh complachta (captain) bheith an-aireach nuair a bheidh siad ag toghadh ceann buidhre nó ceann sgaoithe. Má bhíonn na cinn buidhre agus na cinn sgaoithe go maith, ní bheidh aon bhaoghal ar an gcomplacht. Má bhíonn na cinn buidhre nó na cinn sgaoithe gan mhaith ní bheidh aon rath ar an gcomplacht, dá fheabhus an captain ná na cinn leath-chomplachta. Ba cheart don chaptain gach sadhas ócайд a thabhairt do gach ceann buidhre chun ceannus na buidhre do chleachtadh.