

SOME LESSONS TAUGHT BY THE

ANGLO-BOER WAR.

As Effectiveness of Weapons Increases, Fatalities In Battle Apparently Decrease.

BY CAPTAIN G. L. KILMER, LATE U. S. V.

BOER and Briton have demonstrated in the four months of South African warfare some things about up to date fighting machines. One important fact brought out is that, for creating extensive cemeteries and making bloody history, the old fashioned fighters, with their old fashioned short range weapons, still hold the championship. Dynamite bombs and Lyddite shells, bullet sifting machines and long range smokeless powder guns have not feared the world's record for carnage an iota. The civilized nations stand aghast at the fall of a few score of officers in a single fight as though it were an unheard of thing and that science had rendered warfare too frightfully gory for it to be tolerated among human beings. Probably the almost bloodless victories of our navy at Manila Bay and Santiago have led people to look for enormous gains on a minimum of investment. These were marvelous exceptions.

War means fighting, and fighting in a war worthy of the name means killing on both sides. The casualties among officers are reported promptly, and at first blush seem to be excessive, but when the returns are officially made up it often transpires that the percentage is no greater than would be expected from the more exposed positions that brave officers will take in a fight and the fact that the insignia on their uniforms make them exceptional targets. Looked at alone, the losses of officers at Santiago were exceptionally large. We have no percentages of the officers killed in the South African war, but, judging from the proportion of officers to men, it may be believed that the losses among British officers up to this time have not been as great under similar circumstances as they were at Santiago. For instance, the Sixth United States Infantry, which charged on the San Juan blockhouse, lost 25 per cent of its men killed and wounded in a fight lasting not more than two hours and 33 per cent of its officers. Taking the

yards, and may close down to 1,100 or 1,000 yards. At the latter range the fire is supposed to be very effective. I should very much like to see the official records of the Boer losses in the recent attack upon Ladysmith. It is said that the fighting there was at 500 yards' range, and the Boers, being the assailants, the losses sustained by them, if they can be ascertained, would be a test for the effectiveness of the modern weapons. Of course, there has been no fighting by large bodies of men in South Africa—that is to say, large bodies such as we were accustomed to marshal in the battles of the civil war. Take my corps at Gettysburg, numbering from 8,500 to 9,000 men. In the course of a three hours' fight we lost 4,211 men killed and wounded. The casualties were chiefly bullet casualties. It is true that the Confederates opened the ball that day with about 60 pieces of artillery, and during the fight I brought up nearly as many cannons. My opponent, Longstreet, fought me that day with about 15,000 men in two divisions. The next day Longstreet's third division, General Pickett's—had a fight all by itself on Cemetery ridge, and in these

machines. The Germans, who, by the way, also had their breechloading, long range rifle, the needle gun, rushed to close quarters, and the result was disastrous to the French." General Nelson A. Miles said recently, apropos of the subject of modern improved weapons and projectiles in relation to battlefield casualties, "Losses diminish in proportion as man killing devices progress." This is a fact, as shown by figures, and is well known to close students of warfare. Examples of the kind cited by General Sickles in the case of his own regiment and brigade might be found in scores from the records of the civil war. Take, for instance, the Federal attack upon the Confederate stone wall at Fredericksburg in 1862. The experience of the Seventh New York (Steuben) regiment in that charge is typical. The Seventh went in after other brigades had been repulsed in front of the stone wall so that it did not receive the fierce outburst of Confederate fire, but in 20 minutes, or at the outside 30 minutes, out of 25 officers in the regiment 19 were killed and 8 wounded, and out of 450 men 246 were killed and wounded. All

hope attack upon log breastworks at Petersburg in 1864, the First Maine heavy artillery carried 525 men in line and lost 812 killed and wounded in a rush that kept them under fire not to exceed seven minutes. At Gettysburg, during a crisis, the First Minnesota was called upon to charge a moving line of Confederates and capture its colors, in order to stagger the assailants, who were marching upon Federal batteries. The Confederates held their fire until the daring Yankees were close up, and 215 of the Minnesotans out of 262 were struck down upon a few square yards of earth, just at the point of contact. In the second battle of Bull Run, 1862, Duryee's zouaves stood up in front of a battery which was being maddened by Confederate troops and left 119 dead comrades stretched in regular rows around wheel ruts and trail prints on the spot where the guns had stood. The regiment numbered 470 at the beginning of the fight. The heaviest losers at the battle of Gettysburg were two opposing regiments—the Twenty-fourth Michigan and the Twenty-sixth North Carolina. They fought in the first day's battle almost man for man in the duelling contest which took place in McPherson's woods. At the end of the day nothing remained of either regiment except their flags and two pitiful squads of battle grimed soldiers. The Michigans lost 297 out of 496, and the North Carolinas 688 out of 920. The casualties sustained by these troops were almost entirely from mus-

witnessed at the battle of Franklin have seldom been equaled during the century. These figures on what a weapon can do against a given target. One enthusiast, writing of the Creusot gun now heard of in South Africa, says, "With such pieces one can in seven minutes put four hundred three-quarter rounds of the effective of the troops of a covered campaign battery at a distance of more than two miles." Of course, that would be possible, provided the soldiers were inclined to stand up and be shot down without an attempt to get to cover. This would not occur one time in a hundred. Hundreds of thousands of projectiles have been rained upon inclosed positions with only trifling casualties. The better the weapons an army is going to be called upon to face the closer will be the attention paid to securing cover for the troops while under fire. It is only in cases of accidental miscalculation or rare foolhardiness that a mass of troops is exposed to the murderous fire of breechloaders or of quick firing cannon. It was supposed that the British army would be supplied with the latest form of weapons. Their machine gun is the Maxim with certain modifications, and it seems that the Boers are supplied with the same piece. At Tugela river Colonel Long found that his guns were outclassed by those of the Boers, and for that reason he pushed them dangerously close to the Boer position, and lost them in consequence. Since the Franco-Prussian war there

and the urgency of the fight which will do the most execution. The British carry ten shots in the magazine and the Boers five. General Sickles is not alone in wishing for more complete data of the fighting in South Africa before expressing opinions as to the lessons to be learned by military men. Two sets of figures have been made out for the British losses at Spion Kop; one set places it at 784 and another at 823. The number of troops engaged there has been set down as 2,000, increased to 5,000, and General Buller stated that the casualties were having fought splendidly, and the casualties in officers referred to but five commands, which probably carried into battle not over 2,000 men. Being myself a veteran soldier familiar with the difficulties of close fighting, it is with reluctance that I state that British soldiers as a mass do show fight to a fair degree. The British themselves go out of their way to praise the bravery and valor of the Boers, but on reading between the lines it is evident, from the accounts of British correspondents and official dispatches, that Tommy Atkins does not stand to his work in the supreme moment. His casualties at Magersfontein were less than 10 per cent, and it transpires that his army backed away from the Boer position before it had lost its tried strength with the enemy. The first accounts stated that the Black Watch got within 200 yards of the Boer works. An officer of the Guard brigade wrote that the Highlanders got within 100 yards of the enemy, but an officer of the Black Watch places "the distance at 500 to 600 yards. It is plain, from British accounts, that the Highlanders stampeded at the first fire. They also fled off in the retreat, and the other commands followed. At Tugela River, where Buller lost 22 guns, the Boers shot down the horses and oxen of the batteries at 400 yards. Then the gunners abandoned their pieces. In the civil war it was a common occurrence for the battery horses to be shot down, but unless the gunners fired until the enemy swarmed into the batteries and then defended their pieces with handspikes, rammer staffs and even stones, it was not called good fighting. Spion Kop was a forlorn hope equal to the Confederate assault on Little Round Top. But it transpires that, after 2,000 men had lost 40 per cent and there were 2,000 fresh supports at hand, the captured ground was abandoned without orders. Nothing less than a fight to a finish between formidable bodies of combatants can determine the effectiveness of the weapons and projectiles now in use. If armies cease to fight upon losing 25 per cent of the total strength, then that percentage represents the limit of human endurance in modern warfare.

WASHINGTON A CENTURY AGO.

On Feb. 22, 1800, a century ago, the obsequies of George Washington were officially celebrated at the national capital and also observed in every city of the nation. The greatest American was also the subject of eulogies throughout the civilized world. Washington died on Dec. 14, 1799, after a few hours of great suffering. He passed away at half past 10 o'clock in the evening, and by his side were his devoted wife, his secretary, Colonel Tobias Lear, and his two lifelong friends and physicians, Drs. Dick and Craik. The last words he spoke were "It is well!" In these days, when Washington's memory is revered by every one, it seems strange to read that on his birthday anniversary in 1796 a motion was



HOUDON'S BUST OF WASHINGTON.

made in congress to adjourn in his honor, but was lost because a few disaffected members declared that it would be a "bad precedent." When the crowd outside heard the news, such a shouting ensued that the speakers could not be heard, and an adjournment was forced. Washington's birthday is now a legal holiday in the District of Columbia and in every state in the Union except six.

WASHINGTON. Transcendent man! His mortal part Has long since passed our ken, Yet face and form, by painter's art, Are made to live again. What majesty imbued that brow! What grandeur marked that brow! Sure Nature never did perform Her noblest work till now. See! lent to fit her utmost skill, Her touch, firm, but elastic, And, as her crowning act of will, She used her choicest plastic. The people leaned on his great arm; He led the nation's life. He was their rock in war's alarm, Their safe retreat. He moved through scenes of waste and war, Plying yet serene; Heart wrung was he, but yet needs were A firm and steadfast men. When peace ensued, the wasted land Involved 'in greater care; 'Tis appalling task made stern demand For all his wisdom rare. This nation is an object proof Of what the man has done; Of what he was it is enough To name it, "Washington." Oh, grandest life, sublimest soul! Oh, proudest mortal name! Through coming time, as ages roll, They carry down the fame. D. H. BARRER.

THE NEW WAY—COLENSO.

THE OLD WAY—GETTYSBURG.



fighting right through at San Juan hill, the percentage of loss in the cavalry division was 14 per cent and that of the infantry 15 per cent. This includes all of the infantry and all of the cavalry on the field of battle. The partial returns of casualties from South Africa seem to apply, whenever percentages are hinted at, only to the troops immediately engaged. The percentage of officers shot down in the cavalry and infantry at Santiago runs as follows, from the highest to the lowest: Tenth cavalry, 50 per cent; Ninth, 33 per cent; Third, 27 per cent; Sixth, 25 per cent; rough riders, 24 per cent; Sixth infantry, 28 per cent; Thirteenth, 29 per cent; Tenth, 28 per cent; Sixteenth, 26 per cent; Twenty-fourth, 26 per cent; Second, 23 per cent. In the fight on San Juan hill, which was a battle of less than a day, there were 32 officers shot down. The effectiveness of the long range weapons used in the South African war and the mortality which is looked upon by the laymen as something excessive attract the notice of military men who have had actual experience in war. When the dispatch was published recently stating that General Buller's army was again "in close touch with the Boers," the attention of General Daniel E. Sickles was called to it. "Ha, ha!" said he, and then, reading on further, he saw the statement that the distance between the opposing lines was 1,300 yards. "Well," said he, "that may

two days of battle Longstreet's corps of 15,000 lost 7,000 men killed and wounded, a percentage, you see, about equivalent to the loss of my own corps. "Much has been said about the probable superiority of British artillery. This superiority has not been demonstrated up to this time, but even if the British should be better supplied with modern long range cannon than the Boers, it may not prove to be a great advantage for them. Artillery is, of course, effective to break up solid lines of infantry. Naturally, in assaulting positions held by artillery the columns of assailants must be deep for the reason that a thin line of troops would be blown from the ground and could do nothing; but if there are several lines, then the men of the third or fourth or fifth lines will close up the gaps in the first and second lines, and, if they are persistent, they will be able to do something against the heaviest artillery. It is impossible to make artillery fire effective against troops who are covered behind a height, for instance, or by the lay of the land or by rocks and trees. "I never had much faith in the effectiveness of long range weapons, for, once you teach troops that they can send a bullet a mile, it takes away their intrepidity. Napoleon III demoralized his army by causing the soldiers to think that the long range breechloading chassepot and the mitrailleuse would defeat the enemy. It took all the

of these casualties came from bullets fired from the stone wall. This loss in officers killed was never exceeded but once in the whole civil war, and that was in the case of the Seventh New Hampshire at the storming of Fort Wagner. In that affair 11 officers of this regiment were killed outright. In the attack upon the stone wall the Seventh regiment fought with Hancock's division. This division, as already indicated, was brought in as a supporting column to the initial attack. It consisted of 18 regiments, and there were 19 companies in the line. In the regimental commanders shot down and disabled in one hour. Others were killed or wounded. General Hancock's division lost 2,029 killed and wounded out of 4,834 paper strength; that equals 42 per cent. Caldwell's brigade numbered 1,937 on paper, and lost 52 killed and wounded—that is to say, 2.7 per cent. It might be said that the attack of Hancock's division, coming after other troops had been repulsed, was in the nature of a forlorn hope, but the casualties in South Africa, which have been made the most of as having been heavy, were sustained in actions which should be looked upon as forlorn hope—for instance, the charge of the Highland brigade at Magersfontein and the attack upon Spion Kop. In a forlorn

they strongholds during the hours of darkness and gaining thereby much valuable information. Delagoa bay, around which so much interest is just now centered, is the finest harbor in South Africa and practically the key to the Transvaal. Its value to England, therefore, if they could number it among their possessions, would be readily understood, for it would enable them to cut off the supply of Boer war stores which the Portuguese are doubling to pass through Lourenco Marques. It will doubtless surprise most people to learn that any soldier of the British army who is captured by the enemy gets his pay stopped at once. Therefore, the 2,000 English warriors who are now playing football on the race course

has not been a conflict between armies equally equipped until the present. In the battles between Russia and Turkey the Turks had inferior weapons. Being fanatical fighters, like the dervishes in the Sudan, they were slaughtered by the breechloaders and dynamite shells of the foe. To go back still farther for examples of the execution of weapons in warfare, it is interesting to look at the records of battles in the seventeenth century. In seven great battles of that era, when the masses carried muskets and pikes, the average of casualties was 25 per cent, so that each man stood but about three chances in four of escape. The casualties in the bloodiest battles run as high as 35 per cent. In this class belongs the battle of Lutzen, which proved a victory for the Swedes, but their leader, Gustavus Adolphus, was killed, and one of his regiments lay upon the ground in the order in which the men had stood while fighting. In the middle of the eighteenth century the bayonet attached to the musket superseded the pike. There were 23 great battles fought with smoothbore muskets and bayonets from Fontenoy in 1745 to Waterloo in 1815. The average of casualties for this period of smoothbore musket and bayonet fighting was about 20 per cent. The following 15 battles of the muzzle loading, bayonet period represent the martial nations of the world:

- 1. Elipa, 1807. Loss, 39 per cent.
2. Bunker Hill, 1775. Loss, 24 per cent.
3. Stone River (Murfreesboro), 1862. Loss, 29 1/2 per cent.
4. Marengo, 1800. Loss, 23 per cent.
5. Chancellorsville, 1862. Loss, 21 per cent.
6. Antietam, 1862. Loss, 21 per cent.
7. Lepel, 1818. Loss, 21 per cent.
8. Gettysburg, 1863. Loss, 20 per cent.
9. Shiloh, 1862. Loss, 20 per cent.
10. Land's Lane, 1814. Loss, 19 per cent.
11. Mar-la-Tour, 1870. Loss, 18 per cent.
12. Waterloo, 1815. Loss, 18 per cent.
13. Worth, 1859. Loss, 14 per cent.
14. Solferino, 1859. Loss, 12 per cent.
15. Sadova, 1866. Loss, 12 per cent.

The loss in killed and wounded at the battle of Elipa is placed at 40,000 by conservative estimates. In the figures of Gettysburg given in the table, which are official, the total is little short of 30,000. The first battle belongs to the smoothbore and the second to the rifle barrel era, and the figures show that as weapons improve casualties grow less in percentages. The average was 25 per cent in the days of the musket and pike, 20 per cent with the smoothbore and bayonet, about a similar loss with the rifle barrel and bayonet, and in the Franco-Prussian war, fought with the breechloading rifle, the casualties fell below 16 per cent. In 1881 Chile invaded Peru under disadvantages as great as those under which the United States army labored in Cuba or that of the British in attacking the Boers in their fastnesses in South Africa. The invading army was no greater than that of the defensive army, yet, having breechloaders and modern cannon and machine guns, Chile won at all points, and in the decisive battle of Miraflores actually won a great victory while attacking with an inferior force. As a matter of fact, the up to date weapons have not been fully tested in the South African war. The Boers have the Mauser rifles in great numbers, and also the Mannlicher, a new and savage weapon. The British carry the Lee-Enfield, believed to be, in the long run, the best weapon of the three, but it all depends upon the position of the troops

at Pretoria are in no sense of the word weary. The Boer treatment of war prisoners is forcing commendation now even from the English papers. Here is an instance of their humanity. Twenty-five wounded officers and men captured at the Nicholson's Nek disaster were handed over unconditionally to the British medical staff by the Boers. These men have since recovered and are now proceeding to the front again. A Kafir captured by the Boers while taking a quill dispatch from Mafeking to Kuruman was searched from head to foot and then told to go. The wily native thus escaped, with the dispatch safely concealed up his nose, and reached his destination without further mishap.

INTERESTING WAR FACTS.

Lord Raglan in the Crimea had under him only 25,000 British troops. Lord Roberts will be in command of 130,000 men. Nearly the whole South African plateau is covered with a long, slender grass, which, under the fierce sun, is often as dry as tinder. Nothing can

live in a veiled fire, and in its passing it leaves a desert. Under the cover of the smoke that arises the Boers can utilize that strategy for which they are famous. Lord Roberts before he left England refused to abide by any plan of operations which the war office would have

liked to thrust upon him. He said that while he conducted the campaign in South Africa it would be necessary for him to be perfectly free from restrictions if they wished for success. Colonel Baden-Powell earned from the Matabele the sobriquet of Impeseli, meaning "he that creeps about at night," from his (to them) uncomfortable habit of scouting alone among

their strongholds during the hours of darkness and gaining thereby much valuable information. Delagoa bay, around which so much interest is just now centered, is the finest harbor in South Africa and practically the key to the Transvaal. Its value to England, therefore, if they could number it among their possessions, would be readily understood, for it would enable them to cut off the supply of Boer war stores which the Portuguese are doubling to pass through Lourenco Marques. It will doubtless surprise most people to learn that any soldier of the British army who is captured by the enemy gets his pay stopped at once. Therefore, the 2,000 English warriors who are now playing football on the race course

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