SUGGESTIONS FOR "BATTLE DRILL FOR STRETCHER-BEARERS".

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INTRODUCTION.

Casualty evacuation in zone warfare presents many problems and difficulties that did not arise with trench warfare in which casualties occurred in greater concentration and in a relatively much smaller area so that their location was comparatively simple even though the risk to stretcher-bearers evacuating them was often very great. As a result, training of stretcher-bearers has been mainly directed to methods of evacuation and little attention has been paid to methods of searching for casualties in the vast areas of modern warfare. This is often dismissed with the assumption that the evacuation to the R.A.P. by regimental stretcher-bearers is an easy matter. Such an assumption is unwarranted. The greater distances involved mean that, quite apart from the difficulty of finding the casualties, fewer wounded will be able to walk to the nearest medical post; so that a greater proportion will require evacuation on a stretcher or by transport. The small number of bearers available prevents more than a few being moved manually as assistance from the infantry is likely to be hard to obtain. In addition, modern surgical experience has shown that operation within six hours allows not only a greatly increased chance of recovery but also a greatly reduced time of recovery so that speed is more than ever a factor of vital importance. Speed in movement is a prime demand of Infantry Battle Drill and teaching is given that, during contact with the enemy, there is not time to assist a wounded comrade by applying the first field dressing. Stretcher-bearers should therefore be disposed in such a way that they are able to take over the duty of providing immediate and essential first aid.

On the other hand the well equipped and well trained modern Army has several advantages which assist in the solution of the problem. In the first place the very mobility of this type of warfare militates against a recurrence of the seas of mud resulting from a heavy barrage by static artillery. Through the impassable morasses of the Western Front in the last war no vehicle could hope to travel and the only possible means of evacuation was manual carriage. Secondly, much more transport is available and its use in forward areas only slightly increases a risk that is already present, anywhere in the theatre of war, from bombing. Thirdly, improvement in communications within the infantry by means of wireless offers an opportunity of passing rapidly to the collecting bearers information about the numbers of casualties and the areas in which they have occurred. Fourthly, Infantry
Suggestions for “Battle Drill for Stretcher-Bearers”

Battle Drill teaching supplies a basis on which training for casualty evacuation may be developed. In order to make searching for casualties an efficient process, instead of haphazard hunting, systematized methods of training are required. These methods should be taught primarily to regimental stretcher-bearers but should also be learnt by Field Ambulance Company personnel. In this way stretcher-bearers of a Field Ambulance Section may be conversant with them and thus able to co-operate fully when the section is attached to a battalion group.

Medical Battle Drill is divided into two parts—firstly, searching drills in which no immediate enemy interference is anticipated and, secondly, close support drills in which the bearers co-operate intimately with the infantry during action against the enemy. It must be emphasized that this training deals solely with evacuation from the site of injury to the R.A.P. or Field Ambulance Section.

Drills are used to train personnel in routine methods for dealing with typical problems likely to occur in the field so that collection and evacuation become a process of automatic efficiency rather than allowing each separate circumstance to become a new problem demanding a new solution. Stress is continually laid on the importance of maintaining a high standard of discipline within the squad—which may consist of four privates—and of constant exertion of control by the squad-leader. In addition, the learner is always taught that the drill only provides a basis for initiative and that it should be his servant rather than his master.

A. Searching Drills.

General Principles.—Searching is carried out by individual bearers according to the drill in use. On locating a casualty, the bearer marks the position by some method such as plunging a bayonet, with rifle affixed, into the ground. First aid is only given at this juncture in cases of haemorrhage. The wound is briefly typed before the bearer continues his search, on completion of which he reports to his squad-leader at a previously indicated rendezvous the location and number of casualties that he has found. The latter, on receiving these reports from the members of his squad, is at once able to assess the task before him. He then makes a plan of evacuation and gives his orders. After first aid has been given evacuation is carried out, the casualties being carried or assisted to the nearest point at which they may be collected by transport. Except in mountainous terrain, the distance to such points should never be great in this country or in Western Europe for it is hard to find a single square on the 1 inch to the mile map which does not contain a road or track; besides which much parkland and many fields are passable by transport. Long stretcher carries, therefore, should be rare so that a squad is not occupied for a long time dealing with one patient and bearers are therefore able to distribute their aid more equitably. Walking wounded are directed to the nearest point from which they can be collected.
When a section of three squads is employed the leader of each squad reports, after the search is completed, to the section commander, who is then able to allot his man-power according to the difficulties associated with the task. He must also arrange for at least two bearers to take charge of the transport and act as a loading squad. Furthermore, in making his plan of evacuation, he should continually adopt the solution offering the minimum physical strain for his men. An obvious example is to evacuate downhill rather than uphill where possible.

Before any drill by a section is carried out it is the duty of the section commander to make a brief reconnaissance, call up his order group (consisting of his three squad leaders) and give clear, well-defined orders, always concluding with the query "Any questions?"

In order to obtain the maximum efficiency from the training, every movement should be carried out at the double except when bearers are actually carrying patients. The ability to think and reason clearly while undergoing considerable strain is not easily acquired but, having been acquired, is one of the most valuable faculties of a well trained soldier.

(1) The Sweep for Casualties.—This organized method of searching an area is based on the open order advance of an infantry section with emphasis on all round observation. Numbers 1 and 3 bearers carry the stretcher, with the former in the rear so that he can exert maximum control while numbers 2 and 4 bearers are extended on either flank, the degree of extension depending on the type of the country being searched. It may be as little as 20 yards in long grass or scrub and may be as much as 100 to 150 yards in open parkland or ploughland.

The angles must be particularly watched by the individual bearer concerned. They overlap, so that the whole circumference is covered by the observation of at least one man.

The area to be searched must be defined before the sweep is begun. As indicated above the strip may be 60 to 400 yards broad and the length of the sweep is normally 300 to 400 yards. Thus a section of three squads working in line is able to search a considerable area quickly and thoroughly. The most efficient results are obtained when the direction of the sweep is made at right angles to a road or track as the bearers are then able to search on the outward journey and to evacuate on the return. When, however, it is necessary to search a large open area with a good surface (an area of grassland, for example) it is obviously more simple to order one or two bearers to drive around it in a truck. The sweep is used when this is impracticable.

(2) Wood Clearing is simply an adaptation of the sweep, necessitating a much closer formation, but strips 100 to 150 yards broad can be swept by a section. The section commander must ensure that the line of bearers is kept straight and does not break up into two or more groups. Otherwise it is easily possible to miss casualties. Particular attention must be paid to marking their positions. Should one be hidden by undergrowth, it is advisable...
to pull him clear of it and, in addition, it is found valuable to mark them with white direction signs carried by the bearers for this purpose. They must be placed so that they are easily visible when the bearers, having reported, return to evacuate the casualties, thus eliminating the difficulty of finding them again. The number of signs missing at the end of the sweep from the total used serves as a check on the number of casualties located. Sheets of paper may be used alternatively being fixed to branches in a conspicuous position. Carrying a casualty through a wood is strenuous work and consequently they should be cleared to the nearest edge and then to the road or collecting post except, obviously, in the case where one side of the wood is under enemy observation when visible movement would invite enemy fire.

Different sizes and shapes of wood demand variations of the drill. One strip of wood may only require two squads to search it while the third may be employed searching a nearby copse. Large woods should be searched by strips, direction being kept by compass. The squads should never be allowed to become widely separated or loss of control will inevitably result. In the same way liaison should always be maintained with the transport being employed.

(3) Street Clearing.—This drill also applies to small villages and farms which, together with woods, are localities likely to be held by the enemy as pockets of resistance and by-passed during a general advance, being left to be reduced by reserve troops. In such circumstances casualties to our own troops are almost inevitable. It is therefore wise to have a section of bearers with transport (1 ambulance for lying cases, and 1 30-cwt. vehicle for sitting cases) readily available in order to give immediate assistance after completion of the action. The orders given are brief, as in all battle drill, e.g. “No. 1 squad left, No. 2 squad right, No. 3 loading. Any questions? Move.” Each searching squad then proceeds as follows. The stretcher is left on the road between the first two houses. The No. 1 then searches the gardens and out-houses while the No. 3 searches the interior by definite routine—basement, ground floor, first floor, attic. Nos. 2 and 4 at the same time deal with the second house. After searching, all report back to the stretcher and evacuation is carried out under the orders of the No. 1. As soon as casualties are brought to the street they are taken over by the loading squad which effects a shuttle service with spare stretchers and dressings carried on the transport. The wounded are then loaded under the supervision of the section commander, while the searching squad moves on to the next house, the transport being moved up to keep abreast of it. Should one squad finish more quickly than the other it is detailed to assist the latter. This method may be applied equally efficiently with irregular buildings, such as those encountered in a farm. In this case the squad leaders must define clearly to each member of their squads what buildings each must search. It is advisable to keep these “bites” small as otherwise one
bearer may be occupied for a long time while the remainder of his squad
finish early and waste valuable time waiting for him. Each bearer must be
fully conversant with methods of extracting wounded from awkward places,
especially in letting them down from windows or roofs. First aid, apart
from haemorrhage which is dealt with immediately it is encountered, is
mainly given in the transport by the ambulance orderly with the assistance
of one member of the loading squad.

Adjuncts to Training.—(1) The "Sweep for Casualties" is taught in the
first instance as a parade ground drill, in order that the fundamental principles
may be thoroughly appreciated before it is used in the open country. The
fact that this drill is new and unorthodox should not be allowed to become
an excuse for slackness or untidy turnouts. All the usual smartness of the
parade ground must be maintained.

(2) The Provision of "Casualties."—It is often difficult to find men whose
time can be spared for this rather passive role. Sometimes it can be done
by mutual exchange of two sections in training. As a substitute, straw-filled
sandbags or white direction signs may be used. These may be marked (on
the reverse side so that examination of the substitute is necessary) with the
legends "1", "2", or "S". These indicate a useful method of abbreviating wound types as one-man, two-man or stretcher carries. These
substitutes must be treated during evacuation with the respect that would
be shown to a wounded man; e.g. one marked "S" must be placed on a
stretcher and carried by at least two bearers.

(3) Placing of casualties should be made as logical as possible. For
example, in street-clearing they should not be placed in totally inaccessible
positions. It is not a game of "hide and seek.” On the other hand,
although logically casualties might be expected in the street itself, it is rather
prodigal to place them where they are so easily found when the supply is
limited.

(4) Bombed streets offer the most realistic training grounds and should
be used wherever possible.

(5) Blackboard schemes are excellent for welding the three searching
drills into a cohesive whole and preparing bearers for the sort of task they
are most likely to face. An area from the map, preferably one square
kilometre, is enlarged on the blackboard and details of the fields, with their
crops, are filled in. A very brief description of the type of action presumed
to have taken place is given. Each man is then asked to consider how he,
as section commander, with, for example, 1 ambulance and 1 30-cwt.
vehicle, would search the area. After a few minutes they form squad
syndicates. This will be found to provoke much discussion and interest.
The answers should be divided into phases, each being a complete move­
ment with a rendezvous for the section and transport at the end. The best
answer is then taken and the casualties located during each phase are marked
Suggestions for "Battle Drill for Stretcher-Bearers"

on the board, the men being asked to make a plan of evacuation for each phase in the same way.

Such schemes can be practised afterwards, on the ground, but it is more interesting for the men to be given an entirely fresh area.

B.—Close Support Drills.

General Principles.—Bearers should be taught fieldcraft and personal camouflage to the highest possible standard. They must never, by failing in these, reveal to the enemy the infantry they support. They should also be taught medical fieldcraft, this being the approach to, and the removal of, the wounded man under fire both by day and by night. Wire offers a special problem as it is designed, not to prevent attack, but to hinder in order that defending troops may have a good opportunity to fire. Therefore casualties in its vicinity may be expected and the negotiation of such obstacles, with wounded, should be a part of this training. It may be possible on occasion for the bearers to be given a covering smoke screen in which case the stretcher makes a valuable improvised bridge.

Bearers should also have a knowledge of elementary infantry tactics in order that they may have a clear understanding of the general methods employed in infantry battle drill.

(1) Drill for the Support of the Company in Defence.—The squad attached to a company taking up a definite position should carry out the following routine: (a) Site a company first-aid post, near Company Headquarters, in a position sheltered from enemy fire and, if possible, close to a point attainable by transport. The only transport likely to come up to the position is a ration and ammunition lorry and that at night. (b) Dig slit trenches carefully disposing of the soil) for themselves and temporary accommodation of wounded. All possible comfort should be given to the latter by such improvisations as beds made of bracken and roofs of branches. (c) Ascertain every platoon and section position, with any alternative positions or outposts that may be taken up. Every bearer must learn how to reach all of them both by day and by night. (d) Locate the nearest point to which an ambulance may be brought with reasonable safety. If required, request should be made by wireless to the R.M.O.

A drill for the use of the Bren-gun carrier in casualty evacuation should be taught in order that prompt action may be taken when the opportunity occurs. The squad may be kept intact at Company Headquarters, or one or more bearers sent out to platoon positions, depending on circumstances.

(2) Drill for the Support of the Company in Advance.—Two companies, covering a front approximately 1,000 yards, normally lead a battalion advance. They may operate several miles ahead of the main body. The tendency is to use roads in order that battalion transport may subsequently follow and even if this is not the case it is likely that some road or track will be found within the area.
To deal adequately with the casualties that occur in attacks against enemy strong-points it is desirable that two squads, with a N.C.O. in charge, should be available for each of these leading companies. The squad additional to the normal complement is found if possible for each of the leading companies from the resources of the attached Field Ambulance Section. This has three squads, the third being held in reserve at the R.A.P. When such assistance cannot be provided, a modified form of the drill can be practised with the one regimental squad available.

During the various forms of attack the infantry split up into groups and the aim of the medical services should be to cover each of these groups by the observation of one bearer, who may be able to watch the group he is covering from a distance of anything up to 100 yards. He is thus not unduly exposed to small arms fire. Particular attention must be paid to the troops taking part in the assault, among whom the majority of casualties may be expected to occur.

In order that the medical N.C.O. may fully understand the action, and thus be able to deploy his bearers rapidly, he becomes an integral member of the company order group, in common with the commanders of other supporting arms.

After the objective has been carried, the routine drill of locating, typing and reporting the casualties to the squad-leader is carried out and a plan of evacuation is made by him. If possible they are cleared to the axis of advance but, failing this, dumps of casualties may be formed or they may even, if time prevents these measures, be left in situ after essential first aid has been given. While this is being done it is the duty of the medical N.C.O. to ascertain how many casualties have occurred and to decide what method of disposal will be adopted.

This he reports to the Infantry Company Commander who incorporates the information in his routine report to Battalion Headquarters, stating progress, casualties and ammunition expenditure. In addition he indicates the earliest moment at which it will be reasonably safe for transport to move up. Should the casualties be left in situ the map reference of the area concerned should also be reported for the information of the R.M.O. The latter is then able to arrange the earliest possible collection of the casualties. If these are evacuated to a road or dump there is no difficulty in locating them but, if they are left scattered about the area, they must be collected by using the Sweep for Casualties. When possible, close support bearers should leave their casualties in ditches or hollows, especially if beside a road, in order that they may be protected from air attack. Immediately the close support bearers have completed their task they re-join the company which will have consolidated ahead. It must be stressed that the bearers should not be left behind if the company continues the advance, in which case collection must be left to reserve bearers using the searching drill. If this principle is neglected the company will find itself without any immediate medical aid.

25
Suggestions for "Battle Drill for Stretcher-Bearers"

With one squad only available, the processes of evacuation to the axis or dump formation are limited by the time taken by the company to reorganize and continue the advance. In this case the casualties must usually be left in situ as indicated above. Evacuation under these circumstances is inevitably delayed.

By using these methods, however, prompt first aid to the wounded is assured and every wounded man can at least be comforted by the knowledge that someone knows where he is.

(3) Drill for River-crossing.—Attacks over rivers by infantry usually take place at night for such natural obstacles provide a splendid defence line. Assault boats are customarily employed and are therefore available, after the crossing has been effected, for use by bearers in casualty evacuation. In order to allow this to be done with essential quietness and efficiency a routine method is taught.

Further training should also be given in the many excellent improvisations for evacuating wounded over water obstacles.

Adjuncts to Training.—(1) Battle inoculation should be practised to the fullest degree. In addition to its value as a preparation for actual battle it provides a great stimulus to morale. Fieldcraft schemes, in which wounded are removed under actual fire, should be carried out frequently.

(2) Support of a company in defence should be practised by having a suitable area selected by an infantry officer having each platoon and section position defined. Bearers may then acquire spatial relationships before attempting to carry out their drill.

(3) Parade Ground Drills may be used with advantage in the early stages of training in the support of the company in advance. They are used to convey the basic concepts only and serve as an introduction to somewhat complicated tactics. The nine armed R.A.S.C. personnel of a Field Ambulance Company (or one section of infantry) are used, each man representing one infantry group. White direction signs, marked as before, are dropped on whistle signals to represent casualties. In this way considerable economy in man-power is effected during training. When the routine has been learnt on the parade-ground skeleton schemes may be carried out using areas comparable to those employed by a whole company. Bearers should then be able to co-operate with a full infantry company including field-firing schemes.

A Parade Ground Drill is also used with advantage in the initial stages of assault-boat training.

Discussion.

The methods described provide a system for the evacuation of casualties from forward battle areas. To be successful they must be used in training until the squad or the section develops a high standard of teamwork. In the case of the close support drills co-operation from infantry commanders is essential. The training of regimental medical personnel has sometimes been
sadly neglected and it is felt that this frequently results from lack of knowledge on the part of infantry commanders of the type of training that should be employed. Physical fitness, of course, is in this training a sine qua non and fit men only should be employed as stretcher-bearers.

The use of these methods stimulates morale in two ways. In the first place the infantry realize that, if wounded, detailed arrangements for their assistance do exist. Such an assurance must surely lead to even greater determination. In the second place, medical personnel are able to appreciate more clearly their role in action and acquire, after this training, a sense of pride of achievement which is of great value. This is particularly true in the case of N.C.O.s and, on occasion, this training may be the basis for action by non-medical officers R.A.M.C.

Casualties among bearers are certain to occur but it should be possible to replace them by having a trained reserve available with each infantry platoon.

**Summary.**

(1) The necessity for a system of casualty evacuation from forward areas is indicated.

(2) Medical Battle Drill Methods are described, being divided into (a) Searching Drills; (b) Close Support Drills. Special reference is made to the principles involved.

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