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Training for the Trenches



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**By
Leslie Vickers**



BRITISH "TANK" IN ACTION

INTRODUCTION

Since the Great European War broke out, printing presses have been busy producing text books, handbooks and guides for soldiers. Military authorities and civilians alike have come to realise that this war has changed many of our old conceptions of strategy and that it has introduced conditions that are entirely unprecedented. New methods have had to be devised—sometimes on the field itself in the midst of the greatest difficulties—for meeting new and novel methods of warfare. Every deadly engine of destruction has called forth some new invention to cope with it. Soldiers have had to live and fight under conditions that to the lay mind, or to the mind of the military men of a few years ago, would seem to be impossible. It is reasonable to assume that the inventive genius of the world will be turned more and more in the direction of the problem of how to construct still more terrible machines of destruction. The next war, if there be one, is not likely to be any less fearful than the present, so that the soldier who is called upon to engage in it will require to know the lessons that have been learned in this war. The author hopes that from a fairly long training in England in preparation for work in France, and from some months in the trenches on the Western British front, he may be able to offer suggestions that will be of value to men who are training themselves with a view to becoming efficient soldiers. He sends this little book forth, not as a treatise on war, nor yet as a scientific handbook. He merely desires it to serve to bring home lessons that are sometimes too dearly bought. "Experientia docet" is the proverb that we used to write in our copy books, and he will feel that he is repaid if, from his experience, others are enabled to learn. While he trusts that there will be many veteran soldiers and instructors who will be glad to have this information in convenient form, he intends this little book primarily for the

use of those who are civilians in the process of becoming soldiers.

L. V.

CHAPTER I. THE CIVILIAN AND THE SOLDIER

The change from civilian to soldier is one that is not easily accomplished. We soon find that there are many new conditions to be faced, many new and uncongenial tasks to be undertaken, and all sorts of strange and novel regulations to which we must render the strictest obedience. In civilian life we become thoroughly independent. We come and go more or less as we please. We do not usually ask the permission of any one if we wish to depart a little from our customary habits. Not since we left school have we answered to roll-calls to any considerable extent, and only in the summertime, "for the fun of it," have we done our own housekeeping and submitted to domestic duties. In civilian life we have been allowed to work out our own salvation, and if we have been part of a machine at all it has been a huge social machine in which we did not figure as a cog but rather as an attachment.

In military life things are all changed. We become at once cogs in the great machine. We have a definite work to perform. The smooth running of the plant depends on us. We lose much of our independence. We realise that other cogs depend on us, and, further, that there are many bigger cogs who drive us and whose bigness and authority we must thoroughly appreciate and recognise. In my own experience, after some years of being my own master to the degree that only the professional man understands, I found it much to my dislike to be obliged to get permission before I could leave the camp grounds for half an hour. A sentry with a fixed bayonet helped me a little in the appreciation of my new circumstances, and when in a few days' time I was the sentry myself, it did me the world of good and took the edge off my displeasure. Again it is not to the liking of the ordinary man to be told that he must rise at a certain hour, and much less is it to his liking to be told that he must be in

bed at a certain hour after which talking is considered a misdemeanour and is punishable. But a few weeks of enforced early rising makes one give thanks for the pure fresh air of the small hours of the day; and a few days of hard physical exertion in the process of training makes a man glad to conform to the rule of early to bed, and gives him reason to class as a nuisance the man who talks after "Lights Out" and thus prevents him from sleeping.

In civilian life, too, a man usually chooses with scrupulous care his roommate or mates. In the army one may be placed in a tent or a billet with men who are by no means congenial, unless he is lucky enough to have been able to join a group of companions who form a unit. But even the experience of having uncongenial companions is not altogether without its compensations; for every civilian finds that he has need of rearranging his estimates of men when he enters the army. The sooner our own corners are rubbed off the better, and many of them are inevitably rubbed off when we are ten or thirteen in a tent!

The quality that is the salvation of the volunteer is his keenness. We volunteer because we are keen and we would be ashamed to be otherwise. The rules and regulations of army life are liable to try our tempers and our patience. There may come times when we question very seriously the wisdom of having "joined up." There may be occasions when we thoroughly despise our seniors and conclude that everything military was arranged for our oppression. Bit by bit we shall lose the conviction that we "know it all" already, and as knowledge increases within us, we shall appreciate more and more the knowledge and experience of those placed over us. Regulations and even red tape will be seen to have a wise purpose, though, to the end of our days, we may long for some official scissors to cut it.

The change from civilian to soldier is produced in one way only—The Learning of Obedience. This is the first and