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NOTES ON THE EMPLOYMENT OF HOTCHKISS AUTOMATIC RIFLES
DURING RECENT OPERATIONS.

1. GENERAL.

During the late operations the Hotchkiss Automatic Rifle has thoroughly proved its value as an ideal weapon for Cavalry. It seems generally to have been used in accordance with the principles laid down in "Notes on the Tactical Employment of Hotchkiss Automatic Rifles" and the results obtained have been most satisfactory.

It is emphasised in several reports that the weapon is essentially one of opportunity and that the value of surprise effect cannot be over-estimated. The effect on the enemy of flanking movements by small parties accompanied by one or more of these guns is also greatly insisted upon.

Some difference of opinion appears to have arisen as to whether this weapon is most effectively employed when used as a troop weapon, or when grouped as "Hotchkiss Troops" or even as "Hotchkiss Squadrons". It is considered that the normal role of this rifle must be held to be that of a troop weapon, in which character it forms (a) a most valuable reinforcement of fire power to the troop to which it belongs, (b) is available to take advantage of any local opportunity for effective action, and (c) utilizes to the full the characteristics of mobility and ubiquity which are two of its most important assets. At the same time it is not considered desirable to lay down hard and fast rules as to their employment on all occasions and the best solution of the problem appears to be contained in the following remarks by the G.O.C., Yeomanry Mounted Division - "There may be occasions when it is better to employ them grouped, and when these occasions arise let them be grouped. There will be other, and in my opinion, more frequent occasions when they will be better placed with their troops. As with the Horse Artillery, sometimes it is better brigaded, sometimes it is better to have the batteries with the brigades, because Cavalry is the arm of opportunity and opportunities will frequently be lost if brigades have no batteries with them. Every occasion must be dealt with according to the situation."

It is suggested in one report that in mounted action, if not remembered and told to fall out, the Hotchkiss Rifles will advance with the rest of the Squadron, straggle and obstruct the remainder. On page 3 "Notes on Tactical Employment of Hotchkiss Automatic Rifles" when dealing with the "dismounted" attack it is laid down that the Squadron Commander should distribute and tell off his guns as he thinks fit as early as possible. If this principle is also adhered to in mounted action whenever it is desired to use these guns in groups for a special purpose, it is thought that no such difficulty should arise, and in any case the position in the Squadron of the Hotchkiss Rifles during mounted action, when no special orders regarding them are given, could be made a simple matter of drill.

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They are said in one report to be an ideal weapon for covering fire "as they can work close behind the troops". These guns, owing to the unsteadiness of their mountings, should only be used for overhead covering fire, which is presumably referred to, under most exceptional circumstances, when the nature of the ground precludes all chance of casualties to our own troops, otherwise disaster is bound to occur and the confidence of the troops in this weapon will be impaired.

2. EMPLOYMENT DURING OPERATIONS.

(a) In attack. (Dismounted). The method of employment which appears to have been most generally adopted was to push guns forward to positions in front of the general line from which they could, by their fire, cover the further advance of the troops and assist the advance of the Machine Guns. They were also on several occasions pushed forward on to the flanks of the enemy, from which positions they were enabled either to pin him to the ground or force him to evacuate his position.

(b) In Defence. In conjunction with the Vickers Guns of the Machine Gun Squadrons their value has been very great. Their moral value both to our own troops and in the effect produced on the enemy is also noted.

(c) In Advanced Posts and with Small Patrols. Hotchkiss Rifles have been used with success when employed as above on several occasions.

3. The replies to the information asked for upon the following points are summarised as follows :-

(a) Ammunition Supply. Various methods were adopted and appear to have worked satisfactorily. The fact that the nature of the country during a great part of the operations allowed pack animals to be brought close up to the firing line greatly facilitated the supply of ammunition.

In no case are guns reported to have run short of ammunition.

(b) Expenditure of Ammunition. On the whole expenditure was not heavy, the greatest number of rounds reported as having been fired by one gun in a day being 1,800.

The fact is emphasised, however, that unless fire is well controlled and men are trained not to use automatic fire unless the target or situation warrants it, expenditure will inevitably become excessive.

(c) Facility of Transport in Action. No difficulty was experienced in this respect.

(d) Vulnerability. Reports vary, but the general experience appears to be that heavy casualties are usually the result of one or two things

- (1) Bundling together of the Gun Detachment,
- (2) The use of excessive automatic fire.

(e) Co-operation with Machine Gun Sections. Appears to have been good throughout, the Hotchkiss Rifles and Machine Guns being used to cover each other's advance or retirement, as required.

In defence the co-ordination of the two weapons appears also to have been well considered.

(f) Effects of Fire at Various Ranges. Reports received work out approximately as follows :-

Up to 500 the lateral dispersion of the cone of fire is so small that unless the target is oblique or in onfilade the best results are obtained by repetition.

500 - 800 most effective.

800 - 1200 effective against suitable targets.

1200 - 2000 inaccurate, but occasionally useful for its moral effect on the enemy, also to induce them to believe that a line is strongly held by Machine Guns.

One report speaks of their accuracy at long ranges, this, however, is in entire disagreement with the general opinion on the subject.

(g) Centre Load versus Side Load. The great majority of opinion is in favour of the Side Load. No cases of sore backs resulting therefrom are recorded nor is any instance given of the loads slipping.

One report mentions that in hilly country the clearance between the horse's neck and the muzzle of the gun, when the centre load is adopted, is said to be insufficient.

4. EQUIPMENT.

Various suggestions for improvements, also for the provision of Asbestos Gloves, Slings for carrying the Gun at the Trail, etc., are brought forward.

These are being dealt with separately.