

CHAPTER XVI.

SKIRMISHING.

STRATEGY loses its advantages against an enemy who accepts few or none of the conventionalities of civilized warfare. The Indian is present one day and when next heard from is marauding in another state or territory; and oftener still, when supposed to be many miles distant, he is in ambush almost within range. He is like the flea, 'put your finger on him and he is not there.' Living off the country, without impediments of any description, and with no lines of retreat to cover, he is enabled to withhold himself from combat, unless he finds himself very superior in number and position.

That portion of our little army scattered over the vast Western Frontier is unable to strike such an enemy an offensive blow, and the prudence and efficiency of our commanding officers are frequently taxed to the extreme, when endeavoring to preserve the morale of the troops by acting even on the defensive.

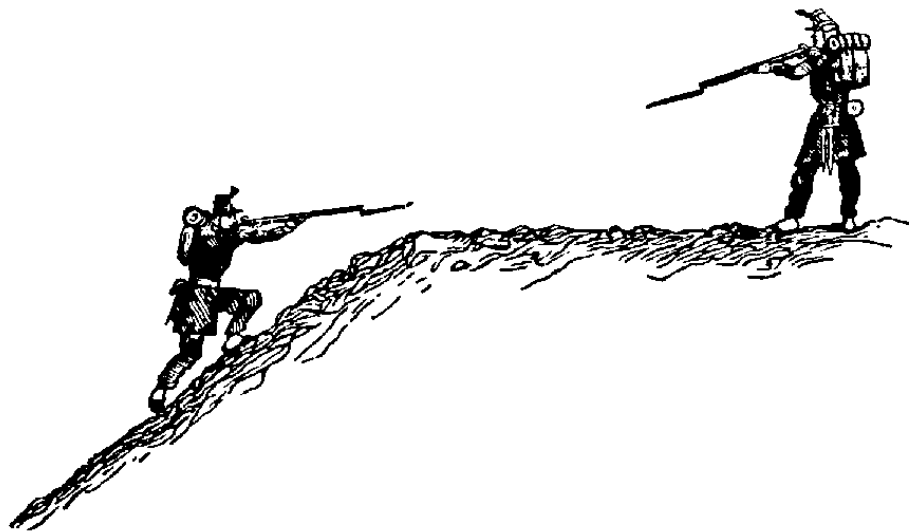
While success is sure and good fortune is with the Indian, foremost in the attack is the post of fame; but when he fails in battle, or when fortune turns against him, rather than pay the forfeit of indiscretion he will abandon an attack or pursuit, and trust to the speed of his pony for escape; or, as a last resort, will abandon his horse and baggage and take to the rocks or timber on foot. Promptest action is then the only safeguard against his escape.

He exhibits marvelous abilities in horsemanship. When fighting upon an open prairie he will frequently cast himself on the opposite side of his pony, until a foot on the back and a face under the neck of the pony are all that can be seen, and will fire with great accuracy either above or under him while at full speed. Any obstacle to the pony is a serious obstacle to the warrior.

When advancing to the attack, he invariably annoys the flanks; and when on the most unfavorable ground will manage in some manner to perform a flank movement, seeming to thoroughly understand the moral effect consequent on having the flanks even slightly pressed.

He is very quick to secure the nearest commanding covered position, and in a lesser time will have made himself well acquainted with the ground—its contour, its relief, its peculiarities of slope and its successive rises. Having the heights, he well understands the necessity of taking position very near the *military crest*; and, by placing himself close to the ground, will, while unobserved, watch every movement of the enemy, and at the most opportune moment will open a deadly fire.

The drawing shows how the defender (who, while stand-

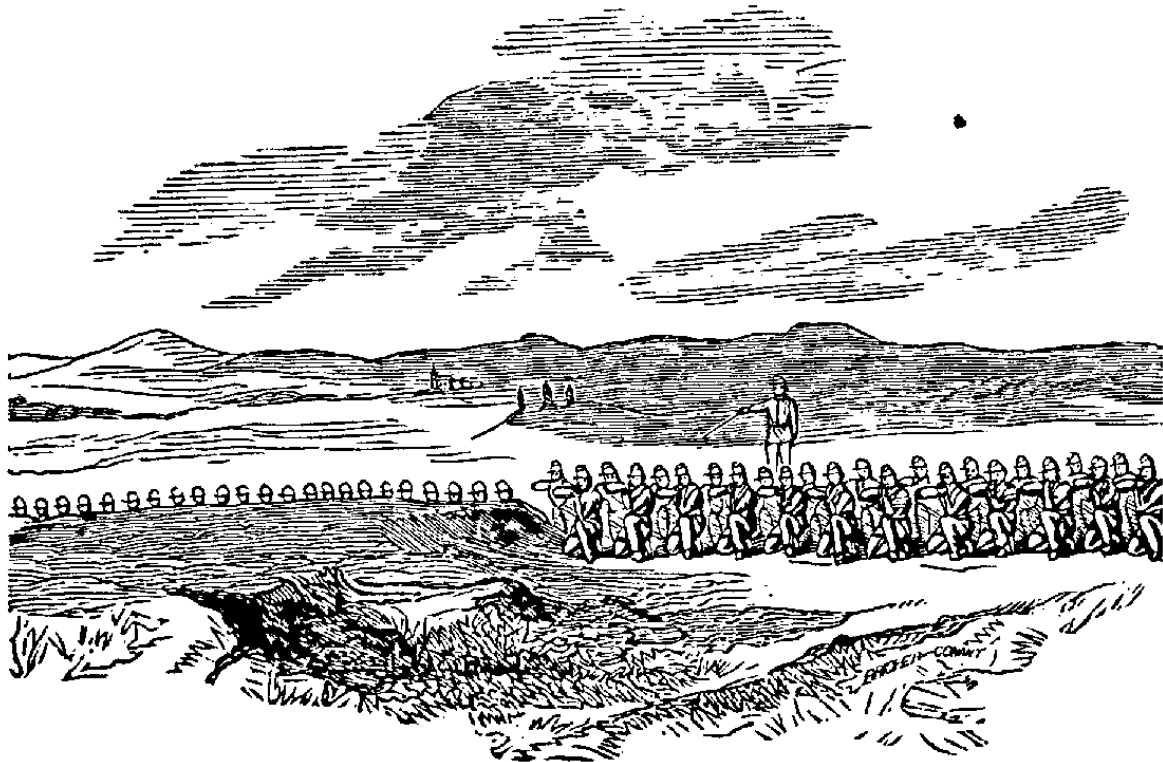


ing near the military crest, uncovers only his shoulders and

be thrown to the ground, with their legs tied together, or may be shot and used as a breastwork when there is but little time for preparation. An Indian dislikes, above all things, to attack a foe holding a defensive position of any kind, and is very cautious, and even cowardly, in his advances.

While of a very inferior order as regards discipline, and the courage that necessarily goes with it, he is at the same time very superior to all his foes in cunning and patience.

When the ground is undulating, rocky or woody, it is easy to avoid the enemy's sight and fire; but, when it is bare and level, the art of constructing cover is of first importance. The history of all battles of late years has shown the expediency of making use of natural shelter or constructing field intrenchments. Not only is such artificial shelter necessary in action, but it is frequently invaluable for the purpose of concealing the troops before the fire has opened.



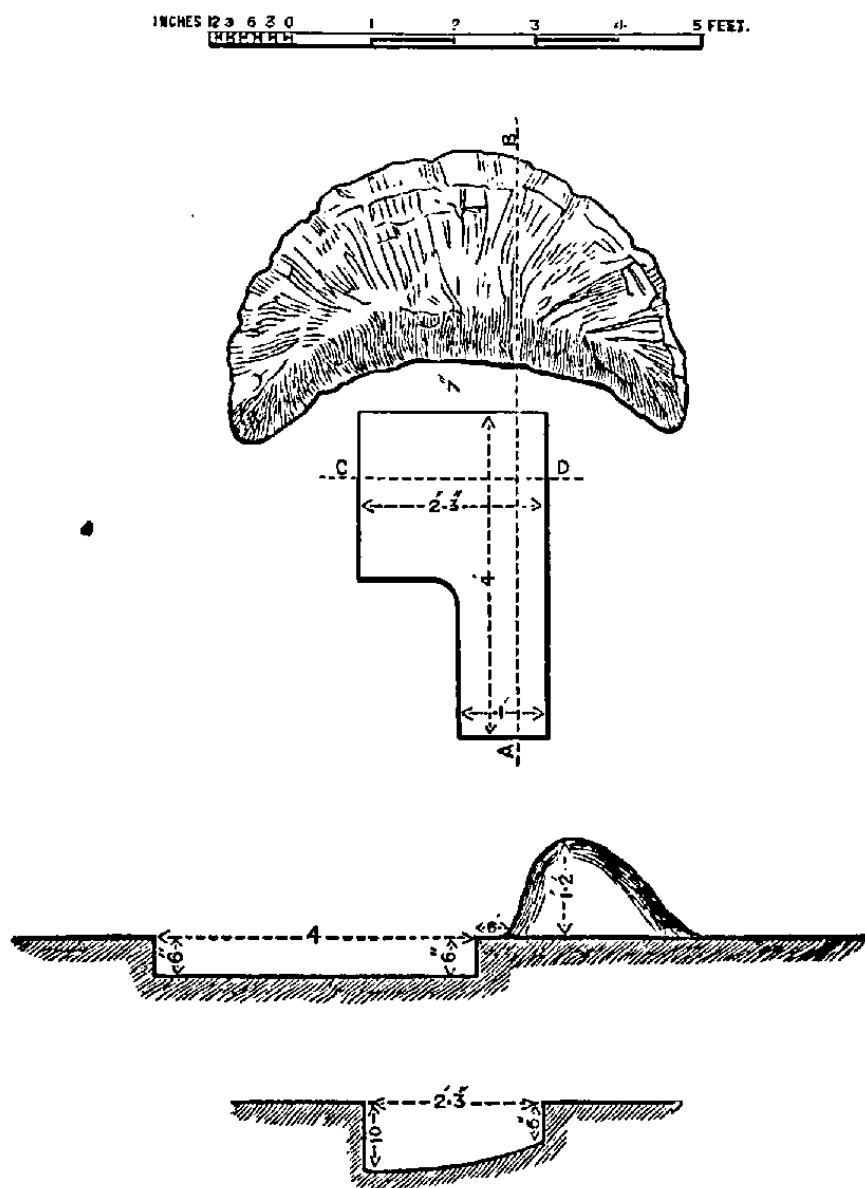
IN TRENCH.

IN THE OPEN.

All soldiers, and especially recruits, should be frequently exercised in throwing up *shelter-pits* and *shelter-trenches*, on grounds of variable contours, and where there is no natural cover.

A very slight parapet of newly excavated earth is sufficient to protect men from the effects of rifle balls. Experiment shows that the penetration of the ball (service rifle) at a range of 10 yards is 20 inches, and only 10 inches at 200 yards.

After a little practice, each soldier will ascertain the form of pit that best suits and protects him. The depth need



SHELTER-PIT FOR SKIRMISHERS.

not be uniform, but should be at least ten inches where the body rests, and six inches elsewhere. With a view to lessening the effect of the enemy's fire, the soldier should lie down well under and behind the cover.

The diagram shows the dimensions of pit and parapet that seem most desirable in practice.

The soldier should never be separated from an intrenching tool of some description. Many are the instances recorded where it was impossible to forward the *intrenching tools* to the front until after the exigency for their use had passed, and the men were compelled to use tin plates, tin cans, fragments of canteens, knives, sticks, etc., in order to get temporary shelter from the enemy's most galling fire.

I am an advocate of Colonel Rice's trowel bayonet, after several practical tests of its merits. It has already been noticed on page 95. There is no doubt as to its excellence.* General Miles indorses its usefulness as follows :

I am fully satisfied that its utility and value are as well established as that of any article carried by the soldier ; that it would increase the efficiency of any army ; and that it should be universally adopted by the entire army. If the opinion of officers com-

*The author's "*Combination Knife-trowel and Tent-peg*," is no improvement on Colonel Rice's bayonet, so far as the *trowel* is concerned, but it handily combines the intrenching tool and a great many other necessary articles for field equipment.

The scabbard (one edge sharp) is of the same shape and size as the blade of the trowel bayonet. A knife (rasp, saw or any other article required by the particular man who uses it), enters the scabbard and is retained in position by means of a small but strong spring. The back edge of the scabbard is prepared so as to form a convenient wrench, screw-driver, shell-extractor, etc. ; while to the upper and outer edge is attached a small neck and ring, so as to convert it into a suitable tent-peg or picket-pin, when driven into the ground. While on the march the scabbard, with knife encased, is hooked to the belt and worn at the side. For intrenching and chopping purposes, the whole is unhooked and used. To use the knife it is simply drawn from the scabbard ; and after arrival into camp, the scabbard (with or without the knife) is driven into the ground wherever needed.

Each soldier might be provided with a knife-trowel, to be worn on the body ; and each cavalry-man, packer, etc., might have attached to his saddle an additional trowel, containing a rasp, saw, etc.

manding troops in the field is considered of value, I believe that opinion is decidedly in favor of its adoption.

The drawing shows the manner of forming *shelter-trenches*.

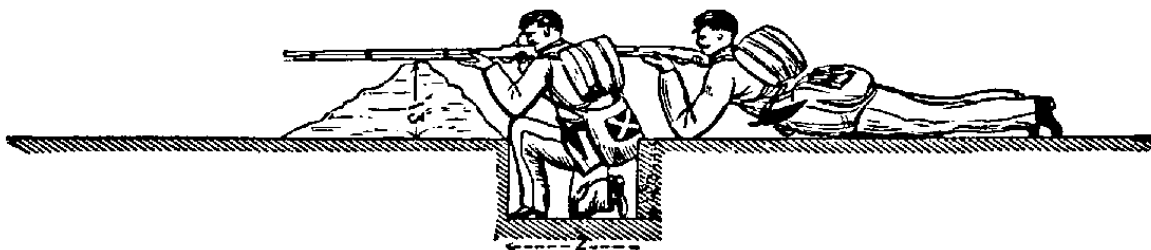


AT WORK.

Having arrived on the line (not necessarily straight, but determined by the features of the ground, so as to secure all natural cover), the men either stack or ground arms, and begin to throw the earth to the front (using both hands if necessary) so as to form a parapet from 16 to 20 inches high. All available turf, logs or rocks should be used as a revetment to the interior slope of the parapet.

The main object of these trenches is to afford cover from the fire of the enemy until the proper moment for advancing against him.

When the trench has been made 2 feet wide and 15 inches



ONE RANK KNEELING IN TRENCH, AND FILE-CLOSERS LYING DOWN IN REAR.

deep, it will afford excellent cover for one rank kneeling in it, and file-closers lying down in rear. If the trench be made $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet wide, it will afford cover for two ranks kneeling inside of it; if it be 7 feet wide, it will allow the men to lie down in it.

The greatest prudence must be observed when charging Indians, as it is their favorite ruse to scatter before the pursuers, and then close again in bands and attack the rear and

