

merely as hints for novices. Avoid the self-styled guide who meets you in remote places with a book of glowing testimonials, and who is always perfectly ready to undertake to conduct you anywhere and everywhere. He is almost certainly incompetent. Remember that a guide should be trusty and trusted; he must necessarily be your companion, and he should be chosen with discrimination. It is possible that the time may come when your life will be in his hands; all the more reason, then, why you should not imperil his life and your own by recklessness or by foolish disregard of ordinary precautions. The result to be attained should be in proportion to the risk required to achieve it, and there is no cowardice in seeking to avoid preventable accidents. If you meditate anything more ambitious than the simplest excursions, it is not sufficient that your guide should be a good climber. He must be this, and more. He must tackle untried ground with a sort of intuitive perception of the best route to be followed; he must not be at fault as to the best point at which to attempt a crevasse. He must be quick, brave, loyal, fertile in resource. There are many amongst the best class of Alpine guides who fulfil these conditions, and they are, as a rule, engaged year after year, months beforehand. Possibly the worst set

of guides in the Alps, taking them as a body, are those at Chamounix. With some few exceptions, it may be said of them that their rapacity is enormous, their ignorance sublime.

Last year seems to have been, on the whole, one of the best Alpine seasons ever known, and, in the record of the year, three feats stand out beyond their fellows. German climbers accomplished the ascent of the Meije from La Grave, and the descent of the Eiger by the dreaded *Mitteleggi arête*; whilst Mr. King, a member of the English Alpine Club, succeeded, after a toilsome climb from Courmayeur which necessitated sleeping out two nights, in accomplishing the first ascent of the Aiguille Blanche de Peuterey. Unhappily, the year did not pass without bringing its usual tale of disaster—a better, or at any rate a more accurate word, perhaps, in many cases than “accident”; and foremost among the casualties of the season must be placed the death of a French abbé and two guides on the Col des Courtes. It is an unpleasant episode to dwell upon, and it need only be said that there must surely be something near akin to madness in attempting, in bad weather, to cut one’s way up an ice-slope which has never been crossed, even in fine weather, and which, moreover, possesses an evil reputation for falling stones.

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HOW I BECAME A SERGEANT OF VOLUNTEERS.

OW did you become a sergeant?” is a question that has over and over again been put to me by enthusiastic recruits, many of whom seemed to think that there was some royal road to obtaining the chevrons. The shortest and most simple answer is that I had to work hard for it; but as this may seem hardly sufficient for any future inquirers, I will endeavour to give, as briefly

as possible, the circumstances attending my volunteer life until I took my place in the “supernumerary” rank.

Coming of a family which erstwhile has contributed considerably more than its quota towards the defenders of our island home, I was early impressed with the idea that it was my duty, at least, to join the volunteers. Not having been in London for any considerable length of time, and knowing no one actively connected with the movement, I was unaware that a recommendation from one or two existing members was required before a recruit was allowed to join any Metropolitan regiment. A subsequent knowledge of this fact, however, explained what at the moment seemed the rather curious behaviour of the two gentle-

men whom I met in the orderly-room of one of the largest London corps, and to whom I mildly stated my desire to be enrolled. I was at once asked if I knew anybody in the regiment, to which I, innocently enough, replied in the negative. It then dawned upon me that I had—if I may be allowed the expression—“put my foot in it.” The shorter and younger of the two, fixing a glass to his eye, gazed at me for what seemed minutes, but could only have been seconds, with a look of mournful reproach, whilst the stern look on the weather-beaten face of the other seemed to meditate some more active measures on my unwarranted intrusion. But just as I thought it time to retreat, a whispered consultation was held, the result being that I was asked as to who I was, what I was, where I lived, and lastly—but by no means least—why I had selected that particular corps.

Another consultation followed, but I firmly believe it was to my answer on the last-named point that I was indebted for having in the books as my two sponsors the names of those two fly-wheels of a volunteer regiment, the adjutant and the sergeant-major. Having thus been duly sworn in to “defend Her Majesty against all enemies whatsoever,” &c. &c., I was then given a book of rules, which pointed out when I was to attend drills, and the number I should have to do to qualify myself: first, for admission into the ranks, and afterwards for my yearly efficiency.

I found that I could do five drills a week if I wished, so decided to get through my recruit stage

as soon as possible—a course which I should recommend to all, for several reasons. In the first place, if you drill at short intervals you are less likely to forget what has been already learned than if you only attended in a desultory fashion, whilst if you get on rapidly and well, you will not only please the staff instructors, but show your captain that you have your heart in the work—things which will sometimes be found to have not a little to do with getting promotion. As regards myself, joining as I did at the end of June, although only required to do thirty drills before the expiration of the volunteer year (then November 30th, not October 31st, as now), I managed to get in about fifty. Nor was this all; for having purchased the drill-sergeant's *vade mecum*, the Red Book, I worked at it at home until I was even almost letter-perfect in the words of command.

During the following year I did nearly eighty battalion and company drills, on many occasions finding my knowledge of the words of command, &c., standing me in good stead, as when sufficient corporals and sergeants did not attend I was found to be a fairly efficient deputy. At the end of this year a vacancy occurred, and as a reward for my assiduity I was made corporal. Sometimes, however, in those days a considerable amount of favouritism was displayed, but I am glad to say that this has almost entirely died out, arbitrary nominations having been superseded by competitions, open to all members of the company.

Having pretty accurately pointed out above what sort of training is desirable, I will only add here that the would-be "non-com." should recollect that it is not sufficient for him to be merely able to give the instruction as laid down in the Red Book, but when drilling a squad, as he may have to do, he will find that a good *distinct* word of command has a great deal to do with the result of the competition. Unfortunately, the fact that the words of caution and instruction should be given slowly and with deliberation, whilst the executive word can scarcely be too sharp, is very often overlooked both by commissioned and non-commissioned officers, the inevitable consequence ensuing that a slovenly word of command causes slovenly drill. As for the gibberish into which many distort the necessary words—a habit introduced by the older class of sergeant instructors—I would at once reduce the man using it, for although it may be understood by the men of his own company from long usage, it should be remembered that if the volunteers were called out, the ranks would most certainly be swelled by a large accession of recruits, or men from other corps, to whom such words would have as much significance as Chinese or Chaldee.

But we will suppose that a competition has been held, and that the desired two stripes have been obtained: some time will elapse before the corporal can reason-

ably expect to blossom into a full-blown sergeant. This period varies greatly. In some regiments that I know, a great many companies have had the same sergeants and corporals as when I first noticed them seventeen or eighteen years ago; but if, on joining, the recruit tells the adjutant—or, better still, the sergeant-major—that he intends to "go in" for promotion, he may get put into a company where there is the most chance, or at all events kept out of those where there is the least. I will, however, suppose that there is a vacancy.

The examination this time will be found much stiffer than that for a corporalship, in many regiments the would-be sergeant having to put the company through its drill, as well as to be able to give instruction in musketry. Only occasionally—although it should be invariably—a knowledge of the bugle-calls is required. All this means more hard work and the consumption of a great deal of time. In getting up my drill, however, I found the following simple means very valuable. I cut thirty-two equal-sized pieces of cardboard to represent the men composing a company of sixteen files; then five pieces of a different size for the sergeants, and other distinctive bits for the two lieutenants and the captain (such sets, I believe, can now be obtained). It is surprising how much can be learnt by the use of such dummies when sitting quietly at your own table, in working out the company drill over and over again, till you have only to think of a movement to see instantly where the pieces ought to be, even before moving them. In fact, I practised this so much that at last I began to look upon the men on parade as so many pieces, and from the drill-book point of view I am not sure that I was not right. With regard to the bugle-calls, I had some little difficulty at first, not being blessed with a musical ear; but fortunately I came across a card, the publisher of which I forget, on which all the "calls" were set to words suggestive of the desired movements. This at once smoothed over all difficulties on this point, although to this day, whenever I hear a call, I cannot help mentally repeating to myself the jingling words by which I first impressed it upon my memory.

Having worked himself up as well as he can, it is almost needless to say that the candidate should turn up at the place of competition with his hair properly cut, and all parts of his uniform in "apple-pie" order, for if he cannot dress himself well, how can he be expected to look after his squad? During the competition he should keep as cool as possible, and be decided in whatever he is about; but by all means he should not allow an assumption of confidence to lead him to the other extreme, or he may have cause to regret it afterwards. Lastly, if successful, the honours won should be borne modestly, in deference to the feelings of the losers; but if not returned at the head of the poll, our young friend should stick to it, and "be at 'em again" on some future occasion.