

THE KRAG-JORGENSEN GUN

It Is Inferior in Many Respects to
the Mauser Used by the
Spaniards.

LESSONS OF CUBAN CAMPAIGN

Enemy's Weapon Easier to Load, Can
Be Fired More Rapidly, Has Longer
Flat Trajectory, and a More
Humane Bullet.

SANTIAGO DE CUBA, Aug. 1.—The chief interest now taken in war by those nations not engaged in it, as well as by the military authorities of the nations that are flying at each other's throats, is in the lessons it may teach for use in future wars. All of our arms and ammunition are experiments, and all our theories of modern war, by sea or land, are empirical.

When we find, as we have just done, that the nations that have put their trust in "reeking tube and iron shard" are no more efficient in war than a peace-loving republic, we pause in our commiseration to glorify our freedom from militarism and Caesarism. If we find, as we have just done, that the gun armor belts of Spanish and other foreign cruisers are a delusion, we cease to think of the charred bodies of several hundred Spanish sailors, and laud our own wisdom in clinging to the simple faith of republics—that the man, whether in the ship, behind the gun, or on the field, is the main thing, after all. And so we forget our humanity for a while to con another lesson in destroying human life.

And we have learned for ourselves, or have been taught by hard experience, several lessons in the present war. The chief one, it seems to me, is that we are armed with a gun far inferior to that used by Spain, and correspondingly inferior to the military guns of Germany, France, and England. It was also clearly demonstrated that the nation which sends its troops on a modern battlefield with black powder is deliberately sacrificing them to its own ignorance, parsimony, or negligence; but we knew this well before we sent our volunteers and our artillerists under fire at El Caney and El Paso to be slaughtered by the enemy, and we can settle the question as best we may as to where the blame for such a useless sacrifice should be placed.

But we did not know about the difference in the guns. It is true that our Government experts had examined the Mauser, but they had not understood its principal merits. Its great possibilities and its fearful effectiveness seem to have been entirely overlooked.

The Krag-Jorgensen Gun.

Our own gun, the Krag-Jorgensen, proved to be inferior in many respects to the Mauser, although we had full opportunity for choosing between the two, and had, it was supposed, subjected both to the severest tests. I do not say we should have selected the Mauser. We also examined guns like the Mannlicher and Lee-Netford, that are better than the Mauser, and rejected all for the Krag-Jorgensen, a wild experiment in gunmaking.

It is said by army officers that we selected the Krag because of its simplicity of action and mechanism. These advantages are not apparent when our gun is compared with the Mauser—indeed, the Mauser seems simpler—but if they be real, they are overwhelmingly outweighed by other advantages possessed by the Mauser. It is said that in using a magazine gun it is advisable to have it as simple as possible, so that the troops will not get confused by a complex mechanism. A very good reason, if it had any application. If the ignorant soldiery of Spain and the still more ignorant and unthinking Cuban guerrilleros can use the Mauser without confusion, surely our troops, who are unquestionably the most intelligent body of men in the world, could handle it with ease and effectiveness.

An American soldier is complete master of his gun in a short time. He studies it, he handles it as carefully as if it were so much gold; he treasures it and knows it as a skilled mechanic knows his lathe or a potter his wheel. It is not a question as to his ability to handle any gun, and he has shown to the world that even with an inferior weapon he can carry theoretically impregnable positions.

The advantages possessed by the Krag-Jorgensen over the Mauser seem to have been reduced to the single doubtful one of simplicity of mechanism, and its easier use as a single-shot gun.

The advantages possessed by the Mauser over the Krag are the following: A longer flat trajectory, greater velocity of the ball, greater penetration, a more humane bullet, greater ease in loading, and greater rapidity in firing. These are the chief requisites in a modern rapid-fire magazine rifle.

The flat trajectory of the Krag is about 600 yards; that is to say, it will throw its bullet on a straight line for that distance. Beyond this the sight has to be raised, and when you begin to raise sights you begin to lessen materially the accuracy of fire, as well as the general effectiveness of the fire. The soldier has to guess at the range, and is likely to misjudge it. Again, if a bullet flies in a straight line at a distance of four or five feet above the earth, it is equally dangerous at every point within its flat trajectory; but if it goes in a parabola it is effective at only one spot—the 30-100 of an inch where it strikes the earth.

The Krag's Flat Trajectory.

Theoretically, the Krag has a flat trajectory of 800 yards, but in practice our soldiers found that the sight had to be raised at any distance beyond 600 yards. The Mauser has a flat trajectory of 880 yards, or a straight effective fire over a range of 280 yards more than is covered by our gun. This 280 yards is enough to win a battle in by a direct fire.

To the greater velocity of the Mauser, which is said to be 500 feet per second greater than that of the Krag, are due the two next advantages—greater penetration and more humanity. It is, therefore, one of the principal merits of the Spanish gun.

The Mauser ball penetrates wood ten inches deeper than the bullet of the Krag. This is important in several ways. It would kill or wound more men if fired against the head of a column or against an enfiladed line. It would also pass through larger trees and more earth, to the injury of soldiers under cover.

The Mauser is a more humane rifle than the Krag. We should prefer to disable men in battle to killing them or inflicting upon them lacerated wounds. The Krag bullet being larger by two calibres, and moving with lesser velocity, has more of the "stopping" quality that fighters of savages and hunters of savage beasts lay so much stress on; but it inflicts a needlessly painful wound. The Mauser bullet cuts through the flesh and bone as a needle passes through cloth, or a surgeon's lancet severs the skin. It seldom has that terrible explosive effect observed by scientists who have experimented on cadavers with the modern bullet driven at its present tremendous velocity. All of our surgeons have pronounced the Mauser more humane than the gun we use.

The Mauser is more easily loaded than the Krag, as the package containing five shells can be inserted in the magazine as quickly as, possibly more quickly than, a single cartridge can be put into the chamber of the Krag.

It is also capable of being fired far more rapidly than the Krag for the same reason. Its rapidity should be, apparently, at least twice as great as that of our arm.

Take the two guns, as subjected to the actual and only test of battle, and it seems to me that we have an inferior gun. It has proved far less effective than the gun we have had to face in the "ditches and blockhouses in Cuba. Its defects would be far more conspicuous if it were contrasted, in battle, with the Mannlicher, the Lee-Netford, the Lebel, or the Peabody.

STANHOPE SAMS.