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THE BRITISH ARMY FROM WITHIN

THE BRITISH ARMY FROM WITHIN

BY
E. CHARLES VIVIAN

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"PASSION FRUIT," "DIVIDED WAYS," ETC.

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CHAPTER I

“UBIQUE”: THE ARMY AS A WHOLE

On the badges of the corps of Engineers, and also on those of the Royal Artillery, will be found the word “Ubique,” but it is a word that might just as well be used with regard to the whole of the British Army, which serves everywhere, does everything, undergoes every kind of climate, and gains contact with every class of people. In this respect, the British soldier enjoys a distinct advantage over the soldiers of continental armies; he has a chance of seeing the world. India, Africa, Egypt, the West Indies, Mauritius, and the Mediterranean stations are open to him, and by the time he leaves the service he has at least had the opportunity of becoming cosmopolitan in his tastes and ways—of becoming a man of larger ideas and better grasp on the problems of life than were his at the time when he took the oath and passed the doctor. Of that phase, more anon.

It is of little use, in the present state of the British Army, to attempt to define its extent or composition, for it is in such a state of flux that the numbers of battalions, regiments, and batteries of a year ago are as obsolete as the Snider rifle. There used to be 157 battalions of infantry, 31 regiments of cavalry, and about 180 batteries of horse and field artillery, together with about 100 companies and 9 mountain batteries of Royal Garrison Artillery, forming the principal strength of the British Army. To these must be added the Royal Engineers, the Army Service Corps, the Royal Ordnance Department, the R.A.M.C., the Army Pay Corps, and other non-combatant units necessary to the domestic and general internal working of an army. To-day these various forces are increased to such an extent that no man outside the War Office can tell the strength of infantry, cavalry, and artillery; no man, either, can tell what will be the permanent strength of the Army on a peace footing, when the present urgent need for men no longer exists, and there is only to be considered the maintenance of a force sufficient for the garrisoning of colonial and foreign stations and for ordinary defensive needs at home. 10

Generally speaking, the soldier at home, no matter to what arm or branch of the service he belongs, undergoes a continuous training. It takes three years to make an infantryman fully efficient, five years to make a cavalryman thoroughly conversant with his many duties, and five years or more to teach a gunner his business. The raw material from which the Army is recruited is mixed and sometimes uneducated stuff, and, in addition to this, recruits are enlisted at an age when they must be taught everything—they are past the age of the schoolboy who absorbs tuition readily and with little trouble to his instructors, and they have not attained to such an age as will permit them to take their work really seriously. This, of course, does not apply to a time of great national emergency, when the men coming to the colours are actuated by the highest possible motives, eager to fit themselves for the work in hand, and bent on getting fit for active service in the shortest possible time. In times of peace, recruits join the colours from many motives—pure patriotism is not a common one—and, in consequence, the hard realities of soldiering in peace time disillusion them to such an extent that they are difficult to teach, and thus need the full term of training for full efficiency. Half the work of their instructors consists in getting them into the proper frame of mind and giving them that *esprit de corps* which is essential to the war fitness of a voluntary army. 11

At the best, there is much in the work that a soldier is called on to do which is beyond his understanding, in the first years of his service. One consequence of this is that he learns to do things without questioning their meaning, and thus acquires a habit of obeying; this, up to a few years ago, was the object of military training—to instil into the soldier unquestioning obedience to orders, and the sentence—“obedience is the first duty of the soldier,” gained currency and labelled the soldier as a mere cog in a great machine, one whose duty lay in obeying as did that Roman sentinel at Pompeii. One of the chief lessons of the South African war, however, was that such obedience was no longer the first duty of the soldier; he must obey, no less than before, but scientific warfare demands an understanding obedience, and not the unquestioning, die-at-his-post fidelity of old time. The recruit of to-day must be taught not only to obey, but to understand, and by that fact the work of his instructors, and his own work as well, are largely increased. “Obedience” was the watchword of yesterday. “Obedience and initiative” is the phrase of to-day. 12

To come down to concrete facts as regards the actual composition and general duties of the Army. The main station in England is Aldershot, headquarters of the first Army Corps. Theoretically, in all cases of national emergency, the Aldershot Command is first to move, and the units composing it are expected to be able to mobilise for active service at twenty-four hours’ notice. Next in importance are Colchester, Shorncliffe, York, and Bulford—the centre of the Salisbury Plain area under military control. In Ireland the principal stations are Dublin and the Curragh. In these stations, under normal circumstances, the furlough season begins at Christmas time and lasts up to the following March; for this period men are granted leave in batches, and drill and training for those who remain in barracks while the others take their holidays is somewhat relaxed. Serious training begins in March, when the corporals, sergeants, and troop and section officers begin to lick their squads, sections, and troops into shape. Following on this comes company training for the infantry, squadron training for the cavalry, and battery training for the artillery, and this in turn is followed by battalion training for infantry, regimental training for cavalry, and brigade training for artillery. Somewhere during the period taken up before the beginning of regimental and battalion training, musketry has to be fitted in, and, as the ranges cannot accommodate all the men at once, this has to be done by squadrons and companies, while those not engaged in perfecting their shooting continue with their other training. At the conclusion of the training of units—regiments, battalions, and brigades of artillery—brigade and divisional training is begun, and then manœuvres follow, in which the troops are given opportunities of learning the working of an army corps, as well as getting practical experience of camp life under conditions as near those obtaining on active service as circumstances will admit. By the time all this has been completed, the furlough season starts again, and the round begins once more with a few more recruits to train, a few old soldiers missing from the ranks. 13

In addition to the regular course of training that lasts through the year and goes on from year to year, there are various “courses” to be undergone in order to keep the departmental staff of each unit up to strength. Thus, 14

in the infantry, signallers must be specially trained, and pioneers, who do all the sanitary work of their units, must be taught their duties, while musketry instructors and drill instructors have to be selected and taught their duties. Each unit, except as regards medical service and a few things totally out of its range of activity, is self-contained and self-supporting, and thus it is necessary that it should train its own instructors and its own special men for special work, together with understudies to take their places in case of casualties. The cavalry trains its own signallers, scouts, shoeing smiths, cooks, pioneers, and to a certain extent medical orderlies. The artillery does likewise, and in addition keeps up a staff of artificers to attend to minor needs of the guns—men capable of repairing breakages in the field, as far as this is possible. Wherever horses are concerned, too, saddlers must be trained to keep leather work in repair. 15

The Engineers, a body of men who seldom get the recognition their work deserves, have to train in telegraphy, bridge-building, construction and demolition of all things, from a regular defensive fortification to a field kitchen, and many other things incidental to the smooth working of an army in the field. Departmental corps, such as the Army Service, Army Ordnance, and R.A.M.C., not only train but exercise their functions in a practical way, for in peace time an army must be fed, equipped, and doctored, just the same as in war—except that in the latter case its requirements are more strenuous. The ancient belief entertained by civilians to the effect that the Army is a profession of laziness is thoroughly exploded as soon as one passes through the barrack gates, for the Army as a whole works as hard as, if not harder than the average man in equivalent stations of civilian life. 16

In foreign and colonial stations, the work goes on just the same, as far as limitations of climate will permit. In “plains” stations in India, the heat of the summer months renders training during the day impossible, and men get their work over, for the most part, in the very early morning, or in the cool of the evening. Malta and Gibraltar are subject to the same limitations in a lesser degree, as is South Africa, while Mauritius and minor colonial stations have their own ways. But, no matter where the unit concerned may be, it works—fitness is dependent on work, and no unit is allowed to get rusty, while the variety of work involved prevents men from getting stale.

At the same time, there is plenty of relaxation and sport as well as work in the routine of military life. Set a battalion down in a new station, and the chances are ten to one that on the evening of their arrival the men will be kicking a football about. Each company and squadron, and each battery of artillery as well, has its own sports fund and sports club, which keeps going the national games in the unit concerned. Men work hard and play hard, and their play is made to help their work. Infantry units organise cross-country races which help enormously in maintaining the men in fit marching condition; cavalry units get up scouting competitions and other sporting fixtures based on work—to say nothing of tent pegging, lemon cutting, and other forms of military sport of which the Royal Military Tournament annually affords examples, while shooting ranges form fields for weekly competitions at such times as they are not in use for annual musketry courses. 17

The actual composition of the various units composing the British Army differs from that of continental armies, the only units of strength which are identical being those of the army corps, and the division, which is half an army corps. The next unit in the scale is the brigade, which is composed of three batteries of field or two of horse artillery, three regiments of cavalry, or four battalions of infantry. A division is made up of brigades, which vary in number and composition according to the work which that particular division will be expected to accomplish—there is a standard for the composition of the division, but changes now in process of taking place in the composition of the whole army render it unsafe to quote any standard as definite. A normal division, certainly, is composed of cavalry, artillery, and infantry in certain strengths, together with non-combatants and supply units making up its total strength to anywhere between 20,000 and 30,000 men. 18

The unit of strength in which figures become definite is the brigade of artillery, the regiment of cavalry, and the battalion of infantry. The peace strength of each of these units may be regarded, as a rule, as from 10 to 20 per cent. over the war strength, and the war strength is as follows:

For cavalry, a regiment consists of about 620 officers and men of all ranks; this body is divided into three service squadrons, each of an approximate strength of 160 officers, non-commissioned officers, and men, the remainder of the strength of the unit forming the “reserve squadron,” devoted to the headquarters staff—the commanding officer and administrative staff of the regiment, as well as the “pom-pom” or one-pounder quick-firer, of which one is included in the establishment of every cavalry regiment. In this connection it is probable that the experiences of the present European war will lead to the adoption of a greater number of these quick-firers, and in future each cavalry regiment will probably have at least two “pom-poms” as part of its regular equipment. The possession of these, of course, involves the training of a gun crew for each weapon—a full complement of gunners and drivers. 19

For artillery, a brigade is divided into three batteries, each of an approximate strength of 150 men and six guns (the artillery battery corresponds to the cavalry squadron and to the infantry company) and, in addition, one ammunition column, together with transport and auxiliary staff, making up a total of about 600 officers, non-commissioned officers, and men. This refers to the field artillery, which forms the bulk of the British artillery strength, and is armed with 18½-pounder quick-firing guns. The Royal Horse Artillery is armed with a lighter gun, and is used mainly as support to cavalry in single batteries. It is so constituted as to be more mobile and capable of rendering quicker service than the R.F.A. Horse artillery is hardly ever constituted into brigades, as is the field artillery. Horse artillery, again, has no counterpart in the armies of Continental nations, so far as mobility and quality of armament are in question.

Infantry reckons its numbers by battalions, of which the war strength is approximately 1010 officers, non-commissioned officers, and men per battalion. Each battalion is divided into four double companies, the “double-company system” having been adopted in order to compensate for a certain shortage of officers. The double company may be reckoned at 240 officers, non-commissioned officers, and men, roughly, and the remainder of the total is taken up by two maxim-gun sections and the headquarters staff of the unit. As in the case of the cavalry “pom-pom,” it is more than likely that the number of maxims or machine-guns per battalion will be increased, as a result of the experiences gained in the present Continental war. 20

Engineers and departmental units are divided into companies of varying strengths, according to the part they are called on to play when the division is constituted. Thus it is self-evident that an average division will require more Engineers, who do all the field work of construction and demolition, than it will Army Ordnance men, who attend to the equipment of the division—fitting out with clothing, provision of transport vehicles, etc. The number of men of departmental corps allotted to each division in the field varies with the strength of the division and with its distance from its base of supplies.

There is a permanent and outstanding difference between the British Army as a whole and any Continental army as a whole. In the case of the Continental army—no matter which one is chosen for purposes of comparison, the conscript system renders it a part of the nation concerned, identifies the army with the nation, and incidentally takes out the element of freedom. A man in a conscript army is serving because he must, and, no matter how patriotic he may be, there are times when this is brought home to him very forcibly by the discipline without which no army could exist. In the British Army, on the other hand, the men serving are there by their own choice; this fact gives them a sense that the discipline, no matter how distasteful it may be, is a necessity to their training—by their enlistment they chose to undergo it. But the British Army, until the present war linked it on to the man in the street, was not a part of the nation, but a thing distinct from the nation; it was a profession apart, and none too enviable a profession, in the opinion of many, but something to be avoided by men in equivalent walks of civilian life. 21

There are advantages as well as disadvantages in the voluntary system by which our Army is raised and maintained. As an advantage may be set first the spirit of the men; having enlisted voluntarily, and ascertained by experience that they must make the best of it or be considered utterly worthless, men in a voluntary army gain a spirit that conscripts can never attain. They are soldiers of their own free will, with regimental traditions to maintain, and practice has demonstrated that they form the finest fighting body, as a whole, among all the armies of the world. On the other hand, they have no political significance, and are but little understood, as regards their needs and the constitution of the force to which they belong. In France, for instance, the rule is "every citizen a soldier," and it is a rule which is observed with but very few exceptions. The result is that every citizen who has been a soldier is also a voter, and in the matter of army requirements he votes in an understanding way, while the British voter, with the exception of the small percentage who have served in the Army, is as a rule unmoved by Army needs and questions. To this extent the Army suffers from the voluntary system, though the quality of the Army itself under present voluntary conditions may be held to compensate for this. It is doubtful whether it does compensate. 22

Further, the voluntary system makes of life in the ranks a totally different thing from civilian life. In conscript armies the discipline to which men are subjected makes their life different from that of their civilian days, but not to such an extent as in the voluntary British Army. The civilian can never quite understand the soldier; Kipling came nearer than any other civilian in his understanding, but even he failed altogether to appreciate the soldier of to-day—perhaps he had a better understanding of the soldier of the 'eighties and 'nineties, before the South African war had come to awaken the Army to the need for individual training and the development of initiative. However that may be, no man has yet written of the soldier as he really is, because the task has been usually attempted by civilians, to whom the soldier rarely shows his real self. Soldiers have themselves given us glimpses of their real life, but usually they have specialised on the dramatic and the picturesque. It is necessary, if one would understand the soldier and his inner life, that one should have a grasp of the monotony of soldiering, the drill and riding school, the barrack-room routine, and all that makes up the daily life, as well as the exceptional and picturesque. 23

In the following chapters, showing as far as possible the inner life of the Army from the point of view of the soldier, an attempt has been made to show the average of life in each branch of the service. Exceptions occur: the quality of the commanding officer makes all the difference in the life of the unit which he commands; again, apart from the influence exercised by the personality of the commanding officer, that of the company or squadron officer is a very potent factor in the lives of the men under his command. The British Army, fine fighting machine though it is, is not perfect, and there are instances of bad commanding officers, bad squadron and company officers, just as there are instances of superlatively good ones. Between these is the influence exerted by the mass on the mass, from which an average picture may be drawn. 24

That picture is the portrait of the British soldier, second to none.

CHAPTER II

THE WAY OF THE RECRUIT

The way of the recruit, though still a hard one, is not so hard as it used to be, for, especially in the cavalry and artillery, various modifications have been introduced by which the youngster is broken in gradually to his work. This is not all to the good, for under the new way of working the training which precedes "dismissal" from recruit's training to the standing of a trained soldier takes longer, and, submitting the recruit to a less strenuous form of life for the period through which it lasts, does not produce quite so handy and quick a man as the one who was kept at it from dawn till dark, with liberty at the end of his official day's work to clean up equipment for the next day. Still, the annual training of the "dismissed" soldier is a more strenuous business now than in old time, so probably the final result is about the same.

The recruit's first requirements, after he has interviewed the recruiting sergeant on the subject of enlistment is to take the oath—a very quick and simple matter—and then to pass the doctor, which is not so simple. The recruit is stripped, sounded, tested for full physical efficiency, and made to pass tests in eyesight and breathing which, if he emerges satisfactorily, proclaim him as near physical perfection as humanity can get without a course of physical culture—and that course is administered during his first year of service. Kept under the wing of the recruiting sergeant for a matter of hours or days, as the case may be, the recruit is at last drafted off to his depot, or direct to his unit, where his real training begins in earnest. 26

We may take the case of a recruit who had enlisted from mixed motives, arrived at a station whence he had to make his way to barracks in the evening, in order to begin his new life; here are his impressions of beginning life in the Army.

He went up a hill, and along a muddy lane, and, arriving at the barracks, inquired, as he had been told to do, for the quartermaster-sergeant of "C" Squadron. He was directed to the quartermaster-sergeant's office, and, on arrival there, was asked his name and the nature of his business by a young corporal who took life as a joke and regarded recruits as a special form of food for amusement. Having ascertained the name of the recruit, the corporal, who was a kindly fellow at heart, took him down to the regimental coffee bar and provided him with a meal of cold meat, bread, and coffee—at the squadron's expense, of course, for the provision of the meal was a matter of duty. The corporal then indicated the room in which the recruit was to sleep, and left him. 27

The recruit opened the door of the room, and looked in. It was a long room, with a row of narrow beds down each side, and in the middle two tables on iron trestles, whereon were several basins. On almost every bed sat a man, busily engaged in cleaning some article of clothing or equipment; some were cleaning buttons, some were pipeclaying belts, some were engaged with sword-hilts and brick-dust, some were cleaning boots—all were cleaning up as if their lives depended on it, for "lights out" would be sounded at a quarter-past ten, and it was already past nine o'clock. When they saw the recruit, they gave him greeting. "Here's another one!" they cried. "Here's another victim!" and other phrases which led this particular recruit to think, quite erroneously, that he had come to something very bad indeed. Two or three were singing, with more noise than melody, a song which was very old when Queen Anne died—it was one of the ditties of the regiment, sung by its men on all possible and most impossible occasions. One man shouted to the recruit that he had "better flap before he drew his issue," and that he could not understand at all. Translated into civilian language, it meant that he had better desert before he exchanged his civilian clothing for regimental attire, but this he learned later. They seemed a jolly crowd, very fond of flavouring their language with words which, in civilian estimation, were terms of abuse, but passed as common currency here. 28

The recruit stood wondering—out of all these beds, there seemed to be no bed for him. After a minute or two, however, the corporal in charge of the room came up to him, and pointed out to him a bed in one corner of the room; its usual occupant was on guard for twenty-four hours, and the recruit was informed that he could occupy that bed for the night. In the morning he could go to the quartermaster's store and draw blankets, sheets, a pillow, and "biscuits" for his own use. After that, he would be allotted a bed-cot to himself. Biscuits, it must be explained, are square mattresses of coir, of which three, placed end to end, form a full-sized mattress for a military bed-cot.

Sitting on the borrowed bed-cot, the recruit was able to take a good look round. The ways of these men, their quickness in cleaning and polishing articles of equipment, were worth watching, he decided. They joked and chaffed each other, they sang scraps of songs, allegedly pathetic and allegedly humorous; they shouted from one end of the room to the other in order to carry on conversations; they called the Army names, they called each other names, and they called individuals who were evidently absent yet more names, none of them complimentary. They made a lot of noise, and in that noise one of them, having finished his cleaning, slept; when he snored, one of his comrades threw a boot at him, and, since the boot hit him, he woke up and looked round, but in vain. Therefore he calmly went to sleep again, but this time he did not snore. The recruit, who had come out of an ordinary civilian home, and hitherto had had only the vaguest of notions as to what the Army was really like, wondered if he were dreaming, and then realised that he himself was one of these men, since he had voluntarily given up certain years of his life to their business. With that reflection he undressed and got into bed. After "lights-out" had sounded and been promptly obeyed, he went to sleep.... 29

His impressions are typical, and his introduction to the barrack-room may serve to record the view gained by the majority of those who enlist: that first glimpse of military life is something utterly strange and incomprehensible, and the recruit sleeps his first night in barracks—or stays awake—bewildered by the novelty of his surroundings, and a little afraid. 30

In a few days the recruit begins to feel a little more at home in his new surroundings. One of his first ordeals is that of being fitted with clothing, and with few exceptions, all his clothing is ready-made, for the quartermaster's store of a unit contains a variety of sizes and fittings of every article required, and from among

these a man must be fitted out from head to foot. The regimental master-tailor attends at the clothes' fitting, and makes notes of alterations required—shortening or lengthening sleeves, letting out here, and taking in there. When clothes and boots have been fitted, the recruit is issued a "small kit," consisting of brushes and cleaning materials for himself and his clothes and equipment, even unto a toothbrush and a comb. As a rule, he omits the ceremony of locking these things away in his box when he returns to the barrack-room, with the result that most of them are missing when he looks on the shelf or in the box where he placed them. For, in a barrack-room, although all things are not common, the property of the recruit is fair game, and he catches who can. 31

Gradually, as the recruit learns the need for taking care of such property as he wishes to retain, he also learns barrack-room slang and phrasing. In the Army, one is never late: one is "pushed." One does not eat, but one "scoffs." A man who dodges work is said to "swing the lead," and there is no such thing as work, for it is "graft," or "kom." Practically every man, too, has his nickname: all Clarkes are "Nobby," all Palmers are "Pedlar," all Welshmen in other than Welsh regiments are "Taffy," all Robinsons are "Jack," and every surname in like fashion has its regular nickname. But, contrary to the belief entertained by the average civilian, the soldier does not readily take to nicknames for his superiors. For his own officers he sometimes finds equivalents to their names through their personal peculiarities, but if one spoke to a soldier of "K. of K.," the soldier would request an explanation, while "Bobs" for Lord Roberts might be understood, but would not be appreciated. The general officer and the superior worthy of respect gets his full title from the soldier at all times, and nicknames, except for comrades of the same company or squadron, form a mark of contempt, especially when applied to commissioned officers. Sometimes the soldier finds a nickname for a comrade out of a personal peculiarity, as when one is particularly mean he gets the name of "Shonk," or "Shonkie," which is equivalent to "Jew," with a reference to usury and extortion. 32

If a regimental officer gets a nickname, it may be generally assumed that he is not held in very great respect by his men. "Bulgy," of whom more anon, was a very fat young lieutenant with more bulk than brains; "Duffer" was another lieutenant, and his title explains itself—it was always used in conjunction with his surname; "Bouncer" was a major who had attained his rank by accident, and left the service because he knew it was hopeless to anticipate further promotion. The officer who commands the respect of his men does not get nicknamed, and the recruit very soon learns to call his superiors by their proper names when he has occasion to mention superior officers in course of conversation with his comrades.

As a rule, the recruit is subjected to one or more practical jokes by his comrades in his early days as a soldier. In cavalry regiments, a favourite form of joke is to get the recruit to go to the farrier-major for his "shoeing-money," a mythical allowance which, it is alleged, every recruit receives at the beginning of his service. The pretext might appear a bit thin if only one man were concerned in the deception, but the recruit is assured by a whole barrack-roomful of soldiers that "it's a fact, and no hank," and in about five cases out of ten he goes to the farrier-major, who, entering into the spirit of the thing, sends the victim in to the orderly-room sergeant or the provost-sergeant, and from here the recruit goes to the next official chosen, until he finds out the hoax. If a non-commissioned officer can be found with the same sense of humour as induced the shoeing-money hoax, he—usually a lance-corporal—orders the recruit to go to the sergeant-major or some other highly placed non-com. for "the key of the square." As a rule, this request from the recruit provokes the sergeant-major to wrath, and the poor recruit gets a hot time. There is a legend of a recruit having been sent to the quartermaster's store to get his mouth measured for a spoon, but it may be regarded as legend pure and simple, for there are limits to the credulity, even, of recruits, though authenticated instances of hoaxes which have been practised show that much may be done by means of an earnest manner and the thorough preservation of gravity in giving recommendations to the victim. Many a man has gone to the armourer to get his spurs fitted, and probably more will go yet. 33

If a civilian takes a thorough dislike to his work, he has always the opportunity of quitting it; if he fails to satisfy his employers, he is either warned or dismissed. In the Army, the man who dislikes his work has to pocket the dislike and go on with the work, while if his employers, the regimental authorities, have any fault to find with him, they do not express it by dismissal until various forms and quantities of punishment for slackness have been resorted to. The recruit gets far more punishments than the old soldier, for the latter has learned what to do and what to avoid, in order to make life simple for himself; his punishments usually arise out of looking on the beer when it is brown to an extent incompatible with the fulfilment of his duties, and, when sober, he generally manages to evade "office" and its results. But the recruit finds that the corporal in charge of his room, the drill instructor in charge of him at drill, the sergeant in charge of his section or troop, the non-commissioned officer under whose supervision he does his fatigues, and a host of other superiors, are all capable of either placing him in the guard-room to await trial or of informing him that he is under open arrest, and equally liable for trial—and this for offences which would not count as such in civilian life, for three-quarters of the military "crimes" are not crimes at all in the civil code. Being late on parade, a dirty button—that is, a button not sufficiently brilliant in its polish—the need of a shave, a hasty word to one in authority, and half a hundred other apparent trivialities, form grounds for "wheeling a man up" or "running him in." And the guard-room to which he retires is the "clink," while, if he is so persistent in the commission of offences as to merit detention, the military form of imprisonment, he is said to go to the "glass house"—that is, he is sent to the detention barracks for the term to which he is sentenced—and his punishment is spoken of as "cells," and never anything else. A minor form of punishment, "confined to barracks," or "defaulters'," involves the doing of the regiment's dirty work in the few hours usually devoted to relaxation, with drill in full marching order for an hour every night, and answering one's name at the guard-room at stated intervals throughout the afternoon and evening, in order to prevent the delinquent from leaving barracks. This the soldier calls "doing jankers," and the bugle or trumpet call which orders him out on the defaulters' parade is known as "Paddy Doyle"—heaven only knows for what reason, unless one Paddy Doyle was a notorious offender against military discipline in far-back times, and his reputation has survived his personal characteristics in the memory of the soldier. 34

The accused, whoever he may be, is paraded first before his company, squadron, or battery officer, and the charge against him is read out. First evidence is taken from the superior officer who makes the charge, and second evidence from anyone who may have been witness to the occurrence which has caused the trouble. Then 35

the accused is asked what he has to say in mitigation of his offence, and if he is wise, unless the accusation is very unjust indeed, he answers—"Nothing, sir." Then, if the case is a minor one, the company or squadron or battery officer delivers sentence. If, however, the crime is one meriting a punishment exceeding "seven days confined to barracks," the case is beyond the jurisdiction of the junior officer, and must be sent to the officer commanding the regiment or battalion or artillery brigade for trial. In that case, the offender is paraded with an escort of a non-commissioned officer and man, and marched on to the verandah of the regimental orderly room when "office" sounds—almost always at eleven o'clock in the morning. When the colonel commanding the unit—37 or, in case of his absence, his deputy—decrees, the offender is marched into the presence of his judge; the adjutant of the regiment reads the charge, the evidence is stated as in the case of trial by a company or squadron officer, and the colonel pronounces his verdict.

Acquittals are rare; not that there is any injustice, but it is assumed, and usually with good reason, that if a man is "wheeled up" he has been doing something he ought not to have done. Then, too, the soldier's explanations of how he came to get into trouble are far too plausible; officers with experience of the soldier and his ways come to understand that he can explain away anything and find an excuse for everything. It is safe, in the majority of cases, to take a harsh view. However, the punishments inflicted are, in the majority of cases, light: "jankers," though uncomfortable, is not degrading to any great extent, and the man who has had a taste or two of this wholesome corrective will usually be a more careful if not a better soldier in future.

"Cells" is a different matter. Not that it lowers a man to any extent in the estimation of his comrades, but it is a painful experience, practically corresponding to the imprisonment with hard labour to which a civilian misdemeanant is subjected. It involves also total loss of pay from the time of arrest to the end of the period of punishment, while confinement to barracks involves only the actual punishment, and, unless the crime is "absence," there is no loss of pay. Drunkenness is punished by an officially graded system of fines, as well as by "jankers" or "cells."38

The average man, however, performs work of average quality, avoids drunkenness, and keeps to time, the result being that he does not undergo punishment. Barrack-room life, for the recruit, is a fairly simple matter. He makes his own bed, and sweeps the floor round it. He folds his blankets and sheets to the prescribed pattern; the way in which he folds his kit and clothing, also, is regulated for him by the company or squadron authorities, and, for the rest, he is kept too busy throughout the day at drill, and too busy throughout the evening in preparing for the next day's drill, to get into mischief to any appreciable extent. The recruit who involves himself in "crime" is, more often than not, looking for trouble.

It has already been stated that a full day's work for the recruit is a strenuous business. If we take the average day of a recruit in, say, a cavalry regiment, and follow him from *réveillé* to "lights out," it will be seen that he is kept quite sufficiently busy.39

Réveillé sounds anywhere between 4.30 and 6.30 a.m., according to the season of the year, and, before the sound of the trumpet has ceased the corporal in charge of the room will be heard inviting his men to "Show a leg, there!" The invitation is promptly complied with, for in a space of fifteen minutes all the men in the room have to dress, wash if they feel inclined to, and get out on early morning stable parade to answer their names. They are then marched down to stables, where they turn out the stable bedding and groom their horses for about an hour. The horses are then taken out to water, returned to stables, and fed, and the men file back to their rooms to get breakfast and prepare for the morning's drill. This latter involves a complete change of clothing from the rough canvas stable outfit to clean service dress and putties for riding-school use. The riding-school lesson is usually over by half-past ten, and after this the recruit takes his horse back to the stables, off-saddles, and returns to the barrack-room to change into canvas clothing once more, and enjoy the ten minutes, more or less, of relaxation that falls to him before the trumpeter sounds "stables." Going to stables again, the men groom their horses, and when these have been passed as clean by the troop sergeant or troop officer the troopers set to work and clean steel work and leather. The way in which this is done in the Army may be judged from the fact that, after a morning's parade, it takes a full hour to clean saddle and head dress and render them fit for inspection. It is one o'clock before midday stables is finished with, and then of course it is time for dinner.40

For this principal meal of the day one hour is allowed; but that hour includes the getting ready for the afternoon parade for foot drill, in which the cavalry recruit is taught the use of the sword and all movements that he will have to perform dismounted. This lasts an hour or thereabouts, and is followed by a return to the barrack-room and another change of clothing, this time into gymnasium outfit. The recruit is then marched to the gymnasium, where, for the space of another hour, the gymnastic instructor has his turn at licking the raw material into shape. Marched back to the barrack-room once more, the recruit is free to devote what remains to him of the minutes before five o'clock to cleaning the spurs, sword, etc., which have become soiled by the morning's riding-school work. At five "stables" sounds again; the orders for the day are read out on parade, and the men march to stables to groom, bed down, water, and feed their horses, a business to which an hour is devoted. Tea follows, and then, unless the recruit has been warned for night guard, he is free to complete the preparation of his equipment for the next day's work, and use what little spare time is left in such relaxation as may please him.41

In the infantry the number of parades done during the day is about the same; there is, of course, no "stables," but the time which the cavalryman devotes to this is taken up by musketry instruction, foot drill, and fatigues. In the artillery there is more to learn than in the cavalry, for a driver has to learn to drive the horse he rides, and lead another one as well, while the gunner has plenty to keep him busy in the mechanism of his gun, its cleaning, and the various duties connected with it.

To the recruit the perpetual cleaning, polishing, burnishing, and scouring are naturally somewhat irksome; and it is not until a man has undergone the whole of his recruits' training that he begins dimly to understand the extreme delicacy and fineness of the instruments of his trade—or profession. He comes gradually to realise that a rifle is a very delicate piece of mechanism; a spot of rust on a sword may impair the efficiency of the blade, if allowed to remain and eat in; while a big gun is a complicated piece of machinery needing as much care as a repeater watch, if it is to work efficiently, and a horse is as helpless and needs as much care as a baby.42

At first sight there seems no need for the eternal cleaning of buttons, polishing of spurs, and other trivial items of work which enter into the daily life of a soldier, but all these things are directed to the one end of making the man careful of trifles and thoroughly efficient in every detail of his work.

Old soldiers, having finished with foot drill (known in the barrack-room as "square") and with riding school (which is allowed to keep its name), have a way of looking down on recruits; the chief aim of the recruit, if he be a normal man, is to get "dismissed" from riding school, square, and gymnasium, and the attitude of the old soldier encourages this ambition. Usually a recruit is placed under an old soldier for tuition in his work, and it depends very much on the quality of the old hands in a barrack-room as to what quality of trained man is turned out therefrom. Service counts more than personal worth, and in fact more than anything else in barrack-room life. The man with two years' service will get into trouble sooner or later if he ventures to dictate to the man of three years' or more service, whatever the relative mental qualifications of the two men concerned may be. "Before you came up," or "before you enlisted," are the most crushing phrases that can be applied to a fellow soldier, and no amount of efficiency atones for lack of years to count toward transfer to the Reserve or discharge from the service to pension. 43

So far as the infantry recruit is concerned, foot drill and musketry, together with a certain amount of fatigues, comprise the day's routine. With foot drill may be bracketed bayonet drill, in which the recruit is taught the various thrusts and parries which can be made with that weapon for which the British infantryman has been famed since before Wellington's time. Both in the cavalry and infantry, every man has to fire a musketry course once a year; the recruit's course of musketry, however, is a more detailed and, in a way, a more instructive business than the course which the trained man has to undergo. The recruit has to be taught that squeezing motion for the trigger which does not disturb the aim of the rifle; he has to be taught, also, the extreme care with which a rifle must be handled, cleaned, and kept. It may be said that the recruits' course is designed to lay the foundation on which the trained man's course of musketry is built, and at the end of the recruits' course the men who have undergone it are graded off into first, second, and third class shots, while "marksmen" are super-firsts. 44

On the whole the first year of a man's service is the hardest of any, so far as peace soldiering is concerned. There is more reason in this than appears on the surface. A recruit joins the army somewhere about the age of twenty—the official limit is from eighteen to twenty-five; it is evident that in his first year of service a man is at such a stage of muscular and mental growth as to render him capable of being moulded much more readily than in the later military years. It is best that he should be shaped, as far as possible, while he is yet not quite formed and set, and, though the process of shaping may involve what looks like an undue amount of physical exertion, it is, in reality, not beyond the capabilities of such men as doctors pass into the service. It is true that the percentage of cases of heart disease occurring in the British Army is rather a high one, but this is due not to the strenuous training, but in many cases to excessive cigarette-smoking and in others to the strained posture of "attention," combined with predisposition to the disease. The recruit has a hard time, certainly, but many men work harder, and the years of service which follow on the strenuous period of recruits' training are more enjoyable by contrast. 45

CHAPTER III

OFFICERS AND NON-COMS.

The higher ranks of officers have very little to do with the daily life of the soldier. Two or three times a year the general officer commanding the station comes round on a tour of inspection, while other general officers and inspecting officers pay visits at times. The highest rank, however, with which the soldier is brought in frequent contact is the commanding officer of his own regiment or battalion. This post is usually held by a lieutenant-colonel, as by the time an officer has attained to a full colonelcy he is either posted to the staff or passed out from the service to half-pay under the age limit.

By the time a man has reached the rank of lieutenant-colonel he is, as a rule, far more conversant with the ways and habits of the soldier than the soldier himself is willing to admit. It would surprise men, in the majority of cases, if they could be made to realise how intimately the "old man" knows his regiment. The "old man" is responsible for the efficiency of the regiment in every detail, since, as its head, he is responsible for the efficiency of the officers controlling the various departments. He is assisted in his work by the second-in-command, who is usually a major, and is not attached to any particular squadron or company, but is responsible for the internal working and domestic arrangements incidental to the life of his unit. These two are assisted in their work by the adjutant, a junior officer, sometimes captain and sometimes lieutenant, who holds his post for a stated term, and during his adjutancy is expected to qualify fully in the headquarters staff work which the conduct of a military unit involves. So far as commissioned officers are concerned, these three form the headquarters staff; it must not be overlooked, however, that the quartermaster, who is either a lieutenant or a captain, and has won his commission from the ranks in the majority of cases, is also unattached to any particular squadron or company. He is, or should be, under the control of the second-in-command, since, as his title indicates, he is concerned with the quarters of the regiment, and with all that pertains to its domestic economy. He cannot, however, be regarded as a part of the headquarters staff; his position is unique, somewhere between commissioned and non-commissioned rank, and it is very rarely that he is accorded the position of the officer who has come to the service through Sandhurst. 47

The colonel and the second-in-command, as a rule, know their regiment thoroughly; they know the special weaknesses of the company or squadron officers; they are conversant with the virtues and the failings of Captain Blank and Lieutenant Dash; they know all about the troubles in the married quarters, and they are fully informed of the happenings in the sergeants' mess. Not that there is any system of espionage in the Army, but the man who reaches the rank of colonel is, under the present conditions governing promotion, keen-witted, and in the dissemination of all kinds of news, from matter for legitimate comment to rank scandal, a military unit is about equivalent to a ladies' sewing meeting. The colonel and the second-in-command know all about things because, being observant men, they cannot help knowing. 48

To each squadron of cavalry, battery of artillery, or company of infantry is allotted a captain or major as officer commanding, and, in the same way as a colonel is responsible for the efficiency of his regiment, so the captain or major is responsible for the efficiency of the squadron, battery, or company under his charge. The squadron or company officer is usually not quite so conversant with the more intimate details of his work as is the lieutenant-colonel. For one thing, he has not had so much experience; for another, he may not have the mental capacity required in a lieutenant-colonel; the squadron or company officer is usually a jolly good fellow, mindful of discipline and careful of the comfort of his men, but there are cases—exceptions, certainly—of utter incompetency. A battery officer, on the other hand, is of a different stamp. Of the three arms, the artillery demands most in the way of efficiency and knowledge; the mechanism of the guns creates an atmosphere in which officers study and train to a far greater extent than cavalry and infantry officers. The battery officer, in nine cases out of ten, is quite as competent to take charge of an artillery brigade as the cavalry or infantry lieutenant-colonel is to take charge of his regiment or battalion. 49

Next in order of rank are the lieutenants and subalterns, youngsters learning the business. The lieutenant, having won his second star, is a reasonable being; the subaltern, fresh from Sandhurst or Woolwich, and oppressed by the weight of his own importance, is occasionally "too big for his boots," a bumptious individual whom his superiors endeavour to restrain, but whom his inferiors in rank must obey, though they have little belief in his judgment or in his capability to command them intelligently. This may appear harsh judgment on the subaltern, but experience of things military confirms it; Sandhurst turns out its pupils in a raw state; they have the theory of their work, but, just as it takes years to make a soldier, so it takes years of actual military work to make an efficient officer, and the trained man in the ranks generally views with extreme disfavour the introduction of a raw subaltern from Sandhurst into the company or squadron to which he belongs, though very often the young officer shapes to his work quickly, wins the respect and confidence of his men, and adds materially to the efficiency and well-being of his troop or section. Again, a young officer may not be popular among his men in time of peace, but may win all their respect and confidence on the field, where values alter and are frequently reversed from peace equivalents. 50

Lieutenants and subalterns are given charge of a troop in the cavalry, a gun or section—according to the number of young officers available—in a battery and of a section of men in an infantry company. Nominally in command of their men, they are in practice largely dependent on their senior non-commissioned officers for the efficiency of the men under their command. An officer's real efficiency, in peace service, does not begin until he "gets his company" or squadron: in other words, until he is promoted to the rank of captain. 51

Next in grade of rank to the commissioned officers stands the regimental sergeant-major, who is termed a warrant-officer, since the "warrant" which he holds, in virtue of his rank, distinguishes him from non-commissioned officers. He has, usually, sixteen years or more of service; he has even more knowledge of the ways of the regiment than the commanding officer himself, and his place is with the headquarters staff, while his duties lie in the supervision and control of the non-commissioned officers and their messes and training. His

position is peculiar; the etiquette of the service prevents him from making close friends among non-commissioned officers, while that same etiquette prevents commissioned officers from making a close friend of him. The only non-commissioned officer who stands near him in rank is the quartermaster-sergeant, who is directly under the control of the quartermaster, and is also a member of the headquarters staff. 52

From this point of rank downward the ways of the different arms of the service diverge. In the infantry, the chief non-commissioned officer of a company is the colour-sergeant, who is responsible both for internal economy and efficiency at drill. In the cavalry and artillery the presence of horses and the far greater amount of equipment involved divide the work that is done in the infantry by the colour-sergeant into two parts. In the cavalry each squadron, and in the artillery each battery, is controlled, so far as drill and efficiency in the field is concerned, by a squadron sergeant-major and a battery sergeant-major, respectively, while the domestic economy of the squadron or battery is managed by squadron quartermaster-sergeant or battery quartermaster-sergeant.

Next in order of rank come the sergeants, the non-commissioned equivalent to troop and section officers, but of far more actual importance than these, since parades frequently take place in the absence of the troop or section officer, while the troop or section sergeant is at all times responsible to his superiors for the efficiency of his men. The rank of sergeant is seldom attained in less than seven years, and thus the man of three stripes whom Kipling justly described in his famous phrase "as the backbone of the Army" is a man of experience and fully entitled to his post. 53

Next in order of rank to the sergeant is the corporal, whose duties lie principally in the maintenance of barrack-room discipline, though he is largely responsible for the training of squads and sections of men in field work. Often in the cavalry he is given charge of a troop temporarily, and in the artillery, though each gun is supposed to be in charge of a sergeant, it happens at times that the corporal has charge of the gun. The lowest rank of all is that of lance-corporal, aptly termed "half of nothing." Men resent, as a rule, any assumption of authority by a lance-corporal—and yet the lance-corporal has to exercise his authority at the risk of being told he was a private only five minutes ago. Bearing in mind the material from which the Army is recruited, it is not surprising that a large percentage of lance-corporals, having tried for themselves what non-commissioned rank feels like, give it up and revert to the rank of private. There are certain advantages in being a lance-corporal; there is a distinct advantage, for instance, in being "in charge of the guard" instead of having to do sentry go; another advantage arises in the matter of fatigues: the lance-corporal—so long as he behaves himself—merely takes his turn on the roll after the full corporals in charge of a fatigue party; he is a superintendent, not a worker, so far as fatigues are concerned. The chief disadvantage consists in the way in which his former comrades regard him. As one concerned in their training and discipline he is no longer to be considered as a comrade and equal by the privates; in many infantry units, lance-corporals are definitely ordered not to fraternise with the men, although they perforce sleep in the same rooms and share the same meals. 54

The sergeants of each unit—taking the regiment or battalion as a unit—have their own mess, in the same way that the officers have theirs. They take all their meals in the mess, and they sleep in "bunks"; their separateness from the rank and file is thus emphasised and their control over the men rendered more definite and easy by this separateness. In each unit there is also established a corporals' mess, but this is merely a recreation room in the same way that the canteen forms a recreation room for the privates. Corporals and lance-corporals take their meals with the men and sleep in the same rooms as the men. This, especially in the case of lance-corporals, diminishes authority, but at the same time it renders easier the maintenance of barrack-room discipline and the control of barrack-room life, for which corporals and lance-corporals are held responsible. 55

Mainly in connection with the development of initiative which arose out of the experience gained from the South African war, a system of understudies has been created among non-commissioned officers and senior privates. Each rank in turn is expected to be able to assume the duties of the rank immediately above it, in case of necessity, and all are trained to this end. It may be remarked that certain certificates of education must be obtained by non-commissioned officers; as soon as a lance-corporal gets his stripe he is expected to go to a military school in the evenings until he has obtained a second-class certificate of education, the qualifications for this being equivalent to those evidenced by the possession of an ordinary fourth-standard school certificate. The higher ranks of non-commissioned officer—that is, all above the rank of sergeant—are expected to qualify for a first-class Army certificate of education, which is quite equivalent to an ex-7th standard council-school certificate.

Further, every non-commissioned officer must obtain certificates of proficiency in drill and musketry, showing that he is a capable instructor as well as fully conversant with drill on his own account. The way to promotion is paved with certificates of various kinds. There are courses in signalling, scouting, musketry, drill, and the hundred and one items of a soldier's work; these courses qualify for instructorship, and some of them are open only to non-commissioned officers. The passing of such courses, increasing the efficiency of the non-commissioned officers concerned, is evidence of fitness for further promotion, and is rewarded accordingly. 56

Technically speaking, the post of lance-corporal is an appointment, not a promotion, and therefore the lance-corporal can be deprived of his stripe on the word of his commanding officer. With the exception of the rank of lance-sergeant, which admits a corporal to the sergeants' mess and takes him out of the barrack-room without a corresponding increase of pay, all ranks from corporal upward count as promotions, and can only be reduced by way of punishment by the sentence of a court martial. A regimental court martial, which has power to reduce a corporal to the ranks and inflict certain limited punishments on a private, is composed of three officers of the unit concerned. A district court martial, with wider powers, including the reduction of a sergeant to the ranks, is composed of three officers; the president must not in any case be below the rank of captain, and usually is a major, and he and the two junior officers who form the tribunal usually belong to other regiments than that of the accused. Military law differs in many respects from civil law; there is, of course, no such thing as a trial by jury; the adjutant of the regiment to which the accused belongs is always the nominal prosecutor, but in actual practice the witnesses for the prosecution are of far more importance than is he. Evidence for the prosecution is taken first, then the evidence for the defence; the accused, if he wishes, can speak in his own defence; if the 57

court is satisfied of the innocence of the accused, he is at once discharged; if, on the other hand, there is any doubt of his innocence, he is marched out while the court consider their finding and sentence, and the latter is not announced until the two or three days necessary for confirmation of the proceedings by the general officer commanding the station have elapsed.

The promulgation of a court-martial sentence is an impressive ceremony. The regiment or battalion to which the accused belongs is formed up to occupy three sides of a square, facing inwards. The accused, under armed escort, together with the regimental sergeant-major and the adjutant of the unit, occupy the fourth side of the square, and the adjutant reads a summary of the proceedings concluding with a recital of the sentence on the accused. In the case of a private the ceremony is then at an end, and the regiment is marched away, while the accused returns to the guard-room under escort. In the case of a non-commissioned officer the regimental sergeant-major formally cuts the stripes from off the arm of the accused. It is to be hoped that in the near future this court-martial parade, degrading to the accused man, and not by any means an edifying spectacle for his comrades, will be abolished, for a record of the court martial and of the punishment inflicted is always inserted in the regimental orders of the day. 58

Fortunately, however, court martials are infrequent occurrences, and, so far as the non-commissioned officer is concerned, life is a fairly pleasant business. There is plenty of hard work to keep him in good health, but there are also many hours that can be spent in pleasant recreation, and the man who takes his profession seriously may now hope to attain to higher rank. Promotions to commissions from the ranks have, in the past, been infrequent; but the prospect is now much more hopeful, and, in any case, the non-commissioned officer can look forward to a pension which will serve as a perpetual reminder that his time has not been wasted. 59

CHAPTER IV

INFANTRY

The old-time term, light infantry, has little meaning at present as far as difference in the stamp of man and the weight of equipment carried is concerned; one infantry battalion is equal to another in respect of "lightness," except that some Highland battalions, recruiting from districts which provide exceptionally brawny specimens of humanity, obtain a taller and weightier average of men. Varieties of equipment in the old days made infantry "heavy" and "light," but the modern infantryman is kept as light as possible in the matter of equipment in all units.

Certain battalions possess and are very proud of distinctions awarded them for feats on the field of battle. Thus it is permitted to one infantry regiment, including all its battalions, to wear the regimental badge both on the front and the back of the helmet in review order, also on their field-service caps, to commemorate an action in which the men were surrounded and fought back to back until they had extricated themselves from their perilous position—or rather, until the survivors had extricated themselves. In another regiment, the sergeants are permitted to wear the sash over the same shoulder as the officers, in view of the fact that on one occasion all the officers were killed, and the non-commissioned officers took command, with noteworthy results. Yet another distinction, but of a different kind, is the concession made to Irish regiments in allowing them to wear sprigs of shamrock on St. Patrick's days. 61

In the "review order" or full dress of modern infantrymen—and in fact of all British soldiers—there are certain buttons and fittings which serve no useful purpose, and soldiers themselves, even, sometimes wonder why these things are worn. The reason is that, in old time, all these fittings had a use; the buttons on the back of the tunic supported belts which are no longer worn, or covered pockets which no longer exist. There is a reason also in the officer wearing his sash on one shoulder and the sergeant his on another, and in the same way there is a reason for every seemingly useless fitting in a soldier's review uniform—it perpetuates a tradition of the particular battalion or regiment concerned, or it keeps alive a tradition of the service as a whole. To the outsider, these may appear useless formalities, but they are not so in reality; the soldier is intensely proud of these things, which make for *esprit de corps* and maintain the spirit of the Army quite as much as material advantages. 62

The actual spirit in which the infantryman views his work is a difficult thing to assess. One noteworthy example of that spirit is the case of Piper Findlater, who, wounded beyond the power of movement at Dargai, sat up and piped—an amazing piece of courage and coolness under fire. Yet that same Piper Findlater, invalided home and out of the service, could display himself on a music-hall stage, an action which was incomprehensible to the civilian mind. But, to the average infantryman, there was nothing incongruous in the two actions—one was as much the right of the man as the other was to his credit, and Findlater was typical of the British infantryman.

Under the present system, each infantry regiment is divided into two or more battalions. Under the old system, each battalion was distinguished by a number, but the numbers have been abolished in favour of names of counties or districts, and two or more battalions form the regiment of a county or division of a county. It is very seldom that these two or more portions of the same regiment meet each other, for, in the case of a two-battalion regiment, one battalion is usually on foreign service while the other is domiciled in England, and the home battalion feeds the one on foreign service with recruits as needed to keep the latter up to strength. A notable exception to this rule occurred in the case of the Norfolk Regiment a few years ago, when the first and second battalions met at Bloemfontein, one outward bound at the beginning of its term of foreign service, and the other about to start for home. 63

The infantryman is fitted for what constitutes the greater part of his work, when the season's "training" is over, by what is known as "route marching." In this, a battalion is started out at the beginning of the route-marching season on a march of a few miles, in light order—carrying rifles and bayonets only, perhaps. The distance covered is gradually increased, and the weight of equipment carried by the men is also increased, until the men concerned are carrying their full packs and marching twelve or fourteen miles a day. Service conditions are maintained as far as possible, so as to make the men fit for long marches at any time; by this means the men's feet are hardened and the men themselves brought thoroughly into condition, while weaklings are picked out and marked down for future reference. "Falling out" on a route march without good and sufficient reason means days to barracks for the offender, at the least, and "cells" is a possibility. 64

The work of the infantryman is less complex than that of any other branch of the service: he has to be trained to march well and to know how to use his rifle and bayonet. Principally, given the physical endurance for the marching part of the business, he has to learn to shoot, and the simplicity of his duties is compensated for by the thoroughness with which he is taught. Then, again, discipline is of necessity stricter in infantry units than in other branches of the service; the cavalryman, with a horse to care for as well as himself and his arms and equipment, and the driver or gunner of artillery, with "two horses and two sets" (of saddlery) or his gun or limber to mind, is kept busy most of the time without an excess of discipline, but the infantryman in time of peace is concerned only with himself, his arms and equipment, and his barrack-room—a small total when compared with the cares of the man in the cavalry or artillery. By way of compensation, the infantryman is made to give more attention to his barrack-room; he is restricted, in a way that would not be possible in the cavalry or artillery, in the way in which he employs his leisure hours, and parades are made to keep his hands out of mischief, as well as to train him to thorough efficiency. 65

A brigade of infantry, consisting of four battalions, looks a perfectly uniform mass of men on, say, a service, dress parade, but intimate knowledge of the characteristics of the men in each battalion reveals a world of difference; each regiment has its own traditions, and each battalion differs widely from the rest in its methods

of working, its way of issuing commands, and its internal arrangements. There is a standard of bugle calls for the whole Army, but practically every infantry battalion infuses a certain amount of individuality into the method of sounding the call. The buglers of the Rifle Brigade, for instance, would scorn to sound their calls in the way that the East Surreys or the York and Lancaster battalions sound theirs, and conversely a York and Lancaster or an East Surrey man would smile at the bugle call of the Rifle Brigade battalion. The districts from which men are recruited, too, account for many little peculiarities in the ways of different battalions. There is obviously a world of difference between the way in which a man of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry will view a given situation, and the view adopted by a man of the East Surreys, for one is "reet Yorkshire," while the other is Cockney all through. Dialects and regimental slang combined make the language of the one almost unintelligible to the other, and, while each arrives at precisely the same end by slightly varying means, each claims superiority over the other. 66

The spirit of the British infantryman, with very few exceptions, consists mainly in his belief that he is a member of the best company in the very best battalion of infantry in the service. As for his particular arm of the service, he points with pride to the fact that he comes in from a march and gets to his food while the poor cavalryman is still fretting about in the horse lines, and *he* has no two sets of harness to bother about after a field day. He slings his equipment on the shelf and goes off to his meal when the field day is over, while the poor gunner is busy with an oil rag, keeping the rust from eating into his gun and its fittings until the time comes to clean it. Thus the infantryman on his advantages, and with some justice, too.

But in the barrack-room the cavalryman and artilleryman have the advantage. They can make down their beds and snooze when work is done, secure from interruption until "stables" shall sound and turn them out to care for their "long-faced chums." The infantryman, on the other hand, has to prepare for barrack-room and kit inspections at all times; he has to wet-scrub and dry-scrub the floors, blacklead the table trestles and legs of forms, whitewash himself tired on articles which, to the civilian eye, appear already sufficiently coated with whitewash, pick grass off the drill ground, and carry out a host of orders which seem designed for his especial irritation, though in reality they are designed to keep him at work and prevent him from being utterly idle. In certain hours, the infantryman must be made to work to keep him in condition, and if the work of a necessary nature is not sufficient to keep him employed, then work is made for him. It must be said that, owing to the existence of undiscerning commanding and other officers, a lot of this work, although undoubtedly it fulfils its purpose, is irritating to the last degree, and might with advantage be exchanged for tasks which would exercise the intelligence of the men instead of rousing their disgust. Grass-picking is an especially detested form of labour which is common in some battalions of the infantry. In most units, however, men are put to useful occupations; in some stations where available ground admits, gardens are allotted to the men, who cultivate creditable supplies of vegetables for the use of their messes and flowers for decorative purposes. 67

Another favourite form of exercise, in which the infantryman is indulged with what appears to him unnecessary frequency, is kit inspection. At first sight, it would seem that the circumstance of an officer inspecting the kit and equipment of his men is not one which would cause an undue amount of trouble, but the reverse of this is the case in practice. Each man has to lay down his kit to a regulation pattern; at the head of the bed, on which the clothing and equipment is laid out, the reds and blues and khaki-coloured squares represent much time spent by the man in folding each article of clothing to the last half-inch of size and form, prescribed by the regulation affecting the way in which kit must be laid down for inspection. Then come the underclothing, knife and fork, razor, Prayer Book and Bible, brushes, and other odds and ends with which every man must be provided. If any article is deficient from the official list, the man is promptly "put down" for a new article to replace the deficiency—and for this he has to pay. The upkeep of a full kit is most strictly enforced, and, in addition to the completeness of the kit, the amount of polish on the various articles calls for much attention on the part of the inspecting officer. A knife or fork not sufficiently bright, boots not quite as well cleaned and polished as they might be, or brass buttons displaying a suspicion of dullness, lead at the least to an order to show again at a stated hour—not the single article, but the whole kit—while repeated deficiencies, either in the quantity of the articles or in the evident amount of care bestowed on them, will lead to defaulters' drill or even cells. 68

Kit inspection counts as a "parade," and not as a "fatigue." The latter term is used to imply all kinds of actual work in connection with the maintenance of order in the battalion, and varies from washing up in the sergeants' mess to carrying coals for the barrack-room or married quarters. To each unit, as a rule, there is a coal-yard attached, and from this a certain amount of coal is issued free each week for cooking purposes, while in the winter months a further amount is allotted to the men to burn in the barrack-room stoves. If the allowance is exceeded—and since it is a small one it is usually exceeded—the men club round among themselves to purchase more, at the rate of a penny or twopence a man. The fetching of this extra coal does not count as a "fatigue" in the official sense. 69

A roll is kept of all men liable for fatigue duty, and each man takes his turn in alphabetical order in the performance of the various tasks that have to be done. As these tasks differ considerably in nature and extent, it follows that the alphabetical way of ordering the roll is as fair as any, though artful dodgers, getting wind of a stiff fatigue ahead, will get out of doing it by exchanging their turns with those men who would otherwise get an easier task. As a rule, sergeants' mess fatigue is one of the least liked, except on Sunday mornings, when it releases the man who does it from church parade—of which more later. 70

For the actual housemaid work of the barrack-room, a roll is usually kept in each room, and the men of the room take turns at "orderly man," as it is called. This involves the final sweeping out of the room after each man has swept under his own bed and round the little bit of floor which is his own particular territory. It involves the care of and responsibility for all the kits in the room while the remainder of the men are out at drill, and also the fetching of all meals and washing up of the plates and basins after each meal. The orderly man of the day is not supposed to leave the room during parade hours, except to fetch meals for the rest; it is his duty, after all have gone out, to put the boxes at the foot of the beds in an exact line, that there may be nothing to disturb the symmetry of things when the orderly officer or the colour-sergeant comes round on a morning visit of inspection. In a home station, as far as infantry is concerned, practically all barrack-room inspections take place 71

before one o'clock in the day, and in the afternoons such men as are in the barrack-room have it to themselves. It is the rule in some battalions, however, that no beds may be "made down" before six o'clock—a harsh rule, and one which serves no useful purpose, unless it be considered useful to keep a man from lying down to rest.

While guard duty is kept as light as possible in mounted branches of the service, it is allowed to assume large proportions in the infantry. In a cavalry regiment, the "main guard," which mounts duty for twenty-four hours and has charge of the regimental guard-room and prisoners confined therein, is composed at the most of a corporal and three men, but in the infantry the main guard of a battalion consists of a sergeant, a corporal or lance-corporal, and six men, providing three reliefs of two sentries apiece. Guard duty is done in "review order." That is to say, the men dress up in their best clothes, with the last possible polish on metal-work and the best possible pipeclay on all belts and equipment that permit of it; and the inspection to which the guard is submitted before taking over its duties is the most searching form of inspection which the soldier has to undergo after he has been dismissed from recruits' training. The men of the guard do turns of two hours sentry-go apiece, and then get four hours' rest, except in very inclement weather, when the periods are reduced to one hour of duty and two hours of rest. Experience has placed it beyond doubt that the "two hours on and four hours off" is the best way of doing duty in reliefs; it imposes less strain on the men, who have to keep up their duty for a day and a night, than any other form in which it could be arranged. 72

Certain men in infantry units—and in fact in all units—are excused from the regular routine of duty in order to fill special posts. Noteworthy among these are the "flag-waggers" or regimental signallers, a body of men maintained at a certain strength for the purpose of signalling messages with flags, heliograph, or lamps, by means of the Morse telegraphic code, and also with flags at short distances by semaphore. Bearing in mind the average education among the rank and file, it is remarkable with what facility men learn the use of the Morse code. Against this must be set the fact that only selected men are employed as signallers; these are taught the alphabet, and the various signs employed for special purposes, by being grouped in squads, and, after their preliminary instruction is completed, they are sent out to various points from which they send messages to each other, under conditions approximating as nearly as possible to those which obtain on active service. 73

In order to maintain the signallers of a unit in full practice and efficiency, the men are excused from all ordinary parades for a certain part of the year; during manœuvres they are attached to the headquarters staff of their unit and carry on their work as signallers, not as ordinary duty-men. The wagging of flags is only a part of their duty, for they have to learn the mechanism and use of the heliograph, since, when sunlight permits of its use, this instrument can be employed for the transmission of messages to a far greater distance than is possible even with large flags. Lamps for signalling by night are operated by a button which alternately obscures and exhibits the light of a lamp placed behind a concentrating lens. The practised signaller is as efficient in the use of flags, lamps, and heliograph as is the post-office operator in the use of the ordinary telegraph instrument, though the exigencies of field service render military signalling a considerably slower business than ordinary wire telegraphy. 74

Another course of instruction which carries with it a certain amount of exemption from duty in the infantry is that of scout. The practised scout is capable of plotting a way across country at night, marching by the compass or by the stars, making a watch serve as a compass, military map-reading—which is not as simple a matter as might be supposed—and of making sketches in conventional military signs of areas of ground, natural defensive positions, and all points likely to be of interest and advantage from a military point of view. The work of the signaller has been going on for many years, but the training of scouts is a movement which has come about and developed almost entirely during the last twelve years, which, as the Army reckons time, is but a very short period. It may be anticipated that the practice of scouting and the training of scouts will develop considerably as time goes on.

Needless to say, the orderly-man is excused all parades during his day of duty as such. Only in exceptional circumstances are cooks taken for parades, and such men as the regimental shoemaker, the armourer and his assistants, and other men employed in various capacities, attend the regular duty parades very seldom. On field days occasionally, and also on certain commanding-officers' drill parades, the orders of the day announce that the battalion will parade "as strong as possible." This means a general sweep up and turning out of men employed in various ways and excused from parades as a rule, and their unhandiness owing to lack of practice sometimes results in their being relieved from their posts and returned to duty, while frequently it involves their doing extra drills in addition to their regular work. 75

The duty-man affects to despise the man on the staff, but this affectation is more often a cloak for envy. "Staff jobs," as the various forms of employment in a unit are called, generally mean extra pay; in nineteen cases out of twenty they mean exemption from most ordinary parades and from a good deal of the ordinary routine work of the unit concerned; in almost all cases they mean total exemption from fatigues. Under these circumstances it is not to be wondered at that the secret ambition of the average infantryman at duty, when he has relinquished all hope of promotion, is to get on the staff.

CHAPTER V

CAVALRY

Practically any man of the twenty-eight cavalry regiments of the line will announce with pride that he belongs to the "right of the line." By this claim is meant that if the British Army were formed up in line, the regiment for which the claim is made will be on the right of all the rest. As a matter of fact this claim on the part of the cavalryman is incorrect, for when the Royal Horse Artillery parade with their guns, they take precedence of all other units, except the Household Cavalry.

British cavalry is divided normally into three regiments of Household Cavalry and twenty-eight cavalry regiments of the line. These latter are subdivided into seven regiments of Dragoon Guards, three of Dragoons, and eighteen regiments of Lancers and Hussars. Theoretically, Lancers take precedence over Hussars, but in actual practice the two classes of cavalry are about equal. Dragoon Guards and Dragoons rank as heavy cavalry; Lancers are supposed to be of medium weight, and Hussars light cavalry. In reality Dragoon Guards and Dragoons are slightly heavier than other corps—except the Household Cavalry, who are heaviest of all—but Lancers and Hussars are of about equal weight, both as regards horses and men. 77

The possession of a horse and the duties involved thereby render the work of a cavalryman vastly different from that of an infantryman. In the matter of guard duties, for instance, it would be possible in time of peace to abolish all infantry guard duties without affecting the well-being of the units concerned. In cavalry regiments, on the other hand, it is absolutely necessary that a certain number of men should be placed on night guard over the stables, since horses are capable of doing themselves a good deal of harm in the course of a night, if left to themselves. This is only one instance of the difference between cavalry and infantry, but it must be apparent to the most superficial observer that a vast difference exists between the two arms of the service.

Cavalrymen affect to despise the infantry, whom they term "foot sloggers" and "beetle crushers," while various other uncomplimentary epithets are also applied at times to the men who walk while the cavalry ride. Each section of the cavalry has its own particular prides and prejudices. The Household Cavalry, for instance, consider themselves entitled to look down on the regiments of the line; line cavalrymen, conversely, affect to despise the men of the Household Brigade, who, they say, count it a hardship to go to Windsor and never get nearer to foreign service than Aldershot. Further, a Dragoon Guard considers himself immensely superior to a mere Dragoon; both look down—a long way down—on the thought of service in the Lancers, and all three affect to despise the idea of serving as Hussars. In the meantime the Hussars declare that Dragoons are big, heavy, and useless, while Lancers are not much better, and the Hussar is the only perfect cavalryman. All this, however, is a matter of good-humoured chaff, and in reality Dragoons and Lancers, or Dragoons and Hussars, or any two regiments belonging to different branches of the cavalry, when placed side by side in the same station, respect each other's qualities without undue regard to their particular designations. 78

Among the many little legends and traditions of the cavalry, that attaching to the Carabiniers (Sixth Dragoon Guards) is as interesting as any, though not a particularly creditable one. It is alleged that some time during the Peninsular Campaign this regiment misbehaved itself in some way, and the sentence passed on it was to the effect that officers and men alike should no longer wear the red tunic common to Dragoon and Dragoon Guard regiments. Thenceforth a blue tunic was substituted for the more brilliant red, and in addition a mocking tune was substituted for the ordinary cavalry *réveillé*, while the band was ordered to play before *réveillé* each morning—possibly the band was guilty of exceptionally bad behaviour in order to merit this extra-special punishment. In any case the blue tunic, the *réveillé* and the band-playing have persisted unto this day, and even yet it is unsafe to inquire too closely of a Carabinier into the reason of his wearing a blue tunic while all others of his kind wear red, although the regiment elected to retain the blue tunic when a further change of colour was proposed. 79

Another tradition is that of the 11th Hussars, who on one historical occasion were supposed to have covered themselves in gore and glory to such an extent that the original colour of their uniforms, and especially that of their riding-breeches, was no longer visible. For this meritorious feat, which is more or less authentic, the regiment was granted the privilege of wearing cherry-coloured riding-breeches and overalls, and this privilege, like the Carabiniers' blue jacket, still survives. It is hardly necessary to add that the "Cherry-picker," as the 11th Hussar names himself, is considerably prouder of his cherry-coloured pants than is the Carabinier of his jacket. A different explanation of the colour is that it was adopted in honour of the Prince Consort, and since the regiment still retains as its title "The Prince Consort's Own," the latter is more probably correct. 80

From the beginning to the end of his service the cavalryman never gets quite clear of riding school. Riding-school work forms the chief portion of his training as a recruit, when he is taught to ride both with and without stirrups, to take jumps with folded arms, to vault on to a horse's back, and, in brief, to do all that can be done with a horse. Supposing him to be an average horseman, he comes back to riding school annually, at least, to refresh his memory with the old riding-school lessons, while, if he is a really good horseman, he is set to training remounts, in the course of which he has to train practically unbroken horses to do their part in the work which he himself has learned on the back of a horse already trained. The best riders of all in a regiment are singled out as "rough riders" or riding-school instructors, and their duty is to take charge of rides of remounts, to instruct men and horses too, and to pay particular attention to the breaking in of especially unmanageable young horses. 81

The riding-school training adopted in the British cavalry is based on the system inaugurated by Baucher, the famous French riding-master who came over to England and revolutionised all ideas with regard to horsemanship in the early part of the nineteenth century. Under this system a horse is taught to obey pressure of leg and rein to the fullest possible extent, and the bit mouthpiece forms only a part of the rider's means of control. By this means the horse is saved a good deal of unnecessary exertion, which is an important

thing as far as cavalry riding is concerned, since the object of the cavalryman on active service is to save his horse as far as possible against the need for speed or effective striking power.

Following on the work of the riding school the cavalryman is taught on the drill ground to ride in line of troop at close order. Theoretically the interval between men is "six inches from knee to knee," but in practice the knees of the men are touching. When a troop of men can keep line perfectly at a gallop, a squadron line is formed; the culminating point of cavalry training is perfection of line in the charge, of which the rate of progression is the fastest pace of the slowest horse. A charge produces its greatest effect when the men ride close together and keep in line, the object being to effect a definite shock by throwing as much weight as possible against a given point at as great a pace as possible. The impact of the charge, in theory, carries the men who make it through and beyond the enemy against whom they have charged, when they are expected to break up their formation and re-form, facing in the direction from whence they have come. 82

The training which a man has to undergo in order to fit him for participating in these shock tactics is necessarily long and severe. In addition to this, cavalry training is directed toward a multiplicity of ends. In any military action infantry have their definite place, which involves bearing the full brunt of attack, maintaining the defensive, or in exceptional circumstances assuming the offensive and charging with the bayonet. Cavalry, however, very rarely bear the full brunt of a sustained attack, as their organisation and equipment render them unfit for prolonged defensive operations. They are used, generally on the flanks of a field force, for making flank attacks and pursuing retreating enemies; they are also used in small bodies, known as patrols, as the eyes and ears of an army. Preceding other arms of the service in the advance, they spy out and bring back information of the position and strength of the enemy, avoiding actual contact as far as possible. Work of this kind calls for such initiative and self-reliance on the part of the rank and file as infantrymen are seldom called on to exercise. 83

Further, all cavalrymen are expected to be as proficient in the use of the rifle as are infantrymen, while they have also to learn the use of the sword, and Lancers still carry and use the lance, which, carried by a certain proportion of the men in the ranks of the Dragoon Guards and Dragoons at the end of the last and beginning of the present century, is no longer used by them. It will be seen from the foregoing that a properly trained cavalryman must be a thoroughly intelligent individual, and must be capable of greater initiative and possessed of more resource than his brother on foot. In many directions, also, he is required to exercise more initiative than the artilleryman, who is always protected by an escort either of cavalry or infantry, and is called on to think for himself and work the gun himself only when all his officers and non-commissioned officers have been shot to stillness.

At first sight it would appear that the Lancer has an immense advantage over the man armed only with a sword, but in actual practice the man with the sword is slightly better off; the Lancer gets one effective thrust, but, if this is parried or misses its object, the man with the sword can get in two or three thrusts before the Lancer has the chance for another blow. Thus Dragoons and Dragoon Guards lose little by the absence of the lance, since they, in common with all other cavalry regiments, still carry the sword. The American Army, by the way, is the only one so far which has tried the experiment of arming the rank and file of its mounted units with revolvers or pistols; in the British Army revolvers are carried only by sergeants and those of higher rank, and the rank and file trust to cold steel for mounted work, reserving the rifles which they carry for use on foot. 84

The bane of the cavalryman's life in his own opinion is stables, where he spends about four hours each day in grooming, cleaning, sweeping out, taking out bedding and bringing it in, and various other duties. Grooming in a cavalry regiment is a meticulous business; the writer has personal knowledge of and acquaintance with a troop officer who used to make his morning inspection of the troop horses with white kid gloves on, and the horses were supposed to be groomed to such a state of cleanliness that when the officer rubbed the skin the wrong way his gloves remained unsoiled. Such a state of perfection as this, of course, is possible only in barracks, and it is hardly necessary to say that the officer in question was not exactly idolised by his men. Like most youths fresh from Sandhurst, he was incapable of making allowances. 85

On manœuvres and under canvas generally, grooming is not expected to be carried to such a fine point as this; on active service it frequently happens that there is no time at all for grooming; but the general rule is to keep horses in such a state of cleanliness as will avert disease and assist in keeping the animals in condition. During the South African war it was found that grey and white horses were dangerously conspicuous, and animals of this colour were consequently painted khaki. It is not many years since a proposal was made that the 2nd Dragoons, known in the service as the Scots Greys, from the nationality of the men and the colour of the horses, should have their grey horses taken from them and darker coloured animals substituted. From the time of the founding of this regiment its men have been proud of their greys, and the order necessitating their disappearance caused a certain amount of outcry, in spite of the fact that modern military conditions rendered the substitution desirable. Regimental traditions die hard, and the Scots Greys elected to remain "Greys" in reality, while they will retain their name as long as the regiment exists. 86

The cavalryman, far more than the infantryman, makes a point of wearing "posh" clothing on every possible occasion—"posh" being a term used to designate superior clothing, or articles of attire other than those issued by and strictly conforming to the regulations. For walking out in town, a business commonly known as "square-pushing," the cavalryman who fancies himself will be found in superfine cloth overalls, wearing nickel spurs instead of the regulation steel pair, and with light, thin-soled boots instead of the Wellingtons with which he is issued. It is a commonplace among the infantry that a cavalryman spends half his pay and more on "posh" clothing, but probably the accusation is a little unjust.

There is in the cavalry a greater percentage of gentleman rankers than in any other branch of the service, and there are more queer histories attaching to men in cavalry regiments than in units of the other arms. The gentleman ranker usually shakes down to a level with the rest of the regiment. It has never yet come within the writer's knowledge that any officer accorded to a gentleman ranker different treatment from that enjoyed by the majority of the men, in spite of the assertions of melodrama writers on the subject. Favouritism in the cavalry, as in any branch of the service, is fatal to discipline, and is not indulged in to any great extent, certainly not to the benefit of gentlemen rankers as a whole. Work and efficiency stand first; social position in civilian life 87

counts for nothing, and the gentleman ranker who joins the service with a view to a commission must prove himself fitted to hold it from a military point of view.

The gentleman ranker is frequently a remittance man, and in that case he is certain of many friends, for the frequenters of the canteen are usually short of money a day or two before pay-day comes round, and thus the man with a well-lined pocket is of material use to them. Disinterested friendships, however, are too common in the Army to call for comment, and many and many a case occurs of one cavalryman, quick at his work, helping another at cleaning saddlery or equipment after he has finished his own, without thought or hope of reward.

The mention of saddlery takes us back to stables, where the cavalryman goes far too often for his own peace of mind, although, as a matter of fact, the three stable parades per day which he has to undergo are absolutely necessary for the well-being of the horses. The really smart cavalryman is conspicuous not only for keeping his horse in exceptionally good condition, but also for the way in which he keeps the leather and steel-work of his saddle and head-dress. Regulations enact that all steel-work in the stables shall be kept free from rust, and slightly oiled, and leather-work shall be cleaned and kept in condition with soft soap and dubbin only. This regulation, however, is honoured in the breach rather than in the observance, for by the use of brick-dust followed by the application of a steel-link burnisher steel-work is given the appearance of brilliantly polished silver, and various patent compositions are used on leather to give it a glossy surface, this latter with very little regard for the preservation of the leather. All this means a lot of extra work in the stable for the cavalryman; it is induced in the first place by one man desiring to give his outfit a better appearance than the rest. The squadron officer approves of the polish and brilliance—or perhaps the troop officer is responsible—and as a result all the men take up what is merely extra work with no real resulting advantage. In some extra-smart units the men are even required by their superiors to scrub the stable wheelbarrows and burnish the forks used for turning over the bedding, but this, it must be confessed, is not a general practice. At the same time, the fetish of polish and burnish is worshipped far too well in cavalry units, with the occasional result that efficiency takes second place in time of peace to mere surface smartness.

As has already been stated in a different connection, the barrack-room life of the cavalryman is easier than that of the infantryman. Kit inspections and arms inspections take place at stated intervals, and barrack-rooms are kept clean, though not kept with such fussy exactness as in infantry units. The trained cavalryman in normal times finishes the main part of his work at midday. He then has his dinner, and after this makes down his bed as it will be for the night. Unless it is his turn for fatigue, he generally snoozes through the afternoon until about half-past four, when it is time to get ready for stable parade. In India especially a cavalryman has a light time of it, for there is allotted to each squadron a definite number of syces, or native grooms, who assist the men as well as the non-commissioned officers in the care of their horses, and who do a good deal of the necessary saddle-cleaning. Cavalry serving in Egypt also get a certain amount of assistance in their work, and, on the whole, a cavalryman is far better off on foreign service than he is in a home station. The advantages of the home station consist mainly in the presence of congenial society among the civilians of the station. The soldier abroad is a being apart, and for the most part civilians leave him very much alone. There remains, however, the ever-present football by way of consolation.

As in infantry units, bodies of signallers and scouts are necessary to the establishment of every cavalry regiment. Signallers, for the period of their training, are excused from all duties connected with horses and stable work. Cavalry scouts, on the other hand, have to use their horses in the course of their training, and thus attend stables like the rest of the men, although stable discipline in their case is somewhat relaxed. The cavalry scout requires more training than the infantry scout; with his horse he is able to go farther afield, and his work is more definitely that of reconnaissance and the obtaining of information which may be of more use to a brigade or divisional commander than that any infantryman is capable of obtaining without a horse to carry him.

To his other accomplishments the cavalryman is expected to add some slight knowledge of veterinary matters, in order that, when forced to depend on himself and his horse, he can find remedies for simple ailments, and keep the horse in a state of fitness. The shoeing-smith and farriers who form a special department of every cavalry regiment are under the control of the veterinary officer included in the establishment of each cavalry unit, and the veterinary officer constitutes the final court of appeal when anything affecting a "long-faced chum" is in question.

Sufficient has been said about the cavalryman on duty to show that his tasks are legion. His fitness to perform them has been attested on recent battlefields as well as on earlier historic occasions. Off duty and in time of peace he is, in the main, a fairly pleasant fellow, often a very shy one, and usually capable of using the King's English in reasonable fashion. The average cavalryman has a sufficiency of aspirates, and, in the matter of intelligence, the nature of the duties he is called upon to perform voices his claims quite sufficiently.

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CHAPTER VI

ARTILLERY AND ENGINEERS

The Royal Artillery of the British Army is divided into three branches, known respectively as Horse, Field, and Garrison Artillery. In normal times the Royal Horse Artillery consists of some twenty-eight batteries, distinguished by the letters of the alphabet, together with a depot and a riding establishment. On parade the Horse Artillery batteries take precedence of all other units, with the exception of Household Cavalry. The Royal Field Artillery consists of 150 batteries and four depots, and the Royal Garrison Artillery consists of 100 companies and nine mountain batteries.

"A" Battery of the Royal Horse is officially designated the "Chestnut" troop, from the colour of its horses, and the Horse Artillery as a whole is one of the few corps of the service which retains the stable jacket for parade use. In the case of the R.H.A. this garment is of dark blue with yellow braid, and the head-dress of the horse gunner is a busby with white plume and scarlet busby-bag, similar to that of the Hussars. The Field and Garrison Artillery wear tunics in full dress, and their helmets are surmounted by a ball instead of a spike. 93

While the weapon of the Field Artillery is the 18½-pounder quick-firing gun, and gunners ride on the gun and limber, the R.H.A. is armed with the 13-pounder quick-firing gun, and its gunners are mounted on horseback. The object of this is to obtain extreme mobility. The Royal Horse are expected to be able to execute all their manœuvres at a gallop, and to get into and out of action more quickly than the Field Artillery. They are designed specially to accompany cavalry in flying-column work; their mobility is only achieved by a sacrifice of weight in the projectile which the gun throws, and they are only expected to hold a position supported by cavalry until the heavier guns come into play. The horse gunners may be regarded as the scouts of the artillery, in the sense in which the cavalry are the scouts of the whole army.

Since, in the Royal Horse, gunners as well as drivers are mounted, the number of horses to a battery is greater than in the Field Artillery, and work is consequently harder. Officers of the Royal Horse are specially selected from the R.F.A., to which they return on promotion, and the rank and file are picked men, chosen for physique and smartness. It is a maxim of the service that the work of the R.H.A. is never done, and when one takes into account the fact that gunners have a horse and saddle apiece to care for as well as their gun, while drivers have two horses and two sets of harness apiece to keep in condition, it will be seen that there is a certain amount of truth in the statement. In old times, when field-day and manœuvre parades were carried through in review order, the horse gunner was eternally in debt over the matter of the yellow braid with which his stable jacket is adorned, for these jackets are particularly difficult to keep clean. The general adoption of service dress for working parade has neutralised this disability. The horse gunner of to-day is a very good soldier indeed in every respect, both by real aptitude for his work and by compulsion. 94

Not that the men of the Field Artillery are not equally good soldiers, for they are. The Field Artillery, however, divides itself naturally into two branches, drivers and gunners. Each driver has two horses and two sets of harness to manage, and, if the cavalryman has reason to grouse at the length of time he spends at stables, the driver of the "Field" has more than four times as much reason to grouse. Moreover, the cavalryman is permitted to clean his saddlery during the official stable hour, but drivers of the R.F.A. are expected to concentrate their attention on their horses during the time that they are officially at stables; they can stay in the stables and get their sets of harness cleaned and fit for inspection in their own time. They are then at liberty to clean up their own personal equipment, and, until the turn for guard comes round, have the rest of their time to themselves. 95

Gunners of the R.F.A. have all their time taken up by the care of the gun, its fittings and appointments, as well as by the various separate instruments connected with the use of a gun. For instance, all arms of the service possess and make use of range-finding instruments, known as mekometers, but in the artillery the mekometer is a larger and more complicated affair, for the range of the gun is several times greater than that of the rifle, and range finding is consequently a far more complex business. The simple gunner must understand this, just as he must understand the business of "laying" or adjusting the sights of the gun to the required range, the use of telescopic sights, the delicate mechanism of the breech-block, the method of putting the gun out of action or rendering it useless in ease of emergency, and a hundred and one other things which involve really complicated technical knowledge, and lie in the province of the commissioned officer rather than in that of a private soldier. The reason for teaching these things to the private soldier lies in the accumulated experience which shows that on many occasions all the officers and non-commissioned officers of a battery have been blown to pieces by the enemy's fire, and there have remained only a few private soldiers to do their own work and that of their officers as well. It is to the eternal credit of the Army, and especially to that of the artillery, that men thus placed have never once failed to do their duty nobly, and the present war has already afforded more than one instance of single men sticking to their guns to the last. Desertion of the guns has never yet been charged against British artillery, nor is it ever likely to be. 96

Field-guns are always accompanied by an escort, sometimes of cavalry, but more often of infantry, for the gunner is admittedly helpless against infantry at close range or against charging cavalry. The charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava forms an instance of what cavalry can do against unescorted guns, and, though the pattern of gun in use has changed for the better, the projectile being far more powerful, and the number of shells per minute far greater, such feats as that of the immortal Light Brigade are still within the range of possibility. 97

The business of the gunner in an army assuming the offensive is to open the attack. The fuse of the shrapnel shell is so timed that the missile, which contains a quantity of bullets and a bursting charge of powder, shall explode immediately over the position held by the enemy. When a sufficient number of shells have been fired to weaken resistance, the infantry advance in order to drive the enemy from the chosen position. In defensive

action the use of the gun lies in retarding the advance of the enemy, and inflicting as much damage as possible before rifles and machine-guns can come into play.

For this business ranges must be taken swiftly and accurately. Loading must be performed expeditiously, and, though the pneumatic recoil of the modern field-gun renders it far less liable to shift in action, the sights must be correctly aligned after each shot. A gun crew must work swiftly and without confusion, and peace training is devoted to attaining that quickness and thorough efficiency which renders a battery formidable in war.

There is, perhaps, less show about the work of a gunner than in that of any other arm of the service with the exception of the Royal Engineers. A good bit of his work is extremely dirty; cleaning a gun, for instance, after firing practice with smokeless powder, is a hopelessly messy business, and the infantryman, who pulls his rifle through and extracts the fouling in about five minutes, would feel sorry for himself if he were called on to share in the work of cleaning the bore of an 18½-pounder after firing practice. There is a considerable amount of drill of a complicated nature which the field-gunner has to learn in addition to ordinary foot-drill; there is all the mechanism of the gun to be understood; there are courses in range-finding, gun-laying, signalling, and other things, and on the whole it is not surprising that it takes at least five years to render a field gunner thoroughly conversant with his work. The finished article is rather a business-like man, quieter as a rule in his ways than his fellows in the cavalry and infantry, rather serious, and little given to boasting about the excellence of service in the Royal Field Artillery. He knows his worth and that of his arm too well to waste breath in declaring them. 98

The driver of the Field Artillery has even more of riding-school work to do than the average cavalryman. It would be idle to say that he is a better rider, for the average cavalryman is as good a rider as it is possible for a man to be. Artillery horses, however, are heavy and unhandy compared with cavalry mounts, and the driver has not only to drive the horse he rides, but has also to lead and control the horse abreast of his own. The principal responsibility for the path which the gun takes lies with the lead or foremost driver, though almost as much responsibility is entailed on the man controlling the wheel or rearmost horses, and, compared with these two, the centre driver has an easy time of it in mounted drill and field work. 99

Notwithstanding the extremely hard work to which drivers of artillery are subjected, the same trouble over harness as obtains over cavalry saddlery is experienced in some batteries. "Soft soap and oil" are the cleaning materials prescribed by the regulations, but certain battery commanders enforce the use of steel-link burnishers on steel-work, and brilliant polish on leather, the last-named polish being obtained by the use of a mysterious combination of heel-ball, turpentine, harness composition, and, according to legend, old soldiers' breath. The mixture is known among the drivers as "fake," and "fake and burnish" is synonymous with unending work in the stables. It is the fetish of smartness, a misdirected enthusiasm, which brings things like this to pass and inflicts extra work on men whose energies should be devoted solely to the attaining of fitness for active service, where "fake and burnish" have no place. 100

The Royal Horse and Royal Field Artillery are the only branches of the service in which substantial prizes are given annually to encourage men in their work. In each battery three money prizes are offered for competition among the drivers; the amounts offered are substantial, and the general result is a spirit of healthy emulation, though far too often, and with the full sanction of the battery officer, this degenerates into the "fake and burnish" craze. This, however, is not the fault of the prize-giving system, but of the officers who not only permit, but encourage and even order this unnecessary work, which, while entailing added labour on the men, assists in the deterioration of the leather-work in harness. For all leatherwork requires constant feeding with oil in order to keep it fit and pliant, while the "fake" dries the fibres of the leather and starves it, rendering it liable to cracking and perishing.

The branch of the Artillery of which least is heard is that of the Royal Garrison Artillery, whose hundred companies are scattered about the British Empire in obscure corners, engaged in the work of coast defence and the management of siege guns. It is fortunate for the garrison gunners that they have no "long-faced chums" to worry about, for they are admittedly the hardest-worked branch of the service as it is. Gibraltar houses several companies; you will find some of them managing the big guns at Dover, and at every protected port. They are big men, all; strong men, and lithe and active, for their work involves the hauling about of heavy weights, combined with cat-like quickness in loading and firing their many-patterned charges. The horse and field gunner have each to learn one pattern of gun thoroughly, but the garrison gunner, employed almost entirely in garrisoning defensive fortifications, has to learn the use of half a hundred patterns, from the little one-pounder quick-firer to the big gun on its disappearing platform, and the 13·4-inch siege-gun. The horse and field gunner may complete their education some day, for the pattern of field-gun changes but seldom, and the present pattern is not likely to be improved on for some years to come. The garrison gunner, however, is the victim of experiment, for every new gun that comes out, after being tested and passed either at Lydd or Shoeburyness, is handed on to the garrison gunners for use, and there is a new set of equipment and mechanism to be mastered. In order to ascertain the quality of their work, one has only to get permission to visit the nearest fort, when it will be seen that the guns are cared for like babies, nursed and polished and covered away with full appreciation of their power and value. 101

Garrison gunners suffer from worse stations than any other branch of the service. They are planted away on lonely coast stations for two or three years at a time, and Aden, the bane of foreign service in the infantryman's estimation, is a pleasant place compared with some which garrison gunners are compelled to inhabit for a period. Lonely islands in the West Indies, isolated places on the Indian and African coast, forts placed far away from contact with civilians in the British Isles—all these fall to the lot of the garrison gunner, and the nature of his work is such that, unlike his fellows in the field and horse artillery, he gets neither infantry nor cavalry escort. 102

Reckoned in with the Garrison Artillery are the nine Mountain Batteries, which, organised for service on such hilly country as is provided by the Indian frontier, form a not inconspicuous part of the British Army. In these batteries the guns are carried in sections on pack animals; Kipling has immortalised the Mountain Batteries in his verses on "The Screw Guns," a title which conveys an allusion to the fact that the guns of the 103

Mountain Batteries screw and fit together for use. The use of these guns can be but local, for they are not sufficiently mobile to oppose to ordinary field-guns on level ground, nor is the projectile that they throw of sufficient weight to give them a chance in a duel with field-guns. They are, however, extremely useful things for the purpose for which they are intended; they form a necessary factor in the maintenance of order on the north-west frontier of India, and, together with their gun crews, they instil a certain measure of respect into the turbulent tribes of that uneasy land.

A consideration of the various branches of the service would be incomplete if mention of the Royal Engineers were omitted. The Engineers are looked on as a sister service to the Royal Artillery, and consist of various troops, companies, and sections, according to the technical work they are called on to perform. Thus there are field troops of mounted engineers for service with cavalry, field companies for duty with the field army, fortress companies for service in conjunction with the garrison gunners, balloon sections and telegraph sections for the use of the intelligence department, and pontoon companies for field bridging work. Every engineer of full age is expected to be a trained tradesman when he enlists, and the special qualifications demanded of this branch of the service are acknowledged by a higher rate of pay than that accorded to any other arm. The motto of the Engineers, "Ubique," is fully justified, for they are not only expected to be, but are, capable of every class of work, from making a pepper-caster out of a condensed-milk tin to throwing across a river a bridge capable of conveying siege-guns. There is no end to their activities, and no end to their enterprise, and in the opinion of many the Engineers, officers and men alike, are the most capable and efficient body of men in any branch of the Government service. 104

Their work is little seen; to their lot falls the task of constructing the barbed-wire entanglements with the assistance of which infantry battalions can put up a magnificent defence against any kind of attack; the Engineers are responsible for the construction of the bridge by means of which the cavalry arrive unexpectedly on the other side of the river and spoil the enemy's plans by getting round his flank; it is the Engineers, again, who repair the blown-up railway line and permit of the transport of trainloads of troops to an unexpected point of vantage, thus again upsetting the plans of the enemy. One hears of the magnificent defence maintained by the infantry; one hears of the brilliant exploits of the cavalry on the flank of the enemy; one hears also of the skill of the commander who moved the troops with such suddenness and disconcerted his enemy; but the work of the Engineers, who made these things possible, generally goes unrecognised outside military circles, and the Engineers themselves have to reap their satisfaction out of the knowledge of work well done. 105

CHAPTER VII

IN CAMP

In going to camp, transferring from the solid shelter of barracks to the more doubtful comfort of crowding under a canvas roof, the soldier feels that he is getting somewhere near the conditions under which he will be placed on active service. The pitching of camp, especially by an infantry battalion, is a parade movement, and as such is an interesting business. It begins with the laying out of the tents in their bags, and the tent poles beside them, near the positions which the erected tents will occupy. The bags are emptied of their contents; men are told off to poles, guy ropes, mallets and pegs; the tents are fully unfolded, and, at a given word of command, every tent goes up to be pegged into place in the shortest possible space of time. At the beginning of a given ten minutes there will be lying on otherwise unoccupied ground rows of bags and poles; at the end of that same ten minutes a canvas town is in being, and the men who are to occupy that town are thinking of fetching in their kits. 107

Under ordinary circumstances, from four to eight men are told off to occupy each tent, but on manoeuvres and on active service these numbers are exceeded more often than not. During the South African war the present writer once had the doubtful pleasure of being the twenty-fourth man in an ordinary military bell-tent. The next night and thereafter, wet or fine, half the men allotted to that tent made a point of sleeping in the open air. It was preferable.

Life in camp is an enjoyable business so long as the weather continues fine and not too boisterous; discipline is relaxed to a certain extent while under canvas, open-air life renders the appetite keener, and one's enjoyment of life is more thorough than is the case in barracks. Wet weather, however, changes all this. The luxury of floor-boards is a rare one even in a standing camp, and, no matter what one may do in the way of digging trenches round the tent and draining off surplus water by all possible means, a moist unpleasantness renders life a burden and causes equipment and arms to need about twice as much cleaning as under normal circumstances.

Camp life breeds yarns unending, and in wet weather, or in the hours after dark, men sit and tell hirsute chestnuts to each other for lack of better occupation. If the weather is fine there are plenty of varieties of sport, including the ubiquitous football to occupy spare minutes, but yarns and tobacco form the principal solace of hours which cannot be filled in more active ways. There is one yarn which, like all yarns, has the merit of being perfectly true, but, unlike most, is not nearly so well known as it ought to be. It concerns a cavalry regiment which settled down for a brief space at Potchefstroom after the signing of peace in South Africa. 108

Some months previous to the signing of peace, a certain lieutenant of this regiment, known to his men and his fellow officers as "Bulgy," became possessed of a young baboon, which grew and throve exceedingly at the end of a stout chain that secured the captive to one of the transport wagons of the regiment. Bulgy's servant was entrusted with the care of the monkey, which, after the manner of baboons, was a competent thief from infancy, and inclined to be savage if thwarted. On one occasion, in particular, Bulgy's monkey got loose, and got at the officers' mess wagon; it had a good feed of biscuits and other delicacies, and retired at length, followed by the mess caterer, who expostulated violently both with Bulgy's servant and with Bulgy's monkey, until a tin of ox-tongues skilfully aimed by the monkey caught him below the belt and winded him. After that, as Bret Harte says, the subsequent proceedings interested him no more. 109

Well, the regiment arrived at Potchefstroom and settled down under canvas, with an average of eight men to a tent and the horse lines of each troop placed at right-angles to the lines of tents. Bulgy's monkey was given a place away on the outside of the lines, with the other end of his chain attached to a tree-stump, and there, for a time, he rested, fed sparingly and abused plentifully by Bulgy's servant. In the regiment itself money was plentiful at the time, and it was the custom in the tents which housed drinking men for the eight tent-mates to get in a can of beer before the canteen closed. Over the beer they would sit and yarn and play cards until "lights out" sounded.

One night, eight men sat round their can of beer in a tent of "A" Squadron, to which, by the way, Bulgy belonged. These eight had nearly reached the bottom of the can. They had blown out all the candles in the tent save one, which would remain for illumination until "lights out" sounded. The last man to unroll his blankets and get to bed had just finished, and was sitting up in order to blow out the last remaining candle, when the flap of the tent was raised from the back, and a hairy, grinning, evil face, which might have been that of the devil himself, looked in on the sleepy warriors. They, for their part, were too startled to investigate the occurrence, and the sight of that face prevented them from stopping to unfasten the tent flap in order to get out. They simply went out, under the flies, anyhow; one man tried to climb the tent pole, possibly with a vague idea of getting out through the ventilating holes at the top, but he finally went out under the fly of the tent like the rest, taking with him the sting of a vicious whack which the hairy devil aimed at him with a chain that it carried. While these eight men were fleeing through the night, the devil with the chain came out from the tent, and, seeing a line of startled horses before it, leaped upon the back of the nearest horse, gave the animal a thundering blow with its chain, and hopped lightly on to the back of the next horse in the row, repeating the performance there. In almost as little time as it takes to tell, a squadron of stampeding horses followed the eight men of the tent on their journey toward the skyline, and in the black and windy dark the remaining men of "A" Squadron turned out to fetch their terrified horses back to camp, and, when they knew the cause of the disturbance, to curse Bulgy's monkey even more fervently than Bulgy's servant had cursed it. The end of it all was that eight men of "A" Squadron signed the pledge, and Bulgy left off keeping the monkey; it was too expensive a form of amusement. 110

This is a typical camp yarn, and a military camp is full of yarns, some better than this, and some worse.

In camp, more than anywhere else, the soldier learns to be handy. The South African war taught men to kill 111

and cut up their own meat, to make a cooking fire out of nothing, to cook for themselves, to wash up—though most of them had learned this in barracks—to wash their own underclothing, darn their own socks, and do all necessary mending to their clothes. It taught cavalymen the value of a horse, in addition to giving them an insight to the foregoing list of accomplishments. It was, for the first year or so, a strenuous business of fighting, but the last twelve months of the war consisted for many men far more of marching and camp experience than actual war service. It was an ideal training school and gave an insight into camp life under the best possible circumstances; its lessons were invaluable, and much of the practice of the Army of to-day is derived from experience obtained during that campaign. 112

One failing to which men—and especially young soldiers—are liable in camp life consists in that when they return to camp, thoroughly tired after a long day's manoeuvring or marching, they will not take the trouble to cook and get ready for themselves the food without which they ought not to be allowed to retire to rest. In the French Army, officers make a point of urging their men to prepare food for themselves immediately on their return to camp, but in the English Army this matter is left to the discretion of the men themselves, with the result that some of them frequently go to bed for the night without being properly fed. This course, if persisted in, almost invariably leads to illness, and it is important that men under canvas should be properly fed at the end of the day as well as at the beginning and during the course of their work.

When under canvas in time of peace, the authorities of most units reduce their demands on their men in comparison with barrack life. It is generally understood that a man cannot turn out in review order, or in "burnish and fake," with the restrictions of a canvas town about him. In some units, however, this point is not sufficiently considered, and as much is asked of men as when they have the conveniences of barracks all about them. The result of this is sullenness and bad working on the part of the men; the short-sightedness of officers leads them to press their demands while men are in the bad temper caused by too much being put upon them, and the final result is what is known technically in the Army as an excess of "crime." A string of men far in excess of the usual number is wheeled up in front of the company or commanding officer to be "weighed off," and the number of men on defaulters' parade, or undergoing punishment fatigues, steadily increases. Although in theory the soldier has the right of complaint, if he feels himself aggrieved, to successive officers, even up to the general officer commanding the brigade or division in which he is serving, in practice he finds these complaints of so little real use to him that he expresses his discontent by means of incurring "crime," or, in other words, by getting into trouble in some way. There is no accounting for this habit; it is the way of the soldier, and no further explanation can be given. Squadrons of cavalry have been known to cut all their saddlery to pieces, and companies of infantry to render their belts and equipment useless, by way of expressing their discontent or disgust at undue harshness. The relaxation of discipline and the absence of barrack-room soldiering when under canvas is a privilege which the soldier values highly, and it ought not to be curtailed in any way. 113

A pleasant form of camping which many units on home service enjoy is the annual musketry camp. It happens often that there is no musketry range within convenient marching distance of the place in which a unit is stationed, and, in that case, the unit sends its men, one or two companies or squadrons at a time, to camp in the vicinity of the musketry range allotted to their use. The firing of the actual musketry course is in itself an interesting business, and it brings out a pleasant spirit of emulation among the men concerned. Keeness is always displayed in the attempt to attain the coveted score which entitles a man to wear crossed guns on his sleeve for the ensuing twelve months, and proclaims him a "marksman." In addition to this there is the pleasant sense of freedom engendered by life under canvas, and the access of health induced thereby. The soldier, in common with most healthy men, enjoys roughing it up to a point, and life in a musketry camp seldom takes him beyond the point at which enjoyment ceases. 114

Infantry units serving in foreign and colonial stations are frequently split up into detachments consisting of one or more companies, and serving each at a different place. This detachment duty, as it is called, as often as not involves life under canvas, and it may be understood that life under the tropical or sub-tropical conditions of foreign and colonial stations can be a very pleasant thing. Here, as in home stations, sufficient work is provided to keep the soldier from overmuch meditation. Time is allowed, however, for sport and recreation, and, even when thrown entirely on their own resources for amusement, troops are capable of making the time pass quickly and easily. 115

While on the subject of camping there is one more yarn of South Africa and the war which merits telling, although it only concerns a bad case of "nerves." It happened during the last year of the war that a column crossed the Modder River from south to north, going in the direction of Brandfort, and camp was pitched for the night just to the north of the Glen Drift. At this point in its course the Modder runs between steep, cliff-like banks, from which a belt of mimosa scrub stretches out for nearly a quarter of a mile on each side of the river. After camp had been pitched for the night, the sentries round about the camp were finally posted with a special view to guarding the drift, the northward front of the column, and its flanks. Only two or three sentries, however, were considered necessary to protect the rear, which rested on the impenetrable belt of mimosa scrub along the river bank. 116

One of these sentries along the scrub came on duty at midnight, just after the moon had gone down. He "took over" from the sentry who preceded him on the post, and started to keep watch according to orders, though in his particular position there was little enough to watch. Quite suddenly he grew terribly afraid, not with a natural kind of fear, but with the nightmarish kind of terror that children are known to experience in the dark. His reason told him that in the position that he occupied there was nothing which could possibly harm him, for behind him was the bush, through which a man could not even crawl, while before him and to either side was the chain of sentries, of which he formed a part, surrounding his sleeping comrades. His imagination, however, or possibly his instinct, insisted that something uncanny and evil was watching him from the darkness of the tangled mimosa bushes, and was waiting a chance to strike at him in some horrible fashion. He tried to shake off this childish fear, to assure himself that it could not possibly be other than a trick of "nerves" brought on by darkness and the need for keeping watch, when—crash!—something struck him with tremendous force in the back and sent him forward on his face. 117

Half stunned, he picked himself up from the ground, and the pain in his back was sufficient to assure him that he had not merely fallen asleep and imagined the whole business. With his loaded rifle at the ready he searched the edge of the mimosa bush as closely as he was able, but could discover nothing; he had an idea of communicating with the sentry next in the line to himself, but, since there was no further disturbance, and nothing to show, he decided to say nothing, but simply to stick to his post until the next relief came round.

Suddenly the uncanny sense of terror returned to him, intensified. He felt certain this time that the evil thing which had struck him before would strike again, and he felt certain that he was being watched by unseen eyes. He was new to the country; as an irregular he was new to military ways, and he promised himself that if ever he got safely home he would not volunteer for active service again. The sense of something unseen and watching him grew, and with it grew also the nightmarish terror, until he was actually afraid to move. Then, by means of the same mysterious agency, he was struck again to the ground, and this time he lay only partially conscious and quite helpless until the reliefs came round. The sergeant in charge of the reliefs had an idea at first of making the man a close prisoner for lying down and sleeping at his post, but after a little investigation he changed his mind and sent one of his men for the doctor instead. 118

The doctor announced, after examination, that if the blow which felled the man had struck him a few inches higher up in the back he would not have been alive to remember it, and the man himself was taken into hospital for a few days to recover from the injuries so mysteriously inflicted. In the morning the column moved off on its way, and no satisfactory reason could be adduced for the midnight occurrence.

But residents in that district will tell you, unto this day, that one who has the patience to keep quiet and watch in the moonlight can see baboons come up from the mimosa scrub and amuse themselves by throwing clods of earth and rocks at each other.

It is a good camp story, and I tell it as it was told to me, without vouching for its truth. Any man who cares to go into a military camp—by permission of the officer commanding, of course—and has the tact and patience to win the confidence of the soldiers in the camp, can hear stories equally good, and plenty of them. For, as previously remarked, camp life breeds yarns. 119

CHAPTER VIII

MUSKETRY

Although the musket of old time became obsolete before the memory of living man, the term "musketry" survives yet, and probably will always survive for laconic description of the art and practice of military rifle-shooting. Musketry is the primary business of the infantry soldier, and it also enters largely into the training of the cavalryman, who is expected to be able to dismount and hold a desired position until infantry arrive to relieve him.

So far as the recruit is concerned, by far the greater part of the necessary instruction in musketry takes place not on the rifle range, but on the regimental or battalion drill-ground, where the beginner is taught the correct positions for shooting while standing, kneeling, and lying. He is taught the various parts of his weapon and their peculiar uses; he is taught that when a wind gauge is adjusted one division to either side, it makes a lateral difference of a foot for every hundred yards in the ultimate destination of the bullet. He is taught the business of fine adjustment of sights, taught with clips of dummy cartridges how to charge the magazine of his rifle. The extreme effectiveness of the weapon is impressed on him, and the instructor not only tells him that he must not point a loaded rifle at a pal, but also explains the reason for this, and usually draws attention to accidents that have occurred through disregard of elementary rules of caution. For long experience has demonstrated that the unpractised man is liable to be careless in the way in which he handles a rifle, and the recruit, being at a careless age, and often coming from a careless class, is especially prone to make mistakes unless the need for caution is well hammered home. 121

At first glance, a rifle is an extremely simple thing. You pull back the bolt, insert a cartridge, and close the bolt. Then you put the rifle to your shoulder and pull the trigger—and the trick is done. But first impressions are misleading, and the recruit has to be trained in the use of the rifle until he understands that he has been given charge of a very delicate and complex piece of mechanism, of which the parts are so finely adjusted that it will send its bullet accurately for a distance of 2800 yards—considerably over a mile and a half. In order to maintain the accuracy of the instrument the recruit is taught by means of a series of lessons, which seem to him insufferably long and tedious, how to clean, care for, and handle his rifle. An immense amount of time and care is given to the business of teaching him exactly how to press the trigger, for on the method of pressing the quality of the shot depends very largely. The musketry instructor gives individual instruction to each man in this, and the man is made to undergo "snapping practice"—that is, repeatedly pressing the trigger of the empty rifle until he has gained sufficient experience to have some idea of what will happen when the trigger is pressed with a live cartridge in front of the bolt. 122

When the recruit has been well grounded in the theory of using a rifle, he is taken to the rifle range for actual practice with real ammunition. He starts off at the 200 yards' range with a large target before him, and, in all probability, the first shot that he fires scores a bull's-eye. He feels at once that he knows a good bit more about the use of a rifle than the man who is instructing him, and at the given word he aims and fires again. This time he is lucky if he scores an outer; more often than not the bullet either strikes the ground half-way up the range, or goes sailing over the back of the butts, and the recruit, with a nasty painful feeling about his shoulder, has an idea that rifle-shooting is a tricky business, after all. The fact was that, with his experience of "snapping," he had learned to pull the trigger—or rather, to press it—without experiencing the kick of the rifle; that kick, felt with the first real firing, caused an instinctive recoil on his part in firing the second time. Later on he learns to stand the kick, and to mitigate its effects by holding the rifle firmly in to his shoulder, and from that time onward he begins to improve in the art of rifle-shooting and to make consistent practice. 123

For the recruits' course, the targets are naturally larger and the conditions easier than when the trained man fires. At the conclusion of the recruits' course, the men are graded into "marksmen," who are the best shots of all, first-class, second-class, and third-class shots, and they have to qualify in each annual "duty-man's" course of firing in order to retain or improve their positions as shots. Before the new regulations, which made pay dependent on proficiency on the range, came into force, there was a good deal of juggling with scores in the butts; one company or squadron of a unit would provide "markers" for another, and since the men at the firing point shot in regular order, it was a comparatively easy matter to "square the marker" and get him to mark up a better score than was actually obtained. Under the present rules governing proficiency pay, however, a man's rate of pay is dependent on his musketry, and third-class shots suffer to the extent of twopence per day for failing to make the requisite number of points for second class. In consequence of this, supervision in the butts is much more severe, and there is little opportunity of putting on a score that is not actually obtained. A case occurred two or three years ago, the 5th Dragoon Guards being the regiment concerned, in which the men of a whole squadron made such an abnormally good score as a whole that, when the returns came to be inspected, it was suspected that the markers had had a hand in compiling what was practically a record. The squadron in question was ordered to fire its course over again, and the markers were carefully chosen with a view to the prevention of fraud in the butts. After two or three days of firing, however, the repeat course was stopped, for the men of the squadron were making even better scores than before. The incident goes to show that there is little likelihood of frauds occurring at the butts under the present system of supervision, and incidentally demonstrates the shooting capabilities of that particular squadron of men. 124

Bad shots are the trial of instructors, who are held more or less responsible for the musketry standard of their units—certainly more, if there are too many bad shots in any particular unit. The bad shot is usually a nervous man, who cannot keep himself and his rifle steady at the moment of firing, though drink—too much of it—plays a large part in the reduction of musketry scores. At any rifle range used by regular troops, during the carrying out of the annual course, one may see the musketry instructor lying beside some man at the firing point, instructing him where to aim, pointing out the error of the last shot, and telling the soldier how to correct his aim for the next—generally helping to keep up the average of the regiment or battalion. As a rule, there is 125

no man more keen on his work than the musketry instructor, who is usually a very good shot himself, as well as being capable of imparting the art of shooting to others.

The great musketry school of the British Army, so far as home service goes, is at Hythe, where all instructors have to attend a class to qualify for instructorship. Here the theory and practice of shooting are fully taught; a man at Hythe thinks shooting, dreams shooting, talks shooting, and shoots, all the time of his course. 126 He is initiated into the mysteries of trajectory and wind pressure, taught all about muzzle velocity and danger zone, while the depth of grooving in a rifle barrel is mere child's play to him. He is taught the minutiae of the rifle, and comes back to his unit knowing exactly why men shoot well and why they shoot badly. He is then expected to impart his knowledge, or some of it, to the recruits of the unit, and to supervise the shooting of the trained men as well. In course of time, constantly living in an atmosphere of rifle-shooting, and spending more time and ammunition on the range than any other man of his unit, he becomes one of the best shots, though seldom the very best. For rifle-shooting is largely a matter of aptitude, and some men, after their recruits' training and a duty-man's course on the range, can very nearly equal the scores compiled by the musketry instructor.

Since shooting is a matter of aptitude to a great extent, it follows that the present system, punishing men for bad shooting by deprivation of pay and in other ways, is not a good one. It has not increased the standard of shooting to any appreciable extent; men do not shoot better because they know their rate of pay depends on it, for they were shooting as well as they could before. Certainly the man who can shoot well is of greater value in the firing line than the one who shoots badly, but, apart from this, all men are called on to do the same duty, and the third-class shot, if normally treated, has as much to do, does it just as well, and is entitled to as much pay for it as the marksman. There can be no objection to a system which rewards good shooting, but that is an entirely different matter from penalising bad shooting, as is done at present. 127

The penalties do not always stop at deprivation of pay. In some infantry units a third-class shot is regarded as little better than a defaulter; he has extra drill piled on him—drill which has nothing at all to do with the business of learning to shoot; he is liable for fatigues from which other men are excused, and altogether is regarded to a certain extent as incompetent in other things beside marksmanship. This, naturally, does not improve his shooting capabilities; he gets disgusted with things as they are, knows that, since his commanding officer has determined things shall be no better for him, it is no use hoping for a change, and with a feeling of disgust resolves that, since in his next annual course he cannot possibly put up a better score, he will put up a worse. It is the way in which the soldier reasons, and there is no altering it; the way in which men are disciplined makes them reason so, and the determination to make a worse score since a better is impossible is on a par with the action of a cavalry squadron in cutting its saddlery to pieces because the men are disgusted with the ways of an officer or non-commissioned officer. Thus, in the case of unduly severe action on the part of commanding officers, the pay regulations, which make musketry a factor in the rate of pay, have done little good to shooting among the men. 128

When actually at the firing point, a soldier is taught that he must "keep his rifle pointing up the range," for accidents happen easily, and, in spite of the extreme caution of officers and instructors, hardly a year goes by without some accidental shooting to record. The wonder is not that this sort of thing happens, but that it does not happen more often, for, until a soldier has undergone active service and seen how easily fatal results are produced with a rifle, it seems impossible to make him understand the danger attaching to careless use of the weapon. One may find a man, so long as he is not being watched, calmly loading a rifle and closing the bolt with the muzzle pointed at the ear of a comrade; it is not a frequent occurrence, but it happens, all the same. And, in consequence, accidents happen. 129

The range and the annual course are productive of a good deal of amusement, at times. There is a story of an officer who pointed out to a man that every shot he was firing was going three feet to the right of the target, and who, after having pointed this out several times, at last ordered the man to stop firing while he telephoned up to the butts and ordered that that particular target should be moved three feet to the right. Whether the result justified the change is not recorded. Cases are not uncommon in which a man fires on the wrong target by mistake, especially at the long ranges, and there is at least one well-authenticated case of a man who put all his seven shots on to the next man's target, and of course scored nothing for himself. For the law of the range is that if a man plants a shot on another man's target, the other man gets the benefit of the points scored by that shot. The markers in the butts must mark up what they see, for if they were compelled to go by instructions from the firing point and had to disregard the evidence of the targets, a musketry course would be an extremely complicated business, and would last for ever.

One oft-told story is that of the recruit who sent shot after shot over the back of the butts, in spite of the repeated instructions of the musketry instructor to take a lower aim. At last, probably being tired of being told to aim low, the recruit dropped his rifle muzzle to such an extent that the bullet struck the ground about half-way up the range and went on its course as a whizzing ricochet. "Missed again!" said the instructor in disgust. 130

"Yes," said the recruit, "but I reckon the target felt a draught that time, anyhow."

The recruits' course of musketry ends on the short ranges, but when the duty-man comes to fire for the year he is taken back, a hundred yards at a time, until he is distant 1000 yards from the target. This distance, 1000 yards, is considered the limit of effective rifle fire, though a good shot can do a considerable amount of damage at 2000 yards, and the limit of range of the Lee-Enfield magazine rifle, the one in use in the British Army, extends to 2800 yards. The weight of the bullet is so small, however, that at the long distances atmospheric conditions, and especially wind, have a great influence on the course of its flight, while the power of human sight is also a factor in limiting the effective range. Even at 1000 yards a man looks a very small thing, while at 2000 yards he is a mere dot, and it is impossible to take more than a general aim. More might be accomplished with more delicately adjusted sights and wind-gauges, but those at present in use are quite sufficiently delicate for purposes of campaigning, and telescopic sights, or appliances of a delicate nature for bettering shooting, are quite out of the question for use by the rank and file. Most of the shooting of the Army is done at ranges between 500 and 1000 yards, and, whatever weapon science may produce for the use of the soldier, it is 131

unlikely that these distances will be greatly increased, since even science cannot overcome the limitations to which humanity is subject.

Up to a few years ago, the old-fashioned "bull's-eye" targets were employed at all ranges and for all purposes, but they have been practically discarded now in favour of targets which reproduce, as accurately as possible, the actual targets at which men have to aim in war. The modern target is made up of a white portion representing the sky, and a shot on this portion counts for nothing at all; the lower part of the target is dull mud-coloured, and in the middle, projecting a little way into the white portion, is a black area corresponding roughly in shape and size to the head and shoulders of a man. Shots on this black portion, which may be considered as a man looking over a bank of earth, count as "bull's-eyes," and shots on the mud-coloured portion of the target have also a certain value, for it is considered that if a shot goes sufficiently near the figure of the man to penetrate the earth that the target represents, such a shot under actual conditions would possibly ricochet and kill the man, and in any case would fling up such a cloud of dust or shower of mud and stones as to wound him in some way, or at least put him out of action for a few minutes. Further, rapid individual fire plays a far greater part in modern rifle-shooting than it did a few years ago. The "volleys," which used to be so tremendously effective in the days of muzzle loading and slow fire at short ranges, are little considered under present conditions; with the development of initiative, and the introduction of open order in the firing line, men are taught to fire rapidly by means of exposing the targets for a second or two at a time, two shots or more to be got on the target at each exposure. In the musketry course of ten years ago there was very little rapid firing, but now it takes up more than half of the total of exercises on the range. 132

Apart from the annual course of musketry which men are compelled to undergo, they are encouraged to practise shooting throughout the year by means of competitions, financed out of regimental funds, and offering prizes to be won in open competition. Competitors are graded into the respective classes in which their last course left them, and prizes are offered in each class, though why silver spoons should be offered to such an extent as they are is one of the mysteries that no man can explain. Certain it is that in nearly every shooting competition held, silver spoons are offered as prizes—and a soldier has little use for an ordinary teaspoon, silver or otherwise. 133

The scores put on by men of the Army, taken in the average, go to prove that British soldiers have little to learn from those of other nations in the matter of shooting. The "marksman," in order to win the right to wear crossed guns on his sleeve, has to put up a score which even a Bisley crack shot would not despise, and yet the number of men to be seen walking out with crossed guns on their sleeves is no inconsiderable one, while first-class shots are plentiful in all units of the cavalry and infantry. Artillerymen, of course, know little about the rifle and its use; their weapon both of offence and defence is the big gun, and in the matter of rifle-shooting they trust to their escort of cavalry or infantry—usually the latter, except in the case of Horse Artillery. Taken in the mass, the British soldier has every reason to congratulate himself on the way in which he uses his rifle, and the present Continental war has proved that he is every whit as good at using the rifle in the field as he is on the range, though, in shooting on active service, the range of the object has to be found, while in all shooting practice in time of peace it is known and the sights correctly adjusted before the man begins to fire. 134

An adjunct to the course of musketry is that of judging distance, in which men are taken out and asked to estimate distances of various objects. Even for this there is a system of training, and men are instructed to consider how many times a hundred yards will fit into the space between them and the given object. They are taught how conditions of light and shade affect the apparent distance; how, with the sun shining from behind the observer on to the object, the distance appears less than when the sun is shining from behind the object on to the observer. They are taught at first to estimate short distances, and the range of objects chosen for experiment is gradually increased. In this, again, aptitude plays a considerable part; some men can judge distance from observation only with marvellous accuracy, while others never get the habit of making correct estimates.

An interesting method practised in order to ascertain distance consists in taking the estimates of a number of men, and then striking an average. With any number of men over ten from whom to obtain the average, a correct estimate of the distance is usually obtained. Another method consists in observing how much of an object of known dimensions can be seen when looking through a rifle barrel, after the bolt of the rifle has been withdrawn for the purpose. Since, however, the object of training in judging distance is to enable a man to make an individual estimate, neither of these methods is permitted to be used in the judging when points are awarded. The award of points, by the way, counts toward the total number of points in the annual musketry course. 135

CHAPTER IX

THE INTERNAL ECONOMY OF THE ARMY

Given such a conscript army as can be seen in working in any Continental nation, there is a very good reason for keeping the rate of pay for the rank and file down to as low a standard as possible, for the State concerned in the upkeep of a conscript army puts all, or in any case the greater part, of its male citizens through the mill of military service, and not only puts them through, but compels them to go through. It thus stands to reason that, as the men serve by compulsion, there is no need to offer good rates of pay as an inducement to serve; further, it is to the interest of the State concerned to keep down the expense attendant on the maintenance of its army as much as possible, and for these two reasons, if for no other, the rate of pay in Continental armies is remarkably small.

With a volunteer army, however, the matter must be looked at in a different light. It is in the interest of the State, of course, that expenses in connection with its army should be kept as low as possible, but there the analogy between conscript and volunteer rates of pay ends. If the right class of man is to be induced to volunteer for service, he must be offered a sufficient rate of pay to make military service worth his while—in time of peace, at any rate. The ideal rate of pay would be attained if the State would consider itself, so far as its army is in question, in competition with all other employers of labour, and would offer a rate of pay commensurate with the services demanded of its employees. By that method the right class of man would be persuaded to come forward in sufficient numbers, and the Army could be maintained at strength without trouble. 137

The British Army is the only voluntary one among the armies of the Western world, and for some time past it has experienced difficulty in obtaining a sufficiency of recruits to keep it up to strength, as was evidenced by the series of recruiting advertisements in nearly all daily papers of the kingdom with which the year 1914 opened. Statistics go to prove that recruiting is not altogether a matter of arousing patriotism, but is dependent on the state of the labour market to a very great extent. In the years following on the South African war, there was a larger percentage of unemployed in the kingdom than at normal times, and consequently recruiting flourished; men of the stamp that the Army wants, finding nothing better to do, and often being uncertain where the next meal was to come from, enlisted, and the Army had no trouble in maintaining itself at strength, although the rate of pay that it offered was lower than that earned, in many cases, by the ordinary unskilled labourer. Gradually, however, commercial conditions began to improve, and for the past year or two, in consequence of a very small percentage of unemployment among the labouring classes, recruiting has suffered—the Army does not offer as much as the ordinary civilian employer, either in wages or conditions of life, and consequently men will not enlist as long as they can get something to do in a regular way. Hence the War Office advertisements, which had very little effect on the recruiting statistics, and were wrongly conceived so far as appealing to the right class of man was in question. It was not till Lord Kitchener had assumed control of the War Office that the advertisements emanating from that establishment made a real personal appeal to the recruit; the two events may have been coincidence, for the war has pushed up recruiting as a war always does; again, there may have been something in the fact that Kitchener, as well as being an ideal organiser of men, is a great psychologist. 138

However this may be, the fact remains that, although the War Office by the mere fact of its advertising has entered the labour market as a competitor with civilian employers, it has not yet offered any inducement equal to that offered by civilian employers. The rate of pay for the rank and file is still under two shillings a day, with lodging and partial board, for in time of peace the rations issued to the soldier do not form a complete allowance of food, and even the messing allowance is in many cases insufficient to provide sufficient meals—the soldier has to supplement both rations and messing out of his pay. When all allowances and needs have been accounted for, the amount of pay that a private soldier can fairly call his own, to spend as he likes, is about a shilling a day—and civilian employment, as a rule, offers more than that. Moreover, modern methods of warfare call for a more intelligent and better educated man than was the case fifty years ago; the soldier of to-day, as has already been remarked, has not only to be able to obey, but also to exercise initiative; a better class of man is required, and though the factor of numbers is still the greatest factor in any action that may be fought between opposing armies, the factor of intelligence and elementary scientific knowledge is one that grows in importance year by year. The mass of recruits, in time of peace, is drawn from among the unemployed unskilled labourers of the country; though, by the rate of pay given, the country effects a certain saving, this is more than balanced by the difficulty of educating and training these men—to say nothing of the expense of it. A higher rate of pay would attract a better class of man and provide a more intelligent army, one of greater value to the State. And, even assuming that the class of man obtained at present is as good as need be, still the rate of pay is insufficient; the work men are called on to perform, the responsibilities that are entailed on them in the course of their work, deserve a higher rate of pay than these men obtain at present. 139

An illustration of this will serve far better than mere statement of the fact. It is well known that for years past there has been some difficulty in obtaining a sufficiency of officers for cavalry regiments, but what is not so well known is that, when a troop of cavalry is short of a lieutenant to lead it at drill and assume responsibility for its working, the troop-sergeant takes command and control of the troop. At the best, the pay of the troop-sergeant cannot be reckoned at more than four shillings a day, and on that amount of salary—twenty-eight shillings a week—he is given charge and control of somewhere about thirty men, together with horses, saddlery, and other Government property to the value of not less than £1800. For the safety and good order of this amount of property he is almost entirely responsible, as well as being charged with the superintendence, instruction, and control of the thirty men or more who comprise the troop under his command. 140

The fact is that the world has moved forward tremendously during the past thirty or forty years, while, except for small and inadequate changes in the rates of pay, the Army has stood still. Labour conditions have 141

altered in every way, and the cost of living has increased, forcing up the wage rate. The Army has taken note of none of these things, but has gone on, as regards pay and allowances, in the way of forty years ago. The necessity for an advertising campaign proved that the old ways were beginning to fail, and efforts were being made to overcome the shortage of men without increasing the rates of pay—vain efforts, if statistics of the amount of recruiting done before and after the beginning of the advertising campaign count for anything.

We may leave these larger considerations to come down to a view of the interior working of a unit, its pay, feeding, and general life. All arrangements as regards pay for infantrymen are managed by the colour-sergeants of the companies, while in the cavalry and artillery the squadron or battery quartermaster-sergeants have control of the pay-sheets. These non-commissioned officers are charged with the business of drawing weekly the amount of pay required by their respective companies, squadrons, or batteries, and paying out the same to the men under the supervision of the company, squadron, or battery officers. The presence of the officer at the payable is a nominal business in most cases, and the non-commissioned officer does all the work, while in every case he is held responsible for any errors that may occur. Each man is given a stated weekly rate of pay, and at the end of each month there is a general settling up, at which the accounts of each man are explained to him; he is told what debts he has incurred to the regimental tailor, the bootmaker, or for new clothing that he has been compelled to purchase to make good deficiencies; in every unit each man is charged two or three pence a month—and sometimes more—by way of barrack damages, which includes the repair of broken windows, etc., and altogether the compulsory stoppages from pay generally amount to not less than two shillings per man per month. 142

The system of pay is a complicated one. As a bed-rock minimum there is a regular rate of pay of a shilling and a penny a day for an infantryman, and a penny or twopence a day more for the other arms of the service. On to this is added the messing allowance of threepence a day, which is spent for the men in supplementing their ration allowance of food, and never reaches them in coin at all; there is a clothing allowance, which goes to defray the expense attendant on the renewal of articles of attire; there is yet another allowance for the upkeep of clothing and kit; there is the proficiency pay to which each man becomes entitled after a certain amount of service, and which consists of varying grades according to the musketry standard and character of the man; this ranges from fourpence to sixpence a day; and then there is badge pay, which adds a penny or twopence a day to old soldiers' pay so long as they behave themselves. The colour-sergeant or quartermaster-sergeant has to keep account of all these small items, and it is small matter for wonder that many a worried officer or non-com., puzzling his brains over the intricacies of a pay-sheet, expresses an earnest wish that the whole complicated system may be swept away, and a straightforward rate of pay for each man substituted. 143

The Army Pay Corps, a non-combatant branch of the service, is charged with the business of auditing and keeping accounts straight, and this corps forms the final court of appeal for all matters connected with the pay of the soldier. The Royal Warrant for Pay, a bulky volume published annually, is the manual by which the Pay Corps is guided to its decisions, and from which the harassed colour-sergeant or quartermaster-sergeant derives inspiration for his work. 144

In all units serving at home, and in most of those serving abroad, a system of messing is established regimentally to supplement the ration allowance. Rations for the soldier, by the way, consist in England of one pound of bread and three-quarters of a pound of meat with bone per day, and all else must be bought out of pay and messing allowance. In colonial stations the ration allowance is enlarged to include certain vegetables, and in India the scale is still more liberal, but it is obvious that the English ration of bread and meat is not sufficient for the needs of the soldier, nor will the official messing allowance of threepence per day per man altogether compensate for ration deficiencies. Beyond doubt, however, the provision of necessaries has been brought to a very fine art in the Army, and, with an efficient cook-sergeant in charge of the regimental cookhouses, and capable caterers to supervise purchases for the messing account, with an allowance of fourpence a day per man the rank and file can have a sufficiency of plain, wholesome food. 145

The sergeant-cook in charge of the cookhouses of each unit must have passed through a course at the Aldershot school of cookery before he can undertake the duties of his post, but he is the only trained cook in each unit. Men are chosen as company cooks or squadron cooks haphazard, and often with too little regard to their fitness for their posts. In spite of all disadvantages, though, the average of cooking in the Army is good, especially when one considers the unpromising material with which the cooks have to deal. The contract price for Army meat is not half that paid per pound by the civilian buyers; it is, of course, all foreign meat that is supplied in normal times.

While the single men of the Army draw their meat supplies daily, married quarters' rations are drawn on stated days, and, as the majority of the occupants of the married quarters are non-commissioned officers and their wives, it follows naturally that, in getting their exact ration with regard to weight, they are given every consideration with regard to the quality of meat cut off from the lump. On married quarters' days the troops get a surprisingly small allowance of meat and a surprisingly large allowance of bone, for the regulation governing supply enacts that "three-quarters of a pound of meat *with bone*" shall be allowed for each soldier. That "with bone" may mean that two-thirds of the allowance or more is bone, though the soldier has in this matter as well as in others the right of complaint if he considers that he is being subjected to injustice in any way. The quality of meat supplied, and its correct quantity, is supposed to constitute one of the cares of the orderly officer of the day, for the orderly officer, together with the quartermaster or the representative of the latter, is supposed to attend at the issue of rations of both bread and meat. 146

In this connection a word regarding the duties of the orderly officer will not be out of place. These duties are undertaken by the lieutenants and second lieutenants of each unit, who take turns of a day apiece as "orderly officer of the day." It has already been remarked that an officer does not really begin to count in the life of a unit until he has attained to the rank of captain and to the experience gained by such length of service as makes him eligible for captaincy. In no one thing does this fact become so clear as the way in which the duty of orderly officer of the day is performed in the majority of units. It happens as a rule that a lieutenant performs his turn of orderly conscientiously and well; at times, however, it happens that a subaltern, impatient at the fiddling duties involved in the turn of orderly, regards complaints on the part of the men as trivial and annoying, neglects to 147

see that real causes of grievance are properly remedied, and lays the foundations of deep dislike for himself on the part of the men of the unit. One of the duties falling to the orderly officer is that of visiting the dining-rooms of the regiment or battalion and inquiring in each room if the men have any complaints to make with regard to the quality or quantity of the food supplied. If any complaint is made, it should be at once investigated, and, if found justifiable, remedied.

But the subaltern doing orderly duty far too often does not know—because he has not troubled to learn—the way to set about remedying a just complaint; a very common form of reply to a complaint by the men is, “I will see about it,” and that is all that the men ever hear, while they are careful never to make a complaint to that particular officer again, since they know he is not to be depended on. The attitude of some junior officers towards the men making a complaint is at times one of suspicion; the officer seems to imagine that the man is doing it for amusement, and not until he has grown a little, and incidentally passed out from the rank in which he takes his turn as orderly officer, does he come to understand that men only make complaints to their officers about things which are absolutely beyond their own power to remedy. Frivolous or unjustifiable complaints, when proved to be such, are very heavily punished, and consequently men abstain as a rule from making them. 148

The orderly officer is not concerned alone with the food of the men; he is supposed to visit the barrack-rooms and see that everything is correct there; he has to visit the guard of his unit once by day and once by night, and see that the guard is correct and the articles in charge of the guard are complete according to the inventory on the guard-board; he is supposed to visit all the regimental artificers’ establishments once during the day to see that work is being carried on properly, and he is even concerned with the quality and issue of beer in the canteen, while at the end of his day’s duty he has to fill in and sign a report to the effect that he has performed all his duties effectively—whether he has or no. His work, correctly carried through, is no sinecure business. 149

Mention of the canteen takes us on to another point of military economy, that of supplies of varying kinds apart from the actual ration bread and meat. In each unit serving at home, a canteen is established for the supply to the troops of articles of the best possible quality at the lowest possible price “without limiting the right of the men to purchase” in other markets, according to King’s Regulations on the subject. In effect, however, the tenancy of a regimental canteen by a contractor is a virtual monopoly, and, unfortunately for the troops concerned, the monopoly is often made a rigid one. There is a “dry bar,” or grocery establishment, at which men can purchase cleaning materials for their kits and all articles of food that they require; there is a “coffee bar,” where suppers are sold to the men and cooked food generally is sold; and there is the “wet canteen,” whose sales are limited to beer alone, and where the boozers of the unit congregate nightly to drink and yarn. In old time the wet canteen used to be a fruitful source of crime—as crime goes in the Army—and general trouble, but moderation is the rule of to-day, and excessive drinking is rare in comparison with the ways of twenty years or so ago. The wet canteen of to-day is a cheerful place where men get their pints and sit over them, forming “schools,” as the various groups of chums are called, and drinking not so much as they talk, for they seek company rather than alcohol. 150

For the teetotallers of each unit, the society known as the Royal Army Temperance Association has established a “room” in practically every unit of the service; at a cost of fourpence a month a man is given the freedom of this room, and at the same time invited to sign the pledge, which he generally does. In any case, if an A.T.A. man is caught drinking to excess, he forfeits his membership of the Association and the right to use its room. In the room itself a bar is set up at which all kinds of temperance drinks are sold, together with buns and light eatables. In the Army, a man refraining from the use of intoxicants is said to be “on the tack,” and is known as a “tack-wallah.” Members of the R.A.T.A. are designated “wad-wallahs,” or “bun-scramblers,” by the frequenters of the canteen, who are known as “canteen-wallahs.” The word “wallah” is a Hindustani one which has passed into currency in the Army, its original meaning being the follower of any branch of trade or employment. In the same way, numbers of Hindustani terms are in general use; “roti” is almost invariably used in place of “bread,” “char” for “tea,” and “pani” for “water,” all being correct Hindustani equivalents. “Kampti,” meaning small, and “bus,” equivalent to “enough” or “stop,” come from the same language, while “scoff” in place of “eat” is derived from South Africa, where it is common currency even among civilian white folks. 151

Married “on the strength” in the Army carries with it a number of advantages for the married man. It is a little galling, in the first place, to have to satisfy one’s commanding officer as to the respectability of the intended wife before marriage, but it is not so many years ago that there was good reason for this. Once married, the soldier is granted free quarters for himself and wife, and the wife is allowed fuel and light up to a certain amount, together with rations, and an additional allowance is made in the event of children being born. Curiously enough, however, the size of the quarters allotted to the married men and their families is not determined by the number of children in the family, but by the rank of the married man; not many private soldiers venture to marry, for their rate of pay is so low as to make the experiment an extremely risky one, although the wife of the soldier gets—if she wishes it—a certain amount of the single men’s washing to do, by way of supplementing her husband’s pay. 152

Married “off the strength”—that is, without the permission of the officer commanding the unit—is doubly risky, for the wife of the man who marries thus gets no official recognition; her husband has to occupy a place in the barrack-room, for no separate quarters can be allotted to him; he has at the same time to find lodgings somewhere among the civilian inhabitants of the station for his wife—and children, if there are any—and, if he is a good character, he may be granted a sleeping-out pass, which confers on him the privilege of sleeping out of barracks—and this is a privilege that he must beg, not a right that he can claim. As the married establishment of a regiment or battalion is necessarily small, men frequently get married “off the strength,” though how they manage to exist and at the same time provide for their wives on military pay is a mystery. The most common explanation is that the wife, whatever work she has been engaged in before her marriage, continues it after; the hardest part of the business is that neither wife nor husband, in these circumstances, can count on the possession of a home as those married “on the strength” understand it. 153

The private soldier married “on the strength” usually has entered on his second period of service—that is, he has finished the twelve years for which he first contracted to serve, and has re-enlisted to complete twenty-one

years with a view to a pension. Generally he manages to get a staff job of some sort, from employment on the regimental police to barrack sweeper, or anything else that will get him out of attending early morning parades as a rule—though all staff men have to attend early parades when the orders of the day say “strong as possible.” The rule in most units is that the staff jobs are distributed among the older soldiers, for these are supposed, and with justice, to be better able to dispense with perpetual training than the younger men. As a rule, the appointment of any young soldier to a staff appointment—except such posts as that of orderly-room clerk, for which special aptitude counts before length of service—is the cause of considerable bitterness among the older soldiers who are still at duty, and is usually attributed to rank favouritism, whether it is due to that or no.

In cavalry regiments especially, the ordinary duty-men look for amusement when the staff men are “dug out” to undergo the ordinary routine of duty, either by way of annual training or on the occasion of a “strong as possible” parade. The duty-man has his horse every day, and horse and man get to know each other, but the staff-man, attending stables only on the occasion of his being warned to attend a duty parade, has as a rule to take any horse that is “going spare,” as they call it, and usually the horse that nobody else has taken up for riding is not a pleasant beast. And the staff-man may be a bit rusty as regards drill and riding, so that the two things combined produce the effect of involuntary dismounting in the field or at riding school occasionally—or, as the soldier would say, “dismounting by order from hind-quarters.” Taken on the whole, the staff-man’s day at duty is not a pleasant one, while, if he ventures to complain to his comrades or grumble in any way, he gets more ridicule than sympathy. Usually the duty-man affects to consider the staff-man an encumbrance, and in the cavalry even signallers, during the time that they are excused riding and attending stables, are told that it is “easy enough to wag a little bit of stick about—why don’t you come down to stables and do a bit?” The reply generally makes up in forcibility for a deficiency in elegance, for the trooper is capable of maintaining his reputation as regards the use of language—of sorts.

A form of staff employment which calls for a particular class of man is the post of officer’s servant; it amounts to the regular work of a valet for “first servant,” and that of a groom for “second servant,” and is not always an enviable post, especially if the officer in question is short-tempered or “bad to get on with.” Officers’ servants occupy quarters away from the duty-men, and in the vicinity of the officers’ mess in the case of single officers; married officers’ servants are provided with quarters in their masters’ houses. In addition to the officers’ servants, there is in each unit a regular staff of mess waiters both for officers’ and sergeants’ messes, while all non-commissioned officers from the rank of sergeant upward are permitted to employ a “bâtman” from among the men serving under them. The sergeant’s bâtman, though, is not excused from duty as is the officer’s servant, but has to get through all his own work, and then clean the sergeant’s equipment, keep his bunk in order, groom his horse, and clean his saddle (in cavalry and artillery units), as well as attend all parades from which the sergeant has no power to excuse him. Every staff job carries with it a certain amount of extra-duty pay, and this, in addition to the fact of being excused from at least some of the ordinary parades of the duty soldier, causes a post on the staff to be sought after by most men. There are some, though, who prefer to be at ordinary duty, and the man who is going in for promotion usually avoids staff employ, for the two do not go together.

Among non-commissioned officers as well as among the rank and file there is a certain amount of staff employment, but it is a smaller amount, and a good deal of it is unenviable business. The post of provost-sergeant, for instance, although it carries extra-duty pay, is naturally not a popular business, for having control of the regimental police and being responsible for the punishments of delinquents on defaulters’ drill and punishment fatigues does not tend to increase the popularity of a non-commissioned officer. The business of postman in a regiment is usually entrusted to a corporal; as a rule, the oldest corporal is chosen to fill this berth, and one just concluding his term of military service is practically certain to get it as soon as it falls vacant. But staff jobs for non-coms. are far fewer, relatively, than for the rank and file, and, outside the artificers’ shops, the regimental orderly room and quartermaster’s store, practically every non-com. is at duty.

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CHAPTER X

THE NEW ARMY

In the course of these pages the remark has already been made that the British Army is in a state of flux; this is true mainly as regards numbers and organisation, but with regard to discipline and training no very great changes are possible. Methods of training may alter, and do alter for the better from time to time, but the basic principles remain, since an army can be trained only in one way: by the use of strict discipline and of means calculated to impart to men the greatest possible amount of instruction in the shortest space of time. The more quickly a man absorbs the main points of his training, the better for him and for the army whose effectiveness he is intended to increase.

In the new army of to-day, from which it is intended to draft effective men into the firing line at the earliest possible moment, rapidity of training is a prime essential. At the outset, owing to the enormous numbers of men who flocked to the colours, training was no easy matter, and for some time to come instructors will be scarce when compared with the multitude of men who require training. In order to combat this, instructors have been asked to re-enlist from among ex-soldiers who, past fighting age themselves, are yet quite capable of drilling the new men. A minor drawback arises here, however, in that such of the instructors as left the colours before a certain date are out of touch as regards modern weapons and drill. For instance, the field gun at present in use in the British Army was not generally adopted until after the conclusion of the South African campaign; in the case of the cavalry, again, important modifications have been brought about in drill and formations during the last ten years, while the charger loading rifle with wind gauge is comparatively an innovation both as regards cavalry and infantry. It is not intended to imply that drill instructors who finished their colour service ten or twelve years ago are of no use, for, in the matters of imparting elementary drill and the first principles of discipline to the recruits, they are invaluable and far too few. But, in more advanced matters, it must be conceded that the sooner the new army can instruct itself the better, for the proverb about an old dog and new tricks may be applied to re-enlisted instructors and the new army, which is a whole bag of new tricks. 159

It is essential that the new army should train itself at the earliest possible moment, and for this reason there are endless opportunities for the man with brains who enlists at the present time. The re-enlisted drill instructor will not accompany the men of the new army into the field, and, as an army increases, a relative increase must be made in the number of its non-commissioned officers, while there are also vacancies by the hundred for commissioned officers. For the average man, however, it is useless at the present time to depend on influence and back-door methods for promotion. Worth is all that will count, and an ounce of enlistment to-day is worth a ton of influence that might have been exercised yesterday. It is as true of the new army as of any other profession that there is plenty of room at the top. The way to get there is by enlistment to-day and hard and patient application to one's work for a matter of weeks or months. 160

No man can tell how long the new army will last, or what will be the conditions of service and strength of the army after the proclamation of peace. One thing, however, is certain. Not while a first-class power remains on the continent of Europe will conscription cease altogether between the Urals and the Atlantic, or between Archangel and Brindisi. It is quite probable that when peace comes again, universal conscription will cease, for there will no longer be an embodied threat in central Europe—the Powers will have no more of that, and the burden of armaments on the old scale must cease. On the other hand, however, nations will maintain sufficient forces to enable them to insist on international justice; the threat of the sword will always form the final court of appeal from the decisions of any arbitration body, and, while this is so, a British army must always be maintained. The existence of primal human instinct is fatal to the idea of total disarmament; war may not come again, for that is a contingency with regard to which none can prophesy, but the fact remains that the best provision for peace is ample preparation against the chances of war. 161

Thus the man who looks for a career out of the British Army need not look in vain, for there will always be sufficient of an army, if only for colonial and foreign service, to furnish capable men with all the careers that they may desire. The other reason for enlistment, less selfish and more vital, has been expressed by many voices and by means of many pens; the country has called, and there are ugly names for those who, without sufficient claims of kin to form cause for exemption, refuse to answer the call. 162

With regard to the composition of the new army it may be said that the standing of the men has altered materially since the outbreak of hostilities, though this is in keeping with the trend of thought and feeling that has been evident since the end of the South African campaign. Up to the end of the nineteenth century there still remained obscure provincial centres in which it was supposed that only wastrels would enlist, with a view to getting an easy means of livelihood; farther back, this conception of the Army was a very common one. It is hard to say at what period of British history such an idea gained currency, unless the employment of mercenaries previous to the time of the French Revolution may have given it birth. For, long before Waterloo, the British soldier gave ample proof of the stuff of which he is made, and there is not a battlefield of history from which there has not come some instance of self-denial or devotion to a comrade which attests among the ranks of the British Army the existence of the highest principles by which humanity is actuated.

But, up to the end of the nineteenth century, civilians could not understand the Army. Kipling taught them a little, but Kipling's soldiers are all hard drinkers with a tendency to the slaughter of aspirates, and various other linguistic eccentricities. As character studies, Kipling's soldiers are masterly works, but they bear little relation to the soldier of to-day, who, even as an infantryman, is required to be an educated man in certain directions, since he lives in a welter of wind gauges and trajectory, decimal points and mathematical calculations with regard to the accomplishment of his duties. The public as a whole has been waking up to these facts slowly—very slowly—but it has taken the world-catastrophe of a general European war to shake the public entirely from its apathy, and cause it to realise that the Army is an agglomeration of men in the highest sense of that little three-lettered word. There is to-day among all ranks and classes a realisation of the good that is, and always has 163

been in the Army; there is a new interest in soldiers, in military movements, and in all that pertains to the theory and practice of war, and this augurs well for the future of members of the new army, both on duty and among their friends. Counting from the day that the nation awakened to the good that is in the Army, and the possibility of soldiers being at root like other men, military uniform has become a matter for pride to its wearer, and respect from those who from any cause are unable to assume the uniform. As this war has knit together motherland and colonies, so, by means of this war, the soldier has come to his own. The new army is not a thing apart from the nation: it is the nation. 164

The new army means an increase not in numbers alone, for we may accept as a principle that the best will rule in a mass composed of all sorts from best to worst—that is, if we grant relative equality in the numbers of best and worst, and of each intervening grade. Periods of commercial prosperity have left the Army dependent mainly on the unemployed for its recruits, with a corresponding loss in education and moral tone, but the new army is composed of men of all grades, actuated for the most part by the highest possible impulses, and asking only to be allowed to give of their best. Enlisting in this spirit, it is inevitable that these men should look upward, and thus the best will rule. For purposes of rule the Army needs the very best, for its own sake and that of the future of the nation's manhood. In gaining the best and their influence, the Army will increase in social standing and moral tone as well as in numbers. 165

No man comes out from the Army as he went in; there are many types, and with the enormous increase in numbers at the present time, the number of types will increase as well as the number of representatives of each type. Country youths, town dwellers, agricultural labourers—who often make the best and keenest soldiers—men who know nothing of what labour is like, skilled artisans, and men from the office—all come to the ranks of the Army, which, shaping them to compliance with discipline, still leaves the stamp of individuality. The soldiers of the new army will come back to their ordinary avocations bearing the stamp of military training, stronger physically, and different in many ways—mainly improved ways. But the metal on which the stamp of the Army is impressed will remain the same, for one is first a man and then a soldier. The instances of Prussian brutality evident to-day, and an eternal disgrace to the German nation, do not prove anything against the Prussian military system, but afford evidence that brutality is ingrained in the Prussian before he goes up as a conscript to begin his training. So, whatever the characteristics of a man may be, the Army cannot make a brave soldier out of a cowardly civilian, and it cannot make a good man into a bad one; it accentuates certain traits of character and drives others into the background, but it neither destroys nor creates. It is a training school which, taken in the right way, brings out all that is best in a man, stiffens him to face the battle of life as well as the battles of military service, and strengthens self-confidence and self-respect. The men who are seen to have suffered in character during their military training are by no means examples from which one can cite the result of discipline and army work, for it is not the training that is at fault, but the inherent weakness of the men themselves. The social standing of the majority of recruits joining the new army renders it ten times more true of the Army of to-day than of the Army of yesterday, that military training gives more than it demands, inculcates habits which, followed in after life, are invaluable, and makes a man—in the best sense of the word—of each one who joins its ranks. 166

One thing that officers and men alike in the new army should be made to realise is that the possession of a good kit carries one half of the way on active service—the things that carry the other half of the way are not to be purchased. But the man who has undergone the rigours of active service understands the value of good boots, good field-glasses, well-fitting and suitable clothing, and really portable accessories to personal comfort. These things, and an intelligent choice of them, go far to make up the difference between the man successful at his work and the failure, for although a bad workman is said to quarrel with his tools a good workman cannot do good work with bad tools. In the peculiarly exacting conditions entailed on men by active service, kit and equipment should be of the best quality obtainable, and the choice of what to take and what to leave behind is evidence, to some extent, of the fitness of the man for his work. The most important item of all is boots, and in fitting boots for active service one should be careful to select a size that will admit of the wearer enjoying a night's sleep without removing his footwear. Care of the feet, and retention of the ability to march, are quite as important as shooting abilities, for the man who cannot march with the rest will not be in it when the shooting begins. For the rest, it is wise to try, if not to follow, as often as possible the tips given, by men who have been on active service, with regard to the choice of kit and the little things that make for comfort—that is, as far as compliance with these "tips" is compatible with keeping the size of one's outfit down. The seasoned man, when talking of such subjects as kit and comfort, usually speaks out of his own experience, and his advice is worth following. The golden rule in the choice of an outfit for service is simply "as little as possible, and that little good." 167

This rule, by the way, used to be applied to the British Army in another way: the new army, however, makes a difference in the matter of size. 168

CHAPTER XI

ACTIVE SERVICE

The popular conception of active service is of a succession of encounters with the enemy. Desperate deeds of valour, brilliant charges by bodies of troops, men saving other men under fire, the storming of positions, and the flush of victory after strenuous action enter largely into the civilian conception of war.

The reality is a sombre business of marching and watching, nights without sleep and days without food; retracing one's steps in order to execute the plan of the brain to which a man is but one effective rifle out of many thousands, marching for days and days, seeing nothing more exciting than a burnt-out house and the marching men on either side and to front and rear—and then the contact with the enemy. A vicious crack from somewhere, or the solid boom of a piece of artillery; somewhere away to the front or flank is the enemy, and his pieces do damage in the ranks; there is a searching for cover, some orders are given, perhaps a comrade lies utterly still, and one knows that that man will not move any more; there is a desperate sense of ineffectiveness, of anger at this cowardly (as it seems) trick of hitting when one cannot hit back. There is the satisfaction of getting the range and firing, with results that may be guessed but cannot be known accurately by the man who fires; there is the curious thrill that comes when an angrily singing bullet passes near, and one realises that one is under fire from the enemy. In a normal action, there is the sense of disaster, even of defeat when one's side may in reality be winning, for one sees men dying, wounded, lying dead—one knows the damage the enemy has inflicted, but has no idea of the damage one's own force has inflicted in return. Often, when it begins to be apparent that the enemy is nearly beaten, there comes the order to retire; one does not understand the order, but, with a sullen sense of resentment at it, retires, ducking at the whizzing of a shell, though not all the ducking in the world would avail if the shell were truly aimed at the one who ducks, or starting back to avoid a bullet that whizzed by—as if by starting back one could get out of the way of a bullet! 170

After a day of action, or after the chance has come to rest for a while after days of action, one gets a sense of the horror of the whole business—the tragedy of lives laid down, in a good cause certainly, but the men are dead, and one questions almost with despair if it is worth while. So many good men with whom one has joked and worked and played in time of peace have gone under—and there are probably more battles yet to fight. It is not until a war has concluded, and men who have served are able to get some idea of the operations as a whole, that they are able to understand what has been done and why it has been done. Men who came back wounded from Mons and Charleroi, away from the magnificent three weeks' retreat that was then in progress for the British and French armies, were, in many cases, fully convinced that they had been defeated—that their armies were beaten, and had to retreat to save themselves from destruction. The man in the ranks cannot understand the plan of the staff who control him, for he sees so very little of the whole; at the most, he knows what is happening to a division of men, while engaged in the retreat to the position of the Marne were, at the least, twenty divisions on the side of the Allies. Had one of these been utterly shattered in a set battle, the other nineteen might still have won a decisive victory, and, if news of that victory had not come through for a day or two, the survivors from the shattered division would have spread tidings of a defeat—which it would have been, to them. The man in the ranks sees so little of the whole. 171

Here the war correspondent makes the most egregious mistakes, for, untrained in military service himself, he takes the word of the man in the ranks—the man on the staff of army headquarters is far too busy and far too discreet to talk to war correspondents—and out of what the man in the ranks has to say the war correspondent makes up his story. Though the man in the ranks may believe his own story to be true, though he may tell of the operations as he conceives them, he may be giving an utterly false impression of what is actually happening. The man in the ranks is one cog in a machine, and he cannot tell what all the machine is doing at any time, least of all when a battle is in progress. 172

Every battle fought differs from all other battles, for no opposing forces ever meet under precisely identical conditions twice. Thus it is useless to speak of a typical battle except in the broadest general sense, and useless to attempt to describe a typical battle, or action of any kind. Usually, the artillery get into action after cavalry have reconnoitred the enemy's position; the guns shell the enemy until he is considered sufficiently weakened to permit of infantry attack, and then the infantry go forward, even up to the rarely occurring bayonet charge. If their advance dislodges the enemy, the cavalry are set on to turn retreat into rout; if, on the other hand, the attacking force is compelled to retire, the cavalry cover the retreat, and, in order to make good in a retreat, a part of a force is taken back while the remainder hold the enemy in check. In modern actions, artillery fire their shells over the heads of their own infantry at the enemy, distance and trajectory permitting of this. By trajectory is meant the curve that a projectile describes in its flight; both rifles and big guns are so constructed and sighted that they throw their projectiles upward to counteract the pull of gravity, and the missile eventually drops down toward its object—it does not travel in a perfectly straight line. But it is bad for infantry to be in front of their own guns, with their own artillery shells passing over them, for too long—*morale* suffers from this after a time, since a man cannot distinguish in such a case between his own artillery's shells and those of the enemy. Whenever possible, the artillery in rear of an infantry force are posted slightly to either flank; circumstances, however, do not always admit of this. 173

On mobilisation for active service, the first thing that happens in the British Army is the calling up of the reserves. All men enlist, in the first case, for a certain number of years with the colours and a further period "on the reserve." In this latter force, they are free to follow any civilian avocation, but on mobilisation must immediately report themselves at headquarters—wherever their headquarters may be—and take the place appointed to them in the mobilised army. Then comes the business of drawing war kit and equipment from stores. As a battleship clears for action, so the Army rids itself for the time of all things not absolutely necessary on active service, exchanges blank ammunition for ball, sharpens swords and bayonets, and in every way prepares for stern business. Each man is issued with a little aluminium plate which he is compelled to wear, and 174

on which are inscribed such particulars as his name, regimental number, unit, etc., so that in case of his being killed on the field he can be identified and the news of his death transmitted to his next of kin. Each man, too, is issued with an "emergency ration," which is a compressed supply of food amply sufficient for one day's meals, so that in any tight corner, where provisions are not obtainable, he may be able to hold out for at least one day without being reduced to starvation. The opening and use of this ration, except by permission of an officer, counts as a crime in the Army, unless a man is placed in such a position that no officer is at hand to sanction the opening of the package, when the matter is perforce left to the man's discretion. 175

Marching on service is a different matter from marching in time of peace. Not only is there the strain of ever-possible attack, but there is also, for cavalry and infantry, the weight of service armament and equipment to be considered. Every man carries in his bandoliers 150 rounds of ammunition for his rifle—not a bit too much, when the rate of fire possible with the modern rifle is taken into account. But 150 rounds of ball cartridge is a serious matter when one has to carry it throughout the day, and, when active service opens, it is easy to understand why only really fit men are passed by doctors into the Army. So far as the rank and file are concerned, it is power to endure that makes the soldier on active service; bravery is needed, initiative is needed, but staying power is needed most of all.

There may be days of solid marching without a sight of the enemy. One may form part of a flanking force whose business is to march from point to point, fighting but seldom, but always presenting a threat to the enemy or his lines of communication, and thus ever on the move, with very little time for sleep or eating; again, one may be placed with a force which has to march half a day to come in contact with the enemy, and to fight the other half of the day; or yet again, it may be necessary to march all night in order to take a position—or be shot in the attempt—at dawn. In time of peace and on manoeuvres, officers take care that compensating time is allowed to men, so as to give them the normal amount of rest; on active service, the officer commanding a force spares his men as much as he can, and gives them all the rest possible, but he has to be guided by circumstances, or to rise superior to circumstances and cause himself and his men to undergo far more than normal exertions. War, as carried out to-day, requires all that every man has to give in the way of staying power, and now, as in the days of the battle-axe and long-bow, physical endurance is the greatest asset a man can have on active service. The hard drinker in time of peace and the man who has been looking for "soft jobs" all the time of his peace service soon "go sick" and become ineffective; they may be just as brave as the rest, but they lack the staying power requisite to the carrying on of war. 176

Men's impressions of being under fire vary so much that every account is of interest. "My principal impression was that I'd like to run away, but there was nowhere to run to, so I stuck on, and got used to it after a bit." "I felt cold, and horribly thirsty—I never thought to be afraid till afterwards." "It was interesting, till I saw the man next to me rolled over with a bullet in his head, and then I wanted to get up and go for the devils who had done that." Thus spoke three men when asked how they felt about it. My own impression was chiefly a fear that I was going to be afraid—I did not want to disgrace myself, but to be as good as the rest. 177

One man, who came back wounded after the day of Mons, described how he felt at first shooting a man and knowing that his bullet had taken effect—for in the majority of cases, with a whole body of men firing, it is difficult to tell which of the bullets take effect. This, however, was a clear case, and the man could not but know that he was responsible for the shot.

"I had four men with me on rear-guard," he said, "and we were holding the end of a village street to let our chaps get away as far as possible before we mounted and caught up with them. We could see German infantry coming on, masses of them, but they couldn't tell whether the village street held five men or a couple of squadrons, so they held back a bit. At last I could see we were in danger of being outflanked, so I got my men to get mounted, and just as they were doing so a German officer put his head round the corner of the house at the end of the street—not ten yards away from me. I raised my rifle, shut both eyes, and pulled the trigger—it was point-blank range, and when I opened my eyes and looked it seemed as if I'd blown half his face away. I felt scared at what I had done—it seemed wrong to have shot a man like that, though he and his kind drive women and children in front of their firing lines. It seemed to make such a horrible mess, somehow. I got mounted, and just as I swung my leg over the horse, a fool of a German infantryman aimed a blow at me with the butt end of his rifle—I don't know where he sprung from—and damaged my arm like this. If he'd had the sense he could have run me through with a bayonet or shot me, but I suppose he was too flurried. But that officer's face after I'd shot him stuck to me, and I still dream of it, and shall for some time, probably." 178

He who told this story is a boy of twenty-two or three, and he has gone back to the front to rejoin his regiment, now—with three stripes on his arm, instead of the two that were his at the beginning of the campaign. 179

On forced marches, and often on normal marches as well, all the things that one considers necessities—with the exception of sufficient food to keep one in condition—go by the board. One sleeps under the stars, with no other covering than a coat and blanket; one lies out to sleep in pouring rain, with no more covering; tents are out of the question, for there is no time to pitch and strike them. One goes for days without a wash, and for days, too, without undressing. There were two scamps in the South African campaign who promised each other, for some mysterious reason, that they would not take their boots off for a month, and they ran into such a series of marches and actions that, even if they had not made the compact, they would only have been able to remove their boots three times in the course of that month. The smart soldier of peace service goes unshaven, unwashed, careless of all except getting enough of food and sleep at times; and when a lull comes in the operations, so that he gets a day or even an hour or two to himself, a bath is a luxury undreamed of by the man who can have one every morning and consider it a mere usual thing. 180

If in time of peace the soldier considers a rifle carelessly, and even resents having to carry it about with him, he looks on it differently on service, knowing as he does that his life may depend on the quality of the weapon and his ability to use it at almost any minute of the day or night. The confirmed "grouser" of peace time, who will make a fuss over having to put twenty rounds of blank ammunition in his bandolier to go out on a field-day, will swing his three bandoliers of ball cartridges on to his person without a word of complaint, for he knows that he may need every round. Values alter amazingly on service; the man with a box of matches, when one has been

away from the base for a few days, is a person of importance, and a mere cigarette is worth far more than its weight in gold. In General Rundle's column during the South African war, half a biscuit was something to fight for, and the men who thought it such had many a time thrown away the same sort of unpalatable biscuits and bought bread to eat instead. An ant-heap acquired a new significance, for it might be the means of saving a man's life at any time, and among mounted men a "fresh" horse, which might give its rider some trouble at the time of mounting, was no longer to be avoided, for by its freshness it showed that it had plenty of spirit and go about it, spirit that might take a man out of rifle range at a critical moment, when the slower class of mount might come out of action without its rider. 181

This reversal of the circumstances of ordinary life produces lasting effect on men; no man who has undergone the realities of active service comes back to the average of life unchanged. The difference in him may not be apparent at a casual glance, but it is there, for the rest of his life. He has looked on death at close quarters, and, whatever his intelligence may be—whether he be gutter-snipe or 'Varsity man, sage or fool—he has a clearer realisation of the ultimate values of things. One may count the Army in peace time as a great training school out of which men come moulded to a definite pattern, and yet retaining their individuality. But active service is a fire through which men pass, emerging on the far side purified of little aims to a greater or less extent, according to the material on which the fire has to work. For many—all honour to them and to those who mourn their loss—it is a destroying fire.

So far as the limits of space will permit, there is set down in these pages a record of what military service amounts to for the rank and file, in peace and war. It is necessarily incomplete, for the story of the British Army of to-day, apart from its history of great yesterdays, is not to be told in any one book—there is too much of it for that. There are those who belittle the Army and its ways and influence on the men who serve, but one who has served, with the perspective of time to give him clearness of vision, can always look back on the Army and be glad that he has learned its lessons, accomplished its tasks; the men who would belittle it are themselves very little men, too little to be worthy of serious notice. The British Army is a gathering of brave men, fighting in this year of grace 1914 in a noble cause, and fighting, as the British Army has always fought, bravely and well. 182

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Transcriber's Notes

Punctuation and spelling were made consistent when a predominant preference was found in this book; otherwise they were not changed.

Simple typographical errors were corrected; occasional unbalanced quotation marks retained.

Ambiguous hyphens at the ends of lines were retained. Inconsistent hyphenation was not changed.

Page [173](#): *morale* was printed as *moral*; changed here.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BRITISH ARMY FROM WITHIN ***

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