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SOME PECULIARITIES IN THE WAR ORGANISATION OF A NATIVE INFANTRY REGIMENT.

By Major H. L. BALDWIN, 1st Bn. 8th Gurkha Rifles.

THE Field Service Manual tells us that the normal strength of a native infantry battalion proceeding on service is as follows:—

13 British officers.

17 native officers.

1 hospital assistant.

735 rank and file.

When we look at these figures the first thing noticeable is that there is here a very considerable discrepancy between the assumptions contained in the Training Manuals and in the calculations regarding time and space based on these assumptions, and generally recognised and practised in all tactical schemes, staff rides, etc.

What are these assumptions?

In the first place, a battalion is assumed to be divided into 8 companies, each company being of the average strength of 100 men, excluding officers. In a calculation regarding space, we assume that a battalion in column of fours consists of 800 men, and therefore takes up 400 yards of road. Similarly, calculations as regards time depend on the rate of march and the space assumed to be occupied by troops in column of route. Further, in tactical schemes it is always assumed that the 800 men of which a battalion is supposed to consist are all available in the firing line as fighting infantry pure and simple. Again, we are told in "Infantry Training" that a company is the tactical unit of infantry. No meaning can be attached to this definition unless the term "tactical unit" conveys some more or less definite idea of numerical strength. Otherwise, there would seem no reason why a section, squad or group should not be defined as the tactical unit of infantry. Though nowhere expressly stated, it may be hazarded that the company is defined as the tactical unit of infantry because it contains the minimum number of men capable of playing an independent infantry rôle in any given tactical situation. It is therefore of some importance to ascertain how many men this minimum number should consist of. As before said, this number is assumed to consist of, roughly, 100 men exclusive of officers, which is the ordinarily accepted idea of the strength of a company.

Perhaps the best way of arriving at what the approximate strength of a company should be, independent of any numerical

data, is by considering its functions as a separate tactical unit in an outpost scheme. An outpost company should supply its own support, and the strength of the latter should as a rule be equivalent to the strength of the picquets it has to support. Assuming, therefore, that a company provides two picquets with half a company in support, it will be seen that each picquet with its sentries, patrols, and reliefs, could hardly consist of less than 25 men, *i.e.*, the total strength of the company would be about 100 men.

The first thing to be noticed, then, is that the native infantry battalion contains only 735 rank and file, which in round numbers amounts to 92 men per company—in other words, a shortage of nearly 10 per cent.

This might not be considered a serious deficiency if every one of these 92 men could be looked on as a fighting infantryman available in the firing line. This, however, is far from being the case, as we shall presently proceed to show.

Referring to the Field Service Manual again, we find the following deductions must be made:—

- 1 ward orderly.
- 1 British officer. { Maxim guns.
- 14 rank and file. {
- 6 rank and file—signallers.
- 4 rank and file—regimental reserve of S.A.A.
- Total, 1 British officer and 25 rank and file.

Leaving officers out of the account, the strength of the battalion is thus reduced to 710 men, or in round numbers, 89 men per company.

Before going any further I should like to make it clear that I am not discussing the necessity or relative fighting value of these deductions. All I contend is that maxim gun detachments, signallers, etc., however useful they may be in their separate capacities, must necessarily, when drawn from an infantry unit, weaken that unit by just so many men as are deducted from it to perform services that are outside the province of infantry pure and simple. Maxim guns, for instance, cannot follow infantry through thickly-wooded country, up precipitous hills, across ravines, with no footpath for mules; neither can they always advance in the open where it is possible for infantry to do so; they are unsuitable for night operations; they can only be employed under exceptional conditions in the outpost line—in a word, their functions are entirely distinct from those of infantry, and however useful they may be, every man that is taken from an infantry unit and placed in charge of Maxims and their equipment must necessarily weaken the tactical efficiency of his infantry unit or company by just that amount. The same may be said of signallers and others who are deducted from the infantry unit to perform functions which may be useful, but at the same time cannot fail to impair the

tactical efficiency of their unit, considered as a fighting infantry unit, in the firing line.

Admitting all this, then, we find our company is reduced to a maximum of 89 men, and although this is considerably below the normal idea of what the strength of a company should be, we might still congratulate ourselves on having reached bottom and knowing the worst.

Unfortunately, however, the above modest list of deductions, which may be gathered from the Field Service Manual, is very far from representing the real state of affairs on service.

I will first give a list of additional deductions that may be expected on service, and then proceed to discuss them. The list is as follows:—

- 16 buglers.
- 32 stretcher bearers (4 per company).
- 2 men in charge of camp equipage and Q.M. stores.
- 18 signallers (additional).
- 6 soldier clerks.
- 24 men (3 per company) as escort of baggage.

Total, 98 non-commissioned officers and men.

The buglers are, of course, a most necessary and valuable adjunct to a battalion, but when they are included in the fighting strength, the fact is apt to be lost sight of that their particular duties cannot be performed efficiently if they are employed as fighting members of the unit in the firing line. It therefore seems justifiable to deduct them from the fighting strength of a battalion, though in the opinion of many they have a greater claim to be included than, for instance, signallers.

As regards stretcher-bearers, the Field Service Manual provides for a certain number of stretchers being carried by mules. In practice, however, at least one stretcher per company is carried on the march and in the field by men detailed from the company. At least 4 men per company must be detailed for this duty, with the result that 32 men per battalion are taken out of the firing line for this purpose. Their fighting value is thus completely eliminated, and to all intents and purposes they are relegated to the rôle of followers.

The next on the list are the 2 men (1 non-commissioned officer and 1 sepoy) delegated to remain in charge of camp equipage and Q.M. stores. Formerly this duty was carried out by public followers especially engaged for this purpose, consisting of a *tindal*¹ and 4 Lascars. On service, two followers of this establishment were sent in the field while the remainder were retained at the dépôt. It lately occurred to the authorities that an economy might be effected by abolishing this establishment and getting trained soldiers to do the work instead. What is the result? The pay of these followers has been saved, but the duties they had to perform, which were considerable, are now less efficiently performed by sepoys who have their military

¹ *Tindal*, the Native Petty Officer in charge of a party of Lascars.

training and duties to attend to in addition, while in the field these sepoys, who have been provided with the expensive military training and equipment of the soldier, are once more relegated to the rôle of followers, and are entirely wasted as fighting units.

We next come to the signallers. The Field Service Manual allows for one signalling unit consisting of six signallers only. In practice, however, the number of men trained as signallers in a battalion is generally four times this number. As these men require constant practice in the special duty they are trained for, they take little part in the ordinary soldiers' training except the musketry course. On service, Commanding Officers naturally consider that the special training of these men is more or less wasted, unless they are employed as signallers. Consequently, from 12 to 18 men, in addition to the ordinary signalling unit, are detailed for signalling purposes only, thus entailing a still further depletion of the firing line.

The same argument applies to the six soldier clerks taken on service. These men are nominally included in the fighting strength, but as great inconvenience would be caused by the loss of their special services, it is generally considered advisable to avoid risking their lives in the firing line and to keep them as far as possible outside the area of actual fighting.

Finally, a certain number of men must always be detailed to escort and take charge of regimental baggage. I have here assumed this number to be about 24 per battalion, i.e., 3 per company, a minimum estimate. These men are generally, though not necessarily, detailed from each battalion; but assuming that the minimum baggage escort of an infantry brigade amounts roughly to a company of 96 strong, it is apparent that the firing line will be depleted by the average number of 24 men per battalion.

The total number of these additional deductions amounts to 98 rank and file.

Subtracting this from the previous estimate of 710 men per battalion, we arrive at the considerably reduced figure of 612 men as the fighting strength of a battalion.

We have not even now, however, come to the end of the deductions that must be allowed for. There are still the mounted infantry and scouts to consider. Mounted infantry, as everyone is aware, can only be used effectively on service when organised into a distinct and separate corps. No such corps exists, however, on a peace footing. On service they are entirely drawn from the war establishment of infantry battalions, that is to say, each battalion furnishes from 20 to 30 men, who have been through a special course of training for the purpose, to form a separate corps organised as companies of mounted infantry. Whatever the relative value of the latter may be, the fact remains that they considerably deplete the fighting strength of infantry as infantry, and it is idle to suppose that the tactical efficiency of an infantry unit remains unimpaired when subjected

to a constant drain requiring it to furnish all sorts and conditions of men from a war establishment not exceeding the meagre limit of 735 men all told.¹

We have next to consider the question of scouts. In every company at least 6 selected men receive a special and independent course of training as infantry scouts. They are specialists whose principal and almost exclusive rôle is to gain and transmit intelligence regarding the enemy. As the importance of information in the field depends chiefly on the rapidity and accuracy with which it is gained and transmitted, the principal requirements of a scout are mobility coupled with a high degree of intelligence. The infantry scout, who has to work entirely on foot, is enormously handicapped as regards mobility, and therefore requires to be a man of exceptional bodily activity with great natural intelligence, as well as educational qualifications of a high order. To judge from some of the numerous pamphlets and essays recently published on scouting, the scout must be an exceptional man indeed, combining the activity and cunning of a Red Indian, with powers of deductive reasoning scarcely inferior to those of Sherlock Holmes. Even infantry battalions, rich as they are supposed to be in talent of every conceivable sort, may well be staggered by the problem of finding and training the modern scout. Nevertheless, each battalion must provide no less than 48 of these gifted individuals, and as their special duties are considered of exceptional value, they are usually grouped as a separate unit, divorced from their companies, though forming an integral part of the battalion. In some cases, however, the commander of a force may brigade the scouts of the various battalions to form a separate unit, so that in such cases the services of 48 of its best men are entirely lost to the battalion.

Mounted infantry and scouts together would amount to at least 68 men per battalion, so that if these are eliminated, the strength of the fighting infantry per battalion is reduced from our previous total of 612 men to a pitiful total of 544 men.

It must be remembered that the deductions above enumerated, though considerable, are all calculated on a minimum scale. There might, for instance, be 30 men instead of 20 eliminated on account of mounted infantry; there might be four or five men per company told off as baggage guard instead of only three, and so on. Then, again, no deductions have been made on account of men detailed for special and miscellaneous duties, such as orderlies, ammunition carriers, etc., which would all tend to still further decrease the fighting strength of the battalion.

¹As regards mounted infantry, a recent order from Army Headquarters indicates that Indian infantry will no longer be required to furnish men for this purpose. If so, it is a welcome step in the direction which the whole argument of the succeeding pages is intended to set forth.

Even as it stands, a company, the so-called tactical unit of infantry, is reduced to 64 men, and this without allowing for a single casualty, either through sickness or losses in the field.

One would suppose that with 64 men per company, bed rock had at last been reached, and that these 64, at all events, would be available as infantry in the firing line. Nothing of the kind. Yet other methods have been introduced by which the firing line is still further depleted in order to provide men for special duties considered more important. It has been left to individual battalions to devise their own system of inter-communication within the battalion, and it is in connection with this system that numbers of battalions have adopted methods that, whatever their respective merits may be, undoubtedly have the great defect of still further weakening the firing line.

For instance, the following system of inter-communication is said to work well and to have found favour in many regiments, though it is, of course, impossible to say to what extent it has been generally adopted as no fixed system has been laid down for use by all regimental units. In general outline the system is as follows:—

In every company 2 men are specially selected for the purpose of collecting and passing on written messages, and, in addition, 2 men for the same purpose are attached to the Commanding Officer, one to accompany the Commanding Officer wherever he may be, and the other to remain at the spot where it is notified in orders that reports are to be sent. When a message is sent from the front, the collector, as he is termed, first takes the messages to his own company collector, who in turn directs him to the collector nearest to the person for whom the message is intended, and so on from company to company until the message reaches its destination. In addition to these collectors, every section or detached party is required to tell off a man as "look out," whose duty it is to be on the look-out for messages and give notice of all information coming in, whether intended for his party or not. What with collectors and look-outs, a battalion may have to provide anything from 18 to 50 men. As all the time and energy of these men is necessarily taken up in acting as animated letter-boxes or dak-runners, they are, of course, not available for such an unimportant detail as actively engaging the enemy. The system, as before mentioned, is said to work well, and certainly if battles can be won by sending copious messages backwards and forwards, battalions are now thoroughly equipped for the purpose. What will become of the system if some of the collectors are shot down and the chain of communication interrupted is not so clear, but such untoward events do not occur on field days, and are, perhaps, hardly worth taking into account. It must be remembered that the collectors above referred to are not supplied by the trained signallers of the battalion, as the latter have other and more important duties to perform, so that the fighting strength of the already attenuated companies is reduced by another 3 or 4 men.

Our company, whose proper fighting strength we assumed should consist of at least 100 men, in order to qualify for its definition as the tactical unit of infantry, is now reduced to a meagre 60 men or so, and this without allowing for a single casualty of any sort or kind.

In the late war the Russians were seriously embarrassed by the enormous depletions their fighting units were subjected to in order to carry out special duties, apart from their proper unit, or else duties of an entirely non-combatant character. Brigades, regiments, and even battalions could often only be made up to their proper strength by a piecemeal collection and re-assortment of separate and distinct units. The result was lack of cohesion, tactical inefficiency, friction in leadership, and the general state of conditions which spell failure. It is, therefore, worth considering whether the present organisation of the Indian Army, at all events as far as infantry are concerned, is not calculated to bring about precisely the same evils which proved so disastrous to the Russians, in spite of the immensely superior numerical resources of the latter.

After all, it is infantry pure and simple that wins or loses a campaign. It is on infantry that the brunt of the fighting falls, and the first requisite is that we should have plenty of them. Mounted infantry, Maxims, signallers, etc., are all very useful adjuncts, but the infantry is not a widow's cruse which can supply all these side-shows without seriously impairing the efficiency of its own particular rôle. Not only are battalions and companies reduced to a dangerously low ebb as regards numbers by supplying a multitude of special and distinct services, but they lose at the same time their best and most intelligent men, who are invariably ordered to be selected when required for any special purpose outside the ordinary training of the infantry soldier.

The injury inflicted is thus a double one, for the company's loss is not only one of quantity, but also one of quality. The systematic elimination of all the most active and intelligent members of a battalion injures its general standard of efficiency even more seriously than is indicated by the actual numerical loss sustained.

It may be asked if this alleged weakness of infantry battalions is such a vital matter, how is it that it has not been conspicuously noticed in frontier and other campaigns in which portions of the Indian Army have been engaged from time to time? The answer is, that small wars of this nature are no real test whatever. The enemy has never been a civilised one; his arms and general organisation have always been immensely inferior; the total fighting strength of our mobilised columns has almost invariably provided for a very liberal margin of safety; the percentage of casualties has been small; in every respect the conditions have been such as to throw the smallest

possible strain on the fighting organisation of the troops, the main problem being principally one of supply and transport. Minor campaigns of this description, though instructive up to a certain point, give little scope for testing our strength as against the organised armies of a great civilised Power.

In a war of the first magnitude, involving the destinies of the Empire, where the resources of the latter would be taxed to the last man, defects in our fighting organisation which under ordinary circumstances seem comparatively insignificant will assume a shape of new and vital importance. There are not a few indications that such a war may be thrust upon us with dramatic swiftness in the near future, perhaps even within the next few years. It is fervently to be hoped that the magnificent potentialities of the Indian Army will not be wasted in the rôle of idle and useless spectators, as during the late Boer War, but utilised to the full in taking its share in the storm centre of the conflict, thousands of miles removed from Indian soil though it may be. It is to prepare for this day, which may be fast approaching, that no time should be lost in thoroughly overhauling and testing every weak point in the armour of the Indian Army.

The weakness of the firing line in infantry battalions is an evil the disastrous consequences of which will not become apparent except under the stress of a great war. That the evil has hitherto been ignored may be due to several reasons:—

1. The many and great reforms in the organisation of the higher branches of the Service have diverted attention from the humble but basic unit of the whole Army superstructure, viz., the infantry battalion.
2. Practical experience is confined to frontier warfare, the conditions of which provide an altogether inadequate test of military efficiency, and consequently fail to bring the matter into prominence.
3. The Field Service Manual is misleading, for though it gives the number of men mobilised in a battalion, it mentions only a small proportion of the men actually diverted from the firing line in order to perform a variety of special and entirely distinct services.

Whatever the reason may be, the fact remains that the infantry battalion on a war footing consists at the present moment of a hotch-potch composed of Maxim gun detachments, mounted infantry, signallers, stretcher-bearers, men detailed for internal communications, etc., the remainder being what the whole is supposed to be, namely, fighting infantry pure and simple. The real infantry machine, by far the most important of all these items, has thus been both complicated and weakened to an incredible extent apparently under the impression that it is both possible to have one's cake and to eat it.

If one were to trace the origin of the multifarious specialities required of infantry it would probably be found that they were due to tentative and independent experiments among individual battalions, which adopted specialities that were eventually sanctioned by the military authorities and gradually expanded and made applicable to all battalions. The gradual absorption of a mass of special functions, which, considered individually, had no doubt much to be said in their favour, has resulted in the infantry machine being clogged with a mass of cog wheels which infinitely complicate the mechanism and threaten to throw the whole machine out of gear.

The whole question and its remedy is comparatively simple if we start with the assumption that a company is only an efficient unit when it contains not less than 100 men available in the firing line. If this assumption is approximately correct, it follows that an infantry battalion should have at least 800 men available in the firing line. Allowing for certain absolutely necessary details, such as ammunition and baggage guards, etc., which are necessarily eliminated from the firing line, a war organisation of, say, 850 men per battalion would probably cover all purposes. If, however, it is considered necessary to make mounted infantry, signallers, Maxim guns, and stretcher bearers and so forth part and parcel of each battalion, then the latter should be raised to a war strength of 1,000 men, which would enable it to supply all these special services and yet retain a substantial minimum of men for the real purposes of infantry.

To raise the regimental establishment to 1,000 men would, however, entail such gigantic changes in so many details of Army organisation that its realisation may seem well-nigh impracticable. To begin with, the financial aspect of the question alone would seem to present unsurmountable difficulties. This would certainly be the case if it were a question of increasing the total numbers of the Army, but an increase in the strength of regimental units need not necessarily entail an increase in the strength of the Army as a whole. It makes no difference whether 100,000 men are split up into 125 regimental units or only 100 regimental units as far as the total number of men is concerned. It is merely a question of organisation, and if we get superior efficiency out of 100 units 1,000 strong than out of 125 units 800 strong, there can be no doubt whatever that the smaller number of stronger units gives us better value while not costing a penny more than the larger number of weaker units. Far from entailing extra expenditure, there are strong grounds for presuming that the lower number of strong establishments will be economically superior to the higher number of weak establishments.

The principal difficulties connected with a largely increased regimental establishment are therefore rather administrative than financial. It would be superfluous to examine these in detail,

as even if they could be successfully overcome, there yet remains the objection that even with a largely increased establishment the door would still be left open for a repetition of the same evils that the stronger establishment was intended to cure. In course of time the number of scouts, signallers, and all the other adjuncts would probably be doubled and the actual fighting strength of the company be reduced to the same dimensions as before, with the result that little would be gained and the interior administration of a battalion made more complicated than ever.

There seems to be only one way out of this *impasse*. All the side-shows of a regiment should be ruthlessly eliminated. Scouts, signallers, Maxim gun detachments, stretcher-bearers, and all the other details which cannot be employed as fighting infantry should be taken out of battalions altogether and formed into separate and distinct corps. They could then be trained to a much higher degree of efficiency in their own distinct and special functions, while the genuine infantry arm would be left free and unhampered to reach its full development and efficiency on its own proper lines.

Let infantry be infantry first, foremost, and all the time. Let them be masters of their own business and not Jacks of a dozen other trades. The multiplication of appliances tends to decrease not increase efficiency. The simpler the machine the better will it stand the wear and tear of actual service. The removal of all the excrescences, which at present make up one-third of an infantry battalion, would, I venture to believe, more than double its tactical and fighting efficiency.

It may be asked: How can infantry fulfil the requirements of modern warfare without such important and necessary adjuncts as scouts, Maxims, signallers, and so on? The answer is: That it is not in the least necessary to dispense with the undoubted advantages of some of these adjuncts, but there is no object whatever in making them integral portions of a battalion.

Let us examine this proposition in greater detail and discuss separately what may be called the supernumerary functions of infantry.

To take first the question of Maxim guns. No one will deny that Maxims add enormously to the fighting strength of any force, and their extreme usefulness was repeatedly illustrated in the late war in Manchuria. There is, however, nothing to show that they are more usefully employed as integral portions of a battalion than as a separate and distinct arm organised in batteries of 6 or 8 guns, which may be divided into pairs or groups according to circumstances and the requirements of the tactical situation. On the contrary, in every Army except our own this organisation appears to be the universal practice, and original batteries of, say, 8 machine guns each are certainly *prima facie* distinctly superior to our own

system. Their advantages may briefly be summarised as follows :—

- (a) The employment of the machine guns is under better and more convenient control. Instead of responsibility being divided between the commanding officers of battalions, the officer in charge of each pair of guns and the commander of the whole force, the guns are brought under the direct control of the latter with the Maxim battery commanders under his immediate orders. They can consequently be employed in whatever place or manner is most suited to the requirements of the tactical situation without hampering or interfering in any way with the movements and orders of the battalion commander, who will be relieved of making all sorts of special and separate arrangements for the machine guns at present under his personal charge. The tactical handling of his infantry to the best advantage demands the whole attention and energy of the battalion commander, and the care of an arm whose functions are as distinct from infantry tactics as those of artillery, though in a lesser degree, can only serve to distract and hamper him on service.
- (b) Economy in officers. At present the British officer is in charge of each pair of machine guns. If organised into batteries of eight guns, one or two British officers would suffice for the whole battery.
- (c) Greater individual efficiency of officers and men in Maxim gun detachments.

It is tolerably obvious that if Maxim guns were organised as distinct units in batteries, a much higher standard of proficiency could be attained in the handling of this arm than is possible under the existing system with its constant chopping and changing of officers and men, who moreover have many other infantry duties to attend to.

The advantages of Maxim batteries may, therefore, be summed up as ensuring greater economy as well as greater administrative and tactical efficiency. Moreover, if the Maxims were organised in the proportion of 1 battery of 8 guns per infantry brigade, the same proportion of guns per battalion as are at present allotted would still be maintained.

Signallers are the next item to be considered. It has become a stock axiom that the value and importance of signalling is self-evident, and a matter entirely beyond dispute. Emphatic assertion, however, does not necessarily prove that the fact asserted is true, and when the matter is examined impartially and without bias, the utility of signalling, *i.e.*, visual signalling, will be found to be considerably less demonstrable than is apt to be imagined.

It must always be borne in mind that signalling is not a means of gaining information, but merely a method of transmitting such information rapidly. The only question at issue is therefore this : Is signalling the best and most effective method of rapidly transmitting information in the field ?

On this point let us take a fairly representative opinion judged from the standpoint of peace manœuvres, where, if anywhere, signalling might be expected to show up in the most favourable light.

In the report on the Bannu Brigade Training, 1908, the G.O.C. has the following remarks to make on the subject of signalling :—

“The formalities now required to be gone through in sending and receiving a message are all very well on the practice ground, but for practical work on the field, the time they take greatly reduces the value of signalling as a means of inter-communication. Whether it is possible to obtain much improvement without having a special corps of signalling experts with nothing else to do, I am not in a position to say, but considering the vital necessity of good means of inter-communication, the subject is one which deserves earnest attention.”

The grave drawback above quoted is, however, only one among many other disadvantages of visual signalling. Little attention has hitherto been paid to these disadvantages because in default of a better system they are regarded as unavoidable evils. There is, for instance, the difficulty of selecting signalling stations which are invisible to the enemy and at the same time visible to our own troops; secondly, the impossibility of maintaining inter-communication unless the weather is clear and the signalling parties can post themselves at conspicuous points where buildings, woods, or other natural features do not obstruct the view. Again, when a column is on the march, the signalling party attached to it is constantly obliged to place itself at some more or less considerable distance from the line of march, which is usually under cover of some natural features of the ground, in order to get into touch with neighbouring signalling parties, the result being that it frequently loses its own column, while in any case there is generally a good deal of additional delay and confusion entailed. Further, signalling parties when on the move often experience great difficulty in picking each other up again; in their endeavours to re-establish communication they often expose themselves to the enemy's view, thus betraying the whereabouts of our own troops, while messages are sent hurriedly and inaccurately, thus causing still more delay and confusion.

Altogether, considering the time, labour and constant practice required to attain even moderate proficiency in visual signalling, it is certainly open to question whether the game is worth the candle. At the present day its utility, such as it is, appears likely to be entirely thrown in the shade by the field

telephone. The latter, though capable of improvement, is already a great step in advance of visual signalling—in fact, there are good grounds for surmising that it will completely supplant the flag-wagger, who will soon become as extinct as the dodo.

The telephone has none of the drawbacks of visibility or non-visibility as the case may be, neither is it so dependent as visual signalling on weather conditions or features of the ground; messages can be transmitted with infinitely greater accuracy and speed than by flag-wagging. Its portability, range, and general utility under all conditions is already great, and will undoubtedly be improved and perfected when once adopted and brought into general use. Finally, men can be trained in its use and method of employment at a vastly smaller expenditure of time and trouble than is the case with visual signalling.

It is remarkable that such an admirable substitute for visual signalling is not generally adopted without further delay; but there will always be those who cling to old-established methods, however inferior, and it would be contrary to precedent not to expect the usual quota of objections. Some may go so far as to concede that it would form an excellent adjunct to visual signalling. The suggestion seems on a par with that of recommending a horse as an adjunct to a Shetland pony for carrying a load which is within the capacity of either, though in different degrees. What is wanted is not an adjunct, but a substitute. Infantry are already overloaded with adjuncts, and to add one more to their number would make matters worse than ever.

Whatever the upshot may be, and whether visual signalling is retained or not retained, there can be little doubt that signallers could be much more profitably and usefully employed if organised into special corps, as suggested by the G.O.C., Bannu Brigade.

We next come to the question of infantry scouts. Systems of scouting in different regiments are as varied as the colours of the rainbow, and there is, perhaps, no other branch of military training so befogged with elaborate and conflicting theories and ideas.

The reason for this is not far to seek. There are, to begin with, two absolutely opposed principles contending for the mastery, and the training manuals seem to incline first towards one and then the other. The resulting systems of scouting advocated are consequently a more or less abortive attempt to hedge and effect an apparent combination of both principles. The impossibility of any real combination is apparent when we consider what these principles are. The first is that scouts cannot obtain reliable information as to the enemy's main forces without fighting; the other is, that scouts not only can, but must obtain information without fighting.

To reconcile two such contrary principles is beyond the capacity of the average intellect. When, however, we turn to

the text books for information, we find that the apparently impossible is effected by adopting a vagueness of language which lends the upholders of either theory a certain amount of support, while not definitely committing itself to either view.

The Field Service Regulations of 1909 say that information will *rarely* be obtained without fighting (*vide* Sec. 92, para. 2), while the Infantry Training Manual, which is more uncompromising in its support of the opposite view, states that scouts *should* avoid fighting, and again in Sec. 89, para. 7, it re-affirms that scouts must *never* fight unless forced to do so in self-defence.

Now in cases of doubt, the Field Service Regulations are the ruling authority, so we may leave the inconsistencies of other manuals to look after themselves, and confine our attention to elucidating the principles of scouting as laid down in the Field Service Regulations.

It will help to clear the ground and save confusion of thought if we constantly bear in mind what is meant by scouting. It is often spoken of as if it were the only, or, at all events, the best method of obtaining information regarding the enemy. It is neither the one nor the other. It is only one among many forms of obtaining information, and far from being the best is generally the least practicable and least reliable of all forms of information, though circumstances often render its employment unavoidable.

Personal reconnaissance by the commander is infinitely preferable to scouting, as Napoleon and other great military leaders have frequently demonstrated; but under modern conditions of long-range weapons and wide extensions, this means of gaining information is often impracticable, or else reduced to very restricted limits. Failing personal reconnaissance, the next best method is individual reconnaissance by selected staff or regimental officers. Failing either of these, balloons and dirigible airships are likely in the immediate future to perform invaluable service in reconnaissance. Failing any or all of these, a system of spies, as adopted by the Japanese in the late war, and also, to a certain extent, by the Boers, was found to be immeasurably superior to any scouting. Failing, or rather subsidiary, to any or all of the above methods, is the scouting performed by the screen of protective cavalry. Last and least important of all comes the infantry scout.

In spite of the torrents of literature on the subject, and the extraordinary booming of the infantry scout, the fact remains that the latter has achieved no practical results of importance, either in former or in the most recent campaigns.

The Japanese, as far as can be gathered, never employed infantry scouts at all, not even when they were operating in the mountainous regions of Manchuria. The greater distances a mounted man can cover and the greatly increased mobility conferred on him by means of his horse, render him infinitely preferable for scouting purposes, even though he may often be

obliged by the nature of the ground to dismount and do a portion of his scouting on foot. Boer scouting was, of course, all done by mounted men, and even if we go as far back as the Napoleonic period, the same universal practice of employing only mounted troops as scouts will be found to prevail.

It is true that the Japanese usually employed infantry skirmishers in close support of their mounted patrols. Such troops are often loosely referred to as scouts, but they had nothing whatever in common with the reconnoitring infantry scout as described in Infantry Training. They were essentially a fighting force who merely acted as a support to the cavalry patrols in case the latter was driven back by a superior force of hostile patrols, and also to guard against ambushes. In the same way the light infantry of Napoleon's or Wellington's armies who advanced in open skirmishing order to clear the ground for the serried lines in rear are frequently described as scouts, though they were essential fighting troops.

In Sec. 87 of Infantry Training the misconceptions on this very point are evidently recognised, for it is definitely laid down that "scouting is not to be confused with skirmishing which involves fighting." In Sec. 83 of the same manual, however, we have it laid down under the chapter on skirmishing that scouts may be formed in chains or groups "to feel the way for a larger body, and in working as a patrol sent out to obtain information of the enemy or the ground," i.e., they are, to all intents and purposes, the very thing they are subsequently described as *not* being, namely, skirmishers.

How is the ordinary man to reconcile such diametrically opposed views laid down by the same authority? If he seeks for further light, he is promptly brought up with a round turn by the following comprehensive dictum:—"It is impossible to lay down precise rules for these most important duties."

Seeing, then, that the text books furnish no conclusive guidance on the subject of infantry scouting, it may, perhaps, be pardonable to arrive at some definite conclusion by means of general considerations.

The root of the difficulty is the divergence of view on the fundamental principles as to whether scouts can or cannot obtain reliable information without fighting. It stands to reason that if the enemy has no protective screen, or a very partial and inefficient one, it is, of course, possible to gain information without fighting. If the word "rarely" in para. 2 of Sec. 92 of the Field Service Regulations is used in this sense, no one could quarrel with it, though it would, perhaps, be better omitted, as it seems unnecessary to legislate for the obvious, and may give rise to misconceptions.

In settling a general principle of this kind it must be taken for granted that the enemy has taken the ordinary precautionary measures universally adopted in civilised warfare; that is to say, the provision of a protective screen. Assuming this to be the case, it is clear that the protective screen will consist mainly

of cavalry, with possibly infantry in close support. Our own protective cavalry (putting strategical reconnaissance aside) would naturally be the first to come in contact with this screen. The question then arises: are our advanced patrols to try and push through the hostile screen without being observed, or are they to tear it aside by attacking the hostile patrols and driving them back? Theoretically the former course is possible, and apparently strongly advocated in our Army. Given sufficient time and men of extraordinary ability, coolness, nerve, patience and many other physical and mental qualities of a high order, it may of course be possible to accomplish the task required, but its dangers and difficulties are enormous. The men concerned are practically left to their own resources and entirely cut off from support. The nearer they approach the enemy's main body the more difficult will it be to escape observation, while on the other hand, to remain concealed and yet gain adequate and reliable information regarding the enemy requires immense skill and patience. There are perhaps a dozen men in an army equal to such requirements, but that they can be turned out by the score in every battalion by means of 3 or 4 months' special annual training, seems an over sanguine view to take. It seems far more likely that 90 per cent. of the scouts employed in this fashion will be ambushed or captured by the enemy, and that the advantage reaped by the enemy through their capture will greatly outweigh the advantage obtained through those who survive to bring in information to our own side.

These general considerations, which are supported no less by recent than by past experience in the history of warfare, bring us to the same conclusions as those consistently maintained in the Field Service Regulations, viz., that tactical reconnaissance—in other words, scouting—should practically be entirely confined to mounted troops, and that reliable information as to the enemy's main forces will rarely be obtained without fighting.

These precepts are, as before said, in diametrical opposition to those laid down in Infantry Training, 1905, which talks of scouting as if it were one of the principal and most important functions of infantry, and, moreover, insists in one place that scouting is not skirmishing, and must be carried out without fighting, while in another place (Sec. 83) it makes it equally clear that skirmishing and scouting are practically one and the same thing. Fortunately, where such inconsistencies occur, the Field Service Regulations are the ruling authority, and there can be little doubt that they contain the sounder and more correct views on the subject.

The only stumbling-block in the dictum of the Field Service Regulations is the insertion of the word "rarely," which introduces an element of doubt and uncertainty in what should be a definite and clear-cut principle. If the word "never" were sub-

stituted it might be less exact from a verbal purist's point of view, but there would be the great compensating advantage of having a sound principle stated in definite and uncompromising terms, so that no loophole would remain for doubt or misapprehension.

The unreserved acceptance of the principle that reliable information cannot be obtained by scouts without fighting—a principle which has been amply confirmed by actual experience in war—must entail as its logical consequence a complete reversal of the numerous new theories on scouting which have been put forward of late years, and which are all based on a directly opposite principle. If scouting means the gaining of information by driving in the enemy's patrols, or at least providing sufficient power of resistance to prevent the enemy gaining information when our advance is checked by superior numbers, the whole question becomes at once reduced to the simplest dimensions. Infantry scouts will simply be what they have always been in the past—that is to say, active, mobile, and clever skirmishers. Skirmishing in whatever method is best adapted to the ground will be their uniform method of advance; the officers in command of the skirmishing parties will record any important information gained, and be responsible for its rapid transmission by signal or otherwise and, finally, if hostile scouts are encountered there will be no futile attempts made to evade them and escape observation, but on the contrary, they will be promptly attacked and either driven back or captured. In case the enemy is met in greatly superior numbers, the skirmishers will fall back gradually on supports in rear, and dispute every inch of ground in order to hold the enemy in check and give time to the troops in rear to make the dispositions necessary. The rôle of scouts will, in fact, be practically the same as that of the old light infantry troops under Napoleon or Wellington: their function to feel for the enemy, drive in his patrols, and clear the ground for the main body. This seems a much saner and more practical method of employing scouts than that of sending them in small and widely-scattered groups to penetrate the enemy's screen without being seen or heard, and then expecting them to return unscathed with a budget of valuable information and a rough sketch of the enemy's dispositions and the route to be followed.

Three comfortable assumptions are made by the advocates of the latter method of employing scouts: First, that the scout will escape observation and return unharmed; second, that the information he obtains is sufficiently ample and reliable to be acted on; third, that the time occupied in gaining such information, which, from the nature of the conditions, must necessarily be very considerable, will have no unfavourable effect on the commander's plans. Put to the actual test of war, it would probably be found that a scout would rarely fulfil even one of these assumptions, and that he would fulfil them all is

almost inconceivable. If that is so, however, no further argument is required to demonstrate that scouting on such lines should be prohibited.

Taking all these considerations together, the conclusions arrived at may, therefore, be summed up as follows:—

1. It is rarely if ever that scouting for reconnaissance purposes will be carried out by other than mounted troops. For infantry it is consequently a side issue.
2. All scouting, but more especially infantry¹ scouting, should be carried out on the principle that reliable information can only be obtained by fighting.
3. Infantry scouts should be active, mobile troops, whose training should be specially devoted to acquiring the highest degree of skill and perfection in skirmishing and the duties of protection.
4. The old *raison d'être* of light infantry regiments might well be revived in this connection, with such adaptations as are required by modern conditions, in order to make a speciality of this form of training.

If these conclusions are correct, and the spirit and tenour of the Field Service Regulations are apparently in full accord with them, it may be gathered that the elaborate and complicated system of scouting which now finds favour in so many regiments might with advantage be consigned to the limbo of broken and useless toys. Scouting, when thus reduced to its proper dimensions, will no longer require that highly specialised training which demands a standard of education and intelligence altogether beyond the reach of the average soldier, and consequently when enforced merely resulting in an elaborate system of make-believe, commonly known as eyewash.

Let every man in a regiment be trained as a potential scout, but let scouts, as such, be eliminated altogether from regiments. One of the principal causes of the weakening and depletion of the firing line would thus be removed, and the general gain in tactical efficiency correspondingly increased. Incidentally, the result would also be to remove a prominent factor of unpopularity among the rank and file of the native army, to whom the highly technical and educational requirements of scouting as at present inculcated are a continual source of trial and tribulation.

The principal factors in the weakening of battalions have now been discussed in some detail, and the remedies which most obviously suggest themselves have been discussed. In

¹ Especially infantry, because their relatively inferior mobility demands a closer mutual support and co-operation than in the case of mounted troops.

general, the course that appears most feasible is the formation of separate and distinct corps in the case of mounted infantry, signallers, Maxim guns, and scouts. The latter, if treated as troops who make a speciality of skirmishing while still retaining the ordinary functions of infantry, are ready to hand as special corps in the shape of light infantry and rifle regiments, whose functions merely require to be adapted to modern conditions in order to give them the meaning and significance they formerly enjoyed.

As regards stretcher bearers, there seems no reason why their duties should not devolve entirely on the Army Bearer Corps. If necessary their establishment could be permanently increased, or followers might be specially enrolled for active service to the number required and attached to the Army Bearer Corps, just as specially engaged transport followers are attached on service to the Supply and Transport.

The duties connected with the charge of regimental stores and equipments might with advantage be relegated once more to the small proportion of public followers formerly known as Lascars with a *tindal* in charge. As for regimental inter-communication by means of a special body of Sepoy messengers, it could very well be dispensed with altogether, there being other less spectacular but far simpler and more practical methods of maintaining the necessary inter-communication.

There remain, then, only the ammunition and baggage guards, together with certain miscellaneous duties, such as orderlies, ammunition carriers, etc., which are indispensable and must be carried out by fighting men within the regiment. To allow for these a margin of 40 or 50 men would be ample, and the ideal war strength of a battalion would thus be fixed at 850 all told. Such an organisation, with all the previously mentioned excrescences eliminated, would give us real tactical units of 100 men per company. It would, of course, entail a peace organisation of not less than 1,000 men per battalion, i.e., about 150 men more than under the present peace organisation. To raise these additional men, together with special and separate corps of signallers and Maxim guns, implies an increase in the total numbers of the Army. But if the State is unwilling to face this additional burden to the military finances, the required result can still be attained by cutting down the total number of battalions to the extent necessary to balance the increased establishment of individual battalions, together with the creation of supplementary corps of signallers and Maxim guns.

Whatever the temporary inconveniences might be, the result, I am firmly convinced, would be to double if not treble the fighting efficiency of the Indian Army. The battalion would become a formidable, solid, and homogeneous unit, with all its energies concentrated on the one great aim and purpose of establishing fire superiority in the field. Strategy, tactics, and military training of every kind is entirely directed towards

accomplishing this one all-comprehensive object. This is true everywhere and under all circumstances. Fire superiority, directly or indirectly, is the ultimate arbiter of victory in every single battle or campaign. It is so even in cases where garrisons or large forces in the field capitulate without firing a shot, for the reason of such capitulations is simply that the force in question has been placed by the opponent in such a position as to leave no alternative between surrender and complete destruction. The destruction threatened can only be compassed by the enemy's fire, so that defeat under any circumstances is ultimately due to the superiority of the opponent's fire, whether effected directly by the infliction of casualties or, indirectly, by the manœuvring of forces in such a manner as to leave no means of escaping the penalty of destruction except by surrender or capitulation.

It would seem superfluous to mention such an obvious, fundamental, and universally acknowledged fact were it not that its implications have been constantly and flagrantly ignored not only in our own day but throughout the whole history of war with firearms. Other things being equal, it is, of course, clear, as Napoleon said, that victory rests with the big battalions, or in other words, with superior numbers. But why? Simply because superior numbers imply the possibility of deploying stronger firing lines. If superior numbers fail to do this, they are not only no advantage but a distinct disadvantage, for every additional man complicates the problem of transport and supply, decreases mobility, and in many other ways increases the difficulty of effecting the primary object of all strategy and tactics, viz., concentration at the right time and in the right place. When all the initial difficulties of concentrating superior forces at the decisive point have been successfully overcome, it is obvious that the advantage will be nullified to a greater or lesser extent unless the fullest use is made of superior numbers by placing them where their fire action can reach its highest development. To repeat this seems almost a platitude, but, incredible as it may appear, one of the clearest inferences of such a common-sense principle was entirely ignored at the outbreak of the Peninsular War. At that time the Training Manuals of the British Army most strictly enjoined the three-deep formation as the correct battle formation of infantry in the firing line—that is to say, the fire of one-third of the firing line was practically rendered inoperative, presumably in order that the third line should by its mere presence afford some fanciful and imaginary moral support, though seeing that it must inevitably have presented a denser and more vulnerable target to both musketry and artillery fire, it is difficult to understand how even this argument in its favour could possibly have been entertained. Fortunately, the Duke of Wellington had other ideas on the subject. So convinced was he of its futility and unsoundness that in his very first Peninsular battle at Vimiero he ordered the two-

deep formation to be adopted, thus increasing his firing line by one-third without adding a single man to the numerical strength of his force. The brilliant result completely justified his theory, based as it was on common-sense principles, and the two-deep formation was adhered to thereafter with unvarying success throughout the war.

In our own day we seem to be committing the same cardinal error of weakening the firing line in a different and less conspicuous but no less vicious form than that of the three-deep formation in pre-Peninsular times. The functions of an infantry battalion have been divided and sub-divided into a variety of special branches of training. The quantity and quality of the essential fighting line has been sacrificed to provide a number of specialities which absorb all the most active and intelligent of the rank and file, and incidentally lower the self-respect of the ordinary infantryman, who, if not selected for scouts, Maxim guns, signallers, etc., regards himself as placed on the shelf and no longer open to any prospect of promotion. *Esprit de corps* declines, the popularity of military service decreases, there is unwholesome competition among all ranks to catch the eye, to be spectacular, to invent and perpetrate gyms and fads of all kinds whose main desideratum is that they be showy and win commendation, practical utility being a minor consideration.

How far this state of affairs is due to the causes I have endeavoured to trace, and how far it can be remedied by a change in organisation on the lines suggested, is a matter which may perhaps be worthy of inquiry, considering the vital issues that are at stake.