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LECTURE.

Wednesday, June 23, 1875.

GENERAL SIR WILLIAM J. CODRINGTON, G.C.B., Colonel
Coldstream Guards, in the Chair.

THE COMPANY AS A MILITARY BODY.—ITS ESTABLISHMENT.—THE BEST NUMBER OF COMPANIES IN THE BATTALION.

By Colonel SIR LUMLEY GRAHAM, Bart.

INDIFFERENT as the British people has generally shown itself to matters concerning the organization of armies, there are two great military questions which have of late years occupied a large share of public attention, having been much discussed in Parliament, and in the newspapers, besides furnishing a theme for many pamphlets and essays.

I refer, firstly, to the question of appointment, promotion, and retirement of officers; secondly, to that of recruiting and reserves.

These two subjects belong to a class of universal interest, involving, as they do, not only military but also political and social considerations, and containing within themselves problems, upon the right solution of which depends the very existence of the army and of the empire.

The question upon which I have the honour of addressing you now is neither of such vital importance, nor of such general interest. It is purely and simply a military question about which few civilians will trouble their heads. Still, for us soldiers it is, I believe, a most important question, and one which has not been sufficiently studied in this country, even by the profession.

Great Britain is *par excellence* the country of companies in a non-military sense, but I do not think that the company, as a military body has ever been held in proper estimation amongst us; moreover, I think that of late years, owing to various causes which I shall notice further on, it has been declining in importance, whilst in foreign armies it has, in obedience to what I conceive to be sounder military principles, been steadily rising in value. Holding these

views, I believe the present state of things to be detrimental to the efficiency of our Army, and especially of our infantry, and I have sought an opportunity for advocating the cause of the company, for promoting a full discussion of the subject by competent persons, and for eliciting the various opinions which may be held both upon the main point, *i.e.*, the value which should be assigned to the company as a military body, and upon the two minor points upon our notice board, our conclusions as to which must be in a great measure based upon our decision with regard to the first part of the subject. This opportunity has been afforded to me by the Committee of the Royal United Service Institution, by their kind acceptance of my offer to read a paper on the subject, for which I tender them my thanks. At the same time allow me to say, Sir, that your presence in the chair is extremely gratifying to me, not only on account of the honour it confers upon me, but also because I hope to induce you to give us the benefit of your opinion upon the matter before us, thereby setting an example which will, I trust, be followed by some amongst the able and experienced soldiers present, in which case we shall not spend this afternoon unprofitably to the service.

In order to form a just estimate of the value of the company as a military body, it will be as well to commence by giving a glance at its previous history in this, as well as in other countries, at the causes which have contributed to increase or diminish its importance, and at the position which it at present occupies at home and abroad.

A lover of antiquarian research might perhaps point to Jethro, the Priest of Midian, as having originated regimental organization, when he suggested to Moses the appointment of "rulers of thousands and rulers of *hundreds*, rulers of fifties and rulers of tens," but his organization was rather for civil than for military purposes; and I believe that the first example we have of the *company* as an organized military body is in the standing army of ancient Rome, and strangely enough, this "remote progenitor" of the modern company had thus early attained a completeness of development from which its descendants for many centuries receded, only now in these latest times holding out hopes of returning to the original form.

For what was the "maniple" with its 200 men (the establishment in Cæsar's time) commanded by its 1st and 2nd centurions, but the strong company of the present day, with a 1st and 2nd captain, or the double-company, both of which forms have now their advocates?

The maniple, however, does not appear to have had any tactical independence, being merely used as a convenient fraction of the cohort (or battalion), for purposes of discipline and administration. The word "company," now domesticated in all the principal European languages and used in a great variety of senses, was originally invented as a military term, I don't know exactly when, but certainly by the commencement of the 6th century, for, according to Grose, it is used under the form "*companio*" in the Salic law which was proclaimed, we are told, in 511. The word "*companio*" was compounded, say the etymologists, from the two Latin words "*cum*" and "*panis*," being at first, and for long afterwards, exclusively applied to

a body of armed men raised and commanded by one leader. They took their bread, or as we should say, messed together—"cum," "panis,")—shared the same fortunes, and were subject to the same discipline, being in fact comrades or companions.

Standing armies had ceased to exist. Until their revival, and indeed for some time afterwards, companies both of horse and foot were raised for service in the field by nobles, knights, and military adventurers, being generally disbanded on the completion of the particular enterprise for which they were raised, except in the case of corps like the "free companies" which went from one theatre of war to another, selling their services to the highest bidder, holding together as long as their leaders were fortunate, and making on the whole a very good thing of it. The strength and composition of these companies varied greatly according to the requirements of the employer, and to the means and influence of the commander.

In England the word "company" does not appear to have been in use, as a military term, before the end of the 16th century, but the thing was well known, and there was a nearer approach to the comparative uniformity of modern organization here than on the continent before the revival of standing Armies. For, besides its feudal levies, England had its militia, which, according to Grose, when called out for service, was divided by Officers, called "Arrayers," into thousands, hundreds, and twenties, representing what we should call battalions, companies, and squads. All mediæval military bodies, being usually raised only for a temporary purpose, must have been more or less wanting in that cohesion which is the great element of strength in permanent formations, and which is the principal cause of the superiority which standing Armies possess over militia and other levies temporarily embodied.

Still, whilst embodied, the men of a company took their bread together, and were bound together by that great bond of union—*comradeship*—the first great moral agent which gives a special importance to the company, for this same feeling of comradeship can hardly extend to a wider sphere. When I speak of comradeship, be it understood, I refer, not only to the intimacy existing between the men of the same company, but also to that which exists, *mutatis mutandis*, between Officers and men.

Of course, when standing Armies were formed, the feeling of comradeship became intensified in the company as its members served longer together; and however great the ravages of war or disease, there were always some of the old lot left to carry on the company's traditions. Thus, too, with the revival of standing Armies, came also the revival of a moral agent not unknown to the Armies of ancient Rome, one which, however, is not confined to the limits of the company, but which has a much wider sphere, extending to the battalion, regiment, brigade, division, nay, even to the whole Army—a feeling which is, happily, very prevalent amongst us, though, oddly enough, we have no English term for it, and are obliged to borrow one from the French, namely, "*esprit de corps*."

The company, then, has the advantage which, as I maintain, no

larger military body possesses, of being acted upon by both these great moral agents, "comradeship," and "*esprit de corps*;" and this powerful, double moral influence has affected the company, to a great extent, ever since the formation of standing Armies, thus giving it a great importance for purposes of training, discipline, and administration, whilst adding largely to its fighting power.

For a long time, however, even after the creation of standing Armies in modern Europe, this moral influence was necessarily impaired by the uncertainty as to military establishments which prevailed, more or less, in all countries, and the full development of the company's importance in this and, as I shall presently show, in other ways, has been reserved for the age in which we are living, and especially for the very latest days, if, indeed, that full development has yet been attained.

The system of permanent cadres now adopted, or in course of adoption, by every nation having any pretension to an Army, has imparted the permanency which was before wanting in military bodies, and which was required to complete the moral influences which, as we have seen, work so powerfully upon the company.

But its value has been raised, to a still greater degree, in another manner.

The maniple had, as I have already remarked, no tactical independence in the standing Army of Rome, and the same became the case with the company when modern standing Armies were formed, companies being united into regiments, the latter being afterwards subdivided into battalions, and independence of action, on the part of the company and its commander, being discouraged, or only permitted under very exceptional circumstances. The object was to impart cohesion to as large a mass as possible. The attack of cavalry was much feared, the effect of fire-arms being comparatively slight, and solidity was cultivated at a great sacrifice of mobility. Frederick the Great, indeed, imparted the latter quality to his Armies; at least, their marching and manœuvring power was great in comparison to that of the Armies opposed to them, but this comparative mobility was attained by perfection of drill and discipline, which enabled the commander to handle a long line of many regiments as one body. Thus, the regiment and the battalion lost much of their individuality, as had before done the company, and the latter made no progress as a tactical body. Frederick, however, appears to have recognized its value in other ways, for he sought to add to its efficiency by augmenting its cadre to fourteen non-commissioned Officers, that of an Austrian company at the same period consisting of six.

(I am indebted for this fact, and for some others mentioned in the course of this lecture, to General Renard's valuable little book on "*Infantry Tactics*," published in 1857.)

For many years after Frederick the Great's death, the so-called linear tactics which had with him proved so successful, were imitated by every European Army, and took such firm root that, in face of altered conditions of warfare, and though over and over again proved wanting and generally set aside in practice, even by those who

advocated them in theory, their spirit still haunts the parade-ground, and lingers more or less sensibly in the drill books of every European Army.

In the latter half of the 18th century, however, a school of tacticians was formed in France, who, in spite of drill regulations modelled on those of Potsdam, initiated what is called the "perpendicular" system, which powerfully contributed to the victories of the Republican and Imperial Armies. This school, of which De Broglie, Kellermann, Dumouriez, and Custine were members, all Officers who had bought their experience in the Seven Years' War, and were not blinded by the victories of the great king to the serious defect inherent in his tactical system, namely, the want of independence allowed to the minor units, that school was reinforced by Rochambeau, Lafayette, Jourdan, and the brothers Berthier, who came fresh from the American battle-fields, where they had learnt to appreciate the action of skirmishers, limited though it then was by the comparative inefficiency of fire-arms. The new French tactics, requiring much greater pliability, necessitated the employment of smaller tactical units than those hitherto in use, whilst the habit at the same time introduced of fighting on all sorts of ground, and in extended order, instead of confining the conflict to open plains where men fought shoulder to shoulder in unbroken lines, which had been the general practice under the old system, contributed to the same result by rendering supervision more difficult, and by necessarily giving greater independence to inferior Officers.

Thus commenced a new era for the company, which then for the first time since it had lost its independence by being merged in the battalion, became a tactical unit. But though the French deserve the credit of having led the way in this matter, they do not seem to have appreciated the importance of developing the force of the minor unit which their system of tactics may be said to have created.

The company made but little progress in France under the Republic and Empire, whilst in other countries it occupied a still lower position, the Potsdam principles being generally adhered to.

The Prussians above all held on, as was to be expected, to their famous linear system, to the principle of the "bar of iron," which, to use Baron Ambert's well-known metaphor, was found wanting when opposed to the "flexible chain" of the French. Jena first opened their eyes, and after the peace of Tilsit, a commission, of which the illustrious Scharnhorst was the inspiring genius, drew up a new system of regulations, which were issued in 1812, and remained in force, I believe, till 1847. These regulations gave greater tactical importance to the company, and laid great stress on skirmishing. Still the battalion was not rendered flexible enough to satisfy the far-seeing race of soldiers which had now grown up in Prussia. Reflecting, doubtless, upon the dearly bought experience of the Napoleonic wars, and upon the alterations in tactics likely to be produced by the inventions of Delvigne, Thouvenin, and Dreyse, which were in course of elaboration, they invented the company column, first introduced officially into the Prussian Army in 1843, and rendered a permanent

institution by the drill book of 1847.¹ Its merits were conclusively established in the battle fields of Bohemia and of France in 1866 and 1870-71.

There are probably many among my hearers who have made themselves acquainted with the tactical system of Prussia by personal observation. There are, doubtless, few who are not more or less acquainted with the Prussian drill regulations, and with the works of May, Boguslawski, Du Vernois, Von Scherff, Kühne, and other German writers, who describe the working of the company-column, both on the exercise ground and in action. It will therefore not be necessary for me to enter into details, even if I had the time to do so. Suffice it to say that all the battle-formations of the German Army, under Prussian inspiration, are now founded upon the "Company-column," and upon the principle that "individual order," to use their new phraseology, has supplanted the "order of masses." Hence in the German Army the company has become the most important unit of combat, and enjoys a degree of independence hitherto not allowed to it in any other Army except in that of Sweden, which has not had the opportunity of testing its efficacy in action. It is only fair, however, to state that the effects of this independence have been somewhat dreaded by many of the most experienced German officers, and that attempts have been made by regulation and precept to keep it within narrow bounds, but in vain, for throughout the great wars of 1866 and 1870-71, the company established its pre-eminence as a battle-unit on all occasions, and tactical regulations, suitable only to an earlier state of things, were compelled to give way to the necessities arising from the changed conditions of warfare.

Fortunately for the Prussians the excellent company system which had for years been growing up and perfecting itself, gave them special facilities for adapting themselves to the new order of things, and enabled them to adopt, as it were, impromptu the "individual" system of tactics which makes such great demands on company-efficiency. For as the company rose higher in estimation as a fighting body, so more was necessarily expected of it, and the fact became recognized that it would be unable to perform its task efficiently unless it possessed a perfection of training and discipline, and of inter-reliance between its members of all ranks, only to be attained by the most careful supervision and the most unremitting exertion on the part of officers and non-commissioned officers, seconded by the willing obedience of the men. The whole tendency of German company regulations is to render the Company as independent and complete in itself as possible, to make the men look up to their own officers and non-commissioned officers with the greatest respect and trust, and above all, to make them consider the Captain (the company-father as he is sometimes called), the man of most consequence to them in the whole Army, whilst the Captain by the constant habit of responsible command, and by the constant study and practice of

¹ Though the Prussians deserve the credit of inventing the company-column, they probably took the idea from Méné-Durrand's double-company-column, advocated by him in 1770.

his professional duties, gains the quickness, decision, and self-reliance necessary to enable him to play the important part assigned to him in the field. There is only one way of attaining these objects, and that is to give the Captain the power, responsibilities, and consideration which have hitherto been only granted to him fully in the Armies of Germany and Sweden. All the other Continental Armies are now adopting, more or less completely, the same system. Of course it does not necessarily follow that that system is the best, for we are all very apt to imitate successful people merely because they have been successful, without investigating the causes of success; but I think that in the present instance investigation will show that the imitators are right, and that the Germans owe their recent triumphs in great measure to their careful development of the company, which enabled them to carry out effectively their present system of tactics, a system, the general features of which, at least, every Army will, I doubt not, be forced to imitate in war, whatever may be its drill regulations, and despite of them if necessary. Happy will it be for those Armies which have already been learning in peace what they will have to practise in war, and in which the company occupies its proper position as a military body.

With us, I think, it has never done so, and it does so less now than ever, for of late years it has certainly lost ground relatively if not positively. *Relatively*, most certainly, because notwithstanding what recent experience shows us to be the present conditions of warfare, the company has not been raised as it has been elsewhere into the position of a tactical unit, neither has it hitherto received the sort of training fitted to prepare it for that position. I think that it has also declined in *positive* value as a military body, first, because our Captains have lost much of their influence, never sufficiently great, through the constant and increasing interference from without. Instead of looking up to his Captain as his paramount chief, after the fashion of the German soldier, the Englishman knows not whom he should most honour and obey. For the first few months of his service, the Adjutant, sergeant-major, and drill instructors, are the gods whom he must worship, and to the first two at least he must look up with particular awe throughout his service. As time goes on, he falls into the hands of the musketry instructor and his sergeant, to whom he has to pay his devotions annually. Then comes the gymnastic instructor. In fact, he has so many masters beyond the limits of the company that his allegiance is too much divided, and he cannot have much reverence to spare for his Captain and the other company-Officers who instruct him only in the ordinary routine of his duty, whilst all that is unusual, and specially calculated to awaken his interest, comes to him from outsiders.

In like manner the young company-Officers have more to do with the Adjutant and sergeant-major than with their Captain, and later on they go for instruction in the higher branches of professional knowledge not to him but to a garrison instructor, thus going not only beyond the limits of the company, but beyond those of the battalion. As for the non-commissioned Officers, throughout their career, they are far more dependent on the regimental Staff than on the Captain,

whose good opinion is not nearly so important to them as that of the Adjutant. A good deal of what I complain of has grown up of late years by necessity. Improvements in fire-arms, and the general advance of military science, rather took us by surprise, and regimental Officers had not as a rule the necessary amount of professional knowledge. Hence specially trained Staff Officers were appointed, to whose zeal and intelligence the service has been much indebted. But thanks to their efforts, to the School of Musketry, and to what I think I may call the great military revival which has taken place amongst us, I hope that the time will soon come (if it has not already arrived), when the services of these special Officers may be dispensed with, and the whole responsibility of the professional education of subalterns, non-commissioned Officers and privates, may fall upon the Captain, as it does in Prussia, not excepting that portion of it which now devolves upon the regimental Adjutant, an Officer whose position is unique, for I do not believe that a subaltern in any other army occupies so high a position, and has so much influence as falls to the lot of our Adjutants. Now, I have a great respect for the British Adjutant; he is almost always a good Officer, and when he rises in rank, the experience which he has gained on the regimental staff proves most valuable to him, and I doubt not that a large proportion of our ablest Generals have been regimental Adjutants. Still I should like to clip his wings, for they overshadow greatly his brother Officers, particularly those whom I think we should do much to elevate, namely, the Captains.

My time is too short for me to enter into minute details upon this subject even if it were advisable in other respects to do so. But I will refer to one point, in which a change for the better has been made of late years with regard to the Captain's authority; namely, the increased power of punishment which has been given to him. This appears to me to be a step in the right direction. The foregoing general remarks will, as regards the rest, be, I hope, sufficient to indicate the policy which, in my opinion, should be pursued in order to give our company its due importance as a military body.

I spoke at the beginning of this lecture of more than one cause which has tended of late years to lower the position of the company. I have just enlarged somewhat at length upon what appears to me to be the chief cause.

There are two other causes, however, of great though of minor importance concerning which a few words must be said.

Up to the middle of this century, the British infantry was broken up into small detachments. There were few stations at home at which more than one battalion was stationed, and few battalions which had not some of their companies detached. This state of things, prejudicial as it was in many ways, had at least a good effect in adding to the responsibilities and influence of the battalion and company-commander, each in his own sphere. The greater concentration of troops which has been effected during the last twenty-five years has doubtless done good on the whole, but it would have done good unmixed with evil if due care had been taken to check the rage for centralization which has affected perniciously both the battalion and the company.

Again, another cause of weakness in the company has been the smallness of the home establishment generally maintained.

This has seriously affected the company both with regard to discipline and instruction. It has been impossible to carry out in earnest the squad system which we all know to be so essential to the former, whilst the number of men available for the latter is generally so small that company-drill is out of the question without an intermixture of companies. Hence company-drill, properly so called, is rarely carried out, which materially lowers the influence of the Captain and the value of the company as a military body. This difficulty of establishments is easily overcome (the change being accompanied by no increase of expenditure) in a manner which I shall point out further on. But before proceeding to consider that branch of my subject I wish to add a few words upon the main part of the question as concerning ourselves.

I believe, as I have said before, that the company has never occupied its proper position in our Army, but I ought to have added the words "in peace time," for our troops have so often been engaged in mountain warfare and other similar operations which make special demands on the smaller military bodies, and on the individual soldier, that the company has been called into independent action more frequently with us than with the soldiers of any other European nation, until the recent tactical changes. And nobly have our companies done their work on the whole; still, if we study the history of our "little wars," we shall almost always discover traces of the want of previous individual training which can only be acquired under a good company-system. Our companies struggled against the difficulties created by this deficiency, and almost always with success in the long run, meanwhile, however, suffering much loss and sometimes incurring disaster.

Unfortunately our Army did not profit by experience, and the same sort of thing was repeated over and over again.

There have, however, been cases amongst us in which Commanding Officers who have been in advance of their age have appreciated the importance of the company as a battle-unit, and who have prepared the troops under their command in peace for the part they would have to play in war. I will allude to two such cases, the first being a matter of history well known to you all. I refer to the famous Light Division, which owed much of its superior efficiency in war to the careful training and discipline of the Shorncliffe Camp, under Sir John Moore, an essential feature of whose system was to develop the importance of the company as a military body. The lessons first learnt at Shorncliffe, and afterwards impressed upon that splendid body of soldiers by many years of practice in the field, had not been quite forgotten by their descendants when I joined one of the famous old regiments of which the division was composed. In it, and, I believe, in its sister corps, the old company-spirit was pretty strong, and contributed much towards maintaining a high standard of efficiency under adverse circumstances.

Another case to which I would refer came under my own observation.

I allude to the 73rd Regiment, quartered at the Cape of Good Hope, under command of Lieutenant-Colonel (afterwards Major-General Sir William) Eyre, before and during our last Caffre war. That able Officer prepared his battalion with the greatest zeal and energy for the work which he foresaw it would probably have to perform; and, above all, took the greatest pains in training his companies to independent action.

The result justified his foresight, for throughout the war which ensued, the 73rd Regiment, though employed more than any other in the country, never, I believe, met with a check, and certainly inflicted more damage on the enemy than did any other corps.

The efficiency and self-reliance of both Officers and men in the field were very remarkable, and presented a strong contrast to the action of regiments fresh from home, which at first showed more or less want of real military instruction, a want which, in some cases, entailed severe loss. They learnt by experience, and all did their work well in the end, but they bought their experience dearly.

Having thus given my estimate of the company as a military body, with some illustrations drawn from previous history, I will turn to the second part of my subject and consider how the establishment of the company affects its value in peace and war, and what appears to be the best number of companies to unite into a battalion.

Until the latter part of the 18th century, when, as we have seen, the company rose into the position of a tactical unit, the military authorities of all countries seem to have been guided by no fixed principle in matters relating to company and battalion organization. If we examine the records of our own oldest regiments, we find a tale of alternate reduction and augmentation effected sometimes by adding to or diminishing the number, sometimes by increasing or reducing the strength of companies, sometimes by both processes. Military efficiency appears seldom to have been considered in these arrangements which were often affected by favouritism and by respect for vested interests. Nor does the case appear to have been very different abroad during the 17th and most of the 18th century; the establishment and number of companies were constantly varying.

In the latter part of Frederick the Great's reign, the Prussian battalion consisted of five companies formed for manœuvre into eight divisions, a curious and complicated process. In 1792 the French battalion had nine companies including one of Grenadiers. Soon afterwards as the practice of skirmishing gained ground, a tenth company, that of Voltigeurs, was added, the two flank companies being composed of picked men and specially employed for tasks of particular difficulty and as light infantry. This system was imitated by most of the European armies including our own, and remained in force until the general introduction of arms of precision, and the consequent extension of fighting in skirmishing order caused the abolition of flank companies.

At the commencement of this century the strength of companies ranged from 100 to 150, the flank companies being generally somewhat stronger than the others.

We have seen how the French led the way in raising the value of the company by giving it tactical importance. About the same time the Prussians introduced a change in battalion organization which has, I believe, in no small degree contributed to give the company the high position which it now occupies in Germany. In 1787, the year after the death of Frederick the Great (I am indebted for this date to General Beauchamp Walker), the four-company formation was introduced. It has been maintained ever since in Prussia, and is now, as we shall see presently, being adopted in all the great armies of the Continent.

I believe that the change of organization was due, in the first instance, not to considerations of military efficiency, but rather to motives of economy, for it does not appear to have resulted in any immediate tactical improvement; and it was doubtless accompanied by a considerable reduction of Officers and non-commissioned officers, retrenchment in military expenditure being just then the order of the day in Prussia. But, as time went on, and as the value of the company became better understood, the great advantages, consequent on the system adopted in 1787, became evident, and it was maintained for reasons very different from those which led to its first introduction.

From the date of the French revolutionary war, all nations appear to have become more systematic in their arrangements as to military organization. The French for some time adhered to the ten-company formation, for which they afterwards substituted that of eight, and in later times that of six, in which they fought their last battles.

I have not ascertained what was the formation of the Austrian and Russian battalion during the Napoleonic wars, but in later days, up to 1866, the former consisted of six companies formed for manœuvre into three divisions, each company being divided into four sections, whilst the latter had at the time of the Crimean war, four companies each of two sections, No. 1 company being composed of picked men, and one of its sections forming on each flank of the battalion. The strongest regiment engaged at Inkermann mustered, according to Todleben, an average of 244 men per company; the weakest an average of 198 men. The Russians had, shortly before the Crimean war, adopted the Prussian company-column formation, but fortunately for us, in the letter and not in the spirit, for there was very little of that independent self-reliance in the Russian companies which characterises those of Prussia. Since the war of 1866, the Austrians have adopted the four-company formation with establishments similar to those of Prussia, and their last regulations give an importance to the company, not inferior to that possessed by it in the army of their great neighbour. After the Crimean war, the Russians added a company to their battalions which were thus made to consist of four battalion-companies, and one light company. This formation has been maintained ever since, but I saw in the "*Revue militaire de l'Etranger*," (number of the 16th April) that the 5th companies were by degrees to be abolished, so that battalions will again consist of four companies, but without any distinction between them, a much

more rational plan. The war strength of the present Russian Company is about 190.

Italian battalions used to consist of six companies, after the fashion of the French, but Italy has lately adopted the Prussian plan, after a thorough discussion of the subject in Parliament, and the Italian company is fast attaining the importance enjoyed by those of Germany, Sweden, and Austria.

The French have been much divided in opinion upon the subject. Ever since the late war there have been amongst them many advocates of the Prussian company-system, but also many strong opponents to it, some of the latter being, I think, somewhat influenced by their prejudice against anything coming from the other side of the Rhine. However, the question was most fairly and exhaustively discussed upon its merits in the National Assembly at the beginning of the year. The debate is given fully in the "Journal Officiel," and is both interesting and instructive. It has resulted in the adoption of the four-company battalion, with a war establishment resembling that of Germany, but with what appears to me an insufficient peace establishment, insufficient, I mean, to maintain the efficiency of the Company, which will on the peace-footing be composed as follows:—

Officers 3.				Non-commissioned Officers, 14.			
Captain	..	..	1	Sergeant-Major	..	1	
Lieutenant	..	..	1	Quartermaster Sergeant			
Sub-Lieutenant	..	..	1	(Fourrier)	..	1	
				Sergeants	..	4	
				Corporals	..	8	
Drummers or buglers	..	..	2				
Privates, including 2 pioneers	..	..	66				
Total, all ranks	..	..	85				

The cadre is out of all proportion to the number of privates, so as to allow for partial expansion for the annual manœuvres, and for augmentation to the war footing, which would raise the number of privates to about 200, the cadre being then also increased by 1 subaltern, 1 quartermaster-corporal (caporal-fourrier), 4 sergeants, 8 corporals, 2 drummers.

And now let us turn to our own country and see what we have been doing in this way since the beginning of the century. During the "great" war, as we English may still call it, our service battalions consisted generally of ten companies of about 100 men.

(By the way, I will only deal with the service battalion, as I have no time to enter into the dépôt question, though it should properly be a branch of my subject.)

Since 1815 more attention has been paid to military considerations as affecting company efficiency than was the case before the war. The service-battalion has consisted at different periods of six, of eight, and of ten companies, each of which arrangements may have been

good as long as it was allowable to adhere to the system of tactics under which Wellington's armies fought and conquered. Of course during the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny, the only great wars in which this country has been engaged since 1815, every other consideration gave way to those of a military nature, and the establishments were suited to our supposed requirements; but in the long intervals of peace this has not generally been the case, and military efficiency has too often been subordinated to political expediency and to the exigencies of party. Thus there have been statesmen on both sides of the House who inveighed whilst in opposition against the parsimony and neglect of those in office, and who, on succeeding to power, have, after a decent interval, done their best to vie with their predecessors in the art of retrenchment. I think we have reason to hope that those times are over, that the question of the national defences will no longer be discounted for party purposes, and that all parties will agree that there is no true economy without efficiency, and that the latter is not a plant which springs up all at once, but that it is the result of constant care and cultivation. Meanwhile party strife has often been productive of evil to the British Army, and has in great measure been the cause of the constant fluctuations in our military establishments, which it has been the policy to reduce to the utmost minimum compatible with bare existence, except when the state of foreign affairs has produced a momentary panic, and its consequence, army augmentation. Of late years, however, as public opinion in this country has become more enlightened upon military matters, the conviction has been gaining ground that such things should not be left to chance and to the caprice of the moment, but that both the peace and war establishments of our military bodies should be, as far as possible, permanently settled, in accordance with the practice now prevailing throughout Europe. Arrangements of this nature have been made, and the result at present is as follows, as far as concerns the question before us:—Our service-battalions consist of eight companies, the peace establishment of the latter ranging (as is necessary, I suppose, in consequence of the peculiar exigencies of our foreign peace service), from—

Lowest Peace Establishment.

- 1 Captain, with one or two subalterns.
 - 4 Sergeants, including colour-sergeant,
 - 2 Drummers,
 - 5 Corporals,
 - 60 Privates, including 1 pioneer and, on an average, 3 musicians,
- Making up a total per service battalion of
605 all ranks, to—

Highest Peace Establishment.

- 1 Captain, with two or three subalterns,
- 5 Sergeants, including colour-sergeant,
- 2 Drummers,
- 5 Corporals,

98 Privates, including pioneer and musicians as before,
 Making up a total per service battalion of
 919 all ranks.

According to the "Soldier's pocket book," the war establishment of our service companies is fixed at

War Establishment of a British Company.

1 Captain, with two subalterns,
 5 Sergeants, including colour-sergeant,
 2 Drummers,
 5 Corporals,
 119 Privates, including pioneer and musicians as before.
 Total per company, all ranks, 134.

Total per field-battalion, all ranks, 1,097, including 4 hospital orderlies.

Compare the foregoing with the peace and war establishments of a German company and battalion.

Peace Establishment of the German Company.

1 Captain,	1 Sergeant-Major,	115 Privates, including
1 First-Lieutenant,	1 Officer Cadet,	4 Musicians,
2 Second-Lieutenants.	4 Sergeants,	2 Reserve Musicians.
—	7 Corporals.	
4 Officers	—	
	13 non-commissioned	
	Officers	

Total all ranks, 4 officers, 128 men, besides 1 hospital orderly and 3 tradesmen, non-combatants, making per battalion, 18 officers and 514 men, besides non-combatants.

War Establishment of the German Company.

1 Captain,	1 Sergeant-Major,	6 Musicians,
1 First-Lieutenant,	1 Officer Cadet,	223 Privates.
3 Second-Lieutenants.	4 Sergeants,	
—	14 Corporals.	
5 Officers.	—	
	20 non-commissioned	
	Officers.	

Total, 5 officers, 249 men, besides 1 hospital orderly and 2 drivers, making per battalion, 22 officers, 998 men, besides non-combatants.¹

I trust that you will consider me justified in making the following assumptions. At any rate I must beg you to allow me to do so, if only for the sake of argument. I will assume then—

1. That "individual order," and not the "order of masses," will, in future, be employed in battle.

2. That, in consequence, the minor units, and notably the company, have acquired a great increase of importance.

¹ From "Heerwesen, &c." By Lieut.-General v. Witzleben.

3. That the company is not only *the* most important battle-unit, but is also *the* great school of military instruction and discipline; in short, to use General v. Witzleben's words, "*der Grundpfeiler unserer militairischen organisation*" (the basis of our military organization); "*die Familie im militairstaate*" (the family of the military world).

4. That a wise organization is the first step towards making this "basis" solid, this "family" united.

We have before us, speaking in a general way, three patterns to choose from, each of which has its admirers—

1. That of few companies and large ones.
2. That of many companies and small ones.
3. That of many and small companies united by pairs for tactical purposes.

The maximum number of companies being eight to the battalion, the minimum number four.

To which system will you give the preference?

I myself am inclined to favour the first system for the following reasons—

1. It is the system which makes the company of most importance for instruction, for discipline, for battle.

For instruction; because it ensures the Captain a sufficient number of men to make "company drill" a reality and not a sham, promoting thus both his own military *education* and that of his Officers, non-commissioned Officers, and privates; and by *education*, I mean, as you will understand, a great deal more than *drill* or even *training*.

For discipline; because, the higher the position of the Captain, the more constant his intercourse with his men, the greater becomes his influence over them; and there has been no period since the formation of standing armies when the personal influence of the leader was as powerful an agent in war as it is now.

Moreover, in a strong company the "squad" system can be maintained in its integrity, and nothing conduces more to discipline and efficiency than a squad system properly carried out. Amongst its other advantages it serves to train subalterns and non-commissioned Officers to the exercise of responsibility, and to the habit of self-reliance. The effect of the presence or absence of such training will be clearly shown on the battle-field; for, as battles are fought now-a-days, the intelligent co-operation of inferior leaders of all ranks down to the junior lance-corporal is called into play.

For battle; because, in addition to the advantages accruing to the company in action, on account of the superior instruction and discipline already claimed, I think that the tactical advantages derived from the four-company system are great. Without going into details, for which there is no time, and which might weary you beyond endurance, the chief merits of this organization, from a tactical point of view, seem to be, firstly, that it reduces to a minimum the subdivision of command. Such subdivision being, I think, under the present conditions of warfare, unavoidable, I would reduce the number of sub-unit leaders as much as possible, both for the sake of maintaining a general unity of action, and also on account of the difficulty of finding

a sufficient number of capable leaders. But I would not reduce the number of companies per battalion below four, because we should then have unwieldy companies or too small a battalion. Secondly, that it provides us with a strong company capable of performing the part now required of it in battle, of which a weak company would be incapable, particularly after it had undergone the wasting effects of even a few weeks' campaigning.

The only argument of any weight which I have heard against the four-company system is, that it provides us with a company too large for one leader to control in action, assuming the field-battalion to be, as I think it should be, not less than 1,000 strong.

But I would reply to this objection; firstly, that the company will, from the very first moment show far fewer men on parade than the number shown on its muster-rolls, and that its fighting strength will be reduced day by day until drafts have been received from home; secondly, that the difficulty of command in battle will be much diminished for the Captain who has trained his subalterns and non-commissioned Officers to that intelligent co-operation of which I just now spoke, and which alone will render it possible to command a company efficiently in war.

As to the system of "many and small companies united by pairs for tactical purposes," in other words the "squadron" or "division" system, it seems to me radically wrong in *theory*, because the commander of the double-company in the field will only command half his unit in quarters. Over the other half, therefore, he cannot exercise the direct personal influence so necessary to his position.

In *practice*, it has been tried and has been abandoned by two of the greatest military powers, France and Austria.

Having settled, to my own satisfaction at least, that the four-company system is the best, I will propose establishments which appear to me suited to the object in view, giving my reason for any departure from the ordinary custom, and taking care to keep within our present battalion establishments.

Proposed lowest Peace Establishment of the Company.

1 Captain-Commandant (or Major)	} Officers 5.
1 Captain	
3 Lieutenants	

1 Sergeant-Major ..	} Non-commissioned Officers 20.
1 Quartermaster-Sergeant ..	
6 Sergeants	
6 Corporals	
6 Lance-Corporals ..	

8 Drummers and Buglers	3
120 Privates, including 6 Bandsmen, 1 Acting-Bandsman, and 2 Pioneers	120

Total, all ranks	148
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Battalion Staff Officers	..	..	..	4
Non-commissioned Officers	..	..	..	7
Battalion total. Officers	..	..	..	21
Men	..	..	..	579

Proposed War Establishment of the Company.

1 Captain-Commandant (Major)	} Officers 6.
1 Captain	
4 Lieutenants	
1 Sergeant-Major ..	} Non-commissioned Officers 29.
1 Quartermaster-Sergeant ..	
6 Sergeants	
6 Corporals	
6 Lance-Corporals ..	
Drummers and Buglers	4
Privates, including 6 Bandsmen and 4	} 230
Pioneers	
Total, all ranks	260
Battalion Staff. Officers	4
Non-commissioned Officers	7
Battalion total. Officers	28
Men	1,023

besides non-combatants.

Many object to the idea of having two captains for the company, and I think it would be very objectionable unless you distinguished the senior from the junior both by giving him a higher title and higher pay. Call him either Captain-Commandant, or Major, and give him 15*s.* a day and forage for a horse, for he should be a mounted officer. With the increased amount of work which I propose to be thrown on the company, I do not doubt that plenty of occupation would be found for the Second Captain even when the Commandant is present. During his absence, of course the Second Captain would be in command. The company would be divided into three squads (or sections on parade). Each of these squads under a Lieutenant. The war establishment would give a fourth Lieutenant to provide for a casualty. I propose three instead of four squads or sections, because I think that owing to their greater strength, as thus arranged, the squad system would be more efficiently carried out, because the three-section formation appears to have some tactical advantages, and also because it demands a comparatively small proportion of non-commissioned officers.

Sections would be subdivided into half-sections, each of which under a sergeant. The half-sections would be again sub-divided into fractions, for which we must invent a name, each under a corporal.

There would be two lance-corporals in each section to assist the other non-commissioned officers. Lance-corporals should receive higher pay than privates.

All non-commissioned officers should be out of the ranks; that is to say, either as leaders of sections, half-sections, &c., or as supernumeraries. The sergeant-major would be head of the company non-commissioned officers, and would perform all the duties now devolving upon the colour-sergeant, except those relating to the charge of arms, ammunition, clothing, accoutrements and other stores, and to the supply of provisions, fuel, and such like, which would fall to the lot of the quartermaster-sergeant. As company work would be largely augmented both by the increased size of the company, and by the proposed redistribution of regimental duties, there would be ample occupation for two company staff non-commissioned Officers. I propose reducing the battalion staff by one Officer, the Quartermaster, because I think that the diminished duties of both that Officer and of the Adjutant may well be performed by the latter. I propose relieving the subaltern filling the office of musketry instructor of his special duties which may in future be performed by Captains of companies. I propose also doing away with the sergeant-pioneer, sergeant-cook, and sergeant-instructor of musketry, whose services can, I think, now be dispensed with.

The proposed change of organization would produce the following saving on the daily pay of a battalion on the lowest peace footing :—

				£	s.	d.	
By	1 Quartermaster	..	..	0	6	6	per diem.
	1 Lieutenant	..	..	0	5	3	
	1 Sergeant-pioneer	..	..	0	2	2	
	1 Sergeant-cook	..	..	0	2	2	
	1 Sergeant-instructor musketry..			0	3	2	
	Extra pay of musketry-instructor			0	2	6	
	16 Corporals	..	..	1	4	0	
	4 Drummers	..	..	0	5	0	
	Total saving	..	..	£2	10	9	

But as my motto is not "economy by retrenchment," but "economy by efficiency," I propose devoting my savings to the following purposes :—

				Per diem.
				£ s. d.
Extra pay for	4 Captains-commandant at	3s. 5d.		0 13 8
"	24 Lance-corporals at	1s. 2d.		1 8 0
"	4 Sergeant-majors, at	6d.		0 2 0
"	1 Battalion ditto, at	1s.		0 1 0
"	1 Lieut.-Colonel-Commandant at	3s.		0 3 0
Forage for	4 Captains' horses, at	2s.		0 8 0
	Total extra expenditure	..	..	£2 15 8

Leaving us *apparently* 4s. 11d. out of pocket, but *really* not so, for more than this sum would be saved on the *allowances* of the reduced Officers and non-commissioned Officers. Moreover, my establishment would provide 24 more combatants per battalion than does the one with which it is compared.

Only one word, Gentlemen, in conclusion. I have heard it said that we should never get the British Captain to do the amount of work which I have proposed to cut out for him. I believe that, speaking generally, this is a calumny upon our British Captains, and that the great majority of them would welcome what I will venture to call a reform which would give them *real* responsibility and *real* influence, though coupled with extra work. At the same time I desire to guard myself against the imputation of wishing to raise the Captains at the expense of the Colonel. Far from it. I wish to raise him in like proportion, and I believe that one sure way of doing so is to relieve him of many petty cares and duties which under our present system devolve upon him, but which should be taken off his hands by the Captains, thus leaving him more time to devote to his higher functions.

I am aware that I have not made the best of my case, having omitted much which might be said in support of my views. But I felt that the time at my disposal was too short to give more than a slight outline of the picture, which I hope those who think with me will complete, whilst those who disagree with me do their best to point out its defects.

P.S.—Since writing this paper, an important tactical memo. has been issued by order of His Royal Highness the Commander-in-Chief, upon which it would of course be unbecoming in me to make any critical remarks. But I think I may say, with perfect propriety, that I welcome this memo. as a boon to the service, because it appears to me to contain the recognition, hitherto withheld, of a tactical principle materially affecting the action of infantry in battle, also because it is a step towards that development of the company as a battle-unit which I have been advocating. I doubt not that it will soon be found that further steps must be taken, in order to make our companies equal to their new task, and that, to use the words of a recent article in the "*Revue Militaire de l'Etranger*," upon the necessity of a similar reform in France, we shall "profit by the experience of our neighbours," and whilst using the "most legitimate efforts to mould the company into an instrument for battle which our infantry does not at present possess, we shall be careful in no way to depreciate the value of that other important unit—the battalion."

The CHAIRMAN: I am sure that we are obliged to Sir Lumley Graham for having introduced this subject to our notice. I will not state my own opinions at present, as I am sure there are people here who would like to discuss it, and I hope that we shall have an interesting subject worthily handled.

Colonel the Hon. PERCY FIELDING, Commanding Coldstream Guards, said that he entirely agreed with everything that Sir Lumley Graham had stated.

Lieut.-General Sir HAMILTON GORDON: I should like to ask Sir Lumley Graham

if he can inform us what is the war establishment of a French company? He has stated the peace establishment, and the commissioned Officers and non-commissioned Officers of the war establishment, but I do not think he has stated the number of privates on the war establishment. Where do you find that?

Sir LUMLEY GRAHAM: I may as well answer that question at once. With regard to the war establishment of the French company, I think I stated that it was supposed to be made up to about the same as the Prussian war establishment. I find it only in a casual way. I do not think the war establishment has yet been finally settled; but I find it casually alluded to in that discussion in the French Chambers of which I spoke.

Sir HAMILTON GORDON: It is a remarkable thing. In the elaborate law they have issued for the organization of the French Army they omit to mention the war establishment of the company.

Sir LUMLEY GRAHAM: They do not give it in the Tables, but I inferred from a statement, I think, of the Minister of War, that the establishment was intended to be about the same as that of the Prussian battalion.

The CHAIRMAN: This question is one of great importance to our Army. It is the introduction of a great change—a thing which, perhaps, Englishmen do not much like at first. One of the main points would be, whether the 250 men of the four-company system are not a very large number for an Officer to manage, unless you consider him as the mounted Officer commanding what we should call a battalion. In the Prussian system, the Captain is mounted nominally, but has to dismount when he is in charge of his company under fire. I do not know whether it is very practicable to command 250 men under fire, unless it is at the last moment, when you must advance with the men to the attack; because 250 men extended (which I apprehend is the first line of attack of the Prussian Army), is a large number, covering much space when extended in open order, and difficult to command on foot. I do not suppose that any one can differ with Colonel Graham, that the company is the foundation of the military system of almost every nation, and ought to be so. It is the means by which the men are known to the Officer who commands, more particularly if he pays them, and is in the habit of that constant communication that takes place between them. The double Company is rather excluded by Colonel Graham, and I quite agree in the exclusion, because you then mix up two separate authorities. I cannot myself conceive, either when manœuvring or fighting, why there should be that mixture of two companies under one Officer, who, nominally superior, might be superseded or replaced by a man who is not known to the rest of the two companies, mainly by quitting his own company for the command of the two, if he becomes the senior. The Prussians have considered the necessity for having the Officers mounted. I noticed Colonel Graham at first said, that our companies have not had the general independence that he considers they ought to have; but he afterwards a little corrected himself, when he spoke of what occurred in war, for, I suppose in no Service in the world, certainly in no better record of it than in "Napier's History," has there been shown a greater independence of the company, or a more trusting feeling on the part of men to their officers, than in the several actions that we read of in that history. I think we are peculiarly strong when the company Officer has the means of really being with his men in action. They are attached to their Officers, and the company influence is as great as in any Service in the world. I do not know that you would increase that influence by making it so much larger. There are many other observations that might be made on this subject; but I hope that other gentlemen who have experience in the habits and discipline of our regimental system will give us the benefit of their opinions, for it is most valuable that we should know them. I do not know whether Colonel Graham would wish to make any other remarks.

Sir LUMLEY GRAHAM: With regard, Sir William, to what you just said about our Army in the Peninsular War. Of course, we all know how intimate are the relations between the British Officer and the soldier in the field; how well the Officer looks after the soldier, and the soldier looks up to the Officer. But still, I think the independent tactical working of the company has rather grown up in the field than been taught before-hand; that is rather what I alluded to; the English company has succeeded rather in spite of the peace system than in con-

sequence of it; and I mentioned those exceptions that were known to me, in which a company had been prepared in peace for what it had to do in war. With regard to the difficulty of commanding a strong company in action, I think that difficulty perhaps may be more apparent than real; first of all, from the fact that we never have a company anything approaching the nominal strength actually in action. Supposing my proposed establishment provides for 220 fighting privates, if I had 180 of those privates to fight under me, as a Captain, in the first battle I was engaged in, I should think myself very lucky. You will bear me out in saying that would be as large a proportion as I should have a right to expect. That would allow me only 170 privates; that reduces my difficulties very much of command, and I think my difficulties would be reduced even more by the careful training of the subaltern and non-commissioned Officers; that is how, in Prussia, the Captains manage to control their large companies. There is such a thorough understanding by the inferior Officers, that they all know almost by instinct what the Captain wants them to do. I think in that seems to lie the secret of the power of commanding large companies, and that of course can only be attained by constant practice.

The CHAIRMAN: In our Service you must take off one-fourth.

Sir HAMILTON GORDON: I think you will not find the Prussian Officers dismount under fire, but only at the time of attack.

The CHAIRMAN: I do not know the exact rules. I remember the tactical retrospect made in the Prussian Service, in which the great fault then found with the company and company column was, that every one went to the front. You will remember there was a case in which every soldier, non-commissioned Officer, and even the Generals, went to the front, and they all joined the fighting line, and that made an enormous extent of line, scarcely controllable. That, I remember, was the effect of making that fighting line. That I cannot say.

Sir HAMILTON GORDON: Did they all dismount? I have made special inquiries on that subject. It is only at the time of assault that the Officers dismount, and not merely when they come under fire.

The CHAIRMAN: Not in the preparation to do so?

Sir HAMILTON GORDON: No. Is not there some new order from the Horse Guards about mounted Officers dismounting?

Sir LUMLEY GRAHAM: Contained in the memorandum of last week.

The CHAIRMAN: That memorandum is very much in accordance with the Prussian system. If no other gentleman wishes to make any remarks, I am sure that we may thank Sir Lumley Graham for his lecture, which contains points of very great interest, and is a subject which we are all very glad to hear discussed. I only wish there had been more Officers present to give us their opinions.