

Contributed and Selected

REASONS FOR PROMOTING THE STATUS OF THE HOSPITAL CORPS OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY.

GEO. F. PAYNE.

We wish to see remedied as far as possible the present and long standing condition which makes it actually impossible to secure for the Medical Department the class of men necessary for the efficient performance of duties connected with the care of the sick and the sanitary service in general. Inasmuch as all branches of the army are practically in competition with each other for men possessing the necessary qualifications, it is obvious that efficiency can only be maintained by offering equal opportunities for advancement in all branches, or, as in this case, by a compensatory increase in the rate of pay in those branches in which the noncommissioned grades are relatively few in number as compared with other corps.

Prior to the Act of May 11, 1908, the privates first class of the Hospital Corps received \$5.00 per month more than privates of the line of the army. It appears to have been recognized by Congress that the work of the Hospital Corps was not only arduous and confining, but that, involving as it does the care of the sick and wounded, the compounding of drugs, etc., it was extremely technical and responsible, and that to secure the class of men who met the requirements indicated, it was necessary to offer some better inducement than the pay of a private soldier. The Act of May 11, 1908, gave no increase in pay to the private first class, Hospital Corps, while the pay of other soldiers was increased *from 20 to 80 per cent with the sole exception of the Hospital Corps*. About 12 per cent of the total strength have the grade of corporal at \$24.00 per month on first enlistment, while in the Hospital Corps the proportion of corporals to the total strength is but 1.42 per cent. Plainly therefore the opportunity for advancement for the privates of this corps are about ten times less than in other staff departments. In actual figures the difference against the Hospital Corps amounts to the loss of 400 corporals; there being in this corps but fifty corporals (or 1.42% of its total), while on the basis which prevails in other staffs—the Signal Corps for example (12.88%)—there would be 450. It requires no elaborate argument to show that the loss of promotion which would be possible with 450 corporals has a most serious effect on the class of men who enlist for the lower grades—those of private and private first class. To a great extent the Hospital Corps is now compelled to accept men who realize their inability to make good in other branches where, the prospects of advancement being so much better, there is a far wider field from which to make a selection. It follows, therefore, that unless legislation can be enacted which will give to the Hospital Corps the same pro-

portionate number of corporals as in other corps, that there must be some compensatory increase in the pay of the privates first class. The increase requested is \$3 per month, which will make the pay of this grade \$21 instead of \$18. It is observed, in passing, that the farrier, who, under the direction of the veterinary surgeon, cares for sick mules and horses now receives \$21, a higher wage than that now paid the Hospital Corps privates, first class, who, under the direction of the medical officers, care for the sick soldier or officer.

The sergeants of the Hospital Corps now actually receive less pay than any other non-commissioned officers of the same grade in any branch of the service. Their flat pay is \$30 per month, without the opportunity to qualify in marksmanship, gunnery, or so-called special ratings, as in other branches; these qualifications add from \$2 to \$9 per month to the flat pay of sergeants in all other branches. In the Signal and Coast Artillery Corps, the sergeant and second class electrician sergeant respectively, who may fairly be compared with the sergeants of the Hospital Corps, receive \$36 flat pay.

To obtain the position of sergeant in the Hospital Corps, the soldier is required to qualify in a written examination in pharmacy, materia medica, care of sick, elementary hygiene, arithmetic, minor surgery and hygiene, and is, in addition, examined orally in army regulations, nursing, practical pharmacy, clerical work, drill, minor surgery, including extraction of teeth. In other branches, an examination of relatively equal scope and difficulty is required only of sergeants and second class electrician sergeants of the Signal and Coast Artillery Corps, and their pay is \$36, as compared with \$30 of the Hospital Corps sergeants.

The duties of the Hospital Corps sergeants are arduous, confining and responsible. In the compounding of prescriptions alone, he assumes a responsibility which merits adequate remuneration. In the pay increase of 1908 sergeants of infantry, cavalry and artillery received an increase of 65%; the sergeants of the Hospital Corps received an increase of 20%. It is proposed in accompanying bill to pay the sergeants of the Hospital Corps \$36, as in the case of Signal Corps sergeants and second class electrician sergeants. Considering the long hours of duty and nature of the work devolving upon them, it is believed that the proposed equalization is not only necessary, in the interests of the sick, but also just to the corps.

The grade of pharmacist at \$75—corresponding to that of master signal electrician and master electrician—is created by this bill with the object of placing the Hospital Corps on a basis of equality with other branches and offering to the noncommissioned officers of this branch opportunities equal to those obtainable in others. This course is necessary if the medical department is to secure its quota of the best and most desirable soldiers. At the larger hospitals it is necessary, as there will be found five or six sergeants first class all receiving the same rate of pay, although the senior carries the responsibility for his juniors. The work of such a man requires highly technical training and considerable ability; such men will not at present enlist in the Hospital Corps because they realize the better opportunities open to them in other branches. The grade of pharmacist exists in the navy and in the Marine Hospital service at a far higher rate than that proposed for the army.

An increase of \$15 per month (from \$50 to \$65) is proposed for the sergeants

first class. The proposed rate equals that of the engineer in the coast artillery. What has been said about the qualifications, duties and responsibilities of the sergeants of the Hospital Corps applies with greater force to the sergeants first class. The latter are selected by competitive and searching examination from the best qualified sergeants; they perform the duties of pharmacists, clerks, storekeepers, disciplinarians, anesthetists and are practically continually on duty and at work. The sick soldier is sick quite as much at night as during the day and it is the function of the sergeants first class and sergeants to nurse and supervise the nursing of the sick. The sergeants first class are practically the house surgeons, pharmacists and chief nurse combined, of our military hospitals.

Alone of all noncommissioned officers of the army, the sergeants first class are subject to re-examination professionally every three years. This fact alone compels these men to devote to study the majority of the few hours of spare time which others can devote to amusement. Under present conditions the sergeants first class are all on the same level of pay; there is no reward for exceptional qualifications or merit. In this respect the Hospital Corps differs from any other branch of the army and with a most unfavorable result.

The duties of the Hospital Corps in the field are even more arduous than in garrison. The work of driving an ambulance filled with sick is, for example, quite as important as driving a wagon loaded with forage. Yet the wagon driver receives \$40 if a civilian and \$21 if a soldier; while the Hospital Corps private receives but \$16 or \$18.

In the navy the first class hospital apprentice corresponding to first class private Hospital Corps, receives \$33 as compared with \$18 in the army.

The privates of today are the noncommissioned officers of the future; it is a military axiom that good noncommissioned officers—men trained in their specific duties—are absolutely necessary for military efficiency. It follows that if the Hospital Corps cannot obtain good material for privates the quality of its noncommissioned officers will decline. The private soldier seeks and obtains his reward to noncommissioned rank—that of corporal, sergeant, etc., and without some improvement in the pay of those and other grades, it is evident that men competent to become noncommissioned officers will not enter the Hospital Corps.

The soldier, whether officer or enlisted man, has practically no voice in the selection of his nurse or pharmacist; the national government provides both and whether skilful or otherwise, the soldier must perforce be content. The functions of the nurse and of the pharmacist are too responsible to be entrusted to men of a low order of intelligence or who lack appreciation of the responsibilities of their duties. It is a matter of official record in the War Department, as reported by numerous medical officers, whose interests are purely professional and humanitarian, that the morale and quality of the Hospital Corps are a progressively declining factor. The outcome is obvious and requires no comment.

Following the custom in all branches of the army, it is proposed to change the designation Hospital Corps to Medical Corps. The Hospital Corps is the only branch in which the soldier belongs to one corps and the officer who immediately commands him, to another. The present arrangement has nothing to commend it and much to criticise. It is unwieldy, administratively cumbersome and inhibits the development of that esprit de corps which is maintained in other branches.

The National Guard under certain conditions becomes an actual portion of the United States Army, and the above arguments apply with equal force to its members, hence the pharmacists of the whole country are deeply interested. This matter is a serious one, for even during actual hostilities more men die in the United States Army from sickness than from the missiles of the enemy, which shows how very important is the promotion of the efficiency of the Hospital Corps.

BETTER PAY DESERVED BY THE ARMY HOSPITAL CORPS.

"The decline in efficiency of the Hospital Corps of the United States Army has been made the subject of an official report by the surgeon-general to the chief of staff. As a result, the American Pharmaceutical Association has taken up the cause of the military pharmacists and proposes to urge legislation which will increase the efficiency of the Hospital Corps, in accordance with the recommendation of the surgeon-general. The functions of this corps range from those of kitchen helper to those of the trained nurse; it includes the pharmacist, clerk, photographer, ambulance driver and orderly. The nursing of the sick, the sterilization of instruments and dressings, the compounding of medicines—all the details of an intricate system of property accounting and sick records are in the hands of the members of the corps. They are the only nurses at army hospitals, except at four or five general hospitals in the United States and in the Philippines.

"The federal government is under a moral, if not a legal, obligation to furnish efficient and capable nursing and pharmaceutical service to the army. The government should also set an example in the organization and service of its hospitals. The sick soldier should not be left to the untrained and incompetent. From the privates of the Hospital Corps are drawn its non-commissioned officers. If the privates are not carefully selected men of education and reliability, the non-commissioned officers will not be much better. Supervision of military hospitals, the sick, the attendants and the equipment requires no slight qualifications. When to this is added proficiency in pharmacy, nursing and minor surgery it is evident that the government must offer better inducements if it expects to obtain men with the necessary ability.

"The Army Pay bill of 1908 gave increased pay to the various grades, averaging 40 per cent and in some cases as high as 80 per cent increase. It gave the Hospital Corps not more than 20 per cent increase, thus placing it at a decided disadvantage in attracting the best class of privates. All the branches of the army are practically in competition with one another for educated and reliable men. The more intelligent the man, the more carefully he considers and selects the branch of service which offers the best inducements in pay and in opportunity for advancement. In these respects, the Hospital Corps today is the lowest of any branch of the service.

The Surgeon-General of the Army submitted a memorandum to the Chief of Staff, August 3, looking to a modest increase in the pay of the Hospital Corps, an increase rendered necessary by the practical impossibility of obtaining men of any description for this branch of the service. The surgeon-general is held responsible for the health of the army and the efficiency of its medical service.