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A BRIEF SKETCH OF THE SYSTEM OF OFFICERING THE PRUSSIAN ARMY.

By Lieut. CHARLES E. H. VINCENT, 23rd Royal Welsh Fusiliers.*

Modes of Entering the Army.

THERE are two ways by which, in time of peace, a Prussian Officer can obtain his first commission:—

- (a.) By passing the required examination in general subjects, serving a short time in the ranks, and afterwards as a Non-commissioned Officer, and qualifying in the theoretical knowledge of his profession, after a nine months' course of study at the School of War.
- (b.) By passing this latter examination direct from a special superior class of the corps of cadets.

The *modus operandi* in case (a) is as follows:—

The aspirant to a commission in the Army presents himself to the Colonel of the regiment to which he hopes eventually to belong. Should his birth be such as to render him a suitable comrade for the Officers of the regiment, and his parents be prepared to provide sufficient means for him to live on the same standard of expenditure as his brother Officers, and should his testimonials as to conduct and character be satisfactory, the Colonel gives his consent to his coming into the regiment, provided the medical inspection puts no obstacle in the way, and the candidate pass the "Fähnrich's" ("Ensign" he can't be called, for "Ensign" in our Army means a Commissioned Officer, on one roster with the Lieutenants, corresponding to the second Lieutenant of the Prussian service) examination in general subjects—such as French, English, geography, history, Latin, Greek, mathematics, and drawing—which is held periodically under the auspices of the Government. This examination passed, the "Fähnrich" provides himself with the uniform of a private soldier, though made of better cloth, and he is allowed to wear his sword-bayonet in the streets, &c., with an Officer's sword-knot attached thereto. He joins the regiment, is attached to a company, and is drilled in every respect as a common soldier. In some regiments he must live for a week in the barrack-room; but as a general rule he is allowed a room to himself during the entire time. He is made an honorary member of the Officer's mess (though never omitting to pay his superiors every mark of military respect), in order that they may have additional facility for observing the character of their future comrade.

As regards absence from barracks, the "Fähnrich" is bound by the same restrictions as the private soldier, if he be serving in the ranks, or as the Non-commissioned Officer, if he be doing duty as such. His morals are under the care of his Captain; and the Colonel, knowing

* Reprinted from a pamphlet circulated privately in January, 1871.

exactly the funds he commands, can judge if his habits of life are beyond the length of his purse. The "Fähnrich" receives the pay of the rank with which he is doing duty.

Having thoroughly mastered every detail of his drill and duty as a private, he is passed through the several grades of the non-commissioned ranks. He must perform *every duty at least* once himself, after which he may pay a substitute. The "Fähnrich" is then sent on to the School of War (Krieg's Schule), organized on much the same principle as our military academies, in companies with professors, superintendents of military discipline, and student under Officers and Corporals. Here during a course of nine months, working nine or ten hours a day, he is taught the theory of war, fortification, military history, surveying, &c., &c., but beyond riding-classes there is no military drill. For the slightest offence, whether of idleness or of conduct, the "Fähnrich" returns for a year to the ranks of his regiment, thus losing a year of his career. The severity of the discipline at the Krieg's Schule passes all comprehension; a minute late, an illicit correspondence, and the merest infraction of the letter of the law, is followed by the severest punishment. Should the "Fähnrich" be suffering on entering from venereal disease, he returns forthwith to his regiment, and in like manner if he contracts it during his residence at the institution. At the end of nine months the examination is held; those that pass, return to their régiments to await a vacancy in the subaltern ranks, and, although retaining the old uniform, wear an Officer's sword; those that fail, are not allowed another trial. The "Fähnrich" who has passed the School of War, does duty as a second Lieutenant, and a vacancy occurring, the Colonel assembles the Officers, and inquires if they have any objection to accept him (the "Fähnrich") as a comrade. Should he have made himself in any way obnoxious, or should he have proved himself an unworthy companion, one who would never be to the credit of the regiment, the Colonel would recommend him for his commission, but append thereto a request that he shall be transferred to another regiment on obtaining his promotion. The transfer he may also obtain at his own request; but should all be well, he will obtain his commission forthwith in the regiment.

(b.) A cadet first enters the corps at the age of ten, but beyond an hour's drill or gymnastics daily, except in the higher classes, the education differs very slightly from that of an ordinary public school. Beyond the first class, is a special military class, in which the same subjects are taught as at the School of War, and from which the Officer's examination may be directly passed. But if the cadet leave the corps before he reaches this class, his military route differs in no way from that of the private individual, and even those who pass from the special class have to learn practically the duties of a soldier and Non-Commissioned Officer. Commanding Officers, as a rule, prefer those Officers who have not been cadets, as their education and line of life has extended over a wider scope, and also because the discipline of the cadets having been so terribly severe, they generally break away when the curb is loosened. The only exceptions for Fähnrichs not passing the School of War is in favour of those who have passed the

"Abiturienten" examination (the Bacchélaurent of France, the Degree of England), or who have resided for a year at a university.

Instruction of Officers.

The Officer, when once he has obtained his commission, is freed from all further theoretical instruction, but in garrisons, voluntary classes are formed. Each year every Prussian Officer under field rank has assigned to him a practical and a theoretical task.

The practical task is as follows:—The Officer is warned over night that on the morrow he will have to carry out his practical exercise, for which purpose he will be on parade at such an hour. Here he finds the detachment awaiting him which is to be at his orders. Sealed instructions are handed to him, on which he forthwith acts. But an hour before, another Officer has left the barracks to carry out also his practical task, with instructions, the reverse of those of his unknown opponent.

For instance, one Officer is informed that his party forms the advanced guard of a force attacking Berlin from the north; his directions are to feel well forward for the enemy, to find the best position for crossing the river, and, if necessary, to force a passage. His opponent has the command of the advanced posts of the defenders, and makes his dispositions accordingly. The parties are distinguished by the one wearing forage caps and shell jackets, and the other wearing full dress, and in the cavalry with lance-flags furled, and flying. At the time when a critic may be able to form an opinion on the superiority of the one's disposition over the other's, the Colonel, General, or some other superior Officer comes up, and decides for the victor. Both parties then unite, and publicly each Officer explains his dispositions, and the reasons for making them. The Colonel, or umpire, makes his remarks and awards praise or blame. It is obvious that as the whole matter goes before the superior authorities, and every Officer is anxious to appear to advantage in the eyes of the men, a spirit of emulation is excited, and as all the details are patiently explained to the men, they too take an interest in the result. The contending Officers, on their return home, draw up a complete military report of the proceedings, with a sketch.

The theoretical task is one which is awarded to each Officer yearly, and to perform which he is allowed a time in proportion to the subject.

The subjects are infinite: invasion of different countries; army organisation, sanitary and commissariat arrangements in the field; training horses, &c., &c.; in which full freedom and liberty of speech are allowed; and, however wide the work may be from the mark, it must accomplish its purpose of developing habits of thought and study. The task when completed is read by the Colonel,—the Generals of Brigade and Division each appending his remarks,—and is then returned to the author. Those of special excellence go before yet higher authorities, and even to the Emperor himself.

Examination for Promotion.

There is none for any commissioned rank in the Army.

Relative Merit of Officers.

The relative merit of every Officer, from highest to lowest, is known to the general staff at Berlin. Each year a confidential report is made by the Colonel of the regiment and the General of Brigade, on every Officer under their command; that of subalterns is based on the testimony of their Captains. Extracts from these reports are entered at head quarters in a "Conduitten Liste." On the commencement of a campaign, those Captains whose military proficiency is of an inferior order, are left behind with the Reserve, or speedily disposed of as commanders of an unimportant post. The same principle works from General to junior second Lieutenant. Those of ability are pushed on; those of inferiority kept in the background. In every regiment there is one Major, but should he be unfit to assume the command of a regiment he is passed over "*sans mot dire*." The Majors of the Army are on one list for promotion, whereas the promotion of the junior Officers goes regimentally. Now, a Major seeing one junior after another get the command of a regiment, speedily appreciates his incompetence, and retires. Thus the quality of the Colonels and Generals is accounted for.

Promotion for Merit in Peace.

An Officer who shows marked ability in any particular subject or line, is pushed on very rapidly by the following means. His commission as second Lieutenant bears date August 10th, 1869; he is drafted into a regiment, where the senior second Lieutenant would be his junior; he therefore takes his place at the top of the list, and obtains the first vacancy for promotion, and so on again.

Staff or Regimental Employment.

Except in special cases, which are by no means rare, Officers are not eligible for staff or regimental employment until they have had three years' service.

Staff College,

the equivalent for which is the "Krieg's Academie," to enter which an Officer can try after three years' service. The course of study is three years. At the end of each year, should an Officer not come up to the standard, he will return to his regiment, by no means injured in reputation, but rather with a character for a desire to improve. Those who pass, are sure of staff employment, each according to his line. It is needless to add, that visiting privately the defences, lines of invasion, &c., of foreign countries,—however peaceful the existing relations,—finds employment for considerable numbers.

Leave of Absence.

Each Prussian Officer receives, as a rule, from six weeks to two months' leave of absence during the year—i.e., about a fortnight between

the winter and spring-drills, about three weeks in the middle of summer, between the spring-drills and summer-mancœuvres, and about a fortnight between the summer-mancœuvres and the winter-drills. Of course never more than half the Officers are absent at one time, and if an Officer desire, for some well substantiated reason, to have the whole at once, or the accumulation of two or three years, he can do so.

Pay, Regimental Details.

Each Officer receives his pay direct from the Paymaster, with monthly deductions for messing, tailors', shoemakers' bills, widows' fund, band, &c., &c.; and there are also many regimental details in points of honour, etiquette, &c.; many regimental committees, so perfectly incompatible with the British service, that I refrain from entering into them, but only add, that as the Colonel knows the income of each of his Officers, he can check any undue expenditure.

Connection with Men.

The connection of the Prussian Officer with his men is very close. He drills them, gives lectures to them, superintends their every action; an Officer during the winter months gives lectures to them on their profession, on geography, military history, &c., to which classes the voluntary attendance is very large. In fact, the Officer is constantly showing how thoroughly he is the master of his profession, and by education, birth, and breeding, the superior of the soldier.

Social Position of Officers.

• In the Guards, the majority are of noble families, but in the Line many are gentlemen only by virtue of their cloth and education; but so high is the standard of honour among them, that I recently heard a very animated discussion as to whether it was consistent with the dignity of an Officer to take a rifle from a private in action for the purpose of killing, by superior skill, one of the enemy whose death would be of importance. Some argued that it was the duty of every Officer to inflict as much injury as possible on the enemy, and being a better shot, he would be to blame if he did not adopt the above-named course. However, a very large majority decided that it would be a breach of international honour and etiquette to depart thus from your position as an Officer.
