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THE NATIONAL RESERVE.

(I.)

By COLONEL J. G. HICKS, V.D. (retired), formerly Commanding
the Percy Artillery.

IT is impossible to overrate the importance of organizing the National Reserve on a sound and permanent basis.

If it is to escape the evanescence which is so often the fate of popular movements, and is to establish itself as one of the permanent institutions of our country, the details of such organization will require very careful handling. The successful establishment of such an institution as the National Reserve gives promise of becoming, will add enormously to the strength and well-being of the British nation, and will prove an asset of the utmost value in the day of that nation's need.

The provisional Regulations issued in March, 1913, have been, and are now being considered, by all the County Associations, and the use of the word "provisional" leads one to hope that future steps will remedy their defects and make good their omissions, some of which it is the purpose of this article to point out.

What is a "Reserve"?

The dictionary tells us that a reserve is something saved up, or kept for future use on special urgent occasions. The Bank of England maintains its gold reserve in order that it may have it to fall back upon, in case of vital necessity. The true use of the National Reserve should be the same, and any attempt to utilize it in ordinary times to make up shortages in the Active Services, or in order to avoid adopting what measures are necessary to obtain recruits for the Regular Army and the Territorial Force, must lead to disaster and to the destruction of the force itself.

The Three Classes.

It is open to question whether the division of the National Reserve into three classes is either necessary or opportune. All men who have been enrolled in it have, by the fact of their enrolment, signified their willingness to serve on emergency, in whatever capacity their services can best be made use of, and the division into classes must now, almost inevitably, lead to jealousies and discouragements which will prove detrimental to the force as a whole.

This division is laid down in the Regulations as follows :

Class I.—Officers and other ranks under 42 years of age who satisfy the medical requirements as to their physical fitness to join a combatant unit for service in the field at home or abroad.

Class II.—Officers, warrant officers, and sergeants under the age of 55, and rank and file under the age of 50, who satisfy the medical requirements as to their physical fitness to join a combatant unit for home defence, or for duty in fixed positions, or for administrative work at home.

Class III.—This class will consist of those who are unable to undertake any obligation, etc., etc.

"On reaching the limit of age for either Class I. or Class II., a National Reservist will be struck off the strength of that class; he may, however, voluntarily transfer his name to the next class."

The amount of fruitless labour involved in registering, medically examining and passing men *now*, who in a few months' time will be over the age limit or medically unfit, will be very great, and many a man rejected as *unfit now*, might be fit a few months hence. There are also many who, on the outbreak of war, would at once volunteer for active service, and could be medically examined and passed as fit in a few minutes, but will now hold back from registering themselves in Class I., either from family reasons, uncertainty as to future plans, or from natural shrinking from undertaking *now* an obligation which they may not at a future time be able to carry out, but yet would be ashamed to withdraw from at a time of crisis.

The undertaking is described in the Regulations as "an honourable obligation," but that exactly describes the obligation already undertaken by enrolment. Much unnecessary heartburning and discouragement must arise by the application of the age limit, and to tell a man who is in the prime of life, healthy, active, and willing, that his services are not required because he is 43, seems unreasonable.

The same arguments apply to Class II., though in a less degree; but to imagine that a man of 51 will be debarred from giving his services when the country is at war, and every trained man available is wanted, is quite unjustifiable.

The effect of the Regulations on those who are only eligible for Class III. will be gradually to eliminate them, for they are bound to feel that they are not wanted, whereas their services would be most useful in depôts, in training recruits, in quartermasters' stores, hospitals, etc.; and to nip their patriotic instincts in the bud now, will have a bad effect on the whole force.

In the War Office Circular Memorandum, dated March 21st, 1911, the following appears:—

"Experience has shown that many men are deterred from joining the Veteran Reserve if they are asked to undertake beforehand a binding engagement to come out for service in time of national emergency. To impose any such condition of liability would, in the opinion of the Army Council, be contrary to the conception underlying the formation of this Reserve."

The War Office would, in the writer's opinion, have been well advised to have left it at that.

The Question of Uniform.

The Regulations say :—

“Members of the National Reserve will not wear uniform in their capacity as members of this Reserve, but provision will be made for the uniform, arms, and equipment of every man whose services are accepted on mobilization.”

They also say :—

“Local military authorities assist County Associations in giving the National Reserve a privileged position in the public life of the country. Its members will be officially recognized on national ceremonial occasions and at local military functions.”

Again the Regulations say :—

“The National Reserve is supplementary to the Army.”

Uniform for any military body is as great a necessity in time of peace as it is in time of war. The smartness, *éclat* and *esprit-de-corps* which the wearing of it engenders, and the influence which it has on men who might join, is considerable.

To ask men who have served for years in a smart regiment to attend national ceremonial occasions and local military functions in what, at the best, must often be shabby plain clothes, can scarcely be called giving them a privileged position in the public life of the country.

The issue of a neat distinctive uniform for ceremonial purposes is most desirable. The occasions of wearing it will not be so frequent as to wear it out quickly, and on mobilization the men should at once assemble in it, and, until drafted or detailed to their respective regiments, would be a military body commanding the respect of all who saw them, as in the case of men of the Royal Fleet Reserve, who keep their own uniforms.

The provision of active service dress, equipment and arms on joining their regiments is sound, and any further issue of full dress or walking-out dress would be unnecessary, as the appearance of a detachment in a regiment on parade in the National Service uniform would be an honour to it rather than the reverse. Complete uniformity is rarely to be found in these days, when officers, N.C.O.'s and men of other regiments or branches of the service are so often attached for special training.

Officers and N.C.O.'s in the National Reserve who have retired after long service, with permission to retain their rank and wear their uniform on retirement, should be encouraged to wear their uniform at musters and ceremonial parades, and in their case the provision or wearing of the distinctive National Service uniform should be optional, but the letters “N. R.” should in such case be worn on the shoulder straps.

Officers.

The most serious omission from the Regulations is that of any mention of officers of battalions of National Reserve and of their duties.

It is most important that good officers should be attracted and encouraged to join, in order to organize and control the various units, to keep the men together, to assemble them occasionally to rub off the rust, and bring them up annually for inspection.

This whole question is left in a nebulous condition to County Associations, who frame their own rules and appoint (or acquiesce in the appointment of) officers to help them to carry them out.

In every other military body, whether Regular, Special Reserve, or Territorial, His Majesty's Commission is indispensable to the exercise of command, and in a force composed as the National Reserve is, with more than half of its strength consisting of ex-Regular soldiers from every branch of the Service (including ex-naval ratings), the officers' authority should be unquestioned and unquestionable, and the names of all officers when appointed should be entered in the Army List.

As matters now stand, the officers will, when mobilization is ordered, be ignored, and their men dispersed—those belonging to Class I. to be despatched direct by the County Associations to the regiments requiring them; and Class II. will be called up by the officer commanding the Territorial Force unit. By this means whatever advantage has been gained by organizing the National Reserve in battalions and companies will be thrown away; the officers who have taken the trouble to make themselves acquainted with the men and organize them in time of peace, will be put on one side at the very time their services would be most useful; and the staff of the County Associations and the officers commanding the Territorial regiments, when they are straining every nerve to get their units mobilized, will have to deal with a crowd of men about whom they know little or nothing. A much more sensible plan would be for each battalion of National Reserve to assemble as a military unit under its own officers at its own headquarters, or, if accommodation could be found, at the nearest regimental dépôt, and for the officers to be responsible for making up drafts and despatching them to their respective regiments, retaining a nucleus for enrolling and drilling new comers—who will flock in immediately at a time of national danger—and, as these become fit, drafting them on as before.

Then will be the time for medical examinations to be made, and the National Reserve itself ought to contain sufficient ex-R.A.M.C. officers to make these examinations without calling on the already overburdened medical officers at the stations.

Financial Considerations.

The payment of additional grants of 10s. and 5s. respectively, in respect of men registered under Class I. and Class II.—not to the men themselves, but to the County

Associations—seems a very inequitable arrangement, and is not likely to produce much result.

In a very able article by the late General Sir E. P. Leach, V.C., which appeared in the January number of this JOURNAL, it was urged that a soldier who has served in the Army and Army Reserve, and who, whilst still in the prime of life, undertakes a further obligation for active service, would certainly be worth half the retaining fee paid to an Army Reservist, and that it would be only fair and just to give him such a fee in return for his undertaking.

It must be remembered that many of these men are very badly off, and can ill-afford to pay even train or tram fares for attending musters and inspections, and certainly cannot afford to supplement out of their own pockets whatever meagre allowances of ammunition may be given to enable them to keep up their shooting.

A retaining fee of half the amount should be given to men in Class II., and a much smaller sum than what is now proposed to be given to the County Association would suffice for clerical work and postages.

The retaining fees should only be paid to men who appear at inspection, or produce satisfactory evidence of their inability to attend, and, if uniform is given, it must be produced in good order, and the fee must be subject to deduction in any case where the uniform shows signs of ill-usage. A certain standard of proficiency in shooting should also be required before the fee is paid.

What about the Future?

The great value of the National Reserve is *now*, when trained men for home defence are lacking.

Universal training for the youth of this country must, the writer believes, come sooner or later, but even if it is adopted at once, several years must elapse before it has an appreciable influence.

There is no need to discuss here the question of compulsory service, or whether the voluntary system can be maintained, provided universal training is given, but experience has always shown (and is showing now in the very fact of the National Reserve's existence) that—given the training and the feeling of confidence which training imparts—there will never be any lack of volunteers for service in the ranks of the Regular Army or of the Home Defence Army.

In any case, however, compulsory universal training must come, and, when it comes, where are the instructors to be found more readily than in the ranks of the National Reserve, which contain at this moment the most magnificent material in the world, in the old N.C.O.'s who have retired with "exemplary" characters?

Employment in training the youth of this country would put a little much-needed money in their pockets, and in return

they would put some patriotic spirit into the lads, a quality which they so much lack at the present day.

The potentialities of the National Reserve are great. The numbers now on the roll are about 200,000, and Colonel Seely, in one of his recent speeches, estimated that there must be at least ten times that number of trained men in the country eligible for enrolment. General Leach showed in his article that in the county of Dorset half the men enrolled are ex-Regulars; in the unit commanded by the present writer, 63 per cent. are ex-Regulars. The statistics for the county of Surrey show that 65 per cent. of men enrolled are under 45 years of age, and this may be taken as a fair basis for calculation throughout the country.

If the desire expressed in the Regulations to give this force "a privileged position in the public life of the country" is carried out, its value in the day of necessity will be incalculable; but any attempt to utilize it to make good deficiencies in the Territorial Force, or as an excuse for further reducing Regular establishments, will be fatal to its existence.

It must never be forgotten that these men have done their job, and it is for the younger men now to do theirs. Should the day of dire necessity arrive, the men of the National Reserve, to whatever class they belong, are not likely to be found wanting.

(II.)

By COLONEL H. C. C. D. SIMPSON, C.M.G., late Royal Artillery.

IN the January number of the JOURNAL, appeared an article dealing with the above subject, in which the writer "desires to emphasize the potential value of the ex-Regular as a fighting man, and to indicate what he believes to be his legitimate position as a National Reservist."¹

Having had some experience in organizing a battalion of the National Reserve, I desire to make a few remarks on his suggestions.

The National Reserve is composed of various categories of officers and men—regulars and non-regulars—who at some time or other have performed some military or naval service under the Crown. The only branch which is not at present represented in its ranks is the Territorial Force, due to its having been in existence only five years, and from the fact that a T.F. man to be eligible for service in the National Reserve, must have served continuously for eight years in the Territorial Force or its Reserve. It may be said that upwards of three-fifths (115,000) of the registered members of the National

¹The National Reserve, by the late General Sir E. P. Leach, V.C., p. 102 of the JOURNAL for January, 1913.