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SPECIALIZATION IN TRAINING .

A SUGGESTION.

By MAJOR-GENERAL W. D. BIRD, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.

FOR many years, or indeed for some centuries, the British people has firmly believed in the advantages of the policy of voluntary service for its armies in time of peace, and of improvization to meet the uncompromising requirements of war. It is not surprising, therefore, that after its most recent experience of victories gained partly by means of forces raised by voluntary enlistment, the nation should have decided to revert to the policy which was followed prior to 1914. As a result such British and Indian military forces as are to be maintained for the security of the Empire will be recruited on a purely voluntary basis, whatever may be the system that is adopted in the Oversea Dominions.

It has been stated on high authority that the recent war has not ended war because it could not do so. War then is; it appears; likely to remain one of the greatest and most persistent facts in human history; and it is very evident that to meet the liabilities of the future it may be necessary to resort to an expansion, as great as was the case in the past, of such Imperial forces as may be in existence at the outbreak of hostilities. It may be concluded, therefore, that the organization and training of the troops that are now to be raised should be governed by this obligation to as large an extent as may be practicable, having regard to their other essential functions, in which are included the "bloody wars of peace."

Recent experience does not appear to have negated the old belief that the work of an army in war is, broadly speaking, divided among those whose primary business it is to control and to think when in the field and when in action, and those whose first duty it is to follow and to do. Nor has it been refuted that the efficiency of the units of an army is relative to the efficiency of their cadres; and that if these are in existence, and of high professional value, reliable units can readily be formed. Also that, however excellent the units, their effective employment can be secured only when commands are in capable hands, and when commanders are assisted by competent staffs.

It may be supposed, then, that the general training of the British Imperial army should be so regulated that the requisite number of cadres, of commanders, and of staffs may be available should the Empire again be faced by such an emergency as occurred in 1914, or even to meet an eventuality such as the South African War.

In battle, and generally in operations which involve a great physical and mental strain, one of the first requirements of success is that the

mind should be free to put its knowledge to the best use, and to devote itself to the problems whose solution demands thought, and that little or no conscious effort of will should be required for the performance of the motions and duties which can be reproduced as mechanically as, for instance, are those brought into play when walking. Men can walk and think deeply, and can walk and at the same time speak sound sense. In the case of the cadres, the motions or duties which must be repeated until they become habitual, would include, among other things, the words of command appropriate for the movements or actions which the mind, fortified by knowledge, would have decided as those most appropriate to be undertaken by the men ; for the staff they would comprise the knack of drafting those orders, in clear and logical sequence, which were best calculated to secure the execution of the intentions of the commander ; and for commanders the custom of so reviewing a situation that its vital elements might at once be recognized.

Specialization, except as regards the arms of the service, was at one time anathema in our small British and Indian Armies, whatever may have been the practice in the Dominions, and as a result men were often turned over from one different task to another until they had acquired a general knowledge of many aspects of the military art, but did not possess the skill of the expert in any.

In the earlier days of the world's history there was but little specialization in the business of life, including that of warfare, but in the process of social aggregation work gradually became specialized, so that now populations are generally subdivided into groups, each of which is engaged in one kind of work only, and there is a regulative class over them consisting of stewards, managers, directors, ministers, and so forth. But the directors often, and ministers, at any rate, generally are without technical knowledge of the business or department which they control, although possessing in a high degree general administrative or political ability and knowledge, and being, therefore, experts in these respects:

It is said that all development exhibits "not only a multiplication of unlike parts, but an increase in the distinctness with which these parts are marked off from one another." Armies, in the recent process of development, have demonstrated the truth of this statement by becoming much more complicated in organization ; the training and organization of cadres, staff and commanders should, therefore, also tend towards a greater specialization than in the past. Instead, then, of endeavouring to fit the same individual to take his place with high efficiency as part of a cadre, as a staff officer, and perhaps ultimately as a commander, the military authorities may find it necessary, after a certain stage of preliminary training has been passed, to differentiate sharply in the instruction and development of the men selected as most suitable for these different tasks ; and potential commanders, for instance, may receive a training analogous with that which is undergone by so many of the individuals who form the directorates of the great

business concerns, and by almost every one of the ministers who form a Government.

There is another aspect of the matter. Few men are capable of doing more than one thing well, and many are incapable of attaining more than a moderate standard of skill in what they undertake. Moreover, "faculty of every kind tends always to adjust itself to its work. Special adjustment to one kind of work involves non-adjustment to other kinds." The more perfectly fitted an individual becomes for any one set of functions, the less capable, therefore, will he become of undertaking successfully a different set of functions, for "readjustments become difficult in proportion as adjustments are made complete." Right thinking on any matter also depends a good deal on habits of thought, but to arouse a chain of thought always involves the overcoming of some mental resistance, and "where the association of mental states has not been frequent a sensible effort is needed to call up one after the other."

It may be supposed, then, that one who has been long and carefully trained to be an efficient leader of a small unit will, if he becomes a staff officer, as a rule not carry out successfully the duties which devolve on the staff, until some time has elapsed. Equally, one who has spent many years in dealing with administrative details is unlikely to be capable of directing efficiently the larger operations of war. And there is a strong probability that an officer who has passed the best period of his life on the staff in interpreting the wishes and executing the orders of a series of commanders will begin to "read things with other men's eyes and discern them with other men's understanding," and will not have developed the mental qualities and habits of thought favourable for self-reliant and resolute action, should he eventually become an independent commander.

It is suggested, therefore, that in the preparation of men to take their place in cadres, on the staff, and as commanders, differentiation should be made at a comparatively early period of their military careers, in fact as soon as an estimate can be formed as to the value of their characters and characteristics. In these circumstances a Staff College would no longer be suitable as the school of instruction for staff officers as well as for the exercise of the higher commands, and the formation of a separate school for training in the higher branches of leadership would be necessary.

Napoleon observed that it was more favourable for success when a force was under one Commander-in-Chief of even moderate ability, than if split up under two able but independent commanders; and, if the same principle is applied to Imperial training, this should preferably be under some central authority.

It would not, however, in all probability, be practicable to found one University for the training of all cadres for the Imperial Armies, or even one central Staff College for the instruction of the men who in a great war would form their numerous staffs. On the other hand, there should be no special difficulty in establishing an Imperial War School for the instruction of those who are considered suitable to lead the forces

of the Empire in the field, and the officers so trained could ensure that general uniformity was maintained in the local training of cadres and staffs. One such central school, moreover, even supposing the instruction were unfortunately not of the highest quality, would, in accordance with the principle stated by Napoleon, be of greater value than two or more altogether admirable institutions where views and teaching were divergent.

To sum up, therefore, it is suggested that, as far as may be possible, the training of the cadres, of the staffs, and of the commanders for the Imperial forces, which would be needed in another great emergency, should be undertaken in time of peace. That, so far as may be practicable, differentiation as regards their training should be made early in the military career, in order to meet the requirements of possible expansion; and that specialization should be admitted to a much greater extent than has been the case in the past. Also that an Imperial War School should be founded for the instruction of those selected to undertake, when necessary, the duties of the higher leadership.

