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THE TERRITORIAL ARMY

TRAINING AND ITS PURPOSE

II.—A FORGOTTEN FACT

From Our Military Correspondent

The uneasy compromise between long-established forms and modern trends is still more manifest in the organization and training of the Territorial infantry divisions—if the remark also applies, in somewhat lesser degree, to the Regulars. Here it is only fair to a band of hard-working teachers to distinguish between the doctrinal test of training and that which comes on the battlefield. The great difference between them nowadays is that under the former an attack is considered as having succeeded so long as it is able to concentrate a moderate superiority of numbers and is carried out methodically, whereas under the latter test—as shown by actual experience in the last War and more recently in Spain—it is normal for it to be a costly failure unless it is backed by an immense superiority of weapon-power or favoured by some exceptional condition. And, even when it thus succeeds, the sequel is apt to raise the question whether it has really profited the side which undertook it.

By the gauge which a scientific judgment must apply there is no adequate evidence that any offensive in the last War laid the foundations of the Allies' ultimate victory; the nearest approach to any clear evidence of the effect of any offensive is that of the effect of the Germans' 1918 offensive in undermining their own foundations. And in the latest concluded war, that in Abyssinia, the clearest point is that the Ethiopians' action in taking the offensive opened the way for the Italians' victory.

FURTHER IMPROVEMENT

Having drawn this necessary distinction between doctrinal and actual tests of sound tactics, one may go on to remark that by the former standard there has been a further improvement this year in the training of the Territorials. There was more method shown generally—in the preparation of schemes, the design of plans, the issue of orders. Even combined exercises of a kind which would have been hardly thought worth attempting a few years ago were carried out with fair success as practice. There is, however, still considerable room for improvement in suiting exercises to the particular ground available, and in some cases training programmes had a bareness which raised a doubt, subsequently found to be justified, of the amount of thought that had been given to preparing the work. At present there is a good excuse for any scantiness in the growing burden of administrative work which is laid on Territorial commanding officers and their adjutants. This must be relieved if practical training for war is to receive its due attention.

While method is much to be desired in tactics, it is not enough. In view of the emphasis laid on the paramount importance of surprise by

the War Office Committee of generals, which a few years ago investigated the lessons of the War and their application to the present training of the Army, it is depressing to find so little attention given to surprise in current training. That authoritative body of soldiers reached the conclusion that the outstanding lesson of the War was that under modern conditions no attack is practicable against an enemy unless his resistance has already been paralysed by surprise in some form. That being so, the question how such a surprise effect can be achieved ought, surely, to be considered as an essential point in every appreciation and every plan. Yet it is not even mentioned in the official Training Regulations, when they deal with the points to be considered, and it is rarely included in any appreciation or plan I have seen during the training seasons.

The deepest fault of all, however, is the way that training schemes refuse to recognize the outstanding fact of the War: the mastery which defence has attained over attack in the present state of warfare. Too many soldiers seem to feel instinctively that the admission of such a fact would be tantamount to a declaration of their own futility. Finding a solution difficult, they deal with the biggest problem of to-day by virtually ignoring its existence. Worse still, what I have seen and heard of this year's Territorial training has shown how the best intentions can, by misinterpretation, pave the path to hell. It was laid down beforehand that the main subject of study in the Army this year was to be the problem of the offensive. The wise emphasis on "the problem" would seem to have been overlooked. What has happened in general is that exercises have been concentrated more than ever on practising the attack, and in a stereotyped way that offers but the faintest chance of succeeding. One can only hope that this does not foreshadow the course of the Regular Army's exercises now beginning. It might have been better if the exploration of this immensely difficult problem had been left to a picked experimental force, while the bulk of the Army, Territorial and Regular, had devoted itself to practising the easier role of defence, in which the practice of familiar methods is both more profitable and more needed.

A HAZY OUTLOOK

One of the chief obstacles to the adaptation of training to modern realities is haziness as to the object for which the Territorial Army is training. In contrast to the new anti-aircraft and coast defence units, the bulk of it suffers both in training and recruiting from the lack of a clear sense of its purpose in war. It is inconceivable that these Territorial infantry divisions could be used, in the early stages of a war, for the offensive role to which their training is mainly devoted; and doubtful whether they would be thus employed even at a later stage. One immediate purpose for which they would probably be needed is obvious: to help in maintaining order and internal communications in this country under the possibly chaotic conditions produced by heavy and sustained air attack. For that need there is at present no adequate provision, and no training at all. If the Territorial Army is to cope with it, part at least of its units should be primarily, not exclusively, trained for that role in peacetime. It is likely to require, moreover, a higher proportion of engineer and signal troops than is available on present establishments; and these would be no less valuable later for supplementing any force that was sent abroad.

Another likely purpose is, as in the last War, to relieve or reinforce Regular units in the oversea garrisons. Here again preparatory training is necessary for efficiency, and the training which would fit them for internal security duty at home would to a considerable extent fit the work for which they might be needed abroad. We must also reckon on the