

The British War Office

Some Idea of the Big Task in Hand--Incessant Work Under High Pressure and with rigid Military Discipline--War Secretary is Acme of Courtesy and Never Fails to Return Salutes of Soldiers in the Corridors.

London (Correspondence of the Associated Press). — Sir Reginald Brade, Secretary of the War Office, received a representative of the Associated Press, and gave facilities, through one of his staff as escort, to see something of this huge war machine in full swing under the pressure of one of the greatest wars with which it has ever had to cope. It was an experience of several hours, exploring the labyrinths of the vast institution, fairly vibrating with energy at every point and yet proceeding with precision and efficiency in meeting the big part it is taking in the conduct of the war.

Some idea of the immensity of this war establishment may be had from the fact that its corridors are two miles long—a good brisk walk of an hour. And along these two miles is a good-sized city of people, over 4,000 engaged in the infinite details of this war work, great and small, all the way from Lord Kitchener, Secretary of State for War, down to boy scouts and girl messengers. And this is only the central establishment, for the war exigencies have outgrown even this huge building, and many outside buildings, business blocks and other premises have been taken in as War Office branches. The sudden extension of censoring as a precaution of military defence has called into service a large army of censors, and a number of business premises in various quarters have been acquired for the military censors' branch. Three or four other branches are at other points, and practically the whole ordnance branch has grown into a separate government department, with a Cabinet Minister, Mr. Lloyd George, at its head.

Yet the War Office still remains the throbbing centre of the work; here the larger questions of strategy and the campaigns in various theatres of the war are worked out; here the Army Council and the Imperial General Staff hold their meetings, and here the many branches of military work ramify from the headquarters of Lord Kitchener, Gen. Sir W. Robertson, Chief of the Imperial Staff; Lieut.-General Sir H. Sclater, adjutant-general to the forces; Lieut.-General Sir I. Cowans, quarter-master general, and the two members of Parliament who represent the civilian branch and keep the war branch in touch with Parliament; Mr. Tennant, parliamentary under-secretary for war, and Mr. Foster, financial secretary for war, with Sir Reginald Brade as secretary of the War Office and of the War Council.

It is difficult to get into the War Office, and more difficult to get out—like the continental railway system. Guards turn away all those without papers from authorized sources, stating a definite purpose for the visit

and a fixed time. Passing this barrier, one's name and address is taken, and a permit issued, and the addresses are always available if Scotland Yard wishes to investigate the antecedents of anyone making unauthorized inquiries.

Within the building there is an air of work under high pressure and with rigid military discipline, with many officers in uniform, old soldiers as messengers, and the boy scouts and girl messengers also in uniform, the girls in brown khaki dress and blouse with brass buttons and a brass device on the collar.

Kitchener and Derby.

There are two outstanding figures of interest at the War Office just now—Lord Kitchener, the supreme head of the whole establishment, and Lord Derby, whose scheme for increasing the army has brought him very much in the public eye, while across the road, at the Horse Guards, is Field Marshal French, now Lord French of Ypres, who as commander of home defence, is now directing home defences in general and the aircraft defences in particular. Lord Kitchener's windows look out on the busy traffic of Whitehall, with the mounted Horse Guards across the way, and the bronze equestrian statue of the Duke of Cambridge, in sweeping plume and full regalia of a field marshal, at the entrance. The offices are stately, with portraits of distinguished war ministers. But under Kitchener they have taken on an air of the camp, with maps all about and on the walls indicating the campaigns in many fields of British operation—in Flanders, at Salonika, in Egypt and Mesopotamia, and of ally operations on the Austro-Italian front, in Russia and other points.

Lord Kitchener comes and goes, always as a soldier, in uniform. He goes in uniform to Buckingham Palace for his conferences with the King, and in uniform to the House of Lords, where he is a member, to announce Government policies on the war. His busy hours at headquarters are in the morning and at night, attending war councils, seeing the chief staff officers and directing plans. He appears always calm and unruffled in the mass of details pressing from every side, and he returns the salutes of soldiers along the corridors with the same deference they give him, like Washington, who bowed to his servants because he would not permit his subordinates to outdo him in courtesy.

Lord Derby's quarters are across the corridor, and though he is a civilian and wears no uniform, he is surrounded by a military staff and is doing one of the most important military works—"establishing a reservoir," he calls it, which will supply a steady stream of recruits

as the military authorities need them. Instead of war maps, Lord Derby has a map of the United Kingdom hanging back of his desk, for his problem has been the assembling of men in proper quotas from different points within the country. Field Marshal French's quarters are not far away, the centre of hustling activity in connection with the new air defences. Just what these are is not being made known, except in the guarded announcements of Lord Kitchener to Parliament, as the theory of the war officials is that surprise is an essential element in the effectiveness of a war-weapon. So that about all that is known is that Field Marshal French is working with Sir Percy Scott, the naval expert, is an extensive scheme of land and coast defences and warnings, with rapidly increasing air defence guns around London and in all exposed parts of England.

But while these main figures of the War Office are most before the public, there is also a vast organization carrying on the innumerable day-to-day branches of military work. The main divisions are the General Staff, the Adjutant General, the Quartermaster General, and the Civil and Finance departments, with most of the Ordnance branch now transferred to the Ministry of Munitions. Under these main heads there are some 120 divisions, taking in the whole range of military activities.

The War Council is, in effect, made up of the heads of these main divisions, seven in all, with Lord Kitchener as president of the Council, and General Robertson, chief of staff, Adjutant-General Sclater, Quartermaster-General Cowans, Major-General Von Donop, Parliamentary Secretary Tennant and Financial Secretary Foster as the other members of the War Council. The General Staff, with General Robertson at its head, makes the scientific studies of military defence, assembles all the available intelligence on different campaigns, furnishes the experts, and has charge of the military inter-communication by telegraphing and signalling. Unlike the American system, the British Army Medical Service is under the adjutant-general. The extensive purchase of American horses, harness and supplies has come under the direction of Quartermaster-General Cowans, who has general charge of food, clothing and supplies, land and water transportation of troops, supplying horses, etc.

The recent transfer of ordnance from the War Office to the Ministry of Munitions shows the remarkable development of ordnance, particularly artillery, since it first came into use. It was not until 1483 that England established an ordnance officer, the War Office records showing that Rauf Bigod was the first master of ordnance. That was the time the Germans were first using these strange engines called artillery, throwing enormous stones. So the English appointed a Master of Ordnance, and soon after Ferdinand of Spain also got some of these new engines of warfare and with them succeeded at last in battering down the walls of Grenada and driving the Moors out of Spain. From that time on artillery was a main factor in settling wars, and in England such men as the Duke of Marlborough, Lord Cornwallis, Lord Howe, and the Duke of Wellington, were Masters of Ordnance. It is a curious fact that after Lord Cornwallis' surrender at Yorktown, he returned to England and became the Master-General of Ordnance. This matter of big guns has been growing ever since, until this war made it such a factor that a new Cabinet

Minister took it over as a separate department.

100,000 Letters a Week.

A visit to the Registry branch of the War Office gave an idea of the immensity of the work going on, for this branch received everything coming in and distributes the business to all branches. Over 100,000 letters are received every week, and of these an average of 40,000 go through the formality of registering. Once registered, a communication is an official record of the government, eventually under the control of the Master of the Rolls.

The mere registering of this vast influx of 40,000 pieces of separate war business is a prodigious work. Ten youths were at a long table engaged solely in slitting open the envelopes. Fourteen sacks of war business had come in the first morning mail, and this was only the start. Room after room is filled with men and women workers, registering these communications and getting them started to the 120 branches. A war communication addressed personally to Lord Kitchener or any other official is delivered direct, but unless personally addressed it is part of the War Office business, and goes to one of the 120 branches, according to the subject treated. There is no time for high-sounding titles, and so every branch and every official is known by a group of letters, and every officer in the service has a number. This Registry branch under the direction of one of the veteran members of Sir Reginald Brade's staff, Mr. Pedley, is a model of efficiency in the handling of the avalanche of documents which the war turns loose on every branch of the War Office. Going down in the sub-basement, below the level of the Thames, one could see the bewildering vistas of documents, stretching for long distances but arranged with mathematical precision for instant reference as a Government record.

One of the curious requirements growing out of the rush of war work is the need of a staff of "searchers" to look up lost documents. The "searchers" make their rounds every morning. Very often in the pressure of many kinds of work an important war record will get laid aside or covered up on some desk, and it is the business of the "searchers" to ferret out every lost record and get it back again in the regular channels.

Altogether this glimpse of the War Office and the passing exchanges with the many officials along the miles of offices, gave the impression of a perfectly regulated machine with the steam-gauge wide open and working under full pressure; and from end to end of this vast establishment, along with the sure and steady movement, was the spirit everywhere manifest war workers: "Let us do our part and expressed among these part to win the war."

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