

Official Reports on the Russo-Japanese War



In a series of articles the London Standard is reviewing the official reports of the British officers in the field during the Russo-Japanese war. The first is as follows: Ruthless, relentless economy is the policy at present prescribed to the War Office, so it may be assumed that this is the reason why the official history of the Russo-Japanese war has taken the particular form in which it is presented to the British public. Had it been modelled on the more literary pattern of the German official account of our own South African war, for instance, a more readable chronicle would have been produced. Still, this series of direct statements of fact from the pens of those British officers who were privileged to be present in the actual cockpit forms a very vivid record of a great military tragedy. For the advanced student ample material is provided by the detailed narratives of the various writers and the excellent and carefully prepared maps and plans.

Official histories should, however, aim not only at the instruction of the higher ranks, but should equally tempt the novice to the study of the science of war. It may be doubted whether these uncolored reports, most of which assume a complete knowledge of the military organization of the two antagonists in their readers, will afford sufficiently attractive fare to the weaker appetites of junior officers unless driven to its assimilation by examination exigencies. What a labor of love it would have been for the late Col. G. R. F. Henderson to bind together and illuminate with his wonderful power of pen the disconnected and occasionally inharmonious chapters into one continuous narrative. We hope that private enterprise may still carry out so valuable a work. Meanwhile, but little fault can be found with the copious and often admirably expressed reports themselves. Word-painting is conspicuous by its absence. Comment is withheld. Praise and blame must be sought between the lines. A succession of well-ordered and matter-of-fact chronicles; some essays on the military systems of either combatant; graphic descriptions of the more important topographical features—each separate document with the covering letter of the senior officer who forwarded it—such is the official commentary on the recent war drama of the Furthest East.

It goes without saying that it is no unpurged edition of the official post-bag, which is not published for the first time. Consideration for the feelings of our allies has no doubt dictated the suppression of faint praise or direct criticism. A generous desire to spare the vanquished friend has equally certainly expunged occasional passages which might have caused old wounds to smart afresh. Indeed, the absence of skilful editing betrays the fact in more than one incomplete sentence and broken thread in other places than where a tell-tale line of asterisks confesses to a hiatus. But there are more noticeable errors which should not have escaped the attention of the revising eye. For instance, where one report states that the Japanese soldier carries a weight of 56 lb. in full marching order, another loads him with the still more crushing burden of 90 lb. Numbers are not given with invariable accuracy. On page 39 of the third volume there appears to be a discrepancy of ten thousand bayonets in the total strength of the Japanese field army south of Mukden.

While one officer discourses on the advantage to the Russian artillery of having for years employed smokeless powder, not only on active service, but at peace manoeuvres, another report, on tactics, alludes to the disadvantage under which the Russian guns labored in not employing smokeless powder. There are frequent instances in which a report commencing as a personal narrative suddenly lapses into the third person, with no indication as to the identity of the informant referred to. These may be comparatively small points, but such slips should not mar the accuracy which is expected of an official history.

An introductory chapter on the organization for war of the opposing armies would have very greatly assisted the reader who is not versed in the text-books on the subject, and is immediately concerned with such questions as the relative strengths of a Japanese and Russian battalion, or the difference between a regular and reserve unit of the latter army. It is true that most of such questions are unravelled before the conclusion of the three volumes, but the student should be enabled to start equipped with a useful knowledge of these matters. A thoroughly good index to each volume would go far towards remedying this shortcoming—but the existing index can only be characterized as an inadequate attempt. The lesson from Manchuria is none the less distinct because conveyed with lack of literary finish and in cumbersome form. The condemnation of military faults which is conveyed by silence can be as biting as that poured out in winged words, and no amount of expurgation can disguise the bitter truth concealed in these letters from Manchuria.

Behemoth and Leviathan have ever formed the parable for opposing monsters who were deprived of a common arena for battle. Yet in these volumes we see Leviathan leaving his natural element and gradually establishing his supremacy over Behemoth on land. Both the fact and its explanation are now matters of past history, but they lose none of their weight as warnings for the future in their narration by the spectators of the duel. The struggle may be repeated by another pair of gladiators of similar attributes. Will the verdict again

be in favor of the island race? The means of ensuring success, humanly speaking, cannot be more plainly recognized than in the record of this great struggle.

The Russian army, solid and immobile as Behemoth, trusting only to its crushing weight of numbers, has been overthrown. Japan has transferred all the matchless strength and agility of Leviathan to a fight on shore. How was the miracle accomplished? Many and various have been the explanations. The teaching of the German, Meckel, in the art of war, bushido, relentless cunning, an infinite capacity for taking pains, imitative adaptability—all these have been in turn assigned as the reason for Japan's astounding victories. Still, one after the other, the British officers' reports from the seat of war convey the same message; mind has defeated matter—long preparation

Russian forces into the neighborhood of Liao-Yang. Russia had no chance of escaping the fate of those who make themselves "weak everywhere." By this time continual retreats and invariable defeat had affected the Russian morale.

It is interesting to note how few battles were fought by the Russians for military reasons. The fight on the Yalu, the abortive expedition under Stakelberg for the relief of Port Arthur, the affair of Hei-Ku-Tai, the whole of the fighting on the Sha-Ho were engagements precipitated entirely for political reasons, and, as we are told, more for the sake of diverting the attention of the Russian nation from internal matters than in the hope of achieving a useful military purpose. There remain the battle of Nan-Shan, the fighting around Port Arthur, and the long-drawn

The discipline of the men was excellent. There is no more enduring patient being, I believe, than the Russian soldier. He does not grumble or criticize, and bears all the hardships, many of them unnecessary ones, which are incidental to a campaign, with fortitude. He was severely tested in 1904." And again:—

The infantry soldier "is a quiet, well-behaved, good-tempered, easily-led, and easily-disciplined man. . . . His courage is beyond suspicion, and even very heavy losses do not appear to affect his morale. . . . His strong point is stolid endurance rather than brilliant dash. . . . Taken all in all, the Russian soldier when joining as a recruit is second to none, though the finished article may be behind the trained soldier of other Powers."

For Russia's antagonists the reporting officers have nothing but praise. Far superior

were so good that nothing had to be borrowed or purchased from the shore."

If the field the Japanese organization, and especially the General Staff work, appears to have been equally conspicuous for its excellence. On every occasion, and with all their armies, the reports speak of the precision, accuracy, and absence of fuss with which the staff work was conducted.

THE WESTERN LAND OF PROMISE

Following is the first of a series of articles to appear in the Standard of Empire by a new contributor whose intention it is to settle in British Columbia:

"To traverse climes beyond the Western Main, Where wild Oswego spreads her swamps, around And Niagara stuns with thundering sound."

So says Goldsmith in his "Traveller," and, for our part we shall soon be West, far more West than the "wild Oswego." Boer rule, or the financial depression, or what you will, has caused us—three married men, with our families—to leave the Transvaal, where we had spent some years, and after many confabs we have decided to try luck in British Columbia.

We have selected British Columbia in preference to the older portions of Canada as it appears to us to offer more scope for our energies, and we are being joined by a fourth friend at Montreal, where he journeys from one of the eastern states of the United States of America. He is a farmer, the only one of our party, as I am a civil engineer and estate agent, and the other two men are respectively a civil engineer and a prospector who has been farming in the Transvaal, with fair success, although not enough to keep him there.

However, we are all used to work, whatever it may be, and I have no doubt that we shall succeed in winning a modest competence, perhaps even better, in the land where we are going to, where we shall not hesitate to risk some small amount of capital in a fruit farming venture.

That is our ultimate aim and end, but we are determined to get thoroughly acquainted with the local conditions before we invest in any land. This will, of course, delay us somewhat, but in the end we think we shall gain, as we shall be able to choose our ground with care and deliberation, and, moreover, we shall see the possibilities of other sources of income which we shall need until our trees come to maturity.

If we had a large capital it would not be necessary, perhaps, for us to consider this question, but as our available resources are quite modest we must pay a good deal of attention to mixed farming and, indeed any source of revenue that may be available, the more so that we are all married and have families.

The last few months we have devoted to collecting information about Canada from every quarter. Both the Government offices and our friends in Canada have been laid under contribution, and our stock of literature and piles of letters would fill a large box.

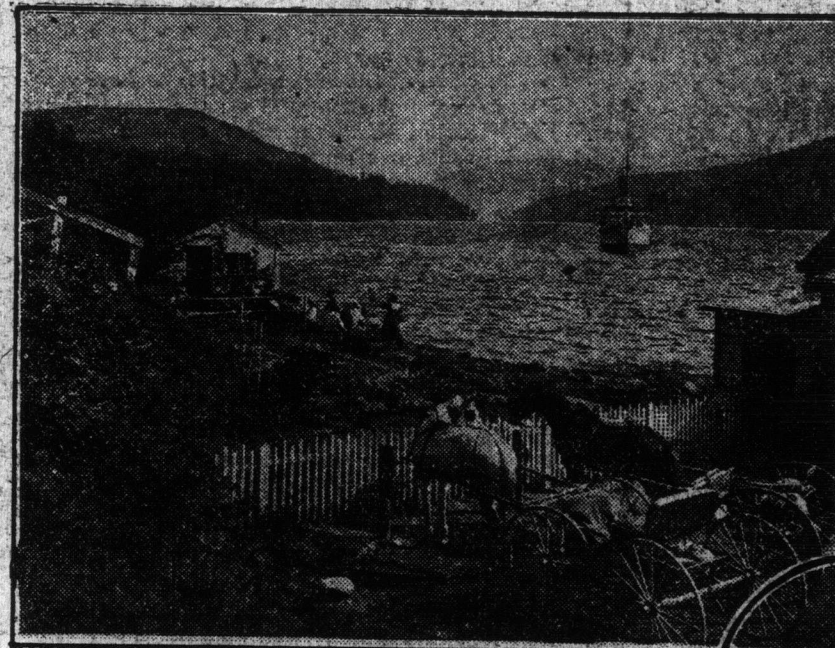
From this mass of information we have strained out a few salient facts, chiefly as to the right sort of clothing and the best gear to take out, and we have got together the following impedimenta for each family: Corduroy suits, rough strong boots, thick underwear, strong tweed skirts and coats, plenty of flannel underclothing. The children have jerseys and serge skirts, and thick clothing for the winter.

In the way of gear my wife and I are taking out our linen, silver, cutlery, some few favorite books and small pictures, and then we have a gun, revolver, saddle, and bridle. A good stock of useful carpenters' and shoemakers' tools is included, and with these two thermometers, a lactometer, small microscope, camera (No. O. Kodak), a box sextant, Abney level, and a few other useful instruments occupying but little space.

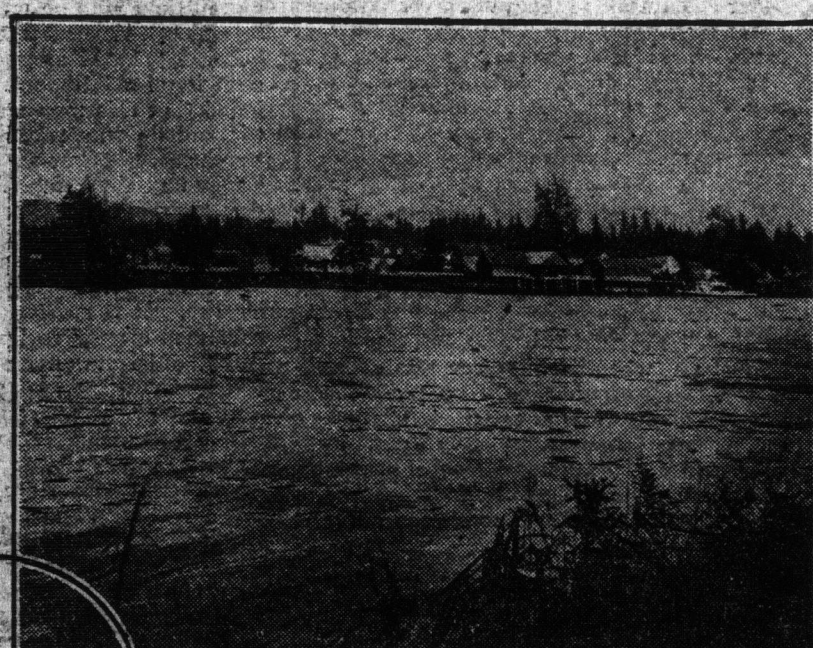
The engineer is taking his instruments and drawing materials with him in addition to clothing and a few other effects, and the prospector, who is on the water coming home from South Africa, will probably take with him much the same as we do.

We are despatching our heavy baggage ahead by goods train consigned to the ship. This is cheaper, and saves a good deal of worry. Our great query is the question as to which class we ought to travel by from Montreal, whether it should be "Colonist" or "Tourist." First class is, of course, out of the question. I am inclined to try "Colonist" for the sake of the difference in the fares, but the rest of the party favor the "Tourist." At the Canadian Pacific Railway offices, for it is by the Canadian Pacific Railway that we shall travel, the officials seem surprised at any one travelling other than first. No doubt we shall find that they have an excellent reason for their surprise by the literature issued by the company. It is really difficult to gather why any one should travel other than "Colonist," or, if very "finicky," by "Tourist."

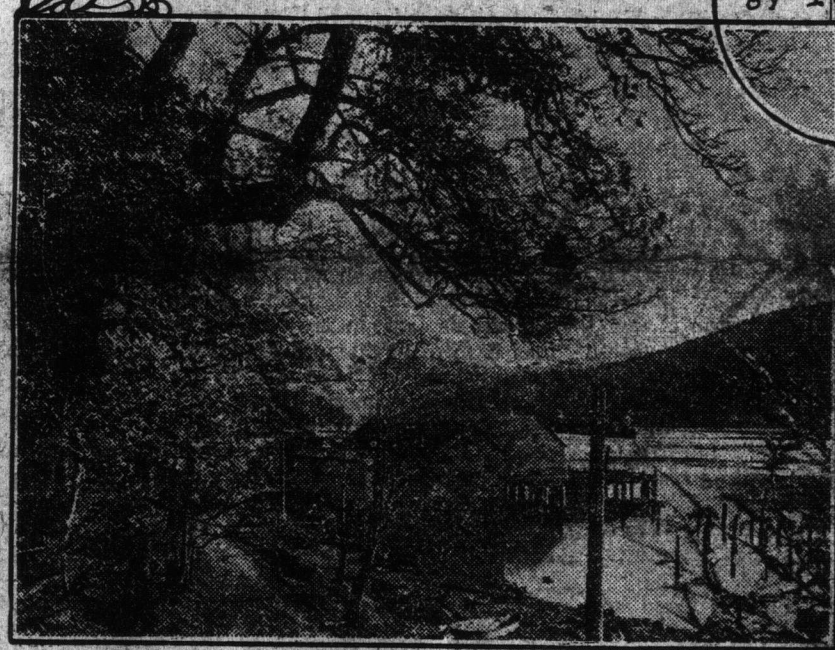
However, these doubts and knotty points will all be settled when we reach Montreal. Whatever happens, we all feel that we are taking a wise step in going out. We all have our ambitions, and we feel that the air of a free and progressive colony is much better suited to their growth and fruition than the moribund, if more exciting, political atmosphere of the Transvaal; so, although the expense of moving and the annoyance of breaking up our homes were great, yet we are confident that the future will more than repay us for these temporary drawbacks, and that in a few years we shall look back and wonder whether we were really in our senses when we questioned the wisdom of leaving South Africa.—Walter Howard.



CABLE SHIP IRIS AT NEW ALBERNI



ALBERNI TOWN AND SOMASS RIVER



THE WHARF - NEW ALBERNI



AT ALBERNI



RESIDENCE OF G. A. SMITH

has triumphed over the carelessness of conceit. Jiu-jitsu, the brain-applied skill of the weak, has been victorious over mere brute strength.

Japan throughout the campaign had but one controlling mind—one set and steadfast purpose—to achieve victory. To this the manhood, the resources, and the soul of the Japanese nation were all devoted from the moment the first transports left the inland sea till the last shot had been fired eighteen months later. Russia, on the other hand, spoke from the outset with a multitude of voices, was distracted by a multitude of aims. Neither policy nor strategy was considered in relation to the military situation or requirements. Policy dictated at St. Petersburg was distorted by the Viceroy of Manchuria and imposed its paralyzing fetters on Kuropatkin at the seat of war. Strategy was made to oscillate in sympathy with politics. The opening battle of the war is a conspicuous instance of the same treatment applied to tactics. General Zasulich was torn by conflicting instructions. From the commander-in-chief he had received orders not to become seriously engaged on the Yalu, but to retire fighting a rearguard action. The Viceroy had told him to stop the Japanese advance on that river at all costs. When the commander is attempting to reconcile such contradictory instructions the extent of the Japanese victory is scarcely to be wondered at. Not even the Russian general plan of campaign escaped the influence of vacillating purpose.

Col. Waters, who had been military attaché at St. Petersburg, and was attached to the Russian army in Manchuria, reports as follows:

"I was told that the original Russian plan of campaign, which was definitely approved by the Emperor in January, 1904, was that the Russian army should first of all be concentrated in Northern Manchuria and not assume the offensive until sufficient numbers had been assembled in that region. Harbin was manifestly the centre to be selected. This plan, after having been definitely decided upon as the best on under the circumstances, was entirely reversed prior to the arrival of General Kuropatkin in the theatre of war."

Thus the sound plan of initial concentration was abandoned—the Russian forces were dispersed over a vast area, and suffered the natural consequence of continual defeats in detail. Until the concentric advance of the victorious Japanese had shepherded the scattered

battles around Liao-Yang and Mukden as purely military combats. To these heavy drawbacks in the direction of the campaign the writers add much which reflects on more direct and personal control on the field of battle. "A house divided against itself cannot stand," and this dangerous condition appears to have been the rule rather than the exception among all the staffs of the Russian army at the front. Strong corroborative evidence of a similar state of things within Port Arthur has recently been given by a book written by a Russian, and seems to have been largely responsible for the premature surrender, which receives the rare distinction—in this official history—of direct condemnation. The very unsatisfactory system of appointing officers, the perfunctory attention to training in peace-time, and a universal predilection in favor of purely defensive tactics, whether in the case of an army or a battalion, are other causes which are mentioned as contributory of the Russian debacle. Against all these drawbacks there seems but one merit to assign to the Russian army—the magnificent qualities of the rank and file, of whom Col. Waters writes: "The general physique was very good. . . .

in intelligence and training, the Japanese seem to have at least equalled the Russian rank and file in individual courage, tenacity, and power of enduring punishment. The Japanese officer is unsurpassed in professional keenness, in qualities of leadership, and in single-minded devotion to the cause of the army and the nation rather than to personal and individual distinction. But it is as exponents of strategy, as masters of tactics, as models of foresight and trained preparedness that these volumes reveal the leaders and general staff of the Japanese army. Where even the divisional general on the Russian side scarcely had a copy of the inaccurate survey of the country, which had been in their control for nearly a decade, every Japanese officer appears to have had an excellent map of Manchuria. From the date of the first landing at Chemulpo all the Japanese arrangements and movements appear to have run with the regularity of clockwork. Of the actual landing, Commander Wemyss, R. N., writes:

"The organization for the landing of about 21,000 men was, I consider, most perfect. . . . The arrangements made for landing the troops