

SESSIONAL PAPER No. 35a

I cannot close my remarks on the training of the Permanent Force without expressing my admiration of the performance of 'A' and 'B' batteries of the Royal Canadian Horse Artillery at Kingston under Lt.-Col. Burstall, on June 2. I have no doubt it is in some degree owing to this officer's able instruction and supervision that the Canadian Field Artillery appear to have attained to the degree of efficiency which, considering the circumstances under which they serve, has caused me considerable astonishment.

Coming to the Canadian Militia, the first conclusion I have drawn from my observation of their work is that there is an absence of uniformity in the standard of efficiency to which they have attained.

Some units are far ahead of others in this respect, and even in the same command they seem to differ considerably.

This remark does not apply to the field artillery to anything like the same extent as to the cavalry and infantry.

Of the nine cavalry regiments I have seen in eastern Canada only two appear to me to have attained a standard of efficiency commensurate with the material in men and horses which they possess and the opportunity they have had.

I was favourably impressed with the standard of training efficiency reached by the two brigades of field artillery which I saw at Petawawa. Their riding, driving, manœuvre and firing practice seemed to me very remarkable in view of the short time they had been together in camp and the few opportunities they have.

As regards the field training efficiency of the infantry, I am of opinion that their methods of carrying out company and battalion training, so far as I saw them, are not up to date or suitable to the requirements of modern war, but I am compelled to add that, when I saw them manœuvre in the field, all ranks showed greater aptitude and knowledge than I should have thought they possessed.

The plans made and carried out by brigadiers were fairly sound and, on the whole, regimental and company commanders displayed intelligence and initiative in directing and leading their commands. I observed, however, many faults and mistakes which would not have occurred under a better system of company and battalion training.

Coming now to the training methods generally adopted, and commencing with the cavalry, I have already expressed the opinion that, as a whole, this arm is decidedly behind the others in regard to field efficiency, but I do not think that Canadian Militia cavalry officers are altogether to blame for this state of affairs.

It appears to me that the proper rôle of cavalry in a country like eastern Canada has not been correctly appreciated, and that the energies of those responsible for its training and inspection have not been used in a right direction.

In the whole of eastern Canada there are hardly any open spaces which admit of the employment of that form of engagement known as 'shock action.' If the most highly trained cavalry in the whole of Europe were put down to fight in this country they would find no opportunities of employing 'shock tactics' with any effect, and they would be compelled to act as mounted rifles.

But besides the character of the country there are other weighty reasons why the Canadian Militia cavalry must rely for their power of offence upon the rifle rather than upon the sword.

Amongst the most important of these reasons are—

- (a) The class of horse they ride, both as regards breeding and training.
- (b) The short time they are brought together.
- (c) The entire lack of highly trained regimental, squadron and troop leaders.
- (d) The impossibility of training higher commanders.

I think the rôle of cavalry in this country is to act altogether as mounted rifles, and the training on the cavalry should tend towards securing efficiency in this direction.