AN EARLY MILITARY MEDICAL SERVICE

Now for the first time, at least in English history, we find a Commander-in-Chief making regular provision for the medical and surgical treatment of his sick and wounded. Henry V, before he set sail for the Battle of Agincourt on 11th August, 1415, enlisted in his command a medical service. Early in the year (the indentures bear date 29th April 1415) the King had agreements drawn up with his physician Nicholas Colnet and his surgeon Thomas Morstede. Each was to have the daily pay of twelve pence, and to have a guard of three archers, each archer receiving the daily pay of six pence.

Thomas Morstede, esquire, and chirurgeon to King Henry IV, V, and VI, one of the sheriffs of London in 1436, gave unto the church of St. Mildred built upon Walbrooke a parcel of ground, containing in length from the course of Walbrooke toward the west 45 feet, and in breadth from the church toward the north 35 feet, being within the gate called Scalding wike, in the said parish, to make a churchyard wherein to bury their dead’, wrote Stow in his Survey of London. The site of Scalding wike today is in St. Mildred’s Court, between the National & Provincial Bank on the east, and the Midland Bank on the west.

We do not hear of Nicholas Colnet being furnished with any assistance. Anything like hospital treatment of disease was probably impossible in a campaign of those days; and a staff of physicians could hardly have had any proper facilities for using whatever knowledge they may have possessed. On the other hand, Thomas Morstede, the surgeon, was accompanied by a considerable establishment. When a wound had been received life could often be saved, or efficiency preserved, by immediate surgical treatment. The surgeon-general, as we may call him, was accordingly directed to take with him twelve of his own craft. Each of the twelve was to receive the daily pay of an archer; and in addition to the daily twelve pence, a quarterly allowance of a hundred marks was assigned to each of the two chief medical officers.

Nearly a month later Morstede presented a petition to the King praying for a sum of money for the purchase of such things as were necessary for his office, and also that all persons engaged in the surgical service of the army should be directed to act under his instructions, and should receive such wages as he should appoint. A third request was for a transport service, modestly limited to a chariot and two wagons. Morstede wished also to know what wages he was to receive, and how many attendants were to be allowed him. The King’s reply granted the chariot and wagons for the ambulance service and twelve assistants: but it is not clear that these twelve were the same surgeons whom Morstede had been originally directed to take with him.

Six pence a day could not have been a very attractive remuneration. Accordingly we are not surprised to find Morstede afterwards applying to the King for power to press, “as well within as without franchise birth, persons of his craft such as he should choose to accompany him”. In the following year, that it may not be necessary to return to the subject, the King issued a writ to Morstede and William Breawardine, his colleague, to this effect:

“Know ye that we have appointed to you, conjointly and severally, surgeons and other workmen, to take and provide without delay for the making of certain instruments necessary and fitting for your mystery, such as may be required for our present campaign beyond the sea”.

The army, raised and equipped with such care and forethought numbered, it is said,
6,000 men-at-arms and 24,000 archers. Cannons as effective as the manufacturing skill of that day could produce, and other engines of war had been procured. So effective and so well prepared an army had never before been collected in England for service abroad. A splendid relic of the expedition remains to this day in the Record Office. On 20th July a roll was prepared in which should be written the names of all who were to set forth with the King. It is still to be seen, a splendid example of the caligraphy of a time when that art was approaching its perfection.

REFERENCES

E. F. St. John Lyburn, M.B., B.Ch., B.A.O., B.A.(Mod.).

PROGRAMME OF EVENTS, 1966

Particulars of events usually associated with "Corps Week" have been circulated to Commands and sent to all retired officers who are associate members of the Headquarter Mess.


Thursday, 23rd June. R.A.M.C. Officers Annual Dinner (Note change of day).

Friday, 24th June. A.G.M., R.A.M.C. Funds Officers’ Branch, R.A.M. College, 2 p.m.
R.A.M.C. Officers’ 'At Home'—Headquarter Mess, 4 p.m.


Religious Services
Thursday, 23rd June. Roman Catholic Church Service (Holy Mass)—Westminster Cathedral (St. George's Chapel), 11-30 a.m.

Sunday, 26th June. Corps Sunday—Drumhead Service 11 a.m. followed by March Past of serving soldiers, old comrades and members of R.A.M.C. Association.

Thursday, 15th September. R.A.M.C. and R.A.D.C. Swimming (final day), 6 p.m. followed by subscription supper R.A.D.C. Mess,