FIELD MEDICAL UNITS: THEIR MOBILIZATION, ORGANIZATION, ALLOTMENT, ETC.¹

By Lieutenant-Colonel D. M. O’CALLAGHAN.
Royal Army Medical Corps.

While most officers have a practical knowledge of the subject of the mobilization, organization, and allotment of field medical units, it is especially desirable that all junior officers should familiarize themselves with it, and not leave it lightly to those who may have to accept all its responsibilities. Knowledge is good, but on mobilization, when we shall all be working at high pressure, it is especially useful, and very happy will be the lot of those commanding officers who find their subordinates not only willing but able to help.

Without quoting extracts from regulations, mention must be made of a few of the more important headings: Mobilization is the process by which an armed force passes from a peace to a war footing. It may be general or partial. For the latter, special instructions are issued from the War Office. In the case of a field medical unit, which is a new creation, the procedure is practically the same, though the stages of evolution towards a perfect war machine must necessarily be slower and the process more difficult. The place of mobilization is the place where a unit is made ready to proceed on active service, and must not be confounded with the place of joining, which is where regular reservists join on mobilization. The day of mobilization is, unless otherwise ordered, the day following that on which the order to mobilize is received from the War Office. A unit is considered to be mobilized when its personnel and animals have been completed to war establishment, the whole of its war outfit received, horses shod and harness fitted.

The war establishment is the number of officers, warrant officers, non-commissioned officers and men, animals and vehicles with which the unit takes the field and which are to be maintained during the war, and takes effect without further authority from the first day of mobilization. Particulars can be found in War Establishments. The details left at the base are also shown there, and are defined in Field Service Regulations, Part II. The war outfit consists of: (1) War equipment, (2) clothing and necessaries, (3) regimental supplies, and (4) medical and veterinary equipment.

¹ Précis of a lecture delivered to the officers of the Royal Army Medical Corps, Portsmouth District, February, 1914.
Field Medical Units

(1) War equipment is the whole equipment with which a unit takes the field, and consists of: (a) Personal equipment, comprising all that the soldier takes with him everywhere, even if transferred or attached to another unit, and (b) regimental, which is unit equipment; in fact, all the rest—vehicles, stationery, stores, etc., as shown in Army Form G 1098 series, and is drawn from the ordnance department.

(2) Clothing and necessaries comprise the personal kit of the soldier, details of which can be found in Clothing Regulations, and Regulations for the Territorial Force.

(3) Regimental supplies consist of the rations and forage carried by units in the field. See War Establishments and Allowance Regulations.

(4) For medical and veterinary equipment see corresponding regulations. Medical equipment for field units is held at the place of mobilization or forwarded without requisitions.

How Allocated.

The field medical units are cavalry field ambulances and field ambulances, and to save time this lecture is chiefly confined to the latter. Let us now consider how the personnel is provided. Officers are posted by the deputy director of medical services, acting under instructions from the War Office through the general officer commanding-in-chief. For the rest the War Office has fixed an establishment on the following lines:

(1) A proportion of serving soldiers.

(2) A proportion of regular R.A.M.C. reservists.

(3) A proportion of other reservists from three sources, namely: (i) Reservists transferred from the infantry and Royal Garrison Artillery; (ii) special reservists, category "A"; and (iii) special reservists, category "E."

The serving soldiers are posted in peace to some unit, and are furnished with cards according to their sections and duties: Red for the nursing section; blue for the clerical section; yellow for the cooking section; and white for the general duty section. These postings are entered on Corps Form I, and care should be taken that men so allotted are acquainted with the work required of them on mobilization. The cards should be shown at kit inspections. The following are exempt: War Office clerks; the chief clerks of deputy and assistant directors of medical services; the personnel of the Army Medical Stores, Woolwich, Dublin, and Southampton, and of "D" Block, Netley.

The number of regular reservists allotted to each unit is shown
in Mobilization Instructions, Army Medical Service, Table IV, which includes 10 per cent for casualties.

The infantry and artillery reservists are ordinary reservists who receive three months' training on transfer, and after that eight days biennially. They join at their training centres. Category “A” represents the old Militia, and these reservists undergo six months' training on enlistment, followed by an annual training of fifteen days. They are posted by the officer in charge of records to the companies where their kits are stored. Category “B” are from the territorial R.A.M.C. They have to be efficient and present at their annual trainings, and they join at their own headquarters.

It will be seen from the above that a typical field unit is composed of divers elements. A stiffening of serving soldiers who should be well trained men, an almost equal number of regular reservists doubtless slightly rusty, and a very large proportion of special reservists, many of whom, even if well trained, are not perhaps as well disciplined or conversant with their duties in the field; and we should make a mental note here of the importance of the special reservist and the necessity for those who may at any time be in touch with him ensuring that he makes the best use of his all too limited training periods.

Horses are furnished and despatched to units under arrangement made by the deputy director of medical services. They arrive on the sixth day, and as the Army Service Corps details report on the fifth day they are ready to take them over on arrival and fit harness and mark horses the day after. This is new, and as some of us know, saves the officer commanding the unit considerable worry. I notice in Mobilization Regulations you are referred on this point to Remount Regulations, where you gain the interesting information that you will probably get a good many grey and white horses. Well, grey is a good colour; at least I have always found it so.

**Preparatory Measures.**

Railway time-tables for all units are prepared by the general officer commanding, showing details of all trains provided for personnel, horses, and material. A mobilization diary is prepared by the officer commanding the company, R.A.M.C., in conjunction with the officer commanding the Corps in the district or command and the general officer commanding, showing all the duties of everybody concerned as far as possible in the order in which they take place, from the first to the last day of mobilization, showing the date, time, and locality for medical examinations,
Field Medical Units

drawing of stores, etc. Enclosed in the same cover are mobilization orders for the carrying out of the duties by officers, warrant officers, and non-commissioned officers. These orders should be such that on receipt of them each responsible individual will know exactly what to do and how and when to do it without worrying others for additional information. Copies, with a copy of the diary and a list of documents such as returns, requisitions, indents, etc. (made out as far as possible), orders for reservists as to handing in certificates, marching to the inspection room, having their clothes marked and plain clothes disposed of, etc., and an index of contents are kept in envelopes addressed to units concerned. Unless one has seen some of these no idea can be formed of the work and care required to keep them up, especially as the alterations and amendments fully equal those of the more ordinary official books, and if it is borne in mind that at every centre not one but many units are mobilizing, their necessity and importance will easily be grasped.

The officer in charge of records keeps in touch with all reservists and allots them to various units; he keeps an addressed envelope containing complete instructions and a railway warrant for each man, which is posted at once on receipt of orders to mobilize. On this occurring, he prepares as early as possible a list of promotions to complete establishments. He forwards the documents of all reservists to officers commanding units, and carries on a voluminous correspondence with them during mobilization. If it is remembered that many reservists are continually notifying changes of address and that casualties are frequently occurring, some of the difficulties of an officer in charge of records will be appreciated.

THE OFFICER COMMANDING THE COMPANY.

The officer commanding the company, on whom the mobilization duties fall heavily, is not only responsible in peace for these preparatory measures, but also for the care and fitting (which should be checked at every training) of the clothing and boots of all reservists, also that the stores containing them are suitable and accessible, and he should test this whenever possible. He is responsible for the careful training of his serving soldiers in all capacities, and should offer them every incentive to work for advancement, carefully explaining to them that on mobilization promotions will be at once made from those who have qualified, and that a large number of additional non-commissioned officers will be required. Similarly he is responsible that all reservists are carefully trained and given every facility for learning their
duties during their trainings. On mobilization, if it be partial, he recalls all officers on leave and all soldiers on furlough. On general mobilization all ranks rejoin automatically. He arranges for the medical examination of serving soldiers and reservists (the examination of the latter used to be a preliminary, but is now a final one), and for the rations and accommodation of men joining. He clothes the reservists and obtains from them their life, identity, and reserve certificates, which he forwards to the regimental paymaster at Aldershot, and then sends them to units in accordance with orders received. He sends daily to the officer in charge of records a nominal roll of those who have joined and a statement of the remittances they wish sent to their families, messing charges, etc.

THE OFFICER COMMANDING THE UNIT.

Some people think the officer commanding the field unit has nothing to do; merely to walk in and find everything ready and all arrangements made; but when one considers the confusion and travail attendant on the birth of a new unit, the position is not so simple. Everything is no doubt arranged on paper. The mobilization orders, diary, etc., may be complete, but let us not forget that the officer commanding the company will have departed, together with his quartermaster and many of his subordinates, and the commander of the unit will probably find that many of the duties laid down are incomplete, and that details arriving from places of joining will for this reason be less advanced in their preparation than the schedule dictates. Apart from these "alarms and excursions" his duties are laid down in Mobilization Regulations, paras. 197-233. Briefly they are as follows:

(1) If his establishment is not complete he must wire to the officer in charge of records for additional reservists, who may be supplied from "reliefs and miscellaneous" at the depot.

(2) He will send Army Form D 418 (separation allowance) to the record office, and Army Form 01796 (allotments of pay) to the regimental paymaster, a much harder task than it sounds; with them he sends also, if not already done, life, identity, and reserve certificates.

(3) He sends all medals, also if they wish it wills of soldiers, to the officer in charge of records.

(4) He will have to examine all documents of reservists so as to apportion qualified men to his various sections, and to make temporary promotions. He will then forward duplicate attestations, conduct sheets, and medical history sheets to the officer in charge
Field Medical Units

of records. He will retain Army Form B 103 (casualty form, active service) until he arrives at the theatre of war, when he will forward the forms with a nominal roll to the adjutant-general's office at the base. Army Form B 122 (field conduct sheet) is kept for use.

(5) He sees that all ranks are in possession of an active service pay-book, identity disk, and iron rations.

(6) He reports progress every evening through the regular channel to the general officer commanding, giving reasons for any departure from the normal.

He has a definite limited number of days to do all this and to mobilize, and he must never get behindhand. The time of departure is fixed and cannot be altered; ready or unready he must go, so it will be seen that in spite of cut-and-dried arrangements he has a fairly anxious time. I have been through it myself, and can assure those who have not that it is a high trial of one's personality and requires a cool head as well as organizing and driving powers. One's unit is not a finished car only requiring oil and petrol to keep it going; it is, to use an engineering term, an "unassembled" unit, and has to be "assembled" with the assistance in many cases of insufficiently trained mechanics. One cannot afford to sit comfortably with one's hands on the lever, but must don the overalls and work in the shops oneself.

The chief object of this brief account of the mobilization of field units is to arouse interest and stimulate a desire for a knowledge only to be obtained by personal effort. Everything has been so carefully thought out that it is hard to suggest any improvements; but improvement is generally possible, and I always like to see our juniors attack problems with open minds. As Descartes says: "In order to seek truth it is necessary once in the course of one's life to doubt as far as possible of all things." In doubting, young minds are brought to consider them, untrammeled by the prejudices and grooves of older men. May the results be good! For myself, I should like to see reservists joining at the place of mobilization, and I think that if a retired officer and non-commissioned officer were employed at each centre they would relieve officers commanding in peace, and there would be less confusion and a minimum of trouble on mobilization, while on departure of the units the officer commanding details would have an easier time in bringing order out of chaos with his remaining odds and ends. Bearing in mind also that our raison d'être is war, I consider that all officers should not only have full access to the secret mobilization documents but that their study should be enforced.