MILITARY CONVALESCENT DEPOTS IN FRANCE DURING THE GREAT WAR.

By L. GRAHAM BROWN, M.A., M.D. OXON., ETC.
Lately Acting Lieutenant-Colonel, Royal Army Medical Corps.

(Concluded from p. 202.)

We arrive now at the consideration of, undoubtedly, one of the most important influences at work in the matter of benefiting the mind of the average convalescent patient; one which depended upon the means at hand of providing entertainment during leisure hours, and particularly that period between supper and bed-time which in winter would otherwise have dragged on so long. The means for this did not vary much in different depots, and consisted chiefly of brass bands and orchestras, and cinemas and concert party entertainers. The important work of these was fully recognized by the authorities. Hence, it was not surprising to find that the finally authorized establishment of personnel of a fully constituted convalescent depot allowed thirty bandsmen and entertainers as a permanent nucleus towards the formation of such pleasure-making concerns. A similar number was allowed to be recruited as temporary personnel from the ranks of the patients themselves and in accordance with the previously described system of patient employment. The value of bands and orchestras could not be exaggerated, and every depot was justly proud of them. Some even did not rest content with a brass band only, but possessed a fife and drum, and a bag-pipes band as well. These were usually kept very busy, since they were employed on all and every possible occasion; such, for instance, as upon route marches to and from the ground where physical exercises were daily undertaken, to the station when large bodies of “fit” men left the depot to entrain for their base depots, and finally, in the depot grounds themselves, or near neighbourhood, when band selections were deemed advisable by way of entertainment alone, or in conjunction with a sports meeting or ceremonial parade. The orchestra, on the other hand, consisting of brass, stringed and reed instruments, was reserved for special occasions, and provided concerts of itself, or aided at the performances of the concert party, or else played dance music whenever the men sought amusement in this direction.

Concerning the true value of concerts and concert party entertainers one could very readily write volumes. At the same time it would be difficult to exaggerate their influence and merit. At base depots as no less in the front areas their existence was proved to be invaluable. They afforded necessary relaxation of mind for the “Tommy,” and served to turn his thoughts away, for the time being, from the horrors, discomforts and monotony of war. In the convalescent depot this form of entertain-
merit was greatly encouraged, and every facility given the performers to make their displays as bright and attractive as possible. As might be surmised the style of performance usually approximated to that of the music hall idea, where individual talent could appear at best advantage and provide a variety of "turns" such as delight the mind of the average soldier. At special seasons, notably at Christmas and Easter, concert parties did not hesitate to blossom out into company artistes and present pantomimes, which, though usually of a well-worn character, often out-rivalled, if not in stage effects, certainly then as regards rough humour, the more orthodox efforts of their civil brethren. As a rule the large dining hall served as a concert room, and herein a permanent stage and proscenium were erected; with footlights, curtains, scenery, and an orchestra playing in the auditorium it was not difficult sometimes to imagine oneself sitting at a good-class London or provincial music hall. Talent was generally readily forthcoming and the party usually included one or two "professionals" of civil life. Hence in the matter of make-up, and the manifold tricks and artifices of "putting it across the footlights" there were no two ways about it; an actor either "made good" or "got the bird" according to the merit, as assessed by his comrades, of his own individual efforts. A "female" impersonator, who either sang in a high falsetto or danced gracefully or gawkishly according to "her" degree of ability, was an essential and constant member of every concert party. In addition there were the tenor, the baritone, the bass, and one or more comedians, some or all of whom could indulge also in concerted items or short sketchy acts, humorous, dramatic, or otherwise. Such performances were of almost nightly occurrence, and one was wont to leave them feeling that the evening had indeed passed merrily enough.

In addition to these entertainments of a local character, mention too must be made of the periodical visits of "Lena Ashwell Concert Parties," a most excellent institution carried on under the auspices of the Y.M.C.A., and greatly appreciated by all troops on the Lines of Communication and at base depots who happened to have the opportunity and good fortune of attending the concerts. They were usually mixed companies of from six to eight ladies and gentlemen, all of whom were personally chosen by Miss Lena Ashwell for special ability in their various accomplishments. As a rule such a company of artistes exerted a tremendous influence upon its audiences, and, as regards the convalescent patient, served to take his mind altogether off the war, and to bring him in touch with softer influences and memories of his home life in England or other country whence he came.

Lastly, the authorities of some convalescent depots, in their desire to provide easy and congenial entertainment for their men, bought whole cinema plants and set them up in their dining halls. The money for this outlay was provided out of depot funds, the whole sum in the course of a very short time being easily recoverable by means of the receipts taken at
Military Convalescent Depots in France during the War

Each performance. Such receipts too were dependent upon a mere nominal charge of a penny or twopence as prices of admission. Changes of programme were effected twice weekly by means of an arrangement whereby the depot subscribed to a circulating library, controlled by a service of the Army itself or some Parisian firm of film-makers.

The popularity of such an entertainment need not be described. Suffice it to say that wherever there was a Cinema available for soldiers, thither they flocked.

To sum up now the effects of these concerts and other entertainments upon the convalescent patient, one might say that they taught him, whether the prevailing influence was one of sentiment, sentimentality, humour, callousness or even irresponsibility, to maintain, and perhaps even to regain, his wonted spirit of cheerfulness, his indifference to his fate, his belief in the justice of his cause, and finally his determination to see the business through, and, whilst doing so, to get the best out of his present mode of life and circumstances. That he was resolved to place a bold and cheerful front upon his future destiny was plainly evident from an observation of his conduct and bearing upon that day when, again physically and fighting fit, he marched off to the station along with his fellows to the stirring notes of the brass band, and with swinging step, his head up-lifted, a smile on his face, and a joke on his lips, he dared all and sundry amidst his passers-by to answer aught but "No!" to his famous sally "Are we down-hearted?" Many such left the depot grateful for the efforts done to make them comfortable and happy, and not a few of them converted into real and active propagandists on behalf of the merits of such an institution. In the latter way the fame of individual depots was spread throughout France and Belgium wherever soldiers happened to be, and particularly the Front areas; consequently very often when a man became a casualty, if it was not a question of his luck of reaching "Blighty," it certainly resolved itself into one of which convalescent depot he should be fated to attend.

Let us pass now to a consideration of the physical influences at work upon the convalescent patient. Previously mention has been made of the necessity on the part of the authorities of providing, not only convenient and congenial, but also healthy sites in their choice of areas for the establishment of convalescent depots. For the most part these sites were near the sea, enjoyed pure and bracing air, and afforded the many opportunities of health-giving exercises and pastimes connected with such seaside places. Not the least of these was sea-bathing, and in the warm summer months it was no unusual sight to see thousands of convalescents partaking at one and the same time of the delights of this healthy form of exercise. But apart from such a setting, however great the influences of such might have been, there were the direct influences of work and play upon the physical welfare of the patient, and these proved undoubtedly the greatest factor and the most beneficial asset in the curriculum of his daily life towards the recuperation of his bodily strength, and the regaining of his sense of well-being.
Let us deal firstly with that form of bodily exercise, of which all convalescent patients at some time or other during their stay in the depot were obliged to partake. It was rightly termed "physical and recreational training." It was placed directly under the charge of an officer, usually a regular and of the rank of captain, and in most instances a graduate of the Army Gymnastic Staff Corps. He had as assistants personnel in the shape of two or more serjeant-majors instructor, and usually not less than twenty serjeants instructor, these being either graduates of the same peace-time institution, or else, as among the lower grades, men drafted from regiments on the line, and after a course or two of training passed as proficient for such an occupation and transferred for duty to the Army Gymnastic Staff. As previously noted a convalescent depot counted on its list of permanent personnel the above-mentioned staff of physical training instructors. Their work was both important and arduous. Not only had they to act as instructors in the ordinary routine of physical training, but also they must needs interest themselves in and encourage every form of sport and physical activity in the depot, the latter at times including even morris and country dancing as well as that of the ordinary kind. The instructors were allotted for this duty equally amongst the several companies, and upon their shoulders fell the responsibility of encouraging their men to enter for all the various forms of monthly competition in sport, and by so doing promote the spirit of competition and healthy rivalry throughout the whole depot.

Physical training in itself was no hard-and-fast dull routine of daily exercise, but for the most part appealed to the sporting instincts of the men. It resolved itself into nothing more nor less than a series of amusing games interspersed with more serious periods of disciplined exercise of both mind and body. A morning of such training was usually spent after the following fashion. Those patients, who were not required for divisional or depot employment or the usual fatigue duty, were paraded appropriately dressed for the occasion, that is to say, minus their belts, gaiters or puttees, in their separate companies and divisions under charge of their physical training instructors, and ready to march off at nine o'clock in the morning to their training ground. The latter was situated at a variable distance from the depot, but usually allowed of a route march of a mile or two either way. One or more bands accompanied the long column of 2,000 men or more on the march, and served to keep them in ordered formation. Having arrived at the appointed spot chosen for exercise the column was broken up promptly into small groups, each under the supervision of an instructor. Now began that system of physical "jerks," games and exercises, that became so well known and established throughout the whole British Army. A man was expected to do only so much as his physical condition allowed, but very often he set off in the morning, expecting to do very little, only to find himself unconsciously exercising himself to the fullest extent and unable to resist the fun and frolic and
mental attraction of that cleverly thought-out system of games and exercises. Then, too, the bands playing at intervals their varied selections of music greatly added to the general cheerfulness of the occasion. It might be imagined by some sterner critics that a performance such as this, in which cheerfulness and even a touch of hilarity proved the predominant note, was not conducive to the acquirement of that spirit of discipline necessary amongst such large bodies of men. They would be wrong, for actual experience demonstrated that men, so exercised, proved more amenable to discipline, and readily turned from the free and spontaneous expressions of their enjoyment to the willing and sober performance of what might be classed more military actions and duties.

It is granted, however, that the attainment of such perfection depended primarily upon the personality and efficiency of the officer in charge of such recreational training. He must needs be a real student of human nature, indeed a psychologist conscious or otherwise, and not only possessed of a real knowledge of this adopted system of army training, but also of the powers of leadership and command over men, of sympathy, tact and firmness, and above all of a sense of humour in keeping with that of the men themselves, and capable of overcoming difficulties or restoring, whenever occasion demanded, jaded and flagging spirits. Such an officer had usually risen from the ranks himself, had gone through the mill of pre-war discipline and training, had seen active service at the front, and had in fact seen and done more than any of those men he had been called upon to instruct. His own enthusiasm and spirit generally pervaded the atmosphere of the whole depot, and he kept ever in close contact with the men, urging, encouraging, and, if necessary, goading them on, whether it was in work or play, in their entertainments or their festivities; nor did he rest content with this but gave advice and help to many an individual out of the store of his own personal knowledge acquired from long and useful military service. At his word of command one has seen a laughing, shouting tangle of men turned into a sober, quiet and well-ordered parade standing to attention and awaiting almost eagerly, their next order. At mid-day as the troops marched into camp again after their morning's exercise their demeanour of pride and good discipline was well displayed as in turn the men of each Company obeyed the order "eyes right" to their commanding officer, who stood at the saluting point critically examining the results of that morning's work. And sometimes as he stood there the thought struck him, "are these indeed the same men who but a few weeks previously arrived at the depot dirty and unkempt in appearance, with depressed spirits, and with their bodies weak and bent from the results of wounds or maladies?"

Apart from this enforced routine of physical training during the mornings, a routine carried on even in wet weather by making use of the large dining halls as shelter, the afternoons were given over to all forms of voluntary sport. Their different nature has been touched upon
L. Graham Brown

before, and also the fact mentioned that each sport took the form of a monthly competition amongst the various companies, the winner acquiring as trophy a cup or shield. The commanding officer usually presented the latter at the close of the monthly competition at some gathering of the men, such as a concert or other entertainment. The enthusiasm with which the winning of each trophy was received not only by the successful company or division but by the whole depot spoke well for the spirit of good sportsmanship that prevailed. Moreover, it encouraged the unsuccessful ones towards greater efforts and determination to win in future competitions.

As regards the relative popularity of the various kinds of sport, it must be confessed that football, chiefly of the Association code, easily held first place in the estimation of the men. In fact, it is no uncommon knowledge that, given a football, a few leisure hours, and an open space of ground, a number of soldiers could easily find sufficient occupation, exercise, and full enjoyment. So, in convalescent depots, this sport claimed the attention of the greater numbers. Besides the hundreds of inter-company games that took place during the course of the monthly competitions, there were also inter-divisional, and even inter-depot matches played, at which there were large gatherings of interested spectators from the surrounding area. During the progress of these games partisan feeling ran high, though invariably it was in keeping with the good sportsmanship and good fellowship of all present.

After football came boxing, tug-of-war, and hockey, in order of appreciation, but there were found devotees of almost every form of sport from the baseball of the Canadians to cricket, basketball, or even less strenuous bowls. Mention, too, must be made of long-distance runs, which took place monthly, and usually on the neighbouring roads over a course of about three miles. For this, enthusiasm had generally to be worked up a few days ahead of the appointed day of the race, so that as many men as possible from each company might be encouraged to take part, even though they were unable, and not expected to run the whole distance. As a result, it was surprising the large numbers that actually took part on the day of the race, as many sometimes as two thousand or more, and whether these ran, walked, or hobbled the whole distance did not materially matter, since, by a system of giving points to the winning company for attempted endeavour rather than actual skill and practice in running, that company invariably proved the winner that possessed the greatest number of starters in addition to the greatest number of triers. To the actual placed men in the race, that is, to the first, second, and third, small prizes were given by way of encouragement and reward.

During the summer months it was the custom to hold occasional athletic meetings, and herein team-racing as well as individual effort were catered for. They proved, without exception, most popular gatherings,—the whole area as a rule attending—and they bade fair to rival almost in
Military Convalescent Depots in France during the War

290

every respect, even to the presence of the gentler sex in the shape of nurses, V.A.D. ladies, and the French inhabitants of the locality, similar club gatherings in England during the days of peace.

Naturally for so large a body of men, and for such a variety of games, a huge assortment of sporting articles and equipment was essential, such, for instance, as footballs, football-nets, and hockey balls and hockey sticks, cricket sets, boxing gloves, basket balls, and not to mention sporting kits, such as running singlets and shorts, football jerseys and boots. These were obtained for the most part by application to the British Red Cross Society, as likewise by private purchase from depot funds, the latter having been acquired in the form of donations from interested and generous visitors to the neighbourhood, or else from the Government purchase of dripping derived from the boiling down of the waste fat of the depot.

The Administration of Other Depot Departments.

No description of the convalescent depot would be complete without further mention of all those subsidiary departments, namely, the dental, bath and laundry, dining hall, pay, shoe-making and tailoring, barber’s, fire brigade, police, quartermaster, general maintenance, and orderly room, all of which formed an essential part in the complete machinery of depot administration. It will serve, then, to take each of these several departments separately, explain them, and show in what way their activities become correlated to the work of the depot as a whole.

Dental Department.—This Department was placed under the supervision of a qualified dental officer, assisted by two experienced mechanics. A dental surgery fitted with all the necessary appliances was allotted for the purpose. The work undertaken consisted of extractions, the filling of teeth, and the fitting of new dentures, and although perhaps bordering slightly on the style of “rough and ready” dentistry, it, nevertheless, served most efficiently from the military point of view. The condition of the average soldier’s teeth in the British Army was by no means good (statistics placed dental unfitness as high as seventy-five per cent), and it was soon recognized, especially after conscription came into force, when men were enlisted without regard to this side of their medical fitness, that dentistry, even though of a mere patching-up variety, must needs play an important part in the medical treatment of those on active service. Nor could any better place for treatment have been chosen than in the large convalescent depots, where the men not only remained some appreciable length of time, but where they had more leisure and were free from the vagaries and uncertainties of Front area work, and thus were enabled to receive the best attention. This arrangement, however, did not exclude the usefulness of dental establishments elsewhere, such as at base depots, and in connexion with general hospitals and casualty clearing stations, since work begun in one place, for example, the fitting of new dentures, could be completed in the next and this without causing delay, and hence...
L. Graham Brown

wastage of strength to the Army. Keeping the latter fact in mind, the medical officer of a division in his usual routine of early examination of new arrivals picked out all those in need of dental treatment, and sent them straightway to the dental surgeon to have their wants duly attended to. In this way they were practically assured of getting all requisite treatment even to the fitting of new dentures during their limited stay in the depot; but should they by any chance have had to leave before completion of treatment, they were always safeguarded on being sent to their base depots by being placed in the category of those requiring further dental treatment.

Baths and Laundry Department.—In the front area the British "Tommy" as a rule had not the facilities for washing and drying his own underclothing. Hence, recourse had to be made to divisional baths and laundries. Here, on an average of about once a month the men had baths and were supplied with a change of clean underclothing. Not so in the convalescent depot. In this place facilities for proper cleanliness were amply provided and hence more was expected of the patient in this respect. He was obliged to partake of a hot shower bath once a week, and at the same time to provide himself with a change of clean underclothing, and a system was worked out for the whole of the patients and personnel whereby each could and must avail himself in turn of the wash-houses and drying-rooms provided for the purpose. Furthermore, before being washed all dirty clothing had to be thoroughly fumigated, since, by no other means could a check be put upon the prevalence and spread of vermin amongst large bodies of men grouped together in close contact with one another.

Dining-hall Department.—The providing and serving of three meals a day for 5,000 men was in itself a very large undertaking. Dining-halls were provided to accommodate 2,500 men, which consequently necessitated two successive sittings for each meal. To each dining-hall were adjoined a cook-house, larder, butcher's shop, food preparing and washing-up rooms, the whole conforming to a system that minimized labour and facilitated the serving of hot and well-cooked meals to the men.

It was generally agreed that a well-fed soldier was invariably a contented one, and that should trouble arise its cause could readily be traced to some department of the commissariat. Hence the great importance of strict and constant supervision of this department on the part of the authorities. The food provided was the ordinary army rations, and not hospital diet. Consequently, those in charge were responsible for presenting this food in as palatable and varied a form as possible, at the same time having due regard to economy. In order to make the men realize that everything possible was being done for their welfare, a Messing Committee, consisting of the quartermaster, his subordinate assistant the quartermaster-serjeant and two or three convalescent patients nominated from each division, was appointed. This Committee met daily
Military Convalescent Depots in France during the War

for the purpose of arranging the menu after due consideration of the rations available.

This scheme of organization for the efficient carrying on of this department depended upon the following principles. Divisions fed separately, were served by their own appointed staff, had as far as possible menus differing daily from one another, took part in a monthly competition for efficiency, which was made to embrace proper cleanliness and regularity, and above all attempted to avoid any grounds for complaint on the part of the men on the score of insufficient or badly-cooked food, or the serving cold of intended hot meals. In this way a good deal of trouble was naturally avoided, but this itself did not suffice. It was the fixed duty of the orderly officer of the day to inspect all meal, kitchens, and food-preparing rooms, and to listen to all serious complaints whilst the men were actually partaking of their meals. He had power to deal at once with the source of complaint, and, if the complaint were justified, to order adjustment of it, and, if unable to do this, report the matter at once to his commanding officer. Such meticulous care brought its own reward, for it meant that half the battle was already won in bringing contentment of body and mind to the vast majority of men throughout the depot.

Before concluding a description of this department, one must not omit to make mention of a side issue, namely, the fat extraction plant. This was concerned with the extraction of fat from the waste food and refuse, whilst not depriving "Tonimy" of all the fat he wanted in the form of food. By the method of boiling down and filtering, large quantities of fat were obtained, duly placed in tins and transferred to the Government department at the Base, which in turn sent it to England for utilization in the making of explosives for munitions. The Government paid the various units throughout France providing this commodity at the rate of about half a franc per lb. of pure fat; and it can be gathered how large a quantity was sent from a convalescent depot when it is estimated that depot funds benefited each month to the extent of about four thousand francs. This money was utilized entirely upon the men in providing them with luxuries in some shape or form whether it was extra food and drink at Christmas time, extra sporting material, or a contribution to the expenses of their entertainments, such as, outlay on a cinema plant, costumes for the concert party, scenery, stage properties, etc.

The dining-halls, as already has been stated, besides being utilized for their orthodox purpose, also served many others. Thus, they were used for lectures, dances, and in wet weather as parade grounds and places for physical and recreational training. And that they could fulfil all these purposes in a satisfactory manner certainly reflected great credit upon those responsible for these adaptations.

Pay Department.—An Army Regulation forbids the granting of pay to men on the sick list in general hospitals and convalescent depots. Whilst
it continued to apply to the former, a wise and tactful administration waived
the application of the rule to convalescent depots, and granted the privilege
to the patient of drawing a certain maximum, for the private ten francs a
week, and on an ascending scale for N.C.O.'s and W.O.'s according to rank,
that is to say, what was considered necessary to meet current expenses
whilst not leading him into the temptation of spending his money in
unprofitable enterprises, which, as a rule, were by no means difficult to find
in his new environment.

Now, in order to pay out this weekly allowance to five thousand men, a
well-organized system was an essential factor in the scheme of depot
administration. The dining halls were utilized for the purpose and the
actual process of payment was spread over several afternoons during the
week so as not to interfere unduly with the many other important duties
and activities of the men. An officer, usually the assistant adjutant and
quartermaster, was placed in control of the department, and was assisted
by a staff of permanent officials—comprising a staff-serjeant, a corporal and
one or two clerks—and a variable number of temporarily employed patients.
The necessary money was drawn from time to time from the local Army
Pay Office on the authority of the Depot Imprest Account, and the staff in
its daily routine of office work was obliged to keep accurate check of all paid
out moneys by means of signatures and totals in the soldiers' pay books,
and the so-called Army Acquittance Rolls. Since the sole responsibility
rested upon the officer making the payments, and Army Regulations forbade
the entrusting of government money to any rank but that of an officer, the
possibility of fraud was thereby considerably reduced. Such money for
payments and surplus cash was, of course, kept in the safe deposit provided
for the purpose in the orderly room.

Shoemaking and Tailoring Departments.—These departments housed
in Nissen huts, were under the control of permanent staff-serjeants who
were duly qualified masters of their respective trades. They were assisted
by a variable staff according to the stress of work on hand and culled from
amongst the convalescent patients themselves under that system of
employed labour already described. As a rule they were kept fully
occupied with repairing footwear and clothing, whilst the master tailor
did not hesitate to accept private work in his spare time from those who
were either too indolent to undertake their own repairs, or else put little
faith in their skill with the "housewife," without which no kit of the
soldier, strictly speaking, could be said to be complete. Besides this, both
shoemaker and tailor found their vocations highly profitable and their
assistance most welcome in the provisioning of "properties" for the
concert party.

Barber’s Shop.—One of the first principles inculcated into the mind of
the soldier was that he must endeavour to keep his hair short, and especially
so round about the nape of the neck. Perhaps it might safely be said that
the neglect of this order caused more trouble than any other between
294 Military Convalescent Depots in France during the War

"Tommy" and his C.O., or Regimental or Company serjeant-major. Strict disciplinary action was ever found necessary to urge the average soldier to conform to this regulation, and besides this every encouragement and facility were necessary. Hence in a convalescent depot a special barber's shop was provided and placed in charge of a permanent staff corporal. He was assisted by co-opted patients, who themselves had pretensions to the tonsorial craft. These, as can be imagined, were kept fully busy with the three to four hundred daily operations accruing from a total of five thousand men, each of whom found he required on an average a hair-cut at least about once every fortnight in order to enable him to retain his smart appearance and meet the wishes of his superior officers. Again, in their spare time, these barbers could engage in business on their own account and for private gain, since shaving, unlike hair-cutting, did not come within the category of free government provision though it was equally prompted by the rigorous upholders of neat and cleanly soldierly appearance.

Postal Department.—Letters and parcels were the only tangible method of communication between the soldier in France and his friends and kinsfolk at home. Hence one can readily understand how great was the task of the military postal department adequately to cope with the abundance of over-sea correspondence, an amount that increased rather than diminished as the war went on. Every convalescent depot added no mean quota to this vast bulk of mails. Here the soldier found more leisure for writing, greater opportunity on account of the encouragement and facilities, e.g., free paper and envelopes, writing desks, etc., afforded him by the various existing charitable institutions; moreover the desire to write was perhaps greater upon him since he had much to tell of the trials, troubles and dangers he had just come through, he was now enjoying comparative ease and immunity from danger, and, further, he could dilate at length upon his present occupations of work and pleasure. Therefore, not hundreds, but thousands of letters found their way daily into the pillar-boxes of the depot, and these had to be collected, censored and franked, and tied up in mail-bags for dispatch to the local army post office. In the same way thousands of letters and parcels had in turn to be received, sorted and delivered to the men. The whole question demanded, therefore, a special department, with office, sorting rooms, and an adequate staff all under the control of an officer, and in addition a thoroughly organized scheme for the receipt and delivery of mails. The task of censoring, too great and monotonous a duty for one officer alone, was divided amongst the General Duty Officers, occasionally assisted by the voluntary services of one or more of the "padres."

There can be no question but that this work of the postal department, when ably carried out, proved a source of great happiness and comfort to all these, both at home and on active service, who were separated sometimes for such long intervals from those they loved.

Fire Brigade Department.—With such a large collection of wooden
huts and buildings the risk of fire was always a menace to be adequately met. To meet requirements a hand-pumping fire engine was kept in a centrally-placed shed in the depot, and a specially trained squad of men were kept to serve it. A system of water mains with accompanying hydrants and reservoirs was established throughout the depot grounds, and moreover, an ample supply of water buckets, constantly kept filled with water or sand, was ready at hand within easy reach of every building. Besides this squad of specially trained firemen the whole of the depot complement, including both patients and personnel, were periodically exercised in the practice of fire alarm. On the sounding of the alarm all available men in the depot were required to fall in on parade with buckets in hand in respective stations near their various hutments and company lines, and under W.O.'s and N.C.O.'s were doubled to the scene of the outbreak, and there were set about their task of extinguishing the fire in a well-ordered and efficient manner. The orderly officer of the day assumed control of the whole direction of fighting the fire, and in this duty he became thoroughly versed after oft-repeated practices. Thus the risks attendant upon the outbreak of fire were reduced to a minimum.

Police Department.—To assist in the maintenance of good order and discipline a guard-room and police force were essential. These were put in charge of a serjeant of police, whose duties, though not of a very enviable nature, were certainly most responsible, and who must needs possess the qualities of command over men, firmness and tact in an unusual degree. He and his men were responsible for the safe custody of prisoners awaiting trial or punishment on the charge of severe breaches of military discipline, acted as escort at the daily orderly room trials by the commanding officer, helped to control large gatherings of men, such as at concerts and other entertainments, guarded depot property in general, or prevented trespassing, and in addition acted as pickets at the various entrances, exits and boundaries of the camp area to prevent illicit leave-taking on the part of the men both by day and night. In addition, a picket was generally employed for duty in the town area during that period of leave between 5 and 9 o'clock in the evening granted to men on pass. Their duties consisted in patrolling the streets and helping the town military police corps to preserve the local administrative routine orders.

Quartermaster Stores Department.—Naturally the responsibility and work of this department should have fallen upon the shoulders of the adjutant and quartermaster, but in actual practice it was found advisable, owing to the large amount of work connected with the adjutant branch of this officer’s duties, to give control of the quartermaster department to the assistant adjutant and quartermaster. In fact, the manifold duties connected with the adjutant and quartermaster departments resolved themselves into a division of labour, the senior officer performing those of the former department whilst the junior, his assistant, took over those of the latter. In this way more effective “administration” of both branches was found to be obtained.
The quartermaster's stores department might be likened to a general emporium on a small scale. It had its offices, store rooms, and receiving and dispatching platforms, and adjoining the main building were the food store, for meat, groceries and vegetables, and the coal and firewood enclosures. Centrally placed in the depot it was within easy reach of the dining-halls and their kitchens, and conveniently placed as regards means of transport either by light rail or road.

It would prove too tedious a task to enter into an enumeration of all the activities of this department as regards the provisioning of almost every commodity essential to the maintenance of the depot, whether it was the supply of food to the men, the refitting of them with clothing and equipment, the apportioning of coal rations, of cleaning materials and the supply of all those numerous articles and materials for the general maintenance and upkeep of the depot. Indeed, in its dealings directly with the Royal Army Service Corps, the Ordnance Supply Service, and the Royal Engineer Corps, and by means of its magic indent forms, it could furnish all kinds of articles from the humble bootlace for the "Tommy" to the elaborate electric light-stand for the officers' mess.

A clerical staff assisted in the work of keeping all necessary accounts and books, and every Government article in use in the depot, whether it were sock, shirt or vest; blanket, pillow or palliasse; plate, cup or basin; pick, rake or shovel, had each to be noted and duly accounted for. Stock-taking, usually about once every three months, was carried out systematically in order to check depot equipment and, whenever justifiable write off wastage owing to wear and tear. A process of decentralization lightened the task of distribution and lessened the burden or responsibility of the quartermaster. By this, divisions were made responsible for their own share of equipment, and since each division was supplied with a quartermaster-serjeant well versed and especially trained in this work, such responsibilities accepted by divisions were found to be not too difficult to bear, and at the same time were much appreciated by the central office.

General Maintenance Department.—Although the local administration provided a branch of the Royal Engineer Corps for the preservation of the depot buildings, the provision of new constructions on a large scale, the repair of the main roads, and the maintenance of water, electric, and sewage systems, it was nevertheless found necessary and more practicable to establish in the depot itself a department capable of effecting repairs of a minor nature, or that needed immediate attention, and of dealing with those hundred-and-one smaller details such as led towards improvement in the depot itself both as regards appearance as well as efficiency.

The carpenter's shop formed the basis or nucleus of this establishment and together with the sanitary department directed the control of those many and diverse activities associated with the proper upkeep of the depot. The whole department was placed under the control of a medical officer, assisted by a whole host of "employed" patients supplied by the Labour
Bureau. This officer, as can readily be imagined, was needed to possess business capacity, imagination, initiative and command in order to enable him to put ideas into effect, such as embraced practical schemes for ornamentation, sanitation, and all necessary repairs and improvements. Success on the part of this particular officer was borne out by such results as the following. The depot grounds were made to include large areas of vegetable gardens, which, when in full swing, provided fresh vegetables of every variety for the men, and were instrumental in saving the government, through underdrawing of rations. In these commodities many thousands of francs besides means of transport, had this condition of things not prevailed.

The general aspect of the depot was, moreover, beautified by means of flower beds and gardens, the planting of trees and shrubs, the bordering of paths with grass, and even the making of lawns, the keeping of rank grass cut short on the athletic fields, the erection of barriers and fences of rustic work or more sober structure, the painting of depot buildings without, the painting and ornamentation of offices within, the interior ornamentation of dining-halls, sergeants' and officers' messes, the clean appearance of cook-houses, latrines, incinerators and fat-extraction plant, sewage and drainage systems in general, accentuated the more so by the judicious application of black-lead for iron-work and white-wash in the neighbourhood of all these otherwise unsightly areas; the provision of painted notice boards and signs, the making of office tables, cupboards, racks, trays, and even, when the services of an expert cabinet-maker could be obtained, of articles of furniture for the messes such as would not have shamed the pretensions of many a London drawing room.

Thus, as one might gather, the question of a General Maintenance Department was one occupying a good deal of attention and energy if it were to bear results in keeping with the ambitions connected with the running of a well-ordered, highly efficient and attractive convalescent depot.

*Orderly Room Department.*—Lastly, one comes to that department, namely, the orderly room, which was the centre of control of administration over the whole depot, and was concerned with the task of correlating the activities of all the above-mentioned branches. This main administrative building was divided up into several rooms, comprising the commanding officer's office, the adjutant's office, or orderly room proper—an office for the administrative clerks, and another for the depot sergeant-major and his clerks and orderlies.

The work carried on in this department naturally embraced part of the commanding officer's duties, and the adjutant's in the matter of administration proper, such as touched upon outside relations, e.g., correspondence, the furnishing of records, the estimation of daily strength as derived from patient admissions and discharges, and that larger duty concerning the intimate knowledge and administration of the depot itself such as appertained to the discipline and welfare of the men, the supervision of
the work of divisions and the many depot departments just previously described, and the co-ordination of the whole into a definite, sound, and efficient policy. To attain to this high standard of efficiency, it needed great energy, determination, tact, and imagination on the part of that medical officer destined to find himself in command of such a large and important establishment. For success his policy must needs demand the following essentials, namely, the maintenance of a high standard of discipline, routine inspection of all convalescent patients and permanent staff personnel of the depot, constant supervision of all departments, the inspection of the whole area from the point of view of cleanliness, repair, improvement, and ornamentation; and finally the maintenance of a good moral tone amongst all the men, apart from the methods of discipline, by rigorous attention to their legitimate wants, such as were reflected in their appreciation of sufficient and palatable food, in the comfort of their living quarters, and in the full enjoyment, after the work of the day, of their sports, concerts, and other entertainments.

The adjutant, in the capacity of right-hand man to the commanding officer, assisted in all this, but more especially in the matter of discipline, with which he was intimately associated. Aided by the depot serjeant-major he directly controlled the work of all the special departments of the depot, e.g., the barber’s, shoe-making, tailoring, police, fire brigade, etc., such as were not directly under the charge of another officer, and drew up standing orders, approved by the commanding officer, for their proper guidance and administration. Moreover, as has already been remarked, he had charge of the Depot Imprest Account, made weekly payments to the men, kept accounts of all depot funds accruing from the sale of fat extraction products, or gifts from charitable institutions; supervised the accounts of the Serjeants’ Mess Fund, and, finally, controlled the Depot Lottery in the War Office scheme for the encouragement of the purchase of War Savings Certificates amongst soldiers on Active Service. In addition to all this, his other activities included his presence on all parades of the commanding officer, his attendance on the latter during hours of inspection, his conduction of the daily procedure of orderly room parade during the commanding officer’s trial of accused men, and, lastly, his attendance on Courts Martial either in the capacity of “soldier’s friend” or prosecutor or, in the absence of the former, of both.

As regards the office organization of this department, namely, the work of the various clerks employed and their adaptation of an efficient scheme of indexing, filing and keeping of correspondence, records and other information—a scheme whereby, for instance, information could be obtained at a minute’s notice regarding any man, admitted or discharged at any time during the life of the depot—it is unnecessary to dilate. Suffice it to say, that particular care had always to be exercised in this respect to ensure the smooth working of everything concerned. Moreover, in his task of co-ordination, and in his determination of policy, the commanding officer
L. Graham Brown

depended not only upon the loyal co-operation and enthusiasm of his
officers, with whom he held weekly conferences to discuss the welfare of
the depot, but equally upon that spirit of good fellowship and sympathetic
understanding that was wont to pervade all ranks throughout the British
Army.

CONCLUSION.

What inference, then, can be drawn from the existence of these institu-
tions throughout France during the progress of the Great War. The
purpose of their origin has already been made manifest at the beginning
of this work. It therefore remains only to confirm in this respect the
beneficial results obtaining both to the convalescent soldier himself and no
less to that ever-constant aim on the part of the military authorities—the
maintenance of the highest possible strength of efficient fighting forces in
the field. As regards the first factor, viz., the benefits accruing to the
man himself, no doubt can remain in the mind of the reader after due
consideration of all the influences—moral, spiritual and physical—actuating
on his behalf, that he left the depot appreciably strengthened as regards
his physical well-being and in his qualities of manhood, as manifested by
his courage and determination to face once again his arduous, monotonous
or dangerous services in the field such as he might be destined to under-
take. Ideas of fatalism were rife in the mind of the average "Tommy;" and it must be confessed that this spirit helped rather than hindered
him in his acceptance of a task imposed upon him by his country in its
determination to fight victoriously for the principles and ideals of humanity.
Then as regards the question of reinforcement for the front area—especially
in times of crises such as prevailed during the retreat of March, 1918, and
when, as is well known, the fate of the whole of the British Army was
imperilled, it is obvious that wastage could be more promptly accounted
for than if these reinforcements had wholly to be supplied from England,
and this too in the face of distance, the submarine menace, and difficulties
of transport that prevailed. Indeed, in this particular instance of crisis in
1918 statistics proved that between the months of March and August
convalescent depots in France, in returning no less than three hundred
thousand men as reinforcements to the Front, played no small part in
turning the tide of events and bringing about a check to the victoriously
on-rushing enemy.

Thus we see that out of a small beginning there was evolved a system
of convalescent depots throughout France such as reflected and creditably
upheld the greatness of thought and genius of British organization and
administration, and assisted, both from the humane and material points
of view, the welfare and efficiency of our men as fighting forces in the
field.