AN AREA MEDICAL EXERCISE.

By Colonel E. T. F. Birrell, C.B., C.M.G.

The following medical exercise was prepared as part of the winter scheme of training 1923-24, for regular officers, Royal Army Medical Corps, serving in the South-Western Area, Southern Command, and was carried out at Devonport in November, 1923. The notes on each task were issued to the officers taking part after they had handed in their work, and conferences followed, the results of which are embodied in the comments on officers’ work.

The general idea in this exercise is taken from another exercise contributed to the JOURNAL OF THE ROYAL MEDICAL CORPS by Major R. L. V. Foster, R.A.M.C., and myself, and the situations are in continuation of that exercise.

I am indebted to Major and Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel A. L. Ransome, D.S.O., M.C., D.A.A. & Q.M.G., South-Western Area, for preparing the tactical part of the scheme.

References: Provisional War Establishments, Part XXIII A, June 1, 1923; Field Service Regulations, vol. i, 1923; Field Service Regulations, vol. ii, 1920 (especially Chapter VI, operation orders); Training and Manoeuvre Regulations, 1913 (especially Section 14, appreciations), and R.A.M.C. Training, 1911.

GENERAL IDEA.


On June 12, 1923, Eastland, comprising the counties of Hampshire, Wiltshire, Dorset, and Somerset, with capital at Salisbury, declared war on Westland (capital Plymouth), comprising the counties of Devon and Cornwall. On June 13, the Eastland fleet heavily defeated the Westland fleet off the coast of Devon, and blockaded it in Plymouth harbour, where it had taken refuge. On July 26, the main armies of Eastland and Westland came into contact about thirty miles north-east of Exeter. Fighting was heavy but undecisive.

On July 29, an Eastland division was landed at Dartmouth and Salcombe with orders to march on Plymouth. Their advance was held up on the River Erme by the 3rd (Cornish) Division (newly mobilized at Plymouth) until August 1, when, the enemy having been strongly reinforced, the 3rd (Cornish) Division retired to the north of Plymouth, which was occupied by Eastland troops on August 2.

Note.—Moral and armament of forces of Eastland and Westland approximately equal and similar to that of the British Army.
An Area Medical Exercise

SPECIAL IDEA.

(1) On August 1, general headquarters, Westland, issued orders for the formation of the III Corps, consisting of the 3rd (Cornish) Division, 4th (Launceston) Division, and 5th (Devon) Division.

(2) On August 3, the III Corps was located as follows:

4th Division, in touch with the enemy along the line Bere Alston—Buckland Abbey—Yelverton—Meavy. 3rd Division, in reserve in the Tavistock area, after relief by 4th Division. 5th Division, mobilizing at Okehampton, and expected to be ready to move on August 5. Corps Headquarters at Tavistock. There has been a pause in Eastland’s offensive since the morning of August 3.

(3) The general officer commanding III Corps, in pursuance of the plan of general headquarters, Westland, to retake Plymouth, ordered the following dispositions to be complete by 06.00 hours, August 6, preparatory to assuming the offensive on the morning of August 7:

(a) The 3rd Division to be established on the line Buckland Abbey—Hellingtown—Yelverton, relieving the 4th Division on that part of the Corps front. Headquarters at Horrabridge. (b) The 4th Division is to be established on the line Yelverton (exclusive)—Meavy—Gutter Tor. Headquarters at Walkhampton. (c) The 3rd and 4th Divisions to be ready to attack on the morning of August 7. (d) The 5th Division in reserve in the Tavistock area. (e) Corps Headquarters to remain at Tavistock.

(4) Reinforcements for the 3rd Division to replace casualties were due to arrive at Tavistock on August 5.

(5) Corps railhead is Tavistock. Casualties are to be evacuated by motor ambulance convoy to Tavistock under Corps arrangements.

(6) In pursuance of the above the general officer commanding 3rd Division orders the following dispositions of his division:

(a) 7th Infantry Brigade, the line Buckland Abbey—Hellingtown (inclusive). (b) 8th Infantry Brigade, the line Hellingtown (exclusive)—Yelverton. (c) 9th Infantry Brigade in divisional reserve at Horrabridge. (d) Divisional artillery (less forward batteries) in positions east of Buckland Monachorum.

REQUIRED: FIRST TASK.

As assistant director of medical services, 3rd (Cornish) Division, having been informed of the orders and arrangements mentioned in the Special Idea, write an appreciation of the situation, showing how you would place your field ambulances and divisional sanitary section.

Note.—The medical units of the Division are the 7th, 8th, and 9th Field Ambulances, and the 3rd Divisional Sanitary Section.

NOTES ON FIRST TASK.

The appreciation required might be on the following lines:

The situation is that the 3rd (Cornish) Division is to move into the
line from rest at Tavistock on August 6, with a view to attacking on August 7. The assistant director of medical services is informed of this on August 3.

The object of the assistant director of medical services is so to locate his medical units as will best serve the division, not only in the position it is to take up, but in the subsequent operations against Plymouth.

Therefore, his ambulances should be in positions suitable for the earlier phases of the battle, and be kept readily mobile (e.g., not filled with slight cases), and, in the hilly country which the division is to occupy, it is important that they should be on roads accessible to motor transport. There are no particular indications for placing the sanitary section elsewhere than immediately at hand, i.e., near divisional headquarters.

The division has probably a number of footsore and tired men, who only need a few days’ rest to be able to return to duty. He can propose a divisional rest camp for them, in which they can be left when the division moves south to its position. He should arrange for their medical care, but must see that their retention does not diminish the mobility of his units.

It will serve immediate purposes if he first selects sites for main dressing stations, so that they may be allotted by divisional headquarters, leaving the question of advanced dressing stations to be determined after reconnaissance of the ground. Two field ambulances will suffice for the troops in the line. If placed on or near the main road, to which the roads leading from the front converge, casualties could be brought to them by field ambulance transport, horsed or mechanical according to the nature of the roads leading from the front, while the main road would facilitate evacuation by motor ambulance transport. Main dressing stations should not be too far forward, nor with this narrow front need they be far apart.

He might therefore propose to place two ambulances, say the 7th and 8th Field Ambulances, at Mill, a few hundred yards south of the Horrabridge—Walkhampton road, which by the map seems suitable, being near main roads, but not actually on them. The 7th Field Ambulance would serve the area of 7th Infantry Brigade, and the 8th Field Ambulance the 8th Infantry Brigade. The 9th Field Ambulance should be in reserve and for local duties at Horrabridge, where also the divisional sanitary section should be placed in the first instance.

Comments on Officers’ Work: First Task.

Several officers chose sites for main dressing stations in the neighbourhood of Pound, west of the main road. It was pointed out, however, that there might be difficulty during the expected action in getting the medical units on to the main road, owing to the movements of troops, guns,
brigade transport on the side roads, whereas traffic control on the main road would probably be divisional and specially regulated.

NARRATIVE.

(1) By 04.00 hours, August 6, the 3rd and 4th Divisions had taken up the frontage assigned to them, and their patrols were in touch during August 6 with hostile advance troops, who maintained a passive attitude.

(2) Westland aircraft reported during August 6 signs of new entrenchments in the following areas, and many working parties seen: Roborough Down, Wigford Down, Upperton, and Shaugh Moor. Considerable movement was observed in Plymouth, and on the Plymouth-Roborough and Plympton-Bickleigh roads. The triangle Ridgeway—Ivybridge—Cornwood was reported clear of the enemy.

(3) In pursuance of his plan for the recapture of Plymouth, the general officer commanding III Corps issued orders at 09.00 hours, on August 6, as follows:

(a) 3rd and 4th Divisions to assume the offensive at 05.00 hours, August 7. 1st objective: Point 333, Porsham—Road junction point 507, ½ mile South of Roborough Inn—Bickleigh Bridge—Faunstone—Lee Moor.
2nd objective: Point 332, Tamerton Folliott—Crownhill cross roads—Plym Bridge—Boringdon—Hemerdon Ball. Dividing line between 3rd and 4th Divisions: the Yelverton-Plymouth railway (inclusive to 4th Division).

(b) 5th Division to move from Tavistock (where it had arrived by 22.00 hours, August 5) to the area Horrabridge—Walkhampton, there to be in Corps reserve. (c) Corps headquarters to open at Yelverton on capture of the first objective.

(4) In pursuance of the above, the following is a summary of the orders issued by the general officer commanding 3rd Division:

(a) The attack is to be carried out on a two-brigade front, 7th Infantry Brigade on the right, 8th Infantry Brigade on the left. Dividing line between brigades: Sowton—Road junction point 633—Roborough—Crownhill road (inclusive to 7th Infantry Brigade). (b) 9th Infantry Brigade in divisional reserve at Horrabridge. (c) Divisional artillery (less forward batteries) in positions east of Buckland Monachorum. Later moves dependent on the situation. (d) Headquarters, 7th Infantry Brigade, at zero hour at Crapstone. Headquarters 8th Infantry Brigade, at zero hour at Yelverton. Headquarters of both infantry brigades to follow the Yelverton-Crownhill road when they move forward. (e) Divisional headquarters will move to Lodge at point 633 on the Yelverton-Crownhill road on capture of the first objective.

Note.—Field ambulances are located as in Notes on First Task. Advanced dressing stations are open at road junction point 473 (7th Field Ambulance), and Retreat (8th Field Ambulance).
E. T. F. Birrell

REQUIRED: SECOND TASK.

As assistant director of medical services, 3rd (Cornish) Division, write an R.A.M.C. order in view of the above summarized divisional order:

Note.—The instructions issued by headquarters, III Corps, included in the medical paragraph information that the ambulances of the 3rd (Cornish) Division will be cleared by the 6th Motor Ambulance Convoy (at Tavistock), and that the assistant director of medical services should arrange direct with the convoy commander.

NOTES ON SECOND TASK.

The fighting is likely to be severe. The country is hilly and much cut up by valleys. The most advantageous route for clearing casualties would be towards and along Yelverton-Crownhill road. If divisional headquarters agree that this main road can be so used, e.g., at certain stages of the fight, the general plan of the medical arrangements might be for the companies of field ambulances to follow the fighting troops, while the headquarters of ambulances remain near the main road, clearing their advanced dressing stations with their own ambulance transport, and themselves being evacuated by the motor ambulance convoy at the disposal of the assistant director of medical services. As the troops move forward, main dressing stations should also move forward, as necessary, along the main road. Their movements should be controlled by the assistant director of medical services, who can ascertain from divisional headquarters when they can take place. The order might read as follows:—

3RD (CORNISH) DIVISION.

R.A.M.C. Order No. —:

(Issued reference 3rd (Cornish) Division Order No. —.)

SECRET.

Copy No. —

Reference 1 inch O.S. Map, Sheet 148.

August 6, 1923.

(1) (a) Enemy troops have been located on Roborough Down, Wigford Down, Upton, and Shaugh Moor.

(b) The position of our troops is unchanged.

(2) (a) The 3rd (Cornish) and 4th (Launceston) Divisions are to assume the offensive at 05.00 hours, August 7, with a view to retaking Plymouth; dividing line between 3rd and 4th Divisions, the Yelverton-Plymouth railway (inclusive to 4th Division). 1st objective of 3rd Division: Point 333, Porsham—Road junction point 507, ½ mile S. of Roborough Inn. 2nd objective: Point 332, Tamerton Folliott—Crownhill cross roads—Plym Bridge.

(b) The attack is to be carried out on a two-brigade front, 7th Infantry Brigade on the right, 8th Infantry Brigade on the left; dividing line:
An Area Medical Exercise

Sowton—Road junction point 633—Roborough—Crownhill road (inclusive to 7th Infantry Brigade). 9th Infantry Brigade in reserve at Horrabridge. Division artillery (less forward batteries) in position east of Buckland Monachorum.

(c) At zero hour Headquarters 7th Infantry Brigade will be at Crapstone, Headquarters 8th Infantry Brigade at Yelverton. Both headquarters are to follow the Yelverton-Crownhill road when they move forward.

(3) (a) 7th Field Ambulance will clear the area of 7th Infantry Brigade, 8th Field Ambulance will clear the area of 8th Infantry Brigade. Each of these field ambulances will detail one officer and two other ranks to report to the respective infantry brigade headquarters at zero hour for liaison duty.

(b) At zero hour field ambulances will be in position as follows:—

(i) Headquarters 7th and 8th Field Ambulances (each less two companies) at their present site, Mill, 300 yards south of the Horrabridge-Walkhampton road.

(ii) Two companies, 7th Field Ambulance, at road junction point 473.

(iii) Two companies, 8th Field Ambulance, at Retreat.

(iv) 9th Field Ambulance in reserve at Horrabridge.

(4) As the troops move forward, the companies of 7th and 8th Field Ambulances will follow up and form advanced dressing stations as required, the sites of which will be immediately reported to the A.D.M.S. Officers commanding field ambulances will arrange to clear these advanced dressing stations. Headquarters of 7th and 8th Field Ambulances will be prepared to move to new positions along the Yelverton-Crownhill Road at half-an-hour's notice. Orders for moves of headquarters of field ambulances will be issued by the A.D.M.S.

(5) The clearance of main dressing stations will be arranged by A.D.M.S.

(6) Reports showing numbers for evacuation in main dressing stations will be sent to the A.D.M.S. at divisional headquarters at 08.00, 11.00, 14.00 and 17.00 hours.

(7) Divisional Headquarters will be at Horrabridge until capture of the first objective, then at Lodge at point 633 on the Yelverton-Crownhill road. Acknowledge.

H. J. Major,

D.A.D.M.S., 3rd (Cornish) Division.

Issued at 13.30 hours.

Issued to: 7th F. Amb. Copies to: G.

8th F. Amb.

9th F. Amb.

A. and Q. 6th M.A.C.

D.M.S. III Corps.

H.Q. 7th Inf. Bde. D.M.S.

H.Q. 8th Inf. Bde. War Diary

H.Q. 9th Inf. Bde. File
COMMENTS ON OFFICERS' WORK: SECOND TASK.

There was a tendency in the orders written to name sites for advanced dressing stations. It was pointed out at the conference that as the actual course of the fight could not be definitely foretold, it would have been better to leave the selection of these sites to the ambulances themselves. Some indicated sites for main dressing stations, for example, near Lodge at point 633, to which headquarters of ambulances were ordered to move after capture of the first objective. Although the sites named were such as probably would have been selected, it was considered unlikely that the ambulances would have been able to move up to them on their own initiative, as probably they could not have advanced along the main road without special arrangements by divisional headquarters.

The orders contained much detail as regards liaison with the assistant director of medical services, liaison with and assistance to battalions, the disposal of "N.Y.D.N." and other special cases, and the nature of the reports required, which tended to lengthen the orders and would, in actual war, have been embodied in standing instructions. The preparation of such instructions would be an interesting exercise.

DEVPONPORT,

November 16, 1923.