

7. 2. 39. 15

AN ARMY ACROSS CHANNEL ?

PAST AND PRESENT CONDITIONS

I.—CONFLICTING CALLS

In the House of Commons yesterday the Prime Minister made it clear that a threat to the vital interests of France or Britain would be met with the fullest cooperation of both. In two articles, the first of which appears below, our Military Correspondent considers the extent to which, if war should come, the prospect of British military intervention by land has been enlarged by recent events in Europe.

From Our Military Correspondent

There is general agreement on the need of strengthening the Air Force and the anti-aircraft forces as an essential requirement of this country's security. Indeed public opinion would here seem to be well ahead of Government measures. As for the Navy, while there may be some doubt whether its deterrent and defensive effect as a means of economic pressure will remain undiminished as Continental Powers become more self-supporting, there is little disposition to question the need of maintaining at least its present ratio of strength. The sense of our own dependence on seaborne supply and the consciousness of new dangers that threaten it suffice to assure agreement on this score. It is becoming clear, however, that the attainment of adequate security in these two vital spheres calls for an effort, financial and industrial, far exceeding anything that was contemplated when our rearmament programme was initiated.

At the same time the idea of furnishing an army for the Continent is vigorously canvassed. While recent events have given it impetus, it has never been far back in the mind of many here as well as in France, and was already gathering pace before the September crisis. An article in *The Times* of June 17 drew attention to this trend, contrary to that which had been authoritatively defined when the Service Estimates were issued in March. On October 10, so close on the heels of the crisis that its earlier conception was manifest, the War Office announced the remodelling of the bulk of the Territorial troops as a field army composed of nine infantry divisions, three motorized divisions, and one mechanized mobile division. It was to have all the ingredients required for modern Continental warfare: tank battalions, cavalry light tank regiments, anti-tank artillery regiments, anti-aircraft regiments to deal with low-flying attack, and motor-cyclist battalions. The one important aspect left obscure was the time which its re-equipment, as distinct from its reorganization, would take.

LIMITED LIABILITY

The answer to that question obviously affects its prescribed role and destination. Also it has an important bearing on the question, which naturally arises, of further expansion. Once committed to the reconstitution of a Territorial Field Army, as we now are, it would not be easy, if war were to come, to stop short of a renewal

JULY 20 1938

ORGANIZATION OF INFANTRY

SIZE OF THE BASIC UNIT

ECONOMIZING ENERGY

FROM OUR MILITARY CORRESPONDENT

From watching exercises during the present training season one is led anew to the question whether the basic infantry unit—the section of seven fighting men—is unnecessarily large for the modern battlefield. Would not more effect and economy of force be attained by distributing them in smaller but more numerous sections?

Last March, when introducing the Army Estimates, the Secretary of State for War outlined the reorganization of the Army as planned by his advisers, and underlined its more significant features. He stated that there would in future be two types of division—"One type a motorized division based on the light machine-gun, and the other, a mechanized armoured division, based on the tank." In the first, the infantry battalions would "each possess 50 Bren guns, of which a proportion will be borne in armoured carriers. They will in fact be light machine-gun battalions."

He went on to say that, as with the Navy and Air Force already, the "strength of the modern army is based not on the individual, but rather on fire-units. . . ." Why alone in the Army should heads be counted, and firepower and mobility discounted? The number of men required in each unit is the number needed to man and serve the weapons, together with the necessary elements for service, replacement, and administration. Any men beyond this minimum were simply "an additional target."

OBSOLETE GAUGE

In applying such a principle it would seem natural to begin with the foundation unit—the section. It is now based on the light machine-gun, there being one to each section. This has produced an essential change, which ought to be recognized, in the basis on which the size of the section is computed. In the days before the light machine-gun was introduced, the natural unit of military measurement was the individual infantryman armed with rifle and bayonet; and was a true one—apart from differences of training and moral, which were not calculable, the strength of any army could be gauged by count of heads. The gauge was increasingly affected by the growth of artillery, and then upset by the intrusion of the machine-gun, yet the old and misleading way of talking of strength