

A LITTLE OF THE TRUTH.

Poultney Bigelow Writes From Tampa About the Actual Condition of Affairs.

Harper's Weekly prints the following article from the pen of Mr. Poultney Bigelow, at Tampa, Florida, dated May 22, in reference to the unpreparedness of the army of the United States:

Down here we are sweltering day and night, with the thermometer 98 in the shade. Nobody dares complain, for fear of appearing unpatriotic. Still, it will do us no harm to hear a little of the truth, for this affair is turning out just as officers of the regular army have foreseen.

Here we are thirty days after the declaration of war, and not a regiment is yet equipped with uniforms suitable for hot weather. The Cuban patriots and other cigarmakers look happy in their big Panama hats and loose linen trousers, but the United States troops sweat night and day in their cowhide boots, thick flannel shirts and winter trousers. In addition to this, they wear a tunic at inspections—a piece of torture.

Who is responsible for this? No one knows.

The poor man has to sleep on the ground in the heavy, dirty sand. Their sweaty clothing picks it up, and their food is full of it. Every whiff of hot air blows fine dust about, and every horse, cart or even passing person adds discomfort to men already miserable. How little it would cost to have the camp sprinkled once or twice a day! Or, at least, the Government might have provided rough boards, from which the men could have saved themselves a few feet of flooring.

We are in the habit of pitying the soldier of Europe as badly treated. For downright neglect, I have seen nothing to beat the way the American is treated by Uncle Sam.

Who is responsible for this meanness, which is seriously affecting the health of our men?

In this hot climate we yearn for fresh fruit and vegetables, for anything that will quench thirst and at the same time cool the blood. Meat and all healing things we try to avoid by a wise instinct. The troops, however, are supplied with only that which is most unseasonable—greasy pork, and beans of that brown quality that makes one ready to spend the rest of the day in a watermelon patch. The result is that already the camp doctors are busy every morning with men and officers.

The war is thirty days in swing. It took less time than that for Germany to put half a million well-trained men on the French frontier in 1870. To-day we look in vain for a single regiment fit to take the field. We hear much in the political organs of throwing fifty thousand men over into Cuba and taking Havana, yet here we are drilling recruits and waiting for regiments to fill up. The strength of a regiment is nominally twelve hundred men. As a matter of fact, the average number is less than six hundred. Who is responsible?

Every day raw recruits are dumped down here out of an incoming train, and they are taken out into the deep sand and made to move their legs up and down until exhausted nature cries out for rest. Drill sergeants and recruits soon lose their taste for calisthenics in the roasting pine barrens of Tampa. The ordinary man asks why were not these recruits licked into shape up in the cool North,

and sent down properly clothed and armed. Who is responsible? If the invasion should take place tomorrow, half the men would be in civilian dress, raw recruits who had probably never before had a gun in their hands.

Tampa is a seaport town, and, therefore, one might have expected that our super-heated troops would have been so located as to enjoy a salt water bath at least once a day. One or two regiments near Port Tampa have managed to locate near the beach, but the bulk of the troops are so far from the water that the journey to and fro robs them of any benefit they might otherwise derive from a swim. The Government provides them no bath houses, not even a trough at which they may take baths by instalments. So far the weather has been oppressively hot and dry. It will be a miracle if disease does not break out when the rains begin.

While Uncle Sam's boys are parching for fresh food and vegetables, trainloads are leaving Florida filled with succulent fruit for northern markets.

The army is lumbered up with civilian staff officers, whose duty it is to see that our men are properly located and taken care of.

In European armies staff officers are selected from the most highly educated of the army. They have to pass special examinations in order to test their fitness for a variety of special duties of the most important kind; and of all important duties, the German officer regards the care of the men's health as the most important. When a German regiment marches to war, the staff officer goes ahead to lay out a proper camping ground, to provide wood and water and in other respects to make the regiments about to arrive as comfortable as possible. When the weary men arrive they have but to cook their supper and curl up to sleep.

The United States troops who arrive in Tampa are dumped out at a railway siding like so many emigrants. No staff officer prepares anything in advance for them. Regiments go off in any direction that suits them, looking for the nearest place where they may cook their pork and beans.

In no army of Europe, not even in Spain, have I seen troops so badly treated through the incompetence of staff officers, who today are strutting about in new uniforms, when they ought to be whistled out of camp as frauds.

Let us turn now from the matter of health and comfort to that of military efficiency.

The war authorities have crowded together in and about Tampa several thousand men on the plausible pretext that in a big camp of this kind the troops could be exercised in large bodies, and the superior officers thus get familiar with brigade and divisional formation. We must bear in mind that most of our troops have never since the civil war been brought together in larger bodies than a few companies at a time. Many colonels of regiments have never until this war seen all their men together on a parade ground. Brigadier-generals have been created who have never seen the regiments that are to constitute their brigade. We have for this war laid out a complicated scheme of army organization, and entrusted the working of it in most instances to men who scarcely know the manual of arms.

Let us tell the truth—disagreeable as it is. We are strong enough to bear it, and to profit by it.

While the nation has been patriotically

DR.

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voting men and money for this campaign of alleged philanthropy, promotions have not been made wholly from deserving officers whose lives have been spent in active military work, but from the ranks of politicians, who may have had a smattering of militia drill, or may have worn a uniform forty years ago.

Today, thirty days after the declaration of war, there has not been held at Tampa a single military field exercise likely to be of service to generals of brigades or divisions, let alone an army corps. The main reason is, no doubt, that there are no brigadiers or major-generals in Tampa who would know how to go to work in the matter.

General Wheeler, for instance, is supposed to be the dashing leader of a cavalry division. I admire the venerable warrior of the Confederacy, and his appointment is a beautiful tribute to the new spirit pervading North and South. But his place is in Washington, on the Strategic Board, not in the field, where young blood is needed. Besides, to put General Wheeler in charge of troops to-day is like putting on board a modern iron-clad a naval officer whose knowledge of the sea was gained exclusively in the days of Faragut.

What is now imperative, if the troops are to be brought into an efficient condition, is to put them at once on transports and bring them up north to a big camp of exercise on the most bracing part of our coast, say about Narragansett. Here they could be properly drilled in anticipation of an invasion of Cuba in November.

Here generals might learn the elementary duties of their new grades. Instead of men losing their vitality from day to day, as they are at present doing, they would be storing up health.

Up in the North the people would more readily see the gross manner in which our brave troops are being exploited by politicians. If people up North could see what I have been seeing, there would be a cry of indignant protest throughout the country.

There is a German military attached at Tampa noting all these things, and what is concealed from the American people in the North is carefully sent to Europe.

Nothing, I am sure, is so well calculated to encourage Spain in her obstinate resistance as the knowledge that our military resources are being squandered as recklessly as were those of France in 1870.

Finally, let us insist that, for the successful conduct of war, there must be one man, and one man only, responsible for the command. Today no one is in command. There are half a dozen people in Washington pretending to be directing operations. General Miles sits at the War Department, with no more influence than his doorkeeper.

There is no head to the army. The railway, telegraph, steamship and other corporations are getting fat out of this war; so are all contractors who deal with politics. The more inefficient the army, the better it suits them.

Even as late as January this year our representatives declined to vote most pressing measures for making our fighting forces adequate. When the war came not a single regiment of our army was at its full strength, not a single gun at Sandy Hook was provided with ammunition, not a single mine was ready to be put down in the channel of our greatest seaport. Our press cried: "On to Havana!" just as the Paris press cried: "A Berlin!" yet at the same time not a single regiment of either regulars or volunteers was equipped for war.

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When the most insignificant person tells us we are wrong, we ought to listen. Let us believe it possible we may be wrong when anyone supposes we are, and enter into renewed examination of the matter with a grateful spirit.

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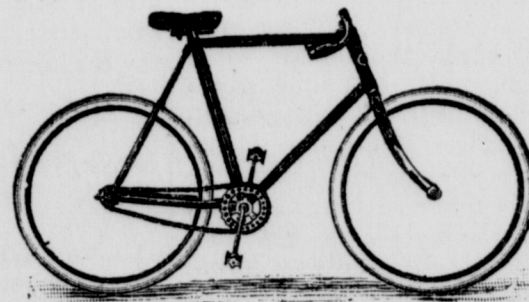
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