Red Cross Organizes Medical Preparedness

Colonel Jeffrey R. Kean Tells Why It Is Necessary to Train Physicians for Complicated Duty of Caring for the Wounded

Colonel Jefferson R. Kean, U. S. A., who has been designated to co-operate with the American Red Cross in organizing medical preparedness work, shows in the following article, written before the Army bill passed Congress, how necessary it is to train physicians and surgeons for the projected field work and to create efficient machinery for the care of the wounded.

WTH all the talk about preparedness there has been very little attention paid to one form that is of vital importance. It is the care of the sick and wounded in time of war. Bullets, shells, mines, epidemics, are no respecters of persons. Our soldiers should be returned to civil life fit to cope with their environment as far as possible. Nor can the cost of caring for them be forgotten when we are following the example of the wise king of old, who demonstrated his wisdom by sitting down to count the cost before going to war.

The medical corps of the regular army consists of 414 officers, or 4.6 to the thousand men. The ideal proportion is ten to the thousand. The maximum provided for by the House preparedness bill was seven to the thousand. The Senate bill makes provision for a proportion of 5.3. It is therefore certain that there will be less than seven to the thousand. The Government, in adopting this proportion, is expecting civilians to furnish the remainder if war breaks out. As a matter of fact, there is no prospect that we ever will see a time when it will not be necessary to rely upon civilians. Preparedness is needed here.

Preparedness cannot stop with the provisions for a supply of military personnel and supplies. It requires nothing less than a complete medical service, with the necessary service of auxiliary personnel. The medical service is an essential part of any military force. If war breaks out, not only will the regular service of the Army be called upon, but it is certain that the mobilization of the National Guard will take place, and that the State and territorial boards of health will be called upon to render such assistance as may be needed.

The Government expects that the American Red Cross will do the greater part of this work. Indeed, steps have been taken toward the organization of Union camps and field hospitals, and leave has been given for three New York hospitals units being formed and these will be ready to go to any part of the country in case of war. They are to receive training in the administrative duties which will devolve upon them in caring for the sick and wounded. This is the form in which the Government is putting preparedness to work, and it is the only one which will be permitted to assist the medical corps of the army.

Under the law passed in 1908 provision was made for a volunteer corps of medical officers of nearly 2,000 physicians and surgeons of high reputation enrolling and enrolling. Yet, with the exception of about 450 who paid their own expenses last year in order to go on a nearby training camp at Tohoyama, Penn., none of them is prepared to take up his duties. One of the reasons why the American Red Cross needs additional members is in conducting such a campaign to obtain them that it may fulfill its obligations to the Government and the community in time of war, by preparing in time of peace.

Let us follow a soldier who is wounded in some form or other of his regiment advances. The regimental medical officers at the earliest opportunity pick him up and carry him to the regimental aid station. This station is necessarily close to the firing line. It may even be in the trenches. It should be protected from the fire of the enemy. The equipment of the regimental aid station can only be limited. It consists of first-aid dressings, a few simple instruments, a tent, fly and some blankets and basins. The entire outfit is carried on one pack mule.

One of the fields of the medical department is the transportation of the wounded to the rear. Because of this duty it is necessary that all medical officers to men must be higher than in civil life, and preliminary training is necessary in order to make them efficient witnesses of time of war. To provide for this each division has four ambulance companies of twelve ambulances each. To each of these companies is attached a pack mule section of four mules for the transportation of a whole regiment. At such a station more thorough work can be done than at the regimental aid station.

Attacked to each division also are four field hospitals, each of which requires seven or eight nurses for constant attendance. The equipment of these hospitals also is limited. There are tents for the shelter of about 330 men. Hay or straw is spread on the ground. This is covered with rubber blankets. One woolen blanket is furnished each man. A part of the equipment is a fairly complete dressing outfit for doing emergency work that cannot be postponed until the patient is seen by a field surgeon. After this hospital he is in the hands of civilians, for if Congress adopts the larger number of medical officers provided for in any bill, will have only enough to man the mobilized relief service. Officials will then be relied upon to do all work back of this point and in connection with any volunteer forces which may be enlisted.

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