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"THE EYES AND
EARS
OF
THE ARMY"

COMPANY "B" OPERATING
PORTABLE FIELD
WIRELESS.

COMPANY "B" SIGNAL
CORPS, N. G. OF SAN
FRANCISCO ON THE MARCH IN
MANEUVERS AT MANZANITA.



By Arthur H. Dutton

Story of Company B, Signal Corps, National Guard of California

DURING President Taft's recent visit to this city, when the military parade was on its way to the exposition ground breaking ceremonies in Golden Gate park, many onlookers were interested in a body of mounted troops near the end of the procession. It was a well mounted, well equipped body of men, soldierly in appearance and bearing. The average spectator probably mistook this body for a troop of cavalry, but it was not. It was Company B, signal corps, of the national guard of California, an organization of which the state may well be proud, for it is one of the most efficient bodies of citizen soldiery in the entire country, vying with regulars in discipline and military value.

The signal corps has well been named "the eyes and ears of an army," for without a competent signal corps an army would be about as helpless as a railway system without a telegraph and switch signals. Modern armies are handled from a distance. The commanding general sits in his tent or other quarters, often many miles away from the actual fighting, and there, like a chess player, moves his men and material as occasion demands. At the battle of Liaoyang, General Kuroki was 12 miles away. In most of the big operations of the Russo-Japanese war the Japanese generals were far away from the firing line, yet they knew what was going on all the time everywhere as well as if the whole field of battle were unfolded before them. They moved their troops hither and thither, ordering an advance here, a retrograde movement there; dispatching reinforcements in one direction, supplies in another.

It was all done through the medium of the signal corps, which is the means of intercommunication in an army.

In bygone times the general's information and his orders were carried by

mounted scouts; later by scouts and by flag or fire signals. In some cases the topography of the country traversed was such that this system of intercommunication was difficult and hazardous, if not occasionally, impossible.

This is all changed. The modern general has a system of telegraph and telephone communication that is well-nigh perfect. He can talk to the officers on the firing line as well as to the aid by his side, for the signal corps men of today run their field telephones right into the zone of fire.

The old flags, the familiar "wig-wag," are still used, but the field telegraph, the field telephone and the wireless telegraph are the principal means of communication nowadays.

The use of these devices calls for complete equipment and the highest skill and training in the men handling them. To provide such men, the signal corps is organized, and in its signal corps the National guard of California is singularly fortunate. Company B of San Francisco is composed of picked men. The recruits, besides being of proper physical attainments, must be of high intelligence and more than the average education, especially technical, for delicate machinery must be handled and repaired often under great difficulties.

Company B was organized in April, 1889, largely through the efforts of the late Colonel E. A. Denicke. It at once attracted a superior class of young men to its ranks, and it has always maintained its high standard. During the Spanish-American war it served with credit in the Philippines, and in the stirring times in San Francisco from April to June, 1906, it did valuable work in the stricken city.

The present commander of the company is Captain Frank J. Sullivan, a veteran of the Philippine campaigns. To his efforts is due the fact that the company is conceded to have reached a higher state of efficiency than ever, for Captain Sullivan, a soldierly man himself, who has seen hard campaigning, devotes himself to his military work and requires his subordinates to do the same. Under him are two lieutenants, William Godsell and F. B. Smith, and 60 noncommissioned officers and privates. Captain Sullivan has had command since December 19, 1907. Among the men are many former soldiers of the regular army, and veterans of both the regulars and the volunteers in war.

Twice a week, in its armory at 1574 McAllister street, or out of doors, the company holds its drills. Every Tuesday night there is mounted drill, the company having a contract for its horses with a local riding academy, which furnishes picked animals, of the same color, each man, as a rule, having the same horse at every drill, thus keeping the animals trained to the military work as well as the men.

Every Thursday night signal drills are held. The men are taught and practiced thoroughly in flag signaling, use of heliograph, acetylene signal lantern, "buzzer" telegraph, wireless telegraph, field telephone service and other methods of communication. The curriculum of instruction also includes hippology, or the study and care of the horse; riding and revolver, troop drill, use of sabre and revolver, target practice with carbine and revolver, and other military arts.

In the extensive equipment of the company are found, a one kilowatt wireless station, two field wireless outfits, complete field telephone and field

telegraph outfit and all the camp equipment that a well found military company should possess.

In the field live trees are used for wireless stations, it having been demonstrated that the limbs of a live tree, but not of a dead one, make satisfactory "antennae" for wireless telegraphy. Trees are used extensively for this purpose, messages being exchanged between them at distances as great as 30 miles.

Company B is so well trained and equipped that it can be put in readiness for service at a few hours' notice. The men are arranged in squads, according to residence, and each squad has its leader, who knows the addresses of all his men. The squad leaders are always in touch with the officers, and the moment a call for service is issued each man is promptly notified and hastens to the armory. Each man knows his particular duties for a mobilization as well as for the field, and once in the field the work of installing telegraph, telephone and wireless systems goes on rapidly and methodically. It is astonishing how rapidly the signal corps spreads its net work of communications. The signal men move forward with their telegraph and telephone apparatus as fast as, and sometimes faster than, the fighting troops, with whom they are in close touch. The progress of the advance of the fighting is reported constantly to the commanding officer in his headquarters. The "madly dashing aide de camp" of olden days is a rare sight nowadays. The telegraph and the telephone dash more swiftly than he and are not so likely to get lost or fall victim to other accident.

Military operations may now be conducted more rapidly than under old con-

ditions. It is recorded in official reports that at the battle of Mukden the Japanese signal corps of the third army alone laid 155 miles of field telegraph line during the battle. This labor may be appreciated when it is considered that, in addition to the danger of death from the enemy's bullets, difficult country had to be covered and, what must not be lost sight of, the wires had to be taken up again for future use as the army advanced.

To accomplish such difficult and rapid work, Company B is carefully trained. It does its work like clockwork, and it is a pleasure and a wonder to see it at its drills in the open, which are held from time to time, rushing its wagons and its animals, loaded with equipment, hither and thither, while active, intelligent, trained men lay wires, install stations and send messages with celerity and accuracy.

The company is well armed and well equipped, for the signal corps and its stations and equipment are always objects of the enemy's attention. To sever the opposing force's means of communication is the desire of every general, and to possess his equipment is highly desirable, for one's own losses must be remedied at the enemy's expense if possible.

Of course scouts and scouting will always be requisites of an effective army, but the information secured by the scouts must always be given to the commanding officer. The more quickly, the more frequently and the more thoroughly the information is provided the better, and to accomplish these results the signal corps is ever striving to improve its methods.

The signal corps of the California National guard is a crack corps and its value to state and nation already has been demonstrated. Like most creatures of genuine merit, it is modest and usually keeps its activities to itself until emergency arises, when it is on the spot, ready and capable.