

THE OPEN COURT

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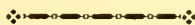
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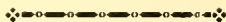


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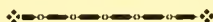
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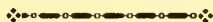
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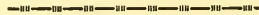
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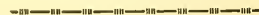


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SHAKESPEARE AS A MILITARY CRITIC

Particularly in *Richard II*, *Henry IV* parts 1 and 2,
Henry V, and *Richard III*.

BY GEORGE H. DAUGHERTY, JR.

I.

Interest of Shakespeare in National Defense.

TO the student of military affairs, as to so many other specialists, Shakespeare reveals an astonishing amount of information. In fact he is one of the most important sources for the military history of the Sixteenth Century. Fortescue, eminent British military historian, salutes him thus: “. . . he is as truly the painter of the English army in his own day as was Marryat of the navy in later years. Falstaff the fraudulent captain, Pistol the swaggering ensign, Bardolph the rascally corporal, Nym the impostor who affects military brevity, Parolles ‘the damnable both-sides rogue,’ nay even Fluellen a brave and honest man but a pedant soaked in classical affectations and seeking his model for everything in Pompey’s camp—all these had their counterparts in every shire of England and were probably to be seen daily on the drill ground at Mile End. Not in these poor pages but in Shakespeare’s must the military student read the history of the Elizabethan soldier.”¹ It is probably assuming too much to imagine that Shakespeare had much actual military service. His point of view is rather that of an amused, though very patriotic civilian. “Regular” soldiers are a gloomy lot, at least whenever their profession is concerned. Theirs is a frightfully grave business.² Consequently the swaggering cowardice and inefficiency of Captain Fal-

¹ *A History of the British Army*, Vol. I, London, 1899, p. 140.

² No pun intended. D.

staff, and his farcically corrupt administration of the king's draft would cause them the most painful concern. For these be matters which determine life or death in battle. Hearken to the pronouncement of Sir Henry Knyvett, honest and faithful soldier of Elizabeth: "If the killing or robbing a man by the highe waie deserve deathe,³ what punishment are they worthie to have, that by deminishing their companies for gaine, and robbing the Prince of deade payes⁴ to maintaine their licentiousness, are the cause of lingering warres to the greate distruction of a multitude of valiant men, the unjust wasting of the Prince's treasure, and betraying of the actions they take in hande. Trulie ten deaths were to little for them, and the penaltie of treason their true rewarde of their desert; And therefore it is more than highe time that the necessarie yoke of true discipline were severallie offered them."⁵

Inefficiency among the officers was chronic in Tudor times and after. In 1639 we find the pious military commentator still complaining about the Falstaffian captains and their slip-shod methods of taking in recruits.

“. . . some be admitted . . . into Captainships, which neither have courage, skill, nor delight in Armes themselves, nor discretion to command others; . . .

"We admit into our trained Bands without Judgment or discretion, any that are offered, how unlikely, or uncapable soever they be of the *Art Militarie*; yea which is worse, we suffer them almost every Training to alter their men, and put in new ones, like Mouldy, Shadow, Wart, and Feeble. . . ."⁶

There is also evidence that Shakespeare had a serious if non-professional interest in national defense. The doings of Falstaff in *Henry IV* constitute a real exposé of the appalling weaknesses of the army and the whole military system; while the battles, sieges,

³ Sir Henry must, of course, be excused for his old fashioned ethics. In the barbaric sixteenth century robbery and murder were actually considered crimes; and the death penalty was yet in vogue.

⁴ Drawing pay for dead soldiers who, of course, were not reported: A common practice of the period.

⁵ *The Defense of the Realm*, London 1596. Ed. by Charles Hughes, Clarendon Press 1906, pp. 56-57.

⁶ Robert Ward, Gentleman and Commander. *Animadversions of Warre, or A Militarie Magazine of the Truest Rules, and Ablest Instructions for the Managing of Warre. Composed of the Most Refined Discipline, and Choice Experiments that these late Netherlandish and Swedish Warres have Produced, With Divers new inventions, both of Fortifications and Stratagems*, etc. In two books. London 1639, pp. 31, 32.

"alarums and excursions" in *Henry V* undoubtedly were meant as a stirring exhortation to the Elizabethan public to emulate the martial glory of their ancestors. Furthermore, the soldierly qualities of the heroes of historical plays are chiefly emphasized. King Henry IV, Hotspur, Prince Hal, all won their chief renown in the field. And the villains, such as Richard III, are redeemed only by their desperate valor in battle. There are also in these plays a number of incidental speeches, put in for the purpose of arousing public interest in military training as a means of preserving the nation:

French King. "Thus come the English with full power upon us;
And more than carefully it us concerns
To answer royally in our defences."
.

Dauphin. ". . . My most redoubted father,
It is most meet we arm us 'gainst the foe;
For peace itself should not so dull a kingdom,
But that defences, musters, preparations,
Should be maintained, assembled, and collected,
As were a war in expectation.
Therefore I say, 'tis meet we all go forth
To view the sick and feeble parts of France:
And let us do it with no show of fear;
.
In cases of defence, 'tis best to weigh
The enemy more mighty than he seems:
So the proportions of defence are fill'd;
Which of a weak and niggardly projection
Doth like a miser spoil his coat with scanting
A little cloth."⁷

If the names of the speakers are omitted, and "England" is inserted for "France" in the Dauphin's speech, the passage clearly becomes a warning to England, grown heedless in the years following the victory over the Armada.

Where the omniscient Will got his special (and for the most part, accurate) military information, it is, of course, impossible to say. Undoubtedly he shared the intense patriotism of his courtly and literary friends. The famous speech of John of Gaunt is ample proof. Undoubtedly, too, he watched the drilling of the "Honour-

⁷ *King Henry V*, II, 4, 1-47.

able Artillery Company"⁸, and others of the London trained bands, and laughed at the mistakes of the raw civilian recruits. Perhaps some of their officers were his friends. One is tempted to go even further and imagine a certain W. Shakespeare temporarily in the ranks of the London men who marched in 1588 to the great mobilization at Tilbury, grimly resolved to beat back the threatened invasion. According to best accounts he would have seen enough of the comic inefficiency and serious disorganization of the Elizabethan military to supply him for all his plays.⁹

Whatever the source, military topics came in for a large share of his interest. Incidental references are scattered through a large number of his plays. For the present study, however, only the historical dramas, which contain the largest proportion of the material, have been examined; and of these, the list has been reduced (see above) to such as are accounted entirely Shakespeare's. In such plays as the three parts of *Henry VI*, or *King John*, some of the material may have been left in from the older source dramas, and would not, therefore, directly represent the military knowledge and interests of Shakespeare.

II.

Description of the Elizabethan Army.

The Sixteenth Century army was the product of gradual evolution from the feudal forces of preceding centuries. Ever since Anglo-Saxon times the free men of England had constituted a national citizen army, obliged to keep at all times the implements of war, and to be ready to use them at a summons from the sovereign. In the ranks of the Saxon fyrd, or *landwehr*, thane and carle fought on foot, side by side. It was this citizen force which later formed the most important reserve for the Norman kings and for the English people ever since. The unconquerable military spirit of the Anglo-Saxon people is at once our highest attribute, and the

⁸ That the "Honourable Artillery Company" nevertheless may have attained some little reputation of superiority over the other "trained bands" of the day is to be inferred from Ward's statement:

"We must therefore herein imitate the worthy citizens of London, who in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth, chose out of their several Companies, three thousand of the most likely and active persons, whom they appointed to be Pikemen and shot."

—Ward, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

⁹ Fortescue, *History of the British Army*, pp. 150-151.

source of our world power. If it is ever weakened, whether through natural decay of the race, or through the efforts of misguided sentimentalists, then the strength and glory of our civilization will be irrevocably lost. And none knew this better than our greatest poet.

King Henry V. "On, on, you noblest English!
 Whose blood is fet from father's of war-proof,
 Fathers that, like so many Alexanders,
 Have in these parts from morn till even fought,
 And sheathed their swords for lack of argu-
 ment.
 Dishonour not your mothers: now attest,
 That those, whom you call'd fathers, did beget
 you.
 Be copy now to men of grosser blood,
 And teach them how to war. —And you, good
 yeomen,
 Whose limbs were made in England, show us
 here
 The mettle of your pasture; Let us swear
 That you are worth your breeding: which I
 doubt not;
 For there is none of you so mean and base,
 That hath not noble lustre in your eyes.
 I see you stand like grey hounds in the slips,
 Straining upon the start. The game's afoot:
 Follow your spirit; and upon this charge,
 Cry—God for Harry! England and St.
 George!"¹⁰

Until the end of the Fifteenth Century the armies of England were composed of the feudal retainers of kings and nobles, and such citizens as the king chose to draft from the country at large. Henry II re-established the old national militia in 1181 by the Assize of Arms. Edward I and his successors cherished this branch of their forces, and issued "Commissions of Array," providing for the muster of county forces by the leading men. During the War of the Roses feudal and mercenary armies of private nobles were the scourge of the country. The establishment of the Tudor dynasty marked the end of feudal militarism in England. Thereafter the citizen forces were, as of old, the chief defence of the realm.¹¹

Shakespeare has portrayed, though rather sketchily, the gen-

¹⁰ *King Henry V*, III, 1, 17-34.

¹¹ For the summary of early English military history, see Fortescue, *History of the British Army*, Vol. I, Part 1, especially chaps. 1-4.

eral features of the feudal forces. Orders for the nobles to assemble their forces, the lack of cooperation between the leaders, their seizure of property to pay expenses, the motley and ill-assorted character of the hastily assembled bands of retainers, dependence of the forces on the personality of individual nobles,—all these characteristics are plain to see in the chronical plays. Their source is to be found in Holinshead and other histories current in the 16th century; and the pictures they present are generally in accord with the facts of military history of the 14th and 15th centuries.¹² Unfortunately the scope of the present paper does not permit quotations, or further discussion of Shakespeare as a military *historian*. We are here concerned with him rather as an *observer*.

Even more interesting are those passages which seem to reflect his actual observations of the troops of his own day. These deal more intimately with the raising of troops by levies and county musters, the interior organization of the companies and regiments, the character of officers and men, life in the camp and on the field, the conduct of battles. It is true, of course, that they do not always reflect the conditions existing in the earlier 15th century armies they are supposed to represent. Instead, we may safely assume, both because of their style, and from contemporary evidence, that in many or most passages they depict the army of Elizabeth's time.

Henry VII had strengthened the militia by imposing obligation of military service on two new classes, holders of office under the crown, or of honours and lands under the Kings letters patent. Henry VIII established the royal body-guard, "the first permanent corps of trained English soldiers in our history;" and evolved a fairly definite type of military organization composed of companies of about a hundred men grouped territorially according to shires. For his general muster in 1539, each hundred of a county furnished its contingent.¹³ In the reign of Elizabeth, men were raised by "Commissions of Array" issued to "County Lieutenants" who were supposed to report on "the able trayned and furneshed men reduced into bandes under Captaines, and how they were soarted,

¹² See especially: I *K. Henry IV*, 3, 2, 100 ff; *Ibid*, 5, 5, 19 ff; II *K. Henry IV*, 1, 1, 12-125; *Ibid*, 4, 4, 2; *Ibid*, 4, 2, 59 ff; *Ibid*, 4, 1, 9-13; *K. Richard III*, 5, 2, 1 ff; *Ibid*, 4, 4, 499 ff; *Ibid*, 5, 3, 316 ff; *K. Richard II*, 2, 3 110-125; etc.

¹³ *Fortescue, op. cit.*, pp. 109-114, and Col. George J. Hay, *History of the Militia* (The "Constitutional Force"), London 1905, p. 17.

with weapons in readiness with convenient armour, furniture, and other accessories.'"¹⁴ The Elizabethan musters revealed in 1570 the astonishing total of nearly 600,000 men. "Yet when we look into these muster-rolls we find simply a list of able bodied men and of serviceable arms in each shire without attempt at organization."¹⁵ The whole military system was in a state of bad decay, which revealed itself at every emergency. In 1569, when levies were made in the northern counties to quell the Yorkshire rebellion, "The difficulties of the commanders were frightful. The numbers that came to muster were far short of the true complement; horsemen could hardly be obtained by any shift and the footmen that presented themselves came with bows and bills only, there being but sixty fire arms, and not a single pike among two thousand five hundred infantry. The rebels on the other hand were well equipped. . . ."¹⁶ Fortescue lays the blame for this situation on the avaricious, "tricky, and inconstant queen."

All authorities, indeed, harp mournfully on the utter inefficiency of the Tudor, particularly the Elizabethan, armies. These defects were hardly compensated by the occasional reckless bravery of officers and men. A very short and charitable summary is the following:

"In the conduct of such military operations as were undertaken, there was extraordinary diversity, due to lack of capacity and lack of discipline. In Dorset's expedition to Spain in 1512 the men were guilty of cowardice and indiscipline and finally sailed back to England without orders. At Ancrum Moor an English army fled, just as a Scottish army had done at Solway Moss, and in Surrey's campaign at Boulogne the troops bolted. Such disreputable incidents occur repeatedly. At the siege of Havre, where Mary had expected

¹⁴ Hay, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*, quoting Stow.

Note: For the wars in Ireland in 1560, and in Holland in 1584, civilians were driven into the ranks by press gangs. "On one occasion they [the press gangs] took advantage of Easter Sunday to close all the church doors in London and take a thousand men from the various congregations."

—Fortescue, *op. cit.*, pp. 128 and 145, note 1.

Shakespeare does not, however, mention this practice.

¹⁵ Fortescue, p. 133.

The actual number of men called into service to suppress the rising in the North at this time, 1569, was only 20,000; and something over 40,000 were all that could be mustered to repel the threatened Spanish invasion in 1588.

—C. W. C. Oman, "The Elizabethan Army," in H. D. Traill, *Social England*, Vol. III, Section 2, New York 1909, p. 620.

¹⁶ *loc. cit.*

that her resistance would enormously benefit Philip of Spain, the forts were taken by the French almost without a loss. 'It is a source of shame to the English,' wrote Chantonnay. The lack of discipline was often lamented and at the siege of Guines in 1558 when Lord Grey refused to surrender, his soldiers threatened to fling him over the walls. Worst of all, at Alost in 1583, the English garrison not only surrendered disgracefully but turning traitors joined the Spaniards under Parma. The same thing happened later when William Stanley and Rowland Yorke, both of whom had been in Leicester's intimacy, went over to the enemy. An experienced soldier like Sir John Norris felt alarm at the landing of a single Spanish regiment of regulars in a land so unprepared as England."¹⁷

The reasons for this extraordinary state of affairs were many: among others, fear of despotic misuse of power by a central government possessing a strong regular army; constitutional and inherent dislike of the English for professional military service, exaggerated by the knowledge of how the continental countries had suffered at the hands of soldiery. Furthermore, "The absence of any real national foreign danger until toward the end of the Sixteenth Century, and the growing current of individualism, were not conducive to . . . preparation. In addition the recollection of former victories in France acted detrimentally. Men with pride in their traditions are loath to cast aside what has made their success, and the memory of how the long bow in the hands of the yeomen had won Crecy and Portiers caused England to lag far behind the Continent in the art of war."¹⁸

With this brief foreword it were better to let Shakespeare tell his own story. We read of the rousing of the country at any threatened danger in Falstaff's rather far-fetched simile:

"It [sherris wine] illumineth the face, which, as a beacon, gives warning to the rest of this little kingdom, man, to arm; and then the vital commoners and inland petty spirits muster me all to their captain, the heart, who, great and puffed up with all this retinue does any deed of courage;"¹⁹

The order to levy troops goes forth in many passages of nearly all the historical plays. King Henry IV would even press forces to go crusading (1 *Henry IV*, 1, 1, 22-24): When the rebellion

¹⁷ Lewis Einstein, *Tudor Ideals*, New York 1921, p. 170.

¹⁸ Einstein, *op. cit.*, pp. 168-169.

¹⁹ 2 *Henry IV*, 4, 3, 115 ff.

breaks, Falstaff is ordered to "take up soldiers in counties" as he goes. The manner in which he takes them up is revealed in the immortal scene with Justice Shallow, and the recruits. Mouldy, Shadow, Wart, and Feeble, so celebrated as not to need re-quoting. Several incidental particulars are, nevertheless, worth attention.

That the scene is not exaggerated we have ample contemporary testimony: "First in our refractory carriages, when authority commands our service, as namely our musters; what murmurings are breathed out . . . what strange circumstances are used to gaine freedome, and the posting it over to another, happily [*unhappily*] far insufficenter than himselfe.

". . . When necessity compels the finding of arms; what foul delays and slight excuses are set abroad to defer the time; and in this they have a double ayme: First that either the dallying with time shall be to bring it in oblivion; or Secondly, the removing themselves out of the division they conceive to be prevalent, untill notice be taken of some other to complete the list."²⁰

Evidently there was some provision made for paying and equipping the recruits. Falstaff orders Bardolph to give Wart, the recruit, a caliver (an early form of arquebuse, or matchlock) and to issue coats to the soldiers. (*2 Henry IV*, 3, 2, 292 and 314.) Although the shires were supposed to equip the men at public charge, they frequently did not do so; and the arms, if any, we are told, were provided by the crown.²¹

The dishonesty of Falstaff is obvious in his acceptance of bribes to release Bullcalf and Mouldy from service, and in his punning statement "we must have a number of shadows to fill up the muster book." This last refers to the almost universal practice of company officers in padding out the muster rolls, with fictitious names, or the names of dead men, so as to draw extra pay, which they deftly pocketed. Froude says that systematic fraud was practiced in the army, and cites the siege of Leith as an example: "the soldiers [English] had deserted by hundreds; to conceal their carelessness a false return was sent in by the captains, and wages continued to be drawn for more than a thousand men

²⁰ Ward, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

Note: "The men were procured by volunteering so far as possible, but as this never sufficed, the full number had always to be filled up by forcible impressment."

—Oman, *op. cit.*, p. 621.

²¹ Ward, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

who had left the camp."²² He also quotes Sir Peter Carey's report to the queen about the same affair. (Burley Papers, Vol. I, May 28, 1560.)

"Your Majesty is charged at this time for 8813 footmen, and there are not 5000 serving in the camp; so that your majesty is monstrosly robbed."²³

Sir Henry Knyvett also gives stern testimony that the peccadilloes of Falstaff, Bardolph, and Nym are by no means overdrawn.

"To make recitall perticularlie of the errors and disorders crept into our warrs in these daies were a troublesome business for mee, and to tedious a work for yor Majestie to peruse and therefore sith it is knowne by longe experience that the corruption thereof springeth onlie from the rash and evill choyse which hath byn most commonlie made of needie riotous licentious, ignorant and base collonells, Captaynes, Lieutenantes, Ensignes, Sargentes, and such like officers, who have made marchandize of their places, and without regard of their duty or respect of conscience have made porte sale of their soldiers bloode and lives to maintayne their unthriftiness and disorders;"²⁴

Furthermore, the corruption even among high officials is revealed by Shakespeare in Bolingbroke's assertion (*K. Richard II*, 1, 1, 87-89) that Mowbray had embezzled army funds entrusted to him. One need not look far in the history of the times to find analogies.²⁵

The natural result of such a system was that the army was as badly equipped, drilled, and administered as it could possibly be.

"I would wish," says the pious Commander Ward, "our noble Captaines would be pleased to be more circumspect in their election of officers, and not to put undeserving fellowes of base birth and qualite into the place of command. . . ., the office of Ensign [sub-lieutenant] being a place of repute and honour doth not fite with every Yeoman, Taylor or Fiddler. . . ." Of the captains themselves be remarks, apropos of the Falstaff type: "In the time

²² *History of England*, Vol. VIII, N. Y. 1867, p. 236.

²³ *loc. cit.*, note 1.

See also Fortescue, *op. cit.*, p. 128, and Hay, *op. cit.*, pp. 36 ff.

²⁴ *Defense of the Realme*, p. 31.

²⁵ In 1596, 900 men sent from Wiltshire, the county of which Knyvett himself was Deputy, to assist in the defence of the Isle of Wight, were found to have been badly chosen, and very poorly furnished. There was also complaint on account "'of great abuse committed in the discharge of certain soldiers for sums of money.'"

—*Defense of the Realme*, Introduction, pp. xxx-xxxi.

of peace every brave fellow desires to bee honored with the name and charge of a Captaine; but when Warre approacheth and the enemy is at hand, they quake their swords out of their scabberds, and had rather make use in flight of their wings, then their talents;"²⁶

Falstaff, the cowardly captain, with his shrewd moralizing about honor, is more than a mere foil for valorous prince Henry, and the fiery Hotspur. He is actually parodying the conventional style of military sentiments held by the officers of this and all preceding periods. The dictum of the *Buke of Batailles*, concerning the soldiers' attitude toward death is as follows:

"The dede [death] is the maist terrible thing that is and maist bitter and maist to be doutit. Bot it war agayn all gude faith and gude naturale resoun to ches [choose] the thing that maist is doutit and dred, maist terrible and maist felloune. And be that caus, a man suld nocht desyre to ches it than; for chos of desyre cummys of plesaunce and of delectacioun; Bot our autour Arestotle holdis the contraire of this, sayand, that for na warldly thing a man suld nocht desyre thing that war dishonourable. . . . And it is wele clere to understand that to flee of the bataille is baith dishoneste and schameful thing."²⁷

For which Falstaff's speech on Shrewsbury Field is an excellent parody:

Prince Henry. "Why, thou owest God a death." (Exit.)

Falstaff. "'Tis not due yet: I would be loath to pay him before his day. What need have I to be so forward with him that calls not on me? Well, 'tis no matter; honour pricks me on. Yea, but how if honour prick me off when I come in? how then? . . . What is honour? A word. What is that word honour? Air. A trim reckoning. Who hath it? He that died o'Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. . . . Is it insensible then? Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? No. . . . Therefore, I'll none of it. . . ." (*K. Henry IV*, Part I, Act V, Sc. 1, 125 ff.)

Another type of officer whom Shakespeare has taken from real life is the military pedant, Fluellen. Practically all the military authors of old, doubtless brave men, as was Fluellen, are of this

²⁶ Ward, *op. cit.*, pp. 198 and 201.

²⁷ *Buke of Batailles*, p. 86 ff. See also Ward, *op. cit.*, p. 172 ff.

type. One and all, from the authors of *The Buke of Batailles*, on down, larded their works with intolerably weary quotations and references to the ancients, particularly the Romans, and above all, General Pompey. One Fluellenish specimen will suffice:

"Therefore let us endeavor to amend what hath been amisse, and in all dutiful obedience follow such directions as Authority shall prescribe, . . . and every day furnishing and fitting ourselves to the largest extent of our power and abilities doe our God, King, and Country the faithfullest and best service wee possibly may. . . .; for this end wee were first borne, as was truly verified by *Pompeius Magnus*, that famous commander, hee having shipt his men and ready furnisht them with Victualls and munition for the reliefe of the City of Rome, . . ." etc. (Pompey was beset by a rainstorm which scared his men; but for the sake of duty he persevered. The author does not say whether his fleet was lost or not.)²⁸

To return to the subject of officers and soldiers of the army; when the mobilization is ordered, officers like Falstaff are hardly to be found, so well hidden are they, carousing at disreputable taverns.

"*Peto*. . . .

And there are twenty weak and wearied posts
Came from the north: and I as I came along,
I met and overtook a dozen captains,
Bareheaded, sweating, knocking at the taverns,
And asking everyone for Sir John Falstaff."

When they finally took command of their men, hear Commander Robert Ward describe the drilling:

". . . and by that time the Armes be all viewed, the muster-master hath had his pay (which is the chiefest thing many times he looks after) it draweth towards dinner-time; and indeed officers love their bellies so well as they are loath to take too much paines about discipline of their souldiers. Whereupon, after a little careless hurrying over the Postures with which the Companies are nothing bettered, they make them charge their Muskets, and so prepare to give the Captaine a brave volley of shot at his entrance

²⁸ Ward, *op. cit.*, p. 170 ff.

See also this author's "Discourse of Politique Stratagems," *ibid*, Sec. xiii, pp. 321-361; Frike, *Select Essays*, etc., allusions to more "politique stratagems," particularly those of Hannibal, pp. 247 ff; the *Arbre des Batailles*. Part II, pp. 36-71; and indeed any military book of the 14th to the 17th centuries.

into his Inne; . . . We have other inconveniences also which attend our Trainings, and hindreth our breeding of Souldiers; for we appoint our meetings, commonly near some great Town, as indeed it is meet for the relief of the Companies, but this inconvenience followeth thereon: when we are in the Field, many of our souldiers (so regardless are they of the Service) slip away, and are in the Innes and Taverns tipling when they should be exercising in the field. And this is another cause why divers of them are so ignorant in the use of their Armes; thereby they get an ill habit of drinking which is the disgrace of our Nation and the loss of many of our souldiers at such times as they are employed in foiraigne service.”²⁹

And now let Captain Falstaff speak for his company:

“If I be not ashamed of my soldiers, I am a soused Gurnet. I have misused the king’s press damnably. I have got, in exchange for a hundred and fifty soldiers, three hundred and odd pounds. I press me none but good householders, yeomen’s sons; inquire me out contracted bachelors, such as had been asked twice on the banns; such a commodity of warm slaves as had as lief hear the devil as a drum; such as fear the report of a caliver worse than a stuck fowl or a hurt wild-duck. I pressed me none but such toasts-and-butter with hearts in their bellies no bigger than pins’-heads, and they have bought out their services; and now my whole charge consists of ancients, corporals, lieutenants, gentlemen of companies, slaves as ragged as Lazarus in the painted cloth, where the glutton’s dogs licked his sores; and such as indeed were never soldiers, but discarded unjust serving-men, younger sons to younger brothers, revolted tapsters, and ostlers trade-fallen; the cankers of a calm world and a long peace, ten times more dishonourable ragged than an old faced ancient; such have I, to fill up the rooms of them that have bought out their services, that you would think that I had a hundred and fifty tattered prodigals lately come from swine-keeping, from eating draff and husks. A mad fellow met me on the way and told me I had unloaded all the gibbets and pressed the dead bodies. No eye hath seen such scare-crows. I’ll not march through Coventry with them, that’s flat; nay, and the villains march wide betwixt the legs as if they had gyves on; for indeed I had most of them out of prison. There’s but a shirt and a half in all my company; and the half shirt is two napkins tacked

²⁹ Ward, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-31.

together and thrown over the shoulders like a herald's coat without sleeves; and the shirt, to say the truth, stolen from my host at Saint Alban's, or the red-nose innkeeper of Daventry. But that's all one; they'll find linen enough on every hedge."³⁰

Speaking of these armies (in particular of the force sent to relieve Havre in 1562) the military historian remarks: "No troops, hurry. The prison doors were opened; the gaols were swept clean; hurry. The prison doors were opened; the gaols were swept clean; robbers, highwaymen, and cut-purses, the sweepings of the nation, were driven into the ranks; . . . None the less these poor men fought gallantly enough against the besieging French, until the plague suddenly broke out among them; and then they went down like flies. . . . Further requests for men and arms were met by the dispatch of raw boys and of all the worn out ordnance in the Tower."³¹

No wonder King Henry is made to say: "the king is not bound to answer the particular endings of his soldiers. . . . Besides there is no king, be his cause never so spotless, if it come to the arbitrement of swords, can try it out with all unspotted soldiers. Some, peradventure, have on them the crime of premeditated and contrived murder; some of beguiling virgins with the broken seals of perjury; some making the wars their bulwark, that have before gored the gentle bosom of peace with pillage and robbery."³²

When the wars were over and the troops demobilized, there was no provision for the disabled veterans; and thus they, and also many a stout and hearty rascal were beggars throughout the land—until statutes forbade charity to them. Once more, Falstaff: "I have lead my ragamuffins where they are peppered: there's not three of my hundred and fifty left alive, and they are for the town's end, to beg during life." (1 *Henry IV*, 5, 3, 36-40). Later he takes a similar resolve on his own account. "'Tis no matter if I do halt; I have the wars for my colour, and my pension shall seem the more reasonable." Being an officer and a friend of the prince's he could expect compensation for his services. Pistol also decides

³⁰ 1 *Henry IV*, 4, 2, 12-53.

³¹ Fortescue, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

Ward says (*op. cit.*, p. 31) that in one case the whole English army would have been defeated if the general had not stove in the wine-casks, and thus forcibly kept his men sober enough to fight.

³² *K. Henry V*, 4, 1, 165 ff.

to make fraudulent use of pretended battle-scars (*K. Henry V*, 5, 1, 92-94).

Shakespeare's knowledge of the interior organization of the troops is also fairly complete, though he evinces it only incidentally. Mention has already been made of the company unit, which varied from eighty men to Falstaff's hundred and fifty and sometimes more. These companies were commanded by officers chosen, no doubt, partly according to the bids they offered for their commissions.³³ Company officers were captain, lieutenant, and ensign. The non-coms included sergeants, and corporals (who commanded squads of twenty men, though some authorities say fifty).³⁴ Such officers as Pistol and Bardolph were, of course, of low station. Among the private soldiers in this motley army, however, there were often gentlemen: Pistol challenges King Henry (disguised), and asks:

"Discuss unto me; art thou officer?
Or art thou base, common and popular?"

K. Hen. I am a gentleman of a company.

Pistol. Trail'st thou the puissant pike?

K. Hen. Even so."³⁵

The companies were at this time the highest regular organizations in the army. No groups of companies, or regiments existed. "In an army of 6,000 or 8,000 men, comprising forty or fifty bands [*i. e.* companies under local commanders], there was no unit of organization beyond the small band and the old triple divisions of 'vaward,' 'main battle,' and 'rearward,' into which the bands were told off."³⁶

Discipline within the ranks of such an army was to be found but occasionally, and then only under press of imminent danger and the strictest orders from the commanders. Shakespeare gives the impression that Henry V had his men unusually well in hand. Bardolph, and presumably Nym, he summarily ordered to be hanged for theft (*K. Henry V*, 3, 6, 116 ff.). One would also infer from

³³ See comments of Knyvett and Ward, cited on p. 9.

³⁴ Fortescue, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

Ward, *op. cit.*, p. 200, and William Freke, Esq., *Select Essays tending to the Universal Reformation of Learning; Concluded with the Art of War, Or a Summary of the Martial Precepts Necessary for an Officer.* London 1693, p. 265.

³⁵ *K. Henry V*, 4, 1, 36 ff.

Ward also speaks of a private in infantry as a "Gentleman of a Company." *op. cit.*, p. 200.

³⁶ Oman, "The Elizabethan Army," p. 622.

this scene, and from the sentencing of the treacherous knights (*ibid.*, 2, 2, 166 ff) that courts-martial and trials were often done away with in this riotous outfit. The English soldiers are also represented as being under strict discipline before the battle. Fluellen cautions Gower on the necessity of silence in camp (*ibid.* 4, 1, 64 ff), though it must be admitted he does so more out of pedantic admiration for the practices of Pompey than from a real sense of caution. The prologue to Act IV of *King Henry V* describing the "fixed sentinels," and the varied activities of the English camp; and Grandpre's description, in the same act, of the battle, are better testimonials as to orderly fighting men.

To offset these impressions we have the King's speech before Harfleur (3, 7-42):

"If I begin the battery once again
I will not leave the half-achieved Harfleur
Till in her ashes she be buried.
The gates of mercy shall all be shut up,
And the flesh'd soldier, rough and hard of heart,
In liberty of bloody hand shall range
With conscience wide as hell, mowing like grass
Your fresh-fair virgins and your flowering infants.

What rein can hold licentious wickedness
When down the hill he holds his fierce career?
We may as bootless spend our vain command
Upon the enraged soldiers in their spoil
As send precepts to the leviathan
To come ashore."

The gloomy Elizabethan officers themselves are much inclined to confirm this latter impression of the discipline among their men. Says Commander Ward, in a tone of intense exasperation: ". . . their backwardnesse and unwillingnesse in answering to the commands of Authority, and many times some of them are altogether deficient both in their Armes and appearance." Not always did the men get out of hand in their eagerness for battle and destruction, as King Henry (according to Shakespeare) feared they would at Harfleur. More frequently their officers complained of them in terms like the following:

"It was partly seene and tried at the Isle of Ree in France at the Siege of Rochelle, and although our English had been some short time tutored and exercised under the banners of Mars; yet the right valiant and judicious captains³⁷ had no more command of

³⁷ Doubtless the author of this was one such, himself.

them then in the time of need . . . then of a Herd of Deere: For all they saw by flight there was no safety but eminent distruction yet they could not bee persuaded to make an honourable resistance, whereby they might either have freed themselves or have died like men with their faces towards the Enemy.”³⁸ In this connection the sad experience of Lord Grey at the siege of Guines will be recalled.

Furthermore there are frequent brawls between officers and men. Williams, a soldier, does not hesitate to box the ear of Captain Fluellen, whom he thinks has insulted him on a previous occasion. Fluellen resents the blow, but not as an insult to his rank; and the king rewards Williams for keeping his oath (*King Henry V*, 5, 1). Later on Fluellen fights with Pistol (whose rank it is hard to determine—he is sometimes called a lieutenant); and triumphantly makes him eat a leek (*ibid*, 5, 1).

Such quarrels were extremely common not only in the medieval armies but in the Elizabethan forces as well. In the *Arbre des Battailles*, a fourteenth century work, translated by Honore Bonet, we read of the Earl Marshall (adjutant general of the army, or perhaps corresponding more closely to a chief of staff) that “it efferis pertains to the constable marshall to here all questiones, querelis, and complayntes of his meyne troops . . . and to do justice and resoun to all partis complenzeand; and decide all debatis, noyses, and rejtotis that in the ost is movit.”³⁹ Two hundred and fifty years later quarrels are still so dreaded that it is a specific part of the company officer’s duty to stop them. “. . . the lieutenant is to take notice of what discords, quarrels, and debates arise amongst the Souldiers of his band, hee is to pacify them if it may be, otherwise to commit them; he is to judge and determine such disputes with gravity and good speeches . . .”⁴⁰

³⁸ Ward, *op. cit.*, pp. 170-71.

³⁹ Honore Bonet, (translator) *Arbre des Battailles* (written *cerca* 1382-87) or *The Buke of the Law of Armys*, or *The Buke of Batailles*, Gilbert of the Haye’s Prose Manuscript A. D. 1465, ed. by J. H. Stevenson 1901 0.115 ff. The Earl Marshall also had to “visyte the hurt men and seke men, and to get purway for theme lechtis leeches and medicinaris.” Evidently his job was no sinecure.

⁴⁰ Ward, *op. cit.*, p. 199. This same lieutenant had other duties equally surprising to the modern soldier. “If in the Field and to goe upon service, hee ought to see prayers read at the head of the troopes every night, and every Sabbath all those Souldiers that have not the Guard, hee is to compel them to goe to the colonell’s tent to heare Prayers and preaching, hee is to be religious, valiant, and wise. . . .” *op. cit.*, p. 200.

These "moderne corrupted and impious customes of bare and unrulie mercinarie chieftaines and soldiers" also call forth some re-proving shakes of the head from honest Sir Henry Knyvett: "Besides all other disorders by the care and industerie of the generall . . . maie be amended or suppressed as the not wearing of such armes as they are appoynted. If they list to cast them off, wich in my conceipt is a straunge and perilous tolleracion, the eccesse of costlie diet and apparrell, and beastlie custome of drunken Carusing, the surcharging the Campe with multitudes of woemen and boyes, the untollerable pilfering of freebooters, and in a worde all newe barberus inormities whatsoever."⁴¹

The weapons which Sir Henry says were cast aside (probably during retreats), consisted of the newer pikes and harquebuses, and also the traditional bows and bills. Shakespeare mentions all of them, and especially the artillery. Thus he describes the hastily organized recruits in the rebellion lead by Bolingbroke.

" . . . and boys with women's voices
Strike to speak big, and clap their female joints
To stiff unwieldly arms against the crown;
The very beadsmen learn to bend their bows
Of double fated yew against the state;
Yea, distaff women manage rusty bills."⁴²

These weapons actually did predominate in the 14th century. The frequent mention of firearms (other than cannon) by Falstaff and others is, however, an anachronism. The smaller types of firearms did not become common in the ranks of the armies until the late 15th century.⁴³ When Falstaff makes puns on the name of Pistol (2 *Henry IV*, 2, 118-129), or gives Wart a caliver (*ibid*, 3, 2, 278-309), he is speaking of weapons of Shakespeare's own time.

Cannon, however, were used as early as 1344, in the army of Edward II. Until the 16th-century the artillery-men were civilians, usually Germans, who often owned their own cannon, and hired their services to any army or feudal band.⁴⁴ The master gunner of Orleans and his apprentice who so neatly destroyed the English observation post, were of this type.⁴⁵ The mention of "gun stones," or stone cannon-shot (*K. Henry V*, 1, 2, 280-282) is ac-

⁴¹ *The Defense of the Realm*, p. 61.

⁴² Speech of Scroop, *K. Richard II*, 3, 2, 112-120.

⁴³ Fortescue, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

See also Ward, *op. cit.*, p. 212 ff, and Freke, *op. cit.*, p. 265 ff.

⁴⁴ *Encyc. Brit.* 11th Ed. Vol. 2, "Artillery," pp. 686 ff.

⁴⁵ 1 *K. Henry VI*, 1, 4.

curate for such missiles up to the 17th century. The English did not develop their own artillery until Henry VIII began to accumulate cannon.⁴⁶ Elizabeth however neglected this branch of the army as she did all the others.⁴⁷

Whether from personal experiences, or the tales of his soldier friends—Ben Jonson was one—Shakespeare describes most powerfully the activities and hardships of army life. Lady Percy shudders at Hotspur's midnight ravings:

“Of sallies and retires, of trenches, tents,
Of palisadoes, frontiers, parapets,
Of basilisks, of cannon, culverin,
Of prisoners' ransom, and of soldiers slain.”⁴⁸

Barring the prisoners' ransom, the details of the ancient craft of war have changed but little since Hotspur's day. No finer description of an army camp has ever been written than the Prologue to Act IV, *King Henry V*. Such details as:

“The hum of either army stilly sounds;
Steed threatens steed, in high and boastful neighs
Piercing the night's dull ear; and from the tents
The armourers accomplishing the knights,
With busy hammers closing rivets up.”

are irresistible in their appeal to the imagination. I cannot forbear quoting Grandpre's description of the English awaiting the dawn attack:

“Yon island carrions desperate of their bones
Ill-favour'dly become the morning field:
Their ragged curtains poorly are let loose,
And our air shakes them passing scornfully:
Big Mars seems bankrupt in their beggar'd host,
And faintly through a rusty beaver peeps:
The horsemen sit like fixed candlesticks,
With torch staves in their hand; and their poor jades
Lob down their heads, dropping the hides and hips,
The gum down-roping from their pale dead eyes,
And in their pale mouths the gimmel-bit
Lies foul with chewed grass, still and motionless;
And their executors, the knavish crows,
Fly o'er them, all impatient for their hour.”⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Fortescue, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, Chapters III and IV. Fortescue makes the queen appear to have been a most incompetent governor; whose success was due to able and heroic, if ill organized, efforts of her various commanders.

⁴⁸ *Henry IV*, 2, 3, 52-60.

⁴⁹ *K. Henry V*, 4, 3, 39-52.

Better than any number of histories, descriptions, or even paintings, this brings to life the ancient army. There they stand, silent, desperate, in the bone-chilling fog of northern France, waiting to die. But more than description is here. The feelings of the soldiers, of the very animals, is expressed. One grows faint with physical exhaustion, and feels a stir of grim resolution within him as he reads. What the consummate skill of Conrad would require pages to do, Shakespeare has accomplished in fourteen lines.

And these are not only medieval soldiers, but fighting men of all times and places . . . "faintly through a rusty beaver peeps." Exactly as I looked and felt, any morning around Champagne or Chateau Thierry, as I stared out from under my steel helmet, with eyes swollen and blood-shot from lack of sleep. But the horses are the master-pieces of suggestive description. Poor brutes, they always express in their forlorn attitudes all the hopeless misery of war. "The gum down-ropng from their pale dead eyes," the bit "foul with chewed grass, still and motionless." Who but Shakespeare could make poetry out of such things; and who by any words at all could so reveal the weariness and strain preceding a battle? I can almost see once more my own "poor jades" as they strain at the creaking caisson; and hear again faint echoes of roaring guns in Northern France. Is it possible that Shakespeare ever heard them? I wonder.